

Vladivostok as a Meeting Point between West and East at the Beginning of the 20th Century (Around Years of Siberian Investigation)

Kumi Tateoka

To commemorate the centenary of the Russian Civil War and the Siberian intervention by foreign powers after the October Revolution, many symposia on civil war and intervention have been held and publications on these themes are also growing since 2018, mainly in the Far East. In the past, in most cases, researchers' interest was restricted to the scheme of the conflict between the Red Army and the White Army and the victory or defeat of the October Revolution. However, more than 30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the events of this period are now being examined by scholars mainly from the perspective of the residents and outsiders in various regions who, without knowing the consequences of the revolution, were both anticipating and anxious about significant social changes.

Vladivostok served as both an entrance to Siberia for the Japanese or other foreign troops and an exit for emigres. I would like to share a discussion of those papers in Russian and Japanese on the cultural diversity of Vladivostok and its suburbs.

1. Vladivostok: Transportation and Cultural Exchange

Vladivostok is the eastern gateway to the Russian Empire. However, because it is the furthest point from the capital cities of Moscow and Petersburg, foreigners often think Vladivostok is just a small provincial town at the furthest reaches of the Russian border. This town, however, was an extremely convenient trading centre adjacent to China by land, adjacent to Japan's Hokkaido by sea, connected

Kumi Tateoka, University of Tokyo, Japan, kumit@l.u-tokyo.ac.jp, 0009-0008-4625-8097

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to North America via the Pacific Ocean, and to Western Europe by Indian Ocean route. There also are waterways such as the Amur River or a land route by the Trans-Siberian Railway to Moscow (Hara 1998, 18-29).

The so-called discovery of Vladivostok dates to the Crimean War. French warships in the Far East pursued Russian warships, as Russia was the enemy. In doing so, they discovered a complex terrain at the tip of a peninsula (today's Murav'yov-Amurskiy Peninsula), which had been Qing territory, and named it Port May. After the Treaty of Aigun (1858), Russia built a port. After the Treaty of Aigun (1858), Russia made a port. Russia, however, did not have the technology to build a bridge across the great Amur River for the Trans-Siberian Railway, so Vladivostok traded with China, Japan and North America via the sea route to the Pacific Ocean rather than Moscow; for example, when Chekhov travelled to Sakhalin in 1890, he returned to Moscow via Vladivostok to the Indian Ocean. He travelled by ship through the Suez Canal to Odessa. The sea route was a much more practical travel route in those days. Despite the freezing problems in winter, the sea route was a convenient and essential means of transport. In 1916, the entire Moscow-Vladivostok line of the Trans-Siberian Railway was built, and the exchange of people and goods between Moscow and Vladivostok finally became active.

2. Vladivostok as the multi-ethnic city

Vladivostok has been a multi-ethnic city since its opening. Before it was developed, the city centre was bought up by Germans, Americans, Dutch and Swedes. The Russian Army and Navy even had to buy back land from them at high prices (Morgun 2016, 16). The city's residents and visitors included Russians, Ukrainians, Cossacks, Jews, Chinese, Americans, Koreans, and Japanese at various times as settlers, labourers, and traders. It was also more convenient for merchants on the west coast of the USA to trade with Vladivostok via the Pacific Ocean, even though there were less attractive goods there than to transport goods overland to the east coast.

The Russian government tried to attract peasants from the European part of the country to cultivate land. Peasants who could not obtain land after the emancipation of the serfs increasingly migrated to Siberia at the beginning of the 20th century. Still, only some wanted to go as far as the Far East. Immigrants from abroad were given land and exemptions from taxes and military service for a certain period without distinction, and the cultivation of land by immigrants in the Primorsky Krai finally began to progress (Sato 2011, 137-72; Morgun 2016, 16).

The city also includes military personnel from Western countries and Japan interested in the town. So, it is by no means a stand-alone Russian city. Immediately after the First World War outbreak, an increasing number migrated from the western part of the empire to avoid the chaos of war. As discussed below, there was also an influx of activists from various genres of art, including music, literature, fine arts and so on. As a result, Vladivostok, in the early 20s, became a substantial cultural salon in the Far East.

