

## РОССИЯ И ВОСТОК

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**Russian Ambassadors to China at the Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Specifics of their Activities in the Qing Empire\****N. A. Samoylov, E. O. Starovoitova*

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The article discusses the role of leading Russian diplomats in the development of Sino-Russian relations at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is based on rare archival documents and memoirs written by contemporaries of the described events. The article presents and analyzes the assessments given to their activities in the publications of Russian, Chinese and Western historians. The authors focus their attention on the activities of two ambassadors to China: Arthur Cassini and Pavel Lessar, who headed Russian diplomatic mission in the Qing Empire during difficult periods of China's history and the conditions of complicated international situation in East Asia. The first of them served there at the time of the Sino-Japanese War, while the second — in the period between the Boxer Rebellion and the Russo-Japanese War. The clash of interests of the great powers in China at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century predetermined the complex tasks faced by Russian diplomacy. The analysis of the activities of the Russian Envoys to China, Cassini and Lessar, demonstrates the significant role of career diplomats at that time and proves that Russian diplomats of the late 19<sup>th</sup> — early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were well prepared and, even without special education in oriental studies, but having experience of diplomatic work in different countries and being able to analyze the contemporary international situation, could make correct decisions in hard situations, promoting the prestige of Russia and solving the intricate problems of foreign policy.

*Keywords:* China, Sino-Russian relations, Russian diplomacy, Cassini, Lessar, international relations in the Far East.

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The permanent Russian diplomatic mission in the Qing Empire began its activities in 1861, when the first permanently accredited Russian Envoy Louis Heinrich von Balluseck (Lev Fedorovich Balluzek) arrived in Peking. That moment marks the beginning of the long history of the Russian missions in China, whose staff carried out daily painstaking work of establishing and maintaining bilateral relations between Russia and the Qing Empire. Among them there were many talented professionals — excellent experts in their field, selflessly devoted to their homeland.

Russian diplomats who served in their positions in China in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries can be divided into two large groups. The first is now known as “career” diplomats, graduates of privileged schools that provided the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with well-trained personnel, such as the Imperial Alexander Lyceum (Before 1844 known as the Imperial Tsar’skoye Selo Lyceum)<sup>1</sup> or The Page Corps (envoys E. de Bützow, A. P. Cassini, V. N. Krupenskiy, M. N. von Giers), and the military men (L. H. von Balluseck, A. G. Vlangali). The second group includes those who received professional orientalist training, mainly in St Petersburg University.

On October 22 (November 3), 1854, by a decree of Russian Emperor Nicholas I, the Faculty of Oriental Languages was established at St Petersburg University. This was a truly historic step that contributed to the development of Russian academic and practical Oriental studies. Many graduates of the Faculty found their place not only in scholarly activities, but also in the diplomatic field, contributing to the strengthening of Russia’s ties with the countries of the East. Since the first graduation of students from the Faculty of Oriental Languages of St Petersburg University, there have always been young people who chose a diplomatic career and achieved great success in this field. In the case of China and Sino-Russian relations, this reference begins with Carl Friedrich Theodor von Waeber or Karl Ivanovich Weber (1841–1910). In 1865, he graduated from the Faculty of Oriental Languages and joined the diplomatic service. From 1876 he served as consul in Tientsin, and from November 1882 till October 1883 as Envoy to China. Although most of his diplomatic career and fame were connected with Korea, we can rightfully consider him the first Orientalist graduate of St Petersburg University who contributed to the development of Russia’s relations with China.

