

A RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE:
KONSTANTIN N. LEONTIEV (1831-1891)
ON THE EASTERN QUESTION

A Master's Thesis

by

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DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
BILKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA

August 2008

To my family

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The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences
of
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis intends to analyze the ideas of a nearly forgotten Russian intellectual, Konstantin Nikolaevich Leontiev on the Eastern Question in the light of his opinions on democracy, liberalism, nationalism, and the East-West dichotomy. Leontiev spent nearly ten years in various parts of the Ottoman Empire as a diplomat, where he had made noteworthy comments about international politics, as well as interesting observations about the Balkan peoples. Leontiev's political utopia, namely Byzantinism, was formed during his diplomatic service.

Byzantinism came into being as a result of the interaction of various aesthetic and religious elements with Leontiev's unique theory of history. It may be claimed that at the basis of Leontiev's approach to politics, history, and

religion laid a theory of aestheticism. Leontiev, in line with his historical theory explaining the rise and fall of civilizations, underlined the necessity for Russia to hold fast to the Byzantine heritage in order to escape from cultural decline. The anti-nationalist but theocratic Byzantinist discourse, accompanied by aesthetic considerations, is instrumental in understanding his approach to the Eastern Question, the Ottoman Empire, and its peoples, particularly, Turks, Greeks, and Bulgarians. Leontiev's conservative utopia, though it is far from desirable, presents a sui generis assessment of the theoretical deficiencies of such concepts like nationalism, democracy, and liberalism.

Keywords: Eastern Question, Byzantinism, aestheticism, philosophy of history.

ÖZET

OSMANLI İMPARATORLUĞU'NDA BİR RUS DÜŞÜNÜRÜ:

KONSTANTIN N. LEONTIEV (1831-1891)

VE ŞARK MESELESİ

Üre, Pınar

Master tezi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Bu tez, neredeyse unutulmuş olan bir Rus düşünürün, Konstantin Nikolayeviç Leontiyev'in demokrasi, liberalizm, milliyetçilik, Doğu-Batı ikiliği konusundaki fikirlerinin ışığında Şark Meselesi'ne bakışını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Leontiyev bir diplomat olarak Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun çeşitli yerlerinde hemen hemen on yıl geçirmiş, bu süre içerisinde hem uluslararası politika konusundaki kayda değer yorumlarını, hem de Balkan halkları hakkındaki ilginç gözlemlerini anlatan eserler kaleme almıştır. Leontiyev'in Bizansçılık adını verdiği siyasi ütopyası, diplomatik görevi sürecinde oluşmuştur.

Bizansçılık, çeşitli estetik ve dini unsurların Leontiyev'in dairesel tarih anlayışıyla etkileşiminden doğmuştur. Leontiyev'in siyasete, tarihe ve dine

yaklaşımının temelini özgün bir estetizm teorisinin oluşturduğu söylenebilir. Leontiyev, medeniyetlerin yükseliş ve çöküşlerini açıklamak için geliştirdiği tarih felsefesine bağlı olarak, Rusya'nın kültürel gerilemeden kaçabilmek için Bizans'tan devraldığı mirasa sahip çıkması gerektiğini vurgulamıştır. Bu estetik kaygılarla süslenmiş, milliyetçilik karşıtı, teokratik, Bizansçı bakış açısı, Leontiyev'in Şark Meselesi'ne, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na ve halklarına, yani Türklere, Yunanlılara, Bulgarlara bakışını anlamak için temel teşkil eder. Leontiyev'in muhafazakâr ütopyası, her ne kadar arzu edilir olmaktan çok uzaksa da, milliyetçilik, demokrasi ve liberalizm gibi kavramların teorik yetersizliklerini ele alışı bakımından sıradışı bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Şark Meselesi, Bizansçılık, estetizm, tarih felsefesi.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Largely misunderstood both by his contemporaries and later critics, Konstantin Nikolaevich Leontiev (1831–1891) was a controversial figure in the history of Russian thought. It is difficult to place his social, political, and religious ideas within the framework of a school of thought with clearly-drawn boundaries. An equally unmanageable task is to trace back the influences of other thinkers or ideological waves upon his thought. Though it would be convenient to align Leontiev's name with the conservative camp, his ideas should not be confused with nationalist-oriented theories.¹ Leontiev can rightly be considered among the ideologues of reaction,² but, even this should not be taken to mean that he was a narrow-minded apologist of the Russian monarchy. Leontiev's antagonism to

¹ Though there were variant interpretations, the major determinant of Russian conservatism in the second half of the nineteenth century was strong adherence to autocracy. In this sense, Leontiev can be classified among the conservatives. Richard Pipes defines Russian conservatism as "the ideology which advocates for Russia an authoritarian government subject to restraints neither by formal law nor by an elected legislature but only of such limitations as it sees fit to impose on itself." Richard Pipes, "Russian Conservatism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 30, No: 1 (March, 1971), p. 121.

² Reaction in the Russian context is used to mean an uncategorical opposition to social and political reform.

European civilization and his fierce support for autocracy did not stem from a bigoted desire to justify officialdom. Certainly, his ideology was not a baseless argumentation devoid of philosophical depth. On the contrary, it was fostered by several religious, moral, and aesthetic principles. Challenging the general tendency in the history of Russian thought, Leontiev's political outlook was not marked by a glorification of the Russian or Slavic culture as pure and original in itself, nor was he captured by a feeling of burden towards the Russian people. Quite uncommon among Russian thinkers, what formed the basis of his ideas was neither a sense of superiority over political adversaries nor social responsibility towards the common people, but aesthetic considerations. It may well be argued that Leontiev was a solitary thinker without precursors and successors, and the efforts to categorize him under a specific school of thought would only distort the way in which we understand his political views.

What differentiated Konstantin Leontiev from many other members of the Russian intelligentsia was the fact that he was not a thinker who was far away from the practical world of politics. His ideas were not formed by engaging in endless philosophical debates in the intellectual circles of Moscow and St. Petersburg. His active participation in the Crimean War as a military doctor and his later career as a diplomat in the Ottoman Empire significantly contributed to the formation of his political thought. By this way, Leontiev had the opportunity to have first-hand knowledge about one of the major military and political adversaries of Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and his Slavic brethren living in the Turkish realm. Actually, the basis of Leontiev's political ideas were shaped during his diplomatic service. In numerous articles and literary works, he expressed his views on the Eastern Question, Russo-Turkish relations, Russia's mission with regard to Balkan Slavs and

posited unorthodox and unusual ideas, which set him apart from both left and right currents of thought. As an, aesthete, sociologist, literary critic, philosopher, diplomat, and man of letters, Leontiev's perception of Turks, Greeks, and Balkan Slavs provide insight for the reader who would like to see the evaluation of the Eastern Question from the eyes of a Russian intellectual.

This dissertation tries to explain this long-neglected intellectual's unique approach to the Eastern Question and his opinions about the Asian world as understood from his fictional and nonfictional works. While analyzing the intellectual origins of his outlook on international political matters, the reader also gets acquainted with his perception of the peoples of the Ottoman Empire; namely, Turks, Greeks, and Bulgarians. Leontiev's aesthetic theory of Byzantinism, though neither desirable nor applicable, offers a provocative perspective when it is taken as a criticism of nationalism and the dominance of mass culture, which, to an extent, even makes sense in our days.

Present study is structured into three chapters. The first chapter intends to explain the formation of Leontiev's political discourse within the context of the experiences he passed through. A general description of the existing literature and the major controversies with regard to his intellectual personality are also briefly dealt with. The second chapter focuses on the basic tenets of his ideology. His theory of history and of aestheticism, his ideas on liberalism, autocracy, and European culture, that is, all the ingredients of his Byzantinism are explained by placing him within the overall framework of the Russian intellectual tradition. Finally, the third chapter directs our attention towards his evaluation of the Eastern Question, his perception of the Ottoman Empire and its peoples in the light of the information gathered in the first two chapters. The discussion is specified with the

portrayal of a particular case, the Greco-Bulgarian dispute and Leontiev's attitude towards its parties with an emphasis on his anti-nationalist theory of cultural evolution.

CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF A REACTIONARY

2.1 Konstantin Leontiev in Literature: “The Other Russian”³

Konstantin Leontiev, whose ideas were marked by an exaggerated hatred of bourgeois banality and every aspect of middle class culture, remained a “forgotten”⁴ thinker for long, especially in Russia. The most probable cause of this was his provocative ideas and extravagant personality. He was considered by some scholars as a new Chaadaev,⁵ or the Russian Nietzsche,⁶ and by others as a superstitious

³ The term is derived from George [Yuri] Ivask, “Foreword” in Konstantin Leontiev, *Against the Current: Selections from the Novels, Essays, Notes, and Letters of Konstantin Leontiev*, ed. George [Yuri] Ivask, trans. George Reavey (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), p. ix.

⁴ George Kline, “Religion, National Character, and the ‘Rediscovery of Russian Roots,’” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 32, No: 1 (March, 1973), p. 34. Kline points out to Soviet ignorance of Leontiev. D. S. Mirsky compared Leontiev to such writers as Dostoyevsky and Tolstoi, but noted that the originality of his works went unrecognized because of his political isolation; until Vladimir Soloviev, though he did not agree with Leontiev’s ideas, acknowledged his worth as a writer and philosopher. D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature: Comprising a History of Russian Literature and Contemporary Russian Literature* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1966), pp. 343–345.

⁵ Kline, “Religion, National Character, and the ‘Rediscovery of Russian Roots,’” p.34. Petr Chaadaev was a Russian philosopher who criticized Russia’s backwardness and isolation from both Eastern and Western civilizations in his “Philosophical Letters.” These letters are considered as the first stimulus for the Westerner-Slavophile controversy that dominated Russian intellectual scene in the nineteenth century. Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*

chauvinist. His most well-known biographer, Nikolai Berdiaev said that Leontiev was “a solitary spirit, a man of absolutely unique destiny.”⁷ Though Berdiaev did not treat his philosophy as a systematic one, he appreciated Leontiev’s sober criticism of mass culture, nationalism, and his evaluation of the role of religion in the making of civilization. Berdiaev stated that “this so-called ‘reactionary’ was a thousand times more open-minded than most Russian ‘progressivists’ and ‘revolutionaries.’”⁸ Richard Hare also recognized him as “one of the most far-sighted and consistent political thinkers of his epoch.”⁹ Sidney Monas stated that he was not a fanatic but an inexhaustable critic, a man of totally independent standing, who was against “conformity, against the herd instinct.”¹⁰ As for Boris Filippov, Leontiev was “closer to our times, than his own epoch.”¹¹ Yuri Ivask did not take Leontiev’s political and historical theory seriously, but he still pointed out that Leontiev had noteworthy observations with regard to the nature of the Russian

(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), pp. 81–92. Berdiaev, who wrote the most well-known monograph on Leontiev, compared Leontiev and Chaadaev in their aristocratism, apathy towards the “Holy Russia” idea, their positive evaluation of the role of Catholic Church in European history, and their isolation in the intellectual circles. Nicolas Berdiaev, *Leontiev* (Orono: Academic International, 1968), p. 3.

⁶ There are varying interpretations with regard to the similarities between Nietzsche and Leontiev. Rozanov was one of the thinkers who emphasized the parallelisms between them. He lamented that while Nietzsche provoked fierce discussions in Europe, Leontiev went nearly unrecognized even in his fatherland. V. V. Rozanov, “Vstuplenie” in Konstantin Leontiev, *Pis'ma k Vasiliu Rozanovu* (London: Nina Karsov, 1981), p. 34. Leontiev and Nietzsche might be compared in their criticism of nineteenth century European culture. However, the sources of inspiration for them were quite different. While Nietzsche had the source of his inspiration in antiquity, Leontiev was inspired by the Eastern pathos, as a result of the years he spent in the Near East. G. I. Shchetinina, *Ideinaia zhizn' russkoi intelligentsii: konets XIX-nachalo XX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995), p. 73. Leontiev may not be influenced by Nietzsche, since he never read Nietzsche’s works. George [Yuri] Ivask, “Konstantin Leont'ev's Fiction,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 20, No: 4 (December, 1961), p. 623.

⁷ Berdiaev, *Leontiev*, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid, p. 69.

⁹ Richard Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 323. Hare qualified Leontiev as “a tradition-loving landowner, ... a full-blooded but discerning pagan, ... a professional surgeon, consular official, religious-minded journalist, and most un-Christian monk.” p. 332.

¹⁰ Sidney Monas, “Review: Leontiev: A Meditation,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 43, No: 3 (September, 1971), p. 494.

¹¹ Boris Filippov, “Strastnoe pis'mo s nevernym adresom” in *Moia Literaturnaia Sud'ba: Avtobiografiia* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), p. 38.

polity, like his dismissal of the “Holy Russia” myth and his prophecy of an authoritarian socialist regime in Russia.¹²

Andrzej Walicki, though admitting his consistency, qualified Leontiev as an “integral reactionary, the last uncompromising defender of Russian, Western European, or even Turkish feudalism.”¹³ According to Walicki, Leontiev was alone among the conservatives of the second half of the nineteenth century in his rigorously anti-democratic tendency; since, different from the Slavophiles, he did not compromise with any liberal, egalitarian, progressive, or reformist ideas.¹⁴ Vasily Zenkovsky pointed out that though Leontiev’s ideas conformed with the conservatives in political matters, the essence of his philosophy and his amoral aestheticism differentiated him from these circles.¹⁵ Donald W. Treadgold, along with Dostoevsky, Apollon Grigoriev, and Vladimir Soloviev, classified Leontiev among the “syncretists”, with whom he meant the individual conservative thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century who attempted “intelligently and creatively to achieve a combination, a symbiosis, of Western and Russian ideas and traditions.”¹⁶

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk coined him as a theorist of official theocracy. Masaryk stated that Leontiev was the “born reactionary, the predestined self-made reactionary.”¹⁷ Richard Pipes remarked his unpractical and idiosyncratic ideas, and likened Leontiev’s conservatism to the anti-bourgeois futuristic ideology and

¹² Ivask found parallelisms between Leontiev’s philosophy and the romanticist tradition, and compared him to Lord Byron. Ivask, “Konstantin Leont’ev’s Fiction,” pp. 622, 627.

¹³ Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth Century Russian Thought* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 517.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 531.

¹⁵ Vasily V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 435–436.

¹⁶ Donald W. Treadgold, *The West in Russia and China*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 202.

¹⁷ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia: Studies in History, Literature, and Philosophy*, Vol. I (London: George Allen and Unwin), p. 219. Masaryk claimed that Leontiev “will believe and can believe in nothing but the absurd.” Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, p. 214.

Mussolini's fascism, both of which glorified violence.¹⁸ Stephen Lukashevich, who approached Leontiev from a Freudian point of view, was the first scholar to portray his ideas as parts of a coherent and orderly system. He identified Leontiev as a "heroic vitalist" along with Carlyle, Nietzsche, Spengler, Bernard Shaw, and Wagner. With heroic vitalism, he meant the anti-liberal and anti-rational heroic cult, that emphasized the innate inequality of men in place of uniformity, and justified violence in the name of greatness.¹⁹

All those perspectives have their share of truth. Still, it may be argued that Leontiev was treated superficially as a thinker. Likewise, his literary endeavour awaits an analytical interpretation with particular emphasis on his cultural, religious, and political background and within the context of the overall intellectual and political atmosphere of the Russian Empire of his time. However, such a grandiose task falls outside the scope of our context, which intends to discuss Leontiev's political theory in the sense that it relates to his grasp of Russia's prospects with regard to the Eastern Question.

2.2 Early Life

Konstantin Nikolaevich Leontiev was born on 13 January, 1831 in the Kudinovo estate, located in the Mestchov district of the Kaluga Gubernia to an aristocratic family.²⁰ His father, Nikolai Borisovich Leontiev was a petty aristocrat.

¹⁸ Richard Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics: A Study in Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 150.

¹⁹ Stephen Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev, 1831–1891: A Study in Russian "Heroic Vitalism"* (New York: Pageant Press, 1967), pp. xiv-xv.

²⁰ For biographical information, see Yuri Ivask, *Konstantin Leont'ev: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Bern: H. Lang, 1974); Stephen Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*; and Nicolas Berdyaev, *Leontiev*.

His mother Feodosiya Petrovna, who was a staunch monarchist, was descended from the prestigious Karabanovs. His mother had a lasting influence upon Leontiev's devout Christianity and the evolution of an aesthetic taste in his mind, the features that later became the basis of his political philosophy.²¹ The early childhood images of the poetic beauty of their country estate and of Orthodox rituals which his mother strictly attended explain his aristocratic bias and life-long quest for aesthetic principles in everything; from literature to politics.

From 1841 to 1849, Leontiev studied successively in various schools in Smolensk, St. Petersburg, and Kaluga. In 1849, upon his mother's wish, he was enrolled at the medical department of the Moscow University.²² His medical training helped him to develop a naturalistic way of explaining social phenomena, a trait not quite common among the Russian intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Different from the intellectual climate of his period, Leontiev was not a philosopher who trained himself in classical German philosophy and he was not successful in dealing with abstract Hegelian terms.²³ However, his naturalistic insight provided his readers with a clarity of language and mind.

During his student years in Moscow, Leontiev took interest in the philanthropic literature of the period and got acquainted with Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev, until being disillusioned with his uncompromising conservatism,

²¹ Leontiev himself acknowledged the impact of his mother on his political philosophy: "... I myself, was growing up in the traditions of monarchical love and genuine Russian patriotism, and, as I have already said, I had no business with any 'republic.' And for those good principles—which began to assert themselves not too late, but at my very first encounter with the extremes of our "democracy" of the sixties—I am obliged to my mother, who, since my early childhood, had sowed good seeds in me." Konstantin Leontiev, "Mother," *Against the Current*, p. 16. From a Freudian point of view, Lukashevich grounded Leontiev's philosophy totally on his relationship with his mother. Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, pp. 4–9.

