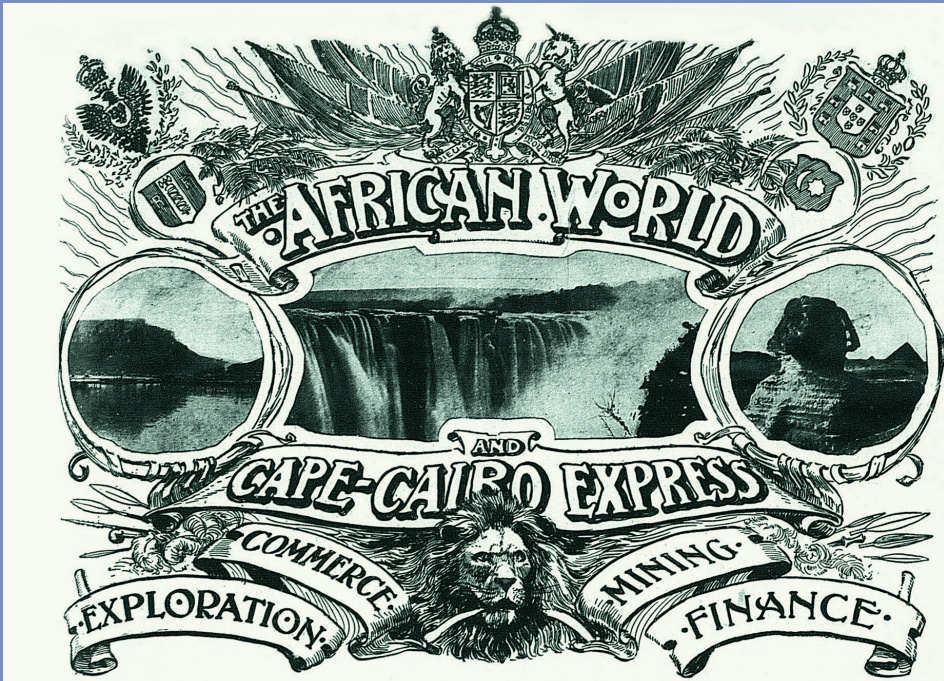


Knowledge in Modern Transimperial History

Actors, Formations, Causes



CYRUS SCHAYEGH WITH
DAVID MOTZAFI-HALLER, ED.

Knowledge in Modern Transimperial History

Critical, Connected Histories

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KNOWLEDGE IN MODERN TRANSIMPERIAL HISTORY

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Introduction

Cyrus Schayegh

Abstract

The Introduction firstly explains how transimperial history has emerged. Secondly, it outlines the particularities of *modern* transimperial history (vis-à-vis *early modern* transimperial history), in so far as those particularities matter to the issue of knowledge formation. Thirdly and most importantly, it reflects on six aspects of transimperial knowledge that feature in this volume's chapters. These include two descriptive comments on the transimperial knowledge formators and the texts "themselves," as it were. Then, the text makes four more interpretative comments, on background, enabling factors, space, and transformations that occur when transimperial knowledge is created.

Human history has known a wide variety of polity forms, including tribal federations, city states, and, most recently, nation-states. But certainly for the last 2,500 years, empires have been the politically most powerful form, and economically and culturally truly influential to boot.

Sure, some scholars think that the term "empire" has become inflationary, and there is some disagreement about what is and is not an empire.¹ But many agree on at least some of the following traits: empires do not just seek to extract profits but also rule politically, usually at least in principle from a metropolitan center and always with the help of intermediaries; make universalistic claims; are spatially expansive; contain heterogeneous peoples and spaces; and treat those peoples and spaces unequally.² Many also agree that those common traits overarch diverse

¹ Yuri Pines with Michal Biran and Jörg Rüpke, "Introduction: Empires and their Space," in *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 5–6.

² Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); George Steinmetz, "The Sociology of Empires, Colonies, and Postcolonialism," *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014), 77–103; John MacKenzie, "The British Empire: Ramshackle or Rampaging? A Historiographical Reflection," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43:1 (2015), 101, relating the definition he used when working as Editor-in-Chief of the Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Empire. Political-military dominance (rather than economic profit): Osterhammel, "Imperien," 60. On definitional disagreements, see Yuri Pines with Michal Biran and Jörg Rüpke, "Introduction: Empires and their Space," in *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 5–6; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "What, Exactly, is an Empire?," in *Connected Histories* (London: Verso, 2022), 104–105; and Marc Beissinger, "Rethinking Empire in the Wake of Soviet Collapse," in *Ethnic Politics after*

“repertoires” of rule and diachronic changes meant to adapt to new contexts. Prasenjit Duara has talked of “family resemblance.”³

Although some *common* fundamental attributes of empires are agreed upon by scholars today, historically, men and women of the pen have been influential legitimizers of *specific* empires. Legitimization has come in different forms. Especially before the modern period, it often was explicit. Scholars, poets, painters, and musicians working for an imperial court lionized “their” emperor (a practice common also in non-imperial princely or royal courts, and at imperial courts also in the modern period). Legitimization could also be more implicit. Especially in modern Europe, many scholarly and non-scholarly texts stressed the distinctiveness of “their” empire and treated them as a distinct unit in space and time rather than as part of an interlocking world. Such texts practiced a sort of “methodological imperialism,” a close cousin of methodological nationalism.⁴

This approach has been in name or at least in effect critiqued for a good time now. Related approaches did not begin in the historiography of Western—that is, European and the US—empires, but, rather, of non-Western empires.

For one thing, in 1997, an early modernist, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, called for entangled histories of early modern Eurasia, including its empires.⁵ Put differently,

Communism, ed. Z. Barany and R. Moser (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 14–45 (a subjective definition, which in turn is criticized, e.g., by Dominic Lieven, *Empire* (London: John Murray, 2000), 6). For an overview of various definitions, see Peter Fibiger Bang, “Empire—A World History,” in *The Oxford World History of Empire*, ed. Fibiger Bang, C.A. Bayly, and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), II:15. *Ibid.*, II:21, identifies four “themes” that “define ... current theories of empire” (my italics): “(a) an economic strategy to monopolize markets, (b) a form of aristocratic class interest, (c) an ideological system and mode of identify formation, and finally, (d) an expression of interstate competition.” For universalism, see Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, ed., *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For “governing” and not just “profiting,” see also and perhaps most interestingly the literature on early modern imperial chartered companies: now classic: Philip Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford 2011); and *Itinerario* special issue 39:3 (2015), especially on the Dutch case.

³ Quotes: Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 16; Prasenjit Duara, “Empire and imperialism,” in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy and Andrew Sartori (London: John Wiley & Son, 2014), 384. Similarly, Peter Fibiger Bang spoke of “deep commonalities in the imperial condition” while emphasizing also “historically alternating rhythm”: idem, “Empire—A World History,” II:5, 48. And see Jürgen Osterhammel, “Imperien,” in *Transnationale Geschichte*, ed. Gunilla Bude, Sebastian Conrad, Oliver Janz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht, 2010), 64, for “differences”—or, rather, variations—like the relative importance of bureaucracy and the degree of orientation to the sea.

⁴ Quote: Bernhard Schär, “From Batticaloa via Basel to Berlin. Transimperial Science in Ceylon and Beyond around 1900,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48:2 (2020), 232.

⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31:3 (1997), 735–62.

although pre-modernist historians did not use the term “transimperial,” certainly not at first, they became interested in histories that in effect were transimperial a decade and a half before modernists. This was fundamentally because the real and perceived power difference between Western and non-Western empires was minimal if not simply non-existent in the early modern period.⁶

For another thing, historians of non-Western empires in the *modern* period—which we define broadly as having begun during a long “saddle time” from the last third of the eighteenth to the first third of the nineteenth century⁷—have studied them *not* in separation from other empires for many decades. The reason is simple. Modern non-Western empires were in no position to believe that they were truly distinct, let alone separate. Thus, in Asia, at the latest by the middle third of the nineteenth century, Western empires’ meddling in the very heartlands of empires on that immense continent was such that (however hierarchical) “interactions” could not be denied. Indeed, certainly by the twentieth century, scholars of Asian (and African) empires took a position that was in effect the reverse of that of scholars of Western empires. If the latter framed “their” empires as subjects and as distinct boxes, the former saw theirs as objects subjugated by “the West” and emulating it. Nonetheless, they, unlike their “Western” counterparts, at least recognized interactions between (yes: unequal) empires as a key feature of those empires *themselves*. Moreover, as of late, some historians are showing that non-Western empires did not just play defense but tried to stay on the offense using various tools and tactics.⁸

What about modern Western empires? In 1978, Edward Said argued that “[E]very single empire in its official discourse has said that is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special.”⁹ But for better or worse, he treated different literatures in separation: French texts here, British ones there, plus American ones. Then, from the 1980s, the hub-and-spokes view of empires—a metropole at the center, which entertains rather one-way relations with separate colonies—that underlay

⁶ See, e.g., Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, 148; for a case, the Ottoman Empire, see Cemal Kafadar, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4 (1997–98), 30–75.

⁷ We here follow broadly the periodization used in Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 [2009]), 45–76.

⁸ Cyrus Schayegh, *Modern Transimperial History: An Introduction* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press), chs. 3 (“Comparisons”) and 4 (“Power”). For the Ottoman case, see, e.g., Aimee Genell, “The Well-defended Domains: Eurocentric International Law and the Making of the Ottoman Office of Legal Counsel,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3:2 (2016), 255–75; Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Lale Can, *Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the Ottoman Haj at the End of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), xxi.

methodological imperialism came under fire, especially by the earliest generation of scholars who came to form the New Imperial History. In the 1990s, Véronique Dimier, who has contributed a chapter to this volume, was one of the first historians who began to do research that empirically showed how and why British writers from the late 1800s constructed “their” empire in distinction from the French one, and vice versa.¹⁰ In the 1990s, too, an edited volume was published that originated in discussions in the 1980s, and that soon became a classic for students of empire: *Tensions of Empire* (1997). Questioning the empire-legitimizing convention of treating a metropole and its colonies separately, co-editors, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, called on scholars to treat the two as a joint analytical field.¹¹ And as part of this move, Cooper and Stoler also noted that empires should not necessarily be studied in separation—that overlaps and interactions, also beyond competition, were worth investigating.¹² In 2001, Stoler defended the value of studying comparisons by turning them from a method into an object of historical investigation, identifying empires’ “politics of comparison” with other empires as a key *modus operandi* of that polity.¹³ And again in the early 2000s, various texts pushed beyond center-periphery, hub-and-spokes conceptualizations of the metro-colonial relationship—an “opening” of the imperial “box” itself that helps opening the box to the outside, as it were. Thus, in 2001, Tony Ballantyne employed the term “web” to conceptualize how Aryanism developed between New Zealand, India, and Britain in the late 1800s. In 2002, historical geographer, Alan Lester, invoked “circuits” of empire that far transcended the metropole. And in 2007, Stoler, Carol McGranahan, and Peter Purdue called for thinking less of empires and more of changing “imperial formations.”¹⁴

Together, the above-noted approaches—conceptual and intellectual shifts within the field of single-Western-empire studies since the 1990s and earlier accounts of how non-Western modern empires interacted with Western ones—have

¹⁰ Véronique Dimier, *Le gouvernement des colonies, regards croisés franco-britanniques* (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 2004).

¹¹ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Introduction,” in *Tensions of Empire*, ed. idem (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–56. Classic studies soon followed; see, e.g., Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹² Cooper and Stoler, “Introduction,” 13, 28–29.

¹³ Historians of nation-states and national movements had for some time made similar points. Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post)Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History* 88:3 (2001), 829–65.

¹⁴ Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Alan Lester, “British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002), 25–48; Ann Laura Stoler, Carol McGranahan, and Peter Purdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007).

formed the necessary foundations of, and constitute multiple genealogies for, transimperial history.¹⁵

Per se, however, transimperial history defined as a perspective of the past that studies both governmental and non-governmental relations across empires¹⁶ is relatively recent. It has begun to take shape since the early 2010s: in conferences,¹⁷ blogs,¹⁸ programmatic articles,¹⁹ and far-ranging edited volumes.²⁰

This is where this edited volume comes in. It focuses on a key issue in transimperial history: knowledge formation, with an eye particularly to the roles and workings of *intermediaries* from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, with one chapter taking us to the early postcolonial period.

The volume comprises nine chapters. The first four chapters pivot around an individual. We begin with a chapter, by Marc Palen, on the German-American economist, Friedrich List's 1841 classic neo-mercantilist *The National System of Political*

¹⁵ On a related note, an oft-cited introductory text has noted that "a transimperial approach would ... give non-European empires—such as the Ottoman, the Chinese or Japanese—more space:" Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History—Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16:4 (2018), 430. Also: Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski, "Introduction: Encounters of Empires. Methodological Approaches," in *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870–1930: Empires and Encounters*, ed. idem (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 3–33.

¹⁶ Put differently, like some fellow travelers such as Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, I believe that a distinction between governmental and non-governmental actions is both empirically and conceptually well-nigh impossible to make. Drawing a lesson from scholars who have come to regret the division between "international" and "transnational" history—think of Erez Manela, "International Society as a Historical Subject" *Diplomatic History* 44 (2020), 184–209—I will exclusively use the term "transimperial." For one thing, the preposition *trans* (across) suits our field much more than *inter* (between). When we use *inter* in a story, we imply the existence of *separate and for the purpose of the story, uniform* entities. This does not work for empires. They are by definition multi-form; moreover, historians of the most varied modern empires have time and again shown that metropolitan ministries pulled in different directions; and the call to study "metropole and colonies in a single analytical field" highlights not the least intra-imperial inequalities. For another thing, governmental and societal actors who were engaged in relationships across empires affected each other such that it is impossible to sort their actions into two distinct interimperial inter-governmental and transimperial trans-societal sets.

¹⁷ E.g., <https://www.transimperialhistory.com>; <https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/modern-transimperial-and-interimperial-histories-forms-questions-prospects-o>.

¹⁸ <https://www.transimperialhistory.com/>.

¹⁹ Hedinger and Heé, "Transimperial History."

²⁰ James Fichter, "Britain and France, Connected Empires," in *British and French Colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Middle East: Connected Empires across the 18th to the 20th Centuries*, ed. idem (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1–16; Barth and Cvetkovski, *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer*; Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, ed., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

Economy. Palen focuses on this text's reception across various empires throughout the long nineteenth century, highlighting the sheer range of interpretations, the importance of translations, and how in those translations, interpretative prefaces helped frame for readers why List matters. Chapter 2 takes place during the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War. Jenny Day examines the double dealings of Wang Zhichun, who leveraged his deep acquaintance with the Qing court, local Chinese officials, and Europeans during a sensitive war-time mission to multiple European imperial metropolises, and in the process toured, and wrote an interpretative account of, European weapons manufacturers, too. In Chapter 3, Ulrike Lindner examines the early years of *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*. Distributed from London by the German-South-African-British Jewish publisher Leo Weinthal, this magazine collated news from across colonial Africa, which helped to sharpen a common, racially based transimperial sense of identity among urban middle- and upper-class whites in Africa. Chapter 4, by Ulrike von Hirschhausen, focuses on Silas Hardoon, an Ottoman Jew who in 1874 migrated to the Chinese treaty port of Shanghai. He married a Chinese woman, became a British Protected Person, and amassed riches and influence by developing a fine-grained knowledge of the city's real estate and by straddling its European institutions and Chinese sociocultural networks.

The last five chapters cover different socio-professional groups. In Chapter 5, Alexander Morrison focuses on Russian military officers in the 1800s. He shows how during tours especially of the French empire's colonies and through other forms of contacts, they—and some other Russians—reflected on other empires' military-colonial administration; how their specialized (and other, general) journals served as a platform for their thinking and exchanged information with similar European journals; how they thought about neighboring non-European empires; and how other Europeans framed a presumably distinct Russian style of colonial warfare. Chapter 6, by Jiajia Liu and William Robert Kelson, examines how Chinese financial intermediaries in the later nineteenth century used, and profited from, detailed knowledge to bring together European banks and governmental and private Chinese loan applicants; and shows how their knowledge structured the nature of private loan letters, so-called chops. In Chapter 7, Florian Wagner focuses on influential academics such as the Frenchman Louis Massignon, who were associated with the *Institut Colonial International* (ICI), which was founded in 1893. Extending his analysis into the interwar years, Wagner shows how those academics and other ICI members leveraged their training and connections in their and other colonies to advocate for the re-vitalization and craft guilds and rural cooperatives throughout the colonial world. Chapter 8, by Patrick Bernhard, focuses on British journalists as well as think tankers and some government officials in the 1930s, with a glance also into the post-World War II period. He demonstrates how those journalists both interpreted and amplified a considerable fascination in Britain and in white dominions with fascist Italy's aggressively state-led colonization projects in

its African colonies. Last but not least, in Chapter 9, Véronique Dimier takes us to the 1950s–70s. Focusing on British and French historians and looking also at postcolonial economic development specialists, she shows how they fundamentally replicated colonial-time views about the presumed clear distinction between formal French and informal British colonial administration and the latter’s presumed superiority.

Examining a range of individuals and socioprofessional groups and tying together not only European actors but also European and non-European actors, this volume’s nine chapters collectively showcase the variety of modern transimperial knowledge formations. Before offering some reflections on those chapters, let me take a step back, and add a general note on transimperial relations in the modern period in which these chapters play out, i.e., roughly the mid-1800s to the mid- to late 1900s.

This note matters because, as we will see, the *general* range of varied transimperial relations is refracted in *concrete* transimperial knowledge formations, including in histories that involve societal actors.

The most important point to be made—the bottomline, really—of transimperial relations in the modern period is that whether, in reality or perception, there was a much clearer difference than in the early modern period in the power and status between Western, i.e., European and the US, empires and non-Western ones. This relative, not absolute difference to the early modern period showed transimperiality in two principal ways. First, intertwined patterns of competition and cooperation between Western empires became more common, more accentuated, and more momentous. And second, Western empires now directly intervened in non-Western empires—often on and across their territories and in their economies and governments—in ways that eclipsed early modern patterns. In turn, non-Western counter-interventions—what James Gelvin has called “defensive developmentalism”—became exceedingly common.²¹

This fundamental pattern, while real, is a generalization, however. It needs to be qualified. First, the sense that the whole world is bifurcated into a Western and a non-Western group of empires²² fully crystallized only during the second half of the nineteenth century. Before, certainly non-Western imperial subjects and governments did not believe that they necessarily have much in common.

²¹ Quote: James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 73. Relatedly, Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Empires* (Munich: Beck, 2023), 407, invoke “defensive agency.” For intervention and counterintervention going hand in hand, see Schayegh, *Modern Transimperial History*, ch. 2 (“Facets”).

²² These two groups would comprise polities that ultimately remained subaltern to empires through the 1940s, including nation-states.

Empire-specific religious and/or universalizing civilizational identities were much too exclusive (and became *less* exclusive by the late 1800s).

On a related note, second, even in the late 1800s at least one empire, Japan's, did *not* see itself as simply a member of the non-Western bloc. Sure, it emphasized its difference from racist Europeans and Americans to stress its own attraction to other non-Western empires and their populations. But as importantly, certainly at home but also abroad, it stressed that it was different, and indeed better, than other non-Western empires, including China; this fact showed not the least in its ability to enter an alliance of sorts with the British Empire in 1902. As a consequence, many Japanese thought that their empire led much of the non-Western imperial world, and non-Westerners should accept it as a, if not *the*, leader.

Third, sometimes, cooperation and/or competition between Western empires turned interventionist; think of the US war against Spain in 1898. And Western imperial interventions in non-Western empires on the ground led to cooperative and even competitive patterns between Western and non-Western imperial actors, too. Thus, Britain's Opium Wars forced Qing China literally at gun point to open certain port cities to British and soon other Western state and imperial actors. But to function properly, these actors were forced to systemically cooperate with the most varied Chinese actors, who sometimes became competitors, too.

Fourth, in European eyes, key Asian (but not African) empires persisted in, or civilizationaly echoed through, modern times. Yes, Europeans did not see them as their equals. But even so, some Asians continued to call them names that upheld their distinction if not superiority. In Qing China, imperial-status-conscious Europeans objected to being called *yi*, which they interpreted to exclusively mean "barbarian."²³ Moreover, Asian empires' cultural production, including vast bodies of written literature and imposing representational buildings like the Taj Mahal, were so impressive and in tune with fundamental European civilizational standards, and so age-old and sometimes known in "Europe" since Antiquity, that they complicated European arguments that they were backward and simply and categorically inferior.²⁴

Last, modern Western empires did not look at themselves and at each other as equals. For one thing, there were, among Western empires, two powerful newcomers who were rising fast, which created some concern among all others: the United States and Germany. And for another thing, there were multiple (ways of seeing) inequalities between European empires. One was geographical: here, a northwestern European core—most centrally, Britain, France, and the Netherlands—was

²³ Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 31–68.

²⁴ See, e.g., Phiroze Vasunia, "Akbar's Dream: The Mughal Emperor in Nineteenth-Century Literature," in *Regimes of Comparatism*, in *Regimes of Comparatism*, ed. Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, and Geoffrey Lloyd (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 284–317.

juxtaposed to empires who were (seen to be) at Europe's periphery and hence perhaps not *really that solidly* European: Russia (a bit Asian!?) in the east and Italy, Spain, and Portugal in the south. Another purported inequality was racial: Anglo-Saxons of different stripes—including America and Germany—were by the late 1800s seen to trump Latins and Slavs. On top, within each group, there were purported inequalities and claims to superiority, too: some Frenchmen “recognized” Britain's superiority but framed their country as the big sister of all Latins.

What insights do this volume's nine chapters hold for our understanding of transimperial knowledge formation, then? Our answer begins with two descriptive comments on the transimperial knowledge formators and the texts “themselves,” as it were—comments that are rather self-evident but need spelling out for clarity's sake. Then, we make four more interpretative comments, on background, enabling factors, space, and the transformations that occur when transimperial knowledge is created. Together, it is hoped, these points will broaden how transimperial historians have thought about the topic of knowledge,²⁵ including the role played by intermediaries.²⁶

²⁵ Historians of transimperial cooperations have been especially interested in knowledge. To be more precise, cooperation as a research “perspective has been especially fertile ... in the history of medicine, natural sciences, and humanities.” (Quote: Laurent Derdyvère, Patrick Farges, Indravati Félicité & Élisabeth Goudin, “Introduction,” in *Transimpérialités contemporaines / Moderne Transimperialitäten: Rivalités, contacts, émulation / Rivalitäten, Kontakte, Wettstreit*, ed. idem (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 19. For the social sciences, see also Jeremy Adelman, ed., *Empire and the Social Sciences* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).) This was the case basically because knowledge indeed was a central theme in a transimperial cooperation in the modern period. This, in turn, was the case because the need to economically develop colonies and, in the case of land empires, frontier regions, became ever more important in the modern period: for economic reasons, and as importantly as the central ideological justification for imperial rule over colonies and hinterlands and, in fact, as the ultimate marker of *successful* colonization. Historiographically, this interest in knowledge has built on historians' keen interest, since the 1990s, not anymore in how “the West” spread modern science to “the rest”—see, e.g., George Basalla, “The Spread of Western Science,” *Science* 156 (1967), 611–22 (reflection: Marwa Elshakry, “When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections,” *Isis* 101 (2010), 98–109)—but, rather in how “symbiotic” a manner empire and science have evolved (quote: Andrew Goss, “Introduction,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, ed. idem (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 1.) Pushing further: Pratik Chakrabarty, “Situating the Empire in the History of Science,” in *Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, 10–20. Origins text: Paolo Palladino and Michael Worboys, “Science and Imperialism,” *Isis* 84, no. 1 (1993), 91–102. An early, now classical edited volume was John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and the Natural World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); and a now classical monograph is Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Key works include Benjamin Lawrance et al., ed., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and Richard

The first descriptive point concerns the fact that a quite enormous range of textual objects were involved in, i.e., materially underpinned and carried, transimperial knowledge formations. In this volume, these textual objects include Liu and Kelson's bank chops; the manifold prefaces and postscripts that translators of List's classic (and/or their financiers) added to their translations (Palen); Wagner's internal, unpublished ICI reports; Lindner's journal; Bernhard's British newspapers (and his think tank pieces and government reports); Morrison's specialized military journals, the influential "so-called 'thick' journals," and their "reciprocal relationship" for instance with British military and general-geographical journals, which all "published translations of each other's articles"; travelogues (Morrison; Day); and Dimier's Anglo- and Francophone historical monographs and other books.

Second, the knowledge formators in evidence in the chapters fall broadly speaking into two categories. One category involves people who bring together, on the face of it through *their* initiative, information about two or more empires that were spatially separated. Put differently, respective stories involved people from empires that were (seen to be) *roughly* of the same power and status and hence did not systematically territorially intervene in each other's affairs, but rather cooperated/competed. Examples are Palen's Western-imperial translators of List, Lindner's *African World-Cape Cairo Express* covering multiple European colonies, Morrison's Russian officers who were in touch, e.g., with French counterparts, Wagner's multi-European ICI members, Bernhard's British journalists covering Italian colonization schemes, and Dimier's British and French historians. However, as importantly, in each account, there are *gradations* in power and status, too, which create frictions that are central to each story.

Antaramyan: *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), on the Ottoman Empire; Stephen Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace: The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020) on Russia; Sherman Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Networks: Western, Japanese, and Chinese Corporations in China, 1880-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), John Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), and Kaori Abe, *Chinese Middlemen in Hong Kong's Colonial Economy, 1830-1890* (London: Routledge, 2017), on Qing China. From a different, "professional" perspective, see, e.g., the literature on consuls. Two examples include Jeffrey Dyer, "Pan-Islamic Propagandists or Professional Diplomats?: The Ottoman Consular Establishment in the Colonial Indian Ocean," in *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law*, ed. Lâle Can et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), and Nicole Phelps, "One service, three systems, many empires: the U.S. consular service and the growth of U.S. global power, 1789-1924," in Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires*. For a quite different case that is grounded in the (later) early modern period and then falls apart around 1800, see the classic Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

The other category comprises actors who bridge between people from two (or more) empires who came to live face to face. The—however quite varied—examples here are Liu and Kelson's Chinese financial intermediaries, von Hirschhausen's Hardoon, and Jenny Day's Wang Zhichun. These cases correspond to realities in which some empires directly intervened in another one—here: Europeans in China—but in which actors from all empires involved cooperated with each other for varied reasons. These transimperial knowledge creators correspond to an argument that Sanjay Subrahmanyam developed in his Afterthought to the 2009 edited volume *The Brokered World*: “The mere existence of transactions ... is certainly not sufficient to create the go-between. In order for that to happen, the transactions must ... be characterized by forms of friction. The go-between is born of this transactional friction. The go-between is thus the third party in a transaction where the two other parties ... are themselves incapable of completing it in the absence of mediation. ... The go-between thus emerged in a world of imperfect information. ... Information here ... is portrayed as an asset that yields returns.”²⁷ What *differs* from Subrahmanyam's argument, of course, is the fact that the two parties that that knowledge formator brought together were *not* equal in power.

This brings us to our four interpretative comments. The first one concerns background. In each and every chapter, actors from one empire initiated a knowledge-based transimperial relationship with people from other empires as a result of either a rather long-term structural development or of a specific event. Put differently, a transimperial relationship did not “just” happen in a vacuum. There were complex and multiple backgrounds, even causes. In our chapters, specific events are in evidence most clearly in Day's chapter (the 1894/95 Sino-Japanese War) and twice in Palen, who notes that List's *National System* was a direct reply to the British turn to free trade in the 1840s, and that the book's protectionist and Anglophobic message became really transimperially popular following the onset of the Long Depression in 1873 among Britain's less industrially advanced rivals. Meanwhile, long-term structural developments are at play in Morrison's chapter (the question of how to administer new large Muslim-majority lands conquered in Central Asia, aka “the Muslim Question”); Lindner (the need to hone transimperial white racial solidarity); Wagner (interwar ICI members' double fear about capitalism and communism); Bernard (British migration and demographic issues); and Dimier (the problems posed by decolonization).

Secondly, *all* transimperial knowledge creators seem to have enjoyed a varying combination of three (certainly equally varying) “enabling factors” that facilitated or underpinned their work. One factor concerned languages. Wagner mentions

²⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Some Afterthoughts,” in *The Brokered World*, ed. Simon Shaffer et al. (Sagamore Beach: Watson, 2009), 430, 432.

the importance of French as a scholarly lingua franca into the interwar period. Lindner's *African World-Cape Cairo Express* evidently assumed that many potential interested readers in colonial Africa would be able to read English as a lingua franca (in parallel to French?). Liu and Kelson's financial intermediaries knew local Chinese dialects and some English or pidgin. Morrison notes that many Russian officers' fluency in English, French, and German underpinned their ability to engage with related empires. Bernard shows that the fascist Italian empire offered translation help to British journalists covering state-led migration movements. Translations play a central role in Palen's account of the fate of List's classic. And to end with a counterpoint, von Hirschhausen notes that Hardoon, like a few select other Ottoman Jews sent to work in East Asia in the late 1800s, used Judeo-Arabic as a secret language, here for trade.

The other two enabling factors somewhat blend but can be separated for heuristic purposes. It appears that most if not all successful transimperial knowledge formators honed, and had access to, *both* institutions *and* informal, non-institutionalized personal networks. Palen's List nurtured friendships with influential politicians such as Adolph Thiers; but his classic became more visible through the efforts, in the late 1800s, of the German Historical School, which radiated all the way to Japan and, from there, to China, to cite one example. The extensive personal contacts of Liu and Kelson's actors allowed them to properly gauge local and regional businessmen's creditworthiness; but they had privileged access to banks, too, and solved problems at the Sino-foreign Mixed Courts. Lindner's *African World-Cape Cairo Express* entertained correspondents across Africa *and* had access to key print and financial media institutions in London. Von Hirschhausen's Hardoon nourished a most astonishingly intricate social world with Chinese friends, peers, and acquaintances, but simultaneously served on several Western Shanghai municipal councils and enjoyed the protection of the legal institution called "British Protected Person." Day's Wang entertained the strongest of ties with local gentry officials from Southern China *and* with the Chinese Foreign Ministry, among other institutions. Wagner's ICI members came from a rather homogeneous social background that facilitated interaction, *and* they were able to mobilize sprawling academic and colonial administrative institutions for their studies. And, to add a last example, many of Dimier's historians knew each other while at the selfsame time enjoying financial and status-related support from academic institutions including Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne, and the Collège de France.

A perhaps particularly tantalizing insight may be that gained from reading Morrison, Day, and Liu and Kelson side by side: in all cases, transimperial knowledge creators did *not* come from a well-established, secure, and hence perhaps risk-averse background. Rather, many of Morrison's Russian officers came from "humbler backgrounds" and were "hungry" for success; Liu and Kelson's Hu never

earned a degree under the imperial examination system. And Day's Wang did not pass the Qing Civil Service Examination. In fact, she notes that his "story shows that the Sino-Japanese War was not exclusively a conflict between empires but also represented a transimperial moment of networking, opportunity-seeking, and knowledge-making by men occupying lower levels of the official echelon."

Thirdly, regarding space, two generalizations can be made about the chapters. All involve multiple spaces; and in all cases those spaces are of different types, or, put differently, these spaces evince fascinating differences in function and power. In Day's chapter, multiple Chinese embassies in Europe are a key space—and are connected with multiple different spaces in China, i.e., not just the capital city of Beijing and its Foreign Ministry but also local officials who entertained unofficial relationships with certain diplomats and emissaries. In Bernhard's chapter, London-based newspapers play a central role in gathering, processing, and distributing news about Italy: "Quite a few news editors between Vancouver and Sydney followed the prestigious Times and printed an abridged version of the essay." At the same time, however, some non-British journalists from dominions visited Italy and its colonies on their own. London was an information-processing hub for the journal that Lindner covers, too. List's ability, in Palen's chapter, to develop his neo-mercantilist argument in the first place relied to a considerable degree on the fact that he was not "just" a German but also a US-American *and* lived for years in France, too. In Hirschhausen's chapter, Shanghai is central: Haroon barely moves—because he was able to reliably pull to himself and into his estates economic, cultural, and political actors from across China and beyond. Morrison's Russian officers framed comparable Muslim borderlands like Algeria and Central Asia as object-spaces to be comprehended and mastered; and they performed this move partly by visiting those spaces, partly by meeting in European capitals with peers, and partly by exchanging information via journals in a joint if unequally organized and also in this sense fluid Western information space. And in Liu and Kelson's chapter, financial intermediaries' offices brought together two spaces: the Western-penetrated port treaty cities and "their" often also rural hinterlands.

Fourthly and lastly, as important as the sheer range of these textual objects is the fact that they did their transimperial knowledge formation work in very different ways. Palen's prefaces and postscripts presumably argued from the margin (of the translation) but in effect could be said to be center stage, and were very explicit to boot. By contrast, the whole beauty about Liu and Kelson's bank chops, certainly the earlier version until the 1880s, was that they were extremely short if not vague. The transimperial knowledge was basically stored in the head (and perhaps some notes) of the transimperial financial broker, *not* in the chop itself. Lindner's journal fundamentally functioned like an alchemist. It sought to create gold—a (new) overall all-white European-wide high-status transimperial

identity—by throwing into one single pot, i.e., covering side by side, most often very banal and mundane tidbits of information from this or that individual European empire’s African colony: a work of “comparison,” as Lindner notes. In Wagner’s chapter, we come across ICI members who “regarding Islam ... claimed to know it better than Muslim intellectuals, having a bird-eyes view on the different schools of law present in different empires.” That is, they determinedly discerned, from up high, deep patterns that evaded the empirical, case-obsessed, narrow minds of this or that specific Muslim community. Some of Morrison’s officers saw a fundamental similarity—and hence, a similar threat!—between North African “dervishism” and Russian-Muslim Sufi orders. Day notes that while touring Europe’s armament industries, Wang held that *all* “European militaries developed according to the principle that ‘the best defense is to attack’ (*yigong weishou*) and ‘spar[ed] no effort’ (*buyi yuli*). This approach stemmed from the proximity of European powers, wherein any sign of weakness could be exploited by a neighbor.” Put differently, he made a sweeping generalization that was based on a reading of all European powers as being locked into one common (in)security system. Last but not least, Bernhard’s British journalists did not “just” objectively report on Italy. Rather, as he details, they were knee-deep engaged in transimperial framing and interpreting Italy’s moves, which not the least had what Bernhard calls a crucial amplifier function (and, one might add, a framing function as well).

Building on the above comment, it seems that transimperial knowledge formations always involve some combination of two operations. They assemble a bricolage of “facts” and data. And then, using this or that universalizing yardstick, they create sometimes more and sometimes less sweeping generalizations, that is new transimperial knowledge formations. This operation formed a complex process that we may call commensurabilization. In it, certain facts and data were marginalized if not simply cut from view, while other facts and data were framed to be central and determined to be similar enough to be put into one single commensurable frame. Put differently, this process was inherently shaped by its actors’ power to make and carry out certain knowledge-related and -forming decisions. And this power—however varied and uncertain and in need of constant reinforcement and whatever the downstream consequences on the “consumers” of such transimperial knowledge—this power fundamentally reflected the uneven and uncertain yet definitely existing power relations more broadly across empires in the modern period.

To conclude, while many empirical cases, methodological approaches, and conceptual viewpoints to do with transimperial knowledge formation remain to be explored, it is our conviction that the following chapters individually and collectively point out some fascinating issues, raise tantalizing questions, and point to promising future directions for research.

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Economic Ideologies and Transimperialism: Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* (1841) as a Case Study

Marc-William Palen

Abstract

Owing to the centripetal force of British imperial historiography, historians have paid less attention to how the British embrace of free trade from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries sparked a countermovement of economic nationalism across the imperial world order. Tracing the global influence of a central text, German-American economic theorist Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* (1841), among leading nationalists in both imperial and anti-colonial contexts provides a much-needed corrective: it illustrates the transimperial crossings and formations of knowledge and opinions about economic nationalism in an imperial age.

Keywords: transimperial, Friedrich List, economic thought, imperial and anti-colonial economic nationalism.

“The highest means of development of the manufacturing power, of the internal and external commerce proceeding from it, of any considerable coast and sea navigation, of extensive sea fisheries, and consequently of a respectable naval power, are *colonies*,” German-American theorist Friedrich List (1789-1846) argued in his 1841 book *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie* (*The National System of Political Economy*).¹ He also laid out how Western industrializing powers required not only colonies abroad, but also high tariff walls to protect domestic “infant” industries from the full force of global market competition. List was effectively updating the older zero-sum game of the European mercantilist system to take into account a rapidly globalizing mid-nineteenth-century imperial world system marked by industrialization, nationalism, and technological advancements like the telegraph, steamships, and railways that were connecting markets at an unprecedented level. List’s own travels across the imperial metropolises of Germany, the United States (where he became a citizen), and France, before ending up back in Germany helped inspire

¹ Friedrich List, *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie* (Stuttgart & Tübingen, J. G. Cotta, 1841).

The National System. So, too, did his worries about how “England’s manufacturing, commercial, and naval supremacy” might threaten the manufacturing futures of the less developed imperial powers.² His book thereby enunciated trepidations that struck a chord among the British Empire’s neomercantilist rivals—particularly the United States, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire—as well as among Britain’s own colonies, which sought to become industrial powers in their own right. The transimperial journey of List himself and of his book together illustrate the growing popularity of economic nationalism during this era of imperial globalization from the nineteenth century to the Second World War. *The National System*’s modern advocacy of imperial expansion, economic nationalism, and industrialization made his book the most influential protectionist text across the globalizing imperial world order by the dawn of the twentieth century.

List published *The National System* in Germany in 1841, after many years abroad in the United States and France, where he learned much about US and French protectionist policies and theories. In 1841, Britain was the most industrially advanced nation in the world and was in the middle of liberalizing its trade policy to expand its imports, especially of wheat and cotton. British free traders also hoped that the rest of the mercantilist world would follow its lead and open their markets up to British manufacturers. List did not believe that the time was right for any imperial power to turn to free trade, including Britain, and therefore put forward his theory of infant industrial protectionism. He argued that Britain’s Western imperial rivals required high tariffs and subsidies for domestic industries to develop their national economies to catch up to Britain and counter its free-trade policies.

A transimperial examination of List’s life and *The National System*’s widespread popularity following his 1846 suicide illustrates the growing penchant for economic nationalism over economic cosmopolitanism following the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) and the onset of the Long Depression (1873–1896). The growing transimperial popularity of List’s brand of economic nationalism and imperial expansion contributed not only to the successful industrial rise of the West, but also to global geopolitical rivalries over markets and natural resources that ended with two world wars. List’s argument on behalf of infant industrial protectionism, national consolidation, and colonialism quickly found a receptive audience among Britain’s imperial rivals, most notably in the United States, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire, as well as Britain’s own settler colonies. List believed that western Europe, the United States, and the British “white” settler colonies of Canada and Australia needed to couple their economic nationalist policies with the colonization of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These colonies would then provide

² Emphasis in the original. Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy*, translated by Sampson Samuel Lloyd (1909 (1885, 1841)), 216–17.

the cheap labor and natural resources required to help cultivate the manufacturing power of the Western imperial metropolises. Fascinatingly, the book also garnered a sympathetic readership among anti-colonial nationalists in China, Ireland, and India, where Britain coercively enforced free-trade policies. List's popularity among Chinese, Irish, and Indian anti-colonial nationalists is quite remarkable considering that List himself believed that his theory was only applicable to Britain's Western imperial rivals, not to the colonial world.

After nearly a decade of internal free-trade agitation, Britain's unilateral decision in 1846 to overturn the protectionist Corn Laws—to abandon mercantilism—marked a momentous point in the transimperial history of modern globalization. It ushered in the beginning of what some refer to as the first age of globalization. This economic revolution of trade liberalization was a milestone that is readily recognized, not least as kickstarting Britain's "imperialism of free trade."³ But owing to the centripetal force of British imperial historiography, historians have paid far less attention to how this same British free-trade movement sparked a counter-movement of economic nationalism—what in 1944 Hungarian economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi famously dubbed as a "double-movement"—across the imperial world order.⁴ Adding to the historiographical problem, in some cases, like that of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century US empire, these very same protectionist movements have even been misleadingly reinterpreted as free trade in character.⁵ Tracing the transimperial influence of German-American economic theorist Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* (1841, hereafter *The National System*) among leading nationalists in both the imperial and the anti-colonial world provides a much-needed corrective to the common but misleading narrative that the decades leading up to the First World War were exclusively free trade in character.⁶ Rather, the transimperial case study of List's

³ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* 6 (1953), 1–15.

⁴ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944).

⁵ For criticisms of this free-trade or "open door" characterization of the American Empire, see Mary Speck, "Closed-Door Imperialism: The Politics of Cuban-U.S. Trade, 1902–1933," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85 (2005), 449–83; Marc-William Palen, "The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism, 1890–1913," *Diplomatic History* 39 (Jan. 2015), 157–85; Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalisation, 1846–1896* (Cambridge, 2016); Benjamin Fordham, "Protectionist Empire: Trade, Tariffs, and United States Foreign Policy, 1890–1914," *Studies in American Political Development* 31 (Oct. 2017), 170–92; Palen, "The Open Door Empire," in Christopher Dietrich, ed., *A Companion to U.S. Foreign Relations: Colonial Era to the Present* (2 Vols., Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), Vol. 1, 271–87.

⁶ Scholars have begun connecting these various transimperial economic nationalist strands together. See, for instance, Mauro Boianovsky, "Friedrich List and the Economic Fate of Tropical Countries," *History of Political Economy* 45 (2013), 647–91; Onur Ulas Ince, "Friedrich List and the

ideas demonstrates that the market interconnectivity and geopolitical conflicts arising across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries owed far more to the imperialism of economic nationalism than to the imperialism of free trade.⁷ Starting with the imperial world, the reception of List's *National System* provides a useful way to explore the growing transimperial economic nationalist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

List played a prominent role as a transimperial knowledge creator first through his personal transimperial knowledge exchanges between Germany, the USA, and France, and then through *The National System*'s translation and dissemination in numerous nationalist settings. The book's message tapped into a burgeoning late-nineteenth-century nationalistic trepidation of British free trade. List's *National System* was a direct reply to the British turn to free trade in the 1840s, but the book's protectionist and Anglophobic message became far more transimperially popular following the onset of the Long Depression in 1873 among Britain's less industrially advanced rivals, who laid most of the blame for the economic crisis upon the era's main financial hub, the City of London. List's text was eventually translated into around a dozen languages. Most translations were undertaken between the Long Depression and the Great Depression, whereupon *The National System* often became bedside reading for nationalist politicians and industrialists across the globe. Along Listian lines laid out in *The National System*, high tariffs to protect "infant" domestic industries, subsidies for internal improvements, and colonial expansion became the rule for industrializing imperial powers like the USA, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan; British free-trade imperialism was the exception.⁸ List's economic nationalist creed for the industrializing world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to thwart Britain's attempt to "kick away the ladder" played a foundational part in kickstarting the transimperial growth of imperialism and economic nationalism from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War.⁹

Imperial Origins of the National Economy," *New Political Economy* 21 (2016), 380–400; Eric Helleiner, *The Neomercantilists: A Global Intellectual History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021); Marc-William Palen, "Economic Nationalism in an Imperial Age, c. 1846–1946," in the *Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism*, edited by Aviel Roshwald, Matthew D'Auria, and Cathie Carmichael (2 Vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), II, 538–58. Conversely, on trans-anti-imperial free-trade networks, see Marc-William Palen, *Pax Economica: Left-Wing Visions of a Free Trade World* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2024); Palen, "Transimperial Roots of American Anti-Imperialism: The Transatlantic Radicalism of Free Trade, 1846–1920," in Jay Sexton and Kristin Hoganson, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Duke University Press, 2020), 159–82.

⁷ Palen, *Pax Economica*.

⁸ Palen, *Pax Economica*, chap. 1.

⁹ For more contemporary resonances of List, see, for instance, James Fallows, "How the World Works," *Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 1993); Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London: Anthem, 2002); and Henryk Szlajfer, *Economic Nationalism and Globalization: Lessons from Latin America and Central Europe*, trans. by Maria Chmielewska-Szlajfer (Leiden, Brill, 2012).

The widespread influence of List's ideas upon the industrializing imperial world order proffers numerous examples upon which to draw. List himself lived a transimperial life. He was born in Germany in 1789, became a US citizen in the 1820s, and directly influenced French and German imperial projects in the 1830s and 1840s. Following his 1846 suicide, his ideas, encapsulated in *The National System*, would continue to resonate among Britain's imperial contenders, first in the United States, France, and Germany, followed later by the Russians, Japanese, and the Ottomans. List's ideas would also leave an indelible mark upon British imperial debates in Britain, Canada, and Australia, as well among Chinese, Irish, and Indian anti-colonial nationalists.

The Transimperial Impact of List and *The National System*

List was born in Reutlingen, a town within the German Kingdom of Württemberg, in 1789. Following a short career as a clerk, in his late twenties, List lobbied the Württemberg imperial government of King Wilhelm I to establish an economics department at the University of Tübingen, after which Wilhelm appointed List to a professorship within it. List's subsequent creation of a trade association got him removed from his professorship. As head of the new association, List worked to economically unify Germany, which won him an election to the Württemberg Parliament. His vocal criticisms of the imperial government, however, soon sent him fleeing to Paris in 1824. There he met the Marquis de Lafayette, who asked him to join him on a trip to the USA. In 1825, after a six-month stint in a Württemberg prison, List was more than amenable to joining Lafayette for the transatlantic voyage. List's years of exile between 1825 and 1832 in Pennsylvania, the heartland of US protectionist theorizing, proved formative when later formulating *The National System*. He kept himself busy in Pennsylvania as a farmer, editor of a local German-language newspaper, and co-founder of a local railway company. He did all this while immersing himself in US protectionist thought, culminating in the publication of a series of letters on the subject, *Outlines of American Political Economy* (1827). He became a US citizen in 1830, after which President Andrew Jackson appointed him to be US consul to the Kingdom of Saxony, which allowed him to return to his homeland as a US citizen, interspersed with long stopovers in France, where Anglophobic French mercantilist politics also helped shape his critique of British free trade.¹⁰

Building upon earlier US protectionist theorists like Alexander Hamilton, List updated mercantilism for a rapidly globalizing world system, what some have since dubbed as "neomercantilism."¹¹ Seeing the close connection between

¹⁰ Eugen Wendler, *Friedrich List's Exile in the United States: New Findings* (Heidelberg, Springer, 2016), 1–4.

¹¹ See especially Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*.

US Westward expansion and state-sponsored internal improvements and infant industrial protectionism informed his evolving economic nationalist outlook, as would his friendship with the prominent French politician, Adolph Thiers. Thanks in part to his own US and French experiences, List's calls for a strong nation state, protectionism, and colonial expansion played a pivotal part in shaping the economic nationalist makeup of the US, French, and German empires, and, later, those of the Russians, Japanese, and Ottomans. List's influence on the British Empire was also quite transformative, owing to how *The National System* helped shape both imperial and anti-colonial debates in Britain, Canada, Australia, China, Ireland, and India. List's first-hand witnessing of the overturning of the protectionist Corn Laws in the British Upper House in 1846, in turn, contributed to his ill mental health; he committed suicide later that year.¹²

The initial impact of *The National System* in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s was notable, even if it paled in comparison to List's influence upon the global protectionist turn after 1870. While in France in the 1830s, List had the ear of Adolph Thiers, an influential French politician that helped oversee the protectionist maintenance of "Fortress France" for years to come.¹³ German imperial expansionists like Alexander von Bülow quoted List to support colonial designs upon Latin America in the late 1840s and early 1850s, and *The National System* was even rumored to have been Otto von Bismarck's bedside reading.¹⁴ The first English language translation was published in 1856 in the United States. The translator, a French-American lawyer named G. A. Matile, drew upon List's biography written by the translator of the 1851 French edition to supplement his American translation. Matile's translation from the German edition was undertaken at the instigation and editorial direction of Philadelphia's Stephen Colwell, a close friend of Henry Charles Carey, who crafted the Republican Party's protectionist platform upon its founding in the late 1850s. As justification, in a preliminary essay to the 1856 translation, Colwell described how "List's School" in Germany "at the present moment" was "the most influential and respectable in every point of view." It therefore seemed only fitting to Colwell that List's work now be "given to the American public," considering how closely *The National System* aligned with and built upon US protectionist theories.¹⁵

List's ideas began making greater headway within the nationalistic intellectual and political circles of Euro-American imperial metropolises thanks to widespread

¹² Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade*, 2–3.

¹³ Todd, *Free Trade and its Enemies*, ch. 3; W. O. Henderson, "Friedrich List and the French Protectionists," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 138 (1982), 262–75.

¹⁴ Wendler, *Friedrich List*, 214; Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany*, 61–65.

¹⁵ Stephen Colwell, "Preliminary Essay," in Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1856), lx.

national consolidation. The US Civil War (1861–1865), Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), and the Long Depression (c. 1873–1896) all played a big part here. So, too, did the propagandizing of the List-inspired German Historical School (GHS), a pro-imperial economic nationalist school that dominated late-nineteenth-century German universities that included prominent protectionist academic theorists like Gustav Schmoller and Adolf Wagner.¹⁶ Many young Americans undertook “Atlantic crossings” to study with the GHS professors. Following their studies abroad, these US disciples of the GHS returned to the United States to preach their nationalistic critiques of laissez faire to a new generation of intellectuals and policymakers, ushering in a new wave of Listian politics and economics in the United States from the late 1870s.¹⁷ The transatlantic Listian currents were such that in 1893, Italian economist, Luigi Cossa, called it “the German-American school of economics.”¹⁸

US and German imperial expansion bore the mark of List’s *The National System*. Republican economic nationalists would oversee the construction of ever higher tariff walls, as well as the acquisition and protectionist maintenance of the US colonial empire following Spain’s 1898 defeat.¹⁹ The German navalist and imperialist Friedrich Naumann, influenced by the GHS, worked to establish his *Mitteuropa* from the turn of the century. Naumann’s influential vision of German-dominated railway networks, industrialization, and colonialism were, according to Henry

¹⁶ For the latter, see Keith Tribe, *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995); Yuichi Shionoya, ed., *The German Historical School: The Historical and Ethical Approach to Economics* (London, Routledge, 2001); Shionoya, *The Soul of the German Historical School: Methodological Essays on Schmoller, Weber and Schumpeter* (New York, Springer, 2005); Peter Koslowski, ed., *The Theory of Ethical Economy in the Historical School: Wilhelm Roscher, Lorenz von Stein, Gustav Schmoller, Wilhelm Dilthey and Contemporary Theory* (Berlin, Springer, 1997); Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864–1894* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Iva Lambi, *Free Trade and Protectionism in Germany 1868–1879* (Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1963).

¹⁷ See Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 3; Palen, *The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade*, chap. 7; Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1965), chap. 6; Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009), chap. 9; Axel R. Schafer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920* (Stuttgart, F. Steiner, 2000), 37–40; Sidney Fine, “Richard T. Ely, Forerunner of Progressivism, 1880–1901,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 37 (March 1951), 599–624; Jack C. Myles, “German Historicism and American Economics: A Study of the Influence of the German Historical School on Economic Thought” (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 1956); Carl Diehl, *Americans and German Scholarship, 1770–1870* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978); James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Luigi Cossa, *An Introduction to the Study of Political Economy* (New York: Macmillan, 1893), 477.

¹⁹ Palen, “The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism.”

Meyer, but “following in the footsteps of Friedrich List.”²⁰ Naumann’s efforts also laid an expansionist path for economic nationalists of the Nazi Empire to follow in Eastern Europe and Latin America.²¹

The Russian Empire’s “Friedrich List,” Count Sergei Witte (1849–1915)—as, variously, director of railway affairs, minister of ways and communications, finance minister, and prime minister—vividly illustrates the empire’s Listian turn beginning around 1890. Witte’s domestically popular 1889 pamphlet *The National Economy and Friedrich List* made the connection explicit.²² A trans-Siberian railway, high tariff walls, and Russian industrialization topped Witte’s nationalistic agenda amid his efforts to get the Russian Empire caught up to the other imperial powers. Witte’s colonial designs upon the agrarian lands of Manchuria stemmed directly from the imperial prescription contained within List’s *The National System*.²³ According to Roman Szporluk, Lenin thereafter “translated List into a Marxist language and adapted him to the Russian political tradition.”²⁴

Prominent Meiji-era nationalists within the Japanese Empire, inspired by List and other US protectionist theorists, began implementing protectionist and imperial policies by around 1900.²⁵ Ernest Fenollosa, a US professor based in Tokyo in the 1880s and 1890s, taught List to a new generation of Japanese students. A Japanese translation of *The National System* was published in 1889. Tomita Tesunosuke, the

²⁰ Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action 1815–1945* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1955), 96. See also Bo Strath, “Mitteleuropa: From List to Naumann,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 11 (2008), 171–83.

²¹ C. W. Guillebaud, “Hitler’s New Economic Order for Europe,” *Economic Journal* 50 (Dec. 1940), 449–60; Salvatore Prisco, “Vampire Diplomacy: Nazi Economic Nationalism in Latin America, 1934–40,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 2 (1991), 173–81; Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 8–9, 28–29, 88, 113–14, 174–75.

²² Sergei Witte, *Po povodu nacionalizma: Nacional’naja ekonomija I Fridrikh List* (2nd edition, St. Petersburg, Brokgaus-Efron, 1912 [1889]).

²³ Steven Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850–1917* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); T. H. von Laue, “The Industrialization of Russia in the Writings of Sergei Witte,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 10 (Oct. 1951), 177–90; von Laue, “A Secret Memorandum of Sergei Witte on the Industrialization of Imperial Russia,” *Journal of Modern History* 26 (March 1954), 60–74; Sidney Harcave, *Count Sergei Witte and the Twilight of Imperial Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 49–57; Chia Yin Hsu, “A Tale of Two Railroads: ‘Yellow Labor,’ Agrarian Colonization, and the Making of Russianness at the Far Eastern Frontier, 1890s–1910s,” *Ab Imperio* 3 (2006), 221–25.

²⁴ Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 224, 219–20.

²⁵ Palen, *Pax Economica*, 54–56; Mark Metzler, “The Cosmopolitanism of National Economics: Friedrich List in a Japanese Mirror,” *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local*, edited by A. G. Hopkins (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 85–89, 173–80.

governor of the Bank of Japan and an acquaintance of Henry Carey, requisitioned it. Another Carey acquaintance, Oshima Sadamusu, “the Friedrich List of Japan,” was the translator. Still other Japanese nationalists returned from their studies in Germany imbued with the teachings of the GHS. Two such students, Kuwata Kumazō and Kanai Noburu, joined Fenollosa at Tokyo’s Imperial University. Takahashi Korekiyo helped oversee the creation of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in 1925 to protect Japan’s infant industries; the inspiration was derived in part from his interpretation of List.²⁶ Interwar right-wing politician, Mōri Hideoto, of the Foreign Ministry’s Asian Development Board thereafter borrowed explicitly from List in justifying his imperial economic nationalist vision for a Japanese-dominated Asia.²⁷

The Ottoman Empire joined the Listian imperial double-movement comparatively late, owing to continued Western European free-trade imperial control over Ottoman fiscal policies.²⁸ Strong intellectual affinities grew between the List-inspired GHS and economic nationalists such as the Ottoman economist, Akyiğitzade Musa, and Young Turks such as Ömer Seyfeddin, Mehmed Ziya Gökalp, and Yusuf Akçura. As Vedit Inal puts it, “[t]he German Historical School found fertile ground in Turkey.”²⁹ Before the First World War, however, economic nationalist developmentalists had to make do with boycotts, building railways and telegraphs, and colonizing land for agricultural exploitation.³⁰ During the Great War, the empire began its more formal Listian turn, a protectionist drift that was thereafter maintained and expanded upon under the auspices of Turkish nationalists in the decades that followed.³¹

But, considering List’s critique of British free-trade policy, *The National System*, rather ironically, most ably informs controversies within the British Empire. List himself had provided a scathing critique of Britain’s precipitate embrace of

²⁶ Metzler, “The Cosmopolitanism of National Economics”; Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 85–89, 173–80; Yanaga, *Japan since Perry*, 73–75; Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 29, 96–98.

²⁷ Aaron Stephen Moore, “The Technological Imaginary of Imperial Japan, 1931–1945” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2006), 49–54, 56 n. 48.

²⁸ Cyrus Schayegh, “Imperial and Transnational Developmentalisms: Middle Eastern Interplays, 1880s–1960s,” in Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 65–66.

²⁹ Deniz T. Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 47–57, 65–67, 134; Vedit Inal, “Evolution of Economic Thought in the Ottoman Empire and Early Republican Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 57 (2021), 22–26, quote on 29.

³⁰ Schayegh, “Imperial and Transnational Developmentalisms,” 67.

³¹ On List’s ideas in the Ottoman Empire, see Deniz T. Kılınçoğlu, *Economics and Capitalism in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2015). On Ottoman development, see especially Cyrus Schayegh, “Imperial and Transnational Developmentalisms: Middle Eastern Interplays, 1880s–1960s,” in Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

economic cosmopolitanism and its transimperial attempts to spread free trade to an ever more nationalistic world order. The most widely disseminated and common English-language translation of *The National System*, from 1885, provides numerous avenues for exploring British colonial and anti-colonial developments, from the 1880s to Britain's abandonment of free trade in 1932.

List's *The National System* made early headway in the British "white" settler colonies of Canada and Australia, but found few subscribers in Britain itself, which was still riding high on its newfound free-trade principles. Protectionists in Canada began citing List to support their developmentalist efforts from the late 1850s. Their efforts culminated in the Conservative Party's protectionist National Policy in 1879 and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s.³² At the same time that economic liberals circled their free-trade wagons in the Australian colony of New South Wales, economic nationalists in Australia's protectionist colony of Victoria drew upon List and other US protectionist theorists to advocate for higher tariffs in the 1860s.³³

But the most popular English-language translation of *The National System* was first published in Britain in 1885. Conservative politician and Birmingham manufacturer, Sampson Samuel Lloyd (of Lloyd's Bank fame), undertook the translation along with a preface explaining why. As he described it, the inspiration came following his globe-trotting tour of the British settler colonies. From his travels, he realized how List's ideas had "directly inspired the commercial policy of two of the greatest nations of the world, Germany and the United States of America." But, importantly, List's work was also influencing "our English-speaking colonies" and "some commercial economists in this country [Britain]." List's forty-year-old economic nationalist creed was "applicable at one time as at another," not least "the present moment" in Britain, amid the Long Depression and as it found itself encircled by protectionist imperial rivals.³⁴ Lloyd's preface thus provides a window into the growing rumblings within the British Conservative Party and its settler colonial counterparts in their protesting the hands-off imperial governance of British free traders.³⁵ Lloyd helped create the National Fair Trade League in the 1880s. It proved to be the first among many coordinated attempts to replace the British free-trade system with one of tariff retaliation and imperial preference,

³² Craufurd D. W. Goodwin, *Economic Inquiry in Australia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1966), 45–51.

³³ Edmund Rogers, "Free Trade versus Protectionism: New South Wales, Victoria, and the Tariff Debate in Britain, 1881–1900," *Australian Studies* 1 (2009), 1–16.

³⁴ Sampson Samuel Lloyd, translator's preface to Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy*, translated by Sampson Samuel Lloyd (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904 [1885]), v–vii.

³⁵ Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade*, 212.

especially after the Republican passage of the extreme McKinley Tariff in 1890 in the United States.³⁶

Listian organizations like the Fair Trade League became the forerunners of the most concerted attempt to overturn British free trade: Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform movement (1903–1913). The Birmingham-manufacturer-turned-politician Chamberlain and his Tariff Reformers sought to “take back control” by curbing immigration, by retaliating against rival powers with high tariffs, and by cultivating a system of imperial trade preferences. And here again List's *The National System* made its reappearance. A new edition of Lloyd's translation was published in 1904 to provide intellectual support to the Tariff Reformers. This was the same year that Benjamin Hoare, the secretary of Melbourne, Victoria's Protectionists' Association, published *Preferential Trade*, which drew explicitly on List and “the profounder reasonings of the German school of economics” in support of the Tariff Reform movement. The famous British political economist, Joseph Shield Nicholson, agreed to write a new introduction to *The National System* to explain the book's continued resonance for Edwardians. Nicholson would go on to pen *A Project of Empire* in 1909, which sought to transform Adam Smith—the intellectual father of the Manchester School of economic liberalism—into a protectionist and an imperialist.³⁷ In 1906, Conservative journalist and politician, Leo Amery, probably Chamberlain's strongest supporter, explicitly drew upon List in *The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade*. It represented a full-on assault upon the Edwardian disciples of Adam Smith. As Colonial Secretary (1924–1929), Amery continued to push for “Buy British” and Empire Shopping campaigns through the Empire Marketing Board (1926–1933).³⁸ With the aid of Chamberlain's sons, Amery would help oversee Britain's abandonment of free trade in 1932, when it joined the empire's trade preference system, thereby bringing an end to nearly a century of British free-trade imperial policies.

³⁶ Marc-William Palen, “Protection, Federation and Union: The Global Impact of the McKinley Tariff upon the British Empire, 1890–94,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38 (Sept. 2010), 395–418.

³⁷ Benjamin Hoare, *Preference Trade* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1904), v–vi; Marc-William Palen, “Adam Smith as Advocate of Empire, c. 1870–1932,” *Historical Journal* 57 (March 2014), 197.

³⁸ L. S. Amery, *The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade* (London: National Review Office, 1906); Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231.

The National System's Trans-Anti-Imperial Impact

Imperialists did not have a monopoly upon List's ideas. Elements of *The National System* found their way into numerous nationalist movements, but while largely overlooking its calls for Western colonialism toward "the rest." Owing to the European continental drift of the GHS, for example, List's book was translated into a wide array of nationalist contexts, including Romania (1887), Sweden (1888), Bulgaria (1926), and Finland (1846, 1935), albeit without the same passion that it inspired among the previously discussed imperial expansionists. Some mid-nineteenth-century Swedish nationalists, for example, encountered French and German versions of the text, but List's influence dropped off in a big way after 1860, when French-style economic liberalism became more fashionable following the signing of the Cobden–Chevalier treaty, which freed up western European trade for about a decade.³⁹ But in keeping with the wider Listian turn after 1870, it is probably more than coincidence that a Swedish translation appeared in 1888, the same year that Sweden began substantially raising its tariffs to foster its infant industries.⁴⁰

The National System made more headway in a variety of anti-colonial settings within the British Empire in which free trade was coercively enforced. As counterintuitive as it might at first appear, *The National System* provides numerous opportunities to explore the British Empire's anti-colonial nationalist movements, which moved across imperial boundaries. Listian anti-colonial nationalists focused narrowly on List's critique of British free-trade imperialism. They also drew inspiration from the apparent economic successes of Listian nationalist states like the United States and Germany, and conveniently overlooked List's support for European imperial expansion into areas like China and India. Britain's "white" settler colonies had been given greater control over their fiscal policies beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and had been deemed ripe for infant industrial protectionism by List himself. But this was not the case for China, India, or Ireland, colonial spaces that List and British imperialists considered too "uncivilized" for self-rule or tariff autonomy.

Feeling the full coercive force of British free-trade imperialism following the two Opium Wars and the subsequent divvying up of Chinese markets between the British and the other imperial powers, the Chinese nationalist, Liang Qichao (1873–1929) helped lead the way. However, Liang's endorsement of economic nationalism as both an imperial weapon and an anti-colonial tool were an unusual

³⁹ Eli F. Heckscher, "A Survey of Economic Thought in Sweden, 1875-1950," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 1 (1953), 106–10.

