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“The Perfect Type of Industry”:

2012 and Apocalyptic Visions of the Asian Century

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Asian American Studies

by

Jessica Man

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“The Perfect Type of Industry”:

2012 and Apocalyptic Visions of the Asian Century

by

Jessica Man

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Victor Bascara, Chair

This thesis traces apocalyptic narratives of East Asian labor and mastery through the reportage of the Russo-Japanese war to the modern disaster film, using *Yellow Peril* as a framework to explore how American economic anxieties have remained mapped to the Chinese laborer even through recent upheavals in U.S.-China relations and the transition of the global economy into late-stage capitalism. By investigating selected literary and cinematic works like Jack London’s “The Unparalleled Invasion” and Roland Emmerich’s *2012* (2009) as speculative projections of an apocalyptic understanding of history, I seek to illuminate how the different formations of *Yellow Peril* function as *state-sanctioned eschatologies* that plan to extend the ideological life of the state beyond its material life, naturalizing capitalist and colonial relations that preserve the strictures of race, gender, and sexuality in order to reproduce the nation, avoiding the apocalyptic re-orientation of the end of empire.

The thesis of Jessica Man is approved.

Valerie J. Matsumoto

Thu-huong Nguyễn-võ

Victor Bascara, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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S. D. G.

I. Introduction

Donald Trump's comments on China after his assumption of the presidency have left American journalists scrambling to make sense of his opinions. Once having accused China of "raping" the United States on the campaign trail (Diamond, 2016), he has recently expressed great admiration for President Xi Jinping as the leader of a world superpower; he proclaimed in a stump speech that China committed "one of the greatest thefts in the history of the world" (Smith, 2016) in its trade relations with America, but on March 4th, 2018, praised Xi for eliminating the two-term limit on China's presidential office, remarking off-handedly that "[America] might want to give that a shot someday" (Liptak, 2018). Accordingly, this statement made the headlines of several major publications and provoked intense speculation on Trump's perception of the office of the President and suspicion about his ultimate goals in governing the United States.

For all the psychological, political, and economic analyses that have tried to make sense of Trump's "flip-flopping" attitudes toward foreign relations, it has thus far remained unclear where and how the President formed his opinions on Chinese trade policy. His avowed affection for Fox News and other conservative media outlets, who have long held concerns about Chinese economic ascendancy, might be the root of his campaign-trail vitriol. However, his more recent remarks supporting the Chinese presidency and begrudgingly expressing admiration for the policies he had previously excoriated display a kind of economic sportsmanship more attuned to his background as a businessman with interests in playing to the most profitable market. These are both reasonable hypotheses, and there is hardly any precedent to expect an elected official to hold to campaign promises, but it is inaccurate to the past century and a half of U.S.-China relations to say that Trump is "flip-flopping" on China. Rather, he is exposing two sides of the

same political outlook that has driven our foreign policy in the East Asian arena for so long – two sides that have co-existed for as long as the West has feared the East: the dualism of Yellow Peril.

In order to truly understand this strange relationship between China and the United States, we must first look back to the origins of the Yellow Peril and trace its development at the beginning of the 20th century. The term itself was coined by Russian sociologist Jacques Novicow in 1897 to describe the Sinophobic logic pervasive in the Western discourse of nationalist economic anxiety. In the essay “Le Péril Jaune,” he dissected several common arguments laid forth for the suppression of Chinese workers, most prominently that they were naturally satisfied with being paid a lower wage than whites, were predisposed to find pleasure in hard work, and would ultimately destabilize the world economy in China’s favor through the sheer size of their workforce. They represent what Jack London refers to as “the perfect type of industry” (78), a people naturally inclined and suited to hard work, with few economic goals or aspiration beyond their station. Such arguments were the driving force for the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and were popularly supported by organizations like the Asiatic Exclusion League through the turn of the century. They were only fueled by reportage on wars in the Pacific where Eastern nations were beginning to assert their military power, first against each other, and then – unthinkable – against Western civilizations.

The Russo-Japanese War heralded change on an apocalyptic level for the West. Russia, having only recently established itself as a European power under the controversial Romanov dynasty, lost several major conflicts against a Westernized Japanese military and was forced to make major concessions to a nation that, in the Western imagination, had primarily been the setting for lush, courtly Orientalist fantasies like *The Mikado* and *Madama Butterfly*. The

Japanese, it seemed, had mastered the ways of the West much faster than anyone had predicted, and the West was beginning to pay the price for its inattention. China, where Japan threatened mastery of the long-feared hordes of cheap labor, was cast in a new and immediately threatening light. The corrupt rule of the Qing Dynasty had long plagued China with the title of the “sick man of Asia,” threatening the death of the Chinese empire. If the Asiatics could somehow master themselves and take full advantage of the plentiful natural resources that the non-industrializing Qing had failed to tap, then Russia would only be the first of many to fall to the Yellow Peril.

In November 2017, Trump praised China for mastery of the trade game and clear dedication to Chinese national interests. “Who can blame a country for being able to take advantage of another country for the benefit of its citizens?” he asked, going on to criticize previous administrations for their comparatively lax pursuit of American profit. It would seem that China, then, has finally mastered itself without the help of Japan, and has furthermore bested the United States as the greatest economist in the world, fulfilling the prophecy of an “Asian Century” that has been anticipated in fear for over a hundred years. How, then, is it possible that journalists – the very same Fourth Estate that feverishly reproduced the diverging Yellow Peril narratives of the Russo-Japanese War – cannot reconcile his comments with the narratives that their predecessors played in perfect tension, directly correspondent as they are? And how has the global imagination responded to this supposedly impending collapse of Western civilization?

The purpose of this thesis is firstly to argue that the particular strains of apocalypticism that emerged around the Russo-Japanese War crystallized the two faces of the Yellow Peril that has once again reared its Janusian head in American journalism. I identify one as that of the classic “coolie,” and the other as the “master,” primarily to distinguish between the roles of dominator and dominated. Over the course of the argument, I will replace “master” with

“creditor” to denote the transformation of the economic arena of concern from the factors of production to that of financial capitalism over the course of the 20th century. Through an investigation of war correspondences, memoirs, educational books, short fiction, and essays, I will trace the development and circulation of the “coolie” and “master” images of Yellow Peril in the United States from 1904 through 1923 and argue for the necessity of the Russo-Japanese War to understanding portrayals of American economic precarity as well as the resulting effects on Asian Americans.

The secondary purpose of this thesis is to explore how America has dealt with the apocalypticism inherent to Yellow Peril. Although journalists of the early 20th century were relatively trigger-happy with warnings of impending civilizational collapse at the hands of the Chinese, modern journalism stops rather conservatively at predictions of trade war and national decline as a world power. However, the apocalyptic has not by any means been vanished. Rather, it has been relegated (or perhaps sublimated) to the realm of fiction, and most spectacularly that of the disaster film, where entire countries might be obliterated with no real consequence, to the delight of the public. This is particularly true of German director Roland Emmerich’s Hollywood oeuvre, which includes such American epics as *Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and *Godzilla*. When Emmerich deals with impending disaster on a global scale, one might reasonably expect to witness the spectacular collapse of significant nations around the world, especially those with a familiar visual lexis ripe for gleeful iconoclasm. The entry of China onto the world stage as one of these significant nations, because of this dual narrative, has had complex implications for its depiction in disaster films both on a diegetic and a production level. Emmerich’s *2012* (2009) is uncommon in this genre because of its treatment of China as a source

of salvation for all Western civilization, and because of its popular reception amongst Chinese moviegoers.

Ultimately, this thesis will seek to answer the questions I have posed about the underappreciated cultural significance of the Russo-Japanese War, its centrality to the discourse of Yellow Peril, the development of dichotomous narratives during that era, and how the prophetic aspects of journalism, as well as its apocalyptic figurations, have been developed in cultural production. It will also explore the function of apocalyptic films as an ideological apparatus that foments support for exclusionist Yellow Peril policy and populist racial hysteria, providing the public with visions of America as it might persist even after a physical obliteration through a *state eschatology* in direct opposition to civilizational collapse. By theorizing an American approach to confronting the impermanence of empire, I hope to shed light on an often-overlooked influence on U.S.-China relations and the domestic treatment of Asian Americans, and provide a basis for discussing how apocalypticism is used as a national project to plan for the collapse of the national apparatus it is intended to serve.

II. Methodology

My argument relies on several fundamental contentions. The first is that the Yellow Peril is a tool used by the West to understand its economic relationship with Asia, especially in terms of coolie labor and the presentation of a call to action to limit Asian immigration. The second is that the Yellow Peril is a type of eschatology through which the American empire can cathect its anxieties about its place on the world stage. Finally, I contend that the publication of the documents previously mentioned, as well as the release of *2012* (2009), indicate the presence of a *state-sanctioned* eschatology, which focuses on naturalizing and preserving the superstructure

of empire, dislodging it from its material formations and creating a pathway toward maintaining regenerative but imperially reproductive understanding of social, political, and economic relationships. It is a way of anticipating the total obliteration of the American state and envisioning a future in which it may one day rise again.