²² He later admitted that he was a nihilist for a short time in his youth, and idealized the cult of revolution. However, he stated that the idea of revolution attracted him only from the aesthetic and romantic perspective, and he "recovered" quickly. Leontiev, "Aesthetics II," *Against the Current*, pp. 142–143.

²³ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 13.

continued to patronize Leontiev and considered him one of the most promising young writers along with Tolstoy.²⁴

In 1854, one year after the Crimean War (1853–1856) broke out, in his last year as a medical student, Leontiev voluntarily entered service as a military surgeon before receiving his degree. As a part of his duty, he was commissioned to the military hospitals in Yenikale, Kerch, Feodosiia (Kefe), Karasubazar, and Simferopol (Akmescit). Through his experiences, he personally witnessed the horrors of war. Nevertheless, far from feeling alarmed and distancing himself from the terror and bloodshed caused by war, direct observation of it satisfied his thirst for adventure, and further motivated him to search for the “wild and picturesque”²⁵ poetry in life. As Berdiaev put it, Leontiev “resembled those Russians of the 1820’s who flocked to the Caucasus in the hope that the Caucasian wars might satisfy their thirst for action and picturesque life, and palliate their boredom with a quiet and uniform civilized life.”²⁶ The experience of war helped him to develop an aesthetic yet amoral approach to politics.

Returning penniless from Crimea in the fall of 1857, Leontiev first spent some time in Moscow, and finally in 1858 settled in Nizhny Novgorod, where he found a profession as the house doctor on the estate of Baroness Rosen. He spent two years in Nizhny Novgorod, and during this period he wrote his first major

²⁴ Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 340. For a description of his relations with Turgenev, see Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, pp. 24–35.

²⁵ Berdiaev, *Leontiev*, p. 21.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 23–24. Crimea was a widely used symbol in Russian Romantic literature. It was appreciated from the aesthetic point of view as a region in which ancient Hellenic civilization coexisted with the Islamic-Oriental civilization. Crimea was depicted as a safe haven for the “superfluous man” who wanted to take refuge from the monotony of European Russia. For details, see Henrietta Mondry, Sally Thompson, *Konstantin Leont’ev: An Examination of His Major Fiction* (Moscow: “Nauka” Oriental Literature Publishers, 1993), pp. 59–61. Crimea was also perceived as the borderland separating the exotic East from the “civilized” West. For the Crimean image in Russian symbolic geography, see Sara Dickinson, “Russia’s First ‘Orient’: Characterizing the Crimea in 1787,” *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 3, No: 1 (Winter, 2002), pp. 3–25.

novels, *Podlipki (Under the Linden Trees)* and *V svoem kraiu (In My Own Land)*.²⁷

After these two years, Leontiev gave up his medical profession, never to turn back.

In 1860, he abandoned the isolated country life and went to St. Petersburg in the hope of finding himself a place in the intellectual and literary society of the imperial capital. However, in St. Petersburg, he found progressive and egalitarian ideas on rise, which were completely alien to him. This new ideological atmosphere, plus, the social chaos following the emancipation of the serfs and the Polish uprising of 1863 strengthened his conservatism. Moreover, the breach of his relations with Turgenev, whom he admired, caused a great disappointment for him. His amoral aestheticism caused his alienation both from the conservatives and from the reformists.²⁸

2.3 Diplomatic Service in the Ottoman Empire

The year 1863 was an important turning point in Leontiev's life as well as in the formation of his political discourse. In this year, he entered the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry and consequently started his career as a diplomat. In late 1863, he was appointed to the Russian Consulate in Crete as the secretary and dragoman, and spent the subsequent ten years in various parts of the Ottoman Empire. He subsequently served as a dragoman in Edirne (Adrianople) (1864–1866), in Constantinople (1866–1867), as a vice consul in Tulça (1867–

²⁷ For a detailed analysis of his literary career, see Ivask, *Konstantin Leont'ev*. Rzhevsky covers the period prior to his appointment to the Balkans. Nicholas Rzhevsky, *Russian Literature and Ideology: Herzen, Dostoyevsky, Leontiev, Tolstoy, Fadeyev* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 105–113.

²⁸ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 29.

1868), as a consul in Yanya (Janina) (1869–1871), and as a consul in Seânîk (Thessaloniki) (1871).

In the expression of Ivask, Leontiev “found himself and his style not in Russia but in Turkey.”²⁹ Diplomatic service appealed to Leontiev’s aesthetic tastes, as well as providing him with the opportunity to have direct observation of the lives of the Balkan Slavs, Greeks, and Turks. He stated that consular duty in the Ottoman Empire was more important than ambassadorial position in a Western European country.³⁰ In the words of Ladnev, the protagonist of his most celebrated novel *Egipetskii golub*³¹ (*The Egyptian Dove*):

I attached great value to my work in the foreign service. To put it more clearly, I was terribly fond of it—this service which was completely unlike our normal routine at home. In this activity there was so much that was not European, not ‘bourgeois,’ not ‘progressive,’ not of today; in the foreign service there was then so much scope for personal freedom, for a personal choice between good and evil, so much trust on the part of our national Russian authorities! So much scope for independent action and inspiration, so many possibilities of doing good to political ‘friends’ and of hurting one’s opponents with impunity and without censure! Turkish provincial life was so pastoral, on the one hand; so feudal, on the other!³²

²⁹ Ivask, *Konstantin Leont’ev*, p. 101.

³⁰ Konstantin Leontiev to Vasily Rozanov, 13 June 1891, *Pis’ma k Vasiliuu Rozanovu*, p. 83.

³¹ *The Egyptian Dove* was an autobiographical novel, and its protagonist Ladnev, a Russian diplomatic agent serving in the consulate in Edirne, was Leontiev’s “alter ego.” Ivask, *Konstantin Leont’ev*, p. 111. Konstantin Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove: The Story of a Russian*, trans. George Reavey (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969). For a more detailed analysis of Ladnev as a reflection of Leontiev’s own experiences, see Ivask, *Konstantin Leont’ev*, pp. 114–117. It would be right to deduce conclusions about Leontiev’s own experiences and thoughts from his novels, since the characters he created were quite identical with Leontiev himself as Ivask pointed out. His narcissistic superheros were a reflection of his inner world. Ivask, “Konstantin Leont’ev’s Fiction,” p. 624.

³² Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 63.

For Leontiev, life in the Ottoman Empire had a poetic taste. It was also an escape from the Europeanized life style in St. Petersburg and Moscow that stifled him. He wrote: “I had long dreamed of living in Turkey, in the Orient, and here my dreams were realized: I was indeed in Turkey. I had longed to see cypress trees, minarets, and turbans; I was seeing them now. I had yearned to be as far removed as possible from the odious, straight, broad streets of Petersburg.”³³ He acknowledged that he never liked the Russian capital, and for this reason made his way either to the Crimea or to the Ottoman provinces.³⁴

In the summer of 1871, after experiencing a sudden religious crisis,³⁵ he withdrew into solitude in a monastery on Mount Athos, an important centre for Orthodox spirituality.³⁶ From this time onwards, he accepted a rigorously ascetic version of monastic Orthodoxy as his guiding principle in life. In the same year, he decided to resign from diplomatic service, as a result of his disagreement over crucial matters such as the Greco-Bulgarian conflict³⁷ with the decision makers of

³³ Ibid, p. 66.

³⁴ Konstantin Leontiev to Vasily Rozanov, 13 June 1891, *Pis'ma k Vasiliuu Rozanovu*, pp. 82–83.

³⁵ In July 1871, when he was serving in Selânik, Leontiev fell ill with what he thought was cholera, probably accompanied by psychological disorder. In a letter to Rozanov, he explained that while he was laying on a divan, fearing his imminent death, the image of Virgin Mary appeared before his eyes as a living woman, to whom he promised to visit Mount Athos for his spiritual salvation. He claimed that he recovered in a couple of hours. Konstantin Leontiev to Vasily Rozanov, 14 August 1891, *Pis'ma k Vasiliuu Rozanovu*, pp. 110–111. According to Lukashevich, his mother's death in February 1871 triggered this crisis. For Lukashevich's analysis, see, Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, pp. 72–78.

³⁶ In his reminiscences, he happily remembered that in the Oriental-Byzantine world of Mount Athos, there was nothing to remind him of the “bourgeois, prosaic, vulgar, vile Europe.” Leontiev, “On Mount Athos,” *Against the Current*, p. 100.

³⁷ Living politically under Turkish rule and ecclesiastically under Greek domination, Bulgarian nationalism had an anti-Greek as well as anti-Turkish character. An important milestone for the advancement of the nationalist cause among educated Bulgarians was the establishment of a separate Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870, autonomous from the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul. The edict authorizing the establishment of the Exarchate stipulated that the jurisdiction of the Exarchate could be extended over new districts conditioned that the consent of the two-thirds of the population was secured. This issue will be explained in more details later. For further information, see, L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 371–375; Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 343–345.

Russian foreign policy. His eccentric religious fervour also alienated diplomatic circles.³⁸ His resignation was officially accepted in 1873.

Leontiev wrote one of his most important works in which he highlighted his political views, *Vizantizm i slavianstvo* on Mount Athos. For some obscure reason, the elders on Mount Athos did not want Leontiev to remain there and he left for Constantinople in 1872, where he lived until the spring of 1874.³⁹ During his stay, he worked as a correspondent for Katkov's *Russki Vestnik* (*Russian Messenger*). He also wrote important political articles, *Panslavizm i Greki* (*Panslavism and Greeks*) and *Panslavizm na Afone* (*Panslavism on Athos*); and finished his collection of essays, *Vizantizm i slavianstvo* (*Byzantinism and Slavdom*).

After returning to Russia, Leontiev for some time contributed to the paper *Varshavskii Dnevnik* (*The Warsaw Diary*). Starting with 1880, he worked as a censor, but gave up this profession in 1887. He settled near the Optina Pustyn Monastery, where many other prominent intellectuals like Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Kireevsky looked for spiritual guidance.⁴⁰ In August 1891, Leontiev secretly took monastic vows, assuming the name Kliment, and in the November of the same year, he died in the Troitskie-Sergieva Monastery near Moscow. This extraordinary man who was obsessive with aesthetic qualities paradoxically ended his life as a hermitic monk.

³⁸ Russian Chancellor Gorchakov stated that they did not need monks in the Foreign Office. Ivask, *Konstantin Leont'ev*, p. 179.

³⁹ Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, p. 78.

⁴⁰ Vasily V. Zenkovsky, "The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy," *Russian Review*, Vol. 22, No: 1 (January, 1963), p. 50.

2.4 Konstantin Leontiev and Slavophilism

Although Leontiev is considered as a representative of Russian conservative thought, he had significant diverging points from the traditional course of Russian conservatism. Leontiev's name is sometimes counted among the ranks of the later Slavophiles.⁴¹ At first sight, Leontiev's thinking may seem to reflect some major Slavophile themes. The traditional Slavophiles and Leontiev shared the belief in the decadence of Western European culture and the need to protect Russia from the "contamination" of Western influence. Still, this resemblance is only superficial.⁴² Leontiev himself remarked the distinctions between his Byzantinism and Slavophilism.⁴³

Contrary to the Slavophiles, Leontiev advocated repressive political, social, and cultural measures for the preservation of Russian culture. Leontiev's

⁴¹ The term "Slavophile" needs to be illuminated. Slavophilism was the first systematic formulation of Russian conservatism, and without doubt had a significant impact on the upcoming generations of Russian political thought. For this reason, reactionary, chauvinistic and isolationist ideas, all ideologues supporting Russian superiority and Panslavists are sometimes associated with Slavophilism. However, the classical wave of Slavophilism included thinkers such as Aleksey Khomyakov, Ivan Kireevsky, Petr Kireevsky, Konstantin Aksakov, Ivan Aksakov, Yury Samarin, A. Koshelev, and D. Valuev, who had a more benign approach to politics. While more nationalist-oriented intellectuals such as Pogodin, Shevyrev, Danilevsky, Leontiev, and even Dostoyevsky are cited by some as Slavophiles, this term should be used with reserve. It can be said that after 1860s, classical Slavophilism left its place to two trends of thought, both having their origins in the Slavophile ideology. On the one hand, Slavophilism evolved towards an aggressive formulation marked by particularism, as in the case of Leontiev and Danilevsky. The other wave, represented by Vladimir Soloviev, underlined Christian universalist tradition. For further information on the distinguishing features of the Slavophiles and the influence they exercised upon various political thoughts in Russia, see, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study of Romantic Ideology* (Gloucester: Mass. P. Smith, 1965).

⁴² Berdyaev noted that Leontiev, far from being a Slavophile, in many regards was the opposite of them. Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1992), p. 85. Zenkovsky observed that although Leontiev grew up in a similar environment with the Slavophiles – religious, traditionalist, and aristocratic – the intellectual sources inspiring them were quite different. The criticisms he posed to Slavophiles were as numerous as his statements expressing his sympathy for them. Therefore, Zenkovsky states that it would be misleading to call Leontiev a "disillusioned Slavophile." Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 436. According to Walicki, Leontiev differed from the Slavophiles with regard to the basic tenets of his ideology. He was unlike the Slavophiles in his attitude towards the Russian masses, Russian and Slav nationalism, Orthodoxy, and in his interpretation of the European culture. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, pp. 524–530. Lukashevich also saw Leontiev's theory as a refutation of Slavophilism. Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, pp. 163–167.

⁴³ Konstantin Leontiev, *Moia Literaturnaiia Sud'ba: Avtobiografiia* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), pp. 56–58.

prescription for the future of Russia was the consolidation of autocracy and he opposed the Slavophile ideology as too democratic and universalist. Leontiev's amoral political theory, with its aristocratic and anti-egalitarian premises, is a rejection of the Slavophile outlook, which glorified pre-Petrine Russia without clearly delineated social divisions and harmonious traditions. While the Slavophiles idealized the traditional Russian way of life before the reforms of Peter the Great, Leontiev did not hold special sympathy for ancient Russia, or its institutions. On the contrary, Leontiev saw, what he coined as flourishing complexity in the age of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great.

Different from the Slavophiles whose philosophical training was shaped by German idealism and metaphysics, Leontiev based his arguments on a naturalistic explanation of history and sociology. Leontiev's understanding of Christianity was also markedly different from that of the Slavophiles. While Slavophiles advocated the universalist and humanitarian aspect of Russian Orthodoxy, Leontiev associated Orthodoxy with its monastic and ascetic Byzantine origins. Leontiev criticized Slavophiles from the point that they minimized the influence of formalism and Byzantinism on Russian Orthodoxy.⁴⁴ He opposed Khomyakov's theory of *sobornost'*⁴⁵ as not authentically Russian, too liberal and modernized for the very same reason.

Leontiev's lack of confidence in the Russian people is another point of divergence from the Slavophiles school of thought. Leontiev did not specifically attribute a peace-loving nature to the Russian people, nor did he see in the Russian

⁴⁴ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, pp. 68–69.

⁴⁵ Zenkovsky, "The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy," p. 43. *Sobornost'*, a term widely used in the Slavophile discourse, laid stress on the nature of the Russian society as a community organically integrated through love and freedom of spirit, though in an anti-individualistic sense. Janko Lavrin, "Khomyakov and the Slavs," *Russian Review*, Vol. 23, No: 1 (January, 1964), pp. 35–48.

masses a promise for cultural elevation, as did the Slavophiles.⁴⁶ For him, what made Russian culture noteworthy was not the intrinsic quality of the Russian people but its Asiatic-Turanian elements and the Byzantine tradition inflicted upon it. Leontiev did not ascribe a holiness to the Russian fatherland or its people, which was an indispensable part of the Slavophile ideology. Actually, it may be argued that though his ideas were far from being applicable, Leontiev was more far-sighted and objective in his political and sociological analyses than the Slavophiles, who in many cases distorted reality for the sake of national pride.

⁴⁶ Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p. 524.

CHAPTER III

LEONTIEV'S IDEOLOGY: BASIC TENETS

3.1. Intellectual Atmosphere in Russia of 1860's

Leontiev's ideas flourished in the post-Reform Russia as a reaction to the changing social, economic, and political dynamics of his country. After the defeat against the Western allies in the Crimean War, the Russian autocracy turned its face to the domestic problems which were neglected until then. In order to develop material and human resources, judicial, economic, and social reforms were carried out. The abolition of serfdom in 1861 was the most significant of these. With this novelty, the Russian autocracy for the first time relied on the common people as a source of legitimacy.¹ Consequently, nationalism, instead of universalism became a part of conservative ideology more than it was in the former decades. In addition, the rapid modernization that the reforms brought about resulted in the emergence of radical intellectual movements. Therefore,

¹ Richard Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics: A Study in Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 115.

post-Reform conservatism can be characterized mainly with strong anti-Westernism, nationalism, and a reaction to the newly rising nihilist/radical movements and social, political, economic transformation of the country.²

3.2. Intellectual Influences on Leontiev

It is a highly difficult task to detect the influence of philosophical trends or thinkers upon the thought of Leontiev. There are similarities between his ideas and that of German conservative romantics,³ as well as with the theocratic and authoritarian conceptions of Joseph de Maistre,⁴ Carlyle, and especially John Stuart Mill.⁵ Though at times, it is possible to detect commonalities between Leontiev and Nikolay Danilevsky, Aleksandr Herzen, Vladimir Soloviev and the classical Slavophiles, it may be misleading to claim that any of these thinkers exercised a great deal of influence upon the shaping of his thoughts.⁶ As Leontiev himself explained in a conversation with Ivan Aksakov, because he lived outside the intellectual influences of Russian intelligentsia for a long while, his ideas on

² Ibid, pp. 115–118.

