

A French journalist terminates a long study of Russia based on first-hand experience with the conclusion that the Soviet Union's future lies in Asia.

# Russia *in* ASIA

By MAURICE PERCHERON

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IT WAS from central Asia that the Persians set forth to conquer the world, and it was from central Asia that the Huns rode their horses all the way to the River Loire. Genghis Khan came from Mongolia. Raised by a wolf, this offspring of the Scythians quit the shores of Lake Baikal where he first saw the light of day and at the head of his mounted men forged the peoples of Asia into a compact bloc. It was from the land of the Uzbeks that Tamerlane of Samarkand arrived with a flourish of silk and steel, the same man who wrote the history of his conquest in the granite of the Hungarian plains.

Mongolia and Turkestan saw first an Iron Horde and then a Golden Horde pour out of them. The names Great Pamir and Iran became familiar to European ears. When peace came, the victors built cities on the rivers that had seen Alexander's hoplites pass their way. They dug themselves

in and made themselves ready to annihilate any rebellion. As time passed, however, the soft Persian air dulled the edges of their scimiters. The greatest empire the world had ever known fell apart into different family divisions. The conquered nations freed themselves; palaces were pillaged and destroyed.

The soul of the conquerors still lives in the foothills of Great Pamir, in the valleys of the Turcomans, and in the Mongolian steppes. An amalgam of nations that used to be allied and intermingled persists in spite of fratricidal war. To-day old civilizations are beginning to remember that they were once united. A new cement is being prepared. Nearly four hundred million Chinese, as many Indians, sixty million Arabs, and forty million Iranians all share in common their hatred of the white man and former master.

The Soviet Union follows this awakening of the Orient with ardent

interest. Nations that Europe vaguely refers to as Russian are chiefly aware of their hot Asiatic blood. The Finns, Caucasians, Georgians, Tatars, Turcomans, Buriats, Kirghiz, Kalmuks, and many others have been made Soviet subjects. The Soviet Union now wishes to gain their allegiance, and in pursuit of that end it has shattered the instrument that made these races downtrodden slaves in the time of the Tsars. I refer to religious oppression, as symbolized by a cross that used to dominate a reversed crescent on a mosque in Kazan, which had been changed into a church. Furthermore, while trying to win over the youth of Islam, the Kremlin also conducts intrigues to gain support of the Caliphate if it is ever reestablished.

What we must never forget is that the U. S. S. R. is the only country in the world that has all its colonies flanking its own frontiers. The colonizing agents are Greater Russia and White Russia with a hundred and ten million inhabitants. The Tatar country along the Volga, Georgia, the Caucasus, Mongolia, though it calls itself autonomous, and even the Ukraine are mere colonies, protective outlying districts or scattered points of crystallization for new exterior influences.

All this territory, except the Ukraine, lies in Asia. Stalin is a Georgian, proud of his Asiatic origins. Turkmenistan is Iranian, and farther to the east is Kazakstan, which is inhabited by Turko-Mongolians. As for Siberia, the people who dwell in its southern regions are absolutely yellow.

The U. S. S. R. has bet double or quits on the dangerous game of cultivating the national spirit among backward people, who were always eager

for independence. Victory has crowned its courage and gained it the support of all Asia. Facing Turkish Armenia is Russian Armenia. On the border of Turkey and northwestern Persia lie Crimea, Tatar, and Azerbaijan. The Tadjiks and the Turcomans of Turkestan are brothers of the inhabitants of Afghanistan and Persia. Farther eastward the Uzbeks, Kazaks, and Kirghiz have the same blood in their veins as the inhabitants of Chinese Turkestan, Sin-Kiang, and Inner Mongolia. Tribes living in the foothills of Tibet cast their eyes at the towering mountains that separate them from India, where the great moguls used to reign. In the Altai Mountains and along the whole length of Lake Baikal live the Oirad and Buriats. Only an imaginary line separates them from Outer Mongolia, a republic that is independent of the U. S. S. R. but that is Soviet none the less. Of course, these federated or autonomous republics often show discontent toward Moscow. They are impatient because many promises have not been completely fulfilled, and they even feel ungrateful. They raise their heads higher than Stalin can admit, and the central power must sometimes come down with a heavy hand. But, on the whole, the bloc is proving more national, more pan-Russo-Asiatic every day. And it is made up of people who have repudiated their soft, corrupt, feudal chieftains.

