

**Messianic Revanchism: Narratives and Strategies of Russian Nationalism in Early Twentieth
Century Manchuria**

by

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To Alina Vladimirovna Makin (née Udalchenko), who first lit the flame of my love of Russian history, language, and culture

Алине Владимировне Мейкину (урожд. Удалченко), впервые зажегшей огонь моей любви к русскому языку, истории, и культуре

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Introduction: The Light and Dark of Messianic Revanchism

We group ourselves into nations, but it has never really been clear to me what that means, or what we get out of it. Are we grouped together because we believe something together and are proud of associating with others who believe the same way? Or are we grouped together because our ancestors found themselves pushed onto a piece of land by people who didn't want them on theirs? It seems that all nations have some bright periods and some dark periods in their past. Building a national myth out of our bright memories probably creates a different character than if we build one out of the dark.¹

It may be unorthodox to begin an M.A. thesis about an early 20th-century diaspora community with an excerpt from the program note of a piece of music composed in 2014. However, this passage of text perfectly encapsulates the plight of the Russian émigré community in Manchuria. The overwhelming majority of the diaspora relocated to China after the October Revolution of 1917. Most of its members were participants in the anti-Communist White movement and felt a sense of collective ostracization that came with being exiled from their homeland. As they came together in emigration, the émigrés turned the “or” in David Lang’s musings into an “and”: they shared an ardent belief and love for the Russia that they came from, *and* they were “pushed onto a piece of land by people who didn’t want them on theirs.

As will be explored in this thesis, both sides of this national myth emerge frequently in émigré writings from the period. The diaspora viewed the preservation of Russian culture and morals as an antidote to the trauma of being alienated from their homeland, and they considered it essential to educate their children in these positive aspects of “Russianness.” Conversely, many in the diaspora expressed hatred at the humiliation they experienced in 1917, even writing of the urgent need to avenge those that brought the Russian nation to its knees. Returning to David

¹ David Lang, program note, “The National Anthems,” 3.

Lang's quote, the identity that this community of Russian émigrés cultivated drew from both the "bright" and "dark" periods of their history: fond recollection and protection of their past traditions was coupled with the desire for revenge against the community's enemies.

Two ideologies are required to accurately categorize the essence of this community's worldview: messianism and revanchism. Because both ideologies offer fame and honor for those espousing them, messianism and revanchism are highly compatible. Whether the people act as saviors or avengers, they will be revered in their own history and that of the world, and such a reputation will lead to the categorically positive reversal of past and present misfortunes. The former, as the term suggests, refers to the belief that an individual or people acts as a messiah, a savior, for a group of people.² Some scholars, especially Peter Duncan, have noted the emergence of messianic narratives at several points in Russian history: Dostoevsky, the Slavophile movement, and even the Soviets all espoused a quasi-materialist, quasi-religious argument that Russia's destiny is inimitable and divinely bestowed.³ The second half of the émigrés' national myth is revanchism, a political program intended to claim revenge for injustices believed to have been inflicted upon a community. To provide an example, as Babak (Ali) Rod Khadem elucidates in his dissertation that revanchism emerges in world order discourse in Sunni and Shia Islam, "the distinctive feature of revanchism is the notion that the purpose of the final world order is to correct the historical wrongs suffered by Shi'ism."⁴

Both messianic and revanchist ideas emerge with equal frequency within the writings of the Russian émigré diaspora in Manchuria. Messianism emerges in the belief that by preserving

² Bockmuehl, Markus and Paget, James Carleton Paget (eds.), *Redemption and Resistance. The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity*. London: T & T Clark, 2009, xxi.

³ Peter Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After*, London: Routledge (2000). This phenomenon is certainly not unique to Russian history. Countless other national myths involve the belief in a "saving people" acting on behalf of another.

⁴ Babak (Ali) Rod Khadem, *From the Islamic State to the Messiah's Global Government: Structures of the Final World Order According to Contemporary Sunni and Shiite Discourses*. 2017. Harvard U, PhD Dissertation, 40.

their past traditions, Russians could potentially not only redeem the humiliation of 1917, but also liberate humanity from the darkness of Bolshevism, an ideology that they feared was already spreading throughout the world. Additionally, émigré leaders expressed revanchism through their desire to reverse the suffering that the people experienced at the hands of “Russia’s enemies,” a term principally applied to the Bolsheviks, but occasionally other groups as well. As the sources will reveal, the manufacturing of an enemy in this instance is typically grounded in xenophobia: the enemies of the Russian nation were dangerous foreigners, sometimes infiltrating and sowing instability in Russia from the outside, and sometimes betraying Russia from within.

In this thesis, I argue that narratives of *messianic revanchism* were widespread among the Russian diaspora in Manchuria in the early 20th century. Unlike other communities of displaced refugees after 1917, security came not from starting over and acculturating in their new home, but from looking even further inward and clinging to what the community already had.⁵ Moreover, the top priority for Manchurian émigrés was the realization of future goals as the “next chapter” for a Russia with a centuries-old historical legacy. Messianic revanchism was quite effective in urging the émigré public to constantly be mindful of their past, present, and future; there was always a task to develop. Russian émigrés were to remind themselves of the history and culture they came from, recognize the enemies who seized that culture from them, take back their homeland from those enemies, and attain liberation, both for themselves and the planet, by restoring that homeland. Thus, messianic revanchism is summarized through four

⁵ Quoted from John Stephan *The Russian Fascists*, pp. 14-15: “Disillusioned, most émigrés eventually abandoned all hope of ever seeing Russia again. They turned their attention to seeking assimilation in adopted homelands. As a middle-aged refugee living in Los Angeles remarked in 1927: ‘I don’t hope to go back to Russia. I don’t recognize Russia now. Russia and my past are somewhere in my dreams. My present life is just to live, no ambitions, no thoughts about the future. I am going to be a citizen next month and try to be an American.’”

keywords that may be termed the “four R’s”: 1) *realization* of a historic destiny; 2) *revenge* against a hostile enemy; 3) *return* to a lost territory; and 4) *redemption* of a fallen people.

Review of Primary and Secondary Literature

The newspaper articles, manifestos, essays, poems, and letters of these two organizations reveal the narratives and strategies behind the simultaneously nostalgic and future-oriented purpose of Russian emigration in Manchuria. Although Russians resided in Manchuria before the October Revolution of 1917, the “four R’s” of messianic revanchism are most consistently and strikingly identifiable in sources written between 1917 and the end of World War II. I focus on documents affiliated with two institutions that shaped the political and cultural life of the region during this period: the short-lived All-Russian Fascist Party and the centuries-old Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing, which later oversaw a small affiliate in Harbin. Over the course of my research, I came to discover that there is a paucity of English translations of these sources; accordingly, all translations of Russian-language primary sources are my own.

Secondary literature on the history and daily life of the Russian émigré community in Manchuria is extensive and insightful, and I rely on the works of a variety of authors in each chapter of this thesis. Even though their work does not emerge frequently in this thesis, it would be unjust to ignore the works of landmark scholars in the broader history of the Russian Far East and the Sino-Russian border. Sören Urbansky’s *Beyond the Steppe Frontier: A History of the Sino-Russian Border*, masterfully traces the cross-border social, cultural, and political exchanges that took place over centuries of history between two of the world’s largest powers.⁶ John Stephan authored *The Russian Far East: A History*, one of the leading compendia on Russia’s

⁶ Sören Urbansky, *Beyond the Steppe Frontier: A History of the Sino-Russian Border*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (2020).

domestic and foreign policy in the region.⁷ Finally, Sergei Glebov has written extensively about Eurasianism in the Russian context and questions of identity and nationalism in imperial spaces.⁸

Works on the history of Russian emigration in the late 19th and early 20th century, particularly the founding of the city of Harbin, is illuminated in the works of David Wolff, Mara Moustafine, and Olga Bakich. These scholars provide indispensable roadmaps for understanding the emergence, population, and maturation of the Russian émigré community in northern China and the intercultural encounters that informed processes of identity formation.⁹ James Carter and Sergienko & Urilene have written about the legal status of Russians and other nationalities in early 20th-century Manchuria, while Russian-language émigré memoirs, like that of Viktor Petrov, further deepen our knowledge about the richness of daily life in Harbin from a first-hand perspective.¹⁰

Susanne Hohler is one of the leading scholars on the history and activities of Russian fascism in Manchuria and has written several landmark monographs and academic journal articles on the subject. Her works, most notably *Fascism in Manchuria: The Soviet-China Encounter in the 1930s*, describe the emergence of Russian fascism in Manchuria, its political and ideological relationship to its global analogues, and the avenues that the ARFP pursued

⁷ John Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1994).

⁸ Some of Glebov's publications include *From Empire to Eurasia: Politics, Scholarship and Ideology in Russian Eurasianism, 1920s-1930s* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017); "Between Foreigners and Subjects: Imperial Subjecthood, Governance, and the Chinese in the Russian Far East, 1860s-1880s" (*Ab Imperio* 1 (2017), pp. 86-130); "Siberian Middle Ground: Languages of Rule and Accommodation on Siberian Frontier," in I. Gerasimov et al. (eds.) *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 121-151.

⁹ David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999; Olga Bakich, "Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2000), 51-73.

¹⁰ James Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002; Viktor Petrov, *Gorod na Sungari* [The City on the Sungari], Washington D.C.: Russko-Amerikanskogo istoricheskogo obshchestva, 1984.

within Harbin civil society to popularize their theories.¹¹ The literature of John Stephan is once again praiseworthy in this subject and includes *The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce in Exile, 1925-1945*. Other scholars on the history of Russian fascism in Manchuria include Erwin Oberländer and A.V. Okorokov.¹² When read together, these sources offer the reader a rich analysis of the extent to which Russian fascists (albeit recklessly and dishonestly) complemented their revanchist political agenda and strategies with narratives from Russian history, all to remind their supporters of the legacy they were honoring by supporting the fascist cause.

Despite the rich wealth of both English- and Russian-language literature on the history of Russians in Manchuria and Russian fascism, histories on the Russian Orthodox Church in Manchuria are relatively limited. Eric Widmer's *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking During the Eighteenth Century* is arguably the leading thesis on the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in the English language. The book explores the mission's early beginnings as an institution established for diplomacy and scholarly study, while also arguing that the mission failed to fulfill some of its stated goals.¹³ Russian-language sources, especially B.G. Aleksandrov's *Bei-guan'* and Korostelev & Karaukov's magnificent historical survey offer illustrative accounts on the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia and the Ecclesiastical Mission in northern China.¹⁴ The Russian-language sources are particularly effective at underscoring the church's conscious efforts to maintain relationships with their

¹¹ See also "Russian Fascism in Exile. A Historical and Phenomenological Perspective on Transnational Fascism," *Fascism* 2 (2013), 121-140.

¹² A.V. Okorokov, *Fashizm i russkaia emigratsiia (1920-1945 gg.)*, Moscow: Rusaki (2002).

¹³ Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking During the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1976).

¹⁴ B.G. Aleksandrov, *Bei-guan': Kratkaia Istorii Rossiiskoi Dukhovnoi Missii v Kitae*, Moscow: Al'ians Arkheo, 2006; V.V. Korostol'ev & A.K. Karaulov, *Pravoslavie v Man'chzhurii, 1898-1956: Ocherki Istorii*, Moscow: PSTGU, 2019.

Russian counterparts in Europe and preserve the historical legacy of Russia's cultural past in émigré China.

As this literature review indicates, there exists a wealth of engaging material on the long history and various forms of interaction between Russian and Chinese politics and culture, and the Russian émigré diaspora in Manchuria and the social actors that acted on their behalf is a crucial component of that history. By most accounts, life for Russian émigrés in Manchuria after 1917 was exceptionally difficult, both for cultural and socioeconomic reasons. This analysis hopes to contribute to this already rich scholarly body by providing insight into the rhetoric of the community's leaders, who sought to elevate the spirits of their population and offer them a promise to redeem their present misfortune. That messianic revanchist vision, bizarre and unrealistic as it may have been, emerged as a major sustaining force in the community through their time in emigration.

It must be noted that the actual number of people in the Manchurian diaspora who subscribed to messianic revanchist ideas, particularly those of the All-Russian Fascist Party, is unclear. Some figures suggest that the party had over 30,000 active supporters, while the party's manifesto claims 20,000 adherents.¹⁵ Given that Harbin's population was roughly 50,000 at the time of the party, claiming that every Russian émigré in Manchuria endorsed the All-Russian Fascist Party would be as reductive as saying that everyone in Nazi Germany was a National Socialist. Additionally, despite striking parallels between fascist publications and those of the émigré church, the two groups did not always align in their strategic objectives. Indeed, at times outright hostility emerged between the two groups, as will be discussed later. Yet as Susanne

¹⁵ The number 30,000 is referenced in Center. archive of the FSB of the Russian Federation. Investigation case N-18765 in relation to Semyonov GM, Rodzaevskii KV and others T. 10, Id 145-206. Okorokov even mentions suggests that there were as little as 5,000 Russian fascists in Harbin.

Hohler mentions, Russian fascism deeply penetrated civil society for years, and because the “four R” narratives emerge almost identically on the part of church officials, Russian messianic revanchism must be analyzed as a community-shaping ideology in Manchuria rather than as a niche movement on society’s fringes.

Thesis Structure

This thesis contains three main sections. Chapter One describes the 20-year process by which the Russian diaspora in Manchuria was formed, from the inception of the Chinese Eastern Railway to the 1917 October Revolution. This chapter particularly emphasizes the mechanisms by which Russians in China formed an inchoate communal identity in response to the political events that were surrounding them, both proximately in the Russian Far East and over 5,000 miles away in St. Petersburg. The chapter concludes by analyzing the various changes of the early 1920s, a period in which Sino-Soviet policy gradually displaced and eventually altogether eliminated imperial Russian supremacy in the region. It was precisely this sense of loss that fueled the messianic revanchist ideology that would later dominate local Russian identities.

Chapter Two explores the theory and practice of the All-Russian Fascist Party, which was headquartered in Harbin. Party manifestos, daily newspapers, and monographs that the fascists published are analyzed for the “four R” narratives of messianic revanchism: realization, revenge, return, and redemption. Fascist leaders like Konstantin Rodzaevskii engaged in historical revisionism to develop the idea of an ancient Russian nation and reminded their supporters of that nation’s “enemies,” whom they define as Communists and Jews. What emerges is a strange and hateful agenda, yet one fully committed to fulfilling a messianic revanchist vision: after defeating their enemies in armed revolution and returning to their historic homeland, Russians

would organize around fascism and liberate themselves, and all of humanity, from their communist shackles.

Chapter Three adopts a similar analytical framework as Chapter Two, with a focus on the “four R’s” in the writings of the Russian émigré church. Primary sources in this chapter center around historical theses and epistles to the community written by church officials and other cultured elites in a monthly newspaper entitled *The Chinese Evangelist*. The chapter identifies the many points of comparison, and occasional points of contrast, between the narratives of the church and those of Russian fascists in Harbin. The resulting analysis reveals that the only substantial difference between the two institutions is on the form of the “return” to the homeland; while the fascists believed in military seizure of territory, the church favored overthrowing Russia’s “enemies” through non-violent means. All other points of overlap between the philosophies of the two groups confirm the status of messianic revanchism as a defining feature of Russian national identity in émigré China.

The conclusion of the thesis contains two main parts. The first is an examination of the unsuccessful fate of the messianic revanchist experiment. Despite the passion of its adherents, the Communists remained in power in the Soviet Union for decades after World War II, resulting, for a variety of reasons, in the dissolution and exodus of the Harbin diaspora. The second part of the conclusion examines the four components of messianic revanchist rhetoric in the context of the ongoing war Russo-Ukrainian war. The chilling parallels between Vladimir Putin’s recent speeches on the war and the reactionary messaging of the Manchurian diaspora suggest that even though the Manchurian diaspora’s ideals were not realized, their ideas remain just as consequential in the present day.

Chapter One, The Russian Diaspora in Manchuria, and the Road to Identity

In its early history, the city of Harbin, China experienced several different phases of development. First a small outpost housing Russian and Chinese railroad laborers, the city grew to a multinational liberal trade hub in the early 1900s before becoming the *de facto* headquarters of Russian nationalist politics following the October Revolution. This chapter outlines the first three periods of Harbin's early history, with an examination of the different appearances of a Russian communal identity in each period. Starting from the establishment of the Chinese Eastern Railway (hereafter CER) and ending with the early 1920s, I consider attitudes and relationships between Russians and non-Russians in the region, both on the railroad line and within the city center. Historical documentation reveals that Russians in Harbin always coexisted with equally prevalent non-Russian, primarily Chinese, populations. The three ideologies can be characterized as follows: 1) colonial expansionism on behalf of the Russian imperial regime (1896-1898); 2) multinationalism and populist anti-tsarist sentiments (1898-1917); and 3) "Russianness" manufactured as a counterweight to material hardship (post-1917). The misfortune that Russian émigrés in Harbin experienced following the October Revolution, and the sense of "Russianness" that they created in response, laid the foundation for the messianic revanchist ideology of Harbin's Russian fascists in the following decade.

