

Integrating Imperial Space

The Russian Customs System in the 19th Century





Schnittstellen

Studien zum östlichen und südöstlichen Europa

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You can't tie a knot with one hand.
– Russian proverb

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Introduction

A fundamental change in the relationship between region and empire was hardly what Minister of Finance Mikhail Reiter expected when State Comptroller Samuil Greig submitted a report on the mundane issue of lax customs controls in the Transcaucasian region. The territory had been detached from the empire's core customs space and subordinated to the Caucasian Viceroy since 1847. Three decades later, however, growing complaints about smuggling activities called for revision. Rather than lingering over minor technicalities of border protection, Greig suggested the full reintegration of the Transcaucasian customs territory in his 1877 report. This reform appeared inevitable to him, as he argued that "[...] the financial history of other countries provides us with examples of the unification of the customs of different states under one administration. However, examples of several independent customs administrations within one state cannot be found anywhere."¹ What had once been designed as a bespoke solution to accommodate the region's peculiarities was now conceived as backwards and deviant. And it did not help that the construction of railways and telegraphs promising to shrink the empire spotlighted the non-uniformity of its many peripheral economic spaces.

Greig's lamentation on the deviation from a presumably normal developmental path is little surprising, and just one of many possible variations on the theme of Russia's "backwardness." Others had put an optimistic twist on it, hoping to skip over the pitfalls of modernization, which forerunner countries such as Britain experienced. And yet others, like economist Vasilii Vorontsov, advocated a developmental course altogether different from the European model.² Greig most likely bore in mind a comparison with the recently unified German Empire, which had developed from a customs union – the *Zollverein* – into a powerful political union, firmly positioning Germany within the concert of Great Powers.³ Against this backdrop, Russia's

1 RGIA, f. 1152, op. 9, d. 84, "O preobrazovanii karantinno-tamozhennoi chasti na Kavkaze i v Zakavkazskom krae", l. 3ob.

2 For the many ways in which "backwardness" was interpreted by contemporaries throughout Russian history, see *Hildermeier, Manfred*: Das Privileg der Rückständigkeit. Anmerkungen zum Wandel einer Interpretationsfigur der Neueren Russischen Geschichte. In: *Historische Zeitschrift*, 244(3) (1987), 557–603. For Vorontsov's position in particular see 585–586.

3 From the vast body of literature on the *Zollverein* see the classic study by *Hahn, Hans-Werner*: *Geschichte des Deutschen Zollvereins*. Göttingen 1984. The more recent collection edited by Hahn presents fresh perspectives on a seemingly familiar subject, see *Hahn*,

fragmented customs system appeared as yet another archaism curtailing its pursuit of modernization, ignited by a devastating defeat in the Crimean War in 1856. The task of overcoming “backwardness” and debates over the empire’s future development were ubiquitous. The ensuing phase, known as the “Great Reforms”, saw almost every aspect of political, economic and social life in the Russian Empire put under scrutiny.

An overhaul of such significant scale, in a state so deeply steeped in autocratic political tradition as the Russian Empire, has attracted substantial scholarly interest. The static image of the empire was gradually revised, starting with the basic prerequisites for any reform – the reformers. Bruce Lincoln identified a group of “enlightened bureaucrats” as the driving force behind the Great Reforms of the 1860s and 1870s, establishing a continuity between the rule of Nicholas I and Alexander II, rather than reinforcing the idea of a radical and startling rupture.⁴ As early as the 1840s, these distinguished state servants had identified serfdom as one of the most obstructive factors for the empire’s development, yet reform was slow to come. It took the humiliating defeat in the Crimean War to embark on a sweeping reform program, the centerpiece of which was the abolition of serfdom in 1861. Alongside, the judicial and educational system had been reformed, institutions of local self-government were introduced, and the military was put on a new footing. The aim was an all-encompassing transformation from which the Russian Empire would emerge, strengthened both militarily and economically, ready to compete with other Great Powers.

This book contributes to the study of this transformative phase and the ensuing decades by tracing the development of the Russian Empire’s customs system in the 19th century and exploring the junction between issues of economy, space and imperial rule. At its core, it tells the story of how the Russian Empire perceived and manipulated its imperial economic space throughout

Hans-Werner/Kreutzmann, Marko (eds.): *Der deutsche Zollverein. Ökonomie und Nation im 19. Jahrhundert*. Köln 2012. For a global perspective on the trade policies of the Zollverein see *Torp, Cornelius*: *Die Herausforderung der Globalisierung. Wirtschaft und Politik in Deutschland, 1860–1914*. Göttingen 2005. For the international impact of Friedrich List’s ideas in general and particularly on Russia see *Wendler, Eugen*: *Die List-Rezeption in Rußland*. In: *Wendler, Eugen* (ed.): *“Die Vereinigung des europäischen Kontinents.” Friedrich List – Gesamteuropäische Wirkungsgeschichte seines ökonomischen Denkens*. Stuttgart 1996, 473–490; *Barnett, Vincent*: *D. I. Mendeleev, Russian Protectionism and German Political Economy*. In: *Rieter, Heinz/Shirokorad, Leonid/Zweynert, Joachim* (eds.): *Deutsche und russische Ökonomen im Dialog. Wissenstransfer in historischer Perspektive*. Marburg 2005, 169–184.

