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The “Borderland” of Europe and Asia: an Ambivalent Identity of Russia in British Public Opinion (in the British Press at the Turn of the 20th Century)

Abstract

This article deals with the problems of perceiving Russian identity in the British press at the turn of the 20th century. The analysis was conducted on the materials of the British press dealing with the Far Eastern Problem. We can compare how “Eastern” was Russia in comparison with the “True East” – Qing (Ch’ing) China and the other “equivocal European” – Meiji Japan.

The author analyzes publications in the leading British journals and newspapers of the time: “The Nineteenth Century”, “The Contemporary Review”, “The Fortnightly Review”, “The Times”, “The Economist” and in the illustrated magazine “The Punch”, for the period 1898–1901. The article displays the different sides of the Russian image in the press popular among “well-educated” Englishmen. The cartoons of “Punch” provide an extraordinarily rich resource for analyzing the Russian identity and its different features. The author focuses attention on an understanding of the Russian identity during the Boxer Rebellion.

Key words: image of the Other, British view on Russia, British press, the “break-up of China”, the Boxer Rebellion, the Far Eastern problem

Often Europeans consider Russia as the Other¹. But how deep is the gap between Russia and Europe? Is Russia the borderland of Europe and Asia or a fully “European” country? How “European” was pre-Bolshevik Russia of the 19th century in the European’s view? Now these questions seem significant as Russia tries to return to a pre-Bolshevik identity (Scott 2008; Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2010). To answer this question, we have analyzed the images of Russia in the British press at the turn of the twentieth century (Codell 2003, p. 16). “Civilizational” descriptions of Russia were not numerous in the British Press. However, they gave one an opportunity

¹ In this article we differentiate the term the “Other” in the following way. The “Other” is something, key features of which prohibit it from perceiving it as one’s “Own”. At the turn of the 20th century the culture and the way of thinking were key features to distinguish “civilized” and “uncivilized” nations. “Civilized nations” were strictly associated with the “West” – mainly Europe and the United States. “Uncivilized” ones were determined as the “East”. The West–East contradiction was the main feature of the mental map of the 19th century. The West was associated with energy, power, order and reason. In the image of the East the main accent was put on inactivity, infectivity, its hostility to the “Western order”. In the European’s view of the time, the West was exclusively good, the East needed to be improved.

to examine the idea of Russian identity in the British mind. The restricted volume of the work limits our research. We shall concentrate our attention on the British images of Russia and her activity in the region where the great Western and Eastern civilizations were in close contact – the Far East². In analyzing the British image of Russian activity in this region, we can compare how “Eastern” was Russia in comparison with the “true East” – Qing (Ch’ing) China. We shall compare the British perception of Russia and the other “equivocal European” – Meiji Japan³. Such research can uncover the views of Western public on Russia and related mental bodies. An understanding of the fundamental conceptual structure underlying the terms of identity is vital for an accurate interpretation of modern European and Russian political thought.

We have analyzed publications in the leading British journals and the newspapers of the time: “The Nineteenth Century”, “The Contemporary Review”, “The Fortnightly Review”, “The Times”, “The Economist” and in the illustrated magazine “Punch”⁴ for the period 1898–1901. The so-called “break-up of China”, “fight for the concessions”, where Russia was one of the main British antagonists, took place in this period. 1900 brought with it the ferocities of the Boxer Rebellion and its elimination, where Russia was one of the main powers destroying the Boxers on a par with Britain. How did the British view of Russian identity change in these years? Answering this question, we can more completely recognize the civilizational identity of the Russian Empire in the British minds. A civilizational approach and comparative method are the methodological basis of the work. Hence we can note some special methods, such as system and chronological approaches. Conceptions of stereotypes and myths of public consciousness were used during the interpretation of articles and cartoons.

Images of the Other and problems of identity are popular objects in contemporary social science. All of the works on the subject have different degrees of interest in this respect. We can note that the book by the distinguished historians Martin Hall and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2007) “Civilizational Identity: The Production and Reproduction of «Civilizations» in International Relations” highlights how cultural essentialism outside the West is connected to colonization. The work describes modern culture as an increasing hegemony of particular central cultures. The focus of the book picks up on the diffusion of values. The authors write mainly about contemporary American cultural hegemony. But this way of thinking is current for all works on culture and imagined differences. One of the book’s main ideas

² At the turn of the 20th century the East became associated in Britain with the Far East, instead of the Middle East (McKenzie 1985, p. 54).

