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"The Highest Limit of Statesmanship"

Ritterian Geography and Russian Exploration of the Amur River Basin, 1849–1853

Sharyl Corrado

Abstract: The lower Amur River basin was annexed by Russia in the mid-nineteenth century following several years of unauthorized exploration by naval officer Gennadii Nevel'skoi. Scholars recognize multiple factors—geopolitical, economic, and nationalist—that prompted Russia's interest in the region. This article adds to this list the budding science of geography, and in particular, the influence of German geographer Karl Ritter. To Ritter, a nation's true borders were set by nature, not by man. His ideas are reflected in both the words and actions of Nevel'skoi regarding the lower Amur basin. The explorer described the territory not as foreign or other, but as naturally, historically, and rightfully Russian land. The river, to him, was a highway, facilitating transport through Siberia. In time, even the tsar was convinced. Ritter's ideas extended far beyond intellectual circles in Russia, serving to at once guide and justify Russia's eastward expansion.

Keywords: Amur, colonialism, Gennadii Nevel'skoi, geographic determinism, imperial expansion, Karl Ritter, Russian Far East

After nearly a decade of mediating between the insubordinate naval officer Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel'skoi and the tsar's conservative-leaning Council of Ministers, East Siberian Governor General Nikolai Nikolaevich Murav'ev successfully negotiated the Treaty of Aigun with Chinese Prince I-Shan in 1858, awarding the left bank of the Amur River to Russia and the right bank to China, adding more than 600,000 km² to the Russian Empire. Two years later in Beijing, Russian envoy Nikolai Ignat'ev negotiated a second treaty that not only confirmed the conditions agreed upon at Aigun but also granted to Russia the entire lower Amur River basin and the maritime region east of the Ussuri River, a total of 910,000 km². By order of Murav'ev, in the summer of

1860, the Russian flag was raised on the shore of the Golden Horn Bay on the southern end of the Ussuri region, the newly founded post given the name Vladivostok, or “Ruler of the East.” For his accomplishments, Murav’ev was granted the title of Count and the honorific surname Amurskii.¹

Russian attention to the Amur River basin in the mid-nineteenth century was motivated by a variety of factors. As John J. Stephan outlines, initial interest was primarily for geopolitical reasons, as the 1842 British victory in the First Opium War had granted Great Britain a foothold in East Asia.² Aleksandr I. Alekseev emphasizes the growing number of American whaling ships plying the waters of the Sea of Okhotsk and periodically pillaging indigenous settlements as well, arousing concern in St. Petersburg.³ As Mark Bassin demonstrates, burgeoning nationalism also motivated Russian eastward expansion, as nationalists drew attention to the country’s unique position in both Europe and Asia and saw in the Amur River the potential to transform Siberia into a rich and fertile land.⁴ Moreover, this was an era of imperialism worldwide, and along with the Amur region, Russia sought to secure the Caucasus and Central Asia as its own. Flowing eastward from East Siberia, the Amur River could serve as a highway connecting valuable Siberian resources with new markets on the Pacific. By the mid-1850s, the state was actively preparing the region for settlement.

This essay points to an additional factor shaping Russia’s acquisition of the lower Amur River basin: the ideas of the prominent German scholar Carl Ritter, professor of geography at the University of Berlin, applied to Russia by members of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and other educated Russians of the period. At a time when Romantic Nationalism pervaded European thought, educated Russians sought to define Russian identity both prescriptively and descriptively, looking at not only cultural factors, such as religion and ethnography, but at geography and the nation’s physical environment as well. According to Carl Ritter, both individuals and nations (peoples) “exist under the influence of nature,” “every organism form[ed] in accordance with its inner nature and its modifying surroundings.”⁵ Patriotic Russian advocates of the scholar’s “new geography,” therefore, faced a dilemma: how to explain Russia’s imperial expansion without departing from Ritter’s concept of an organic homeland. Yet even as scholars debated these concepts in the Russian capitals, Gennadii Nevel’skoi implemented them practically in the Far East. Applying Ritter’s geographic

determinism to Russia, Nevel'skoi was able to colonize without viewing himself as imperialistic, to claim vast territories for the empire while claiming they had been Russian all along.

Widely regarded as the father of modern historical and cultural geography, Karl Ritter was a household name among the educated classes of Europe and Russia by the mid-nineteenth century. Not only had he reinvented the field of geography, but he had influenced scholars in countless other fields as well. An ever-growing number of Russians attended his lectures in Berlin, and Russian translations of his works began appearing as early as the 1820s. By the early 1840s, he was often referred to in the Russian popular press as “renowned” and “genius.”⁶ It was, in part, thanks to Ritter, who devoted 19 volumes to Asia, that Russia experienced a revival in the study of Siberia in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷

The influence of Ritter was evident among many prominent Russian scholars. Those influenced directly by Ritter include Moscow University historians Timofei Granovskii and Mikhail Pogodin, both of whom appropriated from the geographer the importance of geography as the foundation of history. While Pogodin actively promoted translation of Ritter's works into Russian, Granovskii's popular lectures introduced Ritter to Russian society.⁸ A student of Granovskii and successor of Pogodin at Moscow University, the prominent historian Sergei Solov'ev spread the German geographer's geographic determinism in his multi-volume *History of Russia since Ancient Times*,⁹ teaching that nature determined the natural boundaries of the state.¹⁰ The renowned geographer's emphasis on the interconnections between all aspects of the universe inspired Konstantin Arsen'ev to propose a “universal geography” that synthesized the sub-disciplines of mathematical, physical, and political geography.¹¹ Ritter's emphasis on the role of geography in the realization of the nation's destiny inspired the foundation of the Russian Geographical Society.

It is no surprise that geographic science was employed in service of the Russian empire. By the mid- to late nineteenth century, colonization—like many aspects of society and politics—had become a scientific endeavor. No longer were intellectual pursuits regarded as impractical occupations advancing knowledge for its own sake. They had become tools applied in the service of Russia itself. Natural scientists were cataloging the empire's flora, fauna, climate, and terrain.¹² In the empire's Pacific Northeast, imperial officials heeded naturalists' warnings regarding the pending extinction of sea creatures.¹³ Ethnographers studied the peoples of the empire.¹⁴ Demographic data was gathered in an effort to regulate population density and direct

peasant resettlement.¹⁵ Writing from the recently annexed southern Ussuri territory, explorer Nikolai Przheval'skii appealed in the late 1860s for “correct colonization [*pravil'naia kolonizatsiia*], based on data from science and experience.”¹⁶

Asian Russia played an ambiguous role within the Russian Empire as both a remote colony and an extension of Russia itself. To many Russians, Siberia was to Russia what India was to Britain—a foreign territorial possession with valuable resources desirable to the state.¹⁷ As such, Siberia was governed by a *General-Gubernator* (Governor General), a position modeled after that of the British Governor General over India. Yet Siberia was more than simply a distant, if valuable, colony. Siberia was also Russia's frontier, a land gradually settled by Russians, holding much in common with the American West.¹⁸ Moreover, not all Russians viewed Siberia as different or other. As Claudia Weiss demonstrates, Siberia was “mentally appropriated” by Russians through the writings of key members of the Russian intelligentsia exiled to Siberia on political grounds.¹⁹ Ilya Vinkovetsky stretches the realm of imagined Russianness even further, showing how Russian America came to be perceived by Russian elites as “mentally much closer to Russia than the bulk of Siberia,” due to the introduction of regular around-the-world voyages.²⁰ To populist writers such as Nikolai Nekrasov and Fedor Dostoevsky, Asian Russia was in some ways better than European Russia, representing the potential for Russian rebirth.²¹ Indeed, by the early twentieth century, historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii described Russia's eastward expansion in both Europe and Siberia as a process of Russia “colonizing itself.”²²

Close attention to the writings of insubordinate naval officer Gennadii Nevel'skoi reveals noticeable similarities between the views of the Russian explorer and those of the foreign geographer and his Russian admirers, suggesting that Ritter's influence extended far beyond the realm of ideas. While Ritter devoted two volumes to northeast Asia alone, even more important was the shift in perspective that he introduced to scholarship and society. No longer was geography limited to a collection of facts about the Earth's surface, serving the advancement of knowledge alone. Ritter emphasized the influence of the natural environment on the course of history, including the political and economic development of mankind, and urged the application of geographical knowledge in service of the state. In his memoirs, published in 1876, Nevel'skoi cited the geographer directly, describing Russia's lost opportunity in the seventeenth century to establish a “rich granary” at the “farthest border of Asia”—an enterprise that failed through no

fault of their own.²³ Yet, as an educated Russian of the mid-nineteenth century, the naval officer was undoubtedly familiar with the basic tenets of Ritterian thought even before his departure. From the very beginning, Nevel'skoi viewed his exploration as not aimed at the advancement of science alone, but in service to Russia itself. Both the motivations and methods of his exploration correspond to ideas introduced by the explorer and developed further by his Russian followers.

