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## WE'VE NEVER BEEN GLOBAL

### HOW LOCAL MEANINGS MATTERED IN 1900 AND STILL MATTER NOW

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*The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red clouds of the West and the whirlwind of hatred.*

*The naked passion of self-love of Nations, in its drunken delirium of greed, is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance.*

— Rabindranath Tagore, December 31, 1900

*Sometimes a useful thing for historians to do is to point out when something seems radically new. That is our situation today. . . . In our circumstances, historical analogies can easily become a form of dangerous nostalgia.*

*This isn't 1914. It isn't 1941. It isn't even 2008.*

*It is 2020. So expect all hell to break loose.*

— Adam Tooze, *Washington Post*, March 25, 2020

As we strive to make sense of this wrenching year of surprise and sorrow, is it useful to look for parallels to the past? And if so, how far back should we go to find a match?

In struggling with these questions, I keep pondering “We’ve Never Been Here Before,” historian Adam Tooze’s tellingly titled op-ed that argues for seeing 2020 as taking the world into uncharted waters.<sup>1</sup> I first read it when it was published in March, at a time when I was supposed to be heading to London for a stint as a visiting professor but was instead sheltering at home in California. Tooze, a specialist in international history who has recently been writing impressively on US-China relations, referred to the tendency of many commentators to point to a specific period as providing a key for understanding the unsettling present moment. Many, he wrote, were “struggling for historical reference points,” as though a perfect precursor year was out there to be found. This, he argued, was misguided. 2020 is a year of novel and overlapping crises. Pointing to a year defined by a pandemic, a war, or an economic crisis will not do.

As compelling as I find his essay, I view the situation differently. I remain convinced that looking for parallels for present developments in the past can always be of value, as long as we engage in the exercise in a certain fashion that I have described elsewhere as an “imperfect analogies” approach.<sup>2</sup> We need to be clear from the start that history never repeats itself exactly. We must take it for granted that there will be important divergences between the present and whatever point in the past we go back to, no matter how well the match between two moments seems at first. We have to keep those differences in mind. The goal should not be to find a perfect fit—as that is sure to be a chimerical endeavor—but to figure out if there are moments or periods that are particularly suggestive and illuminating to place side by side. The hope is that doing this will help us see things in the present that we might otherwise have missed or that we will see some facet of today’s situation in a new way.

What then of my second question—how far back into the past should we look to make sense of a troubled year that seems to have lasted an incredibly long time? My answer, as suggested by opening with lines from Tagore’s “Sunset of the Century,” is that 1900 is a good place to turn. That century-closing year interests me for two reasons. First, it was a year of overlapping crises. Second, it fell roughly midway through a volatile period, lasting two or three decades, during which the world seemed suddenly to grow smaller. That era shares intriguing features with our current one. I will get to those below, but it is also worth noting that there are some specific echoes of 1900 in the air in 2020. For many weeks, the Internet has been filled with digital equivalents of what Tagore referred to as the “howling verses of vengeance,” and we have gotten many reminders of the way virulent forms of nationalism, what the poet referred to as “self-love of Nations,” can remain powerful, even in an era that seems to call for broad thinking that rises above parochial concerns.

The cusp between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is not a period that people in most parts of the world have been mentioning lately. Reflecting this, Tooze does not include 1900 in his list of years that have been suggested as a good match for 2020. The American press as well as publications in other parts of the world have been filled, above all, with commentaries that look back to the late 1910s, the time of a deadly, fast-spreading disease often likened to COVID-19. Since Tooze wrote, as protests against racism have broken out in many locales, 1968 has been added to the list of possible precursors to 2020.<sup>3</sup> There is one place, though, where people have been going back exactly 120 years from 2020 when considering precedents for current events: China, the main country I teach and write about.

Sixty-year cycles, and, by extension, 120-year ones, figure prominently in traditional Chinese numerology. This is because it takes six decades for each animal of the zodiac to be paired in turn with each of the five natural elements. These cycles, and a sense of each year being tied to both an animal and an element, continue to be important in China. This is true even as people in China pay attention to decades and centuries—just as many there now mark two new year moments: January 1, signaling the start of a solar year (in this case, 2020), and a different date a few weeks later marking the start of a lunar year (a Metal Rat Year in this case). It is as natural in China to ponder sixty- and 120-year anniversaries as it is in other settings to consider centenaries and bicentenaries, so 1840, 1900, and 1960 readily come to mind as possible precursors for 2020. There has been some fascination online in China with how often Metal Rat Years (*Gengzi Nian* in Chinese) have been troubled ones (1840 fell during the Opium War, 1900 during the Boxer Crisis, 1960 during the Great Leap Forward Famine).

