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A Land Divided: Sakhalin and the Amur Expedition of G.I. Nevel'skoi, 1848-1855

By Sharyl Corrado

Abstract

In histories and geographies of Russia, Sakhalin Island, off the east coast of Siberia, is often treated as separate from the mainland, an isolated island sharing little with its neighbor across the strait. Yet this has not always been the case. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Amur River and its delta were viewed as a unit centered on waterways, and included the mainland to the north of the river and Sakhalin across the delta to its east. To Russians, it was an unknown wilderness, unmapped, uninhabited, and of little interest to the state. Yet this was changing, as an increase in Pacific shipping rendered the region economically and geo-politically strategic. This article examines the negotiation of Russia's eastern border, a conflict not between nations, but between liberal Russians, who sought to locate 'natural,' scientific borders, and the Tsar's conservative statesmen, intent on preserving the status quo. To the state, the land was Chinese based on a seventeenth-century treaty, although the exact border was unknown and unimportant. Naval officer Gennadii Nevel'skoi disagreed, arguing that the land was naturally Russian, and vital to Russia's interests. After four years of exploration, Nevel'skoi and his supporters finally convinced the Tsar of the region's Russianness and importance, and the Tsar ordered in troops and a Russian administration. In the process, however, the region was divided, the mainland becoming Russian both administratively and in the Russian imagination, while Sakhalin became the 'other,' imagined as separate from Russia and governed as such.

Keywords

Sakhalin; Amur; Russian empire; Russian Far East; Borders

As Admiral Gennadii Nevel'skoi told the story more than two decades later, he had been a hero—a valiant explorer who relinquished the comforts of civilization and risked his career to rescue savages from oppression and restore lost lands to their rightful ruler. On 12 July 1850, two years after his departure from St. Petersburg, the young Lieutenant Commander Nevel'skoi and a crew of eight were exploring the barren Amur River delta in eastern Siberia by rowboat. One hundred kilometers upstream, they happened upon a crowd of Nivkhs and Ul'chas gathered around a Manchu chieftain, who sat importantly on a stump.¹ When he saw the unexpected visitors, the Manchu elder questioned their presence in those parts, but Nevel'skoi insisted they had a 'complete and exclusive right to be here' and that not the Russians, but the Manchus must

immediately depart. The chieftain summoned his men to attack, but soon acquiesced when Nevel'skoi pulled a pistol from his pocket. The indigenous onlookers, Nevel'skoi reported, burst into laughter, while the elder grew pale, jumped from his stump, swore that he desired only friendship, and invited Nevel'skoi to dinner.²

While it seems to belong more to an adventure film than to the annals of diplomatic history,³ in Nevel'skoi's account, it was this comical and seemingly chance encounter that prompted his declaration of the territory to be Russian, an unauthorized assertion contentious at the time and a source of tension for years to come. The interactions that followed allegedly convinced Nevel'skoi of not only his right, but his *duty* to assert Russia's claim to the Amur Liman—the narrow, muddy lagoon near the mouth of the river—along with Sakhalin to its east and the mainland Amur basin to its west. While authorities in St. Petersburg considered the territory Chinese, Nevel'skoi allegedly learned at this meeting that the Qing had no military posts on the lower Amur River,⁴ and that local peoples paid no tribute to the emperor. He reported that the Nivkhs distrusted the Manchus, who were breaking Qing law by trading in foreign lands. He also learned—so we are told—that foreign ships pillaged their villages each spring, likely from among the numerous American whaling vessels in the Sea of Okhotsk. Nevel'skoi explained in his memoir that for all of these reasons, he proclaimed to aboriginals and Manchus alike that while Russians had not set foot there in many years, they had *always* considered the region their own. Henceforth, both the land and people would be protected by the tsar. He allegedly confirmed his pronouncement with a written declaration: 'In the name of the Russian state, I hereby declare to all foreign ships sailing in the Gulf of Tatar that... the shores of the Gulf and the Pri-amur region ... along with Sakhalin Island are Russian domains [*rossiiskiiia vladeniia*].'⁵

While the details are likely apocryphal, Nevel'skoi's declaration and the responses it evoked illuminate conflicting views within Russia of its border in the east. Narratives of Russian history tend to treat Russia's eastward expansion as either conquest—an aggressive Russian state conquering foreign lands—or as a natural process of expansion that took place over centuries. In the 1840s, as growing nationalism plagued the empires of Europe, Russians faced a crisis of identity. Russia was simultaneously a nation and an empire, *ruskii* and *rossiiskii*, with no clear distinction between the two. While the term *rossiiskii* refers generally to the empire, and *ruskii*

to the nation, at the time, the terms were often used interchangeably, failing to distinguish between its empire and Russia itself. Indeed, such a distinction was difficult to make. Russia had been founded through expansion and the assimilation of indigenous peoples, a fact emphasized fifty years later with historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii's famous assertion that 'the history of Russia is the history of a country colonizing itself.'⁶

In the context of European nationalism, defining Russia became a matter of particular significance. Avoiding the question of Russia's physical geography, Tsar Nicholas I defined Russia by the triad of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and *Narodnost*'—the last an ambiguous term referring to purportedly recognizable characteristics of Russians themselves. This was insufficient, however, to the European-educated liberals of the 1840s, who were afraid for their motherland and pushed for reform. Influenced by romantic nationalism in Europe and its resulting quests for national histories and homelands, these young nationalists strove to discover their fatherland's heritage and natural borders.⁷ The resulting tension was felt more than 6000 km from St. Petersburg, as Nevel'skoi's exploration incited re-mapping of Russia itself.

While the mid-nineteenth century was an age of nationalism, it was likewise an era of imperialism, albeit no longer the annexation of nearby land and peoples characteristic of the Ottomans, Austrians, and Russians themselves. As the industrial revolution eased travel across oceans and around the world, European powers competed for colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Having a colonial empire implied power and prestige, and those who failed to defend their land risked losing it to the colonialism of others. To compete, Russia had to not only establish its borders as a nation, but to join the race for colonial acquisitions. In the Caucasus, Russia confronted Persia, Britain, and France, while it competed with Persia and later Britain for Turkestan. While contiguous, both Turkestan and the Caucasus were unapologetically colonies, considered non-Russian land with non-Russian peoples whom Russia sought to 'civilize' and exploit for their resources. Alaska—or Russian America—was the nation's only overseas colony, albeit of waning value with the decline of the fur trade.⁸ Sakhalin was soon to become its second.

A number of questions plagued Russians concerning their country's boundary in the East. Where was Russia's 'real' border, and how was it determined? According to folklore, Russia was unbounded and unmeasurable. For a land inhabited by subjects of neither, what did it mean to be labeled Russian or Chinese? If the Amur Basin did belong to Russia—as Nevel'skoi and others

claimed—was it part of Russia itself, which had expanded naturally over the centuries? Or was it a colony, a land strategic and prestigious to Russia, but separate from the Russian homeland? In the context of both nationalism and imperialism, these questions could no longer be ignored.

THE AMUR BASIN

The Amur River basin [figure 1] had long maintained an ambiguous relationship with Russia. Explorers and traders reached the lower Amur in the 1640s, and for the next four decades, Russian Cossacks collected tribute from the indigenous peoples of the region. Nineteenth-century Russians were familiar with the territory through the life of Protopope Avvakum, exiled there in 1653. Yet when the powerful Qing dynasty turned its attention to the north, Russia agreed to the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689), which declared the border ambiguously ‘from the top of the cliffs or rocky mountains in which is the source ... of the Gorbitsa River and along the peaks of those mountains to the sea.’⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, no one knew which river was once the Gorbitsa or which mountains constituted its source. For the next 150 years—as a Russian exile recalled in his memoirs—‘the two neighbouring empires did not know accurately what distance separated them, and what was in the interior.’¹⁰

Events of the 1840s granted the region new significance not only to Russia, but to the world. In 1842, Britain defeated China in the first Opium War, leading to the opening of ports and new shipping in the region. To its north, the Sea of Okhotsk was a hotbed of the whaling industry, while to the south, the United States hoped to open Japan to trade. Russian statesmen knew that if the Amur proved navigable, a natural highway would not only connect Siberian resources with emerging markets, but it would grant enemies access to Russia’s interior. Nicholas I seemed eager to acquire what he labeled the ‘Russian [*rusaskaia*] river Amur,’¹¹ but hesitated out of fear of antagonizing the Chinese. Two covert expeditions were dispatched to explore the region, but no channel was located. The Tsar authorized no further exploration.