A New Geography

While geographers in the past had gathered facts and descriptions as an end in themselves, to Karl Ritter, the Earth was a complex, organic whole made up of interdependent parts. In his 19-volume *Geography [Erdkunde] in Relation to the Nature and History of Mankind* (1817–1859), Ritter sought not only to integrate the natural sciences but also to demonstrate “the relation of Nature to History, of the Country to its People, and in special of the Individual to the Globe.” A pious man, he attributed to geography a determining effect on the development of societies, the physical environment serving as a tool through which divine purposes are implemented on Earth. The Earth’s natural features, Ritter explained, were designed in the interests of its human inhabitants. As Ritter explained in the introduction to his masterwork, both “man as an individual, and...nations...cannot attain to perfect harmony with themselves before they find their true place to live and develop what is in them.” While in the past, this interrelationship between man and nature may have gone unnoticed, “in these our times, the law which controls this harmony...must be sought with all the aids which science gives.”²⁴

Of particular significance in Russia was Ritter’s view of the nation and its corresponding political state. At a time when national consciousness was emerging throughout Europe, Ritter argued that the characteristics of nations—*die Völker*—were in part determined by their natural environment. Nature exercises great influence on nations, he asserted, describing an influence that “has everywhere and at all times penetrated to the very heart of history.” “Nations, like men,” Ritter explained in his introduction to *Erkunde*, “are formed under a law superior to themselves....Every organism forms itself in accordance with its inner nature and its modifying surroundings, and thus the formula of its existence is read in the law imposed on it and in the mould in which it is found.” He predicted that one day scientists would decipher those laws through the study of a nation’s natural environment, thereby uncovering the most desirable course of that nation’s development. Furthermore, the scientists would determine measures to

take in order to ensure the welfare of the nation as ordained by Providence. Such an act, he asserted, was “the highest limit of statesmanship.” Only when a nation occupied its “true place” in the world would harmony emerge between the land and the people, politics and philosophy, and nature and the state, ensuring “through the course of history, prosperity and renown to peoples and states.”²⁵ As politically ordained boundaries had changed regularly over time, Ritter asserted that “for a true system of scientific geography, the statement of the area of political divisions does not suffice; that of the divisions marked out by nature itself...must be first ascertained,” the divisions that create nations, and at times, states.²⁶

Ritter granted particular importance to the study of history, which to him was inseparable from geography. Historical phenomena and geographical features, he wrote in 1818, constituted a “natural unity,” explaining that “nature”—by which he meant the entirety of all things—existed in both space and time.²⁷ At an 1833 speech at the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin, the geographer explained further: “Areas, times, shapes, and forms...do not remain the same in their relation to the globe, viewed as the dwelling place of mankind, rather they truly change their relative values with the progress of centuries and millennia.”²⁸ The Earth operated according to laws of geography that conditioned the development of both people nations, some “more favourably situated for progress than others.”²⁹ Ritter emphasized, however, that the influence of nature was waning with the development of technology, as distances “which were once regarded as almost untraversable, are now readily traversed by the aid of sails and steam.”³⁰ It was “the task of the geographer...to discover what causes have exerted a promotive or retarding influence on the various forms of the globe and their development hitherto.”³¹ Ritter’s seminal 1833 article on this topic, “The Historical Element in Geographical Science,” was published in Russian in 1836.³²

Ritter’s direct influence in Russia is most evident within the Russian Geographical Society, founded in 1845 by men who shared Ritter’s nationalistic vision of promoting knowledge of the nation’s land and its inhabitants.³³ Rather than focusing on knowledge for its own sake, the newly formed Geographical Society existed to serve the homeland itself, to “direct all efforts toward the benefit of Russia, devoting them primarily to the study of the Russian land and the Russian people”—a goal not unlike Ritter’s call for scholars to apply their geographical knowledge in service of the nation.³⁴ In 1846, Ritter was named an honorary member of the Geographical Society, and soon the Society commissioned translation of large portions of

Ritter's work into Russian.³⁵ Many of the society's Baltic German founders, including explorers Fedor Litke (Friedrich Lütke), Aleksandr Middendorf (Alexander von Middendorff), Ferdinand Wrangel' (Ferdinand von Wrangel), and Karl Baer (Karl von Baer), advocated for Ritter's new geography within the Society, even as Ritter cited their work in his 19-volume *Erdkunde*.³⁶ Ritter's influence was spread in Russia through a small book published by the Society in 1848 aimed at reaching a broad audience. Along with other works influenced by the German geographer was included an article by Karl Ber on the influence of natural features on nations and on human history, documenting the role of rivers as connectors and the capacity of other geographic features to form boundaries, facilitating the development of both nations (*narodov*) and states (*gosudarstv*).³⁷ Even after the Society's ethnically German founders were replaced by Russian leaders in 1849, Ritter's influence remained strong. Society member and explorer Petr Semenov, later to become Vice-chairman of the Society, attended Ritter's lectures in Berlin, and the Society continued the ongoing project of translating *Erdkunde* into Russian. Like nationalists throughout Europe, the Society prioritized the organic borders of the Russian nation over those of an artificially created state, and members of the Society were often at odds with the conservative politics of Tsar Nicholas I.

A key distinction emerged, however, between the teachings of the master himself, and those of his Russian followers. To Ritter, God had created the natural world in a manner that enabled the growth of pre-ordained cultures, civilizations, peoples, and states. However, development in these areas was not predestined by fate. Man had a moral obligation to seek knowledge of the world and to make proper use of the possibilities granted through nature by God himself. To Ritter, nature shaped mankind's development but did not determine his ultimate fate.³⁸ In Russia, however, fatalism predominated among Ritter's followers. Baer emphasized that "even today, when accomplishments in the fields of science and industry have provided man with many tools with which to subjugate nature, the course of human development is still subject to that same inescapable fate [as determined at the creation of the world]."³⁹ Solov'ev likewise claimed that nature determines inevitable state boundaries, and that it is therefore futile to oppose them.⁴⁰

While the geographer primarily described his observations on the interrelations between man and nature, his followers did not hesitate to apply his ideas prescriptively, as indeed Ritter had predicted.⁴¹ By the mid-nineteenth century, ideas once articulated by Ritter had found direct

application to Russia itself. In 1843, Baron August von Haxthausen undertook a year-long voyage throughout the Russian empire, establishing broad contacts with Russian scholars and introducing them to the latest European scientific ideas.⁴² The political unity of Russia, Haxthausen asserted, was “intended by nature...[its lands] only capable when united of constituting a powerful and independent state.”⁴³ Haxthausen cautioned, however, that Russia could not “without injury to herself be a conquering power.”⁴⁴ This was no concern to historian Mikhail Pogodin, who taught that all peoples of the Russian land would not only accept Russian authority, but would themselves russify, and indeed wanted to do so.⁴⁵ Aleksandr Balasoglo, a liberal young archivist at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an early member of the Russian Geographical Society, shared similar sentiments, claiming boldly in the mid-1840s that “the East belongs to Russia immutably, naturally, historically, of its own free will.”⁴⁶ Balasoglo was soon arrested for participation in the radical Petrashevsky circle, yet his influence lived on in a lengthy memo he prepared for Nikolai Murav’ev upon the latter’s appointment as Governor General of East Siberia.⁴⁷ In it, Balasoglo emphasized that East Siberia stretched naturally to the Pacific and was part of a larger unified Russia. He described a flourishing Russian fur trade on the Amur in the early seventeenth century—information likely gleaned from Ritter himself—and argued that the land belonged rightfully and historically to Russia.⁴⁸ Consistent with Ritter’s theories that nature created interdependent parts within an organic whole, Balasoglo considered it the *estestvennoe naznachenie* (natural function) of the eastern borderlands to serve all of Russia.⁴⁹ “If Russia does not wish to recognize its treasures,” he warned the Governor General, “then someone else will see them and take measures [to acquire them]! A holy place will not be empty!”⁵⁰

