

# Migrants and Borderland Identity: A Comparative Study of Japanese Communities in British Columbia and the Priamur Region in the 1870s–1900s

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## Abstract

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the building of modern nation states, the rise of the international state system and the completion of border demarcation around the world obliged governments to pay special attention to the enforcement of newly acquired borderlands and to establish policies for their successful integration into the state. Two such regions, British Columbia and the Priamur Region, joined Canada and Russia respectively at almost the same time, 1871 and 1858–1860. Basing on primary sources collected in Canadian and Russian archives and other sources, the present paper attempts to contribute to the discourse on borderland identity, exploring the role the East Asian and particularly Japanese migrants played in the construction of the regional identity of the two borderland regions—British Columbia and the Priamur Region. The study investigates the contradiction between the development of the region and the identity-based concept of immigration and naturalization policy. This paper also tries to answer, how East Asian and particularly Japanese migrants contributed to the crystallization of the regional borderland identity and to analyze the similarities and differences in the policies of the two countries.

To live in the borderland is to  
live at the end of the country, the last place before  
another place starts.

Jeffrey Aaronson

## 1. Introduction

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the building of modern nation states, the rise of the international state system and the completion of border demarcation around the world obliged governments to pay special attention to the enforcement of newly acquired borderlands and to establish policies for their successful integration into the state. Two such regions, British Columbia and the Priamur Region,<sup>1</sup> joined Canada and Russia respectively at almost the same time, 1871 and 1858–1860.

Both of them were scarcely populated peripheral territories of large northern nations and the governments of both countries had been increasingly concerned about their status and the success of

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their integration into the state. Populating these regions was crucial to developing them, exploiting their abundant natural resources such as fish and timber and keeping them part of their sovereign territories. Linking these territories with the most populated parts of the two countries by projected Canadian Pacific and Trans-Siberian Railways was considered a catalyst for regional development, in particular for moving people to these outskirts of the two countries. However, the construction works themselves required a large labor force that, consequently, resulted in an influx of people not only from the most populated areas of the respective countries, but also from abroad. In its turn, the sudden increase in foreign workers made it necessary to employ a regional policy aimed at strengthening the sense of these borderlands' belonging to their respective states and, consequently, their national integration.

A large number of recent works explore history, society or other facets of certain borderland territories (for example, Darieva & Kaschuba 2007), but there are still very few works that focus on the notion of borderland itself and try to analyze those societies through the prism of their distinctiveness from other regions of the same country. The present paper attempts to contribute to the discourse on a distinct representation of space and the complexity of inter-ethnic relations in the border zones and borderlands that has recently been developed by Roy, Toyota, McKeown and others (Roy 1989; Toyota 2007; McKeown 1999), and Sugimoto's concept of West Coast sectionalism (Sugimoto 1978), exploring the role that East Asian and particularly Japanese migrants played in the construction of the regional identity of the two borderland regions—British Columbia and the Priamur Region. As the various facets of Japanese immigration to Canada and Russia have already been thoroughly studied (Adachi 1976; Sugimoto 1978; Roy 1989; Iino 1997; Grave 1912; Vaskevich 1906; Morgun 1993; Galliamova 1992; Saveliev 2006), the present paper focuses on the discourse on Japanese migration as an important part of the crystallization of regional borderland identity and particularly on the contradiction between the development of the regions and the identity-based concepts of immigration and naturalization policy in Canada and Russia. This paper also tries to analyze the reasons for the difference in the policies of the two countries—an almost complete ban on Japanese immigration to British Columbia and the encouragement of Japanese activities in the Russian Far East.

This paper consists of three main sections. The first section will explore the formation of Japanese communities in British Columbia and the Russian Far East. The second section discusses the local immigration policies of the regional authorities in the context of the political construction of the two borderlands and tries to look at the implications of the nativist discourse on regional identity for the construction of borderland identity. The third section attempts to contribute to the discussion on the notion of borderland using the examples of British Columbia and the Priamur Region.

## **2. The administrative construction of British Columbia and the Priamur Region and the formation of Japanese communities**

In the first decades after the new territories entered their respective states, the settlement policies were rather loose and generous. Aspiring to populate their extremities, Russia in its East and Canada in its West, both governments were more concerned with populating their outskirts than with the proportions of its ethnic composition.