⁴⁰ Viktor Persarvet, "Tariffs, Trade, and Economic Growth in Sweden 1858-1913" (Ph.D. thesis, Uppsala University, 2019), 18, 27.

departure from the defensive position taken by other Chinese, Irish, Indian, and Egyptian anti-colonial nationalists. In 1898, Liang made a transimperial landing in Meiji imperial Japan, where he first encountered the Listian ideas of the GHS. For Liang, these complemented an older tradition of Chinese mercantilist thinking, and he became a self-described disciple of “national economics” thereafter. In Listian fashion, he saw geopolitics as a zero-sum game, of perpetual warfare, and thus believed that China’s future depended upon winning a trade war with the Western empires. China’s European-controlled treaty ports were clear examples of free-trade imperial coercion. His Listian worldview led him to ask rhetorically “if the whole country becomes a free-trade zone, then is that not equivalent to making the whole country a colony?” Liang therefore wanted to fashion for China the economic nationalist policies that had worked so well for the United States, Europe, and Japan; this included carving out corporate monopolies alongside Chinese imperial expansion. When he returned to China in 1911, Liang threw himself into the nationalist political scene. Liang next demonstrated his “national economics” at the 1919 Paris Peace conference, when he requested that China be granted control over its own tariffs.⁴¹

Other leading Chinese nationalists instead focused squarely on the anti-colonial developmentalist context of List’s *The National System*. In the early 1920s, Ma Yinchu, who would later become president of Peking University, made his return to China after studying in the United States. He gave a speech in Peking wherein he argued that China required Listian policies to counteract decades of European colonial exploitation. In 1925, Liu Binglin (1891–1956) wrote a Chinese biography of List after studying at the University of Berlin and the University of London. Two years later, Wang Kaihua published a Chinese translation of List’s *The National System*, which he began working on while a PhD student at the University of Tübingen. Wei Chenzu, China’s minister to the German Legation, wrote the preface to the 1929 edition. In it, he observed that List’s ideas remained relevant to China because it “has been deprived of the right to set its tariffs. . . . It is highly proper that List’s theory should be adopted in China.”⁴²

Irish nationalists also began embracing List by the early twentieth century. Irish anti-imperialist, Arthur Griffith (1871–1922) drew explicitly upon List when he started the Sinn Féin Party in 1905. In his Dublin speech (and subsequently a popular pamphlet), Griffith critiqued British free-trade imperialism: “I am in economics largely a follower of the man who thwarted England’s dream of the commercial

⁴¹ Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 262–68.

⁴² Helleiner, *Neomercantilists*, 263–66; Mei Junjie, “Friedrich List in China’s Quest for Development,” in Harald Hagemann, Stephan Selzer, and Eugen Wendler, eds., *The Economic Thought of Friedrich List* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 213–22; Palen, *Pax Economica*, 58–59.

conquest of the world . . . Frederick [sic] List.” Griffith “wish[ed] to see” the *National System* “in the hands of every Irishman” and thus brush “aside the fallacies of Adam Smith and his tribe.”⁴³

Thanks in part to trans-anti-imperial connections with Irish anti-colonial nationalists, Indian anti-colonial nationalists numbered among the strongest adherents of List from the turn of the century onwards. Decades of coercive free-trade policies had undermined India’s ancient industries. The Swadeshi Movement arose in 1905 as an anti-colonial protest through the boycotting of British-made goods and through the purchase of Indian-made goods. Metropolitan meccas in the United States and Germany became what Kris Manjapra describes as “the most important centers for Indian anti-colonial internationalism.” They cultivated and worked within trans-imperial networks to help create, after 1905, “a highly articulated international imagination . . . by which Bengali thinkers saw their own experiences mirrored back in political events that had occurred, or were occurring,” in the United States, Japan, China, and Germany.⁴⁴ Arthur Griffith’s 1905 Listian pamphlet *The Sinn Féin Policy* was circulated in Hindi translation the following year in various nationalist newspapers because, according to one newspaper, it provided a “great service” as “*Sinn Féin*” was “only another name for our ‘Swadeshi’ policy.”⁴⁵ Manu Goswami explores how at this time, List’s *The National System* became a “foundational text” for South Asian anti-colonial nationalists such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Vaman Govind Kale, Subramania Aiyer, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Radhakamal Mukherjee, and Benoy Kumar Sarkar.⁴⁶ Sarkar himself, after a decade of travels spanning from Japan to Berlin, returned to interwar Calcutta, where he described *The National System* as “the Bible of a people seeking a rapid transformation of the country from the agricultural to the industrial stage.”⁴⁷ Sarkar also took it upon himself to translate *The National System* into Bengali between 1912 and 1916.

⁴³ Arthur Griffith, *The Sinn Féin Policy* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., 1906), 11.

⁴⁴ Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 42.

⁴⁵ Seán Ó Lúing, “Arthur Griffith, 1871–1922: Thoughts on a Centenary,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 60 (Summer 1971), 127–28.

⁴⁶ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 215–24, 336n14.

⁴⁷ Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 150; Andrew Sartori, “Beyond Culture-Contact and Colonial Discourse: ‘Germanism’ in Colonial Bengal,” in *An Intellectual History of India*, edited by Shruti Kapila (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81–82.

Conclusion

The transimperial and trans-anti-colonial crossings of Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy* provide a rich tapestry for exploring the global history of economic nationalism within a variety of imperial and anti-colonial contexts since the book's original 1841 German publication. The spread and translation of List's ideas highlight the economic nationalist makeup of the imperial world system from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War, challenging longstanding free-trade misrepresentations of the era. List as a case study thus provides a novel transimperial lens for revolutionizing economic intellectual history and for rethinking the entwined histories of economic globalization and imperial expansion.

Nor are the examples included here far from exhaustive. Perhaps with further investigation, the impact and translation of *The National System* might also be connected to imperial debates within Hungary, Romania, Sweden, Bulgaria, Finland, and Spain. Examining to what extent translators of List relied upon the original German text or upon subsequent translations in other languages might also uncover further transnational and transimperial intellectual networks. The widespread demand for Listian infant industrial policies across much of the decolonizing world after the Second World War in turn illustrates how *The National System's* developmentalist message resonated far more strongly among anti-colonial nationalists after 1945 than during the preceding century.

Decolonizing states increasingly looked to Friedrich List for guidance. They, too, were seemingly able to sidestep List's arguments against industrialization for the underdeveloped colonial world as well as his arguments in support of Euro-American colonialism.⁴⁸ Theodore Von Laue observed as much in 1969, when he noted that "List's recent disciples" included "Sukarno and Nkrumah, as well as Mao."⁴⁹ Biographer, W. O. Henderson, similarly depicts List as a "prophet of the ambitions of all underdeveloped countries."⁵⁰ Leonard Gomes has also observed that, "whether they are conscious of the fact or not, development economists the world over owe a great debt to the memory of Friedrich List."⁵¹ In this vein, Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang has looked to List in order to advocate for

⁴⁸ Mauro Boianovsky, "Friedrich List and the Economic Fate of Tropical Countries," *History of Political Economy* 45 (2013), 647–91.

⁴⁹ Theodore H. von Laue, *The Global City: Freedom, Power and Necessity in the Age of World Revolutions* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1969), 147–8n.

⁵⁰ W. O. Henderson, *Friedrich List: Economist and Visionary, 1789–1846* (Frank Cass and Company, 1983), 163.

⁵¹ Leonard Gomes, *The Economics and Ideology of Free Trade: A Historical Review* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003), 66, 83–89.

infant industrial protectionism for underdeveloped states in his popular 2002 book *Kicking Away the Ladder*, which is itself a paraphrasing of a famous line from List's *The National System*.⁵²

List became a knowledge creator thanks to his own personal travels between the German, US, and French empires, as well as to *The National System*'s seemingly timeless developmentalist message. The book's myriad nationalist iterations, reinterpretations, and translations across empires and aspiring nation states since its original 1841 publication when examined together, highlight a transimperial history dominated by longstanding grievances and criticisms of free trade that still resonate among today's nationalist opponents of "neoliberalism." Tracing *The National System*'s past transimperial travels therefore also provides much needed historical context for understanding the resurgence of economic nationalism, imperial designs, and geopolitical conflict across much of the globe following the presidential election of the protectionist Donald Trump in the United States in 2016 and 2024, and Russia's most recent imperial invasion of Ukraine.

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⁵² Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*.

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The Double Agent between Empires: Diplomacy, Conspiracy, and Reconnaissance during the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895

Jenny Huangfu Day

Abstract

This article explores the activities, during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95, of Wang Zhichun (1842–1906). Wang acted as a double agent traveling between the Qing, British, French, and Russian empires, using his knowledge of informal and formal Chinese and non-Chinese networks to represent local and imperial Chinese interests abroad. Officially, he served as the envoy extraordinary representing the Qing court to the Tsar, pleading for Russia's diplomatic intervention on behalf of China. But beneath this façade, he also served as an intermediary for local Chinese officials from southern China who were dissatisfied with Qing conciliation. In this unofficial capacity, Wang also traveled to the Qing's legations in London and Paris, gathering and interpreting knowledge about European military industries and seeking loans, gunboats, and military support from foreign companies in defiance of the Qing court's decision to end the war.

Keywords: transimperial, Wang Zhichun, Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Diplomacy, Qing China, Britain.

In the decades after the Opium Wars, the Qing government employed a growing number of investigators to carry out land surveys, reconnaissance missions, and strategic operations in its frontier regions and in foreign countries. Although these investigators held low-ranking official titles, they primarily served as aides or secretaries to provincial governors-general, utilizing their talents in less conventional fields, such as cartography, military technology, and foreign languages.¹ This article explores the activities and perspective of one such agent, Wang Zhichun (1842–1906), during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Wang acted as a double agent traveling between the Qing, British, French, and Russian empires, representing local and imperial interests in different capacities. Officially, Wang served as the envoy extraordinary

¹ This trend had much to do with the devolution of bureaucratic authority to local elites during the Taiping Rebellion. See Stephen Halsey, *Quest for Power: European Imperialism and the Making of Chinese Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), chapter 4.

representing the Qing court to the Tsar, pleading for Russia's diplomatic intervention on behalf of China. But beneath this façade, he also served as an intermediary for local Chinese officials from southern China who, dissatisfied with the Qing court's conciliatory attitude, searched for foreign loans and militia to continue the war. In this unofficial capacity, he traveled to the Qing's legations in London and Paris, acting as a provincial agent seeking loans, gunboats, and military support from foreign companies in defiance of the Qing court's decision to end the war.

The story of Wang as a double agent representing conflicting local and imperial interests abroad underscores how a transimperial approach can bring a fresh perspective to an established narrative of the Sino-Japanese War. The war has conventionally been presented as a story of conflict and competition that irrevocably shifted the balance of power in East Asia, or as a diplomatic chess match marked by interventions from other powers, a prelude to the so-called "scramble for concessions."² The main categories of analysis adopted in these studies are empires, a framework privileging imperial rivalries and the work of official representatives—statesmen, diplomats, and commanders. Within the historiography of modern China, the Sino-Japanese War has also been known for galvanizing the politicized literati, many of whom had little connection to officialdom, in challenging the court's legitimacy and paving the way for the reform movement of 1898. According to Liang Qichao, the famous late Qing journalist and public intellectual, the Sino-Japanese War "awakened the country from its four-thousand-year slumber."³ As a result, the historical narrative of the war often assumes a dichotomy between those embodying the Qing's dynastic interests on the one hand, and those who took the Qing's defeat for granted and used the war to agitate for reform and the overthrow of the dynasty, on the other.⁴

Wang's story shows that the Sino-Japanese War was not exclusively a conflict between empires but also represented a transimperial moment of networking, opportunity seeking, and knowledge making by men occupying lower levels of the

² For classics representing the first approach, see Sarah Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) and John L. Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Series, 1967). For studies in diplomatic history surrounding the War, see Frank W. Iklé, "The Triple Intervention: Japan's Lesson in the Diplomacy of Imperialism" (*Monumenta Nipponica* 22:1/2 (1967), 122-30; E. D. Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires, 1894-1907* (Dover, NH: The Athlone Press, 1966); Qi Qizhang, *Jiawu zhanzheng guoji guanxi shi* [A history of the Sino-Japanese War from the perspective of international relations] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994).

³ Liang Qichao, *Wuxu zhengbian ji* [A record of the 1898 coup d'état], 1.

⁴ Edmund S. K. Fung, "Ch'ing Policy in the Sino-Japanese War," *Journal of Asian History* 7, no. 2 (1973): 128-152. Harold Z. Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen and the Origins of the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), chapters 3-4.

official echelon. What enabled these dynamics were transimperial processes, facilitated by the flow of money, the free movement of individuals between empires, their access to both formal apparatus of the states and the private world of entrepreneurs, and finally, their access to the print media. As a member of the Xiang Army, a local militia, the social and political ties which shaped Wang's career were rooted in regional ties, not the formal apparatus of the Qing state. He represented an increasing number of low and mid-ranking officers from southern China whose interests did not necessarily align with those of the Qing court, even though they served in an official capacity. Their social networks extended above to powerful provincial officials in charge of the Qing's industrialization and self-strengthening movements, and below to the local gentry who often served as investors and stakeholders for provincial enterprises.⁵

By moving between different regions and empires, writing about his encounters during his travels, and publishing them upon his return, Wang's diaries represented a new type of knowledge about the world, one told from the perspective of a border crosser and informal powerbroker. The emergence of this type of semi-official agent came as a result of intensified trade and diplomatic relationship with Western powers, as well as the daunting threat of the Taiping Rebellion (1856–1860). It was widely recognized that the traditional channels for selecting officials—the Confucianism-oriented Civil Service Examinations—were no longer sufficient for recruiting the kind of talent needed in a new commercialized and transnational environment. As the Qing's regular army—the Eight Banners and the Green Standard—proved incapable of defeating the southern rebellions, the state increasingly relied on local forces commanded by Han Chinese officials drawing from their own native hometowns and powerbases.⁶ These officials, in turn, promoted their own trusted lieutenants—often from the hometowns or provinces—over successful examination candidates.⁷ Besides Wang, Chinese provincial elite promoted a wide range of eccentric and talented translators, entrepreneurs, belletrists, and publishers such as Yung Wing (1828–1912), Zeng Jize (1839–1890), Wang Tao (1828–1897), Xue Fucheng (1838–1894), and Yao Wendong (1853–1929), many of whom went on to have illustrious careers in the formal bureaucracy of the Qing due to their earlier successes.

⁵ One historian has termed Wang's mission as one representing both “centralized diplomacy” and “regional diplomacy.” See Ji Chen, “‘Zhongyang waijiao’ yu ‘difang waijiao’ zhijian: Jiawu zhanzheng qijian Wang Zhichun chushi lunshu” [Between centralized and regional diplomacy: Wang Zhichun's mission during the Sino-Japanese War], *Guoli zhengzhi daxue lishi xuebao*, no. 50 (2018), 1–44.

⁶ William Rowe, *China's Last Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), chapter 8.

⁷ For a range of case studies on how local elite changed their engagement with the state in the late Qing, see Joseph Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, eds., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

Acting as the unofficial intermediary between foreign resources and the Qing's local interests, men like Wang socialized widely with merchants, mercenaries, and agents of other empires. The accounts and strategic advice they offered to Qing officials, in turn, represented the vantage point of those traveling between empires, rather than those who stayed within the metropolises of the empires.⁸ Compared to the latter, transimperial actors like Wang often had no fixed agenda, political affiliation, or bureaucratic hierarchy, but were constantly on the move in search of opportunities, intelligence, and resources. The unconventional services they offered came to be in particularly high demand during periods of crisis, such as the Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Uprising. Their motives, mobilizations, and networking efforts were critical in bringing about a new understanding of China's engagement with the West, which in turn underpinned the dramatic shifts in the Qing's political reforms in the postwar era.

In this chapter, I analyze Wang's activities abroad in the period 1894–1895 and argue that he undertook three distinct kinds of knowledge-related mediations between the Qing and the Western powers: 1) as a formal agent between empires, 2) as an informal agent between provincial Chinese interests and foreign capital, and 3) as an interpreter of the West for domestic audiences. First, as a formal agent of the Qing, he served as an envoy to the Tsar by representing the peace-seeking faction of the Qing court, hoping to gain Russia's intervention in Japan's aggression against Korea and China. As he fulfilled his official duty in Russia, Wang engaged, via telegraphic communication, in clandestine networking and mobilization with provincial officials who disagreed with the Qing court's policy of peace seeking. He met with financiers, mercenaries, and foreign representatives in Britain and France and obtained two million pounds with which to order a fleet from Chile for a surprise attack on Japan—a plan which failed to materialize because of political opposition. Thirdly, I analyze Wang's travelogue during his mission in Europe to uncover how he presented a different image of the “West” from reports of previous envoys and diplomats, with attention to circulation, connectivity, and resource mobilization over intrinsic cultural qualities.

⁸ This approach can be juxtaposed with the existing scholarship on Chinese and Europeans employed in the diplomatic and customs services, which primarily sees them as mediators between the Qing and the West; see, for instance, Jenny Huangfu Day, *Qing Travelers to the Far West: Diplomacy and Information Order in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and “Mediating Sovereignty: The Qing Legation in London and its Diplomatic Representation of China, 1876–1901,” *Modern Asian Studies* 55:4 (2021), 1151–84; Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Andrew Hillier, *Mediating Empire: An English Family in China, 1817–1927* (Folkstone: Renaissance Books, 2020); Emily Whewell, *Law Across Imperial Borders: British Consuls and Colonial Connections on China's Western Frontiers, 1880–1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

Wang Zhichun's Profile

Born in 1842 in Hunan, a province along the middle reaches of the Yangzi, Wang Zhichun's career followed an unconventional path to officialdom. When he was still a teenager, the Taiping Rebellion threatened his home province, interrupting his study for the civil service examinations. In the late 1850s, he was recruited into the Xiang Army, a local militia organized for provincial defense. In 1863, Wang came under the service of Zeng Guofan, the famous Confucian statesman who would lead the Xiang Army to defeat the Taiping forces, thereby preserving the dynasty. Over the next five years, through donations and patronage, he earned a series of low ranks while continuing to work as a secretary to provincial officials.⁹ During the period 1870–1871, he provided logistical aid to General Zuo Zongtang's campaign against Muslim rebellions in the northwest, responsible for overseeing the transportation of grain and fodder to Qing forces.¹⁰ From 1872 to 1881, he was transferred to the staff of the Li Hongzhang, Governor-General of Liangjiang, and entrusted with leading a battalion.¹¹

Wang's career took a turn in 1879, when Li chose him to embark on a reconnaissance mission to Japan during the Sino-Russian conflict over the Ili Valley, which raised concerns about maritime security. After he successfully accomplished his duty, more unofficial diplomatic assignments followed. During the Sino-French War of 1884–1885, Wang was dispatched by Zhang Zhidong, the Governor-General of Liangguang, on a secret mission to Thailand to seek an unofficial alliance against the French in Tonkin. After the war, Wang managed to lead a joint Sino-French mission to chart the border between Guangxi province and Annam.¹² Due to his excellent work during the war, he was promoted to Surveillance Commissioner in Guangdong Province (rank 3a).

This biographical sketch shows that Wang did not climb the bureaucratic ladder through the civil service examinations, nor did he consistently render service to any single patron but moved from patron to patron depending on the military and political exigencies of the time. His networks were closely intertwined with the provincial armies—the Xiang and the Huai, in particular—which relied on local sources of funding and were controlled by Han Chinese statesmen from the southern provinces. Because he combined literary skills and military experience

⁹ Qin Guojing et al., eds., *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan Qingdai guanyuan luli dang'an quanbian* [Complete official records of the Qing dynasty held at the First Historical Archive] vol. 3 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 735.

¹⁰ Qin, eds., *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan Qingdai guanyuan luli dang'an quanbian*, vol. 5, 14.

¹¹ Qin, eds., *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan Qingdai guanyuan luli dang'an quanbian*, vol. 3, 735.

¹² Qin, eds., *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan Qingdai guanyuan luli dang'an quanbian*, vol. 5, 14.

(*yi wenren jian wushi*), Wang was kept out of the conventional path of bureaucratic service until 1884, when he became a circuit intendant in Guangdong province.¹³ His work was not characterized by any single official position (*que*), but a series of temporary assignments (*chai*) which required a high level of specialized knowledge and unconventional skills, such as land survey, navigation, map making, and conducting on-site negotiations with foreign agents.¹⁴ He was also an ingenious networker and enjoyed friendships with a wide range of people, foreigners included. This can be observed from the numerous calls that he received from his erstwhile colleagues and subordinates when his steamship reached Guangdong and Hong Kong on its way to Europe. Wang was also able to claim to have established a degree of “friendship” with the French reconnaissance agents when he joined a Sino-French survey mission in Vietnam. He tapped into this connection in 1895, when he pleaded for French military intervention in Japan’s seizure of Taiwan. A talented writer, Wang had the ability to compose poems quickly, a valuable social skill which endeared him to his friends and acquaintances.¹⁵

Beyond his military and diplomatic service, Wang was also an excellent historian and geographer. In a capacity similar to Wei Yuan (1795–1857), author of the famous *Haiguo tuzhi* (1843), Wang published compilations of statecraft essays, geographical accounts, and studies of the Qing’s previous engagement with the outside world.¹⁶ His most famous work was the twenty-volume *Guochao rouyuan ji* [An account of the imperial dynasty’s pacification of men from afar], which he wrote in 1879 and published in 1882. The book revolved around the idea of *rou* (to cherish with grace) as a strategy in foreign affairs, with a particular focus on the way in which the High Qing emperors pursued a flexible and pragmatic “middle course” in subjugating foreigners.¹⁷ It argues that the court’s combination of force, alliances, patronage, and trade was the real source of the Qing as a great power in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Complete with accurate maps of the Chinese coast and sites of maritime fortification, it was widely respected as an

¹³ Qin, eds., *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan Qingdai guanyuan luli dang'an quanbian*, vol. 5, 14.

¹⁴ Even though Wang’s official title was circuit intendant (*daotai*), his work throughout the 1880s seemed to have very little to do with bureaucratic administration and inspection.

¹⁵ Wang used poems as a way of establishing a shared ground for his sentiments and emotions about the war, and for tying the goals of mission with Qing officials and overseas Chinese whom he encountered abroad. Most of these poems are included in Wang, *Shi E cao*, usually placed after his main diary entry of the day.

¹⁶ For an insightful discussion of the significance of Wei Yuan’s work, see Matthew Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), chapter 8.

¹⁷ Wang Zhichun, *Guochao rouyuan ji* [An account of the imperial dynasty’s pacification of men from afar] (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1985), 127.

authoritative record of the Qing's foreign affairs up to the Guangxu years, receiving five glowing prefaces from prominent officials of the time. By the late 1880s, Wang's extensive fieldwork and scholarship had made him one of China's most valuable military advisors, and the ideas that he expressed in accounts such as *Guochao rouyuan ji* were, in essence, the guiding spirit leading self-strengthening officials.

Envoy to Russia

Wang's mission to Russia took place at a critical juncture during the Sino-Japanese War: following significant losses by the Qing but preceding any negotiated treaties. Naval conflict first began in July 1894 with Japan's surprise attack on and sinking of the British-made man-of-war *Kowshing*, which the Qing had commissioned to transport troops to Korea.¹⁸ In a series of battles from September 1894, the Chinese army lost the cities of Pyongyang and Lüshun. Meanwhile, in the naval engagements in the Yellow Sea, the Qing's Beiyang Fleet lost some of its best battleships and naval officers. By late October, Japanese forces breached the Qing's defense at the Yalu River and occupied the Liaodong Peninsula.¹⁹

In response to these setbacks, two concurrent mobilization efforts unfolded: one overt, the other covert. The more overt approach involved the Qing's diplomatic appeal to foreign powers.²⁰ Empress Dowager Cixi, backed by a "peace party," delegated Li Hongzhang to explore possibilities of European and American diplomatic mediation. Li and his supporters hoped to leverage international law and diplomatic pressure to restrain Japan. Discussions were held in Beijing with European and American ministers, mediated by Robert Hart, Inspector General of the Qing's Maritime Customs. In the meantime, Qing ministers abroad were instructed to visit foreign offices personally to apply for help. However, by October, Germany, the United States, and Italy had declined to support the Qing, while a lukewarm British mediation attempt was rejected by Japan. In November, the French government followed suit and declared its neutrality. It seemed that the only hope was for a Russian intervention.

Another form of mobilization remained inconspicuous to contemporaries and has been largely overlooked by historians. Its proponents saw the prospect of a

¹⁸ For a detailed study of this event and its ramifications, see Douglas Howland, "The Sinking of the S.S. *Kowshing*: International Law, Diplomacy, and the Sino-Japanese War," *Modern Asian Studies* 42:4 (2008), 673–703.

¹⁹ Qi Qizhang, *Jiawu zhanzheng shi* [A history of the Sino-Japanese War] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2014), 37–144.

²⁰ For an analysis of the activity of the peace party, see Fung, "Ch'ing Policy in the Sino-Japanese War," 128–52.

treaty, signed under the condition of defeat, as deeply humiliating and harmful to China. They were particularly wary of the looming threat of territorial concessions. Their endeavor focused on sustaining the war effort until the Qing was in a better place to negotiate. Spearheaded by provincial officials heavily invested in the war, they believed that the Qing could not afford to lose its territories. This group included provincial governors-general in charge of provincial defense, such as Zhang Zhidong, Liu Kunyi, and Tang Jingsong. The staff employed by Zhang, Liu, and Tang often shared the unconventional paths of Wang Zhichun—men who rose from humble backgrounds not through the civil service examination, but due to their specialized knowledge and problem-solving skills. In Beijing, these pro-war local officials found allies in Weng Tonghe and Li Hongzao, two powerful Grand Councilors close to the Guangxu Emperor. The young monarch, groomed by his aunt, the Empress Dowager, had already developed his own political ambitions and ideas for China's future. In October 1894, Zhang had proposed applying for loans from Western banks, acquiring a new fleet, and forming military alliances with European powers, but these plans were disregarded by the court.²¹ As the Qing army and navy faced repeated defeats, and Japan's demands for a peace treaty grew increasingly audacious, support for the war camp gained momentum. By February 1895, when Japan's terms were revealed to include not only a war indemnity and Korea's independence, but certain "territorial concessions," such as Taiwan, Zhang and his allies at court were prompted to take immediate action.

Wang's official mission, aligned with Li's conciliatory camp, sought to enlist Russia's intervention in Japan's aggression toward Korea and the Liaodong Peninsula. The goal was to cultivate a favorable friendship with Russia through a special mission of condolence and congratulation to the Russian court. The opportunity arose due to the recent ascension of Tsar Nicolas II following the death of his father, Alexander III, on November 1, 1894. Wang was chosen for this role for two reasons. During Nicolas II's tour of East Asia in 1891, he was hosted by Wang in Canton and the two developed a personal relationship; and Wang was well known to the Qing court for his expertise in foreign affairs, international law, geography, and foreign customs.

Wang hoped that his mission could make a difference. In preparation, he studied closely the diplomatic files in the Zongli yamen (the Qing's foreign office), paying particular attention to the so-called "Port Hamilton incident."²² In 1885, British forces had occupied the islands of Komundo off the southern coast of Korea as a deterrent against perceived Russian threats. In response, the Russians dispatched their own envoy to Chosŏn with the ultimatum to annex "ten times as much [Korean] territory as

²¹ Zhang Zhidong, "Telegram to Grand Councilor Li in the capital," October 28, 1894 in *Zhang Zhidong quanji*, vol. 7 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1998), 5824–25.

²² Wang, *Shi E cao*, 611–12.

had been occupied by Great Britain unless the latter withdraws.”²³ Through the mediation efforts by Zeng Jize, Qing minister in London, and Li Hongzhang, Commissioner of Trade in the Northern Ports, the Russians decided to temporarily withdraw, with the understanding that Korea would remain diplomatically neutral. These historical documents fueled Wang’s optimism that Russia would uphold its commitment to Korean neutrality and serve as a counterbalance to Japan’s aggression.²⁴

Departing from Shanghai on January 5, 1895, Wang arrived in St. Petersburg on February 16. His main activities were under the close supervision of Xu Jingcheng, Qing minister in Russia and Germany, who had made all the necessary provisions for his visit.²⁵ The Russian court welcomed Wang’s entourage with a sumptuous reception. Wang was aware that all his conduct in Russia was highly visible to Western presses, the Russian court, and the Qing minister in St. Petersburg, so he strictly adhered to his role as an envoy of goodwill.²⁶ He presented Emperor Guangxu’s letter of condolences and congratulations to Nicolas II on February 18, expressing goodwill and the desire for closer diplomatic collaboration. The Tsar responded favorably, expressing a wish for a “harmonious and intimate relationship between the two countries.”²⁷

To keep Wang from interfering from his long-term diplomatic relationship with the Russian government, Xu Jingcheng, the Qing’s resident minister in St. Petersburg, had memorialized and requested Wang not to mention anything about the war. Xu’s reasoning was that “being a special envoy of condolence and congratulation, Wang should refrain from mentioning other business to show the Qing government’s sincerity.” Although Xu’s memorial was accepted and a telegram edict was issued to that effect, Wang still alluded to the war in his meeting with Nicolas II, but kept the message simple and discreet. At a private meeting, when Nicolas II asked whether Li’s peace negotiations in Japan had come to a conclusion, Wang took the opportunity to entreat the Tsar to “hold a conference of remonstrance to restore peace between the two countries.” According to Wang, the Tsar reassured him that “now that you have come all the way here, it will be unreasonable of me not to exhaust my means to help. Please express this to your emperor.”²⁸ Wang duly informed Li of his exchanges with the Tsar via telegram.²⁹

²³ Kirk W. Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850-1910* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center), 174.

²⁴ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 610.

²⁵ The court was notified of Wang’s activities in Russia by Xu’s telegrams.

²⁶ See *Dezong jing huangdi shilu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), juan 359.

²⁷ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 673.

²⁸ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 674.

²⁹ Li Hongzhang, *Li Hongzhang quanji* [The complete works of Li Hongzhang], v. 26 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 55, 60, 61.

Wang's official activities in Russia were carefully documented in the Qing archives, remaining the standard narrative by historians.³⁰ But this official understanding does not capture the complexity in the networking, reconnaissance, and strategic planning that Wang engaged in after he left Russia, nor does it take into account the deep-seated ambition and frustration which the war kindled in the minds of Wang and his compatriots. For this, we need to turn to private journals, memoirs, and the telegrams between Wang's entourage and the provincial officials in charge of military defense. These unofficial sources reveal the mobilization and conspiracies pursued by networks of provincial officials and gentry, which laid outside the formal knowledge of the court.

Commissioner Wang's Secret Plans

The Sino-Japanese war ushered in a significant shift in the exchange of information among the Qing court, the Zongli yamen, provincial officials, and the Qing agents overseas. Prior to the war, the Qing legations had served as the nodal points for sifting and structuring diplomatic intelligence before sending it to the Zongli yamen, which then conveyed it to the court or other domestic officials. This system was established in the late 1870s and was gradually implemented throughout the 1880s, and by 1894, this information network had worked relatively well in shaping domestic consensus that supported the fundamental interests of the Qing dynasty.³¹ But in late 1894, when consensus over military policies collapsed, officials who favored war circumvented this bureaucratic channel by setting up an informal network through their own agents abroad.

By March 1895, when Wang concluded his mission in Russia, the need for immediate action to prevent further territorial loss was glaringly apparent. After leaving Russia, Wang stopped communicating with Li Hongzhang and the Zongli yamen, thus disappearing from the official awareness of the Qing bureaucracy. Instead, he directed most of his correspondence to Zhang Zhidong and aligned his new mission with the goals of Zhang and the pro-war officials. They aimed to prolong the war by using resources overseas, such as a securing a new fleet, recruiting a private merchant navy, or leveraging trade privileges for foreign intervention. Just before Wang's departure to Russia, he detoured to Hubei for an extensive exchange of ideas with Zhang.

³⁰ Philip Snow, *China and Russia: Four Centuries of Conflict and Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 133-150; Li Yongchang, "Wang Zhichun shi E yu Qing zhengfu de lian E zhengce" [Wang Zhichun's mission to Russia and the Qing government's policy of alliance with Russia], *Shehui kexue jikan*, no. 4 (1996), 117-21.

³¹ See Day, *Qing Travelers to the Far West*, chapters 4-6.

As we have seen above, Zhang and the other provincial governors-general in charge of coastal defense resisted a peace treaty due to Japan's excessive territorial demands, particularly concerning the cession of Taiwan. Following the outbreak of the war, the Qing's central and local treasuries depleted rapidly, and the necessity of foreign loans became immediately apparent. Prior to the Sino-Japanese War, foreign loans to the Qing were primarily facilitated by HSBC (Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Corporation), which served as the intermediary between the Chinese silver-based economy and the global financial market based in London. The loans were generally of modest size and backed by Customs revenue as security, which required the approval of Robert Hart, the fiscally prudent Inspector General for the Maritime Customs. This arrangement was intended to prevent provincial officials from borrowing from foreign banks without the approval of the Zongli yamen, thus controlling the size of the Qing's total debts.³²

Provincial officials saw emergency foreign loans as critical in fighting the war, but because of the reluctance of Hart and HSBC to underwrite local loans, they began to search for alternative funding avenues. Under Zhang's direction and authorization, Wang turned his mission into a travel agency enabling his patron to bypass the regular bureaucratic channels to communicate directly with foreign banks, companies, and mercenaries. Via telegram, Wang provided Zhang with up-to-date news, offers, and details of negotiation, helping him navigate a new world of resources and promises overseas.

Wang's first stop after Russia was London. Here, within the staff of the Qing legation, he discovered several officials who supported his views on the war. One of his most significant allies was Song Yuren, the counselor of the Qing legation.³³ Before Wang's arrival, Song had independently reached the conclusion, too, that the key to solving the Qing's predicament in the Sino-Japanese War was to rebuild the navy and sustain military engagements. While perusing the London legation's files, Song had discovered that Gong Zhaoyuan, the minister, had worked with Li to explore the possibility of purchasing a fleet from Brazil and Chile in the early stages of the war.³⁴ He also learned that a British navy reserve named Hargreaves had offered to procure a fleet on behalf of the Qing government, circumventing British neutrality. But these plans were ultimately dismissed by Li Hongzhang. At the same time, minister Gong was absent from the legation due to official business in France. Recognizing an opportunity, Song decided to take matters into his own hands.

³² Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, 133–38.

³³ For a short biographical sketch of Song, see in Wang Dongjie, *Jindai sixiangjia wenku (Song Yuren juan)* [A literary archive of modern intellectuals: Song Yuren] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2015), 1–12.

³⁴ Li, *Li Hongzhang quanji*, v. 25, 122.

During Gong's absence in early 1895, Song assumed responsibility as deputy minister and managed the legation's everyday affairs. He connected with a member of the British Chamber of Commerce in Australia known as "Angewatt," whose opinions apparently carried some influence within the chamber. Angewatt showed willingness to advocate for the chamber's nominal employment of a new fleet in the name of protecting Australian merchants in Japan, thereby providing it with a semblance of legitimacy under international law. To lead this fleet, they sought the expertise of Admiral William Lang of the British Navy.³⁵ Lang had been appointed as Vice Admiral of the Beiyang Navy in 1888 but resigned in 1890 due to his conflicts with the Chinese commanders.³⁶ The plan was to purchase a fleet from Chile and Argentina and place it under the command of Lang. Lang would then recruit a crew from Australia to man the fleet. The strategy involved a surprise attack in Nagasaki while Japanese forces were occupied in Korea and the Shandong peninsula. Although it sounded audacious, by February 1895, the plan was mostly set in motion by a group of inexperienced, mid-ranking Qing agents.

The group's plan, as Song was aware, faced a major issue: they lacked the authorization from the Qing government to negotiate the loans. While Song had informed his British partners that he was acting under a "secret order" from the Qing court, no such endorsement was ever issued.³⁷ It was around this time that Wang arrived in London on his return trip from Russia on March 26, 1895, giving Song and his associates their much-needed connection to officials in China. Wang kept Governor-General Zhang closely informed about the progress of the bank loans, the purchase of the fleet, and the recruitment of the navy. Zhang, in turn, gave his authorization for these activities in the name of military defense. Shortly after Wang arrived in London, he sent a member of his entourage to Chile to inspect the condition of the ships that Song had arranged.³⁸ As Minister Gong had returned to London on the same day as Wang, the group decided to conduct their secret meetings in Paris.

On April 5, 1895, Wang sent an urgent telegram to Zhang with promising news: they had ordered a new fleet from a certain "Western shipyard." The fleet was well equipped with munitions, and was to arrive in China within three months. The total cost amounted to two million pounds. It would be paid under a loan from several "gentry merchants" in Europe, and the Qing government was given twenty years to repay it.³⁹ They sought Zhang's assistance in memorializing this matter to

³⁵ Song, "Jiechou ji," 4–6.

³⁶ Qi Qizhang, "Lang Weili yu beiyang haijun" [Captain William Lang and the Beiyang Navy], *Jindaishi yanjiu*, no. 6 (1998), 53–72.

³⁷ Song, "Jiechou ji," 4–6.

³⁸ Wang, *Shi E ji*, 738.

³⁹ "Wang Qichai laidian" [Telegram from Commissioner Wang], in Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang Zhidong quanji* [Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1998], vol. 8, 6237.

the throne. In the meantime, they also revealed to Zhang that a similar plan was being negotiated in Germany.

Zhang responded immediately and enthusiastically. He had already received authorization from the emperor to order new ships, guns, and torpedoes from Europe, but he knew that by the time that these orders were fulfilled, the war would likely be over, and China's losses would be irreversible. Wang's news offered a chance to take immediate action to derail the peace treaty negotiations. The timing was favorable, as they had just learned that Li, having arrived in Japan for the negotiations, had been shot and wounded by a radical Japanese assassin.⁴⁰ Although they were appalled by the incident, they saw it as an opportunity for delaying the signing of the treaty. In his reply, Zhang inquired about the speed, tonnage, and length of each ship, and encouraged the group to pursue their plan with the Germans.⁴¹ He also promptly telegraphed the Zongli yamen, asking them to present a memorial in support of the plan. The Zongli yamen followed Zhang's suggestions, but no definite answers came from the court.

With Zhang's endorsement, Wang, Song, and their colleagues worked diligently on the details of the loan. But their efforts were rebuffed by the newly returned Minister Gong, who in turn informed Li Hongzhang and the pro-treaty faction. It also faced unanimous opposition by senior members of the Qing diplomatic establishment, including Halliday Macartney, Gong's second-in-command and long-term Qing diplomat in London, and Robert Hart, the Intendant General of the Maritime Customs.⁴² Apart from their concerns about the plan's high risk, they disagreed with Wang and Song's choice of the Ottoman Bank, favoring instead HSBC, the Qing government's long-term partner. On April 18, 1895, the day after the Qing ratified the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Zhang Zhidong received an edict instructing him to abandon the plan. He was also warned that any future loans for the naval project must be approved by the Board of Revenue and come exclusively from HSBC.⁴³ This edict effectively put an end to Wang and Song's ambitious scheme. Upon hearing the news, Wang fell ill and expressed his frustration in a letter on April 25:

For more than a month I have exhausted my heart and mind inspecting Chilean ships, recruiting soldiers and captains, attending to every detail in the purchasing and fitting of the ships. I had hoped that this work could come to use, however slight the chance might

⁴⁰ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 726.

⁴¹ "Zhi Bali Wang qinchai," [Telegram to Commissioner Wang in Paris], in Zhang, *Zhang Zhidong quanji*, vol. 8, 6236.

⁴² Song, "Jiechou ji," 8–9.

⁴³ *Qingji waijiao shiliao* [Historical sources on the late Qing], vol. 5, juan 109 (Changsha: Hunan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2015), 2169–70.

be. I knew that it was like cutting one's own flesh to fill a wound, but I had placed my life under oath, and when the war began, I could not help recommending my own service (to the country). Once I heard that the peace treaty had been ratified, and China's loss was significantly more (than if the war had continued), my resentment and frustration cannot be restrained. My whole body is sick from it.⁴⁴

A widely circulated anecdote symbolized the spirit of the moment. According to this story, Wang and Song allegedly cut their queues—the Qing hairstyle mandatory for all men and a symbol of loyalty to the dynasty—and boarded the ships that they had borrowed, ready to sail for a fight in Japan. At that time, the news of the treaty ratification had reached them, prompting them to sigh with anguish and disappointment. “The Qing is done for!” they exclaimed. Song then abandoned government service and joined a study society to investigate alternative ways to save China.⁴⁵

Though partly fictional, the story captures the prevailing sentiment of the ambitious mid- and low-ranking officials during that time. The Sino-Japanese War provided them with the opportunity for socialization and mobilization beyond the world of diplomats. It also disrupted the bureaucratic channels of communication between the Qing government and the financial and military resources overseas. To men like Wang and Song and their patrons at home, it was access to foreign capital, rather than formal decrees of the court, that could decide the final outcomes of the war. The energy and initiative exhibited by Wang and the junior diplomats in the London legation was spontaneous and contagious. It demonstrated that the court's decision to pursue peace was not absolute, and the war could be legitimately pursued up to the moment that the peace treaty was ratified. Although they were formally agents of the empire, their actions were not bound by a sense of obedience to the dynasty, but loyalty to their country and conditioned by personal ambitions and local exigencies.

Traveling in Europe during the Sino-Japanese War

Traveling in Europe during the Sino-Japanese War presented a profound emotional and psychological challenge for Wang. He received timely news about the Qing's losses via telegrams and newspapers. The newspapers provided explanations for

⁴⁴ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 772.

⁴⁵ According to Song's own account, they had indeed planned to cut their queues and board the ships, but it was to disguise their identities as Qing officials by dressing as overseas Chinese merchants. The plan was never carried out. See Song, *Jiechou ji*, 7.

China's defeat and speculated about its future, often leaving him despondent.⁴⁶ As an emotional outlet, Wang and his fellow junior diplomats sometimes gathered at local taverns, attempting to drown their sorrows. As a military man, Wang channeled his pent-up frustration into an extensive study of Europe. China's wartime predicaments influenced the planning of his visits, the nature of his inquiries, and his documentation of his observations. He meticulously examined every facet of Europe with the goal of discerning the deeper cause of China's loss in the war.

This narrow focus on China's military inferiority was, in essence, a consequence of the Sino-Japanese War. This was not the common perspective of prior diplomats who had visited Europe and America. The 1880s and early 1890s had seen several notable diplomatic triumphs, fostering a general sense of relief that the Qing's foreign affairs were on the right track. In 1890, Xue Fucheng, minister to England and France, reported that many British and French officials who had previously scorned the Qing now sought an alliance. Xue gave several explanations for this shift. First, the failure of France to obtain an indemnity from China after the Sino-French War (1884–1885) suggested that China could fight a major European power to a standstill. Second, the restructuring of Chinese coastal defenses and the Qing navy projected an impression of maritime strength. As Allen Fung and Benjamin Elman have observed, the pre-1894 Chinese navy was widely respected for the quality of its weapons and military strategy.⁴⁷ Third, Chinese students studying abroad often ranked highest in their classes, defying racial expectations. Perhaps the most significant reason was the proliferation of Qing ministers and consuls around the world, who actively sought to understand foreign cultures and scrutinize the state of affairs, gradually integrating China into the international order.⁴⁸

The Qing's crushing loss in the period 1894–1895 prompted mid- and low-ranking officers to question the entire edifice of China's self-strengthening movement under which these projects were pursued. In the case of Wang, this manifested as a proclivity to extol the virtues of Western institutions based solely on their contributions to the state's military prowess—their ability to quickly mobilize resources, money, soldiers, and public support. He spent most of his leisure time visiting military establishments and manufacturing plants. In all the cities that he visited—St. Petersburg, London, Paris, and Berlin—he paid close attention to military museums, artillery and armament manufacturers, naval and infantry schools, and shipyards. According to Wang, European militaries developed according to the principle that “the best defense is to attack” (*yigong weishou*) and “sparing no

⁴⁶ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 773.

⁴⁷ Allen Fung, “Testing the Self-Strengthening: The Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895,” 1007–31.

⁴⁸ Day, *Qing Travelers to the Far West*, chapter 6.

effort” (*buyi yuli*). This approach stemmed from the proximity of European powers, wherein any sign of weakness could be exploited by a neighbor. As each country strove to perfect its weaponry, artillery, ships, and fortifications, each possessed some technology capable of countering that of others. Thus, “the ability to attack and defend becomes the best way to maintain peace.”⁴⁹

Wang observed that all European military establishment sincerely and eagerly pursued a cult of the new. Because war was a topic of great interest, even in peacetime, European countries had a thorough and accurate understanding of each other’s military capacity. By knowing which country possessed the most, best, and newest armaments, Western countries could settle conflict without always resorting to war. Military manufacturers were seen as a primary driver of the European economy: they employed tens of thousands of people each, constantly improved their products, and made huge profits. Wang was painfully aware that, because China lacked the technological and industrial means to compete with European arms production, it was perpetually kept at a disadvantage to European powers no matter how much and how quickly it purchased their products. He noted with alarm the significant advancements in recent products compared to those utilized merely a decade or two ago. With increased speed, power, precision, and maneuverability, armies equipped with newer products could easily surpass adversaries armed with only slightly dated weaponry. As he inspected the newest torpedoes that the Qing navy had just ordered with money borrowed from foreign banks, Wang observed that they too would soon be obsolete. Foreign engineers were already working on the blueprint of a faster and more powerful model.⁵⁰

Another aspect which Wang highlighted in his journal was networks of railways, which strengthened the state’s military, fiscal, and commercial capabilities. While previous diplomats praised the railway for its convenience, comfort, and benefits to the general populace, Wang argued for its centrality to the fiscal-military state.⁵¹ Railways figured in his writing as the most important source of European wealth and power: they facilitated commerce and industry, bolstered state security, nurtured scientific discovery and technical ingenuity, and were indispensable to territorial integration. He likened the functions of railways in a society to blood vessels in a human body in transmitting and balancing the *yin* and *yang* forces.⁵² He also corrected a common misconception of his contemporaries that railways were always operating at a loss. Wang stressed the fact that although initial funding

⁴⁹ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 723.

⁵⁰ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 735.

⁵¹ For a comparison to earlier observations, see Day, *Qing Travelers to the Far West*, 45–48.

⁵² Wang, *Shi E cao*, 765.

came from private sources, the government could regain control over the railway in ten or twenty years.

Wang highlighted that the burgeoning demand for affordable, high-quality steel driven by the railway industry prompted engineers like Henry Bessemer to refine steel-making technology.⁵³ He argued that the relentless drive for more military capacity served as the fundamental impetus behind the technological progress. The urgency of building the railway was underscored by the fact that Westerners had already moved onto more convenient and powerful methods of communication. Electric cars, he reported, promised lighter maintenance and easy maneuvering. Furthermore, the French were experimenting with building an “electric channel” on the ground for sending light mail. The future, Wang predicted, would witness a constant influx of new and outlandish inventions.⁵⁴

In order to access Western expertise in building railways and other infrastructure, the Qing needed capital. As a specialist in provincial finance, Wang observed that the exchange rate between gold and silver had been widening significantly since the 1880s. China’s lack of a centralized currency made it particularly vulnerable to worldwide fluctuations in the relative values of gold, silver, and copper. If, as it seemed likely to him, gold mines worldwide were depleted, the exchange rate between European currency and silver ingots would skyrocket. If by then China was still using bulk silver in transactions with foreign countries, how much more would it stand to lose? The expansion of the state’s military expenditure suggested the urgency of the problem. To avoid getting into an endless cycle of foreign debt, Wang suggested that the government establish official banks with branches in each province similar to Japan’s postal saving system. This could help the common people accumulate savings and fund large, expensive projects for the government. In addition, he proposed that the government purchase the newest Russian machines, which could print a variety of hidden code and patterns on paper notes, making them difficult to counterfeit.⁵⁵

Another aspect of European institutions subjected to Wang’s investigation was education. Previous diplomats paid attention to a wide variety of schools; Wang’s focus was on military and naval academies.⁵⁶ In the Naval Cadet Corps in St. Petersburg, Wang was impressed by the discipline of the students, noting, for example, that each wrote his name and badge number neatly on the left side of his bunk bed. He observed that Russian women also received education and served in

⁵³ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 753.

⁵⁴ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 719.

⁵⁵ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 838.

⁵⁶ For a study on a Qing minister’s investigation into the education system of Victorian England, see Day, “Searching for the Roots of Western Wealth and Power,” *Late Imperial China*, 35:1 (2014), 1–37.

the military. Boys who were weak and poor, instead of enlisting as an army reserve, were trained as military musicians, with all their expenses paid for by the government.⁵⁷ The necessity of educating soldiers was obvious in that modern soldiers often had to read detailed maps, military intelligence, and directives. According to an official German publication in 1893, for every ten thousand German soldiers, only twenty-four were illiterate. The figure for the French was 643, but this was still much better than for China, where soldiers, often recruited in haste, rarely had any education.⁵⁸ Wang observed:

Presently we see the flourishing of education laws in European countries. If boys and girls do not go to school by the age of eight, their parents are punishable by law. Not only does each man pursue an appropriating course of learning, women, too, studied widely. The deaf, dumb, blind, crippled, each have their schools to learn what could be taught to them. Charity schools are established to teach the poor and the orphaned. Numerous schools exist on the county, prefecture, and state level, and universities, middle schools, and elementary schools are established to nurture children into talent. Those who can conduct research also have levels and degrees attainable: literary scholars study in schools of arts, soldiers study in military schools, farmers study in agricultural schools, artisans study in schools of engineering and technology, and merchants study in business schools. Not only do elites study, everyone in the country who has an occupation study [...] In the last ten years, German schools have been the most extraordinary. Because its soldiers are all trained in schools, the German army is superior in battle. Other countries also join in the education competition and model their schools, whether in literature, agriculture, engineering, and business after Germany military schools. If we observe the deeper causes to the waxing and waning of civilizations, we know that the origin of strength and wealth is not elsewhere.⁵⁹

Wang's sense that universal education had its origin in European military demands led him to propose a reintegration of civil and military education for China's students. He argued that the classical education of gentlemen from the Zhou to the Tang dynasties contained both aspects, and it was only in the Song and the Ming (900s–1300s) period that the two became two separate paths. This unfortunate separation resulted in a widening gulf between the civil and military servants of the state. As the civil bureaucrats became more prestigious, they also disdained being associated with the military, and soldiers were men of the lowest quality. European countries, on the contrary, put the ancient Chinese ideal into practice:

⁵⁷ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 700.

⁵⁸ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 769.

⁵⁹ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 708.

soldiers were all trained in preparatory academies, and even princes and nobility were proud to be in the army.

In a secret memorial submitted after his return, Wang summarized his observations and put forth a series of proposals which he argued must be implemented immediately.⁶⁰ The Qing government should develop a dense network of railways, linking the empire's heart with its frontiers, and connecting resource poor and the wealthy regions. It must revamp the existing army on the German model, send more talented officers to study abroad, recruit foreign officers, and provide a basic level of education to all its soldiers. It must reform the civil service examination, to give more weight to sciences, foreign language, and other practical knowledge, and set up dedicated schools of Western learning. To ensure the government's ability to fund these operations, it must build a nation-wide banking system, encourage popular saving, and issue its own paper currency. The government must also promote industrialization, commerce, and mining. Finally, it needs to rationalize its offices in foreign affairs and eliminate joint posts or overlapping responsibilities. The gist of the proposal was to increase the circulation of goods and money, to pursue new knowledge and technology, and to adapt the existing system of recruitment so that every man's talent could contribute to the wealth and power of the state.

Compared to the famous reform proposal put forth by Kang Youwei in 1898, Wang's memorial strikes us as rather conservative: it was strictly confined to the measures which had been taken by leaders of the self-strengthening movement and had nothing to say about administrative or political reform. But if we refrain from the failure narrative later constructed by the constitutional propagandists, it appears that Wang's memorial was far more practical and politically feasible and was probably the farthest the government could safely go without alienating too many stakeholders.

Reading Wang's travelogue from a transimperial perspective illuminates what Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé have termed the "three c's"—"competition, cooperation and connectivity not as separate phenomena but as entangled processes."⁶¹ From Wang's point of view, great empires were not simply entities locked in competition or cooperation but were constructed from the ground up through the sinews of capital, enterprises, transportation networks, and education systems. By observing the dynamics of empire through the prism of wartime mobilization, Wang created insights about the modern world that emphasized the importance of circulation and connectivity over intrinsic cultural qualities.

⁶⁰ Wang, *Shi E cao*, 833–41.

⁶¹ Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16:4 (2018), 430.

Conclusion

Wang's complex experience of diplomacy, conspiracy, and reconnaissance in Europe during the Sino-Japanese War demonstrates the limits of a purely international approach to the event. To him and the other mid- and low-ranking agents of the Qing empire, the European states were not only allies, competitors, or foes, but also offered resources—be it military, capital, or intellectual assets—for the Qing. While diplomats and higher-ranking officials often had to navigate within the confines of formal diplomatic relations, agents like Wang transcended these strict roles. They assumed multiple identities—as envoy extraordinaries, imperial commissioners, and private agents—and shifted between these roles freely. More importantly, these men did not simply follow orders passively, but sought to exert their own agency to change the course of the war. In the process, they got to know European empires in new ways, and helped frame them for multiple Chinese audiences. And, finally, they demonstrated an ability to maneuver within and beyond formal diplomatic channels to serve both the interests of the Qing empire and to satisfy their own ambitions.

To Wang and many who traveled with him, the mission was a trip of revelation on the inner logic of European state making. Diplomats who had reported on the condition of the West prior to 1894 had generally frowned upon what they saw as the incessant pursuit of novelty and waste of resources. The Sino-Japanese War, disrupting the traditional logic of Confucian statecraft, provided the key to how the various parts of the war machine fit together. As Wang says, “European countries established their governments on the basis of war.”⁶² Confucian principles, which traditionally regarded war as a symbol of despotic rule to be avoided by virtuous leaders, could no longer be sustained. Instead, a state of military readiness had to be recognized as the norm, essential for maintaining peace.

Although Wang and Song's plan failed, the precedent that they established of using foreign banks to fund local developments continued after the war. They showed how self-strengthening officials interested in foreign loans could circumvent the control of the central authority—as represented by the Board of Revenue and the Imperial Customs—and directly negotiate loans. After the war, provincial officials would increasingly turn to foreign capital for industrialization projects in transportation, infrastructure, and textile. While these new developments spurred on provincial development, they also worsened the Qing's fiscal crisis and the tension between the central and local administrations in how to allocate a dwindling revenue. In many ways, this devolution of the fiscal control and the rising conflict between the local and the central governments over the sources of loans would directly pave the way for the 1911 revolution that toppled the Qing dynasty.

⁶² Wang, *Shi E cao*, 835.

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Transimperial Co-Operation and White Supremacy-Thinking in African Fin-de-Siècle Empires: The Weekly Newspaper “The African World and Cape-Cairo Express”

Ulrike Lindner

Abstract

In the fin-de-siècle, not just competition but also connections and co-operations between European empires increased. This was very manifest in colonial Africa, where related practices involved the racist demarcation of a European elite from Africans. To investigate this phenomenon, this chapter studies *The African World*. A newspaper founded in London in 1902 by Leo Weinthal, a Jewish British South African of German descent, it addressed a white European trans-imperial elite in Africa by collecting and printing information about French, Belgian, German, British and Portuguese colonies, creating a unified knowledge base for a common European interest in colonial Africa that was based on white superiority.

Keywords: transimperial, Leo Weinthal, The African World and Cape-Cairo Express, Journalism, Colonial Africa

During the decades before World War I, one could observe growing forms of trans-imperial connections between European empires, besides an increasing rivalry and competition in Europe.¹ As a prominent example, one should mention the Institut Colonial International (ICI), founded in 1894 in Brussels with Dutch, French, Belgian, German, and British colonial experts as members, discussing and analyzing colonial policy as an inter-imperial endeavor. Over the following decades, the members of the institute met bi-annually and published countless manuals and papers on practical colonialism, be it in the field of agriculture, work management,

¹ See Ulrike Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen: Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880 – 1914* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2011); Ulrike Lindner, “Transimperiale Orientierung und Wissenstransfers: Deutscher Kolonialismus im internationalen Kontext,” in *Deutscher Kolonialismus: Fragmente seiner Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Deutsches Historisches Museum (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum; Theiss Verlag, 2016), 16–29.

or colonial law, substantially underlining the transimperial character of colonial rule.² Co-operation between imperial powers went even as far as mutual support in colonial wars, as documented in my work on the Herero and Nama War in German South West Africa. This genocidal war fought by the Germans was substantially supported by supplies from the neighboring British Cape Colony, even if the Cape Colony remained officially “neutral.”³ Furthermore, as recent research has shown, it was not only military knowledge of colonial wars that traveled significantly between fin-de-siècle empires. Rather, also actors themselves—colonial officers and military experts—moved between colonies of various empires and supported different colonial regimes.⁴

This chapter argues that such forms of co-operation in the imperial world were mainly based on the racist assumption of a European “white superiority” that should not be questioned and was to be upheld against the indigenous populations under all circumstances. The argument of a common “whiteness” was able to overcome various other national and cultural differences, particularly in colonial settings where white people were and saw themselves as a threatened minority.⁵ The chapter concentrates on the new imperial colonies in Africa, where most of the European empires acquired territories during the so-called “Scramble for Africa” in the 1880s. In the African possessions, the notion of co-operation was fostered by similar problems that the colonizers encountered during the fin-de-siècle and equally encouraged by a globalization push in the last decades of the nineteenth century that allowed a growing exchange via new channels of communication and transport.⁶ Furthermore, the advance of mass media in European empires and a growing

² Ulrike Lindner, “New Forms of Knowledge Exchange between Imperial Powers: The Development of the Institut Colonial International (ICI) since the End of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Imperial Co-Operation and Transfer, 1870-1930: Empires and Encounters*, eds. Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 57–78; see also the article by Florian Wagner in this volume.

³ Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, 231–38.

⁴ Tom Menger, “‘Press the Thumb onto the Eye’: Moral Effect, Extreme Violence, and the Transimperial Notions of British, German, and Dutch Colonial Warfare, c. 1890-1914,” *Itinerario* 46, no.1 (2022), 84–108; Tom Menger, “Of ‘Big Bags’ and ‘Golden Bridges’: Thinking the Colonial Massacre in British, German, and Dutch Manuals of Colonial Warfare, 1860-1910,” *European History Yearbook* 22 (2021), 79–97.

⁵ See generally Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1890-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) or for the discussion of the constant problems with black domestic servants in white homes Elizabeth Dillenburg, “Domestic Servant Debates and the Fault Lines of Empire in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa and New Zealand,” in *New Perspectives on the History of Gender and Empire: Comparative and Global Approaches*, eds. Ulrike Lindner and Dörte Lerp (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 179–208.

⁶ See for the globalization push, e.g., Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 451–62.

international press landscape made it much easier to note and compare developments in each other's colonies and territories.⁷ Politics of comparison became a crucial feature of colonial and imperial rule, again fostering transimperial exchange.⁸

The paper particularly focuses on the group of "white"/European people who lived and worked in-between empires—often in the main cities of the new African colonies—and who traveled between different European empires. It analyzes their specific situation, often simultaneously shaped by notions of co-operation and competition, but also by a constant need for imperial comparison. The paper particularly concentrates on the discourse produced by "white" colonizers, who styled and re-invented themselves as a distinct group. The paper thus follows Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé's concept of transimperial history, which sees imperial cooperation, connectivity, and competition as highly entangled phenomena.⁹

The group in question consisted of businessmen, administrators, missionaries, and various other colonial experts such as scientists and engineers.¹⁰ They can be seen as a transimperial "white"/European elite who created a certain lifestyle and self-understanding through common practices and who were able to exert a considerable influence on colonial policies.

In studies on colonial racism, a society structured around a "white" racial ideal with systems of violence and oppression for non-whites is seen as dominated by "white supremacy."¹¹ One would certainly observe a strong structure of "white supremacy" and an unchallenged "white superiority thinking" in the fin-de-siècle African colonies, both forming the everyday life of the European colonizers. Clearly, the white groups were not only shaped by the category of race; their status and self-definition, which granted them many privileges in colonial societies, was strongly influenced by class and personal wealth, too. The group shared a white sociability belonging to an upper-middle-class ideal. "Poor whites" were not part of the group

⁷ See for the growing international press and news market Volker Barth, *Wa(h)re Fakten: Wissensproduktionen globaler Nachrichtenagenturen 1835-1939* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2020), see for Africa André-Jean Tudesq, *Feuilles d'Afrique: Étude de la presse de l'Afrique subsaharienne* (Pessac: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine Collection, 1995).

⁸ Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan, "Introduction: Refiguring Imperial Terrains," in *Imperial Formations*, eds. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 12.

⁹ Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16 (2018), 429–52, 430.

¹⁰ Lindner, "New Forms of Knowledge Exchange," 62–63.

¹¹ See on white supremacy in general: John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); see also Mark Christian, "An African-Centered Perspective on White Supremacy," *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 2 (2002), 179–98; see generally Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

and were always addressed as a grave problem in colonial societies of the fin-de-siècle, as they endangered the whole concept of a white colonial superiority over a non-white majority population.¹² One can thus perceive how these white elite groups in the colonies were also able to create and disperse transimperial knowledge, given their status, their mobility, and their access to colonial institutions.

From 1902 to 1944, the weekly newspaper *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express* offered news and information for colonial circles interested in or living in Africa. It was produced by actors from the aforementioned white group and also aimed at a transimperial elite living or interested in Africa as a readership. Even if the newspaper had a focus on British interests and British South Africa, it always covered news from French, German, Portuguese, and Italian colonies in Africa as well as the Belgian Congo, debated economic development in various colonies, and included society news of the colonial “white” elite in Africa. The newspaper *African World* also sheds light on the process of how such transimperial knowledge was first created and then translated from one empire to another. Comparison between empires became not only a crucial element of imperial rule during the fin-de-siècle; comparative knowledge also shaped the transimperial discourse that was created in the *African World*. So far, this newspaper has not found resonance in research despite being a fascinating source for the oftentimes overlooked phenomenon of transimperial cooperation.¹³ Additionally, it mirrors the self-definition processes of a “white”/European colonial elite in the fin-de-siècle world of Africa and is therefore crucial for understanding the shaping and self-affirmation of the transimperial group of white colonizers.¹⁴

Firstly, the paper will address notions of transimperial cooperation in general and will look at “white supremacy” thinking and practices that created a white European elite in colonial Africa. Secondly, it will look at the weekly newspaper *African World* in more detail and investigate how the newspaper contributed to forming such a European colonial elite by addressing news from all African colonies, reporting on colonial administrators and military men from different empires and always emphasizing the demarcation lines between local African populations and European elites.

¹² See, e.g., for South Africa Thandiwe Ntshinga, “Poor Whites: A Threat, Challenge and Embarrassment to South African Formations of White Identity,” in *Shades of Whiteness*, ed. Ewan Kirkland (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 65–76. See for East Africa Philippa Söldenwagner, *Spaces of Negotiation: European Settlement and Settlers in German East Africa 1900–1914* (München: Martin Meidenbauer, 2007); see generally Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

¹³ Generally, Africa-oriented newspapers published in Britain during the period of High Imperialism have been only rarely researched; see Jonathan Derrick, *Africa, Empire and Fleet Street: Albert Cartwright and the West Africa Magazine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

¹⁴ Katharina Walgenbach, “Whiteness Studies als kritisches Paradigma für die historische Gender- und Bildungsforschung,” in *Transkulturalität: Gender- und bildungshistorische Perspektiven*, eds. Wolfgang Gippert, Petra Götte, and Elke Kleinau (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 53.