I. 1896-1898: Russia-China Affairs and the Chinese Eastern Railway

The official founding of the city of Harbin remains unknown. However, the general historical consensus suggests that the city was born when construction began on the CER in 1898.¹⁶ The events anticipating the project's commencement highlight the various interests of the three regional powers: Russia, China, and Japan. At the time, Japan was the real winner in

¹⁶ Susanne Hohler, *Fascism in Manchuria: The Soviet-China Encounter in the 1930s*, London, I.B. Tauris & Co. (2017); Wolff (1999); Stephan (1978).

Manchuria. After routing the Qing Dynasty in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, the Japanese sought to maintain its considerable sphere of influence in the region. Meanwhile, the Qing government, considerably weakened after the war, hoped to incur as few losses as possible. Recognizing this power imbalance, Russian officials saw an opportunity to develop their own sphere of influence. This was partially motivated by the agenda of the up-and-coming tsar Nicholas II, who viewed expansion in Manchuria as the key to developing Russian imperial authority.¹⁷

Considering the tsar's expansionist goals, Sergei Witte, the Minister of Finance for the new tsar, strategized an opportunity to advance Russian authority in northern China while aiding the Qing in the process. Through consultations with Li Hongzhang (李鴻章), the diplomat charged with concluding peace talks with the Japanese, Witte assured the Qing of military assistance in the event of further incursions by the Japanese. In exchange, according to Witte's personal diary, the Qing government offered the Russian Empire a construction concession for a privately-owned expansion of the Trans-Siberian railway into Manchuria. As a bonus for the Russians, Li was to attend the coronation ceremony of Nicholas II, further strengthening diplomatic relations between the two empires. This covert exchange was formalized in the Li-Lobanov Treaty, otherwise known as the Sino-Russian Treaty of Alliance (*Soyuznyi dogovor mezhdru Rossiiskoi imperiei i Kitaem*).¹⁸

It was this treaty that stipulated the establishment and management structure of the CER in 1896. The Russians dictated the process in a manner highly favorable to its interests. The treaty stated that CER shareholders may be Russian or Chinese, yet in practice Russia possessed

¹⁷ Ironically, the tsar's expansionist ambitions would lead to a substantial weakening of the Russian autocracy following the 1904 Russo-Japanese War. See Esthus (1981).

¹⁸ Igor V.L Ukoianov, "The First Russo-Chinese Allied Treaty of 1896," *International Journal of Korean History* 11 (2007), 151-177.

virtually exclusive ownership over the railroad's stock company for 36 years.¹⁹ Moreover, Russian troops were permitted to use the railway for transportation through Chinese territory. Although Russia enjoyed massive privileges ownership over the railroad's construction and operation, it seemed the partnership between the two parties would proceed quite smoothly. A glorious ceremony directly on the border of the Russian Empire marked the commencement of the Russian corporation's activities. As part of the festivities, a new flag incorporating the Russian tricolor and the Qing Yellow Dragon was unveiled; this flag would later become the official flag of the CER.²⁰ Russia had now firmly established its presence in Manchuria, and construction on the CER was initiated.

Thanks to recent advances in railroad construction across the country, the project was rapidly developed and executed: the roughly 600-mile track was completed by 1903. Because the Russians had essentially unlimited authority in designing and building the railroad, Russian authority was uncontested in expanding across Manchuria. Imperial authorities in Petersburg celebrated Russia's expansion into a bountiful new region, and survey missions conducted by Russian officials in the early stages of CER construction compiled knowledge of the Sino-Russian frontier.²¹ Additionally, given that diplomacy and administration in Manchuria required navigating Chinese language and customs, sinology became an academic discipline of prime importance to the Russian regime.²² As Alexander Matveevich Pozdnev, director of the Eastern Institute from 1899-1903, wrote in 1903,

¹⁹ The process by which shares were distributed was highly unfavorable to the Chinese. See Chin-Chun Wang, "The Chinese Eastern Railway," <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1016450>.

²⁰ Wolff (1999), 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²² David Wolff dedicates an entire chapter of *To the Harbin Station* to the emergence of Russian institutions specializing in Far East Asian Studies, both in the Russian Far East (Vladivostok) and Harbin proper.

May [our institution] succeed in all matters of real value for the Fatherland! May it be true to the basic behests [*korennye zavety*] of the Russian land and the historic tasks of education [*prosveshchenie*]! ... and that in this development a considerable part was played by the zealous staff and alumni of the Eastern Institute – true servants of the White Tsar.²³

Through a favorable treaty developing the CER and the project of preparing students for the advancement of imperial interests in Manchuria, Russian authorities converted northern China into Russian colony.²⁴ Without firing a shot, Petersburg had turned the native home of the then rulers of the Chinese Empire into a Russian sphere of influence.

II. 1898-1917: Cosmopolitan Demographics and Anti-Authoritarian Attitudes

The events influencing the construction of the CER described in Section I. reveal the processes by which Russia first gained a foothold in Manchuria. Yet the true impact of Russian authority locally is best analyzed through the urban demographics and inter-ethnic attitudes within the city of Harbin between 1898 to 1917. During this period, the city rapidly expanded from a few thousand railroad builders to a multinational professional hub. While many of the cities nearly two dozen ethnicities coexisted harmoniously, anti-Russian sentiment on the part of the Chinese also proliferated, challenging the legitimacy of Russian power in the city and region. Consequently, local disorder only strengthened the empire's resolve to defend its regional interests, leading to further Sino-Russian tensions that would influence bilateral actions in the future.

²³ Cited in Wolff (1999), 146.

²⁴ Numerous scholars describe late 19th-century Manchuria as a colonial project. These include David Wolff (1999); Olga Bakich, "A Russian City in China: Harbin before 1917," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 28, no. 2 (1986): 129-148; Mara Moustafine, "Russians from China: Migrations and Identity," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 5, No.2 (2013), 143-158.

Like most burgeoning cities, the city of Harbin first became populated through employment opportunities on the CER. Under the imperial administration, Russian railroad workers on the CER were granted extraterritorial citizenship rights through the Chinese government, allowing them to live and work as non-Chinese residents of Manchuria. The early years of the railroad's development saw the arrival of several thousand state engineers and builders from across the Russian lands, even from as far away as Odessa. Most of these individuals were railroad construction veterans who had participated in the railroad boom of the past two or three decades. Attitudes toward the new project were overwhelmingly positive among the labor cadres. The opportunity to journey into the exotic and unexplored frontier while being paid up to double their previous salaries was irresistible for Russian builders. Because of all the exciting adventures ahead, as well as the chance to cultivate group morale on the job, the employees took immense pride in their work.²⁵

It was not just Russians that participated in the CER labor force. Between 1899-1903, tens of thousands of builders from Chinese cooperatives were hired to accelerate the construction timeline. Mutual opinions were mixed. The Russians displayed a neutral attitude toward the Chinese; to both the engineers and the builders, the Chinese were nothing more than cheap workers for the job.²⁶ However, the Chinese builders, who in fact represented the majority of the labor force, were more hostile to their counterparts in several aspects of the job. There were no Chinese engineers on the railroad line, so language proved to be a constant barrier. Additionally, Chinese workers received lower salaries than the Russians, and the barracks where they resided frequently overflowed.²⁷ One incident even involved the Chinese accusing Russian engineers of

²⁵ Wolff (1999), 30-31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

using human fat to grease the locomotives on the railroad, a rumor which later proved to be false.²⁸ Cheap Chinese labor forces were essential to achieving the company's objectives, yet such instances of unequal treatment and tension on the job escalated into further and more wide-reaching conflict.

The most vivid example of conflict was the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, an uprising that at its core sought to expel foreign influence in Chinese affairs. The rebellion's leaders named Russian control over the CER as one of their principal grievances. The railroad presented several reasons why the Boxers took issue with Russia's involvement in Manchuria. The first was Russian military presence in the region. Even though the Russians had assured the Chinese of military aid in the event of a Japanese incursion, the Boxers considered the movement of Russian troops along the railroad to be an unjustifiable instrument in a Russian colonization project. Another factor contributing to anti-foreign sentiment among the Chinese was a sizable famine in China's northern regions, for which the Boxers blamed Russians and other Europeans.²⁹

One of the main targets of the Boxer Rebellion were Christian institutions and their followers. Because of their political involvement with the Chinese government, German-sponsored Protestant missionaries were viewed as "primary devils," while their converts were called "secondary devils."³⁰ Russia was no exception in this regard, and in the early summer of 1900, the Boxers ravaged the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing. Over 200 Russian Orthodox priests, missionaries, and worshippers perished on June 10; within three years, the Russian Orthodox Church canonized the deceased as martyrs.³¹ As will be further discussed in Chapter

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁹ Eskridge- Kosmach, 42.

³⁰ Diana Preston (2000). *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900*, New York: Walker & Company, 25.

³¹ Edward Pehanich, "The Chinese Martyrs," American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the U.S, accessed February 6, 2022. <https://www.acrod.org/readingroom/saints/chinese-martyrs>. For more on Father Mitrofan Ji, see http://www.orthodox.cn/history/martyrs/1_ru.htm.

Three, their deaths became a subject of particular importance to Russian church officials who wrote about the importance of keeping the flame of Orthodoxy alive against ascending “godless forces” in the world.

Russian military presence in Manchuria increased substantially in response to the Boxer Rebellion. Initially underestimating the revolutionary forces and reluctant to commit substantial resources to suppressing the uprising, Russia saw no choice but to intervene once its stake in the CER became threatened. Nearly 200,000 troops from the imperial army—100,000 in Manchuria, 100,000 reserve troops across the border in Siberia—participated in quelling the uprising.³² With the Boxers decimated and Russian troops remaining garrisoned in the Far East, Russia managed to reassert control in Manchuria. As Chia-pin Liang writes, to achieve peace, China became further subordinated to Russian-Western treaties and spheres of influence in its own lands.³³ The development of Russian authority in Manchuria continued apace.

Thanks to the growth of trade and economic opportunities that the CER offered, tens of thousands of people migrated to Harbin with the completion of the main track of the railroad in 1903. According to Susanne Hohler, 50,000 to 60,000 people lived in the city that year, most of whom were Russian or Chinese.³⁴ Although enjoying *de jure* legal authority over local institutions like the CER, Russians constituted the minority of the city’s population.³⁵ Nevertheless, as Mara Moustafine writes, Russian culture and architecture dominated the city’s streets relative to that of the Chinese:

³² Eskridge- Kosmach, 45.

³³ Chia-Pin Liang, “History of the Chinese Eastern Railway: A Chinese Version,” 192. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2750147>.

³⁴ Susanne Hohler, *Fascism in Manchuria: The Soviet-China Encounter in the 1930s*, 20.

³⁵ According to the 1903 census, there were twice as many Chinese as there were Russians living in Harbin and the neighboring region. See Olga Bakich, “Origins of the Russian Community on the Chinese Eastern Railway,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 27, no. 1 (1985), 12-13.

[Harbin's] architecture was reminiscent of Moscow or St. Petersburg, with onion-domed cupolas, empire-style façades, wide boulevards, and touches of art nouveau. Russian was spoken in the streets, shops, and theatres. It was also the language of administration, commerce, and education. Street signs and billboards were written in Russian. Only in Fujiadian, where most of Harbin's Chinese lived and few Russians ventured, did Chinese prevail.³⁶

In the coming years, people from 22 nationalities and religious denominations, half of which were minorities of the Russian Empire, flocked to Harbin seeking similar economic opportunities. Of note are the thousands of Russian and Polish Jews, as well as Armenians, Polish Catholics, and Muslim Tatars.³⁷ Yet for now, Harbin's multinational residents lived in a state of peaceful coexistence, to the extent that interpersonal violence was seldom encountered.³⁸ The three main regions of the city each contained a mixed Russian-Chinese population, with the trade center of Pristan containing the largest percentage of Chinese residents.³⁹ Harbin's Jewish population established a synagogue, education system, and hospital, all of which were encouraged by local administrators. As a result, the inchoate Russian identity in Harbin was colored by the city's cosmopolitan character.

The multinational Russian identity that developed in the liberal cosmopolitan space of pre-1917 Harbin did not fulfill the aspirations of Tsar Nicholas II, who sought to bolster "official

³⁶ Mara Moustafine, "Russians from China: Migrations and Identity," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 5, No.2 (2013), 143-158. Fujiadian was a small village outside Harbin proper and served as a base for Chinese CER workers. See Bakich (1986), 136.

³⁷ For a more extensive account on Harbin's religious and ethnic groups, see E. N. Chernolutskaia and Julia Trubikhina, "Religious Communities in Harbin and Ethnic Identity of Russian Emigres," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, Number 1 (2000), 79-96.

³⁸ Jews in Harbin were scapegoated from the moment they arrived in the city. Although antisemitism was rare in the early decades of the city, Harbin's Jews fell victim to antisemitic attacks encouraged by Russian fascists during their regime. For more on the early history of Jews and other ethnicities in Harbin, see Wolff (1999), 100-103.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

nationalism” in Manchuria.⁴⁰ This speaks to the fact that because Harbin was so distant from Petersburg geographically, imperial administrators stationed there struggled to seamlessly transfer the tsar’s edicts. The result was competing discourses on national versus multinational “Russianness” among Russian officials in Harbin. For example, Alexei Mikhailovich Abaza, manager of the Special Committee for the Affairs of the Far East, pursued a conservative agenda of russification that was consistent with the desires of the tsar.⁴¹ Conversely, Minister of Finance Vladimir Nikolaevich Kokovtsov, who would later become Nicholas II’s prime minister, recognized the benefit of liberal ethnicity politics as a valuable factor that could not only stimulate economic growth, but also not interfere with Russia’s development initiatives.⁴² Ultimately, as described above, the multinational version won out as Harbin developed into a cosmopolitan city.

Another challenge to the tsar’s wishes to implement “russified autocracy” in Manchuria arose from the railroad strikes that occurred during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. As part of the empire-wide railroad strike of October 1905, the CER and its workers proposed to organize a labor strike halting virtually all transportation of troops and supplies.⁴³ Revolutionary attitudes and activities surrounding this strike led to a rift between the railroad employees and the imperial troops stationed in Manchuria since the Boxer uprising. The extent to which this was a true strike movement is dubious; most CER trains continued operating normally, and more troops were transported along the railroad line during the strike than previously.⁴⁴ Yet the reason for this, as David Wolff writes, further indicates that the political positions of Harbin’s residents

⁴⁰ Esthus (1981), 397. Russian “official nationalism” refers to Sergei Uvarov’s 1833 three-pronged formulation “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationalism,” which would be upheld as the principal ideological doctrine of the Russian Empire until the death of Nicholas I in 1855. Future tsars would continue this ideology in their own ways.

⁴¹ Wolff (1999), 104-105.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴³ Reichman, “The 1905 Revolution on the Siberian Railroad,” *The Russian Review* 47, no. 1 (1988), 25-27.

⁴⁴ Reichman, *Railwaymen and Revolution: Russia, 1905*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

at the time fundamentally differed from those of Nicholas II and the imperial center. Trains continued operating not because of poor organization or hypocrisy on the part of the strikers, but because popular sympathy remained with the soldiers, who were viewed as martyrs in Nicholas II's futile war project. Moreover, participants in the strike movements hoped to convert soldiers from servants to the autocracy into fighters for the liberation of Russia from tsarist autocracy.⁴⁵ This populist narrative echoed the broader revolutionary fervor of 1905 and reflected a spirit of Harbin that was as distant ideologically from the tsardom as it was geographically.

If the establishment of Harbin at the end of the 1900s was primarily determined by the political, military, and diplomatic interests of governments, the direction and identity of Harbin in the following two decades were shaped by local populations on the ground. The story of Harbin from 1898-1917 is a microcosm of the eroding legitimacy of Russian imperial expansion. The anti-Russian sentiments that exploded during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 were rooted in discontent over Russia's economic and military primacy in Manchuria. The CER continued transporting Russian soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War, but with the explicit aim of inciting a revolution against the autocracy rather than fueling the tsar's militarism in Port Arthur. Finally, the tsar's russified "official nationalism" was rejected in favor of a multinational liberal society, one whose inter-ethnic relations, at least among Russia's imperial minorities, were superior to those in the Russian mainland. Harbin's anti-tsarist inclination would only increase in the post-imperial moment of 1917. At the same time, drastic and rapid changes were imminent in Harbin's way of life.

Post-1917: Russian Identity as Safeguard and Antidote to Adversity

⁴⁵ Wolff (1999), 132-133.

Everything in Harbin changed in 1917. In that year and during the Russian Civil War of the early 1920s, between 100,000 and 200,000 Russians immigrated to northern China from the territory of the former Russian Empire after the Bolsheviks deposed Nicholas II in the October Revolution. For some, Harbin was just a temporary stop on the long journey away from Russia, and of those that came to China, fewer than half remained a decade later.⁴⁶ The immigrants came from all the different groups that the Bolsheviks battled during the Civil War: anti-Bolshevik peasants and workers, but also lawyers, cultured intelligentsia, government officials, actors, and minor aristocrats were among them. Therefore, anti-Communist sentiment spread rapidly throughout the community and would later serve as one of the key tenets of Russian fascism in the region.