'What savages those people are who live in Sin-Kiang! Would you believe it, the only way they protect their animals from sickness is by sorcery? As for hammering the alphabet into their heads or persuading them to wash . . .' Who said this to me? An Uzbek from Tashkent, the sub-director of a collective farm. Of whom

was he speaking with such disdainful pity? Of the Uzbeks in the mountains, his brothers.

As in the time of Genghis and the Emirs, what is happening in central Asia has repercussions on the surrounding countries, all the more so because Moscow, already mistress of the gates of India and China, has prepared the way. By modernizing the national spirit she has begun to de-orientalize the Asiatic continent. Four great civilizations, Chinese, Indian, Iranian, and Arabic, are all vibrating to-day to the roar of Soviet motors.

Need I recall the political agreement that regulates relations between the U. S. S. R. and Turkey, a friendship that was perhaps strengthened by the entry of Turkey into the League of Nations last year and by the modified state socialism Mustafa Kemal is pursuing? It was with Ankara that Moscow signed its first international treaty. The Kremlin took advantage of the 'sick man of Europe's' desire to live again and to have no more to do with those excessively solicitous European doctors, especially the English ones. The Turks looked forward to the day when the Black and the Caspian Seas, joined together by a canal, would create a single stretch of open water as far as the Bosphorus.

Protest against capitalist exploitation of the Orient by the Occident prepared the way for relations to be opened up with the Kingdom of Nejd and the Hejaz and for treaties to be signed with Afghanistan and Persia. A friendly Persia supports the Russo-Turkish agreements, for Persia is primarily anti-British. Incidents involving the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and the oil deposits in Bahrein Island are very significant in this con-

nection. Moscow has worked upon Afghanistan so successfully that Kashmir has become the pivot of British defense in India. As in all the other Moslem countries where England is able to act, it is encouraging militant Islamism and opposing Soviet atheism.

## II

In China Moscow first played the game of supporting Canton, the heart of the revolutionary Chinese Republic. Nobody has forgotten the aid it gave to Sun Yat-sen when he was abandoned by Europe and the way it helped to form a proletarian Kuomintang. The intrigues of Borodin and Karakhan in this part of the world are also remembered. After Chiang Kai-shek changed his opinions in 1927 and broke off from his old Red allies in order to establish a national government at Nanking supported by the United States, the Soviets began bolshevizing western China, thus putting themselves in opposition to the Chinese Government. But, while Moscow was encouraging rebellion in Fukien and Kiangsu, it also began to flirt with official China. By abandoning the privileges granted to the Tsars it upset the appercarts of other nations, including Japan. In spite of the diminished propaganda funds at Moscow's disposal, the Red influences spread through the western and southern provinces of China.

Sin-Kiang in particular became the base of Chinese Communism and is drawing closer and closer to the U. S. S. R., rapidly crystallizing in that direction. At the present time, a Chinese Communist Government exists in Kiangsi. Its three groups, including a hundred million Chinese,

support Leninism, a doctrine that is really quite remote from Marxism but sufficiently anti-capitalistic and anti-foreign to serve the interests of Russian expansion. Kiangsi, Fukien, Honan, Hupeh, Kwangtung, Kwangsi, and Anhwei are all Red. The thin Moslem cordon does not threaten Turkestan or the two Mongolias any more than the armies of Chiang Kai-shek are draining the Communist sea. Will all this end in a renaissance of China or of Japan?

The lower half of the Soviet pincers in Asia is anchored in Turkestan. The upper half takes its point of departure in Outer Mongolia. There the penetration assumes a purely political character. If the collectivization of Uzbekistan and Kazakstan, if the insidious russification of Chinese Sin-Kiang can apparently justify themselves by successfully exploiting the enormously abundant natural wealth and educating the backward peoples, no economic or social consideration can account for the invasion of Mongolia.

### III

Fifty years ago Mongolia used to be called 'land of flowers' because the valleys were covered with a carpet of tiger lilies as high as a man's chest and with a carpet of anemones, crocuses, and other wild flowers taking advantage of the few weeks of spring when the thermometer was neither below zero nor above a hundred. But Mongolia is also a country of desolation. At the end of the enormous plateau and the bare, pebbly plains rise bluish, wrinkled mountains. The countryside is so barren that you can see a man on horseback as soon as the crown of his felt hat appears above the

horizon. Often the bare hills undulate softly before they rise into the steepness of the Altai Mountains. Once you have crossed them, they add to your disappointment at having seen nothing but a limitless country without villages or any sign of life except hostile nature.

