

## **The Precursors of the Yellow Peril Theories: Mikhail Bakunin and Charles Pearson**

**Akira Ikura**

### **Introduction**

The Yellow Peril was, in general, the idea that the rise of the yellow race was a danger to the white race. It began to be advocated in the 1890s, became widespread at the beginning of the twentieth century in the “White” nations, and exerted, more or less, an influence upon contemporary societies, cultures, economies, and international relations. This might be the broadest definition of the Yellow Peril. More specifically, the Yellow Peril can be defined as an apprehension of the rise of “yellow” nations, especially the Chinese and Japanese, who, once emancipated from Western domination or influence and armed with modern weapons, would be able to wipe out the “white man” in the East due to numerical superiority and would be masters of the East or even of the world.<sup>(1)</sup>

Underlying the Yellow Peril was the image of hordes of the barbarous yellow race invading Europe, looting the wealth of Europe and assaulting the Europeans. This image of the “savage” yellow race

can be traced back to the age of Mongol incursions under the leadership of Genghis Khan in the twelfth century, to the age of the Hun invasion of Europe led by Attila in the fifth century, or to the age of ancient Rome under the threat of the frequent incursions by Barbarians or of the ancient Greeks under the threat of Persian invasion.

It may be possible to say that as such the Yellow Peril fears are rooted in this image of a “savage” yellow race. This has formed an undercurrent of European history as if it was a *basso continuo*. It was alive even in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, although these were the centuries of Occidental “invasion” into the Orient under the disguised name of “civilisation” and increasingly in the naked form of imperialism. However, still unsolved is the more fundamental question of why the Yellow Peril theories emerged from the late nineteenth century. It seems to me that these ideas, though based on the traditional Orientphobia and the belief of racial supremacy in the West, put in question the modernization of the non-Western world. After all, I think, the rise of the Yellow Peril fears in this period was the “modern” phenomenon.

The main objective of this essay is to evaluate the “modern” Yellow Peril theory of Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin (1814–1876), the Russian revolutionary anarchist, and of Charles H. Pearson, an Oxford-educated British historian and colonial minister. Although they never used the phrase “Yellow Peril,” their theories on the Orient laid the groundwork for later Yellow Perilist ideas. Therefore, they can be regarded as the precursors of these ideas. First, this essay examines

Bakunin's Yellow Peril idea as the prototype of the "modern" Yellow Peril. Then, the author discusses Pearson's Yellow Peril theory which was said to be a "classic" of the Yellow Perilists ideas. Lastly, the arguments of later Yellow Perilists will be taken up.

### I Bakunin's Yellow Peril Idea:

#### The prototype of the "Modern" Yellow Peril Theory

When a peace congress was held at Geneva in September 1867, Bakunin made a sensational appearance in Europe to take part in the deliberations. He made an impressive speech advocating the revolutionary defeat of Tsarist Russia, the establishment of international justice, and a plan for a United States of Europe which would be organized by a liberal federation of communes of region and states.<sup>(2)</sup> It is said that he then also advocated the Yellow Peril idea. Later, in 1904, a contributor recalled the fact that Bakunin was the first to prophecy the irruption of the yellow race into Europe and stated as follows:

There is a better warrant still for apprehension in the prophesies of Bakounine [Bakunin], father of the anarchist school of socialists. He set forth the Yellow Peril at a peace congress held at Geneva thirty-three years ago, just before another great war burst upon the second French Empire.<sup>(3)</sup>

This description contains a mistake in the date.<sup>(4)</sup> It was quite possible, however, that he advocated the Yellow Peril idea at the

congress.<sup>(5)</sup> Yet it was true that his “anarchism had more germinative vitality”<sup>(6)</sup> than his vaccinations for the Yellow Peril.

The written form of Bakunin’s Yellow Peril idea first appeared in his *La théologie politique de Mazzini et de l’Internationale* in 1871.<sup>(7)</sup> In more than half of this book, Bakunin criticized Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72), the Italian patriotic social activist who promoted the unification of Italy. Yet, in the last part of this book, he discussed Asia as a possible threat to Europe and European civilisation.

First, Bakunin foresaw that, even if the West formed a federation, it would not be enough because of a possible threat from Asia. He said, “Let us consider all of Europe including Russia to be a great federal republic based broadly on the true human principles; that is to say on the principles of liberty, equality, justice and solidarity.” Then he asserted that this would be undoubtedly a great triumph for mankind. He went on to say, “If you add the greatest part of America and Oceania to the population of Europe, this will form a humanitarian Federation of 340 to 350 million people. This should be really immense.” “However,” he questioned, “will humanity be finally established on its bases?” He answered “No,” and emphasized the threat from Asia. He stated:

[B]ecause outside this federation, there should still remain a far more immense population, 850 million of the Asiatic whose civilisation, or rather, barbarism and traditional slavery will remain suspended as a horrible menace on all this magnificent organization of world - human and liberal.<sup>(8)</sup>

Bakunin also pointed out the fear of an immense Asian population. If a great number of wild beasts like lions and tigers had been pushed to Europe, he thought, this would be doubtlessly a terrible invasion. "However," he said, "this will be not more terrible than the invasion of the Asiatic population which threatens us."<sup>(9)</sup>

He regarded Asians as ferocious people, and went so far as to say:

If Asia were only populated by wild beasts and Europe were only threatened by the invasion of some hundred millions of lions or tigers, this danger would be undoubtedly serious; but incomparably less so than that of the existence of this 800 to 850 millions of ferocious people in Asia, by whom Europe is really threatened today, who are capable of constituting states and are forming already immense despotic states, and about to pour, sooner or later, their surplus on Europe. If they were but savage beasts, even though double that number, European people, undoubtedly with great effort, would be able to destroy them. However, 800 million people are not destroyed.<sup>(10)</sup>

Here Bakunin emphasized the population peril which was one of the forms of the Yellow Peril. Assumed here was the fertility of the yellow race.

