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IMAGINING THE RUSSIAN CONCESSION IN HANKOU*

ALAN CRAWFORD
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

ABSTRACT. *In 1896, the Russian empire established a territorial concession in the Chinese treaty port of Hankou. Russian activity in the treaty ports has usually been subsumed into a wider 'European' or 'Western' presence, the assumption being that the Russian empire copied existing British and French concessions. This article traces the development of the idea of establishing a Russian concession from its inception to the early years of its development. The various arguments made at different stages in this process make clear that the decision was not a simple case of imitation of existing concessions, but was reached in the context of a broader shift in ideas about the proper relationship between economy, nation, and the Russian imperial state.*

On 14 April 1896, the Russian empire took control of a piece of land outside the Chinese city of Hankou.[1] While Russia's role in north-eastern China in the decade before the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) is well documented, this outpost in central China remains little studied.[2] It was not typical of Russian imperial possessions. The rest of the empire formed a single mass, accumulated

School of Humanities, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 800 Dongchuan Rd, Shanghai, China
alancrawford@sjtu.edu.cn

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[1] For the text of the agreement, see P. E. Skachkov and V. S. Miasnikov, eds., *Russko-kitaiskie otnosheniia, 1689–1916: ofitsial'nye dokumenty* (Russo-Chinese relations, 1689–1916: official documents) (Moscow, 1958), pp. 69–70. Note that dates in the body of the article are according to the modern Gregorian calendar. Dates of Russian diplomatic correspondence in footnotes give the Gregorian date first followed in brackets by the date according to the Julian calendar in use in Russia until 1918, which was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century and thirteen in the twentieth.

[2] Exceptions are V. G. Datsyshen, 'Russkie v Khan'kou: iz istorii rossiisko-kitaiskikh otnoshenii vtoroi poloviny XIX – pervoi poloviny XX v.' (Russians in Hankou: from the history of Russian–Chinese relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), *Rossiia i Kitai: Nauchnye i Kul'turnye Sviazi*, 2 (St Petersburg, 2012), pp. 67–80; and K. Eiermann,

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by conquest and colonization of contiguous territory. The new acquisition in Hankou, by contrast, was an urban commercial enclave 1,400 miles beyond the Russian frontier. Though it would be bound by Russian law and patrolled by Russian troops, the land was only leased, not annexed. Chinese residents did not become Russian subjects but remained answerable to their own government. Such territories were known as concessions, and Russia's move into Hankou marked the start of its quarter-century-long experiment with this distinctive form of colonialism.

Hankou was a treaty port, one of the cities in which the Qing empire, under duress, allowed foreign trade and residence. The first treaty ports were created after Britain defeated the Qing in the First Opium War (1839–42) and demanded access to five coastal cities. Other countries soon concluded similar agreements, with most-favoured-nation clauses extending any new privilege won to every 'treaty power'. The introduction of extraterritoriality made treaty-power nationals immune to Qing justice and provided legal justification for self-governing foreign concessions in Chinese cities.[3] Propelled by a series of wars, the foreign presence expanded. When the Qing dynasty fell in 1911, seventeen countries had access to dozens of treaty ports and sixteen ports contained one or more concessions; Hankou eventually had five. Colonialism in China became a multi-national phenomenon.

Located 430 miles inland on the Yangzi River, Hankou became a treaty port after the Second Opium War (1856–60). A British concession (established 1861)[4] was later followed by German (1895), Russian (1896), French (1896), and Japanese (1898) concessions. This influx of concessions in the 1890s has received little attention from historians since H. B. Morse succinctly explained it a century ago: after the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5), 'advantage was…taken of China's condition of abasement to establish new foreign "concessions" at several of the treaty ports…At Hankow, obviously destined to be a great railway centre, all joined in the scramble.'[5] Morse thus identified three causal factors: post-war Qing weakness made further foreign encroachment possible; ideas about the role of railways in the future development and exploitation of China made Hankou strategically important; and imperial competition drove a 'scramble' for concessions.

Morse's account is not inaccurate; certainly, these factors featured in the Russian case. However, it is typical of most subsequent literature in its focus on diplomacy and implicit homogenization of the foreign powers. Historians of the treaty ports, focusing on Sino-foreign relations, have often characterized

'The Russian concession in Wuhan (1896–1925): imperialism and great power rivalry', *Comparativ*, 15 (2005), pp. 39–49.

[3] See P. Cassel, *Grounds of judgment: extraterritoriality and imperial power in nineteenth-century China and Japan* (Oxford, 2011).

[4] B. Dean, 'Sino-British diplomacy in the 1860s: the establishment of the British concession at Hankow', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 32 (1972), pp. 71–96.

[5] H. B. Morse, *International relations of the Chinese empire*, III (London, 1918), p. 122.

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the foreign element as 'Western', or 'modern', implying a certain internal similarity at least by contrast with 'traditional' China.[6] As in Morse's account, this makes inter-state politics the default framework for understanding the proliferation of concessions: imperial competition determined the timing and location, but, as products of a homogeneous 'West', the concessions themselves are unexamined. More recent work on the foreign presence concentrates on the British and the city of Shanghai, for many scholars 'the concession city par excellence'.[7] Broader claims about the 'West' in China, however, still often seem like extrapolations of these two cases.[8]

This elides the question of how concessions were reproduced by empires that were dissimilar in significant respects. The Russian empire is an awkward fit in an undifferentiated 'West' based on Britain. Its territorial contiguity, multi-ethnicity, peasant economy, and autocratic government have led to it being described as a 'hybrid' empire, comparable to dynastic empires like the Ottoman and Persian as well as 'modern' maritime colonial empires like the British and French.[9] Historians of British imperialism generally see concessions as examples of 'informal empire', designed to secure access to the Chinese economy with a minimum of risk and expense.[10] Informal influence of this type, however, was rarely a feature of tsarist imperialism.[11] Imperial Russia can scarcely be described, as Britain has been, as 'the core of a larger "world-system"…much more than a "formal" territorial empire'.[12]

Why and how did continental, autocratic Russia adopt a form of colonialism developed decades before by insular, free-trading Britain? Edward Said noted that colonialism includes the 'imaginative processes at work in the production

[6] The classic critique of this approach is P. A. Cohen, *Discovering history in China: American historical writing on the recent Chinese past* (New York, NY, 1984).

[7] O. A. Westad, *Restless empire: China and the world since 1750* (London, 2012), p. 62.

[8] This point is made in S. Hanneman, 'Moving beyond the "unequal treaties"', *Frontiers of History in China*, 7 (2012), pp. 344–75, at p. 345. Recent work looking beyond the British and Shanghai includes B. Goodman and D. Goodman, eds., *Twentieth-century colonialism and China: localities, the everyday, and the world* (Abingdon, 2012); R. Bickers and I. Jackson, eds., *Treaty ports in modern China: law, land and power* (Abingdon, 2016); R. Rogaski, *Hygienic modernity: meanings of health and disease in treaty port China* (Berkeley, CA, 2004).