The Russian government granted privileges in acquiring land to both Russian and non-Russian newcomers in the Far East under the “Regulations of Settlement of Russians and Foreigners in the Amur and Maritime Provinces” which was approved on 27 April 1861 (Complete Collection 1867: 107–110; Petrov A. I. 2001: 94). Those who arrived at their own expense in these two provinces received one-hundred-desiatina (equal to 109.2 hectares) parcels of land for each family. The Law of Citizenship approved on 10 February 1864 stipulated that foreigners had equal rights with Russians and were allowed to acquire Russian citizenship after five years of permanent residence, equalizing alien residents and Russians. Therefore, the Law of Citizenship permitted all East Asians, except unmarried women, to reside in Russia and to naturalize. Thus, many Korean migrants took this opportunity in the 1890s.

Similarly, the Canadian government and the government of British Columbia had no special restrictions in the first decade after this province joined the Confederation of Canada. As Triadafilopoulos notes, “controls during the first phase of immigration policymaking (in Canada) were minimal” (Triadafilopoulos 2004: 394).

The lack of a coherent settlement policy in combination with the gradual development of the region’s industries naturally led to an influx of migrants from neighboring countries. Labor shortages and these rather non-restrictive immigration policies encouraged East Asian migrants to establish communities in the two multilayered borderland regions. Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century both British Columbia and the Priamur Region experienced significant immigration of Chinese, mostly employed in the gold fields, railroad construction or other construction work. A few decades later less numerous groups of Japanese added to both regions’ diversity. The formation of a large Korean community also played an important role in the constructing of the ethnic composition of the Russian Far East and in the development of its agriculture, but it will not be covered in this paper. As space constraints do not allow a comprehensive account of the formation of East Asian and particularly Japanese communities in detail, this section will focus only on the major facets of their establishment—their construction, migrants’ occupational structure and their role in the local economies.

The fact that the formation and growth of Japanese communities in Canada and Russia was strikingly similar is partly explained by the continuous transformation of the Japanese government’s attitude towards migration. Until the 1890s, when only state-sponsored emigration to Hawaii was

allowed, only small groups of individuals trickled into the unknown northern countries. Manzo Nagano and some other individuals appeared in British Columbia in the 1870s and early 1880s (for example, Adachi 1976: 9–13), while individuals and small groups of Japanese penetrated to the Russian Far East on Russian or German ships or through Sakhalin as early as the 1860s–1870s (Saveliev 2006).

A great role in encouraging the Japanese to go abroad was played first, by the Japanese Government, then by emigration agencies [*imingaisha*], which were created in the 1890s and whose activities were regulated by the Rules of Emigrant's Protection of 1894 and then by the Emigrant's Protection Law of 1896 (*Imin hogohô* 1896). The gradual relaxation of emigration regulation in Japan at the end of the 1880s in combination with the advancement of the remote regions' development in both receiving countries resulted in a considerable increase in numbers of Japanese going to Canada and Russia and a proportional augmentation of the permanent community (for example, 400 people annually in Russia) (Japanese Imperial Statistical Annual 1910) in the next decade, 1891–1901. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the Japanese community in the RFE almost ceased to exist in the years of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 and restored its numbers only in 1906, the Japanese population in Canada peaked in 1907, when 8,125 residents were registered in the country, almost exclusively in British Columbia (Sugimoto 1978: 9). Most Japanese immigrants in both destination countries were from rural areas of the poorest southern part of Japan—Kyûshû and Hiroshima and Yamaguchi prefectures on Honshû, except a significant number of the descendants of central part of the country—Wakayama and Shiga prefectures in British Columbia (Sasaki & Shimomura 1994: 36; Vaskevich 1906: 7).

The total number of Japanese in both regions was just a few thousand in 1901–4,738 (Adachi 1976: 13) in Canada and 2,898 in Russia (Vaskevich 1906: appendix; Grave 1912: 431–437; Archives of Orientologists 1909: 116–156). However, these small-scale Japanese communities had soon become very visible because of their place in both regions' economy and their marked organization. While in Russia we can clearly distinguish quantitative differences between two categories of Japanese migrant, settled traders and artisans [*eijûsha*] and seasonal sojourners—fishermen [*dekaseginin*] (See Saveliev 2006 for more detail), in Canada most migrants were employed as unskilled or semi-skilled workers in the fishing industry who were unable to return to Japan in the winter because of the long distances involved.

