

Rediscovering Russia in Northeast Asia

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Abstract

How do we define the region of Northeast Asia? Do we consider Russian Asian provinces as belonging to the regional framework? What kind of evaluations do we hold to on the history of Russian integration into the region? Our perspectives can be expected to vary depending on the angle we look from: European, Russian, American, Asian, etc. It can be also influenced by the historical narratives we chose to follow: whether we consider Russian expansion in the context of European colonialism, or whether we look at the Russian presence from the inter-borderlands level and consider it as a regional actor. Our understanding of the problem can be also challenged by inquiries into scholarly literature, which aims to analyze the colonization of Siberia and the Far East from different approaches and research objectives. The latter can open some new insights into the development of Northeast Asia in pre-modern times, and thus, expand our vision of the region's transformation in time and space.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the contemporary narratives related to the Russian colonization of Siberia and the Far East (18th-19th centuries) as well as issues associated with their incorporation into the historical framework of Northeast Asia regional transformation.

The basic logic of the contemporary spatial division (world regional framework) has been a product of the postwar mapping (the later half of the twentieth century), although it has deep roots in the European cartography of the 19th century.¹ Based on the criterion used, the world has been divided into macro regions and its major subdivisions, which become accepted by geographers,

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1. Martin W. Lewis, Karen Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, (University of California Press, 1997). 163-167.

anthropologists, and other scholars. But the recent tendency has been shifting towards “drawing new boundaries based on historical connections”² rather than simple landforms and recognizing the historical contingency in the creation of macro regions.

The academic interest in Northeast Asian studies, including the Russian Eastern provinces that emerged in the post-Soviet era, has increased in recent years. Among the first comprehensive works on this topic was *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Far East*³ - a collection of articles that gathered local perspectives on the dynamics of the regional formation of Northeast Asia and the role of Siberia and the Far East. The volume shows that (1) depending on the processes examined, Northeast Asia has a different geographic range (“lines on the map moves over time”), therefore the Northeast Asian region must be understood as “a cohesive unit of imaginary geography”⁴; (2) similarly, depending on the approach of the researcher, Siberia and the Far East can be treated as separate entities or as one closely connected region; Siberia can be seen as a buffer between Moscow and the Far East, the Russian Far East can be seen as a mediator between Siberia and the non-Russian Far East; or in a broader sense, both Siberia and the Far East can be referred as “Russian Asia.”⁵

Another significant work that combined the scholarly analysis of the Russian involvement in the formation of Northeast Asian region is the result of the joint project between Osaka University 21st Century COE and The Slavic Research Center 21st Century CEO (Hokkaido University) published under the title “The Birth of Northeast Asia: the Attempts Towards a Cross-border History.”⁶ The work highlights some important shifts in the study of the Northeast Pacific region among which the following should be noted: (1) a shifting focus towards cross-border and inter-regional perspectives as opposed to inter-state relations approach; (2) an integration of Russian history of the Far East into the regional history. These points have challenged mainstream Japanese views on the formation of modern Northeast Asia and the region’s emergence in the later half of the 19th century.

2. Ibid., 157.

3. *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*, ed. S.Kotkin, D. Wolf, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

4. Ibid., 324.

5. Ibid., 324.

6. *Kindai Tohoku Ajia no Tanjo: Kokyoushi eno Kokoromi*, ed. by Sakon Yukimura, (Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 2008).

At the same time, the last decade brought new significant perspectives in the field of Russian involvement in pre-modern Northeast Asian history, which include (1) rethinking Russo-Japanese encounters in the Kuril Islands region during the later half of the 18th century and the early 19th century;⁷ (2) rediscovering the history of the Russian fur trade-network in Siberia and the Northern Pacific in the 16th-19th centuries;⁸ (3) studies on the impact of Russian encroachment towards the Japanese Northern frontier on the intellectual and political discourse of Japan during the Tokugawa period;⁹ (4) research on Sino-Russian economic cooperation and territorial demarcation in the 17th-19th centuries.

No less important are the new approaches that have been developed in the study of the Russian empire and national building¹⁰: (1) the regional approach, as opposed to the minority-oriented analysis;¹¹ (2) imaginative geography (or mental maps) and its role in the construction of imperial (national) spatial identity;¹² (3) inquiry into the influence of imperial rule on the internal “others” (Russian “Orient”),¹³ etc.

The results of these approaches have opened new possibilities for research on the transition to modernity in Central and Eastern Asia, as well as for the North-Pacific Regions (Sea of Okhotsk and Bering Sea). Similarly, the history of Siberia and the Far East as a trans-regional history has yet to be fully articulated into the pre-modern history of Northeast Asia.

The purpose of this paper is to review some new historical findings in the

7. See Hirakawa Araki, *Kaikoku eno Michi*, (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2008), Watanabe Kyoji, *Kurofune Zenya: Roshia Ainu Nihon no Sangokushi*, (Tokyo: Yosensha, 2010).

8. See Morinaga Takako, *Roshia no Kakudai to Kegawa Koueki: 16-19 Seiki Shiberia Kitataiheiyo no Shounin Sekai*, (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2008).

9. See, Ronald Toby, “*Sakoku*” *toiu Gaiko*, (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2008), Satoru Fujita, *Kinsei Koki Seijishi to Kindai Kankei*, (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2005).

10. On the overall problem of new paradigms in Russian imperial history see I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, M. Mogilner, A. Semyonov, “*In Search of a New Imperial History*”, *Ab Imperio*, 1/2005, 33-56.

11. See Alexei Miller, “*Between Local and Inter-Imperial: Russian Imperial History in Search of Scope and Paradigm*,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 5-1 (Winter 2004), 7-26; Kimitaka Matsuzato, “*Soren Hokaigo Surabu Yurashia Sekai to Roshia Teikokuron no Ryusei*”, in *Teikokuron*, ed. N. Yamashita, (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2006).

12. See *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, ed. J. Burbank, M. von Hagen, A. Remnev, (Indiana University Press, 2007).

13. See *Russia's Orient, Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. D. Brower and E. Lazzerini, (Indiana University Press, 1997).

study of Russian imperial integration of Siberia and the Far East; by doing that we want to draw attention towards the local perspectives on the Russian encroachment in Northeast Asia and to speculate about Russia's place within the regional history. The angle, with which we chose to look at Northeast Asia starts in Siberia, shifts to the Far East and the activities of Russian-Japanese Company in the North-Pacific. Our primary purpose is to articulate the ways in which we can integrate the history of Russian penetration into Northeast Asia, not only as an external (Western colonization impact) but also as an internal (Eastern/regional) actor.