The largely harmonious relationship that had existed between Russian and non-Russian ethnic groups and social classes in Harbin evaporated instantly. Since many of the individuals fleeing to Manchuria were former tsarist officials or soldiers in the imperial army, the newcomers introduced major challenges to urban life. Disputes erupted between monarchist émigrés and the leftist railroad workers who just a decade ago had participated in the CER strikes. Such a massive and unforeseen population boom placed a massive burden on the housing and employment industries, both of which collapsed rapidly.

Failing to restore public order, the head of the CER was deposed by the Chinese, thereby giving the Chinese economic and political control over Harbin for the first time.⁴⁷ In recognition of the city's new authority, the government of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic requested that the Chinese nationalist government terminate all activities with former Russian consulates in Manchuria, which the Chinese did on September 27, 1920. This action was gravely

⁴⁶ Bakich (2000), 56.

⁴⁷ Carter (2002).

consequential for the tens of thousands of Russians living in Harbin. With all their documents from the imperial era now voided, Russian émigrés in Harbin lost their extraterritorial rights and were rendered stateless.⁴⁸

Ironically, the very arrival of hundreds of thousands of Russian emigrants to Harbin was one of the key factors to the disintegration of Russian authority in the city. Indeed, as James Carter argues, the period following 1917 was the beginning of the end of Russian Harbin as Chinese nationalist thought affected local political and cultural institutions on a widespread scale.⁴⁹ Interestingly, despite the increase of Chinese nationalism in the city, Harbin did not see a radical increase of anti-Russian sentiment as had existed during the Boxer Rebellion.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it was still the case that in the mid-1920s, as more Russians departed Harbin and the Chinese consolidated their control, Russians found themselves in the considerable minority of the urban population, to an even greater extent than in the previous two decades.⁵¹ Increasingly demographically isolated and devoid of both passports and legal protection, the newcomers to Russian Harbin were in a truly dire condition.

For the Russian émigré community, problems did not stop with their increasing socioeconomic insecurity in Harbin; their very identity as Russians became challenged as well. Beginning in the early 1920s, maintenance of the CER changed as the Chinese and Soviet governments continued the process of kindling diplomatic relations. Negotiations in 1924 created a stipulation that the railroad would only employ Soviet and Chinese citizens. Responses to this were varied: some Russian Harbiners, mostly former CER workers who already favored Soviet

⁴⁸ Documents of USSR Foreign Policy, 1917 - 1944. Vol. 3, Moscow: Gospolizdat, 1958, pp. 213 - 216. Cited in Vera Sergienko & Elena A. Uirilene, "The Legal Status of Russians in Manchuria (the 1920s)," *Far Eastern Affairs* 1, no. 36 (2008), 135-36.

⁴⁹ Carter (2002), 66-91.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵¹ According to John Stephan, there were nearly five times as many Chinese as there were Russians by the late 1920s and early 1930s. See Stephan (1978), 40.

policies, accepted Soviet citizenship; some White Russians did so reluctantly for the sole reason of keeping their jobs; and others, unwilling to have the label “Soviet citizen” on their conscience, simply refused and remained stateless and unemployed.⁵² Yet regardless of the choice that Russian Harbiners took, it became clear that “Russian,” at least in a legal sense, was no longer an acceptable category in Harbin.

As Olga Bakich describes, with the Soviet Union now possessing substantial influence in Manchuria, antagonism festered within the Russian diaspora itself after 1917.⁵³ Battle lines were drawn between the original wave of railroad workers, who were largely Soviet sympathizers, and the newly arrived émigrés, who remained devoted to the monarchy and Russian cultural practices. So-called “radishes” (red on the outside, white on the inside) who accepted Soviet citizenship for purely materialistic reasons, were caught in the middle; for the Soviet camp, they were chastised as antiquated opportunists, while for the White Russians, they were traitors to the Russian nation that had been viciously destroyed by the very people they praised.⁵⁴ This seismic ideological divide indicates that the “state of statelessness,” caused and exacerbated by regional Sino-Soviet policies, played a substantial role in alienating the Russian community of 1920s Harbin.

In a state of such vulnerability, the émigré community that came to Harbin in 1917 recognized the urgent need to stick together to survive their new life in Harbin. To foster a sense of stability, these individuals supported the safeguarding of Russian cultural traditions and raising children in a purely “Russian” manner while in emigration. As Olga Frolova wrote about her experience growing up in 1930s Harbin:

⁵² Bakich (2000), 56-57.

⁵³ Many Soviet citizens also travelled to Harbin to work on the CER, reifying the Soviet presence in the city to the dislike of the White emigres.

⁵⁴ Bakich (2000), 58.

I am from a typical Russian family, which in its heart preserved the way of life, morals, and attitudes of pre-revolutionary Russia ... In our family we were brought up to love our homeland, to love Russia. Russia embodied radiance. We were also brought up with the belief in the necessity of returning to our homeland. Toward this goal our family inculcated in us such traits as practical mindedness, steadfastness, decency, responsibility, humanity, industriousness, and lack of coddling.⁵⁵

This excerpt reveals that by cultivating patriotism and teaching the morals above, Russian émigrés in Harbin raised the future generations in the spirit of “Russianness.” Prior to 1917, there is little evidence suggesting that immigrants to Harbin felt the need to craft such an identity. Russian authority in the region was already widespread, and most newcomers to Harbin still considered their home to be within the Russian Empire. In other words, they did not need to inculcate “Russianness” because they already possessed it. Now in a post-imperial moment, lacking formal Russian institutions both at home in Russia and abroad in Manchuria, national identity had to be manufactured to provide the émigré community with spiritual fortitude in times of trouble.

In summary, Russians in post-1917 Harbin looked and behaved very differently than their predecessors of the pre-1917 period. Because of the revolution, entire segments of Russia’s imperial population went from occupying favorable social positions to having no social standing whatsoever in less than five years. Flocking to Harbin in search of stability and security, they found neither as Russia’s social and political institutions in Harbin changed hands. Families suffered from crime and became impoverished. Battered down in this miserable condition, new voices emerged from the émigré community emphasizing the importance of preserving what was

⁵⁵ Laurie Manchester, “Repatriation to a Totalitarian Homeland: The Ambiguous Alterity of Russian Repatriates from China to the USSR,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 16, no. 3 (2007), 354.

lost: Russia itself. The diaspora did this on the grassroots level, by teaching children in every Harbin home what it means to be Russian and the values that Russians hold.

IV. Conclusion: Authority to Abstraction

This chapter has outlined the manifold historical events leading to the development of a Russian community in Manchuria and the factors influencing the development of a communal identity among Harbin's Russian émigré population. As Olga Bakich asserts, Harbin's first settlers journeyed across Siberia seeking new economic opportunities "guided by the wish to build a peaceful and prosperous life for themselves and their families."⁵⁶ Critically, they did not do so because they wanted to leave Russia and thereby abandon their Russian identity. From their earliest days in Harbin, Harbin's Russian population pursued very conscious efforts to replicate Russian schools, churches, and institutions in Manchuria; to transfer a piece of the daily life of the fatherland to a foreign land. Yet the consequence was a fundamentally new Russian identity, one sufficiently removed from the autocratic controls of the imperial center and unified through populist solidarity.

The first two sections concur with previous scholarship in that pre-1917 Harbin was characterized by a spirit of liberal cosmopolitanism. Russians, Chinese, and dozens of other nationalities found in Harbin new economic opportunities provided by the Chinese Eastern Railway and tolerated each other's presence. Everyone suffered in times of hardship, and individuals of different ethnicities even went to great lengths to assist each other. At the same time, given the pro-Russian territorial agreements reached by Sergei Witte and the Qing Dynasty in the late 19th century, Russians assumed a sovereign status in Harbin and established their dominant authority in the city through various bureaucratic and cultural institutions.

⁵⁶ Bakich (1985), 14.

The events of the pre-1917 period demonstrate that while the tsar took pride in this “Russian colony” in Manchuria, popular sentiments in Harbin rejected the tsar’s policies. The damage of the Boxer Rebellion represented the collective frustration of the Chinese people in Russian administrative and military presence in their territory. The 1905 CER strikes were a form of protest among the Russian people in Manchuria, who refused to satisfy the militarist ambitions of their own leader. And urban life in Harbin at this time, multinational and cosmopolitan, was in many respects a direct counter to the russifying and antisemitic official nationalism of Nicholas II. Minority populations of the Russian Empire, greatly struggling for self-expression back home, were welcomed in Harbin and lived alongside their compatriots. In other words, the people of Harbin in pre-1917 Harbin still felt a great sense of attachment to their homeland, yet in their minds, Russian society could be replicated and indeed ameliorated in Harbin without the tsar. In short, the Russian people living in their “home away from home” in the Far East drew upon their compatriots' revolutionary fervor to conceive of a different future for Russia and Russians.

1917 provided a new purpose for solidarity among Harbin’s Russian community. In the aftermath of the revolution and the resulting civil war, tens of thousands of émigré Russians fled to Manchuria, where they had to start over from scratch, often unsuccessfully. In the following decades, prominent voices arose in the community decrying the new Soviet influence in Harbin and proclaiming unity in a Russian spirit. In their view, Russia could be preserved through diligently fostering morals considered inherent central to its people. Yet for some in the diaspora, merely preserving Russian traditions in emigration was not enough. A younger generation of émigrés, born and raised in a revolutionary age, sought to implement a new direction for their people: a fascist Russian nation. Members of this young nationalistic cohort eventually occupied

leading positions in Harbin's fascist organizations, which proclaimed the possibility not only of preserving Russia spiritually, but also physically returning there. The next chapter will explore how these young émigré fascists weaponized a Russian national identity to fuel their messianic revanchist ambitions.

Chapter Two: The All-Russian Fascist Party

...as a titanic struggle is being waged between two elements, Good and Evil, we Russian emigrants cannot sit idly, for this is a crime before God, before our heavenly patron Holy Prince Vladimir, and before our Motherland, and therefore we must go from words to deeds, to action, and to the sacrificial struggle to the bitter end, to the restoration of a Great National Russia. Forward, to our heroic feat! Forward, to the blue sky of Russia!⁵⁷

As the previous chapter asserted, the Russian émigré diaspora that migrated to Harbin after the 1917 revolution faced considerable misfortune in their early years in the city. The collapse of tsarist institutions led to economic uncertainty and a breakdown of social order. As people lost their jobs and citizenship rights, tension erupted between the new émigrés and the socialist-aligned Russian railroad workers already residing in Harbin. Recognizing the volatility of the situation, Soviet and Chinese authorities collaborated to form new policies and pacify the city. Even though their material needs could now be satisfied, Russian émigrés remained deeply perturbed on a spiritual level. As the former “Russian colony” of Harbin came under Soviet-assisted Chinese control, the émigrés’ humiliation that came with displacement from their homeland became compounded with the recognition that one of the last vestiges of Russian authority on the planet was now lost as well.

⁵⁷ *Natsiia*, August 1939, 1.

In the years that followed, Russian fascists emerged in Harbin proposing a mission for the émigré public to develop in emigration: the restoration of Russian glory in the world, both in a spiritual and territorial sense. Their writings demonstrate that the organizational work to these ends required first inculcating the belief that Russian émigrés were fulfilling a “sacred mission” by joining the fascist cause; only once they were fully convinced of this could they combat the Bolsheviks militarily. A bonus to seeing the Russian homeland restored would be the downfall of the enemies that drove the community away in 1917. Therefore, Russian fascist ideas in Harbin were quintessentially messianic and revanchist at the same time: Russian émigrés were chosen long ago to save themselves and the globe from communism, and the only way to do so was by vengefully recapturing the territory that they felt was stolen in 1917.

This chapter centers on ideas of messianic revanchism as they emerge in the writings of Russian fascists in Harbin. Following a brief historical interlude on the general history and activities of local Russian fascism, I pursue a close reading of several documents published or endorsed by the ARFP, the content of which consistently and forcefully espouses the “four R’s” described in the introduction: realization, revenge, return, and redemption. Taken together, these sources demonstrate that in the diaspora’s state of extreme vulnerability in Harbin, the ARFP fostered hope and faith in something that nobody else could, or even cared, to offer: a monument for the past, a purpose for the present, and a vision for the future. The details of that process, as convincing and attractive as they are quixotic and disturbing, are revealed below.

Russian Fascism in Manchuria: A Historical Synopsis

The story of Russian fascism in Manchuria revolves around the biography of Konstantin Vladimirovich Rodzaevskii, the man who would later become the general secretary of its largest organization. The child of bourgeois parents, Rodzaevskii was born in the town of

Blagoveshchensk, located directly on the Russia-China border, in 1907. Many of his violent, rebellious proclivities, as John Stephan argues, are rooted in the environment in which he grew up.⁵⁸ Before his birth, the city, like Harbin, was an important trade town along the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Yet at the outset of the Boxer Rebellion, Blagoveshchensk became a conflict zone between Russians and Chinese; the Qing and Boxers shelled the city, and in retaliation, local Cossacks deported thousands of Chinese subjects. The result was a massacre leading to the drowning of over 5,000 people and a furthering of Chinese resentment toward Russians.

Despite the violence that plagued the city in the years anticipating his birth, Rodzaevskii spent his childhood years in Blagoveshchensk living in a state of relative peace. However, his world was altered by the outbreak of the Russian civil war. After the Soviets ultimately won the war, Rodzaevskii came to despise the Soviet authority that uprooted his way of life, and in 1925, he fled to Harbin. While it is unclear why he was motivated to emigrate to Manchuria, it is reasonable to assume that a combination of his bourgeois background and the further entrenchment of Soviet power in Blagoveshchensk played a considerable role.⁵⁹

Rodzaevskii's arrival in Harbin coincided with the founding of the first organization of Russian fascists in Manchuria, the Russian Fascist Organization (*Russkaia Fashistskaia Organizatsiia*, hereafter RFO), by members of the Law Faculty at Harbin Normal University. Rodzaevskii, now a student under the tutelage of two anti-Communist Russian nationalists at the local Juridical Institute, joined the RFO almost immediately after its founding.⁶⁰ Bold and charming, Rodzaevskii assisted the RFO in winning over the hearts of his fellow students. The organization published its own manifesto entitled "Three Theses of Fascism," which enjoyed

⁵⁸ Stephan (1978), 49.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 52-53

support among other anti-Communist organizations. In addition to its major publications, the RFO spread anti-Soviet and pro-fascist propaganda both in the Institute and the Soviet Union itself.⁶¹ Over time, Rodzaevskii firmly established himself as a leading Russian fascist in Harbin, one who seemed poised to lead the RFO to a bright future.

However, Rodzaevskii's successes were soon curtailed. As soon as the Soviet government learned of the counterrevolutionary activities on their border, a special envoy was sent to Harbin to prevent the spread of anti-Soviet propaganda. The Chinese, similarly, were wary of fascist propaganda proliferating in their territory and banned all fascist activity in Manchuria. These events, coupled with the secondary factor of increased Soviet presence in Harbin's academic institutions and economic life, substantially affected the publicity efforts of the RFO.⁶² Functionally stripped of their authority, the RFO, like the rest of the diaspora, existed in a state of limbo as they struggled against Sino-Soviet restrictions to maintain their presence in the city.

Rodzaevskii never gave up on his ambitions, and in 1931 he and his mentors convened émigré Russians from several Chinese cities and other countries to discuss the formation of a new fascist organization, the Russian Fascist Party, later renamed to the All-Russian Fascist Party.⁶³ The party was organized around a central council (*soviet*) and chaired by Rodzaevskii, who claimed the title of general secretary.⁶⁴ Like the RFO, the party committed itself to organizing the émigré public to join the fight against Bolshevism, only this time it was much more successful in its recruitment and organizational efforts.

⁶¹Erwin Oberländer, "The All-Russian Fascist Party," *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 1 (1966), 160-161.

⁶² Ibid. See also Stephan (1978), 53-54.

⁶³ In the original Russian, the party was called the *vserossiiskaia fashistskaia partiia*. The terminological significance of the term *vserossiiskaia* is discussed further below.

⁶⁴ The fascists' use of the term *soviet*, as well as other similarities to the Soviet Union, are revisited at a later point in the chapter.