It is already clear that whatever happens during the rest of 2020, this Metal Rat Year will go down as one when China was hit by domestic problems (a health crisis and an economic one) and its government faced international challenges. Similarly, 1900 could be described that way. It also marked, as 2020 may mark, an inflection point in the history of both Chinese internal affairs and the country's place in the world, due above all in that earlier case to the Boxer Crisis, a complex series of events that reached its apogee during the Metal Rat Year of 1900.

The Boxer Crisis—a term derived from the pugilistic nickname Westerners gave to anti-Christian millenarian militants who sometimes called themselves the *Yihequan* (Fists of Righteous Harmony)—began with religious sectarians launching murderous raids on Chinese Catholic and Protestant villages.<sup>4</sup> The members of the group, who blamed a devastating drought on local gods withholding rain to show displeasure over the polluting presence of Christians on sacred soil, expanded to killing foreign missionaries and sometimes the children of those missionaries as well. In the middle months of 1900, the crisis took on global dimensions when the



Figure 1: A newspaper from “Le Petit Parisien.” The Chinese Boxers destroy a railroad during the Boxer Rebellion.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

group, backed by soldiers of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), laid siege to Tianjin and Beijing, imperiling the lives of foreigners in each case, including, in the latter instance, diplomats from more than ten countries. The sieges were lifted by an international military force known in Chinese as the *Baguo lianjun* (Eight Powers Allied Army) and sometimes called simply “the Allies” in the Western press, the first time that shorthand was widely used. The soldiers from eight different nations and empires in that fighting force took Tianjin in July and in mid-August





Figure 2: Boxer Rebellion, 1900. American, British, and Japanese armies storming Pekin Castle, China, August 14, 1900. Artwork by Torajiro Kasai. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. (5/22/2015). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

took Beijing, driving the Qing rulers out of their palaces and into exile in the far western city of Xian.

The Allies then proceeded to carry out reprisals across North China, which were ostensibly to rid the countryside of all remaining Boxers but took the lives of thousands of villagers with no ties to the group. These continued until the crisis ended with a 1901 treaty that allowed the Qing rulers to return to their palaces. In order to gain permission to return to Beijing, the Qing had to make it clear that they realized they had erred in backing the Boxers and agreed to pay an enormous indemnity to make up for all foreign losses.

In China, why is the Boxer Crisis that peaked during one Metal Rat Year worth thinking about in this Metal Rat Year of tragedy and trauma? Radically different answers to this question have been given online, where most of the toggling between 1900 and 2020 has been done. For some, it is because of parallels between the autocratic nature of the Qing dynasty then and the Chinese Communist Party now. This is viewed as having made a bad situation worse in 1900 (when China's rulers made the mistake of backing the Boxers as a sort of renegade loyalist militia to push back against foreigners who had been defeating the dynasty's forces on the battlefields for decades and taking parts of the empire as victor's prizes) and doing

the same thing in 2020 (when China's rulers initially suppressed information about a new disease, setting COVID-19 on its way from being a regional to a national and then a global problem).<sup>5</sup> A very different sort of nod back to the time of the Boxers is made by some backers of Xi Jinping. In this case, the parallel lies in the fact that many different countries have mishandled the pandemic, yet some foreigners are talking of requiring the Chinese government to pay an indemnity to make up for losses suffered by other lands—as if the only mistakes have been made in China.

This talk of reparations is seen as uncomfortably comparable to what happened in 1901. The Qing had to pay an indemnity to foreigners, but no comparable penalty was levied on the nations and empires responsible for looting Beijing's palaces and leveling North China's villages.<sup>6</sup> References to foreign powers behaving in 2020 like the *Baguo lianjun* of 1900 have also appeared in some commentaries as Western governments have pushed back against the Chinese Communist Party on issues such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong this year.<sup>7</sup>

My own sense is that there are other reasons to pair 1900 and 2020. Let me explain. When I began sheltering in place this spring, I buried myself in sources related to the Boxer Crisis. As I read letters written by captives of the Beijing siege, I sometimes felt an eerie sense of familiarity. For instance, Sarah Conger, the wife of the chief American envoy to the Qing court, referred to the summer of 1900 as a period of “anxious waiting,” as much of 2020 has been for many people. She also wondered if her family had enough of some kinds of food stored away to last them, and she wrote of being unsure how long it would be until she could move about freely again.<sup>8</sup>