The writings of Nevel’skoi and his associates shed light on the process through which the mainland Amur region—once considered distant, insignificant, and foreign—became ‘inalienable property of Russia,’¹² while Sakhalin—once an integral component of the Amur River Basin—became separated from the mainland, no longer part of the Amur region, and no longer Russia at all. While the written word does not accurately represent physical reality, and perceptions reflect preconceptions of the viewer, these reports and diaries served as a lens

through which the region became known to the Russian state. When the Tsar proclaimed the mainland Amur basin Russian in 1853, the Amur he claimed was that of Nevel'skoi and his associates. The Sakhalin Russia invaded was that of Boshniak and Voronin, sent by Nevel'skoi to report on the region. Through these documents decisions were made that define Russia even today.

DEFINING RUSSIA

To Russian liberals seeking reform, a key aspect of defining Russia was locating its natural, historical boundaries, those defined by geography rather than diplomacy, by ethnography rather than conquest. In Berlin, geographer Carl Ritter was teaching that true states were organic, with borders determined by physical geography and historical patterns of settlement. According to him it was biologically necessary for nations to expand along naturally-determined routes.¹³ Influenced by Ritter—an honorary member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences—as well as other European scholars, Western-leaning Russians founded the Russian Geographical Society in 1845 to ‘facilitate knowledge of the Russian [*rusaskaia*] land and the Russian people [*ruskii narod*],’ as secretary Petr Semenov later explained.¹⁴ Meanwhile, at Moscow University, historian Sergei Solov'ev contributed to the cause by teaching that true Russian territory was united geographically by its extensive river system, which had enabled expansion throughout the centuries.¹⁵ Although Solov'ev analyzed pre-modern Russian settlement across European Russia, there was nothing to prevent his theory from applying farther east in the modern era.¹⁶ Specifying Russia's exact eastern border was impossible, as the land remained unmapped, and hence, unknown.

Even labeling the territory was problematic. Much has been written on the gradual, ambiguous, and even today incomplete process through which Siberia became Russian [*ruskii*, part of the Russian nation] in the mid to late nineteenth century.¹⁷ Until 1884, East Siberia was governed by a governor general [*general-gubernator*], a colonial official familiar primarily from the British colonies. The Amur territory was *east* of East Siberia, even further removed from Russia's European heartland. Moreover, the designation ‘Amur’ had no clear referent. The term ‘Amur region’ [*amurskii krai, priamur'e, amurskaia oblast'*] most often denoted not the geographical zone of the Amur River basin, but the river itself and the land to its immediate north.¹⁸ Sakhalin was also part of the Amur region in the 1840s. In an 1849 memo written before

Nevel'skoi's arrival in the east, a special committee in St. Petersburg defined the 'Amur territory' [*mestnost' Amura*] as 'the mainland shore on the left [north] side of the river *and the northern shore of Sakhalin Island.*'¹⁹ (emphasis mine) The changing definition of the *Priamur'e*, and in particular, the changing position of Sakhalin in regard to the Amur, provide insight into the establishment of the border and the defining of Russia itself.

The ambiguity of borders

Scholars today recognize the ambiguity and instability of borders, emphasizing the difference between the physical geography of a region—including the borders experienced on the ground—and a person's mental map, representing the perceptions and knowledge that a person has of an area, often through maps and descriptions of the region. In his memoir, Nevel'skoi made a similar distinction between borders that existed *myslennno*—as an idea—shown on maps through which the region was known to outsiders, and those which existed *fakticheski*, or in fact, visibly dividing the territory.²⁰ Yet *myslennnye*—imagined—borders were created by more than maps alone. In this essay, I trace the process through which mainland territory shown on maps as Chinese was re-imagined as 'inalienable property of Russia,' inseparable from the historic Russian heartland, while Sakhalin became detached from the Amur basin.²¹ When Nevel'skoi arrived in 1848, neither side of the Liman was *fakticheski* Russian, although he claimed both in the name of the Tsar. In less than a decade, an island previously unknown, considered by explorers to be a natural extension of the Amur basin, became imagined as 'other'—not part of the Amur, and not even Russian at all. In an era of both nation-building and imperial expansion, the mainland Amur basin became part of the nation, while Sakhalin became part of its empire.

Surprisingly little has been written about Russia's acquisition of the Amur region. In the Soviet narrative of Russian expansion, Russia's right to both Sakhalin and the mainland Amur basin is taken for granted, the position held by Nevel'skoi in the 1840s but disputed at the time by the Russian state. Soviet scholars emphasized the settlement of 'empty' wilderness and the protection of its exploited peoples, often portraying Nevel'skoi as a heroic patriot.²² In English-language scholarship, the hero is often Nikolai Murav'ev, the East Siberian governor who spearheaded Russia's acquisition of the territory and negotiated the Treaty of Aigun in 1858, adding 600,000 square kilometers to the empire, an act referred to alternately as 'annexation' or 'conquest.'²³ Recent emphasis on Russia's position as a multi-national empire has led to a focus

on the Russification of the Amur *people*, rather than the land, and to acknowledgment that its longtime inhabitants were neither Russian nor Chinese.²⁴ Mark Bassin's masterful *Imperial Visions* powerfully demonstrates the discursive significance of the region in the quest for a Russian national identity,²⁵ yet even he treats the Amur region as ending naturally at the Liman. Even historiographically, Sakhalin has been separated from the Russian mainland.

Through exploration and diplomacy, both Siberia and the mainland Amur region became *russkii*—part of the Russian nation—in the mid-nineteenth century, a status seldom questioned since then, despite the chaos of wars, decolonization, and the rise and fall of the USSR. Sakhalin, however, did not. Although the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg granted Sakhalin to Russia, in Russian minds Sakhalin became a colony, a non-Russian territory governed by Russia, a status it holds for many Russians even today. To Anton Chekhov, who visited the island in 1890, Sakhalin served as an 'other' against which Russianness itself was redefined.²⁶ While some Russians adopted Nevel'skoi's view of the island as rightfully belonging to Russia, others noted that the Japanese had been there decades, possibly centuries, before any Russians arrived.²⁷ Soviet historians, in contrast, cited a presumed seventeenth-century discovery of Sakhalin to support Russia's right to the entire island.²⁸ Outside of Russia, John J. Stephan, author of the authoritative English-language history of Sakhalin, depicts the island as historically Chinese, while Japanese historian Akizuki Toshiyuki emphasizes that the land belonged to its indigenous inhabitants, themselves subjects of the Qing.²⁹ Yet the question of to whom Sakhalin truly belongs predates the attention granted Sakhalin in print.

THE AMUR LIMAN

When Gennadii Nevel'skoi departed for the Far East in 1848, fundamental differences existed between his own mental map of the region and that of the Tsar's ministers in St. Petersburg. The official state map of Asian Russia [*Aziatskaia Rossiia*]³⁰—through which the statesmen know the region—placed the Sino-Russian border well to the north of the Amur.³⁰ [See figure 2] Yet this was the *myslennaia* border described by Nevel'skoi, one which appeared on maps but corresponded little to patterns of settlement or state control. Moreover, as imagined by the ministers, the Amur River was unnavigable, a 'fact' demonstrated as recently as 1846, rendering it of little value to the state. No one knew for certain whether Sakhalin was an island.

Many older maps depicted it as such, but recent explorers such as Ivan Kruzenshtern, who explored the region in 1805, had failed to find a strait between Sakhalin and the mainland. [See figure 3] The most detailed maps, therefore, depicted Sakhalin as a peninsula.

A top graduate of the Naval Cadet Corps familiar with recent developments in geography, Nevel'skoi shared the quest of the Russian Geographical Society for a Russian national identity.³¹ Nevel'skoi was almost certainly familiar with the works of Carl Ritter, which describe in detail the seventeenth-century Russian discovery and exploration of the Amur basin.³² He also associated closely with his Naval College acquaintance Aleksandr Balasoglo, a member of the Russian Geographical Society and archivist at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to Balasoglo, who was influenced by Ritter and had studied the history of the region in the archives, East Siberia was part of a larger Russia that stretched to the Pacific, the 'natural purpose' [*estestvennoe naznachenie*] of which was to serve Russia as a whole.³³ Together Nevel'skoi and Balasoglo planned a joint expedition to the Amur delta, the latter to travel through Siberia and down the river itself, while Nevel'skoi would approach by sea. Balasoglo was forced to abandon his plans, while Nevel'skoi accepted an assignment to deliver supplies to Kamchatka in 1848, intent on exploring the Amur delta further southward as well.

