A SEPARATION: WATERWAYS, LOGISTICS, AND THE MAKING OF THE USSR'S NORTHEAST ASIAN BORDERLANDS, 1920S-1940S

By

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the socioeconomic transformation of the middle and lower Amur River Basin in the first half of the 20th century. Through the lenses of social, spatial, and biographical history, this project addresses the following questions: how the Amur River Basin, once a coherent geographic unit, was socioeconomically carved up along national lines; and how the left bank of the middle Amur River became an inward-looking Soviet borderland that resembled many other Soviet heartlands. I discuss this process, by which the Amur River became a hardened, highly politicized international border, through reconstructing biographies of five middle Amur River-centered, interconnected social and economic institutions: an inland shipping company, a cohort of hydrological scientists and engineers, a trans-border brewery, the local establishment of the Soviet customs service, and the state agency for social welfare. This dissertation reveals that the history of everyday socioeconomic institutions was central to understanding the Soviet state and local communities' participation in distinctively transforming the built environment, the mode of logistics, supply chains, and consequently the human-environment relationship of the left bank in the name of realizing local and All-Union economic self-sufficiency. Underlying the state-led pursuit of socioeconomic self-sufficiency is the Soviet Union's fascination with legibility in statecraft and socioeconomic reorientation, substantiating the socialist regime's very modern nature.

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother:
Shang Yulin (1936-2019)

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INTRODUCTION

WALDO TOBLER IN THE AMUR

Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things.
--Tobler's First Law of Geography

Still, the two cities remain worlds apart in many respects.
-- Michael Schuman, "Thaw in China-Russia Relations Hasn't Trickled Down," *The New York Times,* Dec. 15, 2015.

History takes place. The placement, movement, and connection of natural resources, humans and various other forms of life, artifacts, and ideas all involve some geospatial features: as small as a point that may be hardly visible on a large-scale map, and as large as the entire surface of the Earth. In modeling and analyzing spatial correlation, i.e., how geospatial relationality can affect the connectedness of everything, geographers have contributed to social sciences Tobler's First Law (TFL): nearby things are more similar than distant things.[1] Evidence that substantiates Tobler's theory is ample. For example, people can rely on the weather forecast of the neighboring town to extrapolate their own, while the weather forecast of a town fifty miles away is much less reliable for the same extrapolative purpose. Another classic example is that terrain elevations and vegetation types are more likely to be similar at points a few feet apart than at points miles apart.[2]

In social scientific fields like economics and linguistics, TFL applies to many phenomena. The housing value of one's home is highly dependent on the value of nearby homes

[1] Waldo Tobler, one of the leading scholars in geospatial information science, first put forward the core principles of spatial autocorrelation that has been termed as the Tobler's First Law of Geography and gained recognition across disciplines for its wide utility and applicability. See Waldo, R. Tobler, "A Computer Movie Simulating Urban Growth in the Detroit Region," *Economic Geography* 46 (1970): 234-240. For general discussion of the Tobler's First Law's wide application in and outside of geography, see Danial Z. Sui, "Tobler's First Law of Geography: A Big Idea for a Small World?" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 2 (2004): 269-277.
[2] For classic examples that substantiate Tobler's First Law, see Michael F. Goodchild, "The Validity and Usefulness of Laws in Geographic Information Science and Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 2 (2004): 300-303.

and crime statistics of the neighborhood. Michiganders living in the Copper Country of the Upper Peninsula speak with an accent that shares much more key features with the Wisconsin accent rather than the accent of those from Michigan's Lower Peninsula.[3] TFL as an analytical tool, however, does not apply to some other phenomena, just like many other social scientific theories. Landscapes, both literally and figuratively, that are subject to intensive anthropogenic activities defy TFL on certain scales. For instance, some U.S. states, including Mississippi, strictly prohibit sale of alcohol on Sundays. That means Sundays' alcohol sale data associated with two adjacent locations that are only divided by, say, the Mississippi-Louisiana state border, would represent a radical change, instead of some smooth, continuous variation.

This dissertation is a case study of how the Amur River Basin, an area in Northeast Asia about three times the size of Spain and once a coherent geographic unit that validated Tobler's First Law evolved into socioeconomically fragmented national borderlands that remarkably defied TFL in many regards. My examination of the political and socioeconomic transformation of the region is primarily focused on the left bank side of the middle and lower Amur River Basin, an area consisting of contemporary Russia's Amur Oblast, Jewish Autonomous Oblast, and the southern half of the Khabarovsk Krai. In the Russophone world, this area is collectively known as *Priamur'e*, meaning the land by the Amur.[4] In English and Chinese literature, this area has been commonly referred to as Outer Manchuria and Outer Northeast (*Wai Dongbei* in Mandarin Chinese). The modifier "outer" suggests that *Priamur'e* belongs to a much broader,

[3] Peter Daniel Richards, "Indirect Land Use Change and the Future of the Amazon" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2012), 104-109. Kathryn A. Remlinger, *Yooper Talk: Dialect as Identity in Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2017), 124-130.

[4] The name Amur was derived from indigenous Tungusic Peoples' term for "black rivers," as the river water was described as dark and yet transparent in local folklorist record. A. A. Bolotov, *Amur i ego bassein*, (Harbin: Obshchestvo Izucheniia Man'churskogo Kraia, 1925), 2. The Chinese name for the same river, *Heilongjiang*, means black dragon river.

continuous geographic unit: the massive lands reached by the Amur River and its many tributaries.

The story about the Amur River Basin and many an iteration of its transformation in history, as some scholars have approached, could start with the discussion of the geography and climate of the vast Amur watershed. Originating near the mountain of Burkan Khaldun in contemporary northeastern Mongolia, the Amur River runs about 2800 miles eastward into the Gulf of Tatar in the Pacific Ocean, making it the ninth longest river in the world. The Amur and its more than two hundred tributaries run through various topographies: The Gobi-Manchurian steppe to the west, the Greater and Lesser Khingan Ranges in the middle, and the Zeya-Amur-Songhua (Sungari) riverine plain to the east sandwiched between the Bureya and the Sikhote-Alin Mountain Ranges. Except for the grassland to the west, dense forests cover most terrains in the Amur River Basin: large tracts of coniferous forests in the north and temperate deciduous forest in the south. The thick vegetation and predominantly mountainous nature of the area's topography had long posed logistical challenges to those living there. Mountain ranges separate riparian plains and valleys from one another, leaving only narrow natural passageways for ground transportation in some localities.[5] Another extraordinary challenge to human activity and communication in the area is posed by the harsh and long winter. Although located roughly at the same latitude as Prague and Vancouver, some major towns in the Amur River Basin, such as Khabarovsk, experience significantly lower average temperatures in the winter. The Siberian high-pressure system dominates the area and ensures the persistence of dry, cold air during the

[5] Ibid., 18-20. See also V. A. Anuchin, *Geograficheskie ocherki Man'chzhurii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1948), 142-143; Alexander Hosie, *Manchuria: Its People, Resources, and Recent History* (Boston: J. B. Millet Company, 1910), 64-65; Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 16.

prolonged winter. In the relatively short summer, the monsoonal moist air results in heavy rainfall in the region and leads to frequent flash flooding in the lowland.[6]

The historiography of Manchuria and Pacific Russia from the early twentieth century to the present has included substantial discussion of how this area's geography and inhospitable climate played a determinant role in the formation and evolution of human societies in the longue durée. Many have ascribed the notably low population density of indigenous groups in this area and their relatively limited contact with the world outside before the nineteenth century to the mountainous terrains and the harsh climate.[7] Speaking of the indigenous groups long inhabiting the riverbanks in the Amur Basin, modern political regimes have categorized and designated them along ethnonational lines. They include the Manchus, arguably the most widely known amongst all the indigenous groups, Nanais, Evenkis, the Ulch, the Oroqen, the Udekhe, and many other smaller peoples. These indigenous groups have spoken languages that are at the crossroads of the Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic linguistic families.[8] Archeologists and anthropologists in the past century have suggested that these indigenous communities of varied sizes had engaged in hunting, fishing, farming, and swine-tending for centuries. The numerous rivers constituted the main network of communication for indigenous people to contact, trade, collaborate, or engage in combat with one another. In the long run, frequent contacts and intermarriages among indigenous groups had given rise to new peoples. For example, centuries of contact and intermarriage between some proto-Mongol groups residing along the upper stream

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[6] Petre Y. Baklanov & Anatoly V. Moshkov, "Amur Region of Russia: Natural Resources, Population, and Economy," in *Environmental Change and the Social Response in the Amur River Basin*, ed. Shigeko Haruyama & Takayuki Shiraiwa (Tokyo: Springer, 2015), 3.

[7] D. A. Davidov, *Kolonizatsiia Man'chzhurii i severo-vostochnoi Mongolii* (Vladivostok: Vostochnyi Institut, 1911), 124-25; Lattimore, *Manchuria*, 18; Victor Zatsepine, *Beyond the Amur: Frontier Encounters between China and Russia, 1850-1930* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 5; Mark Gamsa, *Manchuria: A Concise History* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2020), 20-21.

[8] Richard Zgusta, *The Peoples of Northeast Asia through Time: Precolonial Ethnic and Cultural Processes along the Coast between Hokkaido and the Bering Strait* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2015), 114-119.

of the Amur and southern Tungus inhabiting the middle section of the Amur-Songhua valley had led to the rise of a culturally inclusive ethnic group, the Manchus: the titular people of Manchuria and the founders of the Qing, the last imperial dynasty that had conquered, governed, and expanded the geopolitical space of China for nearly three centuries.[9]

Speakers of Chinese and Russian, the most widely spoken languages in the region today, and Korean to some lesser extent, arrived en masse in the Amur River Basin much later. Chinese settlers had resided in the Liaodong plain, the southern edge of Manchuria, long before the Manchus conquered China proper in the 17th century. However, only very small numbers of Han Chinese had migrated up north to the heartland of the Amur River Basin until the Qing court lifted the ban of Han Chinese settlement in Manchuria, the sacred homeland of the imperial ruling class, in the 1870s. As a matter of fact, the demarcation the Qing-Russian borders along the Amur River in the 1860s and the subsequent arrival of Russian colonists in the Amur valley played a key role in shaping the Qing rulers' decision to open Manchuria for Han Chinese resettlement.[10] Spearheaded by Cossacks, peasant settlers, exiles, and river pirates, Imperial Russia marched eastward and claimed Siberia, much of the Far North of Asia, and Alaska from the mid seventeenth century to the mid nineteenth century. Following their conquest of each area of the vast landmass across North Asia, the Russians went to great lengths to assert and retain

[9] For discussion of the evolution of the Manchus into a more culturally distinct yet inclusive ethnic group in history, see Pei Huang, *Reorienting the Manchus: A Study of Sinicization, 1583-1795* (Ithaca, NY: East Asian Program Cornell University, 2011), 33-34; Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 46-49; see also Gamsa, *Manchuria*, 11-13. For anthropological and archaeological scholarship on the ethnological evolution of indigenous people in the Amur River Basin before coming into extensive contact with Russians and Chinese, see Kwang-chih Chang, "Neolithic Cultures of the Sungari Valley, Manchuria," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 17, no 1(1961): 56-74; Aleksei. P. Okladnikov, "The Shilka Cave: Remains of an Ancient Culture of the Upper Amur River," in *The Archaeology and Geomorphology of Northern Asia: Selected Works*, ed. Henry N. Michael (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 112-180; Aleksei P. Okladnikov & Anatolii P. Derevianko, *Dalekoe ploshloe Primor'ia i Priamur'ia* (Vladivostok: Dal'nevostochnoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1973), 327-359.

[10] Gamsa, *Manchuria*, 41-42.

authority over the indigenous population residing there. Russian imperial statesmen had learned to keep the region under Moscow and St. Petersburg's influence through trade, voluntary and forced migration, the Orthodox Church's proselytizing mission, and intermarriage between Russian settlers and native Siberians and North Asians.[11]

The Russian expansion in Siberia and North Asia first reached the heartland of Manchuria and met the Qing in the mid 17th century. The encounter of the two "converging empires and cultures" in Eurasia led to intermittent skirmishes and major military clashes in the upper Amur valley. Far outnumbering the serving men dispatched from Moscow, the Qing force of several thousand Manchu and Chinese troops kept Russians at bay and defended its claim over the Amur River Basin.[12] Although Russian forces retreated to Northern Siberia, Russian imperial interests in the Amur River and its extensive watershed area only grew stronger over the next two centuries. The historiography of Pacific Russia has pinpointed the main reasons that the Russian imperial elite increasingly aspired to acquire the Amur. First and foremost, the Amur and its main tributaries could serve as main arteries and guarantee the shipment of material and foodstuffs from Siberia to the Okhotsk seashore and Kamchatka in support of the imperial colonizing effort of the Far North. In addition, the land and water of the Amur River Basin is rich in biodiversity and valuable natural resources: dense boreal and temperate deciduous forests, pearls, sea cucumbers, furs, and other animal products, ginseng, and massive gold deposits that

[11] John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 23-25; Alan Wood, *Russia's Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991* (London: Bloomsburg Academic, 2011), 37-40, 54-58; For the role of trade and business played in solidifying early modern Russia's agenda of imperial expansion, see Erika Monahan, *The Merchant of Siberia: Trade in Early Modern Eurasia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 184-206. I use the term Russian here only to refer to those hailing from the political space of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, the Russian Tsardom, and later the Russian Empire. It does not denote the Russian ethno-nationality as discussed in contemporary social science scholarship.

[12] For the demarcation of the Qing-Russia border in Northeast Asia in the 1680s, as mutually recognized by the Treaty of Nerchinsk, and the discussion of the "two converging empires and cultures," see Stephan, *The Russian Far East,* 30-32.

were only discovered later towards the end of the nineteenth century. The fertile black soil of the Amur riverain plains, in the same vein, was arguably a more irresistible lure in the eyes of Russian imperial statesmen. The rich natural resources and productive soil would not only allow them to bring in remunerative financial gain, but also insure the viability and sustainability of Imperial Russia's colonial developmental project in the far-flung Northeast and North of Asia in the long term. The Amur River Basin made the reliable base for an extensive agricultural and material supply chain.[13]

For the Qing Empire, the nineteenth century was long and eventful. The costly defeat in two Opium Wars with the Britons decisively exposed its military, technological, and economic weaknesses. Domestic upheavals, such as the Taiping Rebellion, further debilitated the ailing empire. As a matter of consequence, maritime European empires forced it to open the long-sealed borders and encroached on its territorial and economic sovereignty. Against such a backdrop, the ruling Manchus conceded the land of 360,000 square miles north of the middle Amur and east of the Ussuri River, a good part of their sacred ancestral land, to Russia in 1860. For St. Petersburg, the annexation of the Amur saved it some face in the aftermath of its defeat in the Crimean War.[14] The Amur River, once an internal waterway of the Qing, now became the marker of an international political boundary. The left bank of the upper and middle Amur

[13] James R. Gibson, *Feeding the Russian Fur Trade: Provisionment of the Okhotsk Seaboard and the Kamchatka Peninsula, 1639-1856* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 127-31; S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and Their Disputed Frontier* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 45-60; Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840- 1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 16-18, 143-146; Mark Sokolsky, "Taming Tiger Country: Colonization and Environment in the Russian Far East, 1860- 1940" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2016), 168-173.

[14] Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, 18-21; For discussion of Russian Cossack forces' infiltration and expedition in the left bank nominally under the Qing's jurisdiction before 1860, see G. I. Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi russkikh morskikh ofitserov na krainem vostoke Rossii* (Moscow: Drofa, 2008), 165-170.

became the Russian Empire's new borderlands in Northeast Asia, entering the Russophone public discourse as *Priamur'e*.

The temporal framework of this dissertation is primarily bookended between the 1920s and the 1940s. However, what had happened on the ground in the left bank since the demarcation of the Qing-Russian borders along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers until the early Soviet years looms large as the integral historical background, against which the main story makes sense, and my analysis holds water. Quite a few sources, both primary and secondary, in multiple languages suggest that the Amur waterway border was rather porous then. It linked people, goods, capital, and ideas from opposite banks and facilitated their integration instead of dividing them. During this time, the quotidian socioeconomic activities on the left bank were deeply embedded in the broad social processes across the whole Amur River Basin. The geography held together a coherent transnational community. In other words, snapshots of life in late imperial *Priamur'e* would well bear out Tobler's First Law.

I approach the question of how the socioeconomic life in *Priamur'e* had undergone no less than a paradigm shift in the early Soviet era and evidently defied TFL at the regional level mainly through three lenses: the built environment, the logistics, and the formation and dissolution of communities. The built environment mainly refers to construction of infrastructural projects centered on and supplementary to the left bank's waterway networks, including embankments, bridges, dams, and roads. In terms of logistics, I focus on communication and trading networks and supply chains of goods that had long ensured human migration, material provision, and business and cultural transactions in *Priamur'e*. I pay special attention to some individual organizations that participated in sustaining as well as regulating such logistics: a shipping company, a brewery, and local offices of the customs agency. All

human historical actors appearing in my dissertation belonged to some communities. These communities, often based on shared professions, business or class interests, and cultural and linguistic ties, resulted from historical actors' cultivation on the ground while also being subject to the influence of greater social forces beyond the confine of local and regional geography, such as modern nationalism.

The natural environment gifts the region with networks of navigable inland waterways, and those arriving and residing by the waterways in late imperial *Priamur'e* had intuitively learned to use nature's gift to their own advantage. The Amur and Ussuri Cossacks, for example, sailed up and down the rivers to patrol the border and deliver goods and information for settlers and the state, since the postal route connecting Moscow and Siberia faded beyond Lake Baikal, and the Trans-Siberian Railway was not completely constructed until the 1910s. Peasant migrants, including those from rural Ukraine and Central Russia and the Old Believers, relied on the rich soil and fresh water to engage in commercial agriculture. People used these rivers and water resources on a regular basis but built infrastructure that aimed at facilitating the use of water and waterways had less noticeable presence and been mostly just concentrated on the construction of embankments and docks. No state agencies or business organizations took concerted action to finance, construct, and maintain such infrastructure. It is not an exaggeration to claim that Cossack border guards, Russian and European shipping companies, Japanese small business owners, Chinese migrant laborers, and Korean farmers had all contributed to building and maintaining inland water infrastructure for their own needs.[15]

[15] Burton Holmes, *Down the Amur, Peking, The Forbidden City* (New York: Travelogue Bureau, 1918), 56-62; N. I. Dubinina, *Priamurskii general-gubernator N. L. Gondatti* (Khabarovsk: Priamurskie Vendomosti, 1997), 91-92, 97-99.

In the realm of logistics, *Priamur'e* was part of a free trade zone between Irkutsk and Vladivostok that St. Petersburg designated in hopes of reinvigorating the economy of the Far Eastern periphery and attracting more investment and settlers to the newest territorial addition of the empire. From the perspective of imperial statesmen, socioeconomic prosperity of the left bank was vital for its positionality as the staging ground for Russian penetration into Manchuria. The laissez faire economics brought about an "international emporium" into the Amur River Basin. Trans-border business and cultural transactions happened routinely and reflected the pan-regional nature of the communication networks. On a typical day in late imperial *Priamur'e*, a Russian passenger might board a commercial ship, run by a Vladivostok-based German company, traveling through major riverside towns on both banks of the Amur River. On board he found himself seated amongst many others coming from afar: Californian businessmen selling made-in-US toys and canned food, Belgian trade representatives seeking new opportunities in the resource-rich Far East, Japanese importers of Amur salmon and sturgeons, and most likely Chinese merchants and business middlemen eager to arrange new deals between Russian owners of newly discovered gold mines and Chinese migrant laborers. Looking outside, he could see large bulk carriers transporting grain from Transbaikal and Manchuria, which were cultivated and harvested by sojourning farmers from Manchuria and Choson Korea.[16]

Some primary sources published at the turn of the century have offered ethnographic insights into how cultural diversity and social blend defied artificial political boundaries in Northeast Asia and gave rise to distinctive local yet transnational communities in *Priamur'e*.

[16] Stephan, *The Russian Far East,* 58-59, 82-84. For discussion of how all major towns in the Amur River Basin, including Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, and Harbin, belonged to a larger regional economic system and how East Asians had been an integral part of *Priamur'e*'s economy, see also V. V. Grave, *Kitaitsy, Koreitsy, i Iapontsy v Priamur'e* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia V. O. Kirshbauma, 1912), 124-128, 196-200, 232-243; Blaine Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918-29* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 17, 49-53.

Among the most valuable of them is Vladimir Arsen'ev's travelogue. The great Russian geographer and explorer traveled on horseback and on foot with his indigenous hunter-trapper guide named Dersu across the Sikhote-Alin Range in the 1900s. His observation of some local indigenous groups' lifestyle showed how ethno-national identification was blurred and situational in people's conceptualization of communities and belonging. For example, the group of *Datsy*, predominantly the offspring of intermarriage between Chinese-speaking migrants and indigenous Tungusic small peoples, were deftly embedded in various cultural spheres: Tungusic, Chinese, Korean, and Russian.[17] They not only traversed between cultural communities, but also bridged different social and cultural groups. A rather notorious example is that some daring indigenous people, including *Datsy*, with their social versatility and localized knowledge about the Amur country, became the needed intermediaries for many transnational collaborative undertakings of smuggling along the border.[18]

All the snapshots discussed above point to the key feature of the left bank's social economy from the mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth century: its interconnectedness with other parts of the broad Amur River Basin's social geography. In other words, intra-connectedness and integration characterized the whole region's socioeconomic ecosystem, often centered on the Amur and its main tributaries. The waterway border was porous. Khabarovsk was more related to Harbin than Moscow, and Blagoveshchensk residents relied more on provisions coming from neighboring Chinese towns on the opposite side of the Amur than goods from Vladivostok. Tobler's First Law stood out.

[17] V. K. Arseniev, *Dersu the Trapper*, trans. Malcolm Burr (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1941), 72-75.
[18] N. A. Beliaeva. *Iz istorii Vladivostokskoii tamozhni: stanovlenie, 1899- 1914* (Vladivostok: Izvestiia RGIA DV, 2000), 62, 79-80.

Until *Priamur'e* entered the Soviet era. In the following body chapters, I trace the origin, transformation, and in some cases, demise of five organizations, whose undertakings all revolved around the Amur River: an inland shipping company, a cohort of hydrological scientists and engineers, a trans-border brewery, the local establishment of the Soviet customs service, and the state agency for social welfare. Through examining their evolution in the socio-geographic context of the whole Amur region, I showcase the process, by which the Soviet state and its agents interacted, contested, and negotiated with various local communities on the ground to chart out the course for the *Priamur'e* borderland's development. The result was that the mode of material production, the communication and supply networks, and the human-environment relationship of the left bank were gradually decoupled from the rest of the region. *Priamur'e* had morphed from an integral part of socially and culturally distinctive Northeast Asian borderlands into an area resembling many other Soviet heartlands by the 1940s. The Amur River became a solidified, highly militarized international border.

The Soviet state's aspiration for ridding *Priamur'e* of trans-border socioeconomic dependency, I argue, first and foremost contributed to the implementation of polices that reoriented the left bank's political economy towards Moscow. At the same time, learned Soviet citizens had accumulated knowledge about the left bank and acquired novel expertise in harnessing local natural and human resources. Those learned professionals that appear in the following chapters, including Soviet scientists, hydraulic engineers, boatmen, transportation planners, and trained customs officers, translated such knowledge into techniques for making over the left-bank borderland on the ground.

Underlying the Soviet state's and citizens' reconfiguration of the built environment, the logistics, and some human communities was the idea of *osvoenie*. This Russian term can be

translated into English as "colonization, assimilation, and mastery," and it appeared in both secondary Russophone documents and historical actors' discourse in the Russian Far East throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I borrow the term *osvoenie* as a central analytical framework of my dissertation, for it articulates the interdependence and "duality of knowledge and control" in modern Russophone contexts.[19] The left bank's separation from the rest of the Amur River Basin and its rapid assimilation into the All-Union political economic apparatus geared towards autarky indeed resulted from the interplay and reciprocity of knowledge and control. Underlying the state-led pursuit of autarky is the Soviet Union's fascination with legibility in statecraft and socioeconomic reorientation, substantiating the socialist regime's very modern nature.[20]

Considering that the dissertation is a project of socio-spatial history, I have also consulted analytical categories from the literature of cultural geography and spatial historiography. In addition to Tobler's Law, I regularly invite the idea of "mental mapping" into my chapters to highlight the subjectivity of space and communities claiming ownership of the space. I discuss the critical role played by the psychological processes of perception in constructing and transforming humans' relationship with a place. The Soviet historical actors often internalized the cognitive process of perception as part of their experience of knowledge production and knowledge application. Russian Far East-based Soviet scientists, as discussed in the second chapter below, tried to identify the causes of massive flooding in the left bank in 1928 but their

[19] For examples in Russian sources, see A. I. Alekseev, *Osvoenie russkimi liud'mi Dal'nego Vostoka i Russkoi Ameriki: do kontsa xix veka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka" 1982). Anglophone scholarship has also offered some in-depth discussion of the term and its academic applicability. For the direct quote, see Emma Widdis, *Visions of New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 7. See also Andy Bruno, *The Nature of Soviet Power: An Arctic Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 31-32.

[20] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), Introduction.

quest turned out futile. The reason was that they baked the manmade conceptualization of border into their analytical mindset and forsook some more holistic approaches to studying naturally happening phenomena like precipitation and flooding.

This dissertation is mainly situated in the intersection of two clusters of scholarship. The first is the historiography of the Russian Far East and its entanglement with East Asian society. The studies of Pacific Russia's history, unfortunately, had been predominantly based on St. Petersburg and Moscow-centered sources, and scholarly works on Russia and the USSR's East Asian entanglement remain mostly on the level of diplomacy. Earlier scholarly work on the outreach of Russia's imperial influence into the Far East had its analytical emphasis on international relations and interpreted Russia's social and economic entanglement with Japan and China from the perspective of state interests. Shaped by political policy in the Cold War era, monographs on the modern history of Northeast Asia published prior to the 1990s were also notably centered on security studies and comparative studies of communism.[21] With the opening of many Soviet archives in the 1990s in the aftermath of the USSR's disintegration, Anglophone historians started to employ newly declassified archival sources to publish work on the Far East that intended to rethink the central-periphery relations in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union's modern state making. Instead of focusing on the political and diplomatic arenas, scholars branched out into social and cultural history to investigate how particular social groups and communities shaped the political and social landscapes in the Far East in the 1990s and 2000s. For example, David Wolff discusses Russian imperial elites and technocrats' effort into strengthening Russia's colonial footing in Manchuria in the late imperial era. Elena Shulman

[21] Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1958); Donald Threadgold, *Soviet and Chinese Communism: Similarities and Differences* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1967); Allen Whiting, *Siberia and East Asia: Threat or Promise?* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981).

focuses on Soviet woman in the Stalinist era and their active participation in peopling and building the Far East and highlights the mobilizational nature of the Soviet state.[22] At the same time, scholars also published monographs and edited volumes that could serve as textbooks for survey courses on Pacific Russian history. John Stephan's *The Russian Far East* remains the most comprehensive history book on the matter and widely cited by researchers across fields.[23]

The scholarly community of Pacific Russian studies has grown substantially over the past two decades. Historians have paid close attention to sources outside the confine of St. Petersburgh and Moscow and sought to interpret the power and limitation of modern state building from the alternate local perspectives. By amassing and scrutinizing regional archival sources from Krasnoyarsk to Vladivostok, for example, Ivan Sablin reconstructs the history of the short-lived Far Eastern Republic and offers a glimpse into the consensus and contention of many versions of Soviet nationalism among political elites taking charge of the nation's far-flung borderlands.[24] More notably, some recent publications have involved multilingual sources and multi-sited research to emphasize that the Russian Far East has long been a socially and politically vibrant zone of cross-cultural, transnational contact and contestation. They have not only enriched the historiography of Pacific Russian, but also offered insights into understanding

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[22] David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). Elena Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Woman and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[23] Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*. Other edited volumes and monographs include Stephen Kotkin & David Wolff, ed., *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); Wood, *Russia's Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991*.

[24] The Russian Far Eastern Republic was a nominally independent state that came mainly under the control of RSFSR from the spring of 1920 to November 1922. The FER functioned as a buffer state between the RSFSR and Imperial Japan's sphere of influence in Northeast Asia. See Ivan Sablin, *The Rise and Fall of Russia's Far Eastern Republic, 1905-1922: Nationalisms, Imperialisms, and Regionalisms in and after the Russian Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2019). For other scholarly work, see Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). Alyssa Park, *Sovereignty Experiments: Korean Migrants and the Building of Borders in Northeast Asia, 1860-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019). Soren Urbansky, *Beyond the Steppe Frontier: A History of the Sino-Russian Border* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

popular social scientific terminologies, such as "colonialism" and "sovereignty." Soren Urbansky's monograph on the steppe borderlands between Russia and China addresses how the movement of people and idea were not in alignment with the centralized states' demarcation of political boundaries and how territoriality of modern states has been subject to the negotiation between the spirations of the political centers and the realities on the peripheral society. Alyssa Park's monograph uses the case study of the Korean communities traversing between Choson Korea and Russia to illuminate how the modern, Eurocentric discourse of sovereignty, meaning state authority over both territory and people, was materialized by the expansionist Russian Empire and fundamentally changed the political contour of Northeast Asia.

The second cluster is the literature of border and borderlands studies at large and some specific scholarly work on the extensive stretch of Russian and Soviet frontiers. A large and ever-growing body of literature on frontiers and borderlands has influenced my research. From Peter Sahlin's revelation of the local borderland society's critical role in the formation and consolidation of nationhood to David Newman's discussion of borders as social institutions that manifest power dynamics, the literature has informed me that it is essential to consider the agency of various actors defining and experiencing the borders: the state, grassroots officials, local dwellers, and trespassers. Local actors in the borderlands especially could maintain a more complex relationship with the states on both sides than those in the heartlands.[25] In addition to

[25] Michiel Baud & Willem Van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands" *Journal of World History* 8. Fall 1997. David Newman, "On Borders and Power: A Theoretical Framework," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 18, Spring 2003. Michael Muller & Cornelius Torp, "Conceptualizing Transnational Spaces in History," *European Review of History* 16, 2009. Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 1991). Kelly L. Hernandez, Migra: *A History of the US Border Patrol* (Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 2010). Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the US-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 2012). Lissa K. Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders: Salmon, Boundaries, and Bandits on Salish Sea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012). Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Eagle Glassheim, *Cleansing the Czechoslovak Borderlands: Migration, Environment, and Health in the Former Sudetenland* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press,

the scholarship on Asiatic Russia, recent monographs on Russia and the USSR's long borders and extended borderlands in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus have especially informed my approach to considering the borderlands as a focal point of contact between the policy-making organs in the metropole and the plural interpretations and responses in the periphery. Authors have employed cultural anthropological categories, such as religion, linguistics, and folk culture, to analyze the clashes and overlapping of the imagined communities at various local, regional, and national levels. Situated in the rich historiography of Ukraine and the western borderlands of the Russian Empire, Faith Hillis's work reveals the contingent and situational nature of national identifications in the periphery through her scrutiny of the formation and evolution of the "Little Russian" ideas in late imperial Southwestern Ukraine. Matthew Pauly's thorough examination of the linguistic Ukrainianization in the early Soviet years reminds us of the powerfulness of local historical actors' and non-party institutions' agency in realizing the Soviet nationalities policy and facilitating the process of Soviet nation building. His bottom-up approach particularly highlights the decentralized nature of Soviet knowledge production, as evidenced by the party-state's reliance on local linguists' and educators' know-how. In the Caucasus, Mathijs Pelkmans uses the case study of a section of the Turkish-Georgian borderlands to illustrate how religious identities could give way to national identities and fail to challenge the rigidity of modern political borders. In Central Asia, Madeleine Reeves highlights the unfinished feature of modern state-making in the borderlands, and her detailed anthropological investigation of various Central Asian communities' post-Soviet transformation in the Ferghana Valley informs us how borderlands have become the test sites for modes of governance and their sustainability. Above all, my research has benefitted tremendously from Kate Brown's engrossing account on how the

2016). Nianshen Song, *Making Borders in Modern East Asia: The Tumen River Demarcation, 1881-1919* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

kresy, the borderland between Poland and the USSR, transitioned from a land for culturally heterogenous ethnic groups' cohabitation into a "homogenous nation-space" from the 1930s to the 1950s. It has inspired my conceptualization of the Amur River Basin's fragmentation into borderlands that resembled national heartlands.[26]

However, very few among the existing literature on Pacific Russia have narrowed their foci down to the realms of infrastructure and logistics, where the Soviet state and borderland residents also came into frequent contact, interacted and (mis)communicated. Concentrating on the understudied built environment and socioeconomic logistical networks in the Amur River Basin, my dissertation fills a void in the existing body of knowledge about the state's material territorialization in the frontier. Through further examining how local actors contributed to and responded to the material transformation of the borderlands' infrastructure and logistical networks, I underscore that the mutual influence between human actors and the material milieu they were in deserves more scholarly attention in understanding the consolidation of Russia and the USSR's inward-looking borderlands in Northeast Asia. This dissertation also sheds light on the broad trend of sociopolitical compartmentalization across Eurasia in the twentieth century by means of significant infrastructural makeover and logistical rerouting.

The sources of this dissertation reflect my research approach. I collected a plethora of primary and secondary sources in three languages, including Russian, Chinese, and English, from across Eurasia: Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk, Heihe, Harbin, Moscow, and

[26] Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderlands to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Mathijs Pelkmans, *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2014). Matthew Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine, 1923-1934* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015). Faith Hillis, *Children of Rus': Right-Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

Taipei. I have perused and analyzed them to present the stories of the Soviet Northeast Asian borderland's makeover in the convergence of local, transnational, and global perspectives. Adopting a biographical approach, I organize this dissertation thematically and divide it into five chapters, and each chapter is primarily focused on the evolution of one institution or social group based in the Amur borderlands. The first chapter concerns the transformation of the borderlands' river and road transport, and the main enterprise under scrutiny is the Amur Shipping Company. I pay special attention to how the Amur boatmen navigated the regime change, participated in rebuilding the inland waterway fleet, and led the company through nationalization and transition into an essentially borderland institute. Going with the stream of the unruly waterways, I examine how frequent flooding in the Amur River Basin had posed a major challenge to the Soviet transformation of the borderlands, and how a group of left bank-based scientists and engineers worked on taming the flooding and turning the surplus water resources into productive forces in the second chapter. In the first two chapters, I especially explore the changing mental mapping of my historical actors vis-à-vis the changing material and spatial configuration of *Priamur'e'*s built environment. The third and fourth chapters primarily cover the changing logistical networks that enabled the profound socioeconomic separation of the two banks in the early Soviet era. Chapter three traces the evolution of the newly established Far Eastern branch of Soviet customs service. It reveals how many a customs officer based in the middle Amur learned to become the Soviet state's agents through policing the borders and ridding the borderlands of pre-existing cross-border business contacts unsanctioned by Moscow. The fourth chapter presents a case study of a short-lived borderlands business by the Amur that did not manage to survive the separation and went under in the 1930s. The life and death of the business, a brewery run by a Manchuria-based Chinese merchant who maintained ties to the left bank, also

cast light on a major feature of the Soviet Far Eastern borderland's demographic change: the cancellation of the Chinese diaspora's membership in its redefined citizenry. The last chapter is centered on the Soviet welfare systems and their implementation in the Amur borderland. I use examples related to organizations appearing in the first four chapters to demonstrate how the discourse of *Priamur'e*'s borderland character had been built in the institution of Soviet welfare state in the Far East. The discursive institutionalization of *Priamur'e* as a Soviet frontier went hand in hand with the physical shutdown of the Amur waterway border in the heyday of Stalinism in the 1930s.

CHAPTER ONE

TRANSPORTATION AND REORIENTATION: THE AMUR SHIPPING COMPANY

In June 1890, 30-year-old Russian writer Anton Chekhov made a stop in Blagoveshchensk, a Russian border town by the Amur River, on his journey to Sakhalin Island, Imperial Russia's penal colony. In Blagoveshchensk, he drafted a letter to his friend and publisher Alexei Suvorin, describing his adoring impression of the Amur River and slightly complaining about the rocky steamer that he was on board for the past several days. Chekhov wrote that he was "in love with the Amur" after sailing "more than a thousand versts" down the river, for there was "beauty, space, freedom, and warmth."[1] He further praised the Amur River by commenting that "the lowest convict breathes more freely on the Amur than the highest general in Russia."[2] It seemed that the unsteady transport on the Amur was his only mishap in the journey, for it "prevented him from writing properly" for days.[3]

Among the numerous published letters that Chekhov wrote on this journey, the writer only mentioned the border status of the Amur River a couple of times in passing. He was pleased to "see Russia on the left bank and China on the right," but he noted that both sides were equally "deserted and wild."[4] The border was actually an absent term from Chekhov's accounts on the "Amur country."[5] The writer viewed the river as an integral part of the wildness and difference

[1] Anton Chekhov, *Letters of Anton Chekhov to his Family and Friends: with Biographical Sketch*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 210. Verst is an old Russian unit for length measurement. One verst equals about 3500 feet or 1.0668 kilometers.
[2] *Ibid*., 211.
[3] *Ibid*., 210.
[4] *Ibid*., 192, 211.
[5] Chekhov used Amur to refer to the Amur River Basin as the Amur country in his original text. It designated the territories by the Amur River and its tributaries without explicit specification of the territorial sovereignty of the area. *Ibid*., 267.

of the East that European Russia had yet to fully claim, let alone transform.[6] The Amur country, part of Imperial Russia's last territorial annexation three decades earlier, had been very sparsely populated by the time of the writer's visit.[7] Such emptiness and wilderness not only characterized the area's geography, but also obscured the Amur River's functionality as an international political border between Russia and the Qing Empire throughout most of the mid and late nineteenth century. Chekhov was not alone. Other travelogues of the late nineteenth century on the same region also indicated that the Amur River was still more of a natural barrier than an imposed political border. For example, Sir Henry Evan Murchison James, a British colonial official based in India, journeyed to Manchuria in the late 1880s and noted that the landscape along the Amur River was "a boundless rolling plain dotted with military and postal stations and Tungusic tribes."[8]

A few discrete written records produced by Slavic peasant settlers newly arriving in the Russian Empire's recently annexed Far Eastern territory in the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century also confirmed much of Chekhov's impression about the remote Amur country.[9] Apart from occasionally triumphant description of the openness and copiousness of

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[6] Chekhov kept reflecting upon Imperial Russia's Europeanness in his writings during his tour of the Asian part of the empire. He talked about settlers' lack of any conception of Europe in the Amur River Basin. He also emphasized how his tour outside of Europe informed him of the little difference between European Russia and other European countries. *Ibid*., 202, 289-293.

[7] According to Ernst Georg Ravenstein, an accomplished 19th-century German-English geographer, a population of only 64,000 settlers was spread over an area of 361,000 square miles in the Russian territories of the Amur River Basin in the 1860s. See Ernst Georg Ravenstein, *The Russian on the Amur: Its Discovery, Conquest, and Colonization, with a Description of the Country, its Inhabitants, Productions, and Commercial Capacities* (London: Turbner and Co., 1861): 155. At the end of the 1880s, population growth picked up, but the region was still thinly populated. See S. C. M. Paine, *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and Their Disputed Frontier* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1996): 56- 57.

[8] H. E. M. James, *The Long White Mountain: Or a Journey in Manchuria* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888): 308.

[9] Historians have garnered limited yet valuable peasant letters in the late nineteenth century that showed how Slavic settlers perceived their relocation to the empire's geographical peripheries, such as the Far East and Central Asia. See Willard Sunderland, "Peasant Pioneering: Russian Peasant Settlers Describe Colonization and the Eastern Frontier, 1880s- 1910s," *Journal of Social History*, 34, no. 4 (2001): 895- 922. Historians have also informed us about Russian peasants' overall level of literacy and how letter writing was involved in social mobilization in the process of peopling the empire's outlying territories. See Edward Judge, "Peasant Resettlement and Social Control

land resources in the frontier, many talked about the inconvenience associated with moving from one place to another overland or by water. Exhausted peasants traveling thousands of miles from Poltava, Tambov, and Siberia to the Amur River Basin only found out that more rugged paths and wild water travel awaited them.[10] The inadequacy of land transport systems in the Far East meant that settlers primarily relied on various waterways to reach their new settlements sparsely dotting the vast, fresh farmland in the empire's southeastern end.

The waterway network of the Amur country, albeit complex and navigable, had actually failed to allow the new settlers to experience the same level of freedom and spaciousness of the area as extoled by Chekhov. As a matter of fact, sailing on the area's waterways often caused peasant settlers further discomfort and exhaustion. Chekhov was traveling in a first-class cabin on the steamer *Ermak* that was equipped with a heavy set of steam turbines and advanced technology for propulsion,[11] and yet the young writer was quite discomforted by such waterborne transport. In comparison, ordinary passenger steamboats that many average peasant settlers boarded were shabby, shaky, and crammed with not only people but also livestock and smelly fish harvested by indigenous people and Cossack soldiers.[12] Due to the very low population

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in Late Imperial Russia," in Edward Judge and James Simms, Jr. eds., *Modernization and Revolution: Dilemmas of Progress in Late imperial Russia*, (New York: East European Monographs, 1992), 77- 98; David Moon, "Peasant Migration and the Settlement of Russia's Frontiers, 1550- 1897," *The Historical Journal*, 40 (1997): 859- 893; Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Paradise or Just a Little Bit Better? Siberian Settlement 'Fever' in Late Imperial Russia," *Russian Review* 76, no.1 (2017), 22- 37.

[10] Sunderland, "Peasant Pioneering," 906. See also Yu. N. Osipov, *Krest'iane-Starozhily Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii, 1855- 1917* (Khabarovsk: Khabarovsk Krai Museum, 2008): 112- 115.

[11] Chekhov, *Letters of Anton Chekhov*, 207. Ermak was the name of Russia's early explorers in Siberia and was widely recognized in Russian folklore and myths for his great contribution to conquering Siberia in the 16th century. The steamer *Ermak* was a relatively technologically advanced vessel that had carried Russian geographers, peasant scouts, and military personnel down the Shilka and Amur Rivers in the late nineteenth century. See V. G. Bersenev, *150 let Russkogo Sudokhodstva na Amure* (Komsomolsk-na-Amure: Komsomolsk, 2005): 237- 38.

[12] Khabarovsk-based historian Mikhail Kovalchuk has offered brief description of water travel of early peasant settlers in the Russian Far Eastern colonies in the late 19th century. He summarizes that watercraft, primarily steamboats, used for everyday transportation were shabby (*nekrepno*) and overfilled (*perepoleno*). See M. A. Kovalchuk, *Gruntovye dorogi Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii, seredina XVII- nachalo XX vv*. (Khabarovsk: DVGUPS, 2005): 72.

density of the area, it was not lucrative for shipbuilding companies based in the empire's industrial centers like St. Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod to expand their businesses to the Far East. Throughout most of the 1870s and 1880s, out of the eight steamers that sailed on a complete route between two major river ports of the Amur, Blagoveshchensk and Nikolaevsk, only two were government-owned.[13] Under such circumstances, small and middle-sized wooden steamboats owned by small-scale local enterprises took on the role of transporting people and goods, often in the same undivided cabin, across the Amur River Basin. Low frequency of service, low level of cabin comfort, and overall low efficiency characterized the Amur country's waterborne transportation over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century.[14]

The waterborne transportation's low efficiency had a direct impact upon those Slavic settlers' new homelands in the Amur River Basin: it weakened and obstructed the connectivity between patches of settlements in the whole borderland area. In other words, Russian agricultural settlements and military outposts on the left-bank riverine plain of the Amur were like discrete nodes that failed to be connected into a coherent socioeconomic network two to three decades into the area's takeover by Russia. On a larger geospatial scale, Tsarist Russia's Far Eastern borderlands in the Amur River Basin as a whole could be conceptualized as an outlying node yet to be connected with the empire's network of social, commercial, and cultural expansion and integration across the entire Eurasian landmass. The Russian imperial elite had in mind the project of claiming remote borderlands, including the middle and lower Amur River Basin, through peasant settlement and agricultural cultivation in the Russian way.[15] Russian peasant

[13] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 27- 29.
[14] Kovalchuk, *Gruntovye dorogi Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 75.
[15] Nikolai M Przheval'skii, one of the Russian Empire's leading geographer and explorer in the age of Russia's territorial expansion into Central Asia and the Far East, called for the empire's mobilization of native Russians (*korennye russkie*) to people the Far East. He discussed the importance of popularizing Russian agricultural cultivation in securing the newly acquired land. See N. M. Przheval'skii, *Puteshestvie v Ussuriiskom krae, 1867-1869 gg* (Vladivostok: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1990): 68- 70.

settlers in the Amur River Basin thus shouldered the responsibility of safeguarding the frontier and Russifying geographic as well as sociotechnical landscapes of the borderlands on behalf of the empire.

However, the sparsely distributed peasant settlements and their very disconnected nature, thanks to the underdeveloped waterborne transportation, put a restriction on formation of a symbiotic relationship between Russian colonists and the land they were supposed to tend and transform in the Amur River Basin. The Amur River, for one thing, was hardly the political frontier between Imperial Russia and its neighboring foreign dynasty in the eyes of many peasant settlers.[16] Russian settlers living by the Amur crossed the river by Chinese junk ships more regularly than sailing up or down the stream to other settlements.[17] They learned to barter goods with people from across the Amur and exchange commodities for services, such as tailoring and laundry.[18] They first forged social and economic ties with people and milieus from across the border, instead of forming an intra-empire network of communication with the rest of the Russian Far Eastern region. When the entire Amur River was frozen over during the long and harsh winters lasting from early November to early March, settlers relied even more on the cross-border ties by walking directly to the other side of the river and engaging in necessary economic activities.[19] The border, on a day-to-day basis, appeared borderless.

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[16] Sunderland, "Peasant Pioneering," 908. See also Osipov, *Krest'iane-Starozhily Dal'nego Vostoka*, 21.
[17] Russophone sources refer to small and middle-sized Chinese boats with canvas as junk (*dzhonka*). Russian documents published in the late imperial era and by the White émigrés seemed to use dzhonka to designate Chinese ships at large. See A. A. Bolotov, *Amur i ego bassein*, (Harbin: Obshchestvo Izucheniia Man'churskogo Kraia, 1925): 32. See also RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 1, d. 10, l. 3.
[18] Tailoring and laundry were the two services that Slavic settlers in the Amur country had mostly associated with Chinese residents from across the border from the late imperial era to the early Soviet years. Blagoveshchensk-based researchers collected and published oral history and memoirs on local residents' lived experiences in the borderlands. See A. V. Teliuk, T. N. Teliuk, N. A. Shidialov, and V. P. Levchenko ed., *Triumfal'naia Arka Blagoveshchenska: iz Veka v Vek* (Blagoveshchensk: OAO Amurskaia Iarmarka, 2006): 23, 27.
[19] *Ibid*., 31, 112- 13. See also O. I. Sergeev, S. I. Lazareva, and G. Ia. Trigub, *Mestnoe Samoupravlenie na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX- nachale XX v.* (Vladivostok: Dal'nauka, 2002): 224- 25. Sergeev, Lazareva, and Trigub discuss Khabarovsk's reliance upon cross-border trade with the Chinese and cheap Chinese laborers in the process of its rapid development from a small-sized military post into a regional administrative center.

Fast-forwarding to the last years of the Romanov dynasty, the Amur River Basin as a whole was in much closer contact with the rest of the empire, thanks to Russia's rapid industrialization that brought more internal migrants, increasing amounts of capital, and the railroad to the area. The Trans-Siberian Railway particularly enabled unprecedented integration of the Far Eastern borderlands into the empire's growing economic and communication networks. Russian historiography of transportation has remarked on the construction and completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway in the 1910s as St. Petersburg's resolute attempt to showcase and consolidate its imperial power across Eurasia.[20] The scholarship has also noted that Imperial Russia's eastward expansion of the railway system to the Pacific end had evolved into a temporal trope of a search for its less manifest Asiatic spiritual roots.[21] The significance of the improved intra-empire connectivity, from the perspective ordinary imperial subjects residing in the borderlands, might lie in the shortened travel distance and the increasing accessibility of more goods and bigger markets. For example, large quantities of salmon harvested from the lower Amur and Ussuri Rivers now could arrive at dining tables in Central Siberia by train fairly fast and fresh.[22] In addition, tea, one of the most traded commodities between Russia and East Asia, now could be shipped in significantly larger volume to European Russia and allowed merchants to make faster business turnover. Vladivostok and Harbin, Russia's imperial enclave

[20] Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 14. See also Olga Malinova-Tziafeta, "On the Path to Russian Modernity," *Kritika* 19, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 864- 65.
[21] Anindita Banerjee, "The Trans-Siberian Railroad and Russia's Asia: Literature, Geopolitics, Philosophy of History," *Clio* 34, no. 1- 2 (Fall-Win 2004- 05): 20. See also Harsha Ram, "Spatializing the Sign: The Futurist Eurasianism of Roman Jakobson and Velimir Khlebnikov," in *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism*, ed. Marlene Laruelle, Sergey Glebov, and Mark Bassin (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005): 139- 40.
[22] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 608, l. 17.

in Manchuria, soon replaced Kiakhta and Irkutsk to emerge as the new centers of Eurasian tea trading.[23]

Industrialization and transportation technological advancement had notably decreased the level of the Amur country's disconnection from the empire's social and economic development and helped to knit major settlements in the Far Eastern periphery into a more connected socioeconomic network. Chekhov's observation of emptiness, however, was still applicable to summarizing the overall anthropo-geographical landscape of the borderlands, when the imperial era drew to an end. The borderlands remained underpopulated. After the lower Amur River Basin was formally incorporated into the Russian economy in the 1850s, the imperial elite long projected that the newly annexed land, with its relatively mild climate and rich soil, would serve as a granary for the whole Far East and enable consistent provision and delivery of agricultural products northward up to Yakutsk.[24] The projection was never effectively realized.