Vladivostok, where Japanese troops landed during the Siberian Intervention War, was not just a provincial city but the cultural centre of Primorskiy krai.

Somewhat further back in time, the Siberian minorities on the coast of Primorsky Territory, the Kamchatka Peninsula and Sakhalin traded with the Ainu of Hokkaido in seafood or exotic clothes. The northern regions were one of the essential windows to the rest of the world.

When Japan opened the country to the world, Vladivostok was a special place as the nearest Western European city. Tall Western-style buildings of those days still exist on one of the central streets, Kitaiskaya Street (now Okeanskii Boulevard), where the Japanese consulate was located, and on Svetlanka Street along Golden Horn Bay¹. Vladivostok was the most magnificent city for the Japanese. In contrast, in Japan, most structures were still built of wood. From the beginning, Hakodate, the port of Hokkaido, provided food and goods for Vladivostok. By the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, Vladivostok had become one of Japan's key commercial centres abroad. In particular, the proportion of Japanese in the service sector was high. Tradesmen such as laundry (35 out of 36), barbers (7 out of 11), photo studios (5 out of 7), watch shops (8 out of 9) and woodworking furniture (15 out of 25) settled in the area. Many were from Kyushu Island, as Nagasaki became a wintering base for Russian military officers at the end of the Edo period.

Vladivostok was a city with a high proportion of men due to the high proportion of soldiers and merchants. The Russian local government allowed an influx of prostitutes from Japan; women often comprised a higher proportion of the Japanese emigrant population. The conditions for women working in the brothels were harsh: they were heavily in debt, deprived of their freedom of life and forced to buy everyday items at several times the market price (Sato & Savel'ev 2004, 28; Morgun 2016, 82-8).

It was also from Vladivostok that Esperanto was introduced to Japan. Futabatei Shimei, a famous translator of Russian Literature and an author himself at the end of the 19th century (Meiji period), learned from Fyodor Postnikov, head of the Vladivostok branch of the Russian Esperanto Society. Returned to Tokyo, he published the first textbook for Esperanto in 1906. While studying at the Pavlovsk Military School in St. Petersburg, he became acquainted with Zamenhof, the founder of Esperanto. After being transferred to Vladivostok on military service, he opened an Esperanto branch in Vladivostok. He was forgotten for a long time, even in his native land. He is being re-evaluated in the Far East as the "Father of Esperanto in Japan" (Мизь 2013).

Just as Postnikov was forgotten as soon as he left St. Petersburg, perceptions of people, society, events, and space at the periphery are often divergent from those at the centre and those at the edge. As Thongchai Winnichakul points out, the

¹ See the online site "A walk in the old Japanese town of Vladivostok", which provides photos of the current Vladivostok city centre, where buildings from that period still stand: <https://vladivostok.travel/jp/todo/japantown/>

time space of a nation is too large to be captured by an individual's vision. Hence, the illusion provided by map-based education enables people to recognize it as a homogeneous unity. As discussed by Tessa Morris-Suzuki in *View Of The Frontier* (Morris-Suzuki 2000), that sense of unity is created by a historical description written from the gaze of the central government.

When viewed from the European part of Russia, Vladivostok's complex historical background and diversity should be remembered. The land, known as 'Han Shen Wei' under Qing rule, was acquired by Russia under the Treaty of Aigun (1858) and the Treaty of Peking (1860), renamed "Vladi (to own and rule) Vostok (East)" and incorporated into Russia. Teruyuki Hara points out that the latitude and naming period of Vladivostok and Vladikavkas are almost identical (Hara 1998). At the same time, here we can also see parallels in naming practices with the annexation of Crimea in the 18th century.

The Crimean Peninsula, annexed to the Russian Empire, was likened to Greece, and used as an ornament to mark the cultural heights of the Empire (Ito, 2019, 242-44).