Fishermen constituted an important category of migrant in both countries. In British Columbia “Japanese held 235 of 1,174 or 20 per cent of total licenses issued” in 1893 (Roy 1989: 83), while they greatly dominated in the Amur estuary and Sakhalin (Pestushko 2009: 82–91). According to Russian statistics in the later period of 1912–1914 about 13,000–15,000 Japanese were working every year in fisheries leased by Japanese companies (Gallyamova 1992: 32). Japanese fishermen villages became part of the “ethnoscape” (Appadurai 1996) of Victoria Island and the Amur estuary, bringing controversy into the inter-ethnic relations and the political life of both regions. As cannery operators

testified to the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese immigration to British Columbia, “difficulties would arise if the Japanese were not available to the fishing industry” (Sugimoto 1978: 82). It is therefore no exaggeration to say that Japanese fishermen became essential to the development of the fishing industry in both regions.

Japanese laborers did not play such an important role in railroad construction as Chinese. Only several hundred were brought as contract workers to the Canadian Pacific, Canadian Northern, and Grand Trunk Railways (Adachi 1976: 27). In the Priamurie, 1896 was the only time when a large Japanese agency, named the Hiroshima Emigration Company (*Hiroshima Imin Kaisha*), tried to bring 1,500 laborers to work on the *Ussuri* Railroad failed, because wages had not been agreed in the signed contract. Japanese workers caused a riot, which was suppressed by Russian soldiers (Irie 1943: 433). This negative example seemed to have frightened other agencies from sending laborers to the Priamurie. Therefore, only 700 Japanese were engaged in construction work on the Ussuri Railway Line in May of 1895, compared with 4,500 Chinese. While by August, the number of Chinese and Koreans reached 6,200, Japanese accounted only for 1000 (Matsuura 1897: 231).

Coherent communities gradually emerged and ethnically homogeneous districts came into being. Small Japanese districts grew up in Vancouver and Vladivostok as well as in other populated areas of the two regions. Although traditionally adjacent to Chinatowns, they had the best reputation among other East Asian districts in Canadian and Russian cities and were rarely accused of unsanitary conditions as was the case in the Chinatown of Vancouver and the notorious Millionka district in Vladivostok. Thus, on 29 February 1902, Nicholas II granted the municipal legislatures of Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Nikol'skoe, Blagoveshchensk and other cities of the Priamur Governor-Generalship the temporary right to restrict the dwelling of those Asians where unsanitary conditions necessitated special supervision to certain districts within those cities (Grave 1912: 127). However, these measures applied in the case of Koreans and Chinese could be applied against Japanese only in cases where the Japanese resided inside or nearby Chinese or Korean districts.

In Vancouver, Powell Street between (numbers 100 and 3000), Alexander Street and some parts of Water and Cordova streets gradually evolved into a “Little Tokyo” (Roy 1989: 32; Sasaki & Shimomura 1994 & 1995) with a large number of Japanese shops, restaurants and hotels, where mutual-aid associations played an important role.

In Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and some other Russian cities Japanese tradesmen took advantage of the undeveloped state of commerce and some service industries and managed to occupy an important niche in the business activities of the region. For example, Japanese trade companies sold subjects for everyday use, such as tea, fruit and vegetables, which were difficult to cultivate in the cold climate. Even in 1889 there were seven Japanese trading firms, among which the company of Toshihiro Sugiura was the biggest.<sup>2</sup> Although the Japanese represented less than one per cent of the total population of the *Priamurye* in 1903, they owned one-fifth (108 of 558) of all business enterprises.

The Japanese actually monopolized some areas of business: they owned 35 of 36 laundries existing in that time in Vladivostok, 7 of 11 barber shops, 5 of 7 photography studios, 8 of 9 watch repair shops, and 15 of 25 joineries (Gallyamova 1992: 32-33). The economic empowerment of Japanese communities allowed them to occupy areas in central part of Vladivostok and other cities that symbolized their prosperity.

Therefore, the Japanese, who were not significant in numbers and could be called a “spill-over” of an ethnicity from a neighboring country, comprised an important and distinctive layer of the borderlands’ multiethnic society. They brought their industriousness, together with skills such as many centuries of the islanders’ experience in fishing, and became an essential element in the development of certain economic spheres of the regional economy, particularly in the British Columbian and Priamur fishing industries.

