

Prince Ukhtomskii, *Russia's Imperial Destiny*, 1891

Our stay at Saigon, the base of French operations in the advance against important borderlands of China, will in its turn be marked by enthusiasm in the greeting of a friendly nation. For us Russians, who scarcely ever visit the distant lands of Asia to study the powers and the means of European colonists, a visit to the central point of the "Indo-Chinese" empire governed from Paris will be doubly instructive, doubly useful after seeing the British domains and patriarchally protected Java. This will be the more appropriate in that every figure, every vivid detail, every living fact, must and will lead us to reflect in what a marked degree we Russians, as regards our prestige in Asia, voluntarily resign to every comer from Europe our historical part and our inherited mission as leaders of the East.

In such an abnormal state of affairs all the gain, as regards material prosperity, falls to the share of the representatives of Western principles---representatives foreign in spirit, and in reality hateful to those peoples of an ancient type on whom they have forced themselves by means of their cannon. Burma, Cambodia, and Annam are no more; Siam is on the eve of dangerous external catastrophes; Japan is on the threshold of terrible internal dissensions; China alone, standing guard over its own, and unconsciously over Russian interests, holds its ground with the wisdom of the serpent, gathers its forces against the foe from beyond the seas, and anxiously glances toward the silent North, where is situated the only state from which the Celestial Empire, educated in autocratic principles, can expect moral support, disinterested assistance, and a practical alliance based on community of interests.

This northern land of mist, forest, and ice, the extreme east of Siberia, opened up by Khabaroff, and other bold pioneers like him, the land reunited to Russia by the genius of Mooravioff-Amoorsky---is still a realm of primitive quiet, of deepest stillness and stagnation. It is only with the end of the century, with the opening up of new ways of communication with our eastern coast, that a new era with all its unforeseen consequences may begin. Meanwhile the land bears the stamp of something unformed and sad, like the life of its original settlers. All the more attention and unprejudiced judgment, then, is required of anyone who would draw a parallel between the lands of the Pacific south now opening out before us, with the emerald island of Java, the inexhaustible natural riches of the Indo-Chinese soil, the self-confident vitality of the Celestial Empire, and the marshes and retired nooks, the boundless desert

borders of the country whose mission, in spite of all this, is to be a source of light for the neighboring expanse, with its countless population.

The tiny kingdom of Holland holds sway in Asia over more than thirty million human beings (and that, too, at the equator, in an earthly paradise), while in the third part of the same continent the most important power in it cannot reckon up one half the number. European colonizers, though not without envy and enmity, have shared among them the best coast districts of these lands. Towns of such universal commercial importance as Hong Kong and Singapore are the most eloquent witnesses to the indefatigable enterprise of Europeans amidst the prevailing Asiatic torpor. But while drawing the juices out of this gigantic continent, and, wherever possible, holding hundreds of millions in a state of economic slavery, do the pioneers of civilization hope for final success? Holding on to the brink and ledges of a precipice, are they not in a state of constant alarm, lest the stones should give way and hurl them into the abyss? When the whole East awakes, as it will sooner or later: when it realizes its mighty power and determines to speak its mind, then threats, violence, and superficial victories will not remedy the internal discord. This is why it is Russia's part to grow in power unobserved amidst the wastes and deserts of the North in expectation of the conflict between two worlds, in which the decision will depend on neither of them.

The idea of invading a complex foreign life, of using Asia as a tool for the advancement of the selfish interests of modern, so-called civilized, mankind, was repugnant to us. For more than two hundred years we have remained at home; for our natural union with Turkestan and the region of the Amur cannot be regarded as political annexations. We have remained at home with our traditional carelessness and indolence, while the Pacific has become the arena of western European advance against a native world with an ancient political constitution and an undoubted civilization of its own.

The results are patent. The strangers have dethroned and oppressed the East. Coming here to live and make money, they do not find a home (But any Asiatic borderland soon becomes a home for a Russian.) The natives are not brothers in humanity to them; for them the land is one of voluntary exile, and the people are considered as miserable and inferior beings. The latter gradually realize the meaning of these outrageous views, and repay their "masters" with intense hatred. But where and how are they to find protection and a bulwark against the foreign foe?

But the mythologizing spirit is still alive amongst them. The more actively Europe presses on Asia, the brighter becomes the name of the White Czar in popular report and tradition....

From that remote period when our great golden-domed Moscow, which but a little earlier was no more than a small town in an insignificant subordinate principality, received the blessing of the saints and was irradiated by the creative glow of the autocratic idea, the East, advancing on us with fire and sword, has masterfully drawn toward it the eyes of the Russians: has wakened in them sleeping powers and heroic daring: and now calls them onward to deeds of glory, to advancement beyond the bounds of a dull reality, to a bright, glorious, and ineffable future! There neither is nor ever has been a nation whose past is so closely bound up with its future, as may be seen in the growth of the Russian Empire. The man of the West (the German, the Frenchman, the Englishman, the Italian) must cross the seas to find relief from the pressure which overwhelms him at home. Far from his native land, he must build his temporal prosperity on a foundation of sand, and the more firmly he takes root there under conditions of the most favorable nature, the more evident does it become that his old home, and he the voluntary exile, belong to two perfectly alien worlds. Beyond the seas, away from the life of his native land, he may gain money and position, but cannot (except artificially and but for a short time) retain completely untouched the spirit of his people, their ideals and traditions.

