

**2013-2014 Title VIII Research Scholar Program
Final Report**

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Secret Missions: Russian Intelligence, the Jesuits, and the Qing, 1675-1825

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Research Abstract

In the 17th century, despite Muscovy's reputation for isolationism and paranoia, Russia's encounter with China was both widely discussed and widely disseminated both at home and abroad, while Russians drew upon and helped to constitute Jesuit intellectual networks. In post-Petrine Russia, which was far more intellectually active and integrated with Europe, the large volume of work produced about China had virtually no circulation in either sphere. What happened? 18th century Russian sinology had found its home in intelligence bureaucracies, above all that of the College of Foreign Affairs. Because its practitioners were not in a social or institutional position to produce or popularize original work, and because it was restricted by secrecy rules, the intelligence collected by these bureaucrats both in the capitals and on the Mongolian border was highly isolated from mainstream Russian intellectual life, and had little in common with the limited Sinological work at the Russian Academy of Sciences. In particular, it was highly rooted in the Manchu, Inner Asian context of the Qing, and it saw the Jesuits less as highly privileged, idealized sources of information than as neighbors and resources. This gradually changed in the late 18th century, as European powers began to impose a Pacific context on Russo-Qing relations and Russian ties with Mongolia frayed. Western Sinological notions drawn from the Jesuit experience as retranslated in Paris gained ascendancy in St.

Petersburg, and in the first two decades of the nineteenth century they came to replace their predecessors. Russian Sinology had rejoined Europe.

Research Goals

My goal in Russia was twofold. On the one hand, I aimed to locate, classify, and work through the major institutional and bureaucratic collections related to eighteenth-century Russo-Qing relations, following initial steps I made in that direction in Summer 2011. These are concentrated in three archival collections: in Moscow, RGADA (the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts) (covering the period up to the mid-late 18th century), and in St. Petersburg, RGIA (the Russian State Historical Archive, covering the 19th century as well as the activities of the Holy Synod in the 18th century) and SPB-ARAN (the St. Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Academy of Sciences, covering the Academy's activities throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). A further substantial body of material directly produced by the College of Foreign Affairs, contained at AVPRI (the Archive of Foreign Relations of the Russian Empire) in Moscow, was inaccessible to me due to that archive's being closed until 2016. Hence part of the task was also to find substitutes for the unavailable material in other archives, since Imperial Russian bureaucratic institutions frequently replicated documents, memoranda, and reports.

On the other hand, I aimed to comb through manuscript collections, largely covering the period before the mid-18th century, for materials having to do with early Russo-Qing relations and their informational context. (The distinction is that manuscript collections are typically assembled in a piecemeal and miscellaneous fashion as libraries by private or institutional collectors, often in the form of manuscript books, rather than forming the operational archive of a single institution.) These collections included, above all, those at the Russian State Library in

Moscow and the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, although I also used smaller and more specialized collections and manuscript departments at the State Historical Museum, the St. Petersburg Institute of History, the Library of the Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, and Pushkin House (the Institute for the History of Russian Literature). This would involve sifting through a large number of manuscript catalogues, identifying relevant texts, and sometimes correcting incorrect, incomplete, or imprecise archival metadata. A special goal was examining the dozens of extant copies of Nikolai Spafarii's *Opisanie pervyia chasti vseleennyia...*, an augmented 1676 translation of Martino Martini's *Novus atlas sinensis*, which was the most widely-circulated Russian-language description of China from the late seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century but remained unpublished until 1910.

Research Activities

In the course of my archival research in Russia I examined around five hundred archival documents, many of which were volumes ranging from several hundred to over one thousand pages. I manually transcribed over 850,000 words of manuscript material spanning the entire chronological field of my research. Although the majority of the documents I transcribed were in Russian, many were in other languages: Latin, French, German, Manchu, Chinese, and English. A number of the documents I located have never previously been used either by Russian or foreign scholars, and nearly all will be used in English-language work for the first time. Likewise, in over a dozen cases, I have identified the authorship, context, and sources of manuscript materials that had previously remained unclassified or mislabeled.

At RGADA, my primary focus were the materials produced by the Governing Senate of the Russian Empire, especially documents related to the Beijing caravan trade and the Secret

Expedition, which dealt primarily with frontier security and espionage in the mid-18th century (*sekretnaia ekspeditsiia*, as opposed to *tainaia kantseliaria*, which dealt with secret-police cases). The thousands of documents in this expedition's collections have very rarely been used by researchers, because its catalogue is not readily available at the archive and internal reshuffling within the archive has made previous references to its material invalid. Using this collection's documents, I was able to trace the precise process of the production and circulation of eighteenth-century Russian intelligence on the Mongolian border, a phenomenon which had been only vaguely understood previously. I also made use of RGADA's collections of papers belonging to Count A. R. Vorontsov, a high-ranking imperial official in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and G.-F. Müller, a historian at the Russian Academy of Sciences. These contained highly rare and valuable reports on Russo-Qing relations collected by both individuals over the course of their careers. Finally, in addition to a wide range of miscellaneous collections, I made use of the books of reports from Siberian governors preserved in the archives of Her Imperial Majesty's Chancellery, which contained classified snapshot overviews of the border situation in the second half of the century. Among other finds, I located several documents related to the highly secret Russian project to undermine the British Macartney Embassy to China in 1791-3.

