

‘Agir à l’anglaise’: Britain, France, and Russia in the Imperial Mirror, 1814–1914

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Abstract

While earlier literature on the Russian empire assumed that it was *sui generis*, recent texts have shown manifold linkages with other empires. This chapter focuses on the work of Russian military officers. It shows how through visits to other empires, through studies of texts written in other empires, and through informal and institutional links with other military and non-military institutions, they created a body of knowledge about best military and administrative practices that could be used in Russia—while also showing how Russia differed. The chapter also looks at how non-Russian, e.g. British and French, officers thought about Russian imperial military practices.

Keywords: transimperial, Military officers, Russia, Britain, France

‘Ici il faut agir à l’anglaise, et cela d’autant plus que c’est contre les Anglais qu’on agit.’

—V. A. Perovskii, 1840.¹

The British and Russian empires were long understood to have been imperial rivals in nineteenth-century Asia, playing out a lengthy competition for territory, trade, and influence which is invariably known as the ‘Great Game.’ A similar relationship is usually held to have existed between Britain and France in Africa and Southeast Asia, although it has not generated such persistent historical clichés. More recent scholarship has begun to emphasize the awareness of all three great powers and their smaller German, Dutch, Belgian, and Portuguese colonial counterparts that they were engaged in a common European ‘civilizing’ enterprise, while their ruling elites studied and borrowed from each other’s techniques of imperial control, rule, and conquest.² This was certainly true of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus

¹ Perovskii to Bulgakov, February 4, 1840, “Pis'ma grafa V.A. Perovskago k A. Ya Bulgakovu,” *Ruskii Arkhiv* (1878) No.7 Letter 9, 309.

² See in particular the essays in Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (ed.) *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer 1870 – 1930. Empires and Encounters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). For a systematic exploration of borrowings and commonalities between British and French imperialism, see Berny

and Central Asia, which looked repeatedly to the British and French empires as exemplars, both during the period of initial conquest and in the establishment of a colonial administration in these Asian border regions. This paper will seek to explore some of these borrowings, as well as give some examples of the reciprocal influence which Russia had on its western European rivals.

Much earlier literature on the Russian Empire assumed that it was *sui generis*, an anomaly which shared little or nothing in common with either its European or its Asian counterparts.³ This understanding ultimately derives from Soviet scholarship, in which the willingness of the 1920s ‘Pokrovskii School’ of historians to critique Russian colonialism in the same terms as British or French was suppressed under Stalin.⁴ Instead, a new orthodoxy was forged which decreed that Russia was free from the European sin of colonialism, something practised only by bourgeois states—the ‘friendship of peoples’ was projected from the Soviet present back into the Tsarist past.⁵ This has changed significantly in the last twenty years, and there is now a rich historiography which both compares Russia with other European empires, and which has begun the still more complex task of establishing how they learnt and borrowed from each other.⁶ This has been particularly valuable in exploding the idea of a Russian *Sonderweg* (*osobyi put’*)—an imperial experience that has nothing in common with that of other empires—something that can be traced back to nineteenth-century Slavophile and twentieth-century Eurasianist thinking on Russia as a distinct civilization which was neither European or Asian.⁷ Most historians of imperial Russia no longer accept these Soviet-era claims of

Sèbe *Heroic imperialists in Africa: The promotion of British and French colonial heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

³ This tendency is visible even in Geoffrey Hosking’s rightly admired *Russia, People and Empire 1552 – 1917* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), and to a lesser degree in Andreas Kappeler’s *The Russian Empire, a Multi-Ethnic History* (London: Longmans, 2001).

⁴ Alexey Golubev, “No natural colonization: the early Soviet school of historical anti-colonialism,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol.65 No.2 (2023), 190–204.

⁵ Lowell Tillet *The Great Friendship. Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

⁶ Martin Aust “Rossiia i Velikobritaniia: vneshniaia politika i obrazy imperii ot Krymskoi Voyny do pervoi mirovoi Voyny,” in *Imperium inter pares: rol’ transferov v istorii Rossiiskoi Imperii 1700-1917* ed. Martin Aust, Ricarda Vulpius and Alexei Miller (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010), 244–65. A comparative approach which still yields many instances of inter-imperial transfer can be found in Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (ed.) *Imperial Rule* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003).

⁷ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky “The Emergence of Eurasianism” *California Slavic Studies* Vol.IV (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 39–72; Seymour Becker “Russia between East and West: The Intelligentsia, Russian National Identity and the Asian Borderlands,” *Central Asian Survey* Vol.10 (1991), 47–64; Marlène Laruelle *l’Idéologie Eurasiste Russe ou Comment Penser l’Empire* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999) and most recently Jane Burbank and Frederick. Cooper *Post-Imperial Possibilities: Eurasia, Eurafrica, Afroasia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 45–88.

Russian exceptionalism. The role of foreign expertise in the Russian Empire has long been clear when it comes to culture and technology, and it is simply implausible that such trans-imperial transfers would not exist in the intellectual, administrative, legal, or military realm as well. Just as Tchaikovsky's ballets were choreographed by the Frenchman, Marius Petipa, and steamers built in Newcastle were the first to navigate the Aral Sea, so Russian statecraft drew extensively (though not exclusively) on the British and French colonial experience in areas as varied as ethnography, religion, irrigation, public health, and, perhaps most importantly, the understanding of the general norms of behavior and rule for a European 'Great Power.' When the *Institut Colonial International* was established in Brussels as a think tank for the mutual exchange of ideas between colonial empires, it was natural that Russia would be a founding member.⁸

This short chapter will only cover a limited selection of examples of these trans-imperial comparisons and transfers, but the character of those making them should be clear even so. They were overwhelmingly male, and most of them were military officers, reflecting the fact that Russia's colonial territories in Asia were largely under the control of the Ministry of War. While their interest in and borrowings from other imperial settings often cropped up in private correspondence and memoranda, their published writings appeared most commonly in specialized military journals—notably *Voennyi Sbornik*, the Ministry of War's official forum for long-form reflections on the military art—but also in prestigious so-called 'thick' journals such as *Vestnik Evropy*, which played an important opinion-forming role within the Russian elite. They wrote partly for career advancement, but also out of a genuine belief that they could educate their fellow officers and officials and improve Russian governance of non-Russian peoples by promoting ideas and expertise from the British and French empires. This group was particularly well-placed to absorb and disseminate trans-imperial knowledge. Military knowledge—of weapons, technology, and tactics—similarly crossed political boundaries, and any ambitious officer who wanted promotion or a staff appointment would be obliged to familiarize himself with works in English, French, and German, which were the main languages of exchange. Fact-finding missions or espionage were a logical extension of this, and might be undertaken with official sponsorship or independently as a means of attracting favorable notice from one's superiors. While they were members of an elite, those who were born into this status were not always the most thirsty for knowledge—aristocratic security could breed

⁸ Ulrike Lindner "New forms of Knowledge Exchange Between Imperial Powers: The Development of the *Institut Colonial International* (ICI) Since the End of the Nineteenth Century," in *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer* ed. Barth and Cvetkovski, 67; Florian Wagner *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

lassitude and lack of intellectual curiosity. Instead, it was often those from humbler backgrounds using the military as a pathway into the imperial ruling elite who were the most assiduous in their pursuit of trans-imperial knowledge as a means of advancement. The means for this were abundant, as the knowledge economy of nineteenth-century Europe was in many ways remarkably open. All European military establishments had their equivalents of Russia's *Voennyi Sbornik*, such as the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* in Britain, which frequently published translations from the former, and a similar reciprocal relationship existed between the Royal Geographical Society's *Journal* and *Proceedings* and the *Vestnik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestvo*, the Journal of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, which published translations of each other's articles on their respective colonial possessions in Asia. The institutional links between European armies were often strong, as neutral observers were permitted to accompany campaigns, or officers visited on exchanges in peacetime—this was particularly true of links between the Russian and French armies, especially after their formal alliance from 1890. Meanwhile, the boundary between military and other forms of knowledge was never firm, even less so when it concerned questions of imperial governance and control that were intimately linked to it. While by no means all trans-imperial transfers in Russia took place under military auspices, the Russian army certainly played a dominant role. This chapter will present a necessarily limited selection of the evidence for these transfers, before turning to the ways in which Russia influenced French and British imperial practice, and some consideration of Russian official attitudes to its Asian imperial neighbors—the Ottoman Empire, Qing China, and Meiji Japan.