Following Weber, many sinologists who graduated from St Petersburg University took important diplomatic posts in China. Among them were G. A. Planson, Russian Charge d’Affaires in China in 1902–1903, later Russian Envoy to Siam, who graduated from two faculties of the University: those of Oriental Studies and Law; G. A. Kozakov — 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary and briefly Russian Charge d’Affaires in China in 1905, later — Head of the Far Eastern Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a candidate for the position of Envoy to China after the February Revolution; Victor Carl Grosse (Viktor Fedorovich Grosse) — Consul General in Shanghai (1911–1924); S. A. Kolokolov — Consul General in Kashgar (1904–1909) and Mukden (1910–1920); A. T. Belchenko — Consul in Fuzhou (from 1910) and Canton (1913–1914), Consul General in Hankow (1915–1920); V. F. Lyuba — Consul General in Harbin (1907–1909), P. G. Tiedemann — Consul in Chi-fu during the worst years of the Russo-Japanese War, then Consul General in Tientsin,

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<sup>1</sup> At the turn of 1843–1844. The Imperial Alexander Lyceum was moved to St Petersburg to a building in Kamennoostrovsky Prospect. The Lyceum was a closed educational institution providing secondary and higher legal education with a philological bias. Its alumni included many famous statesmen and diplomats, including those who worked in China.

and many others. However, even in this brilliant line of diplomats-sinologists, Dmitriy Dmitrievich Pokotilov (1865–1908), who served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to China from 1905 to 1908, stands out.

The Minister of Finance Sergey Yulievich Witte, who was well aware of the need to develop relations between Russia and the Far Eastern countries and the importance of training diplomats with an Oriental education for this activity, wrote in his memoirs: “At that time, in fact, there were very few people who had a general idea of what was China, who had a clear understanding of the geographical position of China, Korea, Japan, and the relationship of all these countries; for the most part, our public and even the high-rank state officials were completely ignorant about China” [1, p. 35]. For this reason, he recruited professional orientalist for his ministry and sent them to East Asian states to study the political and economic situation there right on the spot.

However, one should not think that Russian diplomats, who served in China at the time and who had not received special sinological education, were completely unaware of the Far Eastern affairs. Often those with extensive diplomatic experience gained in different countries were able to quickly navigate the situation in China and its neighboring countries, and made balanced and really well-thought out decisions.

In this connection, it is worth recalling the names of A. P. Cassini and P. M. Lessar, who led our diplomatic mission to China during difficult periods of the country’s development and the complicated international situation in East Asia. The former served during the Sino-Japanese War, and the latter — between the Boxer Rebellion and the Russo-Japanese War.

Count Arturo Paolo (Artur Pavlovich) Cassini (1835–1919) served as Russian envoy to Peking from 1891 to 1896. He was a member of a noble Italian family and a hereditary diplomat. Artur Pavlovich’s grandfather, Viktor Ivanovich, was invited to Russian service by Prince Potemkin-Tauricheski in 1790 and was appointed a chargé d’affaires to the Holy See. His father, Active State Councillor Pavel Viktorovich (1797–1875), served as Consul General of Russia in Trieste and Venice.

Artur Pavlovich, like his brother Mikhail, graduated from the Imperial Alexander Lyceum in 1854 and in the same year began to serve as an interpreter for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he quickly advanced in service. Before his appointment as Envoy to Peking, Cassini worked in the Russian diplomatic missions in Saxony and Denmark, was minister-resident at the Hanseatic Free Cities in Hamburg. A. P. Cassini can be considered an experienced diplomat, but he certainly was hardly familiar with Chinese specifics.

Yuriy Yakovlevich Solovyev, Secretary of the Russian mission in Peking from 1895 to 1908, wrote about him: “Cassini got to China quite accidentally, by patronage of ministerial well-wishers. The position of envoy to China with a salary of 45,000 rubles allowed him to gradually pay back his debts”, noting also that “at that time, that is, until 1896, the beginning of the Russian expansion in the Far East, the service in Peking was considered a provincial post” [2, p. 51–52].

