Edited by
Benjamin Beuerle
Sandra Dahlke
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Environments, Resources, and Infrastructures Between Russia and the Asia-Pacific

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Sources and Discussion

1 Introduction

Benjamin Beuerle, Anna Mazanik, Andreas Renner

From the time Russians first settled along the North Pacific, their experience of colonisation and their interactions with Indigenous peoples and neighbouring countries have been shaped by the exploitation of and competition for the region's rich natural resources. These encounters were central to the often very violent construction of one of the world's largest empires, but they also helped create a complex web of connections, including trade, cultural exchange, and the development of material and social infrastructures. As in many other parts of the world, the shared environment and its natural wealth served as links and junctures or as points of contention and sources of conflict and violence.

The relationship between resources, environments, and infrastructures has long been a major topic of scholarly inquiry. Ecological constraints and incessant resource demands have profoundly shaped political and economic history and driven European expansion across the globe. Transforming ecosystems to extract natural wealth; appropriating land for allegedly "more productive" use; creating complicated infrastructures to exploit natural resources—from plantations, mines, and ports to railways and oil pipelines—facilitating massive circulation of people, plants, animals, knowledge, commodities, and diseases; and restructuring environmental relations through deforestation, pollution, targeted extermination, and accidental habitat destruction have been integral parts of modern imperialism and have had a huge impact on how our world looks today.[1]

In the last two decades, historical studies of the human–nature relations, infrastructures, and political ecologies of Northeast Asia have experienced a certain boom, linked both to the renewed interest in the Pacific and specifically North Pacific history[2] and a dramatic increase in Russian and Soviet

1 Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*; Arnold and Guha, *Nature, Culture, Imperialism*; Griffits and Robin, *Ecology and Empire*; Richards, *Unending Frontier*; Ross, *Ecology and Power*; Edwards, Infrastructure and Modernity.

2 Armitage and Bashford, *Pacific Histories*; Beattie, Jones and Melillo, *Migrant Ecologies*; Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*; Grinëv, *Russian Colonization of Alaska;* Winkler, *Das*

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environmental history scholarship.[3] In light of the parallel trends in the Chinese and American historiography, borderland spaces and environments have turned to be a particularly productive field of study for historians and researchers in the environmental humanities.[4] Scholars of the region have underscored the crucial role that natural resources played in Russia's expansion into the East and exposed the devastating effects that this expansion had on the ecosystems of the North Pacific. Throughout imperial times, it was commodified animal bodies, culled for their valuable pelts and tusks but also for meat and fat, that were the main object of desire in that distant Eastern frontier. Fur was then joined by timber, fisheries, gold, iron, tin, copper, wolfram and other metals, diamonds, coal, oil, and gas.[5] At the same time, the highly biodiverse and very dynamic environments of the Pacific region were not just mere backgrounds to human action but, instead, powerful historical actors in themselves that had a clear impact on the directions and forms of colonisation, defying easy attempts at categorisation, the establishment of settled agriculture, and the extraction of nature's wealth.[6]

Since the eighteenth century, trans-Asian connections, military, diplomatic, or commercial, were essential to shaping resource policies in the region. In the Northeast Asia of the early modern period, fur was what oil is today, and the main market for many of the East Siberian and North Pacific furs was in China. The treaties of Nerchinsk (1689) and Kiachta (1727) and the creation of the infrastructure for frontier trade at the Kiachta/Mai-Mai-Cheng crossing allowed Russia to establish a huge commercial hub in Asia, where furs and hides, Russia's major export resource, were exchanged for cotton, rhubarb, silk (and other luxury goods), and, later, tea. Despite the strong British competitors, this trade was so profitable that Russia sold not only Siberian and Alaskan furs but even imported additional pelts from Canada. Some of the pelts sold in Kiachta were, in fact, not precious enough to be transported

Imperium und die Seeotter; Beuerle, Dahlke, and Renner, *Russia's North Pacific*; Renner, *Nordostpassage*.

3 Jones, *Empires of Extinction*; Breyfogle, *Eurasian Environments*; Chu, *The Life of Permafrost*; Kindler, *Robbenreich*; Jones, *Red Leviathan*, to cite but a few.

4 Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers of the Far North;* Bello, *Across Forest, Steppe and Mountain*; Demuth, *Floating Coast*; Urbansky, *Beyond the Steppe Frontier*; Rogaski, *Knowing Manchuria*.

5 Sokolsky, *Between Predation and Protection*; Kindler, *Troubled Waters*; Eisuke, *International Fisheries Conflicts;* Litvinenko and Murota, "The Spatial Transformation"; Makliukov, *Elektrifikatsiia;* Antonova et al., *Resursnye otrasli Dal'nego Vostoka*.

6 Demuth, *Floating Coast*; Jones, *Empires of Extinction;* Sokolsky, "Making the Land Russian."

all the long way to Europe. The existence of the demand in China and the possibility of selling the pelts at huge profits was crucial for the exploration of the fur reserves in the Far East, driving both imperial territorialisation and the continuous overhunting that would eventually bring many of the animal populations to collapse.[7] At the same time, imported Chinese commodities, particularly tobacco, were an important object of Russian barter with the Indigenous communities of Kamchatka, Alaska, and the Aleut islands.[8]

The history of the Russian colonisation of the Pacific coast was not only a story of the radical depletion of the animal world but also that of the suppression of the Indigenous cultures. Recent scholarship has not just reconstructed the complex experiences of the Indigenous societies of the North Pacific but also reclaimed their agency in naming, categorising, using, and shaping the environments of the region, although that agency was performed in a situation of dramatic power asymmetries. Indigenous communities were essential to the commercial networks of the imperial period: they not only hunted but also actively participated in the fur trade; sought and altered it; protested and cooperated with the colonisers, facilitating the imperial expansion and the harvesting of the resources that would destroy the ecosystems with which their own communities were intricately bound.[9]

The rapacious exploitation of natural resources, including one of the first examples of modern megafaunal extinction in the case of the Steller's sea cow, also led to early reflections on the ecological consequences of imperialism in this part of the planet and, from the nineteenth century onwards, to conservation efforts, which acknowledged the fragility of animals and their worlds in the face of human action. This trend grew stronger in the twentieth century, and, although conservation efforts had primarily anthropocentric utilitarian goals and aimed to preserve precious resources in order to use them in the future for the benefit of the empire and the Soviet state, they did allow the populations of some of the nearly extinct species to recover.[10]

The current volume contributes to these vibrant debates by bringing together interdisciplinary studies of the environments, resource policies, and infrastructures in the North Pacific from the eighteenth century until today.

7 Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers of the Far North,* 103–105.

8 Romaniello, "'Tobacco!'"; Grinëv, "Spetsifika tovaroobmena."

9 Grinëv, *The Tlingit Indians;* Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers of the Far North;* Jones, *Empires of Extinction;* Grinëv, "Spetsifika tovaroobmena"; Grinëv and Bland, "Social Protest in Russian America."

10 Jones, *Empires of Extinction;* Kindler, *Robbenreich;* Sokolsky, "Between Predation and Protection."

The broad time frame of three centuries and the diversity of the authors' perspectives in the volume helps trace historical phenomena—social, material, and ecological—over the *longue durée* and explore the links and continuities between different periods and thematic fields that have hardly been connected by researchers until now. The volume emerged from the international conference "Resources, Environment, and Infrastructures between Russia and the Asia–Pacific: Cooperation and Conflicts," organised in February 2019 at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea, by its Institute of Russian Studies in cooperation with the "Russia's North Pacific" project of the Max Weber Network Eastern Europe and the Chair for Russian–Asian Studies at Ludwig Maximilians University Munich.

After the first, deliberately broad and heterogeneous, workshop of the "Russia's North Pacific" project in 2018, which resulted in the first volume of the "Russia and the Asia–Pacific" book series,[11] the editors and organisers suggested zooming in on the material links between Russia and its neighbours, the environment they found and created between them, and the resources they have coveted, traded, or disputed. Several members of the book series' scientific advisory board took part in conceptualising the conference and in the conference's discussions, paving the way for the current volume, without figuring visibly among its editors or authors: David Wolff (Hokkaido University), Frank Grüner (Bielefeld University), and last but not least, Joonseo Song (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul). Song and his colleagues at the Institute of Russian Studies played a pivotal role in making the realisation of the conference possible and contributed much to its constructive discussions.

The Seoul conference was structured into five panels: "Russia's Asia–Pacific in Film and Literature: Representations and Images" (featuring Ryan Jones), "Human Resources and Goods between Russia, China, and America" (including a paper by Ivan Zuenko), "Grand Strategies for Russia's Asia–Pacific" (with a presentation by Andreas Renner), "Fossil and Renewable Energy Sources in Russia's Asia–Pacific" (with papers by Nikolai Fedorov, Hongjin Liu, and Benjamin Beuerle), and "Polar Partnerships? Russia and its Pacific Neighbours in the Arctic" (including a contribution by Martin Kossa). Though the current volume is organised differently and counts among its authors only a fraction of the Seoul conference's participants, this list indicates to which extent the volume has been moulded by the conference.

Environment, resources, and infrastructures are intertwined concepts that are at the same time culturally loaded and tightly linked to social processes.

11 Beuerle, Dahlke, and Renner (eds.), *Russia's North Pacific*.

The environment encompasses the complex of natural, cultural, and technological elements that shape human experiences and is being increasingly reimagined to emphasise the interconnectedness and interdependence of various species and agencies.[12] As environments are co-created by humans and are infused with profound cultural meanings, the human perceptions of and relations to the environment are culturally specific.[13] In the North Pacific, Indigenous communities, Chinese or Korean settlers, Russian peasants, imperial or Soviet officials often understood and interacted with the same environment in dramatically different ways. For all of them, however, the environment was an essential repository of resources that they harvested, used, and managed to support their way of life.

Resources, whether material or non-material, are entities valued by those who possess or strive to possess them. As such, they are culturally constructed, meaning that what is considered a resource is shaped by human knowledge, practices, needs and beliefs; yet their extraction can have a very tangible and often devastating impact on the environments in which they are embedded.[14] The exploitation of natural resources, such as animal pelts, fisheries, precious metals, oil, and gas played a major role in the history of the North Pacific. However, the discussions during the conference underlined that human knowledge and labour, for example, that of the Indigenous people, were also an important resource for the Russian colonisers. This is why, in this volume, we opted for a broader concept of "resources," not confined to the material world but also comprising human resources.

Infrastructures are material and social networks that allow human societies to function. They are essential for accessing, extracting, distributing, and consuming resources and form a crucial element of the environment while simultaneously depending on both. Meant to serve human needs, infrastructures inescapably reflect human understandings of the more-than-human world around them.[15] Similarly to other colonial contexts, the development of infrastructure in Northeast Asia was tightly linked to imperialism. The early imperial infrastructures in the North Pacific, such as *ostrogs* (fortified settlements) and ports, were infrastructures of conquest, created to harvest

12 Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Van Dooren et al., "Multispecies Studies"; Ogden at al., "Animals, Plants, People, and Things."

13 This culturally contingent and relational meaning of "environment" is stressed (among others) by Descola: Descola, *Une écologie*.

14 Schubert and Knecht, *Ressourcen*; H-Soz-Kult, "H-Soz-u-Kult Debatte."

15 Larkin, *Politics and Poetics*; Van Laak, *Alles im Fluss*; Marklund and Mogens, *Historicising Infrastructure.*

and control resources and suppress Indigenous people. Later on, they became interwoven with the more complex structures of the modern state and turned into important tools of imperial "civilising mission" and symbols of power and modernity or arenas of international collaboration, helping to coin political alliances.

These subjects connect to the broader themes of conflict and cooperation. One focal point of the conference discussions was the (post-)colonial nature of the resource exploitation and trade in and through the borderlands between Russia and its Pacific neighbours and the effects they had on the Indigenous peoples in the region. As in other parts of the world, it was *their* immediate environments and life practices that were transformed or destroyed by the empire's thirst for resources, while their knowledge and labour were often used to promote imperial goals. In light of this, the first part of the volume is dedicated to the predominantly colonial triangle relationship between imperial Russians or Soviets, the Indigenous people and the environment in the Pacific region.

Another major topic of the conference discussions was transnational collaboration in the field of resource extraction and infrastructure development. Although much of the existing scholarship on resources in transnational relations focuses on conflict,[16] during the Seoul conference many of the speakers working on recent history and current developments emphasised the importance of cooperation. They studied collaborative projects between the Soviet Union or post-Soviet Russia and its Pacific neighbours, above all with China, but also with Vietnam, Japan, and the Korean states—though cooperation almost never appeared tension-free. This focus on cooperation is mirrored in the second part of the present volume.

The first part of the volume opens with a chapter by Spencer Abbe examining the historical significance of tsunamis in the North Pacific, one of the Earth's most seismically active regions (Chapter 2). The study of natural disasters such as earthquakes, mudslides, and floods and their multifaceted relations with colonialism, political conflict, and infrastructural change has

16 See for example Bolton, "Water Wars"; Brunschweiler and Bolte, "Natural Resources"; Heffernan, "Conflict"; Kaminaga, "International Fisheries"; Koubi et al., "Do natural Resources Matter"; Lee and Mitchell, "Energy Resources"; Reuveny and Maxwell, "Conflict"; Rustad and Binningsbø, "A Price"; Strüver, "Too Many Resources"; Strüver and Wegenast, "The Hard Power." For some studies of (factual and possible) cooperation on common resources, cf. Makim, "Resources"; Wang, "Management"; Wouters, "Implementing."

recently found a productive field in Russian imperial and Soviet history,[17] but the early modern period and Pacific region remain little explored. Abbe argues that the tsunamis had a dramatic impact on Indigenous communities, especially as their resilience had been drastically undermined by the imperial restructuring of settlements, migration restrictions, and the decades of colonial violence and exploitation. Nonetheless, they turned out to be of little concern to Russian colonisers.

In the third chapter, Luise Fast provides a fresh perspective on a well-known source on the Russian colonisation of Alaska—the journal of the expedition by Lavrentii Zagoskin, whose primary task was to explore the condition of fur-bearing animals in the Yukon basin and the prospects of fur trade. As Russian hunting parties brought the population of Alaskan sea otters, whose pelts were a major object of fur trade and as such a crucial resource of the North Pacific, to the verge of extinction, the Russian American Company moved to the inner regions of Alaska to procure more furs from the local animal species, primarily land otter and beaver. One could not, however, reach the precious animal resources without adequate human resources, that is, the knowledge and the skills of local intermediaries. By analysing Zagoskin's network and communication with local guides and translators, Fast reveals the pivotal role played by the Native and Creole intermediaries in aiding Russian colonial expansion, which would eventually lead to the near destruction of their world. Their multilingualism; their knowledge of the environment, routes, and cultural realities; their ability to mediate and build trust with the local communities were in themselves important, if overlooked, resources that Russian colonisers urgently needed and actively used in order to explore and claim the natural wealth of the distant frontier.

Mark Sokolsky, in Chapter 4, delves into the intricate relationship between colonisation and environmental change in Primor'e from its annexation by Russia in 1860 until the Second World War. While the imperial quest for space and resources drove profound environmental change in Primor'e, above all overhunting and deforestation, it also catalysed the emergence of unprecedented conservation initiatives. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, the ecological degradation in Primor'e had sparked widespread concern among Russian officials and scientists who, crucially, did not ascribe it to colonisation but instead to the perceived "backwardness" and "uncivilised" habits of the Chinese and, to some extent, Russian peasant settlers. Tsarist

17 Elie, "Late Soviet Responses to Disasters"; Raab, *All Shook Up;* Zajcek, "The Seismic Colony."

elites viewed environmental stewardship as the responsibility of the empire and responded with what Sokolsky calls a "green civilising mission," advocating for the protection of nature in the interest of Russian colonisation and the "rational" management of natural resources, that is, orderly, planned, informed by European science, and often industrial. This attitude remained remarkably consistent throughout the late imperial and Soviet periods, highlighting the crucial role that cultural biases played in shaping the approaches to the environment and resource use.

The complex and often contradictory relationship between ruthless exploitation and conservation, as well as the continuities between the late imperial and the Soviet period, are also discussed in the chapter by Ryan Jones, who examines the role of Vladimir Arsen'ev in shaping Soviet whaling policy. Arsen'ev, Russian geographer and writer, is best known for the eloquent descriptions of his expeditions to the Far East in the 1900s and 1910s, and particularly his autobiographical novel *Dersu Uzala*, but Jones reveals the part that Arsen'ev played in the environmental history of the North Pacific as the employee of the Department of Far Eastern Fisheries and Hunting in Vladivostok at the time when the new Soviet state was trying to gain control over its eastern peripheries and find a way to efficiently exploit its marine resources while simultaneously protecting them from overuse and foreign predation. Thanks to Arsen'ev, Soviet whaling in its early stages was imbued with some of the most progressive late imperial conservation practices, which privileged smaller marine mammals, reflecting the historical experience of their devastating overhunting in the imperial period. Arsen'ev also advocated for the rights of the Indigenous peoples to hunt whales and emphasised their vulnerability in the face of expanding commercial whaling—concerns that influenced Soviet policy at least until the 1940s, although they failed to prevent the catastrophic excesses of the whaling industry in the later period.

The second part of the volume moves to the late Soviet and post-Soviet period to examine transnational entanglements, cooperation, and rivalries in resource use and infrastructure construction in Northeast Asia. This subject has attracted considerable interdisciplinary attention, triggered by Russia's attempts to "turn to the East" and increased cooperation with partners in the Asia–Pacific as well as the launching of China's Belt and Road Initiative and its intensive infrastructure diplomacy, with scholars underscoring infrastructure's crucial role in changing environments, societies, and geopolitics.[18] The chapters in this

18 Jia and Bennet, "Chinese Infrastructure Diplomacy in Russia"; Lukin, *The "Roads" and "Belts" in Eurasia*; Hirsh and Mostowlansky, *Infrastructure and the Remaking of Asia.*

part of the volume discuss the evolving dynamics of cooperation and conflict in infrastructure development and resource extraction between Russia and other actors in the Asia–Pacific in recent decades and outline possible future trajectories in light of the radical transformation of the geopolitical realities.

In Chapter 6, Ivan Zuenko and Ilya Chubarov provide a historical overview of the development of the cross-border infrastructure between Russia and China from the late Soviet period until the present day. They focus on one of the most important cases of early Russian–Chinese cooperation, when the two countries re-approached each other after the Sino-Soviet split: the cross-border economic zones, which were supposed to transform former peripheries and military buffer zones into booming hubs of economic growth. Although initially successful, profiting from the decentralisation in Russia and the strong agency of regional actors, the project lost the momentum in the 2000s, when the tide of Russian politics changed in favour of re-centralisation. Zuenko and Chubarov also highlight the role of cultural factors in shaping attitudes toward infrastructure development and resource use, echoing the chapter by Mark Sokolsky, as Sinophobic discourse in the media and the fear of Chinese immigration undermined the support base for the cross-border economic zones.

Nikolai Fedorov, in Chapter 7, examines Russian engagement in oil and gas exploitation in Vietnam, which also makes Russia indirectly involved in the territorial disputes of the South China Sea, one of the most serious problems of international relations in Pacific Asia, where China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, and the Philippines compete for the exclusive right to control and utilise rich marine resources, particularly hydrocarbons and fisheries. Cooperation in the sphere of energy resources, together with the Soviet export of weapons, has been an essential part of Soviet–Vietnamese relations since the 1970s, when Soviet geologists identified the oilfields in the shelf along the Vietnamese coast. In 1981, Soviet Zarubezhneft and Petrovietnam established a joint company that would lead the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas in the shelf of Vietnam, preparing the ground for the post-Soviet cooperation, when new players, such as Gazprom, TNK-BP (Tiumenskaia Neftianaia Kompaniia–British Petroleum), Lukoil, and Rosneft came to the stage. As Fedorov reveals, despite many advantages, particularly partnerships with both Vietnam and China, Russian actors now face many challenges in the competition for the natural resources of the South China Sea, including the increased presence of foreign energy companies, pressure from China, and broader confrontation with the West.

The eighth chapter, by Martin Kossa, analyses Sino-Russian resource and infrastructure engagement in the Arctic over the last decade. As the

environment of the Arctic transforms, with sea ice, glaciers and permafrost retreating due to climate change, new expectations and opportunities for the commercial exploitation of the region arise. These include, in particular, the extraction of Russia's rich oil and gas reserves and the development of infrastructure and shipping through the Northern Sea Route, a transportation lane that runs along the northern coast of Russia. Despite past animosities and sometimes contradictory foreign policy priorities, Kossa argues, Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic develops rapidly because the two sides have complementary interests regarding the region. Rich Arctic resources are considered a crucial source of economic growth by Russia's leadership, and, to fuel Arctic development, especially post-2014, Russia looks to China for investment to tackle financial, technological, and infrastructural challenges while securing a foothold in China's energy market. China views the Arctic as a lucrative frontier for energy supply diversification and shortened trade routes between the Asian and the European markets, as highlighted by the incorporation of the Northern Sea Route into China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2017 and Beijing's Arctic Strategy in 2018.[19] Furthermore, projects in the Russian North are crucial for enhancing China's expertise in resource exploration, logistics, and production under extreme polar conditions that would be essential for its future economic expansion into the Arctic.

In this volume, we have also introduced a separate section titled "Sources and Discussion," which provides a forum for contributions other than peer-reviewed research articles that, nevertheless, present interesting perspectives, reflections, and sources on the relations between Russia and the Asia–Pacific in the past and present. This section includes a paper by Hongjin Liu on an unrealised cooperation project in the field of gas infrastructure in Northeast Asia. In the 1990s, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs initiated a research programme, "Transportation and Utilisation of Natural Gas in Northeast Asia," that studied possible gas pipeline routes to connect Russia, China, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan. The survey for this project was led by a team of Chinese scientists who managed to propose five potential routes and a cooperation plan extending until 2020. The paper provides an overview of this project based on documents from the Archive of Modern Chinese Scientists in Beijing and interviews with two of the Chinese project participants. Hongjin Liu highlights the effects that economic growth and changing environmental views and regulations in the Asia–Pacific had on the demand for Russian gas and, similarly to the other

19 See also Renner, *Nordostpassage*.

papers in this volume, underscores the significant role that transnational entanglements played in the policies on the natural resources of Siberia and the Far East.

Many of the topics analysed in this volume are bound to become more relevant in the near future. Climate change, which has been progressing at an accelerated pace since the early 2000s, is a game changer that will greatly affect environments, the migration of species, and the availability of natural resources as well as opportunities to extract and trade them, for example, along the Northern Sea Route. At the same time, given the binding targets of the Paris Agreement and their implications, and China's credible promise to peak its emissions by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2060, at some point in the coming decades the demand for Russia's fossil resources in the Asia–Pacific will most likely decline, while European demand has already drastically declined since February 2022.[20] This raises major questions regarding the rentability of the development of Arctic extraction sites and the future viability of Russia's current socio-economic model as a whole.

Meanwhile, climate change results not only in additional trouble spots but also in new options and even necessities for cooperation. One example is PICES, the North Pacific Marine Science Organisation. Since the early 1990s, Russian, US-American, Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Canadian scientists have closely cooperated within this framework, notably in researching the effects of climate change on the North Pacific's biosphere.[21]

Less predictable, but undoubtedly of fundamental significance, will be the geopolitical development of the region, especially in view of the growing relevance of the North Pacific for the Sino-Russian partnership, which has been strengthened by the war in Ukraine. Cooperation is visible in the sphere of energy, with the region becoming more important for Russia against the background of rapidly decreased energy imports to Europe. At the same time, there is a persistently high level of geopolitical strain in the North Pacific. The most important case concerns the ever-rising tensions between China and Taiwan, which bear the risk of a major military conflict involving China and the US. China's territorial disputes with other neighbours, like the Philippines and Vietnam—as seen in Fedorov's chapter—are also conflict-ridden. In addition, tensions are visible between Russia and Japan, the US, and Canada; and (against obvious appearances) also between Russia and

20 Hare et al., *Implications*; Fujimori et al., "Implications"; International Energy Agency, *An Energy Sector*; Reuters, "China's Carbon Emissions."

21 Tjosem, *Journey to PICES*; Tjossem, *Fostering Science*.

China. The Russian arms build-up in the Far East, in apparent preparation for a possible escalation, was also a subject discussed at the Seoul conference. It will be worthwhile to observe how these developments play out in the future.

For now, however, the ongoing conflict and increasing economic disentanglement between Russia and Europe since 2022, as well as the complementarity between the resource-rich eastern part of Russia and its economically ambitious and resource-hungry East Asian neighbours, will almost certainly ensure that the Asia–Pacific will continue to grow in significance for Russia both economically and politically. This will add new chapters to the long history of cooperation and conflict between Russia, its neighbouring countries, and non-state actors in this region in relation to resources, infrastructures, and environments, some key aspects and stages of which the present volume seeks to illuminate.

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Colonial Encounters (1700–1960s)

2 "The Tsunami Has No Borders": Considering the Significance of Disaster in North Pacific History

Spencer Abbe

Abstract Earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions have been frequent features of the North Pacific in historical times. However, these violent and dramatic events have rarely been examined by historians, and their role in the longer history of the region is murky at best. This chapter briefly surveys a few major earthquakes and tsunamis which have taken place in the North Pacific since the arrival of the Russian Empire and offers the conclusion that, while these events may have had substantial and devastating impacts in local areas, they do not appear to have substantially impacted long-term processes in the human history of the region, such as Russian and American colonisation.

Keywords earthquake, tsunami, Alaska, Kodiak, Kamchatka

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Introduction

"In regard to the dangers which plague this country by reason of earthquakes and floods, this is a disadvantage which has been observed in many other places which however are not considered any less fit to be inhabited because of this."
(Stepan Krashenninikov, 1755)[1]

"I am sure there are areas in the world having trouble with volcanoes but people live under them all the time."
(Senator Clinton Anderson, 1964)[2]

"As the tsunami has no borders and extends widely," Dr. Tatiana Ivelskaya, Chief of the Sakhalin Tsunami Warning Centre, wrote in 2015, "the exchange of tsunami warnings is also important."[3] Her comment, and the increased efforts to share scientific data concerning tsunamis in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, reflect the widely held understanding that tsunamis and the large earthquakes or volcanic eruptions which often generate them are a matter of significant regional importance. Indeed, the North Pacific exists atop one of the planet's most seismically active zones, with as much as seventy-five percent of the planet's seismic energy being released at the edges of the Pacific plate, and the Kamchatka peninsula in particular has experienced a substantial tsunami roughly twice a century over the last few thousand years.[4] Despite this prevalence, the role of these geological events has rarely been considered in the historiography of the region.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions have no regard for human organisations of space and strike where they will, regardless of human activities. The destruction caused by these hazards, however, is anything but random. Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, European empires and their successor states have reorganised space, people, and infrastructure in the North Pacific. In doing so, they have also transformed human relationships with these regularly occurring natural hazards.

However, while the relationships between people and these natural hazards have changed over time, it is less clear if this long-term pattern of

1 Krashenninikov, *Explorations of Kamchatka,* 87.
2 "Transcript of Proceedings," July 27, 1964.
3 Kong, *Pacific Tsunami Warning System*, 12.
4 Pinegina, "Holocene Tsunamis in Avachinsky Bay, Kamchatka, Russia."

geological events has had a substantial impact on other long-term processes in the human history of the region, such as colonisation and imperialism. Generally, historians of disaster have focused on singular events, and with substantial success. By contrast, some works have endeavoured to describe long histories of disasters in particular countries to examine changing responses to disasters over time. In both cases, historians of disaster frequently stress the revelatory qualities of disasters for historical research. For example, Charles F. Walker's *Shaky Colonialism*, which traces the long aftermath of the 1746 earthquake in Lima, Peru, argues: "The earthquake and ensuing tsunami cracked open Lima and provided a snapshot, albeit a dreadful one, of the city at 10:30 PM on October 28, 1746."[5] Walker approaches this event through what he calls "incident analysis," a term coined by Robert Darnton to describe a process of focusing on a certain event in a particular time or place and following its repercussions.

Another such recent work to examine an individual incident is Joanna Dyl's *Seismic City*, which tells the story of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Dyl examines the history of the city's construction and attempts by boosters and insurance professionals to excuse the earthquake damage by attributing it to fire, while also highlighting that the earthquake granted city officials additional tools to relocate Asian-American populations. Dyl argues that disasters "not only remind us of non-human nature's ongoing power to affect both the planet and human history, but they also demonstrate how our own actions and decisions—our own efforts to shape nature—in turn often have unforeseen consequences."[6] These studies of individual incidents also prompt questions about how the historical phenomena they identify fit within broader, long-term processes because these histories often deal only with a few specific geographies, short stretches of time, or specific aspects of disasters as phenomena.

What remains to be investigated, then, is the relationships between long cycles of disaster recurrence and other long-term historical processes. This chapter argues that, while tsunamis and other disasters in the North Pacific had substantial impacts when they occurred, they had little impact on the long-term colonisation of the region. To do this, two case studies are presented here, one for the Kamchatka peninsula and one for the Kodiak archipelago. Neither case study is exhaustive, and significant geologic events, including the 1952 Kamchatka/Kuril tsunami and the 1912 Katmai eruption, are omitted for

5 Walker, *Shaky Colonialism*, 11–12.
6 Dyl, *Seismic City,* 10.

space—to say nothing of abbreviated human events. The tsunami may have no borders, but the empires in the North Pacific certainly did, and neither the Russian Empire and its successor states nor the United States ever gave up territory or abandoned their colonial projects because of tsunamis.

The "Disaster Regime" and Other Terms

Disasters have generally been considered to be social phenomena by most existing scholarship.[7] That is to say, disasters take place within the context of human societies and so are shaped by those societies' behaviours towards them. While this understanding of disasters remains useful to clarify when we are discussing the impact of a natural hazard on people, the idea of disasters as entirely social phenomena has seen welcome reconsideration in recent scholarship.

Seeking to "guard against a slow drift toward social determinism" (that is to say, a view at the other end of the spectrum from environmental determinism, in which human action entirely causes historical phenomena), Chris Courtney coined the term *disaster regime* in his book *The Nature of Disaster in China: The 1931 Yangzi River Flood*. According to Courtney, a disaster regime describes "a configuration of human and environmental relationships which condition the humanitarian impacts of natural hazards in a particular time and place."[8] While he clarifies that each disaster is unique and that disaster regimes change over time, he also uses the concept of a disaster regime to assert that the same constellation of causes which were present during a catastrophic flood in 1931 were also present in several other disasters of the era.

The idea of tracing changing configurations of human and environmental relationships over time is a useful one for the North Pacific, where political continuity has been sporadic, with the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, Russian Federation, and several distinct eras of American administration seizing control of different areas at different times. While these changing political regimes did often change these relationships in substantial ways, comparing their associated disaster regimes also reveals a surprising degree of continuity.

7 Shimoyama, "Basic Characteristics of Disasters."
8 Courtney, *The Nature of Disaster in China, 10–11.*

Kamchatka and the Tsunami of 1737

The tsunami of 1737 began with an eruption. For more than a full day, the Avachinsky volcano in Kamchatka spewed out ashes and covered the land in a fine, grey powder. For most of the residents, this would not have been the first eruption they had experienced. The North Pacific peninsula of Kamchatka on which they lived was covered by at least twenty active volcanoes which occasionally spewed out ashes, lava, and smoke. The eruption of 1737, though, turned out to be the prelude to a far more dangerous event. At around three in the morning the following day, a powerful earthquake shook the peninsula. Many buildings were destroyed or damaged by the shaking, but the worst was still to come. The entire ocean seemed to vanish into the pre-dawn darkness, and many miles to the south, elder observers in the Kurile Islands looked on in amazement as the tops of undersea mountains which had never before been seen became visible as the sea retreated. Moments later, the frigid waters of the North Pacific came crashing back in a series of devastating tsunamis. Stepan Krashenninikov, a naturalist employed by the Russian Empire to help survey the peninsula, reported that the first tsunami surged in at a depth of 3 *sazhen*, or about 6.4 metres. The water receded, and a second earthquake and second tsunami of the same height surged in before the ocean receded so far that it could not be seen from shore. A quarter of an hour later, there was another powerful earthquake, and the ocean returned as a tsunami with a depth of 30 *sazhen*, or 64 metres. Krashenninikov writes that the seas remained greatly agitated for some time, and great terrifying sounds could be heard to be coming from underground. Meadows became hills, and fields became lakes and bays. According to Krashenninikov, "the natives lost everything, and many died horribly."[9] Tremors persisted until the following year.

The tsunamis struck a land at war. Four decades prior, a small number of agents of the Russian Empire and their allies from Siberia's central regions entered the peninsula seeking furs, especially the pelts of sables, foxes, and sea otters. To acquire these furs, they practised a time-worn strategy which had been employed across Siberia. First, they would build a fort, an *ostrog*. Then, they would take hostages from the resident population. Finally, these agents of empire compelled the relatives of the hostages to deliver a tax in the form of furs, the *iasak*. The particulars of this complex system functioned differently throughout the diverse lands of Siberia and Central Asia, but as a broad pattern these features remained consistent. In Kamchatka, attempts

9 Krasheninnikov, *Explorations of Kamchatka,* 99.

to impose this system quickly spiralled into more than half a century of raids and counter-raids, shifting alliances, pitched sieges, and bloody massacres. When the tsunami of 1737 crashed into the peninsula, the effects it would have on the people living there were closely tied to the changes this invasion had brought to Kamchatka.

There are only two extant sources for the tsunami of 1737: the accounts of the naturalists Stepan Krashenninikov and Georg Steller, neither of whom were eyewitnesses to the event. Krashenninikov experienced the earthquake from the sheltered southwestern corner of the peninsula only shortly after arriving in Kamchatka for the first time, and so based his account largely on later interviews. Steller did not arrive until substantially later and similarly based his account on interviews and the work of Krashenninikov. The accounts these naturalists wrote also included detailed ethnographic studies of the people, plants, animals, and geography of the peninsula and have formed the source basis for almost all studies of life on the peninsula during the early decades of the Russian invasion. However, it has never been remarked upon that every observation took place in a landscape and society which had just suffered a substantial disaster. This fact, in conjunction with the violent and radical changes that accompanied the invasion, makes it difficult to assess the differences between the disaster regimes which existed prior to and after the invasion; however, the extent to which the invasion changed life in Kamchatka suggests that the invasion may have substantially influenced the experience of the tsunami.

The Invasion of Kamchatka

The events of the invasion, then, deserve some commentary. While the subject has received some attention in Russian-language literature, it has never received detailed treatment in English. Furthermore, the entanglement of the violence of the invasion with intense geologic activity on the peninsula is not simply an artefact of historical coincidence. Krashenninikov commented that:

> not only the Kamchadals, but the Cossacks as well, regard the eruption of volcanoes as a presage of a bloody war, and they back up their superstitions with many examples. They say it never once happened that an eruption was not followed by much bloodshed. They

> assert, moreover, that the more violent and long-lasting the eruption, the more cruel, bloody, and deadly the war will be.[10]

Steller made similar commentary.[11] These are the only extant accounts in which this connection between revolt and volcanism is identified, and, as we will see, all other extant documents which discuss revolts on the peninsula attribute decidedly human—or at least non-volcanic—causes to the events. Further, significant eruptions like that of 1737 do not appear to have been accompanied by significant revolts. If this rhetoric of revolt entangled with volcanism is untrue, as the evidence suggests, then it is the circumstances which led to this entangling of human affairs with volcanism that ought to be considered more fully. While, ultimately, it is coincidental that the first half of the eighteenth century was a period of high volcanic activity in Kamchatka as well as a period of pitched warfare between Itelmens, Koryaks, and Russian servitors, the belief that these events might be related constitutes a close relationship between the changes brought by the invasion and regularly-recurring natural hazards of the North Pacific which has so far been neglected in the study of the region.

Excepting the disastrous expedition of the Cossack Semyon Dezhnev in the 1650s, the first major Russian incursion into the Kamchatka peninsula originated from the Anadyrsk *ostrog*, where an uneasy alliance between deer-herding Koryaks and a small number of Cossacks and Yukaghirs existed against the Chukchis to the north in Chukotka, where several failed Cossack raids had not produced a significant number of furs or ivory walrus tusks. This first raid, undertaken by the Cossack Luka Morozko at the head of sixteen Cossacks, sacked a likely Itelmen fort on the Tigil River in 1696, where they found several letters written in a language they could not understand. Later, the nineteenth-century naval historian A. S. Sgibnev would identity that language as Japanese. It was also during this campaign that Morozko first encountered information about a chain of islands extending beyond the peninsula. The account of this journey was reported to Moscow in 1701.[12]

10 Krasheninnikov, *Explorations of Kamchatka,* 102. Kamchadal is a term that was often used by Russians to describe Itelmen people. While it does still see some contemporary use, I have chosen to use the term Itelmen (English plural: Itelmens). Even this term is inadequate, as Steller specifies that people on the peninsula identified themselves according to their tribe, their settlements, their names for their neighbours, and different pronunciations of the same language.

11 Steller, *Steller's History of Kamchatka*, 31.

12 Sgibnev, "Istoricheskii Ocherk Glavneishikh Sobytii v Kamchatke, 1650–1855."

In 1697, the following year, the Cossack Vladimir Atlasov, armed with the intelligence gathered by Morozko's previous raid, returned to Kamchatka leading fifty-five Cossacks and sixty Yukaghirs. Atlasov's report to Moscow in 1701 included a variety of information, including early descriptions of volcanic activity, noting:

> A week's travel upwards from the mouth of the Kamchatka River there is a mountain, with the likeness of a stack of bread that is extremely great and high, and another mountain near it is like a stack of hay and similarly tall, and from that other mountain smoke comes in the afternoon, and at night glowing and sparks.[13]

Atlasov's report also provided information that Itelmens were already responding to the Russian threat by building additional fortifications from which to fight:

> Until the arrival of the Russians they did not have forts, and it is notable that under Russian people they build more forts. They fight from these forts, throw stones from slings in their hands, and hurl large stones by hand from the fort, and fought with sharpened sticks and poles.[14]

While the timeline of this first campaign in Kamchatka is not exactly clear, it is notable that a new kind of warfare appears to have been emerging in conjunction with visible volcanism at around this time. This new kind of defensive siege warfare, however, may have been spurred by the need to defend against Russian firearms. Atlasov's report states that they encountered heavy resistance but that Itelmens would usually flee once firearms were used. It appears, then, that in the earliest years of the invasion, Itelmens may have already been adapting to changing conditions of warfare, not staging revolts based on volcanic eruptions which happened to coincide with the appearance of novel forms of violence.[15]

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 It should be noted, however, that when Steller wrote his account roughly half a century later in 1741, he remarks that such structures had been built long before Russian arrival due to the prevalence of warfare on the peninsula. Whatever the case, it is clear that conditions of war, and not volcanic eruptions, drove the use of these structures. Steller, *Steller's History of Kamchatka*, 153.

Atlasov's initial expedition also established the Upper Kamchatka *ostrog* a few miles inland from the mouth of the Kamchatka River, and during his absence from the peninsula from 1701 until 1706, the administrators Mikhail Zinoviev and Vasili Kolesov in successive command established the short-lived first iteration of the Bolsheretsk camp in the southwest of the peninsula and the Upper-Kamchatka *ostrog* in the southern reaches of the Kamchatka River, deep in the peninsula's interior.[16] The next ten years would be defined by a series of raids and counter-raids as well as rebellions against Cossack leadership. Around 1704, the Bolsheretsk camp was destroyed by an Itelmen raid; and a collector of *iasak* was slain, along with five Cossacks, around the same time. Krashenninikov attributes these raids to the collection of *iasak* because "the severe manner in which it was extracted was a great burden to the Kamchadals, who had never lost the memory of their former liberty."[17] In 1707, Atlasov, having been freed from prison in Irkutsk, re-assumed command of the Cossacks on the peninsula and dispatched Ivan Taratin and seventy Cossacks to attempt to conquer the Itelmens who had killed the *iasak* collector three years earlier. This party encountered a force of nearly 800 Itelmens, and, after a bloody battle in which six Cossacks and an unknown number of Itelmens were killed, Taratin's party took three purported Itelmen leaders prisoner. They also briefly attempted to reconquer the Bolsheretsk camp but were unsuccessful.[18]

After 1711, when the Cossacks under Atlasov's command murdered him in his sleep over accusations of cruelty and embezzlement, this band of Cossacks returned to Bolsheretsk once again, hoping to reconquer it. According to Krashenninikov's account, the result was far more a massacre than a battle. The Cossacks destroyed an Itelmen fort in early May and began to build up an *ostrog*. By May 22, a combined force of whom Sgibnev calls *kurili*[19] (potentially Ainu) and Itelmens had assembled to retake it. The fighting lasted well into the evening, and by the time it was over, "so many of the rebels were killed or drowned that the Bolshaia River was covered with bodies."[20] The Cossacks proceeded to set out by boat to the Kuril Islands, where they raided for the remainder of the season.

16 Atlasov was imprisoned in Irkutsk at this time for plundering a merchant ship on the Tunguska River during his return journey.
17 Krasheninnikov, *Explorations of Kamchatka,* 302.
18 Sgibnev, "Istoricheskii Ocherk Glavneishikh Sobytii v Kamchatke."
19 Ibid.
20 Krasheninnikov, *Explorations of Kamchatka*, 309.

By 1713, staggered reports of the chaos and bloodshed in Kamchatka, including the murder of two other administrators by Cossacks and a failure to deliver the expected furs, had reached the regional Russian authority in Tobolsk. Prince Gagarin subsequently dispatched Pyotr Tatarinov to Kamchatka to both punish rebelling Cossacks and extract *iasak* by taking hostages. Tatarinov arrived in Anadyrsk in April of 1714, having left many of his servitors and Cossacks behind in a long trail of winter camps due to a shortage of food. When he arrived, he discovered that Afanasy Petrov, who had been in command at Anadyrsk, had left with a combined force of Cossacks and Yukagirs to attempt to conquer sedentary Koryaks who were living on the Olyutor River to the east.

The siege began on August 6, and after a bloody but successful battle in which nearly 130 Yukagirs were badly wounded, Petrov decreed that all survivors from the besieged fort should be hunted down. He ordered that the Yukagirs return with the severed fingers of the fleeing people or face hanging. These losses were compounded by the fact that the Cossacks had been feeding themselves on Yukagir reindeer herds, which were almost entirely depleted, and further still by the fact that they were forbidden from returning to the tundra while also being commanded to pay *iasak* as payment for tobacco and other goods. Tatarinov sent an order to Petrov commanding him to release the Yukagirs from their *iasak* obligations, but Petrov disregarded this order and simply left the Yukagirs at the newly established Olyutorsk *ostrog* with the remaining Yukagir reindeer. While in transit, the Yukagirs killed almost all of the Cossacks. A few managed to escape to the nearby Aklansk ostrog by December 5. The surviving Boyar Ivan Yeniseisky sent a letter to Anadyrsk stating that there were only eleven Cossacks remaining in Aklansk and that they were besieged on all sides. On December 16, Tatarinov sent munitions and gifts to attempt to diffuse the situation, but his messengers returned the next day with news that the camp had been raided. Tatarinov then sent a detachment of thirty people to capture hostages from the Yukagirs and their Koryak allies, but it is unclear if they were successful in this attempt.

In February of the following year, Tatarinov received confirmation from an *iasak* collector named Afanasy Surgutsky that all but one Cossack at Aklansk had been killed and that, while the Yukagirs had returned to the tundra, a group of Koryaks had made plans to besiege the Olyutorsk *ostrog*. At the time, the garrison within the Anadyrsk was so small (amounting to only around forty Cossacks in total) that Tatarinov feared sending any potential reinforcements, so the Olyutosk *ostrog* remained under siege until a band of twenty-nine Cossacks attempted to travel to some Koryak allies along the

coast to seek food. Nearly all of them were killed or taken prisoner by the besieging forces.