It is also natural to assume that a "negative" view on Asia underlies his warning. He revealed his perception on Asia by saying, "The first historical states came into being in Asia. Asia was the cradle of all religions and despotism." States, despotism and religion, which the Russian anarchist really detested, all originated in Asia. Furthermore, "it is, nowadays, again, Asia," according to him, "that threatens liberty and

humanity of the civilised world.”

Bakunin’s prophecy, though fantastic, was based on his analysis of contemporary international relations in the East. He asked if anyone could enslave Asians. He thought that Britain and Russia were trying to do so. He wrote, “England on one side and Russia on the other seem to be obliged to enclose, if not to suffocate, all Asiatic Orient in their arms for the greater triumph of civilisation.” Yet he asked again, “Will they succeed?” His answer was no, because England and Russia, the ambitious rivals, made incessant conflicts and even war to the death with each other in Asia. Either of them tried to foil the other’s projects and to paralyze the other’s efforts. What is more important, Bakunin foresaw that these two countries’ rivalry would lead to the armament and rising of Asian people one against another. He thought that Britain and Russia, though unintentionally, habituated them to European war tactics and to the use of European arms. As a result, he predicted the Asian invasion of Europe. He stated:

[A]s this [Asian] population numbers not some ten million but several hundred million, the most probable result of all these intrigues and of the struggle between the two powers, which fight over the domination of Asia, will be to shake this Asiatic world to the place that remained immobile and to pour it into the Amur region, Siberia, the region of Kirghiz, Persia and Turkey, and the next time, into Europe.<sup>(11)</sup>

It is more interesting to note that Bakunin foretold the rise of Japan specifically. “I am convinced,” he said, “that all transient victories

which the Russian government obtains today will end in Japan.” He predicted that in the near future, the Russian dominance in all Amur regions would be completely destroyed by the irresistible pressure of a formidable invasion of the Japanese. The Russian government would not be in a position to oppose any force to this Japanese invasion. Bakunin emphasized the Japanese potential and stated:

The Japanese are not like the Chinese; they are not old people. On the contrary, they are the people who are quite juvenile, quite barbarous, and full of vim and lively strength and who are by far gifted of innate intelligence. They are the people who observe and learn well very quickly. Now they are only for imitation like every people who start civilizing themselves. Indeed, they have so far advanced this talent of imitation in the short period that they have learned the techniques to construct steamships, to manufacture guns, and to cast cannons. Young Japanese people nowadays are going to study in European universities and institutes of higher education in engineering. . . . They after all begin to construct a battle fleet and everything goes well. She has developed with an unheard-of rapidity.<sup>(12)</sup>

Bakunin, though he appreciated not so much the Chinese capabilities as those of the Japanese, also pointed out the possibility of a Chinese invasion into Europe and the possible awakening of China triggered by the European presence there. He asserted that all Russian power in Siberia was nothing but fiction. Then he warned of the possible invasion by several ten million Chinese pushed by hunger. Bakunin thought that the Chinese were “much more debased

intellectually and more decrepit physically than the Japanese,” but necessity would give them energy. Although the pitiless, atrocious civil wars tore up the inside of this immense Empire in appearance, Bakunin forecasted that the Chinese would revive their energy and character. Therefore, he stated: “Europeans who came to Peking have put an end of the old Empire. A new order of the affairs must come out from this ruin.” He thought that this new order was “a new formidable movement” because the movement of 500 million people could be nothing but a formidable one. Therefore, he insisted, “Beware, in Europe!”<sup>(13)</sup>

Furthermore, Bakunin linked this Asian threat with European politics and wrote a possible scenario for “Adieu liberté Europe.”

Indeed, even if there were no war of the two rival powers in Asia by assuming an all united Europe and concord in a common action, can Europe conquer Asia and maintain its domination in Asia? Will 265 to 270 million Europeans combined with 75 million Americans be able to maintain the enslavement of 800 million barbarous Asians? By admitting just the possibility of this fact, it is clear that they can maintain it to the detriment of their own liberty.<sup>(14)</sup>

Bakunin foresaw that to enslave the Asiatic, Europe must maintain a formidable permanent army. He feared that there would be European generals who would become dictators and sovereigns at the head of brutal Asian masses. Finally, these generals with well-organized and disciplined Asian troops would lead the hordes of Asians to the plunder



of Europe.<sup>(15)</sup>

Although Bakunin drew a gruesome picture of the future, he also proposed the way to save Europe. He stated, "Therefore, to save Europe, there is only one way; that is, to civilise Asia." Although commerce and religion were, he thought, the measures to civilise barbarous people, Bakunin did not expect much from these methods. Rather, he combined the remedy with his political creed. After discussing the issue of the Chinese immigrants to California, he proclaimed:

*Revolt of workers and the spontaneous organization of labour, humane and interdependent by way of a liberal federation of worker groups!* So, the riddle which the oriental Sphinx forces us to solve nowadays is under penalty that we will be devoured if we cannot solve it. The principle of justice, liberty and equality for work and in interdependent work is needed. This principle shakes today the mass of workers in America and in Europe and also penetrates equally and completely into the Orient.<sup>(16)</sup>

In his conclusion, he pronounced that it was not enough for the Latin, Celt, German and Anglo-German Occident to liberate itself and to form a great federal republic founded on an emancipated and interdependently organized work. He continued to say that, for making this constitution solid, it was also indispensable that all Orientals in Europe, Slav, Greek, Turkish, Magyar, Tartar and Finnish, should liberate themselves by the same method and make up the integrated part of this federation. However, he thought that it was not enough that humanity triumphed in Europe, in America, and in Australia. He

continued to say as follows:

Humanity must also penetrate this dark and divine Orient and it must drive away the memory of the divinity to the last man. Triumphant in Africa and especially in Asia, humanity must expel this cursed principle of authority from their last shelter with all their religious, political, economic and social consequences in order to be able to triumph at this place, develop themselves and organize themselves based exclusively on the interdependent labour, scientific reason, human respect, justice, equality and human liberty.<sup>(17)</sup>

Several characteristics can be found in Bakunin's Yellow Peril idea. First, he pointed out the population peril. Indeed, the numerical superiority of Asia formed a major element of the Yellow Peril fears. Hordes of Asians, driven by hunger or an overflow of their population, would invade Europe. Underlying this peril was the possible danger of the assumed Asian fertility. But Asian fertility alone was not a great fear. Yet if the fertile Asia was modernized, what would happen? Then, Bakunin predicted the possible rise of Japan in the near future by assimilating and using European science. He foresaw that Japan would drive Russia out of Northern Asia. In addition, he also foresaw the awakening of China.

