

“The White Tsar”: Romantic Imperialism in Russia’s Legitimizing of Conquering the Far East

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At the end of the 19th century, many discourses of legitimation were formulated to assist the imperial advance of western powers into Asia and Africa using political, economic, cultural and scientific lines of argumentation. Administrators, colonists, missionaries and explorers developed a vivid literature on the civilizing mission born by “Whites” in the rest of the world. Imperial Russia was also part of this massive European trend, and developed discourses of legitimization to justify its push into Central Asia and the Far East. Saint Petersburg’s expansionist desires aimed at gaining control of Manchuria, Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Tibet yielded a kind of “romantic imperialism” a central feature of which was the myth of the “White Tsar.”

The notion of the “White Tsar” (*belyi tsar*) probably originated in Muscovite times. Its exact origins are unclear, but it appears to date from the time of the Golden Horde. During the reign of Vasili III, Russian monarchs occasionally used the term in diplomatic correspondence, though it had already fallen into disuse by the time of Ivan IV.¹ Since then it has been employed in relation to Asian nationalities in order to legitimate Russia’s claims to dominion over the East. The phrase “White Tsar” appeared frequently in Russian writings with respect to Inner and Eastern Asia around the end of the 19th century. Colonized peoples also developed new imaginaries in reaction to the cultural shock of colonization, attempting to reckon with the political realities to which they had come to be subjected. Buddhists, for example, attempted to incorporate well-known European political personalities into their religious pantheon by reformulating their ancient mythologies: in Tibet, the Russian tsar and Queen Victoria were seen as reincarnations of local divinities; and under Russian domination the Kalmyks and Buriats re-conceived the tsars as Bodhisattvas. The idea that Buddhist peoples awaited the arrival of the famous White Tsar deeply impressed itself on Russian nationalist circles, Dostoevsky included; he in fact declared to be pleased that “among these peoples of several million men the belief in the invincibility of the White Tsar and his sword is strengthening and has spread to the borders of India and indeed into it.”²

Academic interest in Imperial Russia’s drive into Asia has grown since the early 1990s, due to increased archival access as well as the renaissance of diplomatic and intellectual history. At the same time, the development of post-

1 I would like to thank my anonymous reviewer for having shared this information with me.

2 F. Dostoevski, *Journal d’un écrivain, 1873-1881* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 1456.

Soviet scholarship on nationalities has stimulated research on Russia's Eastern borderlands. Yet despite this, the question of ideological motivations in tsarist colonialism remains largely understudied.³ This article will thus attempt to analyze the role that specific ideological references, such as the White Tsar and the Aryanness of Russians, played in legitimating imperial conquest. At issue is not to claim that this conquest was carried out in the name of these symbolic motifs when it was in fact something that responded above all to geo-strategic interests, but to underscore how much the history of ideas and political philosophy is developed in interaction with the surrounding environment. After presenting those major forerunners to the Aryan theme of the White Tsar that were the explorer Nikolai Przhevalskii, and the Buriat Lama Agvan Dorzhiev and Petr Badmaev, this article will go on to examine in more detail the character and work of Esper Ukhtomskii. In his numerous works, Ukhtomskii developed a range of arguments far larger than just the myth of the White Tsar, for his aim was to establish proximity between the Russian and Buddhist worlds based on their common Aryan identity and their hopes for a theocratic regime.

PRECURSORS: ORIENTALISM AND ADVENTURISM IN COURT CIRCLES

Already during Catherine II's reign, Russian authorities had wanted to use the religious networks of their Buddhist subjects as means to facilitate commercial penetration in Asia. During the late 18th century, many plans to conquer Mongolia in order to reach China's borders were conceived, such as those by the General Governor of Irkutsk, Ivan Iakobi for example. Yet it was not until the second half of the 19th century that Russia came to take real interest in the Buddhist world. New projects to incorporate Mongolia had been in on the drawing board since the 1850s under the direction of the General Governor of Eastern Siberia, N.N. Muraviev-Amurskii (1809-1881); but it was not until the start of the 20th century that any of them met with the approval of official circles. Some years after the second English-Afghan war (1879-1880), the Russians reached the foothills of the Pamir and no longer concealed their desire to form alliances with Tibet and China. Just before his death in 1888, the explorer Nikolai Przhevalskii called upon the tsar Alexander III to conquer Eastern Turkestan, which was then in rebellion against the Chinese.⁴ If the tsar made no secret of his doubts about annexing the region, his son Nicholas II would not have such concerns.

3 With the exception of certain fundamental works such as M. Bassin, *Imperial Visions. Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun. Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

4 A letter from P.S. Vannovskii to N.K. Girs, 5 November 1885, quoted in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, p. 38.

As a matter of fact, the young Crown prince had long had his eyes set on the Orient. This is possibly because two of his private tutors were none other than prince E.E. Ukhtomskii and N. Przhevalskii, with both of whom he would begin an intense correspondence and whose numerous publications he would personally finance. The “Grand Tour,” a rite of passage customarily undertaken before acceding to the throne, led the tsarevich not to the fashionable high places of Europe, but to the “Orient”: in 1890-1891, the emperor-to-be set out from Greece and Egypt to visit India, Ceylon, Singapore, China and Japan, returning from Vladivostok through Russia’s “interior Orient” via the Empire’s Kazakh, Bashkir and Kalmyk steppes. As Sergei Witte (1849-1915) noted in his memoirs, Nicholas II was simply obsessed with Asia and dreamed of conquering the titles of Bogdykhan of China and Mikado of Japan.⁵ He was particularly attuned to discourses declaring that Lhasa, the “Rome of Asia,” awaited Russian domination, and remained in close contact for several years with an Orientalist group that included E.E. Ukhtomskii, P. Badmaev and A. Dorzhiev. During the decade stretching from the 1895 Sino-Japanese war to the 1904-1905 Russian-Japanese war, under a tsar who was particularly fond of the idea of Russia’s messianic mission in Asia, Russian foreign policy in Asia would be marked by a series of blunders.⁶

Przhevalskii and Russia’s Mission in China

The explorer Nikolai Przhevalskii⁷ (1839-1888) was one of the first to maintain that Russia had a mission in Buddhist Asia, particularly in China and Tibet. Between 1871 and 1888, he had the Russian Imperial Geographical Society finance four great expeditions with the aim of developing routes that would enable Russia to go deep into Asia, either through Mongolia or through Xinjiang. The first expedition (1871-1873) took him to the Orod plateau and near to Lake Koko Nor. Before reaching Xinjiang, however, he was forced to turn back both because of the uprising of Yakub-Beg⁸ and the Russian occu-

5 S.Iu. Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte* (New York: Sharpe, 1990), p. 127.

6 D. Geyer, *Russian Imperialism. The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860-1914* (Hamburg-New York: Berg, 1987).

7 On his life, see the biography by D. Rayfield, *The Dream of Lhasa: The Life of Nicholay Przhevalskii, Explorer of Central Asia* (London: Elek Books, 1976); N.F. Dubrovin, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval’skii. Biograficheskii ocherk* (Saint-Petersburg: Voennaia Tipografiia, 1890), as well as D. Brower, “Imperial Russia and Its Orient: The Renown of Nikolai Przhevalskii,” *The Russian Review* 3 (1994), pp. 367-381.

8 As soon as the first Russian-British tensions started in Central Asia, Russia turned to Oriental Turkestan while it was under Chinese domination and was granted the right to trade with it in the treaty of Kuldzha signed in 1851. The revolt of Muslims from Oriental Turkestan, which started in 1861 under the leadership of Yakub-Beg, provided Russia with a perfect opportunity to invade the region, but it was forced to retrocede it to China in 1881. Xinjiang, however, became a de facto protectorate of Russia, since the real power was in the hands of Russian consuls, not of Chinese governors.

pation of the Ili valley. He set out again the following spring with a Tibetan merchant caravan that was on pilgrimage, entering Tibet with the hope – soon shattered – of reaching Lhasa.

