

# **Sidney Gulick'S 1905 The White Peril In The Far East: An Inter-Pretation Of The Significance Of The Russo-Japanese War**

**By Daniel A. Metraux**

[Editor's Note: Last year I republished Sydney Gulick's fascinating 1905 book, *The White Peril in the Far East* through VCAS and Writer's Club Press (iuniverse.com). The following is a brief introduction to this book and to the life of a very early Japanologist.]

Daniel A Metraux, ed. *Sidney Gulick's 1905 "The White Peril in the Far East: An Interpretation of the Significance of the Russo-Japanese War."* New York: Writer's Club Press, 2003.

Many years ago I was wandering through the stacks of the public library in Greensboro<sup>1</sup>, Vermont looking for books by the early Japanologist, Sidney L. Gulick. One of my Greensboro neighbors, Lewis Hill, felt that Gulick's pioneering work in Japanese studies should come to the attention of modern Asianists and suggested that I study his work. I found Gulick's book on the Russo-Japanese War to be so interesting that I read it that very night.

I am republishing Sydney Lewis Gulick's 1905 treatise, *The White Peril in the Far East*, because it presents the modern historian with a thoroughly scholarly view of Asian affairs a full century ago from the perspective of an intelligent and well-versed writer. Gulick, who fully recognized the long range significance of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), also gives us some Japanese perspectives on the rapid modernization of their country during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and their attitude towards the other Western powers. The modern reader will have a much clearer picture of Japanese and East Asian history by studying what Gulick has to say.

Dr. Sydney Lewis Gulick (1860-1945) was born in Ebon, Micronesia. His father, Luther H. Gulick (1828-93), was a missionary who spent much of his career in Hawaii, China, Japan and the South Pacific. Sydney Gulick graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary and traveled to Japan in 1888 where he became a missionary in Kumamoto Prefecture for the next 25 years. He quickly developed a deep love and fascination for the Japanese and in time became a

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<sup>1</sup> The Gulick family has summered in Greensboro, a delightful village in northern Vermont, for almost a century.

widely recognized scholar of Japanese culture and language. He taught English, science and religion in a number of Japanese schools and universities, gave sermons in Japanese, and wrote a number of well-read books on Japan.

Gulick maintained his active interest in Japan after his return to the United States in 1913. He continued to write and lecture on Japan with the conviction that if Japanese and Americans had a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's culture, the growing tensions between the two countries might subside. He also sought a relaxation of the United States' harsh immigration laws which, he felt, were a source of humiliation for the Japanese. He called for just treatment of all aliens and immigrants regardless of their race, color or religion. He wrote: "I am as truly a missionary working for Japan as if I were in Japan."

Gulick is perhaps best known for his key role in the late 1920s in the formation of the Committee on World Friendship Among Children which was sponsored by the Commission on International Justice and Goodwill of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. Gulick's committee successfully mobilized thousands of American and Japanese children and their parents and schools to send dolls to their counterparts in the US and Japan. The goal of the Committee was to "implant in the minds of children the ideals of goodwill, understanding, and peace among nations." Eventually the program sent 12,700 American "friendship" dolls to Japan, where many today remain on display in schools throughout Japan, and brought 58 finely crafted Japanese dolls to the United States where they are still displayed in a variety of museums.

Gulick was also a prolific writer who authored a vast number of books, articles, and other tracts on Japanese relations with the West. His books include the book republished here, *The White Peril in the Far East: An Interpretation of the Significance of the Russo-Japanese War* (New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905); *Evolution of the Japanese* (New York: FH Revell. 4 editions before 1905); *American Democracy and Asiatic Citizenship* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1918); *The American Japanese Problem: A Study of the Racial Relations of the East and the West*, and *The East and the West: A Study of Their Psychic and Cultural Characteristics*.

Gulick's *The White Peril in the Far East* is a fascinating study of the international situation in East Asia at the time of the Russo-Japanese War from the perspective of an American scholar who greatly admired the Japanese. Gulick contends that a strong and

victorious Japan in the war against Russia would be the best guarantor for the future peace and stability of the region.

Gulick's Japan is an amazing country which in only two generations had transformed itself from a backwards oriental dictatorship that had little respect for its people into a thriving embryonic capitalist democracy and civil society that had readily adopted such Anglo Saxon values as the rule of law, full respect for individual rights, and a non-aggressive attitude towards weaker states. Gulick credits the role of Christianity and Christian missionaries and teachers who had instilled these values in Japan and leaders of Japanese society who had brought Christian values, though not necessarily the religion itself, into Japan life.