The young historian Sergei Solov’ev, who became chair of Russian history at Moscow University in 1845, was familiar with Ritter’s ideas through his teachers at the same university, including his predecessor Mikhail Pogodin, his mentor Timofei Granovskii, and statistics professor Aleksandr Chivilev. He himself attended the famous geographer’s lectures in Berlin in 1842.⁵¹ In early 1850, Solov’ev published a short, yet important, article in the liberal literary magazine *Otechestvennye zapiski* (*Notes of the Fatherland*), introducing themes that would pervade his multi-volume history. Echoing Ritter, yet emphasizing strict geographic determinism, Solov’ev wrote that what matters is not the size of a state but the manner in which it came into being. If a large state comes into being through wars or treaties, Solov’ev explained,

it cannot last, as nature itself will facilitate its division. If nature, on the other hand, designed vast boundaries for a state from the beginning, the opposite would be true. “Sooner or later,” Solov’ev wrote, “nature will take its own [*priroda beret svoe*]: despite all obstacles, artificially separated parts will strive for unification and ultimately achieve their goal.”⁵² Like Ritter, who taught that it was the “harmony between people and country, this relation of the state to nature and to the life of man, and so to politics and philosophy, which has given, through the course of history, prosperity and renown to peoples and states,”⁵³ Solov’ev, too, maintained that a state was strongest when it occupied its natural borders. Just as Americans at the time viewed their westward expansion in terms of a “manifest destiny” to stretch to the sea, so Russian land, Solov’ev argued, was an organic unit centered on the vast East European plain, which contained no natural divisions. While many tribes had once co-existed in that immense territory, they were unable to remain enemies for long. Their differences had been rapidly annihilated.⁵⁴

While Solov’ev located Russia solidly in Europe, detailing what he considered natural expansion of pre-modern Russia along eastern European rivers, he noted that Russian expansion even beyond Europe was facilitated by nature. Like Ritter, he viewed waterways as a means of transportation. Acknowledging that mountains often divided people into nations, he explained that in the Caucasus—which Russia had annexed earlier in the century—nature had “removed the capacity [of the mountains] to divide” by surrounding them with water on two sides, facilitating transportation within the region.⁵⁵ The Caucasus, therefore, had been easily taken by Russians, as was Siberia, which had no natural divide between itself and European Russia. “Because of their insignificant height,” he wrote in his 1850 article, the Urals “do not have the divisive character of other mountain ranges,” a sentiment shared by Ritter, who described the Urals as no longer a barrier, but a “medium of connection...between Europe and Asia.”⁵⁶ Likewise, the historian expanded upon the geographer’s narrative of how small tribes scattered throughout Siberia had been unable to oppose natural Russian expansion, and soon the Russian state had reached the shores of the Pacific.⁵⁷ While Solov’ev’s multi-volume history detailed pre-modern expansion that ended at the Urals, there was nothing to prevent further Russian expansion into Asia. Indeed, his famous pupil, Vasiliï Kliuchevskii, later described how modern Russia did just that.⁵⁸

Imagining the Amur

By the 1840s, only the Amur River basin in southeastern Siberia remained free of Russia's grasp, cut off from even Siberia by the thick forests and high mountains of Zabaikal'e. While Russian soldiers and traders had inhabited northeastern Siberia since the seventeenth century, southeastern Siberia had seen few Russians in nearly 200 years. According to maps based on the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk, the territory was Chinese. Yet even this picture was beginning to change, prominently challenged by Russian Geographical Society founder Aleksandr Middendorf, an early Russian disciple of Ritter. In 1843, the famous explorer had undertaken his own expedition to the Far East, assigned by the Russian Academy of Sciences to investigate Siberian permafrost and the Sea of Okhotsk. Warned of the dangers of encroaching on Chinese territory, Middendorf nonetheless disregarded orders and explored the Amur River as well. Like Ritter, he believed that waterways were a natural means of communication and transport, their watersheds dividing the Earth into natural units of territory.⁵⁹ This territory, he believed, was rightfully Russian, rather than Chinese. To him, the Amur and its tributaries, flowing out of inner Siberia, could not be disconnected from Russia itself. Since human settlement patterns followed the waterways, Middendorf saw Russian expansion on both sides of the Amur as inevitable.⁶⁰ It was the fate of Russia and the United States, Middendorf wrote in his travel report, to "look at each other across the ocean as neighbors."⁶¹

On the Russian side of the Pacific, two factors were preventing the realization of Middendorf's vision. Perhaps most important were state concerns about relations with China, with whom trade had suffered following the opening of treaty ports to the west. Hoping to avoid conflict, Foreign Minister Karl Nesselrode vehemently opposed exploration of the region, which was designated Chinese on official Russian maps.⁶² Secondly, the Amur River was presumed to be unnavigable at its mouth, preventing it from facilitating transport to and from the Pacific. In 1846, a covert expedition had been dispatched in search of a navigable channel up the river. When no such channel was located, the tsar declared the river "useless" and the question was considered closed.⁶³ Further exploration was assumed to be both dangerous and unnecessary.

It was in this context that Gennadii Nevel'skoi gained interest in the Amur River basin. A top graduate of the prestigious Naval College with 14 years of experience at sea, Nevel'skoi—like Ritter—questioned the findings of past explorers.⁶⁴ In the mid-1840s, the officer began meeting with Balasoglo, and together the two men planned a joint expedition in search of the

river's mouth. Balasoglo, they assumed, would travel through Siberia and down the Amur itself, while Nevel'skoi would circumnavigate the globe to approach by sea.⁶⁵ When the opportunity arose to command an around-the-world voyage delivering supplies to Kamchatka, Nevel'skoi volunteered for the assignment, proposing to Naval Minister Aleksandr Menshikov to explore the Amur estuary as well. If all went well, he would meet Balasoglo there. Neither Balasoglo's subsequent arrest nor the rejection of his proposal by the Minister of the Navy daunted Nevel'skoi, who set sail in August of 1848.

Nevel'skoi and Balasoglo were not the only ones to recognize the potential value of the Amur to Russia. The explorer is unlikely to have embarked on his unsanctioned exploration were it not for the support of Nikolai Murav'ev, who had been appointed Governor General of East Siberia in 1847. Having studied Balasoglo's lengthy memorandum on East Siberian history and geography, Murav'ev was well aware of the geopolitical significance of the region to Russia. He knew that Russian Cossacks had traded along the Amur in the seventeenth century, until they were forced out by the Manchu. He found a kindred spirit in Nevel'skoi, and soon Murav'ev became Nevel'skoi's primary supporter. Before his departure, Nevel'skoi wrote to his friend, "is it possible that such a vast river as the Amur would fail to carve an outlet into the sea, and would instead get lost in the sand, as it somehow seems based on the aforementioned briefs?"⁶⁶ If navigable, the river would not only serve Russia as a natural highway but also render Siberia vulnerable from the east. If Nevel'skoi was right, Russia would be forced to defend the land as its own. From Rio de Janeiro that November, Nevel'skoi wrote to Murav'ev that he was on schedule and expected to continue to the Amur as planned, although he still lacked approval from St. Petersburg. Aware of the potential consequences of his anticipated insubordination, he asked the governor to approach the tsar on his behalf.⁶⁷