France as an Exemplar

Writing in 1835, Vasilii Perovskii, the Russian governor of Orenburg—the main center of Russian power in the South Urals and the Steppe frontier—invoked the notorious *casus belli* which had been used as an excuse for the French expedition to Algiers in 1830 as a justification for the attack which he was urging on the Khanate of Khiva:

The guilt of the Dey of Algiers against the King of the French pales into insignificance in comparison with the crimes carried out by whole generations of Khivan Khans against the Emperors of Russia [...] there a single, momentary, and in reality bloodless insult to the Consul; here in the course of a whole century constantly accumulating perfidy which increases day by day, deliberate malice, robbery, banditry and disrespectful abuse of Majesty; [...] France demanded millions for the conquest of Algeria, and has retained for all

time her conquests beyond the restitution of what she has spent. For Russia the conquest of Khiva would not cost one tenth of this; but all of Central Asia would be revived, would rise up from its torpor with the introduction of an educated, beneficial government.⁹

His urgings were successful, although owing to the logistical difficulties involved (principally securing sufficient camels), the expedition would not depart until 1839. By then, the East India Company's invasion of Afghanistan had provided it with both a new purpose and a new model—Perovskii resolved to imitate the British in installing a puppet ruler on the throne of Khiva, just as they had done with Shah Shuja ul-Mulk: this was what he meant by *agir à l'anglaise*. The Khiva expedition ended in disaster, at least partly because Perovskii's desire to imitate the aggression of Russia's imperial peers led him to overreach and ignore local informants, but this did nothing to blunt the sense that Russia was engaged in a wider imperial contest.¹⁰ This was not the direct competition with Britain for influence and territory implied by the 'Great Game' narrative, but a clear imperative to behave (and to be seen to behave) as a 'Great Power,' making use of a set of shared imperial norms, of which one of the most important was to secure the submission and obedience of lesser, Asiatic or African powers on the imperial frontier as an end in itself, often regardless of any wider strategic or economic concerns.¹¹ In the period between the Congress of Vienna and the Crimean War, when Russian land power in Eurasia was largely unchallenged, the perceived insolence of 'Asiatic' states such as Khiva was the focus of Russian anxieties—they had to be punished and subdued to uphold imperial prestige in the eyes of other Asian peoples and states, and also to avoid perceptions of weakness in the eyes of Russia's imperial rivals. After the Crimean war, following Russia's humiliation in that conflict, these anxieties over imperial prestige became still more acute. The sentiments of competitive emulation expressed in Perovskii's memorandum became a constant factor in Russian imperialism in Asia.

This awareness of being engaged in a common but competitive imperial enterprise would crop up repeatedly in Russian thinking as the century progressed, sometimes with an emphasis on the need to copy 'best practice' from other European imperial powers, sometimes with a greater emphasis on Russian exceptionalism and the possibility of improving on the experience of the empire's

⁹ "‘Zapiska o snosheniyakh Rossii s Khivinskim khanstvom i o protivnykh narodnym pravam postupkakh khanov Khivinskikh protiv Rossii’, Perovskii to Chernyshev, 7/01/1835,” in A. G. Serebrennikov *Sbornik materialov dlya istorii zavoevaniya Turkestanskogo kraya* Vol.I 1839g. (Tashkent: Tip. Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga, 1908) Doc.6, 28.

¹⁰ See Alexander Morrison, "Twin Imperial Disasters. The Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British Official Mind, 1838 – 1842," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.48 No.1 (2014), 253–300.

¹¹ I develop this argument more fully in Alexander Morrison *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia. A Study in Imperial Expansion 1814 – 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Western rivals, but always with the latter's colonial policies and practices as an implied or explicit benchmark. As the previous example suggests, France was often seen as an exemplar despite Napoleon's defeat by Russia in 1814: its cultural prestige for the Russian elite remained undiminished in the 1820s and 30s, while from the 1840s onwards, French power began to reassert itself more decisively on the international and imperial stage. The appeal of Algeria can be seen in the overt comparisons which Russian observers made between their treatment of the great Caucasian resistance leader, Imam Shamil, captured in 1859, and that of the Algerian leader, 'Abd al-Qadir, who had surrendered to French forces in 1847: both became in some sort celebrities in captivity, paraded before the respective publics of the two empires as 'fanatical' leaders who were now thoroughly tamed and domesticated, and as examples of humane and honorable treatment of the defeated enemy.¹² As Vladimir Bobrovnikov has shown, the system of *voenno-narodnoe upravlenie* or 'military-popular administration,' first introduced in Daghestan in 1860 and then used in an adapted form across all newly conquered Muslim territories in the Caucasus and Central Asia, was explicitly modeled on the *Bureaux Arabes* which had been introduced in 1848 in French Algeria, the logic being that the Russians were faced with similar colonial challenges in managing wild and untamable regions unsuited to civilian governance.¹³ In the period 1873–1874, the then Captain Alexei Kuropatkin (later Russian Minister of War from 1898 to 1904) was sent on an official mission to the French Army in Algeria, producing a report on civil and military administration there in which he commented admiringly on the French system of maintaining a permanent force of camels for desert expeditions and recommended its adoption in Central Asia.¹⁴ Kuropatkin also showed a particular interest in the *Bureaux Arabes* in the colony's Saharan territories, which he described as a form of '*voenno-narodnoe upravlenie*.' He described their structures and operations in detail, as well as the justifications for using this form of military rule:

Members of the military-popular administration in Algeria, who have spoken against the usefulness of this forced reallocation of territory and people from military to civilian authority, assert that this reallocation is almost exclusively formal, and consists of the replacement of administrative personnel, made up of individuals with military titles (commandants of military circles and officers of the bureaux arabes) with civilian officials,

¹² Austin Jersild *Orientalism and Empire. North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 20–21.

¹³ Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Russkii Kavkaz i Frantsuzskii Alzhir: sluchainoe skhodstvo ili obmen opytom kolonial'nogo stroitel'stvo," in *Imperium inter pares*, 182–209; Alfred J. Rieber ed., *The Politics of Autocracy. Letters of Alexander II to Prince A. I. Bariatinskii, 1857–1864*, (The Hague, Mouton, 1966), 68–71.