One of the main reasons for the success and confidence of the ARFP, at least in the early years of its existence, was its constructive relationship with the Japanese Empire. The Russian émigré community experienced further changes in their daily life after the Japanese annexed Manchuria and founded the puppet state Manchukuo in 1932. Other scholars have explored the complex details of the social status of Harbin Russians under the Japanese administration.⁶⁵ However, it should be noted that Harbin Russians were allowed to live in peace under Japanese rule, as long as they remained loyal to the Japanese and hostile to communism; the latter, of course, was hardly an issue.⁶⁶ Taking advantage of the Japanese policy of non-interference in Manchukuo, the ARFP freely published and disseminated their materials to their audience.⁶⁷ Rodzaevskii even managed to forge close links with the Japanese Kwantung Army, allowing the Japanese to become a proximate partner in the Russian fascists' long-term ambitions. While Rodzaevskii's opinion of the Japanese people on a personal level is unknown, he clearly viewed them as a worthy strategic ally, one with a military potential large enough to one day challenge the Soviet Union and support the revanchist takeover.⁶⁸

With cooperative partnerships and a wave of public energy at his back, Rodzaevskii was in a prime position to finally lead the movement to resoundingly defeat Bolshevism and restore Russian glory to the world. The critical task remaining was to develop the narratives that would inspire the community to join the fascist cause for the liberation of the Russian people.

Realization: The Unique Destiny of the Russian People and Russian Fascism

⁶⁵ Hohler (2017), Stephan (1978).

⁶⁶ Hohler (2017), 36-37.

⁶⁷ For further information on increased surveillance and control in Manchukuo from 1937-1945, see *Ibid.*, 38-43.

⁶⁸ Rodzaevskii once said, "Japan is the only country interested not in the dismemberment of Russia, but in the creation of a great and powerful Russia which would be Japan's friend." See Oberländer (1966), 166.

Like most nationalist thinkers, Russian fascists held that Russia and Russians had a unique, inimitable national history, one that all its people could and needed to recognize and take pride in. Various fascist publications demonstrate the extent to which their authors identified in the past a “sacred mission” that contemporary Russians could fulfill by joining the fascist cause. The clearest example of this is Rodzaevskii’s 1938 essay, “Russkost’ Rossiiskogo Fashizma” (“The Russianness of Russian Fascism”). In the opening paragraph of the essay, Rodzaevskii explicitly states that “...fascism is not an imitation of the West...but a native Russian (*russkaia*) tradition, one that has fully or partially emerged at various stages on the historical path of the Russian people (*russkii narod*).⁶⁹ In this paragraph, not only does Rodzaevskii write about Russian fascism as influenced by Russia’s past experiences, he describes fascism itself as a Russian invention, the legacy of which present generations of Russians are entitled to continue.

For Rodzaevskii, the same battles that Russian fascism is fighting in the present – fascism versus liberalism, the National versus the International, Good versus Evil – have continuously emerged throughout Russian history. These age-old battles have all centered around a “collective unity of social classes” defeating the selfishness of individuals or a cohort, and every time the “collective” has triumphed. Rodzaevskii does not hesitate from reaching back into the earliest annals of Russian history to argue for a fascist legacy. For example, Saint Vladimir and his princely retinue constituted the earliest example of fascist collective unity, for the simple reason that they were people of varying social classes united by bravery and initiative.⁷⁰ Later Russian statesmen, including Yaroslav the Wise, Andrei Bogolyubsky, and Ivan IV continued Vladimir’s

⁶⁹ Konstantin Rodzaevskii. “Russkost’ Rossiiskogo Fashizma” [The Russianness of Russian Fascism]. Harbin, 1938. Accessed January 13, 2022. <https://coollib.net/b/458689-konstantin-vladimirovich-rodzaevskiy-russkost-rossiyskogo-fashizma/read>.

⁷⁰ Rodzaevskii uses the Italian term *fascio*, which translates to “bundle,” and in this context refers to the fasces, a bundle of sticks held together by rope. There are various connotations to this mythological symbol: sometimes it simply refers to collective unity, and other times to state law and power. It is the origin of the term “fascism.”

“fascist example” because of their contributions to organizing the Russian state system. The pinnacle of fascism for Rodzaevskii is found in the *zemskii sobor*, the first example of what Rodzaevskii considers to be the corporate statism at the foundation of the ARFP’s economy. Referring to the 20th century, Rodzaevskii positively characterizes Stolypin’s land reforms and Zubatov’s police forces as fascist in character, going on to praise antisemitic politicians and intellectuals as inspirations for the fascist worldview.⁷¹

Such arguments for the uniqueness of Russian fascism are also found in the party manifesto of the ARFP, *The ABCs of Fascism*.⁷² Questions 42 and 44, respectively, describe how claims that Russian fascism has copied Italian and German fascism are “entirely baseless,” and that the idea of Russian fascism can be found throughout Russian history, for fascism has “deep roots in Russia’s historical past.”⁷³ These exact points are copied almost identically in Rodzaevskii’s 1938 article as well:

Russian ideas can be found in both Italian fascism and German National Socialism: Russian fascists resolutely reject accusations of [ideological] borrowing and declare themselves the faithful successors of the Russian past, who are cleansing it of Masonic forgeries and Jewish slander and revealing the Russian Spirit in its worldview and the Russian nation in its state.⁷⁴

In Rodzaevskii’s interpretation, it is not the Russian fascists who borrowed from the Italians and Germans, but the other way around. This nativist interpretation of fascism as a Russian invention is laughable from a factual perspective. One need only glance at the main symbol in the party

⁷¹ “Russianness.”

⁷² The first edition of *ABCs* was written in the summer of 1934 by G.V. Taradanov and V.V. Kibardin, with edits and additions made by Konstantin Rodzaevskii in 1935. It is a collection of answers to 100 “basic questions that arise whenever a Russian person thinks of the word ‘fascism.’”

⁷³ *ABCs*, Question 42, “Why is it unfounded to claim that Russian fascists are copying Italian and German fascism?”

⁷⁴ “Russianness.”

emblem of the ARFP – the swastika, itself invented in Nazi Germany over ten years before the establishment of Rodzaevskii’s party – to disprove the idea that Russian fascists “resolutely reject accusations of borrowing.”⁷⁵ Rodzaevskii further explicitly states in *ABCs* that Italian and German fascism have been instructional to the Russian fascist movement.⁷⁶ However, as already discussed above, logical incongruities were meaningless to Rodzaevskii; the key was to develop a narrative so that present-day Russians were reminded of the “heritage” they came from, and that they would feel motivated to action on behalf of that heritage.

It is unsurprising that Russian fascist authors often mixed religious themes into their narrative of a “sacred mission” for the nation. Various essays and poems in daily fascist newspapers like *Nash Put’ (Our Way)* and *Natsiia (Nation)* are dedicated to Saint Vladimir and the monumentality of his greatest achievement, the Christianization of Kievan Rus’, as the quintessential instantiation of a Russian identity. Rodzaevskii identifies Vladimir as the “heavenly patron (*nebesny pokrovitel’*)” of the Russian fascists because of his founding of Orthodoxy.⁷⁷ Another particularly illustrative example of Saint Vladimir’s importance to Russian fascists is the front page of the July 15, 1939 edition of *Natsiia* – the saint’s feast day – which features a lengthy article written by Rodzaevskii himself entitled, “Under the Banner of Saint Vladimir: For the Resurrection of Holy Rus’!,” an ode to the saint written by one V. A. Sadikov (“To the Inapostolic Saint Vladimir”), and an illustration of the baptism of Rus’.

To truly emphasize the importance and sanctity of their mission, the fascists habitually contextualized Vladimir within the current struggle of Russian emigration. As Rodzaevskii writes about Holy Rus’ as the historical inspiration for the modern Russian nation, a stanza in

⁷⁵ *ABCs*, Question 98, “What is the Party Emblem and Religious Sign of the ARFP, and what is their symbolism?”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Question 38, “What do the experiences of Italy and Germany teach us?”

⁷⁷ “Russianness.”

Sadikov's poem describes the importance of following the Vladimir's example to counter the evil forces destroying the might and faith of the Russian nation.⁷⁸ Saint Vladimir appears in *Nash Put'* in a similar context alongside local church officials, and academics; all the above figures are attributed a heroic status as "knights" of Orthodoxy, and therefore Russia as a whole.⁷⁹ Finally, the editors of *ABCs* write that the icon of Vladimir would accompany the swastika as the official "religious image" of the ARFP, given that it "testifies to the devotion of the Orthodox members of the party to the religion of their ancestors, Orthodoxy."⁸⁰

For Rodzaevskii and other fascist leaders, modern-day Russians were the descendants of a unique historical experience. As they reflected upon their collective suffering and humiliation, the community was told to recognize the destiny in all of them and appreciate the historic mission to which they were called. The success of that mission hinged upon the defeat of an enemy, whom the fascists wasted no time in defining.

Revenge: The "Enemies" of the Russian Nation

Russian fascists went to considerable lengths to persuade their audience of the true nature of the enemies of the Russian people. According to *ABCs*, "knowledge of the enemy is the first guarantee of victory."⁸¹ Those "enemies of fascism are socialists, and especially Communists; international capitalists and liberals; stateless plutocrats (*plutokratiia bez otechestva*); and the Jews and masons standing behind all of them."⁸² These were to be the primary targets of vengeance in the "sacred mission" of the Russian fascists.

⁷⁸ *Natsiia*, August 1939, 1.

⁷⁹ *Nash Put'*, June 6 (1936), 2.

⁸⁰ *ABCs*, Question 98, "What is the party emblem and religious sign of the ARFP, and what is their symbolism?"

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Question 90, "The tasks of each individual fascist."

⁸² *Ibid.*, Question 15, "Who are the fascists fighting?"

There is no ambiguity in how Russian fascists describe the real consequences of Jewish and Communist corruption around the world. ARFP ideologues branded Jews as simultaneously greedy capitalists and satanic communists.⁸³ In their view, the USSR was a “fiefdom” of world Judaism. Marxist Jews had progressively “infiltrated” state structures, and Russia was the victim of this process that culminated in 1917. Moreover, the writers of *ABCs* describe how “Jewish interests” were explicitly oppositional to the interests of workers: those at the helm of the Soviet Union were Jewish hypocrites who were only in power for self-aggrandizement.⁸⁴ Aside from the dangers of Judaism, the authors of the ARFP manifesto describe how Communists in the USSR were conducting terror operations against the Russian people through the GPU.⁸⁵ Fascist newspapers also discuss with horror the infiltration of communism into Western universities. One *Nash Put*’ article describes Oxford as the “nursery of red politicians,” with the subtitle, “Communists have corrupted the English aristocracy.”⁸⁶

It is interesting to note that when identifying the axis of evil in the world, Russian fascists not only selected active forces like Communism and Judaism, but also the passive forces that had enabled them to come into being. In this regard, ARFP ideologues did not hesitate to accuse the older generations of their own émigré community. The turbulent events of the 1920s witnessed a generational conflict in the Manchurian diaspora. According to Susanne Hohler, “Monarchists were still mired in endless debates between Legitimists and the so-called Unpredetermined (*nepredreshentsy*) about who should inherit the Romanov throne.”⁸⁷ At the same time, the émigré youth argued that in order to truly reverse their adversities, a new direction was needed.

⁸³ Ibid., Question 10, “What is capital and the fascist attitude toward it?”; Question 21, “What is the provocation of socialism?”

⁸⁴ Ibid., Question 23, “How is fascism different from liberalism and Marxism?”

⁸⁵ Ibid., Question 35, “Describe the emotional state of the Russian people.” The GPU refers to the State Political Directorate, a security agency affiliated with the NKVD.

⁸⁶ June 9 (1936), 3.

⁸⁷ Hohler, *Fascism in Manchuria*, 47-48.

Moreover, Russian fascists argued that by clinging so desperately to moribund political institutions, monarchists in the Russian émigré diaspora had unwillingly yet indisputably aided and abetted the rise of Bolshevism in 1917. The past movements had failed, and the supporters of those movements were responsible to the community's disarray:

The state of emigration before the emergence of Russian (*rossiiskii*) fascism can be characterized as a state of almost total apathy and passivity in the fight against the communist authority.⁸⁸

The White movement...did not give concrete answers on what they would provide Russian workers and peasants, and their complete inattention to social questions pushed away the masses, who sided not with the White heroes, but with Communist demagogues.⁸⁹

It is also the case that despite concern for communism's supposed corruption of European political and educational institutions, some authors occasionally identify Western European states as "passive enemies" of the Russian nation as well. An exceptionally long article in *Natsiya* outlines how England allegedly sabotaged Russia in World War I. According to the article's author,

England played the role of an obedient tool of dark forces. The murder at Sarajevo was organized by the English, and then the English built obstacles in the way of the victorious movement of the Russian troops. If not for the treacherous role of the English "ally," Russia would not have known either Brest-Litovsk or Bolshevism.⁹⁰

However factually dubious this assertion may be, this author viewed England as another "agent" that enabled the dark forces of Bolshevism. The "crimes" they committed by allegedly

⁸⁸ *ABC's*, Question 39, "the state of emigration before the emergence of Russian fascism."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Question 37, "why was the White movement unsuccessful?"

⁹⁰ *Natsiia*, August 1939, 5.

abandoning Russia were written in Russian blood in 1917; blood that could only be avenged by organizing for the fight for the motherland. As the article proclaims, “The hour of [Russia’s] resurrection is undoubtedly near. God will grant that she will stand again and be much stronger than her older self, for she will be purified like an innocent child through her suffering on the Cross, her Golgotha.”⁹¹ At least in this author’s opinion, past Western treacheries against Russia in World War I represented another name on the fascists’ list.

Russian fascist leaders in Harbin inculcated in their supporters a spirit of revenge against the enemies of the Russian nation. To truly rectify the humiliating injustices of 1917, it was incumbent on the diaspora to not only recognize its own destiny, but also be steeped in a spirit of revenge against those that stopped Russia on its unique path. With work begun on manufacturing the various actors on the sides of Good and Evil, the fascists proceeded to describe and prepare for the return to their ancestral homeland.

Return: The Coming Battle for the *Rodina*

As the ARFP manufactured a list of enemies against whom to seek revenge, they reminded their readers that the only way to defeat those enemies was to recapture their homeland through armed conflict; nothing else would represent a more satisfying or totalizing reversal of fortune. Russian fascists argued that “active revolutionary struggle against communism” must ultimately be carried out “in the territory of Russia.”⁹² Such a plan was to occur in both an overt and covert manner. The ARFP took pride in preparing military cadres for battle, as well as espionage programs within the territory of the USSR and on the Sino-Soviet border, and the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² ABCs, Question 39, “The state of emigration before the emergence of Russian fascism.”

headquarters of an ARFP branch in northwestern Manchuria was topped with a blazing swastika, seemingly reminding the communists that the so-called “fighters for Russia” had not vanished.⁹³

The battle to retake Russia would have surely seemed difficult for an isolated émigré community in northeastern China. After all, how could just under 100,000 people overthrow the full force of the Bolshevik authority across the USSR? The fascists addressed these concerns with assurances that the “enemies of the Russian nation” were far weaker than they appeared, be it culturally, ideologically, or economically. Three articles cover a page of the July 15, 1939 edition of *Natsiya*: “Vladimirian feelings in the USSR,” about the growing strength of churches and other religious institutions in the Soviet Union; “Soviet Youth Don’t Want to Study Marxism,” a lengthy piece on the eroding support for the Soviet Union’s key ideological doctrine; and “Socialist Transport,” an anecdote describing the inefficiencies of Soviet transportation.⁹⁴ Accompanying these pieces is a short text about shortages in the Soviet shoemaking industry, causing hundreds of thousands of people to walk around barefoot.⁹⁵ Beyond the USSR, other articles document reports about either the weakness of political organizations that are adversarial to fascism (“France will be cut off from the Little Entente,” “Demands of Reform from the League of Nations”).

Not only were the enemies of fascism reportedly weak, but collaboration between global fascist networks had never been stronger. According to several articles in *Nash Put’*, Italians, Germans, and Romanians represented a sizeable bloc of fascist organizations in the West. and the Japanese had joined with Russian fascists in Manchuria “against communism and

⁹³ Stephan (1978), image insert between pp. 326-327.

⁹⁴ *Natsiia*, August 1939, 7.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

freemasonry.”⁹⁶ The seamless collaboration between Rodzaevskii and the Japanese Kwantung Army, as described in the historical synopsis of this chapter, confirmed this perception.

Fascist publications like *ABCs*, *Natsiia*, and *Nash Put’* persuaded Russian émigrés that the culmination of both their sacred mission and their wishes to exact revenge on Russia’s enemies was to be the reclaiming of their native home. Despite being materially outnumbered against the might of the Soviet Union, ARFP followers became convinced that the battle to liberate Russia was not only imminent, but also inevitably in their favor, thanks to the ostensibly global union between fascists of all nations; everyone would surely join the fight to ensure that Russians returned to their homeland. With information spreading across Manchuria about the fascists’ success in undermining an already “weakened” Soviet Union, and with all the necessary strategic alliances in place to commence the great battle, there was no reason for Russian fascists to doubt that the vengeance they sought would come to their enemies, and their homeland would be restored. Their reward for doing so, as presented by the Russian fascists, was to be glorious beyond measure.

Redemption: Glory for Russia and the World

According to Russian fascist ideas, if the fighters for Russia succeeded in their sacred task to rid themselves of their enemies and return to their homeland, they would achieve collective liberation from their past and present woes. The authors of *ABC’s* describe Russia as “subjugated” (*pod’yaremnaiia*) no less than eleven times. One example reads, in part, “The first slogan, ‘To represent subjugated Russia,’ means that the ARFP must be like a representative of the subjugated Russian population, expressing its will that the Russian population cannot reveal on its own in the conditions of Soviet reality.”⁹⁷ The root of the original Russian adjective

⁹⁶ *Nash Put’*, June 9 (1936), 2.

