

Investigating the Concept of “Yellow Peril” in Brazil from Abroad:

Digitalized Works and Primary Sources Accessible on the Internet

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Introduction

Japanese emigration to Brazil began in 1908¹, when 781 contract farmers (colonos) reached the port of Santos in the state of São Paulo, and it particularly flourished during the 1920s and the 1930s, since ninety percent of the Japanese who crossed to South America went to Brazil. However, as nationalism was also on the rise in Brazil, the immigration environment for the Japanese began to deteriorate. Indeed, starting with the introduction of a bill (later named the “Reis Bill”) in 1923² that aimed to limit Japanese immigration for racial reasons, followed in 1934³ by the adoption of quotas on foreign immigration, Japanese felt they were not the most desirable immigrants in Brazil. Moreover, some Brazilian intellectual and political elites, who based their views upon racial assumptions, called for the “whitening” of the Brazilian population, lobbied the government to promote European immigration, as well as to forbid the entry to any “colored immigrants”, including, thus, the Japanese⁴. An anti-Japanese-immigration group whose leaders considered Japanese immigration as a “Yellow Peril” – a way for Japan to invade Brazil – initiated these laws. Indeed, their leader, Deputy and Physician Miguel Couto, asserted that the danger of Japanese immigration was an imperialist one, stating that by purchasing lands and promoting the settlement of its colonies, the Japanese Empire was aiming to expand its “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” across Brazil⁵.

The “Yellow Peril” is a metaphorical concept originating in the late nineteenth century that expressed Western fears about Asian immigration, culture, and economic and military power. This rhetoric originated in Europe and spread to the United States of America to reach the shores of Brazil, after the arrival of the first Japanese to the New World, and further intensified during the 1920s, and especially the 1930s⁶.

Some Brazilian scholars have already dedicated several works in Portuguese to the concept of “Yellow Peril” in the Brazilian society; contemporary researchers in Brazil are still debating this topic. However, it seems that no works written in Japanese or in English – either by specialists of

Japanese Immigration in Brazil, or by scholars specializing in “Yellow Peril” – dealing with that question, has been produced so far. Of course, many Japanese and Western scholars have made references to the use of the rhetoric of the “Yellow Peril” in Brazil, especially when they refer to the political debates over foreign immigration that took place in Brazil during the 1920s and the 1930s, but none of them went further into their analysis to fully examine the place of such rhetoric in Brazilian society.

It seems that the difficulty of accessing Brazilian primary sources, especially from a distant location overseas such as Japan or an English-speaking country, has so far been the main obstacle that has prevented scholars in such locations to conduct research on this topic⁷.

However, on the occasion of a paper given to the ASCJ (Asian Studies Conference Japan) in June 2012, entitled “Attempts to Limit Japanese Immigration in Brazil During the 1920s and the 1930s: On the Possible Existence of a Yellow Peril in Brazil”, the author (a French PhD student living in Japan) has been able to conduct an introductory survey on the above question, especially by making full use of primary sources and other works available on the Internet, that are directly related to the presence of “Yellow Peril” in Brazil.

Thus, this short article will aim to introduce primary sources and works to be found on the Internet that are necessary for anyone who desires to start investigating the matter of “Yellow Peril” in Brazil, in order to show that any scholar situated abroad is still able to conduct a solid introductory survey on this topic.

1. Works dedicated to the “Yellow Peril” in Brazil and related matters available on the Internet

In order to prepare our paper, we referred to what we thought were the best three works on this topic that we could get access to on the Internet. The first one, by Marcia Yumi Takeuchi, deals directly with the emergence of the “Yellow Peril” from the late 19th century in Brazil (A). The second one, by Endrico Geraldo, doesn't deal directly with the matter in hand, but in analyzing the political aspect of restrictive attitudes towards foreign immigration under Getúlio Vargas' (1930-45) governance, the author provides us with the political context in which anti-Japanese feeling emerged in Brazil, particularly on the political level (B). The last work, produced by Leão Neto Valdemar Carneiro, goes back to the debates over Japanese immigration that took place among the Constituent National Assembly (1933-34). By paying close attention on the diplomatic aspects, the author offers a new analytical perspective by shedding light on the international context of the “Yellow Peril” in Brazil (C).