³ One can see the images of British rivals in the East at the turn of the 20th century in Виктор А. Макаров (2010), “Конструирование соперников”: “британские конкуренты” в Китае по материалам английских периодических изданий (1898–1902). In А.В. Старцев (ed.) Международные отношения в Центральной Азии: история и современность: Материалы Международной научной конференции. Барнаул, 29 апреля 2010 г., Vol. II, Барнаул: Азбука, p. 77–80.

⁴ One can see the magnitude of cartoons for the study of international relations in Hammet D. Mather (2011, p. 103–105).

is of Western pretensions to uniqueness and superiority in the interconnection with the “other” cultures. The authors pay attention to “Western” cultural superiority to a greater extent than to the “non-Western” one. However, we can recognize that Western scorn for other cultures is only a particular case of common human scorn for the Other. In the book “The Empire of Civilization” Brett Bowden (2009) analyzes the process of the creation of an image of the outer world. The focus of the book picks up that this process was led mainly by restricted groups of people for their own profit. This position is constructive, but not absolute. In our opinion, it extremely simplifies the process of creating the Other.

Etienne Balibar (1998) in his article “The Borders of Europe” discusses the meaning of the Border in the European mind. He writes about the equivocal meanings of the concept of the Border in different times. His study on the problem of “borderlines” is extremely useful for our work. Jonathan Clarke (2005) in his work “Language and The Construction of Identity in Russia” analyzes the identity of Russia using the language construction common for Russians. He highlights the linguistic markers of the “Other” and one’s “Own”. This work is important for our research, as the author compares the “internal” and “external” images of Russia.

The book by Fred Dallmayr (2002) “Dialogue among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices” advocates greater research attention to the views of intellectuals from different cultures on the subject of dialogue among civilizations. The work pays attention to the global inequalities of power, wealth and knowledge of the participants of the dialogue. The work is about contemporary period, but its approaches are important also for this work. Therefore, I would like to draw attention to the work of Iver Neumann (1998) “Uses of the other. «The East» in European Identity”. Most of the important problems of identity, borders and the Other are discussed here. Anyone who is interested in the problem of the Russian image should find this book valuable.

Among recent works we can note the article by Henry Zhao (2008, p. 107–117), where the author examines the problem of China–Western cultural relationships. The author stresses the inequality of China’s cultural knowledge about the West and the West’s one about China and points out its consequences. Regardless of the limited scope of the work, Zhao draws some interesting and augmented conclusions. The book by the eminent Russian researcher into images of the Other Svetlana Luchitskaya (2001) sheds light upon the special features of determination of the Other and common traits of his image using the images of Muslims during the Crusades. In spite of the restricted field of her research, the book is one of the most interesting works of the Russian intellectual history.

The international relationships at the turn of the 20th century in the Far East have attracted considerable attention within world’s historiography. We can point out some works on the subject. The book by John Aldred (2004) reveals the concealed features of British imperial and foreign policy. However, the extensive chronological span of the work does not enable the author to describe in detail the period important for this paper. There is an interesting work by Ian Nish (2002) which examines Japanese policy as a part of the international system of the Far East. However, the author does not refer to the area of the impact of cultural images on

Far Eastern policy. The Russian researcher Evgeny Sergeev (1998) analyzes the different sides of international policy in the Far East at the turn of the 20th century. Still the author fails to analyze these materials in relation to the mental origins of the events in question. We can see that a substantial number of works is related to various aspects of the situation in the Far East at the turn of the 20th century. However, these are not the works on the meaning of the conceptions of Russian identity for Far Eastern policy within contemporary historiography.

After the defeat of China by Japan in 1895 the extreme weakness of the Celestial Empire was obvious to all. Expectations for the “break-up of China” existed. The governments of The Great Powers⁵ took measures to use or prevent it. Britain had an important commercial position in Far East; she was interested in the integrity of China. Russia carried out expansion in the North China (Dallin 2008, p. 56–64) – Mongolia and mainly Manchuria.