### **3. The political construction of the two borderlands and the nativist discourse**

It might be said that the central government paid interest to the development of the country’s remote areas sporadically, mostly under the influence of external factors. Long distances often prevented central governments’ officials from tighter control over the administration of these territories. However, the progressive development of the two regions themselves and the enforcement of their geographic neighbors as well as their growing ethnic diversity resulted in the central governments’ paying greater attention to the building of borders in their most remote regions and tightening their grip over the multiethnic populace. In Canada this was partly related to an intention to diminish the influence of its powerful southern neighbor. In Russia the tensions in relations with China over the Posyet Bay and the rivalry with Great Britain over the dominance in waters off the coast of the Korean Peninsula fueled Russian efforts to strengthen the administration of the remote eastern outskirts and establish a Special Priamur Region Committee, which included the Ministers of Interior, Finance and War, to be gathered first in St. Petersburg on 18 June 1883. In 1884, the Amur and Maritime Provinces along with Sakhalin island were transformed into the Priamur Governor-Generalship with the Generalship government in Khabarovsk (Nadarov 1886).<sup>3</sup>

The reinforcement of the borderlands by the central government urged the local authorities to accelerate administrative construction. As Toyota notes, “the political construction of the border in ways that allow it to make distinction between inclusion and exclusion is a means of legitimating the structure of territorial power and its embodiment in the state” (Toyota 2007: 92). As assimilationist models (for example, Thomas, Park & Miller 1971) were dominant in both North American and Russian societies at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the local governments in the two borderland regions saw assimilation of the ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse inhabitants as a necessary

condition for the administrative construction of the regions and the development of immigration policies. That led to a shift to identity-based selection of settlers, which has played an important role.

Therefore, while discussion of East Asian immigration had gone on continuously and evolved in the notorious notion of so-called “Yellow Peril” at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see, for example, Adachi 1976: 65), the exclusionist approach prevailed in both regions and became part of the establishment of territorial power in British Columbia and the Priamur Region. As McKeown points out, Asian migration appeared to be an important factor in the building of borders and the creation of immigration laws. In the 1880s–1890s both Russia and Canada saw the emergence of new controls and restrictions “on the mobility of Asians to white settler nations” (McKeown 2008: 7).

In British Columbia the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration had been established in 1885 and two decades later in 1902 the investigation of the commission was extended to Japanese, some even believed that Japanese were more capable of assimilation than Chinese (Roy 1989: 22).

The Chinese were the first ethnic group to experience restrictions. After the numbers of Chinese migrants increased dramatically and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed, the so-called Chinese Immigration Act was enacted in 1885, restricting the entrance of Chinese into the country and imposing a fifty-dollar poll tax on them (Roy 1989: 58–60). There is still no evidence that the Russian government conducted an exchange of information with Britain or its dominions or the United States on the matter of regulating immigration, but the first steps of the governments of British Columbia and the Priamur Governor Generalship were taken almost synchronously. In the same year, the first Priamur Governor General A. N. Korf organized the first in a series (1886, 1893 and 1904) of meetings of the Amur governors, local officials and entrepreneurs held in Khabarovsk in 1885, where the issue of East Asian immigration was widely discussed and the first restrictive measures were proposed (Nadarov 1886; Siegelbaum 1978: 311). Simultaneously, Korf, in his report to Alexander III, stated that Russian authorities had not levied any taxes on Chinese or Koreans and that these groups owned the “best lands in the region” and hence (the authorities) requested permission to strengthen their governance and to restrict Asian entry to the RFE. Korf’s proposal initiated wide discussion of the East Asian immigration issue within the Russian government and the Council of State, which resulted in a decision to ban Chinese and Koreans from settling along the borders and to force inland those who had previously settled along the borders. Alexander III approved this bill on 22 November 1886 followed by another law, adopted by Alexander III on 17 May 1888 (AVP RI 1886: 5–7). According to article 344 (section 5) of this law Chinese and Koreans who did not own real estate should pay a 5.15–rouble (5.15–dollar) poll tax annually (Grave 1912: 23–24). Moreover, in 1892, Alexander III adopted a bill proposed by Korf which forbade foreigners to own land.

The Japanese immigrants initially were regarded more like Anglo-Saxons in British Columbia and were not subject to a poll tax (Roy 1989: 81). In Russia they enjoyed the privileges of a most favored nation and almost the same rights as Russians in the Priamurie according to the Russo-Japanese



Treaties of 1858 and 1895. They were entitled to pay a 0.75-rouble residence tax in Russia, much lower than poll tax imposed on Chinese and Koreans. Thus, the Priamur Governor-General, Dukhovskoi, stated that “attracting Japanese laborers and craftsmen to the region was very desirable because of their personal qualities—skill, punctuality, discipline and honesty” (RGIA 1893: 83).