- 4 *Lincoln, Bruce W.*: *In the Vanguard of Reform. Russia’s Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825–1861*. DeKalb 1982; *Lincoln, Bruce W.*: *The Great Reforms. Autocracy, Bureaucracy, and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia*. Dekalb 1990.

the 19th century and what visions for its future can be read from the mundanity of customs regulations.

Late Imperial Russia's Economy

The interpretation of Russia's economic modernization as peculiar and deviant has not only been voiced by contemporaries such as State Comptroller Samuil Greig, but also made its way into scholarly work. Among the most influential was Alexander Gerschenkron's use of the Russian Empire as an example to theorize "economic backwardness" and extrapolate the specifics of belated development. He argued that the more backward an economy, the more important the role of the state in its developmental process and the larger the scale of production.⁵ The elevation of "Great Men", most notably Sergei Vitte, went hand in hand with this statist interpretation.⁶ Although persuasive in its elegance, Gerschenkron's thesis could not hold up to empirical scrutiny. Subsequent scholars discovered far greater ambiguity in the economic life of the late Russian Empire. While large-scale projects such as the Donbas coal and steel industrial zone were certainly of great importance, smaller industries like the Ural iron producers continued to exist in their slipstream and fared much better than previously assumed, adjusting flexibly to market conditions.⁷ Close scrutiny of individual enterprises such as the Putilov works revealed a state that promoted the creation of large-scale enterprises, yet likewise suffered

5 *Gerschenkron, Alexander*: Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective. A Book of Essays. Cambridge, Massachusetts 1962.

6 Vitte's interpretation as a great modernizer, popularized by von Laue, a contemporary of Gerschenkron, remains dominant and is in line with the latter's modernization theory approach. Francis Wcislo recently presented a more multifaceted reading of Vitte, contextualizing both him as a person as well as the Russian Empire within 19th century Europe, rather than perpetuating the narrative of a peripheral state of exception. Vitte has received much scholarly attention with Ganelin and Anan'ich presenting an in-depth account of his life and works. Other ministers of finance remain more obscure with only one substantial work on Nikolai Bunge written by Stepanov, who also produced a short outline on Mikhail Reiter. See *Von Laue, Theodore H.*: Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia. New York 1963; *Wcislo, Frank*: Rereading Old Texts: Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia. In: *McCaffray, Susan P./Melancon, Michael* (eds.): Russia in the European Context, 1789–1914. A Member of the Family. New York 2005, 71–83; *Wcislo, Francis William*: Tales of Imperial Russia. The Life and Times of Sergei Witte, 1849–1915. Oxford 2011; *Ganelin, Rafail/Anan'ich, Boris*: Sergei Iul'evich Vitte i ego vremia. Saint Petersburg 1999; *Stepanov, Valerii*: N. Kh. Bunge. Sud'ba reformatora. Moscow 1998; *Stepanov, Valerii*: Mikhail Khristoforovich Reiter. In: Russian Studies in History, 35(2) (1996), 8–41.

7 *Blanchard, Ian*: Russian Railway Construction and the Urals Charcoal Iron and Steel Industry, 1851–1914. In: The Economic History Review, 53(1) (2000), 107–126.

once it had to bail out conglomerates deemed too big to fail.⁸ Neither did Gerschenkron's observations on the nature of the relationship between state and entrepreneurship in autocratic Russia hold true.⁹ On the surface, many impediments to the emergence of interest groups and associations existed. Nevertheless, in practice, entrepreneurs succeeded in creatively circumventing limitations, and were able to develop a "proto-parliamentarian posture."¹⁰ More often than not, the state failed to act upon its regulatory rhetoric, and economic activities were meddled with less than previously assumed. Limitations of the state's access even extended to vital areas such as the control of banking and speculation operations.¹¹

These revisions do not mean to smooth over the peculiarities that existed in the Russian economic system, but rather challenge the notion of "backwardness" as such. Susan McCaffray and Michael Melancon argue that particular phenomena in Russia's development should not be unquestioningly read as "pathological deviance from a universal European norm" but taken seriously and situated within a field of "contested possibilities." Thus, "ideas that seem strange or doomed in retrospect seemed very much alive 150 years ago, and not just in Russia."¹²

While much of the backwardness theorem has been debunked, most studies on the economy of the late Russian Empire retained the geographical focus on the Western core regions of the empire inherited from the modernization-theory informed works of Gerschenkron and the likes. If modernization is understood narrowly as the creation of factories and railroads, then a look at any statistical map of the Russian Empire's industrial infrastructure justifies the neglect of territories such as the Transcaucasus, Turkestan and Siberia. Viewed from the center, they appear both geographically and economically peripheral.¹³

8 Grant, Jonathan A.: *Big Business in Russia. The Putilov Company in Late Imperial Russia, 1868–1917*. Pittsburgh 1999.

9 Gerschenkron: *Economic Backwardness*, 16–20.

10 McCaffray, Susan P.: *The Politics of Industrialization in Tsarist Russia. The Association of Southern Coal and Steel Producers, 1874–1914*. DeKalb 1996, 40.

11 Anan'ich, Boris: *Banking Firms in the Russian Empire, 1860–1914*. In: *Russian Studies in History*, 35(1) (1996), 6–61.

12 McCaffray, Susan P./Melancon, Michael: *Introduction: A Member of the Family – Russia's Place in Europe, 1789–1914*. In: McCaffray, Susan P./Melancon, Michael (eds.): *Russia in a European Context, 1789–1914. A Member of the Family*. New York 2005, 1–10, here 7.