At the Russian State Library, I located the previously unknown original copy of Spafarii's *Opisanie*, which is identifiable by the marginalia as well as some other textual features. I also obtained a full reproduction of a secret intelligence journal kept by Russian students in Beijing in the 1770s. More importantly, I identified a new genre of texts I plan to focus on in my Chapter I: manuscript route descriptions, which describe how to get from place to place in late 17th-century Siberia. These contain a wide range of information about the Qing

realm and frontier trade with Qing subjects, frequently borrowing from nominally classified diplomatic reports. Versions of these texts appeared in all of my manuscript collections and I attempted to catalogue as many as I could. Finally, I discovered a lengthy memorandum by the College of Foreign Affairs detailing the Russian role in the Qing conquest of the Junghar Confederation in the 1750s and the precarious position of the Kazakh Middle Horde in the territorial renegotiation that followed.

At the State Historical Museum, which includes two manuscript departments—the Manuscript Department proper, which deals largely with pre-18th century works, and the Department of Written Sources, which covers later materials—my most important find was a set of two bound manuscript volumes on Russo-Qing relations dating from the early nineteenth century. While such volumes are relatively common, the materials in these are unusually rare, unknown and unpublished. In particular, a secret 19th century memorandum detailing the conspiracy against Macartney in the context of prior Russo-Qing encounters is uniquely significant for my work. The volumes also include original, corrected Manchu-Russian translations done by the students at the Qing government's Manchu Russian School in Beijing.

At ARAN in St. Petersburg, I focused on three distinct areas. First, I examined the correspondence between the members of the Academy of Sciences and the Jesuit missionaries in Beijing in the 1730s-50s, a large trove of mostly unpublished letters in Latin, French, and German, along with supplementary materials like book inventories. Second, I combed through the Academy's bureaucratic archives to locate documents dealing with the daily lives and careers of its Chinese-Manchu translators, who were formerly students at the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing. Finally, I used materials on the Academy's own scientific research on China

and Mongolia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. These materials have never been considered in the same context, and I aim to bring them together in my dissertation.

RGIA was my other major archive in St. Petersburg. There, I worked primarily with the documents generated by the Holy Governing Synod, the supreme ecclesiastical authority in the Russian Empire and the agency responsible for curating the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing. Although the files I consulted dealt with over a hundred years of history and cover an endless variety of day-to-day matters, perhaps my most serious finding was the serious misrepresentation of some of these files by Soviet scholars. In particular, a large proportion of the documents deal with the missionaries' sexual misconduct, which has been covered up in Russian-language work. In addition, RGIA contains a large number of documents concerning Russo-Qing commercial and political relations, including matters such as espionage and secret diplomacy. Key among them is the collection of the papers of Count Iakov Lambert, secretary to the failed 1805 Golovkin Embassy to China and the official most responsible for its intelligence activities.

Finally, I worked in a number of other collections in St. Petersburg. At the Russian National Library, in addition to advancing my work on the strands I already identified at the RSL, I worked through the voluminous notebooks of the Russian Sinologist, translator, and mission director Pavel (later Petr) Kamenskii, tracing his Western European and Jesuit influences. At the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, I examined the papers of Iakinf Bichurin and transcribed a number of eighteenth-century Manchu and Chinese documents in its collection, particularly from a compendium of memorials from the head Qing official in Northern Manchuria. At Pushkin House, I identified a previously unknown Kamenskii notebook in the collection. Finally, at the St. Petersburg Institute of History, I used another collection of

Vorontsov manuscripts, which contained Vorontsov's incoming and outgoing correspondence and reference files on the entire history of 18th-century Russo-Qing relations.

Research Findings

Chapter I. The 17th and early 18th-century manuscript materials I've located suggest a dramatically interconnected web of textual circulation between Russian ambassadors and caravan employees, foreign-affairs bureaucrats, Jesuits, and Western Europeans. Although Muscovy in this period had a longstanding reputation for paranoia and informational opacity, in practice highly privileged documents participated in this exchange on an equal basis with materials oriented towards a broader public. Hence visiting European ambassadors were able to copy such texts as Spafarii's *Opisanie* and bring them back to their courts, where they were often translated and published. Meanwhile, the privileged documents themselves drew upon information provided directly and indirectly by Jesuit sources, who themselves hoped to use Russia as a communication route between Europe and the Qing realm. Finally, information gathered in Siberia itself, particularly in the commercial entrepôts on the border, incorporated the testimony of Mongols, Kalmyks (Western Mongols), and other Inner Asians, indicating the breadth of Russia's Eurasian connections.

