

A belated remark on a 1994 article*

Among the new entries displayed in August 1997 in the library of the Institute of Oriental Studies (St. Petersburg, Russia), I came across Bruce A. Elleman's article «Soviet territorial concessions in China and the May 30th movement: 1917-1927» (*Journal of Oriental Studies /Centre of Asian studies, Univ. of Hong Kong*. 1994. Vol. 32. N 2. P. 162-181). In this article Elleman claims that in the 1920s the Soviet government regained control over most of the Russian property in China. He believes that there were four categories of Russian property in China — legations, consulates, real estate and churches (p. 166), all of which through secret diplomacy with the Peking government (p. 162) were handed over to the USSR. I know nothing about the first three «categories of Russian property». As to the Russian Orthodox churches, Elleman claims seem to me rather doubtful.

On the very first page of Elleman's article we read: «Following the opening of diplomatic relations with China in 1924, the Soviet government... also regained control of all Russian Orthodox churches in China». And further: «Finally, Karakhan even coerced Peking into handing back all Russian Orthodox churches prior to the conference, even though the May 31, 1924 treaty had specifically stated that this issue would be discussed only at the upcoming conference»¹. In «Conclusions» Elleman states: «Furthermore, the Bolsheviks — avowed atheists notwithstanding — took back all of the Russian Orthodox churches in China» (p. 176).

I was born in China and my family belonged to, as Elleman puts it, «the White Russians.» I had as a close relative a high Orthodox priest, who stayed in China from the beginning of the 1920s up to 1956. Hence I am «from within» and know for certain (the documentary evidences are given below) that the opposite was the case. It appears indeed like a miracle (if we bear in mind only the situation in China — civil wars, Japanese occupation, etc., not taking into account the general negative attitude of the Soviet government towards the Church). The Russian Orthodox Church together with its large amount of real estate survived in China not only through the 1920s, but through the 1930s and 1940s up to the middle of the 1950s. However, Elleman is not to be blamed for this inaccuracy — the inadequate description of the events which happened in China more than seventy years ago is quite understandable in view of the lack of published data on the subject. Obviously, «documents located in the Peking government's Foreign Ministry Archives in Taiwan» (p. 162), which represent Elleman's main source material, seem to be not quite sufficient for elucidating the problem. I hope these short notes of a *waihang*

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will be useful additional data for those interested in reconstructing the chain of events which took place in China in the 1920s in connection with the Russian Orthodox Church (I do not touch upon other theses of B. Elleman's article).

First of all, I would like to stress that despite the fact that Elleman's speculations give an impression that the property belonged to a kind of abstract entity by the name of the Russian Orthodox Church in China,² the property was specifically under the ownership of the Russian Orthodox Mission in China (hereafter ROMC)³, and I leave out of consideration the Orthodox Church property in Manchuria.

It seems that while working on his article Elleman was quite unaware of the existence of such a religious institution, but its key role in the events at issue here is not to be denied.

ROMC itself, especially in the context of these notes, deserves special attention. In 1685 after a rather long siege, the Chinese seized a Russian fortress situated on the Amur river, namely, Albazin. The Chinese took back to Peking 45 Cossacks, defenders of the fortress, who were accompanied by an Orthodox priest. When the Cossacks reached Peking, they were heartily welcomed by Emperor Kang-xi who gave them a piece of land at the north-eastern corner of Peking inside the city wall. The place was, and still is, called Bei-guan. Furthermore, Kang-xi granted to the Cossacks for their liturgical needs a Buddhist temple situated in Bei-guan. This is why ROMC considered 1685 as the year of its foundation. The official foundation of the ROMC was decreed by Peter the Great in 1700, and the first Mission came to Peking in 1715⁴. During the long existence of ROMC over the ensuing centuries, there were altogether 20 missions. After the 1917 October revolution ROMC came under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. In 1944 Archbishop Victor⁵ appealed to Patriarch of Moscow for the reunion with the Moscow Patriarchy, and their relation was formally re-established in 1945. Officially the Moscow Patriarchy abolished the ROMC on July 3, 1954; however, ROMC continued to exist in China for two more years. In 1956 Archbishop Victor transferred the Mission's property to the Soviet legation in Peking. This information is taken from a letter dated October 17, 1963, addressed to Mitropolit Nicodim, the head of the department of foreign relations of the Moscow Patriarchy: «After the abolishment of the ROMC ... all the Mission's property, irrespective of its whereabouts in China, and in keeping with the March 11, 1955 prescription of the Moscow Patriarchy, I handed over to the USSR legation in Peking».

Having carried out the Moscow Patriarchy's prescription, Archbishop Victor left China in May 1956, after 35 years in Bei-guan⁶.

Now let us turn to the main subject of these notes.