By February of 1715, an alliance of Koryaks from around Kamensky and Aklansky began to regularly raid the area around the Olyutosk *ostrog*. The besieged counter-attacked with a force of ten people, eight of whom were killed. Following this latest skirmish, it seemed likely that the *ostrog* would fall to the siege, but smallpox broke out among the besiegers, forcing the Koryaks to retreat.

From 1716 to 1728, life on the peninsula further deteriorated into a series of raids and counter-raids between Cossaks and Yukagirs, Cossacks and Koryaks, and Koryaks and Yukagirs to seize hostages and collections of *iasak*, arms, reindeer, and food. In all cases, though, this violence appears to have been motivated by immediately apparent needs and circumstances: furs and prisoners to exchange for trade goods and diplomatic leverage; reindeer for all their many purposes as food, trade goods, and pack animals, or as revenge for previous killings or betrayals. In no cases, though, do volcanic eruptions appear to have been strong motivating factors, or at least, not as apparent to the Russian observers as other, more immediate possibilities.

All the while, the furs of foxes, sea otters, and sables continued to flow from Kamchatka back towards western markets in fits and starts. In 1715 alone, more than 6,000 sable pelts were sent to Yakutsk, along with the pelts of 898 red foxes and 166 sea otters.[21] The collection of all of these furs, in addition to spurring the practices of raiding and counter-raiding, also produced ripple effects in the economy of Kamchatka. Steller remarks in his writings from 1741 that the standard practice among the Cossacks had been to coerce labour from Itelmen villages, including to hunt furs, meaning that villagers "had to neglect their own families during the best time [for food gathering]." Steller further details numerous heinous accounts of sexual assault, slavery, torture, and extortion on the part of occupying Cossacks and accuses them of pitting different groups of Koryaks and Itelmens against each other in order to more easily dominate both in the aftermath.[22] In his travels around the peninsula, Steller also noted that the landscape near rivers was lined with "so many pits and holes […] where dwellings once stood that in the summer you cannot take a step without fear of falling into a pit" and that "even now, you still find human bones and skulls as frequently as you find field stones elsewhere […] Most of these, however, were delivered from toothaches at the hands of

21 Sgibnev, "Istoricheskii Ocherk Glavneishikh Sobytii v Kamchatke."
22 Steller, *Steller's History of Kamchatka,* 173–175.

the Cossacks."[23] By all accounts, the extraction of furs from Kamchatka had introduced a state of endemic warfare and violent exploitation to the peninsula, which was accompanied by a frequent economic dislocation.

This violence and economic disruption likely impacted the ability of communities on Kamchatka to respond to disastrous tsunamis. Steller's history of Kamchatka, for example, notes that Itelmen villages were generally autonomous but were connected by familial trade networks and regular travel. He notes: "these families were in constant contact, made special friendships, and helped each other with various necessities when one had an abundance and the other a deficiency."[24] Steller also noted the importance of regional travel for Itelmen people as well as the misery that the decline of travel brought to the peninsula:

> At the beginning of winter, those living at the rivers' mouths went visiting upriver. Starting in March, those living upriver near the headwaters went visiting downriver until, having been en route for two months in order not to bypass anyone […] Their memories of their happy lifestyle now evoke many tears, and their bitterness will only be completely gone when the few remaining elders and "historians" who were alive before the arrival of the Russians will have all closed their eyes; not many of them are left anyway.[25]

In this passage, Steller confirms the importance of regional travel and connectivity in Itelmen life and directly attributes the decline of this lifestyle to the arrival of the Russians on the peninsula. If the assertions made by archaeologists elsewhere in the North Pacific are correct, then this decline in regional travel and connectivity likely deprived Itelmen populations of one of their best tools for mitigating the effects of disasters: a distributed network that was able to provide necessities in the event of shortages. An example of a site where archaeology has established a link between distributed kinship networks and disaster resilience is given later in this chapter in the case study on Kodiak. Given that, averaged over the last 4,000 years, Kamchatka has experienced a tsunami every fifty-six years, it appears likely that these social features helped to mitigate vulnerability to these regular events.

23 Ibid. 167.
24 Ibid. 161.
25 Ibid. 167.

The exploitation of Kamchatka reached a new degree of intensity with the arrival of Vitus Bering. Bering was a Danish seafarer sent to conduct an expedition to satisfy Peter the Great's curiosity about Asia's connection to America. Bering conducted two expeditions in the North Pacific between 1725 and his death in 1741. For the second expedition, he intended to set off from the eastern side of the Kamchatka peninsula. Rather than move his supplies by ship from the ramshackle maritime outpost of Okhotsk and around the southern tip of the peninsula, he ordered them to be moved overland from the Bolshertsk *ostrog* to the Lower Kamchatka *ostrog* during the winter—a distance of some 500 miles—and commanded local dogs and labour be conscripted for the purpose.

The results of this order were disastrous, even to the sensibilities of the nineteenth-century imperial naval officer and historian Alexander Sgibnev when he penned his account of Bering's activities in 1869. The trek demanded so much labour that few people were available to hunt, and so found themselves unable to gather the furs to pay *iasak*. Worst of all, though, was the loss of sled dogs, which were, aside from reindeer, the only domesticated animal on the peninsula and of critical importance to surviving the winter. A great multitude of them was required to haul the supplies over the mountainous landscape, down the frozen rivers of Kamchatka, and through the long portages between. The pace of the work was gruelling, and the dogs perished in droves. With each death, another critical tool for transportation, another object of trade to pacify the Russians, and another key to survival was lost.

Sven Waxell, a lieutenant on the expedition who would take over command following Bering's death, commented on the response to the requisition of dogs from Itelmens, saying: "The result was they became rebellious and killed several of our people." In response, a force from the expedition besieged an Itelmen stronghold in a steep place on a mountainside (which Waxell states he thinks were created by earthquakes), and "some hand grenades were thrown at them and that had a tremendous effect, for by doing this some of the male Kamchadals and some of their women and children were killed."[26] The account gives another glimpse into the violence which accompanied the requisition of supplies for the expedition as well as an additional instance of the features of the earthquake-prone landscape becoming entangled with the conquest.

Bering died on the return journey from Alaska, on a small island off the coast of Kamchatka, in December of 1741 as he and his crew suffered the debilitating effects of scurvy. As they suffered from this disease of poor

26 Waxell, *The American Expedition*, 97–98.

nutrition, they also experienced the shaking earth. That same winter, Sven Waxell recorded two earthquakes while sheltering on the island:

> During the winter we experienced two quite violent earthquakes. Our quarters, that is our pits and hollows in the sand, suffered considerably by them, being almost entirely filled with sand. Some of our people, those who were so weak that they were lying asleep, found themselves completely covered with sand when the quakes awoke them.[27]

The seismically active landscape of Kamchatka and the surrounding area, and this incident in conjunction with his subsequent questioning of people on mainland Kamchatka to confirm that they had felt the shaking on the same dates, suggest that this experience may have been one which influenced the thinking of both him and Steller—who was also present on the expedition—that earthquakes occurred seasonally.

Persistent theft in combination with the forced labour associated with moving provisions for the Kamchatka expeditions and recent memory of large massacres, such as the one in 1711, continued to spur resistance to the Russian occupation, culminating in the largest recorded revolt. In 1731, while Bering was back in St. Petersburg reporting on the results of his fist expedition and preparing for the second, insurgents who had been waiting for his ship—the *St. Gabriel*—to leave Kamchatka along with its crew, weaponry, and supplies struck at the Cossacks along the coast of the peninsula. They succeeded in capturing the Lower Kamchatka *ostrog*—an important fortress on the peninsula which had been used for the collection of the fur tax—and burned it to the ground. Only the church was left standing. According to Sgibnev, the attackers killed everyone inside the fortress, sparing no one, and afterwards celebrated their victory by drinking, dancing, and holding a prayer service under the guidance of a man named Savin, whom Sgibnev calls a "baptised Kamchadal." These tactics, as with those many raids, skirmishes, and sieges which preceded them in the previous decades, do not mesh with the reported rumours of volcanic eruptions stirring revolts, but instead demonstrates a clearly organised effort to overthrow Russian authority.

In a story recorded by Soviet ethnographers, a Koryak man named Kaynyvilyu, after returning from a journey meeting with giants on the tundra, found that his father's eyes had been gouged out. When he questioned his

27 Ibid. 140.

father, he discovered that some Cossacks who had been celebrating a wedding were responsible and were living in his house. Kaynyvilyu then immediately went to the Cossacks, grabbed them by their feet, and smashed them into a wall. He then broke all their arms and legs and threw them outside before setting off on a quest to restore his father's eyesight.[28] This story is both another example of resistance to invasion and non-volcanic motivations for counterattacks. While this story cannot be firmly placed in time, it describes decidedly human motives, not action driven by the eruption of a volcano.

Interrogations of prisoners taken by the Russians in the wake of the 1731 revolt similarly reveal non-volcanic motives. While the information taken from prisoners should be treated cautiously, these interrogations still accurately reflect the Russian view of the causes of the revolt. In one interrogation an Itelmen man, Fyodor Harchin, claimed that Russian servitors had raped his wife and demanded excessive overpayment of taxes.[29] This presents another case of entirely non-volcanic motives behind key revolts. In the end, Steller also believed that the causes of rebellions on Kamchatka were more human than volcanic: "This much is certain: that the Itelmen have always been forced to rebel."[30]

Even so, the active landscape of Kamchatka was a frequent factor in a period of pitched, brutal warfare and intense social and economic upheaval. The belief that revolts were linked to volcanic eruptions, said to have been commonplace by the 1740s, represents a linkage between the active seismic landscape and the decades of extreme violence which accompanied the conquest. This story suggests that the conquest dramatically changed the humanitarian impact of natural hazards. Still, it is important to note that such natural hazards never appear to have dissuaded imperial ambitions in the region, and Kamchatka has remained under the administration of the Russian Empire and its successor states up to the present. Commenting on the suitability of Kamchatka for colonisation, Krashenninikov wrote:

> In regard to the dangers which plague this country by reason of earthquakes and floods, this is a disadvantage which has been observed in many other places which however are not considered any less fit to be inhabited because of this.[31]

28 Dolitsky and Alaska-Siberia Research Centre, *Ancient Tales of Kamchatka*, 78.
29 *Kolonialnaia politika tsarizma na Kamchatke i Chukotke v XVIII veke*, 70.
30 Steller, *Steller's History of Kamchatka*, 177.
31 Krasheninnikov, *Explorations of Kamchatka,* 87.

While the intertwined effects of the tsunami of 1737 and the invasion of the peninsula should not be ignored, the fact that the tsunami and the frequency of observed earthquakes did not stymie the colonisation of the region remains significant.

Kodiak and the Tsunamis of 1788 and 1964

Today, Kodiak is well known as one of the early sites of Russian conquest in North America. When the Russian Empire's claim to Alaska was sold to the United States in 1867, Kodiak remained of peripheral concern to the United States until the outbreak of the Second World War, when Alaska was quickly militarised to create a Pacific fortress against Imperial Japan. Over the relatively short period of about 250 years since the Russian arrival, Kodiak has been rocked by several substantial tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. These events significantly affected the people on the archipelago, even as colonisation changed almost every part of life. Still, even while they occasionally stymied efforts at settlement, these events never proved to be long-term obstacles to colonisation.

Kodiak and surrounding areas on the Kenai Peninsula, Cook Inlet, and Prince William Sound have been homes of Alutiiq people and their ancestors for at least 10,000 years. It is difficult and largely inadvisable to attempt to summarise the diversity of Alutiiq culture over the course of such a long period of time, but it can be said that over this extended period, Alutiiq people traded and interacted with the many other groups living in the region while developing a succession of cultures that made use of the abundant natural resources of the region, including salmon, birds, and sea mammals. They have also lived alongside the frequent natural hazards of the North Pacific and adjusted their lives to these events when necessary.

Earthquakes occurring in 1150 AD and 1550 AD do not appear to have had long-term impacts on Alutiiq society. A combination of maritime skill, large social territories, and strong inter-village relationships allowed communities to disperse and coalesce in response to disasters, mitigating their effects.[32] This is not to say that earthquakes, tsunamis, and eruptions never had any negative effects. These natural hazards disrupted shellfish beds and salmon runs and changed the elevation of the coastline. Still, the ability to move from a damaged site to another while the local ecology recovered appears

32 Saltonstall and Carver, "Earthquakes," 172–173.

to have been an invaluable part of life on Kodiak for hundreds of years, and constituted a disaster regime which mitigated the scale of destruction of these regular events.

In addition to ample geological evidence of these events, the oldest known human record of a volcanic eruption in Alaska comes from Kodiak. The record is the painted panel of a wooden box depicting an erupting volcano and a series of low humps speculated to indicate tsunamis. The box dates to about 1550 AD, approximately the time of the eruption of the St. Augustine volcano, which is suspected to have repeatedly erupted and generated tsunamis during the same period.[33] Whether or not the artefact is related to the eruption of the St. Augustine volcano, its existence is demonstrative of existing human relationships with these natural hazards prior to the Russian invasion.

Alutiiq people often moved their settlements in historical times due to economic or environmental changes, including the effects of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. This has resulted in outsiders viewing certain village sites as "abandoned." However, as Marlane Shanigan of the Kanatak Tribal Council argued in 2001, "abandonment means that one leaves without the intention of returning."[34] In many cases, Alutiiq communities have maintained lasting connections to village sites as well as the intent to eventually reoccupy these sites at some point in the future. This long-term process of relocation and resettlement is predicated on a system in which people belong to the land, an understanding which clashed with the idea of human ownership of land imported with the arrival of the Russian and American empires. While the arrival of the Russian Empire would change many aspects of how people on Kodiak lived with natural hazards, within only four years of the initial invasion of the archipelago, the violent movements of the earth forced the Russians, too, to relocate a settlement.

The conquest of Kamchatka provided a springboard from which the Russian invasion of Alaska's archipelagos commenced. Driven by the high price of furs in Europe and China, fur traders and Cossacks moved from island to island, enacting similar patterns to those they had practised in Siberia and Kamchatka: locating population centres, crushing resistance, and taking hostages to compel tribute in the form of furs, food, labour, and tools. Agents of the Russian Empire subjugated the Kodiak archipelago in a series of confrontations and massacres from 1784–1786. As Lydia Black has argued, the conquest of Kodiak was qualitatively different from the later activities of

33 Steffian, Begét, and Saltonstall, "Prehistoric Alutiiq Artifact."
34 Crowell, Steffian, and Pullar, *Looking Both Ways*, 84–86.

other merchant skippers in Alaska, who generally sought trade and temporary stays in the region. By contrast, the Russian operation led by Grigory Shelikhov sought out armed conflict and the creation of a permanent base in a populated area from which to move to the Alaskan mainland.[35] He would later appoint a man named Alexander Baranov to govern the colony. Baranov governed for almost thirty years from Kodiak and a subsequent stronghold at Sitka. The first attempt at establishing a permanent colony would be at a site called Three Saints Bay in the southwestern corner of the Kodiak archipelago.

Shelikhov, from the early years of his arrival, envisioned Kodiak as a potential site for agriculture. In a report on the island, he commented on the success of his experiments and his future aspirations for the settlement:

> The islands lying along the American coast and extending from Kykhtak [Kodiak] to the east, and to Northeastern America are mainly rocky and mountainous. However, there are also good lands suitable for agriculture, which was confirmed by my own experiments having planted barley, millet, peas, beans squash, carrots, mustard, beetroot, potatoes, turnips and rhubarb. Everything came up very well except that the millet, beans, and squash did not develop seed and that only because they were not planted in time. There are meadows suitable for making hay, and many types of grass, and in places cattle can subsist through the whole winter without hay.[36]

These projections would prove to be rose-coloured over the following decades. While a few cold-hardy vegetable crops would experience small degrees of success, production never rose to the levels necessary to sustain an agricultural export economy.

This outpost at Three Saints Bay would not last long, however. A major earthquake occurred on July 11 (on the Julian calendar; July 21 on the Gregorian calendar, accounting for the international dateline), 1788 and—possibly—a substantial aftershock on July 27 (Julian calendar; August 6 on the Gregorian calendar, accounting for the international dateline). Both events (if, indeed, there were two) were followed by substantial tsunamis which badly damaged the settlement. The specifics of the tsunamis of 1788 have long been the subject of some confusion, with some sources citing a single event, others citing two, some mentioning only an earthquake, and others emphasising

35 Black, "The Russian Conquest of Kodiak," 165–188.
36 Shelikhov, *A Voyage to America, 1783–1786*, 52.

only a tsunami. In all likelihood, there was only a single earthquake which resulted in a tsunami in 1788, with several significant aftershocks. A letter from Shelikhov to Baranov in August of 1794 mentions that the entire island of Kodiak was "not such a strong location, taking for example after my past departure from Kodiak, and the former Three Saints harbour, in which place I had experimented in planting grains and had vegetable gardens that were sunk by an unexpected rise in seawater" and goes on to list the various advantages of settling on the mainland rather than on an island.[37] Shelikhov was, of course, not on the island at the time of the tsunami and received his account second-hand. An earlier 1793 letter from Baranov to Shelikhov concerned his reasons for beginning the process of relocating the town the previous year. He suggested that the subsidence had permanently altered the site to such a degree that settlement was no longer possible:

> Our old harbor has become hopeless as a place for men to live in. After the earthquakes, the ground settled and became so low that there are regular straits between the buildings, and during extremely high tides there is very little dry ground left.[38]

As is often the case, the person to do the most research on the earthquake and tsunami of 1788 was a seismologist, S. L. Soloviev of the Soviet Union. His research determined that the existing almanacs of 1968 used the report of the Russian missionary I. Veniaminov as their key source. Veniaminov lived in the Aleutian Islands from 1824–1839 and so was also not a first-hand witness, but drew his information from church records. His account stated of the event of July 21 (Gregorian calendar): "In one of the notes I have seen, it was told that on July 11, 1788 […] on Unga Island, there was an earthquake so strong that one could not stand on his feet. Many mountains crumbled, and after this event during some time there was a terrible flood." Veniaminov also described a second event, writing: "I have seen a note in one of the church books in an old handwriting in which it was told, that on July 27 [August 6 Gregorian calendar] 1788 there was a terrible flood on Unga Islands from which many Aleuts died but the Russians were saved by God and old men say that (this time and later) the water level rose up to 50 sazhens [117 meters]." Soloviev contends that this second date is a false one, arguing that the ship *Three Saints* was in harbour at Three Saints Bay on July 27 (Julian calendar)

37 Alekseev and Fedorova, *Russkie ekspeditsii*, 322.
38 Pierce and Donnelly, *A History of the Russian American Company*.

and made no mention of a tsunami in the ship's journal.[39] It is likely, then, that while there were probably substantial aftershocks, there was only a single tsunami that year at Three Saints Bay on Kodiak, even if there was indeed a separate event on Unga Island.

Soloviev also provides a new source: a letter to Shelikhov from Vasili Merkuliev on Kodiak from May of 1789, which contains perhaps the only written account of the event from a witness. It is also likely the means by which Shelikhov first learned of the event. It reads:

> in 1788 on July 11th, here on Kodiak Island we had a big earthquake and some thought that the earth would collapse. The earthquake was so strong that one could not stand on his feet. We did not have time to recover from this earthquake when a flood came from the sea. We had a deluge in our harbour, and at that time every man was looking for a safe place to save his life. The flood did a lot of damage. First, my barabara was flooded and the merchandise was carried away as were other small structures and the palisade. In your garden all of the soil and vegetation were washed entirely away and at this place water brought in gravel and dug holes in the ground. The raise of the level of the water was almost up to the windows in your room. However, the flood only lasted a very short time, there were two large waves and the rest of them were minor. After this the earth was shaking every day for a month or longer. It was shaking two or three times a day and even more often. Since the time of the earthquake, our place near the harbour subsided.

This account was likely the driving factor behind Shelikhov's choice to advise Baranov to seek a new site for his town on Kodiak. When Yuri Lysianskyi visited Three Saints Bay in 1805 as part of his circumnavigation of the world, he noted of the harbour, "its shores were formerly tolerably high, but since the earthquake of 1788, they have sunk so much, that the equinoctial floods cover them almost to the very mountains."[40] This again suggests a single event in 1788. Still, the destruction of 1788, in conjunction with the lack of forests in the area, led Baranov to relocate the base of operations in 1792 to St. Paul's Harbour on the eastern side of the island, the site of the contemporary city of Kodiak.

39 Soloviev, "The Sanak-Kodiak Tsunami of 1788," 232–237.
40 Lysianskyi, *A Voyage Round the World*, 183.

While this earthquake and its aftermath are well attested, it is notable that it does not seem to have been a matter of grave concern for either Shelikhov or Baranov. Their designs were commercial, and the presence of earthquakes—with which they were surely already familiar, setting out as they did from the Russian Far East—does not appear to have dissuaded either of them. Dealing with earthquakes, we can infer, was simply another risk of doing business in the North Pacific, where harsh storms, shipwrecks, starvation, and scurvy were likely far more imminent threats than the possibilities of future earthquakes.

Following the initial violence of conquest, Russian agents compelled the Alutiiq residents of Kodiak to perform labour gathering furs and food, disrupting the local economy. Men from Kodiak were sent to places as far off as the Kuril Islands north of Japan and California to hunt for sea otters, and life in the archipelago became increasingly centred upon Russian outposts. Following a smallpox epidemic in the late 1830s, the roughly 2,000 survivors were relocated to only seven settlements, nearly all of which were located adjacent to Russian trading posts on the coast, and left many former villages at least temporarily uninhabited.[41] The smallpox epidemic ultimately made Kodiak into a far more colonial place than it had been before.[42] That is to say, the life of the survivors on the island became far more centred around the commerce which took place at the Russian trading posts. These changes in spatial organisation would go on to have important impacts on human relationships with natural hazards in the coming centuries by steadily concentrating population centres into fewer and fewer coastal locations.

From its new base at St. Paul's Harbour, the Russian Empire administered first a trade in furs, especially the skins of sea otters. Later, these efforts expanded to include short-lived ventures in whaling and ice production, among others. During these years, the Russian Orthodox Church maintained a significant presence on the island, and thousands of Alutiiq people converted to Russian Orthodoxy.[43] This conversion was fuelled in part by the work of Egor Ivanovich Popov, a missionary who would later come to be canonised as St. Herman. Orthodoxy brought with it a new, theological means of understanding the turbulent earth on which Kodiak sat. Among the miracles cited for St. Herman's canonisation was the prevention of a tsunami by placing an icon of the Mother of God on the shoreline. The source for this information appears to be from a document compiled by a man identified

41 Crowell, Steffian, and Pullar, *Looking Both Ways*.
42 Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages Under Russian and U.S. Rule*, 46–47.
43 Mousalimas, "The Account from Old Harbor."

as the Creole Constantine Larionov and published in St. Petersburg by the Valaam Monastery in 1900. The relevant passage reads:

> At the settlement of Father Herman on Spruce Islands in the first year there was a flood [navodneniye], or a high tide of the sea [priliv morya] (which must have been from an earthquake) and the people inhabiting that place were afraid and told the elder, who went from his cell to the home of his disciples where every Sunday he served divine liturgy for hours for lack of a chapel or a church, and took an icon of the Mother of God and bore it to the shallows on the shore where the water had risen last time, and placing the icon began to pray to God, and having finished his prayer, declared to those present not to fear, saying, "greater or further from this place, where this sacred object is placed, the water will not go!" which those who heard the event affirmed. When it was necessary to carry the icon back, after instructing the people, Herman allegedly said to Sofia Vlasova (who was already the caretaker of the young girl disciples) that in the event the sea rises again in the future, to place the icon on the shallow shore and promised that the sea would not rise beyond that place.[44]

The author goes on to cite several people from around the archipelago who had heard the story and at least one who had not. A few details are worthy of emphasis here. First, the author clearly recognises the connection between earthquakes and flooding. According to the story, the people were afraid that the flood would come, indicating some widespread foreknowledge of the event. This presents two possibilities. This first possibility is that there was an earthquake, and the island's residents recognised that it might portend a tsunami. The second possibility is that a first tsunami wave had already arrived, and people went to Herman fearing a second, as Herman bore the icon "to the shallows on the shore where the water had risen last time." However, this could also mean that Herman either knew or was told of the effects of a previous tsunami and brought the icon to that place to stop it. In either case, this story establishes the existence of widespread knowledge of the dangers posed

44 *Valaamski Missioneri v Amerike*, 172–173. My thanks to Heghine Hakobyan for her assistance with the details of this translation. No precise date exists for this event, but it was likely sometime between 1811 and 1817. Korsun and Black, *Herman: A Wilderness Saint,* 91.

by earthquakes and tsunamis on the island in the early nineteenth century. The second item of importance is the creation of a tradition of invoking the power of icons to avert natural hazards. In the story, Herman teaches Sofia Vlasova to use the icon in the event of future floods, establishing both that it was known such events would happen again in the future and that Russian Orthodoxy was a known means of mitigating the events.

This was not the last time residents of Kodiak would turn to their faith to understand the tsunami. Only about a century later, in 1964, when a magnitude 9.2 earthquake rocked Alaska, the town of Kodiak—now a busy American fishing port which grew rapidly following the militarisation of Alaska—was devastated by a tsunami. Reconstruction after the fact never seems to have been in question. Only three days after the earthquake on Easter Sunday, Father Marx, the local Catholic priest on Kodiak, preached, "Nineteen hundred years ago when Christ died on the cross, God reached out his hand and shook the earth. This Good Friday He again caused the earth to shake to remind us to rebuild our lives close to Him even as we try to rebuild our city."[45] Many who wrote letters in the days following the tsunami reflected similar thoughts: that the damage was terrible, but rebuilding was the only option. While the island's only newspaper press had been destroyed by the tsunami, once the island's only newspaper, the bi-weekly Kodiak mirror, finally put out a stopgap issue in April, the headline read, "Kodiak Will Rebuild!" and reported that: "Kodiakans, generally, are very optimistic about the future." Following a brief accounting of the many businesses and buildings which had been damaged or destroyed by the waves, the paper concluded, "Thus the picture damage-wise is not pretty. It is a low blow economic-wise to Kodiak, which seemed favoured by the gods up to now. But all seem to think Kodiak will build on its misfortune a better, cleaner, more modern and attractive city."[46] This statement betrays the general lack of understanding the new settlers on Kodiak had of the history of the environment in which they lived. Within their limited knowledge of the island, they could only assume that such an event as the 1964 tsunami was a one-time event, rather than a long-term pattern: a supposition that would dominate rebuilding efforts.

On July 28, 1964, the Federal Reconstruction and Development Planning Commission for Alaska convened in Washington DC to discuss the ongoing process of rebuilding Alaskan communities following the earthquake. Tensions were beginning to run high in the meetings of the commission as the short

45 Martinson, "Good Friday 1964."
46 "Kodiak Will Rebuild!"

summer construction season waned and several important decisions about funding reconstruction remained unfinalised. Most contentious of all was the designation of so-called "high risk" areas by the Scientific and Engineering Task Force. These "high risk" areas included many lightly damaged homes and commercial buildings and were described by the Task Forces as "land considered unstable, particularly in the event of future earthquakes. No economical means of stabilisation known. No repair, rehabilitation, or new construction involving use of Federal funds is recommended."[47] Nevertheless, loans for the repair of damaged structures amounting to 6 million dollars were already being disbursed for the high risk areas at the time of this July meeting, and the Small Business Administration only required that a building be structurally sound under present conditions. As one committee member, Mr. Schaem of the US Army Corp of Engineers, said, "we are not saying these are safe houses. They are structurally safe, as far as the house is at the present time, under current conditions, but not under another earthquake."[48] Eventually, Edward McDermott, the director of the Office of Emergency Planning, expressed some frustration with the proceedings, stating, "My concern goes to this question of whether we, as the federal government, aren't getting too deeply into this question of being the ultimate prophet of what is going to happen to everything in Alaska […] we should be mindful of the Federal commitment […] that attaches to all of this prophesying we are doing about the security and stability of these properties up there. Theoretically, they [the SBA] shouldn't be loaning money to people who live near airports because an airplane might fall on the house." While the possibility of future earthquakes and their consequences was known to the members of the committee, absent any certainty about the timing of these future events, they elected to pursue a policy which supposed the land to be a static thing. It was a policy anchored in an imagined eternal present, disconnected from the slow but steady movements of the earth over time. The declaration of safety "at the present time, under current conditions" effectively abdicated responsibility for the consequences of future earthquakes.

While the committee established early on in their deliberations that geological data would be necessary to inform their decision-making, the chair of the committee, Clinton Anderson, set the tone for the discussion of future earthquakes. When Vic Fisher warned that every geologist gave the

47 "Transcript of Proceedings: Meeting of the Federal Reconstruction and Development Planning Commission for Alaska July 28, 1964", 738.

48 Ibid. 743.

opinion that the current town site of Valdez should be abandoned and the town rebuilt elsewhere, the senator responded that "they said the same thing about San Francisco but the people are still living there" and went on to say: "I am sure there are areas in the world having trouble with volcanoes, but people live under them all the time." In August of 1964, about five months after the committee had begun its work, Senator Anderson recommended a return to the pre-earthquake system of planning in Alaska, and in October of 1964, duties for planning and reconstruction at the Federal level were handed over to the newly formed Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska and President's Review Committee for Development Planning in Alaska.[49]

Just as had been the case 176 years earlier in 1788, the earthquake and tsunami of 1964 did not prove to be a substantial detriment to the continued occupation of Kodiak and other sites in Alaska. While the disaster did prove to have many effects, both short-term and lingering, the long process of colonising the archipelago was not substantially dissuaded.

Conclusions

The prevalence of earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions in the North Pacific has received relatively little attention as a historical phenomenon, a fact which is surprising given their dramatic interjections at some of the most critical moments during the conquest and colonisation of the region. However, while these powerful events were certainly devastating to the communities they impacted, and triggered both immediate effects and long-term changes, they had little impact on long-term human processes such as the colonisation of the region. As the Russian Empire and the United States expanded into the North Pacific, they altered the way people in the region experienced these frequent natural hazards, but these changes seldom deterred colonisation. As environmental historians continue to assess the importance of earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions in the North Pacific and elsewhere, we must also remain open to the possibility of their unimportance. Given that the societies which have resulted from colonisation have persisted in the North Pacific and the virtual certainty of future earthquakes, tsunamis, and

49 Committee on the Alaska Earthquake of the Division of Earth Sciences National Research Council, *The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964*, 154.

eruptions, the factors which proved to make colonialism so durable under these circumstances are deserving of further inquiry.

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3 Trust, Anxiety, and Power in the Yukon Backcountry: Reading Zagoskin's Expedition Journal, 1842–1844

Luise Fast

Abstract The expedition journal of Lavrentiy Alexeyevich Zagoskin from the early 1840s introduces a number of interpreters and intermediaries who, in one way or another, partook in the Russian American Company's push into the Yukon backcountry. Mapping the relationship between explorer and interpreter as a function of fluctuating economies of trust and mistrust, this paper investigates interaction histories that often remain hidden on account of the ephemeral nature of interpreting. They reveal how literacy and experience (or the lack thereof) impacted the emotional regime of the exploration party, and challenge, rather than confirm, the power dynamic between empire and colony on the periphery, opening up spaces for negotiation, strategic action, and creative adaptation for the Native intermediary.

Keywords Alaska, fur trade, intermediaries, Indigenous

In a paper titled "The Empire Talks Back," Michael Cronin describes a phenomenon widely overlooked in studies concerned with imperial exploration of border regions. "The central problem," he writes,

> of translation in general and interpretation in particular is the problem of control. […] Proximity is both desirable and dreaded. The desire is to manipulate and the dread comes from the fear of being misled, either by the native interpreter, or by the nonnative interpreter going native. The difficulty for the imperial agent is dealing with this monstrous doubleness, the potential duplicity of interpreters.[1]

1 Cronin, "The Empire Talks Back," 55.

Fast, Luise. 2025. "3 Trust, Anxiety, and Power in the Yukon Backcountry: Reading Zagoskin's Expedition Journal, 1842–1844" In *Environments, Resources, and Infrastructures Between Russia and the Asia-Pacific*, edited by Benjamin Beuerle, Sandra Dahlke, Anna Mazanik and Andreas Renner, 47–72. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing. https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.1589.c23566

Cronin's reflections on power, control, and interpreting in colonial settings point to the orality of the encounter in the imperial borderlands, which by its very nature is difficult to study. Cronin's title references the seminal "The Empire Writes Back," a theoretical conceptualisation of postcolonial literature penned by Bill Ashcroft, Garth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in 1989.[2] But before the empire *wrote* back, it first *talked*—and from a practical standpoint, the talking was first and foremost done by Native interpreters, who, on account of their function as "conduits for privileged 'inside' information on the society and culture," were able to "confer authenticity and verisimilitude on the account," as Cronin notes elsewhere, but at the same time fundamentally challenged the power dynamics on the frontier.[3] Interpreters, he argues, in some sense became "monsters," combining both desirable and threatening attributes, creating anxiety and plaguing the imperial travellers' state of mind.[4]

There are many reasons why the case of the Russian Empire, as Andreas Kappeler has pointed out, does not fit models of imperialism that were developed with Western European constellations in mind.[5] It occupied a vast contiguous landmass that was home to a multitude of very heterogeneous ethnic groups with a long history of contact with the Russians. The interactions between the various ethnic groups and the Russians, governance strategies, and enforcement of rule also varied to large degree in measure and form, and were often guided by pragmatic rather than paternalistic considerations.[6] While, at certain times, much of the Russian Empire might resist an easy classification as a colonial empire, Russian America differed from the rest of the Russian Empire in significant ways. Not only was it the only overseas possession, it was also the only part of the Russian Empire explicitly defined as a colony and was held and kept more for its economic resources than for geopolitical reasons. Russian America, as Ilya Vinkovetsky argues, served as a site for experimentation for governance approaches that emulated those of Russia's Western European counterparts, creating a chartered company, the Russian American Company (RAC), tasked with the management of the colony's resources and territory.[7] This is also visible in how the Russian

2 Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back.*
3 Cronin, *Across the Lines*, 72.
4 Cronin, "The Empire Talks Back," 52–54.
5 Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 7, 161–162;
6 Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 161–171. Ilya Vinkovetsky therefore applies Frederick Cooper's concept of the empire-state to Russian America: Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 9–13.
7 Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 6–10.

colonisers related to the Natives of Russian America. Feelings of Eurocentric superiority towards non-European groups, patterned after Western European attitudes, grew more pronounced in many parts of the Russian Empire throughout the nineteenth century, Kappeler has shown.[8] In Russian America at the middle of the century, they had found their way into the modes of interaction between the colonisers and the Natives as well as into the discourse on Native intermediaries.

For the Russian exploration of the Alaskan interior in the nineteenth century, the report of Lieutenant Lavrentiy Alekseyevich Zagoskin provides a rare and detailed account of terrain, ethnography, and—the primary interest of the Russians—the condition of fur-bearing animals in the Yukon river drainage. Like colonial explorers elsewhere, Zagoskin had to rely significantly on the services of local intermediaries, who were often recruited as guides and acted as interpreters of language, culture, and geography. His report introduces us to a number of interpreters that served different functions in his colonial exploration, providing us with a glimpse into the oral and experiential dimension of his interactions with these intermediaries. In this paper, I want to revisit Zagoskin's writing, which is usually used as an important source for the Russian American Company's attempts to expand its knowledge about and its realm of influence into the interior of the American colony. I am going to read it for its accounts of Zagoskin's relationship with the intermediaries who played a crucial role in these attempts. A closer look at the dynamics that unfold between the lines of his writing reveals interaction histories that often remain hidden on account of the ephemeral orality of interpreting. They interrupt the sonority of conventional colonial exploration narratives, offering insight into how the talking of Native interpreters fundamentally challenged colonial power dynamics, shaping the explorer's state of mind through shifting economies of trust and mistrust. The appearance of Cronin's "monster," although derived from examples of Western European colonial empires, also suggests that the anxiety it was able to create was a shared experience in the colonial peripheries of the Russian and Western European empires.

8 Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 205–207.

Zagoskin's Expedition into the Yukon Backcountry

As one of the remaining white spots on Western maps, the interior of Alaska became a site of intensified cultural encounter between foreigners and Alaska Natives beginning in the early 1830s. The hunting parties of the RAC had decimated the Alaskan sea-otter population, the primary object of desire for the fur hunters, to a point of virtual extinction.[9] Faced with an overall decline in fur prices, the RAC decided in 1828 to expand its operations into the interior in order to make up for the declining revenues by trading other fur-bearing animals from the inland, mainly beavers and land otters.[10] Attempts to access the interior date back as far as Korsakovkii's 1818 expedition on the Nushagak, when the RAC likely first learned of the rich hunting grounds that lay beyond in the river valleys of the Kuskokwim and the Yukon rivers.[11] Now the RAC planned to open up the Alaskan interior to their trans-Pacific fur trade, using the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers as their main access routes.[12] In 1833, Mikhailovski Redoubt was established on the shore of Norton Sound as a hub for Native traders to sell their furs from the Yukon, as well as serving as a base for expeditions and attempts to establish more trading posts in the interior.

The Russian fur trade had changed the subsistence character of the Native economy on the Yukon long before the Natives of the Yukon backcountry ever came into direct contact with the colonisers. European trade goods such as metal pots, knives, tobacco, and other items that were traded at posts in the Russian Far East had found their way into Alaska via Chukchi and Iñupiat middle men, who traded them in return for Alaskan furs that could then be sold to the Russians.[13] Arvid Adolf Etholen, the RAC's chief administrator (*glavnyi pravitel'*) from 1840 to 1845, had travelled the Bering Straits in the 1820s, noticing how Native Alaskan traders sold furs from the lower and middle Yukon directly to Chukchi traders at the seasonal trading fairs on the shores of Kotzebue Sound. The Chukchis then went on to trade the Alaskan furs to Siberian fur companies.[14] This trade network was firmly established by the 1830s. The Russian outpost on Norton Sound was not able

9 Jones, "A 'Havock Made Among Them'," 585–609.
10 Records of the Russian-American Company 1802–1866, *Correspondence of the Governors General.* For the decline of the fur trade, see Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 68–72.
11 VanStone, *Ingalik Contact Ecology*, 47.
12 Arndt, *Dynamics of the Fur Trade*, 27–30; Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 200–207.
13 Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 38–39, 51–56; Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North*; VanStone, *Ingalik Contact Ecology*, 63–64, 98.
14 VanStone, "Athapaskan–Eskimo Relations in West-Central Alaska," 152–154.

to interrupt this trade by diverting the Native traders, who were avoiding the company's posts, as the Chukchi were able to trade in commodities that the RAC could or would not provide for them, such as iron and copper utensils.[15]

The furs still entered the Russian market, but the RAC was losing considerable profits to their Siberian competitors at a time when they could really have used the additional legitimacy. In the early 1840s, the company was in a difficult position. The RAC's charter to manage the territory and its resources was coming up for renegotiation in 1844, and the company needed to prove itself profitable to decision-makers in St. Petersburg.[16] But the fur business was not going well. The use of Russian or Siberian employees in the American colony had turned out to be expensive, and a smallpox epidemic had devastated the Native villages on the coast to the point where, in some settlements, up to half of the population died, killing the base of the RAC's local workforce.[17] As fur-bearing animals on the coast were almost extinct, it was clear that in order to stay profitable, the company had to diversify. In the coming years, the RAC tried to get a foothold in the Chinese ports importing tea to Russia, but for the time being, they depended on buying furs from Native traders from the interior.[18]

From the perspective of the RAC, the Native traders were undercutting their business. Chief administrator Etholen made this problem one of his priorities and tasked young and eager Lieutenant Lavrentiy Alekseyevich Zagoskin with exploring the Native trade routes from the middle Yukon to the shore in 1842. His goal was to find ways to intercept the trade from the interior and divert the furs to the Russian posts in order to gain control over the fur trade on the Yukon, putting an end to the Native trans-Beringian trade.[19]

15 Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 70. James VanStone's reconstruction of Native trade routes in Western Alaska, although an older publication, provides a detailed analysis of the Native trans-Beringian trade network: VanStone, *Ingalik Contact Ecology*, 63–75. See also VanStone, "Athapaskan–Eskimo Relations in West-Central Alaska," 152–154.

16 Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 66–67.

17 Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North*, 193.

18 Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 69–71.

19 At around the same time as this happened, the Hudson's Bay Company employed similar tactics on the northwest coast in an attempt to cut out its competitors—mostly the RAC and the American traders, but also Native groups, who were to be enticed to sell to the HBC rather than to the Russians or the Americans. James R. Gibson documents these efforts in a recent volume: Gibson, *Opposition on the Coast.*

Talking across Boundaries

By the time Etholen became chief administrator in 1840, the colonisers had gained a certain familiarity with several of the coastal languages. Under the leadership of Ioann Veniaminov, priest of the Orthodox Church (and, since late 1840, archbishop in Russian America), and with the notable contribution of Native and Creole informants and interpreters such as Ivan Pan'kov and Iakov Netsvetov, liturgical texts were translated into the Unangan (Aleut) and Tlingit languages. He also published an Aleut primer in 1840 and a study of Aleut grammar.[20]

Zagoskin's situation, however, was particular. The area he was about to explore was inhabited by Natives who belonged to three different linguistic groups that were still largely unfamiliar to the Russian American Company: the Yupi'k on the eastern shores of Norton Sound, the Iñupiat dialect spoken by the Malemiut people of the Seward Peninsula, and the Athabascan dialects of the interior Natives. While the terrain certainly was exceedingly difficult to traverse, navigating this linguistic and cultural borderland proved to be the primary challenge for the expedition, as it required a set of skills no one in the RAC possessed. Upon the express wish of chief administrator Etholen, the men that the RAC attached to Zagoskin's expedition were Creoles, as he assumed them to be better adapted to backcountry life and to have a natural talent for bushcraft.[21] The term "Creole" encompassed the offspring of Russian–Native alliances,[22] but while it might suggest a racial hierarchisation, it rather seems to have been used to designate a social estate that incorporated this group the Russian estate system.[23] Since the Russian Empire had no intention of populating their American colony with Russian-born settlers, and the RAC had to keep the number of Russian employees low, the Creole offspring of the *promyshlenniki* provided the company with reliable, skilled local labour. The RAC's second charter of 1821 made special provisions for the Creole estate and put it under legal protection comparable to town residents in the Russian Empire. In contrast to the taxable Russian peasants in

20 On Veniaminov in Alaska, see Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 98–107; Pierce, "Introduction."

21 Only one expedition member, Iakov Makhov, was a Russian sailor who was attached to Zagoskin as an orderly. Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America,* 84–85.

22 Although there were considerable exceptions. Pavel Akliayuk might be one—he was the son of a Sugpiaq man and a California Indian woman, who had grown up at Fort Ross. Several sources refer to him as Creole. Arndt, "Transplanted to a Northern Clime," 10.