In years 1898–1900 Russia was presented in the British press as the main opponent of the United Kingdom in the Far East. Her aspiration to limit foreign trade in Manchuria was repeatedly emphasized by the British authors⁶. This conviction is vividly presented with cartoon in “Punch” entitled “«The Private Secretary» at the foreign office” (1898, p. 94; Figure 1). In the picture we can see an armed Russian brown bear closing the doors of China and preventing the British entering. The sign on the door reads as follows “The Same Old Door”. In the same way the cartoon’s author alluded that the conflict for the “Closed Door” was traditional for British relations with Russia. The policy of limiting trade was a part of Russian image of the time. The British businessman C. Moreign (1898, p. 398) emphasized it in the article “Recent Business Tour in China” in “The Nineteenth Century”. The problem of Russian protectionism was interestingly interpreted in the article “A Sample of Chinese Administration” (Cobbold 1899, p. 593–594). The author of this article said that Russian businessmen prevented foreigners from investing capital in Russia and “her” sphere in China, although the Russians had no experience and financial resources to do it themselves. At this time the “backward” states of the “East” were characterized in the same way (Douglas 1896, p. 906). There, maybe not deliberately, Russia was compared to an “Eastern state”, diverse from “The West” thanks to her trade policy. “Punch” cartoon “Quite at Home” (1901, p. 200; Figure 2) gives the other model of the British view of Russian identity. There we can see a Russian who is sitting comfortably in Manchuria and speaking with the Westerners. The Russian is a Cossack, dressed in a Caucasus-like outfit, armed with a spear, a sable

⁵ Under the term the “Great Powers” we mean the group of leading Western countries of the time. This term was popular at the turn of the 20th century. Usually the definition of the “Great Powers” included: Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia and sometimes the United States.

⁶ Russian activity in the Far East was the main “bogey” for British international policy of the period (Bourne 1970, p. 163). Crisis of Port-Arthur in 1898 was the lowest point of British-Russian relationships (Otte 2007, p. 216). Britain was busy in South Africa and her statesmen were especially afraid of Russia in the Far East. (*The Cambridge history of the British Empire* 1959, p. 512). British National Security Council supposed Russian main British enemy until 1903 (Hyam 2002, p. 262).

and broad Caucasus poniard. He is surrounded by luxurious Chinese things and he is smoking a long pipe, like a hookah⁷.

Most British authors voiced the opinion that Russian policy was not a fair one. “Russian’s «guaranties» mean nothing” – the British military asserted in “The Nineteenth Century” (Cobbold 1899, p. 592). In “The Fortnightly Review” the author stated that no agreement with Russia cost its paper (Krausse 1898, p. 356). In “The Economist” it was said that Russian guaranties were futile ones (*The Chinese Papers* 1898, p. 646). In the British understanding the British were ready to cooperate with Russia, but the Romanov Empire was not. Russian “duplicity” was vividly presented in “Punch” cartoon “Imperial Bruin” (1899, p. 242; Figure 3). There we can see the Russian Bruin, who solemnly promises not to be detrimental to China. But the Bruin is standing among a number of weapons and hides a list of “further demands to China” behind his back. We have to notice that his interlocutor – a woman – is called “Europe”. In the British view, the military character and duplicity of Russian policy in the Far East were its main features. “Russian” in a cartoon is always a military figure: a Cossack, a soldier, the Tsar in uniform or an armed brown bear. At the same time, Japan was denoted as the “civilized” power of the Far East. Japan’s economic and trade successes were stressed (Wilson 1898, p. 510–511).

The Boxer rebellion⁸ in 1900, spreading like wild fire, was a shock for the whole “civilized world”. The Boxer disturbances were perceived as the rebellion of Asia against Europe or even “Civilization”. The most part of press materials was devoted to the joint actions of the Great Powers against China. A number of reports about Russian military successes in Manchuria were on the pages of “The Times” (*The Siberian Frontier* 1900, p. 486; *Russo-Chinese Hostilities* 1900, p. 519; *Russia and China* 1900, p. 152). Russian individual activity in North China was reported with great sympathy. The eminent British journalist W. Reid appealed to the public to interact with Russia in China (Reid 1900, p. 318). However, in “The Economist” an anonymous author wrote that it was impossible to give Russia a chance to eliminate “the Boxers” in the name of Europe. Russia’s former image had been too shady (*Russian Diplomacy in China* 1900, p. 808).

At the time of the Boxer rebellion cartoons in “Punch” on the Chinese crisis enjoyed a great success. It gives us a chance to trace the evolution of the image of Russia. The first of them was “The Same Old Bear” (1900, p. 419; Figure 4). There we can see the Chinese Dragon, ready to fight. The British Lion and Russian Bear are dressed in European uniforms, stand at the center of the cartoon. Other states are

⁷ The Victorians accented not racial, but cultural differences with other nations (Porter 2004, p. 100).