⁹⁷ *ABCs*, Question 86, “What is the meaning and role of our annual tactical slogans?”

translates to English as “yoke” (*yarmo*), and is often used in the context of an earlier period of Russian history: the Mongol invasions of the 13th century.⁹⁸ It is as if the fascists were implying, “Russians have been under a yoke before, and we are in the same state again.” However, just as the Mongols were eventually expelled from the East Slavic lands, so too, in the eyes of the fascists, would the Russian nation be redeemed again from the present yoke through diligence, honesty, and perseverance.

It is curious to observe whom the ARFP claimed to be liberating through their return to the Russian lands. Who exactly was “Russian” in the fascist perspective? The answer can be found in several questions in Part I that address issues of Russian identity. Question 7, “What is the nation?” describes the nation as “spiritual unity”: “The nation is the spiritual unity of people based on an awareness of a shared historical destiny in the past, a shared national culture, national traditions, etc., and a desire to continue its history in the future.” The fascists directly apply this definition to the Russian context by including peoples from across the former Russian Empire in the national body:

The Russian nation is the spiritual unity of all Russian people based on an awareness of a shared historical fate, national culture, traditions, etc. Therefore, the Russian [*rossiiskaia*] nation does not only include Great Russians, Belarusians, and Little Russians [Ukrainians], but also other peoples of Russia: Georgians, Armenians, Tatars, etc.⁹⁹

It is interesting to note the use of the term *rossiiskaia* in both this excerpt and the name of the party itself (*vserossiiskaia fashistskaia partiia*). The term *rossiiskaia* is one of two terms for “Russian” in the Russian language, the other being *russkaia*. The former refers to Russian citizenship, or any other form of belonging within the Russian state or territory, while the latter

⁹⁸ Another Russian term for “yoke,” *igo*, is encountered more frequently in Russian historiography to refer to the Mongol period. This term is synonymous with *yarmo*, and its meaning would not have been lost to Russian readers.

⁹⁹ *ABCs*, Question 48, “What is the Russian nation?”

refers to things that are “inherently” Russian, including ethnicity, language, culture, and literature. When referring to individuals, the term *rossiianin* would apply to a modern-day Latvian national living in the Russian Federation (*Rossiiskaia Federatsiia*), while *ruskii* would apply to an ethnic Russian down the street from him. By selecting the more inclusive “civic” term to characterize its future national-labor state, the ARFP could claim to liberate the totality of the Russian nation as it was historically constituted.

Taradanov et al. further elaborate on their use of the term “rossiiskii” instead of the more ethnocentric “ruskii.” In their view, there was no other way to formulate belonging in a Russian national community. As they write in Question 49:

All the people of Russia must be included in a united Russian nation, for only in this case, if they imagine themselves as a closely soldered family that is aware of the importance of firm unity and cohesion, can we create a powerful national state capable of opposing external pressure and corrupting internal influences, as well as all forms of Jewish freemasonry, and ensure peace and flourishing for the nation as a whole and all its peoples included therein.¹⁰⁰

As other questions in the manifesto demonstrate, Taradanov et al. also held that there were practical reasons to embrace and maintain ethnic diversity in Russia. Question 51 (“What will Russian fascism provide for the individual peoples of Russia?”) even outlines *autonomy* for minority nationalities once they returned to their new home:

All the peoples of Russia participating in the national revolution will be granted cultural, administrative, and political autonomy...since this autonomy will not contradict common national interests. Cultural autonomy will provide each people with the opportunity to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Question 49, “Why must all people inhabiting Russia be included in the Russian nation?”

raise the growing generation in its own language, possess a literary canon in that language, etc.”¹⁰¹

The ARFP did not limit their use of the term *rossiiskaia* to different ethnic groups; it also applied to religious belief. As Question 54 states, freedom of speech and conscience are to be cornerstones of the future Russian fascist state: “The national-labor state will also grant each Russian citizen full freedom of conscience (professing one or another religion at one's discretion), freedom of thought, etc.”¹⁰² Non-Orthodox religions were not to be excluded from the religious mosaic of the national body and could even declare their allegiance with Russian fascism: “other religious believers [*inoslavnye*] (for example, Muslims) will have their own religious symbol as upheld by the Supreme Soviet of the ARFP.”¹⁰³

Such an inclusive picture of nationalism would likely not readily come to a modern reader's mind when thinking of fascist movements. However, a possible reason informing the fascists' perspective on “Russianness” may be found in the conclusion of Konstantin Rodzaevskii's “The Russianness of Russian Fascism,” which explicitly reveals the global dimension of Russian liberation from communism. He writes, “...we, the Russian Fascists, flesh of flesh and blood of blood of the native people, are the children of mighty Russia, remembering the legacy of the Russian past and finding among these testaments the testament of fascism, by which Russia will be saved and Russia will save the world.”¹⁰⁴ For Rodzaevskii, precisely because only Russia has possessed such a unique historical destiny, only Russia's fascist descendants – Russia's “children” – could liberate humanity from the darkest evils of this world.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Question 51, “What will Russian fascism provide for the separate peoples of Russia?” As described earlier in the chapter, because they were one of the “enemies” of the Russian nation, Jews were not included in the “peoples of Russia”

¹⁰² Ibid., Question 54, “What will the Russian national-labor state grant to each Russian citizen?”

¹⁰³ Ibid., Question 98, “What is the Party Emblem and Religious Sign of the ARFP, and what is their symbolism?”

¹⁰⁴ “Russianness.”

Whatever the case may be, Russian fascists, as discussed above, undoubtedly viewed their fallen country as unique in the world and a model for all of humanity to revere. It follows, then, that the “children of Russia” – the peoples of the Russian Empire – had a responsibility to save that world from darkness. Just as Vladimir was a liberator for his people by turning them away from paganism, Russians in the present, as the descendants of Vladimir, would be liberators for their people and save them from communism. True liberation would then be achieved for the collective body of Russia – the *rossiiskie* – as individuals would have the chance to shape their lives in a better society.

Conclusion: The ARFP Anthem

No text offers a more suitable summary of the All-Russian Fascist Party’s ideals and goals than the party anthem, “The Russian Banner” (*Russkii Stia*). The anthem perfectly encapsulates the messianic revanchist spirit of the ARFP. The appeal to a “Russian truth” inspiring the party’s troops to victory is coupled with a march to the “ancient Kremlin,” another connection to the centuries-old legacy that Russian fascists claimed to advance in the present. Furthermore, the path to realize such grand intentions is military violence; the Russian fascists were destined to “smite their enemies” in the Soviet Union, such that they “shattered to dust”:

Rise up, brothers, with us,
Russia’s banner roars,
Over hills and over valleys,
Russia’s truth is flying.

Come to us, all you who believe in God,
Come to us, Russian land,
We will win ourselves the road
To the walls of the ancient Kremlin.

Strike harder our Russian hammer,

And smite like Divine thunder...
May the satanist *Sovnarkom*,¹⁰⁵
Fall and shatter into dust.

[Repeat Stanza 1] ¹⁰⁶

According to its performance details, this anthem was set to the Preobrazhensky March, the march of one of the most elite and long-standing guard divisions in the Russian imperial army. Its listeners, displaced émigrés of the former Russian elite, would have instantly recognized the tune and recalled their inner “Russianness”; their spirits would have surely been stirred.

As they promulgated their vision for a brighter future for their community, Russian fascists rallied their supporters using narratives of messianic revanchism. For Rodzaevskii and others, modern-day Russians were the descendants of a unique historical experience, and, now awakened to action in emigration, must realize their responsibility to literally save the world from the horrors that were subjugating it. On one hand, the fascists wrote of the “sacred legacy” that their supporters were fulfilling by joining their cause. Moreover, the ARFP described fighters for Russia as a liberating force in the world, one that would usher in salvation for Russia and the globe upon successfully defeating their enemies. In the eyes of the Russian fascists, it was the duty of Russians to rise from their captivity in emigration, realize their destiny, and defeat the scourge of international Bolshevism, thereby reclaiming their homeland for the glory and salvation of Russia and the entire world. The Russian people were the messiah that the world needed in these dark times.

As inspiring as this rhetoric may have been to ARFP followers, one cannot ignore the logical inconsistencies that abound in *ABCs*. In Question 17 (“What is liberalism and why is it

¹⁰⁵ Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union, the highest executive body in the USSR until 1946.

¹⁰⁶ *ABCs*, Question 100, “What does the fascist military hymn call for?”

dangerous?”), Taradanov et al. define liberalism as an ideology proposing inalienable rights such as freedom of speech and assembly and economic freedoms to all people. The writers describe these freedoms as harmful to the interests of the nation since they prioritize personal, private interests over the larger interests of the nation. Democracy is characterized identically in Question 18.¹⁰⁷ However, several questions that have already been analyzed above propose granting Russian citizens freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and freedom of “cultural creativity” for the intelligentsia.¹⁰⁸ The writers seem to assume that all “thinking people” will naturally do everything in the interests of the Russian nation, and they outline a series of proposals to “educate” people to do so.¹⁰⁹ Yet can it really be freedom of thought if everyone is solely acting on behalf of “Russia”? Given the lack of clarity around the issue, advocacy of unlimited personal freedoms must be interpreted as such.

The most glaring inconsistency in *ABCs*, ironically, is found in the very definition of who the “Russian people” are. The notion that Jews were “undesirable foreigners” naturally begs the question, “who else is a foreigner to the Russian fascists?” Xenophobia vis-a-vis Jews abounds in the manifesto, yet what about toward those who might not consider themselves Russian? After all, one could reasonably ask Rodzaevskii, “how do you expect Poles, Muslims, and Georgians to agree to become ‘Russian’?” The manifesto does not provide a clear answer to this question. This is because the writers themselves confuse the terms *ruskii* and *rossiiskii*, sometimes within the same question. The “Russian people” is generally referred to as the *ruskii narod*, while the “Russian nation” is described as the *rossiiskaia natsiia*. The application of *ruskii* and *rossiiskii* is also inconsistent when paired with the term “fascism” itself, as well as other key terms in the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Question 18, “What is democracy and why is it a lie?”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Question 80, “What does Russian fascism offer the intelligentsia?”

¹⁰⁹ The editors of *ABCs* write in the introduction that the manifesto is a “collection of answers to elementary questions that arise in the mind of every thinking Russian person when the word ‘fascism’ arises.”

coming struggle; “Russian patriots” of the White movement, although composed of many different nationalities, are described as *russkie patrioty*.¹¹⁰ If the authors claim that the fighters in the revolutionary struggle were exclusively “Russian” in an ethnic sense, members of other nationalities would not be wrong to doubt the sincerity of the cause they had signed up for.

One also cannot ignore the ironic fact that Russian fascist conceptions of progressivism, national unity, and cultural autonomy highlight unexpected ideological parallels between the ARFP and the Soviet Union. Cultural autonomy and national-independence within a unified ideology echoes Lenin’s theories on national self-determination as the antidote to imperialist rule.¹¹¹ For a time, Lenin and later Stalin also pursued the policy of *korenizatsiia*, which, in order to foster the development of a multiethnic society, incorporated non-Russians into the party apparatus and promoted national language education.¹¹² In this sense, it is ironic to note that the fascists adopted nearly identical strategies as their opponents for developing a national Russian character. They even called their main governing body the “Supreme Soviet” (*verkhovnyi soviet*) of the ARFP.¹¹³ It is possible that the fascists recognized the success of Bolshevik policies in quelling public dissatisfaction with the autocracy and accordingly attempted to replicate that success for their own aims.

For a modern viewer, it is difficult to view the Russian fascist experience in Manchuria as anything but idealistic and perplexing. Within three years of its inception, the All-Russian Fascist Party presented a bold agenda to reconquer the ancient land of Russia from the Bolsheviks. Fascist ideologues took advantage of their community’s misfortune and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Question 31, “Briefly describe the history of the USSR.”

¹¹¹ Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1914).

¹¹² George Liber, “*Korenizatsiia*: Restructuring Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 14, no. 1 (1991), 16-17.

¹¹³ It is interesting to note that the founding of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR postdated *ABCs* by four years, though it is unlikely that the former derived its name from the same body in the ARFP.

manufactured the belief that Russia had been captured by communism in 1917. 15 years later, the time had come to avenge that dark chapter, and fascism would lead the way. Party documents illustrate how the ARFP attempted to define what “Russia” meant and who belonged there. The party’s leaders demonstrate staggering levels of historical revisionism and inconsistency in their argumentation. It is unclear whether Rodzaevskii et al. viewed Russia as a single territory with a single people or a place scattered throughout the world, with multiple ethnicities and confessions present therein. Did Russia still exist under Soviet occupation, or had it been displaced? Was Harbin, and the “Russians” who lived there, now the only remaining pocket of “Russia” in the world?

In many respects, the inability of Russian fascists to remain consistent on fundamental aspects of their platform suggest the likeliest of answers to the above questions: Russia was a dream, an ideal, an experience. And for a population facing extreme difficulties, there was no other option but to latch onto that ideal and develop it to the best of their ability in emigration. Supporters of Russian fascism in Harbin felt betrayed by everyone: by their compatriots in the Soviet Union, who so quickly forgot about all the beautiful aspects of Russia’s legacy and joined the godless Bolsheviks; by the left-leaning residents of Harbin, who enabled the Soviet presence in Harbin to blossom; and even by monarchist factions in their own émigré community, who were mired in petty bickering over the proper time and place to restore the tsardom. The fascists believed that developing the next chapter in Russian history – the “Third Russia” – was the only way to overcome the social ills surrounding them.¹¹⁴

To convince people of the importance of this task, Russian fascism appealed to a powerful narrative to convince their supporters of their destiny: Russia’s uniqueness. Only

¹¹⁴ ABCs, Question 30, “What is the Soviet Union?”

Russia had produced Saint Vladimir, the first missionary of the Russian Orthodox faith. Only Russia had established itself as the world seat of Christianity following the collapse of Rome and Constantinople. And only Russia would rid the world of communism after its chosen people in the present fulfilled their sacred mission. For the émigré population in the present, there was no ambiguity in what the fascists were telling them: they alone possessed the means to avenge 1917, restore the Russian lands to their former glory, and achieve personal and national liberation from their subjugated state.

Chapter Three: The Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing

Our Russian Church was the first to be baptized in blood and was adorned with the crimson and purple blood of its martyrs. Despite the apparent defeat, we have achieved great things. We have an innumerable host of holy martyrs who intercede for us in heaven and are ready to help us if we follow their steps.

And at this very time, at the very height of the war, we are advised to renounce our heroic spiritual leaders, to take the name of Antichrist, to become citizens of the Soviet hell, subjects of the devil himself.

No, a thousand times no, the cruelest death is better than such a disgrace! Now more than ever, we must not be afraid of those who kill our bodies and remember the testament of Christ: “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Christ and the Gospel will save it (Mark 8, 35).¹¹⁵

As the previous chapter demonstrated, Konstantin Rodzaevskii and other leaders of the All-Russian Fascist Party relied on messianic revanchist ideas to provide their community with a purpose and future mission. The fascists maintained that the task in emigration was to realize

¹¹⁵ *The Chinese Evangelist*, June 1941, 17.

their destiny as the “children of Russia” and return to their homeland, thereby claiming revenge against the “Jewish Bolshevik” enemies that shamed them and redeeming themselves and the global human community. The ARFP promised salvation for all those who realized their sacred mission by honoring the “Russian spirit” and ridding the world of the Communist Evil; all who succeeded in doing so would receive the full benefits of the Russian nation’s triumph.

The fascists were not the only organization that occupied a prominent place in the daily life of Harbin. After 1917, the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing (hereafter ROMB) was one of the most active organizations dedicated to the spiritual and material well-being of their congregation scattered throughout China. Although headquartered in Beijing, the Mission operated several smaller eparchies across China, including one in Harbin, and the publications of the church were circulated throughout the diaspora. The ROMB was similarly shaken by the events of 1917, and in response to the wave of émigrés flooding into China, the Mission’s pastors committed themselves to making the community whole again. Accordingly, church publications mirrored those of the fascists in promising a return to Russia as a way of redeeming the diaspora’s fall from grace. It seems that for both Russian fascists and church officials, the answer to the community’s misfortune was messianic revanchism.

This chapter analyzes newspapers and letters attributed to Russian Orthodox Church officials in China for instances of messianic revanchist language. I argue that the ARFP and the ROMB were equally preoccupied with educating their congregation about its historic legacy, claiming revenge against “Russia’s enemies” by eliminating communism from the world, and attaining Russian and global salvation by returning to the Russian homeland. However, there were noticeable differences in how the fascists and church officials envisioned the defeat of communism. While the fascists favored military counterrevolution, the Church advocated non-

violent transformation through ideological work and propaganda; changing the hearts and minds of the Soviet masses, not deadly violence, was the way to undermine the forces hostile to Russia.