Here, for the first time, the modernization of Oriental countries constituted an element of the Yellow Peril fears. The more these countries were modernized, the more the fears seemed to grow. The major characteristic of the "modern" Yellow Peril theories lies in this problem of the modernization of Oriental or non-Western countries.

Many Yellow Perilists feared that once Asian countries were modernized by adopting Western science, they would become a threat to the West. Of course, the modernization of Asia alone was not sufficient to form a great threat to the West. So the combination of some peculiarities of Asians combined with modernization was thought to be a real threat to the West. In Bakunin's case, the fertility of the Asian population presented this peculiarity.

However, Bakunin's Yellow Peril idea was different from other Yellow Peril theories on various points. First of all, it seems to be peculiar to him that he appreciated Japan's potential to be higher than that of China. Although the character of the Yellow Peril had been transformed to meet with the demand of the times and international relations, the salient aspect of it before 1914 was the fear of an awakened China. "Lethargic" China was dreaded due to her vast potentialities of resources and population. Hence the main question was who would awaken the sleeping China. Before the Russo-Japanese War, Russia, or Japan, or even China herself was expected to arouse the sleeping giant and make her the real Yellow Peril. Broadly speaking, the dread of an awakened China under Russian leadership was almost extinct after the Russo-Japanese War. The dread of an awakened China under Japanese leadership had ultimately become the major factor of a Yellow Peril at the end of the war. That change happened in tandem with the emergence of Japan as a world power. Yet lethargic China was still the main source of the dread. By replacing China, Japan had to wait for the next decade to be recognized as the sole peril. After 1914, the

fear finally shifted from the “Chinese Peril” to the “Japanese Peril.” Thus, it can be said that in the latter half of the nineteenth century Bakunin’s prediction of the rise of Japan is peculiar to him.

The other point of difference is the fact that he did not think much of the White’s racial superiority. Although he called Asians barbarous or even ferocious people, he seems to have been free from the idea of racial superiority. This is unusual because many Yellow Peril theories were obviously racially biased on the premise that the white was the “higher” race.

The last point of difference is his neglect of the possible economic peril. As early as the mid-eighteenth century, Chinese cheap labour with a minimum standard of living became a threat to “white” labour. In addition, cheap Japanese goods came to be a menace to the Western economies by the turn of the centuries. Though Bakunin admitted that the Chinese workers in California were “inconvenient” for the America workers, he thought that they served their apprenticeship to liberty, dignity, rights and human respect. It is cynical that the working class, whom Bakunin much relied on, furiously opposed “coloured” labour and successfully excluded them in California and Australia.

The other question worth considering is the reason why Bakunin could predict the rise of Japan in 1867 or 1871. Ivanovich, a contributor to *Contemporary Review*, explained that Bakunin “arrived [in] Japan during the regeneration crisis, and came away with the conviction” that “the Russian Empire west of the Baikal would be broken down and replaced by the Japanese.”<sup>(18)</sup> Bakunin had long been in exile in Siberia.

In 1861, he ran away from Siberia, traveled down the Amur, and embarked on an American ship bound for Japan. He arrived at Yokohama via Hakodate in August. He left Yokohama for the United States in September. Actually including the days on board from Hakodate to Yokohama, his stay in Japan amounted to less than seven weeks.<sup>(19)</sup> It seems to be difficult for anyone to foretell the future rise of Japan at that time. There were still seven years before the Meiji Restoration. However, what he saw at this stay was the rapidly modernizing part of Japan. Therefore, it is natural to assume that he might be greatly impressed by this “developing” Japan.

In the year 1867 when he reportedly expressed his Yellow Peril idea, or in the year 1871 when his Yellow Peril idea was first published, Japan had just embarked on the long journey of modernization. Indeed, how could Bakunin foresee the rise of “modern” Japan in the near future? Although his prediction must have been a surprise to many, it seems that his prediction was mainly based not on scientific inquiry but on his intuition. In this sense Bakunin’s Yellow Peril idea was not so much a reasoned theory as a “prophecy”

Yet his prophecy was not a shot in the dark. I offer two reasons why he made such a prediction. The first reason, I think, was that by exaggerating the formidable fear of the invasion of yellow race, he tried to promote his idea; that is, the unification of Europe as the United States of Europe. The second reason, I think, was that his Slavonic intuition and Messianic disposition might have induced him to predict so.

I saw the originality of Bakunin's Yellow Peril in his combination of the possible rise of Asian countries and the assumed fertility of the Asians. As he warned, a "modernized" Japan began to pose a great threat as early as the late nineteenth century. However, his prediction did not draw so much attention as his anarchism. His prediction might have been regarded as irrelevant to the immediate issues. It was the threat of the yellow races brought under the leadership of the Russians rather than the awakening of Japan and China or an alliance between China and Japan that came to be dreaded by the Europeans.<sup>(20)</sup> In the following sections, I shall examine Charles Pearson's Yellow Peril idea and the different types of Yellow Peril theories in order to unravel the intricate nature of the Yellow Peril.