[9] D. Lieven, 'Dilemmas of empire, 1850–1918: power, territory, identity', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (1999), pp. 163–200. On the Russian empire in comparative perspective, see I. Gerasimov, J. Kusber, and A. Semyonov, eds., *Empire speaks out: languages of rationalization and self-description in the Russian empire* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 3–32. See also A. Morrison, 'How "modern" was Russian imperialism?', in T. Uyama, ed., *Empire and after: essays in comparative imperial and decolonization studies* (Sapporo, 2012), pp. 1–17.

[10] J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The imperialism of free trade', *Economic History Review*, 6 (1953), pp. 1–15; J. Osterhammel, 'Britain and China, 1842–1914', in A. Porter, ed., *The Oxford history of the British empire*, III: *The nineteenth century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 146–69. For some qualifications, see B. Dean, 'British informal empire: the case of China', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 14 (1976), pp. 64–81.

[11] D. Lieven, *Empire: the Russian empire and its rivals* (London, 2000), p. 267.

[12] J. Darwin, *The empire project: the rise and fall of the British world-system, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 1.

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as well as the acquisition, subordination, and settlement of space'.[13] Morse dealt with acquisition, but concessions were more than lines on a map: they were collections of buildings, people, institutions, ideas, and practices, all changing over time. What did it mean for Russians to 'imitate' them? If treaty ports and concessions were originally imagined as not only serving the interests but 'express [ing] the ideals…of Britain's worldwide commercial expansion',[14] how did Russians, subjects of a 'Eurasian, never fully capitalist or bourgeois polity', imagine them?[15] A purely diplomatic account of the establishment of the Russian concession abstracts it both from the imperial imaginaries that gave it meaning and the colonial practices that gave it form.

Discussing the diffusion of ideas and practices among empires, Ann Stoler and Carole McGranahan suggested 'a "modular" model of colonialisms' similar to Benedict Anderson's explanation of the spread of nationalism.[16] For Anderson, forms of nationalism became imaginable in specific historical circumstances, but, once created, they became 'modular': 'capable of being transplanted…to a great variety of social terrains'. Later nationalisms drew on earlier models for inspiration, though models also 'imposed certain "standards" from which too-marked deviations were impermissable'.[17] The Russians who conceived, constructed, and administered the concession in Hankou, however, rarely stated explicitly what meanings they attached to it. Stoler and McGranahan therefore suggest studying the comparisons drawn by contemporaries: how Russians imagined their concession must be inferred from how they framed the decisions that shaped it. Together, these suggestions offer a constructive approach to studying the trans-imperial spread of the concession form.

This article follows the proposal for a Russian concession in Hankou from its inception to the early stages of implementation. Mercantile interests in Hankou, diplomats in Beijing, and statesmen in St Petersburg all imagined the concession differently, bearing out Stoler and McGranahan's insistence on comparison as an 'active, political' process:[18] at each stage, Russians looked to Britain and others for models to adopt, adapt, or reject, but the comparisons they drew were imaginative processes framed by their particular local and imperial contexts. Reproducing the concession form in all its complexity entailed constant comparisons at different scales and levels of abstraction. This cautions

[13] E. Said, 'Representing the colonized: anthropology's interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (1989), pp. 205–25, at p. 218.

[14] J. K. Fairbank, 'The creation of the treaty system', in J. K. Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge history of China*, x: *The late Ch'ing, 1800–1911, part 1* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 217.

[15] J. Burbank and M. von Hagen, 'Coming into the territory: uncertainty and empire', in J. Burbank, M. von Hagen, and A. Remnev, eds., *Russian empire: space, people, power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington, IN, 2007), p. 21.

[16] A. Stoler and C. McGranahan, 'Introduction: refiguring imperial terrains', in A. Stoler, C. McGranahan, and P. Perdue, eds., *Imperial formations* (Santa Fe, NM, 2007), pp. 3–42.

[17] B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (revised edn, London, 2006), pp. 4, 81.

[18] Stoler and McGranahan, 'Introduction', pp. 14–15.

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against understanding the modularity of concessions as simple imitation. Instead, I suggest that the Russian empire's adoption of the concession model must be understood as part of a broader, multi-faceted process of reimagining the relationship between economy, nation, and the Russian imperial state.

I

To understand how Russians imagined their own concession, it is necessary to outline the prior development of the concession model and Russian engagement with it. The model was pioneered in Shanghai, though the British, American, and French enclaves established there in the 1840s were technically 'settlements': foreigners leased property directly from the Qing authorities, whereas in concessions foreign states leased whole areas then sublet plots. Evolving ad hoc, Shanghai's foreign settlements were products of their time. In the mid-nineteenth century, the international spread of tariff reduction, championed by Britain and France, accompanied visions of a peaceful, progressive, commercial 'Commonwealth of Europe'.[19] The emerging concession model reflected this optimism. The key comparison by which the foreign presence was defined was between the 'West', glossed first as European and Christian and later as 'civilized' and 'white', and backward, 'Asiatic' China. When in 1863 Shanghai's British and American settlements joined to form an International Settlement, business interests combined to assert its independence from any country's formal control.[20] The municipal seal adopted in 1869 displayed the flags of twelve nations and the motto *Omnia juncta in uno*: 'All joined in one.'[21]

After the Second Opium War, Shanghai served as the base for establishing concessions in second-wave treaty ports like Hankou. Shanghai's foreign zone was already being described as a 'model settlement',[22] a phrase also applied to planned industrial towns in Britain and missionary-run villages for Christian converts in India; some no doubt imagined the International Settlement as fulfilling something of both exemplary functions. But it was true also in a practical sense: developing concessions became a modular process of importing 'versions of Shanghai precedents' for administration, regulation, and infrastructure, even into territories that were often tiny by comparison.[23]

[19] A. Howe, 'Free trade and global order: the rise and fall of a Victorian vision', in D. Bell, ed., *Victorian visions of global order: empire and international relations in nineteenth-century political thought* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 32–7.

[20] Fairbank, 'Creation of the treaty system', pp. 216–17, 237–43.

[21] I. Jackson, *Shaping modern Shanghai: colonialism in China's global city* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 7.

[22] Giquel to Hart, 1 Feb. 1866, *Reports from the foreign commissioners at the various ports in China, for the year 1865* (London, 1867), p. 98.