³ His literary style and ideas reminded many scholars of Carlyle and Hamann. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia: Studies in History, Literature, and Philosophy*, Vol. I (London: George Allen and Unwin), p. 214. Filippov also classified him as a romantic; not in the Russian sense, but in the European sense of the word. Boris Filippov, “Strastnoe pis’mo s nevernym adresom,” *Moia Literaturnaia Sud’ba: Avtobiografiia* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), p. 7.

⁴ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 305.

⁵ Though at first sight it might seem strange to compare a British utilitarian philosopher to a Russian conservative, both Mill and Leontiev criticized the “tyrannical mediocrity” of the industrial societies. George [Yuri] Ivask, “Konstantin Leont’ev’s Fiction,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 20, No: 4 (December, 1961), p. 623.

⁶ Masaryk overemphasizes the influence of Herzen, Danilevsky, and Soloviev on his thought, Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, Vol. I, pp. 207–220. In our opinion, this is an exaggerated statement. Though these philosophers might have inspired him intellectually, Leontiev’s deductions were genuine. According to Zenkovsky, his ideas were already formed when he encountered with the impacts of these writers. Vasily V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 436–437.

the Eastern world, Europe, and Slavdom were completely original and independent.⁷

Mirsky reduces the basis of Leontiev's political philosophy to three basic elements.⁸ The biological explanation of the historical and social phenomena and individual treatment of each civilization constitutes the first of these. Second comes the amoral aestheticism, which placed beauty and diversity above ethics. Third element was his strict devotion to ascetic and monastic Orthodoxy in the Byzantine tradition. The synergy and contrasts of these three elements resulted in the creation of Leontiev's unique conservative political doctrine.

3.3. Theory of Historical Process

A major influence on Leontiev's theory of history, also testified by himself, was that of Nikolay Yakovlevich Danilevsky. Symbolizing the replacement of the universalist and pacific Slavophilism of the 1840s and early 1850s by aggressive Panslavism, Danilevsky developed a naturalistic explanation for the comparison of cultures. Instead of German idealism, his philosophy was based on a realist and empirical analysis of different culturo-historical types. Actually, contrary to the progressive and unilinear understanding of historical process, Russian conservatives were generally tending to view it as cyclical.⁹

⁷ Konstantin Leontiev, *Moia Literaturnaia Sud'ba: Avtobiografiia* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), p. 57.

⁸ D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature: Comprising a History of Russian Literature and Contemporary Russian Literature* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1966), p. 343.

⁹ Richard Pipes, "Russian Conservatism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 30, No: 1 (March, 1971), p. 127.

Danilevsky categorized cultures as distinct historical types and denied the commonality of world civilization. Therefore, he challenged the Christian universalism of the Slavophiles and German idealists, who emphasized the role of each culture in the formation of the universal history of mankind. For Danilevsky, the “question is not so much the mission of Russia in the world as the formation of Russia into a peculiar cultural and historical type.”¹⁰ Danilevsky hoped that the Slav cultural-historical type would, for the first time in history, embody all aspects of cultural activity; religious, political, socio-economic, and aesthetic.¹¹ To this end, he proposed that “struggle against the Germano-Roman world... will help to eradicate the cancer of imitativeness and the servile attitude towards the West, which through unfavourable conditions has eaten its way into Slav body and soul.”¹²

Leontiev, in terms of philosophy of history, was partially Danilevsky’s follower, though he “stood at a very much higher level than Danilevsky.”¹³ Both theorists focused on distinct individual civilizations as self-contained and complete mechanisms.¹⁴ Leontiev did not believe in the freedom of spirit and human freedom in the historical process.¹⁵ His theory of history reflected his naturalistic attitude towards history and society, which he gained through his medical training. For him, societies, politics and cultures were comparable to living organisms with respect to their gradual evolution; and historical development corresponded to “*a gradual transition from colourlessness, from*

¹⁰ Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1992), p. 83.

¹¹ Nikolai Danilevsky, “The Slav Role in World Civilization” in *Readings in Russian Civilization*, Vol. II, edited by Thomas Riha (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 389.

¹² Danilevsky, “The Slav Role in World Civilization,” p. 388.

¹³ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, p. 84. Actually, before he was influenced by Danilevsky, the basis of Leontiev’s ideas were already shaped independently. Danilevsky’s work only strengthened his position. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 437.

¹⁴ Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 342.

¹⁵ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, p. 85.

simplicity, towards originality and complexity.”¹⁶ [Italics are Leontiev’s.] Social stratification and inequality, since they paved the way for more diversity, were the necessary preconditions for the sophistication of a culture. Actually, what Leontiev laid emphasis on was the “individuation” of a culture, which was characterized by a peculiar self-expression.¹⁷ For him, the level of cultural development was not marked by literacy rates or other material indicators, but by political, artistic, and existential originality and diversity of a society.¹⁸

Leontiev formulated a three-staged pattern for the evolution of societies and cultures, which in his view was inevitable.¹⁹ First stage was the period of primitive simplicity (*pervichnaia prostota*). This period was marked by social and cultural uniformity. Then came the second period, that is, complex flourishing (*slozhnoe tsvetenie*), in which a society reached its highest, most diversified and sophisticated cultural level. At this stage of historical process, every aspect of a culture acquired a distinct character within the confines of a particular style, as in the case of ancient Greece or the Renaissance civilization. It was followed by the secondary simplification (*vtorichnoe uproshchenie*) or the final disintegration and decay of cultures. In this last period, the diversified culture lost its distinctive style

¹⁶ Konstantin Leontiev, “The Triune Process of Development,” *Against the Current: Selections from the Novels, Essays, Notes, and Letters of Konstantin Leontiev*, ed. George [Yuri] Ivask, trans. George Reavey (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), p. 148.

¹⁷ Donald W. Treadgold, *The West in Russia and China*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 213.

¹⁸ Leontiev, “Russia and the Russians,” *Against the Current*, p. 204.

¹⁹ Leontiev, “The Triune Process of Development,” *Against the Current*, pp. 147–169. The cyclical theory of history, which was later popularized by Spengler, focused on the isolated study of various types of civilizations. Spengler’s historiosophical theory, like Leontiev’s, was pessimistic and pointed out to the cultural decline of the West. Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p. 205. There are similarities between Leontiev’s cyclical theory of history and that of Spengler. Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth Century Russian Thought* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 519. The historical phases indicated by Leontiev corresponds to Spengler’s *Vorkultur*, *Kultur*, and *Zivilisation*. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 342. Actually, the three stages put forward by Leontiev was in one way or another repeated by many nineteenth-century thinkers, which was in essence a reflection of Hegelian influence upon them. Treadgold, *The West in Russia and China*, Vol. I, p. 213.

and left its place to homogeneity, which foretold the coming of cultural decomposition, that is, the apocalypse of a civilization.

Leontiev likened these processes to the paths passed by all living things: Organisms become more and more complex as they grow, and acquire a distinct individual character. However, when they fall prey to a disease or another destructive force, they lose this distinctiveness, and turn back to their initial simplicity. Only if the symptoms of the disease can be diagnosed and necessary precautions can be taken beforehand, the disease can possibly be contained and the organism might be saved from an early death. Nevertheless, as death is unavoidable, all preventive efforts would only postpone the coming of the end. In the political and cultural sphere, the illness was associated with the rapid diffusion of liberal-egalitarian ideas in Leontiev's mind.

When a society was at the first stage, Leontiev purported that reformist efforts should be supported, since reform would transform the initially simple culture into a flourishing and diversified one. Conservative reaction in a state with primitive culture would lead to stagnation. However, after a culture reached the second period of flourishing complexity, the highest degree attainable, Leontiev advocated reactionary measures to preserve the sophistication already attained. *"Until the day of flowering, it is better to be a sail or a steam engine. After this irrevocable day, it is more worthy to act as an anchor or a brake for the peoples that are rushing steeply down-hill."*²⁰ It is the duty of the reactionaries to delay the inevitable collapse as long as possible, though they are doomed to failure in the long run.

²⁰ Leontiev, "The Triune Process of Development," *Against the Current*, p. 168.

Different from the Slavophiles, Leontiev did not full-scale reject European history.²¹ Unlike them, Leontiev thought that the Catholic Church had a significant role in the creation of a diversified and flourishing culture in the classical ages.²² He expressed his admiration for the ancient glories of European history. In the aristocratic and monarchical Europe, he saw what he coined as the complex artistic flourishing of culture. The cultural peak for Europe was the period between the Renaissance and the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, for him, Europe of nineteenth century symbolized decay and disintegration after a glorious past. He stated that “little by little European civilization is disposing of all that was elegant, picturesque, and poetic to the museums and the pages of books, and introducing into all aspects of life mere prose, physical monstrosity, uniformity, and death...”²³

In nineteenth century, with increasing prosperity, European history witnessed the spread of democratic and liberal ideals, and mass culture captured supremacy. In literature, the masterpieces of classicism; in architecture, the monuments of Renaissance were replaced by realist novels and utilitarian structures, to the distaste of Leontiev. In his view, liberal progress “is *nothing but a process of disintegration*,”²⁴ which is comparable to the spread of cholera, a

²¹ Ibid, pp. 154–155. For a discussion on Leontiev’s interpretation of the decay of Western culture, Berdyaev, *Leontiev* (Orono: Academic International, 1968), pp. 74–79. It was a noteworthy contribution of Leontiev to Russian political thought that he merged the admiration for Byzantine legacy with an appreciation of the creative periods of European history. The general tendency among Russian thinkers have been to select one of them at the expense of the other. Heinrich Stammeler, “Russia Between Byzantium and Utopia,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 17, No: 2 (April, 1958), p. 99.

²² Quite objectively in his analyses, Leontiev admitted that Russia adopted Orthodoxy without any creative contribution, whereas Catholicism stimulated cultural growth in Europe. As a rare example among Russian intellectuals, he appreciated the qualities of Catholicism. He stated that “Catholicism is such a mighty and complete religion that it has never before, perhaps, had its equal on earth.” Leontiev, “Catholicism,” *Against the Current*, pp. 224–225.

²³ Konstantin Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove: The Story of a Russian*, trans. George Reavey (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), p. 41.

²⁴ Leontiev, “The Triune Process of Development,” *Against the Current*, p. 158.

malady that was needed to be cured. The adherence to progressive ideas ultimately resulted in Europe's loss of cultural peculiarity and ancient splendour.

According to Leontiev, Russia experienced a praiseworthy development during the reign of Peter the Great,²⁵ but the real peak of cultural glorification came during the reign of Catherine the Great.²⁶ However, Russia was also destined for cultural decay. In order to preserve the level of cultural sophistication that was already reached, reactionary measures, despotism and social privileges were necessary precautions. He agreed with the reactionary policies implemented by Konstantin Pobedonostsev and saw in them a promise to prevent cultural degradation.²⁷ Otherwise, Leontiev prophesized, the "illness" would inescapably spread to Russia. This would bring the third stage in the cyclical historical process, the phase of secondary simplification. As a justification of the heavy-handed policies of Pobedonostsev, Leontiev expressed his hopelessness in his famous phrase: "... it is necessary to freeze Russia, if only slightly, in order to prevent it from 'rotting.'"²⁸

With the reforms of 1860's, Russia followed the reformist path of European liberal tradition, thus in Leontiev's view, the way for social and cultural disintegration was opened. To remedy this impact, Leontiev prescribed the consolidation of autocracy and monastic Orthodoxy in the Byzantine tradition as the baselines of Russian statehood. Nonetheless, in 1890's, he lost hope in the

²⁵ For further details, see Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, pp. 306–307.

²⁶ Leontiev, "The Warming Up of Russia," *Against the Current*, p. 220.

²⁷ Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p. 520. Konstantin Pobedonostsev was a Russian statesman and advisor to Tsar Alexander III. Largely responsible for the repressive policies of the Tsar, he unconditionally opposed democracy, social reforms, and freedom of press. Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, pp. 297–300. However, Leontiev's theoretic alliance with Pobedonostsev and the reactionary policies of Alexander III was only superficial. He agreed with them only in the sense that such reactionary policies, by "freezing" Russia, might postpone Russia's social demise for the time being. However, he criticized their policies for their impotence to create anything new. Richard Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 331.

²⁸ Leontiev, "Freezing Russia," *Against the Current*, p. 217.

possibility of Russia and the Greco-Slavic world as the bearer of an original culture.²⁹ Leontiev recognized that cultural uniformity and disintegration were the inevitable outcomes of historical process. He regretfully prophesized that Russia would give birth to “Antichrist,” and in a few decades, would transform from a “God-fearing people” into a “God-fighting people.”³⁰ This statement is generally taken as Leontiev’s anticipation of the socialist order in Russia. It can be said that Leontiev foresaw socialism as a likely scenario for Russia’s future, but the dreadful possibility, the Antichrist for him was not the realization of socialism but the cultural homogenization of a society.

Essentially, against liberalism, Leontiev was even ready to compromise with socialism, which he saw as the “reactionary organization of future.”³¹ Whereas socialism incorporated elements of discipline, liberals intended to export alien European political tradition, which ultimately led to Europe’s own cultural downfall in his view.³² In his last years, he widely read socialist literature, from Marx to Proudhon.³³ Though the materialist aspects of socialism were alien to him, Leontiev saw in the socialist ideology the antidote to democratic and egalitarian premises of liberalism. Furthermore, he appreciated strong personalities that emerged during revolutionary upheavals. However, as a far-sighted social analyst, he forecasted that if socialism – as an organization of labour and capital, not as a nihilist revolution – ever triumphed, it would possibly achieve the projected order under the semblance of a monarchical system with a

²⁹ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, pp. 85–86.

³⁰ Leontiev, “Antichrist in Russia,” *Against the Current*, p. 222.

³¹ Filippov, “Strastnoe pis'mo s nevernym adresom,” p. 33. Leontiev was sure that liberals would never triumph in Russia, and if further exposition to prosaic European bourgeois culture would end in a revolution, the future organization would be even more strict than any regime Russia witnessed so far. Future belonged to socialism, which meant, for Leontiev, “the feudalism of the future.” Stephen Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev, 1831–1891: A Study in Russian “Heroic Vitalism”* (New York: Pageant Press, 1967), p. 130.

³² Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought*, p. 343.

³³ Shchetinina, *Ideinaiia zhizn' russkoi intelligentsii*, p. 72.

strict social order.³⁴ In this sense, it was not socialism *per se* that Leontiev feared but cultural decomposition accompanied by it.

3.4. The Aesthetic Principle

It is generally claimed that Leontiev was the first Russian aesthete.³⁵ Leontiev's quest for aestheticism not only in art but in every aspect of life makes him a unique thinker in the history of Russian philosophy. In an age when Russian thought was highly social, Leontiev's emphasis on the aesthetic cult – a non-Russian element in his thinking – differentiates him from the general outline of Russian intellectual heritage. Contrary to traditional Russian thought, he was concerned with "poetic humanity", not with "suffering humanity."³⁶

Leontiev's understanding of ethics was shaped not by a consideration of human dignity, but by a concern for aesthetics and poetry in life, preconditions that render the flourishing of a culture possible. "Beauty is the goal of life, and good ethics and self-denial are valuable only as one of the manifestations of beauty as the free creation of good."³⁷ For him, beauty was more precious than man, and "for the sake of beauty he was ready to acquiesce in any sort of suffering and torment for men."³⁸ In the words of Janko Lavrin,

³⁴ Leontiev, "The Warming Up of Russia," *Against the Current*, p. 221. Ivask remarked that Leontiev was more long-sighted than many of his contemporaries in his appraisal of Russia's future. For a discussion of Leontiev's interpretation of the "socialist monarchy," see Yuri Ivask, *Konstantin Leont'ev: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Bern: H. Lang, 1974), pp. 265–269.

³⁵ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, p.85.

³⁶ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 2.

³⁷ Leontiev, "The Rapacious Aesthete," *Against the Current*, p. 139.

³⁸ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, pp. 110–111.

To him human beings were only the material out of which a beautiful and dignified form of existence should be fashioned by means of the severest self-discipline after the Byzantine pattern. The State itself should become not a democratic institution, but one of unlimited power, majesty, and beauty.³⁹

With regard to the relationship of aesthetics to ethics, Leontiev marked a distinction between individual morality and morality of a society.⁴⁰ He stated that in personal life, people should try to be kind, whereas laws should be as strict as possible. The interaction of these principles would balance each other.

Leontiev acknowledged the necessity of evil in political life.⁴¹ For him, beauty existed in the fruitful struggle between good and evil and in variety of life forms. He claimed, “*Harmony* – or what is beautiful and lofty in life – is not the fruit of an eternal peaceful solidarity, but merely the *image* or the *reflection* of the complex and poetic process of life, in which there is room for everything – for both antagonism and solidarity.”⁴²

In the formation of Leontiev’s social and political system, whether the main motive was religion or aestheticism is a matter of discussion.⁴³ It is

³⁹ Janko Lavrin, “Vladimir Soloviev and Slavophilism,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 20, No: 1 (January, 1961), p. 14.

⁴⁰ Leontiev, “Fundamental Theses,” *Against the Current*, p. 211.

⁴¹ He stated that a “great nation is great in both good and evil.” Leontiev, “The Rapacious Aesthete,” *Against the Current*, p. 137.

⁴² Leontiev, “Aesthetics I,” *Against the Current*, p. 141.