By 1924 ROMC had existed in China for more than 200 years (the celebration of its 250th anniversary took place in 1935)⁷.

Despite the fact that during the Boxer uprising in 1900 Bei-guan was totally ruined and everything on its territory (including trees and bushes) was burnt down, by 1917 all the buildings (two churches, a steeple and two monasteries) were built anew. Moreover, after the Boxer uprising, as a token of gratitude⁸, the Chinese government presented to ROMC a large piece of land to the south of its previous

territory. In 1912 Archbishop Innocent (1863-1931), the head of the 18th Mission, purchased an additional piece of land (about 30000 square metres, later named by the ROMC's inhabitants as the Southern Park)⁹ located to the south of their new acquisition after the Boxer uprising. Because of that, Bei-guan's main entrance was now at 21 Yang-guan hutung.¹⁰

The attempt to seize such a tasty morsel as the property of ROMC was first undertaken by L. Karakhan in the first half of the 1920s, but failed, as Archbishop Innocent proved successfully that the property did not legally belong to the Russian government but was in the possession of the Church and so could not be included in the list of the properties of Tsarist Russia.

Bishop Victor in the jubilee issue of *Kitajskij Blagovestnik*¹¹ states as follows: «At that time [after 1921-22] representatives of the USSR made a swift attempt to abolish the Mission. The 1924 treaty between USSR and China threatened the Mission with depriving it of all its property. It seemed that there was no chance for surviving, but at the expense of a lot of trouble and anxiety, as well as emotion, Mitropolite Innocent managed to uphold the Mission — he had clearly proved that the Mission's property was not in the possession of the Russian state, but belonged to the Church».

I am sure that Archbishop Innocent's impeccable reputation, as well as the profound respect he enjoyed among the Chinese officials (no doubt due to his intercession against the destruction of Yong-he-gong) helped him greatly here.

As Elleman clearly shows on page 166, the change in Peking's attitude towards the Orthodox Church's property was evidently caused by Soviet pressure. At first, Peking officials did not even mention the Church's property: «In particular, this 13 October, 1923 draft [compiled by the Peking officials — K.K.] stated: «The Soviet Government agrees to renounce *the concessions, military barracks, and parade grounds* [italics are mine] leased as well as established by the former Russian Government in China». Article 1 of the 31 May, 1924 Sino-Soviet treaty cited by Elleman proclaimed: «The Government of the Republic of China agrees to take the necessary steps to transfer to the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics *the Legation and Consular buildings* [italics are mine] formerly belonging to the Tsarist Government». As we observe, again nothing is said about the Church property. In Elleman's article we read: «In a declaration [first declaration] which was added at the end of this treaty, Peking and Moscow also agreed that each government would «hand over to each other *all the real estate and movable properties owned by China and the former Tsarist Government* [italics are mine] and found in their respective territories». And only in the third declaration attached to the treaty was it «agreed that China would return [to whom?] *the Russian Orthodox Church properties in Peking and Patachu, a town just outside of Peking* [italics are mine]¹², and that the question of «transfer or other suitable disposal» of all other Russian Orthodox churches would be discussed at the upcoming Sino-Soviet conferences, scheduled to meet one month later».

This «upcoming Sino-Soviet conference» which, as was stated in the 31 May, 1924 treaty, had to be convened within a month, was actually not held until much later, and as Elleman puts it (p. 168), «during the next 14 months Karakhan delayed the conference time and time again in order to force Peking to carry out this demand [to gain control of the Russian property in China]». According to Elleman, the conference was held in August 1925, i.e., when Karakhan had consolidated «control over Outer Mongolia, the Chinese Eastern Railway, the Peking legation and numerous Russian consulates, property and churches all over China» (p. 173).

However, having analyzed Elleman's statement on the reasons of postponing the Sino-Soviet conference and the facts known from publications made by the ROMC during the period of its existence, one may suppose that the delay of the conference was connected with (the) Karakhan's unsuccessful attempts to gain the ROMC's property (it seems that there were no such difficulties in respect to other kinds of Russian property).

Having read attentively the so-called third declaration in Elleman's rendition, one gets the impression of a certain lack of clarity in its wording (here I will not go into details). However, much more striking is the discrepancy between the Russian and the Chinese texts of this declaration. According to Elleman (having no access to the Chinese original of the «third declaration», I rely exclusively upon Elleman's interpretation of the Chinese text), the declaration proclaims: 1) China will return the Russian Orthodox Church property in Peking and Badachu, 2) the question of «transfer or other suitable disposal» of all other Russian Orthodox churches will be discussed at the upcoming Sino-Soviet conference. The Russian text of the same declaration, however, runs as follows: «As to the buildings and the property of the Russian Orthodox Mission situated in Peking and Potashu¹³ which belong to the government of the USSR, the government of China will take measures for the possible immediate transfer of it in keeping with the Chinese laws and rules concerning the property in China, as soon as the government of USSR will indicate a person of Chinese nationality or a suitable organization»¹⁴.