[23] R. Bickers, *The scramble for China: foreign devils in the Qing empire, 1832–1914* (London, 2011), p. 155; see also R. Bickers, 'British concessions and Chinese cities, 1910s–1930s', in

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Russia, meanwhile, was recovering from the Crimean War (1853–6). Defeat by Britain and France was seen as an indictment of Russian socio-economic organization and prompted major reforms. Hopes that Russia was again converging with Europe mingled with resentment: British and French discourse of the time regularly portrayed Russia as 'Asiatic' and 'barbaric', often explicitly categorizing it alongside China. In response to perceived rejection by 'the West', some Russians looked to 'the East' as an arena where Russia could regain its pride and status. But the methods would matter. The writer Ivan Goncharov, visiting Shanghai in the 1850s, was not alone in questioning the wisdom of imitating 'how the English accomplish this: they get rich on account of the Chinese, poison them [with opium], and then despise their victims'.[24] Nor was he the last to imagine, as Susanna Lim summarizes it, a 'Russian and continental' model of expansion that was 'less cynical and more organic' than that of Britain.[25]

The imaginative work of Russian imperialism, then, involved trying to compete with, and assert equality with, the self-appointed European bearers of 'progress' and 'civilization', while maintaining Russia's distinctiveness and often its moral superiority. Post-Crimean imperial policy in East Asia displayed traces of both these contradictory imperatives. Russia tentatively joined the general turn to tariff reduction, signing a more liberal trade agreement with the erstwhile enemy, Britain, in 1859.[26] The Second Opium War presented another opportunity: at negotiations in 1858 and 1860, Russian diplomats persuaded the beleaguered Qing to cede the vast Amur River basin, the future site of the city of Vladivostok.[27] In light of the wider incorporation of the Pacific Rim into the global economy, great hopes were attached to its commercial prospects. The Amur valley was declared a 'free-trade zone' and its governor courted foreign businesses.[28]

The negotiations of 1858 simultaneously made Russia a treaty power.[29] Since the First Opium War, the Qing had refused Russian requests to access the treaty ports on the grounds that the two empires could trade at the frontier town of Kiakhta as they had since 1727.[30] Some historians have seen Kiakhta as a prototype treaty port, albeit inland and founded on conditions of equality;[31] in the

B. K. L. So and M. Zelin, eds., *New narratives of urban space in Republican Chinese cities: emerging social, legal and governance orders* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 164–8.

[24] I. Goncharov, *Frigate Pallada* (1855), quoted in S. S. Lim, *China and Japan in the Russian imagination, 1685–1922* (Abingdon, 2013), p. 85.

[25] Ibid., p. 89.

[26] Howe, 'Free trade', p. 34.

[27] R. K. I. Quested, *The expansion of Russia in Asia, 1857–1860* (Kuala Lumpur, 1968).

[28] M. Bassin, *Imperial visions: nationalist imagination and geographical expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 147–52.

[29] Quested, *Expansion of Russia*, pp. 107–8.

[30] S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial rivals: China, Russia, and their disputed frontier* (Armonk, NY, 1996), pp. 58–70.

[31] M. Mancall, *Russia and China: their diplomatic relations to 1728* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), p. 275.

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1890s, some Russians, echoing Goncharov, would point to it as an example of Russia's morally superior treatment of China. But in the 1850s, Russia's major exports at Kiakhta – furs and woollen textiles – were suffering from dwindling stocks and competition from the new coastal treaty ports. The main Qing export, tea, meanwhile, was becoming a mass-market product in Russia.[32] Treaty-power status could not save Siberia's devastated fauna, but it did allow Russian tea traders to cut costs by operating directly in the central mart of the growing regions: Hankou.

Russians arriving in Hankou in the 1860s mostly settled in the British concession, which, following the example of Shanghai's International Settlement, was open to merchants of all treaty powers. In Hankou, the Russians helped form, as a Russian resident later described it, a 'single international colony…[with] a social life of close unity of all residents, without distinction of nationality'. '[T]he foreigners liv[ed] as one close European family', albeit with a 'clear tendency to English customs and practices'. Russians took 'a highly active part' in foreign social life at the Hankou Club and the Race Club.[33] Russian firms tapped into foreign transport networks, sending tea down the Yangzi to Shanghai, from where it either went up the coast to Tianjin and overland to Kiakhta or directly to European Russia in ocean-going vessels. The trade prospered: 8,554 chests of tea were sent to Russia from Hankou in 1867, rising to 9,120 in 1868 and 26,446 in 1869.[34]

By the 1880s, Russians had built several large factories for producing brick tea as well as some of the finest homes in the city and a 'small but very beautiful' Orthodox church in a corner of the British concession.[35] Successful integration shaped how metropolitan Russians perceived the treaty ports: one observer marvelled, 'who would have thought that Siberians, living in…China, are made more European? They read foreign newspapers, know languages.'[36] Foreign Hankou imitated what foreign Shanghai self-consciously modelled: not only administration, regulation, and infrastructure but an image of itself as a pan-European 'cosmopolitan republic' that transcended national attachments in the pursuit of commerce and progress.[37] International competition remained a factor in Russian imperial policy, as it did for other empires, and, like others, some Russians imagined their empire as morally superior. But in the 1860s, domestic reform in Russia, the international influence of free-trade

[32] S. Thompstone, 'Russia's tea traders: a neglected segment of a still neglected entrepreneurial class', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 24 (1980), pp. 131–63, at p. 132.

[33] 'Russkii klub v Khan'kou…1897–1922: kratkii istoricheskii ocherk' (The Russian Club in Hankou…1897–1922: a short historical essay), Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), Bel'chenko papers, box 24, folder 13.

[34] *O Russkoi torgovle v Khan'kou za 1869 god* (On Russian trade in Hankou for 1869) (Moscow, 1870), p. 9.

[35] V. Nadarov, *Materialy k izucheniiu Khan'kou* (Materials for study of Hankou) (Vladivostok, 1901), p. 81.

[36] Quoted in Datsyshen, 'Russkie v Khan'kou', p. 70.

[37] Giquel to Hart, 1 Feb. 1866, *Reports from the foreign commissioners*, p. 98.

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ideology, and the adaptability of the Russian tea traders combined to incorporate a Russian component into the economic, institutional, and imaginative frameworks of the developing model of 'European' concessions in China.

II

Cracks in the image of European solidarity in the treaty ports began to show in the 1890s. In September 1895, the Russian minister in Beijing, Count Artur Pavlovich Kassini, reported that some Russian tea traders in Hankou had petitioned him about the possibility of establishing a separate concession. It is not clear how spontaneous this petition was: it is possible that the merchants were prompted by the Russian consul in the city. For two decades after the opening of the port, various local Russian merchants acted as vice-consuls, but as the trade grew in importance the state took more interest and in 1882 appointed a permanent representative. In 1895, the Russian consul in Hankou was Aleksandr Stepanovich Vakhovich. Unofficial sources from a few years later attribute the genesis of the concession idea to him.[38]

The consul's involvement is plausible. Many of Vakhovich's generation of Russian consular staff came to the service without aristocratic connections but with university degrees, professional backgrounds, or personal experience of commercial affairs. Such men were particularly successful in East Asia; some even reached the position of minister, a rarity in European capitals. Contemporaries blamed the increasingly mercenary environment in China. 'Change was necessary', one Russian recalled; 'the old nobility' was being replaced by a new breed of 'diplomatic businessmen'.[39] Vakhovich, son of a Vladivostok merchant, was of this type. He found the established Russian commercial communities in the treaty ports staid and complacent by comparison with other foreigners. While other nations raced to 'line their pockets at China's expense', the Russians, he noted sarcastically, 'sat by quietly and nobly as before'.[40]

According to Kassini, the petition centred on the advantages of a concession for the development of direct shipping between Hankou and Russia.[41] Perhaps not coincidentally, Vakhovich's brother worked for the Vladivostok firm

[38] Shishkin to Ivashchenkov, 29 (17) Sept. 1895, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive, RGIA), f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 1, mentions the petition; Vakhovich is credited in Nadarov, *Materialy k izucheniiu Khan'kou*, p. 81; and L. N. Pavlenkov, *Pamiati Aleksandra Vakhovicha, Russkii konsul v Khan'kou* (Memories of Aleksandr Vakhovich, Russian consul in Hankou) (St Petersburg, 1904), p. 7.