13 The map of the Russian Empire's "industrial-enterprise-regions" included in the catalogue for the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 went as far as fully omitting the territories east of Omsk. Only seven years later at the Paris World Fair in 1900, however, "Asiatic Russia" was already prominently featured as a land of opportunity only waiting to be invested in. For the map see Il'in, A.: *Obshchaia karta fabrichno-zavodskoi promyshlennosti Rossiiskoi Imperii*. In: Mendelev, Dmitrii (ed.), *Fabrichno-zavodskaiia promyshlennost' i torgovlia Rossii*. Saint Petersburg 1893. For the Trans-Siberian railway's

Nevertheless, the second half of the 19th century was particularly dynamic in the Russian Empire's east. While the end of the Caucasian Wars prompted debate on the region's future role in the imperial edifice, a bloody war was waged on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea to expand the empire further into Central Asia. Moreover, the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway made the realization of ambitious visions for Siberia more tangible than ever, and the Russian imperial space appeared to condense. However, only few industry-specific studies have ventured into these peripheries of the empire, though returning astounding results.

John McKay traced the protracted development of the Transcaucasian oil-pipeline to reveal the interplay of state and private interests, as well as the deep division between different departments and ministries over the issue. The close proximity to the border with the Ottoman Empire and Persia further heightened awareness for strategic considerations. However, the government lacked both funds and determination, leaving the project in limbo. The case can be read as a repudiation of the etatist interpretation of the late Russian Empire's economy. Likewise, it can serve as an example for the relationship of imperial center and periphery, in which a major project with the potential to alter regional hierarchies has been caught up between interdepartmental, military and regional interests.¹⁴

Similarly, grand schemes for the development of large-scale cotton production in Central Asia should not simply be dismissed as a story of imperial megalomania and inaptitude. Studies rather suggest that careful balancing of interests delayed the project. Local interests and customs had to be accommodated, strategic considerations outweighed economic ones, and international fundraising acquired a political dimension in this geopolitically sensitive region.¹⁵ Thus, when analyzed for its imperial dimension and not along the

presentation in Paris see *Schenk, Frithjof Benjamin*: Das Zarenreich als Transitraum zwischen Europa und Asien: Russische Visionen und westliche Wahrnehmungen um die Jahrhundertwende. In: *Aust, Martin* (ed.): Globalisierung imperial und sozialistisch: Russland und die Sowjetunion in der Globalgeschichte 1851–1991. Frankfurt am Main 2013, 41–63. Russia's self-depiction in World Fairs is discussed by *Voerkelius, Mirjam*: Russland und die Sowjetunion auf den Weltausstellungen. In: *Aust, Martin* (ed.): Globalisierung imperial und sozialistisch: Russland und die Sowjetunion in der Globalgeschichte 1851–1991. Frankfurt am Main 2013, 207–224.

14 *McKay, John P.*: Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines, 1883–1891: A Study in Tsarist Economic Policy. In: *Slavic Review*, 43(4) (1984), 604–623.

15 *Joffe, Muriel*: Regional Rivalry and Economic Nationalism: The Central Industrial Region Industrialists' Strategy for the Development of the Russian Economy, 1880s–1914. In: *Russian History*, 11(4) (1984), 389–421; *Joffe, Muriel*: Autocracy, Capitalism and Empire: The Politics of Irrigation. In: *The Russian Review*, 54(3) (1995), 365–388; *Pravilova, Ekaterina*: River of Empire: Geopolitics, Irrigation, and the Amu Darya in the Late XIXth Century. In: *Cahiers d'Asie centrale*, 17/18 (2009), 255–287.

lines of modernization theory, economic activity in the Russian Empire's peripheral territories has far more to tell than its marginal role in the over-all process of industrialization would suggest. Rather than dismissing certain phenomena as deviant it should be asked how they developed, why certain approaches were deemed suitable, and how they relate to the specific conditions found within the Russian Empire. One such condition is indisputably the vastness and heterogeneity of its imperial space.

Russia's Imperial Space

The recent historiographic focus on Russia's heterogeneity was initially sparked by the study of the imposing ethnic and religious diversity found across its territory.¹⁶ In order to avoid a fragmentation into disjointed regional studies Alexei Miller has suggested to approach the empire's heterogeneity using a "situational approach", focusing on a particular structural feature and trying to reconstruct the logic behind the actions and interactions of all involved actors. A thus widened perspective allows to transcend narrow regionalism by opening up comparative perspectives between the empire's various territories