Apart from a few settlements, such as Urga, Uliassutaï, and Kobdo, there are no human habitations at all and no form of life except antelopes, wild horses, camels, and nomads, who never get tired of setting up and taking down their tents as they follow their grazing herds. Caravans advance across this country with the majesty of a heavily loaded vessel, and there are wolves, pestilences, and terrific winds that seem to proclaim the end of the world. The souls of Genghis Khan and his cavaliers sigh in the sand storms. Evil spirits and their precarious priestly masters rule with greater sovereignty than the princes. Above all else Mongolia is an overwhelming country.

This desolate immensity, four times as big as France, has become the prize which has inflamed many ambitions in Asia. Everyone has had a try at it. In the course of fluctuating dynasties China has been alternately vassal and sovereign. Finally, it claimed jurisdiction over the few remaining Mongols, and the shortsighted neighboring countries recognized the claim. Ataman Semenov and the legendary Baron Ungern von Sternberg then failed to establish a kingdom there with their straggling troops. The U. S. S. R. has wisely remained content to support with all its political power and all its money the independence that the northern Mongols have proclaimed. Finally, Manchukuo, the last-born of

all the nations in the world, is playing the same game with Inner Mongolia that the Soviet Union is playing with the Soviet Mongol Republic, and the Manchu Mongol State that has been proclaimed may become the germ of a still larger empire.

Thus we find face to face in these bare countries two antagonists who hold our destinies in their hands. There are only two nations here—the Soviet Russians and the imperial Japanese. The U. S. S. R. has been wise in refusing to admit the independent Socialist Soviet Republic of Mongolia into the framework of the Soviet Union. This enables it either to intervene in defense of an oppressed nation or to withdraw behind the neutrality that it must observe toward a nation that China claims as its own property.

To tell the truth, prudence is the only sound principle here. The representative assembly of tribal chieftains, poor shepherds, and common people, put itself into the hands of the Soviets in 1924. The Council of People's Commissars and the National Revolutionary Party function as the federated republics of the Soviet Union function. The nobles have been driven out of public life and have seen their overpowering privileges abolished. The Young Mongols have more than fifteen thousand members, and they are real Comsomols. Even anti-religious propaganda has taken advantage of the decadence of reformed Lamaism, the corruption of the monks, and the jealousy that the poor lamas feel toward the rich monasteries.

Feudal and religious properties have been confiscated, collective farms created, and pastoral lands socialized. A Russian trading company, the Torg-

mong, has mobilized commerce and transportation. Mongolian students have been received in the educational and military schools of Moscow. Scientific missions have explored the country and taken an inventory of its possibilities. Teachers have been sent from Moscow, members of the 'Down with Illiteracy' society, professors of Marxist politics, engineers, and agricultural experts. Coming after the Chinese administration, they have done so much to transform mental attitudes and living conditions that it is easy to understand the gratitude of the inhabitants and their enthusiasm for Soviet socialism.

Above all, military advisers have arrived. The army is really Mongolian, but its fifty thousand men are staffed by Russian officers, armed with Russian guns and cannon, protected by Russian artillery and airplanes, all of which are Mongolized for the time being. Mongolian troops are manoeuvring along the Siberian frontier, and railway cars and airplanes are concentrating here. If the Japanese general staff at Hailar is as accurately informed about military organization in Mongolia as I was, it should have no illusions as to what will happen in the event of a conflict here.

In the U. S. S. R. as in Nippon, everybody speaks of the war as of something unavoidable, the result of destiny rather than hatred. In Mongolia they go still further and prepare for it. In spite of the military demonstrations at Blagovieshchensk and Vladivostok, it is in Mongolia and not in far-eastern Siberia that the fire will break out. People take care not to mention the fact, but it is in Mongolia and for Mongolia, and not on the banks of the Amur, that a conflict

will occur. This is the stake over which two adversaries will dispute, for it is the key to eastern Asia. Mongolia is also the connecting link between the Soviet armies in maritime Siberia and in Transbaikalia, which signifies something to the Japanese supreme command.

#### IV

To plumb the depths of the Japanese-Soviet antagonism we must focus our attention on one of the sorest spots in Asia. Will Manchukuo long remain the godchild of Japan?