I have structured this argument to begin with an historical account of the Russo-Japanese War, discussing its origins, its effects on perceptions of Asian labor as militarized and imperial, and the role of wartime news correspondents in shaping these perceptions through journalism and fiction, primarily of those who were directly dispatched to Manchuria or lived in Japan before the war. Although I will be looking through the work of several journalists, missionaries, and authors of fiction, most of these documents will be used to examine the contemporary opinions that may have informed Jack London's vision of an apocalyptic Chinese future in "The Unparalleled Invasion." I will argue that the weight behind the language used to describe Japanese and Chinese imperial ambition changed fundamentally through the Russo-Japanese War and eventually collapsed during the late 20th century during a global transition to a finance economy, although the language itself remained popular as ways of fomenting populist support for exclusionary and isolationist foreign and economic policy. I will explore the lasting effects of these two periods of drastic nationalist re-orientation by conducting a close reading of the disaster film *2012* (2009) directed by Roland Emmerich and examining how its writing, production, and international reception indicate cosmetic change and fundamental similarity to the strain of Yellow Peril apocalypticism popularized at the turn of the 20th century. I will conclude by observing how working at the entanglements of fiction, law, and economy can reveal mutually-informed relationships that change our understanding of the forms that contemporary political and economic networks can take. I will also emphasize the importance of

understanding the Russo-Japanese War as a watershed moment for the relationship between the United States and Asia that still reverberates through modern discussions of debt economy and Asian labor.

III. Contextualizing the Russo-Japanese War

The Russo-Japanese War marked several turning points in world history, whose threatening effects are still felt in Western conceptualizations of the East today. The consequences of Japanese military victory, how it was brought about, and its implications for the changing geopolitical landscape of the 20th century mark the emergence of new nations into global capitalism in ways that fulfilled the apocalyptic prophecies made at the end of the 19th century.

Firstly, the defeat of Russia caught the West by surprise. Having long considered Japan another relic of the antiquated East and a rather stubborn mentee in the ways of civilized life, the British and American attachés to both the Russian and the Japanese contingents were universally surprised by Japan's military prowess, most notably their efficient organization and the fighting spirit of their soldiers. By 1904, the Meiji Restoration had been underway for fifty years, combining Western political ideas, gubernatorial structure, and military discipline with Japanese belief systems and national interests. In particular, the complete reform of the government and military had gone relatively unnoticed except by those missionaries, reporters, and ambassadors who had attempted to mediate on both cultural and political levels between East and West. However, because of their lack of domestic influence, antiquated ideas about Edo Japan continued to proliferate through European and American cultural production in the fine arts, especially dramatic theater and japonist painting. This only exacerbated the humiliation of

Russian defeat: an arena of sexual and economic domination had closed up and dealt out defeat to a nation that had begun the Westernizing project three centuries earlier.

Secondly, it was the first truly modern war, both in terms of strategic and technological advances and because it involved trans-hemispherical intervention and finance. Scholars of the war often refer to it as “World War Zero” because it anticipated the types of political and economic forces that would shape World War I, and more generally the future of 20th century warfare. The advent of the machine gun and barbed wire drastically changed the terrain of the battlefield, and the Japanese navy’s extensive use of pre-dreadnought large-caliber gunships forecasted the complete dominance of heavily-armored fleets armed predominantly with large-caliber guns throughout the World Wars. It also established some of the major international financiers that would fund both the Allies and the Central Powers during World War I.

Thirdly, it signaled the entry of the United States onto the world stage as a financial and political power. Along with the British, the United States was one of the only parties interested in lending to the Japanese; Jacob Schiff, then of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., coordinated with the Bank of Japan to organize the loans that accounted for half of the funds used by the Japanese during the war and allowed them to outlast the Russians in terms of resource management (Ananich, 449-464). At the conclusion of the war, treaty terms were negotiated by President Theodore Roosevelt in Kittery, Maine, between two prideful and consequently volatile nations. This success, although met with mixed reactions on the Russian and Japanese home fronts, earned Roosevelt a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts, and provided firm ground for the United States to begin establishing itself as an authority in international diplomacy.

Finally, Japan’s victory transformed the nature of Yellow Peril. Where previously Western nations had been apprehensive about the rising numbers of Asian immigrant laborers

and their perceived threat to white employability, Japan demonstrated that Eastern nations, if modernized, would present an even more immediate military threat. Specifically, Western journalists both praised Japan's vigor and imperial ambition as a modern civilization, but also theorized based on its prior victories that it was capable of mastering the hitherto-undisciplined Chinese. The numbers of the Chinese population alone were enough to fuel furious speculation about its ability to raise a standing army larger than any other in the world, and under Japanese guidance, the Yellow Peril would almost certainly change the world order, if not cause its destruction altogether.

Although it had been in American interests through the end of the war to support the Japanese as an emerging and rapidly-Westernizing nation, their eventual victory deeply unsettled the already-fraught relationship between white and Asian laborers in the United States workforce. Nowhere is the domestic implication more clearly outlined than in San Francisco, where the organization of the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League in 1905 and the segregation of Japanese students from public schools in 1906 reflected rising racial tensions that were exacerbated by the unprecedented ascendancy of the Empire of Japan. Widespread distrust of the Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese, which had been fomented since the mid-1800s, grew even more vitriolic at the agitation of American labor unions in the aftermath of the San Francisco Earthquake (Lee, 126). The city made no efforts to rebuild Chinatown. Both the National Guard and other local residents actively harassed the Chinese who had not yet left the city (Nee, 21). A large number of Japanese immigrant families also fled the oppressive atmosphere in San Francisco (Rasmussen, 2001), moving south to Los Angeles's Little Tokyo where many sought employment at Pacific Electric, which had begun to install a railway in the Los Angeles area some years before (Several, 1998). Nativist lobbies continued to push anti-

Japanese and anti-Chinese laws in the United States Congress. By 1902, the Chinese Exclusion Act had been renewed twice and then made permanent; by 1907, the United States informally negotiated the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan, agreeing not to restrict immigration from Japan if the Japanese government refrained from issuing new passports to potential émigrés, except in special cases for family reunification. Along with all others of Asian descent, the Japanese were barred from owning property in California through the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920, which several other states imitated. Immigration from Asia (except the Philippines, a U.S. colony at the time) was completely illegalized through the Immigration Act of 1924.

We cannot ignore the centrality of the labor threat to the cascade of legal action against Asian immigrants. The effect of the Russo-Japanese War was not to create a new threat – it was simply the transformation of an old one, mostly inhabited by, and forever tangled up in, the threat of a Chinese invasion. As a political curiosity, the Empire of Japan certainly intrigued the West, and to some extent concretized the progressivity of Western thought and sociopolitical organization. However, as an element of the Far East, and of the Orient, Japan's victory and imperial interests could never have been viewed without the accompanying threat of Chinese economic domination, no matter which Eastern nation took up the project of organization. The duality of admiration for Japan and the terror of Chinese domination insinuated themselves into the narrative of Yellow Peril permanently, and although they have taken different forms and moved between countries over the past century, we will find that their most clear and nascent forms sprouted from the reportage of this victory in Manchuria.

IV. National Ambitions

In the years leading up to 1904, the Russian government faced severe internal unrest primarily because of its continual exploitation and mistreatment of the peasant class. Although full emancipation of the serfdom had been legally declared in 1864 under Alexander II, peasants were still heavily restricted in terms of mobility and earning potential, as many had neither the means to purchase the land they worked on nor move away from it; a significant portion of all of their earnings were paid to the village commune. The increased localization of government, however, resulted in the creation of such institutions as the *zemstvo*, which allowed the election of governing officials on the provincial level. Although the *zemstvo* was usually composed mostly of nobles, whose votes were weighted vastly more than the peasants', it represented a step toward the fracturing of the tsar's power as well as the increasing influence of the Russian intelligentsia, who saw the continued existence of the peasant class as a symbol of Russia's inferior progress as a Western civilization (Falkus, 266-270). The transition of power from the nobility to revolutionary elements was accelerated, albeit unintentionally, with the reorganization of local governance.

With the establishment of the *zemstvo* and the increased agitation of the peasantry, the power of the Tsar was under constant challenge. Nicholas II responded to the problems arising from ruling a multi-ethnic empire with diverse religious affiliations largely with strong-armed and often violent suppression until general strikes and civil unrest forced him to make concessions of executive and legislative power. Although the most prominent of these concessions, the October Manifesto, nominally granted basic rights to all Russians and instated the Duma, he continued to retain most of the executive power that was traditional to the role of the tsar, and attempted to exercise his position as his predecessors had, wishing to carry on the

legacy of Peter the Great despite being a much less competent and much more reviled ruler. His failure to muster enough resources to defeat the Japanese in Manchuria along with his complete mishandling of the resulting dissatisfaction on the home front was the beginning of the end of his rule. The widespread civil unrest eventually culminated in the February Revolution and the Bolshevik deposition and massacre of the Romanovs in 1917.