The chapter is structured in a similar manner to Chapter Two. After briefly introducing the history of the Mission, the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to a close reading of articles in various editions of the magazine *The Chinese Evangelist (Kitaiskii Blagovestnik)*, a monthly publication issued by the ROMB. The chapter is organized thematically once again, focusing on the same four aspects of messianic revanchism that were explored in Chapter Two: *realization* of a historic destiny by educating the public about their Russian past and organizing émigré forces in the present, *revenge* against the godless Communists that subjugated Russian power and glory, *return* to the homeland through spiritual enculturation and ideological persuasion, and *redemption* for the earthly sins of the Russian people and humanity at large. These writings demonstrate how émigré church leaders reminded their congregation of the importance of “keeping the flame alive,” for the hour of collective liberation and salvation was at hand.

A Brief History of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing

Russian Orthodoxy first emerged in northeastern China as early as the 17th century, during Russian consolidation of power in Eastern Siberia. Religion proliferated in Manchuria as part of the frequent border conflicts between Russia and China at the time.¹¹⁶ The first Orthodox believers in China were found among a community known as the Albazians, a group of 45 Russian Cossacks captured by the Chinese during the siege of Albazin in 1685. Following their capture, the Albazians were moved to Beijing to serve the Qing emperor in his military affairs.¹¹⁷ It was there that Father Maxim Leontev, a priest serving the Cossacks in Albazin,

¹¹⁶ For more on the early history of the Russia-China border, see John J. Stephan (1994) and Sören Urbansky (2020).

¹¹⁷ *Bei-Guan*, 22.

consecrated an initially Buddhist shrine in the name of Saint Nicholas in 1685, thereby officially introducing the Orthodox faith to the Chinese lands for the first time. Father Maxim served the spiritual needs of the small Albazinian community for the next 25 years. Although not engaging in missionary work and conversion of the local people, the community had brought Russian Orthodoxy to the still largely unknown border kingdom of China.¹¹⁸

The presence of Orthodoxy in China attracted the interest of Russian imperial officials, who witnessed an opportunity to develop diplomatic relations with the Qing Dynasty. Accordingly, Tsar Peter I ratified a decree to initiate the creation of a Russian Orthodox mission in China. Another motivation necessitating the establishment of the mission was institutional continuity since subsequent generations of Albazinians were already rejecting the Orthodox faith. Hieromonk Nicholas (Adoratsky), historian of Russian Orthodoxy in China, wrote that Father Maxim was not instructed “to protect the Albazinians from pagan influence,” and consequently there was “an open indifference to the faith of the fathers” among the next generation.¹¹⁹ With the death of Father Maxim in 1711, the small community of Orthodox believers petitioned the tsar for new leadership, and they received it with the formal establishment of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing in 1715 under the leadership of John of Tobolsk (Ivan Maximovich).¹²⁰ The Qing Emperor welcomed the arrival of the mission’s staff in the imperial capital, on the condition that they be accompanied by a doctor skilled in treating infectious diseases.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁹ Hieromonk Nicholas (Adoratsky), historian of Russian Orthodoxy in China, wrote that Father Maxim was not instructed “to protect the Albazinians from pagan influence,” and consequently there was “an open indifference to the faith of the fathers” among the next generation. <https://lib.pravmir.ru/library/readbook/2253>.

¹²⁰ *Bei-Guan*, 23.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the ROMB served as one of the main conduits for Sino-Russian relations. The Russians sent 14 missions led by dozens of clergy members to Beijing over the next 150 years. During that time, the mission's primary purpose was to serve the needs of Orthodox believers located in China.¹²² In the political and scholarly realms, the ROMB also ensured Russia-China diplomatic relations and served extremely important center of Russian sinology, long before the Vladivostok school discussed in Chapter One. The mission actively trained specialists in Chinese language translation, both oral and literary, and the drawings and paintings of cartographers and artists vastly expanded Russian knowledge of the Heavenly Kingdom. One of the most notable individuals in this regard was Father Hyacinth (Bichurin).¹²³ During his tenure as the head of the ninth ROMB from 1807-1821, he published dozens of Russian translations of Chinese historical, scientific, and political documents; his finest works were a Russian-Chinese dictionary and a translation of a Manchurian-Chinese dictionary, both the first of their kind in the world.¹²⁴ After returning to Russia, Father Hyacinth founded Russia's first Chinese language school in Khiakhta in 1835.¹²⁵ Each of these works suggests that the ROMB facilitated mutual knowledge production between Russia and China at an unprecedented scale.

Despite the wide range of its important diplomatic and cultural work, the mission's activities remained largely confined to Beijing. Converting the surrounding population to Orthodoxy was not an active priority for the mission, and the minor conversion projects that were undertaken were rejected by the Chinese; records indicate that there were fewer than 200

¹²² *Bei-Guan*, 15.

¹²³ Father Hyacinth has a conflicted legacy in Russian and Orthodox historiography. Though widely revered as the first Russian sinologist, he is also criticized for his unwillingness to manage the administrative affairs of the ROMB. See Alexander Kim, "The Life and Works of N. Ia. Bichurin, A Pioneer of Russian Sinology," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 66, no. 2 (2013): 163-178.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

total converts during this time, many of whom were descendants of the Albazinians.¹²⁶

Following the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin, which in part afforded European Christian missionaries residency rights in Beijing, the ROMB's diplomatic functions were converted entirely to proselytization in 1864. The next 30 years saw sporadic construction of Orthodox churches in China's northern cities and conversion, and missionary activity greatly accelerated during the 18th Mission led by Archimandrite Innocent (Figurovsky).¹²⁷

It did not take long for Innocent and the ROMB to experience tremendous misfortune. The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 resulted in the complete destruction of the mission's compound and the deaths of over 200 Orthodox believers residing therein.¹²⁸ Inspired by the sacrifice of the deceased and aided with funding from the Qing government, Fr. Innocent led the mission in rebuilding and resuming its activities. In the years before the 1917 Revolution, the mission founded new schools and consecrated new chapels at an unprecedented level: 19 churches, 17 schools, and 32 affiliate missions of the ROMB were established in just 15 years, and the number of baptized Chinese grew to just under 6,000.¹²⁹ The Harbin mission was one of the most important of these branches and developed in conjunction with the Chinese Eastern Railway.¹³⁰

Everything changed with the onset of the revolution of 1917. The mission's activities fundamentally changed course for the third time in its 200-year history: much as diplomacy and academic research were abandoned for evangelization in the 1860s, the ROMB now made supporting the influx of Russian refugees in Manchuria their primary purpose. As K. B. Keping writes,

¹²⁶ Widmer (1976).

¹²⁷ Archimandrite Innocent led the Mission from 1896-1931.

¹²⁸ The 222 mission residents, most notably among them Fr. Mitrofan Ji, were consecrated as new martyrs by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.

¹²⁹ Denis Vladimirovich Khmyrov, "Russkaya tserkovnaya emigratsiya v Kitaye v istoricheskom i politicheskom kontekste (1917-1945)," *Vestnik RKhGA* 1 (2013), 25.

¹³⁰ More extensive details on the history of the Harbin mission can be found in Korostolyov and Karaulov (2019).

The Mission played a large role in helping the refugees in resettling in a foreign country, a country with a foreign culture and an unfamiliar language. The Mission provided shelter and bread and conducted widely organized clerical work among the emigrants, opening churches, parishes, schools, hospitals, and orphanages. But funding was needed for all of this.¹³¹

Funding proved increasingly difficult to obtain. The fact that nearly all financial support from Petersburg was eliminated with the rise of Bolshevik power further isolated the ROMB and curtailed their activities. Soviet officials even attempted to take possession of the ROMB's assets, yet Archimandrite Innocent managed to maintain it by claiming the mission's status as a non-state entity.¹³²

Despite the massive financial burden incurred in the 1920s, the ROMB persevered in organizing aid and shelter for the emigres. During this period, the Orthodox church became one of the few constants that the Russian diaspora had left. It is not surprising that church officials in the ROMB shared the sentiments of their congregation. As will be explored in the rest of the chapter, feelings of loss, betrayal, and anger frequently emerge in the letters of Archimandrite Innocent and Archbishop Viktor (Svyatin) to their communities.¹³³ These sentiments are framed around the same call to action that the fascists in Harbin were preaching: if we cultivate patriotism and a willingness to fight for our future, we will surely reverse our collective misfortune.

It is at this point that a note about the association between the ROMB and Russian fascist organizations is warranted. The historiography is clear that following the revolution, several priests in the ROMB fled China for the semi-autonomous Russian Orthodox Church Outside

¹³¹ *Bei-Guan*, 186.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Archbishop Viktor served as the final leader of the ROMB, from 1931-1956.

Russia, which at the time was headquartered in Sremski Karlovci, Yugoslavia.¹³⁴ The priests at ROCOR displayed a noteworthy affinity for fascism. As Susanne Hohler writes, “high representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in exile...sent their congratulations on the establishment” [of the Russian National Front].¹³⁵ Other accounts mention the grievances of ROCOR with the “Jew-Masons” in the Bolshevik party, a chilling echo of the writings of Konstantin Rodzaevskii.¹³⁶

The relationship between Rodzaevskii and the Chinese émigré church is largely unknown. However, it is more likely that the two groups were limited to opportunistic collaboration, if even that, because of fundamental differences in their ideologies. Russian fascists summarily rejected the argument that the tsardom must be restored.¹³⁷ Similarly, the church also seems to have held a largely negative stance on fascist beliefs. *The Chinese Evangelist* contains allusions to Russian liberation groups seeking to achieve their aims through military action:

In a small group among the emigration there are also such military-political "figures" to whom the liberation struggle is presented in the form of a military campaign against Russia at the head of an emigre army...The deadly and difficult struggle against communism is depicted for them as a rapture of bloody reprisals against the "enemies of Russia," and by these enemies they mean all Russian people who do not recognize their rights to supreme leadership.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Kostriukov, *Russkaya Zarubezhnaya Tserkov' v 1939-1964 gg.* (2015).

¹³⁵ Hohler (2013), 121-122. The Russian National Front was a short-lived union of several Russian fascist organizations, including the ARFP.

¹³⁶ <https://www.rocorstudies.org/2019/12/07/the-russian-orthodox-church-outside-of-russia-and-the-holocaust/>

¹³⁷ Konstantin Rodzaevskii praised the fact that the emigre community mourned the killing of Tsar Nicholas II in the form of a national holiday. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, he and other fascists viewed the autocracy as moribund.

¹³⁸ *Evangelist*, March 1930, 9.

Given the content of the fascist manifestos and newspapers discussed in Chapter Two, this criticism appears to address Russian fascist cells in Harbin and elsewhere. This author and others in *The Chinese Evangelist* do not necessarily view the struggle against Communism as waged on a literal battlefield, but rather an abstract one through continuous ideological collaboration and spiritual cultivation.

At the same time, there are several moments of overlap between the ideas of Russian fascist organizations and Russian Orthodox Church officials in China. The two groups seem to have shared the same “enemies”; Hieromonk Nathaniel explicitly accuses “brother masons” of assisting the Bolsheviks in undermining the efforts of émigrés abroad.¹³⁹ Both the ARFP and the ROMB share the belief that although Russia’s political orientation has shifted over time, religion and nationalism will always remain central to the Russian identity. This is apparent in mentions of “religio-national consciousness” and “spiritual unity” in *The Chinese Evangelist*.

In that sense, regardless of the extent of its active collaboration with Russian fascist organizations, the ROMB, like Russian fascist parties, went to extreme lengths to convince people that a global darkness had humiliated Russia, and it was the task of the true children of Russia to organize for the battle to defeat it. Whether it was physically on the battlefield or within hearts and minds, Russia was destined to awaken from dormancy. In doing so, its history would enter a new and glorious chapter, one in which subjugated Russians would be liberated from their yoke and would once again reach their original heights, from which, as one academic wrote, they would “guide the culture of all of humanity.”¹⁴⁰

The ROMB’s two post-1917 leaders, Innocent and Viktor, sought to provide Russian emigres with a haven in China by grounding them in a “Russian lifestyle” and reminding them of

¹³⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁰ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, XXIII.

their place in the world as Russians. As V. F. Pecheritsa writes, “by preserving spiritual proximity to the Motherland, the intelligentsia created [in China] a special world in the Russian diaspora.”¹⁴¹ The writings of Innocent, Viktor, and their subordinates in the ROMB emphatically profess the centrality of faith in all stages of Russian history, both in its historical development, present émigré lifestyle, and future mission. That mission, inspired by the Russian émigré community’s triumphs and misfortunes, is revealed in the captivating documents below.

Realization: Keeping the Flame Alive

For Russian Orthodox church leaders in China, overthrowing their enemies and attaining salvation could not be done with the help of outside forces; it was a sacred task that could only begin through personal commitment to Russian virtues and knowing one’s participation in a Russian historical legacy. Authors of *The Chinese Evangelist* dedicate considerable attention to reminding the community of their history in the world, both as Russians and children of Christ, and their responsibility to uphold that history now and in the future.

Two aspects of Russia’s historic legacy emerge in various editions of *The Chinese Evangelist*. The first is the use of faith as a shield against evil. Archbishop Viktor writes that it was only through faith that Russia was saved from the same evil that the Bolsheviks represented in the present: “Strong faith in the Lord the Savior also saved Russia during the Time of Troubles in 1612...Kulikovo field, the fields of Poltava and Borodino, and the places of the miraculous deeds of Suvorov’s miraculous heroes...resounded with the singing of prayers and hymns of the church inspiring Russian soldiers to victory.”¹⁴² The message is simple: Russia defended itself against all these historical invaders through the Christian faith in the past, so why

¹⁴¹ V.F. Pecheritsa, “Dukhovnaia kul’tura russkoi emigratsii v Kitae [The Spiritual Culture of Russian Emigration in China], Religioznaia Deyatel’nost’ Russkogo Zarubezh’ya, accessed February 28, 2022. http://zarubezhje.narod.ru/texts/chss_0568.htm.

¹⁴² *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, XII

would it be any different now? Viktor further writes, “It is our sacred duty to preserve the Christian Faith in our hearts and sacredly honor the covenants of the church. It is a shared duty, starting from the archbishops and ending with the last emigrant. We will recognize this duty and fulfill it.”¹⁴³ The church stressed that if the community held faith in their hearts, they could achieve even the mightiest tasks.

The second narrative concerns Russia’s unique greatness in world history. Articles of this type were often not written by members of the clergy, but historians and other scholars in the émigré public. Grand Prince Vladimir and the Romanov Dynasty are central to this formulation. As observed previously, both clergy and historians alike recall that great battles of resistance throughout Russian history were inspired by the Divine. Archbishop Viktor, in an article entitled “To the Russian Children,” praises Grand Prince Vladimir as an individual whose achievements were without equal in world history. By defeating the “pagan confusion” that had reigned in the East Slavic lands for so long, Vladimir became the original lighter of the “Russian flame.” Viktor also claims that without Vladimir and his contribution to the life of the Russian nation, the Russian empire would have never achieved such a mighty status in world history. He writes,

Yaroslav the Wise and Vladimir Monomakh, the Holy Blessed Grand Duke Alexander Nevsky and Dmitrii Ioannovich Donskoi were always animated by the flame of the Holy Faith emanating from St. Vladimir. With deep faith in the invincible power of the Cross of the Lord, Grand Duke John III resolutely and boldly overthrew the Tatar yoke, which lasted over Russia for almost 250 years ... Thus, under the protection of the Orthodox Church and the scepter of the Tsar, the brilliant might of the Russian Empire was created.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Ibid., VIII-XI.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., XII.

In this appeal, Archbishop Viktor urges the people to remember Vladimir, both as the baptizer of the Slavic tribes and the inspiration for so many mighty Russian statesmen from Yaroslav the Wise to Nicholas II, as the righteous example to follow in these dark times.¹⁴⁵

Leaders of the Russian Orthodox congregation in China used historical essays and moral guidance in publications like *The Chinese Evangelist* to keep the community spiritually motivated in an intimidating world. With their homeland lost, the émigrés turned inwards; to educate themselves and their children and to be reminded of the glorious historical tradition they descended from. The words of Archbishop Viktor and many others in *The Chinese Evangelist* outlined the importance of the sacred duty to which God entrusted the diaspora and the unacceptability of remaining a bystander. Indeed, in a community struggling for survival and longing for return, there was no other option but to cultivate the history and traditions of Mother Russia, as one headline reads, “so that the candle does not go out.”¹⁴⁶

Revenge: Agents of Satan, Atheism, and Bloodshed

If Mongols and other foreign invaders were the evil enemies of Russia’s past, then Communists represented the dark, subjugating in the present. Not only were the Bolsheviks acting as oppressive atheists in the Soviet Union, but also were actively sowing discord among the émigré community in China. According to several authors in *The Chinese Evangelist*, all agents of darkness were responsible for humiliating Russia in 1917, and the good Russian forces in emigration needed to remain vigilant to counteract all of them.