Ivan Yakovlevich Korostovetz, second secretary of the diplomatic mission and later Russian Envoy to Peking, who served under Cassini, also had a very critical attitude towards this high-ranking career diplomat, and their relations were to be extremely strained in the future. I. Y. Korostovetz wrote in his memoirs that “Cassini belonged to those foreigners who were made by Russian diplomats under the patronage of the Court or any of the higher dignitaries... Clever, cunning, and ingratiating, he was not without a certain

Machiavellianism, and in former times could be probably a great success". Korostovetz was particularly disgusted by the fact that, in his opinion, the envoy had little understanding of Chinese affairs and poor knowledge of the host country. In his memoirs Korostovetz wrote that Cassini "had a very vague idea about the geography of China and Russia's historical ties with this empire. China was a foggy spot for him, and Chinese dignitaries seemed like people from another planet". The situation, according to I. Y. Korostovetz, was saved only by the fact that the envoy, uninformed in Chinese affairs, was actively assisted by an experienced embassy employee A. I. Pavlov, who could give a reference on any subject, and communication with the Chinese, and all important negotiations were undertaken by an experienced sinologist P. S. Popov, "who represented a whole trove of Chinese wisdom and language" [3, p. 56].

I. Y. Korostovetz noted that A. P. Cassini very rarely visited Zongli Yamen<sup>2</sup>, mainly for personal meetings with Prince Qing<sup>3</sup>. Cassini content with "general conversations" and assurances from the Chinese in the "bicentennial friendship of neighboring empires", and all current affairs were handled by the dragoons of the mission, i. e. professional sinologists. The key role in these contacts with Qing officials and diplomats was always played by P. S. Popov, who had an excellent knowledge of the Chinese and Manchu languages.

However, not all contemporaries were so critical of Count Cassini, many admitted that Artur Pavlovich played a significant role in the development of Sino-Russian relations in the period described: "Already at that time the extensive historical tasks that had to be solved in connection with the construction of the Siberian railroad were outlined in general terms. The merit of preparing the ground in China for the present events unquestionably belongs to Count Cassini. Having thoroughly studied the character of the Chinese and being always attentive to their statements, taking advantage of the detailed blunders of British diplomacy, during his six-year stay in Peking the Count step by step managed to push England off from its former position. This state of affairs was best reflected in the Anglo-Chinese press, which daily poured out its irritation in caustic articles against Russia and its Peking representative, attributing to them all kinds of conquering designs" [4, p. 1].

Solovyev noted that in those years in the Peking diplomatic corps there was a peculiar opposition between the Russians and the British, and, according to him, Cassini was very close to the French envoy Gérard, who arrived in the capital of the Qing Empire in 1894, especially since in his everyday life Cassini preferred to speak and correspond only in French: "Relations between the Russian and French missions were so close that we jokingly claimed that on national holidays our Archimandrite Amphilochius<sup>4</sup> could have been expected to hold a joint service with Catholic Bishop Favier<sup>5</sup>" [2, p. 60]. On the contrary, the Earl's relations with the English mission were rather strained: "For all his dexterity, Cassini sometimes succumbed to Anglo-Saxon business rectitude and especially to American rudeness. This also explains the reluctance with which Cassini spoke English, though he knew it quite well. When receiving Englishmen or Americans, he would usually ask one of us to serve as his interpreter" [2, p. 70]. Thus, the foreign policy situation around

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<sup>2</sup> Zongli Yamen (总理衙门) — the institution that performed the functions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Qing Empire from 1861.

<sup>3</sup> Yikuang, Prince Qing (1838–1917) was a major Manchu dignitary, great grandson of Emperor Qianlong. In March 1884, he was appointed head of the Zongli Yamen.

<sup>4</sup> Archimandrite Amphilochius (Alexander Lutovinov) (?–1905) — chief of the 17<sup>th</sup> Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing (1883–1896).

<sup>5</sup> Alphonse Favier (1837–1905) — French Missionary priest in Peking (1862–1897).

China in the mid-1890s, when Russia and France pursued a joint policy in opposition to Great Britain, exerted influence on both the relationship between these countries and on the interpersonal relations in the circles of Peking diplomats of the time.

Emphasizing the complex nature of relations between representatives of various powers in China, contemporary Chinese authors note: “The Russian envoy Cassini in Tianjin maintained close contacts with Li Hongzhang, constantly taking a close interest in the development of the Korean question, sending requests to the Russian imperial court for the earliest possible adoption of categorical measures regarding the Japanese intervention, which strengthened China’s faith in Russia” [5, p. 154].

