TRAVEL, SCIENCE, AND EMPIRE: THE RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY'S
EXPEDITIONS TO CENTRAL EURASIA, 1845-1905

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the employment of ethnographic, geographic, and natural-scientific expeditions by the Russian Geographical Society and the Russian Imperial government during the second half of the nineteenth century. The expeditions and the expeditionary leaders under discussion were sent to the Central Eurasian region for a number of reasons, including the gaining of samopoznanie (self-knowledge) of lands and peoples already under imperial control, but more often to gather information on lands and peoples beyond Russian borders. These expeditions collected samples of flora and fauna, mapped the territory, made ethnographic observations, and provided other information of use for future settlement or colonization. The expeditionary leaders also left research reports about their journeys, which are analyzed and summarized in this dissertation. The individuals who led these expeditions became important instigators of the further eastward colonization of the region by shifting the research focus of the institution beyond Russian Turkestan (during the 1850s and 1860s) to research in China, Tibet, and Eastern Turkestan (from the 1870s until the end of the century). The traveling expeditions and the expeditionary leaders themselves are analyzed comparatively and placed into the wider global and national historical contexts. This work also identifies a shift in the language of these travel accounts as the century progressed, moving from the relatively-benign documentation of flora and fauna during the earlier period to more overtly strategic and even jingoistic reports by the end of the century. The individual identities of scholar-travelers are also investigated, with some analysis of the process of creating the Russian or Russian Geographical Society scholar-traveler.

After an introductory chapter, chapter 2 provides an overview of the Russian Geographical Society’s organizational history and how they became involved in Central Eurasian exploration.
Chapters 3 through 6 provide discussions of individual scholar-travelers and their main research expeditions to Central Eurasia, with analysis of their findings in the context of ongoing Russian colonial and imperial projects in the region. Chapter 7 provides some comparative context and suggestions for possible points of future comparison.
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### Abbreviations

#### Sources
- **AAAG**: Annals of the Association of American Geographers
- **AHR**: American Historical Review
- **AQR**: Asiatic Quarterly Review
- **ARGO**: Arkhiv Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva (St. Petersburg)
- **ASI**: Acta Slavica Iaponica
- **CAR**: Central Asian Review
- **CESR**: Central Eurasian Studies Review
- **GBS**: Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies
- **JEH**: Journal of Economic History
- **JfGO**: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas
- **JMH**: Journal of Modern History
- **JWH**: Journal of World History
- **KR**: Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History
- **MA**: Military Affairs
- **MAS**: Modern Asian Studies
- **NP**: Nationalities Papers
- **ORRNB**: Otdel Rukopisei Rossiiskoi Natsional’noi Biblioteki (St. Petersburg)
- **OT**: Otan Tarikh
- **PFA RAN**: Sankt-Peterburgskii filial Arkhiva Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk (St. Petersburg)
- **RB**: Russkoe Bogatstvo
- **RR**: Russian Review
- **RV**: Russkii vestnik
- **SEER**: Slavonic and East European Review
- **SR**: Slavic Review
- **VG**: Voprosy geografii
- **WSIF**: Women’s Studies International Forum

#### Archival Terms
- **f.**: fond (holding)
- **op.**: opis’ (register)
- **d.**: delo (file)
- **l.**: list (page)
- **ll.**: listy (pages)
Notes on Usage

When referring to dates from the pre-1918 era, the Julian calendar dates are used. To correspond with the Western Gregorian calendar, add twelve days to the Julian-calendar dates. For the early twentieth century up until 1918, the Julian calendar was thirteen days behind the Gregorian.

There are many considerations involved in how I chose to represent non-English words. Names, places, and terms from Russian and Central Eurasian Turkic languages are transliterated using the Library of Congress system, with some slight modifications where needed. However, when a word is usually recognized using a non-orthodox transliteration, I have maintained the spelling usually employed in contemporary English. For example, “Fedor Dostoevsky” would normally be transliterated as “Dostoevskii,” but I use the more commonly-accepted spelling (Fedor Dostoevsky). For those who are not the famed and much-troubled nineteenth century writer who have the same family name, I use the more correct Dostoevskii. I have chosen to use “Kazak,” which is the transliteration of the people often referred to as Kazakh. This is because “Kazak” is the Kazakh language transliteration, rather than the Russian-language transliteration, which is “Kazakh.” However, I use “Kazakhstan” to refer to the modern national state and the historical homeland of the Kazaks. I am using “Kyrgyz” in most cases rather than the more antiquated “Kirghiz,” particularly since the older spelling carries a lot of historical and cultural baggage. Chinese names, places, and terms are transliterated using the Hanyu pinyin system of transliteration. Place-names from the Central Eurasian regions of the former Qing
Empire often receive a host of different spellings in English-language publications. I have largely followed James Millward’s (*Beyond the Pass*) spelling of place-names for those places beyond Russian imperial control. This approach may sacrifice some of the Russified spellings of those places, but his approach usually maintains more of the original Turkic origins of those place-names (e.g., I use Millward’s spelling of Lop Nor, rather than the transliteration from Russian, which would be Lob Nor). Exceptions are made to this rule only when I am quoting from the titles or texts of sources which use the Russified spelling. I have chosen to use the more commonly-used “Ili” to refer to the river that crosses the Kazakhstani-Chinese border, rather than Millward’s “Yili” (which is a Chinese spelling). The “celestial mountains” of Central Eurasia are also spelled a multitude of ways, but I use the more commonly-used and simplified Tian Shan. Petr Petrovich Semenov was given the additional title of Tian’-Shanskii in 1906, in recognition by the Russian state of his enormous contributions to geographical knowledge of the Tian Shan Mountains and the wider region of Central Eurasia. Most bibliographical references in secondary sources refer to him using his longer family name. In this dissertation, I refer to him throughout as Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, in order to avoid confusion. I also use “Muhammad Yaqub Beg” to refer to the Kashgar ruler, admitting that there are countless other ways which his name has been presented in English-language sources.

It is also important to define at the outset why I am using the term Central Eurasia, and what that term implies in relation to terms that are often used to also refer to a similar or the same geographical space. Central Eurasia is a newly-coined term used to
refer to the entire inland territory of the continent of Eurasia. The term takes as a given that the arbitrary divide of Europe and Asia as separate continents is a historical construct, with no basis in logical understandings of space. Of course, by the same token we can also consider Africa and Eurasia as one contiguous landmass, but at the time of this dissertation’s completion AfroEurasia or other terms are only beginning to come into common usage. Central Eurasia refers to the wide swath of territory that includes the former-Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This term also includes the territories of the contemporary states and provinces of Afghanistan, Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Tibet. Central Eurasia is used in this dissertation, rather than Inner Asia, Inner Eurasia, or Central Asia, because it is the most inclusive of those terms and has gained the most widespread acceptance among scholars whose research attempts to see beyond the theoretical and historical borders of the empires and states which have traditionally held sway over the region. I do not use Inner Asia, as that term is often used to refer only to the territories that have been at various times under Chinese administrative control, and excludes those areas in the region beyond China’s traditional western borders. Inner Eurasia is a useful term which the scholar David Christian has used to refer to the entire region, but it has not as yet become a commonly-used moniker for the region. Central Asia is perhaps the most commonly used term to refer to the region in contemporary media and public discourse, but carries some of the historical baggage of the Cold War or even of post-9/11 discourse. The term Central Asia derives from the Russian and Soviet Empires’ term for that part of Central Eurasia that was conquered and ruled by those states. Central Asia also is not employed here because it typically excludes the Chinese-controlled territories, and only refers to the Russian ones.
Chapter I- Introduction

Science, Travel, and Empire

Central Eurasia became a region of primary interest to the Russian Empire during the middle of the nineteenth century. At that time, a vibrant and idealistic generation of young scholars came of age in Russia. These cosmopolitan and enlightened bureaucrats, who were mostly from elite backgrounds, were the instigators behind major changes in the way the empire studied itself as they filled and swelled the ranks of the state's scientific and scholarly corps.1 As fundamental changes occurred in the bureaucratic methods of the Russian state, and the desire for self-knowledge (samopoznanie) of the empire increased, it became clear that statistics, ethnography, geography, and natural-scientific studies, which had been finely-tuned through the work of the new elite domestically, could become crucial instruments for the solidifying of hegemonic political control in the empire's peripheral regions and for the expansion of colonial/imperial borders into the heart of Eurasia. The Russian Geographical Society (Russkoe geograficheskoе obshchestvo, abbreviated as the RGO) would prove during the second half of the nineteenth century to be a crucial organization

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1 W. Bruce Lincoln, In the vanguard of reform: Russia's enlightened bureaucrats, 1825-1861 (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982).
for the expansion of the state’s interests and the advance of empire into Central
Eurasia.

The RGO formed during the repressive reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55) and
amidst the backdrop of an increased concern for Russia’s economic and
demographic wellbeing. As Nathaniel Knight has made clear, ethnography was
near the top of the Geographical Society’s main concerns in its early years, and
the ongoing intellectual and political struggle between the Westernizers
(zapadniki) and the Slavophiles (slavianofily) fueled support for scientific
research to prove that Russia could compete with its Western European rivals and
distinguish itself internationally.2 Through ethnographic research, the state’s
intellectual elite could gain important insight into the cultures of the very
“people” (narod) whose lives the enlightened bureaucrats aimed to improve,
particularly during the Great Reforms period. Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War
in 1856 also shifted Russian collective attention away from the empire’s
southwestern periphery to the Kazak steppe, the mountainous home of the

2 On the RGO’s earliest efforts in ethnography, see Nathaniel Knight, “Constructing the Science
of Nationality: Ethnography in mid-nineteenth century Russia” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University,
1995); idem, Nathaniel Knight, “Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian
Geographical Society, 1845-1855” in Jane Burbank and David Ransel, eds., Imperial Russia: New
Histories for the Empire (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 108-41;
?idem, “Grigor’ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?” SR 59,
no. 1 (Spring 2000), 74-100. For a succinct overview of the differences between the zapadniki
and the slavianofily and references to the abundant literature on this topic, see Mark Bassin,
JMH 65, no. 3 (September 1993): 487-90.
Kyrgyz, and later to the valley and oasis zones of Western Turkestan in what would come to be known to Russians as *sredniaia Azia* (Central Asia). Gradually, the processes of “bureaucratic colonization” and “reformist colonization,” both of which proved successful in the taming of Russia’s “wild fields” across the great Eurasian steppe, yielded to the “correct colonization” of those zones. By late in the nineteenth century, as the military victories over Central Asians further solidified their control over the military government in Tashkent, the empire began to show interest in the farthest northern and western outreaches of the Qing Chinese empire. The scholarly elite of the RGO showed particular zeal for bringing their perfected brand of roving experimentation across established national borders and into the so-called “wild” territories of Asia, spurring a fresh round of exploration and extension of imperial territory while reigning in more lands, peoples, and natural-scientific features into the realm of the known.

This dissertation focuses on the process of Russian expansion and interest in Central Eurasia, as evidenced through the sponsorship of over a half century of extensive scientific, ethnographic, and geographic research expeditions to the area. The collective importance of these expeditions for supporting the process of colonization and imperialism has been largely overlooked by contemporary scholars in North America and Western Europe. Although there is much in the way of Russian and Soviet scholarship on the Russian Geographical Society’s

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expeditionary activities in Central Eurasia, much of this work is colored by ideological and political concerns that painted these explorations as heroic adventures that benefited the civilizing mission that Russia and the Russian-dominated Soviet empires saw for themselves in Asia. This work aims to illuminate the explorations that the RGO sent to the region, while also bringing these expeditions and the observations that their leaders made into clearer historical and theoretical focus. This will be done by examining some of the principal figures who carried out crucial expeditions to the region and supported the causes of information collection and, ultimately, colonization.

There are a number of larger theoretical issues which this dissertation will address. Mary Louise Pratt has previously identified a close connection between the travel narrative and the discourse of imperialism, by examining travelogues of Western European travelers to sub-Saharan Africa and South America. Building upon the important insights of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, Pratt discerned that the travelogue conveyed a sense of power or control for the European over the landscapes and peoples of the colonized world. Foucault had discerned a close relationship between the language constructed in the natural sciences and the hegemonic processes of the Enlightenment and European colonization.


5 On the construction of scholarly language in the natural sciences and the philosophical and historical implications of this, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970). For more on the Foucaultian conception of the
Cultural studies scholars have built on Foucault's initial findings to further elucidate the reflection of colonization in scholarly language and discourse. Said then applied a Foucaultian analysis to his study of oriental scholars' depictions of the Near East. In Pratt's work, she related how the descriptions of many European travelers to the colonized and colonizing world were indicative of an unequal power relationship. Pratt's "monarch-of-all-I-survey" was a seemingly passive, or in some cases, recreational observer whose observations about the picturesque qualities of a landscape or comparisons to Western European sites established a degree of control through the knowledge of that site. Scientific travel became a more overt form of imperialistic endeavor, which often combined collection of natural scientific specimens with landscape description and ethnographic diversions. Pratt found that scientific classification of the environment was just one of several methods by which the European scholar and traveler could establish a firm sense of control over the environment. The "anti-conquest" that she identifies was made possible through the description of foreign lands in Linnaean terminology, as enclosed works of art, or through comparisons to sites or sights in imperial centers. The "imperial eyes" of the foreign traveler was able to extract those elements of the environment or of the people that were most utilitarian for their intended readers, who were typically of the same relationship between power and institutions, see idem, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

imperial citizenship. The travel reports that were generated could become valuable pieces of information for national states, as was certainly the case with Russia’s utilization of RGO travel reports on Central Eurasia.

Russians became involved in scientific travel, or the employment of natural scientific methods to descriptions of landscapes, flora, and fauna, relatively late. This was in part a reflection of Russia’s relatively-late transition to modernity. But it goes too far to say that Russia is an unusually unique case. Similar to earlier Western-European and Qing-Chinese historical patterns, the onset of scientific travel expeditions was preceded by an earlier period of travel abroad characterized more by casual personal observations than scientifically-informed collections of information.

Travel for non-scientific purposes had very early roots in Russia. Religious journeys and processions were common events carried out by tsars for their symbolic, political, and sacred value. As Nancy S. Kollman has written, the processions and pilgrimages made during the reign of Ivan IV “had meaning as demonstrations of authority, as demarcations of sacred space, and as manifestations of the theoretical order of the realm.”7 The early Russian state was also involved in mapping space and territory from very early on, dating to at least as far back as Muscovy and the late fifteenth century. The Muscovite conquest of Kazan’ was a pivotal event, as it was the first defeat of the Mongols by a proto-

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Russian state, and cleared the way for Muscovite expansion into Eurasia. This conquest was also the first serious Russian encounter with Muslim subjects. By the seventeenth century, maps held an important place in the state’s efforts to represent itself. Valerie Kivelson’s work was an analysis of how early Russians viewed space and constructed notions of this. Her work attests to the importance that the constructions of space had for Russian observers, from even non-elite backgrounds, from an early period. It also reflects that the conception of space was something that could be reflected through the analysis of maps, including non-official ones. During the eighteenth century, travels were increasingly done by intellectuals and/or elites (writers, historians, poets, aspiring philosophers and others) who saw travel as a way to gain a window of new perspectives on the world. Travels abroad could serve as important rites of passage, particularly for those from the more privileged societal classes. These earlier travelers were typically not trained in modern scientific methodology, but they still made observations that, either intentionally or not, were beneficial to their national states. The popularity of Russian Nikolai Karamzin’s 1789-90 European

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8 For more on this see Matthew P. Romaniello, “Absolutism and Empire: Governance on Russia’s Early-Modern Frontier” (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 2003). For an article which normalizes the Muscovite accession of territory as typical for the early modern era, see Idem, “Ethnicity as Social Rank: Governance, law, and empire in Muscovite Russia” NP 34, no. 4 (Sept. 2006): 447-69.

travelogue in Russia was an important milestone in the importance of Russian travel writings, ushering in the era of the elite and casual Russian observer. These elite and casual travelogues led to interest in other lands and peoples, providing information that could later be translated into more concrete knowledge as the state made the transition to more scientific travels. As Romanticism established a firm hold on the Russian imagination, Pushkin and other literary giants used the medium of the written word to capture an exoticized essence of the Caucasus, which would be reflected in later feminized depictions of other geographical regions, including Siberia and Central Eurasia. Early Russian travel accounts, as some scholars have noted, often revealed as much about the travelers themselves as about the landscapes or peoples that they reported on. As early as the time of Peter the Great, Russia began sponsoring research missions through the national Academy of Sciences to collect information on the empire’s territories. But the transition to the kind of hard scientific data that was


typically part of Western European travel accounts did not happen among Russian scholars until the middle of the nineteenth century.\(^{13}\)

Since the La Condamine mission of 1735 to Lapland and South America, overland exploration became a key point of global scholarly interest.\(^ {14}\) This expedition was also the first global expedition that made travel reports more focused on the reporting of scientific data, rather than the casual musings of traveling elites. La Condamine’s journey was also a pioneering one for its intent on documenting information on lands far removed from coastlines. By the mid-eighteenth century, Western and Central Europeans began devoting substantial time and resources into the financing of overland and inland expeditions worldwide. This coincided with a particularly active time for the Qing Chinese Empire in the exploration of the Eurasian interior, including the often-cited touring missions of the Qianlong emperor.\(^ {15}\) The Qing from early on realized the value of overland scientific exploration, which became a critical aspect of their imperial expansion and sustainability, a point that has been recently a center of

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13 The great scholar of Russian science, Alexander Vucinich, also noted that the era of the Great Reforms in Russia during the late 1850s and 1860s, while most known for the tremendous social changes, also oversaw major advancements in natural science. Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture*, 1861-1917 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 6.


historians’ interest. Western and Central Europeans’ second major wave of
colonization coincided with the shift to scientific travel and methods of collection
during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Likewise, the Qing’s shift to more
scientific modes of reporting was contemporaneous with their annexation and
subjugation of their most far-flung territories at the heart of Asia. As the British
forged inland with their South Asian empire, travel accounts and scientific
documentation became key tools for their taming of the tropics and the later shift
to crown, rather than company, rule. The mid-century reformist era in Russian
history and a newfound interest in the Eurasian interior brought the importance of
scientific travel to the forefront of Russian colonial discourse. The shift in
Russian collective attention towards employing scientific reporting methods to
their expeditionary travels in Central Eurasia also coincided with a period of

16 On the early development in the Qing of geographical techniques, see Laura Hostetler, Qing
Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China (Chicago and
London: University of Chicago Press, 2001). On the Qing’s travels into Central Eurasia, and the
imperial implications of those travels, see Peter C. Perdue, China Marches West: The Qing
University Press, 2005), especially 409-61. For more on the Qing empire, see chapter 7 of this
dissertation.

17 For theoretical perspective on British travel writing about India in the early-nineteenth century,
see David Arnold, The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science 1800-
1856 (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005). For more on the British empire and travel, see chapter 7 of
this dissertation.
successful colonization and subjugation of the territory that would be organized in 1867 as Russian Turkestan. 18

The Russian scientific exploration of Central Eurasia was championed by young elite and highly-idealistic scholars like Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, a major supporter of the reform movement. His journey to the Tian Shan Mountains at mid-century was a critical starting point in the process of scientific travel and exploration of the region. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s journey gained immediate attention from the elite of the Russian Geographical Society and he quickly rose to prominence as one of its most celebrated leaders, enjoying a long career that closely coincided with the establishment of Russian imperial hegemony in Central Eurasia. His scholarly example would be followed by subsequent generations of Russian scholar-travelers, and his direct support for the training and equipping of explorers and expeditions paved the way for the success of the empire in the region.

Perhaps the greatest contributions that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii made to the process of Russian colonization were his establishment of a scholarly example and his personal cultivation of future scholars and travelers. Petr Petrovich handpicked a number of individuals to become advocates for state expansion. In order to conform to the expectations of the time as set in the example of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and influenced by the standards of European scholarship, scholar-travelers needed educational training, preferably in the

18 On the history of Turkestan, see Daniel Brower, Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire (London: Routledge Courzon, 2003).
natural sciences or in the burgeoning field of oriental studies (*vostokovedenie*) prior to embarking on a career in exploration. An ideal scholar-traveler would devote a number of years in study, either in the imperial capital of St. Petersburg or in a metropole intellectual center like Omsk. Through the study of scientific subjects such as botany, biology, geography, and others, the scholar-traveler could equip himself with the necessary tools to communicate in the language of science. It would no longer be enough to provide random or even uneducated musings on the environment. One should be able to identify and catalogue scientifically, ideally using the Linnaean system of scientific classification, the flora and fauna that the scholar-traveler encountered. This would aid the state in gaining insight into the potential value of lands for cultivation, hunting, or human inhabitance.

Oriental Studies training was also a critical scholarly discipline for the cultivation of the nineteenth-century Russian scholar-traveler. Education in *vostokovedenie* often involved gaining familiarity or fluency in the languages, cultures, and histories of the peoples of the Central Eurasian region. Oftentimes, the greatest gains in knowledge about the region at the state’s institutions in Siberia or on the Russian frontier came not from the instructors at these institutions of learning, but from students’ acquaintance with their classmates, who hailed more and more frequently from Central Eurasian backgrounds themselves, such as the Kazak intellectual Chokan Valikhanov, the Buriat Innokentii Pirozhkov, or the Cossack Grigorii Potanin. The most insightful travel accounts and reports on the region came from those who were conversant with the languages and cultures of Central Eurasia, though a lack of regional language facility did not preclude an individual
from making a successful career out of scientific expeditions under the Russian Geographical Society's sponsorship. The training of indigenous guides and translators was also an effective, although somewhat less convincing, method of gaining insight into the ethnographic characteristics of a population. Following some scholarly training during one's youth, a prospective scholar-traveler was typically assigned to apprentice under a more experienced traveler by accompanying them on an initial long-term and long-distance research expedition. The young scholar-traveler could then earn his proverbial wings by writing a convincing or impressive travel report or write-up of his research on a scientific topic. Following the publication and acceptance of this report in the scholarly community, the young scholar-traveler could then either propose an individually-led long-term journey to a specific area or he could wait for one to be offered to him by a leader from within the Russian Geographical Society. Taking the position of leadership on an extended expedition was a highly important event in the scholar-traveler's early career, as success on an initial expedition and an impressive report or research results could then ensure a career of scholarly expeditions, visits to St. Petersburg for discussion of their results, a degree of financial stability and prestige, and even for some of the later scholars the possibility of participation in international research conferences or symposiums. If the individual's expeditions were especially daring or involved, or their reports were particularly well-written or notable, awards would also be bestowed on them, typically in the form of medals named after previous well-known or accomplished travelers. They could also expect promotions to positions of
authority in the RGO or become involved in the future planning of expeditions. Many also became historical authorities on the organization itself and wrote essays on their colleagues' and predecessors' research work.

This dissertation will analyze the contributions of Semenov-Tian-Shanski and his disciples in the Russian Geographical Society to the process of scientific and imperial travel to Central Eurasia and the implications of those expeditions for colonial and imperial gain. Following upon Pratt’s findings, this dissertation will argue that there was a close connection between the scientific, geographic, and ethnographic collection of information made during these expeditions and the state’s efforts at gaining hegemonic political control over the region. These explorers and their research also aided in the expansion of imperial borders and in what one of the scholar-travelers of this study called the “reconnoitering” of Central Eurasia. Besides providing mapping of little-known territories and acquisition of flora and fauna samples, the expeditionary leaders also made ethnographic observations that, in some cases, facilitated cross-cultural understanding and alliance-making, something the Russians and Soviets later referred to using the term sblizhenie, or the “coming together” of peoples or nations. In some cases, the information that these expeditionary leaders acquired was akin to modern-day intelligence gathering. The research missions of the Russian Geographical Society were separate from the state’s military missions of expansion to the region, but these often came on the heels of the expeditions of scholar-travelers. Therefore, the RGO’s expeditions were often critical for laying the logistical and intellectual groundwork for later territorial gains and could
serve tremendous strategic importance. These expeditions likewise provided the state’s elite with a degree of confidence that they “understood” the environmental and ethnic composition of lands on their periphery or beyond their own borders.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as international scholarly activities among European states converged and a degree of scholarly cooperation and competitive collaboration emerged, the Russians held up the exploits and findings of their Central Eurasian scholar-travelers as evidence that Russia had finally acquired their entry ticket (vkhodnoi bilet) to cosmopolitan European society. Although there was increasing collaboration in the form of international scientific and scholarly conferences and exhibitions, this did not take away from the ongoing “scramble” among European states. Indeed, the international competitiveness of the New Imperialism era was in part made up of the competition for the production of scholarship on terrae incognitae worldwide. As David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley had proven that the British Empire could reconnoiter the interiors of Africa, the Russians strove to replicate a similar success in Asia. By shining the light of knowledge onto the new “dark continent” of Asia, the Russians believed that they could put themselves in a prominent place in the international pageant of nations. Individuals within the Russian Geographical Society also saw these expeditions as their opportunity to emulate “greatness” and achieve international acclaim for their findings.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there were signs that the Russian Geographical Society was making inroads in the global competition for discovery. The success of Nikolai Przheval’skii in the exploration of Tibet, Mongolia, and
other Chinese hinterlands brought him international acclaim. Przheval’skii, perhaps more than any other individual in this period, exemplified the epitome of a Russian scholar-traveler working in the service of empire. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye has poignantly referred to Przheval’skii as a modern conquistador, a blatant advocate of imperialism and European superiority. His four major research expeditions were epic in proportion and in their devotion to the extraction of scientific data. Przheval’skii collaborated closely with Russian military authorities and encouraged, unsuccessfully, further Russian colonization in Inner Asia. Although much has been made of his devotion to imperialism, far little space has been taken discussing Przheval’skii’s actual findings. He amassed enormous collections of flora and fauna, which became the property of the state and served to greatly augment its knowledge of Inner Eurasian lands. Przheval’skii’s example, much like Semenov-Tian-Shanski’s earlier in the century, would serve as a prototype for future Russian scholar-travelers. An entire generation of Russian Geographical Society explorers followed upon Przheval’skii’s enormous body of scientific work, many of whom had traveled with him before. Some dreamed of carrying forward his explorations to the “darkest” interiors of Asia, and followed up on his expeditions with even more ambitious journeys to relatively little-known places. However, by the close of the nineteenth century and the dawning of the twentieth, the Russian Empire

19 David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 24-41.
and its Geographical Society was showing cracks in its armor. The financing of long-term research expeditions of the magnitude of those financed during earlier periods seemed less and less viable, given the rise in the number of those who were now opposed to the empire.\textsuperscript{20} The idealism of scholarly research and travel was beginning to take a backseat, as it so often does during times of turmoil or decline, to focus on survival and defense of past gains. By the time of Russia’s defeat in the war with Japan and the revolution at the dawn of the twentieth century, it was becoming clear that the Russian state had to transition from a period of expansion to one of survival. Central Eurasia became a region that the Russian state scrambled to contain, with the rise of Muslim and Turkic nationalism and the growing opposition to tsarist rule. The seeming stability that had once under-girded Russian control over Turkestan was now being challenged by the transnational and inter-imperial networks of Islamic and Turkic ideologues.

\textbf{Historical Sources and Interpretations}

The major source of information on the research expeditions are the travel accounts and travelogues produced by these scholar-travelers. Many of these

\textsuperscript{20} For an authoritative study of the financing of the Russian Empire, including a section on the financing of Russian Empire in its Central Asian territories, see Ekaterina Pravilova, \textit{Finansy imperii: dengi i vlast’ v politike Rossii na natsional’nikh okrainsakh, 1801-1917} (Moskva: Novoe izd-vo, 1996) Novye granitsy., esp. 127-44.
were initially published during the nineteenth century by the Russian Geographical Society. Those reports produced by individuals who were touted during the Soviet era for their exploits, typically for their service to the Russian empire or their heroic contributions to science, were often reprinted during the height of Soviet interest in these travelers. These reprint publications mostly came at the end of Stalin's reign and immediately after the end of World War Two. The Soviets typically edited these initial accounts and abbreviated them. Both the originals and the Soviet reprints have been utilized in this study. A few of the travel accounts employed in this study were translated into English, a reflection of the Great-Game interest and intrigue during the period.

Another primary source of information comes from the Russian and Soviet Geographical Society-sponsored histories, which were typically written upon major anniversaries of the founding of the society. Besides the organizational histories, a number of the society's major figures wrote their memoirs, which often include discussions of the other principal figures, their travels, or the life of the Geographical Society itself. There are also academic studies produced by the scholar-travelers which were often based on the work that they had carried out earlier on their expeditions. Archival documents accessed from the Russian Geographical Society archive, the Russian Academy of Science filial archive, and the manuscripts division of the Russian Academy of Sciences, all in St. Petersburg, added further detail to the travel experiences and research of these individuals beyond that revealed in their published reports. The personal archival

21 For more on these histories, and the relative benefits and drawbacks of them, see Chapter Two.
collections of these individuals were particularly revealing, allowing a glimpse into their original travel notes, sketches that they made in the field, and documentation of plant and animal species that they encountered en route. I have also relied on secondary historical sources, including the great number of studies on individual scholars composed by Soviet historians during this postwar period of renewed interest in Russian geographers in Central Eurasia. These biographical essays are useful for their summaries of mundane information, though their analysis is often heavily clouded by ideological concerns. I have tried to separate opinions from "facts" in their accounts, which can make them valuable research aides.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two of this dissertation examines the formation, activities, and history of the Russian Geographical Society itself. The organization was founded in 1845 to promote scientific research both within and beyond the borders of the Russian empire. Although tensions within the organization soon developed between those members intent on studying lands within Russia and those interested in foreign travel, these differences were soon reconciled. By 1856, the RGO began financially supporting geographical expeditions to Central Eurasia. It is argued in this chapter that the Russian Geographical Society was vital to
geographic expeditions, mapping, and scientific research carried out through expeditionary missions to Central Eurasia. Recent appraisals of this organization are few and far between, lending more importance to a study of its history. The RGO became an active component of the Russian empire's "reconnoitering" of lands in Central Eurasia, which was part of a broader process in the collection of information on lands both nearby and far away.

Chapter Three is the first of a series of chapters which explore individuals and their scientific travels and research in Central Eurasia. This chapter discusses the career, expeditions, and scholarly contributions of Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii. Particular attention is paid to his 1856-57 travel to the Tian Shan Mountains and his leadership role in the RGO. After this famous expedition, he continued to lend support to future explorers and research missions to the region. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii became the first of many Russian explorers to Central Eurasia who earned a privileged place in society. He urged support for the later expeditions of Chokan Valikhanov, Nikolai Przheval'skii, Grigorii Potanin, and many other RGO explorer-travelers, serving as a cheerleader for Central Eurasian exploration and a scholarly example for these and many other explorers to follow. His

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22 Most existing studies are both antiquated and not accessible in English language. It should be noted, as an aside, that Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii composed one of the first historical overviews of this organization over a century ago. This work stands as the definitive study of the first fifty years of the organization. Petr Semenov Tian'-shanskii and Andrei Andreevich Dostoevskii Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo obschestva (S.-Peterburg: [Tip. V. Bezobrazova i komp.], 1896). For a more extensive bibliography of RGO studies, see Chapter Two of this dissertation.
importance to the larger process of Russian imperialism in Central Eurasia and to
the more specific process of scientific documentation of the region will be
strongly emphasized throughout this study.

Chapter Four will be a summary of the contributions of Chokan Valikhanov to
the process of imperial scientific travel in Central Eurasia. His explorations and
scholarship over an approximately ten-year period contributed greatly to Russian
imperialism in the region. Valikhanov will be dealt with as a unique case, given
his ethnic identity as Turkic and Central Eurasian. Valikhanov can be regarded as
having a dual identity, both as Turkic/Central Eurasian and as an agent of Russian
imperialism. Though Valikhanov has long been a subject of interest among
Kazak, Russian, and Soviet scholars, there is limited information about him
available in Western languages. Therefore, this study will broaden understanding
of Valikhanov's unique contributions to the shaping of Kazak identity, Kazak-
Russian relations and cross-cultural interactions, and the methods of scientific
imperialism. His career is indicative in many ways of a tension (common to many
of the subjects of this study) between individual identity and that of a collective
scientific/scholarly identity as established for Valikhanov in the example of
Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii. Valikhanov's successful scholarly research expeditions
to Central Eurasia provided the rare opportunity at that point for a foreigner
(inorodets) to achieve a high position in the Russian scholarly elite. His
information on Kashgar and the territory of Muhammad Yaqub Beg's state was
critical for the Russian administration. Valikhanov's short life and career
coincided with a crucial period in the Russian acquisition of territories in Central
Eurasia. The territory that he covered during his own research expeditions was close to the zone where the forward advance of the Russian military was taking place, thus underscoring the important role that the information he acquired on his journeys had to Russian incursions into the region.

Chapter Five provides an overview of the career, major explorations, and historical impact of Nikolai Przheval’skii. His four major expeditions to Central Eurasia in the 1870s and 1880s gained him a very noticeable place in popular Russian culture and a degree of recognition abroad. His travel accounts were widely read both inside and outside of the Russian empire during the late-nineteenth century. Przheval’skii’s longtime aim was to garner support for Russian imperial missions to Tibet, Mongolia, and the surrounding areas. Although his expeditions and the information that he collected made him the source of virtual canonization in the Russian public, they did not garner the institutional support nor clear the way for the imperial firepower that earlier expeditions did to Western, or Russian, Turkestan. Most of the territories that Przheval’skii explored and mapped never became part of the Russian Empire. His contribution is reflective of the new imperialist era as manifested in the Russian empire.

Chapter Six examines the career and explorations of Grigori Potanin and Aleksandra Potanina. The Potanins were a husband-and-wife team who traveled together in RGO-sponsored missions across Central Eurasia from the 1870s until the 1890s. Both Grigori and Aleksandra kept their own notes and later published separate travel accounts and descriptions about the territories and peoples they
encountered. The information they chose to report reflected their own personal interests and the gender expectations of the time. While Grigorii focused on the collection of ethnographic information, folklore, and stories from the region, Aleksandra focused on the lives of women and children as well as the material and religious cultures of Central Eurasia. Whereas Grigorii's reports were written in the scholarly style typical of many of the (male) individuals who led expeditions for the RGO, Aleksandra's reports were directed towards a non-scholarly audience. The discussion in this chapter on the Potanins further diversifies the picture of the face(s) of Russian imperialism in Central Eurasia.

The final chapter of this dissertation will extrapolate from this information the contribution that the RGO's scholar-travelers made to the process of imperialism in Central Eurasia. Previously, some have argued that Russia's oriental scholars deserve a unique place in the study of what constitutes orientalism. This was in part because of the idea that the Russian empire was made up of such a diverse mixture of nationalities, language groups, and religious confessions, something that was not common in the British or French nations. Since diversity was staring the Russian oriental scholar straight in the face (or so the logic goes), it was not difficult for them to develop a keen insight into the nationalities of the empire. It has also been questioned by some the degree to which the oriental scholars of the Russian empire truly worked "in the service of empire." This final chapter will contribute to these discussions while also contextualizing the RGO's work in Central Eurasia in comparative framework, particularly in relation to projects of a
similar nature in other national or imperial contexts, including the Qing and the British.
Chapter II - The Russian Geographical Society and the Draw to Central Eurasia

Organizational Histories

To date, there are several monographs which focus on recounting the entire history of the Russian Geographical Society as an organization, all of which are in Russian language and were published in Russia or the Soviet Union. They were all written either with the direct support of the RGO or at least with its indirect participation in the process. Most were written by prominent members of the society. Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Lev Semenovich Berg, Stanislav Vikent'evich Kalesnik, and Sergei Borisovich Lazrov wrote, edited, or co-edited comprehensive histories of the organization and all of them held prominent positions in the society. Each of these histories were written upon an anniversary of the founding of the society (including the twenty-fifth, fiftieth, one-hundredth, one-hundred-twenty-fifth, and one-hundred-fiftieth anniversaries).