Transimperial Cooperation and Practices of Racist Demarcation in Fin-de-Siècle African Colonies

Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have stressed the growing importance of “whiteness” and “white superiority thinking” in the colonies of the British Empire at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. In their book *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, they sought to “chart the spread of whiteness as a transnational form of identification.”¹⁵ In this paper, this notion will be expanded and applied to the frame of inter-imperial exchange, support, and self-definition. To do so, the paper maintains that the arguments of transimperial co-operation and racist “white supremacy” thinking should be brought together. It thus focuses on arenas of racist co-operation between empires and the self-styling of a transimperial white elite. Such an analysis should help us understand why transimperial co-operations were so long-standing in the African colonies and were, for example, taken up in Africa shortly after the disruptions of WW1.¹⁶ It should also give more insight into the enduring power of white supremacy thinking, a notion that was shared by all European colonial powers and shaped colonial policies until after World War II.¹⁷

Whiteness as a means of domination was early on identified and criticized by Black scholars.¹⁸ At the Pan-African Congress in London in 1900, W. E. B. Du Bois famously stated: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.”¹⁹ In another essay, “The Souls of White Folk,” he elaborated on these thoughts and stressed the connection of superiority thinking—what one would call biological racism today—with the period of the late nineteenth and twentieth century: “The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s people is a very modern thing—a nineteenth and twentieth century matter.”²⁰

¹⁵ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁶ See as an example the ICI that reassembled shortly after WW1 and continued with its policy of transimperial exchange of colonial knowledge, Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁷ See, for example, the concept of “Indirect Rule” developed in the 1920s and popular in the British colonies until after WW2. It implied an unchanging inferiority of the African population that should be ruled through traditional chiefs. See for the concept of indirect rule and its problems, Andreas Eckert, *Herrschen und Verwalten: Afrikanische Bürokraten, staatliche Ordnung und Politik in Tanzania, 1920-1970* (München: Oldenbourg, 2007), 39–62.

¹⁸ Walgenbach, “Whiteness Studies,” 46.

¹⁹ His talk was re-printed in a collection of his essays; see W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), vii.

²⁰ W. E. B. DuBois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921), 30.

Racist theories and theories of Social Darwinism were of course widespread in all European colonial empires as well as in the U.S. during the last third of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. They had a major influence on colonial policy and the relationships between white and colonized people. White colonizers saw it as a fact that the indigenous populations were inferior to them and derived their claim to power in the colonies at least partly from this conviction. Yet, they also felt threatened by the non-white majorities in their colonial territories, a fact that again reinforced the racialized self-identity.²¹ Their mindset was additionally shaped by the constant interactions of Europeans with other ethnicities in the imperial and colonial world. The image of the white European (including the white U.S.-American and the white ruling class in the independent Latin American nations) was practiced, tried, and tested in colonies and dependent territories throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas. With a growing biologization of society and the spread of racial concepts, being “white” and “European” became important categories of distinction in political and societal debates of the Global North.²² Some scholars even speak of the construction of “the European” in the colonial and imperial world of the late nineteenth century. It was exactly there, in the colonies, where the differences between the white Europeans shrank in distinction to the respective indigenous populations.²³ Especially in Africa, where most European colonial powers either had possessed or conquered colonies at the end of the nineteenth century, the image of being white colonizers and having a common undertaking became a central notion of their colonial life.

Places where the white transimperial colonial elite could be easily observed were the new colonial cities on the African continent. These cities were intended to represent the colonial power’s claim to rule, be it British, German, French, Belgian, Portuguese, or later Italian. The most obvious example of such a representation of power may be Khartoum in Sudan, which Lord Kitchener partially destroyed after his victory over the Mahdi in 1898. He had it rebuilt in the shape of a British Union Jack, thus representing British imperial power spatially.²⁴

²¹ Christian Geulen, *Geschichte des Rassismus* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), 83–86.

²² Veronika Lipphardt and Kiran Klaus Patel, “Einleitung,” in *Der Europäer – ein Konstrukt: Wissensbestände, Diskurse, Praktiken*, eds. Lorraine Bluche, Veronika Lipphardt, and Kiran Klaus Patel (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 11.

²³ Mandy Kretzschmar and Veronika Lipphardt, “Der Europäer in Übersee,” in *Die Erfindung des Europäers: Begleitbuch zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung*, eds. Frauke Stuhl, Julia Franke and Kiran Klaus Patel (Berlin: Kreuzberg-Museum, 2009), 26–33.

²⁴ Robert K. Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities* (London: Spon, 1997), 166–67.

Most of the African colonial cities were located on the coasts, where the raw materials and agricultural products from the respective colony could be loaded onto ships and distributed to world markets.²⁵ The planning of these cities was in the hands of a variety of colonial experts: colonial administrators, military and railway engineers, physicians as well as architects and urban planners. They all influenced the construction and character of the cities, but not all of them came from the same national background. Already in the planning and building stage, one could observe a strong transimperial exchange of knowledge and various forms of co-operation.²⁶ In the European quarters, the planners paid attention to representative buildings and wide streets where military parades could be held for the self-representation of the colonial power. The following picture shows a typical colonial city street.



Figure 3.1: Military Parade in Dar-es-Salaam [n.d.], Photo Collection of the German Colonial Society, Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt a.M., Nr. 071-1999-38.

²⁵ Anthony O'Connor, *The African City* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 32; see for the new colonial city Dar-es-Salaam in German East Africa, Ulrike Lindner, "Wissen-Kontakt-Transfer: Koloniale Stadtplanung am Beispiel Dar-es-Salaam/Deutsch-Ostafrika," *Kunstchronik* 74 (2021), 381–89.

²⁶ Lindner, "Koloniale Stadtplanung," 385.

Unlike in the pre-existing neighborhoods of African towns, the Europeans preferred straight, rectangular street patterns that were meant to represent the colonial order.²⁷ In this way, the power and superiority of the respective colonial rulers over the local population should be spatially represented and experienced.²⁸

Another factor that shaped the demarcation lines between white and non-white in the African colonies was the concern about possible contagions and infections. French as well as British and German colonial administrators and experts argued that the residential areas of the Europeans had to be protected from diseases and other dangers. This could only be done by consistently separating the European areas from the local ones, where endemic diseases such as malaria or yellow fever were suspected.²⁹ In British colonies, for example, health officer William J. R. Simpson (1855–1931), who was highly influential throughout the British Empire and had been stationed in India and West Africa, advocated strict segregation in colonial towns for supposedly biomedical reasons.³⁰ Many of the African colonial cities followed such guidelines, even if they were in fact much more heterogeneous.³¹ Still, official segregation legislation, as in Apartheid South Africa in the 1940s, occurred only rarely in the African colonies of high imperialism. However, the necessity of segregation of the different ethnic groups was regarded as self-evident knowledge that had to be implemented if the aim was to achieve functioning colonial rule.³² The strong racist demarcations shaped everyday life in the colonies and made the colonizers even more aware of their own race.

If one looks at the white elites who lived in the colonies and colonial cities before World War I, one can observe quite a mixed European community: If we take the German colonial town of Dar-es-Salaam as an example, one would find German administrators, experts, planters, and traders, but also engineers, traders,

²⁷ Karl Vorlauffer, "Kolonialstädte in Ostafrika: Genese, Funktion, Struktur, Typologie," in *Kolonialstädte – Europäische Enklaven oder Schmelztiegel der Kultur*, eds. Horst Gründer and Peter Johaneck (Münster: LIT, 2001), 145–202.

²⁸ Liora Bigon, "Urban Planning, Colonial Doctrines and Street Naming in French Dakar and British Lagos, c. 1850–1930," *Urban History* 36, no. 3 (2009), 435.

²⁹ Odile Goerg, "From Hill Station (Freetown) to Downtown Conakry (First Ward): Comparing French and British Approaches to Segregation in Colonial Cities at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32, no. 1 (1998), 3; Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 224.

³⁰ R. A. Baker and R. A. Bayliss, "William John Ritchie Simpson (1855–1931): Public Health and Tropical Medicine," *Medical History* 31, no. 4 (1987), 450–65.

³¹ Jürgen Becher, *Dar es Salaam, Tanga und Tabora: Stadtentwicklung in Tansania unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1997), 36.

³² Sarah L. Smiley, "City of Three Colors: Segregation in Colonial Dar es Salaam, 1891–1961," in *Historical Geography* 37 (2009), 178–196.

and settlers from various other European nations, particularly British, Belgian, Italian, and Greek people. Especially engineers, the new modern class of experts, who worked in railway and infrastructure building and were sought after, often moved between colonies.³³ Such a European transimperial community was based on an assumed shared “whiteness” and underlying racist assumptions, but also on a common understanding of being members of an upper-middle colonial class. However, the unity of the European colonizers was often contested. If we take again Dar-es-Salaam as an example, it was not so clear who would belong to that group. For example, Greek merchants were assumed to be “South European,” not “proper white European” and had problems entering the white colonial society.³⁴ Delineations were also clearly linked to status and property. Rich Greek businessmen and ship-owners could move in European circles, while poorer Greek merchants were ostracized. Other groups did not conform at all to the divisions of the colonial society, e.g., rich Syrian merchants, who could be neither classified as “white” nor as “indigenous.”³⁵

It was therefore not only racial demarcation but also the common social life that this group entertained in the colonies that shaped their outlook. Certain activities and self-created traditions, such as tea parties in the governor’s garden, dinners in the clubs, military parades in the streets, balls, and sports events, served to distinguish and demarcate the group from the colonized people and other ethnic groups; they also strengthened their class consciousness.³⁶ The members of the white group in the colonial cities could be seen as an imagined community in the sense of Benedict Anderson’s concept, but also as a community that became manifest through common practices.³⁷

In summary, late-nineteenth-century colonial Africa witnessed the rise of a self-styled white European elite with established practices that stressed co-operation in everyday colonial life. That elite overcame many inter-European rivalries in a colonial situation determined by middle- and upper-class whites’ demarcation vis-à-vis the indigenous population.

³³ Lindner, “New Forms of Knowledge Exchange,” 61–63.

³⁴ Söldenwagner, *Spaces of Negotiation*, 83.

³⁵ Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, 168.

³⁶ Lindner, *Koloniale Begegnungen*, 159–61; Diana M. Natermann, “To Maintain or Adjust?: On the Whiteness of Swedish Men in the Congo Free State (1884–1914),” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 51, no. 3 (2023), 464–86.

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1982).

The *African World and Cape-Cairo Express* as a Mirror of Transimperial Co-Operation of a Self-Proclaimed European Elite in Africa

The weekly illustrated newspaper *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express* was published 1902–1944 in London and catered exactly to the group that this paper referred to—an expatriate white colonial elite. It had correspondents in several African colonies and summarized important news from British, German, French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonies in Africa for people with a strong interest in the African continent in Britain, but equally for Europeans living in different colonies in Africa.³⁸ The content of the paper had a strong British core and covered particularly the economically interesting colony of British South Africa. However, it was also of use to other European colonizers. The German colonial administration, for example, subscribed to the newspaper and stored many cuttings in its files.³⁹

Generally, the British newspaper market expanded dramatically in the nineteenth century. Besides London-based and provincial daily newspapers, numerous journals and magazines were addressing special topics—amongst them many that dealt with imperial interests. Additionally, in many parts of the empire, be it the white dominions of Australia and Canada, or in India and the Cape Colony, a multifaceted imperial press began to develop.⁴⁰ After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 and with the beginning of a so-called “legitimate trade” in West Africa, British-based papers covering several regions of Africa started to be published. One was the *African Times*. Published from 1861, it concentrated on trade in West Africa during its first two decades, later following the wider expansion of the British Empire in Africa during the “Scramble for Africa” in the 1880s.⁴¹ Some of these Victorian journals can be seen as forerunners of the *African World*, but the latter’s unique feature remained the fact that it reported from almost all colonies in Africa.

Leo Weinthal, founder and chief editor of the paper, had had a longstanding experience in British South Africa and the colonial world of Africa in general. He was a British publisher and editor but could also be seen as a protagonist of a transimperial elite. He was born in 1865 in Graaff-Reinet in the Cape Colony, as the son of a Jewish wool merchant who had migrated there from Germany. He died in London in 1930. Weinthal was educated in Hamburg and Port Elizabeth and trained

³⁸ See editorials: *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, November 14, 1903, No. 53, Vol. 5, 1.

³⁹ See Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 14816. The edition of *The African World* is to be found in this file.

⁴⁰ Chandrika Kaul, “Media and the Portuguese and British Empire: Themes in Comparative Perspective,” in *Media and the Portuguese Empire*, eds. José Luís Garcia et al. (Cham: Palgrave, 2017), 39; Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1–11.

⁴¹ Derrick, *Africa, Empire and Fleet Street*, 13–15.

as a photographer, but soon developed a strong interest in journalism. Accordingly, he worked as an agent for Reuters in the Transvaal from 1888.⁴² He became an important figure in the Transvaal newspaper business around 1890 and edited the newspaper *The Press*, generally supporting the Kruger government in that decade. After the Jameson Raid in 1895, he had to resign over political issues. During the South African War, he acted as a correspondent for various American newspapers, and moved to London in 1900. He became an ardent supporter of Cecil Rhodes' and Alfred Beit's Cape-Cairo Railway project, penning an encyclopedic publication titled "The Story of the Cape to Cairo Rail and River Route" that was published in the 1920s as a four-volume book.⁴³

Weinthal saw himself not only as an editor and journalist but also as a trans-imperial traveler and writer. In 1902, he published a report of his travels around Africa on German steamboats, including details of all colonial towns in which the steamships stopped, to which Weinthal added short descriptions of Portuguese, German, and Italian colonies.⁴⁴ The guide covered all colonies on steamships' Eastern and Western African routes: Egypt, Italian Somalia, German East Africa, Portuguese Mozambique, Madagascar, British East Africa, German South West Africa, and Portuguese Angola.

Still in 1902, in line with his transimperial and all-African interests, he started the newspaper *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*. It was financially supported by Alfred Beit, a German-British businessman and South African Randlord, co-owner of De Beers and one of the wealthiest men of his generation.⁴⁵ Interestingly, both Beit and Weinthal had a dual-imperial, German-British background and were probably therefore rather inclined to foster transimperial connections. Weinthal thought the time opportune for publishing such an illustrated newspaper that would address most African colonies. And he indeed found an eager readership. When the *African World* celebrated its first anniversary on November 14, 1903, the editorial proclaimed: "[W]e started on the hypothesis that a journal dealing with all Africa was wanted and that, properly conducted, it should prove a success. Our experience since last November has completely justified the hypothesis."⁴⁶

⁴² Anon., "Leo Weinthal," in *Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol. 1 (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1968), 871–72.

⁴³ C.W.H., "Leo Weinthal, C.B.E – Obituary," *Journal of the African Society* 29 (1930), 449–50; see also Leo Weinthal, *The Story of the Cape to Cairo Railway and River Route from 1887 to 1922* (London: Pioneer Pub. Co., 1923–1926).

⁴⁴ Leo Weinthal, "Round Africa" by the D.O.A. [*Deutsch-Ostafrika*] Line: *A Guidebook for Passengers to North, East and South Africa* (London: A. Andrews, 1902).

⁴⁵ See for Alfred Beit: Henning Albrecht, *Alfred Beit: The Hamburg Diamond King* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2012).

⁴⁶ *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, November 14, 1903, No. 53, Vol. 5, 1.

From the start, the *African World* covered all parts of Africa and addressed colonies of different empires. Still, on the front page of each issue, the Coat of Arms of the British Crown, a roaring lion, and three pictures of famous sights in British colonies in Africa (the Victoria Falls, the Egyptian sphinx, and Table Mountain at the Cape) were displayed. This was of course a sign that the expansive British Empire that covered huge parts of Africa was indeed at the core of the newspaper. The headings “Commerce,” “Exploration,” “Mining,” and “Finance” on the title page characterized some of the main themes of the paper.

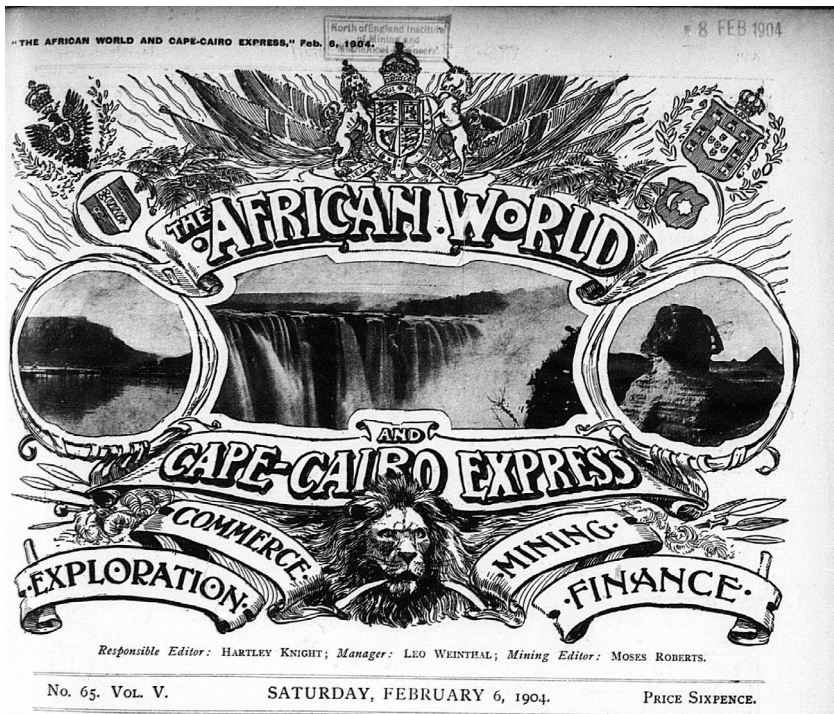


Figure 3.2: The African World and Cape-Cairo Express, February 6, 1904, No. 65, Vol. 5, 1.

Until 1914, the first page hardly changed—only the picture of Table Mountain was replaced by a picture of a South African city and the sphinx by pyramids.⁴⁷ In December 1903, the first Annual of the newspaper was published. The editorial

⁴⁷ See, e.g., *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, November 21, 1903, No. 315, Vol. 25, 1.

announcing “The African World Christmas Annual” stressed again the unique approach of the weekly newspaper:

“To the best of our knowledge it represents the first attempt that has ever been made to deal with the affairs of all Africa inside the covers of a single publication, and to combine with a mass of information much that is in a lighter vein. The prominent features of African progress are discussed by writers whose ability to deal with the subjects of which they treat is unquestionable, and prominence is given to the story of the South African development.”⁴⁸

A typical issue of the *African World* had around fifty to sixty pages, containing articles and reports, but also many illustrations, photographs, and advertisements. Ads took up around ten to fifteen pages in every issue, clearly being the main financial backbone of the paper.⁴⁹

Fifty to sixty percent of the newspaper articles concentrated on mining, finance, and company news with a strong bias towards British Southern Africa and its gold and diamond economy and therefore addressing the interests of its British recipients. At the same time, the reader would also find business reports from West and East Africa, Egypt, and other regions, including the colonies of non-British, European empires, e.g., news from railway companies in German and French colonies or the Deutsch-Ostafrika shipping line. *The African World* also included a broad section on “News from Greater Africa.” As the index of volume 14, consisting of the issues from February to May 1906⁵⁰ shows, the *African World* presented news from Central Africa, the Congo Free State, East Africa, Egypt, French Africa, German Africa, Italian Africa, North Africa, Portuguese Africa, Rhodesia, and West Africa in almost every issue.⁵¹ Topics included economic developments as well as wars and uprisings in various colonies, discussions of labor questions, problems of colonial administration, and news on explorations or scientific achievements concerning Africa. For example, the November 21, 1908 issue of the newspaper reported, under the heading “German Africa Progress,” short articles on “The Ousambara Line,” “Heliograph Signals,” “The Cameroon Forests,” and “To Fight Sleeping Sickness,”

⁴⁸ *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, December 5, 1903, No. 56, Vol. 5, 1.

⁴⁹ See *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, August 19, 1905, No. 144, Vol. 12, with 48 pages of which 13 pages consisted of advertisements for colonial railways, colonial shipping lines, banks investing in Africa, shops selling outdoor and mining gear, etc.

⁵⁰ One volume comprised twelve to thirteen issues in three months.

⁵¹ See *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, Index to Volume 14, Supplement to *The African World*, July 28, 1906, iii.

dealing with the current developments in the four German colonies in Africa.⁵² Additionally, the newspaper listed the most important shipping lines around Africa, noted their departures and arrivals, and showed possibilities for tourism and safaris in Africa.⁵³

Not only did *African World's* topics refer to a transimperial white elite in Africa, the newspaper also addressed that group directly as an audience. It thus contributed to the formation and constitution of that elite. This issue was manifest in the section "Points about People" that featured the white colonial elite of Africa, consisting of higher-ranking colonial administrators and experts as well as important businessmen. That section noted their arrivals and departures in and from various colonies, announced marriages and deaths, and delivered congratulations.⁵⁴ Even if it mainly concentrated on personalities from the British Empire, it always included well-known German, Portuguese, and Belgian colonial figures, too, creating the shared sense of a transimperial group with a common interest.⁵⁵ It is also clear that the paper addressed the higher social class of European colonizers and businessmen who were able to afford rather luxurious travel and who enjoyed leisure time in Africa. Another aspect was various reports on people of different nationalities working in certain African colonies. One article mentioned Italian administrators in the Belgian Congo. And the newspaper listed the mixed European heritage of white inhabitants of East African cities.⁵⁶ Even if it is not clear how deliberately such stories were chosen by the publishers in order to stress a transimperial, pan-European outlook, these groups of Europeans did live in colonial Africa. However, they were hardly addressed by ordinary colonial press organs

⁵² "German Africa Progress," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, November 21, 1908, No. 315, Vol. 25, 79.

⁵³ "Shipping Intelligence," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, November 14, 1903, No. 53, Vol. 5, 21.

⁵⁴ "Points about People," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, February 10, 1906, No. 170, Vol. 14, 286–88.

⁵⁵ See, for example, "Points about People," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, August 12, 1905, No. 144, Vol. 12, 219: "Mons. Renè Garnier, entrusted with a commercial mission by the Governor-General of Algeria, is now at Brussels and has addressed an appeal to Belgian merchants desirous of entering into trading relations with Algerian producers. Captain Lenfant, accompanied by Lieut. Mailles, has also arrived in Brussels to confer with the German officer who will direct the Cameroon-Congo delimitation mission."; p. 221: "The passenger list of the 'Eleonore Woermann', which left Hamburg on the 9th inst., reached us last night too late for inclusion in our shipping pages. The list is a fairly long one and among others we note the names of a number of Reichstag deputies, who (...) are making an educational tour in the German-African colonies." One would find similar reports on international colonial travelers in every edition.

⁵⁶ "Across Widest Africa," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, February 17, 1906, Vol. 21, 283.

that focused primarily on the colonies and colonists of one particular empire. In sum, the newspaper *African World* conveyed the impression of a transimperial European white elite with shared social interests.

In all debates, *The African World* strictly supported white colonialists and settlers and rejected any criticism of their behavior towards the indigenous African populations. It championed a strong white supremacy thinking. A case in point was the German explorer and colonial expert, Carl Peters, who had lost his position as colonial administrator due to abuse and extreme cruelty in the 1890s, and was later partly rehabilitated by the German Emperor. Peters' rehabilitation was met with strong criticism in the German parliament, on which the *African World* reported, wholeheartedly taking Peters' side:

A perusal of the report of the scandalous debate in the Reichstag this week, in the course of which the notorious Socialist Bebel indulged in foul personal libels on Dr. Carl Peters, leaves a nasty taste in the wake. (...) Whatever the mistakes made by Dr. Peters, he always behaved in a manly and patriotic manner throughout (...). To Carl Peters Germany owes to-day one of her finest over-sea colonies, which but for crass official mismanagement in its early phases and complete want of enterprise till very recently would be now have been a source of great commercial prosperity to the fatherland. It is always easy for men of the stamp of Bebel to pose as critics; it is far more difficult to find men like Carl Peters who have recklessly risked their lives on many occasions to carry the flag of their king and country into unknown regions.⁵⁷

Similar arguments were used to support the behavior of Leopold II and his administration in the Congo. Despite mounting criticism of Leopold's rule and his predatory capitalism in the Congo all across Europe and much evidence, *The African World* held the administration of the Congo in high esteem. An interview with Sir Henry Morton Stanley, who strongly supported Leopold's rule, was printed in an issue in November 1903. Stanley was even quoted with the following statement: "Sir H.M. Stanley says not more than truth when he declares that no living sovereign has done more for humanity than King Leopold, first by suppressing the slave trade, and then by adopting other measures for the amelioration of the lot of the natives."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ "Cui bono," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, March 24, 1906, No. 176, Vol. 14, 355.

⁵⁸ "A Notable Defense and Challenge to the Congophobists," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, November 21, 1903, No. 54, Vol. 5, 80.

In a later issue, *The African World* quoted a rather questionable source, A. Henry Savage Landor, a successful travel writer who was rather notorious for inventing stories.⁵⁹ Landor attributed the atrocities in the colony to alleged cannibalism in certain regions of the Congo, which was in fact never practiced there:

From thence he [Mr. Landor] proceeded (...) to Yacoma, where he was given a hearty reception into the Congo Free State by Commandant Van Luffen. The traveler noticed the promising surroundings – the beautiful farm, the thriving live stock, and the ingeniously constructed plough – but he was reminded that the ‘picturesque’ natives were also cannibals. Here is the explanation of the ‘Congo horrors’, the source of the gruesome photographs, and the suggestions of cold-blooded cruelty against officials trying to do their best in the midst of a land dominated for centuries innumerable by ignorance, brutality, and the lust for blood.⁶⁰

Almost everything was taken as a sign of white moral superiority and good governance, e.g., war dances that went along orderly and without upheavals at a reception of British royalty in Lorenzo Marques in the Portuguese Colony Mozambique. The *African World* writes on the occasion:

“It was also something much more than that it was a supreme object lesson in the proper and absolutely safe handling of thousands of armed natives without any outward display of force whatsoever; at a time, too, when in other parts of South Africa, the native mind is showing signs of restlessness, and his temper is one of subordination. It is an ability—call it an art if you will—which the Portuguese seem to possess to its full, this power of easy handling of untutored natives in the mass – an exhibition of the European’s purely moral and intellectual control over the Kaffir....”⁶¹

Overall, the view of a united white superior class in the African colonies was constantly formed and reified in the articles and reports of the newspaper.

To support such an outlook, *The African World* also featured the shared sociability of the “white” colonizers. It occasionally congratulated rulers of other European empires. As an example, a page with photographs served to congratulate the German Emperor Wilhelm II on his silver wedding in February 1906:

⁵⁹ Landor never published in contemporary scientific journals. His self-stylization as explorer and adventurer in his autobiography which was published in the year of his death is extreme; see A. Henry Savage Landor, *Everywhere: The Memoirs of an Explorer*, (London: Unwin 1924).

⁶⁰ “Across Widest Africa,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, February 17, 1906, Vol. 21, 283.

⁶¹ “Portuguese Africa,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, April 7, 1906, No. 178, Vol. 14, 481.



Figure 3.3: Supplement to *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, February 24, 1906, No. 172, Vol. 14.

The African World clearly served European social interests. In its issues and annu- als, it functioned as a travel and society guide and sometimes even as a gossip magazine. Sojourns in colonial towns and at safari destinations were promoted as leisure activities for the colonial elite in Africa and Europe. Recent research has highlighted that mass communication and a growing mass press contributed to the forming of a new class of media-savvy European-American High Society during the first decades of the twentieth century.⁶² The members of this group traveled between luxurious hotels during the respective season in New York and Europe, accompanied by journalists styling them into trendsetters and “high society.” Many

⁶² For the growing significance of an international high society, see Juliane Hornung, *Um die Welt mit den Thaws: Eine Mediengeschichte der New Yorker High Society in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 67–69.

of them added the luxurious hotels of Egypt or the princely states in India to their itineraries.⁶³

The African World featured Egypt regularly as an important African destination for the European–American High Society during the winter period. In December 1903, Bernie Mansfield, the correspondent in Cairo, reported:

“The season by now can be regarded as fully opened. The season hotels have opened their doors, and at both Ghezereh Palace and the Savoy Hotels there are many tourists. Bookings for both these ‘chic’ hotels are very numerous, and all first-class hotels hope to have full houses shortly after Christmas. Shepheard’s and the Grand Continental Hotels are almost full already. The Anglo-American Nile Steamer and Hotel company opened their season to-day, sending up the great stern-wheeler Mayflower to Assuan with a large number of passengers.”⁶⁴

The Opera house in Kairo was obviously equally of interest: “I may now say that we badly require a new or re-modelled Opera House. The Egyptian government gives a subsidy each year of no less a sum of BP 4,000 to ensure good opera in Cairo, the idea, I presume, being to present an attraction to visitors in the season.”⁶⁵ Mansfield, complaining about the smallness and the “shoddy construction” of the building, calls for an enlargement or even a completely new building. The most important social event seemed to have been the Khedive’s State Ball in Egypt: “The annual state ball given by his Highness the Khedive took place at Aberdeen Palace on Wednesday evening last and in point of brilliancy was in keeping with its many predecessors.”⁶⁶ The correspondent described the astonishing setting, the picturesque uniforms of Egyptian nobility, and the wonderful gowns of all the “European ladies.” Over the years, the European-American (moneyed) aristocracy that frequented Egypt was regularly highlighted in *The African World*.

Other points of interest around Africa for an imagined moneyed European tourist community as readers were also discussed, e.g., the sights and peculiarities of Aden, where all the steamboats on the Eastern African route stopped, or the new crown colony of the Seychelles, which was introduced to the readers with some

⁶³ The German moneyed aristocracy had also traveled to Egypt since the turn of the century. The Thyssen Family, e.g., preferred the Shepherds Hotel: Simone Derix, *Die Thyssens: Familie und Vermögen* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), 209–10.

⁶⁴ “The Season,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, December 12, 1903, No. 57, Vol. 5, 234.

⁶⁵ “Khedival Opera House,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, December 12, 1903, No. 57, Vol. 5, 234.

⁶⁶ “The Khedive’s State Ball,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, February 6, 1904, No. 65, Vol. 5, 699.

pictures of the governor's house and the landing pier.⁶⁷ The German colonial town Dar-es-Salaam featured quite prominently in the *African World* before 1914. In 1904, for example, the newspaper wrote about the German colonial city: "Handsome streets, a charming position, a model system of sanitation and tasteful buildings in the villa style, give Dar-es-Salaam the appearance of an up-to-date European town."⁶⁸ Later, in 1913, *The African World* ran a whole issue on German East Africa, with several pieces on the colonial society of Dar-es-Salaam, showing again the typical practices of self-identification as a "white"/European group. The newspaper also included articles on German East Africa as a tourist destination for safaris.⁶⁹



Figure 3.4: *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, November 15, 1913, Special Edition German East Africa, front page.

⁶⁷ "Round about Aden," and "Round Africa," in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, December 5, 1903, No. 56, Vol. 5, 189 and 191.

⁶⁸ "German Africa," in *The African World and Cape Cairo Express*, June 6, 1904, 236.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., *The African World and Cape Cairo Express*, November 15, 1913, Special Edition German East Africa.

The discussion of social occasions, colonial cities as tourist destinations, and “high society” events in Egypt clearly contributed to the forming of a certain class of “white” colonizers who connected the interests of different colonial empires in Africa.

Even more significant for the argument of a transimperial “white” interest and a white “superiority thinking” was the coverage of colonial wars in the *African World*. Texts in the section “Around Africa,” very often discussed the “troubles” with “natives” in various colonies, be they German-, French-, Portuguese-, or British-controlled. Overall, *African World* conveyed the message that the white colonizers would properly handle the “troubles,” quickly suppress “customary turbulences,” and react immediately and with suitable harshness and brutality. For example, regarding Italian Africa, “Troubles in Somaliland” reported in 1905 that “the latest reports received by the Government from Somaliland state that Marka is no longer blockaded by the Bimal, and that two of the three rebellious tribes have submitted in consequence of the reverses which they suffered at Gilib last August.”⁷⁰

Moreover, in the period 1904–1907, the Herero and Nama War in German South West Africa as well as the Maji-Maji War in German East Africa featured quite prominently, too. Almost every issue brought some news on the two wars, describing them mostly as “troubles” that should be speedily crushed.⁷¹ The German East African uprising was attributed to “heathen practices.” Even if the war was protracted, headings like “Rebels Totally Defeated” dominated the reports;⁷² and criticism of the German military was entirely absent. Rather, the main message was that any uprising would be problematic for the standing of all “white” colonizers in Africa. Thus, in 1906, *The African World* wrote on the Herero and Nama war that

“[E]verybody in South Africa – Briton, Boer or German – will be glad to see this protracted struggle come to a close as the successful resistance being offered by the badly armed and generally badly equipped rebels can – especially under present circumstances – produce nothing but a demoralizing effect on the native mind, and will cause a heavy loss to German prestige throughout the Dark Continent.”⁷³

The African World’s coverage of colonial wars show that the notion of transimperial co-operation was common, at least in colonial wars against indigenous populations in Africa. Militaries shared a significant amount of knowledge and

⁷⁰ “Troubles in Somaliland,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, October 21, 1906, 498.

⁷¹ See, e.g., “The Trouble in South West,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, September 30, 1905, 348; “The Rising in German East Africa,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, August 26, 1905, 117.

⁷² “East Coast Revolt Spreading,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, September 9, 1905, 211.

⁷³ “Germany’s Little War,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, February 17, 1906, 85.

sometimes cooperated directly. And some high-ranking officers traveled between empires, as Tom Menger has shown.⁷⁴ The general racist argument of European or Western superiority over “savages and semi-civilized races” was omnipresent, justifying more brutal forms of war than in Europe. Crucially, European colonizers accepted measures that were forbidden by international law and seen as inhumane in European wars as necessary against “savages.”⁷⁵ These measures included killing prisoners of war, destroying fields, carrying off livestock, burning stores and houses, and therefore destroying indigenous population’s livelihood, as the Maji-Maji War showed.⁷⁶ *The African World* fully supported this stance. Similar convictions were clearly shared by all European colonial powers, and shown in steadfast mutual support in colonial wars.⁷⁷

The African World habitually emphasized that indigenous problems could arise in any African colony. This fear united all European colonial rulers; conquering and ruling Africa thus was a transimperial shared task and helped form a transimperial shared white European identity.

Whereas *The African World* published broad and positive articles on German Africa until June 1914,⁷⁸ the understanding of a common task in Africa was fundamentally challenged with the outbreak of World War I. Reporting changed immediately. Now, the *African World* concentrated on patriotic topics and stopped reporting on the colonies of other empires as one can observe in the issues in August 1914.⁷⁹ However, after the war in the 1920s, the newspaper returned quickly to its transimperial outlook.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Tom Menger, “The Colonial Way of War: Extreme Violence in Knowledge and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British, German and Dutch Colonial Empires, c. 1890-1914” (PhD thesis, Universität zu Köln, 2021), in print, Cambridge University Press.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., the famous manual on “Small Wars” by Charles Callwell, the classical introduction into colonial/“savage” war that was well received not only by the British military but equally by the French and German military, Charles E. Callwell, *Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice* (London: Harrison and Sons 1906), 40–41; see also Ulrike Lindner, “Kriegserfahrungen im Empire: Von den Kolonialkriegen zum Ersten Weltkrieg,” in *Europa 1914: Wege Ins Unbekannt*, eds. Nils Löffelbein, Silke Fehleemann, and Christoph Cornelißen (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), 81–101.

⁷⁶ Ludger Wimmelbucker, “Verbrannte Erde. Zu den Bevölkerungsverlusten als Folge des Maji-Maji-Krieges,” in *Der Maji-Maji-Krieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1905-1907*, eds. Felicitas Becker and Jigal Beez (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2005), 87–99.

⁷⁷ See the more than 30 reports written by attached British officers Trench and Wade on the Herero and Nama War between 1905 and 1907, who argue in that vein. The National Archives, War Office, TNA, PRO, WO 106/268 and WO 106/269, *passim*.

⁷⁸ “German Africa,” in *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, June 6, 1914, 257.

⁷⁹ *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, August 8, 1914, now featured huge pictures of the king and of the National Relief Fund, and the heading changed to “Mining and Financial News.”

⁸⁰ *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express*, Index to Vol. 65, February 3, 1919 to May 3, 1919.

Conclusion

Transimperial exchanges, co-operation, and identity formation in Africa were central to the European colonial elite in the *fin-de-siècle*. This development was based on a belief both in “white superiority” and in belonging to a common social class embracing all upper-middle and upper-class European colonizers. The “white”/European societies in the colonial cities of Africa would not have functioned without the underlying conviction of a common racist superiority that was expressed in demarcation processes via many aspects and was concretized in social-class-coded daily practices. At the same time, the “white”/European groups were able to create and spread forms of transimperial knowledge and information.

A weekly newspaper covering business and society news around Africa, *The African World and Cape-Cairo Express* helped form, maintain, and multiply these convictions. It also helped reify the racist demarcation of the “white”/European class against African indigenous populations. It foregrounded a shared sociability of the white colonizers across different colonies and empires. Although a product of the British imperial world, it was able to construct a transimperial outlook on Africa and helped form a transimperial “white”/European elite in Africa. Moreover, especially when reporting on colonial wars, *The African World* stressed that white superiority was to be upheld against the indigenous populations under all circumstances—a conviction that quite self-evidently included and indeed necessitated knowledge transfer and mutual support between empires. At the same time, the newspaper also shows that the “white”/European elite and its supremacy thinking was contested in daily colonial life. It had to be constantly re-established in practice and discourse—and finally, in World War I, would become more fundamentally challenged.

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The Potential of Immobility: Silas Hardoon and Transimperial Agency in Shanghai 1874–1931

Ulrike von Hirschhausen

Abstract

The New Imperial History has revealed the spatial dimension of empires by focusing on mobile individuals and moving beyond the poles of centre and periphery. By contrast, this chapter introduces a historical figure who, like most people in colonial settings, chose to stay put, demonstrating the analytical potential of immobile actors in revealing transimperial logics. Silas Hardoon, a Jewish merchant born in Baghdad, spent his entire life in semi-colonial Shanghai, where he encountered multiple imperial agendas. The density of the British, French, American and Chinese imperial regimes enabled Hardoon to amass a fortune in real estate and act as a mediator between rival political parties. As the paper argues, through the lens of this biography, we can also recognise the potential of immobility for transimperial history.

Keywords: transimperial, Silas Hardoon, Immobility, Cultural-financial intermediary, Shanghai

Silas Hardoon's rise from an anonymous migrant to Shanghai's richest inhabitant seems to be a classic rags to riches story. When the gifted real estate developer died in 1931, he owned almost a third of Shanghai's most lucrative shopping street, Nanjing Road, as well as large blocks of flats in the international concessions of the city. However, a deeper look into the life of this Ottoman subject who held the status of British Protected Person for most of his life, and simultaneously assimilated into Chinese imperial culture, makes clear how much the transimperial context made this rise possible in the first place. Rather than a single empire providing the background for Hardoon's trajectory, several imperial zones interacted and overlapped in his biography and shaped its outcome both privately and professionally. Transimperial competition, cooperation, and connectivity thus become discernible even in the biography of a man who was not particularly mobile and decided to stick to Shanghai for more than fifty years. Sketching out this life can help us to see more clearly the potential of such static life courses for explaining the logic and workings of transimperial settings.¹

¹ For an extensive account of Silas Hardoon, see Chiara Betta's unpublished dissertation, Silas Hardoon (1851–1931). "Marginality and Adaption in Shanghai," Phil. Diss., University of London 1997,

So far, the New Imperial History has tended to focus on particularly mobile actors, be they rotating governors, migrating workers, wandering pilgrims, or experts on their travels through empires. Tracing their pathways inside or outside an empire has made a spatial dimension visible which often lies beyond the poles of center and periphery.² In recent years, global mobility and the resources that individual actors gained from it, brought home, and often used against colonial rule have become a focus of research.³

But the overwhelming majority of people in the colonies or in transimperial spaces were not particularly mobile and preferred to stay where they were. However, under certain political circumstances and depending on their social and professional background, even actors much less marked by high mobility moved between imperial spaces and acted transimperially. Hardoon is a case in point. In Shanghai, several imperial concessions, constitutive of this semi-colonial city since 1842, formed the basis for different British, American, French, and Chinese imperial agendas to exist, collide, and compete with each other within a very narrow space. The particular density of Shanghai's multiple political regimes enabled also rather stationary actors to operate across different political, economic, and cultural zones without leaving the city. If this empirical reality seems unusual in the twenty-first century, it was more common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than traditional geographies of empires and nation-states suggest.⁴

Silas Hardoon was therefore confronted with a multiple imperial repertoire in Shanghai, which allowed him choices that were normally not available in classic colonial spaces. First, it was the small diaspora of Ottoman Jewish merchant

available in the SOAS library, London. See also idem, "The Land System of the Shanghai International Settlement. The Rise and Fall of the Hardoon Family, 1874-1956," in Robert Bickers and Isabelle Jackson (eds.), *Treaty Ports in Modern China. Law, Land and Power*, London 2016, S. 61-77; idem., "From Orientals to Imagined Britons. Baghdadi Jews in Shanghai," in *Modern Asian Studies* 37 (2003), 999-1023; Ulrike von Hirschhausen, Jörn Leonhard, *Empires. Eine globale Geschichte 1780-1920*, München 2023, 468-81.

² David Lambert, "Reflections on the Concept of Imperial Biographies. The British Case," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40 (2014), 22-41; David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds.), "Colonial Lives across the British Empire. Imperial Careerism in the Long 19th Century," Cambridge 2006; Desley Deacon et al. (eds.), "Transnational lives. Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present," London 2010; Tim Buchen, Malte Rolf (eds.), *Eliten im Vielvölkerreich. Imperiale Biographien in Russland und Österreich-Ungarn (1850-1918)*, Berlin 2015.

³ Jane Carey and Jane Lydon (eds.), "Indigenous networks. Mobility, connections and exchange," London 2014; Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, "Empires and the reach of the global, 1870-1945," Cambridge 2012; Ulrike von Hirschhausen und Jörn Leonhard, "Empires und Mobilität: Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) und Blaise Diagne (1872-1934)," in Eva-Marlene Hausteiner, Sebastian Huhnholz (eds.), *Imperien verstehen. Theorien, Typen, Transformationen*, Baden-Baden 2019, 225-54.

⁴ Pär Kristoffer Cassel, "Rule of law or rule of laws. Legal pluralism and extraterritoriality in nineteenth-century East Asia," Cambridge 2006.

families that enabled him to start as a real estate agent and allowed him to become an investor at all. Second, Shanghai's institutional set-up as a treaty port for multiple empires was of central importance. The city's division into several imperial concessions allowed Hardoon to trade in land across imperial borders. An essential condition was the legal instruments that especially the British Empire offered subjects of other empires. Relatedly, Hardoon was able not only to invest transimperially, but also to serve both in the British-American and in the French municipal council. Third, the culture of the Chinese empire that he encountered in Shanghai became a further turning point for his life. His life-long marriage to a Euro-Asian woman greatly influenced his decision to personally acculturate into imperial Qing culture, to engage privately as a patron of Chinese education and science and to become a Chinese philanthropist towards the end of his life.

The empirical reality of such a transimperial space in which Silas Hardoon worked for almost 60 years, also invites methodological suggestions of how to expand the current conceptual borders of the New Imperial History. Why is that necessary? Contextualized imperial biographies have established themselves as a key way of "putting a networked imperial model into practice as both a methodological tool for doing research and a means of communicating this perspective."⁵ Underlying this approach is a conceptualization of empire as a dynamic network whose politics are enacted on various sites by mobile men and women. This approach has focused so far particularly on mobile agents and elites. Precisely because its aim is to reconstruct the connections between multiple metropolitan and colonial sites, the mobility of the actors in question is pivotal. Governors, doctors, military men, convicts, sailors, or indentured laborers alike have become visible as the prime actors making and unmaking empire.

This approach has prioritized flows and connectivity, evoking an inaccurate image of empires as polities in which particularly mobile agents seem to thrive. But the overwhelming majority of imperial or colonial subjects were not particularly mobile, but lived where they were born. We thus need to rethink how to explore traces of empire in stationary lives, which nonetheless reflect imperial politics and the limits of such politics, too. Under certain conditions, even transimperial phenomena manifested themselves in a stationary life. Silas Hardoon, after coming from Bombay to Shanghai as a youngster, remained there for almost sixty years, stuck to the place and certainly was not a particularly mobile man. Contextualizing his imperial biography illuminates how we may situate non-mobile agents in transimperial settings and reveal their analytic potential for explaining the logics and mechanisms of transimperial space.

⁵ Lambert, "Concept of Imperial Biographies," 26.

Against this background, this chapter first explains the specific institutional context of Hardoon's biography. Then, it asks to what extent he himself was able to use that context for transimperial cooperation, competition, and connectivity. Finally, it summarizes the arguments for re-recognizing the analytical potential of largely static actors for transimperial logics, and ends with a plea to broaden New Imperial History by integrating transimperial connectivity into its repertoire.⁶

An Institutional Landscape: Hardoon's Shanghai between 1870 and 1930

Hardoon was 23 years old when he arrived in Shanghai from Bombay in 1874. Years earlier, his father had taken the family, including two-year-old Silas, from Baghdad to Bombay to work there for the Sassoons, an Ottoman merchant dynasty that had settled in Bombay to trade in silk, cotton, and opium. Now, in a bid to extend the Sassoon trade network to the new Chinese treaty ports, David Sassoon was sending dynamic, young Jewish men to Shanghai, preferably those who could read and write Judeo-Arabic, an Arab dialect written in Hebrew. In use in the Ottoman Empire and Arabic-speaking areas beyond, Judeo-Arabic was the language in which the entire balance sheets of the trading house were written. Silas Hardoon brought exactly this knowledge with him when his father made him travel to Shanghai to work there for the Sassoons. Hardoon was to live in Shanghai for almost sixty years and would experience the rise of the treaty port into Asia's most populous metropolis. When he arrived in 1874, Shanghai had 800,000 inhabitants; when he died there in 1931, there were more than 3 million. This massive influx was above all a direct consequence of Shanghai's status as a semi-colonial treaty port, where half of the city remained under Chinese rule while the other half was split up in Western-controlled territories, the so-called concessions.⁷

Treaty ports developed as a result of the inter-imperial conflict between the aggressive European empires and the Chinese Empire around the middle of the nineteenth century. Britain, the leading naval power and industrial nation of the world, was eager to enforce China's opening to international trade and did

⁶ Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Hée, "Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," in *Journal of Modern European History* / *Zeitschrift für moderne europäische Geschichte* / *Revue d'histoire européenne contemporaine*, vol. 16, No. 4 (2018), 429–52.

⁷ Marie-Claire Bergère, "Shanghai. China's Gateway to Modernity," Stanford 2009, 98–99; Tomoko Shiroyama, "The Shanghai Real Estate Market and Capital Investment, 1860–1936," in Billy So and Ramon Myers (eds.), *The Treaty Port Economy in Modern China*, Empirical Studies of Institutional Change and Economic Performance, Berkely 2011, 47–74, here 52. Regarding the term "semi-colonial," see Anne Reinhardt, "Navigating Semi-Colonialism. Shipping, Sovereignty, and Nation-Building in China, 1860–1937," Cambridge 2018, 3–7.

so using military power in the First Opium War of 1842. China's defeat resulted in the so-called "Unequal Treaties," which secured the opening of five coastal cities to foreigners and to international trade. In 1842, a new colonial era began in Shanghai. The British, the French, and the United States set up enclaves, known as concessions, on the city territory, established their own city councils, and applied their own laws. Land registers, freedom of the press, and freedom of association, for example, all existed in the British Concession (which was soon to be united with the American into an "International Concession"), while at the same time, French civil law was applied in the neighboring French Concession. Unlike in the Chinese part of the city, the British magistrate hardly interfered in trade or craft, provided only the basic rules for buying real estate, and levied very low taxes, which made the British–American Concession increasingly attractive to Western foreigners and Chinese migrants alike. Much of China had been laboring under civil-war-like conditions since the middle of the century as a result of the uprising of the militant Taiping salvation movement and other protest mass movements. The treaty ports on the coast, however, had largely remained intact, and refugees and job seekers had been pouring into Shanghai in waves ever since. The advantages of these imperial enclaves within a Chinese city were as visible to the tens of thousands of Chinese migrants and traders as they were to Western foreigners or Ottoman merchants like the Sassoon brothers or Silas Hardoon.⁸

Ottoman Jews were only marginal Westerners among the many immigrants to Shanghai.⁹ Because of this, they formed a close network, as Silas Hardoon learned when he began working for the trading house Sassoon in 1874. Like almost all young Jewish men, he first moved within the culturally and religiously narrowly limited world of the small Jewish diaspora. His employer provided accommodation, and in return expected participation in Jewish rites and holidays and observance to the commandment of only intra-Jewish marriages. It was a tightly knit cultural world from which Hardoon would soon break out, professionally as well as privately. On a business level, the Jewish merchants oriented themselves towards the British Empire because their intercontinental trade and investment in Shanghai's real estate market in turn presupposed good relations with the British magistrate. Freedom of trade and low taxation plus the existence of land registers secured by the British council offered central advantages for their economic activity both locally and globally. Furthermore, the weakness of the Ottoman Empire since the

⁸ Debin Ma, "The Rise of Modern Shanghai 1900-1936. An Institutional Perspective," in So and Myers, *Treaty Port Economy*, 33-46; Bergère, Shanghai, 346-63.

⁹ Chiara Betta, "Marginal Westerners in Shanghai. The Baghdadi Jewish Community, 1845-1931," in Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot (eds.), *New Frontiers. Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842-1953*, Manchester 2000, 38-54.

1870s made it increasingly unattractive, both politically and economically, to the Jewish merchants who were nominally its subjects.¹⁰

As a result, many of the Jewish merchants who immigrated from the Ottoman Empire to Shanghai and whose legal position as Ottoman subjects was unstable, found closer proximity to the British Empire the most promising way to combine personal security with economic opportunities. Therefore, the majority of Jewish merchants from the Ottoman Empire tried to change their legal status, with the newly introduced category of “British Protected Person” proving particularly suitable for this purpose. The status had only recently been developed for Ottoman subjects living in British-controlled areas such as Egypt or India, but was also used for Christian minorities within the Ottoman Empire. It removed these persons from the control of their own state and placed them under British protection, something which was later to become a source of conflict between the two empires. It did not mean naturalization, so it could not be equated with British citizenship. But in semi-colonial Shanghai, being a “British Protected Person” (BPP) was invaluable. Unlike other Ottoman subjects, Jews with this status were no longer subject to the so-called Mixed Courts, which were composed of Chinese and Europeans, but could rely on British law in disputes. The trading house Sassoon had been able to negotiate a compromise with the British City Council as early as the 1860s, and the majority of its employees were now under British protection.¹¹

Silas Hardoon applied for BPP status in 1896. In the Western concessions, where he lived and worked, his legal status placed him largely on an equal footing with the Europeans there, which offered important advantages in terms of land purchases and trade. Between 1920 and 1930, a third of all Shanghai Jews held BPP status. Because of the legal protection that they enjoyed, the relationship between the British and the Jews in Shanghai seemed to the Jews less like that between the colonizers and the colonized, and more like one determined by a convergence of economic interests. This was underscored by a permanent Jewish seat on the British-dominated Shanghai City Council, while the 98 percent Chinese population in the Western enclaves had no such representation.

The more Shanghai's capitalism flourished, the more British, French, and American officers and merchants became interested in expanding the territory of their imperial concessions. Behind the ostensible argument of rapid immigration stood the political interests of the British and the French Empires, as well as of

¹⁰ Betta, “Marginal Westerners,” 43–45.

¹¹ Sarah Abrvaya Stein, “Protected Persons? The Baghdadi Jewish Diaspora, the British State and the Persistence of Empires,” in *American Historical Review* 116 (2011), 80–108; Eileen P. Scully, “Bargaining with the State from Afar: American Citizenship,” in *Treaty Port China, 1844–1942*, New York 2001.

the American government to extend their rule in Imperial China. The warships of the Royal Navy patrolling off the coast of Shanghai provided the appropriate threat setting for corresponding demands. The weakened government in Beijing had less and less to counter the military pressure on the ground and the political demands from London, Paris, and Washington. Against the will of the local Chinese city government, the European empires, with Imperial Beijing's consent, managed to push through the gradual expansion of their urban enclaves in Shanghai.

In 1850, the Western concessions had barely covered one square kilometer of the city's total area. By 1900, the British-American and French Concessions had expanded to 33 square kilometers and were home to about half of the total population of more than 1 million. Shanghai's economic and cultural powerhouse shifted from the ancient Chinese walled city in the south to the booming concession districts along the Bund in the west and north. Around 1900, the number of industrial and commercial enterprises here was ten times greater than in the Chinese part of the city, and land was worth many times what was paid in the Chinese-controlled districts.¹² The rapid rise in the value of land, which was also a result of the legal and economic freedoms in the imperial enclaves, was a major factor in enabling Silas Hardoon to start his own real estate business in the 1890s. Not only did the rule of Western empires help him become a successful businessman, Hardoon was also, due to his wealth, elected to the board of the International (that is the British-American) Concession, and served as well on the French Council between 1892 and 1902. However, he seems to have left no real traces in municipal politics, and his seat in the exclusive British "Shanghai Club" almost always remained empty. Nevertheless, the fact remains that more than 98 percent of those living in the Western-controlled areas of the city were Chinese, but their administration was entirely in the hands of wealthy Western merchants, mostly British or American.

Shanghai's rapid growth and the permanent influx of immigrants posed enormous challenges to the administration of all parts of the city. Police duties, tax collection, criminality control, and medical care could not be adequately implemented either in the Western concessions or in the Chinese half of the city. Chinese native place associations, which integrated immigrants according to their region of origin, started to fill this gap, taking on more and more functions, which the municipal authorities were unable to perform. This communal politicization reinforced an anti-imperial stance that the leaders of the Chinese native place associations were increasingly able to mobilize from the 1890s onwards when it came to fighting for Chinese rights against the "foreign imperialists" (as they were then referred to). Everyday life in the Western concessions reinforced this anti-imperial orientation. Working and living in Shanghai brought Chinese immigrants, who

¹² Ma, "Modern Shanghai," S. 42.

formed the overwhelming majority of the population, into increasing contact with Europeans and Americans and the privileges that they enjoyed, and subordinated them to a foreign jurisdiction to which the new immigrants were now subject.¹³

At the same time, Western freedom of press, association, and assembly could usefully be exploited when conflicts arose in connection with foreign domination. Such conflicts increasingly did arise from the 1890s onwards, triggering a spiral of mass anti-imperial protests between 1895 and 1911 of which Shanghai became the center—mainly because the many freedoms in the imperial enclaves made it easier for Chinese nationalists to organize large-scale public resistance from there. A boycott of American goods was seamlessly followed by a railroad boycott that opposed the economic prerogatives of Britain and the United States in the Chinese railroad market and culminated in the revolution of 1911. As China disintegrated into rival territories under changing military leaders after 1911, close ties with the political leaders of the Chinese parties became increasingly important. Calling themselves “Shanghailanders,” hardly any of the Western merchants in Shanghai had such ties, identifying themselves primarily with the city which offered them such valuable economic opportunities, and less with the country as a whole.¹⁴

Silas Hardoon stood out from his Western business partners and from his Jewish co-religionists in this respect by systematically integrating himself into the Chinese society of Shanghai. He sought close contact with Chinese politicians and used part of his fortune to promote Chinese culture and science, thus pursuing a policy of cultural and social acculturation which also served his interests as an entrepreneur. When the political landscape changed radically after 1911 and gave way to a permanent rivalry of Chinese fractions and parties, he was able to become a neutral mediator between the different groups. For this too, the legal and cultural freedom that the imperial concessions continued to offer was a central institutional basis.

An Individual Career Between Empires and Cultures

Silas Hardoon took advantage of the institutional opportunities that Shanghai offered Western foreigners and Chinese immigrants in his individual advancement as an entrepreneur. British law was the most important basis for his rise as a real estate developer. Initially as an employee, and then from the 1890s as a partner in the Sassoon trading company, he experienced Shanghai's dynamic real estate

¹³ Bryna Goodman, “Native Place, City and Nation. Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937,” Berkeley 1995.

¹⁴ Robert Bickers, “Shanghailanders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai 1843-1937,” in *Past & Present* 159 (1998), 161–211.

market on a daily basis and increasingly began to concentrate all his energies in this sector. As a young employee, Hardoon had invested his private savings in a number of modest properties in Shanghai's international district, where for a variety of reasons, the land prices were increasing year on year. Firstly, a plot of land in the British or French concession area provided security for the owner that did not exist in the Chinese-administered half of Shanghai. If a buyer registered his land with the British or French consulate it was protected from illegal taxation, was sold under British or French supervision, and the owner was subject exclusively to Western jurisdiction in the event of a legal dispute. In addition, a cadastre maintained at the British City Council secured the registration with its own land registry entry. As a result, British- or French-registered land and real estate had been traded like liquid collateral since the 1860s and was accepted as loan collateral by all the banks in the city.¹⁵ Such economic tools became increasingly common in Shanghai's Western enclaves. These had initially been militarily imposed by the British Empire on China; later, the British Empire also imposed a system of extraterritoriality that exempted its subjects and other foreigners from local Chinese laws.¹⁶

But a view that focuses only on the lack of political participation by Chinese groups and the dependence of the Chinese government in Beijing on the Western empires overlooks what the treaty port actors themselves made of the diversity of overlapping legal systems there. These actors changed the institutional rules within the city, for example by developing new ways of buying, leasing, and mortgaging land that were independent of the nationality of the investors. Shanghai's real estate market also shaped the financial market, benefiting Chinese investors and entrepreneurs as well as Western merchants and non-Western immigrants such as Silas Hardoon.

Initially, Chinese inhabitants had been prohibited from purchasing land in the foreign neighborhoods. But the intertwined economic interests of the Chinese and the resident foreigners gave rise to contractual forms in Shanghai that circumvented such prohibitions and benefited both groups. One such contract was the "Quangbindan," a document which was to play a central role in Hardoon's career. The Quangbindan allowed the Chinese to buy land in the Western concessions while foreigners residing there registered it for them with the British or French consulate. Such hybrid contract forms, which were typical of Shanghai's urban capitalism, made Chinese merchants and traders important market players, especially since they could also keep their assets secret from Chinese authorities through concealed

¹⁵ Shiroyama, "Shanghai Real Estate Market," in So and Myers, *Treaty Port Economy*, 57–64.

¹⁶ Klaus Mühlhahn, "Geschichte des modernen Chinas. Von der Qing-Dynastie bis zur Gegenwart," München 2021, 120; Pär Cassel, "Extraterritoriality in China. What we know and what we don't know," in Bickers and Jackson, *Treaty Ports*, 23–42.

land registration. In 1926, for example, when land worth one billion U.S. dollars was registered in Shanghai under British names, about 37 percent of it actually belonged to Chinese owners. In the central business district, as much as 74 percent of the land was Chinese-owned. Figures like these document the economic rise of the Chinese bourgeoisie in Republican Shanghai.¹⁷

The massive immigration to Shanghai, the increasingly densely populated space in the Western concessions, and the possibility of legally securing real estate property with the consulates of the empires caused an almost unchecked real estate boom between 1870 and the 1920s. In 1865, a mu, the Chinese unit of measurement equivalent to about 660 square meters, had cost about 1,300 yuan. In 1907, the same area cost 9,600 yuan, and in 1933, when Hardoon's descendants were already fiercely fighting over his inheritance, which included 450 mu in prime locations, a mu of land in Shanghai's International Concession was trading at 34,000 yuan. At the time, that was roughly equivalent to \$170,000. Land values had increased 25-fold in the imperial territories between 1865 and 1933.¹⁸

When Silas Hardoon set up his real estate business in the 1890s, he was counting not just on land prices, but on Shanghai's remaining semi-colonial treaty port for the other benefits this conveyed. His status as a "British Protected Person" was enormously helpful in allowing him to trade in real estate in the British or French quarters, and it would have been catastrophic to lose it. However, ten years after he was granted BPP status, the line of the British authorities in Shanghai hardened considerably—in accordance with stricter laws in Great Britain that had been introduced to curb immigration from Eastern Europe. The Foreign Office in London was flooded with requests from Jewish merchants from Shanghai who had suddenly been denied the hitherto unproblematic extension of their status. Yet, when Silas Hardoon applied for the renewal of his status in 1907, the request was promptly granted. The decisive factor in this quick renewal was the prospect of the inheritance taxes that would be due on his by now enormous fortune. The British Consul General in Shanghai soberly noted in the files that "the loss to government revenue would be very considerable" if Hardoon were no longer to be a British Protected Person.¹⁹ In fact, the British Treasury was to receive over 500,000 pounds after his death in 1931.

In 1911, Hardoon left his long-time employer and invested ever more extensively in the Shanghai property market. His strategy was essentially always the same. He bought land in locations that seemed to him to have a particularly promising future and developed a very good instinct for this. Because land registered with the

¹⁷ Shiroyama, "Shanghai Real Estate Market," 59.

¹⁸ Ibid, 54; Betta, "Rise," 69.

¹⁹ Quoted after Stein, "Protected Persons," 97.

consulates of the empires could be used as collateral for new loans, he was always able to obtain new capital, which in turn he invested in development and in the purchase of yet more land. His lenders were large banks and insurance companies such as the China Insurance Company, the Union Insurance Society of Canton, and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, today's HSBC. The apartments built on his land were rented out on a large scale to Chinese tenants. Tenants in default so often ended up in court that they formed their own tenants' association, the Hardoon Road Tenants' Association, to negotiate compromises. Generally, however, they did not meet with much success.²⁰

Hardoon's early investment in Nanjing Road in particular proved extremely profitable against the backdrop of a decades-long real estate boom. Around 1860, what was then Park Lane was still just a swampy path, but by 1900, renowned Chinese and European stores had settled there. Hardoon was by then the street's third largest property owner, behind his former employer and now rival, Sassoon. Between 1913 and 1916 he bought more large properties there, making him, after the First World War, the largest property owner on the rapidly growing shopping street.²¹ The increase in the street's value was mainly due to the department stores that made the city a laboratory of Western–Chinese consumer culture in the 1920s. This was reflected above all in sharply rising land prices, which increased by a factor of 35 between 1910 and 1933.²² In 1918, the largest department store in East Asia, the five-story Wing On, opened its doors on land leased by Silas Hardoon to the Chinese-Australian entrepreneurial Guo brothers. The Sun Sun department store, which he leased to another Chinese-Australian family and which opened a short time later on Nanjing Road, was also modeled on American department stores and with its vast, open displays of merchandise was far removed from a traditional Chinese shop. The terms of the contracts for the large department stores proved to be extremely lucrative for Hardoon and were repeated in further leases on Nanjing Road. Before his death in 1931, one-third of his real estate holdings were located on East Asia's most famous shopping street.²³

Hardoon's willingness to gamble entirely on Shanghai's future as a treaty port, where the imperial presence of Britain, France, and the United States legally secured land ownership, paid off during his lifetime. Between 1920 and 1930, real estate prices climbed to new records. Only shortly before his death did the speculative

²⁰ Betta, "Rise," 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

²² Shiroyama, "Shanghai Real Estate Market," 56; Wen-Hsin Yeh, "Shanghai Splendor. Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843–1949," Berkeley 2007; Sherman G. Cochran (ed.), "Inventing Nanjing Road. Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900–1945," *Ithaca* 1999.