(A) The first work that we recommend the reader to refer to is the PhD dissertation submitted by Marcia Yumi Takeuchi⁸, entitled “*Entre gueixas e samurais: a imigração japonesa nas revistas*

ilustradas (1897-1945)” (Tese de Doutorado, Unidade da USP Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, São Paulo, 2009), to which we can get free access on the website of the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations of the University of São Paulo (Biblioteca Digital de Teses e Dissertação). In this work the author makes full use of Brazilian diplomatic records and illustrated magazines, to show Brazilian diplomats of the Legation of Brazil in Tokyo started to draw the attention of politicians to the fact that the Empire of Japan was aiming to expand to Brazil, and thus began to diffuse the idea of a “Yellow Peril”. On the public side, illustrated magazines also played an important role as they constructed and diffused a stereotyped imagery of Japanese immigrants, seen as an imperialist as well as an economic danger for the nation. This work is essential to understanding how the “Yellow Peril” rhetoric emerged both in Brazilian society and on the political stage of the country. It constitutes a good starting point to commence any research on this topic because in its bibliography it references official documentation, magazines (Fon-Fon, A Careta), and also other works dealing with “Yellow Peril”, or related matters.

<http://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8138/tde-04022010-132805/pt-br.php> (Retrieved on December 17, 2013)

(B) The second work that we invite the reader to refer to is also a PhD dissertation, written by Endrica Geraldo, entitled “*O “perigo alienigena” : politica imigratoria e pensamento racial no governo Vargas (1930-1945)*” (Tese de Doutorado, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Campinas, SP, 2007). This document is to be found on the online database of the University UNICAMP (SBU, Biblioteca Digital de UNICAMP »,

URL: <http://www.bibliotecadigital.unicamp.br/document/?code=vtls000420746>.)

This paper deals with restrictive immigration and alien control policies during the Getúlio Vargas government (1930-1945), by shedding light on the political conditions that helped the emergence of a growing criticism towards alien workers and immigration, coming from politicians and other social groups. The author also investigates anti-Japanese sentiment, and debates over alien immigration in the Constituent National Assembly of 1933/34, in which, as we mentioned above, the “Yellow Peril” reached its full expression. In sum, this work can help us to contextualize the debates over Japanese immigration inside the restrictive immigration policies enacted in 1930s Brazil.

<http://www.bibliotecadigital.unicamp.br/document/?code=vtls000420746>

(Retrieved on December 17, 2013)

(C) The last work that the author suggests to readers was produced by Leão Neto Valdamar Carneiro, under the title “*A Crise da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil (1930-1934): Contornos Diplomáticos*” (Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 1989). This publication can be found in the digital library of the FUNAG (Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão⁹). This study is about the diplomatic

aspect of the Japanese immigration crisis, which, according to the author, reached its apex in the debates over foreign immigration in the Constituent National Assembly of 1933/34.

Leão Neto sheds light on the action taken by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to ease the tension generated by this crisis on the diplomatic front between Japan and Brazil; in this way the author analyses the international aspect of this crisis. One of the greatest advantages of this work, especially in terms of methodology, is that it reproduces in its appendices original documents from the Constituent National Assembly (1933-34) that contain the debates over Japanese immigration.

<http://www.funag.gov.br/biblioteca/dmdocuments/0079.pdf>

(Retrieved on December 17, 2013)

2. Primary sources available on the Internet

Our study focuses on the presence of “Yellow Peril” rhetoric in the debates over Japanese immigration that took place in the 1920s at the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, and also during the 1930s in the Brazilian Constituent National Assembly of 1933-34. Thus, for the purpose of our analysis, we made use of first-hand official materials, which consist of speeches addressed by the leaders of anti-Japanese groups to those state assemblies, on the occasion of the submission of their law draft aiming at limiting Japanese immigration: one given by Fidelis Reis in 1923 (A), and the other by Miguel Couto in 1934 (B). Thanks to the digitization project being conducted by the members of the Digital Library of the Chamber of Assembly of Brazil, these official records can be directly accessed on the Internet.