On his second expedition (1876-1878), he had wanted to pass via the Ili valley, Kashgar and the Taklamakan desert, before coming to the mythical Lob Nor – the legendary centre of Buddhist Central Asia that had been given life by the waters of the Tarim, and that no Westerner had reached since Marco Polo. The third expedition (1879-1880) led him to the discovery of the famous horse of the steppes, which he had named after himself. Przhevalskii reached Lhasa in late 1880 but was prohibited from approaching the town and forced to return via Mongolia and Kiakhta. On the fourth expedition (1883-1885), he abandoned the attempt to reach Lhasa, trying instead to enter a region situated between Tsaidam and Lob Nor. However, Przhevalskii was once again forced to return to Taklamakan. Again in 1888, he embarked on another voyage from Russia, via Astrakhan. This time however he was quite ill and ended up dying at the end of the same year – his wish was that his corpse be buried in Karakol (today's Kyrgyzstan).

Przhevalskii's 1872 feat of entering Tibet was the first by a Russian. In fact, until then the country was little known by Europeans in general, and so came to be the coveted object of many fantasies.⁹ His travel stories became bestsellers and were translated into many Western languages, propelling him to star member status of the Society of Geography, and earning him the recognition of the imperial family who regularly called him to their side. The explorer M.I. Veniukov (1832-1901) unhesitatingly described him as the "most famous traveller in Asia since Marco Polo."¹⁰ Przhevalskii was the first to develop the idea of the White Tsar, notably in his *Essay on the contemporary situation in Central Asia*¹¹ (*Ocherk sovremennogo polozheniia v Tsentral'noi Azii*) published in 1886. He was indeed convinced that if Russia were to attack China, the subjugated populations – Buddhists (Mongols, Tibetans) as well as Muslims (Uzbeks and Uighurs from Oriental Turkestan) – would rally to aid the tsar; Russia would thereby be able to annex these regions without too much difficulty, and then turn a weakened China into a Russian protectorate.

According to Przhevalskii, Russia's main goal in Asia was the possession of Lhasa, which he saw as the Rome of Asia. Not only was Tibet a rich kingdom but it was the capital of a still larger world comprising more than 200

9 P. Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La. Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), and J. MacGregor, *Tibet: a Chronicle of Exploration* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970).

10 Letter from Veniukov to the 3rd Congress of Geography, 1881, quoted by Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, p. 39.

11 Article from his secret memorandum, *New Considerations on the War with China (Novye soobrazheniia o voine s Kitaem)*, published in the *Russkii vestnik* of 1886, then republished as the last chapter of his book *Ot Kiakhty na istoki Zheltoi reki*.

million Buddhists who regarded the Russian Emperor as the White Tsar: "The Mongol nomads, Muslim Chinese and the inhabitants of eastern Turkestan... all aspire to become subjects of the White Tsar, whose name, like the Dalai Lama's, appears to the eyes of the Asian masses wrapped in a halo of mystical light. (...) The intolerable yoke of the Chinese, on the one hand, and the reputation earned by our humane domination over the autochthons in our oriental possessions, on the other, are the main reasons that we enjoy a good reputation in the heart of Asia."¹² Przhevalskii thought that were the tsar to establish himself in Potala, it would give him the prestige necessary to rule all of Asia, and that a Russian-Tibetan alliance would enable both countries to surround China and to contain the British in India. Presenting himself in his correspondence to the tsar and court officials as a mere intermediary expressing Asian demands, he claimed that many autochthons had conveyed to him both their desire to have the Cossack troops free them and their belief that the Russian tsar was a "demigod."¹³ Yet, Przhevalskii would never have the fortune to reach Lhasa; only his close companions, one of whom was Petr Kozlov, would, in a later expedition (1905), finally be welcomed by the Dalai Lama at the Mongol border.

Dorzhiev or the Alliance between Saint Petersburg and the Potala

In circles close to Nicholas II, the myth of the White Tsar was further developed by the Buriat Agvan Lobsang Dordje, also known as Dorzhiev (1854-1938). In Lhasa to finish his training as a Buddhist monk, Dorzhiev was quickly accepted into the young pontiff's small group of tutors and became a confidant of the 13th Dalai Lama, Thoubten Gyamtso (1876-1898). He was the chief representative of the Russophile lobby at the Potala court, but the lobby did not have unanimous backing. Dorzhiev's opponents, who were trying to estrange him from the Dalai Lama, succeeded in forcing him to leave in 1898. Despite this he managed to return several times and remained the representative of Tibetan hope in Russia, which he pursued by advocating both a Buriat and Kalmyk pan-Mongolism and the constitution of a great Buddhist state under Russian protection. Accused by the British of being a Russian agent in Lhasa, Dorzhiev rather thought of himself as Tibet's emissary in Russia. Esper E. Ukhomskii introduced him to the Russian court where, in 1900 and 1901, he met the tsar thanks to the intervention of personalities like the vice-president of the Imperial Society of Geography, Petr Semenov Tian-Shanskii (1827-1914).¹⁴ He submitted his project for turning Tibet into a Russian protectorate to the em-

12 N.P. Przheval'skii, *Ot Kiakhty na istoki Zheltoi reki. Issledovanie severnoi okrainy Tibeta i put' cherez Lob-Nor po basseinu Tarima* (1888), pp. 509-510.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 514.

14 P. Semenov Tian-Shanskii is supposed to have written a letter to Lamsdorff in 1900 requesting Nicholas II to grant an interview to Dorzhiev. T. Shaumian, *Tibet. The Great Game and Tsarist Russia* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 25.

peror and met Sergei Witte, the War Minister Aleksei Kuropatkin (1848-1925),¹⁵ and the Foreign Affairs Minister Vladimir Lamsdorff (1845-1907). However, neither he nor his right-hand man, a Kalmyk by the name of Ovshe Norzunov, who was a representative in Tibet for the tsar on behalf of the Imperial Society of Geography, were unanimously liked in Russian political circles.

The idea nonetheless appealed to Nicholas II, who promised to respect Buddhism if Tibet were to accept Russian domination and decided to open a consulate on the Sino-Tibetan border in Sichuan. Russia and Tibet then engaged in some unofficial negotiations, the 13th Dalai Lama considering the "Northern Empire" a less intrusive and less dangerous protector than the British Empire. In order to counter Russian manoeuvres in Asia, the Chinese press published a fake Russian-Chinese political agreement in which Tibet, "the roof of the world," was to become a common condominium with Russia in charge of military defence and China in charge of trade. Against what they considered a provocation, the British signed an alliance with Japan in 1902, provoking Russia and China to make a treaty in return. With the end of the war in Transvaal, the British armies were redeployed, and the viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, concerned about the meetings between Dorzhiev and Nicholas II, decided to charge the Tibetan border in 1904. Lhasa, having received no military help from Russia, fell to the British. Dorzhiev and the tsar's hopes were dashed. Dorzhiev then accompanied the Dalai Lama to his place of exile in Urga where, under Russian protection, they met Nicholas II at the border town of Kiakhta. The Buddhist theocracy became a British protectorate before being retroceded to China in 1906, though the Victorian empire decided to keep its trading posts. Dorzhiev though did not lose all hope and continued in his bid to strengthen Russian-Buddhist ties.