[39] A. M. Kotenev, *Big trifles and little people: memoirs of a Russian nobleman* (Lincoln, NB, 2000), p. 120.

[40] Quoted in I. V. Lukoianov, *'Ne otstat' ot derzhav...': Rossiia na Dal'nem Vostoke v kontse XIX–nachale XX vv.* ('To keep up with the powers…': Russia in the Far East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) (St Petersburg, 2008), p. 120.

[41] Kassini to Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MID), 19 (7) Sept. 1895, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 2.

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Shevelev & Co., which some years before had tried, unsuccessfully, to start steamer services from Vladivostok and Nikolaevsk to Hankou.[42] The only Russian shipping company that regularly visited Hankou was the Volunteer Fleet, named for its establishment by patriotic donations during the Russo-Turkish War. Assisting the development of the tea trade became one of the Fleet's core peacetime aims.[43] It was hampered, however, by a lack of Russian exports. The only reliable outbound cargoes were government contracts for transporting troops to the Russian Far East or prisoners to the convict colonies of Sakhalin. The Volunteer Fleet therefore called at Hankou too infrequently to meet the tea traders' needs.[44]

Figures for 1894 show that British firms dominated Yangzi shipping. Seven Russian ships visited Hankou, once each, with a total tonnage of 17,658. Meanwhile, twenty-three British vessels made 541 visits, for a total tonnage of 449,578. Where the Russians unloaded a mere 6,865 silver rubles' worth of goods, the British brought in 25,425,040 rubles' worth of foreign goods and 18,420,432 of Chinese goods.[45] Some Russians tried to offset their dependence on foreign shipping by investing in it: one Hankou tea trader held shares in the American-owned Shanghai Steam Navigation Company.[46] In general, however, they were reliant on the British, who made, according to one British account, 'many thousands each year by carrying Chinese tea for the Russian merchants'.[47]

The Russian concession in Hankou, then, was first conceived in response to locally defined problems of a primarily economic character. Nevertheless, the idea gained traction amid wider developments. After winning the Sino-Japanese War, Japan had demanded the island of Taiwan (Formosa), access to the treaty ports, and the lease of the Liaodong peninsula in south Manchuria.[48] This last demand alarmed the Russian minister of finances, Sergei Iul'evich Witte. Witte was pursuing an ambitious scheme to modernize Russia, centred on the Siberian Railway between Moscow and Vladivostok. He wanted the Railway to run through north Manchuria, the shortest and easiest route to Vladivostok. Japanese control of south Manchuria would pose a

[42] C. Vapereau, 'De Pékin a Paris', *Le Tour du Monde*, 67, 12 (Mar. 1894), pp. 177–272, at pp. 182, 199. On Shevelev, see Thompstone, 'Russia's tea traders', p. 145; and M. G. Shevelev, *Srochnoe parokhodnoe soobshchenie mezhdu Khan'kou i Nikolaevskom* (Direct steamship communication between Hankou and Nikolaevsk) (St Petersburg, 1880).

[43] A. Bagurin, *Dobrovol'nyi flot i ego zadachi* (The Volunteer Fleet and its missions) (St Petersburg, 1888), pp. 3–4.

[44] *O Russkoi torgovle v Khan'kou*, p. 10.

[45] Commercial report of consulate in Hankou for 1894, Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii (Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Empire, AVPRI), f. 143, o. 491, d. 396, l. 150.

[46] Dmitrievskii to Dept. of Internal Affairs, MID, 13 (1) July 1885, AVPRI, f. 143, o. 491, d. 384, ll. 5–6.

[47] C. Beresford, *The break-up of China* (London, 1899), pp. 153–4.

[48] S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: perceptions, power, and primacy* (New York, NY, 2003), pp. 265–71.

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permanent threat to his plans. In April 1895, at Witte's urging, Russia, opportunistically supported by Germany and France, insisted that Japan give up Liaodong. The Japanese submitted before overwhelming naval superiority and relinquished the peninsula.[49]

The European powers exacted a price for their intervention. In June 1895, France received economic and political privileges in the southern Chinese provinces bordering French Indochina, while Russia and France collaborated to loan the Qing government funds to pay its indemnity to Japan. In October, Germany negotiated concessions in Tianjin and Hankou.[50] In December, a Russo-Chinese Bank was established, nominally independent but actually controlled by Witte's ministry.[51] Finally, in June 1896, Witte got Qing agreement for the Siberian Railway to cut through Manchuria and the Russian and Qing empires signed a secret defensive alliance against Japan. Russia's 'bold intervention in eastern affairs', as a Ministry of Finances report described it, had dramatically furthered Witte's programme for the 'peaceful economic penetration' of China.[52] The role of these enterprises in provoking the Russo-Japanese War has been debated ever since.[53] Most studies begin with either the Sino-Japanese War or the decision to build the Siberian Railway. In both cases, the focus is Russia's escalating involvement in Manchuria, and its violent curtailment in the war with Japan.

Russian aims, however, were not confined to Manchuria. Just as annexation of the Amur in 1858–60 overshadowed Russia's acquisition of treaty-power status, so the dramatic narrative of the path to war with Japan obscures the connected but distinct trajectory of Russian activity south of the Great Wall. Competition among the interventionist powers combined with existing interests in the decision to move into Hankou. 'The German government has received a concession in Tianjin', recorded the acting foreign minister, N. P. Shishkin, in September 1895, 'and they are directing their efforts to the establishment of another in Hankou. In view of the significance of the latter for our commercial interests, Count Kassini now thinks it necessary to consider…setting up a Russian concession at this port.' Some political and economic rights in the treaty ports accrued automatically by virtue of Russia's most-favoured-nation status, but Kassini understood the acquisition of land as a zero-sum game. Shishkin agreed that Russia must act quickly to secure the 'excellent spot already selected' by Kassini.[54]

[49] Paine, *Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 281–8.

[50] Ibid., pp. 304–5.

[51] Lukoianov, *'Ne otstat' ot derzhav…'*, p. 163.

[52] Quoted in F. Wcislo, *Tales of imperial Russia: the life and times of Sergei Witte, 1849–1915* (Oxford, 2011), p. 158.

[53] For recent contributions, see J. W. Steinberg, B. W. Menning, D. S. van der Oye, D. Wolff, and S. Yokote, eds., *The Russo-Japanese War in global perspective: World War Zero*, I (Leiden, 2005), pp. 3–101; R. Kowner, ed., *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905: centennial perspectives* (Folkestone, 2007), pp. 13–62.

[54] Shishkin to Ivashchenkov, 29 (17) Sept. 1895, RGIA, f. 560 o. 28 d. 617 ll. 1–2.