¹⁴ A. N. Kuropatkin *Alzhiriya* (St Pb.: Tip. V. A. Poletiki, 1877), 285–309.

most of them only recently returned from France and not knowing either the country, nor the native population of Algeria. They assert that for the Arabs and Kabyles, who are warlike by nature and only respect force, commandants from among the officer class will long continue to have greater weight than civilian officials.¹⁵

He would later use exactly the same arguments to prevent any move from military to civilian administration in Russian Turkestan, referring to the unhappy results that this had produced in Algeria.¹⁶ As this suggests, once Russian colonialism in Central Asia and the Caucasus shifted from conquest to rule, there was a growing interest in French techniques of colonial administration, and in particular their management of what Russian officials called the 'Muslim Question' in these territories.¹⁷ In 1898, a Sufi religious leader known as the Dukchi *Ishan* led his followers in an attack against the Russian garrison of Andijan, at the eastern end of the Ferghana valley.¹⁸ Though the uprising was easily suppressed, it prompted a wave of paranoia about the dangers posed by Sufi 'sects' (*Dervishizm* and *Miuridizm*, as the Russians called it), reflected in this passage from a handbook on Islam prepared in the uprising's aftermath and distributed to all district commandants in Turkestan:

In conclusion we cannot fail to answer directly the question which arises unwillingly for every Russian with the memory of the recent sad events in Ferghana: how dangerous is Sufism to us with its Ishans? The recent history of so-called Miuridizm in the Caucasus, the development of Sufism in Turkey and the current state of Dervishizm in Africa are all too well-known to every educated man to need further circulation. They serve as an excellent illustration of the vitality and strength of Sufism.¹⁹

'Dervishizm in Africa' was a reference to the Sanussiyya brotherhood, and was based on the French military ethnographer, Louis Rinn's *Marabouts et Krouan*.

¹⁵ A. N. Kuropatkin 'Alzhiriya: voenno-statisticheskii obzor' *Voennyi Sbornik* (1876) No.6, 405.

¹⁶ Dmitrii Vasil'ev *Bremia Imperii. Administrativnaia politika Rossii v Tsentral'noi Azii. Vtoraia polovina XIX v* (Moscow, Politicheskaiia Entsiklopedia, 2018), 483.

¹⁷ See Elena Campbell *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 84–105, and for a comparative exploration, David Motadel, "Introduction," in *Islam and the European Empires* ed. David Motadel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–31.

¹⁸ See Alexander Morrison 'Sufism, Panislamism and Information Panic. Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the aftermath of the Andijan Uprising' *Past & Present* No.214 (2012), 255–304.

¹⁹ V. I. Yarovoi-Rabskii, "Kratkii obzor sovremennogo sostoyaniya i deyatel'nosti musul'manskogo dukhovenstva," in *Sbornik Materialov po Musul'manstvu* ed. V. I. Yarovoi-Rabskii Vol.1 (St Petersburg, Tip. M. Rosenoer, 1899), 28.

Etude sur l'Islam en Algerie, published in Algiers in 1884, which was extensively referenced in the text.²⁰ This interest, it appears, was reciprocated by Rinn, who in 1903, published a short paper on the Central Asian Naqshbandiyya, whom he characteristically stated “make up an integral part of the great Panislamic union, at the head of which stands the Sanussiyya.”²¹ As Rinn’s remark suggests, French and Russian colonial officials saw not just parallels but connections between their respective colonized Muslim populations. In 1900, the Russian ministry of foreign affairs began requesting regular reports from its consuls across the Muslim world—Bombay, Constantinople, Jeddah, Tehran, Algiers, and Tangier—on possible Pan-Islamic contacts with the Muslims of the Russian Empire, prompting a series of increasingly lurid and paranoid responses.²² Rinn was also far from the only French author to make the connection between the challenges France faced from Sufi *tariqas* in North Africa, and those faced by Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In 1912, for instance, the prestigious *Revue du Monde Musulman*, the journal of the French scientific mission in Morocco, published an extensive survey of what the author, using the Russian term, called ‘Muridism’ (i.e., Sufism) in the Caucasus.²³ Based largely on Russian sources, this reproduced in exactly the same terms the Russian military’s belief that it was the secretive, conspiratorial, and ‘fanatical’ nature of Sufism which had sustained the prolonged resistance to Russian rule in Daghestan and Chechnya between the 1820s and the 1860s.²⁴

France had no direct territorial rivalries with Russia, and her culture and language had long been the most prestigious and attractive for Russian elites. The forging of the Franco-Russian military alliance after 1890, and the related growth of French capital investment in Russia (80% of whose foreign state debt was held by French investors by 1914) would only consolidate this relationship of mutual admiration and exchange.²⁵ In the 1880s and early 1890s, French travelers and journalists were at the fore in reporting on Russia’s newly constructed Transcaspian railway (in modern

²⁰ Rinn (1838–1905) served in the *Bureaux Arabes* in Algeria, and his work examines the threat which Sufi orders posed to French rule in North Africa. See Jean-Louis Triaud *La Légende Noire de la Sanussiyya. Une Confrérie Musulmane sous le regard Français (1840-1930)* (Paris: Editions de la Maison de Sciences de L’Homme, 1995) Vol.1, 347–61.

²¹ Commandant Rinn, “Les Krouane Naqchebendya,” *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d’Alger et de l’Afrique du Nord* Vol.8 (1903), 248–53.

²² Russian Consul in Algiers to Foreign Minister Sazonov, 21/12/1910 Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI) F.147 Op.485 D.902 ‘Panislamizm’ ll.337–8ob.

²³ R. Majerczak, “Le Mouridisme au Caucase,” *Revue du Monde Musulman* Vol.20 (Sept. 1912), 162–241.

²⁴ See Alexander Knysh, “Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm,” *Die Welt des Islams* Vol.42 No.2 (2002), 139–73.

²⁵ Janniger Siegel *For Peace and Money. French and British Finance in the Service of Tsars and Commissars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

Turkmenistan), the first in Central Asia, while it also figured in one of Jules Verne's lesser-known *Voyages Extraordinaires*, *Claudius Bombarnac*.²⁶ French admiration for the Russian colonial enterprise can also be seen clearly in the prominence given to the Trans-Siberian Railway and to Russia's Central Asian and Caucasian Borderlands at the Paris International Exhibition of 1900, where the French government offered the largest plot on Trocadero Hill to their Russian ally, resulting in a pavilion which showcased Russian modernity, colonial and engineering prowess, and which won the grand prize.²⁷ Meanwhile, Russian interest in French colonial practices continued to be marked by specialized comparative publications. Although the original model for the protectorates that the Russians established in the Central Asian khanates of Khiva and Bukhara was the princely states of British India,²⁸ 1905 saw the publication of a systematic economic comparison between Bukhara and the French protectorate in Tunisia, concluding with a reference to the common European civilizing mission of the two powers in "barbarous Asiatic lands."²⁹ France's attraction as a colonial exemplar for Russian scholars, soldiers, and statesmen thus existed throughout the nineteenth century, but became particularly pronounced in the last two decades before the outbreak of the First World War.

Britain as an Exemplar

Britain was a more overt imperial rival to Russia than France after 1815, and relations between the two empires would be wary if not openly hostile for most of the nineteenth century. Anglo-Russian commercial and diplomatic relations throughout most of the eighteenth century had been largely positive, with Britain's reliance on naval stores from the Baltic meaning that Russia had usually had the upper hand.³⁰ However from the 1830s onwards, the relationship soured, partly because British industrial supremacy changed the terms of trade to Russia's detriment, and

²⁶ Svetlana Gorshenina and Claude Rapin. "Voyageurs Francophones En Asie Centrale de 1860 à 1932," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* Vol.39, No.3 (1998), 361–73; Svetlana Gorshenina, "Une vision marginale des marges: une relecture à travers les idées reçues du voyage à Samarkand de Léon de Beylié," *Études de lettres* Nos.2-3 (2014), 95–122. See, for instance, le Comte de Cholet *Excursion en Turkestan et sur la Frontière Russo-Afghane* (Paris: Plon, 1889); Jules Verne *Claudius Bombarnac* (Paris: Hetzel, 1892).