In 1912, acting on behalf of the Dalai Lama, Dorzhiev signed with the Mongols, who had only just become independent, an agreement to establish a pan-Buddhist confederation between Tibet and Mongolia - an idea to which he would remain faithful throughout his life.¹⁶ In 1913, he took advantage of

15 A.N. Kuropatkin started his career in the regiment of Turkestan and, attracting attention for his bravery, he entered the Russian military academy. Sent back to Turkistan, he quickly became the right-hand man of General Skobelev and was also close to the General Governor of Turkistan, K.P. von Kaufman, who sent him to negotiate with Yakub-Beg during the 1876 insurrection. He then accompanied Skobelev to the Balkans in 1877-78, and after returned to participate in the capture of Gok-Tepe in 1881. In 1897, he was appointed War Minister by Nicholas II and put in charge of the Russian armies during the conflict with Japan. Following its crushing defeat, he resigned, and wrote numerous publicist works about the Russian army. He was eventually sent back to Turkestan during the 1916 uprising. For more details, see the chapter devoted to him in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, pp. 82-103.

16 In 1917, Dorzhiev sat on some Buriat national committees but was suspected of counter-revolutionary activities around 1918. He was imprisoned by the Cheka, later freed, and spent the civil war in Kalmykia. In 1919, he started to collaborate with the Bolsheviks,

the fact that Orientalism had come into vogue in cultivated Russian circles, to finance the building of a Buddhist temple in the heart of Saint Petersburg. Presented as the symbol of Russia's reconciliation with its "internal Orient" and national minorities, this temple in reality would be attended by a Russian intelligentsia looking for exoticism. Further, Dorzhiev organized a support committee which included Buriat doctor Badmaev, Orientalist academics such as Vasiliï Radlov (1837-1918), Sergei Oldenburg (1863-1934), and Fedor Shcherbatskii (1864-1942), and artists such as Maximilian Voloshin (1877-1932) and Nikolai Rerikh (1874-1947). The diversity of support Dorzhiev received revealed the ambiguity of the project: whereas scholars took it as a political act towards the country's Buddhists, intellectuals and artists tended to view it as a symbolic gesture pertaining to Russia's national identity. After much trouble, the temple was eventually inaugurated in 1913, just in time for the three-hundredth anniversary of the Romanov dynasty.¹⁷

Dorzhiev made a considerable contribution to the construction of the myth of the White Tsar through his unofficial diplomatic actions and statements. He was in fact the inventor of an argument Przhevalski himself had failed to notice and which Badmaev and Ukhtomskii would later adopt. The argument was simply as follows: the reason that the long-awaited White Tsar of the Buddhist mythology was in fact going to be the Russian tsar is that Shamballah, the Tibetan "paradise," was located in Russia. Dorzhiev had actually received a popular legend dating from the 13th century called "the prayer of Shamballa" as a gift from the ninth Panchen Lama, Choki Nyima (1883-1937). In this prayer it was stated that the founder of the Yellow Hat sect would be reincarnated in a town located to the North of Tibet close to the polar Circle, a town "reminiscent" of Saint Petersburg. Dorzhiev thus began developing a long series of mythological arguments justifying comparisons between Russia and Shamballah, more refined versions of which are also to be found in Badmaev's works.

Badmaev - Russia as Inheritor of the Mongol Empire

Petr A. Badmaev (1851?-1920) played a major role in elaborating the discourse about the White Tsar in Russia. Of Buriat extraction, he converted to Orthodoxy, as did his brother. His godfather was the Tsarevich Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, the future Alexander III. He studied oriental languages and

acceded to the Bolshevik Communist Party and attempted to make his nationalist imperatives compatible with the new regime. At the start of the 1930s the officially anti-Buddhist activities began: Dorzhiev was first confined to residence in western Russia and later in Transbaikalia. He was arrested by the NKVD in 1937 and died the following year from bad treatment in a prison-hospital. On his life, see J. Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia. The Story of Aḡvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emisary to the Tzar* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1993).

17 A. Andreev, "La maison du Bouddha dans le nord de la Russie (histoire du temple bouddhique de Saint-Petersbourg)," in D. Savelli, ed., *Présence du bouddhisme en Russie. Slavica Occitania*, no. 21 (2005), pp. 153-177.

did a degree in medicine but never graduated, which earned him accusations of practicing medicine and pharmacopoeia illegally. In 1898, he and his brother translated the two first volumes of the Tibetan medical treatise *Guy-zhi*. Embroiled in struggles around the throne that opposed Rasputin and Illiodor, he was accused by his detractors of being the “Buriat Rasputin.” He nonetheless practiced Tibetan medicine with great success among the elites of Saint Petersburg, members of the Court, and even the imperial family.¹⁸

Introduced to the Court by Ukhtomskii in 1893, he became one of Serge Witte’s advisers on oriental policy before Witte and he became estranged over disagreements about the Trans-Siberian plan and because Witte thought him too much of a schemer. Badmaev had in fact suggested that the Tsarist authorities open a trading post in his name that would both enable Russian products to conquer Asian markets and act as a cover for future attempts at annexing the surrounding regions. The main trading post of Badmaev & Co. opened in Chita, but already by 1895 its financial and political-diplomatic results were far from satisfactory, leading both Witte and Ukhtomskii to withdraw their support for the initiative. Badmaev nonetheless continued for some time to be an unofficial instrument of Russian power in Asia, though relations between him and Nicholas II subsequently soured.

In any case, Badmaev was far from unanimously backed at the Court and some people, like War Minister Aleksei Kuropatkin, regularly complained about his influence on the tsar: “I think that one of the most dangerous features of the sovereign is his love of mysterious countries and individuals such as the Buriat Badmaev and prince Ukhtomskii. They inspire in him fantasies of the greatness of the Russian tsar as master of Asia. The Emperor covets Tibet and similar places. All this is very disquieting and I shiver at the thought of the damage this would cause to Russia.”¹⁹ Excluded little by little from ruling circles, Badmaev continued his medical activities and assisted with integrating the Buriats into Russia.²⁰ He remained a zealot for the Trans-Siberian railway, which for him signalled the beginning of Asia’s incorporation into Russia: as late as 1916, he participated in the concession of a railway line to link Semipalatinsk to the Mongol frontier and fantasized about building a great Trans-Mongolian railway. In the 1910s, he became a staunch Slavophile, rather Germanophobic, a partisan of Uvarov’s formula “Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality,” and extolled the virtues of the Russian culture of working the land.²¹

18 G.V. Arkhangel’skii, “Petr Badmaev – znakhar’, predprinimatel’ i politik,” *Voprosy istorii* 2 (1998), pp. 74-84; Iu. Kuz’min, *Tainy doktora P.A. Badmaeva* (Irkutsk: Ottisk, 2003).

19 A.N. Kuropatkin, *Dnevnik*, 22 September 1899, quoted by K. Meyer, S.B. Brisac, *Tournament of Shadows. The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999), p. 281.

20 For his and his family’s history, see B. Gusev, “Moi ded Zhamsaran Badmaev,” *Novyi mir* 11 (1989), pp. 199-226; and especially T.I. Grekova, *Tibetskaia meditsina v Rossii. Istorii a sud’bakh i litsakh* (Saint Petersburg: Aton, 1998).

21 See his last publications: *Svoevremennost’ prizyva vserossiiskoi druzhiny* in 1915, *Konets voiny* in 1916 and *Mudrost’ russkogo naroda* in 1917.