Even before the beginning of peace negotiations with Japan, in February 1895 Li Hongzhang visited Cassini, wondering what would be Russia’s reaction to the demands of the Japanese side. However, the Russian envoy at that moment could not give a clear answer to this question, which, according to Soviet historian G. V. Efimov, indicated “the absence of clearly expressed decisions of St Petersburg” [6, p. 104].

In the memoirs of Weng Tonghe, a Confucian scholar, high rank official and mentor to the Tongzhi and Guangxu emperors, a participant in the events described, the following words are quoted, allegedly spoken by a Cassini envoy after China came into conflict with Japan in 1894: “During the Sino-Japanese military conflict, the situation in Korea was unstable and it was uncomfortable to overcome it peacefully. If an invasion of Russian [influence] had occurred, the Russian army would certainly have responded harshly, otherwise [Russia] would have fallen out of favor for the time being. If, after the reconciliation between China and Japan, the Japanese continue to occupy Korea for a long time, the Russian court will have to find a way to prevent them from solely occupying the peninsula. If the Sino-Japanese war does not end, there will certainly be many casualties, [but] in the end it will be necessary to make peace. Better to take advantage of the fact that the enemy has not yet invaded, rather than to discuss a way to end the war” [5, p. 159]. The authors add that these words of the envoy “disappointed” Li Hongzhang.

Contemporary Chinese authors often attribute quite harsh statements to Cassini. For example, the collective monograph “From the Nerchinsk Treaty to Yeltsin’s Visit” provides this information without citing any source: “Russian envoy to China Cassini visited Zongli Yamen to put forward official demands for land leases for the construction of the railroad. At the same time, he threatened to say that if China does not give its consent, then, despite diplomatic relations, Russia will have to cooperate with Japan in order to find a new way to resolve this issue” [7, p. 83].

St Petersburg historian I. V. Lukoyanov, on the basis of analysis of a wide range of archival documents, revealed that A. P. Cassini had a difficult relationship with Colonel K. I. Vogak, Russia’s military agent in China and Japan. “The able, energetic officer clashed with the diplomat in 1893, believing that the Russian mission in Peking tended to indulge in complacency and underestimated the strong anti-imperial movement in China as well as German infiltration into North China. A. P. Cassini responded by advising the military agent to stay out of matters in which he understood nothing” [8, p. 96]. Lukoyanov suggests that faced with the opposition of Vogak and his supporters, in 1895 Cassini was forced to support the so-called “northern” option of extending the Siberian tract through the territory of Manchuria.

The episode in which a Chinese delegation was sent to Russia to attend the coronation ceremony of Nicholas II in May 1896 can be interpreted as evidence that Cassini had

considerable influence in Peking at the time. The original plan was to send Wang Zhichun to the coronation, but Cassini objected, pointing out that his status was not high enough, and Li Hongzhang was appointed envoy, despite numerous protests of his detractors in Peking. During this visit, which took place in the spring and summer of 1896, the Russian-Chinese treaty of defensive alliance against Japan was signed, and so was a treaty on the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria. Thus, one cannot but agree with the opinion of Solovyev, who believed that “Count Cassini directly participated in Peking in the implementation of the first part of the Russian plan — to obtain access to the ice-free sea through Chinese territory” [2, p. 69].

Russia's diplomacy seems to have responded appropriately in attempt to counterbalance the growing influence of Japan and the West in China by strengthening bilateral cooperation with the Qing Empire, on the one hand, by giving it support and, on the other, by securing the most favorable treatment for itself.

The complexity of the international situation, as well as the lack of domestic resources on both sides resulted in only short-term successes of Russian diplomacy. Nevertheless, the events of the first half of the 1890s influenced not only the further development of Russian-Chinese relations, but also the entire situation in the Far East, and the diplomatic representatives of the parties concerned played no small role in their development.