I had a similar sense when I read certain news reports. One feature of the 1900 coverage of events in China that particularly interested me as I had 2020 news on my mind was the way that commentators in different settings often used different historical analogies to make sense of specific episodes in the Boxer Crisis. Another was how often these commentators drew connections between the violent events taking place in China and violent actions associated with other conflicts underway in 1900 in other parts of the world—with their choice of where to look across the globe, like their choice of where to look in the past, shaped by their location. This interest in looking back in time and to other parts of the world in locally specific ways to make sense of an event that was affecting people with ties to many different countries feels different when I consider it now than when I considered it before, since in 2020 we find COVID-19 affecting every part of the planet, but discussions of it veer off in varied directions due partly to location. I have already given a hint of what I mean by this in noting that 1900 comes up as a reference point in China but not in Tooze's essay, presumably because he was immersed in news sources in the United States and parts of Europe. I will give further examples below.

I should stress, though, that I do not think that 2020 and 1900 are even close to being completely comparable years. One event that made headlines in America in 1900 was a disease, a variety of plague, that originated in Asia and began causing deaths in the United States early in that century-closing year, but that was a relatively minor news story. The main reason that 1900 was, like 2020, a year of overlapping crises was not because of a combination of an international public health crisis and an international economic crisis, but rather due to three wars with international dimensions. In addition to the Boxer Crisis, fighting raged in the Philippines (between US forces trying to subjugate the former Spanish colony and local ones pushing back against this effort) and in South Africa (between the forces of the British Empire and Boer farmers who wanted an independent state). These 1900 conflicts were not as close to being truly global as was the one in China, but they each had robustly international dimensions. Soldiers from many parts of the British Empire, and other places as well, fought in the Transvaal. The conflict in the Philippines, formerly a colony of Spain, was in some senses a continuation of the Spanish-American War that had begun in the 1890s in the Caribbean, bringing celebrity to Theodore Roosevelt for his charge up San Juan Hill. In general, when it comes to details, the contrasts between 1900 and 2020 are much more striking than the parallels, but there are broad echoes across time that come through in many texts. These cast intriguing light on a major contemporary phenomenon: globalization. And its limits.

In 1900, as in 2020, the world felt to many as though it had recently become much more tightly interconnected, yet in neither case did this mean that localized cultural differences ceased to be important. To put it bluntly, in 1900, the world did not become “flat,” to borrow Thomas Friedman’s famous term, and it still is not flat now.<sup>9</sup> Even the most global crises of the early twentieth century were often viewed through local lenses using local referents, and this is the case now, too. Local meanings and modes of understanding persist. In both 1900 and 2020, news stories took on richly varied meanings as information (and misinformation) got fed into dramatically different narratives. This is relevant to this volume, as it underscores the enduring value of regional studies broadly defined. The world is often imagined to be growing ever flatter, but 2020 has convinced me yet again that the world remains stubbornly bumpy.

To illustrate what I mean, consider the interconnections, real and imagined, between 1900’s three major wars. All of them affected people in more than one place and all sparked debates about, and were shaped by, what we now call “globalization,” a word not coined until well into the Cold War era. In *The Birth of the Modern World*, a magisterial work by a leading specialist in South Asian and British imperial history writing on a planetary scale, Christopher Bayly aptly described the late 1800s and early 1900s as witnessing a “great acceleration” in

globalizing trends, as well as a dramatic increase in the flow of information across borders. This gave people in widely scattered settings a novel sense of following the same news stories that their counterparts in distant places were following at roughly the same time. Yet, in 1900, people in different places reached to varied parts of the past to make sense of the wars underway and had varied understandings of how the wars related to one another. In part because of this, any notion of a completely shared experience of following global events was illusory.