Gulick strongly condemns the aggressive conduct of such imperialist European powers as Russia, France and Germany whose avarice was leading them to totally destroy the lives and cultures of Asian peoples solely for their own profit. Gulick is specifically concerned with China which, he predicts, if continually ravished, would one day rise up like a dragon to seek revenge in its total hatred for the West. A Russian victory would therefore not only destroy all of the progress made by Japan as a responsible power, but would also turn Russia and its cohorts, Germany and France, loose on a hapless China.

The real peril to East Asia consists of the white imperialists of Europe.

A Japanese victory, on the other hand, would finally stem the tide of Western imperialism and would allow China and other Asian states the opportunity to assert their independence and to begin to modernize just as Japan had done in the previous three decades. Continued Western imperialism would result in future world disorder while its demise could bring greater stability. The fair-minded Japanese would of course lead their oriental bothers to greater heights in a benevolent manner. In effect, Japan would be the same modernizing and progressive professor for Asia that Britain and the United States were for Japan. Japan would be the vehicle for the spread of Anglo Saxon values to East Asia. This way of thinking reflects the ideas of earlier Japanologists like E. Warren Clark and W. E. Griffis.

Gulick concludes his analysis by noting:

England alone stands for relatively fair and just treatment of subject races. She does not exclude elevating influences; instead she encourages them. But even English rule, benign and just though it is, signifies enrichment of the white at the expense of the yellow man. It means the control of wealth by aliens and not by

natives; and this results in diversion to foreign lands of wealth which should go to the betterment of the native population.

This consideration throws ominous light on the plans of European powers for China. Unless China can in some way retain the rights to her own natural resources, as Japan has done, the white peril to her industries and commerce will prove to be a peril of tremendous proportions. For her own future development China should retain possession of her natural wealth. When she awakens and begins to build her cities and her empire on a scale commensurate with her people, the wealth of her mountains and her mines will be needed. But if these are the permanent possession of foreign capitalist, the wealth which should have gone to make her great, intelligent and happy will be perpetually drained from the county. This aspect of the white peril in the Far East receives scant consideration from aggressive white men.

Russian victory then would be a dark omen for Eastern Asia. That Japanese evangelist was right when he compared this to the Greco-Persian War. Fancy conditions in Europe to-day, had Greece been overrun and destroyed by Persian hordes. Without Grecian influence could our modern civilization have arisen? Philosophy and art, ethics, logic, science and mathematics, all had their rise in Greece, and no race has independently produced them. Had Persia prevailed, the subsequent 2,500 years of European history would have been radically different. Similarly, on the victory of Russia or Japan turns the history of Eastern Asia for a thousand years to come. This, however, is not all. The future history of Russia, Germany, France, and England also turns on the role they play in the Far East. Military possessions and necessities there will develop for these countries a different history from what would otherwise be natural to them. Thus it is clear that the Russo-Japanese war brings a crisis in the history of the world. We are all more or less closely involved.

In summarizing we find that the real meaning of the war is this: - Has the white man's aggressive policy in the Far East come to an end? Is the yellow man to have a fair chance to enter into the world's best life and progress? Or is he to be crushed by the white man, and compelled to serve him as the hewer of wood, and the drawer of water? Is the normal development of the yellow man to suffer permanent arrest under the grinding heel of the white man? Involving as it does not only the direct welfare of a quarter of the earth's population, but also, indirectly, all the nations of the earth, these are questions of great importance. The Russo-Japanese war involves world relations. Let the world therefore have a thought for what it signifies.

The reader, however, must be wary of Gulick's over-enthusiasm for the Americans and British. While he does admit to some bad behavior by these Anglo-Saxon powers in the past, he singles them out for their greater virtues and respect for the native peoples of Asia. Gulick somehow manages to make no mention of the United States' appalling conduct just 5 years earlier during its infamous conquest of the Philippines.

While Gulick's work provides a fascinating perspective on the world order a century ago, his most interesting analysis centers on the conservative reaction to foreign ideas and manners in the 1890s. During the late 1870s and 1880s Japan had gone through a period when it worshipped almost anything Western. Christian churches and schools grew in popularity, but by the 1890s there was a nativist conservative reaction that began to question the imposition of foreign values on Japan's traditional culture, especially Christianity. Gulick provides a good objective analysis of the problems that Christianity was facing in Japan and concluded that while it would be better for there to be a few able Japanese converts to the religion rather than millions of unlettered masses, Japan as a whole was already benefiting from Christianity's respect for the dignity of the individual.

Gulick concludes his book with a rather wild proposal which he thought would bring true stability to East Asia. A defeated Russia should be forced to forfeit much of its

Empire in Asian Siberia to Japan which in turn would sell the region for a generous price to Britain and the United States. The US and Britain would exploit Siberian resources for the benefit of all of Asia while Japan could recoup its war expenses through the sale. A now defanged Russia would no longer threaten Asia.

Today we can use hindsight to critique Gulick's ideas and suggestions, but we can better understand his time by studying his work.