In order to understand why the Russian defeat in Manchuria was considered such a great humiliation, and also why it was the first sign of the end times for the Romanovs, we must first consider Russia's history relative to the other great European powers. While the rest of Europe had enjoyed the heights of intellectual output of the Renaissance, Russia had still been under the control of the Golden Horde, and retained many influences from the Khanate's governing practices as well as the neighboring Ottoman Empire, which had begun to fail by the time Peter the Great inherited the throne. As a result, Russia still maintained a serf class through the 19th century when the other great powers of the West had long since enacted the abolition of the serfdom. Despite Peter I's widespread Westernizing reforms and the absorption of Enlightenment thinking under Catherine III amongst the educated classes, the Romanovs never completely relinquished the autocratic power of the tsardom. Although they chased Westernization and clearly realized that Russia had neither the military nor political power that others did despite their widespread conquests and flirtatious relationship with German and French political elements, they relied heavily on the military machine to legitimize their rule, which necessitated the extraction of resources from the peasantry; peasant abolition was thus contrary to Russia's imperial interests, and remained one of the most prominent barriers to entry for Russia (Hosking, 198-199).

As a result, Russia to this day straddles the border between East and West, physically and ideologically. Western Europe has continually seen it as a less-civilized, more-Oriental cousin, despite whatever appearances it may have as a white European nation. Consequently, many of Peter the Great's projects of Westernization sought to do away with the "barbaric" practices of the Muscovites, and many of his successors continued his reforms on an aesthetic and a political level, closely associating with German nobles in political practice and in marriage. Anna in particular brought about the Westernization of Russian architecture, moving away from the Byzantine flair seen in structures like St. Basil's Cathedral toward an imitation of British Elizabethan luxury, which is evident in the Romanovs' primary residence, the Winter Palace. Russia's status as an imitator and a latecomer to the European game plagued the Romanovs and contributed to the instability of the Russian national idea and even to its geopolitical ambiguity. Is Russia an Asian or a European power? Its seat of power has historically resided in Moscow and St. Petersburg, placing it in closer proximity to Europe, but the majority of its territory lies in Asia, and it is continually associated with Oriental despotism.

One can easily see that this problem of identity greatly affected Russia's attitude toward its war with Japan. Asserting power over China and Japan was supposed to have been an easy project for any Western power; China and its vassal, Korea, were constantly harangued by foreign powers and had little with which to represent themselves convincingly, and Japan had only just begun the project of modernization, having much to learn from its European mentors. It was a chance for Russia to take a step in casting off its Oriental associations and define itself as a Western nation with practices so distinct from the Japanese "yellow monkeys" (Erlanger, 1995) that there could be no mistaking it for a lesser civilization. Unfortunately, it had neither the means nor the popular support to emerge victorious, and was forced by the nations that it had so

desired to see as colleagues into making significant concessions of land to a nation which had in only fifty-odd years apparently surpassed all of Russia's centuries of progress. This defeat drove home the inadequacy of Russian military and economic power in comparison to its contemporaries, and was a significant factor in revealing the increasing obsolescence of the tsar in the modern era. By the end of the war, Russia had been thoroughly humiliated in front of the watching eyes of every other major power on the globe (Riasanovsky, 401-403).

Japan, on the other hand, had recognized their unpreparedness to deal with the West from the moment Commodore Perry forcibly opened Japan to European trade through the use of "gunboat diplomacy" in 1854. The Meiji government quickly began to Westernize both its structure and its military, although it did not place similar strictures on culture. After allowing Christian missionaries to proselytize the populace during the 16th century, the Tokugawa shogunate had received significant backlash from the Japanese who resisted the apparent eradication of traditional cultural and practice – the destruction of Japanese ways of life along with traditional government in favor of a method of social and political organization that had been brought in by a foreign agent who purposefully impinged on the national sovereignty of Japan (Gulick 12-13). Although the Meiji empire negotiated it with much more consideration, some continued to see Westernization as a humiliating capitulation to Europe and part of a long string of abuses heaped upon Japan's dignity by the various European governments.

1868 saw the end of the Edo period and the shogunate institution that had previously dominated all practical rule of the Japanese people, leaving only symbolic power to the position of the Emperor. Oda Nobunaga had unified Japan under the Ashikaga shogunate during the mid-16th century, along with two of his major retainers, Tokugawa Ieyasu and Toyotomi Hideyoshi. After Oda's assassination, a short-lived power vacuum incited violent and bloody struggle

between the Tokugawa and Toyotomi factions at the Battle of Sekigahara. Although the Tokugawas ultimately gained control of the shogunate and continually rooted out and eliminated political dissenters over the two centuries of their rule, they were not able to amass enough military power to resist the “opening” of Japan or the additional trade concessions that Europeans demanded, and failed to take action when the populace pushed for the expulsion of all foreigners in 1863 (Perez, 33). In 1866, the last Tokugawa shogun, Yoshinobu, came to power. Yoshinobu was left with the task of negotiating the demands of the people for the shogun to relinquish power to the emperor, and although he tried to reform the shogunate during his brief reign, several of the factions that the Tokugawas had defeated at Sekigahara united and gained enough traction to force Yoshinobu to resign his position through a military coup after a brief period of civil war (Perez, 32).

Among the reforms that the Meiji government instituted were social and economic reforms that lateralized Japanese society. Universal male conscription into the military, the centralization of government, rapid industrialization, the establishment of a national dialect, efforts to stabilize the declining yen (Bailey, 106-109), the practical dissolution of the samurai class, and the disempowering of the daimyo did much to eradicate the feudal structures of society that had previously been commonplace under the shogunate. The emperor remained more or less a political figurehead and a religious symbol while the civil government transitioned into a Western-style national assembly with a constitutional document, reorganizing the country into prefectures and preparing for eventual elections that would take place in 1890. One of the government’s primary goals, and one that was openly advertised to the public, was to fortify and modernize its military. In order to do that, it worked closely with major domestic corporations to ensure a smooth transition into a capitalist industrialist economy, creating a domestic military

industry that added to export profits in order to fund the modernization of the Japanese army and navy.

Seeking to imitate other modern powers, Japan set its eyes on conquest, which seemed to be the game of national legitimacy – Britain, the Netherlands, and France all controlled colonial acquisitions abroad. The Meiji government decided that its first project would be gaining control of Korea, which was little more than a vassal state of a corrupt and tremendously weakened Qing-controlled China at the time. Japanese troops clashed with the Chinese during the First Sino-Japanese War, and Japan won with relative ease, gaining control of parts of Korea and Manchuria, including possession of the Liaodong Peninsula and Formosa (now Taiwan) through the Treaty of Shimonoseki. However, Japan was forced to cede Liaodong to Russia during the Triple Intervention of three Western powers – Russia, Germany, and France – on threat of military action. Although Japan had been successful against the Chinese, it would not be able to withstand the combined forces of three seasoned Western armies, and completed the cession unhappily. Russia's expansion of influence in the Manchurian sphere brought the two countries into conflict in the years leading up to the war (Auslin, 3-21).

It is absolutely undeniable that Imperial Japan reached industrialization much more quickly than Russia and that it entered onto the world stage under much more favorable conditions. Japan had only needed to organize its immediate territory, while Russia was stretched thin in an attempt to address centuries-old problems inherited through the dynastic succession across all of the territories it had snatched up in its conquests. Unequal and often exploitative governance of a heterogeneous population essentially led to Russian self-sabotage, and had to be rectified with a total regime change. Japan was able to leverage respect for the divinity of the Emperor in its construction of a national identity and transition almost completely out of the

feudal system within the span of a few decades. Although it had also necessitated a regime change of sorts, the shogunate had already been unpopular for its handling of international trade relations and foreign presence. Japan entered into the war at an economic peak, with control over the Chinese in its Manchurian and Korean territories; Russia was desperately trying to establish a trade route through the East and maintain its identity as a Westernized and European nation as the tsardom began to deteriorate in earnest.

V. The War, Quickly

Japan struck the first blow of the war with no warning. The Imperial Navy fired on the Russian Far East Fleet off of Port Arthur, after which the Japanese issued a declaration of war. Although it did not damage the Russian fleet, the aggressive symbolism was enough to put Russia on the back foot – Japan aimed to take back the territories it had been forced to give up during the Triple Intervention and would happily engage the Russian military in combat.

Combat took place on two fronts: land and sea. Most of the naval conflict surrounded the Japanese blockade of Port Arthur, which was hotly contested as a warm-water port that would allow trans-Asiatic trade. The Russian navy was unprepared for the way the Japanese conducted naval warfare, with extensive minelaying and use of torpedoes. Their adaptation to these strategies did not amount to any significant naval victories; as the Japanese army progressed on land, they were eventually able to capture vantage points along the Manchurian coast that enabled them to shell and destroy the lead ships of the Russian fleet from land. The rest of the fleet was withdrawn to defend Mukden, Russia's greatest stronghold in the Korean and Manchurian territories. Russia might have been able to put up more of a fight if its naval forces had not been divided at such a crucial point in the war. General Aleksey Kuropatkin, the Russian

Minister of War, called for the dispatch of the Baltic fleet well into 1904, but it took several months to arrive, having to make its way to the Pacific around the Iberian peninsula, then past the tip of Africa and through the Indian Ocean (Steinberg, 115).