As we can now see, the Russian Orthodox Mission is mentioned in the Russian text, and not in the Chinese text. Even more interesting is the point concerning «a person of Chinese nationality or a suitable organization», whom the Soviet government had to find — this passage is again absent from the Chinese text. The most important point in the Russian text seems to be the claim that the property should belong to the Soviet government. It seems that Archbishop Innocent, who was equally fluent in colloquial and written Chinese¹⁵, made use of this inconsistency and thus saved the church property.

In his article Elleman makes one rather questionable assertion without indicating clearly his source of information. He states: «Karakhan's interest in acquiring control of the Russian Orthodox churches in China is especially noteworthy because of the Bolsheviks' avowed opposition to religion. This would suggest that the Soviet government wanted to use these buildings for non-religious purposes¹⁶. This supposition is supported by the fact (no reference is given) that the Soviet government quickly evicted the Orthodox Russian monks, who had continued

their religious duties in China throughout the Russian civil war, as well as those Russians who had fled war-torn Russia to take refuge in these churches» (p. 170).

This «fact» however, has nothing to do with reality¹⁷. Russian monks continued to stay in China, the last two (Archbishop Victor and the monk Seraphim who for many years was in charge of the ROMC library) left China only in May 1956, and the Russians «who had fled war-torn Russia» continued to live in China as well¹⁸. Only after the Second World War did Russians (White Russians) began to leave China en masse. Our family (father, mother and me) left China in June 1954.

Obviously, Elleman could not himself invent the «fact» about the eviction of Russians in the 1920s¹⁹, but where did he get it from? This is a question which I would like to have answered.

Before concluding my notes, I would like to touch upon one more problem — the so-called White Russians. It seems that in Elleman's article there is a misunderstanding of the term which becomes evident in the following statement: «About the only Russian lands actually returned to China [during 1917-27] were those owned by the Bolsheviks' enemies, the White Russians. Even this relatively small gain is questionable, since many of the White Russians sold their property to other foreigners prior to the opening of Sino-Soviet negotiations in 1920» (p. 176). However, in China «prior to the opening of Sino-Soviet negotiations in 1920» there were *Russians* (merchants, diplomats, monks, etc.). The *White Russians* fled Russia after the civil war and began to pour into China only in 1921-22. Hence, before that time in China there were no White Russians and, consequently, no property belonging to White Russians.

Notes

1. According to Elleman (p. 167), the Sino-Soviet conference «was scheduled to meet at the end of June» 1924.

2. In the Russian text of, as Elleman puts it, the third declaration appended to the May 31, 1924 Sino-Soviet treaty is the expression «the property of the Russian Orthodox Mission». See: *Sovetsko-kitajskie otnoshenija, 1917-1957. Sbornik dokumentov.* (Soviet-Chinese Relations, 1917-1957. Collection of documents) Moscow. 1959. P. 86. No. 45.

3. ROMC is the name the Mission used itself (precisely this name was written both on the first page of the Mission's periodical *Kitajskij Blagovestnik* and on the gates of the Mission compound). In Chinese it was named *Zhu Hua E zhengjiao hui* (see Archbishop Innocent's visiting card). E. Widmer names it «The Russian ecclesiastical mission in Peking». See: Widmer E. *The Russian ecclesiastical mission in Peking during the eighteenth century.* Cambridge, Mass. 1976 (Harvard East Asian monog.; 69); In the publication of papers presented at the conference devoted to the ROMC which was held in 1991 in St. Petersburg (it was the first conference on ROMC after the 1917 October revolution), one finds the correct name — Russian Orthodox Mission in China. See: *Pravoslavie na Dol' nem Vostoke: 275 letie Rossijskoi*

duhovnoj missii v Kitae (Orthodoxy in the Far East: 275th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Mission in China). SPb., 1993.

4. For details see Petrov V.R. «Rossijskaja Duhovnaja Missia v Kitae» (Russian Orthodox Mission in China). Washington. 1968. P. 4-20. A very brief history of the ROMC can also be found in the contemporary Russian periodical press: see January 30, 1993, *Izvestia*, «Ukaz imperatora Kang-xi. Posol'stvo Rossii v Kitae stoit na zemle, podarennoj bogdyhanom amurskim kazakam» (By Emperor Kang-xi's decree, the Russian legation is situated on the land presented to the Amur Cossacks by the *Bogdyhang*).

5. Archbishop Victor (Sviatin, 1893-1966), the head of the last, 20th Mission. In this article he is also named «Bishop Victor» and «Mitropolite Victor».