Will the Chinese Manchukuan, contemptuous as ever of the time factor, absorb Japanese nationalism bit by bit in the true Chinese tradition? Will the new state, which to-day has a sovereign in the person of Henry Pu Yi, include some day the people of Manchuria, the Mongolians, and the northern Chinese as far as the Yangtze? Will the near future see a federated association of three peoples ruled by the new sovereign of Manchukuo, His Majesty Kang Teh, a man who might become the focal point of divergent racial tendencies? Will the Government at Hsinking prove to be the germ of an imperial Peiping restoration with Chiang Kai-shek in the rôle of General Monk?

Now let us turn to the one social gospel of Moscow, struggle against world capitalism, especially Anglo-Saxonism. The U. S. S. R. would not particularly care if imperialist Japan administered Manchukuo and even the coast and islands of China. An Asiatic Monroe Doctrine would serve Bolshevik projects, for it would aim at nothing less than the destruction of European influence in the Far East. For a long time Moscow has been di-

rectly interested in one thing only, the domination of central Asia. At one moment, before the proclamation of Manchukuo as an independent state, a sort of tacit accord seemed to govern the relations between the U. S. S. R. and Japan, limiting their respective activities.

One cannot deny—and at Moscow no one does—that the U. S. S. R., deprived of Poland and the Baltic states, freed from the Nordic domination of Saint Petersburg, is pursuing the conquest of Asiatic markets. Even if we do not believe that the Soviet Union has established a war industry five hundred kilometres away from the Altai Mountains of Mongolia, we may well assume that Moscow is farsighted in the economic field. If, for the time being, Russian industry looks solely to the needs of the Russians themselves, within thirty or fifty years the market will have become saturated, and Greater Russia will possess a top-heavy industrial plant. And this is exactly the line of reasoning that the Japanese, who have a twenty-year head-start, are following to-day. There are about a billion Asiatics to clothe, feed, and equip. The conquest of Asia is perhaps nothing more than the search for a trade monopoly and exclusive relations between producer and consumer.

The industrial development of the Urals interests all manufacturing nations, even those that have only the vaguest conceptions of what Asia has to offer. It is sufficiently gigantic to cause a war, for the Russian merchants who carry the Muscovite gospel will inevitably clash with British, Japanese, and American cannon, ready to defend their national investments.

Biological reasons, such as a desire

for access to the open sea and the instinctive migrations of peoples toward the south and toward more fertile regions, are even more profound. This law is strangely reinforced by the mania for grandeur that has seized Russia and that threatens to reign over Eurasia. By freeing the Oriental peoples from white domination, the Soviet Union pretends to be their protector and educator. To-morrow it will arm them for its own profit; the day after to-morrow, when its opponents have been set aside or destroyed, it will become Asia's central source of supply. But Japanese policy blocks the way of the U. S. S. R. Soon the thin strip of land known as Northern Soviet Mongolia will have become merely a protective border for central Siberia and will enter the Manchurian orbit.

## V

It is not as disinterested spectators that we must consider the possibilities of conflict. Whether Russia or Japan triumphs will determine not only which European interests in Asia will be at stake but also, directly or indirectly, the destiny of Europe and the future of western civilization—that is, the civilization that extends from San Francisco across the Atlantic to the Russian-Polish frontier. Is the threatening war inevitable? Obviously, there are fanatics on both sides. Some anticipate the destruction of Japanese power, weighted down with the digestion of Manchuria, by a sudden attack, and by the rebellion of the yellow peoples who have not yet entered the Japanese orbit. Facing them, the Social Nationalists of Japan, hungry for continental domination, would like to take the U. S. S. R. unawares be-

fore improved means of communication have made it into a nation capable of fighting the Empire of the Rising Sun on equal footing.

Japanese military men claim not to fear a war with Russia alone, for they have the great advantage of fighting near their bases. The U. S. S. R., on the other hand, claims that with its airplanes, its cavalry, and its tanks, it would be victorious in a month. But it does not deny that for the time being it prefers peace.

As a matter of fact, in spite of intense preparation on the part of both countries, neither the U. S. S. R. nor Japan is capable of seriously going to war, I mean with a violence that could obtain definite results. It is certain that, if either one of the adversaries felt sure of victory, it would have tried to get the jump on the other.

