


1 From the Editors

Benjamin Beuerle , Sandra Dahlke, Andreas Renner

Since the middle of the seventeenth century, when Cossacks built their first forts on the eastern shores of Eurasia, Russia has bordered not only on Europe but also on the Pacific. Long before Tsar Peter the Great broke through his famous *window to the West*, his predecessors had broken through to the East. Yet historians, at least those with Western eyes, have mostly preferred to look at Russia through Peter's window, studying it almost exclusively in comparison with or as part of European history. Even researchers within Russia, "Westerners" and "Slavophiles" alike, have more often than not turned to Europe for a template to explain their country's history—though orientalist and scholars influenced by so-called Eurasian notions of Russia as a non-European culture have proposed an Asian perspective. Only with the disintegration of the Soviet Union has the dominance of the Eurocentric perspective been seriously challenged, in particular by the new imperial history. In recent years, since John Stephan's pioneering work on the Russian Far East, more and more scholars have (re)discovered Russia's history in the Asia-Pacific region.¹

The new interest in the region clearly follows two related shifts in the political tectonics of the world: accelerated globalisation after the dissolution of the Soviet block and the reemergence of China as a first-class geopolitical player. As a consequence of these shifts, the Asia-Pacific has become one of the world's most dynamic economic regions. During the last twenty years, the Russian Federation has been striving to integrate into it by establishing closer political and economic ties not only with China but also with other countries and international organisations, such as APEC and ASEAN. With the progressive deterioration of relations with the West even before Russia's annexation of Crimea, Moscow's Asia-Pacific strategy has come to play a key role for Russia's geopolitical agenda. On several occasions, leading politicians—among them, President Vladimir Putin—have announced a "pivot to the east."²

- 1 Stephan, *Russian Far East*; Kotkin and Wolff, *Rediscovering*; Renner and Urbansky, *Zeichen*.
- 2 Blakkisrud and Wilson Rowe, *Russia's Turn*; Bordachev et al., *K Velikomu*.

The German Historical Institute in Moscow (GHIM) has decided to support studies of this pivot and Russia's entanglement with the Asia-Pacific in general. In the spring of 2017, in cooperation with the chair of Russian-Asian Studies at Munich University, the GHIM created a new platform, which was dubbed *Russia's North Pacific*.³ The objective was, and is, twofold: first, the endeavour aimed to complement the research on the Asia-Pacific region (which had largely been concentrated on the US and East Asian countries) with a Russian Far Eastern perspective; second, we intended to build an international and multidisciplinary network for the exchange of research ideas between scholars of all career levels and to promote new collaborative projects. During the last four years, international scholars, many of them from Russia and her European and Pacific neighbour states, have been meeting at workshops and conferences or simply online. To present the results of past and future collaborative research and to create an outlet for excellent monographs, we created a new book series, *Russia and the Asia-Pacific*, with Heidelberg University Publishing, the first volume of which we are now happy to launch. It is based on papers presented at the project's first international workshop held at the GHI in Moscow in March 2018.

Imperialism and globalisation in the Far East, the central keywords from this meeting's agenda, encompassed a wide range of topics and experts. Over the course of two days, participants discussed almost a century and a half of Russia's role in the Asia-Pacific realm, from the opening of China and Japan in the 1850s to the present "pivot." The workshop brought together papers on four broad areas of interactions between Russia and its North Pacific neighbours that are mirrored in the structure of this book⁴—processes of entanglement and disentanglement, of cooperation and conflict. Speakers analysed manifold political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental contacts and processes—but they all did so without focusing on traditional international relations with "big" political and military protagonists. Instead, the papers posed questions such as: how were / are directives and decisions from a centre situated thousands of kilometres away perceived and (possibly) implemented by actors in the Russian Far East? To what extent was / is the centre successful in integrating a region as far away from it as the Russian Far East in its state structures? But also, to what extent are "centre" and

3 <https://www.dhi-moskau.org/de/forschung/20-bis-21-jahrhundert-die-udssr-und-russland-in-der-welt/russlands-nordpazifik.html#cs7784>; <https://www.gose.geschichte.uni-muenchen.de/lr-russland-asienstudien/index.html>.

4 See below under "Aims and Scope of the Book Series and the Present Volume."

“periphery” fixed attributions or, rather, fluid terms, if we adopt the perspective of Far Eastern actors?

The GHIM’s interest in Russia’s Asia-Pacific exceeds the broad scope of the first “kick-off” workshop in several respects. This stems from the nature of the growing network, which aims to build five bridges:

First, it connects specialists from several different countries, academic cultures, and disciplinary backgrounds. Although the focus is primarily a historical one, not only historians are involved in the project but also geographers and anthropologists as well as political, economic, and environmental scientists. Especially welcome are graduate students and early-career scholars.

Second, Russia is the main, but not the exclusive, focus of the project. The network links the study of Russian history, which in Germany has been a sub-discipline of the historical sciences since the late nineteenth century, with East Asian area studies, which developed outside the history faculties. As a rule, these disciplines have not counted the Russian Far East as Asian, while from many Muscovites’ perspective, the region has been a remote and backward Asian periphery. The project wants to overcome this double marginalisation,⁵ at least on the level of scholarship.