23 Smith-Peter, "'A Class of People Admitted to the Better Ranks'," 363–84.

the employ of the company, the Creole estate was exempt from taxes and military service, and Creoles were given access to whatever education and health care the RAC could provide.[24] In return, they were required to work for the RAC, usually for around fifteen years. After that period, they could become free Creoles if they had no debts with the company—which often resulted in a sort of debtor's serfdom.[25]

In some cases, Creole sons of high-level fathers had the chance to receive a considerable education; some were sent to Russia and were able to have important careers in the imperial navy or the RAC.[26] With proper education and exposure to Russian culture (usually through their living arrangements), as Vinkovetsky argues, the Creoles were supposed to bridge the cultural gap between Russians and Natives, binding their loyalty to the Russians while preserving their Native expertise, thereby making the company more independent in its operations on the frontier.[27]

The Novo-Arkhangel'sk Creoles in Zagoskin's team were officially signed on as hunters, but they were expected to be multitaskers in order to support Zagoskin's traverse across difficult terrain in any way that was necessary. While Etholen assumed the Creoles to possess an intrinsic cultural and practical affinity to backcountry life on account of their bi-cultural heritage, Zagoskin did not agree. He accredited adaptability to the rigours of expeditions to their upbringing rather than to an assumed inherent quality:

> […] there is a vast difference between the Creoles at Novoarkhangelsk and those who grow up in the outlying areas. The latter, with the easygoing quality common to all Creoles, bear any type of hardship and take the pleasure in whatever comes along; with the courage which is also common to all Creoles they combine the experience which they have been acquiring since childhood. A Creole from an outlying district knows how to sew his own clothing, boots, how to track and bag game, make nets, set a dragnet, etc. The Creoles who have grown up in a colonial metropolis, receiving everything ready-made from their fathers or from the Company, turn into fine dock-workers or sailors aboard ship, but are absolutely devoid of the

24 Smith-Peter, "'A Class of People Admitted to the Better Ranks'," 363–84; Easley, "Demographic Borderlands," 73–91. For a critical analysis of the Creole status, see Grinëv, "Social Mobility of the Creoles in Russian America," 20–38.

25 Grinëv, "Social Mobility of the Creoles in Russian America," 27–29.

26 Smith-Peter, "'A Class of People Admitted to the Better Ranks'," 376–77.

27 Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 143–145.

> skills necessary for maintaining and feeding themselves. Not one of the Novoarkhangelsk Creoles knew how to paddle a kayak, much less build one; not one had the notion of how to make himself a harpoon, a dog sled or snowshoes; not one had ever seen a dragnet or a fishnet in use, or anything of the kind.[28]

As the Creoles in the "colonial metropolis" were raised as children of Russians, many of them, especially those that were Creoles in the second generation, spoke Russian as their primary language and might not have been fluent in Native languages. They could not be expected to be of much help in the encounters with the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the interior. When Zagoskin reached the Russian post at Mikhailovskii, he took on one of the Creoles on staff there to act as official interpreter. Grigoriy Kurochkin, a Creole from Kodiak, was likely to be somewhat familiar with the Central Alaskan Yupi'k language.[29] It is possible that more men on the team who were able to communicate in several languages—we know for sure that one of the hunters, Pavel Akliayuk, later on served as interpreter on other expeditions.[30] Grigoriy Kurochkin, the designated interpreter, however, fit the bill of the "Creole from an outlying district" while at the same time being sufficiently Russianised: raised in Kodiak—outside of the "colonial metropolis"—Kurochkin had received an education from the Orthodox Church, learned how to read and write, and served as a deacon at the Kodiak church. To Zagoskin, he appeared to have one foot in—however generalised—"Native" culture and the other in Russian culture. He fondly writes about Kurochkin:

> [Kurochkin] as a literate interpreter, combined a rare gaiety of temperament with an astonishing capacity for imitation. As soon as he arrived in a native village he made himself at home, fraternized with the inhabitants, took note of their peculiarities, learned their songs and their dances, and then performed them in the kazhim in front of an audience.[31]

28 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America,* 84–85.
29 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 85.
30 Pavel Akliayuk played a pivotal role during Kellett's rescue attempt in search of the ill-fated Franklin expedition in the early 1850s. Maguire, *The Journal of Rochfort Maguire*.
31 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 202.

By explicitly mentioning his literacy in this context, Zagoskin connects Kurochkin's ability to read and write to his reliability as an interpreter. In a footnote, he further reflects on literacy and reliability:

> My interpreter, Grigoriy Kurchkin from Kadyak, was a Creole who could read and write. For six years before he took this assignment he had served as a deacon in the Kadyak church. I mention this because I think that one must judge by the education of the interpreter the reliability of the information he imparts.[32]

As Zagoskin was a member of a literate culture, his reasoning that someone is more reliable because he has received some education may seem more or less expected and self-evident. In her discussion on interpreting in Alaska, Elena Filonova argues that interpreters who were non-literate were less likely to find enough common ground to draw from for their mediation. Being able to tap into both literate as well as non-literate modes of thought was a substantial advantage when interpreting in the encounter between those (somewhat) socialised in Russian literate culture and Native oral cultures. It suggested a higher reliability in the interaction and provided the Russian explorers with reassurance in the face of a puzzling confrontation with a way of seeing the world that often did not have corresponding concepts in their own modes of thought, leaving entire categories of reference inaccessible to them.[33] To be sure, this experience certainly was not entirely novel to Russian empire-building, as centuries of interaction with the multitude of Native groups in Siberia and the Far East certainly provided a lot of lessons and practices to be drawn in this respect as well. The importance of reliable intermediaries was surely one of them.

The value of a bi-cultural interpreter whose loyalty could be ensured went far beyond faithful translation between systems of meaning. Filonova credits Kurochkin with fostering Zagoskin's interest in and understanding of Native creative culture that resulted in the considerable ethnographic descriptions provided in his expedition report.[34] In most instances described by Zagoskin, however, it is not possible to assess who actually interpreted and explained during Zagoskin's interactions with various Native groups. While Kurochkin seemed to have possessed a significant ability to understand what

32 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 291.
33 Filonova, "Between Literacy and Non-Literacy," 211–231.
34 Filonova, "Between Literacy and Non-Literacy," 226.

was going on, as well as the capacity to explain it to Zagoskin, his ability to actually interpret what was being said had to be by definition limited to the dialects he understood. It would be unreasonable to assume that Kurochkin, raised in a Russian settlement far away from the Yukon, would be able to interpret across the multiplicity of languages encountered in an inaccessible region he had never visited before. Even when Kurochkin could not literally interpret conversations in the interior, however, his value lay in his ability to ease Zagoskin's mind, who could be sure of his loyalty as well as his ability to participate in both Russian and Native modes of thought, providing necessary reassurance and trust in the face of the uneasiness of encounter. As Cronin puts it, the "interpreter [was] valuable not only because of what they do but because of who they are."[35]

Kurochkin, the literate Creole in the employ of the RAC, was only one piece in the chain of intermediaries that enabled Zagoskin to travel, which also highlights another common practice of backcountry interpreting. Once Zagoskin reached Mikhailovskii Redoubt, he attempted to hire an additional interpreter who would be able to guide him and mediate the encounters expected further inland. A Yup'ik man from a settlement close to Mikhailovskii Redoubt, Feofan Utuktak, had served as interpreter and guide for Aleksandr Filippovich Kashevarov's coastal expedition in 1839 and was familiar with the area between Norton Sound and the Yukon.[36] It is likely that Utuktak, living close to the linguistic boundary between the Yup'ik and Iñupiat languages, was able to understand both.[37] While Zagoskin trusted and valued Kurochkin for his literacy, education, and position as Creole in the employ of the RAC, Utuktak, the independent Native, was recommended by his previous experience on a Russian expedition, which increased his trustworthiness. But when Zagoskin asked Utuktak to accompany him, he flat out refused: "He declared," Zagoskin writes, "that he had formerly been a bachelor, but that he now had two beautiful wives, and because of them his wants were fulfilled."[38] Since Utuktak was no employee of the RAC and fell under the category of "independent Native," he could not be compelled to join the expedition. Zagoskin spend hours with him at the fort, questioning him about topography and the Native communications routes. He even had Utuktak draw a

35 Cronin, *Across the Lines*, 72.
36 Kashevarov, *A. F. Kashevarov's Coastal Explorations in Northwest Alaska*, 30.
37 Kashevarov, *A. F. Kashevarov's Coastal Explorations in Northwest Alaska*, 66, editor's footnote 5.
38 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 89.

map of the area between the Yukon and Kotzebue Sound, and compiled a list of Native settlements and their positions based on Utuktak's information.[39]

Utuktak's refusal to go with Zagoskin not only demonstrated his own independence and agency with regard to requests from the RAC, it also put Zagoskin in a position where he had to hire additional interpreters and guides every time he reached an area with a new dialect. These new expedition members had little to no confirmed reputation among the Russians, and there was no satisfying way for Zagoskin to make sure their loyalties were with him.

In his report, Zagoskin recounts an episode that reveals the unease of his inability to put trust in local intermediaries. Throughout the 1830s, several RAC expeditions under the leadership of Andrei Glazunov attempted to reach the Yukon from Norton Sound by following the Unalakleet River to its headwaters and then crossing the portage to reach the Yukon. It was an important route used by Native traders, who transported considerable amounts of furs from the interior to the Native trading fairs at the coast.[40] It provided a relatively short passage through otherwise unforgiving terrain, connecting the Bering Sea with the Middle Yukon where the river was closer to the shore than anywhere else. The headwaters of the Unalakleet River, which drains directly into Norton Sound, were only 32 km away from the Yukon—a significant shortcut for traders, saving them a river passage through of over 560 km, including the treacherous sloughs of the Yukon delta.[41] Guided by Ulukagmiut traders, Glazunov found the portage to be decidedly difficult, leading him across jagged terrain where the travellers had to lower their sleds on ropes into ravines and haul them back up again on the other side. While Glazunov succeeded in reaching the Yukon, the difficulty of the crossing prevented him from establishing a permanent post on the river, as this difficult supply route did not seem feasible at the time. Only in 1838 did an expedition led by Petr Malakhov succeed in finding a much easier crossing, enabling him to establish the *odinochka* at Nulato on the Middle Yukon.[42]

The narrative of the previous attempts to find a manageable portage to the Yukon as we find it in Zagoskins report reflects his suspicion of and lack of trust in the Native intermediaries. He suspected that the Ulukagmiut guides to the previous expeditions had deliberately misled the Russians in

39 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 124–126.

40 Arndt, *Dynamics of the Fur Trade*, 41–42.

41 Pratt, "Reconstructing 19th-Century Eskimo-Athabascan Boundaries," 95–96.

42 Detailed reconstructions of the expeditions that led to the establishment of the post at Nulato are provided by Arndt, *Dynamics of the Fur Trade,* and VanStone, *Ingalik Contact Ecology*.

an attempt to sabotage the RAC's efforts to get their foot in the door to the Yukon trade. The Ulukagmiut, who lived along the Unalakleet River right on the linguistic boundary between the Athabaskan, Iñupiat, and Yup'ik languages, had long acted as middlemen in the Native fur trade. The Yup'ik regarded them as Athabascan, whereas Athabascans considered them to be Yup'ik. As Kenneth Pratt notes, researchers tend to consider them to be of mixed Athabascan–Yup'ik ancestry.[43] Due to their strategic location on the Unalakleet River, the Ulukagmiut effectively controlled Native trade relations in the region and, according to Zagoskin, guarded the portage jealously. In a "recourse to Machiavellian diplomacy," Zagoskin writes, "these shrewd native traders, who gauged the strength of the Russians and foresaw losses to themselves, [offered] their services as guides […] concealing the easiest and shortest route to Nulato. Finally, an inexperienced boy betrayed the location of the real portage to Malakhov in 1838."[44]

Being forced to hire Ulukagmiut intermediaries as interpreter-guides while being aware that they were the RAC's direct competitors for control of the fur trade naturally fed into Zagoskin's mistrust toward his guides. It was a feeling shared among colonial explorers in many places. Depending on the mediation of indigenous intermediaries felt unnerving to many imperial travellers, creating frustration and insecurity on the imperial peripheries. We find traces of this well-documented phenomenon all across the globe, from the writings of Spanish explorers in the Americas to nineteenth-century travel journals from the Holy Land to reports by settlers in Australia.[45] Was this anxiety a universal state of mind at the edges of empires? While the practices and governance strategies of the Russian Empire toward its peripheries differed from those of the British Empire, the crucial challenge to the power dynamic between colonisers and the colonised experienced by Zagoskin in the Alaskan backcountry shows how similarly the lived realities in contact zones played out in situations where mediation was required. The lack of familiarity with language, customs, and terrain exposed the weakness of the coloniser. It forced Zagoskin to acknowledge that the RAC was not capable of reaching its goal without the guidance of those it was attempting to exploit—whether through negotiation, coercion, or plain force. It had to be disconcerting to know

43 Pratt, "Reconstructing 19th-Century Eskimo-Athabascan Boundaries," 97.

44 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 136–137.

45 Cronin, "The Empire Talks Back," 55–56. See also Valdeón, *Translation and the Spanish Empire*, 40–41; Driessen, "Mediterranean Divides and Connections," 25–38; Schaffer, *The Brokered World*; Karttunen, *Between Worlds*; Shellam, *Brokers and Boundaries*.

that the RAC was forced to put its trust into the hands of someone whose own interests did not necessarily align with its own. Elliott Colla describes this phenomenon as "the terror of knowing that there is no such thing as neutral mediation."[46] The presence of an intermediary—be it an interpreter, a guide, or in many cases both at once—embodied a deep fear of not being in control and fortified the conviction that knowledge was, indeed, power. Those who were in the position to distribute knowledge and control the flow of information were in possession of this power, capable of challenging the arrangements of colonial rule in Russian America.

The Traveller and the Intermediary

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it was feelings of mistrust and unease that guided Zagoskin's interactions with the intermediaries he had to rely upon from this point onward. Throughout his report, Zagoskin describes how he had to rely on an increasing number of Native intermediaries the further he advanced up the Yukon. He was aware that, even if they were reliable—which he had little means of confirming—there was always meaning lost in translation. Everything he learned came to him filtered through several stages of interpretation and depended on each link to both understand correctly as well as convert faithfully what was being said into different modes of understanding and communication. Translation, Peter Burke points out, was always a messy compromise, a negotiation involving distortions of meaning, misunderstandings, and adjustments.[47] The interpretation chain made this very tangible, creating an element of insecurity and adding to the anxiety of colonial exploration.

Retracing this interpretation chain offers insight into the dynamics that challenged the explorer's state of mind. It also reveals Zagoskin's way of dealing with the uneasiness that came with this loss of power. Zagoskin devoted the summer of 1843 to an attempt to travel upstream on the Yukon on an *umiak* up to the Canadian border, making it as far as Nowitna River, about 500 miles upstream.[48] While it is not possible to identify specific individuals who interpreted for him in every interaction, Zagoskin's report introduces us

46 Colla, "Dragomen and Checkpoints," 145.
47 Burke, "Cultures of Translation," 9.
48 De Laguna, *Travels among the Dena*.

to three intermediaries he hired on this trip in order to communicate with the locals and gather information on hunting grounds and trade networks.

Tatlek was a young Koyukon, one of the few Natives from his village at Nulato who had survived the devastating smallpox epidemic that reached the middle Yukon in 1839 via the trade networks.[49] Due to his long hair, the Russians liked to call him "Volosaty" (Russian for "hairy").[50] Tatlek was familiar with some of the coastal dialects and had picked up some Russian while helping out Deriabin, the Creole manager of the Nulato post. But he did not know any of the dialects spoken on the middle and upper Yukon—in fact, he seemed to have never travelled beyond the Koyukuk River.[51] Zagoskin hired Tatlek in addition to another interpreter, Nikifor Talizhuk from the Nulato post staff. Talizhuk was a Creole from Fort Ross in California. He was fluent in the coastal dialects and Russian, and seems to have displayed a certain talent at picking up languages.[52] There was enough expertise between him and Tatlek to interpret as long as the expedition was close to the coast. Continuing up the Yukon, however, they hired another Native they met while passing through a hunting camp. In a Robinson-Crusoe-esque manner, he was dubbed "Vtornik"—Russian for "Tuesday," the day they met. We don't learn a lot about Vtornik, not even his real name. From Zagoskin's account, we can assume he was a hunter from further up the river, and he offered himself as a guide and interpreter to the expedition. Tatlek was able to communicate with him, while Vtornik was supposedly more proficient in the dialects spoken along the Yukon. But, as it turned out, he understood very little as they advanced further into the interior.[53] In order to communicate with the population along the Yukon, information passed through these interpreters before it reached Zagoskin, who had no other choice than to rely on it. Conversations were held in a mixture of several Native languages and Russian.[54] Although Zagoskin recorded what information he gained from these conversations in his official report to the RAC, he did not consider it

49 This epidemic coincided with the Great Plains smallpox epidemic of 1837–1840 but might have had a different origin. For the impact of the smallpox epidemic on Native communities in the Northern Pacific, see Gibson, "Smallpox on the Northwest Coast," 61–81.

50 De Laguna, *Travels among the Dena*, 166–167, 181.

51 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 146–147, 163.

52 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 160–161.

53 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 163, 175.

54 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 167.

entirely credible—if not because of deliberate deception or inaccuracy, then due to the effects of chain interpretation. At one point, he adds a disclaimer:

> However, to avoid future criticism I feel that it is my duty to explain that all the information I collected here from the Tlëgon-khotana [Upper Innoko] natives, as well as from those I met later on, came to me through the following system: every answer to my questions was given to Vtornik, who passed it on to Tatlek, who told it to the Creole interpreter from our California colony [Nikifor Talizhuk], who told it to me. Thus even a perfectly accurate piece of information could be distorted through the oral transfer between interpreters who barely understood each other.[55]

Not being able to trust the intermediary, and not being able to do anything about it, seems to have been an integral part of the explorer's state of mind. It meant living with the insecurity of not knowing what was going on or who had other interests at heart, without having the opportunity to confirm, forcing Zagoskin to make decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate information, with potentially harmful consequences.

An additional crucial challenge to the relationship between Zagoskin and his intermediaries arose from differing interpretations of what this relationship entailed. At this point, I believe a brief reflection is in order on the terminology I have been using to describe the people who interpreted for Zagoskin: the "interpreter" and the "intermediary." Both terms imply translational activities between two or more languages, but they reflect different types of relationships between the medium and the target of the translation. While I use "interpreter" whenever the source material directly refers to the oral translation of words and meanings from one language into another, the term suggests a level of professionalisation that did not exist in the Yukon backcountry. For Creole employees of the RAC—such as Grigoriy Kurochkin—who were specifically tasked with interpreting and received payment for it, "interpreter" might be an adequate descriptor, especially when taking into consideration that the Orthodox Church, who trained Kurochkin, made a conscious effort to educate Creoles in order to use them as translators. In fact, multilingual Creoles played a crucial role in the development of the

55 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 168.

Aleut and Tlingit alphabets and translated scriptures into Native languages, introducing literacy to the Alaska Natives.[56]

Exploration interpreting, however, was largely a situational practice. The Creole interpreters were merely the last link in the interpretation chain. They had to rely themselves on what was relayed to them by non-literate members of the Native groups they encountered and who acted as intermediaries, which encompassed more than translating words from one language into another. They usually were taken on as guides who also possessed at least some degree of multi-lingual and intercultural experience, which enabled them to explain the geography and culture the explorers were encountering. The intermediary filled a pivotal role, but this did not necessarily have to come with a conscious self-conception as "man in the middle," occupying the best position to mediate between worlds. The priorities and focus of backcountry intermediaries could lie entirely elsewhere than what their colonial employers might require.

We see the understanding of the intermediary's place and duty diverge between Zagoskin and his intermediaries. Both Tatlek and Vtornik seemed to have regarded their engagement with the expedition in terms of an opportunity to engage in trading with the Natives they encountered and, at times, prioritised their trading activities over their commitment to the expedition. Shortly after Vtornik joined the expedition, he decided to leave the group and returned to his own settlement to get beads that he intended to barter with along the way, leaving the expedition stranded for a few days.[57] He joined the expedition voluntarily and of his own accord but was not bound to it by loyalty, and Zagoskin gives us no hint as to whether and how Vtornik was compensated for his services as guide and interpreter. It is likely that the opportunity to use the expedition as a means of conducting trade was the reason Vtornik decided to join in the first place. As Zagoskin depended on his guidance, there was not much he could do to prohibit Vtornik's trading activities and any time delays they may have caused in the short northern summer. Vtornik also brought traders to the expedition camp who, in Zagoskin's opinion, charged them too high a price for the dried beaver and fish they sold them.[58]

56 Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 239–247; Murray, "Together and Apart," 31–110. Lydia Black also notes that Aleut headmen were also directly involved in the creation of the Fox Aleut alphabet: Black, "Ivan Pan'kov," 94–107.

57 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 165–166.

58 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 166.

Although not explicitly described in the expedition report, the differing interpretations of the relationship between Zagoskin and his intermediary are noticeable in the accounts of these interactions. For Zagoskin, the presence of a local guide was crucial to the success of the mission. Guiding and interpreting, therefore, were what he was expecting of them. For the Native intermediary, however, guiding and interpreting for the Russians could be primarily an opportunity to engage in trade with other Natives as well as the Russians and, therefore, might well have come second to other concerns. The actual guiding and interpreting happened situationally as a matter of circumstance.

Tatlek's position in the group differed from Vtornik's. He came from the village close to the Russian post at Nulato, which, by proximity, put him in closer dependence on the RAC, which had the means to ensure Tatlek's services. Zagoskin's entry for June 23, 1843 recounts how Tatlek disappeared one morning. Zagoskin suspected that Tatlek had decided to leave and join a group of Native traders who had passed by the previous night. Tatlek returned after a relative talked him into re-joining the expedition for fear of the impact his "desertion" might have upon his future dealings with the Russians. Zagoskin's reaction to Tatlek's attempt to leave, as recorded in this entry, further reveals his unease in the face of his dependence on Native interpreters. On the one hand, he plays down the importance and capability of his guide:

> I was not concerned by the fact that in losing Tatlek, we lost the only man capable of communicating some necessary piece of information; we were already convinced that in order to collect factual information about a country we must be able to understand its inhabitants, if not ourselves, then at least through a man capable of grasping the significance of our questions and the answers to them. […] But I was concerned lest Tatlek's action unfavorably affect the trading operations of our post.[59]

When Tatlek returned, however, Zagoskin told him "that he would have made a great mistake to show up at Nulato without us, because he would have been kept in custody with his family, and if we had not returned he would have been sent off to the fort [Mikhailovskiy Redoubt] in the fall."[60] He also ordered both Native guides to be watched to prevent any other attempts to

59 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 172.
60 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 171–172.

leave. Although it is hard to gauge how useful Tatlek's services as guide actually were to Zagoskin, he still needed him to play his role as a subordinate in the expedition team. His reaction reveals the discomfort of the expedition leader as he struggled for control in this situation. With Tatlek living close to a Russian post, Zagoskin had the opportunity to enforce his compliance by using his family as a bargaining chip. Tatlek had to have been quite young, and Zagoskin notes that he had lost his siblings and parents just a few years earlier in the smallpox epidemic. But he was recently married to a Koyukon woman, who could be used by Zagoskin to pressure Tatlek whenever his intentions seemed to diverge from the expedition's best interests.

We see Zagoskin using this strategy in another instance as well. While he was surveying possible portage routes from the Koyukuk River to the Buckland River to the north, he suspected this to be a major Native trade route to the seasonal fairs on Kotzebue Sound. As before, Zagoskin suspected that the local population was trying to hinder the advance of the expedition. With Tatlek's interpreting, nuances, tone, and meanings were bound to get distorted in the translation process, which led Zagoskin to fear that the Natives were influencing his guide to sabotage the Russians:

> Some of the inhabitants […] had visited Nulato during the past two winters for the purpose of trading and had become fairly well acquainted with the Russians. As they were good traders, they easily understood the aims of our expedition, and as they did not wish to let us pass through to the tribes on the upper river, they decided to turn Tatlek, our interpreter, against the idea, and to frighten us off. Later on we were to hear from all the natives living along this river about the unfriendliness of the Maleygmyut and their antagonism towards us. But hearing this for the first time was strange. The guide began to waver.[61]

Again, we see Zagoskin struggling for control over the interpreter, diminishing the extent to which he depended on Tatlek while at the same time implying consequences for his family:

> Seeing a beaten trail leading up the river, I explained to him that we really did not need him very much and could find our own way, but that if he went back to Nulato without us, he would not have the

61 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 150.

> pay we had agreed upon, nor would the head of the post allow him access to his wife before we returned. Tatlek was worried about the pay and the wife, and we proceeded, after we had given some trifles to the natives.[62]

Zagoskin's power struggle followed a pattern that ultimately aimed at establishing authority and enforcing compliance and loyalty in the absence of trust. By denying his reliance on the Native guide and downplaying his competence and contribution to the mission, he was reaffirming his own position, independence, self-sufficiency, and, ultimately, power while enforcing the guide's obligation to the expedition by watching him and basically using his family as hostages. *Amanatstvo*, the taking of hostages as a way of ensuring loyalty, had been a common practice in Russian frontier politics for a long time. It had been used widely as a guarantee against any violations of treaties between the Russians and the peoples living on the peripheries of the Empire. It also prevented Natives from moving further away out of the reach of Russian influence during the expansion across Asia, keeping the indigenous peoples under the control of the Empire, where they were subject to the system of tribute payments (*iasak*) which kept them in an increasingly dependent relationship with the Russian centre.[63]

A version of this practice was brought to Alaska in the eighteenth century by the *promyshlenniki*, yet while the practice of hostage-taking was abolished by Catherine II in 1788, the RAC's system of procuring furs based on the Aleutian Islands and Kodiak Island was practically built on it: the men were compelled to gather at company posts every year, where they received provisions, tools, and kayaks, and sent on long hunting expeditions, while their families had to stay in the vicinity of the posts, producing clothes and utensils, digging roots, gathering berries, and doing other chores in order to contribute to the new economy forced upon them by the company.[64] While there are certainly important distinctions, Andrei Grinëv points out that the way the RAC ensured control over the families of their hunters displayed similarities to the *amanatstvo* system used in Siberia, suggesting it was employed in order to prevent desertions by the Natives, who were practically enserfed to

62 Zagoskin, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian America*, 150.
63 Khodarkovsky, "From Frontier to Empire," 115–128.
64 Gibson, "Russian Dependence on the Natives of Alaska," 21–42; Liapunova, "Relations with the Natives of North America," 105–143.

the company.[65] The way Zagoskin pressured Tatlek by leveraging the RAC's power over his family fits into this Russian mode of colonial rule, albeit in a more improvisational manner. It also reveals the increasing insecurity that corresponds to the vulnerability and loss of control experienced by the explorer the further he ventured into areas that did not have direct experience with Russian colonial power.

Reflections on Talking, Power, and the State of Mind at the Frontier

Reading Zagoskin's expedition journal for instances of mediation, we can observe different relationships between explorer and intermediaries that serve as a function of differing levels of trust and mistrust. The desire to establish a certain degree of trust was crucial to the colonial explorer. The ability to create trust was fundamentally tied to the proximity the intermediary had to Russian culture and the RAC. Literacy and an upbringing in the Orthodox Church were important factors that enabled Zagoskin to put trust into the mediatory efficiency and loyalty of his Creole interpreter Grigoryi Kurochkin. Once the Creole's linguistic expertise approached its limits, seeking the assistance of Feofan Utuktak, a Native with established rapport with the RAC and proven experience on a previous expedition, was the next best thing. But trust was a fickle resource. When literacy and experience were unavailable as facilitators of trust, Zagoskin took to coercion and force in ensuring the compliance of the Native intermediary Tatlek, whose priorities did not necessary align with the expedition's, but whose proximity to the RAC in the form of his family's residence near an outpost enabled Zagoskin to do so; while with Vtornik, the Native with no connection to the RAC whatsoever, coercion as a means of enforcing cooperation in the absence of trust was not a possibility. An ever-fluctuating economy of mistrust and suspicion consequently guided the relationship between Zagoskin and his intermediaries, creating a mindset of insecurity and lack of control.

The concealment of the Unalakleet portage by Ulukagmiut intermediaries, as well as Zagoskin's accounts of his interactions with Tatlek and Vtornik, are indicative of the anxiety of not being in control, subliminally present in many colonial contact zones of the nineteenth century. The RAC might formally have been in "possession" of the entirety of the Alaskan territory, but

65 Grinev and Bland, "Deserters and Fugitives in Russian America," 139.

the interior was never under colonial control. While the devastating effects of the Russian presence in North America were ultimately felt by most interior Native Alaskan communities—for example, through the introduction of diseases or the social and economic changes the fur trade brought along—direct interactions between Russians and interior Native Alaskans remained very limited. The power dynamics of these encounters were up for negotiation on a day-to-day basis, calling into question what supposedly established colonial rule entailed in a country this vast and inaccessible. Being the newcomers to indigenous landscapes and unfamiliar with local knowledge, the Russian colonialists relied on intermediaries teaching them how to survive, travel, and interact with the land and its inhabitants.

Retracing the chain of interpretation that made up Zagoskin's interaction with interior Alaska offers an insight into the texture of these power dynamics. The cooperation of his intermediaries was frequently enforced through coercion and force, and the knowledge they relayed was often disregarded, disrespected, or misused by the RAC to further the economic demands of colonial exploitation. While the Native intermediaries found themselves in the middle of these developments, it is important to note that their motivations and rationales were complex and went beyond simple notions of cooperation and collaboration—in fact, it would be harmful to characterise them as collaborators in what would eventually lead to the near destruction of their own cultural and social life-worlds. It also does not do their role justice to regard them as passive victims of an unstoppable colonial force. Scholars engaging with the history of transculturation and cultural encounters have long noted that the necessity of mediation opened possibilities for strategic action and creative adaptation on the part of the intermediaries.[66] Tatlek and Vtornik were able to use their position as members of Zagoskin's expedition to engage in trade and gain a reputation as guides and intermediaries; others, such as Feofan Utuktak, were able to build notable careers and expand their own networks, which enabled them to accept and refuse assignments of their own accord.

Acting as an intermediary also could come in the form of subtle but skilful resistance and defence against the colonisers, as shown in the case of the Ulukagmiut, who protected their own interests as middlemen in the Native trade network while avoiding direct confrontation with the Russians. As guides and interpreters, they could use the power of mediation in many different ways—but in some sense it was not even that important if they

66 Mackenthun and Jobs, "Introduction," 14.

actually did use it to resist the RAC. For the Russians to know that they *could* was enough to add to the anxiety. Zagoskin's journal shows he understood that he was not entirely in control. His writing reflects the colonial discomfort caused by the possibility for power reversal in the contact zone. As gatekeepers to hidden knowledge, his Native intermediaries were in an exclusive position where they could protect Native interests and potentially sabotage the Russian efforts. And as Russia increasingly adopted Eurocentric attitudes of superiority throughout the nineteenth century and colonialist elements became more pronounced in the Russian Empire,[67] Zagoskin's Native intermediaries represented the limitations of colonial control and the RAC's dependence on their colonial subjects, questioning the "natural" authority of "civilised Europe" over "uncivilised savages."[68]

Examining Zagoskin's writing regarding his intermediaries leaves us speculating as to what these stories mean beyond the underlying imperial anxieties and power dynamics. There are only traces left that hint at what they would have looked like had they been told by the intermediaries instead of the explorer. Acknowledging the "agency" of Native intermediaries and the effects it had on Zagoskin only partially reflects the experiential dimension of these encounters. Intrinsically, finding "Native agency" is a pretty banal, if not patronising undertaking. As Walter Johnson argues, the term "agency" tends to be used as a function of subaltern humanity in the form of subversion against imperial power.[69] Of course Native intermediaries had "agency"—whether they used it in ways that could be read as self-interest, resistance and subversion, or diplomacy, or whether they did not choose to use it in any way that impacted their relationship with the Russians all that much. A conventional idea of "agency" of the Native intermediaries cannot be the epicentre of their story. Despite their "agency," Native intermediaries in contested border zones were in many ways in a precarious position. Scholars studying cultural brokers have shown how, due to their mediatory acts between competing interests, they often were subject to mistrust and suspicion on both ends.[70] The interpreter as traitor is a familiar trope in the archives of encounter.[71] Zagoskin's writing is no exception in that regard, suggesting

67 Kappeler, *The Russian Empire.*
68 Colla, "Dragomen and Checkpoints," 145–46.
69 Johnson, "On Agency," 113.
70 Hinderaker, "Translation and Cultural Brokerage," 357–78; Driessen, "Mediterranean Divides and Connections," 27; Bowen, "Interpreters and the Making of History," 247–82; Torikai, *Voices of the Invisible Presence*, 3.
71 Mairs, "Translator, Traditor," 64–81.

that by the mid-nineteenth century, the discourse on Native intermediaries in Russia's only overseas colony had somewhat converged with the way more "typical" Western European empires thought and wrote about their Native interlocutors. We find him questioning the integrity of his guides on multiple occasions, characterising them as self-interested, incompetent, or disloyal. Being expected to prioritise their employers' interests over those of their own people—particularly in cases where it came down to conflicts over resources, land, and access to trade networks—had to imply some rethinking of their own sense of belonging and allegiance. Navigating the uncharted waters between languages, cultures, and belonging required skill and courage; it also challenged old relationships and subjectivities. The act of manoeuvring and negotiating between colonisers and colonised left the intermediary susceptible to coercion and force, such as in the case of Tatlek, whose continuous and diligent service was ensured by the threat of separating him from his family. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that, while the intermediaries' position "in between" did come with "agency," it also came with vulnerability and possible alienation on both sides of the encounter—and not only as far as their physical and economic well-being was concerned. Their mediation simultaneously utilised the tensions between the colonisers and the Native population and fed them, which made them suspicious to both sides alike and could call their own sense of identity into question.

When reading sources from the colonial frontier, it is crucial to keep in mind that the local knowledges Zagoskin conveys in his writing, such as ethnography and geography, were—more often than not—only borrowed. They come to us through a chain of interpretation of their own, passing through the scrutiny of imperial eyes but ultimately relayed and co-produced by intermediaries, who through their mediation and curation played an integral part in the transfer and production of knowledge about the interior of Alaska. A closer look at Cronin's "monsters"—horrible and wonderful, indispensable and dangerous, powerful and vulnerable at the same time—points toward the demons found inside the colonial explorer himself—the colonist's state of mind on the frontier: the colonial anxieties, the fluctuating dynamics of trust and mistrust, and the realisation that the multilingualism and the local expertise of Native middlemen had the potential to threaten the power asymmetry of the contact zone, serving as a destabilising factor for the establishment of colonial rule on the edges of the empire.

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4 Colonisation and Russia's "Green" Civilising Mission in the Far East

Mark Sokolsky

Abstract This paper aims to shed light on the environmental implications of Russian colonisation of Primor'e through a close examination of attitudes toward nature and its use in the late tsarist and early Soviet eras. It finds that Russian observers showed great concern for the region's environment(s) from an early stage but that such concerns, along with the conservationist measures they prompted, stemmed from the widespread belief that ecological degradation was a product of backwardness and barbarism, especially on the part of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese migrants, as well as peasant settlers. Tsarist elites associated environmental stewardship with civilisation and believed it was the empire's responsibility to bring rational, civilised nature-use to the Far East. This "green" civilising mission was remarkably consistent during the late tsarist era and continued into the early Soviet period.

Keywords Russian Far East, Primorskii Krai, environment, colonisation, nationality

Introduction

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many lands and waters around the Pacific—from Hokkaido to British Columbia to New Zealand—experienced an influx of migrants and changes in resource use as previously remote regions became increasingly tied to imperial and global economies. As many scholars have shown, colonisation—that is, settlement by migrants from a metropole and the installation of their ways of life—played an important role in the environmental transformations that took place around the Pacific during

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the modern era, in a manner analogous to the changes associated with early modern European colonisation of the Americas.[1]

One aspect of this broader transformation related to how newcomers' attitudes toward nature shaped its use. Colonisation brought not only material changes—population growth, the expansion of farming, commercial logging, etc.—but also new ways of thinking about nature, which in turn played a significant role in changing human–nature relations in colonial settings. Regarding the natural world as a collection of marketable commodities, for instance, rather than as part of a cohesive, sacred whole (as in many Indigenous traditions) could have a transformative effect. Similarly, in some contexts, cultural and aesthetic preferences shaped how colonists remade the landscapes they settled.[2]

Parts of the Russian Far East also experienced an influx of new migrants and economic expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though much of the Far East had long been claimed by Muscovy/Russia, relatively few migrants settled there before the late nineteenth century. At that point, migration to the Far East increased rapidly, particularly to the Amur and Primor′e territories, which the Russian Empire had seized from Qing China in 1858–1860. Agriculture, trade, transportation, and extractive industries—such as fishing, timbering, and mining—grew apace, and Russian and foreign merchants in the Far East became deeply involved in the developing Pacific economy.

While Russian settlement of the Far East has received considerable attention from scholars (though less so for the Soviet era), the study of the relationship between colonisation and Far Eastern environments remains in its early stages.[3] In exploring this broader question, the present study focuses on attitudes toward nature and its use in the Russian Far Eastern territory of Primor′e during the late imperial and early Soviet eras. Primor′e—roughly speaking, the area between the Ussuri River and Lake Khanka in the west

1 See, for instance, Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands*; McNeill, *Environmental History in the Pacific World*; Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside*; Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World*; Demuth, *Floating Coast;* Beattie et al., *Migrant Ecologies*.

2 Cronon, *Changes in the Land*; Brooking and Pawson, "The Contours of Transformation"; Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside*; Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora*.

3 Notable works that address the intersection of colonisation and environmental change in the Far East include Demuth, *Floating Coast*; Jones, *Empire of Extinction*; Man′ko, *Lesnoe delo na rossiiskom Dal′nem Vostoke*; Gaponov, *Istoriia taezhnogo prirodopol′zovaniia Iuzhno-Ussuriiskogo regiona*; and Mandrik, *Istoriia rybnoi promyshlennosti rossiiskogo Dal′nego Vostoka (50-e gody XVII v. – 20-e gody XX v.)*.

to the Sea of Japan in the east, along with a coastal strip stretching south to Korea—was one of the principal areas of nineteenth- and twentieth-century settlement in the Far East, with more than half a million people migrating to the region from elsewhere in the Russian Empire, as well as from China, Korea, and other countries, between the 1850s and 1914.[4] For a variety of reasons, including its unique landscape and collection of wildlife, Primor'e's environment garnered a great deal of attention from Russian observers (that is, Russian imperial subjects, some of whom were not ethnic Russians), including naturalists, publicists, military officers, officials, and wealthy settlers. By examining their accounts, this paper aims to shed light on how the arrival of new understandings of nature and its proper use shaped approaches to a colonial environment.

While these commentators were a diverse group, they were remarkably consistent across the Imperial and early Soviet periods in their regard for Primor'e's environment and the proper use of natural resources. They evinced very little desire to "conquer" or "subdue" the land and little of the providentialism that marked westward expansion in North America—the view that God had created the land for (European) Americans and that the conquest of Indigenous peoples and capture of their lands was part of the divine plan. Instead, from the outset, and increasingly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were strikingly concerned with the ecological changes they witnessed in the Far East and sought to protect "nature" from misuse. Their concerns were consistent with the belief, detailed by Ekaterina Pravilova, that natural resources were a "public good" and that correct management of nature by experts was essential to advancing the national interest.[5] Indeed, in the Far East, the wise husbanding of natural resources and national/imperial interests were particularly closely aligned, given that natural resources were the principal source of wealth and their use generally fell within the purview of state organs.

Observers' works also show, however, that ideas of "rational" or "proper" resources had a strong national-imperialist and Eurocentric orientation and

4 The area discussed here (Primor'e) was, in the tsarist period, generally called the South-Ussuri *krai* (or, for a period, *okrug*), but its administrative divisions varied over time. It was part of Primorskaia *oblast'* until 1884 and the Priamur Governor-Generalship thereafter (with a brief spell as part of the Far Eastern Vice-Regency, between 1903 and 1905). In some cases, this paper addresses parts of the present day in Khabarovskii Krai. On the region's administrative permutations, see Matsuzato, "The Creation of the Priamur Governor-Generalship"; "Primorskaia oblast' (1856–1922)"; Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 40–61.

5 Pravilova, *A Public Empire*.

effectively became part of Russia's "civilising mission" in the Far East. Observers in the territory consistently interpreted (unwanted) ecological changes as a product of the "barbaric" or "predatory" attitudes and practices they ascribed to 1) the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese migrants who lived in Primor'e or migrated there on a seasonal basis; and 2) "uncivilised" peasant and Cossack migrants. In this way, they espoused what Jeffrey Wilson, in his study of German colonisation of Polish lands, has called a "green" civilising mission: the belief that wise environmental management is a hallmark of civilisation—especially European civilisation—and that an imperial power has the right and responsibility to impose "civilised" nature-use.[6]

In this regard, Primor'e's experience echoes that of other colonial contexts, such as British India and the Progressive-era United States, where conservation—that is, the protection of nature for long-term human interests—often involved the displacement and prosecution of Indigenous and other local peoples.[7] It was a way to protect nature *from* some peoples, typically marginalised groups, and *for* others.[8] In the case of late-tsarist Primor'e, elites sought to protect nature—and, in some contexts, Indigenous peoples—from Chinese, Korean, and Japanese migrants and from supposedly backward and irrational peasants and Cossacks. The solutions they proposed, accordingly, focused on making the exploitation of nature more "rational": orderly, planned, informed by European science, and (often) industrial, rather than small-scale and haphazard. Such a response, from the outset, tended to support the case for imperial authority rather than critique it.[9]

This "green" civilising mission, moreover, carried forward into the Soviet period. Although it acquired a Marxist–Leninist gloss, the basic idea was the same: the juxtaposition of reason, Europeanness, and responsible environmental management on the one hand with disorder, irrationality, barbarity,

6 See Wilson, "Environmental Chauvinism in the Prussian East."

7 Scholars generally distinguish between conservationism and its contemporary, preservationism—the protection of nature for its own sake or for spiritual and aesthetic reasons. See Brain, *Song of the Forest*, 2; Oravec, "Conservationism vs. Preservationism," 444; Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 150–154.

8 See Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation*; Guha and Gadgil, "State Forestry and Social Conflict in British India"; MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*; Pouchepadass, "British Attitudes towards Shifting Cultivation in Colonial South India"; Warren, *The Hunter's Game*; Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature*.

9 This contrasts with the experience of eighteenth-century naturalists in the North Pacific (where, as Ryan Jones shows, environmental concerns informed criticism of Russian imperialism) and with the "green imperialism" analysed by Richard Grove. See Jones, *Empire of Extinction*; Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

and Asianness on the other. The Bolsheviks were revolutionaries, but in their desire to replace exploitation and destruction with science and civilisation, they were traditionalists, in step with both their predecessors in Primor'e and imperial conservationists abroad.

The Green Civilising Mission and the "Yellow Peril"

Before and after Russia's acquisition of the Amur Valley and Primor'e in 1858–1860, explorers and naturalists travelled up the Amur and Ussuri rivers, along the coast of the Sea of Japan and the border with Chinese Manchuria, documenting the lands, waters, wildlife, and peoples they observed. They also encountered Primor'e's Indigenous peoples—the Nanai, Udeghe, Ul'chi, Orochi, Nivkhi, and Tazy—along with some Manchu and Chinese. Some early observers regarded the area as a wilderness—"virgin today and Russian tomorrow," as Yuri Slezkine puts it—with rivers teeming with fish, thick forests, a relatively mild climate, and access to the Pacific, which filled them with optimism about Russia's future in the East.[10] Some early visitors, particularly foreigners, lauded Russia's expansion into the Far East as part of the broader march of civilisation: "Here the tiger and leopard rule," wrote the English travel writer Thomas Atkinson, "but the time is approaching when Russian colonists will dispute their right and either kill or drive them into other regions."[11]

On the whole, however, few early commentators celebrated the "conquest" of the Far Eastern wilds. Instead, one finds almost immediate concern about the exploitation of Primor'e's flora and fauna—and, especially, about the Chinese hunter-foragers doing the exploiting. An estimated 1,000 Chinese lived in Primor'e year-round at the time of Russia's acquisition of the territory, and they retained extraterritorial rights as Chinese subjects. Many more travelled to the territory seasonally to hunt, fish, and trap, and to work as wage-labourers. (Chinese migrants' legal status varied over time, becoming generally more restrictive, even as their numbers grew.)[12] Tsarist officials complained of Chinese migrants enslaving Indigenous peoples in

10 Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 96. For a discussion of early depictions of the region, see especially Sukhova and Tammiksaar, *Aleksandr Fedorovich Middendorf*; Bassin, *Imperial Visions*; Bassin, "Russian Geographers and the 'National Mission' in the Far East."