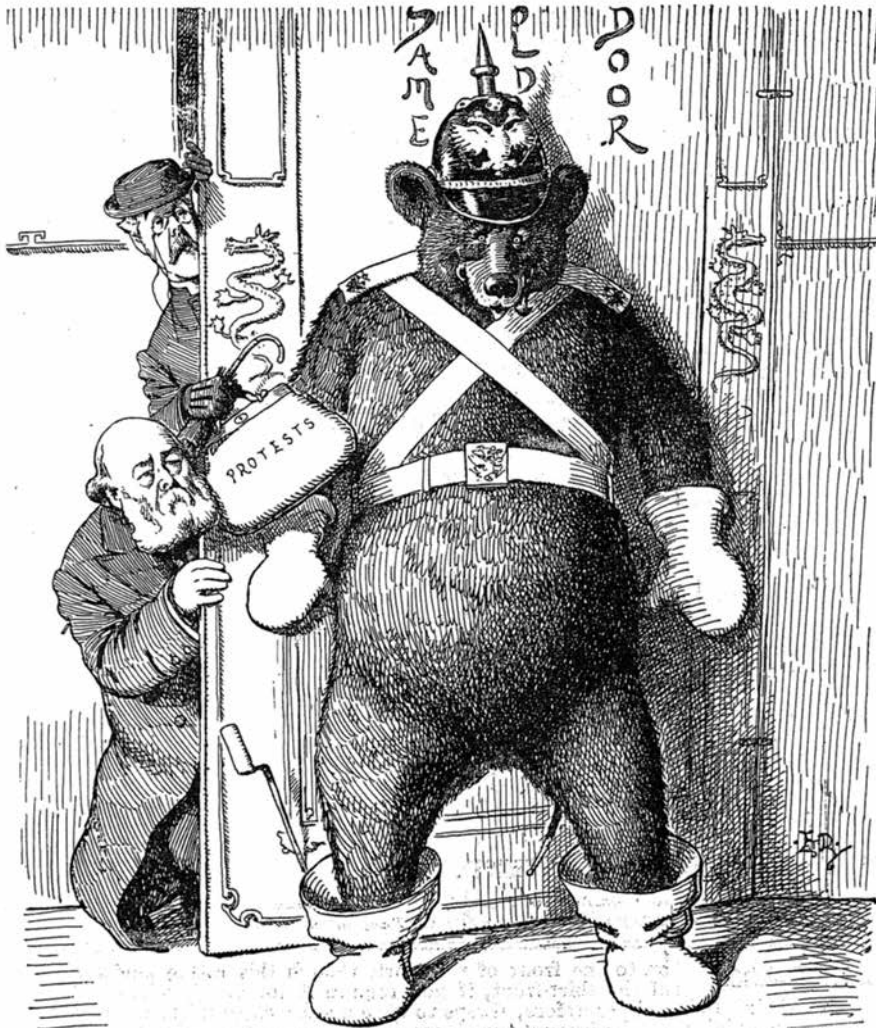
⁸ The Boxer rebellion (1898–1900) – anti-foreign movement in late Qing China. The bands of the “Boxers” attacked and killed foreigners and Chinese Christians and destroyed all that had a “foreign devil’s” origin. They were supported by some high-ranked Manchu’s courtiers and, finally, by the Empress Dowager Cixi. “Boxers” entered Peking and attacked foreign legations, jointly with the government’s best troops. Some detachments tried to destroy foreigners in the city of Tianjin. Finally European, Russian, American and Japanese military contingents scattered the Boxers and governments troops and took Peking. Japan provided the most soldiers for this action; Russian forces were most numerous too. Britain, being busy in South Africa, could send only a restricted number of troops to China.

pictured as animals near the edges of one. The Bear wants to eat the Dragon, but the Lion hinders him. Japan is presented as an ugly dragon with a samurai sword, dressed in European uniform. Russia is to become a man in the following cartoons. After "The Same Old Bear" she is presented as a Cossack or a soldier. In the cartoon "A Legacy of Discord" (1900, p. 459; Figure 5) a formidable Cossack, armed with a rifle, leads a group of Europeans who approach a curious Chinese. Small Japan with an old sword and "primitive" traditional armor stands aside in fear. The other Asian – the Chinese – is an utterly comic figure. He is dressed in an armored robe, has a shield with pictured muzzle and a curious spear. The Chinese man looks full of discouragement and amazement.

The third cartoon – "Rubbing in It" (1900, p. 11; Figure 6) – presents a bivouac of powers, participants of the advance on Peking. Two Englishmen, a Frenchman, a German and a Russian Cossack are sitting in a circle. The Russian with his huge sable, top fur hat and baggy trousers is the most Asiatic person of all. But the small Japanese man stands above the circle. He is armed with "primitive" traditional armor and sword. Besides, Japan says to all the Europeans, that he (Japan) might be dangerous for Europe. The cartoon hints that Japan's victory over China will be dangerous for the whole Europe – including Russia. The following cartoon depicts the advance on Peking (*To Peking* 1900, p. 47; Figure 7). All of the Europeans are dressed in identical knightly armors. The Russian differs from the German only by the eagles on helmets. The Japanese follows in the distance in front of the group. He is dressed in traditional Japanese armor and is armed with a samurai sword. In spite of the fact that he goes at the head of the group of Europeans, the Japanese is a comical figure.