1 These histories are in chronological order by date of publication: Imperatorskoe Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo, Dvadtsatipiatiletie Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva, 13 Ianvaria 1871 goda (S-Peterburg: Tip. Maikova, 1872); Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, Istoriiia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti; Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let; Stanislav Vikent'evich Kalesnik, Geograficheskoe obshchestvo za 125 let (Leningrad: Nauka Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1970); Oleg Arkad'evich Konstantinov, Sto
Figure 1. Map of Central Eurasian region. Adapted from <globaled.org> website.

dvadsat' piat' let Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR materialy v s"ezda Geogr. o-va SSSR (Leningrad: [s.n.], 1970) (This source is a published essay done in honor of the one-hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of the RGO); Agafonov and Isachenko. Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo: 150 let.
For the first fifty years of the organization, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s multi-volume *Istoriia poluvekovo deiatel’nosti Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva 1845-1895* (History of the First Half-Century of Activity of the *Russian Geographical Society 1845-1895*) is a remarkably exhaustive history, which most of the subsequent generations of historians have attempted to build upon, while largely repeating Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s findings about this initial period. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s history reflects tremendous optimism about the society at the close of the nineteenth century and portrays the first fifty years of the society as a highly-active and even heroic time. A major focus of this study, as with the subsequent histories, is on the achievements of individuals. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii deliberately recounts and summarizes, in great detail, individual achievements, explorations, and research work. He also neatly divides the history of the organization into time periods which reflect important historical changes both in the organization itself and in its research focus.

Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii divided his three-volume history into five major parts, each of which covered a discrete historical period. Part I (1845-50) covered the organization of the society in its first years. Part II (1850-57) was labeled as the period of the vice-presidency of M.N. Murav’ev, and was portrayed as the time the society shifted from the control of the “German” faction to the “Russian” faction. Part III (1857-71) coincided with the vice-presidency of Fedor Petrovich Litke. During this era, the RGO became increasingly involved in expeditions to Central Eurasia, though most efforts in the region focused on lands already under Russian control. This changed during the period under study in part IV (1871-
85), which Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii called the “Period of the Expeditions of N.M. Przeval'skii.” The 1870s and 1880s have been referred to as a golden age for the society in its exploration of Central Eurasia. Part V (1885-95) covered the years immediately prior to Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's publication of his history.

Lev Semenovich Berg's history, published immediately after Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War, is a useful resource which was published in celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the organization. Berg's history of the RGO was written during an intense and unparalleled period of Soviet post-war scholarship on the RGO and its scholar-travelers. It is clear that many of the studies on the RGO and its members produced in the period roughly between 1945 and 1955 were done through the "encouragement" of the Stalinist regime, which strove to assert Russian scientific superiority and reverse a darker era immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution in which the science of geography was seen as a bourgeois enterprise. There is also a notable deficiency of studies on the history of the organization between the turbulent period of 1917 and 1945. Dozens of Imperial Russian members of the RGO were highlighted in countless essays and monographs that celebrated them as heroes of Russian civilization. A large cadre of Soviet scholars were also put to task editing and republishing the research reports of Russian Geographical Society members from the nineteenth century, particularly those whose research contributed to the expansion of the Russian Empire. Scores of collected works of nineteenth-

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2 Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let.

century Russian Geographical Society members' writings were also published during this decade.

Stanislav Kalesnik's history largely repeats that of Berg and Semenov-Tian-Shanski and also strongly reflects Marxist sensibilities, as does the essay of Oleg Konstantinov (both of which were published in 1970). One of the standard mantras of studies of the organization done by scholars working under the USSR was that the RGO's increased activities following the reform era of the 1860s corresponded with the buildup of capitalism in the Russian Empire. Geographical research under the RGO became, according to this line of thought, a key catalyst for "the study of natural resources, [the search for] markets for raw materials, commercial markets and spheres of supplement to capital."4

The one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the organization (and the changes brought following the events of 1991) instigated the creation of a new history of the RGO done by a group of scholars.5 This history holds primary importance for its analysis of twentieth-century events. It is striking to note in this latest monograph the small degree, if any, of revision of existing interpretations of the organization's history and motives. There is a general reluctance in this text, as in the previous all-encompassing histories of the Russian Geographical Society beginning with Berg, to question the ideas of the scholars writing closest in time to events. The preference for these historians has been to focus on the most recent period, that which has not been published about before, and merely repeat or

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4 Konstantinov, Sto dvadtsat' piat' let Geograficheskogo obschestva SSSR, 3.

5 Agafonov and Isachenko, Russkoe geograficheskoe obschestvo: 150 let.
reorganize the information presented by previous generations of historians on earlier eras. Under this rationale, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii is the authority on the period 1845-95. Berg carries the torch for the period 1895-1945. The era of 1945-1970 is first fully presented in Kalesnik’s history. And, finally, Agafonov and Isachenko say that their task is to focus on the last twenty-five years about which “basically nothing is as yet written.” There is a general reluctance to revise prior histories, as this is seen as tarnishing the image of the previous generations of RGO leaders and scholars.

It should also be reiterated here that these organizational histories were largely written by the highest-ranking leaders of the RGO and that writing a history of the RGO was seen as a distinct honor and not something for an amateur or low-ranking scholar to undertake. One typically finds a high degree of praise in these studies for the previous generation of leaders and scholars, perhaps with the understanding that they will receive the same treatment from the subsequent generation. This tradition of writing organizational histories of the RGO was established with Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and becomes a right of later leaders.

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6 Ibid., 5.
Foundations of the Geographical Society

The Russian Geographical Society was formally established in 1845. The history of the name of this organization in itself reveals much about the many changes of political power that the society was forced to deal with. In 1849 its name was officially changed to the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (Imperatorskoe Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo), but the organization was usually referred to simply as the Russian Geographical Society (Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo). From 1917 until 1938 the society was known as the State Geographical Society (Gosudarstvennoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo). From 1938-1945, the RGO was called the All-Union Geographical Society (Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo). From 1946-1992 the name was changed again to the Geographical Society of the USSR (Geograficheskoe obshchestvo soiuza SSR). Finally, in 1993, the name was changed back to the original Russian Geographical Society. When Soviet-era historians referred to the organization in historical works that referred to the pre-1917 era, they shortened the name to simply Geographical Society (Geograficheskoe obshchestvo or simply GO), in an attempt to avoid confusion. This dissertation will strictly use the term Russian Geographical Society (RGO) in order to minimize confusion.

The RGO's genesis followed the creation of similar national geographic societies in France (1821), Germany (1828), and Great Britain (1830) and
preceded the foundation of the American Geographical Society in 1852. Like its cohorts in Europe, the United States, and beyond, the Russian Geographical Society was founded upon certain common interests. These societies were formed partly in response to growing collective interest in scientific advancement through geographical research. Organized geographical expeditions were sent to lands that fell under the control of imperial powers and lands beyond their own control. Scholars in national geographical societies aimed to find answers to unresolved matters like locations of certain places, elevation of landscapes, climate information, and other details that could be useful both for the state’s interests and for the interests of the global scientific and geographical communities. The advent of the geographical-society expedition in the nineteenth century led to a new era in scientific travel which would replace earlier patterns of traveling. The national geographical societies were capable of funding larger-scale expeditions that could stay in the field longer, travel further, and collect more information than previous expeditions.

In addition, the research of national geographic societies could become a mechanism for the promotion of nationalism, and at the same time nationalism fueled geographical exploration and research. As noted above, in the Russian

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context, the founding of the RGO happened at a time in which many in the Russian elite, Westernizers and Slavophiles alike, were eager to prove themselves collectively as capable of competing with Western European scientists and geographers. Therefore, their research missions were to become yet another realm for colonial and imperial competition among the nineteenth-century powers.

The RGO was unique among other national geographical organizations in the reasons for its creation and its motivations for research activities. In short, there was a larger issue at stake in Russian affairs of the time, which was a crisis in the development of Russian national identity as a European or Asian state. The Russian identity crisis was a major factor both in the RGO’s founding and the development of its organizational activities thereafter.

As will be discussed in detail below, the RGO’s establishment was a means of defining Russian national identity, through gaining self-knowledge of the state’s already-existing ethnic and geographic makeup and by increasing understanding

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9 The issue of Russia as a part of Europe or of Asia has been, and continues to be, an important issue in Russian history and historiographical interpretations. For a poignant overview of this issue see Valerie Kivelson’s article, in which she provides the early historical background for the emergence of this debate. Idem, “Merciful Father, Impersonal State: Russian Autocracy in Comparative Perspective” *MAS* 31, no. 3, Special Issue: The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400-1800 (July 1997): 635-63.
of non-Russian peoples and foreign lands. Russian national identity was also defined in the organization, in part, by raising the level of professional and scientific achievement. This worked both to raise the opinion of non-Russians toward Russian scientists and with the intention of bringing Russia closer to Western and European scientific achievement.

The RGO modeled itself especially after the Royal (British) Geographical Society. This was in part because one of the British society's leaders, Sir Roderick Murchison, spent some time carrying out research in Russia in the Ural Mountains, established contacts with Russian scholars, and also encouraged the formation of a Russian geographical society along similar lines to the Royal Geographical Society. Murchison had enjoyed a long career of his own as geologist and explorer in Canada, Africa, and Latin America and was invited by imperial authorities to Russia originally to search for coal and iron ore in Asiatic Russia. He spent about two years carrying out research for a book on geology in the Ural Mountains and while there encouraged Russian scientists to form their own national geographical society. Besides introducing and supporting the idea of a Russian Geographical Society, Murchison also must have conveyed many of the techniques and ideas that the Royal Geographical Society's members and leaders had earlier honed in their explorations of Africa and the Americas.

Similar to these other national geographic societies, the RGO made the collection

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10 Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860, 344-45.

of both geographic and ethnographic information about lands and peoples both within and beyond their national territories a major point of early focus.

The Russian Geographical Society would become a key organization for gaining increased understanding about the peoples of the eastern and southernmost portions of the Russian Empire, as well as those beyond the national borders, particularly in Central, Inner, and Eastern Eurasia. It is interesting to note that the organization did not devote scholarly attention and research activities to the study of territories in Europe, seeing those as previously explored and understood lands (by European scholars), unlike those of Asia. The assumption was that European geographical societies and individuals had already created a sufficient store of knowledge about those territories and thus, the only lands left to bring under the control of scientific study were those places which were perceived as little-known or unknown territories. Of course, we now know that many efforts were already underway in the “Asian” geographical orbit to gain control over lands and peoples there.\(^{12}\)

As will be discussed later, this was also because Russian intellectuals and leaders began to see their expansion and collection of information in Asia as part of a messianic mission of the Russian state. Many Russians viewed the exploratory activities of the RGO as a way to serve nationalism and simultaneously fulfill the destiny of western civilization itself by bringing Asian

\(^{12}\) There are a couple of recent works which bring to light the efforts of the Qing Chinese state towards gaining control over ethnographic and geographic information in lands either nominally under their control or beyond their area of direct influence. See Hostetler, \textit{Qing Colonial Enterprise}; see also Perdue, \textit{China Marches West}, especially 409-61.
lands under the realm of knowledge and, so they hoped eventually, Russian political hegemony. This could also serve as a way for Russia to be further recognized as a bona fide European state, something that was at the forefront of ideals for many of those young individuals who constituted the new mid-century Russian intellectual and cultural elite.

The RGO's formation was in addition a product of a dramatically-increasing sense of international awareness and homogenization throughout the world in the mid-nineteenth century. Science had become a major focus of many national states, and geographic societies served to institutionalize this growing interest. These organizations, though working under the auspices of individual states, became interconnected, and a kind of uniformity was evident in their organization and activities. This can also be connected to the relatively recent rise to global prominence of the Russian state and its leaders' eagerness to compete in the increasingly-competitive global system of economic activity and territorial gains.

It is interesting, for comparative purposes, to note that the formation of the RGO was nearly contemporaneous with the United States' formation of its own geographical society and its rise to global economic and political prominence. It

13 Although he does not address the various national geographical societies directly, C.A. Bayly's highly-impressive discussion of nineteenth-century world history, Birth of the Modern World, discusses this growing sense of homogeneity in the development of scientific endeavors worldwide in the nineteenth century. In this highly sophisticated work, Bayly synthesizes the development of science into his larger argument about the growing "similarities, connections, and linkages" worldwide during the long nineteenth century. Bayly, Birth of the Modern World, 312-20.
can be argued that the United States at mid-century faced many of the same obstacles to geographical knowledge of its inland territories and neighboring (i.e., foreign) lands that the Russian Empire struggled with at the same time. In the United States’ case, it was during the middle of the nineteenth century that the country became increasingly interested in westward expansion and settlement. This is a similar process to the Russian Empire’s eastward expansion in the mid-nineteenth century into Central Eurasia, Siberia, and the Russian Far East. However, this chapter is not intended to present the rise of the RGO strictly as a blueprint of earlier formed national geographic societies, especially since the many nationalist members of the RGO strove to make this a unique entity that would demonstrate the “distinctive character” of the Russian nation and people.

Mid-Century Mission

The RGO’s foundation can be placed in the context of the changing nature of Russian identity at mid-century. In Mark Bassin’s seminal study on the colonization of the Russian Far East, he sets the historical context for this period of Russian colonization in Asia in his second chapter, “National identity and world mission.”14 During the 1830s and 1840s, Russians became increasingly concerned about their position in world affairs, and particularly their role within

14 See Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 37-68.
the ascendancy of European civilization worldwide and the quickening pace of scientific progress. As mentioned above, many Russians began to believe that they had a “messianic mission” to advance European interests in the world. This meant increasing the level of general knowledge about both nature and man, which could only be done “correctly” through western means of science, geography, and the natural sciences. Those areas that were not under European control (i.e., through knowledge and information) should be in order to advance civilization. The question became, for Russians, how to embrace this mission and what part they should play in its success.

The Russian concept of samopoznanie was often evoked as an important means for Russia to carry out its messianic mission. This term can be translated alternatively as self-knowledge, self-awareness, or self-understanding and was a major part of Russia’s interest in forming scientific, geographic, and research missions to the interior of its own empire. Only by discovering about itself and those peoples and territories within its empire, could Russia fulfill whatever mission it should play in European expansion. By the 1840s, Russians began to see their mission as a kind of cultural caretaker for Asia. Many also came to believe that by establishing more control over the continent, Russians could acquire their virtual vkhodnoi bilet (admission ticket) to membership in the elite cultural club of European nations.

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15 Ibid., 42-43.
16 Ibid., 57.
Therefore, in the years leading up to the RGO's formation, many Russians in the intellectual and political elite were interested in bringing Russia closer to Europe by way of exploration within Russia and beyond in Asia. This tendency of moving Russia towards a European model was derailed shortly after the RGO's foundation, as nationalists took up membership in the organization. They strove to move the RGO down a more "unique" path that benefited Russians more than the European family of nations.

Establishment of the RGO

The scholar Nathaniel Knight, in his 1995 Ph.D. dissertation, listed a number of reasons why the RGO's formation occurred when it did and what preconditions existed for its founding. One factor was the growing number of European scientists whose work was being recognized in Russia at the time. In particular, the scientific findings of the Germans Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter were being transmitted to the Russian Empire's elite both via individual scholars' travels to Russia and by increasing numbers of Russian scholars studying, traveling, and establishing scholarly contacts in Europe. Humboldt was initially invited by Emperor Nicholas I to conduct research on mineral ores in the Ural Mountains. On an 1829 journey, Humboldt traveled as far east and south as Barnaul and the Chinese border, as he reached the edge of the Central Eurasian plateau. In discussions in Berlin in the early 1850s, Humboldt encouraged Petr
Semenov to establish a mission to Central Eurasia. Humboldt was interested in confirming his theory that the Tian Shan Mountains had both volcanoes and glaciers. Semenov also established close personal contacts with the scientist Carl Ritter in Berlin. This type of Russian-European interaction was common in the early days of the RGO among many of its leading scientists and researchers.\(^\text{17}\)

Another major factor was the need to provide an organization through which the growing body of geographic research could be assimilated and organized, as well as verified or refuted through the processes carried out by a professional organization.\(^\text{18}\) Knight further found that educational and scholarly activities had been greatly increasing in Russia since the reign of Alexander I. Since that time, Russia had seen a drastic increase in the number of both professional and amateur scholars, whose ample numbers made both the feasibility and sustainability of an organization like the RGO possible.\(^\text{19}\)

The RGO organized its work into several key areas and much attention was devoted to expanding the existing store of geographic knowledge about both previously-explored and unexplored (at least by European or Russian eyes)

\(^\text{17}\) Nathaniel Knight, "Constructing the Science of Nationality," 214-16. Von Humboldt's contribution to scientific development has been well-explored by Mary Louise Pratt in her chapter on the formation of a new scientific consciousness. See Pratt, Imperial Eyes, especially 111-43. Ritter's Geography of Asia (Erdkunde von Asien) was a very influential work for the RGO and portions were later translated into Russian by Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii. See Ritter, Zemlevedenie Azii.

\(^\text{18}\) Knight, "Constructing the Science of Nationality," 216-17.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 217-19.
territories. Discussions between the main founders of the RGO (Litke, Ber, and Vrangel') were underway by March of 1845, and by September of that year the founding members held their first meeting. In one of the first documents published upon the founding of the RGO, it was decided that the organization should focus its efforts in three major areas: geography (including department devoted to general geography and the geography of Russia), statistics, and ethnography. In 1849, a charter was drawn up which was kept in effect until 1931. This charter actually reorganized the RGO into four distinct departments of scientific activity, which consisted of mathematical geography, physical geography, ethnography, and statistics. Various scientific pursuits were included under the four departments. The mathematical geography department included geodetics, cartography, and determination of geographical coordinates. The physical geography department carried out studies dealing with geology, climatology, hydrology, botanical and zoological geography, and topography. The statistics department was concerned with collecting quantitative information about economic and social conditions. Finally, the ethnographic division carried out the work of documenting the customs, beliefs, practices, and material cultures of peoples, including Russians themselves. Statistics became a major scientific pursuit for the Russian state in the mid-nineteenth century. It was believed that all aspects of social behavior could be predicted through statistical analysis. Although the divisions within the society were discrete at the outset, there was

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20 See RGO f. 1-1845, op. I, no. 11.

21 Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860, 351.
soon a blurring of the lines between the different intellectual categories and soon the activities of researchers often overlapped and intermixed among different scholarly disciplines.

Many of the organization's early leaders came from the Russian Academy of Sciences and included professional academics, statisticians, ethnographers, and important military leaders. Most of the first founders of the RGO were ethnically-German Baltic Russians, meaning that they had a Germanic family name but were born on the territory of the Russian empire, usually in the Baltic region. The high number of German and Baltic Russians became an oppositional rallying point in later years for Russian nationalists who wanted to see ethnic Russians take leadership positions in the Geographical Society. By the end of its first year, the RGO had 144 members. The original leaders of the four major sections of the Russian Geographical Society were all foreign or Baltic German scholars brought to the Russian Empire by Sergei Semenovich Uvarov. The heads of the four sections were: Baron van Wrangel in the General Geography section; Baron von Struve for the Russian Geography section; Karl von Baer for the Ethnographic section; and Piotr I.Köppen for the Statistics section. The founders and early members of the RGO, among the native-born Russian element,

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were the elite scientists of the Russian Empire, many of whom were veterans of previous military, mostly naval, missions of exploration. In general, these elites were highly-educated, from fortunate economic backgrounds, were avid travelers and explorers, or enthusiastic researchers and scientists of varying disciplinary training. Among the academic specialties and professions of those members present at the RGO’s first meeting were a zoologist, statisticians, expeditionary travelers, academicians, a historian, directors of observatories, a geologist, physicists, geographers, professional military men, and a geodesist.

Admiral Fedor Petrovich Litke (1797-1882) is widely recognized as the single most important individual for the founding of the RGO, though opinions differ to some extent on who was most responsible.²⁵ Litke was an ethnic German, though his native language was Russian, and he only developed his knowledge of

²⁵ In a couple of the most recently-published Russian-language sources on the history of the RGO, there is a consensus that Karl von Baer was the single-most important individual in terms of establishing the idea of a Russian Geographical Society. The following scholars also feel that though von Baer was important for the ideas, F.P. Litke was most responsible for putting those ideas into action in order to start the organization. In support of this viewpoint, see Agafonov and Isachenko, Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo: 150 let, 11. See also Natalia Georgievna Sukhova, Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990). For an English-language source on Litke, see Aleksandr Ivanovich Alekseev, Fedor Petrovich Litke, ed. Kathy Arnt, trans. Serge LeComte (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1996). See also Litke, A Voyage Around the World, 1826-29. Translated from the French edition by Renée Marshall; supplemented with a parallel account by E.H. Baron von Kittlitz, translated from the German, with an introduction, by Joan Moessner, edited by Richard A. Pierce; Alaska history, no. 29 (Kingston, Ontario: Limestone Press, 1987).
German through study. RGO historian Lev Semenovich Berg was particularly eager to point out the relative abilities of Litke in Russian and in German in his postwar study of the RGO, in an attempt to revise previous interpretations of the Geographical Society as a German-dominated one in its first decade. Litke was already well-known at the time of the RGO’s founding for his extensive travels earlier in the century across Siberia, the Pacific, and to Russian America.27 Discussions between Litke and his colleagues Karl von Baer and Ferdinand Wrangel during the mid-1840s, along with conversations with the Royal Geographic Society member Sir Roderick Murchison seemed to provide crucial impetus to the organization’s founding. There was a series of correspondences back and forth between these individuals about the topic of forming a Russian Geographical Society, which seems to point towards the organization’s genesis by

26 Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograjicheskoe obshchestvo za sto let, 25.

27 Litke was present on two important naval expeditions, one under the command of V.M. Golovnin in 1817-19 and the second was Litke’s own expedition of 1826-29. See Vasilii Mikhailovich Golovnin, Around the World on the Kamchatka, 1817-1819, trans. Ella Lurry Wiswell, foreword by John J. Stephan (Honolulu: Hawaiian Historical Society, 1979) [First Russian ed. 1822]. The account of Litke’s second trip is an especially important source for constructing histories of the Pacific Islands and has been used in Marshall Sahlins’ work. For an extensive bibliography on Litke, see Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality,” 223-24. Incidentally, Litke’s 1826-29 journey account was recently translated into English and published.

See Litke, A voyage around the world, 1826-29.
approximately April of 1844. By May of 1845 Litke and Baer had drawn up a proposal, which was submitted for the emperor’s approval via the Minister of Internal Affairs, L.A. Perovskii.

After a few months, the RGO was in place and ready to begin its activities. The early years of the organization were in part dedicated to clarifying the activities and areas of research that the society would concern itself with. On October 7, 1845, the first general meeting of the Geographical Society was held and Litke delivered a speech which charted out his ideas of how the organization should develop. Much of his speech focused on the “fatherland” (otechestvo) and the need to focus research on Russian geographical territories. He found that the RGO should acquire more knowledge about its own territories, arguing that Russia had very little knowledge about the geographic features and demographics of the lands already under Russian political control. Litke also emphasized in his speech that the most important work for the Russian Geographical Society must be the study of the geography of Russia itself.

28 See Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality,” 224-26. For more information on the early formation of the organization and short biographies of Litke and other early founders of the RGO, see Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obschestvo, 22-48.

29 The text of this document, titled, “Ob osnovanii Russkogo geografo-statisticheskogo obschestva” can be found in ibid., 31-35.

30 See RGO f. 1-1845, op.2, no.1. The first meeting of the founding members was held September 19, 1845. See RGO f. 1-1845, op. 1, no.1, no. 11. The first meeting of the RGO council was held October 18, 1845. See RGO f. 1-1845, op. 2, no. 2.

31 Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obschestvo za sto let, 38.
At the same meeting, Nikolai Ivanovich Nadezhdin presented a paper titled "The Ethnographic Study of the Russian People," in which he defined what ethnographic pursuits the society should concern itself with. Nadezhdin found that ethnography in the RGO should be carried out in three broad areas: ethnographic linguistics, physical ethnography, and psycho-ethnography. Ethnographic studies became an important area of academic interest and research missions for the RGO from the outset. In the initial years, ethnographic research focused on the documentation of peoples who already lived within Russian territorial borders, but as the work of the RGO itself moved into extraterritorial lands later in the century, so too did the shift in ethnographic focus. Ethnography became a critical tool for the state's expansion and for the solidifying of power in areas already annexed.

The importance of ethnographic research during the RGO's formative years can in part be attributed to a corresponding rise in interest in Oriental studies, vostokovedenie, in the Russian Empire. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered substantial financial and educational support towards the training of oriental scholars, especially in the decade or so leading up to the RGO's founding. Several of the RGO's ethnographers were trained through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' institutional backing. The ethnographic wing of the society brought obvious benefits to the imperial state, particularly since large parts of the empire

32 Physical ethnography was a sub-field of zoology. Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860, 351-52.

33 Knight, "Constructing the Science of Nationality," 222.
were still largely or completely unknown territories. Ethnographic research would also prove beneficial in discovering information about peoples in foreign lands. Chokan Vallikhanov’s spying expedition to Kashgar would later become evident of the potential uses of the RGO’s ethnographers for the state’s benefit. Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii’s and Nikolai Przheval’skii’s expeditions also brought back important ethnographic information about peoples both within and beyond the borders of the Russian state and served to increase the store of information on those peoples encountered in their expeditions. The work that the society’s ethnographers carried out during the nineteenth century paved the way for a more “scientific” and thorough ethnographic and cultural cataloguing of the empire upon the transition to the Soviet regime, a point discussed at length in Francine Hirsch’s study of ethnographic study in the early Soviet period.  

International and National Tensions in the RGO

Shortly after the group’s founding, the RGO began to attract and open its doors to more members. As this happened, the demographic makeup of the organization changed dramatically. This meant a drastic increase in the number

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of younger members, who were mostly Russians. By the mid-1840s the RGO had around 150 members, but by 1860 its membership had ballooned to over 800. This corresponded with a dramatic increase in the RGO’s expeditions and activities during the mid-1850s. It is also evident that a clear split developed within the ranks of the RGO by the end of the 1840s, between two groups who have been referred to as the “German Party” and the “Russian Party.” The German party consisted of those members who had ethnically German family names and who often espoused scientific research in an attempt to bring Russian scientific achievement closer to that of Western Europe. Scientific research was, for them, to benefit the larger community of Western science in general, not to benefit the Russian state individually. They hoped to model the RGO on the Russian Academy of Sciences, as an institution that was supportive of scientific progress along a European-inspired model or path. The “German Party” was representative of an old guard within Russian scientific circles who espoused internationalist sensibilities. Admiral Litke was both a main spokesman for the German Party group and was representative of those who made up its ranks, who were typically “professional” scientists.

Litke and others of the German Party were threatened by a sudden increase in memberships among “amateur” scientists who often had ethnically Russian family names. Many of the newer members have been collectively referred to as

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35 Knight, “Science, Empire, and Nationality,” 112.

36 Kalesnik, Geograficheskoe obshestva za 125 let, 343-45.
the “Russian Party.” The Russian Party differed in their approach and hoped to insure that the RGO would be an institution to benefit the promotion of the Russian state. Many of these men hoped to curb the German and European influence over the RGO and steer the organization down a more expedient path for the Russian state. Conflicts between the German and Russian factions of the party worsened during the early years of the organization. Within a few years, the Russian faction would win control over the organization and steer the RGO down a path more beneficial for the advancement of the state.

Amidst one of the many conflicts that arose between the two factions, Vasilii Vasil’evich Grigor’ev (who was representative of the Russian Party faction) made the following statement in 1847, expressing an opinion that was certainly indicative of the nationalist approach that many of the Russian Geographical Society’s new members espoused:

I will speak for myself. I am not a geographer, nor an ethnographer, nor a statistician... Geography in and of itself does not interest me nearly as much as archeology or linguistics. But in my soul I am a Russian and anything that can be in any way of benefit to Russia can not be foreign to me. The Society declared that it would labor for Russia, and I considered myself fortunate to join my feeble powers to the common mass... If it had been said that the main goal of its establishment would be the advancement of geography as a science, for the good of mankind in general and Western Europe in particular, I would never have even considered seeking the honor of becoming a member. The majority of members of the society are also not specialists in geography or statistics and, I venture to think, take part in the works of the society with the same patriotic motives as I. 37

37 RGIA, f. 853, op.1, no. 10, l.11 cited in Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality,” 246-47.
Grigor'ev's words demonstrate a couple of important points about the RGO at mid-century. The society was to put less emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge's sake. If one was a geographer, they should not strive to make new discoveries or uncover a new geographical discovery simply to benefit the store of knowledge. Instead, all expeditions should be undertaken primarily to benefit perceived needs for the state, not just to fill a lacuna of information about a given region for the benefit of world (or in the context of Russian world views of the time, Western European) geographers. In other words, the organization began to instill in its researchers the importance of advancing state interests.

A second point about Grigor'ev's words is to emphasize his own intent in joining the organization initially. He professed that he never would have considered joining the organization at all if it had made its goal to "advance geography as a science" or "for the good of mankind." He and others saw their entry into the RGO primarily as a way to serve the Russian Empire. Many of the early members of the RGO, particularly those associated with the Russian faction, would express similar points of view about their intentions in both joining the organization and in their motivations for research.

To reiterate, there was a tension within the organization between its internationally-directed and nationally-directed goals and activities. From one perspective, it was founded upon the increasing international prominence of state-supported scientific societies. Many of these societies' members, including the RGO's, argued that their organizations would benefit the scientific community
and the world store of scientific knowledge. And although many of the RGO’s members did aspire to do that, they also hoped that by carrying out research they were raising the national scientific achievement and prominence of Russia, by making the state competitive internationally with other national scientific societies. Certainly the RGO did not confine itself to research within its own national borders and often sent expeditions beyond them, a practice that can be seen as serving both national and international agendas. The organization drew upon a lot of members with international (i.e., non-Russian) family names and many who spent considerable time abroad or those who had digested scientific studies done by non-Russian scientists, like Litke. On the other hand, there were many in the mold of Grigor’ev, who were Russians dreaming above all of working for the state’s benefit. Consider the following excerpt written by Grigor’ev in 1837:

The dissemination and strengthening in Russia of eastern learning, which makes the horizon of our knowledge and understanding broader than that of thinkers and public figures of western Europe, would force us not to bow down before the results of their thought and activity so submissively and subserviently as we do in the present time out of necessity; it would give us autonomy and, serving as a counterweight to western principles that repress our national development, would facilitate its strengthening and rapid progress...The best means to counteract the influence of the west is to rely on the study of the east. 38

There was also the tension between those who wished to shore up more knowledge about lands within the borders of the Russian state (often unknown or

38 Quoted in Knight, “Grigor’ev in Orenburg,” 80. Knight cited this from Nikolai Ivanovich Vsevolovskii, Vasili Vasil’evich Grigor’ev po ego pis’mam i trudam, 1816-1881 (S.-Peterburg: Tip. i. khromolit. A. Transhelia, 1887), 33.
little-known territories) and those who wished to move the RGO into unknown lands beyond national borders. I would argue that this tension was not purely paradoxical because both the internationally directed and nationally directed aims of the organization were in a way complementary in that they both provided impetus for the implementation of the organization's research agenda.

**Early Research Work**

The RGO's research agenda in its formative years was widely varied and quite ambitious. Ethnographic research was high on the agenda, and was carried out within the borders of the Russian Empire. Academician Johann Sjögren carried out two detailed ethnographic studies of two tribes in Lithuania and Kurland. Sjögren hoped to gain insight into the ethnic origins of Baltic peoples by studying the cultural elements of the Livs and the Krevings tribes and their languages. Peter Köppen produced an ethnographic map of Russia in another early RGO project between 1846 and 1851. In a related project, Nikolai Vladimirovich Khanykov produced a map of the area between the lower Volga and the Ural Rivers. Sjögren and Köppen's projects were both indicative of those who espoused German party views. These research missions focused on identifying those peoples on the verge of extinction, so that they could be rescued from this
fate and brought “into the fold (i.e., under the realm of knowledge or of the known) of European ‘civilization.’”

In one of the more interesting early projects, the RGO sent an expedition to survey the imaginary boundary between Europe and Asia in the northern Urals. This expedition was headed by Professor of Mineralogy and Geology at Petersburg University, E.K. Goffman. This expedition lasted from 1847-1850 and led to the production of a detailed map of the region and a pair of thorough geographical reports. Goffman’s expedition was the first to earn the golden Constantine medal, which would be awarded each year by the RGO for outstanding achievements in geographic research.

The German party scholars thought that ethnographic efforts carried out by the RGO should strive to rescue those potentially lost peoples or, at the very least, document their appearances, languages, and cultural practices as best as possible for the benefit of (European/Western) science. In a memo from 1846, Karl von Baer, leader of the RGO’s ethnographic division in its earliest days, argued that the RGO should compile a “complete description of the various tribes inhabiting

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39 Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality,” 269.

40 Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860, 352. For an interesting historical overview on the process of drawing the line between “Europe” and “Asia” in the Ural Mountains, see Mark Bassin, “Russia Between Europe and Asia,” 1-17.

41 Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obschestvo za sto let, 44-45. For the announcement of this see RGO f. 1-1846, op. 1, no. 14. The decision to establish this award, the first of several similar medals to be given out to well-accomplished scholars, geographers, and travelers, was made December 3, 1846.
Russia and their subdivisions with regard to their physical, social, and intellectual features in their present state. Baer further proposed that the society should gather all existing information on ethnography within the Russian empire and then supplement that information which was lacking by sending out information-gathering expeditions to certain regions.

This should also include, if possible, visual representations of these peoples. In Sjögren's expedition, Baer sent a drawing teacher from St. Petersburg University named Petzold to accompany him and make sketches of the Livs and Krevings.

Employing artists to accompany RGO scholar-travelers was a common practice later as well. Pavel Kosharov was a very skilled artist from Omsk High School who was employed on Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's 1856-57 mission to the Tian Shan Mountains. From this expedition, Kosharov produced 148 drawings. This included drawings of named individuals (usually Russians), various Central Eurasian "representative types," utensils, weapons, folk costumes, dwellings, animals, scenery, and geological formations. A few of Kosharov's prints have been published in color as insets to the Hakluyt Society-published English translation of Semenov's journey. The RGO in its early years strove not only to map unknown territories, but also to develop composite pictures of the empire itself and its peoples. Sketches of different peoples became an important part of the RGO's collection of information. This would particularly be true as the RGO

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42 Knight, "Constructing the Science of Nationality," 269.

43 See Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Travels in the Tian'-Shan'.
later expanded its activities into Central Eurasia, East Asia, and the Russian Far East. 44

A Shift in Research Focus

By 1847, the RGO’s activities began to shift more towards that which accommodated the aforementioned Russian (nationalist) party. Nikolai Nadezhdin emerged as the main champion of the Russian party, working under the RGO’s ethnographic division. Nadezhdin and Baer’s views on the organization were clearly at odds. As Nadezhdin drew upon an increasing amount of support, Baer was forced to resign his position in 1848 and was replaced by him. Shortly after his appointment, Nadezhdin put into motion an ambitious ethnographic survey of the Slavic peoples within the Russian state.

This survey focused on Russian peoples from traditional backgrounds and “those of whom it can be said they still live in a simple way, like Russians!” 45 His study would exclude all non-Russian peoples. As Knight notes, this fact highlights the sense of social distance that the RGO members felt from the common people or

44 Details on this practice in Central Eurasia and East Asia are to follow in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. For information on the portrayals of peoples in the Russian Far East, see two particularly important studies that deal with Russian portrayals of both the peoples and the lands. Bassin, Imperial Visions; see also Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors.

45 Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality,” 282.
the masses, who were considered sufficiently different to be studied as an ethnographic other.