Siberia as a Region

It must be noted that our contemporary understanding of Siberia and the Far East originated from the Russian domestic discourse of the historical period we focus on (18th-19th centuries) and was reinforced through the national historical narratives of the later periods. As Alexei Miller points out, "Siberia was extremely heterogeneous in its nature and economy" and was never "a single administrative unit."¹⁴ The definition of the Far East as a separate unite outside of the Siberian scope was a product of an even later national discourse during the 19th century. Generally speaking, this paper refers to the regions of Siberia and the Far East (within its geographical boundaries recognized during the 18th-19th centuries) that include the lands beyond the Urals towards the Pacific Ocean, with an approximate "end" in the area of the Russian Pacific colonies (Alaska, Aleut Islands, Kuril islands), the borders with China and Japan, and a rough, undefined border in the southern steppe region.¹⁵

In other words, the regional boundaries (both external and internal) of Siberia have never been static. The "external borders" of the Russian empire were formulated simultaneously with the process of the "internal regional" boundaries (the mental mapping of those regions within Russia).¹⁶ In that sense, as Anatolyi

14. Alexei Miller points our attention to the fact that according to the 1822 "Decree on the Siberian Kirgiz" Siberia included part of present-day Kazakhstan. See A. Miller, "Between Local and Inter-Imperial: Russian Imperial History in Search of Scope and Paradigm," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 5-1 (Winter 2004), 13.

15. *Ibid.*, 13.

16. See Anatolyi Remnev, "Administrativnaia Politika Samoderzhaviia v Sibiri v XIX- nachale XX vekov," *Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni doktora istoricheskikh nauk*. (St. Petersburg, 1997); "Regionalnie Parametri Imperskoi "Geografii Vlasti"(Sibir i Dalnii Vostok)," *Ab Imperio*, 2000. No.3/4, 343-358; "Siberia and the Russian Far East in the Imperial

Remnev formulates, empire-building within Russia was similar to the process of the integration of the Eastern borders; and the processes of Russian imperial expansion saw the gradual incorporation of the frontier lands by the imperial core (mainly through colonization of peasants).¹⁷

The issue of what should be considered Russian core areas has different interpretations: (1) as the principality of Muscovy at the time when it began its eastward expansion; (2) as a broader territory with a primarily Great Russian population, whose resources supported the imperial expansion.¹⁸ Both interpretations are tied to the problem of the nature of Russian imperial expansion, particularly in the Asian realm.

Russian Eastward Expansion

Terayuki Hara notes that the way we deal with the issue of Russian involvement in East Asia differs dramatically depending on whether we chose to focus on inter-state relations or inter-regional (borderlands) relations. Depending on the perspective, the whole vision of pre-modern, modern, and the present



Geography of Power,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1799-1930*, ed. J. Burbank, M. von Hagen, A. Remnev, (Indiana University Press, 2007).

17. Anatolyi Remnev, “Regionalnie Parametri Imperskoi “Geografii Vlasti”(Sibir i Dalnii Vostok)”, 425-254.

18. Alexei Miller, “Between Local and Inter-Imperial: Russian Imperial History in Search of Scope and Paradigm”, 22.

region will differ.¹⁹ If we look at state-to-state relations in Northeast Asia, then in many cases Russian political and military activities and its policies towards China and Japan can be regarded as a Western impact in the region. But if we look at the integration of Primorye into the regional economy for example, then Russia should be regarded as the Eastern or being under the Western impact territory.²⁰

Map 1 Expansion of Imperial Russia²¹

But the problem lies even deeper. As James Gibson shows in his research,²² Russian imperial expansion has often been excluded from the Western colonial narrative. An example is the 31 volumes of *An Expanding World: The European Impact on World History, 1450-1800*²³, which does not refer to Russian expansion as a part of European experience. Among the reasons Gibson underlines the following: (1) Russia's geographical ambivalence of not being European geographically and therefore not being part of the European expansion; (2) Western common understanding of the "colony" as an overseas, "non-contiguous territory" (most of the Russian territories, except for Alaska, were contiguous); (3) the fact that "the Russian frontier was extended relatively gradually and placidly by means of peasant encroachment upon neighboring nomadic territories, assisted by small bands of Cossack mercenaries;"²⁴ (4) Russian expansion was generally accomplished without competition from other expansionist powers; "gained mostly from nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples of the tundra and steppe and sedentary or semi-sedentary hunters, fishers, and gatherers of the taiga."²⁵ Based on the above-mentioned reasons, Russia's unique colonial experience can be attributed to its

19. Terayuki Hara, *Kindai Tohoku Ajia Koueki Nettowa-ku no Seiritsu: Kannihonkaiei wo Chuushin*, Kindai Touhoku Ajia no Tanjo - Kogyoshi e no Tokoromi, ed. by Sakon Yukimura, (Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 2008), 25.

20. Ibid., 27.

21. *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*, ed. Stephan Kotkin and David Wolff, (M. R. Sharpe, New York, 1995), xxi.

22. James Gibson, "Russian Imperial Expansion in Context and By Contrast", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 28, 2 (2002), 181-202.

23. *An Expanding World: The European Impact on World History, 1450-1800*, ed. J.R. Russell-Wood (Andershot, 1995-8).

24. James Gibson, "Russian Imperial Expansion in Context and By Contrast", 182-183.

25. Ibid., 184.

continental character.²⁶

Dominic Lieven also highlights the tendency of Western imperial historians to focus on “maritime empires’ role in the creation of today’s global economy.”²⁷ According to Lieven, the reason for this oversight is based on the Marxist critique of empire, “which is rooted in economic analysis and goes to the heart of ideological disputes” of both the Cold War narratives and today’s debates on Third World poverty and dependence.²⁸ The other reasons, according to Lieven, are rooted in the fact that the areas colonized by the maritime empires are now independent states, while the biggest colony of the Russian empire - Siberia - still remains the part of the Russian Federation.

Although the history of Russian eastward expansion did not develop in the obvious New - Old World European categories, some attempts were made to use the categories and models derived from the Western European experience. It can be seen in the application of the concept of “Orient” towards the Russian Eastward expansion.