In the same way, Teruyuki Hara guesses Vladivostok was likened to Constantinople (Byzantium) and, as a result, was given the names "Golden Horn Bay" and "Eastern Bosphorus" (Hara 1998). The naming also conveys the joy of the Russian Empire, which until then had only one outlet to the Pacific Ocean, an estuary of the Amur River (Nikolaevsk on Amur), which was in the same position as the northern part of Sakhalin and had a long frozen period. However, geographical remoteness is undeniably a significant obstacle to a real grasp of this blessed land with a sense of reality.

There is an expression that implies the solid ruling power of a despotic state, 'the two-headed eagle stares east and west', and the opposite, 'comparing the Urals to a spine, the short western arm can't reach the itching point of the long eastern arm'. For example, during the so-called Year 2000 problem with Windows, a senior Moscow official said Russia would look at how Japan managed the situation and then think about it. He was misled by the cliché about Japan as the "Land of the Rising Sun" and failed to realize that Kamchatka is further east than Japan. And when people in the Russian capital around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century thought about the vast space of Siberia and the Far East, the eastern limit of reality they could imagine might have been Omsk or at most Tomsk in Western Siberia, where the Ministry of National Education and other ministries were located during the civil war. The landscape of the Far East is difficult to grasp from the perspective of the capital city. And we who look at it from outside the country also tend to share the image of the state as conceived by the capital.

Supposed to imagine the world image of people living in the Far East, the area that local people consider as an extension of their sphere of life is the triangle of Blagoveshchensk, Khabarovsk and Vladivostok and its surroundings, with Irkutsk and Chita east of Baikal as relay points with the central government. This can be inferred from the geographical scope covered in the Proceedings of the International Academic Symposium "Civil and Intervention Wars in the Russian Far East: Inception, Characteristics and Participants."

3. Notation of the city name: Japanese pseudo-territorialization of Vladivostok

The Russian Empire attempted to create geographical unity as a nation by endowing Vladivostok with a concrete and familiar image analogous to the Bosphorus, the exit to the Mediterranean (European world).

An analogous situation can be seen in establishing the Vladivostok transliteration in Japanese. Vladivostok was written in a phonetic system using seven kanji, Chinese characters (烏拉細窩斯杜屈 / U-Ra-Ji-Wa-Su-Tō-Ku). Gradually, the first four sounds were replaced by two kanji meaning sea and tide, and then Vladivostok came to be written as 浦潮斯杜屈 or 浦潮 as an abbreviated style.

Anna Sharko, who studies how foreign proper names were written in kanji in Japanese during the late Edo and Meiji periods, speculates that a suggestion by a reader of the Yomiuri Shimbun introducing a waka (a traditional Japanese poem of 31 syllables) containing a pun on Vladivostok led to the spread of character combinations that evoked poetic images of the sea.

異国の浦路は州遠く (ウラジハストヲク) 潮みちて 錦を流す夏の夜の月
 Kotokuni-no uradi-ha su-toōku shio-michi-te nishiki-wo nagasu natsu-no yo-no tsuki
 (The sand spit of foreign shores is far off. The tide is high. The moonlight on a summer night shines like a stream of brocade) (Sharko 2020, 148-49).

The waka quoted here is by Hisato Sewaki. The original poem's third line was written as "clouds clear" instead of "The tide is high". Sharko suggests that this misremembering (or rewriting) may have occurred because the combination of the words 'ura' ('creek') and 'shio/zio'² ('tide') fits the traditional variety of images in Japanese poetry. The creation of the transliteration 浦潮 (U-Ra Ji-o), which has a lyrical image, and its use as a shortened form of the name, made Vladivostok not only geographically closer to Japan but psychologically closer and more romantic.

4. Some aspects of Vladivostok as a multicultural space

As already mentioned, after the outbreak of the First World War, to avoid the disorder caused by war and revolution people migrated to the Far East or stayed there temporarily to leave for further afield. The cultural situation in Vladivostok also underwent various changes due to the intense influx and outflow of people.

In 1918 the decree on the separation of schools, religion and politics was issued, which legalized religious activities of all kinds. Non-Russian Orthodox Christians were also granted freedom of religion. Taking advantage of the city's location on the periphery, there were also Seventh-day Adventist churches of North American origin (Дударенок 2018, 167-71).