11 Atkinson, *Travels in the Regions of the Upper and Lower Amoor*, 375.

12 See Sorokina, *Khoziaistvennaia deiatel'nost' kitaiskikh poddannykh*, 29–39, 199–201; Pozniak, "Politika rossiiskoi vlasti v otnoshenii immigrantov na Dal'nem Vostoke vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XX v.," 45–47; Lohr, *Russian Citizenship*, 35–36, 77–78.

debt bondage, overhunting, overfishing, and denuding forests.[13] Nikolai Przheval'skii, who travelled through the territory in the late 1860s, blamed local Chinese for all manner of environmental despoliation. He wrote of the destruction of forests by Chinese foragers, some of whom felled oak forests to grow mushrooms on the fallen logs. The "beautiful oak forests," he wrote, were being "methodically destroyed" as the Chinese cleared one stand after the next to create favourable conditions for growing mushrooms.[14] Another early visitor, Nikolai Aliab'ev, also lamented the "barbarous destruction" of forests at the hands of Chinese trappers and traders, while another account spoke of the "terrible, fearful harm" inflicted by Chinese trappers.[15]

By the 1880s, and increasingly thereafter, the image of avaricious Chinese wreaking havoc on flora and fauna became a common trope in writing on the Far East. One official, in an 1883 report for the Ministry of Finance, complained of Chinese illegally exporting timber from the territory—that is, not exporting through sanctioned ports and without paying duty[16]—and leaving signs of "profligate, foolish and terrible destruction" behind. The "destruction of forests," he wrote, "occurs throughout the territory [and is] not only merciless, but the most disgraceful that can be imagined."[17] A. Ia. Maksimov, a former naval officer, described the Chinese as "shamelessly" exploiting the region's animal wealth such that "places which were not long ago rich with diverse beasts" were becoming barren.[18] The writer Dmitrii Shreider, similarly, complained of "the reckless embezzlement of those gifts which nature has so generously provided" by Chinese migrants. It was not simply "exploitation" of natural wealth, he wrote, but "extermination."[19]

The notion of "predatory" Chinese was also evident in discussions of fishing and coastal gathering, and Japanese and Korean fishermen also drew

13 Matsuzato, "The Creation of the Priamur Governor-Generalship," 375.

14 Przheval'skii, *Puteshestvie v Ussuriiskom krae*, 85–86. Przheval'skii had a notable disdain for China in general and promoted Russian imperialism in the Far East. See Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 34–42.

15 Aliab'ev, *Dalekaia Rossiia*, 49; Moscow Agricultural Society, *Amur i Ussuriiskii krai*, 110.

16 On the forestry regulations of this period, see Russian State Archive of the Far East (hereafter RGIA DV) F. 702, op. 2, d. 16, ll. 1–4; Man'ko, *Lesnoe delo na rossiiskom Dal'nem Vostoke*, 85–86, 93; Anuchin, *Mery, prinimaemye k uporiadocheniiu ustroistva lesov Priamurskogo kraia*, 1–7.

17 Skal'kovskii, *Russkaia torgovlia v Tikhom okeane*, 41–44.

18 Maksimov, *Na dalekom vostoke*, 112.

19 Shreider, *Nash Dal'nii Vostok,* 334, 256.

criticism.[20] Vsevolod Krestovskii, who served as secretary to the commander of the Siberian flotilla in the early 1880s, described the "barbaric destruction" wrought by Chinese hunters in the taiga and the ravaging of marine life by foreign fishermen and gatherers. "It is said," he wrote, "that in former years the Korean coast was, no less than ours, rich in seaweed, but now there is none at all: all was destroyed as a result of the incorrectly conducted industry, which therefore was forced to turn further north, to our shores."[21] Another writer complained of the "predatory" methods employed by Korean fishermen, such as blocking the Ussuri River with nets, which he said had damaged fish stocks, and catching more than they could use while dumping unwanted, rotting fish into the river.[22] Other officials complained that Korean fishermen were overfishing and damaging salmon populations in the Tumen River and that Japanese fishermen were doing the same on the Amur.[23] In this way, ecological concern fit well with the so-called "yellow peril"—the fear of being attacked or overwhelmed demographically by neighbouring peoples, principally the Chinese and Japanese.[24]

Even Vladimir Arsen'ev, who was more judicious in his discussions of Primor'e's Chinese than many of his contemporaries, complained of the attitudes and trapping methods he found. Having encountered many Chinese hunters and trappers during his explorations of 1906–1907, along with storehouses packed with antlers and dried animal organs, he wrote that the Chinese were "by nature a cruel people," always looking to bring "suffering to some living creature," including wildlife and local Indigenous peoples. They were, moreover, perpetrating terrible "vandalism" in the taiga and robbing Russia through their "predatory hunt." Arsen'ev saw in Chinese exploitation an opportunity to win Indigenous allies. He believed that granting greater rights and property to *inorodtsy* could attract them to the Russian side and that they would gladly become forest guards or even Cossacks, since they competed with the Chinese for furs. The "eviction of [the Chinese]," he wrote, "would

20 Primor'e's coast had long been a destination for gatherers of seaweed, sea cucumbers, and molluscs. Indeed, the Chinese name for the site of present-day Vladivostok was *Haishenwai,* "Sea Cucumber Bay."

21 Russian State Naval Archive (hereafter RGA VMF), F. 410, op. 2, d. 4046, ll. 237–239, 241–242ob, 245–247.

22 Sil'nitskii, *Kul'turnoe vlianie ussuriiskoi zheleznoi dorogi*, 70.

23 RGIA DV, F. 1, op. 4, d. 975, ll. 1–4; Office of the Priamur Governor Generalship, *O rybnom promysle v Primorskoi oblasti*, 8–9.

24 On the "yellow peril" in Russian, see Stolberg, "The Siberian Frontier between 'White Mission' and 'Yellow Peril'; Siegelbaum, "Another 'Yellow Peril'," 307–330.

be met with sympathy" from native populations. In this view, Indigenous peoples were by no means a hindrance to colonisation; if anything, they were potential allies against the Chinese and, on the coast, the Japanese.[25]

Criticism of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean migrants on environmental grounds indicates a contrast with the situation in colonial North America. There, Anglo-American settlers had argued that Indigenous peoples did not make productive use of the natural bounty around them—they did not "mix their labour" with it, through agriculture—and did not reside on it year-round, and thus had no claim to it.[26] The tsarist government, similarly, did not allocate land grants to Indigenous groups in the Amur or Primor′e because they were nomadic (or semi-nomadic) and were thus thought not to need fixed land allotments.[27] But the denial of Indigenous territoriality had nothing to do with a belief that they were misusing land. Rather, officials charged that competing migrants—particularly the Chinese, Japanese, and, in some cases, Koreans[28]—were *overusing,* not underusing, land and resources and thus should be removed and replaced by a more civilised people, one that could better protect nature.

Nature-Use and the Peasant Question

Who that more "civilised" people might be was far from obvious, however, since Russian migrants—that is, tsarist subjects from elsewhere in the Russian Empire, including many Ukrainians, and smaller numbers of Balts, Finns, Poles, and others—also garnered their share of criticism on environmental grounds. Nearly half a million Russian subjects migrated to Primorskaia *oblast′* between 1860 and the First World War, with most settling in Primor′e and on the Amur. Along with temporary exemption from military service and certain taxes, these migrants received substantial land allotments (100 *desiatinas* per

25 Arsen′ev, "Polevye dnevniki ekspeditsii V.K. Arsen′eva 1906 goda," 12, 22–26; Arsen′ev, "Polevye dnevniki ekspeditsii V.K. Arsen′eva 1906 goda (prodolzhenie)," 48; Arsen′ev, *Kratkii voenno-geograficheskii i voenno-statisticheskii ocherk*, 195.

26 As discussed, for instance, in Cronon, *Changes in the Land*.

27 Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*; Arsen′ev, "Polevye dnevniki ekspeditsii V.K. Arsen′eva 1906 goda," 96.

28 Koreans were relatively welcome in the Russian Far East and received land allotments like those granted to Russian subjects, though they were smaller. After 1905, Korean migrants faced many more restrictions. See especially Glebov, "Exceptional Subjects"; Babrenko, "Otnosheniia russkikh krest′ian i koreiskikh pereselentsev," 17–23.

family until 1901, then fifteen *desiatinas* per adult male household member thereafter).[29] Settlers affected the territory's lands, waters, and wildlife in many ways. They cleared forests, burned fallow fields—often sparking forest fires in the process—hunted game, and fished. They also quickly became involved in the lucrative trade for various forest products bound for China.[30]

Tsarist elites tended to attribute changes at their compatriots' hands less to colonisation itself and more to what they believed were the "predatory" or "barbaric" habits of peasants and Cossacks. As Jane Costlow and other scholars have shown, there was a broad post-Emancipation discourse linking deforestation and other ecological changes with poverty, backwardness, and/or moral decline. In several parts of the empire, elites sought to protect nature from misuse, often by peasants.[31] We find a similar pattern in late-tsarist Primor'e, as officials and other educated observers viewed unwanted ecological changes as evidence of the failings of Russian colonists—the "poor whites," as Alexander Morrison puts it with regard to settlers in Russian Turkestan, who were essential to empire-building but whose behaviour sometimes undermined claims to being a bearer of civilisation.[32]

Deforestation and changes associated with Russian settlement were evident by the 1880s, and observers tended to ascribe them to settlers' short-sightedness, barbarism, or "predatory" attitudes. Maksimov, for instance, complained that colonists around Vladivostok had "cut down the forest impulsively, without calculation, without judgement […] It's a sad, typical result of the predatory relations of people to the bounty of nature."[33] A forester who toured Primor'e in 1886 warned of possible wood shortages due to settlers' "barbaric" relationship with the forest.[34] Another writer lamented that settlers destroyed forests without thinking—evidence, in his view, of a "barbarian attitude" and a "predatory approach" to nature. A "feeling of

29 One *desiatina* was equivalent to 1.09 hectares. Settlers were also permitted to purchase the land and convert it to private property if they wished. Kabuzan, *Dal'nevostochnyi krai v XVII – nachale XX vv.*, 226–228; Vashchuk et al., *Etnomigratsionnye protsessi v Primor'e v XX veke*; Kabuzan, *Kak zaselialsia Dal'nii Vostok*, 52–54; Goncharova et al., *Dal'nyi Vostok Rossii v materialakh zakonodatel'stva*, 203–5; Osipov and Galliamova, "Osvoenie Primor'ia (XIX–XX)"; Vlasov, *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii*, 45–47.

30 On settlers' involvement in cross-border trade, see especially Sorokina, *Khoziaistvennaia deiatel'nost' kitaiskikh poddannykh*, 63–67.

31 Costlow, "Imaginations of Destruction"; Moon, *The Plough That Broke the Steppes*; Pravilova, *A Public Empire*, 60–80.

32 Morrison, "Peasant Settlers and the 'Civilising Mission' in Russian Turkestan."

33 Maksimov, *Na dalekom vostoke*, 97.

34 Man'ko, *Lesnoe delo na rossiiskom Dal'nem Vostoke*, 37–46.

respect for the forest is completely unknown among the local population," he wrote, because they lived among abundance; they considered forests a "gift from God" to do with as they pleased. They plundered the taiga in "pursuit of easy living"—weakening their energy and "distracting their minds from agriculture."[35]

One frequently finds a paternalistic, "they know not what they do" attitude toward peasant settlers on this question. Nikolai Kriukov, for instance, an agronomist who penned a major 1894 study of the Far Eastern economy, critiqued settlers on the Amur and Ussuri for their "predatory methods of fishing," such as catching more than they ate, and warned that they threatened to "destroy natural riches." In a striking passage, he wrote that "one cannot leave fisheries, the people's wealth, to the arbitrariness of that people [*na proizvol etogo samogo naroda*]." Instead, it was necessary, he argued, to "care for the people's descendants."[36] Arsen'ev, similarly, lamented that among peasant settlers, an understanding of the harm they caused forests "had never entered their heads" (in contrast to Indigenous and Chinese hunter-foragers, whatever their faults, because their livelihoods depended on the taiga).[37] V. F. Romanov, a member of the Amur Expedition—a major fact-finding study of the peoples, flora, fauna, and resources of the Far East conducted between 1909 and 1912—likewise criticised settlers for their "foolish" destruction of animals and forests, writing that "our simple folk [*narod*] and non-Russians [*inorodtsy*]" were simply not developed enough to understand the harm they caused.[38]

During the regime's final decade, as tens of thousands of migrants came to the Far East, concern with deforestation, overfishing, and overhunting combined with elites' frustrations about what they saw as settlers' deficiencies as colonists. According to this view, peasants and Cossacks, by using low-intensity agricultural practices, such as swidden and long-fallow farming, were destroying flora and fauna without producing much agricultural surplus, while they could have been running productive farms and leaving the forests to rational, modern timbering. Pavel Unterberger, for instance, governor-general of the Primaur from 1906 to 1910 and the leader of the Amur Expedition, was

35 Shreider, *Nash Dal'nii Vostok*, 314, 332–333.

36 Kriukov, *Nekotorye dannye o polozhenii rybolovstva v Priamurskom krae*, ii, 46–47.

37 Quoted in Beu, "A Journey towards Environmental Wisdom," 88.

38 Romanov, *Nuzhdy Nikolaevskago raiona Primorskoi oblasti*, 161. The *inorodtsy* Romanov referred to were probably Indigenous peoples, rather than Chinese or other non-Russians, though the meaning of the term was quite flexible, as discussed in Slocum, "Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy?"

highly critical of peasant settlers. He complained that peasants managed their lands in a "predatory fashion," "completely stripping it from their lot" before moving on to start the process anew.[39] Another Expedition member likewise complained of the "extensive character" of agriculture around Nikolaevsk as one cause of slow growth and an example of settlers' "predatory relationship with the bounty of nature."[40]

To some, such behaviour seemed to indicate not only economic failures but moral and cultural problems as well. N. V. Sliunin, an envoy from the Ministry of Finance, reported in 1907 that settlers' low productivity stemmed from their "extensive predation": their tendency to farm a single plot until it was exhausted, then log new forest plots and start again. "Having in a predatory manner destroyed the forests near their allotments," Sliunin wrote, settlers "soon move on to a new place, loudly complaining of the unsuitability of the soil for farming," even as their Korean neighbours enjoyed bumper crops. Settlers had imported their "old, barbaric, patriarchal method of working the soil" and were merely "predator-exploiters of the land and forest plots allotted to them."[41] Such practices, in his view, also created opportunities for "yellow labour," since lacklustre farming led peasant and Cossack settlers to rent their lands to Chinese and Korean migrants who could actually farm them competently, a practice that yielded "indifference, debauchery, and overwhelming apathy."[42] A committee on settlement of the Far East, for instance, which Unterberger chaired, reached a similar conclusion in a 1910 report, blaming peasants for "predatory destruction […] of a large area of forest without clear economic benefit, often [to finance] drinking"[43] and for selling off their land to loggers or renting their land to Koreans and Chinese, leading to "an idle and carefree life, [one that] does not accord with the tasks of colonisation."[44]

Protecting Nature

Not surprisingly, given the level of concern surrounding the "predation" of Far Eastern flora and fauna, the value of the region's natural resources, and the fact that they fell under the purview of the Ministry of State Domains

39 Unterberger, *Priamurskii krai, 1906-1910 g.g.*, 125.
40 Gluzdovskii, *Primorsko-Amurskaia okraina i severnaia man'chzhuriia*, 85.
41 Russian State Historical Archive (hereafter RGIA) F. 391, op. 3, d. 262, ll. 47–50.
42 RGIA F. 391, op. 3, d. 1152, ll. 25–29, 31.
43 RGIA F. 391, op. 4, d. 513, l. 79.
44 Ibid. ll. 40–41, 43.

and its successors,[45] Primor'e's administrators were deeply concerned with regulating the use of resources from an early stage. And since they interpreted environmental harm as a product of barbarism and backwardness, their efforts focused on constraining certain practices—and excluding certain peoples—while simultaneously encouraging exploitation using "rational" methods. Indeed, few were those who thought colonisation and economic development were at odds with conservation—though Arsen'ev, toward the end of his life, edged toward such a view.[46] Rather, the conservationist measures adopted suggest that tsarist elites regarded state management of natural resources as part of the state's mandate, and as something that would benefit both nature and the empire.

The first attempts at conservation aimed to create a rational forest industry. In 1863, the Siberian Committee promulgated forestry laws for the Far East, drawing on the recommendations of A. S. Budishchev, a forester who had surveyed the forests of the Amur and Primor'e in 1859 and advocated for the introduction of "rational" timbering. The Committee opened Far Eastern forests to Russian and foreign loggers and permitted exports through Imperial (now Soviet) Harbour while also setting aside stands of valuable timber to be off-limits to logging. In keeping with a long-established practice, protected stands included those with timber appropriate for shipbuilding, but they also extended to areas deemed particularly fire-prone. Regional authorities were empowered to appoint forest overseers, foresters, and guards to enforce the new laws and collect duties.[47]

Such measures did not prevent mounting forest destruction, so further regulations followed: in 1877, the military governor of Primor'e, G. F. Erdman, banned throughout the Murav'ev-Amurskii Peninsula, where Vladivostok is located, the logging of oaks to grow mushrooms and the use of fence-and-pit traps (long fence systems, sometimes hundreds of metres long, that channelled game toward deadfalls) favoured by Chinese hunters. He also placed limits on logging operations and outlawed activities such as the burning of fallow fields. His successor, I. G. Baranov, enacted similar regulations throughout the whole South Ussuri region, and he also attempted to enrol the Amur Cossacks

45 That is, the Ministry of Agriculture and State Domains (1894–1905, 1915–1917) and the Main Administration of Agriculture and Land Management (GUZZ) (1905–1915).

46 Beu, "A Journey towards Environmental Wisdom."

47 Man'ko, *Lesnoe delo na rossiiskom Dal'nem Vostoke*, 85–86, 93; Anuchin, *Mery, prinimaemye k uporiadocheniiu ustroistva lesov Priamurskogo kraia*.

in assisting with fire prevention and controlling illegal logging.[48] Likewise, in 1881, the military governor of Vladivostok, Rear-Admiral Fel'dgauzen, imposed similar measures around the increasingly denuded city to put forestry on a "rational footing." He unconditionally forbade the oak-mushroom trade as well as the construction of fence-and-pit traps. Notably, Fel'dgauzen also set aside some parts of the Vladivostok region as protected (*zapovednye*) groves.[49]

Meanwhile, D. G. Anuchin, who became governor-general of Eastern Siberia in 1880, empowered foresters to fine and even evict Chinese migrants, citing "complete disorder" and rampant destruction of Far Eastern forests.[50] Roundups of Chinese trappers and hunters occurred sporadically in the following decades. In 1895, citing illegal activities, police removed Chinese from the Suchan (now Partizanskaia) Valley, and in 1899 conducted a similar operation along the Suchan and in the vicinity of Ol'ga Bay.[51] Military detachments again swept through the taiga in 1907–1908, removing "hunters and vagrant elements" who had "illegally [*samovol'no*] occupied Russian land," some of whom may have lived in Primor'e for more than forty years.[52]

Officials also sought to control peasants' use of forests. Baranov and Fel'dgauzen emphasised fire protection and tried to restrict the manufacture of charcoal and tar in the forest, which could contribute to fires. Baron A. N. Korf, the first governor-general of the Priamur, outlawed the burning of fallow fields (except during the spring) and required rural communities to extinguish forest fires, when possible, around their settlements.[53] Forestry regulations promulgated in 1891 and 1898 further restricted the use of fire on peasant allotments and sought to involve village leadership in controlling fires and wanton logging.[54] Beginning in 1900, peasant communities were also supposed to elect local forest wardens and "fire elders" to help state foresters and guards stop illegal logging and fires.[55] In 1908, in a curious attempt to protect both forests and one of the region's Indigenous peoples, Priamur Governor-General Nikolai Gondatti directed foresters to stop logging within

48 Anuchin, *Mery, prinimaemye k uporiadocheniiu ustroistva lesov Priamurskogo kraia*, 82–84, 105–111; Skal'kovskii, *Russkaia torgovlia v Tikhom okeane*, 46; Man'ko, *Lesnoe delo na rossiiskom Dal'nem Vostoke*, 62, 81–82.

49 RGIA DV F. 702, op. 2, d. 16, ll. 39–40.

50 RGIA DV F. 702, op. 2, d. 16, ll. 128.

51 Vashchuk et al., *Etnomigratsionnye protsessi v Primor'e v XX veke*, 39.

52 RGIA DV F. 1, op. 4, d. 1910, ll. 1–10, 59–60, 102–103, 159ob.

53 RGIA DV F. 1, op. 5, d. 502, ll. 1–5.

54 RGIA DV F. 94, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 37–41, 39; RGIA F. 1273, op. 1, d. 409, l. 111; Shreider, *Nash Dal'nii Vostok*, 320–321.

55 RGIA DV F. 1, op. 4, d. 169, ll. 1–1ob.

one kilometre of Nivkhi villages, claiming that logging would threaten the Nivkhis' property and would lead to moral corruption.[56]

Tsarist authorities also sought to regulate hunting, which was decimating some animal populations. Korf established a hunting season for sable in 1886, and in 1899, hunting rules were expanded to protect deer, goral (wild goats), elk, sable, and other animals, with new bans on the use of fence- and pit-traps and other methods.[57] In 1910, in response to concerns among traders, Governor-General Gondatti enacted a two-year suspension of sable trading in the Priamur. The following year, his office issued a set of hunting regulations that stipulated all manner of restrictions on the killing of deer, elk, moose, and other valuable species. (No such restrictions applied to killing predators, which were thought to be part of the problem.)[58]

At the same time, during the last decade of the regime, administrators also sought to boost industrial, export-orientated industries, which they believed would be more amenable to both economic production *and* conservation. Such a view was particularly evident in approaches to forest management. Thus, A. N. Mitinskii, a member of the Amur Expedition, wrote that while the typical settler was "an enemy of the forest," unable to manage their woodlands wisely, a "large influx of capital" could help introduce "correct forestry."[59] Governor-General Unterberger and his successor, Gondatti, adhered to this view, criticising resource depletion while promoting industrial timbering and other extractive industries. Unterberger held that industrial forestry and timber exports would bring about "rational exploitation" of Far Eastern forests, which would otherwise be just "dead capital." Accordingly, he granted timber concessions to foreign and Russian subjects, permitting the harvesting of 1.5 million trees in various parts of Primorskaia *oblast'* between 1904 and 1911. Timber exports through Vladivostok rose rapidly after 1905, reaching a high of 2.8 million cubic feet in 1918.[60] The Resettlement Office, similarly, promoted the development of local timber processing facilities in

56 RGIA DV, F. 1, op. 94, d. 17, l. 4.

57 RGIA DV F. 1, op. 5, d. 502, l. 4; RGIA DV F. 702, op. 2, d. 299, ll. 3–4.

58 State Archive of Primorskii Krai (hereafter GAPK) F. 1351, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2ob.

59 Mitinskii, *Materialy o polozhenii i nuzhdakh torgovli i promyshlennosti na Dal'nem Vosoke*, 113–116.

60 Unterberger, *Priamurskii krai, 1906-1910 g.g.*, 123–124; Ivanov, "Lesnaia torgovlia Primor'ia," 48–49; Gaponov, *Istoriia taezhnogo prirodopol'zovaniia Iuzhno-Ussuriiskogo regiona*, 153.

order to effect "rational exploitation of the region's natural riches."[61] While the scale of industrial timbering in the Far East was modest before the Soviet era, there was a trend toward state support for fostering a capital-intensive forest industry.[62] Officials increasingly looked to private, capital-intensive timbering, combined with state oversight, as the best means to ensure what they believed to be rational use of forest resources and rescue the Far Eastern taiga from predation.[63]

An analogous approach emerged with respect to wildlife conservation. Given the challenges of enforcing regulations in a vast area, state authorities and elements of Far Eastern civil society turned to "farming" valuable species and, eventually, setting aside protected reserves for more regulated use. An early manifestation of this pattern was deer farming. Because of the great value of spotted deer and elk antlers, settlers had begun penning in spotted deer to harvest their antlers as early as 1867, a practice long known in China and one that Russian migrants in the Altai had also adopted.[64] The practice spread late in the century, with large landholders in coastal Primor'e keeping hundreds of semi-domesticated deer on their allotments. By the First World War, there were perhaps 6,000 head of spotted deer on private farms of various kinds across the region.[65]

In addition, beginning in the 1880s, some of Primor'e's well-heeled residents began to create hunting reserves for their exclusive use. In 1887, with support from high officials, a group of Vladivostok-based hunters acquired exclusive hunting rights on islands in Peter the Great Bay and formed the Vladivostok Society of Amateur Hunters (VOLO). (A similar group formed in Nikol'sk-Ussuriisk in 1899.) During the following decade, VOLO created

61 Curiously, this initiative seems to have been inspired in part by a report from a tsarist envoy on colonisation of the west coast of the United States and Canada. The envoy observed "merciless destruction of forests" there and argued better state oversight and more efficient approaches were necessary to avoid the error. RGIA F. 391, op. 4, d. 1296, ll. 72–73, 81–82, 90.

62 The Far East produced only one percent of the empire's timber exports by the First World War. Man'ko, *Lesnoe delo na rossiiskom Dal'nem Vostoke*, 93.

63 This was consonant with a broader trend toward export-oriented logging across the empire, as Steven Brain describes, though distinct from the rising suspicion of private (typically noble) ownership of forests in European Russia, which underpinned calls for forest nationalisation. See Brain, *Song of the Forest*; Bonhomme, *Forests, Peasants, and Revolutionaries*, 22–59; Pravilova, *A Public Empire*, 60–80.

64 Dudareva et al., eds., *Iz istorii issledovaniia i razvitiia maralovodstva na altae, XVIII – nachalo XX v.*, 3–14.

65 Aramilev, "Sika Deer in Russia," 479–480; Baikov, *Iziubr i iziubrevodstvo*, 11–12.

game reserves for deer and goral on several offshore islands, as well as on Lake Khanka, where members hunted pheasant, grouse, and waterfowl. On these reserves, they would conduct "proper" (*pravil'nye*) hunting and keep out those who had wrought "merciless destruction" and hunted in a "completely predatory way," driving game into remote areas where they were inaccessible to the "cultured" (*intelligentnoi*) part of the population.[66] Much like their contemporaries in India, Africa, and the United States, VOLO members sought to keep uncivilised local peoples from killing game—so they could do so at their leisure.[67] While the impact of VOLO and its Nikol'sk-Ussuriisk counterpart was limited, it is nevertheless indicative of the prevailing attitudes about proper nature use among Far Eastern tsarist elites.

These different threads—voluntary organisations, state conservation, and the "green" civilising mission of the tsarist elite—came together during the First World War to yield the territory's first nature reserve. Beginning in 1908, foresters operating in the Kedrovaia Valley, west of Vladivostok, had begun working to create a sanctuary for rare species, including Korean pine, sable, and spotted deer. They soon won support from the Society for the Study of the Amur Region (OIAK) and from Governor-General Gondatti. In 1914, Gondatti had requested funding to form armed detachments to drive Chinese and Korean hunters and trappers—an estimated 40,000 of them—from the taiga. Alexander Krivoshein, the head of the Main Administration for Agriculture and Land Management (GUZZ), denied the request but suggested that Gondatti create *zapovedniki* (inviolable reserves) instead. Policing the whole Priamur, he warned, was unrealistic, but protecting a bounded area might be possible.[68] In 1916, a group of volunteers created the Priamur Forest Society and won Gondatti's recognition for the creation of the Kedrovaia Pad' (Cedar/Pine Valley) reserve (*zakaznik*), from which human activities were prohibited—one of the first in the empire.[69]

66 RGIA DV F. 1, op. 4, d. 1889, ll. 1, 13; Obshchestvo liubitelei okhoty, *Otchety*, 11–13, 51–52; Khisamutdinov, *The Russian Far East*, 2, 53, 83–84.

67 VOLO was particularly similar to the Boone and Crockett Club, whose founding members looked upon poor whites, blacks, Italian immigrants, and others as unsporting. See Taylor III and Klingle, "Environmentalism's Elitist Tinge Has Roots in the Movement's History."

68 State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter GARF) F. 387, op. 19, d. 67789, ll. 1–3ob, 19, 29.

69 Man'ko, "Istoriia lesnykh obshchestv na rossiiskom Dal'nem Vosoke"; Organ Primorskogo gubernskogo ekonomicheskogo soveshchaniia, *Sovetskoe Primor'e*, 131; Shtilmark, *History of the Russian Zapovedniks*, 92–94; DVO RAN, "Gosudarstvennyi prirodnyi zapovednik Kedrovaia pad."

The Red–Green Civilising Mission

The Far East experienced a chaotic interregnum after the revolutions of 1917 that lasted until 1922. While much changed under Soviet rule, the "green" civilising mission persisted, in part because it dovetailed with aspects of Marxism–Leninism, especially its Eurocentrism and emphasis on the promises of industrial progress and scientific management. Soviet officials—some of whom had served the tsarist government, the Far Eastern Republic, and/or the Kolchak regime, and many of whom had been educated before the Revolution—were, like their predecessors, quite concerned with environmental problems in and around Primor'e, including overfishing, overhunting, deforestation, and flooding. They continued to associate environmental problems with backwardness and Asianness while seeing development based on (European) science, state planning, and industrial methods as a path toward economic growth and environmental protection.

The "green" civilising mission *à la Sovietique* was perhaps most evident in the realm of fisheries, where, as Robert Kindler shows, the sense of being outcompeted by a non-European power, Japan, was particularly acute.[70] In 1923, the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee created a Far Eastern Hunting and Fisheries Agency, Dal'rybokhota, to oversee fisheries management in the region. Among its major concerns early on was the imminent "exhaustion of natural [salmon] reserves," especially on the Amur, where the catch peaked in 1910, and in the Sea of Japan.[71] In 1925, a fisheries official warned that the population of chum salmon in the Amur "ha[d] been almost entirely destroyed, reserves of pink salmon ha[d] been completely ruined." The once renowned sturgeon of the Amur and Ussuri, another wrote, had become "a thing of the past."[72]

Dal'rybokhota officials tended to ascribe both ecological decline and slow economic development to backwardness, as had their predecessors, while inflecting their concerns with the prevailing ideology. The agency's first director, F. I. Adrianov, blamed peasant settlers and Indigenous peoples on the Amur for much of the decline, writing that they were responsible for the "catastrophic" reduction in salmon stocks. The piecemeal distribution of fishing plots

70 Kindler, "Troubled Waters," 23–41.

71 State Archive of Primorskii Krai (hereafter GAPK) F. 633, op. 4, d. 64, ll. 4–6; Augerot, "An Environmental History of the Salmon Management Philosophies of the North Pacific," 61.

72 Rusanov, "K zapreshcheniiu lova osetra i kalugi v basseine reki Amura," 77.

to them was an "SR-like decision" that had engendered "predatory fishing" practices that damaged salmon stocks without achieving the industrial scale needed to compete with the Japanese. As a result, the region was in danger of regressing to a "primitive condition."[73] Another Dal'rybokhota official, V. O. Kolobov, who had also served the Kolchak government during the Civil War, attributed the decline of salmon and sturgeon fisheries to merciless over-exploitation and a "provincialism and amateurishness" that was "specifically Asian."[74] Kolobov recommended rationalising the industry through scientific studies of fish populations, a shift toward other fish species, the development of local canning and processing industries, and the construction of a telegraph network to coordinate fishermen. He wrote that such measures would enable the Soviet Far Eastern fishing industry to "shed its centuries-old clothes of amateurishness and yellow provincialism and enter the wide road of global, concentrated production."[75]

Shedding "amateurishness" and "yellow provincialism" while achieving "concentrated production" demanded science and state oversight. In 1925, a group of ichthyologists and OIAK members established the Pacific Scientific–Industrial Station (TNPS) in southern Primor′e to gather knowledge of fish populations and find "the most rational means of exploitation of this or that fish without the loss of its natural abundance."[76] The TNPS sought to document and restore salmon and other fish stocks, shift away from over-exploited areas and species, protect forests around spawning grounds and along migratory rivers, and promote fish-farming.[77] Dal'rybokhota pursued some such measures in its effort to rationalise the industry. It immediately imposed a seven-year ban on sturgeon fishing in the Amur and Ussuri systems, citing declining yields and fish size.[78] Beginning in 1927, it sought to regulate fishing more broadly in the Amur basin, restricting the use of certain types of nets, the catching of undersized sturgeon, and fishing in spawning waters, among other measures. Indigenous peoples—who were conspicuously absent from these discussions—were permitted in spawning areas if they did not have access to fishing grounds near their village.[79] Dal'rybokhota officials also

73 GAPK F. 633, op. 7, d. 13, ll. 1–4, 7.
74 Kolobov, "Perspektivy Dal'nevostochnykh rybnykh promyslov," 347–352.
75 Ibid., 343–357.
76 Zasel'skii, *Razvitie morskikh biologicheskikh issledovanii na Dal'nem Vostoke v 1923–1941 gg.*, 42–43.
77 GAPK, F. 633, op. 7, d. 43, ll. 9–10.
78 Rusanov, "K zapreshcheniiu lova osetra i kalugi v basseine reki Amura," 76–79.
79 GAPK F. 633, op. 4 d. 2, ll. 87-89; GAPK F. 633, op. 7, d. 62, ll. 1–2.

encouraged fishermen to diversify, facilitating the creation of a small herring fishery in Peter the Great Bay and supporting experiments with fish hatcheries. The agency also attempted to consolidate small ("SR-like") fishing plots, since larger operations would "be easier to establish and simpler to control" and thus more amenable to conservation.[80]

At the same time, Dal'rybokhota (Dal'ryba from 1931 onward) sought to push Japanese fishermen from Soviet waters, an indication of how conservation and anti-foreign sentiment continued to dovetail. The Japanese had enjoyed broad fishing rights because the Fishing Convention of 1907, one of the agreements resulting from the Russo-Japanese War, dominated fishing along much of Russia's Pacific seaboard, and they were able to operate with impunity during the Civil War. The Soviet–Japanese Fishing Convention of 1928 was more favourable to Soviet fishing operations but maintained many fishing areas and continued to allow Japanese firms to bid on fishing plots in Soviet waters.[81] From the mid-20s, there had been efforts to favour Soviet fishermen and push the Japanese from Soviet waters by peaceful means.[82] The agency's fishing inspectors also sought to ensure Japanese fishermen complied with the boundaries stipulated in the fisheries agreements and to prevent "predation of our natural riches," efforts that were sometimes accompanied by violence.[83]

During the 1930s, conservation took a back seat to increasing demands from the centre for output, though such demands dovetailed with the pursuit of "concentrated production"—and, in practice, with a kind of Russification. There was heavy state investment in industrial fishing during the first two Five-Year Plans, including the purchase of ocean-going, refrigerated fishing vessels from abroad, the construction of shipbuilding facilities and

80 Zasel'skii, *Razvitie morskikh biologicheskikh issledovanii na Dal'nem Vostoke v 1923-1941 gg.*, 25–28, 35–36.

81 Kindler, "Troubled Waters"; Kaminaga, "Maritime History and Imperiology"; Kaminaga, "International Fisheries Conflicts in the Bering Sea in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," 43–64; Mandrik, "Rybnaia promyshlennost' Primor'ia v period novoi ekonomicheskoi politiki"; Mandrik, *Istoriia rybnoi promyshlennosti rossiiskogo Dal'nego Vostoka (1927-1940 gg.)*.

82 Wertheim, "The Russo-Japanese Fisheries Controversy," 193–194.

83 GAPK F. 633, op. 7, d. 53, l. 30b. See also Kindler, "Troubled Waters," 33–38; Sokolsky, "Fishing, Settlement, and Conservation in the Russian Far East, 1860–1940," 234–238; Sokolsky, "Fishing for Empire: Settlement and Maritime Conflict in the Russian Far East."

fish-processing plants, and the directed migration of settlers to the coast.[84] While fish conservation in the '30s seems to have done little, efforts to compete with the Japanese bore fruit: Japanese vessels were excluded from certain areas, concessions were curtailed, and Soviet fishermen began to predominate in the Sea of Japan and in the Amur basin. Whether Far Eastern fisheries became more "rational" during the Stalin era is debatable, but they certainly became more "national."[85]

A similar convergence of conservationism with nationalism emerged in discussions of rice farming. Wet-rice cultivation had emerged among Primor'e's Korean communities during the Civil War and expanded rapidly in the early 1920s, as did the cultivation of soybeans.[86] Soviet officials, like their predecessors, were keen to populate Primor'e and establish intensive forms of agriculture. To that end, they established a state company, Dal'ris, to oversee rice growing and processing. Dal'ris officials saw in planned, irrigated agriculture a solution to the "predatory use of arable land" about which tsarist officials had long complained, and created plans for a network of damming and drainage works in Primor'e to support the new crops.[87]

However, state officials soon took issue with Koreans' rice farming practices, which did not seem adequately modern. To flood their rice fields, Koreans built small dams, partitions, and ditches using fascines, rocks, timber, earth, and other materials. Occasionally, these structures leaked or collapsed, and water spilled into adjacent fields used for dry-land crops, prompting complaints. In 1923, in response to such concerns, a regional economic council cited the "improper" and "primitive" methods of irrigation found on Korean

84 Lee and Lukin, *Russia's Far East*, 36–37; Mandrik, *Istoriia rybnoi promyshlennosti rossiiskogo Dal'nego Vostoka (1927-1940 gg.)*, 41–52. The Japanese, as Kaminaga Eisuke shows in the first volume of this series, made similar investments in their fishing fleets, though they shifted toward pelagic fishing. Kaminaga, "International Fisheries Conflicts in the Bering Sea in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," 49–50, 53–55.

85 GAPK F. 633, op. 5, d. 95, 1–3ob; Augerot, "An Environmental History of the Salmon Management Philosophies of the North Pacific," 61–63, 70; Bilim, "Pereselenie rybakov na sovetskii Dal'nii Vostok (1928-1941 gg.)"; Mandrik, *Istoriia rybnoi promyshlennosti rossiiskogo Dal'nego Vostoka (1927-1940 gg.)*; Mandrik, "Rybnaia promyshlennost' Primor'ia v period novoi ekonomicheskoi politiki"; Primorskaia oblastnaia planovaia komissia, *Primorskaia oblast' v tsifrakh*; Sokolsky, "Fishing, Settlement, and Conservation in the Russian Far East, 1860–1940."

86 See GAPK F. 1166, op. 1, d. 115, ll. 1–3; Voeikov, "Uspekhi razvedeniia risa v Primorskoi Oblasti"; Charnetskii, "Mestnoe risoseianie," 7; Charnetskii, "K voprosu o razvedenii risa v Primorskoi oblasti," 230–240.

87 GARF F. A310, op. 16, d. 337, ll. 11–17.

farms, which, one official wrote, threatened to aggravate flooding and damage fisheries. The preferred alternative was state-supported irrigation systems based on experimental fields, electric pumping stations, and hydrological observations.[88] Similarly, in 1927, Dal'ris promoted the idea of interesting "the Russian population in the development of rice and [soy]beans, since at present these crops remain purely Korean," an initiative that seemed to demand systems other than those used by Koreans.[89]

The Sovnarkom in Moscow, in the process of outlining the goals of the first Five-Year Plan in the Far East, also made ecological arguments (among others) to devalue Koreans' economic activities, emphasising that Korean rice-farming was spontaneous and wasteful, "regulated by nothing and no one," "leading to waterlogging of the soil," and contributing to flooding. It advocated instead "more modern technical approaches, as occurred in Italy and America, where a rice farmer works without soaking his feet in a swamp." One Korean farmer's request to manage his own waterworks was rejected on the grounds of his "primitive irrigation works" and "predatory use of rice fields and water resources," which threatened "total anarchy in land usage and water usage." Officials were also concerned that rice agriculture might function as a kind of agricultural fifth column; one report proposed that it was a Japanese scheme to provision its army in the event of invasion. With thousands of Koreans growing rice, the Sovnarkom argued, Japan killed two birds with one stone: "on the one hand, it frees Korean territory […] for settlement by Japanese, who are not acclimatised to Primor'e, and on the other hand it creates a food base for its occupying army." Thus, it was necessary to create "conditions under which rice-farming can be undertaken by Russian settler[s]."[90]

That, in effect, was what occurred: most of the Korean and Chinese populations in the Far East were deported in 1937–1938, and their farms were taken over by new, mostly Russian settlers.[91] Several new state farms were created on

88 GAPK F. 1506, op. 1 d. 1, 93; GAPK F. 1506, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 16–18; GAPK F. 1506, op. 1, d. 28, l. 1-ob; Charnetskii, "Mestnoe risoseianie," 7–11; Charnetskii, "K voprosu o razvedenii risa v Primorskoi oblasti," 231, 234–235.

89 GARF F. 1235, op. 122, d. 77, 11ob, 17. As Maya Peterson has shown, Soviet officials were similarly contemptuous of local water-management practices, though for different reasons. See Peterson, *Pipe Dreams*.

90 GARF F. A406, op. 1, d. 814a, ll. 34–40; GARF F. A310, op. 16, d. 337, 6, 13.

91 On the deportations, see especially Chang, *Burnt by the Sun*; Kim, "On the Preparation and Conduct of the Repression of Koreans in the 1930s Soviet Union"; Toropov, "Koreiskaia emigratsiia na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossii, vtoraia polovina XIX v. - 1937 g."; Gelb, "An Early Soviet Ethnic Deportation," 389–412.

the lands previously tilled by Koreans, under the direction of Dal'ris, which also oversaw the creation of pumping stations and new irrigation works.[92] Such techniques do not seem to have brought improved output, or at least could not compensate for the general upheaval in the countryside in the near term. The production of rice and soybeans fell by forty to fifty percent during collectivisation, and at the end of the 1930s were but a fraction of what they had been a decade earlier.[93] As one scholar has observed, the deportation of Koreans ushered in "a sustained agricultural crisis, which only resolved in the course of several decades."[94] Like fisheries, agriculture in Primor'e became more "national," if not more "rational."

Soviet-era wildlife protection also retained a modified form of the "green" civilising mission, though it lacked the nationalist, "use it or lose it" dimension we see in fisheries and agriculture. One account, for instance, attributed the disappearance of local flora and fauna during the late imperial and revolutionary period to "predatory capitalist exploitation" and argued it had fallen to Soviet scientists to restore these populations.[95] The zoologist G. F. Bromlei blamed the Civil War and foreign intervention for forest destruction and the dwindling numbers of sable, deer, goral, and tigers—an act of "plunder" that halted only with the arrival of the Red Army.[96] Similarly, in 1936, the forester A. A. Tsymek ascribed losses in the region's natural riches to Russian and foreign capitalists and praised the regulations, reserves, and breeding programs of his own era.[97] There was some truth to such claims: during the Civil War, a combination of lawlessness and privation brought renewed pressure on the taiga and its wildlife. Hunters flouted tsarist-era restrictions to gain access to food, furs, and antlers, and the number of elk, deer, goral, tigers, and other mammals likely declined.[98]

With the establishment of Soviet rule, naturalists and officials picked up where tsarist-era conservationists had left off, seeking a combination of protection and rational production of taiga products under state direction, typically at scale. In 1925, for instance, a group of academics, including members of the Forest Society, appealed to Soviet authorities to expand the

92 GAPK F. 853, op. 2, d. 61, ll. 1–9, 22–25.
93 Lykova and Proskurina, *Derevnia rossiiskogo Dal'nego Vostoka v 20 - 30-e gody XX veka.*
94 Kim, "On the Preparation and Conduct of the Repression of Koreans in the 1930s Soviet Union," 282.
95 Liverovskii and Kolesnikov, *Priroda iuzhnoi poloviny sovetskogo Dal'nego Vostoka*, 28–31.
96 GARF F. A-358, o., 2, d. 437, l. 14–15.
97 Tsymek, "Introduction," 3–4.
98 Gaponov, *Istoriia taezhnogo prirodopol'zovaniia Iuzhno-Ussuriiskogo regiona*, 169.