Michael Khodarkovsky examines the process of the construction of non-Russian, non-Christian identities in Russia.²⁹ He argues that when the Russian Cossacks began their conquests across Siberia they encountered numerous indigenous people that not only spoke different languages, but also adhered to a different culture and faith. Therefore, Russian officials developed a “clear-cut, bipolar” perspective on the Russian (Christian) and non-Christian world in which “the non-Christian nomads represented the savage, the brutish, the unreliable, and the unruly, while Russia stood for civilization, morality, and a stately order.”³⁰ The basis for the relationships with the indigenous people became the peace treaty, which in words of Khodarkovsky represented for Moscow “not a mutual treaty but an allegiance sworn by a non-Christian people to their Muscovite sovereign.”³¹ At the same time, economic submission was enforced through the system of yasak - a tax imposed by the state on the non-Christian peoples, which

26. James Gibson, *Russian Imperial Expansion in Context and By Contrast*, 187.

27. Dominic Lieven, *Empire on Europe’s Periphery: Russian and Western Comparisons*, Imperial Rule, ed. A. Miller, A. Rieber, (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), 141.

28. *Ibid.*, 141.

29. Michael Khodarkovsky, *Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects: Constructing Non-Christian identities in Early Modern Russia*, *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*. ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J, Lazzerini (Indiana University Press. 1997), 9-26.

30. *Ibid.*, 10.

31. *Ibid.*, 13.

was a “manifestation of the natives' subject status vis-à-vis the Russian suzerain.”³² Although as Michael Khodarkovsky argues, “the non-Christian peoples of Siberia were concerned less with their political status and more with their practical relations with Russians...What was tribute to the Russian authorities was a trade transaction to the natives.”³³ (In that sense, as B. Walker suggests, the tribute system of yasak which Russia maintained in Siberia and North Pacific shared structural similarities both with the Qing and Japanese trade systems. Russian government, like Qing, encouraged local native headmen, rather than Russian officials, to collect yasak. But unlike the Qing tribute system, “yasak system rendered not just the Russian settlers in Siberia and the North Pacific but also the native peoples dependent on the exchange of the pelts.”³⁴ The later allows B. Walker to compare the relationship between the Russians and the indigenous people of Siberia and the North Pacific with the one between the Matsumae family and Ezo.)

Although the problem of the applicability of the Western deductive concepts towards the Russian empirical framework remains target for the debate,³⁵ Russian views of its own Orient (primarily Siberia and the Far East) have been consistently analyzed in a number of works, amongst which Mark Bassin's research should be noted.³⁶

The research on the contrasting images of Siberia in Russia has a long history since the middle of the 19th century, but what Bassin tries to do is to analyze the perceptions of Siberia at the level of their construction and therefore fit them “into a larger ideological complex that produced them.”³⁷ Bassin shares the understanding that the territorial contiguity with a metropolis (the core) together with a large and long-established Russian population “made it possible to see the territories beyond the Urals as a continuation or extension of the zone of

32. Ibid., 15.

33. Ibid., 16.

34. Brett Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese expansion, 1590-1800*, (University of California Press, 2006), 162.

35. See Maria Todorova, “Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nahaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid”, *Kritika* 1,4 (2000).

36. Mark Bassin, “Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of the Geographical Space”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No 1 (Spring, 1991), 1-17. “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the early Nineteenth Century”, *American Historical Review* (June 1991), 763-794. *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

37. Mark Bassin, “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century”, 766.

Russian culture and society.”³⁸ In that sense, the Siberian frontier has parallels with the American perceptions of the Wild West, not with European colonial experiences.³⁹ Bassin points out that the contrasting images of the Russian Eastern region in the 19th century were the reflection of the “growing political and cultural fragmentation of European Russian society.”⁴⁰ The original contrast between Siberia and Russia (Siberia as desolate, uncivilized) was shifted towards reflections on the meaning of Russian expansion beyond the Urals as an “inspirational material” for the emerging national movements in Russia. An image of Siberia, seen in a positive light and as a “part of Russia’s national saga,” was popularized through the first half of the 19th century.⁴¹ Therefore, the presence of Siberia became a significant issue for the movements of the Decembrists, Petrashevtsy and Slavophiles, and for other general national movements. Siberia became a “sort of imperative”, “a means of developing and enhancing Russia as a whole.”⁴²

The problem of “national” consciousness and its connection towards the “territoriality” represents another crucial aspect for understanding Russian eastward expansion and colonization.

Many scholars agree upon that fact that Siberia originally was geographically contiguous with the Russian “core”, therefore territorially speaking from its beginning it was very difficult to distinguish between the colonizer and the colonized. The beginning of the Russian empire itself started with the so-called gathering of Russian lands under the dominion of the Grand Duke of Moscow and “the line between the “gathering” of lands that had once belonged together and were then dispersed and the “imperial expansion”⁴³ was rather thin. Although with the conquest of Kakhanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, Russia moved beyond “gathering” and towards expansion. After the Volga region was secured, it became possible for the Cossack bands, hired by the merchants and interested in conquering Siberia for its supply of the fur, to cross Siberia all the way to the Pacific. At about the same time (1654) the Ukraine was incorporated, first as a

38. Ibid., 766.

39. Ibid., 766.

40. Ibid., 792.

41. Ibid., 781.

42. Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, 8.