Moreover, the waterway border remained fairly porous. The Russian political elite at the turn of the century, notably including Sergei Witte, considered that an open border between Russia and its East Asian neighbors enabled St. Petersburg to project its imperial influence to Manchuria and China proper, and yet many were concerned that the porous border increased the Amur and Ussuri Basins' vulnerability to potential interference from other European colonial powers and Japan, especially in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War.[25] In regard to the Amur River's role as both an international border and part of an internal waterway transportation network, some from the educated strata in the Russian Far East noted that the Amur River's

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[23] Chinyun Lee, "From Kiachta to Vladivostok: Russian Merchants and the Tea Trade," *Region* 3, no. 2 (2014): 210-211.
[24] Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840- 1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 176; John Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1996): 37- 38.
[25] T. Ia. Ikonnikova, *Dal'nevostochnyi tyl Rossii v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Khabarovsk: Izdatelstvo Khabarovskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta, 1999), 78- 80.

porosity and very accessibility to Chinese ships by way of its major tributary, the Sungari River, tightened the borderland area's association with Manchuria and diminished its role as a link in the domestic communication chain.[26] Nikolai Gondatti, the last imperial governor-general of the Amur Province, was especially eager to halt international ships' navigation on the Amur. The open border and tariff-free trade astride the Amur River, in Gondatti's opinion, prevented the Amur country's rich land from unleashing its productivity, for the whole Amur country now relied excessively on grain and produce transported from Manchuria.[27] Like-minded imperial officials, such as Russia's then minister of railways and transportation Petr N. Dumitrashko, also expressed much eagerness to rein back foreign ships' use of the Amur River out of similar concerns.[28] Some contended that both railway and waterway transport systems in the area did more disservice than favor to Russia's interests against the backdrop of loose governmental regulation of both transportation modes. Instead of magnifying Russia's sphere of influence in Northeast Asia, the construction of railroads, especially the Chinese Eastern Railway, and the permeable waterway border appeared to increasingly subject Russia's Amur country to the influence of foreign businesses and politics.[29]

The early 1920s saw the world's first socialist regime, the Soviet Union, having battled against the White Russian Army and foreign military interference during the Russian Civil War and wrestled with regional separatism in the aftermath, finally get ahold of the left-bank borderlands in the Amur River Basin and inherit the Amur-Ussuri waterway borders. The new

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[26] *Ibid*, 91- 93. See also Yukimura Sakon, "Development of Trade on the Amur and the Sungari and the Customs Problem in the Last Years of the Russian Empire," in *Russia and Its Northeast Asian Neighbors: China, Japan, and Korea, 1858- 1945*, ed. Kimitaka Matsuzato (New York: Lexington Books, 2017): 56- 57.
[27] Sakon, "Development of Trade on the Amur," 57.
[28] The edited volume of a series of historical treaties and acts signed by Russia and China contains documents on bilateral negotiation between China and Russia on the abolishment of free trade zone along the Amur and Russia's extraterritoriality in Manchuria. V. S. Miasnikov, ed. *Russko-kitaiskie dogovorno-pravovye akty: 1689- 1916* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2004): 362.
[29] *Ibid*., 367- 69.

political regime did not bring an end to the old regime's dilemmas. Late imperial Russian statesmen's concerns about the Amur country's inefficient waterborne communication and transport networks, for example, remained valid into the early Soviet era. Also, much of Chekhov's observation remained valid. The Amur River remained the major component of an intricate transnational waterway transport network, and yet it became more institutionally reified as an international border separating two polities. The border now presented the old challenge to the new Soviet regime: how could those on the left bank properly harness the Amur's potential as an essential section of their domestic transport system without inviting inland the familiar, excessive dependence upon the right bank?

This chapter investigates how the Soviet state and its citizens living in the Amur country borderlands took on the perennial transport challenge and made efforts to overcome it. It focuses on the history of a particular regional enterprise, namely the Amur Shipping Company (*Tovarishchestvo Amurskogo parokhodstva,* later *Amurskoe obshchestvo parokhodstva i torgovli*), and its involvement in the Soviet state's assertion and transformation of the borderlands through several major undertakings: moving goods and people, rediscovering and mastering the intricate channel systems of the Amur and its tributaries, and participating in defining and policing the waterway border. The biography of the shipping company in this chapter starts from its formative and developmental stages in the nineteenth century and carries on to later stages of its expansion and nationalization in the heyday of Stalinism. I pay substantial attention to the pre-Soviet timeline of the Amur Shipping Company's development and contextualize this for-profit company's key business undertakings and techniques that set the stage for its nationalization and militarization in the Soviet period. I then investigate how the shipping company's cumulative know-how in the imperial era had enabled and informed its

transformation into not merely a nationalized logistics service provider, but also a politicized border institution. Apart from discussing the quantitative and technological enhancement of the company's fleet, I specifically analyze three key undertakings that characterized the company's socialist transformation: embracing nationalization and integrating its operation into the USSR's national communication network; cultivating disciplined Soviet boatmen; and more notably, producing authenticated, empirical knowledge about the Amur, the increasingly impermeable international border. In addition to investigating the Amur Shipping Company's evolution into a border institution, this chapter reserves some room for a brief discussion of the infrastructural development for road transport in the same Soviet borderlands along the Amur. The construction of roads and the transformation of the shipping company complemented each other, and they both spelled out the shared pursuit of the socialist state and borderland residents in the Amur country: a self-sufficient socioeconomic ecosystem.

Focusing primarily on the Amur River and an enterprise built for harnessing the transport potential of the Amur, I use the story of the shipping company to illustrate the process by which the once socioeconomically coherent and interconnected Amur River Basin became fragmented along national lines. I use the Russian term *osvoenie* as the central framework of this chapter. Translated in Anglophone works as colonization, *osvoenie* was a term appearing in both secondary documents and historical actors' discourses throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially those pertaining to the geographic periphery of the Russian Empire and later the USSR. *Osvoenie*, in comparison with colonization, contains nuanced connotations beyond the assertion of one's hegemony over territories, politics, and socioeconomic institutions of the colonized. Its appearance in historical discourses has always carried the ethos of certain temporality. In the particular setting of the Amur country, Soviet state agents' comprehension of

osvoenie bore its own characters, differing from Imperial Russian statesmen's attempt at *osvoenie* of the same Far Eastern borderlands.

Looking into the history of a shipping company through the lens of *osvoenie* in this chapter, I argue that Imperial Russia's bid for socioeconomic assertiveness and political influence in the broad Amur country projected into and informed the Soviet state's pursuit of *osvoenie* of the Northeast Asian borderlands. As evidenced by various undertakings of the Amur Shipping Company over the course of seven decades, the establishment and reconfiguration of Soviet border institutions relied heavily on personnel, techniques, and knowledge inherited from the old imperial days. However, the Soviet state's aspiration of *osvoenie* in the borderlands fundamentally differed from its predecessor, for the Soviet consideration of *osvoenie* was more tightly associated with socioeconomic self-sufficiency at both regional and state levels and political reorientation towards Moscow. Experiences and know-how that the shipping enterprise accumulated in the imperial era legitimized its nationalization in the Soviet years. However, it was the Soviet version of *osvoenie* that decisively shaped its transition into a statized, modern border institution, smoothing out of the process of the Soviet *Priamur'e*'s socioeconomic separation from the broad Amur country.[30]

The border town where Anton Chekhov made a brief stop in June 1890 on route to Sakhalin Island has long treasured and celebrated the cultural footprint the great writer left there. Blagoveshchensk, now a city of 200,000, engraved a memorial plaque of Chekhov on the frontal façade of its historical river transport terminal (*rechnoi vokzal*) and recently identified the writer's association with the Amur Shipping Company, whose origin was in this very border

[30] In both written and oral communications, Russians, especially Russian Far Easterners, use the term *Priamur'e* to broadly refer to the Russian part of the Amur River Basin. On a more local scale, people from the Amur Oblast proudly refer to only their oblast as *Priamur'e*.

town. Allegedly, Chekhov disembarked on the deck of Blagoveshchensk's historical river terminal, and a day later on the same deck he boarded a different ship owned by the Amur Shipping Company for Khabarovka, his next destination.[31] Although it is not entirely certain that Chekhov's connecting steamship was the property of the Amur Shipping Company,[32] local media's remembrance of Chekhov together with the company demonstrates its significance in shaping Blagoveshchensk's patriotically oriented public discourse on history. The Amur Shipping Company was indeed an important part of the border town's past.

Blagoveshchensk and the Amur Shipping Company were both founded in 1858, when the Amur River became an international border, and its left-bank riverine plain was transferred from the Qing Empire to Imperial Russia. Both of their histories had much to do with the Amur. Russian geographers have agreed on dividing the Amur River into three streams. Narrower passages, more sheer cliffs, and rapids with occasionally difficult waves notably characterize the upstream. The river channel significantly widens and deepens after joining the waters of one of its major tributaries, the Zeya River, and hence the more open and navigable middle stream begins.[33] Blagoveshchensk is located right by the confluence of the Amur and the Zeya Rivers. This geographic particularity played a determinant role in this former military outpost's acquisition of town status in the wake of Russia's annexation of the left shore by the Amur. The

[31] The city of Khabarovsk was named Khabarovka before 1893, when its area and population remained under the level of average Russian Far Eastern township. For Blagoveshchensk residents' new discovery of their association with Chekhov, see "V Blagoveshchenske otmechaiut 155-letie so dnia rozhdeniia pisatelia Antona Chekhova," *Amur Info*, January 29, 2015, https://www.amur.info/news/2015/01/29/88865

[32] The Amur Oblast Research Library (Amurskaia oblastnaia nauchnaia biblioteka) organized a regional conference on the historical legacies of the Amur Shipping Company in winter 2017. The organizers later selected a dozen conference presentations and published an edited volume *Proshloe i nastoiashchee: Amurskogo parokhodstva*. An independent local historian in this volume lists in detail the company's historical possession of vessels in the 1890s and 1900s, and Chekhov's connecting steamer *Murav'yov* was not among them. See Al'bina. N. Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," in *Proshloe i nastoiashchee: Amurskogo parokhodstva: Sbornik dokladov nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, ed. M. K. Chesnokova (Blagoveshchensk: Amur Oblast Research Library, 2018): 18- 19.

[33] Victor Zatsepine, *Beyond the Amur: Frontier Encounters between China and Russia, 1850- 1930* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017): 23.

geography also decisively shaped the developmental trajectory of a new navigation company that would consistently contribute to Blagoveshchensk's facilitation of regional communication, trade, and military security: Benardaki & K (*Tovarishchestvo Benardaki i K*).

The founder of the company, Dmitry E. Benardaki, was a Moscow-based entrepreneur owning a sizable shipbuilding company and multiple other businesses in European Russia. Encouraged by the tsarist government's subsidy and financial incentives for certain economic undertakings in the Amur country, Benardaki purchased three boats from a small shipbuilding company in the Transbaikal Oblast and opened his own shipping business in Blagoveshchensk. He planned to transport more goods from European Russia and make use of his own shipping vessel to expand his business territory to the middle and lower Amur Basin.[34] Unfortunately Benardaki's shipping business enjoyed only modest success, despite its prime location at the Amur and Zeya Rivers' confluence. In 1871, shortly after he sold the company to a collective of businessmen in Transbaikal, it went out of business. Benardaki himself allegedly had never been to Asiatic Russia. The new owners adopted for the company a plain, memorable name that bore the character of the new borderlands: Amur Shipping Company (*Tovarishchestvo Amurskogo parokhodstva*).[35]

The shipping company had in general experienced steady development ever since adopting a new name as well as arguably a new business model. It soon became one of a few key players in the regional market of waterborne transportation in the entire Amur River Basin. By the mid 1880s, the company owned a fleet of 67 steamships through purchase and shipbuilding in its own dockyard located near the estuary of the Zeya River.[36] Its vessels regularly sailed

[34] R. Keizerlinga, *Sibir': Iz putevykh zapisok grafa* (Moscow: Univ. tip., 1900): 77- 78.
[35] *Ibid*., 78. See also Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," 21.
[36] The same site of the Amur Shipping Company's dockyard is still in use by Blagoveshchensk's only shipbuilding factory October Revolution today. See Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," 23.

between major river ports on the upper and middle streams of the Amur and its tributaries during the navigation season. It distinguished its transport service from other competitors by using different types of steamers for different sections of the travel routes. The company was among the first builders of sidewheel steamers in the Russian Far East.[37] The sidewheel steamships, in comparison with the then mainstream sternwheel steamers, kept better stability while in motion in more difficult rapids. The Amur Shipping Company invested in sidewheel steamships in its routes covering the Amur's upstream.[38] That might help explain the company's preeminence in providing transportation service for merchants and internal settlers between Sretensk, a major river port town by the Amur's upper stream, and Lakhasusu (named Tongjiang in Chinese), another river port on the right bank of the Amur's middle stream.[39] The Amur Shipping Company made Blagoveshchensk a mandatory stop, where passengers switched onto bigger steamers with deeper drafts.[40] This way it contributed to the constant flow of people and goods into Blagoveshchensk and helped assure the border town's socioeconomic prosperity.

The Amur Shipping Company's business wellbeing from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth was notably associated with the migration of an important group of people: the Cossack hosts. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the company's association with Cossacks guaranteed its consistent relevancy in narratives of Russian and Soviet history. Admittedly the history of Imperial Russia's expansion into the Amur River Basin was also a history of Cossack hosts' adventures and settlement in the area. The Transbaikal and Siberian

[37] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 568, l. 12.
[38] I. N. Muravetskii, "Lainer sungariiskoi linii," in *Proshloe i nastoiashchee: Amurskogo parokhodstva: Sbornik dokladov nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, ed. M. K. Chesnokova (Blagoveshchensk: Amur Oblast Research Library, 2018): 32.
[39] Archival sources belonging to Imperial Russia's Maritime Ministry show that the Amur Shipping Company had the second largest fleet of 53 steamers running on the Amur from 1892 to 1893, only behind a Khabarovsk-based shipping company Konstantin. It almost dominated transportation service on the Amur's up and middle streams. See RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 608, ll. 20- 22.
[40] Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," 24.

Cossack hosts both mobilized battalions eastward to stake a claim to the left bank of the Amur in the mid nineteenth century. Since then, many a *stanista* of the Transbaikal Cossack host as a whole had moved to and settled along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers. The Amur Cossack host was finally split from the Transbaikal Cossack host in 1879, bearing particular responsibility for defending and protecting the empire's frontier in the Amur country.[41] The Transbaikal Cossack host continued to be a major source of the Amur Cossack host's population, and organized migration of Cossacks from the Transbaikal steppe to the Amur valley remained steady throughout the late nineteenth century. The Cossack hosts' choice of the Amur Shipping Company for transportation might have to do with their steamships' relative technological advantage and the greater size of the fleet compared to other carriers. The imperial state subsidized Cossacks hosts' migration and resettlement in Asiatic Russia, and it might have been more pragmatically convenient for the Resettlement Administration to work with one sizable transportation company instead of a few smaller carriers.[42] As a result, the private transportation enterprise now became more tightly intertwined with these farmer-warrior colonists of the empire. The Amur and Ussuri Cossack hosts not only took the carrier's steamers to travel between various localities, but also rented its vessel from time to time for military use, including river patrol and occasional drills.[43]

Russophone historiography has cast a patriotic light on the Amur Shipping Company's past, especially given its association with the Cossacks who safeguarded the frontier. The

[41] A. V. Teliuk and V. N. Abelentsev, ed. *Amurskie kazaki: materialy, dokumenty, svidetel'stva, vospominaniia, vol. 1* (Blagoveshchensk: OAO Amurskaia iarmarka, 2008), 86- 87.
[42] The sources that I have at hand do not clearly indicate the reason that Cossacks chose the Amur Shipping Company in the first place. My interpretation is based on secondary sources' summarization of the Transbaikal and Amur Cossack hosts' transportation records from the 1870s to the 1900s. See V. G. Bersenev, *150 let Russkogo Sudokhodstva*, 51- 53; see also Kovalchuk, *Gruntovye dorogi Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 14.
[43] V. R. Chepelev, "Amursko-Ussuriiskaia Kazach'ia flotiliia" in *Amurskoe kazachestvo: vchera i segodnia*, ed. N. G. Dolgoruk and M. K. Chesnokova (Blagoveshchensk: Amur Oblast Research Library, 2018), 121- 22.

patriotic aspect of the company has been highlighted primarily in discussions of its contribution to the formation of the Amur military flotilla at the turn of the century. The crew of the military flotilla, needless to say, consisted of predominantly Amur and Ussuri Cossacks.[44] Such a patriotic portrayal could be somehow misleading. The initial configuration of the Amur military flotilla surely included several gunboats built and reassembled by the Amur Shipping Company. However, the company did by no means donate these vessels to Imperial Russia's Ministry of War for free, nor did it voluntarily trade them for free out of patriotic consideration. It sold steamships to the Maritime Ministry-owned flotilla. It was, after all, a for-profit organization.

At the same time, the Amur Shipping Company had increasingly morphed into a borderland enterprise with particular imperial and patriotic characteristics since the turn of the century. Individual evidence from secondary sources reveals the company's patriotic turn, and these examples are not just tied to the company's connection to the military flotilla. For one thing, those in charge of the business started conceptualizing the company's position in the whole region's transport and logistics industry in the frame of imperial patriotism. The Amur River Basin's boom in industrial development and population growth went hand in hand at the turn of the century, as denoted by the construction of the railway and the surge in the number of new settlers. The official statistics indicated that population in the two border oblasts, Amur and Maritime, doubled within ten years between 1897 and 1907 to nearly one million.[45]

The population and its wide distribution across the Amur country meant increasing transportation demands. Quite a few waterborne transportation providers entered the market in

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[44] *Ibid*., 130. See also M. A. Kutuzov and V. D. Iavnov, "Kazachestvo na russko-kitaiskoi granitse," *Zapiski obshchestva izucheniia Amurskogo kraia* 36, no. 2 (2003): 47; N. E. Ablova, *KVZhD i rossiiskaia emigratsiia v Kitae: mezhdunarodnye i politicheskie aspekty istorii* (Moscow: Russkaia Panorama, 2005): 50- 51.

[45] The source points out that the official population statistics did not reveal the actual picture of the demographics, for imperial Russia's statistics had failed to include accurate numbers of highly mobile East Asian populations in the region. See E. L. Motrich and S. N. Naiden, "Naselenie i sotsial'noe razvitie rossiiskogo dal'nego vostoka," *Prostranstvennaia Ekonomika* no. 2 (2009): 48.

this period, and some owned and financed by foreign capital soon became competitors with Russian companies, including the Amur Shipping Company. The company's notable foreign competitors included the Amur Navigation Company, a similar enterprise with an almost identical name and owned by arguably the most preeminent American merchant then in the Russian Far East, Enoch Emory.[46] Eastward in the Ussuri valley and northward up in the lower Amur valley, the Amur Shipping Company did not have much market share, particularly after the very successful Vladivostok-based wholesale trading company Kunst & Albers branched out into the shipping business and dominated water travel from Vladivostok to northern Sakhalin in the early 1890s.[47] In addition, cheap Chinese carriers with junk ships vied with the Amur Shipping Company for short-distance routes on the Amur, and they easily won favor with Chinese passengers, including mostly seasonal migrant workers and farmers.[48]

One of the co-owners of the Amur Shipping Company, Prokopii I. Pakholkov, responded to the increasingly competitive transportation market by proposing the creation of an association catering to the shared interests of Russian shipping companies in the region. A senior entrepreneur native to Eastern Siberia and having taken part in Imperial Russia's great

[46] The Amur Navigation Company has at times appeared in secondary Russian sources in a confusing fashion, for some sources mistook it for the Amur Shipping Company by treating the two companies' titles, *kompaniia* and *tovarishchestvo*, interchangeably. As for some brief history of Enoch Emory's adventure in the Russian Far East, see Washington Baker Vanderlip and Homer B. Hulbert, *In Search of a Siberian Klondike* (New York: The Century Co., 1903): 11- 13.

[47] Kunst & Albers was one of the largest and most influential trading firms in the entire Northeast Asian region from the late 19th century to the 1920s. It was founded by two German businessmen from Hamburg, Gustav Kunst and Gustav Albers, who later became naturalized citizens of the Russian Empire. It started off in 1864 as a small store selling German agricultural machinery and European alcohol in Vladivostok. Soon it grew into an all-encompassing international firm with stores and offices in all major towns in the region: Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Nikolayevsk, Harbin, Dalian, etc. For detailed documentation of the firm's move into the shipping industry, see Lothar Deeg, *Kunst and Albers Vladivostok: The History of a German Trading Company in the Russian Far East, 1864- 1924,* trans. Sarah Bohnet (Berlin: epubli, 2013): 104- 106. Discrete archival documents pertaining to Imperial Russia's Maritime Ministry also contain information that can indicate the scale of Kunst & Albers's shipping service in the region. RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 608, l. 103.

[48] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 1, d. 10, l. 3- 4.

expedition in the Amur River Basin in the mid nineteenth century,[49] Pakholkov considered that Russian shipowners (*parokhodovladel'tsy*) needed to work closer with one another to have the edge over foreign competitors in the waterborne transportation industry. His concern about the standing of his company, as well as Russian shipping companies at large, in the transportation market in Northeast Asia was couched in a particular imperial and patriotic fashion. According to Pakholkov, British and German shipowners could soon outperform Russian fleets on the Amur and in the Sea of Okhotsk and Japan Sea, if those Russian shipowners failed to collaborate and open more navigation routes.[50] He seemed to be especially wary of the British imperial regime's northward expansion into Manchuria, for it already had the right to build railway and navigating waterbodies in Beijing, the capital area of the dysfunctional Qing Empire.[51] In 1899, the Administration of Waterways of the Amur River Basin (*Upravlenie vodnykh putei Amurskogo basseina*), a regional Russian shipowners' association, was founded in Blagoveshchensk at the initiative of the Amur Shipping Company.[52]

This Administration of Waterways soon transitioned into a quasi-state agency. It appeared to be one of the imperial Russian agencies that participated in the negotiation with the Republic of China on navigation rights on the Amur and Sungari Rivers in the 1910s.[53] As for

[49] L. M. Damenshchek and M. D. Kushnareva, "Kupecheskaia perepiska kak istochnik izucheniia problem razvitiia pushnoi torgovli krupnym kapitalom v severo-vostochnoi sibiri vo vtoroi polovine xix- nachale xx v." *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* no. 403 (2016): 43.
[50] Notes from the written by Pakhokov from documents pertaining to the Administration of Waterborne Transport of the Amur River Basin. RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 563, ll. 171- 172.
[51] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 563, l. 134. Local historians in the Russian Far East have also discussed Russian imperial elite's concern about confrontation with the British in Manchuria, the area supposedly belonging to Russia's sphere of influence. The rise of Japan as another potential rival was not yet seriously taken into consideration. See Kovalchuk, *Gruntovye dorogi Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 18- 20.
[52] Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," 25.
[53] *Izvestiia Ministerstva inostrannykh del: Kniga I* (St. Petersburg: Tip. V. F. Kirshbauma, 1912): 48- 49. The same Administration of Waterways of the Amur River Basin seems to also appear in secondary Chinese sources. The author refers to the same participatory role of the organization in the discussion of Republican China's diplomatic battle for navigation right on the Amur and Sungari Rivers. See Tan Guilian 谭桂恋, *Zhongdong Tielu de Xiuzhu yu Jingying, 1896- 1917: Eguo Zaihuashili de Fazhan* 中东铁路的修筑与经营，1896- 1917：俄国在华势力的发展

the Amur Shipping Company, its business profile was more notably linked to and nested in Russia's imperial ambition in Northeast Asia. Its undertakings during the last couple of imperial decades not only brought in better profits, but also de facto helped tackle what imperial statesmen deemed hardships that hampered Russia's effective *osvoenie* of the Amur country.[54] The company continued to expand shipping routes and its own transport routes started to form an infra-areal network of logistics in the Amur River Basin. The company extended its regular shipping routes all the way to the estuary of the Amur and started sailing on the more competitive route on the Ussuri River and Lake Khanka. Contemporary sources estimate that all shipping routes of the company added up to more than 4000 kilometers in the 1910s. Some routes were hardly profitable in the short term, but the owners insisted on keeping them in hopes that their service would outperform other competitors in the long run.[55]

The company's extension of shipping routes had a much more profound impact upon the imperial regime's *osvoenie* of the area: it created new settlements and wove these nodes into the developing infra-regional network of logistics and socioeconomic communication. A most essential settlement brought into being by the Amur Shipping Company was Zeya-Pristan', a river port town roughly 600 kilometers north of the Zeya River's convergence with the Amur. Once an anonymous locality for military warehousing, it was chosen by the Amur Shipping Company as a new connecting point in the middle of its new navigation route on the Zeya River. Steamers soon brought over a steady flow of settlers and businesses, and the supposed travel

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[The Construction and Management of Chinese Eastern Railway, 1896- 1917: The Development of Russian Influence in China] (Taipei: Lianjing Publishing, 2016): 525.

[54] Anglophone scholarship tends to translate the Russian term *osvoenie* into colonization, yet it connotes claim, assimilation, development, and transformation of the entire anthropo-geographic and socioeconomic systems of a place in the context of the imperial state's relationship with the Far Eastern borderlands. Eurasianist historians, such as Willard Sunderland, have discussed the term in their monographs. For example, see Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004): 4.

[55] Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," 27- 28.

connection point grew into a port town of nearly 9,000 by 1910, the fourth largest town in the Amur Oblast.[56] As Zeya-Pristan' continued to grow, mass-recruited Chinese laborers for the gold mining industry started appearing there, and the Amur Cossack host also organized migration of Cossack farmers and soldiers.[57] The port town's steady development showed how the for-profit organization's business undertaking complemented the imperial regime's efforts in *osvoenie* of the borderland colony by bringing to life new towns and invigorating human and capital movements.

If the creation of settlements like Zeya-Pristan' appeared to be an imperial by-product of the Amur Shipping Company's implementation of strategic business plans, another contribution the company made to strengthening imperial *osvoenie* of the Amur country can be considered deliberate. In the aftermath of the Qing Dynasty's downfall, Russia and Republican China conducted several rounds of negotiations over navigation right on major rivers in the Amur River Basin between 1911 and 1912. By conditionally lifting the restriction of Chinese ships sailing on the Amur, Russians acquired the exclusive extraterritorial right to navigating the Sungari, the largest tributary of the Amur stretching through Manchuria.[58] The Amur Shipping Company very soon opened new routes down the Sungari and set up facilities in Harbin, the capital city of the Russia-owned Chinese Eastern Railway zone right by the Sungari River. Harbin was experiencing rapid urbanization in the 1910s and becoming significantly cosmopolitan. Russia's technocratic elite categorically dominated the Harbin city council and enjoyed their social privilege in the heartland of Northern Manchuria, yet they increasingly fretted about the

[56] For the Amur Shipping Company's decision on having a middle point for connecting steamships, see RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 608, ll. 142- 45. For the population of Zeya-Pristan' in 1910, see Bolotov, *Amur i ego bassein*, 55.
[57] Chepelev, "Amursko-Ussuriiskaia Kazach'ia flotiliia," 125.
[58] Chinese steamships were allowed to sail long distance on the Amur only if they met specific requirement for size, horsepower, and ownership. Yuexin Rachel Lin, "White Water Red Tide: Sino-Russian Conflict on the Amur 1917-20," *Historical Research* 90, no. 247 (February 2017): 77.

increasing influence of other imperial powers over Harbin, especially the Japanese.[59] Russian entrepreneurs in the Far East, including the owners of the Amur Shipping Company, broadly shared the same concern. Genrikh Lyuders, a German-Russian businessman in possession of over 30 percent of the Amur Shipping Company's property and a goldmine in the Amur Oblast, contracted the company to purchase goods in China and transport them to Russia by way of the Sungari. By assuming the role of mass purchaser, according to Lyuders, the company would circumvent Chinese and Japanese business middlemen's interference with necessary goods' pricing and availability.[60] Regional industrial and economic periodicals revealed that the Amur Shipping Company was the primary supplier of several commercial crops, including sorghum, maize, and buckwheat, to markets in major Russian towns of the Amur country between 1912 and 1913.[61] The company's firsthand involvement in large-scale procurement and shipment of such crops presumably resulted in Russian borderland settlements' declining reliance on small-scale, cross-border trading. The Russian Far East's economic dependence on transnational, cross-border trading has been well documented by historians. The participation of local businesses in international trading under state subsidy or contract, as evidenced by the Amur Shipping Company, showed that a non-market approach to minimizing such economic and material dependence was taking shape prior to the Soviet state's planned economic intervention decades later.

The extension of an elaborate intra-regional trading and transport network into Manchuria by the Amur Shipping Company also facilitated the development of a particular

[59] Joshua A. Fogel, "The Japanese and the Jews: A Comparative Analysis of their Communities in Harbin, 1898-1930," in *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842- 1953*, ed. Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000): 93- 94.
[60] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 705, ll. 76- 77.
[61] "Sel'skokhoziaistvennoe delo" in *Sibirskii torgovo-promyshlennyi ezhegodnik, 1913* (St. Petersburg: Izd. D. R. Yung, 1914): 52- 54.

human tracking system for managing complex human migrations in the borderlands. After Japan defeated Russia and took over the southern section of the Chinese Eastern Railway zone between Harbin and the Liaodong Peninsula in 1905, the tsarist regime's wariness of Japanese encroachment in North Manchuria translated into the building of the Amur Railway, part of the Trans-Siberian Railway yet lying north of the Sino-Russian waterway borders.[62] The Russian domestic workforce could not satisfy the growing demand for human resources. As a result, thousands of low-paid Chinese workers from Manchuria and other Northern Chinese provinces were enlisted and transported to the Russian Far East to fill the labor pool. After being recruited by various agencies, a majority of Chinese laborers would be transported to Russia by way of Harbin. There they either took the train to Vladivostok or sailed by steamship on the Sungari to the Amur Oblast. The Amur Shipping Company took on the responsibility of transporting them to destinations on the other side of the border en masse.

Russian historiography has included detailed discussions on Imperial Russia's love-hate relationship with the Chinese in the Far East, especially Chinese migrant laborers. Both imperial elite and ordinary Slavic settlers grappled with striking a balance between inviting Chinese laborers and keeping them at bay in the late imperial era. The literature has highlighted the laissez faire attributes of Russia's immigration policy and its implementation in the Far East.[63] The Amur Shipping Company's participation in moving Chinese laborers, in the meantime, offered a glimpse into the less studied efficacious and regulatory dimension of the migration regime. In order to keep Chinese laborers in check, the Amur Shipping Company issued them a

[62] Ablova, *KVZhD i possiiskaia emigratsiia v Kitae,* 65.
[63] See Sergey Glebov, "Between Foreigners and Subjects: Imperial Subjecthood, Governance, and the Chinese in the Russian Far East, 1860s- 1880s," *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2017): 96- 98; A. G. Larin, *Kitaiskie migranty v Rossii: Istoriia i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Vostochnaia kniga, 2009): 39- 41; Lewis Siegelbaum, "Another 'Yellow Peril': Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (1978): 322- 324.

particular immigration ticket (*russkii bilet*) that worked simultaneously as their boarding pass and their travel visa into Russia. Chinese laborers usually stayed in designated working or farming sites for a duration of three to six months, and they were expected to retain the immigration tickets the whole time. The same laborers returned to China by ships of the same shipping company, and they then returned their *bilet* to the transport carrier.[64] In Chinese sources, the same immigration tickets have been remembered as border river-crossing passes (*guojiang xiaopiao*). Chinese workers associated the ticket with much dread and dislike, for it "cost them unreasonably too much money and always subjected them to Russian officers' harassment." Allegedly the Chinese would pay as much as thirty rubles for their failure to retain the tickets.[65]

In a sense, Chinese laborers' discontent with the shipping company's ticketing practice, as documented in various sources, testified to the efficiency of such a human migration tracking technique. The border-crossing pass, the name the Chinese assigned to the immigration *bilet*, revealed that the for-profit enterprise functionally bore increasing resemblance to a border-policing imperial agency. The shipping company had not only expanded its transportation network to Harbin, but also extended the spatiality of Russia's political borders beyond the actual borders and inserted it into Manchuria. It remains unclear if the Amur Shipping Company first devised this separate ticketing system for keeping track of Chinese migrant workers, but it had most decidedly adopted and perfected such a system in its regular business operation. The company's adoption and perfection of the laborers-tracking system, in some sense, marked a

[64] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 609, ll. 13, 19, 31- 32.
[65] For Chinese sources on the infamous tickets, see Chen Fuguang 陈复光, *You Qingyidai Zhi Zhong'e Guanxi 有清一代之中俄关系* [Sino-Russian Relations Since the Qing] (Kunming: Yunnan Chongming Publishing House, 1947): 256- 257; see also Lei Yin 雷殷, *Zhongdonglu Wenti 中东路问题* [On the Chinese Eastern Railway] (Taipei: Wenhai Press, 1967): 179- 182.

pinnacle of its overall contributions to maximizing Russia's imperial interests and fulfilling the empire's mission of *osvoenie* in the remote Far Eastern periphery. After all, it externalized imperial Russia's political borders and concretized the conception of borders in the mental mapping of many groups, including those Chinese migrant workers, Slavic settlers, and certainly the patriotically aware Russian elite, in a time that has been predominantly associated with a stage of openness and porosity of the Amur River.

At the conclusion of Russia's imperial era, the Amur Shipping Company was no longer the same small, local navigation business first established in Blagoveshchensk more than half a century earlier. Had Chekhov taken the Amur Shipping Company' steamship to journey along the Amur country two decades later, his experience and impressions would have been different. Travel time from Blagoveshchensk to Khabarovsk by ship had shrunk to less than thirty-six hours, and giant double-decker sidewheelers had better prevented passengers from feeling the rockiness. Moreover, the borderlands had become more populated and better supplied with goods and labor. The borderless nature of the region, as insinuated in Chekhov's text, was giving way to the realization of borders in some social groups' collective mental map. The shipping company could surely take come credit for these transformations in the Amur country. It had a much larger fleet equipped with exceptional horsepower. It enabled the loyal defenders and colonists of the empire- the Cossack hosts- to more smoothly navigate and harness the waterway systems in the Amur River Basin for imperial and militaristic purposes. It certainly took an active part in broadening the region's waterborne transportation network and consequently creating new nodes in the network, as evidenced by Zeya-Pristan'. The company's effort in strengthening the intra-regional shipping and trading network also included effective integration into it of a variety of human settlements, including the emerging Zeya-Pristan' and the rapidly

growing Harbin. Informed by the discursive framework of European imperialism, the owners of the company had been invested and engaged in particular techniques that consolidated Russia's imperial building in the Northeast Asian borderlands: bringing new settlements into life, brokering mass purchase and supply of agricultural goods, and filtering and tracking foreign migrants.

Later in the Soviet era, the new socialist regime would tap into the Amur Shipping Company's technological and socioeconomic know-how and nationalize this once for-profit enterprise. Such know-how that the company accumulated while being embedded in the process of Russia's empire-building in the Amur River Basin, would make notable contributions to the Soviet state's bid for self-sufficiency and endeavor to take in hand material and human transportation and distribution.

But first, the story of the Amur Shipping Company in the years between the revolutions in 1917 and the short-lived Far Eastern Republic's incorporation into the RSFSR in 1922 could generally be characterized by a constant rotation of business breakdown and reconfiguration. What happened to one of its steamships, namely *Baron Korf*, would well illustrate the convoluted timeline of the company during those years. Russian sources indicate that the ship was built in the early 1890s, and it was named after Baron Andrei N. Korf, the first Governor General of the *Priamur'e* Krai, who passed away in 1893 upon the steamship's launch. With an 18-meter width and 75-meter length, it immediately stood out as one of Amur Shipping Company's leading merchant ships with immense freight capacity.[66] The company employed it for primarily transporting goods between Blagoveshchensk and the estuary of the Amur throughout the 1890s. Into the twentieth century, *Baron Korf* became one of the company's

[66] RGIA DV, f. 704, op. 3, d. 568, l. 39. For information on its freight capacity and outstanding engine power, see P. K. Panaev, *K desiatiletiiu Amurskoi rechnoi flotilii* (Petrograd: Tip. Morskogo Miniterstva, 1916): 44-46.

properties that were chartered by the newly founded Amur military flotilla and converted for military use.[67] The fleet amassed by the Amur military flotilla to fight against Chinese rebels of the Boxer Movement from across the Amur and subsequently police the waterway border in the early 1900s might include *Baron Korf*.[68]

The steamship had been a component of the Amur military flotilla for most of the pre-revolutionary years with the exception of a brief period between 1909 and 1911, when the Amur Shipping Company reclaimed it for trading and sailed it on the Sungari into Manchuria.[69] In 1917, *Baron Korf* served on regular military duty throughout the navigation season and stayed put in the moorage area near Blagoveshchensk's river terminal for the long and harsh winter. When the ship was ready for navigation in the early spring the next year, its sailors, now aligning with the Far Eastern Soviet of People's Commissars (*Dal'sovnarkom*), put a red flag on it that signaled the soviet's possession of it.[70] By the end of the navigation season in 1918, however, *Baron Korf* was found in the White Army's armada of seized red vessels. Archival sources show that Japanese military forces also played an active role in attacking and capturing a handful of vessels belonging to the Amur military flotilla, including *Baron Korf*.[71] In the summer of 1921, the Whites and foreign military intervention forces were mostly driven out of the Far Eastern

[67] Chepelev, "Amursko-Ussuriiskaia Kazach'ia flotiliia," 123. See also Panaev, *K desiatiletiiu Amurskoi rechnoi flotilii*, 52, 59.
[68] Bersenev, *150 let Russkogo Sudokhodstva*, 88- 89; 101.
[69] Panaev, *K desiatiletiiu Amurskoi rechnoi flotilii*, 57.
[70] Historian John Stephan has provided insights into several key social groups' complicated political orientations in the Russian Far East in the aftermath of two revolutions of 1917. Boatmen of the Amur military flotilla, especially those from the Transbaikal and Amur Cossack hosts, mostly belonged to the lower middle rung of the Cossack communities and tended to support local soviets and welcome the land redistribution plan of the People's Soviet. Those boatmen's affinity for the People's Soviet was fluid and temporary and mostly driven by socioeconomic interests at first. See Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 119- 121. For the Amur military flotilla's red turn in the aftermath of the 1917 revolutions, see State Archive of Khabarovsk Krai (GAKhK), f. R-18, op. 6, d. 2, l. 5.
[71] GAKhK, f. R-18, op. 6, d. 2, ll. 17- 18.

Republic, the pro-Soviet buffer state between the RSFSR and territories under the influence of Japanese militarism, and the FER's state-owned flotilla took back the ship.[72]

Baron Korf, as well as many other gunboats reclaimed by the FER in 1920, did not survive the civil war unscarred. They were in need of repair and reappraisal. The FER flotilla returned some vessels to their original shipowners, for its budgetary shortage posed a limitation to their overall maintenance.[73] As for *Baron Korf*, its original owner might be among those who had fled Russia since the revolutions and sold part of their properties to Chinese and Russian buyers from across the border in Manchuria.[74] The establishment of North China's biggest shipping company in the Republican period, the Harbin-based Wutong Navigation Company, was a result of Russian shipowners' mass sell-off between 1918 and 1920.[75] That said, the Chinese shipping company's rise paralleled some of its Russian counterparts' business stoppage. The Amur Shipping Company, once a leader in the region's waterborne transport industry, now shrank to a small fleet of dozens and was barely in operation. With a large number of pre-revolutionary business owners having left, many unclaimed ships like *Baron Korf* were now under the superintendence of former ordinary sailors and boatmen.[76]

A group of former boatmen played a particularly decisive role in saving the Amur Shipping Company from liquidation and later reconfiguring it into a Soviet state agency between 1918 and 1925. One of them was a knowledgeable sailor named Afanasii N. Karpenko. In late

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[72] GAKhK, f. R-18, op. 6, d. 2, l. 22.
[73] Archival documents in the State Archive of Khabarovsk Krai do not specify the reasons the FER flotilla had former *parokhodovladel'tsy* reclaim their ships. See GAKhK, f. R-18, op. 6, d. 2, l. 27- 28. For discussions on the FER's military budgetary shortage and its resort to private businesses for economic recovery, see L. I. Galliamova, ed. *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii, Tom 3: Dal'nii Vostok Rossii v epokhu sovetskoi modernizatsii, 1922- nachalo 1941 goda* (Vladivostok: Dal'nauka, 2018): 594- 595.
[74] Bersenev, *150 let Russkogo Sudokhodstva*, 114.
[75] Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, ed. *Zhong'e Guanxi Shiliao: Dongbei Bianfang 中俄关系史料: 东北边防* [Documents on Sino-Russian Relations: The Manchurian Frontier] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2015): 169.
[76] GAKhK, f. R-18, op. 6, d. 4, ll. 4, 7, 8, 11.

March 1918, more than twenty boatmen mainly from the Amur and Transbaikal Oblasts organized and attended the First Watermen's Convention of the Amur River Basin (*s'ezd vodnikov Amurskogo basseina*) in Blagoveshchensk. In the convention, boatman representatives elected Karpenko to be the chair of this new organization. They also put on the table Karpenko's proposal of merging the three active shipping companies in the region that limped in the wake of revolutions and war: the Amur Shipping Company, a pro-Soviet section of the Harbin-headquartered Chinese Eastern Railway Society of River Boats (*KVZhD obshchestvo rechnogo parokhodstva*), and Company *Oparin*, once Khabarovsk's leading shipbuilding enterprise.[77] Karpenko's chairmanship and initiative for business merger did not come out of nowhere. A son of a lifelong Amur Cossack sailor and an experienced maritime pilot on the Amur, Karpenko demonstrated his familiarity with the remaining fleet of the Amur Shipping Company and the transportation industry in general at the Convention and used his expertise to persuade other boatmen into considering the potential merger.[78]

The merger, according to Karpenko and some like-minded boatmen, could better guarantee the survival of many a fragile vessel in the context of continuing conflicts in the region. Ideologically gravitating towards the People's Soviet, Karpenko suggested that a coalition of the three shipping companies would ascertain ordinary boatmen's collective right to control and protect the vessels as well as their own welfare.[79] The merger allegedly took effect right after the Convention, and representatives decided on adopting the name of Amur National Fleet (*Amurskii natsionalflot*) for this new three-in-one enterprise. Those boatmen also worked

[77] State Archive of Amur Oblast (GAAO), f. 988, op. 1, d. 2, l. 10.
[78] I have not been able to locate much detail on Karpenko's biography from local archival documents. Summaries and decrees of the Convention only revealed his Cossack background and his family's long-term association with the river navigation business on the Amur and its tributaries. He might have been at the managerial level of the Amur Shipping Company before 1917, and that might explain his renowned status among boatmen in the Convention. GAAO, f. 988, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 17- 19.
[79] GAAO, f. 988, op. 1, d. 2, l. 19.

out several secure, dependable shipping routes between major towns for material provisioning and human transportation amidst chaotic military clashes.[80] The Watermen's Convention also devoted sessions to discussing militarily equipping the boatmen's fleet to avoid foreign, especially Japanese military forces' harassment and intervention.[81] This First Amur Watermen's Convention was brief and spontaneous, yet it marked a milestone of the once for-profit Amur Shipping Company's drastic change after 1917 and paved the way for the company's gradual transformation into a militarized, statist border institution.

Partially influenced by historical literature published in the Soviet era, the mythical depiction of the Amur boatmen as unanimously immediate supporters of the nationalization idea, as advocated by the Soviet leadership, is prevalent in recent secondary Russophone sources. However, political orientations of Amur boatmen, including those constituting the manpower of Imperial Russia's Amur military flotilla and those working for various for-profit navigation companies, were diverse and complex, and the boatmen's political gravitation toward and affiliation with the Soviet regime by no means took place overnight.[82] A good number of remaining sailors of the Amur military flotilla, for example, opted for the Left SRs and even a faction of them sided with the Right SRs in early 1918.[83] Amur boatmen in the Blagoveshchensk area hardly reached any political consensus or agreed upon nationalization of their boats especially in the context that no political party had developed a firm base of support there. Even

[80] GAAO, f. 988, op. 1, d. 2, l. 26.
[81] GAAO, f. 988, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 21, 22, 26.
[82] Russophone secondary sources' description of boatmen in the Amur River Basin as a collective has tended to over-generalize their supportive response to the idea of nationalizing steamships as well as the leadership of Bolsheviks and allies in 1918. For examples, see L. I. Galliamova, ed. *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 597; Aleksandr A Chernyshev, *Triumf Tikhookeanskogo flota SSSR* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "E" Iauza, 2015): 6- 7.
[83] Ivan Sablin, *The Rise and Fall of Russia's Far Eastern Republic, 1905- 1922: Nationalism, Imperialism, and Regionalism in and after the Russian Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 103.

the merger appeared to be only in effect on paper on many occasions after the 1918 Watermen's Convention.[84]

The actual nationalization of all steamships, barges, and tugboats on the left bank of the Amur River, including *Baron Korf* and others owned by the Amur Shipping Company and the later Amur National Fleet happened four years later. Earlier in 1922, the FER government issued a proposition on strengthening the Amur River's waterborne transportation through agglomerating and nationalizing navigation services and establishing all-encompassing, state-owned shipping agencies. In May the same year, the decree to nationalize all commercial fleets came into effect in the Far East Republic. The Amur National Fleet became a constituent of one of the newly nationalized fleets: National Amur River Shipping Company (*Amurskoe gosudarstvennoe rechnoe parokhodstvo*, and hereinafter also referred to as AGRP) headquartered in Blagoveshchensk. This marked both the demise and rebirth of the old Amur Shipping Company.[85]

The National Amur River Shipping Company had since inherited the river terminal, shipyards, docks, and most other facilities of the old Amur Shipping Company. The former for-profit enterprise's metamorphosis into a state-owned institution surely had much to do with the FER central administration's push for nationalization of key sectors, including the waterborne transportation industry.[86] In the meantime, various primary and secondary sources have pointed to other forces that contributed to the Amur Shipping Company's nationalized turn in the early 1920s and its transformation into an increasingly distinctive border institution. First and

[84] "Blagoveshchensk utratil slavu rechnogo flagmana," *Amurskaia pravda*, August 17, 2007, https://www.ampravda.ru/2007/08/17/print02401.html
[85] Bersenev, *150 let Russkogo Sudokhodstva*, 116- 7.
[86] For the records of the FER's nationalization of transportation industries, see Far Eastern Republic, *Trade and Industries of the Far Eastern Republic* (Washington, DC: Special Delegation of the Far Eastern States to the United States, 1922): 27- 29.

foremost, the protracted, multi-party Russian Civil War unfolding in the Far Eastern battleground profoundly affected many boatmen's understanding of their relationship with the watercraft, the waterbody, and the less concrete entity of a state. As discussed above, White armies and foreign military intervention forces had interrupted, attacked, and seized ships on the Amur River run by the Red Guards or those aligning with the pro-Bolshevik forces between 1918 and 1919. For many boatmen active in the middle stream of the Amur, the multi-party warfare was synonymous with despair. In August 1918, one of the pro-Bolshevik local newspapers in Blagoveshchensk, *Amurskoe Ekho*, published a short article on foreign military boats' harassment of Russian ships carrying material supplies and civilian passengers on the Amur. The author mourned the dysfunction of the *Dal'sovnarkom* and thus blamed the political vacuum in the Blagoveshchensk for the Amur boatmen's mishaps on the Amur.[87] Another piece of local news in October stated that the joint forces of the Japanese, the Czech Legion, and Ussuri Cossack Ataman Kalmykov's followers had occupied Khabarovsk. As the newspaper remarked, the chaos downstream in Khabarovsk foreboded Red Guards' withdrawal and escalated conflicts in the area that could paralyze all waterway transport on the Amur and disrupt Blagoveshchensk's communication with other area of the Amur country.[88]

Rethinking the wartime experiences in retrospect in their Fourth Convention in 1923, Amur boatmen representatives approved of their organization's move under the direction of the District Committee of Waterborne Transport (*Raikomvod*) and the All-Union People's Commissariat of Railways (*Narodnyi komissariat putei soobshcheniia*, or NKPS). The Convention reports showed that Amur boatmen viewed the lack of a centralized authority and an elaborate defense system during the Civil War as an explanation for their fleet's cornered

[87] "Blagoveshchenskaia izvestiia," *Amurskoe okho*, August 25, 1918.
[88] "Telegrammy," *Amurskoe okho*, October 18, 1918.

confrontation with the Japanese military irritant.[89] The consideration of the Amur as a political border played out in this convention. Amur boatmen representatives noted that their regular sailing routes were still vulnerable to foreign interference, especially considering that the RSFSR had given up its right to navigate right-bank tributaries of the Amur, and Japanese and Chinese forces could subsequently threaten the borderlands.[90] In addition, the overall shipping capacity of the newly nationalized AGRP was only half of its pre-revolutionary predecessor's at best. The significantly shrunken fleet size and its impaired shipping capacity further justified the state's ownership, as Amur boatmen agreed that nationalization could free them from concern about the cost of watercraft's repair and maintenance and enable them to safeguard their ships and their Amur River.[91]

Table 1: National Amur River Shipping Company's fleet statistics in 1922 [92]

Steamers	Quality	Horsepower	Tonnage/ poods
Mail-Passenger-Freight	29	9,175	226,400
Freight-Passenger with tugging arrangements	6	1,740	16,600
Tugboats	26	6,770	N/A
Total	61	17,685	243, 000

Amur boatmen's collective firsthand experience of chaos and disorder during wartime and its profound impact upon their approval of the fleet's nationalization was by no means distinctive across the vast space of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Peter Holquist has studied how Russian state apparatuses created particularly violent wartime institutions to tackle the food supply crisis and quell civil unrest in the Don Cossack region over the course of

[89] GAAO, f. R-116, op. 1, d. 1, l. 33.
[90] GAAO, f. R-116, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 34- 35.
[91] The convention session summaries (*doklady*) used the same word safeguard (*okhrana*) for describing the benefits of state ownership for the fleet as well as for the river. GAAO, f. R-116, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 34- 35.
[92] Far Eastern Republic, *Trade and Industries,* 30.

the First World War and Russian Civil War. His study has revealed that the Soviet state carried over such wartime institutions into peacetime in the name of establishing the orderly "political organization of society."[93] In a similar vein, top-down, effective measures that political regimes took for mass mobilization and governance during wartime, or rather, the lack thereof in the story of those Amur boatmen, justified the Soviet state's direct involvement in and control of everyday socioeconomic institutions in the Northeast Asian borderlands after the Civil War ended. Modern states, at this time, appeared to win the endorsement of private organization globally as a powerful instrument for weathering hardships and fostering and restoring order across a broad spectrum. The business of the aforementioned Wutong Navigation Company, one of the harbingers of China's modern river shipping industry, hit a rough patch in the early 1920s when the RSFSR asserted its monopoly on waterborne transportation on the lower stream of the Amur and more and more Japanese and British shipping enterprises entered into the competition for dominating the Manchurian transportation market. The Wutong Company thus resorted to the government of Republican China in Beijing for nationalizing its business and making it profitable.[94]

Another rationale also lay behind Amur watermen's approval of the shipping enterprise's nationalization. The belief in *osvoenie* of the Amur River Basin through harnessing the potential of the river system persisted into the 1920s, and it found its way into Amur boatmen's conventions. Imperial Russian statesmen and the educated class once had high hopes for transforming the Amur country into the whole Far Eastern region's productive granary, and now

[93] Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914- 1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002): 6, 40.
[94] Jin Zhi 金智, *Qingtianbairi Qixia Minguo Haijunde Botaoqifu: 1921- 1945* 青天白日旗下民国海军的波涛起伏：1921- 1945 [Chinese Navy during the Republican Era: 1921- 1945] (Taipei: Independent Authors Publishing House, 2015): 343- 344.

