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Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the “Yellow Peril,” and the Critique of Modernity

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THE French aristocrat and writer Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau (1816–82) is well known as one of the nineteenth century’s most systematic race theorists. The premise of this essay is that his views are of interest both as significant interventions in nineteenth-century historical debates, and also as points of reference for thinking through the relations of modernity, racism, and Western discourses about “other” peoples.¹

That China was intensely admired by Voltaire and certain other Enlightenment thinkers is well known and well documented.² The popular impression of universal eighteenth-century adulation of the “Middle Kingdom” is misleading, however, since judgments about Chinese culture were hotly contested throughout the eighteenth century (was it superstitious or rational? a moral exemplar or a bed of depravity?). In the nineteenth century, by contrast, there was broad agreement that China fell far below the West on the scale of civilization. The aca-

¹ This paper was originally presented in September 1995 at the eighth Colloque de Sinologie de Chantilly. The first seven of those conferences, held once every three years at the Jesuit mother house near Paris, were devoted to the history of Sino-Western relations and Chinese studies in the period of the “old” Jesuit China mission (c. 1555–1773). The 1995 meeting was the first one devoted primarily to nineteenth-century sinophobia.

² Much of the best scholarship on Western interpretations of China focuses on the period before 1800. Lach (1965–) and Étiemble (1988–89) are essential references. The acts of the successive Colloques de Sinologie de Chantilly are also valuable resources with contributions by many leading authors in the field.

demic treatment of nineteenth-century sinophobia can be conveniently dated to Ernest Rose's landmark article, "China as a Symbol of Reaction in Germany, 1830-1880" (1951). Rose's treatment of the subject documented an important part of the historic shift that Western writers had frequently commented on over the previous century—namely, that the admiration for the land of Confucius that had been commonplace among early Enlightenment thinkers turned into a broadly shared (if not quite unanimous) disdain in the nineteenth-century Western world as "progress" became a watchword for defining the "modern" identity of Europe in contrast to "other" civilizations. Historical studies published since the 1960s have fleshed out the picture of the general "decline" in China's reputation after the Enlightenment.³ They show how that decline, though beginning as early as the seventeenth century, became more rapid from the late eighteenth century, eventually reaching a nadir in the hegemonic, commonsensical contempt felt by most Europeans and Americans toward China in the decades between the First Opium War (1839-42) and World War I.

It was within this cultural context that Gobineau encountered China. By 1853 he had obtained a fair degree of knowledge of that country, and he seems to have entertained strong views about Chinese civilization throughout his later life. Though writing during the "Manchester era," he was himself a principled opponent of progress and modernity. One of his recent biographers, who closely examined his writings on Iran, has indicated that Gobineau's antirevolutionary and anti-Enlightenment stance even led him to look favorably to Asia for the "image de l'anti-Europe."⁴ Following up on this idea, the present study will begin by examining the "reading" that this principled anti-progressive and antimodernist gave of China, a civilization conven-

³ See, for example, Dawson 1967, particularly pp. 65-66, and Mackerras 1989:44-46. These two works are the best single-volume surveys of Western views of China; the former deals primarily with the period before 1900, the latter with the twentieth century. Unfortunately the 1770-1930 era is less well covered in the literature than are earlier and later periods. Kiernan (1969:chap. 5) is still useful for situating then current views of China in the context of Western attitudes toward other "third world" peoples generally. Spence (1980) treats the attitudes and activities of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Western advisers in China. Myers, ed. (1982) is an early series of essays attempting to develop a Saidian approach. Adas (1989) documents perspectives with reference to scientific and technological differentials until World War I, while Hevia (1995) and Lodwick (1996) look anew at the 1793 Macartney embassy and at debates about the British opium trade with China, respectively. My chapter "China and Western Social Thought" in Brook and Blue, eds. (forthcoming) treats analyses of China formulated by Western social and political theorists from the early modern period until World War II, and it situates Gobineau in that context.

⁴ Boissel 1973:23, 401, 403.

tionally interpreted in his day as archetypically "static" and "traditional," to determine to what extent his opposition to modernity might have induced him to swim against the tide of sinophobic opinion characteristic of thinkers committed to the ideal of progress. The second part of the essay will consider some issues relating to the reception of his ideas. The conclusion will revisit the relationship of modernity and race theory.

Definitions of *modernity* and *progress*, of course, vary greatly, and opinions about their desirability have been sharply divided for two centuries. It is fortunately not my task here to attempt to present the various interpretations systematically, but I can say without much fear of objection that a commitment to progress is probably the most commonly accepted component in various definitions of modernity. In recent years, debate has emerged in the academic community over the nature of the linkages among racism, modernity, and the notion of progress. A few voices may suffice by way of illustration. Cultural historian Anne McClintock has depicted the invention of race as one of the "fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity" and gone on to express her sympathy with the aim of overcoming the "ideology of progress" in all its aspects.⁵ Philosopher David Theo Goldberg has similarly characterized race as "one of the central conceptions of modernity" and has argued that the more modern culture has committed itself to the "idealized principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity," the more it has multiplied racial exclusivities.⁶ Readers who are tempted to think this idea a recent radical innovation might recall that Tocqueville in 1835 drew a similar conclusion after observing the intensity of racial hostility toward free blacks in the north of the United States.⁷ Social historians Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, however, have rather summarily dismissed as "cynics" those current critics of modernity "who say Western democratic ideology sanctioned racism."⁸ Comparative historian Michael Adas has argued more substantially that the reduction of all forms of modern Western superiority to racism misses "the main point" that throughout the modern era the standards westerners used for asserting their superiority were primarily

⁵ McClintock 1995:6, 10.

⁶ Goldberg 1993:3–6. If the relation of racism to modernity is taken as constitutive rather than historically contingent, it becomes difficult to understand how on these premises an antiracist program could ever be thought of as succeeding, particularly if one accepts with Lyotard (1986:29) that the postmodern is itself "assuredly part of the modern." But that is another issue.

⁷ Tocqueville 1960:1:374.

⁸ Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 1994:41.

based on perceptions of relative progress in science and technology.⁹ Though Adas perhaps underestimates the autonomy and strength of modern religious and racist chauvinisms, the case he makes is a serious one.

In any case, as E. H. Carr once remarked, "where the pundits contradict one another so flagrantly, the field is open to inquiry."¹⁰ The serious definitional problems involved in the notion of modernity make me hesitant to approach the relationship of racism and modernity head on, but I am inclined to think that some light might be shed on it by considering it obliquely from the perspective of a neglected chapter in the intellectual history of Western views of China. One of my general aims will be to suggest that there are significant aspects of racist culture and its history to be discovered by taking into account factors other than a thinker's commitment to the notions of modernity and progress.

SITUATING THE MAN AND HIS WORK

First promoted as a promising young talent by his mentor Alexis de Tocqueville, Gobineau served for some twenty years in the diplomatic corps of Napoleon III.¹¹ Though staunchly conservative, he was far from being a narrow nationalist and was instead distinctly cosmopolitan, a "good European" in Nietzsche's sense, enjoying close friendships with diplomatic peers of various nationalities.¹² Though he seems throughout his lifetime to have felt insufficiently appreciated, one gets a sense of his horizons from the company he kept at the height of his career. In 1876 he toured Russia as the personal companion of Dom

⁹ Adas 1989:338–42.

¹⁰ Carr 1961:8.

¹¹ In a series of letters to Gobineau written between 1853 and 1856, Tocqueville famously rejected his protégé's views on predestined racial aptitudes and inevitable civilizational decline as fatalistic, while equally famously predicting that Gobineau's views on race would find fertile soil in Germany. Their differences on race issues did not prevent them from remaining intimate until Tocqueville's death, the older man declaring himself torn between his attachment to Gobineau as a person and his revulsion at his racial views. See particularly his letters of 17 November and 20 December 1853 and 30 July 1856, reproduced in Schemann 1910:17–21, 30–32. Thibaudet (1934) analyzes the political positions of Tocqueville and Gobineau as alternatives both grounded in a common perception of the decline of the aristocracy since the Middle Ages.

¹² Gobineau's close friends included the Habsburg ambassador Anton Prokesch-Osten, the German statesman Philipp zu Eulenburg, the British envoy and poet W. S. Blunt, and the Italian diplomat Victor de La Tour and his wife Mathilde. He counted Mérimée, Renan, and Charles de Rémusat among his French friends.

Pedro II, emperor of Brazil. The two were received together at Yalta by Tsar Alexander II and then at Constantinople by Sultan Abdul Hamid. After parting company with Dom Pedro, Gobineau was received privately in Rome by Pius IX and in Berlin by the imperial prince and princess (the parents of the future Kaiser Wilhelm II), to whom he had been recommended by Lord Lytton, soon to be viceroy of India.¹³

Often designated in recent decades as the "father of racist theories," Gobineau now has a notoriety that contrasts with his influence from the 1880s to the 1920s, when racist ideas were still a largely unchallenged feature of the Western intellectual landscape.¹⁴ The discredit into which he has fallen since World War II is due largely to the appropriation of his name and some of his theories—most notably that of Aryan superiority—by pan-Germanists, and particularly by the Nazis, though these groups certainly differed from him on several key doctrines.¹⁵ The complicated question of the extent to which Gobineau's thought was a forerunner of the racism of the Third Reich can be set aside until later in this essay, and readers interested in the issue of Gobineau's complex relationship to earlier forms of racist thought must be referred to the large body of secondary literature.¹⁶

¹³ Gobineau 1983–87:3:lxvii–lxix. The German Imperial Princess Victoria was the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria of England, whom Lytton would proclaim empress of India the following year.

¹⁴ The phrase "father of racist theories" is that of Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Race et histoire*, first published in 1961; see the 1984 edition, p. 10. The same characterization is found in many other works on the history of race ideology published since then, and perhaps most prominently in the title of Michael Biddiss's (1970) seminal study of Gobineau. In the light of the steady flow of publications by and about Gobineau during the period from the 1880s to the 1920s, Rowbotham (1929:1–2) referred to Gobinism as a veritable cult, noting that interest in Germany was mainly in Gobineau's historical and ethnological works, while in France the focus was on his literary and travel writings. Though his influence in both those countries and in the English-speaking world is clear, Gobineau remained something of an *auteur maudit* in France during this period because of his sharp criticisms of French culture and institutions, including the Third Republic itself. Following from the pre-1914 arguments of pioneers such as W. E. B. Dubois in the United States and Jean Finot in France, the growth of political antiracism in the 1920s and 1930s was aided by the articulation of important new scientific critiques of race theory. Barkan (1992) documents American and British academic contributions during that period in the key fields of anthropology and biology.

¹⁵ "By all the rules of logic, his racial hierarchy should have got his book burned in the Third Reich," wrote Leon Poliakov, the eminent historian of anti-Semitism. Yet, whatever the Nazis' doctrinal differences with Gobineau regarding the Jews, they had the German translation of his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* republished in Berlin in 1935 and again in Stuttgart in 1939–40 at the outbreak of war. Soon after taking Paris, they ordered republication of the French original. See Poliakov 1974:234; also Bernal 1987:1:344.

¹⁶ In assessing Gobineau's relationship to previous and later writers, it is worth keeping in mind Banton's (1970) warning of the importance of avoiding anachronism when analyzing the history of racial thinking. Poliakov (1974) and Mosse (1964) remain valuable as

What is beyond dispute is that his writing on race was important and influential as a synthesis of previous strands of Western chauvinist thought, and in particular that it integrated anthropological and scientific analyses attributing biological superiority to "whites" with the broad literature asserting the cultural-historical superiority of the West.¹⁷ His thought is worth examining in the framework of the history of Sino-Western relations because it includes one of the fullest treatments of China in the theoretical literature of Western racism, and because Gobineau himself assigned considerable significance to his analysis of the Chinese and their history.

WORLD HISTORY AND THE DYNAMICS OF RACE RELATIONS

Gobineau elaborated his racial doctrine and his vision of history most explicitly in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, a four-volume historico-theoretical treatise published in 1853–55. Until his death in 1882, however, he was celebrated primarily for his other, mainly literary, works. These included poems, short stories, novels, accounts of his travels, and scholarly essays. Many of these focused on Asian peoples and their histories and drew on his travels in Iran, India, and the Levant during his time in diplomatic service.¹⁸ In all his writings he

systematic surveys of the ideological roots and long-term historical development of doctrines of Aryan supremacy in various Western cultures. Useful treatments of Gobineau's relationship to earlier race theorists are provided by Barzun 1966:chap. 4; Buentzod 1967: 288–355; Poliakov 1974:chap. 10; Boissel's introductory notice to Gobineau's *Essai* in *Oeuvres* (Gobineau 1983–87:1:1233–1249); and Hannaford 1996:264–72. A detailed analysis of previous French race theory as it relates specifically to Gobineau is provided by E. J. Young (1968:1–106). Similarities and differences between Gobineau's ideas and the doctrines of H. S. Chamberlain, Alfred Rosenberg, and Adolf Hitler are discussed in Young (1968:242–69, 295–328). In considering the diverse assessments of his "legacy," it is important to keep in mind that his international reputation was especially shaped by the fact that the main promoters of his works after he died were outspoken racists, anti-Semites, and pan-Germanists. The connection between his ideas and Nazi doctrine was consequently widely accepted in the first half of the twentieth century and has since been standard in treatments of modern racism by political historians and social scientists. Among literary critics and historians of French literature, however, Jean Gaulmier and Jean Boissel have been central figures in a group that has worked since the 1960s to rehabilitate Gobineau, on the grounds that his ideas were distorted by later disciples and opponents alike. I return below to the issue of the appropriation of Gobineau's ideas and his role in that process.