This ethnographic research was primarily carried out through the use of surveys by ethnographic teams to describe such characteristics as individuals' health, susceptibility to illness, fertility, strength, and aptitude for physical labor. The survey also investigated issues involving language, including pronunciation, grammar and word formation, idioms, different meanings of standard vocabulary words, and regional lexicons.46 Over the next five years, this research garnered the collection of approximately two thousand ethnographic-research reports from field workers. This information is so detailed and involves so much information that it still has not been completely processed. However, Vladimir Dal' later used this as a basis for his research in the writing of two publications: an Interpretive Dictionary of the Russian Language (1864-68) and a collection titled The Proverbs of the Russian People (1862).47 This type of research was, of course, carried out for the benefit of advancing Russian samopoznanie. By learning more about the lives and languages of the peoples within Russian borders, Russians were also redefining their own sense of national identity. This type of research, though, would be quite different from that which the RGO would concern itself with particularly after its defeat in the Crimean War in 1856. Following this defeat, the organization clearly became more interested in learning information about territories and peoples who were more “foreign” and not strictly Russian

46 Ibid., 284-85.

47 Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860, 352.
lands and Russian peoples. But for the period from approximately 1848-1855, the organization was clearly intent on advancing the process of *samopoznanie*.

During the 1850s, the RGO greatly expanded its research activities, particularly through its research missions to Central Eurasia and the Amur River region. By the early 1850s, the society was publishing a handful of scholarly journals and publications including, (the) *Journal, Geographical News, Messenger of the Geographical Society, Ethnographic Symposium*, and *Meteorological Symposium* (published in German). During its early years, the RGO also established branch institutions of the Petersburg-based national society in regions of the empire. These included the Caucasus Section in Tiflis (opened in 1851), and the East Siberian Section in Irkutsk (opened 1851). Later in the century this was followed up by openings of the Orenburg regional office in Orenburg (1867), the Northwestern Section in Vil’no (1867), the Southwestern Section in Kiev (1872), and the West Siberian Section in Omsk (1877). A few

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50 Both the Vil’no and Kiev offices were closed in 1876. The Kiev office was closed upon the order of Emperor Alexander II, who found that the organization could have been indirectly promoting Ukrainian nationalism through its studies of ethnography and language in the region. This opinion, at least, is the one determined by L.S. Berg in his history of the RGO. Berg, *Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshestvo za sto let*, 160.
decades later additional offices were opened in the Priamurskii region in Khabarovsk (1894) and the Turkestan office in Tashkent (1897).51

The RGO was also the first learned society in Russia to elect women as members, by electing two women as “cooperating members” in 1877. Olga Aleksandrovna Fedchenko made geographical expeditionary work to Turkestan and Aleksandra Iakovlevna Efimenko was known for her ethnographic and juridical study of the Lapps, Karelians, and Samoeds.52 However, women were mainly held to supporting roles within the organization. In general, women were encouraged to support their husbands’ research and could contribute to research only under the direction of their spouse. The few women who were allowed to undertake research expeditions during the nineteenth century carried out their research alongside their husbands, who were often the expeditions’ leaders. One of these women, Aleksandra Potanina, is discussed in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the RGO sent a number of missions to territories far beyond Russian borders. Among the many interesting activities of the RGO during the second half of the nineteenth century was the 1870 planned mission of Nikolai Nikolaevich Miklukho-Maklai (1846-1888). He is heralded in RGO histories as one of the most interesting characters in service to scientific research. His expedition to New Guinea was followed by a continuous

51 Agafonov and Isachenko, Russkoe geograficheskoe obshestvo: 150 let, 11.
52 Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: 1861-1917, 86. For more on women in the Russian Geographical Society, see the last chapter of this dissertation and the section on Aleksandra Viktovna Potanina.
twelve-year stay abroad. During this time, Miklukho-Maklai visited many areas in the Pacific region, including the Philippines, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. He even married the daughter of the Governor of Sydney, Australia, Sara Robertson. His expeditions, sponsored by the RGO, truly tested the limits of the geographically-known territory of the world. Among the other extra-territorial journeys of the RGO during the second half of the nineteenth century were the 1858-60 expedition to Khurasan of orientalist Nikolai Vladimirovich Khanykov; A.I. Voiekov’s 1878-80 journey to North America, India, and Japan; and three expeditions to India by Ivan Pavlovich Minaev in 1874-75, 1879-80, and 1885-86. Although there were a number of these expeditions to foreign lands, the primary focus of the RGO from the 1850s until the early 1900s continued to be on lands either within existing Russian territories (that were still under-explored and little-known) or those lands adjoining Russian territory, which held the promise of becoming future points of Russian colonization, commerce, and settlement.

The RGO, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century, began to see itself as part of a wider European mission to uncover and map those parts of the globe which were still “unknown” to science. By the last quarter of the century, the Russian Geographical Society was part of this heroic global mission that put them alongside the contemporary Western-European explorers of sub-Saharan Africa. The Russians began to feel that geographical discoveries of Central Eurasia could be equated to Western European discoveries on the African

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54 Ibid., 121 and 131.
continent. This sense of a heroic mission is echoed in contemporary histories of
the organization, in which it was asserted by one group of RGO-sponsored
authors that global geographical discovery has overwhelmingly been dominated
by Europeans. Agafonov and Isachenko wrote that, “Really, is it taking a position
of Eurocentrism [to say that Europeans] built practically the entire history of
geographic discovery?!“55

There is also evidence by the 1870s of an increasing degree of international
collaboration on the part of the RGO with its European and Western partner
organizations. Beginning in 1871, the organization participated in international
conferences of national geographical organizations. The first International
Geographical Congress was held in Antwerp, and subsequent meetings would
also garner the participation of the RGO in Paris (1875), Venice (1881), and other
European cities.56 This increasing international collaboration coincided with the
era of “new” imperialism and the growing competition for territories in unclaimed
or little-known parts of the globe, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Central
Eurasia.

55 Agafonov and Isachenko, Russkoe geograficheskoe obschestvo: 150 let, 13.
56 Information on the RGO participation in the 1875 conference in Paris is in RGO f. 1-1874, op.
1, no. 13. Information on the RGO participation in the 1880 conference in Venice is in RGO f. 1-
1880, op. 1, no. 18.
The RGO in Central Eurasia

In February of 1849, twenty-two-year-old Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii began his relationship with the RGO, which would last into the next century. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was an exuberant young scholar, recipient of a high education, and a dedicated member of the RGO. At the same time that he began his association with the RGO, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii became active with the Petrashevskii political circle of utopian socialists. The Petrashevskii circle, called in Russian the Petrashevtsy, began to gather weekly in 1845 to discuss Charles Fourier’s ideas and against Nicholas I’s political regime. The members’ ideas were also characterized by extreme devotion to the otechestvo (fatherland), nationalism, and opposition to the emperor. The group earned its name from its chief organizer, Mikhail Petrashevskii. The Petrashevtsy were just one of several examples of radical political groups in Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century. The group also included Fedor Dostoevskii and the main person behind the Pan-Slav movement, Nikolai Danilevskii (also a close friend of Semenov’s and fellow member of the RGO). Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s participation with the Petrashevskii circle gave some indication of his political inclinations, and those of many of the young men who joined the RGO at mid-century. Many of the

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57 Bassin has argued that many of the Petrashevtsy dreamed of using the east as a Russian El Dorado. Lands in Siberia and the Far East were seen as desirable for fulfilling the potential of the Russian state, as California or western lands had for the United States. Bassin, Imperial Visions, 93. There is more on the Petrashevtsy Chapter Three of this dissertation.
Petrashevtsy were arrested or repressed, but Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was able to escape this. He took up a position as librarian for the society and served as secretary of the Physical Geography Section. He was also awarded a graduate degree for his thesis, which compared the flora of the Don valley to the vegetation of European Russia.⁵⁸

During the 1850s, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was hired by the RGO to translate portions of Carl Ritter’s Die Erdkunde von Asien to Russian, which became a key turning point in his career. The translation of Erdkunde was later taken up by several members of the RGO and became a hallmark project in the Russian Geographical Society’s collective education of European physical geography. This translation project also helped to garner interest in the execution of research expeditions to Central Eurasia, in order to prove or disprove Ritter’s ideas about the features of Central Eurasian geography. In his introduction to this translation, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii ruminated on his own ideas on science, which were indicative of the new directions that the RGO was taking by the 1850s. He found that science in the present

is no longer a foggy distraction of scholarly minds; it is rather samopoznanie [self-knowledge], the recognition of the objects and forces of Nature and the ability to subject them to our own power, to use them for our needs and demands... The striving of every scholar, if he does not wish to remain a cold cosmopolite but rather wants to live a single life with his countrymen, has to be... the desire to introduce the treasures [of human knowledge] into the life of the nation.⁵⁹


⁵⁹ Quoted in Bassin, Imperial Visions, 97.
Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's ideas on science were representative of a new guard in the RGO, who saw their mission to extract information from nature for the benefit of the nation. Although Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's views could be associated with utopian socialism earlier in the decade, one should not think that this precluded his support for the Russian state, nor that of many in his academic and social circles. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was an intense nationalist at heart, who saw science and geographical research as a way to channel that energy into benefits for Russia, a kind of nationalist activism.

Upon the early death of his wife late in 1852 and his own contraction of typhoid, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was advised to go abroad to regain his health. In early 1853 he traveled to Berlin both for this purpose and to attend lectures. While there, he made the acquaintance of both Carl Ritter and Alexander von Humboldt. In conversations with Humboldt and Ritter, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was encouraged to make an expedition via the RGO to the Tian Shan Mountains to verify or refute Humboldt's speculation that glaciers and volcanic activity were present there. After some further time off in Europe and a number of holidays in Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii returned to Petersburg in 1854.

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60 As mentioned before, Humboldt had made a journey to the Ural Mountains earlier in the century, which brought him as far east as Barnaul and the Chinese border. Humboldt's contribution to the natural sciences was very significant, and played a prominent role in the study of Mary Louise Pratt on the relationship between natural science-research-travelers and European imperialism. See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*. 
He was able to convince the leadership of the RGO to support a mission to the Tian Shan, which would be initiated in 1856. This expedition was carried out following a key turning point in Russian history. Following their 1856 defeat in the Crimean War, the Russian state began changing the focus of its military and colonial ventures from its western borders to its eastern ones. The terms of the 1856 Treaty of Paris effectively forced Russia to relinquish its interests in Southwest Asia, spurring a new round of colonial and political interest in Central Eurasia (and the Russian Far East). Russian advances in Central Eurasia were both offensive and defensive moves, as they conquered the only areas left to them and hoped to position themselves against future British encroachment in the region. Interest in Central Asia became more active during the early 1860s, as

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61 For more details and analysis on this mission, see chapter three of this dissertation, titled “Expeditions of Petr Semenov.”

62 For a useful summary of Russian expansion in the Far East, see Stephan, The Russian Far East.

63 It is difficult to do justice to the historical concept known as the “Great Game” in one footnote, so instead it is better to give a brief definition of the term and then point out the useful literature on this topic. Suffice it to say that during the nineteenth century, Russia was engaged in a diplomatic, political, and military competition for control over the Central Eurasian region, which the British referred to as the “Great Game” and the Russians referred to as “The Tournament of Shadows.” This competition is generally considered as having lasted from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. For a more thorough overview of the concept in 1500 words, see my forthcoming encyclopedia entry “Great Game” in The Age of Imperialism, 1800-1914 ed., Carl Cavanagh Hodge (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007 (forthcoming)). One of the more popular accounts of this period and phenomenon is Peter Hopkirk, The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia (New York: Kodansha
Russia and Europe began to feel the impact of the American Civil War and a major decrease in cotton imports from across the Atlantic.⁶⁴ The recent defeat of Shamil in the Caucasus also allowed the Russians the opportunity to move their military might from one Islamic region to another.

Russian expansion into Central Eurasia during the 1860s was seen by some in the elite, like Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Gorchakov, as a necessity, which was also part of a heroic civilizing mission. Regarding Russian expansion, Gorchakov argued the following, which is reflective of the discourse of the time:

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⁶⁴ A group of Russian merchants had approached the minister of finance to support the locating of raw materials in Central Asia, in order to fill the economic void that the American Civil War had created. Helene Carrere d'Encausse, “Systematic Conquest, 1865 to 1884” in Allworth, *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance*, 131.
The situation of Russia in Middle Asia is that of all civilized states which come into contact with semi-savage and itinerant ethnic groups without a structured social organization. In such a case the interest in the security of one's borders and in trade relations always makes it imperative that the civilized state should have a certain authority over its neighbours, who as a result of their wild and impetuous customs are very disconcerting. Initially it is a matter of containing their attacks and raids. In order to stop them, one is usually compelled to subjugate the adjoining ethnic groups more or less directly. Once this has been achieved, their manners become less unruly, though they in turn are now subjected to attacks by more distant tribes. The state is duty-bound to protect them against such raids, and punish the others for their deeds. From this springs the necessity of further protracted periodic expeditions against an enemy who, on account of his social order, cannot be caught...For this reason the state has to decide between two alternatives. Either it must give up this unceasing work and surrender its borders to continual disorder...or it must penetrate further and further into the wild lands...This has been the fate of all states which have come up against this kind of situation. The United States in America, France in Africa, Holland in its colonies, Britain in eastern India—all were drawn less by ambition and more by necessity along this path forwards on which it is very difficult to stop once one has started.\textsuperscript{65}

Over the course of the next few decades, the territories in the heart of Asia became a major point of focus for geographic and ethnographic missions and exploration, which led to stronger political and military control over the region, particularly leading up to and following the 1865 conquest of Tashkent.\textsuperscript{66} The

\textsuperscript{65} Cited in Andreas Kappeler, \textit{The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History} (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 196.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 131-50. Basically, the years 1864-65 were very important ones in initiating a strong Russian advance on the region. General Mikhail Cherniaev was the orchestrator of the military attacks on several Central Asian cities including Aulie-ata, Chimkent, and Tashkent. These attacks earned Cherniaev the nickname “The Lion of Tashkent” and led to the Russian formation of the colony of Turkestan. The plans for Turkestan were initiated with the formation of the Steppe Commission in 1865 and were solidified with the formal establishment of the colony in 1867. For a detailed, though somewhat heroic, account of the life and activities of General Cherniaev, see David MacKenzie, \textit{The Lion of Tashkent: The Career of General M.G. Cherniaev
forceful tone that the Russian administration had taken by the mid-1860s was clear from foreign minister Prince Gorchakov's well-known circular, in which he justified Central Eurasian conquests in the interest of protecting the state's sovereign borders from attacks from bandits or local indigenous rulers. Gorchakov argued in his circular that the problem of maintaining borders was one that all European global empires faced. The Russians should make a forward advance into the southern Central Asian region in order to find suitable land for agriculture and settlement as well as fending off potential attacks from the Kokand Khanate or the other regional nations in opposition to Russia. But Gorchakov argued that once the border was solidified, that further colonization would end, in the interest of making future diplomatic inroads with the remaining regional nations. He said:

...we must halt, because on the one hand, any further extension of our rule meeting henceforth, not with unstable communities, like independent nomad tribes, but with more regularly constituted states, would exact considerable efforts and would draw us from annexation to annexation into infinite complications; while, on the other hand, having henceforth for neighbors such states, notwithstanding their backward condition and the instability of their political action, we can nevertheless be assured that to the common advantage regular relations will one day be substituted for the disorders which have hitherto paralysed the progress of those countries.  

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Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's 1856-57 expedition collected a great deal of information on the geography, flora, fauna, and peoples of the Central Asian region and made Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii a well-known personage across the empire and particularly in elite social circles. Following this mission, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii requested the funding for a second journey to the Tian Shan through the RGO but was rejected. His longer-term impact on the society was also profound, as he played a key role in organizing and supporting future missions to the Central Eurasian region, including those of Chokan Valikhanov, Nikolai Przheval'skii, Grigorii Potanin, and Petr Kozlov. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also wrote a history of the organization upon its fiftieth anniversary.

Documenting the Burgeoning Empire

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's mission to Tian Shan resulted in a wave of subsequent explorers' missions to the region known to the Russians as Sredniaia Azia. These missions coincided with the solidification of Russian political and military control over the Kazak steppe, Kirghiz territories, and later the Uzbek, Tajik, and Turkmen lands further south. In just one example of the subsequent missions spurred by Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Nikolai Alekseevich Severtsov

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68 Lincoln, Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, 36.
69 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti.
made an 1864-68 expedition, sponsored by the RGO, to the Tian Shan Mountains, hoping to follow up on Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s earlier geographic findings.⁷⁰ Severtsov undertook a series of expeditions from the 1850s until the 1870s that covered much of the territory newly under Russian control in Srednei Azii⁷¹. The three research trips of Aleksei Pavlovich Fedchenko and his wife Olga Aleksandrovna Fedchenko to the Zarafshan Valley in 1869-72 focused on collecting information on hydrography, flora, and fauna, and proved important in advancing scientific knowledge of Russian Turkestan.⁷² Within a few years of the establishment of the Turkestan military government at Tashkent in 1867, the governors-general assumed the responsibility for sending out ethnographic and exploratory missions for the state, largely supplanting the importance of RGO there. Turkestan Governor-General Konstantin von Kaufmann was a particularly avid supporter of the value that ethnographic research could bring to making colonization more effective. Von Kaufmann based his model for establishing an ethnographic survey of the region on the way the empire’s nations were presented at the first Russian ethnographic exhibition in Moscow in 1867. The exhibition was sponsored and made by the Society of Amateurs of Anthropology, Natural Sciences, and Ethnography. The exhibition consisted of approximately 300 life-

⁷⁰ See RGO f. 1-1863, op. 1, no. 10. See also RGO f. 1-1864, op. 1, no. 12.

⁷¹ Severtsov’s expeditions included visits to Verniy (later Alma-Ata or Almaty), Issyk-kul’, the Fergana Valley, the Pamirs, and Semirech’e. See Kalesnik, Geograficheskoe obshestva za 125 let, 52.

⁷² Aleksei Pavlovich Fedchenko’s research work ended with his tragic death in 1874. On the Fedchenkos see ibid., 50-52.
size mannequins, 900 artifacts and 600 photographs, which was to have offered visitors a picture of the lives of “all the peoples of European and Asian Russia.”

As governor-general, von Kaufmann was able to dictate the terms of his ethnographic survey, and relied largely on the methods and approaches that he found in the Moscow exhibition. He strove to locate and hire “specialists,” like the botanist Fedchenko and his wife Olga, a geologist. Fedchenko had developed some ethnographic techniques while training at Moscow University under Professor Anatoly Bogdanov, a major figure in the Society of Amateurs of Anthropology, Natural Sciences, and Ethnography. Von Kaufmann also strove to visually represent the region, so he hired the artist Vasily Vereshchagin to complement the natural-scientific and ethnographic information that their ethnographic team would collect with visual images.

Valikhanov’s first major expedition was nearly contemporaneous with that of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii’s. This expedition was carried out through the geographic regions controlled by Middle Horde Kazaks and Kyrgyz and was sponsored by the Russian military and led by General Khomentovskii. Valikhanov’s stated mission for this journey was to gain an oath of loyalty from

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73 Cited in Brower, Turkestan, 45.

74 Ibid., 46. It should be noted here that the Russians continued to face opposition from the Turkmen well beyond the founding of the Turkestan colony. For an outstanding study of their resistance to Russian rule, see Mehmet Saray, The Turkmens in the age of imperialism: a study of the Turkmen people and their incorporation into the Russian Empire (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1989).
the Bugus clan of the Kyrgyz, who lived near Lake Issyk-kul’. Although the stated purpose of the mission was so specific, Valikhanov’s journey proved very valuable in a wider sense to the development of Russian knowledge about the geographic, natural-scientific, and ethnographic characteristics of this steppe and mountain region. Valikhanov’s 1856 journey brought the Russians closer to both the Kazaks and the Kyrgyz, in terms of political friendship and in terms of establishing some mutual respect for these Turkic cultures *vis a vis* their Russian counterparts. Valikhanov’s collection of ethnographic materials about the Kazaks and Kyrgyz was especially important in this respect, making him into a hero both of Turks and Russians for his recording of customs, stories, and cultural traditions of these peoples. Valikhanov’s success in this mission earned him the respect of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, who helped make him an honorary member of the Russian Geographical Society. Following this acknowledgement, Valikhanov was later sponsored by the RGO to undertake in a spying mission to Kashgar, which was later considered his most noted travel achievement.

Valikhanov’s activities in the RGO pointed to a change in the organization’s approach by the mid-1850s. As they increased their activities to Central Eurasian lands, the organization began to realize the importance of recruiting individuals from the region to more effectively carry out explorations in non-Russian-populated lands. Valikhanov was a most extreme example of this, as someone

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who was ethnically Kazak and whose research missions were primarily directed towards Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uighurs and the lands that they inhabited. In most other cases, the RGO expeditions to Central Eurasia would often employ indigenes at the level of work hands. These individuals often fulfilled the roles of interpreters and guides, assisting their superiors on the missions (who were usually ethnically Russians, native speakers of Russian language, and outsiders who had never been to these lands before).77

Valikhanov's role in the RGO highlights one of the critical aspects of this organization's work and the process of traveling geographers and ethnographers in general. It has recently been recognized by the scholar Harry Liebersohn, in his study on three voyaging travelers to the Pacific, that the success of European travelers to unfamiliar territories was typically determined by a degree of collaboration with the locals. Liebersohn wrote that

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77 A famous historical example of this phenomena was the case of Dersu Uzala, who was portrayed in a popular historical novel and later a highly-acclaimed Soviet film directed by famous Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. Vladimir Klavdievich Arsen'ev, Dersu Uzala (Vladivostok: Dal'nevost. kn.izd-vo., 1972). “Dersu.Uzala” [videorecording]/ Mosfilm (U.S.S.R.): Atelier 41 (Japan) and Satra Films; directed by Akira Kurosawa; screenplay by Akira Kurosawa, Yuri Nagibin.
Collaborations resulted from the mutual interests that were as strong on the locals' side as on the travelers. For the travelers, collecting ethnographic knowledge was a means of fulfilling their obligations to their patrons, furthering their careers, and satisfying their scientific curiosity. For their part, locals had equally powerful ambitions and sought protection from enemies, social prestige, and an opportunity to satisfy their own curiosity about the larger world. 78

Liebersohn also made the following interesting observation about voyagers in the Pacific and their experiences of cross-cultural negotiation with locals. He found that "to imagine just two opposed categories, natives and non-natives, would be to simplify the nature of cultural encounters in general...in fact people on both sides moved beyond this polarity to take advantage of a multiplicity of roles between native and European societies." 79

During the late 1850s and early 1860s, there were discussions among the leaders of the RGO, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Russian military authorities on the organization of an expedition across the Chinese border and across regions of China. This led to a prolonged discussion on the subject about the possibility of sending a mission of a few qualified persons to the region. Following the conclusion of a pair of agreements with the Chinese at Beijing and Tianjin, in 1858 Count Y.V. Putiatin made the most sustained appeal to the RGO's leadership about the urgency of sending Russian-led expeditions to the inner provinces of China. Putiatin argued that should be sent both for scientific and economic exploration of China. This was especially imperative for the

79 Ibid., 141.
Russians, he argued, in light of the fact that the British had also acquired this right and seemed intent on carrying out their own research missions.  

Although the administration of the RGO approved the idea, ultimately the Vice-President of the society, Fedor P. Litke, resisted the proposal, believing that it was more beneficial for the RGO to be involved in the Ussuri and Primorskye regions. Litke argued that it would be "far better...[and would be] would be far more important for science in general [in that it already].has [realizable] value for Russia." In the period before Przheval'skii, the RGO leadership was quite unsure of the value of researching lands in the interior of China. Instead, they focused during the late-1850s and throughout the 1860s on exploration of the territories adjoining the Chinese border. Valikhanov's mission to Kashgar was an exception, though his mission was not done legally in the eyes of the Chinese authorities and was done prior to the Tiansin agreement of 1858. Przheval'skii was only able to convince the leadership of the potential value of an Inner-China expedition about a decade later. His initial application to the Russian Geographic Society of a cross-border expedition to China in 1866 was rejected by the authorities. In the meantime, and in order to acquiesce with the wishes of the Geographical Society's administration, Przheval'skii carried out his 1866-67 mission to the Ussuri River region which was within Russian borders. The results

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81 ARGO f. I (1858), op. I, no. 24.

of this mission led to a change of heart in the Russian Geographical Society’s administration regarding the potential value of missions to China.

During the next few decades, the RGO became an important part of the increasing Russian presence in the region and was a key agent in the exploration of unknown lands beyond Russian borders. Przheval’skii’s visits to Mongolia, Tibet, the Tangut lands, and other parts of China in the 1870s and 1880s were crucial to this process. On a series of four major expeditions across the region, Przheval’skii collected ethnographic, geographic, and natural scientific information about Asian lands. Przheval’skii became the most well-known of the RGO’s explorers to Central Eurasia and considered himself as fulfilling the role of someone like David Livingstone or Henry Morton Stanley for the Russian Empire. His three-year journey to Tibet from 1870 to 1873 was the event that first garnered him notoriety. After convincing the RGO leadership on his initial major expedition (particularly Semenov-Tian-Shanski) of the potential value that these Central Eurasian expeditions could have for science and empire, Przheval’skii enjoyed the rest of his life in the career of a scholar-traveler. His life, like those of many of his contemporaries and successors became a repetitive pattern of extended long-distance expeditions followed by periods of reflection, publication of research findings, public presentations of work, and notoriety in Russian academic circles (usually in St. Petersburg, often in imperial metropoles).

Following upon Przheval’skii’s fame and success, Grigorii Potanin became one of the most important successors who would be well-supported by the RGO for his exploration of the Central Eurasian region. Potanin was born to a family
of Cossack officers and likewise gained the possibility of exploration in Central Eurasia through his contact with Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanski, who met him during the 1850s in Omsk and encouraged him to get an education in St. Petersburg. Potanin studied at the military academy in Omsk alongside his longtime friend Chokan Valikhanov. From Valikhanov he gained an interest in the culture, language, and history of Central Eurasian peoples. By the early 1860s, Potanin was also going on geographic expeditions for the RGO and later led his own extended missions into Mongolia and China. His wife, Aleksandra Viktorovna Potanina, was also a devoted scholar on these missions, whose research heavily focused on the collection of ethnographic, cultural, and historical information about the nomadic peoples of the area. Aleksandra Potanina accompanied her husband on most of his major research travels and augmented the information that he had at his disposal by carrying out her own independent research.

On Nikolai Przheval’skii’s latter research expeditions to Central Eurasia, he was accompanied by a talented scholar who seemed to take Przheval’skii on as a personal mentor. It was written by a twentieth-century historian of these missions that, “among the scholars and fellow travelers who went with Przheval’skii, without a doubt, none were as great as Petr Kuz’mich Kozlov.” Kozlov basically picked up where Pzheval’skii left off by continuing expeditions to

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Mongolia, Tibet, and parts of China. Similar to Pzheval’skii, he demonstrated a near-obsession with collecting scientific specimens and data from these expeditions. His last expedition took place from 1923 until 1926.85

Semenov-Tian’-Shanski, Valikhanov, Pzheval’skii, and the Potanins will each be discussed in more specific and detailed contexts in subsequent chapters of this dissertation which examine their travels to the Central Eurasian region. This chapter has outlined the early history of the RGO, as it went from an organization dedicated to vague notions of scientific advancement to a tool of colonial/imperial conquest and an institutional advocate of new conceptions of Russian national identity. In future years, the organization would concern itself with the many peoples and lands that would come under Russian imperial control during the second half of the nineteenth century. The RGO’s research expeditions paved the way for future conquests and were essential for the construction of Russian notions of who these people were and what was important about the lands that were falling under Russian colonial control.

85 Murzaev, V dalekoj Azii, 143.
Chapter III - Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, Global Scientific Consciousness, and Eurasian Exploration

“An Ambitious, Brilliant... Tireless Man”

This chapter discusses the enormous contributions of Russian geographer Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii (1827-1914) to the colonization of Central Eurasia and to the wellbeing of the Russian Geographical Society. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was without doubt the single individual most actively involved in forwarding research efforts during this critical period of the RGO’s interest in Central Eurasia. He did this by serving as an example of how these research expeditions should be carried out, and through the later sponsorship, organization, and general support for further research efforts. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii transmitted and replicated the style of natural-scientific scholarship that was already commonly found among scholar-travelers in Western and Central Europe. He became one of the first Russian Empire scholars to bring this new global scientific perspective to his work, while also instigating widespread RGO interest in Central Eurasian exploration and colonial expansion. Although it can be argued that among the individuals in this study Nikolai Przheval’skii may be the most well-known, Przheval’skii merely took the example of Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s scholarship and travel and expanded upon it, which was then replicated and revised in the subsequent generation of RGO scholar-travelers. Semenov-
Tian’-Shanskii’s contribution to the society is difficult to overstate, but some have
gone as far as to argue that “the history of [the Russian Geographical Society] was
essentially the history of the scholarly activity of this ambitious, brilliant, and
tireless man.”¹

¹ Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture: 1861-1917*, 89.
Figure 3. Young Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii.
Figure 4. 1905 Portrait of Semenov-Tian-Shanski by Valentin Serov.
This chapter aims to provide a fuller discussion of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, his critical research expedition to the Tian Shan Mountains, and his contribution to later RGO expeditions to the region. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was a prolific scholar with a wide variety of academic and scientific interests which make him a difficult individual to characterize. He has also been a subject of many studies by Russian academics and historians in the succeeding generations, most of whom offer highly laudatory appraisals of his work and his contributions to the state.²

² Biographical monographs of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii include: Andrei Andreevich Dostoevskii, Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost': Sbornik statei (Leningrad: Izdanie Gos. Russkogo geograficheskogo obshestva, 1928); Andrei Ignat'evich Aldan-Semenov, Semenov-Tian'-Shanski. (Moscow: Molodia gvardia, 1965); Lincoln, Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii; Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii is also the subject of countless shorter biographical essays within collections on the history of Russian geography or explorers. For example, see Eduard Makharovich Murzaev, V dalekoi Azii, 20-41. See also ARGO f. 58, op. 3, no. 12 or Colin Thomas, "Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tyan-Shanskii 1827-1914" GBS 12 (1988): 149-58. Likewise, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii produced a wealth of his own literature, much of it being self-referential either often referring to his part in the history of the RGO or his own recollections of his research expeditions or activities within the organization. For Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's autobiography, see Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Memuary, Izd. 7, 4 vols. (Petrograd: Tipzia M. Stasiulevicha, 1917-46). Although this is an extremely long work, it is a bit inappropriate to title it Memoirs, given that three of the four volumes are devoted to his discussion of the liberation of the peasant class in Russia. Volumes two through four (on the serf liberation) should be evaluated as a separate work from that of volume one, which is strictly autobiographical. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's history of the first fifty years of the RGO is an exhaustive piece of research and a gem of historical scholarship. It consists of three volumes composed of forty-six chapters. This work is indicative of the tremendous commitment he had to documentation of the
However, the wealth of information on Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also makes this job somewhat easier, as the “factual” information about Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii is now well-documented through the work of many researchers, biographers, and scholars. However, to date there are no critical analyses connecting Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s personal contribution to Russian imperial interests.

RGO’s activities and research progress. For the first fifty years of the organization, this is the first definitive history. Subsequent histories that refer to the time period 1845-95 draw very heavily on Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s history. See Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, *Istoriia poliuekovoi deiatelnosti*. For personal published accounts of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s expeditions see (in English): idem, *Travels in the Tian'-Shan’*; (in Russian) idem, *Puteshestvie v Tian'-Shan’* v 1856-57 gg (Moskva: OGIZ, Gos. izd-vo geograficheskoi lit-ry, 1946); see also Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Berg, *Puteshestvie v Tian'-Shan’* v 1856-1857 gg. (Moskva: OGIZ, Gos. izd-vo geograficheskoi lit-ry, 1948); for a further example of his intense commitment to scholarship, see Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Geografichesko-statisticheskii slovar’ Rossiskoi imperii*, 5 vols. (S.-Peterburg: V tip. V Bezobrazova, 1863-1885). For an example of his scholarship during his later years that reflected the collected work of the RGO on the geography of Asiatic Russia, see Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Okrainy Rossii: Sibir’, Turkestan, Kavkaz i poliarntaia chast’ Evropeiskoi Rossii* (S.-Peterburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1900). For the most updated complete list of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s publications, see Lincoln, *Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii*, 98-107. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii published well over one hundred books, articles, edited works, translations, jointly-authored or jointly-edited works, reviews, published letters, and published speeches. An earlier compilation of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s publications was made by Andrei Andreevich Dostoevskii in Dostoevskii, *Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, ego zhizn’ i deiatelnost’* sbornik statei (Leningrad: Izd. Gos. Russkogo geograficheskogo ob-va, 1928), 255-96.
One major point to be emphasized in this chapter about Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii is that his methods of data collection and geographical observations set a trend that many subsequent RGO scholars would follow in their own research expeditions. His research findings combined information from a variety of scientific disciplines and also included ethnographic descriptions of the local populations. One is struck by the utilitarian and scientific language of his reports. Similar research reports would be duplicated time and again by future generations of RGO explorers and scientists who made Central Eurasia the focus of their research. A second major point to emphasize in this chapter is the sense of a larger mission at work in Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's involvement with the RGO. He devoted tremendous energy to compiling voluminous collections of data which were written with a high degree of scholarly and professional distinction. Petr Petrovich worked on this scientific and imperial project with a unique zeal and dedication that would be, again, held up as an example which the succeeding generations would emulate. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii set the bar of scholarly achievement in the name of science, the state, and of empire-building very high. But many would try their best to equal his lofty achievements. And some scholars later in the century would take his model of scholar-scientist in the service of empire a step further, by making their work more overtly in the support of imperialistic ventures.
Biography of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii

Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was born about 100 miles south-east of Moscow in Riazan' province, near the village of Urusov. His family was part of the minor gentry, and his father had served in the Napoleonic Wars at Borodino and Kulm (Chelm).\(^3\) Petr grew up in a privileged environment on estate land and his early life was "comfortably predictable."\(^4\) However, things turned for the worse during Petr's childhood when his father died in 1843 and his mother succumbed to frequent bouts of mental illness.\(^5\) He seems to have chosen to bury himself in study to avoid his problems, and absorbed himself in Western writers like Voltaire, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Sir Walter Scott. By the fall of 1845, he was sent to St. Petersburg to begin his higher education.\(^6\)

At Petersburg University, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was fortunate to be among a number of distinguished scholars, both professors and classmates. He was tutored by the German scholar Danil Ivanovich Kreim, who had studied botany under J.F. Erhart, a student of famed-scientist Karl Linneaus at the University of Göttingen. Through Kreim's guidance Petr developed an interest in plants and

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\(^3\) Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Travels in the Tian'-Shan*, xiv.

\(^4\) Lincoln, *Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii*, 5.

\(^5\) For more details on the troubles of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's early family life, including his mother's bouts with mental illness and his father's death, see chapter two of the first volume of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's memoirs. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Memuary*, I: 34-103.

transformed that into a mastery of the Linnaean system of taxonomy, which was being mastered by many in the young generation of Russian scholars, a system that had for some time been mastered by many Western and Central European scholars and travels. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii later transmitted this knowledge to many in the younger generation of Russian scholars. He was representative of those in the first generation of Russian scientists to convey knowledge of the new global scientific consciousness.  

He also read voraciously in English, French, and German, and later in his life became active in many international studies associations. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii later became a full member of over ten Russian natural-scientific and scholarly societies, including the Entomological Society, the Mineralogical Society, the Moscow Society of Naturalists, the Moscow Archaeological Society, and several others. Among the international societies that he was later affiliated with, though mainly as an honorary member, were societies in Berlin, London, Vienna, Paris, Portugal, Hungary, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, and Spain.  

During his studies in the department of physical-mathematics at St. Petersburg University, Petr was exposed to a remarkable array of courses and subjects, including many courses

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7 The Linnean classification system was created by Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus in his 1735 publication, *Systema Naturae* (*The System of Nature*). This was a system designed to classify all plant forms on the planet, both known and unknown. Mary Louise Pratt considered the creation of this system as an important development toward Europe's new "planetary consciousness." Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 15.