Kedrovaia Pad reserve, citing its economic and ecological value.[99] Regional officials agreed that there was an economic interest in protecting valuable sable and spotted deer populations—and a scientific interest in studying a relatively undisturbed forest ecosystem—and agreed to the expansion in 1926. Up the coast, near Ol'ga bay, K. G. Abramov, a long-time Bolshevik who became enamoured with the Far Eastern taiga—and dismayed by the anthropogenic damage he found—convinced other officials that they needed to create both protected zones and consolidated deer farms. He argued that existing deer farms were too small to preserve the species and were concentrated in the hands of well-to-do settlers and kulaks. He proposed instead a combination of *zapovedniki* and large, collectivised deer-farming operations, which would yield greater productivity and a large, diverse breeding pool of wild deer.[100] While such a line may have been an act of what Douglas Weiner calls "protective colouration"—a reframing of nature-protection to suit the prevailing ideology and protect oneself—it was also consistent with the "big (and modern) is beautiful" idea that had been circulating since the late tsarist era: that state-led, scientifically informed development would be better for the region's economy and ecology.[101]

As a result of the efforts of Abramov and others, the vast Sikhote-Alin *zapovednik* was created in southeastern Primor'e in 1935, and other protected areas followed. Those reserves, as planned, served an important economic function, producing pelts, deer antlers, and other valuable commercial products. In 1940, for instance, the Sudzukhinskii (now Lazovskii) *zapovednik* sold over 30,000 roubles' worth of pelts harvested from the reserve. Zapovednik staff also hunted predators to help protect the valuable species. Meanwhile, state-run deer farms thrived and ultimately proved critical to replenishing wild populations after the Second World War.[102]

In this way, early Soviet wildlife conservation in Primor'e built on pre-revolutionary precedent. As before the Revolution, a conservationist regime—one orientated toward sustained output for human ends—made a great deal

99 GAPK F. 1506, op. 1, d. 35, ll. 15–16ob; GAPK F. 1506, op. 1, d. 36, ll. 1–1ob; Korkeshko and Miroliubov, "Gosudarstvennyi zapovednik 'Kedrovaia Pad', 33; Aramilev, "Sika Deer in Russia," 479, 483; Bromlei and Kucherenko, *Kopytnye iuga Dal'nego Vostoka SSSR*, 156; Organ Primorskogo gubernskogo ekonomicheskogo soveshchaniia, *Sovetskoe Primor'e*, 131; Baikov, *Iziubr i iziubrevodstvo*, 11–12.

100 Bromlei, "Dal'nevostochnye Zapovedniki," 213–227; Bromlei and Gutnikova, *Suputinskii Zapovednik*; Suvorov, *Zapovednoe Primor'e*, 19–38.

101 Weiner, *Models of Nature*; Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*.

102 GAPK F. 1351, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 1–2; Aramilev, "Sika Deer in Russia," 479.

of sense. Forest resources remained a key source of wealth; they fell largely under the purview of the state (though private enterprises persisted through the NEP era); and the need to square development (now "building socialism") with natural limits led experts to seek planned, rational development, much as it did elsewhere in the contemporary world.[103] In this sense, the "green" civilising mission dovetailed well with Bolshevism, as it had with tsarist-era imperialism.

Conclusion

While Soviet rule brought many wrenching changes to Russia's Pacific coast—collectivisation, industrialisation, the deportation of Chinese and Koreans, renewed migration (along with exile) from the centre—there was a great deal of continuity in ideas about how natural resources should be used and by whom. Both Soviet and tsarist-era authorities, along with other observers, expressed notable concern for the ecological changes they witnessed (or feared), such as deforestation, wildfires, and a decrease in certain animal populations. They tended to interpret such changes in civilisational terms: they cast Chinese, Korean, and Japanese migrants as barbaric and rapacious invaders, and peasant and Cossack settlers as backward souls (and incompetent colonisers) in need of correction. Accordingly, the solutions proposed (and sometimes adopted) focused on criminalising "predatory" behaviours and practices and promoting "rational" ones, including exploitation by modern industrial methods. In this version of the "green" civilising mission, economic advancement and nature protection were two sides of the same technocratic coin—and the correct approach was a European one.

In this sense, this study accords with works that have found lines of continuity in technocratic attitudes and practices of rule across both the revolutionary divide and national boundaries.[104] The sources of such continuity were many. There were, as in many areas of early Soviet government, continuities in personnel, at least until the purges of the 1930s. Others had trained under the old regime and thus shared some of the same assumptions

103 See, for instance, Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside*; Pouchepadass, "British Attitudes towards Shifting Cultivation in Colonial South India"; Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*.

104 Pravilova, *A Public Empire*; Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses*; Hoffmann, "European Modernity and Soviet Socialism"; Peter Holquist, "'In Accord with State Interests and the People's Wishes'."

and biases, Eurocentricity and a horror of "backwardness" among them. Also, in the broader context of the early twentieth century, statist approaches to natural resource management—and derision toward local and Indigenous practices—were far from unusual. Soviet authorities, moreover, retained a strong ethnocentric bias against migrants from China, Korea, and Japan, though it was less overt than during the tsarist period, and confronted the same basic strategic situation in the Far East until 1945.[105] Whether in the realm of fisheries, forestry, or wildlife management, there was, in discussions of Primor'e's environment, a merging of nationalist and conservationist arguments, with the prevailing assumption that state coordination, scale, and European science would conserve the resources of the Far East while advancing the state's objectives. And by 1940, whether by intent or by accident, the Soviet regime had fulfilled some aspects of Russia's "green" civilising mission, including the removal of most of the region's Chinese and Koreans from the interior; an expansion of industrial fishing and logging; and the displacement of Japanese fishermen from some Soviet waters, though those waters remained contested until after the Second World War.

To be sure, this is not to say that the pursuit of "rational" development was necessarily futile or misguided. Like "sustainable" development today, it was an understandable response to the attempt to meet people's needs without compromising their future. Yet a critical analysis of "rational" development underscores how rationality—perhaps like sustainability today—was, to some degree, in the eye of the beholder. Viewing nature as something to be claimed and saved through rational development dovetailed well with the broader goals of colonisation, in both tsarist and Soviet eras, which may well have contributed to its prevalence.

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105 On the question of "race" in interactions between tsarist and Soviet states in the Far East, see especially Chang, *Burnt by the Sun*; Babrenko, "Otnosheniia russkikh krest'ian i koreiskikh pereselentsev"; Weitz, "Racial Politics without the Concept of Race."

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5 Vladimir Arsen'ev, the Russian Far East, and Origins of Soviet Whaling in the North Pacific Ocean

Ryan Tucker Jones

Abstract The Far Eastern author Vladimir Arsen′ev is well known in Russia for his eloquent works of autobiographical fiction, such as the classic *Dersu Uzala*. This chapter details a far less known part of Arsen′ev's autobiography, one with arguably much greater consequence for the environmental history of the North Pacific: his stint working as a fisheries official in Soviet Vladivostok in the 1920s. In that capacity, Arsen′ev oversaw the beginning of the Soviet Union's whaling industry, which in subsequent decades would become environmentally ruinous. Arsen′ev helped inaugurate Soviet whaling, but he also offered important cautions based on his own experience and his deep knowledge of the North Pacific's history of overexploitation of marine mammals. This story helps understand better the origins of Soviet whaling and Arsen′ev's own environmental ethos, which also featured in his literary work.

Keywords environment, revolution, whales, Japan, Indigenous

Vladimir Klavdievich Arsen′ev is well known in Russia for his eloquent works of autobiographical fiction, such as the popular *Dersu Uzala*. Despite that novel's ecological themes, however, Arsen′ev's importance for Russia and the North Pacific's environmental history is far less recognised.[1] His impact came not only through his literature but also from a stint working as an employee of Soviet Vladivostok's Dal′rybokhota (The Department of Far Eastern Fishing and Hunting) in the early 1920s. In that position, Arsen′ev oversaw the beginnings of the Soviet whaling industry. As whistleblowers and historians later showed, over the next fifty years Soviet whaling would leave a legacy of

1 An important exception is Beu, "A Journey towards Environmental Wisdom."

Jones, Ryan Tucker. 2025. "5 Vladimir Arsen'ev, the Russian Far East, and Origins of Soviet Whaling in the North Pacific Ocean" In *Environments, Resources, and Infrastructures Between Russia and the Asia-Pacific*, edited by Benjamin Beuerle, Sandra Dahlke, Anna Mazanik and Andreas Renner, 105–123. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing. https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.1589.c23568

unparalleled mendacity and environmental destruction.[2] But, while Arsen′ev certainly facilitated the beginning of the destruction of the North Pacific's whales, his work at Dal′rybokhota shows other paths Soviet whaling might have taken and, as it happens, did take for several decades. In fact, in those years, Arsen′ev warned specifically against the ruthless and reckless paths Soviet whaling would take while also expressing a host of ecological ideas drawn from his distinctive experiences in the Russian Far East. This chapter examines Arsen′ev's work with Dal′rybokhota both to re-examine his contributions to the North Pacific's environmental history and to better understand the origins of Soviet whaling.

Arsen′ev's contributions to Soviet whaling buttress recent claims for continuity in environmental policy across Russia's revolutionary divide.[3] While proclaiming a new approach to every aspect of life, the Soviet government in fact often relied on pre-revolutionary expertise to manage its economy and environmental policy. This was especially true in distant corners of the empire such as the Russian Far East. Arsen′ev's long tenure in that region also points to the importance of local difference in the Soviet Union. Arsen′ev's environmental ideas were deeply informed by the Far East's distinctive history of overexploitation of marine mammals and interaction with Indigenous peoples. He was able to insert some of the local knowledge of conservation into the Bolsheviks' economic plans. It was only when Soviet whaling left its Far Eastern roots that the industry became truly rapacious. Finally, Arsen′ev's work with whaling demonstrates the very underappreciated fact of Russia's deep impact on the world's marine ecosystems.[4] Though commonly thought of as an exclusively terrestrial empire, in fact Russia has for centuries been a significant actor at sea as well. The way that its inhabitants have shaped the oceans, and the ideas and practices that have guided them, remain mostly a mystery to historians.

2 See Ivashchenko, "Soviet Whaling" and Jones, *Red Leviathan*.
3 See for example Bruno, *The Nature of Soviet Power*; Brain, *Song of the Forest*.
4 I have explored some of these impacts more deeply in Jones, *Empire of Extinction* and Jones, *Red Leviathan*, but much more remains to be done.

Far Eastern Fisheries in Revolution

In 1918, Arsen′ev received a post as junior inspector in Vladivostok's newly created Dal′rybokhota. Later, he would be named the department's specialist for marine mammal hunting.[5] Arsen′ev—then a well-known army officer and explorer but not yet a famous author—had recently moved south from Khabarovsk. The city on the Amur was then in the grips of violent unrest in conjunction with the Bolshevik Revolution, and Vladivostok offered a measure of calm. Helping make a move out of Khabarovsk attractive, Arsen′ev likely also sympathised with the counterrevolutionary cause, as Amir Khisamutdinov claims.[6] Arsen′ev would remain in Vladivostok for the better part of the next decade despite having numerous opportunities to emigrate. Perhaps he was compelled to stay by the exciting work he found in Dal′rybokhota, which allowed him to travel widely through the Far East.[7] Historian John Stephan surmises that Arsen′ev "stayed out of trouble by keeping a low profile working in a fisheries trust."[8] However, while he may have chosen the Vladivostok bureau for its quiet, Arsen′ev ended up making decisions with important consequences for its surrounding oceans.

The state of the Far Eastern fisheries that confronted Arsen′ev in Vladivostok was highly unsatisfactory from the Russian point of view, having fallen into veritable "anarchy and chaos."[9] Russia's share of North Pacific salmon was declining as more and more Japanese fishermen were catching the fish just offshore from Kamchatka and the mouth of the Amur—all legally, thanks to the Russo-Japanese Fisheries Treaty negotiated in the wake of the Russian empire's defeat in 1905. The revolution had only made the situation worse. Due to heightened Japanese influence and a need to raise immediate capital, in 1920 the Far Eastern Republic (a temporarily independent state subject to Bolshevik influence) advised that Japanese fishermen be granted unlimited access to the natural resources of the Russian Far East.[10] In light of the straitened circumstances of the postrevolutionary years, Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin recommended the continuation of fishery concessions to the Japanese and even favoured extending them to the United States. In 1920, he and the Soviet government were embarrassed by a deal they struck with the

5 Vinogradova, "V. K. Arsen′ev," 110–126, 165; Khisamutdinov, *Vladivostok,* 27, 48, 90, 280.
6 Khisamutdinov, "Vladimir Arsen′ev," 1–14.
7 Khisamutdinov, *Vladivostok*, 280.
8 Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 170.
9 Mandrik, *Istoriia rybnoi promyshlennosti*, 69.
10 Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 147, 149.

American fraudster Washington Vanderlip, who made spurious promises to develop Kamchatka's coal, oil, and fish resources.[11]

Instead, most American activity in the Russian Far East remained illicit. Just offshore (and sometimes even onshore in Chukotka), American whalers were catching right whales and bowhead whales.[12] As for Russia's own history of whaling in its Far Eastern waters, it was "impoverished," as a later Soviet writer euphemistically put it.[13] Despite great hopes, the late imperial years had seen several failed whaling ventures, notably those of the Finnish mariner and imperial subject Otto Lindholm and the ill-fated Russian Akim Dadymov, who perished somewhere at sea in the North Pacific in 1888. As the century turned, those interested in the Far East and whaling stressed that such ventures had relied, fatally, on an amateurish overenthusiasm and too little systematic knowledge.[14]

As a well-travelled military officer and amateur naturalist, Arsen′ev was deeply familiar with the natural world of the Russian Far East, including its oceans.[15] Even before joining Dal′rybokhota, Arsen′ev had been interested in whaling. He also knew the desultory history of Russian whaling and the current state of the region. In fact, he was personally acquainted with the old whaler, Lindholm. Once he joined Dal′rybokhota, Arsen′ev also tapped into regional expertise. He distributed questionnaires to knowledgeable Far Eastern residents, inquiring about the state of animal populations in the ocean. Although answers came back slowly, and even then were sometimes too vague for satisfactory use, Arsen′ev was able to compile a fairly complete view of the nearby North Pacific Ocean and Sea of Okhotsk. Especially innovative and useful was his large 1921 map depicting the migratory paths of whales and other marine mammals. This kind of information fulfilled specialists' longstanding desires—from as far back as 1895—for just this kind of precise information, which they saw as necessary for economic development.[16] Arsen′ev's work and map represented the most comprehensive, dependable knowledge of the Far East's marine resources, one upon which a real, profitable, and relatively safe whaling industry could be built. Such work made Arsen′ev an ideal choice to assist the new Soviet state's efforts to make their Far Eastern oceans profitable.

11 Parry, "Washington B. Vanderlip, the 'Khan of Kamchatka'," 312.
12 Mandrik, *Istoriia rybnoi promyshlennosti*, 91.
13 Liulke, "Na kurse – Vladivostok," 369.
14 Sliunin, *Promyslovye bogatstva Kamchatki, Sakhalina, i Komandorskikh Ostrovov,* 93–95.
15 Slaght, "Arsen′ev's Lament."
16 Sliunin, *Promyslovye bogatstva*, 2.

To stimulate local initiative, in the early 1920s, Dal′rybokhota also invited Russian subjects to submit sealed envelopes containing plans to start whaling ventures. Remarkably, in this time of chaos, malnutrition, and widespread violence, a large number did just that. Some of the applicants were ambitious charlatans, and some were fronts for foreign capitalists, but the dozen or so who asked for government permission to whale Far Eastern seas show some of the restless energy unleashed by the collapsing imperial structures and the openings of new possibilities. Arsen′ev, as the most knowledgeable member of Dal′rybokhota, scrutinised and rendered judgement on these proposals. In this crucial period, he exerted tremendous influence on the shape of Soviet policy toward the oceans.

Arsen′ev did not enjoy unlimited control over these proposals' fates—he approved at least one that was later rejected by Moscow as being too entangled with American whaling interests. However, his written responses to the proposals demonstrate the range of concerns that informed late imperial and early Soviet attitudes toward whales and whalers. Working out rules to govern successful applicants' operations, Arsen′ev largely turned to longstanding Far Eastern concerns about conservation informed by a relentless historical series of marine mammal population crashes and foreign predation. Reflecting the sense of environmental fatalism that animates parts of *Dersu Uzala*, Arsen′ev stressed the dangers of heedless exploitation. As he noted, "every whaling industry has been predatory, in the sense that whalers have destroyed all the animals in the first few years."[17] Accordingly, Arsen′ev cautioned Russian whalers not to kill young whales or mothers still with their offspring.[18] However, the Far East's geography, along with whale behaviour, made him pessimistic about the prospects for effective conservation. The whales swimming off Russian shores were migrating either northward to their feeding grounds or southward towards Japan. Thus, Japanese whalers would kill them if Russians did not do the job themselves—the classic problem of managing migratory marine mammals everywhere, here intensified by longstanding diplomatic difficulties with Japan.[19]

Arsen′ev repeatedly cautioned against hunting near the several *zapovedniks* (nature preserves) in Kamchatka. The numbers of *zapovedniks* had

17 "Instruktsiia o poriadke proizvodstva kit…" 1924, State Archive of the Primorsky Krai (GAPK), R-66, op. 4, no. 85, 163.

18 "Instruktsiia o poriadke proizvodstva kit…" 167. On relations with Japanese fishermen, see Eisuke Kaminaga, "Maritime History and Imperiology."

19 "Instruktsiia o poriadke proizvodstva kit …" 163.

expanded in the last years of the Russian empire and enjoyed Soviet support in the 1920s as important areas for the scientific study of "pristine" ecosystems that existed outside of human influence.[20] Arsen′ev's caution around *zapovedniks* reflected his—and most Far Easterners'—historical experience with the overharvesting of smaller marine mammals, such as sea otters, sea lions, and walruses. This, in fact, was the reason prospective whalers needed to avoid the nature reserves, since Arsen′ev feared the noise of harpoons would frighten the skittish and still-rare sea otters.[21]

Arsen′ev's concerns found their way into the instructions given to those granted permission to hunt. Applicants were ordered not to anchor near sea otter or fur seal *zapusks*. These were special places where no hunting was allowed for a certain number of years and which had a long history in the Russian North Pacific, dating back at least to the early nineteenth century.[22] Furthermore, the Soviet government reserved the right to extend these *zapusks* at any time.[23] One official (perhaps Arsen′ev himself; the Dal′rybokhota documents are sometimes unsigned) stressed that licenses should only be given out to whalers for long terms (ten to fifteen years) and that the first three years should be left as a *zapusk*, measures that would hopefully encourage investment in the longer-term health of the whale stocks. Whaling, in other words, was to be encouraged, but with significant cautions attached.[24]

At times, the concepts attached to the *zapovedniks* and *zapusks* extended past the rational-use arguments relatively common to the time—and even beyond the *zapovedniks*' unique function as biological laboratories—to preservationist goals.[25] Russian observers of the 1920s believed (wrongly, as it turned out) that the waters around Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands preserved the last examples of the sea otter species, elsewhere hunted to extinction by fur traders.[26] They credited the survival of remnant populations to farsighted imperial Russian conservation measures, but felt more was needed to save the species from extinction. In 1923, Kuril Islands fisheries

20 Weiner, "Community Ecology in Stalin's Russia," 685.
21 "Instruktsiia o poriadke proizvodstva kit …" 6.
22 See Jones, "A. F. Kashevarov, the Russian–American Company, and Alaska Conservation," and Kashevarov, "Shto takoe zapusk."
23 "Instruktsiia o poriadke proizvodstva kit …" 25.
24 "Obshchie soobrazheniia otnositel′no form ekspluatatsii …," GAPK, F. 633, op. 2, no. 31, 14.
25 On the creation and role of *zapovedniki* in imperial and Soviet Russia, see Weiner, *Models of Nature*.
26 See Jones, *Empire of Extinction*.

inspectors recommended the animal be granted complete protection at the Cape Lopatka *zapovednik*, its last remaining Kamchatkan stronghold.[27] Such concerns long outlived Arsen′ev's tenure, and prohibitions on whaling around *zapovedniks* later applied to the new Soviet whaling fleet in the 1930s as well. Thus, despite a later history of gross excess, Russian whaling was imbued at its outset with some of the most progressive aspects of imperial conservation, though ones that privileged pinnipeds and other smaller marine mammals.

Arsen′ev's concerns for fur-bearing marine mammals also informed other, more problematic, recommendations. For example, he advised shooting and killing as many orcas as possible, regardless of their age. *Kasatki* (as they are known in Russian, a name taken from the Kamchadal term for the animal) were, in Arsen′ev's view, "tigers among the marine mammals, and should be extirpated everywhere, with whatever means, and at whatever time of year."[28] This was another recommendation for practices that endured into later Soviet plans. Killer whales are, indeed, efficient predators of smaller marine mammals, and in the past may have been significant hunters of whales as well. In the 1920s, humans around the world regarded them as pests and rarely thought twice about killing them. However, rarely have there been plans to systematically eradicate the whales, though in the 1950s and 1960s Canadians attempted to extirpate killer whales at a scale similar to that which Arsen′ev recommended.[29] Later, Soviet whalers would kill them opportunistically, before briefly turning in desperation to commercially hunting these comparatively lean whales as other species declined. So, in the 1920s, Arsen′ev's plan for eradicating orcas was in a sense ahead of its time, though very much out of step with later ecological views on the importance of predators in maintaining prey populations.

Big Animals and "Little People"

Imperial—and Soviet—conservationists worried about the possible impacts of whaling on human communities as well. In particular, they expressed real concern about the effects it might have on the Far East's indigenous peoples, the so-called "little people" of the North who belonged formally to the

27 "Doklad ob okhrane bobrov u mysa Lopatka, 1923," GAPK, F. 633, op. 2, no. 31, 34–34ob.

28 "Instruktsiia o poriadke proizvodstva kit …" 163.

29 See Colby, *Orca*.

Russian and Soviet empires.[30] It was assumed, quite rightly, that commercial whaling might harm them, especially by reducing their food supplies. As an ethnographer reporting to Arsen′ev put it: "For the coastal natives, the marine mammal is everything. It gives them meat, habitation, food for their dogs, tea, sugar [through trade], etc."[31] This unnamed government official experienced the vulnerability of marine mammal hunters first-hand while stationed in Chukotka in 1925–1926. That winter, the wind shifted from south to north, blowing the sea ice onto shore and cutting the people off from the ocean and its creatures. Not only did the local Chukchi begin to starve but they got very cold, since they were deprived of the seal oil they normally depended on for warmth.[32] In light of the vagaries of the ice, this official urged that the catching of marine mammals be "left in native hands […] in order that capitalist hunting does not destroy the natural resources before they have been studied."[33] These concerns entered into practice as well. For example, one whaling petitioner, a Mr. Barykin, found his request turned down when he could not give reliable information on how his proposed venture would affect Far Eastern Indigenous people.[34]

But the whaling status quo was not acceptable to the Soviet government either. The Chukchi were then selling most of the whale products they did not use for subsistence to American traders in the North Pacific. This contraband trade, conducted mostly at Diomede Island in the Bering Strait, proved impossible for the Soviets to stop because of the wide oceanic spaces involved and the excellent prices offered by the Americans.[35] Soviet commentators were sure the trade did not benefit the Chukchi. They noted that, despite the motorised boats and harpoon guns they had bought, the Chukchi were neither catching more marine mammals, including whales, nor was their own population increasing.[36] The reasons were several. First, the intensity of the Indigenous hunt itself was reducing the numbers of marine mammals. Second, the rapacious Americans were also killing too many of the creatures. As a result, the Chukchi were now "sitting on their half-ruined floors, cursing

30 For a full treatment of Soviet relations with the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*.
31 "Otchety i informatsionnye materialy o promysle morskikh zverei, 1952–1926," GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 85, 46.
32 "Otchety i informatsionnye materialy o promysle morskikh zverei, 1952 – 1926," 35.
33 "Otchety i informatsionnye materialy o promysle morskikh zverei, 1952 – 1926," 6.
34 GAPK F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 54.
35 "Otchety i informatsionnye materialy o promysle morskikh zverei, 1952–1926," 44.
36 Sliunin, *Promyslovye bogatstva*, 10.

all whites, and especially the Russians"—an outcome especially galling to the very Russians who thought of themselves as protectors of Chukchi interests.[37] Thus, the Soviets needed a policy that would simultaneously conserve marine mammals, preserve Chukchi access to their food supplies, and chase out the foreigners who competed for them.

Despite the risks, then, it seemed imperative for political reasons that Russians become directly involved in Far Eastern whaling. As Dal'rybokhota officials wrote in 1921, the "hunting of marine mammals will without a doubt have great significance for the local natives […] therefore it is essential that [commercial ventures] […] have a pure Russian character."[38] The next year, Dal'rybokhota laid out a more comprehensive vision when granting another applicant a six-year license to hunt marine mammals in Chukotka:

> At the current time, when the waters of the furthest reaches of Far Eastern Asia, are almost exclusively visited by ships sailing under foreign flats, when almost all commerce is held in the hands of foreign merchants and *promyshlenniki* [private entrepreneurs] and in some regions the local native population has not been able to see a Russian ship for several years – in order to avoid the strengthening of foreign influence, the appearance of pure Russian undertakings is absolutely necessary.[39]

State-sponsored whaling would edge out both American whalers and less-responsible Russians (the *promyshlenniki* mentioned), who were presumed to be taking advantage of the Chukchi and other Indigenous people.

This calculus rested on one necessary assumption: that Russian ventures would be more environmentally responsible than American "capitalist" whaling. One whaling applicant, a Mr. Korolev, appealed to just this line of thinking. He proposed bringing Russian whalers to "regions where American ships go unchecked and, without paying any duties, exterminate a mass of marine animals in our waters."[40] Indeed, there was no arguing about Americans' ecological shortcomings. From the 1840s, they had eliminated huge numbers of right, bowhead, and grey whales in Far Eastern waters.[41] Russian whalers'

37 "Otchety i informatsionnye materialy o promysle morskikh zverei, 1952–1926," 45.
38 GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 50.
39 GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 64.
40 GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 66.
41 Parry, "Yankee Whalers in Siberia."

environmental records were still unproven. Perhaps, with the expertise and caution that Arsen'ev offered, they might do better, with better results for the Far East's Indigenous people.

In such a situation, support and even subsidies for Russian whalers seemed quite sensible. Yet the desperate Far Eastern government could not afford much. One particularly expansive plan, brought forward by Graf Eremeev, to build a whaling station near Vladivostok required the use of some government land then being used for growing hay. The Navy agreed to lend the land, but only on the condition that Eremeev deliver 300 *puds* of the finest hay to a nearby lighthouse every year.[42] Given those costs, it is hardly surprising that no trace exists in the archives of Eremeev ever starting his whaling venture.

Other officials were readier to prescribe government support for whaling, in the hopes that it could offer immediate relief to some of the pressing problems posed by Indigenous peoples' declining welfare. In a 1926 report to Dal'rybokhota, Commissar K. Kulagin addressed the problems facing the Commander Islands, the exceptionally remote, treeless islands that Russians had settled with Aleutian Islanders in 1826 in order to hunt fur seals and sea otters. After the predictable crash in these animals' populations, effective conservation measures taken in the nineteenth century had cultivated a rebound. During the chaos of the late empire and the Civil War, these measures had been discontinued, and the animals were again in serious decline. Japanese bandits were often blamed. Because of the environmental ruin, the Aleuts now faced unemployment and starvation.

Kulagin mooted the possibility of removing the Aleuts entirely from the Commanders. But if that were not an option, the multitude of whales swimming unmolested in the surrounding waters offered another solution. Though Russians at the time knew little of whales' potential uses, Kulagin assured them there would be many. Whale blubber could provide raw materials for Vladivostok's underutilised soap factories to produce exportable products earning hard currency, then a pressing concern for the new Soviet state. In addition, though Kulagin anticipated scepticism about this, whales could be turned into margarine—a replacement for butter, he explained. Whale margarine could substitute the expensive importing of pig fats that was then harming the Soviet balance of trade. Exports of whale margarine would be so lucrative, he thought, that any necessary machinery would pay for itself within a year. In the longer term, Soviet citizens could be acclimated to whale meat;

42 GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 82.

Japanese palates, which enjoyed it fresh, salted, canned, pickled, and dried, could not be completely wrong. Having tried it himself, Kulagin thought whale meat compared favourably with veal. And, with enough whales, the Commander Island Aleuts would finally be free of expensive imported foods.[43] If Russians could just become a little more like the Chukchi and Japanese, they could create a new whaling tradition and find profitable paths through the chaos of the time.

In a certain light, then, industrial Russian whaling could actually appear to some Soviets to be a solution to the problems of foreign encroachment, economic crisis, conservation, and Indigenous welfare all at the same time. Indeed, these problems and their solutions seemed intertwined. Government inspector I. I. Gapanovich saw cooperation with Kamchadals—and especially Chukchi—as the only readily available means for Russians to build their own whaling expertise and crowd out the American whalers. "A cooperative organization would be worth attention," he wrote, "as it would promise both commercial profit and would allow the fulfillment of the government's goals."[44] Others also saw potential in cooperation, not conflict, between modern and Indigenous whaling. While discussing the numerous plans being submitted in Vladivostok, one fisheries official, N. Rudin, noted in 1924 that companies allowed to hunt whales should be "required to leave the meat that remains on the processed whale carcass near places of local habitation for their use."[45] Far from breaking with traditional Indigenous whaling in the Far East, the new Soviet ventures could build on this history and enhance the well-being of those who depended upon the animals.

Arsen′ev supported such initiatives as well, noting that there were many Indigenous peoples in the Far East who could benefit from increased consumption of whale meat. If done right, whaling could feed people while also removing animals (such as orcas) who consumed others species such as salmon and pinnipeds, thereby increasing their numbers and making still more food available for humans. Chasing away American whalers would help meet all these goals as well.

43 "Doklad nachal′nika komandorskikh pushnykh promyslov K. Kulagina, 26 Sentiabria, 1926." GAPK, F. 633, op. 5, no. 18, 1–2.

44 "Stat′ia I.I. Gapanovicha," GAPK, F. 633, op. 5, no. 6, 24.

45 "Instruktsiia o poriadke proizovdstva kit…" 25.

Plans in Action

This last goal, though, proved tricky to meet in light of the Soviet Union's perilous financial state. Arsen′ev was dismayed and irritated to receive several proposals to hunt for marine mammals along the rivers of the Russian Far East that seemed to conceal their true national character. "According to rumours," he wrote about one, the applicants were "agents of the American Company Svenson, and are unlikely to contribute to the development of the economic well-being of the Russian Republic […] but will work in America's interest and to the detriment of the Russian riverside population." In some cases, foreign connections were necessary in order to procure sufficient capital to embark upon significant, long-term ventures. Arsen′ev supported these as long as there were promises to employ a significant number of Russians, but he joined in the general condemnation of foreigners practising "predatory" hunting.[46]

In one respect, Arsen′ev was an outlier. Although he shared a widespread Far Eastern dislike for Chinese and Korean people, he downplayed general fears of increasing Japanese incursion into nearby waters.[47] There was growing anxiety that the Japanese would steal a march on the Russians and begin catching whales along the Russian coast and perhaps even venture into the Peter the Great Bay in Vladivostok. Arsen′ev thought these fears overblown for one simple reason: conveniently for the Japanese, many species of North Pacific whales migrated from their feeding grounds in the Bering Sea past Russian shores to Japan, arriving, as it were, at the doorstep of eager Japanese whalers. What reason would they have for whaling in Russian waters, something that would only cost them more effort and fuel for the same result?[48]

Later Soviet officials would perceive Arsen′ev's relationship with the Japanese as too cosy. He was the personal friend of the Japanese ambassador in the Far East and held the country in high regard (once, in Hakodate, he had written in his diary that the "order, cleanliness and quiet, politeness, and aspiration toward the good and elegant—all this provided such a stark contrast with our Russian dirtiness, chaos and disorder").[49] The Bolsheviks posthumously convicted Arsen′ev of leading a Japanese spy ring.[50] The accusations were preposterous, but they signify a qualification to the argument that

46 "Doklad nachal′nika…" 42.
47 Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 212; Glebov, "The Political Ecology of V. K. Arsen′ev."
48 "Tezisy i plan rabot. Uboi morskogo zveriia (Kitobraznikh), 1923." GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 163.
49 V. K. Arsen′ev, *Dnevnik*, 7–9 May, 1918, 1.
50 Khisamutdinov, *The Russian Far East*; Khisamutdinov, "Vladimir Arsen′ev."

Arsen′ev helped establish long-term Soviet approaches to the ocean. Soviet plans for the whaling industry sometimes took Arsen′ev's ideas in perverse and caricatured directions. Long after the Far East was secured from foreign influence, planners—and even some novelists who picked up the plume of Arsen′ev—would replay the days of the American and Japanese environmental scoundrels, even as the Soviets' own actions rivalled and then outdid anything from that era.[51] Almost none would heed Arsen′ev's prescient warning that no whale fishery had ever operated sustainably.

Even in the feverish days of the 1920s, the whaling ventures that launched after the revolution seldom went off without problems. Making plans to whale was one thing; putting together the capital and expertise necessary to successfully capture the leviathans was entirely different. A doomed first postrevolutionary attempt illustrated some of the dangers. In 1920, a group of entrepreneurs and government bureaucrats set sail on a motorised sloop named the *Diana* in order to assess the possibility of catching whales in Far Eastern waters. The sloop's new motor quit while still in Peter the Great Bay, and the crew rerouted to Hakodate, Japan, where they docked for repairs. Temporarily fortified and having transferred most of the passengers to another ship, the twenty-one remaining men on board the *Diana* headed north for Kamchatka and into the Bering Strait. In October, the autumn storms, famous in the region, began to hit. With the motor still not working, escape was difficult. The crew decided to head south for the Kurils and Japan, but on November 8, a giant wave tore through the ship, washing the cargo and a Korean sailor, Ipondyu, off the deck and into the ocean, never to be seen again.[52]

In the middle of November, the rudder was lost in another storm, and the ship now drifted more or less helplessly south into waters about which the crew knew almost nothing. Another monstrous wave smashed through the gunwales and threw the captain, I. Khudoleya, into the ocean and to his death. Now, food supplies began to dwindle, and the men faced reduced rations as they floated through increasingly tropical seas and past several islands to all appearances bereft of humans. Finally, on January 16, 1921—more than seven months after setting sail—the *Diana* drifted near the island of Guam, where American naval officials towed it to shore and provided food and medical

51 For example, the whaling trilogy of the Vladivostok novelist A. A. Vakhov: Vakhov, *Tragediia Kapitana Ligova*; Vakhov, *Shtorm Ne Utikhaet*; Vakhov, *Fontany na Gorizonte*.

52 GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 46ob.

care to the surviving crew.[53] Despite all the applications to Arsen'ev's office, no more Soviet whaling attempts were made for another decade.

Instead, Dal'rybokhota, under the order of Far Eastern Republic head Jan Gamarnik (1923–1926), decided to grant a foreign concession to get whaling started. The organisation had determined in 1923 that this strategy was necessary, as "under the condition of the moment this could give the Treasury greater benefits, both material and economic," provided the concession was granted to a solid foreign company.[54] That year, the Soviet Union signed a fifteen-year concessionary treaty with the Norwegian firm of Christian Christensen, Jr., based in the Norwegian whaling capital of Sandefjord. The agreement allowed the Norwegians to kill and process any species of whale within the twelve miles of territorial waters between Cape Serdtse-Kamen and Cape Lopatka that the Soviets claimed as their own. Shore stations were envisioned as a possibility, though this would cost the Norwegians extra.[55] In the meantime, in exchange for the concession, the Soviet government was to receive five percent of any sales of whale products taken in Soviet waters. At first, the crew would consist entirely of Norwegian citizens, but the venture was conceived partly as a school for future Soviet whalers, and within five years they were supposed to make up a quarter of the workforce.[56]

Far Eastern officials were immediately nervous about the arrangement. They complained about the long period of the concession, the low payment received in return, and the need to keep a large security staff in case of violations. Some, including Arsen'ev, thought the start of the concession should be delayed.[57] In 1925, though, the Norwegians took it up as planned and began moving the floating factory "Commanderen" and four chaser boats (together termed the *Vega* fleet) to the Far East. Later that year, the fleet arrived in Kamchatka, which surprised Soviet officials, who had thought it would first dock in Vladivostok, where higher Soviet officials could have handled formalities.

Further misunderstandings plagued the concession until 1927, when it was revoked, thirteen years ahead of schedule. Historian A. T. Mandrik claims this was because the *Vega* did not bring enough profit to the Soviet government.[58] The Norwegians, for their part, stated that, due to constant

53 GAPK, F. 633, op. 4, no. 100, 47.
54 GAPK, F. 633, op. 2, no. 31, 23.
55 "Kontsesionnyi dogovor," 3.
56 "Kontsesionnyi dogovor," 3.
57 Letter to Dal'ryba, August 1923, GAPK, F. 633, op. 5, no. 3, 5–6, 10.
58 Mandrik, *Istoriia rybnoi promyshlennosti*, 131.

Soviet harassment, they had wanted to give up the concession anyway. Otto Paust, one of the lead Norwegian whalers, reported that the Soviets "lived in a childish fantasy" that led them to believe they could skim endless profits off the concession while expecting it to continue; in short, that they could "have their cake and eat it too." Paust also opined that Kamchatkan officials were jealous of the large share of the profits Moscow was taking, hinting at some of the regional concerns that shaped Soviet whaling history.[59]

Interestingly, these were not the reasons the Soviets cited for discontinuing the concession. Instead, they referenced a host of ecological violations that largely reflected Arsen'ev's conception of proper resource management. *Izvestiia* reported on August 20, 1926 that the Soviet merchant fleet had discovered one hundred carcasses of dead whales in Morzhovoi Bay. The gigantic, rotting animals were so thick in the water that they imperilled navigation. "However," wrote *Izvestiia*, "the main thing here is how the dead whales had been killed completely pointlessly, as they were discovered unused." Secret internal reports outlined a "host of violations committed by the concessioners"—primarily ecological violations that included "the killing of young whales, antisanitary actions, throwing unused parts of the whales overboard," and so on.[60]

Alongside these concerns for the impact whaling would have on the ocean (and other Russian activities), controversy about relations with the North Pacific's Indigenous people also erupted in ways that encapsulated the divergent Western and Soviet understandings of whaling and underlined whaling's geopolitical importance. Paust, the Norwegian who had criticised Kamchatkan graft, also expressed anger and puzzlement over Soviet relations with the Eskimos (Chukchi). He had the chance to meet several while whaling in the region, and he found that they universally clamoured for cartridges for their weapons. The Soviets, he claimed, had withheld them for fear of rebellion. The lack of weapons was senseless and deadly for "such a peaceful people such as the Eskimos," who, because they could not shoot marine mammals, were now starving. As a result, Paust willingly paid for Chukchi labour with Norwegian cartridges.[61] There was another side to this story. Paust was ignorant of the long history of Chukchi resistance to Russian rule, and he was also—according to Soviets in the Far East—the actual cause of their current problems. "The whales of the Bering Strait zone of the Chukchi Peninsula,"

59 GAPK, F. 633, op. 7, no. 19, 39ob, 40.
60 GAPK, F. 633, op. 7, no. 19, 70.
61 GAPK, F. 633, op. 7, no. 19, 40.

wrote the Soviet Committee for the Protection of the People of the North in 1927, "have gotten ever rarer in the last two years. The explanation for this, in large part, is that the concessionary firm *Vega* started whaling [in these waters] in 1925." In an extraordinary statement for the time, the Committee recommended the total closure of the waters to any industrial whaling, both because of the declining number of whales and the way the exploding harpoons scared off walruses.[62] Thus, on the eve of the Soviet Union's first large-scale whaling venture—the *Aleut* fleet, launched in 1932—important officials felt these waters could sustain no more catches.

When two decades later, in 1948, the Soviet Union joined the International Whaling Commission (IWC), their delegates were instructed to fight for the rights of indigenous Soviet people to hunt grey whales, to ensure that all commercial hunting around Kamchatka and Chukotka be forbidden, and to insist on the full use of whale carcasses by all Commission members.[63] As the list demonstrates, even as they were divorced in time and place from the Far East of the 1920s, the ideas most fully articulated by Arsen′ev long influenced the whaling industry's planners. They also informed Russian policy throughout the 1920s and even into the *Aleut* fleet, which sailed out of Vladivostok and into the North Pacific for several decades. In this way, Arsen′ev's emphasis on conservation and local knowledge outlasted the general decline of such concerns in the late 1920s, when Stalinist central planners marginalised regional knowledge, or *kraevedenie*.[64] Arsen'ev's concerns did not persist forever, though. After the Second World War, Soviet whaling's Far Eastern legacy was sundered as the industry expanded into the distant Antarctic. From the late 1950s, Soviet whalers began illegally killing thousands of endangered whales around the world and lying about its cheating to the IWC.[65] In 1969, the Soviets shut down Chukotkans' own whaling and instead sent a ship of their own to kill and process whales on their behalf. The fears of 1920s Dal′rybokhota that Chukchi would be harmed by industrial whaling had been fully realised.

One of this story's implications, however, is that we cannot adequately understand Soviet environmental politics as reflective merely of the predilections

62 GAPK, F. 653, op. 7, no. 19, 53; the committee specifically recommended forbidding "capitalist" whaling.

63 "Instruktsiia delegatam na Mezhdunarodnuiu Konferentsiiu," Russian State Archive for the Economy (RGAE), F. 9242, op. 1, no. 342, 66.

64 Donavan, "'How Well Do You Know Your *Krai*?'" 472; Loskutova, "'Nauka oblastnogo masshtaba.'"

65 Ivashchenko and Clapham, "Too Much Is Never Enough."

of a high-modernist behemoth that cared nothing for the environmental damage it wrought.[66] In the case of whaling, at least, the tail that wagged this dog for several decades was the remote Russian Far East, a region absorbed with its own historical problems and momentum. During the revolutionary era, those problems revolved mostly around the perception of an urgent need to exploit the region's maritime resources while protecting them from overharvesting and foreign predation and also ensuring Indigenous well-being. Vladimir Arsen′ev was a prominent voice in the articulation and enactment of these ideas, even if they were only imperfectly realised and only persisted through the 1940s. Arsen′ev stepped only briefly into this pivot in place and time, but, in his quest for quiet, arguably his greatest impact on Russia's—and the North Pacific's—environmental history came not with *Dersu Uzala*, but with a few years of bureaucratic work in a temporary fisheries agency.

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66 As Paul Josephson argues in *Industrialized Nature* and elsewhere.

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Competition and Cooperation (1960s–2020s)

6 "A Window on China": A History of Creating Cross-Border Economic Zones on the Sino-Russian Border

Ivan Zuenko, Ilya Chubarov

Abstract This chapter provides a historical perspective on one of the most important cases in Sino-Russian regional cooperation: the development of cross-border economic zones, often seen as symbols of mutual trust and readiness for further integration. Paradoxically, however, in this case, a high level of intergovernmental relations between Moscow and Beijing still coexists with a "wheelspin" at the regional level because none of the proposed cross-border economic zones has yet been launched. On the basis of open sources, archival material, memoirs, and interviews with participants in cross-border cooperation, the authors explain why this is so. An important conclusion is that, from the late 1980s to the present, shifts in the governments' attitudes toward local cross-border projects have been the main factor influencing their implementation. Now, large-scale infrastructural projects (such as trans-Amur bridges or cross-border pipelines) with proactive involvement of the two governments are successful, while the projects initiated by local business or officials remain uncertain.