- 16 Andreas Kappeler's now-classic study on Russia as a multinational empire coincided with the Soviet Union's dissolution, which was followed by an upsurge of works on the various ethnic and religious groups within the empire helping counterbalance the narrative of Russia as a nation-state. However, approaching the empire from its fringes – as it is even inscribed in the title of the series "Okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii" – has also received criticism as implicitly operating with a center-periphery dichotomy, yet, shying away from defining the presumed "core." Proponents of the "new imperial history" suggest to use empire as a "context-setting category" and a phenomenon sui generis rather than measuring it against the nation-state and directing attention towards "imperial situations" analyzed for "languages of rationalization and self-description." See Kappeler, *Andreas*: *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung – Geschichte – Zerfall*. München 2008; For the "Okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii" series see Dolbilov, *Mikhail/Miller, Aleksei*: *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii*. Moscow 2006; Bobrovnikov, *Vladimir/Babich, Irina*: *Severnyi Kavkaz v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*. Moscow 2007; Dameshek, *Lev/Remnev, Anatolii*: *Sibir' v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*. Moscow 2007; Abashin, *Sergei/Arapov, Dmitrii/Bekmakhanova, Nailia*: *Tsentral'naia Aziia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*. Moscow 2008. For the "new imperial history" school's position towards the "imperial turn" see Gerasimov, *Ilya/Glebov, Sergey/Kaplunovski, Alexander/Mogilner, Marina/Semyonov, Alexander*: In *Search of a New Imperial History*. In: *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2005), 33–56; Semyonov, *Alexander*: *Empire as a Context Setting Category*. In: *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2008), 193–204; Gerasimov, *Ilya/Kusber, Jan/Mogilner, Marina/Semyonov, Alexander*: *New Imperial History and the Challenges of Empire*. In: *Gerasimov, Ilya/Kusber, Jan/Semyonov, Alexander* (eds.): *Empire Speaks out? Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*. Leiden 2009, 3–32.

and highlighting both differences and administrative transfers.¹⁷ Further, a situational rather than a territorial approach allows for better comparison with other imperial structures, firmly establishing Russian history within the field of empire studies.¹⁸ Miller's approach has been fruitfully applied to questions of ethnicity and religion in the Russian Empire. Such questions, particularly with regard to traditional economic practice, certainly play a role in the study of the Russian Empire's customs system and will be addressed where appropriate. However, this book approaches the empire primarily via the category of space, analyzing *situations of economic territoriality* across the empire.

It builds on Jane Burbank and Mark von Hagen's argument for the "importance of differentiated space to imperial institutions and imaginations."¹⁹ Of course, Russia's vastness is proverbial – so much so that the appeal seems to border on the banal. Yet it is not just the size of the imperial space they draw attention to but its heterogeneity that "became a habit of thought" and "profoundly affected the ways that rulers tried to govern the polity." Thus, they suggest analyzing the "intersecting roles of cultural assumptions, geographical knowledge, economic goals, and administrative practices in the extensions and attempted extensions of Russian state power over its enormous realm."²⁰ Such an approach promises a deeper understanding of the internal workings of the Russian Empire, as it avoids both centralism and regionalism. Rather than reducing the history of the empire to a national history of its core – however that would be defined – or counterbalancing the same with special regional studies, access via the category of imperial space presupposes the examination of the territory as a whole and the interrelations of its constituent parts. It

17 Miller, *Aleksei*: Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm. Esse po metodologii istoricheskogo issledovaniia. Moscow 2006, 28–32.

18 Dominic Lieven's "The Russian Empire and its Rivals" is exemplary in attempting to resituate the Russian Empire amongst a broad range of imperial formations, see *Lieven, Dominic*: Empire. The Russian Empire and its Rivals. London 2000. Where Lieven's broad brushed approach can elicit criticism, other authors narrow down comparisons to other contiguous multi-ethnic empires, which are understood as facing similar challenges of modernization and nation-building as the Russian Empire see *Barkey, Karen/Von Hagen, Mark*: After Empire. Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building. The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires. Boulder 1997; *Brisku, Adrian*: Political Reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires. A Comparative Approach. London 2017.

19 *Burbank, Jane/von Hagen, Mark*: Coming into the Territory: Uncertainty and Empire. In: *Burbank, Jane/von Hagen, Mark/Remnev, Anatolyi* (eds.): Russian Empire. Space, People, Power. 1700–1930. Bloomington 2007, 1–29, here 4; Remnev has earlier suggested the terminology "geography of power" – *geografiia vlasti* – to capture the dynamic territorialization of institutions and the shifting administrative hierarchy between center and periphery. *Remnev, Anatolii*: Rossiia dal'nego vostoka. Imperskaia geografiia vlasti XIX – nachala XX vekov. Omsk 2004.

20 *Burbank/von Hagen*: Coming into the Territory, 5, 7.

thus ties in with general reflections on the concept of territoriality and the management of space it entailed.

Territory, though often taken for granted by historians, was subject to constant reconceptualization and endowed with varying importance throughout history, as argued by Charles S. Maier. His seminal work “Once Within Borders” analyzes territory as “an underlying framework that makes states and economies possible”, stressing that “territoriality is manifested less as a quality in its own right than as a property implicated with historical phenomena that change, whether frontiers, states, sovereignty, or economic resources.” Thus, its evolving character can be traced by looking at “activities in which territory has a formative presence.”²¹ To situate specific activities, Maier outlines two ideal types of spatial imaginaries: the space of empires and the space of states.

The space of empire was marked by “unrest at the periphery” and an “uneven grip of central authority” that necessitated tolerance of “local autonomy” and entailed a proclivity towards ambiguous boundaries.²² A notion reminiscent of Frederick Cooper’s often-cited “long arms and weak fingers of empire-states”, which suggests both a far outreach and the inability to permeate territory with power.²³ The opposite ideal type – the space of states – is characterized by an aspiration to stabilize frontiers and establish “a more direct, uniform, and pervasive administration at home.” As ideal types, Maier acknowledges, they can hardly grasp reality; qualities of state and empire space can coincide, while self-descriptions as either empire or nation-state can be misleading.²⁴

His model echoes Ronald Suny’s argument that nation and empire, as ideal types, constitute two ends of a dynamic continuum within which a state is situated. The implied dynamism helps better explain how the challenges of modernity put empires under pressure to partially nationalize so as to match “the efficiencies of the new national states” by centralizing and unifying its “polycentric and differentiated polity.”²⁵ Nevertheless, the typology provides a useful framework, particularly when thought of in conjunction with the growing technical potential to manipulate space through the rise of the railway,

21 Maier, Charles S.: *Once Within Borders. Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500*. Cambridge, Massachusetts 2016, 2–7.