8 For a complete list of his memberships in scientific and scholarly societies, see Lincoln, *Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii*, 80-82.
devoted to the natural sciences.\(^9\) Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii soon became part of the age cohort that was considered the first generation of the Russian intelligentsia, exhibiting much of the enthusiasm and idealism typical of that group.\(^{10}\)

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s closest friend and classmate was Nikolai Iakovlevich Danilevskii, a young utopian idealist who would later become a well-known naturalist and member of the Russian Geographical Society. Like so many of the Russian intellectual elite of the second half of the nineteenth century, Danilevskii’s interests were widely varied. His main natural-scientific research was on the conditions of fishing in Russia’s lakes, including the Caspian.\(^{11}\) Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii shared an apartment with Danilevskii on Vasilievskiy Island during their years in Petersburg University. Petr Petrovich described Danilevskii in his memoirs as having “the highest level of originality and [also a] nice personality.”\(^{12}\) The two shared a couple of passionate interests: one for travel for the benefit of scientific research and the second for liberal progressive political philosophy. They often engaged in short trips to the countryside together

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\(^{9}\) For more details on the educational experience of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii at St. Petersburg University, see Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Memuary*, I: 173-76.

\(^{10}\) For more on the activities of the men of this generation, see Knight, “Grigor’ev in Orenburg,” 78.

\(^{11}\) See, for example, ARNB f. 237, no. 1, which is an essay which Danilevskii wrote on the topic of this research during the 1860s (exact date of this document unknown). His political interests were wide and varied as well, as is made evident below.

during breaks between classes, collecting both natural-science information about the environment and forming their opinions about the social and economic situation of the Russian countryside at that time.

After passing his exams in spring of 1848, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii left with Danilevskii from Petersburg to embark on a research journey to Moscow. They traveled by foot and collected a number of botanical and geological specimens that would later be employed by Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii in research for his dissertation. In visiting villages along the Volkhov River area, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Danilevskii met many peasants who were stricken by a cholera epidemic. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Danilevskii’s close encounter with human suffering, both medical and economic, seemed to have a dramatic impact on their political views, pushing them both (but particularly Danilevskii) towards more radical ideas. This initial research travel would be a sign of things to come from both men, though they would direct their careers along two different paths: Danilevskii followed the path to political radicalism and Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii that of more sober, though no less active, scientific research and intellectual pursuits.

However, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s interests were always broad and he, like Danilevskii, took a degree of interest in political matters. During their Petersburg days they befriended M.V. Butashevich-Petrashevtskii, who was a devotee of the socialist and utopian ideas of Charles Fourier and Saint-Simon. In Petersburg,

13 Berg, Vsesoiznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let, 59.
Butashevich-Petrashevskii organized meetings of a group that became known as the Petrashevtsi Circle, or the Petrashevtsy. A number of prominent artists and intellectuals, including the famed writer Fedor Dostoevskii were active participants in this organization. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was very fond of Dostoevskii, whom he first became acquainted with through the Petrashevtsi meetings. They would later be reacquainted in Western Siberia during the 1850s, where Dostoevskii will also befriend Chokan Valikhanov. Members of the group soon became devoted followers of, in addition to the aforementioned Fourier and Saint-Simon, the French writer George Sand, British utopian socialist Robert Owen, and many others. Their influences represented a veritable “who’s who” of idealist intellectuals of mid-nineteenth-century Europe.

Soon the Russian authorities became alarmed about the activities and ideas of the Petrashevtsi circle and arrests were made. Some were sentenced to exile and hard labor in Siberia (including most notably Dostoevskii), but Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was fortunate that he escaped prosecution and was able to continue his work, as he never fully identified with these ideas. Danilevskii was not so fortunate and was arrested for his activities.

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14 For an overview of the Petrashevtsy ideas, see Walicki, A History of Russian Thought, 152-61.

15 For Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s personal opinions of Dostoevskii and more on their relationship, see Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Memoary, I: 200-204. For an interesting article on the Dostoevskii/Valikhanov connection, and Dostoevskii’s views on Islam, see Michael Futrell, “Dostoyevsky and Islam (and Chokan Valikhanov)” SEER 57, no. 1 (1979): 16-31.

16 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Memoary, I: 199.

17 Berg, Vesesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let, 60.
often attended the Petrashevtsi meetings, he remained “on the fringe” of this
group and avoided the problems that the more devoted members of the
organization faced. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii biographer W. Bruce Lincoln
attributed Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s distancing from this organization to a
number of factors. One was that, unlike Danilevskii, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii
was no longer in a dire financial situation, having just received a significant
inheritance. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii did, though, harbor sympathetic feelings
for the serfs and for the poor classes of Russia and harbored a distrust of the
Russian bureaucracy. Although Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was frustrated with
the repressive Russian administration of the time under Nicholas I (r. 1825-55), he
was ultimately loyal to the tsarist state and was particularly supportive following
the transition to the reform era of Alexander II (r. 1855-81).

Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii as Geographer

Following the arrest of Danilevskii, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii returned to the
field research that they had initiated and in the winter of 1849-1850 devoted
himself to writing up the results of this research into his dissertation, titled, “Flora
of the Don Region and its Relationship to the Vegetation of European Russia,”
which he defended in 1851. This dissertation was the first of a long line of

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18 Lincoln, Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, 15-16.
academic works that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii composed during the next sixty-plus years.

Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii cultivated many varied interests by this point in his young adulthood, but his primary interests were scientific or scholarly. Unlike many of this generation, he never devoted himself fully to the path of a social radical and instead chose to work for change within the system. Although he forewent the radical path, he was very devoted throughout his life to both the improvement and development of the Russian Empire and those less privileged within it, including the plight of the peasantry. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii soon found, during these years of the middle of the nineteenth century, that the best way for him to promote Russian advancement and reform was through the pursuit of scientific and geographical research. The natural sciences and geography held great potential for studying the problems of Russian society and shedding light on what could be done to improve the lot of the lowest classes, while also bringing up the level of the state at the same time. In 1849, he became a member of the newly-born Russian Geographical Society and devoted increasing attention to his study of geography in the next several years, which led to a long career through the RGO. He took up a post immediately as bibliographer of the library of the Russian Geographical Society, though at that time the publications of the society were still quite meager. He was charged with the job of building up the library, which he continued to do until 1851.19

19 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Memuary, I: 190. It should be noted that the Russian Geographical Society's library in St. Petersburg today has an impressive collection of holdings, including the
Although he exhibited many varied interests, scholars of the Russian Geographical Society who have studied Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s life seem determined to portray him, above all his other interests, as a geographer.

Consider the following lines from Eduard Murzaev’s *V Dalekoi Azii: ocherki po istorii izucheniiia srednei i tsentral’noi Azii v XIX-XX vekakh* (*In Distant Asia: Essays on the History of the Study of Middle and Central Asia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*):

If you were to ask Petr Petrovich Semenov the question of which one of these is he - a geographer, a geologist, a statistician, an expert on artwork or a statesman- he, I am sure, would answer in no time,-that he is a geographer. Geography was definitely his true calling, but although this was his specialty it is important to realize that he had many different pursuits. There are three types of geographers: explorers, experts on particular regions, and organizers [of information]. Petr Petrovich was all of these and more. 20

Soviet-era scholars of the Geographical Society portrayed Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii as a *specialist* of geography, which was more in line with Soviet educational training. The Soviet-era publications focused attention on Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii strictly as a geographer and not as the multi-disciplinary scholar that he was. 21 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was a highly-versatile scholar and

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21 One example of this was the essay written by Berg titled “Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii kak geograf” (Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii as Geographer), which was first published in a Soviet-era study dedicated to the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth and
statesman, who dabbled in history, politics, social reform, statistics, botany, volcanism, and the fine arts. But perhaps it is best to characterize him as a geographer because of the broad definition of what it meant to be a geographer during his time. As will become clearer below, Petr Petrovich adopted the model of geographic science from Berlin, Germany, which was to see geography as a melding of natural scientific information and observations with an understanding of the people who lived in particular lands. Geography entailed a broad synthesis of scientific and ethnographic thought, making it an ideal tool of empire.

In 1851, Semenov-Tian'-'Shanskii was encouraged by the RGO to get involved in their project of translating Carl Ritter's Asia, which was an exhaustive, multi-volume, and highly-influential geographical description of the Asian continent. The Russian Geographical Society was interested in translating and publishing those parts of Asia which most concerned Russia, particularly “...Russia and the countries adjoining it, namely the Chinese Empire, Turan, and Iran...” Semenov-Tian'-'Shanskii became particularly involved in translating those sections of the work that dealt with the geography of Central

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22 Carl Ritter actually began the project of publishing on world geography in 1822 with the publication of the first volume of Zemlevedeniia (Physical Geography), which focused on Africa. In 1832, Ritter shifted his attention to the Asian continent and published the first volume of Zemlevedeniia Azii. He would publish one volume every year for the rest of his life. Sukhova, Karl Ritter i geograficheskata nauka v Rossii, 13.

23 Ritter, Zemlevedenie Azii. 1: 4-5.
Eurasia and East Asia. In his introduction to the first volume, Semenov-Tian'-Shanski mentioned that Carl Ritter should be credited with creating the idea of comparative geography, which drew comparisons among geographical features located on different continents or comparisons within the same continent of two or more features. He also found that Ritter divided the study of geography into four different sub-fields: Mathematical Geography, Physical Geography, Ethnography, and Statistics. Most interesting of these was the inclusion of ethnography as a sub-field of geographical study. Semenov-Tian'-Shanski found that Ritter saw ethnography, for geographic study, as a study in the relationship between the people and the land. 24 The inclusion of ethnographic research in the work of the RGO's missions to Central Eurasia must have been influenced by this particular point, given the society's strong emphasis on ethnography.

There were a few other interesting developments regarding Semenov-Tian'-Shanski's translation of Ritter's work. Semenov-Tian'-Shanski found that many of the geographical terms which Ritter used had no equivalents in Russian language. Therefore, one of the contributions of this translation was to introduce new terms into Russian for geographical features. 25 This was just one way, of many to come in the next few years, in which Semenov-Tian'-Shanski would inscribe a notion of language and a new intellectual framework for Russian geographers and the Russian nation itself. Through this molding and shaping of

24 Ibid., I: 7.

25 For example, Semenov-Tian'-Shanski translated the term hochland (highland) into Russian as nagor'e. He also translated niederung (lowland) as nizmennost'. Ibid., I: 11-12.
language, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii exerted enormous influence on the work to come in the spheres of geography and science in the Russian empire. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s research in geography, the natural sciences, and ethnography established a paradigm of research on the Central Eurasian region. The many who followed him, many of whom were either directly involved in the Russian Geographical Society and some of whom were indirect agents of the organization, advanced the Russian Empire’s knowledge of these crucial areas of science. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was among the first of the Russian scholar-travelers in Central Eurasia to advance research that was reflective of earlier Western European scholarship in the natural sciences and geography.

In doing his translation of Carl Ritter’s work, Petr Petrovich’s interest in the Central Eurasian region was piqued and he quickly became a leading expert on the area, though he had never personally visited there. The first volume of his translation of Asia was published in 1856, and focused on the geographical description of Mongolia, Manchuria, and Northern China. An enormous amount of intellectual labor went into this translation, as the first volume alone consisted of about seven-hundred and fifty pages of text. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s translation of this volume was a precursor of many remarkable intellectual and scientific achievements to come.

In 1851 Petr Petrovich was also appointed as secretary of the Physical Geography section of the Russian Geographical Society, a position he became

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26 For more on Ritter’s scientific theories and the significant impact that his ideas had on Russian geography, see Sukhova, Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii.
well-suited for while doing the translation of Ritter’s masterwork of physical geography. He held this position until leaving for an extended stay abroad (1853-55) and during the time of his important research mission to the Tian Shan (1856-57). After his return later in the decade, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii again took on a leadership role in the society, which would be a constant for him for the rest of his life. It was also during the early 1850s that Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii befriended and married Vera Aleksandra Chukhova. They were married in 1851, but she died of tuberculosis shortly after the birth of their son, Dmitrii, in November 1852. At the same time as her illness and death, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii himself became ill with typhoid and was recommended to go abroad to regain his health, which he did in 1853. The long period of his recovery was also one of great intellectual discovery for Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, as his recuperative efforts drew him along the path of a scholar-traveler. He took up walking tours and long hikes to build up his strength and also to experiment with the geographic surroundings, a topic taken up in the next section.

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From 1853 until 1855 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii lived in Europe and did not return to Russia. These years were spent studying in Berlin, traveling around Europe on excursions, regaining his health, cultivating an interest in artwork, and developing a keen interest in the geography of Central Eurasia. During much of this time he attended lectures at the University of Berlin, where he became personally acquainted with Carl Ritter and Alexander von Humboldt, two scholars who had a profound impact on his own ideas and whose research interests in Asia soon became part of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s own intellectual pursuits. Ritter and Humboldt had a major impact not just on the young Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, but several generations of Russian scientific scholars. Both men were unanimously elected in 1846 as the first foreign members of the Russian Geographical Society, along with the British scholar Roderick Murchison, who had been instrumental in helping to organize the RGO a few years earlier. 29

Humboldt particularly exerted a major influence on scholarship globally. His intellectual legacy was to promote the natural sciences and promote the importance of measurement and classification of the environment. Humboldt also promoted the quantification of scientific research and his worldwide influence is difficult to overestimate in this period. Countless scientists during the nineteenth century developed an entirely new worldview based on his intellectual

29 Sukhova, Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii, 89-90.
contributions, which emphasized field research and travel to distant geographic regions. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was absorbed by Humboldt's descriptions of his heroic and acclaimed explorations of the Americas and stimulated his own interest in making expeditions of epic scientific proportions.

Pratt has characterized Humboldt's travels through the Americas in the following way:

Humboldt's 'aesthetic mode of treating subjects of natural history' re-enacted America in a primal state from which it would now rise into the glory of Eurocivilization. In the myth that followed from his writings (and for which Humboldt must not be held solely responsible) America was imagined as unoccupied and unclaimed terrain; colonial relations were offstage; the European traveler’s own presence remained unquestioned. I have called this configuration an anti-conquest, expressing an incipient expansionist project in mystified fashion.\(^{30}\)

As Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii continued his work on the Russian translation of Ritter's *Geography of Asia*, Ritter showed a particular interest in acquainting Petr Petrovich with information on the geography of China and Central Eurasia. Ritter's study of Asian geography showed a remarkable synthesis of both European and Chinese source materials. Ritter seemed to realize the importance that an understanding of Chinese sources would have to gaining insight into the Central Eurasian region. He conveyed to Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii that as Ritter's translator and commentator, he had the possibility to carry forward this work. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii wrote that it was Ritter's opinion that "[I was in] the real position [of acquiring more] geographic information about this part of Asia, [and was capable of becoming] closer [to the subject] then he [(Ritter) could]."\(^{31}\)

\(^{30}\) Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 181-82.

contemporary historian Natalia Georgievna Sukhova has previously argued that Carl Ritter also had an enormous impact on the ideas of many Russian geographers of the time and that his ideas helped moved forward the work of the RGO itself. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii played a major role in conveying Ritter’s ideas to the Russian scientific community in future years, as evidenced in the travel reports of subsequent scholars, which often mimicked both Ritter and Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s style of reporting.

Besides getting closely acquainted with the physical geography of Central Eurasia through his relationship with Ritter and his translation work, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also developed a personal interest in Chinese language and history during his time at Berlin University. Ritter encouraged him to develop this interest so that he could utilize Chinese sources for his own future work. While in Berlin University, Petr attended the lectures of Professor Schott on Chinese language and literature. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii wrote that he never mastered Chinese, but was able to understand the basic form of the language enough to

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32 From Sukhova’s book, see the chapter titled “Ritter and Russia” on the connections between his ideas and those of Russian geographers (esp. 71-89). Page 89 begins Sukhova’s discussion on the RGO and Ritter. Sukhova, Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii. For a more succinct overview of Ritter’s ideas on physical geography as recognized through the history of European global discovery, see Carl Ritter, Istoriiia zemlevedeniia i otkrytii po etomu predmetu (St. Petersburg, Izd. O.I. Baksta, 1864).
understand "the Chinese weltanschauung (world view) and the history of China."  

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's study of Chinese language and history combined with his close personal work with Ritter piqued his interest in making a personal exploration of the Tian Shan Mountains. He made the following observation about how this intellectual interest developed:

My work in Asian geography acquainted me over the course of the last few years to the circumstances with all that was known about Inner Asia. . . . [it was] particularly interesting for me the most central of the Asian mountain ranges—the Tian-Shan, on which there had still never stepped the foot of a European traveler, and was known only through the scant Chinese sources, naïve repetitions of that information, which was collected some time about the Tian-Shan. [This information was] singularly collected [about the Tian-Shan] by Buddhist missionaries in the 4th and 7th centuries—the Chinese [missionaries] Faxian and Xuanzang.

Ritter's information on the physical geography of the Tian Shan Mountains was largely speculative, never having visited them himself. His information was gleaned from a wide variety of source materials, mostly of travelers and traders who visited the region centuries before. His extensive discussion of the Tian

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33 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Memuary, I: 255. It is interesting to note that it was necessary at Berlin to have four students in order for the class to exist. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and his fellow-scholar Ferdinand von Richthoffen were joined by two Protestant missionaries in their studies with Professor Schott. Ibid., I: 255-56.

Shan Mountain region appears in the second volume of his *Physical Geography of Asia*. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also translated the third volume, which dealt with the physical geography of the Altai-Saian Mountains range along the Russian/Chinese border. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's introduction states that this area, like the Tian Shan area of volume II, is very interesting for physical-geographical and ethnographic reasons. He finds that the Altai-Saian area is the "most interesting in physical-geographical and ethnographic relations [of] Siberia proper." It must be underscored that Ritter's work established a paradigm of thinking geographically and scientifically about the Central Eurasian region. This massive multi-volume work was a major step in the scientific documentation of the region, but undoubtedly Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, during his translation of this work, identified the potential for pushing the documentation further. Unlike Ritter, to whom these Central Eurasian lands were distant, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's position as a prominent citizen of the Russian Empire steered him towards an interest in further scientific examination of lands right under the Russian-tsarist nose. Ritter's emphasis on the Chinese sources may have also alerted Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii to the urgency of bringing Russian explorers to the region, if for nothing else than to compete with the Qing.

While living in Europe, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii made numerous travels to the Swiss Alps, cities in Germany, Paris, and Mt. Vesuvius, among other areas of Central and Western Europe. He made at least seventeen trips up Mt. Vesuvius.

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36 Ibid., III: i.
during 1854-55, which were mainly done to study its volcanic characteristics, which Ritter had hypothesized could bear comparison to the Tian Shan.

Humboldt had made earlier observations on vulcanization in his American travels. This time allowed him to also broaden his perspective on the conditions of the lower classes worldwide. While traveling around Central Europe, Petr Petrovich observed that the living conditions of the Russian peasants were much worse than that of anything that he found in Central Europe. He wrote that, "in comparison with the seeming poverty and slovenliness of the homes, clothing, and food of the serf population in Central Russia, the prosperity, cleanliness, and tidiness in which these people lived [in Germany], gained as a result of their own free labor, made a painful impression on me." Petr Petrovich made a number of excursions and expeditions during these years abroad, which honed his skills as a young geographer and for the first time acquainted him with mountains that he could see and touch. He wrote in his memoirs, "I was pulled to the mountains, which I, having studied completely geographically through theory, [had] never seen [before] in my life."

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also spent time cultivating an interest in art. He showed particular interest in the Dutch and Flemish artists and continued to build up his collection long after his return to Russia later in the 1850s. By late in life, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii had amassed one of the largest and most distinguished art collections (mostly drawings and paintings) in the world and donated them to

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the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg a few years before his death. This large collection of artwork was evidence of the wealth that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii had at his disposal. This wealth seems to largely have been as a result of his family inheritance, but was also likely due to the high social and political position he found himself in by the second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly during his golden years on the eve of the Great War.

During the 1850s Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii first met the Kazak Chokan Valikhanov and Grigorii Potanin, whose father was a Cossack, in Western Siberia. In traveling from Petersburg to Semipalatinsk in preparation for his journey to the Tian Shan Mountains, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii met Valikhanov and Potanin at the imperial metropole of Omsk in late spring of 1856. Valikhanov had spent some time in Omsk and was well-connected with the Russian elite social and intellectual scene there. Fedor Dostoevskii became an important and highly-sympathetic friend of Valikhanov's. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was very impressed by the young Kazak scholar. Judging by his

39 The Hermitage periodically presents exhibitions devoted to the Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii collection. One such exhibition, mainly of Dutch and Flemish paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was on display at the museum during October 2006 until January 2007.

40 Valikhanov made a number of friends in Omsk of importance to Russian and Central Eurasian history. According to source materials, Valikhanov's two closest friends in Omsk were Fedor Dostoevskii and former Petrashevtsy S.F.Durov. Both of these men were in Omsk serving time as political exiles.

41 A letter dated December 14, 1856 from Dostoevskii to Valikhanov confessed to a mutual love of each other and indicated Dostoevskii’s strong support for Valikhanov. See ORRNB, f. 262, no. 5, l. 1.
description of Valikhanov's family lineage, he seemed equally impressed by his family's close relationship to the tsar. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii took credit for suggesting to the Russian military leader and Governor-General of Western Siberia Gustav Ivanovich Gasfort to utilize Valikhanov on spying and diplomatic missions to Eastern Turkestan. Valikhanov went on a mission to Kashgar not long after his trip across the Kazak and Kyrgyz steppe. This was considered an extremely dangerous mission and one which Valikhanov was uniquely suited for, given his knowledge of the cultures and languages of the area and his Kazak ethnicity. On this trip, Valikhanov disguised himself in order to blend in with the Kashgar environs. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii wrote the following about Valikhanov and his trip to Kashgar:

Ch.Ch. Valikhanov was the single most capable officer at that time, in the staff of general-governor, who, being sent in a...Kirghiz costume to Kashgar, had the possibility, because of his maturity and talent, to collect precious (for Russia) pieces of information about the contemporary situation of not only Kashgar, but also all of the Alti-Shar and elucidate the causes of the disturbances that were occurring in Chinese Turkestan at that time. 42

Valikhanov spent the next few years carrying out expeditions, some under the support of the RGO and others under support of the Russian military, across contemporary Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Western China. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's suggestion of utilizing Valikhanov on missions to Eastern Turkestan launched his brilliant, though short-lived, academic career. Valikhanov then emulated Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's style of research reports and followed his lead in putting geographic observations and ethnographic conclusions at the

42 Valikhanov, Izbrynnye proizvideniia, 7.
forefront of his reports’ priorities. Potanin also directly benefited from his interactions with Semenov-Tian’-Shańskii. Potanin first utilized Petr Petrovich’s financial support and personal connections to travel to St. Petersburg to continue his education. Later Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was also responsible for the organization and support of Potanin’s first RGO-sponsored expedition. Their professional relationship, in which both men were heavily involved in the exploration and scientific documentation of the Central Eurasian space, would continue until well into the twentieth century. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s support for Valikhanov and Potanin would be echoed again later in the nineteenth century, as he was responsible for the cultivation and support of many of the Russian Geographical Society’s scholar-travelers, including Nikolai Przheval’skii.

1856-1857 Expedition to the Tian Shan Mountains Region

Before undertaking his major expedition to Central Eurasia, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii wrote in an 1855 article about the Russian role in Central Eurasia. His comments reflect a common opinion that Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii and many of his contemporaries had of the Russian imperial mission in Asia. He wrote that, “Russia moves forward, as Providence itself has ordained, in the general interests of humanity: the civilizing of Asia.” Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii believed that the Russian colonization of the region would not repeat the tragedies associated with
the Spanish colonization of South America or the British colonization of North America. "Rather they [the Russians] gradually assimilate [the half-wild tribes of Central Asia and the Far East] to their civilization, to their social life and their nationality." Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's vision of empire was of a bloodless yet forceful conversion and assimilation of the non-Russian populations of Central Eurasia. He was inspired by this civilizing project, which he saw as purely benevolent for the peoples it impacted and purely beneficial for the empire it served. The Tian Shan expedition would represent his first major step towards the idealistic goals of a civilizing mission for Russia in Asia.

As mentioned earlier, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's journey was quite meticulously organized beforehand. In fact, he considered this expedition as the fulfillment of his "cherished dream" to journey to Central Eurasia. The basic and primary objective of the expedition was clear: to find out if the Tian Shan Mountains had glaciers and/or volcanoes (as Alexander von Humboldt had hypothesized). He did find glaciers there, but no sign of volcanic activity. But in the course of the journey, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii found more information about other geographic areas. He found that Lake Issyk-kul was not a tributary of the Chu River, contrary to Ritter and Humboldt's assumptions. He also collected ethnographic information on the region's peoples. In addition, his journey supported the future imperialist ambitions of Russia in the southern Central

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43 Quoted in Richard Wortman, “Russian Noble Officers and the Ethos of Exploration” unpublished paper, 12. See also Bassin, Imperial Visions, 203-04.

44 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Travels in the Tian'-Shan’, 3.
Eurasian region by spurring on a series of future explorers and an increasing zeal for dangerous expeditions to unknown lands. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's expedition provided geographical knowledge of a region that mostly fell under Russian control within the next decade, southern Turkestan. Although the information that he collected on this expedition was far from exhaustive, it represented some crucial first steps in the southward advance of Russian colonial interests. The route of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s journey was to travel beyond the current borders of the Russian Empire, something that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs frowned upon. He chose to instead cloak the true intentions of his expedition (to reach the highest points of the Tian Shan Mountains and cross into foreign territory), and instead propose officially to only explore areas further north. The Russian Geographical Society, which at that point had not become the overt supporters of empire in Central Eurasia that they would become later, only reluctantly provided financial backing for Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s journey, and only a minimal amount of financial support at that. But Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was content to have their institutional backing for this initial venture, hoping that his success on this expedition would lead the society to finance more travels to the region in the future.45

There are a few points about Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s findings from this expedition that come through most clearly. One is that he was thoroughly committed to documenting the flora and fauna not only of the Tian Shan itself, but also of the entire path leading up to the mountains from Semipalatinsk.

45 Lincoln, Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, 23-24.
southwards. His descriptions are often in the form of comparisons to sites he visited during his earlier travels in Europe. Another point, which is an important aspect of this travelogue and will become a crucial aspect of future RGO scholars' research reports, is that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii diverts at times from his mission of documenting the environmental qualities of the region by making some ethnographic observations of the many peoples whom he encounters. It should also be noted that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's report reflects a hierarchical notion of empire, as demonstrated through his description of different individuals and ethnic groups in his travel account. The way that he established connections, the people whom he visited on this journey, and how he chose to address the individuals whom he encountered were all indicative of how Petr Petrovich viewed himself within the workings of this expanding Russian colonial presence in Central Eurasia. This "other-ing" of the peoples of Central Eurasia is a process that became progressively more oppositional and polarized as the century progressed and as "others" followed (both literally and figuratively in so many ways) in Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's footsteps.

**Classifying the Environment**

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's diaries contain many detailed descriptions of the environment and the flora and fauna of the region. Armed with the Linnaean
classification system, which he had mastered from his study in Berlin, Semenov-
Tian'-Shanskii thoroughly investigated the environment and documented plant
and animal life using this system. This led to his identification of many new
species of plant life and an extensive increase in the knowledge of what this space
contained for scientific and geographic interest. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s
language in his travelogue is reflective of the new global and scientific
consciousness and language that had become a firm part of many European
scientific scholars’ lexicon earlier. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was one of the first
of a wave of Russian scholars who became versed in the neologisms of scientific
classification, and as noted above, even participated in the inscribing of new
geographical and scientific descriptive language, conveying new terms to Russian
scholars and peoples.

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii included extremely long lists of plants that he
collected on his journey in his travel reports. He also demonstrated a virtual
obsession and a genuine passion in collecting and documenting this information.
He also took great pride in identifying new species and later (re)naming them for
Western scientific audiences.\textsuperscript{46} Consider the following quote, demonstrating the
heroic role that he saw for himself in science:

\begin{displayquote}
The 19 June was one of the \textbf{most successful} days of my
journey...[because] with a thorough investigation...I was able to discover
six completely new species of plants; four while still in the forest zone,
and two in the alpine zone.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{displayquote}

\textsuperscript{46} Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, \textit{Travels in the Tian'-Shan'}, 125-26.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 177.
At times, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii seemed lost in his work to identify and classify the plants that he encountered. His documentation of these, through long lists of the Latin names gives an indication of the fanatical lust he had for collecting scientific information. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii extracted a high degree of pleasure from his work. At one point, in which he came upon an abundance of new plant species during his final ascent up the Tian Shan, he wrote that, “I spent three enjoyable hours in the meadows of the sub-alpine zone collecting plants...”\(^48\) In another section, he noted that, “At the top of Alaman ridge I spent four hours collecting plants and samples of rocks and making hypsometric observations, which were successful because my bottle of spirits, which was this time in the care of Adamsart [a Kirghiz sultan who served as a guide for Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii during one leg of his journey], had not been drunk.”\(^49\) For Petr Petrovich, scientific documentation and collection of specimens seemed a labor of love, surpassing even his love of drink or other comforts.

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s passion for scientific discovery and commitment to classifying this information was evident throughout his diaries. In one three-day period in July of 1857 he collected and “registered” no less than 150 plant species, which are documented in his study.\(^50\) He also made notes of locales that were along his route to the Tian Shan, demonstrating in some of his findings his

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 181.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 67.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 207-08.
implicit role in the imperialist project. For example, in describing one area along
the road he found that it would be a good climactic and soil zone for cereal crops,
“(I was convinced) that this remarkably fertile locality, if it made room for a fairly
strong Russian colonization, would immediately become one of the stable strong
points of our dominion in Middle [Srednia] Asia.”51 This comment is
particularly important evidence that Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s scientific research
had a two-fold mission: to benefit the larger body of European scientific
knowledge, and to benefit the Russian state’s efforts at colonization and Central
Eurasian hegemony.

Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s observations of the flora and fauna of the area, and
his research and documentation of their qualities reflected his earlier involvement
with Ritter and Humboldt, and the degree of cataloguing and classification that
Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii carried out in this Tian Shan expedition made him one
of the first Russian scholars to speak in the language of Humboldtian science.
This language held enormous potential for the state, as it provided a system of
classification of the environment, allowing the state to exert a newfound degree of
control and understanding of the environment and its characteristics. This
typology could then be replicated in the classification of other elements of
society, including animal life, human beings, and geographic categories. The
efficiency of the Humboldtian/Linnaean language, it was believed, held great
potential as well for “knowing” the empire and gaining the crucial samopoznanie
that so many Russians yearned for at mid-century.

51 Ibid., 59.
Comparing Europe and Asia

There is a strong comparative aspect to Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's observations of the environment. He often employed references from his earlier travels in Central Europe to compare to geographical features that he located in Central Eurasia. These comparisons often lent a familiarity to his observation of Central Eurasian geography that could also make the region seem more hospitable in its approximation of European sites. For example, during his journey to the Tian Shan, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii stopped to take in the view of the Kora River Valley, which he noted "reminded me of the beautiful valleys of Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen." For Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, the Tian Shan Mountains were beautiful, but their beauty must be quantified and categorized in relation to the Alps. There are a number of comparisons that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii draws between the mountainous heart of Asia and that of Europe.

He wrote that

Dzasyl-kul' was visible from this enormous height, just like Lake Brienz from the slopes of the Faulhorn; only from the right side of the knoll, which I had measured, and which our Kirghiz guides called Kyz-imchek (Virgin's breast), the view of it was limited. A high wall of needles hid Talgar peak from us to a certain extent, and despite its steepness, was enveloped in snow cover, from which protruded black teeth and needles, similar to the Aiguilles du Midi in the Mont Blanc group, and absolutely inaccessible.\(^{53}\)

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 128.
He also compared the Charyn River's width to that of the Aare near Interlaken in Switzerland. Two mountain groups that the Kazaks called the Kuiandy and the Alaman Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii likened to the Dents du Midi. The Issyk waterfall struck him as akin to the picturesque qualities of the Swiss Giessbach Falls, a prominent European tourist attraction of the time on Lake Brienz.54

Travel theorists have argued that by drawing these kinds of comparisons, travelers could also assert a degree of power or control over the environment. James Buzard has written on the role that the picturesque had in many of these kinds of comparisons that were made by travelers worldwide. Through this kind of logic, a particular space could be alternatively viewed as monotonous and unworthy of comment; spectacularly unusual; or pleasingly picturesque in a way that makes it comparable to another well-known spot, usually in Western Europe. Buzard has also noted how, theoretically, anything or any spot could be considered picturesque. Its identification by the observer/traveler was a projection of their power or control over the environment. Buzard wrote that

54 Ibid., 75.
Chief among the motifs under consideration here and often embracing the others is *picturesqueness*, a concept which by the mid 1820s had outgrown the landscape studies of its eighteenth-century origins, broadening its applications to include cities and their inhabitants and extending its range of metaphors as well, taking as models not only landscape painting but also such related visual arts as drama and *tableaux vivantes*. Repeatedly in nineteenth-century travel-writing the cities, landscapes, and inhabitants of visited regions are stretched on the Procrustean bed of picturesqueness.\(^{55}\)

Though Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was writing several decades after the Western-European fascination with the picturesque had reached its apogee during the Romantic era, his observations still reflect or hark back to the same basic concept. By asserting his knowledge of these Western-European sites, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was able to belittle the Central Eurasian environment, to bring it under the realm of the known, and to assert his own and Russia's own dominance over the area.

Louise McReynolds has written poignantly on the history of tourism and traveling in pre-socialist Russia, and provides a wider historical perspective on the wider traveler in her chapter titled, “The Prerevolutionary Russian Tourist.” She places the institutional capitalist practice of tourism in Russia as a direct outgrowth of the Great Reforms period which was ushered in at the time of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s journey. In the succeeding decades of the nineteenth century, McReynolds finds that Russians embraced tourism as a support of the imperial mission and as a result of new economic opportunities. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s observations, though, reflect an earlier era of travel as it existed in

Western Europe and thus elements like the picturesque trope were commonly found in his writing. His work predates this transition in the Russian Empire to a commodified travel, which was firmly established in Europe at mid-century, but did not find its way to Russia until at least the 1870s.  

Ethnography as Geographical Science

Although it is obvious that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's natural-scientific findings proved a very valuable source of information for Russian science and imperialism, his ethnographic descriptions were also a frequent diversion in his travel account. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii never received any formal training in ethnography or related subjects, but his diary includes a number of interesting descriptions of the Kazak and Kyrgyz peoples whom he encountered. This can be in part based on the understanding of geographical research that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii acquired from Humboldt and Ritter, which of course emphasized research that included a strong ethnographic component. All three scholars (Humboldt, Ritter, and Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii) believed that a key component of geographical research was information on the people that inhabited the lands

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studied. The relationship between the peoples and the land was of utmost
importance for the science of geography.