43. Marc Raeff, “*Patterns of Russian imperial policy towards the nationalities*”, Soviet Nationality problems, ed. Edward Allworth, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1971), 25.

protectorate and then as a rapidly integrated entity in the Czardom of Muscovy. That was followed by a more limited advance into the Baltic provinces during the reign of Peter the Great and a very sizable extension of the empire's territory occurred in the late 18th and early 19th centuries with the conquest of the shores of the Black Sea and the Crimea, the partitions of Poland, the incorporation of Finland, and the beginning of a penetration into the Caucasus.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, although the Russian empire obtained permanent outposts on the Pacific Ocean earlier than it did on the Baltic or the Black seas,⁴⁵ the Eastern territories only value to the Russian empire stemmed from their worth within the tribute system (*yasak*).⁴⁶ According to Willard Sunderland, the shift in the understanding of “territoriality” and imperial “space” happened at the beginning of the 18th century in Russia (during the reign of Peter the Great and his successors).⁴⁷ The change resulted from new thinking about geography and territorial space which was now regarded as (1) a “resource to be studied, managed, and exploited”; (2) “a terrain to be shaped and molded as the physical expression of state power”; (3) “a symbol of national pride.”⁴⁸ The latter resulted in the state's drive to acquire new maps, the launching geodesic surveys and the establishment of printing houses to produce civilian maps. Detailed maps of the Empire were first produced in 1734 by Ivan Kurilov, then by the Academy of Sciences in 1745. With this new geographic imagination, the Russian empire could be represented in a “graphic picture.”⁴⁹ The state organized expeditions with the intent to discover, map, and record uncharted areas and coastline, which was new for Russia. Sunderland shows that “the new geography of the Petrine era was highly nationally conscious, and geographer-cartographers like Kirilov and Tatischev routinely noted that their efforts were designed to correct the misinformation provided about Russia in “foreign” (i.e., European) maps and to produce a domestic geographical science that would be a truly Russian

44. *Ibid.*, 26.

45. *Ibid.*, 20.

46. The fur as a commodity of exchange and major export accounted for a third of state treasure receipts in 1660. The “soft gold” included the pelts of squirrels, otters, martens, beavers, ermine, mink, arctic foxes, and sables. See John Stephan, *The Russian FarEast*, (California: Stanford University Press, 20).

47. Willard Sunderland, “*Imperial Space: Territorial Thought and Practice in the Eighteenth Century*”, in J, Burmark, M. von Hagen, A. Remnev, eds, *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power: 1700-1930*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

48. *Ibid.*, 36.

49. *Ibid.*, 35.

endeavor.”⁵⁰ Geographical practice became a part of the states craft, while the mapping became a part of the basis for identifying the Russian nation (together with the religion, language, morals, customs and history).

The new imperial thinking of the 18th century included the shared understanding that (1) the Russian empire was a European country but extended into Asia; (2) the empire consisted of a Russian historical core which was surrounded by a non-Russian periphery;⁵¹ (3) the state should be defined by the borders (a general map of the empire published in 1783 not only depicted the current boundaries but also was surrounded “by a text describing all the border changes that had occurred”⁵²); (4) the borders must be colonize as there was a territory-population imbalance (which led to the encouragement of rural people to colonize “open” areas in the borderlands.”⁵³) Therefore a direct link was drawn between territorial expansion and national achievement.⁵⁴

It should be noted that the concept of “nation” in 18th century Russia referred to the “subjects” of empire or Russian empire in general. It was yet to become connected with the ethnicity principle or Russinness, which was a product of early 19th century intellectual thinking under the influence of the French Revolution.

Sunderland points out that the complexities of the relationship between Russian nationality and state territory were not resolved during the 18th century (nor were they fully resolved during the later period). The above situation represents a broader problem of the correlation between the imperial and national building in Russia.

Imperial and National Building in Russia

With a crisis of nation-state studies, there is a further criticism found towards the mainstream development of humanities and social sciences which evolved within the framework of the national paradigm.⁵⁵ The concept of the modernity itself evolved within the national paradigm, and “this explains why

50. Ibid., 42.

51. Ibid., 46.

52. Ibid., 53.

53. Ibid., 50.

54. Ibid., 54.

55. I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, M. Mogilner, A. Semyonov, *In Search of a New Imperial History*, 41.

empire never became one of the basic concepts of modernity, on a par with state, society, or even nation.”⁵⁶

When we deal with the case of the Russian empire, one must be careful with generalizations about the course of nation-building in Russia. Russian imperial-building can not be simplified to a pre-national process; similarly, the nation-building in Russia can not be understood in strictly anti-imperial dynamics.

The post-Soviet historiographies of the Russian empire undertook an important task – the creation of separate national histories of the peoples incorporated in the empire⁵⁷, and the regional histories, with a goal to strengthen local patriotism⁵⁸, but it also showed that the history of a multinational empire can not be presented as a simple sum of national experiences of the incorporated peoples, as it reduces “the complex of configurations of national, confessional, and state relations to binary oppositions between the “Russifying center” and the national borderlands.”⁵⁹

Among the gaps remaining in the history of Romanov’s Russia are the following: (1) a theory of how archaic institutions manage to preserve their specific character while being transformed under the impact of modernization processes and the intrusion of normative modernity from the West; (2) clarification on the nature and character of the nation-building processes in multinational contexts, “taking into account the various horizontal and vertical ties penetrating imperial society.”⁶⁰ Therefore, the problem of defining Russian imperial space and finding an adequate integrated imperial perspective still remains in the study of the Russian empire. Borrowing the words of J. H. Hexter, the contemporary discourses in the Russian imperial studies represent the “macro-rhetoric of historical storytelling” and combine the number of “rhetorical strategies deployed by historians, including the selection of facts embraced within the narrative.”⁶¹

Still, despite the absence of a broad paradigm explaining the correlation of Russian imperial and national building, we cannot deny the value of the emerging new perspectives within the imperial and nation-building studies, particularly in

56. *Ibid.*, 42

57. *Ibid.*, 47.

58. Alexei Miller, “*Between Local and Inter-imperial*”, 13.

59. I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, M. Mogilner, A. Semyonov, “*In Search of a New Imperial History*”, 47.

60. *Ibid.*, 49.

61. J. H. Hexter, *The History Primer*, (New York, 1971).

the borderland regions, which “often had their own geopolitical logic.”⁶²

As it has been argued above, despite the remaining imbalance and contradictions in the perceptions of Siberia during the 18th - 19th centuries, the shift within the geographical (territorial and spatial) consciousness and the intellectual sentiment over the Russian expansion and its meaning had a profound impact for the Russian imperial vision. The later must be taken into account in order to comprehend the Russian presence in the region of Northeast Asia.