6. Shortly after Archbishop Victor's departure, the churches and the steeple in Bei-guan were blown up and the Soviet legation was transferred from the Legation Quarter to Bei-guan (see also note 16).

7. Kitajskij Blagovestnik, 1685-1935. Jubilejnyi sbornik, posvjatchennyi 250-letiu so dnija osnovanija Rossijskoj Duhovoj Missii v Kitae. (Jubilee issue commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Mission in China). 1935.

8. The story is really fascinating. When the Allied troops entered Peking (the Boxer Uprising was then well over), Archimandrite Innocent (later he would be made Archbishop and then Mitropolite) left the Legation Quarter, where he had been given asylum during the rebellion. He made his way to Bei-guan. However, it proves that nowhere in Bei-guan could he lay his head. Archimandrite Innocent was then given shelter in the nearby lamaist temple, the famous Yong-he-gong (this fact is by itself significant, since it shows the Chinese attitude towards the Mission). One day a detachment of German troops came to the temple with the intention to rob it (cf. the disastrous consequences of a similar situation at Yuan-ming-yuan, the old summer palace outside the Peking wall, which was utterly devastated in 1860). Archimandrite Innocent came out and told the marauders that he personally was living in the temple and that he would not tolerate any damage to it. His imposing appearance and fluent German impressed the marauders, and they withdrew. Thus, the head of the ROMC saved the famous Yong-he-gong from, as it seemed to be, unavoidable devastation. See: *Kitajskij Blagovestnik: 1685-1935: Jubilejnyj sbornik...* P. 46. The incident was described in one of the papers presented at the conference on ROMC in 1991. See: Ipatova A.S. *Prazdnovanie 250-letija Rossijskoj duhovnoj missii v Kitae, 1935.* (The celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Mission in China, 1935)// *Pravoslavie na Dal'nem Vostoke...* P. 77.

9. By that time ROMC was flourishing so much that Archbishop Innocent was able to make regular purchases of land both inside Peking and in its vicinity as well as other parts of China.

10. Yang-guan hutung is still found on modern maps of Peking.

11. Kitajskij Blagovestnik: 1685-1935: Jubilejnyj sbornik... P. 30.

12. Patachu, i.e. Badachu — The Eight Great Places, obviously not identified by Elleman. These Eight Great Places were eight temples situated one above the

other in a defile of the Western Hills (Xi Shan) near Peking. ROMC owned a piece of land in Xi Shan with a little monastery (in Russian, *skit*) on it. In 1949 the land was still in the possession of the ROMC. See the list of the ROMC's property in Archbishop Victor's report No. 266 addressed to the Moscow Patriarchy, December 1949.

13. Rather strange is the Russian rendering of the place name Badachu as Potashu, which does not coincide with any of the names known to me in Russian transcriptions of Chinese place names.

14. Sovetsko-kitajskie otnoshenija: 1917-1957... P. 86. No. 45.

15. By 1924 Archbishop Innocent had stayed in China for thirty years. He was the author of a huge Chinese-Russian dictionary in two volumes, published by ROMC in 1909.

16. Elleman proves to be correct: when, at last, in 1956 Soviet officials received among other properties of ROMC Bei-guan, they immediately transferred the Soviet legation to Bei-guan. According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, «the largest embassy is the USSR embassy in Bei Xiao Jie, Beijing, China. The whole 45-acre area of the Orthodox Church mission (established 1728), now known as the Bei-guan, was handed over to the USSR in 1949» (1990. P. 157).

17. It is worthwhile to cite here the following passage from the *Guide to Peking*, published by The Peking Chronicle (revised edition, September 1935. P. 151): «The Russian Orthodox Mission. This is the Head Mission in China. It is located outside Tung Chih Men and commonly known as Pei-kuan, the Northern Church. Bishop Victor (Sviatin) is the Head of the Mission».

18. In August, 1955 in Tientsin there were still two Orthodox churches, namely, St. Nicholas Church and St. Innocent Missionary Church, and, according to Archbishop Victor, during services these churches were filled with worshippers. See Archbishop Victor's notes on the visit of the Moscow Patriarchy's delegation to Peking, August 1955. As for Harbin, the same source states that at that time there were 18 churches and 32 priests.

19. Between 1922 and the end of the 1950's hundreds of Russian children were born in China (including Manchuria). As a rule, all of them were brought up in keeping with the tradition of Russian Orthodoxy. Today these people can be found all over the world (in Russia, the USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, Sweden, etc.). In Russia they even have their own newspapers, namely *Russians in China* and *On the mounds of Manchuria*, both published in Novosibirsk. The mere existence of these people denies Elleman's «fact».