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii spent many days and nights in the company of
Kazak and Kyrgyz nomads and often, like the later RGO-sponsored explorers to
Central Eurasia, relied on their hospitality for his survival. In this description of a
night spent in a iurta (Central Eurasian dwelling), notice Semenov-Tian'-
Shanskii's culturally descriptive, evocative, and sentimental language, which
contrasts with his descriptive natural-scientific sections:

When we went into the iurta...we found there rich Tashkent carpets
already spread out, prepared for our stay overnight. Soon a friendly fire
began to burn in the middle of the iurta...To begin with, there appeared
kumys [fermented horse's milk], then we drank tea, and then mutton, the
usual expression of hospitality, was served. The Sultan said his prayers,
then we were given beautiful Bukharan copper kungamy (wash-hand-
basins), and all of us washed our hands and set about our supper, after
which the owners of the iurta and inhabitants of the aul [Central Eurasian
village or small community] withdrew, and the Sultan and I lay down on
the silk pillows which had been prepared for us. The fire went out.
Through the aperture at the top of the iurta we saw the stars begin to
glisten. To the accompaniment of the melancholy and monotonous
singing of the Kirghiz (Kazaks) guarding the herds which surrounded us,
we were soon fast asleep.57

One is struck by the sense of comfort and support that Semenov-Tian'
Shanskii felt from his Kazak hosts. In this excerpt, it is also evident that
Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was not satisfied with merely collecting the "hard data"
on the environment, but was also striving to increase Russian "understanding" of
Central Eurasian peoples. He does this in part through his mention of Central
Eurasian terminology, but also through evocative ethnographic descriptions. His

57 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Travels in the Tian'-Shan*, 68.
journal is likewise valuable for the information that can be read between the lines about Kazak or Kyrgyz cultures. Take, for example, the following passage in which Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii describes his encounter with a Central Asian shaman (duana)

...there appeared in his picturesque costume and tall hat of swan’s-down, with tambourines in his hands, a duana, that is a soothsayer, or shaman, as the Siberians call them, since the Karakirgiz [Kyrgyz], like the Kirgiz [Kazaks] of the Great Horde, had the relics of shamanism smouldering under the cloak of Islam, which had not taken deep root. After some customary frenzied leaps, the duana brought himself into a prophetic trance and started to foretell my future. According to his desultory words...he foretold that I would become an ul'kun-tiure (a great dignitary) of the tsar and would have a hundred ranks (or decorations), which, judging by his gesticulation, he saw on me 'with his own eyes,' after which, every time he saw me with a new honour, he fell down at my feet in such exhaustion that he finally fainted. 58

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii demonstrated an interest in the cultures of the people and in his descriptions tried to communicate cultural aspects of the various peoples he encountered. In one description of his negotiations with a Kara-kirghiz (Kyrgyz) manap (local leader), Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii professed a personal knowledge of "Kara-kirghiz customs" and cultural practices. He described the process involved in trying to get the manap, named Umbet-Ala, to become his tamyr (friend or ally) through the exchange of gifts. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii engaged in negotiations with Umbet-Ala to attempt to stop retributive strikes (baranty) by a particular Kyrgyz tribe against neighboring Russian settlement. 59

58 Ibid., 182-83.
59 Ibid., 96-97.
This evidence indicates that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was interested not merely in gaining a scientific understanding of the environment, but also a cultural one. By documenting the “customs” of the region’s peoples, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was advancing Russian attempts at colonization and hegemony. He also seemed intent on establishing at least some minimal diplomatic ties with the peoples whom he encountered. His interaction with Umbet-Ala was indicative of this. Therefore, although scientific research was certainly high on his “to-do list,” he was also interested in diplomatic and cultural matters, a point to be repeated as well in the later travels of Valikhanov, Przheval’skii, and the Potanins. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii devoted a portion of his expeditionary efforts to the establishment of diplomatic ties with the indigenous peoples. Typically, the Russian expeditionary members fared far better in establishing diplomatic ties in the Sredniaia Azia region (including the territories of contemporary Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) more so than in the Tsentral’naia Azia (Western China, Mongolia) region, as those peoples in the Tsentral’naia regions tended to be more suspicious of these foreign travelers than those in the Sredniaia regions, which had already had longstanding trade and diplomatic relations with Russians and the Russian military.
Hierarchies of Empire and the Subaltern

Another point regarding Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's initial travel findings is to note his hierarchical notion of both himself and the peoples whom he encountered in his expedition. Some of the implicit assumptions in his writing demonstrate his close connection to the imperialist project. This can be understood through a reading of the references he made to the various ethnic/national groups with whom he interacted. Petr Petrovich's language was in some ways a reflection of the classificatory process that he used to analyze environments. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s discussion and description of the various ethnic and national groups which he encountered on the 1856-57 journey exhibited an implicit hierarchical conception of people based on race, nationality, and proximity to the imperialist power structure. At the top were highly-educated, powerful, or rich Russians living in or around Petersburg. Second on the list were provincial officials, who were usually Russians living in the borderland cities, military outposts or checkpoints, villages, or settlements. They were lower than regular Russians because they were detached from the high-culture influences of the capital. Third on the hierarchy were the non-official Russians, usually poor peasants, who lived in the provincial borderlands, some of whom served in military or other official capacities. Next were Cossacks, who were further removed from Russians in terms of education and "culture."
Those at the top of the hierarchy were referred to by name and/or rank. Their characters were described in relatively full detail, and Petr Petrovich went into description at times of these individuals' careers and family lives, treating them as "whole" individuals. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii never referred to anyone from provincial low-ranking Russians and further down the hierarchy by name, unless they were Kazak or Kyrgyz leaders (usually manaps or sultans) who were somehow befriended by Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii or who offered diplomatic or some other assistance to the expedition. Unless they were local elites or rulers, they were usually referred to as "my Cossack interpreter," for example. Fifth in Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's hierarchy were Kazaks. They were lower than Cossacks because their culture was nomadic with relatively few traces of Russian influence. However, they were higher than the Kyrgyz in Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's typology because the Kazaks of the Middle and Greater Hordes that he encountered in his journey had earlier accepted nominal allegiance to Russia, and the Kyrgyz had not. For Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, the Kyrgyz seemed to embody the Other at this period in their interactions. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii commonly deployed adjectives like "wild" or "savage" to describe the Kyrgyz. It should also be noted that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii distinguished varying degrees of civilizational level for different hordes, clans, or tribes of the Kazaks and Kyrgyz. Therefore, not all Kazaks were on the same level, nor were all Kyrgyz.

60 For a good overview of the political history of Russian colonization of the Kazak steppe, see Olcott, The Kazakhs. For an interesting cross-cultural study of the Russian colonial administration's negotiations with the legal traditions of the Kazaks, as well as a useful overview of the period, see Martin, Law and Custom in the Steppe.
The added fact that a number of Kyrgyz tribes were in conflict during Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's journey contributed to his more negative portrayal of the Kyrgyz.

As Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and his traveling detachment got further away from the Russian-settled areas and more into the "heartland" of Central Eurasia, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's sense of his own superiority as part of this imperialist hierarchy became more evident. His responsibility in this effort seemed to weigh on him at times, such as in this passage in which he feared possible attacks from Kyrgyz: "On me rested the responsibility for the lives of almost a hundred people and for the success of the whole enterprise."61 This inflated notion of self could be attributed to his imperialist notions of hierarchy. Interestingly, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's journey would have never been possible if not for the help of the numerous Cossack, Kazak, and Kyrgyz guides and interpreters whom he and his group relied on throughout the journey for support, though he never gave them formal credit for their contributions in his travel report. The expeditionary crew typically spent their nights in the hospitality of Kazaks or Kyrgyz. When their group could not locate a iurta or an aul to house and feed them, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and company seemed quite desperate. Throughout this journey, they relied heavily on local guides and interpreters to get to their destinations.

Therefore, the very ones whom he identified as nameless and faceless were

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probably the very ones on whom the "success of the whole enterprise" truly rested.

Linking Travel with Imperial Strategic Concerns

By the spring of 1857, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii moved north to Omsk to make preparations for the last part of his journey, an ascent up the Tian Shan Mountains. He had earlier befriended the Governor-General of Western Siberia Gasfort and engaged in frank discussions with him there. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii argued that the region was still highly unstable, with infighting among many Kyrgyz a common occurrence that would make the last leg of his journey particularly difficult. Most notably from his discussions with Gasfort, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii argued for the Russian colonization of the Zailiisk region of the Tian Shan. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii wrote that, "I told him, first of all, that I did not doubt but that his occupation of the Zailiisk region, which would firmly secure peaceful Russian colonization, would make it become one of the pears of Russian power in Asia."\(^{62}\) Petr Petrovich's impressions from the expedition, though not yet completed, had intrigued his interest in the southward movement

of the Russian empire into Central Asia. He also argued to Gasfort that the administrative centers of the empire, which had been based along old Cossack lines along the contemporary borders of today's Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, be moved southward into the region. During the middle of the 1850s, this line extended west to east from the Urals to Orenburg to Siberia and the Irtysh River area. He wrote that he found it completely absurd that we, already having a rather firm foothold in a large portion of Central Asia...continued to maintain our state borders not in front of this area, but behind it, along the old lines of Cossack outposts...Travelling through the domains of the Kirghiz tribes...I was convinced of how difficult it was to administer this nomadic population from Omsk, let along [sic] protect them from the raids and ravages of neighboring tribes from areas not under Russian dominion. 63

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was particularly perplexed about the location of the current forward line of the Russian military administration in Western Siberia, believing it better to move it southwards in order to better deal with the Middle and Greater Horde Kazaks, and in order to better negotiate the differences among the Kyrgyz tribes. He proposed establishing a forward base at Kopal and new settlements at Lepsin, at Urdzharsk in the Semirech’e region, and along the southern slopes of the Tarbagatai. 64 He further argued that by moving the Russian military and administrative offices southward into the aforementioned areas the Russian empire could establish an unyielding presence in the region. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii reasoned that

63 Ibid. (both, sources listed in previous note).

incomparably more may be expected from the newly-occupied Zailiisk region. Here it is possible to build through the support of our colonization the strongest and indestructible bulwark of Russian power and dominion in *Srednei Azii*. 65

He also encouraged Gasfort and the Russian military to connect Almaty with Fort Perovski on the Syr-daria. He called not only for the colonization but also the “scientific research of the acquired region,” which would bring the “luminescence of science” to the darkest interiors of the Asian continent. 66

Following his meeting with Gasfort, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii continued to scout the region, making a number of collections of plants for his report and to carry back for specimens. His attention by May 1857 turned to research on the Kazak peoples outside of Verniy. Among those whom he closely befriended was the Sultan Tezek, whose friendship proved valuable to Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s movement through the homelands of the various Kyrgyz tribes, many of whom were engaged in ongoing disputes and power struggles in wake of the Russian southward advance into their homelands. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii attributed Sultan Tezek’s support for the opportunity that he had to “penetrate” the heart of the Tian Shan region. Petr Petrovich realized that alliances with the indigenous would be key to establishing effective colonization of the zone, particularly given the influence that the Kokand Khanate still had on the region. Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii wrote that

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 195.
I soon came to the conclusion that, with such an ally, I finally could realize my secret dream of laying a path from Russia into the depths of Central Asia, and, even further, into what had been completely inaccessible to geographical science until that time—the heart of the most central of mountain systems of the Asian continent—Tien Shan.67

By the fall of 1857, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s expedition had drawn to a close. The latter part of his account discussed the implications that this expedition had for the advancement of empire. He noted that within two years of the expedition, the Kyrgyz clans of the Bogintsy and the Sarybagish became Russian subjects, allowing the Russian border to “lean upon the snowy crest of the Tian'-Shan'.”68 In the final paragraphs of his account of this journey, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii mentioned his request to General Gasfort to send Chokan Valikhanov on a mission to Kashgar and expressed support for Grigorii Potanin’s education in St. Petersburg.69

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii as Organizer for Central Eurasian Expeditions

Upon completion of his Tian Shan expedition, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii returned to St. Petersburg and turned in a preliminary report of his research


68 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Travels in the Tian'-Shan', 238.

69 Ibid.
findings to the Russian Geographical Society. He also urged the leadership of the society, including the Vice-President of the RGO at that time, Fedor Petrovich Litke, to organize future missions to the area around the Tian Shan Mountains. He argued that more expeditions should be carried out in order to facilitate the "reconnoitering" of these lands which were "still known to no one, [but were] gradually coming under Russian dominion."\(^7\) Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s use here of the Russian word translated as reconnoitering (*rekognosstirovat’*) was likely a result of the influence of Nikolai Przheval’skii, as Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii wrote these words in his *Memoirs* during the early-twentieth century. Przheval’skii, who became a key disciple of Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s work and torch-bearer for the RGO in Central Eurasia, frequently used this term to refer to the work that he did. This term reflects the intense focus of research activities by the scholar-travelers who visited Central Eurasia. It implies an in-depth analysis of the lands and an extraction of information that few other terms can adequately connote.

The RGO and the Russian administration did more than just follow up on Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s recommendations. Following this journey, the society increased its support for explorations, and within a decade the entire territory was firmly under Russian military control. But upon his return to Petersburg in 1857, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s immediate attention turned to the execution of the Great Reforms.

One of the main projects which Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii worked on in this vein over the next several years was the liberation of the Russian serf population. He served on a state committee which studied the issue and produced a voluminous study on the condition of the serfs of Russia on the eve of their liberation. Petr Petrovich later devoted volumes two through four of his Memoirs to documenting his work on this project and recounting the history of the serf liberation in Russia. Perhaps more than at any other time in his career, his work on this project during the late 1850s and early 1860s reflected his earlier interest in bettering Russian society, which was fostered during his student days in St. Petersburg. He was again taking an interest in the social problems of the Russian state, a tendency that harked back to his involvement with the Petrashevtsi and the radical youth of Vasilievsky Island. It is important to note, though, that for Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii this reform work was seen as a pursuit of the same basic mission that his geographic research worked towards. The goal in both matters, as Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii saw it, was a strengthening of the Russian state, although one project was through bettering individual conditions and the other through the "civilizing" of new or little-known peoples and their lands and improving Russian state scientific knowledge of the lands and peoples.

Following the 1856-1857 travels, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii began to take a different intellectual and career path, which he felt would better serve the Russian state. He had already garnered a great deal of attention in intellectual circles prior to his trip to Central Eurasia. His journey to the Tian Shan, though, earned him a

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71 See volumes II-IV of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Memoary.
kind of immortality in Russian scientific circles. After his trip he published his findings in RGO journals and periodicals and gained not only Russian notoriety, but also international attention for his research. This notoriety seemed to only grow with the progress of time. Although his days as an adventurous explorer of Central Eurasia basically ended with the 1856-57 mission, his activities as leader of the Russian Geographical Society, public figure, and prolific scholar were only beginning. His career became a sort of template for future RGO scholars, who undertook ambitious expeditions early in life, published their findings, took high positions in the organization, in turn supported the next generation of scholar-travelers and their expeditions to even more remote and lesser-known destinations, and devoted their mature years to quiet scholarly contemplation and tireless publication of research on subjects pertinent to the RGO.\textsuperscript{72}

Petr Petrovich continued to play an important role in the RGO later in life. He served as the organizations' vice-president for a very long time, was the main writer and organizer behind the enormous effort of compiling a five-volume geographical-statistical dictionary (which was an ongoing project from 1863 until 1885),\textsuperscript{73} and wrote an exhaustive three-volume history of the RGO in 1895.\textsuperscript{74} The society increased its research expeditions under his direction in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, sending expeditions to Tibet, Mongolia, China, and the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{72} To name just two individuals who seemed to follow similar career paths here: Lev Semenovich Berg and Vladimir Afanas’evich Obruchev, both of whom produced academic works which prominently appear in this study.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{73} Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, \textit{Geograficheskoi-statisticheskii slovar’ Rossiiskoi Imperii.}}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{74} Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, \textit{Istoria poluveskoyi deiatel’nosti.}}
Russian Far East. Semenov-Tian'-Shanski was the most crucial individual in the RGO involved in advancing and organizing the expeditions of Valikhanov, Przheval'skii, the Potanins, Kozlov, Roborovskii, and many others.

Semenov-Tian'-Shanski's later life saw the Russian colonization and acquisition of the various Central Eurasian states that had resisted this trend earlier. Therefore, unlike Valikhanov, he lived to see many of the fruits of his scientific labors. In 1888, Semenov-Tian'-Shanski returned to the region, as he was invited to join the inaugural journey of the trans-Caspian railway from Uzun-Ada to Samarkand, allowing him to retrace some of his steps from over thirty years earlier.

Classifying the Empire through Academic Publishing

Among the academic publications of Semenov-Tian'-Shanski, his Geographic and Statistical Dictionary of the Russian Empire (Geografichesko-statisticheskii slovar' Rossiiskoi imperii) was an early publication indicative of the already-imperial nature of the RGO's work. The work provides an

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75 Semenov-Tian'-Shanski, *Travels in the Tian'-Shan*, xxiii.

76 This essay was published in the RGO's journal in 1889. The title of the article, cited in Colin Thomas' introduction, is "Turkestan i Zakaspiiskii krai v 1888 godu po putesvym vpechatleniiam." Semenov-Tian'-Shanski, *Travels in the Tian'-Shan*, xxii-xxiii.

77 Semenov-Tian'-Shanski, *Geografichesko-statisticheskii slovar' Rossiiskoi imperii*. 
alphabetically-ordered cataloguing of the empire, from the smallest village and
hamlets to oblasts, towns, lakes, rivers, mountains, and even monasteries. Each
entry, which was collected by Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii through his work in the
RGO, included historical information, geographical coordinates, and
distinguishing features of the particular entry. The entries also focused attention
on trade, production, population numbers, numbers of churches in particular
areas, number of Muslims or "Old Believers," and other information. This
encyclopedic geographical dictionary reflected the new imperial direction of the
RGO and was representative of how far the organization's attention had moved
towards providing detailed geographic information about the territories under its
control. For Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's academic career, the publication of this
dictionary was further evidence of his commitment to the reform-minded
direction that he wanted to direct the RGO towards. By "knowing" the empire
well, they could better serve its peoples. This same level of determination and
interest in depicting the geographic and demographic characteristics of areas was
later replicated to benefit colonialism.

In anticipation of Russia's participation in the world exhibition at Paris in
1900, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii compiled another impressive resource for the
RGO and the empire. This work, on Russia's Asian territories titled Okrainy
Rossii (The Outlying Areas of Russia), provided an interesting contrast to
Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's dictionary, as it brought to bear the same tools of
analysis utilized in the dictionary, by shifting the focus to the empire's peripheral
zones. According to the foreword, the book intended to demonstrate to peoples of other Western European nations both the cultural and natural-resource riches of Asiatic Russia. Whereas the dictionary had focused on documentation of the empire for its own reference, Okrainy Rossii was Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and the RGO’s attempt to showcase the empire’s peripheral areas to the Western world and prove that Russia was capable of competing with the Western colonizers. This monograph was representative of the tremendous research work that the Russian Geographical Society had done over the past fifty years. It was divided into three major sections (Siberia, Turkestan, and the Caucasus). Each section focused on a particular region of the Russian Empire and conveyed a great deal of information about each region. Each section discussed the geography, climate, cultural and demographic composition, agriculture, livestock, natural resource base, flora, fauna, industry, and economy of a region of Asiatic Russia. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii described the value that Central Asia, Siberia, and the Caucasus had for Russia, comparing these areas as economic metropoles not unlike those that Western Europe possessed worldwide.

Okrainy Rossii is most striking as a compendium of the work that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii had done and indicates one of the ultimate motives that the RGO had in exploring and documenting the details of its peripheries. The empire’s elite planners saw these regions as exhibiting strong potential economic benefits to the state. The research work that the RGO had done during the last half-

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78 This work was published in both Russian and French for display at the exhibition. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Okrainy Rossii: Sibir', Turkestan, Kavkaz i poliarnaya chast' Evropeiskoi Rossii.
century had facilitated the state's inventory of lands already under its control. 

Russia and Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii could boast of those lands and peoples that the Russians had under their control in the same way that France, Great Britain, or the Dutch could of their own colonies. It was a statement of the bounty that the Russian Empire had at its immediate disposal on the eve of its impending downfall. It was also indicative of the mountains of information that the RGO had acquired, much of which was done under the direction of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii himself. By the time of this publication, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii seemed to have felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment and felt himself as part of a successful imperial project. Of course, he lived to see only the beginning of the unraveling of this effort, as he died prior to the 1917 revolutions. Although the empire would collapse shortly after, another more centralized and efficient regime would soon replace it. The new regime owed significant intellectual debt to the scientific and ethnographic methods of collection that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and the RGO established, which would be replicated and improved during the Soviet era.79

Petr Semenov was honored by the tsar with the additional last name "Tian'-Shanskii" upon the fiftieth anniversary of his famed journey in 1906. This commemoration demonstrated the continued notoriety that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii had achieved as well as Russia's sustained interest in the scientific-imperialist project in the early twentieth century, despite its recent military and political setbacks. It also demonstrated the admiration that the Russian state

79 Hirsch, Empire of Nations.
showed towards this landmark expedition and what it represented for Central
Eurasian exploration.
Chapter IV - Valikhanov: Russian Imperialist or Kazak Nationalist?

Dual Identity?

Many of the scholar-travelers discussed in this study relied on the help of local indigenous peoples for the success of their research missions. This was particularly the case on large-scale missions like those of Petr Semenov-Tian’-Shanski to the Tian Shan Mountains in 1856-57 or the later expeditions of Nikolai Przheval’skii to various parts of Central Eurasia in the 1870s and 1880s. At various stages of their missions, these Russian scholars often received help or support from local peoples in the form of food, shelter, interpretation or translations, directions, or other information that would be valuable to their research and travel efforts. Some of the members of missions were actually Central Eurasians, but far more often the people who provided help to the Russian expeditions were volunteers and not official members of the expedition. The Russian Geographical Society and the Russian state realized the importance of employing the help of local peoples in order to benefit their research missions, which in turn benefited the administration and expansion of empire.
Figure 5. Chokan Valikhanov
Figure 6. Valikhanov and Fedor Dostoevsky, 1858.
There is probably not a more prominent or celebrated example of the RGO employing a person from the Central Eurasian region to facilitate their reconnoitering of this terra incognita than that of Chokan Chinggisovich Valikhanov (1835-1865). Unlike most of the supporters or collaborators, he was himself a trained scholar who led his own research missions through the financial and logistical support of the RGO. Valikhanov was first noticed by Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii during their concurrent stays in Omsk in Western Siberia and was later recommended to lead an important, dangerous, and secret Russian mission to

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1 As with Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, there is no shortage of studies devoted to Valikhanov in various ways. This note will list monographs and articles that focus on him as a historical personality. It should be noted that he is often profiled as well in more-broadly-defined works that encompass subjects such as the history of Russian geography. These are too numerous to mention in this study. For Chokan Valikhanov’s collected works, see Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomax, 5 vols. (Almaty: Izd-vo Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, 1961). For a more condensed version of his selected writings, see Valikhanov, Izbrannye proizvedeniiia. For an overview of opinions of Valikhanov by his contemporaries, see A. Akhmetova, Chokan Valikhanov: v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov (Alma-Ata: Kazakhskoe gos. izd-vo, 1964). For a succinct biographical overview of Valikhanov and his close associate Grigorii Potanin, see Ju.N. Bessonov and V.Ia. Yakubovich, Po vnutrennei Azii (Ch.Ch. Valikhanov i G.N. Potanin) Russkie puteshestvenniki (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1947). See also “Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov” CESR 14, no. 1(1966): 25-31. See also Igor Mikhailovich Zabelin, Chokan Valikhanov (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1956). For a recent English-language overview of his biography, see Kermit E. McKenzie, “Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar” CAS 8, no. 3: 1-30. For the RGO historian Lev Semenovich Berg’s summary of Valikhanov’s life and accomplishments, see Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let, 110-12.
Kashgar. Valikhanov was, according to Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, the only person among the Russian scholarly-scientific ranks at that time who could successfully carry out a proposed journey to Western China. This was mainly because of Valikhanov's ethnic identity as a Middle Horde Kazak (in Kazak language they are called the Orta Zhuz), which was considered similar enough to the Kashgaris to pass himself off as one. Chokan is unique among the individuals discussed in this study in that he has been seen both as a major supporter of the Russian imperial project in Central Eurasia and a Kazakophile who devoted much of his brief yet productive life to the acquisition and organization of histories, stories, and legends about the Kazaks and the Kyrgyz. Valikhanov could be seen by some as a conflicted individual, as one who identified with opposing camps. But he never seems to see his identity and his relationship with Russians and Central Eurasians as a conflict of interests. He saw his support for the Russian Empire and his quest for knowledge about the Kazaks and the Kyrgyz as ultimately serving a unitary purpose. Valikhanov believed that the coming together of Russian and Turkic peoples (in Russian sblizhenie) would bring benefits to both groups. Chokan supported the "civilizing mission" of his "own" peoples, making him in the eyes of some an imperial collaborator. However, he himself did not

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Grigorii Potanin might also be considered both a collaborator of the Russian state and a supporter of the autonomy and advancement of Central Eurasian peoples. In his case, he was from a Cossack family and spent much of his life in support of the promotion of Siberian political and cultural advancement. This included a stint as a supporter of the political movement known as "Siberian separatism" and a long career of collecting ethnographic, historical, and literary information about the peoples of Siberia. For more on Potanin, see Chapter Six of this dissertation.
see it this way, believing in the inherent benefits that European civilization, technology, and trade could bring to the steppe. Although he was from a quite different cultural upbringing than most of the individuals discussed in my dissertation (most of whom were Russian), his education and the path that his career took were not unusual. He mastered western scientific methods; traveled widely into little-known territories; tirelessly documented the geographical, scientific, and cultural features of the territory; and contributed to the intense acquisition of information about Central Eurasia which was being hotly debated by scholars in St. Petersburg and in the imperial metropoles. Therefore, although Chokan Valikhanov’s individual identity is rather unique, the tenor of his career and the type of research contributions that he made to the reconnoitering of Central Eurasia were not recognizably different from those of other scholar-travelers.

The Education and Upbringing of a Russian Scholar-Traveler

Chokan, born Mukhammed Khanafiia, was raised on the steppe in the northern part of contemporary Kazakhstan. His family was part of the Middle Horde Kazaks, one of the three major tribes of Kazaks. The Middle Horde lived in an area stretching across the central and northern parts of contemporary
Kazakhstan. Valikhanov’s paternal grandfather Vali was a Kazak khan who could trace his family line back to the sixteenth-century Siberian khan Kuchum. Emperor Alexander I had granted the creation of an estate for Vali, his grandmother Aiganym, and the Valikhanov family in Syrymbet, which was said to be the first European-style home built for and inhabited by Kazaks. One of Vali and Aiganym’s sons was Chokan’s father, Chingis, who served in the Russian imperial administration over the Kirghiz (Kazaks) of Siberia. Chingis Valikhanov was educated and was one of the first Kazaks to learn Russian language. In 1834, at the age of 23, Chingis married Zeinep Chormanova, who became the mother of seven sons and five daughters. Chokan was born to Chingis and Zeinep in November 1835 in Kushmurun. His family spent time between Syrymbet and another small settlement in Northern Kazakhstan, Kushmurun. The Valikhanovs enjoyed close relations with the Russian imperial administration, which gave him and his siblings educational opportunities that were unparalleled among most Kazaks. Chokan’s grandmother Aiganym cultivated particularly close relationships with the Russians throughout her life. She was seen as a great admirer of Russian culture and corresponded frequently with the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the Siberian Committee in St. Petersburg. Her example was clearly an important one.

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3 The other two hordes were the Greater or Elder Horde (Uly zhuz) and the Lesser or Younger Horde (Kishkentai zhuz). The Greater Horde lived in the southeastern part of Kazakhstan. The Younger Horde lived in western Kazakhstan.

4 Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, I: 10-22.

5 Ibid., 11.
in the formation of Chokan Valikhanov's career. She steered her grandson along the path of an educated Kazak man whom she hoped would gain entry to the Russian imperial elite, just as she had done earlier with her son Chingis.

Chokan as a young boy studied in a Kazak village school, where he was encouraged to "zhety zhurtyn tilin bilu." While in school he studied Chaghatai Turkic, Arabic, and Persian. The young Chokan also developed a keen interest in drawing, a pastime that he cultivated in close association with the many Russian scientists, scholars, and military officers who frequently visited the Valikhanov home during their periods of service on the steppe. Chokan enjoyed studying traditional Kazak poetry and legends, which he continued to research throughout his life. He also spent a lot of time developing his interest in falconry, a long-established pastime for many Kazaks. Chokan assisted his father and other family members with the herding of animals, drank kumys, lived some of the time in yurts, and practiced Islam "in the Kazak way." Many Russian observers of the Kazaks found that their practice of Islam was far from conventional. Many Kazak Muslims, including those from the Middle Horde, combined elements of shamanism into a syncretistic blend of the faith. Kazaks were often known for ignoring Muslim restrictions on alcohol and other social vices. From the time Chokan was very young, he also spent many summer days traveling on long-distance excursions around the steppe. His love for independent travel and for

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6 The translation of this Kazak proverb is to "learn the languages of seven peoples." Ibid., 26.

7 Ibid.
the arts from a very young age was typical of that of many of the “cultivated” individuals in my study, most of whom came from privileged backgrounds.

The Valikhanov family’s social and political connections allowed Chokan admittance to the prestigious Siberian Cadet Corps Institute in Omsk in 1847, considered the best educational institution in the region in those years. The Cadet Corps Institute’s curriculum included coursework in a wide range of subjects including, but not limited to, military discipline, world geography, Russian geography, world history, Russian history, Russian and Western European literature, principles of philosophy, botany, zoology, physics, mathematics, geodesy, architecture, natural history, drawing, calligraphy, western languages (Russian, French, and German) and eastern languages (Turkic, Mongol, Arabic, and Persian). Valikhanov studied assiduously and acquired a reputation as a fine student. The fact that he was Kazak also attracted a lot of attention from his teachers and colleagues. While there, he became acquainted with a number of oriental scholars, including Professor Il’ia N. Berezin, who encouraged Valikhanov to pursue his interest in Kazak folk culture. Berezin was a Russian scholar, orientalist, and traveler who visited Iran in 1842. He also traveled across much of Southwest Asia and was an active participant in the Russian Geographical Society. The Omsk intelligentsia at that time consisted of many Russian intellectuals either in exile or in service to the empire in the region and

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8 Ibid., 30.

was an active and talented group of scholars. Valikhanov established friendships and collegial relations with several Russian scholars, and these relationships had an important influence in his own intellectual development. Grigoriy Potanin and Nikolay Iadrintsev were also educated at the Siberian Cadet Corps Institute, both of whom enjoyed long and acclaimed careers in exploration in Central Eurasia. Chokan completed his education in Omsk in 1853. He was not allowed to graduate from the institution and carry out the final year's coursework because of Valikhanov's status as an inorodets (foreigner, or someone ethnically non-Russian), for whom it was forbidden to be educated in the military science subjects that dominated the final year of study. The Omsk Cadet Corps only allowed Russian students to take military science courses and graduate.

In his memoirs, fellow-RGO scholar-traveler and friend of Chokan's, Grigoriy Potanin, noted that Valikhanov like himself fostered an early interest in exploration. He found that Valikhanov had very specific ideas of how he and Potanin would best advance their future careers as explorer-travelers. In frequent conversations over tea and snacks in each others' apartments in Omsk, the young Valikhanov and Potanin charted their future plans. Valikhanov hoped that some

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10 “Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov,” 27.

11 Potanin is one of the main subjects of Chapter Six of this dissertation. Iadrintsev also appears a number of times in this study.

day they would collaborate on explorations across Central Eurasia. Potanin wrote in his memoirs that

when we, Chokan and I, both lived in Omsk, we saw each other often; sometimes he would come over and spend the entire evening [at my apartment], sometimes I would go over to his place. Often, at the time of these meetings, he [Valikhanov] established plans [for] our future travels together.\(^{13}\)

Of the two men, it is clear that at that time Valikhanov was the organizer, planner, and dreamer. Potanin seemed content to follow Valikhanov's lead.

During these discussions, Valikhanov established the following concrete plan for their future success as scholar-travelers:

First, he [Valikhanov] said, we must go to Petersburg and enter the university, in order to prepare for [our] travels. There he would attend the eastern department, and I would be sent to the natural sciences department of the physical-mathematical college; before the time of his travels he would study philology of eastern tribes, and I would establish a collection for the Petersburg botanical gardens and for the zoological museum of the Academy of Sciences. He in his plans would go far away; at that time the border with China was still closed for Europeans, and could only possibly [be crossed] on an incognito journey... He therefore thought of going under cover of some kind of disguise, [and] penetrate to the most distant banks of Lake Kuku-Nor and its surrounding [majestic] mountains of which were published in *Asia Centrale* by Alexander [von] Humboldt. He constantly carried this dream in his head. And [this dream] came to light involuntarily in his casual utterings and gestures.\(^{14}\)

The close friendship of Valikhanov and Potanin was based on their mutual interests in exploring and researching the Central Eurasian region. In years to come, both men would fulfill their dreams, though Valikhanov's life was cut

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\(^{13}\) "Grigori Nikolaevich Potanin... Vospominaniia", red. Nikolai Nikolaevich Ianovskii i dr. [2 ch.] *Literaturnoe nasledstvo Sibiri* VI: 93.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
short. Many years later, Potanin recalled much about Valikhanov in his own memoirs. He even made a final visit to northern Kazakhstan in 1895 to pay final respects to Chokan’s elderly father Chingis.\(^{15}\)

Valikhanov’s educational development was not based solely on his education in this Russian-dominated institution. As mentioned earlier, a major part of his early intellectual development came at the hands of his grandmother Aiganym, who took responsibility for raising him from early on. His grandmother instilled in the young Chokan a love for Kazak folk legends, stories, songs, and poems.\(^{16}\) This part of his education undoubtedly steered him towards his later interest in ethnography and collecting information on Kazak and Kyrgyz folklore. Among his later scholarly achievements in this area was his collection and translation into Russian of the Kyrgyz epic story “Manas,” which is still performed today by many Kyrgyz.\(^{17}\) This achievement has been particularly heralded by many contemporary Central Eurasian scholars. Valikhanov himself argued that “Manas” was like “an encyclopedia, a collection of all the stories, tales, traditions,

\(^{15}\) For Potanin’s memoirs, see ibid. Volumes six and seven of this collection focus on Potanin’s memories. His article on this meeting with Chokan Valikhanov’s father in 1895 was originally published as Grigorii Potanin, “Viite posledniago kirgizskago tsarevicha,” RB 8 (August 1896): 60-88.

\(^{16}\) Valikhanov, Izbrannye proizvedeniia, 5-6.

of all the geographical, religious, [and] intellectual ideas and moral concepts of a
people..., and all this grouped around one person, the *bogatyr* [traditional Kazak
or Kyrgyz warrior] Manas.  

Valikhanov’s Initial Expeditions

Unlike Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, Valikhanov did not enjoy a high position in
the imperial hierarchy. Both men had their first taste of organized long-term
expeditions to Central Eurasia in the middle of the 1850s, but their forays into
exploration were quite different. Whereas Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was allowed
to organize and plan his first expedition, Valikhanov was not and was instead
employed as a subaltern member of an expedition that was led by Russian
military men. This was another of the drawbacks of being an *inorodets* in the
employment of the state—one was only very rarely given positions of authority.
After completing his study in Omsk, Valikhanov was put to work in the staff of
the Governor-General of Western Siberia in Omsk, General Gustav
Khristianovich Gasfort. Although most of his job involved work in Omsk,
Valikhanov was also sent out on short expeditions across Kazakhstan. In 1854 he
accompanied Russian military officer K. K. Gutkovskiy to Kopal in southern

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Kazakh Princeling and Scholar,” 27.
Kazakhstan and in 1855 traveled with Governor-General Gasfort to Central Kazakhstan, Semirech’e and Tarbagatai. In these expeditions, Valikhanov visited regions of Kazakhstan that had only recently fallen under Russian control. He established a reputation as a capable researcher and traveler on these brief expeditions, which led to more involved assignments in the future.¹⁹

Journey to Issyk Kul

His expedition across Kazakhstan southward to Lake Issyk Kul in contemporary Kyrgyzstan in 1856 was planned and coordinated by the Russian Colonel M. M. Khomentovskii, administrator of the Trans-Ili territory, who also accompanied Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii during part of his journey to the Tian Shan Mountains.²⁰ This was a major military and scientific expedition. The military purpose of the mission was to acquire an oath of loyalty from the Bugus clan of the Kyrgyz, who lived in the area of Lake Issyk Kul. The scientific goal of the expedition was to collect topographical information about the Issyk Kul area. Although these were the official goals of the expedition, Valikhanov also made his own observations about the Kyrgyz tribes of the area and provided valuable


²⁰ Ibid., 72. Valikhanov’s “Dnevnik poezdki na Issyk-kul’” was also published in Valikhanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, I: 228-88.
information that would be used to facilitate the process of Russian-Kyrgyz sblizhenie.