22 Ibid. 15.

23 Cooper, Frederick: *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley 2005, 197.

24 Maier: *Once Within Borders*, 15.

25 Suny, Ronald Grigor: *The Empire Strikes Out. Imperial Russia, ‘National’ Identity, and Theories of Empire*. In: Suny, Ronald Grigor/Martin, Terry (eds.): *A State of Nations. Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. Oxford 2001, 23–66, here 29–30.

steamship, and telegraph in the 19th century.²⁶ If a polity, previously imagining its territory predominantly as a space of empire, acquired the technological means to saturate space with power, did its spatial imaginary then shift towards the space of the state? What tensions arose from the ambition to form a uniform and bounded space? Particularly, what can be learned about the self-imagination and envisioned developmental trajectory of the Russian Empire from the management of its economic space?

To be sure, the conceptualization of territoriality is not monolithic; competing approaches exist within particular situations and all the more across different spheres such as military, economy, religion, etc.²⁷ Thus, it appears appropriate to speak of *situations of economic territoriality*, particularly those relating to the manipulation of customs space and regulations, which will be isolated and treated in this book. To approach and grasp them, the focus is put on the “intersecting roles of cultural assumptions, geographical knowledge, economic goals, and administrative practices.”²⁸

The enormous potential that cultural assumptions and geographical visions could unfold was aptly demonstrated by Mark Bassin’s study on Russia’s expansion into the Far East. Despite a lack of geographical knowledge or even in defiance of it the Amur river had turned into a screen for personal and governmental aspirations. The prospect of fulfilling a national destiny had fueled imagination, yet ended in bitter disappointment.²⁹

Similarly, cultural assumptions, availability or lack of specific knowledge, as well as visions of the empire’s future in the Steppe regions, Central Asia and the Caucasus informed decisions in the imperial center and on the spot. Mapping – the production of “Herrschaftswissen” – constituted the basic operation underlying the claim to control territory.³⁰ Meanwhile, the coming of the railway age promised to deliver the tools to act upon it. Nevertheless, the technological possibilities were put to use with different – partly competing –

26 Maier devotes a chapter to the impact of railways on ideas of continentalism, the diminishing role of natural borders and the transformation of territory from “merely a container” to “a source of communal energy and self-realization”, which elevated political territory to become the “underlying framework for industrial strategies” see *Maier: Once Within Borders* 185–232, here 191, 194.

27 I would like to thank Benjamin Schenk for a stimulating conversation about the multi-layeredness and incongruence of imagined and administrative territorial units in the Russian Empire.

28 *Burbank/von Hagen: Coming into the Territory*, 5.

29 *Bassin, Mark: Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865*. Cambridge 1999.

30 *Sunderland, Willard: Taming the Wild Field. Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe*. Ithaca 2004, 5; *Weiss, Claudia: Wie Sibirien “unser” wurde. Die Russische Geographische Gesellschaft und ihr Einfluss auf die Bilder und Vorstellungen von Sibirien im 19. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen 2007.

visions of space in mind: some informed by geopolitical goals, others in the service of a mission civilisatrice, while others again followed economic goals.³¹

As an institution which – at least in its modern ideal type – operates on the state borders at the furthest distance to the imperial center, all these factors played an exacerbated role for the design of Russia's Asiatic customs space. Thus, the development of customs regulations reflects a growing belief in the malleability of geographic space, assumptions about the feasibility of bureaucratic and economic reforms on the empire's peripheries, as well as the limits for the implementation of plans drawn up in Saint Petersburg.

The tension between such visions and aspirations in the imperial center and their practical implementation on the spot can be best observed when closely scrutinizing administrative practices. The institution of Russian governors-general is a case in point. Though they formally existed in most peripheral regions of the empire at some point, their respective functions were distinctly divergent. Kimitaka Matsuzato argues, that “at the western peripheries governors-general manipulated ethno-social categories, whereas in Asiatic Russia they managed space.” Strengthening the insular principle of government over a linear one, they “renewed the integrity of macro-regions”