⁴³ There are different interpretations whether it was aestheticism or ascetic Orthodoxy that was the moving force for Leontiev. Mirsky claimed that Leontiev “was a rare instance in modern times ... of an essentially unreligious man submitting consciously and obediently to the hard rule of dogmatic and exclusive religion.” Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 344. Masaryk seems to agree with Mirsky, and claimed that Leontiev had faith in the “visible” church, and though he remained a fierce enemy of revolutionary nihilists and realists, he himself was a realist and even nihilist. Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, Vol. I, p. 214. Ivask also claimed that the aesthetic principle was prevalent even in his monastic Christianity. That is, his “*black Christianity*” stood in contradiction to the pagan elements in his thought, and he had an artistic taste out of this striking contrast. Ivask, “Konstantin Leont’ev’s Fiction” p. 624. On the other hand, Zenkovsky claimed that Leontiev’s strong commitment to Byzantine Orthodoxy and his religious consciousness delineated the framework of his thought. Though before the religious crisis he experienced in

sometimes claimed that he valued Orthodox Christianity neither because he was in search of the absolute nor for the spiritual perfection it promised. He was fascinated with Orthodoxy because of its emphasis on the imperfection of worldly life and the fear it propagated.⁴⁴ Prior to his spiritual conversion in 1871, he expressed in his own words, “I esteemed the Orthodox church, I loved it with all the strength of my soul; but I loved it with a Russian and poetic feeling rather than with a spiritual or ethical one.”⁴⁵

However it may seem paradoxical for a man of passionate vitalism, Leontiev’s understanding of religion was rigorously ascetic, pessimistic, and was based on unquestionable obedience to authority. He did not trouble himself to propagate universalist or humane ideas. He conceived of Christianity as a religion based on fear instead of love in which there was no place for individualism. In Leontiev’s view, Christianity did not promise universal brotherhood or harmony.⁴⁶ Apparently, the never-ending conflict between good and evil was much more dearer to Leontiev than universal fraternity. This is probably why in his personal life, he found a poetic taste in the sharp contrast of his comings and goings between aesthetic ecstasy and ascetic religiosity. These aesthetic and

1871, he appreciated Orthodoxy from an aesthetic point of view and his religiosity was marked by an interest in the outward form of Orthodox sermons and services, he converted to a more personal and mystical version of Orthodoxy afterwards. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 438–442. Berdyaev is in between these two opposite views. For him, the aesthetic and religious principles are in a mutually interacting relationship with each other in Leontiev’s mind. Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 5. A careful examination of his writings persuade the reader that the first position, that is, the prevalence of aestheticism over religion, is more valid. At the foundation of his doctrine laid an aesthetic obsession, which determined his approach to every phenomena, including religion. Leontiev’s religiosity cannot be evaluated apart from this aesthetic ingredient in his thought.

⁴⁴ Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 344.

⁴⁵ Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, pp. 116–117.

⁴⁶ For this reason, he criticized the “rose-coloured Christianity” of Dostoyevsky on the grounds that he distorted the originality of Orthodoxy by emphasizing universal harmony. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p. 556. For Leontiev’s criticism of Dostoyevsky from an Orthodox Christian point of view, see Leontiev, “Dostoyevsky,” *Against the Current*, pp. 240–245. For, Leontiev, Christianity meant what he termed “transcendental egoism,” that is, a quest for personal salvation; since he was neither hopeful nor interested in the salvation of mankind, contrary to many other Russian intellectuals. Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, p. 95.

religious concerns stimulated him for envisaging a despotic and theocratic state in the long run.⁴⁷

It can be claimed that aesthetic concerns formed the basis of Leontiev's political theory.⁴⁸ He approached every political and social problem from the prism of aesthetic criteria. He devised a unique theory formulating aesthetics of history, religion, and politics. Actually, Berdyaev did not exaggerate when he stated that "... Leontiev's political sympathies were shaped less by abstract thought or moral experience than by his plastic or pictorial impressions. He became a conservative because he seemed to find more beauty in the Church, the Monarchy, the Army, and the nobility, than in the practices of equality and the life of the middle class."⁴⁹

In the egalitarian and democratic societies of Western Europe, he saw the disappearance of the aesthetic principle, and replacement of it by vulgarity. The sustainment of social and cultural vividness, according to Leontiev, was possible only in societies that were ruled by a strictly authoritarian regime. Therefore, he associated the variegation of a society with inequality and lack of social mobility. "The aesthetic of *life* ... and the poetry of *actuality* are impossible without that diversity of situations and feelings which can only be developed thanks to inequality and conflict."⁵⁰ Only in this way the individuality and uniqueness of a national or social group might be protected.

⁴⁷ Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, Vol. I, pp. 208–210.

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of aesthetics of history as the basis of his thought, see Filippov, "Strastnoe pis'mo s nevernym adresom," pp. 14–36.

⁴⁹ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Leontiev, "Aesthetics II," *Against the Current*, p. 144.

3.5. A Critic of Western Bourgeoisie

The discussion of aesthetics logically follows Leontiev's rejection of nineteenth century European culture on aesthetic grounds. At this point, it would be illuminating to briefly mention a possible influence on Leontiev, that of Alexander Herzen. Though at first sight it seems contradictory to talk about the influence of the socialist Herzen on the reactionary Leontiev, Leontiev highly appreciated Herzen's appraisal of Western European bourgeoisie, and labeled him an "aesthete of genius"⁵¹. One from the uncompromising conservative camp, the other from left, both of these thinkers "rebelled against the bourgeois world and wanted to set the Russian world in opposition to it."⁵² Leontiev and Herzen drew similar conclusions with regard to the expected impacts of the bourgeois spirit spreading from Western Europe.

After his emigration in 1847, Herzen was horrified by the mediocre philistinism of the European bourgeoisie.⁵³ He remarked that the reformists in Russia had a distorted view of Europe, which was not derived from real life, but from history books and literature. They wrongfully praised Western civilization, and what they knew and hailed about Europe was only the cultured top layer of it. Personal contact convinced Herzen that nineteenth century Europe was visibly inferior to this perception. He expressed his disappointment in the following manner:

⁵¹ Leontiev, "Proudhon and Herzen," *Against the Current*, p. 172.

⁵² Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, p. 81. Herzen influenced Leontiev in his criticism of philistinism. Leontiev kept Herzen's books with him even on Mount Athos. However, like Danilevsky and Soloviev, the influence exerted by Herzen came after the formation of Leontiev's philosophy. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 437.

⁵³ Janko Lavrin, "Populists and Slavophiles," *Russian Review*, Vol. 21, No: 4 (October, 1962), p. 308.

The valour of chivalry, the elegance of aristocratic manners, the stern decorum of the Protestants, the proud independence of the English, the luxurious life of Italian artists, the sparkling wit of the Encyclopaedists and the gloomy energy of the Terrorists- all this has been melted down and transmuted into one integral combination of different predominant manners, *bourgeois* ones ‘with its morality’ of a lower order.⁵⁴

The cunning and calculating merchant, “colourless intermediate figure” was the prototype of the new world. He was the opposite of the idealized knight of the Middle Ages who was ready to sacrifice his life for what he had faith in.⁵⁵

Bourgeois morality recognized no social obligation other than increasing wealth, which ultimately brought dullness to culture and daily life. This general atmosphere of European life, according to Herzen, was felt to the greatest extent in the most developed, industrialized countries where the modern Western system was deeply rooted. It followed that living in England or France was more intolerable than living in Italy or Spain.⁵⁶ Upon his disappointment with Europe, Herzen turned his face towards Russia, and hopefully remarked that “*Petite bourgeoisie* is incompatible with the Russian character-and thank God for it!”⁵⁷

Herzen was not the only Russian philosopher to recognize that European culture was directed towards monotony. The Slavophiles also put forward that Europe was destined to decay and Russia was the possible candidate that might assume a pioneering position after the demise of the European culture. From

⁵⁴ Alexander Herzen, *The Memoirs of Alexander Herzen*, Vol. II (London: Hatto and Windus, 1968), p. 749.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 749–750.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 754.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 490.

Dostoyevsky to the historian Klyuchevsky, many prominent Russian intellectuals underlined Russia's mission after the expected fall of European civilization.⁵⁸

Different from these intellectuals, Leontiev associated the demise of European culture not with an intrinsic quality of European history, but to its attachment to progressive ideas. In this sense, he was the first Russian to question the deficiency of the European belief in social progress.⁵⁹ Without making a clear-cut distinction between various European nations, he sarcastically disdained nineteenth century Europe as a whole. Actually, his aversion for bourgeois Europe was of a "pathological" nature.⁶⁰ For him, the average nineteenth century European was a "self-satisfied caricature of the people of former days."⁶¹ "Which is better" Leontiev asked, "the bloody but spiritually splendid epoch age of the Renaissance or some kind of present-day Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, peaceful, prosperous, and moderate?"⁶²

Leontiev was in favour of social stratification at the expense of inequality and injustice, which he saw necessary for the flourishing of a culture.⁶³ He approached progressive ideas, democracy, and liberalism from an aesthetic point of view. He stated: "Everyday life should be poetic, varied in its national unity, and insulated from the West."⁶⁴ In the eyes of Leontiev, democracy and vulgarity were inseparable from each other. "To love the peaceful and universal democratic

⁵⁸ Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought*, p. 356.

⁵⁹ In this regard, Hare recognized him as a precursor of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. Ibid, p. 326. For Leontiev's most detailed analysis of European history in the light of his historical theory, see Konstantin Leontiev, *L'Européen moyen: idéal et outil de la destruction universelle* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1999).

⁶⁰ Leontiev never lived in Europe. The impressions he had were indirectly shaped by observation of European influence on Russia and the Balkan Christians. Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought*, p. 353.

⁶¹ Leontiev, "The Average European," *Against the Current*, p. 170.

⁶² Leontiev, "The Rapacious Aesthete," *Against the Current*, p. 139.

⁶³ Walicki compares Leontiev to anti-egalitarian critics of mass culture, such as Ortega y Gasset. Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 301.

⁶⁴ Leontiev, "Fundamental Theses," *Against the Current*, p. 210.

ideal implies loving vulgar equality – not only political equality but also social, almost psychological equality.”⁶⁵ In a provocative vein, he claimed: “If the consequences of democracy are so horribly prosaic, then I can have no more sympathy with democratic ideas!”⁶⁶

In the monotonous uniformity of the European bourgeoisie, he saw the “ruin of beauty.”⁶⁷ He purported that nature reveals itself in variety, and man should take nature as a model.⁶⁸ Poetic beauty was existent when the peculiarity and individuality of a culture was protected, and diversification and inequality were preconditions for it. The ascendancy of middle class values and liberalism would result in the destruction of the peculiar cultures of nations. Like Herzen, Leontiev was against the dull culture and life style of Western bourgeoisie, about which he said that he detested “to the point of fanaticism, to the point of stupidity.”⁶⁹ He thought that democracy, liberalism, and socialism would all lead to bourgeois dominance and uniformity of culture.

For Leontiev, the protection of the uniqueness of national cultural forms was crucial to enhance the creative power of a nation. For this reason, he considered the uniforming effect middle class culture as a dangerous threat. The homogeneity of progressive societies, he thought, had nothing to inspire creative people. In such a society, the “poet will have nothing to write about; the sculptor will then only decorate railway stations or mold columns for gas lamps.”⁷⁰

Leontiev recommended the reinforcement of church conservatism and aristocratic privileges as a barrier against bourgeois mediocrity. Otherwise,

⁶⁵ Leontiev, “The Rapacious Aesthete,” *Against the Current*, p. 138.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 27. Obviously, Leontiev’s political and sociological theory was an amoral one.

⁶⁷ Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, p. 86.

⁶⁸ Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 301.

⁶⁹ Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 188.

⁷⁰ Leontiev, “The Rapacious Aesthete,” *Against the Current*, p. 138.

cultural simplification was inevitable. To save itself from the contagious disease spreading from Europe, what Russia needed was Byzantine-style discipline and the strengthening of its Oriental links.

3.6. Blessing the Autocracy

As a bulwark against liberal ideas blowing from Europe, Leontiev prescribed a rigorously autocratic regime based on class privileges and social stratification. He claimed that only in this way the originality of a national way of life could be maintained. A state, in Leontiev's view, should be complex and diversified, with delineated social groupings and limited social mobility. *"It would seem again that a great complexity of form – the conjunction of aristocracy and monarchy – is essential in order to produce the maximum greatness and strength."*⁷¹ [Italics are Leontiev's.] If necessary, the state had the right to implement policies "... strict to the point of ferocity."⁷²

Since the consolidation of the Muscovite power, autocracy has been an indispensable part of Russian political tradition. Russia inherited its autocratic tradition from two sources: its Byzantine mentors and Tatar overlords, of which the latter seems to have more influence.⁷³ However, autocracy was certainly

⁷¹ He gave the examples of several civilizations, from ancient Egypt to France, and claimed that each of these civilizations reached the utmost level of cultural superiority during maximum monarchic power and social stratification. Leontiev, "The Triune Process of Development," *Against the Current*, p. 165.

⁷² Leontiev, "Fundamental Theses," *Against the Current*, p. 210.

⁷³ When Byzantium exercised the greatest influence on the ancient Rus', they were still governed by a decentralized appanage system, which challenged with the centralized autocracy of the Byzantine rulers. In the thirteenth century, the Rus' lands fell under Tatar rule, while Byzantine Empire was sacked by Crusaders. The consolidation of Russian autocracy was realized after the Tatar period. This counts for the Tatar influence on Russian autocracy. For a discussion of

endorsed by the Orthodox tradition, which was inherited from Byzantium.⁷⁴ The political tradition which the Byzantine Empire inherited from its Roman predecessor rested upon the direct central administration of the emperor. Even when the central administration weakened, the principle of full sovereignty of the universal Christian Emperor remained as the defining character of the Byzantine Empire. The Church faithfully legitimized this imperial ideology by emphasizing the universality of the Constantinopolitan Church.

Orthodox faith carried the premise that the all-powerful Christian emperor, as the leader of the temporal and the heavenly worlds, had universal power. This position was justified by the Church, which never exercised power over secular matters. Different from their Western counterparts, church-state relations in the Eastern world rested not on rivalry but mutual cooperation.⁷⁵ Actually, The Eastern Church did not evolve as an autonomous political organ, but functioned as a part of the overall system, whose head was the Emperor.

Like their Byzantine predecessors, absolute authority of the monarch was endorsed by the Russian Church. Actually, it was the elders of the Russian Church that formulated Russian autocracy (*samoderzhavie*) from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century.⁷⁶ While Muscovy assumed a patronizing role over the Church, the Church provided the rising Muscovite power a legitimate basis for its political ambitions as the sole representative of the “true faith.” After the collapse of Byzantium, Muscovy, being the only Orthodox power, the only feasible protector of the Eastern Church, was thought to need autocratic power to fight

Byzantine influence on Russian autocratic tradition, see Thornton Anderson, *Russian Political Thought: An Introduction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 23–37.

⁷⁴ John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989), pp. 11–17.

⁷⁵ Anderson coins Church-state relations in the Eastern world as a *symphonia*. Anderson, *Russian Political Thought*, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Pipes, “Russian Conservatism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” p. 122.

internally against heresies so widespread in Russia; and externally against Islam and Catholicism. When one takes into account the interdependent relationship between autocracy, Byzantine culture, and Orthodoxy, the fusion of these elements in Leontiev's mind becomes more understandable.

In the proceeding centuries, Russian autocracy was justified from several perspectives.⁷⁷ In the intellectual atmosphere of post-1860s, during Leontiev's life-time, there emerged a new reason for conservatives to hold fast to autocracy even more firmly than before. The emergence of radical movements proved counterproductive for conservatives. The nihilist, for them, was "the symptom of all that is wrong with Western culture in general and with Russian Westernism in particular."⁷⁸ Now, in the eyes of conservatives, autocracy gained a new mission: to contain this new type of man who challenged the very basic features of Russian statehood. This apprehension was also shared by Leontiev.

Leontiev differed in his analysis of the basic tenets of autocracy from other conservatives of the era. With an implicit anarchist attitude in their explanation, Slavophiles contrasted Russian autocracy with Western European absolutism, and claimed that political power, which contaminated human soul, was a God-given burden on the shoulders of Russian monarchs.⁷⁹ In contrast to European nations, Russian people were not interested in the use of material power, thus protected their freedom of spirit. The Tsar, as the father of all Russians, undertook this burden and acquiesced to contaminate his soul to safeguard his people's purity. The Slavophiles were not elitists. They foresaw harmony between the common

⁷⁷ The traditional Catherinian argument followed that mass territories of Russia could not be administered without an absolute monarchy. Another argument underlined that autocracy was an indispensable part of Russian political identity, an ancient Russian tradition. It was also suggested that the unenlightened population of Russia necessitated autocracy. Ibid, pp. 121–123.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 124.

⁷⁹ For a further explanation of the patriarchal state theory put forward by the Slavophiles, see Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, pp. 162–164. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p. 525.

people and autocracy and did not underline the role of the noble class in the constitution of Russian autocracy.

Contrary to the Slavophile theory of patriarchal family explaining the evolution of Russian state, Leontiev recognized the overwhelming role of monarchy, aristocracy, and Byzantine principles merged with German and Tatar elements in the making of Russian statehood. As Berdiaev stated, Leontiev was apparently more realistic than the Slavophiles in his explanation of the formation of Russian autocracy.⁸⁰ He acknowledged Russian people's tendency for anarchy and democracy, but considered it as evil contrary to the Slavophiles. The anarchic disposition of the Russian masses provided a sound reason to keep them under a strong autocratic administration.