## **II   *National Life and Character:*** **"Classic" of the Yellow Peril Theories**

As we previously examined, Bakunin's Yellow Peril idea was a concept that assumed the modernization of Asia, not the least Japan and China. His idea seemed to be regarded as an unrealistic prophecy by his contemporaries in the 1870s and even in the 1880s. However, as time went by, part of his prediction became a reality. Japan, steadily modernized her institutions, economy, society, culture, and military, and was counted as a regional power after the Sino-Japanese War. Although Bakunin's idea was almost forgotten by that time, the "modern" Yellow

Peril idea became much more acceptable to the people of the day. Needless to say partly due to the German Kaiser's propagation of his idea, the last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed various theories of the "modern" Yellow Peril. They seem to have reflected the nature of then predominant theories of science such as Social Darwinism and pseudo-scientific ethnology. Moreover, it appears, they captured a mood — the fall of Western civilisation.

Two years before the Kaiser's propagation of the Yellow Peril, Charles H. Pearson (1830-1894), an Oxford-educated British historian and colonial minister, published his *National Life and Character: a Forecast* (London and New York: 1893). He passed away one year later without knowing the vast influence of his book in the coming decades. It must be admitted that his book laid the groundwork of later Yellow Perilist ideas and became, in a sense, a "classic." In this book, Pearson drew a pessimistic future for Western civilisation. He forecasted the rise of non-white nations, especially the Chinese, in the near future, the explosion of their population and the industrial as well as military threat from them. Moreover, he predicted that Western civilisation would decay from within and cease to progress. First, he tried to verify that there would be no room in the temperate zone for the expansion of the white race. He assumed that there were the higher and lower races. In his argument, the white race or the Aryan race was the higher and the rest the lower. Although it was generally believed that the higher race would triumph over the lower, he found that the Chinese, Japanese, Indians and Africans could not be exterminated because they were "too

numerous and sturdy to be extirpated.”<sup>(21)</sup> Then he considered that the Aryan race could “only make small gains in Europe, and in the Temperate Zone districts of Asia, Africa, America and Australasia.”<sup>(22)</sup> In addition, he stated: “by far the most fertile parts of the earth, and which either are or are bound to be the most populous, cannot possibly be the homes of what it is convenient to call the Aryan race, or indeed of any higher race whatsoever.”<sup>(23)</sup>

Along with the parameter of “white” expansion, what he feared most was the probable explosion of the tremendous population among the colored people, especially in China and India. He reiterated the fertility and danger of the Chinese population. He wrote, “[W]e are well aware that China can swamp us with a single year’s surplus of population; and we know that if national existence is sacrificed to the working of a few mines and sugar plantations, it is not the Englishman in Australia alone, but the whole civilised world, that will be the losers.”<sup>(24)</sup> He also pronounced: “In fact, it is supposed that from its superior fertility, China could carry more than England to the square mile [the City], and might double its numbers before it needed to trouble its neighbours.”<sup>(25)</sup>

He thought there to be two factors which would cause the population explosion – mitigation of war and the introduction of Western science and technology into the East. He analyzed that the mitigation of war was not confined to Europe. He stated:

Meanwhile the effect already produced has told visibly in



favor of the growth of population; and its chief effects have naturally been seen in the increase of those who suffered most from war formerly. China and India are the two most striking instances.<sup>(26)</sup>

Considering the effect of the introduction of Western science and technology, Pearson wrote, "There is another way in which we are the blind instruments of fate for multiplying the races that are now our subjects, and will one day be our rivals. We carry the sanitary science and the engineering skill of Europe into the East." He took India as an example and pointed out the improvement of sanitary conditions, the decrease of cholera epidemics, the overcoming of famine by irrigation, the enhanced security, and the railways which enabled production to be more rapidly distributed. As a result of the introduction of Western science and technology, he said, "[T]he people, as is only natural, are taking advantage of the prosperity by multiplying rather than by raising their standard of comfort."<sup>(27)</sup> Against the backdrop of his conviction, there was a general law which he believed; that is, the lower race increased faster than the higher.<sup>(28)</sup> Finally, he foretold the pessimistic future of Europe as follows:

The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant, when the European observer will look round to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolizing the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the European; when Chinamen and the nations of Hindostan, the States of Central and South America, by that

time predominantly Indian, and it may be African nations of the Congo and the zambesi, under a dominant caste of foreign rulers, are represented by fleets in the European seas, invited to international conferences, and welcomed as allies in the quarrels of the civilised world. . . . We shall wake to find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside by peoples whom we looked down upon as servile, and thought of as bound always to minister to our needs.<sup>(29)</sup>

As we have already seen, Pearson feared that when the colored people achieved independence and gained enough power to expand, they would encroach upon the white temperate zones. With his limited imagination, he feared Orientals, especially the Chinese above all others, because of their seemingly expansive nature. He wrote, "The expansion of China towards the south and south-west seems most probable, because there is here most natural wealth to develop and because the circumstances are specially favorable."<sup>(30)</sup> He thought that the European had "compelled her to come into the fellowship of nations." China had adopted steamers, European artillery and army organization, and so on. A modernized China, he thought, would expand. "On three sides of her", Pearson believed, "lie countries that she may easily seize." He went on to say:

Flexible as Jews, they can thrive on the mountain plateaux of Thibet, and under the sun of Singapore; more versatile even than Jews, they are excellent laborers, and not without merit as soldiers and sailors; while they have a capacity for trade which no other nation of the East possesses.<sup>(31)</sup>

Then, Pearson foresaw that China would become a great military power without having a man of genius as her leader. He stated:

Ordinary statesmanship, adopting the improvements of Europe without offending the customs and prejudices of the people, may make them a State which no Power in Europe will dare to disregard; with an army which could march by fixed stages across Asia; and a fleet which could hold its own against any the strongest of the European Powers could afford to keep permanently in Chinese waters.<sup>(32)</sup>

His conviction of the rise of China was linked with his forecast of the future society. He predicted that military absolutism would be combined with industrial Socialism in the communities of the future. This form of polity, he thought, was congenial to Eastern nations.<sup>(33)</sup>

It is more interesting to note that what he dreaded more was a Moslem China. He feared that China would become an aggressive military power if she was controlled by the Moslems. "Islam, in this country also, transforms its votaries into military fanatics," he wrote and predicted that the popular Buddhism in China might fall before a monotheism. He stated:

