

Russia between imperial and national in North East Asia in the late 19th and 20th centuries

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This paper will develop the central theme of the changing borders between national, homeland territory and an imperial possession which shaped Russia's engagement in the North East Asia in the late 19th and 20th century. I would like to build on feedback from the Tokyo conference and add to my analysis of transformation of imperial into national more empirical data as an illustration of the conceptual framework of the paper.

A further development of the paper would see some tentative comparisons with the formation of the image of a core national territory in the 19th and early 20th century Japan, using Hokkaido and the Northern Territories as examples. Some preliminary thoughts will be given to extending the comparative approach to other national territories formed in the 19th and early 20th centuries concurrently with imperial expansion or consolidation, including the USA, Britain and China.

At the core of the paper remain the following research questions:

- What does count as imperial territory, and what counts as national territory?
- How did the shift from empire to nation state as the dominant unit of international order in the course of the 20th affected status of Russian territories in North East Asia? Was similar mechanisms at play in other countries in the region, including Japan?
- What role does geography, history, politics and ideology play in ascribing a specific territory as part of homeland, or as an imperial colony?
- How easy is the transformation from imperial to national? Specifically, to what extent can this be an objective and consistent distinction, instead of circumstantial and constructed?

Finally, the paper will address the issue of what this ambiguity, at least in the Russian case, means for competing imperialisms in North East Asia. Specifically, the paper will look at how the imperial/national distinction impact in the Russo-Japanese dispute over the Kuril islands.