²⁷ Anthony Swift "Russian National Identity at World Fairs, 1851–1900," in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities* ed. Jeop Leerksen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 125–36.

²⁸ Morrison *Russian Conquest of Central Asia*, 164.

²⁹ A. F. Gubarevich-Radobyl'skii *Ekonomicheskii ocherk Bukhary i Tunisa. Opyt' sravnitel'nogo issledovaniya dvukh sistem proktektorata* (St Petersburg, A. Kirshbaum, 1905), 200–201.

³⁰ Matthew P. Romaniello *Enterprising Empires. Russia and Britain in Eighteenth-Century Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Philip MacDougall *The Great Anglo-Russian Naval Alliance of the Eighteenth Century and Beyond* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2022).

partly because of growing colonial rivalry in Asia. Even more so than for France, Britain's empire was the source of its global power, while unlike most French and Russian colonies, Britain's appeared to be profitable. British colonial methods and techniques thus carried considerable prestige in Russia, something seen as early as 1799 in the creation of a joint-stock charter company to administer Russia's North American territories, in a manner consciously modeled on the Hudson's Bay or East India Companies.³¹ This admiration for British economic prowess was tempered by skepticism regarding the British failure to create settler colonies in the majority of their possessions in Africa and Asia, as for most Russian observers these were the only durable form of colonial rule—this applied particularly to India, where the fact that barely 120,000 Britons ruled over more than 300 million 'natives' was taken as evidence of the inherent fragility of British rule. In 1878, Ivan Minaev, a Russian scholar of Buddhism who had traveled extensively in India, wrote: "There are no colonists here, there are no settled Englishmen here. A third generation Englishman in India is a rarity," which he considered spelled the ultimate doom of British rule.³² This perception was shared by General Alexander Geins, who in the same year advocated a military demonstration towards the Russian frontier with Afghanistan in Central Asia, anticipating that it would provoke a widespread uprising in India (his miscalculation on this point helped to trigger the second Anglo-Afghan War).³³

This was also often accompanied by critiques of British racial prejudice, arrogance, and high-handedness, usually with an implicit or explicit subtext that Russia was exempt from these faults. One of the most celebrated—and certainly the most widely read—Russian accounts of British colonial power in Africa and Asia was the novelist Ivan Goncharov's best-selling travelogue *The Frigate Pallada*. In the course of this celebrated journey in the period 1852–1853 from the Baltic to Japan, Goncharov spent time at Cape Colony, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. It was the latter which provoked his most celebrated critique of British colonial arrogance:

In general the relations of the English with the Chinese, and with other peoples—especially those subject to their rule—are not so much cruel as peremptory, rough, or so coldly contemptuous as to be painful to witness. They do not recognise these peoples as human

³¹ Ilya Vinkovetsky, "The Russian-American Company as a Colonial Contractor in the Russian Empire," in Miller and Rieber (ed.) *Imperial Rule*, 164.

³² I.P. Minaev *Ocherki Tseilona i Indii. Iz putevykh zametok Russkogo* (St Petersburg: Izd. A. F. Panteleeva, 1878) Vol.2, 16.

³³ "Zapiska general-maiora A. K. Geinsa o politicheskom polozhenii i anglichanakh v Indii, o chislennosti i sostoyanii ee voisk, o ee naselenii," 02/04/1878 Russian State Military-Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.1396 Op.2 D.103 ll.42–8—see Alexander Morrison, "Beyond the 'Great Game'. The Russian Origins of the Second Anglo-Afghan War," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.51 No.3 (2017), 700–702.

beings, but as beasts of burden, whom they may, perhaps, refrain from beating. They may tend them—that is, feed them well and pay them fairly and generously, but they do not disguise their contempt for them.³⁴

As Edyta Bojanowska has argued, while Soviet historians presented this as evidence of a straightforwardly anti-colonial agenda in Goncharov's work, such sentiments coexisted with a grudging admiration for and envy of the thrusting and entrepreneurial quality of the British presence he encountered across maritime Asia, and it certainly did not extend to any criticism of Russia's own colonial enterprise in Siberia; denigrating portrayals of non-Europeans as culturally and racially inferior are common throughout Goncharov's work.³⁵ This attitude of moral superiority combined with grudging admiration and a lurking inferiority complex was characteristic of Russian writing about British colonialism. Unlike with France, the Russians generally felt that they had little to learn from the British example in the military sphere—in their view, the 1857 rebellion had demonstrated the foolishness of Britain's policy of relying on 'native troops' for security in India, whatever the cost savings.³⁶ However, when it came to civil and economic questions by the late nineteenth century, British India had become a more common reference point for the Russians than Algeria or other French colonies—the sheer wealth and size of the Anglo-Indian colony, and its central role in sustaining Britain as a world power rendered it an object of fascination for many Russian officials, who cited its civil service, irrigation, and taxation systems as models for Russian rule in Central Asia.³⁷ This continued to be tempered by critiques of British racism—twenty-five years after Goncharov, the military geographer, Mikhail Veniukov, wrote that "We are not Englishmen, who in India strive by no means to mingle with the native races," while Minaev deplored how "white Britons" referred to "black Indians" as "Niggers."³⁸ Thirty years after that, the military Orientalist, Andrei Snesev, also

³⁴ I. A. Goncharov *Fregat Pallada* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Geograficheskoi Literatury, 1957), 383.

³⁵ Edyta Bojanowska *A World of Empires. The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 22–62, 102–103, 220–43.

³⁶ N. P. Ignat'ev, military attaché in London, to the War Minister A. V. Dolgorukov 26/07/1857 in P. M. Shastitko (ed.) *Russko-Indiiskie Otnosheniya v XIX v.* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1997), 105–118; K. Lvovich, "Ocherk Vozmushcheniya Sipaev v Ost-Indii," *Voennyi Sbornik* (1858) No.1, 107–38; Baron A. Tizengauzen, "Voenno-Statisticheskii Ocherk Britanskoi Indii," *Voennyi Sbornik* (1887) No.1, 152–66; No.2: 278–305; A. E. Snesev *Indiya kak Glavnyi Faktor v Sredneaziatskom voprosu* (St Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, 1906), 129.

³⁷ See Alexander Morrison, "Russian Turkestan and the Example of British India," *Slavonic & East European Review* Vol.84 No.4 (2006), 666–707.