The accident of a leader of genius arising to combine the Mahommedans in a common organization might conceivably transfer sovereignty to a follower of Islam. In that case it is difficult to suppose that China would not become an aggressive military power, sending out her armies in millions to cross the Himalayas, and traverse the Steppes, or occupying the islands and the northern parts of Australia, by pouring in immigrants protected by fleets.<sup>(34)</sup>

However, if this came true, he thought, China would drain her population and wealth and die out gradually. Although he dreaded the possible military threat from China, the foremost Peril was not, in his opinion, a military one; but rather an industrial one. He wrote, "The military aggrandizement of the Empire, which would provoke general resistance, is, in fact, less to be dreaded than its industrial growth."<sup>(35)</sup> He was afraid that an industrialized China would pose the greatest danger to the West. As in the European nations, he thought, their production was limited and its price was enhanced by Socialism and trade among them was fettered by protectionism, they "would find themselves at a great disadvantage in competing with a really industrial China."<sup>(36)</sup> He appreciated the Chinese potential and said, "The resources of China are immense, the capacity of its people for toil is almost unlimited, and their wants are of the slenderest." He thought that what was true of the Chinese was true more or less of Hindus and Blacks. Therefore, he wrote, "[W]hen they have borrowed the science of Europe, and developed their still virgin worlds, the pressure of their competition upon the white man will be irresistible." Pearson continued to say that Europe would "be driven from every neutral market and forced to confine himself within his own."

Among these colored people, of whom Pearson predicted to be the most powerful nation was the Chinese. Therefore, he wrote, "With civilisation equally diffused, the most populous country must ultimately be the most powerful; and the preponderance of China over any rival — even over the United States of America — is likely to be

overwhelming.”<sup>(37)</sup>

Pearson's Yellow Peril theory, which we have already seen, can be regarded as the classic theory on four points. First of all, the explosion of population in non-white nations, especially in China and India, was foreseen in his theory. This is the population peril which is one of the salient features of Yellow Peril ideas. Secondly, Pearson dreaded the modernization of non-Western nations, especially of the Chinese. A modernized China would be a military and industrial peril. Two major forms of Yellow Peril fears, the military and industrial peril, can be found in his theory. Thirdly, he emphasized the Chinese peril. As I have discussed before, this peril is the major element of the Yellow Peril fears. Contrary to Bakunin's Yellow Peril idea which exaggerated the Japanese peril, Pearson dreaded more the potential of China than that of any other non-white nation. If he had seen the result of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 -1895, his conclusion must have been different from the original one. However he passed away before seeing it. Lastly, it can be pointed out that his theory assumed the racial superiority of the white races, though he was pessimistic about their future. Racial antagonism seems to have been underlying his theory. The racial factor, which is also one of the major characteristics of the Yellow Peril ideas, can be seen in his argument.

What was reflected explicitly in his idea is an aspect of the decline of Western civilisation. He was pessimistic about the future of the West not only in the rise of the colored people but also in the decay of Western civilisation from within. He predicted the triumph of state

socialism, the replacement of church by the state, the tyranny of industrial organizations, and the loosening of family bonds. He thought these developments implied the decay of character, of independent genius, and of all that is best and noblest.<sup>(38)</sup>

### III Lafcadio Hearn and Other Yellow Perilists

It can be said that along with the current belief in the decline of Western civilisation, Pearson's idea was deeply influenced by Spencer's predominant Social Darwinism.<sup>(39)</sup> There was one other person who was fascinated with Spencer's idea of Social Evolution and with Pearson's theory, and feared overpopulation, not least that of the Chinese. That is Lafcadio Hearn, the best known Japanophile.<sup>(40)</sup> According to his letter to Basil Hall Chamberlain, another well-known Japanophile of the day, Hearn had the same view on the survival of the West as Pearson did. "As I wrote to you long ago," wrote Hearn, "I have been inclined to the same conclusions as Pearson reaches, for some years." However, he emphasized that he had arrived at these conclusions by different methods. He said that his life in the tropics had taught him what tropical life means for white races, and America taught him "something about the formidable character of the Chinese" and "the enormous cost of existing civilization to the Western individual." Pessimistically enough he forecasted the extinction of the white races and stated:

I think it highly probable that the white races, after having bequeathed all their knowledge to the Orient, will ultimately disappear, just as the ichthyosaurus and other marvellous creatures have disappeared, — simply because of the cost of their structure.<sup>(41)</sup>

Hearn's fear was explicitly expressed in his three essays "China and the Western World," "The Future of the Far East" and "Jiu-jitsu."<sup>(42)</sup> Hearn believed that overpopulation was bound to produce human suffering. After pointing out that the high Japanese population growth resulted not from "unusual fecundity" of the Japanese but from better economic conditions created by her Westernization, he anxiously asked what would happen when a much more fertile China was westernized. If China was industrialized, inevitably, he thought, a population explosion in China would take place and would threaten the world. He also warned of Chinese immigration into Caucasian nations. Hearn also had a pessimistic view under the influence of the then predominant thought of Social Evolution.<sup>(43)</sup> In his *Out of the East*, "Wherein consists the fitness for survival?" asked Hearn concerning the fitness of Westerners to survive. He said, "Now in this simple power of living, our so-called higher races are immensely inferior to the races of the Far East." Although he had no doubt of the racial advantage of the white race in its physical energies and intellectual resources, the cost of its life was the problem.