Abstract belief in a Russian national homeland was not the sole motivation for Nevel'skoi's exploration. As a skilled navigator who knew the charts and notes of past explorers, Nevel'skoi distrusted their conclusions. He believed that the Amur River was navigable, writing before his departure, 'is it possible that such a vast river as the Amur would fail to carve an outlet into the sea and instead get lost in the sand?'³⁴ If this were true, whether or not the land was naturally Russian, it was strategic to Russia. In an age of imperialism, it was crucial that Russia establish its presence there before its rivals did, both to profit from Pacific trade and to protect Siberian resources. Balasoglo shared this view, warning the newly-appointed Governor General of East Siberia, Nikolai Murav'ev, 'If Russia does not wish to recognize its treasures, someone else will. A holy place will not remain empty!'³⁵ Murav'ev would soon become Nevel'skoi's biggest supporter, his name associated forever with Russia's acquisition of the Amur.³⁶

While they disagreed about the region's geography and significance, neither Nevel'skoi nor the Tsar's ministers distinguished between Sakhalin—the east bank of the Amur Liman—and the river's western shore. To the statesmen, what mattered was the river, with its liman and straits providing access from the Pacific. To Nevel'skoi and his men, the densely-forested land

only hindered exploration. The natural unit was the water itself, along with its shores, upon which settlements could be established. Six years later, Nevel'skoi would continue to insist—despite opposition—that ‘the Pri-Amur and Pri-Ussurii lands are an indivisible whole, where the rivers and sea provide the only means of transportation.’³⁷ To Nevel'skoi it seemed obvious that they should be governed as a unit. The question in 1849, however, was not the region's interconnectedness, but whether it was Russia's to govern.

The rogue explorer

While Nevel'skoi was a nationalist, he was also an imperialist—a distinction of little significance in an empire known for ‘colonizing itself.’ Convinced of the region's economic and geo-political significance to Russia, Nevel'skoi made it his mission to not only render the land *myslennno* Russian—redrawing maps to place the border further south—but to colonize it, making it *fakticheski* Russian by establishing forts, naming landmarks, and raising Russian flags. After accepting the assignment to Kamchatka, Nevel'skoi approached the Naval Chief of Staff, Prince Aleksandr Menshikov, for permission to explore the nearby Amur delta in search of a navigable channel. His request was denied and a committee established to consider the question further. Along with financial and practical concerns, Menshikov noted that Foreign Minister Karl Nessel'rode was unlikely to approve a mission that could provoke the Chinese.³⁸ Only at a later meeting did the committee agree that they must ‘prevent attempts by foreigners to occupy land near the mouth of the Amur.’ They decided to send traders, rather than troops, to avoid conflict with the Qing.³⁹ While they did not share the nationalist convictions of Nevel'skoi and the Russian Geographical Society, they recognized the region's significance in an era of imperialism and respond with covert, yet deliberate, imperialism of their own.

Having departed from St. Petersburg in August of 1848, Nevel'skoi did not know about the conversations that continued in St. Petersburg, nor of the committee's plan to establish dominance in the region through trade. Despite rejection of his proposal, the explorer refused to be daunted in his quest to explore the Amur. In November he wrote to Murav'ev from Rio de Janeiro that he would explore the river with or without permission, asking the Governor General to appeal to the Tsar on his behalf.⁴⁰ It was not until February of 1849 that the committee granted him permission to explore Sakhalin and the coastline north of the Amur River, although only by rowboat and avoiding the river itself.⁴¹ When weather delayed the arrival of the courier bearing

his instructions, Nevel'skoi departed for the Amur unaware of the new directives from St. Petersburg.⁴²

Nevel'skoi's discoveries that summer would forever alter Russia's position in the East. He proved correct in assuming that previous explorers had been mistaken, as he watched whales frolic in water shown on maps to be land. He found no river bisecting Sakhalin from the north, as Kruzenshtern had suggested.⁴³ Even more significantly, he located a navigable channel along the Amur's southern bank, which he followed downstream, taking depth measurements along the way. A week later he reached the Gulf of Tatar, confirming the navigability of the Amur River delta. Nevel'skoi hoped that his disobedience would be forgiven. Not only was the Amur River navigable, but no isthmus connected Sakhalin to the mainland, rendering the river approachable from both north and south.⁴⁴ Murav'ev emphasized to Nessel'rode the importance to the state of the 'southern strait from the Liman and the unblocked entrance it provides for even the largest ships from the Gulf of Tatar directly into the river!' The Governor General continued, 'This discovery forces us to set about occupying the mouth of the Amur without delay, for we must expect that it will be taken any day by others from the south,' forcing the Russians to declare war on the encroacher.⁴⁵ Inaction was no longer an option.

'Sakhalin is an island'

Nevel'skoi is often lauded as the first to establish Sakhalin's insularity, but that was not important in 1849.⁴⁶ In his report to Menshikov, written soon after his return from the Liman to the Russian-American Company station of Aian, Nevel'skoi emphasized not the insular status of Sakhalin, but its suitability for Russian settlement. He wrote that he had charted the 'entrance to the Liman from the Gulf of Tatar' and the channel up the Amur River.⁴⁷ He ended his description: 'Such are the Amur and its surroundings [as approached] from the sea.'⁴⁸ Only in later accounts did claims appear that he had proclaimed triumphantly to the Governor General that 'Sakhalin is an island!' and emphasized the same to the Naval Chief of Staff.⁴⁹ Reports of 1849 mention no such announcements.⁵⁰ To both Nevel'skoi and the Russian state, what mattered was not Sakhalin, but the Amur itself.

Although tsarist officials shared Nevel'skoi's view of the Amur region as a natural geographic unit, to the state, Nevel'skoi's discovery rendered the area valuable, but not Russian. To Nevel'skoi and Murav'ev, both of whom viewed water as integrating territory, rather than

dividing it, the region's Russianness seemed obvious. The Amur River flowed from Siberia and had been home to Russian Cossacks in the seventeenth century. Employing both nationalist and imperialist rhetoric, they argued that a Russian presence was again necessary at the Amur's mouth, as the channel rendered the river vulnerable, endangering Siberia as a whole. Yet the region was not merely strategic to Russia, but was *rightfully* Russian, according to their arguments. Even Sakhalin belonged rightfully to Russia, Murav'ev emphasized to Menshikov, not only because of they had—he claimed—first discovered it, but because it was located next to the Russian-owned Kuril archipelago, its southern tip at the same latitude as the Russian island of Urup.⁵¹

The differing positions of liberals and conservatives became clear in the debates that followed. While liberal-leaning Menshikov was persuaded by the arguments of Nevel'skoi and Murav'ev, the conservative Foreign Minister was not. Although Nevel'skoi found no evidence of Chinese in the region, Nessel'rode maintained that his map was accurate. He resented Nevel'skoi's insubordination and demanded that the officer be reprimanded. Murav'ev, meanwhile, contacted the Tsar directly with his concerns. In an 18 March [1850] memo to Nicholas I, he pointed out the threat Britain posed to the Amur Region, given the growing British influence in China. He proposed a compromise: inform the Chinese that the Russians would act in the interests of both empires by protecting the Amur from foreign—meaning British—encroachment.⁵² Nessel'rode remained unmoved. Only after long debates did the committee resolve to cautiously expand Russian influence in the region. Nevel'skoi was to establish a single post to the north of the Amur, but not approach the river itself. To avoid the appearance of encroachment on China, the post would be a wintering station for the Russian-American Company. Nevel'skoi would serve directly under Murav'ev. The delicate question of the river was set aside, and Sakhalin was left out of the discussion altogether.⁵³

'Where once a Russian flag has been raised...'

To Nevel'skoi, to whom the land was already *myslennno* Russian, the next step was occupation, rendering it *fakticheski* Russian—to use his later terminology—demonstrated by a flag and a military post. Despite the caution urged by the committee, Nevel'skoi grew more confident once he answered to Murav'ev. In accordance with instructions, upon his return in 1850, he founded Petrovskoe Wintering Station to the north of the Liman to serve as headquarters for the Russian-

American Company. Disregarding the committee's admonition, he made plans to explore the river and establish a post at its mouth. He told a fellow officer, 'If the General's [Murav'ev's] permission does not arrive in time, we will take command ourselves in the name of God.'⁵⁴ Without waiting for the General's permission, he departed for the Amur, where he encountered the Manchu traders and unhappy Nivkhs described above. Three weeks later, he established Nikolaevskii Post at the river's mouth, raising a Russian military flag to the accompaniment of cannon shots and the Russian national hymn.⁵⁵ While Nevel'skoi's later account portrays his declaration as spontaneous, he had been planning such actions from the start. Upon his return, he evoked nationalist sentiments to justify his disobedience, explaining that he had acted out of 'moral responsibility to the fatherland,' fearing loss of the region to Russia forever.⁵⁶