³⁸ M. I. Veniukov "Postupatel'noe dvizhenie Rossii v Srednei Azii," *Sbornik Gosudarstvennykh Znani* Vol.3 ed. V. P. Bezobrazov (St Petersburg: Tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1877), 61; Minaev *Ocherki Tseilona*

provided a litany of examples of how the British in India “consider the people they rule over to be inferior intellectually, physically and morally”—but was simultaneously forced to concede that British investments in railways and irrigation in India dwarfed anything the Russians had managed in their own territories, while he was also impressed by the liveliness and extent of the press and publishing industry there.³⁹ In his account of traveling through the subcontinent, another Staff Officer, Vasilii Novitskii, also combined a condemnation of British racism with admiration for what he saw as the economic and technical achievements of the *Raj* in areas such as railway construction, higher education, and print culture.⁴⁰ These lessons would reverberate in Russia’s Central Asian possessions, which were widely seen as most analogous to British India. In 1906, the engineer Stanislav Ostrovskii was sent to India to study the irrigation systems in Punjab and on the Ganges as a model for those that the Russians were building in Turkestan’s ‘Hungry Steppe.’⁴¹ In 1913, General Alexander Gippius, the Governor of Ferghana Province, produced a report entitled *The resolution of the task of decentralising agriculture in British India*, which quoted, amongst others, John Stuart Mill, Sir John Strachey, and Sir Henry Maine, as part of an attempt to both improve revenue collection and potentially allow Turkestan’s provinces greater budget autonomy.⁴²

As this suggests, in the more liberal quarters of the Russian elite, full-blown colonial Anglophilia was not unknown. In 1906, the jurist and Baltic German aristocrat, Baron Boris Nolde, produced an article entitled, ‘England and her autonomous colonies’ for the prestigious ‘thick’ journal *Vestnik Evropy*.⁴³ This was a study of the systems of devolved government in Britain’s white settler colonies, looking mainly at Lord Durham’s 1839 report recommending responsible government for Canada

i Indii Vol.4, 15.

³⁹ Snesev *Indiya kak Glavnyi Faktor*, 37, 64, 139–41. Snesev also edited a collection of articles and translations on the regions surrounding Turkestan which was an important source of information on India for staff officers: A. E. Snesev (ed.), *Svedeniya kasayushchiyasya Stran, sopredel'nykh s Turkestanskim Voennym Okrugom* (Tashkent: Tip. Shtaba Turk. Voennogo Okruga 1898–1900) 19 vols.

⁴⁰ V. F. Novitskii *Voennye Ocherki Indii* (St Pb.: Tip. Shtaba Voisk Gvardii, 1899); V. F. Novitskii *Iz Indii v Ferganu* (St Petersburg.: Tip. Imp Akademii Nauk, 1903); A. E. Snesev *Indiya kak Glavnyi Faktor v Sredne-Aziatskom Voprose* (St Petersburg: A. Suvorin, 1906).

⁴¹ S. F. Ostrovskii to the Russian Consul in Bombay, A. A. Polovtsov (n.d., 1906) in P. M. Shastitko (ed.) *Russko-Indiiskie Otnosheniya v 1900 – 1917g.* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1999), 201; S. V. Chirkin *Dvadsat' let sluzhby na vostoce. Zapiski tsarskogo diplomata* (Moscow: Russkii put', 2006), 177; S. F. Ostrovskii *Irrigatsionnye sistemy Indii* (St Petersburg: Tov. Golike & Vil'borg, 1907).

⁴² “Reshenie zadachi detsentralizatsii zemskogo khozyaistva v Britanskoi Indii,” 30/09/1913 Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan (TsGARUz) Fond I-1 Op.27 D.1526 ll.34–36.

⁴³ B. E. Nol'de, “Angliia i ee avtonomnye kolonii,” *Vestnik Evropy* (1906) No.9, 5–67; on Nolde, see Peter Holquist, “Dilemmas of a Progressive Administrator: Baron Boris Nolde,” *Kritika* Vol.7 No.2 (2006), 241–73.

and the granting of this by the Act of Westminster in 1867. As David Macdonald has suggested, Nolde's main purpose was to emphasize the need for responsible government in Russia, with ministers appointed by and answerable to the legislature rather than the monarch.⁴⁴ Nowhere was this colonial Anglophilia seen more clearly than in the attempt by Senator Count Konstantin von der Pahlen to create a codified system of *Shari'a* for Turkestan on the basis of 'Anglo-Muhammadan Law' (see appendix). Pahlen was also a member of the Baltic German nobility, whose father had been a notably reactionary Minister of Justice under Alexander III. He himself had more liberal tendencies, expressed when he was governor of Vil'na province in his advocacy of equal civil rights for Jews and the abolition of the Pale of Settlement.⁴⁵ He had been dispatched to Russian Turkestan on a tour of inspection and reform in the period 1908–1909. From the outset, he was explicit about the need to draw upon the Indian example in his recommendations:

These insufficiencies present themselves especially clearly on comparison of our system for ruling the area with that of other Governments over Asiatic possessions, especially with the most prominent and extensive – the British Indian Colony. [...] this situation presents itself particularly starkly when the powers of the head of the Turkestan Krai are compared with those of the Governor-General of India.⁴⁶

Pahlen was building on earlier interest in the British management of Muslim law, represented by General Nikolai Grodekov's translation (from English) of a key juridical text in Anglo-Muhammadan law, the *Hidaya*, in 1893 for use by Turkestan's administrators.⁴⁷ In the event, however, his proposal was a debacle—the Congress of *qazis* which Pahlen summoned to discuss these proposals rejected them out of hand, stating that the *Shari'a* they were presented with in these poorly translated Anglo-Indian colonial texts bore no resemblance to the law as they currently practiced it.⁴⁸ As this shows, while the Russians and their French and British coun-

⁴⁴ David Macdonald, "Whig History with a Russian Accent: B. E. Nol'de, Russian Liberalism, and the problem of Responsible Government, 1906," Unpublished MS, cited with the kind permission of the author.

⁴⁵ *Tainaya dokladnaya zapiska Vilenskago gubernatora [graf K. K. Palen] o polozhenii evreev v Rossii*. Izd Vseobshchago evreiskago rabochii soiuza v Litve, Pol'she i Rossii (Geneva: Tip. Bunda, 1904).

⁴⁶ "Kratkii Vsepoddanneishii Doklad K. K. Palena o revizii Turkestanskogo Kraya. Chernovik," 1909 Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) F.1396 Op.1 D.437 ll.30–34, 43ob.

⁴⁷ N. I. Grodekov (ed. & trans.) *Khidaya. Kommentarii musul'manskogo prava* (Tashkent: Tip. S. I. Lakhtina, 1893) 4 Vols.

⁴⁸ See Alexander Morrison, "Creating a colonial Shari'a for Russian Turkestan: Count Pahlen, the *Hidaya* and Anglo-Muhammadan Law," in Barth and Cvetkovski (ed.) *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer 1870 – 1930*, 127–49.

terparts might have believed in the ‘interoperability’ of their respective imperial systems, the local politics, society, and culture of colonized regions mattered more, and could easily stymie this.

Russia as an Exemplar

To what extent was the Russian interest in France and Britain reciprocated? As we have seen, French commentators were often positive about the civilizing effects of Russian rule in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and looked to their experience with Muslim populations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, interest in Russia’s experience in governing Muslim populations seems to have been particularly marked in French North Africa, where even a local Algerian newspaper such as the *Petit Oranais* might publish a letter reflecting on the lessons offered by the experience of Muslim service in the Russian army for French proposals to extend conscription to at least some portion of Algeria’s Arab and Berber population.⁴⁹ There seem to have been limits to French enthusiasm for Russian colonial models however, reflecting their general sense that France stood above Russia (and indeed everywhere else) in the hierarchy of civilizations. In 1903, Dr Alcée Durrieux produced a pair of articles on Russian Turkestan for the Bulletin of the Algerian Geographical Society in which he noted approvingly the Russian decision not to assimilate the ‘Sarts’ and ‘Kirghiz’ of Central Asia or transform them into Russian citizens—possibly making an oblique commentary on the parallel decision to exclude the Muslims of Algeria from French citizenship in 1871. However, although he praised Russian rule in Turkestan and made comparisons between it and British rule in India that were very unfavorable to the latter, he did not extend this to France’s own colonial possessions.⁵⁰ Their British counterparts were even less likely to see the Russian Empire as a model, characterizing it instead as backward and semi-Asiatic, with systems of governance that were derivative of and inferior to western European models—although Francis Skrine, a former Indian Civil Service officer, did write, “That so much of the Russian edifice is built on Anglo-Indian models is the strongest proof of their intrinsic excellence. We were pioneers, and had difficulties to encounter with which our neighbours were never perplexed; they have profited by our experience and mistakes.”⁵¹ Russian officials themselves were well aware of British condescension, as the Russian diplomat, Sergei Chirkin, Acting

⁴⁹ “Lettre de Russie – Le Service Militaire chez les Musulmans,” *Le Petit Oranais* 22/05/1908.