Russian Encounter with China and Japan

By the end of the 16th century, the Moscow authorities had sent representatives to Siberian towns to find out “where the Chinese state is, how rich it is and whether anything may be obtained from it.”⁶³ But reliable information was only obtained 60 years later when the Cossacks reached the Mongolian border and came into contact with the vassal states of China. Russians imposed *yasak* on the Tungusik-Mongolian peoples who inhabited the Amur River basin (Dauri, Ducher, etc) and refused to pay *yasak* due the fact that they were already paying tribute to the Chinese dynasty. The latter led to confrontations between Russians, the local peoples and the Qing troops in the area of the Russian port of Albazin on the upper Amur River. The persistent conflicts in the border regions between the two empires were resolved by negotiations in the town of Nerchinsk and the conclusion of the Treaty in 1689. Despite the continued border disputes, trade between China and Russia became permanent after the 1650's.⁶⁴ In the first half of the 18th century, after the treaty of Kyakhta (1728), Russian-Chinese trade continued to expand in the town of Kyakhta. At the same time, in the first half of the 19th century, a new player appeared in the Kyakhta market - the Russian-American Company - a government sponsored charter-company that governed the area of the Russian North-Pacific colonies.

Russian colonization of the Northern Pacific coincided with less than expected expansion in the area south-east of the Amur River basin due to territorial sacrifices for the sake of “fostering commercial relations with China.”⁶⁵

62. Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals*, (Pimlico, 2003), 264.

63. Mikhail Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations between Russia and China: From Modernization to Maoism*, (Transaction Publishers, 2007) 2.

64. *Ibid.*, 12.

65. Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in*

Russia re-directed its attention towards the north-east, and stretched its focus on the North Pacific (the Okhotsk seaboard, Kamchatka, Chukotka, the Kurile Islands and eventually North America) which was explored and colonized by the Russian merchants and hunters through the course of the 18th century. The colonization of the North Pacific brought new problems relating to the regional food supply and required Russia to seek new trade relationships with Japan as a possible solution to the long-term provisional problem.

Starting from the second half of the 18th century Russian merchants were frequent at the Kurile Islands spreading the yasak system which led to confrontations with Ainu.⁶⁶ At the same time, in 1792 the first Russian mission to Japan attempted to establish trade relations with Tokugawa Japan. Despite Japan's isolationist policy, which limited its channels of contact with the outside world, the situation in the northern Japanese frontier got attention from the Japanese intellectuals. Through these students of Western studies, the knowledge of Russia's vast conquest was introduced to Japan.⁶⁷ The second Russian mission to Japan (1803-1805), which also failed, stirred up an escalation of the conflict in the Kurile Islands (1806-1807) and Russia was perceived as a threat to the Japanese northern frontier. The hostilities were resolved through the negotiation of the release of the Russian navigator V. Golovnin, who was captured by the Japanese officials in Ezo (1811) while conducting his survey in the Southern Kurile Islands. It has been shown in various studies that both Russia and Japan were eager to fix the border in the area of the Kurile Islands, although such negotiations did not take place.⁶⁸ Delineation of the Russo-Japanese frontier took place over an extended period of time.⁶⁹

During the two centuries onward (17th-18th), the Russian empire spread its influence on the lands stretching from the Urals to the Pacific ocean, where it literally got face to face with the Asian empires: first with China around the middle of the 17th century and with Japan in the second half of the 18th century.

the Russian Far East, 1840-1865, (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113.

66. Brett Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590-1800*, 163.

67. See Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan*, (Harvard University Press, 1991).

68. See Yoshimitsu Kohriyama, *Bakumatsu no Nichiro Kankei*, (Tokyo: Kokushokankokai, 1980).

69. In 1855, Sakhalin was made a joint possession of Russia and Japan but not partitioned; in 1875, in exchange for recognition of Japanese sovereignty over the Kuriles, Russian sovereignty was recognized over Sakhalin.

Those lands did not have significant importance for the major political and economic hierarchy of early modern Northeast Asia, but the confrontation with Russia over control in the peripheral regions (the Amur River with China and the area of the Kuril Islands with Japan) drew attention to the region.

The emerging awareness of the importance of geographical space and the encounters with the “Other” in the borderland regions contributed to an acceleration of the scientific explorations of the frontiers and the attempts to map the Russian border.

Yamada-Komeie shows that the Russian Bering's expeditions of the first half of the 18th century “led to the rapid progress in geographical knowledge of the northern coast of Siberia, Kamchatka and Chukot Peninsula, and the geographical shape of the Kurils,”⁷⁰ (the knowledge of Sakhalin and Japan remained rather vague). The next important phase of Russian mapping of its Far East territories began in the beginning of the 19th century when Krusenshtern's expedition investigated the northern part of Sakhalin, especially the coastal area, and surveyed the coast of Ezo⁷¹ (See Map 2).

At the same time, the first expedition was sent by Tokugawa shogunate in 1785-1786 to explore Ezo, Sakhalin and the Kurils.⁷² The intensification of the Russian threat from the North in the beginning of the 19th century led to the expedition of Mamiya Rinzo included Sakhalin and the Amur River region. In this way, through encounters with the “Other” in the frontier regions and the exploration and mapping of the borderlands, Russia and Japan became aware of each other.

Research on the impact of the Russian encounters with Ainu on Japanese domestic discourse can be found in the works of Satoru Fujita and Ronald Toby.⁷³ Their analysis shows that Russian expansion towards the Japanese northern frontier forced the Japanese government to reflect on its traditions in dealing with foreigners, which were restricted due to the Christians threat in the 17th century. The new threat from the Northern area forced Japan into reassessing its strategy towards the outer world as ‘sakoku’ or the restriction of any relationships

70. Shinobu Yamada-Komeie, “*Mapping the Russian Far East: Cartography and the Representation of Sakhalin, the Kurils, and Japan in the 18th century*”, Hosei Daigaku Bungakubu, Vol. 54, 2006, 36.

71. *Ibid.*, 36.

72. Shinobu Yamada-Komeie, “*Mapping the Russian Far East: Cartography and the Representation of Sakhalin, the Kurils, and Japan in the 18th century*”, 64.