Japan's naval victory was much more clear-cut than its struggles on land. The first major conflict between the Russian and Japanese armies took place at Liaoyang, on the Liaodong peninsula. Kuropatkin, having overestimated the size of the Japanese forces, continually withdrew forces from the front lines after each successive attack by the Japanese, although the Russian artillery was able to respond successfully to every assault. Oyama Iwao, the commander of the Japanese troops, attempted to encircle the Russian forces and ensure complete defeat of the Russians at Liaoyang. Kuropatkin successfully retreated, having caused the Japanese to expend too many resources attempting to break through the defensive lines to continue pursuing the Russians. Many of the subsequent battles throughout 1904 ended in frustration for the Japanese and mixed victory for the Russians, who built easily-defensible trenches that slowed the Japanese advance considerably. However, they were gradually driven back toward Mukden after General Nogi Maresuke's conquest of Port Arthur, losing the Battles of Yalu and the Yellow Sea, although not without causing significant losses to the Japanese army.

The largest conflicts of the war took place in 1905, at the city of Mukden by land and at the Tsushima Strait by sea. Japan won Mukden over a two-week campaign that resulted in almost 90,000 Russian troops lost and a Japanese victory due to several blunders in Russian maneuvering and communications (Steinberg, 125-126). The Russians were pushed out of Southern Manchuria altogether, leaving Tsushima the last hope of Russian recovery. Both sides at Tsushima were equipped with cutting-edge naval technology, including the wireless telegraph, which Japan used more efficiently and to greater effect (Price, 4). Despite this apparent balance

of power, the Japanese obliterated the Russian fleet, sustaining less than 200 casualties with three sunken ships compared to Russia's over 4,000 casualties and thirty ships sunken or otherwise neutralized in the aftermath of Japanese victory. Although the battles by land had all but exhausted the Japanese and Russian supply lines, the Japanese navy could most likely have held out for an additional six months of continual active warfare against the Russians if Tsushima had not been such a decisive victory (Ananich, 449-464).

Japan approached the United States to negotiate the terms of the treaty that ended the Russo-Japanese War in 1906. Having already declared support for Japan at the beginning of the conflict but maintaining practical neutrality, the United States took the lead in negotiations, bringing representatives of both governments to the Portsmouth Naval Yard in Kittery, Maine. The Japanese demanded territorial concessions from Russia as well as a significant indemnity. The Russians refused to pay reparations, which brought negotiations to a standstill for several days while American politicians put pressure on the Japanese to accept the terms, knowing that although they still had the ability to continue fighting the war, it would soon prove too expensive to maintain.

The Japanese contingent eventually signed onto the Treaty of Portsmouth. It was a highly unpopular decision amongst the Japanese, who took the lack of full concession as an affront to their status as clear victor and a sovereign nation with all of the sophistication and rights afforded to those in the West. After several days of rioting and violence against foreigners, the Emperor was forced to deploy military measures to calm the populace. The Russian home front was in even worse condition – rioting had already begun during the war once reports of losses against the Japanese began to reach Russia, and, as discussed before, agitated both the peasantry and the intelligentsia against the reign of Nicholas II, leading to full-scale revolution and the decline of a

European monarchic power that had previously marked the boundaries between East and West. The resulting emergence of another dichotomy alongside East and West – corporation and commune – would precipitate some of the most violent and traumatic political and military struggles of the 20th century, emphasizing the immanent threat of economic ideology and pushing it to the forefront of nationalist preoccupation.

VI. Apocalyptic Visions of Asiatic Labor

Both Britain and the United States had vested interests in the outcome of the war, and sent attachés to observe the workings of each army. They also provided charitable medical assistance in the form of both field and civilian hospitals. As the war drew to a surprising close, however, many observers began to publish reports and memoirs of their time in Japan and on the Korean-Manchurian front in an attempt to explain what appeared to the overseas public as an event that contradicted common sense. Reporters, missionaries, nurses, and soldiers alike recounted the events of the war in the decades following, grappling with issues of race relations, religion, diplomatic history, and the trajectory of their civilizations in the millenarian light of the 20th century.

Among these reporters was American novelist and notable socialist Jack London, who had published the classic adventure-survival novel *The Call of the Wild* to fanatical international acclaim in 1903, one year prior to the outbreak of the war. London followed the Russian forces through Korea and Manchuria and documented his experiences with all of the people in the area, later releasing several essays to his enraptured global audience on his experiences to bolster the reports he had written during his time on the front. In his essay “The Yellow Peril,” which was written on dispatch in 1904, he describes the bleak conditions of the Manchurian front and the

condition of the soldiers, praising the Japanese for their patriotic and martial spirit. Based on his observations of life by the border on the Yalu River, he writes:

The Chinese are the perfect type of industry. For sheer work no worker in the world can compare with him. Work is the breath of his nostrils. It is the solution of his existence. It is to him what wandering and fighting in far lands and spiritual adventure have been to other peoples. Liberty to him epitomizes itself in access to the means of toil. To till the soil and labor interminably with rude implements and utensils is all he asks of life and of the powers that be. Work is what he desires above all things, and he will work at anything for anybody.

London leaned more toward racial liberalism than other portenders of the Yellow Peril menace. His invocation of coolieism here is not as based in cultural determinism as his contemporaries leading anti-Asiatic labor movements back in the United States, instead blaming the industrial nature of the Chinese on generations of strict suppression by authoritarian government. However, his writing does not manage to escape the logic of coolieism, which calls the Chinese laborer more inherently suited to hard labor, institutionalized suppression of intellectual development or no. His generosity, which was remarkable for the time, only manages to exchange one logical mode for another.

London went on to position the Japanese in a complementary manner. Whereas London's Chinese thrive when presented with hard labor and are adaptable to commercialism in all of its forms, his Japanese are "a fighting race through all its history, a race which has always despised commerce and exalted fighting," and the country itself is "an apt imitator of Western material progress, a sturdy worker, and a capable organizer" (281). He argues in the final paragraphs that China's main hindrance from civilizational progress is its intellectual inaccessibility to the

“leavening” ideas of the West, and that it is thus constrained to mindless, manual, servile labor. Japan, he hypothesized, having undergone the Meiji Restoration and adopted European-style government, had no such problems with the linguistic barrier and were mentally and culturally adept enough to provide the Chinese alternative guidance from that of the rapidly-deteriorating Qing Dynasty.

His 1910 apocalyptic short story “The Unparalleled Invasion” marks one of the earliest uses of biological warfare in speculative fiction. Written in 1907 after his journalistic experience in Manchuria, the piece is framed as a hypothetical account of global geopolitics beginning with the Russo-Japanese War, based clearly in the notions of race and labor that he developed in essays like “The Yellow Peril.” In brief summary, he tells the story of a Chinese civilization awakened by Japanese mastery of European intellectualism. China, outnumbering the Japanese, eventually outgrows that mastery, and its population begins to grow at an exponential rate, expanding westward into India. Despite the diplomatic efforts of the West, China’s population continues to grow, eventually pressing up against the borders of Europe, unassailable by military means and so self-sufficient that embargo or political maneuvering is useless. The West is eventually saved by the genius of an American scientist, Jacobus Laningdale, who spearheads the effort to eliminate the Chinese threat. Together with several other European allies, America blockades China and bombards the entire nation with vials of contagious and deadly diseases. Escapees are shot when they attempt to pass the blockades. After virtually all Chinese have been killed, the Americans and Europeans begin a “sanitation” (99) effort and take up residence in the newly empty country, using the plentiful natural resources there to create a new and enlightened civilization after they “solemnly pledged themselves never to use against one another the laboratory methods of warfare they had employed in the invasion of China” (100).

London's outlook on the issue of Yellow Peril, on the one hand, respected the nations of the Orient for their rising status on the world stage, but also held them at arm's length, suggesting that the sheer coolie labor power of the Chinese could threaten the privileges that Western civilization enjoyed at the peak of economic power, and that it was in the West's best interest to help improve the East for the benefit of both. Failing that, however, the cancerous growth of Chinese labor would have to be eliminated somehow – possibly through total genocide. "The Unparalleled Invasion" investigates the consequences of inherent and unrestrained laboriousness, of the industrialized and mechanized foreign body, and of an unrestrained and unmastered coolieism that threatens the balance of a global economic and political order. This key distinction between coolie and master, between Chinese and Japanese, continued to develop throughout the early 20th century in public discourse until the end of World War II and the United States's assertion of total military power.