For the Oriental has proved his ability to study and to master the results of our science upon a diet of rice, and on as simple

a diet can learn to manufacture and to utilize our most complicated inventions. But the Occidental cannot even live except at a cost sufficient for the maintenance of twenty Oriental lives. . . . It may be that the Western Races will perish — because of the cost of their existence. Having accomplished their uttermost, they may vanish from the face of the world — supplanted by peoples better fitted for survival.<sup>(44)</sup>

Hearn feared China, especially for her industrialization and her potentialities in population and resources, and her possible alliance with Japan. Japan, he thought, could supply the scientific intelligence which China lacked. He said, "China and Japan — representing the Far East, have shown themselves able to compete with the West in commerce and also in the intellectual battle of races."<sup>(45)</sup> He went on to say that not only the ability of the two countries but also the necessity would drive them to "compete with the West in order to defend themselves."<sup>(46)</sup> When the world population reached its maximum capacity, he predicted, the struggle for world control would occur between the West and the two Oriental nations. In this struggle, the economy would be the most important factor and economically weaker nations would perish. Pessimistically enough, he foresaw that the winner would be the Oriental nations because Orientals could work for lower wages and live under poorer conditions. Hence the poverty of the Oriental masses was their strength. He stated, "Assuredly in the future competition between West and East, the races most patient, most economical, most simple in their habits will win."<sup>(47)</sup> Therefore, he said, "I believe also that the



future is for the Far East — not for the Far West. At least I believe so, as far as China is concerned.”<sup>(48)</sup>

Though he forecasted the possible conflict between the East and West, Hearn thought that the Russian conquest of China would be far more dangerous to the West than Japanese domination. There is a Yellow Perilist of the day who also dreaded a China under Russian domination. It was Brook Adams (1848-1927), who published books such as *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (New York: 1896), *America's Economic Supremacy* (New York: 1900), and *The New Empire* (New York: 1902). He also laid the intellectual groundwork for later Yellow Perilists as Pearson did. His major concern at that time was the fall of Western civilisation. He had an idea that civilisation would follow commercial growth and decay and tried to apply it to contemporary history.<sup>(49)</sup>

When the commercial centers of the world reach their peak of prosperity, he thought, they would form the center of world military strength as well. What seemed unique in his theory is his belief that this military-commercial hub of power has moved always to the West. He calculated that this westward moving economic center was just reaching the United States in 1900. He wrote, “Americans seem, at last, to realize that the economic centre of the world is moving westward, and has already, probably, entered the United States.”<sup>(50)</sup> It would be a matter of course, at least for him, that the center would move across North America. Ignoring the Japanese islands between the United States and the Eurasian Continent, he thought that it would reach China in due

course. He stated, "[O]n the decision of the fate of China may, perhaps, hinge the economic supremacy of the next century."<sup>(51)</sup> He dreaded not only the tremendous wealth of the Chinese population and resources but also the strengthening of China under the control of a single foreign power. That was not Japan but Russia. He feared an awakening of China under Russian domination. "Russia must play a leading part in the future of Asia," he said.<sup>(52)</sup> He seems to have believed that Russia and the United States would eventually meet in armed conflict over China someday. Therefore, he warned the United States saying that:

The Chinese question must, therefore, be accepted as the great problem of the future, as a problem from which there can be no escape; and as these great struggles for supremacy sometimes involve an appeal to force, safety lies in being armed and organized against all emergencies.<sup>(53)</sup>

This form of the Yellow Peril, in other words the Slavic Peril, was not new. Even after Bakunin's first public warning of the Yellow Peril, some Europeans began to fear the Chinese under the leadership of Russia instead of a Japanese Alliance with China. A French statesman, Barthélemy Saint Hilaire, and a Polish statesman, Mieroslawsky, both feared that Russia could dictate terms to Europe with a rich Chinese reservoir of force at her disposal.<sup>(54)</sup> This variation of the Yellow Peril idea, it seems, was feared by Europeans rather than Bakunin's Yellow Peril. In the *San Francisco Chronicle* between 1890 and 1892, a French writer occasionally expressed his fear that Russia would arm the Orient

to turn it on Europe.<sup>(55)</sup> This fear of a Slavic Peril was more frequently expressed between 1901 and 1905 in Europe and America.<sup>(56)</sup>

There was a foreboding that Western civilisation would decline. From a military point of view, however. Asia was still nothing but a trifle. While Japan began to be recognized as a military power after the Sino-Japanese War, she was still a regional power. Hence many Yellow Perilists tried to discover economic grounds for their Yellow Peril ideas. The economic peril might rather be a tangible threat than the other supposed threat from the East.

When we examine the Yellow Peril theories in terms of the economy, there were two critical points. The first one was the competition of an industrialized Orient in the world market. The second one was the economic menace of the Oriental immigrants to the United States, Australia and South Africa.<sup>(57)</sup>

Although there were ebbs and flows in the discussions of competition from an industrialized Orient, they mainly centered on the issue of Chinese industrial potentiality. These discussions tended to focus on the aspects peculiar to Oriental economic activities. Before the Sino-Japanese War, cheap Chinese labour and bimetallism which was maintained by the cheap silver were the major concerns about the Orient. In a book entitled *Le péril jaune* (Paris: 1901), namely, the Yellow Peril, a French national economist and journalist, Edmond Théry (1855-1925), warned of industrial competition from the East. He stated:

China is open from now on. The competition of European

capitals is going to set up there a perfect economic plant rapidly. Under the strong influence of the Japanese, their brothers as a yellow race the Chinese will be the producers of the first class very soon.<sup>(58)</sup>

Japanese military successes in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars also made people entertain apprehensions of Japanese industrial development.<sup>(59)</sup>

Although fear of the competition from the East was growing at that time, the more potent fear was the economic menace of Oriental immigrants in the United States and Australia. In the United States, Chinese immigrants had been perceived as a major threat until their total exclusion in 1902. After the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese immigrants became the primary object of concern.

There is no doubt that Chinese immigration into the United States in the last half of the nineteenth century played an important role in forming the Yellow Peril sentiment in the United States. Furthermore, many arguments of the Yellow Peril can be traced back to arguments about the menace from Chinese immigrants. As early as the 1880s, three Californian authors published "scare" literature which warned of the imminent danger from the hordes of Chinese invading and conquering the United States. These works were obviously inspired by the campaign for a national Chinese exclusion law, although they seem to have had no effect on their contemporaries.<sup>(60)</sup>

It is important to note that the exclusionists' arguments were not always based on the Yellow Peril theories. At the same time, however, it

can be said that many of them were based on a similar sentiment of the Yellow Peril. The psychological aspect of the Yellow Peril might have played an active role in the exclusionists' assertions. They reduced the Oriental to a stereotype in which the Oriental could not be culturally assimilated into the United States. They accepted a lower standard of living and lower wages. Furthermore, in their opinion, they were racially inferior, but fertile. These alleged dispositions peculiar to the Oriental contributed to the formation of the stereotype of many Yellow Peril theories.