⁵⁰ Dr Durrieux, “Avenir de la Nation Russe en Asie Centrale” & “Les Grands Villes du Turkestan,” *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d’Alger et de l’Afrique du Nord* Vol.8 (1903), 232, 238–40, 248–80.

⁵¹ F.H. Skrine and E. Denison Ross *The Heart of Asia* (London: Methuen, 1899), 414.

Consul-General in Bombay from 1907 to 1910 recalled the extraordinary ignorance of Russia he encountered among officers and colonial officials, which he attributed to their view that Russia was 'half-savage'.⁵² The exception to this apparent indifference was in the military sphere, where Russian campaigns of colonial conquest did call forth admiring sentiments: to some extent, British and French assumptions about Russian 'backwardness' relative to Western Europe translated into admiration for the supposed Russian absence of scruples in inflicting exemplary violence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As early as 1830, the Russian War Minister, Alexander Chernyshev, sent Paris a memorandum "On the usages and Customs adopted in our Eastern Wars," which drew upon the experiences of the recently concluded Russo-Persian War.⁵³ This was used by the French government in their preparations for the expedition to Algiers, which would in turn, as we have seen, be cited by Perovskii as a justification for the invasion of Khiva, thus neatly completing the imperial feedback loop.⁵⁴ Seventy years later, Colonel Charles Callwell, the closest thing that the British Army had to a military guru in the early 1900s, cited Russia's Central Asian campaigns as a pre-eminent example of what he called the use of 'moral force'—by which he meant rapid blows to cow and overawe an inferior enemy—in his standard textbook *Small Wars, Their Principle and Practice*:

In the Russian campaigns in Central Asia it has generally been the same. Energy and resolution have been the watchword. The procedure has been rather to overawe the enemy by a vigorous offensive than to bring against him a mighty force, and the result speaks for itself. Prestige is everything in such warfare. It is the commander who recognizes this, and who acts upon it, who conquers inferior races absolutely and for good.⁵⁵

Callwell's enthusiasm extended to the tactics of General Mikhail Skobelev, who notoriously ordered the massacre of 8,000 fleeing Turkmen after the fall of their fortress at Gök-Tepe. Callwell's admiration for Russian violence was shared by Lord Curzon, later Viceroy of India, who on his visit to Russian Central Asia in 1889, observed that "there can be no doubt that the Russian tactics, however deficient

⁵² Chirkin *Dvadtsat' let sluzhby na vostoke*, 170.

⁵³ Sébastien Haule "...us et coutumes adoptées dans nos guerres d'orient": L'expérience coloniale russe et l'expédition d'Alger," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* Vol.45 Nos.1/2 (2004), 293–320.

⁵⁴ "Zapiska o snosheniyakh Rossii s Khivinskim khanstvom i o protivnykh narodnym pravam postupkakh khanov Khivinskikh protiv Rossii," Perovskii to Chernyshev, 7/01/1835, Serebrennikov *Sbornik* Vol.1 Doc.6, 28.

⁵⁵ C. E. Callwell *Small Wars, their principle and Practice* 2nd ed. (London: HMSO, 1899), 58. See further, Alexander Morrison, "'The extraordinary successes which the Russians have achieved'. The Conquest of Central Asia in Callwell's *Small Wars*," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol.30 Nos.4–5 (2019), 913–36.

they may be from the moral, are exceedingly effective from the practical point of view.”⁵⁶ The previous year, the French journalist, Napoleon Ney, traveling on the same railway, observed that “our very important possessions in North Africa have a great analogy with the terrain in which General Skobelev had to operate,” and that in consequence, the Russian campaigns in Central Asia “present a special interest for the French reader.”⁵⁷ There is, however, much more research to be done on the reception of Russian imperial ideas in the British, and particularly the French case: certainly the British assumption that they had nothing to learn from Russia may not always have been borne out in practice.

John MacKenzie has noted the prominence of German expertise in the British Empire in scientific areas such as forestry, agriculture, and the management of the natural world where British higher education lagged behind.⁵⁸ As Moritz von Brescius has shown, from the 1840s and 1850s, partly thanks to the example and publications of Alexander von Humboldt, German science and linguistic and scientific training had become particularly prestigious within Europe, although the recruitment of experts from this source was not uncontroversial in British colonial settings.⁵⁹ By the late imperial period, Russia’s own German-modeled scientific institutions were potentially a similar source of such expertise, with the added advantage that unlike Germany, Russia had a territorial empire on a comparable scale to Britain’s, providing a vast field for the testing of ideas and techniques. As David Moon has shown, one indication of this is the important role that Russian agronomists played in introducing hardy and high-yielding forms of wheat from the Black Sea steppes and lower Volga region to the Great Plains of the United States and Canada.⁶⁰ Jennifer Keating has explored how, in the early 1900s, the United States Department of Agriculture turned to Turkestan and Russian imperial botanical expertise when searching for hardier variants of Alfalfa that could cope with extremes of drought and cold on the American plains.⁶¹ Although some of these imperial experts would go on to serve the Soviet regime, the revolutions of 1917

⁵⁶ G. N. Curzon *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question* (London: Longmans, 1889), 86.

⁵⁷ Napoléon Ney *En Asie Centrale A la Vapeur* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1888), 229.

⁵⁸ John Mackenzie, “European Imperialism: A Zone of Co-operation Rather than Competition?,” in Barth and Cvetkovski *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer*, 40–43.

⁵⁹ Moritz von Brescius, “Empires of Opportunity: German naturalists in British India and the frictions of transnational science,” *Modern Asian Studies* vol.55 no.6 (2021), 1936–42; see further *idem German Science in the Age of Empire: Enterprise, Opportunity and the Schlagintweit Brothers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁶⁰ David Moon, *The American Steppes. The Unexpected Russian Roots of Great Plains Agriculture, 1870s–1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶¹ Jennifer Keating, *On Arid Ground. Political Ecologies of Empire in Russian Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 173–74.

scattered educated Russians far and wide across the imperial world of the 1920s, for instance, Vladimir Minorsky, a diplomat and orientalist at the Russian imperial legation in Tehran. After a period at the *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in Paris, he would become a Professor at London's School of Oriental and African Studies from 1932 to 1944, where his publications and his research students played a formative role in the development of Oriental Studies in Britain.⁶² A still more compelling example of the kind of imperial transfer that this produced lies in the career of Sir Boris Uvarov (1889–1970), an entomologist from Ural'sk (now in Kazakhstan) who began his career in Tsarist Central Asia, working mainly in Transcaspia (now Turkmenistan). In Tiflis when revolution came in 1917, the brief British occupation of Transcaucasia saw him emigrate to London, where he became the head of the Anti-Locust research office of the Colonial Office, with responsibility for a vast swathe of desert spaces across British territories in East Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.⁶³ Given the much larger number of often well-educated émigrés from the Russian Empire who settled in France, it seems plausible that some of these scholars and professionals must also have entered French imperial service, though I have not yet tracked down any examples.