While their small numbers and well established businesses were not regarded as any kind of economic threat in the Russian Far East, in British Columbia, after the number of Japanese increased and their presence in the fishing industry became conspicuous in the 1890s, they were also increasingly restricted in their rights. In 1898, they were added to the Chinese and Indians who were not entitled to vote in British Columbia, despite the protests by the Japanese consul (Roy 1989: 21). Almost at the same time, in May of 1897, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia adopted a resolution urging the Dominion government to amend the Naturalization Law so that Chinese and Japanese immigrants would be required to maintain residence for ten years before they could be naturalized (BC Sessional Papers 1897: 1277).

The increasingly restrictive regulations towards the East Asians were paralleled by popular xenophobia in both regions. As has often been the case, the borderlands had become zones of inter-ethnic tension and violence. This, for example, occurred in some parts of Eastern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. It is often that the change of status of a borderland or the contesting of its status may lead to “different, rival ways of life, grounded in dissimilar, altering power structures,” (Chamberlain-Creanga 2010) as it is the case in the present-day Transnistria. British Columbia and the Priamur Region did not have a long history of alternative state belonging, but being absorbed by empires received a strong impulse for the rapid development and intensive attempts at population by various ethnic groups, where the relationship between majority and minorities soon became complex. Moreover, as Roy notes, the attitudes towards East Asians in British Columbia had been changing over time (Roy 1989: ix).

In the nineteenth century in both British Columbia and the Priamur Region the majority population, including local governments and common people, split into defenders and opponents of East Asian immigration. The defenders were employers of East Asians who depended on their labor, and the opponents were those who were afraid of labor competition with migrant workers in both regions and those entrepreneurs in the Russian Far East whose profits had been damaged by cheap products imported by Chinese and Japanese traders. Thus, in Russia, the newspaper *Vladivostok* described the growing division between defendants and opponents of the Asian presence and was calling for mutual tolerance (*Vladivostok*, 20.9.1892, 38: 77; 15.11.1892, 46: 8; 22.11.1892, 47: 5). In 1893, four years after Chinese community assemblies had been formed, the *Vladivostok* devoted a whole page to their success, informing dwellers of the city as to how Russian and Chinese merchants cooperated and competed. Unlike the Chinese, the Japanese had rarely been a target of antipathy in the Russian Far East as they were few in number and comprised a comparatively wealthy part of



Russian city populations. While almost all of them returned to the homeland during the Russo-Japanese War, they immediately restored their numbers in the Priamur Region after the peace treaty was signed. Except for heavy criticism on monopolizing the fishing industry in the Amur estuary and Sakhalin, the permanent settlers in Russian cities were well respected and treated with dignity until the social disturbances of the Civil War of 1918–1922 (See Saveliev 2005).

The attitude towards Japanese migrants changed greatly in the twentieth century in both regions, but in a different way. While in Russia it was mostly related to the notion of the potential cooperation of Japanese residents with their government and the threat to national security, in British Columbia, the identity-based notion of a “white-man’s province” (Roy 1989: x) had become common and restrictionism became predominant especially after rumors of the imminent arrival of 50,000 Japanese spread across the province in 1907 (Adachi 1976: 64). Even in the 1900s there were enterprises such as coal mines and railway construction companies that continued hiring Japanese and Chinese. Thus, Kootenay Shingle Company, which tried to employ Japanese and Chinese mill workers in the spring of 1905, had to keep policemen on their premises to protect the laborers from the public and was heavily criticized by the inhabitants of the town of Nelson, where the company was located. A special Resolution against the Employment of Japanese and Chinese was passed by a mass meeting in Nelson on April 26th, 1905 (BC Archives: GR441–25–5 • 6; Roy 1989: 20). British Columbians constantly insisted on the danger of Japanese and Chinese, whose wages were lower than those of other ethnic groups, to the standards of the work conditions of people of European descent.

The extreme expression of anti-Japanese feelings emerged in the notorious attack on the Japanese quarter in Vancouver in September of 1907 (Roy 1989: 185–226). Soon afterwards, after negotiations in Tokyo, the Japanese government agreed to stop issuing passports for entry into Canada according to a so-called Gentlemen’s (Lemieux) Agreement (Iino 1997: 91–96).<sup>4</sup>

Having summarized previous studies on racial hatred and the introduction of special restrictions against East Asians, Roy shows that besides xenophobia and race hatred, there was a large bulk of feelings and notions such as economic, political and strategic fears, and a deep antipathy to racial intermixture that must be also taken into account in British Columbia (Roy 1989: ix). It might also be truth of both regions that the anti-Asian agitation referred to feelings that Asians did not easily assimilate and that they were not as loyal to their host countries as to their homelands.