Among other achievements of Russian diplomacy in China at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it is necessary to call attention to the establishment of the Russian concession in Hankow in May 1896. Usually, when referring to this event, mention is made of the achievements of the Russian consul in Tientsin P. A. Dmitrievskiy. If we turn to his correspondence with A. P. Cassini, we note that the Russian envoy to Peking also made great efforts to establish a Russian concession as soon as possible. In particular, the good relations between the Russian and French envoys enabled Dmitrievskiy to obtain the support of the French consul in Hankow in resolving certain difficulties concerning the issue of the size of the concession, which arose in March 1896 [9, p. 5].

After ratification of the Sino-Russian Secret Treaty of Moscow in 1896, Cassini left Peking. However, the count continued his diplomatic activities, becoming Envoy Extraordinary in 1897 and, in 1898, receiving the status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United States, where he served until 1904.

His American contemporaries had quite a high opinion of Artur Pavlovich's personality and diplomatic qualities, and also considered him a great specialist in international relations, particularly emphasizing his knowledge of Far Eastern affairs. One North American newspaper of the early twentieth century wrote of him as follows: “Cassini had been minister at Peking before coming here. He there did the unprecedented thing of refusing to present his credentials to other than the emperor himself. The Chinese foreign office tried to induce him to modify this position, but without success. He was finally granted audience of the emperor, an attention which greatly affected the Chinese mind. When the war between China and Japan closed, he led the way for the European combination which compelled Japan to withdraw the demands for territorial indemnity which she had planned. He then arranged for the acquisition of Port Arthur by Russia, and Talien Bay, which eventually became the commercial port Dalny. He thus has been actively concerned in history-making affairs...” [10, p. 5].

Chinese authors describe Count Cassini as a tough negotiator who does not compromise and defends Russian interests in every possible way. It seems as if Cassini often

expresses his personal opinion when communicating with his opponents in China and practically directs the entire policy of the Russian state in China. Apparently, this tradition goes back to those descriptions given to Count Cassini by Chinese contemporaries. The mishap with the so-called “Cassini Convention” may serve as an illustration of this assertion. It is about the article “The North China Herald”<sup>6</sup> dated October 30, 1896, in which the drafts prepared by the envoy to negotiate in Zongli Yamen on the agreement between Russia and China on the construction of the CER and the lease of the ports were presented as a signed agreement [11, p. 1091].

After leaving the post of envoy to Peking, Count Cassini did not cease to be interested in the Far Eastern direction of the foreign policy of the Russian Empire. For example, in a note addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire on October 23, 1900, and containing an analysis of the letter of A. P. Cassini, there are the following considerations: “Our ambassador in Washington cannot hide his bewilderment about the reasons which prompted Emperor Wilhelm to join the ranks of the enemies in the Far East and link German interests with those of Great Britain, the most terrible rival to German trade in China. ... There is reason to believe that at the very moment when England and Germany begin to exploit the Yangtze Valley, Japan will take all measures to realize its cherished dream of establishing itself on the mainland precisely in Korea. In view of this, Count Cassini is very much concerned with the project of neutralizing Korea, which would put an end to the desires of the Japanese...” [12, p. 27].

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the United States became increasingly interested in China, seeking primarily to expand its commercial presence in that country. This is evident from a dispatch from Washington to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 1901, sent by A. P. Cassini, envoy to the United States: “The subject of most concern to [The United States secretary of state John Milton Hay] is the fear that England and Germany may not take advantage of our agreement with China concerning Manchuria, lest [they] ... take possession of some or other part of Chinese territory and thereby begin to dismember China ... to the detriment of the commercial interests of the United States. In short, the Washington cabinet regards the inviolability of China not as an immutable political principle to be achieved at all costs, but as a guarantee to ensure behind the vast export trade of the United States an almost untouched and profitable market” [12, p. 31].

Immediately on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War A. P. Cassini, in a secret message to the Foreign Ministry, reported on January 5, 1904, about Washington’s sympathies for Tokyo: “The sympathies of the Washington Cabinet are now indisputably on Japan’s side, although it has, nevertheless, decided to maintain strict neutrality in the event of war...” [12, p. 78]. At the same time our envoy was actively collecting information in Washington about the strengthening of Japanese influence on China: “The German ambassador told me that he had learned from a reliable source that there were many Japanese officers and especially non-commissioned officers in the corps of Generals Yuan Shikai and Ma. I think it would be wise to check this through our military agent, as it is a clear violation of neutrality” [12, p. 165].