The Chinese Evangelist makes clear that world-altering societal changes at the hands of ominous forces are imminent, and that there would be severe ramifications for the world faithful if not defeated. There are a myriad of examples from the newspaper that emphasize the presence

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., XI-XII.

¹⁴⁶ *Evangelist*, March 1941, 44.

of dark forces capable of filling Orthodox believers with dread, subjugating the world population to their intentions, and extinguishing the faith among all people:

... dark, godless forces of satanism and destruction living in our earthly world began to stir uneasily and became alarmed...the sons of the devil decided to put out this Light [of Orthodoxy] ... to suffocate the Holy Christian Faith in simple, honest Russian people, to tear them from the Orthodox Church and raise a fratricidal struggle between them.¹⁴⁷

A bloody darkness has enveloped the earth, and in vain we ask along with the prophet, "Watchman, how much longer is the night?" No one can say when the hour of joyful light will come.¹⁴⁸

Never before has our Motherland been so oppressed and so disgraced as it is now ... they will only think of ... how to bury under the ruins of states everything that is pure, honest, and holy, everything that testifies to God and the image of God in man, in order to celebrate a great bloody feast of triumphant evil on the ruins of the old world.¹⁴⁹

The existential nature of this threat to the future of Russia and the world could not be clearer.

Archbishop Viktor and other clergymen further echo this narrative through the use of terms like "subjugated" (*pod'yaremni*) and "yoke" (*igo*) to describe Russia's present state of captivity.¹⁵⁰

For the church leaders, Russia and the world will be no more should these forces succeed in their earthly mission of anarchic bloodshed and horror.

Unsurprisingly, the newspaper's authors specifically identify this evil as originating from the Soviet Union: not only is it "bloody" and "satanic," it is also "Bolshevik," and "communist."

Articles employ phrases like "servants of the red beast" (*slugi krasnago zverya*) and "princes of

¹⁴⁷ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, XIII.

¹⁴⁸ *Evangelist*, March 1941, 24.

¹⁴⁹ *Evangelist*, April 1941, Introduction.

¹⁵⁰ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, VIII. The Russian fascists also used these exact terms to describe the oppressive darkness shrouding the planet.

darkness” to describe the Soviet government. In his letter to Russian children, Archbishop Viktor issues a clear instruction: “Know and always remember that [communism] always brings with it blood, violence, darkness, and destruction.”¹⁵¹ Perhaps the most damning indictment of the Soviet Union and its atheistic policies was written by Archbishop Innocent in 1924.¹⁵² In the journal *The Church Bulletin*, the archbishop asks in a headline “whether the church can ever recognize the Soviet government.” Relying on a passage from the Book of Revelation (3-8), Innocent likens the Soviet authority to the forty-two-mouthed beast spewing blasphemies against the Lord and waging war against His holy people.¹⁵³ In another section of the article, “On the Soviet Government,” Innocent vividly describes the effects of this “beast” on the faithful citizenry of the former Russian empire: “Under their satanist autocracy, entire vast regions, once densely populated, have turned into deserts; people have become wild to such an extent that they have become worse than animals, they eat corpses; children kill and devour their parents, parents their children... Truly, all the forces of hell have emerged to combat the Orthodox Church.”¹⁵⁴ From the perspective of the Church, the government of the beast, of a satanic antichrist, had turned the people into beasts themselves.

The forces of darkness threatening to undermine world stability were found not just in the vastness of the former Russian Empire, but also in the diaspora itself. In an article written just days after the October Revolution, “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” Hieromonk Orentius warns the community to remain vigilant about the evildoing of deceivers woven into the community: “I am telling you this because there are people (albeit not many) that are driven by envy; slanderous, malicious people spreading false rumors...they go

¹⁵¹ Ibid., XIII

¹⁵² Not to be confused with Archimandrite Innocent, the leader of the 18th ROMB Mission.

¹⁵³ Quoted in *Evangelist*, June 1941, 13.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 15.

around town sowing the seeds of discord among illiterate, dark people....Those "hard times" that the Apostles predicted have now truly arrived...."¹⁵⁵

The surest way to counteract all these agents of evil was knowing the true nature of Russian history, for remaining ignorant at such a critical time was tantamount to evil itself. Major-general V.D. Kos'min writes in *The Chinese Evangelist*: "The collapse that has befallen Russia before our eyes convinces more eloquently than any words how disastrous it is for the state and people to lack [a sense of] national consciousness.... [Russia's] enemies, since the 17th century, have been working hard to...deliberately [distort] its history."¹⁵⁶ Kos'min believes that illiterate, ignorant Russian people who lack or operate on a distorted understanding of their nation are actively aiding the envious, malicious people working to undermine Russian society. In other words, not knowing one's own origins at such a critical time was an act of betrayal.

As consistently as the Russian fascists, Russian Orthodox church officials in émigré China instilled in their followers the belief that satanic communist agents were all around them, and that their destructive actions were already being felt by people within the Soviet Union and across the globe. *The Chinese Evangelist* stresses the importance of realizing the unique, historical legacy of the Russian nation, for it was only through preserving the goodness of Russia that the émigrés would realize their destiny and rectify the injustices of the world.

Return: Conversion from Communism to Russianness

With the threat of the enemy known and the community keeping its Russian identity alive, all that remained was the final step: the return to and resurrection of Russia. According to the church leadership, spiritual fortitude would fuel the greater purpose of defeating the Bolsheviks through ideological warfare. *The Chinese Evangelist* outlines the stakes of such a war

¹⁵⁵ *Evangelist*, October 30, 1917, 9.

¹⁵⁶ *Evangelist*, January-February 1939, II-III

and heralds the certainty of Russian victory. For the journal writers, this counterrevolutionary battle would be just like all the intrusions that came before, only this one would not occur by organizing the Russian people, subjugated under a Soviet yoke, in the spirit of the church.

For the battle to be successful, people needed to recognize why they lost the Civil War. According to one anonymous author, “the struggle of the White forces against the Bolsheviks was unsuccessful because national consciousness among the Bolsheviks was not based on a religious spirit.”¹⁵⁷ Presumably, this author was one of those presently working in the community “keeping the flame alight” as discussed in the previous section. Yet here the author ascribes another importance to this duty: not only will maintaining the Christian faith keep Russia alive in the world, but the faith will also be weaponized in the coming war against communism. The émigré diaspora now had the spiritual tools on their side to achieve victory. As Archimandrite Innocent wrote in the October 1917 edition of *The Chinese Evangelist*, “The program is clear: church discipline, educational service, a faith-filled life, a church court, sermons, and charity.”¹⁵⁸

Archbishop Viktor writes on the immortality of the Russian church: it was not destroyed when the communists seized power, but merely went into hiding: “There, in subjugated Rus’, the Orthodox Church went into the catacombs, hid in the depths of its heart, but did not surrender or change; and here abroad, she alone is the Unbreakable Wall and a refuge inaccessible to the devilish forces of the red international.”¹⁵⁹ There are two critical aspects to this passage. First, Viktor argues that the people of Russia still possessed the light of Orthodoxy within them, and it was merely waiting to be reactivated. Additionally, because the émigré church was being preserved so resolutely, so strongly that the “devilish forces” of communism could not access it,

¹⁵⁷ *Evangelist*, March 1930, 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Evangelist*, October 1917, 4.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII.

the émigré public could reignite that fire of faith when the time was right. Upon doing so, the “Unbreakable Wall” would gradually be rebuilt, and communism would perish from the planet.

The church envisioned the process of rekindling that faith within the people of Russia – trapped under the communist ideology of the Soviet Union and yearning for freedom – as bilateral and discursive. For Hieromonk Nathaniel, the people inside Russia are weakening the Bolsheviks through the sustained spiritual energy radiating from the émigré community in China:

The eyes of our brothers in Russia are turned not only to the prisoners and those exiled for believing in the Fatherland, but also to the émigrés. They know that the émigrés are hardened in the fight against the communists and are faithful to the Orthodox Church... Every word against the Bolsheviks, especially public speeches against them, every sermon, every strong thought makes its way to Russia through unknown ways, is passed from mouth to mouth and creates an inseparable bond and deep understanding of Russia with Emigration.¹⁶⁰

Nathaniel’s words were surely inspiring to all émigrés seeking vengeance against the Bolsheviks. Through their own continuous efforts to propagate the message that the Bolsheviks are a villainous regime, more people were joining their side with each passing day. It was helpful that the Soviet regime was only making their task easier. As he writes in the same article, “atheists in Soviet Russia organized a special private society, but their demands to close the churches were in no way considered binding on the Government. The clergy are not forbidden to worship, preach or teach religion to adult people.”¹⁶¹ All of this reinforces the message that the Bolsheviks were weaker than they appeared, while simultaneously urging the need for solidarity among Russian émigré forces with their oppressed brethren in the Russian homeland.

¹⁶⁰ *Evangelist*, March 1930, 4.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

After the unimpeded and persistent process of communicating the goodness and importance of Russianness to the brainwashed people of the Soviet Union, Communist cadres would abandon their current loyalties, turn back to the proper path of Christ, abandon their current loyalties, and realize their Russian essence again. The anonymous author of the article, “The Scheme of the Struggle Against the Bolshevik Authority in Russia” describes this process in the article’s conclusion:

Russian national forces...will form a united, durable Union: a brotherhood in which our emigration will participate *alongside representatives of all segments of the current USSR, the Red Army, the communist apparatus, and peasants* [my emphasis]. Upon completing its organizational preparation, this powerful national Union, having extended its bodies across Russia, will reject the communist authority and commence the building of a state on the foundations of religio-national consciousness and brotherly humility.¹⁶²

According to Nathaniel, there is no limit to the number of people who will join the righteous cause of Russian liberation: upon realizing their “religio-national” unity with the people around them, even individuals who are deeply entrenched within the Soviet power structure will remember their original “Russianness.”

In the church’s outlook, toppling the dark forces of the Communist international would not be achieved through violent military struggle as the fascists envisioned. Indeed, Archbishop Viktor explicitly stated that émigré Russians were *delirious (bezumstvuem)* to think that the homeland could be returned through human forces.¹⁶³ The path to resurrect Russian glory in the world involved restoring the spirit of “Russianness” within each heart: none of the people of fallen Russia, even those perceived to have traveled the length of the communist path, were

¹⁶² *Evangelist*, March 1930, 12.

¹⁶³ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, IX.

beyond salvation. The process would take tremendous effort, yet the church would not stop until every vestige of communism was cleansed from the world and Russian Orthodoxy restored to its rightful, historic home.

Redemption: Liberation for the Sins of the World

As the émigré church in China urged their congregation to begin their spiritual preparations to return Russian glory to the world, they never lost sight of the ultimate purpose of the importance of their task: to redeem Russia and the world of their sins. Various articles in *The Chinese Evangelist* express the apocalypticism of the spiritual conversion of Soviet citizens to the proper Russian path. The coming struggle entailed glory for all those fighting on the side of righteousness and damnation for those who failed to repent.

According to the church, preparation for the sacred task of saving the world from Bolshevism had to begin with confession. As Archbishop Viktor writes, the invasion of communist forces into holy Russia was only the symptom of a larger problem, namely the ignorance and sin that was running rampant in the Orthodox community. The archbishop expresses deep lament in a 1938 article in *The Chinese Evangelist*, “The Holy and Just will of the Lord came to pass. We must not grumble with it. The Lord is punishing the Russian people for turning away from Him and His Church.”¹⁶⁴ He further writes in the same edition, “The Lord’s rage took the Tsar and the Fatherland away from us. Divine mercy will only return them to us when we once again become worthy of having them. Only repentance from all the people can open the doors of a bright future to us.”¹⁶⁵ Although communists are the principal agents of evil in the church’s conception, Archbishop Viktor reminds the Russian émigré community that the

¹⁶⁴ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, XIII.

¹⁶⁵ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, VIII-XI.

present conflict is a result of their own actions, namely, that the Russian faithful rejected divine mercy:

It is interesting to note the narrative continuity of “forgiveness for the sins of the Russian people” between the 20th century émigré church and earlier centuries of Russian history. During the 13th century Mongol invasion of Kievan Rus’, historical chroniclers wrote of the Russian people being punished for their sins with invasion and destruction:

Emperor Batu had four hundred thousand, and he conquered the whole Russian land, the whole earth, from the east to the west. And God punished the Russian land for its sins... We love the Russian land as a mother loves her dear child. The mother caresses her child and praises it for good deeds, but she also punishes it for bad deeds...¹⁶⁶

This excerpt from Sofonii of Ryazan’s *Zadonshchina* laments the losses of battle as divine punishment; even though God showed mercy to the Russian princes in victory, it was an incomplete triumph, for many brave sons of Russia died that day. This did not mean that the Russian people were beyond forgiveness. However, to become “worthy” of receiving salvation, they needed to repent and deliver good in the world once again. In the 20th century context, the Russian émigrés would receive their own opportunity to do good by dispersing the satanic forces of the world.

Like Konstantin Rodzaevskii, Russian church officials like Archbishop Viktor consistently stated the global dimensions of the coming conflict: “a destructive struggle...against the shameless, godless Communists...has begun before our eyes, and the great and mighty powers of East and West have united in this struggle.”¹⁶⁷ The framing of the conflict as one between East and West signifies just how consequential this battle is for the fate of human

¹⁶⁶ Serge A. Zenkovsky (ed.), *Medieval Russia’s Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, New York: Penguin Group (1974), 222.

¹⁶⁷ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, XIII.

history. Fortunately, Russians had never lost their resilience and relevance. This is expressed particularly vividly in Hieromonk Nathaniel's article in *The Chinese Preacher* of March 1930:

By destroying the Monarchy, Russia's enemies thought that the Church would be dragged along with it. They were mistaken. Not only was the Church not destroyed, but it immediately took the lead in the fight against the Bolsheviks (Patriarch Tikhon's epistle). The people, reacting too passively to the fall of the monarchy, instantly felt their unity in the church, and since then the cause of the Church and the cause of the struggle against the Bolsheviks have become one and the same.¹⁶⁸

Although criticizing the people for their apathy to the political situation, Nathaniel praises them for rallying around the church, the only fallback in times of hardship. Mirroring Archbishop Viktor's words about the "Unbreakable Wall" of the Orthodox faith in emigration, the notion of uniting around the church reassures the reader that even though Russia may no longer exist on world maps, it remains alive spiritually. This was to be the émigrés' greatest advantage in the fight against the Communist oppressors.

Through the "enormous organizational work" that Archbishop Viktor claimed would be required of the Russian émigré diaspora, the Russian people would redeem their own sins and those of humanity; in this regard, they were deserving of the highest praise. It was through this work, according to Archbishop Viktor, that the Russian people, "chosen by Divine providence," will achieve "a mighty, inimitable service in Russian history."¹⁶⁹ By persevering in their efforts, the present generation of Russians will be sanctified in world history, allowing their own mighty achievements to join the ranks of their forefathers.

Conclusion: "The Light of Christ Enlightens All"

¹⁶⁸ *Evangelist*, March 1930, 3-4.

¹⁶⁹ *Evangelist*, October-November 1938, IX.

This chapter's conclusion, "The Light of Christ Enlightens All" (*Svet Khristos Prosveshchaet Vsekh*) adopts the title of the October-November, 1938 edition of *The Chinese Preacher*. Education and knowledge cultivation encapsulated the activities of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing since its inception in the 18th century. Founded as a safeguard for the small Albazinian community, the mission eventually facilitated diplomatic relations between the world's two greatest empires, mutually expanded knowledge of the histories, politics, and cultures of the two lands, and spread the Christian Gospel to the Chinese people. Although the Mission lost considerable momentum after 1917, its leaders never ceased publishing *The Chinese Evangelist* as they attended to the needs of the émigré community.

The journal's content was the embodiment of messianic revanchist ideas. To help the émigrés realize their unique destiny, ROMB leaders like Archbishop Viktor and other members of the clergy consistently focused *The Chinese Evangelist* on educating the community in Russian history and virtues, for the alternative was ignorance and destruction that the enemy could exploit. The church taught that Russian émigrés had a duty to avenge their enemies, for too many Russians had already fallen victim to the evils of communism. The only path for the diaspora to return to their homeland was by turning to the light of Christ. Spiritual conversion required organizing Russian forces to teach the astonishing achievements of their history with such fervor that communism would have no manner of countering them. Once the godless Bolsheviks fell, Russians would become the agents of salvation, both for themselves and the world. Although distinct from the Russian fascists in terms of the details, the general framework of the "four R's" of messianic revanchism emerge just as consistently and with as much passion in the writings of the Russian émigré church.