This act of disobedience challenged the mental maps of the Tsar's ministers, with not one, but now two Russian outposts—Nikolaevskii and Petrovskoe—on what was ostensibly Chinese land. Murav'ev defended Nevel'skoi to the Tsar, but the committee was concerned. Based on intelligence from Peking about supposed troop movement in the region, some committee members felt the new post should be withdrawn. Others argued that Nevel'skoi should be demoted. Nevel'skoi was scolded: 'What if every captain first class disregards the tsar's orders for the good of the fatherland?'⁵⁷ Tsar Nicholas, however, was reportedly pleased with Nevel'skoi's initiative, calling it 'valiant, noble, and patriotic,' and declaring 'where once a Russian flag has been raised, never shall it be lowered.'⁵⁸ When the Tsar reconvened the committee in January 1851, the conservative Nessel'rode was replaced by the more liberal *tsarevich*, the future Alexander II. In February they reached a decision. Nikolaevskii Post was to be maintained as an outpost of the Russian-American Company. Sixty men from the Siberian fleet would be assigned to Nevel'skoi for a so-called 'Amur Expedition.'⁵⁹ Because of continued concern about China, the Russian-American Company must appear to be working alone. Nevel'skoi was to make no further proclamations.⁶⁰

THE AMUR EXPEDITION

Upon his return to the Far East in the summer of 1851, in charge of a covert but now authorized 'Amur Expedition,' Nevel'skoi strove to achieve his own goals as well as official interests of the state. As a representative of the Russian-American Company, he sent out officers and Company

agents to develop trade and build relations with local peoples. That winter he dispatched four explorers—one to the north, two to the south, and one eastward to Sakhalin.⁶¹ Based on their reports, he identified seven strategic locations for Russian posts in the region, six on the mainland and one across the strait.⁶² While he had already declared the land Russian, to establish it as Russian *fakticheski*, the next summer (1852) he disregarded orders and placed men, guns, and flags in four of those strategic points.

While Nevel'skoi continued to view Sakhalin and the mainland Amur basin as a unit, Sakhalin itself drew the officer's attention in late 1851 when four Nivkhs visited Petrovskoe, one wearing a button of Sakhalin coal. Nevel'skoi realized that if coal were present on the island, the land would be valuable not merely for the Amur's defense, but as a source of fuel for Pacific steamships. The Nivkhs also reported that five Russians had lived on Sakhalin for many years, and that one had only recently died. If true, Nevel'skoi reasoned, Russians were not only the first to discover the island (in the seventeenth century), but the first civilized people to settle there. In February of 1852, as similar expeditions were underway throughout the Amur region, Nevel'skoi sent Lieutenant Nikolai Boshniak by dogsled over the frozen Tatar Strait. He was instructed to search for coal beds, gather population data, and inquire about ships that had approached the island's shores and any Russians who had resided there.⁶³ In accordance with instructions, Nevel'skoi told Boshniak not to announce Russian possession of the island or to promise protection, but instead to initiate trade, as would be expected of a Russian-American Company agent.⁶⁴

Boshniak's travels convinced Nevel'skoi that the island warranted further attention, but failed to establish a historical Russian presence on the island. The explorer found coal, but no natural harbor, remarking tongue-in-cheek that 'nature, having so generously scattered coal... evidently wished to balance the ease of gathering it with the difficulty of its transport.' He verified only that shipwrecked Russian sailors had lived on the island for approximately two decades.⁶⁵ While the official Russian map depicted southern Sakhalin as belonging to Japan, Boshniak reported that the Sakhalin natives he met were subject to neither Qing nor Japanese rule. Foreign ships indeed raided their villages each spring.⁶⁶ He was told that there were Ainus in southern Sakhalin, but met few Nivkhs who had ever encountered them. Even fewer had encountered any Japanese.⁶⁷ Inland he found Uil'tas, reindeer-herders whom he believed were

related to the East Siberian Evenks (Tungus) who paid tribute to Russian Cossacks.⁶⁸ Yet the Uil'ta avoided Boshniak, reportedly out of fear that he would subject them to Russian rule.⁶⁹ Despite Boshniak's failure to demonstrate that Sakhalin was historically Russian—and despite strict instructions not to proclaim the region so—once the ice melted, Nevel'skoi dispatched Second Lieutenant Aleksei Voronin to explore Sakhalin by boat and to inform residents that Sakhalin was a Russian possession. If he encountered foreign ships, he was to raise the Russian flag and declare that both Sakhalin and the mainland belonged to Russia.⁷⁰

THE SAKHALIN EXPEDITION

In the end, it was not the Amur Expedition that convinced the state to claim Sakhalin and the mainland Amur basin, rewriting maps and sending troops to protect Russia's distant land. Not belief in the Russian nation, but fear of Western imperialism persuaded the state to act. While two small posts had sufficed to protect villagers from marauding whalers, when word reached Murav'ev of a large American naval expedition heading toward the region, he was concerned. Directing his attention to the Tatar Strait, Murav'ev wrote to Nevel'skoi in May of 1852, 'It is vital that the Americans see Russians in DeKastri harbor [on the mainland shore across from Sakhalin] and on Sakhalin, and that we make clear to them that we are here and no one else can be.... It will be necessary to watch for the Americans and show them as many men as possible on Sakhalin and the Tatar Strait.'⁷¹ Meanwhile, tensions in Europe were mounting and would soon lead to the Crimean War.

That winter (early 1853), Murav'ev presented Tsar Nicholas with an eloquent plea for Russian attention to the Amur region, citing not only geopolitical interests, but invoking Russia's manifest destiny to stretch to the ocean. It was not to be regretted that the Russian-American Company left California, Murav'ev told the Tsar. It was the destiny of the United States to possess all of North America, just as Russia, too, must extend to the Pacific. As the Far East gained strategic significance due to Commodore Matthew Perry's approach and growing tensions in Europe, Murav'ev argued that 'because of its longstanding possession of the shores of the Pacific Ocean,' Russia had more right to both Sakhalin and the mainland Amur region than any other power. Murav'ev continued, referring to British influence in China, 'We have [already] allowed the English to intrude into this part of Asia.... To the detriment and reproach

of all of Europe, that little island has inflicted its laws over all the earth.’ It was Russia’s duty, he concluded, to intervene. The Russian-American Company must establish operations on Sakhalin Island immediately.⁷² To Murav’ev’s surprise, the Tsar agreed.

Within a year, what began as an admonition to ‘show [Perry’s troops] as many men as possible’ on both sides of the strait became a Russian ‘occupation’ of Sakhalin itself.⁷³ No longer was the island merely part of the Amur region—the eastern shore of the Tatar Strait and a natural extension of Siberia. With its proximity to Japan and the approaching American squadron, St. Petersburg officials felt it merited troops of its own to protect the strait and the entrance to the Amur. Grand Duke Constantine, head of the Russian Navy, approached the Russian-American Company with the task. With decades of experience in Russian America, the Company was well-suited to defend Sakhalin from Russia’s enemies.

To the Russian state, Sakhalin became a colony, while the mainland Amur basin was integrated into Russia itself. Unlike the covert Company expeditions on the mainland, Sakhalin, it seemed, merited a fort providing full military protection, as provided in Alaska. Company officials proposed occupation of two points on the southern shores in view of approaching enemy ships. They promised to construct redoubts modeled after their North American forts, and to send a governor from Alaska. Meanwhile, Nevel’skoi was to land one hundred troops on the island—a military operation referred to as the ‘Sakhalin Expedition.’⁷⁴ If they encountered Japanese resistance, Nevel’skoi was to explain that they had come to protect the island from American attack.⁷⁵ If necessary, they were to be prepared to fight.

The territory across the strait, meanwhile, became more than simply part of an expansive Russian empire, but was integrated into Russia itself. That same month (April 1853), Murav’ev presented the Tsar with evidence from a recent expedition by Lieutenant Colonel Nikolai Agte [Akhte] that the Qing had neither forts nor settlers along the Amur. After considering Murav’ev’s arguments and examining Agte’s maps and reports, the Tsar reportedly exclaimed ‘So it’s ours!’ [*itak eto nashe!*], and ordered the Minister of War to approach China on the subject.⁷⁶ No longer needing the Russian-American Company as a smokescreen, the Tsar ordered Company affiliation on the mainland to end. This was not a colony, but long-time Russian land. Expedition members were to receive government salaries and pensions. Because of

the American threat, troops were scheduled to arrive the next year, along with medical personnel, clerks and a priest.⁷⁷ Balasoglo's 'holy place' would be empty no more.

The Amur divided

Paradoxically, once both sides of the strait had been declared Russian, the Amur basin became divided, no longer a single territory united by waterways, but separate regions with their own administrations, histories, and diplomatic concerns. Most obvious was the administrative division. Sakhalin occupation was separated from the covert Amur Expedition of Nevel'skoi, who served under the Governor General, and given to the Russian-American Company, with its governor from Alaska who would answer directly to St. Petersburg. The Company was released from service on the mainland. Now that the state claimed the territory officially, it no longer needed the pretense of trading missions to explore, nor a Company wintering station in place of a military post. The integration of the mainland Amur basin into East Siberia had begun.