Keywords China, Russia, Far East, cross-border cooperation, integration

Introduction

The current stage of global economic development has seen the rise of intense cross-border contact that has become possible both due to an increased level of population mobility and a continued increase in IT solutions. Many border areas, which previously were considered peripheries and military buffer zones, are seen now as territories of rapid development—at least within the discourse espoused by governmental authorities and area experts. This view necessarily searches for new forms of cross-border activity in order to justify

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its legitimacy; one of these is cross-border zones for economic cooperation by two or more neighbouring countries, which usually feature simplified border-crossing regimes for visitors and goods, as well as other benefits for business. Although there are various terms for such zones, we choose to use one term for all of them: "cross-border economic zone(s)" (CBEZ(s)).

For the purpose of our research, it is of crucial importance to make a clear distinction between *cross-border* economic zones, located on both sides of the border, as the name suggests, and the more widespread *border* zones for economic cooperation (BZEC) located on the territory of *one* country close to its border with another. As an example, the Khorgos Region at the Sino-Kazakhstani border has both types: 1) the cross-border zone "Khorgos International Centre for Cross-Border Cooperation," which is located on both sides of the border and provides its visitors with duty-free privileges for purchases; and 2) the Kazakhstan special economic zone "Khorgos – Eastern Gates," which utilises the "dry port" model for transporting cargo and also provides some preferential policies for enterprises.[1] The focus of the current research is cross-border zones (the former) and *not* special economic zones (the latter).

This trend of increasing cross-border activity is also common for the Russo-Chinese border (RCB): both countries try to solve their regional economic problems by intensifying cross-border contact. Eastern Russia border areas are suffering from depopulation, and in recent years, the same process can be seen in the border areas of Northeast China (NEC) as well. A lack of large cities in these areas limits the development of a consumption-based economy while long distances and outdated cross-border infrastructure weaken connectivity. In Russia, the development of the Russian Far East (RFE) became a priority for national policy in 2013, whereas in China, the "Northeast Area Revitalising Plan" has been on the agenda since 2003. Border regions on the Chinese side also position themselves as important parts of the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under the nickname "China–Mongolia–Russia economic corridor"[2] and various regional programmes, such as the Eastern Silk Road Belt and Longjiang Silk Road Belt. Whichever name is chosen, experts of both countries agree that the key to successful development of border areas and connecting them to the global economy lies in cross-border

1 Ruehl, "Khorgos Hype."
2 Chubarov, "Eurasia under the BRI."

cooperation.[3] It is naturally expected to be concentrated in hubs or growth poles on the border, which, among other options, could take the form of CBEZs.

2018–2019 was the time when discussions about CBEZs on the Russo-Chinese border were activated at an official level. In February 2018, Russian vice-premier and presidential envoy to the RFE federal district Yury Trutnev announced plans for the creation of a so-called "cross-border territory for advanced development" (a de facto CBEZ) between Russia's Pogranichny settlement and China's Suifenhe.[4] In March 2018, news about the future of the Blagoveshchensk–Heihe CBEZ appeared in the media. In June 2018, a memorandum of understanding on the creation of a CBEZ between the Jewish Autonomous Oblast and Tongjiang town was signed by authorities.[5] Another CBEZ, on Bolshoi Ussuriiskii Island near Khabarovsk, was mentioned in official documents of the Ministry of Economic Developments during the reconciliation of a new version of the bilateral programme of joint development of border areas between Russia and China, which should have replaced the previous programme (2009–2018).

However, the new programme for the Development of Russo-Chinese Cooperation in Economic and Investment Spheres (2018–2024), which was signed at the East Russia Economic Forum in Vladivostok (September 2018), did not mention CBEZs.[6] The authors of the programme explained simply that the project required further improvement.[7] In September 2019, cross-border zones were again mentioned by the high-ranking Russian central government official at the East Economic Forum, probably bearing in mind mostly the Blagoveshchensk–Heihe area.[8] After the COVID-19 pandemic occasioned a pause in cross-border cooperation, both sides returned to discussions about the possibility and forms of creating cross-border zones between Russia and China, but still without practical details.[9]

In this chapter, we wish to highlight the fact that the history of CBEZs on the Russo-Chinese border did not start in 2018. In fact, it was in the early 2000s when the process began, in exactly the same locations; but in 2008,

3 Zuenko et al., "Programme for Cooperation," 5.
4 Ministry, "Transgranichnaya TOR."
5 "Tongjiang i EAO."
6 Ministry of Commerce of PRC, "Programme."
7 Interview by I. Zuenko with a high-ranking official of the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East, September 2018, Vladivostok.
8 Krutikov, "Dal'nemu Vostoku."
9 Roscongress Fund, "Sozdaniye."

the project had, quite simply, failed. Surprisingly, despite the interest in this topic shown by the media and officials in 2018, proper analysis of the history of preceding Russo-Chinese CBEZs had never been conducted. There is not one single academic paper on this topic, while media materials rarely have any other information except official statements. Moreover, the results of the field studies in the Pogranichnyi District of Primorskii Krai (summer 2018) highlighted that CBEZs of the past and the future are not even a part of local discussions: interviewed officials learned about the revival of a Pogranichnyi–Suifenhe CBEZ from the authors.

The aim of this chapter is to fill that gap. It is dedicated to the history of the creation of CBEZs on the Russo-Chinese border, analysis of the reasons for its failure, and discussion of the prospect for its revival. The history of the Pogranichnyi–Suifenhe CBEZ's conception, attempts to develop it, and its following failure is the most representative one among the cross-border zones, so it was chosen as a research case.

Research Methods and Sources

This research uses various kinds of source (mainly Russian-language): Pogranichnyi–Suifenhe CBEZ (PSCBEZ) official documents from the authors' personal archive (during 2006–2008, Ivan Zuenko attended numerous PSCBEZ events as an interpreter. The authors guarantee that utilised documents are not confidential or classified, including commercially classified information); the results of semi-structured interviews with former PSCBEZ employees and regional authorities conducted in the summer of 2018 and winter of 2019 in Vladivostok, Ussuriisk, and Pogranichny District (Primorskii Krai); materials from the "Cross-Border Cooperation of Russia and China" conference (Suifenhe, 2006, August 15–17); a report titled "Strategy and Opinions on PSCBEZ Economic Development" drawn up by the Chinese Euro-Asian Social Development Research Institute of the State Council (November 2007); and materials from Russian and Chinese regional media.

An element of comparative analysis was applied to the research, taking into consideration the fact that PSCBEZ initiators appealed to other CBEZs on the Chinese border with Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and Kazakhstan. The main object of comparison was the "Khorgos International Centre for Cross-Border Cooperation" on the Sino-Kazakhstani border. A field study was conducted there in the winter of 2019 for the purpose of this paper, including several semi-structured interviews with local experts and zone

visitors (the administrative committee of the "Khorgos International Centre for Cross-Border Cooperation" refused to meet with the authors). The results of this field study are also published in Central Asian Analytical Network by the University of George Washington.[10]

This paper consists of two parts. The first gives a brief overview of the literature on the topic, with a focus on terminology and the legal framework of CBEZ development, while the second considers the case study of PSCBEZ in 2001–2008. Facts about this case are gathered in the Appendix.

Theoretical Background

The American specialist on economic geography Montague John Lord and his Thai co-author Pawat Tangtrongjita gave the following definition of CBEZ (they use the term "special border economic zone"): "It is a geographic region located along an international border crossing that is designated as a bilateral project area targeting a range of activities like infrastructure development, construction of transport and logistics hubs, and the overall facilitation of cross-border trade and investment. In some cases, it can include cross-border "sister city" pairing."[11] CBEZs operate under the same principles as "special economic zones": (1) investors are allowed to import and export free of duty and exchange controls; (2) licensing and other regulatory processes are facilitated; (3) firms are usually exempt from paying VAT, corporate taxes, and local taxes.

Cross-border free trade and a visa-free regime, which are common for countries enjoying a high level of cooperation, such as those in the EU, make it pointless to create CBEZs. Also, it is quite clear that bordering countries should share more or less similar economic characteristics, otherwise even minor disputes make the creation of CBEZs difficult or even impossible. This is why, in practice, just a handful of scenarios fit for the creation of CBEZs, which explains the lack of research papers on this topic.

The works that formed the theoretical base for this research are: a paper by Wang Zanxin that analyses potential places for CBEZs (he uses the term 跨境经济合作区, "cross-border economic cooperation zone") on the borders between China and Southeast Asian countries;[12] a paper by Lord and

10 Zuenko, "Transgranichnye zony."
11 Lord and Tangtrongjita, "Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand Growth Triangle," 15.
12 Wang, "Cross-Border Economic Zone."

Tangtrongjita, which analyses the creation of CBEZs in the triangle of Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand;[13] and a paper by Galina Kostyunina and Vladimir Baranov, who claim to study CBEZs based on the Chinese cases but, in fact, study border zones of economic cooperation inside Chinese territory.[14]

The practical basis for this research can be seen through the experience of CBEZs along the border of China, in the following locations: on the border with Kazakhstan (Khorgos, since 2004), with Myanmar (Jiegao, since 2007),[15] with Vietnam (Pingxiang–Dong Dang, since 2007; Dongxing–Mong Cai, since 2014), and with Laos (Mohan–Boten, 2002–2011).[16]

Cooperation along the Border

In 1984, Hu Yaobang, reformist leader of China, visited Heihe, declaring that this small border town should copy the success of Shenzhen, with the goal that these two border cities should be the "northern and southern wings by means of which the Chinese economy should fly."[17] This proves that even at the beginning of the 1980s, the Chinese government viewed cross-border cooperation as key to providing NEC economic growth. In 1986, China and the Soviet Union signed their first agreements on the development of cross-border trade in sister town pairs Zabaikalsk–Manzhouli, Suifenhe–Pogranichnyi, and Hunchun–Zarubino. It was a historical moment when, after thirty years of closure during the Sino-Soviet split, the border reopened in the late 1980s. According to new discourse on both sides of the border, former periphery and military buffer zones should now become areas of intense international cooperation.

These expectations did, indeed, become reality, but only partially. Border regions immediately witnessed a drastic growth in trade: from the very beginning, cheap China-made consumer goods were in huge demand in post-Soviet Russia. Thus, after the signing of several inter-governmental agreements regarding development of cross-border cooperation, the volume

13 Lord and Tangtrongjita, "Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand Growth Triangle."
14 Kostyunina and Baronov "Transgranichnye svobodnye ekonomicheskie zony."
15 There is very little information available on the Jiegao Border Trade Zone. Official sources do not contain information about the CBEZ itself, but there is evidence that a de facto visa-free and tax-free regime exists for people and goods flowing from Myanmar to the Chinese part of the Zone.
16 Strangio, "The Rise, Fall and Possible Renewal."
17 Zhang, "Hu Yaobang Went to a Sino-Soviet Border."

of trade reached 7.7 billion USD in 1993—thirty-one percent more than year before[18]—but weak supervision, especially the lack of control over the quality of China's exports, meant that large numbers of fake and low-quality goods in the Russian market have damaged consumers' confidence in Chinese entrepreneurs and Chinese goods in Russia. Regions from the Chinese side of the border were capitalising on their access to the producers, who were usually located in more developed coastal areas. A decade later, quick growth in Russian household income and a strong ruble exchange rate not only enforced the existing trade model but also added a growing number of Russian short-term visitors, who enjoyed various consumption services on the Chinese side. The driving forces behind that cross-border economic cooperation model, which emerged in the late 1980s, stayed unchanged for more than two decades. Meanwhile, governments on both sides were weighing in to push the process in a favourable direction.

In 1992, the Chinese government approved a list of fourteen border towns (including Heihe, Manzhouli, Suifenhe, and Hunchun) which would see the development of BZECs, providing benefits for residents such as the tax-free importing of equipment for zone-based production, reducing corporate and value-added tax obligations, and the elimination of local fees. The idea of CBEZs became an extension of the concept of unilateral border zones, with the expectation of simplified access to the zones from partner countries.

In 1998, the Russian and Chinese governments came to an agreement about visa-free access for Russian citizens to Chinese BZECs. In 1999, they clarified the provisions of the previous agreement and established visa-free access for Russian citizens to BZECs in Heihe and Suifenhe. A fully-fledged bilateral agreement on visa-free access for citizens of both countries to BZECs did not exist at that time—it still does not —but according to documents dating from 1999–2006, experts and businessmen of both countries were sure that as soon as possible, there would be "a new model of cross-border cooperation."[19] A key element of such a model would be CBEZs.

The concept of border cooperation, accepted by Russia in 2001, encouraged this opinion. According to the concept, the federal government concludes international agreements, while regional authorities have a right to conclude agreements with the regional authorities of neighbouring countries, and municipalities have a right to conclude agreements with foreign

18 World Bank Trade Statistics. "China Product Exports and Imports."

19 Analytical Report of Pacific Center for Strategic Researches (August, 2006, personal archive of I. Zuenko).

partners (including private companies and persons). Thus, in 2001, the administration of Primorsky Krai and Amur Oblast on the Russian side, and Heilongjiang Province on the Chinese side, started working on the creation of two CBEZs: Pogranichnyi–Suifenhe and Blagoveshchensk–Heihe. The official name for this experiment was the Border Trade and Economic Complex: (Russian: Приграничный торгово-экономический комплекс (ПТЭК); Chinese: 贸易综合体). Later on, CBEZs projects mushroomed, including ones for Zabaikalsk–Manzhouli, Poltavka–Dongning, and Khasan–Hunchun.[20]

The situation on different parts of the long border varies significantly. The Russo-Chinese border is extremely long (over 4,000 km), but due to the scarce population and difficult natural conditions, cross-border activity is highly concentrated in a few nodes around the most convenient border crossings. Both experts and governments identify just four such nodes: Zabaikalsk–Manzhouli, Blagoveshchensk–Heihe, Khabarovsk–Fuyuan, and Pogranichny–Suifenhe (Plan of Development, 2013). Westernmost Zabaikalsk has little consumption potential and few capital sources other than timber industry and mining. Heihe and Fuyuan and their Russian counterparts are divided by the Amur river, which significantly reduces their logistical capacity. The Suifenhe–Pogranichny border crossing is the most convenient one. It is located on a shortest route between the regional capitals of Harbin and Vladivostok and has sufficient available land resources. Proximity to Vladivostok also provides the necessary level of consumer pool and capital market.

In the case of Blagoveshchensk–Heihe, the Chinese side established a thirty-day visa-free regime as early as 2004. It became one of the main factors of rapid economic growth in the town, though still not satisfying Hu Yaobang's expectations. Zabaikalsk–Manzhouli established the practice of visiting the neighbouring town by private car (with a special permit that can be obtained from the authorities).

However, further CBEZ developments there were halted due to strong alarmist sentiments among the Russians as well as a lack of finances and capacity on the part of the local governments. Alarmist Sinophobic sentiments across Russia were especially strong during 1990–2000s due to the dynamic rise of labour immigration from China and general mistrust of officials suspected of corruption and betrayal of national interests. Alarmists usually appeal to population and, later, economic figures, arguing the huge disparity between the two sides of border constitutes an imminent threat to territorial integrity. Cross-border cooperation, under such circumstances, is

20 Goryachev, "Kitaiskie podkhody."

a harmful tool which requires strict control. Such sentiments, as a rule, were supported by media hype but rarely had any proof in real life. For example, communities on the Chinese side of the border are, indeed, more populous than their Russian counterparts, but the gap is not so wide when we move down from regional comparison to the community level.[21] All in all, alarmist phenomena need special research, which is not the aim of the current paper. One can get an insight into the alarmists' agenda in works by Gelbras[22] and counter-points by Far-Eastern specialists.[23]

The most mature of all Russo-Chinese CBEZs is the case of Pogranichny–Suifenhe. Its history allows us to follow up the evolution of views of CBEZs, including the main expectations and the reasons for the idea's failure.

Despite both belonging to the peripheral parts of their respective countries, Suifenhe and Pogranychny still somehow differ in the degree of that belonging. Pogranichny is a border town that has a population of about 10,000 people. It is the seat of a district of 3,700 sq. km with a population of 25,000, close to the two largest cities of Primorsky Krai: Ussuriysk (170,000) and Vladivostok (600,000). The latter is the leading city of the Russian Far East. South of Primor'e can be found the most liveable and fertile areas in this part of the country. The climate here is similar to the northern parts of central Russia and presents a striking contrast with other, almost inhabited parts of Pacific Russia.

Suifenhe is a county-level city with an area of 460 sq. km and a permanent population of 100,000. It is subordinated to Mudanjiang prefecture-level city, which has area of 40.2 sq. km and a population of about 2.5 million people. Suifenhe has no specific climate or locational advantages compared to other places along the long borderline. Such positioning means that any Russia-related projects are of great importance to the Suifenhe government (see Figure 1).[24]

21 Chubarov and Mikhailova, "Problemy preodoleniya."
22 Gelbras, "Kitaiskaya real'nost'."
23 Ivanov, "Pragmatizm i konspirologiia."
24 Ivanov, "Uchastie vlastei," 133–134.

The Pogranichnyi–Suifenhe Case

Despite the governmental agreements of 1998 and 1999, even after the 2001 concept of border cooperation in Russia, there were no documents which specified the procedures for the creation of a CBEZ. Moreover, in China the situation was the same: visa-free access to the border area of Heihe was implemented only in 2004, five years after the signing of the respective agreement.

However, since the late 1990s, Chinese authorities have proposed, and Russian regional experts and business community have supported, the idea of creating a CBEZ with the possibility of visa-free access for not only Russian citizens into Chinese territory but for Chinese citizens into Russian territory as well. The main figures from the Russian side were two local businesspeople with strong connections to regional government. Gennady Lysak was born in 1950, served as a vice-mayor in Vladivostok, was a member of the Legislative Assembly of Primorsky Krai in 2002–2011, and was owner of several companies, including the largest bread maker in Vladivostok. Igor Ivanov was born in 1965, served as a vice-governor of Primorsky Krai between 2001–2004, and was the 2004–2007 representative of Primorsky Krai in the Federation Council (the Russian parliament's upper house).

Initially, their partner from the Chinese side was Suifenhe Zhicheng Business Service Co. Ltd (绥芬河市志城事业)—a small local company with headquarters in the borderland town of Suifenhe that was interested in creating a casino at the cross-border zone.[25] After new Suifenhe Communist Party secretary (de facto head of the town) Xu Guangguo took his post in June 2003, he refused to support the casino business. The main partner from the Chinese side changed to Suifenhe Shimao, a subsidiary of Shimao Group (世茂房地产), one of the largest private corporations in China with business in real estate, construction, and hotel management.

The project initiators received support from the government of Primorsky Krai and the People's Government of Heilongjiang Province as "implementers" of the PSCBEZ.

Work on the project on the Russian side began in 2001, when Lysak established a special agency known as IAA Primor'e (for a detailed timeline, see Appendix A). IAA stands for "information analytical agency," but in practice, it was an operator of the Russian side of the PSCBEZ project. In November

25 Russia and China Plan for Cross-Border Casino. *South China Morning Post*. September 14, 2003. Accessed August 23, 2023. https://www.scmp.com/article/427813/russia-and-china-plan-cross-border-casino.

2001, IAA Primor'e rented 300 hectares of land on the Russian side of the border for forty-nine years. They planned to build a border trade area, the same as one which was under construction in Suifenhe. The idea was that the two areas should be linked into one zone, with the possibility for citizens of both countries to move freely between the two parts. Practically, this meant visa-free access to the territory of a neighbouring country, though strictly limited to a specific area (300 hectares in Pogranichnyi, 153 hectares in Suifenhe).

The initial concept included development of hotel, shopping, and entertainment industries inside the future zone alongside some industrial component. The target audience was Russian citizens, potentially attracted inside by duty-free prices on Chinese commodities and other consumer opportunities. Manufacturing facilities (clothing, footwear, and electronics) were supposed to use Chinese pre-produced components kits and use a Russian labour force mostly to assemble them. In an ideal scenario, development of the PSCBEZ would provide several hundred new jobs for locals in trade and manufacturing for the Russian and Chinese borderland population.

2001–2004 was the preparation period, after which, in June 2004, the project was officially presented to the public. At that time, IAA Primor'e and Suifenhe Shimao signed an agreement on PSCBEZ development, while Primorskii Krai and Heilongjiang signed a protocol on the functioning of the PSCBEZ. In 2004, the government of Primorskii Krai and Lysak's structures worked out a draft agreement on cross-border economic zones, planned to be signed by the governments of Russia and China.

It worth noting that, according to Lysak, all draft documentation regarding the PSCBEZ was also provided to the initiators of the Khorgos cross-border zone (not the Khorgos–Eastern Gates SEZ). Due to this help, China and Kazakhstan signed inter-governmental agreements in 2004 and 2005 that, in 2012, the CBEZ would open its doors to visitors.[26]

In 2005, the construction of the PSCBEZ started. Local media outlets announced that the project's first stage (hotels, office buildings, and exhibition centres) would be completed in 2006–2007, and all planned infrastructure would be completed in 2015.[27] Investors promised to create assembly facilities on the Russian side (manufacturing of TV sets, electronic devices, and

26 "Gennadii Lysak: Zhivu v Slovenii, rabotayu v Kitae, myslyami i serdtsem s Primor'em" [Gennady Lysak: I Live in Slovenia, Work in China but My Heart Is in Primor'e]. *PrimaMedia*. August 2, 2017. Accessed August 23, 2023. https://primamedia.ru/news/610204.

27 Khabalov, Dmitry. "Novoe litso torgovli s Kitaem" [New Face of Trade with China]. *Konkurent*. June 8, 2004. Accessed August 23, 2023. http://konkurent.ru/article/2433.

footwear) and trade and entertainment infrastructure on the Chinese side. However, the legal framework for the operation of the CBEZ had never been signed into law, either during the preparation period (2001–2004) or the period of construction (2004–2006). A "legal vacuum" was obvious even to the initiators of the project,[28] but it didn't impact the construction process.

Field studies show that the Chinese side was misled about the lobbying potential of their Russian partners; moreover, they underestimated the number of different interest groups in the Russian political elite, both central and regional, involved in the decision-making process. Initially, the project gained the support of the government of Primorskii Krai and Governor Sergei Darkin personally (his partner relations with Igor Ivanov were very well known).[29] According to the authors' estimations, the project got the red light from the Krai authorities in 2006. The government of Primorskii Krai halted support for the project, did not lobby its interests at the federal level and, moreover, compromised its reputation. The question of why this happened remains open due to internal reasons of elite relations dynamics (and the impossibility of conducting research interviews with many of the erstwhile elite with certain criminal backgrounds). However, we can suggest that Lysak and Ivanov failed to coordinate their business interests with business circles close to Governor Darkin. An advisor of the former governor stated that the CBEZ, from the very beginning, had been aimed only at investor profits and could not bring the region desired benefits such as investment inflow, job creation, and taxes.[30] What it could bring were problems with trafficking and other criminal activities—a fact that became crucially important to the regional authorities in the context of gradual political "re-centralisation" in middle-2000s Russia. For that reason or another, at that time Darkin focused his support on another Russo-Chinese flagship project: an industrial zone in Ussuriysk.[31]

Despite initial difficulties, the first stage of the project was completed in 2006. On the Chinese side, a Holiday Inn hotel with 354 rooms and large shopping centres appeared just a few metres from the border (see Appendix B), costing Shimao a total investment of more than 1 billion yuan.[32] On the Russian side, they built a small office building (called the "Centre for Business

28 Goryachev, "Kitaiskie podkhody."

29 "Gubernator i ego komanda" [Governor and His Team] *Vladivostok*. June 17, 2005. Accessed August 23, 2023. https://vladnews.ru/ev/vl/1769/73598/gubernator_komanda.

30 Interview by I. Zuenko with one of the former officials from the Administration of Primorsky Krai (January, 2019).

31 Interview by I. Zuenko with one of the former employees (January, 2019).

32 Ivanov, "Uchastie vlastei," 120.

Communication") and the Orthodox Chapel of St. George the Victorious (see Figure 2). It is interesting that on Bolshoi Ussuriyskii island near Khabarovsk at another part of the border, which is also regarded as a location for active cooperation, another Orthodox chapel stands—in the name of Saint Victor of Damascus, devoted to all Russian soldiers killed while defending its Far Eastern borders. As we can see, the coexistence of two diametrically opposed discourses—cooperationist and alarmist—is typical of local bureaucracy.

2006–2008 became a period of crisis when the remaining sides, who were still struggling to launch the project, had to start new talks with local officials and find new ideas in order for the PSCBEZ to continue. For example, IAA Primor'e proposed to establish a gambling zone in the PSCBEZ (in 2006, Russia banned gambling nationwide in all but four regions, including Primor'e). But according to the negotiation protocol, Suifenhe authorities perceived this idea negatively and even declared they would quit the project if casinos were to be constructed. The case of Boten proves that these threats were not empty words.[33]

In late 2006, it became obvious that the original plans for establishing simplified access of Chinese citizens to the Russian part of the CBEZ, including construction builders, had failed. The position of the Russian authorities, both central and regional, toward the project became negative. Russian investors left the project for various reasons. In October 2006, Gennady Lysak announced to his employees that the company could be liquidated because the CBEZ had not launched yet, and there was no profit accrued from the project. Maintenance costs from the beginning of the year reached 21 million rubles (around 800,000 USD).[34] In August 2007, under Putin's 2006–2007 anti-smuggling campaign, both Lysak and Ivanov were accused of organising smuggling and put on the police wanted list. Both fled abroad, to Slovenia and Spain. The PSCBEZ project was discredited as a "mechanism for smuggling."

On the Chinese side, the situation was different: the necessary legal arrangements were also not approved in time, but unlike Russia, new lobbyists from local Suifenhe government circles appeared. Between 2006–2008, they seized the initiative from Shimao Group, who lost interest in the project. The only remaining force that wanted to develop the project was the Suifenhe government (new party chief E Zhongqi and mayor Fu Yangcheng). After several attempts to agree with the Russian side on bilateral access of visitors to the PSCBEZ territory, they gave up as well.

33 Strangio, "The Rise, Fall and Possible Renewal."
34 Interview by I. Zuenko with a former employee of IAA Primor'e (January, 2019).

Later, Suifenhe city implemented these ideas for the CBEZ unilaterally. In 2009, Suifenhe established its own free economic zone for cross-border trade (互市贸易区) with benefits for residents such as the duty-free importing of goods and export-tax refunds.[35] This includes measures helping enterprises to list on Chinese stock exchanges and giving access to Chinese domestic equity for the expansion of Sino-Russian joint ventures. In 2014, they let Russian citizens cross into the whole city of Suifenhe visa-free in groups consisting of just two people or more and, later, even let them use Russian rubles in Suifenhe. Hotel and entertainment infrastructure built by Shimao Group is still in operation, but its popularity among Russian tourists is low due to the remoteness from the Suifenhe downtown area and the absence of any specific benefits.

So, why did the PSCBEZ fail?

It is obvious that there are several reasons, including some that are very subjective and internal. The role of personalities in all of this appears to have been very important. Two Russian businessmen, Lysak and Ivanov, started the project when they had ties with regional authorities and received their support. Worsening relations with authorities, and the large-scale 2006–2007 anti-smuggling campaign, led to the demise of their business empires, including the PSCBEZ.

It is also appears that, from the very beginning, they did not have enough administrative influence to get all necessary approvals for visa-free and duty-free access to CBEZs. Even if regional authorities maintained their support for the project, in the middle of the 2000s, due to re-centralisation in Russia, their impact on international cooperation projects of such size was shrinking. The key policy-makers were federal authorities – and for them, the PSCBEZ seemed to be a private initiative of local businessmen with a bad reputation, with a lot of uncalculated risks and no guaranteed profits.

We must say that these doubts were reasonable. Even according to IAA Primor'e former employees, Chinese investors had no serious interest in starting any real manufacturing activity on the Russian side of the PSCBEZ. Both they and their Russian partners were interested mostly in simplified customs procedures for importing consumer goods.[36] It made the project economically profitable as a "show-room" for Russian goods or a "cargo hub" for further shipments to the Russian market (both legal or illegal) and "shuttle trade." That's what we see in the case of the Khorgos cross-border economic zone.[37]

35 Kostyunina and Baronov, "Transgranichnye svobodnye ekonomicheskie zony."
36 Interview by I. Zuenko with a former employee of IAA Primor'e (January, 2019).
37 Zuenko, "Transgranichnye zony."

The PSCBEZ is one of many prominent experiments in cross-border cooperation, but it failed due to numerous factors, including the negative opinion of the Russian border guard and national security authorities, strong alarmist discourse all over Russian society, the absence of administrative support after 2006 even on a regional level, and the trend towards centralisation in the international agenda.

The project fell into a coma in 2008, though officially it was not finished.[38] Its revival (albeit in the form of a "cross-border territory of advanced development") occurred ten years later (see above). The initiative came from the Russian government, which changes the situation. However, learning from previous experience shows that the creation of a "window" on a Russo-Chinese border will require as long and painful an approval by the authorities as it did in the past. It is true that CBEZs require additional consideration and probably cannot be a part of the new programme of Russo-Chinese cooperation in the RFE at the present moment.

Conclusions

The Pogranichnyi–Suifenhe CBEZ's history shows an evolution of the Russian approach to cross-border cooperation. The PSCBEZ was initiated in the liberal political climate of the late 1990s–early 2000s. It was a time when the inertia of decentralisation in Russia was strong enough to stimulate activity in regional actors. This was also supported by the federal government (2001 concept of border cooperation). The project was ready to launch when the political climate crucially changed—in the middle of the 2000s, when Putin's re-centralisation drive firmed up. The federal centre started to "put things right," regional elites lost their influence on important decisions, and the corruption of regional authorities and businesspeople took a knock. Cross-border cooperation processes became less dynamic and, at the same time, more regulated and controlled. From this point on, the agenda was formulated by Moscow.

The federal grip became even tighter from the middle of the 2010s, when all cooperation projects turned out to be under the control of the newly established federal "development bureaucracy," the Ministry for the Development of the Far East and its agencies. Their task is to develop the economic prospects of the RFE and support the Russo-Chinese "strategic partnership" with new

38 Avdeev, "Gosgranitsa v Primor'e."

regional projects. To fulfil this mission, they need new ideas, new concepts, new results; this makes them open to reconsidering previously failed ideas. In 2018, we witnessed the revival of the PSCBEZ. But its characteristics are still too liberal for alarmist discourse among Russian elites, media, and the expert community. The example of the Khorgos International Centre for Cross-Border Cooperation shows that positive impact on the regional economy is limited, while the negative impact is visible: smuggling, corruption, and shuttle trade beyond tax duties are still big problems, while at the same time, the increase in legal production is not a consideration. This is why one cannot expect that CBEZs on the Russo-Chinese border will quickly become a desired growth pole for the regional economies.

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Appendix A. Timeline of PSCBTEZ Development

1998, February 17 – The governments of Russia and China signed a memorandum on the organisation of simplified access for Russian citizens to trade zones on Chinese territory near the border.

1999, June 2 – The governments of Russia and China reached a memorandum on the organisation of simplified access for Russian citizens to trade zones in the Chinese towns of Heihe and Suifenhe.

1999, September – Suifenhe administration declared an opening of a full-town-sized "Suifenhe trade zone" with visa-free access for Russian citizens (in practice, this concept was introduced only in 2014).

2001, February 9 – The Russian government approved the concept of cross-border cooperation.

2001, November 13 – ZAO IAA Primor'e (Closed Joint Stock Company Information Analytical Agency Primor'e) was established by Gennadiy Lysak to run the PSCBTEZ project in cooperation with Suifenhe Shimao (a Shimao Group subsidiary company).

2003, January 21 – According to a Russian government resolution, 300 hectares of land with "wooded lands" status near the Russo-Chinese border at Pogranichnyi municipality were officially transferred to "non-wooded" lands (Resolution no. 79-p) and then leased out to IAA Primor'e for forty-nine years for building infrastructure in a cross-border economic zone.

2004, June 1–2 – The "Cross-Border Cooperation between Russia and China" conference was held in Suifenhe to discuss PSCBTEZ perspectives.

2004, June 18 – The leaders of Primorskii Krai and Heilongjiang province signed a protocol for creating a PSCBTEZ during a cross-border cooperation conference in Harbin.

2004, August – The draft of "Agreement between the Governments of Russia and China about Cross-Border Economic Zones" was developed by Primorskii Krai administration and the Pacific Center for Strategy Studies (a think tank affiliated with Lysak's business empire).

2005, October – PSBCTEZ infrastructure building was started in the Russian and Chinese zones.

2006, February–March – The governor of Primorskii Krai, Sergei Darkin, and the presidential envoy to the Far Eastern federal district, Kamil Iskhakov, petitioned the Russian government for the introduction of amendments to Russian regulations in connection with the PSCBTEZ's functioning (Primorskii Krai Document no. 11-2/669, Apparatus of Presidential Envoy Document no. A56-763).

2006, April – Russian president Vladimir Putin started an anti-smuggling campaign.

2006, June 18 – PSCBTEZ's Russian part's first-stage objectives (centre for business communication, church, maintenance infrastructure) were officially opened.

2006, August – PSCBTEZ's Chinese part's first-stage objectives (hotel, exhibition centre, shopping mall) were officially opened.

2006, August 15–17 – "Russo-Chinese Cross-Border Cooperation" forum was held in Suifenhe to discuss the problems of PSCBTEZ functioning.

2007, July – Experts of PRC State Council's think tanks visited PSCBTEZ to research the zone's problems.

2007, August 1–3 – A meeting of the Russo-Chinese joint expert commission on PSCBTEZ development was held in Suifenhe.

2007, August 12–14 – A meeting of the Russo-Chinese permanent working group on inter-regional and cross-border cooperation was held in Vladivostok. Its final protocol mentioned plans to conclude a Russo-Chinese agreement on "About Measures for Economic Development and Cooperation of Border Regions of Russia and China" on the basis of 2004's "Agreement between the Governments of Russia and China about Cross-Border economic zones" draft (in practice, it was never signed).

2007, August – The main investors of the PSCBTEZ, Gennadiy Lysak and Igor Ivanov, were accused of organising contraband in the framework of the 2006–2007 anti-smuggling campaign and were put on a wanted list. Both disappeared abroad (to Slovenia and Spain). IAA Primor'e fell into crisis.

2007, November – A PRC State Council think tank published "Strategy and View of the Economic Development of PSCBTEZ."

2008, February 21 – Negotiations between the Department of International Cooperation and Tourism of the Administration of Primorskii Krai and Suifenhe People's Government on the issues of the simplified access of Russian citizens to the Suifenhe border trade zone (the PSCBTEZ Chinese zone) were held in Suifenhe. Start of access was scheduled for the current year in May but was delayed.

2014, January 1 – The Suifenhe government, on a unilateral basis, permitted visa-free access for Russian citizens to Suifenhe municipality territory (for "groups" of two persons and more).

2018, February 8 – Russian vice-premier Yury Trutnev announced the creation of the so-called "cross-border territory of advanced economic development" Pogranichnyi–Suifenhe, with a concept very similar to that of the PSCBTEZ.

Appendix B. Maps of the PSCBEZ Area

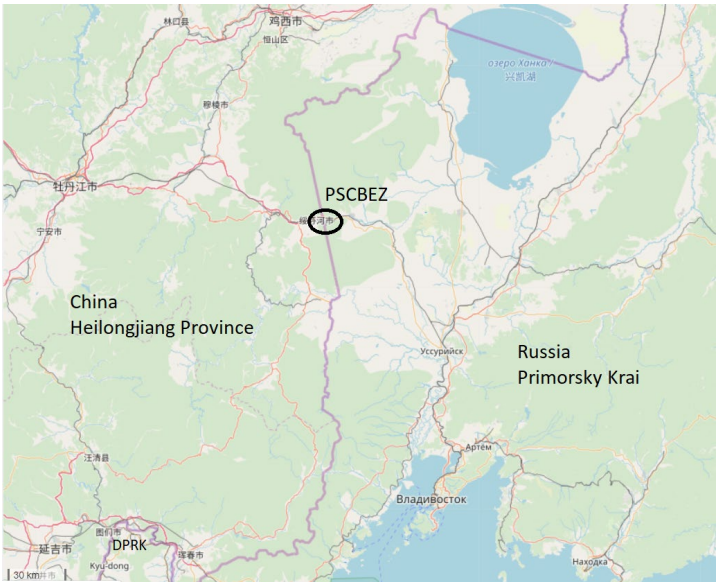

Fig. 1 PSCBEZ surrounding area (Map data from OpenStreetMap [https://www.openstreetmap.org]. Additional drawings by the authors).

Fig. 2 Sketch of PSCBEZ, 2012, air photography. 1. Centre for business communication; 2. St. George the Victorious Chapel; 3. Shimao Shopping Mall; 4. Holiday Inn Suifenhe; 5. Pogranichnyi Border Point (not launched; the current border point is in Sosnovaya Pad', located 5 km from the border, not on the sketch); 6. Suifenhe Border Point (Map data from Yandex Maps [https://yandex.ru/maps/]. Additional drawings by the authors).

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7 Russia and the Rivalry for Oil and Gas in the South China Sea

Nikolai Fedorov

Abstract One of the dimensions of the South China Sea conflict relates to the struggle for energy resources on the sea's continental shelf. This chapter explores the characteristics of Russian oil and gas projects in the South China Sea as well as the prospects and obstacles for their realisation. Russia is tied into the oil and gas resources of the South China Sea primarily through its joint projects with Vietnam. Russian collaboration with Vietnam in the hydrocarbon sphere is distinguished by a long history of interaction in this field, strategic partnerships with both Vietnam and China (the main opponent of Hanoi in the South China Sea conflict), and a complex approach to energy cooperation. Today, Russia faces serious challenges in its energy policy in the South China Sea: rivalry with foreign companies, indirect pressure from China, tense Vietnam–China relations (and, as a result, Hanoi's mistrust of Moscow), and confrontation with the West.

Keywords South China Sea, Russia–Vietnam relations, Russia–China relations, energy cooperation

Introduction

The South China Sea (SCS) conflict is one of the most serious problems of contemporary international relations in the Asia–Pacific region. Participants of the dispute over the Spratly and Paracel islands and surrounding waters consist of the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, and some states of Southeast Asia (Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam). In addition, some SCS water areas are claimed by Indonesia. The conflict is complicated by the involvement of some external actors (including the United States). External actors do not claim the Spratly or the Paracel Islands and, as a rule, do not support the pretensions of participants in the conflict, but they pursue their own political, strategic, and economic interests. One of the reasons for the

Fedorov, Nikolai. 2025. "7 Russia and the Rivalry for Oil and Gas in the South China Sea" In *Environments, Resources, and Infrastructures Ru Russia and the Asia-Pacific*, edited by Benjamin Beuerle, Sandra Dahlke, Anna Mazanik and Andreas Renner, 147–164. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing.
https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.1589.c23571

attention of the international community to the SCS conflict might be the rich volumes of oil and gas on the continental shelf of this sea. Many states are trying to get access to these resources. Participants of the dispute are ready to call foreign partners to explore and exploit the oil and gas resources on the continental shelf. However, some of the oil and gas fields are situated in the disputed areas, and this complicates the situation in the zone of the conflict.

Russia is also tied into the SCS conflict, including the issue of energy resources. Its indirect involvement in this dispute is mostly the result of its partnership with Vietnam and of the nature of its relations with the PRC. The energy sphere traditionally has been a strong element of Russian policy in the Asia–Pacific region, but—in contrast with its relations with China, Japan, and South Korea—Russia in its partnership with Vietnam acts not as an exporter of energy resources but as a supplier of technologies and know-how in the energy field. Moscow is actively cooperating with Hanoi in the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas resources on the continental shelf of the SCS. Russia's participation in these energy projects stipulates the involvement of Moscow in some aspects of the SCS conflict, including rivalry for oil and gas resources.

This chapter will define the key elements and the nature of Russia's involvement in the energy issues of the SCS, and the factors of global and regional policy influencing Russian energy projects in the SCS. As a hypothesis of this research, the author proposes the following case: despite the high level of Russian–Vietnamese political relations and the solid starting position of Moscow in energy cooperation with Hanoi, nowadays Russia may be confronting serious challenges to its interests in the oil and gas projects on the continental shelf of the SCS.

The author analyses the issue of Russian energy policy in the SCS in the context of Russian–Vietnamese relations, the foreign policy of Vietnam, problems of SCS conflict, and Russian–Chinese partnership. The chapter focuses on the connection between the global dimension of Russian foreign policy and regional interests of Moscow in Southeast Asia. The author examines new challenges for Russian energy companies wanting to access the resources of the SCS and forecasts further problems and prospects for their activity in Vietnam.

Russian–Chinese Partnership versus the United States in the South China Sea

Officially, Russia's position in the SCS conflict is neutral, but in some issues it supports both Hanoi and Beijing. For instance, Russia stands against the interference of "the third parties" in the conflict: at a briefing of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in July 2016, it was said that the SCS disputes had to be solved on the basis of international law; negotiations should be undertaken by participants of the conflict, and the interference of "non-regional" powers was "counter-productive."[1]

The "third parties" or "non-regional powers" are presumed to be, first of all, the United States, which is trying to counteract the reinforcement of Chinese positions in the SCS.[2] Officially, the US declares protection of *freedom of navigation* in the SCS and, in the framework of this policy, dispatches its warships into waters that are considered by Beijing as being under Chinese sovereignty. This American activity occasions harsh discontent and criticism from China. For its part, the US expresses resentment because of the development of Chinese military infrastructure on the Spratly and Paracel islands. Also, Washington tries to support the opponents of China in this conflict (including assistance in the defence sphere). US approaches to SCS issues are connected with the policy of containment of China. Control over the SCS has strategic importance for maritime communications between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The position of Moscow toward US policy in the SCS is explained from one side by the development of interaction between Russia and the PRC and from other side by the aggravation of Russia–US relations.[3] China has been playing more and more essential a role as a partner for Russia. The two countries are developing interactions in various spheres, including foreign policy and defence. China's importance for Russia has increased since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 and, especially, after February 2022. China, in turn, needs cooperation with Russia in the context of altercations with Washington and America's allies. Russia and China share a common view of the world order, including the issue of negative attitudes toward the global dominance of the United States.[4] As a result, Russia has tried to demonstrate its indirect support for China on some SCS issues.

1 TASS, "MID RF."
2 Bin, "China–Russia Relations," 133.
3 Tsvetov, "Did Russia Just Side."
4 Lukin and Kashin, "Rossiysko-kitayskoe sotrudnichestvo," 137.

This is explained not only by solidarity with its strategic partner but also by attempts to counteract the US.