Below is an overview of some interesting topics in ethnic education and arts activities.

² In Japanese, word-initial consonants behind consecutive kanji may be muddled. So here 'shio' ('tide') is pronounced as 'zio'.

4.1. Attempts to establish a Korean Teacher Seminary in Ussuriysk-Nikolsk

After the annexation of Korea by Japan, more people migrated from the Korean peninsula.

After the outbreak of the First World War, emigration from the western part of the empire to avoid the chaos of war increased in particular (An Jung-geun, who assassinated Ito Hirobumi in 1909, also belonged to the Korean-language newspaper *Daito Koho* (The Great East Proceedings, published in Vladivostok). The Japanese Government constantly tried to interfere in matters related to Korean immigration by demanding the Russian Government to repatriate people of Korean nationality as “their citizens” or send officials from the Governor-General of Chosen’s Office to Vladivostok to survey Korean people’s movements (Himeda 2012, 111-12).

The Korean immigrants were eager to create the education system where they settled. To this end, in the city of Nikol’sk-Ussuriysk, north of Vladivostok, the Korean community attempted to establish a teacher seminary (i.e. Teachers’ College). The little-known history of this process is revealed by O. B. Lynsha by her archival research (Лынша 2017; 2018, 159-67).

The Korean community was keen to educate their children still before the Revolution. First, the classes for non-Russian speakers were created in parochial schools attached to the Russian Orthodox Church in cooperation with Zemstvo (an elective district council in Russia). Here, children were educated exclusively in Russian to enable them to adapt to Russian society.

After February 1917, the need for education in their ethnic language was discussed at the All-Russian Korean Soviet (National Congress) in Nikol’sk-Ussuriysk. Then plans were drawn to establish a Teacher Seminary under the Korean Soviet. Zemstvo again assisted with the necessary funds and place. Young Korean who had education in Moscow, Petersburg and elsewhere were recruited. The educational goal was to familiarize Korean children with Russian culture and allow them to learn the language and culture of their ethnic group. The school aimed to be an educational institution open to society by accepting Russian students if seats were available. Russian pupils were not obliged to take the Korean Language.

The Bolshevik regime administered the Korean Teacher Seminary after establishing the Ministry of National Education in Omsk. They demanded the Korean Teacher Seminary’s acceptance of the same system as the Tatar Teacher Seminary in Tomsk. In such a way, the Teacher Seminary was suspended or required to undergo institutional reform several times.

The Japanese raid on Nikolaevsk-on-Amur in April 1920 caused extensive damage to school personnel. In addition, the school suffered from constant operational, financial difficulties.

To improve their financial difficulties, they organized a charity concert in 1921. Many well-known artists who had taken refuge in Primorsky Krai, including Vera Huvan, the first professional singer from Far, participated there. It shows that many cultural figures understood and supported the need to maintain the educational environment.

At this time, the Trans-Siberian Railway was under Japanese military control, and the Japanese also visited this charity concert. One of the memoirs records the fear and tension under Japanese rule. There is an episode in which Korean students sang revolutionary songs in Korean.

We sang a song in Korean at the Charity concert at the community centre. The song was revolutionary. In 1921, some Japanese with high social status sat in the front row. They suddenly got up and walked out of the hall. We needed clarification. They gathered in the library at the end of the lobby and violently hit the desks and furniture with their knuckles. Our responsible thought they would all be arrested and started exchanging goodbyes with each other. But they made as much noise as they could and left. We continued with the concert (Лыньша 2018, 165).

However, it is unclear to what extent the Japanese military understood the meaning of the socialist revolution. According to Masafumi Asada's study *Siberian Expedition* (published in 2020), the Japanese government initially recognized Lenin as a puppet government of Germany. The Siberian Intervention by Japan was also intended to preserve the Trans-Siberian Railway and Manchurian interests from Bolsheviks and America rather than to oppose the revolution (Asada 2016, 23-7).

Even the school had to change their system; the first nine students graduated from the school in 1923. In the same year, the school was temporarily closed by the Soviet administration due to poor management conditions. The Ministry of National Education temporarily united it with the Nikol'sk-Ussuriyskiy Pedagogical College, then independent the Nikol'sk-Ussuriyskiy Korean Pedagogical College.