¹⁷ Barzun 1966:76–77; Poliakov 1974:233.

¹⁸ Gobineau was also asked to serve as first secretary to the new French legation in China after the Treaty of Tianjin, but he declined the offer in January 1859, judging the post to be a punishment, as he confided to Tocqueville (cited in Rowbotham 1929:17; see also Biddiss 1979:196).

drew on an impressive range of ethnographic, historical, and orientalist scholarship.¹⁹

Despite the popularity of his other creations, Gobineau himself spoke of the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* as the best work of his career, a judgment shared by many of his admirers down till World War II.²⁰ The analysis that follows will thus concentrate in the first instance on the *Essai*, which is the work that includes the author's most sustained treatment of China. To understand that work, it is essential to recognize that it was composed in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, upheavals that shook from Gobineau the last vestiges of Enlightenment optimism and confirmed in him a profound disdain for democracy, liberalism, and, above all, popular revolution. Michael Biddiss observes that Gobineau's first sustained example of race analysis involving the concept of a Germanic master race appears in the epic poem *Manfredine*, completed in 1848, the same year that the *Communist Manifesto* appeared.²¹ The notion of racial character in *Manfredine* was essentially similar to that found in many influential early nineteenth-century Romantic works on social conflicts in ancient and medieval European history. Popular examples of such literature include Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and Augustin Thierry's *Histoire de la conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands*. Similarly flavored scholarly contributions were provided by Barthold Niebuhr and K. O. Müller on ancient Italian and Greek history, respectively; and the elderly Alexander von Humboldt applied the principle of racial character on a global scale in his universal history *Kosmos*, the first volumes of which began to appear in print in 1845. Such works were themselves built on earlier traditions of diagnosing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social and political conflicts in terms of ongoing antagonisms between conquering and conquered "races," such as the Normans and Saxon

¹⁹ Gobineau was representative of the turn to German scholarship among French intellectuals from the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Among his most frequently cited sources were Karl Ritter on comparative geography, Alexander von Humboldt on central Asia and the New World, Richard Lepsius on ancient Egypt, Karl Movers on the Phoenicians, Christian Lassen on ancient India, Heinrich Ewald on the Jews, Barthold Niebuhr on Greece, W. L. Abeken and K. O. Müller on ancient Italy, Christian Keferstein and Lorenz Diefenbach on the Celts, and Paul Schaffarik on the Slavs. Prominent British sources were the naturalist James Cowles Prichard, the leading scientific authority on racial differences before 1848, and the orientalist J. G. Wilkinson.

²⁰ Letter to Albert Sorel, 1 May 1874; cited in the account of the *Essai*'s publication history in Gobineau 1983–87:1:1278–79. For admirers, see the editor's introduction to the 1887 edition of *Amadis*; and Schemann 1894:3.

²¹ Biddiss 1979:64–65. Rowbotham (1929:41–43) observes that the affirmation of aristocratic superiority remained the same from *Manfredine* until the end of Gobineau's life.

“round-heads,” or the Franks and Gallo-Romans.²² What Gobineau considered original in his *Essai* was not the general discourse of race differences, but rather the central role assigned to racial mixture as the principle for understanding the rise and decline of the world’s major civilizations.²³

On the question of the origin of the human race, Gobineau in the *Essai* adopted a formally monogenist position reminiscent of Herder’s, a stance that reflected his allegiance to the Church as a bulwark of social order. In substance, however, his position was a conflation of the monogenist and polygenist views, for while depicting all humans as ultimately descended from a single set of ancestors, he argued that the original race of Adam was succeeded by three “secondary” races—namely, black, yellow, and white, each with distinct traits. He saw the secondary races as having been differentiated in the early period of geological upheaval posited by Cuvier, when the earth was still being formed. As the surface of the globe cooled and settled into distinct environments, so too did the anatomies and the characters of the three major races become fixed. The permanence of these characteristics was such that they remained unaffected by changes of location from one region to another.²⁴

Gobineau portrayed blacks as physically powerful, filled with strong desires, wildly imaginative, and having little capacity for thought. The yellow race he cast as the antithesis of the black—that is, as physically lethargic and tending to obesity, emotionally apathetic, generally mediocre, and lacking in imagination, but having a dogged practical sense geared to the simple fulfillment of narrow material desires. The white race was naturally vastly superior to the other two: among the qualities Gobineau ascribed to it were energetic intelligence, courage, physical force, perseverance, and a sense of utility that was broad and far-sighted. The “extraordinary instinct for order” of the whites and

²² Buenzod (1967:289–92) notes that Gobineau himself repudiated two-races/two-nations theories and objected particularly to Boulainvilliers’s version of that theory. He instead subscribed to an organic conception of nation and civilization.

²³ Gobineau 1853–55:1:1170; in an editor’s note (p. 1467), Boissel observes that this idea was in fact first defended in 1837 by Victor Courtet de l’Isle, whose work Gobineau used. Buenzod’s suggestion that Gobineau pioneered the idea of race struggle as the motor of world history (1967:348), though catchy, is overstated, since “struggle” is too narrow to describe the process of interaction he envisioned. However, one does find the idea of the primacy of race struggle in his American admirer, Josiah Nott, who wrote: “Looking back over the world’s history, it will be seen that human progress has risen mainly from the war of races” (Nott and Gliddon 1854:53).

²⁴ Gobineau, 1983–87:1:Bk. 1, chap. 11; on Cuvier, p. 271.

"their pronounced taste for liberty" went together with a natural hostility both for the "formalist" type of organization in which the Chinese in particular cocooned themselves and for the "despotism" needed to constrain populations of blacks.²⁵ From the American comparative anatomist Samuel Morton and the German scholar of comparative spirituality C. G. Carus, Gobineau reproduced tabulated figures purporting to display the different cranial capacities typical of each race.²⁶ His sources clearly implied that the different races were unequal in their physical capacity for civilization, and Gobineau pushed the argument further. He maintained that the different races were inherently unequal in strength, beauty, linguistic potential, and intelligence, and that as human beings the whites were, simply, more gifted and more valuable.²⁷

Gobineau designated central Asia and Siberia as the first homeland of the white race, which he considered sedentary by nature.²⁸ He thought the blacks had originated in Africa and then spread across the southern zones of Europe and Asia. The yellow peoples, he believed, had first been native to the Americas and later, because of prodigious population growth, had spilled over across the Arctic into both Europe and east Asia.²⁹ At first they were forced to spread along the coastal regions of Eurasia, since the central parts of the land-mass were firmly held by the whites. However, the increasing numbers of yellow people eventually caused a crucial historical transformation: from approximately 5000 B.C.E. successive groups of whites began to be pushed out of Siberia and central Asia, in search of new territories to conquer and rule. In Gobineau's view, the biblical record of the dispersal of mankind after the Flood gave a mythical but generally accu-

²⁵ Gobineau 1983–87:1:339–41.

²⁶ Morton's figures, which Gobineau had from Carus, indicated that Chinese cranial capacity fell midway between the "Caucasian" and "Ethiopian." Gould (1981) shows that Morton misleadingly manipulated the measurements for his skulls, which incidentally included only seven Chinese examples. Banton (1987:19–22 and 34) discusses the respective positions of the three authors and shows that if Morton had not massaged the figures, his study would have failed to support Gobineau's conclusions (p. 34).

²⁷ *Pace* Lévi-Strauss, who thought Gobineau made the secondary races separate but equal (1984:10). See, for example, Gobineau 1983–87:1:344: "The white race originally possessed a monopoly of beauty, intelligence and strength." Similarly, regarding civilizations (1:225): "The question now arises as to whether, under the above mentioned conditions, all civilizations are equal. I do not think so." (Unless otherwise indicated, translations in this essay are mine.)

²⁸ Gobineau 1983–87:1:561.

²⁹ He systematically identified the "yellow race" with the Finns, whom he took to be remnants of the original yellow immigration into Eurasia; see, for example, 1:560–61.

rate account of the white migrations. There were thus three major branches of the race, which migrated in succession from the original white homeland: the Hamitic, Semitic, and Japhetic peoples, named after Noah's three sons. The last were also known as Aryans and were composed of several distinct stocks, including Celts, Slavs, Germans, and Scandinavians.

The movements of the various races eventually resulted in interbreeding and the emergence of tertiary races. One example of this process occurred in southern China and southeast Asia, where the meeting and interbreeding of yellow and black peoples gave rise to the tertiary race of the Malays, in whom inputs from each parent stock were said by Gobineau to compensate for deficiencies in the other. The hybrid offspring thus possessed more intelligence than either of the parent races.³⁰ Elsewhere, the mixture of whites and blacks provided the combination of intelligence and imagination that was required for the emergence of art.³¹ Like most thinkers of his time, Gobineau failed to specify a mechanism of genetic transmission; he assumed, on the one hand, that the traits of each secondary race remained fixed and, on the other, that their operation was modified through miscegenation. Unlike Lamarck, who pictured an evolutionary tendency for species to become more perfect, Gobineau saw human history as involving a long-term, inevitable decline in the quality of the human stock. The attraction of white males toward black and yellow women led to interbreeding between the conquerors and the conquered races. This interbreeding resulted in a temporary elevation of the qualities of the general population, perhaps for a series of centuries, but ultimately the superior white qualities would be effaced or at least diluted to the extent of being rendered generally inoperative (though they might again be combined from time to time in great creative personalities).

According to Gobineau, only branches of the white race were capable of actively engendering a civilization.³² In his view each civilization had been formed by means of a white conquest. Following the conquest a civilization was first established politically through the constitution of a new order suited to the character of the ruled. In

³⁰ Gobineau 1983–87:1:565.

³¹ Gobineau 1983–87:1:461–78.

³² In contrast to Guizot and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Gobineau defined a civilization as “a state of relative stability in which the masses devote themselves to peacefully seeking the satisfaction of their needs, and thereby refine their intelligence and morals”; see Gobineau 1983–87:1:224–25.

following generations the nature of the civilization became fixed biologically through miscegenation as the rulers interbred with the conquered and made kinship alliances with parts of the indigenous population. Gobineau recognized only ten "great human civilizations."³³ The first was that of India, in which the caste system reflected a typical, and to Gobineau admirable, Aryan commitment to maintaining racial purity. Egyptian civilization was the work of an Aryan colony from India, which conquered the black populations of the Nile valley and Ethiopia. The early civilization of Assyria, to which he believed the Jews and Phoenicians belonged, derived its characteristic intelligence from Hamitic and Semitic conquerors of black populations, though its later Zoroastrian-Iranian incarnation resulted from a new Aryan influx. Ancient Greece was in his eyes the product of a combination of Semitic and Aryan elements, while the civilization of ancient Italy, including Rome, was the result of a diverse mixture of Celts, Iberians, Aryans, and Semites. True to aristocratic form, Gobineau wrote enthusiastically of the Germanic invasions of the Roman empire, which he interpreted as bringing revivifying infusions of Aryan blood into a "semitized" Europe and as establishing a distinct civilization in which the dignities of the nobility were properly (re-)enshrined.³⁴ Gobineau's differential assessment of the worth of various races and peoples led him to adopt a position of cultural relativism, in the sense that for him each civilization had specific characteristics derived from its peculiar racial make-up (more or less "masculine" or "feminine," and more or less "active" or "passive"), and each civilization consequently had its own characteristic values.³⁵

³³ Gobineau 1983–87:1:346–47.

³⁴ Gobineau 1983–87:1:346–47. Apart from China, the other three civilizations Gobineau recognized were the American ones he identified as Alleghanian, Mexican, and Peruvian. In his view, the original yellow composition of the Americas had been altered historically through Malay additions from across the Pacific, but he credited the founding of the three American civilizations to small numbers of Vikings who had bravely made their way across the North Atlantic (1983–87:1:1122–30). He told the story of his own imagined Viking ancestors in his *Histoire d'Otto Jarl*.

³⁵ A cultural relativism, but not a cultural egalitarianism. Gobineau did concede that modern Western civilization excelled over earlier civilizations in certain regards, and particularly in science, as Adas points out. Adas, however, overlooks the fact that Gobineau considered the modern West inferior overall to early Aryan civilizations and that he denied it pre-eminence in politics, morals, and the arts. See, for example, Gobineau 1983–87:1:218, 1162–64.