Artur Pavlovich Cassini, not being a professional orientalist, managed to handle the duties of envoy to China very well and even after leaving that country continued to actively monitor the situation in East Asia.

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<sup>6</sup> An influential English-language newspaper published in Shanghai from 1850 to 1941.

Pavel Mikhailovich Lessar (Paul Lessard, 1851–1905) was born in an intelligent family of French descent. He received his engineering education at the Institute of Railway Engineers in St Petersburg. After the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, during which P.M. Lessar worked on the construction of a railway bridge over the Prut River, located in the Carpathians, he was engaged in the organization of communication routes for the army of the Russian Empire in the Transcaspien region. After the conquest of Turkmenistan under General M. D. Skobelev, P.M. Lessar built a railroad line along the Russian-Persian border and was appointed agent (representative) of the governor-general of the Trans-Caspian region. He combined railroad construction with long journeys across Persia and Afghanistan to Herat.

Lessar is the author of such scientific studies and publications as “De la construction des Chemins de Fer en temps de guerre. Lignes construites par l’armée russe pendant la campagne 1877–1878 ... Traduit du russe par M. L. Avril” (1879); “Despatches from Her Majesty’s ambassador at St Petersburg forwarding translations of the published reports of M. Lessar’s journeys in Central Asia” (1883); “Notes on Trans-Caspia and adjacent countries” (1885); “Military routes to the Indo-Afghan frontier” (1891), etc. These editions were popular with Western readers at the time, and their translations are still preserved in the British National Library (see: [13, p. 124–125]).

In 1885, P.M. Lessar was seconded to the Russian embassy to determine the border line between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. As early as 1884 Russia and England cooperated in defining this border. At the suggestion of the Russian side the work was carried out on the ground. On the English side the commission was headed by the famous British commander Sir Peter Stark Lumsden. The topographical survey was completed by the end of the year, and in January bilateral negotiations were held in London. The Russian delegation was headed by the ambassador to Great Britain, Baron Georg von Staal (Yegor Yegorovich Staal), and P.M. Lessar, who was familiar with the region, became his assistant. That is why mentions of Lessar can be found on the pages of English, American, and even New Zealand newspapers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, as M. E. Soroka wrote, Lessar, realizing that public opinion in Great Britain influences political decision-making, established personal contacts with representatives of the London press in order to have the Russian point of view on various issues of Russo-British relations represented in it. This was also the case in the struggle between Russia and Britain for spheres of influence in the Pamirs during the so-called Great Game. This rivalry culminated in the signing of the Anglo-Russian agreement on the division of spheres of influence in the Pamirs on March 9, 1895, which was largely to the credit of P.M. Lessar [13, p. 127–129], who from 1890 served as a political agent of the Russian Empire in the Emirate of Bukhara, and then became a Russian political agent for Asian affairs in London.

It is possible that due to his vast experience with representatives of Great Britain in 1901 P.M. Lessar was appointed envoy extraordinary of the Russian Empire to Peking. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century China became a center of contacts between leading world powers in their struggle for the division of spheres of influence, and after Russia’s participation in the suppression of the Boxer rebellion in China and the signing of the Boxer Protocol in 1901, Russian-Chinese relations ceased to be strictly bilateral. The most important issue at that time was the presence of Russian troops in Northeast China and their evacuation.