Its closure could be due to nationwide institutional changes by the Soviet regime to seek operational stability or to eliminate Japanese influence.

Soviet authority declared as below: «The Korean Teacher Seminary, reformed and re-organized [...], would become a nursery of proletarian culture for the working class in Primorye and mainland Korea» (*ibid.*, 166). It seems, however, undeniable that the Korean community lost their autonomous organisational management.

4.2. Education of the Japanese community

The Japanese community in Vladivostok lived a life that preserved their traditional culture but also conformed to the local cultural diversity. The house had tatami mats, pechka (a Russian stove) and samovar (a Russian water boiler for tea). Japanese cuisine was prepared from food shipped directly from Japanese ports, but Russian food such as Chinese, pryaniks (Russian traditional baked sweets) and black bread was also eaten daily. The Japanese also celebrated various ethnic holidays. For example, New Year was celebrated three times according to the Japanese custom (the Western calendar), the Russian Orthodox Julian calendar, and the lunar calendar used by the employed Chinese people (Morgun 2016, 146-50).

They were, at times, critical of the Japanese Government. The Japanese primary education system, however, was transplanted so that when the children returned to Japan, they would have access to higher education.

To help children learn Japanese, the Japanese Alliance in Vladivostok invited Takeo Sanami, a graduate of the Tokyo University of Foreign Languages, as a teacher in 1894 and rented a place at the Honganji Buddhism Mission Station in Vladivostok to implement a compulsory Japanese education program. A female teacher, Bun Aburaya, was also employed to educate girls. Russian language classes were also provided to help the children adapt to the local culture. The children interacted with Russian children at Christmas and birthday parties (Sato & Savel'ev 2004, 31-3; Morgun 2016, 94-7).

4.3. Refugees stimulate artistic activity

Immigrants and refugees to Vladivostok increased immediately after the start of the First World War. They escaped from war and starvation in the West. Between 1916 and 1922, the population increased four to five times (Виловатая 2015).

The migration of cultural and artistic figures meant that information about the newest tendency of the modern culture in the European part of the country was received almost without a time lag. Modernist culture in the early 20th century consisted of various groups who actively dismantled traditional styles. Vladivostok also experienced rapid mobility and diversification of the composition of the ethnicity, and it renewed people's worldview. It needed to train new creative people. Education and enlightenment in the Far East proceeded, relying on the passion and efforts of individuals (*ibid.*).

4.3.1. Art

The spread of education and enlightenment in the Far East depended primarily on the passion and efforts of individuals.

In 1917, Vasily Batalov opened the first art school (primary and secondary) in the Primorskiy region at his own expense. Batalov was born in Ufa but grew up in an orphanage in the Urals received his art education in Odessa and then went to Munich to study. He taught in Ufa before moving to Vladivostok in 1915 (Прантенко 2011, 27-7)³.

He not only trained professional painters but, in parallel, he organized free exhibitions of his students' works at the Vladivostok People's University and allowed citizens to gain experience in appreciating paintings (Виловатая 2015).

4.3.2. Music

The diversity of Vladivostok during this period is particularly evident in the music provided by the military bands of various countries. According to Vilovataya's research, the Vladivostok Symphony Orchestra (represented by M. Fiveisky, a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov), and Military bands such as the Irkutsk Military Or-

³ Also see: https://artmuseum.ru/listofdays/12/30/Vasilij_Alekseevich_Batalov/

chestra, the brass band of the American Intervention Army, the orchestra of the Czechoslovak Volunteer Army, the Czech Military Information and Enlightenment Department Symphony Orchestra, and other musicians from the western regions frequently gave concerts.

Gypsy songs, popular in the capital, were also popular in the Far East. Czech orchestras were particularly popular because of their musicality (Виловатая 2015).

4.3.3. Performing arts

European-style performing arts began in the 1870s with travelling theatre troupes based in Blagoveshchensk. Soon many enthusiasts' theatre groups emerged in Vladivostok and began to perform their repertory almost every day in the early 20th century. There were also Chinese opera houses.