73. Ronald Toby, “*Sakoku*” *toiu Gaiko*, (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2008), Satoru Fujita, *Kinsei Kouki Seijishi to Kindai Kankei*, (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2005).

with Europeans apart from the Dutch. At the same time, it made it necessary to draw a “line” in the Northern area of Ezo against the possible invasion of Russians. It resulted in the policies towards the Ainu, with an aim towards integrating them into Japanese society, and the withdrawal of the control over Ezo from the Matsumae clan directly to Bakufu. The intellectual debates in Tokugawa Japan of the late 18th-first half of the 19th centuries on whether or not Ezo should be considered a part of Japan, and how the Ainu should be treated, can be found in the works of Nobuhiro Katsurajima.⁷⁴

Map 4 Northeast Asia on the Kruzenshtern’s World map (published in 1813)⁷⁵

The integration of the Pacific borderlands into Russian unified imperial space was also accompanied by both the public discovery of the region and by the transitions in the administrative structure of region’s imperial incorporation. In case of Siberia and the Far East, as Anatolyi Remnev argues it was “the transition from military-administrative oversight of the traditional institutions of power to their replacement with a Russian bureaucratic system of state institutions.”⁷⁶ In the Western Siberia the process of imperial incorporation went much faster due to its geographical proximity to the Russian core; Eastern Siberia was left much behind (the separation of the Far East from Eastern Siberia into a separate administrative unit was confirmed only in 1884 by the creation of the Priamur Governor-Generalship).

This integration of East Asian territories into the Russian imperial bureaucratic system and the shift of its status from that of a colony towards a position on the imperial periphery must be viewed with a close eye on the Russian-American Company.

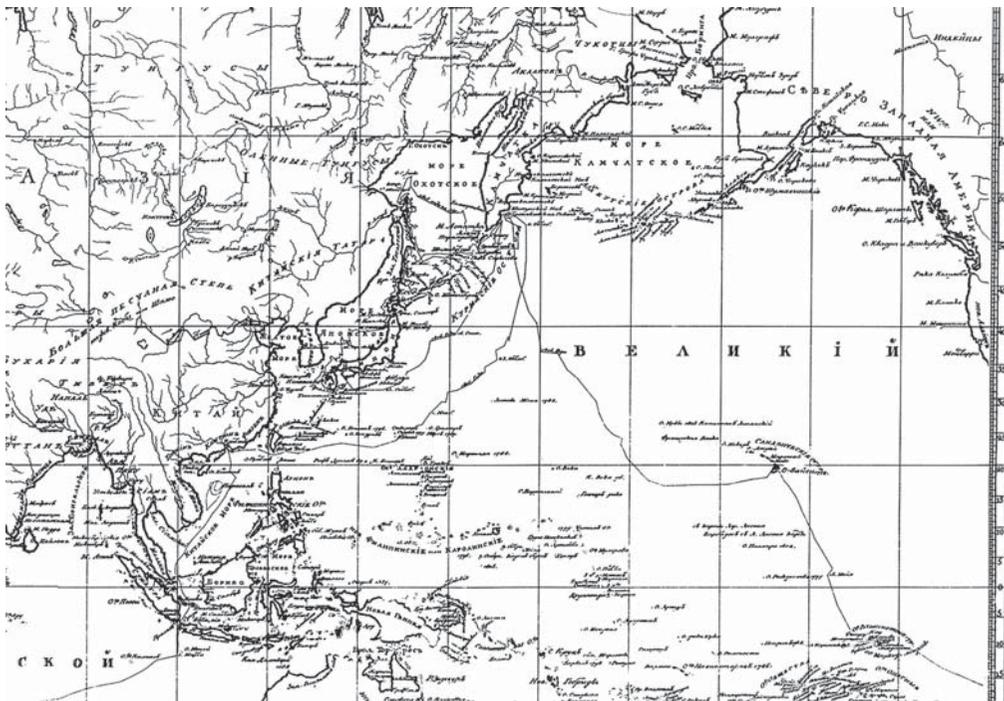
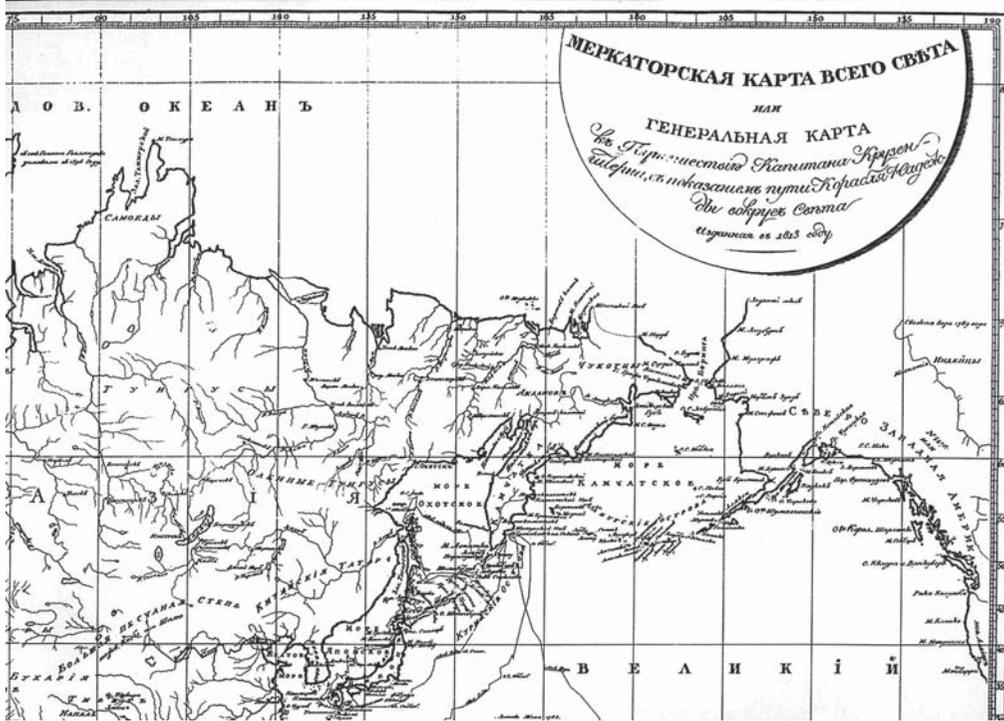
The history of the Russian-American Company is closely linked to the history of Alaska, and though it has gotten a lot of interest from researchers of Russo-American relations, it seems of less importance for researchers of Northeast Asia. Among the reasons here, it should be said that it is due to the fact that Alaska has never been considered a part of Northeast Asia, although here we need to question this perception of the region which is not a geographical given but a

74. Nobuhiro Katsurajima, *Jita Ninshiki no Shisoshi: Nihon Nashonarizumu no Seisei to Higashiajia*, (Tokyo: Yushisha, 2008).