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The petition sent to Kassini, however, had made no reference to the factors that Morse identified: the Sino-Japanese War, the actions of rival empires, and future railway lines. The first two factors helped the proposal's transmission, via Kassini and Shishkin, from the remote commercial enclave of Hankou to the centre of imperial power. But they did not change the content. The argument for the concession remained that of the original petition: the facilitation of Russian shipping in Hankou for the benefit of established Russian commercial interests. It reflected the concerns of Russians based in Hankou, and proposed a solution that drew on their knowledge and experience of the concession model that they had been part of since the 1860s. The consul Vakhovich regularly dealt with British concession authorities in Hankou as well as during his previous posting in Tianjin. Russians in the British concession in Hankou had the same rights as other foreign residents: subject to property restrictions they could vote in municipal council elections, and some served as councillors themselves.[55] After thirty years of such close observation, it can have been no great stretch for them to imagine running a concession themselves.

At this point, the proposed concession was imagined as being the same as the existing British concession, but with economic benefits stemming from greater Russian control over taxation. Making the concession a reality, however, would require co-operation from other parts of the imperial bureaucracy, and, ultimately, the approval of the emperor himself. This stage in the decision-making process would see the concession idea reframed to fit into another, more expansive vision of Russia's role in East Asia.

III

Above all, the proposal needed the support of Sergei Witte. Since the 'triple intervention', the minister of finances was the most influential statesman in the empire and virtually supreme in East Asian policy.[56] Shishkin, moreover, could approach Witte knowing that he already had his eye on Hankou. Just a few months earlier, Witte's ministry had published a study of the possible impact of the Siberian Railway on Russian trade with the Chinese treaty ports. The study's author, Dmitrii Dmitrievich Pokotilov, whom Witte would soon appoint as head of the Russo-Chinese Bank in Beijing, had identified Hankou as a city of 'paramount importance' for Russian commerce in East Asia.[57] As Witte's right-hand man in East Asian affairs, Pokotilov's work offers insights into the thinking behind Witte's support for the concession proposal.

[55] See reports on annual general meetings of the British concession in the *North China Herald* newspaper.

[56] D. McDonald, *United government and foreign policy in Russia, 1900–1914* (Boston, MA, 1992), pp. 11–14.

[57] D. D. Pokotilov, *Kitaiskie porty imeiushchie znachenie dlia Russkoi torgovli na Dal'nem Vostoke* (Chinese ports with significance for Russian trade in the Far East) (St Petersburg, 1895), pp. iv, 139.

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Russian commerce with China, according to Pokotilov, faced three linked problems. The first was geography: 'complete dependence on natural conditions, with which it is extremely difficult to struggle'. The second was lack of transport links. Despite their long border, 'in ease, speed, and convenience of communication European Russia and even Siberia remain in much worse conditions than western European states, not to mention Japan, America, India, and Australia'. Simply getting to China from Russia was slow, expensive, and inconvenient, 'especially for persons setting out for the Far East for the first time'. The third problem was cultural. Like Vakhovich, Pokotilov had a low opinion of the entrepreneurial qualities of the Russian commercial class. The average Russian merchant was 'by nature little mobile', and 'accustomed to overland travel'; he lacked the 'commercial abilities and resourcefulness which secured the success in the Far East of the English, and in recent years the Germans'.[58]

To do business in China, the Russian merchant 'must leave completely his usual routine, change his habits…[and] enter what is for him a completely new set of situations'. The completion of the Siberian Railway, however, would 'radically change' all this. Russians would be able 'to travel in the space of three weeks from Moscow to the most distant ports of Eastern China…mainly overland and on Russian territory'. There, they would be able to compete with the British and Germans thanks to their innate possession of a 'different valuable skill – the ability to adapt to local conditions and quickly familiarize themselves with the temper, customs, and language of the people' with whom they came into contact.[59] This was the imperial Russian exceptionalism hinted at by Goncharov updated for the railway age.[60] Imperial policy, even in the economic sphere, was imbued with ideas about national 'character', imagined identities produced through comparison with 'others'. Pokotilov concluded, in terms certain to please his patron Witte, that there was 'no doubt' that the Railway would 'attract to the Far East fresh forces from the heart of Russia…[and] give a jolt to the development of our commercial affairs in these regions'.[61]

The idea that Russian commerce needed state support to succeed – whether it liked it or not – was central to Witte's vision for the future of the empire. Witte's main intellectual inspiration was the German political economist Friedrich List, about whose concept of the 'national economy' he had written an enthusiastic pamphlet.[62] For List, the 'great task' of nations was that of

[58] Ibid., pp. 138–40.
[59] Ibid., p. 140.
[60] Numerous important Russian thinkers took up similar themes in the nineteenth century. See Lim, *China and Japan*; and D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the rising sun: Russian ideologies of empire and the path to war with Japan* (DeKalb, IL, 2001).
[61] Pokotilov, *Kitaiskie porty*, p. 139.
[62] Reproduced in V. A. Fadeev, ed., *Fridrikh List: natsional'naia sistema politicheskoi ekonomii* (Friedrich List: the national system of political economy) (Moscow, 2005), pp. 259–307.

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'safeguarding their moral, economic, and political independence by the establishment of manufacturing and the creation of a strong class of manufacturers and merchants'.[63] His recommended tools were railways and protectionism. The economic growth of the United States and Germany seemed to bear out List's claims and Witte was eager to apply his theories in Russia. An internal report for the Ministry of Finances in January 1896 would confirm that Russian commerce's lack of 'autonomy,…initiative, and knowledge' meant that it fell to the state to foster 'the inculcation of a new spirit'.[64]

In November 1895, Witte had a memorandum drawn up and presented to the tsar. It repeated many of the conclusions of Pokotilov's study, beginning with Hankou's prospects: 'Of all the ports of China, the city of Hankou has the greatest significance for Russian trade…this port is developing rapidly and by volume of trade already occupies first place after Shanghai.' Moreover, Russian entrepreneurs there held their own against foreign competition: the city's 'importance is due entirely to the tea trade, in…which the pre-eminent place belongs to Russian merchants'.[65] This was a foothold worth cultivating if a 'strong class of manufacturers and merchants' was to be created. In most treaty ports, the Russian contingent was tiny, and, as Pokotilov had noted in his earlier study, in numbers 'yield[ed] even to such nationalities as Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Norway'.[66]

However, even the seemingly successful Russian tea traders needed imperial support. 'Up to the present', the memorandum continued, in Hankou 'Russian firms have been forced to build their factories and warehouses within the borders of the English concession.'[67] This was primarily an issue of cost. Russians based in the British concession paid for the privilege. A later report produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expanded the point: 'Renting land and buildings from the English municipality', Russians were forced to pay 'special levies and taxes, which reached significant sums…from wharf dues alone the English received from Russian merchants up to 5,000 rubles a year'.[68]

There is no evidence that British concession authorities discriminated against Russian commerce, but Russians contributed an increasing share of the concession's revenue. By 1895, most British tea firms had abandoned Hankou. Some contemporaries attributed this to British consumers' preference for Indian and Sri Lankan teas; but, as Erika Rappaport has shown, British colonial producers had also deliberately undermined confidence in Chinese teas by stoking fears

[63] Quoted in S. Harcave, *Count Sergei Witte and the twilight of imperial Russia: a biography* (Armonk, NY, 2004), p. 50.
[64] Quoted in Wcislo, *Tales of imperial Russia*, p. 162.
[65] Witte to Shishkin, undated, Nov. 1895, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 3.
[66] Pokotilov, *Kitaiskie porty*, p. 137.
[67] Witte to Shishkin, undated (Nov. 1895), RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 3.
[68] Note prepared by Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the State Duma, undated, Oct. 1909, RGIA, f. 1278, o. 2, d. 2925, ll. 69–71.