When Nevel'skoi arrived in Kamchatka in May of 1849, he did not wait for word from St. Petersburg, although instructions had, in fact, been dispatched by courier across Siberia. Instead, he departed immediately for the Amur. After nearly two months of exploration, Nevel'skoi confirmed what he had suspected all along. The mouth of the Amur was not only navigable, he ascertained, but was accessible from both the north and the south. What previous explorers referred to as the Gulf of Tatar, a body of water south of the Amur estuary, Nevel'skoi found to be a strait, providing direct access from the Amur River to China and Japan. Both Nevel'skoi and Murav'ev rejoiced at this discovery, convinced that the region would prove

of great significance to Russia.⁶⁸ Murav'ev wrote to Naval Minister Menshikov, "The most important of all [Nevel'skoi's] discoveries is the southern strait from the liman [estuary] and the unblocked entrance it provides for even the largest ships from the Gulf of Tatory directly into the river. This discovery forces us to proceed immediately with the occupation of the mouth of the Amur."⁶⁹

While they did not immediately claim the land as Russian or send ships to defend it, Nevel'skoi's discovery convinced St. Petersburg officials of the political and military significance of the Amur. Soon the state approved further exploration, although still undercover and limited in scope. Nevel'skoi was to establish a post to the north of the river but not to approach the river itself.⁷⁰ A year later, he was assigned a crew of 60 men and granted a position as officer on special assignment to Murav'ev himself. Until 1855, Nevel'skoi remained in the region exploring the territory, establishing forts, trading with the area's indigenous inhabitants, and proclaiming the territory Russian land. As in the past, much of his activity was conducted without the approval of the tsar.

Ritterian Geography Applied in the East

While to the state in the latter half of the 1850s, Russian exploration and fortification of the region was primarily a defensive measure, Nevel'skoi's activity in the first half of the decade, along with the language he used later to describe it, reveal the influence of Ritter and his followers not merely on an intellectual level among the Russian intelligentsia but also in very practical ways on the distant frontier. Just as Ritter had predicted that one day scholars would understand the laws of nature and implement them to benefit the nation, Nevel'skoi put Ritter's words into practice when he explored the Amur basin, claimed it for Russia, and defended his actions to statesmen in the capital. Having studied the geography of the region in preparation for his travels, it is no surprise that the officer was familiar with Ritter's volumes on northeastern Asia. Indeed, in his memoir, he referenced the geographer directly, referring to the "rich granary" the region could have become for Russia, had the seventeenth-century Cossacks made proper use of it.⁷¹ It is likely that both Nevel'skoi and Murav'ev were familiar with more than just the sections of *Erdkunde* relevant to the Amur, however. Both men were well-educated and Western-leaning, and both were involved in the Russian Geographical Society. Moreover, during his 10 years in the Baltic Fleet, Nevel'skoi served under Fedor Litke, a key figure behind the

Russian Geographical Society's translation of Ritter's work into Russian. He was likely familiar with the 1848 book by the Russian Geographical Society, which popularized Ritter's ideas among a wider Russian audience.⁷²

Nevel'skoi and Murav'ev may have also been familiar with Solov'ev's application of Ritter to the Russian state.⁷³ Solov'ev's crucial initial article laying out the relationship between the natural environment and the historical development of the Russian state was published in February of 1850 in the liberal literary magazine *Otechestvennye zapiski (Notes of the Fatherland)*.⁷⁴ Both men were in St. Petersburg at that time, reporting on Nevel'skoi's findings and explaining the significance of the Amur basin to the tsar and his advisors. Moreover, Murav'ev almost certainly had access to the journal at his home in Irkutsk, and there is evidence that Nevel'skoi shared some issues of the magazine with his officers in the Far East.⁷⁵ While neither man cited the historian directly, Solov'ev contributed significantly to the intellectual climate of the time, which shaped the narrative through which the men explained Nevel'skoi's undertaking and pronounced Russia's destiny in the east.⁷⁶

Certain key similarities are discernible between Ritter's—and Solov'ev's—theoretical understanding of national borders and the explorer's claims on the Far Eastern lands. To Ritter, rivers were “the great veins of the earth,” whose pulsation “conduces to the activity of the human race, and calls states and nations forth, and stamps them with conscious individuality.”⁷⁷ Historically, he asserted, the districts formed by watersheds were “the home of culture and the seat of organized political states.” Such states developed naturally, and could not easily be split apart.⁷⁸ As Karl Baer explained to the Russian public, “the influence of [the earth's natural features] is seen in the division of people into groups with natural borders and the development through them of nations and states.”⁷⁹ Likewise, to Solov'ev, waterways were crucial to a state's natural expansion, and in that area Russia was exceptionally well-endowed. Russia's river systems, according to Solov'ev's narrative of pre-modern Russian history, served as guides to the early populations. Tribes settled along rivers, and the first cities developed along them.⁸⁰ Navigable waterways enabled the unity of both the people and the state. Solov'ev portrayed Russian history as a series of migrations along river routes, all converging on the Moscow River, which he deemed the state's natural center.⁸¹ While Solov'ev focused on pre-modern Russia, however, Ritter emphasized the even greater connective function assumed by rivers in the modern era. “The waters of the continents, the colossal rivers, have lost their former length” he

wrote in 1833. “They are practically shortened six or seven fold; and whereas they used to be navigable only in one direction, except with the greatest difficulty, their current is now almost as readily stemmed as followed.”⁸²

As a seaman, Nevel’skoi, too, viewed water as a means of transportation, as a connector rather than a divide. While his interest in the Amur originated due to its geo-politically strategic location, he soon came to describe it as Russia’s destiny to expand along the Amur. What made the river Russian, according to Nevel’skoi and Murav’ev, reflecting the influence of Balasoglo, was its origin deep in Siberia, which itself was connected by rivers to Russia’s European heartland. Demonstrating the nationalism of the era and the ethos of the Russian Geographical Society, Nevel’skoi emphasized that his actions were in the service of the fatherland (*otechestvo*). His discovery of the navigability of the river’s mouth, Nevel’skoi explained in his memoir, “proved the great importance of the Amur River as an artery, connecting East Siberia with the ocean, which had previously been considered separated by tundra, mountains, and huge empty spaces.”⁸³ These views were shared by Lieutenant-Commander Voin Rimskii-Korsakov, who piloted the first ocean-going vessel through the Strait of Tatar in 1853. Rimskii-Korsakov wrote not of the military or geopolitical significance of the region—although he certainly grasped this, serving on a diplomatic mission to Japan. Rather, echoing Balasoglo and Haxthausen, who emphasized the economic interdependence of regions within a naturally ordained state, he wrote of the Amur basin as an integral part of an organic Russian land, without which the entire body would suffer. “Thank God that attention is now being paid to this land,” Rimskii-Korsakov wrote from the East. “It alone can bring life to our Siberia and supply the resources it needs by means of the Amur.”⁸⁴ Possessing the eastern borderlands of the natural Russian homeland would strengthen the state as a whole.

When Nevel’skoi claimed the Amur River basin as rightfully Russian in the 1850s, he demonstrated similarity in particular to Solov’ev by declaring not only a Russian future for the region but also a Russian past. While Ritter viewed the shifting of state and national borders as a natural and even teleological process,⁸⁵ to Solov’ev, such movement signified a departure from the organic territory in which the nation belonged. Yet, in a country as large as Russia, organic territorial borders seldom coincided completely with the actual boundaries of the state. “As a result of historical conditions,” Solov’ev explained, “many Russian regions were torn away by foreign powers; but nature itself resisted this artificial separation. [For example,] Poland was

unable to tear apart southwestern Rus from northeastern [Rus].”⁸⁶ Solov’ev was confident that territory artificially divided would naturally be united again.⁸⁷ To Nevel’skoi, the withdrawal of the Cossacks in the seventeenth century was likewise a temporary separation. He considered it his duty to reconcile the land with the Russian state.