On September 29, 1901, Lessar succeeded M. N. von Giers as Envoy extraordinary and Minister plenipotentiary to Peking. The appointment of a new envoy of the Russian



Empire to Beijing also drew the attention of the Qing subjects. As S. A. Kolokolov, a diplomatic official, reported to Lessar from Mukden in October 1901, local intellectuals actively discussed the new assignment in teahouses, barbershops, and opium parlors, places where they felt free to express their thoughts. “The recent departure of our former envoy, Mr. Giers, and the arrival of your Excellency, are due to the displeasure of the Chinese government at Mr. Giers, who avoided introducing into the program of general peace negotiations articles concerning the resolution of this question [of the evacuation from Manchuria]. — “Prince Qing, who was averse to this refusal on the part of the Russian envoy, telegraphed about it to St Petersburg, and as a result of his telegram the envoy was recalled and a new envoy was appointed to replace him, who arrived recently in Beijing, and who immediately began negotiations on the return of Manchuria” [14, p. 16 rev.]. But these hopes were not to be, as contemporary Chinese authors accuse the new envoy, who “resolutely refused to discuss the amendments proposed by the Chinese side, leading to a deadlock in the negotiations” [15, p. 103].

On April 8, 1902, at Peking, he with Prince Qing and Wang Wenshao as representatives of the Qing Empire signed an agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Northeast China (Manchuria), which recognized this territory as “an integral part of the Chinese Empire”, and Russia was obliged to withdraw its troops from there within a year and a half, unless “there was unrest and the manner of action of the other powers prevented it”. During his tenure as Envoy to China, P. M. Lessar spoke out strongly against military and political confrontation with the Japanese Empire, anticipating that it might escalate into a war in the Far East.

However, it should be noted, that the appointment of P. M. Lessar as Envoy to China was not well received.

S. S. Tatischev, a Russian commercial agent in London, in 1901 wrote to the Minister of Finance, S. Yu. Witte: “Of course, you already know about the appointment of Lessar as envoy to Peking in place of Mikhail Giers, who was being transferred to Munich. I am personally very happy about this, but I cannot help regretting the fact that such a painfully irritable, extremely suspicious, intransigent and stupidly obstinate person, who is malicious and envious of his colleagues from other departments, is called to represent Russia diplomatically in a country where, more than anywhere else, our economic interests are inseparable from our political ones, and where therefore mutual trust and friendly relations between the Foreign and Finance Ministries are the first necessary condition for the success of our common efforts” [16, p. 98].

At the same time, D. M. Pozdneev, a graduate of the Faculty of Oriental Languages at St Petersburg University, who in 1900–1903 worked in the Peking branch of the Russo-Chinese Bank, in his letter to S. Yu. Witte gave the following characteristic of P. M. Lessar, who had shortly before taken up his duties as envoy to the Qing Empire: “The distinguishing characteristic of P. M. Lessar seems to be systematic; from this point of view he tries to consider all the facts of Chinese life that he encounters; the same system seems to him necessary to introduce into our relations and our actions with China” [16, p. 139]. His system of action, according to D. M. Pozdneev, was to achieve Russia’s major goals and objectives in the Far East, especially in Manchuria, “without chasing trivialities” and without causing protests from foreigners. D. M. Pozdneev noted that P. M. Lessar immediately set out to reach an agreement with China while preserving Russia’s basic positions and taking into account China’s vital interests. For example, P. M. Lessar spoke of the illegality of holding Yingkou

as an open port and the illegality of using the revenues of the “junk customs”. He also drew attention to the inexpediency, in his opinion, of participation in the Provisional Government of Tientsin, formed by the eight-nation alliance, and suggested that the Russian representative be withdrawn from it. His proposals to make some concessions to the Chinese government caused serious opposition from the Russian military authorities in Port Arthur. Thus, the main problems that occurred during his tenure as envoy were mainly related to the issue of the evacuation of Russian troops from Manchuria in 1902–1903.

P.M. Lessar wrote to the Foreign Ministry that “Manchuria is a vicious circle from which there is no way out: while we are there, the Chinese are not allowed to have enough troops and are not able to keep the peace, and we are not allowed to leave until that is accomplished. In reality, with our departure the Chinese will have enough troops, and tranquility in Manchuria will be ... more assured than in other provinces of China” [12, p. 47].