One of the most charitable views of the Japanese during the war came from American Congregationalist minister Sidney Gulick, who had been stationed in Japan as a cultural ambassador with a Christian missionary organization since 1888. Gulick published several volumes that attempted to create a sympathetic and encouraging relationship between the peoples of Japan and America, including *White Peril in the Far East*, *American Democracy and Asiatic Citizenship*, and *Anti-Japanese War-Scare Stories*. The first book stands out for its inversion of the Yellow Peril into a White Peril. Gulick concentrates for most of the book on telling the story of Japan as a developing state with its people's best interests in mind, which had suffered repeated indignities at the hands of European nations in the forcible opening of Japan, the asymmetrical trade negotiations that followed, and the disappointing conclusion of the Treaty at Portsmouth. He also blames the lack of effective Christian proselytizing on the poor behavior of

Americans, citing the completely degraded moral character of New Yorkers as displayed to Japanese visitors as the reason why Christianity was so rapidly abandoned (39-41). The White Peril, to Gulick, was Western imperialism that had no grounds for asserting superiority. How could the Japanese be ushered into the ranks of global citizenship if its mentors were so obviously hypocritical about the standards they used to measure moral fitness?

Charles Harvey Fahs, a Methodist minister, and Frazier Hunt, then a reporter for *The Sun*, both echoed this sentiment in variation. Fahs's book *America's Stake in the Far East* (1920) lambasts Western imperialism's interests in maintaining racial hierarchy and its subsequent humiliation of Japan, an emerging power that should have been its imperial protégé; Hunt's *The Rising Temper of the East*, somewhat following in London's vein, connects Chinese and Japanese ascendancy to revolutionary decolonial and anti-imperial gestures around the world, including the growing resistance to British occupation in South Asia. He warned against the overuse of hard power, believing that it would eventually drive the colonized to seek "race revenge" (Hunt, preface) once they gained equal footing with other imperial powers. But how? Both look to the cancerous quality of population growth and cultural eternism that London attributed to the Chinese in order to create an ideological scaffold. Hunt describes his experiences in China with a careful sensitivity, attributing to his native acquaintances humor, honesty, and patience among other sympathetic qualities that were uncommon to portrayals of the Chinese, but quickly falls back on the coolie-master vocabulary in order to structure his thoughts about the future of the Chinese economy. The Chinese, he writes, are "industrious beyond belief. He works harder and longer and more consistently and for less pay than any one else in the world" (69); and furthermore, that the method of Chinese imperial expansion is "like a great family of ants attacking a sleeping enemy; slowly, methodically, endlessly they creep over

their victim” (71). More sinisterly, he points out (erroneously) that “they’re the only race in the history of the world that has ever completely absorbed the Jews. It’s a clean record” (72). Hunt’s claim that China completed this supposedly impossible task supports London’s theory that the Chinese, given the chance, would assimilate other nations completely and annihilate cultural difference, no matter how great; China, with a surplus of labor and natural resources, could achieve any number of imperial quests if its government were not quite so corrupt and subject to foreign influence. Even sympathetic journalists pushed a narrative of *correct mastery* of coolieism as a source of salvation for both the West and the East, a disciplinary framework that centers Western survival and the primacy of Western worth – and thus necessarily positions the Orient as a major focus of Western apocalyptic anxiety that demands immediate management.

In the United States, this management was conducted in large part through a series of anti-Asian immigration legislation passed at the turn of the 20th century, the first of which was the Page Act of 1875, a wholesale ban on the immigration of Chinese women suspected of prostitution. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 followed quickly, ending the immigration of male workers as well, and was renewed several times in the following decades. The movement of Japanese migrant laborers, who supplied the increasing American demand for cheap labor, was first restricted in 1907 after the Russo-Japanese War through the Gentlemen’s Agreement, and then again in 1924 when the National Origins Act all immigration from Asia, excepting Filipinos. This series of racially-motivated, nationalist acts were passed at the same time as bans on the immigration of people with epilepsy as well as “beggars” and anarchists.

Adam McKeown reminds us that the ways in which the Chinese Exclusion Act was enforced at the American border “did more than just classify Chinese immigrants. It asserted a vision of properly ordered global social relationships, a vision that was inseparable from the

failures and contradictions inherent in its enforcement” (379-280). There is a wealth of scholarship that addresses the imperial preoccupation with legislating the border, linking it to both nationalist-statist anxieties about maintaining the ethno-national hierarchies of empire as well as anxieties about controlling subjugated bodies and legitimating colonial relationships to land. Chinese exclusion, which provided the basis for all subsequent iterations of racialized border control, points to the conceptualization of migrant labor as ideological contagion. All migrants are “carriers;” “illegal” migrants as early as the Exclusion Act had not been subjected to the proper ritualized screening that McKeown writes about. The inconsistencies inherent to border policing despite several attempts at reform indicate that Exclusion was not only about the physical prevention of Chinese entry, which it failed to do in the comprehensive manner pushed by labor unions, but about the public ideological decontamination of the United States. The concept of Yellow Peril not only threatened the stability of these “properly ordered global social relationships,” i.e. the economic and political ordering of immigrants and citizens based on American ideas of trade, race, and disability, but with actual total cultural and national annihilation. Yellow Peril is not only epistemological or metaphysical – it is an *eschatological* way of understanding U.S.-China (and more broadly U.S.-Asian) relations. With this framework, we can begin to understand the Page and Exclusion Acts and the associated immigration bans levied in the early 20th century as a state-sanctioned method of staving off apocalypse and eschaton, a legitimate way of recognizing the periodic and transitory nature of Empire.

VII. Dream Interpretation – Apocalypse, Eschaton, and Empire

In order to understand the relationship between state and apocalypse, we must first define the terms “apocalypse,” “eschaton,” and “eschatology.” “Apocalypse” is commonly understood

as a temporal mode that is focused on the imminence of an ending – to Empire, to global life, to cosmology. I am making a distinction here between the popular and the theological, scholastic definitions. The former conflates apocalypse and eschaton into a commentary on imperial and colonial anxiety, while the latter approaches apocalypse as a critical, fundamental, and radical shift in epistemology where what is hidden is revealed, and eschaton as the moment or period of obliteration where knowledge itself collapses.

“Apocalypse” is a term derived from the Greek *apokalypsis*, roughly translating to “uncovering,” but most famously taken to mean “revelation,” as in the biblical *Revelation of John*, sometimes called the *Apocalypse of John*. The word cannot be separated from its theological origins; Christianity is one of the fundamental traditions of thought through which Western nations understand history, social order, and futurity, and apocalypticism comes directly out of that tradition. The secularized notion of apocalypse turns prophesy into prediction, masking imperial Christian logics behind those of capitalism, modernity, and the state. “Apocalypse,” especially in its theological sense, should not be used as a semantically-neutral stand-in for just any religious conceptualization of the end of the world for this exact reason.

John’s apocalypse, received on the island of Patmos, is an extremely dense text, crowded with fantastic and terrifying images, moving in and out of different modes of signification without giving the reader a comprehensive cipher. Throughout the text, John describes a vision of the destruction of the world, wars in spiritual and physical realms, the subjugation and liberation of humanity, and the dramatic culmination of Christian notions of spiritual warfare. Most importantly, the text *anticipates* the thing which is to be revealed: the total renewal and redemption of the spiritual and physical realms, and the nature of the perfected body. John’s vision is not only of the end of the world but of how the cosmos will be reorganized into a new

“kingdom” ruled by God, and a preview of the consequences for human social and political orders. What is being revealed or uncovered – what is undergoing apocalypse – is *the reason for which everything has happened*; the apocalypse reveals a future state that forces us to retroactively reinterpret history, allowing the voices of oppressed, dead, or otherwise vanished peoples to assume their rightful place in the human narrative, shifting our perceptions of the world from one order of organization to another.

“Eschaton” (from the Greek *éskhaton*, “the last”) refers specifically to the events of the end which bring about the future state that apocalypse reveals; the apocalypse is the method through which John delivers his description of the eschaton. An *eschatology* orders and gives meaning to those events. Whereas an apocalypse is an interpretive system that imputatively reframes an historical narrative, an eschatology selects the events that represent the culmination of that narrative, describing their fruition in teleological terms. John’s apocalypse is an eschatological device.

In this way, the Exclusion Act, the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, and other turn-of-the-century immigration acts can be understood to constitute a *state or state-sanctioned eschatology*. Protective and nationalist legislation is always instated to narrow down the possible futures of empire and empire’s end. If American triumphalism is a belief in the inevitable dominance of U.S. government, culture, and ways of life over those of other nations, it must be maintained and driven by an eschatological imaginary that exposes weaknesses in the imperial strategy and thinks about the ways through which the empire could be destroyed. London’s “Unparalleled Invasion” provides an apocalypse that exposes the eschatological nature of the Exclusion Act and how it anticipated the fundamental threat Chinese laborers posed to the American nation-state. The Exclusion Act and all other anti-Asian immigration laws function on, and are justified

through, an imagined future predicated on the destructive power of Yellow Peril, validating a specific vision of eschaton and apocalyptically reframing the nature of Asian immigration.