In order to convince both the Russian state and its Far Eastern neighbors of Russia’s historic right to the region, Nevel’skoi emphasized Russia’s historic position in the Amur region, at times implying a firmer Russian hold on the Amur than had ever been the case. When he raised a Russian flag at the mouth of the Amur in 1850, Nevel’skoi announced to indigenous onlookers that Russians had always considered the land their own. To whalers from Europe and North America, he spoke of the territory’s “*prinadlezhnosti Rossii*” (belonging to Russia), again implying a natural connection or indivisibility, an inevitable belonging together.⁸⁸ In his memoirs, Nevel’skoi highlighted evidence of Russia’s historic presence and influence in the region: a Russian prayer book left behind by shipwrecked sailors, the ruins of a Russian fortress at Albazin, and most importantly, indigenous inhabitants of Sakhalin Island who had dark blond or brown hair and claimed Russian ancestry.⁸⁹

Departing from Ritter, who considered the region to have been legitimately ceded to China in 1689,⁹⁰ both Nevel’skoi and Murav’ev emphasized in their correspondence with St. Petersburg not only that Russians had historically been active in the region but also that Russia had never, in fact, lost the north Amur basin. Since neither Russians nor Chinese had explored the region and neither needed a distinct, fortified boundary, no exact borderline had ever been defined.⁹¹ Again emphasizing the role of water as a means of connection, Murav’ev wrote to Menshikov in 1850, “Historical research on the eastern edges of Russia shows that throughout the seventeenth century, Russian Cossacks and traders controlled the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, Kamchatka and the Amur River, and while we did not have a [Russian] population at the mouth of the Amur, the Cossacks sailed down it and into the Sea of Okhotsk.”⁹² The land had been neglected by Russia, however, due to faulty maps that placed the border well to the north of the river.⁹³ “By reproducing these inaccurate maps,” he explained, “it was as if we were acknowledging that the area south of that arbitrarily drawn line belonged to China.”⁹⁴ To him, it was high time to rectify that mistake.

Nevel’skoi likewise proclaimed a Russian past for Sakhalin Island, across the strait from the Amur’s mouth, which had not been mentioned in the Treaty of Nerchinsk. When he

established Murav'evskii Post on southern Sakhalin in 1853, Nevel'skoi insisted that Russia "has and has always had a complete and irrefutable right" to the island.⁹⁵ Nevel'skoi justified Russian activity there by explaining to the Japanese that the island had "belonged to Russia since time immemorial."⁹⁶ In an account of the landing written 13 years later, Nevel'skoi described himself as claiming "Russia has always recognized Sakhalin as its own."⁹⁷

To Nevel'skoi in the Amur region, as to Ritter's Russian followers, not just the territory of a preordained state was a single united entity, but the inhabitants of the land were destined for unification. According to Ritter, more advanced civilizations, having achieved dominance thanks to natural features such as rivers and coastlines, were morally obliged—indeed, ordained by nature—to share their achievements. He notes that Europe had become "the place whence the ripened fruits of civilization might be transferred to all other nations of the globe."⁹⁸ As Baer explained, "the convenience of [river] transportation united people into one nation and spreads languages, so that even seemingly different nations soon merge into one."⁹⁹ Russia, too, had a history of sharing its civilization with its neighbors, emphasized Pogodin, elucidating Russian history as a process of "undisputed takeover,...[a] loving deal" with its less accomplished neighbors—in the words of Alexander Etkind, "colonization by consent."¹⁰⁰ To Solov'ev, the unity of the vast Russian empire was assured. "Thanks to the...ease of transportation and coming together [provided by the Russian rivers]," Solov'ev wrote, applying Ritter's ideas in a Russian contest, "when nationalities [*narodnosti*] collide, they naturally and necessarily strive toward sameness [*priravnenie*], merging one with another....Soon the entire plain is populated by a single nation with one language, faith, law, and government."¹⁰¹ Yet Russia was not European, Pogodin emphasized, noting both geographical and cultural disparities between the two. "We have a different climate from the West...a different temperament, character, different blood, a different physiognomy, a different outlook, a different cast of mind...different conditions, different history....Everything is different."¹⁰²

Likewise, Nevel'skoi emphasized that the indigenous people of the region desired to become Russian. To him, declaring them Russian was not conquest but an act of brotherhood. Throughout his reports, he described the indigenous peoples welcoming him, assisting him, and petitioning him for protection. Nevel'skoi explained to Grand Duke Constantine in 1850:

The Giliaks [Nivkhs]...helped us diligently, showing us fairways, storing our supplies. Not only did they fail to show any displeasure that we were building among them, they in contrast were glad and flocked to us to beg for protection from the tyranny of whalers whose ships often visit their shores....They said to us: “We, Giliaks, just like our kinsmen the Neidal’tsy, Negri, Samgery, and others living on the shores of the Amur, Amgun and other rivers, live on one land [*na odnoi zemle*] with the Tungus. But you protect the Tungus, and no one touches them. Why do you not want us to live like that as well?”¹⁰³

With that statement, Nevel’skoi not only indicated that the Nivkhs desired to submit to the Russians but also attributed to Nivkhs themselves the idea of the land as a single united whole, inhabited jointly by Nivkhs, Evenks, Neidal’tsy, and Russians. Its inhabitants were *rodichi* (kinsmen) who belonged together. Sharing one land with the Russians, they wished to share the protection of the Russian tsar, described by Pogodin as “peaceful guest [and] a desired protector.”¹⁰⁴ According to Nevel’skoi, the Nivkhs themselves claimed a particular closeness to the Russians, pointing out that “we do not hide our children from you or our wives” and wondering why Russians did not reciprocate.¹⁰⁵

Nevel’skoi also emphasized the ability and presumed desire of the indigenous peoples to adopt Russian culture. While Pogodin had asserted that all peoples of Russia would naturally unite, and Solov’ev placed the assertion into a scientific framework, in the Amur region, Nevel’skoi put this idea into practice, fulfilling the moral obligation granted to Russia by nature itself. To him, the Nivkhs were not savage and deceptive, as explorer Ivan Kruzenshtern had described them after his 1805 exploration.¹⁰⁶ Instead, they were destined to become one with the Russians, a process that had already begun on Sakhalin, where a trader encountered villages whose inhabitants exhibited Russian values and traits.¹⁰⁷ Nevel’skoi’s wife, Ekaterina Nevel’skaia, furthered this process by teaching Nivkh women to bathe, comb their hair, garden, and wear Russian clothes.¹⁰⁸ Nevel’skoi’s officer Nikolai Boshniak recalled that Nevel’skaia invited her Nivkh guests inside and served them tea.¹⁰⁹ Boshniak himself sought to arrange the marriage of a sailor under his command to the daughter of a wealthy Nivkh trader, cementing the union of the peoples in another way. To his disappointment, the marriage never took place.¹¹⁰

While the 1860 Russo-Chinese border ran along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, Nevel'skoi was never satisfied with this arrangement. To Nevel'skoi—like Ritter—the Amur and Ussuri Rivers were not borders but natural unifiers, representing a single unified whole. “The Amur and Ussuri regions,” he claimed, referring not to the rivers alone, but to their entire watershed, “represent a single indivisible whole, where the river and the sea constitute the only means of transportation.” Arguing based on his own interpretation of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, he continued, “the mouth of the Sungari River and the entire Ussuri River basin, all the way to the Korean border, should constitute the inalienable property of Russia, all the more since the Amur River alone represents only a base for our activities and does not determine the full significance of the regions for Russia.”¹¹¹ Even after his return to St. Petersburg in 1855, he continued to argue for the geographical unity of the entire region, including most of northern Manchuria. The annexation of the Ussuri region in 1860 represented a compromise.¹¹² Yet future Russians would indeed seek unification of Russia with Manchuria and even China itself. In the 1890s, the Asianists (*vostochniki*) emphasized the Oriental roots of Russia, arguing for “reunification,” while opposing the use of military force to attain it. Russia had no need to resort to force, emphasized Prince Esper Ukhtomskii, a leading Asianist and tutor to the future Nicholas II. Fifty years after Pogodin and Solov'ev made similar claims, Ukhtomskii wrote that “Russia in reality conquers nothing in the East, since all the alien races visibly absorbed by her are related to us by blood, in tradition, and in thought. We are only tightening the bonds between us and that which in reality was already ours.”¹¹³