According to Leontiev, Russia received everything it had in the name of civilization, from Christianity to political tradition, arbitrarily and through the impositions of autocracy.⁸¹ The reforms of Peter and Catherine the Great were the best examples for this. Leontiev did not take seriously the arguments idealizing common people, depicting them as the bearers of an original idea. The greatness of a nation depended not on the qualities of common people, but on the idea dominating their existence. Without autocracy, this creative force inflicted from above would be abandoned, and the society would be drifted towards social and cultural uniformity, that is, the last phase in historical development. The individual was nothing but the part of a machine. According to Leontiev:

A political state is like a tree, which attains to its full growth, flowering, and fruitfulness by obeying a certain mysterious, autonomous, despotic, governing inner idea lodged within it. A state is also a machine, fabricated

⁸⁰ Berdiaev, *The Russian Idea*, p. 164.

⁸¹ Leontiev, "The Warming Up of Russia," *Against the Current*, pp. 219–220.

half-consciously by people and maintaining people like machine parts, like wheels, levers, screws, atoms; and finally it is like a machine perfecting and forming people. In the state, a man is at one and the same time a mechanic, the wheels or a screw, and the product of a social organism.⁸²

A strong religious principle was expected to serve as the basis of autocracy, thus transforming in into a theocracy.⁸³ In Leontiev's political ideal, a state was "blessed where these "priests and warriors" (bishops, spiritual elders, and the generals of sword) predominate, and woe to the state in which "the sophist and the rhetorician" (the professor and the lawyer) take precedence."⁸⁴ He argued that the Church must be independent from secular authority, and more power should be vested in the church hierarchy. Church influence over the state was tolerable and desirable, but not the reverse.⁸⁵

3.7. The Myth of "Holy Russia"

The tradition of attributing sanctity to Russia and its people by underlining their uniqueness points out to "something godly in the common soul" of the Russian people.⁸⁶ The idea originated from the close association of the ordinary lives of the Russian people with the Orthodox Church. Although it is partly

⁸² Leontiev, "The Triune Process of Development," *Against the Current*, p. 159.

⁸³ Leontiev, "Thrace," *Against the Current*, pp. 181–183.

⁸⁴ Leontiev, "Aesthetics II," *Against the Current*, p. 145.

⁸⁵ Leontiev, "Fundamental Theses," *Against the Current*, p. 210. When it is considered that Church subordination to political authority was an essential part of the Byzantine tradition, such ideas may seem contradictory with Leontiev's Byzantinist discourse. However, when his appraisal of the role of the Catholic Church is remembered, the picture becomes clearer. Leontiev's high esteem for the Byzantine culture was not at the expense of the Western Roman legacy. Rather, the reason for his strong attachment to Byzantium was because he saw in it the only promise for Russia to establish a basis for an original culture.

⁸⁶ Vasily V. Zenkovsky, "The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy," *Russian Review*, Vol. 22, No: 1 (January, 1963), p. 52.

related to the Third Rome theory,⁸⁷ it has a more popular character. Both the “Third Rome” and the “Holy Russia” myths ascribed a messianic mission to Russia, and both had their roots in Orthodoxy. Yet, while the former was born in the monastic circles and was manipulated by political elites, the “Holy Russia” myth had antistate connotations and focused on the divinity of the “God-bearing” Russian people.⁸⁸

Idealization of the Russian *narod* and depicting them as selfless saviours have always been a part of Russian intellectual thinking, both in the left and the right camp.⁸⁹ While the conservatives saw in the Russian people the representatives of the “true” faith, the reformists and radicals valued them for their presumed capacity to actualize ideal social order exemplary for the Western world. The strong emotional attachment to common people has been a glue bringing philosophers from opposite poles together. In the famous words of Alexander Herzen:

We had one love, although it differed. They [the Slavophiles] and we succumbed from our earliest years to one powerful irrational feeling—the feeling of a limitless all-embracing love for the Russian people. And we, like Janus, like the two-headed eagle, looked in different directions while at the same time we had one and the same heart... To them the Russian people was above all Orthodox, i.e., closest to the heavenly city; to us it was above all a social entity, i.e., closest to the earthly city.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ This theory will be dealt with in detail later.

⁸⁸ Michael Cherniavsky, “‘Holy Russia’: The Study in the History of an Idea,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 63, No: 3 (April, 1958), p. 633.

⁸⁹ Nikolay Berdyaev rightly stated that “... they [Russian thinkers] had faith in the people even when they had lost faith in everything else.” Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 160. For a detailed analysis of the similarities of intellectuals from left and right on their ascription of a mission to the Russian people, see Lavrin, “Populists and Slavophiles,” pp. 307–317.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 308.

A characteristic feature differentiating Leontiev's unique political theory from the traditional path of Russian intellectual heritage was his disregard for the Russian people. This peculiarity constitutes a distinction between him and the conservatives who were his contemporaries. Leontiev, being "an aristocrat by nature,"⁹¹ had no faith in the Russian people, and did not see in them a promise for the elevation of the Russian civilization. Though he praised the Russians "for being alien to the "counting-house morality" of the Western European bourgeois"⁹² his appreciation of *muzhik* was only within the aesthetic framework, whose life style should be protected as a peculiarity of the Russian society.⁹³

What stimulated the cultural sophistication of a nation was not the autonomous qualities of its people, but a coercive idea dominating the national culture. He stated that "Everything great and solid in the life of the Russian people was achieved almost artificially and *more or less arbitrarily*."⁹⁴ In the case of Russia, this dominating idea was Byzantinism. He associated Russia's cultural flourishing with the strengthening of Byzantine Orthodoxy and consolidation of autocracy in a strict sense.

For the cultural rise of Russia, Leontiev attached more importance to factors imposed from above than the intrinsic potential of the *narod*, which might come to surface once necessary social measures were taken by the autocratic empire. For this reason Leontiev was critical about the educational reforms of Alexander II that extended primary education among the masses. It was not that he praised illiteracy as a virtue, but he feared the spread of progressive European

⁹¹ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 3.

⁹² Bogdan Kistiakovskii, "In Defense of Law: The Intelligentsia and Legal Consciousness," *Vekhi: A Collection of Articles About Russian the Intelligentsia*, edited by Nikolai Berdiaev (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 96.

⁹³ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 161.

⁹⁴ Leontiev, "The Warming Up of Russia," *Against the Current*, p. 219.

ideals among people. For him, the European-oriented intelligentsia constituted a more serious threat to Russian culture than the illiterate peasant.⁹⁵ His neglect for people accounts for his firm opposition to nationalism as an ideology based on the virtues of common people. His strong attachment to autocracy, Byzantinism and his positive evaluation of the cultural impositions of the autocrat can also be assessed within the same context.

In his vehement calls for a campaign against nineteenth century Western culture, therefore, Leontiev did not ascribe a holy saviour mission to Russia; neither did he glorify Russian Orthodoxy over Catholicism. He did not regard patriotism as a value in itself. He reserved his respect for a Russia worth loving.⁹⁶ For him, Russia, as a result of the historical course it passed through, was only a feasible candidate that might be the cradle of an original flourishing culture and counter European bourgeois decadence. Nevertheless, in his last years, he completely lost hope in Russia's ability to fulfill this mission.

3.8. Merging Religion with Autocracy: Byzantinism

Certainly, as the cradle of Orthodox Christianity, the Byzantine Empire had everlasting influence on the evolution of Russian culture and statehood. After the conversion of Vladimir of Kiev to Orthodoxy in 988, mutual interactions with the Byzantine Empire had a determining role on the evolution of Russian ecclesiastical and intellectual development.⁹⁷ Even their Cyrillic alphabet

⁹⁵ Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought*, pp. 337–338.

⁹⁶ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 154.

⁹⁷ Immediately after converting to Christianity, Vladimir ordered the construction of a church in the place where there had previously been ancient pagan idols, and invited architects from

Russians owed to Greeks, which was invented by Greek monks in ninth century to disseminate Christian teaching among the Slavs. The strong Byzantine imprint on Church dogmas and rites is beyond dispute.⁹⁸

Different from the Balkan Peninsula, ancient Rus' did not fall directly under Byzantine political jurisdiction.⁹⁹ Russian subordination to Byzantine cultural, political leadership and ecclesiastical hierarchy had a mystical rather than a practical character. It was the "greatest of all spiritual conquests of the Byzantine Empire."¹⁰⁰ In the eyes of ancient Rus', who were geographically remote from the core of the Byzantine Empire, Byzantium represented not the earthly but the heavenly seat of the ecumenical Church. Its holy capital, Tsargrad, was the "symbol of world Christian unity," and held "an ideal, almost mystical conception."¹⁰¹

Interactions with the Byzantine civilization had repercussions mainly on three spheres of Russian culture; these being the autocratic Byzantine political tradition, Orthodox Christianity, and Greek literary influence.¹⁰² In the historical process, Russian culture evolved as the reformulation of these features within the context of peculiar conditions of Russia along with other foreign influences.

Constantinople for this end. The long-lasting Byzantine impact on Russia thus started. Nikolay Mikhailovich Karamzin, *Istoriia Gosudarstva Rossiiskogo, Tom:1* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2004), pp. 132–133.

⁹⁸ George [Yuri] Ivask, "North and South: Some Reflections on Russian Culture," *Russian Review*, Vol. 24, No: 3 (July, 1965), p. 238.

⁹⁹ Whether Kievan Rus' was a vassal of the Byzantine Empire or a totally independent state is a matter of discussion. Vasiliev contended that the real circumstances were between these two poles. Byzantine aim was to establish effective control over this newly baptized Northern neighbour by appointing a Greek metropolitan, whose influence went beyond ecclesiastical matters. However, in the practical world of politics, it would be misleading to think that the basileus in Constantinople had direct influence on Rus'. Russian recognition of the universal Emperor remained to a great extent as a religious conviction. A. A. Vasiliev, "Was Old Russia a Vassal State of Byzantium?" *Speculum*, Vol. 7, No: 3 (July, 1932), pp. 350–360.

¹⁰⁰ Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 16. Tsargrad is the historic Slavic name for Istanbul, or Constantinople, which had a meaning far beyond geographic connotations. The word implied the dignity and sacredness of the city.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 10. Among them, Byzantine influence on Russian autocracy was discussed previously.

The most fundamental legacy that the Byzantine Empire bequeathed to the Rus' was of course Orthodox Christianity. At this point, two particular traits of Orthodoxy are worth mentioning. Eastern Christianity particularly relied on unquestionable devotion to Church tradition and the use of national languages in Church sermons.¹⁰³ The latter provided the opportunity for distinct national interpretations of religion to develop. This also applied to Russian formulation of Christianity. In the course of centuries, Russians developed a distinct – at the same time isolated – world-view nourished from their original interpretation of Orthodoxy.

Russia could not use Orthodoxy as a stepping stone to have access to the sources of antiquity; and remained cut off from the overall European cultural development. Since the lingua franca of the Russian Church was an artificial Slavic tongue with expressions derived from Greek, the intellectual legacy of antiquity was transmitted to Kievan Rus' and Muscovy through translated texts, and few had learnt the Greek language. Therefore, the distinctive feature of Russian Orthodoxy appeared to be “the nervous concern... in preserving the *very letter* of tradition received ‘from the Greeks,’”¹⁰⁴ without deriving benefit from the intellectual dimension of this tradition. In the case of Russia, Christianity could not serve as a vehicle for secular intellectual activity, as was the case in Western Europe.

Though Russians failed to have competence in the intellectual aspects of Christianity, they “became good pupils in those aspects of Christian faith which demand an intuitive experience of truth and beauty.”¹⁰⁵ Started out as a mere imitation of Byzantine architecture, painting, and literature, Russian artistic

¹⁰³ Zenkovsky, “The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy,” p. 38.

¹⁰⁴ Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 24.

development acquired an indigenous character in time.¹⁰⁶ Russians especially caught up with their seniors in the arts of icon-painting, mosaic, and fresco. Hence, Russians, while embracing the religious dogmas and principles without any intellectually creative contribution, built up a peculiar expressive style in visual arts as well as in patterns of asceticism.¹⁰⁷ The unique contribution of Russians to Orthodox liturgy oscillated between a quest for aesthetic perfection and monastic asceticism.

The peculiar formulation of Orthodoxy had its repercussions not only in art but also in the political sphere. The demise of the Byzantine Empire and the fall of Constantinople to Turks in 1453 proved to be a turning point for Russian self-consciousness. The holy city was captured by the “infidel” Turks, and the universal emperor of all Christians was dead. The empty seat of the basileus demanded a new successor. The solution came from the Russian Church. In early sixteenth century, an abbot named Philatheus formulated the “Third Rome” theory, which had a lasting influence on how Russians perceived of their mission in domestic and foreign matters in the proceeding centuries.¹⁰⁸

The Third Rome theory purported that after the downfall of the first two Romes (the first pagan and the second Christian), Moscow was destined to be the third and the last heir of the Roman Empire; and naturally had the right to fill the vacuum in the Orthodox world created by its demise.¹⁰⁹ The marriage of Ivan the

¹⁰⁶ For Russian artistic development under Byzantine influence, see, Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, pp. 17–23.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ Zenkovsky, “The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy,” p. 39.

¹⁰⁹ Legendary claims were also put forward to justify the links between the Byzantium and ancient Rus’. However, the logical explanation follows that after the demise of the Golden Horde, the Russian Church promoted the Grand Prince of Muscovy as its new benefactor. For further information regarding the discussion of Third Rome and attempts to trace a genealogy of Russian rulers back to Roman emperors, see Anderson, *Russian Political Thought*, pp. 69–80; Michael Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), pp. 165–166. Actually, as Cherniavsky argued, even during the Kievan period, Russian image of

Great (Ivan III) with the Byzantine princess Sophia Paleologue in 1472, who was the niece of the last Eastern Roman Emperor Constantine XI, further promoted this belief. The adoption of the originally Eastern Roman symbol of double-headed eagle signified the identification with the Roman heritage. In sixteenth century, the title “Tsar” or “Caesar”, which originally addressed Byzantine emperors or Tatar Khans, was also started to be used in diplomatic correspondence by Muscovite rulers, a practice which became official when Ivan the Terrible (Ivan IV) was crowned in 1547.¹¹⁰ With the recognition of themselves as the heirs to the Roman heritage, Russians readily accepted the Orthodox mission as a part of their imperial identity. In the following centuries, this claim to the Byzantine inheritance brought with it the assumption of being the protector of all Orthodox Christians. Russian Empire used the Byzantine heritage as a part of their political discourse vis-a-vis the Ottoman Empire and the Western world. It served as a legitimizing basis for expansionist Russian foreign policy.

Though it would be a gross generalization to coin Russian historical philosophy as an anti-Byzantine one,¹¹¹ it may be claimed that links with Byzantium was not appraised as a fundamental reason to carry Russia towards glory. Western oriented thinkers were on the whole negative towards Byzantium

the Roman Emperor vacillated between recognition of his sovereignty and the desire to usurp his image. With the latter's downfall, Russian rulers had the opportunity to take over the role of the Roman Emperor. Michael Cherniavsky, “Khan on Basileus: An Aspect of Russian Mediaeval Political Theory,” *Journal of the History of the Ideas*, Vol. 20, No: 4 (October-December, 1959), p. 463.

¹¹⁰ Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism, 1856–1870* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 6. For the rulers of the medieval Rus', Byzantine emperor symbolized absolute authority. During the “Tatar Yoke,” Tatar khan was considered as the secular authority while Byzantine emperor was still respected as the dignified ruler of Eastern Christianity. Therefore, Tatar and Byzantine rulers represented two faces of authority, the earthly and worldly ones. With the decline of both in late sixteenth century, Muscovite rulers, namely, Ivan IV, assumed the title Tsar with a claim to fill their vacuum. For the medieval Russian perceptions of the Byzantine emperors before and after the Tatar domination, see Michael Cherniavsky, “Khan or Basileus: An Aspect of Russian Medieval Political Theory,” pp. 459–476.

¹¹¹ Ivask points out that Kievan Rus', Muscovy and imperial Russia had their peculiar reasons to keep a certain distance from Byzantine influence. Ivask, “North and South: Some Reflections on Russian Culture,” p. 238.

for its despotic heritage and blamed it for the cultural isolation of Russia from Europe.¹¹² Although intellectuals of the conservative camp seemed to be more positively disposed, they related Russia's greatness not to the Byzantine tradition dictated from above, but to the spiritual quality of the Russian people and the peculiar Slavic culture came into being at the crossroads of European, Byzantine, and Oriental civilizations. This distinction reserves a unique position to Leontiev as the only thinker seeing Russia's worth only in its association with Byzantium. Rather than designating a special mission to Moscow as the Third Rome as many other Russian conservatives did, Leontiev wanted to see the regeneration of the Second Rome from its ashes.

Leontiev's fascination with the aesthetic and visual aspects of Orthodoxy dates back to his childhood. The image of Byzantium in his mind, as the source of Russian Orthodox tradition, was to a great extent influenced by these aesthetic and religious impressions. For him, Byzantium was the source of cultural peculiarity Russia longed for. The conquest of Constantinople and the recreation of the Byzantine Empire would enable Russia to develop an authentic civilization, not a Slavic one, but an "Oriental-Byzantine"¹¹³ one, under the shadow of Orthodoxy. Russia, as an already old country, was approaching its unavoidable demise in the cyclical process of history. Only the promise of "Tsargrad" and the Byzantine principle accompanying it might keep Russia alive. The image of "Tsargrad" was venerated in Leontiev's philosophy as the source of Russian culture. Only a revived Byzantium strongly attached to its Hellenistic origins,

¹¹² The most prominent example for this attitude was that of Chaadaev. Chaadaev disdained Byzantine culture and regretted that Russia evolved after its example. Petr Chaadaev "Apology of a Madman" in *Readings in Russian Civilization*, Vol. II, edited by Thomas Riha (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 306–307. Likewise for Vladimir Soloviev, Byzantium, which was cut off from antiquity and lost the spiritual foundation of its existence, represented stagnation. Shchetinina, *Ideinaia zhizn' russkoi intelligentsii*, p. 74.