75. Kyushu University Museum Digital Archial, <http://record.museum.kyushu-u.ac.jp/>

76. Anatolyi Remnev, “*Siberia and the Russian Far East in the Imperial Geography of Power*”, 431.

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historical creation.⁷⁷ As a historical construct of the first half of the 19th century the boundaries of the Northeast Asian region must be viewed including Russian American frontier (Alaska) due to the sphere of interests of the Russian-American Company (which influenced the imperial policy of Russia towards Japan and China). Throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries, Russian settlements in North Pacific, and to a lesser extent along the continental coast of the Sea of Okhotsk, became the main centers of the fur trade network and hence of Russian activity overall in the Pacific coastline region. As Ilya Vinkovetsky argues, in the imperial visions of Alexander the first, Russian America was seen as a piece within a broader puzzle, in which China and Japan were to be the principle actors.⁷⁸ RAC leader Nikolai Rezanov's primary assignment on Russia's first round-the-world voyage was "to be the Russian emperor's emissary to Japan, with the aim of establishing trade; Ivan Kruzenshtern's was to negotiate the terms for the opening of the port of Canton to Russian's ships."⁷⁹

Russian-American Company and the Integration of the Far East

The Russian-American Company (RAC) was Russia's first joint-stock charter company from 1799 until its transfer to the United States in the 1867. According to its charter it was established to promote Russian interests in the lands of Northeast America, the Aleut and Kurile Islands, and in the whole Pacific Northeast area by right of discovery.⁸⁰ In the Soviet historical tradition, the position of Semen Okun had been so dominant that the Tsar government sought to use a strong monopoly company to strengthen the position of the empire in region, to prevent the peril of western powers, or in other words, it was a direct call for Russian competence in Northeast Asia. Such scholars as Nikolai Bolkhovitinov point to an exaggerated importance placed on the Tsarist expansionist program in the Pacific region, confronting the idea that at the time of the Company's creation (1799) the Russian government had a deliberate plan for the North Pacific, due to the reason that there is no documented proof of any

77. David Wolff, "Regionalism, Russia, and Northeast Asia: An Agenda", in *Rediscovering Russia in Asia*, 323.

78. Ilya Vinkovetsky, "The Russian-American Company as a Colonial Contractor for the Russian Empire", *Imperial Rule*, ed. A. Miller, A. Rieber, (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), 168.

79. *Ibid.*, 168.

80. *Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia Kompaniia i Izuchenie Tihookeanskogo Severa: 1815-1841*, ed. N. Bolkhovitinov, A. Grinev, Vol.4, (Moscow, 2005).

such plan. Still, Andrei Grinev draws attention to the fact that the projects for Russian colonial expansion “directing at transforming the northern part of the Pacific basin into a “Russian sea” and increasing the possessions of the empire in the New World had been repeatedly promoted by government and private individuals”⁸¹ in the beginning of the 19th century. These contrasting positions in the scholarly literature demonstrate, according to Grinev, “the absence of unity in Russian and foreign historiography in relation to the key question of Russian expansion in the New World.”⁸²

Ilya Vinkovetsky stresses that the Company had “a sizable infrastructure beyond America,”⁸³ which included the Main Office in St. Petersburg and a whole system of branches throughout of the country. Despite its small size, RAC’s office in Kyakhta represented a significant part of the trade network in the Pacific, until the forced opening of China’s sea ports in the 1840s; it was the only place where RAC traded directly to the Chinese, exchanging fur for tea, nankeen, and sugar.⁸⁴ By the 1850’s, the RAC accounted for 30 per cent of all the sea-borne Chinese tea imported into Russia.⁸⁵ By that time the RAC had become primarily a tea importer (from China) and “made more money from marking up the price of merchandise it imported and sold to the Russians, Creoles, and Natives in Russian America...than it did from the sales of furs.”⁸⁶

The closest connection with the Kyakhta office was maintained by the branch in Irkutsk, which in general coordinated the RAC’s business network in the eastern part of the country and was “in charge of supplying Russian America via the Siberian route, and receiving and sorting furs that arrived from America via Okhotsk and Iakutsk.”⁸⁷ The branch in Moscow was primarily conducting the sales of the Company’s Chinese goods on the domestic market. Other branches were engaged in the maintenance of the communication and transportation networks.⁸⁸

81. Andrei Grinev, “*The Plans for Russian Expansion in the New World and the North Pacific in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*,” *European Journal of American Studies*, Special issue on the North-West Pacific in the 18th and 19th centuries, (2010), 2.

82. *Ibid.*, 5.

83. Ilya Vinkovetsky, “*The Russian-American Company as a Colonial Contractor for the Russian Empire*”, 162.

84. *Ibid.*, 162.

85. *Ibid.*, 172.

86. *Ibid.*, 172.

87. *Ibid.*, 162.

88. *Ibid.*, 163.

The foundation of RAC created a new administrative body interested in regional trade simply for its own survival - the problem of maintaining a food supply was inherent in the organization of the Company. Therefore, the strongest advocates for the further development of trade with China and Japan came from the Siberian officials and the high ranks of the RAC. The government tried to make some organizational changes in the administrative body of Kamchatka, which was thought to be the center of control over the RAC activities and the possible center for the trade with China, Japan and America. Nevertheless, the reforms of 1812 only worsened administrative situation in Kamchatka, and the ongoing protection of the region was left to the forces of RAC.

The comparison of the colonization of Siberia and the Northern Pacific brings some new perspectives to the history of Alaska's concession. As Nikolai Bolkhovitinov expresses it, the continental colonization of Siberia and the maritime colonization of the North Pacific were crucial for its destiny - Siberia became a part of Russia, and Alaska was sold to the United States in 1867.⁸⁹ Bolkhovitinov gives a few major differences. First, the proportion of local and Russian populations in each region. By the 18th century Siberia was populated with thousands of people, including local and Russian, and the population was steadily growing and assimilating into Russia through mutual encounters. As to the American colony, the population of indigenous people remained unfamiliar for the RAC officials. And the percentage of Russians there did not increase but remained the same through the whole history of Russian Alaska until it was sold to the United States (around 450-800 people). Second, though the colonization of Siberia resulted in the establishment of towns in all the areas of Russian expansion during the 16th and 17th centuries, the colonizers of North Pacific and the officials of RAC were all concentrated in only two places - Novo-Arkhangelsk and Kodiak.⁹⁰

With the sale of Alaska, according to A. Grinev, Russian expansion became "entirely confined to the Asian continent."⁹¹ It drew a new borderline of the Russian presence in the region, making Kamchatka a Northern Asian frontier and excluding Alaska from its integration into the Russian Far East. At the same time, it redirected Russian focus in Northeast Asia into the Amur River region

89. Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, "*Kontinentalnaia Kolonizatsiia Sibiri i Morskaiia Kolonizatsiia Alaski: Shodstvo i Razlichie*," *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 109-125.