The ambiguity of the attitude towards the Japanese is well represented by the statement of a cannery businessman who admitted that Japanese fishermen were essential in keeping canneries running, “but wanted to get rid of the Chinese and Japanese as soon as conditions permitted”(Sugimoto 1978: 82). Being “hard-working, skilled, efficient” (Roy 1989: xii–xiii), Japanese were viewed “as aggressive people who could quickly dominate an industry as they did with the fisheries” (Roy 1989: xii–xiii) in both countries. Thus, the efficiency and competitiveness that could have been a symbolic representation of the best of the Japanese paradoxically impeded their adoption in host societies.

Unlike Canada, Russia had not concluded any agreements with East Asian nations to restrict immigration and did not approve any laws or regulations that could curb the influx of migrants from that region. The only law that was aimed to restrict the employment of East Asians, as will be shown below, was not efficient as it had a clause allowing their employment in the cases where native workers could not be recruited.

This difference in attitudes may be explained by some differences in the minorities and immigration policies in Canada and Russia. While in Canada British Columbia was the only part of the country that experienced large-scale immigration from East Asia and non-Anglo-Saxon citizens of the country were predominantly European, the Russian Empire had a large number of regions with non-Russian majorities and had a long history of forging productive relations with them. Therefore, while right-wing politicians, some intellectuals and some common people saw East Asian immigrants as a threat, the central and local governments did not see the necessity to employ any severe restrictive measures, especially taking into account the acute shortage of workers in the region.

#### **4. The notion of borderland and Japanese migrant communities**

A large number of works have studied the history, society or other facets of certain borderland territories, but there has been very little research that has focused on the notion of borderland itself and tried to analyze those societies through the prism of their geographical and other distinctivenesses from other regions of the same country.

Is borderland a real “end of the country,” where “another place starts”? The “borderland” signifies a territory that is adjacent to a border. Usually it is a national border between two distinct nations. Often, it is also a territory that has changed its “national belonging” several times as is the case in some European, Asian or African countries with a long history and often high density of population. These changes of political rule often lead to an extreme diversification of ethnic composition and a “sensitivity to the social and cultural ambiguities of people living in such zones, particularly the dynamic, contingent, and often ambiguous character of ethnic identification and ethnic differences” (Borderlands 2007).

It might have been quite different in the case of newly developed territories of the former colonies. The factor of physical distance played an important role in the dichotomy between center and periphery, between the central government and the remote regions. Thus, already in 1912, British scholar Philip Price compared the “consciousness of being Siberian” with “the sentiments of English settlers in Canada,” noting that “both were dissatisfied with metropolitan conceits and central policies” (Price 1912: vii; Stephan 1994: 92). Stephan mentions that Prime Minister Stolypin was worried about a possible emergence of a “rough democratic society” east of the Urals (Stephan 1994: 92). Similarly, in British Columbia, as Sugimoto notes, “situated outside the main sphere of Canadian

political and economic activity”, the “feeling of being neglected” and “overlooked by the rest of the country...naturally” developed (Sugimoto 1978: 96–97). Sugimoto’s thesis is proved by the Report to His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor by the Hon. Dunsmuir and the Hon. D. M. Eberts on their mission to Ottawa (Report 1901), which was aimed to demonstrate to the Dominion’s government that British Columbia’s integrity was threatened by its becoming “the landing place for Oriental immigration” (Report 1901: 546).

The victory of Japan in the war with Russia in 1905 and its emergence as a world power greatly affected the attitude towards Japanese immigrants on the both sides of the Pacific. As British Columbia’s *Colonist* noted, “Japan would stimulate China and pose a “new danger, the dominance of the yellow races in Asia, a menace to Europe on the east, to Australia in the south, the Pacific coast on the west and to Siberia on the north” (cited by Roy 1989: 23). Defeated in the war with Japan, the Russian government, some politicians, statesmen and journalists quickly started pointing the finger at the ethnic minorities, which were accused of cooperation with the Japanese and even of preparing the revolution. Ultra-right-wing *Duma* member V. M. Purishkevich linked the Chinese “penetration” into Siberia to the revolutionaries’ efforts to undermine the existing regime of the tsar’s rule (Purishkevich 1913: 92–97). Dozens of thick books, thin pamphlets, magazines and newspaper articles ‘heightened the fear of the East’, emphasizing that the strengthening of East Asian nations and their rising national consciousness would threaten poorly protected Russian Far Eastern possessions (for example, Ukhtubuzhskii 1913).