Amur boatmen learned that their work made an important contribution to materializing such an aspiration. In the Seventh Convention of the Amur Boatmen in 1925 (which, by that time, had mostly evolved into a formal internal meeting of selected representatives from AGRP), participants approved a series of plans that emphasized conversion of more passenger and damaged military ships into freight vessels and increasing the frequency of freight ship lines especially in the lower stream of the Amur.[95] The goal, according to the convention record, was to help bring people and provisions back to many settlements along the Amur's lower stream and revive them, especially Nikolaevsk-on-Amur (formerly known as Nikolaevsk) , the port town located at the estuary of the Amur and almost completely torn down during the Russian Civil War. According to the convention session's record, Amur boatmen were supportive of the proposal of turning Nikolaevsk-on-Amur into another Odessa in the region, initiated by the *Dal'revkom*, the centralized governmental organ of the whole Far Eastern territory.[96] At the same time, the *Dal'revkom* also expected the AGRP's fleet to heighten its shipping logistical efficiency and make major river ports like Blagoveshchensk and Khabarovsk into Samaras in the Far East.[97] The persistent aspiration for making another Odessa or Samara, the trading and transport centers of important merchandise like grain, revealed that now the Soviet officials and Amur boatmen were caught up in imaginaries inspired by notions of *osvoenie*.[98]

[95] GAAO, f. R116, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 6- 8.
[96] GAAO, f. R116, op. 1, d. 5, l. 13.
[97] GAAO, f. R116, op. 1, d. 5, l. 14.
[98] For the imperial Russian elite's obsession with turning Vladivostok and, to some lesser degree, Nikolaevsk into Odessa-like trading and transportation center and those Far Eastern ports' comparability to Odessa, see Masafumi Asada, "Making a Vancouver in the Far East: 'The Trinity Transportation System' of the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1896- 1917," in *Russia and Its Northeast Asian Neighbors: China, Japan, and Korea, 1858- 1945*, ed. Kimitaka Matsuzato (New York: Lexington Books, 2017): 66; V. I. Iuzefov, *Gody i druz'ia starogo Nikolaevska: Sbornik ocherkov i novell o Nikolaevske* (Khabarovsk: Bol'shoi FO, 2005): 69- 70. For reference on Odessa's actually position as the Russian Empire's grain trading and shipping hub, see Lewis Siegelbaum, "The Odessa Grain Trade: A Case Study in Urban Growth and Development in Tsarist Russia," *The Journal of European Economic History* 9, no. 1 (1980): 113- 117.

The imperial elite's undertaking of *osvoenie* of the Far Eastern frontier long had the connotation of transforming the borderlands for the good of the Russian motherland (*rodina*). The same trope of *rodina* appeared in the discourse of Amur boatmen in the 1920s and enabled this social group to understand and adjust to its new relationship with the Soviet state. In the same 1925 Convention, Amur boatmen commemorated V. Ia. Nakorenko, a beloved coworker who oversaw Blagoveshchensk's main shipyard for more than a decade and just recently passed away. Nakorenko, as it turned out, was not merely a waterman, but also an amateur poet. His fellow watermen honored his service for the shipping industry of the Amur country's settlers (*amurchane*) and recited his poetry:

> "The open vastness is calling us from afar,
> Where good words and deeds rule;
> We, free men, hurry over to do honest and friendly work;
> For the good of the motherland and all people."[99]

Nakorenko's poem gave a glance at how ideas associated with *osvoenie* of the borderlands, including settlers' emotional attachment to the motherland, the excitement of exploring the open frontier, and the calling of hard work, all still made sense in the Soviet era. Moreover, they helped made sense of the transition into collective and state ownership of the boatmen's labor and steamships.

In the Soviet context, effective *osvoenie* of the borderlands in the Amur River Basin involved rearrangement of social and economic resources. AGRP's timetable for regular routes of passenger ships in 1925 offered a glimpse into such rearrangements: the nationalized

[99] The transliteration of the original Russian poem is as following: "*Nas manit v dal' otkryvshiisia prostor/ Tsarit gde slovo dobroe i delo/ Speshim, svobodnye, na chestnyi, druzhnyi trud/ Dlia blaga rodiny i dlia vsego naroda*." GAAO. f. R116, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 37, 40, 41.

enterprise now assigned more passenger ships and freight barges to the lower Amur lines between Khabarovsk and Nikolaevsk-on-Amur. The timetable was also an early indication of the gradual shift of the transportation system's hub from Blagoveshchensk to Khabarovsk. Such a shift had to do with Khabarovsk's position as the region's administrative center and one of its railway transport hubs. Commodities and people arriving in Khabarovsk by rail could immediately find means of waterborne transportation for their next destination. Its convenient connectivity to other major cities of the Far East- Vladivostok and Ussuriisk by train and Blagoveshchensk and Nikolaevsk by ship- secured its centrality in the region's overall transport network.

Table 2: Timetable for the company's major passenger ship routes in 1925 [100]

Name of Lines	Distance in Miles	Trip Frequency
Sretensk- Blagoveshchensk (Upper Amur)	807	9 per month
Blagoveshchensk- Khabarovsk (Middle Amur)	620	12
Khabarovsk- Nikolaevsk-on-Amur (Lower Amur)	591	15
Blogaveshchensk- Zeya	415	10
Blagoveshchensk- Ekimchan	483	5
Blagoveshchensk- Chekunda	400	3
Pokrovka- Olochi	267	3
Lakhasusu- Harbin	571	0

Khabarovsk's rise to the position of central node in the AGRP's waterway transport network underscored some other distinctly Soviet features of *osvoenie* of the Amur country in the 1920s. First, small, indigenous people now mattered. When planning the AGRP's shipping routes, Soviet Amur boatmen learned to consider integrating the social economy of small, indigenous nations into their operational agenda. Small, indigenous peoples (*korennye narody*) in

[100] GAAO, f. R116, op. 1, d. 5, l. 19.

the USSR's Northeast Asian borderlands were concentrated along the Ussuri River and the lower Amur stream. Between Khabarovsk and Nikolaevsk-on-Amur lived three relatively larger ethnic groups: the Nanai, Ulch, and Nivkh peoples. Terry Martin's conceptualization of the Soviet Union as an affirmative action empire in terms of its *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) policy in the 1920s is applicable to understanding those small Northeast Asian indigenous peoples' development in the same period. The Far Eastern Executive Committee enacted policies that aimed at granting the small indigenous peoples forms of nationhood with pronounced cultures, languages, and a certain level of political autonomy. In addition, the government also exempted these peoples from conscription and state taxation in order to boost their socioeconomic advancement.[101] Scholars have contributed much nuanced and insightful studies to understanding the implementation of *korenizatsiia* policies in various local contexts across the broad Soviet space. Yuri Slezkine, for example, showcases how the kolkhoz administration in the Soviet North incorporated teaching indigenous children ideological correctness into the enactment of *korenizatsiia* policy. Adrienne Edgar reveals the tension between Russified indigenous people and non-Russified indigenous groups in vying for the preferential treatment in employment in Soviet Central Asia that other historians do not pay special attention to. Matthew Pauly's monograph on linguistic Ukrainization further enriches the discussion by highlighting the significance of researching "soft-line" indigenization policies and those who translated those policies into daily practice. After all, those non-Party historical actors who were engaged in

[101] *Korenizatsiia* policies aimed at effectively integrating non-Russian nationalities into their Soviet republican governments and the Soviet state, and they especially entailed granting non-Russians preferential treatment in employment and education. For Martin's theorization of the Soviet Union as an affirmative action empire, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923- 1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001): 5- 7. For the Far Eastern Krai government's enactment of nationalities policy for the indigenous peoples, see A. N. Agalarkhanova, "Natsional'naia Politika rossiiskoi imperii i sovetskoi Rossii v otnoshenii korennykh malochislennykh narodov severa, sibiri i dal'nego vostoka," *Gumanitarnye issledovaniia v Vostochnoi Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke*, no. 6 (2013): 21- 22.

national culture-building at the grassroots level, as represented by the Ukrainian educators and linguists in Pauly's account, informed and profoundly shaped *korenizatsiia* on a regular basis.[102]

Archival sources pertaining to AGRP indicate that the shipping company was responsive to the government's indigenization policy. It increased navigation frequency of the lower Amur line and added more stops on the route to serve the purpose of drawing the indigenous peoples' communities closer to whole region's development. In September 1927, an inspector from Rabkrin, the All-Union Workers and Peasants' Inspectorate (*Raboche-krest'ianskaia inspektsiia*), noted AGRP's inadequacy for carrying people of small nations in the lower Amur stream. According to the inspector, the company's passenger ships had inconsistent, varied occupancy rates and sometimes were "only half full." In the meantime, indigenous people sailed to markets with harvested fish and garments in their own small boats (*lodachka*).[103] The inspector suggested that AGRP replicate the experience of the National East Siberian River Navigation Company, as the latter had made better use of the inland waterway in the area and extended its business to the Mongolian People's Republic.[104] The Rabkrin inspector's investigative notes further demonstrated the shipping enterprise's incorporation into the Soviet state apparatus. It thus bore specific institutional responsibilities for materializing top-down plans of regional development, including enabling and integrating indigenous nationhood into the broad Soviet social economy in this case.

The table above also revealed part of a seemingly contradictory feature of the AGRP's operation in the Soviet Amur country: the suspension of shipping lines into Chinese Manchuria

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[102] Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small People of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 221-25. Adrienne Lynn Edgar, Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press). For Pauly's intervention in the literature on *korenizatsiia*, especially his critique of Terry Martin's partial emphasis on the "hard-line" Ukrainization, see Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue*, 17-18, 258-266.
[103] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 531, ll. 39- 40.
[104] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 531, l. 42.

and transportation of a growing number of the USSR-bound, organized foreign passengers, especially Chinese passengers. Once one of the most profitable shipping lines of Amur Shipping, the Sungari line between Harbin and Lakhasusu, the confluence of the Sungari and Amur Rivers, was suspended in the 1920s. The Soviet state gave up some extraterritorial rights and privileges in Manchuria that were acquired before by the Russian Empire, including the navigation right on the Sungari.[105] The suspension of the shipping route to Harbin, however, did not translate into suspension of human migration to the left bank of the Amur by way of the Sungari. In fact, AGRP shouldered the responsibility of transporting imported goods and organized foreign travelers and laborers into the Far East. In Rabkrin's investigative reports in 1927, Amur boatmen were praised for reserving their best vessels for transporting Asian revolutionaries and communist delegations to the Comintern's training schools in Khabarovsk and Irkutsk.[106] Local archival sources suggested that Comintern trainees coming from China via the Sungari River mostly used two short routes provided by AGRP: one between Lakhasusu and Blagoveshchensk and the other one between Lakhasusu and Khabarovsk.[107] In addition to moving international communists and revolutionaries in and out of the Soviet Union, AGRP kept serving both state-owned and small, private businesses by transporting foreign laborers to their worksites throughout the 1920s. For example, labor demand for massive projects of infrastructural construction supervised by NKPS, including dredging of the upper Amur and building dikes, resulted in recruitment and transportation of thousands of seasonal Chinese workers in the Soviet borderlands.[108] AGRP's activities connoted both the USSR's and the Amur River Basin's

[105] Tan, *Zhongdong Tielu*, 577.
[106] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 531, l. 55.
[107] GAAO, f. R116, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 71- 73.
[108] For a general image of Chinese labor migrants in the Soviet Far East in NEP years, see A. G. Larin, *Kitaiskie migrant v Rossii, Istoriia i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Vostochnaia Kniga, 2009): 132- 33. For dredging projects on the upper Amur near locations like Albazino, Shimanovsk, etc. in 1925 and 1926, see GAAO, f. R-116, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 22, 27- 30.

outward-looking and cosmopolitan nature in the 1920s. The Soviet Amur country, now undergoing Soviet *osvoenie*, still kept its connectivity to Northeast Asia at large and became an important link in the chain of the USSR's international engagement.

One of the ships that took on the task of transporting international delegations and passionate revolutionaries was actually named *Komintern*. It's old name before conversion into a passenger ship was *Baron Korf*.[109] By the end of the 1920s, AGRP had renamed the majority of its vessels inherited from the prerevolutionary era in light of the borderlands' socialist transformation. Ships with names that bore imperial characters now were pronounced Soviet. For instance, the ship Sergeant (*Uriadnik*) became ship Comrade (*Tovarishch*), and the barge Thunderbolt (*Gromovoi*) now was barge Worker (*Rabotnik*).[110] In addition to the repaired and renovated old vessels, many a newly built ship has been added to its fleet since the company's nationalization in the early 1920s. Rabkrin's reports revealed that the amount of vessels for moving passengers alone increased almost twofold to 55 in 1927, and AGRP's Khabarovsk-based fleet was responsible for carrying over ninety thousand passengers during the navigation season.[111] Having already seen high volume of passengers and freight gravitating towards the lower Amur, AGRP moved its headquarters permanently to Khabarovsk in 1928 and only kept an operational branch in Blagoveshchensk (and established another office later in Nikolaevsk-on-Amur). The move corresponded to the increase in the Far Eastern Krai-bound internal migration, in which Khabarovsk was a central transference point for the migrant population's further distribution. State-arranged resettlement of demobilized Red Army soldiers to the Far

[109] Archival sources from regional archives only suggested that the *Baron Korf* was once named *Trotsky*. See GAAO, f. R-116, op. 1, d. 7, l. 4. Secondary Russian sources discussed the renaming of famous prerevolutionary steamships, including *Baron Korf*, and showed that *Baron Korf* was renamed twice: *Trotsky* and then *Komintern*. See Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," 32.
[110] GAAO, f. R-116, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 4- 5.
[111] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 531, l. 86.

Eastern Krai, for example, picked up in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The Far East was at the receiving end for around two thirds of all international migrants within RSFSR during the period of the First Five-Year Plan. Moreover, there was the first group of Jewish migrants arriving in Birobidzhan in 1928, later designated as territory for Jewish settlement, by way of Khabarovsk.[112] Headquartered now in the political center of the borderland region, AGRP became more integral in the state apparatus and carried out transportation tasks in line with the socialist regime's aspiration for making over the Far East.

AGRP's enlarging fleet and steadily growing shipping capacity translated into increased demand for qualified human resources. Amur boatmen, now working on behalf of the state apparatus, were in need of learning to be Soviet, and their professional cohort was constantly in need of fresh blood. The collective of Amur boatmen had started the journey of Sovietized acculturation in tune with the shipping company's transition into a state agency since the early 1920s. One of Rabkrin's inspective reports on AGRP boatmen's level of culturedness (*kul'turnost'*) in 1927, for example, showcased in detail the Soviet state's expectation for a group of informed, professional, and efficient boatmen. The uneven cultural level among Amur boatmen was a central issue facing AGRP's managerial officials. Near half of AGRP's staff boatmen were illiterate, and the Rabkrin inspector found it hard for the organization to engage or educate them as a whole through daily activities.[113] The inspector was also concerned about the boatmen's work ethics and self-disciplining, as many boatmen showed the problem of lacking

[112] For state-organized internal migration and settlement, especially of demobilized soldiers, in the Far Eastern Krai in this time period, see Lewis H. Siegelbuam and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoire and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014): 42- 43; see also E. N. Chernolutskaia, *Prinuditel'nye migratsii na sovetskom Dal'nem Vostoke v 1920- 1950-e gg.* (Vladivostok: Dal'nauka, 2011): 171. For information on Soviet Jews' migration to Birobidzhan prior to the Jewish Autonomous Region's official establishment, see Robert Weinberg, "Jews into Peasants? Solving the Jewish Question in Birobidzhan," in *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Ilford, England: Frank Cass, 1995): 91- 92.

[113] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 531, l. 47.

awareness of punctuality. That made it difficult to make efficient use of the small fleet for multiple shipping lines. It appeared that AGRP's management once attempted to convert some fishermen of indigenous tribes and even East Asian bandits in the area into potential boatmen. Rabkrin praised the organization's effort to broaden the base of its workforce, and yet questioned its feasibility at the same time.[114]

The Soviet regime's obsession with improving the cultural level of toilers in general indeed left imprints on Amur boatmen's everyday experiences. The memoir of a Chinese Communist Party veteran, the renowned Chinese Trotskyist Zheng Chaolin recounted how Soviet cadres in Chita, Khabarovsk, and Vladivostok helped arrange transportation for Chinese trainees from Moscow's Community University of the Toilers of the East back to China proper in the 1920s. The Chinese communist revolutionary was impressed that seamen in Vladivostok and boatmen in Khabarovsk in their work setting had access to sizeable libraries with many French novels.[115] Besides libraries, Amur boatmen had organized their own clubs for entertainment and further enhancement of communist learning to improve their overall cultural level. Directors of AGRP especially held dear the boatmen's clubs, for they not only offered opportunities for various recreational programs, but also provided the venue for grassroots boatmen to socialize, engage in the community, and forge comradeship together. AGRP's employees, after all, had extended off-hours each year in the long wintertime.[116]

The increasing demand for qualified socialist boatmen in the Soviet Amur country was satiated particularly thanks to a training school: the Blagoveshchensk River School

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[114] Limited archival documentation only mentioned *aziatskie bandity* without further specification. It might refer to those Chinese or Korean bandits recruited into the Red Army during Civil War and later gaining their membership in the Soviet Far Eastern community. See GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 531, ll. 48- 49.
[115] Zheng Chaolin 郑超麟, *Zheng Chaolin Huiyi Lu 郑超麟回忆录* [Zheng Chaolin Memoir] (Shanghai: Dongfang Publishing House, 1998): 204.
[116] GAAO, f. R-201, op. 2, d. 1, l. 17.

(*Blagoveshchenskoe rechnoe uchilishche*, and hereinafter also referred to as BRU). Established in 1899, the Blagoveshchensk River School was more of a byproduct of local shipowners' and transport entrepreneurs' business expansion in its early history. The school did not have a permanent location before 1905, let alone formal pedagogical personnel. During the remainder of the prerevolutionary years, two imperial captains of 2nd rank took charge of BRU's regular operation and transformed the school into an accredited vocational training institution. BRU offered several six to eighteen-month-long training programs.[117] Allegedly graduates from BRU made up a majority of the late Amur Shipping Company's captains in its business peak in the 1910s. Completion of the river school's mechanical training courses was indispensable for boatmen's occupational promotion to captainship in the company.[118] Revolutions and warfare between 1917 and 1920 disrupted BRU's normal sessions. The number of BRU graduates from 1917 to 1920 totaled only 40. The pedagogic personnel shrank even more significantly during the same period of time, for many who ideologically aligned with the Whites left Russia with the conclusion of the Civil War.[119]

BRU faced the possibility of disbandment in 1921 and 1922, when both student body and teaching staff were extremely small, and the Far Eastern Republic's limited fiscal budget did not seem to allow the school to reverse its misfortune. Fortunately, authorities of NKPS and the *Dal'revkom* deemed BRU an important institution for recovering the interrupted transportation system in the Far East, and the school underwent restructuring and steady development throughout the latter half of the 1920s.[120] Although retaining the same title, BRU had gradually

[117] T. Lazarev, "Blagoveshchenskomu rechnomu uchilishchu 70 let," *Rechnoi transport*, vol. 29 (1970): 51.
[118] Galina E. Zubakina, "Muzei rechnogo uchilishcha," in *Proshloe i nastoiashchee: Amurskogo paroxodstva: Cbornik dokladov nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, ed. M. K. Chesnokova (Blagoveshchensk: Amur Oblast Research Library, 2018): 34.
[119] Lazarev, "Blagoveshchenskomu rechnomu uchilishchu 70 let," 51.
[120] "Ekonomicheskaia khronika po materialam transportnykh RKI," *Ekonomicheskaia Zhizn' Dal'nego Vostoka*, no. 9 (1927): 91- 92.

become a more comprehensive technical college, or *tekhnikum*, with diverse programs much beyond captain training and naval engineering by the late 1920s. Similar to many other educational institutions' transformation under Soviet state superintendence, BRU included a Communist Party cell, and political teaching became an increasingly essential part of its pedagogy.[121] The school thus served as a venue for the state's selection of qualified cadres. Completing education at BRU had been almost the prerequisite for becoming commanders and leading engineers of AGRP's fleet from the 1930s onwards. Exceptional performances at BRU not only led graduates to command positions in the transport agencies like AGRP and the Vladivostok-based *Sovtorgflot*, but also earned them tickets into the leadership of higher political positions, including the Directorate for Road Construction in Eastern Siberia and the Far East (*Upravlenie dorozhnogo stroitel'stva Vostochnoi Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka*) and the Committee of Waterborne Transportation of the Far East (*Raikomvod*).[122]

The primary goal of BRU, as its name suggested, was still to cultivate boatmen for the Soviet Far East. According to a brief description of BRU's curricula in 1929, courses mainly fell into the two disciplinary categories: navigation and naval mechanical engineering. In the meantime, the development of BRU's training programs demonstrated increased breadth and utility, for classes of physics, radio-frequency engineering, and chemistry were also on the list.[123] The number of enrolled students had risen to nearly 400 in the 1930s. In order to encourage students to become professionally well-rounded watermen, the school carried out the policy of granting some fifty-ruble stipends to model students on a monthly basis.[124] Fifty rubles was quite a handsome amount of money in the 1930s. BRU was not an academic affiliate of AGRP, but a

[121] Lazarev, "Blagoveshchenskomu rechnomu uchilishchu 70 let," 51- 52.
[122] Zubakina, "Muzei rechnogo uchilishcha," 35.
[123] GAAO, f. R-201, op. 2, d. 2, ll. 29- 30, 32.
[124] GAAO, f. R-201, op. 2, d. 2, l. 34.

majority of its graduates did enter the company after completing their vocational training. The two organizations' close collaboration was also apparent in the AGRP's supply of vessels for BRU's teaching and learning purposes. One of the ships for pedagogical use was named *Amur*. Sailing *Amur* on the Amur for a full trip between Blagoveshchensk and Nikolaevsk-on-Amur upon students' graduation was a rite of passage for a long time at BRU.[125]

By the 1930s, BRU had transformed itself from a relatively informal, provincial school into an efficient, specialized educational institution that was oriented towards mass cultivation of socialist professionals on behalf of the state. Such modern institutionalization and statization, as illustrated in BRU's restructuring, were widely shared by other agencies, including AGRP and Soviet customs houses in the Far East, the main subject of chapter 3. BRU and AGRP's statization was particularly worth highlighting, for it offered insights into how the interplay between the Soviet state and key groups of its bone fide citizens- boatmen in this case- enabled a process, by which the geospatially peripheral borderlands became socioeconomically reconstructed and reoriented towards the political heartland of the nation. In other words, both AGRP and BRU furthered the state's ability to take hold in the outlying borderlands of the Amur River Basin through making a collective of competent, professional Soviet Amur boatmen. Learning to be the middlemen of Soviet state sovereignty, the collective of Amur boatmen made substantial contributions to defining the waterway borders and justifying socioeconomic fragmentation of the Amur River Basin along national lines.

Admittedly many local and international events throughout the 1920s and 1930s had influenced the trajectory of AGRP's ongoing statization. One of them, the Chinese Eastern Railroad Incident of 1929, proved to be particularly impactful upon the shipping company's

[125] A. Troshin, "Boevye traditsii rechnikov Amura," *Rechnoi transport*, vol. 29 (1970): 18.

further transformation into not merely a state agency, but also a borderland institution. The Chinese Eastern Railroad (CER) was one of the material legacies of tsarist Russia's colonial influence in Manchuria. Although the Soviet regime renounced Russia's imperial concessions in Manchuria in the 1920s, the northern section of CER was still placed under joint management by the USSR and the Republic of China. Discontented with the dominance of the Russian-speaking workforce at the managerial level, Zhang Xueliang, the Chinese warlord of Manchuria and his nationalist allies, attempted to forcibly remove Soviets from the administration and assert full claim to the CER. Small-scale confrontations between Chinese and Soviets accumulated and eventually led to military actions in fall of 1929.[126] In response to the nationalist Kuomintang forces' raids of Russian settlements along the CER and the Soviet consulate in Harbin, the Soviet Union put together a special army commanded by the famous Vasilii Bliukher to fight back in Manchuria to reclaim Soviet ownership of the CER.[127]

Bliukher's military forces, according to some scholars, were "heterogeneous" and created "out of improvisation." His army's overall coordination was not efficient at first.[128] Bliukher's heterogeneous naval forces striking into Manchuria included vessels and sailors enlisted from AGRP. In mid-October, they participated in the battles near Lakhasusu, in which the Soviet fleet of gunboats and iceboats reached the confluence of the Sungari River and the Amur River and fusilladed Chinese vessels. The Soviet brown-water naval force quickly compelled Chinese troops to abandon the mainstream of the Amur and move back onto the Sungari.[129] Effectively fending off Chinese attacks and especially pushing Chinese naval forces back onto the right-side

[126] Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 182.
[127] Aleksei Mikhailovich Pastukhov, "Opyt istoricheskoi rekonstruktsii srazheniia za Lakhasusu," *Kul'tura i Nauka Dal'nego Vostoka* no. 26 (2019): 103.
[128] Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 182- 183.
[129] Pastukhov, "Opyt istoricheskoi rekonstruktsii srazheniia za Lakhasusu," 105.

tributary of the Amur, the new Soviet regime showcased its military prowess in influencing Northeast Asian regional affairs. For those Amur boatmen recruited to assist in the Sino-Soviet military confrontations on the Amur, the waterway was experienced as a militarized political border firsthand. Such experiences of border militarization crucially informed AGRP's shipping and navigation routines that reinforced the Amur River's border characteristic in actual geo-spatiality as well as in *Priamur'e* residents' mental mapping of their borderland milieu.

Part of the upper and middle streams of the Amur, shared by the USSR and China, was more than 1000 miles long. It was impossible for the Soviet agency of border guards to police this extensive waterway border. AGRP, whose vessels navigated the entire Amur River, thus shared with the border guard forces the responsibility of border patrolling. The same part of the Amur, especially its middle stream, was also wide. Many islets are in its wide current, and even more are visible in early summer when the water level is relatively low. When sailing on the Amur, AGRP's boatmen chose to navigate between those islets and the right bank of the Amur. International treaties regarding the delimitation of borders between Russia and China had left many of those islets' territorial belonging unspecified. Articles in the Treaty of Peking, which confirmed Imperial Russia's annexation of the Amur's left bank in 1860, only stated that the Qing-Russian waterway border "went down through the stream of the Amur (*vniz po techenie reki*)."[130]

After the Sino-Soviet conflict over the CER, AGRP made sure that its ships navigated the Amur by sailing through streams between major islets and the Chinese bank.[131] One of the most disputed islets in the middle of the Sungari River's estuary into the Amur, Chichi Islet, was a

[130] B. I. Tkachenko, *Rossiia-Kitai: Vostochnaia granitsa v dokumentakh i faktakh* (Vladivostok: Izd-vo "Ussuri" 1999): 82.
[131] "Amurskomu parokhodstvu prisuzhdeno perekhodiashchee krasnoe znamia VTsSPS i Narkomrechflota," *Amurskaia Pravda*, May 8, 1932.

major site of the battle of Lakhasusu in 1929 and only 500 meters away from the closest right riverbank of the Amur. In most of the 1930s, AGRP's ships of the Middle-Amur line passed the islet by the stream south of it and passengers could clearly see activities on the river docks on the Chinese side.[132] Chinese diplomats in Harbin had voiced objection to Soviet ships' crossing over the supposed border, for many river islets, like Islet Chichi, were already geographically south of the middle line of the Amur's mainstream. Yet AGRP's shipping route remained unchanged.[133] Amur boatmen's practice of sailing south of disputed islets in the Amur River was a frank demonstration of the Soviet state's right to control and interpret the border. Such border-policing practice would bring to mind the Amur Shipping Company's several undertakings in the imperial era, including its close association with regional Cossack hosts and its human tracking techniques for regulating Chinese migrant laborers. It had lasting impact upon the cognitive conceptualization of the waterway border of borderland residents on both banks. In their mental mapping of the Amur River Basin, the middle stream of the Amur River thus became a more tangible, concrete space of contestation between two polities. Statist agents like Amur boatmen performed civic duties in the contested space to display and internalize the sovereignty and hegemony of the state they represented.

Amur boatmen won recognition from the All-Union Council of Trade Unions for their "heroic acts" that included surpassing the shipping quota, opening up new shipping lines on the Bira River, and more importantly, complementing the military flotilla's logistics in smaller river ports.[134] Those boatmen's militarized practice was not merely confined to their navigation routines. Their familiarity and association with the military started earlier at BRU, where retired

[132] See Tkachenko, *Rossiia-Kitai*, 80- 81.
[133] *Ibid.*, 82, 85- 86.
[134] "Amurskomu parokhodstbu prisuzhdeno perekhodiashchee krasnoe znamia VTsSPS i Narkomrechflota," *Amurskaia Pravda*, May 8, 1932.

military officers and captains were regular speakers and instructors for various training courses.[135] As shown, AGRP's collaborative relationship with Soviet military forces was another salient feature of the organization's statization. Later this feature would be named as the Amur boatmen's great tradition and celebrated with evidence of AGRP boatmen's participation in border confrontations with Japan-backed Manchukuo in 1936-37 and in battles against Japanese imperial marines in World War II.[136]

AGRP echoed another legacy of its predecessor's business practice: bringing into life new settlements along the company's waterway transportation routes. Unlike the former Amur Shipping Company's contribution to the creation and development of the river town Zeya-Pristan' (renamed Zeya in the Soviet era), AGRP's participation in materializing new settlements along the Amur and its tributaries in the Soviet years was no longer a result of for-profit business development. It was an active fulfillment of the modern state's aspiration for further *osvoenie* of the region. Of all the new settlements in the Soviet Far East, the most famous was Komsomolsk-on-Amur, an industrial town located by the Amur River halfway between Khabarovsk and Nikolaevsk-on-Amur and allegedly built by young Komsomol members voluntarily in the 1930s. AGRP and its boatmen had been an essential part of Komsomolsk-on-Amur's early history.

Komsomolsk-on-Amur was a planned settlement. Its construction from scratch in 1932 resulted from the RSFSR Central Executive Committee's determination to rapidly industrialize its Far Eastern hinterland. In the eyes of Soviet economic planners, the lower Amur River Basin, gifted with immense natural resources and convenient river transport systems, could unleash better productivity by having additional industrial centers. One of the industries that first took

[135] Archival sources suggested that the school had a tradition of hiring demobilized naval officers and retired captains as instructors at least in the early 1930s. For detailed records, see GAAO, f. R-201, op. 2, d. 2, ll. 45- 47.
[136] A. Troshin, "Boevye traditsii rechnikov Amura," *Rechnoi transport*, vol. 29 (1970): 19.

hold simultaneously as the town was under construction was shipbuilding.[137] With increased demand for watercraft in the region, the Far Eastern Krai government (*kraikom*) approved the construction of a new shipbuilding yard near a small village 250 miles north of Khabarovsk on the Amur in 1929. Throughout the 1930s, the shipbuilding yard evolved into the entire Soviet Far Eastern Krai's biggest shipbuilding base, and the village became an administrative district of fast-growing Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Responding to the Far Eastern *kraikom*'s call for contributing industrial know-how to the new town in 1932, AGRP's then director Aleksei A. Rogozhkin signed an agreement to transfer marine engineers and experienced sailors from his company to enable the formation of the new Amur Shipbuilding Factory (*Amurskii sudostroitel'nyi zavod*).[138] In addition to transferring essential technological know-how to the new shipbuilding factory, AGRP's leaders further shifted the company's operational center to their lower Amur lines and made the backwater area in Komsomolsk-on-Amur a moorage station for their submarines and refrigeration boats.[139] AGRP's most noteworthy contribution to the formation of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, the new node in the expansive intra-regional socioeconomic network, certainly lay in its provision of steady, reliable transportation of a workforce and materiel into the site. The first two groups of young Komsomol volunteers for constructing the new town arrived in summer 1932 on AGRP's passenger ships. These two ships had been commemorated as Komsomolsk-on-Amur's *Mayflower*, and one of them was named *Komintern*.[140] Its prerevolutionary name, as already noted, was *Baron Korf*.

[137] Galliamova, *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 163; See also Kathleen Barnes, "Komsomolsk- Pioneer City on the Amur," *Far Eastern Survey* 8, no. 4 (February 1939): 48.
[138] GAKhK, f. P-2, op. 12, d. 2, l. 46.
[139] GAKhK, f. P-2, op. 12, d. 2, l. 53.
[140] Galliamova, *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 167.

Throughout the 1930s, AGRP had been further down the path of evolving into a statized borderland institution that manifested naval technical know-how, preparedness for military collaboration, and patriotic awareness of border security. The collective of professional boatmen continued learning to develop affinity for both the Soviet ideology and local *amurchane* identification, and they continued to participate in the company's core undertaking: maintaining active shipping lines for distribution and redistribution of people, materiel, and knowledge. Through integrating the waterway system into an active intra-regional transportation network and adding new nodes in the network, AGRP took an active part in *osvoenie* of the borderlands in accordance with the lead of the centralized Soviet state. Admittedly AGRP's increased level of statization meant increased subordination to Moscow's scrutiny and arbitrary disciplining. Aleksei Rogozhkin, the director of AGRP between 1932 and 1936, was arrested by the NKVD in 1937 for "organizing and committing counterrevolutionary deeds in the industry waterborne transport." In addition, local secondary sources indicated that at least four cadres at AGRP's managerial level fell victim to a set of top-down political investigations for "suspicious promotion of regionalism" that trumped their political identification with the state.[141] The Soviet political purifying movements' outreach to AGRP further revealed the state's tightened grip on the borderland agency's operation.

In the general discourse of the Soviet and later Russian public of the Far East, the identification of AGRP's status as a patriotic state borderland institution in history had ultimately to do with the organization's close collaboration with the Soviet naval units in combating the Japanese and knocking down the Japanese Empire's puppet regime in Manchukuo (Manchuria) in World War II. To be sure, almost all social and political organizations in the Russian

[141] Mednikova, "Amurskoe parokhodstvo," 34.

Northeast Asian borderlands claim their share of glory and heroism in supporting the Soviet motherland in the Great Patriotic War on the Far Eastern front. What set AGRP and BRU's patriotic and heroic reputation apart from other institutions' wartime performance was a particularly noteworthy crew of boatmen, or to be precise, boatwomen.

For most Soviet Far Easterners, although actual war never took place in their homeland, threats posed by Japanese militarism south of the Amur in Manchuria always felt imminent from the late 1930s till the end of the Great Patriotic War. For AGRP, the Japanese Kwantung Army's menacing presence was especially close, as its vessels still sailed almost shoulder-to-shoulder with Japanese gunboats on the Amur.[142] Moreover, its manpower ran low in the wartime, since more than one third of AGRP's boatmen, amongst nearly 250,000 Far Easterners, were recruited for sustaining the USSR's war effort on the western front.[143] The remaining workforce of AGRP, in particular a crew of boatwomen, managed to carry on and make essential contributions to keeping the Far Eastern region's supply chain unbroken. The widely regarded representative and one of the backbone members of the boatwomen crew was Zinaida Pavlovna Savchenko. The heroine's name entered local historical books as the first female graduate of BRU and the first female ship captain of the Russian *Priamur'e*. In addition to her first-woman reputation, Savchenko was remembered as being good at "taming storms." Throughout her career, Savchenko had served multiple times as the leading pilot of AGRP's upper Amur line, known as the navigation line with the most difficult rapids.[144] Together with other senior boatwomen, she

[142] Galliamova, *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 583.
[143] For a brief description of AGRP's wartime human resource restructuring, see Mikhail A. Serov, "Istoriia pogranichnoi Amurskoi Flotilii," in *Proshloe i nastoiashchee: Amurskogo parokhodstva: Sbornik dokladov nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, ed. M. K. Chesnokova (Blagoveshchensk: Amur Oblast Research Library, 2018): 100- 101. For information on recruitment of Far Easterners during World War II, see Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 238.
[144] Svetlana Podznoeva, "Kapitan Zina Savchenko ukroshchala liuboi shtorm," *Tikhookeanskaia Zvezda*, October 25, 2002.

organized the first all-women crew in AGRP and kept expanding the team of boatwomen and female naval mechanics throughout the 1930s. By the time the USSR entered World War II, all-women crews had become an essential, defining component of AGRP's everyday workforce.[145]

Savchenko's story reveals how AGRP and BRU had mobilized and integrated women, an essential social force that exercised less agency before, into the Soviet project of borderland transformation and state-making at large. When the war was in full scale in the 1940s, AGRP was one of a few transportation agencies in the Far East that maintained its operations at near prewar level. In comparison, many other factories, collective farms, and construction worksites hastily put elderly, women, and even early released "reliable" prisoners into their manpower in the wartime.[146] In AGRP, in response to the labor shortage, Savchenko and other female members organized and fast-tracked training programs especially for young, amateur boatwomen between 1941 and 1944.[147] Those boatwomen and, of course, remaining boatmen managed to maintain the orderly shipping lines for rationing and supply of agricultural goods in the context of the Far East's overall food shortage during the war. In addition, Savchenko and three other women joined the contingent of 70 voluntary watermen who crossed the Amur into Manchuria to collaborate with the Red Army and defeat the Japanese in the summer of 1945.[148] The Soviet Communist Party awarded both AGRP and Savchenko the Lenin Certificate of Honor (*Leninskaia iubileinaia Pochetnaia gramota*) afterwards to recognize the outstanding contributions they made to the USSR's victory in the Great Patriotic War.[149]

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[145] Troshin, "Boevye traditsii rechnikov Amura," 19.
[146] Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 238.
[147] The source- a journalist's essay on Savchenko with a section of interview- was first published in a local paper in Khabarovsk in 1961. The magazine discovered the essay and put it in its special issue on women in 2013. See V. Ivanov, "Nasha sovremennitsa kapitan Savchenko," *Slovesnitsa Iskusstv: Kul'turno-prosvetitel'skii zhurnal* 31, no. 1 (2013): 39.
[148] *Ibid*., 39- 40; for description of the Amur boatmen's contingent in Manchuria, see Troshin, "Boevye traditsii rechnikov Amura," 20.
[149] Ivanov, "Nasha sovremennitsa kapitan Savchenko," 37; Chernyshev, *Triumf Tikhookeanskogo flota SSSR*, 31.

The story of the Amur Shipping Company's transformation from a once for-profit company into a nationalized transportation agency sheds light on how existing social and business institutions in the borderlands changed their functionality in line with historical actors' changed understanding of their relationships with less concrete socioeconomic objects, including state, nationality, and sovereignty. Although Amur boatmen had been engaged in the same kind of business undertakings since the mid nineteenth century, namely taming and harnessing the waterway system, the changed understanding of *osvoenie* of their share of the Amur country in the Soviet period brought about fundamental change of the Amur River's socioeconomic functionality in Northeast Asia. The Amur morphed from an international waterway channel that enabled conflicts but also cross-cultural connectedness into an actually militarized, divisive political border whose left-bank socioeconomic activities became increasingly inward-looking and oriented towards the heartland of the USSR.

The Amur Shipping Company and its Soviet successor, the National Amur River Shipping Company, were first and foremost navigation enterprises providing transportation services to individuals and communities in the Amur country and connecting them to one another. The waterway transport system, as well as all other transportation modes in the Amur River Basin, can be conceptualized through the geospatial science's framework of network and nodes. That said, the waterborne transport network was just one of many that enabled connectivity of the multitudes of nodes: major urban centers, small towns, collectivized farms, new industrial sites, etc. For Soviet Far Easterners, it was essential to develop all modes of transport networks to fully enhance their homeland's intra-regional communication and material supply chain. The one particularly in need of development was the network of roads. In Rabkrin's investigative notes on the Soviet Far East's waterway transportation development, the

inspector from Moscow briefly called for ameliorating the region's poorly built road infrastructure.[150] The Amur country's roadless problem was indeed acute to the degree that it set back the Far Eastern *Dal'kraikom*'s aspiration of rapidly industrializing the borderlands or making a Far Eastern Odessa there. The poorly maintained, predominantly dirt roads (*trakty*) between settlements paralyzed communication, once the waterborne transportation was in suspension in the wintertime.

Scholars working on Russian transportation history have employed roadlessness as a category to analyze the Soviet construction of socialism. Tatiana Argounova-Low, for example, emphasizes the regional variation and peculiarities that have been otherwise overlooked in studying Soviets' shared experience of roadlessness.[151] Lewis Siegelbaum, delving into the Soviet automobile industry and Soviet roads in a book and several scholarly articles, offers insights into the term's metaphorical connotation. The Soviet experience of *bezdorozhnost'*, according to him, was associated with the sense of getting lost "in a swamp" and the opposite of the "path to socialism." It also evoked the graphic experience of seasonal muddy, impassable roads in Soviet Russia.[152] For historical actors in the Soviet Northeast Asian borderlands, roadlessness represented the broken, incomplete communication system of their homeland. Moreover, it reminded local residents of their limitation in reaching out, exploring, understanding, and developing further attachment with their own environment. In 1929, an editor of a new Soviet cultural magazine *Rost* sent a letter to Blagoveshchensk-based correspondent

[150] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 531, l. 81.
[151] Tatiana Argounova-Low, "Roads and Roadlessness: Driving Trucks in Siberia," *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 1, no.6 (2012): 75- 76.
[152] Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008): 135- 36. See also Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Soviet Car Rallies of the 1920s and the 1930s and the Road to Socialism," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 2 (2005): 247-273; Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Roadlessness and the 'Path to Communism': Building Roads and Highways in Stalinist Russia," *Journal of Transport History* 29, no. 2 (Sep. 2008): 282- 83.

Petr Spitsyn and asked him to photograph various localities, including sites visited by Anton Chekhov, newly collectivized farms, and more importantly, less accessible natural areas in the lower Amur Basin. In his reply, Spitsyn informed the editor that roadlessness (*bezdorozh'e*) did not allow him to reach the less accessible beautiful nature, even if the editor promised to pay him 30 more rubles.[153] Four decades after Chekhov's journey, wilderness was still applicable for describing the anthropo-geographic landscape of the Amur country.

Turning the wilderness into accessible and knowable borderlands through building roads was parallel to the restructuring of the Amur Shipping Company in the timeline of the transformation of *Priamur'e*'s transportation scene. Amur boatmen's participation in improving waterborne transportation means and infrastructure was in line with the state's aspirations for unleashing the natural resources' productive potential and subsequently boosting the borderlands' socioeconomic development. Such aspiration resonated with the blueprint that those overseeing road-building projects envisioned for the same borderlands: to turn the left bank of the Amur into a productive, self-sufficient breadbasket for potentially the whole Far Eastern krai. As shown below in an agricultural district's attempt at further integration into the whole area's overall economic activities by solving the roadless problem, roads were an extension of the region's waterway transport network. To be more precise, the road network and waterway network complemented each other and together enabled improved connectivity of human communities.

The land of the lower Amur River Basin is arable and fertile. The southern belt of the Amur Oblast along the Amur River has particularly productive soil. In the late imperial era, agrarian settlements southeast of Blagoveshchensk were the breadbasket of the entire Amur

[153] GARF, f. R391, op. 5, d. 33, ll. 22- 23.

Oblast. Tambovka and Gilchin, two major agrarian districts of the region, respectively appeared on the winners' lists of the Russian Empire Agricultural Ministry's special exhibitions in 1899 and 1908. During the last prerevolutionary years, the Tambovka district alone contributed to roughly 20 percent of the grain crops that the Amur Oblast consumed.[154] Local farm owners started to purchase and apply more advanced German and American technologies, such as better fertilizer, to Tambovka's agricultural production in the mid 1900s. The primary reason was that the arrival of Russian army in the Far Eastern front during the Russo-Japanese War and the influx of workers for construction of railway and other infrastructures translated into a sudden surge of demand for more bread and forage.[155]

The market-driven mode of agricultural production and distribution prevailed in Tambovka more thoroughly than in other agrarian settlements in the Amur Oblast during the late imperial decades. Good crop yields translated into profitable sales and exports of agricultural products from Tambovka. Stolypin's reforms further sped up Tambovka's agricultural commercialization, as big farms of private ownership became prominent. The owners of those farms, mostly Molokans, manipulated the area's agricultural trade. The Tambovka area's proximity to the Amur River decisively shaped the form that the agricultural commercialization took. Cross-border economic connections were commonplace. Tambovka farm owners did not merely sell large amounts of products to Chinese and Japanese traders. They also purposefully grew what were greatly demanded on the other side of the waterway border to gain great profit: opium seeds in many cases.[156] Opium was listed as one of contraband goods by both sides, and

[154] I.I. Shukin, "Rol' I mesto Tambovskogo raiiona v ekonomike Amurskoi Oblasti nachala XX veka" in *Priamur'e-Forpost Rossii na Dal'nevostochnykh Rubezhakh*, ed.V.N. Ablentsev (Blagoveshchensk: Amurskii Oblastnoi Kraevedcheskii Myzeii, 2007): 49- 52.
[155] *Ibid*., 57.
[156] Tatyana Sorokina, "Liquor and Opium: Joint Efforts to Control Contraband Along the Russia-China Border at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," *Inner Asia* 16, (2014): 144.

opium smugglers could face penalties if the Cossacks ever captured them. However, the relatively inefficient patrolling of the extensive waterway border between Tambovka and Manchuria somehow created the condition that at most times did not obstruct such opium smugglings.[157]

The Amur River as both an international border and a navigable waterway path profoundly shaped the mode of socioeconomic production and communication of the Tambovka area. That being said, Tambovka was no less dependent on and involved in the border economy that was characterized by regular, even increasingly intensified exchanges of labor, goods, services and capital across the Amur in the years leading up to the Revolution. Blagoveshchensk and Tambovka, important urban and agrarian centers on the same side of the border, both had strong social and economic ties to people on the opposite side of the Amur River. However, the internal economic connection of Blagoveshchensk and Tambovka did not seem be stronger or more effective in comparison. On most occasions the Amur River served as the only thoroughfare that enabled communication and logistics between Blagoveshchensk and Tambovka, as it did for both localities' cross-border communications.

The Russian Civil War and the subsequent regional political reorientation in the Far East brought Tambovka's commercialized farming industry to a halt. Wealthy Molokan farm owners deserted their properties and fled Russia to East Asia or North America, where their brothers and sisters of the same religious sect could provide shelter. In addition, some large number of Chinese laborers that had made significant contributions to Tambovka's land cultivation either left or became enlisted soldiers for various conflicting camps, when the Civil War disrupted the

[157] *Ibid*., 145. See also, V.N. Abelentsev, *Amurskoe Kazachestvo, XIX- XX vv.: Sbornik Stateii i Publikatsii*, (Blagoveshchensk: 2-e dop. i ispr, 2005): 85- 87.

normal tempos of their agricultural work.[158] The rich farmland in southern Amur Oblast waited for revitalization in the early 1920s, when the RSFSR absorbed the short-lived FER and the *Dal'revkom* officialdom took to gradually integrating the remote *Priamur'e* into the new socialist experiment of production and distribution.