Officially Russian

In 1853, after four years of exploration, declarations, and repeated justification of Nevel'skoi's insubordination, the Russian state revised its policy regarding the Amur River basin. Summoned from Irkutsk to St. Petersburg in early 1853, Murav'ev again invoked Ritterian geography in defense of Nevel'skoi's actions, arguing that it was Russia's destiny to occupy the Amur River basin. “Some twenty-five years ago,” he declared, “the Russian American Company appealed to the state for permission to occupy California, . . . expressing fear that the region would become a trophy of the American United States. It has now been more than a year since California became one of the North American states.”¹¹⁴ This was not to be regretted, the Governor General insisted, since it was natural for the United States to possess all of North America, just as Russia

should naturally rule over the Asian shores of the Pacific. He continued: “Due to circumstances, we have allowed the English to intrude into this part of Asia, [imposing] laws that do not serve the good of mankind, but satisfy merely the commercial interests of Great Britain.” Yet it was not for Britain, but for Russia, to occupy Sakhalin and the mouth of the Amur.¹¹⁵ At a second meeting that month (April 1853), Murav’ev shared with the tsar the conclusions of a surveying expedition by topographer Nikolai Agte, who had spent three years exploring the Russo-Chinese frontier. After considering the governor’s arguments and studying the topographer’s maps of the region, the tsar finally accepted the Governor’s claim that the land had been Russian all along. He ordered the Minister of War to approach China on the subject.¹¹⁶ Not only had Nevel’skoi accomplished his goal of attracting the state’s attention to the region, but he now had the tsar’s wholehearted support. In the eyes of the state, the Amur was—and had long been—Russian.

Nevel’skoi’s dream of a river connection between Siberia and the Pacific became reality in May 1854, when a flotilla of 78 boats transporting more than 800 Cossacks and soldiers departed downriver from Siberia to defend the Russian borderland against Britain, France, and the United States of America. Although the river took them through territory until recently recognized as Chinese, they experienced no resistance. An encounter with indigenous Evenks in possession of an engraved Russian dagger from the early 1700s and a day of rest at the ruins of the Cossack fortress at Albazin seemed to confirm that the land was theirs, as did the friendly welcome they allegedly received from the indigenous peoples as they neared the Pacific. Upon reaching the region explored by Nevel’skoi’s Amur expedition, Murav’ev reported to the officer, “We entered land that seems to have always belonged to Russia.”¹¹⁷ Similar expeditions followed the next two years.¹¹⁸

In 1856, the region became part of the newly organized Primorskaia oblast’ of East Siberia, the once-unauthorized Nikolaevskii Post founded by Nevel’skoi in 1850 serving as its center. That summer, not only did troops sail down the river from Siberia, but peasants and Cossacks also began arriving to settle the region. Once a remote wilderness separated from the Russian heartland by mountains and forests, the region was becoming part of Russia itself. Russia’s possession of the northern Amur basin became official with the 1858 Treaty of Aigun, which placed the Russian-Chinese border along the Amur River, and by the 1860 Treaty of Beijing, which granted to Russia the entire lower Amur basin east of the Ussuri. To many Russians, the Amur provided hope in Russia’s national greatness and future abundance.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

In an era of imperialism, when European states were fighting for land and influence around the globe, Baron August von Haxthausen seems to have contradicted himself when he predicted a “great future destiny” for Russia, while warning that it must not become a “conquering power.”¹²⁰ Historically, great nations had conquered, and in the mid-nineteenth century, they demonstrated their superiority through colonization, which granted them land, resources, subjects, and prestige. To followers of geographer Karl Ritter, however, there was no contradiction in this statement. Some states, Ritter claimed, were predestined to be large and strong, which they achieved not through war, but by integrating land and peoples that belonged naturally together. A nation’s true boundaries, according to Ritter’s teaching, were determined by natural features such as rivers, which united peoples and facilitated population movement, and mountains, which often created divisions.

Ritter’s ideas shed light on an apparent paradox in the language and actions of Gennadii Nevel’skoi concerning the Amur River basin in the mid-nineteenth century. In less than a decade, facing regular opposition from the tsar’s ministers, Nevel’skoi spearheaded Russia’s annexation of more than 900,000 km², a land with rich potential for agriculture and of geopolitical significance to the state. Moreover, the annexation opened up shipping on the Amur River itself, facilitating transport of people and goods from the heart of Siberia. Yet language of conquest and imperialism is conspicuously missing in the writings of Nevel’skoi. Not once in his 424-page memoir—outside of quotations and official titles—did Nevel’skoi refer to Russia as an empire. The word *imperiiia* in Nevel’skoi’s writing was used in reference to the empires of the Japanese and the Qing, while the Russian empire was the fatherland (*otechestvo*), or simply Russia (*Rossiia*) itself. Nevel’skoi did not speak of conquest, but of *prisoedinenie*—literally fastening together or counting as one—and of *vodvorenie*, or settlement of land that was already Russian.¹²¹ Defending his friend’s actions, the Governor General—himself an official in charge of a large colonial possession—argued not for the expansion of Russian borders but for recognition of territory that had been Russia’s all long. The tsar, it is reported, was convinced, responding “*Itak eto nashe!*” (So it’s ours) and taking measures to rectify the situation.¹²²

The geographic theories of Karl Ritter reached far beyond the realm of European intellectuals and Russian intelligentsia, their Russian variations evident even in the expansion of

Russia in the East. Despite the disapproval of a conservative Russian state, Nevel'skoi's Amur Expedition of 1849–1853 put into practice Solov'ev's theory that Russia's *gosudarstvennaia oblast'* (state territory) developed historically along the vast river systems of Russia, fulfilling Ritter's hope that one day scholars would “determine from the whole of a nation's surroundings what the course of its development is [best] to be.”¹²³ While Russia's actions in the Far East conformed to patterns of colonialism around the globe, the discourse surrounding them was of a natural, rightful, and historic Russian land. Within an intellectual context shaped in part by Ritterian geography, Nevel'skoi could colonize without considering himself a colonizer, expand the empire while arguing that the region was Russia's all along.

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¹ John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 47–49; Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 135, 146.

² Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, 43.

³ Aleksander I. Alekseev, *Amurskaia ekspeditsiia 1849–1855 gg.* (Moscow: Mysl', 1974), 9.

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- ⁴ Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 37–101. Bassin explores the role of geography in this undertaking in Bassin, “Russian Geographers and the ‘National Mission’ in the Far East,” in *Geography and National Identity*, ed. David J. M. Hoosen (Oxford, England and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 112–133.
- ⁵ Carl Ritter, “Introductory Essay to General Comparative Geography” [1818], in *Geographical Studies*, trans. William L. Gage (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1863), 59.
- ⁶ Nataliia G. Sukhova, *Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990), 81–82.
- ⁷ Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 304. Other scholarship that considers Ritter’s influence in Russia includes Mark Bassin, “Turner, Solov’ev, and the ‘Frontier Hypothesis’: The Nationalist Signification of Open Spaces,” *The Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 3 (1993): 473–511; Mark Bassin, “Geographical Determinism in Fin-de-siècle Marxism: Georgii Plekhanov and the Environmental Basis of Russian History,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 1 (1992): 3–22; Bassin, “Russian Geographers and the ‘National Mission’ in the Far East;” and Denis J. B. Shaw and Jonathan D. Oldfield, “Landscape Science: A Russian Geographical Tradition,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no. 1 (2007): 111–126.
- ⁸ Sukhova, *Karl Ritter*, 82–83, 110; Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture*, 276.
- ⁹ Sergei M. Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishkh vremen*. 29 vols. St. Petersburg, 1851–1878.
- ¹⁰ See Bassin, “Turner, Solov’ev, and the ‘Frontier Hypothesis,” 483–484.
- ¹¹ Steven Seegel, *Mapping Europe’s Borderlands: Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 84–85. See also 112, 117.
- ¹² Scott C. Matsushita Bailey, “Travel, Science, and Empire: The Russian Geographical Society’s Expeditions to Central Eurasia, 1845–1905” (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2008).
- ¹³ Ryan T. Jones, *Empire of Extinction: Russians and the North Pacific’s Strange Beasts of the Sea, 1741–1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
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- ¹⁵ Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 55–95.
- ¹⁶ Nikolai M. Przheval’skii, *Puteshestvie v Ussuriiskom krae: 1867–1869 gg.* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1947), 34. See discussion in Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, 156.
- ¹⁷ Mark Bassin, “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 3. (1991): 767.
- ¹⁸ Bassin, “Inventing Siberia,” 766.