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about adulteration and poor hygiene. Plantations located in the formal empire, and thus wholly in British hands, were portrayed as 'healthier, more moral, and more modern' than unregulated production in a China subject only to informal influence.[69] A Russian concession, with a municipal council composed of Russian businessmen setting their own taxes, would prevent the British from profiting at the expense of Russian trade.

It would also allow the construction of a permanent consulate building in Hankou. Vakhovich had been operating out of a string of rented premises and was forced to move 'sometimes even several times in a year'; a state of affairs that could not, Witte's memorandum noted, 'fail to diminish the prestige of Russia' in Chinese eyes. This aside was perhaps added with the emperor in mind, for Witte knew that the young ruler was easily moved by appeals to Russian prestige. The final point in the economic argument, though, is probably most revealing of Witte's thoughts:

> That the representatives of our broad interests in Hankou should be in such a position of dependence on foreigners is all the more undesirable because, in view of the imminent completion of the Siberian Railway, it is impossible not to expect the development of our commercial relations with China, and consequently an expansion of the contingent of Russian firms in Hankou.[70]

Witte genuinely believed in the Siberian Railway's transformative potential, not only for Siberia and the Far East but the whole empire; his hopes for it have been described as 'millenarian'.[71] In 1893, he predicted that, if fully realized, his programme would build a Russia that 'from the shores of the Pacific and the heights of the Himalayas…would dominate not only the affairs of Asia but those of Europe as well'.[72] Railways would form the iron skeleton of this new Russia, but also extend beyond the empire's borders to draw in the commerce of the entire continent. For some years, the Qing government had been debating plans to build railways between Beijing, Hankou, and Guangzhou, connecting the whole of China from north to south; the Yangzi formed an east–west connection between Hankou and Shanghai. Witte was already planning to push for a line linking Beijing to the Siberian Railway. Though it was not originally his idea, a territorial concession in the soon-to-be highly strategic city of Hankou complemented Witte's plans.

By the time it reached the emperor, the concession idea had passed through three distinct stages on its path to St Petersburg, via Beijing, from Hankou. At each stage, the concession was imagined differently. To the Russians in

[69] E. Rappaport, 'Packaging China: foreign articles and dangerous tastes in the mid-Victorian tea party', in F. Trentmann, ed., *The making of the consumer: knowledge, power and identity in the modern world* (London, 2006), pp. 135–7.

[70] Witte to Shishkin, undated, Nov. 1895, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 3.

[71] S. G. Marks, *Road to power: the Trans-Siberian Railroad and the colonization of Asian Russia, 1850–1917* (London, 1991), p. 224.

[72] Quoted in H. Seton-Watson, *The Russian empire, 1801–1917* (Oxford, 1967), p. 582.

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Hankou, it was a locally defined project to help develop cheaper shipping routes for the tea traders. In the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War, for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the concession became an object of zero-sum imperial competition for commercially significant territory. Finally, the concession was slotted into place as one small cog in Witte's Listian vision of a 'national economy' of continental scale, and, perhaps to pique the emperor's attention, embellished with an appeal to affronted imperial prestige. Whichever ingredient in this powerful mix proved most appealing to the tsar, he was convinced. On 22 November 1895, he informed Witte that the plan had his approval.[73]

IV

The plan was put in motion in late 1895. On 20 December, Kassini reported that the matter was 'all but settled' with the Qing government.[74] Post-war Qing weakness likely hastened negotiations. Certainly, some high Qing officials viewed Russia as a potential counterweight to Japan in Manchuria. But, parallel to discussions over the indemnity loan in June 1895, the Qing had also agreed to reduce duties on tea shipped to Russia from Hankou.[75] More work in Qing archives is required to establish how Russian involvement in Hankou was viewed from Beijing as well as locally.[76] Russian documents, however, describe some resistance from local authorities and residents as well as other foreign powers. Dealing with these issues forced Russians to begin making comparisons on a more immediate scale, about matters that would determine how the concession actually functioned. The 'imaginative processes' that gave the concession meaning would now have to take account of the practical difficulties involved in 'subordination and settlement' of the space.

Vakhovich surveyed the proposed site on 16 December.[77] It was announced that Chinese occupants had to sell their property at a price agreed by the Russian and Qing authorities, while foreigners could negotiate a price individually or join the concession by accepting new terms.[78] A 'wealthy Chinese' named Tang owned 'nearly a third of the whole area'. After an attempt to hide his ownership behind a foreign proxy failed, Tang began constructing a large building that would require extra compensation. Pokotilov, now in Beijing at the Russo-

[73] Witte to Shishkin, undated, Nov. 1895, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 3. Approval date noted in the margin.

[74] Kassini to Lobanov, 20 (8) Dec. 1895, AVPRI, f. 143, o. 491, d. 390, l. 10.

[75] *Svod mezhdunarodnikh postanovlenii, opredeliaiushchikh vzaimnaia otnosheniia mezhdu Rossiei i Kitaem, 1689–1897* (Collection of international treaties concerning relations between Russia and China) (St Petersburg, 1900), pp. 77–9.

[76] The Chinese literature discussed in Eiermann, 'Russian concession in Wuhan', consists of a handful of relatively short works, most only a few pages long. According to Eiermann, they describe some local resistance, probably the same cases recorded in the Russian documents.

[77] Carles to Beauclerk, 2 Jan. 1896, The National Archives, FO228/1226, no. 2.

[78] Foreign businesses often leased land close to but outside British concessions from Qing authorities.

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Chinese Bank, thought Tang was 'obviously paying off the [Qing] officials' to leave him alone.[79] The British had dealt with a similar case in 1861 by sending in armed sailors.[80] The Russian concession, however, was supposed to signal Qing gratitude for the 'triple intervention', and Russian activity in China was supposed to be 'peaceful'. Unable to employ force, it took the Russians eighteen months to evict Tang, including payment of a substantial sum for the 'unfinished warehouse' on his property.[81]

On 31 December, Kassini reported that another 'temporary delay' had arisen. The French minister in Beijing had suddenly announced that his government had a prior claim to the land earmarked for the Russian concession, dating back to the 1860s.[82] France was Russia's most important ally: to avoid a breach, the two ministers fairly quickly agreed to divide the space. In dispatches, however, both Kassini and Pokotilov pointedly noted the minuscule French commercial presence in Hankou: the implication was that French actions stemmed from competitive pride – in Pokotilov's words, the 'desire… not to concede to the Germans in energy or activity' – whereas the Russian decision was based on practical reasoning rooted in Russia's substantial existing interests.[83] These comments, like Tang's case, are indicative of how concession policies and the imagined qualities of the Russian empire were linked, and exerted influence on each other, in the minds of Russians.