The Bolsheviks of the Amur Province first reactivated the market-oriented mode of agricultural production in agrarian settlements like Tambovka in the NEP years. Now that those prerevolutionary farm owners had left, the new regime exerted economic leverage and allocated economic aid to motivate the peasants' participation in working the land so that they would help return the region's agricultural productivity back to prerevolutionary levels. On account of the administrative and financial supports, in Tambovka suspended big farms soon had new owners. The statistical data of the Amur Province's 1924 and 1925 agrarian production showed that a large majority, namely more than 65 percent of the new farm owners, were better-off upper-middle peasants and new settlers of Ukrainian descent.[159]

The introduction of the blanket food tax (*prodnalog*) in the Far East did not bring about overall contentment among all strata of the peasantry. In Tambovka and some other nearby agrarian communities, the poor and middle peasants expressed strong discontent with the undifferentiated *prodnalog* policy, for they were disappointed at the meager improvement of the agricultural produce at their disposal. Moreover, the relatively well-off peasants' living conditions surpassed the middle and the poor at an even wider margin. In January 1924, those disenchanted peasants led a protest in Tambovka and many strongly expressed their disappointment at the Soviet policy.[160] Quickly responding to the crisis, *Dal'revkom* sent

[158] Galliamova, *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii,* 272.
[159] The Organ of the Amur Province Planning Committee, *Itogi kampanii po edinomu sel'skokhoziaistvennomu nalogu 1924/1925 po Amurskoii gubernii*, 5-6.
[160] GAAO. f. 114, op. 3, d. 98, l. 18

officials to investigate the mass incident, and they considered taking measures and engineering some additional tax reduction policies specifically targeting particularly underprivileged peasants.[161] In July 1925, *Dal'revkom* officials in charge of finance submitted petitions to the RSFSR's National Commissariat of Finance. They solicited Moscow's approval for an increase of the agrarian tax exemption for poor peasant households chosen by the Amur and Maritime Provinces. They also requested an extension of the agricultural tax exemption program in their krai into 1926.[162]

While Tambovka's peasants worked their land in response to the incentives, including tax reduction, the Amur Province's functionaries were contemplating how to enhance the communication between the Tambovka district and its adjacent urban area of Blagoveshchensk. In the eyes of these officials, it was disadvantageous that the communication between Blagoveshshensk, the province's administrative center and the most populous city, and Tambovka, one of its agriculturally highly productive areas, was mostly enabled through the river network of the Amur and Zeya. To reach the Tambovka village, the geographic and administrative center of the Tambovka District, one needed to first take the ferry to cross the Zeya River. Once inland, one found it hard to ferret out functional roads out of mud and dirt. In a transcript of the Tambovka District's 1925 Party Congress, one attendant named N. Shimoiko singled out the bad conditions of roads in his talk, and his emphasis on the district's bad roads evoked consensus among other speakers. Shimoiko's argument stressed that the lack of paved roads would reduce the willingness of peasants to settle in the Tambovka district, even if agricultural production proved vital for securing the economic development of the southern belt

[161] GAAO. f. 114, op. 3, d. 98, l. 20.
[162] GARF, f. A259, op. 9b, d. 2526, ll. 33- 35.

of the Amur Province.[163] Needless to say, better transportation infrastructure would allow the farmland like Tambovka's to better serve the needs of the urban population's food consumption.

The insufficiency of transportation means also slowed down the pace of people's movement between the countryside and the rest of the Amur country. Prior to mass collectivization of the agricultural sector in the Far East in the early 1930s, there were discussions going on at national and regional Party congresses regarding ordering demobilized Red Army soldiers to settle in the *Priamur'e* to work the rich soil and unleash its agricultural productivity. In October 1927, the Amur Provincial Planning Committee's monthly journal, *Economic Life* (*Ekonomicheskaia Zhizn' Amura*) published an article that discussed the necessities of expanding and maintaining infrastructural constructions, especially roads and electric wires, in the southern belt of the province. According to the article, it would need real roads to facilitate the future flow of demobilized soldiers and peasants into the districts with the most fertile land, such as Ivanovka and Tambovka.[164]

The consensus soon translated into action. The first paved road in Tambovka was finally under construction in 1926.[165] It stretched through populous agrarian settlements in the Tambovka district and connected them to the bank of the Zeya River, the edge of Blagoveshchensk. Residents in the Tambovka village named the new road the third (*tretii*) to distinguish it from the other two much shorter and narrower dirt roads in the village. Before the construction was underway, villagers had already started to plan on building new structures and wooden houses near the future main street.[166] *Amurskaia Pravda*, the official news outlet of the

[163] GAAO, f. 17, op. 2, d. 196, l. 22
[164] F. Chilikin, "Planovaia Igeia v Kolonizatsii Amurskoi Gubernii" in *Ekonomicheskaya Zhizn' Amura* (Organ Amurskoi Gubernskoi Planovoi Komissii, October 1927): 44- 45.
[165] Munitsipal'noe biudzhetnoe uchrezhdenie Tambovki, *Istoriiu rasskazyvaiut ulitsy: Puteshestvie po selu Tambovka*, (Tambovka, Amur Oblast: Tambovkaia Mezhposelencheskaia tsentral'naia biblioteka, 2012): 6.
[166] *Ibid*., 9.

province's propagandist apparatus, acclaimed the construction as a "meaningful project," for it improved transportation of goods on the borderlands and "brought the population in the southern countryside areas closer to Blagoveshchensk."[167]

Tightened connection of major sites along the river helped relieve the local political and social elite from being too much concerned about food security in the province. In the letters and reports sent out from provincial officials to Moscow, the term of provision and logistics (*snabzhenie*) of basic goods, especially food, appeared with a high frequency. In a summary composed by regional officials who inspected the networks of communications in the Amur Province in 1927, Tambovka's pivotal position as a hub of communication and food supply was highlighted. It was "of great necessity," according to the officials, to establish a postal junction in the village of Tambovka.[168] It was also necessary to increase the capacity of Tambovka's grain reserves and well maintain the supply chain of grain, for Blagoveshchensk's major bread-making factories heavily relied on grain provided by Tambovka's peasants.[169]

In July 1927, *Amurskaia Pravda* published an almost full-page article on a provincial government meeting, in which representatives from various bureaus spoke highly of the achievements of state-run and cooperative food procurement organizations in guaranteeing the supply of staple food in two major cities: Blagoveshchensk and Zeya. The meeting also touched on the importance of improvement of transportation infrastructures in better ensuring a food supply chain between the two cities and many rural areas and the whole province's food security. The same article also invoked local residents' memory about staple food prices once being manipulated by international speculative merchants before the Soviet takeover, implying that

[167] D.I. Ianguzov, "Pespektivnyi plan sel'skokhozyaiistvennogo khozaiustroiistva," *Amurskaia Pravda*, March 05, 1927.
[168] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 2176, l. 3
[169] GARF, f. R374, op. 10, d. 2176, l. 5

increased administrative regulation and intervention in grain procurement and food distribution brought about security and certainty for everyday needs.[170] The rerouting and rebranding of the Amur Shipping Company, the construction of new roads in Tambovka, and the local leaders' emphasis on food security and economic self-sufficiency all pointed to the prominent inward-looking characteristic of Soviet *osvoenie* of the Northeast Asian borderlands. The Amur boatpeople and residents in the Blagoveshchensk-Tambovka area had experienced the process of redrawing their mental mapping, resulting in the exclusion of the right bank from their imagined community.

[170] "Khlebozagotovitel'naia Kompaniia," *Amurskaia Pravda*, July 18, 1927.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FLOODED AND THE UNTAPPED

In March 1928, the All-Union Presidium of the Central Executive Committee issued the decree that first mandated "a free territory near the Amur River for Jewish toilers' settlement." In the same year, the Soviet Committee for the Settlement of Jewish Toilers on the Land (Komzet) was entrusted with the undertaking of organizing the first group of Jewish settlers in the area.[1] Soon in late spring, the first group of more than 600 Jewish colonists arrived in Birobidzhan, the land situated on the Trans-Siberian Railway and by the River Bira, a small tributary of the Amur River. By October the same year, however, half of the group had left. One major reason that new Jewish settlers left en masse was the challenging geographic environment: the unattended, swampy land, the humid air full of mosquitos, and excessive rainfall that subjected the middle Amur and its Basin to flooding in the summer of 1928.[2] From the perspective of some Soviet officials, the historic flooding of the middle Amur River Basin might be the primary causal factor for the state's unsuccessful attempt at mass resettlement of Jewish toilers in the Far East in 1928. In Komzet's publication on Birobidzhan's ongoing construction and development, the flooding was characterized as destructive. One aspect of the direct impact of the flooding, according to Komzet's summary, was failed engagement (*vovlecheniia*) of arriving Jewish settlers with the rich land in southern *Priamur'e*.[3]

How severe was the 1928 flooding then? *Amurskaia Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Amur Regional Communist Committee, named it "once a century flooding" (*Navodneniia*

[1] P. Novik, "Kolichestvo evreiskikh kolonistov v nastoiashchee vremia," in *Birobidzhan: Zemleustroistvo trudiashchikhsia evreev v Rossii* (Harbin: Izdanie "Kharbin Observer," 1930): 8.
[2] *Ibid*., 11- 12.
[3] A. Kantorovich, *Perspektivy Birobidzhana* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo po zemel'nomu ustroistvu trudiashchikhsia evreev v SSSR, 1932): 21.

veka) in the headline when the flood was at its peak in early August. Starting in late July, torrential rainfall in southern Yakutia first led the Zeya River, the largest left-bank tributary of the Amur River, to overflowing its banks. In only two days, the flood washed away and permanently ruined more than 70 percent of the structures in the town center of Zeya. As the rain belt moved southward and eastward, the middle Amur soon started overspilling its banks and the high water reached towns and villages as far as 14 miles away from the waterway. A total of 160 settlements of various sizes had been inundated in the left bank riverine plain of the Amur River. Sections of railway tracks were washed away. As a result, rail communication between Blagoveshchensk and Khabarovsk, the region's two economic and administrative hubs, was suspended.[4] The Harbin Russian Émigré Committee for Assistance to Russian Refugees organized fundraising events for flood victims in Soviet *Priamur'e*. The organizers of the events called the aftermath of the flooding "desperate" and particularly emphasized in their pamphlets the serious disruption of supply chains of food and medication in the region.[5] The heavy rain intermittently lasted almost into late August. It caught the international media's attention as well. The New York City-based paper *Jewish Daily Bulletin* reported on its front-page that a new cyclone swept the lower Amur River Basin and the water level rose as high as to 16 feet.[6]

The Amur River and people dwelling in its riverine plains were no stranger to flooding. When Slavic settlers first claimed the left bank of the middle Amur River in the 1860s, the Zeya River had overflowed its riverbanks and inundated emergent Cossack settlements in its floodplain twice within that decade. Local gazetteers' records indicated that the flash flooding in 1861 and 1863 turned the lower Zeya River into a lake and the water level at the confluence of

[4] "Navodneniia veka," *Amurskaia Pravda*, August 2, 1928.
[5] GAKhK, f. 1128, op. 1, d. 115, ll. 8-9.
[6] "New Cyclone Sweeps Affected Russian Area," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, August 15, 1928.

the Zeya and Amur Rivers climbed as high as 15 feet above the embankment. The devastating flooding thus forced new Cossack settlers to constantly relocate their villages across the area.[7] In the broad southern belt of Pacific Russia, flooding had long been one of the pronounced difficulties challenging the imperial regime's attempt at *osvoenie* of the recently annexed Northeast Asian periphery. In the neighboring Maritime Oblast, for instance, seasonal flooding often disrupted migrant peasants' cultivation of the land in the Ussuri River valley. The hilly terrain of the valley means that agricultural land is particularly vulnerable to soil erosion. The overall damp, soggy soil, whose quality worsened after floods, made it hard to grow crops that peasant settlers used to cultivate back in Southern European Russia and Ukraine, such as rye and barley. The Empire's Resettlement Administration (*pereselencheskoe upravlenie*) considered flood prevention and mitigation in the Far East a most pressing task, and imperial technocrats implemented schemes of hydrological management in the region to boost the Amur and Maritime Oblasts' agricultural productivity.[8]

In the same vein, Chinese sources show the riverine plain on the other side of the Amur River has been equally subject to the destructive effects of the Amur and its tributaries' flooding in history. In the summer of 1911, for example, one of the worst floods across the drainage area of the Songhua (Sungari) River coincided with the one of the worst outbreaks of pneumonic plague in Manchuria. Severe flooding especially contributed to the high mortality rate from the plague among the urban population in Manchuria. In riverside urban settlements, such as Harbin, flooding forced many migrant laborers and underprivileged inhabitants to constantly move

[7] "Eti neproshenye navodneniia," *Birobidzhaner Shtern*, August 6, 2013.
[8] For description of Slavic peasant settlers' trying adjustment to the damp soil that was subject to constant flash flooding, see Aleksandr I. Petrov, *Istoriia kitaitsev v Rossii: 1856- 1971 gody* (St. Petersburg: Beresta, 2003), 429-430. For the Resettlement Administration's effort to mitigate the impact of flooding in the Maritime and Amur Oblasts, see Mark Sokolsky, "Taming Tiger Country: Colonization and Environment in the Russian Far East, 1860-1940" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2016), 59, 129, 132-133.

around, and that made it more difficult to implement social isolation and quarantine for curtailing the epidemic. As a result, urban settlements by the Songhua River and its tributaries logged tens of thousands of deaths from the pneumonic epidemic in 1911.[9] The South Manchurian Line of the Chinese Eastern Railway, then owned and operated by Japanese colonial agencies, completely halted its service three times in 1924 due to unmanageable flash floods in the summer. For the Japanese colonial regime in Manchuria, seasonal floods posed a major challenge to maintaining its economic connection to the European market and realizing its colonial economic gains. Infrastructural restoration after a flood could take up to a week, and unfulfilled shipment of goods became backlogged and brought about substantial financial losses.[10]

The seasonal, periodic floods across Russia's Amur country and their unpredictable, unruly nature have not taken center stage in the Anglophone scholarship on human-environmental interactions in Russian and Soviet history. Nevertheless, environmental topics pertaining to the past of Pacific Russia, to a broader extent, have started to attract more scholarly attention over the last decade.[11] Together with the existing literature on Russian, Soviet, and Eurasian environmental history at large, such scholarly inquiries have offered useful analytical frameworks for this chapter. In *An Environmental History of Russia*, the first comprehensive environmental history of Russia and the USSR covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

[9] Jiao Runmin & Zhang Chunyan, *Zhongguo Jindai Zaihuang Ji Jiuzhu Yanjiu* (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2011), 121- 123, 126. For general discussion of the 1910-1911 Manchurian pneumonic plague and the Chinese, Russian, and Japanese historical actors' responses to the epidemic, see Mark Gamsa, "The Epidemic of Pneumonic Plague in Manchuria 1910-1911," *Past & Present* 190, (Feb. 2006): 147- 183.
[10] "Zhiming Zhuyi Yunshu Zhengce Xiade Huokeyunshu," in *Mantie Dang'an Ziliao Huibian vol. 5: Longduan Dongbei Tielu He Haigang* [Compilations of South Manchurian Railway Archival Sources vol. 5: Northeastern China's Railway and Seaports], ed. Su Chongming (Beijing: China Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011), 64-65.
[11] Some representative scholarly works include Sokolsky, "Taming Tiger Country: Colonization and Environment in the Russian Far East, 1860- 1940;" Christopher J. Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Pey-Yi Chu, *The Life of Permafrost: A History of Frozen Earth in Russian and Soviet Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

the authors have highlighted an overarching theme that Russia, in its various historical iterations, has been both blessed and bedeviled by its natural environment. The transformation of the natural environment in Russia over the past two centuries, as the authors have pointed out, has shared some common features with the rest of the industrialized world. Well-intended use and transformation of nature for the purpose of "protecting national security, promoting public health, and improving citizens' daily lives," for example, often paradoxically came at unanticipated social and environmental costs.[12] What has set the Soviet Union's apprehension and transformation of nature apart from industrialized nations in Western Europe and North America is that its state actors had disproportionately more power in shaping environmental policies and behaviors and more "control of resources and amenities."[13]

A growing volume of academic work on Russian environmental history over the past two decades has engaged with the approach of examining human-nature relationships across Eurasia through the lens of key historical agents and their power in configuring such relationships. In his monograph that examines how the Russian Empire agriculturally assimilated and transformed its steppe grassland over two centuries, David Moon pays special attention to how imperial elites, including officials, landlords, and scientists, studied, debated, and worked towards alleviating the soil deterioration on the steppe in the context of imperial territorial expansion. He studies the prominent Russian geologist Vasilii Dokuchaev and his anthology on various environmental problems related to soil exhaustion. Instead of only accentuating the impact of Dokuchaev and the scientific community, Moon discusses how peasants' preferred farming methods on the

[12] Paul Josephson, Nicolai Dronin, Ruben Mnatsakanian, Aleh Cherp, Dmitry Efremenko, Vladislav Larin, *An Environmental History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3-4.
[13] *Ibid*., 7-8. The authors claim that they echo the prominent Russianist environmental historian Douglas Weiner's argument that the environmental history is precisely about power and who will control access to resources and amenities. See Douglas Weiner, "A Death-Defying Attempt to Articulate a Coherent Definition of Environmental History," *Environmental History*, vol 10, no. 3 (July 2005), 404-420.

steppe empirically validated the geologist's theory and how peasants, as an important group of historical agents, also actively partook in the efforts of sustaining the steppe grassland's fertility.[14] Stephen Brain focuses on Georgii Morozov, another environmental scientist in late Imperial Russia, and the legacy of his studies of forest science in guiding the formation of the Soviet Union's forest conservation and protection policies. The author emphasizes that cultural conservatism and increased patriotism in the Stalinist era boosted the credibility of Morozov's ideas that were substantially rooted in nineteenth century Slavophilism and Russian nationalism.[15] These authors' contextualization of the rise in popularity of certain schools of environmental scientific thoughts among state actors and agents illustrates how political, economic, and ontological concerns shared by those in power had profoundly shaped the paradigms of human-nature relationships in modern Russian history.

Recent scholarship has also kept the natural environment front and center, while historicizing ideas and activities of individuals, institutions, and various human communities that engaged with these abiotic components in the environment, including water, soils, and landscape in general. The seeming abundance of water resources in the Chu River valley and in the whole Syr Darya drainage region, for example, ignited the aspiration of Russian colonial administrators and later Soviet technocrats for transforming the area into agricultural land for cash crops through massive makeover of the irrigation systems. Maya Peterson's study thus challenges the view that the cotton monoculture has shaped the environmental fate of the region. As her analysis has revealed, it was the environmental features of the region, especially the availability and distribution of the water resource, that led both colonial and socialist elites in Central Asia to

[14] David Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grassland, 1700-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[15] Stephen Brain, *Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905-1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

embrace massive cotton production.[16] Jenny Leigh Smith's discussion of the USSR's agricultural systems' industrialization has similarly stressed how the many environments profoundly altered the modes of agricultural production and supply of foodstuffs in the Soviet economy. The functionality of the Soviet agroecological system, despite its planned and mechanized characteristics, was "frustratingly reliant on the natural environment."[17] Non-human historical actors, meaning the "alive and inert elements of the natural world," as Andy Bruno has explicitly argued, were also participants in the Soviet communist project.[18] Such environment-centered analytical frameworks not only remind readers of the Soviet experiment's dependence on the power of the natural world's materiality, but also offer humanities researchers a springboard to cross over into more interdisciplinary fields, such as the history of science and technology and cultural geography.[19]

Informed by the existing literature on Russian and Eurasian environmental history, this chapter focuses primarily on two environmental aspects of the Amur River and its left-bank riparian area's transformation in the early Soviet era: how hydrologists and geologists in the left-bank riverine plains encountered and tried to rein in the seasonal flooding and other environmental challenges; and how the political elite and the agricultural community mitigated the negative impact of the floods on farming and agricultural productivity in general. The seasonal flooding that affected extensive areas in the Amur River drainage Basin presented a

[16] Maya Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[17] Jenny Leigh Smith, *Works in Progress: Plans and Realities on Soviet Farms, 1930*-1963 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 20.
[18] Andy Bruno, *The Nature of Soviet Power: An Arctic Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 7-8.
[19] For a brief discussion of this framework in other interdisciplinary scholarly accounts, see Nicholas Breyfogle, "Toward an Environmental History of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union," in *Eurasian Environments: Nature and Ecology in Imperial Russia and Soviet History*, ed. Nicholas Breyfogle (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 8, 11-12.

chronic challenge to the Soviets' efforts to effectively harness the rich water resources in the region and subsequently transform the riverine borderlands into the granary of the Far East. In this chapter, I consider the fluvial system in the Amur River Basin as a non-human actor. The fluvial floods and their disruptive effects, as one of the actor's main features, profoundly influenced and even dictated how local human actors understood the ecohydrological systems for the purpose of mitigating flooding, harnessing hydropower, and enhancing industrial and agricultural *osvoenie* of the borderlands. I will contextualize the expert knowledge of a particular group of human actors, namely the scientific personnel in local Soviet institutions for hydrological, geological, and hydraulic engineering research as well as in local *Soiuzkhleb* offices, the state-run enterprise for grain purchase and distribution. I will discuss how their knowledge systems and the borderland nature of the floodplain had particularly informed their undertaking on a broad ecohydrological system: harnessing the power of waterbodies, controlling floods, and managing the relationship between hydrology and agriculture. I argue that Soviet scientists, especially those having strong self-identification with *Priamur'e* and the Far East at large, had developed their expertise structured by local and ethno-national knowledge systems. The scientific personnel applied such expert knowledge to brokering the relationship between taming and harnessing the waterbodies and fulfilling the aspiration of socioeconomic *osvoenie* in the Northeast Asian borderlands.

The Amur River and most waterways in its drainage Basin flood every spring. The high latitude and northeasterly monsoonal winds result in extremely cold weather with moderate snow accumulation in the area in the winter. Rivers are frozen over roughly between November and the next March. Melting ice sheets and runoff from snowmelt contribute to the rising water levels each spring. The arrival of spring flooding has been mostly predictable and celebrated by people

living in the Amur River Basin. It signals that the harsh winter is behind after all.[20] Fluvial flooding in the summer, in comparison, often indicates excessive precipitation during the season and foreshadows less ideal harvest of some grains, such as wheats and oats.[21] When discussing the potential locations for the first Jewish settlements in the southern agricultural belt of *Priamur'e* in the late 1920s, Soviet agronomists noted the region's moist nature and its land's susceptibility to flooding in the summer. They considered that those areas with loam soil and black soil could better withstand flooding and waterlogging in summer and fall and thus were more suitable for agricultural settlements. Birofeld, the pioneer Jewish settlement in what would later become the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, was chosen for not only its arable land but also its location on a gentle slope of a ridgeline between two watersheds. The latter meant that the new settlement should be much less susceptible to lowland flooding.[22]

The historic flooding of 1928, however, did not spare Birofeld. Initial Jewish settlements near the Bira River, including Birofeld, became a helpless archipelago when new settlers found themselves cut off from the outside material supplies for as long as two weeks- highwater had destroyed temporary bridges and erased dirt roads.[23] The early Jewish settlers recalled that their requests for more disaster relief, including more construction subsidies and more loans, barely received any clear response from either Komzet or the *Dal'kraikom*.[24] Three hundred miles

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[20] E. A. Simonov, O. I. Nikitina, P. E. Osipov, E. G. Egidarev, & A. V. Shalikovskii, *My i amurskie navodneniia: nevyuchennyi urok?* (Moscow: WWF Russia, 2016), 13.
[21] Natalie V. Mishina, "Land-Use Dynamics in the Amur River Basin in the Twentieth Century: Main Tendencies, Driving Forces and Environmental Consequences," *in Environmental Change and the Social Response in the Amur River Basin*, ed. Shigeko Haruyama and Takayuki Shiraiwa (Tokyo: Springer Japan, 2015), 239-40.
[22] M. B. Druianov, *Evreiskaia Avtonomnaia Oblast'* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Der Emes, 1934), 10. For discussion of Birofeld's selection and construction as the first Jewish settlement in the Far East, see A. Serafimov, "Priroda ne znaet iazykov," in *Birobidzhan: Zemleustroistvo trudiashchikhsia evreev v SSSR* (Harbin: Izdanie "Harbin Observer," 1930), 39-40.
[23] Kantorovich, *Perspektivy Birobidzhana*, 29.
[24] Local historians in Birobidzhan have contributed significantly to the general historical knowledge of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast's early years. For early settlers' recollection of the flood's impact and the Amur River Basin's challenging environmental features in general, see David Vaiserman, *Kak eto bylo*? (Birobidzhan: Oblast Local Lore Museum, 1993), 28.

northwest of Birofeld, residents in rural settlements along the Zeya River expressed similar demands for disaster relief and emergency assistance, and officials in the Amur Governorate similarly failed to offer them effective help immediately. Farms undergoing collectivization did not receive sufficient building supplies for repairing and reconstructing barracks destroyed during the flooding until late fall that year.[25] The Far Eastern Krai Executive Committee put together a special mission to take care of the post-flooding management and relief for people affected by the natural disaster. Limited records showed that agricultural communities in small settlements along the Zeya River only received as little as 30 rubles for home repair and reconstruction.[26] Black markets mushroomed, especially in the temporary settlements for evacuated communities, and pricing for many everyday commodities soared due to the disruption of supply chains.[27]

For a region that had been barely out of the mire of the Russian Civil War and foreign military interventions, the disastrous flooding impeded the Far Eastern Krai's post-war economic recovery and its attempt at achieving social orderliness. The historic flooding in the middle Amur Basin in 1928 was one of the first major natural disasters that put to the test the new socialist administration's governance in the Far East. Historical sources, albeit being sporadic in my possession, have suggested that there was much room for the improvement of local Soviet state agencies' execution of emergency relief.

Nearly 4000 miles away in Moscow, officials from Komzet and the Society for Settling Toiling Jews on the Land (OZET) expressed concerns about *Dal'kraikom* and local

[25] GAAO, f. 371, op. 3, d. 6, ll. 12-13.
[26] Local researchers have collected and published some archival evidence that particularly shows the meager and insufficient financial and material assistance rural residents received from the administration in the wake of the flooding. For concise examples, see P. Iu. Afanas'ev, *Navodneniia Verkhnego Priamur'ia* (Talakan: Bureiskaia GES, 2012), 22-23.
[27] Aleksandr Garkin, ed., *Navodnenie 2013* (Talakan: OAO RusGidro, 2014), 7.

administrative organs' slow-moving, inefficient response to flood control and disaster management and their lack of coordination with local Komzet branches for post-disaster recovery.[28] Earlier that year, OZET formed its own Far Eastern Krai delegation that assisted with realization of Komzet's Jewish settlement programs. After the flooding had ravaged the newly designated Jewish settlements, the delegation urged OZET to consider conducting more research into the geography and hydrology of the area where the planned Jewish settlements would spread out, especially the Lesser Khingan mountain range that the Amur River flowed through.[29] OZET's records showed that flash floods of various scales occurred again in 1929 along the middle Amur, and the riverside Jewish settlement of Amurzet submerged twice in July. Citing again the flash floods and their discouraging impact upon the agricultural settlement schemes, OZET finalized a contingent of twenty for an ecohydrological expedition, including members from the Main Geological Prospecting Department (*Glavnoe geologorazvedochnoe upravlenie*) of the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy, the Far Eastern branch of the Soviet Geological Trust (*Dal'geoltrest*), and so on.[30]

After being caught off guard in managing the flooding and mitigating its effect on the populace afterwards, leaders in *Dal'kraikom* also turned to knowledge of natural science and the scientific community for redemption. Sergei Chutskaev, the then Chairman of the Far Eastern Krai Executive Committee, signed the order and approved more money for carrying on the scientific expeditions that started in 1928 and aimed at enhancing understanding of hydrometrics and pedology in the whole Far Eastern Krai. More hydrologists and geologists would soon join

[28] Vaiserman, *Kak eto bylo*, 55.
[29] The 1928 flooding and its devastating effects was one of the main factors that contributed to OZET Far Eastern Krai delegation's proposal of geological and hydrological studies of the region, see Z. A. Abdullaev, V. N. Danilovich, I. V. Moiseev, E. I. Rembashevskii, & S. I. Shkorbatov, *Trudy Birobidzhanskoi geologicheskoi ekspeditsii Lenozeta* (Leningrad: Glavnaia Redaktsiia Gorno-Toplivnoi Literatura, 1937), 7-8.
[30] *Ibid*., 11-12.

forces and travel to major tributaries of the upper and middle Amur streams.[31] Scientists and researchers who shouldered the responsibility of the continued expeditions were affiliated with mainly two institutions: the Council for the Study of the USSR's Productive Forces (*Sovet po izucheniiu proisvoditel'nykh sil*, or SOPS), and later the Far Eastern Polytechnic Institute (DVPI). The primary goals of the expeditions were to "continue learning the streamflow, runoff, and structures of aquifer" of the main left-bank tributaries of the Amur River and to manage floods locally. Moreover, scientists from SOPS considered that expeditions would help "improve the rivers' navigation and timber rafting" and turn unruly waterbodies into "beneficial hydropower."[32]

At the beginning of the next decade, the two groups of scientists set out on their expeditions into the less inhabited lands in the Amur River Basin. The first research group, at the discretion of OZET, arrived in the station of *Tikhon'koe,* later renamed Birobidzhan, in 1931. The team of twenty went on several expeditions in batches in the following two years and traveled across the plains and hills in the Lesser Khingan.[33] The other one, a continued effort partially at the request of the Far Eastern Krai government, started their expedition a year earlier and focused on the two largest left-bank tributaries of the middle Amur: Zeya and Bureya Rivers.[34] For both groups of scientists, the most prominent question was how the local and regional fluvial systems' hydrological features contributed to the scales and frequency of floods in the Amur drainage area. They would consequently work towards seeking solutions to the issue of flood control and turning the waterways into productive hydrological power.

[31] GAKhK, f. p-2, op. 1, d. 446, ll. 22-23. The existing pedological and hydrometrical expeditions were well documented in publications of the Far Eastern Krai's People's Commissariat of Agriculture. Dal'nevostochnoe Kraevoe gidrometricheskoe biuro, *Materialy po gidrogii Dal'nevostochnogo Kraia* (Vladivostok, 1930).
[32] GAKhK, f. p-2, op. 1, d. 446, ll. 31, 33.
[33] Abdullaev et al., *Trudy Birobidzhanskoi geologicheskoi ekspeditsii Lenozeta*, 13.
[34] GAKhK, f. p-2, op. 1, d. 446, l. 40.

Vasilii A. Kravtsov, a hydro-meteorologist and hydraulic engineer who participated in the expedition along the Zeya River in 1930, argued in his research notes that the Zeya River drainage's susceptibility to torrential rain floods had most to do with its topology. The river and its longest tributary, the Selemdzha River, run through the lowland sandwiched between the Sikhote-Alin mountain range and the Greater Khingan range. The cooler air masses from the Sea of Okhotsk to the North and warmer air masses from the Sea of Japan and Yellow Sea to the Southeast squeeze in and meet in the middle Amur corridor. These cool and warm air masses form local fronts that lead to intensive precipitation in the summertime.[35] Kravtsov considered that a major reason that the Zeya drainage was more prone to flooding lay in the nature of the soil in its upper and middle reaches. This type of rocky brown earth with less clay content was worse at retaining water and preventing surface runoff in the valleys. In comparison, the riverine plain on the right bank of the Amur River and in the Songhua River drainage had primarily loamy soil. Such comparison, as Kravtsov noted, showed that the left bank of the lower and middle Amur drainage constituted a rather separate geological and hydrometric unit.[36]

Kravtsov's notes smacked of what had prevailed among the educated communities of geographers and surveyors in late imperial Russia, namely geographic determinism. Imperial Russian statesmen's ambition of annexing the territory northeast of the Amur and east of the Ussuri River in the mid nineteenth century, as scholars have informed us, was couched in the discourse of geographic determinism. Imperial statesmen, professional geographers, and surveyors compared the territorial expansion into the Amur River's estuary in the Far East to the

[35] GAKhK, f. p-2, op. 1, d. 448, l. 3. For Vasilii Kravtsov's biographical information, see the introduction of the RSFSR Far Eastern Regional Hydrometrical Bureau's publication on the region's hydrological survey. *Materialy po gidrologii Dal'nevostochnogo krai: tom 1* (Vladivostok: Izdanie Dal'nevostochnogo kraevogo gidrometricheskogo biuro, 1930), vii.

[36] The expedition did not cover any land on the other side of the Amur River. Kravtsov's discussion of the right-bank soil textures was very likely derived from previous historical data. GAKhK, f. p-2, op. 1, d. 448, ll. 6-7.

United States' westward expansion at the same time, and they justified such expansion by considering the naturally happening barriers like the Amur River markers of Russia's predestined frontier.[37] Kravtsov spelled out the *Priamur'e* borderlands' ecohydrological and geographical peculiarities with the similar teleological conceptualizing framework. The artificially imposed international borders, in Kravtsov's mental mapping, coincided with some naturally happening boundaries that marked flooding as local natural disaster instead of a shared problem across a contiguous geographic region.

Participants from the expedition in the Lesser Khingan Ridge on OZET's initiative, in the meantime, offered similar geological explanations for the future Jewish Autonomous Oblast's susceptibility to flooding. Sharp elevation and steep slopes, according to their publication, characterized the mountains in the area. Such type of terrain would guarantee fast accumulation of surface water and inundation in the lowland once torrential rain came. Major rivers formed in the lowland, including Rivers Bira and Bidzhan, had shallow streambeds, and rainfall could quickly overfill these waterbodies.[38] For those surveying the land designated to be the national homeland of Soviet Jewry, the geologic and topographic features of the Lesser Khingan Ridge surely presented a dilemma for planning future settlements: steep hillsides were not habitable for agricultural purposes, and yet the rich soil in the valley was subject to flooding and could quickly turn swampy.[39] Some participants cited the work of Boris Bruk, a well-established agronomist and one of the early proponents of the Soviet Jewish homeland project, and argued against his ideas that settlement locations should be chosen in consideration of their access to both forests

[37] Sharyl Corrado, "The Highest Limit of Statesmanship: Ritterian Geography and Russian Exploration of the Amur River Basin, 1849-1853," *Sibirica* 14, no, 2, (Summer 2015): 1-28; Erki Tammiksaar & Ian R. Stone, "Alexander von Middendorff and his Expedition to Siberia (1842-1845)," *Polar Record* 43 (226), (2007): 194-196.
[38] Abdullaev et al., *Trudy Birobidzhanskoi geologicheskoi ekspeditsii Lenozeta*, 29-30.
[39] *Ibid*., 32. Other scientific publications on the Lesser Khingan Range's geological and hydrological features also contained similar observation and discussion. See Dal'nevostochnaia kraevaia planovaia komissiia, *Khingano-Bureinskaia problema: materialy ko vtoromu piatiletnemu planu D.V.K.* (Khabarovsk: Dal'giz, 1934), 22.

and rivers for facilitating the development of the logging and timber rafting industries.[40] One of the contributors to the volume on the Lesser Khingan Ridge expedition, Vasilii Danilovich, stressed that the forest resources in the area were not inexhaustible, and forests should only be cleared "for agricultural purpose in the lowland in the valleys." Deforestation in medium and low relief landscapes increased the chance of soil erosion and sediment runoff, and it would result in more uncontrollable floods surrounding human settlements.[41]

Other scientific and technical personnel affiliated with Komzet and studying the designated Jewish Autonomous Oblast's hydrology, geology, and vegetation expressed similar concern about the correlation between deforestation and flooding. Evgenii I. Vaneev, who spent three years between 1927 and 1930 in the Far East studying the geography and biosphere of Birobidzhan under the auspices of Komzet, singled out deforestation in the Amur and Ussuri valleys as one of the environmental challenges facing the agricultural settlements. Having evaluated historical records of the Amur and Maritime regions' soil erosion and vegetation change, Vaneev wrote that disproportionate clearance of forest and shrubland in the valleys of the region's major rivers had led to soil degradation. One of the main consequences of soil deterioration was increased frequency of flash flooding. In the meantime, as Vaneev reminded his audience, flooding and runoff contributed to worsening soil degradation.[42] In his discussion of the measures towards preventing further deforestation, Vaneev considered it important to raise

[40] For Bruk's ideas on the development of logging and timber rafting in the Lesser Khingan range, see B. L. Bruk, *Birobidzhan: S geograficheskoi kartoi raiona i 7 fotografiiami* (Moscow: Izdanie Tsentral'nogo Pravleniia "OZETa", 1929), 37-38. Boris Bruk fell from grace politically in 1931 and was subsequently banished to Kazakhstan. This might also explain these scientists' open criticism of Bruk's proposals and blueprints for the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. For his political fate, see Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Founder of Jewish Region in Siberia Banished by Soviet," *Daily News Bulletin*, May 6, 1931.
[41] Abdullaev et al., *Trudy Birobidzhanskoi geologicheskoi ekspeditsii Lenozeta*, 73, 77-78.
[42] Disproportionate forest clearance meant that for the relatively small population and low population density in the Amur valley, the area of cleared woodland was too large and wasteful. See E. I. Vaneev, *Birobidzhan: Istoricheskaia spravka geografiia, prirodnye bogatstva, put' soobshcheniia, naselenie, khoziaistvo, kolonizatsiia* (Khabarovsk: OGIZ Dal'nevostochnoe kraevoe otdelenie, 1931), 20-21.

the awareness that excessive burning of the woods for farming as well as timber logging on a massive scale were detrimental for the biosphere in the long-term. The technique of burning the woods for farmland and livestock, as Vaneev summarized, was introduced by Asian migrants to the area, and such practice needed to be under stricter regulation in Birobidzhan.[43]

Vaneev cited contemporary research findings on the Amur River Basin's ecology, hydrology, and climate, and his engagement with them revealed a common approach that characterized locally based scientific and technical personnel's work: casting nationalist light onto the region's environmental issues. Further discussing the oblast's forest resources, he brought up that excessive logging of some tree species, such as Korean pine, Khingan fir, and red pine, had also been a result of the Asian population's exponential growth in Manchuria from across the border.[44] Other scientists also talked about the growing timber demand that led to declining tree cover in the Amur and Ussuri valleys and pointed out that such demand mostly came from the large Chinese, Korean, and Japanese populations in the region and their needs for housing, transport, and energy. Pavel Ivanovich Koloskov, one of the Soviet Southern Far East's leading meteorologists and main founding figures for the region's climate studies infrastructure, alluded to increasing lumber exports to Manchuria and Japan for housing and fuels over the past couple of decades as having significantly contributed to the decline in tree cover in the Amur Province.[45] Deforestation in mid-to-low altitudes in such a climatic zone could cause reduction

[43] Ibid., 23. Vaneev's claim was not historically evidenced, for the practice of burning forest to reclaim land for agriculture had been part of indigenous people's agricultural techniques as well as of some Russian peasant settler communities' existing practice. The great Russian explorer Vladimir Arsen'ev documented it in his monographs. See V. K. Arsen'ev, *Kratkii voenno-geograficheskii i veonno-statisticheskii ocherk Ussuriiskogo kraia 1901-1911 gg.*, (Khabarovsk, 1912), 125.
[44] Vaneev, *Birobidzhan*, 27, 34.
[45] P. I. Koloskov, *Klimaticheskie osnovy sel'skogo khoziaistva Amurskoi gubernii* (Blagoveshchensk: Tipografiia Amurskogo Vodnogo Upravleniia, 1925), 90, 96-97.

of soil temperature in the early vegetation period and weaken the potential of such deforested land for agricultural production as a result.[46]

Forestry specialists affiliated with the Far Eastern branch of the Russian State Geographical Society also noted that deforestation and its negative environmental consequences, including massive flooding, soil deterioration, and vegetation change, had much to do with the high demand of coniferous wood among the East Asian population and East Asian economies in the region.[47] The area of Korean pine trees in the northern edge of the Sikhote-Alin Range, for example, decreased at a fast rate in the 1910s and 1920s. This mountainous area's deforestation mainly resulted from growing consumer and industrial demand not only inside the Soviet Far East but also from across the border in China and Japan. Soviet researchers noted that Asians especially valued the stiffness of Korean pine wood for construction and manufacturing purposes. East Asians' preference of the pine wood influenced Russian and Soviet people's choice of wood in turn, and that further caused the steady loss of Korean pine trees in the area.[48] The discernible loss of forest cover in the southern mixed-leaved forest belt of the Far East thus was an environmental problem imported from across the border and a result of cross-border dependency on East Asian economies and populations broadly. In other words, the high frequency of flooding, as one of the main consequences of the area's deforestation problem, could be traced to some of its anthropogenic origins in East Asian communities from across the Amur border. Like Kravtsov's conceptualization of the left-bank borderlands as a standalone

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[46] *Ibid*., 99.
[47] I. K. Shishkin, "Materialy k flore basseina reka Imana," *Zapiski Vladivostokskogo otdela gosudarstvennogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* 22, tom v, (1930): 99-102. The Iman River was renamed Great Ussuri (Bolshaia Ussurka) in the 1970s. It is one of the longest tributaries of the Ussuri River. The lengthy research notes published in the Vladivostok-based Russian Geographical Society branch's quarterly journal included detailed discussion of not only the Iman River's flora, but also the change of tree species and vegetation in the whole Ussuri and middle Amur River valleys.
[48] *Ibid*., 142-144.

geo-ecological unit, those exploring and studying the biosphere of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, including Danilovich, Vaneev, and Koloskov, considered flooding and its many causal factors from a local vantage point and resorted to social and political constructs, such as nationality and borders, to make sense of the anthropogenic aspects of the flooding's origin.

Apart from investigating regular flooding's causal factors and assessing its impact, the scientific personnel offered suggestions for enhancing the productivity and agronomic efficiency of the Amur borderland's seasonally waterlogged soil. In accordance with their diagnoses of many causes of the flooding, they offered suggestions on how to minimize the impact of flooding on various communities in the middle and lower Amur drainage. Those having participated in the expeditions along the tributaries of the middle Amur and into the Lesser Khingan Range suggested that established kolkhozes and planned agricultural settlements in the lowland reserve large areas for crops that favored sandy and loamy soil and survived the wet soil conditions caused by flash floods, such as tomatoes and corn.[49] As for the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, scientists considered that the land in the lower altitude of its less mountainous southeastern corner was good for planting legumes, especially soybeans. When flooding occurred flushing the organic components off the soil's surface, leguminous crops like soy could grow well in soggy, heavy soil with less content of organic matter.[50]

Scientists also shared their advice that aimed to broker the relationship between socioeconomic development and utilization of natural resources in the region. Kravtsov, for example, mentioned that dredging would be "necessary for shallow waterways in the future,"

[49] GAKhK, f. p-2, op. 1, d. 448, l. 7. See also Abdullaev et al., *Trudy Birobidzhanskoi geologicheskoi ekspeditsii Lenozeta*, 138, 140.
[50] Abdullaev et al., *Trudy Birobidzhanskoi geologicheskoi ekspeditsii Lenozeta*, 140-141; Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union exported large volumes of peas and lentils to countries in Europe and Asia in the early twentieth century. Soviet agronomists and soil scientists in the Far East also endorsed the idea that legumes could be cultivated in the milder climate zone in Priamur'e. See *Khingano-Bureinskaia problema,* 24.

especially those parts near sizeable human settlements. Dredging would help alleviate the impact of peak flooding on human activities. In the meantime, it could also improve major waterways' navigation capacity, benefiting the transportation of goods in the long term.[51] As for the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, scientists affiliated with Komzet and OZET stressed that future use of forest resources should be rational. For the lumber industry, the growing demand of wood from Manchuria, resulting from the exponential increase of internal Chinese migration and Imperial Japan's rapid economic expansion in the area, validated some Soviet scientists' concern about further deforestation in their *Priamur'e* borderlands. Scientists pointed out that wood with longer rotation ages, such as Korean pine and Mongol oak, needed to be first and foremost used for construction and industries in major towns like Birobidzhan and in the Soviet North Asian borderlands at large, instead of being exported to Manchuria and farther overseas.[52]

The ideas these hydrologists, geologists, soil and forestry scientists, and geographers put forward and iterated about what had contributed to flooding and what people could do to prevent and minimize the disastrous effects of severe flooding offered a glimpse into some distinctive features of the scientific personnel's knowledge systems. Socially and politically constructed concepts, namely borders and nationalities, became integral in their understanding of the land and water that they surveyed and studied and profoundly structured their expert knowledge. Natural phenomena, such as bountiful rainfall, and anthropogenic activities, such as deforestation, all occurred over a broad, continuous geographic area. The expertise the scientific personnel directed towards explaining and mitigating those problems pertaining to a broad

[51] GAKhK, f. p-2, op. 1, d. 448, l. 12.
[52] For discussion of the increase of East Asian population in Manchuria and the influence of Japanese Empire's expansion in Manchuria, especially their economic impact on the demand of timber import, see Wang Changfu, *Dongbei jindai linye jingji shi* [The Economic History of Northeast China's Forestry Industry in Modern Era] (Beijing: China Forestry Publishing, 1991), 229-31. For scientists' discussion of the future arrangement of the lumber industry in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast and in the broad Soviet Far East, see Vaneev, *Birobidzhan*, 35; see also I. K. Shishkin, "Materialy k flore basseina reka Imana," 117-119.

biosphere, however, was local, inward-looking, and teleologically nationalistic. Another feature of these scientists' expert knowledge was its applied and pragmatic characteristic vis-à-vis the Soviet state's aspiration for effective socioeconomic transformation of the remote Far Eastern borderlands. Vaneev, for example, not only holistically identified the environmental issues intrinsic to the Jewish Autonomous Oblast's physical and ecohydrological configuration, but also embedded in his writings pragmatic socioeconomic information that could inform the Soviet state and shape its industrialization and trade policies in the Far East.

Perusing these scientists' notes and publications, one could easily notice that many harbored holistic regards for the ecohydrological system they surveyed and researched. While working towards enhancing human understanding of the ecohydrological mechanism in the Amur drainage and subsequently minimizing the disruption of regular flooding, Soviet scientific personnel did not suggest subjugation and dominance of the natural environment. The idea known in contemporary environmental science as sustainability dotted their writings instead. Scientists affiliated with SOPS, DVPI, and OZET had all discussed the intricacy of the ecohydrological cycle: waterbodies, topology, soil, and flora and fauna were all in synchrony in the biosphere, and anthropogenic interventions, such as overlogging, to alter the natural course of one in the name of development could bring about significant consequences for all in the whole ecosystem. This feature of their expert knowledge systems brings nuance into the more established points of view on Soviet environmental history, especially during the Stalinist era. The more mainstream scholarly interpretation of the relationship between the Soviet state-led economic development and the natural world is that the former came at the expense of the latter. Environmental unfriendliness as the major attribute of the Soviet economic makeover has been a

common theme in the literature of Russian environmental history.[53] Kravtsov's and his Far East-based fellow scientists' discussion of how to harness the unruly and abundant water resources in the Amur River Basin would further complicate similar scholarly narratives on the Soviets' relationship with their natural environment.

In the summer of 1932, torrential rain in central Manchuria triggered severe flooding on the Songhua River, the largest right-bank tributary of the Amur River, and its surrounding riverine areas. The flooding paralyzed Harbin, the unparalleled regional center for trade and transportation by the river.[54] The Harbin-based Soviet management of the Chinese Eastern Railway documented the flooding's crippling effects on everyday life and the local economy in the city amid military tensions between the Chinese, Japanese, and to some extent, the Soviets. The flooding suspended ongoing clashes between Japan's imperial military and local Chinese resistance forces in the city, and the Japanese and Soviets airlifted supplies for their compatriots whose communication with the outside area was cut off by the flooding.[55]

Vasilii Kravtsov learned about the flooding of the Songhua River in Vladivostok. He quoted this severe flooding that breached the embankment and submerged Harbin in his writing on the Amur River's major tributaries in 1933.[56] Apart from being a participant of the SOPS-led expedition along the Zeya River, Kravtsov was also a member of the Commission for Electrification of the Far Eastern Krai (*Komissiia po elektrifikatsii Dal'nevostochnogo kraia*). In 1933, he worked with other members from the Commission and wrote reports in response to the superior State Commission for Electrification of Russia (GOELRO)'s aspiration for turning

[53] For example, Douglas Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation, and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 15; Paul Josephson, *Industrialized Nature: Brute Force Technology and the Transformation of the Natural World* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002).
[54] "Songhua Jiang Baozhang," *Nanyang Shangbao*, August 6, 1932.
[55] V. V. Levitskii, *Istoriia v mifakh i vospominaniiakh vokrug KVZhD* (Kharkiv: PARK, 2019), 254.
[56] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 75, l. 17.

hydropower into electricity.[57] According to them, the Amur River's main tributaries could generate more hydroelectric power than the Amur itself. For the Soviet Northeast Asian borderlands, the use of the Amur fluvial system's waterpower should first entail unleashing the hydrological potential of several left-bank tributaries of the Amur, namely the Zeya, Amgun, Bureya, and Selemzha Rivers. The Songhua River flooding, in Kravtsov's and his colleagues' assessment, demonstrated again that the streamflow of the Amur and its tributaries varied significantly in different seasons and in different years. The excessive high streamflow of these rivers manifested itself in the form of flash flooding. In theory, to contain the flooding meant to not waste the potential hydraulic energy generated by some large volume of water flowing down the channels.[58] Unruly flash floods in the Amur fluvial system, in other words, became untapped (*neispol'zovanna*) water resources, and Kravtsov and his colleagues were to develop solutions for incorporating the untapped into the Soviet state's effort of *osvoenie* in the Northeast Asian borderlands.

Viktor P. Vologdin, one of the most prominent early Soviet engineers in electrical welding and a senior colleague of Kravtsov in the Commission for Electrification of the Far East, agreed with Kravtsov. He further proposed that building hydropower stations (*gidroelektrostantsiia*, also *GES*) on major left-bank tributaries of the Amur should be the optimum solution for transforming the unruly water into much needed energy. Citing local scientists' research findings, Vologdin called for designing modern hydropower dams on the upstream of the Zeya River to take advantage of some natural slopes and the area's hilly topography.[59] The proposition of building dams on some left-bank tributaries that Kravtsov,

[57] The Far Eastern regional counterpart of the GOELRO seemed to be growing substantially in the 1930s and including more researchers and scientists devoted to studying local hydroelectric power sources. *Ibid*., ll. 12-17.
[58] *Ibid*., ll. 23-24, 26.
[59] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 7, 17, 19.