Russia alone does not know what it is annually to send forth to foreign lands thousands of her sons who cannot find food and shelter amid the superfluity of wealth and labor falling to the share of their countrymen. With us there is work for all---work to last for hundreds of years; with us everyone who has hands to work is a welcome guest on our eastern, or, rather, southeastern borders, where a vigorous flow of life breaks forth in an inexhaustible spring, and the charms of an untrammelled life are an everlasting attraction. Properly speaking, in Asia we have not, nor can have, any bounds, except the boundless sea breaking for ever on her shores, an ocean as unfettered as is the spirit of the Russian people itself. When one states such an evident truth, one generally hears the reply: "What do we want with it? We have land enough already. As it is, we have spread and grown to a monstrous size, to the prejudice of the government of the state and to the direct harm of our radical population." But for Russia there is no other course than either to become what she is destined to be----a great power uniting the West with the East, or ingloriously and imperceptibly to tread the downward path, because Europe of

itself would crush us with its external superiority, while the races of Asia, awakened from their slumber by other hands than ours, would be in time even more dangerous to Russia than the nations of the West. Naturally we cannot, even in thought, admit of our ruin or future humiliation! The unavoidable growth of our historical heritage, our triumph over inimical principles, the coming supremacy of Russia in the greatest and most populous of continents, is perfectly evident to our spiritual eyes. In days of old, when communication with distant borderlands was far more difficult than in our days, vast empires, nevertheless, easily came into being, grew powerful, and extended their boundaries on the borders of semi-barbarous Europe and the East, fluctuating in form, but immutable in its essence. At the present time, when railways, the telegraph, the telephone, to say nothing of other inventions and improvements of importance, have simplified communication between all lands and nations to the last degree, there is scarcely any reason to fear either distance or the estrangement of the several parts of a single whole. Practically distance is almost nonexistent. What to our ancestors appeared simply near at hand now seems to lie immediately before our eyes.

All that used to be matter of report, a dream of a fabulous land on the very borders of the world, is now accessible by a journey of a few weeks. The twentieth century promises us even greater surprises in this respect. We must not blind our thoughts and our imagination by prejudices and fancied terrors to the undoubtedly coming events which will change all things. If on the threshold of a future of growing complexity we really thirst for moral healing, for great knowledge and unheard-of deeds in the cause of Russia and the Czar, we must first call to mind whence and how our native land came into being, whose blood it is that flows most abundantly in our veins, what are the brilliant traditions of our past. A predominant part in it has always fallen to the share of Asia. It was Asia that devastated us, and it was she, on the other hand, that renovated us. It is owing to her alone that the Russian mind has developed the idea of a Christian autocrat placed by Providence above all earthly vanity, amid a throng of heterodox but sympathizing races. An old Russian poem gives a characteristic view of the position of our sovereigns on the throne of Moscow---

"Our White Czar is a king above kings,
And he holdeth fast to the Christian faith,
To the Christian faith, to the faith of prayer:
He standeth forth for the faith of Christ,
And for the house of the Holy Virgin.

All the hordes have bowed down to him,
All the tribes have submitted to him,
Because the White Czar is king over kings."

The popular songs of Russia present us with a similar view of the secular prince of Moscow. In the letter of Ivan the Terrible to Prince Koorbsky there is a still clearer realization of the divine origin of all true autocratic thought and constant care for the good of the people: "The earth is ruled by the mercy of God and the grace of the Immaculate Virgin; by the prayers of the saints and the blessing of our fathers, and last of all, by us, its sovereigns." Where and when, in what European sovereigns, can we find more or as much humility in the estimate of their position? Such words could be used only by a sovereign deeply imbued with the Oriental view that the world is plunged in sin and falsehood; that he himself, a weak mortal, was strong and "wide ruling" only by the unseen favor of a bright and spiritual power, creating and maintaining all around him.

It is this sacred conviction which has given birth to the steadfast belief both of our rulers and of the ruled, that Russia is the source and center of an invincible might, which is but increased by the attacks of her foes. The East believes no less than we do, and exactly as we do, in the preternatural qualities of the Russian national spirit, but values and understands them just in the same measure as we treasure the most precious of our national traditions---autocracy. Without it, Asia would be incapable of sincere liking for Russia and of painless identification with her. Without it, Europe would find it mere child's-play to dismember and overpower us as thoroughly as she has overpowered and dismembered the Slavs of the West, now suffering a bitter fate. The question is: In whose name and by whose single will shall the heritage of Russia be ruled in the future?