The Europeans, however, were unreservedly alien, nothing but enemies, and their predominance promised nothing that could flatter national ambition, while in the hands of Japan the Chinese saw the delightful lure of Pan-Mongolism.¹

Vladimir Solov’ev, “A Short Tale of Antichrist”

Here is where the real “yellow peril” lies: […] not in the fact that China is going to Europe, but that Europe is going to China. Our faces are still white; but under our white skin flows not the previous thick, red, Aryan blood, but a more watery, “yellow” blood […] the cut of our eyes is straight, but our gaze is beginning to narrow, to slant.²

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, The Coming Beast

At the height of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, a popular Russian periodical, The Alarm Clock (Budil’nik), featured an illustration of a woman washing a yellow dog in a wooden tub filled with water on the cover of its tenth issue. The white, European-looking woman’s elegant coiffure and attire suggest that she belongs to the upper class. She attempts, with considerable effort and exasperation, to scrub the dog clean. The title of the image reads “In the laundry of European civilization,” with an accompanying caption that claims: “European civilization: No matter how much you wash this yellow dog, you can’t turn it white.” This satirical cartoon depicting Japan as a yellow dog being washed by the Russian—European—woman, is a stark example, one among many, of the racist ideology that formed a core aspect of Russian popular attitudes towards the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905).

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² Merezhkovskii, 1973 [1914], XIV: 10–11.
Russia’s war with Japan, which began when the latter launched an attack on Port Arthur, the Russian naval base in the Liaodong Peninsula in southern Manchuria, took most Russians completely by surprise. Initial bafflement was soon followed by patriotic declarations and confident predictions of the easy and quick victory of the great Russian empire over an Asian nation that had never been considered a serious political or military power.\(^3\) As several scholars have pointed out, the images of the Japanese which were widely circulated in the Russian press of the time—in written and visual media such as newspapers, journals, cartoons, posters, and the *lubki*, Russia’s distinctive popular prints—were unmistakably racial in nature.\(^4\) The content of such racial portrayals and the spirit of vehement jingoism motivating them are perhaps best captured by Alexander Pasternak, author Boris Pasternak’s brother, who was ten years old at the time. In his memoir, he recalls:

> In town, everything kept step with the strut of the two-headed Imperial eagle…. The Japanese were uniformly portrayed as knock-kneed weaklings, slant-eyed, yellow-skinned, and, for some reason, shaggy-haired—a puny kind of monkey, invariably dubbed “Japs” and “macaques.” Opposing them were the legendary heroes of our army, Russian stalwarts and Manchurian Cossacks…. The chef d’œuvre, I remember, was a Cossack, riding at the trot with lance aslant on his shoulder, a clutch of Japs skewered on it like rats on a spit […].\(^5\)

As this slightly ironic account suggests, there were those among the Russian intelligentsia who were critical of and even embarrassed by the racial caricatures they felt reflected the crude taste of the masses, and accordingly sought to distance themselves from such attitudes. But although Pasternak wonders why the Japanese were depicted as monkeys, the identification of the two appears to have been quite natural and irresistible for many Russians from the lower classes, as seen in their consumption of popular prints, to the highest figures of the tsarist government, including Nicholas II and Aleksei Kuropatkin, commander-in-chief of the Russian forces, both of whom commonly referred to the Japanese as “little monkeys” [*makaki*].\(^6\)

Similarly, racial perceptions occupy a prominent place in representations of Japan and East Asia in the Russian “high” culture and literature

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