AN ANTIMODERNIST'S "READING" OF CHINA

Gobineau considered the civilization of China the fifth of the "great human civilizations" to have resulted from the initiative of the white race.³⁶ Together with India it was especially important in his understanding of world history, because he thought the antiquity and continuity of these two civilizations allowed him to demonstrate the permanence of racial traits.³⁷

It deserves to be pointed out again that Gobineau's convoluted views were fully compatible with his using—and sometimes distorting—excellent contemporary works of relevant scholarship. His analysis of China was studded with a typically impressive array of references to sinological and other orientalist sources. Among the scholars he cited were the distinguished Jesuit proto-sinologists Gaubil and Prémare, the prominent French missionary Évariste Huc (a personal friend), the British sinologist-diplomat J. F. Davis, and the founding father of German sinology K. N. Neumann. He likewise quoted the *Zhou Li* and the encyclopedia of Ma Duanlin in the translations of Edouard Biot. For comparative judgments regarding China, he referred as well to the widely respected Alexander von Humboldt, to the Indologists Wilhelm von Schlegel and Christian Lassen, and to the influential Julius Mohl, president of the Société Asiatique in the 1840s and 1850s. Gobineau believed that the civilization of China had first been established, like that of ancient Egypt, by an Aryan group that had migrated from India, and he saw China as having been graced later with new "non-Hindu" inputs by Aryan invaders from central Asia. He explained differences between Egyptian and Chinese civilizations as due partly to the specific character of each conquering elite and

³⁶ Gobineau 1983–87:1:347, 602.

³⁷ Gobineau 1983–87:1:220–21. The prominent American race theorists Nott and Gliddon referred likewise (1854:448–49) to the antiquity of China as demonstrating the fixity of races in their widely read *Types of Mankind* (1854), which was a justification for slavery in the southern states. This work shared several analyses of China espoused by Gobineau in the second volume of his *Essai* (1853)—perhaps not surprising since its treatment of that country (Gobineau 1853–55:689–97) relied largely on similar French sources, including the eighteenth-century Jesuits Gaubil and Prémare, as well as translations by the nineteenth-century academic sinologists Biot and Pauthier. Soon after publishing their book, the American authors discovered Gobineau's volumes and wrote him enthusiastic letters, which Schemann later published (1910:189–216). Nott commissioned a somewhat abridged translation of the first volume of Gobineau's *Essai* and contributed an essay to the resulting publication (Gobineau 1984; originally published in 1856). Tocqueville warned Gobineau that Gliddon and Nott were anti-abolitionists; and Gobineau waxed ironic over their failure to include in their abridgment his treatment of the United States as a racially and socially debased society.

partly to the particular makeup of each conquered population. It was his contention that the impetus for Chinese civilization came in the mid-third millennium B.C.E. from a group of Aryans of the *kshatriya* caste of nobles and warriors who left India after rebelling against the brahmans, soon after the latter had established themselves as the socially preeminent caste.³⁸ In China the indigenous population over which this racial and military elite took charge was of predominantly Malay stock (Gobineau took the Miao to be the latter-day remnants of this).³⁹ In direct reaction against brahmanism, the conquering elite tackled the tasks of civilization with a "male rather than feminine" and a "political rather than religious" approach.⁴⁰ In line with his notion of a primordial invasion from India, Gobineau insisted that the cradle of Chinese civilization had been in south China, although—apparently unaware of any discrepancy—he asserted elsewhere that it had originated in Henan.⁴¹

By Gobineau's time, Western writers had long associated China with a patriarchal social order. Although commonly condemned by liberals and socialists of the day, patriarchy was a system with which Gobineau was in sympathy. To him it had been the natural and laudable form of government in the primeval white society, and he imagined that migrating branches of the white race had carried it with them, adapting it to local circumstances as they established new civilizations. Among Aryans, he believed the authority of the father of a family (the "complete man") was compatible with respecting the indi-

³⁸ Gobineau 1983–87:1:567, 571. Unencumbered by Gobineau's Aryan invasion thesis, Nott and Gliddon were more flexible in accounting for the origin of what they called China's "prolonged semi-civilization" (1854:52). They located Fuxi in the thirty-fifth century B.C.E. and Yu's founding of the Xia dynasty in the twenty-third. These datings allowed them to pursue their general project of developing a rationalist Christian understanding of world history that would refute and displace fundamentalist interpretations based on literal readings of Genesis (Nott and Gliddon 1854:448, 694–96).

³⁹ Gobineau 1983–87:1:568–69, 579. The same interpretation of the Miao is put forward by Nott and Gliddon 1854:448.

⁴⁰ Gobineau 1983–87:1:574. Indeed, he considered Chinese civilization as the model of predominantly "male" civilization (1:221). In his world view, this was something of a reproach, since he held that capacities for creativity derived from a balance of male and female traits (1:226). Gobineau shifted in his own sense the Scottish Enlightenment view that the position of women reflected the degree of a country's civilization; he presented the superior society of the Aryans as one inhabited by women with strong personalities who were leaders and the equals of their men. The prominence of strong women in his literary works (such as Manfredine, Emmelina Irnois, Akrivie Phrangopoulo, and Urgande in *Amadis*) has led Sylvie André (1990) to treat him as a proto-feminist. Annette Smith (1984:121–26) links Gobineau's celebration of independent women to Saint-Simonian utopianism.

⁴¹ Gobineau 1983–87:1:569, 571.

viduality of each family member, but Gobineau claimed that individuality was absent among the "inert multitudes of yellow and black peoples."⁴² In India the early white warriors fashioned the patriarchal order in a pluralist direction by insisting that the prerogatives of the Aryan nobles be institutionalized in elective aristocratic republics. In Africa, however, "absolute despotism" was required because, according to Gobineau, the black character understood no arguments "but those of violence." In the Middle Eastern civilizations of Semitic character, rulers sought to impress their subjects and gain legitimacy through impassioned demonstrations of power, even if these were ferocious and depraved.⁴³ In China, in turn, the patriarchal principle of government was translated into a "peaceful despotism" suited to the "Malay disposition" with its characteristic patience and submissiveness to the law, its capacity to "grasp the advantages of a regular and coordinated [State] organization," and its desire for an "exclusively material well-being."⁴⁴

Thus, in Gobineau's interpretation of China, the form of rule there was patriarchal because the original rulers had been Aryan, and government was absolute because it had been established by conquest. In practice, however, "the absolutism of the sovereign . . . was generally enclosed within narrow bounds because Malay sensibility did not call for excessively great demonstrations of arrogance." Theoretically, the emperor could do what he liked, but any real attempt to start an ambitious program would meet with grave difficulties, for the nation would become agitated, the mandarins would make representations, and ministers would decry any innovations before the throne. The emperor would be isolated and would ultimately face an insurrection.⁴⁵ In other words, "the absolute authority of the emperors was limited by public opinion and by the manners [of the country]; and it is thus that one has always seen tyranny appear in China as an accident that is constantly detested and repressed and that is hardly ever perpetuated because the natural character of the governed race does not lend itself to it."⁴⁶

What one finds Gobineau doing in these passages is typical of his general approach: he constructs a civilizational portrait out of mate-

⁴² Gobineau 1983–87:1:576–77.

⁴³ Gobineau 1983–87:1:577–80.

⁴⁴ Gobineau 1983–87:1:578–79, 593.

⁴⁵ Gobineau 1983–87:1:580. This passage and the following one strongly echo the views on Asian despotism and its Chinese variant that were first advanced by Montesquieu and then widely disseminated.

⁴⁶ Gobineau 1983–87:1:582.

rials drawn from indigenous historiography and conventional Western analyses of China, and he then purports to explain each component and the overall portrayal with his allegedly higher level theory of racial determination. Since he discerned contributions by all three of his secondary races to the composition of Chinese society, and since his theory ascribed to those three taken together the total range of human traits, he conveniently allowed himself a maximum of flexibility for “explaining” Chinese civilization. If this flexibility was convenient, it also fostered various inconsistencies that belied the apparent “logic” of the analysis.

For instance, in developing the idea that the initiators of Chinese civilization were *kshatriyas* reacting against the brahmanical imposition of castes, Gobineau held that a prominent form of their reaction was a commitment to the doctrine of absolute equality. However, he argued that the Aryan elite could not get away from the fact of racial inequality and was therefore forced to introduce what Gobineau considered the “absurd” and naturally repugnant institution of ennobling ancestors on the merits of their descendants. To promote his theory, Gobineau thus took an institution that he could have known was characteristic of the post-Qin imperial era, and identified it as a feature of early Chinese civilization.⁴⁷ Elsewhere, however, he happily argued that China for its first 2,000 years had been organized in a “feudal system”—that is, according to a “fragmentary institution of authority” that reflected the Aryan sense of hierarchy and aversion to unity.⁴⁸ Since documentary evidence of an early system of fragmented (“feudal”) sovereignty was useful for confirming his thesis of an Aryan invasion, he overlooked the contradiction between his allegedly primordial antibrahmanic egalitarianism and the originary feudal hierarchy he depicted as typical of Aryan peoples.⁴⁹

Gobineau bought into the conventional notion of China’s immutability when he referred to the people as politically and culturally homogeneous and to the state as displaying “governmental principles that have never changed.”⁵⁰ He nevertheless did allow that

⁴⁷ Gobineau 1983–87:1:575–76.

⁴⁸ Gobineau 1983–87:1:593–95, 571–72, 774.

⁴⁹ Gobineau’s attitude toward feudalism was in fact nuanced. While he saw its characteristic hierarchy as typical of Aryan-generated civilizations, he nevertheless took some distance from feudalism by depicting it as a degeneration from the original, pure Aryan monarchy. His antiprogressivism was expressed in the view that the white race had originally been organized harmoniously in perfect institutions and (unlike the black and yellow races) had never existed in a “primitive” state. He treated the Bourbons in particular as a debased, “latinized,” dynasty.

⁵⁰ Gobineau 1983–87:1:228–29, 582.

one major historical transformation had occurred (in accordance with the "racial laws" of history) at the outset of the imperial era. As he put it,

the feudal system remained in place from the Aryan invasion down to the reign of Tsin-chi-hoang-ti [Qin Shi Huangdi], in the year 246 before Jesus-Christ, in other words, for as long as the white race conserved enough virtual power to maintain its principal aptitudes. However, as soon as its fusion with the Malay and Yellow families was sufficiently pronounced so that not even any half-white groups remained . . . the feudal system, hierarchical domination, the large number of small kingdoms and the independence of persons no longer had any reason to exist, and the imperial level[ing] was imposed on everyone, without distinction.

It was at this moment that China was constituted in its current form.⁵¹

Though conceding the importance of this change, Gobineau allowed it only the status of a negation. "There was only this innovation, great nonetheless in itself, that the last trace of independence, of personal dignity as understood in the Aryan manner, had disappeared forever before the definitive invasions of the Yellow type [l'espèce jaune]."⁵² The invasions later on of the Mongols and Manchus, though explainable as due to the presence of certain dynamic Aryan elements among the conquering peoples, were mainly only infusions of "the Yellow type." As such they brought with them "almost nothing new" to China. It followed that those conquests were not comparable to the Germanic invasions, which had reinjected "noble" blood into Europe from the fifth to the tenth century.⁵³

What, then, were for Gobineau the characteristics of Chinese society in the last 2,000 years? The form of mild patriarchal rule he attributed to it has already been considered. Another trait frequently identified in the sinological literature as Chinese, and one that he found "natural" because of the society's yellow/Malay foundation, was an indomitably materialistic orientation.⁵⁴ In his view this trait determined that in China political priority was given to government administration rather than to war and diplomacy, the two areas in which Western

⁵¹ Gobineau 1983-87:1:594.

⁵² Gobineau 1983-87:1:595.

⁵³ Gobineau 1983-87:1:593, 596-97.

⁵⁴ Gobineau 1983-87:1:583.

rulers sought glory.⁵⁵ The country's racial character dictated a primal urge for political stability, which in turn required that food be grown in abundance; that agriculture and industry receive "perpetual encouragements"; that everyone "should be able to clothe, feed and house themselves"; and that a "solid and profound tranquility should be preserved as the supreme means for attaining these ends."⁵⁶

Another aspect of Chinese life that was well attested in Western convention was the government's famous tolerance toward various philosophical and religious doctrines. This Gobineau explained as following from the people's alleged materialism. Happiness for the Chinese, he maintained, consisted of simply having enough to eat and sufficient clothes to wear.⁵⁷ That was why the government could afford to allow the most unnatural doctrines to be preached as long as they had no social consequences. It could even allow such monstrosities as freedom of the press and of association because the "exclusively utilitarian" nature of the Chinese people defused any destabilizing effect these institutions might otherwise have had.⁵⁸ As long as they had the material necessities, no Chinese would "bother to confront police truncheons for the greater glory of a political abstraction."⁵⁹

In Gobineau's eyes, the entrenchment of liberties and a propensity for extravagant grand theories were features of Hindu society that followed from the mixture of white and black components in the Indian population. In China, by contrast, the strength of yellow and black components determined that the civilization's greatest achievements were attained at the level of material organization. Gobineau granted that in this domain China surpassed the Roman empire, and even modern Europe, though he held that it did so "without beauty and without dignity," as befitted its racial character. Though the Chinese population was renowned for being peaceful and submissive, it was so only because it was "lacking in sentiments beyond the humblest notion of physical utility."⁶⁰ Reversing the Enlightenment esteem for the simplicity of Chinese classical thought, Gobineau reasoned that Chinese "religion is a résumé of practices and maxims strongly reminiscent of what the moralists of Geneva and their educational

⁵⁵ Again one finds Gobineau purporting to explain conventionally accepted features of Chinese civilization: its alleged self-imposed isolation and unwarlike character had previously been recognized by Kant, among others.

⁵⁶ Gobineau 1983–87:1:583.