Unlike Dorzhiev, Badmaev had no fantasies of a greater Buddhist state: converting to Orthodoxy in his youth, he became a devout proselyte Christian. He fostered notions of Buriat nationalism not with a view to separatist objectives, but to taking advantage of religious and commercial ties between Buriats, Mongols and Tibetans. To these ends, Badmaev, in 1895-1896, published the first bilingual Russian-Buriat daily paper to be written in Cyrillic, *Zhizn' na vostochnoi okraïne* (*Life in the Oriental provinces*), which promoted tsarist policy among local populations. He thought Russia's mission was to become the "Byzantium of China," and when Nicholas II was in Beijing in 1897 unhesitatingly sent him extravagant memoranda about Chinese hopes and the enthusiastic welcome he would receive. He was sincerely convinced of Russia's civilizing mission in Asia: Russia, he thought, shall enter Asia "not for the profit and the exploitation of the Asian tribes, as some of the European states do, but for the very welfare of the inhabitants of Asia."²²

In the very first sentence of his book, *Russia and China (Rossiia i Kitai)*, published in 1900, Badmaev states that it is the express "wish" of the Asian peoples to submit to Russia. He aspired to turn the Buddhist and Muslim minorities against the Manchu dynasty. He was one of the first to put forward historical arguments justifying Russia's presence in Asia. He considered that facts like Russia's lengthy domination of the Finno-Ugrian population, the republic of Novgorod's discovery of the Urals very early in its history, the national diversity of the Cossacks, and, lastly, Russia's policy of respecting conquered peoples' mores, constituted simply so many factors indicating the "naturalness" of Russia's eastward expansion. Like Przhevalskii and Dorzhiev before him, Badmaev considered Tibet rather than China to be the political crux of Asia. Thus, around 1893, he called on Alexander III to open an additional line of the Trans-Siberian Railway that would pass via Mongolia and China on the way to Gansu, the entrance to Tibet. The reasons for this Russian advance he thought completely justified: as Russia was the direct inheritor of the Mongol Empire, it had to capture Gansu since that is the point from which Genghis Khan would have conquered China.²³

According to Badmaev, Russia's destiny was to rule over continental Asia because the Russian Emperor was in fact the White Tsar, though he referred to the latter as "knight" (*bogatyr'*) in order to connect the myth to the traditional heroes of Russian *byliny*.²⁴ In his view, the tsar ought to be considered either as the reincarnation of the Buddhist goddess Dara-eke, who freed beings from suffering (in Mongol belief), or as the emanation of the king of the mystical kingdom of Shamballah, a reservoir of beneficial forces, a sort of heaven whose kings were divinities close to Vishnu (in Tibetan belief). The Empire of the

22 P.A. Badmaev, *Rossiia i Kitai* (Saint Petersburg, 1905), p. 37.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

24 The *byliny* are popular Russian poems. They belong to great poetic epic cycles telling of the feats of knights, and are part historical and part mythological.

North would thus be called on by these very peoples to dominate Asia and secure for itself a world destiny, for which Buddhism would provide the legitimisation. He claimed that “Mongolia, Tibet and China represent the future of Russia (...). May we hold together in our hands Europe and Asia all the way from the shores of the Pacific ocean to the heights of the Himalaya.”²⁵

Buoyed by such convictions, Badmaev along with Dorzhiev and Ukh-tomskii all appear to have supported some of Russia’s most bellicose stances on the Far East, which eventually led to the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese war. They also wielded influence over A.S. Suvorin’s very conservative newspaper *Novoe vremia*, which at the time supported Russian ambitions in the Far East and Tibet, and published several texts written by Badmaev.²⁶ However, by 1903 *Novoe Vremia* had changed its tune. Taking a very dovish stance on East Asia, Suvorin repeatedly editorialized about the need to focus on domestic issues rather than Pacific adventures. In 1904, two parties clashed in Saint Petersburg: a prudent one, including Witte, Pobedonostsev, Kuropatkin and Lamsdorff, that was ready to relinquish Korea; and a hawkish one, including Nicholas II, Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, Viacheslav von Plehve and above all the adventurer Aleksandr M. Bezobrazov (1855-1931). The latter, who had been introduced to the tsar by Ukh-tomskii, quickly obtained the title of State Secretary of the Commission for the Affairs of the Far East. His wheeling and dealing – a forest concession in the Yalu in Korea – led Russia to reject the idea of splitting the continent into spheres of influence (Japan over Korea, Russia over Manchuria), sparking off the war.²⁷

CONCEIVING THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE INTO THE FAR EAST: ESPER UKHTOMSKII

The “Thinking Head” of Official Asiatism

Prince Esper E. Ukh-tomskii (1861-1921) was the key figure behind the “White Tsar of Asia” myth. Not only was he a schemer in Nicholas II’s court, but also an essayist of considerable scientific knowledge. Ukh-tomskii came from a very ancient noble family linked to the Riurikides. His father, E.A. Ukh-tomskii, had served as a naval officer in Sebastopol during the Crimean war, and later founded a maritime company whose ships followed a route from Bal-

25 Quoted by V.P. Semennikov, ed., *Za kulisami tsarizma. Arkhiv tibetskogo vracha Badmaeva* (Leningrad, 1925), p. 56.

26 Shaumian. *Tibet. The Great Game and Tsarist Russia*, p. 32.

27 Kuropatkin claimed in *Russkaia armiia i iaponskaia voina* (1909) that the famous Bezobrazov was directly responsible for triggering the war. He is supported in his claim by Boris Glinski in *Prologue to the Russian-Japanese War (Prolog rusko-iaponskoi voiny)* (1916); on the other hand, B.A. Romanov, in *Russia in Manchuria* (Ann Arbor: Edwards, 1952, originally published in Russia, Leningrad, 1928) lay the blame squarely on Witte’s diplomacy. For a comprehensive historiography of the subject see, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, and A. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

tic Sea to China and India via the Black sea. The young Ukhtomskii, markedly Slavophile in sensibility, published his first student poems in Ivan Aksakov's *Rus'* and continued throughout his years to submit his verse to selected periodicals, including *Vestnik Evropy*, *Russkaia mysl'*, *Niva*, *Sever* and *Grazhdanin*.

Very early on Ukhtomskii developed a passion for the Orient and the nationalities subjugated to the rule of the Russian Empire. After his studies, he was employed in the Department of Non-Orthodox Religious Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior. Then he traveled extensively throughout Siberia, developing a particular interest in the Buddhist, Buriat and Kalmyk minorities. In 1886, he was put in charge of reporting on and explaining the frictions between the orthodox missionaries and the Buddhist clergy in Buriatia. He anonymously visited about twenty Lamaic monasteries, before going to Urga and then to Beijing to meet the Buddhist leadership. In his report he strongly defended the leadership, later harshly criticizing the policy of Russification, and the aggressive promotion of orthodoxy by the Archbishop of Irkutsk, Veniamin.²⁸ A passionate aesthete, Ukhtomskii became the largest collector of Asian art in all of Russia, amassing more than 2,000 mostly Chinese and Tibetan items on his travels.²⁹ But his interest was not limited to the Far East: in 1889, he travelled along the Trans-Caspian Railway, returning full of enthusiasm for Central Asia. Later, he was elected a member of the Society of Geography and also of the Russian Committee for Central and Oriental Asian studies for his numerous works. He was then speedily recruited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Far Eastern affairs.

In 1890, he was selected to be a part of Tsarevich Nicholas's "Grand Tour," and was entrusted with the task of writing and publishing travel notebooks.³⁰ During this association he became a close friend of Nicholas II. Foreign and Russian diplomatic circles went so far as to claim Ukhtomskii was one of tsar's shadow councillors and Russia's main policy-maker for Asian affairs. As the French representative in China, Auguste Gérard, said "the tsar has chosen to make him the interpreter and the main architect of Russian policy in Eastern Asia."³¹ The publisher A.S. Suvorin declared that Ukhtomskii "says anything

28 See his report, E.E. Ukhtomskii, *O sostoianii missionerskogo voprosa v Zabaikale* (Saint Petersburg, 1892).

29 Ukhtomskii's acquisitions were originally exhibited at the museum Alexander III (today the State Historical Museum) and earned him the golden medal during their presentation in the Siberian pavilion at the Paris World Fair in 1900. They were confiscated by the Bolshevik regime and are now part of the collection of the Asian Art department of the Hermitage.