For example, across the British Empire, commentators continually likened the sieges of Tianjin and Beijing to the sieges that had trapped Britons in the Indian cities of Lucknow and Cawnpore in 1857. In the same newspapers that carried these commentaries, the Boxers were sometimes treated as posing a similar threat to civilized ways as the Boers, with both of the groups being portrayed as using “barbaric,” as opposed to “civilized,” fighting techniques. The connection between all of these events were emphasized in different ways, including via discussions of literature (new books on 1857 appearing in 1900 were hailed as timely, Britons trapped in Beijing read histories of, and an Alfred Lord Tennyson poem about, Lucknow) and individuals (much was made in English periodicals of soldiers and armaments used in the Transvaal coming to China in 1900). There were even connections made in theatrical works, with Belle Vue Gardens in Manchester, which was known for mounting spectacles linked to current affairs, shifting from putting on one inspired by the lifting of the siege of Ladysmith, a key battle in the Boer War, to putting on one inspired by the lifting of the siege of Beijing, presenting them as though they were chapters in the same basic story.

However, in at least one part of the British Empire, Bengal, the way history came into play was different. The leading foreign-owned English-language newspaper there, the *Times of India*, was filled with articles that likened the Boxers to the Boers and brought up parallels between the 1857 and 1900 sieges. But the vernacular press and a locally run English-language newspaper, *The Bengalee*, brought up a different analogy. The Allied Army’s invasion of the Qing Empire, some contributors to these publications claimed, was an action that was similar to events that took place as the last “Hindu kings” lost their kingdoms in the 1700s. The Qing Empire was about to find out, these commentators predicted, what it was like to come under colonial rule.

In the United States, no commentators I know of referred to the “Hindu kings,” and while some brought up 1857 parallels, more deployed historical analogies closer to home. One popular approach was to liken Boxer actions to those of Native Americans, such as those by the participants in the 1890 Ghost Dance Rising. This is easy to understand, as the Sioux millenarian militants who took part in that event, like the Boxers a decade later, believed that they could make themselves invulnerable to bullets and call down spirit soldiers to fight beside them



against better-armed opponents. While most of those who compared the Boxers to the Sioux in the US context were Americans, including Theodore Roosevelt in speeches given while campaigning for the vice presidency in 1900, not all were. Wu Tingfang, the leading Qing diplomat in America, told US reporters that they should think of the Boxers as Chinese counterparts to those who joined the Ghost Dance Rising. This was a departure from the main historical analogies in play in the Chinese press in the Qing Empire at the time, in which, not surprisingly, the Boxers tended to be compared to militants in China's own past.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to connections to other contemporaneous conflicts, the American press was less likely to bring up South Africa than to bring up the Philippines. Roosevelt's speeches sometimes included references to the Sioux, the Boxers, and the Tagalog insurgents battling American troops in Southeast Asia as all being similar actors—and, to his way of thinking, all “savage” ones to be dealt with severely. There were other connections to the Philippines as well, as some troops in the Allied Army came to China from Manila, while the head of the US contingent in Beijing, Adna Chaffee, fought Native Americans on the frontier early in his career and came to the Qing Empire from Cuba, where he had seen action in the Spanish-American War. In other words, many observers believed what was happening in the Boxer Crisis had a parallel in the past and a connection to events elsewhere, but they looked back to different years and to different parts of the world depending on their own location.

A single curious event brings much of this into perspective: a 1901 production of the Wild West Show that featured a reenactment of a Boxer Crisis battle. This enormously popular performing troupe was headed by William Cody (aka “Buffalo Bill”), who served beside and became friends with Adna Chaffee when both were cavalrymen in the mid-to-late 1800s. In mid-1900, a journalist interviewed Cody about Chaffee being chosen to head the US contingent in the Allied Army. Buffalo Bill explained that the Chinese would find his friend a formidable adversary, as Chaffee was used to fighting cunning foes, suggesting that the Boxers and Native Americans were similar opponents and also a bit like those his friend fought during the Spanish-American War. The connection was clearer in the battle reenactment. Two of the troupe's most famous previous reenactments had depicted scenes from the 1890 Ghost Dance Rising and from the 1898 charge up San Juan Hill. In each of those, Native American cast members played the enemies that Cody and other white men on horses vanquished. In the spring of 1901, these Native American cast members donned Chinese-style clothing and died on stage not as Sioux or Spaniards, but as Boxers.<sup>11</sup>

One thing to note about the use of historical analogies and comparisons is that there is never consensus, even within a single setting. Consider two examples involving the same famous figure, Mark Twain. Late in 1900, he wrote a scathing