Chapter II. In the 1730s-'50s, the Imperial Academy of Sciences carried on an extensive correspondence with the Jesuit missionaries in Beijing, something which has been studied by a handful of Russian scholars. My research suggests, however, that this correspondence was far more commercial in nature, oriented towards the accumulation of collections of books, plants, and curiosities, than merely intellectual. Moreover, the correspondence carried by the Russian caravan to Beijing was only a small portion of its intelligence activities. The Russian state tasked

caravan employees with conducting industrial espionage (particularly related to expensive exports like porcelain and silk), creating maps of the territory traversed, secretly purchasing maps from Beijing state agents, and gathering intelligence on the political situation in the Qing realm. These need to be understood as aspects of a common project integrally linked with the caravan's commercial function.

Chapter III. Students at the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing were highly integrated into the social and cultural fabric of the city. The patterns of their sexual and criminal interactions with other missionaries, Jesuits, and Qing subjects reveal complicated emotional lives and widely differing understandings of their place in Russian and Qing society. Their book collections, meanwhile, show how closely rooted they were in Qing book culture. Upon their return to Russia, they faced a different set of challenges. In particular, because of their fixed, subordinate place in Russian society and in their institutions, they were never allowed to emerge as Sinologists, publishing books and promoting original theories. At most, they were allowed to produce translations. Larion Rossokhin, despite having a native speaker's understanding of the Qing languages and an intimate knowledge of Beijing life, earned 200 rubles per year and bore a corporal's rank for almost his entire two-decade-long career. Later, Aleksei Leontiev was able to leverage his publishing and translation practices to earn a respectable place in society, but continued to be above all an employee of the College of Foreign Affairs, not a full-fledged Sinologist.

Chapter IV. In the middle of the eighteenth century, relations between the Russian and Qing Empires began rapidly deteriorating due to the Qing defeat of the region's other dominant power—the Junghar Confederation—in 1755. The result was a cold war, in which both powers used the threat of military confrontation as leverage while competing for influence among the

peoples of the imperial borderlands, including Mongols, Kazakhs, former Junghars, and others. The most important Russian actor in this struggle was Varfolomei Iakobii, the commandant of the Trans-Baikal border town of Selenginsk. With only a handful of poorly-equipped troops under his command, Iakobii's influence was not determined by his military capability. Instead, it was his ability to monitor the behavior and intentions of the Qing in Mongolia by maintaining a network of well-placed informants—some of them secretly sworn into Russian service—along the border and in Kuren, Mongolia's capital.

Chapter V. After Iakobii's death in 1768 and amid increasing Qing efforts to subordinate Mongolia, the Baikal-area intelligence network began to decay, with commercial contacts increasingly substituting for military and political ones. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Russian elites began to pay increasing amounts of attention to foreign penetration of the North Pacific, especially after Captain Cook visited Kamchatka in 1779. Meanwhile, the British plan to create a foothold for commercial hegemony in China through an embassy headed by Lord Macartney inspired an elaborate two-pronged Russian conspiracy to undermine it, using the services of Jesuits from Russia's newly annexed Polish territories. The followup Russian embassy attempted to renew Russia's intelligence engagement with the Qing, but its failure rendered such efforts futile.

Chapter VI. As traditional institutionally-grounded intelligence came to play an increasingly less significant role in Russo-Qing relations, Russian foreign policy elites developed a series of thoroughgoing reforms in the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission sent to Beijing in 1820-30, which reoriented it both towards the production of public-facing academic knowledge and the effective conversion of local Beijing residents to Orthodox Christianity. The reforms enabled by this mission, both planned and executed by its head Archimandite Petr

Kamenskii (formerly a Mission student in 1795-1807), transformed Russian Sinology and integrated it with the newly professionalized field emerging in Europe. These reforms took place against the background of the scandalous failure of Archimandrite Iakinf Bichurin (long considered the progenitor of 19th century Russian sinological studies) to complete the various missions entrusted to him in 1807-20.

Photos



An early-20th c. armored car parked briefly outside of RGIA (St. Petersburg).



One of the objets d'art requested in a watercolor catalogue issued to Academy agent Franz Lukas Jellatschitsch for his trip to Beijing in 1752-55.



One of many cats at RGADA (Moscow).