Apocalypse necessarily deals with periodicity. Christian theology recognizes several “marks” in its historical record: pre- and post-lapsarian time, ante- and post-diluvian time, pre- and post-messianic time, pre- and post-apocalyptic time, and so forth. It also recognizes the nebulous and intractable nature of time – Giorgio Agamben notes in *Infancy and History* that Christianity “resolutely separates time from the natural movement of the stars to make it an essentially human, interior phenomenon” (95). The *Second Epistle of Peter* corroborates this observation, famously stating that “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (3:8, ESV). Eschatology therefore must be understood to extrapolate from a specific system of periodizing or marking history, but purposefully leave the actual span of the period it envelops unclear in order to avoid foreclosing itself at a certain date. In a state-sanctioned eschatology, the effect is to suspend, extend, and frame the period of imperial life so that the end state of totalized destruction hangs ominously over the present moment, continually presenting a justification for exclusion and border maintenance as nationalist projects of conservation.

A state-sanctioned eschatology can be expressed both through law and through cultural production, as Jack London, Robert Heinlein, and Philip F. Nowlan have aptly demonstrated. Alongside London’s “Unparalleled Invasion,” Heinlein’s *The War in the Air* and Nowlan’s *Armageddon 2149 AD* present speculative narratives that describe a Sino-American war and an American landscape under Chinese rule. Aris Mousoutzanis makes a critical intervention here in *Fin-de-Siècle Fictions, 1890s/1990s* by identifying apocalypse as “a form of colonization that is enacted at the interstices of technoscientific and biopolitical discourses, a motif whose early

traces may be identified... as ‘reverse colonization’ narratives” (154-155). All three of these texts anticipate Chinese ascendancy and hypothesize about methods of American resistance to invasion, a tradition that has evolved alongside American anxieties about China. Now, in a global economy where China has become not only a source of stigmatized and abjected labor but also a formidable creditor of the United States, American fears have left traditional military invasions behind in favor of anticipating a networked apocalypse, where annihilation can be transmitted through bank transfers, airports, computers, and other points of international contact, including, as always, state borders.

During the period of 2007-2009 known as The Great Recession, these anxieties were made explicit in the attribution of global economic recession to Chinese insistence on keeping the value of the renminbi stable instead of allowing it to depreciate alongside the American dollar (Kamrany, 2011). By the end of 2010, China owned about \$900 billion of the U.S. debt (“Datablog,” 2011), a number which has appreciated beyond \$1 trillion in 2018, rousing concerns that China would simply “buy” America and maintain a fiscal stranglehold with unspoken but surely destructive cultural and political consequences. Military conquest is no longer the primary mediator of relations between East Asia and the United States, although this by no means indicates a demilitarization of the area. The creditor-debtor relationship has subsumed the master-coolie relationship, where the status of “creditor” legitimizes a national ownership and therefore control over the labor force, controlling outward migration for its own nationalist projects. The partial upending of the master-coolie relationship, adding the creditor Chinese to the image of the coolie Chinese, and the creation of a global economic system of financial capital, has largely transferred anxieties about Chinese migrant laborers onto the entanglement of Chinese bankers and investors with the American economy and thus the

American future, a disorderly relationship that comes much closer to realizing the threat of the Yellow Peril than anything early 20th century writers imagined.

State-sanctioned eschatology has also changed since the days of London and Heinlein to reflect globalization and pathological understandings of how the world has been networked and flattened. Before the Great Recession, there was SARS, a disease that originated in southern China but was transmitted through air travel to 37 countries worldwide, including the United States. The worst of the SARS outbreak lasted for five months and was declared the first pandemic to occur in the 21st century (LeDuc and Barry, 2004), confirming fears about increased globalization and the pathological consequences of movement for networked nations that was once the sole claim of immigration. As early as the 1880s and 1890s, American apocalypticism regarding Asia had begun to incorporate ideas about disease, pathogenesis, contagion, and power quite naturally into its ideas about borders and the body politic. Mousoutzanis points out quite clearly that eugenics, disease, entropy, and imperial time were all closely linked at the turn of the 20th century; the second half of the 19th century saw the rise of the germ theory of disease, the laws of thermodynamics and the theory of the heat death of the universe, and eugenics (71-90). Disease and deformity were treated in literature and in popular discourse as entropic indicators of moral and physical decline that contradicted the triumphalist timeline of Christian empire. Entropy itself was extremely upsetting to eternist concepts of time and human survivability, putting an apocalyptic timer on the existence of the entire universe. Eugenics became popular at the time as a way to manage these indicators of declining society – disease, disability, mental illness, and race – and fight entropy, denying the possibility of the death of the universe and reasserting sociopolitical, cultural, and spiritual hierarchies of ability, race, and gender through legislation, medicinal practice, and border control.

The idea of border control as preventative medicine already admits to the porous nature of policed boundaries, which McKeown discusses in great depth in his study of the enforcement of the Exclusion Act. Invasion is a type of pathology that completely obliterates borders through phagocytosis, dissolving any identity based on geographical or organ-based (i.e., state) markers. However, in fiction, this sort of dissolution can actually be a source of positive anticipation, because it aesthetically effaces the settler-colonial country and provides a chance to distill its colonial ethos. Paul Williams observes that “the post-apocalyptic world can be an arena for the replaying of the colonial encounter, frightening in its unintelligibility but alluring in its virgin promise... [it] was the most plausible arena in which imperial adventurism could be restaged” (304-305). A state-sanctioned eschatology can therefore also be understood as a contingency plan for the end and the time beyond the end, and not only as a warning system or a means of avoidance. It is also an understanding that the end of empire is not synonymous with the end of its people, and crucially provides a way to propagate its intrinsic power structures and hegemonic values in hopes that it will one day be reestablished in a different form. Post-apocalyptic work that does not deconstruct the interlocking forces of patriarchy, criminality, and racialization must envision the nation and the empire as ideology. One of the best examples of this is from the final scene of Werner Herzog’s *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, where the titular character stands on the remains of his ruined colonial expedition and declares: “We will produce history as others produce plays... I, the wrath of God, will marry my own daughter, and with her found the purest dynasty the world has ever seen.” Although the particular material structures of empire and means of asserting imperial ambition may crumble with time, a persistent desire for its renewal and recreation will remain – the superstructure will persevere – if the survivors of the eschaton do not enact a radical shift in the nostalgia and desires they carry through the end times.

VIII. 2012 and the Asian Century

James Hansen gave a statement before the 99th Congress in 1985, declaring that “in 1983, transpacific trade exceeded transatlantic trade by \$30 billion... Leaders of the region began talking about a coming economic leap that would propel them into an ‘Asian Century’” (541). This term, popularized in the mid-1980s, refers to a century of Asian economic dominance in the vein of Henry Luce’s conceptualization of the 20th century as the “American Century” and the historical name of the 19th century as Britain’s “Imperial Century.” This periodization is clearly apocalyptic, and absolutely eschatological if one views the “Asian Century” as the fulfillment of Yellow Peril.

However, this is the limit of press speculation. Even in the most lurid op-eds, no journalist for a major publication has ever published anything like “The Unparalleled Invasion.” The speculative role of the reporter has been largely separated from that of the author of fiction. As a consequence, the telling of “alternative histories” has been mostly relegated to the realm of popular entertainment. In the decade since the beginning of the Great Recession, stories grappling with fears of Asian political and economic anxiety have experienced a new type of resurgence. Cinematic works like *Cloverfield* (2008), *The Man in the High Castle* (2015—), *Quantico* (2015—), *Red Dawn* (2012), *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), *Pacific Rim* (2013), *World War Z* (2013), *The Martian* (2015), *Arrival* (2017), *Daredevil* (2015—), *Homefront* (2011), *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* (2012), *The Book of Eli* (2010), etc. generally follow one of two narratives: 1) that Asia is a source of global threat, often specifically to American society; or 2) that Asia is

a seat of power that possesses the material means and human capital necessary to save the world. The second is much less common, but nonetheless present.

2012 is a 2009 disaster film directed by Roland Emmerich. It stands apart from the works listed above because it follows the second narrative explicitly and dramatically, and was the first to do so after the Recession hit. It also works with the “Mayan apocalypse” urban myth that had been circulating since the mid-2000s, building up to such anxious momentum that it drove people worldwide to begin investing in doomsday preparations. In the United States, this was famously encapsulated in the January 2011 case of Jared Lee Loughner, a mass murderer who targeted politician Gabrielle Giffords in a shooting in Tucson, Arizona that killed thirteen people and injured an additional six (Hudson, 2011). Although he was critical of religion, reporters made a point of bringing up Loughner’s belief in a 2012 doomsday scenario, which was thought to be part of his motivation for carrying out the murders. On the other side of the Pacific, panic was also beginning to sweep through China, where the sale of candles surged toward the end of 2012 in anticipation of a nationwide failure of the Chinese power grid as an interpretation of the 2012 phenomenon (Fisher, 2012). In reality, the Mayan Long Count calendar simply began a new cycle in December 2012. There was no cataclysmic eschatological prophecy associated with it in the context of its native culture; in fact, the beginning of this new cycle was widely celebrated by the Maya people throughout Central America. The prophetic doomsaying of New Age theorists and other such spiritualists was probably taken from a heavy-handed misinterpretation of the *Popol Vuh*, a Mayan prophetic text that grounds the contemporary era in a “fourth world” that is perhaps in transition to a fifth.