⁵⁷ Gobineau 1983–87:1:583–84.

⁵⁸ Gobineau 1983–87:1:589–90.

⁵⁹ Gobineau 1983–87:1:583–84.

⁶⁰ Gobineau 1983–87:1:584–85, 590.

books are pleased to recommend as the *nec plus ultra* of the good: economy, moderation, prudence, the art of making a profit and never a loss.”⁶¹ This formulation is notable because it brings together his racist aversion to China and his visceral hatred for Swiss bourgeois democracy (a hostility cultivated from the time of his early diplomatic posting to Switzerland). Even more striking, however, is that, more than fifty years before Max Weber’s comparative works on the emergence of modernity, Gobineau devised a quasi-historical analysis that associated Calvinist and Confucian approaches to economic rationality, though in a manner quite contrary to Weber’s.⁶²

Gobineau advanced similarly disdainful opinions of Chinese manners and Chinese literature, the allegedly low condition of which he naturally saw as deriving from the same racial principles discussed above. Chinese manners were, accordingly, nothing but “perpetual cant,” without similarity to the medieval European forms of courtesy that represented the freeman’s grave deference to his superiors, his “noble benevolence” toward his equals, and his “affectionate condescension to his inferiors.” In China materialism dictated instead that politeness amounted to “nothing more than social obligation, which, taking its source in the grossest egoism, translates into an abject prostration toward superiors, a ridiculous fighting over proprieties with equals, and an arrogance with inferiors that grows in proportion to the lowness of their rank.” Chinese courtesy, in other words, was a formalist invention for keeping everyone in their place, rather than an “inspiration of the heart” as in the West.⁶³ In addition, the Chinese lacked a sense of proportion, for among them, Gobineau thought, the trivialities of everyday life were as rigorously regulated by law as were matters of importance.

Although the Chinese esteemed their literature highly, in Gobineau’s eyes it was instead a “powerful force of stagnation,” partly because of its incorporation into the government examination system, but also largely because of its inherent characteristics. Again echoing Herder, he scorned Chinese literature as marred by all sorts of “puerile” embellishments. The best Chinese literary forms were descriptions of nature and the novel, because in these the yellow capacity for observation and subtlety could be expressed. Otherwise, Chinese literature had nothing to recommend it. Chinese theater was “flat” and “ill-conceived.” Chinese poetry that attempted to capture feelings only suc-

⁶¹ Gobineau 1983–87:1:585.

⁶² See Biddiss 1970:chap. 9.

⁶³ Gobineau 1983–87:1:585.

ceeded in being "ridiculous." Chinese philosophy consisted of nothing but "commonplace maxims" formulated in a "puerilely obscure" and "drily didactic manner." The "great [Chinese] scientific works" were simply "verbose compilations" lacking a critical dimension. That was only to be expected because, as he put it, "the spirit of the yellow race is neither profound nor insightful [sagace] enough to attain this quality [i.e., scientific excellence] reserved for the white race." That is to say, yellow people might have been able to make useful drawings of natural objects, since these require patience and observation, but the Chinese lacked a capacity for "general theories."⁶⁴ In addition, since "tradition is all-powerful in China," any new idea that might emerge is immediately the object of indignation; and in any case those literati who are occasionally taken by a creative urge fall immediately into "inanity" when this happens.⁶⁵

RACIAL CHARACTER AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

From Gobineau's assertions, the present-day reader might be led to think that he was simply constructing a noxious categorical distinction between westerners and Chinese. That would be somewhat simplistic. The judgment needs to be qualified, because Gobineau also saw the populations of Europe as subject to acute racial degeneration.⁶⁶ According to him, European civilization too had been constructed by Aryans on a foundation of yellow and black stocks. The West was different from China in that it had had later and greater inputs of Aryan material. But might that not be taken to mean only that there would be a lag in the timing of the West's inevitable decline in comparison to China's? Rather than being a point from which Gobineau shrank, this

⁶⁴ Gobineau 1983–87:1:586–88. Gobineau did accept that the Chinese had been responsible for a considerable number of materially useful innovations (1:223–24). One of the earliest rebuttals of his charges against Chinese literature was Étienne's (1934:236–37) brief but pertinent defense of the main Chinese genres.

⁶⁵ Gobineau 1983–87:1:582, 586–88.

⁶⁶ It should again be stressed that Gobineau was no narrow nationalist, for he believed Aryan components had been responsible for the civilizational achievements in various European societies, and he argued that all modern nations had passed through a long process of degeneration. His antinationalism distinguished him from the many contemporaries who used racial theories to justify the aims and activities of their respective nation-states as these contended with one another. See, for example, Poliakov (1974:261–72) on the racialist positions taken by leading scholars in both France and Germany during the Franco-Prussian War.

was one with which he aggressively confronted the readers of his *Essai* in highlighting what he saw as parallels between the two civilizations. For him China was an essentially “democratic” civilization because the central institution was the mandarin, which the imperial examination system made accessible to everyone. The mediocrity and stagnation of Chinese literature he saw as going together with the government’s promotion of widespread popular education.⁶⁷ From his antiprogressive standpoint, and giving his historical terminology a medical diagnostic twist, he described the Chinese state-sponsored program of Confucian civic education as being in a “more advanced” state than that of the West—a piece of irony that implicitly accused the Western reader, while simultaneously damning the Chinese.⁶⁸ More pointedly, he went on to describe the alleged loss of Aryan independence completed by Qin Shi Huangdi as “a fact absolutely similar to what took place, *chez nous*, in 1789, when the innovating spirit saw as its first necessity the destruction of the ancient territorial subdivisions [of France].”⁶⁹ And in another passage:

Popular education everywhere promoted, [emphasis on] the well-being of the subjects, complete liberty in the allotted sphere, the fullest industrial and agricultural development, production at the most modest prices, rendering all European competition difficult for the ordinary

⁶⁷ Gobineau 1983–87:1:585, 590–91. Since Western writers in the nineteenth century rarely recognized the considerable degree of popular education and the high rate of literacy of Qing dynasty China, it is remarkable that Gobineau’s antidemocratic stance fostered his doing so, even if only disapprovingly. An earlier passage of the *Essai* (1:229) similarly affirmed China’s high degree of literacy, but held that success in the Chinese examinations was restricted de facto to the sons of officials, a judgment that underestimated the degree of social mobility permitted by the system, though no doubt sons of the gentry usually did predominate among the successful candidates. If Gobineau’s interpretation of China as simultaneously a democracy and a tyranny strikes readers today as strange, it should be noted that it not only accorded with the Aristotelian political tradition (very alive then in Catholic thinking) regarding popular democracy, but also, perhaps more pertinently, recalled such chapters of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* as “Despotism in Democratic Nations” and “Equality More Loved than Liberty.” Tocqueville also argued that the quest for equality undermined the pursuit of excellence. See Tocqueville 1960:2:42–49, 99–103, 334–39.

⁶⁸ In response to Tocqueville’s view that the *Essai*’s fatalism was pernicious, Gobineau asserted that humanity was like a person with a fatal disease, and that his attitude in the *Essai* had been that of a doctor, rather than that of an assassin (Gobineau to Tocqueville, 20 March 1856, in Schemann 1910:27). Tocqueville’s reply was that if Gobineau’s diagnosis was not immoral in itself, it could produce only immoral and pernicious results (Tocqueville to Gobineau, 30 July 1856, in Schemann 1910:30).

⁶⁹ Gobineau 1983–87:1:595n. “Liberty” was a value vaunted by Gobineau, but (rather like the “states’ rights” movement in the United States) he meant by it the rights of provincial and local authorities to maintain distinct traditions and to exercise autonomous decision-making powers.

necessities of life like cotton, silk and pottery. These are the incontestable results of which the Chinese system can boast.

It is impossible here not to reflect that, if the doctrines of those schools of thought we call socialist ever come to be applied and to be successful in Europe, the *nec plus ultra* of the good will be to obtain what the Chinese have come to fix permanently in place in their country. . . . And to enthrone their regime they will not refrain from exercising tyranny.⁷⁰

The idea of identifying Chinese society as a form of socialism had been suggested by Gobineau's friend Julius Mohl in the latter's 1851 presidential address to the Société Asiatique. In the same year that Gobineau endorsed it, the identification was similarly made by another of his friends, the French Roman Catholic missionary Évariste Huc, in his widely circulated volume *L'Empire chinois*. Both Gobineau and Huc pinpointed Wang Anshi's eleventh-century reforms as socialist in orientation. Huc recognized that they had been overturned long before, a point he interpreted as throwing socialism into discredit.⁷¹ Gobineau preferred to treat socialism and egalitarianism as enduring Chinese traits.

⁷⁰ Gobineau 1983–87:1:590–91. Gobineau's identification of socialism and Confucianism here probably seemed to him quite compatible with his equation elsewhere of Confucian and Calvinist ideals. From his arch-conservative perspective, liberalism and socialism were merely successive stops on the same downward road.

⁷¹ Gobineau 1983–87:1:590; Huc 1859:307–308. Gobineau's friendships with Mohl and Huc are reported by Schemann (1910:188, 1913–16:1:471) and Rowbotham (1929:15). Illustrating how dubious ideas can become broadly accepted clichés, the identification of socialism with the premodern Chinese social order eventually came to be adopted in the West both by advocates of socialism and by its detractors. At the other end of the political spectrum from Gobineau, Karl Marx maintained intermittently from the 1850s that the Chinese and Indian countryside retained features reminiscent of primitive communism, such as communal ownership and the self-sufficiency of village life. Half a century after Gobineau's *Essai*, the race theorist H. S. Chamberlain depicted China's "self-governing" villages as "communitic" in character (1899:2:884–85). He also described Confucius as a pedantic moralist similar to the French republican Jules Simon, who had promoted reforms aimed at improving working-class conditions during the 1870s. (The analogy was perhaps not entirely coincidental, for Simon had been among the left-wing ministers whom Gobineau held responsible for forcing him out of the diplomatic corps [Gobineau 1983–87:3:lxix–lxx]; on relations between Gobineau and Chamberlain, see below.) In the twentieth century Étienne (1934) and Needham (1964) are among the many authors who have given the traditional China/socialism trope a favorable, pro-Chinese slant. Their usage might derive from Sun Yatsen's analysis of anarchism and communism as ancient Chinese doctrines deriving from Laozi and Liezi. Like Gobineau in the *Essai* (1853–55), Sun considered Proudhon and Bakunin as the main Western theoreticians of those political philosophies; see Sun 1931:157–58.

TWILIGHT YEARS AND THE COLLAPSE OF CIVILIZATION: CHINA AS MENACE

One finds Gobineau returning to draw an explicit parallel between China and the French politics of his day in a late essay attacking the Third Republic. In that work he maintained that for most people the word *republic* symbolized the “chimera” of “equality” as represented by “the rule of merit,” the opportunity to succeed through one’s own abilities. This “principle of 1789,” he again stated, was exactly what had long existed in China, where it had produced the mandarinat— a political system run by universal competition and requiring, precisely for that reason, a dictatorship at the top that would ultimately spell the end of liberty.⁷²

There is nothing to suggest that Gobineau intended the racist argumentation of the *Essai* as anything less than a serious interpretation of world history. If he had limited himself to analogies like those just cited, his references to China might perhaps be interpreted as mere metaphors or as so many polemical devices meant to bear on European political conflicts alone. This was, after all, the function of much of the China imagery used by the nineteenth-century authors treated by Ernest Rose. Gobineau, however, was quite explicit that there were practical applications for international politics to be derived from his reading of history. Especially during the last years of his life, he became consumed with the idea that Chinese armies under Russian (and perhaps German) command would overrun Europe and destroy white civilization.⁷³ The prominence of this theme in his conversations and correspondence has been documented by Jean Gaulmier, editor of the recent critical edition of his works.⁷⁴ By 1880 Gobineau was even suggesting that the struggle against socialism in Europe was a secondary matter because of the

⁷² Gobineau 1970:211–13. This essay was from 1877.

⁷³ According to Schemann, Gobineau was first alerted to the “Yellow Peril” by Count Julien Rochechouart, who served as his attaché in Teheran in the early 1860s before spending ten years in the new French legation in Beijing, from which he wrote to Gobineau about China [Cf. Schemann (1910), pp. 219–20 and (1913–16), I, p. 511]. He depicted a looming Chinese threat to Western civilization in his *Pékin et l’intérieur de la Chine* and in his *Les Indes, la Birmanie, la Malaisie, le Japon et les États Unis* (Paris: Plon; 1878 and 1879). It is worth noting that in 1870, de Rochechouart was the French chargé d’affaires in the Chinese capital at the time of the so-called Tianjin massacre, the gravest crisis in Sino-Western relations since the Opium Wars. Given Gobineau’s dramatic depictions, it is worth recalling that the massacre began when a Chinese crowd overwhelmed the French consul and beat him to death (he burst into the district magistrate’s offices waving a pistol and, missing the magistrate himself, shot dead an assistant). Cf. Hsu 1990:301.

⁷⁴ See his introduction in Gobineau 1983–87:3:xl, xlvii–xlviii. In 1878 Gobineau predicted a Chinese invasion within ten years.

imminent prospect of an epoch-changing Chinese invasion.⁷⁵ His final publications unambiguously testify to the strength of his obsession with what eventually came to be known as the Yellow Peril.