(A) Official records relating to Fidelis Reis.

Fidelis Reis, a federal Deputy, introduced in 1923 a Bill (later named the “Reis Bill”) at the Chamber of the Deputies prohibiting the entry of immigrants of the “black race” and limiting the entry of the “the yellow race” to an annual rate of 3 per cent of the immigrants already residing in Brazil.

The speech that he made on this occasion, which we believe constitutes the first appearance of “Yellow Peril” on the political stage, is to be found in the Digital Library of the Diaries of the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil (Diários da Câmara dos Deputados – Pesquisa em Diários, URL: <http://imagem.camara.gov.br/diarios.asp>), in the collection of the Annals of the Chamber of Deputy of Brazil, by clicking on the following link :

http://imagem.camara.gov.br/dc_20b.asp?selCodColecaoCsv=A&Datain=22/10/1923 (Retrieved on December 17, 2013)

(B) Official records relating to Miguel Couto.

In 1934, when the Constituent Assembly gathered to draft a new constitution for Brazil, the anti-Japanese lobby saw an opportunity to renew discussions over the potential danger of Japanese immigrants to Brazilian Society. Their leader, Dr. Miguel Couto, suggested that the Assembly incorporate an amendment into the Constitution that would prohibit the entry of any “African immigrants or African-type immigrants” and limited the number of Asian immigrants to an annual rate of 5 percent of the Asians already residing in Brazil.

In an unambiguous speech entitled “The Japanese immigration considered quantitatively and as a stage of Japan’s expansionism” (“A imigração japonesa considerada quantitativamente e como estadio de expansionismo do Japão”), addressed to the Constituent Assembly in 1934, the Deputy explained why, in his opinion, the Japanese immigration had to be considered a military threat to Brazil, that is to say a “Yellow Peril”, and should therefore be controlled and limited.

This famous speech can be found in the collection of the official records of the debates that took place at the Constituent National Assembly (1933-34), on the Digital Library of the Chamber of Deputies website (Biblioteca Digital da Câmara dos Deputados, URL: <http://bd.camara.gov.br/bd/>). The reader must look into the collection of the Constitutions of Brazil (Constituições brasileiras), especially into the documentation relating to the Constituent National Assembly of 1933 (“Assembleia Nacional Constituinte 1933”), in which they will find the Volume number 8 (Annaes da Assembléa Nacional Constituinte da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, Volume VIII, Imprensa Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, 1935), in which Miguel Couto is recorded.

<http://bd.camara.gov.br/bd/handle/bdcamara/8169>

(Retrieved on December 17, 2013)

3 . Other documents: Illustrated magazines

As we mentioned above when we introduced the reader to the works of Marcia Yumi Takeuchi, the “Yellow Peril” not only appeared on the political stage of Brazil, but also spread throughout Brazilian society. As Takeuchi shows, two illustrated magazines largely diffused a stereotyped and negative imagery of Japanese immigration: “*Fon-Fon*” (first published in 1907) and “*A Careta*” (first published in 1908). Their authors, through the use of caricature, portrayed the Japanese immigrant as a racial and military threat to the country, in order to gain public acceptance of the fact that Japanese immigration was jeopardizing national security, as well as the racial purity of the Brazilian people.

Both magazines can be found in the digital archives of the Digital Library of the Brazilian National Library Foundation (Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, URL: http://www.bn.br/portal/index.jsp?nu_pagina=1).