Emmerich’s film capitalizes on the fearmongering of New Age doom theorists in a spectacular way. His filmography up to 2009 included the enormously popular *Independence*

Day (1996), *Godzilla* (1998), and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), all of which dealt with imminent threats to humanity, and the last of which was a similar capitalization on fears of climate change and global warning that had been brewing in the public consciousness since James Hansen's testimony before Congress on that topic in 1988. *2012* similarly envisions the end of the world, but with a spin of inevitability that both constructs and leans on the fetishization of an indigenous knowledge of time.

A summary of the film is as follows:

In 2009, Adrian Helmsley (Chiwetel Ejiofor) journeys to visit a colleague in India. He discovers that the Earth will soon be subjected to cataclysmic change on the level of civilizational annihilation; a solar flare is exciting the Earth's core and causing it to accelerate global warming by releasing a massive amount of neutrinos. He brings this to the attention of the U.S. government, who then begins to cooperate with other G8 nations and China in order to create a survival strategy. The film continues the story in 2012, when the cataclysmic changes are scheduled to begin. Jackson Curtis (John Cusack), an unsuccessful writer, takes a vacation with his estranged family to Yellowstone National Park, and discovers that the discreet survival strategy is to construct "Arks" to which only a select number of elite people have access. After returning to Los Angeles, Curtis remains preoccupied with this notion as earthquakes begin to break the city apart. After his wealthy Russian employer (Zlatko Burić) confirms the existence of the Arks and leaves on a private plane, Curtis follows suit and convinces his family to get on a plane just in time to escape the collapse of Los Angeles into the Pacific Ocean. With the help of a conspiracy theorist radio host, Curtis flies to Yellowstone and obtains a map of all of the Ark sites. The radio host stays behind in Yellowstone when it explodes; Curtis, his former wife, her new plastic surgeon husband, and their two children escape in the plane and head toward a major

airport in Las Vegas, where they again meet Curtis's Russian employer, who allows them to board his jet along with his own family when they leave for the Chinese Ark site. Because of a complete rearrangement of the continents due to "crust displacement," the plane is able to crash-land in Chinese territory, where PRC soldiers greet the survivors but only extend Ark boarding privileges to the Russian family, who were wealthy enough to purchase tickets. Curtis's group sneaks on board the Ark with the help of some Tibetan Buddhist monks (Chin Han and Osric Chau), where their progress is monitored by the U.S. military crew. Eventually the Ark is filled due to the charitable efforts of Helmsley, inspired by Curtis's writing, and the doors are successfully closed in time to weather the impact of the first mega-tsunami.

Helmsley's storyline is interwoven with Curtis's as he tries to work against the non-humanitarian attitudes of the world's political and economic elite. He continually fails to rouse significant sympathy for the common people trying to gain access to the Arks, and is the only one to question the boarding selection procedure alongside the President's daughter (Thandie Newton). The President (Danny Glover) dies when Washington, D.C. is wiped off the map in one of the many titanic natural disasters that continue to ravage the world. Among Emmerich's visual casualties are the Vatican, Christ the Redeemer, Los Angeles, Hawai'i, London, and the White House. Helmsley also has an unresolved subplot with his father, a jazz performer who presumably perishes when his cruise ship is overturned by a tsunami. Eventually, Helmsley manages to use Curtis's writing to inspire the politicians and crew of the Chinese Arks to allow the thousands of stranded common people on board the Arks along with the elites, calling upon their sense of human decency and common humanity in the face of disaster.

2012 is a peculiar film. It is a neoliberal parable about the judgment of humanity and the moral corruption inherent to opulent living, hence the destruction of Los Angeles; it rides the

coattails of the Occupy movement as it pits the rich elite against the poor commoner in a struggle to overcome the vices of greed and selfishness while avoiding Occupy's institutional critique of wealth-hoarding. It is also an apocalypse that purports to have its origins in a Native American cosmic foreknowledge, but thematically takes all of its eschatological vocabulary and systems of signification from Christianity. Most relevantly to this discussion, it treats China in an incredibly positive light. Although the film is ostensibly about Curtis's development into assuming his rightful place as heteropatriarch of his family in a symbolic restoration of a righteous social order, it locates his salvation in the hands of the Chinese workers who can be seen constructing the Arks upon Helmsley's arrival at the embarkation area in China. The Arks are massive projects; a White House official remarks in passing as they see them for the first time, where workers are still putting on some finishing touches: "Leave it to the Chinese! I didn't think it was possible, not in the time we had." This set of circumstances surrounding China in the film has several consequences.

Firstly, *2012*'s inclusion of China as a world leader alongside the other G8 nations is an explicit acknowledgement of China's economic power and an argument for its rightful inclusion amongst other global superpowers in making world-changing decisions. India, which boasts a similar economic growth rate, was not acknowledged in the same way; the Indian subcontinent is completely destroyed by mega-tsunamis in the film, resulting in the death of one of Helmsley's closest friends. Emmerich is tapping into old and originally paternalistic approaches to the Far East, praising China's growth out of the role of "Sick Man of Asia" into a modern economic heavyweight, as reporters and writers around the Russo-Japanese War had predicted would be the case based on the sheer labor power available to China. Emmerich's China has mastered this labor power to the benefit of a future world that precludes its very existence as a nation.

Secondly, Emmerich's decision to have the Chinese workers remain uninformed about the purpose of their project points again to the idea that these people are coolies whose only purpose is to do hard labor, and who are ultimately disposable. Creating a disposable and rapidly-replaceable workforce has been China's purported strategy for world takeover since the inception of Yellow Peril into the European imagination. Although the Chinese are masters of labor, they are really masters of an abjected labor force enslaved by the dictatorial tyranny of an Oriental leader. In this way, one can portray the Chinese as undeserving of and incapable of satisfying these leadership positions, and suggest that the true economic and political order is one that places the American economy in a triumphal position, contradicting anxieties about China's status as creditor to the American debtor and reasserting a "proper" relationship between the two nations. This is diegetically reinforced with the centrality of Curtis's narrative – the whole world must be destroyed and renewed to restore proper morality, which includes Helmsley being paired off with the President's daughter and Curtis reuniting with his divorced wife in a heterosexist return to the status quo. The Chinese workers and even the Tibetan monks ultimately provide the labor that propels Curtis and his nuclear family to safety on the Ark.

Thirdly, as a corollary, the apocalyptic reframing of Chinese labor as a force that mainly develops to save Curtis but is ultimately disposable strives to teleologically subjugate China and Chinese economic interests. The Ark workers comprise the disposable and destructible basal infrastructure that are jettisoned before passage through the eschaton. Emmerich's fundamental argument, purposeful or not, is that China's development serves the West, a notion that Jacques Novicow anticipated in the original publication of "Le Péril Jaune." However, it remains an Orientalist notion that does not measure Chinese civilizational progress in terms of humanitarianism or with consideration of intangible cultural factors, but rather by an increasing

rate of production that may eventually develop to the stage where it is beneficial to the West, but does not develop so much that Jack London's strategy of total destruction is needed to cull Chinese civilization from the global herd in order to make room for others to grow.

Finally, *2012* envisions an end to both the Asian Century and the world, wiping out all forms of economy so that humanity can start anew once the waters of the global flood have receded. The Asian Century, on Emmerich's timeline, arrives late enough to save the world from the ills of late-stage capitalism, but not early enough for China to develop into a real Yellow Peril. This exposes the narrative of Asian salvation not simply as a positive twist on coolieism, but also as a way of defanging Asia and truncating Asian economic development in favor of rebuilding European and U.S. civilization anew, reiterating the imperial project and liberating it from the entropic social ills of late capitalism, global networking, and frankly Victorian ideas of opulence. Cusack's character is a writer, essentially an ideologue who appeals to common humanity in the face of danger as an essentially human and virtuous quality. His wife's new husband is a plastic surgeon based in Los Angeles, who is not portrayed unsympathetically but is doomed to die both because of the moral vicissitudes of his profession and the imperative for Curtis to resume his role as *paterfamilias* in order to recuperate himself. His Russian employer dies while helping his sons through the closing door of the Ark; the President of the United States is determined to go down with his ship and does not possess Helmsley's faith in humanity and instinct for self-preservation that eventually help him maintain a place on his Ark and secure additional spots for others. *2012* is judgmental, and judges China to be useful in performing the last miracle that will secure humanity's future. However, it ultimately rules that China as a state and Chinese (Communist) modes of organization must be obliterated in order to allow the

successful communication of American imperial desires through the crushing pressure of the eschaton into the new world.