The later dissemination of his views on this subject was substantially affected by the company he kept during the last period of his life. In 1876, the year of his "grand tour" with Dom Padro of Brazil, he first met Richard Wagner.⁷⁶ In 1880 they met again, and Wagner read the 1853–55 *Essai*. By 1881 Gobineau was on intimate terms with the composer, his wife Cosima, and their circle at Bayreuth.⁷⁷ Wagner's *Bayreuther Blätter* first introduced Gobineau to German readers and later promoted him by publishing articles about his work as well as translations of selected passages.⁷⁸ Most critics who have assessed the relationship of the two men agree that the differences in intellectual outlook between them were great. Wagner himself, however, found their visions quite compatible; believing that the Frenchman's work gave scientific justification to his own racial ideas, he dedicated the 1881 edition of his works to his new friend whose views he was determined to disseminate.⁷⁹ Despite their differences Wagner seems (particularly in his book *Heldentum und Christentum*) to have absorbed the French author's influence on important issues, including the interpretations of the Italian

⁷⁵ Gobineau to W. S. Blunt, 7 January 1880, cited in Gobineau 1983–87:3:xlvi.

⁷⁶ As it was the avid Wagnerian Lytton who at this time gave Gobineau his introduction to the German imperial family, one wonders whether he might have played a role in encouraging the count's meeting with the composer. As viceroy of India and designer of the imperial assemblage at which Victoria was proclaimed empress in 1877, he arranged for the event to open with his own entrance to the strains of the "March from Tannhäuser"; see Metcalf 1995:76.

⁷⁷ Wagner's disciple H. S. Chamberlain testified that Gobineau was one of the handful of people whom Wagner considered a personal friend toward the end of his life (cited in Seillière 1903:355). Early treatments of the Gobineau-Wagner friendship are found in Seillière 1903:373–74; Schemann 1910:236–42; and Schemann 1913–16:passim. For more recent discussions, see Biddiss 1970; Boissel 1981; and P. L. Rose 1992.

⁷⁸ Biddiss 1979:256; Seillière 1903:363, 371.

⁷⁹ Chamberlain 1899; Seillière 1903:355, 364–65, 435; Young 1968:223–34; Biddiss 1970:256; Watson 1979:291; P. L. Rose 1992:140, 157–58. Gobineau disliked Wagner's Christian-derived theme of salvation for all, while the composer was unimpressed by Gobineau's argument that artistic creativity required the mixing of black and white stocks. Wagner as a Schopenhauerian argued for a morality of compassion, while Gobineau justified a morality of the strong, in this presaging the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil*, as noted by Schemann (1910:157). Nietzsche confessed privately that he regretted never having met Gobineau (Barzun 1966:64). The significant ways in which Gobineau influenced Nietzsche are discussed by E. J. Young (1968:270–84). Nietzsche's characterizations of *Übermensch* and *Untermensch* echo the French author's distinction between the Aryan "fils du roi" and "the mob" (his term was *la boue*, literally "the mud"). For more on Wagner's dedication, see Watson 1979:302–303.

Renaissance and of ancient Greek theater, and the crucial themes of degeneration and of the ascetic Aryan hero.⁸⁰

In 1881, a year before his death, Gobineau contributed to Wagner's *Bayreuther Blätter* an article published under the title "Ein Urteil über die jetzige Weltlage," which carried an introduction by the composer and was translated by Cosima.⁸¹ In this the count first gave a summary of world history as seen from his racial perspective, and then he constructed on that foundation an analysis of world politics since the "opening" of China in the First Opium War. A crucial role in the historical survey was played by the yellow destroyer Attila, whom Gobineau credited with delivering the decisive death-blow to a Roman empire rotten from a profusion of black blood that had been introduced through a long process of "semitization." However, as most of Attila's troops were depicted as being of rude Germanic stock, the so-called "Hunnic" invasions actually set the stage in Gobineau's script for a new flowering of Aryan culture in medieval Europe.⁸² When he turned to current international trends, Gobineau drew particular atten-

⁸⁰ See E. J. Young 1967:231–32; P. L. Rose 1992:141–58. The notion of Wagner's borrowing from Gobineau's ideas on these scores is drawn from Seillière 1903:357–66 and 371, which argues that early Greek theater served as Wagner's model for Bayreuth, and that his interpretation of it was influenced by Gobineau's analysis of ancient Persian drama. Although Seillière shows Wagner enthusiastically absorbing Gobineau's ideas of degeneration and the ascetic Aryan hero, he argues that the borrowing was equivocal because Wagner's Schopenhauerian philosophy was so very different from the world view of the Frenchman. For Gobineau, degeneration represented history's final, ineluctable result, while for Wagner degeneration made sense as an intermediate phase that set the stage for triumphant regeneration brought about through the creative synthesis of art and religion. Seillière argues too that the late Wagnerian notion of the hero followed Gobineau's depiction of the ideal Aryan character-type in whom sense experience and volition were restrained by intelligence. However heroic in the composer's hands, heroic Aryan asceticism was an instrument for winning redemption, while for Gobineau Aryan stoicism was an assertion of principle and honor in the face of decadence and ultimate tragedy. The recent, briefer analysis of P. L. Rose (1992:140–41) yields similar conclusions, with the benefit of access to Cosima Wagner's journals in showing the importance of the impact of Gobineau's Aryanism on her husband's music, particularly *Parsifal* and *Siegfried*.

⁸¹ This translates as "An Assessment of the Current State of the World," but the German *Urteil* may have been intended to carry connotations of religious judgment.

⁸² This part of the historical "Ethnographic Résumé" is omitted from Biddiss's (1970) selection from Gobineau's works; I draw on the reproduction in Schemann (1910:480–85). Attila makes his "dramatic" entrance on p. 482 ("Ce fut alors que le ciel fait éclater Attila"). The early evolution of Gobineau's portrayal of Attila as traced by Boissel (1973: 144–45) starts with *Manfredine* (1848), in which the young Gobineau has Attila as a positive force defeating a popular urban revolution. The favorable portrayal there was in line with the "rehabilitation of the barbarian" championed by Romantic and post-Romantic authors who denounced (modern, urban) civilization as decadent and immoral. In the systematically racialized analysis of the 1853 *Essai*, however, Attila was consigned mainly to the yellow race and thus lost some but not all of the positive attributes earlier accorded to him.

tion to recent Chinese emigration overseas and raised the specter of a Chinese wave that would eventually flood into Europe through the new railways of the expanding Russian empire. Gobineau legitimized white opposition to Chinese immigration to California, Hawai'i, and the British dominions on the grounds that racial antipathy was natural, but he forecast that ultimately Europe itself would be overcome by hordes from the East, as its own social structure and racial character had become far too degraded to be able to withstand the flow for long. His vision was that of a "new fifth century," this one involving an invasion in which "yellow" hordes would "explode" upon a Europe far more racially decadent than it had been at the end of the Roman empire. In his view, the modern invasion would thus mean the demise of the last vestiges of Aryan civilization in Europe at the hands of masses of Chinese motivated by self-interest and narrow commercial gain.⁸³

Gobineau gave this vision artistic expression in his last literary work, the incredibly ponderous, five-hundred-page tragic poem *Amadis*, some 12,000 verses in all, the final version of which was published posthumously in 1887.⁸⁴ *Amadis* centers on a final cosmic conflict between white and yellow races. It features a noble elite of white heroes who have created and long upheld civilization and social order. In time they are subverted from within by a revolution of commoners led by the ethnically mixed middle classes, who in turn are faced with rebellion by the racially inferior lower orders. In such a weakened state, Europe is a vulnerable prey, irresistible to the predators waiting voraciously beyond its frontiers. The nobility of the white race emerges one final time to resist the inevitable invasion of innumerable yellow (or more precisely, Chinese) hordes aided by half-Asiatic Slavs.⁸⁵ The Aryan heroes, though standing to the end unbeaten in actual fighting, are finally drowned in the sea of the corpses of those they have slain.⁸⁶

One aspect of Gobineau's late writings that is worth noting is the marked coincidence between his historiography and his eschatology. This is displayed in the clear parallel between the *Essai's* depiction of the disruption of the Aryan homeland by yellow hordes at the dawn of history and the portrait of civilization's last days in *Amadis*. A second

⁸³ Translation in Biddiss, ed. 1971:241–47, especially 243 and 246. See Gobineau 1983–87:3:xlvi–xlvi on the new fifth century.

⁸⁴ A partial version was published in 1876 in a limited edition.

⁸⁵ Schemann held *Amadis* to be the author's crowning achievement and maintained that Gobineau had there recognized the Chinese threat, but had not yet been able to grasp the role of Japan (1910:485, 490). After the Russo-Japanese War, Japan was widely seen in the West as the prospective leader of the "yellow race."

⁸⁶ *Amadis* has been left out of the recent critical edition of Gobineau's works.

aspect of the late writings that deserves mention (and is consistent with his earlier politics) is that Gobineau's racial analysis led him not to support for imperialist expansion, but to a racist anticolonialism. He thus referred to Asia as a tempting fruit that would poison whoever ate of it, and he warned of long-term negative effects of European expansion into Asia, and especially of Russian expansion into north China.⁸⁷ If such reservations about Europe's "civilizing mission" were ostensibly out of step with the mood of the "new imperialism" of the 1880s, however, the main anti-Asian thrust of his analysis proved quite compatible with the dominant thinking. By his death in 1882, and despite his hopes and efforts, the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* had languished without republication for three decades. Yet it went into its second edition and then immediately into its third in 1884, the year that France, tightening its hold on Vietnam, initiated hostilities in the Franco-Chinese War.⁸⁸ The French original of his 1881 German article

⁸⁷ Gobineau's often cited metaphor of Asia as a poisonous fruit (which naturally evoked the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis) was deployed in his widely read *Trois ans en Asie*, published in 1859 following his tour as secretary to the French diplomatic mission to Persia; see Gobineau 1983–87:2:369. In correspondence with Tocqueville before publication of *Trois ans en Asie*, Gobineau had already predicted that Asians would overrun decadent Europe (Schemann, ed. 1908:269–72); more specifically, see the reference to the "opening" of a China "voracious in its old age" in his letter to Tocqueville of 15 January 1856 (quoted in Biddiss 1970:142). In the 1853 *Essai* Gobineau had attributed a design for invading China to Robert Clive, the British conqueror of Bengal, but Gobineau objected that such a venture was doomed to failure because the invaders would eventually be either absorbed or expelled (1983–87:1:599–602). Gobineau's recent editors suggest that his source for this plan might have been John Malcolm's 1836 biography of Clive, but I have not found any such reference there. A similar plan attributed to Clive was, however, discussed by Lord Macartney in the journal he kept of his 1793 embassy to China. Though that journal remained unpublished in Gobineau's day, the idea might have found its way to him through an intermediate source. Gobineau's shrill warnings regarding European imperialism coincided particularly with Russian initiatives at expansion during and after the Russo-Turkish War of 1876–77, including the 1878 subjugation of Kokand in central Asia. Biddiss, ed. 1971:243–47; Biddiss 1970:250–54.

⁸⁸ Gobineau's correspondence shows that until the mid-1870s he planned to do a major revision of the *Essai*, in which he intended to "smash" the "objectionable" parts of Darwin's theory. However, by 1878, having failed to find a publisher, he chose to let the first edition stand with the addition of a new introduction in which he merely claimed that Darwin and Buckle had formulated the main "derivations" from his own theory (Gobineau 1983–87:1:1170). Although he rejected the notion that the white race had ever descended from apes, his correspondence shows him affirming that Darwin's system "has some truth in it, in the sense that some of our present mongrelized races are indeed descended from certain beings intermediate between man and the monkey, as a consequence of the intermixture of these types and man." See Biddiss (1970:246–48), who also notes that the *Essai*'s posthumous republication may have been aided by a subvention from Wagner's circle.

raising the specter of a Chinese invasion of Europe finally appeared in print the following year in Paris.

THE LEGACY—FROM GOBINEAU TO TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARYANISM

The two decades following Gobineau's death saw his ideas widely disseminated, though the manner of their reception varied from country to country. As Jacques Barzun put it in 1938, "the different responses to Gobineau's ideas in France, Germany and England might be summarized by saying that in England these ideas have been adopted or paralleled without reference to him; in France credit was somewhat delayed and partly withheld, and in Germany recognition, both early and full, prevailed from the first."⁸⁹ The extent of his reception in Germany was due to the vigorous efforts at propagating his ideas made by Ludwig Schemann and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, both members of the Wagners' circle at Bayreuth. Schemann was an unremitting admirer of the count and in 1894 was central in founding the Gobineau-Vereinigung to propagate his ideas.⁹⁰ Chamberlain, who came to be greatly admired both by Wilhelm II and later by Hitler, adapted Gobineau's ideas more selectively.⁹¹ Both Schemann and Chamberlain nevertheless contributed to altering the content of Gobineau's "historical Aryanism" in several important ways, the main lines of which

⁸⁹ Barzun 1966:75. Young (1968:B–III, C, D) traces Gobineau's influence and the various interpretations of his thought in France and Germany.

⁹⁰ On Schemann and his role in shifting the sense of Gobineau's thought on key issues, see Andre 1984.