²³ Shiroyama, "Shanghai Real Estate Market," 69.

boom come to an end. In the early 1930s, in response to the Great Depression, the U.S. bought up silver stocks worldwide. The Chinese currency was pegged to the silver standard, so the deflation which resulted had an immediate effect on Shanghai's financial market. The financial crisis led inevitably to the devaluation of land prices, and ultimately to the collapse of the real estate market in 1934, forcing Hardoon's widow, Luo Jialing, to mortgage one-third of her real estate holdings. Her husband may have left her a fortune of \$150 million in land, but he had few liquid assets at the time of his death.²⁴

Two decades earlier, an already complex situation in Shanghai became even more complicated when, after the revolution of 1911, China disintegrated into rival territories under changing local military leaders.²⁵ Although a central government formally continued to exist in Beijing, individual "warlords" actually controlled the provinces and engaged in constant power struggles with one another. Even the Guomingdan Nationalist Party, founded by Sun Yat-Sen, was only one of several rival groups that were opposed by the Chinese Communist Party from 1921 onward. Against the backdrop of constant political power struggles and power changes, close relations with the political leaders of the various parties became increasingly important. However, hardly any of the foreign entrepreneurs and merchants in Shanghai had such contacts. The Western foreigners felt a strong connection to the city which provided them with such lucrative commercial opportunities, but not necessarily to the country as a whole. Culturally, too, they were oriented toward the dominant British milieu.²⁶

Silas Hardoon stood out in this respect among his fellow Jews and wealthy Westerners by systematically integrating himself into Chinese society in Shanghai. With his close contacts to Chinese politicians and his commitment to the promotion of Chinese culture and science, he pursued a policy of acculturation that at the same time served his interests as an entrepreneur. His forty-year marriage to Luo Jialing played, of course, an important role in this. Hardoon had married Luo Jialing, the daughter of a Chinese seamstress and a French sailor from the poorest of backgrounds, in 1886, possibly according to both Jewish and Chinese rites. In order to eliminate any legal doubt about the marriage in view of the enormous fortune that he later acquired, the two married again in 1928 before the British Consul. Just as Hardoon's status as a British Protected Person enabled him to purchase land in the International Concession, he and his wife used her Chinese affiliation to purchase land in the Chinese parts of the city, where foreigners like him otherwise could not

²⁴ Betta, "Rise," 67.

²⁵ Sabine Dabringhaus, "Geschichte Chinas 1279-1949," München 2006, 78-79; Mühlhahn, "China," 273-78.

²⁶ Bickers, "Shanghaianders," 194-204.

work in real estate. In her private life, Luo Jialing became increasingly committed to Buddhism over the years and surrounded herself with Buddhist monks who also acted as advisors to the couple. His wife's considerable influence greatly strengthened Hardoon's networking success in Shanghai's Chinese milieu.

The Hardoons' residence, the "Aili Gardens," certainly provided a suitable platform for networking. The couple had had a classical Chinese palace built around 1900, whose large gardens were surrounded by high walls. Here, in Shanghai's International Concession, they lived with eleven adopted children who were taught the Jewish religion but were influenced much more by Chinese culture. During the 1911 revolution, Silas Hardoon made his estate available to Chinese revolutionaries for their meetings, and when China split into competing militarist regimes, Hardoon cast himself as a host to and middleman between the political factions. He himself initially supported the conservative modernizer, Sun Yat-Sen, who briefly became the first president of the Chinese Republic in 1912.²⁷ Time and again, when he came to Shanghai to cultivate his contacts with the city's Chinese entrepreneurs, Sun Yat-Sen was a guest in the Aili Gardens. Concerned by the changing governments in Beijing and a hardening of the conflict between the imperial powers and Chinese interests, Hardoon repeatedly tried to act as a mediator between the rival factions, hosting various political actors whom he also advised financially. Because he remained politically neutral, he skillfully positioned himself in a role that was even accepted by Chinese nationalist politicians and entrepreneurs.²⁸

In the decades between 1900 and 1930, Hardoon's estate became a refuge for Chinese politicians, persecuted intellectuals, and Taoist monks on the one hand, and an educational center for conservative Chinese thought on the other. The scholars whom the Hardoons supported financially were nationalistic, but they always referred to basic Chinese values and Confucian models when discussing the question of the path which a republican China should take in the future.²⁹ Around 1920, the Hardoons' school and college housed some 500 boys and 200 girls who were all taught the classical Confucian doctrine. A separate publishing house coordinated and financed the translation of important Chinese works into other languages and, conversely, commissioned a Chinese translation of the Koran in

²⁷ Marie-Claire Bergère, "Sun Yat-sen," Stanford 1998, 246–86.

²⁸ Betta, "Silas Hardoon," S. 133–66.

²⁹ Though the specific ways in which religious affiliations and influences played out in the political and confessional microcosm of the Hardoon's household lie beyond the scope of the current chapter, it represents an interesting case through which to explore the longer history of the complex interaction between Buddhism and Confucianism. For more on each of these religions' role in the history of the region and the relationship between them, see Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions* (London: Routledge, 2009), ch. 6 ("Schools and Practices of Chinese Buddhism") and 8 ("Later Transformations of Confucianism"); Ronnie Littlejohn, *Confucianism: An Introduction* (London: Tauris, 2010).

1928. Learned societies held their scientific meetings several times a year in the Aili Gardens, embodying the very traditional scholarship that students and activists in the rest of Shanghai were increasingly protesting against.³⁰ High walls from an outside world, which after the First World War had become enormously politicized, were to shield the pupils and students of Hardoon's conservative schools. The surreal effect was not lost on contemporaries: "The Aili Gardens form a small separate world unto themselves. The lives of its many young residents seem as self-contained as in a monastery, and Luo Jialing's efforts to design her educational projects along very traditional principles are indeed so formative that students could easily imagine themselves living in the 19th century rather than the 20th."³¹

But the new intellectual currents would eventually penetrate even the high walls of the Aili Gardens. In April 1919, news of the Paris peace negotiations reached all of China's major cities. The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that the former protectorates on the Chinese peninsula of Shandong should be handed over to Japan instead of being returned to China, in violation of the right of national self-determination. This led to mass protests in Beijing, Shanghai, and many other major cities. Among the tens of thousands of demonstrators protesting against the treatment of China by the victorious powers and the continuation of its semi-colonial status were mostly students, but also many artisans and small merchants. Students at the Hardoons' private schools also demanded to be allowed to participate in the protests, which sparked fierce conflicts between school administrators, the two patrons, and the students. For Silas Hardoon, Shanghai's transimperial status had formed the basis of his own career both as an entrepreneur and as a patron of the arts. For the majority of the Chinese population, however, this very status represented a national humiliation that had been giving rise to vehement anti-imperialism and nationalism in Shanghai's urban society since the turn of the century. In 1923, finding no way to reconcile the traditional outlook of their schools with the anti-imperial, nationalist protest mood gripping Shanghai, the Hardoons eventually closed them.

Silas Hardoon and Luo Jialing had dedicated themselves at enormous financial cost to the promotion of classical Chinese culture. The legal and cultural freedom offered by the imperial territories of Shanghai was a central condition for this patronage, through which Hardoon and his wife, both of them border crossers between religions and cultures, wanted to become part of the emerging Chinese bourgeoisie. But in a society that continued to see him as a foreigner, the attempt ran up against barriers that could not be overcome with money. While he was, to

³⁰ Dabringhaus, "Geschichte Chinas," S. 81; Jürgen Osterhammel, Shanghai, 30. Mai 1925, "Die Chinesische Revolution," München 1997, 60–134.

³¹ Quoted after Betta, "Silas Hardoon," 185.

some extent, able to play the role of a neutral mediator in the political arena, there were limits to his acculturation in the Chinese milieu. Even his contemporaries were struck by the discord between the extreme focus on past culture in his patronage of Chinese arts and sciences, and his complete commitment to the present and the future as an entrepreneur. The combination of very different cultural and religious traditions, Buddhist, Jewish, and Chinese, that characterized Silas Hardoon's funeral service in July 1931 reflected in its ambivalence his life between empires and cultures, a life which eluded clear attributions.

The importance of imperial affiliation, which had been decisive for Hardoon's career as an entrepreneur, was also to shape the disputes over his inheritance. In his will, he had bequeathed his entire fortune to his wife. Shortly after the will was opened, seven alleged members of the Hardoon family from Baghdad appeared before the foreign minister of Iraq, which was under British control, and sued against its execution. They argued that Luo Jialing was not the legal wife of the deceased, that the eleven children were only adopted, and that most of the assets were due to relatives in Baghdad. The decisive argument of the Iraqi relatives was aimed at Hardoon's legal status. He had been an Ottoman subject and should be considered a citizen of Iraq after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. His status as a "British Protected Person," which also determined succession, violated not only Iraqi national law but also international regulations, since Hardoon had never lived in Great Britain, whose protection and right of succession he could therefore not claim posthumously. The relatives' interest in the inheritance of millions was cleverly linked with an argument that placed national affiliation to Iraq above the imperial status of "British Protected Person."³²

A legal dispute flared up which lasted several years, involving the government of Iraq, the Shanghai Jewish community, experts in international law, and British lawyers. They all had different answers to the question of the succession of a Jewish billionaire from Baghdad who had been married to a Chinese woman, lived in Shanghai for almost sixty years, and had been under British legal protection there. The British judge finally ruled that Luo Jialing was the rightful heiress of the property since Hardoon was indeed subject to British succession laws—a decision which underlined the validity of his imperial categorization as a "British Protected Person" and its precedence over national legal concepts. It was not until Communist rule that all relics of this transimperial biography disappeared: in 1953, the Chinese authorities moved the couple's burial place to the outermost city limits and built the House of Soviet-Chinese Friendship on the site of the Aili Gardens.

³² Stein, "Protected Persons," 101–104.

Conclusion: Rethinking Biographies as a Tool of Transimperial Research

Silas Hardoon's biography directly reflected the ambivalences and contradictions of a transimperial and semi-colonial space like Shanghai. A typical phenomenon for spaces of this kind was the overlapping of different imperial regimes and their legal orders, from which Hardoon as a migrant and member of a religious minority was able to benefit. From the personal protection offered by the imperial category of "British Protected Person" to the hybrid contract forms that made the Shanghai land market largely independent of nationality and ethnicity, to his financially merited membership of the British and French city councils: the institutional foundations of the semi-colonial city favored Hardoon's individual rise as an entrepreneur and allowed him a status that lay beyond the categories of colonized and colonizer.

At the same time, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious metropolis like Shanghai also offered cultural choices that suited Hardoon's individuality. His marriage to the Chinese-European, Luo Jialing, did not conform to the fixed rules of the Jewish diaspora. Hardoon's efforts to integrate himself into Chinese society distanced him even more from his Jewish co-religionists as well as from his British business partners and club co-members. His wealth enabled him to promote Chinese literature and culture and to found numerous schools. But with a focus on the Confucian tradition, Hardoon promoted a cultural conservatism that increasingly conflicted with the socialist and democratic mass protests in Shanghai in the 1920s.

The limits of his acculturation into the Chinese milieu proved equally clear on the political level after a certain point. Although his wealth allowed him to play a role as host and mediator between Chinese politicians, Chinese anti-imperialism and nationalism constituted a boundary that prevented further involvement. Hardoon did not become an acolyte of the Guomindang party, nor did he give up his imperial status of "British Protected Person" as his Chinese partners repeatedly urged him to. He simply remained a mediator and neutral observer in the political struggles of the Republican era.

In which respect does profiling this extraordinary biography help us to open up new methodological approaches and conceptual perspectives in the New Imperial History? In my view, four arguments speak for the potential of such biographies to yield new answers to the opportunities and limits of transimperial contexts.

1. Critical inquiries into imperial formations have greatly benefited from what we now call "imperial biographies": Tracing imperial lives across an empire yielded a new understanding of how imperial actors managed difference on the ground, how they represented empires, and above all how different imperial sites and

regions became interconnected through mobile agents.³³ Whether in continental or in maritime empires, the mobility of these actors remained pivotal to exploring the mechanisms of imperial rule between metropolises, colonies, and extra-imperial sites. As a result, mobile actors often seem to have benefited from the Empire, while losses and gains of non-mobile actors have been neglected in such re-conceptions of empires as networks or webs. Yet the overwhelming majority of imperial or colonial subjects were not mobile. Semi-colonial sites and transimperial spaces, however, created specific conditions under which even men and women who did not leave their homes faced choices as well as pressures from different imperial sides. Often, the inhabitants of such zones were forced to economically, politically, or culturally act in a transimperial manner which is why the complexity of such zones was also reflected in the agency of rather static life courses. Contextualizing biographies such as Silas Hardoon's can help us rediscover the analytical potential of rather stationary lives while also explaining the logics and mechanisms of transimperial space.

2. Correspondingly, such transimperial spaces often create conditions which undermine familiar binaries of colonizers and subalterns, of Western and non-Western agency. A plethora of political loyalties, ethnicities, and cultural choices, as Silas Hardoon encountered them in Shanghai, complicates any black and white analysis of identity and belonging. Confronted with such variety, the young Ottoman merchant decided to transcend his religious confines as much as his imperial affiliation and cultural origins. His choice was deliberately transimperial. He replaced his Ottoman citizenship with the protection of the British Empire, yet declined to assimilate into British culture, as many of his co-religionists did, and instead chose Chinese culture as his personal lifestyle. He also overcame his religious roots in Judaism by marrying a devoted Buddhist and sharing her religious priorities. Was he a Westerner, a religious outsider, or did he see himself more as a patron of Chinese culture? The categories of colonizer and colonized do not seem appropriate to adequately describe this transimperial biography. If anything, Hardoon's life brings the hybrid choices of individual actors to the fore, which actually point to the modernizing potential of transimperial settings, particularly in their urban form.

3. Further, Silas Hardoon's biography helps to contour more closely the consequences of multi-imperial agency on the ground. Rather than a single colonizing

³³ Lambert, "Concept," 30–33; Ulrike von Hirschhausen, "A New Imperial History? Programm, Potenzial, Perspektiven," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41 (2015), 734–37. See also Rolf and Aust, *Eliten*; Aust, Martin and Fritjof Benjamin Schenk, "Imperial Subjects." *Autobiographische Praxis in den Vielvölkerreichen der Habsburger, Romanovs und Osmanen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2015.

government, there were multiple imperial powers at work in nineteenth- and mid-twentieth-century Shanghai. The consequence of the treaty port system was that several municipal regimes were in power in close proximity, all competing with each other. This created a variety of overlapping or rival legal orders, hybrid financial instruments, and varying cultural offerings. Local agents, be they Westerners or certain groups of Chinese society, profited from the transimperial order economically and culturally. Instead of strengthening the colonizing force, the presence of several empires, including the Chinese, actually weakened any collective imperial might and made a stronger local agency viable. Silas Hardoon was able to profit economically and culturally from this transimperial constellation just as the Chinese native place associations, to cite another example, were able to take over political responsibility in the absence of a strong unified municipal force. A decisively transimperial context with the political fragmentation it entails seems to provide a broader arena of possibilities to a semi-colonized society than direct confrontation with one single imperial power allowed for.

4. Transimperial relations and ruptures are by no means to be found only along imperial borders, in wars, or monarchical festivities, to name just some familiar sites of such encounters.³⁴ Hardoon's life in Shanghai can serve as an example for areas where empires overlap, cooperate, confront each other or other states, and where statehood often became fragmentized beyond the familiar picture of empire or nation-state. Transimperial encounters can equally take place in a single site claimed by different imperial or national powers, or peopled by different colonized groups. China's treaty ports, in particular Shanghai, were spaces shaped by interactions, competitions, and cooperations between Western empires and the Chinese Empire and later Republic. India's princely states also became zones of contested sovereignty, where rulers and administrators presented alternatives to British colonial modernity, sometimes resulting in an overlapping of various imperial and non-imperial judicial systems.³⁵ Alternatively, transimperial connections could unfold equally well in one imperial center where colonized migrants came in and developed anti-imperial stands, as in Paris during the 1920s and 30s.³⁶ In Brussels, for example, several imperial governments founded the International Colonial Institute, where colonial practices of rule were discussed between 1893 and the

³⁴ Paulmann, Johannes, *Pomp und Politik. Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg*, Paderborn 2000; Bühner, Tanja et al. (eds.), *Imperialkriege von 1500 bis heute. Strukturen, Akteure, Lernprozesse*, Paderborn 2011; Pešalj, Jovan et al. (eds.), *Borders and mobility control in and between empires and nation-states*, Leiden 2022.

³⁵ Eric Beverley, "Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, c.1850–1950," Cambridge 2015.

³⁶ Michael Göbel, "Anti-imperial Metropolis. Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism," Cambridge 2015.

1980s, not the least to prevent colonies from becoming independent.³⁷ In light of these empirical realities, we need a new sensitivity for historic spaces that do not belong to one empire or nation-state, but rather lie at the crossroads of different political regimes or their manifestations. Restoring the local to transimperial questions can shed new light on the permeability and fluidity of imperial borders and boundaries and deconstruct any idea of empire as a totalizing power.

This chapter has aimed to sketch new avenues for transimperial research by introducing a formally colonized agent and his rather static life course in a both semi-colonial and transimperial treaty port in the early twentieth century. The margins of sovereignty were left to the Chinese government while Western imperial powers simultaneously exerted control through municipal regimes in Shanghai's Western concessions. In a semi-colonial setup such as this, even the biography of a rather static broker such as Silas Hardoon has the potential to shed light on the logics and mechanisms of transimperial contexts. The very existence of multiple powers rather than one single colonial authority produced a political fragmentation and a cultural variety that local agents used to enlarge their individual autonomy. Thus, the future agenda of the New Imperial History should include the restoration of non-mobile biographies to the exploration of transimperial contexts and their ambivalent modernizing potential.

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³⁷ Florian Wagner, *Colonial internationalism and the governmentality of empire, 1893-1982*, Cambridge 2022.

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‘Agir à l’anglaise’: Britain, France, and Russia in the Imperial Mirror, 1814–1914

Alexander Morrison

Abstract

While earlier literature on the Russian empire assumed that it was *sui generis*, recent texts have shown manifold linkages with other empires. This chapter focuses on the work of Russian military officers. It shows how through visits to other empires, through studies of texts written in other empires, and through informal and institutional links with other military and non-military institutions, they created a body of knowledge about best military and administrative practices that could be used in Russia—while also showing how Russia differed. The chapter also looks at how non-Russian, e.g. British and French, officers thought about Russian imperial military practices.

Keywords: transimperial, Military officers, Russia, Britain, France

‘Ici il faut agir à l’anglaise, et cela d’autant plus que c’est contre les Anglais qu’on agit.’

—V. A. Perovskii, 1840.¹

The British and Russian empires were long understood to have been imperial rivals in nineteenth-century Asia, playing out a lengthy competition for territory, trade, and influence which is invariably known as the ‘Great Game.’ A similar relationship is usually held to have existed between Britain and France in Africa and Southeast Asia, although it has not generated such persistent historical clichés. More recent scholarship has begun to emphasize the awareness of all three great powers and their smaller German, Dutch, Belgian, and Portuguese colonial counterparts that they were engaged in a common European ‘civilizing’ enterprise, while their ruling elites studied and borrowed from each other’s techniques of imperial control, rule, and conquest.² This was certainly true of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus

¹ Perovskii to Bulgakov, February 4, 1840, “Pis'ma grafa V.A. Perovskogo k A. Ya Bulgakovu,” *Ruskii Arkhiv* (1878) No.7 Letter 9, 309.

² See in particular the essays in Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (ed.) *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer 1870 – 1930. Empires and Encounters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). For a systematic exploration of borrowings and commonalities between British and French imperialism, see Berny

and Central Asia, which looked repeatedly to the British and French empires as exemplars, both during the period of initial conquest and in the establishment of a colonial administration in these Asian border regions. This paper will seek to explore some of these borrowings, as well as give some examples of the reciprocal influence which Russia had on its western European rivals.

Much earlier literature on the Russian Empire assumed that it was *sui generis*, an anomaly which shared little or nothing in common with either its European or its Asian counterparts.³ This understanding ultimately derives from Soviet scholarship, in which the willingness of the 1920s ‘Pokrovskii School’ of historians to critique Russian colonialism in the same terms as British or French was suppressed under Stalin.⁴ Instead, a new orthodoxy was forged which decreed that Russia was free from the European sin of colonialism, something practised only by bourgeois states—the ‘friendship of peoples’ was projected from the Soviet present back into the Tsarist past.⁵ This has changed significantly in the last twenty years, and there is now a rich historiography which both compares Russia with other European empires, and which has begun the still more complex task of establishing how they learnt and borrowed from each other.⁶ This has been particularly valuable in exploding the idea of a Russian *Sonderweg* (*osobyi put’*)—an imperial experience that has nothing in common with that of other empires—something that can be traced back to nineteenth-century Slavophile and twentieth-century Eurasianist thinking on Russia as a distinct civilization which was neither European or Asian.⁷ Most historians of imperial Russia no longer accept these Soviet-era claims of

Sèbe *Heroic imperialists in Africa: The promotion of British and French colonial heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

³ This tendency is visible even in Geoffrey Hosking’s rightly admired *Russia, People and Empire 1552 – 1917* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), and to a lesser degree in Andreas Kappeler’s *The Russian Empire, a Multi-Ethnic History* (London: Longmans, 2001).

⁴ Alexey Golubev, “No natural colonization: the early Soviet school of historical anti-colonialism,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol.65 No.2 (2023), 190–204.

⁵ Lowell Tillet *The Great Friendship. Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

⁶ Martin Aust “Rossiia i Velikobritaniia: vneshniaia politika i obrazy imperii ot Krymskoi Voyny do pervoi mirovoi Voyny,” in *Imperium inter pares: rol’ transferov v istorii Rossiiskoi Imperii 1700-1917* ed. Martin Aust, Ricarda Vulpius and Alexei Miller (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010), 244–65. A comparative approach which still yields many instances of inter-imperial transfer can be found in Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (ed.) *Imperial Rule* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2003).

⁷ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky “The Emergence of Eurasianism” *California Slavic Studies* Vol.IV (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 39–72; Seymour Becker “Russia between East and West: The Intelligentsia, Russian National Identity and the Asian Borderlands,” *Central Asian Survey* Vol.10 (1991), 47–64; Marlène Laruelle *l’Idéologie Eurasiste Russe ou Comment Penser l’Empire* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999) and most recently Jane Burbank and Frederick. Cooper *Post-Imperial Possibilities: Eurasia, Eurafrica, Afroasia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 45–88.

Russian exceptionalism. The role of foreign expertise in the Russian Empire has long been clear when it comes to culture and technology, and it is simply implausible that such trans-imperial transfers would not exist in the intellectual, administrative, legal, or military realm as well. Just as Tchaikovsky's ballets were choreographed by the Frenchman, Marius Petipa, and steamers built in Newcastle were the first to navigate the Aral Sea, so Russian statecraft drew extensively (though not exclusively) on the British and French colonial experience in areas as varied as ethnography, religion, irrigation, public health, and, perhaps most importantly, the understanding of the general norms of behavior and rule for a European 'Great Power.' When the *Institut Colonial International* was established in Brussels as a think tank for the mutual exchange of ideas between colonial empires, it was natural that Russia would be a founding member.⁸

This short chapter will only cover a limited selection of examples of these trans-imperial comparisons and transfers, but the character of those making them should be clear even so. They were overwhelmingly male, and most of them were military officers, reflecting the fact that Russia's colonial territories in Asia were largely under the control of the Ministry of War. While their interest in and borrowings from other imperial settings often cropped up in private correspondence and memoranda, their published writings appeared most commonly in specialized military journals—notably *Voennyi Sbornik*, the Ministry of War's official forum for long-form reflections on the military art—but also in prestigious so-called 'thick' journals such as *Vestnik Evropy*, which played an important opinion-forming role within the Russian elite. They wrote partly for career advancement, but also out of a genuine belief that they could educate their fellow officers and officials and improve Russian governance of non-Russian peoples by promoting ideas and expertise from the British and French empires. This group was particularly well-placed to absorb and disseminate trans-imperial knowledge. Military knowledge—of weapons, technology, and tactics—similarly crossed political boundaries, and any ambitious officer who wanted promotion or a staff appointment would be obliged to familiarize himself with works in English, French, and German, which were the main languages of exchange. Fact-finding missions or espionage were a logical extension of this, and might be undertaken with official sponsorship or independently as a means of attracting favorable notice from one's superiors. While they were members of an elite, those who were born into this status were not always the most thirsty for knowledge—aristocratic security could breed

⁸ Ulrike Lindner "New forms of Knowledge Exchange Between Imperial Powers: The Development of the *Institut Colonial International* (ICI) Since the End of the Nineteenth Century," in *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer* ed. Barth and Cvetkovski, 67; Florian Wagner *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

lassitude and lack of intellectual curiosity. Instead, it was often those from humbler backgrounds using the military as a pathway into the imperial ruling elite who were the most assiduous in their pursuit of trans-imperial knowledge as a means of advancement. The means for this were abundant, as the knowledge economy of nineteenth-century Europe was in many ways remarkably open. All European military establishments had their equivalents of Russia's *Voennyi Sbornik*, such as the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* in Britain, which frequently published translations from the former, and a similar reciprocal relationship existed between the Royal Geographical Society's *Journal* and *Proceedings* and the *Vestnik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestvo*, the Journal of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, which published translations of each other's articles on their respective colonial possessions in Asia. The institutional links between European armies were often strong, as neutral observers were permitted to accompany campaigns, or officers visited on exchanges in peacetime—this was particularly true of links between the Russian and French armies, especially after their formal alliance from 1890. Meanwhile, the boundary between military and other forms of knowledge was never firm, even less so when it concerned questions of imperial governance and control that were intimately linked to it. While by no means all trans-imperial transfers in Russia took place under military auspices, the Russian army certainly played a dominant role. This chapter will present a necessarily limited selection of the evidence for these transfers, before turning to the ways in which Russia influenced French and British imperial practice, and some consideration of Russian official attitudes to its Asian imperial neighbors—the Ottoman Empire, Qing China, and Meiji Japan.

France as an Exemplar

Writing in 1835, Vasilii Perovskii, the Russian governor of Orenburg—the main center of Russian power in the South Urals and the Steppe frontier—invoked the notorious *casus belli* which had been used as an excuse for the French expedition to Algiers in 1830 as a justification for the attack which he was urging on the Khanate of Khiva:

The guilt of the Dey of Algiers against the King of the French pales into insignificance in comparison with the crimes carried out by whole generations of Khivan Khans against the Emperors of Russia [...] there a single, momentary, and in reality bloodless insult to the Consul; here in the course of a whole century constantly accumulating perfidy which increases day by day, deliberate malice, robbery, banditry and disrespectful abuse of Majesty; [...] France demanded millions for the conquest of Algeria, and has retained for all

time her conquests beyond the restitution of what she has spent. For Russia the conquest of Khiva would not cost one tenth of this; but all of Central Asia would be revived, would rise up from its torpor with the introduction of an educated, beneficial government.⁹

His urgings were successful, although owing to the logistical difficulties involved (principally securing sufficient camels), the expedition would not depart until 1839. By then, the East India Company's invasion of Afghanistan had provided it with both a new purpose and a new model—Perovskii resolved to imitate the British in installing a puppet ruler on the throne of Khiva, just as they had done with Shah Shuja ul-Mulk: this was what he meant by *agir à l'anglaise*. The Khiva expedition ended in disaster, at least partly because Perovskii's desire to imitate the aggression of Russia's imperial peers led him to overreach and ignore local informants, but this did nothing to blunt the sense that Russia was engaged in a wider imperial contest.¹⁰ This was not the direct competition with Britain for influence and territory implied by the 'Great Game' narrative, but a clear imperative to behave (and to be seen to behave) as a 'Great Power,' making use of a set of shared imperial norms, of which one of the most important was to secure the submission and obedience of lesser, Asiatic or African powers on the imperial frontier as an end in itself, often regardless of any wider strategic or economic concerns.¹¹ In the period between the Congress of Vienna and the Crimean War, when Russian land power in Eurasia was largely unchallenged, the perceived insolence of 'Asiatic' states such as Khiva was the focus of Russian anxieties—they had to be punished and subdued to uphold imperial prestige in the eyes of other Asian peoples and states, and also to avoid perceptions of weakness in the eyes of Russia's imperial rivals. After the Crimean war, following Russia's humiliation in that conflict, these anxieties over imperial prestige became still more acute. The sentiments of competitive emulation expressed in Perovskii's memorandum became a constant factor in Russian imperialism in Asia.

This awareness of being engaged in a common but competitive imperial enterprise would crop up repeatedly in Russian thinking as the century progressed, sometimes with an emphasis on the need to copy 'best practice' from other European imperial powers, sometimes with a greater emphasis on Russian exceptionalism and the possibility of improving on the experience of the empire's

⁹ "‘Zapiska o snosheniyakh Rossii s Khivinskim khanstvom i o protivnykh narodnym pravam postupkakh khanov Khivinskikh protiv Rossii’, Perovskii to Chernyshev, 7/01/1835,” in A. G. Serebrennikov *Sbornik materialov dlya istorii zavoevaniya Turkestanskogo kraya Vol.I 1839g.* (Tashkent: Tip. Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga, 1908) Doc.6, 28.

¹⁰ See Alexander Morrison, "Twin Imperial Disasters. The Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British Official Mind, 1838 – 1842," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.48 No.1 (2014), 253–300.

¹¹ I develop this argument more fully in Alexander Morrison *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia. A Study in Imperial Expansion 1814 – 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Western rivals, but always with the latter's colonial policies and practices as an implied or explicit benchmark. As the previous example suggests, France was often seen as an exemplar despite Napoleon's defeat by Russia in 1814: its cultural prestige for the Russian elite remained undiminished in the 1820s and 30s, while from the 1840s onwards, French power began to reassert itself more decisively on the international and imperial stage. The appeal of Algeria can be seen in the overt comparisons which Russian observers made between their treatment of the great Caucasian resistance leader, Imam Shamil, captured in 1859, and that of the Algerian leader, 'Abd al-Qadir, who had surrendered to French forces in 1847: both became in some sort celebrities in captivity, paraded before the respective publics of the two empires as 'fanatical' leaders who were now thoroughly tamed and domesticated, and as examples of humane and honorable treatment of the defeated enemy.¹² As Vladimir Bobrovnikov has shown, the system of *voenno-narodnoe upravlenie* or 'military-popular administration,' first introduced in Daghestan in 1860 and then used in an adapted form across all newly conquered Muslim territories in the Caucasus and Central Asia, was explicitly modeled on the *Bureaux Arabes* which had been introduced in 1848 in French Algeria, the logic being that the Russians were faced with similar colonial challenges in managing wild and untamable regions unsuited to civilian governance.¹³ In the period 1873–1874, the then Captain Alexei Kuropatkin (later Russian Minister of War from 1898 to 1904) was sent on an official mission to the French Army in Algeria, producing a report on civil and military administration there in which he commented admiringly on the French system of maintaining a permanent force of camels for desert expeditions and recommended its adoption in Central Asia.¹⁴ Kuropatkin also showed a particular interest in the *Bureaux Arabes* in the colony's Saharan territories, which he described as a form of '*voenno-narodnoe upravlenie*.' He described their structures and operations in detail, as well as the justifications for using this form of military rule:

Members of the military-popular administration in Algeria, who have spoken against the usefulness of this forced reallocation of territory and people from military to civilian authority, assert that this reallocation is almost exclusively formal, and consists of the replacement of administrative personnel, made up of individuals with military titles (commandants of military circles and officers of the bureaux arabes) with civilian officials,

¹² Austin Jersild *Orientalism and Empire. North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 20–21.

¹³ Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Russkii Kavkaz i Frantsuzskii Alzhir: sluchainoe skhodstvo ili obmen opytom kolonial'nogo stroitel'stvo," in *Imperium inter pares*, 182–209; Alfred J. Rieber ed., *The Politics of Autocracy. Letters of Alexander II to Prince A. I. Bariatinskii, 1857–1864*, (The Hague, Mouton, 1966), 68–71.

¹⁴ A. N. Kuropatkin *Alzhiriya* (St Pb.: Tip. V. A. Poletiki, 1877), 285–309.

most of them only recently returned from France and not knowing either the country, nor the native population of Algeria. They assert that for the Arabs and Kabyles, who are warlike by nature and only respect force, commandants from among the officer class will long continue to have greater weight than civilian officials.¹⁵

He would later use exactly the same arguments to prevent any move from military to civilian administration in Russian Turkestan, referring to the unhappy results that this had produced in Algeria.¹⁶ As this suggests, once Russian colonialism in Central Asia and the Caucasus shifted from conquest to rule, there was a growing interest in French techniques of colonial administration, and in particular their management of what Russian officials called the 'Muslim Question' in these territories.¹⁷ In 1898, a Sufi religious leader known as the Dukchi *Ishan* led his followers in an attack against the Russian garrison of Andijan, at the eastern end of the Ferghana valley.¹⁸ Though the uprising was easily suppressed, it prompted a wave of paranoia about the dangers posed by Sufi 'sects' (*Dervishizm* and *Miuridizm*, as the Russians called it), reflected in this passage from a handbook on Islam prepared in the uprising's aftermath and distributed to all district commandants in Turkestan:

In conclusion we cannot fail to answer directly the question which arises unwillingly for every Russian with the memory of the recent sad events in Ferghana: how dangerous is Sufism to us with its Ishans? The recent history of so-called Miuridizm in the Caucasus, the development of Sufism in Turkey and the current state of Dervishizm in Africa are all too well-known to every educated man to need further circulation. They serve as an excellent illustration of the vitality and strength of Sufism.¹⁹

'Dervishizm in Africa' was a reference to the Sanussiyya brotherhood, and was based on the French military ethnographer, Louis Rinn's *Marabouts et Krouan*.

¹⁵ A. N. Kuropatkin 'Alzhiriya: voenno-statisticheskii obzor' *Voennyi Sbornik* (1876) No.6, 405.

¹⁶ Dmitrii Vasil'ev *Bremia Imperii. Administrativnaia politika Rossii v Tsentral'noi Azii. Vtoraia polovina XIX v* (Moscow, Politicheskaiia Entsiklopedia, 2018), 483.

¹⁷ See Elena Campbell *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 84–105, and for a comparative exploration, David Motadel, "Introduction," in *Islam and the European Empires* ed. David Motadel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–31.

¹⁸ See Alexander Morrison 'Sufism, Panislamism and Information Panic. Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the aftermath of the Andijan Uprising' *Past & Present* No.214 (2012), 255–304.

¹⁹ V. I. Yarovoi-Rabskii, "'Kratkii obzor sovremennogo sostoyaniya i deyatel'nosti musul'manskogo dukhovenstva,'" in *Sbornik Materialov po Musul'manstvu* ed. V. I. Yarovoi-Rabskii Vol.1 (St Petersburg, Tip. M. Rosenoer, 1899), 28.

Etude sur l'Islam en Algérie, published in Algiers in 1884, which was extensively referenced in the text.²⁰ This interest, it appears, was reciprocated by Rinn, who in 1903, published a short paper on the Central Asian Naqshbandiyya, whom he characteristically stated “make up an integral part of the great Panislamic union, at the head of which stands the Sanussiyya.”²¹ As Rinn’s remark suggests, French and Russian colonial officials saw not just parallels but connections between their respective colonized Muslim populations. In 1900, the Russian ministry of foreign affairs began requesting regular reports from its consuls across the Muslim world—Bombay, Constantinople, Jeddah, Tehran, Algiers, and Tangier—on possible Pan-Islamic contacts with the Muslims of the Russian Empire, prompting a series of increasingly lurid and paranoid responses.²² Rinn was also far from the only French author to make the connection between the challenges France faced from Sufi *tariqas* in North Africa, and those faced by Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In 1912, for instance, the prestigious *Revue du Monde Musulman*, the journal of the French scientific mission in Morocco, published an extensive survey of what the author, using the Russian term, called ‘Muridism’ (i.e., Sufism) in the Caucasus.²³ Based largely on Russian sources, this reproduced in exactly the same terms the Russian military’s belief that it was the secretive, conspiratorial, and ‘fanatical’ nature of Sufism which had sustained the prolonged resistance to Russian rule in Daghestan and Chechnya between the 1820s and the 1860s.²⁴

France had no direct territorial rivalries with Russia, and her culture and language had long been the most prestigious and attractive for Russian elites. The forging of the Franco-Russian military alliance after 1890, and the related growth of French capital investment in Russia (80% of whose foreign state debt was held by French investors by 1914) would only consolidate this relationship of mutual admiration and exchange.²⁵ In the 1880s and early 1890s, French travelers and journalists were at the fore in reporting on Russia’s newly constructed Transcaspian railway (in modern

²⁰ Rinn (1838–1905) served in the *Bureaux Arabes* in Algeria, and his work examines the threat which Sufi orders posed to French rule in North Africa. See Jean-Louis Triaud *La Légende Noire de la Sanussiyya. Une Confrérie Musulmane sous le regard Français (1840-1930)* (Paris: Editions de la Maison de Sciences de L’Homme, 1995) Vol.1, 347–61.

²¹ Commandant Rinn, “Les Krouane Naqchebendya,” *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d’Alger et de l’Afrique du Nord* Vol.8 (1903), 248–53.

²² Russian Consul in Algiers to Foreign Minister Sazonov, 21/12/1910 Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI) F.147 Op.485 D.902 ‘Panislamizm’ ll.337–8ob.

²³ R. Majerczak, “Le Mouridisme au Caucase,” *Revue du Monde Musulman* Vol.20 (Sept. 1912), 162–241.

²⁴ See Alexander Knysh, “Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm,” *Die Welt des Islams* Vol.42 No.2 (2002), 139–73.

²⁵ Jennifer Siegel *For Peace and Money. French and British Finance in the Service of Tsars and Commissars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

Turkmenistan), the first in Central Asia, while it also figured in one of Jules Verne's lesser-known *Voyages Extraordinaires*, *Claudius Bombarnac*.²⁶ French admiration for the Russian colonial enterprise can also be seen clearly in the prominence given to the Trans-Siberian Railway and to Russia's Central Asian and Caucasian Borderlands at the Paris International Exhibition of 1900, where the French government offered the largest plot on Trocadero Hill to their Russian ally, resulting in a pavilion which showcased Russian modernity, colonial and engineering prowess, and which won the grand prize.²⁷ Meanwhile, Russian interest in French colonial practices continued to be marked by specialized comparative publications. Although the original model for the protectorates that the Russians established in the Central Asian khanates of Khiva and Bukhara was the princely states of British India,²⁸ 1905 saw the publication of a systematic economic comparison between Bukhara and the French protectorate in Tunisia, concluding with a reference to the common European civilizing mission of the two powers in "barbarous Asiatic lands."²⁹ France's attraction as a colonial exemplar for Russian scholars, soldiers, and statesmen thus existed throughout the nineteenth century, but became particularly pronounced in the last two decades before the outbreak of the First World War.

Britain as an Exemplar

Britain was a more overt imperial rival to Russia than France after 1815, and relations between the two empires would be wary if not openly hostile for most of the nineteenth century. Anglo-Russian commercial and diplomatic relations throughout most of the eighteenth century had been largely positive, with Britain's reliance on naval stores from the Baltic meaning that Russia had usually had the upper hand.³⁰ However from the 1830s onwards, the relationship soured, partly because British industrial supremacy changed the terms of trade to Russia's detriment, and

²⁶ Svetlana Gorshenina and Claude Rapin. "Voyageurs Francophones En Asie Centrale de 1860 à 1932," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* Vol.39, No.3 (1998), 361–73; Svetlana Gorshenina, "Une vision marginale des marges: une relecture à travers les idées reçues du voyage à Samarkand de Léon de Beylié," *Études de lettres* Nos.2-3 (2014), 95–122. See, for instance, le Comte de Cholet *Excursion en Turkestan et sur la Frontière Russo-Afghane* (Paris: Plon, 1889); Jules Verne *Claudius Bombarnac* (Paris: Hetzel, 1892).

²⁷ Anthony Swift "Russian National Identity at World Fairs, 1851–1900," in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities* ed. Jeop Leerksen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 125–36.

²⁸ Morrison *Russian Conquest of Central Asia*, 164.

²⁹ A. F. Gubarevich-Radobyl'skii *Ekonomicheskii ocherk Bukhary i Tunisa. Opyt' sravnitel'nogo issledovaniya dvukh sistem proktektorata* (St Petersburg, A. Kirshbaum, 1905), 200–201.

³⁰ Matthew P. Romaniello *Enterprising Empires. Russia and Britain in Eighteenth-Century Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Philip MacDougall *The Great Anglo-Russian Naval Alliance of the Eighteenth Century and Beyond* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2022).

partly because of growing colonial rivalry in Asia. Even more so than for France, Britain's empire was the source of its global power, while unlike most French and Russian colonies, Britain's appeared to be profitable. British colonial methods and techniques thus carried considerable prestige in Russia, something seen as early as 1799 in the creation of a joint-stock charter company to administer Russia's North American territories, in a manner consciously modeled on the Hudson's Bay or East India Companies.³¹ This admiration for British economic prowess was tempered by skepticism regarding the British failure to create settler colonies in the majority of their possessions in Africa and Asia, as for most Russian observers these were the only durable form of colonial rule—this applied particularly to India, where the fact that barely 120,000 Britons ruled over more than 300 million 'natives' was taken as evidence of the inherent fragility of British rule. In 1878, Ivan Minaev, a Russian scholar of Buddhism who had traveled extensively in India, wrote: "There are no colonists here, there are no settled Englishmen here. A third generation Englishman in India is a rarity," which he considered spelled the ultimate doom of British rule.³² This perception was shared by General Alexander Geins, who in the same year advocated a military demonstration towards the Russian frontier with Afghanistan in Central Asia, anticipating that it would provoke a widespread uprising in India (his miscalculation on this point helped to trigger the second Anglo-Afghan War).³³

This was also often accompanied by critiques of British racial prejudice, arrogance, and high-handedness, usually with an implicit or explicit subtext that Russia was exempt from these faults. One of the most celebrated—and certainly the most widely read—Russian accounts of British colonial power in Africa and Asia was the novelist Ivan Goncharov's best-selling travelogue *The Frigate Pallada*. In the course of this celebrated journey in the period 1852–1853 from the Baltic to Japan, Goncharov spent time at Cape Colony, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. It was the latter which provoked his most celebrated critique of British colonial arrogance:

In general the relations of the English with the Chinese, and with other peoples—especially those subject to their rule—are not so much cruel as peremptory, rough, or so coldly contemptuous as to be painful to witness. They do not recognise these peoples as human

³¹ Ilya Vinkovetsky, "The Russian-American Company as a Colonial Contractor in the Russian Empire," in Miller and Rieber (ed.) *Imperial Rule*, 164.

³² I.P. Minaev *Ocherki Tseilona i Indii. Iz putevykh zametok Russkogo* (St Petersburg: Izd. A. F. Panteleeva, 1878) Vol.2, 16.

³³ "Zapiska general-maiora A. K. Geinsa o politicheskom polozhenii i anglichanakh v Indii, o chislennosti i sostoyanii ee voisk, o ee naselenii," 02/04/1878 Russian State Military-Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.1396 Op.2 D.103 ll.42–8—see Alexander Morrison, "Beyond the 'Great Game'. The Russian Origins of the Second Anglo-Afghan War," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.51 No.3 (2017), 700–702.

beings, but as beasts of burden, whom they may, perhaps, refrain from beating. They may tend them—that is, feed them well and pay them fairly and generously, but they do not disguise their contempt for them.³⁴

As Edyta Bojanowska has argued, while Soviet historians presented this as evidence of a straightforwardly anti-colonial agenda in Goncharov's work, such sentiments coexisted with a grudging admiration for and envy of the thrusting and entrepreneurial quality of the British presence he encountered across maritime Asia, and it certainly did not extend to any criticism of Russia's own colonial enterprise in Siberia; denigrating portrayals of non-Europeans as culturally and racially inferior are common throughout Goncharov's work.³⁵ This attitude of moral superiority combined with grudging admiration and a lurking inferiority complex was characteristic of Russian writing about British colonialism. Unlike with France, the Russians generally felt that they had little to learn from the British example in the military sphere—in their view, the 1857 rebellion had demonstrated the foolishness of Britain's policy of relying on 'native troops' for security in India, whatever the cost savings.³⁶ However, when it came to civil and economic questions by the late nineteenth century, British India had become a more common reference point for the Russians than Algeria or other French colonies—the sheer wealth and size of the Anglo-Indian colony, and its central role in sustaining Britain as a world power rendered it an object of fascination for many Russian officials, who cited its civil service, irrigation, and taxation systems as models for Russian rule in Central Asia.³⁷ This continued to be tempered by critiques of British racism—twenty-five years after Goncharov, the military geographer, Mikhail Veniukov, wrote that "We are not Englishmen, who in India strive by no means to mingle with the native races," while Minaev deplored how "white Britons" referred to "black Indians" as "Niggers."³⁸ Thirty years after that, the military Orientalist, Andrei Snesev, also

³⁴ I. A. Goncharov *Fregat Pallada* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Geograficheskoi Literatury, 1957), 383.

³⁵ Edyta Bojanowska *A World of Empires. The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 22–62, 102–103, 220–43.

³⁶ N. P. Ignat'ev, military attaché in London, to the War Minister A. V. Dolgorukov 26/07/1857 in P. M. Shastitko (ed.) *Russko-Indiiskie Otnosheniya v XIX v.* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1997), 105–118; K. Lvovich, "Ocherk Vozmushcheniya Sipaev v Ost-Indii," *Voennyi Sbornik* (1858) No.1, 107–38; Baron A. Tizengauzen, "Voenno-Statisticheskii Ocherk Britanskoi Indii," *Voennyi Sbornik* (1887) No.1, 152–66; No.2: 278–305; A. E. Snesev *Indiya kak Glavnyi Faktor v Sredneaziatskom voprosu* (St Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, 1906), 129.

³⁷ See Alexander Morrison, "Russian Turkestan and the Example of British India," *Slavonic & East European Review* Vol.84 No.4 (2006), 666–707.

³⁸ M. I. Veniukov "Postupatel'noe dvizhenie Rossii v Srednei Azii," *Sbornik Gosudarstvennykh Znani* Vol.3 ed. V. P. Bezobrazov (St Petersburg: Tip. V. Bezobrazova, 1877), 61; Minaev *Ocherki Tseilona*

provided a litany of examples of how the British in India “consider the people they rule over to be inferior intellectually, physically and morally”—but was simultaneously forced to concede that British investments in railways and irrigation in India dwarfed anything the Russians had managed in their own territories, while he was also impressed by the liveliness and extent of the press and publishing industry there.³⁹ In his account of traveling through the subcontinent, another Staff Officer, Vasilii Novitskii, also combined a condemnation of British racism with admiration for what he saw as the economic and technical achievements of the *Raj* in areas such as railway construction, higher education, and print culture.⁴⁰ These lessons would reverberate in Russia’s Central Asian possessions, which were widely seen as most analogous to British India. In 1906, the engineer Stanislav Ostrovskii was sent to India to study the irrigation systems in Punjab and on the Ganges as a model for those that the Russians were building in Turkestan’s ‘Hungry Steppe.’⁴¹ In 1913, General Alexander Gippius, the Governor of Ferghana Province, produced a report entitled *The resolution of the task of decentralising agriculture in British India*, which quoted, amongst others, John Stuart Mill, Sir John Strachey, and Sir Henry Maine, as part of an attempt to both improve revenue collection and potentially allow Turkestan’s provinces greater budget autonomy.⁴²

As this suggests, in the more liberal quarters of the Russian elite, full-blown colonial Anglophilia was not unknown. In 1906, the jurist and Baltic German aristocrat, Baron Boris Nolde, produced an article entitled, ‘England and her autonomous colonies’ for the prestigious ‘thick’ journal *Vestnik Evropy*.⁴³ This was a study of the systems of devolved government in Britain’s white settler colonies, looking mainly at Lord Durham’s 1839 report recommending responsible government for Canada

i Indii Vol.4, 15.

³⁹ Snesev *Indiya kak Glavnyi Faktor*, 37, 64, 139–41. Snesev also edited a collection of articles and translations on the regions surrounding Turkestan which was an important source of information on India for staff officers: A. E. Snesev (ed.), *Svedeniya kasayushchiyasya Stran, sopredel'nykh s Turkestanskim Voennym Okrugom* (Tashkent: Tip. Shtaba Turk. Voennogo Okruga 1898–1900) 19 vols.

⁴⁰ V. F. Novitskii *Voennye Ocherki Indii* (St Pb.: Tip. Shtaba Voisk Gvardii, 1899); V. F. Novitskii *Iz Indii v Ferganu* (St Petersburg.: Tip. Imp Akademii Nauk, 1903); A. E. Snesev *Indiya kak Glavnyi Faktor v Sredne-Aziatskom Voprose* (St Petersburg: A. Suvorin, 1906).

⁴¹ S. F. Ostrovskii to the Russian Consul in Bombay, A. A. Polovtsov (n.d., 1906) in P. M. Shastitko (ed.) *Russko-Indiiskie Otnosheniya v 1900 – 1917g.* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1999), 201; S. V. Chirkin *Dvadsat' let sluzhby na vostoke. Zapiski tsarskogo diplomata* (Moscow: Russkii put', 2006), 177; S. F. Ostrovskii *Irrigatsionnye sistemy Indii* (St Petersburg: Tov. Golike & Vil'borg, 1907).

⁴² “Reshenie zadachi detsentralizatsii zemskogo khozyaistva v Britanskoi Indii,” 30/09/1913 Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan (TsGARUz) Fond I-1 Op.27 D.1526 ll.34–36.

⁴³ B. E. Nol'de, “Angliia i ee avtonomnye kolonii,” *Vestnik Evropy* (1906) No.9, 5–67; on Nolde, see Peter Holquist, “Dilemmas of a Progressive Administrator: Baron Boris Nolde,” *Kritika* Vol.7 No.2 (2006), 241–73.

and the granting of this by the Act of Westminster in 1867. As David Macdonald has suggested, Nolde's main purpose was to emphasize the need for responsible government in Russia, with ministers appointed by and answerable to the legislature rather than the monarch.⁴⁴ Nowhere was this colonial Anglophilia seen more clearly than in the attempt by Senator Count Konstantin von der Pahlen to create a codified system of *Shari'a* for Turkestan on the basis of 'Anglo-Muhammadan Law' (see appendix). Pahlen was also a member of the Baltic German nobility, whose father had been a notably reactionary Minister of Justice under Alexander III. He himself had more liberal tendencies, expressed when he was governor of Vil'na province in his advocacy of equal civil rights for Jews and the abolition of the Pale of Settlement.⁴⁵ He had been dispatched to Russian Turkestan on a tour of inspection and reform in the period 1908–1909. From the outset, he was explicit about the need to draw upon the Indian example in his recommendations:

These insufficiencies present themselves especially clearly on comparison of our system for ruling the area with that of other Governments over Asiatic possessions, especially with the most prominent and extensive – the British Indian Colony. [...] this situation presents itself particularly starkly when the powers of the head of the Turkestan Krai are compared with those of the Governor-General of India.⁴⁶

Pahlen was building on earlier interest in the British management of Muslim law, represented by General Nikolai Grodekov's translation (from English) of a key juridical text in Anglo-Muhammadan law, the *Hidaya*, in 1893 for use by Turkestan's administrators.⁴⁷ In the event, however, his proposal was a debacle—the Congress of *qazis* which Pahlen summoned to discuss these proposals rejected them out of hand, stating that the *Shari'a* they were presented with in these poorly translated Anglo-Indian colonial texts bore no resemblance to the law as they currently practiced it.⁴⁸ As this shows, while the Russians and their French and British coun-

⁴⁴ David Macdonald, "Whig History with a Russian Accent: B. E. Nol'de, Russian Liberalism, and the problem of Responsible Government, 1906," Unpublished MS, cited with the kind permission of the author.

⁴⁵ *Tainaya dokladnaya zapiska Vilenskago gubernatora [graf K. K. Palen] o polozhenii evreev v Rossii*. Izd Vseobshchago evreiskago rabochii soiuz v Litve, Pol'she i Rossii (Geneva: Tip. Bunda, 1904).

⁴⁶ "Kratkii Vsepoddanneishii Doklad K. K. Palena o revizii Turkestanskogo Kraya. Chernovik," 1909 Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) F.1396 Op.1 D.437 ll.30–34, 43ob.

⁴⁷ N. I. Grodekov (ed. & trans.) *Khidaya. Kommentarii musul'manskogo prava* (Tashkent: Tip. S. I. Lakhtina, 1893) 4 Vols.

⁴⁸ See Alexander Morrison, "Creating a colonial Shari'a for Russian Turkestan: Count Pahlen, the *Hidaya* and Anglo-Muhammadan Law," in Barth and Cvetkovski (ed.) *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer 1870 – 1930*, 127–49.

terparts might have believed in the ‘interoperability’ of their respective imperial systems, the local politics, society, and culture of colonized regions mattered more, and could easily stymie this.

Russia as an Exemplar

To what extent was the Russian interest in France and Britain reciprocated? As we have seen, French commentators were often positive about the civilizing effects of Russian rule in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and looked to their experience with Muslim populations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, interest in Russia’s experience in governing Muslim populations seems to have been particularly marked in French North Africa, where even a local Algerian newspaper such as the *Petit Oranais* might publish a letter reflecting on the lessons offered by the experience of Muslim service in the Russian army for French proposals to extend conscription to at least some portion of Algeria’s Arab and Berber population.⁴⁹ There seem to have been limits to French enthusiasm for Russian colonial models however, reflecting their general sense that France stood above Russia (and indeed everywhere else) in the hierarchy of civilizations. In 1903, Dr Alcée Durrieux produced a pair of articles on Russian Turkestan for the Bulletin of the Algerian Geographical Society in which he noted approvingly the Russian decision not to assimilate the ‘Sarts’ and ‘Kirghiz’ of Central Asia or transform them into Russian citizens—possibly making an oblique commentary on the parallel decision to exclude the Muslims of Algeria from French citizenship in 1871. However, although he praised Russian rule in Turkestan and made comparisons between it and British rule in India that were very unfavorable to the latter, he did not extend this to France’s own colonial possessions.⁵⁰ Their British counterparts were even less likely to see the Russian Empire as a model, characterizing it instead as backward and semi-Asiatic, with systems of governance that were derivative of and inferior to western European models—although Francis Skrine, a former Indian Civil Service officer, did write, “That so much of the Russian edifice is built on Anglo-Indian models is the strongest proof of their intrinsic excellence. We were pioneers, and had difficulties to encounter with which our neighbours were never perplexed; they have profited by our experience and mistakes.”⁵¹ Russian officials themselves were well aware of British condescension, as the Russian diplomat, Sergei Chirkin, Acting

⁴⁹ “Lettre de Russie – Le Service Militaire chez les Musulmans,” *Le Petit Oranais* 22/05/1908.

⁵⁰ Dr Durrieux, “Avenir de la Nation Russe en Asie Centrale” & “Les Grands Villes du Turkestan,” *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d’Alger et de l’Afrique du Nord* Vol.8 (1903), 232, 238–40, 248–80.

⁵¹ F.H. Skrine and E. Denison Ross *The Heart of Asia* (London: Methuen, 1899), 414.

Consul-General in Bombay from 1907 to 1910 recalled the extraordinary ignorance of Russia he encountered among officers and colonial officials, which he attributed to their view that Russia was 'half-savage'.⁵² The exception to this apparent indifference was in the military sphere, where Russian campaigns of colonial conquest did call forth admiring sentiments: to some extent, British and French assumptions about Russian 'backwardness' relative to Western Europe translated into admiration for the supposed Russian absence of scruples in inflicting exemplary violence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As early as 1830, the Russian War Minister, Alexander Chernyshev, sent Paris a memorandum "On the usages and Customs adopted in our Eastern Wars," which drew upon the experiences of the recently concluded Russo-Persian War.⁵³ This was used by the French government in their preparations for the expedition to Algiers, which would in turn, as we have seen, be cited by Perovskii as a justification for the invasion of Khiva, thus neatly completing the imperial feedback loop.⁵⁴ Seventy years later, Colonel Charles Callwell, the closest thing that the British Army had to a military guru in the early 1900s, cited Russia's Central Asian campaigns as a pre-eminent example of what he called the use of 'moral force'—by which he meant rapid blows to cow and overawe an inferior enemy—in his standard textbook *Small Wars, Their Principle and Practice*:

In the Russian campaigns in Central Asia it has generally been the same. Energy and resolution have been the watchword. The procedure has been rather to overawe the enemy by a vigorous offensive than to bring against him a mighty force, and the result speaks for itself. Prestige is everything in such warfare. It is the commander who recognizes this, and who acts upon it, who conquers inferior races absolutely and for good.⁵⁵

Callwell's enthusiasm extended to the tactics of General Mikhail Skobelev, who notoriously ordered the massacre of 8,000 fleeing Turkmen after the fall of their fortress at Gök-Tepe. Callwell's admiration for Russian violence was shared by Lord Curzon, later Viceroy of India, who on his visit to Russian Central Asia in 1889, observed that "there can be no doubt that the Russian tactics, however deficient

⁵² Chirkin *Dvadtsat' let sluzhby na vostoke*, 170.

⁵³ Sébastien Haule "...us et coutumes adoptées dans nos guerres d'orient": L'expérience coloniale russe et l'expédition d'Alger," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* Vol.45 Nos.1/2 (2004), 293–320.

⁵⁴ "Zapiska o snosheniyakh Rossii s Khivinskim khanstvom i o protivnykh narodnym pravam postupkakh khanov Khivinskikh protiv Rossii," Perovskii to Chernyshev, 7/01/1835, Serebrennikov *Sbornik* Vol.1 Doc.6, 28.

⁵⁵ C. E. Callwell *Small Wars, their principle and Practice* 2nd ed. (London: HMSO, 1899), 58. See further, Alexander Morrison, "'The extraordinary successes which the Russians have achieved'. The Conquest of Central Asia in Callwell's *Small Wars*," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol.30 Nos.4–5 (2019), 913–36.

they may be from the moral, are exceedingly effective from the practical point of view.”⁵⁶ The previous year, the French journalist, Napoleon Ney, traveling on the same railway, observed that “our very important possessions in North Africa have a great analogy with the terrain in which General Skobelev had to operate,” and that in consequence, the Russian campaigns in Central Asia “present a special interest for the French reader.”⁵⁷ There is, however, much more research to be done on the reception of Russian imperial ideas in the British, and particularly the French case: certainly the British assumption that they had nothing to learn from Russia may not always have been borne out in practice.

John MacKenzie has noted the prominence of German expertise in the British Empire in scientific areas such as forestry, agriculture, and the management of the natural world where British higher education lagged behind.⁵⁸ As Moritz von Brescius has shown, from the 1840s and 1850s, partly thanks to the example and publications of Alexander von Humboldt, German science and linguistic and scientific training had become particularly prestigious within Europe, although the recruitment of experts from this source was not uncontroversial in British colonial settings.⁵⁹ By the late imperial period, Russia’s own German-modeled scientific institutions were potentially a similar source of such expertise, with the added advantage that unlike Germany, Russia had a territorial empire on a comparable scale to Britain’s, providing a vast field for the testing of ideas and techniques. As David Moon has shown, one indication of this is the important role that Russian agronomists played in introducing hardy and high-yielding forms of wheat from the Black Sea steppes and lower Volga region to the Great Plains of the United States and Canada.⁶⁰ Jennifer Keating has explored how, in the early 1900s, the United States Department of Agriculture turned to Turkestan and Russian imperial botanical expertise when searching for hardier variants of Alfalfa that could cope with extremes of drought and cold on the American plains.⁶¹ Although some of these imperial experts would go on to serve the Soviet regime, the revolutions of 1917

⁵⁶ G. N. Curzon *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question* (London: Longmans, 1889), 86.

⁵⁷ Napoléon Ney *En Asie Centrale A la Vapeur* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1888), 229.

⁵⁸ John Mackenzie, “European Imperialism: A Zone of Co-operation Rather than Competition?,” in Barth and Cvetkovski *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer*, 40–43.

⁵⁹ Moritz von Brescius, “Empires of Opportunity: German naturalists in British India and the frictions of transnational science,” *Modern Asian Studies* vol.55 no.6 (2021), 1936–42; see further *idem German Science in the Age of Empire: Enterprise, Opportunity and the Schlagintweit Brothers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁶⁰ David Moon, *The American Steppes. The Unexpected Russian Roots of Great Plains Agriculture, 1870s–1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶¹ Jennifer Keating, *On Arid Ground. Political Ecologies of Empire in Russian Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 173–74.

scattered educated Russians far and wide across the imperial world of the 1920s, for instance, Vladimir Minorsky, a diplomat and orientalist at the Russian imperial legation in Tehran. After a period at the *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in Paris, he would become a Professor at London's School of Oriental and African Studies from 1932 to 1944, where his publications and his research students played a formative role in the development of Oriental Studies in Britain.⁶² A still more compelling example of the kind of imperial transfer that this produced lies in the career of Sir Boris Uvarov (1889–1970), an entomologist from Ural'sk (now in Kazakhstan) who began his career in Tsarist Central Asia, working mainly in Transcaspia (now Turkmenistan). In Tiflis when revolution came in 1917, the brief British occupation of Transcaucasia saw him emigrate to London, where he became the head of the Anti-Locust research office of the Colonial Office, with responsibility for a vast swathe of desert spaces across British territories in East Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.⁶³ Given the much larger number of often well-educated émigrés from the Russian Empire who settled in France, it seems plausible that some of these scholars and professionals must also have entered French imperial service, though I have not yet tracked down any examples.

Russia and its Asian Neighbors

A further question is whether Russian enthusiasm for the British and French imperial example had any echoes in views of their immediate imperial neighbors in Asia—the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Chinese colonialism in Xinjiang, and Japanese colonialism in Korea and Manchuria. Once again, there is more research to be conducted in this area, but broadly speaking, it seems that the somewhat Orientalist contempt in which Russia was held by France and (especially) Britain was transferred wholesale by Russia to her Asian neighbors. One limited exception lay in Russian interest in Ottoman religious administration. At least one historian has suggested that Russia's own 'confessional state,' which under Catherine the Great sought to create a bureaucratized religious hierarchy for the empire's Muslims which mirrored that for Orthodox Christians, may have been inspired by

⁶² Denis Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia. Orientalism in Diplomacy and Intelligence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 183–87, 212–17; Ilya Gershevitch, "Professor Vladimir Minorsky," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no.1/2 (1967), 53–57; D. M. Lang, "Obituary: Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol.29, no.3 (1966), 694–99.

⁶³ My thanks to Robert Fletcher for alerting me to Uvarov's importance—see Uvarov, Sir Boris Petrovich (1889–1970) V. B. Wigglesworth, revised by V. M. Quirke *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36619>.