“salutation” from the nineteenth century to the twentieth in which he referred to British actions in South Africa against the Boers, American actions in the Philippines, and international actions by the Allied Army in the Qing Empire as all belonging to the same category of immoral activity: brutal “pirate raids” that were dressed up to seem like efforts to protect civilization. In the spring of 1901, he went to see the debut of the Wild West Show’s latest incarnation, which ended with the battle reenactment set in China. Twain attended as a guest of Cody, whose show’s recreation of life on the frontier he once praised as wonderfully accurate. He left before the climactic battle scene, however, as he knew that he would dislike it, since it would treat the Boxers as villains. The famous author did not want to be in a crowd cheering the defeat of the militant Chinese, for he was one of the rare Westerners who thought that they were “traded patriots,” having once famously said that had he been Chinese, he might have been a Boxer.<sup>12</sup>

One final feature of these diverging analogies is worth noting. In 1900, many people took it for granted that the connections they were making were obvious and self-evident. In the US press, some did not make a case for seeing the Boxers as similar to Native Americans but simply put forward the comparison, just as some cartoonists paired disparaging images of anti-Christian Chinese militants and Tagalog insurgents without explaining the pairing. The British press similarly assumed that readers would find connecting the 1857 and 1900 sieges natural.

I see a similar way of thinking—parochial associations being presented as universal ones—in some commentaries on 2020. This is true of connections between current crises and moves between past and present, via fact and even via fiction. This spring, some commentators referred to people *everywhere* having the 1918–1919 pandemic on their minds, there were articles about the popularity of Camus’s *The Plague* around the world, and an article appeared in *Vogue* in May that began as follows: “All of a sudden, *everyone* [emphasis added] seems to be reading Giovanni Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*, a novel published more than 600 years ago” about Italy during a plague.<sup>13</sup> References to 2020 being defined by “two viruses,” the new one of COVID-19 and the old one of anti-Black racism, started out as an idea that needed explanation in the American press and then became a standard form of expression used without a gloss. What interests me about this is that in following the news from East Asia as well as the United States, there was a disconnect. In East Asia-based publications, while the 1918–1919 pandemic was certainly mentioned at times, the more recent experience with SARS was more often mentioned. *The Plague* enjoyed a surge of popularity in Japan, but I have seen no evidence that it is being read widely in China, nor that any part of Asia was one where “everyone” was reading stories set in Florence centuries ago. What came to mind for some in Japan (especially those with a particular tie to the locale in question) was how the government response to the pandemic seemed similar to

the response to the Fukushima disaster (some referred to a sense of “Fukushima déjà vu”); some people in China saw corollaries between the early efforts to cover up the new disease with Soviet government action in the time of Chernobyl, which led to an increased interest in the 2019 television show about that catastrophe.<sup>14</sup> There have also been multiple ways that the actual virus, so important in 2020, has been likened to metaphoric ones. To cite just one example, when the Chinese official press has referred to there being “two viruses” circulating in 2020, they have sometimes claimed that the second was not anti-Black racism triggering protests, but Hong Kong activism destabilizing society.<sup>15</sup>

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Just as there are parallels between specific years, so too are there similarities between general eras. The last fifty years or so is another period that can be described as witnessing the sort of “great acceleration” in globalization that Bayly had in mind. Recent increases in long-distance air travel, and the creation and then expansion of the Internet, have had the same sort of exhilarating world-shaking and world-shrinking impact that the rise of steamships, trains, and telegraphy had more than a century ago. The wars of 1900 were not the first events of that earlier period of acceleration to make people concerned about the costs and benefits of the world growing smaller, but they did shine a spotlight on the troubling features of globalization *avant la lettre*. Similarly, the pandemic has made especially obvious the downsides of our own recent moves toward interconnectedness. And in 2020, as in 1900, we have had crises that not only remind us that this period of globalization, like that earlier one, has disturbing features. It also reminds us that when crises take place in such periods, they are often interconnected in complicated ways, as the pandemic and protests of this year have been, and that no matter how much it seems that “everyone” is following the same stories, they end up viewing them through such locally specific lenses that this is an illusion—it was an illusion in the days of the telegraph and is still in this age of the Internet.