⁹¹ Schemann was charged by Wagner with the mission of publicizing the count's vision (cited in Seillière 1903:442). Especially important in his carrying out of that mission were his presentation of Gobineau's racial thinking (Schemann 1910) and his two-volume biography (Schemann 1913–16). Gobineau's papers and the literary rights to his estate effectively fell to Schemann after Gobineau's confidante and literary heir, the Comtesse de la Tour, entrusted them to the Vereinigung (Schemann 1913–16:2:591) in 1898 and 1901. Schemann was responsible for translating into German the complete *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* as well as other works by Gobineau, and also for editing parts of his correspondence. Young (1968:235–38) examines Schemann's distortions of Gobineau's ideas. Mosse's (1964:91–92) profile of Schemann shows the strength of his anti-Semitism and throws light on his links with the imperialistic and anti-Semitic Pan-German Association, of which he was a board member. Young also examines the relation between Chamberlain's ideas and Gobineau's (1968:242–60), while Mosse (1964:93–97 and passim) treats Chamberlain's general racism and Hitler's debt to his thought.

apparently derived from Wagner's reading of the Frenchman.⁹² These deserve brief elucidation here. As shown above, Gobineau was a historical pessimist in that he regarded racial miscegenation both as inevitable and as the source of an ineluctable racial degeneration. Schemann obscured this aspect of his thought; together with other pan-Germanic ideologues, he and Chamberlain replaced it with a belief that racial "purity" could be maintained or restored through the implementation of eugenicist measures of varying degrees of severity.⁹³ Second, Gobineau's thinking about whether modern peoples could be considered Aryan seems to have been somewhat inconsistent. His praise for the character and virtues of the "Germans" generally referred to the historical invaders of Europe in antiquity and the early Middle Ages. He tended to treat all modern European nations as decadent products of racial mixing, though in comparing contemporary Europeans, he was most clearly critical of the French. He is nevertheless reported to have said in various conversations that either the modern Germans, or the British, or the Swedes had best preserved the Aryan character in his own day.⁹⁴ The Wagnerians and other pan-Germanists not surprisingly preferred this latter interpretation of the modern German nation as a historical embodiment of the Aryan race. The extent to which this can be considered a distortion of Gobineau's thought is open to interpretation because of his own ambiguities. Finally, for anti-Semites like Chamberlain and Schemann, the Jews were agents of racial and spiritual degeneration, congenital underminers of Aryan "purity," and the Aryans' main enemy. Gobineau's attitude had been much more ambiguous: though viewing the Semitic peoples as fatally infused with black blood by Roman times, he depicted the original Semites as whites, and in that vein he wrote with esteem of the ancient Israelites. And although undoubtedly considering the Jews as agents of "semitization" in line with much previous (and later) nineteenth-century thought, he also pictured them as representing an element of vitality within European society. Thus, as Biddiss has noted, he seems to have shown the Jews a degree of respect

⁹² The Wagnerian precedents are presented by P. L. Rose 1992:chap. 9.

⁹³ Georges Vacher de Lapouge, who founded the school of thought known as anthropo-sociology and argued for such eugenicist measures in France, was explicit in crediting Gobineau for the fundamental insights of his school. See Young 1968:209–22 on his interpretation of Gobineau's thought.

⁹⁴ Rowbotham 1929:11, 22.

that is absent from his treatment of the “yellow race” or, for that matter, the “semi-Asiatic” Slavs.⁹⁵

ECHOES OF GOBINEAU IN THE YELLOW PERIL RHETORIC OF WILHELM II?

There is no doubt that Yellow Perilist ideas of varied provenance were widely propagated during the late nineteenth century. Schemann, however, observed that it was Gobineau who first introduced such ideas prominently into Germany.⁹⁶ Gollwitzer notes that the echo of Gobineau’s apocalyptic warnings remained clearly audible in Bayreuth well after his death.⁹⁷ Within Germany as a whole, the count’s message seems to have been the loudest call to arms sounded throughout the 1880s against a predicted Chinese military expansion. In the 1890s, however, the individual most prominent in fanning European Yellow Peril sentiment and seeking to translate it into international action was the emperor himself, Wilhelm II. As it happens, there seem to be some curious resonances between Gobineau’s vision and Wilhelm’s political imagery.

Wilhelm has long been conventionally credited with coining the German phrase *die gelbe Gefahr*, which seems to have entered current

⁹⁵ Biddiss 1970:255. The connection of Gobineau to Chamberlain’s anti-Semitism is complicated by the fact that the Englishman, though he rejected Gobineau’s pessimism and denied being influenced by him on other issues, did specifically credit the count with educating him in the notion that the Jews were an “anti-civilizational force” (Chamberlain 1899:2:881). The solution to this puzzle may lie in P. L. Rose’s (1992:140) observations that Gobineau freely displayed an aristocratic aversion to Jews during his time with Wagner.

⁹⁶ Schemann 1910:480. The term *Yellow Peril* was itself coined later; the question of its origins is considered below. Central to Yellow Perilist ideology, which predated the coining of the term, was the idea that the peoples of China and/or Japan posed a mortal threat to Western civilization. Several variants can be distinguished, which highlighted alleged military, economic, demographic, genetic, or cultural dangers. Several major academic studies have dealt with the subject in a variety of ways. Gollwitzer (1962) uses an intellectual history approach and focuses mainly on European theoretical and literary sources. The social history of anti-Chinese movements is systematically explored through the analysis of journalistic sources by S. C. Miller (1969) and R. A. Thompson (1978) for the United States and by P. E. Roy (1989) and W. P. Ward (1990) for Canada. Decornoy (1970), though more essayistic in approach, is also of interest.

⁹⁷ Gollwitzer 1962:154. Gollwitzer shows that the Yellow Peril discourse that emerged in Germany and France in the 1890s built on several previously existing slogans, including the “American peril” (which referred to cheap grain imports that threatened European agriculture generally and German landed estates in particular); the “Russian peril,” which had both economic and military variants; and the “Red peril” posed by the Social-Democrats. See also note 103 below.

usage at the end of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95.⁹⁸ (The French and English equivalents, *le péril jaune* and *the Yellow Peril*, both appeared later.) There is no doubt that Wilhelm was strongly promoting the idea of a threat from the East at this time. After the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, he followed the lead of his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II, and associated Germany with Russia and France in the “Far Eastern” Triple Alliance, which forced Japan to return the Liaodong peninsula to China.⁹⁹ In writing to the tsar shortly thereafter, Wilhelm thanked him for initiating the joint action and explained: “I shall certainly do all in my power to keep Europe quiet, and also guard the rear of Russia so that nobody shall hamper your action towards the Far East. For that is clearly the great task of the future Russia to cultivate the Asian continent and to defend Europe from the inroads of the Great Yellow Race.”¹⁰⁰ Soon thereafter, on the basis of a pencil sketch of his own, the Kaiser commissioned his well-known engraving depicting the nations of Europe as mythic armored figures gathered in tense deliberation under a luminous heavenly cross, while in the background a menacing Buddha is enthroned on a black dragon that hovers above a scene of fiery destruction. The Buddha and dragon symbolize Japan and China respectively. The figure of the archangel Michael holds high a flaming sword and exhorts the European nations to arms.¹⁰¹ Lest the message be unclear, the Kaiser added an inscription in French, “Nations Européennes! Défendez vos biens sacrés!” The original was presented by the Kaiser to Nicholas II, with a description that linked external and internal enemies in a manner already familiar to us as typical of Gobineau’s outlook. Wilhelm wrote that the engraving

⁹⁸ Gollwitzer 1962:42–43.

⁹⁹ The Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed on 17 April 1895. Russia, Germany, and France lodged a protest, which they threatened to back with force, on 24 April.

¹⁰⁰ Grant, ed. 1920:10–11 (Wilhelm and Nicholas corresponded in English). To explain such pronouncements, Balfour (1964:189) cites the Kaiser’s comment to one of his officials that he was taking this tack to tie Russia down in Asia. Ludwig (1926:223) avows that he “talked himself into a hate for the yellow races” for the same reason, and further affirms, “No sooner had the slogan of the Yellow Peril sounded in his ears than his heated imagination beheld yellow armies and navies overrunning Europe; Russia was the only Power who could tackle these.” The need for diverting Russia arose at least in part because, after the dismissal of Bismarck and in line with Caprivi’s “New Course,” the new German government had chosen not to renew Bismarck’s Reinsurance Treaty in 1891. However, by 1894 Wilhelm and his confidant Eulenburg were intent on dumping the defenders of the “New Course.”

¹⁰¹ All the others were represented by female personages. Britannia at the rear of the company had to be coaxed to participate. Brief discussions of this painting are to be found in Morse 1910–18:3:309; R. A. Thompson 1957:1–3; Gollwitzer 1962:42–43; and Kiernan 1969:172; the fullest analysis, still useful despite the British colonial slant, is Diósy’s chapter 4, first published in 1898.

"shows the powers of Europe represented by their respective Genii called together by the Arch-Angel Michael,—sent from Heaven,—to *unite* in resisting the inroad of Buddhism, heathenism and barbarism for the Defence of the Cross. Stress is laid on the *united* resistance of *all* European powers which is just as necessary also against our common internal foes, anarchism, republicanism, nihilism."¹⁰² Wilhelm presented prints of the engraving to other European heads of state to impress on them the importance of concerted action in east Asia, and he had a newspaper version published as well, apparently to excite popular feeling in the same direction.¹⁰³ With its medieval trappings, its sense of imminent life-and-death confrontation, and its plea for white solidarity, the painting was certainly consistent with Gobineau's vision. But was there an actual connection? Before addressing this question, it is worthwhile examining more of the Kaiser's record of publicizing the threat of the Yellow Peril.

If Wilhelm's first foray into east Asian politics may have had some marginal advantage for China in that Japanese ambitions in Manchuria were temporarily blocked, it is clear that his actions were not simply motivated by goodwill. That fact was dramatically underlined in October 1897, when the Kaiser and his hand-picked foreign secretary Bernard von Bülow organized the occupation of the port of Jiaozhou (Kiaochow) and the imposition of a German sphere of influence over Shandong province. The initiative for the occupation is known to have come from the Kaiser and the court, and the project was carried out over the strong objections of Foreign Office civil servants and even of Admiral von Tirpitz, secretary of the navy, who feared that the timing might provoke a war with Russia.¹⁰⁴ In fact, however, Wilhelm seems

¹⁰² Wilhelm to Nicholas, 26 September 1895, in Grant, ed. 1920:19. An even more purple description, likely from an official press release, appeared in the *Nord-Deutsche Gazette* and was then published in translation in the British *Morning Post* of 11 November 1895.

¹⁰³ Contrary to common belief, the inscriptions to this piece of visual propaganda did not include the phrase *gelbe Gefahr*. Gollwitzer (1962:42–43) cites Wilhelm in personal correspondence with the tsar as crediting the Russian press with having formulated the phrase on the basis of this painting, but notes that Wilhelm himself also claimed privately that he had personally coined the phrase. Gollwitzer prefers the former claim, but both are possible, and neither is certain. Further research into the terminology of the German and especially of the Russian press at the time would be most useful. Gollwitzer locates the first use of the French *péril jaune* as occurring in 1896–97, but his judgment that the English phrase *Yellow Peril* was first coined in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion, probably in the American press (1962:43–46), must be revised. Arthur Diósy, chairman of the Japan Society of London, had already used the phrase as a chapter title in his 1898 work, *The New Far East*, which gave a shrewd, sarcastic analysis of the Kaiser's painting and the intentions behind it. A reproduction of the painting served as the frontispiece to Diósy's book.

¹⁰⁴ Schrecker 1971:34–35.

to have obtained the tsar's agreement to the occupation two months before it was carried out.¹⁰⁵ The Qing government was forced to accept German territorial and other claims following the arrival of the German war fleet in Chinese waters. The Kaiser's well-publicized personal instructions to the fleet were that it should gain its objectives "if necessary, with the most brutal ruthlessness," not sparing the "mailed fist"¹⁰⁶—a typical medieval touch.

The next major development in Wilhelm's relations with China came with the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. When news reached Europe that the German minister to China had been killed by a renegade Chinese soldier, the Kaiser and von Bülow once again took the matter into their hands, this time leading the organization of the international expeditionary force charged with suppressing the Boxers.¹⁰⁷ The German contingent was personally dispatched from Bremerhaven by Wilhelm, who gave instructions that, while suffused with historical imagery, were unambiguous. He told the troops:

Show yourself Christians, happily enduring in the face of the heathens! May honors and fame attend your colors and arms! Give the world an example of virility and discipline! You are well aware that you face a brave, well-armed and savage foe. No pardon will be given, and no prisoners taken. Anyone who falls into your hands falls to your sword! Just as the Huns under their King Etzel [Attila] created for themselves a thousand years ago a name which men still respect, you should give the name of German such cause to be remembered in China for a

¹⁰⁵ Röhl 1967:208; Balfour 1964:209. The occupation came at a critical time in the relationship between Wilhelm and his government—during the Kaiser's establishment of a more autocratic regime. Marginalization of Reichskanzler Hohenlohe and his cabinet was part of the plan. See Röhl 1967:208, 252; and Hull 1982:90–97. Nicholas received another of the Kaiser's sketches in appreciation for his cooperation in the Jiaozhou occupation. This one portrayed Germany and Russia as "sentinels at the Yellow Sea" whose presence would be "duly respected especially by the Yellow Ones!" (Wilhelm to Nicholas, letters of 4 January and 28 March 1898, in Grant, ed. 1920:45, 48).