Vologdin, and their colleagues put on the table had its socioeconomic root in the Soviet regime's aspiration for bringing industrial enterprises and socialist farming inland in lieu of concentrating them in the southernmost borderland belt. In the mid 1920s, the plans that Gosplan laid out for the Amur and Maritime Provinces' industrial progression included extending mass electrification into remote, rural settlements and preparing newly electrified towns for industrialization.[60] However, the underdeveloped infrastructure for generating and transmitting electricity across thinly distributed human settlements in the vast Far Eastern geography did not bode well. Against such context, Vologdin argued that building hydropower dams on the Zeya River would transform the Zeya waterbody into a productive source of electricity and the station's installed capacity could reach as much as 110,000 kilowatts- enough electricity for not only the Amur district but also southern Yakutia.[61]

The Russian Far East, as well as the rest of the RSFSR, had relied predominantly on fuels like coal and oil for electricity generation throughout the late imperial and early Soviet periods. The use of waterpower for electricity in Russia only had a short history of less than two decades, starting with constructions of the first hydroelectric dams on the Volkhov River near St. Petersburg in the mid 1910s.[62] The construction of the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station in Central Ukraine, the first Soviet hydroelectric installation of strategic significance, was still ongoing[63] when Kravtsov, Vologdin, and their colleagues discussed the feasibility of building the first hydroelectric dam in the Amur fluvial system to help electrify the region. For scientists and engineers in the Commission for Electrification of the Far East, knowledge and experience

[60] V. V. Alekseev, *Elektrifikatsiia Sibiri: Istoricheskoe issledovanie, 1885-1950* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1973), 148.
[61] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 81, l. 20.
[62] Jonathan Coopersmith, *The Electrification of Russia, 1880-1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 122, 125.
[63] G. A. Unpelev, *Sotsialisticheskaia industrializatsiia Dal'nego Vostoka* (Vladivostok: Dal'nauka, 1972), 216.

associated with designing and building hydroelectric power plants, at least in the domestic context, were only emerging. Vologdin stressed that more expeditions and research needed to be done for the realization of the hydroelectric station project.[64]

Having grown up in Perm in the 1890s and receiving education on electrical engineering both domestically in St. Petersburg and overseas in Germany and Switzerland, Viktor Vologdin first joined Imperial Russia's Navy Department as an expert in electrical arc welding for shipbuilding in the early 1910s. Recruited by Alexander Kolchak's Omsk Regional Government in the aftermath of the revolutions, he first came to Eastern Siberia and the Far East circa 1918. He had been mostly based in Vladivostok since then and had contributed valuable electrical engineering expertise to rebuilding the shipbuilding industry in Pacific Soviet Russia. In the mid 1920s, Vologdin was promoted to the position of the director of the newly established Polytechnic Department at the Far Eastern State University.[65] During his tenure as the head of the Polytechnic institute, Vologdin's research interests broadened, and the major waterways' potential for hydroelectricity in the Far East especially captured his attention. As a result of his persistent exploration of hydroelectrical modeling, Vologdin, together with some of his colleagues in the Far Eastern Polytechnic Institute, including Vasilii Kravtsov, formed the core of the Far Eastern Krai Commission for Electrification in the 1930s.[66] The scientist, a native of the Urals, eventually would cement his scientific scholarly legacy as an electrical engineer in the Far Eastern end of Eurasia.

[64] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 20-21.
[65] The Department would become the prototype of the Far Eastern Polytechnical Institute, officially established in the 1930s in Vladivostok. See Gennadii P. Turmov, "Stodvadtsatiletie so dnia rozhdeniia Viktora Petrovicha Vologdina," *Klub Direktorov Vladivostok,* Nov. 2005.
[66] M. A. Vilenskii, *Problemy razvitiia elektroenergetiki Dal'nego Vostoka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk, 1954),142 & 145.

A notable feature of Vologdin's scholarship and his contributions to the conception of hydroelectric dams on the Amur's left-bank tributaries, according to one Soviet publication on the Commission, was his devotion to local, empirical knowledge in analyzing problems and offering scientific solutions.[67] Regional archival documents corroborated it and showed that Vologdin and colleagues in the Commission not only called for organized scientific expeditions upstream on major left-bank tributaries of the Amur, but also strongly suggested the Commission sponsor researchers to the Moscow and Leningrad branches of the Hydroelectric Project (*Gidroelektroproekt,* later *GidroProekt*), the Soviet state enterprise specializing in designing hydroelectric stations and canals.[68] Headquartered in Moscow, the Hydroelectric Project was naturally the partner that both GOELRO and the Commission for Electrification of the Far East should consult and work with in attempting to build dams to capitalize on the Amur River Basin's hydrological resources. However, Vologdin and his colleagues turned down the Hydroelectric Project proposal for the development of a working blueprint for the future dam on the Zeya. Vologdin's correspondence with GOELRO indicated that the electrical engineer frowned upon the idea to uncritically entrust the *Gidroelektroproekt* with the design of the hydropower dam. He reasoned:

> "The main tributary of the Amur has uneven flows running through drastically differing terrains from north to south… Very few in the *Gidroelektroproekt* had visited or studied Amur and its many tributaries, and their designs (of dams) were likely undifferentiated and less useful in the hydrology and geology of the *Priamur'e*."

[67] Vologdin was one of several electrical engineers who helped lay the groundwork for the future Zeya and Bureya hydropower dams and earned recognition in the 1950s publication. According to the source, Vologdin and other main engineers in the Commission emphasized on the use of local and empirical (*rodnoi, konkretnyi*) data when laying out the roadmap for designing and building the hydropower dams. *Ibid*., 150, 157-158.
[68] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 82, ll. 7-8. The *delo* contains research and meeting notes of the Commission written by Vologdin and his colleagues between 1934 and 1936.

Vologdin's critical assessment of the *Gidroelektroproekt*'s work was by no means baseless. As a matter of fact, the *Gidroelektroproekt* first expanded its business reach into the Far East Krai in the early 1930s, when GOELRO planned to build a middle-sized hydropower dam on the River Bila in hopes of solving the problem of the shortage of power in new settlements in the future Jewish Autonomous Oblast. However, GOELRO's idea and *Gidroelektroproekt*'s design draft both turned out as futile, as the Bila River's streamflow and velocity were too steady to sustain a run-of-water type of hydroelectric facility.[69] GOELRO's plan had not materialized. Neither had the *Gidroelektroproekt*'s draft design of the dam on River Bila. In hindsight, hydropower only became one of the primary sources for electricity generation in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast as well as the entire southern belt of the Russian Far Eastern Okrug in the 2000s, long after the Soviet Union had disintegrated.[70]

Table 3. GOELRO's general plan for electrification of southern Far East through hydropower stations at the beginning of the Second Five-year Plan.[71]

River	Planned Installed Capacity of Hydropower Dams (Thousand kilowatts)		
	1932	1937	1947
Bila	15	25	37
Selemdzha	x	x	150
Zeya	x	x	420
Bureya	x	x	75
Total	15	25	682

In another series of notes that members in the Commission for Electrification of the Far East exchanged with GOELRO in 1935, Vologdin again took unfavorable stances regarding

[69] Aleksei. V. Makliukov, "Gosudarstvennaia politika v sfere razvitiia elektroenergetiki na Dal'nem Vostoke SSSR v 1920-30-kh gg." *Gumanitarnye issledovaniia v Vostochnoi Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke* no, 2, (2015): 48.
[70] It became the third largest source for electricity generation in the 2000s after the Bureya Dam was completed and almost tripled the Far East's capacity of hydroelectric generation. See I. Molianov, "Zeiskaia GES: Mify i deistvitel'nost'," *Amurskaia Pravda*, August 23, 2007.
[71] Sergei V. Klopov, *Issledovaniia v Basseine Amura* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Znanie," 1960), 17.

Moscow-based officials' and engineers' propositions for some details of *Priamur'e*'s first hydropower station. He called the plan approved by GOELRO an unrefined (*bez dorabotki*) replica of the Dnieper Hydropower Station. The height of the Dnieper Dam, as Vologdin discussed, was primarily determined by its function of ameliorating the turbulence of the middle Dnieper rapids. The dam height and the ratio between dam volume and dam size of the Dnieper Plant could not work for the station on the Zeya River, given that a main function of the Zeya dam would be to mitigate the large volume of seasonal flooding. The Dnieper River's flood regime, after all, "does not compare with the Zeya River." According to Vologdin, the Zeya River and the Amur fluvial system's very susceptibility to uneven volumes of seasonal flooding also posed a challenge to sedimentation management of the dam. The Dnieper River and other big rivers in Europe just "did not have the same problem nor the same scale."[72]

Vologdin's critique of GOELRO's plans and his remarks on building a hydropower station on the Amur's tributaries revealed how local, empirically generated scientific data had retooled the scientist's knowledge systems. Vologdin and his colleagues brought into question the Moscow-centric epistemological approaches to studying hydropower and planning out hydroelectric facilities in the geographic setting of the Amur River Basin. Instead of taking the centrality and universality of the Moscow-centric mode of knowledge production and knowledge transfer for granted, the scientific personnel in the Commission for Electrification of the Far East produced localized knowledge and applied it to transforming the very locality that they lived in and increasingly identified themselves with. Through stressing that rivers in the European part of the USSR and in the Amur fluvial system did not present the same challenges to riverside human

[72] The author might indicate that the Amur and Zeya Rivers' flood regimes were more affected by uneven seasonal precipitation and long frozen period, and thus such seasonality could result in a specific pattern of erosion and sedimentation. The dam designers should take such specifics into account. RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 82, ll. 21, 29, 33-36.

communities, Vologdin's notes further showed how the physical environment played an important role in shaping the relationship between Moscow and the Amur borderlands. The local environment and its peculiar features informed the scientific personnel and allowed them to question and reasonably opt out of the mode of knowledge transfer institutionalized by Moscow.

Vologdin and his colleagues were not alone. Scholars studying Soviet scientific personnel and their interaction with the natural world in other parts of the USSR have shown that scientists similarly produced and used localized knowledge to broker the evolving relationship between state-led socioeconomic development and local environmental transformation. For example, John Seitz discusses how Soviet agronomists based on the Kazakh steppe had unlearnt the "authoritative" technologies for testing salinity and chemical qualities in water that they first acquired in European Russia. Producing and prioritizing localized knowledge, Soviet agronomists managed to efficiently map out areas more suitable for productive agricultural settlements in the 1930s.[73]

For Vologdin and his colleagues, their system of localized knowledge not only evolved vis-à-vis Moscow-centric know-how, but also developed against the temporal backdrop of Russian colonists' *osvoenie* of the Amur River Basin in the recent imperial past. Another member in the Commission for Electrification of the Far East by the name of M. Levenko remarked that GOELRO's estimation of the Zeya and Selemdzha Rivers' flow capacity was based on data gathered and organized from the 1910 Amur Scientific Expedition led by Nikolai Gondatti, the last imperial governor-general of the Amur Province.[74] Levenko questioned the

[73] John Seitz, "Science and the Steppe: Agronomists, Nomads, and the Settler Colony on the Kazakh Steppe, 1881-1917" (PhD Diss., Iowa State University, 2019), 198-199.
[74] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 82, ll. 41-42. For information on the extent of the 1910 Amur Expedition and Gondatti's leadership, see N. Dubinina, *Priamurskii General-gubernator N. L. Gondatti* (Khabarovsk: Amur Geographical Society, 1997), 99- 101.

usefulness of some findings yielded in the Gondatti-led expedition. The former governor-general's preference for the upper Amur stream as the location for future river dams, in Levenko's opinion, proved to be a hasty and less precise conclusion. Although the gradient of the upper Amur is high and its riverbed forms cascades across the mountainous Greater Khingan Range, the river channels are "winding with sharp bends." Levenko specified that winding river channels "created more uncertainties when engineers needed to divert the water before building (the dam)." In addition, it was difficult to fathom the "changing water pressure of the upper Amur's rapids."[75] Levenko cited research results from the Far Eastern branch of the newly renamed State Geographical Society's recent expeditions along major rivers in the area, and he claimed that the Gondatti-led expedition only brought to light limited information about the hydrological regime of the Amur and its main tributaries.[76]

The 1910-11 Amur Scientific Expedition, led by the Amur Governor-General, was indeed oriented towards a different administrative undertaking. Gondatti viewed the lack of decent rail and road infrastructure in the broad *Priamur'e* a major hurdle for the region's economic growth, primarily bolstered by the mining, fishing, and forestry industries and export of their products. Participants of the 1910 Expedition did not focus on how to harness the hydrological potential of many waterways in the Amur watershed. Instead, they explored the rivers and studied the riverine geologies to understand how to minimize the waterbodies' negative impact on the construction and operation of railways and roads, as appearing in the forms of flooding and landslides.[77] Gondatti's envisioned dams (*plotiny*), as Levenko remarked,

[75] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 82, l. 42.
[76] *Ibid*., I. 43.
[77] Dubinina, *Priamurskii General-gubernator*, 105. Secondary sources published in the Soviet era also pointed to the passive nature of the 1910 Amur Expedition's engagement with water resources in the region. A main goal of the expedition was to make sure no major disasters, including flooding, could affect the extension line of the Trans-Siberian Railway in the Amur Province. See Klopov, *Issledovaniia v Basseine Amura*, 9.

would function more as dikes (*damby*) that just prevented flooding and created reservoirs.[78] The different approaches adopted by imperial technocrats and Soviet scientific personnel to studying the fluvial system of the Amur watershed highlight how the mode of *osvoenie* of the Amur borderlands' environment in the early Stalinist era had diverged from the recent past. Soviet scientists were more proficient at local ecohydrology and more actively engaged with the waterways in support of unleashing and maximizing the waterbodies' productive forces as part of the new regime's effort to holistically revamp the borderlands' political economy.

As for Gondatti's idea of building dams on the Amur River, the Far East-based Soviet officials and scientists had long rejected it. The river's winding channels in the upper stream and the low gradient of its middle and lower stream were already unfavorable conditions for dam construction. Moreover, the river's very nature as an international border did not stand a chance of sustaining a major hydropower infrastructural project: local Soviet officials considered it too subject to foreign forces' interference.[79] On top of the concern about national security, Soviet scientists raised the alarm of a broken ecosystem of the Amur, especially if dams were planned on its lower stream to the estuary. Natural science faculty from the Far Eastern Polytechnic Institute advised against the idea of building large projects on the lower Amur and its tributaries, for that might "degrade the natural habitat for some anadromous fish, including the Amur salmon." Fishery was one of the pillars of local economy. The fishing industry, first oriented towards harvesting and exporting profitable fish like Siberian sturgeon and Amur salmon, helped sustain the economic recovery and growth in the wake of revolution and wars in the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Far East.[80]

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[78] RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 82, l. 43.
[79] Klopov, *Issledovaniia v Basseine Amura*, 16.
[80] The secondary source only contains a brief discussion of some Far East-based Soviet scientists' caution against the negative ecological consequences of building dam in the lower Amur. Klopov, *Issledovaniia v Basseine Amura*,

Contemporary Russophone scientific literature offers other evidence that speaks to Soviet Far Eastern scientific personnel's attentiveness to potential ecological degradation resulting from industrialization and economic development projects. In the mid 1950s, for example, Soviet ichthyologists and hydraulic engineers based in the Far East once again advised against Moscow's proposal for a large hydroelectrical station in the downstream of the Ussuri River. They argued that large hydropower projects and the resultant changing water levels could significantly reduce the spawning grounds of some fish species and drive some species like the taimen trout exponentially rapidly out of freshwater in the lower Amur Basin.[81] Soviet scientists' active and enlightened engagement in the process of assessing various historical and contemporary plans for building dams on the Amur and its main tributaries reflected their evolving expert knowledge systems that were increasingly shaped by their familiarity and identification with the local environment: the flora and fauna, the landscape, the hydrological regimes, and the general biosphere in the Amur River Basin. As discussed throughout this chapter, the natural world and the Soviet scientific personnel reciprocated. The former informed the latter, and the latter integrated the acquired information into their expert knowledge systems and employed such knowledge to help reconfigure the modernizing state's engagement with the environment in the borderlands.

Viktor Vologdin, Vasilii Kravtsov, and many of their fellow scientists based in the geography of the Amur River watershed and engaged with its ecohydrology had utilized their knowledge to scrutinize and critique the plans for the hydropower stations that were conceived in

19, 21. For discussion of the role fishery had played in the early Soviet economy in the Far East, see S. F. Zolotukhin & A. N. Kanzeparova, *Tikhookeanskie lososi Amura* (Vladivostok: Vsemirnyi fond dikoi prirody/ WWF, 2919), 29.

[81] G. V. Novomodnyi, S. F. Zolotukhin, & P. O. Sharov, *Ryba Amura: Bogatstvo i krizis* (Vladivostok: Apel'sin, 2004), 39-40.

the political center and intended to translate the potentiality of the natural world into productive forces. The aspiration and excitement for a monumental hydroelectric dam, however, still prevailed in the scientific community, as amongst the bureaucrats and technocrats in the Far East. An underexplored dimension of the social forces that drove the local Soviet scientific personnel's commitment to building hydropower stations in the Amur fluvial system was the inspiration and influence of other polities that pursued similar large-scale engineering projects at both global and cross-border levels. In his notes, Vologdin at least twice referred to the ongoing construction of the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River. He discussed the technologies that the Americans used for compressing the water flow and allowing high water pressure through the turbine. The future Zeya Dam, as Vologdin remarked with a tone of excitement and admiration, could "adopt similar technologies without significantly restructuring the original plans for the blanket drainage."[82]

Apart from the excitement at learning the cutting-edge U.S. engineering technologies and possibly applying them in the construction of their own hydropower stations, Soviet scientific personnel affiliated with institutions like the Far Eastern office of the Council for the Study of the USSR's Productive Forces also shared a sense of urgency. The Japanese Empire, Imperial and Soviet Russia's major geopolitical rival in the Far East, just set in motion the construction of its first large-scale hydroelectrical dam, namely the Fengman Dam, in neighboring Manchukuo around the same time. The dam under construction was located on the Second Songhua River, one of the Songhua River's main tributaries. According to some limited secondary sources, Soviet scientists were not only aware of the ongoing project, but also inspired by their Japanese

[82] The blanket drainage system (*dreny*) has been designed for controlling groundwater seepage, and its structural design and material might vary in accordance with the water pressure and seepage rate. See RGIA DV, f. p-2848, op. 1, d. 82, ll. 29, 37.

counterparts to find efficient ways to "overcome difficulties" brought about by the "long wintry weather" in Northeast Asia.[83] The Fengman Dam started to expose some engineering problems in some secondary pump stations a decade after its completion. In the early 1950s, the newly founded People's Republic of China invited experts from the brotherly Soviet Union to help examine the conditions of the Fengman Dam and come up with solutions for restoration of the pump stations.[84] Recent Russian sources indicate that the Far East-based Soviet scientific personnel's growing knowledge of the Japanese Empire's engineering legacies, especially the two hydroelectric dams, on the other side of the Amur River in Manchuria was one of the key motivations for the Second Zeya River Expedition from 1958 to 1962. Participants in this expedition came from various research institutes, including the Soviet Geographical Society, Leningrad Geological Survey, and the Far Eastern Polytechnic Institute.[85]

Two years after the Second Zeya Expedition was completed, the construction of the long-planned Zeya hydropower dam finally began. The Council of Ministers' State Economic Commission (*Gosudarstvennaia ekonomicheskaia kommissiia Soveta Ministrov SSSR*) and the Ministry of Energy and Electrification of the USSR (*Minenergo*) finalized the programs for building the Zeya Dam, the first hydropower station in the Soviet Far East, and the Central Committee of the Communist Party approved the project in 1965.[86] The Soviet state's tightened

[83] For a brief discussion of the Soviet engineers' solution to problems that were caused by long winter intermission and could disrupt the overall construction progress, including the Japanese dam project's inspiration and influence, see Klopov, *Issledovaniia v Basseine Amura*, 18-19; see also V. N. Sementovskii ed., *Reka Amur: Ocherk Prirody* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Geograficheskoi Literatury, 1959), 37-39. According to one Chinese public history source, engineers and technicians from the metropole of the Japanese Empire had long gathered data on the fluvial systems in Manchuria. That might help explain how the Japanese Empire could efficiently mobilize resources and complete the first operational plant in the early 1940s. Pang Xiujie, "Wangshi Ruyan Hua Fengman," *Guojia Dianwang [State Grid]* 136, (November 2014): 117-18.
[84] Pang Xiujie, "Wangshi Ruyan Hua Fengman," 19.
[85] A. V. Makliukov, "Ekspeditsionnye issledovaniia energeticheskikh resursov basseina reka Amura 1930-1950-kh gg." *Rossiia i ATR* no, 104, (2019): 111.
[86] Galina N. Dmitrieva, "Prichiny i istoriia vozvedeniia Zeiskoi GES," *Istoricheskie, filosofskie, politicheskie i iuridicheskie nauki, kul'turologiia i iskusstvovedenie: Voprosy teorii i praktiki* 7(no. 13) (2011): 64.

fiscal situation in the earlier decades and Moscow's preferential distribution of financial resources to similar infrastructural projects in other regions spread out across the Soviet landscape might help explain the time lag of three decades between the planning of the first Soviet hydroelectric dam in the Amur watershed and its actual construction. In addition, it was the upcoming construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline, as local researchers have emphasized, that prompted Moscow to get the dam construction on the Zeya River under way. The construction and operation of the BAM would entail huge amounts of readily available electricity.[87] Many engineers and construction workers who built the dam had just participated in the completion of the Bratsk Hydropower Station on the Angara River in Eastern Siberia. Soviet engineers and scientists had accumulated significant expertise in designing and building dams at this point. The Council for the Study of the USSR's Productive Forces, now part of the State Economic Commission, endorsed Siberia and Far East-based scientists and engineers' contributions to the design of the Zeya Dam: their participation in designing and managing smaller hydraulic projects in Eastern Siberia and *Priamur'e* over the years had built up immense expertise that they finally invested in materializing the Zeya Hydroelectric Dam.[88]

In the aftermath of the 1928 historic flooding, another newly established Soviet state agency based in the Amur borderlands was also forced to deal with the natural disaster's disappointing consequences. It was the Far Eastern branch of the All-Union Association of Grain Procurement (*Vsesoiuznoe ob'edinenie khlebozagotovok*, or *Soiuzkhleb* hereafter). Existing literature on Soviet economic history contains detailed discussion on the 1927-28 crisis of grain procurement across the country that beset the new socialist regime. During the NEP years, Soviet peasants could make relatively independent economic decisions about whether they would sell

[87] Makliukov, "Ekspeditsionnye," 109.
[88] Dmitrieva, "Prichiny i istoriia," 65.

the surplus of their agricultural production and where to sell it.[89] As in most other parts of the USSR, state-sponsored grain procurement organizations in the southernmost belt of the Far East, the most agriculturally productive land of the entire Soviet Far East, encountered peasants withholding grain from the markets and especially avoiding selling their produce to the state.[90] In order to strengthen the state's control of grain procurement and supply of agricultural products, the *Dal'kraikom* initiated the merger of several local grain procurement organizations and milling plants and reconfigured them into the *Priamur'e* branch of *Soiuzkhleb* in 1928. The branch took charge of overseeing and arranging the grain procurement campaigns across the region on behalf of the state.[91]

In 1929, however, the amount of several major crops the Amur *Soiuzkhleb* branch had purchased, including oats and wheat, dropped to levels 9 to 15 percent lower than the procurement targets, despite the fact that the agency had already trimmed down its planned grain procurement targets due to the impact of the previous year's flooding. *Soiuzkhleb* officials suspected that many farming communities chose to hoard their limited surplus harvest, as the severe flooding of the past year could lead to a substantial drop of crop yields in the first place. In the meantime, officials also suspected that the flooding became peasants' legitimate excuse for ignoring and evading the requirement for minimum grain supply to *Soiuzkhleb*.[92] Moreover, *Soiuzkhleb* had noticed that cross-border trade of certain cash crops like rice between Soviet peasants and private grain merchants based in Manchuria picked up in the past year. Officials there summarized that the flooding and its lasting consequences, especially the destructive effect

[89] R. W. Davies, Mark Harrison, and S. G. Wheatcroft, ed. *The Soviet Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 111-112; James Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province: A Study of Collectivization and Dekulakization in Siberia* (New York: Palgrave, 1996), 20-22.
[90] L. I. Proskurina, "Derevnia rossiiskogo Dal'nego Vostoka v 20-30 gg. XX veka: kollektivizatsiia i ee posledstviia," *Rossiia i ATR* no, 101, (2006): 18.
[91] GAKhK, f. R-353, op. 3, d. 53, ll. 199-201.
[92] *Ibid*., ll. 207, 209.

on regional transport infrastructure, had worsened the crisis of the state's grain procurement. Those peasants with "existing familiarity with middlemen and merchants from across the border" chose to trade crops for better profit in the international (*zagranichnyi*) market and cited both logistical inconvenience and natural disaster-induced meager agricultural harvest to justify their trade.[93] Faced with the options of importing grain from Manchuria at higher market pricing or coordinating with the neighboring East Siberian *Soiuzkhleb* branch to fulfill the grain procurement targets, dismayed Amur officials informed the *Dal'kraikom* to draw attention to the flooding's impact on the supply chain and processing of grain procurement. They stressed the necessity of building more paved roads, as the regular flash flooding "paralyzed transportation to settlements with promising agricultural productivity." They also emphasized the need of flood control and mitigation in the region, as flooding of major rivers in the region could "cause more crop failures, including in the newly planned Jewish Autonomous Oblast." *Soiuzkhleb* would also need to constantly "revise related agrarian policy" to deal with peasants' unwillingness to deliver in the name of loss to natural disasters.[94]

The previous chapter of this dissertation examines how the Soviets in the *Priamur'e* borderlands built new road transportation infrastructure to strengthen communication between various settlements, especially between urban and rural communities. This chapter focuses on another aspect of the *Priamur'e Soiuzkhleb* officialdom's concern: how the Soviet state agencies and individuals understood the water regime of the ecohydrology in the Far Eastern borderlands

[93] *Ibid.*, ll. 174, 222-25. I assume that a good portion of the grain the Soviet state imported from Manchuria could very likely be originally harvested in the land of Soviet *Priamur'e* and purchased by Manchuria-based merchants. Russian sources on the Amur Shipping Company contain brief discussion about Harbin-based Russian merchants' involvement in grain trade cross the Amur border during and after the revolutions. See I. N. Muravetskii, "Lainer sungariiskoi linii," in *Proshloe i nastoiashchee: Amurskogo parokhodstva: Sbornik dokladov nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, ed. M. K. Chesnokova (Blagoveshchensk: Amur Oblast Research Library, 2018): 33.
[94] GAKhK, f. R-353, op. 3, d. 53, ll. 81-83. See telegram correspondence from *Soiuzkhleb*'s leader named O. Mironov to *Dal'kraikom*'s committee of agricultural districts (komitet sel'skokhoziaistvennykh raionov).

and made the effort to tame the unruly waterways in hopes of transforming untapped freshwater into productive forces. In this chapter I have paid close attention to one particular social group, namely Soviet Far East-based scientific personnel, and the key role they played in shaping the interplay between the state's development-driven socioeconomic agenda and local communities' entanglement with the natural world. I have highlighted how the ecohydrology of the Amur watershed had informed Soviet scientific personnel's localized, empirically rich expert knowledge and their identification with the geography of the Soviet *Priamur'e*. I have also stressed how scientists used their localized knowledge system to enlighten the Soviet state's *osvoenie* effort in the borderlands and make terms with Moscow and local communities in the process of charting the path for turning hydrology into productivity.

CHAPTER THREE

TO CHASE AND TO LEARN: SOVIET CUSTOMS SERVICE IN *PRIAMUR'E*

In the late 1920s, the *Priamur'e* branch of *Soiuzkhleb*, the state agency taking charge of grain procurement, noticed volumes of cross-border trade of some economic crops between Soviet peasants in the left bank of the Amur and merchants and middlemen based in Manchuria from across the border. *Soiuzkhleb* officials learned that peasants, especially those living near major riverports like Lakhasusu, had good trading information and ties to merchants from the opposite side of the border. *Soiuzkhleb* officials referred to other Soviet state agencies and branches in *Priamur'e* that they needed to work more with to figure out and curb the outflow of food crops outside of the state's supervision.[1] One of the most frequently mentioned agencies in *Soiuzkhleb*'s meeting minutes was the local customs service (*tamozhnia*).

This chapter is devoted to the early development of the USSR's customs service in its far-flung Northeast Asian borderlands in the 1920s and 1930s. Combing through events in the making and transformation of the customs service into a border institution in the *Priamur'e*, I contend that the Soviet state apparatus grew out of regional and local specificities. The widely deemed omnipresent state did not reach out to the borderlands; nor did it maintain its firm grip on the task of the borderlands' transformation. Through the discussion of how customs offices and houses on the left bank of the Amur's middle stream developed into competent executive organs of the USSR's borderlands policies, I demonstrate that the regional customs establishments' learning of the particular environmental, cultural, demographic, and economic landscapes of the borderlands legitimized their position as the extension of state authority in the

[1] GAKhK, f. R-353, op. 3, d. 53, ll. 224-227.

borderlands and allowed them to become active participants in making sense of borders and borderlands. In other words, the customs establishments learned to become a border institution in the remote borderlands. Their statistical records of exports and imports helped local governments to rationalize economic planning. Their investigation into smuggling and collaboration of smugglers contributed to the state's acquisition of local knowledge and increasing the legibility of the *Priamur'e* borderlands' population and environment. Most importantly, the customs services' engagement in battling against contraband and smuggling suspects cleaned away impediments to the state's monopoly of international trade and conditioned the Soviet aspiration for economic self-sufficiency.

Russian customs laws first specified that the customs service was an indispensably major constituent of imperial law enforcement in the early eighteenth century, when the Petrine Reforms brought about the establishment of the Collegium of Commerce, an antecedent of the modern-day Customs Department that oversaw the protection and patronage of domestic and international trade. A series of instructions issued by the Collegium of Commerce in 1722 entrusted the customs establishments of several border provinces with fiscal and inspective tasks of controlling the cross-border flow of goods. Early provincial customs establishments included those located in territories adjacent to Poland and the Ottoman Empire in the expansive Russian Empire's western and southern ends, in the Astrakhan Governorate, and in the southeastern end of the Siberian Governorate, where Russia met the Qing Empire overland.

Russophone scholarship on the development of the Russia customs service has highlighted how Russia's industrialization in the late imperial era played the determinant role in bringing about the institution's modernization. The Russian Empire's growing industrial output and mushrooming demand for more up-to-date technologies in the last quarter of the nineteenth

century put it into closer business contact with other industrializing powers and integrated it well into the world market. Such integration meant that Russia's domestic and foreign trade, especially the latter, were increasingly subject to global economic fluctuations and the influence of other economic entities' trade policies. For example, the newly unified Germany, one of Russia's top trading partners then, stepped up economic protectionism and imposed the "iron and rye" tariff on foreign goods in the late 1870s. Germany's escalation of trade barriers, as well as continental Europe's gradual turn to commercial protectionism at large in the same timeframe, pushed the Russian Empire to respond by refashioning its trade policy and strengthening the role played by its customs service in effectively implementing the policy.[2] Russia's trade policy thus shifted towards imposing higher tariffs onto foreign goods, especially those imported from Germany and presumably putting some of Russia's burgeoning national industries in a disadvantageous position even in its own domestic market.[3] In addition, Russia's long-term trade deficit in the 1880s convinced the Imperial Court, Tsar Alexander III included, that increasing tariffs could help maintain more balanced trade relationships with other nations. In 1887, the then minister of finance, Ivan Vyshnegradsky, proposed to the State Council that an "increase of tariffs was imperative for achieving an international trade balance."

The imperial customs service, officially named the Customs Revenue Collection Department (*Departament tamozhennykh sborov*) within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance, was accordingly entrusted with the crucial tasks of implementing tariffs on imports and ruling out illicit smuggling of foreign industrial goods into Russia. In addition to its major role as

[2] Iu. G. Kislovskii, *Istoriia tamozhennogo dela i tamozhennoii politiki Rossii* (Moscow: RUSINA Press, 2004): 244-45.

[3]Russia and Germany were in a trade war in the 1880s. According to sources in Russia, Imperial Russia's increased tariffs on foreign imports first resulted from its retaliatory policy targeting Germany in particular. See Iu. N. Petrov, *Istoriia tamozhni: konspekt lektsii* (Moscow: Akademiia biznesa i predprinimatel'stva, 2000): 17.

trade law enforcement agency, it took on the responsibility for protecting the empire's commercial borders. Russia's ambition of becoming an industrial powerhouse, amplified in the heyday of European imperialism, faced fierce competitions from other imperial rivals. In the words of Vyshnegradsky, the customs service functioned to safeguard Russia's commercial sovereignty and "created conditions for Russia's further economic expansion."[4] In order to enhance the functionality of the imperial customs service, St. Petersburg undertook the projects of revamping the customs department, especially those customs branches in the border regions of its European territories. Measures taken to strengthen the customs service included redrawing the customs districts and correspondingly establishing more customs houses where there had not been any before. In the meantime, the organs of border protection (*pogranichnaia strazha*) within the customs department continued receiving increased financial and personnel support in the 1880s and early 1890s until they were administratively detached from the customs department and refashioned into an autonomous agency in 1893.

The detachment of the border protection agency from the customs department was by no means an act of decentralizing the customs service. It was indeed a move towards systematizing and professionalizing the customs service. Baron Sergei D. Gan, who would direct the customs department in the 1900s, endorsed the separation of the border protection organs, commenting that the customs department, with the professional border guards' cooperation, could work more effectively in checking foreign capital threats against Russia and "defending its economic and sovereign borders."[5] Gan's endorsement of the two agencies' administrative separation and their functional collaboration reflected the Russian imperial elite's increasing appreciation of its customs service's institutional professionalization. Customs officials and policymakers now

[4] Kislovskii, *Istoriia tamozhennogo dela*, 249.
[5] Ia. V. Butov, *Tamozhnnaia politika Rossii v posledneii chetverti XIX v.* (Moscow: Uchebnoe posobie, 1997): 38.

discussed Russia's economic sovereignty and political borders more frequently in pairs in favor of stepping up the customs service in late Imperial Russia. At the turn of the century, the significance of the customs service was couched in patriotic terms and attached to the securitization of Russia's broader business and geopolitical interests at an increasing rate against the backdrop of intensifying imperial competition worldwide.

The literature that has discussed the Imperial Russian customs service's development and given particular attention to how Russia's involvement and placement in the industrializing world's trade network had major impact on the customs agency's maturation has tended towards Eurocentrism. Authors use data and evidence generated in customs houses in Russia's European provinces to illustrate the Department of Customs Revenue Collection's transition into an increasingly professional component of the modernizing state apparatus. Customs organs in St. Petersburg, Vilnius, Odessa, and Kharkov have contributed most of the historical data to researchers' studies of the Russian customs service's development.

Odessa, for example, appeared in quite a few works as the illustrative case study showcasing the Russian customs service's capacity for bringing in consistently increasing revenue.[6] Odessa's particular geographic importance as both a major port city and a border site on the Black Sea has helped push it to the front of scholarly investigations into the Russian customs service's transformation. Many a study has highlighted this former free port's successful reconfiguration into the empire's critical checkpoint for the collection of customs revenue and regulation of international trade in the second half of the nineteenth century. The center of Russia's agricultural exports, Odessa had been handling more than 70 percent of Russia's total

[6] See Patricia Herlihy, *Odessa: A History, 1794- 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Vernon Puryear, "Odessa: Its Rise and International Importance, 1815- 50" *Pacific Historical Review* 3, no. 2, (June 1934): 192- 215; and Iurii G., Kislovskii, *Kontrabanda: Istoriia i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Avtor, 1996).

grain exports throughout most of the nineteenth century. It remained a hub for Russian imports of wine and olive oil as well. Employing impressive numerical records that showcase Odessa's fiscal gains from subjecting massive international trade to efficacious tariff laws,[7] researchers have contended that the transformation of the customs service into a well-staffed, well organized, and well managed agency had complemented and facilitated Russian governance of foreign trade and management of imperial fiscal well-being. In addition, the Odessa customs service's high profitability and improving operational efficiency made important contributions to securing Russia's commercial edge in the Black Sea region, where many imperial powers vied for inserting and expanding their mercantile influences.

Such historical evidence from Odessa and some other European Russian customs posts have led scholars to claim further that the customs service in the late imperial era had provided the administrative and methodological frameworks that the Soviet system of customs duties would later conveniently borrow. The USSR customs service's endeavor to rid the borders of transnational smuggling and bring international trade under state control, according to some scholarship, was first grounded upon its imperial equivalent's accumulated experiences and techniques.[8] This emphasis on the practical continuity between Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union's customs agencies is by no means a rarity in the predominantly Russophone scholarship. Studying those more experienced and better-equipped Russian customs service establishments in its European territories, however, has oftentimes led to misleading conclusions that could hardly be impartially applied to understanding the Russian customs service's historical transformation

[7] Odessa's customs service's impressive contributions to the state fiscal revenue were reflected by sets of statistical data. Odessa's customs revenues increased on an annual rate, and by the 1890s, its annual revenue was six times of what it collected in the early 1870s. Also, in the year of 1898 alone, Odessa customs service's battle against contrabands resulted in fines and confiscation of goods equaling roughly 153,000 rubles. See Kislovskii, *Istoriia tamozhennogo dela,* 272- 73.

[8] Iurii G, Kislovskii, *Istoriia tamozhennogo zakonodatel'stva o kontrabande* (Moscow: RUSINA Press, 2004): 131.

at large. Many a Russian, and later Soviet customs service's post in Transcaucasia, Siberia, Central Asia, and the Far East did not share the identical timeline of development with those in Odessa or St. Petersburg. The Russian customs service did not homogeneously develop into a professionalized state agency at the same rate or at the same time.

By the time the fledgling Soviet regime started to reconstruct the customs service in accordance with its ambitious pursuit of economic self-sufficiency and rational regulation of international trade, the Bolsheviks inherited a customs agency whose extensive branches developed at substantially uneven paces. When Odessa's customs officials increased the tariff on imports of manufactured goods to nearly one third of their value in the years leading up to the First World War,[9] Vladivostok, the empire's primary seaport and transportation hub in the Asian Pacific, just ended its historical status of being a free port and witnessed the establishment of its first customs house.[10] The port city that later headquartered the RSFSR's Far Eastern branch of the USSR Main Customs Administration had only accumulated slightly more than a decade's experience of using customs as a means to regulate international trade and channel multilateral transactions by the time the Bolshevik reign formally took hold in the Russian Far Eastern provinces in 1922. Moreover, the Russian Civil War and foreign military intervention during the war in the Russian Far East severely disrupted the development of the new customs organization in Vladivostok. Russian Far East-based researchers have bemoaned that the customs house in Vladivostok in the years of Russian Civil War left the least detailed and unambiguous documents in the archives.[11]

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[9] P. S. Smirnov, *Natsional'naia bezopasnost': voprosy torgovoi politiki* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo ekonomicheskaia gazeta, 2001): 212- 13.

[10] Vladivostok's free port status came to an end in 1909. See *Iz istorii tamozhennoi sluzhby Rossii na Dal'nem Vostoke: materialy i dokumenty, 1899- 1925* (Vladivostok, 1998), 9- 10.

[11] V. A. Gribnev, and V. E. Shabel'skii, *Blagoveshchenskaia tamozhnia: Istoriia, ekonomika, Perspektivy* (Blagoveshchensk: LITek, 2007): 11; Kislovsky also suggested in his monograph that Vladivostok's green customs

The situation of Vladivostok's customs house in the late imperial era was representative of Russian customs establishments in its vast Northeast Asian territory roughly from Irkutsk to the Pacific coast. The de-facto absence of a formal customs service characterized the regional history of international trade and transaction in Eastern Siberia and the Far East. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this far-flung area had been considered too depopulated to have customs establishments in the eyes of St. Petersburg's imperial administrators. Valid customs service and tariff laws were only briefly in effect when the imperial government's Department of Internal Commerce and Ministry of Finance agreed to contract the customs service out to local private enterprises in the 1880s.[12] Another reason that imperial Russian tariff laws could not go into effect in this section of its territory was that Russia's expansionist agenda in Northeast Asia had always included increasing its influence in Manchuria. The imperial elite argued that application of strict customs laws in the region where trans-border small-scale business interactions remained mainstream could be detrimental to Russia's southward expansionist effort in general.[13] When many customs houses' de-facto "free port" status came to an end in Eastern Siberia and the Far East at the beginning of the twentieth century, local customs officers found themselves only able to assume minimal workloads and hardly keep in check the transportation of goods across the lengthy, extensive borders among Slavic settlers, Mongols, Manchus, Chinese, and other Inner Asian peoples over the same time period.[14] Contrary to becoming a border-regulating agency, those provincial customs establishments' inability to regulate international trade in Eastern Siberia and the Far East

service backtracked to almost dysfunction during the years of Japanese and British intervention. See Kislovskii, *Istoriia tamozhennogo delo*, 270.

[12] V. E. Shabel'skii*, Tamozhnia na Amure: Blagoveshchenskoii tamozhne 25 let* (Blagoveshchensk, 2013): 7.

[13] N. A. Beliaeva. *Iz istorii Vladivostokskoi tamozhni: stanovlenie, 1899- 1914* (Vladivostok: Izvestiia RGIA DV, 2000), 158.

[14] *Ibid*., 164.

contributed to reinforcing the porous nature of imperial Russia's Inner Asian and Northeast Asian borders, when the empire was finally set to bring cross-border businesses under tighter control.

Porosity had well characterized the Amur-Ussuri waterway borders in terms of business activities between the two banks of the rivers. In the mid nineteenth century, the Aigun Treaty signed between the Qing and the Russian Empire pushed their borders southward to the Amur-Ussuri watershed. Disappointing some imperial expansionists who predicted that geographical barriers would serve as natural means to help shield the fertilization of Russian civilization in the Amur River Basin from foreign interference, the Amur River Basin turned out to be no less borderless than Russia's less heeded periphery on the Mongolian-Manchurian steppe. During his visit of the empire's Maritime and Amur Oblasts in 1902, Sergei Witte, the Minister of Finance of Russia, justified the de facto porosity of the Amur River and the openness of Russia's left-bank borderlands in the *Priamur'e* to free international trade. For a long time, according to Witte, it indeed was unnecessary to establish customs services in a frontier "with no burgeoning industry or economic productivity." He also admitted the realistic difficulty in managing the extensive and geographically complex waterway borders.[15] However, it was also Witte who stressed the importance of solidifying and strengthening the borders immediately after Russia's humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. He considered the deregulated border zone might be subject to Tokyo's increasing influence or "ceded to spontaneous colonization of the Chinese," if no further measures were taken.[16]

In response to Witte and other political elites' proposals for stepping up border regulation, the tsarist government provided substantial financial support to opening up formal

[15] Gribnev and Shabel'skii*, Blagoveshchenskaia tamozhnia,* 15.
[16] Sergei Ol'denburg, *Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II* (Moscow: Dar', 2006): 208.

customs establishments in the *Priamur'e* around the same time when Vladivostok was about to welcome its first customs house. For the first time the regional customs service specifically overseeing and managing foreign trade in the *Priamur'e* borderlands came into operation in 1912 with dual headquarters in Chita and Khabarovsk.[17] By the time of the Russian Revolution and Civil War seven customs posts existed in the Russian *Priamur'e*, the three largest of which were located in Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, and Lakhasusu, nowadays Leninsky District in Russia's Jewish Autonomous Oblast.

In a similar vein with imperial customs setups in other Eastern Siberian and Far Eastern areas, the conversion of small checkpoints for cross-border trade into formal customs offices and the increased density of the customs service on the left bank of the Amur in the last imperial years failed to bring about long awaited institutional efficacy in sorting out cross-border flows of commodities and capital, let alone keeping the unbridled contraband business in check. A variety of secondary sources indicate that the late imperial customs service in *Priamur'e* had remained at the stage of testing the waters. The efficiency of the new customs offices by the Amur was rather low, as reflected by the long waiting time many ships had to waste at the mooring for basic customs inspection in Blagoveshchensk and Lakhasusu.[18]

The Amur Cossack Host (*Amurskoe kazach'e voiisko*) that was stationed on the left bank of the Amur and performed the duties of patrolling and militarily protecting borders still shouldered most of the responsibility for ridding the Amur of contraband goods. According to the chronicle (*letopis'*) of a Cossack stanitsa in Belogorsk, a then middle-sized military outpost and railway hub about 100 kilometers away from the Amur River, the new customs service was

[17] Gribnev and Shabel'skii*, Blagoveshchenskaia tamozhnia,* 31- 32.
[18] Yukimura Sakon, "Development of Trade on the Amur and the Sungari and the Customs Problem in the Last Years of the Russian Empire," in *Russia and Its Northeast Asian Neighbors: China, Japan, and Korea, 1858- 1945*, ed. Kimitaka Matsuzato (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 59.

not able to offer much useful information about notorious contraband's penetration and circulation in *Priamur'e*. Opium from China continuously found way into the interior territory of the Amur Oblast between 1910 and 1912.[19] Chinese sources offered similar conclusions on the *Priamur'e* customs service's lack of professionalism in the 1910s. Chinese officials in the Aigun customs headquarters that was located immediately across the Amur River from Blagoveshchensk documented their frustration of following up the Russian customs' mercurial tariff regulations and working with Russian customs officers in the years of 1914 and 1915. "The amount of stamp duty Russian customs officials requested from the same Chinese barge," according to a Chinese account, "could change within a single day, and they declined to explain why it was only 25 kopecks in the morning but 75 kopecks in the afternoon."[20]

Russian customs in the Amur River Basin did not enjoy much time to allow itself to develop into a more fully-fledged, professionalized institution comparable to some of its European Russian equivalents. The Civil War years subjected the Amur River back to being more or less unattended and contested amongst various political forces. Less systematically organized documents in *Priamur'e*'s regional archives show consistently disjointed import and export forms and incomplete records of tariff impositions from customs offices in Blagoveshchensk, Shimanovsk, and Lakhasusu in 1918.[21] The customs service became again nominal, when railway supply of consumer goods was disrupted and the connection between the border area and the rest of the homeland was severed during the Civil War. Chinese barges

[19] The chronicle included events of the Amur Cossack Host detecting opium shipment and circulation in the borderlands between 1900 and 1912. The R. S. Ivanov, *Kratkaia istoriia Amurskogo kazach'ego voiiska* (Blagoveshchensk, 1912), 16- 17.
[20] Gai Yuling, *Aihui Zhen Shihua [Historical Chapters of Aigun Town]* (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Science, 2016), 121.
[21] State Archive of Amur Oblast (GAAO) contains several fonds pertaining to the prerevolutionary customs administration. Fond no. 114 has dela showing the Blagoveshchensk customs office's incomplete import and export records as well as discrete forms of tariff imposition on foreign shipments. See GAAO f. 114, d. 1- 5.

carrying meat, vegetables, and other everyday items again flocked to the quay in Blagoveshchensk's riverport.[22]

Finally, the Bolsheviks arrived. The Soviet Union's All-Union customs system extended its administrative structure to the *Priamur'e* borderlands in the 1920s, after the RSFSR officially incorporated the short-lived Far Eastern Republic. Old customs establishments in *Priamur'e* that were created in the imperial era now became constituents of the new regime's Far Eastern Customs Administration.

The Soviet system of customs service consisted of three major executive bodies, namely the USSR's Main Customs Administration, the regional customs administrations, and a large number of customs houses scattered across the country. According to the summaries of the USSR's Customs Code, the Moscow-based Main Customs Administration was in possession of the authority over establishing, reorganizing, and liquidating regional customs administrations and customs houses.[23] Conforming to the Soviet mode of power distribution in many other administrative organs, provincial customs services thus operated under the guidance of the Main Customs Committee and were responsible for implementing policies and instructions enacted from above.

This structure of the USSR's customs system was first fixed in the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution at the discretion of the Sovnarkom, the Council of People's Commissars. The Sovnarkom designed the pyramid organizational structure of the customs system to ensure the government's effective control of international trade.[24] Although having

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[22] Gai, *Historical Chapters*, 129.
[23] "USSR Customs Code Published," *Joint Publications Research Service Reports* 91-023, (May 1991): 1- 2.
[24] Historians have divergent discussions on the origin of the new socialist regime's intention to keep international trade firmly under state control. The more prevalent perception is that the Soviet state adopted this interventionist approach to ensure the return of foreign trade turnover to prewar level. See Robert Lewis, "Foreign economic relations," in *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945*, ed. R. W. Davies, Mark Harrison, and S. G. Wheatcroft, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1994), 198-215.

been tailored and revised quite a few times over the course of Soviet history, the USSR Customs Code had consistently specified five principal tasks that the regional customs administrations and customs houses were supposed to accomplish. They included "ensuring the observance of Soviet customs legislation, efficient application of the customs tariff mechanism," promotion of accelerated commodity and passenger turnover through the customs border, management of customs statistics, and "control of smuggling and other violations of customs rules."[25]

The USSR Customs Code did not single out any particular tasks that regional customs organizations should prioritize, but regional customs administrations and houses did invest various degrees of time and effort into different tasks in accordance with geographic, economic, and social specificities of the regions. For example, the customs administration in Kharkov, the capital city of the Ukrainian SSR, constantly earned the All-Union Main Customs Committee's acclaim in the early 1930s for its staff's extraordinary commitment to curbing the influx of "harmful" religious publications into the Soviet territory from Europe.[26] Also, take the relatively small customs house in Nikolaevsk-on-Amur for example. The local customs office on the Pacific coast seemed to do very well in statistically keeping track of the turnover of fish and seafood products in and out of the port in the early 1930s. Despite being understaffed, the customs service in Nikolaevsk-on-Amur received recognition from the Main Customs Administration for its endeavor to generate accurate and useful statistical data on imports and exports.[27] Temporally speaking, the Soviet customs system and individual customs

[25] "USSR Customs Code Published," *Joint Publications Research Service Reports* 91-023, (May 1991), 3.
[26] The correspondences between the USSR's Main Customs Committee and customs officers in the Khabarovsk customs administration included many discussions about other regional customs administrations' accomplishments and weaknesses. The former intensively praised the Kharkov customs administration's effort to keep at bay smuggling of religious books and material into the USSR in the letters. It also called for the Khabarovsk-based customs staff to learn from the Kharkov counterparts in order to improve the quality of their work. See RGIA DV, fond 2443, opis 01, delo 206, ll. 25- 28.
[27] RGIA DV, f. 2443, o. 01, d. 206, ll. 30- 32.

establishments targeted different issues and problematic situations in various historical periods. The 1920s, for instance, was primarily remembered in the chronicle of the Russian Customs Service as the time of intensively battling against contraband that was permeating not merely the border regions but also the interior of the new socialist motherland.[28]

In winter 1922, the freshly reorganized Far Eastern branch of the Soviet Customs Administration was underway in Vladivostok, where the old imperial customs establishment's infrastructure was renamed Bolshevik. Customs houses and posts on the left bank of the middle Amur River stream were placed under the Far Eastern branch's jurisdiction and gradually loosened their administrative ties to the Zabaikal Region and other East Siberian provinces. Moscow's decree urged all branches to prioritize the battle against contraband, especially along the borders where smuggling was habitual and rampant.[29] Being fully aware of the *Priamur'e* borderlands' strategic importance in curbing contraband's movement inland and checking vicious transnational speculation, customs inspectors and officials in Vladivostok very soon worked out a set of ambitious reformist agendas in hopes of heightening the professionalism of their customs services and improving the performance of patrolling transnational business activities in border areas. Studying the distribution of customs houses in the region, newly appointed officials chose first to significantly increase the density of the left-bank *Priamur'e* customs service locations.