With great difficulty the Russian envoy had to convince the representatives of the Qing government that Russia really does plan to withdraw its troops from Manchuria, but will do so in stages, taking into account the introduction in different regions of other foreign powers, especially Japan. In a secret message addressed to the Russian Foreign Ministry on December 27, 1903, he said: “It is absolutely impossible to shake the conviction of the Bogdohan government that we have decided to annex Manchuria... In private conversations, I have repeatedly pointed out the danger of relying on Japan and act together with it. With China’s hostility toward us, after the undeniable defeat of Japan ... we will not be satisfied with Korea alone. But if we imagine a totally improbable case — the triumph of our enemy, then, obviously, he will not be satisfied with Korea alone, but will seize at least part of Manchuria, because China is unable to defend it and that a return of the Russians into it would be too dangerous for Japan” [12, p. 74].

Immediately after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (January 29, 1904) Lessar reported to the Foreign Ministry on the position taken by the Qing imperial court in the emerging situation: “The Chinese government has reconciled to the idea that we must be masters of the possible theater of future hostilities and that for this we need to take emergency measures. It only needs to save face, that is, it needs not to be reproached by the court for sacrificing supreme rights in Manchuria in favor of the Russians” [12, p. 153]. The same day in another secret telegram to the Foreign Ministry, he said: “China may want to stealthily act against us in Manchuria. It will be difficult for him to decide on it when he knows that the answer could be our appearance near Peking, on the contrary, the neutrality of Zhili Province guaranteed by Powers will leave the Bogdokhan<sup>7</sup> government a complete freedom of action” [12, p. 153].

P.M. Lessar passed away on April 21, 1905, in Peking. Intensive work during the Russo-Japanese War finally undermined his health. In the autumn of 1905, a zinc coffin with the body of P.M. Lessar was delivered to Odessa on the steamship “Munich”, together with the remains of the hero of Port Arthur, General R. I. Kondratenko.

The analysis of the activities of the two Russian Envoys in China, A. P. Cassini and P.M. Lessar, provides solid evidence to state that Russian diplomats of late 19<sup>th</sup> — early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were prepared quite well even without getting a special education in sinology, but, instead, having experience of diplomatic work and being able to analyze the over-

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<sup>7</sup> A term used in Russian documents centuries to refer to the Ming and Qing dynasty emperors of China. The appearance of the term in Russian usage is associated with the assignment of the Mongolian “bogdo-khan” title by the Manchu emperor Abahai or Hong Taiji (1592–1643).

all international situation, could make right decisions in difficult situations, promoting and strengthening the prestige of Russia and solving intricate foreign policy issues.

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## Послы России в Китае на рубеже XX века: специфика деятельности в Цинской империи\*

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Рассматривается роль ведущих российских дипломатов в развитии отношений России и Китая на рубеже XIX–XX вв. Статья основывается на редких архивных документах и воспоминаниях современников описываемых событий, в ней также представлены и проанализированы оценки деятельности этих дипломатов, содержащиеся в публикациях российских, китайских и западных историков. Авторы сосредоточили внимание на работе двух российских посланников в Китае: А. П. Кассини и П. М. Лессара, возглавлявших российскую дипломатическую миссию в Цинской империи в очень сложные периоды истории Китая и в условиях обострения международной обстановки в Восточной Азии. Первый служил там во время Японо-китайской войны, а второй — в период между восстанием ихэтуаней и Русско-японской войной. Столкновение интересов великих держав в Китае на рубеже XIX–XX вв. предопределяло сложные задачи, стоявшие перед российской дипломатией и требовавшие скорейшего разрешения. Углубленное изучение деятельности российских посланников в Китае А. П. Кассини и П. М. Лессара позволяет понять значительную роль карьерных дипломатов того времени во внешней политике Российской империи и убеждает в том, что русские дипломаты конца XIX — начала XX в. были достаточно хорошо подготовлены и, даже не имея специального востоковедного образования, но обладая богатым опытом дипломатической работы в разных странах и способностью анализировать общую международную обстановку, могли принимать верные решения в сложных ситуациях, содействуя укреплению престижа России и решению запутанных внешнеполитических проблем.

*Ключевые слова:* Китай, российско-китайские отношения, российская дипломатия, Кассини, Лессар, международные отношения на Дальнем Востоке.

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