Ottoman models.⁶⁴ A more concrete case lies in the work of the Orientalist Nikolai Tornau, which relied heavily on Ottoman sources and seems to have been used as a guide for understanding land tenure in Central Asia.⁶⁵ Russia had a deep and longstanding involvement in Persia which dated from the Treaty of Turkmanchai in 1828, but this was on strictly unequal terms—there was no suggestion from the many Russian officers and scholars who worked in and for the Qajar state that they might have anything to learn from what they saw as a fragile entity that only survived thanks to Russian patronage.⁶⁶

Vigorously modernizing Japan might seem a more likely source of new ideas, and certainly did have some appeal among Russian radicals—Mikhail Bakunin and Lev Mechnikov were deeply influenced by their experiences in Meiji Japan, paradoxically seeing in its vigorous, authoritarian, and state-led reformism a model and inspiration for their own anarchist visions for Russia.⁶⁷ In 1900, the liberal journal *Vestnik Evropy* enthused that:

Japan's active participation in the „concert“ of the great powers in the Far East presents a highly interesting and instructive fact. The modern Japanese Empire, with its new institutions, with its parliament and free press, arose, one might say, before our eyes and has developed and strengthened with remarkable speed since the mid-sixties. The example of Japan clearly showed that the great evil from which the old Asian states are suffering and perishing is rooted not in the people, but in the governments, in their frozen political and administrative organization, based on the complete lack of rights of the population and the unlimited arbitrariness of those in power. Japan shook off these shabby rags, renounced the unfortunate traditions of the past and consciously set out on a new path, under the initiative and guidance of the young emperor and his enlightened advisers; and thanks to the reforms undertaken and implemented, in a short time it achieved such development and prosperity that the leaders and participants in the reform movement themselves had barely dreamed of. Possessing energy, enterprise and broad ambition, the Japanese

⁶⁴ Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar. Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006), 151–52, 354–55.

⁶⁵ Nikolai Tornau, *Izlozhenie Nachal Musul'manskogo Zakonovedeniya* (St Pb., Tip. Imp. Akademii Nauk, 1850) & *O prave sobstvennosti po musul'manskomu zakonodatel'stvu barona N.E. Tornau (posmertnoe izdanie)* (St Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii Nauk, 1882); see Paolo Sartori, “Colonial legislation meets shari‘a: Muslims’ land rights in Russian Turkestan,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.29 No.1, 43–60.

⁶⁶ See Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game. Travelogues and Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 2007) & Moritz Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism – The ideal anarchists 1800 – 1914* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁶⁷ Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

naturally seek space for themselves in the world and, above all, strive to acquire a reliable foothold on the Asian mainland.⁶⁸

However, the sub-text here was not that Japan might serve as a model for Russia, but that Britain's Machiavellian attempts to set up Japanese power as a counter-weight to Russia in the Far East would backfire, while the article went on to note that "Tribal and racial instincts do not disappear and will not work themselves out in two or three decades." Any enthusiasm for Japan as a model was not replicated among Russian state actors, many of whom notoriously underestimated the threat which this rising imperial power posed to them in the Far East, not least because of racist assumptions of innate Japanese inferiority.⁶⁹ In 1900, even so shrewd an observer as Alexei Kuropatkin, who had graduated from observing Algerian camels in the 1870s to become Minister of War, was sure that Russia would emerge victorious from a Far Eastern war, though he predicted that the cost in men and money would be high.⁷⁰ After inspecting the troops on a visit to Tokyo in 1903, he would describe the Imperial Japanese Army in faintly patronizing terms. Although he thought that the men looked reliable, he cast doubt on the quality of NCOs and officers, and emphasized the inferiority of their cavalry. Above all, he thought that they lacked moral fiber compared to the Russians: "The Japanese army are still southerners."⁷¹ They will be ardent in the attack and tenacious on the defensive during the day. But tired, weary, and having suffered several defeats, they will be inclined to panic in night action," while he also considered that in the absence of Christianity, "without religion, without faith in salvation, some individuals might endure the severe trials of the warrior, heavy losses and deprivation, but the masses cannot."⁷² He would discover how wrong he was when he became Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies in Manchuria in 1904. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kuropatkin's retrospective assessment of Japanese military capabilities and morale was much more positive, as he wrote that "in the cooperation of the nation with the army and the government lay the strength which brought Japan

⁶⁸ 'Rol' Iaponii v Kitaiskom voprose' *Vestnik Evropy* (1900) No.8, 831.

⁶⁹ See David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward the Rising Sun. Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 187–95; Bruce W. Menning, "Miscalculating one's enemies: Russian intelligence prepares for war," in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective* ed. David Wolff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), Vol.1, 45–80; I. S Rybachenok *Zakat velikoi derzhavy. Vneshniaia politika Rossii na rubezhe XIX – XXvv* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 536–48.

⁷⁰ Rybachenok *Zakat velikoi derzhavy*, 538.

⁷¹ The term 'Kuropatkin' used here was *iuzhane*, which carries similar overtones of torpor, lassitude, or lack of ardor to those of 'Mediterranean' or 'tropical' in English.

⁷² A. N. Kuropatkin "Dnevnik s 27 maya 1903g. po 6 iunya 1903g," *Rossiiskii Arkhiv* Tom VI (Moscow: Rossiiskii fond kul'tury, 1995), 417, 436–37.

victory,” in stark contrast to Russia. With the benefit of hindsight, Kuropatkin noted the ‘immense condescension’ with which Russian military representatives had viewed Japan, and poured scorn on an unnamed ‘Japanese expert’ who before the war claimed that “one Russian soldier was as good as three Japanese,” but perhaps unsurprisingly did not candidly acknowledge his own misjudgments.⁷³ In the aftermath of the war Russia—like Britain, Germany, and Switzerland—produced an official history which sought to learn lessons from Japanese military and naval success and Russian failure.⁷⁴ This and other Russian publications on the Japanese army and navy sought to analyze their weaknesses and strengths in case of further conflict, but there remained an assumption that specifically Japanese cultural traits were alien, undesirable, and could not be transferred to Russia, while the merits of her military (for which Russian observers now had a hard-earned and healthy respect) derived from its adoption of European training, technology, and tactics.⁷⁵ Kuropatkin’s own pessimistic outlook on Russia’s prospects in East Asia would develop into a racialized fear of ‘the Yellow Peril’ overwhelming Russian and other European civilizing colonial projects in Asia.⁷⁶

Similar racialized contempt informed Russian views of China, which by the same period had become an object of Russian colonialism in Manchuria and Kwantung. Here it was slightly tempered by a respect for the antiquity of the Chinese civilization and statecraft, as well as the long history of more or less equal and cordial relations between the Russian Empire and the Qing from the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, when China was seen above all as an enormous trading market and a repository of valuable knowledge. This was rudely brought to a close by Nikolai Murav’ev’s Amur expedition of 1855 and the subsequent ‘unequal treaty’ of Aigun in 1858, which saw Russia annex the northern bank of the Amur and the Ussuri region.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, an echo of this earlier relationship can be seen in Russia’s grudging decision to

⁷³ General Kuropatkin *The Russian Army and the Japanese War* trans. Capt. A. B. Lindsay (London: John Murray, 1909), Vol.1, 212, 216.

⁷⁴ M. E. Barkhatov and V. V. Funke *Istoriya Russko-Yaponskoi Voiny* (St Petersburg: T-vo R. Golike and A. Vil’borg, 1907-9) 6 Vols; *The Official History of the Russo-Japanese War prepared by the historical section of the Committee of Imperial Defence* (London: HMSO, 1906 & 1909) parts 1 & 2; *The Russo-Japanese War: Reports from Officers Attached to the Japanese Forces in the Field*. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1905-6) 10 vols. E. Reventlow: *Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg: Mit Zahlreichen Text, Illustrationen, Kunstbeilagen und Einer Mehrfarbigen Karte Des Kriegsschauplatzes* (Berlin: C.A. Weller, 1906); Fritz Gertsch: *Vom Russisch-Japanischen Kriege 1904/1905* (Bern: Verlag von Ch. Künzi-Locher, 1907) 4 Vols.

⁷⁵ E.g., V. Nedzvetskii ‘Iaponskaia Armia v 1908 godu’ *Voennyi Sbornik* (1909) No.1, 271–86 & No.2 259–74.

⁷⁶ Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Toward The Rising Sun*, 102.

⁷⁷ On this reversal of the older Sino-Russian relationship, see Gregory Afinogenov *Spies and Scholars. Chinese Secrets and Imperial Russia’s Quest for World Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2020) esp. ch.11.

return the Upper Ili valley to China in 1881, in fulfillment of a commitment made when it was annexed ten years before. The fact that the Chinese could be expected to maintain a stable and orderly frontier, as they had by and large done before the Muslim rebellions of the 1860s which had prompted the Russian annexation, and the unexpected military effectiveness that they had shown in reconquering what would come to be known as Xinjiang meant that these negotiations were conducted in a spirit of surprising equality and good faith.⁷⁸ This did not, however, translate into any admiration for Chinese rule once it was re-established, let alone any desire to emulate it. In China, as elsewhere, other European colonial powers remained the benchmark for comparison for Russian official commentators: in his description of what he described as “our first colony in the far East”—the new Russian commercial and military settlements of Port Arthur and Dal’nii—Colonel Alexander Khvostov, a veteran of the Boxer campaign, was extraordinarily sensitive to criticisms of Russia’s colonial record in the Far East in the English-language newspapers of Shanghai and Hong Kong.⁷⁹ The letters of Russia’s long-serving consul in Kashgar, Nikolai Petrovskii, adopt a tone of constant condescension punctuated with explosive expressions of contempt when describing the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang and his relations with them.⁸⁰ There is of course a long and complex history of Russian influence in and even direct control over Xinjiang in the late Qing and Nationalist periods, but that lies beyond the scope of this chapter.⁸¹

Conclusion

Far from following an imperial *Sonderweg*—land-based, dynastic, or ‘Eurasian’—the Russian Empire was seen as fully comparable with the other two principal European colonial powers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. British and French observers saw their own imperial possessions mirrored in Russia’s Central Asian and Caucasian colonies, and the Russians saw similar parallels in India and Algeria. If the Russian imperial influence on British and French statecraft seems to have been limited to the military sphere (though future research may alter this verdict), Russian transimperial borrowings from the French and British

⁷⁸ See Morrison *Russian Conquest*, 211–12.

⁷⁹ A. Khvostov “Russkii Kitai. Nasha pervaya koloniya na dal’nem vostokey,” *Vestnik Evropy* 1902 No.11, 186.

⁸⁰ N. F. Petrovskii *Turkestanские Pis’má* ed. V. S. Myasnikov (Moscow: Pamyatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2010).

⁸¹ See in particular David Brophy *Uyghur Nation. Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Eric Schluessel *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

empires were extensive, and undertaken in a spirit of both competitive and cooperative emulation. Russia's reliance on French capital for its industrial development in the later nineteenth century is well known—its use of the *Bureaux Arabes* of the Algerian Sahara as the model for its own systems of colonial rule over Muslims in the Caucasus and Central Asia less so. Russia's rivalry with Britain in Central Asia—the so-called Great Game—is a tiresome and persistent historical cliché, but the Central Asian military administration's modeling of the protectorates of Bukhara and Khiva on Anglo-Indian princely states, its fact-finding expeditions to look at Indian irrigation networks, and its attempts to make use of 'Anglo-Muhammadan Law' tell us something significant about the nature of Russian rule.

That said, much of this remained rhetorical: the fact that British, French, and Russian statesmen and soldiers believed that there was a common transimperial repertoire of violence and governance that could be drawn upon and applied indiscriminately to colonial subjects did not mean that this was actually possible in practice. Very often, it simply reflected their own vague and poorly informed ideas about Islam, 'Asiatics,' or 'natives,' with widely different civilizations and peoples subsumed under vague labels that were forms of colonial knowledge. As the late Bernard Cohn would have acknowledged in his less dogmatic moments, when colonial forms of knowledge came up against the social and cultural reality of colonized societies, they frequently crumbled in the face of that challenge—colonial regimes were rarely powerful enough to simply impose them.⁸² This was clearly the case with Count Pahlen's failed Anglo-Indian-derived project of *shari'a* codification, based on a flawed understanding of the universality of Islamic law. French attempts to use the Russian experience with Islam in the Caucasus to help them control North African Sufi brotherhoods seem to have foundered in a similar way. On the other hand, less specific tools of governance, such as the use of indirect rule, seem to have been more readily transferable, as do tools and techniques for managing the natural world such as seed transfers or irrigation technology, though these could have disastrous long-term environmental consequences.⁸³ These conclusions are tentative—in particular, far more research is needed on the place of Russia and its Muslim subjects in the French North African public sphere, on the role of Russian emigrés in the British and French empires after the Revolution, and on the importance of the Russian example for Chinese rule in Xinjiang both before and after the fall of the Qing dynasty. What I hope is clear even from this short paper is the need to integrate Russia fully into comparative histories of nineteenth-century European empire and of transimperial transfers.

⁸² Bernard Cohn *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge. The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁸³ Keating *On Arid Ground*, 72–97.

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Transimperial Fulcrums: Financial Intermediaries in Late-Qing Shanghai

Jiajia Liu and William R. Kelson

Abstract

This chapter aims to integrate Shanghai's history with that of Qing China as a whole, emphasizing Shanghai's significant position as a transimperial bridge connecting the Qing's domestic financial system to the global banking system. Looking at a range of texts including bank chops, the chapter elaborates on the functions and interactions between different types of banking institutions and their transimperial Chinese financial intermediaries. These filled and interpreted the gaps in linguistic, cultural, and financial knowledge separating banks associated with colonial powers from local markets.

Keywords: transimperial, Financial intermediaries, Banking, Shanghai, Qing China. Britain

Introduction: Shanghai as a Transimperial Space

After the British defeat of Qing China (1644–1912) in the First Opium War (1839–1842), Shanghai became a port opened to foreign trade with the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) by the British and Qing empires. That treaty entitled Westerners to “reside, for the purpose of carrying on their mercantile pursuits, without molestation or restraint” in special foreign concessions in select Chinese “treaty ports.”¹ Thereafter, the treaty port of Shanghai handled an increasing volume of Qing imports and exports. By the end of the nineteenth century, Shanghai had grown into the largest harbor in Asia.² As its merchants accumulated large quantities of capital trading tea and silk originally produced in nearby regions, Shanghai ultimately became responsible for about 50% of the Qing dynasty's financial capital stock and transformed into the dominant money market in China by the closing years of the Qing.³

¹ *Treaty of Nanking*, Article 2.

² Michael Schiltz, *Accounting for the Fall of Silver: Hedging Currency Risk in Long-Distance Trade with Asia, 1870–1913* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

³ Thomas Arthur, *Western Capitalism in China: A History of the Shanghai Stock Exchange* (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2001); Frank M. Tamagna, *Banking and Finance in China* (New York: International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1942).

The city's financial strength and its ties to global markets attracted a large number of Western enterprises and financial institutions to the international settlements of Shanghai to assist their "imperialism of free trade."⁴ The British were the first to organize their settlements in Shanghai. The British Queen appointed superintendents, consular officers, and other officers to the acquired British Concession in Shanghai. Incoming British residents also gained extraterritorial privileges, most-favored-nation status, and jurisdiction over their own people in Shanghai through the Treaty of Bogue in 1843. Not long thereafter, the Americans in 1848, the French in 1849, and following them, other Westerners also scrambled for settlements and business opportunities in Shanghai.

Shanghai subsequently became a transnational and transimperial space. The British, Americans, and foreigners of other nationalities all resided within the Shanghai International Settlement (SIS).⁵ The SIS was governed by an independent foreign body, the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC); the French concession was administered by the French consulate in Shanghai.⁶ The SIS left the jurisdiction of the foreigners living there to foreign consulates in China. The council members served as representatives of the foreign nationals residing in the SIS. Their role in the SMC was to administer the SIS and coordinate relations with foreign and local authorities, as well as govern the foreign residents themselves.⁷ Among the nine council members, usually six or seven were British, the rest being American and German.⁸

It was through this transimperial space, namely Chinese treaty ports like Shanghai after 1845, that foreign powers and Western banks entered Qing China. They exercised their financial power by directly engaging in foreign exchange businesses, financing colonial trade with India and Australia, underwriting loans to the Qing Empire, giving credit to Chinese financial institutions, and more.⁹ Moreover, by the end of the nineteenth century, banknotes issued by the foreign banks in

⁴ Arthur, *Western Capitalism*; Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Global Shanghai, 1850–2010: A History in Fragments* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 51. See also the classic text John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* 6 (1953), 1–15.

⁵ Marie-Claire Bergère, *Histoire de Shanghai* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Shanghai Municipal Archives, *The Minutes of Shanghai Municipal Council Volume I*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2001.

⁸ Shanghai Zujie zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Shanghai zujie zhi* [Chronicles of The Shanghai International Settlement] (Shanghai: Editorial Committee of the Chronicles of the Shanghai International Settlement, 2001).

⁹ Frank King, *Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1845–1895* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 98–102; David Sunderland, *Financing the Raj: The City of London and Colonial India, 1858–1940* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013).

Shanghai circulated across Qing China.¹⁰ On the impact of Western banks in the Qing, Frank King claims that Western banks in China predominated the Qing's monetary relations with the world. Both domestic commerce and foreign trade in the Qing depended more upon Western banks than Chinese native banks.¹¹

Existing research on the economic history of Shanghai, however, often separates this coastal commercial and financial city from the vast lands of the Qing Empire. For example, Rhoads Murphey argues that the treaty port economy of the Qing Empire represented by Shanghai was only weakly linked to its hinterland, since the city was organized on Western models and was highly self-sufficient.¹² Lin Man-houng echoes Murphy in arguing that this supposedly stark division between hinterland and port constituted a full-fledged “dual economy” in the late Qing.¹³ Marie-Claire Bergère calls Shanghai “the other China,” making an allusion to “the other France” that was so heavily engaged in foreign trade on the coast and separated itself from the inland agricultural economy of that nation.¹⁴ To Bergère, Shanghai was a “foreign zone” that broke away from the rest of China through its absorption of Western capital and its adoption of Western technologies to achieve its own modernization.¹⁵

Taking a different approach, this paper aims to integrate Shanghai's history with that of the Qing dynasty as a whole, emphasizing Shanghai's significant position as a transimperial bridge connecting the Qing's domestic financial system to the global banking system. At both the institutional and interpersonal levels, Shanghai was not the “other China” as maintained by Bergère. It was the transimperial fulcrum linking late-Qing commerce and finance with that of the rest of the world's empires and nations. As such, this chapter recasts the history of banking in Shanghai from 1842 to 1912 by elaborating on the functions and interactions between

¹⁰ Rhoads Murphey, *The Treaty Ports and China's Modernization: What Went Wrong* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1970).

¹¹ King, *Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1845–1895*; Srinivas Ram Wagel, *Finance in China* (Shanghai North-China Daily News & Herald Ltd., 1914); Linsun Cheng, *Banking in Modern China: Entrepreneurs, Professional Managers and the Development of Chinese Banks 1897–1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹² Murphey, *Treaty Ports*; Linda Cooke Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074–1858* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

¹³ Lin Man-houng, “The Initial Stages of the Modern Economy: Late-Qing Economic Development” [Xiandai jingji de qibu: wanqing de jingji fazhan], in *Liang'an xinbian zhongguo jindaishi: wanqing juan(xia)* [*The New History of Modern China Written by Scholars across the Strait Volume 2*], eds. Wang Jianlang and Huang Kewu, (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016), 578–84.

¹⁴ Marie-Claire Bergère, “The Other China’: Shanghai from 1919 to 1949,” in *Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis*, ed. Christopher Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

different types of banking institutions and their transimperial intermediaries. It aims to answer the question of how domestic and Western banking institutions influenced one another as the banking system developed in the last dynasty, the Qing, in Imperial China.

The transimperial banking intermediaries in this article filled the linguistic, cultural, and information gaps that often separated colonial powers from local markets.¹⁶ Like so many of the other intermediaries studied in this volume, what made late-Qing Shanghai's financial middlemen particularly indispensable was their knowledge base: a unique constellation of information and contacts few others in China possessed. Where foreign bankers in Shanghai were concerned, these intermediaries knew the local language (or languages) and also knew the relative creditworthiness of local and regional businessmen. Conversely, where Qing borrowers were concerned, these intermediaries spoke either English or pidgin and had privileged access to managers at colonial banks in China. Lastly, where statesmen were concerned, the more diplomatically inclined intermediaries maintained personal contacts with both foreign bankers and high-ranking Qing officials, that rarest of combinations. Their information and connections secured, these figures were therefore well placed to serve as China's essential transimperial figures bridging the divide between local, imperial, and global financial systems.

The following sections first lay out the major bank types in Shanghai during the Qing Empire; then examine how financial intermediaries in and between those banking institutions served as transimperial agents; and, finally, examine the key features of transimperial banking in late-Qing Shanghai.

Banks in Shanghai: An Overview

The major bank types in Shanghai during the late Qing period included Chinese native banks, Western banks, and modern Chinese banks, whose businesses, while separate, grew gradually more intertwined.

The two major forms of native banks were *qianzhuang*, which focused on local banking business, and *piaohao*, which played a leading role in interregional and governmental remittance. *Qianzhuang*, literally meaning money (*qian*) houses (*zhuang*), debuted prior to the establishment of the Qing Empire in the middle of the previous

¹⁶ Benjamin Nicholas Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

Ming dynasty (1368–1644).¹⁷ They are believed to have initially been concentrated in the Yangtze Valley, where Shanghai is situated and commercial activities had been highly active, and then to have expanded along the coast of southern China.¹⁸ The main businesses of qianzhuang included deposits, exchange services, and loans. Qianzhuang extended loans with different requirements of means of security, but these loans were mostly unsecured and issued to “fiduciary communities”, “bred through native-place ties” that relied heavily on interpersonal trust within families and between acquaintances.¹⁹ Qianzhuang also provided credit instruments by issuing promissory notes. These banknotes were called *zhuangpiao* in Chinese, literally the bills (*piao*) of money houses (*zhuang*). A merchant who did not have sufficient cash on hand could use such promissory notes to purchase goods.²⁰ The merchant would then arrange a date to repay the qianzhuang the principal and interest. These promissory notes helped merchants and businessmen in Shanghai augment their working capital and expand their trade volumes at the port. Crucially, such credit instruments had not been widely used in Shanghai until the 1820s. They only occurred when the increase in Sino-Western trade called for more convenient methods of payment.²¹

Piaohao, literally meaning shops (*hao*) of bills (*piao*), appeared around the 1820s and functioned as long-distance remittance banks.²² Unlike qianzhuang’s primary functions as a money keeper, money converter, and creditor, the main businesses of piaohao consisted of remittance services between over twenty provinces and the central government, as well as between branches in inter-regional wholesale transactions.²³ Originally based in landlocked Shanxi, the speedy bills of exchange issued by piaohao accelerated the nationwide capital supply and circulation involved in foreign trade by enabling private enterprises to remit money regardless of the distance between active treaty ports and the hinterland.²⁴

¹⁷ Zhaojin Ji, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China’s Finance Capitalism* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

¹⁸ Rajat Kanta Ray, “Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800–1914,” *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 3 (July 1995), 449–54.

¹⁹ Richard von Glahn, *The Economic History of China: From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 386.

²⁰ Yen-p’ing Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth Century China: The Rise of Sino-Western Mercantile Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

²¹ Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China*, 1986.

²² Zhang Guohui, *Wanqing qianzhuang he piaohao yanjiu* [Research on Old-Style Qianzhuang and Piaohao in the Late Qing Dynasty] (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007).

²³ Luman Wang, *Chinese Hinterland Capitalism and Shanxi Piaohao: Banking, State, and Family, 1720–1910* (London: Routledge, 2020).

²⁴ William N. Goetzmann, Andrey D. Ukhov, and Ning Zhu, “China and the World Financial Markets 1870–1939: Modern Lessons from Historical Globalization”; Wang, *Chinese Hinterland Capitalism and Shanxi Piaohao*.

Following the First Opium War, from the 1840s, Western banks began to appear one after another in China, concentrating on the Qing treaty ports. The earliest ones came from British India (Oriental Banking Corporation in 1845, hereafter OBC), London (Chartered Bank of India, Australia, and China in 1858, hereafter CBIAC), Paris (Comptoir d'Escompte de Paris in 1860, hereafter CEP), and British Hong Kong (Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in 1865, hereafter the Hongkong Bank).²⁵ The Hongkong Bank occupied a particularly important position. It became the first exchange bank in Qing China that set the exchange rates in Shanghai based on the London price of silver, fundamentally increasing its foreign remittances business in turn. After operating in Hong Kong and Shanghai for its first twenty years, the bank became the largest Western bank in Qing China by the mid-1880s. By 1887, the Shanghai office of the Hongkong Bank turned into the second most profitable bank branch among all branches of the Hongkong Bank in Asia, closely following its Hong Kong headquarters.²⁶ By contrast, CBIAC suffered from continual yearly losses, showing difficulties in maintaining profits as a Western bank competitor in the final decades of late-Qing Shanghai.²⁷

In addition to the core business of such banks as international remittances, deposits, long-term loans, and banknote issues, Western banks in Qing China also became involved in the local capital market by extending short-term loans. Western banks, led by the Hongkong Bank in the 1860s, began to make such loans to Chinese banking institutions, often small *qianzhuang* that were experiencing a lack of capital. *Qianzhuang*, subsequently, lent those funds received from Western banks on to their Chinese customers in order to sustain their normal business of financing trade and construction.

Qing China's exposure to the West made the Chinese aware of the technological advances happening in Western empires. In the "Self-Strengthening Movement" that took place in Qing China from the 1860s to modernize the country in all aspects, Chinese elites proposed that the Qing government modernize Chinese banks. To the reformists, modern Chinese banks should be compatible with financing the rising national industries on a large scale in the form of joint-stock; and to the nationalists, establishing Chinese-owned banks continued and symbolized the national

²⁵ Song peiyu, *Jindai Shanghai waishang yinhang yanjiu 1847-1949* [The Study of Western banks in Modern Shanghai 1847-1949] (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 2016).

²⁶ Bryna Goodman, "Not a Club for Ethical Culture': The Early Writings of Max Weber, Liang Qichao, and Kang Youwei on the Stock Exchange," *Frontiers of History in China* 10, no. 4 (January 2015), 539-40; Frank H. H. King, Catherine E. King, and David J. S. King, *The Hongkong Bank in Late Imperial China 1864-1902: On an Even Keel*, Volume 1 of The History of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

²⁷ "Profits and Losses: Head Office, Agencies and Branches," 1895-1953, CLC/B/207/CH04/02/02/001, CBIAC, London Metropolitan Archives [hereafter LMA], London, UK.

resistance to the further Western penetration into the Chinese financial system.²⁸ In 1897, the central government allocated 1 million *taels* from the Imperial Board of Revenue as initial working capital to organize a modern joint-stock Chinese bank called the Imperial Bank of China (IBC).²⁹ It had dozens of times more than a normal qianzhuang's capital and a few times more than a normal piaohao's. The IBC directly adopted its regulations from the Hongkong Bank, hired a British banker as the general manager, and employed a few foreign professionals in key positions.³⁰ Due to its commercial nature, the IBC was renamed the Commercial Bank of China in 1913 in the Republican Era. Yet despite the Qing's efforts to organize more modern Chinese banks in its last decade, qianzhuang, piaohao, and Western banks remained the three dominant pillars that supported the banking system of Shanghai. The paid-up capital, deposits, and note issues of qianzhuang at the time amounted to some 218 million taels, and those of piaohao and Western banks some 201 million taels, respectively.³¹

Banking Intermediaries as Transimperial Actors

At the institutional level, the banking system of late-Qing Shanghai was transimperial, including both multinational colonial banks chartered by the British Crown (or Hong Kong colonial government) and domestic banks licensed by Qing imperial officials. Whether scholars treat these "colonial banks" (as they were acknowledged to be by their contemporaries) as an arm of British informal imperialism in China, as do P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, or as "frontier banks," as does Ghassan Moazzin—a descriptor meant to stress their business between colonial, semi-colonial, and independent jurisdictions—these banks operated across empires.³² Yet at the interpersonal level, stark differences remained in the language and business customs between foreign and Chinese bankers.

²⁸ Kong Xiangxian, *Daqing yinhang hangshi* [The History of Daqing Bank] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1991).

²⁹ The Board of Revenue was renamed the Board of Finance in 1906.

³⁰ Cheng, *Banking in Modern China*.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *The Economist* in this period, for instance, writes of foreign banks in China as colonial banks—see "Our Colonial and Foreign Banking Interests in 1883," *The Economist*, October 27, 1883, 1249. See also Geoffrey Jones, *British Multinational Banking, 1830-1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2015* (London: Routledge, 2016), 392-413; and Ghassan Moazzin, *Foreign Banks and Global Finance in Modern China: Banking on the Chinese Frontier, 1870-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

As a result, it fell to a small number of Qing intermediaries to act as the transimperial tissue connecting the two halves of the credit system in China's burgeoning financial center. Between financial institutions and governments, as well as between foreign banks and Chinese banks, credit flowed in Shanghai thanks to culture-crossing figures who bridged the gap between Qing and Western imperial institutions, public and private. Many of these intermediaries were *mai-ban*, or compradors: Qing subjects who were staff heads at foreign merchant or banking houses, whose job it was to liaise between the business worlds of China and non-China, and importantly, who could speak English.³³ An older generation of scholars in the People's Republic of China labeled these figures "running dogs" of capitalist imperialism; historians writing in English have tended to prefer more benign labels, such as "bridges between East and West."³⁴ These opposite perspectives, however, are merely two sides of the proverbial coin. Bank compradors and other bank intermediaries were, in truth, liminal actors who "ran," as it were, not between a generic capitalist West and a stereotypical colonized East, but between empires—mostly the Qing and British, but also the French.

Qing intermediaries naturally profited by greasing the wheels of foreign trade in tea, silk, opium, and cotton goods—the *raison d'être* of British free trade imperialism in treaty port China—but their role was not exclusively one of imperialist collaboration.³⁵ Intermediaries also facilitated flows of sovereign credit, which Qing officials used to pursue their own geopolitical ends (chiefly the reconquest of Xinjiang in the 1870s). And they facilitated flows of interbank credit as well, which, in the end, financed Chinese trade and construction that benefited Qing subjects. At the same time, cross-cultural debt relations were, however, hardly harmonious, and confusion over borrowing and lending practices—and in particular customary guarantorship and bankruptcy—persistently caused friction. Disputes over credit thus periodically landed Qing intermediaries at the unique Sino-foreign Mixed Court of the SIS, an *ad hoc* institution whose essential function was to smooth over the kinks of a multifaceted, transimperial debt relationship.

³³ Kaori Abe, *Chinese Middlemen in Hong Kong's Colonial Economy, 1830-1890* (Routledge, 2017).

³⁴ Two PRC takes are Wang Yanan, *Zhongguo banfengjian banzhimindi jingji xingtai yanjiu* [Research on China's Semi-feudal, Semi-colonial Economy] (Beijing: People's Press, 1957) and Nie Baozhang, *Zhongguo maiban zichan jieji de fasheng* [The Rise of China's Comprador Bourgeoisie] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1979). An inverse view is Yen-p'ing Hao, *The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China: Bridge between East and West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

³⁵ The point is also a theme of Moazzin, *Foreign Banks and Global Finance*. On British trade imperialism, see John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review*, 6, no. 1 (1953), 1–15, and Nathan Pelcovits, *The Old China Hands and the Foreign Office* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

Sovereign Lending, or Hu Xueyan

The most overtly transimperial aspect of this debt relationship was at the state-to-bank level, namely sovereign lending from British institutions in Shanghai to the Qing Empire. In Shanghai's early days as a treaty port, Qing officials were wary of foreign borrowing and took out only short-term, high-interest loans from foreign merchants, such as Russel & Co. or Jardine, Matheson & Co., using the funds to suppress the Taiping and Small Swords Rebellions of the 1850s and 1860s. In the late 1860s and 1870s, however, the difficulty of defending Taiwan against Japanese incursions while simultaneously reconquering Xinjiang from Yakub Beg, whose Muslim armies had expelled Qing forces and established an Islamic state there in the early 1860s, required more intensive foreign borrowing.³⁶ Waiting in the wings was the Hongkong Bank. Its long game in China was to shift from financing foreign trade with international bills of exchange and telegraphic transfers to financing Qing sovereign debt. In their efforts, Hongkong Bank managers gradually established what Cain and Hopkins have called an "awkward alliance" between their bank and the British Foreign Office.³⁷ Prior to 1885, however, when the Qing court at last granted the bank permission to open a branch in its Beijing capital, those foreign bankers had to work through local intermediaries in Shanghai to establish and bolster their "China loan" business.

No financial intermediary was more important to this project than Hu Xueyan. In the long run, Hu's contribution was to cement the Hongkong Bank's informal imperial influence as the leading sovereign lender to the Qing state. But early in his career, he was simply an upwardly mobile bank's apprentice from Hangzhou, near Shanghai, who dreamed of getting rich. Hu first worked at a qianzhuang in his native place, then gradually rose through the ranks, forging extensive official and commercial contacts up and down the Yangtze Valley in the process.³⁸ By the 1870s, he was the proprietor of a silk trading house that dominated Lower Yangtze silk markets, as well as a respected banking establishment, the Fukang Bank, providing interregional payment services to merchants and officials alike. The Fukang Bank and Hu's other "southern piaohao" issued and discounted silver bills of exchange that circulated domestically across branches in Shanghai, Beijing, Fuzhou, Ningbo,

³⁶ Chen Zhengping, *A Brief History of Foreign Debt in China* (Paths International, Limited, 2014), 2–10; Hodong Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and the State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864–1877* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard J. Smith, "The Military Challenge: The Northwest and the Coast," in *The Cambridge History of China*, eds. John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 202–73.

³⁷ Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 392–413.

³⁸ C. John Stanley, *Late-Ch'ing Finance: Hu Kuang-yung as an Innovator* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 1–19, 33–44.

Hangzhou, Hunan, and Hubei.³⁹ Thanks in part to this silver exchange business, and in part to Hu's leading role as a loan broker for the Qing, he eventually earned a reputation as a so-called "living wealth god," before whose rotund likeness in both prints and woodcuts Qing aspirants to riches lit incense and presented symbolic offerings.⁴⁰

Hu's role as a transimperial intermediary began in the 1860s, when the Qing court tasked Zuo Zongtang, Governor-General of Shaanxi and Gansu, with spearheading the dynasty's reconquest of the northwest territory of Xinjiang. Zuo then tapped Hu Xueyan to drum up military loans for the expedition, petitioning at court for the living god to be granted an official title (despite Hu's never having earned a degree under the imperial examination system). In the mid-1860s, Hu began soliciting domestic loans from Qing traders and bankers, secured by customs funds from domestic (rather than foreign-facing) trade. When that home credit source proved a mere "cup of water to douse a burning cart," Hu turned to the managers of the global financial institutions in Shanghai's foreign-ruled SIS—businessmen with far more to lend than partners or proprietors of Yangtze Valley merchant houses.⁴¹

In Shanghai, Hu quickly became a fixture in foreign circles. There he worked first for Governor-General Zuo to broker a pair of six- and ten-month loans in 1867 and 1868 at 1.2 and 1 million *taels*, respectively—loans that yielded a small cohort of Western merchants 0.8% interest per month, and Hu himself 1.3%. Between 1869 and 1870, Hu again worked to raise a military loan, which this time did not materialize; but now his efforts piqued the interest of the Hongkong Bank, whose Court of Directors authorized branch managers in Shanghai to lend up to one million taels to the Qing state in future negotiations with Hu. These new, longer sovereign loans were to be guaranteed by an imperial edict and secured by international customs revenue—soon the model for all bank borrowing on the part of the Qing dynasty.⁴²

After 1875, the length of the loans that Hu negotiated increased. With foreign lenders' trust secured, the transimperial intermediary first negotiated a three-year loan from Jardine, Matheson & Co. and the Crown-chartered OBC, followed by three loans in 1877, 1878, and 1881 from the vaunted Hongkong Bank, with six- and seven-year

³⁹ *Shanxi piaohao shiliao* [Shanxi Piaohao Historical Materials] (Taiyuan: Shanxi People's Press, 2002) [hereafter *SPHH*], 65, 116–24.

⁴⁰ Ellen Johnston Laing, "Living Wealth Gods' in the Chinese Popular Print Tradition," *Artibus Asiae*, 73, no. 2 (2013), 356, 361–62.

⁴¹ *SPHH*, 116–24.

⁴² King, *Hongkong Bank*, 162; Chen, *Brief History*, 11–14; Zongli Yamen to Shanghai officials, Shandu choujie yangyin erbaiwan liang yijie xu chi daoyuan Hu Guangyong deng zunzhao zouan zhi xu choujie yibaiwan liang you ["Rationale for Shaanxi Governor-General Raising Two Million *Taels* in Foreign Loans and Swiftly Ordering Daotai Hu Guangyong to Raise One Million in Accordance with Imperial Memorials"], Archives of the Institute of Modern History [hereafter IMH], Academia Sinica, January 23, 1868, 72–73.

maturities. The Hongkong Bank lent 1.6, 1.75, and 1.26 million taels in these loans to the Qing, respectively, floated at 8–10%, with Hu taking an additional cut of 10–15%.⁴³

Foreign treasure in hand, Zuo's armies in Xinjiang were able to rout Yakub Beg's troops and re-colonize the territory, reincorporating it as a Qing province. Hu's financial intermediation was, to many Qing high officials, the very lynchpin that secured territorial integrity not just for Xinjiang, but for the empire as a whole. With some exceptions, officials in Beijing shared a "domino theory" of sovereign territorial extent: if Xinjiang were "lost," the logic ran, next would fall Mongolia, then perhaps certain provinces, then the dynasty itself would lose the right to rule under the Mandate of Heaven. True or not, policymakers believed it, yet Xinjiang remained a long, long way from Beijing. Thus, the millions of taels that Hu raised were considered essential to Qing territorial integrity, since they provisioned Zuo's expeditionary force of eighty-two battalions (both cavalry and infantry) consisting of 30,000–40,000 troops (excluding horses and pack animals). Man and beast had to travel great distances to meet their foe in Xinjiang. The most expensive aspect of the colonial venture was feeding Zuo's troops. Zuo devoted the bulk of the funds borrowed from the Hongkong Bank to the purchase of grain from Russian merchants. In the Xinjiang oasis towns of Ghulja (Yining) and Gucheng (Qitai) on the old Silk Road, Siberian traders marketed both whole grain and flour to Zuo's agents at war-inflated prices. In 1875 alone, I.O. Kamenskii sold 670,000 pounds of grain to Zuo's men. In the period 1876–1877, the same Kamenskii earned a stunning 400,000 taels from the military grain sales. Qing troops and horses—their bellies now full of grain thanks to Hu's efforts—proceeded, in grim fashion, to ensure that the first "domino" did not fall in the west (or so they believed).⁴⁴

Hu continued brokering sovereign loans for the Qing from the Hongkong Bank until 1884, when the living god was bankrupted in a financial crisis that swept through China. Managers at the Hongkong Bank in Shanghai, suddenly robbed of their most reliable intermediary, now dispatched agents directly to Beijing to meet with Sir Robert Hart, foreign commissioner of the Qing Imperial Maritime Customs Service, in order to compete for China loans floated to finance the Sino-French War (1883–1885). A year later, in 1885, the bank at last opened its Beijing branch, obviating the need for intermediaries such as Hu—that "great friend of the Hongkong Bank," in Hart's telling, who had pioneered the sovereign loan business in China.⁴⁵

⁴³ King, *Hongkong Bank*, 163; Chen, *Brief History*, 11–114; Hu Xueyan to Zongli Yamen, Huifeng hang yangkuan yishi ["The Matter of the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation Foreign Debt"], IMH, December 22, 1878, 121–23.

⁴⁴ Kim, *Holy War in China*, 159–78.

⁴⁵ King, *Hongkong Bank*, 417; Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 396–98.

Prior to Hu's bankruptcy, the Qing had achieved its geopolitical aims, Hu had profited handsomely from his handiwork, and the Hongkong Bank had profited, too—and continued to do so. From the mid-1870s on, China loan earnings at the Hongkong Bank comprised a significant share of the bank's overall earnings. Between 1876 and 1888, income from sovereign lending in China fluctuated year to year but was regularly 20-30% of net earnings, in some years surpassing 50%.⁴⁶ That lucrative business of state was part of what made it possible for the bank's Court of Directors to approve a new share issue in 1883 (even amidst a financial crisis), which doubled the bank's capitalization and secured its place as the wider region's preeminent financial institution.⁴⁷ Whether scholars consider this business “frontier banking” or “semi-colonial banking,” it was clearly transimperial banking, insofar as Hu's intermediation sustained British informal imperial support (via the Hongkong Bank) for Qing imperial ventures.

Interbank Lending, or Wang Huaishan

As the above figures suggest, sovereign lending continued to play an important role in frontier banking and British informal imperialism in China into the 1890s and early twentieth century. Just as essential to this transimperial credit relationship, however—if less overtly political—was bank-to-bank lending. In this case, the indispensable transimperial intermediaries were bank compradors at foreign banks, whose task it was to shepherd regular, profitable flows of short-term call loans from those banks to Shanghai's hundred or so qianzhuang. Beginning with the invention of that credit instrument in the 1860s until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, the short-term call loan remained a mainstay of the financial structure of the empire's central financial city. To secure the repayment of these two- to ten-day loans, foreign bank compradors stamped an interbank promissory note from a qianzhuang with a proprietary red seal, or “chop” (due to which these loans were widely known as “chop loans”): promises to pay in which foreign bankers placed near-complete trust. To them, these chop loans carried 12–28% annualized interest that provided a profitable outlet for idle bank funds; to Shanghai's perennially under-capitalized qianzhuang, responsible for financing local and regional trade and construction with loans and promissory notes, the interbank loans were a much-needed source of liquidity; and to transimperial intermediaries, they were

⁴⁶ King, *Hongkong Bank*, 283, 309.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 281–82, 295–99.

the source of both their profits and market power.⁴⁸ In this way, chop loans issued by Western banks gradually became a critical source of capital for Chinese banking institutions in the late Qing by increasing the flow of funds within the domestic money market.⁴⁹

The chop loan's inventor, Wang Huaishan, negotiated the first such advance for the Hongkong Bank in 1869, and by 1873, the bank's Court of Directors approved a regularized chop loan business.⁵⁰ By the end of that decade, the size of Shanghai's citywide Sino-foreign call loan market had reached roughly 3 million taels a year, growing to 10 million taels by the century's end.⁵¹ Wang, the market's progenitor, was in many respects the archetypal bank comprador: precisely the type of Sino-foreign intermediary upon whose shoulders Shanghai's money market now came to rest.

Wang and his family hailed from nearby Shaoxing, Zhejiang, and on account of his ties to rich Shaoxing merchants, branch managers at the Hongkong Bank in Shanghai appointed him their comprador in the early 1860s. A photograph of Wang taken ten years later, in 1874, when he was in his thirties, shows a well-fed, chubby-faced man dressed in fine silk cloth, one arm resting on an ornate Victorian chair, a thin cigar perched between the index and middle fingers of his right hand. Wang's self-evident wealth, on display in his portrait, was publicly acknowledged in his market nickname: *kuai facai*, or "makes money fast."⁵² Britons in China called him Wah Sam, according to local pronunciation, and this name appears regularly in the bank's internal correspondence regarding tea shipments and the discounting of bank bills, as well as Wang's receipt of lavish gifts, among them Turkish carpets, diamond rings, and gold jewelry. "Old Wah Sam is a good friend of the bank," the firm's London branch manager, David McLean, wrote to its Shanghai branch manager in 1877; "give my thanks to old Wah Sam," he wrote a year later; "tell Wah Sam to come to England, a trip would do him good," he wrote again in 1884.⁵³

McLean's tone of perpetual gratitude is partially explained by Wang's centrality to the bank's day-to-day operations in Shanghai. Like other bank compradores,

⁴⁸ Hao, *Commercial Revolution*, 77–80; Ghassan Moazzin, "Sino-foreign Business Networks: Foreign and Chinese Banks in the Chinese Banking Sector, 1890–1911," *Modern Asian Studies*, 54, no. 3 (2020), 970–1004.

⁴⁹ Cheng I-Fang, *Shanghai qianzhuang (1843–1937): Zhongguo chuantong jinrongye de tuijian* [Shanghai qianzhuang: A Case Study of the Chinese Native Banks, 1843–1937] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan sanmin zhuyi yanjiusuo, 1981).

⁵⁰ King, *Hongkong Bank*, 149.

⁵¹ Cheng Zengnian, "Shanghai Finance: An Integrated Approach," *Chinese Business History*, 3, no. 2 (April 1993), 4.

⁵² Andrea Lee McElderry, *Shanghai Old-style Banks, 1800–1935* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1976), 72–74; King, *Hongkong Bank*, 245–47, 280–81, 514–15, 519.

⁵³ *The Letter Books of David McLean (Volumes V–X), 1875–1889*, ed. Catherine E. King (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1984), 2–3, 5–6, 30, 49–50, 82, 266.

Wang received only a nominal salary, and he made money fast mostly by trading on his own account, or on commissions for bringing in chop loan business to the bank. At his (presumably Turkish carpeted) office, Wang oversaw a staff of five market runners, or “shroffs,” who knew regional markets in depth, in addition to ten attendants responsible for tasks ranging from hauling hard silver to delivering messages.⁵⁴

Before 1889, when German, Russian, Japanese, and US banks began to join the French and British financial institutions in China at scale, there were, in the main, six foreign banks with active Shanghai branches. That quite small number meant Wang’s staff—and the staff of the five other Shanghai bank compradors at the Agra Bank, the OBC, the CBIAC, the Mercantile Bank of India, London & China (Chartered Mercantile), and the CEP—were *the* connective tissue linking local finance to global markets.⁵⁵ Before 1842, Shanghai’s financial center had been located in the city’s south market, near the junk wharves of the old walled city; by 1876, more than half of the city’s qianzhuang (63 of 105) were in the north market, near the steamer wharves—and foreign banks—of the SIS and French Concession.⁵⁶ No detailed data survive to track the flow of chop loans from specific banks to specific qianzhuang. If, however, we divide one scholar’s annual chop loan estimate for Shanghai as a whole in 1878 (3 million taels) by the number of qianzhuang in the north market in 1876 (63), we arrive at a sum of over 47,000 taels in credit per qianzhuang.⁵⁷ These advances were not distributed evenly, of course, but considering that the average capitalization of a qianzhuang in 1900 was only between 20,000 and 60,000 taels, this 47,000-tael figure is a sizable one—a sum equal to the full capitalizations of many qianzhuang.⁵⁸ Such calculations are only the roughest of estimates, and they provide no more than a vague glimpse of the scale of the market. They do, however, attest to the vital importance of Wang Huaishan and other transimperial bank compradors in shepherding private credit between imperial institutions in late-nineteenth-century Shanghai.

What Wang, his comprador peers, and their staff shared, and which foreign bankers lacked, was an intimate knowledge of local markets—perhaps above all, knowledge of the relative creditworthiness of qianzhuang partners and managers who applied for chop loans. “[Local] call lending is a comprador’s professional

⁵⁴ King, *Hongkong Bank*, 246.

⁵⁵ Shizuya Nishimura, “The Foreign and Native Banks in China: Chop Loans in Shanghai and Hankow before 1914,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, no. 1 (February 2005), 111–12.

⁵⁶ *Shanghai qianzhuang shiliao* [Shanghai qianzhuang historical materials] (Shanghai: People’s Bank of China, Shanghai Branch, 1960) [hereafter *SQHM*], 32.

⁵⁷ Cheng, “Shanghai Finance,” 4.

⁵⁸ McElderry, *Shanghai Old-style Banks*, 18.

activity,” recalled one bank comprador, “and it is also one of his profit sources.”⁵⁹ Hefty commissions made the work appealing, and the overall arrangement made Wang and his counterparts the fulcrum of Shanghai’s transimperial credit system. These men, wrote a knowledgeable foreign observer in 1906, “hold a most important and responsible relation to the entire business of the Chinese community,” each being “an *imperium in imperio*” deciding the value of silver bullion and coin, transferring bank funds “to and from inland places” with domestic bills of exchange, and serving as each foreign banks’ sole “medium through whom all transactions are carried on.”⁶⁰ In this, Wang was no different from other transimperial intermediaries. As one Chinese journalist wrote in *Shenbao* in 1884, “Wang thoroughly understands the particulars of each and every [Shanghai] qianzhuang.”⁶¹

Wang spoke just a word or two of English and a bit of pidgin, and what was most valuable to him was his local knowledge and his mother tongue: the Shaoxing dialect. Bankers from Shaoxing soon became Shanghai’s wealthiest financiers, because Wang, their patron, was able to assess the relative creditworthiness each to the Hongkong Bank, so as to make the flow of chop loan credit profitable to all parties.⁶² Drawing on sources from German banks in China between the 1890s and 1912, Ghassan Moazzin has argued that bank compradores then exploited asymmetries of information between Chinese and foreign business communities to manipulate interest rates to their own advantage.⁶³ In the two decades prior, however, Wang Huaishan’s use of local market knowledge to “make money fast”—for himself and his fellow Shaoxing bankers—suggests that bank compradores were *already* exploiting such asymmetries for financial gain in the 1870s and 1880s.

In doing so, Wang and his contemporaries at Shanghai branches of the Agra Bank, the OBC, the CBIAC, Chartered Mercantile, and the CEP positioned themselves as indispensable transimperial intermediaries. They enriched themselves; they helped frontier banks supplement China loan earnings and exchange profits with additional earnings from interbank lending; and they facilitated the flow of credit for profitable, taxable trade, and construction in Qing domains.

⁵⁹ Wu Peichu, “Foreign Bank Compradors in Old Shanghai,” in *Jiu shanghai waishang yu maiban* [Foreign Merchants and their Compradors in Old Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press, 1987), 83.

⁶⁰ John C. Ferguson, “Notes on Chinese Banking System at Shanghai,” *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 37 (1906), 56–57.

⁶¹ *SQHM*, 29.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 28–30.

⁶³ Moazzin, “Sino-foreign Business Networks,” 970–1004.

Transimperial Trust, or the Guarantors

The necessarily high level of foreign trust in figures such as Wang—typically well-placed, though sometimes less so—came to be embodied in various material artifacts, all confusingly called “chops.” In wholesale trade, “chop” simply meant “brand,” in the sense of a given house’s tea chop or opium chop, here meaning “stamp.” In banking, as we have seen, the “chop” in chop loan referred to a comprador’s stamp on an interbank *qianzhuang* promissory note taken as security for a foreign loan. In addition to those chops, there were “security chops,” or third-party guarantor contracts (called *baodan* in Chinese). When hired, a comprador often posted bonds in silver, but his security fund was usually far less than the huge sums which compradors handled in any given financial transaction. So, what ultimately secured the compradors and their staff against default was not money but *baodan*, which wealthy third parties signed to guarantee all debts.⁶⁴ Or so the foreigners believed until a major financial crisis in 1883, which proved how reliant they actually were on local guarantor arrangements—not promises to pay—and precipitated a shift of the transimperial credit system onto a more juridical footing.

In accordance with longstanding Chinese practice, third parties posted *baodan* for debtors in large transactions, and in cases of default, a guarantor was not necessarily required to repay (as in Anglophone practice), but to bring a defaulter and a lender together to reach an extralegal compromise.⁶⁵ Such “customary bankruptcy,” preferred in late Imperial China to the exacting, juridical bankruptcies favored by foreigners, meant that it was common for foreign banks “simply to accept the assurance of their compradors that a given [security] chop is ‘all proper’—a display of confidence which,” this editorialist found, “considering the amounts at stake,” to be “most extraordinary.”⁶⁶ That distinction between “securing the man” and “securing the money,” encoded in the very few Chinese characters to be found in the text of any given *baodan*, was poorly understood by foreign merchants and bankers in the 1860s and 1870s, who left such nuances to their trusted compradors. Before the mid-1880s, security chops included few if any references to repayment or fiduciary responsibility; instead, they included phrases such as *lizhi*, “to arrange,” or *shiwen*, “to be asked.”⁶⁷ As early as 1868, Prince Gong at the Zongli

⁶⁴ “Security Chops,” *North China Herald*, June 13, 1884, 667–68.

⁶⁵ Huixun zai ji [“Another Case Report”], *Shenbao*, March 20, 1885. For the context, see “Securing Trust and Stability: Chinese Finance in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in ed. Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown, *Chinese Business Enterprise in Asia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 27–44 and Maura Dykstra, “Beyond the Shadow of the Law: Firm Insolvency, State-Building, and the New Policy Bankruptcy Reform in Late-Qing Chongqing,” *Frontiers of History in China*, 8, no. 3 (2013), 406–33.

⁶⁶ “Security Chops,” *North China Herald*, 667–68.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 667–68.

Yamen, China's proto-foreign office, warned the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce that the empire's subjects "regarded these 'chops' as in the nature of certificates of character" and the guarantors as "referees," advising foreigners not to "place too much reliance on them," since "conditions of suretyship" were "not identical" to those in Britain, America, or France. With imperious insouciance, the Chamber ignored the advice of Sir Rutherford Alcock not to "shut their eyes to the possible risks" and demanded instead that *baodan*, which were the basis of the Qing "system of guarantee...so interwoven with the whole Chinese mode of doing business," be treated as promises to pay.⁶⁸

Chauvinism aside, another explanation for why the Chamber persisted in this view may be found in the mid-1860s establishment of the Shanghai Mixed Court, an odd organ presided over by a Qing sub-prefect and a British vice-consul. The court, the brainchild of Sir Harry Parkes, was founded largely, as Alcock put it, to improve "the due execution of awards against Chinese debtors and defaulters."⁶⁹ In the court's white-walled rooms inside a traditional tile-roofed building on Nanjing Road, a silk-clad Qing functionary and a besuited foreign "assessor" sat side by side judging criminal and civil cases.⁷⁰ There, plaintiffs and defendants appeared as subjects of different sovereigns, speaking an inconsistent mix of English, pidgin, and various Sinitic languages that regularly befuddled translators. And in Sino-foreign debt cases, as in all others, Qing and foreign court officers shared few legal assumptions and procedural rules, and rulings often depended almost entirely on interpersonal mediation between a given sub-prefect and a given vice-consul (before appeal to the city Daotai).⁷¹ Prior to the mid-1880s, the successful arbitration of most debt disputes—and their relative rarity in a prosperous time for Shanghai trade—removed the need for any clearer language in *baodan*. "For the recovery of small debts," wrote the court's British assessor in 1882, "[court] action is sufficiently prompt and certain; it is only in the more serious cases of indebtedness that it to a partial extent fails."⁷² Those more serious cases, such as *Carter & Co. v. Chang-kee* (1874) or *David Sassoon, Sons & Co. v. Song Cai* (1876), if unsatisfactory to foreign

⁶⁸ George Jamieson, *Chinese Family and Commercial Law* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, 1921), 116–18.

⁶⁹ *Correspondence Respecting the Revision of the Treaty of Tientsin*, Parliamentary Papers, China, no. 5 (London: House of Commons, 1871), 56.

⁷⁰ Description of the court in Zuo Zongtang, *Zi bao Shanghai zujie huishen gongsuo yi di ling jian you* ["Report on Rationale for Building a New Shanghai Mixed Court at a Separate Location"], IMH, December 16, 1883, 1–11.

⁷¹ See Par Cassell, *Grounds of Judgment: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth Century China and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 64–84.

⁷² "Report on the Mixed Court at Shanghai for the Year 1882," *Commercial Reports by Her Majesty's Consuls in China: 1882–83*, China, no. 1 (1884), 61–62.

plaintiffs, never risked the stability of the financial market to an extent worthy of altering the customary practice.⁷³

This all changed in 1883, the year of China's first great deflationary banking panic. In the early 1880s, qianzhuang lending for trade and construction—credit increasingly floated against stock and property collateral, buoyed by chop loans and further call loans from city Piaohao—propelled simultaneous asset price bubbles in stocks and property. These burst in 1883, in part due to the Hongkong Bank's call of its millions in chop loans. The resulting hoarding of silver and empire-wide bank runs nearly halved the number of Shanghai qianzhuang from a hundred or more to fifty-eight, as a cyclical depression set in.⁷⁴

One long-run consequence of this depression was a significant shift in the legal grounds for transimperial intermediation in late-Qing commercial and financial markets. Customary bankruptcy as previously practiced by Qing merchants and bankers worked well when one or two firms failed, less so amidst the chaos of China's first systemic "bankruptcy wave." Officers at the Shanghai Mixed Court and city magistracy now were swamped with suits with unpaid advances, bank bills, promissory notes, and bank balances, as well as breaches of contract, most secured by *baodan*. Mixed Court cases alone doubled, from about 1,450 annually c. 1879–1882 to 2,904 cases in 1883 alone.⁷⁵

As for Sino-foreign debt cases involving security chops, enough of these were settled unsatisfactorily to the foreign banks to prompt their managers and solicitors to at last read the text of their security chops. An examination of surviving *baodan* from the CBIAC housed at the London Metropolitan Archives shows two very different types of guarantor contracts before and after the 1880s. These samples from CBIAC's Shanghai branch and its sister branch in the Middle Yangtze port of Hankou, though small, remain indicative. Four comprador bonds in the archives from the late 1860s are cursory documents, ranging from a single, brief paragraph to—at most—three short clauses. All four are written in poor, often

⁷³ "Mixed Court," *NCH*, June 6, 1874, 515–17; Shaxun kong Song mou qianyin an ["Case of the Sassoons Suing a Certain Song for Silver Owed"], *Shenbao*, February 22, 1876, 3.

⁷⁴ "Financial Difficulties Affecting the Trade of 1883: Native Banks," UK National Archives [hereafter UKNA], FO 671/142; *SQHM*, 32, 44–53; Kwang-ching Liu, Yibabasan nian Shanghai jinrong fengchao: yangwu yundong zhuanqi yanjiu zhi yi ["The 1883 Financial Disturbance: A Case Study of the Self-Strengthening Movement," *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, no. 3 (1983), 94–102; Tian Yongxiu, 1862–1883 nian Zhongguo de gupiao shichang ["China's Stock Market, 1862–1883"], *Chinese Economic History Research*, no. 2 (1995), 55–68; Kong Xiangyi, 1883 nian jinrong weiji zhong de piaohao yu qianzhuang (shang xia) ["Piaohao and Qianzhuang during the Financial Crisis of 1883"], *Journal of Shanxi Finance and Economics University*, 22, no. 3/4 (Jun/Aug 2000), 58–60, 64–68.

⁷⁵ "Report on the Mixed Court for 1883," *Commercial Reports by Her Majesty's Consuls in China: 1883, China*, no. 4 (1884), 233–38; "Bankruptcy Cases" and "Bankruptcy Notebook no. 3" in Shanghai Courts, China: Judges' and Magistrates' Notebooks, UKNA, FO 1092/21.

illegible cursive, and guarantors' obligations in the case of default are discussed in the vaguest of terms, making third parties "responsible for any shortcoming or deficiency" or "to make good any deficiency." Exact sums are never mentioned, and no Chinese copy is included.⁷⁶ Three additional CBIAC *baodan* in the archives that date to c.1897–1907, by contrast, tell a different story. These security chops were longer, ranging from a single-spaced page typewritten in small font to four full pages in clear cursive. Exact sums (typically 20,000 taels) are listed, and Chinese-language copies are enclosed for two of the three. In each, the bank's solicitor names the English version the legally binding copy, and all establish the guarantors' obligations to repay, using phrases such as "will pay and make good" and "shall pay and make good." This juridical language signaled the start of a decades-long effort by bankers and officials to clarify personal debts and distinguish these from company debts—efforts that eventually bore fruit in China's first limited liability law in 1904.⁷⁷

Reproduced below are two CBIAC security chops from before and after the financial crisis of 1883. The first *baodan* (Figure 6.1) is labeled "shroff's & assistant compradore's fidelity bond" and dates to May 1867. The second *baodan* (Figure 6.2) dates to October 1907. Note the relative length of the two: the former is three sentences, cursive; the latter is one page, typed, and comes with a Chinese-language copy (Figure 6.3). Note also the difference in legal language between the two contracts. The first chop makes the guarantor "responsible for any shortcoming or deficiency in (Yeh-Chang-te's) monies." The second chop obligates the guarantors, Tang Langshan and Xie Zhuotang, to "become surety for repayment" for Tang Shouxun, CBIAC's comprador, and specifically says the two will "pay and make good" Tang's debts of up to 20,000 taels. The distinction between "responsible for" (chop one) and "surety for repayment" (chop two) is a crucial one in the context of customary bankruptcy in late-Qing China. It demonstrates the legal evolution of transimperial guarantorship from customary to juridical practice after the panic of 1883.

⁷⁶ See "Shanghai Copy—Shroff's & Assistant Compradore's Fidelity Bond (May 1867)," "Hankow Copy—Security Bond for Chun Tai as Compradore, Vide Shanghai (December 1867)," "Shanghai Copy—Comprador's Own Fidelity Bond and Bond Guaranteeing his Shroffs (July 1868)," and "Hankow—Chun Tai's New Fidelity Bond (November 1869)," each in *Bond Guarantees for Chinese Compradores, 1869–1907*, LMA, CLC/B/207/CH03/01/06/049. On the company law, see Madeleine Zelin, "The Firm in Early Modern China," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, no. 72 (2009), 632–33.

⁷⁷ See "Hsi Yü Kong," signed February 1897, and Tang Shouxun and Tang Langshan, dated to October 1907, in LMA, CLC/B/207/CH03/01/06/049.

Copy
Security Bond ————— 27 July

Yang-pu hereby guarantees
 Yeh-chang-te in the capacity of Shroff
 to the Chartered Bank of India, Australia,
 & China.
 He will be responsible for any
 shortcoming or deficiency in (Yeh-chang-te's)
 monies. In witness whereof this Bond is
 drawn up and handed to the Manager
 of the Bank.
 (Signed) Yang-pu
 Dated a fortunate day in the 4th moon
 of the 6th year of Tung Chih. May 1867.
 True translation
 (Sd.) Chas. Alabaster

Figure 6.1: Pre-crisis *baodan*. Source: London Archives

COPY.

5- OCT. 1907

Whereas the Chartered Bank of India, Australia & China have engaged Tong Saw Hin 唐壽勳 as Compadore in its Banking Establishment at Hankow aforesaid, and has entered into the above-written Agreement and Undertaking, I, Tong Lang Sang 唐朗山 of Hankow aforesaid, along with Tse Ju Tong 謝耀堂 of Hankow aforesaid, do hereby jointly and severally guarantee a faithful compliance with the terms of the above-written Agreement and Undertaking upon the part of the said Tong Saw Hin, and in case the Bank incur any loss, or damage through the negligence, or misappropriation of, or by, the said Tong Saw Hin, or any of his Chinese staff, or by reason of the said Tong Saw Hin acting contrary, or failing to perform any of the terms, provisions, or stipulations contained in the above-written Agreement, I, Tong Lang Sang, jointly and severally, along with Tse Ju Tong, agree to become surety for repayment and will pay and make good the same to the extent of \$ 20,000 each (Twenty thousand Taels).

The above-written Agreement and this Guarantee Note are written in both the English and the Chinese languages, but the English version alone shall for all purposes be accepted and taken as the original thereof.

In witness whereof I the abovenamed Tong Lang Sang have hereunto set my hand and seal this first day of November One thousand nine hundred and two.