¹⁰⁶ The fleet was ostensibly sent to avenge the murders of two German Catholic missionaries in Shandong, a venture for which Wilhelm could count on the support of the Catholic Centre Party in the Reichstag. The two missionaries had actually been killed during a bandit attack that devastated the entire village where they lived. Rodzinski (1979) and Balfour (1964) note that Wilhelm in 1896 had already made the decision to acquire Jiaozhou, which he wanted as the center of a German colonial holding in China. (Citations as translated by Rodzinski 1979:1:355–56; and Balfour 1964:209–10.)

¹⁰⁷ Chancellor von Hohenlohe could only complain that he was completely bypassed, as Wilhelm and von Bülow themselves arranged for the appointment of Waldersee and the dispatch of German troops. They also carried out on their own the diplomacy that resulted in the eight-nation international task force being placed under nominal German command. See Balfour 1964:228.

thousand years that no Chinaman, whether his eyes be slit or not, will dare to look a German in the face.¹⁰⁸

This identification with Attila and the Huns caused Germany considerable fallout in later years, but the orders for Germanic troops to lay waste a rotten civilization again recall the historical analysis of Gobineau's 1881 article in the *Bayreuther Blätter*.¹⁰⁹ They also raise the possibility that, despite differences in their outlooks, Wilhelm might have been acquainted with that article or at least the vision expressed in it. Though Gobineau had warned against increased contact between Europeans and Asians, the Kaiser might logically have concluded from the Frenchman's dramatic scenario of racial confrontation that in the face of an aroused China the best Aryan defense would be a good offense. In any case, a general personally close to Wilhelm, Count von Waldersee, German field marshal and one-time chief of the Imperial General Staff, was appointed to take command of the eight-nation expeditionary force in China.¹¹⁰ Waldersee proceeded to carry out the orders of the Kaiser efficiently. When the other powers declined to act on his proposal to pursue the Qing court across north China to Xi'an, he conducted a series of punitive expeditions that, in the estimation of the American commander General Chafee, resulted in the deaths of fifteen innocent Chinese for every genuine Boxer. Eventually the atrocities committed by the German troops alienated even the military forces sent by the other great powers.¹¹¹

Further evidence of the Kaiser's views on the Yellow Peril came in 1902, when he again raised the issue with the tsar, writing that "20 to 30 Million of trained Chinese helped by half a dozen Jap Divisions and led by fine undaunted Christian hating Jap officers, is a future to be contemplated not without anxiety; and not impossible. In fact it is the

¹⁰⁸ Translation from Balfour 1964:226–27, slightly amended following Morse 1910–18:3:309. Eulenburg and von Bülow tried to fob the press off with a (slightly) toned down official version of the speech, but an enterprising journalist had taken down the spoken version in shorthand.

¹⁰⁹ The Kaiser's association of German troops with the Huns stuck and was of course turned against Germany by its enemies in World War I.

¹¹⁰ The exclusive control by Wilhelm and von Bülow of the German anti-Boxer expedition led to the resignation of Reichskanzler Hohenlohe and his replacement by von Bülow (Röhl 1967:268–69). Wilhelm alone was personally responsible for the appointment of Waldersee, who like much of the military elite was a confirmed racist. He and his wife maintained a salon in their flat at which the young Wilhelm had been a regular visitor. Their group's chaplain, Dr. Adolf Stöcker, a founder of the rabidly anti-Semitic Verein Deutscher Studenten, later became Wilhelm's court preacher. See Balfour 1964:90–92; and Mosse 1964: 132, 193–94.

¹¹¹ Morse 1910–18:3:316–19. Chafee's assessment is cited in Hibbert 1984:354–55.

coming into reality of the 'Yellow Peril' which I depicted some years ago, and for which engraving I was laughed at by the greater mass of the People."¹¹² Similarly, in 1907, after the Russo-Japanese War, Wilhelm predicted that before long there would break out "the final great fight . . . between the yellow and white races in which Japan will lead the Chinese invasion of Europe. It will also be the final great fight between the Christian and the Buddhist religions; the culture of the west and the half-culture of the east."¹¹³ Then again, during World War I, he recalled bitterly: "I prophesied in 1908 that in the event of an attack on Europe by the Yellow Peril, the Slavs will not only fail to offer opposition but will take sides against Europe."¹¹⁴ There is thus a strong suggestion that the Kaiser had a well-developed tendency to speak and perhaps to think in terms of a grand racial conflict, *à la* Gobineau, between "white" and "yellow" peoples.

There is naturally always some question as to whether, and to what extent, public statements by political actors can be taken at face value. In relation to the passage from 1907 just cited, Balfour notes that within six months Wilhelm was calling for a Japanese-German alliance to counter the newly formed Anglo-Russian Entente. Wilhelm was obviously not simply a slave to Yellow Peril thinking, and he might well have made good use of the possibilities for political obfuscation and manipulation that it gave him. It does seem clear, however, from statements made by him over many years, that the notion of a Chinese invasion of Europe, perhaps with Japanese or Russian leadership, was one of the abiding elements of his political vocabulary. Moreover, what is known of Wilhelm's character seems to support the position that his concern with the Yellow Peril was at least at some level genuine in respect to his personal beliefs.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Wilhelm to Nicholas, 2 September 1902, in Grant, ed. 1920:90-91.

¹¹³ Translated in Balfour 1964:260-61.

¹¹⁴ Translated in Balfour 1964:165. Russia and Japan were of course allies after the latter joined the side of the Entente powers in September 1915.

¹¹⁵ A persistent charge against Wilhelm was that when speaking publicly he could not stop himself from being carried away and expressing opinions that were politically harmful and/or offensive. This was, for example, the opinion of the insightful von Holstein, veteran senior counselor at the German Foreign Office (cited in Balfour 1964:146, 168). Similarly, after the 1914 Japanese seizure of German-held Shandong, Max Weber criticized the unprofessional "romanticism" behind Wilhelm's east Asia policies and particularly singled out the Kaiser's public venting of his views on the Yellow Peril; see Weber 1958:372-74. That the Yellow Peril was not only part of Wilhelm's public discourse but also part of his private *Weltanschauung* is seen from the memoirs of his dentist, who reports that similar views were commonplace among the German general staff by 1905 (Davis 1918:chap. 8). The following story is perhaps illustrative of the depth of Wilhelm's beliefs on "geo-cultural" matters. It is told by Balfour (1964:142) to indicate the Kaiser's personal mind toward the end of

FROM BAYREUTH TO BERLIN: THE EULENBURG CONNECTION

Although Yellow Perilist ideas of various sorts were widely propagated during the late nineteenth century, and it is quite likely that the Kaiser was exposed to such ideas from a variety of sources, there are some interesting convergences that lead one to wonder whether he might have been influenced by Gobineau's vision in particular. This is suggested circumstantially by the fact that several generations of the imperial family are known to have had a definite taste for the French writer. Not only was Gobineau personally known to Wilhelm's parents, but Wilhelm's mother had become a special admirer of the count after their introduction through Lord Lytton. According to Schemann, it was she who gave the future Kaiser his copy of Gobineau's book *The Renaissance*.¹¹⁶ Wilhelm's own testimony indicates that his youthful reading of that literary-historical work made a deep impression that he retained throughout his later life.¹¹⁷

More pertinent to the present topic is the fact that Wilhelm had a privileged avenue of access to Gobineau's racial thought. This was Count (later Prince) Philipp zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld, whose uncle Friedrich Albert zu Eulenburg had led the first Prussian expedition to China in 1859–62 at the end of the Second Opium War.¹¹⁸ Closely associated with the Bayreuth circle, Philipp was a close personal friend of Gobineau and one of his earliest and most earnest apostles in Germany.¹¹⁹ In 1886 he published a warm appreciation of Gobineau in the *Bayreuther Blätter*. He is also on record as having had a particularly

World War I: "Just after the German army's 'Black Day' in August 1918, he spent an evening reading out an article on the deciphering of the Hittite language. When someone ventured to suggest that there were perhaps more important things to talk about, he declared that if only the world had busied itself more with the Hittites, France and England would have realized that the danger always came from the east, would never have become allied with Russia and so would never have got into the situation which caused the war." Earlier in the year he had insisted that the war be continued in order to break the power of international Jewry and the freemasons (Hull 1982:278).

¹¹⁶ Schemann 1913–16:2:303, 478.

¹¹⁷ Cf. William II 1926:122, who also observed that the book had been admired by his grandmother, the first German empress (and the daughter of Tsar Paul II), as well as by his aunt, the Grand Duchess of Baden. *La Renaissance* is primarily devoted to drawing the contrast between the creative hero and the mob in a time of decadence, rather than to explicitly treating the period in racial terms.

¹¹⁸ On Friedrich Albert, see *NDB* 4:681. In 1900 Philipp published the correspondence his uncle had written during his embassy to China forty years before.

¹¹⁹ Rowbotham 1929:23; Barzun 1966:63–64; Young 1968:226. Their friendship dated from 1874; see Eulenburg 1886:156. Gobineau's correspondence with Eulenburg regarding an Asian invasion of Europe is cited in the editor's introduction to Gobineau 1983–87:3:xxxix–xl.

high regard for *Amadis*, which he considered to be Gobineau's masterpiece. In his view, the character of Amadis represented "the noblest of all noble Crusaders," and his knightly outlook coincided precisely with Gobineau's own.¹²⁰ Their correspondence shows that Eulenburg was one of those to whom Gobineau particularly stressed the importance of the Yellow Peril, writing of Russia's expansion after its acquisition of the Amur basin as the great political issue of the day.¹²¹ In addition, Eulenburg was (together with Ludwig Schemann and Hans von Wolzogen, editor of the *Bayreuther Blätter*) one of the three founding directors of the Gobineau-Vereinigung, which they established in 1894–95, at the time of the Sino-Japanese War.¹²²

In 1885 Eulenburg had begun an intimate friendship with the future Kaiser, whose bosom companion, confidant, and mentor in intellectual matters he quickly became.¹²³ His background, like Gobineau's, was in diplomacy, and as the most prominent figure in Wilhelm's personal entourage in the decade after his ascension to the throne in 1888, Eulenburg exerted strong political influence on the Kaiser in the formulation of both domestic and international policy. Not only was Eulenburg Wilhelm's chief political adviser de facto until 1898, but he was also the chief architect of the "personal regime" by which Wilhelm himself assumed political preeminence in the imperial government in 1897. A solid conservative, Eulenburg singlemindedly promoted the interests of

¹²⁰ Eulenburg to Gobineau, 29 August 1876, in Röhl, ed. 1976:1:111; Eulenburg 1886:173. Gobineau in turn not only recognized Eulenburg as one of the handful of people who properly understood *Amadis*, but also credited him with being the first person to give his artistic creation a correct discursive interpretation (Gobineau to Eulenburg, letters of 5 and 6 September 1876, translated in Eulenburg 1886:173–74).

¹²¹ Eulenburg translated Gobineau's statement as "[die Stellung Russlands in Asien]. . . . Das ist die grosse Weltfrage." Perhaps significantly, Gobineau made this assertion in his letter just after reporting on his progress with the continuation of *Amadis*; see Gobineau to Eulenburg, 24 August 1878, in Eulenburg 1886:171. The idea raised in this correspondence of his writing something essayistic on the Chinese threat was probably what eventually led to his 1881 article in the *Bayreuther Blätter*.

¹²² On Eulenburg's involvement, see the preliminary notice of the formation of the Vereinigung in BB 16, no. 2 (1894): 171–72; also, Schemann 1895:1. Eulenburg and Cosima Wagner were among the largest initial donors to the Vereinigung (Schemann 1895:5, 7). The announcements and accounts of the Gobineau-Vereinigung continued to be published by the *Bayreuther Blätter* into World War I. Eulenburg remained an executive director of the Vereinigung until scandal overtook him in 1902. Note that the Vereinigung had explicit eugenicist aims from the outset; see Schemann 1894:6.

¹²³ The relationship between Wilhelm and Eulenburg is examined carefully in Burmeister 1981 and Hull 1982:chaps. 3–5 and passim. Burmeister (1981:21) notes that Eulenburg's arguments that Wagner's operas would heighten German national consciousness were what drew Wilhelm to support Cosima Wagner's projects at Bayreuth after her husband's death. Wilhelm participated publicly in the Bayreuth festival both before and after his taking the throne (BB [1901]: 276).

his own Junker class in Prussian politics, while remaining deeply committed to the German unity engineered by Bismarck (in whose dismissal he had a hand). In the spring of 1895 he served at the German embassy in Vienna as the diplomatic conduit for communications between the tsar and the Kaiser.¹²⁴ The latter's famous drawings depicting the Yellow Peril date from 1895 and 1897, when Eulenburg's influence was at its highest. Although Eulenburg's influence over government policy began to wane from 1898, he remained a force personally with Wilhelm until 1902, and his account of the Kaiser's state of mind during the suppression of the Boxers in 1900 shows that he remained a key intermediary between the Kaiser, his government, and the general staff at that time.¹²⁵ Moreover, in the 1890s he held sway not only directly over Wilhelm, but also over von Bülow, the Kaiser's main collaborator in carrying out his China policy, who was appointed foreign secretary in 1897 and Reichskanzler in 1900. Eulenburg had been his original promoter.¹²⁶ Given Eulenburg's friendship with Gobineau and the nature of his relationship with Wilhelm II, the suggestion by E. J. Young that Eulenburg probably expounded the Frenchman's theories on race to the young Kaiser can scarcely be doubted.¹²⁷ The personal relationships and the nature of Wilhelm's pronouncements on the Yellow Peril similarly seem to make it likely that Eulenburg brought the count's notion of an east Asian threat to the Kaiser's attention.