Conclusion: The Fate (and Legacy?) of Russian Messianic Revanchism

The well-being, the very existence of states and peoples...always originates in the powerful root system of their culture and values, experience and traditions of their ancestors, and, of course, directly depend on their ability to quickly adapt to a constantly changing way of life, on the cohesion of society, and on their readiness to consolidate and gather together all the forces needed to move forward.¹⁷⁰

[The special military operation's] goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years. And for this we will strive for the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice those who have committed numerous, bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.¹⁷¹

The fate of the Russian émigré diaspora was anything but satisfactory for those promising a messianic return to the Russian homeland. The ARFP had lost much of its inertia by the late 1930s, and party membership diminished rapidly.¹⁷² There were three sources of eroding support that hindered the activities of the party. The first was Russians overseas, compatriots whom Rodzaevskii expected would rally to the fascist call. Rodzaevskii and Anastasii Vonsiatsky, the leader of the All-Russian Fascist Organization in Putnam, Connecticut, had attempted to form a merger earlier in the decade, yet constantly disagreed on strategic matters. Rodzaevskii endorsed collaboration with the Japanese and other foreign powers amicable to the cause of Russian

¹⁷⁰ Vladimir Putin, announcing a “special military operation” in eastern Ukraine. “Putin ob’yavil voynu” [Putin has declared war], Meduza, February 23, 2022, <https://meduza.io/paragraph/2022/02/24/putin-ob-yavil-voynu-vot-cto-on-skazal>.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Hohler (2017), 49-50.

fascism, while Vonsiatsky argued that only Russians could deliver Russian liberation.¹⁷³

Additionally, Vonsiatsky dissented with Rodzaevskii on the question of antisemitism, stating that “among the Jews, only the red Jew is our enemy.”¹⁷⁴ While the two groups agreed on narrative, tactical disagreements like these hindered their consolidation into a united fascist front.

The Japanese administrators of Manchukuo, previously in league with the ARFP, had become another “problematic ally” of the party by the early 1940s. Rodzaevskii viewed the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941 as an act of betrayal on the part of the Japanese. The Russian fascists recognized that they did not have the military capacity to overthrow the communists on their own, and with the Japanese now bound to observe the inviolability of the USSR, confidence in a revanchist takeover waned rapidly. Furthermore, the Japanese gradually grew suspicious of Rodzaevskii and the ARFP. A wave of paranoia that Soviet spies were everywhere caused the Japanese to doubt the intentions of Rodzaevskii, whom the Japanese secret police interrogated in 1943. Although Rodzaevskii was found innocent, the ARFP’s media outlets were shut down later that year.¹⁷⁵

The third and final source of lacking support came from Russian émigrés themselves, both in the global Russian diaspora and Harbin itself. Russian émigrés outside Harbin did not perceive Harbin Russians as authentically “Russian,” both because of their coexistence with Soviet citizens in the city after 1917 and because there was already a Russian presence in the city before the revolution.¹⁷⁶ According to Laurie Manchester, since the Harbin diaspora “had ended up abroad *without* having made the crucial decision to emigrate,” they could not claim to fully

¹⁷³ Stephan (1978), 166.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 167.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 313.

¹⁷⁶ Laurie Manchester, “How statelessness can force refugees to redefine their ethnicity,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 34, no. 1 (2016), 74-75.

experience the collective trauma of 1917.¹⁷⁷ The party further failed to maintain its legitimacy among Harbin émigrés as its followers realized that the Soviet Union was no closer to disintegrating than it was when the party was founded. Beyond penetrating Harbin civil society and increased episodes of antisemitic violence at the local level, the fascists had achieved little substantive progress in realizing their revanchist revolution against Bolshevism.

The church's project to rekindle "Russianness" among the ideologically "trapped" Soviet citizens failed as well. Several waves of émigré repatriation to Russia occurred in the 1950s following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Upon returning to their homeland, the repatriates were shocked by what they encountered. Laurie Manchester writes how many émigrés found that the words of church officials rang true. Émigrés believed that the Soviet population's cultural level was very low, characterized by swearing and other actions that were considered improper and immoral in émigré Harbin: Russians in the Soviet Union had indeed been changed in the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁸ To counter this, some refugees followed the church's teachings and stepped into the role of the cultural intelligentsia, engaging in a "Going to the People"-esque campaign to remind Soviet citizens of their proper "Russianness."¹⁷⁹ As "culturally superior Russians," the repatriates believed they could offer the Soviet masses an opportunity to achieve redemption and enlightenment in a Russian way of life. Individuals engaged in this campaign did occasionally succeed in teaching Soviet citizens about the pre-revolutionary etiquette they had been brought up with in Harbin.¹⁸⁰ However, there was no

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Manchester (2007), 362.

¹⁷⁹ "Going to the People" refers to a short-lived movement of populist-minded revolutionaries in 1870s Russia that sought to inspire a mass movement of people to overthrow the aristocracy.

¹⁸⁰ Manchester (2007), 376.

transformative movement of the kind that ROMB officials were hoping for; that is, education in “Russianness” did not occur on a scale large enough to fully overthrow the communist order.

To a certain extent, the Harbin diaspora did not consistently maintain its “Russianness” even while it was still in China. Indeed, the outbreak of World War II sparked *Soviet* patriotism among Harbin émigrés. There were several reasons for this. First, Stalin restored the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate and reopened defunct churches, which the church viewed as a step in the right direction for restoring “Russianness” in the world. Second, tsarist epaulettes were added to Soviet officer’s uniforms, serving as a positive reminder of imperial grandeur. Third and finally, Stalin used the term “motherland” (*rodina*) to describe the defense of the Soviet Union. Russian émigrés in China, who exclusively used this term to refer to their homeland, traveled to local Soviet consulates to enlist in the army and answer that call to defense.¹⁸¹ Although the Soviet army rejected these volunteers, it cannot be ignored that Russian émigrés opportunistically defended the actions of their “oppressors” while in China.

In the end, there was no sacred war – military or spiritual – to restore Russia from the Bolshevik chains subjugating both themselves and the world. Communism’s continuous global relevance for 60 years after the founding of the ARFP proves that the Russian diaspora in Manchuria could not honestly claim the revenge they sought against those who humiliated them in 1917. In the following years, the Russian diaspora in China dissipated to several places around the world. Most of those who did not repatriate to the Soviet Union resettled in Australia, South America, and the United States. With the Soviet occupation of Manchuria, many ARFP members and supporters were arrested and sentenced to Siberian labor camps. The leaders of the party,

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 357.

including Konstantin Rodzaevskii, were executed shortly after the conclusion of World War II.¹⁸²

Although the Russian fascist movement in Manchuria collapsed, certain aspects of their ideology have survived long into the present. Indeed, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is. It is unclear what Vladimir Putin intends to achieve in Ukraine. The Russian president at one point or another, and sometimes all at once, has promised to: 1) “save” the Ukrainian people from “Nazis” in the Ukrainian government; 2) return the territory of Ukraine, allegedly drawn out of thin air by Soviet deviants in the early 20th century, to its rightful Russian homeland; and 3) counteract the “threat” that NATO and other Western powers present and have presented to Russia. Regardless of the validity of these claims individually, taken as a whole, they constitute the same messianic revanchist formula that the ARFP and Russian Orthodox leaders professed decades earlier in Manchuria: liberate a subjugated people, reclaim a swath of “homeland,” and claim revenge on national enemies.

It is reasonable to assume that Putin’s displays of messianic revanchism vis-à-vis Ukraine began as early as 2014 with the annexation of Crimea. In late February of that year, Russian security chiefs determined that in response to the ousting of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich, Russia would incorporate Crimea into its own borders. Days later, in the wake of pro-Russian demonstrations in Sevastopol, Russian troops occupied the peninsula and seized strategic points of infrastructure. Russian troops increased their military presence and threatened nuclear warfare to solidify their position in the annexed territory. The Supreme Council of

¹⁸² Stephan (1978), 354.

Crimea later held a referendum on the question of Crimea's status as Ukrainian or Russian; 95.5% of participants voted in favor to secede from Ukraine.¹⁸³

The legality and legitimacy of the Crimean annexation has been disputed since its occurrence. However, it is clear from Putin's own words that the annexation was motivated by a desire to reunite the people of Crimea, most of whom are ethnic Russians, with their strong, historic homeland. Some of the first statements in the Russian president's speech on March 18, 2014, describe the historical significance of Crimea in Russian and Ukrainian history, with particular emphasis placed on Prince Vladimir's Christianization of Rus' and the incorporation of the territory into the Russian Empire under Catherine the Great.¹⁸⁴ By reuniting Crimea with the Russian Federation, Putin claimed, present-day Russians were realizing the historic legacy of their ancestors and honoring the centuries-long status of the territory.

Along with the fulfillment of a historic destiny, Putin believed that formalizing the "Russianness" of Crimea enabled the people of Crimea to be liberated from a hostile Ukrainian government. Midway through his March 18 speech, Putin characterizes the people that deposed Viktor Yanukovich and taken power in the Maidan protests as "nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes, and antisemites."¹⁸⁵ These so-called "ideological heirs of Bandera" were now occupying the highest echelons of power in Ukraine, and the people of Crimea needed salvation from such a power.¹⁸⁶ By incorporating Crimea within the Russian fold and ending this "neo-Nazi" rule, Putin claimed to act on behalf of the Crimean residents: "Let me repeat that [Crimea], as it has been for centuries, will be the native home for all the people living there. It will never

¹⁸³ Mike Collett-White and Ronald Popeski, "Crimeans vote over 90 percent to quit Ukraine for Russia," Reuters, March 16, 2014. <https://news.yahoo.com/crimea-vote-joining-russia-moscow-wields-u-n-024050097--finance.html>.

¹⁸⁴ "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii" [A Message from the President of the Russian Federation], The Kremlin, March 18, 2014, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

belong to the Banderites!”¹⁸⁷ This is the essence of messianic revanchism: in this speech, Putin portrays himself and the Russian military as messianic saviors for the people of Crimea, while also claiming vengeance against those who deposed pro-Russian authorities in Ukraine by returning “stolen territory” to Russia.

In the ongoing war, Putin has continued the liberationist rhetoric that he started in Crimea eight years ago, only now he claims to fight on behalf of the entire Ukrainian population. The purpose of the “special military operation” that Russian military forces launched in eastern Ukraine on February 24, 2022, according to the Russian president, was to “de-Nazify” the Ukrainian government, presumably referring to the same “neo-Nazis” that deposed Yanukovich in the Maidan protests. As Putin said in an appeal to Ukrainian soldiers, “Dear comrades! Your fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers did not defend our shared homeland by fighting Nazis so that today’s neo-Nazis could seize control in Ukraine.”¹⁸⁸ Putin has also cited a “genocide” committed by the Ukrainian government in the Donbass region, only because the people there “opposed the primitive and aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism that has been elevated to the level of a state movement.”¹⁸⁹ The messianic rhetoric of salvation from Nazi enemies is a frequently encountered theme in Putin’s statements on the war.

While claiming to defend the Ukrainian people from the “neo-Nazis” in their own government that are oppressing them, Putin also pretends to protect his own people from the Western nations threatening Russia in the form of a NATO military alliance. Putin has been preoccupied with NATO expansion for decades. Countless statements from the Russian president

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ “Putin ob”yavil o spetsial’noi voennoi operatsii v Donbasse” [Putin announced a special military operation in the Donbass], RIA Novosti, last updated February 24, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20220224/operatsiya-1774620380.html>.

¹⁸⁹ “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [A Message from the President of the Russian Federation], The Kremlin, February 21, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

over the last past two decades mention concern over military bases being built in NATO countries like Poland and Romania.¹⁹⁰ In the context of the current conflict, Putin has stated that Ukrainian accession to NATO is a non-negotiable condition given the threat it poses to Russian existence. As he has stated, “the United States and NATO have begun to shamelessly develop the territory of Ukraine as a theater of potential military operations. Regular joint [military] exercises have an explicit anti-Russian focus. Last year alone, over 23,000 servicemen and over a thousand pieces of military equipment were involved.”¹⁹¹ The activities of the irresponsible, uncooperative “Western bloc” had humiliated Russia in the past: it was the West that brought economic misery and loss of life to Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s:

After the collapse of the USSR, with all the unprecedented openness of the new, modern Russia, we were prepared to work honestly with the United States and other Western partners, and amidst virtually unilateral disarmament, they immediately tried to squeeze us, to finish off and destroy us completely. The so-called collective West actively supported separatism and mercenary gangs in southern Russia. The sacrifices, the losses all this cost us then, the trials that we had to endure before we finally broke the back of international terrorism in the Caucasus. We remember this, and we will never forget it.

For Putin, stopping further Western aggression against Russia via Ukraine was another key factor behind the “special military operation” of February 24, 2022: “Russia cannot feel secure, develop, or exist without the continuous threat emanating from the territory of modern Ukraine.”¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² “Putin ob”yavil voynu” [Putin has declared war], Meduza, February 23, 2022, <https://meduza.io/paragraph/2022/02/24/putin-ob-yavil-voynu-vot-chto-on-skazal>.

For Putin, the neo-Nazi and NATO “threats” to Ukrainian and Russian sovereignty are one and the same, and by intervening militarily to put a stop to both at the same time, Putin will emerge as the messianic savior of the entire territory. Yet there is one more enemy in Putin’s manufactured trifecta: the Bolsheviks. At the heart of this Russian-Bolshevik opposition is an essentialist argument: that Ukraine has always been Russian territory, and that Ukrainians and Russians are the same people.¹⁹³ The Russian president claims that the only reason the two were separated is Soviet pretenders invented Ukraine by arbitrarily delineating the territory of modern-day Ukraine during Soviet state formation.¹⁹⁴ Reconstituting Ukrainians with their Russian heritage is therefore another avenue by which Putin hopes to right a historical wrong: by reuniting the territory of Ukraine with historic Russia, the single, unified people of the East Slavic lands will avenge the crimes of the Bolsheviks that divided them in the first place.

Like the ARFP and ROMB rhetoric in 20th-century Manchuria, Putin’s claims are anything but honest. For example, it is laughable for the Russian president to make the claim that he is protecting the Ukrainian people from Nazis in the government while actively bombing civilian targets across the country. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that Russian soldiers have been ordered to treat all Ukrainians as Nazis.¹⁹⁵ It is unclear throughout all these narratives for whom Putin is fighting. Is the Russian invasion intended to defend Ukrainians from their own government, Donbass residents from pro-European Western Ukrainians, or Russians from a NATO-backed Ukraine? Is it all three at the same time, or is it none of them? Whatever the

¹⁹³ The unity of Russians and Ukrainians is the subject of a long-winded essay written by Vladimir Putin in July 2021. “Stat’ya Vladimira Putina ‘Ob istoricheskom edinstve russkikh i ukraintsev’” [An article by Vladimir Putin “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”]. The Kremlin. July 12, 2021.

<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

¹⁹⁴ “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [A Message from the President of the Russian Federation], The Kremlin, February 21, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

¹⁹⁵ The story of Tetyana Vlasenko and her family can be found at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/-dont-know-survived-family-shot-russian-soldiers-fearful-nazis-rcna19544>.

answer may be, the pattern of Putin’s rhetoric regarding Russian military involvement in Ukraine is quite clear: Russia, a Russia that includes Ukraine and Ukrainians, is actively being besieged and subjugated by dark foreign forces – neo-Nazi, NATO, and Bolshevik alike – and the only way to save the people from this miserable hostility is to make the Russian lands whole again. This is the essence of Putin’s messianic revanchist language inspiring the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Those who espouse messianic revanchism claim to save their people from external humiliation and promise them a part in experiencing the glory of restoring a collective history. Yet by “taking back” a swath of territory, are those who espouse it really saving the world? Are they even saving themselves? The history of Russian fascist activities in Manchuria, the apocalyptic writings of the Russian émigré church, and the present conflict in Ukraine all inform us that violence is a certain consequence of messianic revanchism, and it inevitably leads to tragic destabilizing effects. If World War II is any indication, the battle between communists and Japanese-aided Russian fascists to restore the Russian lands would have created unfathomable destruction. Even in the present day, Ukrainian refugees, now numbering in the millions, are victims of the violence catalyzed by Putin’s “saving mission” to realize a lost territory.

Messianic revanchism may not have been realized in Manchuria, but it still exists in today’s world and expresses itself in the darkest form of war. The examples of the Russian émigré diaspora in China and Vladimir Putin’s military ambitions in Ukraine demonstrate that messianic revanchist narratives can be weaponized by large communities in abject socioeconomic conditions or by one man with a monopoly on state structures of violence. The world must remain vigilant for expressions of messianic revanchism, both among alienated groups of people and individual politicians. Regardless of the context in which they appear,

history proves that harmony and unity are impossible in a messianic revanchist framework; destruction, and death are the inevitable outcome.

Yet it is also inevitable that messianic revanchism never enjoys universal support. Just as not everyone in the Russian émigré diaspora in Manchuria approved of the All-Russian Fascist Party's military aims, so too are those participating in Putin's assault on Ukraine today abandoning support; in both cases, support for the project waned and rendered them unsustainable. Perhaps there will come an age when people realize that we need salvation not from each other, but from ourselves: when revenge is set aside in favor of reconciliation. The former requires violence; the latter, introspection and reflection. It is our duty to assess our collective human past honestly, collaborate in the present constructively, and build the future hopefully, not as exclusive, atomized nations seeking vengeance against one another, but as one inclusive, human community.

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