Signed, Sealed, and delivered by,
the above-named, Tong Lang Sang in the presence of)

(Signed) C. G. Geddes
of Hankow
Merchant

(Seal) 唐朗山

(Signed) P. Douglas Jones

of

Figure 6.2: Post-crisis *baodan*. Source: London Archives

5- OCT. 1907

立保單唐朗山令因

麥加利銀行議允唐壽勳續充漢口麥加利銀行買辦業經
 定立合同茲唐朗山情願保到唐壽勳為麥加利銀行買辦
 謹遵合同辦事如唐壽勳或其所用各項華人設有錯失
 短欠騙竊及唐壽勳不遵守合同辦事以致銀行受虧等情
 唐朗山甘願出款代為賠償限保人保銀貳萬兩以代賠償
 所虧之款此項合同保單均用擬之書寫嗣後以英之為
 主恐後無憑立此保單存照

光緒二十八年拾月初二日立保單人唐朗山印

見証人唐聘儒

Figure 6.3: Chinese-language copy of Figure 6.2. Source: London Archives

Conclusion: Transimperial Banking in Late-Qing Shanghai

Banking in Shanghai between 1842 and 1912 owed its uniqueness to the combination of local and global banking institutions, which were never entirely taken over by Western empires. Before the arrival of Western empires in late-Qing Shanghai, there was already a functioning Chinese banking system and a thriving economic environment. As a busy port connecting north, south, coastal, and hinterland China, Shanghai played a leading role in the trade and finance of the Qing Empire, aided by the capital networks of domestic qianzhuang and piaohao. Under such circumstances, there were limits to how much the banks of Western colonial empires could replace China's domestic banking system. Transimperial intermediaries were thus necessary in Shanghai. Until the demise of the Qing, in boom times or depressions, war or trade, such intermediaries were never simply "running dogs" of capitalist imperialism, nor were they one-sided colonial collaborators, nor were they apolitical bridges between a generic "East and West." Rather, they were transimperial actors. Compradors and other Chinese brokers intermediated a multifaceted debt relationship between the Qing and British (and to a lesser extent French) empires that could serve Qing geopolitical ends as easily as it enriched Western colonial banks, or that could enrich Qing merchants and financiers as easily as it bankrupted them when the credit market broke down. Older interpretations of Shanghai as a world apart from late-Qing China cannot account for this sometimes fragile yet always integrated Sino-foreign money market, in which the financial fates of Qing and foreign subjects were closely intertwined.

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Institutionalizing Transimperial Transfers and Developing Corporative Colonialism, 1890s–1930s

Florian Wagner

Abstract

This chapter focuses on a group of men, mainly academics, who worked with and through the European *Institut Colonial International* (ICI) from the 1890s to the 1930s to develop a common set, across the late colonial world, of knowledge and policies about urban guilds and rural cooperatives. ICI members thought that this knowledge and related policies would help mediate the excesses of both cut-throat capitalism and communism. The chapter shows how academics like the Frenchman Louis Massignon used informal and formal connections in “his” empire’s colonies and beyond to build a common body of transimperially useful knowledge; but also pays attention to how “local” colonial people in the know helped interpret the history and very nature of guilds and cooperatives.

Keywords: transimperial, *Institut Colonial International*, Urban guilds, Rural cooperatives, Colonial world

In 1893, colonial experts from thirteen countries established the International Colonial Institute (ICI), the first international organization exclusively dedicated to transimperial exchange. With approximately 200 official members, the ICI held annual thematic conferences to discuss topics such as colonial law, the training of colonial administrators, agronomy, railway construction, irrigation, tropical medicine, and more. Congress participants routinely prepared case studies on subjects within their expertise, which the ICI’s general secretariat compiled into comprehensive comparative studies. These studies formed a shared pool of transimperial knowledge, facilitating the transfer of proven colonial governance technologies and ideally resulting in best practices for colonialism.

Between 1893 and 1949, the ICI’s members involved in transimperial knowledge exchange and production were exclusively white European males from the upper and middle class. By 1893, most of its members were already accustomed to navigating the well-established infrastructure of nineteenth-century internationalism, being university professors, high-ranking civil servants and colonial

officials, heads of ministries and even states, aristocrats, entrepreneurs, and engineers. Their financial status enabled them to pay membership fees, dedicate time to writing detailed and comparative studies for ICI conferences, and travel to these events. The ICI had a very limited budget for reimbursing travel expenses, funded by membership fees and voluntary contributions from (colonial) governments. Typically, these members were multilingual, with a particular proficiency in French, the *lingua franca* of nineteenth-century internationalism and the ICI's official language. Until the 1920s, the ICI did not provide translations of conference papers and proceedings, which was seldom necessary as members from countries such as Germany, Russia, and Britain were generally fluent in French.¹

A key reason for establishing a new transimperial institution in 1893 was the perceived need to address the first crisis of colonial policy in the age of high imperialism. After the initial enthusiasm of the "scramble for Africa" around the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 had waned, Europeans realized that maintaining empires incurred significant costs. A "second colonization" phase, characterized by expensive "pacification" wars, the establishment of a professional administration, and the efficient exploitation of both natural and human resources, proved to be costly. This realization led to the idea of pooling knowledge and resources to develop more efficient means of governing empires.² The ICI's approach was to study, compare, and emulate successful administrative technologies and governance practices applied in other empires. Transimperial comparisons suggested that "indigenous" corporations and cooperatives might serve as a tool to govern the colonies, avoid unrest, mobilize labor, raise taxes, provide a rudimentary welfare state, encourage development and do justice to a traditional collectivism ascribed to indigenous societies.

The most plausible explanation for the establishment of transimperial organizations like the ICI at the end of the nineteenth century is competitive emulation.³ This concept helps explain why nationalism and internationalism, as well as imperialism and transimperialism, were not contradictory. Competitive emulation refers to nations or empires striving to outdo each other by adopting and adapting successful practices, technologies, policies, or cultural elements from their rivals.

¹ Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); on the context: Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Damiano Matasci, "Imperialism, Internationalism and Globalisation in Twentieth Century Africa," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 5 (2020), 793–804.

² Christoph Kamissek and Jonas Kreienbaum, "An Imperial Cloud? Conceptualising Interimperial Connections and Transimperial Knowledge," *Journal of Modern European History* 14, no. 2 (2016), 164–82.

³ Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 4 (2018), 429–52.

This process blends competition and imitation, aiming to improve one's position by learning from the strengths and achievements of others. Consequently, while empires often compete for power, influence, and resources, they also engage in mutual learning. The ICI's founding father, influential director of the French colonial lobby group, Union Coloniale, Joseph Chailley-Bert, succinctly captured this idea: "Why invent if inventions already exist? It is more effective to look around us."⁴ Chailley's interest in other empires, particularly in Dutch Java, illustrates that joining the ICI was not solely about smaller empires like the Netherlands and Belgium seeking support from larger powers. He was very skeptical toward the colonial methods of the dominant Algerian settler lobby and viewed France as a "latecomer" in modern colonization, recognizing the value in learning from the Dutch and only occasionally from the British. Also, the seemingly uninterested transimperial production of anthropological knowledge might serve as a tool of violent repression within colonies, as the Dutch expert of Islam and ICI-member, Christiaan Snouck-Hurgronje, reveals. He used his Arabic language skills and his high reputation among Muslim leaders in the Aceh region to violently defeat Indonesian resistance against Dutch rule during the Aceh War (1873–1913). He also used transimperial networks of Islam to secure the support of high-ranking Imams for Dutch rule in Indonesia.⁵

The methodological precondition of competitive emulation was the use of cross- and transimperial comparisons, which are to be found in hundreds of studies published by the ICI. Most efficient were prototype comparisons, which facilitated the adaption of successfully tested micro-techniques of colonization across different empires.⁶ Yet, comparisons were full of pitfalls and frequently used in a manipulative way. This was true for what we can call stereotype comparisons, which idealized or stigmatized other empires, and racialized the colonized populations. The idealized model of the alleged technocratic rule of the Dutch in Java, for example, and the stigmatized rule of Spain's "backward" imperialism were among the most frequent stereotypes shaping the ICI's inter-imperial comparisons since 1893. The "transimperiality" of racism that led ICI members to dismiss indigenous contributions to a colonial modernity equally shaped colonial comparisons and distorted their outcome, while these stereotypes simultaneously spread through transimperial transfers. As Alexander Morrisson has shown when analyzing transfers of manipulated sharia codes from Algeria to Turkestan, adaption processes

⁴ Joseph Chailley, *Java et ses Habitants* (Paris: A. Colin, 1900), ix.

⁵ Antje Missbach, "The Aceh War (1873–1913) and the Influence of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje," in *Aceh: History, Politics and Culture*, edited by Arndt Graf, Susanne Schroter and Edwin Wieringa (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 39–62.

⁶ On the nature of transimperial comparisons, see also Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 111–12.

often failed and misunderstandings were frequent, diminishing the value of comparisons and ensuing knowledge transfers: “showing that whilst prestige and access to European networks of knowledge helped to determine which particular pieces of colonial know-how were borrowed, they could not ensure that the transplant would be successful.”⁷ Lastly, archetype comparisons, such as referring to the Roman Empire’s policy by colonial empires of the twentieth century, seemed to have legitimizing effects at best, but contributed little to the declared purpose of making colonial rule more efficient through comparison and transfer. Nevertheless, the fact that the ICI existed until 1982 seems to confirm that colonial experts regarded transimperial prototype comparisons and transfers helpful to strengthen colonial rule. This is why most protagonists of colonial theory and practice joined the ICI sooner or later. Among them were the French Hubert Lyautey, Eugène Etienne, and Robert Delavignette, the British Frederick Lugard, William Malcolm Hailey, and Margery Perham, the Belgian Albert Thys and Pierre Ryckmans, as well as the Dutch Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and Dirk Fock, to mention but a few.⁸

Yet, competitive emulation alone cannot explain the transimperial trajectory that the ICI would take as an organization largely independent of nationalist interest. Combining international experience, colonial expertise, and strategies to minimize costs, free traders came up with the idea of expert cooperation across empires. In theory, they also distanced themselves from protectionism and forced labor. Apart from embracing free trade in the colonies, they intended to portray colonialism as progressive by detaching it from nationalist jingoism and imperialist contest, shifting its image toward internationalist expertise and technocratic government based on scientific findings. Among the free traders was the ICI’s initiator, Joseph Chailley, who was arguably the ICI’s foremost proponent of free trade and economic liberalism. As early as 1886, he addressed the British anti-protectionist Cobden Club, translated Anglo-Saxon free trade literature into French, and regarded Adam Smith as one of his intellectual forebears. Joining him as a founding member was Isaäc Dignus Fransen van de Putte, formerly the Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs who had initiated a campaign in the 1860s to abolish the forced cultivation system of the Dutch Indies and liberalize its economy. The infamous forced cultivation system had been introduced in 1830 and compelled Indonesian farmers to allocate a portion of their land—typically around 20%—to the cultivation of cash crops designated by the government, such as sugar, coffee, and indigo, which the colonial

⁷ Alexander Morrisson, “Creating a Colonial Shari’a for Russian Turkestan. Count Pahlen, the Hidayat, and Anglo-Muhammadan Law,” in Volker Barth & Roland Cvetkovski (ed.) *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870-1930 Empires and Encounters* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 127–49, Jul 24, 2015, 2.

⁸ On them and many others, see Wagner, “Colonial Internationalism.”

government purchased at a minimum price, exported them to the Netherlands, and sold them on the European market. Alternatively, villagers could be compelled to work for a certain number of days on government-owned plantations. This system earned the Dutch colonizers a fortune, while the indigenous farmers suffered under the compulsory cultivation. Fransen van de Putte—himself a beneficiary of the system as a sugar entrepreneur in the 1830s—later became a prominent critic of the practice. As a member of the liberal party and eventually as Dutch Colonial Minister, he played a pivotal role in advocating for its abolition. While he posed as a liberal indigenophile free trader, both the motivations behind and the consequences of his efforts were less honest and more complex. Van de Putte never fundamentally questioned the legitimacy of colonial rule, and forms of forced labor persisted during and beyond his tenure.⁹ This ambiguity also characterized the ICI's first secretary-general, the self-declared Belgian free trader, Camille Janssen. He had previously been the first governor of King Léopold's Free Congo State but resigned from his post when he realized that Léopold abandoned his initial open-door policy in favor of protectionism in 1890. Up to the First World War, even more liberal economists joined, such as the German colonial minister, Bernhard Dernburg. Unsurprisingly, the proponent of free trade, Léon Say, Chailley Bert's grandfather and grandson of the free trade theorist, Jean Baptiste Say, became the honorary founding member of the ICI in 1893.¹⁰

The free trade ideology might have been transimperial by nature, but its application by ICI members was not as straightforward as it seemed. For example, ICI members believed indigenous populations were not ripe for capitalism and thus pondered whether forced cultivation might be a way to “educate” them and thus prepare them for a delayed introduction of capitalism. By 1900, the ICI increasingly recruited experts on indigenous societies. Among them were representatives of relatively new academic fields such as anthropology and Islamic studies, like the Dutch founding member of the ICI, Pieter Antonie van der Lith. Van der Lith was an ethnologist and expert of Islamic and colonial law and trained colonial officials in the applied geography, linguistics, and ethnography of India, he also established the *Revue Coloniale Internationale* in 1885.¹¹ Claiming to have acquired a transimperial knowledge about the nature of indigenous societies, these anthropological experts proposed craft guilds and agricultural cooperatives to guarantee the “education” for capitalism.

⁹ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, “Imperialism after the Great Wave: The Dutch Case in the Netherlands East Indies, 1860–1914,” In: Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York), 25–46, 27–28.

¹⁰ Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 27–28.

¹¹ “Introduction,” *Revue Coloniale Internationale*, 1 (1885), I–II.

The reasons for joining the ICI might have been nationalist for many members, but its development up to the 1920s suggests that transimperial knowledge production increasingly became a field of its own. To increase their expertise, individuals used the ICI not only to enhance their knowledge, but also to get to know specialists in the field, create interdisciplinary networks, bring together science and business interests, apply for jobs, exchange letters of recommendation, and make a career. As to the knowledge produced, the members' research often involved participatory observation, which brought them closer to the colonized. The color bar made "fraternization" with them unlikely, but the ICI indeed encouraged its members to meet and understand indigenous peoples in the colonies. The ICI's notion of transimperial expertise was thus opposed to the idea of the "neutrality of the expert" who avoids mingling with his or her object of study, as was the case for example in the League of Nations' Mandate Commission in the 1920s, whose members were banned from traveling in the mandates they were supposed to take care of. The ICI, instead, required a deeper knowledge of indigenous societies and a certain degree of empathy, which they claimed that "imperialist" administrations in the metropole failed to develop.

While equally dedicated to transimperialism, anthropologists in the ICI embraced a (racist) doctrine of cultural relativism and joined forces with the international lawyers in the ICI who traditionally were reluctant to include the colonized world in the civilized world and concede them the same abilities and rights as the allegedly civilized nations. Both anthropologists and international lawyers warned that the penetration of modernity and capitalism among the colonized population might have effects of alienation, detribalization, and ultimately rebellion. This might have made them opponents of the free traders in the ICI, but it did not. Instead, the debate led them to search for strategies of how to integrate the colonized into the colonial (capitalist) economy without destroying their "traditional" lifestyles and exposing them to the alleged danger of turning against the colonizers or towards socialism. As I will show in this chapter, their transimperial search for solutions again led them to promote a corporatist organization of colonial economies and societies, based on the revival of Islamic craft guilds and rural cooperatives.

In this chapter, I will use the ICI's debate about the revival of craft guilds and rural cooperatives to show how transimperial comparisons and transfers brought about new strategies of colonial governance that lived as long as the colonial era—and as the ICI. The debate resulted in plans for a more general corporatist (re-)organization of empires, especially when the 1920s saw the emergence of the transimperial "Eurafrica" concept that was partly realized after 1945 through the association of African countries with the European Economic Community. While this is the *telos* of the article, the *focus* is the period between the 1890s and the 1930s,

when corporatism was one outcome of transimperial interaction in the ICI and transimperial networks beyond, but in relation to the ICI.

In the twentieth century, corporatism meant many things. We will focus on two interrelated meanings that colonial experts assigned to it between the 1880s and the 1980s. First, more general definitions refer to an economy based on craft guilds or corporations that play an important economic, social, and political role. Craft guilds are typically formed around a certain craft or trade, in which they tend to monopolize both production and marketing. After a highly regulated process of acceptance by a guild, members theoretically benefit from mutual aid, low-interest loans, trade privileges, state protection, health insurance, old age pensions, and a certain stability of wages and prices for their products. Not least, they have a hierarchical structure with elected officials who managed the guild's affairs, enforced rules, and represented members in negotiations with local authorities.¹² Second, the term "corporatism" evokes fascist corporativism, a centralized and authoritarian control of society through corporate interest groups that represent industrial sectors and suppress democratic elections and class organization.¹³

The sources produced in a transimperial context do not draw a sharp line between corporations and cooperatives. The importance of cooperatives for colonial history has caught the eye of considerably few historians. Rita Rhode's study of cooperatives in the British Empire, the only extensive analysis until recently, is largely uncritical and partly idealizing.¹⁴ A few scholars have vaguely hinted at the fact that cooperatives served to perpetuate coerced labor in late colonialism.¹⁵ The

¹² All historiography on Islamic guilds refers to Massignon, starting from Bernard Lewis, "The Islamic Guilds," *Economic History Rev* 8 no.1 (1937), 20, to more recent accounts on the dispositive of the guilds, Thomas E. Jakob, "A Clash of Concepts. Communist Agitation and Organized Labor in Lebanon during the French Mandate," in *Interwar Crossroads*, ed. Leon Julius Biela and Anna Bundt (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2020). Their relationship with authorities and religion, as well as their hierarchical character was the interest of the most important studies on craft guilds: André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1973–4); Hanna, "Guilds," 910. See also Abbas Hamdani, "The Rasa'il Ikhwan Al-Safa' and the Controversy about the Origin of Craft Guilds in Early Medieval Islam," in *Money, Land, and Trade. An Economic History of the Muslim Mediterranean* ed. Nelly Hanna (London: Routledge, 2002), 51–65; Muhannad Moubaydin, *Sheikh Al-Kar: Al-Sulta Wa-Al-Suq Wa-Al-Nas Fi Dimashq Al-Uthmaniyya [Master of Crafts: The Authorities, the Market, and the People in Ottoman Damascus]* (Al-Rayyan: Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, 2018).

¹³ Antonio Costa Pinto, *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2017); Jens Steffek, *International Organization as Technocratic Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 84–94.

¹⁴ Rita Rhodes, *Empire and Co-operation: How the British Empire Used Co-operatives in its Development Strategies, 1900–1970* (Edinburgh: Donald, 2012).

¹⁵ E.g., Alexander Keese, "Forced Labour in the 'Gorgulho Years': Understanding reform and repression in rural São Tomé e Príncipe, 1945–1953," *Itinerario* 38, no.1 (2014), 103–24; Mo Moulton,

first critical empirical monograph is Aaron Windel's *Cooperative Rule: Community Development in Britain's Late Empire*, which argued that the cooperative movement was capitalist and reactionary even though the Labour Party served as its patron. His need to justify his critical approach to the cooperative movement at length speaks volumes about the state of the field, which he identified as being shaped by "popular meanings about democracy that are usually attached to the movement."¹⁶ An essay by Andreas Eckert recognized cooperative movements' governmental role in colonial contexts.¹⁷ My own monograph examines corporations and cooperatives across various colonies in a somewhat fragmentary manner, while the following chapter presents new and rather systematic evidence that more clearly highlights their transimperial significance, along with the long-term coloniality of cooperative and corporatist practice and theory, when applied to the Global South.¹⁸ In so doing, I argue that during the transimperial search for knowledge about the best practices in colonial cooperativism and corporativism, ICI members invoked "indigenization" as a pretext to impose and legitimize strict control, collective liability, and compulsory labor across different colonies.

ICI-Expertise and the Production of Transimperial Knowledge About Corporations in the Colonies

To acquire and sell their transimperial expertise, ICI members excelled in appropriating indigenous knowledge and selling it as their own, which in turn made them eligible for membership in the ICI. Only self-declared colonial experts whom the transimperial community of colonizers accepted as such, could join the ICI. While the ICI was exclusively white up to 1949, the knowledge that it produced often came from indigenous experts whom they reduced to the level of "informants." Their names are habitually absent from the ICI's extensive publications, be it conference proceedings or more specific case studies. However, they did exist. The Algerian lawyer, Mohand Said Ibnou Zekri, for example, provided ICI members with important information to understand the 1871 revolt in Algeria and its transimperial background—89,000

"Co-Opting the Cooperative Movement? Development, Decolonization, and the Power of Expertise at the Co-Operative College, 1920s–1960s," *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 3 (2022), 418–37.

¹⁶ Aaron Windel, *Cooperative Rule: Community Development in Britain's Late Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 6.

¹⁷ Andreas Eckert, "Useful Instruments of Participation? Local Government and Cooperatives in Tanzania, 1940s to 1970s," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007), 97–118.

¹⁸ Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 281–314.

rifles for the so-called insurrection had come from neighboring Tunisia.¹⁹ More importantly, as early as 1903, he promoted the reform (*islah*), revival, and use of Islamic institutions such as *zawiyas* (Sufi “lodges” or religious-economic centers) and mystic brotherhoods for bringing about the “appropriation and domestication of the social modernity proposed if not imposed by the colonization.”²⁰ This use and modification of indigenous institutions for the purpose of governing colonized societies would soon become a centerpiece of the ICI’s transimperial knowledge production, symbolized by comparative studies and technology transfer.

While “indigenous” agency was often transimperial by default (just think of Islamic faith and institutions, which will be particularly important for our case), ICI members rarely acknowledged its importance in transimperial practice and theory. Indeed, ICI members argued that only their transimperial bird’s eye perspective and knowledge enabled them to fully understand the true nature of colonized societies. Regarding Islam, for example, ICI members claimed to know it better than Muslim intellectuals, having a bird’s eye view of the different schools of law present in different empires, and the amalgamation of regional Islams with local customary law.²¹ Tacitly assuming that Whiteness was a precondition of producing transimperiality, the ICI recruited only white male members between its establishment in 1893 and 1949, when it was reestablished and reframed its agenda.

It was in the late 1920s that ICI members increasingly tried to monopolize transimperialism, which they called internationalism or inter-colonial cooperation, both terms increasingly claimed by anti-colonialists who coordinated their efforts to contest colonial rule.²² By then, the ICI’s transimperialism *avant la lettre* served as a strategic and political tool against anti-colonialism. This strategy referred to using craft guilds and rural cooperatives in a manipulative way to secure colonial rule and establish them as a bulwark against independence movements and radical anti-colonialism. Unsurprisingly, the most outspoken transimperial project emerged when the ICI aligned with fascist movements around 1938 to promote a corporatist Eurafrica, thereby taking corporatism to a new level. When the ICI was re-established in 1949, it pursued a similar strategy, this time incorporating moderate critics of empire to oust outspoken and radical anti-imperialists influenced by the communist international. To prevent them from gaining ground, white ICI members equally offered a corporatist reordering of late colonial empires, doing

¹⁹ X. Yacono, “Kabylie: L’insurrection de 1871,” *Encyclopedie Berbère* 26 (2004), 4022–26.

²⁰ Ben Mansour Abd El Hadi. Chachoua Kamel, *L’islam kabyle, religion, État et société en Algérie, suivi de l’Épître (Rissala) d’Ibnou Zakri (Alger, 1903) Mufti de la Grande Mosquée d’Alger*. Maisonneuve & Larose, Paris, 2001. In: *Bulletin critique des annales islamologiques*, n°19, 2003, 48–49, 49.

²¹ Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 173–208.

²² Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

justice to an alleged need for the collective organization of work without collectivization in the style of a Soviet kolkhoz. Yet this is exactly what had happened between the 1920s and the 1940s in the colonies: colonial experts used corporations and cooperatives to implement and legitimize compulsory labor.

A driving force behind transimperial knowledge exchange based on indigenous informants was the French ICI member Louis Massignon, who joined the ICI in the 1920s and was among the first to systematically explore the role of Islamic craft guilds across various empires. In 1923, he headed the French Service of Indigenous Affairs in Morocco and sent a letter to Idris al-Moqri, asking him to list all craft guilds that existed in the city of Fez. Al-Moqri was the *muhtasib* of Fez and as such was responsible for overseeing the market activities in the town. He kept a record of all craft guilds (*hanati*) and immediately presented a list of 164 corporations in the city. *Muhtasibs* all over the country received similar requests, and French administrators found a questionnaire in their letterboxes, urging them to inquire into the nature of artisan corporations. The initiative came from the Resident-General of Morocco, Hubert Lyautey, who had commissioned a *Survey on Muslim Corporations of Artisans and Merchants* in 1923 and was a member of the ICI.²³ Lyautey chose Massignon to prepare the survey. Its purpose was to preserve and even revive Islamic craft guilds, in which Lyautey and Massignon saw a traditional indigenous institution that might provide the basis for a corporatist moral economy in French North Africa and other colonies that were shaped by Islam.

Their focus was on Muslim corporations, mainly because Massignon, a devout Catholic and admirer of Islam, believed in the cohesive power of religious solidarity: he imagined “collectivist” corporations to slow down the penetration of individualist capitalism. The survey suggested a firm legal grounding in Islamic law, *urf* (customs), and *adab* (honorable conduct of life and social intercourse) that allegedly governed the craft guilds and provided legal certainty and reliability. To get to know more about cohesive routines, the survey equally asked about “patronal festivals” and “religious chants and corporative satire” that contributed to a specific esprit de corps. The survey started from the premise that craft guilds existed in every city and were most visible at the local *suq* (market) but had also a strong rooting among the Berbers in the mountainous hinterland.²⁴ Subscribing to a policy of colonial governmentality, Lyautey and Massignon hoped that guilds might help to avoid a hasty transformation of Moroccan indigenous society. The wider goal was to turn North African moral economies into a sustained basis for a more stable colonial economy.²⁵

²³ Louis Massignon, *Enquête sur les corporations musulmanes d'artisans et de commerçants au Maroc* (Paris: Leroux, 1925).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, v-vi.

²⁵ Gude, *Louis Massignon*, 110.

The initiative had not emerged from nothing but had a “domestic” and a “trans-imperial” dimension. To win over North African elites for French rule in the new “protectorates” and to stimulate tourism, French North Africa had already turned into the testing ground for a preservationist policy before World War I. While preservationist laws in Algeria and Tunisia dated back to the 1880s and concerned mainly the vestiges of the “Euro-Roman” Antiquity, the focus shifted to the Islamic and Arabic legacy as soon as Lyautey propagated a more consensual colonialism, based on the voluntary cooperation of the colonized, when establishing the protectorate over Morocco and serving as its first resident-general in 1912.²⁶ Protectionist laws featuring indigenous craft guilds were issued in Tunisia (1907), Morocco (1915), and finally Algeria (1919), seconded by vocational schools for indigenous arts that should revive traditional crafts.²⁷ Preservationist policies went hand in hand with a tightened control, and by 1912, French authorities strengthened the position of the guilds’ official overseers, the *muhtasibs*, who had mostly lost their power in the nineteenth century.²⁸ In a similar way, the *amins* or heads of the corporations were “reduced to mere agents of the government,” as Massignon noted.²⁹

On Lyautey’s initiative, in 1920, the protectorate established the Service of Indigenous Arts under Prosper Ricard, who intended to make Morocco’s corporative past the basis of the colonial future. Ricard redefined Morocco’s artisans as artists to promote their work among European tourists. This had the double effect of preserving Moroccan craftsmanship and attracting European capital. Part of this strategy was the reinvention of Moroccan carpets, certified by the Service of Indigenous Arts and partially exempted from customs if exported to France.³⁰ To stimulate and control the (re-)formation of corporations, the administration opened more vocational schools such as the *Chambre des Métiers* in Fès, in 1924. It had sections for the manufacturing of wood, iron, and copper. An *amin* headed each

²⁶ Colette Zytnecki et al., “Penser le tourisme et le patrimoine au Maghreb et au-delà (XIXe-XXIe siècles),” in *Fabrique du tourisme et expériences patrimoniales au Maghreb, XIXe-XXIe siècles*, ed. Cyril Isnart et al. (Maroc: Centre Jacques-Berque, 2018), 18–20; Muriel Girard, “Invention de la tradition et authenticité sous le Protectorat au Maroc: l’action du service des arts indigènes et de son directeur Prosper Ricard,” *Socio-Anthropologie*, 19 (2006), 31–45.

²⁷ Louis Massignon, “L’Artisanat indigène dans l’Afrique du Nord,” *Congrès International et Intercolonial de la Société Indigène*, vol. 1 (Paris: Exposition Coloniale Internationale, 1931), 169; Zytnecki et al., “Penser le tourisme,” 20. For the context, see Stacy Holden, “When It Pays to Be Medieval: Historic Preservation as a Colonial Policy in the Medina of Fez, 1912–1932,” *Journal of the Historical Society* 6 no.2 (2006), 297–316.

²⁸ Hanna, “Guilds,” 899.

²⁹ Massignon, *Enquête*, 66.

³⁰ Prosper Ricard, *Corpus des Tapis Marocains*, vol. 1 (Paris: Geuthner, 1923), vii and xi.

section and took care of carpenters, blacksmiths, and copper workers.³¹ Training schools of this kind multiplied and were supposed to revive corporative traditions.

What seemed to be the French Empire's effort to resurrect indigenous institutions for its own colonial economy was in fact a result of a transimperial agenda shared by colonial experts across various empires. Indeed, the Foreign Ministry at Paris that officially took charge of the Moroccan protectorate since 1912, as well as settler-minded experts of the influential "Algiers school," tended to reject the use of indigenous elites and institutions for colonial rule, preferring to model the colonies after a more secular French example.³² Lyautey and Massignon, instead, turned away from Paris and Algeria to emulate British and Dutch policies in India and Indonesia, adopting the transimperial trend to use indigenous economies for stabilizing colonial societies.³³ Unlike Paris, they patronized an indigenous moral economy that should prevent "alienation" and potential unrest provoked by hasty industrialization and an abrupt leap into the capitalist modernity. Exploring the potential of Pan-Islamic institutions, Massignon used his first-hand experience in Muslim Africa and Asia, and consulted like-minded colonial officials in other empires, probably also compensating for the fact that he was rarely in Morocco to research and implement the governmental use of craft guilds. Going beyond French North Africa and even beyond the Muslim world, he identified corporative and cooperative institutions across all empires and religions. He idealized the coexistence of Abrahamic religions in Al-Andalus and declared it a model for multireligious corporations, valued Berber traditions of collective production, studied the Dutch cooperative movement in Indonesia, and embraced Gandhi's strategy to strengthen indigenous craft guilds and agricultural cooperatives.³⁴ His admiration for Gandhi, whom he met personally, prompts the question whether Massignon's transimperialism was potentially anti-colonialist. As we will see later

³¹ Massignon, *Enquête*, 176.

³² Mary Louise Gude, *Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Compassion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 110; Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the invention of Moroccan Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 115; Ellen Amster, *Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877–1956* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 68.

³³ Burke, *The Ethnographic State*, 4, 15, and 108–14; Jean El Gammal, *Regards sur Lyautey: Actes du colloque de Nancy, 17–18 Septembre 2004* (Special Issue *Annales de l'Est*, Nancy: Association d'historiens de l'est, 2004); William A. Hoisington, *Lyautey and the Conquest of Morocco* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Daniel Rivet, *Le Maroc de Lyautey à Mohammed V: Le double visage du protectorat* (Paris: Éditions Denoel, 1999).

³⁴ Massignon, *Enquête*, v–vi; Massignon was long admired as an intercultural broker: Jacques Keryell, *Louis Massignon et ses contemporains* (Paris: Karthala, 2007); Wendy de Souza, "Hostility and Hospitality: Muhammad Qazvini's Critique of Louis Massignon," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40 no. 4 (1013), 378–91.

in this chapter, this was not the case. He was an agent of colonialism rather than anti-colonialist transimperialism.

The revival of corporations in Morocco became a much-cited model across North Africa, where corporative artisans were decreasing, but not insignificant. Massignon counted around 25,000, each of them sustaining a family and relatives. Given their significant numbers, the Italian governor of Tripolitania employed Ricard in 1924 to create a similar preservationist department in the Italian colony.³⁵ Resonating beyond the Maghreb, British administrators from India used the 1919 World Fair to inquire about Ricard's scheme to revive "indigenous" guilds in North Africa.³⁶ British administrators subsequently discovered the existence of similar craft guild traditions in India, which supposedly appeared in the Vedas and the Laws of Manu. They equally set out to organize their revival.³⁷ In so doing, they found a stout supporter in Massignon, for whom craft guilds were a genuine attribute of indigenous societies, no matter what their religion was. As mentioned before, he found their roots in a multireligious Andalusia, where Muslim, Christian, and Jewish traditions converged and highlighted the role of craft guilds in the Middle East, in India, and Indonesia.³⁸

Massignon went as far as aligning North African craft guilds with Indian castes. Although these social institutions had emerged in very different contexts, he claimed that they resembled each other in their hierarchical order and social function. He found similarities between corporations and castes, arguing that most corporations had a "morality of a clan or a caste" and existed in "every Muslim society." Obviously, this over-generalized analogy between Moroccan corporations and Indian castes was rather far-fetched, but an unlikely source backed Massignon's theory.³⁹

The aligning of corporations and castes received support from Indian economists, who indeed looked back on a long corporative tradition. In an important study on Indian cooperative economy, the economist, Hiralal Lallubhai Kaji, explained that castes in India had originally been no more than occupational units and professional corporations. Unlike the ill-reputed castes of the twentieth century, the original castes had been voluntary economic associations rather than hereditary social classes. Thus, the primordial castes were much more flexible and less exclusive: "membership by choice has gone and membership by birth

³⁵ Prosper Ricard, "Les Arts Tripolitains (Parte I)" *Rivista della Tripolitana* 2, no. 4 (1926), 203–35.

³⁶ Alain de Pommereau, "The Invention of the Moroccan Carpet," in *After Orientalism*, ed. F. Pouillion and J.-C. Vatin (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 218–35.

³⁷ Eleanor Margaret Hough, *The Co-operative Movement in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 51.

³⁸ École Coloniale, *Congrès International et Intercolonial*, 73.

³⁹ Massignon, "L'Artisanat Indigène," 177.

has come; brotherhood has been replaced by indifference if not hostility and jealousy.”⁴⁰ Bemoaning this development, Indian experts such as Kaji recommended reviving these original professional castes.

Gandhi endorsed this view. It is widely known that he saw in small-scale and self-sufficient families who used the spinning wheel the basis of dignity, autonomy, and ultimately independence. Massignon took up Gandhi’s idea of the spinning wheel that also represented cooperation and solidarity among those involved in the production process. He made a plea to follow “the doctrine of the *charkha* (spinning wheel) and the *khaddar* (hand-spun cloth),” as recommended by Gandhi. Massignon would meet and admire Gandhi, declaring his approach exemplary.⁴¹ Apart from the romanticization of Gandhi, the alignment of corporations with castes reveals the will to engage in a transimperial exchange and find overarching solutions for specifically colonial problems.

In the meantime, Massignon’s idea of using corporations to stabilize the colonial economy and his alleged transimperial expertise attracted the attention of international organizations that lacked deeper knowledge about Islam under colonial rule. In 1930, the International Labor Office (ILO) adopted his strategy, aligning it with their own developing research on artisan crafts.⁴² The ILO’s directory saw “a certain relation with our own enquiry on the *artisanat*,” and sent its attaché, Roger Plissard, on a ten-day study trip to Tunisia. There, he analyzed “the working conditions of Northern Africa” that could provide the basis for a future policy in the “larger domain of the working conditions in a Muslim society.” Plissard’s object of study included the famous Tunisian *chouachis* corporation of artisans and the weavers of Kairouan. Consequently, the ILO prioritized craft guilds in its strategy for the Muslim world, with director Albert Thomas personally advancing this agenda during a visit to Egypt.⁴³

ILO experts regarded Muslim corporations as institutions that fostered “social unity.” An ILO report noted that these corporations, like Islam, were participatory and did not divide society into possessing and dispossessed classes. They opposed the strict employer–employee dichotomy, uniting masters and apprentices into a joint interest group with a shared corporate identity. Salaries were negotiated within the corporation rather than through class struggle. The ILO concluded that “Muslim solidarity” bonded masters and apprentices, tempering their opposition, and “The Koran governs work.” Thus, Muslim corporations seemed to promote

⁴⁰ Hiralal Lallubhāi Kaji, *Co-operation in India* (Bombay: All-India Co-operative Institute, 1932), 14.

⁴¹ Massignon, “L’Artisanat Indigène,” 177.

⁴² ILO Archives, N206/1/01/8, Muslim Labour, Report Plissard, 1931, 1–2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

social peace beyond their religious or economic roles.⁴⁴ This idea shaped the ILO's approach to "Muslim Labor," which was mainly labor in the colonies.

In the 1930s, corporatism became the central strategy of the ILO in its drafting of a "Muslim code of labor" that could potentially be applied to the entire Muslim world. Plissard saw a chance that 240 million Muslims who inhabited the colonial world from Morocco to the Dutch Indies would turn away from communist ideas and revive their time-honored corporative systems: "they constitute a special proletariat because they are artisans trained like our ancient corporations of the old regime by a long practice to the pleasure and the purposefulness of work."⁴⁵

Complementing the ILO's initiative, the revival of corporations and cooperatives was given dedicated attention in a panel at the International and Intercolonial Congress of Indigenous Societies, convened by colonial experts in 1931, partly in response to the ILO's ban on forced labor and the ongoing economic crisis. Distancing themselves from open forced labor, they encouraged economic activities without referring to open coercion. Dismissing British and French habits of inciting indigenous "chiefs" to implement forced cultivation among their subjects, they rather highlighted strategies such as the "*groupement* for collective exploitation with the help of agricultural loans and savings banks" as practiced in Belgian Congo.⁴⁶ What they had in mind was an "indigenous colonization," a sort of reconciliation of the colonized with the colonial project from which they were supposed to benefit.⁴⁷ Massignon was the star of the Congress, whom participants celebrated to have "performed miracles."⁴⁸ Participants also raised the issue of the castes, this time referring to Sub-Saharan Africa. There, some argued, it would be difficult to "recruit elites useful for the colonization" as in North Africa, due to a caste system resembling India's, with impoverished, stigmatized groups unlikely to produce leaders. However, most participants soon agreed that "casting the professions," particularly among blacksmiths and weavers, could lead to prosperity if combined with education.⁴⁹

What is the added value of using "transimperial" as a framework to analyze colonial corporatism? As we can tell from Massignon's focus on "indigenous" corporations, he neither thought of guilds as locally specific nor as a global institution in the sense of a universal phenomenon. Instead, he highlighted the similarity and specificity of "indigenous" corporate traditions lingering on in colonized territories

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ École Coloniale, *Congrès International*, vol. II, 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 64.

“from Morocco to Java.”⁵⁰ Hence, Massignon neither followed the (still) dominant historiographical habits of analyzing corporations within one city, nation, or empire, nor did he anticipate the recent trend by global historians to emphasize the universality of guilds and cooperatives to present it as the “smoking gun” for an empirical globality that required and justified the new discipline of global history.⁵¹

To be sure, Massignon’s distinction between “traditional” indigenous guilds and “modern-capitalist” corporatism and the cooperative movement in the metropolises was as transimperial as it was racist, because this differentiation served to discursively segregate the world. Guilds were constitutive of imperialist tales about backwardness and the economic and cultural “decline” of those territories which Europeans set out to colonize between the 1880s and the 1930s. The narrative of decline applied also to those parts of the world where Europeans admitted to have achieved a certain degree of civilization, such as India and the (former) possessions of the Ottoman Empire, which indeed stretched from North Africa to Asia.⁵² They were not exempted from the general narrative of decline of corporatist and cooperative “moral economies,” which inscribed itself into the racist story of the decline and potential extinction of indigeneity and collectivism as soon as it encountered a capitalist modernity.

But even in transimperial discourse, as we will see, corporatism often played a more ambiguous role, partly blurring the tradition/modernity dichotomy so deeply inscribed into colonial worldviews.⁵³ Since guilds and cooperatives were reimagined in the nineteenth century as a governmental tool in Europe to bring about sustained progress, colonizers became aware of them as instruments of modernizing indigenous economies in an allegedly participatory way, supposedly in harmony

⁵⁰ Bernard Lewis, “The Islamic Guilds,” *Economic History Rev* 8 no. 1 (1937), 20.

⁵¹ On the local analysis, see Nelly Hanna, “Guilds in Recent Historical Scholarship,” in *The City in the Islamic World (Handbook of Oriental Studies: Section 1; The Near and Middle East, Vol. 2)* ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020), 896; Jan Lucassen, Tine de Moor, Jan Luiten van Zanden, “The Return of the Guilds: Towards a Global History of the Guilds in Pre-industrial Times,” *International Review of Social History* 53 (2008), 5–18.

⁵² Ottoman corporate life shaped the world from North Africa to Asia and has received quite some historiographical attention. For a literature review and gaps, see Suraiya Faruqi, “Understanding Ottoman Guilds,” in *Crafts and Craftsmen of the Middle East: Fashioning the Individual in the Muslim Mediterranean*, ed. Suraiya Faruqi and Randi Deguilhem (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 16–18. Unlike the European colonizers, the Ottoman Empire seems to have failed in controlling corporations; see Geoffrey D. Schad, “Colonial Corporatism in the French Mandated States: Labor, Capital, the Mandatory Power, and the 1935 Syrian Law of Associations,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 105–106 (2005), 208.

⁵³ Haupt argues that European guilds continued to exist in industrialized societies; see Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (ed.), *Das Ende der Zünfte: Ein europäischer Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).

with indigenous traditionality. To be sure, this allegedly participatory colonialism represented by the revival of guilds and cooperatives rarely went against colonial rule and helped to uphold the colonial system rather than overcoming it. But it could also be used as an emancipative tool, including the transformation of guilds into trade unions and cooperatives into nationalist organizations.

Focused on cultural expressions of twentieth-century coloniality, postcolonial thinkers have rarely questioned the practice of colonialist corporatism and its embeddedness in transimperiality. In the founding study of postcolonial theory, *Orientalism*, Edward Said honorably mentioned Massignon for his exceptional affection to all matters Islam and exculpated him from “othering” the Orient, only to recognize and criticize Massignon’s role in colonial practice in his later work.⁵⁴ Despite his admiration, Said pointed already in *Orientalism* to Massignon’s unintended misinterpretation and willful exaggeration of Islamic institutions. In this contribution, I argue that Massignon and other transimperial experts equally exaggerated the role of Islamic/indigenous craft guilds and indigenous cooperatives, portraying them as a tool to make colonialism consensual and ultimately employing them to justify the continuation of the colonial project in the form of a transimperial project.⁵⁵

The political and social importance of craft guilds in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Islamic world remains a matter of debate, but Massignon promoted them as the basis of a corporatist society in the colonies. Massignon is known to have defended Islamic practices, sought to correct Western misconceptions about Islam, and promoted a spiritual union of Islam with Catholicism and Judaism. He allegedly exemplified the extreme end of engaging deeply with his research subjects, but other ICI experts on Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or African animism, such as Snouck-Hurgronje, were similarly invested. At the same time, they wanted to stabilize colonial rule with their expertise. The ICI facilitated transimperial exchange by allowing such specialists to use their knowledge about Islam not just for theoretical discussions, as in Orientalist congresses, but to apply it practically in governance. Ultimately, the ICI aimed to sustain the colonial system by leveraging such knowledge to win the favor of the colonized.

Massignon stood for a more general trend among ICI members to portray themselves as transimperial intermediaries between the Muslim world and the non-Muslim world. For ICI members, corporatist and cooperative organizations

⁵⁴ James Brown, “The solitude of Edward Said: the fate of Gibb, Lane and Massignon in *Orientalism*,” *Economy and Society* 28 no. 4 (1999), 565; Nicholas Dirks, “Edward Said and Anthropology,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33 no. 3 (2004), 47.

⁵⁵ Massignon willfully exaggerated the importance of Islamic mystic *Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj*, whose biography made him famous; see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977), 104. His knowledge about craft guilds was both exaggerated and dated, e.g., on the *muhtasibs*: Hanna, “Guilds,” 899.

seemed to exist among all “indigenous” peoples, regardless of their religion. Craft guilds were important across the Islamic world, but the Indian casts and animistic forms of cooperative self-organization allegedly worked on a similar model. The unifying element of these indigenous forms of grassroots organization seemed to be a specific inclination towards collectivity, ascribed to Islamic and Hindu civilizations as well as to allegedly primitive animistic societies. The interpretation of indigenous societies as inherently collectivist certainly emerged from an essentialist and racist view, but it could also serve as a basis of solidarity among anti-colonial movements.

The ICI members’ emphasis on pre-existing indigenous cross-imperial routines tacitly suggested that indigenous cooperation across colonial borders forced colonial experts to equally get organized across empires to respond adequately to the challenge of indigenous transimperialism. This “responsive transimperialism” was advanced with regard to Pan-Islamic institutions (such as the famous Saniya brotherhood active across colonial borders in North Africa), with Islam being declared not only a religion but a social, political, and legal dispositif that structured the everyday life of colonized peoples from Morocco to Indonesia, and from the Caucasus to Southern Africa.

Yet, the emphasis on transimperial responsiveness was not innocent, and actually served to uphold colonial governance while avoiding democratic participation. ICI experts saw in craft guilds the guardians of a traditional moral economy against the penetration of predator capitalism and communism. They imagined these craft guilds as being representative bodies without being democratic institutions. Hierarchically ordered, the authoritarian heads of the guilds were usually appointed by the colonial governments.

To be sure, Islamic craft guilds were a transimperial phenomenon. But they were neither a movement that intentionally brought about transimperialism for political purposes, nor were they a praxis that engendered transimperiality as a social routine and a cultural determinant. Massignon analyzed the transimperial *phenomenon* of craft guilds in Morocco and in Syria. Only in a second step did he make their revival a transimperial project. It was during the 1920s that transimperialism emerged as a colonial strategy.

Cooperatives as a Tool of Transimperial Rule

In the transimperial studies on corporatism, the ICI does not draw a sharp line between corporations and cooperatives. No doubt, craft guilds are mostly urban, and cooperatives are predominantly rural and dedicated to agriculture, but the ICI also mentions urban cooperatives (e.g., the *nidhi* in India) and rural corporations

(e.g., the *khatatariyya* formed by Berber irrigation engineers of the Rif).⁵⁶ Both seemed to share ideas of collective capital, tools, production, and marketing, as well as mutual aid regarding health insurance and old-age pensions. Both corporations and cooperatives seem to have emerged from a specific moral economy that differs from capitalism and is compatible with religious, indigenous, and collectivist lifestyles. Today, we tend to think of cooperatives as democratic grassroots initiatives, but transimperial discourse emphasizes their collectivist character without necessarily qualifying them as democratic.

The ICI was among the first to study cooperatives comparatively in the colonies from around 1900 and way into the period of late colonialism. What is more, its members were deeply involved in implementing cooperatives as tools of colonial governance and social control of the colonized. Already around 1900, French ICI members had helped establish a large network of Provident Societies (*Sociétés de Prévoyance*) in French Africa. These centrally administered, hierarchically ordered, and often forcefully implemented agricultural cooperatives were supposed to restructure local agriculture and teach Africans “providence” by saving both grain and money for the future. Originally introduced in Algeria in the nineteenth century, French ICI member, Ernest Roume, applied them also to French West Africa, when he became the federation’s governor in 1910. By then, membership in the Provident Societies had become compulsory.⁵⁷ In the 1930s, there were several hundred of them in French West Africa, with around five million members.⁵⁸ In 1934, they had an overall capital of 37 million francs. This led the French to conclude that “we indeed observe the birth of an ‘African cooperativism’.”⁵⁹ While many of these Provident Societies existed only on paper, they had nevertheless left a mark on the colonized producers.

In the 1920s, the ICI focused on less centralized cooperative schemes, consistently promoting the use of indigenous institutions within colonial states. The ICI’s transimperial and comparative studies noted the difficulties of earlier cooperative schemes in Asia, particularly in Indonesia and India. By 1900, the Dutch had established a state-run credit system in Indonesia to fund village cooperatives. However, this system collapsed in the 1920s as few villagers could repay their loans. Before World War I, cooperative banks had loaned 1,643,500 florins, but only 93,000 florins were repaid, leaving 1,550,500 florins unsettled.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Institut Colonial International, *L’Organisation du Crédit Au Point de Vue Industriel et Commercial En Faveur des Classes Moyennes* (Brussels: ICI, 1911), 120–23; Massignon, *Enquête*, 52.

⁵⁷ Louis Milliot, *L’association agricole chez les musulmans du Maghreb* (Paris: Rousseau, 1911), 274.

⁵⁸ Marcel Boyer, *Les sociétés de prévoyance de secours et de prêts mutuels agricoles en AOF* (Paris: Loviton 1935), 133.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁰ ICI, *L’Organisation du crédit au point de vue industriel et commercial en faveur des classes moyennes* (Brussels: ICI, 1911), 110.

The ICI attributed the failure of Indonesian cooperatives to the lack of self-organized credit banks. Claude Strickland, an ICI member, argued that colonized people would only repay loans from their own “cooperative” peer group, criticizing the Dutch for not “educating” cooperative members. This critique aligned with Dutch views, leading to a 1927 law encouraging grassroots cooperatives in Indonesia. By 1930, 81 new societies were registered under this law, while the Javanese independently formed 519 cooperatives. However, these cooperatives remained tools of control and “education.”⁶¹

Engaging in transimperial comparison, ICI members advanced similar reasons why cooperative schemes had failed in British India. Like in the Dutch case, the 1904 British Co-operative Credit Societies Act was meant to support, register, and control cooperatives in India.⁶² By 1908, there were 15 bigger cooperative unions that watched over 1,766 rural and 227 urban cooperatives with 184,889 members. While most of them seem to have been self-supporting, many seized the opportunity to borrow from the state banks.⁶³ In 1912, the British government created a central registration office to tightly control and potentially dissolve cooperatives.⁶⁴ It held members collectively responsible for the reimbursement of individual loans. Moreover, special bylaws forced the members to participate in joint work, and cooperatives became a tool to implement obligatory “community” labor.⁶⁵ The ICI criticized this development, not so much because it enabled coerced labor, but because allegedly corrupt and irresponsible indigenous management boards supposedly misused state loans and thus provoked the 1929 collapse of the Indian cooperative system.⁶⁶

Indigenous experts on cooperatives such as the Indian economist, Anwar Iqbal Qureshi, who shared their expertise across colonial borders and who advised the ILO and the League of Nations, came up with less simplistic explanations for the collapse. Instead of accusing the Indian management boards, he blamed the British government for introducing unlimited liability for agricultural cooperatives under the Cooperative Credit Societies Act, meaning that the whole cooperative was responsible if one member was unable to pay back a loan. According to Qureshi, well-off farmers, who had much to lose in the case of unlimited liability, did not join the societies in the first place, “seeing that they risk the whole of their property by

⁶¹ Claude F. Strickland, *Co-Operation for Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 427–28.

⁶² Anwar Iqbal Qureshi, *The Future of the Co-Operative Movement in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 6–7.

⁶³ ICI, *L'Organisation*, 120–23.

⁶⁴ Qureshi, *The Future*, 6–7.

⁶⁵ Vaikunth L. Meha, *Co-operative Farming* (Bombay: Co-operative Union, 1959), 5.

⁶⁶ William M. Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 1466.

becoming members.” Consequently, the cooperatives “may often degenerate into an organization of poor and inefficient farmers of the locality, dependent in its activity only from outside (State) resources.”⁶⁷

The ICI accepted Qureshi’s argument, pleading to replace centralized state loans with a revival of the more collectivist and “indigenous” cooperatives. The *nidhi* seemed to be such an institution, since they were mutual loan associations that received their capital from deposits of individual members. *Nidhi* bylaws contained a security agreement, which stipulated that members received the whole amount of their deposits after seven years. This bylaw ensured that members who received loans in the first seven years of their membership paid them back, in order not to lose the total amount of their deposits after their seven years’ membership. *Nidhis*, ICI-members argued, could prevent the corporative and cooperative credit system from collapsing, and recommended them as an example to emulate in a transimperial setting.⁶⁸

The ICI’s agenda to “indigenize” cooperatives owed much to its British member, Claude F. Strickland, nicknamed the “apostle of cooperation in Africa” in the 1930s. Having served as registrar of cooperative societies in the Punjab in British India, he introduced cooperative policies to Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Nigeria, and even Palestine.⁶⁹ Colonial administrations around the world sought his expertise, also because he seemed to have “really entered the minds of the natives,” as the official Gazette of French West Africa remarked.⁷⁰ In public, Strickland emphasized that the colonial state had to keep aloof from controlling cooperatives too tightly and from granting loans to farmers who were nonchalant in paying them back. No state-funded central banks, he argued, could replace the self-educational character of communal and mutual credit societies. He therefore advocated the family as the smallest unit of a cooperative society.⁷¹

Strickland completely abandoned his liberal ideal as an advisor to the British colonial administration in Kenya and Zanzibar, just as many ICI members switched between allegedly neutral internationalism and state-supporting nationalism and imperialism. In Kenya, the most famous “indigenous” cooperative project was the Kilimanjaro Natives’ Planter Association (KNPA), an entirely African cooperative formed by 4,500 coffee farmers in the Kilimanjaro region, who cultivated about

⁶⁷ Qureshi, *The Future*, 22–23.

⁶⁸ ICI, *L’Organisation*, 120–123; Qureshi, *The Future*, 4.

⁶⁹ Rhodes, *Empire and Co-operation*, 183.

⁷⁰ Gouvernement Général AOF, *Bulletin Hebdomadaire d’Information et de Renseignements* 9 (May 10, 1934), 16–19.

⁷¹ Strickland, *Co-operation*, 427–28.

1,500 acres and produced 80 tons of Arabica coffee by 1925.⁷² The KNPA provided common facilities for the purchase of seeds and tools as well as organizing transport, storage, and the fight against pests and diseases. It gave loans to its members and encouraged “the spirit and practice of thrift, mutual help and self-help.” In every society, a professional secretary took care of the bookkeeping and money transactions. Habitually, each village elected its own representative to the committee, which was named the all-African managing committee. By 1929, it had 27,000 members, but the collapse of coffee prices brought it into financial difficulties. Nevertheless, the KNPA stood on its own feet and did not receive outside help or funding, with the colonial government even temporarily withdrawing administrative support.⁷³

In the late 1920s, however, Strickland became an advisor to the Kenyan government and seized control of the KNPA. He used the KNPA’s financial weakness to bring it in line with British coffee legislation and to influence its price policy.⁷⁴ Staging a coup, Strickland imprisoned its leaders and substituted them with a European manager. In 1932, all cooperatives in Kenya became officially registered under the new Co-operative Societies Ordinance.⁷⁵ Strickland’s alleged liberalism was a farce, and he delivered the ultimate proof of his hypocrisy during his transformation of Zanzibar’s clove industry into a state-controlled cooperative economy, which made wide use of force and compulsion.⁷⁶

During the transimperial search for a best practice of colonial cooperativism, the ICI members used “indigenization” as a pretext to implement and justify tight control, collective liability, and compulsory labor in their respective colonies. Ultimately, the ICI particularly promoted a model developed in French Madagascar, the so-called *fokon’olona* cooperative system. Literally, *fokon’olona* meant an „association of people“ who pursued a common goal and followed common rules. Originally, the *fokon’olona* were pure kinship groups based on the traditional clan and lineage structures of the Merina kingdom in central Madagascar. During the nineteenth century, *fokon’olona* cooperatives became known for joint rice production, which included the purchase of seeds, sharing of tools, collective loans, management of irrigation systems, and the marketing of rice. *Fokon’olona* also

⁷² John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 274–80; Andreas Eckert, *Herrschen und Verwalten: Afrikanische Bürokraten, staatliche Ordnung und Politik in Tansania, 1920–1970* (Munich: Gruyter, 2007), 56–61.

⁷³ “A short account of the Kilimanjaro Native Co-operative Union Ltd.,” *The East African Agricultural Journal* 12, no. 1 (1946), 46.

⁷⁴ Susan Rogers, “The Kilimanjaro Native Planters Association: Administrative Responses to Chagga Initiatives in the 1920’s,” *Transafrican Journal of History* 4, nos. 1–2 (1974), 105.

⁷⁵ “A Short Account,” 47.

⁷⁶ Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 297.

assumed the role of a welfare organization to care for the poor, the sick, and the elderly. Europeans declared these communal self-help groups exemplary because they seemed fully compatible with pre-existing clan and lineage structures.⁷⁷

What international colonial experts presented as the most humane path to cooperative development turned out to be the opposite: the *fokon'olona* became an instrument of oppression. As early as 1902, a French decree forced all residents to become members of a local *fokon'olona*. The government used the *fokon'olona* to collect taxes, holding its board responsible for delivering the correct amount. Added to this taxation were various forms of forced labor: members were required to build infrastructure projects such as irrigation systems, roads, or telegraph lines.⁷⁸ Finally, *fokon'olona* members were collectively responsible for naming and delivering criminals to the colonial government. They thus became an instrument of collective punishment. This, in turn, could be compensated through forced labor. What is more, the *fokon'olona* had actually never been an indigenous institution but had served the pre-colonial authoritarian Merina rulers to control, oppress, and force the “indigenous” population to perform compulsory labor.

Transimperial Corporativism between Liberal, Socialist, and Fascist Internationalisms

As is well known, Gandhi not only stood for the revival of corporations, but also promoted the use of agricultural cooperatives. Gandhi's Tolstoy Farm, which he operated between 1908 and 1914 in South Africa, became a much talked-about experimental field for an emancipative agricultural cooperativism. The 80 members of the Tolstoy farm were mainly occupied with agriculture, but Gandhi used it also to produce sandals, a craft not unlike that of the Moroccan shoemaker corporations. More than that, Gandhi expected the members of the cooperative to learn self-discipline and the love of work, in addition to cooperative and corporate economics, and to internalize the spiritual rationale of nonviolent resistance. In this respect, Gandhi also saw the Tolstoy Farm as an educational tool that helped members to internalize *satyagraha*, or passive resistance to oppression. As we have seen, back in India, Gandhi would declare indigenous Indian cooperative and corporate economies to be one of the pillars of *Hind Swaraj*, self-sufficient and autonomous Home Rule. His cooperative projects were always multireligious and

⁷⁷ “Foreword by G. Julien,” in *Le Fokon'olona (Commune Malgache) et les conventions de Fokon'olona*, ed. Pierre Delteil, (Paris: Loviton, 1931), v; ICI, *L'Organisation*, 95.

⁷⁸ “Organisation de l'Administration Indigène de l'Imerina, Décret du 9 mars 1902,” *Journal Officiel de Madagascar* (April 30, 1902), 7391; Delteil, *Le Fokon'olona*, 79–80.

theoretically disregarded caste hierarchies. Anticipating a much bigger corporative organization of postcolonial relations, Gandhi called the Tolstoy farm a „co-operative commonwealth.“⁷⁹

A more dubious “Indian” who called for a “cooperative world commonwealth” was Freppel Cotta from Portuguese Goa. A renowned expert on agricultural cooperatives in India, Cotta’s work was widely read among liberal cooperativists. For him, ideal agricultural cooperatives were economically self-sufficient communities based on mutual support, with members sharing tools, knowledge, funds, seeds, and marketing strategies. Cooperatives ideally served as credit banks that extended low-interest loans to their members. In India, the colonial administration and Indian economists saw in such cooperative banks a way to combat usurers who lent to and often ruined local farmers.⁸⁰

Cotta found the ideal type of a society’s corporative reorganization in fascist Italy and particularly studied Mussolini’s use of agricultural cooperatives to secure rural support for the fascist state. On paper, Cotta endorsed the liberal British Rochdale model, which provided also the guiding principles for the International Cooperative Alliance that had been founded in 1895. The Rochdale principles stipulated that membership of agricultural cooperatives was voluntary and that members should democratically elect their own board of directors, which acted independently of the state. What was Cotta, who officially adhered to the British liberal cooperative tradition, doing in fascist Italy in 1932? By then, it was widely known that Mussolini had dissolved all pre-existing Socialist and Christian cooperatives and subordinated them to fascist collective agriculture and the state’s corporatist economy. In 1931, Mussolini founded a state agency that controlled and coordinated all cooperative activities in accordance with the corporatist planned economy. These cooperatives spread the fascist doctrine among the rural population and helped implement the fascist “reclaiming of new land” through colonization and settlement inside and outside Italy. Membership was nominally voluntary even under fascism; in practice, it was compulsory.⁸¹

Cotta, aware of the fascist authoritarian and repressive corporatism, defended his admiration for fascist Italy: “As we are treating of Co-operation and not of political systems, any praise or blame attached to the Fascist and any other régime will relate solely to the facts which form the subject of our study.”⁸² He particularly hailed the fascists’ “educational” use of cooperatives, including the possibility of dissolving those who did not submit to fascist ideology. As we will see, Cotta became

⁷⁹ Nishikant Kolge, *Gandhi Against Caste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 14.

⁸⁰ Freppel Cotta, *Agricultural Co-Operation in Fascist Italy* (London: King, 1935).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 136–37.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

one of the harbingers of a planned corporatist economy in Salazar's Portugal, which included the colonies in Africa.

No doubt, fascist corporativism was more attractive for colonial administrations than communist collectivization. Most colonial officials saw craft guilds as an instrument to ward off communist and syndicalist ways of organizing worker collectivities. Massignon hoped that the habitually conservative heads of corporations might defend their society against "bolshevist" infiltration. In Tunisia, for example, "the tribunal of the *'orf* or customary law, where the cheikh el medina from Tunis solves conflicts among corporations, has resisted with pain the infiltration of the communist propaganda upon the new professions (dockers, railway workers, tram workers) for two years."⁸³ Again, colonial experts often exaggerated the corporations' propensity to ward off communism. They were not "conservative" by default but also got involved with trade unions to increase their agency, be it on a local, metropolitan, or internationalist level. They also calculated which degree of radicalism accorded most with their own agenda and interests. As Massignon remarked, "the spokesmen of the Tunisian craftsmen, disenchanted with the *'orf*, suspected the followers of the 2nd International of moderantism and announced to only participate in the 3rd, the Muskovite one, via the C.G.T.T." The C.G.T.T. (General Confederation of Tunisian Workers), founded in 1924, was the umbrella organization of trade unions in Tunisia that had emancipated itself from the original French mother organization. Turning to these organizations put the corporatist elite at a great risk. One year later, the French colonial government destroyed the union and exiled its leaders.⁸⁴ In most cases, the colonial governments used the dissolution as an ultima ratio to prevent corporations from turning to communism.

Corporations and cooperatives thus played an ambiguous role and could be used both as an emancipative and as an authoritarian tool. It was this ambiguity that colonizers could capitalize on, mainly by using them as a governmental institution in the Foucauldian sense. They reinvented corporations and cooperatives to maintain control over colonized societies while equally pretending to loosen their grip by granting more autarky and even political autonomy.

When fascist empires emerged in the 1930s and immediately engaged in an intense transimperial exchange regarding the colonies, they appropriated corporative and cooperative strategies to satisfy both capitalist and authoritarian interest groups among their supporters. Fascist empires such as Italy, Germany, Vichy-France, Spain, and Portugal organized society into various corporations, each representing a particular sector of the economy or a specific interest group. These corporations were composed of both employers and employees within the

⁸³ Massignon, *Enquête*, 185.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

sector to control the proletariat and choke off opposition, critique, wage claims, improved working conditions, and any kind of democratic representation. In Italy, for example, there were separate corporations for industries, agriculture, labor, and various professions, all tightly controlled by the state.