30 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia II na Vostok* (Saint Petersburg–Leipzig, 3 volumes 1893–1897). The book was written by Ukhtomskii but Nicholas II approved every chapter of it. It came out in three richly illustrated volumes and was quickly translated into French, German and even Chinese.

31 A. Gérard, *Ma mission en Chine, 1894–1897* (Paris: Plon, 1918), p. 214.

he pleases to the sovereign"³² and the War Minister A.N. Kuropatkin described him as "a close friend of the Emperor..., he has influenced the tsar and this influence has been detrimental."³³ Ukhtomskii did indeed use his influence to introduce to Nicholas II both the Buriat doctor P.A. Badmaev and the Buddhist monk A. Dorzhiev. However, after 1900, contacts between Nicholas II and Ukhtomskii became less frequent, and little by little Ukhtomskii was "double-crossed" by Rasputin, who monopolized the imperial family and set it at odds with him.

Having published articles for many years on Asian affairs in the highly conservative paper *Grazhdanin*, edited by his friend Prince Vladimir P. Meshcherskii³⁴ (1839-1914), Ukhtomskii tried to found his own newspaper and, in 1895, became the editor of the venerable *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*.³⁵ He hoped to turn it into an openly conservative newspaper, turned against the West, in which he could promote his Asiophile ideas and defend the minorities of the Empire.³⁶ He warned his readership against the tendency to "follow slavishly the scientific road of the West [which will only lead] to catastrophes of a revolutionary nature."³⁷ The daily *Vedomosti*, then, became an instrument for Asian affairs and served as a semi-official outlet for the government's opinions on the Orient. However, it also continued to remain open to publishing opinions different to those of its editor Ukhtomskii. The prosecutor of Saint Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev³⁸ (1827-1907) in particular censured it several times for stances it took in favor of the Empire's national minorities and its open sympathy for Jews and Poles. Ukhtomskii was to remain Asia's greatest exponent in Russia, and he continued to publish *Vedomosti* until the Revolution.

Ukhtomskii was particularly influential at the Court due not only to his friendship with the tsar, but also due to the interventions of his friend, Sergei Witte. The two men collaborated on many of Russia's undertakings in a Far

32 A.S. Suvorin, *Dnevnik* (Moscow-Petrograd: L.D. Frenkel, 1923), p. 113.

33 A.N. Kuropatkin, *Dnevnik A.N. Kuropatkina* (s.l.: Nizhpolygon, 1923), a remark dating from April 7, 1898.

34 A confidant of the last two tsars who had legal training, prince Meshcherskii was a very influential conservative political personality. He was known above all as the publisher of *Grazhdanin* which in the 1890s published opinions against Jews, foreigners, the *zemstvo* and public education, none of which prevented him from obtaining Witte's political and financial support.

35 The *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* was founded by Peter the Great in 1702 and was Russia's first newspaper. Throughout the 18th century, it was published within the Academy of Sciences by key personalities from intellectual life such as Lomonosov. In the 1860s, it became one of the main liberal newspapers, the direct opponent of the *Moskovskie vedomosti* of the conservative Katkov.

36 E.E. Ukhtomskii, "Ot redaktsii," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 3 January 1896, p. 1.

37 Ibid.

38 For his biography, see R.F. Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev, His Life and Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

East at the time submerged in political turmoil. Though a strategic zone, Russia nonetheless left it to one side after conquering the Amur and Ussuri regions and founding Vladivostok in 1860. The decision to build the Trans-Siberian Railway (1891), however, opened new prospects for Russia's access to the Pacific. The tsarist Empire took advantage of China's defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1895, occupying Manchuria in a bid to prevent Japan from either settling on the continent or having access to the ice-free waters of the Yellow Sea. Under the pretext of protecting the Middle Kingdom, Saint Petersburg set itself up in China with the help of Li Hongzhang, a representative of the Rusophile lobby in Beijing which had attended the coronation of Nicholas II.

In 1896, Russia signed with China a treaty in which it committed itself to protect the Chinese from any attack in exchange for fast communication routes. Russia founded the Russian-Chinese bank, headed by Ukhtomskii, in order to lend China the money required by Japan as war reparation. Witte then made Ukhtomskii Russia's unofficial ambassador in Beijing. The Prince accompanied Li Hongzhang and took part in the negotiations defining the route of the Trans-Siberian Railway in Manchuria. In 1897, he became President of the Chinese Eastern Railway Company, a 99-year concession given by China to Russia: the railway line had the legal status of a Russian enclave in China and turned Kharbin into a Russian colonial town. At the pinnacle of his political influence, Ukhtomskii was considered to be the unofficial but direct representative of the tsar in Asia. George Morrison, the correspondent in Beijing for *The Times*, thus wrote that though Ukhtomskii "does not have an official status and is not recognized by the diplomatic Corps, the Chinese regard him as the 'tsar's brother', or even as the tsar himself."³⁹

In 1900, Ukhtomskii was sent to Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion in order to deal with the difficult position that Russia had been put in, with both the Chinese and Western armies asking it for military reinforcement. Russia, which liked to present itself as China's protector made an offer to mediate between Beijing and the Westerners, but Ukhtomskii's delegation arrived only after the Europeans had already occupied the capital.⁴⁰ Once there, he made many diplomatic blunders which disappointed Russian political authorities. Some even maintained that, since he seems to have supported Bezobrazov's bellicose position against Witte's more moderate stance, he should be held

39 Quoted in Sir R. Hart, *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart Chinese Maritime Customs 1868-1907*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 1119-1120.

40 In 1900, Saint Petersburg opted for a policy that was very favorable to the Qing dynasty. Russian public opinion did not feel concerned by the Chinese anti-European attacks, which it considered were aimed at the West but not at Russia. Russia was, however, forced to take part in the crushing of the Boxers, but did so with little enthusiasm and never officially condemned anti-Western acts of violence. For more on the subject, see D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Russia's Ambivalent Response to the Boxers," *Cahiers du monde russe* 1 (2000), pp. 57-79.

partly responsible for the errors in Russian policy leading to defeat against the Japanese. He nonetheless managed to retain his place in power until 1917.

All the Orients in the Service of the Imperial Cause

Ukhtomskii attracted attention for his essay writing with the publication of tsarevich Nicholas II's travel notebooks, *Journey to the Orient of his Imperial Highness the Cesarevich*. This book, first volume of which came out in 1893, constituted the first manifesto of his Asiaticism. Ukhtomskii remained a prolific writer, publishing many brochures in the years before the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905. Drawn from thoughts had while traveling or from attempts to conceptualize Russia-Asia ties, his publications were most diverse: though they focused mostly on China, Tibet, and sometimes Japan, they also ascribed India a key role and included many positive images of Islam and Persia.