There are a few points to make about Valikhanov’s expedition of May through July of 1856. One is to note that, like Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, Valikhanov had a tireless interest in collecting scientific information about the territory itself. For Valikhanov, this involved a painstaking and systematic description of the landscape that he traveled through. The second point is that Valikhanov was also interested in describing the peoples and customs of the region, which is interesting in light of his own identity as Kazak, whose cultural practices were presumably similar to the Kyrgyz and Orta zhuz Kazak peoples he observed. The third point of interest is Valikhanov’s observational style, which exhibited in many ways a mode of description similar to Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of traveling-scholars in Imperial Eyes.  

Valikhanov devoted a large portion of his journal, “Dnevnik poezdki no Issyk-kul’” (“Diary of a Trip to Issyk Kul’”), to describing the geographic layout of the area over which he and his companions traveled. The description is at times monotonous for the reader. Much of this essay described the path that the group took and particular points of observation, something which will be elaborated on below. Valikhanov also included many descriptions of the types of flora and fauna which he came across, though his description did not entail the Linnaean cataloguing that was so prominent in Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s Tian Shan report. This can in part be credited to the very different style of education that

21 Pratt, Imperial Eyes.
Valikhanov had in Omsk versus the one that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii received at St. Petersburg and Berlin. Valikhanov’s military school focused on a wide range of subjects, but natural science was not at the top of the list. As described in the previous chapter, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s more cosmopolitan or international education was also in a wide range of subjects, a major part of which focused on the natural sciences. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s close association with Professors Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter at the University of Berlin further influenced his observational and scientific style, and provided access to an area of scholarship that Valikhanov was not privy to.

The military school at Omsk had emphasized language and geographical training rather than natural-scientific education. For this reason, there was less attention paid to natural-scientific details than in Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s or Przheval'skii’s descriptions of flora and fauna in their individual travel accounts. One gets a sense that Valikhanov was describing the landscape in the way that was most utilitarian for the state, something that was instilled in his education at Omsk. He avoided going into long ethnographic descriptions and focused on geographic description in most of his travel account. Valikhanov occasionally interjected among his geographical descriptions oblique references to local legends, myths, and other ethnographic information. These occasional observations about culture indicate a greater knowledge and interest in these subjects than he was focused on describing in his journal. In other words, he was writing this journal primarily for the intended purpose of geographic and scientific documentation, and chose to withhold discussion of his ethnographic
observations for later essays that were not written for the immediate attention of a Russian scholarly audience. Most of his ethnographic observations went unpublished until several decades after his death. His focus on the geographic and natural scientific information was also indicative of the focus of the state and the military's research expeditions at that time. It was only later in the century (coinciding with the rise to prominence of the Geographical Society) that the focus of expeditions widened to also encompass ethnographic information. Only in the last quarter of the century did the Russian scientific community begin to realize that cultural information could produce important results for the colonizing efforts of the state.

Valikhanov's Issyk Kul travelogue indicates his interest in cultural information, but he does not elaborate on this as his mission was to document geographical and scientific data. The following excerpt is indicative of this tendency. Note that Valikhanov exhibits a familiarity with the local legends and stories, but the focus in his narrative is on more utilitarian information about the location:
On the way from Karaturuk to Chilika on the left hand lies a watery ravine, called by the Kirghiz [Kazaks] according to the grave of one hero [batyr]- Koram. The ravine runs parallel to the road. At the end of it at Chilika appears a marsh and close by are many hay grasses. On the other, dry end of the road lies ruins of a small fortress, or, better [to say] remains of a ditch, close to which was dug a well. A legend of the Kirghiz says, that this was a Kalmyk picket and that Ablai Han destroyed it and cleared the valley of Chilika from non-believers. On the Chilika, higher than Baugach, to the upper reaches lies the remainder of another, more spacious burial mound. The Saribagishi [a Kyrgyz clan] told me, that when the late Urman-batyr was a nomad there, the peasant women and children there found pearls, coral, beads, and other things. As for myself, I personally found in the first burial mound shards from clay vases and earthenware pots. 22

Although Chokan Valikhanov did at times briefly divert from his narrative to clarify some legends or myths, there is a sense of a military mission in his travel description. He tried to avoid wordiness, and there was always a sense of movement in his travelogue. Valikhanov mapped the territory, guided his Russian readers through it, and provided instruction along the way on how future travels could be most efficiently carried out through these little-known lands. Many times he discusses the potential for agriculture or settlement in particular spots, information that would have been valuable for both the military and the state as they made their southward advance through Central Asia during the 1850s and 1860s.

Below is another passage indicative of the rather dry and monotonous tone that Valikhanov used for much of the journal. It is again notable for the utilitarian purpose that he wrote—to document every twist and turn of the landscape for future settlement, development, and mapping.

22 Material in brackets has been added by this author. Valikhanov, Izbrannye proizvedenia, 17.
The Alatau Mountains along the Chilika [river] and its tributaries are covered with fir forests in abundance. In the valley along the bank of the Chilika there is no special fodder grasses, except for yusan and wild poppies (kizgaldak), but on the other side the bank of the river is rich with rose willows, dzhigda, tavolozhnik, dzhingil, barbaris, and honeysuckles. These bushes appear on the side of the river like a thick green alleyway. In the middle of the stream surrounding the river’s rose willows appears a tall forest, called by the Kirghiz Bauagach. At the mouth of the Ili it is covered with cane and saxaul [an important wood used by the Kazak and Kyrgyz to barbecue meat with]. The angle formed by the Chilika and the Ili [river] to Karaturuk, close to the bank, as the natives say, has good places for hay. Only chingil and chi grass grow in this space.23

Although he avoids going into lengthy ethnographic or cultural discussions in this early travel account, they do come up from time to time. There is a peculiar sense of personal detachment in many of these brief discussions. That is, he described brief bits of conversations with the Kazak and Kyrgyz whom he interacted with on the journey, but largely described this from the vantage point of a Russian imperial official, and not a Kazak cultural neighbor. Valikhanov was interested in relaying the information to an educated audience to inform them in brief about the culture and beliefs of peoples and avoided subjective comments.

Following his subsequent success and acclaim among Russian elite scholars during the late-1850s, Chokan Valikhanov seemed to feel less restricted to focusing his attention on geographic and scientific subjects that were of more interest to the Russian imperial scientific audience and shifted the focus of his scholarship to Kazak and Kyrgyz cultural and historical matters. The description of his experience in locating the grave of a folk hero in Kazak lore demonstrated

23 The italicized words in this passage are Turkic words for local plantlife. Ibid.
his interest in “antiquities,” but also indicated the sense of mission that he felt to keep moving and continue documenting the environment:

It was nighttime. At 10 versts, before arriving at picket number four, stands the grave of Kozy-Korpesh, famous in Kirghiz [Kazak] poetry. We had studied the poem well and therefore certainly wanted to take a look at the grave. After the time of our exit from [picket] number two, we had to cross through the Kizil'kiiskii picket at night. But we wanted to be there by morning so that we could drink tea at the grave. It’s nice to drink tea on the trail, but especially at ruins, at ancient graves. [It’s nice] to think about the past and worry about the present.24

Valikhanov later laments that heavy rain made it an inopportune time to stop and drink tea in front of the grave of Kazak princess Kozy-Korpesh. He wrote that, “in this kind of weather [no one] could think about [drinking] tea and comfortably looking at Kirgiz [Kazak] antiquities.”25 Valikhanov and his group resigned themselves to viewing Kozy-Korpesh’s grave on the way back from Issyk Kul. He also mentioned his study of Kazak poetry and interest in connecting to that tradition in some way. Through excerpts like this, one can discern a tinge of sentimentality in Valikhanov’s writings for Kazak and Kyrgyz myths and legends, but this was tempered by his allegiance to the Russian state. Valikhanov’s observations from the Issyk Kul expedition are also interesting to analyze from the point of view of contemporary travel theory. His observations

24 It is interesting to note here that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also came across the same grave in his travels, but had a completely different reaction to it. When Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii happens upon the grave, he only makes comment that someone had defaced it and then launches into a detailed description of the flora surrounding the grave area, rather than going into the sentimentalist ethnographic approach of Valikhanov. Ibid., 13.

on this initial expedition do not fit perfectly under the Prattian rubric of those of an "imperial eyes" traveler. Although he did focus a great deal of attention on utilitarian description, he also exhibited, through a few brief glimpses, a humanity and a connection to the peoples and the environment that one finds lacking in Pratt’s description of European travelers. Chokan indicated an interest in the local culture, landmarks, and peoples that went beyond listing or documenting them as curiosities or points of future conquest. He was also becoming interested in connecting with these places in a way that few of the scholar-travelers included in this study wished to. The peoples whom he described were not completely detached, but they were certainly not attached to him either. This can likely be attributed to his unique position in the imperialist administration as a Kazak whose job was to oversee the very people among whom he was raised, who were being ruled by a perceived Other.

Initial Visit to Qing China (the Kulja trip)

By the end of his journey across Kazakhstan to Lake Issyk Kul, Valikhanov became well-known in Russian academic circles and having earned their trust and respect for his capabilities was recruited for a more challenging reconnaissance mission into Qing Chinese territory. The proposed expedition was to begin later in 1856, in which he would travel to the city of Kulja by the Ili River in Eastern
Turkestan. This journey was made possible through the signing of a joint Russian-Chinese treaty in 1851 that allowed Russia to carry out trade in Kulja. Valikhanov visited there to investigate the economic and trade situation, making his first venture into Chinese-controlled territory. He stayed in the town of Kulja for three months and collected his observations about the city itself, the local peoples, the surrounding geographic area, and the economic situation there. Valikhanov’s success on the Kulja mission propelled him to even higher acclaim within the ranks of the Russian elite. This mission also served as a warm-up for his later, more dangerous, secret trip to Kashgar.

In describing his route through the Alatau Mountains, Valikhanov romanticized the space, comparing it to the Kazak steppe. He described the landscape and the lives of the peoples around there in highly idyllic terms. The Alatau region was described as a boundless space (like the steppe), one in which one’s wishes and affairs are also carefree. As he did in his Issyk Kul travelogue, Valikhanov described the travel experience by discussing the difficulties that he encountered and how these were overcome. He also documented the space with descriptions of flora and fauna, described the lay of the land, and pointed out aspects of the environment that could prove useful for future traders, travelers, or settlers. As he crossed obstacles, both geographic and man-made, he made observations about them and often drew comparisons to his native Kazakhstan.

26 Today Kulja is known as Yining.

27 Valikhanov’s travel diary for this journey to Kulja appears in Sobranie sochinenii, II: 11-104.

28 Valikhanov, Izbrannye proizvedenia, 50.
He found many aspects of Chinese life ideal, noting that they did not have to work
as hard as “Russian” subjects did, whiled away many hours each day at the
trading bazaar, and that during the summers they slept wherever they wanted.

On this journey Valikhanov received some “support” from Qing Chinese
officers, who provided him with some information about the local territory and
peoples.29 The Qing officials also offered Valikhanov and his travel companions
opportunities to rest when stopping at the pikets [pickets] which dotted the
approach to Kulja. Valikhanov described how well they were treated at these
outposts, in which they were offered tea and refreshments and enjoyed pleasant
sleep (“like a sultan on a soft divan with his harem”).30 As the journey
progressed, though, the Qing officials became wary of Valikhanov’s visit and
made every effort to keep close tabs on their location and their activities. Several
times they were approached during the expedition and instructed to check in with
the next piket or were questioned at length about their reasons for being there and
their destination by a passing Qing officer. Although the Qing state officially
welcomed the Russian presence in Kulja, there was still a strong suspicion of the
Russian involvement there.

Valikhanov observed that the Muslims of Western China engaged in
“fanaticism” (fanatism), which he found typical of “Muslims of the East.”31
Valikhanov drew clear distinctions between the Muslims of settled valley areas

29 See his conversation with a Chinese officer at a piket (troop station). Ibid., 59.
30 Ibid., 60.
31 Ibid., 62.
(such as the Uighur) and those of the steppe and mountainous regions (such as the
Kazak and Kyrgyz). Valikhanov concurred with the general consensus that
Western China's Muslims were more orthodox than their western Turkic cousins.

In his discussions about China, Valikhanov tried to convey to his Russian
colleagues and audiences a sense of the complexity of trying to "understand"
Chinese culture and ways. Among his pencil sketches from this journey is an
interesting sketch Valikhanov did of a room of people smoking opium. 32 The
scene evokes a sense of mystery and fantasy. Many of the people in the sketch
are seated on the floor, several have pipes and everyone is dressed in traditional
robes. All the men have queues. In the background, a man and woman walk out
the door arm in arm. Valikhanov provided a lot of cultural observations in the
Kulja essay. He also tried to convey to Russians a sense of the complexity of
gaining an understanding of Chinese language. He wrote that

Chinese language consists of monosyllabic sounds: u, au, dau, khau, mau,
zau and so on. Each of these sounds conveys several different meanings.
[Chinese language] has words which contain 500 [different] meanings.
For example, the sound khoi, which one often comes across in Chinese
conversations, has 214 [different] meanings. Chinese writing and
language are separate things [entirely], without particular meanings like
we have [in Russian language]. Every meaning (but not letters) have their
own script. The sound khoi has 214 different scripts, which determine 214
different meanings. Therefore it's possible to read a Chinese book, and
not know the language. 33

Following his return from Kulja, Valikhanov was invited to St. Petersburg in
February 1857 to present the results of his journey to Issyk Kul to the Russian
Geographical Society. The members of the Geographical Society were impressed

32 Ibid., 80.

33 Ibid., 72.
with his research skills and recommended Valikhanov to make further expeditions to Central Eurasia, an area which the Geographical Society was beginning to take greater and greater interest in following defeat in the Crimean War. Before his next expedition, Valikhanov returned to Omsk, where he worked with Grigori Potanin in the Omsk archives. Valikhanov and Potanin devoted some time to the study of the history of the initial Russian involvement in Central Eurasia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While working in Omsk, the two studied the “half-decayed pages” of correspondences, government decrees, messages, and reports. Chokan also began to enjoy some of the benefits of his newfound fame in intellectual circles. His apartment was nice, and he started to develop a taste for champagne and Havana cigars. This evidence was utilized by Valikhanov and Potanin in their own later works, historical essays, and in their future research missions. Both men gained unprecedented insight into the history of the Russian involvement in the region, a topic which they both became renowned experts of.

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34 The record of this meeting is located in the following archival location: RGO f. 1 (1857), no. 7.
35 Valikhanov, Izbrannye proizvedenia, 7.
Valikhanov had first become acquainted with Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii prior to his journey to Issyk Kul, while Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was preparing for his own crucial journey to the Tian Shan Mountains. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was greatly impressed by the young scholar-traveler and following the completion of Valikhanov’s Issyk Kul mission, and made the recommendation to Governor-General Gasfort that Valikhanov would make an appropriate candidate to send to the troubled city of Kashgar in Western China. Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii first proposed sending Valikhanov to this important and longtime Islamic trade center disguised as a Muslim trader. This could be successful, they hoped, given that many Muslim traders from across Central Eurasia still traveled through this Silk Road oasis town. Valikhanov’s native abilities in Kazak language would make him a much more suitable candidate than a Russian or non-Central Eurasian, given Kazak’s close linguistic ties to Kashgari Uighur. Chokan had studied the Uighur language since childhood in Kazak school. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also knew that few Central Eurasians in Russian imperial service at that time had the observational skills and requisite Russian-style education that Russian scientific and political elites of the time highly valued.

There were several reasons why the Russian military, government, and intellectual elite were interested in sending an expedition to Kashgar in 1857-58. As the Russian war minister Sukhozaneta ordered in an August 1857, “[W]e
should] learn details and with accuracy the present situation in Kashgar, [of the] level of strength and importance [of this] insurrection, [as well as the] incidents... [in this] territory and the feelings of the people towards this Mohammedan dynasty." The Russians were increasingly concerned at that time about the ongoing Hui Insurrection in Eastern Turkestan, and were eager to get reports on the situation both in Kashgar and the wider Altyshar region. The Qing’s problems in western China extended beyond Xinjiang, of course. The Russians saw Kashgar and the surrounding area as a potential site of colonization, given the Russian Empire’s successful recent advances in areas to the west of the Chinese border. It was also believed that the peoples of Eastern Turkestan could be amenable to Russian colonization given their close ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties to the Kazaks and other Turkic peoples of Central Eurasia, many of whom had already submitted to some form of Russian control. To many Muslims of Central Eurasia, Russia had exhibited a willingness to bend and conform to local religious traditions, a tradition of official tolerance dating back to Catherine the Great. The Kashgar mission was also important given the fact that many Kazaks migrated with their herds in the Ili River Valley in Eastern Turkestan, often moving back and forth between the border of the Russian and Chinese empires, a

37 Ibid., 8.

38 The Hui Rebellion was a Muslim insurrection in contemporary Xinjiang.

39 David Atwill has thoroughly studied the disturbances in western Qing territories. See, for example, Atwill, "Rebellion South of the Clouds: Ethnic Insurgency, Muslim Yunnanese, and the Panthay Rebellion" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, 1999); see also idem, The Chinese sultanate: Islam, ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion, 1856-1873 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press,
migration which still happens today.\textsuperscript{40} The Russians were also interested in learning more about the recent death of the German explorer and traveler Adolph Schagintveit, who was killed on his 1856 journey from India through Kara-kor and Kun’lun. Finally, Western China was also critical to the Russians out of strategic concerns, in part out of fear of the region falling under British control.\textsuperscript{41}

Petr Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii later wrote the following about the possibility of sending Chokan Valikhanov to Kashgar in his History of the first fifty years of the RGO:

\begin{quote}
[He was the only one at that time under the command of the Governor-General who could be] sent in Kirghiz national costume to Kashgar, and could, through his [high degree of intellectual] development and talents, collect for information for Russia of the utmost value not only about the contemporary state of Kashgar, but all of the Altyshar [region].\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Valikhanov’s identity as a Kazak was utilized by the Russians as a tool of reconnaissance, as he was better able to disguise himself as a local, a must given the tense political situation there. Following Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s recommendation that Valikhanov be sent on this secret mission, the mission was carried out in late 1857 through the joint support of the RGO, the Ministry of War, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Valikhanov first traveled south to the area of Verniy (Almaty) in order to find out as much information as possible from local Kazaks about the situation in Kashgar, but could never cross the pass due to

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\textsuperscript{40} For more on Kazak migration patterns, see Linda Benson and Ingvar Svenberg, \textit{China’s Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China’s Kazaks} (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 50-55.
\textsuperscript{41} “Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov,” 28-29.
\textsuperscript{42} Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, \textit{Istoriia poluvekovooi deiatel’nosti}, I: 276.
\end{flushright}
heavy snows. The mission was then delayed for several months, and only in June 1858 was he able to join a trade caravan in Semirech’e, disguised himself as a merchant and called himself Alimbai. The caravan he joined consisted of forty-two people, 101 camels and 65 horses. Along the way they stopped in auls to trade for sheep which they could bring to Kashgar. The caravan also met up with and joined some other Kashgari and Tatar merchants, although many rumors began to spread that a Russian sympathizer was among their ranks. Luckily, the rumors never reached a critical point, in part because of the support network he was able to establish both among his comrades in the caravan and later among elites in Kashgar. Valikhanov ably befriended Muslim elders in the caravan, who knew how to properly deal with the locals, often invoking the name of Allah to gain passage past difficult passages inhabited by potentially hostile local peoples.43 The caravan crossed over very treacherous mountain terrain and passed the Chinese border crossing in late-September and arrived in Kashgar at the beginning of October 1858.44

Valikhanov spent only a few months in Kashgar, mostly in fear of being discovered by the locals. He found that the region was under the indirect sway of the Kokand Khanate and was opened to trade to many traders (mostly Muslims) who traveled across the region, including those from Andijan and Bukhara as well as Tajiks, Persians, Afghans, Indians, and Armenians.45 Valikhanov’s survival in

43 See the dialogue in the following reference in which one of Valikhanov’s fellow travelers essentially “sweet talks” a local. Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii I: 181-82.

44 “Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov,” 29.

45 Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, I: 68.
Kashgar was in part attributed to the fact that he was able to quickly befriend a number of aksakals (literally "white beards") or older Turkic men who wielded great power over local communities.\footnote{In Turkic languages aksakal literally means "one with a white beard." Ibid.} He soon was offered by an aksakal to temporarily marry a local noble woman, an arrangement based on local custom, who proved a useful source of information about the area and the current political situation. When Valikhanov left Kashgar for Verniy at the end of winter, he left without her. He only remarried at the end of his life, to a Kazak woman from the Uly Zhuz.\footnote{The Uly Zhuz was the Greater Horde. Grigorii Potanin, "Chokan Chingissovich Valikhanov" in Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, IV: 570. This biographical essay by Potanin was published originally in the newspaper Sibirskaia zhizn' on June 22, 1903.}

This Kashgar mission was basically a spying or scouting one in which the Russians clearly hoped to acquire strategic knowledge of Eastern Turkestan. The execution of this mission demonstrated that key members of the RGO and those involved in the larger project of scientific research in Central Eurasia were interested in the potential for colonial acquisitions or for manipulating political matters in territories beyond even indirect Russian control. The Kashgar mission represented the first clearly imperial or even illegal mission that the RGO sent into Central Eurasia. It was illegal at this time in the eyes of the Qing administration for the Russians to send an expedition to Kashgar. As a general practice, the RGO only sent foreign expeditions prior to this into nations which welcomed Russian exploration, or at least had no strong objections to the practice.
Following later agreements during the 1860s, the Russians gained the right to legally send research missions to China.\footnote{There is more information about this in the chapter on Nikolai Przheval'skii and the section on Grigorii Potanin.}

Valikhanov's arrival in Kashgar coincided with the revolutionary rule of Muhammad Yaqub Beg, who was known as a forceful and violent tyrant. Among the visual examples of this was a pyramid of human skulls which Valikhanov saw on display in Kashgar. He wondered at that time if one of the skulls was that of the missing German traveler Schlagintweit, who was considered the first European to set foot in Kashgar since Marco Polo.\footnote{Grigorii Potanin, “Chokan Chingissovich Valikhanov” in Valikhanov, \textit{Sobranie sochinenii}, IV: 570.} It was later confirmed by Valikhanov that one of the skulls belonged to the decapitated visitor. During his time on the expedition to and from Kashgar, Valikhanov was able to collect a great deal of information about the region and its peoples.

His travel diaries devote a great deal of space to movement to Kashgar and the various problems that they encountered en route.\footnote{For the full account of this travelogue, see ibid., II: 176-264.} As in his Issyk Kul diary, Valikhanov focuses on distances traveled, twists and turns of the journey, passes through checkpoints, notable geographic features, and potential hazards for future travels or travelers. His diaries also include a number of sketches, including plans of buildings and maps of particular locations.\footnote{See one such sketch of the area on ibid., II: 228-29.} At times, the sketches he makes juxtapose utilitarian map information with an artistic depiction of what are
presumably individuals he met during his journey (in Central Eurasian clothes). The Kashgar diaries include a number of bits of conversation with the individuals his group encountered when traveling by caravan. Valikhanov makes it clear throughout this text that his ability to befriend aksakals in the caravan was important for their success. These elders were often well-known by individuals who could have potentially brought trouble to the caravan. Countless times Valikhanov was questioned about his reasons for being in the region. Once they arrived in Kashgar, many of the questions came from mandarin officials, who were anxious to know where they came from and for what purpose. A representative excerpt from one of these dialogues follows:

...he came into the room wearing the outfit of a Chinese mandarin...came close by...approached [Valikhanov’s traveling partner Naimanbai]...took both his hands and asked:

‘Oh, so here are our guests? Where are you from? Who are you? And which ones among you are from Andijan?’

‘We’re from Margelan [Ferghana Valley] and Tashkent.’

‘How many are from Margelan?’

‘Four.’

‘[And from] Tashkent?’

‘Two.’

‘From Bukhara?’

‘Two.’

‘When did you leave from your homeland?’

‘12 months [ago].’

‘For what reason did you come here?’

‘For trade.’

In this particular conversation, the mandarin went on to question them further about their path of travel and was intent on learning whether they are truly

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52 Ibid., II: 232.

53 For one such example, see ibid., II: 211.
“Muhammedans” or if they could, by any chance, be Russians. The group replied that they had not seen Russians in ten years.\textsuperscript{54}

His caravan returned to Russian colonial space via a different return route to Verniy in April 1858. He rested there for about six weeks before returning to the Russian authorities in Omsk to report on his mission. Chokan became very ill after this treacherous and dangerous expedition, and for much of the rest of his life fought severe bouts of sickness. Governor-General Gasfort was very pleased by the outcome of the expedition and proposed to send Valikhanov to St. Petersburg to report on the expedition and to reward him for his accomplishments. During a long recovery period in Omsk, Valikhanov wrote up detailed and extensive reports about Kashgar, the surrounding region, the political situation, and economic information. These essays were later published in the \textit{Zapiskakh Geograficheskogo Obshchestva (Notes of the [Russian] Geographical Society)} and were republished posthumously in his collected works.\textsuperscript{55} Finally, Valikhanov returned to St. Petersburg with his reports in early 1860 and was promoted in the Russian military to the rank of Captain, was given a medal, and a five-hundred ruble award. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii again recommended that Valikhanov be given a new and important though difficult position, this time in the Asiatic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This new duty required a prolonged stay in St. Petersburg. While there he drew up maps, worked on his

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., II: 214-15.

\textsuperscript{55} For Valikhanov’s writings on Kashgar and the Altysbar region, see ibid., II: 167-412. Altysbar means “six cities” in Turkic languages and was the Kashgari name for the region. Valikhanov, “Zapiski ob organizatsii poezdkii v Kashgar,” published in ibid., II: 170.
own research on the history and culture of the Kazaks and Kyrgyz, attended meetings of the Russian Geographical Society, made presentations on his research, and delivered and attended lectures in St. Petersburg University. He also made the social circuit of St. Petersburg, interacting with many of the Russian Empire's political and cultural elite. 56

Valikhanov wrote a number of essays about Kashgar and the surrounding region, largely based on the information that he acquired from this important expedition. Besides providing Russian authorities with valuable information on trade routes and conditions and the political situation in Kashgar, Valikhanov also penned ethnographic reports. Later Russian scholars wrote about his findings that "it needs to be said, [that his work represents the] best of all Muslim compositions, not infected by fanaticism..." 57 Valikhanov made general comments about the national characteristics of the Kashgaris, referring to them as "nice," "sociable," "cordial," "hard-working," and "polite to the extreme." His close connections with the Muslims trading in Kashgar and with the very caravan that he traveled with also allowed him to make some interesting observations about the trade networks in existence. He found that a lot of Russian-made goods found their way to Kashgar, passing initially through Kulja or Kokand and then brought by those traders for exchange in Kashgar. Valikhanov also noted that there was a higher markup for traders in Kashgar who were not Muslim. 58


57 Berg. Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoе obschestvo za sto let, 111.

58 Ibid.
Valikhanov’s Sketches and Perceptions

Valikhanov was an efficient researcher, as demonstrated in his numerous essays and travelogues on the Central Eurasian region. Beyond his essays, Chokan also documented the region visually through sketches. Among his many brothers and sisters, Makazhan Valikhanov (1844-1923) was considered the only true artist, having received professional artistic training in St. Petersburg. 59 However, like his younger brother, Chokan also cultivated an interest in drawing. He had fostered this interest since childhood, when Chokan practiced drawing with the many Russian officers, scholars, and engineers who visited or stayed for extended periods in his Kushmurun home. 60 As an adult, Valikhanov produced a great number of sketches and drawings, some more detailed than others, of the peoples and locations that he visited and lived in.

When viewed collectively, his drawings present an interesting window onto the peoples and lands that he visited. They also provide us with insight into the mind of Valikhanov, who was clearly fascinated by the life of the Kazak and Kyrgyz and their habitat. Valikhanov’s sketches include a great number of drawings of Central Eurasian peoples in everyday life. They are indicative of an

59 Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, I: 21-22.
60 Ibid., I: 26.
artistic eye and of his tremendous interest with the people themselves. Some are individual portraits in greater or lesser detail, while others are depictions of domestic or casual scenes. Some drawings are of groups of men, while others are groups of women. Other sketches are of landscapes or scenery, often with mountains in the background and an encampment of yurts with Kazak or Kyrgyz nomads in the foreground. Valikhanov also made a number of sketches of Muslim mausoleums that he saw during his travels. As mentioned above, there were also many map-like sketches of locations or towns. It seems that some of the sketches that Valikhanov did were intended for show, such as his more-refined portraits of individuals, but many of the drawings that he made were done in the margins of his travel diaries and, one must assume, were not intended for the immediate consumption of a wider audience. There are a number of sketches in the original diary which he kept of his trips to Lake Issyk Kul and Kashgar that seem to have been done strictly for his own eyes.

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61 A collection of Valikhanov's sketches and maps (mostly in pencil) are in PFA RAN f. 23, op. I, no. 13. This fond is an absorbing and diverse collection of drawings including maps, sketches of people, (some more Kirghiz and some more Chinese), sketches of stone inscriptions, random notes. Unfortunately, most of the sketches of individuals or of scenes are without dates or descriptions or labels of the place or people.

62 For an example of a Kirghiz encampment on a mountainside, see PFA RAN f. 23, op. I, no. 2, l. 10. For a sketch of a yurt, see PFA RAN f. 23, op. I, no. 2, l. 14.

63 For one example of this, see PFA RAN f. 23, op. I, no. 2, l. 11.

64 See also his sketches in the margins of a manuscript on Kulja and the western region of the Chinese empire. See PFA RAN f. 23, op. I, no. 4.

65 This diary was only published long after his death. Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, I: 57.
Valikhanov’s interest in depicting these scenes reflects a sensibility that again defies strict classification as a scholar with “imperial eyes.” Many of the scenes which he sketches were not done solely for the benefit of empire, but instead seem to have been done out of his personal interest in depicting the scenes that he saw, perhaps out of interest in the beauty or picturesqueness of the scenes. However, as discussed earlier, even depictions of the picturesque indicate a level of power that the seeing artist tried to project over the landscapes or peoples who were depicted. Perhaps Valikhanov was trying to possess the landscapes and peoples by sketching them, but this seems a stretch. It is more likely that Valikhanov simply had an artistic eye and was interested in depicting the many locales and individuals whom he encountered during his travels across the region. Of course, his sketches and maps of geographical features were more clearly done for the benefit of science and empire.

It is best to view Chokan Valikhanov’s drawings as indicative of his status as an individual with effectively a dual sense of identity. While some drawings, like the maps and sketches of territories or settlements, are indicative of an eye for the empire, many others seem to connect him to the Central Eurasian folk. By viewing his sketches collectively one cannot help but come to the observation that Chokan Valikhanov was not merely an agent of the empire, he was a complex individual with thoughts that were not strictly done as an automaton of the state. The visual component of the geographical and ethnographical job of collecting information cannot be neatly categorized as empire-building. His drawings must be analyzed and studied in light of the entire life of this very complex and
somewhat torn individual. Was he conflicted? Certainly he was, and the sketches are a visual testament to that, just as the content of his essays indicated.

"About Muslims on the Steppe"

Chokan Valikhanov wrote a number of essays, most of which were published posthumously from his personal papers, on a wide range of topics. His brief essay "O musul’manstve v stepi" ["About Muslims on the Steppe"] provides some insight into his views on Islam and its place in the Russian Empire, as well as some predictions on its future development in the Central Eurasian region. He argued that, for "his people" on the steppe, Islam was at a crossroads and was at a relatively early stage in its development. Chokan found that for Kazaks, Islam was only beginning to be known and to slowly replace Shamanism. He compared this to "Ancient Rus' at the time of Reverend Nestorius." Valikhanov argued that Islam was growing quickly among the Kazak and that many of their legal and cultural practices reflected this growing influence. He even made the rather crude observation that "some sultans and rich Kirghiz [Kazaks] lock up their own wives

66 This essay appears in Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, 1: 524-29.

67 Ibid., 1: 524.
in separate yurts, like in harems."68 His discussion compares the Russian policies towards its Muslim subjects with the United States government’s approach to “civilizing” its Native American subjects. Valikhanov noted that 162 schools had been established to educate natives and that an Indian educational fund was established “to help the savages, [who are] interested in becoming settled [peoples].”69 Valikhanov noted that since Russian conquest of the Kazak steppe, “our Kirghiz [Kazaks]” are increasingly wary of “Russian enlightenment” and “Russian brotherhood.”70 In short, he sees the groundwork there for a future Muslim opposition movement in Central Eurasia to Russian colonization. But Valikhanov stops short of turning his essay into a condemnation of Islam in Central Eurasia, sort of. He wrote that, “We are still far from advising the Russian administration to impose Christianity onto the steppe...[nor are we] suggesting them to persecute Islam; such drastic measures always yield contrary results.”71 Valikhanov strongly urged the Orenburg administrators to take measures to curtail the influence of Islamic mullahs, whom he felt could incite further opposition and wariness to Russian “brotherhood.” He further argued that, besides the mullahs, there are a number of other sharlatanov [charlatans] among the growing number of Muslims on the steppe. These pose a direct threat to the Russian imperial project, something that in this essay Chokan Valikhanov expresses a strong opposition to. This did not mean that he always felt this way,

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., I: 525.
70 Ibid., I: 526.
71 Ibid., I: 526-27.
particularly given events later in his life (see below). The opinions that he expressed here could also reflect a certain coercion that he felt to represent Islam as a threatening political force on the steppe, given his position in the Russian administrative elite corps. This is difficult to ascertain given the fact that this essay was only published posthumously, and it does not indicate to whom he addressed these thoughts.

Ritter's Asia

Valikhanov was well-acquainted with the ideas of German scientist Carl Ritter and his magnum opus, *Die Erdkunde von Asien* (*The Geography of Asia*). This was the case with a number of the scholars who worked with the Russian Geographical Society during the 1850s. The translation of Ritter's *Die Erdkunde von Asien*, which was a nine-volume work, was a major project for many of the Russian Geographical Society's scholars beginning in the 1850s. Ritter's ideas exerted a major influence on Russian scholars of this time period, particularly those who were associated with the RGO. In essence, Ritter argued for the importance of a multi-disciplinary scientific study of the geography of Asia. He also saw great potential in comparative studies of geographic features. This meant comparing or contrasting two or more geographical features on different continents or in different parts of the globe, with the inherent idea that by making
comparisons one could locate similar features in different areas and acquire thereby a greater understanding of both locations. Ritter’s holistic approach to geography also placed ethnographic research as an important contribution to gaining a complete geographic understanding. Ritter found that ethnographic characteristics were directly relational to geographical features and, therefore, ethnography should be categorized as a sub-field of geography.  

Among the archival documents available at the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences branch in St. Petersburg is Valikhanov’s translation of Ritter’s essay titled “On the Ancient Kirghiz or Kazakhs.” This translation indicates that Valikhanov was, like Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and many of the other early members of the RGO, highly interested in Carl Ritter’s findings about the history and geography of Central Eurasia. This work also positions Valikhanov as a contemporary scholar of this group, since so many of them made a study of Ritter (and Humboldt) a prerequisite to their own research. Contemporary scholar Natalia Sukhova’s study on Ritter’s influence on Russian scholars represents a more in-depth examination of the close relationship of Russian imperial scholars’ embrace of Ritterian ideas. However, Sukhova omits Valikhanov’s interest in the topic in her study, perhaps because he is viewed even today not as truly Russian but as an inorodets. Nevertheless, Valikhanov took a major interest in Ritter’s work, both at the time of his writing this document and later in life when his attention

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72 See Ritter, Zemlevedenie Azii.

73 PFA RAN f. 23, op. 1, no. 15. The title of this document, which is 45 lists, is “O drevnikh kirgizakh ili khakasakh iz Ritterovoi Azii. Vypiski iz 1 t. str. 1110-1137.”