31 For general observations on the impact of modern technologies on concepts of time and space as well as their role in managing territories see *Divall, Colin*: Railway Imperialisms, Railway Nationalisms. In: *Burri, Monika/Elsasser, Kilian T./Gugerli, David* (eds.): Die Internationalität der Eisenbahn. Zürich 2003, 195–210; *Kaschuba, Wolfgang*: Die Überwindung der Distanz. Zeit und Raum in der europäischen Moderne. Frankfurt am Main 2004; *Wenzlhuemer, Roland*: Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World. The Telegraph and Globalization. Cambridge 2013. On the role of telegraph lines in Imperial Russia's customs border protection see *Tovpeka, Andrei*: Razvitie sistemy svyazi i upravleniia v pogranichnoi strazhe Rossiiskoi imperii, 1827–1917 gg. Saint Petersburg 2014. For the role of the railway in Russia's modernization and restructuring of social space see *Cvetkovski, Roland*: Modernisierung durch Beschleunigung. Raum und Mobilität im Zarenreich. Frankfurt am Main 2006; *Schenk, Frithjof Benjamin*: Russlands Fahrt in die Moderne. Mobilität und sozialer Raum im Eisenbahnzeitalter. Stuttgart 2014; *Schenk, Frithjof Benjamin*: Mastering Imperial Space? The Ambivalent Impact of Railway-Building in Tsarist Russia. In: *Leonhard, Jörn/von Hirschhausen, Ulrike* (eds.): Comparing Empires. Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century. Göttingen 2011, 60–77; While the railway has received broad attention, the development of the road system and its imperial dimension have been researched less. Reinhard Nachtigal's substantial study fills the void for the Caucasus region, see *Nachtigal, Reinhard*: Verkehrswege in Kaukasien. Ein Integrationsproblem des Zarenreiches 1780–1870. Wiesbaden 2016. Similarly, Russia's merchant fleet awaits a renewed treatment taking into account recent paradigmatic shifts in historiography. Meanwhile the main works remain: *Kononov, Iurii Petrovich*: Morskoi torgovyi flot Rossii v period promyshlennogo kapitalizma. 60-e - seredina 90-ch gg. XIX v. (na materialakh Chernomorsko-Azovskogo basseina). Odessa 1981; *Thomas, Ludmila*: Streben nach Weltmachtpositionen. Russlands Handelsflotte, 1856 bis 1914. Berlin 1995.

such as the “Far-East.”³² Hence, they simultaneously contributed to the consolidation of the administrative grip over remote areas and perpetuated their separation from the core space. Factors such as distance from the imperial center, lack of administrative resources, and the imperative to accommodate regional specifics necessitated the introduction of governors-general. However, a genuine tug-of-war with the central government accompanied the controversial institution throughout.³³

Finances constitute one highly contested, yet understudied, field of conflict between regional and central administrations. Alleviating the general shortage of studies on the Russian Empire’s finances, Ekaterina Pravilova’s “Finansy imperii” analyzes the functioning and evolution of the imperial budget. Her work exceeds purely fiscal questions and rather uses the imperial budget as an entry-point to discuss larger issues of imperial rule. Instead of one unified budget, several existed for the respective peripheral territories (Poland, Finland, Transcaucasus and Turkestan) and thus could be analyzed as *situations of economic territoriality*. However, the 19th century saw increasing efforts to merge these budgets. Pravilova argues that the push towards uniformity was not so much part of a grand strategy to alleviate economic asymmetries within the empire but rather unfolded in a piecemeal fashion, mostly driven by political considerations and emerging nationalist notions of a unified Russia.³⁴

Her study works precisely at the intersection formulated by Burbank and von Hagen, taking into account both cultural and economic factors and closely following administrative practices and shortcomings. Putting aside the Polish case, much of her analysis focuses on territories usually deemed economically marginal and thus neglected in economic histories of the Russian Empire. However, it is this comprehensive approach which allows to steer clear of a narrow quasi-national history of the Russian Empire’s financial administration and which stresses the imperial moment. The bureaucratic infighting over the

32 Matsuzato, Kimitaka: Intra-Bureaucratic Debate on the Institution of Russian Governors-General in the Mid-Nineteenth Century. In: Uyaka, Tomohiko (ed.): Asiatic Russia. Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts. Abingdon, New York 2012, 83–101, here 86, 90, 95.

33 Matsuzato’s attempt to theorize Russian imperial rule using a threefold model of core region and two types of peripheries has been criticized as overly static and “essentializing categories of geopolitics [...] and fixed national identities.” Nevertheless, it provides a good frame of reference to situate the competition between linear and institutional logics in the management of the empire’s peripheral territories. See Remnev, Anatolii: Steпноe general-gubernatorstvo v imperskoi geografii vlasti. In: Sugorova, Natalia (ed.): Aziatskaia Rossiia: Liudi i struktury Imperii. Omsk 2005, 163–222, here 164–166; Gerasimov/Kusber/Mogilner/Semyonov: New Imperial History and the Challenges of Empire, 12–13.

34 Pravilova, Ekaterina: Finansy imperii. Den’gi i vlast’ v politike Rossii na natsional’nykh ukrainakh, 1801–1917. Moscow 2006.

role of peripheral territories and their budgets within the empire's financial system reveals the development of underlying concepts of territoriality.

Thus, an ideal object for the study of the relation of the empire towards its space would be one in "which territory has a formative presence"³⁵, that is of significant interest to both central and regional actors, and present along the many heterogeneous peripheries of the Russian Empire. Hardly any imperial institution qualifies as well as the customs institutions.

Customs in the Russian Empire

Customs constitute an often-overlooked hub of Russia's imperial finances, combining three central functions: fiscal, macroeconomic, and political. Second only to the alcohol excise, customs duties made up between 12,6% and 29,7% of total state revenue between 1860 and 1900.³⁶ The importance of indirect taxes had already begun to grow in the late 18th century. By the last decades of the 19th century, however, they dominated the imperial budget. Reasons for such a reliance on indirect taxes lie with a "combination of political pressure and administrative capacity." It was simply easier to indirectly tax consumption than to enforce direct taxes.³⁷ This prevalence of the fiscal function entailed a potential conflict with the second function of customs: macroeconomic regulation.