To sum up we can say that at the turn of the 20th century Russia was usually presented in the British press as the Other. Her "non-European" features were stressed. The main characteristics of Russia were the features of her trade policy, which were incomprehensible and irrational for the British. Besides, Russia was seen by Britain as an unfriendly country. Russian Bruin wasn't a gentleman as the British had seen it. It was eluded, that the origins of Russia and her way of life are not "Western" at all. Often Romanov's Empire was even perceived as an "Asiatic" state. It was related to the long-living anti-Russian stereotypes in the nineteenth century United Kingdom.

However, Russia was recognized as a "European state" during the Boxer Rebellion. Although in the British press the idea of cooperation with Russia became a subject of discussion, the armed Bruin became a very useful ally. He led the other Europeans to fight the Dragon. From cartoon to cartoon the Europeans and Russia were fighting side by side. The differences of Russia and Europe vanished in the "Punch" cartoons. At last Russia became a fully "European" country. Japan at that time became more and more Asiatic. She lost European uniform and was dressed in ancient and "uncivilized" arm robe. We can see polarization of "European" and "Asian" participants of the events, related with the Boxer Rebellion. In this process Russia undoubtedly was the part of Europe. Her "Asiatic" features were not as considerable as to be the "Other" before un-European menace. Russia was one of the equal participants in the "European Crusade" against China. Thus Russia, being "Other" during peace time, became our "Own" for the British in the face of a "Strange" Asiatic enemy.



"THE PRIVATE SECRETARY" AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE.

The Rev. Arthur B-l-f-r. "DO YOU KNOW, WE'RE TAKING QUITE A DISLIKE TO YOU! IF YOU GO ON PUSHING IN THIS RUDE WAY WE SHALL REALLY HAVE TO HURT YOU DREADFULLY! I DON'T KNOW THAT WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO TAKE ANOTHER HARBOUR SOMEWHERE!"

Fig. 1. *The Private Secretary at the Foreign Office*



Fig. 2. Quite at Home



Fig. 3. *Imperial Bruin*



THE SAME OLD BEAR.

Fig. 4. *The Same Old Bear*



A LEGACY OF DISCORD.

CHINAMAN. "YOU ALLEE CHOP-CHOP ME NOW, BUT WELLY SOON FERRIN DEVIL CHOP-CHOP FERRIN DEVIL!"

Fig. 5. A Legacy of Discord



“RUBBING IT IN!”

JAPAN (addressing the Powers). “DELIGHTED TO JOIN YOU, GENTLEMEN; BUT PERMIT ME TO REMARK THAT IF SOME OF YOU HADN'T INTERFERED WHEN I HAD HIM DOWN, IT WOULD HAVE SAVED ALL THIS TROUBLE!”

Fig. 6. Rubbing in It



TO PEKIN !

JAPAN. "EN AVANT!"
RUSSIA (aside). "I DO HOPE HIS MOTIVES ARE AS DISINTERESTED AS MINE!"

Fig. 7. To Peking

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Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest rekonstrukcja wizerunku Rosji w brytyjskiej prasie przełomu XIX i XX wieku. Analizując materiały dotyczące „problemu Dalekiego Wschodu” autor pokazuje, na ile „Wschodnią” wydawała się Brytyjczykom Rosja w obliczu „prawdziwego Wschodu” – Chin okresu dynastii Qing (Ćing) oraz innego kraju o niejednoznacznie europejskiej tożsamości – Japonii epoki Meiji. Badaniem objęto rysunki satyryczne zamieszczone w latach 1898–1901 w czołowych brytyjskich czasopismach i gazetach tamtych czasów: „The Nineteenth Century”, „The Contemporary Review”, „The Fortnightly Review”, „The Times”, „The Economist” oraz ilustrowanym tygodniku „Punch”. Autor ukazuje różne aspekty wizerunku Rosji w prasie cieszącej się popularnością wśród „dobrze wykształconych” Brytyjczyków. Nadzwyczaj bogatym źródłem analizy rosyjskiej tożsamości są rysunki satyryczne w magazynie „Punch”. Autor poświęca szczególną uwagę wizerunkowi Rosji podczas Powstania bokserów.