Ukhtomskii was part of a Third-Worldism "ahead of its time," as were many Germans, including in particular Friedrich Ratzel.⁴¹ Indeed, both Ukhtomskii and Ratzel longed for an alliance between Russia and Germany respectively with China and/or Japan, at the time considered Asia's "great" or so-called "intelligent" nations. Such yearnings seemed to augur a kind of a continental Axis or coalition of the Middle Kingdoms (Germany, Russia, and China) which might one day oppose the Anglo-Saxon maritime world. But, even for a Far East expert like Ukhtomskii, Asia was merely an instrument with which to oppose Europe: his overt sympathy for it mainly served as a means to denounce the West and the "injustices committed by white man."⁴² Ukhtomskii complained bitterly about Westerners, whom he held responsible for the sometimes difficult relations between Russia and Asia. The French and British schemes in China - their missionaries and their opium trade - contributed to fuelling Asian resentment against *all* Europeans, with whom the Russians were often assimilated. As he put it: "Russia was forced to suffer materially and morally from the Bacchanalia done in the Far East by Western peoples."⁴³

Though Ukhtomskii never gave up the idea to annex part of Asia, he never wanted to see it accomplished in a violent and military way. According to him, Asia and Russia had too many points in common for their fusion not to be carried out peacefully. Yet, like many contemporaries, Ukhtomskii's plans for Russian advance, conceived as answers to the demands of Nature (*stikhiinoe*),⁴⁴ denied the existence of any borders before the Pacific Ocean. He readily

41 See for instance, M. Bassin, "Imperialism and the Nation State in Friedrich Ratzel's Political Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 11 (1987), pp. 473-495; from the same author, "Race contra Space, the Conflict between German Geopolitik and National Socialism," *Political Geography Quarterly*, 6/2 (1987), pp. 115-134.

42 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *K sobytiiam v Kitae. Ob otnosheniakh Zapada i Rossii k Vostoku* (Saint Petersburg, 1900), p. 23.

43 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *Iz kitaiskikh pisem* (Saint Petersburg, 1901), p. 24.

44 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *Pered groznym budushchim. K russko-iaponskomu stolknoveniiu* (Saint Petersburg, 1904), p. 5.

compared the Russian expansion to the discovery of the Americas or to Vasco de Gama's circumnavigation: "In Asia, for us, there are in reality no borders, and there cannot be any other than those uncontrollable ones of the spirit of the Russian people, flowing freely forth along the shores of the vast blue sea."⁴⁵ Indeed, he made no secret either of his dreams of capturing India, Chinese Turkestan, Mongolia, and, above all, Tibet, nor of his hopes that future wars, terrible though they might be, would enable the constitution of a new Russian world Empire.

For Ukhtomskii, Russia was neither part of Europe, nor of Asia; it was a third world whose responsibility was to pacify the other two, but whose misfortune was to be the accidental victim of European colonialism. As he said: "Only Russia, [like] ancient Scythia (...), had maintained without change the balance between the oriental-type worlds and the Western-type worlds, which fight and oppose each other."⁴⁶ So, Ukhtomskii, deeming them superficial, called for the suppression of apparently existing borders: Russia was not, like every Western empire, a European state with colonies in Asia; it constituted a natural unity – and thus an indestructible one – on either sides of the Urals, claiming for itself the Scythian heritage of the middle world. Yet, this third continent was far from being neutral, since for Ukhtomskii Russia belonged much more to Asia than to Europe. Very conversant with oriental religions and a great admirer of Buddhism, he affirmed Russia's religious proximity to Asia. Staunchly opposed to the materialist and atheist West, he thus claimed that "for us, for the Russian Orient intact in its innermost depths, as for Asia, the foundation of life is faith."⁴⁷

As a result Ukhtomskii's relations with the Theosophical Society – founded in the West in 1875 and which kept several lodges in Russia toward the Bolshevik revolution – were ambiguous.⁴⁸ During his journey to India, the Crown Prince visited the Madras Society and met with one of its founders, Colonel H.S. Olcott (1832-1907). Ukhtomskii actually accepted to help Olcott by publishing and disseminating his fourteen-point call for the constitution of a syncretic universal religion in Russia. He also appealed to Buddhists from different countries to become aware of their shared unity⁴⁹ and considered this last point to be in harmony with the ideas of Russian Lamaists. He was hurt by the accusations of charlatanism against the Theosophical Society, and he suggested that Great Britain might have instigated them to counter the Russian

45 Ukhtomskii, *K sobytiiam v Kitae*, p. 84.

46 Ibid., p. 10.

47 Ibid., p. 8.

48 On Theosophy in Russia, see M. Carlson. "No Religion Higher Than Truth." *A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

49 Olcott also wanted to found an international cloister with several Buddhist universities in Buddha-Gaya – which was occupied by the British – in order to bring together the different Brahmanic sects.

presence in India. He also defended Helen Blavatsky's (1831-1891) passion for Buddhism, her openness to Orientals, and was very pleased with the positive image of Russia that she spread throughout Asia.⁵⁰ Ukhtomskii seems further to have hoped that theosophy would reconcile Christianity with Oriental religions by opening Christianity up to certain concepts coming from the Orient.

Russia and Asia's religious proximity was also considered an indication of the two spaces' *cultural* proximity. Thus, for Ukhtomskii, the Russian man in Asia was in no way equivalent to Westerner as regards colonial possessions: the Russian was not scornful of the autochthons and felt at home among them. Ukhtomskii even thought that Asian mores were not contrary to the assertion of the Russian greatness. For instance, he defended Islam at a time when the authorities in Saint Petersburg doubted the fidelity of Russian Muslims and worried about the discreet expressions of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism coming from Tatar elites. According to him, on the contrary, Russian autocracy was regarded sympathetically: Muslims "consider the conquest of Central Asia as something miraculous and are ready to reconcile with it."⁵¹ Ukhtomskii thus tried to rehabilitate the – often damaged and undermined – Turkic world in contrast to the "great" sedentary cultures, claiming that the nomads also had a high culture. He further advanced an historical argument according to which Russia was heir to the Mongol Empire, whose image he sought to restore: "Genghis Khan and Tamerlan, [were] leaders of huge armed troops, creators of unvanquished realms, [and] rulers with large spirits, [who] strengthened and enriched the pre-Petrovian Rus with their statist thinking (...), conservative in the Chinese way, [but] formed (...) by the advance of Western elements into the depths of Asia, where we are at home."⁵² The "Drang nach Osten" that began under Ivan IV would therefore mean the realization of Russia's mission, which awaited revelation from the Mongols, a topic that the Eurasianists later co-opted.⁵³

An Aryan Reading of the Asian Peoples

Ukhtomskii's reading of Asian cultures places him squarely in a tradition of Slavophile thinkers. His thought is indeed very close to notions advanced by the father of Slavophilism, A.S. Khomiakov (1804-1860), especially concerning the belief in the existence of two Asias, one "white," the other "yellow." "White" Asia denoted the Asia of Indo-Europeans, most especially of Iranians and Indians. Because the Slavs had supposedly shared with the Aryans the same cradle, i.e., Scythia, the Iranians and Indians are regarded as Russia's brothers. "Yellow" Asia designated the Asia of Turanian or Turkic-Mongol

50 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *V oblasti neviadaiushchei stariny* (Saint Petersburg, 1904), pp. 323-324.

51 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *Mekka v politicheskoi i religioznoi otnoshenii* (Moscow, 1890), p. 13.

