

A PUBLIC LECTURE

CHINA AND RUSSIA: THE TSARIST SUPREMACY (1800-1917)

Mr. Philip Snow

Abstract

Tsarist policy in China during this long nineteenth century falls into three phases: the maintenance of the stable relations established by the treaties of Nerchinsk and Kyakhta despite an increasing sense of the Qing dynasty's weakness (1800 - 1851); a drive for commercial and territorial expansion tempered by the wish to preserve the avuncular posture which distinguished Russia from its Western rivals (1851 - 1897); and an unrestrained quest for spheres of influence (1897 - 1917). Faced with these transformations the Qing court initially showed a distinct preference for dealing with Russia as the devil they knew by comparison with the Western maritime powers; but as the years passed they began to take indirect measures to check the Tsarist advance, fostering Han Chinese immigration into Manchuria and maintaining a stake in the lost territories to the north of the River Amur. They also exhibited some pugnacity in resisting the Tsarist attempts to annex the whole of the Yili valley in Xinjiang in 1880 and to turn the Manchurian provinces into a 'Yellow Russia' in 1900 - 04. With the upsurge of Han nationalism that reached its climax in the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 Tsarist Russia began to be viewed by a new generation of Chinese intellectuals as their country's chief foreign enemy. Despite a few curious instances of fraternisation in the Sino-Russian borderlands ordinary Chinese are said to have felt a quite widespread distaste for the lao maozi, the Old Hairy Ones, and the picture still showed little sign of changing when events in Russia took an unexpected turn in 1917.

Bio

Philip Snow graduated from Oxford University with a BA degree in Chinese (First Class Honours) in 1975. In the years since then he has devoted himself to research and writing on different aspects of China's external relations. He is the author of *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa*, *The Fall of Hong Kong: Britain, China and the Japanese Occupation* and most recently *China and Russia: Four Centuries of Conflict and Concord*. He has lived in Hong Kong since 1994.



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Baptist University Road Campus, Kowloon Tong
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