The state's exclusion of Sakhalin from the Amur region is evident also in the manner in which the regions were claimed. The mainland Amur became Russian through placement at strategic locations of traders and soldiers, who met little resistance from the indigenous population. When Nevel'skoi proclaimed that the land was Russian in 1851, the Tsar supported his declaration. When he received maps showing no Chinese in the region, the Tsar agreed that the land had been Russian all along. Yet Sakhalin was not treated as part of Russia. The Sakhalin Expedition was a military invasion complete with cannons and a well-defended fort. Sakhalin was treated as foreign, a colony occupied for geopolitical purposes, while the mainland was Russian by right. One hundred men were assigned to the Sakhalin Expedition, more than had been allotted to the Amur Expedition over the past two years.

The separation between Sakhalin and the mainland Amur was expressed diplomatically as well. Once the Tsar acknowledged the mainland as Russian, he sent envoys to China to settle the issue at an international level. No such measures were taken regarding Sakhalin. Although islanders had historically paid tribute to the Qing, Foreign Minister Nessel'rode did not seek Chinese consent for Russian occupation. Nor did he approach Japan on the subject, despite the appearance of southern Sakhalin as Japanese on the official Russian map. Instead he approved of the occupation on the grounds that 'our government is not bound by treaties regarding Sakhalin

with either Japan or China.’⁷⁸ To St. Petersburg, Sakhalin was no man’s land, not Russian, but free for the taking. In an era of imperialism, it needed to be taken quickly.

Sakhalin’s disassociation from the mainland Amur signified a departure from the position of Nevel’skoi, to whom the island remained part of a greater Amur basin that had long belonged to Russia. Even after the island had been given to the Russian-American Company, Nevel’skoi explained to Japanese fishermen he encountered that, ‘On the basis of [the Treaty of Nerchinsk], Sakhalin Island, *as a continuation of the lower Amur basin*, is a Russian possession.’ (emphasis mine) While the mainland was more valuable than the island, it made no sense to him to divide them, and he did not share the state’s view of Sakhalin as foreign. To him both sides of the strait merited protection, and it was unwise to devote troops first to the island, rather than the mainland shores of the Amur region. He expressed his dissatisfaction in his memoirs, explaining that ‘the state, once it recognized that Sakhalin belonged to Russia, turned all of its attention toward it. The shores of the Tatar Strait with its harbors that make the area so important to Russia were left without any attention at all.’⁷⁹

Murav’evskii Post

The occupation itself got off to a promising start. In September 1853, the Company transport vessel *Nikolai* anchored off Sakhalin’s southern shore, and three boats flying Russian flags transported thirty armed troops to the island. Having strategically arrived near a Japanese fishing village, Nevel’skoi announced to the onlookers: ‘We stand here on this island for the protection of land and people, desiring to live in peace with the Japanese and all residents of the island, in no way to hinder industry or trade.’ The troops stood at attention to sing the ‘Our Father’ and ‘God Save the Tsar,’ and Lieutenant Nikolai Busse, appointed commander of the newly founded post, raised the Russian flag in the sand. Japanese and Ainu elders assisted in the installation of the flag, a gesture Nevel’skoi interpreted as an expression of support.⁸⁰ While the troops assembled a battery of eight twelve-pounder carronades, Nevel’skoi invited the Japanese elders to the ship to celebrate.⁸¹ Meanwhile, Russian sailors negotiated the purchase of barns to accommodate men and supplies, while Ainus unloaded the ship with their wide, flat-bottomed boats. Nevel’skoi reported to the Governor General, ‘And thus, to the glory of God in the Highest, concluded the occupation of the main point on the island which controls all of

Sakhalin!’⁸² Lieutenant Boshniak recalled in 1859, ‘It seemed that nothing could have gone better.’⁸³

Russian confidence was soon shattered, as local residents disregarded Nevel’skoi’s declaration. If on the mainland, Nevel’skoi’s men maintained friendly relations with the indigenous peoples, on southern Sakhalin neither Japanese nor Ainus submitted to the self-proclaimed authorities. The next day the Russians found the Japanese settlement deserted, and Busse heard rumors that they were plotting an attack.⁸⁴ Even more complicated was the position of the Ainus, indigenous Sakhalin inhabitants whom the Russians promised to free from Japanese oppression. Nevel’skoi reported that Ainu elders told him that ‘this was [Ainu] land, and that everything we saw on the shore had been made by them,’ while others ‘explained that the Japanese beat them with sticks and gave them nothing in return.’⁸⁵ Busse believed the Ainus were happy about the Russians’ arrival.⁸⁶ But most Ainus remained devoted to their Japanese masters. Company officials were perplexed by their unwillingness to trade.⁸⁷ Some Ainus manipulated the situation, realizing that complaints about the Japanese brought favor with the Russians. The Russians never knew whom to trust.⁸⁸

Nevel’skoi did not abandon his claim that Sakhalin was rightfully and historically Russian. He emphasized in his reports that one expedition member did encounter Sakhalin islanders with tie to Russia. While traveling northward, Company agent D.I. Samarin came across villages in which inhabitants, he believed, were descendants of Russians and Evenks who had intermarried centuries earlier. To Nevel’skoi, this indicated Russians had settled the island long before the Japanese. Samarin reported that the natives of one village had dark blond or brown hair rather than black and kept their yurts tidy and comfortable. These interactions featured prominently in Nevel’skoi’s memoir, in which he maintained that they ‘demonstrated once and for all Russia’s indisputable right to possess...Sakhalin Island.’⁸⁹

NATION AND EMPIRE

With the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, Sakhalin and the mainland Amur basin were separated conclusively in the minds of Russian statesmen, and soon to the public as a whole. As European powers were competing in Crimea over Ottoman territory, Nevel’skoi’s romantic notions of a united Russian Amur were overshadowed by the urgency of imperialism. As the war

moved eastward, the post was withdrawn in Spring 1854, before the new governor had even arrived. Nevel'skoi claimed to have warned Busse about the impending hostilities, instructing him not to abandon the island, but there is no evidence that Busse received such a letter.⁹⁰ When Britain and France declared war on Russia that March, Russian Vice-Admiral Evfimii Putiatin relocated his squadron from Nagasaki—where he was conducting trade negotiations—to the Strait of Tatar for protection. He speculated that it may be safest for the post to be withdrawn.⁹¹ Busse agreed, and on May 31, the troops departed.⁹²

In the end, neither Russia's alleged 'indisputable right'⁹³ to the land nor the strategically-placed post made Sakhalin Russian either *myslennno* or *fakticheski*. Instead, the Treaty of Shimoda, signed by Putiatin in February of 1855, declared Sakhalin ambiguously 'unpartitioned between Russia and Japan, as has been the case up to this time.'⁹⁴ What that meant was never clarified. Concerned primarily with establishing trade relations with the Japanese, Putiatin implied that Russia would be willing to divide the island, and underscored the withdrawal of the post as an indication of Russian goodwill.⁹⁵ While the claim of historical joint possession was fictitious, it allowed both sides to subordinate territorial disputes to more pressing economic and political concerns.

An event later that spring reinforced the mental separation of Sakhalin from the now-Russian mainland, drawing attention to the region in the popular press. Once the realm of classified documents known to a small number of the Tsar's advisors, Sakhalin gained international recognition as the Crimean War moved into the Pacific. In May of 1855, Russia's Pacific fleet sought refuge in the DeKastri Harbor across from Sakhalin in the Tatar Strait. Unaware of the channel continuing upriver, the British did not pursue them, assuming the Russians to be trapped. One foggy night, the Russian ships slipped quietly through the strait into the Liman. In the morning, they were simply gone.⁹⁶

Celebrated in Russia and lamented in Britain, the incident drew worldwide attention to region, emphasizing Sakhalin's insularity and forcing the redrawing of European maps.⁹⁷ The escape reinforced the position that Sakhalin and the mainland Amur region were not a unified whole, but were separated by a channel through which the entire fleet could escape. While Russians officially included the joint Japanese-Russian Sakhalin as part of the Maritime [*Primorskaia*] oblast established in 1856, it was missing from the mental maps of Russian

statesmen as well as the educated public. Despite its strategic location, for the next decade, the island received little attention from the state.⁹⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Sakhalin became Russian once again in 1875, when the Treaty of St. Petersburg placed the Russo-Japanese border between Sakhalin and Ezo (Hokkaido). Yet it did not become *russkii*—part of the Russian nation. Even within Russia, there was little agreement regarding Russia’s ‘true’ borders in the East. Russia’s appropriation of the mainland Amur basin in 1853—reinforced in 1858 by the Treaty of Aigun and confirmed by the 1860 Treaty of St. Petersburg—did not reflect the views predominant among the Tsar’s ministers of the 1840s. It took place despite them, due in part to an obstinate explorer who ignored orders from above. The official Sakhalin Expedition—a military occupation that shared more in common with Russian America than Siberia—resulted in the detachment of the island from the mainland, rendering it seemingly separate from Russia and other. Sakhalin gained increasing attention in the press in the 1870s, but the image created was of a distant colony, remote and dangerous, although rich in resources. When the Russian state and society turned its attention toward the mainland Amur region in the late 1850s, Sakhalin was seldom included.