Against the backdrop of Great Britain's industrial dominance, most European countries resorted to protectionist policies. According to protectionist theories, customs tariffs were to foster the growth of domestic industries by both sheltering them from competing foreign produce and enabling cheap imports of raw goods and advanced technologies where necessary. Once domestic industries were deemed sufficiently well-established, tariffs could be maintained at a lower level to secure the market for domestic producers and eventually scrapped altogether. Despite a free-trade-inclined phase in the 1860s, initiated by the Cobden-Chevalier treaty, for most European countries protectionism was the norm rather than the exception in 19th century world trade relations. The 1870s already showed signs of disintegration in the complex network of bilateral trade treaties which had grown to become a sort of free-trade system by relating to each other via most-favored nation clauses. The Russian Empire followed these trends to a certain degree, but remained

35 *Maier*: Once Within Borders, 7.

36 *Sobolev, Michail Nikolaevich*: *Tamozhennaia politika Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka*. Tomsk 1911, 842–843.

37 *Gatrell, Peter*: *The Russian Fiscal State, 1600–1914*. In: *Yun-Casalilla, Bartolomé/O'Brien, Patrick K.* (eds.): *The Rise of Fiscal States: A Global History, 1500–1914*. Cambridge 2012, 191–212, here 204.

more protectionist throughout and eventually embarked on full-fledged high protectionism, even putting it ahead of the United States of America – the “mother country and bastion of modern protectionism.”³⁸

While protectionist ideas and rhetoric were wide-spread throughout the late Russian Empire, contemporary economists like Mikhail Sobolev criticized that in practice, fiscal rather than protectionist interests were paramount. Thus, in the Russian Empire, high tariffs were not the precise instruments of macroeconomic regulation protectionist theorists imagined them to be, but rather blunt measures to fill the state treasury. A lowering of tariffs, however, was not possible, as the low and only slowly increasing level of consumption could not have compensated for the loss of customs revenue.³⁹ Considering the heavy reliance of the state budget on customs duties, the reduction of tariffs would have been fiscally unbearable.

The third function of customs flows from the inherently transnational nature of the institution. Tariffs and border regulations cannot be regarded without the international and global context, be it general economic developments in the course of the first wave of globalization, the specifics of the bordering states, or geopolitical considerations. They could be used to reshape trade routes and geopolitical constellations or impact foreign economies and thus could serve as instruments of foreign politics. The most prominent example being the customs-war between the Russian and German Empires, lasting from 1893 to 1895, which was the peak of a decade-long customs-arms-race and eventually detrimental to both economies.⁴⁰ While Russia’s Western borders were thus becoming increasingly restrictive, her Eastern borders remained significantly more permeable, allowing to maintain traditional cross-border relations and ambiguous boundaries, partially in order to exert influence beyond one’s own state territory.

38 Cornelius Torp aptly demonstrates the interplay of economic ideologies, globalization, internal politics, foreign politics, and economic cycles, which resulted in the ephemerality of free-trade policies in the *Zollverein*. He thus provides more depth than Bairoch’s economic history approach, though limited to the *Zollverein* only. Such a country-specific approach is particularly necessary for Russia, as can be seen from Bairoch’s perfunctory treatment of the Russian Empire as compared with other European nations. He quotes the available data sets as “Incomplete information or difficult to classify” (19) or simply incomparable, as “numerous and important restrictions in importation of manufactured products [existed], which make all calculations of average tariff rates not significant.” (40), see *Bairoch, Paul: Economics and World History. Myths and Paradoxes*. New York 1993, 16–40; *Torp: Herausforderung der Globalisierung*, 121–210.

39 *Sobolev: Tamozhennaia politika Rossii*, vi, 823.

40 On the Russian-German customs war see: *Torp: Herausforderung der Globalisierung*, 186–207; *Ivanov, Kirill: Razvitie tamozhennogo dela v Rossii v kontse XIX-nachale XX veka: ot avtonomnogo zapretitel’nogo tarifa k torgovym konventsiiam*. Saint Petersburg 2012, 177–232.

As customs issues touch upon a broad range of spheres, they were often accounted for as backdrop for the analysis of other political or economic processes, yet were rarely regarded as a standalone object of investigation in western historiography.⁴¹ Russian historians have directed more attention to the functioning of the customs systems as such. Kislovskii has provided an overarching, albeit superficial, study of the Russian customs from 907 to the present.⁴² Krikhunov studied both the ideological debates surrounding protectionism and free trade in the Russian Empire and attempted an evaluation of the protectionist system's efficiency.⁴³ Ivanov analyzed the development of Russian trade practice at the turn of the 20th century, with a focus on the conceptual shift from an autonomous tariff towards bilateral trade conventions.⁴⁴ Geographically, most of these studies retained a focus on the Russian Empire's core industrial region and trade with its western neighbors.