Later, in 1909 Priamur Governor General P. F. Unterberger bombarded the Russian government and Parliament with the reports of an imminent war with Japan (For example, Siegelbaum 1978: 321). Similarly, in Canada, as Roy notes, “despite various Anglo-Japanese treaties, by 1910 some British Columbians feared a Japanese military attack. It was, however, the long-established dread of being “swamped” by unchecked Chinese or Japanese immigration” (Roy: xii–xiii). Thus, the economic and military strengthening of Japan attracted great attention in the borderlands and fears of a military conflict gradually became part of their perception of the Japanese on both sides of the Pacific.

It would be not easy to define what role the sense of insecurity, caused by physical distance from the center and vulnerability to military expansion by neighbors, played in in the Priamur Russians and British Columbians’ desire to prevent further immigration of East Asians, but the constant mentioning of the especially remote geographical location of the region in the communications with the Dominion government and Unterberger’s hysteria suggest that it was an important part of borderlanders’ psychology in both regions and negotiation of power with central authorities.

The issue of East Asian immigration, particularly expressed in the demand to let the British Columbian government to use the largest portion of head tax income (Report 1901: 548), was one of the first in the long list of issues discussed with the Dominion government along with such problems as the construction of a railway that was also aimed at further integration of British Columbia into the

Dominion (Report 1901: 547), and its security. Therefore, it might be right to say that the East Asians issue became a tangible symbol of the formation of British Columbian identity. Thus, the above mentioned Report of the mission to Ottawa stated: "If the people against whom we desire a measure of protection were, in their standard of living, on a par with our own, the competition of Japanese and Chinese would be a legitimate one, but I need not to point out to you what have been contended so often and with so much force against an indiscriminate and unrestricted immigration of Mongolians, that without lowering our standard of living necessary to meet the decrease of wages, it is not possible for the white labour to exist in the face of a system that has grown up under conditions entirely foreign to Anglo-Saxon communities, wholly inapplicable in this country, and out of harmony with our institutions" (Report 1901: 547).

In Russia, despite the efforts to populate the Priamur Region with Russian peasants and substitute East Asian unskilled laborers with Russians happening to be generally unsuccessful, the Priamur Governor General P. F. Unterberger constantly tried to convince the Russian Parliament to adopt a bill, severely restricting the employment of East Asians. This bill proposed by Unterberger to the lower house, the State *Duma*, in 1909 was aimed at restricting the influx of two ethnic groups, Chinese and Koreans, strengthening control over the collection of poll taxes and punishing Russian private and state-owned enterprises that hired those Chinese and Koreans who had not paid these taxes. After discussions and significant changes, it was approved by the State *Duma*, but rejected by the upper house, the Council of State, on the grounds that the government had no resources to increase expenditures for the supervision of foreign residents and insisting on the creation of a new Immigration Law which regulated plainly the residence of foreigners of all nationalities (Grave 1912: 239–240). Russia's top-ranking officials believed that the Chinese and Koreans were needed in the construction of the Amur Railway Line and other strategically important sites. Eventually, a restrictive law was enacted on 21 June 1910. The new law, which contained most of the provisions proposed by Unterberger two years earlier, prohibited the employment of foreign workers, who apparently were only Chinese or Koreans at that time, in state-owned enterprises in the Amur, Maritime, and Transbaikal Provinces after 1 January 1911. Further, its fourth article allowed the Council of Ministers to permit the employment of foreign laborers for urgent work if job vacancies could not be filled by Russian citizens. Consequently, seven of nine requests by several ministries and governors-general to permit Chinese employment were approved by the Council of Ministers within a short period from November 1910 to 1 March 1911 (Grave 1912: 84–86). Thus, the law of 21 June 1910 which aimed to curb Chinese and Korean employment by Russian enterprises was in apparent contradiction with Russian government policy to accelerate the colonization of the Far East and eventually turned out to be ineffective because of the immediate usage of side-door mechanisms for further employment of Chinese and Koreans.

Despite the military collision between Russia and Japan in 1904–1905, the bilateral relations greatly

improved already at the end of 1906 and gradually developed towards the conclusion of the alliance of 1916. In the result of the progressing political rapprochement, the Japanese communities did not become the target of Russian restrictionists. Unlike Chinese and Korean migrants, Japanese resided in Vladivostok and other parts of the Russian Far East successfully reestablished their businesses already in 1906–1907 and enjoyed almost all the same rights as Russian citizens until the Civil War of 1918–1922.