Following the *myslennaia* geography of today, in which land, rather than water, creates natural units of territory, the history of Sakhalin is often written separately from that of the Amur. Yet to explorers in the mid-nineteenth century, the Strait was not a border separating two distinct landmasses, but a highway upon which Russians could move and settle. To Nevel’skoi, it seemed a natural unit that merited a common administration. Nor did the 1849 confirmation of Sakhalin’s insularity render the island non-Russian. As Bruce Batten notes, even for islands, ‘there is no such thing as a “natural” boundary, either in Japan or elsewhere.’⁹⁹ Not until 1853 was the island separated administratively from the mainland. When Murav’evskii Post was withdrawn, the island did not rejoin East Siberia, but became even less Russian, as it was shared with Japan. Despite the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg, the island’s foreignness was reinforced once again following the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, when Tsar Nicholas II insisted that ‘not an inch of primordial Russian land’ be surrendered. He agreed, however, to yield the southern half of Sakhalin Island, calling it ‘land that we stole [*nagrabili*] in better times.’¹⁰⁰

In the modern era, borders are markers of identity, often national identity, reinforcing myths of a united people and a unified land.¹⁰¹ The Russian border is often assumed to correspond naturally with the ocean itself. Yet that was not always the case. As Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes, ‘Borders are created in the mind when nations appropriate territory by mapping, naming or renaming frontier regions.’¹⁰² Only through a decade of mapping, naming, and renaming within the remote Amur River basin did a lasting border become established. Its strength is evident as it survived even the end of the Soviet Union, when other colonies demanded independence as separate states.

While Sakhalin became—and remains—Russian territory, unlike the mainland Amur region, it became separated from Russia on maps and in Russian imaginations. This was not a natural process in which a narrow strait created a boundary between island and continent. It was the result of strategy and negotiation in which multiple parties had stakes. It was not the position of Nevel’skoi that the area be divided, but a decision made in St. Petersburg by men who had never been to the region, a central state exerting its authority to the ends of its empire. Even today, while airplanes render Sakhalin temporally closer to Moscow than much of European Russia, Sakhaliners frequently refer to Russia as someplace else, far away and different from their homeland. Despite efforts to resignify Sakhalin, the response of Chekhov’s coachman continues to resonate. ‘It is dull here, Your Honor,’ the coachman allegedly maintained in 1890, expressing a sentiment common among Europeans living in distant colonies. Emphasizing that ‘here’—referring to Sakhalin—was different from Russia, he continued, ‘In Russia [in our Russia, *u nas v Rossii*] it is better.’¹⁰³

¹ Manchus are the indigenous inhabitants of Manchuria. They conquered China in 1644, establishing the Qing dynasty. Nivkhs—known to Russians at the time as Giliaks—inhabited northern Sakhalin and the lower Amur basin. Ul’chas—or Mangun—lived primarily in the lower Amur.

² G.I. Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi Russkikh Morskikh Ofitserov na Krainem Vostoke Rossii 1849-55 g. Pri-amurskii i Pri-ussuriiskii Krai*, St. Petersburg, 1878, 109.

³ An adventure film was in fact made about Nevel’skoi’s exploits. *Zaliv Schast’ia*, dir. Vladimir Laptev, Sverdlovsk, 1987.

⁴ ‘Lower Amur’ refers to the section of the river between the Ussuri River and the Liman.

⁵ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 110-111.

⁶ V.O. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia v Deviati Tomakh*, vol. 1, *Kurs Russkoi Istorii*, Moscow, 1987, 50.

⁷ See, for example, V. Tolz, *Russia: Inventing the Nation*, London, 2001; A. Martin, The invention of 'Russianness' in the late 18th – early 19th century, *Ab Imperio* 2003, no. 3, 119-134; J. Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society*, Cambridge, 2009, 86-127; O. Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870*, Madison, 2010.

⁸ D. Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire*, London, 2003; J. Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923*, Bloomington, 2007; A. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868–1910: A Comparison with British India*, Oxford, 2008; B. Grant, *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus*. Ithaca, 2009; I. Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867*, Oxford, 2011.

⁹ *Russko-kitaiskie Otnosheniia v XVII Veke: Materialy i Dokumenty*, vol. 2, 1686-1691, Moscow, 1972, 645. See discussion in T. Morris-Suzuki, Lines in the snow: imagining the Russo-Japanese frontier, *Pacific Affairs* 72 (1999) 67.

¹⁰ Ludwik Niemojowski, *Siberian Pictures*, vol. 1, London, 1883, 39-40.

¹¹ D.I. Romanov, Prisoedinenie Amura v Rossii (1636-1858), *Russkoe Slovo* 1859, no. 7, 93. Nevel'skoi later disputed this claim. Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 60. Note that the Tsar used the term *russkaia* – referring to the nation itself – rather than *rossiiskaia* – referring to the Russian empire.

¹² Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 235.

¹³ Carl Ritter, *Die Erdkunde im Verhältniß zur Natur und zur Geschichte des Menschen oder Allgemeine, Vergleichende Geographie*, 19 vols., Berlin, 1822-1859. On Ritter's influence in Russia, see N.G. Sukhova and E.L. Faibusovich, *Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii*, Leningrad, 1990.

¹⁴ P.P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, *Istoriia Poluvekovoi Deiatel'nosti Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva*, chast' 1, St. Petersburg, 1896, xxii.

¹⁵ S.M. Solov'ev, O vliianii prirody na russkoi gosudarstvennoi oblasti i na ee istoriiu, *Otechestvennye Zapiski* 69 (1850, no. 2) 229-231. See also S.M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s Drevneishikh Vremen*, bk. 2, vol. 4 [1854], Moscow, 1960, 647-648; M. Bassin, Turner, Solov'ev, and the 'Frontier Hypothesis': The Nationalist Signification of Open Spaces, *The Journal of Modern History* 65 (Sept. 1993) 498.

¹⁶ Indeed, historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii would do just that. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs Russkoi Istorii*, 50.

¹⁷ A. Miller, Rusifikatsii: klassifitsirovat' i poniat', *Ab Imperio* 2002, no. 2, 141-142; A.V. Remnev, Sdelat' Sibir' i Dal'nii Vostok russkimi: K voprosu o politicheskoi motivatsii kolonizatsionnykh protsessov XIX – nachalo XX veka, *Sibirskaiia Zaimka* 2002, no. 3; A.V. Remnev, Vdvinut' Rossiiu v Sibir': Imperiia i russkaia kolonizatsiia vtoroi polovinoi XIX – nachala XX vv., *Ab Imperio* 2003, no 3, 135-158; C. Weiss, *Wie Siberian 'Unser' Wurde: Die Russische Geographische Gesellschaft und ihr Einfluss auf die Bilder and Vorstellungen von Sibirien im 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, 2007.

¹⁸ M.S. Vysokov, M.I. Ishchenko, *Kommentarii k Knige G.I. Nevel'skogo 'Podvigi Russkikh Morskikh Ofitserov na Krainem Vostoke Rossii'*, Vladivostok, 2013, 57. See also discussion in M. Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, New York, 1999, 1.

¹⁹ Journal of the Special Committee, 28 January 1849; 1 March 1849 instructions of Menshikov to Nevel'skoi, in: T.S. Fedorova, A.Iu. Petrov, A.I. Grinev (Eds), *Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia Kompaniia i Izuchenie Tikhookeanskogo Severa 1841-1867: Sbornik Dokumentov*, Moscow, 2010, 167, 169.

²⁰ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 239.

²¹ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 235.