As early as February 1923, the keen principal customs inspector in Vladivostok decided to dispatch knowledgeable and experienced officials to newly founded customs houses and outposts in the Amur and Khabarovsk provinces to train green customs officers and to help

[28] "History of the Russian Customs Service: 1920s- 1950s," The official online site of the Museum of the Russian Customs Service, http://museum.customs.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14&Itemid=21
[29] RGIA DV, fond 2442, opis 02, delo 01, l. 2.

accomplish some organizational setup in a timely manner. According to Vladivostok-based officials' theory, well-trained officers and examiners would be entrusted with the task of performing customs duties in more newly founded second and third-tier (*vtoroi i tretii razriad*) customs houses.[30] Far Eastern Regional Bolshevik cadres then spoke highly of the regional customs administration's attempt to install secondary and tertiary customs houses in many small ports of entry that were long overlooked before. In 1926, the new appointee in the Blagoveshchensk customs office, its chief supervisor Gregory Mikhailov proudly informed his colleagues about the Far Eastern Krai Executive Committee's (*Dal'kraikom*) endorsement of their effort to expand the network of customs services into the interior of the middle and lower Amur River Basin. They should foresee the rapid development of Soviet customs services in the Amur Oblast, as Mikhailov confidently stated, and they should "keep working hard to rid the border of smuggling" and illegal cross-border collaborations.[31] In addition, in Mikhailov's letters to his supervisor in Vladivostok, he expressed confidence about resolving the thorny issue of contraband eradication. He further pointed out that once contraband smuggling was brought under control, the socialist state's pursuit of a monopoly on foreign trade would be spontaneously materialized.[32]

Mikhailov indeed made a logical argument. His and other customs officials' expectations for fundamental improvement of the *Priamur'e* customs establishments' functionality, however, soon proved to be too rosy. As discussed above, a principal task faced by Soviet customs agencies Union-wide in the 1920s was the intensive fight against pervasive contraband. Nevertheless, the same term now conveyed a different meaning. While the imperial

[30] RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 33, l. 16.
[31] See Mikhailov's correspondence with officials taking charge of third-rate customs houses in the Amur Oblast. RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 02, ll. 65- 67.
[32] *Ibid*., ll. 71.

administrators categorized items like opium and precious metals as contraband, the Soviet government gradually expanded the list of contraband to including almost everything that did not arrive in the market through a state-regulated logistical process.[33] Eliminating contraband was surely pressing on the collective agenda of the customs houses in the *Priamur'e* borderlands. It was surely very difficult as well. Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk, the two major border towns in the *Priamur'e*, had long been accustomed to heavily relying on capital, goods, and labor from across the Amur to keep up economic productivity and social prosperity. For example, two thirds of Khabarovsk residents' consumption of sugar, one of Russians' dietary necessities, was coming from small foreign business vendors in 1923.[34] When Mikhailov expressed his resolution to rid the borderlands of contraband, he should have thought twice about how much effort his organization needed to put into cutting off the area's everyday supplies of food and consumer items without plunging borderlands residents into sheer despair.

Bolshevik officials at both state and provincial levels were by no means ignorant of the trickiness involved in curbing contraband in *Priamur'e*. Following the absorption of the Far Eastern Republic into the RSFSR, Moscow requested the Inspector of Commerce of the Far Eastern Oblast to submit a detailed report on the state of *Priamur'e* and the Maritime Province's international trade. The inspector, K. S. Blianskii, completed and submitted his report in December 1923. In this report Blianskii first frankly pointed out the flagging and saggy performance of *Gostorg*, the state monopoly on foreign trade, in major cities and settlement

[33] Although during the NEP years, private businesses were allowed. However, individuals did not have the right to directly participate in international import and export. They were tightly controlled by the state. See Lewis, "Foreign economic relations," 198- 215.
[34] *Iz istorii tamozhennoi sluzhby,* 39; See also RGIA DV, fond 2241, o. 01, d. 03, l. 25.

points in the *Priamur'e* borderlands.[35] *Gostorg* opened retail stores in Soviet cities and major settlements where people could purchase foreign goods at reasonable prices. In both Khabarovsk's and Blagoveshchensk's central districts, *Gostorg*'s retail store opened up in the spring of 1923. However, sales in both locations were, according to Blianskii's observation, "very quiet and even unnoticed."[36] Blianskii proceeded to analyze why the state-owned stores failed to attract the interest and affinity of the population. The insights he offered included that *Gostorg* did an unimpressive job of publicity and promotion, for many Far Easterners even mistook the name of the new state agency for some kind of castor oil (*kastorka*), and the selection of commodities there was too narrow to meet consumer's basic needs. Moreover, the items' prices in *Gostorg* stores had no edge over their rivals at all.[37]

The rivals of the *Gostorg*, the monopolistic supplier of imported goods, were the Chinese. To be precise, they were the Chinese merchants, speculators, brokers, and peddlers who had long been active in various cross-border businesses in the *Priamur'e*. Blianskii described local Khabarovsk residents' love-hate relationship with Chinese businessmen in his other reports to Moscow-based officials:

> "Large and all-inclusive businesses were entirely absent in Khabarovsk. In other words, the Far Eastern capital city's business scene was primarily petty, coming in the forms of small shops and small kiosks.

[35] *Gostorg* was an abbreviation for State Company for Import and Export Regulation, an important organ within the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade. Scholars have discussed the role the Ministry of Foreign Trade played in distributing imported goods for civilian provisioning in the early Soviet years, although Gostorg has rarely appeared in Anglophone literature. Julie Hessler gives credit to the Ministry for supporting the early Soviet rationing system for basic consumer necessities. See Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917- 1953* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004): 48- 49.
[36] RGIA DV, fond 2241, opis 01, delo 03, l. 2.
[37] RGIA DV, fond 2241, opis 01, delo 03, l. 4.

The Chinese were particularly good at flexibly modifying prices and keeping small shops running in good shape. The Chinese goods disproportionately exceeded others in quantity. The range of Chinese goods appeared to be wide, going from needles to furs and silver tea sets. Local consumers liked the convenience and inexpensiveness of Chinese goods, and yet they were fearful of the near exclusive control of certain goods' supply by the Chinese.

The Chinese petty merchants on many occasions had say over prices of staples and produce, such as rice and cabbage. They not only took control of the import of foodstuffs, but also tried to prevent farmers and peasants in the outskirts of Khabarovsk from directly selling produce to consumers. They bought up farmers' produce at the sites of their agricultural laboring. They then sold the produce at the price of their convenience."[38]

For a long time, as repeatedly discussed in Blianskii's correspondence, the capital of private businesses in Khabarovsk's market had included two types: Russian and alien nationalities, and foreign capital had been almost a synonym for Chinese capital. Only very few "businesses run by non-Russian white race owners" were competing with Chinese and Russian capital.[39] The inspector's detailed descriptions and analysis of the problems posed by Chinese capital's penetration of Khabarovsk as well as the extended *Priamur'e* border area evoked recognition among some social elites who had been concerned about the region's alarming vulnerability to foreign business and cross-border economic ties.

Blianskii's views particularly resonated among officials taking charge of the Khabarovsk customs service. In a summing-up document concerning the progress of containing and eradicating contraband in the fiscal year of 1924, the Khabarovsk customs inspector quoted

[38] RGIA DV, fond 2241, o. 01, d. 03, ll. 27- 30.
[39] RGIA DV, fond 2241, op. 01, d. 11, l. 3.

statistical data from Blianskii's account to show the urgency of escalating the fight against contraband and large-scale cross-border smuggling. Blianskii's statistical evidence revealed that Khabarovsk residents' consumption of sugar and salt was almost entirely dependent on imports. In the fiscal year of 1923, Khabarovsk's imports of salt and sugar totaled 23,000 and 34,000 rubles respectively.[40] Those numbers, however, were considered far from matching the actual quantity of residents' consumption of those basic condiments. It was the undeclared import that helped to fulfill a sizable proportion of the consumer need of salt and sugar in Khabarovsk's market.[41] The undeclared import, a synonym for unbridled smuggling of a wide variety of goods, had substantially troubled the new regime's genuine attempt at gauging the scale of the border region's material productivity and consumption. In addition, as reflected by *Gostorg*'s unimpressive sales performance in the same time period, foreign capital and merchants' continuous participation in sustaining the chain of transporting and supplying smuggled goods had seriously challenged the state's ambitious move towards welfare provisioning through comprehensively manipulating domestic and international trade.

The *Gostorg* retail stores' uninspiring sale performance reflected the main disadvantage of the state monopoly on foreign trade at least in the *Priamur'e* borderlands: the inflexibility of the form of trade and the fixed and often high prices of most items. Trade in the Amur River Basin came in various flexible forms in late imperial Russia, in the years of the Civil War and Far Eastern Republic, as well as in the early Soviet years. Blianskii's report indicated that *Priamur'e* consumers did not always prefer using currency to acquire goods.[42] In fact, barter still had quite some popularity in the 1920s. When foreign merchants, mostly Chinese, had a harder

[40] RGIA DV, fond 2241, op. 01, d. 03, l. 25.
[41] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op. 01, d. 33, l. 28.
[42] RGIA DV, fond 2441, o. 01, d. 03, l. 31.

time entering markets and touting their goods onsite in *Priamur'e* towns, Soviet middlemen became more active in connecting domestic consumers to foreign businesses.[43] Throughout the 1920s, as in the preceding decade, sugar, tea, and small manufactured goods remained in greatest demand in Russian *Priamur'e.* For Chinese people on the right bank of the waterway border, fur had long stood out as their favorite purchases. Soviet consumers were very likely more used to measure the value of imported tea and sugar on *Gostorg* stores' shelves with fur than with the new regime's currency.

Vladivostok's Far Eastern branch of the Customs Administration steadfastly declared war against contraband and smuggling within its jurisdiction in the fiscal year of 1925- 26 through a set of instructions, including some addressing the thorny situation of smuggling in *Priamur'e*. It was imperative now to "rid the borderlands of illicit, low-quality foreign goods and keep at bay the predatory foreign businessmen," as the instructions made clear.[44] The instructions echoed the edict issued by the Inspector of Commerce for the Trans-Baikal, *Priamur'e*, and *Primor'e* regions. The curtailment of petty and unregistered foreign businesses in the region demanded full cooperation with the customs establishments at various levels in the Far East.[45] The Far Eastern customs branch entrusted local customs officials with the challenging job of preventing unchecked foreign businesses from inflicting further harm to the Soviet land and people, such as exhausting valuable Soviet raw materials, gold, and furs in exchange for those poorly manufactured goods. In Mikhailov's correspondence with his supervisor in 1926, he finally showed less confidence and confessed that goods reaching Soviet markets through informal

[43] G. N. Pomanova, *Znachenie russko-kitaiiskikh torgovykh khoziaiistvennom osvoenii Dal'nego Vostoka* (Vladivostok: DVGU, 1989): 139.
[44] RGIA DV, fond 2241, o. 01, d. 11, l. 5.
[45] The edict summarized three major tasks that required administrative agencies' cooperation to achieve. They included constriction and curtailment of petty foreign businesses' existence in the region; the separation of foreign capitals from fundamental resources, such as raw material and gold; and the elimination of competition of foreign capitals with red state corps. See RGIA DV, fond 2241, o. 01, d. 11, ll. 1-3.

channels actually complemented the overall material supply and benefited the economic wellbeing in the context of NEP.[46]

The Vladivostok branch followed the Main Customs Administration's instruction that in order to boost local customs establishments' morale in the fight against contraband, local second and third-tier customs offices could dispense with a certain percentage of confiscated contraband goods on their own volition. In March 1926, endorsed by the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars, the Main Customs Bureau issued a decree specifically addressing the Far Eastern Customs Administration and requiring that customs services should turn over 30 percent of the forfeited or confiscated goods to the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU). The rest of the forfeited or confiscated goods could be distributed to the Far Eastern branch or local customs offices taking charge of detecting and checking illegal smuggling and disposing of contraband goods.[47]

Mikhailov hoped that Vladivostok would allow his Blagoveshchensk office and crew to retain as much of confiscated material as they could. His plan was to let the confiscated contraband goods flow back to the market so that consumers would not panic over the sudden shrinkage of the commodity pool. Vladivostok eventually agreed with Mikhailov's proposal later that same year. Instead of requisitioning the major share of the confiscated goods and redistributing them, Vladivostok's customs branch allowed Blagoveshchensk to dispense with the confiscated goods on the very site where they were seized and turn them in monetary revenue later.[48] Against this background, the Blagoveshchensk's customs office joined the market as a "for-profit" party in the last couple of NEP years. Vladivostok's Far Eastern branch of the Main

[46] RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 03, l. 18.
[47] RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 33, l. 30.
[48] RGIA DV, fond 2443, 0. 01, d. 33, ll. 36- 38.

Customs Administration never declared victory for subduing contraband smuggling in the 1920s. The small customs office in Blagoveshchensk, however, arguably won the battle against contraband in a borderland setting. Through selling off the 70 percent of its confiscated goods to consumers, it helped minimize the destruction of the economic mechanism between supply and demand that had long sustained the borderland city's economic equilibrium. Customs inspectors noted the Blagoveshchensk customs office's stable revenue collection and contribution to the Far Eastern branch's overall revenue in working reports of progress.[49] The Blagoveshchensk customs service's return of contraband to the market made a significant contribution to smoothing out the transition to a complete state monopoly of cross-border trade.

Customs officers in the *Priamur'e* borderlands now worked closely with the new Soviet border protection agency (*pogranichnye okruga*) to maximize their capacity for collecting forfeited and confiscated contraband. They shared useful border-patrolling information with each other. They also shared certain material perks, such as drinking contraband liquors fresh off the boat.[50] Both agencies soon found out that smugglers and their collaborators became more invisible in the context of stepped-up customs inspection. In Blagoveshchensk, local customs officials reported decreasing numbers of smuggling cases on a monthly basis between July 1926 and June 1927, compared to May and June of 1926. The Blagoveshchensk customs office's confiscated contraband items in the last two quarters of 1926 totaled 177,375.95 rubles, and in the next six months the amount of total forfeit was 171,604.35 rubles.[51] The amount of small-scale smuggling especially notably dropped during the same time period. The decrease of

[49] The amount of monetary revenue generated by Blagoveshchensk's customs office was around 160,000 rubles per six months between 1926 and 1929. See RGIA DV, fond 2441, opis 01, delo 05, ll. 19- 29.
[50] It was legal for the customs officers and border guards to retain small portion of their confiscation, at least within the jurisdiction of the Far Eastern branch of Customs Administration, as both rewards and incentives of their hard work.
[51] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op. 01, d. 33, ll. 46- 47.

detectable smuggling cases and the sum of what was forfeited might arguably have resulted from seasonal fluctuations. That being said, the frozen Amur River between October and April could better facilitate smugglers' transportation of contraband across the border. In Blagoveshchensk residents' recollection of life in the late imperial era, the Chinese suppliers of pickled vegetables were more active in the early winter months, when they could walk across the Amur and set up temporary stalls by the waterfront. When frost-covered Soviet border guards tried to displace them, they immediately abandoned the stalls and ran back to the right bank.[52] In addition, the extremely harsh winter in the *Priamur'e* might also have prevented Soviet border guards and patrols from frequently policing the long stretch of the Amur riverside. Small-scale smuggling could more likely go unnoticed over the seemingly endless winter. Failing to satisfy the superior customs administration, the Blagoveshchensk Customs Office and those provincial customs outposts in the Amur Oblast received significant budget cuts and personnel reductions by nearly half in 1929.[53]

The reduction of their budgets and downsizing of personnel had an additional negative impact on small customs outposts in the countryside setting. In Chernyayevo, local customs officials were found at fault for not reporting their confiscation of 35 buckets of Chinese alcohol in February 1929. They sold the alcohol for profit instead and never turned in the revenue. The representative customs official later pleaded their case by writing an explanatory letter to Vladivostok. He stated that their purpose in selling the contraband was entirely to supplement the office's monetary fund, for the curtailed budget wouldn't allow them to sustain the operation of a customs house.[54] Similarly negative effects of the fiscal and personnel curtailment for customs

[52] A.V. Teliuk, N.A. Shidialov, T.N. Teliuk, and V.P. Levchenko ed. *Triumfal'naia Arka Blagoveshchenska: iz Veka v Vek*, (Blagoveshchensk: OAO Amurskaia Iarmarka, 2006): 55- 56.
[53] Shabel'skii*, Tamozhnia na Amure,* 32.
[54] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op. 01, d. 68, l. 21.

establishments existed in Blagoveshchensk. In September 1930 the Main Customs Administration dispatched staff to the Far East to inspect the works of customs houses there.

The officials soon noticed that the Blagoveshchensk customs office had a major problem of not keeping a precise and clearly documented record of confiscated goods in the 1929-30 fiscal year. The Main Customs Administration's report pointed out that Blagoveshchensk failed to maintain detailed records of fines and penalties imposed in several cases of cross-border smuggling. Its statistical documentation of the illegal activities in the past year also lagged much behind other customs establishments in the European part of the country.[55] The Blagoveshchensk Customs Office, together with those border customs houses within its jurisdiction, had been relying on reduced staff since then. To be exact, 86 officials and staff members kept the entire customs system in the Amur Province functioning.[56]

The Far Eastern Customs Inspector in Vladivostok made sense of the removal of some personnel in regional customs services in his correspondence with Mikhailov, the supervisor of Blagoveshchensk's customs office. Customs officials in Vladivostok deemed quite a few employees in the customs office redundant, especially during the long and harsh wintertime when infrequent cross-border exchange of goods and people only needed a small number of staff.[57] While expressing his discontent with some inconvenience caused by the office's labor shortage in the hectic months, the Blagoveshchensk-based customs chief officer admitted that some employees were indeed unqualified for doing customs work. Mikhailov even suspected some officers of being bribed by smugglers and consequently letting go some contraband across

[55] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op. 01, d. 181, l. 45.
[56] *Shabel'skii, Tamozhnia na Amure,* 31.
[57] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op 01, d. 127, l. 55- 56.

the border on purpose.[58] To lay off some customs examiners and officers was actually a way to raise the work efficiency of customs establishments in the *Priamur'e*.

Another way of heightening the customs service's professionalism and work efficiency was to deepen the customs staff's professional training and offer them more learning opportunities in real-world situations. From the late 1920s on, a series of training programs were introduced in the all-Union customs system. The target audience included rank-and-file customs staff members and some middle managers. The content of the training programs mainly included to teach customs staff how to orderly inspect and examine both passenger and freight carts of international trains and watercraft at border-crossing points, to inform the staff about the privileged permits issued by Intourist; and to show customs officers a variety of special permits carried by officials from the Central Executive Committee, the Council of People's Commissars, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, and by diplomats from foreign nations in the USSR.[59] Needless to say, an essential part of the education was the material containing detailed discussions of the harm by foreign capital's permeation of the Soviet Union's internal markets. The educational programs placed emphasis on the proper procedures of imposing fines, preserving confiscated goods, and even arresting smugglers under necessary circumstances.[60]

In *Priamur'e*, the customs staff's learning was not merely confined to this content. They received training in how to gauge values and purposes of goods mostly used among Asian communities. They were also required to take classes in the Chinese and Korean languages that would enable them to decipher Asian travelers' conversations at ports of entry.[61] In November 1929, an Asian herbal medicine suddenly became unprecedentedly popular in

[58] RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 127, l. 61.
[59] Kislovskii, *Istoriia tamozhennogo dela*, 331.
[60] RGIA DV, fond 2443, o.01, d. 260, ll. 24- 26.
[61] RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 68, l. 30.

Blagoveshchensk's Chinese quarter and the nearby Chinese Agricultural Commune. Local police officers noticed the unusually high turnover rate of customers in two Chinese grocery stores and had a hard time figuring out how the spindly herbaceous items appearing in local markets and were in high demand. It was the Chinese and Korean seasonal laborers, as later were uncovered, who quite openly snuck the medicine through customs batch by batch. Having no knowledge about the herbal medicine's utilization and value, Blagoveshchensk's customs staff let it go into circulation in Blagoveshchensk. Bredis, the new supervisor of the Blagoveshchensk Customs Office later apologized in his communication with his administrative superiors and promised to strengthen local customs staff's professional training in handling issues specific to the Northeast Asian borders.[62]

Instead of facilitating cross-border contact and mutual understanding, to learn the languages and cultures of the Asian peoples whose residency straddled the borders allowed the customs establishments in the *Priamur'e* borderlands to more effectively single out certain ethnic and social groups and keep track of their socioeconomic activities. In the 1930s, the regional government in the Soviet Far East introduced new visa regulations for temporary migrant laborers coming from China and Korea. Immigration officers requested East Asian applicants to present a brief statement about their itineraries in the application material. The itinerary helped immigration organs to compute the mobility of the migrants in different times of the year. Customs officers in Khabarovsk and Leninsky District now purposely gathered those migrants' itineraries from the immigration bureau. They marked the itineraries and added notes on their

[62] RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 68, ll. 89- 90.

reverse sides. Those remarks and notes were customs officers' interpretations of raw data on the time and routes of people's movement, as well as potential flows of contraband goods.[63]

The Soviet customs officials and staff's familiarization with the Asian population of various linguistic, cultural, and habitual backgrounds further contributed to the customs service's development into a modern border institution. The enhancement of the customs personnel's professionalism, as necessitated by the customs institution's modernization, also required those customs agents to help increase the legibility of the borderlands' geographic space. The *Priamur'e* has arguably the most arable land and richest biodiversity in the entire Far Eastern Region. Before the arrival of Slavic and East Asian settlers, native Northeast Asian people with diverse ethno-linguistic lineages had long been inhabiting the middle and lower Amur River Basin. In comparison with those Slavic and Chinese latecomers, native people such as the Nanai, Ulch, and Evenki, had more thorough understanding of the locality. The customs agents' attempts at gaining knowledge of the borderlands could hardly bypass lessons offered by the native groups.

Since the late 1920s, customs officials in Khabarovsk had been trying to map out the logistical networks of some smuggled cheap Chinese liquor (*kitaiiskaia khana*) in the Khabarovsk Region. The alcohol was particularly popular in areas along the upper stream of the Amur for its low, approachable price, despite the fact that its taste was by no means pleasing.[64] The Khabarovsk Customs Administration had almost no record of its import. Customs officers in Vladivostok ordered Khabarovsk to make an investigation into the cheap liquor's circulation inland. Working with other law-enforcement agencies, primarily the local police department, the

[63] The Russian State Historical Archive of the Far East in Vladivostok contained a handful of those itineraries written in Chinese. See RGIA DV, fond 2443, o. 01, d. 297, ll. 2- 45.
[64] GAKhK, fond p2, o. 1, d. 65, l. 86.

Khabarovsk Customs Office released its conclusive findings. The Nanais! Quite a few Nanai fisher-villagers living near the border were involved in collaboration with the Chinese liquor producers to transport and sell off the cheap khana liquor. They even helped cover up the Chinese role in many cases.

The center of the illegal logistics was in a small Nanai village named Verkhnii Katar, located less than a hundred miles northeast of Khabarovsk on the right bank of the Amur. Although the tiny village consisted of only ten families, two male breadwinners in the village were ethnic Chinese. They married Nanai women and thus settled in the Soviet territory. They had connections to Chinese liquor producers in Fuyuan, a border township facing Khabarovsk across the Amur. After villagers helped their Chinese brothers-in-law sneaking the cheap liquor through the border for the first couple of times and received substantial financial revenues, they decided to take part in larger-scale shipments and sales of contraband. The Nanais' knowledge of the geography and climate of their homeland guaranteed that their activities went unnoticed. They stored the alcohol in their village and only shipped it in the season of floating ice. Each time they evenly arranged 160 buckets of the liquor in 16 boats and first transported and placed those buckets on wide islets near their points of distribution. The winter was considered the ideal time for distributing the liquor to consumers, for the frozen river surface was more conducive to transportation under almost nobody's surveillance.

It turned out that the two Chinese villagers invited their compatriots over to the village to do farming and gardening in warmer months. They planted poppies for harvesting opium, and then found ways to circumvent inspection and brought the opium products back to Chinese Manchuria. The entire Nanai village stood behind them, and one way or another all villagers had participated in the transportation of contraband goods in return for good financial remuneration.

In summarizing the enduring investigation into the evasive collaboration between native people and foreign petty merchants, the Khabarovsk customs office in 1933 called upon other administrative and law-enforcement agencies to work more closely with the customs system to forestall such unregulated contraband transportations.[65]

The customs system's collaborations with other governmental agencies did notably pick up in the 1930s. Customs officers in Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk started to share more information with other administrative organizations to keep efficient track of foreign people and capital's movement in the Soviet *Priamur'e*. The customs system also became increasingly willing to offer advice and play a leading role in multi-organizational cooperation. The customs agents accumulated experience in differentiating suspicious contraband transaction from normal foreign trade and subsequently learned to take the initiative in checking the former. Drawing the attention of the Khabarovsk Customs Office in 1934 was the Khabarovsk Chinese Commercial Association. This loosely organized commercial venture was first founded circa 1909- 1910.[66] From the beginning, the overall goal of the association was to improve the cultural level of the local Chinese population and to develop their commercial enterprises. The Association organized conventions periodically. In order to defend themselves from the harassment of the Honghuzi bandits, the association even equipped itself with weaponry.

In the context of the USSR's industrialization and agricultural collectivization, the Khabarovsk Customs increasingly deemed the historic association as essentially an organization of predatory Chinese bourgeoisie. In June 1934, the Khabarovsk Customs Office warned the chair of the association about their organizational misconduct of facilitating Chinese laborers'

[65] GAKhK, fond p2, o. 1, d. 65, ll. 88- 92.
[66] Khabarovskoe Kitaiiskoe general'noe kommercheskoe obshchestvo, See GAKhK, fond p2, o. 1, d. 65, l. 157.

thefts of noble metal from the *Priamur'e* mining industry. The chair of the association, Wu Qing-Sang, rejected the accusation. The Customs Office soon informed him that the customs officers would request the NKVD to launch a more systematic investigation into their involvement in misappropriating collective resources of the USSR and possible maintenance of economic ties with drifting White Russian saboteurs in China.[67] The mass detainment and deportation of petty Chinese merchants ensued in 1935. Many were forced to leave the Soviet Union long before their working and residency permits expired.

In addition to working with the NKVD, the customs agents gathered and kept information on migrant workforces through collaborating with regional offices of the Council of Labor and Defense (STO). In 1933, the understaffed mining industry in Zeya and Belogorsk in the Amur Province demanded recruitment of 2000 Chinese and Korean laborers. Upon learning about the recruitment, the Blagoveshchensk Customs Office immediately requested a list of the migrant workers.[68] The disbandment of the Khabarovsk Chinese Commercial Association and the possession of migrant workers' information complemented the process of atomizing the foreign workforce and stifling foreign capital. The customs agencies in *Priamur'e* emerged now as a solid constituent of the modern Soviet state apparatus, taking proactive and interventionist measures to ascertain the execution and display of state authority.

The customs establishments in the *Priamur'e* grew into mature and operative administrative agencies that defended the state's interests and safeguarded the region's economic integrity in the 1930s. By the late 1930s, customs organs under the jurisdictions of the Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk Customs Offices had witnessed steady improvement in their operational efficiency. Customs Inspectors from Vladivostok spoke highly of the *Priamur'e*

[67] GAKhK, fond p2, o. 1, d. 65, ll. 176- 178.
[68] GAKhK, fond p2, op. 1, d. 76, l. 408.

customs houses' achievements, as they maintained very high ratios of solved to unsolved smugglings.[69] The Blagoveshchensk Office had done a particularly impressive job of donating confiscated goods to social organizations in need. For example, the Far-Eastern Society of Children's Friends (*Obshchestvo Druzei Detei DV*) received a generous portion of bean oil that the Blagoveshchensk customs office confiscated from some border-crossing smugglers.[70] The Blagoveshchensk Customs Office also forestalled the smuggling of Russian goods across the Amur to China principally committed by Soviet citizens. Two Blagoveshchensk customs officials once disclosed tens of thousands of pairs of overshoes being hoarded near the customs building and ready for smuggling to China across the river. The Blagoveshchensk customs supervisor requested his colleagues to identify the participants and especially the sources of the illegal transportation of the overshoes manufactured in Soviet Russia.[71] Blagoveshchensk customs agents' caution and trustworthiness were often featured in the bulletins issued by the Far Eastern Customs Administration. The customs establishments' maturation in the *Priamur'e* indicated their evolution towards becoming full-fledged state agencies that internalized the state's intention of transforming the frontier and materialized such transformation accordingly.

[69] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op. 01, d. 33, l. 87.
[70] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op. 01, d. 68, l. 30.
[71] RGIA DV, fond 2443, op. 01, d 176, l. 62.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ESTABLISHED AND THE SEVERED TIES: CHINESE DIASPORA, CROSS-BORDER BUSINESS, AND SOVIET CITIZENRY

In the late 1920s and the early 1930s, the newly founded Soviet customs agency in Soviet Russia's Far Eastern Krai struggled with figuring out the origins and logistics of some cheap Chinese liquor in wide circulation in the borderland provinces of the lower Amur River Basin. The intractable flow of such goods discomforted the Soviet state agents, for it reflected their inadequate effort on reversing the waterway border's permeability. By some Soviet customs officials' reckoning, the Chinese from across the border must have established some liquor production plants that secretly targeted the Russian market on the left bank.[1]

The Soviets were right, partially. A large-scale brewery just got into gear in the mid 1920s on the right bank of the Amur River in Aihui,[2] the Chinese border town facing one of the USSR's Far Eastern administrative centers, Blagoveshchensk, directly across the river. Proudly named Zhenbian, meaning "vitalizing the frontier," the brewery had an average output of 3000 tons of alcoholic drinks per year in its heyday between 1927 and 1931.[3] Specializing in producing distilled spirits and beer, the company won remarkable market shares on both sides of the border. The Chinese in the borderland province of Heilongjiang found the foreign, roasted, and crisp flavor of the beer delightful and welcomed Zhenbian beer with mass purchase and

[1] Soviet customs officials referred to the likely producers and traders of the illicit alcohol interchangeably as Chinese (Kitaitsy) and Asian (Asiaty) in their paperwork discussing this matter of smuggling. See GAKhK, fond p2, opis 1, delo 65, ll. 88- 92.
[2] Aihui is the historical name of Heihe used throughout most Qing and early Republican era in China. The border's name has also been widely spelled as Aigun in non-Chinese literature, particularly in Russian sources. I refer to Heihe in historical period as Aihui and use its contemporary nomenclature in discussions involving historiography.
[3] Liu Bangkun, "A Visit of Zhenbian Brewery [探访振边酒厂]," *Heilongjiang Daily*, Jan. 09, 2008.

consumption. In the meantime, Russians on the left bank found the distilled Chinese spirits an inexpensive alternative to vodka and created solid demand for the Zhenbian baijiu.[4]

The Zhenbian products gained popularity along the Amur River, and yet the brewery quickly fell out of business within roughly a decade. It remains unclear whether alcoholic drinks produced by Zhenbian were smuggled into the Soviet Far East or ever appeared on the contraband list of local Soviet customs houses. However, the story of Zhenbian Brewery well illuminates the proceedings and consequences of the borderlands' fragmentation along increasingly nationalized lines between the mid 1920s and the mid 1930s. It connotes how the USSR's Northeast Asian borderlands lost one of the key ethno-racial groups, namely the Chinese, and severed economic and social ties with the Chinese community from across the Amur River.

This chapter investigates the transformation of the Soviet *Priamur'e* borderlands' demographic and correspondingly economic structures through the lens of a transnational Chinese community's waxing and waning in its near borderlands. It starts with the discussion of the Zhenbian Brewery's owner and his entanglement with the borderlands. It then tells the life and death of the brewery, an essentially borderlands enterprise. The timeline of the brewery mirrored the new socialist regime's scheme of borderlands makeover and its simmering impact upon local communities' changing conceptualization of sovereignty and belonging. By inviting the relatively sidelined perspectives and lived experiences of Chinese entrepreneurs into the analysis of the Soviet borderlands' demographic transformation, I call into question some

[4] Baijiu is the Chinese term for liquor distilled from sorghum or other grains. Zhenbian Brewery's market shares in Heilongjiang and in the Russian Far East were not quantitatively specified in available sources that are comprised of oral interviews and summaries of primary historical documents. See Ning Yanhong. *Heishui Weizheng: Lyu'e Huaqiao de Lishi Jiyi* [黑水为证：旅俄华侨的历史记忆] (Beijing: China Social Science Academic Press, 2018), 166- 168.

scholars' arguments on the Chinese population's withdrawal from the Russian Far East in the 1930s. One type of argument tends to attribute the removal of the Chinese community from the borderlands to the propensity of Chinese immigrants to be sojourners who never developed loyalty to and affinity for the Soviet regime. The other one, well theorized from the legalistic perspective by scholars like Eric Lohr, stresses that the exercise of Stalinist, exclusionary migration and citizenship laws resulted in the unlikelihood of Chinese people's acquisition of legal residency in the USSR. Being partially in agreement with those arguments, I contend that the Soviet Union's obsession with self-sufficiency in terms of political economy drove out the most important element of the transnational borderlands' Chinese community, namely the well-informed Chinese merchants, and eventually tore the community asunder. The discursive and productive preparation Soviet citizens on the left bank of the Amur River had committed for realizing such self-sufficiency delegitimized cross-border commercial ties that sustained the Chinese community. In addition, the Japanese colonial regime's stepped-up influence in Manchuria then sowed more seeds of discord and suspicion between the Soviets and the borderland Chinese population, further disrupting the integration of the left and right banks.

Zhenbian Brewery was a business of the borderlands, for the borderlands, and by the borderlands. The founder and owner of Zhenbian Brewery, Xu Pengyuan, has been remembered in Chinese literature and local oral narratives as one of the most preeminent, internationally oriented, yet deeply patriotic entrepreneurs in an age characterized by mass migration of Chinese northward to and beyond Manchuria.[5] Xu was born into a poor peasant family near the Bohai

[5] Scholars have identified that "over 30 million Chinese people traveled from Northern China proper to Manchuria" from late Qing throughout the republican era. See Adam McKeown, "Chinese Emigration in Global Context, 1850-1940," *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1 (March 2010): 100. Anglophone literature about China and migration has paid increasing attention to this particular wave of migration. The massive scale of such internal migration made no less contribution to Chinese entanglement with the globe than Chinese emigration to Southeast Asia in the context of rising colonialism and nationalism in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the twentieth century. The transnational dimension of this wave of mass migration is relatively underexplored in scholarship, especially

Gulf in Shandong Province in 1877. The overcrowded home village with land of failing fertility left Xu and his brothers no choice but to leave to seek a livelihood. He set out for Manchuria in the mid 1890s, vaguely knowing that "the soy and wheat fields are much richer there."[6] Thanks to the lifting by the Manchu rulers of the Qing of their ban on Han Chinese subjects' mass migration to their sacred ancestral land in the 1870s, Manchuria had become the freshly open, wild virgin land attracting those stricken by hunger and poverty in North China. Xu, together with his younger brother and two fellow villagers spent intermittently two years being on the road before settling in northern Heilongjiang, where "Russia was much closer than hometown."[7]

Xu first worked in private farms of various scales in the area and took several side jobs in blacksmith shops and retail shops in the wintertime. His life in Manchuria took a critical turn when his fellow migrant workers recommended some better-paid job in gold mining by the Amur River.[8] Over the late imperial decades, the Amur River Basin's considerable gold deposits had been a key pull factor of capital's and manpower's flows into the area from European Russia and Siberia. The rush of Chinese northward to Manchuria enriched the labor pool for growth of many industries in the lower Amur River Basin, including gold mining. According to reports from the early Far Eastern Krai branch of the People's Commissariat for Labor (*Kraevoi Otdel Truda*), the mining industry in the Far Eastern Krai was the first that included a significant portion of foreign workers in the labor pool. Ethnically Chinese, and later Korean laborers joined the gold mining workforce as early as the 1880s. The three biggest gold mines in the Amur

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from the perspective of cross-border entanglement and influence between the Chinese and those in Outer Manchuria.

[6] Ning, *Heishui Weizheng,* 165.

[7] *Ibid*., 159- 60.

[8] Gai Yulin, *Historical and Contemporary Personalities in Aihui* [瑷珲古今名人传] (Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Press, 2014), 143.

Province hired more than 2700 Asian laborers when the Soviets were about to take over and nationalize them in the 1920s. That was nearly half of their overall workforce.[9]

Outgoing and clever, Xu Pengyuan soon made friends with workers of Slavic descent and acquired fluent Russian in the mining fields just north of Blagoveshchensk. His increasing familiarity with the people and economics of the borderlands prepared him for a middleman career and eventually led him to running international businesses across the Amur. The majority of Xu's Slavic coworkers were less well-off, recent settlers originating from humble backgrounds. As sources have indicated, the newly discovered ore deposits of gold in the middle and lower Amur River Basin had attracted and absorbed a multitude of the Russian Empire's rural subjects by the turn of the century, only following the agricultural and infrastructural construction sectors. Gold mining had certainly been the backbone of regional socioeconomic development of the empire's last territorial addition.[10] Xu's down-to-earth encounters with Slavic settlers and migrants of humble background allowed him to learn that "Russians consumed a lot of alcohol but most Russian spirits in the market were too unaffordable for them."[11] Russian mining enterprises indeed paid their miners quite poorly at 6 to 8 rubles per day on average. In the meantime, the long-distance transport of goods across the expansive empire

[9] The Far Eastern Krai branch's documents only offered an estimated number. The high turnover of laborers in the mining companies made it almost impossible to consider the number in the archival document as being accurate. See RGIA DV, f. 3421, op. 01, d. 03, l. 63.

[10] Both primary and secondary Russian sources suggest that a strip of gold mines stretched between Albazino to what is known today as Komsomolsk-on-Amur in the Russian Far East. Due to the lack of transportation infrastructure, only those along the waterway were exploited and made profit of in the late imperial years. Russian scholars have emphasized these gold mines' determinant and facilitative role in shaping settlers' communities in Eastern Siberia and the Far East. See Sapozhnikov V. V. *Geograficheskii Ocherk Sibili* (St. Petersburg: izd. A.F. Devriena, 1908), 46.

[11] Xu's motivation of starting his small alcohol-selling business was documented in a volume of historical sources compiled by the Heihe Office of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference. See *Compilation of Documents on Heihe Culture and History, vol. 3* [黑河文史资料第三辑], 81.

and imports of foreign commodities into the Far East rendered the cost of everyday items very high. A bottle of vodka could be as costly as two rubles.[12]

With a decent amount of savings, Xu left the mining job and started making some money through transporting cheap liquor from Manchuria and selling it first amongst the miners' communities on the left bank of the Amur River. Painstakingly crossing the Amur year-round to bargain over and carry thousands of boxes of Chinese liquors, Xu very soon saw his hard work pay off. His supply of cheap, alternate alcohol gained wide popularity among workers and peasants. At the same time, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway invigorated the middle and lower Amur River Basin, when St. Petersburg's resolution to terminate Eastern Siberia and the Far East's de facto isolated status through this monumental imperial project brought more migrants and capital to the area. Against such a backdrop, Xu's businesses picked up at a much faster pace in the second half of the 1900s. In addition to running his alcohol-selling enterprise, he now entered into other businesses, setting up factories that specialized in manufacturing light bulbs and automated grinding mills in Aihui.[13]

The steady growth and expansion of Xu's businesses into the twentieth century was first indicative of how well embedded Chinese merchants and laborers were in this newly incorporated borderland community of the Russian Empire. Xu's success also reflected the international characteristic of the borderland community with regard to its quotidian social and economic activities. Such an international character was evident not only in regular exchanges of people and material goods, but also in the multilateral transfer of technology and knowledge. In Xu's case, multiple international parties had played key roles in shaping the trajectory of his

[12] According to Sapozhnikov's description, Russians transported goods to the Far East both overland and overseas. The long distance and high cost of shipping, especially overseas, translated into expensive commodities in the borderlands. See Sapozhnikov, *Geograficheskii Ocherk Sbirii,* 48.
[13] Ning, *Heishui Weizheng,* 165. See also *Compilation of Documents on Heihe Culture and History,* 85.

entrepreneurial expansion. Although Xu's early-stage business partners included only his fellow Shandong merchants, he employed Chinese, Slavic, and indigenous staff in his alcohol-selling business on both sides of the Amur. Xu's establishment of light bulb and mill manufacturing facilities in Aihui was synonymous with the first introduction of European, particularly German, know-how to the Chinese borderlands in Manchuria by way of Russia. Local history books about Heihe recognized Xu's contribution to channeling German manufacturing technologies to the town when Manchuria remained categorically agricultural and untouched by industrial modernity.[14] In fact, local historical narratives took pride in many a Chinese entrepreneur's attempts to bring then advanced European technologies, including electric generation and water sanitation, to Aihui. Although emphatically remembered as being patriotic, those merchants' engagement with modernizing the border town's infrastructural and industrial profiles first resulted from their desire for better productivity and more profit. Xu's investment in manufacturing light bulbs, for example, was driven by the actual need of more lighting in his dim cellars for alcohol storage.[15]

Individual Chinese merchants like Xu Pengyuan have hardly left noticeable traces on Russophone accounts on imperial development of the Far East. Their presence as a solid component of the borderland international community astride the Amur has been mostly summed up in bland statistics or occasionally in much less serious folktales. Statistical sources of the Russian Far East's demographics from both the late imperial and early Soviet eras suggested that the Chinese population in the two immediate borderland provinces, namely the Amur and Maritime Provinces, experienced a steady increment in general over the span of four decades

[14] *Compilation of Documents on Heihe Culture and History, vol. 3*, 88- 90.
[15] According to his children's recollection, he also reasoned that the absence of a decent light bulb manufacturing company in the Blagoveshchensk- Heihe borderlands area would allow him to have the strongest market share in the sector. Gai, *Historical and Contemporary Personalities in Aihui,* 145.

between the 1880s and 1910s.[16] The Chinese population in these two provinces presumably reached its peak at the time of the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Russian sources suggest that between Chita and Vladivostok at least 100,000 Chinese people worked as wartime substitute laborers or joined either the White or Red military forces in 1918.[17] Historical accounts have portrayed the Chinese diaspora nearly uniformly as a faceless collective of "Chinese laborers," emphasizing their social inferiority lower working class status and much less adaptable nature even in comparison with other already very foreign East Asian ethnic groups.[18] The characterization of the Chinese diaspora in the Russian borderlands as uniformly lower working class in everyday discourse as well as in historical documentation would later have far-reaching effects on the entanglement of the Chinese with, or rather disentanglement from, the increasingly nationalized borderlands.

One of the key questions that such discursive generalization of the Chinese population has failed to answer was how they came to the Russian part of the middle and lower Amur River Basin in droves and formed this much less adaptable and seemingly clannish community in the 1910s, especially in the wartime years. Who took charge of mobilizing and organizing them, if

[16] The size of Chinese diaspora varied in different areas of the Russian Far East over time. The Amur Oblast's Chinese population shrank drastically after what has been known in history as the Blagoveshchensk massacre in 1900. The Chinese population in Blagoveshchensk decreased to less than 5000 in the early 1900s but soon bounced back to more than 30,000 by 1910. Russian historian A. Larin has summarized Russian historical statistical data and offered estimates of the Chinese population in late imperial and Soviet eras. See A. G. Larin, *Kitaitsy v Rossii Vchera i Segodnia: Istorcheskii Ocherk* (Moscow: Muravei, 2003), 28- 29.

[17] Historians have tried to assess different statistical sources to gauge the actual size of the Chinese diaspora community in the Amur and Maritime regions. See Yuexin Rachel Lin, "The Opportunity of a Thousand Years: Chinese Merchant Organizations in the Russian Civil War," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 19, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 752.

[18] Both primary Russian sources and Chinese documents use workers (Рабочие in Russian & 劳工 in Chinese) as the most commonplace term to designate the Chinese in Russian Far East in the late imperial era. Historians have increasingly noted and discussed the collective and faceless feature of the Chinese in historical sources concerning their presence in the North Asian borderlands area in late imperial Russia. See Lewis Siegelbaum, "Another Yellow Peril: Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (1978): 303- 330. David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: the Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999): 14- 48.

presumably the majority of them followed the pattern of chain migration? It turned out that Xu Pengyuan and other active Chinese merchants in the Russian Far East played the key role in welding Chinese manpower to the socioeconomic developmental and productive systems of the Russian Far Eastern borderlands.

Take Xu, again, for example. In his late twenties, Xu fell in love with a senior Russian business acquaintance's daughter and soon married her. Thanks to his father-in-law's connections, his businesses further diversified and grew on both sides of the borderlands despite being amidst Russia's political turmoil and chaos in the late 1910s. Encouraged by a growing population and booming market on both shores of the Amur River, Xu started to make bold investments in larger businesses with both Chinese and Russian partners. The two biggest investments Xu made were a poultry farm on the outskirts of Blagoveshchensk and a gold mine 20 kilometers south of downtown Aihui.[19] What the two new businesses had in common was that Xu and his business partners recruited and organized hundreds of Chinese laborers, and they were migrants from his home province Shandong.[20] Although perceived in the eyes of Slavic settlers and Russophone scholarship as indistinctively Chinese, Xu, his Chinese business partners, and those Chinese workers he recruited and arranged in farming or mining sites on both banks of the Amur River did not necessarily consider themselves so. They cohered primarily because of their shared identification with the same native place.

Just like that Xu's itinerary to the Russian Far East was shaped by word-of-mouth communication with those who hailed from the same province, so the large number of Chinese

[19] Heihe Municipal Archive, *Selected Archival Documents II* [爱辉馆藏二辑], 23- 24. See also Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 162.
[20] Xu's preferable recruitment of Shandong fellows as his trusted labor force was only confirmed and emphasized in his grandson's interview conducted by Heihe-based historian Ning Yanhong. See Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 163- 65.

migrant workers who arrived in the borderlands relied heavily upon native place-based migration networking. According to local archival materials in Heihe, Chinese merchants in Aihui, mostly originating in Shandong and Zhili provinces, formed their own business associations based on spatial and cultural proximity to their homeland in the late Qing and early republican years.[21] Zhang Tingge, another successful entrepreneur who is equally cast in a patriotic light in Chinese historical accounts, also came from a poor county in northeast Shandong and gained his fortune and fame through conducting transnational business with Russians in Manchuria. He owned the largest grocery shop chain in northern Manchuria and ran the only comprehensive department store in Aihui from the 1900s until Japanese colonization in the 1930s. Heihe archival sources show that he seemed to always prioritize hiring migrants from northeastern Shandong as staff and help in those shops, and migrants from northeastern Shandong concentrated in the commercial area of the town. Moreover, residents in Aihui called the neighborhood of the department store "Little Ye County."[22]

Later some Soviet bureaucrats and managerial officials in the borderlands who dealt with the cross-border Chinese labor force also noticed such native place-oriented ties among them. In the summer of 1928, several disputes between Chinese and Russian fishermen in Khabarovsk's Amur Fishing Company surged and caught the manager's attention. In his reports submitted to his superiors in the Far Eastern People's Commissariat for Labor, he mentioned that "those Chinese employees all hailed from a seaside place and they thought they knew the fishing technique much better than the Russians, many of whom did not even know how to swim."[23] He also noted the difficulty of those Chinese fishermen's integration into the overall workforce, and

[21] Heihe Archive, *Selected Archival Documents II*, 35.
[22] Ye County was Zhang's hometown. It was also one of the areas that sent off noteworthy large numbers of migrants to northern Manchuria in the period after the Manchuria-bound migration ban was lifted. *Ibid*., 37- 38.
[23] RGIA DV, f. 3421, op. 03, d. 01, l. 12.

he ascribed it to their employment as an ensemble in Russia.[24] The Soviet manager's analysis made sense. Established Chinese entrepreneurs in the Russian Far East on many occasions also functioned as headhunters or middlemen, connecting human resources from Manchuria and China proper to not only their own businesses, but also Russian employers desperately seeking inexpensive labor in the borderlands.

Needless to say, the Chinese entrepreneurs' recruitment and organization of mass migrant laborers from certain preferable regions in China proper could not be done individually. They did so through the business associations they led or participated in. Historiography on Chinese migration both inside and outside of China's changing political confines in the late Qing and republican eras has paid much attention to how native place ties contributed to orderliness and coordination of waves of mass Chinese migration and strengthened and broadened existing Chinese migration networks in the long term.[25] In terms of this Chinese community in the Far Eastern Sino-Russian borderlands, it was reasonable to consider leading entrepreneurs, such as Xu and Zhang, and the business societies with which they were tightly affiliated as analogous to the essential thread of the whole diaspora fabric. In Aihui, for example, there were at least two Shandong merchants' associations in the 1910s. Xu Pengyuan was an active member and later the vice president of the one named Association of Shandong Townsmen (Aihui Shandong Tongxianghui).[26] Some discretely preserved records from Xu's association show that it did take

[24] RGIA DV, f. 3421, op. 03, d. 01, l. 14.
[25] Scholarship on this topic has been copious and rich. For exemplary monographs see those: Parks M Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalist and the Nationalist Government*, 1927- 1937 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853- 1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882- 1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Philip Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008).
[26] Xu's vice presidency in the association has only been confirmed by his grandson in oral interviews conducted by historian Ning Yanhong. See See Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 163- 65.

care of Chinese migrants' placement in the Russian labor market by helping them sign laboring contracts and explaining to them the expectations and conditions of their future jobs.[27] Both Russian and Chinese sources also indicate that it was those associations that took care of the acquisition and distribution of working permits on behalf of Chinese migrant laborers in Russia.[28] The renewable working permits were the most important travel documents, equivalent to contemporary visas. The Marxian theoretical frame of class conflict would be less applicable to understanding the relationship between Chinese migrant laborers and Chinese entrepreneurs, or the burgeoning bourgeoisie in the borderlands. The former relied on the latter to usher them into the strange setting of industrial production and the latter offered the former guidance, communal consideration, and financial protection in a foreign land.