These attitudes towards the Oriental in the United States tend to be attributed to the racist belief in the superiority of the white race. It is natural to infer in this way, but these attitudes also have something to do with the growing nationalism in the United States in the nineteenth century. American nationalism as well as most of European nationalism had an anti-foreign aspect.<sup>(61)</sup> Actually, the absolute superiority of the white race formed a basic assumption of the Yellow Peril racists as well as many exclusionists.<sup>(62)</sup> If there were no grounds for people to believe in this superiority, the Yellow Peril might not have terrified so many people.<sup>(63)</sup>

#### IV Conclusion

It can be said that the "modern" Yellow Peril theory of Mikhail Bakunin and that of Charles H. Pearson posed a question of Western

civilisation, though they were different on various points. Bakunin's Yellow Peril idea was more prophetic but it partly came true by the emergence of Japan as a world power. Bakunin's remedy to evade the Yellow Peril was to civilise Asia. "Civilisation," which was namely Western civilisation at that time, was the very concept that the then international societies overtly or covertly admitted as their norm. Interestingly, "civilisation" was exactly the national aim of Meiji Japan. The Meiji government tried to develop Japan in line with this theory of "civilisation." At the turn of the century, it can be said, Japan entered the circle of "civilised" nations. If Bakunin had a chance to see this "civilised" Japan, he would have no longer regarded her as a peril. Indeed, it was the heyday of Western civilisation.

Yet after Bakunin, as we have already seen, many Yellow Perilists began to share a common foreboding that Western civilisation had reached its peak and had started declining. This was explicitly reflected in Pearson's Yellow Peril idea. Actually, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Europe had expanded beyond its geographical confines into Africa and Asia. Yet by the last decade of the nineteenth century, a growing number of people began to think that expansion, or in other word, encroachment, had reached its peak and that imperialism, although it was not called such at that time, was morally wrong. Attitudes towards the somewhat pessimistic future of Western civilisation varied at the individual level. Many Yellow Perilists, not like Bakunin, seemed to dread any "change" in the present conditions under which the West could enjoy its prosperity. In this sense, they were

conservative. However, the more they stirred up the fear, the more the fear itself seemed to betray that conditions were changing, although they might not want to admit it. Actually, it can be said that the supposed decline of Western civilisation, which some felt was only imaginary but some thought was a reality, stimulated the Yellow Peril fears.

Things are different today from those days. Recently, nobody claims that Western civilisation is the sole one. We assume that various civilisations co-exist nowadays and it is difficult to say which one is superior to the others. However, it can be said that Western civilisation, though its power has considerably decreased, is still predominant in the world's political arena.

It is particularly interesting that after the demise of the Cold War, the distinction between the Western and non-Western civilisations seems to be revived as an important factor in viewing world politics. This is explicitly true in Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" In this controversial essay, Huntington foretold, "[C]onflict between civilisations will supplant ideological and other forms of conflict as the global form of conflict."<sup>(64)</sup> Although he cannot be regarded as a new Yellow Perilist, when we examine his theses, we may notice that some of his prediction and the way to conceive the world are similar to those of the Yellow Perilists. As many Yellow Perilists did, he dreaded the Chinese military and industrial potential in an exaggerated way. He wrote, "[T]he principal East Asian economic bloc of the future is likely to be centered on China."<sup>(65)</sup> Furthermore, he stated, "Centrally important to the development of counter-West

military capabilities is the sustained expansion of China's military power and its means to create military power."<sup>(66)</sup> What he dreaded most is a Confucian-Islamic connection. He foresaw, "[A] central focus of conflict for the immediate future will be between the West and several Islamic-Confucian states."<sup>(67)</sup>

It seems to me that his way of thinking is not so different from that of many Yellow Perilists. He assumed the confrontation between "the West and the Rest." Instead of using "races" as a key factor to decide the future world politics as many Yellow Perilists did, he uses "cultures" or "civilisations" as a key concept to do so. The difference between Western and non-Western civilisations is almost identical with that between the white and non-white races. The age of the Yellow Peril fears seems to be over. However, such fears have inspired Yellow Perilists and others – then, and ever since, even at the end of the twentieth century.

## Notes

(1) Useful in studying the Yellow Peril in general are three books: *The Yellow Peril 1890-1924* by R. A. Thompson, *Die gelbe Gefahr* (the Yellow Peril) by Heinz Gollwitzer, and *Kôka Monogatari* (Story of the Yellow Peril) by Hashikawa Bunzô. Thompson's book delineates the Yellow Peril ideas chiefly in the United States between 1890 and 1924 and spells out the Yellow Perilist's beliefs. Gollwitzer's book deals with a worldwide perspective of the issue. This book covers the Yellow Peril ideas in Britain, North America, Russia and Germany, studies the history of the Yellow Peril as a political slogan, and relates it to imperialistic ideas. The last



one is not so much of a scholarly work as a narrative history of Yellow Peril ideas. However, it provides us with numerous references and shows how these ideas were received or rejected in Japan. See, Richard Austin Thompson, *The Yellow Peril 1890-1924* (New York: Arno Press, 1978); Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die gelbe Gefahr: Geschichte eines Schlagworts Studien zum imperialistischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962); and Hashikawa Bunzô, *Kôka Monogatari* (Tokyo: Chikuma-shobô, 1976).

(2) Katsuta Yoshitarô, *Jinruino Chitekiisan 49: Bakunin* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1979), pp. 174-176.

(3) Ivanovich, "The Russo-Japanese War and the Yellow Peril," *Contemporary Review*, 86 (August, 1904), 169.