¹¹³ Leontiev, "Byzantium and Russia," *Against the Current*, p. 208.

supplemented by the Asiatic contribution of Russia might be capable of creating an original civilization. According to Leontiev, this was the essence of the Eastern Question.¹¹⁴

Leontiev's motive for dreaming of a Russia incorporating Constantinople, or "Tsargrad" in this sense, was not nationalist as it was for the Panslavists. His dream envisioned not a union of Slavs, but a regenerated Eastern Roman Empire, which could lead an anti-Western crusade. In this respect, he even assigned a universal mission to Russia. He lamented that the heroic wars of the past were fought, the great edifices were built so that "*the French, German, or Russian bourgeois in his ugly and comic clothes* should thrive "individually and collectively" on the ruins of all this magnificent past?"¹¹⁵ With the help of the

The basic tenets of Leontiev's Byzantinism were autocracy and Orthodoxy. Politically, autocracy was to be supported by aristocracy and feudalism; morally, it should suppress human individuality; and religiously, it should incorporate a strict formulation of Byzantine-style monastic and ascetic Orthodoxy.¹¹⁶ The peculiar Byzantine culture was what granted Slavs, and particularly Russians a civilization, otherwise, they were open to European bourgeois influence. Therefore, Leontiev warned about the need for the strict protection of this Byzantine legacy.

¹¹⁴ Leontiev, *L'Européen moyen: idéal et outil de la destruction universelle*, pp. 112–113.

¹¹⁵ Leontiev, "Byzantium and Russia," *Against the Current*, p. 209.

¹¹⁶ Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, Vol. I, p. 208.

CHAPTER IV

KONSTANTIN LEONTIEV ON THE EASTERN QUESTION

4.1. The Background of Russo-Ottoman Relations

The time frame in which Leontiev served as a diplomat in the Ottoman Empire, years proceeding the Crimean War and preceeding the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman War, had significant repercussions on the course of Russo-Ottoman relations. To better understand the peculiar conditions of this period, a general evaluation of Russo-Turkish relations would be enlightening.

The relations between Russian and the Ottoman Empires, as centuries-old rivals, offer an interesting research problem for those who want to understand how the interrelations and mutual perceptions of two societies influenced the construction of the identities of these nations. Starting with the eighteenth century, the relative demise of the Ottoman Empire vis-à-vis its powerful neighbour to the north made the clash of interests between them inevitable. Russian advance to the south occurred at

the expense of the Ottoman Empire. The existence of Slavic-Orthodox peoples as Ottoman subjects added an additional element that should be taken into account while analyzing how the Russian perceptions of Ottoman Turks evolved. As the Russian Empire politically and militarily strengthened, the messianic mission ascribed to Russia as the protector of Ottoman Christians and the true representative of Eastern Christianity was firmly established. This approach formed the ideological basis to legitimize expansionist and aggressive Russian foreign policy.¹

As the borderlands between these two empires shrank, military and political confrontation became inevitable. The real breaking point in Ottoman-Russian relations came with the war of 1768–1774 during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762–1796). The Ottoman loss of the Crimea in 1774 as a result of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was followed by the subsequent annexation of the Crimea by Russia in 1783. The treaty was interpreted to be permitting Russia to act as the protector of Orthodox Christians living under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Sultan.² Russian conquest of the Crimea was an important turning point from several respects, but most significantly, the strategic location of the Crimea gave the Russians the opportunity to become the new masters of the Black Sea: Russia might build a strong fleet and even attack the Ottoman capital.³

Since the Ottoman power gradually weakened, the possibility of Russia filling the power vacuum created by the expected collapse of the Ottoman Empire turned to

¹ The first Russian ruler to take interest in the Balkan Slavs was Peter the Great, who in 1711 called the Orthodox Slavs to fight with Russians against the common enemy, the Turk. Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism, 1856–1870* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 9–10.

² Originally, Russians were granted the right to build a church in Galata. However, out of a misinterpretation of the text, this minor concession was in the subsequent periods exaggerated, and Russian governments used it as a pretext to claim protectorate over the Orthodox peoples of the Ottoman Empire. For further information, see Roderic Davison, “The ‘Dosografa’ Church in the Treay of Küçük Kaynarca,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 42, No: 1 (1979), pp. 46–52.

³ For a more detailed analysis of the Eastern Question in European diplomacy, see M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966).

be a dreadful scenario for European powers. Certainly, such a probability was more than welcomed by Russian rulers, as well as by conservative ideologues. While signifying the decline of Ottoman power, this incident also aroused the desires of Russian rulers to capture “Tsargrad” from the “infidel” Turks.⁴ Catherine the Great’s scheme to re-establish the Eastern Roman Empire, its capital being Constantinople and its emperor being a Russian prince, the “Greek Project” as it was called, clearly showed Russian intentions about the Ottomans.⁵ Catherine viewed her mission to be “planting the Greek Cross upon the Bosphorus” and “driving the Turks out of Constantinople and Europe.”⁶ Obviously, Turks were seen as the “infidels” who oppressed the Russian people’s “brethren in faith,” and who should be thrown out of Europe. Conversely, the Russian Empire was depicted as the only possible “emancipator” of the Orthodox peoples living under the Turkish “yoke”, and the only candidate who had the capacity to restore the holy city Tsargrad and the Eastern Roman Empire.

Even Nicholas I, who was obsessed about the preservation of the balance of power in Europe was uneasy about the Turkish ascendancy over Orthodox subjects. When the Crimean War broke out, he appealed to the Ottoman Christians to rise up; not in the name of Slavdom, but in the name of Orthodoxy. His Eastern policy was legitimized by the same messianic attribution to Russia as the protector of the

⁴ Over the eastern gate of Kherson, an important port on the Black Sea and Dnieper River, the inscription read as follows: “This road leads to Constantinople.” Edward Fairfax Taylor, *Russia Before and After the War* (London: Longmans, Green, And Co, 1880), p. 287.

⁵ For a detailed analysis of the Greek Project, see Hugh Ragsdale, “Evaluating the Tradition of Russian Aggression: Catherine II and the Greek Project,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, No: 66 (1988), pp. 91–117.

⁶ Taylor, *Russia Before and After the War*, p. 277. Catherine brought up her grandson, Constantine, in line with Greek culture. The name Constantine was of course consciously selected for the young Grand-Duke, who was expected to be the emperor of the regenerated Eastern Roman Empire. For the arguments of “Third Rome” in the Catherinian era, see Stephen L. Baehr, “From History to National Myth: Translatio Imperii in Eighteenth Century Russia,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 37, No: 1 (January, 1978), pp. 1–13.

Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, and this policy was facilitated by his belief in the inevitable collapse of the “sick man of Europe.”⁷

After the Crimean War, Panslavism was added to the Orthodox messianism as a result of the disappointment caused by the defeat against the Western world.⁸ Certainly, Russians had been to some extent aware of their ethnic affinities with the Balkan Slavs since the eighteenth century, but it had neither any bearing upon foreign policy nor had they sufficient information about the Slavic peoples. However, the rise of nationalism in Europe and the national revival of the Slavs, particularly in Austria, also had an impact on Russia. The lesson derived from the Crimean War was that Russia should seek new allies in the international scene, and that only Slavs can be loyal partners. It was understood that the policies of Nicholas I to moderate European powers were doomed to failure. The alienation from the West coupled Russian religio-ethnic messianism with regard to the Balkan Slavs. Certainly, this rhetoric legitimized Russian political ambitions by adding a religio-moral dimension.

Though the interpretations of the nature of the relations with the Ottoman Empire differed considerably depending on the ideological position of intellectuals, it is certain that the messianic role ascribed to Russia played a determining role for understanding their perceptions of the Ottomans and for their self-perception. As an outcome of the underlying historical, political, and religious conditions, either in the name of Orthodoxy or Slavdom, Russia found itself as the antagonist of the Ottoman Empire.

⁷ On the Crimean War, Riasanovsky quoted Nicholas I as saying: “Waging war *neither for worldly advantages nor for conquests*, but for a solely Christian purpose, must I be alone to fight under the banner of the Holy Cross and to see the others, *who call themselves Christians*, all unite *around the Crescent to combat Christendom*? ... now nothing is left to me, but to fight, to win, or to perish with honor, *as a martyr of our holy faith*, and when I say this I declare it *in the name of all Russia*.” Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825–1855* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 264–265.

⁸ Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism*, p. 31.

4.1.1. The Eastern Question

In European history, “Eastern Question” was the term used to signify the diplomatic and political difficulties that were thought to arise after the possible disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The term did not apply to a particular conflict, but covered a number of diplomatic, military, and political issues raised during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries particularly with regard to the future of the European territories of the Ottoman Empire. It may be argued that the Eastern Question emerged as the power of the Ottoman Empire gradually began to decline during the eighteenth century. The Eastern Question is generally dated to 1774, when the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774 ended in defeat for the Ottoman Empire. Since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was thought to be imminent, the European powers engaged in a power struggle to safeguard their military, strategic and commercial interests in the Ottoman territories. Imperial Russia stood as the major adversary of the Ottoman Empire to benefit from its decline.

As a solution to the Eastern Question, general Russian attitude aspired for the rise of the Slavic-Orthodox world under the leadership of the Russian Empire, as the “natural” heir of the Roman political heritage, the Third Rome.⁹ Nevertheless, as the well-known Greek Project of the Catherinian period illustrates, the Roman legacy was used as a part of the political discourse, and no special emphasis was put on the

⁹ An exemplary statement showing the classical Pan Slavist attitude on the Eastern Question is Rostislav Fadiev’s pamphlet “Opinion on the Eastern Question.” Fadiev stated that the Russian Empire was the heir of the Eastern Roman legacy, and thus was entitled to regenerate the Christian East. This was the “historical destiny” (p. 69) of Russia. The Russian Tsar was the “direct heir of Constantine the Great” (p. 72) and the natural leader of the Orthodox-Slavic world. He claimed that Constantinople, “far more eternal than Rome,” being “immeasurably important to Russia,” and having an “exceptionable position too important to belong to any small people” should be a free city. (pp. 70–71) Fadiev used this discourse to call Russia to war in the name of Slavdom and Orthodoxy, and to capture Constantinople. Though Fadiev used the Byzantine links of Russia as a guideline for Russian foreign policy, for him, as well as for other Pan Slavists, this was a mere tool to legitimize Russian expansionist claims. This militarist attitude had nothing to do with glorifying the Byzantine culture for its own sake. Rostislav Fadiev, “What Should Be The Policy of Russia?” in *Readings in Russian Foreign Policy*, edited by Gerald Stourzh (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 67–73.

qualities of the Byzantine culture. As the most politically powerful seat of Eastern Christianity, Russia was thought to inherit the role of protectorate of the Orthodox peoples after the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Turks. Therefore, though the Byzantine heritage was politically manipulated, it was appreciated only to the extent that it served Russian political interests. What Russia learnt from the Byzantium, in terms of political culture, religion, arts, and literature, was glorified thanks to the Russian contribution added to it. Orthodoxy, not as it was practiced by the Greeks, but as it was re-evaluated by the Russians was praised. Russia was the only heir to the Byzantine, therefore Roman heritage, but Russian reformulation of this heritage was thought to carry it to a higher level. Therefore, classical Slavophile and Panslavist discourse valued Byzantine as a historical predecessor which contributed to Russia's greatness, as a part of the whole, not as a value in itself.

However, Leontiev deviated from the traditional path in his solution to the Eastern Question. He envisioned a Russian-led regenerated Byzantium in its ancient domains, its capital being "Tsargrad," but his projected neo-Byzantium was to be arisen purely in its original form. The Byzantinism in Leontiev's mind was appreciated as a value in itself, not as a component of Russia's greatness, and it was not an apology for Russian nationalism. On the contrary, his theory was marked by the obvious Byzantine cultural supremacy over Russian civilization. Without hesitation, he asserted that Russia became a part of world civilization thanks to the imported Byzantine influence, and owed its cultural existence to its predecessor. What could possibly hail Russia, according to Leontiev, was its continuing attachment to this Roman legacy. Without this legacy, Russian culture would be dull, and might easily fall prey to Western European bourgeois cultural mediocrity. The

particular emphasis he laid on the Byzantine culture reserved a unique place for him in the history of Russian thought.

During his diplomatic service, Leontiev held sympathy for the Greeks and Ottoman Turks over the Balkan Slavs. In this sense, it was not the Ottoman Empire that Leontiev saw as a threat, but the progressive and liberal trends emanating from Europe. Constantinople, he thought, was better at the hands of Ottomans until it became the capital of a regenerated Byzantium. Likewise, it was better that the Balkan Slavs were kept politically under Ottoman rule and ecclesiastically under Greek control than being independent. At the risk of being excluded from conservative circles, Leontiev boldly expressed his contemptuous attitude towards the Balkan Slavs, and ridiculed the nationalist Russian dreams of “liberating” their oppressed brethren. Actually, far from being inimical towards Ottoman Turks, Leontiev appreciated their way of life in which he saw the colourful and inspiring Orient.

4.2. Russian Perceptions of the Orient

Russian attitude towards the East went through serious changes in the course of centuries. Dominated by Asiatic overlords for a long time, Russian perceptions of Asia were different from the conventional European perspective until the Petrine reforms. After Peter the Great, especially with Russian advance into Asia and Caucasus, Russians adopted the European world-view with regard to Asia.¹⁰ With Russia’s gradual transformation into an imperial power, Russia’s so-called

¹⁰ Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 218. For Russian perceptions of Asia, see Lieven, *Empire*, pp. 216–220.

“civilizing mission” started to be mentioned more frequently. Russians, aware of their military and political advantage over their adversaries, took a colonial attitude towards their Asiatic subjects.

As a matter of fact, Russian perception of the East was mainly determined by their self-evaluation vis-à-vis the Western world. Russians remained “conscious of some identity with Western Europe, if only in contrast to its perception of Turkey or China as utterly alien.”¹¹ The intellectual controversy with regard to the direction Russia took after the Petrine reforms intensified in the mid-nineteenth century. Not accepted by the Western Europeans as equals,¹² and aware of the huge gap between themselves, their past and people, Russian intellectuals could not help but feel the burden of loneliness in-between the Eastern and the Western worlds. The words of Petr Chaadaev best expresses this despair: “We are not part of the Occident, nor are we part of the Orient; and we don’t have the traditions of the one or the other.”¹³

As a reaction to European disregard of themselves, Russian conservatives came up with a formula that highlighted the unique contribution of Russia to the history of mankind. As a sui generis civilization neither Eastern nor Western, but having the “contemplative power of the East and the action principle of the West,” Russia was thought to be a completely different world of its own.¹⁴ From the isolationist Danilevsky who placed the Slavic world as an entirely different cultural-

¹¹ Marc Raeff, “Russia’s Perception of Her Relationship with the West,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No: 1 (March, 1964), p. 14.

¹² Whatever might be in the minds of Russian nationalists, Russian penetration into Asia did not change the European perception of Russians as an Asiatic people. On Russian advances into Central Asia, Lord Curzon remarked that this was “a conquest of Orientals by Orientals.” George N. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), p. 392.

¹³ Petr Chaadaev, “Apology of a Madman” in *Readings in Russian Civilization*, Vol. II, edited by Thomas Riha (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 304.

¹⁴ Janko Lavrin, “Vladimir Soloviev and Slavophilism,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 20, No: 1 (January, 1961), p. 18.

historical type, to the more universalist Slavophiles, the Russian double-headed eagle was seen as a self-contained entity between Europe and Asia.¹⁵

The Eastern theme and Russia's position vis-à-vis East was widely treated in Russian literature. Representing a nationalist outlook, Dostoyevsky exclaimed: "In Europe we were hangers-on and slaves, whereas we shall go to Asia as masters. In Europe we were Asiatics, whereas in Asia we, too, are Europeans."¹⁶ One of the most prominent Russian philosophers, a contemporary of Leontiev, Vladimir Soloviev approached the issue from a different point of view. He portrayed the Orient in his mind in the famous poem *Ex Oriente Lux*, and laid stress on the links of Russia with the Orient. However, Soloviev had in his mind two Orients: one despotic and non-Christian, and the other associated with Christendom; that is, the East of Xerxes and of Christ.¹⁷ It may be claimed that both aspects were precious for Leontiev in different manners; the exotic East represented by Xerxes and the Christian East of Byzantium.

4.2.1. Leontiev and The Eastern World

What made Leontiev a unique thinker was that until the Eurasianists emerged in the 1920s, he was the first Russian to turn to East for the formulation of Russia's

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of Russian self-perception between Europe and Asia after Peter the Great, see Mark Bassin, "Russia Between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No: 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 1–17.

¹⁶ Feodor Dostoievsky [Fedor Dostoyevskii], "Geok-Tepe. What Is Asia To Us?" in *Readings in Russian Foreign Policy*, edited by Gerald Stourzh (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 274.