In reality, war would be as disastrous to the U. S. S. R. as to Japan, for Russia has undertaken in all fields so great a constructive task that it needs thirty years of peace to accomplish it. And Japan, caught in the organization of Manchuria and its own reconstruction, will jump into war only as a man leaps in a parachute from a burning airplane. Whether Japan goes to war or remains at peace depends not so much on its own Government as on the attitude of the Great Powers.

If we try to see things as they are, we must admit that the fear that each opponent shows toward the other serves their domestic politics. What both countries dread is not a conflict with one opponent but with a coalition. Japan fears the intervention of the U. S. S. R. as a third party in a conflict against China or the United States, whereas Russia fears the combined forces of Germany and perhaps

even Poland as Japan's allies. Although young officers in both countries would like to take the offensive, wiser men speak of reconciliation on the back of a common enemy. A Soviet-Japanese entente may not be on the cards, but many people predict parallel conduct on the part of these two violently anti-Saxon Governments. Has not Bukharin divided the world into three groups—'the imperialist world, the Soviet Union, and the Orient in rebellion'?

## VI

In order to preserve the peace and destroy the yellow peril, must we drive the protagonists to mutual self-destruction? And would a far-eastern war accomplish that purpose? Without a simultaneous attack on the western front, the U. S. S. R. cannot be destroyed by an eastern defeat. Without a Russian-American coalition, Japan cannot be crushed by reverses, no matter how bloody they may be. Both sides would merely suffer a temporary setback, which would lead to chronic antagonism and insoluble trouble in Asia. On the other hand, the United States would be put at a disadvantage either by a Japanese victory or by a Soviet Union drunk with success, overflowing with industrial, and even political, activity. Nor can Europe expect anything from a war in which the victory of either belligerent would completely ruin European influence in the Far East.

In answer to the question asked above, 'Is war inevitable?' let us simply reply that two powerful peoples have a single goal but that their do-

mestic situations are holding them back from open struggle. War is merely a possibility, a serious possibility, to be sure; it would become fatal only through the entry of world alliances.

In any case, we must admit that a new cycle of human activity involving the economic, political, and moral domination of one race by another is about to begin. To-morrow, Japan, which is threatened with asphyxiation, may break through the circle that the United States and Great Britain have built around it. Confined to its narrow islands, distended with industry and 'intelligence,' it threatens to burst like an overflowing reservoir. To-morrow, Japan may speak the word of command to the Asiatic peoples, who talk so much about taking group action that their words cannot always remain futile. And let no one imagine that China will be absent in this overflowing pan-Asiaticism. To-morrow, also, the U. S. S. R., unified and powerful, may take command of Asia, for it is not so much the westernization of the East that the Soviet Union desires as a rapprochement between the mother and her nearest descendants.

Let us not rejoice if we see Russia turning away from its western frontiers. From the Pacific to the Volga, from the Polar Seas to the Indian Ocean, people are educating themselves, arming themselves, and passionately hoping that the inscriptions that the cavaliers of Tamerlane left on the rocks of Hungary are still legible: 'To these places we shall return.'

Will their commander-in-chief be a Muscovite?



A Berlin student has sent these pages from his diary to the *Neue Tage-Buch* of Paris, thus providing the outside world with a disturbing picture of the state of mind to which two years of Hitlerism have reduced his generation.

## Pages from a DIARY

By A BERLIN STUDENT

Translated from the *Neue Tage-Buch*  
Paris German-Émigré Weekly

*['I am sending you a number of entries from my diary. It contains nothing unusual. Thousands of other young Germans have written just the kind of thing that lies before you now when they were by themselves in the evening, away from the Brown-clad daily life. But because it is so commonplace, because similar material lies concealed in thousands of dark corners, you may want to use it.']*

A GREAT many people believe that some general or other will flick the whole National-Socialist business aside with a toothpick and that we shall forget this pestilential epoch immediately. Anyone who knows this Germany thoroughly knows how false, how stupid, how dangerous it is to believe any such thing. We feel the earth shaking, we feel that something

terrific is happening among us. We cannot, do not understand it. We only suspect that the destiny of old Europe is being determined in the bleeding heart of Germany. Does that sad little man, Hitler, possess such great significance? Precisely because so puny a figure can wield such power over a great mature people, because this inconceivable thing has happened, because such vulgarity can rage here unchecked, we perceive that something died long ago inside and can be destroyed only from without. An epoch has passed away, and Hitler is merely the gravedigger. But he is that.

Nothing will remain after the Brown house of cards is upset. We have been drained so dry and have become so miserable that there is not even a dog who would have anything