Several British companies leased land in the area earmarked for the Russian concession. The Russians tried to forestall problems by making their agreement with the Qing authorities 'perfectly identical' to those of other governments for 'concessions in both Hankou and Tianjin'.[84] Nevertheless, the British were 'extremely unwilling' to be 'forced to become part of the new Russian concession'.[85] Witte first thought that, since 'territorial sovereignty…is retained by the Chinese Government', only it could order expropriation unless there were 'examples of such appropriation by other European governments with concessions on Chinese territory'.[86] The Russian chargé d'affaires in Beijing explained that 'in English concessions in Chinese ports, the right to expropriate property' belonged to concession authorities.[87] This became the practice in the Russian concession as well, though disputes with some British leaseholders would drag on for years.

[79] Pokotilov to Romanov, 18 (6) Jan. 1896, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, ll. 14–15.
[80] Dean, 'Sino-British diplomacy', p. 88.
[81] Vakhovich to Pavlov, 1 Sept. (20 Aug.) 1897, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 52.
[82] Kassini to Lobanov, 20 (8) Dec. 1895, AVPRI, f. 143, o. 491, d. 390, l. 10. On the French concession, see D. Rihal, 'La concession française de Hankou (1896–1943): de la condamnation à l'appropriation d'un héritage' (Ph.D. thesis, Université Paris VII – Denis Diderot, 2007).
[83] Pokotilov to Romanov, 18 (6) Jan. 1896, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 17; Kassini to Lobanov, 31 (19) Dec. 1895, AVPRI, f. 143, o. 491, d. 390, l. 15.
[84] Kassini to Lobanov, 18 (6) July 1896, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 31.
[85] Pokotilov to Romanov, 18 (6) Jan. 1896, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 15.
[86] Witte to Lamsdorf, 19 (7) June 1898, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 74.
[87] Pavlov to Murav'ev, 25 (13) Aug. 1898, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, l. 76.

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It was an early example of what became a pattern in the concession's early development: the metropolitan government was at least open to the possibility of other approaches, but the concession was steered towards British precedents by Russians based in China. This tendency became more pronounced after the concession was officially signed into existence on 14 April 1896 and Vakhovich formed a 'construction committee' of local Russian businessmen to help him set it up.[88] In 1903, Vakhovich's successor was able to hand over responsibility for day-to-day administration in Hankou to an elected council of ratepayers modelled on 'the type of municipal organizations existing in the English concessions in China'.[89] Local autonomy was entrenched by wider developments. In 1898, against Witte's advice, Russia seized the Liaodong Peninsula, enraging the Japanese and squandering whatever goodwill remained among the Qing government. Subsequently, Witte himself lost the emperor's favour and became increasingly marginalized. In 1905, the Russo-Japanese War ejected Russia from south Manchuria, cutting off the Siberian Railway from China and putting an end to Witte's vision of railway-driven 'peaceful economic penetration' south of the Great Wall.

The 'expansion of the contingent of Russian firms in Hankou' predicted by Witte and Pokotilov never occurred. The tea trade, however, remained profitable for both the merchants and the Russian state, consistently accounting for a quarter of total government revenue from import duties throughout the 1890s.[90] Russian municipal councillors were therefore mostly connected with the established tea firms. These longtime Hankou residents, steeped in the British model and concerned for their standing among the city's foreign community, would go on to create a Russian concession that was functionally very similar to its British neighbour.[91] Comparisons with other concessions continued to inform almost every administrative decision, but, where early decisions were influenced by concern for Russia's relations with the Qing and French governments, local decisions were taken within narrower frames of reference: other concessions in Hankou or other treaty ports. For the remainder of the Russian concession's existence, competition with other concessions would take the form of refining the existing, locally defined model.

V

It is not necessary to identify a single, primary motivation in the Russian decision to acquire a concession in Hankou. To attempt to do so would be an exercise in counterfactuals. Would the original petition have been sent if the Sino-Japanese

[88] Vakhovich to Pavlov, 22 (10) July 1897, RGIA, f. 560, o. 28, d. 617, ll. 55–6.

[89] Spravka o russkikh kontsessiiakh (Information on Russian concessions), undated, 1912, AVPRI, f. 143, o. 491, d. 390, l. 206.

[90] Thompstone, 'Russia's tea traders', p. 134.

[91] A. Crawford, 'Imperial Russia and the Chinese treaty ports, 1890s–1917' (Ph.D. thesis, Bristol, 2013), passim.

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War had not taken place? Would Kassini have supported it if Germany had not been waiting in the wings? Would Witte have proposed a concession himself if had he not been approached by the Foreign Ministry? Perhaps the second proposition seems less likely than the first, and the third less likely still. For the present purposes, it is enough to accept that the events contained an element of contingency, while acknowledging that the role of existing Russian interests in Hankou demonstrates the insufficiency of explanations limited to post-Sino-Japanese War diplomacy.

At the moment of its inception, the concession was imagined in at least two different ways. Russians in Hankou had a vision rooted in their experience of the maritime, commercial model developed under British auspices in the wake of the Opium Wars. For Witte and Pokotilov, however, the concession was desirable not only because Hankou was, as Morse put it, a potential 'great railway centre'; the concession's significance for them also stemmed from its relation to a different, broader vision of the nature and future of the Russian empire. But with the end of Witte's influence, and the Russo-Japanese War, there was nobody else who was both dedicated to this alternative imaginary framework and in a position to try to bring it to fruition. Local Russians in Hankou were left largely to their own devices, and exercised their more limited powers to steer the concession's development in the direction of their own, narrower vision.

This does not, however, imply a reversion to simple *imitation* of British concessions. Stoler and McGranahan stress that models are rarely adopted wholesale but rather through a process of 'selective bricolage' in which what is left behind is as important as what is kept.[92] This can reveal underlying connections between seemingly disparate ideas and events. What did Russians keep as they imagined and constructed their own concession next door to the British? Concessions concentrated the physical (wharves, warehouses) and institutional (legal, economic) structures necessary for conducting international trade in China. That was true no matter how the goods were transported; consequently, the physical form of concessions remained recognizably similar over time. In this sense, when Vakhovich or Kassini envisaged a Russian concession rising from the low, muddy banks of the Yangzi, they had only to look upriver at the British concession for a model.

But concessions were never purely functional. Their physical form was inseparable from layers of representation and meaning. Foreign visitors, for example, invariably compared them to their surroundings, contrasting the tall buildings and wide avenues of the concessions with the low, dense, and seemingly disorderly Chinese city. The riverside embankment or 'bund', in particular, became the public face of treaty ports: images of it were transmitted around the world on postcards and photographs to become rooted in European imagination as 'symbolic of the Western space created and maintained among Chinese

[92] Stoler and McGranahan, 'Introduction', p. 14.

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chaos, and of the remaking of the Chinese environment by Western technology and enterprise'.[93] Perhaps Witte, when he imagined the Russian concession – he never saw Hankou in person – had pictured in his mind's eye not wharves and ships but goods trains pulling in to a station.