Partly from that point, Russia criticised the ruling of the International Court in The Hague adopted in July 2016. According to this ruling, adopted after the claim of the Philippines, China had no historic rights to the waters and islands of the SCS.[5] This support by Russia had significant meaning for Beijing.[6] Chinese media tried to emphasise (and even sometimes overestimate) Russia's solidarity with China on this issue.[7] Incidentally, the ruling of the International Court could play a serious role in Russian maritime interests. Russian sovereignty over many maritime areas (including some Arctic territories) is held because of Russia's "historic rights" to these waters. The ruling in The Hague might create a very dangerous precedent for possible disputes on Russian maritime borders.[8] Other forms of the demonstration of Russian support for China have included the joint Russian–Chinese naval drill that took place in September 2016 in the SCS. This drill was especially important for China (first of all, as moral support) because it happened soon after the ruling of the International Court. These manoeuvres, however, took place not in the waters contested by the PRC and other participants of the conflict but near the Chinese mainland.[9] So Russia and China demonstrated their unity, but, at the same time, Moscow in some way distanced itself from territorial disputes with the participation of the PRC. Russia and China have been enlarging the scale of their defence cooperation since 2012, including annual naval manoeuvres. Some other Russian–Chinese naval drills also took place in "politically sensitive" areas—for instance, in the Black Sea in 2015 and in the Baltic Sea in 2017. In the opinion of experts, these regions might have been chosen specially because of their "symbolic status."[10] The manoeuvres in the Baltic Sea were, according to some scholars, also indirectly tied to SCS affairs. They were not only a "tribute" to Moscow for the drill in the SCS but also an asymmetric reply to Great Britain and France for the involvement of their warships in the protection of freedom of navigation in the SCS.[11]

In the context of this situation, it is interesting to analyse the rhetoric of Russian officials. For instance, the ambassador of Russia in China, Andrei

5 Mosyakov, "Politika Rossii," 30.
6 Sun, "Sino-Russia Strategic Alignment."
7 Lukin and Kashin, "Rossiysko-kitayskoe sotrudnichestvo," 144.
8 Gudev, "Rossiya i Kitai," 21.
9 RIA Novosti, "S mirnymi tselyami."
10 Paul, "Partnership on the High Seas."
11 Ibid.

Denisov, in an interview criticised accusations against Beijing as hindering freedom of navigation, but at the same time, he specially emphasised that Russia did not side with China in the SCS conflict.[12]

Other forms of assistance to China in the SCS might be arms sales from Russia. After 2014, Russian–Chinese military cooperation got a new impulse. For instance, experts noted that Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems let China control a significant part of air space over the SCS.[13] It is curious that US officials (for example, Rex Tillerson and James Mattis, being candidates for the secretary of state and the secretary of defence, respectively), compared Chinese policy in the SCS to Crimea's integration into Russia.[14]

Demonstration of support to China in the SCS corresponds with the current interests of Russia in the sphere of foreign policy and reflects key trends of Russian–Chinese partnership. Moscow and Beijing are ready to indirectly cooperate against their shared opponent—the United States—but the Russian–Chinese alliance is in many ways informal, and the two countries are rivals in some regions.[15] Russian interests in the SCS are mostly economic, and Russian strategic positions in Southeast Asia are not very powerful; so we can hardly talk about the formation of a military alliance between Russia and China, aimed against the USA, in the region of the SCS. After the beginning of the "special military operation" in Ukraine, China took a neutral position on Russia and continued economic cooperation with Moscow. However, Beijing is not interested in involvement in open conflict with the West on the side of Russia. Under these conditions, China might pursue a more careful policy to possible cooperation with Russia on SCS issues; and Moscow, in turn, cannot pay significant attention to the SCS conflict.

Russian–Vietnamese Relations and the South China Sea Conflict

Along with collaboration with China in the SCS, Russia supports Vietnam—a key opponent of Beijing in this conflict. Vietnam, like China, considers all the Spratly and the Paracels as its own territory. One of the variants of Russian assistance is military cooperation between Russia and Vietnam. Interaction

12 RIA Novosti, "Posol RF."
13 Carlson, "Room for Maneuver," 36–37.
14 Thayer, "The South China Sea."
15 Kashin, "Rossiya i Kitai."

in the defence sphere between Moscow and Hanoi has its origin in the period of the Cold War. The USSR supplied Communist Vietnam with weapons, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow and Hanoi continued cooperation (but now on commercial foundations). Although the Cold War was ended and Moscow didn't need Hanoi as its ally against the US and China, Russia and Vietnam could maintain their political relations at a very high level. Vietnam took the course of diversifying its foreign policy, and Russia still played an important role for Hanoi as one of the centres of world policy. In 2001, Russia and Vietnam signed a declaration of strategic partnership. In 2012, the level of their relations was raised to "comprehensive strategic partnership." Vietnam is still the only Southeast Asian state to be a strategic partner of Russia. Cooperation in the defence sphere is considered a significant element of Russian–Vietnamese partnership. Vietnam wanted to get Russian weapons in many ways under the conditions of tensions with China in the SCS. This bilateral defence cooperation got a new impulse in the 2000s along with the escalation of the SCS disputes. For instance, Vietnam bought from Russia S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems, Bastion coastal defence missile systems, Su-27 and Su-30 jet fighters, Gepard-type frigates, and 636-type diesel–electric submarines. In the 2000–2010s, Vietnam became one of the leading partners of Russia in the sphere of arms exports, along with China and India. It's often underlined that Russian weapons enforced the strategic position of Vietnam in the zone of the SCS conflict.[16] Furthermore, Russian–Vietnamese defence cooperation has a complex character. Russia and Vietnam jointly develop new types of weapons (for example, anti-ship missiles). Russia staged a training centre for Vietnamese submariners; Vietnam, in turn, granted Russian naval ships entry to the base at Cam Ranh Bay on particularly favourable conditions.[17]

Relations with China and Vietnam (first of all, in the dimension of the SCS), both having an official status as strategic partners of Russia, create a certain dilemma for Moscow.

In the opinion of many Western experts (for instance, Stephen Blank), the expansion of Russian–Vietnamese military interaction is connected with the intentions of Moscow to shape Vietnam as a counterweight to China in the regional balance of power.[18] At the same time, China considers sales of Russian weapons to Hanoi a "lesser evil" and perceives it as attempts by

16 Thayer, "With Russia's Help."
17 TASS, "Russia, Vietnam Agree."
18 Blank, "Russia and Vietnam Team Up."

Russia to get commercial benefits from military cooperation with Vietnam.[19] On the other hand, an alternative to the cooperation of Hanoi with Moscow might have been an enlargement of interaction in the military field between Vietnam and the United States and, as a result, the strengthening of American positions in the SCS and in Southeast Asia as a whole.

As mentioned in an article in the Chinese newspaper *Global Times*, Russian arms sales for Vietnam did not threaten China: they were stipulated by Russian interests in Vietnam, and China should view the role of Russia in Southeast Asia "positively."[20]

Besides, Russia sells weapons not only to Vietnam but also to China (in some cases, more advanced types of military devices). Russian and foreign experts share the position that the regional contradictions between Russia and China do not hinder their partnership. Brian Carlson wrote that Russia and China keep a "friendly neutrality" in their regional disputes.[21] In the opinion of the Russian expert Vasilii Kashin, the positions of Moscow and Beijing can vary outside their attitude to the US-centric world order. The two countries can realise independent policies in different regions.[22] The Russian researcher Alexander Korolev notes that regional contradictions between Russia and China, including those in the military sphere, do not prevent their rapprochement.[23] In his opinion, the Russian position towards the SCS is based on two approaches: *systemic anti-hegemonist balancing* and *non-systemic regional hedging*.[24] Russia is cooperating with China in the framework of confrontation with the United States, while in relations with Vietnam, the Russian position is founded on diversification of its policies between China, Vietnam, and other East Asian states. From my point of view, A. Korolev is right when he talks about two levels of Russian policy in the SCS. But the relations of Russia with Vietnam are based mostly not on hedging but on the evolution of ties between Moscow and Hanoi since the Cold War. Russia used the achievements of the period of the Soviet–Vietnamese alliance and tried to develop them in the context of the new situation. The other side of Russian policy in Vietnam was, according to the Russian expert Anton Tsvetov, an "image" issue. Promoting relations with Vietnam and other states of Southeast Asia, Russia tries to underline its image as a great power, realising a diversified

19 Wishnick, "In search of the 'Other' in Asia," 120.
20 Global Times, "Russia Takes Larger View."
21 Carlson, "Room for Maneuver," 32.
22 Kashin, "Rossiya i Kitai."
23 Korolev, "Systematic Balancing," 397.
24 Korolev, "The Two Levels."

foreign policy.[25] As a result, it would be more correct to talk about hedging mostly in the framework of the foreign policy of Vietnam, but not Russia.

Since February 2022, Vietnam has officially maintained a neutral position with regard to Russia; but Hanoi is anxious about Western secondary sanctions and more interested in cooperation and mutual understanding with the West than with Russia. That may create new obstacles for Russia–Vietnam cooperation, including in the military sphere.[26]

Russian–Vietnamese Joint Energy projects in the South China Sea

Hedging, in the political course of Vietnam, also touches the sphere of energy cooperation. The participation of Russian companies in exploiting the oil and gas resources on the continental shelf is the other aspect of the involvement of Russia in SCS issues. Cooperation in the energy sphere is also considered one of the most essential elements of Russian–Vietnamese partnership. Joint exploitation of hydrocarbon resources on the shelf had already begun in the days of the Cold War. In 1972, Soviet geologists explored the shelf of the Gulf of Tonkin near the coast of North Vietnam. More successful was the work of Soviet specialists near the south coast of Vietnam. In 1974, vast oilfields were discovered on the continental shelf, controlled then by the government of South Vietnam. Soviet oilmen began to work there in the summer of 1975, shortly after the unification of the state under the Hanoi authority. In June 1980, the USSR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam signed an agreement on the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas on the continental shelf of Vietnam.[27] In June 1981, the joint Soviet–Vietnamese company Vietsovpetro was founded (its shareholders were the Soviet foreign trade venture Zarubezhneft and Vietnam's state company Petrovietnam). The first batch of oil was obtained by Vietsovpetro in 1984. The company has continued operating after the collapse of the USSR. Besides the exploitation of the oil fields, Vietsovpetro began to obtain natural gas on the continental shelf. Vietsovpetro has discovered new oil and gas fields, and it is still one of the leading joint oil and gas companies working in Vietnam.

25 Tsvetov, "After Crimea," 70.
26 Mosyakov, "Rossiya i V'etnam," 119–120.
27 Voronin, "Energeticheskoe sotrudnichestvo," 166–167.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, new Russian companies have been working on Vietnam's continental shelf. Gazprom entered Vietnam in 2000. In 2002, Gazprom and Petrovietnam established the joint company Vietgazprom. The Russian companies TNK-BP and Lukoil expanded into the Vietnamese market in 2011. Rosneft bought assets in Vietnam from TNK-BP in 2013. In 2014, Lukoil stopped its work in Vietnam. In May 2021, Rosneft declared its intention to sell its shareholdings in energy projects in Vietnam to Zarubezhneft.

The cooperation of Russian energy companies with Vietnam involves more than just joint offshore projects in the SCS. In the framework of cooperation in the energy sphere, Vietnamese partners got access to oil and gas resources in the territory of the Russian Federation. Zarubezhneft and Petrovietnam founded the joint venture Rus'vietpetro in 2008. This joint company began to work in 2010 in the Nenets Autonomous District. In 2009, Gazprom and Petrovietnam created the joint company Gazpromviet, which began to work in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District and the Orenburg Region. In 2014, Gazprom and Petrovietnam agreed on cooperation for the exploitation of energy resources on the shelf of the Pechora Sea. In 2013, an agreement on cooperation for joint exploitation of resources in Russian territory was signed by Rosneft and Petrovietnam. The granting of access for Vietnamese partners to energy resources in Russia determines in many ways the offer of new offshore areas in Vietnam for Russian companies.[28]

Russian energy corporations are also developing some "parallel" projects in Vietnam. Gazprom has been promoting a project for the production of gas engine fuel in Vietnam. Gazprom and Novatek have discussed issues for sales of liquefied natural gas to Vietnam.[29]

Energy cooperation has occupied a special place in Russian–Vietnamese relations, and issues of joint exploitation of hydrocarbon resources on the continental shelf of Vietnam have traditionally been included in the summit agendas of the leaders of Russia and Vietnam.

28 Samofalova, "V obmen na Pechorskoe."
29 Toporkov, "Gazprom i Novatek."

Russian Energy Politics in the South China Sea: Prospects and Challenges

All the previously mentioned circumstances created a favourable background for the further progress of Russian–Vietnamese cooperation for the exploitation of oil and gas fields in the SCS. Russia and Vietnam have rich experience in the realisation of joint projects. Moscow was the first foreign partner of Hanoi in the sphere of exploitation of resources on the continental shelf. Russian–Vietnamese energy cooperation carries a multi-level character. Vietnam is now demanding more energy, and so it is interested in new projects on the shelf of the SCS; but at the same time, Russia is confronting some challenges in Vietnam. Firstly, Russia has no monopoly like the USSR on energy cooperation with Vietnam. When the Soviet Union launched joint projects with Hanoi, Vietnam was almost completely internationally isolated. But now, Vietnam is developing cooperation with many Western and Asian energy companies. In the second part of the '80s, the government of Vietnam initiated market economical reforms and began cooperation with foreign countries. In 1987, Vietnam adopted an act on foreign investments that opened its doors to participation by foreign companies in the exploitation of energy resources.[30] Vietnam was interested in the involvement of as many foreign companies as possible in order to get more profitable conditions (from both the commercial and technological points of view). Moreover, activities of foreign companies in the SCS are bound to cause further engagement by external actors with the problems of the SCS and would help to set a regime of *internationalisation* of the conflict, which is favourable for Hanoi's interests. Under such conditions, Vietnam would have more opportunities for manoeuvring and could negotiate with Russian companies, staying in more sustainable positions. At the same time, we can see some examples of cooperation between Russian and foreign companies in Vietnam. For instance, in 2002, Gazprom began interactions with the Indian company ONGC.[31] Zarubezhneft collaborated with the Japanese company Idemitsu.[32]

Another possible challenge that might be mentioned is the SCS conflict itself and the factor of China. Vietnam strives to invite foreign partners for work in those areas of the shelf that are de facto controlled by Hanoi but considered by Beijing as belonging to China. The PRC, for its part, acts in a

30 Buszynski and Sazlan, "Maritime Claims," 157.
31 Trigubenko, "Osnovnye napravleniya," 303–304.
32 Vo, "Etapy i napravleniya," 89.

similar way. China sometimes puts pressure on foreign companies cooperating with Vietnam in disputed areas. Russian companies have also experienced demonstrations of displeasure by Beijing. In April 2012, Gazprom signed an agreement with Vietnam for the exploitation of Sections 05.2 and 05.3 within the oil fields on the shelf, situated in areas contested by China. Earlier, the British company BP had refrained from exploiting these sections, being confronted with Chinese pressure. After the signing of the agreement between Gazprom and Vietnam, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China made a statement with indirect criticism of the Russian company. In this statement, the Chinese officials appealed to corporations from third-party states to refrain from working in the disputed areas until the resolution of the territorial conflict. Vietnam replied with harsh declarations. Russia, however, maintained its position; Gazprom continued its work on the blocks, and this issue was settled after the visit of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Beijing in May 2012.[33]

A similar episode took place in May 2018, when the representative of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticised the work of Rosneft on the field of Lan Do. The media reacted with publications with sensational headlines (for instance, "The First Chinese Warning")[34] and predicted the rise of altercations between Russia and China.

In August 2020, there was one more case, connected with Rosneft in the SCS. Rosneft suspended and then terminated a contract with Noble Corp from the UK for the purchasing of a semi-submersible exploration rig for work in the SCS. The media reported that this happened because of pressure from China. However, the initiator of the termination of the contract with Noble was Rosneft's partner, Petrovietnam.[35] The selling of the shareholdings of Rosneft is also sometimes explained by the factor of indirect Chinese influence. Rosneft has numerous joint projects with Beijing, and so the Russian company preferred to stop its work in Vietnam for the sake of stable relations with China.[36]

On one hand, we can talk about "special relations" between Moscow and Beijing in the SCS. Firstly, Moscow and Beijing are partners regarding many problems of world policy. Secondly, despite the conflict of interests on some problems of the SCS (for instance, the cooperation of Russia and

33 Lokshin, *Yuzhno-Kitaiskoe more: trudnyi poisk soglasiya*, 113–114.
34 Fadeeva, "Pervoe kitaiskoe preduprezhdenie."
35 Neft′ i capital, "Rosneft′ otkazalas′ ot bureniya."
36 Neftegaz.ru, "Zarubezhneft′ mozhet kupit′ aktivy Rosnefti."

Vietnam in the spheres of arms sales and work in the disputed areas of the continental shelf), Russia de facto supports China in many aspects of this conflict. Thirdly, Russia is the only great power that is ready to align with Beijing in the SCS conflict. As a result, Russia can keep its own line, relatively independent from Chinese positions, for issues of development of its oil and gas projects in the SCS.

On the other hand, China is, in fact, obviously influencing Russia for its energy projects in the SCS, and the case of the sale of Rosneft assets in Vietnam to Zarubezhneft can prove this suggestion.

Moreover, the "special" character of Russian–Chinese relations on the issues of the SCS might create a challenge for the partnership of Moscow and Hanoi. Vietnamese public opinion is sometimes dissatisfied by both the absence of direct Russian support for Hanoi in its conflict with China in the SCS[37] and defence cooperation between Moscow and Beijing.[38] Also, for instance, Vietnam perceived Russia's support of China after the ruling of the International Court in The Hague and the joint Russian–Chinese naval manoeuvres in the SCS very negatively. The rise of interactions between Russia and the PRC might impact the position of the Vietnamese authorities in the future regarding the further progress of cooperation with Russia for the exploitation of oil and gas fields in the South China Sea. However, despite the rise of Russian support for China on SCS issues, during the visit of Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang to Russia in June 2017, Moscow and Hanoi agreed to enlarge the zone of oil exploration and exploitation on the SCS continental shelf.[39]

Another challenge might be caused by the development of collaboration between Vietnam and the United States. The US is strengthening its position in Vietnam and demonstrating its support for Hanoi in the SCS conflict. Now, Washington perceives Vietnam as a useful instrument of American policy for the containment of China. The United States has a more solid position than Russia regarding economic cooperation with Vietnam (the US is now Vietnam's second trade partner after China) and is expanding its political, defence, and humanitarian interaction with Vietnam. Washington is trying to expand its positions in the energy sector of Vietnam, including offshore oil and gas projects. Under the circumstances of disputes with China in the

37 Mazyrin and Kobelev, *Rossiya-V'etnam*, 6.

38 Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka, "Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnosheniya na sovremennom etape," 28.

39 Mosyakov, "Politika Rossii," 33.

SCS, Hanoi can count cooperation with the US in the hydrocarbon fields as a strategic and political factor.[40] Russia is not only a competitor of the United States in Vietnam in some spheres (first of all, in energy and military cooperation) but also an opponent of Washington in the global balance of power. The United States, according to the opinion of some Russian researchers, is trying to undermine the Russian presence in Vietnam, playing with the Chinese factor.[41] It could be surmised that the aggravation of US–Chinese and US–Russian relations might impact the issue of Russian companies' participation in the exploitation of oil and gas resources of the SCS.

On one hand, the role of China's factor in Russian–Vietnamese relations seems to be negative, but for the time being, it is not critically fatal. Potentially, Russia could take the role of a mediator in the Chinese–Vietnamese dispute and act as a power, maintaining friendly relations with both Beijing and Hanoi. Russian experts have proposed, for instance, joint cooperation between Russia, China, and Vietnam in the sphere of oil and gas exploitation in the disputed areas of the SCS. These countries might create a joint tripartite company under guaranties from Russia as a mediator between China and Vietnam.[42] Hanoi has serious conflicts with China, but it doesn't want an open confrontation. Vietnam and China are developing cooperation in many spheres (including ties between the Communist parties of the two states).[43] Vietnam and China have a precedent of settling territorial disputes on the basis of joint economic collaboration. In 2000, the two countries delimited the borders of their exclusive economic zones and continental shelf in the Gulf of Tonkin and agreed on areas of joint fishery. That treaty also created the conditions for a possible joint exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in those waters.[44] So Russia has potential opportunities to assist the establishment of measures of confidence between Vietnam and China in the sphere of exploitation of oil and gas resources in the SCS. On the other hand, the situation with the hydrocarbon resources of the SCS differs from fishery cooperation. Besides, since February 2022, Russia has hardly had the intention or necessary opportunities to propose such a project. Both China and Vietnam would perceive this initiative with anxiety and distrust under the threat of a negative reaction from Washington and America's allies.

40 Le, "The Strategic Significance."
41 Tekhanovich, "Voennoe sotrudnichestvo," 137.
42 Mazyrin and Kobelev, *Rossiya-V'etnam*, 9.
43 Lokshin, "V'etnamo-kitayskie otnosheniya," 80–81.
44 Nguen, "V'etnamo-kitaiskie otnosheniya," 73.

Another obstacle for Russian companies in Vietnam might be the general situation in the oil and gas industry of Russia. Sanctions, imposed on Russia after 2014, have touched the energy sphere (including the issues of access to loans and new technologies).[45] They have decreased the ability of Russian companies to drill on the continental shelf of the SCS (especially in new and deep-water areas) and weakened their positions in comparison with foreign competitors. This situation in the oil and gas sphere has worsened since February 2022. Despite this complicated situation, Russia plans to expand its presence in the energy sphere of Vietnam. For example, in April 2022, Zarubezhneft declared its intention to purchase shares of the South Korean company KNOC on gas field 11-2,[46] but this deal still has not been accomplished.

One last problem for Russia in Vietnam might be competition between Russian energy companies. For a long time, Zarubezhneft has been trying to keep its monopoly in Vietnam and make obstacles to the access by other Russian ventures to Vietnam's energy market.[47] Also, Rosneft and Gazprom competed for the acquisition of shares in the Vietnamese oil refinery plant Dung Quat.[48] Rosneft and Zarubezhneft fought over new areas on the continental shelf in the SCS. Vietnamese partners used this situation and set conditions of their being granted access to new oil fields in Russia in return for the distribution of sections in the SCS to either of these two Russian companies.[49] Rivalry between Russian companies let Vietnam manoeuvre between different partners and bargain more profitable deals.

Conclusion

Issues of the exploitation of hydrocarbon resources and rivalry for access to them are traditionally considered important elements of the SCS conflict. Moscow is involved in these problems mostly through its cooperation in the energy sphere with Vietnam. Russia has important advantages in the rivalry for the resources of the SCS—mainly its high level of political partnership

45 Sevast'yanov and Reutov, "Neftegazovye proekty Rossii," 130.
46 Mosyakov, "Rossiya i V'etnam," 124.
47 Vo, "Etapy i napravleniya," 88.
48 Rogalev and Ruban, "Razvitie sotrudnichestva," 39.
49 Samofalova, "V obmen na Pechorskoe."

with Vietnam, the historical ties of Moscow and Hanoi, and the experience of joint exploitation of oil and gas fields on the continental shelf. Russia is also ready to propose for Vietnam an interaction for "parallel" projects—for example, a joint exploitation of oil and gas resources in Russian territory. The friendly relations between Russia and China let Russian companies feel relatively more secure when at work in disputed areas of the shelf.

However, Russia may encounter some challenges when realising its projects in the SCS, due to both economic and political factors. On one hand, we have its rising rivalry with foreign companies. Vietnam is trying to diversify its energy policy and develop cooperation with a broad circle of foreign partners. After February 2022, Vietnam can take a more careful position with regard to Russia and can create a more favourable environment for other foreign partners. On the other hand, the SCS conflict (and, most of all, tensions between China and Vietnam) might negatively affect Russian offshore projects. The partnership between Moscow and Beijing for some issues of the SCS is perceived by Vietnam with suspicion and anxiety. The US, in turn, demonstrates its support for Hanoi against China and looks negatively on the Russian presence in Vietnam (especially in the context of tensions between Russia and the West). Russian interests in Vietnam might be influenced by global policy trends—notably, the United States conflicting with China and Russia. Previously, Russia could keep the situation under control and manoeuvre between Vietnam and China, but the US–Russian confrontation made Russia's position in the SCS much more vulnerable. The approaches of Vietnam and even China to cooperation with Moscow have become more restrained. Russia, in turn, cannot pay enough attention to the SCS in this situation and would prefer to concentrate on saving its current positions and commercial interests.

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8 Sino-Russian Arctic Resource and Infrastructure Engagement

Martin Kossa

Abstract Since the mid-2010s, Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic region has emerged as yet another dimension of the multifaceted partnership between Beijing and Moscow. Both powers seemed to recognise the complementary nature of their interests in the Arctic that goes beyond the scientific exploration of the region. This chapter examines the nature of the Sino-Russian Arctic engagement, particularly in areas of resource extraction and infrastructure development, and illuminates what this signifies for both states and their relations in an era of growing global and regional uncertainties and challenges to the Western-led international order. The chapter concludes with an observation that, while Sino-Russian relations face challenges and even contradictions, there is room for further rapprochement between China and Russia, including in areas of strategic importance, such as the Arctic. Analytically, this chapter draws on Neoclassical Realism as a realist theory of foreign policy that allows for unit-level considerations in determining policy outcomes.

Keywords Sino-Russian relations, Arctic cooperation, natural resources, Northern Sea Route (NSR), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation have managed to substantially expand their bilateral political, economic, and military relations.[1] The two powers resolved their long-lasting border disputes, upgraded their strategic partnership several times, and began

1 For a brief overview of Sino-Russian relations since the end of the Cold War see, for example, Voskressenski, "China's Relations with Russia"; Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations*; Bekkevold and Lo, eds. *Sino-Russian Relations*.

Kossa, Martin. 2025. "8 Sino-Russian Arctic Resource and Infrastructure Engagement" In *Environments, Resources, and Infrastructures Between Russia and the Asia-Pacific*, edited by Benjamin Beuerle, Sandra Dahlke, Anna Mazanik and Andreas Renner, 165–189. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing. https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.1589.c23572

to actively cooperate in non-Western multinational (formal and informal) institutions, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS grouping (together with India, South Africa, and Brazil). The bilateral relationship is further strengthened by close high-level political exchanges. The Chinese and Russian leaders, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping and President Putin, have met over forty times, and their respective Heads of Governments have held twenty-eight meetings (as of 2023).[2] In economic affairs, Russia now fully supports the development of China's pan-Asian infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI);[3] Russia has allowed Huawei to build its 5G network;[4] and the countries' bilateral trade reached a new record of 200 billion USD by the end of 2023.[5] In military affairs, Chinese and Russian armed forces regularly train together,[6] with Russia agreeing to assist China in developing a critical component of strategic nuclear forces—a missile launch detection system.[7] In light of these developments, China and Russia decided to elevate their relationship in 2019 to "a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era" to strengthen strategic communication and coordination,[8] while in early 2022 confirming that there would be "no forbidden areas of cooperation" in their bilateral ties.[9] Sino-Russian relations continued to deepen even after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, as both states made a strategic choice to further embrace each other.[10] For example, during the eighteenth round of their strategic security consultation in September 2023, China and Russia agreed to "work closely on strategic security cooperation, defend true multilateralism, and promote the development of global governance system in a more fair and reasonable direction."[11]

Given the continuous improvements in the Sino-Russian partnership, academics and pundits alike have been debating the nature of this relationship. For some, the state of their bilateral affairs can be described as "a quasi-alliance,

2 The Russian Government, "28th Regular Meeting of Russian and Chinese Heads of Government."
3 Lee, "China and Russia Forge Stronger Eurasian Economic Ties."
4 EUobserver, "China's Huawei."
5 McCarthy, "China's Xi Jinping Hails Russia Cooperation."
6 See, for example, Gady, "China Sends Strategic Bombers."
7 Kashin, "Russia and China."
8 Xinhua, "China, Russia Agree to Upgrade Relations for New Era."
9 President of Russia, "Joint Statement."
10 Lin, "The China–Russia Axis Takes Shape."
11 Xinhua, "China, Russia to Deepen Strategic Security Cooperation."

or entente,"[12] "moving closer to a fully-fledged alliance,"[13] or an outright "alliance of autocracies."[14] Others would contend that this does not fully reflect the reality of their interactions and that limits, imbalances, and even contradictions exist within this relationship. The more sceptical observers point to pervasive mistrust rooted in historical grievances,[15] a relative lack of close people-to-people ties,[16] and fundamentally diverging perspectives regarding the international order (comparing China's attempts to reform the order with Russia's destructive approaches).[17] Others would refer to the detrimental effects China's economic and military rise had for Russia across the Eurasian continent, challenging its traditional spheres of influence (such as in Central Asia).[18] Perhaps, as noted by Lo, the single most important variable that enables a closer Sino-Russian relationship could be the level of tensions in Sino-American relations, directly influencing the level of strategic and normative convergence between China and Russia (the higher the tensions, the higher the convergence).[19] At the same time, statements made by high-level Chinese and Russian officials are adding a degree of ambiguity to these discourses. While the Chinese leadership is careful not to frame the Sino-Russian engagement as an alliance,[20] according to Lukin, Russian officials did previously use the word "ally" with respect to China, possibly as a strategic signal to the West that Moscow is ready to form an alliance with Beijing.[21]

Amid these debates, a new dimension of the Sino-Russian relations has been emerging over the past decade: engagement in the Arctic region.[22] As a result of rising regional temperatures, Arctic sea ice, glaciers and permafrost have been retreating, adding to perceptions that the region is opening up and ready for commercial exploitation.[23] Overall, Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation, particularly in the economic domain, harbours great potential, as the two

12 Lukin, "The Russia–China Entente," 363.
13 Korolev, *China–Russia Strategic Alignment*, 25.
14 Leonhardt, "A New Axis."
15 Erickson, "Friends with 'No Limits'?"
16 Kim, "The Limits of the No-Limits Partnership."
17 Lo, "The Sino-Russian Partnership," 17–18.
18 Wood, "China–Russia Relations Reality Check."
19 Lo, "Introduction," 12.
20 For example, see a recent statement by Ambassador Fu Cong, the Head of the Chinese Mission to the EU: Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, "Transcript of Ambassador Fu Cong's Exclusive Interview."
21 Lukin, "The Russia–China Entente," 369–370.
22 Hsiung and Røseth, "The Arctic Dimension."
23 Roston, "How a Melting Arctic Changes Everything."

powers seem to have complementary interests with regards to the region. For example, the Russian Arctic is abundant in natural resources, such as oil and natural gas, which China can use to plug some of its energy demands and diversify its energy imports. Possibilities are also open in the areas of Arctic Ocean shipping and infrastructure development along the Northern Sea Route (NSR), a transportation lane running across the northern coast of Russia. That being the case, this chapter aims to inquire into the nature of the Sino-Russian Arctic engagement, particularly in areas of resource extraction and infrastructure development, and to illuminate what this signifies for both states and their relations. In doing so, the chapter will follow the proposition by Kirchberger, Sinjen, and Wörmer that, in order to better understand where the Sino-Russian partnership stands and where it might be heading, analysts need to focus, among other things, on areas "where both countries have considerable vulnerabilities and/or overriding strategic interests," such as the Arctic.[24] Additionally, the chapter seeks to contribute to the existing literature on the emerging Sino-Russian Arctic engagement by analysing the current level of Chinese economic presence in the Russian Arctic.[25]

In terms of analytical approach, the analysis draws on Neoclassical Realism (NCR) as a realist theory of foreign policy that allows for unit-level (domestic) considerations in determining policy outcomes.[26] NCR posits that states, when conducting foreign and security policy, respond primarily to international systemic stimuli (i.e., power distributions among states—an insight adopted from Structural Realism) but at the same time holds that these responses are conditioned by variables found at the unit level, such as state–society relations, the nature and needs of domestic political regimes, strategic culture, the perceptions of state leaders, etc.[27] In the context of Sino-Russian Arctic economic engagement, the analysis conducted in this chapter will be concerned primarily with the domestic politico-economic

24 Kirchberger, Sinjen, and Wörmer, "Introduction," 3.

25 For an example of this literature, see: MacDonald, "China–Russian Cooperation in the Arctic"; Kobzeva, "Strategic Partnership Setting"; Wishnick, "Russia and the Arctic in China's Quest for Great-Power Status"; Alexeeva and Lasserre, "An Analysis on Sino-Russian Cooperation"; Zhao, "Zhong-E Beiji Kechixu Fazhan Hezuo"; Sørensen and Klimenko, "Emerging Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic"; Yi, "Eluosi Beiji zhanlve ji Zhong-E Beiji hezuo."

26 For a classical statement on NCR see Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy."

27 For a discussion of the unit-level variables and their application in NCR, see Chapters 1 and 3 in Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobel, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.

priorities of the Chinese and Russian states to illustrate how these unit-level factors influence the levels of Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation at a time of changes within the international system.[28]

The chapter is composed of five parts. Following this introduction, Parts 2 and 3 briefly discuss Russia's and China's interests in the Arctic region as well as the main Arctic policy documents of these powers. Part 4 outlines the Sino-Russian Arctic economic engagement in terms of China's participation in the extraction of natural resources and shipping on the NSR. The chapter ends with a short conclusion focusing on broad observations regarding the Sino-Russian partnership.

The Russian Federation and the Arctic Region

With a long history of polar exploration, Russia is an established Arctic power that controls by far the largest portion of the Arctic region, both in terms of area and population (fifty-three percent of the Arctic coast and 2.5 million inhabitants).[29] The region has traditionally been a zone of special interest for Moscow where virtually all aspects of its national security—political, economic, technological, military, environmental, and those of natural resources—converge.[30] The region is deeply embedded in Russian national identity, history, and strategic culture[31] and plays an important role in Russia's pursuit of great-power status and international prestige.[32] The significance of the Arctic to the Russian state was underlined by President Putin, who declared that "the Arctic is an extremely important region, which will ensure the future of our country."[33]

Russia's main policy document regarding the Arctic—*Foundations of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035* (adopted in 2020)—identifies the following national interests of the Russian state in the Arctic: to ensure Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity; to preserve the region as a territory of peace, stability, and mutually beneficial partnership; to

28 For other works using NCR in the study of Sino-Russian relations see, for example, Korolev and Portyakov, "Reluctant Allies."
29 Arctic Council, "The Russian Federation."
30 President of Russia, "Meeting of the Security Council."
31 Buchanan, "Russia's Arctic Strategy," 32.
32 Grajewski, "Russia's Great Power Assertion."
33 President of Russia, "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin."

increase the quality of life of its Arctic population; to develop the region as its strategic resource base and the NSR as a competitive national transportation passage in the global market; and to protect its environment and preserve the native lands and traditional way of life of Arctic Indigenous peoples residing in the Russian Arctic zone.[34] In order to implement these objectives, President Putin also approved the *Strategy for Developing Russia's Arctic Zone and Ensuring National Security until 2035* in October 2020.[35] Charged with safeguarding the security and development of the Russian Arctic zone is an interagency commission on national interests in the Arctic at Russia's Security Council, consisting of thirty members from across the Russian government.[36]

The aforementioned *Foundations* establish ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity as the top priority of Russia's Arctic policy while pointing out that one of the main challenges to Russia's national security in the Arctic is military buildup by foreign states and an increase in the potential for conflict in the region.[37] This indicates a strong focus on security- and military-related issues of the Russian state in the Arctic. Additionally, a considerable part of the Russian Navy is stationed on the Kola Peninsula and along the White and Barents seas, which include aircraft, surface ships (including Russia's only aircraft carrier), and nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines. The whole Russian Arctic coast is also undergoing a military upgrade in which Moscow is focusing on reopening Soviet-era air and naval bases and border guard stations along the NSR as well as building new ones.[38] Russian officials explain that this is to provide Russia with control over shipping on the NSR, protect oil and gas installations, and maintain maritime domain awareness.[39] Klimenko adds that we should expect further programs aimed at the modernisation of military infrastructure in the Russian Arctic, since these will ensure Russia's continuous enforcement of its sovereignty in the region.[40]

At the same time, Russia has vital interests in the region aimed at the development of natural resources and transportation along the NSR that are considered essential to Russia's social and economic development. The Russian Arctic currently produces ten percent of Russia's GDP and twenty

34 President of the Russian Federation, *Foundations.*
35 President of Russia, "Strategy for Developing the Russian Arctic Zone."
36 The Arctic, "Commission on National Interests in the Arctic."
37 President of the Russian Federation, *Foundations.*
38 Konyshev, Sergunin, and Subbotin, "Russia's Arctic Strategies," 117–119.
39 Humpert, "New Satellite Images."
40 Klimenko, "Russia's New Arctic Policy."

percent of its exports.[41] Indeed, the resource potential of the Russian Arctic is immense. It is responsible for a large part of Russia's gas and oil production as well as chromium, diamonds, manganese, platinum-based elements, and huge quantities of copper, gold, rare earth elements, etc.[42] With regards to the utilisation of the NSR, the Russian leadership set the ambitious goal of increasing the annual goods volumes on the route to 80 million tons by the year 2024[43] (in 2022, the total volume was 34 million tons).[44] In support of these ambitious plans, Russia plans to increase the capacity of its Arctic fleet in the coming years. This will include the construction of forty new vessels—nuclear icebreakers plus hydrographical and various support and rescue ships.[45] Additionally, to spur container shipping activities along the route, Russia's state-owned company Rosatom intends to invest 7 billion USD into Arctic shipping to rival the traditional shipping lanes that run through the Indian Ocean.[46] Given the emphasis on security and economic interests, the Arctic is seen by the Russian leadership as a main source of growth for the Russian economy—a source that is central to Moscow's efforts to maintain the prosperity of the Russian state and to ensure Russia's position as an internationally acknowledged great power.[47]

However, in order to develop the full potential of its Arctic zone, Russia needs to resolve a series of issues pertaining to the region, including renovating and building new infrastructure (ports, roads, search and rescue stations) and organising technologically challenging drilling activities, all of which incur high investment costs.[48] Yet Russia's military interventions in Ukraine (in 2014 and 2022) are impacting its efforts to develop many of its Arctic projects, as Western nations imposed a series of sanctions on the Russian economy, forcing multinational corporations to exit the Russian market—including the energy sector[49]—and pause their cooperation with Russia in the Arctic

41 Klimenko, "Russia's New Arctic Policy."
42 Dobretsov and Pokhilenko, "Mineral Resources."
43 Staalesen, "Shipping on Northern Sea Route."
44 Center for High North Logistics, "NSR Shipping."
45 Staalesen, "Moscow Adopts 15-Year Grand Plan."
46 For comparative purposes, the total annual amount of cargo being shipped through the Suez Canal is around 980 million tons. Additionally, there is a lot of scepticism about the economic feasibility of container shipping on the NSR due to various factors (shallow straits, environmental concerns, etc.). Humpert, "Rosatom to Invest."
47 Staun, "Russia's Strategy in the Arctic," 328.
48 Alexeeva and Lasserre, "An Analysis on Sino-Russian Cooperation," 270–273.
49 Boston and Maloney, "Global Companies."

Council (AC), the preeminent regional forum for regional governance.[50] In light of the evolving international situation, the Russian leadership decided to update its Arctic policy—the *Foundations*—in February 2023.[51] According to Liudmila Filippova, a senior research fellow at the Institute of China and Contemporary Asia of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the updated version, in terms of Arctic international collaboration, mentions the "development of relations with foreign states on a bilateral basis, within the framework of appropriate multilateral structures and mechanisms" while simultaneously removing references to engagement with Arctic states. This, Filippova notes, could imply boosting involvement and cooperation with a much wider range of countries.[52] Indeed, President Putin has already indicated Russia's willingness to include more extra-regional states and associations in the development of the Russian Arctic zone.[53]

The PRC and the Arctic

China has been engaged in the Arctic region for more than twenty-five years now, with its first Arctic scientific expedition launched aboard its research icebreaker, the Xuelong, in 1999. Since then, the Chinese government has managed to organise thirteen research expeditions to the region (as of September 2023) and set up a dedicated Arctic research station—the Yellow River Station, on Norway's Svalbard archipelago—in July 2004. An acceleration of Chinese activities in the Arctic is noticeable after 2012, when Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the CCP and China's paramount leader. In 2013, China became an observer at the AC; together with Nordic partners, it established the China–Nordic Arctic Research Center, and its state-owned enterprises (SOEs) began conducting trial shipments on the NSR and investing in Arctic energy projects, including in the Russian Arctic. To underline its interests in regional affairs, the CCP leadership appointed a Special Representative for Arctic Affairs in 2016[54] and linked Arctic shipping routes with the BRI in 2017 in order to build a Polar Silk Road (PSR). China also managed to establish a second research station in Iceland and deploy some specialised polar

50 Edvardsen, "Arctic Council Paused."
51 President of Russia, "Changes to Basic Principles."
52 Filippova, "China's New Role."
53 President of Russia, "Meeting on Arctic Zone Development."
54 Yang, "Observer Activities Report."

observation equipment, including a second research icebreaker, experimental polar orbiting satellites, unmanned underwater vehicles, buoys, and meteorological stations.[55] Chinese leaders and policymakers were also collectively referring to China as an important Arctic stakeholder.[56]

A dedicated Chinese Arctic white paper was unveiled in January 2018. The policy document regards the changing Arctic conditions as an issue with global implications and international impacts while noting that states from outside the region have rights with respect to scientific research, shipping, fishing, and the laying of submarine cables in the high seas of the Arctic Ocean. It describes China as a near-Arctic state and outlines the country's policy goals in the region in terms of (1) understanding the Arctic (focusing on improving capacities in Arctic scientific research); (2) protecting the Arctic (responding to regional climatic changes and promoting ecological resilience); (3) developing the Arctic (emphasising Arctic technological innovation and economic and social development, including Arctic shipping, hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation, the conservation and utilisation of fisheries, and tourism); and (4) participating in Arctic governance through regional forums such as the AC and on the basis of existing framework of international law such as UNCLOS.[57]

China's engagement with the Arctic region also serves broader Chinese domestic politico-economic considerations and foreign policy objectives.[58] For example, the Chinese Arctic white paper notes that the Arctic environment and its changes have a direct impact on China's climate system and, therefore, on its economic interests in agriculture, forestry, and the marine industry.[59] Through an active Arctic scientific programme, Chinese scientists improve their understanding of these changes to better assess their impact on China. In terms of China's national strategy—the Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation, which would see China as a wealthy and prosperous nation that commands international influence and prestige[60]—Bertelsen and Gallucci note that the Arctic as a potential source of energy supplies and raw materials could contribute to Chinese desires for domestic prosperity, while China's participation in Arctic regional governance

55 Sørensen and Hsiung, "The Role of Technology in China's Arctic Engagement," 5–9.
56 For example, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "Video Message by Foreign Minister Wang Yi."
57 Xinhua, "Full Text: China's Arctic Policy."
58 Sørensen, "Intensifying U.S.–China Security Dilemma Dynamics," 445–448.
59 Xinhua, "Full Text: China's Arctic Policy."
60 Xi, "Secure a Decisive Victory."

could support its ambitions for international recognition.[61] Additionally, technological innovation and complex engineering associated with the development of polar observation equipment (icebreakers, unmanned systems and vehicles, etc.) can further enhance the overall development of China's technological capabilities, which is one of the priorities of China's national development, as exemplified by the adoption of the *Made in China 2025 strategy,* which ultimately seeks to reduce China's dependence on foreign technology.[62] Sørensen further notes that the state which first develops and masters advanced technology capable of operating under the most challenging polar conditions (resource extraction, communication, port development, etc.) could gain an advantage in the global great-power competition.[63] Such a zero-sum notion is very well understood in Chinese elite circles, which view global politics as an endless competition between nation-states.[64]

Sino–Russian Arctic Interactions

Russia is China's key partner in the Arctic, and the two powers have gradually recognised the complementary nature of their overall Arctic interests. However, this has not always been the case. China had to deal with Russian distrust and suspicion toward its Arctic endeavours on numerous occasions. For example, in 2003, during China's second Arctic research expedition, Russian authorities did not allow China's research vessel to enter the Russian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Arctic; in 2012, during China's fifth Arctic research expedition, Russia prohibited Chinese researchers from conducting maritime research while sailing on the NSR; and in 2013, Russian security agencies rejected a proposal for a collaborative project between Chinese and Russian scientists in the Arctic.[65]

This attitude, however, shifted in 2014 after the imposition of Western economic sanctions on Russia in the wake of Moscow's annexation of Crimea. Russia had to abandon its cautious approach towards China and start to reconsider the country as a viable source of capital and technology in the hopes of improving Russia's economic prospects.[66] Since then, Sino-Russian Arctic

61 Bertelsen and Gallucci, "The Return of China," 241.
62 Sørensen and Hsiung, "The Role of Technology in China's Arctic Engagement," 10.
63 Sørensen, "China and the Arctic," 23.
64 Heilmann and Schmidt, *China's Foreign Political and Economic Relations*, 2.
65 Bai and Zhang, "Zhongguo Beiji kexue kaocha" 261–262.
66 Alexeeva and Lasserre, "The Evolution of Sino-Russian Relations," 73.

interactions have been steadily expanding. In the science realm, for example, China and Russia managed to organise several joint scientific expeditions in the Arctic Ocean to fill "in the blanks in the history of the Sino-Russian Arctic research."[67] In September 2016, the Harbin Institute of Technology and the Far Eastern Federal University announced the establishment of the Russian–Chinese Polar Engineering and Research Center, intended to promote industrial development of the Arctic.[68] References to Arctic cooperation were also included in high-level bilateral documents. The 2019 *Sino-Russian joint statement on developing comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination in the new era* contains an Arctic dimension and requires both countries to focus on the development of Arctic-specific ties. The document states that China and Russia will collaborate on, among other things, the development of Arctic shipping routes, energy resource exploration, infrastructure, and polar tourism,[69] indicating a robust focus on commercial opportunities. This was further underlined in March 2023 when Xi Jinping visited Russia and both parties agreed to cooperate more closely in the Arctic energy and transportation sectors.[70]

Resource and Infrastructure Engagement

China is currently the largest energy consumer in the world, and despite the CCP's efforts to reshape the country's energy mix towards the reduction of carbon emissions, its energy consumption is expected to go up in the short term.[71] This being the case, energy security and strong considerations of energy supply diversification are a strategic element of China's national economic development.[72] Given the perceived abundance of energy resources in the Arctic region, some in the Chinese academic community view the region as a possible future energy resource base for China[73] that could contribute to China's energy security and supply diversification.[74] In this regard, the

67 Hu, "Zhong-E shouci Beiji lianhe kekao."
68 The Arctic, "Far Eastern Federal University."
69 Xinhua, "Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo."
70 Humpert, "Putin and Xi Discuss."
71 Sinopec, "Sinopec Releases China Energy Outlook 2060."
72 Ding, "Zhongguo jiaqiang lushang nengyuan zhanlve buju."
73 Liu, "Beiji hangxian."
74 Sun and Wu, "Beiji Anquan Zhili," 55–56.