52 Ukhtomskii, *Pered groznym budushchim*, p. 7.

53 M. Laruelle, *L'idéologie eurasiste russe ou Comment penser l'empire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).

peoples. Despite making this binary division, Ukhtomskii's own willingness to promote Buddhism as an Aryan faith simultaneously undermined it. Disseminating Buddhism in Asia was hence thought to be a means to create greater proximity with Russia and authorize the claim that Saint Petersburg's mission was to form allies with this Asian Aryan faith in order to reunify the continent under the domination of the Romanovs.⁵⁴

For several years Ukhtomskii was particularly close to Hermann Brunnhofer⁵⁵ (1841-1916), who was in charge of his public relations with Western Europe. Of Swiss origin, and holding a PhD in Indian antiquity from the University of Zurich (where he worked with Max Müller), Brunnhofer went to Courland in 1889, where he met Ukhtomskii, and ended up staying in Russia for a decade.⁵⁶ In several Germanophone Russian newspapers, such as the *Saint-Peterburg Zeitung*, he pleaded for the cause of Russian expansion in Asia. In his written works, and notably in *Russlands Hand über Asien – Historisch-geographische Essays zur Entwicklungsgechichte des russischen Reichsdenkens* (1897), he made use of Indo-European mythology to justify Russian colonization and speculated about developing a Chinese-Russian fusion to thwart Japanese expansionism. Brunnhofer claimed that the cradle of the Aryan world was not India but Central Asia. For him this was the meeting point of all races and the very the place of “race struggle”⁵⁷ which in its essence opposed two principles he considered governed the world, Iran and Turan.⁵⁸ In order to become a world power, Russia would then have to occupy this zone that had brought peoples and religions into conflict with one another. Ukhtomskii co-opted and developed this discourse, construing Central Asia as a world arena in which the struggle would be resolved between “the barbaric and eternally decadent Turan and the Iran of the Enlightenment, eternally on the defensive. (...) Hidden in here are all the world events of one of the oldest arenas of human activity.”⁵⁹

However it was Buddhism that remained Ukhtomskii's first Asian love. He was impressed with its level of adaptability to the most diverse cultures,

54 M. Laruelle, *Mythe aryen et rêve impérial dans la Russie du XIXe siècle* (Paris: CNRS-Éditions, 2005).

55 For a brief summary of his life and work, K. Ernst, “Hermann Brunnhofer,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig, 71 (1917), pp. 431-432, bibliography pp. 432-437.

56 He went back to Germany in 1899, taught ancient history and the historical geography of the Orient but also Russian in Berne, and then carried on his career at the University of Munich. He translated Ukhtomskii's and Nicholas II's travel stories into German.

57 H. Brunnhofer, “Arkheologicheskie zadachi i tseli Rossii v Tsentral'noi Azii,” *Russkoe obozrenie* 20 (November 1891), p. 297.

58 H. Brunnhofer, *Urgeschichte der Arier in Vorder- und Centralasien: historisch-geographische Untersuchungen über den ältesten Schauplatz des Rigvedas und Avestas* (Leipzig, 1893) and *Iran und Touran* (Leipzig, 1889).

59 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *Ot Kalmytskoi stepi do Bukhary* (Saint Petersburg, 1891), p. 63.

and thought that the Russians could learn tolerance and respect for power from it. He also appreciated “the human creed of Gautama, [which is] second only to Christianity,”⁶⁰ and, as a romantic, subscribed to the so-called mysticism of oriental religions and their intuition of a super-natural world. Russia’s first mission would be to reconstitute the unity of a Buddhist continent that had been divided up into states and colonies. Achieving such a feat would be made possible by some of its native minorities like the Buriats who were the “representatives of the Russian name at the very heart of the yellow world.”⁶¹ In Ukhtomskii’s thinking, Buddhism was very clearly associated with the Aryan world. He considered it to have been particularly important in India in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, “precisely when the Aryans were spreading their conquests to the Indian shores and began to feel the need for a vision of the world larger than that of the Veda.”⁶² According to him, this religion was particularly “Nordic,” insofar as Buddhist peoples had always prayed to Amītabha, i.e., the Buddha of the infinite light who ruled over the Nordic heavens, and had from time immemorial been attracted to “the ethereal regions of reverence and prayer, to those luminous spaces”⁶³ which were the country of the White Tsar. As a result, Buddhists peoples, he claimed “[would] instinctively feel [an] inner link with the power of the faraway North.”⁶⁴

Seen in terms of its expansion throughout the Asian continent and its presence as far north as Siberia, Buddhism “turned out to be the intermediary, the tie linking the South of Asia (...) to the North.”⁶⁵ Consequently, Ukhtomskii construed it as the strict precursor of a Russian Empire which was simply a North to South retracing of Buddhist expansion. Claiming, then, that Russian advance was merely the reverse counterpart of Buddhist expansion, Ukhtomskii provided further reinforcement for the arguments of White Tsar ideologists. This religion’s presence on Russian territory allegedly gave to the Empire a right of preemption to the Tibetan capital Lhasa. According to Ukhtomskii, if Russia had ruled Mongolia from the 17th century, it could have taken the whole Lamaic world before the British. As such, he called his fellow countrymen to have a greater awareness of Russia’s specific Asian role and hoped for a speedy development of scientific knowledge on Buddhism: “We are behind in our drive (...) to develop a more intimate relationship with the kingdom of the dalai-lama. Russia has all the ready information that would enable it to be ahead of every country in relations [with Tibet] thanks to its Buriats and

60 Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia II na Vostok*, volume 2, p. 12.

61 *Ibid.*, p. XII.

62 E.E. Ukhtomskii, *Iz oblasti lamaizma. K pokhodu anglichan na Tibet* (Saint Petersburg, 1904), p. 16.

63 E.E. Ukhtomskii, Preface to A. Grünwedel. *Mythologie du bouddhisme en Tibet et Mongolie basée sur la collection lamaïque du prince Oukhtomsky* (Lipsia, 1900), p. XVIII.

64 Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia II na Vostok*, volume 2, p. 61.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

its Kalmyks, its experts on the Mongol world and its travelers to Central Asia. Russia has a wealth of great experts on Buddhism such as for instance S.F. Oldenburg, and so many remarkable ethnographers such as D.A. Klemets, and yet it is from foreign hands that the most important information on Tibet has been received, this country which beckons us toward it in the remote hope (...) that one day we will see the dalai-lama, the Bantchen-Bongo incarnated, within the Russian sphere of influence."⁶⁶

Ukhtomskii was also a fanatic of Indian culture. On several occasions, he made known his belief in the Indian cradle of Aryanity, and regularly implied that Egyptian culture was greatly indebted to Indian culture, a classical idea from the end of the 18th century that had been widely discredited by the time of his writing.⁶⁷ His ideological reading of the Indian world, centered on the idea of Aryanness, was thoroughly ideological, and as such he poured scorn on British philologists in their attempts to prove an Aryan proximity between the English and the Indians.⁶⁸ This "sentimental fiction,"⁶⁹ as he called it, was of course in a similar vein to and in direct competition with his own discourse. According to him, the ethnic proximity between Indians and Russians was obvious. During their raids of the Indian sub-continent, the Aryans, he alleged, had conquered the dark-skinned Dravidian masses, while their brothers, who had remained further North, gave birth to the Scythian-Slavic world. Ukhtomskii even claimed that the Rajputs were ancient Scythians who had rather belatedly interbred with the first Aryan warriors. According to him "the mighty Aryans of the Vedas and the Indian epic who fought against the autochthons of Punjab and the Dekkan were the same Slavs who settled in the forests and along the rivers of pre-historical Russia."⁷⁰

He thought it was important to put the history of the two countries in parallel so as to let their common essence disclose itself: "for the European (...), visiting the most densely populated continent means opening to oneself and to one's compatriots a new world; for the Russian, it only represents a shifting of the limit of the already known frontiers (...) of Scythia."⁷¹ Besides making classical and inescapable references to Afanassii Nikitin,⁷² Ukhtomskii remarked

66 Ukhtomskii, *Iz oblasti lamaizma*, p. 128.

67 L. Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); M. Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

68 J. Leopold, "The Aryan Theory of Race in India, 1870-1920: Nationalist and Internationalist Visions," *The Indian Economic and Social Review* 2 (1970), pp. 271-297.