Having begun with the best work I have read lately that argues against using historical analogies when considering 2020, I will end with the best work I have read lately about COVID-19 that makes the opposite case. This is an April *Boston Review* essay by Alex de Waal specifically about pandemics: “New Pathogens, Old Politics.”<sup>16</sup> While it is tempting with each new pandemic to “scour history books for parallels and lessons,” he begins, the “wisdom to be gained” from this often turns out to have been “greatly exaggerated.” He goes on, though, to pull a quote from a Barbara Tuchman book that refers to certain “ways of behavior” and “reactions against fate” in varied eras as being able to “throw mutual light upon each other.” De Waal continues in his own voice, saying he feels that with the current pandemic, “although the pathogen may be new, the logic of social response is not, and it is here that we can see historical continuities” worthy of attention.

The implication of de Waal's essay is that there is a value in looking backward that is not tied to finding a single perfect precedent. The goal is rather to find one or more past times that are useful partial fits, which can be used on their own or in tandem to alert us to aspects of a current situation we might otherwise miss or that can simply bring a phenomenon into sharper focus. I would argue that applying this argument about pandemic years to those of global crises in general, we find that one recurring "logic of social response" that is definitely *not* new, and hence works against viewing 2020 as thoroughly novel, is precisely the tendency of people faced with unusual circumstances to look to the past for precedents—and to seize on different points in history and different sorts of connections between contemporaneous phenomena to make sense of a confusing world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adam Tooze, "We've Never Been Here Before," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Eight Juxtapositions: China through Imperfect Analogies from Mark Twain to Manchukuo* (Sydney: Penguin Specials, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> A July 16 Google search for "1918" and "Déjà Vu" brought up literally dozens of news stories with titles such as "Flu Déjà Vu: UM Closed for Seven Weeks—in 1918" (*UM Today*, a University of Manitoba publication, April 9, 2020, <https://news.umanitoba.ca/flu-deja-vu-um-closed-for-seven-weeks-in-1918/>) to "What Coverage of the Spanish Flu Pandemic Can Tell Us about Coronavirus" (*Variety*, April 1, 2020) to "The Déjà Vu Virus?" (*Project Syndicate*, May 4, 2020). Searching on the same day for "1968" and "2020" brought up many hits as well, including these three up top: "1968 and 2020: Lessons from America's Worst Year" (*The Atlantic*, May 31, 2020); "2020 is Not 1968: To Understand Today's Protests You Need to Look Further Back" (*National Geographic*, June 11, 2020); and "Why 2020 Isn't Quite 1968" (June 18, 2020—the transcript to an episode of the NPR podcast *Throughline*). One sign of the prevalence of the 1968 analogy is that essays were written specifically to criticize it, and the same thing has happened with the 1918 analogy, as in "The Coronavirus Is No 1918 Pandemic" (*The Atlantic*, March 3, 2020). Note: all URLs listed were last checked on August 15, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> I avoid using the term "Boxer Rebellion," even though it is the standard one now in the West, as the eponymous, martial-arts-loving militants involved expressed support for the Qing dynasty and for a time were backed by that ruling family, which makes it hard to see them as "rebels," a word that tends to describe in the Chinese context those seeking to topple those in power.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the collection of materials Geremie R. Barmé introduces and translates under the heading "1900 and 2020—An Old Anxiety in a New Era," in *China Heritage*, April 28, 2020, <http://chinaheritage.net/journal/1900-2020-an-old-anxiety-in-a-new-era/>.

<sup>6</sup> Grady McGregor, "Trump's Demand that China Pay Coronavirus Reparations Evokes an Ugly History," *Fortune*, May 7, 2020; see also, Ye Jiajia, "Coronavirus and the Boxer War of 1900: Do They Have Something in Common?" *Bitter Winter*, August 14, 2020,

<https://bitterwinter.org/coronavirus-and-the-boxer-war-of-1900-do-they-have-something-in-common/>.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Liu Xin and Wan Lin, “Chinese Netizens, Observers Deride ‘Eight Nation Alliance’ against China as a Farce,” *Global Times*, June 6, 2020. A related reference to 1900 as a time when foreign powers ganged up on the country unfairly appears in an online article describing allegedly misguided foreign suspicion of early moves in China to develop a vaccine for COVID-19: posted on Baidu’s Baijiahao platform by Zai Niyan Mouli (pseudonym meaning “In Your Eyes”), “*Zhōngfāng yìmiáo yánfā qūdé jùdà jìnzhǎn! Xīnbǎn “bāguó liánjūn” yòu láile*” (“China has made great progress in vaccine research and development! But here comes a New Eight Powers Alliance”), July 24, 2020, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1673083373636785944&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Conger, *Letters from China* (McClurg and Co., 1909), see especially one dated July 7, 1900.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005). For critiques of his argument, see, among other works, my “China & Globalization,” *Daedalus*, vol. 143, no. 2 (2014), 157–169.