Arctic is at times seen as "the second Middle East" by Chinese news outlets.[75] There are research institutions in China, such as the China Geological Survey (CGS), that investigate the resource potential of the polar regions. CGS has established the Research Center of Polar Geosciences, which, among other things, is tasked with surveying and evaluating energy resources in the Arctic.[76] Additionally, several Chinese SOEs and banks have already provided funding for energy resource development projects in the Russian Arctic zone.

The largest and most prominent of such energy projects is the Yamal LNG project on the Yamal Peninsula, in which the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and the Silk Road Fund hold twenty-percent and 9.9-percent stakes, respectively. In addition, the project received significant loans from China's EXIM Bank and the China Development Bank. Yamal LNG began operations in 2017, with an expected production capacity of around 16.5 million tons of LNG per year.[77] A quarter of this capacity is reserved for the Chinese market,[78] with the first deliveries of LNG reaching China in July 2018.[79] In connection with this project, another Chinese SOE, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), was tasked to deliver compressor modules (made in China) necessary for the production of the LNG.[80] The successful implementation of this project has prompted Chinese and Russian companies to consider a joint development of the Arctic LNG 2 on the Gydan Peninsula, just opposite Yamal. Slated to be fully operational by 2026, this project should have an annual production capacity of nearly 20 million tons of LNG, with thirty percent contracted for China.[81] China's CNPC and CNOOC each control a ten percent stake in the Arctic LNG 2.[82] As a sign of growing energy ties between China and Russia, China has received a record amount of LNG from the Russian Arctic and Far Eastern regions in 2022 and is becoming the world's largest LNG importer.[83] Additionally, in November 2022, the head of Russia's biggest oil company, Rosneft—Igor Sechin—invited Chinese partners to participate in the development of the massive Vostok oil field in the Russian Arctic.[84]

75 For example, see Zhang and Ni, "Kaifa Beiji: Zhongguo bu neng luoxia."
76 China Geological Survey, "Zhongguo Dizhi Diaocha."
77 Humpert, "Novatek's Yamal LNG."
78 Ecns.cn, "China, Russia Jointly Launch."
79 Reuters, "Russia's Novatek Ships First LNG Cargo."
80 Reuters, "CNOOC Delivers Final Compressor."
81 Spivak and Gabuev, "The Ice Age."
82 Humpert, "China Acquires 20 Percent Stake."
83 Humpert, "China Receives Late-Season LNG."
84 Staalesen, "Putin's Top Oilman Praises Xi Jinping."

Besides these projects, other Chinese SOEs were also involved in natural resource development of the Russian Arctic. For example, the China Oilfield Services Limited (COSL), a subsidiary of CNOOC, conducted seismic surveys in the Barents Sea in 2016 and in 2017; its deep-water semi-submersible drilling rig Nanhai 8 operated in the Kara Sea and discovered a large natural gas field. Operations by this Chinese drilling rig continued in the Kara Sea throughout 2018, 2019, and 2020.[85] In 2019, China National Chemical Engineering was contracted to supply crude oil processing equipment for the development of the Payakha oil fields in the Yenisei River delta, which are estimated to hold large oil reserves.[86] Going beyond oil and natural gas, the China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) partnered in 2023 with the Russian company Titanium Resources to develop titanium and other raw material deposits in the Komi Republic in Russia's Arctic zone.[87]

Given their potential to cut costs and time, the utilisation of Arctic shipping routes, and the NSR in particular, has also been an area of growing Sino-Russian cooperation. The Chinese Arctic white paper calls for the establishment of the Polar Silk Road and the development of regular commercial operations on Arctic shipping routes while, as indicated previously, Russia seeks to increase the transport potential of the NSR. The very idea of establishing a PSR emerged in the mid-2010s, when China and Russia began to contemplate the joint development of the shipping potential of the NSR,[88] but the vision became more concrete when Arctic shipping routes were incorporated into the BRI in 2017 as part of China's efforts to create a blue engine for sustainable development and economic growth.[89] To facilitate Chinese involvement in Arctic shipping and to introduce Arctic shipping conditions (such as weather, sea ice, international treaties regarding the region, sailor training requirements, etc.) to the Chinese shipping sector, in 2014, the Chinese Ministry of Transport published a first-of-its-kind set of Chinese-language guidelines for sailing on the NSR.[90]

In this regard, China's largest shipping SOE, COSCO, is a major non-Russian company that is actively engaged in the utilisation of the NSR. Although there is scepticism about the economic viability of the NSR for large-scale transit

85 Staalesen, "Two Chinese Rigs."
86 China National Chemical Engineering, "Zhongguo Huaxue Gongcheng."
87 Humpert, "Russian Mining Company Partners with China."
88 Tillman, Yang and Nielsson, "The Polar Silk Road," 347.
89 Lanteigne, "Who Benefits from China's Belt and Road in the Arctic?"
90 Zhao, "China to Release Its First Guidebook."

shipping,[91] COSCO has been increasing the number of shipments on the NSR since it began operating there in 2013, and, pre-COVID 19, the Chinese were among the largest foreign operators of vessels on the NSR.[92] Additionally, in 2019, Novatek, COSCO, Sovcomflot, and Silk Road Fund agreed to establish a joint venture that would focus on the development of the transportation of LNG produced in the Russian Arctic along the NSR.[93] According to reports, Chinese state-owned companies have stakes in nine out of the fifteen ice-class LNG carriers that ferry LNG from the Russian Arctic to customers in Eurasia.[94] To further enhance Sino-Russian cooperation on the NSR, Russian President Putin announced in 2023 that Russia was ready to create with the Chinese a joint working organ on the development of the NSR,[95] while Rosatom, the Russian administrator of the NSR, declared its intention to partner with China to acquire satellite-based data to improve navigation on the route.[96]

In conjunction with these developments, Chinese business actors have also shown interest in infrastructure projects (such as ports, railways, etc.) along the NSR. For example, it was reported that Chinese investors were previously considering investing in ports in Murmansk and Arkhangelsk[97] as well as in the Belkomur railway project, which would link western Siberia with Arkhangelsk.[98] Likewise, CCCC's titanium extraction project reportedly includes the construction of a railway and a deep-water port for shipments on the NSR.[99] There seems to be a sense of cautious optimism on the Russian side when it comes to Chinese investments in the Russian Arctic. During meetings with potential Chinese investors in 2023, Yuri Bezdudy, the governor of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, declared that "in the new economic realities between Russia and China, these [the Chinese] are our strategic and reliable partners," while Murmansk Governor Andrei Chibis, in a similar setting, stated that "we are entering a new level of partnership with China."[100]

91 For example, see Beveridge et al., "Interest of Asian Shipping Companies."
92 Humpert, "Chinese Shipping Company COSCO." According to reports, however, no Chinese vessels were transiting the NSR in 2022. See Staalesen, "Chinese Shippers Shun Russian Arctic Waters."
93 Novatek, "Novatek, COSCO Shipping, Sovcomflot and Silk Road Fund Sign an Agreement."
94 Humpert, "Chinese Shipping Company COSCO to Send Record Number of Ships."
95 Staalesen, "Arctic Shipping and Energy on Putin's Agenda."
96 Humpert, "Lacking Own Satellite Coverage."
97 Tillman, Yang and Nielsson, "The Polar Silk Road," 355.
98 Sukhankin, "Russia's Belkomur Arctic Railway Project."
99 Humpert, "Russian Mining Company Partners with China."
100 Staalesen, "Russian Arctic Regions."

However, many within the academic community would argue that the Sino-Russian Arctic engagement is facing its own set of challenges. For example, some have pointed to their diverging views about the participation of extra-regional states in Arctic affairs. China, the argument goes, sees the region as more of a global space in which extra-regional states and the broader international community should be involved, while Russia would like to preserve the dominant position of Arctic states in regional affairs.[101] Furthermore, examples of failed deals (such as Russia's unsuccessful sale of stakes in Vankorneft, which controls oil and gas fields in Eastern Siberia, to Chinese SOEs) or stalled projects (such as the aforementioned Belkomur railway and deep-water harbour projects in Arkhangelsk) are seen as either limits of China's willingness to bankroll Russian projects,[102] a reflection of Russia's uneasiness to fully embrace Chinese investors,[103] or a sign of China's strengthened bargaining position that allows it to demand from the Russians a better deal that would include access to more resources, more managerial positions, and more equipment to be manufactured in China.[104] Others would point to challenges associated with the development of the NSR. Alexeeva and Lasserre note that, while Russia sees China as a major user of the NSR and an investor to modernise and construct infrastructure along this shipping route, it does not consider it an effective partner with whom it would share responsibilities over the administration of the logistic network along the Russian Arctic coast.[105] Ultimately, Gao and Erokhin from Harbin Engineering University conclude that China and Russia "are still far from launching effective cooperation in the spheres of shipping and engineering in the North" and that Chinese investments in the Russian Arctic "do little to address major impediments to the vision of the NSR as a viable network for transportation and trade" such as scarcity of infrastructure or underdeveloped systems of navigation aids.[106] A further impediment to Sino-Russian Arctic relations was supposed to be Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent Western economic sanctions imposed on Russia.[107]

101 For example, see: Trenin, "Russia and China in the Arctic"; Greenwood and Luo, "Could the Arctic Be a Wedge"; MacDonald, "China–Russian Cooperation in the Arctic," 200; Kobzeva, "Strategic Partnership Setting," 11.
102 Shagina and Zogg, "Arctic Matters," 3.
103 Sukhankin, "Russia's Belkomur Arctic Railway Project."
104 Ekaterina Klimenko in Thompson, "An Uneasy Alliance."
105 Alexeeva and Lasserre, "An Analysis on Sino-Russian Cooperation," 279.
106 Gao and Erokhin. "China–Russia Collaboration," 365–366.
107 Kopra, "The Ukraine Crisis."

Yet, despite these challenges, the Sino-Russian Arctic partnership kept on evolving. CNOOC and CNPC, the Chinese SOEs with stakes in Russian Arctic LNG projects, continue their operations in Russia despite Western sanctions,[108] while the bilateral energy trade has increased, with significant shipments of oil and natural gas heading to China via the NSR.[109] As indicated previously, the Russians also seem to be willing to give China a larger stake in the development of the NSR and associated infrastructure. Furthermore, the joint statement issued at the end of the Sino-Russian summit in March 2023 notes that Beijing and Moscow want to preserve the Arctic as a place of peace, stability, and constructive cooperation—suggesting, according to Filippova, a deepening of the dialogue between China and Russia on Arctic issues.[110]

Conclusion

The Sino-Russian Arctic engagement is a rapidly emerging dimension of the expanding relations between Moscow and Beijing at a time of ongoing shifts in the international system. Besides maintaining the security and sovereignty of its Arctic zone, Russia also has vital economic interests in the region pertaining to natural resource extraction and shipping along the NSR. The Russian leadership considers the Arctic a main source of growth for the Russian economy. Yet, in order to advance its Arctic economic agenda and to build new infrastructure along the NSR, Russia gradually turned to Asia, and China in particular, for investment, especially in the aftermath of the 2014 Crimea crisis. By developing a Sino-Russian Arctic economic partnership, Russia could alleviate issues pertaining to funds, technologies, and resources needed for Arctic development and acquire a larger stake in China's energy market.[111]

China, for its part, sees the economic potential of the Arctic region, especially as an alternative source for its energy supply and shorter shipping routes between Asian and European markets. To underline its interest in the Arctic, in 2017, China incorporated Arctic shipping lanes into its BRI and published an Arctic white paper in 2018. At the same time, the Chinese are aware of the fact that the extraction of Arctic natural resources will require development of innovative new technologies that will be able to function

108 Eiterjord, "Amid Ukraine War, Russia's Northern Sea Route Turns East."
109 Ramzy, "China Is Gaining Long-Coveted Role in Arctic."
110 Filippova, "China's New Role."
111 Yang and Zhao, "Opportunities and Challenges," 137.

in severe Arctic conditions and that could incur high investment costs.[112] However, the necessity of developing these technologies is why Chinese investments in the Arctic projects are of importance to the Chinese party-state, since they can provide Chinese SOEs with knowledge about resource exploration, logistics, planning, and production under polar conditions.[113] China's participation in the Yamal LNG project demonstrates, according to experts, the country's entry into the international high-end hydrocarbon equipment market as well as showcasing its expertise in cold-weather engineering that could be integrated into other Arctic-related projects.[114]

Broader Sino-Russian bilateral relations are continuously developing. We should not expect Moscow and Beijing to fully align in their national and foreign policy priorities, as such a complex relationship is bound to face challenges and even contradictions. Yet, rapprochement is possible despite historical animosities.[115] This is for several reasons. For example, Kaczmarski notes that Putin's regime does not perceive China as a threat to its survival; Chinese and Russian elites seem to have converging worldviews, while security forces within Russia and China seem to be sharing "best authoritarian practices" such as limiting the operational space of NGOs.[116] Furthermore, successful conclusion of cooperative projects may lead to synergies in the same or other fields as well as to the alteration of previously sceptical perceptions about one another and the gradual building up of trust.[117] In the Arctic, an area of strategic importance to Russia, the successful development of resource and energy projects has led, according to Deng, to policy coordination and strategy docking which has further consolidated bilateral cooperation and contributed to fostering mutual trust, normalising cooperative regimes and exchange channels.[118] Perhaps, post-February 2022, what we are witnessing emerging is a new era of Sino-Russian engagement in the strategic area of Arctic cooperation,[119] further underlining the deepening partnership between China and Russia.

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112 Jia, "Beiji diqu youqi ziyuan kantan kaifa xianzhuang."
113 Xinhua, "Yamaer xiangmu."
114 Deng, "Shipping Matters," 9.
115 Kirchberger, Sinjen and Wörmer, "Introduction," 4–5.
116 Kaczmarski, "Domestic Politics," 61.
117 Kirchberger, Sinjen and Wörmer, "Introduction," 4.
118 Deng, "Shipping Matters," 11.
119 Filippova, "China's New Role."

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Sources and Discussion

9 UNDESA's Research Project: Transport and Utilisation of Natural Gas in Northeast Asia

Hongjin Liu, edited by Anna Mazanik

Abstract This paper offers an overview of the research programme "Transportation and Utilization of Natural Gas in Northeast Asia" led by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the 1990s. It sought practical and economic transnational gas pipeline infrastructure routes to connect Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, and China. A group of scientists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences contributed to the project, with the vice-president of the academy, Teng Teng, being the team leader. The research team managed to outline five potential routes with a long-term prospect until 2020. By studying the TUGNA programme, we can grasp the original considerations of the participating countries and gain insights into the context of infrastructure development and cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Keywords Northeast Asia, natural gas, pipeline, UNDESA, Teng Teng

Introduction

In recent years, oil and gas prices have become increasingly volatile, influenced by newly proven reserves and political and military tensions. For countries with inland energy supply options, oil and gas pipelines can mitigate the problems with sea transportation. These transnational pipelines also symbolise geopolitical connections, providing channels for influence. The Russian Far East is rich in oil and natural gas, while China, Japan, and Korea form a significant consumer market. Since the 1990s, there have been numerous proposals for transnational pipelines between the Russian Far East and other countries in the region, but the first one was realised only in 2019, connecting Russia to China.

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In the 1990s, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) launched the research programme "Transportation and Utilization of Natural Gas in Northeast Asia" (referred to hereafter as TUGNA), which studied the possible practical and economic transnational gas pipeline infrastructure routes to connect Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, and China. A group of scientists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences contributed to this endeavour, with Teng Teng, the vice-president of the academy, being the organiser and leader of the international survey for the project.[1]

This paper offers an overview of the TUGNA project based primarily on the unpublished project symposium materials dated December 2000. These materials, held at the National Museum for Modern Chinese Scientists in Beijing, summarise the outcomes of the survey project and provide the final outline of the proposed pipeline network routes.[2] Additionally, the author conducted several interviews with Teng Teng, the leader of the survey project, in 2017 and with Qiu Tong, another project participant, in 2018. The paper starts by introducing the organiser of the project and its background and then moves on to discussing the individual country reports and the five proposed pipeline routes.

UNDESA's Research Project

Teng Teng (滕藤, 1930–2023) was a Chinese chemical and nuclear scientist and also a senior government officer. Between 1988 and 1993, as the Vice Minister of Education, Teng automatically became China's official delegate on the executive board of UNESCO, and between 1991 and 1993, he was elected vice-chairman of the board. During his official affiliation with UNESCO, Teng was responsible for restoring an amicable relationship with African delegates and establishing the Asian Association for Social Science Research (AASSR).[3] After taking his new position at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Teng still maintained close contact with the UN, and between 1995 and 1997, he was the president of AASSR. Thus, when UNDESA started surveying natural gas transport and utilisation in Northeast Asia in the form of the TUGNA research programme, Teng was selected as the contact for

1 Interviews with Teng Teng, July 5, 2017 and July 19, 2017.
2 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*.
3 Interview with Teng Teng, November 6, 2017.

the Chinese section. Given the fact that Northeast Asia had plenty of natural gas resources and a great consumption market, UNDESA sought potential routes for natural gas transportation networks in the twenty-first century. The original outline of the research project was that there was one contact in each of the six countries (Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, and China) who was responsible for the local survey, coordinating with the other countries' delegates, and submitting a country report.[4]

However, when the TUGNA project held its symposium in Beijing on December 4–6, 2000, only four country reports had been submitted. Russia's report was written by, among others, Boris G. Saneev, L. A. Platonov, A. D. Sokolov, S. P. Popov, A. M. Kler, and Yu. D. Kononov (from the Energy System Institute, Irkutsk); Mongolia's was by Dr. M. Saandar (Monmap Engineering Services Co., Ltd), Dr. J. Dorjpurev (Energy Conservation Co., Ltd), and Mr. Bat-Erdene (Director, Department of Oil and Mineral Exploration and Mining Industry, The Ministry of Industry and Trade); South Korea's report was by Yonghun Jung (Korea Energy Economics Institute); and China's was by Prof. Teng Teng and Prof. Wei Yanshen, both from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.[5] Originally, an Italian scientist was appointed as the leader of the whole project, but he quit halfway through, and his position was handed over to Teng.[6]

As a result, in addition to preparing China's national survey, Teng and his Chinese team had to coordinate with the other Northeast Asian countries. The Chinese team members mostly came from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, e.g., Wei Yanshen (Teng's colleague) and Qiu Tong (a Ph.D. student of Teng's, now a professor at Tsinghua University). Qiu Tong's doctoral study between 1995 and 2000 was supervised by Teng and Wei and funded by the TUGNA project. For the 2000 symposium, she contributed a paper entitled "Technical, Economic and Financial Aspects of Natural Gas Pipelines and Distribution Systems,"[7] and her work for the project has also yielded her Ph.D. thesis. For China's national surveys, Qiu accompanied Teng to visit Northeast China and the oil fields in Xinjiang Province. For the international surveys, Teng, Qiu, and Wei visited the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Mongolia as well as the Energy System Institute (ESI) and the oil fields in Irkutsk, Russia. Wei, with several other colleagues, also visited North Korea.[8] Based on all this

4 Interview with Qiu Tong, December 5, 2018.
5 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, preface.
6 Interview with Qiu Tong, December 5, 2018.
7 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*.
8 Interview with Qiu Tong, December 5, 2018.

fieldwork and surveys and considering China's energy demand and import conditions, they finally proposed five possible gas pipeline networks in Northeast Asia. The country reports and the proposed solutions are presented below.

Russia's, Mongolia's, and South Korea's Country Reports

Russia's Country Report

The Russian country report is entitled "Role of Russian Natural Gas in the Formation of the Gas Pipeline Network in Northeast Asian Countries." It was produced by the Energy Systems Institute (SEI) in Irkutsk, thus reflecting the concerns relevant specifically to the Asian part of Russia. In 1997, the Asian regions possessed eighty percent of Russia's prospected natural gas reserves (about one third of the world's total), seventy-five percent (four percent) of oil reserves, and ninety percent (nine percent) of coal reserves; and produced ninety-three percent of natural gas, more than sixty-eight percent of oil, eighty percent of coal, and thirty-three percent of all electric power in Russia.[9] The economic crisis in Russia and its transition to a market-orientated economy in the 1990s increased the significance of its external economic relations for both the energy sector and the whole economy.[10]

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the strategy of economic and geopolitical development for the Asian regions had to be adapted to the new geopolitical situation and aimed to solve long-term problems. As suggested in Russia's country report, the long-term priority directions included: (1) creating conditions for social stabilisation and then economic development of the Asian regions of Russia; (2) maintaining the industrial, scientific, technological, and other potentials during the transition period; (3) enhancing domestic and international economic ties; (4) attracting foreign investment and technologies via the Asian regions.[11]

As the main fossil energy repository of Russia, the Asian regions performed an important role in maintaining the economic stability of all the entities in the former Soviet Union and enhancing Russia's geopolitical connections with other Northeast Asian countries by exporting fuel and energy resources.[12] Before 2000, there had already been some discussions, both at

9 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 74.
10 Milov, "Russia's Downfall," 165.
11 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 74.
12 Milov, "Russia's Downfall," 165.

the national and international levels, of various options for natural gas export from the Asian regions of Russia to the (other) Northeast Asian countries. However, these proposals were not coordinated with one another in terms of prices, volumes, time, or commercial sustainability.[13] Russia's country report suggested that future plans and the implementation processes should be controlled and coordinated at the federal and interregional levels to assess the consequences of such international cooperation.

According to the estimation of the authors of the report, large-scale infrastructure was infeasible in Siberia and the Far East until 2015–2020, due to the economic crisis in Russia during its period of transition to a market economy. Hence, before that time, the principal task was to maintain and strengthen the foundation for future development. It was suggested that the development of the gas pipeline network and the export system in the east of Russia should undergo the following three stages:

Stage 1 (2000–2010):

- Formation of the regional gas pipeline network in eastern Siberia and construction of the export gas pipeline: Irkutsk Oblast–Mongolia–China–Korea.
- Resource base: Kovyktinskoye gas condensate field (Irkutsk Oblast), natural gas fields in West Yakutia and Krasnoyarsk Krai.
- Potential supply for export may reach 30 billion cubic metres of natural gas.

Stage 2 (2010–2015):

- Formation of the regional gas pipeline network in western Siberia and construction of the export gas pipeline: western Siberia–eastern Siberia–Northeast Asian countries (China, Korea).
- Resource base: natural gas fields in western and eastern Siberia.
- Potential supply for export may account for 30–35 billion cubic metres of natural gas.
- Formation of the regional gas pipeline network in the Far East and construction export gas pipelines to Japan and other countries of Northeast Asia (North Korea, South Korea).
- Resource base: natural gas fields of Central Yakutia and Sakhalin shelf.
- Potential supply of natural gas for export may be 25–30 billion cubic meters.

13 Cao, "Russia's Pacific," 82–85.

Stage 3 (2015–2020):

- Creation of a unified gas pipeline system in the east of Russia and Northeast Asia.[14]

Mongolia's Country Report

The structure of the energy sector of Mongolia at the turn of the twenty-first century was relatively simple. It relied primarily on domestic coal and imported petroleum products.[15]

Half of the total population lived in the central part of the country, including the cities of Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan, and Erdenet. The energy supply of the central part relied on an interconnected grid fed by coal-fired thermal power stations. Heat was cogenerated from those power stations with electricity and distributed by district heating systems. In the other parts of the country, energy systems were isolated and mostly received electricity from oil-based diesel power stations and heat from coal-fired thermal plants. One town was supplied with electricity and heat from a coal-fired thermal power station, while the other population centres received electricity from oil-based diesel power stations and heat from coal-fired heating stations.[16] This energy system was unable to meet load fluctuations and peak demand in daily system operations. Peak demand was met by importing expensive electricity from Russia.[17] With the collapse of the USSR, when Soviet aid stopped, the energy supply in Mongolia faced difficulties.

Domestic coal was the most important energy source, accounting for close to eighty percent of total primary commercial energy use in 1993, followed by petrol fuels (nineteen percent). In 2000, Mongolia had no domestic oil production, and all petroleum products were imported.[18] Mongolia also made substantial use of traditional fuels (wood and dung), which were the only energy source for nomadic herders and most low-income families, even those living in urban areas. In 1993, twenty-five percent of total energy consumption in the country came from such sources.[19]

14 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 91.
15 Sodovyn and Saneev, "China–Mongolia–Russia," 1–4; Asian Development Bank, *Technical Assistance*, 1-6.
16 Chu and Meng, "Ecology Migration," 104–109.
17 Sodovyn and Saneev, "China–Mongolia–Russia," 1–4.
18 Wang, "Oil and Natural," 36–40.
19 Chu and Meng, "Ecology Migration," 104–109.

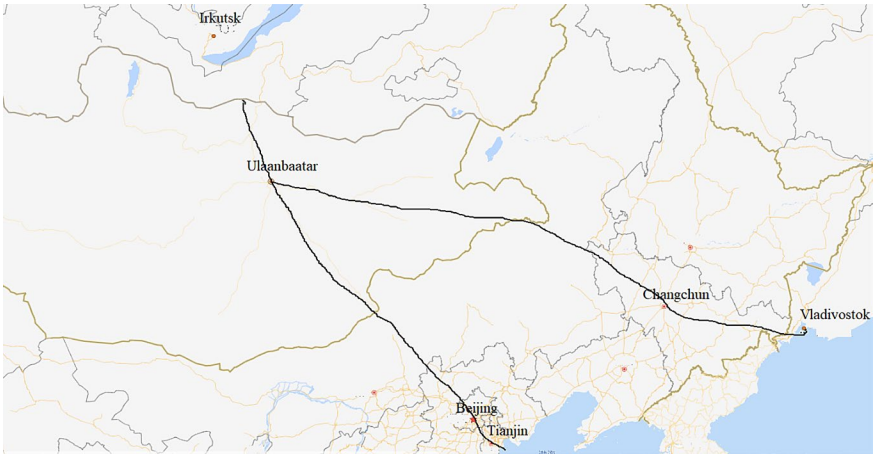

Fig. 1 Proposed routes of the liquid natural gas pipeline (Map data from Google Maps, 2023, routes marked by the author).

Given a forecast of Mongolia's energy supply and demand until 2020, two gas-pipelines were proposed in the country report, as illustrated in Figure 1: (1) Sukhbaatar–Darkhan–Ulaanbaatar–Bagnuur–Choir–Sainshand–Chinese border; (2) Sukhbaatar–Darkhan–Ulaanbaatar–Undurkhan–Chojbalsan–Sumber–Chinese border. Route 1 was to cross Mongolia from north to south, connecting Russian gas fields, e.g., Irkutsk or Chita, with Beijing, which also allowed shipment transportation via the port city of Tianjin. The planned length of this route inside Mongolia was over 1020 km. Route 2 separated from Route 1 in Ulaanbaatar and went eastward to reach the Northeast Asian Economic Free Zone region—the Tumen River Area—through the Dornod Region of Mongolia and the Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, and Jilin Provinces of China as well as the port city of Vladivostok. The prospected length within Mongolia was over 1200 km.[20]

South Korea's Country Report

In the last thirty years of the twentieth century, energy consumption in South Korea rapidly increased to fuel economic growth.[21] Lacking its own energy resources, South Korea faced energy insecurity and tried to diversify its energy

20 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 110.
21 Park, Yun and Jeon, "An Analysis," 288–290.

sources and types, in particular, its dependency on imports from the Middle East. A combination of environmental constraints on the use of fossil fuels and rising per-capita income (allowing more choices) led to an increase of natural gas as a part of energy consumption. In the 1980s and 1990s, the demand for natural gas grew rapidly, with a two-digit growth rate per year until the Asian financial crisis of 1997.[22]

South Korea lacks commercially viable natural gas resources of its own, and the only imported form had been liquefied natural gas (LNG). The Korean gas industry started in 1983 with the establishment of the Korea Gas Corporation (KOGAS), a government-owned import and wholesale monopoly, and an LNG import contract from Indonesia.[23] The first LNG shipment arrived at Pyongtaek terminal in October 1986 and was supplied to Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) as fuel for power generation from November in that year. By 2000, KOGAS was still the sole owner and operator of LNG receiving terminals at Pyongtaek and Inchon, operating ten storage tanks with a 100,000 kl (kilolitre) capacity each.[24]

In South Korea, natural gas was used mainly for power generation and urban gas supply for heating and cooking. In 1987, power generation consumed ninety-five percent of the total amount, which decreased to less than fifty percent in 1996. For city gas use, natural gas began to be supplied to metropolitan Seoul area in February 1987. Thereafter, the volume grew rapidly at an average rate of 42.5 percent with a continuously widening service area, to cover forty cities and counties across the country by the end of 1996. In 1997, natural gas consumption reached 11 Mt, including 5.7 Mt of city gas consumption and 5.3 Mt of power generation consumption. Compared to the forecasts, the natural gas consumption for power generation was higher, but that for city gas was lower, because of the financial crisis and relatively warm weather.[25]

In 2000, South Korea's LNG imports accounted for about fourteen percent of the world total. According to the Long-Term Natural Gas Supply and Demand Plan announced by the Korean government, the average annual growth rate of demand for natural gas was projected to be 5.7 percent from 1998 to 2010. In 1997, the share of natural gas in terms of total primary energy was about 6.5 percent. Although natural gas at that moment accounted for only a small portion of South Korea's energy balance, it was already being

22 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 123.
23 Lee, Kim, and Kim, "Effects," 1–3; UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 123.
24 Stern, *Natural Gas*.
25 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 124.

used in a wide range of end-use applications. Governmental interventions had played an important role in the boom of Korean natural gas consumption. In large cities like Seoul, gas use was supported by the government regulations related to air quality concerns, and most of the gas network construction had been made possible by governmental funding. Starting from 1991, all oil-fired power plants in the metropolitan area were supposed to steadily switch to natural gas out of environmental concerns.[26]

The demand for oil and its products grew rapidly, but more slowly than LNG. Oil was the most important fuel of all, accounting for about sixty percent of total primary energy. Oil imports mostly came from the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia as the major supplier. The dependency of crude oil on the Middle East countries was around seventy percent in the 1990s. The South Korean government, having experienced the oil supply disruptions of the 1970s and 1980s due to the 1973 and 1979 oil crises, attempted to diversify its oil importing sources. The dependency on Middle East oil imports declined from 72.2 percent in 1993 to 66.7 percent in 1997. Low world oil prices helped improve South Korea's trade balance.[27]

Table 9.1 LNG imports of South Korea in 1993 and 1997 (kilotons).[28]

Regions	**1993**	**1997**
Indonesia	4108	6848
Malaysia	90	4028
Brunei	–	753
Australia	56	–
Total kilotons	4454	11629
Total $ (millions)	774	2300

LNG had been being imported from Southeast Asian countries since 1987, and Indonesia was the major exporter to South Korea. As of 1997, Indonesia had supplied more than fifty-eight percent of the total LNG demand in South Korea (see Table 9.1). The major supply source of LNG would shift from Southeast Asia to the Middle East from 1999, when the first cargo from Oman arrived in South Korea. The combined total amounts of LNG

26 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 125–126.
27 Park, Yun, and Jeon, "An Analysis," 288–290.
28 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 132.

contracted with Qatar and Oman would reach 8.9 million tons a year from 2002, intensifying concerns about energy security.[29]

In this situation, Russian gas appeared to be a good possible alternative. The South Korean country report then discussed the potential supply capacity of Russian gas. By comparing three regions in the Far East and Siberia, the gas fields in Irkutsk Oblast were finally identified as the most appropriate option.

The Kovykta gas field in the Irkutsk region, with a reserve of 1,100 billion cubic metres, was considered most promising and was closest to the potential markets in China and South Korea. South Korea, Japan, and China considered a possible joint project for this field. According to a tentative project scheme, about 20 million LNG-equivalent tons of natural gas were to be supplied via the Irkutsk Oblast to China (7 million tons), Mongolia, and South Korea (7 million tons, LNG). The hope was that the so-called the Irkutsk project would supply these countries with natural gas for the next generation.[30] The gas fields in the Krasnoyarsk region were considered as an additional supply source, should the resources in the Irkutsk region become depleted or turn out to be insufficient.[31]

Five Potential Pipeline Networks

After having introduced the single country reports, we now turn to the central part of the results of UNDESA's research project, dealing with the proposed new pipeline net for natural gas. Based on the proposals in the country reports and the forecast of China's demand and output of natural gas (see Table 9.2), the Chinese team outlined five potential pipeline networks, as introduced below.

Table 9.2 Forecast of demand and output of natural gas in China (billion cubic metres).[32]

	2005	2010	2015	2020
Demand	50–60	90–110	150–180	190–230
Proportion of primary energy	3%	7%	9%	10%

29 Stern, *Natural Gas*.
30 Cao, "Russia's Pacific," 82–85.
31 Chen, "Sino-Russian," 48–49.
32 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 146.

Table 9.2 (continued)

	2005	2010	2015	2020
Output	42–50	70–80	90–100	100–120
Overseas share gas & coal-bed gas	0	5	20	40
Gap between supply and demand	8–10	15–25	40–60	50–70
Imported LNG (kilotons)	3,000	6,000	10,000	12,000
Imported PNG[33]	4–6	7–17	27–47	34–54

[1] Irkutsk–Manzhouli–Harbin–Shenyang–Dalian–Inchon

By 2000, the Chinese, Russian, and South Korean governments and some multinational oil corporations had expressed interest in the Irkutsk pipeline project. The pipeline was meant to start at the Kovykta gas field as the supply source and to proceed along the proposed Sino-Russian oil pipeline through Ulan-Ude, Chita, and Manzhouli (according to the Sino-Russian agreement signed in March 2000, a 2,400-km oil pipeline would be built from Angarsk in East Siberia to Northeast China). From Manzhouli, natural gas was also supposed to be transported to some large cities and industrial bases in Northeast China, such as Daqing, Harbin, Changchun, and Shenyang. Given the great demand for gas in Northeast China, the construction was expected to start around 2005–2007. This route could also be extended to South Korea either by land or by sea. The whole length of Route 1 was estimated at 4000 km, and the export capacity to China could reach 20–25 bcm/year and 10 bcm/year to South Korea. Considering the economic, geographical, and political conditions in Northeast Asia, Route 1 was suggested by the Chinese team as the best option for pipeline network infrastructure for the following reasons: first, Northeast China was in urgent need of energy due to economic development, and the local oil output was insufficient; second, it was not economical for China's national pipeline to reach the northeastern provinces, making it necessary to import natural gas from abroad to supplement the

33 PNG: Pipeline Natural Gas.

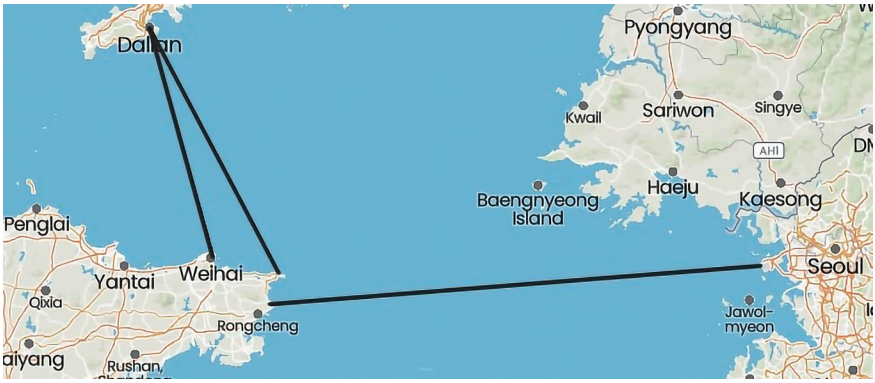

Fig. 2 Potential submarine pipeline routes (Map data from Google Maps, 2023, routes marked by the author).

domestic shortage; third, Route 1 was supposed to follow the same route as the Trans-Siberian Railroad and also the proposed Sino-Russian oil pipeline. This would make the geological prospecting, infrastructure, supervision, and maintenance of the pipelines more economically efficient and environmentally friendly.[34] Finally, it was possible for Route 1 to satisfy the need of another gas market: South Korea. The first option was to build a direct international submarine pipeline from Dalian to Inchon. The second option was to build a submarine pipeline to Weihai or Rongcheng (in Shandong Province) first, and then to Inchon or Mogpo (see Figure 2). In addition, the Chinese team laid some hopes on the improvement of the political atmosphere in the Korean Peninsula to facilitate a crossing pipeline.[35]

[2] Sakhalin–Vladivostok–Tumen River–North Korea–South Korea

Route 2 was an attempt to make use of the natural gas on the Sakhalin. The line would start Yuzhno–Sakhalinsk (in southern Sakhalin), and then the LNG would be shipped to Japan, South Korea, and China. The natural gas transported via this route would directly enter the world LNG competitive market. The major trait of Route 2 was that it passed the Tumen River area (the Tumen River Development Program was officially put forward by UNDP in 1991). In December 1995, China, Russia, North Korea, South Korea, and

34 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 150–151.
35 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 151.

Mongolia signed an agreement and memorandum on the development of this area.[36] The reasoning behind this agreement was that the construction of Route 2 across the Tumen River would boost related industries in this region, such as gas chemistry and LNG factories, and stimulate development and cooperation among the neighbouring regions. Another advantage of Route 2 was that it went along the proposed pipeline project in the Russian Far East and promised to resolve the energy shortage in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok.[37]

[3] Irkutsk–Ulaanbaatar–Beijing–Rizhao–South Korea (or Japan)

Route 3 proposed fields in the Irkutsk region as the gas source and linked them to Rizhao, a coast city in Shandong Province, via Ulaanbaatar, Inner Mongolia, and Beijing. There was also a possibility of extending it further to South Korea or Japan. The length until Rizhao was 3364 km, and the planed export capacity was 30 bcm/year. The major advantage of Route 3 was the short total length and a link to the existing pipeline networks of China. The Chinese team suggested that Route 3 be built after 2010. Before then, the gas demand of North China could be satisfied by the gas fields in the Ordos Basin through the pipeline between Shaanxi Province and Beijing. Too-early construction for Route 3 was not considered desirable because of the market situation and the lower profit of the project.[38]

[4] Yakutsk–Heihe–Daqing–Shenyang

According to the estimations, even if Route 1 and Route 3 were to be constructed, the continuously increasing demand for natural gas after 2010 would still not be met. Route 4 was to start from the gas fields in the Sakha Republic, cross Heihe (in Heilongjiang Province) and connect with Route 1 in Harbin. The construction was planned around 2010–2013, in order to supply natural gas for Northeast China, North Korea, and South Korea. This transnational pipeline was supposed to be built step by step in several stages. The transnational pipeline networks, together with the domestic pipelines in each country, were expected to form a grand pipeline network by 2020. Until then,

36 Blanchard, "The Heyday of Beijing's."
37 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 151.
38 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 151.

the major cities in Northeast Asia would have multi-source natural gas from the synthetic pipeline networks, which would help to guarantee the steady development of the region's energy system.[39]

[5] West Siberia–Shanshan–Shanghai

West Siberia is one of the most gas-rich regions in the world, and by the end of the twentieth century, it was already linked to Europe with gas pipelines. Route 5 was supposed to connect the gas fields of western Siberia with Shanshan in Xinjiang Province and then with China's existing pipeline network. The whole length of Route 5 only needed 1500 km to be constructed. The construction of this route was scheduled for around 2015, when the domestic supply from western China (Xinjiang) would no longer be able to satisfy the needs of eastern China. By connecting to China's interior, Route 5 could bring natural gas to the cities like Lanzhou, Xi'an, Xinyang, Nanjing, and Shanghai. There was also a possibility of exporting western Siberian gas to Japan either through LNG or through a submarine pipeline. Compared to the other routes above, Route 5 was supposed to be the latest one to be implemented.[40]

Conclusion

After the end of the Cold War and with the rise of globalisation, there was an opportunity for countries in Northeast Asia to collaborate, leveraging their respective strengths in markets, capital, technology, and natural resources. This cooperation could have enhanced both domestic and regional development and enabled competition with other major economic centres like North America and Europe. Around 2000, the TUGNA project aimed to foster regional cooperation by focusing on relatively clean energy, specifically the transport and utilisation of natural gas. The Asian part of Russia had abundant energy resources, while other countries in the region had significant consumption and import needs. The TUGNA archives offer us a chance to examine the potential of this cooperation—a potential that remained unrealised.

Around that time, political tensions in Northeast Asia had been eased to some extent, and economic reforms were being carried out, especially in

39 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 152.
40 UNDESA, *Proceedings of the UN Symposium*, 152.

China, South Korea, and Russia, where markets were steadily being opened to foreign investments and modern technologies. Teng Teng, a chemical scientist and the leader of the TUGNA project, along with the Chinese team, managed to outline five potential pipeline routes for transporting natural gas. The plan for the five routes was based on estimates of increasing population, economic growth, and the energy market. Route 1 was suggested as the most appropriate and urgent option. China's need were catered to in almost all the routes, primarily due to its vast consumption market and potential economic and population growth.

However, regional cooperation was complicated by diverse economic structures and national security needs in Northeast Asia, the high price of Russian gas, a lack of financial resources in Mongolia, and the persistent geopolitical risk on the Korean peninsula. Although most of the proposed routes were not implemented, by studying the TUGNA project today, we can grasp the original intentions of the actors involved as well as the circumstances and potentials of Northeast Asian cooperation in infrastructure in the changing world.

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2
Russia and the Asia-Pacific

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