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- ¹⁹ Claudia Weiss, “Representing the Empire: The Meaning of Siberia for Russian Imperial Identity,” *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 3 (2007): 441.
- ²⁰ Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804–1867* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36.
- ²¹ Harriet Murav, “‘*Vo Glubine Sibirskikh Rud*’: Siberia and the Myth of Exile,” in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, ed. Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 100–105.
- ²² Vasilii O. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, part 1, in *Sochineniia v deviati tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Mysl, 1987), 50.
- ²³ Gennadii I. Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi russkikh morskikh ofitserov na krainem vostoke Rossii 1849–55 g. Pri-amurskii i Pri-ussuriiskii krai* (St. Petersburg: Russkaia skoropechatnaia P. S. Nakhimova, 1878), 14. While Nevel’skoi does not provide a volume or page number, it appears that he is referring to volume 2 of Ritter’s masterwork: Carl Ritter, *Die Erdkunde in Verhältniss zur Natur and zur Geschichte des Menschen, oder allgemeine vergleichende Geographie*, 19 parts, 21 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1817–1818, 1822–1859). See in particular vol. 2, book 2, part 1, 103.
- ²⁴ Ritter, “Introductory Essay,” 55, 63–64.
- ²⁵ Ritter, “Introductory Essay,” 59—60, 62, 63.
- ²⁶ Ritter, “Remarks on Forms and Numbers as Auxiliary in Representing the Relations of Geographical Spaces” [1828], in *Geographical Studies*, 221–222, 228.
- ²⁷ Ritter, “Introductory Essay, 74; See also Carl Ritter, *Comparative Geography*, trans. William L. Gage (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1865), xvii; Sukhova, *Karl Ritter*, 54–56.
- ²⁸ Carl Ritter, *Einleitung zur allgemeinen vergleichenden Geographie* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1852), 152, cited in *A Source Book in Geography*, ed. George Kish (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 421.
- ²⁹ Ritter, “The Historical Element in Geographical Science,” [1833] in *Geographical Studies*, 268.
- ³⁰ Ritter, “The Historical Element,” 267.
- ³¹ Ritter, “The External Features of the Earth in their Influence on the Course of History” [1850], in *Geographical Studies*, 336.
- ³² Karl Ritter, “Ob istoricheskome nachale v geografii,” *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia* 1836, ch. 11, 552–585.
- ³³ Sukhova, *Karl Ritter*, 90; *Ustav Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1850), 1. On the Russian Geographical Society, see Bailey, “Travel, Science, and Empire;” Knight, “Science, Empire and Nationality;” Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality;” Mark Bassin, “The Russian Geographical Society, the ‘Amur Epoch,’ and the Great Siberian Expedition 1855–1863,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73, no. 2 (1983): 240–256; Claudia Weiss, *Wie Sibirien “unser” wurde: Die Russische Geographische Gesellschaft und ihr Einfluss auf die Bilder und Vorstellungen von Sibirien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2007); Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in*

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³⁴ “Otchet Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva za 1851 god,” *Vestnik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* Ch. IV, kn. 2 (1852): 16; cited in Bassin, “The Russian Geographical Society,” 243. See discussion in Bassin, “The Russian Geographical Society,” 242–243; Bradley, *Voluntary Associations*, 94–97; Ritter, “Introductory Essay,” 62.

³⁵ Karl Ritter, *Zemlevedenie Azii*, 9 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1856–1879).

³⁶ Sukhova, *Karl Ritter*, 74–78, 89–97.

³⁷ Karl Ber, “O vliianii vneshnei prirody na sotsial’nyia otnosheniia otdel’nykh narodov i istoriiu chelovechestva,” in *Karmannaia knizhka dlia liubitelei zemlevedeniia* (St. Petersburg: Russkoe Geograficheskoe Obshchestvo, 1848), 225–227. See also Sukhova, *Karl Ritter*, 92.

³⁸ See Manfred Büttner, “Zu Beziehungen zwischen Geographie: Theologie und Philosophie in Denken Carl Ritters,” in *Carl Ritter: Geltung und Deutung*, ed. Karl Lenz (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1981), 75–91.

³⁹ Ber, “O vliianii vneshnei prirody,” 232.

⁴⁰ Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody russkoi gosudarstvennoi oblasti na ee istoriiu,” *Otechestvennyye zapiski* 69, no. 2 (1850): 229–230.

⁴¹ Ritter, “Introductory Essay,” 62.

⁴² See Nathaniel Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality: Ethnography in Mid-nineteenth Century Russia (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1994), 215. Haxthausen had been a student in Göttingen when Ritter wrote the first volume of his masterwork at the same university.

⁴³ August von Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire: Its People, Institutions, and Resources*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Fable (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856), xix. Originally published in 1847.

⁴⁴ Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, xxi–xxii.

⁴⁵ Mikhail Pogodin, *Normanskii period russkoi istorii* (Moscow: V. Got’e, 1859), 187. See discussion in Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), 58.

⁴⁶ Aleksandr P. Balasoglo, “Proekt uchrezhdeniia knizhnogo sklada s bibliotekoi i tipografiei,” in *Delo petrashevtsev*, vol. 2, ed. V. A. Desnitskii (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1941), 44.

⁴⁷ Balasoglo’s report was published in 1875. [Aleksandr 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): part v, *Smes’*, 103–188. See also Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 84–90.

⁴⁸ [Balasoglo], “Vostochnaia Sibir’,” 105–106, 114, 188; See Carl Ritter, *Die Erdkunde*, vol. 2, book 2, *Asien*, part 1, 103. Unfortunately, Balasoglo’s memo, written for practical rather the scholarly purposes, does not cite any of its sources.

⁴⁹ [Balasoglo], “Vostochnaia Sibir,’” 103.

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- ⁵⁰ [Balasoglo], “Vostochnaia Sibir’,” 188. “*Mesto sviato ne budet pusto*” is a Russian proverb.
- ⁵¹ Bassin, “Turner, Solov’ev, and the ‘Frontier Hypothesis’,” 483; Sukhova, *Karl Ritter*, 176–177. Between 1851 and 1879, he published his 30-volume history of Russia, soon replacing Nikolai Karamzin as Russia’s foremost historian. Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii*.
- ⁵² Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody,” 229–230. See also discussion in Sukhova, *Karl Ritter*, 176–180.
- ⁵³ Ritter, “Introductory Essay,” 63.
- ⁵⁴ Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody,” 231.
- ⁵⁵ Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody,” 230, 238.
- ⁵⁶ Ritter, “The Historical Element,” 260.
- ⁵⁷ Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody,” 239.
- ⁵⁸ Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, part 1.
- ⁵⁹ See Ritter, “Introductory Essay,” 77; Ritter, “General Observations on the Fixed Forms of the Earth’s Surface,” in *Geographical Studies*, 159–164.
- ⁶⁰ See Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 79–82.
- ⁶¹ A. F. Middendorf, *Puteshestvie na sever i vostok Sibiri*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiia Nauk, 1860), 137; cited in Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 82. Note the similarity to Ritter, who observed in 1833 that “now, it can [no longer] be said that seas separate lands or continents; they are the chains that link them together.... The progress of navigation has completely altered the whole relations of the globe and its inhabitants.” Ritter, “The Historical Element,” 261.
- ⁶² General’naia karta aziatskoi Rossii (St. Petersburg, 1825); reprinted in M. S. Vysokov and M. I. Ishchenko, *Kommentarii k knige G. I. Nevel’skogo “Podvigi russkikh morskikh ofitserov na krainem vostoke Rossii”* (Vladivostok, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Rubezh, 2013), 14–15.
- ⁶³ Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 104–105; George A. Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan: Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697–1875* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 263–264.
- ⁶⁴ See Ritter, *Die Erdkunde*, vol 4, book 2, *Asien*, Part 3, 448–449.
- ⁶⁵ For details, see Aleksandr I. Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel’skoi, 1813–1876* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 43–44.
- ⁶⁶ Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 60–61.
- ⁶⁷ Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 76.
- ⁶⁸ See B. V. Struve, *Vospominaniia o Sibiri, 1848–1854 gg.* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia Pol’za, 1889), 79.
- ⁶⁹ Alekseev, *Amurskaia ekspeditsiia*, 47.
- ⁷⁰ Alekseev, *Gennadii Ivanovich Nevel’skoi*, 83–84; Alekseev, *Amurskaia ekspeditsiia*, 48.
- ⁷¹ Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 14. This loosely paraphrases ideas expressed in Ritter, *Die Erdkunde*, vol. 2, book 2, *Asien*, part 1, 103.