Russia and its Asian Neighbors

A further question is whether Russian enthusiasm for the British and French imperial example had any echoes in views of their immediate imperial neighbors in Asia—the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Chinese colonialism in Xinjiang, and Japanese colonialism in Korea and Manchuria. Once again, there is more research to be conducted in this area, but broadly speaking, it seems that the somewhat Orientalist contempt in which Russia was held by France and (especially) Britain was transferred wholesale by Russia to her Asian neighbors. One limited exception lay in Russian interest in Ottoman religious administration. At least one historian has suggested that Russia's own 'confessional state,' which under Catherine the Great sought to create a bureaucratized religious hierarchy for the empire's Muslims which mirrored that for Orthodox Christians, may have been inspired by

⁶² Denis Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia. Orientalism in Diplomacy and Intelligence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 183–87, 212–17; Ilya Gershevitch, "Professor Vladimir Minorsky," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1/2 (1967), 53–57; D. M. Lang, "Obituary: Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 29, no. 3 (1966), 694–99.

⁶³ My thanks to Robert Fletcher for alerting me to Uvarov's importance—see Uvarov, Sir Boris Petrovich (1889–1970) V. B. Wigglesworth, revised by V. M. Quirke *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36619>.

Ottoman models.⁶⁴ A more concrete case lies in the work of the Orientalist Nikolai Tornau, which relied heavily on Ottoman sources and seems to have been used as a guide for understanding land tenure in Central Asia.⁶⁵ Russia had a deep and longstanding involvement in Persia which dated from the Treaty of Turkmanchai in 1828, but this was on strictly unequal terms—there was no suggestion from the many Russian officers and scholars who worked in and for the Qajar state that they might have anything to learn from what they saw as a fragile entity that only survived thanks to Russian patronage.⁶⁶

Vigorously modernizing Japan might seem a more likely source of new ideas, and certainly did have some appeal among Russian radicals—Mikhail Bakunin and Lev Mechnikov were deeply influenced by their experiences in Meiji Japan, paradoxically seeing in its vigorous, authoritarian, and state-led reformism a model and inspiration for their own anarchist visions for Russia.⁶⁷ In 1900, the liberal journal *Vestnik Evropy* enthused that:

Japan's active participation in the „concert“ of the great powers in the Far East presents a highly interesting and instructive fact. The modern Japanese Empire, with its new institutions, with its parliament and free press, arose, one might say, before our eyes and has developed and strengthened with remarkable speed since the mid-sixties. The example of Japan clearly showed that the great evil from which the old Asian states are suffering and perishing is rooted not in the people, but in the governments, in their frozen political and administrative organization, based on the complete lack of rights of the population and the unlimited arbitrariness of those in power. Japan shook off these shabby rags, renounced the unfortunate traditions of the past and consciously set out on a new path, under the initiative and guidance of the young emperor and his enlightened advisers; and thanks to the reforms undertaken and implemented, in a short time it achieved such development and prosperity that the leaders and participants in the reform movement themselves had barely dreamed of. Possessing energy, enterprise and broad ambition, the Japanese

⁶⁴ Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar. Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006), 151–52, 354–55.

⁶⁵ Nikolai Tornau, *Izlozhenie Nachal Musul'manskogo Zakonovedeniya* (St Pb., Tip. Imp. Akademii Nauk, 1850) & *O prave sobstvennosti po musul'manskomu zakonodatel'stvu barona N.E. Tornau (posmertnoe izdanie)* (St Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii Nauk, 1882); see Paolo Sartori, “Colonial legislation meets shari‘a: Muslims’ land rights in Russian Turkestan,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.29 No.1, 43–60.

⁶⁶ See Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game. Travelogues and Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 2007) & Moritz Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism – The ideal anarchists 1800 – 1914* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁶⁷ Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

naturally seek space for themselves in the world and, above all, strive to acquire a reliable foothold on the Asian mainland.⁶⁸

However, the sub-text here was not that Japan might serve as a model for Russia, but that Britain's Machiavellian attempts to set up Japanese power as a counter-weight to Russia in the Far East would backfire, while the article went on to note that "Tribal and racial instincts do not disappear and will not work themselves out in two or three decades." Any enthusiasm for Japan as a model was not replicated among Russian state actors, many of whom notoriously underestimated the threat which this rising imperial power posed to them in the Far East, not least because of racist assumptions of innate Japanese inferiority.⁶⁹ In 1900, even so shrewd an observer as Alexei Kuropatkin, who had graduated from observing Algerian camels in the 1870s to become Minister of War, was sure that Russia would emerge victorious from a Far Eastern war, though he predicted that the cost in men and money would be high.⁷⁰ After inspecting the troops on a visit to Tokyo in 1903, he would describe the Imperial Japanese Army in faintly patronizing terms. Although he thought that the men looked reliable, he cast doubt on the quality of NCOs and officers, and emphasized the inferiority of their cavalry. Above all, he thought that they lacked moral fiber compared to the Russians: "The Japanese army are still southerners."⁷¹ They will be ardent in the attack and tenacious on the defensive during the day. But tired, weary, and having suffered several defeats, they will be inclined to panic in night action," while he also considered that in the absence of Christianity, "without religion, without faith in salvation, some individuals might endure the severe trials of the warrior, heavy losses and deprivation, but the masses cannot."⁷² He would discover how wrong he was when he became Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies in Manchuria in 1904. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kuropatkin's retrospective assessment of Japanese military capabilities and morale was much more positive, as he wrote that "in the cooperation of the nation with the army and the government lay the strength which brought Japan

⁶⁸ 'Rol' Iaponii v Kitaiskom voprose' *Vestnik Evropy* (1900) No.8, 831.

⁶⁹ See David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward the Rising Sun. Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 187–95; Bruce W. Menning, "Miscalculating one's enemies: Russian intelligence prepares for war," in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective* ed. David Wolff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), Vol.1, 45–80; I. S Rybachenok *Zakat velikoi derzhavy. Vneshniaia politika Rossii na rubezhe XIX – XXvv* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 536–48.

⁷⁰ Rybachenok *Zakat velikoi derzhavy*, 538.

⁷¹ The term 'Kuropatkin' used here was *iuzhane*, which carries similar overtones of torpor, lassitude, or lack of ardor to those of 'Mediterranean' or 'tropical' in English.