¹⁷ G. I. Shchetinina, *Ideinaia zhizn' russkoi intelligentsii: konets XIX-nachalo XX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995), p. 70.

historical mission. Until Leontiev, neither the Slavophiles nor other conservatives approached the Orient as a source of diversity and aesthetic perfection.¹⁸

Quite different from his contemporaries, at the expense of Slav nationalism, Leontiev laid emphasis on the similarities of Russia with the peoples to its east and south. “In the character of the Russian people there are very pronounced and important traits which remind us far more of the Turks, Tartars, and other Asians (or even of nobody at all) than of the southern and western Slavs.”¹⁹ As a result of their history and social composition, he considered Russia quite distinct from the rest of the Slavic world; more Oriental, more “Asiatic-Turanian.”²⁰ This Asiatic-Turanian aspect gave Russia the opportunity to be spiritually and culturally independent from Europe, and lead the Slavs in the anti-European crusade. He acknowledged, and even welcomed Asiatic elements and the strong imprint of despotism on Russian culture.

Since Leontiev strongly rejected Western bourgeois civilization, he laid emphasis on the Asiatic and Oriental prospects of Russia to contain cultural penetration of Europe. This is why he thought that the Russification policy of the indigenous peoples of Asiatic Russia, who were more original than the Russians in their cultural makeup, would be fatal.²¹ As Russia needed to get rid of mediocre European influence, it should stand closer to the Orient. In line with his theory of history, Europe was already at the last phase of its development, and getting closer to the inevitable end. Though Oriental cultures were much more older, they managed to preserve their originality. In his conception, Eastern civilizations, being still in the elementary stage of primitive simplicity, were more praiseworthy than the

¹⁸ Nicolas Berdyaev, *Leontiev* (Orono: Academic International, 1968), p. 37.

¹⁹ Konstantin Leontiev, “Russia and the Russians,” *Against the Current: Selections from the Novels, Essays, Notes, and Letters of Konstantin Leontiev*, ed. George [Yuri] Ivask, trans. George Reavey (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), p. 203.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

²¹ Stephen Lukashovich, *Konstantin Leontev, 1831–1891: A Study in Russian “Heroic Vitalism”* (New York: Pageant Press, 1967), pp. 160–163.

democratic European societies. Therefore, for Leontiev, the cultures of China or India deserved more appreciation than that of Belgium.²²

In his last years, Leontiev believed that Russia stood between two threats: The “awakening” giants, India and China to the east and the dying out West, expected to be shaken by revolutions of a socialist character. For the self-protection and rejuvenation of Russia, his first prescription was the Byzantinist remedy. After he surrendered his Byzantinist dreams upon his disillusionment with the Balkan Christians, he suggested that Russia should adopt Oriental traits and strengthen its links with its Asiatic neighbours to protect itself from European penetration. He proposed a domestic policy based on the combination of Chinese political culture with Indian mysticism, politically accompanied by European socialism.²³ Leontiev thus hoped that by creating a new horizontal social stratification with the touch of Eastern originality, Russia might delay the unavoidable end.

4.2.2. Leontiev on Turks and the Ottoman Empire

As a result of his diplomatic experience, Leontiev was particularly sympathetic towards Turks. Monas rightly stated that he was “the only Russian intellectual before the Eurasians in the 1920s who had *anything* good to say about the Turks.”²⁴ Rozanov claimed that Leontiev was “one of the first Europeans to grasp the ‘living soul’ and poetry of the Turks”, their belligerency, religious naiveté, devotion

²² Leontiev, “Russia and the Russians,” *Against the Current*, p. 204.

²³ Konstantin Leontiev, *L’Européen moyen: idéal et outil de la destruction universelle* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1999), p. 74.

²⁴ Sidney Monas, “Review: Leontiev: A Meditation,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 43, No: 3 (September, 1971), p. 485.

to God and peculiar respect for men.²⁵ Actually, he fell in love with the Ottoman Turks during his diplomatic service in the Ottoman Empire, and developed a profound understanding of the contradictory aspects of the Turkish character.²⁶ In terms of bravery, submission to authority, fatalism, and mysticism, Leontiev found Turks akin to Russians.²⁷ For this reason, he was considered by some scholars as the ideological forerunner of the Eurasian school of thought.²⁸ Certainly, Leontiev's perception of the Ottoman Turks was full of clichés. He treated the Turkish society as a monolithic entity. Rather than a value-free analyst, he was moved by stereotypical images in his outlook.

What Leontiev adored in the Ottoman Empire was the poetic scenery much dear to him. He appreciated the variety of cultures and life styles in the Ottoman Empire, where different religions and indigenous cultures lived side by side. He treasured this diversity with all the colours it embraces. He explained his excitement in the following way:

²⁵ V. V. Rozanov, "Vstuplenie" in Konstantin Leontiev, *Pis'ma k Vasiliu Rozanovu* (London: Nina Karsov, 1981), p. 31. For example, Leontiev noticed that in spite of the underlying contempt for non-Muslims, Turks had a deep-rooted respect for Jewish and Christian shrines, as well as for Christ and the Virgin Mary. Leontiev, "Greeks, Bulgarians, and Russians," *Against the Current*, p. 199.

²⁶ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 303; Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, Vol. I, p. 213. Pipes claims that Leontiev turned to be an ardent "Turcophile" during his diplomatic service, which eventually led to his breach of relations with the upper cadres of the Foreign Department. Richard Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics: A Study in Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 146. Referring to his withdrawal into solitude as a monk in his last year, Berdyaev stated that Leontiev "was in love with the Turks and Islam; and the love he bore them was to act later as a sort of vaccine." Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 39.

²⁷ Leontiev, "Russia and the Russians" *Against the Current*, p. 203.

²⁸ E. Sarkisyanz, "Russian Attitudes Towards Asia," *Russian Review*, Vol. 13, No: 4 (October, 1954), p. 248. Hare points out to his impact on the Eurasianist school. Richard Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 357. For a discussion of the similarities between the Eurasianists and Leontiev, see Yuri Ivask, *Konstantin Leont'ev: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Bern: H. Lang, 1974), pp. 225–226. Conservative Russian political thought, until the Eurasianists, emphasized that Russia had a unique character vis-a-vis Europe, and placed Orthodoxy and Slavdom as the basic causes of this uniqueness. However, Eurasianists for the first time pointed out to Russian commonalities with Asians. In this sense, it may be claimed that Leontiev had a resemblance with the later Eurasianist school of thought, like strong commitment to autocracy and anti-liberalism. Still, it would be a gross distortion to classify him as the first Eurasianist. For a further discussion on Eurasianism, see Lieven, *Empire*, p. 219.

I am in love with the life here; I love all the people I meet on the way; I am madly in love with this poor old Bulgarian with a gray mustache, in a blue turban, who has just made me a low bow; I am in love with this fierce-looking, gaunt, tall Turk who is walking ahead of me in wide crimson *shalvari*... I should like to embrace both of them; I love them equally well!²⁹

Leontiev best expressed his enchantment with the life in the Orient in his most celebrated novel, *Egipetski Golub (The Egyptian Dove)*,³⁰ set in the Edirne of the 1860's. The background of the novel is surrounded by the Slav Question, Greco-Bulgarian dispute over Bulgarian ecclesiastical sovereignty, and Russian mission in the Balkans. Particularly, Russian-British rivalry and the conflict between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, as reflected in the attempts of the Catholic Church to spread Uniatism among Bulgarians, are the central political themes of the novel.

For Leontiev, Balkan Peninsula was the representation of beauty he searched throughout his life, the antidote to the average European man.³¹ The vivid description of the Turkish quarter in Edirne,³² “the pure air of this picturesque Moslem suburb,”³³ and the “enchanted” Selimiye mosque were all expressions of his aesthetic ecstasy. Called as the “Turkish Hegumen” by Rozanov, Leontiev sympathized with Islam because of its relative tolerance of the coexistence of good

²⁹ Konstantin Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove: The Story of a Russian*, trans. George Reavey (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), p. 71.

³⁰ Dove symbolizes the magical Orient. In *The Egyptian Dove*, Leontiev's attitude towards the East-West dichotomy can easily be observed. For a detailed analysis of the novel, see Henrietta Mondry, Sally Thompson, *Konstantin Leont'ev: An Examination of His Major Fiction* (Moscow: “Nauka” Oriental Literature Publishers, 1993), p.89. Monas aptly stated that the political observations revealed in *The Egyptian Dove* are the most interesting aspects of the novel. Monas, “Review: Leontiev: A Meditation,” p. 491.

³¹ Nicholas Rzhevsky, *Russian Literature and Ideology: Herzen, Dostoyevsky, Leontiev, Tolstoy, Fadayev* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 113.

³² Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 3, pp. 69–71.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 108.

and evil in life, and because of its permission for polygamy, which carried a poetic value in his eyes.³⁴

Leontiev's appraisal of the Orient was influenced by his antipathy towards Europe. Oriental crowds, not as a social entity but as a pictorial setting, definitely attracted him far more than average European man. He witfully stated:

I must admit that I love Oriental bandits, love them of course not in the sense that I should like to be captured by them or that they should remain unpunished, but in the sense in which one might prefer a wolf, hyena, or all the more a leopard to a domesticated pig or a harmless donkey.³⁵

In the Ottoman Empire, Leontiev gladly observed that there was not a trace of liberal progress and bourgeois culture predominant in Europe: "I do prefer the Turks to the French. The French have invented democratic progress."³⁶ Actually, this quite superficial vision is a proof of Leontiev's lack of information about the Ottoman society of the second half of the nineteenth century. The modernization process was already underway in the Ottoman Empire after the Tanzimat reforms. Yet, Leontiev saw in the Ottoman society what his Oriental imagery permitted him to see.

Leontiev thought that he found in the Ottoman Empire what Europe lost long ago, and what was missing in his native Russia. The diplomatic service in the Balkans was, for him, a welcome escape from the Europeanized Russian society. Comparing the Orient to the Occident, he explained:

The Orient is picturesque; Europe is plain, in the worst sense. Look at all our clothes, civilian as well as military, at these top hats and kepis... here in the

³⁴ Rozanov, "Vstuplenie," p. 31. In *The Egyptian Dove*, on a question as to what he disliked about the Orient, he criticized his co-religionists' lack of romanticism in family life. Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 42. See also, Leontiev, "Greeks, Bulgarians, and Russians," Leontiev, *Against the Current*, p. 201. In this attitude towards family tradition, he was more European than Russian, and differed from the Slavophiles, who were uncompromisingly traditionalists. Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 43.

³⁵ Leontiev, "Consul in Adrianople," *Against the Current*, p. 62.

³⁶ Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 233.

Orient I still see a variegated crowd of these people dressed in non-European fashion, I admit that I attach more value to each manifestation of soul and mind in them than I do to the incomparably stronger feelings and qualities hidden beneath this vile jacket and loose-fitting coat... These symbols of our decline, this monstrous *fashion*! This is death, this is mourning!³⁷

The Oriental theme in Leontiev's mind should be analyzed in line with his aesthetic considerations and historical philosophy. As an intellectual whose ideas were centered on aesthetic criteria rather than human dignity, he appreciated the authenticity of Ottoman society and Turkish character because he found beauty in them. He thought that Oriental life, far from being monotonous and unvarying, was a genuine combination of different life forms, rich in contrasts, original and vivid. This was exactly what Leontiev praised enthusiastically, and dreamed for his native Russia. In the cyclical process of history, the Eastern civilization, with its primitive simplicity, was more promising than the dying out West. Obviously, Leontiev's appraisal of the Ottoman society had much in common with the European Orientalist discourse, and was marked by superficial assessments and simplifying generalizations.

4.2.3. The Image of "Tsargrad"

Though it is difficult to say whether the Turkish or the Greek elements were more precious, Constantinople was especially dear to him, and this fondness had a

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 40–41.

considerable impact on his Byzantinist political discourse.³⁸ In August 1875, in a letter, he wrote: “Poverty in the Bosphorus is preferable to wealth here [Russia].”³⁹ In another letter, he regretted he could not live there for life:

I love that town, the Islands, the Greeks and the Turks... I love everything there, and you may be certain that I feel keenly the fact that I am unable to settle down there forever. Neither Moscow, Petersburg, nor Kudinovo, neither the most lucrative posts nor the saintliest of monasteries, could afford me as much satisfaction as Constantinople... Alone the life of Constantinople... that multiple life alone can satisfy my *intolerably* refined tastes.⁴⁰

As the holy seat of the universal Christian Emperor, and the symbol of classical Greek, Roman, and Christian heritage, Constantinople, the second Rome, was the spiritual centre of Orthodoxy. The restoration of St. Sophia was a widely referred phenomenon in Russian conservative thinking, which was also valid for Leontiev:

Tsargrad itself, this presently Turkish, commercial, half-European Constantinople, is in the eyes of our people Tsargrad the holy, the Tsargrad of the apostolic Emperor Constantine, the city of St. Sophia, the city of ecumenical cathedrals, a holy place, too, only temporarily defiled by the nonbelievers.⁴¹

The city symbolized for Russian conservatives the rise of the Orthodox-Slavic epoch led by the Russian Tsar. However, Leontiev was disinterested in the glory of the Slavic world. Constantinople, on the one hand appealed to his aesthetic

³⁸ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 47. For the image of Constantinople in Leontiev’s philosophy, see Ivask, *Konstantin Leont’ev*, pp. 223–224.

³⁹ Ivask, *Konstantin Leont’ev*, p. 222.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, pp. 46–47.

⁴¹ Leontiev, “Thrace,” *Against the Current*, p. 181.

standards, on the other, evoked his Orthodox sensitivities. Therefore, his emotional attachment to the holy city was related to the two baselines of his political Byzantinism.

4.3. Nationalism and the Slav Cause:

Leontiev, even during his diplomatic service, was uncompromisingly against nationalism, which he viewed as very dangerous because of its democratic premises. “Cosmopolitan democratism and political nationalism – these are but two shades of one and the same color.”⁴² Pure political nationalism, without any consideration for existential originality, would only help the creation of a uniform middle class all around Europe. For Leontiev, nations were meaningful only when they functioned as the creative force behind the expression of a peculiar culture.⁴³ Otherwise, nationalist movements, as the upholders of liberal and democratic tendencies, could do nothing more than contributing to the final disintegration of cultures.

Quite different from the Russian conservative camp, he was opposed to the Russification of non-Russians, including Tatars, Poles, and Jews, since he saw Russification as a threat to cultural diversity.⁴⁴ According to Leontiev, the aristocratic heritage of Baltic Germans and Polish gentry were bulwarks against cultural decadence, and government support for Baltic nations to counter German

⁴² Leontiev, “Russia and the Russians,” *Against the Current*, p. 206.

⁴³ Italy and Greece started to lose the originality of their cultures after independence. Slavs were in the same direction according to Leontiev. Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 303.

⁴⁴ Konstantin Leontiev to Vasily Rozanov, 13 June 1891, *Pis'ma k Vasiliu Rozanovu* (London: Nina Karsov, 1981), pp. 76–77.

and Polish claims was a fatal error.⁴⁵ Leontiev was fully consistent in his advocacy of aristocracy and privileged social classes that he supported the maintainance of Hungarian, Turkish or German aristocratic privileges, whether at the expense of Slavs or not.⁴⁶ He was equally sincere in his anti-nationalist attitude, and for this reason he preferred a colourful, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious empire with a wide-range of peoples in it to a Russified homogenous state.

Religion, as the bearer of the originality of a culture, was more valued by Leontiev than the nationalist cause. In this sense, he was akin to Vladimir Soloviev, who also defended religious ideal over the national one.⁴⁷ Ethnicity and nationality, without being supported by a more supreme idea, did not carry any intrinsic value for Leontiev, and Slav nationalism was no exception. In his case, Byzantinism was associated with this supreme idea that might elevate Russia. For such opinions, Leontiev came to be regarded as a traitor to the Slav cause by his contemporaries.⁴⁸

Leontiev was equally hostile to the idea of a Panslavic federation, since he held negative ideas about the democratic tendencies of the Balkan and Austrian Slavs, whom he viewed as the representatives of the Western bourgeoisie and the chief antagonists of the Byzantine culture.⁴⁹ He feared that the cultural influence of other Slavs might introduce liberal and democratic tendencies to Russia. "Which is

⁴⁵ Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 307. It might seem interesting that Leontiev sympathized with the 1863 revolution in Poland. Actually, this is a sign that he was consistent in his advocacy for gentry domination. The subsequent Russification policy in Poland and the crushing of Polish aristocracy, according to Leontiev, accelerated the process of homogenization and significantly damaged the peculiarity of Polish culture. Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth Century Russian Thought* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 527.

⁴⁶ Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, Vol. I, pp. 213–214.

⁴⁷ However, Soloviev's attack against nationalism did not stem from his hostility against egalitarian ideas, and this difference later caused the breaking off his relations with Leontiev. See, Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, pp. 575–576. Berdiaev compared the priority of universalist elements over national values in Soloviev's and Leontiev's thinking, and concludes that in Leontiev's ideology, Byzantine meant what Rome symbolized in Soloviev's philosophy. Berdiaev, *Leontiev*, p. 154.

⁴⁸ Berdiaev, *Leontiev*, p. 54.

⁴⁹ "In a word, our western and southern brother Slavs in their virtues and vices resemble far more than we do the European bourgeois of the most average style." Leontiev, "Russia and the Russians," *Against the Current*, p. 204.

better,” he asked, “the fusion of Russians with Southern Slavs and as a result, the inevitable loss of last [traces of] cultural originality that separates us from the West; or union, rapprochement, amalgamation with Turks, Tibetans, Indians or whatever, only to create something organic, peculiar to us, under their, though indirect influence?”⁵⁰

For Leontiev, the political and religious heritage inherited from the Byzantine Empire was more meaningful than the Slavic roots. Without the Byzantine imprint upon it, the Slavic culture was merely an “ethnographic material,”⁵¹ open to Western bourgeois penetration. Leontiev envisioned Constantinople the capital not of a Slavic federation, but of a regenerated Byzantium. Basically, he was not interested in the extension of Russian patronage over the Slavic world if it would simply be a national union. His goal with regard to the Slav Question was not the “liberation” of Russia’s brethren, if political independence would throw them towards vulgar Europeanization. In a heated vein, he exclaimed: “It is not for this that Russian eagles have flown beyond the Danube and the Balkans, not in order that the Serbs and Bulgars should later, in freedom, hatch the chicken eggs of middle-class Europeanism.”⁵² Slavs should be prevented from becoming bourgeois, and he believed that without the disciplinary influence of Russia, they might easily be Europeanized.⁵³ He feared that “... if the Turks were driven out of Constantinople, and Russia failed to replace their conservative rule by a discipline of her own, Constantinople would become the centre of an international Revolution which would eclipse that of Paris.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Konstantin Leontiev, *Moia Literaturnaia Sud’ba: Avtobiografiia* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), p. 57.