It was the combination of representation without democracy and capitalism without freedom that made corporativism interesting for both fascist and colonial administrations, who joined forces to establish a transimperial “Eurafrica” that was economically integrated but remained racially segregated. In the 1930s, fascist empires increasingly identified corporatism as an instrument to guarantee European exploitation of resources and laborers in the colonies while denying them any participation in political and social life. Building on his study of fascist cooperatives in corporatist Italy, Freppel Cotta promoted an overall corporatist reorganization of the Portuguese fascist empire, especially in his influential book *Economic Planning in Corporative Portugal* (1937). It appeared in the wake of other fascist and corporatist pamphlets, such as Mihail Manoilescu’s famous *Siècle du corporatisme* (1936) and Giuseppe De Michelis’ *Reorganisation on Corporatist Lines* (1930). Aiming to transform colonial empires into a pseudo-integrative transimperial “Eurafrica,” De Michelis called for “new systems of European colonisation, founded on association of the native element with the white element,” and suggested that “the construction of what has aptly been called Eurafrica [...] may be found in a just economic distribution of the zones of influence between the various European, Asiatic and American economic groups. We mean that Africa is, and cannot fail to be considered and recognised as strictly complementary to Europe.”⁸⁵ He was among the first to promote a transimperial Eurafrica that should secure the exploitation of “complementary spaces,” such as Africa, by equally maintaining racial exclusion of the colonized.

In his book, Cotta evoked such ideas to promote the transformation of Salazar’s Estado Novo into a corporatist state that indeed dissolved Portugal’s parliament, replaced it with a Corporatist Chamber, and left the legislative to the president/dictator.⁸⁶ Marcelo Caetano, who put this Corporate State for Salazar’s Portugal into practice, wrote the preface to Cotta’s book. An ICI member, Caetano illustrates the increased grip of fascists from Italy, Portugal, and Nazi Germany on the ICI in the 1930s. In 1938, fascist ICI members co-organized the Volta Congress on Africa in Rome. Initiated by Mussolini, this congress assembled 126 colonial “experts” from Europa in Rome, with the purpose of redefining the relationship between a Europe unified by fascism and its colonies in Africa. One of these experts was

⁸⁵ Giuseppe de Michelis, *World Reorganisation On Corporative Lines* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930), 92–243.

⁸⁶ Freppel Cotta, *Economic Planning in Corporative Portugal* (London: King, 1937).

Massignon, who found an ideological home among the fascists. As Mussolini had advanced a spiritual unity between Christians and Islam to win over both for the colonial cause, Massignon saw his own ideas confirmed. To realize this spiritual unification—as opposed to democratic participation—Mussolini had promoted a corporatist state, which he imagined as a neo-Roman empire of “Eurafrica” that included the colonies. This idea fell on fertile ground among French, Portuguese, Italian, and Nazi corporatists at the Volta Congress, who equally defined Africa as an economic “complementary space” to supply fascist Europe with resources.⁸⁷

Unsurprisingly, Louis Massignon claimed to have “seen the birth of Eurafrica at the Volta Congress of 1938, in Mussolini’s Rome.”⁸⁸ What is more surprising is that this quote dates from 1951. Disregarding fascist crimes, Massignon and many other participants of the Volta Congress celebrated the corporatist Eurafrica invented by fascists in 1938. In the 1950s, this corporatist Eurafrica equally appealed to the advocates of a European Community. The pro-European movement designed a post-fascist but nevertheless corporatist union between European colonizers and African colonized. Massignon, Labouret, Caetano, and Freppel, who had designed a corporatist Eurafrica, were members of the ICI, which was reestablished in 1949 and rebaptized the Institute of Differing Civilizations (INCIDI). As such, it loomed large in building the Eurafrica of the early European Community and liberal development policies.

Conclusion

The transimperial practice of reorganizing colonial societies through corporative and cooperative models had three interrelated origins. First, colonial experts like Massignon argued that such structures had historical precedents across the Islamic, and indeed the entire colonized world, from Morocco to Indonesia. They promoted them as tools of indirect rule to enhance colonial control, reimagining them as mutual aid societies to offload state responsibilities for healthcare, unemployment benefits, and pensions, while actually using them for collective punishments, tax farming, and forced labor. Second, by reviving craft guilds and cooperatives, colonizers claimed to respect indigenous moral economies, presenting them as alternatives to capitalism and socialism, which were seen as disruptive. In reality, this masked the continued use of forced taxation and labor banned by the League

⁸⁷ Karsten Linne, “Afrika als wirtschaftspolitischer Ergänzungsraum. Kurt Weigelt und die kolonialwirtschaftlichen Planungen im Dritten Reich,” in *Unternehmenskrisen und ihre Bewältigung im 20. Jahrhundert* ed. Jörg Baten (Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 2006), 146.

⁸⁸ Massignon, *Écrits Mémoires*, vol. 1, 665.

of Nations in the 1930s. Third, the fascist Eurafrica project elevated corporatism to enforce totalitarian control, undemocratic representation, and racial segregation.

Disguised as international development policy, this transimperial practice found its way into post-1945 liberal Third World policy and the EG's Eurafrica project alike. UN development agencies, too, recommended *fokon'olona* and *paysannat* schemes as ideal tools for development throughout the twentieth century. With cooperatives and their ambiguous role continuing to shape developmentalist thinking after 1945, corporatist Eurafrica lingered on, too. It informed the movement for European unification, which was inherently a "Eurafrica" project.⁸⁹ One key figure responsible for this continuity was Louis Salleron. As a Vichy official, Salleron had developed and implemented Vichy's corporatist legislation. After 1946, he co-established the influential European Union of Federalists to lobby for a European federation.⁹⁰ A Christian and right-wing activist, Salleron, cooperated closely with Massignon and advocated militantly for a decentralized, federal, and corporatist Europe that admitted only a limited degree of democratic participation.⁹¹ Africa was part of Salleron's corporatist European federation, but no more than a complementary space to be exploited economically.⁹² With post-fascists such as Salleron at the origin of the European movement, it is not surprising that the INCIDI also collaborated closely with representatives of the early EEC, created by the Treaties of Rome in 1957. These treaties did not only create a European federation but also "associated" African colonies such as Algeria. Leading experts of corporatism in the European Union continued to refer to and even rehabilitate fascist corporatists with colonial ambitions, such as Cotta, Caetano, De Michelis, and others.⁹³ In this way, the transimperial corporatism lived on, within Europe and in its development policy toward countries of the "Third World."

⁸⁹ Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The untold history of European integration and colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Post-imperial Possibilities: Eurasia, Eurafrica, Afroasia* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023).

⁹⁰ Marco Duranti, *The conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 259.

⁹¹ Louis Salleron, "Propositions pour Un temps nouveau," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1.6.1963), 20.

⁹² Louis Salleron, "Les chemins de l'Europe," *Fédération*, 104–105 (September–October 1953).

⁹³ Especially Philippe C. Schmitter, "The New Corporatism: Social and Political Structures in the Iberian World," *The Review of Politics* 36 no. 1 (January 1974), 88.

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Libya, Mussolini, and the “White Race”: Fascist Colonialism and its Imprint on the British Empire

Patrick Bernhard

Abstract

This chapter studies how journalists from Britain and key white dominions, especially Australia, collected knowledge on the fascist Italian empire's settler-colonial efforts in the 1930s and in which complex ways they interpreted those efforts; and shows how such information helped shape contemporary political and administrative debates about Britain's own settler-colonial efforts. In so doing, the chapter shows how people at the time saw differences and commonalities between their own colonial practices and the fascist vision of empire, what they deemed worthy of imitation and what they rejected, and how competing notions of empire were negotiated in sometimes fierce debates.

Keywords: transimperial, Settler colonialism, Journalism, Officialdom, Britain, Italy

In the fall of 1938, Mussolini took the world by surprise. At a time when other European powers were struggling to contain anti-colonial movements and the whole system of imperialism appeared to be in deep crisis, the Italian dictator launched a massive state-sponsored settlement program in his country's overseas territories. As close to 20,000 settlers landed in Libya's capital, Tripoli, the fascist regime launched a huge propaganda campaign at home, announcing that many more settlers would follow. The goal was to achieve at least half a million colonists in Libya by the 1950s and millions more in Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) and other parts of the African continent that the regime aimed to conquer in its quest for “living space.” Indeed, the *Ventimila*—or Twenty Thousand, as they are still remembered today—were part of a much wider scheme seemingly driven by a comprehensive biopolitical vision. North Africa was presented as a huge laboratory for unprecedented experiments in racial demographics. Leading fascists voiced hopes that the southern shores of the Mediterranean would serve as a breeding ground for the “white race,” thus reversing the decline in the growth of population that had been underway in many European societies since the turn of the century.

The scope and purported underlying biopolitical objectives of the fascist scheme stirred considerable international media attention. Some foreign observers drew strong parallels to other large-scale settlement projects that were considered exemplary at the time, such as the French relocation of settlers to Algeria, the Japanese colonization of Manchuria, and the new homesteads for the Jewish people in Palestine.¹

The international ramifications of the fascists' dream of empire are the focus of this chapter. I am interested in how commentators, journalists, intellectuals, and political figures abroad perceived Italy's colonial project, and, even more important, how they gathered, discussed, and used the information in various contexts.² Most studies of the interwar European empires are comparative, seeking to determine their objective similarities and differences.³ In contrast, I adopt a transimperial, cultural approach, exploring subjective frames of reference.⁴ What concerns me are what people *at that time* believed were the differences and commonalities between their own colonial practices and the fascist vision of empire, what they deemed worthy of imitation, and what they rejected, in sometimes fierce debates. Indeed, as Miri Rubin has argued, the domain of representation and the struggle over meaning are among the most fruitful areas for the pursuit of historical understanding.⁵ Ultimately, my contribution questions the very idea of a clear demarcation that can be drawn between an imperial and a transimperial sphere. Instead, I would like to adapt an "outside in" perspective: not only do transimperial forces circulate through, across, and between "imperial spaces"; they ultimately help to establish and maintain them.⁶

* I wish to thank Jessica Urwin (ANU) for her great help in retrieving the archival materials in Canberra during the Covid lockdown in 2021 and Rebecca Lowen for her fantastic editing of the text.

¹ Michael Ortiz, *Anti-Colonialism and the Crises of Interwar Fascism* (London et al: Bloomsburg Academic, 2023), 6–7; Patrick Bernhard, "Hitler's Africa in the East: Italian Colonialism as a Model for German Planning in Eastern Europe," *Journal of Contemporary History* 51,1 (2016), 61–90.

² Similar are the methodological suggestions made by Joahannes Paulmann, "Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer: Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts," *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), 649–85.

³ Reo Matsuzaki, "Placing the Colonial State in the Middle: The Comparative Method and the Study of Empires," *Comparativ* 19,1 (2009), 107–19.

⁴ Similar are Marina Mogilner and Alexander Semyonov, "New imperial History and the Challenges of Empire," in Ilya Gerasimov et al. (eds.), *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 15; Martin Thomas and Richard Toye, *Arguing About Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882–1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–18.

⁵ Miri Rubin, "Cultural history I: what's in a name?" last modified 2008, The Institute of Historical Research, https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/cultural_history.html (last accessed May 28, 2020).

⁶ This argument has been made by Andrew Preston and Doug Rossinow (eds.), *Outside In: The Transnational Circuitry of US History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) in regard to the

Specifically, I look at the British Empire and the associated Dominion of Australia, and to a lesser extent, the Dominions of New Zealand and Canada, to understand how people in these countries viewed the fascist efforts in North Africa and why they viewed them as they did. Although by far the biggest and most potent imperial power of its time, Britain observed other colonial regimes in what was an atmosphere of increasing international competition starting in the late nineteenth century.⁷ As Alex Middleton has noted, the very notion of British exceptionalism derived from Britain's often commonsense comparisons to its imperial rivals, whose purported inferiority British politicians and state officials as well as ordinary tourists traveling abroad confirmed with regularity.⁸ Likewise, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand shared not only an understanding of being settler societies but also the various difficulties that resulted from this status, such as building "white communities" amid multi-ethnic populations.⁹ For these societies, the solutions to such problems that other colonizing countries such as Italy had found were potentially valuable for improving their own settlement practices.

As I will argue, fascist biopolitics served as both an important model and counter model in the Anglophone debates over colonial policies during the interwar years. On the one hand, Mussolini's claim to have overcome the purported laissez-faire colonialism of the British Empire and replaced it with something new in the history of overseas domination provoked strong reactions against Italian settlement schemes. Yet fending off an idea deemed false helped at the same time to reassure people that they were on the "right" path with their own colonial policies. Thus, the fascist challenge functioned as a transimperial confirmation of what were thought to be genuinely British imperial pathways.

On the other hand, fascist biopolitics also served as a beacon to those in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada who were discontented with the state of colonial affairs in their own countries. Paradoxically, the idea of fascist colonialism had a huge impact not despite but *because* empires were believed to be in deep crisis in the interwar years. Mussolini seemed to demonstrate that it was possible to defy the global trend of decolonization. All that was needed was the determination of a political strongman and a state-driven, comprehensive scheme to stem the tide.

relationship between national and transnational history, but it can be easily extended to the sphere of empire.

⁷ Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order* (London: Lane, 2014); Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815–1914: A World History* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 79.

⁸ Alex Middleton, "European Colonial Empires and Victorian Imperial Exceptionalism," in Willibald Steinmetz (ed.) *The Force of Comparison: A New Perspective on Modern European History and the Contemporary World* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 164–90.

⁹ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2011), 180, 458–67.

In sum, Mussolini gave hope for a fundamental renewal of colonial rule and, by extension, of white supremacy.

The interest in fascist Italy overrode even the nationalist and racist resentment that existed in Anglo-Saxon countries towards Italian migrants, especially those from the south of the country. Despite these reservations, the “Roman model” possessed a magnetic appeal, not least due to the strict distinction that it made between “old” Italy and the “new” Fascism that broke with tradition.¹⁰ As Stuart Ward has argued, the preexisting idea of white supremacy in anglophone countries such as Australia was fueled by the rise of fascism in Italy in the 1920s; conversely, the settler colonialism in these countries served as an amplifier for the new ideology.¹¹

Indeed, few in Britain and beyond dismissed the Italian settlement schemes straightaway as the megalomaniac and anachronistic follies of a purportedly backward Mediterranean dictatorship of scant importance. Rather, in interwar debates about empire, Mussolini’s regime wielded what Michel Foucault has called “discursive power”: it succeeded, if only for a limited period, in shaping the international agenda for empire.¹²

It exercised this influence largely via media. For this reason, I focus here on the interplay between media, science, and politics. Much has been written about the prominent role of academic experts, particularly anthropologists, in generating knowledge in support of European imperial dominance.¹³ We know far less about the role of the media.¹⁴ But science-driven knowledge only becomes fully effective

¹⁰ Patrick Bernhard, “The Great Divide? Notions of Racism in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: New Answers to an Old Problem,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 24,1 (2019), 97–114; Patrick Bernhard, “Fascism’s Global Script: Mussolini’s Italy and the Rise and Radicalization of Nazism,” in Jonathan S. Wiesen et al. (eds.), *Global Nazism: The Third Reich in Transnational and International Perspective* (in print London: Routledge, 2025).

¹¹ Stuart Ward, “‘Regular White Man’: Reveries of Reverse Colonization,” in Daniel Geary, Camilla Schofield and Jennifer Sutton (eds.), *Global White Nationalism: From Apartheid to Trump* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 53–70.

¹² On how to use Foucault’s insights in cultural studies, see Esther Konieczny, *Gipfel, Krisen, Konferenzen: Die Entstehung diskursiver Macht in transnationalen Kommunikationsereignissen* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014), 91.

¹³ On this topic in general, see Kerstin Brückweh et al. (eds.), *Engineering Society: The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies, 1880–1980* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020). On the relationship between science and empire in particular, see Andrew Goss (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021); Brett M. Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science Across the British Empire, 1800–1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁴ On the less than straightforward relationship between the press and the colonial apparatus in the case of the British Empire, see Chandrika Kaul, “Introductory Survey,” in Chandrika Kaul (ed.), *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1–19; Simon J. Potter, “Webs,

when it gains wider resonance. Experts exert influence within their own scholarly and scientific networks. They need a wider audience if they are to influence the political process. This is particularly true in democracies in which the role of the media is not just to control and criticize but also to mediate.¹⁵ As I will show, ideas about fascist settlement policy in North Africa that were conveyed by mainstream media aided settlement experts and politicians in the British Empire and its dominions in furthering their own ideas. For example, British parliamentarians could refer to the extensive news coverage of Italian settlers arriving in Libya in October 1938 in arguing for the importance of the event. To put it bluntly: they could declare the settlement of Libya to be important because the renowned London-based *The Times*, among other major newspapers, was reporting about it.

My argument has three parts. First, I focus on the ways people, mainly in Britain and Australia, reacted to fascists' ideas about how to understand imperial biopolitics. Mussolini's project was divisive, both among academics and journalists. And yet both noticeably increased their scholarship on, and news coverage of, *Africa Italiana*. This attention then put pressure on the state to pay closer attention to fascist settler colonialism, including systematically collecting information on the subject and making it available to agencies in charge of imperial planning, such as the British Overseas Settlement Board.

Second, I look at how the extensive news coverage and official reports were used by imperial think tanks and wielded in political debates about fascist Italy. Not only did British and Australian settlement experts discuss the possibilities of exchanging practical know-how and emulating Italian population management; the fascist template also reaffirmed the claims of "white" Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and provided a further stimulus to constrain the immigration mainly of non-Europeans in what has been dubbed the global migration crisis of the 1930s. In this way, this section contributes to an as-yet unwritten transimperial history of fascist racism.¹⁶

Third, I deal with the post-1945 afterlife of the dream of empire. I outline how the fascist template prolonged hopes for a "white" Australia and New Zealand into the late 1960s.

I conclude by assessing how my findings alter our understanding of both (fascist) Italy and Britain and its Dominions in the interwar period and after 1945.

Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire," *The Journal of British Studies* 46,3 (2007), 621–46.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Frank Bösch and Norbert Frei (eds.), *Medialisierung und Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006).

¹⁶ Peter Staudenmaier, "Racial Ideology between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Julius Evola and the Aryan Myth, 1933–43," *Journal of Contemporary History* 55,3 (2020), 473–91; Bernhard, "The Great Divide?," 97–114.

In moving beyond the intra-imperial frameworks of historical analysis that still dominate accounts not only of Italian colonialism¹⁷ but also of the history of empire in modern Europe more generally,¹⁸ we can better apprehend the ideological foundations of countries such as Britain or Australia. We can also better understand the way that people in the interwar period placed themselves in broader international and transimperial contexts, and thereby gain insight into the processes of forming and confirming identities.

Assessing Empire: Fascist Biopolitics in Media, Academia, and Planning Agencies

Readers of *The Times* may have been astonished by the newspaper's October 21, 1938, morning edition.¹⁹ In it was a lengthy article by the London newspaper's Rome correspondent, Canadian-born Sidney Freifeld, warmly describing the newly founded fascist empire under Mussolini. As Freifeld maintained, the fascists were about to accomplish a "remarkable achievement" in creating a new settler society in Libya, Italy's most important colony. Although somewhat mocking of the official fascist rhetoric about the endeavor's uniqueness, Freifeld, a LSE-trained economist, nonetheless appeared impressed by what Mussolini's men had attempted so far and by the huge sums that the Italian regime was willing to invest in Libya. "Farms have been built, roads made, wells drilled, water-pipes laid down, the land deep-ploughed by tractors." The fascist regime was providing everything needed for a settler's life in Italy's main colony. Freifeld brought to bear his knowledge as a former employee of the International Agricultural Institute (IAI) in Rome, one of several international think tanks used by Mussolini's regime to promote itself on an international stage.²⁰ Just a few days before the arrival of almost 20,000 Italian settlers in Tripoli, Freifeld gave a thoroughly positive picture of what he deemed to be the modern imperialism of a foreign country. In his view, Italy had not only caught up with the era's leading colonial powers but was also setting an example. Libya would soon cease to be a mere colony and become an integral part of mainland Italy. True, fascist Italy "has a long road ahead of it, and it will be a rather costly affair." But "who can doubt that the work will be worth it?," the correspondent concluded.

¹⁷ Exemplary is the work of Italian historian, Nicola Labanca; see for instance his *L'Oltremare: Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2002).

¹⁸ Nadin Heé and Daniel Hedinger, "Transimperial History: Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16,4 (2018), 429–52.

¹⁹ "An Exodus from Italy," *The Times*, October 21, 1938, 15.

²⁰ Elisabetta Tollardo, *Fascist Italy and the League of Nations, 1922-1935* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 33.

Freifeld's article attracted considerable attention. Dozens of editors in Australia, Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand reprinted his text, albeit in an abridged form. Thus, his account of Libya reached readers in places as distant from each other as Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, Regina in Saskatchewan, and Hokitika on New Zealand's South Island. In Australia alone, the article was reissued at least 29 times.²¹ At this time, the Anglophone media landscape was a "culture of reprint," giving the most prestigious newspapers the role of opinion leaders.²² The British Empire and the Dominions effectively constituted a huge resonating space for the views from Fleet Street.

Many other newsrooms between Canberra and Vancouver ran their own stories on the fascist settlement scheme, drawing on press releases from Reuters and similar news agencies. Some papers even sent their own correspondents to Libya. The foreign correspondent was a central feature in the imperial press system that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, facilitating contrast and comparison between the rival European powers.²³ As the British consul in Tripoli reported to his superiors in London, the Italian colonists' arrival in Libya was covered by journalists, photographers, and newsreel men from around the globe, for whom Italian authorities had reserved an entire ship in the convoy that carried the settlers across the Mediterranean.²⁴ British newspapers were represented by five correspondents, second only to those of Nazi Germany and France. The reporters cabled to their editors back home entire series of articles that closely followed every step of the settlers' way. To give just one example, the Edinburgh-based *Scotsman* ran no fewer than eight pieces, some illustrated by large photos, between October and November 1938.²⁵ Often, such articles were prominently placed on the front page, reinforcing the impression that the resettlement of thousands of Italian colonists was a historical event.

²¹ The figure is based on a search in the online digital newspaper database "Trove" which is maintained by the National Library of Australia; see <https://trove.nla.gov.au>.

²² Andrew King, Alexis Easley, and John Morton (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers* (Milton Park and New York: Routledge, 2016), 11–13, 125–26.

²³ Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System 1876–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Andrew Griffiths, "Most Extraordinary Careers: Special Correspondents and the News Narrative," in Andrew Griffiths (ed.), *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870–1900* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 20–54.

²⁴ Dispatch No 49(e) of the British Consul in Tripoli, A.E. Watkinson, to the FO, November 7, 1938, The National Archives/Public Record Office in Kew Gardens/Londonn (TNA/PRO), series Foreign Office (FO), 371, 22033.

²⁵ See the articles "Mass emigration" of October 18, "Libya's future" of October 27, "Libyan settlers" of October 29, "Italian colonists leave for Libya" of October 31, "Italian settlers" of November 5, "Libya colonists" of November 7, "Italy's Empire" of November 8, "Italian colonization" of November 9, 1938.

Mainstream newspapers in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand highlighted four aspects of Italian colonialism. One was the supposed uniqueness of the fascist settlement program. Unlike the *Times*, however, the other papers did not mock the fascist rhetoric but rather reiterated it uncritically. Journalists reported that Italy's colonization scheme was the "biggest tried by any nation."²⁶ No other country had ever attempted resettlement on such a scale; it constituted the "greatest organised emigration movement in modern times."²⁷

Second, the fascist empire had transitioned to this new era with amazing velocity. Indeed, "speed" was a key element in international media coverage of the Italian settlements in North Africa. A good example are the articles by Martin Moore, The *Daily Telegraph's* special correspondent. Moore informed his readers in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand that "by a single stroke of policy Italy intends to achieve in a few years what other colonial nations, with much more promising territories, have done only in generations of largely haphazard and unassisted migration."²⁸ Some English-speaking observers even drew on the fascist rhetoric in their descriptions. For instance, the academic journal *Town and Country Planning* published an article that spoke of the "fascist tempo" of the "amazing migration to Libya."²⁹ This was precisely how fascism styled itself: as a political force that was catapulting Italian society into a new era. As Fernando Esposito and Sven Reichardt have noted, fascists cultivated a veritable cult of revolution, dynamism, and speed.³⁰

Third, many writers described not just the speed of the Italian settlement project but also its thoroughness and technical competence. When placing more than 1,800 families on farms sometimes 100 miles from the nearest town, Italian administrators had demonstrated a sense of "elaborate organization." In this context, another journalist spoke of the "clockwork precision" with which it had

²⁶ "Italy's colonisation scheme biggest tried by any nation," *Tweed Daily*, Murwillumbah, NSW, January 12, 1939, 3.

²⁷ "The Great Trek: From Italy to Libya," *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, October 28, 1938, 20. Identical are "Emigrants for Libya," *Nottingham Journal*, October 28, 1938, 1; "Italy's emigration scheme," *Belfast News-Letter*, October 28, 1938, and "Bloc emigration by Italians: Thousands sailing for Libya," *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, October 28, 1938, 7. See, also very similar, "The biggest organized emigration in history: 20,000 Italian colonists for Libya," *Illustrated London News*, November 5, 1938, 25.

²⁸ Martin Moore, "Italy's new colonies on African Coast," *New Zealand Herald*, January 21, 1939, 12 (supplement). Moore's article was reprinted, yet without crediting him as an author as "Italy's colonisation scheme biggest tried by any nation," *Tweed Daily*, Murwillumbah, NSW, January 12, 1939, 3. Moore's articles published in the *Daily Telegraph* served as the basis for his book, *Italy's Mass Colonization of Libya* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1940).

²⁹ "Demographic colonization," *Town and Country Planning* 8-10 (1940), 36.

³⁰ Fernando Esposito and Sven Reichardt, "Revolution and Eternity: Introductory Remarks on Fascist Temporalities," *Journal of Modern European History* 13,1 (2015), 24-43.

transplanted thousands of Italian peasants to North Africa.³¹ For the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, the organization of the whole enterprise was a "striking example of Fascist efficiency and discipline."³² Many journalistic accounts wrote of the development of North Africa by Italy. For example, the *Daily Mail*, a tabloid with one of the largest circulations in Britain, wrote approvingly that Mussolini would "develop" North Africa through the "mass movement of half a million farmers and their families."³³ "Development" was a positively charged buzzword in Britain at the time. It arose in the rhetorical arsenal of British specialist advisors, scientific researchers, and technical experts during the interwar period in response to anticolonial movements both in the British Empire and at home. The term gave a coating of productiveness and altruism to the colonial project well before it became the guiding idea of foreign aid during the Cold War.³⁴ Whether intentionally or not, the many references to the purported constructiveness of fascist colonization efforts supported the claims of an "enlightened" and thus benevolent British rule of its overseas territories.

What made fascist development policies so successful to British eyes was their firm grounding in academic expertise. Unsurprisingly, scholars highlighted this aspect. A good example is Edward John Russell, one of the most influential agriculturalists of his time. Trained at the University of London, Russell became director of Rothamsted Experimental Station, a world-leading center for research in agricultural statistics and genetics, in 1912. His interest in cooperation across borders brought him to Tripoli, Libya's capital, in March 1939 to present a paper at the 8th *International Conference of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture*, an eminent academic gathering of more than 100 experts from across Europe and North America.³⁵ Both in his official published report and in his personal diaries, Russell showed himself impressed by what he saw during his eleven days in Tripoli, the surrounding Italian settlements, and Sidi Mesri, the Italian experimental agricultural institute that was similar to his own near London. In the *Geographical Journal*, the mouthpiece of the renowned *Royal Geographical Society*, he lauded the Italian colonization scheme for being carried out "on the strictest scientific lines."³⁶ And

³¹ "Italians in Africa," *Liverpool Daily Post*, March 26, 1940, 6.

³² "New books: North Africa," *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, January 26, 1940, 3.

³³ "Balbo to Lead Colonist Fleet," *Daily Mail*, October 11, 1938, 3. See also "Duce's Dream of Empire," *Gloucester Journal*, November 9, 1940, 13; "Italy in Africa," *Evening Post*, Wellington, December 13, 1938, 13.

³⁴ Joseph Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

³⁵ Claudio G. Segre, *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 302.

³⁶ E. J. Russell, "Agricultural Colonization in the Pontine Marshes and Libya," *The Geographical Journal* 94,4 (1939), 273–89.

in his diary, he noted the “very magnificent” way that agricultural experts, technicians, and engineers had worked together to green the Libyan desert.³⁷ Russell’s views were taken up and distributed by various media outlets such as *Newcastle Sun*, the *Liverpool Daily Post*, and Perth’s *Daily News*.³⁸ Thus, in conjunction with the media, scientists played a role in popularizing Mussolini’s colonial regime. Media outlets ensured that the dissemination of expert opinions and academic expertise gave a scholarly patina to the press coverage of Italian colonialism.

Fourth, many descriptions of Italian colonialism conveyed a more or less subtle anticapitalistic tone and an appreciation of the racist biopolitical objectives of fascist rule. As journalists explained to their readers, Italian colonization efforts did not follow economic imperatives. Rather, one of its long-term ideas was to improve demographics, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Mussolini, it was argued, in what today would be called populist rhetoric, was not interested in short-term revenues for a few elite capitalists. Rather, he cared about “the people”; his colonial policies were thus “social” in nature.³⁹ It was regularly reported that Mussolini’s regime sought to redirect the considerable outflow of Italians to its own colonies in order to avoid “losing” people who were needed to build a new national society and to “people” its recently acquired imperial territories.⁴⁰ As the *Leeds Mercury* noted with relief, “the usual sad note which accompanies those who abandon their homeland to seek fortunes abroad was almost extinguished.”⁴¹ The immigrants were leaving their homeland but not greater Italy.

Reporters also broadly discussed the ways in which Mussolini was attempting to strengthen the nation racially. All settlers, according to their reports, had been carefully chosen according to strict criteria such as health, fertility, and physique.⁴² While journalists clearly stated that the fascist regime was ultimately pursuing racist objectives, they did not ponder the implications of these policies. As one editor put it, quoting Mussolini himself, the main objective of the fascist conquest was to “reclaim the land and with the land the men and with the men the race.”⁴³ The fact that such a “strengthening” of Italian stock involved the imposition of an apartheid

³⁷ Entry of March 16, 1939, Diary of Edward John Russell’s trip to Libya, March 9–20, 1939, Rothamsted Research Library Archives, papers of Edward John Russell, RUS3.

³⁸ “Italy will make success of Libya,” *The Newcastle Sun*, NSW, May 24, 1939, 8, 23; “Sheer necessity,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, May 23, 1939, 8; “Predicts Success for Libya,” *The Daily News*, Perth, May 24, 1939, 2.

³⁹ “Italy’s Farsighted Work in Libya,” *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, February 28, 1940, 4.

⁴⁰ “Mass migration: peopling Libya,” *Narrabri North Western Courier*, New South Wales, June 12, 1939, 4; “Voronoffing The Desert,” *Liverpool Echo*, April 26, 1939, 8.

⁴² “20,000 Italians Off to Libya,” *Leeds Mercury*, October 29, 1938, 1.

⁴³ “Colonisation,” *Auckland Star*, November 29, 1938.

⁴³ “Italian colonization praised,” *The Wiluna Miner*, Western Australia, July 14, 1939, 2.

policy in the Italian colonies was mentioned by journalists but seen as positive.⁴⁴ Rather than reporting on the massive violence inherent to an apartheid system, most writers concentrated on what they called the constructive aspects of fascist biopolitics, i.e., the technical and financial measures being taken by the fascist state to settle the colonists. As journalists explained to their readers, the Italian state was financing the entire colonization enterprise because it would purportedly rebound to the collective demographic and racial good of Italy.⁴⁵

Commentators emphasized in this context that Italian authorities relied on group settlements, a rather common type of settlement in particular in the anglophone world at the time.⁴⁶ In group settlements (or collective settlements, as they were also called), migrants were placed in a single area by an organizing and sponsoring body instead of finding themselves a suitable farmstead. In the Italian case, this type of settlement had on the one hand to protect against possible attacks by purported hostile indigenous people, and on the other hand to reveal and preserve the best characteristics of the Italian race. To this end, as press reports highlighted, the Italian regime had set up a proper Settlement Agency that tightly controlled all matters concerned "with military efficiency."⁴⁷

The praise for the anti-capitalist thrust and racist objectives of the Italian colonization scheme was the starting point for sometimes harsh condemnations of Britain's supposedly outdated imperialism. Martin Moore's account, *The Fourth Shore: Italy's Mass Colonisation of Libya*, published in 1940, offers a good example.⁴⁸ Building on his previous articles for the *Daily Telegraph*, Moore in his widely noted book blamed Britain for its ultimately failed policies in Africa and Asia. Whereas Mussolini cared about Italy's future, mobilizing all his country's resources, Whitehall was stuck in old laissez-faire thinking. Unlike some of the "haphazard colonization" practices of the British Empire, the "Fascist state does not content itself with shipping the migrant to his new land, finding him a job and leaving him to 'make good' as best he may." Instead, Mussolini's regime took care of the settlers in the most comprehensive way possible, providing each family with a ready-to-work farm plot, a fully furnished farmhouse, manuals on how to plant and sow crops, and basic farming supplies. Then the government bought what the colonists

⁴⁴ "20,000 Italians," *Waikato Independent*, November 1, 1938.

⁴⁵ "Abyssinia: Italian Colonising Scheme Free Land Grants," *The Telegraph*, Brisbane, June 17, 1936, 13.

⁴⁶ C. A. Dawson, *Group Settlement: Ethnic Xommunities in Western Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936).

⁴⁷ "Italy's colonisation scheme biggest tried by any nation," *Tweed Daily*, Murwillumbah, NSW, January 12, 1939, 3.

⁴⁸ Martin Moore, *Fourth Shore: Italy's Mass Colonization of Libya* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1940), 15.

produced, at fixed prices. Even architecture served that end. As Moore emphasized, the new rural centers, or *centri rurali*, provided all the facilities that the settlers needed. Thus, for Moore, the Italian scheme “must be of the greatest interest to all other nations which administer undeveloped quarters in the world.”⁴⁹

This hymn to alleged fascist achievements and the sharp criticism of Britain’s colonial policy are best understood against the backdrop of the Great Depression, which, in the late 1930s, still held parts of Britain, especially northern England and Wales, in a tight grip. Although the British government tried to counter the crisis with a policy of moderate deficit spending that included building roads and other public works, some observers such as Moore wanted it to do more. Whether he and other journalists like him had lost their confidence in the self-healing powers of capitalism during the economic crisis or before, they identified Mussolini’s Italy as offering a purportedly brilliant alternative to emulate.

The positive reportage went hand in hand with a considerable increase in the number of articles in the British, Australian, and New Zealand presses on fascist empires. Although a comprehensive quantitative analysis of Anglophone news coverage of Mussolini’s imperial vision and of the respective output of popular and academic works in the interwar period is beyond the scope of this chapter, data largely corroborate the impressions of contemporaries that news coverage of Italian colonialism was significant. First, the number of newspaper articles on Italian colonization more than doubled between the 1920s and the 1930s. An analysis of the *British Newspaper Archive*, a comprehensive digital collection of British and Irish newspapers and periodicals, shows that “Italian colonisation” was mentioned 744 times between 1923 and 1932, and 1,893 times in the ensuing ten years.⁵⁰

Second, the increase in news reports was so great that Italy became one of the most quoted colonial powers in the Anglophone media. Between 1930 and 1939, Italy was mentioned almost as often as Britain, Germany, and France, whose colonization efforts (past and present) had traditionally been highlighted in British and Irish broadsheets and tabloids. A search of the *British Newspaper Archive* turned up 3,789 matches for “Britain,” 1,707 for “Germany,” 1,532 for “France,” and 1,252 for “Italy.”⁵¹ Other foreign colonial powers received considerably less media attention: 563 matches were found for “Japan,” 497 for the Netherlands, 225 for Belgium, and 197 for Portugal.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰ See <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>. The search parameters were “search all words.” The results were retrieved in April 2024; however, they are subject to change as new contents are continuously added to the *British Newspaper Archives* as digitalization continues.

⁵¹ Ibid. The search parameters were “search all words” and “exact search” for “Italian colonization,” “French colonization,” “German colonization,” etc., while the exact time frame was January 1930 to December 1939 (results being retrieved in April 2024).

In some of the Dominions, the media coverage of Italian colonization even surpassed that of all other foreign powers. A good example is the Australian media. Research in its national database for newspapers and periodicals between 1930 and 1939 shows that Italy received vastly more media coverage than any other country. It was mentioned 329 times, compared to Japan and Germany, which were mentioned 193 and 166 times, respectively. More pronounced is the difference in attention paid to the other imperial powers. France was mentioned 98 times, Belgium, 33 times, the Netherlands, 27 times, and Portugal, a mere five times. An even clearer picture emerges when we look at the coverage by the New Zealand press. In newspapers from Auckland to Nelson, Italian colonization was cited as often as all foreign settlement projects together.⁵²

Third, beginning in the 1930s, Australia's and New Zealand's news coverage of fascist Italy's settlement schemes began to rival the attention paid to the national projects of Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Throughout the decade, Australian journalists mentioned "Italian colonisation" almost as often as they did "Australian colonisation."⁵³ The situation in New Zealand was similar.⁵⁴ In Britain and Ireland, journalists wrote significantly more articles about fascist Italy's settlement scheme than about the equivalent schemes sponsored by Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, despite the traditional understanding that a particularly deep bond existed among the Dominion countries.⁵⁵ These data underline that "the national-imperial" did not necessarily have to be the all-dominating and thus quasi-natural frame of reference in the perceptions and discussions about empire. Rather, even the interwar period, commonly thought of as isolationist and ultranationalist, was quite global and transimperial comparisons quite common.⁵⁶

The broad and overwhelmingly positive coverage of Italian colonial settlements by newspapers and academic outlets had significant repercussions, particularly

⁵² The search was conducted in the national repository for newspapers that is hosted by the National Library of New Zealand. See <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>. The search parameters were "exact match." The exact results are for "Italian colonisation" 205 hits, for "German colonisation" 71 hits, for "Japanese colonisation" 80 hits, for "French colonisation" 45 hits, for "Dutch colonisation" four hits, for "Belgian colonisation" one hit, and zero hits for "Portuguese colonisation."

⁵³ See <https://trove.nla.gov.au>. The exact search parameters were "Newspapers & Gazettes," the exact time frame was 1930–1939. There were 332 hits for "Italian colonisation" and 432 hits for "Australian colonisation."

⁵⁴ Similar are the results obtained for a search in *Papers Past*. The results are 209 hits for "Italian colonization" and 130 for "New Zealand colonization." The search was conducted in April 2024.

⁵⁵ See <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>. The results of a search for "Italian colonisation" were 1,252 hits, for "Canadian colonisation" 1,112 hits, for "New Zealand colonization" 605 hits and for "Australian colonisation" 565 hits. The search was conducted in April 2024.

⁵⁶ Marc Matera and Susan Kingsley Kent (eds.), *The Global 1930s: The International Decade* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017).

in Britain and Australia. Beginning in the late 1930s, curiosity about the fascists grew noticeably. At the same time, criticism of the alleged inactivity of their own countries became more pronounced. The extent of the uneasiness is revealed in the internal communications of the British and Australian governments, which found themselves under increasing pressure to act. This is particularly true for London's Dominions Office (DO). At the time, the DO oversaw relations with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. In this capacity, it also coordinated the immigration of British people to these parts of the Commonwealth. As DO officials declared in the late fall of 1938, "we have recently seen a good many reports in the Press about the somewhat spectacular experiment which is being carried out by the Italian government in the settlement of 20,000 Italian families in Libya."⁵⁷ Further, this media coverage had encouraged numerous people to write "to us enquiring whether some similar scheme could not be carried out in the Dominions or Colonies."⁵⁸

Public pressure was considered so great that DO staff felt compelled to take further action and engage with fascist colonialism at a time when Britain was discussing the reform of its own migration schemes. Indeed, the Dominions Office turned to the Foreign Office (FO) with a request for help. The FO was asked for detailed information about the Italian settlement scheme, e.g., about the families involved, the financing, and the preliminary preparation of the farms and buildings. In addition, FO officials evaluated Italian and English publications on the settlement scheme. The British bureaucracy compiled more than 200 background papers on various settlement schemes up to 1938. It is indicative that of those, Italy was the only country outside the British Empire that was taken into consideration. In other words, it had a rather unique role.

These reports were not only distributed within the respective planning apparatuses in Britain and Australia; they were also sent up the chain of command to the interior and foreign affairs ministers in these countries.⁵⁹ In London, a summary memorandum even ended up on the desk of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Letter R.A. Wiseman, DO, to D.V. Kelly, Foreign Office, November 16, 1938, TNA/PRO, FO 371, 22033, fol. 117.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Memo No 558 of the Foreign Office, November 2, 1939, TNA/PRO, FO 371, 23391; Letter of the Acting Counsel Wakefield Harrey to the Earl of Perth, October 6, 1938, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, vol. 30, Doc 155 J4108/3/66, 329; Letter of the Earl of Perth to Viscount Halifax, October 28, 1938, *ibid.*, 327. For Australia, see the letter of R.H. Wheeler, chief migration officer at Australia House, to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, April 27, 1940, National Archives of Australia (NAA), Canberra seat, A461 H349/3/1.

⁶⁰ Memorandum for the Prime Minister reg. Situation in Libya, January 12, 1939, TNA/PRO, FO 371, 23390.

No evidence could be found in the National Archives at Kew to indicate that the Prime Minister received information about any other foreign settlement project.

Thus, at the end of the 1930s, the interested public and state apparatuses in Britain and Australia possessed considerable information about the Italian settlement scheme. The very existence of this information increased the pressure on policymakers in these countries to act to solve real and perceived problems relating to their own empires and colonization efforts.

Using Empire: Fascist Biopolitics as a Resource in Politics

Beginning in the mid-1930s, knowledge of fascist colonialism was integrated into international discussions related to empire, migration, and race, but in different ways, depending on the various parties to the discussions. First, fascist biopolitics, especially its inherent violence, met with massive rejection from intellectuals, anti-colonial activists of African descent in the Atlantic region, and members of the communist parties of Europe in exile, the unofficial center of which was London. To these people, Italy's actions in Libya and Abyssinia epitomized everything wrong with empire as such; fascist colonialism thus crystallized various existing anti-colonial struggles. More than that, the international protests against Italy brought together anticolonial struggles and the anti-fascist movement for the first time.⁶¹ Unlike Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy was both a fascist regime and a classical "Bluewater" empire.⁶² The international fight against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia could be said to have been a movement of movements.

At the same time, the protests against Italy's violent intervention on the African continent had the potential to shape the identity of the people involved. The protestors believed that they were taking part in an international, if not global, movement,⁶³ and as such, they connected world regions that had not previously

⁶¹ Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 7.

⁶² It is noteworthy that there is a vivid debate on the nexus between colonialism and fascism regarding Nazi Germany, but not for the much more obvious Italian case. See, for instance, Roberta Pergher and Mark Roseman, "The Holocaust—An Imperial Genocide?," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 27,1 (2013), 42–49. See also Salim Khayyata, "Oppressed Ethiopia, or The Start of The Final Fight Against Colonialism in the Period of its Downfall," Wilson Center Digital Archive ID-291023, October 27, 2022, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/salim-khayyata-oppressed-ethiopia-or-start-final-fight-against-colonialism-period-its> (last accessed January 16, 2024).

⁶³ Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930-1970* (London: Palgrave, 2018).

been thought of together.⁶⁴ Last, the fight against fascist biopolitics had serious repercussions for Britain. The Abyssinian War in particular became the “lens through which black intellectuals viewed global politics and the British Empire, particularly its racist foundations, on the eve of the Second World War,” according to Marc Matera.⁶⁵ These intellectuals were deeply disappointed that so few Britons opposed Mussolini’s assault on the East African country, and those that did, did so half-heartedly.⁶⁶

Equally momentous was the discussion about fascist biopolitics that arose when Britain commenced reforming its own imperial migration regime in the mid-1930s. In this debate, various politicians referred to the Italian settlement system, either as a model worthy of imitation, or as a threat to everything that Britain stood for.

The background to this debate was the general crisis in British settlement policy of the 1930s. Broadly speaking, the country’s migration regime sought to distribute its own population within the Empire and the Dominions to increase agricultural production overseas, expand markets for home manufacturers, and guarantee that these territories retained a predominantly British “tradition, character and spirit.”⁶⁷ Racism was at play too. The mentioned group settlements—the transfer of a large body of migrants to one place—were to ensure that people considered “white” dominated the Dominions. These settlements were integral to what has been called “white policy” in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa.⁶⁸

The migration regime soon proved dysfunctional. In Britain, falling birth rates beginning in the late nineteenth century made large-scale emigration undesirable. The Dominions, on the other hand, faced a decline in their “white” populations in the absence of a steady stream of immigration from Britain. An irrational fear that migrants from Asia would swamp the “white” denizens started to take hold in the interwar period and crept into public debates, particularly in Australia and New Zealand.

⁶⁴ Susan Dabney Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶⁵ Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 73.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁷ *United Empire* 30 (1939), p. XXXI. See also Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6–7.

⁶⁸ Jane Carey and Claire McLisky (eds.), *Creating White Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009); James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also from a comparative angle, T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002); Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

In this context, an amorphous coalition of individual Tories, Liberals, and colonial administrators in Britain pinned their hopes on the fascist template. By repeatedly referring to the Italian colonization efforts in North Africa, they sought to revive group settlements that had racial objectives.⁶⁹ Indeed, they supported their demands for more state planning, a central settlement agency, more careful settler selection, and above all, generous financial aid by citing the allegedly outstanding achievements of the fascists, often referring directly to the academic publications and the news coverage in Britain and beyond.⁷⁰

Statements made by members of this coalition in and outside Westminster revealed genuine conviction in the exemplary nature of fascist biopolitics as well as strategic considerations tinged with racist reservations about Italians. An excellent example was Tory hardliner, Henry Page-Croft, who threw all his political weight behind group settlements.⁷¹ Although Croft strongly opposed German rearmament after Hitler's rise to power, he seemed to have no problem with the idea of emulating fascist Italy. He devised a \$50 million plan to fully fund state-sponsored mass migration within the British Empire, from Britain to Western Canada. In December 1938—shortly after the transfer of the first Italian colonists to Tripoli—in a parliamentary session on reforming the British migration regime, Croft drew a comparison between his plans for British Columbia and the Libyan settlements.⁷² As he explained, he sought to prevent the Dominions from becoming “non-British in blood.”⁷³

⁶⁹ On the more general discussion on group settlements, see Kent Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 11.

⁷⁰ For instance, in 1933, John Nation and Frederick Llewellyn-Jones, two politicians from the Tory and the National Liberal Party, respectively, during the deliberations of the House of Commons on the “Home and Empire Settlement Bill” that was to reform the existing colonization schemes, highlighted the purported uniqueness of the Italian experience. See House of Commons, Second Reading of the “Home And Empire Settlement Bill,” February 24, 1933, Hansard vol. 274, columns 2090 and 2094, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1933-02-24/debates/c5169484-3b05-4f85-97aa-1ab835876bfb/HomeAndEmpireSettlementBill> (last accessed August 24, 2020).

⁷¹ On Croft, see Larry L. Witherell, *Rebel on the Right: Henry Page Croft and the Crisis of British Conservatism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997).

⁷² “Canada: Sir Henry Page-Croft's scheme for land settlement in British Columbia,” TNA/PRO, DO 35, 680 and 681. <https://www.electriccanadian.com/lifestyle/CanadaandBritishimmigration.pdf>. On Croft's support of the Italian Empire, see also M. Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism: The Interwar Movement for Peace in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK 2012), 112–13. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/b41d3ccc-of5c-4366-b88e-10787104ddef>.

⁷³ “London Studying \$ 50 Million Plan for British Emigration to B.C.,” *Vancouver Sun*, November 14, 1938, 12.

Croft's views were echoed by like-minded activists and politicians across the Empire and the Dominions. In May 1939, Australia's Foreign Minister, Henry Gullett, a fervent advocate of "White Australia" and restricting immigration from Asia, spoke in parliament of Mussolini's "genius, his patriotism, and his irresistible stimulus and almost superhuman capacity."⁷⁴ Sympathetic Anglophone politicians embraced the self-styled depiction of high-ranking fascists as brilliant masterminds, the essence of their leader cult, for strategic purposes. Although Gullett clearly nourished genuine admiration for Mussolini and saw in fascist imperial biopolitics a promising template, as a cabinet member of the reigning United Australia Party government, he also supported the British appeasement policy towards the Axis powers.⁷⁵

Anglophone media coverage of Mussolini's empire played an important role in these parliamentary debates. Media coverage not only provided lawmakers information on the details of Italian settler colonialism; it also in itself gave them grist for their political argument. This was particularly true of the parliamentary deliberations of the Legislative Council of Kenya, the local colonial parliament in which the European colonists had the upper hand over indigenous representatives. To the Council, Ewart Scott Grogan, a British-born explorer and leading figure in the Kenyan settler community, advocated the fascist model. During the 1937 parliamentary deliberations over Kenya's new settlement scheme, regarded as "essential to the further development of the country," Grogan focused on neighboring Abyssinia, referring to the extensive Anglophone media coverage to make his point.⁷⁶ As so many news articles had made clear, he argued, the Fascists' settlement policies were state of the art; Kenya would have to do much more to keep pace.

However, the continuous references to the Italian model also provoked massive criticism from those who, in Britain, Australia, and beyond, opposed group settlements. Here, too, the media coverage itself was made an issue. None other than Malcolm MacDonald, the British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, took offense at the domestic coverage of fascist colonialism. "Our newspapers are full of these topics," he asserted in January 1937,⁷⁷ such that international affairs had

⁷⁴ On the popularity of Italian Fascism in general, see Roslyn Pesman Cooper, "'We Want a Mussolini': Views of Fascist Italy in Australia," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 39,3 (1993), 348–66.

⁷⁵ Eric Montgomery Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia: Reactions to the European Crises, 1935-1939* (Australian National University Press, 1970), 171.

⁷⁶ Deliberations of the motion of Major Cavendish-Bentinck for a settlement scheme, August 9, 1937, *Legislative Council Debates, Official Report*, Second Series, vol 2: 23rd Juli-13th August 1937 (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1937), column 286.

⁷⁷ Speech of Malcolm MacDonald, second reading of the Empire Settlement Bill in the House of Commons, January 27, 1937, *The Hansard*, volume 319, online under <https://hansard.parliament>.

started to outweigh the domestic agenda. While "every man-in-the-street was an authority on the Italian-Abyssinian dispute," the important issue of migration and settlement within the British Empire itself was being neglected, he lamented.

These critics wished to maintain imperialism but reform it, and they did not believe that Italy's approach to colonization, with its strong focus on group settlements, was the right approach to reform. Instead, they proposed to open the strict migration regime to "white" people from other parts of Europe deemed worthy of assimilation. The latter were to be settled individually, not as a group, as group settlements were considered ineffective, and above all, too expensive. Colonial administrators calculated that the settlement of one family, as in Libya, would cost the British taxpayer over £2,000.⁷⁸

Problems of financing were not at the heart of the political debate in Britain over colonial settlements. Rather, opponents of group settlements insisted on a fundamental conflict between British-style liberal democracies and totalitarian dictatorships and their underlying ideas about human nature. Such an argument required rewriting British history as Britain and the Dominions had long experience with community settlements. However, such settlements were now declared to be completely foreign to Anglophone countries. As the Italian example amply demonstrated, group settlements, their opponents argued, were an expression of autocratic rule, comprehensive social control, and military order. Italians had gone to Libya and Abyssinia not entirely of their own accord, but as a "regimented body."⁷⁹ Britain, however, was a "nation of individualists." Community settlements would never thrive, as "some people would pull in one direction and others would pull in other directions." The notion of a strict dichotomy between individualistic and collectivist tendencies in British and Italian cultures was supported by scholars, providing an aura of truth to the argument.⁸⁰ Thus, the rejection of fascist biopolitics served as a means to affirm the centrality of supposed British values like libertarianism and nonconformity to the "true" national soul.⁸¹ Mussolini's biopolitics became the antithesis of all that Britishness supposedly stood for.

uk/Commons/1937-01-25/debates/8e6be2b7-4bc8-40a2-90e8-8925db3287c5/EmpireSettlementBill (last accessed April 12, 2024).

⁷⁸ Hugo Edward Harper, "Settlements of immigrants: Lessons of experiments," in Hugo Edward Harper (ed.), *Empire Problems* (London: F. Muller Limited, 1939), 203. £2,000 is just under £164,000 in today's currency.

⁷⁹ *United Empire* 30 (1939), XXII.

⁸⁰ Bernard Augustus Keen, *The Agricultural Development of the Middle East* (London: HMSO, 1946), 33.

⁸¹ Chris Rojek, *Brit-Myth: Who Do the British Think They Are?* (London: Cromwell Press, 2008).

Fascist Biopolitics: Its Postwar Afterlife

For years it was believed that the opponents of group settlements and their rhetoric of individualism and freedom had triumphed. As one observer wrote in 1939, Henry Page Croft “and other great patriots” had campaigned for years in support of mass migration without tangible results, implying that these conservative supporters of British imperialism were victims of a supposedly egotistical modernity.⁸² However, when looking at the *longer-term* actions of politicians and planning agencies, a different picture emerges.

Although the outbreak of World War II put migration schemes on hold, the idea of group settlements reemerged after the war. In Britain and Australia, planners continued to put forward the idea that settlers should be grouped together. After the Second World War, just as in 1918, many war veterans and civilian victims of displacement and expulsion needed somewhere to live. Several settlement programs were re-launched and lasted until the 1960s, such as those conducted under the 1945 War Services Land Settlement Agreement in Britain. These programs had been inspired by fascist biopolitics.

Accordingly, the underlying idea of ensuring white supremacy, in particular in Australia, persisted. Gwenda Tavan's book on this subject, *Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, is aptly titled.⁸³ The Australian government did not officially abandon its “white policies” until the early 1970s. In Australia, the fascist settlements in Libya again served as a basis for regional development in places such as Northern Australia. The bombing of Darwin and other northern towns in 1942 had fueled fears of a pending Japanese invasion of the region; at the same time, Australia's vast lands were still considered largely undeveloped, despite the many development attempts that had been made since colonial times.⁸⁴ In this situation, planners in the postwar period turned again to group settlements, seeing them as a viable tool both to defend the nation from foreign threats and develop the territory economically; they thereby made use of the experience gleaned by their Italian colleagues in North Africa. Indeed, this experience became the basis of a long memorandum entitled “The Colonisation of Libya by the ‘Demographic Scheme’ 1938 onwards,” that was drafted in 1946 by the Northern Australia Development

⁸² Clarence Charles Hatry, *Light Out of Darkness* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1939), 231. On the accusation of egotism, see also Krystyna Clara von Henneberg, *The Construction of Fascist Libya: Modern Colonial Architecture and Urban Planning in Italian North Africa, 1922–1943* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley Press, 1996), 380 and 399.

⁸³ Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Carlton North: Scribe, 2005).

⁸⁴ For this and the following, if not otherwise indicated, see Russell McGregor, “Developing the North, Defending the Nation? The Northern Australia Development Committee, 1945–1949,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 59,1 (2013), 33–46.

Committee, the regional planning agency in charge of that region.⁸⁵ Although the plans were discontinued, they were abandoned due to internal squabbles and not because Italian fascism had been discredited.

In another part of the world, however, the Italian model was put into practice: in Palestine. This is less surprising than it may sound to present day ears. The former territory of the Ottoman Empire, since 1923 officially under a British Mandate, was considered a genuinely colonial space not only by the British themselves, but also by the Americans and the League of Nations. In various official publications, Palestine was mentioned in the same breath as India, Algeria, and, precisely, Italian-Africa.⁸⁶ As high-ranking Labour politicians declared in November 1938 during a special session of the British parliament on Palestine's future, Jewish people were highly welcome to settle in the territory, as they had "proved to be first-class colonisers, to have the real, good, old, Empire-building kind of qualities, to be really first-class Colonial pioneers."⁸⁷ In other words, Labour supported Zionism and its objective of establishing a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine (a promise that the British state had made in 1917 in the Balfour Declaration), yet at the same time it considered the settlers also useful tools of British empire building.

Yet it was Tory members who, during the same session, went a step further and tied Palestine to colonial Libya. They suggested borrowing the strict policies of spatial and racial segregation that the fascist regime conducted in North Africa, thus recommending a de facto partition of the Mandate territory between Arabs and Jews.⁸⁸ As Walter Smiles, a longstanding conservative MP, argued, adopting the Italian settlement schemes would be a way of keeping his country's promise given in the Balfour Declaration and ending the Arab resistance against the Jewish presence in the Mandate once and for all.

Smiles' suggestions must indeed be understood against the backdrop of the Arab Revolt that had started two years prior, in 1936.⁸⁹ The popular uprising, which the British authorities referred to as a "colonial rebellion," had its roots in the increasingly desperate economic and social situation of the vast majority of local

⁸⁵ Memorandum of the Northern Australia Development Committee, entitled "The colonization of Libya by the 'Demographic Scheme'", July 1946, NAA, A659 1946-1-3342.

⁸⁶ Louise Bergaw and Annie M. Hannay, *Bibliography on Land Utilization, 1918-36* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1938), 1184; M. Beerensstein, "Jewish Colonisation in Palestine," *International Labour Review* XXX,5 (1934), 623-25.

⁸⁷ Joseph Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism, 1917-1948* (reprint London: Frank Cass, 2013), 85.

⁸⁸ British House of Parliament Commons Sitting on November 24, 1938, in Hansard, vol 341 cc 1987-2107, here: 2057, online under: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1938/nov/24/palestine>

⁸⁹ Matthew Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine: The British Army, the* (2019),

Arabs. Many took to the streets over their frustration with the high taxes on agrarian products following World War I, the ensuing loss of their smallholdings, and the growing presence of Jewish settlers who had migrated from Europe not at least due to antisemitic persecutions in Nazi Germany and elsewhere. Between 1931 and 1936, their number more than doubled from 175,000 to 370,000. In April 1936, various acts of violence between Arab and Jewish militants escalated into an armed Palestinian insurrection that targeted both British and American petroleum installations and Jewish settlers, with hundreds being killed. Although the uprising was also directed against the British occupation of the country, the Mandate power addressed it as an ethnic conflict.⁹⁰ The Peel Commission set up after the outbreak of hostilities by the British government thus recommended the division of the country along ethnic lines.⁹¹ However, only a year later, in 1938, another government commission concluded that this plan was unfeasible and should be dropped.

In this difficult situation, Smiles and other Tories in opposition used the Italian model to revive the Peel Commission's recommendations and put pressure on the Labour government under Arthur Neville Chamberlain. It is noteworthy that they took a foreign case to bolster their claim in the mentioned parliamentary session in November 1938. Similar partition plans had been discussed within the British Empire at the time; thus, they could have easily referred to them.⁹² Instead, Smiles and others opted for a particularly radical model of ethnic segregation. It is therefore possible that the aim was also to deliberately intimidate Palestinians. After all, fascist rule over Libya was very much hated in the Arab world, as the British press had made clear on various occasions.⁹³

Being mingled with Mussolini's colonial regime met with vehement rejection from Jewish organizations, though. The Jewish Agency in charge of the settlements rebutted the insinuations made that Jews arriving in Palestine were akin to European colonialists and thus guilty of imperial exploitation and oppression. Publications such as the *Jewish Frontier*, the mouthpiece of the Labor Zionist movement, took pain to emphasize that for Jews, settling in Palestine simply meant returning to lands previously held by their ancestors.⁹⁴ In addition, the Jewish

⁹⁰ Oren Kessler, *Palestine 1936: The Great Revolt and the Roots of the Middle East Conflict* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

⁹¹ Penny Sinanoglou, *Partitioning Palestine: British Policymaking at the End of Empire* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

⁹² Arie Dubnov and Laura Robson, "Drawing the Line, Writing Beyond It: Toward a Transnational History of Partitions," in Arie Dubnov and Laura Robson (eds.), *Partitions: A Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Territorial Separatism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1–30.

⁹³ See, for instance, "The Wandering," *Sunday Express*, London, October 30, 1938; "Moslem attack on Italy: Libya Plan Exterminating the Arabs," *Evening News*, London, January 2, 1939, 1.

⁹⁴ *Jewish Frontier* 6 (1939), 19.

planning offices in charge of the settlements had bought the land from the locals at a high price instead of confiscating it by force, as had been the case with the European colonial powers and especially fascist Italy. Above all, so it was argued, the Jewish settlement project was not driven by racism. Rather, Jewish settlers were motivated by a sincere desire to establish relations of "social equality" with the local Arabs.⁹⁵

Things were more complicated, though. No matter how hard the Jewish leadership tried to distance the settlement project in Palestine from race and imperialism, it remained "haunted by them ideologically because its project has always been defined by them in practice."⁹⁶ Indeed, shortly after the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Jewish agencies in charge of the new national settlement program oriented themselves to colonial models, and in particular the fascist *pianificazione* for Libya. As Smadar Sharon has shown on the basis of newly unearthed archival materials, Ra'anana Weitz, the founding father of rural planning in Israel, had come in close contact with the Italian colonization efforts during his doctoral studies in agronomy at the University of Florence in the 1930s.⁹⁷ His academic teacher was Arrigo Serpieri, one of the most influential Italian experts in land settlement projects. Serpieri helped to design new towns in Italy at the same time that his knowledge was applied to colonial Libya.⁹⁸

In the postwar period, Weitz was appointed deputy head of the Jewish planning agency of the new state of Israel. In the Lakhish region, a territory in the northern Negev in south-central Israel, he conceived a flagship project of 22 agricultural settlements and two rural centers between 1954 and 1956. The project followed the same pattern as in fascist Italy and its colonies: the new villages built were organized in clusters of settlements around the rural centers, the famous *centri rurali* that people like Moore had highlighted in their accounts of fascist Libya as particularly supportive. Indeed, in his publications after 1945, Weitz expressly referred to the projects of the Italians and occasionally returned to Rome and Florence to reconnect with his former colleagues.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Nimrod Ben Zeev, "Tracing the Historical Relevance of Race in Palestine and Israel, *MRP: Middle East Research and Information Project* 299 (2021), n.p., available online under <https://merip.org/2021/08/tracing-the-historical-relevance-of-race-in-palestine-and-israel/> (last accessed March 26, 2025).

⁹⁷ Smadar Sharon, "'Not Settlers but Settled': Immigration, Planning and Settlement Patterns in the Lakhish Region in the 1950s" (PhD thesis: Tel Aviv University, 2013), 68–88; see also Fatima Abreek-Zubiedat, *A Territory in Conflict: Eras of Development and Urban Architecture in Gaza* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2025), 63–64.

⁹⁸ Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire*, 110.

⁹⁹ Ra'anana Weitz, *From Peasant to Farmer: A Revolutionary Strategy for Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 234 and 285.

Even more important was that the Lakhish settlements also had racialized objectives that linked them, if only tangentially, to the Italian experience. The scheme aimed to resettle poor Mizrahim migrants, that is, descendants of Jewish communities mainly from North Africa and the Middle East. These Jews were often orientalized by Ashkenazi Jews arriving from Europe.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the idea was that the Lakhish settlements would help transform these “orientals” into the Zionist ideal of the modern, productive, masculine “New Jew.” After centuries of being stigmatized in Europe as “foreign,” Ashkenazim Jews in Israel imagined the emerging Israeli society as European and white. Projects such as the Lakhish settlements were thus tools of racialized social engineering aimed at creating a more cohesive society of Western imprint, as Israeli scholars have recently argued.¹⁰¹

At the same time, however, Mizrahim migrants were sent to Lakhish in order to establish Jewish sovereignty over former Palestinian land.¹⁰² Just like in Libya, they were to form a bulwark of Israel against Arabs. One must know that the Lakhish region marked a borderland towards Egypt and the Gaza strip and thus constituted the new frontier of the Israeli society. It was probably also because of this parallel that planners chose the Italian model; in Libya, the Italian settlements had been imagined at home as “oases of Italianness” in an otherwise hostile territory.¹⁰³

What emerges here is a circuit of reference and learning of vast dimensions. The imperial biopolitics of Italian fascism inspired political rhetoric across the British Empire and the Dominions and helped to justify policies aimed at racial exclusionism and white supremacy. Even more importantly, these ideas continued to travel the globe long after the end of fascism.