⁷² A. N. Kuropatkin "Dnevnik s 27 maya 1903g. po 6 iunya 1903g," *Rossiiskii Arkhiv* Tom VI (Moscow: Rossiiskii fond kul'tury, 1995), 417, 436–37.

victory,” in stark contrast to Russia. With the benefit of hindsight, Kuropatkin noted the ‘immense condescension’ with which Russian military representatives had viewed Japan, and poured scorn on an unnamed ‘Japanese expert’ who before the war claimed that “one Russian soldier was as good as three Japanese,” but perhaps unsurprisingly did not candidly acknowledge his own misjudgments.⁷³ In the aftermath of the war Russia—like Britain, Germany, and Switzerland—produced an official history which sought to learn lessons from Japanese military and naval success and Russian failure.⁷⁴ This and other Russian publications on the Japanese army and navy sought to analyze their weaknesses and strengths in case of further conflict, but there remained an assumption that specifically Japanese cultural traits were alien, undesirable, and could not be transferred to Russia, while the merits of her military (for which Russian observers now had a hard-earned and healthy respect) derived from its adoption of European training, technology, and tactics.⁷⁵ Kuropatkin’s own pessimistic outlook on Russia’s prospects in East Asia would develop into a racialized fear of ‘the Yellow Peril’ overwhelming Russian and other European civilizing colonial projects in Asia.⁷⁶

Similar racialized contempt informed Russian views of China, which by the same period had become an object of Russian colonialism in Manchuria and Kwantung. Here it was slightly tempered by a respect for the antiquity of the Chinese civilization and statecraft, as well as the long history of more or less equal and cordial relations between the Russian Empire and the Qing from the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, when China was seen above all as an enormous trading market and a repository of valuable knowledge. This was rudely brought to a close by Nikolai Murav’ev’s Amur expedition of 1855 and the subsequent ‘unequal treaty’ of Aigun in 1858, which saw Russia annex the northern bank of the Amur and the Ussuri region.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, an echo of this earlier relationship can be seen in Russia’s grudging decision to

⁷³ General Kuropatkin *The Russian Army and the Japanese War* trans. Capt. A. B. Lindsay (London: John Murray, 1909), Vol.1, 212, 216.

⁷⁴ M. E. Barkhatov and V. V. Funke *Istoriya Russko-Yaponskoi Voiny* (St Petersburg: T-vo R. Golike and A. Vil’borg, 1907-9) 6 Vols; *The Official History of the Russo-Japanese War prepared by the historical section of the Committee of Imperial Defence* (London: HMSO, 1906 & 1909) parts 1 & 2; *The Russo-Japanese War: Reports from Officers Attached to the Japanese Forces in the Field*. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1905-6) 10 vols. E. Reventlow: *Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg: Mit Zahlreichen Text, Illustrationen, Kunstbeilagen und Einer Mehrfarbigen Karte Des Kriegsschauplatzes* (Berlin: C.A. Weller, 1906); Fritz Gertsch: *Vom Russisch-Japanischen Kriege 1904/1905* (Bern: Verlag von Ch. Künzi-Locher, 1907) 4 Vols.

⁷⁵ E.g., V. Nedzvetskii ‘Iaponskaia Armia v 1908 godu’ *Voennyi Sbornik* (1909) No.1, 271–86 & No.2 259–74.

⁷⁶ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward The Rising Sun*, 102.

⁷⁷ On this reversal of the older Sino-Russian relationship, see Gregory Afinogenov *Spies and Scholars. Chinese Secrets and Imperial Russia’s Quest for World Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2020) esp. ch.11.

return the Upper Ili valley to China in 1881, in fulfillment of a commitment made when it was annexed ten years before. The fact that the Chinese could be expected to maintain a stable and orderly frontier, as they had by and large done before the Muslim rebellions of the 1860s which had prompted the Russian annexation, and the unexpected military effectiveness that they had shown in reconquering what would come to be known as Xinjiang meant that these negotiations were conducted in a spirit of surprising equality and good faith.⁷⁸ This did not, however, translate into any admiration for Chinese rule once it was re-established, let alone any desire to emulate it. In China, as elsewhere, other European colonial powers remained the benchmark for comparison for Russian official commentators: in his description of what he described as “our first colony in the far East”—the new Russian commercial and military settlements of Port Arthur and Dal’nii—Colonel Alexander Khvostov, a veteran of the Boxer campaign, was extraordinarily sensitive to criticisms of Russia’s colonial record in the Far East in the English-language newspapers of Shanghai and Hong Kong.⁷⁹ The letters of Russia’s long-serving consul in Kashgar, Nikolai Petrovskii, adopt a tone of constant condescension punctuated with explosive expressions of contempt when describing the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang and his relations with them.⁸⁰ There is of course a long and complex history of Russian influence in and even direct control over Xinjiang in the late Qing and Nationalist periods, but that lies beyond the scope of this chapter.⁸¹

Conclusion

Far from following an imperial *Sonderweg*—land-based, dynastic, or ‘Eurasian’—the Russian Empire was seen as fully comparable with the other two principal European colonial powers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. British and French observers saw their own imperial possessions mirrored in Russia’s Central Asian and Caucasian colonies, and the Russians saw similar parallels in India and Algeria. If the Russian imperial influence on British and French statecraft seems to have been limited to the military sphere (though future research may alter this verdict), Russian transimperial borrowings from the French and British

⁷⁸ See Morrison *Russian Conquest*, 211–12.

⁷⁹ A. Khvostov “Russkii Kitai. Nasha pervaya koloniya na dal’nem востоке,” *Vestnik Evropy* 1902 No.11, 186.

⁸⁰ N. F. Petrovskii *Turkestanские Pis’ma* ed. V. S. Myasnikov (Moscow: Pamyatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2010).

⁸¹ See in particular David Brophy *Uyghur Nation. Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Eric Schluessel *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

empires were extensive, and undertaken in a spirit of both competitive and cooperative emulation. Russia's reliance on French capital for its industrial development in the later nineteenth century is well known—its use of the *Bureaux Arabes* of the Algerian Sahara as the model for its own systems of colonial rule over Muslims in the Caucasus and Central Asia less so. Russia's rivalry with Britain in Central Asia—the so-called Great Game—is a tiresome and persistent historical cliché, but the Central Asian military administration's modeling of the protectorates of Bukhara and Khiva on Anglo-Indian princely states, its fact-finding expeditions to look at Indian irrigation networks, and its attempts to make use of 'Anglo-Muhammadan Law' tell us something significant about the nature of Russian rule.

That said, much of this remained rhetorical: the fact that British, French, and Russian statesmen and soldiers believed that there was a common transimperial repertoire of violence and governance that could be drawn upon and applied indiscriminately to colonial subjects did not mean that this was actually possible in practice. Very often, it simply reflected their own vague and poorly informed ideas about Islam, 'Asiatics,' or 'natives,' with widely different civilizations and peoples subsumed under vague labels that were forms of colonial knowledge. As the late Bernard Cohn would have acknowledged in his less dogmatic moments, when colonial forms of knowledge came up against the social and cultural reality of colonized societies, they frequently crumbled in the face of that challenge—colonial regimes were rarely powerful enough to simply impose them.⁸² This was clearly the case with Count Pahlen's failed Anglo-Indian-derived project of *shari'a* codification, based on a flawed understanding of the universality of Islamic law. French attempts to use the Russian experience with Islam in the Caucasus to help them control North African Sufi brotherhoods seem to have foundered in a similar way. On the other hand, less specific tools of governance, such as the use of indirect rule, seem to have been more readily transferable, as do tools and techniques for managing the natural world such as seed transfers or irrigation technology, though these could have disastrous long-term environmental consequences.⁸³ These conclusions are tentative—in particular, far more research is needed on the place of Russia and its Muslim subjects in the French North African public sphere, on the role of Russian emigrés in the British and French empires after the Revolution, and on the importance of the Russian example for Chinese rule in Xinjiang both before and after the fall of the Qing dynasty. What I hope is clear even from this short paper is the need to integrate Russia fully into comparative histories of nineteenth-century European empire and of transimperial transfers.

⁸² Bernard Cohn *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge. The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁸³ Keating *On Arid Ground*, 72–97.

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