74 Sukhova, Karl Ritter i geograficheskaiia nauka v Rossi.
was particularly drawn to researching and writing about the history and traditions of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. 75

The Russian Academy of Sciences archives in St. Petersburg contain a number of the manuscripts of Valikhanov’s essays. When one examines them, they get an idea of Valikhanov’s intense devotion to scholarship. His manuscripts include many revisions, extensive footnotes, and of a mastery of a wide variety of scholarship, folklore, and ethnographic knowledge. The manuscripts indicate that he was educated in western methodologies, but also cultivated the acquisition of information from “Eastern” sources in a way that few oriental scholars of that time were capable of. Many of these manuscripts were published either at the beginning of the twentieth century or during the Soviet period and continue to attract the attention of a wide range of scholars. Chokan was interested in studying the geography and culture of the region from many standpoints, including building upon and revising the ideas of Ritter.

Relationship with the Russian Cultural Elite

Valikhanov continued his work for the imperial administration during the late 1850s and early 1860s, continuing to travel around the Kazak steppe and collecting information on the history and culture of the Kazaks. During this time

75 This was presumably written during the 1850s, though the document is not dated.
he developed a close association with the famous Russian writer Fedor Dostoevsky, who had been exiled to Western Siberia by the Russian imperial administration. Valikhanov and Dostoevsky enjoyed long conversations about history, literature, and other subjects during their acquaintance in Omsk. At one point, Dostoevsky was quoted as writing to Valikhanov,

Be the first of your people to interpret to Russia the steppe, its significance, and your people in their relation to Russia, and at the same time serve your homeland as its enlightened intercessor before the Russians. Remember that you are the first Kirghiz [Kazak] to be educated in the European way. Fate has made you moreover a superlative human being, has given you both a soul and a heart...But among these dreams there was one reality: this is that you are the first of your people who has received a European education. Dostoevsky encouraged Valikhanov to utilize his talents and his uniquely European educational background for the benefit of science, the Russian state, and "his people." After Valikhanov's death, Dostoevsky said the following about him to a visitor:

Do you see that big rosewood box? That is a present from my Siberian friend Chokan Valikhanov. It is very dear to me. In it I store my

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76 This excerpt was taken from the only surviving letter that Dostoevsky wrote to Valikhanov. The letter was dated December 14, 1856. OR RNB f. 262, no. 5. Also published in Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, IV: 88-92. Translation into English of this excerpt appears in McKenzie, "Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar," 13.

77 For a thicker analysis of the relationship between Dostoevsky and Valikhanov, see Furret, "Dostoyevsky and Islam (and Chokan Valikhanov)," 16-31. For a tangible example of their close personal relationship, see the letter of Dostoyevsky to Valikhanov dated December 14, 1856. OR RNB, f. 262, no. 5.
manuscripts, letters and those things which are dear to me in my memory. 78

Valikhanov's close association with the Russian cultural and intellectual elite throughout his life was unique for an inorodets of the time. However, it is possible to overvalue the determination or great effort that it took for Valikhanov to achieve his privileged social position. It should be remembered that he was from an advantaged background as a descendant of a wealthy khan and a family whose collaboration with the Russian imperial authorities was well known. Likewise, Chokan's education in the Omsk Cadet Corps gave him early access to elite society. Nonetheless, Valikhanov's intellectual achievements are considerable, especially given his short life and his status as inorodets. 79 One cannot forget that the Russian empire, as practically any European empire of the nineteenth century, in part justified its power and control through racial concepts. If one was not of Russian or European ethnic heritage, success in any sphere of life connected to the imperial apparatus was rarely realized, particularly through scholarly labor. For most of the Russian Empire, indigenous intellectual leaders who served the state were not allowed access to the upper echelons of power until

78 Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, 81.

at the revolutionary era which brought the regime down. The widespread practice
of providing indigenous Central Eurasians access to the elite power structure was
not firmly established until the advent of the Soviet Union.\footnote{Helène Carrère d’Encausse “The National Republics Lose Their Independence,” in Allworth, \textit{Central Asia}, 254-65.}

Valikhanov capitalized on his travels by writing and compiling a lot of
information on the Kazak, Kyrgyz, and other Central Eurasian peoples and their
histories and traditions. Besides enjoying popularity among the Russian elites of
the time, he later gained much acclaim from Central Eurasians. Valikhanov is
held in high esteem by many contemporary Kazaks and Kyrgyz today and is often
recognized as \textit{their} first Western scholar. This led to the creation of an entire
branch of academics in Kazakhstan today called \textit{Chokanovedenie} (the study of
Chokan) and a scholar who specializes in studying him is known as a
\textit{Chokanoved}, or in Kazak language a \textit{Shokhantanushi}.$^{81}$ Contemporary Central
Eurasian scholars, particularly in Kazakhstan today, prefer to see Valikhanov first
as a Kazak, and only secondly as one who served the Russian colonial
administration. This is part of a wider process of radical revisionism of Kazak
historical figures, which is a product of Kazakhstani state building since 1991.

Abai Qunanbaev, Kazak poet and writer of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth
centuries was very critical of the Kazaks in his writings and poetry, but is now
being revised in popular and official Kazakhstani portrayals as a Kazak nationalist
and symbolic figurehead of the Kazakhstani state. This has even resulted in the

\footnote{McKenzie, “Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar,” 5.}
replacement of a Lenin state with an Abai statue on the corner of Prospekt Abai and Dostyk Street (formerly Lenin Street) in Almaty today. 82 This position is opposed to the Soviet-era promotion of Valikhanov as a supporter of Russian colonization and Western-European culture.

Valikhanov chose to return to the steppe in 1861 following a period of particularly bad health during a stay in St. Petersburg. Some had blamed the damp climate of Petersburg for the exacerbation of Chokan’s health problems, though it could have been as a result of so much work and travel, which was beginning to take its toll on his body. Valikhanov decided to return to his aul and his family to recover from his illness. He then ran for and lost a local election as senior sultan of the Atbasar district in 1862. He accredited his loss to corruption and became disgusted. Following this loss and a brief period of good health, Chokan returned to Omsk where he took part in a Russian commission to investigate legal reform in Kazakhstan. 83 By the spring of 1864 he was invited to take part in General Mikhail Cherniaev’s military invasion of southern

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82 For an example of Abai’s work in English, see Qunanbayev, David Aitkyn, and Richard McKane, Abai: Book of Words (Almaty: El Bureau, 1995).

83 The question of Kazak legal reform under the Russian colonial government is well-researched and discussed in Martin, Law and Custom in the Steppe. For more on later legal reforms carried out by the Russian imperial authorities in Muslim Central Eurasia, see the thoroughly-researched and highly-engaging study of Robert Crews. Crews, For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
Chokan participated in the Russian military operations at Auli-Ata (Dzhambul) in June 1864, but was extremely upset with the outcome of the campaign and the tsarist treatment of the local population. He then left Auli-Ata in July 1864 and traveled to Verniy. Rather than return to the Russian imperial metropole of Omsk, Chokan then moved to the aul of his Kazak friend Tezek, a sultan of the Alban clan. This settlement was located close by the Altyń-Emel’ Mountains of southeastern Kazakhstan. He decided to settle down there, married Tezek’s sister, and collected historical and ethnographic information about the Greater Horde Kazaks. He continued to correspond during this last period of his life with officials and scholars in Omsk and St. Petersburg, though his health was deteriorating day by day.

Valikhanov died in April 1865 of complications from tuberculosis, one of the most common causes of death in the nineteenth century, at the age of twenty-nine in Tezek’s aul. During his last years, according to Russian and Soviet historians, he served as a “defender of oppressed peoples.” In the preface to the first collection of his edited works, published four decades later, the Russian editor Veselovskii compared Valikhanov’s brilliant but tragic and brief life to a “brilliant meteor flashing across the field of oriental studies.” Although Valikhanov continued to advocate Russian imperialism, he often noted in his writings up to the time of his death that the administration should be careful not to

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84 For more on Chemiaev and the military invasion of Kazakhstan and contemporary Uzbekistan during the 1860s, see McKenzie, *The Lion of Tashkent.*

85 Quoted in McKenzie, “Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar,” I.
treat all colonial peoples the same way. In particular, those with nomadic lifestyles needed to be dealt with differently. Valikhanov did not elaborate on how that should be done, just that careful attention should be paid to this difference. His remarkable scholarly achievements during his final years led many to consider him, particularly after 1991, as a patriarch of Kazak and Kyrgyz nationalism.

Valikhanov opened an entire world of information to Russian scientists and elites. Aside from the travel diaries excerpted here in this study, he also wrote dozens of essays on a wide range of topics. His work acquainted Russians with information on the region's peoples, geographic features, natural scientific information, travel and trade routes, the practice of Islam among Central Eurasians, traditional religious beliefs, nomadic practices, legal information, historical information, and social and ethnographic descriptions. He made tremendous contributions to the Russian understanding of the region.

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86 Valikhanov, Izbrannye proizvedeniia, 9.

87 Some have spoken of Valikhanov as part of a trinity of Kazak "enlighteners." The other two main figures were the educator Ibragim Altynsarin (1841-89) and the poet and intellectual Abai Qunanbaev (1845-1904). This has been a common assumption in both Soviet and Kazakhstani historiography. McKenzie, "Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar," 3-4. Some comparison could rightly be made of the Kazak "enlighteners" and the Indian modern intellectuals discussed by Partha Chatterjee, as both groups drew support for their intellectual endeavors through their engagement with colonizing powers. See Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse? (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
There are several considerations in approaching the question of whether and to what degree Chokan Valikhanov worked in the service of the empire. As mentioned above, it is possible to draw the conclusion from this information that he was a Russian imperial collaborator. However, is it fair to label someone as an imperial collaborator when they did not themselves see what they were doing as the promotion of one power to the detriment or, at least subjugation, of another group of people? It is clear from the examination of Valikhanov’s writings and his biography that he was a supporter of the Russian state, though it seemed he was much more interested in the benefits that the introduction of Russian cultural values, language, trade, systems of governance, judicial reforms, and technologies could bring to Turkic peoples than supporting the introduction of a colonial or imperial overlord for the Kazaks and Kyrgyz. Valikhanov’s close personal friendships and the opportunities that he saw available for advancing his own research goals through membership in elite circles, including the study of Turkic peoples’ histories and cultures, was a more likely reason for his involvement in Russian state military and scientific institutions than his interest in supporting Russian colonialism. Valikhanov seemed to see his involvement in military and scientific exploratory missions as a means for the promotion of his own academic interests. This could rightfully be called collaboration, to the extent that he cooperated with Russian authorities and that both sides ultimately received from
the arrangement what they most desired. As a result of his participation in elite Russian-sponsored projects, Chokan Valikhanov launched his academic career. He received sufficient funding for exploration projects, was gainfully employed in Omsk and Petersbourg during the lulls between his travels, and was provided time to pursue his research interests. The state gained more insight into the geography, ethnography, and history of Central Eurasia and Central Eurasians from Valikhanov than they could have using someone from outside the region. The Russians established firm control over Kazak and Kyrgyz peoples by the late nineteenth century, and some Kazaks and Kyrgyz benefited from the circumstances of the new imperial relationship. Of course, this imperial or colonial relationship also brought unintended side-effects that both sides would not have wished for. In the sense of both sides working in a partnership, this was collaboration. However, Valikhanov’s motivations for involvement in these activities seemed based more on his own love of research and even for the promotion of the Kazak and Kyrgyz nations, which he saw as having great potential for improvement through the introduction of Russian cultural influences.

It is also interesting to think about the degree to which Valikhanov’s promotion in Russian scientific and military organizations was supported by Russian elites for his potential contributions to Russian imperial interests in Central Eurasia. In order to address this question adequately, one must do an analysis of the motivations of Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, who was such a pivotal figure in the rise of Valikhanov’s career. His suggestion to send Valikhanov on the spying mission to Kashgar looked clearly for strategic motives
and the benefit of the state, as did the state and its various scientific organs’
eagerness to involve Valikhanov in diplomatic missions designed to gain oaths of
loyalty from Kyrgyz clans around Lake Issyk Kul. Chokan Valikhanov’s
participation in General Cherniaev’s invasion of Auli-Ata in 1864 could be seen
as the epiphany moment in the utilization of Valikhanov in Russian imperial
ventures. The question of the degree of his loyalties to the Russians and to
Central Eurasians was raised in this event, given his immediate withdrawal from
most of his public affairs related to the empire in favor of a return to his roots in
the aul.

Another way of assessing Valikhanov’s contribution to empire is to compare
his travels, biographical events, studies, and personal travelogues with those of
the other individuals studied in this dissertation. Valikhanov’s travel observations
are in many ways comparable to Grigorii Potanin’s. Both men chose to become
absorbed in the cultures that they studied. They chose not to be distant observers,
but to attempt to “know” their subjects as much as possible. For Valikhanov this
was easier given his own linguistic and cultural background. At times, both
Potanin and Valikhanov were so committed to the peoples that they studied that it
seemed that they were not in the least bit supporters of the Russian Empire. At
one stage in his career Potanin joined the Siberian separatist movement while
Valikhanov left the battleground of Auli-Ata, presumably in disgust with the
tsarist military’s treatment of the Kazaks. Valikhanov’s observational style was
quite different from that of Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, who largely focused on
documenting the natural environment and took little interest in ethnographic
matters until after his expeditionary days. Valikhanov was also a major contrast to the prototypical imperial explorer of the Russians in Central Eurasia, Nikolai Przheval’skii. Although Przheval’skii also took a major interest in ethnographic matters, he distanced himself from his subjects to a much greater degree than Valikhanov did. Przheval’skii asserted the superiority of the Russian and Western civilization that he saw himself a central part of over the “Eastern” and Central Eurasian peoples whom he saw as backward at best. To Valikhanov, the distinction between East and West was clear, but he rarely drew value judgments about the relative worth of one or the other regions in the way that Przheval’skii and those highly supportive of empires worldwide often did. For most of the time that he was employed in exploratory activities by either the Russian military or the Geographical Society, Valikhanov avoided subjective observations and steered clear of drawing the kind of polarizing characterizations of Russian versus Central Eurasian societies and cultures that Przheval’skii would. Chokan Valikhanov’s ultimate decision, at the end of his life, to completely abandon the imperial project also problematizes any labeling of him as a strict sympathizer or supporter of the empire. For these reasons the question of whether Valikhanov carried out his work “in the service of empire” is a complex one. But in the eyes of the RGO’s leadership, Valikhanov had contributed a tremendous service. Upon his death in 1865, the RGO issued a lofty statement that Valikhanov’s journey to Kashgar “represented the most outstanding geographical achievement since the time of Marco Polo.”

88 Valikhanov, Izbrannye proizvedeniia. 8.
Chapter V - Przheval'skii and the 'Reconnoitering' of Central Eurasia

The Image of Przheval'skii

In Russian and Soviet historiography, Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii (1839-1888) received particular academic and popular attention during two periods of history: in fin de siècle tsarist Russia and during the Stalinist period of the Soviet Union. Shortly following Przheval'skii's death in Kyrgyzstan in 1888, he was canonized as a virtual hero of the tsarist empire, despite the fact that the state did not follow up on his explorations with colonial conquests in Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, or northern China. During the 1940s and early-1950s in the USSR, then firmly under the iron grip of Joseph Stalin, Nikolai Mikhailovich's image was again coveted as an icon of Russian imperialism and power. These periods of Przheval'skiiian popularity coincided closely with periods of instability, as the Russian leadership was struggling to assert its authority and exert control over its imperial subjects. Przheval'skii's iconic image and the bravery that he exuded on his research missions were held up as examples for common Russian, and again later, Soviet citizens. This is understandable, given the monumental contributions that Przheval'skii made to scientific and geographic exploration of what he referred to as “the wild countries of Asia.” Altogether, he spent “nine
years, two months and twenty-seven days” of his life on research expeditions and
traveled about twenty-thousand miles.¹

¹The actual estimate is more than thirty-thousand kilometers. Nikolai Mikhailovich Karataev,

Figure 7. Nikolai Przheval'skii
This chapter aims to gain insight into Przheval'skii's involvement in Russian imperialism in Central Eurasia by examining his four major research expeditions to Central Eurasia in the late-nineteenth century. Przheval'skii, like Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Chokan Valikhanov before him, demonstrated a unique zeal for scientific and geographical discovery. However, Przheval'skii had different motives for exploration than those of his predecessors in the Russian Geographical Society. For one, he saw himself as taking on the role of a Henry Morton Stanley or a David Livingstone in Africa. Rather than go to Africa, though, which was his goal as a youth, he chose to explore Central Eurasia. The interior of Central Eurasia would become an active zone of Russian exploration during the same time as the European intensive efforts to explore and colonize sub-Saharan Africa. Unlike Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Valikhanov's journeys, or those of Morton and Stanley, most of the lands that Przheval'skii mapped and described did not become part of the imperial sphere of colonization, but his ambitious travels improved the store of scientific, geographic, and cultural knowledge for the benefit of the Russian Empire. By the time of Przheval'skii's death from typhoid fever at Karakol (later renamed Przheval'sk, and still later reverted to Karakol) on the banks of Lake Issyk Kul, he was already widely recognized as a national hero in the Russian Empire. He was also a recognizable name to many in the west through translations of his travel accounts and articles in western publications. As a testament to his legacy, some of his expedition members later made journeys of their own to Central Eurasia, following in his iconic footsteps. This led one scholar of Przheval'skii and later accomplished
RGO scholar-traveler in his own right, Eduard Murzaev, to state that one could identify a Przheval'skiian school of geographers and scholars who followed Przheval'skii.²

² Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii, Iz zaisana cherez Khami v Tibet. Pod red., so vstup. stat'ei i primechaniiami. E.M. Murzaeva (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1948). The post-Przheval'skiian period of RGO-led research expeditions to Central Eurasia is the subject of the next chapter (six) of this dissertation.
Figure 8. Monument in honor of Przheval’skii on the banks of Lake Issyk-kul’, Kyrgyzstan. (From Lev Semenovich Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let [Moskva-Leningrad: Izd. Akademii nauk SSSR, 1946] appears in inset between 88 and 89.)
This chapter will take a close look at the source material on Przheval'skii's major RGO-financed journeys to what he called "the wild countries of Asia" and point out details that can shed light on the motivations and the observations made on these missions. His observations and discoveries will be contextualized in terms of their contribution to Russian imperialism and the political and diplomatic situation in Russia during the 1870s and 1880s. Travel theories will be utilized here again to elucidate the relationship that these observations had to imperialism. Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* offers a particularly crucial theoretical perspective for gaining subtle insights into the phenomenon of scientific travel, though the imperial value of Przheval'skii's accounts are at times no less than obvious to most readers.³

Emphasis in this chapter will also be placed on Przheval'skii’s heroic interests as a traveling scientist. Like Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanski and Chokan Valikhanov earlier in the century, Przheval'skii dreamed of attaining fame and saw himself as a personal crusader for knowledge that would benefit both the Russian state and European civilization. There is much debate about to what degree the scientists and scholars of the RGO were interested in their research for the benefit of the global scientific community or for national interests. The consensus is that the leaders of the first years of the RGO were more interested in science for international interests, and that during the 1850s the society shifted its

³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes.*
attentions to more state-centered interests. It will become clear in this discussion that Nikolai Przheval’skii saw his explorations as contributing to both national and international scientific and geographic projects and progress and that he was also very concerned with his personal promotion in the scientific and intellectual elite of Russia and abroad, a factor that seemed to drive his ambitious endeavors.

Przheval’skii’s Biography

During the early 1950s the Soviet director Sergei Iutkevich produced a heroic film titled Przheval’skii on the life of this explorer, exposing his exploits to an even wider audience of Russian and Soviet citizens. The film portrayed Nikolai Mikhailovich as “a great friend of the Asian masses, championing the cause of oppressed Chinese and Korean peasants wherever he journeyed.” This film represents just one of the multiple and widely-varying interpretations of the life of Przheval’skii. Przheval’skii’s biographers have mostly been scholars writing under either the Russian or Soviet flags who wrote in part with the intention of glorifying him as a national hero and an honored member of the Russian

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4 Nathaniel Knight’s doctoral dissertation explores this issue well, particularly in his section on the early years of the RGO. For more on this entire debate, see chapter four of this dissertation. Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality,” 211-266.

5 Information on this film referenced in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. Toward the Rising Sun, 24.
The only English-language biographical monograph of Przheval'skii was likewise laudatory and heroic, celebrating him as a dreamer whose travels to Tibet completed a lifelong wish. Although many of these sources provide a wealth of information on the contributions that Przheval'skii made to science and geographic knowledge, they contain (understandably so, given the time and location of their publication) little in the way of critical analysis of his contribution to empire-building. In fact, only very recently has there been any sort of scholarly attempt to reassess Przheval'skii in light of contemporary meta-historical or theoretical methods. A 1994 article by Daniel Brower represented one of the few scholarly attempts in recent years to revise these interpretations. Brower found that “in the picture gallery of Western empire-builders, (Przheval'skii’s) portrait fits somewhere between George Custer and David Livingstone.” In Brower’s article, he assesses Przheval’skii as an imperial crusader whose activities are comparable to those of other western explorers and participants in the global imperialism of the nineteenth century. However, his article, though widely ranging, only scratches the intellectual surface in terms of assessing the details of Przheval’skii’s research and travels. Brower did not attempt to do an analysis of the micro-data of his travels, but

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6 Examples of Russian and Soviet biographies of Przheval’skii include Karataev, Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval’skii; see also Aleksei Vasil’evich Zelenin, Puteshestviia N. M. Przheval’skogo vsemirnyi puteshestvennik (S.-Peterburg: Izd. P.P. Soikina, 1899).


8 Brower, “Imperial Russia and Its Orient.”
instead dealt with him in broad biographical strokes. Brower admitted that the recent advances in cultural history make for a potentially valuable reassessment of Przheval'skii, and this chapter will attempt to do that. More recently, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye devoted a chapter to Przheval'skii in his study on the rise of Russian imperialism. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye provided a brief overview of his biography and described Przheval'skii as exhibiting a brand of what he terms "conquistador imperialism." He also described Przheval'skii as a jingoistic supporter of Russian expansion to the East, which aided in the Russian drive to the later unfortunate and unsuccessful war with Japan.9

Schimmelpenninck van der Oye's chapter, though, is brief and does not engage in much of the textual analysis that this dissertation chapter will focus on.

The details of Nikolai Przheval'skii's life and his travels are quite well-documented, in part because Przheval'skii kept detailed journals and notes throughout his life and had many educated followers and travel companions who published their impressions about him and his expeditions. Nikolai's adult life coincided with a particularly intense period of Russian colonial interest in Central Eurasia, as he came to maturity just as Russia was shifting its colonial or imperial targets from the Caucasus and the Crimea eastward to Central Eurasia after Russia's disappointing mid-century defeat in the Crimean War and as Russia made the transition to the idealistic period of the Great Reforms. His career as a scholar-traveler would begin just as the colonization of Russian Turkestan was being completed.

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9 Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, Toward the Rising Sun, 24-41.
Nikolai Mikhailovich was born to a noble family with considerable means, and was therefore the privileged recipient of a paid formal education. He lived on an estate where he was encouraged by his mother to spend a lot of time outdoors and to run free. This led him to his interest in hunting wild animals, something that he would enjoy throughout his life. As an adult explorer, he would often engage in hunting trips between his long expeditions to Central Eurasia. Przheval'skii even participated in some expeditions as a way to restore his health. His hunting skills were utilized much on his professional expeditions as an adult, and Przheval'skii's kills were often cooked to satisfy his enormous appetite and feed his expeditions' members and guides. Many of the animals' remains, particularly the skins, were kept as specimens to carry to St. Petersburg, which would contribute to collections like the Academy of Sciences' Zoological Museum. Many of these zoological samples would be scrutinized later by Przheval'skii himself and by natural scientists in Petersburg or in Europe. Much of this attention would be devoted to categorizing newfound species into the Linnaean system of scientific classification.

After completing grammar school, Nikolai entered the Academy of the General's Staff in St. Petersburg. Here he took part in military training and

10 Karataev, Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii, 7-9.

11 Semenov-Tian-Shanski and Dostoevskii, Istoriia poluvecovoi deiatel'nosti, II: 533-34.

12 Ibid., II: 523. Incidentally, the Academy of Sciences' Zoological Museum was greatly expanded during the Soviet period and stands today as a testament to the continued zeal that both the Russian Empire and the USSR had for collecting natural-scientific specimens. The Zoological Museum today displays approximately 40,000 specimens of animals in realistic dioramas.
learned the arts of warfare, skills which would be beneficial for his expeditions.

Przheval'skii loved the outdoors, but detested most other aspects associated with military life. His interest in intellectual pursuits and his independent ways combined to make the military an unattractive career option. According to a Soviet biographer, Nikolai Mikhailovich Karataev, Przheval'skii exhibited a photographic memory which allowed him to not only digest large amounts of information but also to recall it with perfect accuracy.\textsuperscript{13} There was a certain tension in Przheval'skii, then, between the intellectual and the physical. He had enormous energy and talent in both spheres, and perhaps this in part accounts for his interest in scientific exploration, which would be an utmost test of physical and mental endurance. During the 1860s he became interested in the possibility of exploration and dreamt of following in the footsteps of the great explorers of Africa, especially David Livingstone. He decided to devote a great deal of time to personal study of zoology and botany and became particularly interested in exploring the Nile River region, but later changed his mind and decided to instead devote his efforts to exploring the unexplored heart of Inner Asia.\textsuperscript{14} He also took a profound interest in geography and read with great interest the recently-

\textsuperscript{13} Karataev, \textit{Przheval'skii}, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{14} However, other scholars of the RGO did make expeditions to parts of Africa in the nineteenth century. Mountain engineer Yegor Petrovich Kovalevskii and the naturalist L.S. Tsenkovskii visited Egypt through the RGO in 1847-48. Another member of the RGO, Vasilii V. Junker, made an extended journey across North Africa, from Tunisia to the Nile River, from 1873-78. There were other smaller-scale expeditions to Africa sent by the RGO. See Agafonov and Isachenko, \textit{Russkoe geograficheskoe obschestvo: 150 let}, 99-101.
published Russian translations of Carl Ritter’s *Asia*\(^\text{15}\) and Alexander von Humboldt’s works *Map of Nature* and *Asie Centrale*.\(^\text{16}\) Przheval’skii’s digestion of the geographic strategies and assumptions made by Ritter and Humboldt made him a fully-indoctrinated scholar-traveler in the same mold as Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and other earlier scholars from the Geographical Society. By gaining this intellectual framework, Przheval’skii was preparing himself for a future career with the RGO.\(^\text{17}\)

Nikolai Mikhailovich’s first love academically was geography, which he followed into a teaching job at the Warsaw Junker School and even wrote a textbook on the subject for his pupils.\(^\text{18}\) His geographic interests likewise drew him to the possibility of field research on the subject, which he undertook in the Ussuri River region in 1867.\(^\text{19}\) This resulted in a published work of research in 1869 and lectures about his research findings in St. Petersburg in 1870. Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Przheval’skii met prior to Przheval’skii’s trip to the Ussuri River region in early 1867. At that time, Semenov-Tian-Shanskii offered

\(^{15}\) Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, *Istoriiia poluvekovo deiatelnosti’,* I: 29.


\(^{17}\) For more on the influence of the German scientists on the Russians, see Sukhova, *Karl Ritter i geograficheskaia nauka v Rossii*.

\(^{18}\) Przheval’skii was later both surprised and flattered to find his textbook in use in university courses in Beijing. Rayfield, *The Dream of Lhasa*, 53.

\(^{19}\) Rayfield found that Przheval’skii was able to fund this expedition through the income he made from teaching geography, his winnings from playing cards, royalties from a geography textbook he published, and investments in the railroad industry. Ibid., 16.
help in both organization and financing of Przheval'skii's future expeditions. \(^{20}\)

Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii said the following about meeting Przheval'skii and the nature of their initial agreement in a speech of November 1888:

> I first became acquainted with Nikolai Mikhailovich in 1867. Through me...he for the first time tried to get the help of the RGO [to support his research]...Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii was still relatively unknown in the academic world, but [I gave him] an allowance for his undertaking to organize under his leadership a thorough expedition, but the leadership of the RGO declined...after that I tried to encourage Nikolai Mikhailovich, and...gave him my letter of recommendation...in it I promised Nikolai Mikhailovich, that if he were to carry out and complete his interesting expedition to the Ussuri area, which could prove his abilities for exploration and geographical research, that, upon his return from Siberia, he could look forward to organizing with the [financial] support of the RGO, and under his leadership, a more serious expedition into Central Asia. \(^{21}\)

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii was later very impressed by the findings of Przheval'skii's journey to the Ussuri area and encouraged the RGO to support Przheval'skii's proposal of a large-scale research mission into unexplored territories in Mongolia and China.

After attracting the attention and initial support of the RGO, Przheval'skii embarked on his first major expedition to Central Eurasia in late 1870, and did not return to St. Petersburg again until 1874. On this expedition he traveled around much of Mongolia, Tibet, and northern China. His travelogue was marked by his strong dislike of both the Chinese people and everything related to the Qing empire. The RGO later rewarded Przheval'skii with the Constantine Medal for this journey, the highest award the RGO bestowed on its explorer-travelers. His

\(^{20}\) Murzaev, V dalekoi Azii, 46.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
success on this initial major expedition made possible four more major research expeditions to Central Eurasia, all of which were funded and supported by the Russian Geographical Society and the empire.22

Historians are fortunate that Przheval'skii chose to keep detailed notes and journals and later wrote up his account of most of these expeditions and put them into published form. These accounts include scientific information about the flora and fauna of the regions he encountered, geographic descriptions of the environment, ethnographic sketches of the numerous peoples he encountered, and more mundane details about the problems and complexities associated with his journeys, as well as his thoughts on the relative success of these missions. His travel reports and findings were considered of high value to the Russian administration and to the scientific and academic world, gaining him high

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22 In this note the dates, names, and total distance traveled for each of Przheval'skii's major expeditions to Central Eurasia are listed. The first expedition is often referred to as the "Mongolian Expedition" and lasted from 1870 until 1873. The Mongolian Expedition was the longest of Przheval'skii's career, both in terms of time spent on the journey and distance traveled (around 12,000 kilometers). The second expedition is referred to in the literature as the "Lop Nor Expedition" or the "Zungarian Expedition" and was during 1876-1877. This second expedition was the shortest major expedition of Przheval'skii's career in terms of distance traveled, just a bit more than 4000 kilometers. The third expedition is referred to as the "First Tibetan Expedition" and was from 1879 until 1880. The fourth expedition is called the "Second Tibetan Expedition" and took place during 1883-1885. The fifth expedition was cut short by Przheval'skii's death. This fifth expedition only traveled from August 24th until October 5th 1888. Przheval'skii died October 20, 1888 (November 1st by Gregorian calendar). Details cited in Agafonov and Isachenko, *Russkoe geografichesko obshchestvo: 150 let*, 56.
accolades and a membership in the elite Russian Academy of Sciences. Although these travel accounts proved valuable for the Russian state, Przheval'skii's observations represent to present observers a sense of cultural, national, and racial superiority that was typical for many European explorers of the nineteenth century. Przheval'skii's accounts exhibit elements of the mission civilisatrice, as he made frequent mentions of the benefits that Russian rule could bring to the level of civilization of Asian communities and the lives of Inner Asian peoples. Przheval'skii was never reluctant to express disparaging opinions about the various "Asiatics" whom he encounters, characterizing them in unflattering and essentializing terms that reflect the dominant concern of many scholars of the time to identify national characteristics. Despite their disparaging and Social Darwinian quality, Przheval'skii's accounts provide a detailed description of the ethnographic, economic, and natural-scientific characteristics of the places and the peoples that he and his expeditionary crew encounter, opening a window onto these regions at this period of history while also providing some insight into the mental world of this explorer and traveler.

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23 No doubt it seemed rude and overtly racist at the time as well, but these kind of observations were expected of a "European" scholar making observations of "Asiatic" peoples.
Przheval’skii’s 1870-1873 expedition

By the beginning of the 1870s, the RGO had long been active in research in Siberia, the area referred to by the Russians as Sredniaia Aziiia, and the Russian Far East, but the society was not yet involved in Inner Asia, particularly Mongolia, Eastern Turkestan, and Tibet. Part of the reason for this was the unwillingness on the part of the Qing authorities to allow the Russians to explore territories within their sphere of influence. However, there was wide recognition by this point within the leadership of the RGO of the potential importance that geographic and ethnographic information-gathering on Mongolia and other Qing Chinese lands could have for the Russian state. Russian scholars found that this information would be useful for improving administration in the already-existing Asiatic territories of Russia, but the Russians also viewed these peripheral areas of the Qing as being potential future additions to the Russian empire, both for settlement and for potential sources of wealth. This was particularly noticeable in the way that the Russians approached the situation in Chinese Eastern Turkestan at the time of Przheval’skii’s mission, which was in

24 Although the Qing dynasty claimed much of the territory that Przheval’skii and company would travel to, their control over many of these lands was certainly marginal, particularly in Tibet and in those areas that were subject to a long-term Muslim insurrection. See more on the Muslim Rebellion in Chapter Four of this dissertation and later in this chapter.
political and social disarray as a result of the ongoing Hui insurrection.25 The Russians were still concerned about the ambitions of the British Empire for territory in Central Eurasia, and this mission came during a string of military victories for the Russians in the oasis valleys of Central Eurasia.26 The main reason that the leadership of the RGO supported this initial expedition was the hope that Przheval'skii and company could reach the heart of the areas in western China under Muslim revolt. They further hoped that Przheval'skii could collect information on the Hui insurrection, which he did, leading to the first western publications about this revolt.27 Russian diplomats in Beijing were able to acquire, though not without a considerable degree of effort, a letter of permission

25 There is more information on this later in this chapter, under the sub-section titled “Hui Rebellion.”

26 This was a particularly active time in Russian territorial acquisition in the region. Many have argued that these acquisitions were done as defensive moves to counter the possibility of a northward advance by the British Empire from Afghanistan into the oasis valleys. In 1865, the Russians won a major victory at Tashkent, clearing the way for the creation of the Turkestan colony in 1867. This was followed up with military conquest of Bukhara (in 1868) and Khiva (in 1873). Both Bukhara and Khiva were made Russian protectorates in 1873. The Russians also fought an ongoing campaign against the Turkmen near the Caspian Sea from 1869-1885. This is no place to get into the long discussion of the “Great Game,” or as the Russians called it, “The Tournament of Shadows,” between the Russian and British Empires. It is worth mentioning a few sources about this competition. A particularly good recent source on the final years of this struggle is Siegel, Endgame. For the standard popular non-academic account of the “Great Game,” see Hopkirk, The Great Game.

27 Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, Istoria poluvekovoi delatel'nosti, II: 514.
for the mission. A Russian diplomatic presence in Beijing was established following the conclusion of two treaties between Russia and China in 1858 and 1860. The establishment of the Russians in Beijing, coupled with the perceived importance of trade routes between Russia and China, were also major incentives for the RGO's increased interest in sending missions into Chinese territory.28

Przheval'skii acquired the means to set out on this long-term journey to Mongolia and Tibet through the RGO. However, the funding for this initial Przheval'skii-RGO undertaking was very modest.29 The money was not enough for the entire journey and Przheval'skii instead relied on the generosity of the local Mongol and other populations whom he encountered on his journey for the survival of their expedition.30 Nikolai Mikhailovich was not pleased with the outfitting of his expeditionary crew when he prepared to leave for Mongolia. He wrote that:

Now I am starting a real expedition. Yes, it's difficult to foresee my future. Where will I be and what will happen with me is completely unknown. We're going to an unknown country: it's impossible to find a muleteer from the Mongols for any price. Everyone is afraid, because I am going with only two Cossacks.31

28 Kolesnik, Geograficheskoe obshestva za 125 let, 89-90.

29 This will not be the case, though, in the future Przheval'skii-RGO missions, which will be very well-funded. Historians emphasize that despite the inadequate funding, the expedition was very successful in terms of scientific discoveries, distance traveled, and total time of the journey. Murzaev, Vdalekoi Azii, 47.

30 This is also a characteristic of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Valikhanov's journeys across Central Eurasia earlier in the nineteenth century.