⁵¹ Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p. 521.

⁵² Leontiev, “Russia and the Russians,” *Against the Current*, p. 205.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 205.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 56.

Russians appeared as the natural leaders of the Slavs, basically the Southern Slavs. This leadership did not stem from an inherent quality their Slavic origins granted them but because of their peculiar Asiatic-Turanian roots. Leontiev thought that the Asiatic ingredients of the Russian cultural makeup, which distinguished Russians from the rest of the Slavic world, was instrumental in containing bourgeois European culture. Bearing this mind, Russian supremacy over the Balkan Slavs was not unconditional: it depended on their loyalty to the supreme Byzantinist ideal.

In foreign policy, Leontiev did not imagine the ultimate destruction of the Austrian and the Ottoman Empires.⁵⁵ These archaic empires, in his view, would be instrumental in containing the phase of secondary simplification in the cyclical process of history. Leontiev purported that Russia particularly should seek the protection of the Austrian Empire to keep the liberal influence of Western Slavs away. He was grateful to the Turkish rule for isolating Balkan Slavs from Europe, and thus helping the preservation of their originality.⁵⁶ This is why he exclaimed: "... we must raise a Moslem storm, hang a Moslem scimitar above this ecclesiastically educated, devout but not in the least romantic, rather stiff, cold Eastern society of the first half of this [nineteenth] century."⁵⁷ What was problematic about the Turkish rule, according to Leontiev, was that it was centrally weakened so that it gave way to European interference. The Russian policy in the Balkans should emphasize the continuation of the Ottoman rule, until a Byzantinized Russia, autocratic and theocratic, would be capable of taking its place.⁵⁸ He would welcome the survival of the Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor, as long as the holy Tsargrad was restored in

⁵⁵ Boris Filippov, "Strastnoe pis'mo s nevernym adresom," *Moia Literaturnaia Sud'ba: Avtobiografiia* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), p. 10.

⁵⁶ Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 303.

⁵⁷ Leontiev, "Greeks, Bulgarians, and Russians," *Against the Current*, p. 202.

⁵⁸ He drew attention to the critical role of the Ottoman Empire for preserving international stability. Konstantin Dolgov, "A Word About Konstantin Leontiev," *International Affairs*, Vol. 52, No: 5 (2006), p. 191.

conformity with his Byzantinist ambitions.⁵⁹ Furthermore, he was apprehensive that an early collapse of the Ottoman Empire, if it would catch Russia unprepared, might lead to a Greco-Bulgarian conflict for the possession of Constantinople. To avoid such an undesirable situation, Russia should devise an all-embracing ideology for this expected collapse beforehand.⁶⁰ In this sense, his Slav policy had much in common with that of Nicholas I instead of the Slavophiles and the Panslavists.⁶¹

4.3.1. A Particular Case: Greco-Bulgarian Dispute of 1870

An exemplary case showing Leontiev's attitude with regard to the Slavic question was his position in the Greco-Bulgarian Church schism, which led to breach of his relations with ambassador Count Nikolai Ignatiev, and ultimately his redignation from diplomatic service.⁶²

The period in which Leontiev served as a diplomat were the ripening years of Bulgarian nationalism.⁶³ In the mids of nineteenth century, a yet immature cultural awakening started among the educated Bulgarians. Turkish rule, accompanied by the ecclesiastical and cultural domination of Greeks, gave Bulgarian nationalism an anti-Greek as well as anti-Turkish direction. Throwing off the religious and cultural ascendancy of Greeks was the first impulse towards further Bulgarian political pretensions.

⁵⁹ Hare, *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought*, p. 352.

⁶⁰ Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, pp. 159–160.

⁶¹ Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, Vol. I, p. 213.

⁶² Lukashevich, *Konstantin Leontev*, p. 78.

⁶³ For further information on the emergence of Bulgarian nationalism, see Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 335–344.

Throughout 1860's, the Constantinopolitan Church went through several organizational changes, as a result of the reform edict of 18 February 1856 that had provisions for the re-organization of the Ottoman Christians. However, Bulgarian clergymen were no longer content with minor reforms, and nothing short of an autonomous Church seemed to satisfy their aspirations. An apparent expression of the Bulgarian designs came in April 1860, when the Bulgarian Church in Constantinople replaced the Patriarch's name in its sermons with that of the Sultan's.⁶⁴ As a concession to Bulgarian demands, Greek Church eased the use of Bulgarian language, and in 1867, even acceded to an autonomous Bulgarian Church within a territorially limited area. When agreement was reached on the autonomy of the Bulgarian Church, the territory that its jurisdiction would cover turned to be a bone of contention. As a matter of fact, under the guise of a religious friction, a political conflict of the opposing nationalist aspirations of Greeks and Bulgarians was on the way. The disagreement over the territorial jurisdiction of the proposed Bulgarian Church had direct influence on the Macedonian question of the later decades.

Not only local elements but also foreign actors were effective in the making of the crisis.⁶⁵ Russia was in a delicate position: Although the Panslavist party led by ambassador Ignatiev was sympathetic towards Bulgarian claims, they abstained from alienating the Patriarchate and yet another Orthodox people, Greeks. Moreover, Russian diplomats were apprehensive about the activities of Catholic and Protestant missionaries who tried to win over Bulgarians to their side by manipulating their nationalist sensitivities. In short, Balkan Peninsula, in 1860's and 1870's was the scene of conflicting interests between Russia, Britain, France, and Austria.

⁶⁴ For further information on the Greco-Bulgarian dispute, see L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 364–380.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

The solution came with an edict that the Turkish government issued in March 1870. This edict authorized the autonomy of a Bulgarian Exarchate, whose territorial jurisdiction might be extended to new provinces as far as two thirds of the inhabitants consented. This stipulation, while creating a deep split among the Ottoman Christians, opened the way for future Bulgarian political autonomy.

Leontiev's attitude towards the Greco-Bulgarian dispute was an exact reflection of his Byzantinist discourse, that he upheld against Slav nationalism. Leontiev from the very start interpreted Bulgarian pretensions for an autonomous Church as an illegal defiance against the Ecumenical Patriarch, and an expression of racial nationalism. The victory of the autonomous Bulgarian Exarchate was, for him, the triumph of democracy and nationalism over the Church, which should have been above national interests and patriotic feelings.

Leontiev longed the days when Turks referred to Greeks and Bulgarians only as Christians.⁶⁶ As long as the Turkish rule was firmly maintained, he claimed that Balkan Christians were more faithful to the Church, and Orthodoxy had a more dominant place in every aspect of life. National peculiarities of either Greeks or Bulgarians did not have predominance. However, with the decline of the Turkish rule, religion turned to be a mere expression of nationalist ambitions, a tool for secular activity. He acknowledged that the Ottoman Christians were independent in their daily affairs, which caused that education, religion, and society were fused into each other.⁶⁷ Consequently, whereas Church in Russia solely had a religious character, among the Balkan peoples it also had a political mission. Once Balkan Christians acquired their political independence, there would nothing be left to attach them to the Church tradition. They would turn into imitations of European middle-

⁶⁶ Leontiev, "Greeks, Bulgarians, and Russians," *Against the Current*, p. 202.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 198–199.

class, and their cultures would face disintegration even before creating anything complex and unique.

In the *Egyptian Dove*, Leontiev skillfully depicted the concurrency of the rising Bulgarian nationalism with rivalry of foreign powers in the Balkans. Among the major powers active in the struggle, he counted France, Britain, Greece, and Russia, whereas Austria he disregarded as an effective actor.⁶⁸ He especially devoted much attention to Russian rivalry with the British to gain influence over local Christians. Russians, being in a difficult position, undertook to reconcile both Greeks and Bulgarians, since they could not risk alienating neither of them.⁶⁹ On the other hand, Russian diplomats did not want to give opportunity to the British and the Catholic propaganda.⁷⁰

The contention between powers showed itself in the attempts of the foreign missionaries to spread Uniatism.⁷¹ Especially young Bulgarians, in the hope of finding an ally for their nationalist cause in Europe, were likely to convert to the Uniate faith. In addition, by eliminating Greek influence, the young nationalists aspired for the transformation of the Ottoman Empire into a Turkish-Bulgarian Empire, the Sultan being the “Bulgarian Tsar,” based on the example of Austria-Hungary.⁷² However, far from granting Bulgarians a base for independence from the Greek Church, Uniate schism created discord among Bulgarian people. In the end, Uniate propaganda could not succeed among Bulgarians. The Russian Consulate successfully undertook campaigns to attract Bulgarians back to Orthodoxy, like the

⁶⁸ Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 132.

⁶⁹ For the attempts of Russian diplomats to bridge the gap between Greeks and Bulgarians, see Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 175.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 104–105.

⁷¹ Uniatism, in terms of hierarchy recognized the supreme authority of the Pope, while maintaining Orthodox rituals. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, p. 373.

⁷² Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 81.

establishment of a Bulgarian school with Russian subsidies.⁷³ Leontiev, in his depiction of these young nationalists, treated them either as greedy opportunists, or as inexperienced youth lured by false premises.⁷⁴

Leontiev's perception of the Greek and Bulgarian nations had impact on his analysis of the dispute between them. Leontiev recognized that Greeks and Bulgarians had vital importance for Russia, as a result of the strategic location of their homelands, but still warned for caution against both of them.⁷⁵ Though Leontiev recognized Russians superior to both, he observed that the Greeks, as the inheritors of the Byzantine tradition and with their highly diversified traditions, culture, and social structure stood at a higher level than the comparably more homogenous Bulgarians.⁷⁶ In the end, it was Greeks that Russians received Christianity.⁷⁷ He thought that different from Western powers, Russian policy with regard to the Eastern Question had a religious character, and Russian policy-makers should not fall into the trap of ethnic nationalism.⁷⁸ Therefore, as the representatives of the Byzantine heritage, as the true heirs of the Orthodox faith, Greeks were of supreme importance for Russian Eastern policy, even more than the Balkan Slavs. In *The Egyptian Dove*, the protagonist Ladnev's skepticism about the Slavs is basically a reflection of Leontiev's attitude:

...the Slavs are far more easily and sincerely well disposed toward the Catholic powers than toward the Greeks. This is very natural: the Greeks do not have, either in Austria or in Poland, millions of Orthodox brothers. The Greeks are all *alone* in the world. There are just over four million of them,

⁷³ Ibid, p. 90.

⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 77–82. In another instance, he depicts a semi-educated Bulgarian Uniat, who served as an Austrian dragoman as a simple and incapable man, “worshiper of everything European.” Ibid, p. 128.

⁷⁵ Leontiev, “Thrace,” *Against the Current*, p. 174.

⁷⁶ Leontiev, “Greeks, Bulgarians, and Russians,” *Against the Current*, pp. 185–202.

⁷⁷ He stated: “Greeks had baptized us.” Leontiev, “Thrace,” *Against the Current*, p. 180.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 179.

and their whole strength lies in their Orthodox traditions, not in their tribal traditions. Russia and the Greeks-these are the pillars of Orthodoxy. The Slavs can always change. But the interests of both Russia and the Greeks demand, first of all, that Orthodoxy be strong, whereas the Slavs might have other inclinations.⁷⁹

However, this should not be taken to mean that he trusted Greeks *per se*. He regretted that Greeks were as open to European bourgeois influence as other Balkan Christians, and "... as soon as the Turkish yoke had been cast off the corsair would don a cheap jacket and spend his days gossiping in the bars of Athens."⁸⁰ Leontiev was critical of the Ottoman Christians on the whole because he thought that in the daily lives, they lacked poetry. He especially expressed his contempt for the educated urban population among the Balkan population:

In the Orient, among Christians of the educated class, I perceived nothing of the sort... In their sentimental life there was neither pathos, nor music, nor grace, nor intelligence; among them I encountered only two extremes: the rigid morality of custom, or furtive, coarse, and dishonest debauchery...⁸¹

As Leontiev had no interest in Slavdom as it was, he was particularly uncongenial towards Bulgarians, whom he viewed as the holders of philistine European values. He thought that Bulgarian nation showed symptoms of an early transition from the first stage of historical development, that is, the primitive simplicity, to the third stage of final disintegration by being exposed to mediocre European culture.⁸² He claimed that Bulgarian nationalism was "saturated with

⁷⁹ Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, pp. 152–153.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 48.

⁸¹ Leontiev, *The Egyptian Dove*, p. 43.

⁸² Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p. 521.

cheap, realistic European concepts.”⁸³ Politically, he stated that Bulgarians will never be the allies of Russia.⁸⁴ When his views on the condition of Bulgarian and Greek societies are considered, one may better understand his position in the Greco-Bulgarian dispute.

In the final analysis, in Leontiev’s philosophy, the theme of Eastern question was treated as a part of Russia’s own destiny, as it related to Russia’s cultural prospects. His concerns were purely aesthetic, rather than political. If the Ottoman Empire was doomed to decline, then, Russia should fill the vacuum. Nevertheless, this policy should not be supported by nationalist ambitions. The supreme idea behind Russian policy should be the desire to regenerate the autocratic and theocratic Byzantium, and thus, providing Russia an opportunity to create an authentic civilization. However, he had faith neither in Russia nor in Balkan Christians, and was pessimistic about the realization of his designs. His comments on the tenability of Slav nationalism are especially remarkable. It would be appropriate to argue that Leontiev was more accurate in his foreign policy analyses than the Slavophiles and Panslavists, who mistakenly imagined that the prospective Turkish downfall in the Balkans would herald the beginning of a bright era for the Orthodox Slavic East under the leadership of the Russian Empire. In a more realist manner, Leontiev anticipated that upon gaining independence, Balkan Christian would turn their faces towards Europe rather than Russia, and the Panslavist utopia was destined to fail.

⁸³ Leontiev, “Greeks, Bulgarians, and Russians,” *Against the Current*, p. 194.

⁸⁴ Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, p. 58. His prophesy came to be true after the developments proceeding the Turkish-Russian War of 1877–1878.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Leontiev's political program rested on the necessity of regenerating Byzantine imprints upon Russian culture along with the strengthening of Oriental links as a bulwark against rising bourgeois values. His utopia, provocative enough, was a strongly autocratic, multi-ethnic theocracy with highly stratified social structure. Russian conquest of lands with Byzantine culture, especially Constantinople was thought to be a rejuvenating force. His handling of the Eastern Question was shaped by such considerations. In the Balkan affairs, he laid stress on the religious ties, contrary to the Panslavists who exaggerated the importance of ethnicity. He put forward that Russian foreign policy-makers should try to act in alliance with the Greek clergy and Turkish administration in the region.¹ He was more interested in the cultural re-organization of the Balkan Slavs than their political liberation. Leontiev's ideas were not derived from political partisanship. He evaluated Balkan nationalism, and in a wider sense Eastern Question, within the

¹ Monas, "Review: Leontiev: A Meditation," p. 491.

framework of his cyclical historiosophy, which was determined by an amoral aestheticism.

The realization of the Byzantine dream did not seem to be an expected outcome, even realized by Leontiev himself. The paradox was that once the former Orthodox-Slavic subjects of the Ottoman Empire gained independence, they immediately fell prey to the standardizing cultural influence of Europe. Russia, being an old country, could not offer the stimulating cultural inspiration. This resulted in his loss of faith in Russia's capability to produce a distinct flourishing culture. He prophesized the inevitable rise of socialism, not in a democratic but in a strictly authoritarian fashion.

Konstantin Leontiev was never influential in the ruling cadres because of the utopism of his ideas.² Though it is impossible to find Leontiev's political utopia desirable, his observations on the cultural impact of nationalism, liberalism, and the diffusion of middle-class values are of considerable interest. When he is treated as a critic of mass culture, one gets a better picture of his worth as a social and cultural philosopher. He was in an unprecedented way objective in his assessment of the international political conjuncture, and the burning questions of the day, like the Greco-Bulgarian conflict. Being a solitary man who did not feel the need to be the spokesperson of any particular ideological wave, he boldly stated that for Russia, a foreign policy direction based on ethnic ties would prove disastrous, to an extent no other intellectual else dared to express.

This Russian Nietzsche, the "persona non grata" of Russian intelligentsia, took an ecstatic delight from the never-ending clash in his soul, the juxtaposition of self-negation and vitalism. On the one hand, he was amazed by the majestic beauty

² Shchetinina, *Ideinaia zhizn' russkoi intelligentsii*, pp. 71–72.

of the living world, on the other, he exalted ascetism and made pessimistic foresights about future. In fact, this dichotomy itself carried an aesthetic value for him. Though he searched for aesthetic perfection in life and in history, he accepted that beauty could never triumph in earthly life. His approach to politics and culture was an extension of this aesthetic obsession, which came into being gradually since his childhood. The image of the Orient; the Ottoman Empire in particular, its peoples, his beloved Constantinople, his evaluation of the Asiatic elements in the Russian cultural make-up, and his attitude towards international political questions were all marked by this aesthetic sensitivity.

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