²² A.I. Krushanov (Ed), *Istoriia Dal'nego Vostoka v Epokhu Feodalizma i Kapitalizma (XVII v.—Fevral' 1917 g.)*, Moscow, 1991; A.I. Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi, 1813-1876*, Moscow, 1984; A.I. Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia 1849-1855 gg.*, Moscow, 1974; A.I. Alekseev, *Spodvizhniki G.I. Nevel'skogo*, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1967; B.P. Polevoi (Ed), *Podrobnyi otchet G.I. Nevel'skogo o ego istoricheskoi ekspeditsii 1849 g. k o-mu Sakhalin i ust'iu Amura*, in: *Strany i Naroda Vostoka*, no. 13, Moscow, 1972, 114-149; B.P. Polevoi, *K istorii otkrytiia Tatarskogo proliva*, in: *Strany i Naroda Vostoka*, no. 6, Moscow, 1968, 68-85; B.P. Polevoi, *Etnograficheskie nabliudeniia G.I. Nevel'skogo (1849 god)*, *Sovetskaia Etnografiia* 1955, no. 4, 106-116.

²³ See for example J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, Stanford, 1994; S. Kotkin, D. Wolff (Eds), *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*, Armonk, NY, 1995; A. Wood, *Russia's Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991*, London, 2011. Steven Kotkin identifies Murav'ev as the 'conqueror of the Amur' (S. Kotkin, Introduction, in: *Rediscovering Russia in Asia*, 4), while John Stephan, in a section subtitled 'Annexation,' states that 'Russia absorbed the Priamur ... by a combination of encroachment, diplomacy, and luck.' (Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 47). Andreas Kappeler refers to Murav'ev's actions as 'conquest' and 'occupation.' (A. Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, Harlow, 2001, 202-204.)

²⁴ For example, Y. Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, Ithaca, 1994; Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*; B. Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture: a Century of Perestroikas*, Princeton, 1995; B. Grant, *Empire and savagery: the politics of primitivism in late*

imperial Russia, in: D. Brower, E. Lazzerini (Eds), *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, Bloomington, 1997, 292-310; T. Akidzuki [Akizuki], Iapono-rossiiskie otnosheniia i ostrov Sakhalin, *Kraevedcheskii Biulleten'* 2002, no. 1, 54-57.

²⁵ Bassin, *Imperial Visions*.

²⁶ A.P. Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin (iz putevykh zametok)*, Moscow, 1895.

²⁷ To Aleksandr Panov, for example, Sakhalin was (once again) a natural part of the Amur, granted a crucial role in the defense of eastern Russia. Chekhov, in contrast, claimed that Japanese had begun exploring Sakhalin as early as 1613. A.A. Panov, *Sakhalin, Kak Koloniia*, Moscow, 1905, 5; Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 15.

²⁸ A.N. Ryzhkov, Iz istorii, otkrytiia, issledovaniia, i osvoeniia Sakhalina i Kuril'skikh ostrovov, in: K.I. Kniazev (Ed), *Sakhalinskaia Oblast': Sbornik Statei*, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1960, 43; I.A. Senchenko, *Sakhalin i Kurily – Istorii Osvoeniia i Razvitiia*, Moscow, 2006, 8; B. Polevoi, *Pervootkryvateli Sakhalina*, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1959, 97. Japanese historian Akizuki Toshiyuki rejects Polevoi's conclusion. Akidzuki, Iapono-rossiiskie otnosheniia, 78. Senchenko's book was written in the 1960s, although it remained unpublished until 2006.

²⁹ J. Stephan, *Sakhalin: A History*, Oxford, 1971, 19; Akidzuki, Iapono-rossiiskie otnosheniia, 64-67.

³⁰ General'naia karta aziatskoi Rossii, St. Petersburg, 1825; reprinted in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 14-15.

³¹ According to Claudia Weiss, he became a member of the Siberian branch of the society in 1851, while A.I. Alekseev notes that he participated in their St. Petersburg meetings significantly earlier. Weiss, *Wie Sibirien 'Unser' Wurde*, 77; Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi*, 168.

³² Ritter, *Die Erdkunde*, vol. 2, bk. 2, *Asien*, Bd. 1, *Der Norden und Nord-Osten von Hoch-Asien*, 594-630.

³³ [A.P. Balasoglo], Vostochnaia Sibir': Zapiska o kommandirovke na ostrov Sakhalin kapitan-leitenanta Podushkina, *Chteniia v Imp. Obshchestve Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom Universitete*, kn. ii (April-June 1875) chast' v, *Smes'*, 103.

³⁴ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 60-61.

³⁵ [Balasoglo], Vostochnaia Sibir', 188. 'Mesto sviato ne budet pusto' is a Russian proverb.

³⁶ In 1858, following his successful conclusion of the Treaty of Aigun, Murav'ev was awarded the title Count Amurskii and known as Graf Murav'ev-Amurskii.

³⁷ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 372.

³⁸ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 69.

³⁹ Minutes of Committee Meeting of 29 January 1849, reprinted in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 380.

⁴⁰ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 76.

⁴¹ Secret instructions of 1 March 1849, in: Fedorova, Petrov, Grinev (Eds), *Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia Kompaniia*, 169-171.

⁴² Nevel'skoi did receive a copy of the proposed instructions Murav'ev had submitted to the committee for approval. Without the tsar's signature, however, this document had no authority. See I.P. Barsukov, *Graf N.N. Murav'ev-Amurskii po ego Pis'mam, Ofitsial'nym Dokumentam, Rasskazam Sovremennikov i Pechatnym Istochnikam*, bk. 1, Moscow, 1891, 195-198; G. Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan: Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697-1875*, Princeton, 1959, 274-275.

⁴³ Nevel'skoi to Menshikov, 2 September 1849, in: Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 180. See also G.I. Nevel'skoi, *Opisanie severo-vostochnye i severo-zapadnye berega ostrova Sakhalina*, in: Polevoi (Ed), *Podrobnyi otchet*, 120-122.

⁴⁴ Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi*, 74-75; G.I. Nevel'skoi, *Obzor rezul'tatov deistviia russkikh na severo-vostochnykh predelakh Rossii*, *Morskoi Sbornik* 1864, no. 6 (June), *kritika i bibliografiia*, 43-44.

⁴⁵ Confidential report from Murav'ev to Menshikov [Jan 1850], cited in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 394.

⁴⁶ Previous explorers La Pérouse, Broughton, and Kruzenshtern had concluded that Sakhalin was connected to the mainland by sandbars, if not an isthmus. While Japanese cartographer Mamiya Rinzo had circumnavigated the island in 1809, the success of his rowboats did not imply navigability by an ocean-going vessel, nor were his findings depicted on Russian maps. See B. Walker, *Mamiya Rinzō and the Japanese exploration of Sakhalin Island: cartography and empire*, *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007) 283-313.

⁴⁷ *Kopiiia s raporta komandira transporta Baikala, Kapitan Leitenanta Nevel'skogo, Nachal'niku Glavnogo Morskogo Shtaba*, 2 September 1849, cited in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 377-379. See also G.I. Nevel'skoi, *Opisanie ust'ia reki Amura, ee limana i iuga vostochnykh beregov Okhotskogo moria*, in: Polevoi (Ed), *Podrobnyi otchet*, 124, 126.

⁴⁸ *Kopiiia s raporta komandira*, in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 379.

⁴⁹ B.V. Struve, *Vospominaniia o Sibiri: 1848-1854*, St. Petersburg, 1889, 79; Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 92.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Kopiiia s raporta komandira*, in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 377-379; Polevoi (Ed), *Podrobnyi otchet*, 114-149. In an 1864 account of his exploration, Nevel'skoi reported that he claimed for Russia the 'entire lower Amur' [*vsego nizov'e r. Amur*] with no mention of Sakhalin at all. (Nevel'skoi, *Obzor rezul'tatov*, *Morskoi Sbornik* 1864, no. 7 (July) *sec. kritika i bibliografiia*, 8.) In his 1878 memoir, once Sakhalin's insularity had become critical to the state, he claimed to have declared as Russian 'the shores of the Bay [of Tatar] and the

entire Pri-Amur region to the Korean border, *including Sakhalin Island.*' (emphasis mine) Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 110.

⁵¹ Confidential report from Murav'ev to Menshikov, January 1850, cited in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 395.

⁵² Memo from Murav'ev to Tsar Nicholas I, 18 March 1850, cited in Vysokov, Ishchenko, *Kommentarii*, 400.

⁵³ Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi*, 83-84; Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 48.

⁵⁴ Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi*, 86-87.

⁵⁵ The fact that Nevel'skoi raised a military flag rather than the flag of the Russian-American Company is significant given his instructions to carry out operations under the guise of a Company trading mission.

⁵⁶ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 112.

⁵⁷ I.S. Listovskii, *Razskazy iz nedavnei stariny, Russkii Arkhiv* 1878, no. 12, 521.

⁵⁸ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 114. See also P. Shumakher, *K istorii priobreteniia Amura. Snosheniia s Kitaem s 1848 po 1860 god, Russkii Arkhiv* 1878, no. 11, 263.

⁵⁹ Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi*, 92-93.