The physical relocation of China as it moves across the Pacific during the process of crust displacement creates an image that is parallel to the forcible reordering of economic relationships. The massive consequences of continental movement, including enormous tsunamis capable of submerging entire continents, underscore the globalized nature of economy. Catastrophe can no longer remain local in the modern era because all nations are now linked in many fundamental ways: through infrastructure, through outsourced economies, through telecommunications, and through the standardization of time zones. Conveniently, this crust displacement greatly benefits Curtis, his employer, and their families, dropping them directly into a field of snow surrounded by the Himalayan mountains, where they are greeted almost immediately by crisply-uniformed soldiers who welcome them to the “Peoples’ Republic of China.” However, Curtis ultimately gains admission to the Ark with the help of a Tibetan construction worker and his brother, who know the mechanical workings of the ship well enough to form a plan to stow away with the animals on the lower decks. The Tibetans are treated both as oppressed Chinese coolies and as China’s voice of indigenous resistance to capitalism, although neither of the actors are Tibetan or Chinese nationals. *2012* locates anticapitalism within indigeneity, but does not address their liberation struggles with enough nuance to present a reading of their position within the Chinese workforce that respects, for example, Tibetan sovereignty struggles. Similarly, the purported Mayan influences on the 2012 “prophecy” lend spiritual legitimacy and postcolonial, subversive spice to cut the movie’s milquetoast analysis of capital, but Central American locations are strictly excluded from portrayal, most notably during the montage of destruction that shows the collapse of major Christian religious sites. The fact

that the Mayan peoples are so completely preteritized betrays the actual Christian theological framework within which the movie leverages the apocalyptic mechanics of judgement, liberatory futurism, and the recontextualization of moral history. The most blatant sign of this is that Curtis's son is named Noah; it seems that, in 2009, audiences were invited to believe that they were living in an antediluvian time where their fears of Chinese economic ascendancy would, one day, cease to matter entirely.

These critiques were not of great concern to the Chinese moviegoing populace. The film grossed \$166,112,167 domestically and \$68,670,540 in China, over \$20 million more than any other foreign box office. And whereas *2012* ranked 15th in domestic revenue, it came in 5th internationally, lagging \$30 million behind *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* and just above Pixar's *Up* ("*2012* (2009)"). Incredibly, the Chinese censorship board did not request any changes, and *2012* was shown uncut in its entirety (Ford, 2009). By the end of the summer, it ranked above *Transformers* in the box office to become the highest-grossing film in Chinese history. The acknowledgement of China's economic power cannot simply be relegated to textual analysis, then, but must also extend to the ways in which *2012*, a commentary on the effects of global networking in a disaster scenario, was itself subjected to the effects of global networking. Emmerich has since been accused of pandering to the Chinese audience with a relatively positive portrayal of the construction workers who built the Arks, who are ultimately responsible for the survival of humanity (Moxley, 2013). The worker occupies a different space in post-Mao Chinese thought than in the West, and the glorification of the Ark construction workers may have been seen as a capitulation to progressive and anti-imperial economic thought rather than a well-disguised reassertion of imperialist interests.

2012 functions as a production of state-sanctioned eschatology because it is a project that extends the state beyond its death, recognizing that the *esprit des lois* is the kind of ideological apparatus that Louis Althusser describes as state superstructure, and that it functions reproductively. As a neoliberal morality play, it uses subversive narrative elements – the questioning of hierarchy, of the limitation of the right to live, anti-capitalist critique, and authoritative indigeneity to an extent – not to provide arguments against the state but to set discursive constraints that preserve ideology while allowing the destruction of the material base and its infrastructure. Curtis and Helmsley both make appeals to the idea that pressure and precarity should unite human beings in such times as the apocalypse, and that the strong do not automatically have the right to rule the weak. They do so in a post-national and post-racial way, glossing over the narrative implication that the people being left to die are largely from the global South. As none of the other Ark locations are depicted, our focus must return to majority-white crews that are only interrupted by the occasional actor of color like Ejiofor. The continual return to Curtis’s storyline and his status as a partial audience surrogate reinforces ideas of white imperial survivability above all else. The film’s eschatology hinges on this, as well as the acknowledgement of Asian creditor status as a generative site that demands teleological limitation. The consequences of unmastered Chinese labor have already been thoroughly explored in the apocalyptic Yellow Peril fictions of the early 20th century, the conclusions of which are still used to make sense of the role of China in new arenas of capital today.

IX. Conclusion

Through “The Unparalleled Invasion,” Jack London speaks to us about the “sanitation” of China and the sublime horror of a genocide justified by the need to keep other civilizations

alive. His response to the new incarnation of Yellow Peril represented by the rise of Imperial Japan, as well as the American preoccupation with Chinese migrant labor, was primarily about the fear of outcompetition. However, the acceleration of capitalism through the turn of the 21st century has effected several necessary changes in the maintenance of Yellow Peril, and these are mirrored in *2012*. Where London predicted physical conflict with the Chinese over sources of capital in 1907, Emmerich and his screenwriters are living in an era just over a century later where China has already begun to conduct a type of invasion, buying American debt, providing alternative sources of exploitable labor, and butting heads with the United States over its neo-/colonial holdings in and relationships with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and North Korea. The intimate links brought about by economic globalization are neocolonial pathways that threaten to destabilize American exceptionalism and triumphalism; the blurring of borders seems, to the American imagination, an act of reverse colonialism coming out from the third world.

As a response, Emmerich speaks to us through *2012* about the utility of Chinese labor, providing us with a scenario where the United States, stripped of its government, land, and most of its population, can still emerge victorious over emerging Asian economies. In the process, the American way is reduced to its barest ideological form, represented within a handful of American survivors ready to seed a sanitized earth with the ideological remainder of the state. *2012* is not really in the business of arguing about statism; as an articulation of state-sanctioned eschatology, whether Helmsley and Curtis actually want to establish a new America does not matter as much as the structures of relation and valuation that persist within them. This conclusion is fundamentally enabled by an assertion of labor mastery over the East that posits new forms of subjugation. The answer to the question of American imperial survivability arrives inevitably on the back of Chinese coolies.

It cannot be overstated that the Russo-Japanese War changed the geopolitical landscape of U.S.-China relations in particular and Eastern-Western relations more broadly. Although the war was relatively small in its immediate scope, all parties realized the ideological implications of this reversal of power. The question of whether Japan and Russia were Eastern or Western countries destabilized traditional understandings of where the East and West were located – whether the Orient and the Occident could be divorced from their cardinal indicators and reassembled in new ways. Both “The Unparalleled Invasion” and *2012*, which grapple with the implications of emergent Asian power, thus reflect a preoccupation with land, how it is occupied, and where it is, whether it can be moved and whether it can survive demolition. Without recognizing the effects of this war on East Asian political participation in global politics and understandings of East Asian labor as militarized and immanently invasive, we cannot speak comprehensively about how Yellow Peril is constructed or played out. Yellow Peril is not *simply* a fear of an invasive “horde,” or even about immigration per se. As Novicow repeatedly emphasized, Yellow Peril is a primarily economic mode of imperial anxiety that attaches fears of civilizational annihilation to the omnipresence of cheap coolie labor and Chinese reproductive indefatigability; it is a fear of devaluation and of a market saturation that will someday buy out America’s place at the height of global economy.

Without understanding that the Yellow Peril is an apocalyptic mode, and without a persistent critique of how the state leverages eschatology as a reproductive apparatus, the only frameworks that we can use to understand it are statist; our understanding becomes temporally delimited by the end-time of the state. Apocalypse is a way of understanding how the state envisions its persistence beyond that end, and Yellow Peril is itself a racial fiction used to serve that purpose, generating other fictions that struggle to reconcile an understanding of history as

periodic with an understanding of the future as progressive, triumphant, and utopic. It is apocalyptic and eschatological, and proposes a method of preserving ethno-national power. Eugenic self-defense is implicated and inherent to the forecasting of precarious conditions.

The entanglement of history with fiction, as well as the understanding of history *as a fiction*, and of speculation as fictive work, should compel us to look at cultural production as the production of politicized time. This thesis contends that the Orientalist racism of the Yellow Peril resides in an economic understanding of time, space, and progression that generates anxiety about borders, both geopolitical and financial, and that this understanding, as we know it today, comes out of an historical moment that eyes all over the world looked to as a premonition of the things to come – as an apocalyptic play that was meant to prefigure the conditions of the 20th century. Its development into the Asian Century requires fundamental changes to the nature of speculative fictions and methods of subjugation, which we can understand both through legislation and the speculative contexts that generate it. Future discussions of Orientalist apocalypticism, especially those strains that entail Yellow Peril and economy, must first look back to the entry of Japan into modernity at the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in order to understand what sort of future Americans have predicted for themselves, and still predict in different shapes today. If this is to be a decolonial project, we must also look at how an empire understands post-imperial time in order to create a vision of the future that interrupts Empire and forecloses the state. We must look critically at what within us is structurally valued, how that value is reproduced within our imagination, and reconsider what we plan to carry on our backs through our journey into the eschaton of the Asian Century.

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