During the civil war, E.M. Dolin produced various travelling performances of dramas, operettas, and miniatures. Light theatres like cabarets and miniatures flourished, with over 50 small theatres.

The People's Theatre, founded in 1918, was reorganized into the Proletkult (an experimental Soviet artistic group) in 1921. Many theatre companies quickly accepted the new theatrical trends of the revolutionary period. Some Chinese theatre companies also performed agitation dramas. Revolutionary theatrical festivals celebrating the first anniversary of the February Revolution were also held, as in Petersburg.

4.3.4. Literature

In this period, new writers from the Far East emerged. The Association of Far Eastern Literatures and Art was founded by writers, poets and painters who evacuated here and the Futurist Café 'Balaganchik' was opened (Александрова 2018, 192).

Reading competitions flourished. Evacuee literary figures, especially those leading the avant-garde art of the time, won the prizes: in the 1920 competition, David Burliuk won the gold prize for his reading of poems by Mayakovsky and others, then Sergei Tretyakov won third place (Кириллова 2018а).

5. The impact of the Siberian Exodus

There is no doubt that Vladivostok, during the Siberian Intervention, was disrupted by the war. It is not possible to evaluate it only positively as a creative space. Negative aspects such as anxiety and despair with no way out, multicultural chaos and high crime rates are significant. One of the evacuees, the poet Mikhail Shcherbakov, describes the chaos in Vladivostok.

And what kind of people were not brought there: here is some uncle bearded to the very eyes in torbазs and a kukhlyanka (reindeer fur boots and outerwear) selling a sack of golden sand washed up near Okhotsk Sea to a Chinese. Next to him, a pale olive skin Italian changes his lyres, and A Yankee sailor with a face split in

two with an axe, regularly moving his jaw and chewing gum. And everywhere – a vigilant eye – nimble, short-legged Japanese, swarming in all parts of the city, spreading across all the surrounding powder warehouses and forts of the once mighty fortress. Like ants on the paw of a wounded and dying beast which is getting cold... (transl. from Кириллова 2018b, 174).

Incidents of foreigners being killed were used by foreign troops as a pretext for intervention to “protect” and “keep their settlement safe”. For example, to a question from Japan that Vladivostok might be dangerous for the Japanese, an editor of the newspaper *Ushio Nippo*, published by the Japanese Alliance in Vladivostok, responded as follows:

We received a telegram a couple of days ago from a newspaper in Japan, asking to send to report on details of the “disturbances in Vladivostok,” but we can’t figure out what they meant by that. We sent them a telegram stating: “At present, the area is peaceful and safe. If the people in Japan report too much about the disturbances in the Russian territories, it would influence our business, and not a few people are annoyed by this” (Cited from: Hashimoto 1992, 87).

The Japanese invasion severely damaged the commerce of the Japanese community in Vladivostok.

In 1922 the Settlement People’s Association held an emergency congress. It adopted an appeal containing criticism of the Japanese Government’s policy towards Russia, the Japanese Government’s low opinion of Japanese residents in Russia and its lack of understanding of the efforts of Japanese residents to put down strong roots in Russia (Morgun 2016, 162).

As the number of military personnel from outside increases, so does the sex trade business.

The following short humorous poem (chastushka), written by Noel’ (a poet and humorist, a pen name of V.V. Pavchinsky), ironically describes how Golden Horn Bay (masculine noun) in Vladivostok (masculine noun) is alive with foreign troops (feminine noun) stationed there:

‘Secret transport.’
The Golden Horn has long been renowned.
For its hospitality as a stopover,
That’s why flock to him so much,
From overseas countries, foreign ladies (transl. from Кириллова 2018b, 176).

In the vast territory of the former Russian Empire, the revolutionary regime could only be established after some time. People had various dreams or despairs about the revolution. When we think of history and cultural conditions, we tend to think of them as national and ethnic units. Still, it is also essential to consider them from the perspective of regions with particular circumstances that do not fit into the macro picture.

There are no “what ifs” in the historical past, but we could consider many “what if” options for the future from historical studies.

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