The 1910s witnessed those Chinese entrepreneurs and their associations becoming de facto administrative and diplomatic organs that represented and administered hundreds of thousands of Chinese migrants and fully shouldered the responsibility for fostering the Chinese community's relationship with multiple other parties in the borderlands. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution and the ensuing Civil War did not bring the continuous development of the Chinese community astride the Amur River to a halt. Quite oppositely, the vacuum of centralized state power and the contestation among aspiring authorities in the Russian Far East created favorable conditions for Chinese entrepreneurs and their societies to better the techniques of administering and engaging a multitude of their compatriotic migrant laborers. The Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Heihe and in Khabarovsk, for example, although all-encompassing

[27] Heihe Archive, *Selected Archival Documents II*, 31, 39- 40.
[28] Russian secondary sources have referred to the Chinese merchant societies in border provinces as the agency of Chinese seasonal migrant workers, taking care of their travel documents hand in hand. See F.V. Soloviov, *Kitaiskoe Otkhodnichestvo na Dalnem Vostoke Rossii v Epokhu Kapitalizma, 1986- 1917 gody* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), 96. For the Chinese primary sources, see Heihe Archive, *Selected Archival Documents II*, 38.

and high-profile business societies, took on diplomatic responsibilities and functioned matter-of-factly as Chinese consulates in the borderlands where the tsarist government had long turned down the requests to establish Chinese consular services.[29] Russian imperial officialdom in the Far East had cautioned against the pervasive presence of the Chinese chambers and business associations from Chita to Vladivostok, even calling them a "state within a state."[30]

The "state within a state" did exploit the political confusion and social disarray in the wake of revolution and wars and tried to maximize its benefit in such situations. Influential Chinese merchants and their business societies in the area switched allegiance from one political force to another, and the period between 1918 and 1920 rather struck them as an interlude characterized by national aspirations in an era of national humiliation. For one thing, the Chinese momentarily reclaimed the right to navigate the Amur River! Since the Russian Empire had expanded its imperial reach to the Amur River in the mid nineteenth century, the Chinese, albeit sharing the waterway with the Russians, had been denied the right to sail over the river. Chinese merchants conducting cross-border businesses had exclusively relied on the Russian fleet for transportation.[31] In 1918, major political forces vying for dominance and control of the Russian Far East, including the Bolsheviks, the SRs, Aleksandr Kolchak's Omsk Provisional Government, and Grigory Semyonov's Japanese-backed Cossack Host, all acquiesced in lifting the ban on Chinese navigation of the border river. Members from Heihe Chambers of Commerce immediately purchased more than 70 ships from two Russian shipping companies and soon

[29] There was only one Chinese consulate east of the Urals located in Irkutsk in late imperial Russia. See A. G. Larin, *Kitaiskie Migranty v Rossii, Istoriia i Sovremennost'* (Moscow: Vostochnaia Kniga, 2009), 64- 65.
[30] Lin well summarizes tsarist authorities' concern about the Chinese chambers' ubiquitous presence both inside and out of the Chinese community in the Russian Far East. See Lin, "The Opportunity of a Thousand Years," 751.
[31] Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations Since the 18th century* (New York: Routledge, 2003): 72- 73.

formed their own navigation enterprises.[32] Russian parties expressed their willingness to let go of their exclusive grip on the waterway border out of varied considerations.[33] For the Chinese merchants, winning back the right to run navigation businesses on the Amur offered them a rare taste of national aspiration and pride at a time when Russian and Japanese imperialism temporarily ceased to have too much influence over the economic and social landscapes of Manchuria.

While military and ideological conflicts plunged the Russian Far East into chaos that lasted well into the early 1920s, the Chinese population as a whole in the mid and lower Amur River Basin experienced an unprecedented level of social and economic integration into the overall international borderland community. Besides the fact that the statistically recorded number of Chinese people reached its peak during and immediately after the civil war years, the Chinese, for almost the first time, appeared in a more diverse and colorful light in local Russophone historical narratives. Needless to say, Chinese soldiers fighting alongside the Red Army on the left bank of the Amur had gained acknowledgement in official historical rhetoric in the Soviet era.[34] In addition to conventionally recognizable male Chinese coolies, businessmen, and later soldiers, female Chinese figures came to the notice of Blagoveshchensk residents as tailors, peddlers, and occasionally nannies.[35] Another Chinese group that appeared too frequently

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[32] Tong Dong, ed., *Sha'e Yu Dongbei [沙俄与东北]* (Changchun: Jilin Culture and History Press, 1985): 542- 543. Lin has specified that a single Chinese shipping company named "Wu Tong" alone purchased 50 ships from Russians. See Yuexin Rachel Lin, "White Water, Red Tide: Sino-Russian Conflict on the Amur, 1917- 20," *Historical Research* 90, no. 247 (Feb. 2017): 84.

[33] Historians have offered a good number of analyses of different sides' intention to stay on good terms with the Chinese, especially Chinese merchants at this time. See Dong, *Sha'e Yu Dongbei,* 559; Bersenev, *150 let Russkogo Sudokhodstva*, 201-02.

[34] Larin cited that about 30,000 Chinese were enrolled in divisions of the Red Army in Amur and Maritime Provinces during the Russian Civil War. See *Kitaiskie Migranty v Rossii,* 92.

[35] Blagoveshchensk-based researchers have put together an edited collection of oral history interviews on the city's pre-Soviet social history. The collection includes tales of local residents' familial memories that shed much light on the border town's cultural, ethno-racial, and social diversity and richness before it became an insulated Soviet city. See A. V. Teliuk, T. N. Teliuk, N. A. Shidialov, and V. P. Levchenko ed., *Triumfal'naia Arka Blagoveshchenska: iz Veka v Vek* (Blagoveshchensk: OAO Amurskaia Iarmarka, 2006): 48- 50.

in the borderlands not to be noticed by the Russians was the notorious Honghuzi bandits.[36] The increased navigability of the Amur River for the Chinese created a convenient condition for those bandits to travel deeper into Russian territory and possibly converted more of their countrymen in Russia into banditry. The Chinese community's continuous growth and its members' increased participation in the borderlands' social and economic activities in the late 1910s and early 1920s corresponded to other ethnic and social groups' equally high mobility and increasing visibility around the same time. Aihui, for example, for the first time saw an ethnic enclave of Buryat-Mongol nationals taking shape temporarily. Those Buryat-Mongols might be White Army recruits withdrawing from across the River and stationed there in a wait-and-see fashion. They might also be ambivalent Buryat-Mongol nationalists suspicious of allying with either the Whites or the Reds.[37]

Such an increased scale and frequency of demographic and informational exchange in the borderlands showcased the region's internationalism. From Xu Pengyuan's entrepreneurial perspective, that people came, left, passed by, and mingled in the borderlands suggested new business potential. Seeing his alcohol selling business consistently achieve a solid profit margin, Xu considered that it was now feasible to produce alcoholic drinks instead of just selling other suppliers' products.[38] Aihui was ready to have a sizeable brewery in the 1920s. In addition to producing inexpensive Chinese liquor, baijiu, Xu was determined to brew beer as well. He reasoned that the crisp and toasty flavor of this Western beverage had already been popular among the Chinese in Manchuria for years. If he adopted lower prices and bore the small profit margin at the beginning, his beer should win a good share of the market in not merely the

[36] *Ibid*., 60- 63.
[37] Aihui county government yearly notes of 1921 only mentioned the Buryat-Mongol settlement's brief existence in the town's southeast corner in passing. See Heihe Archive, *Selected Archival Documents II*, 82- 83.
[38] Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 169- 70.

Blagoveshchensk-Aihui borderland area but also southward in the more populous urban areas of Qiqihar and Harbin.[39] Xu's plan made sense. Brewing beer was one of the material cultural heritages of European colonialism in China. Contemporary China's best-selling beer brand, Tsingtao Beer, was first a by-product of German colonization of the Jiaozhou Bay area in Shandong Province. European colonizers and settlers transported brewing technologies and introduced a certain lifestyle associated with beer drinking to their bases in China: Germans to Qingdao and Russians to Harbin.[40] By the 1920s, the popularity of beer had reached beyond the confines of European communities in China and become one of the drinks the Chinese liked to spend money on.[41] Having in mind the potential business competitors in Harbin, Xu was convinced that his company could do better. He would promote his beer amongst Chinese consumers in nationalistic tones, because other breweries in Manchuria were all founded by Europeans. As for Russian drinkers, he would attract them by touting his made-in-German devices and brewing equipment. Besides, he would use for brewing the water from the Amur River that all presumably held dear.[42]

Xu's business confidence was also derived from the fact that "the Russians" had persistently embraced private business ownership-friendly policies, despite the unpredictably high tariff rates at times and the "occasionally thuggish demeanors of Russian officials."[43] The socialist successor states of Imperial Russia in the 1920s, first the very short-lived Far Eastern Republic and later the Soviet Union, indeed both adopted liberal economic rules towards private

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[39] *Ibid.*, 171, 175.
[40] Zhiguo Yang, "This Beer Tastes Really Good: Nationalism, Consumer Culture and Development of the Beer Industry in Qingdao, 1903- 1993," *The Chinese Historical Review* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 30.
[41] *Ibid.,* 32.
[42] Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 169- 70. See also Cao Minglong, ed., *Compilation of Historical Sources from the Commemorative Museum of Chinese Immigrants in Russia [旅俄华侨纪念馆史料汇编]* (Beijing: CCP History Press, 2010), 54.
[43] Those words were the summary of Xu's grandson on the hardship his grandparent had endured in the process of launching the Zhenbian Brewery. See Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 166.

businesses. When leaders of the pro-Bolshevik Far Eastern Republic met with Lenin over economic and diplomatic terms between the new regime and Soviet Russia, Lenin endorsed the FER's compatibility with business ventures and foreign capital investment. Lenin also suggested that the "FER could act as an intermediary between capitalism and socialism, heralding the RSFSR's transitioning to the New Economic Policy later."[44] In addition, Bolsheviks within the coalitional administrative and legislative organs of the FER insisted on retaining the existing Chinese diaspora, especially those who were toilers, in Russia and making good use of such human resources to help project their doctrines in Manchuria and eventually China proper.[45] Practically speaking, the material and labor shortage in the aftermath of the Russian Civil War in the Far East also encouraged the participation of Chinese workers in the resumption of economic activity. The FER did not sever or cut short the whole region's business ties to China either. For example, the private poultry farm, in which Xu was a partner, was still in operation in most of the early and mid 1920s.[46] Chinese Chambers of Commerce, at least the one based in Khabarovsk, still took an active part in the negotiations between the Chinese government and the FER for a trade treaty.[47]

Xu spent years setting his own brewery in motion. In addition to calibrating the potential clientele and market, he mobilized his local and international social connections to construct the manufacturing site and install cutting-edge alcohol-producing technologies. His father-in-law, allegedly once an engineer in European Russia, helped him purchase German brewing appliances

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[44] Ivan Sablin, *The Rise and Fall of Russia's Far Eastern Republic, 1905- 1922: Nationalism, Imperialism, and Regionalism in and after the Russian Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 170- 171.
[45] *Ibid*., 166- 167.
[46] Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 162- 63.
[47] The archival documentation of the trade treaty between the FER and the First Republic of China indicated high-profile Chinese merchants' involvement. The Khabarovsk Chinese Chamber of Commerce representatives made some specific requests, including the abolition of Russia's exclusive ownership over the Chinese Eastern Railway and cancellation of organized Bolshevik propaganda in Chinese territory. See RGIA DV, f. R4699, op. 01, d. 203, ll. 5- 62.

and familiarize his hires with the technology.[48] In terms of the brewery's site, the then Aihui county governor gave the nod to Xu's petition for using a piece of land that lay about five kilometers west of downtown Aihui and less than half kilometer away from the bank of the Amur River.[49] The brewery finally opened in 1924. Xu named it Zhenbian, conveying the good wish to "vitalize the frontier." Xu's choice of the brewery's name reflected that the modern conception of nation and national sovereignty had become more ingrained in the collective awareness of Chinese settlers in Manchuria, particularly those who were relatively better informed. Against the backdrop of the Russian and Japanese imperial presence, especially the latter's display of intensified aggression, boundaries of nation and sovereignty played out increasingly in their mental mapping of the social milieu they were living in. By the 1920s, Japan's alarming military presence had overshadowed the whole area between the sending and receiving ends of the mass migration from North China to Manchuria.[50] Merchants like Xu correspondingly adopted more patriotic and nationalism-provoking rhetoric in fashioning their industrial and communal outreach.

While Chinese settlers in Manchuria gradually came to understand their relationship with their adoptive homeland in nationalistic terms, people on the other side of the Amur-Ussuri border also took to reconstructing their imagined community with the new political regime gaining a solid footing. The revolution and wars brought about notable demographic change in the Russian Far East. The Bolshevik takeover drove away those who adamantly opposed the socialist doctrines and felt unwelcomed and threatened in the new socialist regime. Among the social groups that the Soviet borderlands in the mid and lower Amur River Basin had lost were

[48] Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 166, 172.
[49] *Compilation of Documents on Heihe Culture and History, vol. 3*, 93.
[50] Thomas R. Gottschang and Diana Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2000): 130- 31.

White military personnel, some well-off capitalists, and communities of Orthodox Old Believers. At the same time, the overall population in the area did not seem to shrink thanks to domestic migration at a steady pace. According to the first all-Union census of the USSR, for example, Blagoveshchensk's population actually reached a new record of 72,000 and that marked an increase of 10,000 from the last decade.[51]

The foreign population remained an essential component of the borderland area's demographics. After the Far Eastern Republic was officially absorbed by the RSFSR in late 1922, the Amur River became an international border between China and the world's first socialist polity. It remained fairly open and porous for the time being. The Soviet Amur Province and later the Khabarovsk Krai both kept the FER-era liberal policy toward regulating movement of people and goods across the Sino-Soviet border throughout the mid 1920s. At the same time, the Soviets also retained equally liberal laws for admitting foreign people as Soviet citizens. Both Russophone and Anglophone historiographies point out that the Soviet state was generally open to stateless people opting for Soviet citizenship during the early NEP period. It had much to do with the new Soviet regime's hasty aspiration to achieve social uniformity and solidity in as short a time as possible at minimum expense.[52]

The political regime changed, and people moved in and out of the borderlands, but rumors and prejudices in the town stayed. The borderlands' Slavic settlers passed along to the new arrivals such rumors that eventually would have a profound impact upon the area's demographic profile. Domestic new arrivals usually made a stop in Blagoveshchensk, one of the urbanized and busy administrative hubs of the borderlands. Fresh-off-the-boat domestic settlers

[51] Statisticheskoie Biuro Amurskogo Okruga, *Gorogskoe naselenie Amurskogo okruga po perepici 1927 goda*, 12.
[52] Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012)*, 157; see also B. D. Pak, *Koreiitsy v sovetskoi Rossii 1917- konets 30-x gg.*, (Irkutsk: SNp, 1995): 125- 27.

and demobilized soldiers coming from other parts of the former Russian Empire were generally surprised to see how Asian hamlets, predominantly Chinese as well as some Korean, dotted the town. They soon would learn that the Asian presidents' presence was regular, and they worked as miners, farmers, and factory workers amongst the Slavic residents. In other words, they played an indispensable role in assuring normal operation of the border town's everyday life. Rumor even had it that the Chinese farmers were the only suppliers of fruits and vegetables in the area, monopolizing the industry of vegetable farming.[53]

That Blagoveshchensk was too reliant on the Chinese had been a recurring theme of local public discourse. Such material reliance constantly caught the attention of the Russian elites in the Far East. For example, they reflected on the 1900 event known to the Chinese as the "Blagoveshchensk Massacre" in a much different light. Feofilakt Chilikin, the deputy of the Amur Province in the Russian Duma, regarded the event that claimed hundreds of Chinese sojourners' lives as a warning about the foreign population's excessive penetration of Russia and the detriment it could cause.[54] The elitist discursive association of the Chinese with inferiority and unculturedness made many ordinary Slavics settler somehow uncomfortable, since they could hardly distance themselves from material provisions and labor resources of the Chinese. That further concretized their mixed feeling about the Chinese in the borderlands and deepened

[53] Russian historians have gathered documented interesting historical vignettes on Slavic settlers' encounters with the East Asian population in Blagoveshchensk as well as in other Far Eastern towns. See Pavel A. Lykhin, *Vesti iz Blagoveshchenska: Istoricheskie Ocherki nachala XX veka*, (Perm: Presstime, 2012): 12- 13.; See also T.Z. Pozniak, "Sovremenniki o Kitaiiskom Samoupravlenii na Rossiiskom Dal'nem Vostoke vo Vtoroi Polovine XIX- XX vv." in *Dal'nii Vostok Rossii v Sisteme Mezhdunarodnykh Otnoshenii v Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskom Regione: Istoriia, Ekonomika, Kul'tura*, (Vladivostok: Dalnauka, 2006): 328- 335.

[54] V.N. Abelentsev, *Amurskoe Kazachestvo, XIX- XX vv.: Sbornik Statei i Publikatsii* (Blagoveshchensk: 2-e dop. i ispr, 2005): 63. See also Sablin, *The Rise and Fall of Russia's Far Eastern Republic, 1905- 1922*, 11.

their concern about the potential danger the overwhelming Asian population might pose in the long term.[55]

This mixed sentiment towards the Chinese in the borderlands by no means dissipated in the Soviet era. Time had only added new content to the majority Slavic citizens' wariness toward and disaffection with the familiar yet strange Chinese community. The rise of Japanese militarism and its influence in Northeast Asia factored into local Slavic settlers' perception of the Asian population in Blagoveshchensk, especially the Chinese. Russian settlers in the Far East first learned about Japan's military competency in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Since then, Japan had become a solid rival in the geopolitical competition with Russia for dominance over Northeast Asia. The Japanese military's return on a large scale to the Far East and Siberia from 1918 to 1922 further showcased its military prowess. Ordinary Russian settlers in Blagoveshchensk did not necessarily consider relations with Japan from the angle of imperial rivalry. They were concerned that Japan coveted the rich soil and resources surrounding them and would encroach on their homeland. The Japanese Army indeed brought civilians and settled them in Blagoveshchensk under the White force's protection during the Russian Civil War.[56] During the Japanese military intervention, Blagoveshchensk residents were discomforted by the Japanese military force's benign treatment of Chinese businesses in the town. After the Japanese military and civilians' withdrawal, the Chinese soon took over the businesses once set up and run by the Japanese, such as laundries, as if "the Japanese purposefully left those shops for Chinese inheritance."[57] The uneasy feeling about Japanese military intervention and local Slavic

[55] Abelentsey's historical sources on the Amur Cossack stanitsa's reliance and mixed feeling about the Chinese presence in Blagoveshchensk shed light on understanding average Slavic settlers' sentiment towards the same foreign population. See Abelentsev, *Amurskoe Kazachestvo,* 65.
[56] Lykhin, *Vesti,* 67- 71.
[57] The White movement did not affect Blagoveshchensk's demographic as magnificently as in Vladivostok, Ussuriysk, and Khabarovsk. However, local residents still recalled the appearance of Japanese civilians and Japanese businesses alongside with Japanese Army during the Civil War years. The suspicion of the pan-Asian

residents' suspicion of the pan-Asian scheme between foreign people of the same "yellow race" only translated into more distrust of the Chinese.

However, the Chinese were still piling in ships and crossing the Amur River onto the Soviet left bank. From 1923 to 1925, the Far Eastern Oblast government in Chita entrusted the Foreign Department (*inostrannyi otdel*) with the task of registering foreigners and migrants with legal status and issuing them residence permits (*propiska*). The residence permits were comparable to the tsarist era counterparts, the travel *bilet*. In response to the decree from the RSFSR's Central Executive Committee (*TsIK*) on adopting a more welcoming and efficient policy towards immigration and naturalization of foreign proletarians and stateless people, the Foreign Department offices made the process of permit issuance even quicker and simpler than in the pre-Soviet era. According to various sources, it only took five to seven days to issue a residence permit in Foreign Department's offices in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok. Foreigners, probably predominantly Chinese migrants, could even apply for the permit upon their arrival through the Foreign Department office in Blagoveshchensk. It only required the applicants to show proof of employment and payment as the primary prerequisite for obtaining the permits.[58]

Although Soviet officialdom in the Far East seemingly just resumed the old routine for admitting and regulating foreign migrants in the borderlands, there was one different aspect of the routine that eventually set the Soviet immigration practice drastically apart from the old regime. Proof of employment, an essential document for foreign migrants' acquisition of residence permits, now had to be issued and authenticated by Soviet authorities.[59] This specific

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conspiracy between Japanese and Chinese migrants was only articulated in an oral history interview with a resident named I. Bushchensko. See Teliuk, etc. ed. *Triumfal'naia Arka Blagoveshchenska,* 77- 80.

[58] Iu.N. Tsipkin, *Beloe dvizhenie na Dal'nem Vostoke* (Khabarovsk: DGGU, 1996): 158- 59. See also A. V. Druziaka, *Istoricheskii Opit Gosudarstvennogo Regulirovaniia Vneshnei Migratsii na Iuge Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii, 1858- 2008 gg.* (Blagoveshchensk: BGPU Press, 2010): 59.

[59] Druziaka, *Istoricheskii Opyt,* 61. The State Archive of the Amur Oblast preserves discrete files of some Blagoveshchensk-based companies' record of employees in the mid 1920s. The employment record of

requirement signaled that the centralized Soviet state took stepped-up measures to directly keep the complex demographics under control. It also meant that foreign parties like individual entrepreneurs or those "state within a state" Chinese merchants' associations were forced out of the business of cross-border human migration. The Soviet state now became the sole overseer of the migration process. This particular change also laid the foundation for the Chinese community's eventually atomization in the following decade on the increasingly Sovietized left bank the Amur River.

In the eyes of ordinary Soviet citizens inhabiting and guarding the left-bank borderlands along the Amur, the atomization and impending departure of the Chinese population revealed no trace at this time. They still viewed the Chinese diaspora as a formidably alien entity. A match factory of Blagoveshchensk, for example, hired 97 workers in 1925, and 45 among them were Chinese.[60] Some contemporaries recalled that in the 1920s the gold mining industry seemed to hire a larger than ever number of Chinese miners in the Blagoveshchensk area. Newly hired Soviet miners expressed discontent with sharing the workspace with rude Chinese laborers, and small-scale hate crimes targeting Chinese miners occasionally occurred in the mining fields.[61] Instead of shipping produce across the Amur to Blagoveshchensk, Chinese farmers now appeared to "directly seize large parcels of Russian land left unattended during wartime and grow and sell vegetables and crops back to the Soviets."[62] In addition, the simple procedures for foreign migrants, more specifically the Chinese, to receive legal residence status in

Blagoveshchensk match factory in 1925 included official employment proof/ invitation (*priglashenie*) for its 45 Chinese workers. See State Archive of the Amur Oblast (GAAO), f. 5, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 1- 34.
[60] GAAO, f. 5, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 1- 34.
[61] Teliuk, etc. ed. *Triumfal'naia Arka Blagoveshchenska,* 85.
[62] Lykhin, *Vesti*, 74.

Blagoveshchensk only intensified local Slavic citizens' uneasiness. Blagoveshchensk seemed to have become more dependent on the Chinese and the cross-border economic ties.

Despite sharing the same geographic space with Slavic settlers and having a long history of embeddedness in the social and economic activities of the borderlands, the Chinese migrants again were cast out of the collective imaginary of the now Soviet citizenry. This time the socialist borderlands' residents learned to harness particular Soviet discourses to cancel the membership of the Chinese diaspora in their imagined community. First of all, the old discursive category of race (*zheltyi ras*) was not abandoned by the new class-oriented regime. The political and social elite in the socialist Amur Province still treated the yellow race as an ethno-national identifier in official documentation of the province's demographic structure. The use of yellow race as an ethnic category in assessing the demographic changes in official records and reports codified the Asian population's fundamental otherness in the borderlands. The Chinese, like other peoples of the yellow race, appeared to be only secondary in the borderlands' demographics by not being itemized as an individual ethnicity in the official demographic report. As shown in the 1924 report on major cities' populations released by the Amur provincial bureau of statistics, the yellow race constituted 4.2 percent of Blagoveshchensk's total population of 72793. Workers of the yellow race, however, occupied 12.3 percent of the workforce in the secondary sector of the economy.[63] In the countryside under the Blagoveshchensk municipal jurisdiction, one out of every five farmers was of the yellow race.[64] The notably disproportionate yellow-to-non-yellow ratios in the occupations of laborers and farmers were singled out in the analysis, for it showed the majority ethnic groups' over reliance on economic wellbeing created by the ethno-racial minority.

[63] Statisticheskoe Biuro Amurskoi gubernii, *Gorodskoe naselenie Amurskoii gubernii po perepisi 1923 goda*, 33- 34.
[64] *Ibid*., 35- 6.

Paralleling the statistical wariness about the yellow race's overrepresentation in key sectors of economy, *Amurskaia Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Amur Province, articulated concerns about Asian workers' working ethics and actual eligibility for filling in the industrial and agricultural postions in Blagoveshchensk and the surrounding agrarian districts. On July 21, 1925, the newspaper published a reader's open letter, in which he commented on Asian workers' underground practice of opium smoking. According to him, despite long being banned, opium smoking was organized in two remote neighborhoods, where Chinese, and possibly Korean, workers were concentrated. He considered that such a practice revealed those Asian workers' "lack of discipline," and they might also be involved in contraband trading. The author, seeming to have learned how to "speak Bolshevik," suggested that Blagoveshchensk's toiler class include more hardworking and disciplined members coming from other parts of the socialist motherland.[65]

Another aspect reflected and highlighted in the statistical bureau's analysis of the yellow race population in Blagoveshchensk was its extraordinarily unbalanced sex ratio. Blagoveshchensk's Chinese community had a jaw-dropping men-to-women ratio of 210:1, and the statistical report noted that such a ratio was becoming even more unbalanced, as the Chinese community in Blagoveshchensk kept seeing its female members leave.[66] The agglomeration of unaccompanied Chinese males did cause the city's administrative staff to frown. Unlike Koreans, who had an overall men-to-women ratio of 100:78 in the Amur Province and tended to stay in the province as familial units in the long run, the Chinese were considered as permanent sojourners in the description of provincial governmental documentation.[67] In the recollection of a

[65] Bedniak, "Snimaiut Opium," *Amurskaia Pravda*, July 25, 1925.
[66] *Gorodskoe naselenie Amurskoii gubernii po perepisi 1923 goda*, 38.
[67] Statisticheskoe Biuro Amurskoi gubernii, *Gorodskoe naselenie Amurskoii gubernii po perepisi 1925 goda*, 53.

Slavic resident in Blagoveshchensk named Boris Gorlach, the Chinese female he had encountered was his family maid hired in the 1920s, and she did not know how to help with "Russian household chores."[68] The image of a collective of male coolies was how Blagoveshchensk remembered it Chinese community in the 1920s.

The image of unaccompanied Chinese laborers sojourning back and forth across the Amur River prevailed and helped intensify the tendency to alienate the ethnic Chinese population from both the discursive and the jurisdictional constructions of Blagoveshchensk's citizenry. The public liked to compare the Chinese laborers to Korean farmers that resided at the outskirts of the urban area. On October 2, 1925, *Amurskaia Pravda* published a journalist's essay on ethnic Korean farmers' new life under socialism, and the reportage praised the Korean families' attachment to the land and their rootedness in the agricultural settlements in *Priamur'e*.[69] The Chinese population, in comparison, lacked such rootedness and its startling sex ratio indicated little willingness to settle or to be integrated in Blagoveshchensk. On top of that, there was evidence showing that some Chinese were involved in sneaking contraband goods in and out of Blagoveshchensk by crossing the border, in spite of the high risk posed by the increasingly efficient customs institution. As stressed by an article with serious tone in *Amurskaia Pravda* on January 12, 1926, some Chinese workers, as well as some unemployed youths, engaged in regular smuggling of contraband goods out of Blagoveshchensk. It was believed that the local customs house only hunted down 10 percent of all the illegal contraband exchange in December 1925.[70] The same issue was addressed at the Provincial Party Conference of 1926. In his speech, Blagoveshchensk's party chief Khoroshylov expressed the border city's

[68] Teliuk, etc. ed. *Triumfal'naia Arka Blagoveshchenska,* 111- 12.
[69] "Koreitsy- batraki," *Amurskaia Pravda*, October 2, 1925.
[70] A. Gruzd, "Milliona rubleii v god na granitse," *Amurskaia Pravda*, January 12, 1926.

determination to rid the border of contraband smuggling that involved "loafers and foreign workers" and resulted in a huge loss of millions of rubles' worth of state property.[71]

The Soviet regime enabled new approaches to constructing an imagined community. In the process by which Blagoveshchensk realigned itself with the new proletarian state's imaginary, the city, its sociopolitical elite, and ordinary residents together reinvented the criteria for community membership of the particular border city. Chinese workers, albeit belonging to the working class and possessing legal resident permits, were generally considered as outcasts. The old sentiments regarding the Chinese population survived the regime change in Blagoveshchensk, and they were now couched in and reinforced by new discursive evidence that revealed the ethno-racial group's ineligibility for membership in the border town.

The Koreans, another major group of the yellow race, seemingly experienced less discursive exclusion from the Blagoveshchensk community under construction. It did have something to do with the fact that Blagoveshchensk's Koreans only constituted less than 0.5 percent of its overall population, and they were much more sparsely settled in the outskirts of the city. The Korean community had long been invisible in Blagoveshchensk. In the Maritime Province, however, ethnic Koreans were the counterparts of the Chinese in Blagoveshchensk, in spite of the fact that Koreans were much more embedded in the social and economic fabrics of the province and had a long history of naturalization in the Russian Empire. In the same vein, the FER and the RSFSR's less restrictive control over immigration led to an influx of more than 100,000 Koreans into the Maritime Province in the early 1920s. The Soviet officials taking charge of immigration and naturalization showed reluctance to legalistically integrate those Korean migrants into the population of the border province, for the history of Koreans'

[71] GAAO, f. 5p, op. 1, d. 5, l. 2

settlement in the *Primor'e* had informed them that "they were much less likely to be assimilated."[72]

Even while Soviet citizens in the borderlands of the middle and lower Amur River Basin were engaged in discursively excluding the Chinese migrants, or Asian migrants at large, from their imagined community, the demographic structure of their actual Soviet borderland community was changing quickly. The Chinese migrants departed in considerable quantities in the late 1920s. Tambovka, one of the relatively better-developed agricultural districts with fertile and productive soil 40 kilometers east of Blagoveshchensk on the same riverine plain of the Amur's left bank, now awaited the recovery of its peak productivity of the late imperial years. After the Civil War, the mass departure of former owners of the district's big farms, many of whom were Molokans, left Tambovka's arable land deserted. The new regime exerted economic leverage and tried allocating special economic aid to motivate experienced farmhands to work the land so that they would help increase the region's agricultural productivity back to what it was before the revolution. The aim was to form a prototypical farming community in Tambovka that could lead to smooth agricultural collectivization. The local communist Party's economic planning committee had in mind Chinese farmers that had experience working the soil and did not bargain a lot over Soviet agrarian taxation.[73] However, the number of Chinese farmhands was too small to sustain a sizeable ethnic collective farm in 1928. Eventually a Ukrainian farm was founded in Tambovka, despite the fact that peasants hailing from Ukraine constituted only slightly more than half of the farm's entire population.[74] As for the Chinese, they also proudly formed their first ethnic farming community in the Soviet borderlands. The farm had the name of

[72] Druziaka, *Istoricheskii opyt*, 64.
[73] The Organ of the Amur Okrug Planning Committee, *Itogi kampanii po edinomu sel'skokhoziaistvennomu nalogi 1927/1928 po Amurskomu okrugu*, 5- 9.
[74] *Ibid.*, 18.

"Canton Commune" (*kantonskaia kommuna*), possibly reflecting those Chinese members' identification with and certain level of longing for the warm and energetic Canton Province in South China. The registered number of Chinese farmers in the commune was only ninety-six.[75]

By the time the First Five-year Plan was about to kick off in Blagoveshchensk, the proportion of the yellow race in the border town's entire population had dropped to a historical low of less than 1.8 percent.[76] Coming to a conclusion together with NEP was the relatively loosened regulation of foreign proletarians and stateless people's movements in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. Foreigners received more strict scrutiny upon their entry inland. Suspicion of immigrant admission and deceleration of stateless people's naturalization replaced the system of quick visa issuance short-lived during the early and mid 1920s. Just like Tambovka's choice of Ukrainian peasantry, Blagoveshchensk chose to not replenish its yellow workforce when mines and mills became understaffed. Instead, the border city coordinated with other socialist state apparatuses to attract and accommodate internal migrants of Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian nationality in relatively large numbers. Those key economic sectors in which the Asian workforce was once overrepresented now saw Russian and Ukrainian toilers becoming the major contributors of physical strength and intelligence. Blagoveshchensk had not merely discursively excluded the Chinese in the mental mapping of their socialist citizenry's borders. The socialist industrial and agricultural enterprises in the city and its neighboring districts had also been demographically free of dependence on manpower of the unwanted yellow racial others.[77]

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[75] It remains unclear whether the collective farm's name was adopted by the Soviet economic planning institution or the Chinese farmers themselves. Archival sources only showed that the Chinese ethnic commune was founded in a district 5 kilometers north of Blagoveshchensk in 1928 with 96 members. See State Archive of Khabarovsk Krai (GAKhK), f. P2, op. 5, d. 2, l. 9.

[76] Statisticheskoe Biuro Amurskogo okruga, *Gorodskoe naselenie Amurskogo okruga po perepisi 1929 goda*, 47.

[77] Russian workers composed more than 89 percent of the workforce, and in the countryside, more than half of the peasantry were of Ukrainian descent. *Ibid*., 47- 48.

The new Soviet regime's obsession with achieving socioeconomic self-sufficiency was certainly not confined to curtailing its reliance on foreign manpower. Economic ties to cross-border capital and businesses were also meant to be placed under the state authority's sole management. Xu Pengyuan should have felt the effects of the Soviets' economic remodeling much sooner. His poultry farm on the left bank of the Amur River, according to the account of his family history, was nationalized by the Soviet government in the late 1920s.[78] But his Zhenbian Brewery, in the meantime, did quite well in selling alcohol and winning more customers. Zhenbian baijiu offered vodka drinkers an inexpensive alternative. The Chinese community in the Blagoveshchensk-Aihui area astride the Amur certainly made a good contribution to the sales performance of Zhenbian beer. Local public history accounts in Heihe offered some detailed description of Zhenbian beer's popularity among ordinary Chinese, who found this novel western flavor "combining sour and sweet" a pleasant addition to the dining table or social events.[79] Zhenbian Brewery's strong sales performance in its business heyday, however, might have more to do with the Amur River's open navigability from the late 1910s to the early 1930s.[80] His alcoholic products reached markets as far as in Vladivostok and Mukden by way of the Amur and Songhua waterways as well as the Chinese Eastern Railways. The rather small population of the Blagovechensk-Aihui area could otherwise by no means support a sizeable brewery with a 3000-ton yearly output.[81]

The achievement of the USSR's First Five-Year plan in its North Asian borderlands included that the whole Far Eastern region had moved steadily to economic self-sufficiency. For

[78] Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 174.
[79] Heihe Archive, *Selected Archival Documents II*, 52- 54. See also Cao, *Compilation of Historical Sources,* 17.
[80] The Amur River as an internationally shared waterway remained open to both Chinese and Soviet navigation in the 1920s. Even White Russian emigres had records on getting Khabarovsk from Harbin via the Songhua and Amur waterway routes in the 1920s. Tsipkin, *Beloe dvizhenie na Dal'nem Vostoke,* 201- 04.
[81] Liu, "A Visit of Zhenbian Brewery."

those merchants whose entrepreneurial success relied heavily on cross-border, international exchange of people, material, and knowledge, such an achievement of the Soviet regime was a recipe for their own bankruptcy. From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, Soviet authorities in the Amur Province, and later the Khabarovsk Krai, nationalized domestic industries and gradually ruled out the participation of foreign individual capitalists in socialist economic production.[82] At this point, the Chinese merchants and their business societies, which had long acted as the middlemen and contractors between droves of Chinese migrants and other parties demanding manpower on the left bank of the Amur, were denied entry into the socialist economic system. The Soviet borderlands' engagement with achieving social and economic self-sufficiency brought about the disruption of a human migratory mechanism that had enabled and sustained the Chinese diasporic community in the borderlands located immediately next to their homeland since the late nineteenth century.

Against such background, Zhenbian Brewery's business decline became suddenly noticeable in the early 1930s.[83] The quickly dwindling Chinese population on the left bank failed to create robust demand for its products. The Soviet customs agency's imposition of high tariffs on foreign goods and later the Japanese colonial institution's hefty taxation further drove down the brewery's profitability. In addition, the Japanese colonial takeover of Manchuria in 1931 put an end to the Amur River's open navigability. The Amur, a most vital waterway for Zhenbian alcoholic products' transportation and Xu's business survival, became a tensely militarized border belt between the socialist USSR and imperial Manchukuo.[84] Zhenbian Brewery thus was

[82] The nationalization of private and foreign businesses in Siberia and the Far East was already undertaken in the name of fighting against corruption in the late NEP time. A. I. Baksheev, *Problemy Sovetskoi Gosudarstvennosti v Sibiri Perioda NEPa* (Krasnoyarsk: Siberian Federal University, 2013): 318- 20.
[83] Heihe Archive, *Selected Archival Documents II*, 55, 58.
[84] George C. Guins, "Russians in Manchuria," *The Russian Review* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1943): 86- 87.

cut off from its major market areas, and its unannounced demise came a few years later in 1935.[85]

Xu Pengyuan and his Russian Far East-bound fellow Chinese migrants' stories have offered a more complex and revelatory answer to the question of how the Soviet borderlands on the left bank of the middle and lower stream of the Amur River removed the substantial Chinese population from its midst. Through tracking the rise and fall of a quintessentially borderland enterprise, Zhenbian Distillary, I argue that the USSR's autarky-driven political and economic programs destroyed a human migratory mechanism that had long enabled the sustenance and development of a coherent, international borderlands community along the Amur River. The mechanism once entailed well-informed Chinese entrepreneurs as leaders of the cross-border diasporic community and massive migrant laborers as the integral manpower participating in socioeconomic activity in the borderlands. Other contributory factors to the disintegration of the Chinese community on the left bank included Russian and Soviet settlers' long-term discursive alienation of the Chinese sojourning laborers and the Soviet regime's increasing wariness of socialism-unfriendly parties' encirclement. Last, the Japanese empire's colonial seizure of Manchuria and militarization of the border with the USSR became the last straw that finally broke the crumbling Chinese diasporic community.

[85] Ning, *The Heilongjiang River Was the Proof,* 164.

CHAPTER FIVE

INSURED AND INDEBTED: SOCIAL WELFARE IN SOVIET *PRIAMUR'E*

The Soviet customs houses along the long stretch of Sino-Soviet borders were overstaffed throughout the 1920s. Inspectors from higher administrative branches suggested that local customs officials downsize their staff, at least in the off-season winter months.[1] However, the Far Eastern Department of Social Insurance insisted on keeping and even expanding staff of local customs house. The social insurance administration cited the collective effort to protect the Soviet Northeast Asian border as the convincing reason to retain the oversized workforce. The Far Eastern Krai's Party committee as well as its executive agencies endorsed the social insurance department's undertaking. This chapter concentrates on the Soviet social welfare systems and its application in selected economic sectors in the middle and lower Amur River Basin in the 1920s and 1930s. I discuss three sets of cases: the social welfare administration's interaction with local employers, the social welfare system's role in job creation, and the social welfare system's involvement in the transformation of rural communities and foodstuffs' supply.

The recurring discursive theme of the Soviet Amur country being Soviet Russia's remote borderlands featured in all three sets of cases. I argue that the lower and middle Amur River Basin's geopolitical character as the USSR's Northeast Asian borderlands played an instrumental role in the Soviet state's governance in the region. It helped justify the Soviet state's uneven, differential amassing and distribution of scarce socioeconomic resources in the context of pursuing universality in the long term. Dialectically speaking, integration of the borderland and frontier discourse into the state's tactics for realizing its social welfare programs in the region

[1] RGIA DV, f. 2443, op. 1, d. 127, ll. 55- 57.

reinforced the left bank's borderland character as the distinctive driving force of the whole region's political economic development.

Scholars have examined the specific roles the modern Russian and Soviet states had played in realizing charitable missions and implementing social insurance (*sotsial'noe strakhovanie*) programs. According to recent scholarly works, the imperial Russian state was only one of many parties that held together a patchwork of social welfare agendas throughout the nineteenth century. For example, establishments aiming at poor relief, such as parish almshouses, raised funding from not only the state, but also the imperial family charities, private sources, and local philanthropists in towns.[2] Existing literature has substantial discussion on the imperial state's further withdrawal from guaranteeing the masses social welfare in the mid nineteenth century. The institutionalization of zemstvos, the local self-governing bodies, at both district (*uezd*) and provincial levels in the 1860s and the organization of municipalities into local self-governing bodies under Dumas in the 1870s in European Russia had marked such power decentralization in terms of social welfare provision. Scholarship in both English and Russian has offered insights into inadequacies and problems of the decentralized patchwork for providing social welfare in late imperial Russia. For instance, financial resources for public assistance, including almshouses, orphanages, and medical facilities, could be characterized as "unevenly allotted" and even "meager and scarce" in rural settings across provinces.[3] As for the growing

[2] Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity Societies and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996): 76-78. For the role played by both public and private benevolent associations in realizing social insurance and poor relief programs, see also Wendy Rosslyn, *Deed, Not Words: The Origins of Women's Philanthropy in the Russian Empire* (Birmingham, Eng.: CREES, University of Birmingham, 2007).
[3] For discussion of zemstvos' provision of poor relief and broad social assistance in general, see Bernice Q. Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 15- 16. For the scarce resources put in the health care facilities by zemstvo governments in Northern Central Russia, see V. Badanov, "Zemskaia meditsina na severe Rossii," *Sever* 11, (1998), 128- 129. For the uneven distribution of zemstvo fund for education among rural communities, see Jeffrey Brooks, "The Zemstvo and Education," in *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government*, ed. Wayne S. Vucinich & Terrence Emmons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 266- 268.

working class, health and social insurance against work-related accidents and illness was not converted into state law by the Duma until 1912. The Health and Accident Act mandated that employers and employees both contributed to the fund for benefits, and it contained loopholes that many employers exploited to significantly reduce or cancel their employees' benefits.[4] The inefficiency and inadequacies of late Imperial Russia's social welfare provision for those working in the industrial, urban settings were also manifested in the lack of formal protection against disability or death induced by aggressive industrialization.[5]

The late imperial Russian state's endeavor to carry out poor relief programs for those in need and protective laws for workers, as discussed in recent historiography, was lukewarm and unremarkable throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Scholarship, however, has not assigned the same characterization to depicting the imperial government's involvement in providing social welfare to the masses into the twentieth century. One of the imperial state's first noteworthy attempts at establishing a more centralized, comprehensive social insurance program was Tsar Alexander III's creation of a commission for public assistance in 1892.[6] Another, the aforementioned 1912 Health and Accident Act, further demonstrated the government's stepped-up presence in extending social welfare benefits on a mass scale, despite the mandate's inadequacies in realization. Many scholars have highlighted the 1910s, especially the temporal continuum between the First World War and the Russian Civil War as the major watershed in the

[4] Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*, 20; See also Madhavan K. Palat, "Casting Workers as an Estate in Late Imperial Russia" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 309- 311.
[5] For examples and analyses of Imperial Russian state's laissez-faire stance on providing legal protection for the working class's socioeconomic interests, see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Okhrana Truda: Industrial Hygiene, Psychotechnics, and Industrialization in the USSR," in *Health and Society in Revolutionary Russia*, ed. Susan Gross Solomon & John F. Hutchinson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 225- 226; see also: Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 267- 270.
[6] Joshua Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905- 1925* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003): 26- 29.

history of modern Russian social welfare. The Russian state's interest in maintaining a robust labor force and healthy population had been pronounced with increasing firmness, and more state-founded institutions had come into being over this decade. State expenditures on social welfare and public assistance reached an unprecedented level during World War I, as evidenced by the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos and Union of Towns' annual funding of hundreds of millions of rubles for the care of soldiers and their families.[7] The Provisional Government did not break the streak of expanding state welfare after the collapse of the imperial autocracy. The establishment of the Ministry of Labor and Ministry of State Care in May 1917 marked the Provisional Government's resolve to continue investing resources in welfare provision through state sponsorship and management.[8]

The Russian state's transition to the primary sponsor of expanding social welfare programs in the early twentieth century has been a major subject of scholarly investigations. Many have shared the consensus that the First World War and a series of social problems warfare brought about in the domestic sphere propelled the Russian state to embrace a more centralized, comprehensive social welfare agenda. Wounds, deaths, and traumas, endured by a sizable population and produced by total war had quickly overwhelmed private philanthropic organizations, imperial family charities, and zemstvos. In addition, the prolonged war effort forced hundreds of thousands of civilians into refugeedom. The tremendous need for coordinated war relief and poor relief programs during wartime compelled the state to shoulder more obligations.[9]

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[7] David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914- 1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 44.
[8] N. P. Eroshkin, *Istoriia gosudarstvennykh uchrezhdenii dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1968), 352- 53.
[9] For analysis of the overwhelming effect of war on charitable organizations and the subsequential necessity of state takeover of war relief and social welfare management, see Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914- 1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 21- 23; Aaron Retish,

Scholars have also examined the Russian state's expanding responsibility for social welfare provision through a pan-European comparative lens. European nations learned firsthand at war about the correlation between the population's overall wellbeing and robustness and national security and military prowess. Total war had especially pushed many European states to institutionalize state-funded guarantee of welfare to the masses. Against the backdrop of shared war experiences and Russia's aspiration for industrial and imperial competitiveness, many European nations' statist approach to social welfare provision profoundly informed and influenced Russian statesmen's undertakings for the same agendas.[10] The late imperial Russian state's assumption of more responsibilities for guaranteeing social welfare to the population, as many have pointed out, was a prelude to an extensive process of normalizing wartime socioeconomic institutions and baking them into state apparatus in the Soviet era. Germany's wartime economic model, for instance, had equally informed and substantiated the nascent Soviet regime's aspiration for efficient mobilization of socioeconomic resources under the state's close supervision. For example, Yuri Larin, one of the leading Bolshevik economic theorists in the early Soviet era, expressed his appreciation of German economic planning's efficiency.[11] The

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Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 32- 35; Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice,* 169. For discussion about the war-induced refugee crisis and its impact on the state's involvement in enacting centralized social welfare agendas, see Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 33- 36.

[10] For discussion of how war efforts, including World War I, had effects on European nations' social mobilization and social resources' distribution across the board, see Michael Geyer, "The Militarization of Europe, 1914- 1945," in *The Militarization of the Western World*, ed. John Gillis (New Bushwick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 77- 80. Theda Skocpol's analysis of modern industrializing states' evolution into comprehensive welfare state in the trans-Atlantic setting also sheds light on war effort's decisive impact on social welfare systems. See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 4- 5. For analysis of how European models, especially state-funded programs for civilian assistance and military relief in Germany and France, had informed similar programs' materialization in Russia, see R. B. McKean, "Social Insurance in Tsarist Russia, St Petersburg, 1907- 17" *Revolutionary Russia* 3, no. 1 (1991), 56- 57; see also Peter Holquist, "What's so Revolutionary about the Russian Revolution? State Practices and the New-Style Politics, 1914- 1921," in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, ed. David L. Hoffmann & Yanni Kotsonis (New York: Macmillan Press, 2000), 92- 96.

[11] Lars T. Lih, "Bolshevik Razverstka and War Communism," *Slavic Review* 45, no. 4 (Winter 1986), 677.

efficiency of state-run, top-down socioeconomic control, as evidenced across Europe during wartime, validated Soviet leaders' enthusiasm about economic planning and the subsequent establishment of corresponding administrative organs, including the Council of Labor and Defense and Gosplan.[12]

More recent scholarship has reminded us that the Soviet state's attempt to lay claim to universal social insurance and assistance was also a demonstration of the socialist regime's moral superiority vis-a-vis the capitalist system. The latter's welfare program "rested on the whim of the rich" while the Soviet welfare program's nature was based on the entitlement of the poor and disadvantaged. Social historians, such as Maria Galmarini-Kabala and Juliane Furst, pointed out that the moral high ground associated with Soviet citizens' right to be helped had marked the Soviet practice of social protection and social assistance. Galmarini-Kabala's monography especially details how socioeconomically marginalized Soviet citizens resorted to such entitlement to help to participate in shaping the contour of the state's monopolization of the social sphere.[13] Other recent literature has offered another vantage point for viewing the Russian and Soviet states' takeover of the responsibility for guaranteeing social welfare: the development and application of social scientific knowledge for building modern statehood. Russianist scholars have revealed in voluminous works how ethnographic knowledge enabled the Soviet regime to

[12] For discussion of German and British wartime mobilization's influence on the Soviet wartime economy, see Lewis Siegelbaum, *The Politics of Industrial Mobilization in Russia, 1914- 1917: A Study of the War-Industries Committee* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 47- 49. Holquist discusses how Soviet leaders and policymakers bought Larin's argument and supported the idea of planned economy, see Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 38- 40.