Policy Recommendations and Implications

Russo-Chinese relations have long been characterized by assertions of friendship and of a unique, historically unprecedented relationship dating back to the seventeenth century. In fact this relationship has been continuously troubled by mutual suspicion, incomprehension, and contempt, even during periods of supposed peace and stability. War was often prevented only by the unwillingness of both parties to risk military defeat and undertake large-scale military deployments. Recent geopolitical developments that may point towards a Russia-China alliance, such as the much-heralded natural gas deal signed in May 2014, are typically overestimated by foreign commentators, much as similar events were during the eighteenth century. In fact, while

commercial contacts are and continue to be profitable for both countries, both also see commerce as secondary to longer-term strategic commitments. The attempt to extend commercial cooperation to the strategic field failed repeatedly in the eighteenth century, finally leading to Russia's illegal and unprecedented seizure of Northern Manchuria in 1858.

The eighteenth-century experience also points to two other aspects of Russia's China policy that may continue to have relevance in the 21st century. First, although Russia often undertakes substantial efforts to recruit and train China experts, in practice these experts are often ignored and consigned to menial status in an academic hierarchy that does not sufficiently value their form of training; those experts who are more willing to adapt themselves to the preconceptions of non-expert foreign-policy elites tend to be more successful, distorting the intelligence they provide. Second, Russia's China policy is far more determined by the anxieties of its policymaking apparatus about threats from more powerful Western competitors than it is by anything having to do with China itself. Today as in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century, China has become a site for the projection of fantasies about an alternate power bloc and a hidden resource for geopolitical leverage. These overwhelmingly ignore China's own interests and foreign-policy goals even as they imagine that these must necessarily align with Russia's. Thus it is unlikely that this latest round of wishful thinking will prove any more successful than the previous ones.

Co-Curricular Activity

My most important academic contacts were made at the St. Petersburg Institute for the History of Science, where I met (among others) Tatiana Feklova, who conducts research on the Academy's East Asian expeditions in the early 19th century. Feklova provided me with offprints

of her work and pointed me towards highly valuable archival documents dealing with the reform of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in 1820. These documents allowed me to totally reformulate my plans for the concluding portion of my dissertation, seeing the Academy's research projects on China in the context of the role envisioned for them by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Spiritual Affairs. I have also made tentative plans to submit a number of specialized articles to Russian journals and present at conferences in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Finally, in St. Petersburg I met several British and American researchers working on other aspects of Imperial Russian foreign policy.

Conclusions

Russia's relationship with the Qing Empire, although its concrete results were overwhelmingly commercial in nature, involved intelligence and information on every level. Every single institution, agent, and border official that dealt with China was tasked with intelligence-gathering, whether by means of human intelligence, purchase of texts and material samples, or observation and analysis. Hence it is impossible to see this relationship solely in terms of trade and diplomacy. The vast quantities of secret and confidential unpublished documents in Russian documents amply testify to the importance of intelligence in every aspect of Russo-Qing relations.

Equally important are the nuances of when, why, where, how and by whom this information was disseminated. It proved to be tremendously important whether intelligence was produced and retained in secretive foreign-policy bodies or in public-facing institutions such as the Academy of Sciences. The social status of Sinologists (and Qing experts more broadly) proved to be highly variable over time and intimately tied to the Russian Empire's varying

informational policy. Such questions allow us to outline new approaches not just to Russo-Qing relations but to Imperial Russian history more broadly, by putting into stark relief the significance and political value of intelligence production both in the center and in the borderlands. Close attention paid to intelligence will be crucial for any future efforts to situate Russia in its Eurasian context, an increasingly vital research agenda in recent years.

Plans for Future Research Agenda/Presentations and Publications

This research will, of course, be central to my dissertation, which I plan to complete in May 2016. It has already led to a number of future publications and presentations. In May 2014 I presented part of the Chapter II material at a workshop in Leuven, Belgium. In June 2014 part of Chapter V was presented at a conference on Jesuit Survival and Restoration in Boston, MA. This material has already been solicited for publication in 2015 by the editor of the *Journal of Jesuit Studies*. In September 2014, part of Chapter IV will be presented at a conference on Information in the Russian Empire at Darwin College, Cambridge. Finally, I have successfully organized a panel at the American Historical Association conference in January 2015 entitled “Towards a Trans-Imperial Intellectual History of Central Eurasia”; my paper will use materials gathered throughout my research year.

Although I have not yet decided on a future research agenda, it is clear that secret foreign-policy materials such as those in RGADA will be key for my next project. One potential direction involves conceptualizing Northeast Asia as a unified and interconnected geopolitical and environmental space, especially from the Russian point of view; another involves Russian diplomacy and European conservatism between 1770 and 1825, reexamined on the basis of secret archival documents.