What was left behind? The original petition for a concession points to an answer, in its implication that tea for Russia should be transported in Russian vessels. The same logic underpinned Kassini's claim that the concession was necessary to prevent German control of land on which Russian commercial operations were established. It can be seen more explicitly in Witte's Listian vision of a 'national economy' that would safeguard Russia's 'moral, economic, and political independence'. There was an element of contingency in the decision-making process that brought the Russian concession into being. But the process was not random or isolated from wider developments. Despite the different priorities visible at various stages, a common thread can be discerned: the move towards – or rather a return to, after a relatively short-lived mid-nineteenth-century divergence from – an essentially mercantilist understanding of international trade.

In 1901, a Russian visitor to Hankou wrote that it was 'impossible not to pay tribute to the English for blazing a trail here'.[94] He was referring to practical matters of draining the ground and raising the riverbanks, but his words applied in a wider sense. Britain blazed a trail in China in the two wars that were, in Gallagher and Robinson's words, part of the 'sufficient political function of [the] process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy'.[95] British belief in the benefits of free trade had allowed Russia and others to establish commercial bridgeheads in China under the umbrella of British-inspired treaties that were enforced by British gunboat diplomacy. The British and other foreigners alike participated in and benefited from representing this system as cosmopolitan and progressive.

After 1870, however, Britain's industrial supremacy went into relative decline. Protectionist rivals like the United States and Germany began to compete with it for overseas markets. The mid-nineteenth-century's 'optimistic vision of free trade and progress was rapidly dethroned by a new age of…neo-mercantilist economic policies'.[96] The 'larger "world-system"' of which Britain's formal empire was the core seemed to be slipping from British control; in semi-colonial China the warning cries were especially shrill.[97] The 'scramble for Africa' was the most dramatic manifestation of these developments, but the

[93] R. Bickers, *Britain in China: community, culture and colonialism, 1900–1949* (Manchester, 1999), p. 141. On bunds, see J. E. Taylor, 'The bund: littoral space of empire in the treaty ports of East Asia', *Social History*, 27 (2002), pp. 125–42.

[94] Nadarov, *Materialy k izucheniiu Khan'kou*, p. 77.

[95] Gallagher and Robinson, 'Imperialism of free trade', p. 5.

[96] Howe, 'Free trade', pp. 26–7.

[97] Darwin, *Empire project*, p. 81.

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successful campaign to convert British tea drinkers to colonial products was part of the same broad trend.[98]

What was left behind – what was rejected by the very concept of a *Russian* concession – was that mid-nineteenth-century image, modelled by Shanghai's International Settlement and imitated by other concessions, of foreign territories in China as 'cosmopolitan republics' that transcended national rivalries in the twin causes of commerce and progress. Rooted in Enlightenment ideals as well as utopian strands of free-trade thinking, this image was a powerful part of the representation and self-representation of the developing concession model. But by the end of the nineteenth century, as industrial and geopolitical competition intensified, it was increasingly revealed to have been a product of temporary circumstances.

Although it survived in descriptions of Shanghai's unique International Settlement, elsewhere the image of the foreign presence in the treaty ports as 'cosmopolitan' was increasingly supplanted by another image, one that could not have existed before the dramatic expansion of concessions after 1895: that of concessions as nationally distinctive settler colonies, 'miniatures…of the countries they represent'.[99] At the same time, the 'social life of close unity' in a single 'European family' experienced by Hankou's residents in earlier times also began to unravel: as one Russian described it, 'the foreign colonists…began more strongly and more often to display an inclination for a social life of a more national and individual colouring'. Tellingly, the establishment of the Russian concession was followed in 1897 by the founding of a separate Russian Club.[100]

Such attitudes hardened over time. The initial justification for the concession as a future Russian shipping hub proved hollow. In 1904, a Russian nationalist published a pamphlet that looked forward to the day when Russia's trade with Hankou would be served by 'Russian [shipping] agencies, with Russian people in charge, and not Englishmen, Germans, and Jews as we accept now'.[101] That day never came: in 1916, Russian businessmen still complained that foreign shipping companies were 'gradually squeezing [them] and, consequently, consumers of tea in Russia in a vice'. For much of the Russian concession's existence, the biggest lessee of space on the bund was the Japanese shipping company Nissin Kisen Kaisha. Some members of the municipal council expressed their dissatisfaction that 'almost the whole bund [was] in the hands of foreigners'; one openly declared his preference for 'the basic idea of a "Russian concession for Russians"'. After all, this councillor argued, 'the English have long run their concession according to this idea'.[102] The same

[98] Rappaport, 'Packaging China'.

[99] B. St John, *The China Times guide to Tientsin and neighbourhood* (Tientsin, 1908), p. 5.

[100] 'Russkii klub v Khan'kou', HIA, Bel'chenko papers, box 24, folder 13.

[101] Pavlenkov, *Pamiati Aleksandra Vakhovicha*, p. 10.

[102] Minutes of Russian municipal council in Hankou, 21 (8) Mar. 1916, HIA, Bel'chenko papers, box 23, folder 5.

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processes of inter-imperial comparison operated in the early twentieth century as in the mid-nineteenth; but now the results were quite different.

Benedict Anderson's argument now seems relevant in a second sense. As another proponent of a modular understanding of nationalism has put it, the essence of nationalism is the 'contest over the proper territorial, human, and cultural boundaries of the state'.[103] Adding economic boundaries to this list, as late nineteenth-century nationalists surely would, we have as good a description as any of the process from which the Russian concession in Hankou emerged. From this perspective, the transformation of Russia's commercial bridgehead in Hankou into a territorial concession was as much an expression of a national discourse as of an imperial one: the carving out not just of a 'Western' space but a specifically Russian one.[104]

Anderson emphasized the historical context in which forms of nationalism were first imagined; these imagined forms were then transplanted into different contexts. Critics have pointed out, however, that Anderson did not sustain his attention to context, leaving the impression that the modular quality of forms somehow inhered in their initial, imagined aspect. The case of the Russian concession does not bear this out. The physical form of concessions persisted for as long as it remained economically and strategically viable, but the way they were imagined changed over time. As Manu Goswami has argued, not only the emergence of modular forms but also their transplantation must be historicized, understood as embedded within a continuum of intricately linked cultural, political, and socio-economic change.[105] While the Sino-Japanese War, imperial 'scrambles', and projected railway lines helped determine the trajectory of the concession idea at a particular juncture, the process was also dependent on Russia's pre-existing commercial presence as well as evolving ideas about the relationship of nation, state, and economy. The spread of concessions among empires was a dynamic process produced at the interface of local and global developments.

[103] M. Beissinger, 'How nationalisms spread: Eastern Europe adrift the tides and cycles of nationalist contention', *Social Research*, 63 (1996), pp. 97–146, at p. 136.

[104] For a different perspective on this point, see M. Marinelli, 'Self-portrait in a convex mirror: colonial Italy reflects on Tianjin', *Transtext(e)s Transcultures*, 3 (2007), pp. 119–50.

[105] M. Goswami, 'Rethinking the modular nation form: towards a sociohistorical conception of nationalism', *Comparative Studies in Social History*, 44 (2002), pp. 770–99.

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