69 Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia II na Vostok*, volume 2, p. 119.

70 Ukhtomskii, *K sobytiiam v Kitae*, p. 3.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

72 Afanassi Nikitin (?-1472), a merchant from Tver, traveled for many years to the Orient (Caspian, Iran, India, Central Asia, Black Sea) from 1466 to 1472 and wrote a travel story which was published as *Voyage beyond Three Seas (Khozhenie za tri moria)* and is one of the oldest Russian texts about the Orient. He claimed he felt close to the peoples he encoun-

while travelling with the future Nicholas II in India on the similarities in the two peoples' clothing and aesthetic manners, and the similarity of community (*obshchina*) structures existing on both sides of the Himalayas: "These populations are foreign to the West but we Russians, we are closer to them; we understand better their simple and patriarchate mores. A glance is enough for us to see their deep resemblance with our own mujiks. Their features, the colour of their clothes, many details, of some of them, remind us of our compatriots."⁷³ Ukhtomskii also attempted to highlight a certain number of common spiritual features: the Russian peasantry's proclivity toward mysticism, he alleged, had come straight from Brahmanic India.

Finally, according to Ukhtomskii, both peoples were especially united in their age-old struggle against the Turkic enemy. "When the Hindustan and the Muscovite kingdoms were strongly subjected to the mores of their conquerors, they swiftly lost their Aryan character and adopted partly Turanian colours. (...) All this exudes a proximity that cannot be a matter of chance."⁷⁴ Ukhtomskii thus drew parallels between the two cultures' allegedly strong propensities to assimilate, which he considered a specifically Aryan trait, and something that had enabled both the Russians to conquer the Golden Horde and the Hindus to resist the Mughals. With so many common psychological features and shared historical events, Russia and India could have one common future only: the rejection of Western domination.⁷⁵ The world's future, for Ukhtomskii, would be played out in the two capitals of Asia, Saint Petersburg and Calcutta. However, he also conceived these two Aryans brothers as being in competition and was thus pleased at Russia's apparent supremacy, since Russia has managed as early as the 17th century to free itself from European colonialism by driving out the Polish conqueror from its borders; India, on the other hand, still remained silent under the British yoke. This led Ukhtomskii to hint at a possible future involving Russian domination over India, a "still possible coming, beyond the Hindu Kush, of the irresistible North."⁷⁶

However, Russia's mission was not simply to become aware of the unity of spirit and of historical ties with Asia. Ukhtomskii's insistence was above all on the notion of autocracy. According to him, in contrast to liberal Europe, Asia was the very image of a space still dominated by strong and undisputed power. At this point, the myth of the White Tsar conveniently re-surfaced to provide culturalist cover for justifying Russian autocracy: "All the peoples of

tered, particularly those of India, and availed himself of Arab, Persian or Tatar languages for the most "intimate" moments of his texts such as prayers, and in his final Orthodox orison God is even referred to by the name Allah.

73 Ukhtomskii, *Le voyage en Orient de son altesse impériale le césarevitch* (Paris: Charles Delagrave, 1893), p. 223.

74 Ukhtomskii, *K sobytiiam v Kitae*, p. 4.

75 Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia II na Vostok*, volume 2, p. 2.

76 Ukhtomskii, *K sobytiiam v Kitae*, p. 46.

the Orient (...) know the power of the White Tsar, at whose feet lies all Asia which is related to him."⁷⁷ The idea of the White Tsar, according to Ukhtomskii, appeared among the Asian peoples when the Russian medieval princes, driven by Christian spirit, defeated the Mongols thanks to their moral qualities. Consequently, Asian admiration for Russia could be explained by a sense of moral values and Christian goodness. Ukhtomskii thus tried to justify autocracy by claiming it was the only means by which Russia could progress in Asia: "The Orient believes in us (...) as far as we cherish the best of what was bequeathed to us by the past: autocracy. Without this, Asia is not able sincerely to love Russia and identify with it painlessly."⁷⁸ The basis for this proximity between Asia and Russia is thereby alleged to be found in their similarly conservative ideologies and propensity for theocratic ideas.

CONCLUSION

Russia's attraction to Tibet was significant for its direct political implications: ideologues of the "White Tsar," such as Badmaev, Dorzhiev and Ukhtomskii were men committed to their time who tried to take their country's destiny into their own hands. In so doing, they played a by no means insignificant role in the strategic setbacks suffered in the Far East and in putting their country on course for a war with Japan that would lead to bitter defeat – the first failure of a European power against a "yellow" people. However, their opinions cannot merely be reduced to "footnotes" of the diplomatic history of tsarist Russia's last years. For what the myth of the White Tsar in fact revealed were some hidden complexities of Russian imperial thinking: even if Buddhism had turned Russia toward the Tibetan and Mongol world, considered the living symbols of Turanism, it was also, owing to its origins, an eminently Indian creation, and thus regarded as Aryan. The myth of the White Tsar thus led to ideas that humanity's origins were located in the Hindu Kush or in the Himalayas, and thus cannot be separated from a European romantic reading of the Asian world.

What was at issue here was, the idea of an intimate connection between Lhasa and Saint Petersburg through Buddhism: Russia had been called upon to become the protector State of an originally Aryan religion decreed compatible with Orthodoxy (monotheism, faith in the philosophical precepts, and the existence of a historical founder). The myth of the White Tsar thus rested on ambiguities inherent in its terms: though the destiny of Russia was really Asian, nonetheless its autocratic power remained "white," and its Empire was the Empire "of the North." The figures described above, and E. Ukhtomskii in particular, provided equivocal characterizations of the Buddhist world: what

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷⁸ Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia II na Vostok*, volume 3, p. 33.

they tried to describe was a form of “yellow Aryanism,” an Asian version of Aryanity declared compatible with their own identity claims. This is how Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia and Manchuria – all objects of expansionist desires at the turn of the century – came to be subsumed under a supposedly anti-Chinese Buddhist unity with a paradoxically Aryan identity. The much-coveted possession of Tibet would guarantee Russia control over one of the supposed cradles of the Aryan race and lead it to world domination: the idea of a “Rome of Asia” is directly inscribed in a theocratic line of Russian messianic discourse which proceeds from Orthodoxy to Buddhism by way of Aryanism.

The key element of European imperial thought was without doubt Aryanism and in Russia it found a fertile and receptive soil. As Count de Seillière (1866-1955) stated in his book on Gobineau, *Count of Gobineau and Historical Aryanism* (Paris: Plon, 1903), Aryanism was the theoretical disguise of European imperialism: it extended to all the European peoples the supremacy that was once granted only to the descendants of the barbarian invaders. Along with other imperialist powers Russia clearly also felt obliged to provide ideological justifications for its colonial march into Central Asia and the Far East at the end of the 19th century. The discourse of the White Tsar is a point in case: its function is precisely to demonstrate the natural and non-violent nature of this advance, interpreted as the simple reunifying of different peoples destined to live under the same banner. The myth further served as a means to preserve the Empire’s autocratic power, the presumption here being that autocracy was the precise political element that tied Asia and Russia together in their common confrontation against Western democracies. Ukhtomskii’s particular choice of Aryan themes was thus visibly designed to render compatible Russia’s supposed Asian future and Slavophile sentiment: the claim that Lhasa was the “Rome of Asia” signalled its consistency with the Orthodox and theocratic idea of Moscow as the third Rome. Thus, in its Aryanist version, the notion of the White Tsar contributed to the legitimizing of Tsarist foreign policy at the end of the 19th century and inscribed Russia within the general European framework of “Romantic Imperialism.”