90. *Ibid.*, 118.

91. Andrei Grinev, "*The Plans for Russian Expansion in the New World and the North Pacific in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*", 2.

and contributed to the reconstruction of Russian regional involvement. In 1860, a new Russian port on the Pacific was founded – Vladivostok, which was expected to play a key-role for the Russian presence in the Pacific region.

In the words of John Stephan, “Russia absorbed the Priamur and Primorye by a combination of encroachment, diplomacy, and luck.”⁹² Already in the 1840s, the new General-Governor of Eastern Siberia N.N. Muravyov offered a program for developing the eastern imperial frontiers. He believed that due to the low military and economic resources in the Far East, the main focus there should be on strategic defense, as without the strong Far East, then Siberia as well will not be secure. He wrote that “the overpopulated neighbor China is weak...It could become easily a threat for us under the leadership of English and French and then Siberia will stop being Russian, and Siberia for us is not only gold, the Siberian spaces are important for us as it could be enough for the lack of agricultural spaces in European Russia for the whole century; the loss of those lands could not be complemented by any victories or the acquisition in Europe, and to save Siberia we have to save and prove our Kamchatka and Sakhalin and the navigation on Amur and to have the strong influence on China.”⁹³

As Remnev shows in his research, though the policy of General-Governor Muravyov in the Far East in the middle of the 19th century was generally based on the type of Russian colonization strategy the Russian empire used before (securing the territories with the Russian settlers, the creation of military-administrative forts, etc.) but the motives behind the new policy based on the already obvious national sentiment. Muravyov's message to the new Russian settlers in the Amur region was: “Go with God. You are free now. Develop the land, make it a Russian land.”⁹⁴ In other words, the development of Siberia and the Far East became not only an imperial project, but a national one as well. Territorial and cultural integration of the Russian Eastern periphery must be seen within the framework of modern empire/nation/state building. The process of “making” the Far East Russian, the modern mapping of the region by the particular state, localized it, in the words of Stephan, at the “interstices of conventionally defined regions”, and “it awkwardly straddles the parts of the Russian Republic,

92. John Stephan, *The Far East: A History*, 47.

93. Quoted from Anatolyi Remnev, “*Kamchatka v Planah Muravyogo-Amurskogo*”, *Istoricheskii ezhegodnik 1999* (Omsk, 2000). 28-43.

94. Quoted from A. Remnev, “*Vdvinut' Rossii v Sibir': Imperiia i Russkaia Klonizatsiia Voroi Poovini XIX-nachala XX veka*”, *Novaia Imperskaia Istoriiia Postsovetskogo Prostranstva*, ed. I. Gerasimov, (New Imperial History 2004), 230.

Northeast Asia, and the North Pacific...At once within and distinct from Siberia, at once connected with and separate from China, Japan, and Korea, the Far East is a matrix of overlapping borderlands.”⁹⁵ The early modern history of the Far East being colonized by Russia became the basis for its ambiguous location within the modern framework of Northeast Asia.

Conclusion

As we argued in this paper, the historiography of the Russian eastward expansion towards the Pacific (the continental colonization of Siberia and the Far East) and the experience of Russian maritime colonization (Russian-American Company) has inherited the ambiguities of its narratives: (1) the debate over whether to consider Russian expansion in the context of European colonialism; if yes, then how to integrate the specifics of Russian colonialism; (2) the problem of whether to regard the Russian impact on Northeast Asia as “Western” or “Eastern” and whether to consider Eastern Russian provinces a part of Northeast Asia; and if yes, then from what time period can one argue they became a part of the region.

The above situation is generally connected with the situation in studies of the Russian empire, which are still in search of a comprehensive paradigm for an explanation of the multidimensional processes of imperial and national building. Nevertheless, as we showed in this paper, the focus on some recent historiography in Russian imperial studies can give us direction in pursuit of filling the gaps in. By integrating the new historical findings on the Russian eastward expansion into the studies of pre-modern Northeast Asia we can explore the following routes, prospective for both academic and public discovery and speculation.

(1) Go beyond the contemporary ambiguities of the definition of Northeast Asia, especially with the relation to the ambivalent position of the Russian Eastern provinces, which despite its close geographical and historical connection to the region, remain weakly integrated, not only in the present-day regional economic and political framework, but also into the academic tradition and the studies on pre-modern Northeast history.

(2) Rethink the region as a “historical creation” whose boundaries (both external and internal) are not static. The latter makes it possible to draw a picture of Northeast Asia in the context of the first half of the 19th century that

95. John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, 1.

includes the territories of Siberia and Alaska.

(3) Expand our understanding of the modern spatial articulation or the formation of mental geography and the idea of “territoriality” in Northeast Asia, which is directly connected to the development of cross-border encounters and the clashes of imperial visions in the frontier regions in the pre-modern time (Kuril Islands and Sakhalin as Russo-Japanese frontier, Amur River region as Sino-Russian borderland).

The latter makes it possible to articulate the importance of the frontier regions in the modern empire/nation-state building. Frontiers represented the terrain on which the encounters with the “Other” occurred and the physical ground where one’s own vision of boundaries was formulated. As we have seen in the examples of Russia and Japan, social discovery of the frontiers through the means of scientific exploration, mapping (public printings), colonization and the domestic intellectual debate on the meaning of the frontier and its place within the country led to the development of the “national” discourses in both countries and therefore must be considered a basis for the further shifts towards modern state-building. For that reason, we can speculate about a transition to modernity in Northeast Asia through the analysis of spatial articulation of the frontiers and the change in its perception from the pre-modern (imperial vision) towards being seen as “national” boundaries. The above historical agenda constitutes the main interest for our research field, and the inquiry into the history of Russo-Japanese encounters in the frontier regions in the late 18th- first half of the 19th centuries is the primary focus of our present work.

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