EAST ASIAN REVERBERATIONS OF YELLOW PERIL IMAGERY

After having examined Gobineau's and Wilhelm's contributions to Yellow Perilist discourse, it may be of interest to consider what influ-

¹²⁴ Grant, ed. 1920:10.

¹²⁵ Eulenburg 1931:2:174–77 affirms Wilhelm's obsession with the Yellow Peril. Ironically, Eulenburg was frantic by October 1900 to calm the Kaiser's passions and was desperately trying to coordinate von Bülow and the military in order to stop him from assuming personal command over the anti-Boxer expedition (Eulenburg to von Bülow, 3 October 1900, cited in Röhl 1967:268–69).

¹²⁶ On von Bülow as Eulenburg's protégé, see Hull 1982:86–90, 124; also *NDB* 4:681–82. The uproar over Eulenburg's homosexuality was the greatest public scandal of Wilhelm's reign. This developed from 1902 and eventually resulted in Eulenburg's disgrace. Von Bülow seems to have assisted his former mentor's enemies out of fear that Eulenburg might make a political comeback. Wilhelm was reportedly on the verge of a nervous breakdown over the affair, which he blamed on Jewish insolence (the key journalist was Jewish), even as Eulenburg took consolation with Nathaniel Rothschild in Vienna. See Hull 1982:chap. 5; and Balfour 1964:276.

¹²⁷ Young 1968:225–26. In 1901 Eulenburg introduced Wilhelm to H. S. Chamberlain, whose *Grundlagen* the Kaiser later declared his favorite book (Hull 1982:74).

ence, if any, Gobineau's race theories had in east Asia. Western racial ideologies were appropriated in various ways by non-Western intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, often through integration with indigenous forms of chauvinism or antifoignism. Both Frank Dikötter and James Pusey have traced the process in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China. Their works show that when Social Darwinist thought was introduced into China by the famous scholar-translator Yen Fu in 1896, the standard Western classificatory model of five basic human races (white, red, yellow, brown, and black) was reproduced and disseminated with it.¹²⁸ Sun Yatsen, the one major Chinese writer apart from Yen Fu who used social-evolutionary works in English before 1900, likewise posited five fundamental races, rather than Gobineau's three.¹²⁹ The notion that the "yellow race" might pose a threat to the West was also introduced at this time and was even welcomed by some Chinese authors for giving at least some recognition to Chinese abilities.¹³⁰ To one author writing in 1903, the notion of the Yellow Peril even posed the prospect that China might one day avenge the wrongs imposed on it by the foreign powers.¹³¹

Little evidence of the reception of Gobineau's ideas in China is available in the sinological literature beyond perhaps a few curious hints relating to Liang Qichao. In his valuable study analyzing Chinese race discourses, Dikötter is silent on the issue of Gobineau's possible influence. He does, however, cite Liang at the turn of the century as discussing international relations in terms of a historical model that had Hamitic, Semitic, and Japhetic peoples all as branches of the white race. Because Dikötter assumes that this was merely Liang's misunderstanding of conventional Western polygenism, he fails to consider whether Liang might have somehow got hold of Gobineau's distinctive racist reading of Genesis.¹³² James Pusey cites another passage in which Liang perhaps recalls Wilhelm II in foreseeing that "if China really adopts Western institutions, she will become the strongest and most invincible of nations. The Mongol race will again be able to lead its armies against the West, as Attila did of old."¹³³ But further research

¹²⁸ See, for example, Dikötter 1992:77–80; and Pusey 1983:68, 130–31.

¹²⁹ See, for example, Sun 1931:67, 74, 76.

¹³⁰ Pusey 1983:98–99.

¹³¹ Pusey 1983:315. Shortly thereafter, Sun Yatsen (1931:74), without naming specific sources, reported Western predictions that a large Chinese army might invade Europe under Russian direction.

¹³² Dikötter 1992:74.

¹³³ Pusey 1983:98.

on the Chinese sources is needed to clarify what influence, if any, Gobineau's theories may have had in China.

More concrete information is available regarding the introduction of Gobinism into Japan. The notion of an inevitable race war in which China and Japan would together be regarded as "the sworn enemies of the whites" was prominently advanced in the Japanese press in 1898 (just after Wilhelm II's Shandong adventure) by Prince Konoe Atsumaro, who soon became a leading proponent of Sino-Japanese cooperation.¹³⁴ One contemporary Japanese thinker who thought he saw a clear connection between the Kaiser's attitude to east Asian politics and Gobineau's historico-theoretical ideas was Mori Ōgai, one of the key Meiji intellectuals who contributed to the modernization of Japan through the introduction of Western culture.¹³⁵ By profession a military medical officer, Mori worked continuously to increase Japanese knowledge of Western scientific research.¹³⁶ He was also a distinguished writer, a translator of note (he rendered Clausewitz from German into Japanese), and an authority on comparative literature, with a special interest in the comparative study of cultures. With the return of the Japanese contingent from China in 1901, following the suppression of the Boxers, Mori became concerned that the brutality of the German troops might be taken as a model of efficiency within the Japanese army. Arguing against the view that morality had no place in modern warfare, he sought to place the German behavior in cultural context, and he identified racial hatred as a major cultural factor motivating that behavior. For the theoretical foundations of European and especially German racism, he turned to Gobineau's ideas in the *Essai*. On 6 June 1903, in a lecture given to the Kokugo Kambun Gakkai (Society for the Study of Japanese and Chinese), he gave a systematic and largely accurate presentation of those ideas.¹³⁷ He concluded by criticizing Gobineau for ethnocentrism and for excessive use of heredity to explain human culture. Despite these criticisms, in a second, related lecture on Western views of the Yellow Peril given at Waseda Univer-

¹³⁴ See Reynolds 1993:10–11, 211.

¹³⁵ His life and thought have been studied by Bowring (1979); the following treatment draws on Bowring's chapter 4.

¹³⁶ Eventually, in 1907, he rose to the position of surgeon general of the Japanese Imperial Army.

¹³⁷ His treatment of Gobineau's thought is recapitulated and discussed by Bowring (1979:110–14), who observes that the one aspect of Gobineau's position that Mori missed was his historical pessimism. That, Bowring notes, was due to Mori's dependence on Schemann's rendering of Gobineau's thought into German, which added an optimistic and interventionist tinge, as we have seen.

sity in November 1903, Mori nevertheless affirmed: "Like it or not we are fated to oppose the White race. Once this is realized, to study the Yellow Peril means to reconnoitre the lie of the enemy and is, in the words of one tactician, a part of getting to know the opponent. . . . Recently I gave elsewhere a summary of Count Gobineau's racial theories. . . . Both my study of Count Gobineau's theories and this study of the Yellow Peril are reconnoitring the lie of the enemy." As an admirer of much in Western culture and a rationalist, Mori was pained by the idea of the inevitability of racial conflict, and he seems to have retained a belief in the possibility of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the assertion in his Waseda lecture regarding the inevitability of racial conflict seems to support the judgment of Gerard Siary that, through Mori, Gobineau's views might have contributed something to a heightening of race consciousness in Japan.¹³⁸

It is perhaps one of history's ironies that the sharpening of Japanese racial sentiments that followed exposure to Western discourses of "race war" ultimately came to have their most brutal consequences on the peoples of Korea and China. Intensified Japanese xenophobia also rebounded in various ways against the Western powers as well, of course. One example, distinguished by its conscious reciprocity, came in 1915, when the Japanese commanders in issuing their ultimatum for the German surrender of Jiaozhou recalled the imperious Kaiser's similar insistence that Japan relinquish its gains in the Liao basin after the Treaty of Shimonoseki.¹³⁹

CONCLUSION

This essay began by recalling that for most nineteenth-century Western thinkers, China served as a symbol of reaction and historical stasis, and by referring to recent analyses positing fundamental linkages between Western racism and the notions of modernity and progress. The task set at the outset was to clarify how a thinker opposed to progress and modernity would treat a society and civilization conventionally thought of as "traditional" and backward. The answer arising from this examination of Gobineau is that China fared about the same with him as it did with progressive thinkers committed to modernity—that is, poorly.

¹³⁸ Mori, translated in Bowring 1979:116; Siary 1990.

¹³⁹ Balfour 1967:188–89.

This conclusion seems to entail several others. In the first place, most narrowly, the suggestion that "Asia" provided Gobineau with the image of a social order preferable to modern European decadence needs to be seriously qualified. Boissel's analysis focused on Gobineau's treatment of Iran and central Asia, and documented his sympathy for them, but failed to consider his attitudes to China. This enthusiasm for Iran and central Asia, which was typical of the Romantic and post-Romantic "Oriental Renaissance" analyzed by Raymond Schwab, was inextricably linked to Gobineau's view that the populations of those regions included Aryan elements that were less sullied than those of post-Enlightenment Europe. Gobineau's China, however, was not an enchanted anti-Europe but a deadly, soulless menace, a vision of what modern Europe was rushing toward, and an agent of impending disaster from outside. This likewise indicates that the idea conveyed by Ernst Rose's title "China as a Symbol of Reaction in Germany, 1830–1880" also requires revision, for in Gobineau's view China was not so much a symbol of reaction as a warning of where modernity, in the sense of social and political egalitarianism, might lead.¹⁴⁰

Given his opposition to modern empire building, Gobineau's version of Yellow Peril theory need not be collapsed into the corpus of texts justifying colonial expansion, but important aspects of his philosophically pessimistic vision of a final white-yellow race antagonism do seem to have been adopted and critically integrated into the later standard discourse that optimistically promoted European imperialism. It is interesting to note that the relationship between Gobineau's Yellow Perilism and the standard imperialistic optimism parallels the relationship between his overall racial analysis and the eugenicist appropriation of his theory by the Wagner circle in particular and by the pan-Germanic movement in general.

Beyond these points regarding China and the Yellow Peril, there are also perhaps broader conclusions to be drawn. In recent years various postmodernist writers have highlighted opposition to "progress" as a mode of resisting or even subverting the dominant culture in nineteenth- and twentieth-century modern societies. That such opposition can be and at times has been a mode of such subversion in certain instances is clear.¹⁴¹ An examination of Gobineau's thought, however,

¹⁴⁰ Boissel 1973; Schwab 1950; E. Rose 1951.

¹⁴¹ Walter Benjamin's sophisticated attempts at subverting what he saw as the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie's typical myth that technological progress would automatically carry with it universal social improvement are explored by Susan Buck-Morss (1995). Buck-Morss's treatment also shows Benjamin's own recognition of modernity's potential for

shows that a thorough-going critique of progress and modernity does not of itself necessarily entail any rejection of conventional hostilities toward peoples and societies defined as alien. Indeed, his thought seems to have been quite compatible with the promotion of many conventional attitudes of disdain and antagonism. This seems to suggest that the subversion of racism and the rejection of progress/modernity ought to be considered as two distinct enterprises. In some cases they might be compatible and mutually reinforcing; in others, as Gobineau's case shows, they clearly are not. Despite the sense of aggrievement that Gobineau felt at not being more widely recognized for his genius, the support he received from various high quarters during his lifetime and the widespread acceptance of many of his ideas in the decades after his death make it appropriate to recall that even at the height of the colonial era, "progress" and "modernity" were still contested rather than unanimously accepted concepts within European culture and were not the only platforms from which attacks against non-Western peoples could be launched. This conclusion recalls Geoffrey Lloyd's important methodological warning about the dangers of deductivism inherent in the "mentalities" approach to intellectual and cultural history.¹⁴²

However, if Gobineau demonstrates that opposition to progress and modernity did not necessarily lead to throwing off conventional disdain for China, his writings also show that his opposition to those concepts did not stop him from sharing many of the categories for interpreting China that were widely accepted in his day among thinkers of other ideological persuasions. He thus remained within the consensus of nineteenth-century Western opinion that identified China essentially with mediocrity, despotism, and lack of freedom. He did so, it is true, by interpreting those categories through the lens of his racial theory: they were for him typical characteristics of "the masses" and "Revolution." China was thus a striking example of democratic despotism and "progress" as he conceived it, and of the consequences he saw flowing from these—namely, slavery, stagnation, and eventual doom. His subversion of the conventional categories for thinking about China seems therefore to have been more an aggravation than a repudiation of the existing logic of intercultural antagonism.

revolution and his practically oriented commitment to social progress and revolution (1995:249–51, 275, 279). These aspects of Benjamin's thought are overlooked by McClintock (1995:10) in her simplified depiction of Benjamin as an opponent of progress.

¹⁴² Lloyd 1990.

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