Therefore, as anti-Asian sentiments among Russian merchants, right-wing politicians, and journalists were not supported by those officials and magnates in St. Petersburg who were in charge of the expansion of Russian imperialism to the Far East, they did not, unlike British Columbia, translate into exclusionary or restrictive legislation, except for the ineffective law of 21 June 1910.

Both regions' prolonged negotiations with the central governments demanding special attention and a greater degree of protection exemplify the dichotomy of the state's relationship with the periphery, where permanent anxiety about the national integrity of the region with the state and the struggle for the political and economic dominance over other ethnic groups leads to the formation of the distinctive identity of these regions and their inhabitants.

Physical distance from the center obviously meant a greater degree of independence from the central authorities than other regions enjoyed. However, it also meant a much higher degree of vulnerability to external factors that probably played a crucial role in the formation of borderland identity. Fears of possible expansion by surrounding countries and peoples, military or "peaceful", and the loss of their new motherland had always been an important part of the psychology of the representatives of majority ethnic groups in those territories, many of whom had settled in those lands just recently. That explains their sensitivity to the development of neighboring states and to the immigration of their descendants. Those factors and events that have largely been neglected both by central governments and ordinary people in other regions led to significant disturbances in borderlands and sometimes to the development of strong nativist sentiments. It may be true for such remote regions as British Columbia and the Priamur Region in such vast countries as Canada and Russia.

## **5. Conclusion: Japanese immigrants as a regional actor in British Columbia and the Priamur Region**

In British Columbia and the Priamur Region the political construction of the borderland has gradually shaped and reshaped the relationship between the majority and minority ethnic groups. Despite the differences in geographic location and traditional values, the central and regional governments of both countries have employed the same terms of exclusion and inclusion as tools to maintain and enforce their control over these new regions.

In the borderland that naturally admits large numbers of migrants from abroad the perception of foreign people and inter-ethnic relations have always been much more complex and intense than in other parts of the country, where the foreign-born percentage of the population has always been much lower. These interactions and fears, real and imagined, may have been important factors in the creation of distinctive regional identities. Therefore, having enjoyed larger independence from the central authorities than in other regions, the Canadians and Russians of distant British Columbia and the Priamur Region had much more intense interactions with the other ethnic groups that had been entering these regions and much more intense feelings of insecurity. This may be a reason that the assimilationist model popular in the beginning of the twentieth century but that has turned out to be unsuccessful in most parts of the North American continent and Russia in the later period not covered in this article (see, for example, Glazer & Moynihan 1970), revealed its shortcomings earlier and in their most acute forms in borderland regions.

Constant anxiety about the national integrity of the region into the state largely contributed to the construction of exclusive societies and formation of distinctive regional identities at the beginning of the twentieth century. The introduction of a poll tax, the growth of popular xenophobia and the implementation of employment restrictions played significant roles in curbing immigration from China and Japan. Ambiguously perceived as an essential element of the regions' development and an imagined threat, the Japanese communities had mostly been alienated by the Canadian and Russian majority population in both regions. Especially strong anti-Japanese feelings which resulted in the Vancouver riot of 1907 were evident in British Columbia. At the same time, the Japanese occupied certain niches in the economy of the two borderland regions and greatly contributed to the development of the two regions. While the Japanese in British Columbia were continuously excluded from categories of the population, to which the majority group wanted to extend the rights of belonging to society, their counterparts in the Priamur Region had been given the freedom of economic activities and were even encouraged to naturalize.

Finally, it could be noted that the century-old borderland identity debates have reverberations in the present as the fears of the peaceful or military takeover of Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East by China have been repeatedly transmitted by the Russian media, politicians and common people; and some British Columbians are fascinated by the notion of an independent Republic of Cascadia—a country west of the Cascade Mountains.

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## Notes

- 1 Priamurie or the Priamur Region means “the basin of the Amur River.”
- 2 By 1889 there were seven trade companies owned by the Japanese in Vladivostok, among which “Sugiura shōkai” owned by Toshihiro Sugiura was the biggest one. Paying an annual income tax of 850 roubles (about 425 dollars), he became a merchant belonging to the top guild. Since 1897, Sugiura fulfilled the role of banker, carrying

out for Japanese immigrants the important job of remitting funds to Japan; and (from 1902) arranged insurance for the Japanese in the Russian Far East. See Takashima 1972: 37.

- 3 Previously the Governor General of Eastern Siberia, to which this territory belonged, resided in Irkutsk in the central part of Siberia and only rarely visited the Priamur region. See Stephan 1994: 55.
- 4 The negotiations and other issues related to the conclusion of the Agreement will be covered in a separate paper.

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