Magazine “*Fon-Fon*”: http://objdigital.bn.br/acervo_digital/div_periodicos/fonfon/fonfon_anos.

htm (Retrieved on December 17, 2013)

Magazine “*A Careta*”,

http://objdigital.bn.br/acervo_digital/div_periodicos/careta/careta_anos.htm

(Retrieved December 17, 2013)

Conclusion

The aim of this small contribution was to introduce three types of documentation dealing with the “Yellow Peril” in Brazil, which can be found on the Internet, in order to help researchers situated in a remote location to conduct an introductory survey thereupon. The three types of documentation referred to in this paper are:

1. Works dedicated to “Yellow Peril” in Brazil and related matters available on the Internet;
2. Primary sources available on the Internet;
3. Other documents available on the Internet: Illustrated magazines.

The question of the “Yellow Peril” in Brazil is still a topic that deserves better attention and further study, especially among the Japanese and Western scholars specializing in Japanese emigration or the “Yellow Peril” theory in general. Thus, by writing this short paper, we aimed to provide the reader – situated in a remote location outside of Brazil – with the basic materials needed in order to conduct at least an introductory survey on the subject, as well as hopefully opening new research perspectives in the vast topics of both Japanese emigration and “Yellow Peril” studies.

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〈Notes〉

- 1 For an account of Japanese Immigration in Brazil in English see: de Carvalho, Daniela. *Migrants and Identity in Japan and Brazil : the Nikkeijin*. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003; also Lone Stewart Lone. *The Japanese Community in Brasil, 1908-1940 : Between Samurai and Carnival*. Basingstoke, [England]: Palgrave, 2001. In Japanese see: Maruyama, Hiroaki ed. *Burajiru Nihon imin: Hyakunen no kiseki*. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2010.
- 2 Congresso Nacional, Anais de Câmara dos Deputados , Vol. X, Sessões de 18 a 31 de outubro 1923, Sessão em 22 de outubro 1923, Rio de Janeiro, 1928.
- 3 Republica dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, Annaes da Assembléa Nacional Constituinte, Vol.VIII, Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1935, pp.487-501.
- 4 Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993, pp.196-197.
- 5 Republica dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, Annaes da Assembléa Nacional Constituinte, Vol.VIII, Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1935, p.488.
- 6 The “Yellow Peril” (“die gelbe Gefahr”) is a slogan invented by German emperor Wilhem

II (1859-1941) at the outcome of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), expressing a European fear toward Mongols and Asians in general which itself originated in the 12th century, at the time of Attila's conquest. With the idea of an awakened China, this colored metaphor for race articulated the Western fears of Asian immigration and culture, as well as its supposed military power. It went as far as saying that the Asian societies were plotting an invasion, if not destruction, of the Western World. A form of "Yellow Peril" was also notably widespread in the United States of America. First directed towards Chinese immigrants, the coolies slaves who were considered as a military threat, this xenophobic fear led to the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Following the victory of Japan in the Russian-Japanese War (1904-1905), the growing presence of Japanese immigrants in California, and the Empire's military expansion later on during the 1920s, the "Yellow Peril" became rapidly associated with Japanese immigration as well. Once again, it led to the implementation of two laws that limited, and later prohibited, the entry of all Asian immigrants onto American soil: the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement, and the promulgation of the National Origin Act in 1924. For a very good and accurate summary of the Yellow Peril, we invite the reader to refer to the following source: Lyman, Stanford M.. 2000. "The 'Yellow Peril' Mystique: Origins and Vicissitudes of a Racist Discourse". *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* (2000) 13: 683-747, June 01, 2000.

- 7 Regarding the necessity to familiarize oneself with the topic of the "Yellow Peril", we must leave it to the reader to persevere.
- 8 We must inform the reader that Marcia Yumi Takeuchi has passed away few years ago, at a really young age. Not only to her family toward which our feelings go, this tragedy is a great lost for the academic world, thus we hope that this short paper will help her work to be best known, and that it will also invite new researchers to continue investigating that particular aspect of Japanese Immigration in Brazil.
- 9 This foundation is specialized in the publication of studies in the areas of Brazilian external policy and international relations. For more details, refer to the following link:
<http://www.funag.gov.br/biblioteca/>.

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