(4) The peace congress at Geneva, in which Bakunin actually made his sensational debut in Europe, was held in September 1867. This is coherent because "another great war" mentioned in the article was probably the Franco-Prussian War which broke out in 1870. Therefore, the date which Bakunin set forth the first "Yellow Peril" idea should be 1867 if he did so at the congress. As the biography of Bakunin, I refer to Katsuta, *Bakunin*, and a chronological table of his life in Inoki Masamichi (ed.), *Sekaino Meicho 42: Proudhon, Bakunin, Chropotokin* (Tokyo: Chûôkôron, 1967), pp. 560-565.

(5) As the detailed content of his speech at the congress was not published, it is difficult to examine whether he exactly advocated a kind of Yellow Peril theory at the congress. However, Gollwitzer also referred to the congress and Bakunin's reference to the Yellow Peril idea. See, Gollwitzer, pp. 105-106.

(6) Ivanovich, p. 175.

(7) Mikhail Bakunin, *La théologie politique de Mazzini et de l'Internationale* (1871); rpt. in *Michel Bakounine et l'Italie 1871-1872*, ed. Arthur Lehning (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961). The citations of this, hereafter, are personally translated.

(8) *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 68.

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 69.

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

(13) *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 71.

(15) *Ibid.*

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 76.

(17) *Ibid.*

(18) *Ibid.*

(19) According to Katsuta, he arrived at Hakodate on the 4th of August, then arrived at Yokohama on the 24th of August. He left there on the 17th September (Dates are

Russian calendar). Actually he spent less than seven weeks in Japan. See, Katsuta, pp. 144 -145.

(20) *Ibid.*, pp.176 -177.

(21) Charles Pearson, *National Life and Character a Forecast* (London: Macmillan, 1893), pp. 32-33.

(22) *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 47.

(23) *Ibid.*, p. 67.

(24) *Ibid.*, p. 17.

(25) *Ibid.*

(26) *Ibid.*, p. 87.

(27) *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

(28) *Ibid.*, p. 32.

(29) *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

(30) *Ibid.*, p. 53.

(31) *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

(32) *Ibid.*

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 92.

(34) *Ibid.*, p. 140.

(35) *Ibid.*, p. 141.

(36) *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

(37) *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

(38) "Pearson, Charles Henry," *Dictionary of National Biography* (1917; rpt. Oxford: 1973).

(39) Gollwitzer, p. 50. Gollwitzer stated that influenced by Darwin and Spencer his standpoint remained in the discerning of a high and low race.

(40) On Pearson's influence on Hearn, see; Beongcheon Yu, *An Ape of Gods: The Art and Thought of Lafcadio Hearn* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), pp. 226-230.

(41) Hearn's Letter to Basil Hall Chamberlain, September 16, 1893. Lafcadio Hearn, *The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, Elizabeth Bisland, ed. (1910; rpt. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1973), pp. 166 -167. Hearn revealed his view on Pearson's book and pointed out Herbert Spencer's influence on him in his letter to Chamberlain of October 2, 1893. He wrote, "[Pearson] is a little ponderous; but a thinker worth feeling. . . . Pearson has no pulse. He is just as cold and keen as Herbert Spencer, to whom, curious! - he makes but a single reference, though I can see that Spencer was his intellectual milk." *Ibid.*, p. 177. In the letter of April 28, 1893, Hearn told Chamberlain his "audacious idea" about the future of West and East. He foresaw: "[T]he larger brained and nervously more complex races of the West must give way at last to the races of the East." *Ibid.*, p. 90.

(42) Lafcadio Hearn, "China and the Western World: a Retrospect and a Prospect,"

*Atlantic Monthly*, 77 (April, 1896), 450-464; Lafcadio Hearn, "The Future of the Far East," *Japan and the Japanese* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1928), pp. 95-110; and Lafcadio Hearn, "Jiu-jutsu," in *Out of the East* (Boston, 1897; rpt. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1963), pp. 234-242.

(43) According to his biography, Hearn's thought was greatly changed by reading Spencer's *The Principles of Ethics* (1879-1893) in 1886 when he was thirty-six years old. Combining Social Darwinism and the idea of Buddhist metempsychosis, he later built his own idea of the world. See, Ikeda Masayuki, *Koizumi Yagumo no Nippon* (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1990), pp. 258-259.

(44) Hearn, *Out of the East*, pp. 234-242.

(45) Hearn, *Japan and the Japanese*, p. 105.

(46) *Ibid.*

(47) *Ibid.*, p. 108.

(48) *Ibid.*, p. 100.

(49) Thompson, pp. 25-29. "Adams, Brook," *Dictionary of American Biography* ([1964]).

(50) Brook Adams, *America's Economic Supremacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1900), p. 193.

(51) *Ibid.*, p. 196.

(52) *Ibid.*

(53) *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

(54) Ivanovich, pp. 176-177.

(55) Thompson, p. 250.

(56) *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

(57) *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

(58) Edmond Théry, *Le péril jaune* (Paris: Félix Juven, 1901), p. 300. Personally translated. See also, Gollwitzer, pp. 137, 245.

(59) Thompson, pp. 141-142.

(60) See, Roger Daniels *The Politics of Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p.69. These three books are: P. A. Dooner, *The Last Days of the Republic* (San Francisco, 1880); Lorelle, "The Battle of the Wabash," *The Californian*, 2 (Oct., 1880), 364-366; Robert Woltor, *A Short and Truthful History of the Taking of California and Oregon by the Chinese in the Year A.D. 1899* (San Francisco, 1882). Daniels asserted that none of these has the slightest trace of any literary merit. See, Daniels, p. 139.

(61) Thompson, pp. 5-7.

(62) *Ibid.*, p. 58.

(63) *Ibid.*, p. 62.

(64) Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, 72, No. 3 (1993), 48.

(65) *Ibid.*, p. 28.

(66) *Ibid.*, p. 47.

(67) *Ibid.*, p. 48.