Only studies focusing on the junction between tariff policies and specific industries with an interest in eastern markets, such as the cotton industry, delved deeper into the discussion of the empire's customs policies in its eastern territories.⁴⁵ Further, customs issues have been productively used for regional studies. Be it either as a vivid source for the interaction of borderland populations with the state as demonstrated by Sören Urbansky, or as key issues for regional economic development, as shown by Nataliia Beliaeva's in-depth study of the Far-Eastern porto-franco.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, many aspects of the

41 Vincent Barnett's treatment of Russian economic thought and its impact on tariff policies forms a notable exception, see: *Barnett, Vincent: Economics in Russia. Studies in Intellectual History.* Aldershot, Hampshire 2008; *Barnett, Vincent: M. Kh. Reutern and Tariff Reform in Russia.* In: *CEconomia. History, Methodology, Philosophy*, 4(1) (2014), 17–27; *Barnett: Russian Protectionism and German Political Economy.*

42 *Kislovskii, Iurii: Istoriia tamozhennogo dela i tamozhennoi politiki Rossii.* Moscow 2004.

43 *Krikhunov, Vladimir: Protektsionizm ili Fritrederstvo: vybor puti.* Moscow 2002; *Krikhunov, Vladimir: Tamozhennaia politika Rossii i ee ekonomicheskaiia effektivnost', 1877–1914 gg.* Moscow 1999.

44 *Ivanov: Razvitie tamozhennogo dela v Rossii.*

45 *Martin, Thomas: Baumwollindustrie in Sankt Petersburg und Moskau und die russische Zolltarifpolitik (1850–1891). Eine vergleichende Regionalstudie.* Giessen 1998; *Kuprianova, Liubov': Tamozhenno-promyshlennyi protektsionizm i Rossiiskie predprinimateli (40–80-e gody XIX veka).* Moscow 1994.

46 *Urbansky, Sören: Der betrunkenen Kosake. Schmuggel im sino-russischen Grenzland (circa 1860–1930).* In: *Aust, Martin (ed.): Globalisierung imperial und sozialistisch. Russland und die Sowjetunion in der Globalgeschichte 1851–1991.* Frankfurt am Main 2013, 301–329; *Beliaeva, Natal'ia: Ot porto-franko k tamozhne. Ocherk regional'noi istorii Rossiiskogo protektsionizma.* Vladivostok 2003. For customs policies in the Orenburg region prior to 1868 see *Solonchenko, Ekaterina: Tamozhennaia politika na iugo-vostoke Rossii i ee realizatsiia v Orenburgskom krae v 1752–1868 gg.* Orenburg 2007. For the Finnish border see *Katajala, Kimmo: Cross-Border Trade in Karelia from the Middle Ages to the October Revolution 1917.* In: *Lähtenmäki, Maria (ed.): The Flexible Frontier. Change and Continuity in Finnish-Russian Relations.* Helsinki 2007, 70–87; *Lähtenmäki,*

customs system in the empire's east remain understudied. This book aims to address this specific desideratum.

The readiness with which most accounts on Russia's financial system dismiss large parts of the empire's customs space partially stems from the very organization of the customs system. The Russian Department Customs Collection itself distinguished between "European" and "Asiatic" customs: Both with respect to the *tamozhennyi tarif* (customs tariff), which set the customs rate for each product, and with respect to the *tamozhennyi ustav* (customs regulations), the body of rules and regulations that defined the procedures of customs collection.⁴⁷ This division made it all too easy for researchers to dismiss the issue of "Asiatic" customs. Even contemporary economists such as Sobolev, a renowned expert on customs tariffs, opted to exclude "special tariffs, such as the Finnish, Transcaucasian and Asiatic, that had a limited scope of influence and were formulated under the influence of special local conditions."⁴⁸ Sobolev's understanding of the Asiatic customs as "special" echoes the deviance stated by State Comptroller Greig, quoted earlier. Since the inclusion of the Kingdom of Poland into the customs territory of the Russian Empire in 1851, the organizational form on the "western border" – meaning the border to the Kingdom of Prussia and the Habsburg Empire – had come to be considered the norm.

In practice, this meant that the "normal" customs border conformed to the state border and that the neighboring state shared a mutual understanding of economic and bureaucratic processes. Further, these customs institutions were subordinated to the Department of Customs Collection of the Ministry of Finance in Saint Petersburg. They were deliberately designed to be responsible to the central administration, circumventing local political institutions such as the Governor-general of Warsaw. In terms of material resources, the western border had a complex and dense network of both customs stations and border guards. The latter were administered by the civil ranks of the Department of

Maria: Cows, Guns and Bolsheviks: Smuggling in the Borderland Between South-East Finland and St. Petersburg. In: *Katajala, Kimmo; Lähteenmäki, Maria* (eds.): *Imagined, Negotiated, Remembered. Constructing European Borders and Borderlands.* Münster 2012, 119–140; *Suni, Lev:* *Finliandsko-Russkie torgovyie otnosheniia vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka, 1858–1885.* Tartu 1963; *Kornilov, Genrikh:* *Russko-Finliandskie tamozhennye otnosheniia v kontse XIX – nachale XX v., 1885–1914.* Leningrad 1971. For the Habsburg border see *Adelsgruber, Paulus/Cohen, Laurie/Kuzmany, Börries:* *Getrennt und doch verbunden. Grenzstädte zwischen Österreich und Russland 1772–1918.* Wien 2011. For the Chinese border see *Noda, Jin:* *Russo-Chinese Trade Through Central Asia.* In: *Uyaka, Tomohiko* (ed.): *Asiatic Russia. Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts.* Oxon 2012, 153–173; *Heller, Klaus:* *Der russisch-chinesische Handel von seinen Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 19. Jahrhunderts.* Erlangen 1980.

47 For the development of this dualism see chapter 2.

48 *Sobolev: Tamozhennaia politika Rossii*, vi.