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- ⁷² *Karmannaia knizhka dliia liubitelei zemlevedeniia*. While the booklet borrows heavily from Ritter, it does not refer to the geographer by name.
- ⁷³ As scholars have often noted, Russians of the mid-nineteenth century seldom distinguished between nation and empire (for example, Vera Tolz, *Russia: Inventing the Nation* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). To Solov'ev, as to Nevel'skoi and Murav'ev, of interest were the predetermined boundaries of the state, granted by Providence to the Russian people.
- ⁷⁴ Solov'ev, "O vliianii prirody."
- ⁷⁵ A. I. Petrov, *Amurskii shchit: Zapiski pervostroitelia Nikolaevska-na-Amure*, comp. T. V. Pestinskaia (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), 368.
- ⁷⁶ While Nevel'skoi began his exploration in 1849, it was only after his 1850 journey to St. Petersburg that he began systematically exploring and claiming the territory.
- ⁷⁷ Ritter, "General Observations," 174
- ⁷⁸ Ritter, "Remarks on Forms and Numbers," 228–229.
- ⁷⁹ Ber, "O vliianii vneshnei prirody," 226.
- ⁸⁰ Solov'ev, "O vliianii prirody," 231.
- ⁸¹ Solov'ev, "O vliianii prirody," 231–241.
- ⁸² Ritter, "The Historical Element," 263. This article had been published in Russian translation in 1836. (Note 37) Ber emphasized the same thing in "O vliianii vneshnei prirody," 225.
- ⁸³ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 95. Compare with Ber, "O vliianii vneshnei prirody," 225.
- ⁸⁴ Letter to parents of 25 September 1853, in Voin A. Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur: Povestvovanie v pis'makh o plavaniakh, prikliucheniakh i razmyshleniakh komandira shkhuny "Vostok"* (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1980), 122.
- ⁸⁵ See Ritter, "The External Features of the Earth," 311–356.
- ⁸⁶ Solov'ev, "O vliianii prirody," 231.
- ⁸⁷ Solov'ev, "O vliianii prirody," 229–230.
- ⁸⁸ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 111.
- ⁸⁹ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 152, 334–335, 304–307.
- ⁹⁰ Ritter, *Die Erdkunde*, vol. 2, book 2, *Asien*, part 1, 103. See also Balasoglo, "Vostochnaia Sibir'," 105–106, 114, 188.
- ⁹¹ See discussion in Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Lines in the Snow: Imagining the Russo-Japanese Frontier," *Pacific Affairs* 72 (1999): 68–71.
- ⁹² Cited in Alekseev, *Amurskaia ekspeditsiia*, 46.
- ⁹³ Gennadii I. Nevel'skoi, "Obzor rezul'tatov deistviia russkikh na severo-vostochnykh predelakh Rossii i uchastiia ofitserov nashevo flota v dele vosprisoedineniia Priamurskogo kraia k Rossii," *Morskoi sbornik*, no. 6 (1864): kritika i bibliografiia, 22–26.
- ⁹⁴ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 33–34.

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- ⁹⁵ Nikolai K. Boshniak, “Zaniatie chast’i ostrova Sakhalina i zimovka v Imperatorskoi Gavani,” *Morskoi sbornik*, no. 10 (1859): chast’ neofitsial’naia, 397. Boshniak’s published account of the expedition was, in fact, edited by Nevel’skoi himself, leading its author to object publically to changes made without his permission. This claim may have been added or redacted by Nevel’skoi. Nikolai K. Boshniak, “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu *Morskogo sbornika*,” *Morskoi sbornik* 45, no. 2 (1860): chast’ 4, 197–198.
- ⁹⁶ Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 254.
- ⁹⁷ Gennadii I. Nevel’skoi, introduction to N.V. Rudanovskii, “Po povodu vospominaniia N.V. Busse ob ostrove Sakhaline,” *Vestnik Evropy*, no. 8 (1872): 908. See also discussion in Sharyl Corrado, “A Land Divided: Sakhalin and the Amur Expedition of G.I. Nevel'skoi, 1848–1855,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 45 (July 2014): 70–81.
- ⁹⁸ Ritter, “The External Features of the Earth,” 342.
- ⁹⁹ Ber, “O vliianii vneshnei prirody,” 226.
- ¹⁰⁰ Pogodin, *Normanskii period russkoi istorii*, 187; Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, 58.
- ¹⁰¹ Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody,” 230.
- ¹⁰² Quoted in Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 42.
- ¹⁰³ Letter from Nevel’skoi to Grand Duke Constantine, July 1850, in Petrov, *Amurskii shchit*, 353. Similar sentiments were expressed in the report of Nikolai N. Murav’ev to Nikolai I of 5 July 1850, in *Rossiisko-amerikanskaia Kompaniia i izuchenie Tikhookeanskogo severa 1841–1867: Sbornik dokumentov*, comp. T. S. Fedorova, A. Iu. Petrov, A. V. Grinev (Moscow: Nauka, 2010), 194. Neidal’tsy, Negri, and Samgery were indigenous peoples of the Amur region. Unlike their fellow aboriginal Amur residents, the Tungus—today known as Evenks—had paid tribute to the Russian Cossacks since the seventeenth century and were therefore considered Russian subjects.
- ¹⁰⁴ Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 58.
- ¹⁰⁵ Petrov, *Amurskii shchit*, 353. A similar sentiment was expressed by Murav’ev after the first flotilla of Russian troops sailed down the Amur in 1854. See Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 336–337.
- ¹⁰⁶ Adam J. von Krusenstern, *Voyage Round the World in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806*, vol. 2, trans. R. B. Hoppner (London: John Murray, 1813), 151, 164.
- ¹⁰⁷ Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 304–307.
- ¹⁰⁸ Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 161. See also discussion of Nevel’skaia in Bassin, “Russian Geographers and the ‘National Mission’ in the Far East,” 122–124.
- ¹⁰⁹ Nikolai K. Boshniak, “Ekspeditsiia v Pri-amurskom krae,” *Morskoi sbornik* 39, no. 2 (1859), 341–342.
- ¹¹⁰ Boshniak, “Ekspeditsiia,” *Morskoi Sbornik* 39, no. 2: 326.
- ¹¹¹ Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 372–373.
- ¹¹² See Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 215–218.
- ¹¹³ Esper Ukhtomskii, *Travels in the East of His Imperial Majesty Czar Nicholas II of Russia: when Cesarewitch, 1890–1891*, vol. 2 (Westminster: Constable, 1900), 55; quoted in David

Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 44.

¹¹⁴ Struve, *Vospominaniia*, 154–155.

¹¹⁵ Struve, *Vospominaniia*, 155–156.

¹¹⁶ Ivan P. Barsukov, *Graf N. N. Murav'ev-Amurskii: po ego pis'mam, ofitsial'nym dokumentam, rasskazam sovremennikov i pechatnym istochnikam* (Moscow: Sinodal'naia tip., 1891), 324–325.

¹¹⁷ Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 336. According to Nevel'skoi, Murav'ev also reported to St. Petersburg that “960 versts [1024 km] from the mouth of the Amur, the flotilla entered a land that seems to have long belonged to Russia.” (Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 342).

¹¹⁸ Alekseev, *Amurskaia ekspeditsiia*, 139, 144–151; Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 328–337.

¹¹⁹ Bassin, *Imperial Visions*.

¹²⁰ Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire*, vol. 1, xix, xxi–xxii.

¹²¹ Nevel'skoi, “Obzor rezul'tatov;” Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 114.

¹²² Barsukov, *Graf N. N. Murav'ev-Amurskii*, 324–325.

¹²³ Ritter, “Introductory Essay,” 62.