[13] Juliane Furst, "Between Salvation and Liquidation: Homeless and Vagrant Children and the Reconstruction of Soviet Society," *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (April 2008): 232-258. For the more detailed discussion of Soviet citizens' entitlement to help as a main principle of the USSR's social protection and social assistance programs, see Maria Cristina Galmarini-Kabala, *The Right to Be Helped: Deviance, Entitlement, and the Soviet Moral Order* (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2016).

construct ethno-national categories in order to rule the complex population.[14] They have also called our attention to the increasing use of statistical studies in managing public affairs by Soviet bureaucrats and professionals. State agencies' adoption of statistical approaches to intervening in solving social problems, even including one of the most intricate everyday conundrums, suicide, was another marker of the Soviet regime's social science-based governance.[15] Moreover, the political elite in late imperial Russia's administrative organs had already made use of scientifically tailored fiscal means to regulate certain segments of macroeconomics for the purpose of improving the public good. Both the late imperial and the Soviet regimes, for example, learned to consistently adjust rates and categories of taxation- as both means and ends of efficient governance- to facilitate and sustain the materialization of greater social welfare for the population.[16]

One of the early important directives passed by the new socialist government was the 1918 Provision of Social Security for Workers. The document specified that social security was guaranteed to all workers, regardless of their varied positions and states in the workplaces. Approved by the People's Commissariat for Labor (*Narkomtrud*) and People's Commissariat for Social Security (*Narkomsobes*), this decree emphasized that the fund for all workers' social welfare would come from both the highly centralized state fiscal budget and local employers.[17]

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[14] Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 22. Scholarship also includes Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923- 1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 25- 28; Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister, ed., *An Empire of Others: Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 15- 21.

[15] For general discussion of the USSR's application of statistical knowledge for the country's modernizing effort, see Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses,* 48- 49. For detailed discussion of Soviet psychiatric professionals' intervention in refashioning the society and individuals with a propensity for self-destruction, see Kenneth Pinnow, *Lost to the Collective: Suicide and the Promise of Soviet Socialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 142- 175.

[16] Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation: Tax and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and Early Soviet Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 22- 23, 218- 219.

[17] Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiazhenii rachoche-krestian'skogo pravitel'stva, 1919, no. 54, Art. 518.

The decree reflected one of the key tenets of Soviet socialist welfare systems: that "toilers supporting themselves by their own labor had the right to economic support."[18] In other words, the essential criterion for accessing social welfare, as envisioned by the early Soviet policymakers, was "working without exploiting others." The category of toilers soon was extended to include artisans, handicraftsmen, and landless peasants.[19] Officials and policymakers in the nascent socialist regime commended the Soviet approach to realizing comprehensive social welfare, for it fundamentally overshadowed the miserly and inadequate charity aid offered to workers in many a capitalist country.[20]

This inclusivity of welfare recipients that marked the Soviet welfare blueprint, however, meant substantial financial demand placed on various employing establishments. The economic difficulties that beset the country in the wake of the revolutions and wars, in the meantime, hardly allowed many employers to accumulate sufficient wealth for funding social welfare programs. For one thing, a major pillar of the Soviet Union's social welfare program, the social insurance program for income maintenance, was underfunded at many local levels throughout the 1920s.[21] Soviet historiography has included discussions on how Soviet workers, even those in leading industries, could not receive stipulated welfare benefits well into the First Five-Year Plan. Disabled workers across the country, for example, often found their welfare benefits being cancelled for the reason that "they have had some savings or other income" from other household members.[22] The ultimate criterion for Soviet toilers' access to social insurance and

[18] Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*, 50- 51; See also Alastair McAuley, *Economic Welfare in the Soviet Union: Poverty, Living Standards, and Inequality* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979): 4.
[19] A. Vinokurov, *Sotsial'noe obespechenie: ot kapitalizma k kommunizmu* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1921): 6-7.
[20] N. A. Vigdorchik, *Sotsial'noe strakhovanie v obshchedostupnom izlozhenii* (Moscow: Voprosy truda, 1926), 112. See also Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*, 49.
[21] Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*, 54.
[22] For discussions about disabled workers' disqualification for welfare benefits, see A. I. Vdovin & V. Z. Drobizhev, *Rost rabochego klassa SSSR, 1917- 1940 gg.* (Moscow: Mysl' Moskva, 1976): 23- 24; see also Hoffmann,

public assistance, as summarized above, was "the absence of security" rather than "the right to security" in reality.

The new Soviet regime's predicament in providing its toilers with universal social insurance was particularly pronounced in the Russian Far East. As a matter of fact, for years leading up to the Amur River Basin's full incorporation into the RSFSR, similar problems had long inundated various political parties and social groups that tried to assert authority in the region. During the tumultuous years of the Russian Civil War, for example, Bolsheviks in the Vladivostok-based Provisional Government of Maritime Zemstvo (*Primorskaia oblastnaia zemskaia uprava*) had voiced strong concern over the sustainability of their regional administration. They considered that the promise of greater social security and equal material gains incentivized workers and sailors to support their revolutionary cause and the regional zemstvo, but the foreseeably persistent scarcity of food and goods at the time led many to doubt the realization of egalitarian material provision among the population.[23] Following the left bank's incorporation into the short-lived Far Eastern Republic (FER) in 1920, local Bolsheviks in Khabarovsk, another economic and political center of the region, reiterated the same concern about the unfulfilled promise of indiscriminate material and monetary provision for those in need. The whole Far Eastern region's uneven economic productivity posed a first hurdle for political leaders that attempted to use agricultural and income taxation to lay the fiscal groundwork for collective social insurance. Slavic peasants in the middle Amur riverine plain with richer and more arable soil showed very little interest in paying higher taxes and enrolling

Cultivating the Masses, 55. For discussions about the inadequate provision of income maintenance benefits for workers in general, see Madison, *Economic Welfare*, 52; see also Kenneth M. Straus, *Factory and Community in Stalin's Russia: The Making of an Industrial Working Class* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997): 37.

[23] C. Bulygin, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i pervye sovety na Dal'nem Vostoke* (Vladivostok: Dal'giz, 1932), 45- 46.

in social security programs. For those living in the southern part of the Amur Province, higher crop yield already meant guaranteed economic security, and social welfare programs would only benefit others with less productive land at the expense of their socioeconomic wellbeing.[24]

When envisaging the future realization of universal social insurance, local Bolsheviks were also concerned about another foreseeable hardship: the uneven employment rates across the region. Warfare and political turmoil since the late 1910s had sapped the whole region's economic vibrancy. Cities and towns saw an exodus of capital and human resources. In Vladivostok, for instance, suspension of business investments and withdrawal of foreign capital brought about significant job loss in the city's manufacturing and commercial sectors. The high rate of unemployment in urban areas, such as Vladivostok, particularly challenged local Bolsheviks' resolution to take over and sovietize the region's social economy.[25] Blagoveshchensk, in the same vein, transitioned from one of the most economically stable cities to one with a staggering jobless rate in the early 1920s against the backdrop of the mass emigration and relocation of both Russian and foreign businesspeople in the region. As a consequence, the disintegration of many organized economic activities revolving around the region's key industries, such as gold mining and farming, further weakened the FER coalition government's capacity for managing public spending. Although the Bolshevik and pro-Bolshevik majority in the coalition administration attempted to follow Moscow's lead in implementing universal coverage of social insurance and to move closer to the socioeconomic orbit of war communism, the tight fiscal budget and the region's large unemployed population in

[24] Ibid., 51, 53- 54. Discussion in the secondary source specifies the particular tax in kind (*nalog naturoi*) and the cavalier reception of it from communities of Slavic settlers and peasants in the Amur Oblast'. The tax in kind had been partially implemented in other administrative divisions in European and Siberian Russia at that point.
[25] Avdeeva, N. A. and G. S. Chechulina, *Piat' let geroicheskoi bor'by* (Blagoveshchensk: KKI, 1972), 33. For examples about revolutions and foreign intervention's impact on the Far East's social economy, see Lothar Deeg, *Kunst and Albers Vladivostok: The History of a German Trading Company in the Russia Far East, 1864- 1924*, trans. Sarah Bohnet (Berlin: epubli, 2013), 179- 182.

general prompted many to doubt the feasibility of such presumably universalistic social welfare programs.[26]

In the meantime, in the political heartland of Soviet Russia, the first All-Russian Insurance Congress agreed on the merger of the People's Commissariat for Social Security and the People's Commissariat for Labor. The latter now took charge of the management of socialist social security and laid out the framework of social insurance schemes nationwide.[27] As discussed earlier, universality and inclusivity first characterized the Soviet social welfare programs, and yet the People's Commissariat for Labor also created specific, varied tiers for different social and demographic groups in need of social insurance. One group that had been particularly highlighted as beneficiaries of the Soviet social security programs were servicemen, both on active duty and veterans, and their dependents. Veterans, especially those having lost the ability to work due to injury or illness in either the First World War or the Civil War, were entitled to claim monthly financial support in the form of a pension and other social security allowances, such as childcare funds.[28] In FER, Bolsheviks and other pro-Soviet policymakers endorsed the same policy by granting the identical social welfare benefits to those battling to keep domestic stability for fellow Far Easterners in wars against foreign interventions and the White insurgence.[29] In Amur Province, for example, the gubernatorial government set up the

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[26] Bulygin, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia*, 51. The short-lived FER's actual economic policy more resembled the NEP model, and a truly universal social security program never translated into reality. The reason lay in that centralized fiscal regime was missing and local economy's recovery still relied on international trading and exchange of capital. Created and acknowledged by Moscow as a buffer state between Soviet Russia and the Japanese interventionist force, the FER could not completely cut off Japan's economic influence in the region. See John Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 147- 148.
[27] Vigdorchik, *Sotsial'noe strakhovanie,* 123.
[28] Ibid., 159- 161. In the Soviet era, the term "social security" (*obespechenie*) more specifically referred to social welfare spending that covered the wellbeing of servicemen and people performing special services. The proper Soviet counterpart of what is called in the United States as "social security" was "social insurance (*strakhovanie*)."
[29] "Iz protokola o material'nom obespechenii partizan i soldat," *Oktiabr' na Amure: Sbornik dokumentov* (Blagoveshchensk: Amurskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1961), 194-195.

Department of Social Security to specifically take care of the budgeting and fiscal management of programs for veterans and their dependents' welfare. Already heeding Moscow's guidance, the department aimed at efficiently managing and distributing financial resources in accordance with varied levels of neediness of the beneficiaries.[30] The large number of veterans in need of regular social security support, however, immediately overwhelmed the department's endeavor to universally cover all insured individuals. In Blagoveshchensk and its neighboring agricultural districts alone, nearly 6500 individuals had registered as veterans from both World War I and the Russian Civil War at the beginning of the fiscal year of 1922. With a monthly budget of 221,000 rubles, the provincial department of Social Security would only grant each registered individual a benefit of less than 13 rubles per month if it were to stick with the planned universal insurance.[31] The number of registered veterans in the Blagoveshchensk area, after all, was approximately one tenth of the border town's total population at that time.[32]

For the large number of laborers and veterans trying to figure out the landscape of social insurance in the newly founded, socialist-led FER, the numerous executive agencies and organizations that all took similar responsibility for implementing social insurance were confusing and counterproductive. In addition to the provincial department of Social Security, veterans could also turn to a regional council of social insurance (*strakhovyi sovet*) to claim certain welfare benefits, such as medical-care coverage. As for many ordinary citizens, there were at least three venues for seeking welfare benefits: the aforementioned council of social insurance, a Provincial Supervisory Agency for Social Insurance affairs (*oblastnii nadzor po*

[30] *Ibid*., 197.
[31] The source does not specify how the result of 13 rubles was calculated. I assume that the presumable beneficiaries included both registered veterans and their dependents in this case. "Otdel sotsial'nogo obespecheniia," *Vestnik Dal'nevostochnoi respubliki* no. 2 (June 1922): 70- 71.
[32] The Amur gubernatorial bureau of statistics' official documents indicated that Blagoveshchensk residents numbered about 62,000 in 1923. The number did not reflect the high volume of migrants in the border town. See Statisticheskoe Biuro Amurskoi gubernii, *Gorogskoe naselenie Amurskoii gubernii po perepisi 1923 goda*, 9.

delam strakhovaniia), and numerous smaller agencies for managing local social insurance funds (*strakhovaia kassa*).[33] Various agencies and setups supposedly provided different, specialized social insurance services for the public. Sickness and maternity benefits, for example, were handed out through local insurance offices, while the provincial council of social insurance oversaw and directly managed funding for healthcare benefits. However, people in need of these welfare benefits often found it directionless when having to navigate through the variety of administrative venues. A common complaint that FER officials heard about from many a social welfare beneficiary was the low efficiency and long waiting cycles for getting any welfare aid. With no clear directive from either Chita or Moscow, these agencies at local levels all seemed to play a role in managing and distributing unemployment benefits. However, those unemployed often had to bounce back and forth between these agencies and offices to only receive minimum or no benefits.[34]

The FER government's progressive attempt to materialize the socialist scheme towards universal welfare provision also stalled as a consequence of another setback that marked the Amur River Basin's bad luck in 1922 and 1923: the significantly diminishing crop yields of the region. The crop failure in part had to do with overall shrunken area of ploughed land in the region, as many farm owners and individual peasants deserted the land they once tended in the wake of revolutions and warfare.[35] The inauspicious weather also contributed to the diminished agricultural harvest. Spring arrived late in 1922 and the exceeding precipitation of the season subjugated much arable land in the Amur River Basin to constant flooding. Yields of major cash

[33] "Iz protokola o material'nom obespechenii partizan i soldat," 197- 199.
[34] "Sotsial'noe strakhovoe prisutstvie," *Vestnik Dal'nevostochnoi respubliki* no. 2 (June 1922): 79- 82. The bulletin article offered a glimpse into the perplexity and low efficiency of FER's social insurance systems. Individual cases mentioned in the article were centered on Vladivostok and the Maritime Province at large.
[35] A. M. Brianskii, *Krest'ianskoe khoziaistvo Dal'nevostochnoi oblasti porevoliutsionnyi period* (Khabarovsk: DV Oblastnoe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie, 1926), 74.

crops of the region in 1922 and 1923, including soybean, rice, and corn, were all 30 to 40 percent lower than the average level of the previous decade.[36] For the sizeable agricultural population working the most fertile land in the Amur and Maritime Provinces, the diminished crop yields meant loss of surplus crops for both government procurement and market trade. From the state's perspective, the agricultural community's loss of surplus crops translated into administrative management of agricultural taxation and overall food supply and local peasants' potentially increased demand for welfare benefits. Mutual aid societies for peasants (*krestiianskie obshchestva vzaimopomoshchi*) in Amur Province, the capstone organizations in the system of rural Russia's social welfare provision, had to request fiscal intervention and assistance from the FER government to fulfill peasant members' need for financial relief.[37] The FER government, in the meantime, was already struggling to guarantee universal benefits to its proletarian citizens.

All the aforementioned challenges that obstructed FER officials' attempt to provide the masses with universal social welfare programs remained when FER was dissolved into the RSFSR. In the extensive riverain plain on the left bank of the Amur River, state agents and local functionaries, now with the title of Soviet, continued to work out the institution of social welfare in order to fulfill the new regime's commitment to unleashing productivity of the borderlands and its people. In July 1923, regional authorities from the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee (*Dal'revkom*) passed the decision to rearrange administrative resources for managing social insurance and social security programs. According to the decision, *Dal'revkom* abolished the Council of Social Insurance and the Provincial Supervisory Agency for Social Insurance Affairs in the coming fiscal year and replaced them with a new administrative organ that directly responded to *Dal'revkom*: the Far Eastern Department of Social Insurance (*Dal'nevostochnoe*

[36] "Sel'skoe khoziaistvo," *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn' Dal'nego vostoka* no. 3 (June 1924): 96- 98.
[37] Brianskii, *Krest'ianskoe khoziaistvo,* 81- 82.

upravlenie sotsial'nogo strakhovaniia). *Dal'revkom*'s order came with the justification that concentration of administrative and monetary resources in a single governmental organ improved the effectiveness in implementing social insurance policies.[38] For *Dal'revkom*, it was essential to minimize red tape and simplify the process for those seeking welfare benefits. More importantly, the move towards a single administrative organ demonstrated that newly certified Far Eastern officialdom endorsed the social scientific approach to resolving social issues. In its newsletters, *Dal'revkom* stressed that a unified social insurance executive organ allowed the administration to efficiently collect and evaluate statistics of insured proletarians.[39] After all, the newly established department shouldered the responsibility for rationally providing social welfare assistance in the context of material scarcity and helping mitigate mass unemployment in the region. These issues facing the Far Eastern Department of Social Insurance were emblematic of broad, structural hurdles that kept the Soviet Northeast Asian borderlands from more efficiently achieving socioeconomic self-sufficiency.

The Far Eastern Department of Social Insurance and *Dal'revkom*'s solutions to the many a challenge besetting their implementation of social welfare programs in the middle and lower Amur River Basin were accordingly multifacted. Some solutions involved local political elite's adoption of policies enacted by Moscow. For example, *Dal'revkom* immediately enforced the Acts of Civil Status Code of Laws (*Akt granzhdanskogo sostoianiia*) in the whole oblast in 1922. The Code specified adult children's duty to support their parents in the conditions that the parents did not receive senior pensions for an extended period of time. It thus alleviated some fiscal pressure of the regional administration for providing social security to all of its senior

[38] "Khronika," *Biulleten' Dal'nevostochnogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta* (Chita: Izdanie Dal'revkoma, 1924), 122-123.
[39] Ibid., 125.

citizens.[40] Some other solutions were locally devised and tailored in line with regional economic and environmental conditions. They included the creation and expansion of travel funds (*transportnye kassy*) for those migrating into the Far Eastern jurisdiction. Among all eligible for claiming the travel funds, priority was first given to those who moved to and remained in designated agrarian areas for an extended period of time.[41] The arable and fertile soil in the southern belt of the Russian Amur country needed to be immediately taken care of in order to help jump start the economy against the backdrop of the decrease in utilized agricultural area and outflow of the farming population in the wake of revolutions, wars, and great political instability.

One theme regularly featuring in the realization of many of such solutions was the left bank's geopolitical character as Soviet Russia's North Asian borderlands. The discourse of marrying one's worthiness to social welfare with one's contributions to guarding and constructing the borderlands in the context of material scarcity and fiscal tightening particularly recurred in the administration's management of veteran affairs. In a detailed state of affairs statement put out by *Dal'revkom* in mid 1925, the administration addressed the issue of restricted financial means for social security expenditure. The notion of protection of borders (*okhrana granits*) appeared multiple times as one of the central principles for determining which social groups and individuals would be given precedence in the process of granting social welfare benefits. The statement specified that the order of veterans' receipt of social security benefits was first and foremost subject to their military service records. Those who fought against foreign expeditionary forces' military intervention in Transbaikal, Amur and Maritime Oblasts and

[40] Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*, 56- 57. As for the Code's enforcement in the newly founded Far Eastern Oblast and its impact on social insurance programs, see *Zapiska o sostoianii i nuzhdakh Dal'nevostochnogo kraia* (Khabarovsk: Dal'kraikom, 1927), 31- 33.
[41] L. Evstratov, "Sel'skoe khoziaistvo i khlebozagotovki v Iuzhnom Primor'e," *Sovetskoe Primor'e* no. 5 (May 1926): 18.

expelled them across the borders during the Civil War should take precedence in claiming unemployment and disability benefits.[42] In a similar vein, invalid veterans, their dependents, and families and dependents of those killed at the front in battles defending the Amur borderlands (*zashchita priamur'ia*) against the Whites and foreign intervention during the protracted Civil War could first receive free medical care locally.[43] Demobilized former servicemen were also entitled to first queuing for newly planned housing cooperatives (*zhilishchnaia kooperatiia*). Priority was again given to those who fought in the Civil War at the front of the Russian Amur country, followed by those with military records in the First World War.[44]

Funding for veterans and their dependents' social welfare benefits in the Far East was mainly derived from the centralized budgets of the People's Commissariat for Labor and the All-Union Council of Labor and Defense (STO) throughout the 1920s. The main challenge facing the local Department of Social Insurance in terms of managing and distributing available funds to veterans was to create an order that allowed efficiency at the expense of achieving absolute universality in short term. As discussed above, the middle and lower Amur River Basin's geopolitical nature as Soviet Russia's borderlands offered an expedient discursive entry point for local social insurance administration to intervene in the process of dispersing social security. Funding for the vast number of working people and their families under the social welfare umbrella, in the meantime, was derived from both state budget and contributions made by employers.[45] For local agencies administering the distribution of social welfare resources,

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[42] "Obzor kon'iunktury narodnogo khoziaistva DVO za 1925 g." *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn' Dal'nego vostoka* no. 7-8 (July-Auguest 1925): 26.
[43] Ibid., 28- 29.
[44] The source also self-contradictorily indicates that all demobilized servicemembers from World War I and the Civil War in the Amur Oblast could indiscriminately access housing resources with the financial benefits from state loans. P. Kh. Chausov, *Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo na Dal'nem Vostoke SSSR* (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institute, 1981), 66- 68, 71- 72.
[45] Vigdorchik, *Sotsial'noe strakhovanie*, 27.

challenges were doubled, as monetary insufficiency in social welfare funds occurred both upstream and downstream in dire economic conditions that defined most of the 1920s. In other words, the Soviet social welfare systems at the grassroots level in the Far East were marked with chronic funding deficit. On top of the already meager social insurance funds from Moscow and the provincial government, the Far Eastern Department of Social Insurance often found local employers' welfare contributions long overdue.[46]

In 1926, Moscow approved the reconfiguration of the Far East's administrative divisions into one unified Far Eastern Krai (*Dal'nevostochnii Krai*, or *Dalkrai* as in the following discussion) with Khabarovsk replacing Chita as the administrative center. In one of the first state of affairs statement released by the new *Dalkrai* Communist Party Committee (*Dalkraikom*), improvement of implementing social insurance programs, together with self-sufficient supply of foodstuffs and strict regulation of the coal and gold mining industries, were highlighted as some of the main goals that the recently reorganized regional government endeavored to achieve in the new era.[47] Later the same year, the Far Eastern Department of Social Insurance issued orders specifying the amount of contributions that employers of various industries were supposed to pay the reserve fund (*zapasnii fond*) for working people's social welfare benefits.[48] According to those orders, heavy industry and the transport industry paid as much as 18 percent of their employed wage laborers' incomes as mandatory welfare contributions. Employers in all industries, as mandated by the orders, should pay their contributions in full and on time. However, the existing literature on Soviet social insurance programs' enactment in the NEP era

[46] "Kon'iukturnyi obzor narodnogo khoziaistva DVO za oktabr'- dekabr' 1925," *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn' Dal'nego vostoka* no. 1 (January 1926): 51. For discussion of the strained relationship between the social welfare administration and employers in general during NEP, see Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*, 54-55, 81.
[47] "Kon'iukturnyi obzor narodnogo khoziaistva Dal'nevostochnogo Kraia za ianvar' 1926," *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn' Dal'nego vostoka* no. 2 (February 1926), 15- 17.
[48] "Postanovlenie po obiazatel'nomu sotsial'nomu strakhovaniiu," *Dal'nevostochnyi Krai v tsifrakh* no. 1 (1927), 77- 80.

suggests that employers across the board often failed to pay their contributions either in a timely manner or in full.[49] The responsibility for enforcing the orders fell on the shoulders of local social welfare agencies. In the setting of the Amur country, the Far Eastern Department of Social Insurance and its local executive offices in the Amur-Zeya District (*Amuro-Zeiskii raion*) had to work out strategies to maximize their collection of contributions from local employers.

The discourse of borders and borderlands again made its way into many strategies that proved to be instrumental in compelling employers to participate in making contributions to the state-led social welfare experiment. The middle and lower Amur River Basin's peculiar geopolitical nature as borderlands offered the Soviet state the means to broker new relationships with the citizens and enterprises it pledged to administer. An illustrative example were bouts of negotiations between the newly collectivized Amur River Shipping Company (AGRP) and the Department of Social Insurance in the mid and late 1920s. AGRP, a major employer in the region's transport industry, was ordered to pay nearly 20 percent of its boatmen's incomes as its obligatory welfare contributions in 1927. The company, however, was scrambling to generate revenue throughout the 1920s, let alone sparing a decent chunk of its earnings for state welfare funding. Pyotr Bondarenko, a member of the company's leadership, penned letters to the social welfare administration in Khabarovsk and addressed the difficulties that prevented AGRP from paying the welfare contributions in full:

> "Since the company still tries to make profit out of much reduced shipping lines, the financial contributions to social insurance funds only strain our shipping company's

[49] *Ibid*., 75. Russian and Soviet historiography contains rich discussion about the similar tension between social welfare administrative agencies and employers. For comprehensive summary of the literature, see Dorena Caroli, "Bolshevism, Stalinism, and Social Welfare: 1917- 1936," *International Review of Social Histiory* 48, no. 1 (2003), 35- 37.

operation… (AGRP) uses the thin revenue for maintenance of watercraft and other construction projects in the wintertime."[50]

Officials from both regional and district social insurance administrations responded. They explained that the entire workforce of the company would be the beneficiary of collective welfare funds in the long term. The company's indebtedness, as stated in the Amur-Zeya District social welfare administration's letter, would likely result in "its own workers' insurance benefits being placed on hold," when workers needed pension, health care, and temporary unemployment aid.[51] In his later response, Bondarenko further elucidated AGRP's reluctance to contribute in full. The shipping company's workforce, as he described, were strong boatmen and they rarely demanded health care or disability benefits. In other words, the return of AGRP's welfare investment was rather insignificant for the good of its manpower.[52]

The Krai Department of Social Insurance did not give up incentivizing and courting AGRP and its leadership to make full and timely social welfare contributions. In one of the follow-up letters, officials from the Khabarovsk headquarters suggested that the social welfare department could help petition *Dalkraikom* and the Commissariat of Transportation and Communication (NKPS) for reopening the AGPR's forsaken shipping lines into Harbin and Qiqihar in Manchuria. In another letter, social welfare officials in Khabarovsk brought up the patriotic duty of AGRP and the perks it might enjoy as a borderland transport enterprise:

[50] GAAO, f. R-116, op. 4, d. 3, ll. 11, 14.
[51] GAAO, f. R-116, op. 4, d. 3, l. 17.
[52] GAAO, f. R-116, op. 4, d. 3, ll. 22- 23.

> "(Your) transport service is essential in protecting and consolidating Soviet national interest in the Amur borderlands… OGPU and NKPS in *Dalkrai* would make sure to protect your shipping lines from Chinese and Japanese boats' direct competition and disturbance on Amur… It is Soviet Amur citizens' obligation to contribute to the economy and social reserve funds. The social reserve funds empower the company and the employees, especially on emergency occasions."[53]

It remained less clear if AGRP's indebtedness to the state social insurance agency changed over time. Local archival sources, however, indicated that AGRP boatmen had increasingly benefited from the Soviet social insurance funds. As the company's headquarters moved to Khabarovsk in 1928, its workers were allowed to apply for socialist housing with subsidies in the city's commune house projects (*dom-kommuna*).[54] What also helped soothe the mind of AGRP's leadership was that the Far Eastern bureau of the All-Union Trade Unions and social insurance administration categorized their boatmen as skilled laborers. That meant higher wages for the boatmen and better pensions after their retirement. More importantly, that meant AGRP's workforce received relatively generous fiscal support for various agendas, such as paid vocational training for new hires.[55] In one of the statistical notes released by the Department of Social Insurance that summarized its achievements in the past decade, the agency highlighted sectors and employers that made important contributions to the economic recovery and paved the way for the takeoff of industrialization of the Far East Krai. AGRP earned praise for facilitating exchanges of agricultural and consumer goods across the Amur borderlands.[56] The First Five-

[53] GAAO, f. R-116, op. 4, d. 3, l. 33.
[54] GAAO, f. R-201, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 2- 4.
[55] GAAO, f. R-201, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 9- 11.
[56] "Dostizhenie u upravlenii sotsial'nogo ctrakhovaniia," *Dal'nevostochnyi Krai v tsifrakh* no. 3 (1930): 23- 24.

Year Plan in *Dalkrai* was oriented towards two main sets of objects: increasing exploitation of the region's rich natural resources and decreasing material reliance on other players in the Northeast Asian economy, namely the Japanese Empire, the British Empire, and China.[57] The regional social insurance administration, one of the prominent state agencies, rewarded those enterprises that lent labor and talent to realizing the borderlands' self-sufficiency with a touch of favoritism.

Another key economic sector, whose major enterprises also won similar preference from the social insurance agency, was the gold mining industry. The Department of Social Insurance had qualified most of gold miners in the industry as skilled laborers. As a result, Soviet miners in the region were entitled to receive better benefits for the sake of unemployment, disability, and sickness. The unemployment payment for a gold miner could be as much as twice an average worker's same benefit.[58] The gold mining industry used to be heavily invested with foreign capital and its technology was on par with mines in more advanced economies, such as Germany. The necessity of maintaining the mining infrastructure and making the most of it to fuel Far Eastern economic productivity as well as the Soviet economy at large justified the stepped-up welfare benefits for miners.[59] *Dalkrai* authorities had high hopes for boosting productivity of small goldfields across the region and eventually creating some sort of mining behemoth comparable to the (in)famous Lena Goldfields Company in Eastern Siberia. According to the Department of Social Insurance's data, the gold mining industry provided more than 800

[57] Stephan, *The Russian Far East,* 190.
[58] In general, the social welfare benefits should still be characterized as meager, for even miners only received 2.4 rubles per day for unemployment aids. One of the contemporary journals from the 1920s that I have used as my primary source cost 12 rubles per issue! "Dostizhenie u upravlenii sotsial'nogo strakhovaniia," *Dal'nevostochnyi Krai v tsifrakh* no. 3 (1930): 24.
[59] Ibid., 26, 28. The gold mining industry seemed to still have heavy investment of foreign capital well into the First Five-Year Plan and European know-how continued to play an important role in maintaining the industry's competitiveness in the 1930s. See N, V. Mariasova, *Inostrannyi kapital na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossii v 20-30 gody* (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo DVGU, 2000), 29- 31.

new jobs for demobilized servicemen who migrated to and settled in the Far East. For the sake of veterans' proper settlement in the Far East and retention of an experienced labor force in general, it was essential to provide a good level of social welfare support in the mining industry.[60]

Historiography reveals that the gold mining sector in the Amur Province also employed a large number of predominantly seasonal Chinese migrant workers around the same time.[61] Unlike their fellow Soviet miners, these Chinese laborers received no insurance benefits, even though their labor contract included clauses about rights to basic welfare, such as paid sickness leaves and disability aid. The Soviet administration often cited fiscal deficits and material shortage when turning down requests to compensate Chinese miners in the form of basic social welfare.[62] It also showed the exclusive nature of Soviet citizenry, for citizenship transcended proletarian status as the fundamental marker for one's access to social welfare.

The discourse of border and borderlands became integral in creating and sustaining the hierarchy and preferences in the process, by which the state's social welfare agency legitimized and managed scarcity while keeping the promise of egalitarianism and universality in the redistribution of socioeconomic resources. Moreover, the Amur River Basin's particular geopolitical nature as the socialist nation's Northeast Asian borderlands featured regularly in the regional administration's tactics for job creation that helped lift the fiscal burden of the social welfare systems. The intersectionality of the two sets of undertakings- job creation and the operation of social welfare- dialectically reinforced the borderlands nature of the Amur country that drove the development of a regional political economy in the long run. One institute that

[60] "Dostizhenie u upravlenii sotsial'nogo ctrakhovaniia," 28- 30.
[61] Larin, *Kitaitsy v Rossii Vchera i Segodnia*, 71.
[62] Chen Hanshen, Lu Wendi, & Chen Zexian, ed., *Huagong Chuguo Shiliao Huibian (Volume n. 4)* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), 1805.

particularly epitomized such dynamics was the Far Eastern branch of the Soviet Customs Administration and many of its local customs houses along the border.

Unemployment was rampant across the board in Soviet Russia in the early 1920s. Major towns in the Far East were all mired in the same problem of high unemployment rates: 18 percent in Khabarovsk and a whopping 24 percent for Vladivostok in the fiscal year of 1924. The new Soviet elite in *Dal'revkom* blamed capitalism for the overwhelming unemployment crisis which it called residue of capitalism.[63] This residue posed a particularly trying challenge for the social welfare systems in the Far East, as the registered unemployed population had far exceeded state and local social insurance agencies' capacity for regulating and dispersing the limited welfare funding for the collective good. In 1924, the Department of Social Insurance reported to *Dal'revkom* that the lowest unemployment benefits had to drop below half a ruble per day. The broad demand would otherwise not be satisfied.[64] In response to the acute economic crisis, *Dal'revkom* launched the campaign named "clean-up of unemployment" (*chistka besrabotnykh*) in the same year and worked closely with all public administrative agencies, including the departments of labor, communications, and social insurance, to effectively create jobs and lower the unemployment rate.[65]

Dal'revkom first urged all employers in the public service sector to allow more room for employment in the form of community service. The social welfare department, however, indicated that rapid recovery and expansion of employment might also cause fiscal hardship for the regulation of public funding for social insurance. One caveat was that many public service

[63] "Otchet inspektsii truda," GAKhK, f. 920, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 6- 8. In addition, the Soviet welfare systems valued full employment and regarded the high employment as the ideal of effective labor market. For more discussion, see Galmarini-Kabala, *The Right to Be Helped*, 147-149.
[64] GAKhK, f. 920, op. 1, d. 4, l. 13.
[65] GAKhK, f. 920, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 17- 18.

employers only offered seasonal or temporary jobs, and that meant insured new hires would be qualified for claiming employees' benefits even in the months of unemployment.[66] However, as discussed in the same report, public employers whose undertakings involved transportation and international trading, such as the Amur Railway company, would be good candidates for job creation.[67] The Trans-Siberian railway surely was an ideal employer, as it provided transportation service yearlong and it was fueled with international trading and communication, especially cross-border economic activities with other geopolitical players of the region: the Chinese, the Japanese, and the looming British Empire.

In the regional social insurance agency's follow-up reports in 1924 and 1925, many a customs service office and customs houses along the border emerged as another major public employer that made significant contributions to job creation in the region. In Blagoveshchensk alone, the city's customs house added nearly 50 jobs within the fiscal year of 1925, and that record was only dwarfed by the city's fast growing food supply industry's 117 new jobs.[68] Blagoveshchensk's state as the frontline border town made possible the addition of numerous new jobs in the customs house. In the same vein, the need to guard the border brought about jobs and socioeconomic duties that engaged many of those who otherwise would stay jobless for an extended period of time. More importantly, the customs service systems along the border did not rely as heavily on centralized funding as many other public service employers. Confiscated contraband, once retained onsite, became the substitute for scarce social welfare benefits for the employees in many cases.[69] As for the scenario that concerned the social welfare agency, namely

[66] GAKhK, f. 920, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 2, 6- 7.
[67] GAKhK, f. 920, op. 1, d. 6, l. 9.
[68] GAKhK, f. 920, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 18- 20.
[69] RGIA DV, f. 2443, op. 1, d. 33, ll. 46- 47, 50- 53. The third chapter of this dissertation contains more detailed discussion of the hidden perks of customs service employees in the Soviet Far East.

the insured workers' cluster claim on social insurance benefits due to layoff or temporary job suspension, the Department of Social Insurance only logged two cases in Blagoveshchensk's two customs offices in 1925.[70]

The discursive power of border and borderlands in driving the development of Far Eastern Krai's political economy was manifest in another anecdote. The Far Eastern Economic Planning Committee (*Dal'plan*) approved an emergency bill that allowed for the temporary creation of 18 extra check and quarantine points by the Far Eastern branch of the Soviet Customs Service, for rumor had it that a contagious epizootic was discovered in Manchuria, and it needed to be stopped at the extensive border. Two months passed and no mass transmission of any epizootic had been found or substantiated. Instead of rescinding the 18 new check points, *Dal'plan* proposed to keep them as part of the customs infrastructure for safeguarding the borderlands from contagious diseases in the future. *Dal'plan*'s officials had confidence that "Moscow would approve of this project of strengthening border security with funding."[71]

In the similar vein, *Soiuzkhleb*, the state agency that took charge of grain procurement, perceived the discourse of border and borderlands as an effective tool for managing the dicey situation of peasants' failed cooperation in provision of foodstuffs. The grain procurement crisis of 1928-29 across the Soviet Union alerted *Soiuzkhleb* officials to Soviet peasants' uncooperative response to grain requisitioning. In the Soviet Far East, *Soiuzkhleb* officials had another layer of concern: peasants took advantage of their cross-border ties to the grain market in Manchuria and made profit there off their surplus crops. To address the problem of local peasants' unwillingness to comply with the state orders, officials from *Priamur'e Soiuzkhleb* proposed twice that those

[70] GAKhK, f. 920, op. 1, d. 6, l. 21.
[71] "K Voprosu ob okhrane DVO ot epizootii," *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn' Dal'nego vostoka* no. 4 (August 1926): 202-205.

who were found trading grain across the border in international markets should not receive further subsidies for agricultural fertilizers and other similar financial aid.[72] The vignette again shows how the discourse of border and borderland, as the defining geo-social feature of *Priamur'e*, had become entrenched in the local state agencies' techniques of governance. Considering how fiscal and material provision was stretched thin in the early Soviet era, the Far East social welfare administration's invocation of and recourse to the borderland discourse enabled the state agency to efficiently direct and distribute limited resources to a multitude of individuals and enterprises all in need of social security. In the long run, the repetition of such a technique in governing practices reinforced the imagination of *Priamur'e* by those insured in the welfare systems as a separate place detached from the right bank.

[72] GAKhK, f. R-353, op. 3, d. 53, ll. 15, 22-23.

EPILOGUE

As I wrap up this dissertation in the early spring of 2022, the United States, the European Union, Japan, and many other industrialized nations have recently announced the harshest economic sanctions against Russia for Vladimir Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. The sanctions have brutally crippling impacts on ordinary Russians' daily life to say the least: sharply hiking prices of consumer products, plummeting value of the ruble, and the rapidly growing unemployment rate first due to the exodus of many international businesses. This, of course, is not the first time Russians have lived under the shadow of economic warfare. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the ripple effects of Western nations' economic sanctions against Russia and Moscow's retaliatory responses have seeped into Russian people's everyday experience. For example, the Russian government banned wholesale imports of foodstuffs from the EU in retaliation for its sanctions in 2014. As a result, Italian Parmesan, Dutch Gouda, and other European cheese have been off the shelf in Russian grocery shops. Average consumers have had to pay through the nose to chase the limited amount of European cheese that got around the ban and made it to the black market.[1]

But Russia is a big country. When those living in the European part of the country were fretting about the disrupted supply of Spanish ham, Italian cheese, and Polish apples, they assumed that their compatriots living seven time zones away in the Far Eastern end of the

[1] Maria Kiselyova & Olga Popova, "Russian Cheese Lovers Find Way Round Import Ban," *Reuters,* April 7, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-sanctions-food/russian-cheese-lovers-find-way-round-import-ban-idUSKCN0X40SC WSJ has published some in-depth articles detailing the latest sanctions' immediate impacts on Russian economy. For examples, see Ian Talley, Daniel Michaels, Jon Hilsenrath, "How the U.S. and EU Cut Russia Off from the Global Economy," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-the-u-s-and-eu-cut-russia-off-from-the-global-economy-11647595980?mod=Searchresults_pos14&page=1
To add a quick note on personal level, I am completely against the war, and I am unconditionally with Ukrainian people first and foremost. My comments on the crippling effect of the West's sanctions on Russian economy primarily serve the interest my argumentation in this epilogue. I only sympathize with Russians who oppose the war and yet suffer from the demotic economic consequences of the war.

country should feel the economic impacts to some much lesser degree. After all, China is just on the other side of the Amur-Ussuri border, and those living in Pacific Russia should be able to get whatever they wanted from China all year round. Such an assumption that the Russian Far East had been intertwined with its East Asian neighbors, especially China, in trade, investment, and socioeconomic development in general has pervaded European Russia in recent years. To many, the close economic relationship between Pacific Russia and China seemed more concerning than relieving. The region's growing material and fiscal reliance on China indicated that the latter might hold too much sway over Russia in geopolitics in the long run.[2]

However, what has happened on the ground in the Russian Far East does not validate such an assumption. Against the backdrop of Moscow's strategic turn to the East, *Kommersant*, one of contemporary Russia's major national newspapers, published a thoroughly researched special feature story on the social and economic life along the Sino-Russian border in the Far East in 2016. Titled "State of the Borderlands (*Pogranichnoe sostoianie*)," the story served to familiarize readers with the Russian Far Eastern borderland and more importantly, to debunk many a myth about the level of the borderland's entanglement with China. More than a dozen of interviews of Pacific Russia-based academics, businesspeople, and government officials highlighted in the story reveal that China's social and economic influence over the Russian Far East was far less pervasive than many had considered. According to the interviewees, the Chinese had been actively engaged in various cross-border economic activities, but they had by

[2] Any search engine could yield pages of journalistic content about Russia's increasing reliance on trade with China and Russians' complicated views on China's influence over Pacific Russia's economy in recent years. I have found some longer pieces of analytical work doing a much better job of tracing the evolving international relations between China and Pacific Russia and Russians' complex reactions to the asymmetrical interdependency. For examples, see Alexander Gabuev, *Friends with Benefits? Russian-Chinese Relations After the Ukraine* Crisis (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2006); Kulintsev Iurii V., "Bol'shoe evraziiskoe partnerstvo: Problemy sopriazheniia s mezhdunarodnymi intergratsionnymi proektami" (PhD diss., Institut Dal'nego Vostoka Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 2020).

no means played any major role in structuring and maintaining the economic networks of the Far Eastern borderland. In addition to local Russian business and political elites, those who also had the power in shaping the trajectory of the borderland's economic growth predominantly come from Russia's near abroad. In the Amur Oblast, for example, "Azerbaijani businessmen control the retail market, and the Armenians control the restaurant industry."[3]

In terms of the demographic change in contemporary *Priamur'e*, the assumption that the Chinese are coming in droves and soon taking over Pacific Russia has not been proven valid either. In the interview appearing in *Kommersant*'s feature story, the Far Eastern program director of the Institute of Oriental Studies reveals that Uzbeks, Ukrainians, and Armenians have been the largest ethno-national groups among the recipients of temporary and permanent permits of residence in the Amur Oblast. In 2015, for instance, 655 Uzbeks, 597 Ukrainians, and 593 Armenians obtained their permits of residence. In comparison, only 22 Chinese acquired theirs at the same time. The seemingly omnipresent Chinese in Russian Far Eastern border towns are predominantly on short-term tourist, study, and work visas. Russophone scholarship on contemporary Pacific Russia has also highlighted the same trend of the region's population change: Central Asian immigrants, more notably Uzbeks, have primarily driven and sustained the population growth in urban areas of the Russian Far East.[4]

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[3] The feature story is digitally accessible from the newspaper's website. See Margarita Fedorava, "Pogranichnoe sostoianie: Zhizn' mezhdu Rossiei i Kitaem," *Kommersant.ru*, March 3, 2016, https://www.kommersant.ru/projects/china?stamp=637838933827976397
The terms of Russian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian here only refer to the civic nationalities of the business and political elite in the Far East. They could be of various ethno-national descents. In the post-Soviet Russian discourse, near abroad means the other fourteen former Soviet republics. It is a very problematically Russo-centric term. I apologize for adopting it for the purpose of serving the interest of this epilogue's argumentation without further scrutinizing the term.

[4] For the interview of Vladimir Neveikin, the program director at the Institute of Oriental Studies, see the same *Kommersant.ru* digital copy. For data on how Uzbek and other Central Asian immigrants have sustained the slow growth of urban population in the Amur Oblast (the Russian Far East's population shrinks quite drastically outside of the major urban areas), see A. S. Garifullin, R. N. Pavlinova, D. V. Rudenkin, A. N. Starostin, *Musul'mane na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossii: istoriia i sovremennost'* (Kazan': Tipografiia Algoritm, 2020), 424-435.

All in all, the snapshots of quotidian life in contemporary *Priamur'e* from *Kommersant'*s feature story and the corresponding negation of some myths about the Far Eastern borderland's exceeding reliance on China demonstrate how the socioeconomic separation of the Amur River Basin, the central topic of this dissertation, has been consequential to this day. The socioeconomics of the left bank borderlands remains oriented towards Moscow and better integrated with the geospatially distanced near abroad than with neighboring East Asian communities from just across the border today.

This dissertation offers some glimpses into the historical process, by which the built environment, communication and trading networks, and the demographic composition of the Soviet left bank underwent drastic transformation: severing existing ties with the right bank and blending in with the centralized Soviet developmental project. The enterprises and institutions examined in the body chapters above still play important roles in shaping and assuring contemporary *Priamur'e* communities' self-identification at the national and transnational levels: that Pacific Russia is essential in the Russian state's endeavor to pivot to the East, and their homeland socioeconomics retain the fair share of independence amid neighboring East Asian nations' oversized influence. The Zeya and Bureya hydropower stations, for example, have become the engineering wonders that proudly epitomize Pacific Russia's energy independence and efficiency. The Khabarovsk Customs House now serves the world's largest customs jurisdiction by territorial size. As for the Amur Shipping Company, it was privatized after the collapse of the USSR and soon was acquired by Russia Forest Products (RFP), the largest forestry company in Asiatic Russia in the mid 1990s. Over the past two years, the news that a Japanese conglomerate's potential investment in RFP could make the Japanese the majority shareholder of RFP has stirred fierce debate among the public in *Priamur'e*. The Japanese

ownership of RFP and the Amur Shipping Company hit a nerve for many who have clung to it as the backbone of the Russian Far East's inland water transport. After all, it reminds them of the loss of what the "separation" over the past century had achieved: material self-sufficiency and economic self-determination.[5]

The story of separation did not end in the 1940s, and neither did it only pertain to the left bank. Manchuria, the southern half of the Amur River Basin, experienced a no less dramatic transformation throughout the twentieth century. During the first half of the century, Manchuria was successively under four different governing bodies: the Qing, the Republic of China, Imperial Japan via its puppet regime, and finally Communist China. To borrow the key analytical term in Ed Pulford's ethnography on contemporary Sino-Russian borderlands in Northeast Asia, I find the makeover of Manchuria's built environment, logistical networks, and demographic profiles under Chinese communism a "mirrored version" of what *Priamur'e* had gone through since the 1920s.[6] The PRC took advantage of the region's colonial legacies, including the intact transport infrastructure, and invested heavily in improving them in hopes of pulling off rapid industrialization. Determined to make the most of the fertile black soil of the region, the communist state also drew blueprint for turning Manchuria into the nation's "northern granary" and mapped out centralized supply chains for the Northeast's grain to feed more mouths nationwide. Eager to materialize the industrial and agricultural experiments there and showcase

[5] I have followed the Instagram accounts of several Far Eastern regional newspapers and mass media, and the comment sections of these accounts have been a major source for my gauge of ordinary Far Easterners' thoughts about major news and events. For journalistic coverage of the Japanese corporate's investment in RFP, see Mariia Stroiteleva, "Iapontsy zainteresovalis' rossiiskim lesom," *Lenta.ru*, October 21, 2021, https://lenta.ru/news/2021/10/21/les/

[6] Ed Pulford, *Mirrorlands: Russia, China, and Journeys in* Between (London: Hurst & Company, 2019), 8-10.

the merit of planned socialist economy, Beijing orchestrated mass internal migration into Manchuria through both incentives and coercion.[7]

The 1950s marked a brief period of brotherhood in the history of Sino-Soviet relations. Manchuria, thanks to the Chinese communist leaders' branding of it as the "birthplace of China's industrialization," welcomed the arrivals of large numbers of Soviet engineers, scientists, educators, and other experts. Such bilateral interaction, however, was the fulfillment of highly organized state-to-state political and economic transactions. The trans-border communication at the grassroots level between the left bank *Priamur'e* and the right bank Manchuria remained cut off. The 1960s witnessed the two communist countries drifting further and further apart, and the strained relations translated into military conflicts on the very Amur-Ussuri border in 1969. The border conflicts not only set the antagonistic tone for the Sino-Soviet relations in the next two decades, but also deepened the misunderstanding, mistrust, and fear of each other that had been looming since the two sides were in close contact. In recent years, several Anglophone travel writings on the Amur have been published. The authors have all perceptively observed and described the persistent mistrust and fear in the cross-border interactions between Russians and the Chinese in the Far East. The mutual feeling of mistrust and fear annotates the lukewarm Northeast Asian regional integration on the ground despite the declaration by Russian and Chinese leaders of strategic partnership in the international arena.[8]

In their article "Transnationalism in One Country," Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch scrutinize and rethink the use of transnationalism as a productive analytical framework in

[7] Ning Wang, *Banished to the Great Northern Wilderness: Political Exile and Re-education in Mao's China* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2017), 111-122.
[8] Dominic Ziegler, *Black Dragon River: A Journey Down the Amur River at the Borderlands of Empires* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 155-158. Collin Thubron, *The Amur River: Between Russia and China* (New York: Harper, 2021), 170-176. See also Pulford, *Mirrorlands*, xiii-xiv.

studying Soviet migration.[9] This story of the left bank's social and material transformation, its decoupling from the right bank from the 1920s to the 1940s, and the long-lasting legacies, in some sense, is a display of the triumph of the Soviet transnationalism. *Priamur'e*'s evolution from a distinct borderland into a periphery that much resembled any Soviet heartland sheds light on how the various republics and diverse ethno-national communities were knitted together into Soviet transnationalism through material construction, reconfiguration of communication and trading networks, and mass internal migration. After the collapse of the USSR, the intra-Union transnational connections remain robust and supersede the naturally existing transnationalism based on geospatial proximity in the literal near abroad. As evidenced in the Amur River Basin, the left bank is still well embedded in the once internal transnationalism formed in the Soviet era while "worlds apart" from China on the right bank. That is why, I contend, there could hardly emerge a socioeconomically well-integrated Vancouver-Seattle-Portland mega region on the other side of the Pacific Ocean at the same latitude. That might also offer some insights into why Putin became exceptionally bitter and agitated when seeing some former Soviet republics drift away from Moscow and the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and responded with military aggression in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2022.

[9] Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, "Transnationalism in One Country? Seeing and Not Seeing Cross-Border Migration within the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review*, 75, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 970-986.

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