Conclusion: The Long Transimperial Flirtation with Fascism

This chapter challenges conventional understanding of Britain, the Dominions, and Mussolini's Italy and their imperial ties in two ways. First, British interest in fascist biopolitics was deeper than previously assumed. Support for the colonial expansion of Italy in the 1930s can hardly be limited to a few Italophile British Conservatives and the British Union of Fascists, as some scholars have maintained

¹⁰⁰ Aziza Khazzoom, “The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel,” *American Sociological Review* 68,4 (2003), 481–510.

¹⁰¹ Matan Flum, “Israel's Planning Historiography: Interrogating Spatio-Temporal Discourse and ‘Whiteness,’” *Planning Perspectives* 40,2 (2025), 407–19, in particular 413.

¹⁰² Smadar Sharon, “The Dialectic between Modernization and Orientalization: Ethnicity and Work Relations in the 1950s Lakhish Region Project,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40,4 ((2017), 732–50.

¹⁰³ Federico Cresti, *Oasi di italianità: La Libia della colonizzazione agraria tra fascismo, guerra indipendenza, 1935-1956* (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1996).

until recently.¹⁰⁴ The great interest in, if not enthusiasm, for fascism's purportedly constructive, modern, and scientific approach to empire, in particular on the part of the media, and its regeneration of the nation demonstrates that Britain and the Dominions did not in fact overwhelmingly reject Mussolini's dream of empire.¹⁰⁵

Second, this chapter challenges the notion that Mussolini's Anglophone supporters had only a very brief "flirtation with fascism," to use John P. Diggins' suggestive phrase.¹⁰⁶ Conventional wisdom holds that, whereas in the 1920s the general attitude towards fascist Italy in the Anglophone world had been one of benevolence, the brutal invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 opened the eyes of many in Britain and beyond to the true nature of Mussolini's rule. No doubt, the fascists' brutal actions in the Horn of Africa provoked public outrage in, for instance, the British media. However, a different picture emerges when the view of Italian colonialism *as a whole* by the Anglophone press in Britain, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand is considered. Although colonial violence was condemned, at the same time, the Italian development efforts were extolled by the mainstream media as late as the 1940s, well after the character of the fascist regime was clear. In this sense, fascist biopolitics, epitomized by the transport of the *Ventimila* to Libya in 1938, acquired a meaning for Britain and the Dominions that has yet to be fully acknowledged.

Three factors enabled the extended transimperial circulation of ideas. First was the rhetoric of crisis after 1918 developments in relation to the global economic downswing, often dubbed the Great Depression, and to the anti-colonial upsurge that severely challenged European imperial rule after the First World War. These crises were real but they were deliberately magnified and dramatized by experts, journalists, and politicians to generate attention and motivate action.¹⁰⁷ The crisis rhetoric of the time followed a broader pattern that a more self-reflective

¹⁰⁴ Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 162.

¹⁰⁵ A similar argument has been made by Bernhard Dietz, *Neo-Tories: The Revolt of British Conservatives against Democracy and Political Modernity, 1929-1939* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

¹⁰⁶ John P. Diggins, "Flirtation with Fascism: American Pragmatic Liberals and Mussolini's Italy," *The American Historical Review* 71,2 (1966), 487-506.

¹⁰⁷ This strategy has been systematically analyzed by various academic fields, among others education sciences and comparative social policies. See, for instance, Sanneke Kuipers, "Paths of the Past or the Road Ahead? Path Dependency and Policy Change in Two Continental European Welfare States," *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 11,2 (2009), 163-80; Johannes Kiess et al, "Path dependency and convergence of three worlds of welfare policy during the Great Recession: UK, Germany and Sweden," *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* 33,1 (2017). 1-17; Hyejin Kim, *How Global Capital is Remaking International Education: The Emergence of Transnational Education Corporations* (Singapore: Springer, 2019).

historiography has identified as characterizing the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁸ The construction of crises served as a political instrument to de-legitimize the status quo and to induce drastic reform, yet at the same time, the reform's proponents also claimed to have tangible solutions ready to hand. One such remedy, presented by media representatives, scholars, and conservative lawmakers from London to Canberra was fascist Italy's attempts at building a new "white" empire run by a political strongman.

Second was the rise of mass print media in the late nineteenth century, which facilitated the discussion of empire across empires.¹⁰⁹ Not only did the telegraph shrink great geographical distances and made the global dissemination of news possible; information about distant (mostly colonized) countries also brought a new kind of journalist—the foreign correspondent—into existence. In fact, this media innovation is inextricably linked to the history of European expansionism; British, French, and German foreign correspondents initially reported from their own country's "imperial frontiers."¹¹⁰ At the same time, this innovation institutionalized the exchange of information about empires. Foreign correspondents were supposed to inform their readers about their country's colonial rivals. Transimperial comparisons led in some cases to comprehensive reports. For example, British editors from London to Glasgow spared no effort to let the readers of their broadsheets participate in the fate of the Italians who settled in Libya in October 1938. Conversely, Mussolini (himself a former journalist) used existing media channels to present his empire to the outside world. In short, foreign correspondents became the eyes and ears of a world still dominated by empires.

Third were the exchanges among journalists, scholars, and lawmakers that reinforced the transimperial nexus. In fact, media, academia, and politics were not self-contained systems; they were interconnected. The extent of their permeability can be seen in the intersection of their personnel. Sidney Freifeld exemplifies these overlaps. A native of Canada, he began his career as an academic who, after training at the LSE, worked at an international think tank in Rome before reporting for the London newspaper *The Times* as well as the *New York Herald Tribune* and the *Toronto Star*. During World War II, Freifeld worked as a news

¹⁰⁸ Rüdiger Graf and Konrad H. Jarausch, "Crisis" in *Contemporary History and Historiography*, version: 1.0, Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, March 27, 2017, http://docupedia.de/zg/graf_jarausch_crisis_v1_en_2017 (last accessed April 5, 2024).

¹⁰⁹ Leslie James and Emma Hunter, "Communications and Media," in Andrew Denning and Heidi J.S. Tworek (eds.), *The Interwar World* (Milton Park and New York: Routledge, 2023), 351–68.

¹¹⁰ C.A. Vaughan, "Reporting From Imperial Frontiers: The Making Of Foreign Correspondents A Century Apart," *AsiaPacificMediaEducator* 7 (1999), 37–52. See also John Maxwell Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (LSU Press, 2009); Potter, *News*; Griffiths, "Most Extraordinary Careers."

analyst for the Canadian government in New York and wrote a notable media analysis of the interaction between Nazi propaganda and the American press.¹¹¹ After the war, he served as Canadian ambassador to several countries and the UN. Thus, Freifeld moved among positions in academia, the media, and government as well as in Italy, Canada, Britain, and the United States. He was not unique in this regard. Contemporaries of Freifeld in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand began their careers as politicians before becoming journalists or lobbyists. For example, Australian Hal Colebatch moved between the worlds of journalism and politics. After meeting Mussolini in Rome, he became a mouthpiece for fascist Italy in Australia, trying especially to influence Australia's settlement policies.¹¹²

The work of these go-betweens in their wider media and political contexts has attracted the interest from historians of science.¹¹³ This chapter has contributed to the study of the transimperial circulation of knowledge within and across imperial formations, while previous work has focused to a large degree on the well-established British and French cases. We have also clearly shown that the often-overlooked fascist imperialism was of international, if not global, relevance to these very same imperial formations as well as to their reformulations in the twentieth century.

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¹¹¹ Norman Domeier, *Weltöffentlichkeit und Diktatur: Die amerikanischen Auslandskorrespondenten im "Dritten Reich"* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), 603.

¹¹² Hal Colebatch, *Steadfast Knight: A Life of Sir Hal Colebatch* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2004), 114. See also Nick Crowson, *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators 1935-1940* (London: Routledge, 2002), 19-21.

¹¹³ Matheus Alves Duarte da Silva, Thomas A. S. Haddad and Kapil Raj, "Science and Empire: Past and Present Questions," in idem (eds.), *Beyond Science and Empire: Circulation of Knowledge in an Age of Global Empires, 1750-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 1-18.

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Recycling Colonial Comparisons: A Transimperial History

Véronique Dimier

Abstract

This chapter demonstrates that judgmental comparison-making between a presumably clearcut British and French style of colonial rule in the late colonial period did not disappear with the end of formal colonialism. Rather, such comparisons, involving both the British and the French, persisted for various, ultimately often political reasons after the end of empire. This chapter focuses on two groups who were central to replicating and reshaping how one empire knew and represented the other: postcolonial professional historians and development experts.

Keywords: transimperial, postcolonial professional historians, development experts, Comparisons, Britain, France

He [Julius Kiano, Kenyan Minister of Trade] made some observation on the way the French colonized not only countries but the minds of their inhabitants, unlike the British who at least left the inhabitants free to think for themselves.¹

Assimilation or respect for African ways of thinking? Direct or Indirect rule? Such old comparisons between empires resurfaced in the context of the 1975 Lomé convention negotiations at a time when Britain had just entered the EEC and tried to convince its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa to join the trade and development aid arrangements that the European Economic Community (EEC), pushed by France, had concluded with the former French colonies in the 1960s. The continuation of such comparisons, the way that they were instrumentalized politically even after their original context had disappeared during decolonization, is the main object of this chapter. Ann Stoler has argued that colonial comparisons should be analyzed for themselves:² indeed, the way that they are constructed, the way that they are used

¹ Archives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (AFCO, PRO, Kew)/30/1706, report by Duff, High Commissioner in Kenya, May 18, 1973.

² Ann Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001), 829–65.

by imperial governments or post-colonial governments may reveal one's identity and one's political interests at one time in history. More generally, as Heinz Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka have remarked, comparing is not a neutral act. Because "comparisons underestimate the multi-dimensionality, contingency and openness of historical situations," "they tend to insinuate that certain developments and structure are normal." These idealized structures or developments are eventually "used as benchmark in the study of different national and regional cases." This may lead to "the thesis of backwardness of one case compared to the other."³ Comparisons, in this case, are judgmental, used to valorize one nation, region or—as in this chapter—colonial government form over another. They help to hierarchize and rank empires.⁴

I will show here how this hierarchy of empires during and after decolonization was the result of interactions and hierarchies among those who produced and conveyed that comparative knowledge in France and Britain: either colonial or ex-colonial officials; academics; civil servants and politicians. A transimperial approach⁵ will help to see how these actors exchanged and competed within specific international and national contexts and networks. The fact that some of these actors (British ones) were more influential in certain arenas, like the Permanent Mandate Commission of the League of Nations, or were part of prestigious institutions, like Oxford University, may explain why their comparative knowledge prevailed in the long term over others (French in this case). It may also explain how their version of comparisons—and the implicit ranking of empires that it carried—survived more easily after decolonization, making the French—or British—colonial government and post-colonial relationship with Africa, a special/exceptional case.⁶

Starting from this hypothesis, and tackling this fascinating story of continuity, my paper has two parts. I first summarize my previous work⁷ and analyze how

³ Heinz Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 8.

⁴ On this idea of hierarchies of empire, see Daniel Hedinger and Nadine Heé, "Transimperial history-connectivity, cooperation and competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 4 (2018), 429–568.

⁵ Hedinger & Heé, "Transimperial history."

⁶ On the idea of exceptionality in imperial history, see Paul Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910," *Journal of American History* 88 (2002), 1315–53.

⁷ Véronique Dimier, *L'idéologie des méthodes coloniales en France et en Grande-Bretagne des années 1920 aux années 1960*, Travaux et Documents du CEAN, n° 58–59, 1998, I. E. P. de Bordeaux; "L'internationalisation du débat colonial: rivalités franco-britanniques autour de la commission permanente des mandats," *Revue d'Histoire Outre-Mer* (2002), 333–60; "Direct or Indirect Rule: propaganda around a scientific controversy," in *Promoting the colonial idea: propaganda and vision of empire in France*, ed. Tony Chafer Amada Sackur (London: Palgrave, 2002); *Le gouvernement des colonies: regards*

certain French and British academics and politicians made, for ultimately political reasons, colonial comparisons (French Direct vs English Indirect Rule) in the interwar period. I analyze the way that these comparisons were constructed, contested, or confirmed by scientific demonstration in the 1920s, the way that they were used through the Permanent Mandate Commission of the League of Nations and served to enhance or undermine the legitimacy of France and Britain as colonial powers in the interwar context of increasing competition between empires.

In Part II, I study to what extent the British version of these comparisons survived in the 1950s–60s, well after the context in which they were originally produced and used. Indeed, I argue that decolonization formed a new favorable ground on which for them to flourish. Competition between empires and the need/quest for legitimacy may not have ended with the era of independence. Last but not least, I will explore how these comparisons were—as the quotation opening this text illustrates—recycled for other purposes, in policy fields where the competition between former colonial powers or elites within nation-states precisely persisted, like immigration and development.

In this sense, the current chapter is part of my more recent research on the continuity between colonial and post-colonial times in the context of EEC development policy.⁸ This continuity has received increased attention in recent years by historians.⁹ Comparing empires has also led to a number of innovative works in the scientific literature, among which are the recent book by Martin Thomas and Richard Toye on French and British colonial rhetoric and Melanie Torrents on French and British colonial rule in Cameroon.¹⁰ Since I first published my work (1998, 2002, 2004) on French and British colonial comparisons, other studies have further elaborated and confirmed some my hypotheses as to the effect of

croisés franco-britanniques (PUB, 2004); “On good colonial government: lessons from the League of Nation,” *Global Society* 18 no. 3 (2004), 279–99.

⁸ Veronique Dimier, *The Invention of a European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire* (London: Palgrave, 2014).

⁹ Elisabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Joseph Hodge, “British colonial expertise, post-colonial careerism and the early history of international development,” *Journal of Modern European History* 8 no. 1 (2010), 24–44; Sarah Stockwell, *The British End of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also for earlier work on this topic: Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires. European Integration, Decolonization and the Challenge from the Global South, 1957–1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Martin Thomas and Robert Toye, *Arguing about Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882–1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Mélanie Torrent, *Diplomacy and Nation Building in Africa. Franco-British Relations and Cameroon at the End of Empire* (London: Tauris, 2012).

internationalization of the colonial debate on the production of comparative knowledge.¹¹ Except for Mizutani Satoshi, however, few have made colonial comparisons the main and only object of their analysis.¹²

Unlike those works, my approach here will be purely constructivist.¹³ I analyze comparisons as a discourse which was constructed as part of the production of a certain knowledge, at a certain time in history and by certain actors who used them in a specific political and international context. I skirt the question as to whether there were indeed differences or similarities between the French and the British way of governing their colonies, colonizing, decolonizing, and developing.

Part I: "The Myth of the Contrast?"¹⁴

Hard facts may have wrested so many concessions from the old extreme policy of assimilation that the French have been able to rename it association, but the assimilating genius of France survives. ... The Frenchman does not preserve native culture because he does not share our respect for it. To him it is barbarism. ... He will not now deliberately kill indigenous authority but why should he seek to keep alive what offends equally his conceptions of humanity, efficiency and centralisation?¹⁵

This quote comes from Margery Perham, reader of colonial administration at Oxford University (1935–1948), biographer and friend of Lord Lugard, in 1914–1919 Governor of Nigeria, and the so-called "inventor" of Indirect Rule. She drew up her conclusions after a long research project financed by the Trust Travelling Fund (November 1931–April 1932), which allowed her to visit several French and British colonies in West Africa, among which Cameroon, a former German territory that in 1918 was divided and transformed into a French and British mandated

¹¹ Miguel Bandeira Jeromino, *The Civilising Mission of Portuguese Colonialism, 1870-1930* (London: Palgrave, 2015); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Pierre Singaravelou, "Les stratégies d'internationalisation de la question coloniale et la construction transnationale d'une science de la colonisation à la fin du 19^{ème} siècle," *Monde(s)* 1 (2012), 135–57; Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹² Mizutani Satoshi, "Anticolonialism and the contested politics of comparison: Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Japanese colonialism in Korea in the inter-war period," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16, no. 1 (2015) <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cch.2015.0005>.

¹³ On the constructivist approach see the Introduction of Dimier, *Gouvernement*.

¹⁴ By reference to Semakula Kiwanuka, "Colonial policy and administration in Africa: the myth of the contrast," *African Historical Study* 3, no. 2 (1970), 295–315.

¹⁵ Margery Perham, "A contrast of policies," in *Colonial Sequence, 1930-1949: a Chronological Commentary upon British Colonial Policy especially in Africa* (London: Methuen, 1967), 74.

territory of the League of Nations mandates. Such comparisons were not new in the 1930s. British officials already used them in the nineteenth century to criticize the so-called French policy of assimilation in Algeria.¹⁶ The latter was unfavorably contrasted to the decentralized and pragmatic British system set up in India after the Indian Rebellion in 1857, which put an end to the ambition of extending British liberal democracy in its empire and replaced it by the broad idea of respecting native customs and institutions, of favoring the evolution of ‘natives’ in their own way under British supervision. Such system was also praised at the end of the nineteenth century by some French theoreticians and politicians like Jean Louis de Lanessan, Jules Harmand, and Joseph Chailley-Bert, who aimed to change French official policy from assimilation to ‘association,’ especially in the newly acquired colonies in Africa and Asia.¹⁷ Hence their tendency, for political reasons, to use and reinforce the same comparisons. When *association* (the use of local chiefs and respect for native customs) eventually became in 1905 official French doctrine, those comparisons took more subtle forms, at least on the British side. As Lucy Mair, 1932–1956 lecturer in colonial administration at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and anthropologist, remarked:

The French administration like all others have been driven by necessity to utilise the service of subordinate chiefs. These officials are called chiefs, but until quite recently there has been little attempt to select for the position persons whose authority is traditionally recognised and none at all to develop the exercise of their authority along traditional lines. A deliberate policy of suppressing those native authorities who were powerful enough to constitute a potential danger of French authority, combined with a failure to recognise the existence of any authority in tribes which were not highly centralised and with the general indifference of the fate of indigenous civilisation, have made any idea of Indirect Rule in the Nigerian sense inconceivable. The tendency of the French administration to think in terms of grand general schemes applicable to the whole federation of colonies simultaneously militates against any recognition of local differences of cultures.¹⁸

This consensus among British academic analysts of colonial government was, however, no longer accepted universally in the 1930s. Especially on the French side, some, like Maurice Delafosse, were quick to react, and argued that “there are *clichés* that are systematically used without being questioned and confronted to

¹⁶ Alex Middleton, “French Algeria in British imperial thought, 1830–70,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16, no. 1 (2015), 10.1353/cch.2015.0012.

¹⁷ Raymond Betts, “L’influence des méthodes hollandaises et anglaises sur la doctrine coloniale française à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle,” *Cahiers d’histoire* 1 (1958), 33–50.

¹⁸ Lucy Mair, *Native Policy in Africa* (London: Routledge, 1936), 209.

reality.”¹⁹ This was the case according to him for the so-called superiority of the British in colonial government and for comparisons praising their pragmatism, decentralizing system, and capacity for respecting chiefs and customs. An anthropologist, former colonial administrator in French West Africa, and from 1909 to 1926 teacher of colonial government at the Ecole coloniale that was set up in 1887 to train colonial officials for sub-Saharan Africa and Indochina, he described his own experience as territorial officer in the French Sudan in a book titled *Broussard ou les Etats d'âme d'un colonial* (1922). He argued that Indirect Rule was not typically British, no more that direct rule, centralization, and attempts at assimilation were typically French. The same conclusions were made by two other teachers at the Ecole coloniale, Henri Labouret and Robert Delavignette, both former colonial officials and respectively an anthropologist (1927–1947) and director of the Ecole coloniale (193–1946). Delavignette stated that:

We are tempted to translate ideas on native policy into the classical debate: assimilation or association. In fact experience in Black Africa is full of contradictions and exchanges between these two theories. France, who is considered as assimilationist as she made some Senegalese people voters for her parliament, respected at the same time their Muslim personal status, didn't she? England, who colonizes without assimilation, anglicized black men from the Gold Coast by transforming them into collaborators in her plantations and trade, into clerks at the University of Achimota and opponents to Her Majesty's Government in Accra, didn't she? Assimilation or association? There is no definite choice between the two. Assimilation or association: both formulas are often combined and their dosage evolve with the dexterity of the actors concerned and with the course of events.²⁰

For Labouret, too, those comparisons were “a trend of collective mindset against which no one is able to fight.” “The English remained convinced that a complete policy of assimilation is still on the table in the Republican France (...). Following similar errors, our neighbors are persuaded that they were the first to invent in 1900 the principles of Indirect Rule to be applied in the septentrional provinces of Nigeria.”²¹ He himself, however, tried to show the contrary, especially in his book on Cameroon published in 1938 as a result of six months of field work under the patronage of the French Ministry of Education and the International Institute of African Languages and Civilisations. This work was meant to be presented to the tenth conference of the Hautes Etudes Internationales organized in Paris in

¹⁹ Maurice Delafosse, «Menus propos,» *Dépêche coloniale*, August 10, 1925.

²⁰ Robert Delavignette, *Service africain*, 4th ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 87–88.

²¹ Henri Labouret, “Protectorat ou administration directe. Direct or indirect rule,” *Afrique française* (1934), 289.

1937, whose subject was the economic importance of the colonies and the peaceful resolution of international conflicts. This conference was convened at a time when German ambitions in Africa, especially on their former colonies (like Cameroon), were more and more threatening.²²

Interestingly, Perham and Labouret visited the same place, Cameroon, with the same intention, to study colonial administration and native policy on the ground. However, they returned with very different conclusions as to the similarities or differences between French and British methods of governing the 'natives.' Both knew each other and met: Perham invited him to a summer school that she organized in the period 1937–1938 at Oxford University, and they were both active members of the International Institute of African languages and civilizations in London. Like Delavignette and Mair, they actively participated in training institutions and programs for colonial administrators, i.e., the *Ecole coloniale* in France or the Colonial Administrative Service Courses organized in Oxford and Cambridge from the end of the 1920s. They also contributed largely to the development and teaching of a "science of colonial administration" whose purpose was to learn from other empires' experiences. Implementation of native policy and colonial administration had to be studied in their day-to-day working, that is, mainly at the local level, where the colonial administrators dealt directly with 'native' societies. The approach had to be comparative: one had to compare the colonial principles and practices of the different colonial powers and see what worked. In theory, methods were inductive: colonial administration had to be analyzed in the different colonies through field work. In practice, however, a deductive and determinist approach was used on both sides to reach different conclusions. Britain's liberal and aristocratic culture or 'character' led to Indirect Rule, while French Republicanism and universalism led to Direct Rule for the British authors. According to Perham, for example, "our tradition of local government, sympathy with aristocracy, our beliefs that institutions grow and are not made (Burke), our dislike of extreme and oppressive measures"²³ all led to Indirect Rule. "The further I carried the comparison (with the French) the more I realised that our system of indirect system is at its best the expression of our kind of liberalism as the French is of their very different kind. Or rather our system results from our conservatism with its sense of historic continuity and (respect) for tradition and partly from our liberalism with its respect for institution and wishes of the people."²⁴ She concluded: "I think the French are temperamentally and politically unsuited to handle our methods of

²² Henri Labouret, *Le Cameroun*, Centre d'Etude de Politique Etrangère, travaux des groupes d'études, publication 6 (Paris: Hartman, 1938).

²³ Private Archives of Margery Perham (PAMP), Oxford Library, b 230, 18, 17.

²⁴ PAMP, box 230, 7, 21.

ruling through the chiefs.”²⁵ For French authors, elements in national characters could lead either to Indirect Rule or Direct Rule/assimilation: coming from a provincial background in Burgundy, Delavignette was proud to celebrate the “little French *patries*,” those regional cultures rooted in the souls of the countryside, against the French assimilationist tendencies of Paris.

It was not by pure chance that both Perham and Labouret chose Cameroon as their object of study to confirm their hypothesis. Cameroon, like Togo, Tanganyika, and Ruanda-Urundi, was a B Mandate, i.e., a former German colonial territory, which according to Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, were not “yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.” They were to be ruled by the winners of the war, here, France and Britain, under the supervision of the League’s Permanent Mandates Commission—which included, among others, representatives of the mandate powers—and according to the League’s principles. These principles were quite imprecise and could lead to different interpretations.²⁶ They sanctioned the idea that colonies were not mere properties to be exploited, but were inhabited by peoples whose “well-being and development form a sacred trust of civilisation.” The main objective of the mandate governments was to assure this well-being through good government and, as the word “not yet” presumed, was to educate these peoples towards self-government, even though no deadline was set. In this sense, their rule had to be more educational and liberal than repressive and authoritarian. Still different interpretations could be possible as for the methods to be used. Education could take the form of the progressive introduction of democratic elections; or it could be translated into methods similar to Indirect Rule. Looking through the Mandates Commission’s minutes, one quickly realizes that the second interpretation did in fact prevail among its members. Indirect Rule was considered the most liberal and progressive way to govern natives: it meant to govern through their representatives, i.e., the traditional chiefs, which supposedly was the incarnation of a government by the people for the people. What went unnoticed was the fact that this kind of system was introduced in India as a conservative ploy to avoid any evolution towards a liberal parliamentary democracy.²⁷ The prestige of Lord Lugard, the so-called inventor of “Indirect Rule” and British representative to the Commission from 1922 to 1936, and the fact that he could orientate the debates of the Commission into this direction, largely contributed to this course of events.²⁸ The system of Indirect

²⁵ Margery Perham, *West African Passage: A journey through Nigeria, Chad, and the Cameroons, 1931-1932* (London, Boston: Peter Owen, 1983), 190.

²⁶ See Dimier, *Gouvernement*, 201–202. Pedersen, *Guardians*, elaborated further on this work.

²⁷ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

²⁸ See Dimier, *Gouvernement*, 201–202. Pedersen, *Guardians*, elaborated further on this work.

Rule was officially given recognition by the Commission in 1927²⁹ after a brilliant intervention at the eleventh session by Donald Cameron, another theoretician of the system and then governor of Tanganyika, who described Indirect Rule as a “democratic system.”³⁰ In these circumstances, to present French colonial administrators as incapable of Indirect Rule, as the British analysts did, was in fact to accuse them of being unable to rule in a liberal and educational way and to abide by the League of Nations principles. Mirroring the scientific controversy between Labouret and Perham, French representatives, for their part, were prompt to react and contradict these hypotheses.³¹ In the case of the Mandates Commission, the disagreement about possible differences or similarities between the systems of colonial administration similarly dealt with a specific mandate, French Cameroon, and gained in momentum in the 1930s, i.e., at a time when Germany was claiming back her former colonies, especially French Cameroon,³² and France and Britain were quarreling to decide which mandates, under French or British rule, would be sacrificed to appease Germany. As I remarked elsewhere, the fact that France did not send to the Commission representatives who could match Lugard’s influence and aura did not help to disavow the British version of facts.³³

The fact that both political representatives within the Mandates Commission and specialists in colonial administration engaged in the same controversy reveals the new legitimacy process engendered by the League of Nations mandate system in the 1920s, a process that involved the necessity of resorting to science.³⁴ By setting up some common principles officially accepted by the mandate powers and by

²⁹ Report on the work of the Commission during the 11th session, June 20–July 6, 1927, O.J. of the League of Nations, October 1927, submitted to the Council on September 8, 1927, 1259–60.

³⁰ Minutes of the Permanent Mandates Commission, 8th meeting, 11th session, June 27, 1927, *OJ of the L.N Debated of the P. M. C.*; C 348. M 122. 1927 VI, 62.

³¹ Minutes of the Permanent Mandates Commission, 10th meeting, 9th session, June 14, 1926, C 174. M 144. 1926 VI, 62–63, 78; 20th meeting, 9th session, June 21, 1926, 141; 28th meeting, 22nd session, November 24, 1932, C 772. M 364. 1932 VI, 204–207; 2nd meeting, 30th session, October 27, 1936, C 500. M. 313. 1936 VI, 22–23, 29–34. Annual report of the French government on the administration of the mandates in the Cameroon territories, 1936 (Paris: Imprimerie Lahure, 1936), 42.

³² For more information on the German claims, see Philippe Essomba, *Le Cameroun entre la France et l’Allemagne, de 1919 à 1932*, Thèse pour le Doctorat, 3e cycle (histoire des relations internationales), Université des Sciences juridiques, politiques et sociales de Strasbourg, 1984, 49–54. See also Pedersen, *Guardians*.

³³ Dimier, *Gouvernement*, 206, 222; Dimier, “On good colonial government.” See also, Pedersen, *Guardians*.

³⁴ Only the B mandate is considered here. Great Britain was given Tanganyika and part of Cameroon and Togo. France was given the other parts of both of these territories. To have more information concerning the Mandate system, see *Le système des mandats, origines principes et applications*, Genève, Publication SDN, n°89 (1945).

which one could judge their government towards native peoples in their mandated territories, but also by extension in their colonies, the League made moral sanction and criticism easier, all the more so because these criticisms could be made publicly in a political forum, the Permanent Mandates Commission. As a supra-national organization, the Commission did not have any means to enforce the League principles and sanction possible infringements. Still, the mandate powers had to prove regularly to this Commission that they were governing their territories according to the League principles. The proofs given had to be real evidence, practical results, and facts presented in an annual report that included answers to a questionnaire devised by the Commission. In this context, it is worth noticing that Labouret and Perham were both connected with the League of Nations. As part of their research work and training, they both spent time looking through the Mandate Commission minutes and reports. Perham even went to Geneva and was later presented by Lord Lugard as a potential successor to Lord Hailey, the British representative to the Commission between 1936 and 1939. Labouret worked in the French Colonial Office, the *Direction des Affaires Politiques*, where he was responsible for the mandates during 1926–1927.

The legitimacy process in which they were involved could have led to greater co-operation between the scientists and politicians of both countries. Indeed, in some fields like health or food security for example, it led, in the 1940s especially, to some collaboration as a way to answer criticisms by the newly born UN organizations.³⁵ But in our case, it rather reinforced the rivalry between France and Great Britain, each fearing, and at the same time, fueling criticism that could undermine their own colonial rule.³⁶ The construction and political use of comparisons were part of that process and historical context.

Part II: Comparisons Recycled

One may have expected these comparisons to disappear with a new historical context, i.e., once colonization was over. But nothing of the sort happened. Rather, they resurfaced during 1963–1964, first in the works of two historians: Michael Crowder, a British historian specialized in African studies who had been teaching in several Nigerian universities (1968–1978) and who in 1964 was on a visiting fellowship at Berkeley University, in the USA; and Hubert Deschamps, himself a former colonial

³⁵ Pedersen, *Guardians*; Vincent Bonnacase, *La pauvreté au Sahel: Du savoir colonial à la mesure internationale* (Paris: Karthala, 2011); Jessica Lynne Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health: France and the United Nations in Postwar Africa* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

³⁶ Albert Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* (Paris: Sagittaire, 1931), 120–21.

official in Madagascar and colonial governor, who had been teaching at the *Ecole coloniale* that was renamed *Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-mer* in 1945 and at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris*, the newborn postwar institution meant to train the French political elite. In 1962, he was elected professor at the Sorbonne for the newly created chair in modern history of Africa. For Deschamps, “most of your [Lugards’] compatriots, with a refreshing naivety, imagined that assimilation has always been the unequivocal aim of the French colonization.”³⁷

Refuting this “clear Manichaeism,” Deschamps argued that “assimilation has rarely been the official colonial doctrine of France.”³⁸ Using, like his detractors, culturalist schemes, he admitted that this doctrine corresponds to “profound trends which are quite common among the French people,” most notably “logic reasoning” and “universalism,” typical of the eighteenth century. However, taking some distance from the same culturalist approach, he argued that this universalism was quickly replaced on the ground by the “experience of facts” met by colonial officials. “In Black Africa, wherever we found them, and except in rare case of open conflict or absence of clear traditions, we have kept them, enthroned them and made them our superior agents, like the English did and for the same reasons: they were useful for the conquest, the administration and the economy (...). A man as knowledgeable as Maurice Delafosse taught us at the *Ecole coloniale* a doctrine which was close to yours: safeguarding the native institutions while ensuring their evolution within their natural framework.”³⁹ He concluded by arguing that Britain itself did transfer to the newly independent states in Africa its parliamentary traditions with all their historical decorum: the mace, the wig, the speaker, and the loyalty to her Majesty. “This was the English type of assimilation.”⁴⁰ The same arguments would be developed later on in a massive book on Africa in the twentieth century that he wrote in collaboration with Jean Ganiage, himself professor at the Sorbonne from 1961 and the holder of the only existing French chair on the history of colonization.⁴¹

Engaging with Deschamps’s article, Crowder insisted that “there were such fundamental differences between the French and British systems [of colonial administration in Africa] that, even if both made use of ‘chiefs,’ primarily it is not possible to place the French system of native administration in the same category as British Indirect Rule. It is true that both powers had little alternative to the use

³⁷ Hubert Deschamps, “Et maintenant Lord Lugard?,” *Africa* 33, no 4 (1963), 294.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴¹ Jean Ganiage, “Hubert Deschamps et Odette Guitard,” *L’Afrique au XXI^{ème} siècle* (Sirey, 1966). In this book, he wrote the second part on West Africa. See more specifically *ibid.*, 316–19.

of existing political authorities as a means of governing their vast African empires, and in most cases, these authorities were headed by chiefs. What is important is the very different ways in which these authorities were used. The nature of the position and power of the chief in the two systems was totally different and as corollary, so were the relations between the chief and the political officer, who was inspired in each case by very different ideals."⁴² After a lengthy demonstration and referring directly to Perham's and Mair's work, he concluded that "the French explicitly changed the very nature of the powers of the chiefs and that his functions were reduced to that of a mouthpiece of orders emanating from outside." "In general, the French system of administration deliberately sapped the traditional powers of the chiefs in the interest of uniformity of administrative system."⁴³ "The difference has much to do with difference in national character and political traditions. While few would disagree that the British were inspired by the concept of separated development in their African territories, there is still much debate as to how far France were inspired by the concept of assimilation even after its formal abandonment as official policy in favor of a policy of association."⁴⁴

This controversy resurfaced at a time when in the 1960s a new question and battle of legitimacy appeared. The UN *Declaration* affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination and proclaimed that *colonialism* should be brought to a speedy and unconditional end. As Deschamps himself noticed,⁴⁵ the Declaration for the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples adopted by the UN assembly in December 1960, and the following decolonization process posed a crucial question: which colonizing power better prepared African states for self-government and eventually for independence? Here as well, the British version seems to have prevailed, even among some French historians, at least those who were not specialists on West Africa.⁴⁶ There may be several reasons, or rather hypotheses, for this situation. As Carolyn Elkins has remarked, British officials and press during decolonization "carefully constructed [British] colonial image" contrasting it with "the brutal behavior of other European empires in Africa" and forgetting about

⁴² Michael Crowder, "Indirect Rule: French and British Style," *Africa* 3, no 43 (1964), 197. Italics in the original.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 200–201.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁴⁵ Hubert Deschamps, *La fin des empires coloniaux* (Paris: PUF, 1950), 113.

⁴⁶ For some other examples, see Patrick Rostellini, *Histoire de France* (Paris: Hatier, 1990), 66, 80; Maurice Agulhon, *Histoire de France. Vol. 5: La République de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1990), 50–55, 231, 402–404; René Rémond, *Notre siècle, 1918–1998* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 94–95; Georges Duby and Robert Mandrou, *Histoire de la civilisation française, 17e–20e siècles*, vol. 2 (Paris: Colin, 1968), 340–42; Michel Mourre, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique d'histoire* (Paris: Bordas, 1986), 1066.

their own violence in Kenya.⁴⁷ Hence, the “narrative of the British empire as the all-defining model for all others’ remained prevalent.”⁴⁸ The large publicity that accompanied the horrors of the Algerian war of independence and, by contrast, the great capacity of the British government to hide similar facts about Kenya’s decolonization may have given new ammunition for this narrative.⁴⁹ It gave more credit to the thesis that France, because of its assimilation policy—which in fact was, at the political level, very limited in the case of Algeria,⁵⁰—was less able to prepare colonies for independence and that British Indirect Rule, also applied in Kenya.

This thesis is largely asserted by Jean Louis Miège, a French historian specialist in Morocco, lecturer at the University of Rabat in the period 1957–1961, and then professor at the University of Aix-Marseilles. In *Expansion européenne et décolonisation, de 1870 à nos jours*, European expansion and decolonization from 1870 to the present day, he remarked that “by tradition, the English system of Indirect Rule is opposed to the French system of assimilation and centralization,” an opposition that he does not question. “In France, the doctrine was that of assimilation, which should lead to the progressive creation of French departments [French administrative territories] in the colonies. (...) Despite diverse attempts, Direct Rule, in its various forms, remains the mark of French colonization.”⁵¹ Hence, “ill informed, a big proportion of the [French public] opinion stuck to the fiction of the assimilation ideal and only accepted independence because of the Algerian drama.” By contrast, “the very transformation of the Empire into Commonwealth, the development of the principle of trusteeship and *self-government* as dictated by Lugard prepared to independence” and helped the English public opinion to better accept this outcome.⁵²

Similarly, famous French historians like Georges Duby, member of the Académie Française and Professor at the Collège de France (1970–1991), argued that “at no point did the [French] political leaders seem to have interpreted the precursor signs preliminary of the revolts in the colonies. Faithful to the myth of assimilation and of a ‘greater France,’ they were not able to understand that the liberal reforms could only be appreciated if they were part of a process of

⁴⁷ Carolyn Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning. The Untold Story of British Gulag in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 306.

⁴⁸ Hedinger and Héé, “Transimperial history,” 430.

⁴⁹ Elkins, *Reckoning*, chapter 9; Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Adria Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism. Anti-colonial Protests in the French Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵¹ Jean-Louis Miège, *Expansion et décolonisation de 1870 à nos jours* 1st ed. (Paris: PUF, 1971), 220.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 332 (italics in the original).

independence.”⁵³ Maurice Crouzet, author of several books on world civilizational history, also argued that decolonization in the French Empire was initiated with “neither doctrine nor method.” Because the French “could not depart from the assimilationist ideal [...] there was no colonial policy in France between 1945 and 1960, only a series of compromises imposed by events to a Republic that remained late to react to evolutions which she was not able to anticipate, orientate or even perceive.” By contrast, Britain continuously referred to “a doctrine and method,” that of trusteeship, which meant “leaving the colonies when they would be able to administer themselves,” on the same model as that which was applied to the white dominions. This led to a peaceful evolution.⁵⁴ Henri Grimal, working on decolonization, developed the same argument.⁵⁵ In the British Empire, the “way to autonomy was cautious, controlled and led to a final outcome which was likely to satisfy the principle (of self-determination) and the interest of the metropolis.” Indirect Rule “created certain conditions in favor of political evolution.”⁵⁶ In the French Empire, he argued, controversy went on about the possibility of assimilation and the desirability of association. “The formula which was most frequently applied was much subjugation, very little autonomy and a hint of assimilation,” which led to “immobilism as a rule.”⁵⁷

The other factor that may have given long-term credit to the British version of facts may be the academic position of those who carried out those comparisons in the 1920s–30s and the fact that the English version of comparisons created in the 1960s–70s a large consensus among English-speaking historians. Besides, as noted by Daniel Hedinger and Nadine Heé, most books on empires after decolonization focused on the British Empire,⁵⁸ which may have given the English version a large audience. In this sense, the hierarchization of empires accompanied hierarchies of universities, knowledge, and languages during and after colonization.

On the British side, both Perham and Mair worked at prestigious, globally well-recognized universities. Their analysis was confirmed by Raymon Buell, professor at Harvard, who himself wrote his massive book, *the Native Problem in Africa*, after a survey of several months in Africa.⁵⁹ Well after decolonization, Perham’s work was further given large publicity by one of the few British historians specialized in British colonial administration, Antony Kirk Greene, a

⁵³ Georges Duby, *Histoire de la France. Les temps nouveaux, 1852 à nos jours* (Paris: Larousse, 1972), 200.

⁵⁴ Maurice Crouzet, *Le monde depuis 1945*, vol. 2 (Paris: PUF, 1973), 941–49, 964.

⁵⁵ Henri Grimal, *La décolonisation* (Paris: A. Colin, 1965), 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 55, 59.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁸ Hedinger and Heé, “Transimperial history,” 430.

⁵⁹ Raymon Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 86, 270.

former colonial official in Nigeria who ended his career as professor in history at St Antony's College in Oxford University from 1967 to 1981.⁶⁰ The British version of comparisons was also relayed, sometimes with some nuances, by anglophone historians who worked on compared colonialism, like David K. Fieldhouse, the Vere Harmsworth Professorship of Imperial and Naval History at the University of Cambridge.

Fieldhouse's 1956 book, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth century*, which was in 1973 translated into French, juxtaposed the French and British systems of rule in West Africa, too.⁶¹ The latter, he argued, was based on decentralization and autonomy through Indirect Rule, which "allowed to non-Europeans to take part in their own administration without weakening the British control."⁶² "Total cultural assimilation," political uniformity and incorporation (based on the image of the Republic one and indivisible) and bureaucratic centralization from Paris were the ambitions and dogmas of the French Empire, even though practical difficulties forced the French to recognize the principles of association as an "expedient" and "mediocre substitute."⁶³ Centralized control "was efficient"⁶⁴ and "native administration" directly "derived from the assimilation ideal,"⁶⁵ which led to an autocratic form of government. The author admits that, like in the British Empire, varieties of administrative practices were tried in the different colonies. In West Africa, however, Direct Rule, at least the subjection of the remaining chiefs to the colonial administrators who appointed them according to their needs and not the hereditary principles, "constituted the norms."⁶⁶ Whether Direct or Indirect Rule, neither style of colonial government led to a sufficient preparation for independence, he concluded, however.

Similar conclusions were drawn by Lewis Gann and by Peter Duignan (a Hoover Institute Fellow) who in the period 1969–1974 edited the five-volume *Colonialism in*

⁶⁰ Antony Kirk Greene, "Le roi est mort, vive le roi," in *Etats et société en Afrique francophone*, ed. Daniel Bach and Antony Kirk Greene (Paris: Economica, 1993), 13–33. Also: Antony Kirk Greene, "Entente cordiale ou enquête coloniale. Margery Perham hands down her suspended judgement," *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth History* 37 (2009), 119–26; *The Principles of Native Administration in Nigeria: Selected Documents 1900–1947*, edited and introduced by A. H. M. Kirk-Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁶¹ David Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1956).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 258. His bibliography includes books by Lugard, Perham, Mair, but also Deschamps for the French part.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

Africa, 1870–1960 series with Cambridge University Press.⁶⁷ They admit that both French and British in Africa displayed “assimilationist tendencies,”⁶⁸ but concerning the use of chiefs, they summarized Crowder’s version, even though they quote in the footnotes Deschamps’ article as well. They also concluded that both France and Britain engaged in “decolonization unplanned and uncoordinated,” but after decolonization, “the various French African leaders on the whole developed greater fellow feeling [with the French] than their counterparts in British Africa. (...) French culture imprint remained profound.” This was due to the fact, among others, that “their countries had been administered under a common scheme in the past. (...) The French culture was so pervasive that French speaking African leaders often encountered great difficulty in meeting British Africans on a common ground.”⁶⁹ This argument would be developed later on by British officials and scholars, as we shall see, which led to the idea of French “exceptionality” in relation to African countries and elites.⁷⁰ This idea, as the British version of comparisons, was also conveyed by anglophone elites of former British colonies in Africa. Daniel Bach, a French political scientist specialized in Africa, summarized the situation well in the introduction of a volume that he edited with Anthony Kirk Greene. While the latter insisted in the same volume on the usual difference between French and British colonial rule,⁷¹ Bach remarked that “referring to his contacts with Francophones, the great Yoruba politician (Chief Awolowo) found himself choked by the ‘assimilation’ of the Francophone elites and their French cultural referent, all the while forgetting he had just been participating in a ceremonial which was as much British as the toga he wore, but also that more generally his status as lawyer meant he was wearing a curled wig when he presented himself among his peers.”⁷²

More generally, the British version of comparison was given a supplementary scientific aura by anglophone specialists of West Africa, especially Cameroon. Consider Victor Le Vine, author of a major book on Cameroon from mandate to independence published by the University of California Press; Anthony Asiwaju, professor at Lagos University from 1962 and one of the most prominent Nigerian historians; Peter Geschière, professor of Anthropology at the University of Leiden and Amsterdam in the period 1988–2002; Shelon Gellar on Senegal and Philippe

⁶⁷ Lewis Gann and Peter Duignan, *Burden of Empire: An Appraisal of Western Colonialism in Africa South of Sahara* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968), 218–22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 222; for a reference to Crowder’s and Deschamps’ article quoted above, see *ibid.*, 218.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 313, 341.

⁷⁰ Tony Chafer, “Franco-African relations: no longer exceptional,” *African Affairs* 101 (2002), 343–63.

⁷¹ Greene, “Roi.”

⁷² Daniel Bach, “Introduction,” in *Etats et société en Afrique francophone*, 3.

Mawhood, himself a former colonial official in West Africa.⁷³ Delafosse, Labouret, and Delavignette are rarely quoted by these authors, and when they are, their work is misinterpreted. For example, Shelton Gellar's book on Senegal argued that Delavignette hated the traditional chiefs because they perpetuated autocratic rule.⁷⁴ Ganna and Duignan quoted him to argue that a uniform organization was implemented in all African French colonies: the exact contrary of what Delavignette showed!⁷⁵ The only historian who wrote extensively on the French colonial service and the Ecole Coloniale, the American, William Cohen, confirmed that "the British colonial service, which was imbued with the tradition of the gentry had a nostalgic sympathy for the local chiefs, while the French colonial administrators, most of whom came from the middle and lower middle classes had a bourgeois disdain for feudalism and monarchism. The national traditions of the services were very different: the English believe in the virtues of local rules; in France local rule was considered a centrifugal force threatening the unity of the nation. In France, until recently, centralization has been considered a good and local rule a perilous system."⁷⁶ The only anglophone scholar who began to question that version was Raymond Betts,⁷⁷ whose 1955 PhD from Grenoble University, *La doctrine coloniale française entre 1890 et 1910: de l'Assimilation à l'Association*, was in 1961 translated into English as *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory*.

In France itself, Bett's conclusions were seconded by the right wing historian, Raoul Girardet, Professor at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris from 1957 and author in 1972 of a major synthesis, *L'idée coloniale en France: 1871-1962 (The French*

⁷³ Anthony Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889-1945. A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (London: Longman, 1976); Sheldon Gellar, *Structural Changes and Colonial Dependency. Senegal, 1885-1945* (London: Sage Publication, 1976), 24-25; Peter Geshiere, *Village Communities and the State. Changing Relations among the Maka of South-Eastern Cameroon since the Colonial Conquest* (London: Kegan Paul, 1982), 152; Victor Le Vine, *The Cameroons from Mandates to Independence*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 89; Philippe Mawhood, "Applying the French model in Cameroon," in *Local Government in the Third World*, ed. Philippe Mawhood 2nd ed. (Pretoria: African Institute of South Africa, 1993), 187-210.

⁷⁴ Gellar, *Structural Changes*, 24-25; see also Aristide Zolberg, *One Party Government in the Ivory Coast* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 96.

⁷⁵ Gann and Duignan, *Burden of Empire*, 218.

⁷⁶ William Cohen, "The French colonial service in West Africa," in *France and Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, ed. Gifford Prosser and Louis Roger (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 497. See also Cohen, *Rulers of Empire: the French Colonial Service in Africa* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Publications, 1971).

⁷⁷ Raymond Betts, *La doctrine coloniale française entre 1890 et 1910: de l'Assimilation à l'Association* (Thèse pour le Doctorat, Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Grenoble, 1955).

colonial idea: 1871-1972).⁷⁸ Girardet was one of the few French historians during the 1960s–70s to refer to Delavignette, Delafosse, and Deschamps' work.⁷⁹ In his book however, Delavignette's work is mostly used to describe colonialism as a humanist and legitimate project that should have been defended. While a resistant during World War II, Girardet had supported the Organisation Armée Secrète against the independence of Algeria. In the context of the polarization of historians around the Algerian war, quoting colonial officials like R. Delavignette may have been most unwelcome and considered as inappropriate or biased by those who held more radical views (Charles André Julien) or centrist positions (Charles Robert Ageron, University Paris XII).⁸⁰ In any case, it was unlikely to give credit to Delavignette's work.

Besides, the legitimacy and intellectual influence of Delafosse, Labouret, and Delavignette may have been limited by the fact that they taught at the *Ecole coloniale*, a professional institution largely detached from French universities that disappeared during decolonization. Thanks to Deschamps, their version of the facts reached the Sorbonne. But one may note that the main French historians working on colonization were specialists of North Africa, and hence unlikely to quote material from Cameroon or West Africa. A case in point was Charles André Julien—the holder, in France, of a chair specialized in colonial history, at the Sorbonne (1947–1961) and a famous anti-colonialist, he specialized in the Maghreb.⁸¹ So did his successors, Ganiage, Miège, and Ageron.⁸² Those who, like Henri Brunschwig, taught more broadly on the French Empire—in his case at the *Ecole coloniale* in the 1940s and then at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris—focused on the expansion period of the colonies (till 1914) and on decolonization.⁸³ In 1963, Brunschwig noted that few critical works existed on the period in between, that is on colonial administration:

⁷⁸ Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France: 1871-1962* (Paris: Table Ronde, 1972). He does not quote Betts in this book, however. Labouret is not quoted probably because he collaborated during World War II.

⁷⁹ Girardet, *Idée*, 159–60 185, 320.

⁸⁰ As Catherine Coquery Vidrovitch noted, the political position of the main French historians who worked on colonization just after decolonization ranged from conservatism (Miège, Ganiage, Girardet) to these more radical views: Coquery Vidrovitch, *Enjeux politiques de l'histoire coloniale* (Marseille: Agone, 2009), 27.

⁸¹ Charles André Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine 1. La conquête et les débuts de la colonisation 1827-1871* (Paris: PUF, 1964); *Histoire de l'Afrique blanche* (Paris: PUF, 1966); *Une pensée anticoloniale* (Paris: Sindbad, 1976).

⁸² Jean Ganiage, *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie* (Paris: PUF, 1959); Jean Louis Miège, *Le Maroc* (Paris: Arthaud, 1952, 1956); Charles Robert Ageron, *Politiques coloniales au Maghreb* (Paris: PUF, 1973 [English: *Colonial Politics in Maghreb*]); *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine (1871-1954)* (Paris: PUF, 1979 [English: *History of Contemporary Algeria 1871-1954*]).

⁸³ Henri Brunschwig, *Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français* (Paris: A. Colin 1960); idem, *L'avènement de l'Afrique Noire* (Paris: A. Colin, 1963).

the only books that he quoted were anglophone, including Lord Hailey's *African Survey* (1938), a classic on the reform of the British colonial administration.⁸⁴

Last but not least, historians who after Deschamps worked on Tropical Africa, like Coquery Vidrovitch, Professor at the university of Paris VII from 1971 to 2001, who in the 1970s was one of the young specialists on African history whose work since then has been recognized internationally, hardly referred to Delafosse, Labouret, and Delavignette. Her view about the differences between French and British colonial administration is much more nuanced than Miège's, for example.⁸⁵ But she only used Delavignette to explain the absolute power of the *Commandant de Cercle* (District Officer) and hence the coercive aspect of the French colonial state.⁸⁶ Jacques Lombard, an anthropologist and sociologist recruited in 1965 as lecturer at the University of Dakar and adjunct director of the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), quotes Labouret to support his own argument about the arbitrary nomination of the traditional chiefs in the French West African Empire; he thereby confirmed the distinction between a French doctrine based on assimilation/Direct Rule and the British doctrine of Indirect Rule. Even if he and others, like Gérard Gonac, Law Professor at the Sorbonne from 1987, admits that in practice both empires used Direct and Indirect rule, they tend to give credit to the British version.⁸⁷ Not before the end of the 1990s was Delafosse, Delavignette, and Labouret's work rediscovered by a new generation of French historians,⁸⁸ after a twenty-year period of relative absence of colonial studies in France.⁸⁹ A renewed interest in

⁸⁴ Brünschwig, (1963), 209.

⁸⁵ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Afrique Noire. Permanences et ruptures* (Paris: Payot, 1985), 117–20. See also Daniel Bourmaud, *Histoire Politique du Kenya. Etat et pouvoir local*, (Paris: Karthala, 1988), 814; Jean Suret Canale, "La fin de la chefferie en Guinée," *Journal of African history* 7 (1966), 461; Bach, "Introduction," 3.

⁸⁶ Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Afrique Noire*, 126. She was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C. in 1987, at the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University in 1992, and at the Humanities Research Center, University of Canberra at the University of Canberra in 1995.

⁸⁷ Jacques Lombard, *Autorités traditionnelles et pouvoirs européens en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Presses FNSP, 1967), 36; Gérard Gonac, ed., *Les institutions administratives des Etats francophones d'Afrique Noire* (Paris: Economica, 1979), 95.

⁸⁸ Jean-Loup Amselle and Emmanuelle Sibeud, ed., *Delafosse. Entre orientalisme et ethnographie: l'itinéraire d'un africaniste (1870-1926)* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998); Bernard Mouralis and Anne Piriou, ed., *R. Delavignette, (1896-1976) savant et politique* (Paris: Karthala, 2003). I contributed to both these volumes.

⁸⁹ On this point, see the very good Coquery Vidrovitch, *Enjeux*.

colonial history by anglophone historians like Alica Conklin, Frederick Cooper, and John Hargreaves led to further developments on this front.⁹⁰

The last factor which may have contributed to maintaining the British version of those comparisons alive may have been their repetitive use, for political reasons, by French and British actors. For example, they were instrumentalized by diverse French politicians in more recent debates about policies dealing with migrants. In the 2017 presidential election campaign, the extreme-right politician, Marion Maréchal Lepen, defended the Republican principle of assimilation, against what she considered the failed anglophone experience of multiculturalism: migrants have to fully accept their integration into the French culture or leave. By contrast, Alain Juppé, from the right wing, Union Pour un Mouvement Populaire, defended a policy of “integration” within a French nation united around the Republican principles but diverse culturally speaking; he took the Commonwealth, and especially Canadian laws, as his example.⁹¹ In both cases, comparisons with the so-called anglophone model, deriving from Britain’s colonial past experiences, was used to defend or criticize current domestic French policies. Some academics working on French migration policies also used them,⁹² referring to colonial past experiences as a determinant factor in explaining the perpetuation of assimilationist Republican ideals and practices. Like in the old colonial debates, they have been in turn criticized for oversimplifying the reality of policies which had been more complex than purely assimilationist and constructed in specific contexts.⁹³

⁹⁰ Fred Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize. The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); John Hargreaves, “La décolonisation, styles français et britanniques,” in *Etats et société en Afrique francophone*, 11–24. See also later works by E. Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily L. Osborne, and Richard L. Roberts, ed., *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

⁹¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2016/09/14/l-identite-heureuse-histoire-d-une-formule-devenue-une-marque-de-fabrique_4997377_4854003.html; <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2015/02/03/25002-20150203ARTFIG00176-marion-marchal-le-pen-valide-la-theorie-du-grand-remplacement.php>. See also the debate: Lepen against Juppé, October 2, 2014, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4yeqbn>.

⁹² See for example: Elisabeth Buettner, *Europe after empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also the chapter by James F. Hollifield, “France: Republicanism and the limits of immigration control,” in *Controlling Immigration. A Global Perspective*, ed. Waynes A. Cornelius et al. (Stanford: Stanford University, 2004), 184–214.

⁹³ See remarks and commentaries on James F. Hollifield’s chapter by Charles P. Gomez, *Controlling Immigration*, 214–18. See also Mary D. Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), which questions the assimilationist tendencies in French migration policies during colonial times.

Another field in which the British version of colonial comparisons resurfaced under new disguises is development, in the context of the EEC and the 1975 Lomé convention signed with the African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries. This convention succeeded the former Yaoundé Convention concluded by the EEC in 1963 with former French and Belgian colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa. It included Commonwealth territories, i.e., ex-British colonies in Tropical Africa, the Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP). Both conventions comprised trade agreements and a European Development Fund whose aim was to finance development projects proposed by the ACP states. The European Development Fund (EDF) was directly paid by the member states and run by the supranational body of the EEC, the European Commission. The functioning of the EDF and the way that projects were appraised by the European Commission remained a matter of permanent controversy between the fonctionnaires of the European Commission and those of the UK Overseas Development Administration (or Ministry) (ODM),⁹⁴ which managed UK development aid. The latter repeatedly criticized what it considered to be a mismanagement of the fund, arguing that projects were chosen for political reasons rather than for their possible role in alleviating poverty, one of the aims of the Lomé Convention. The criteria, they said, were secret and had nothing to do with projects' potential social and economic impact. Since the EDF was built in the 1960s under the direction of Jacques Ferrandi, a former French colonial official who became director of the EDF, the British concluded that the French "must bear a considerable responsibility for the practices which became established under EDF I to III, under Ferrandi's direction (...) The problem stems from the notoriously different French concept of the relationship between donor and recipient. The French expect and, on the whole, receive a political quid pro quo from 'their' ACP countries. They are therefore more ready to go along with the political demands of the latter"⁹⁵ or even to orient these demands in a very directive way, as remarked by the High Commissioner in Kenya in the quotation introducing this chapter. This kind of new Direct Rule was meant "to maintain good relations with the ACP governments in order to preserve stability and safeguard supplies of raw materials: they [the French within the European Commission] are simply not much interested in the quality of the projects,"⁹⁶ meaning here the quality in terms of potential social and economic impact.

⁹⁴ Véronique Dimier, *The invention of A European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), chapter 5, 6. This agency became a full-fledged ministry under the Labour government in 1964 (ODM), and under the Conservatives was folded into the FCO as ODA, then went through various institutional re-organizations.

⁹⁵ AFCE, 9/426, letter from DJE Ratford to Broomfield, August 23, 1977.

⁹⁶ AFCE 9/426, note by Baxter (ODM), August 77: brief for the Minister's meeting with Mr Pronk, Netherland Minister for development cooperation, August 29, 77.

Making these comparisons was a strategic device for ODM fonctionnaires. As the UK development budget was used for both domestic and international aid, they had an interest in criticizing the EDF to preserve their own budget lines and maintain their legitimacy. They were helped by diverse scholars, notably from the Overseas Development Institute,⁹⁷ who tried to demonstrate that the British did development in Africa very differently from the French and indeed much better than them. Not by chance, the main case that Adrian Hewitt used in the 1970s to exemplify his viewpoint was the Cameroon and the Trans-Cameroon project, a railway project started during colonial times and resumed in the 1960s through a mix of French/US/EDF funding. He argued that “the net benefits to Cameroon of this allocation of EDF funds (...) are extremely slim, if one disregards the political objective of physically integrating the North with the rest of the country (...). Why then was so much allocated to railways, with the approval of the EDF committee?” The answer was that such projects reinforced the political status quo of “a new, uncertain African government, endorsed by France but not authorized by plebiscite according to the normal UN rules for trust territories, fighting a civil war in the Bamiléké area, and committed to integrating over one million people in an area previously administered by a wholly foreign power, Britain, into the fabric of a Yaoundé-dominated Cameroon.” “Judged against the current criteria of aid effectiveness (sustained economic development and increases in local administrative competence and improvement in the lot of the poor) the EDF aid allocation mechanism seems to have missed the mark, predominantly because it failed to adapt to new circumstances and new development priorities.”⁹⁸ At a time when the legitimacy of donors (some of which were former imperial powers) was increasingly linked to projects’ potential effectiveness and to more and more precise and measurable criteria as defined by experts like Hewitt, the World Bank, or UN agencies,⁹⁹ the old tendency to compare, judge, and valorize oneself at the expense of others resurfaced and became again part of the political strategies at the national and international level.

In the case of the ODM and the EDF, these political strategies were undermined by a disturbing fact, however. “Some of the projects that we [the ODM] have put forward on behalf of British dependencies have been just as bad as those put [forward] by the French.”¹⁰⁰ Behind these “inconsistencies” lay the necessity, for other British ministries, especially the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to satisfy their clients amongst British

⁹⁷ The ODI was largely financed by the ODA/ODM.

⁹⁸ Adrian Hewitt, “The European Development Fund as a development agent: some results of EDF aid to Cameroon,” *ODI Review* 2 (1979), 51–55.

⁹⁹ See on the setting up of these criteria by the UN from the 1950s and onwards and the reaction of colonial powers like France: Bonnacase, *Pauvreté*; Lynn Pearson, *Colonial Politics*.

¹⁰⁰ AFCO 9/427, letter from Baxter to Bridger, June 26, 1978.

former colonial and overseas territories. They also wished for Britain “to maintain good relations with developing countries in order to preserve stability and safeguard the supply of raw materials.”¹⁰¹ Eventually, the British Permanent Representation in Brussels asked ODM officials “not to exaggerate the difference between our approach and that of our partners”¹⁰² for the sake of a better collaboration with the European Commission and the French there, but also for the sake of British reputation.

Indeed, comparison in this case was a double-edged sword, as officials in the Commission could easily reverse them, insisting on similarities. As an ODM official put it, “I am concerned that in the eyes of the Commission and other member states our position in the EDF Committee may be becoming weaker as a result of what they would see as inconsistencies. On two occasions recently the Commission has been able to point up instances of UK bilateral aid projects where we have failed to adhere to the very principles that we press for in the EDF Committee. I do not think there is anything we can do about this. We can only hope that the majority of ODM projects do in fact fully demonstrate our policy aims, e.g., good management, economic justification, benefit to the poorest, etc. If the Commission are able to find other instances of ODM bilateral practices falling short of ODM policy our credibility to the EDF committee is undoubtedly going to be quite seriously undermined.”¹⁰³

Conclusion

Colonial comparisons could be elastic in time and space as they served old and new political purposes. Stressing or minimizing differences formed part of legitimacy battles that accompanied the internationalization of the colonial debate. These tactics survived decolonization as new battles of legitimacy arose that were linked to international development or home policies towards migrants. As a matter of fact, the 1930s controversy between French and British specialists in colonial administration that resurfaced during decolonization between academics specialized in West Africa, like Crowder and Deschamps, was part of that process. The very fact that post-colonial historians, including French ones, have forgotten about this controversy, may make us forget to what extent these comparisons were constructed and should be handled with caution. In the same way, referring to national culture or character as a superior entity that persists over time and could explain differences or similarities in colonial policies of the past and in decolonization

¹⁰¹ AFCO 426, letter from Maitland (UK Permanent Representation in Brussels) to Preston, (Permanent Secretary, ODA), September 29, 1977.

¹⁰² Maitland to Preston.

¹⁰³ AFCO 9/427, letter from Sands Smith to Baxter, June 23, 1978.

processes as in post-colonial experiences of the present, may be misleading. It may marginalize other, more important explanations linked to socio-economic contexts. If nations are “imagined communities,” as Benedict Anderson¹⁰⁴ famously argued, then national cultures were as constructed as the comparisons themselves. This may result in a broader question: to what extent were comparisons part of the construction of national identities, either French, British, or those of the post-independent nation-states in Africa or elsewhere?¹⁰⁵

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