<sup>10</sup> Documentation on the points above about the Bengali press and the American context will be forthcoming in the book I am writing for Oxford University Press, the working title for which is *The Ghosts of 1900: Stories of China in the Year of the Boxers*; on the importance and prevalence of the analogy between 1857 and 1900 and connections between the Boer War and the Boxer Crisis in the minds of Britons in Asia and Britain, see Robert Bickers and R. G. Tiedemann, editors, *China, the Boxers and the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), and Ross Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). I have begun to publish short pieces related to the book in progress that supplement the discussion here; see, for example, “‘Never Was History So Interesting’—Reading, Writing, and Confinement in 1900,” *The American Scholar* online, July 25, 2020, <https://theamericanscholar.org/never-was-history-so-interesting/#.XzgWtJNKXok>.

<sup>11</sup> Documentation on specific points made here will be provided in *The Ghosts of 1900*, in which I draw on, in addition to newspapers from the time, the excellent general account of the 1901 Wild West Show dramatization of events in the Qing Empire provided in John R. Haddad, “The Wild West Turns East: Audience, Ritual, and Regeneration in Buffalo Bill’s Boxer Uprising,” *American Studies* 49.3/4 (2008): 5–38.

<sup>12</sup> Twain’s reaction to the show is discussed by Haddad in “The Wild West Turns East”; for more details on Twain’s view of and references to the Boxer Crisis, see Selina Lai-Henderson, “Mark Twain, The Chinese Boxer,” *Stanford University Press Blog*, May 7, 2015, <https://stanfordpress.typepad.com/blog/2015/05/mark-twain-the-chinese-boxer.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Trish Hall, “Six Centuries Later, The Decameron Is Suddenly the Book of the Moment,” *Vogue*, May 5, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> An important resource for Asian responses to COVID-19, including the way that it has been discussed in different settings, is a two-part special feature of the *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, both parts edited by Jeff Kingston: “Pandemic Asia, Part 1,” volume



18, no. 14, July 15, 2020, <https://apjjf.org/2020/14>, and “Pandemic Asia, Part 2,” volume 18, no. 15, August 1, 2020, <https://apjjf.org/2020/15>. Fukushima is mentioned in multiple contributions on Japan; and Chernobyl comparisons are mentioned in Anonymous, “Social Media and China’s Virus Outbreak,” Part 1, no. 6, <https://apjjf.org/2020/14/Anonymous.html>. On Fukushima, see also Azby Brown and Sean Bonner, “What the Fukushima Meltdowns Taught Us about How to Respond to Coronavirus,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 13, 2020, which refers to a sense of déjà vu, and that term for connecting the two crises shows up as well in, for example, Hideo Furukawa’s “*Ubawareta mono, koeru beki kyōkai*,” translated by David Boyd, “What We Lost: COVID-19 Beyond the Numbers,” in the May 20, 2020 issue of *Words Without Borders*, <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/coronavirus-voices-from-the-pandemic-what-we-lost-furukawa-boyd>. On the initial importance and then declining role of the Chernobyl parallel in China (and discussion of the television show’s popularity), see Jane Li, “Chinese People Are Using ‘Chernobyl’ to Channel Their Anger about the Coronavirus Outbreak,” *Quartz*, January 27, 2020, and also Olivia Humphrey, “Is Coronavirus China’s Chernobyl?” *China Channel* (of the *Los Angeles Review of Books*), March 24, 2020, <https://chinachannel.org/2020/03/24/corona-chernobyl/>.

<sup>15</sup> Compare, for example, Lisette Voytko, “America’s ‘Two Deadly Viruses’—Racism and COVID-19—Go Viral Among Outraged Twitter Users,” *Forbes*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisettevoytko/2020/05/31/americas-two-deadly-virusesracism-and-covid-19-go-viral-among-outraged-twitter-users/#911354f5ae3a>; see also Helen Davidson, “China Calls Hong Kong Protesters a Political Virus,” *The Guardian*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/06/china-calls-hong-kong-protesters-a-political-virus>.

<sup>16</sup> Alex de Waal, “New Pathogens, Old Politics,” *Boston Review*, April 3, 2020, <http://bostonreview.net/science-nature/alex-de-waal-new-pathogen-old-politics>.