⁶⁰ Shumakher, *K istorii priobreteniia Amura*, 265.

⁶¹ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 138-139; N.K. Boshniak, *Ekspeditsiia v Pri-amurskom krae, Morskoi Sbornik* 38, no. 12 (Dec. 1858) chast' 3, 179-194; vol. 39, no. 1 (Jan. 1859) chast' 3, 111-131; vol. 39, no. 2 (Feb. 1859) chast' 3, 323-342; vol. 39, no. 3 (Mar. 1859) chast' 3, 193-212.

⁶² Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 176.

⁶³ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 135-139.

⁶⁴ Indeed, Boshniak returned from Sakhalin with twelve sables, 171 squirrels, four elk hides, and other wares. Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 76.

⁶⁵ Boshniak to Nevel'skoi, 15 April 1852, in Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 184, 187. Years later, when Russia was seeking to demonstrate its right to Sakhalin vis-à-vis Japan, accounts emerged claiming that the sailors had lived on Sakhalin significantly longer—prior to the arrival of the Japanese—but Boshniak himself made no such claims in his original report. Boshniak, *Ekspeditsiia, Morskoi Sbornik* 38, no. 12 (Dec. 1858) chast' 3, 192; N. Boshniak, *Pis'mo v redaktsiiu, Morskoi sbornik* 1860, no. 2, chast' 4, 197-198; Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 152.

⁶⁶ Boshniak to Nevel'skoi, 15 April 1852, in: Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 187.

⁶⁷ Boshniak, *Ekspeditsiia, Morskoi Sbornik* 38, no. 12 (Dec. 1858) chast' 3, 190.

⁶⁸ Boshniak to Nevel'skoi, 15 April 1852, in: Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 186; Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 212.

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- ⁶⁹ Boshniak, Ekspeditsiia, *Morskoi Sbornik* 38, no. 12 (Dec. 1858) chast' 3, 189-190.
- ⁷⁰ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 181.
- ⁷¹ Murav'ev to Nevel'skoi, 4 May 1852, in: A.I. Petrov, *Amurskii Shchit (Zapiski Pervostroitel'ia Nikolaevska-na-Amure)*, Khabarovsk, 1974, 359.
- ⁷² Struve, *Vospominaniia*, 156, 155.
- ⁷³ Murav'ev to Nevel'skoi, 4 May 1852, in: Petrov, *Amurskii Shchit*, 359; Memo of Grand Duke Constantine to K.V. Nesselrode, 6 April 1853, in: Fedorova, Petrov, Grinev (Eds), *Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia Kompaniia*, 258-259.
- ⁷⁴ Constantine to Nesselrode, 6 April 1853, in: Fedorova, Petrov, Grinev (Eds), *Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia Kompaniia*, 259.
- ⁷⁵ P.A. Tikhmenev, *Istoricheskoe Obozrenie Obrazovaniia Rossiisko-Amerikanskoi Kompanii i Deistvii eia do Nastoiashchago Vremeni*, pt. 2, St. Petersburg, 1863, 99-102.
- ⁷⁶ Barsukov, *Graf N.N. Murav'ev-Amurskii*, 324-325.
- ⁷⁷ Struve, *Vospominaniia*, 156; Barsukov, *Graf N.N. Murav'ev-Amurskii*, 324; Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 224-226.
- ⁷⁸ Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 98.
- ⁷⁹ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 256, 236, 233.
- ⁸⁰ G.I. Nevel'skoi, Raport kapitana 1-go ranga Nevel'skogo general-gubernatoru Vostochnoi Sibiri i komanduiushchemu voiskami, v onoi raspolozhennyimi, 16 oktiabria 1853 goda, po delu zaniatiia ostrova Sakhalina, *Morskoi Sbornik* 1899, no. 12 (Dec.) chast' neofitsial'naia, 65; N.V. Busse, Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia 1852 goda, *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 10 (Oct. 1871) 758.
- ⁸¹ N.K. Boshniak, Zaniatie chasti ostrova Sakhalina i zimovka v Imperatorskoi gavani, *Morskoi sbornik* 1859, no. 10, chast' neofitsial'naia, 397-398; Tikhmenev, *Istoricheskoe Obozrenie*, 105.
- ⁸² Nevel'skoi, Raport, 68. Nevel'skoi consistently referred to Tomari-Aniva as Tamari-Aniva.
- ⁸³ Boshniak, Zaniatie chasti ostrova Sakhalina, 398. Busse, in contrast, reported conflict among the officers as they established their settlement and negotiated with the Japanese, and that the weather delayed unloading of the ship by twenty-four hours. Busse, Ostrov Sakhalin, *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 10 (Oct. 1871) 759-761.
- ⁸⁴ Busse, Ostrov Sakhalin, *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 10 (Oct. 1871) 765-766.
- ⁸⁵ Nevel'skoi, Raport, 61. Rudanovskii reported similar encounters. N.V. Rudanovskii, 'Poezdki moi po ostrovu Sakhalinu ia delal osen'iu i zimoiu...': Otchety Leitenanta N.V. Rudanovskogo 1853-1854 gg., *Vestnik Sakhalinskogo Muzeia* 10 (2003) 145, 161-162.
- ⁸⁶ Busse, Ostrov Sakhalin, *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 11 (Nov. 1871) 173.

⁸⁷ Tikhmenev, *Istoricheskoe Obozrenie*, 120, 127; Busse, Ostrov Sakhalin, *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 12 (Dec. 1871) 659; Busse, Ostrov Sakhalin, *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 11 (Nov. 1871) 165; N. Rudanovskii, Po povodu vospominanii N.V. Busse ob ostrove Sakhaline i ekspeditsii 1853 goda, *Vestnik Evropy* 7 (Aug. 1872) 919.

⁸⁸ Busse, Ostrov Sakhalin, *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 11 (Nov. 1871) 164, 165, 168, 173, 177; *Vestnik Evropy* 6, no. 12 (Dec. 1871) 658; Tikhmenev, *Istoricheskoe Obozrenie*, 118.

⁸⁹ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 304-307. (Quote on p. 305.)

⁹⁰ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 321. According to Busse's cousin, F.F. Busse, no such letter was found among the major's personal papers after his death. F. Busse, Otvet F. Busse gg-m Nevel'skomu i Rudanovskomu, in: N.V. Busse, *Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia 1853-54 gg. (Dnevnik N.V. Busse)* (St. Petersburg: Tip. F.S. Sushchinskago, 1872) 153.

⁹¹ Alekseev, *Amurskaia Ekspeditsiia*, 144.

⁹² Akidzuki, Iapono-rossiiskie otnosheniia, 127-128; Rimskii-Korsakov diary of 3 June 1854, in: V.A. Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur: Povestvovanie v Pis'makh o Plavaniiaakh, Prikliucheniiaakh i Razmyshleniiaakh Komandira Shkhuny 'Vostok'*, Khabarovsk, 1980, 338. Busse's decision to withdraw the post was heavily criticized after his death. G.I. Nevel'skoi, introduction to Rudanovskii, Po povodu vospominaniia, 909; Rudanovskii, Po povodu vospominaniia, 922, F. Busse, Otvet F. Busse, 153. Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 332.

⁹³ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 305.

⁹⁴ E.D. Grimm, *Sbornik Dogovorov i Drugikh Dokumentov po Istorii Mezhdunarodnykh Otnoshenii na Dal'nem Vostoke (1842-1925)*, Moscow, 1927, 52.

⁹⁵ The best discussion I have found of Putiatin's position in regard to Sakhalin is in Akidzuki, *Iapono-rossiiskie otnosheniia*, 118-121.

⁹⁶ Stephan, *Sakhalin*, 56. See also Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 362-364.

⁹⁷ For example, *The Times* [London], 23 Oct. 1855: 8; *New York Daily Times*, 12 Nov. 1855: 2.

⁹⁸ Military Governor Petr Kazakevich's 1856 report referred to Sakhalin only briefly. Reports of the next few years failed to mention the island at all. P.V. Kazakevich, Otchet Voennogo Gubernatora Primorskoii Oblasti Vostochnoi Sibiri [za 1856 g.], Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennii Istoricheskii Arkhiv [St. Petersburg], f. 1281, op. 6, d. 96, ll. 2-4.

⁹⁹ B. Batten, *To the Ends of Japan: Premodern Frontiers, Boundaries, and Interactions*, Honolulu, 2003, 22.

¹⁰⁰ S.Iu. Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, *1894-Oktiabr' 1905: Tsarstvovanie Nikolaia II*, Tallinn, 1994, 380.

¹⁰¹ See M. Anderson, *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World*, Cambridge, 1996, 2.

¹⁰² Morris-Suzuki, *Lines in the snow*, 59.

¹⁰³ Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 43.