Third, and connected with the interest in area studies, the network includes a still somewhat unusual maritime view of Russian history. Historians have studied the tsarist empire and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union as almost archetypical land empires; however, since the eighteenth century, Russia has been a maritime power, or at least a power with maritime ambitions. For the tsars’ transcontinental dominion, the Pacific Ocean was more suited for imperial visions than the Baltic Sea.⁶

Fourth, as hinted above, a central idea is to historicise the “pivot to the East” Russia’s leaders have been demanding for about a decade. The ambition to transform the Pacific periphery into flourishing landscapes and to strengthen relations with East Asian neighbours is by no means new: it is in line with earlier geostrategic and economic projects dating back to the eighteenth century. Not surprisingly, historical buzzwords such as “To the Great Ocean” from the construction period of the Trans-Siberian Railway have reemerged in the current debate.⁷

Finally, focusing on the Russian Far East does not mean ignoring the European West. Rather, the project is about interweaving the Asia-Pacific

5 Kuhrt, “Russian Far East.”

6 Bassin, *Imperial Visions*.

7 For example, Blakkisrud and Wilson Rowe, *Russia’s Turn*; Bordachev et al., *K Velikomu*.

history of Russia as an equal subject with the established historiography of Russia as part or mirror of Europe. The current “pivot” to Asia may again serve as an example. Like its historic predecessors, it aims not only to strengthen the Russian state at its Far Eastern end but also to establish a new, global role for Russia as a hub between the Atlantic and the Pacific.

From these five perspectives, the region under investigation cannot be defined as a naturally given space but, rather, as a temporary result of region building—a moving target. Russia’s North Pacific can be neither defined as specifically Asian or European nor as a region with clear boundaries; these were almost completely absent, for example, for international Porto Franco merchants of the 1870s, but a century later, they were most sharply demarcated for Soviet inhabitants of a virtually sealed military zone. Today, the region still appears different if viewed from Moscow or Vladivostok and different again from Beijing, Tokyo, Seoul, or San Francisco. Though there are 6,500 kilometres between Vladivostok and Moscow, still any visitor will notice that many Far Eastern cities look like any Russian town east or west of the Urals; the transition to Siberia is blurred. It is true that the political border in the south is clearly defined, as is the Pacific coastline in the east; but the border, extended in the age of imperialism and disputed in war and revolution, has been porous in different ways and has connected the spaces on this side and on the other as much as it has separated them.⁸ The same can be said about the Great Ocean as a sphere of Russian influence and source of income.⁹ Such connections, real and imagined, have played a role for both the mental construction of a Russian Far East (maritime province or Pacific region) and the functions these spaces should fulfil.

As experts of regionalism argue, regions are best defined by, on the one hand, political (or economic, security, or other) programmes that are more or less successfully implemented from above and, on the other hand, by processes from below, such as cross-border migration of people, goods, or ideas.¹⁰ These processes can overlap or contradict. Ultimately, different types of regions develop differently, as can be best exemplified with the politically grounded region of the Russian Far East and the more vaguely, though basically economically, defined Asia-Pacific. Finally, if regions are shaped by political, economic, or environmental cooperation, they also lose shape through obstacles and restrictions. The GHIM network addresses all these processes

8 Urbansky, *Beyond*.

9 See exemplarily Robert Kindler, chapter 3 in the present book.

10 Cf. Dent, *East Asian*.

of entanglement and disentanglement. It welcomes colleagues dealing with any Russian aspect of the history (and present) of the Far East, from Peter the Great's little-studied fascination with his East Asian neighbours over Pacific whaling and Stalin's Asian politics to air pollution in the Northern Pacific.¹¹

Aims and Scope of the Book Series and the Present Volume

The aim of the book series *Russia and the Asia-Pacific* is to promote multidisciplinary research on entanglements and disentanglements between Russia and its neighbours in the Asia-Pacific in a global context from the early eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries and to overcome national boundaries with regard to different scholarly cultures. The objective of bringing different perspectives, academic traditions, and disciplines together is mirrored in the composition of the series' advisory board. We are very grateful for the efforts of its members as well as of a number of competent external peer-reviewers who act together as custodians of the excellence and innovativeness of the series.

Each section of this first volume of our book series deals with one important area of research relevant for our network project. The chapters by Robert Kindler, Eisuke Kaminaga, and Benjamin Beuerle highlight interactions and policy approaches in the realm of *environment and natural resources; migration and transfer* are the focus of David Wolff's and Tobias Holzlehner's chapters; *representation and norms* play key roles in Joonseo Song's and Yuexin Rachel Lin's texts; and Natalia Ryzhova's and Sergey Glebov's contributions bring into focus socioeconomic and ethnic *tensions and conflicts* between centre and periphery as well as within the Far East. Two commentaries—one by the geographer Paul Richardson, who also undertook to introduce each chapter, and one by the historian Willard Sunderland—help contextualise the contributions and connect them with broader research questions. This applies not least to the further volumes in this series, each of which will be devoted to a more specific topic.

In general, each volume consists of texts that are thoroughly peer-reviewed (double-blind) by board members or external reviewers. Subsequent volumes may also include a discussion forum, which allows us to publish shorter thought-provoking or informative articles. We are equally open to publishing pertinent collaborative volumes by other editorial teams as well as outstanding monographs. We explicitly encourage younger scholars to submit their PhD


11 Renner, "Peter der Große"; Demuth, *Floating Coast*; Wolff, *Stalin's*; Benjamin Beuerle, chapter 5 in the present book.

and equivalent theses, as far as these suit the thematic scope of the series. In general, publications in English, German, and Russian will be possible.

Interested parties are asked to check the network's web presence, send information about ongoing projects, or apply for one of the workshops. Suggestions and ideas for workshops and thematic issues are welcome.

For more information, updates, or to join our network, please visit the network website pacificrussia.hypotheses.org.

ORCID®

Benjamin Beuerle  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2075-0832>

Please note: The introduction and all chapters in this volume were written before Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine. They thus do not mirror developments since the start of this war, though the publication of the book has been much retarded by it.

If not indicated otherwise, all weblinks cited in the chapters of this volume were accessible as of 19 December 2022.

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