31 Karataev, Przheval'skii, 73.
His account is full of examples in which the expeditionary members relied on the hospitality of local peoples (Mongols, Tanguts or Northern Tibetans, Hui or Dungans, Han Chinese, Turkic peoples, and others) for their survival. Beyond providing lodging, materials, and foodstuffs, the expedition was also heavily reliant on the employment and assistance of local indigenous guides who could overcome language barriers and help with mapping the territory.32

Lost in Translation

The Przheval’skii mission was also not well-prepared for the communication challenges that they would encounter on this trip. Przheval’skii considered this a “serious omission” of the expedition, which he blamed on the lack of funding which did not allow him to hire a skilled dragoman.33 The journey, though,

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32 Przheval’skii’s reliance on locals was a constant in his later expeditions to Central Eurasia as well.

33 Nikolai Przheval’skii, Mongolia, the Tangut country, and the solitudes of northern Tibet, being a narrative of three years’ travel in eastern high Asia (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876), I: 66. The original Russian version of this travel account was Przheval’skii, Mongolia i strana Tangutov; trekhletnie puteshestvie v vostochnoi nagornoi Azii 2 v. (Sanktpeterburg: Izd. Imp. Russkago Ob-va, 1875-76. This was later republished under the Soviet Union as Przheval’skii, Mongolia i strana Tangutov; trekhletnie puteshestvie v vostochnoi nagornoi Azii, pod red. i so vstup. stat’ci E.M. Murzaeva (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1946).
entailed cross-cultural encounters with countless peoples whom Russians had only limited or even no contacts with prior to Przheval’skii’s journey. The difficulty in communication was increased when one also considers that Przheval’skii was neither a linguist nor an oriental scholar by the standards of his day. His expertise was in the areas of natural science and geography. Unlike Valikhanov or Potanin, Przheval’skii did not undergo language training in imperial metropoles where many of the vostokovedy who were employed by the RGO were trained in their youth. Przheval’skii picked up only a smattering of Mongol and Chinese words and phrases during his trip\textsuperscript{34} and had basically no knowledge of either language group beforehand. He was also ignorant of Turkic languages. This meant that Przheval’skii had to rely on hired guides or other scholars who traveled with him on the expedition for translation and communication. Typically, this meant a long line of translation before words could be exchanged between Przheval’skii and the peoples he encountered. This undoubtedly led to many confusing interactions and conversations. His Cossack guides were typically conversant in both Russian and the Turkic languages of the region, and probably had a basic understanding of Mongol languages. All communications with Mongol populations and Turkic ones had to be done through the Cossack interpreters, making their exchanges challenging. Additional degrees of translation distance were called for when the members of the expedition wished to converse with Chinese-speaking populations, in which

\textsuperscript{34} Though he did make an effort to document some words and usages of the Mongols, Ibid., I: 66-69.
several degrees of translation had to occur. If, for example, Przheval'skii wanted to communicate something to a Chinese speaker, the translation would typically go from him to a Cossack, who would then converse with a Mongol, and from the Mongol to the Chinese speaker. This would have been particularly difficult given that each of them probably spoke a number of unique dialects (Mongol, Chinese) that would have further complicated the communication.

Although Przheval'skii was not conversant with any of these "Asiatic" languages, he made a number of observations about the composition of these languages in his report. For example, he observed that there were important differences between northern and southern Mongol languages, and that particularly in the south he thought there were more Mongols there conversant with Chinese language. As Przheval'skii himself admitted, this was not based on any difference in vocabulary or grammar, both of which he could not comment on, but solely on Przheval'skii's personal observation that the accent of southern Mongolians sounded more like a Chinese accent than that of the northern Mongols.35

Language was a major problem for Przheval'skii's journey in terms of day-to-day survival and likely contributed to his essentialized opinions of many of the peoples whom he encountered on this journey. This meant that Przheval'skii had to rely heavily on his visual perceptions of these peoples, casting what Pratt would call his "imperial eyes" over the scene and rarely interacting with the peoples whom he encountered in the "contact zone." Przheval'skii admitted the

35 Przheval'skii, Mongolia, the Tangut country, and the solitudes of northern Tibet, I: 66-69.
obvious problems this presented in meeting the goals of research expeditions. However, he blamed the problems not on the possibility that the network of communication that they worked from was far from perfect, but instead on indigenous peoples and their lack of intelligence or other racial/cultural flaws. For example, when Przheval'skii discussed the problems of translating and communicating with the Tangut populations, he noted that "I usually spoke in Russian to the Cossack, who interpreted into Mongol, the Mongol in his turn rendering the meaning into Tangutan. Allowing for the limited intelligence of the Cossack, the stupidity of the Mongol, and the suspicion of the Tangutan, some idea may be formed of our difficulties in studying the language."36

Encountering the Other

Although Przheval'skii perceived the Other largely from visual rather than verbal evidence, he did not allow this problem to detract from his fervent effort towards documenting and describing the ethnic groups he encountered in Central Eurasia. Oftentimes, this resulted in detailed ethnographic descriptions which included discussions about clothing, marriage and gender relations, childrearing, economics and trade, artistic pursuits, religion, political matters, and popular

36 Ibid., II: 111.
pastimes and rituals of a number of different national groups. By providing the basic cultural information on peoples who were largely unknown in both Russia and the West, Przheval’skii’s account held high value for those intent on making Russian imperial inroads into Inner Asia.

His travelogue includes sections devoted to detailed descriptions of each of the major ethnic groups he came across. For example, Przheval’skii devoted an entire chapter of his published travelogue to an ethnographic description of the Mongols. His description began with their physical appearance, in which he noted the “distinguishing features of this race.”37 He emphasized a distinction in appearance, as with language, between northern and southern Mongols. Przheval’skii then described their clothes and the yurt dwellings of the Mongols. His description of the Mongols also focused on food preparations, including the Mongol drink _kumys_, and the Mongol love for drinking brick tea. Przheval’skii showed interest in the economic life of the Mongols and discussed what he called their “only occupation,” animal breeding. He made it clear in his discussion that his intention was not just to describe whom he thought the Mongols were, but also the life of “the nomadic” in general, something of obvious informational importance for Russian imperial missions across the Central Eurasian region.

To contemporary readers, Przheval’skii’s attention to national characteristics is particularly essentializing and exhibits his overwhelming sense of cultural superiority. Terms that he used to categorically describe the Mongols in this section alone included: sloth, lazy, indolent, “a slave to habit,” stolid-

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37 Ibid., I: 48.
conservative, passive, apathetic, lifeless, cowardice, and obtuseness. On the more “positive” side, Przheval’skii found that they exhibit cunning, sagacity, strong constitution, excellent health, inquisitiveness, and curiosity. His portrayal of the various Mongol peoples, particularly those of northern Mongolia, bore resemblance to many European Romantic-era-inspired portrayals of the noble savage. Przheval’skii found that the Mongols lived for a long time in innocent isolation but were being slowly corrupted by their increasing cultural negotiations with the Chinese. This point of view is exhibited in the following excerpt in which in a single sentence he lashed out against multiple ethnic groups in describing the Chakhar Mongols of southern Mongolia. “...preserving the native idleness of their (Chakhar Mongols’) past existence, they have adopted from the Chinese only the worst features of their character, and are degenerate mongrels, without neither the honesty of the Mongol or the industry of the Chinaman.”

Przheval’skii emphasized what he saw as a detrimental cultural influence that the Chinese exerted on the Mongols, which he found particularly damaging to Mongol national character. The Mongol “(adopts) only the worst qualities of his neighbor (Chinese), retaining his inherent vices, until he has become a degenerate mongrel, demoralized, instead of rising to a higher social grade, under Chinese influence.” Przheval’skii makes the case that the Russian Empire could bring great improvements to the lives of the region’s peoples by replacing Qing despotism with what he saw as an inherently superior and enlightened empire.

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38 Ibid., I: 32.
39 Ibid., I: 48.
Przheval'skii's descriptions of the Other in this travelogue (including Chinese, Tanguts, Hui, and others), while not as detailed, were no less objectifying. Przheval’skii’s report exhibited an utter distaste for the traditional lifestyles he encountered in Central Eurasia. His disdain for the Great Wall is surprising, but his explanation for state construction of the wall is simply malicious, in which he attributed its building to the attempt to cover up for a lack of “moral strength” in the Chinese nation.40

Przheval'skii’s travelogue exemplified a strong belief in Western civilization as he imagines it and a conviction that it can bring inherent good to this region. For him, religion was an important aspect of Western/Russian culture and he seemed intent on facilitating its spread to this region in the future. Lamaism, or Tibetan Buddhism, was seen as an abomination which he viewed as keeping people from achieving their highest potential intellectual development. He noted that “Lamaism is the most frightful curse of the country, because it attracts the best part of the male population, preys like a parasite on the remainder, and, by its unbounded influence, deprives the people of the power of rising from the depths of ignorance into which they are plunged.”41 Buddhism, which Przheval’skii considered as a “noble religion,” had also failed at reversing the negative innate cultural practices of the Mongols. One common practice which he was particularly appalled of was the ritual feeding of human corpses to wild dogs. Przheval'skii said that this practice in itself earned the Mongols the description of

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40 Ibid., 1: 39.
41 Ibid., 1: 80.
"senseless creatures." At one point in his travel account after describing this practice, he appealed to future generations of Christian missionaries to the region to not only convert the heathen, but also change their cultural practices.\textsuperscript{42}

Przheval'skii wrote to future missionaries, "not to teach the mere outward observance of religion, but to accompany ...(religious doctrine) with (the) refining influences of civilization and the culture of a superior race."\textsuperscript{43} Nikolai Przheval'skii, like many other nineteenth-century explorers and cultural missionaries, foresaw his mission as laying the groundwork for the future benefit of Mongol civilization, a civilizing mission that would bring it up to the level of the Russian.

Cultural Immersion

Przheval'skii also noted that his approach to gaining "understanding" into foreign cultures was to submerge himself culturally into this foreign environment.

\textsuperscript{42} Jerry Bentley has defined what Przheval'skii is proposing be done in the future in Mongolia as a process of cultural conversion (most likely induced by pressure). For a full description of his terminology, see Jerry H. Bentley, \textit{Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times} (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 5-20.

\textsuperscript{43} Przheval'skii. \textit{Mongolia, the Tangut country, and the solitudes of northern Tibet}, 1: 83.
It must be understood what I wish to say...that when a traveler makes his way into remote parts of Asia, he must discard many of his former opinions for others more adapted to the sphere in which he finds himself.44

This idea also arose in his discussion about hunting on this expedition. He made note that it was important for him, and for the westerner in general, to put aside some of his European conventional ideas about hunting while in the Asian wilds: “In fact on entering the deserts of Asia the sportsman must lay aside his European experiences and learn a great deal from the native hunters.”45 Przheval’skii also noted that he wanted to understand the Chinese opium practice and admitted that he tried opium himself once during this journey, presumably to learn from the natives.46

Przheval’skii repeatedly stressed that in order to really gain a firm understanding of the place, he should be willing to loosen up his own habits. However, the extent that this was possible, given Przheval’skii’s lack of suitable language skills and utter ignorance about the cultures of the peoples he interacted with, was difficult to determine. Besides, actions in such initial cultural contacts are generally misunderstood on both sides.47

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44 Ibid., I: 150.
46 Ibid., I: 200-201.
47 Much has been written about the misunderstanding of initial cross-cultural interactions. For a classic exposition of this phenomenon in the nineteenth century, see Misao Miyoshi, As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States (1860) (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979). For a historical example of a more destructive cross-cultural encounter, see Greg Dening, Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land:
Hui Rebellion

One of the more interesting passages of Przheval'skii's initial account is his description of the late stages of the Muslim or Hui Rebellion (referred to sometimes as the Muslim or Hui Insurrection) in progress in Western China. The revolt started in 1862 and lasted until 1875. It was encouraged by the leaders of the Taiping movement and orchestrated by the Kashgar Khan Muhammad Yaqub Beg, whose regime stood in opposition to what was seen as a despotic and alien Manchu Qing imperial rule. Przheval'skii's account of this episode was a rare example of a literate outsider passing through the area at the height of the insurrection. Perhaps not surprisingly, Przheval'skii revealed almost no admiration for the Hui. He characterized this conflict as "one set of cowards [the Hui] [trying to] outwit another [the Qing Empire]." Most of the information which he drew on about this rebellion came secondhand, but he also made his own insights about this very violent event. He describes, for example, the Chinese army's systematic murder of approximately ten thousand Hui men, women, and children who were forced off of high mountain cliffs by steel weapons. Przheval'skii also noted what he referred to as Hui brutality, claiming...

Marquesas, 1774-1880 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1980). For a useful framework for analyzing cross-cultural encounters historically, see Bentley, Old World Encounters.

48 By using the term "outsider" here, I am referring to Przheval'skii and his expeditionary crew as non-Hui and non-Chinese.

49 Przheval'skii, Mongolia, the Tangut country, and the solitudes of northern Tibet, II: 126.
that they threw hundreds of Chinese children into deep wells. Both sides, according to his sources, spared no prisoners following victory in battle.\textsuperscript{50}

Though most of Przheval'skii's information came secondhand, his moral positioning about this struggle was clear: he tried to distance his position from that of both the Muslim Hui and the Chinese, by asserting his own superiority over both. Przheval'skii's interest in this political event underscored his commitment on these missions to the expansion of the Russian Empire in Eurasia. The Hui Rebellion and the fluid and uncertain state of affairs in Qing China was seen by Przheval'skii as a critical point of interest that the Russians could potentially exploit to the benefit of their own empire. The fact that the Hui were constituents of an Islamic population that spanned the entire central part of the Eurasian continent also made this insurrection a point of concern. Although Russian Turkestan was now firmly under Russian territorial control, Przheval'skii and the leadership of the RGO began to realize just how important it was to monitor the situation among the Empire's Muslim subjects in particular. This would become particularly clear later in the century, as the Jadid movement gained momentum in Turkestan and across the Muslim parts of the empire.\textsuperscript{51} Of course, the influence of Pan-Turanism would even extend beyond the borders of

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., II: 127-36.


Scientific Research

Like many scientific explorers who were supported by the RGO in the second half of the nineteenth century, Przheval'skii devoted a lot of attention on his missions to the collection of scientific information about the natural environment of Central Eurasia. His expeditions entailed the usual collection of natural-scientific specimens and the writing down of notes about unusual or first-time finds of plant and animal life, combined with descriptions of geographic features.
Przheval’skii’s notebooks which he kept on these journeys, which have been preserved in St. Petersburg’s Academy of Sciences archive, are remarkably detailed and represent an unusual dedication to the project of scientific classification of the environment. In one such notebook, dated from 15 January 1871 and titled “Notebook number 2: Mammals,” Przheval’skii nearly filled a three-hundred page notebook with information on mammals found on this initial expedition. This notebook is typical of the types that he kept on his expeditions. Przheval’skii divided mammals up into classifications of species, utilizing the Latin names, Russian names, and at times the local Central Eurasian names (in Mongolian or Manchurian languages) for these species. He also kept tallies of the number of each species that the expeditionary crew came across and where these were found, valuable data for potential future settlement. The Przheval’skii field notebooks reveal a remarkable attention to detail and a nearly-fanatical approach to scientific documentation, placing him clearly as an inheritor of the tradition of natural-scientific scholarship first practiced among Russian scholars earlier in the century.

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3 PFA RAN f. 55, op. 6, no. 2. On list 108 is Przheval’skii’s description of the Bactrian camel, one of the mammals which he was particularly interested in. This notebook was written up during his time in Beijing. For one of Przheval’skii’s subsequent notebooks, which was organized very similarly to this earlier one, see PFA RAN f. 55, op. 6, no. 3. This notebook is titled “Mammals. Kul’dzha. 6 August 1876.” In this notebook, one can find Przheval’skii’s notes on the wild Bactrian camel which would later be named after him. His notes on Camelus bactrianus ferus appear on list 179. On list 78 of the Kul’dzha notebook is a list of mammal names with the translation into local languages.
Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii later noted about Przheval'skii's initial expedition that "regarding natural-history riches, Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii found for himself in this still-unknown scientific land a complete El Dorado."\(^{54}\) That is, there was a wealth of new scientific specimens to analyze, document, and catalogue, an embarrassment of riches for the explorer-traveler. Przheval'skii's journey to Mongolia and the surrounding lands is especially notable for his documentation of certain animal life which he found there for the first time. On this journey he focused more on animals, since much of his travel involved long stretches of movement over arid desert lands, including the Gobi, with little in the way of flora or glimpses of the picturesque.\(^{55}\)

Among the recreational activities that the expeditionary crew participated in was the hunting of mountain sheep in Mongolia.\(^{56}\) Hunting of wild game, both for survival and for leisure, was a major pastime for the expedition's members, especially during winter breaks in travel. Przheval'skii's descriptions of hunting were very detailed and focused attention on the danger involved in hunting, and almost read like a hunter's manual on how to most effectively make the kill. He presented these hunting encounters as narratives, which tended to follow a fairly predictable pattern. In one representative example, Przheval'skii and members of his expeditionary group were hunting three yaks, which began charging towards...

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\(^{54}\) Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Istoria poluvelkovoi deiatel'nosti, II: 521.

\(^{55}\) Przheval'skii, Mongolia, the Tangut country, and the solitudes of northern Tibet, I: 121-31. It should be noted here that Przheval'skii made his famous discovery of a previously-unidentified wild horse (named Equus Przewalski) on a subsequent expedition to Tibet in 1879-80.

\(^{56}\) Karataev, Przheval'skii, 86.
him and his party. The group fired on and killed or injured the first two, but the
third would not go down. They managed to hit the animal seven times in the
chest before it finally died, an accomplishment which was related to the reader in
narrative fashion. Przheval'skii's love of hunting was a lifelong pursuit that was
not untypical for late-century explorer-travelers worldwide. There were a few
reasons why he cultivated an interest in hunting. Among these reasons was a
literary interest in capturing this experience which extended back to his youth,
when he published an autobiographical essay about hunting and continued to
devote space on this topic through the rest of his career. Przheval'skii's interest
in hunting is reflective of the dominant expectations of masculine behavior that
was found among so many global imperialist figures of the time. Hunting was a
reflection of the imperial project itself and the active and masculine identity that it
reenacted in the act of the kill was akin to the Western acquisition of territory and
peoples. It was yet another, albeit more violent, means of expressing the advance
of Western or civilized hegemony over the non-Western and uncivilized
environment. Part and parcel with the classificatory process that was central to
these expeditions, the hunting and collection of "samples" from the environment
made the process more concrete, and more "knowable."

37 Przheval'skii, Mongolia, the Tangut country, and the solitudes of northern Tibet, II: 198-99.
Conclusion to the Journey, Write-Up

Przheval'skii’s approach to presenting this journey was quite unique. Whereas earlier explorer-travelers made the collection and description of flora, fauna, and geography the centerpiece of their narratives, Przheval'skii did not center his attention on this. Much more space is devoted to ethnographic descriptions, personal experiences and tribulations, the experience of hunting animals, and other somewhat more lively topics than were typically found in travel reports by RGO-funded scholars. This may account for the tremendous popularity he found beyond academic circles.

The expeditionary crew covered approximately eleven thousand miles on this nearly four-year-long journey. Both in terms of distance traveled and time spent away from “civilization,” this was the longest expedition of Przheval'skii’s career. Highlights included their trip across the Gobi desert, interactions with little-known ethnic groups, discovery of new flora and fauna, and many adventurous hunting experiences, all of which got devoted to print in his write-up. Understandably, after such a long journey, Przheval'skii and company were elated to return to a more predictable life, at least for a short time. On their way home on the final stretch of the journey, they received mail that was now long outdated.

Przheval'skii wrote that
we read with feverish impatience letters and newspapers which, although more than a year old, were new to us. Europe, our country, old times, rose up before us with startling vividness, and we became more than ever sensible of our lonely position in the midst of a people alien not in aspect alone but in every shade of character.  

This quote captures the sense of foreignness that Przheval'skii felt as an Asian traveler. It also highlights, again, the sense that Przheval'skii thought of the Mongols, "Tanguts," and other peoples that they encountered as an "Other" and the strong sense of his identity as European and Russian. When they reached the end of the expedition at Kiakhta in 1873, Przheval'skii offered this final reflection on the journey:

Our journey was ended. Its success had surpassed all the hopes we entertained when we crossed for the first time the borders of Mongolia. Then an uncertain future lay before us; now, as we called to mind all the difficulties and dangers we had gone through, we could not help wondering at the good fortune which had invariably attended us everywhere. Yes! In the most adverse circumstances, fortune had been ever constant, and ensured the success of our undertaking: many a time when it hung on a thread a happy destiny rescued us, and gave us the means of accomplishing, as far as our strength would permit, the exploration of the least known and most inaccessible countries of Inner Asia.

With a similar wave of exuberance, Przheval'skii went to work organizing his notes and crafting this into a well-organized and entertaining write-up of his travel experiences. He already had a solid record of publishing behind him, but this travel account catapulted him into national and, later, international celebrity. In early 1874, he arrived in St. Petersburg, and the conclusion to his extraordinary

58 Ibid., II: 258.

59 Ibid., II: 284.
journey was met with much fanfare. Many newspaper articles were devoted to his story, and he made a number of public lectures in the capital about this journey. Przheval’skii delivered a speech to the members of the RGO at St. Petersburg which was met with “thunderous applause.”60

Przheval’skii donated his collection of botanical specimens to the Botanical Garden and his zoological finds to the Zoological Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.61 From archival evidence, we can understand the great degree of excitement and interest for the zoological specimens which Przheval’skii and company acquired on this initial expedition. A flurry of announcements and correspondences were sent to the Academy of Sciences’ administration referring to this (by RGO leader Fedor Petrovich Litke) as an “unusually important [and] significant collection.”62 Przheval’skii also submitted to the Academy of Sciences’ zoological museum lists of the mammals, fish, birds, and other animal life which he was donating to the Zoological Museum. These inventories list the types of animals by their Latin names (when known) and also include the quantity of each *ekzempliar* (specimens). The numbers of animal life that the expeditionary crew collected on this initial mission are staggering. For example, his inventory includes 323 different types of birds.

60 Brower, “Imperial Russia and its Orient,” 373.


62 See PFA RAN, f. 2, op. 1-1874, no. 1. This letter was from F.P. Litke to President of Academy of Sciences, and is dated 4 April 1874. It appears in the fond as list number 6.
and over 1150 individual *ekzempliar*. This was a major addition to the collections of the Academy of Sciences' Zoological Museum and proved a major incentive for the support of future Przheval'skii missions.

**Pratt and Przheval'skii**

Przheval'skii in many ways could be characterized as an imperial traveler of the type described by Mary Louise Pratt. Her description of interaction in the "contact zone" and the characteristics of what she calls "anti-conquest" writing have strong correlation with Przheval'skii's account of his first major research expedition to Central Eurasia. Przheval'skii extracted natural-scientific information from the environment, and acted as a passive eye that scanned the sites/sights. His ethnographic descriptions "inhabit a separate textual homeland" than his descriptions of the environment, as was the case among some of Pratt's travel accounts by North Europeans in South Africa in the eighteenth century.64

63 Ibid. The inventories appear on lists 8-12 in the above-cited archival collection. There was also discussion in this collection of the ruble value of the collection, which most estimated at ten thousand rubles. This was based on the assessments of RGO leaders and scholars employed by the Academy of Sciences to assess the value of this zoological collection.

64 Pratt's description of four eighteenth-century travel accounts by North Europeans visiting South Africa across the eighteenth century are very comparable with Przheval'skii's account of Central
The ethnographic subjects were set off from the descriptions of the natural environment, so that they could be dealt with directly. This was, according to Pratt’s interpretation of her travelers, done to marginalize the importance of the individuals who inhabit these spaces, as they only impede the process of “naturalizing” the environment.  

He was, perhaps more than any previous Russian explorer-traveler to Central Eurasia in the period, very interested in advancing his travels for the benefit of the Russian imperial state. Przheval’skii’s imperial eyes gazed upon the environment, identifying everything that was necessary for future Russian efforts in the region. Nikolai Mikhailovich also wanted to gain notoriety and support for himself in Russian scientific circles, and this expedition was his most determined effort at doing so. He had, as mentioned before, garnered attention for his Ussuri River trip, but this initial expedition to Mongol country was to be the one which assured sufficient and significant financial backing for expeditions for the rest of his life. Przheval’skii followed this up with several more return trips to Central Eurasia, in between periods of rest and recovery which he spent collecting his notes, writing up his findings, making presentations on his research and, of course, hunting.

For Pratt, these travels represented a narration of the anti-conquest. Quote above is from Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 52. These four travel accounts are discussed on 38-68.

65 “Naturalizing” of environments is Pratt’s term. By this, she refers to the process of translating the physical landscapes these travelers viewed into interpretable scientific data. This was primarily done through classification of plant and animal species using the Linnean classification system, and by the naming of previously-unknown flora and fauna. For more detail see ibid., 15-37.
Much of this “down time” was also devoted to circulating in the social-intellectual environment in St. Petersburg, where he established contacts to further his future research efforts.

Public Acclaim for the First Expedition

Upon his return to Russia, Przheval’skii was made a national hero in Russia and would gain attention internationally as well. In 1874, the Russian Geographical Society rewarded Przheval’skii with the Constantine Medal, the highest award bestowed by the RGO on accomplished geographers. This travelogue became the equivalent of a best-seller for the time in Russia, understandably so. It had all the ingredients necessary to attract a nineteenth-century reader’s interests: exploring uncharted territory inhabited with exotic peoples, the conflict of man versus nature, danger at every turn, and the sense of a heroic journey in the service of the state, knowledge, and empire. Przheval’skii’s Mongol travelogue was a story that was unmatched by his Geographical Society predecessors to Central Eurasia for its pure entertainment value. By this time, he had seen many earlier geographers and explorers achieve academic notoriety by

66 He was awarded the Constantine Medal “for his scientific and geographic discoveries at the time of his journey.” In Semenov-Tian-Shanskii’s history of the RGO, he provided a list of the annual winners of the Constantine Medal. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, Istoria poluvekovoi deiatel’nosti, II: 482-83.
writing detailed scientific travelogues charting the natural environment for imperial benefit. Przheval'skii knew that by writing up the geographic and natural-scientific attributes of the environment in Mongolia and the surrounding territories in as much detail as possible, all of which were still terrae incognitiae, he could also achieve success. However, he sought to go one step further by making his travel account entertaining to a wide audience, something that previous Russian explorer-travelers did not aim to do. Przheval'skii's write-up of this expedition was well-organized into mini-essays within the larger work which focused discussion on specific topics of interest, often cultural ones rather than a strict focus on scientific data. He devoted a lot more discussion space to his personal experiences and problems on the journey, adding a readable element to his account and making it accessible for a wider audience in the Russian-speaking world. Within a couple of years of its initial publication in Russian language, the book had garnered enough attention to attract the financing of an English translation and publication of the book, making Przheval'skii an internationally-known entity. He soon took his place along with other European nations' great explorers and nineteenth-century heroes. The success of this travel account and of his future accounts among both Russian and international (particularly English and German audiences in the late-nineteenth century67) audiences was part of a

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67 This account was translated into English in 1876. Przheval'skii's travel account of his next major expedition to Lop Nor and Zungaria was translated into English and German. Murzaev, V dalekoi Azii, 51.
larger global process of bringing the individual reader into the heroic adventures of national-imperial exploration.

Although there are aspects of his accounts that are typical, Przheval'skii does not fit neatly into Pratt's description of an imperial-serving scholar-traveler. He exhibited many of the characteristics of attention to natural-science descriptions that are so typical of so many travelers of this time, but he was somewhat more "modern" than earlier travelers in that he saw beyond the immediate need for natural science information. Przheval'skii further sought the notoriety that he knew was possible from his explorations, and he knew just how to exploit this to his utmost advantage. Pratt's explorers also did not write with the intention of popularizing their narratives in the way that Przheval'skii did.

Finally, it should be emphasized that Przheval'skii's initial RGO-sponsored mission to Mongolia and the Tangut lands marked the beginning of a shift in research emphasis for the Russian Geographical Society. In the years prior to this mission, the RGO had focused its research expeditions on Eastern Siberia and territories already under Russian control in Central Asia. Upon the conclusion of Przheval'skii's journey in 1873 and by the middle of the 1870s, the RGO began to shift its research emphasis away from Russian-acquired territories to ones which were either directly or indirectly under Manchu control. According to Semenov-Tian-Shanskii's history of the RGO, the Amur-Primorskoye and the Turkestan-Zungarian lands became the new focus of research attention.68 It can be concluded, then, that the successful results of this initial Przheval'skian mission

sparked a new era in Russian territorial exploration beyond its own national and imperial borders.

**Przheval’skii’s 1876-77 Expedition**

After returning from his first major RGO-sponsored expedition, Przheval’skii wasted no time in making plans for a second grand journey into Central Eurasia. The reports of this first major expedition had piqued the interest of the RGO leadership in further Central Eurasian expeditions and its results encouraged them to increase their spending for his second expedition, providing more money for more guides, draft animals, and equipment. The goal of this 1876-77 expedition was to explore the area around the Lake Lop Nor and make as many scientific observations as possible. Lop Nor was an area which had not seen European explorers in hundreds of years, according to prevailing Russian and Western European opinions of the time. Przheval’skii believed that no European had seen the Lake Lop Nor area since Marco Polo, though there is ample evidence that his ideas about this were wrong. However, he was correct in his assessment that there had never been a modern western scientific reconnaissance of the area.

Historian of the RGO and of Przheval’skii, Eduard Makarovich Murzaev, noted that the so-called Lop Nor expedition was more than anything noted for its repeated strokes of what Murzaev referred to as bad luck. Although some of the
problems that Murzaev noted were unlucky occurrences, many of the problems can be directly attributed to the fact that Przheval'skii and company really did not know what to expect on this expedition. Among the instances of bad luck that Murzaev noted in a series of lectures which he gave in Moscow in 1950 were the ongoing insurrection in Western China and the envelopment of that region in war, tense diplomatic relationships between “the tsars of Russia and China,” “the death of the dear mother of Nikolai Mikhailovich,” and Przheval'skii's own illness during the expedition.69

His travel account of this expedition, titled From Kulja, Across the Tian Shan to Lob-Nor opened with a typically Przheval'skian boast about the discoveries made during his expedition: “Another successful step in the exploration of Inner Asia- the basin of Lob-Nor, so long and so obstinate a terra incognita-has at last been revealed to science.”70 In late summer of 1876, Przheval'skii and company


70 Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii, From Kulja, across the Tian Shan to Lob-Nor, transl. E. Delmar Morgan... with an introduction by Sir Thomas Douglas Forsyth (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1879), 31. The original Russian publication of this travel account was published as Przheval'skii, Ot Kul'dzhi za Tian'-Shan i na Lob-Nor, puteshestvie v 1876 i 1877 gg ([Sanktpeterburg]: Izd. I.R.G. Ob-shch., 1878). The Soviet republication was published as Przheval'skii, Ot Kul'dzhi za Tian'-Shan' i na Lob-nor (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1947).
set out for the mission from the city of Kulja on the Ili River, bound for Lop Nor.\footnote{Kulja was an important station for the initiation of many Russian activities in Central Eurasia. For more on Kulja, see Edwin G. Bilof, “China in Imperial Russian Military Planning, 1881-1887” MA 46, no. 2 (April 1982): 69-70. The town of Kiakhta was equally important as a starting point for expeditions. For information on Kiakhta, see Kalesnik, Geograficheskoе obshestva za 125 let, 89.}

Preparations for the Expedition

The expedition enlisted the support of twenty-four camels and four horses. Przheval’skii’s group was outfitted with the help of local guides, the usual practice on these journeys. They had a very helpful local guide who was referred to simply as Eklon. Przheval’skii emphasized that Eklon was a volunteer and that his services were quite beneficial to the journey. He wrote the following about him: “my...traveling companion, the volunteer Eklon, proved to be an energetic and willing youth, and with a little practice he soon became an invaluable assistant.”\footnote{Przheval’skii, From Kulja, Across the Tian Shan to Lob-Nor, 44.} Przheval’skii employed two Cossacks, referred to as Chebaev and Irinchinov, who had also been with him on his first expedition. Przheval’skii also further refers to the hiring of a Kirghiz Christian convert who could speak Tatar.
language, who was hired at Kulja.\textsuperscript{73} His account made mention also of a Taranchi\textsuperscript{74} interpreter from Kulja, about whom Przheval’skii wrote that, “being myself ignorant of any of these forms of speech, I was unable personally to make any observations about them, and the interpreter was too stupid to assist me.”\textsuperscript{75}

It should be reiterated here the important degree to which local, often non-ethnically-Russian, collaborators were a part of these mission, as with all of Przheval’skii’s missions. Without their support, the travels would have proven extremely difficult, in terms of navigating through unknown lands, communicating in local languages, and establishing amiable contacts with local peoples. As will become evident below, on this expedition the locals played an even more important role in the success or failures of the expedition than usual. Przheval’skii’s first major expedition of 1870-1873 had been quite successful at establishing contacts in the Central Eurasian region. Of course, much of the actual work in establishing friendly contacts was done by Przeval’skii’s guides and interpreters.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{74} Taranchi was a term used to refer to the Uighurs.

\textsuperscript{75} Przheval’skii, \textit{From Kulja, Across the Tian Shan to Lob-Noř}, 66.
Muhammad Yaqub Beg and Local Resistance to the Mission

Some progress had been made in establishing amicable relations with the Muslim Hui following the initial expedition. In fact, the Kashgar Khan Muhammad Yaqub Beg, who was perhaps the single person most responsible for leading the Hui Rebellion in Eastern Turkestan, sent a diplomatic letter in advance of Przheval'skii's 1876 mission to the Russian colony of Turkestan, which was delivered to the Governor-General of Turkestan, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufmann. In it, Muhammad Yaqub Beg promised Przheval'skii's expeditionary crew the utmost hospitality on their journey. Of course,

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76 Von Kaufmann (1818-1882) was the first Governor-General of the Russian colony of Turkestan from 1867-81. He has often been portrayed as a progressive leader who allowed for a great deal of autonomy for Turkestani subjects. He was seen as taking a particularly hands-off administrative approach to the practice of Islam, though he did from time to time interfere in the practice of Islamic law in the region when it seemed contradictory to the Turkestani juridical apparatus. The period of his governor-generalship was a crucial one both for Turkestan and the Russian administration, and established relatively successful (that is, stable) rule of this colony. Von Kaufmann’s years of leadership in Turkestan coincided with the acquisition or acquired allegiance of the Central Eurasian states of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand. Von Kaufmann’s amiable relations with many of the Turkic peoples of the region may account for Muhammad Yaqub Beg’s extension of hospitality for Przheval’skii’s mission. For more on von Kaufmann, see Brower, Turkestan.

77 Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, Istoria poluvekovoi deiatel’nosti, II: 525.
Przheval'skii and company had no such assurances on their first expedition to Central Eurasia.

Although Muhammad Yaqub Beg extended this warm invitation to Przheval'skii's Russian expedition, Przheval'skii mentioned several times in his own account that he often felt as though the group was being followed by spies. They also encountered resistance from locals throughout this expedition, who would knowingly provide false information in giving directions or deliberately lead the group through a route that was the most circuitous from point A to point B. Consider the following from Przheval'skii regarding local resistance to their expedition.

To all our questions as to the town of Korla, the number of its inhabitants, their trade, the features of the surrounding country, &c., we received the curtest replies, or absolute falsehoods, and this continued during the whole of our six months' stay in the dominions of Yakub Beg, or, “Badaulat,” i.e. the happy one, as he is termed by his subjects. 78

The resistance to Przheval'skii's expedition may have not been strictly the spontaneous resistance of the indigenes, but in fact a counterintelligence mission organized by someone within the Muhammad Yaqub Beg government. Consider this fragment as evidence of the suspicion that Przheval'skii had:

In order to prevent us seeing the town they led us by a circuitous path across the fields and were bare-faced enough to assure us that there was no better road...They suspected and deceived us at every step; the inhabitants were forbidden to hold any intercourse with or even speak to us. We were in fact under surveillance, and our escorts nothing but spies. 79

78 Przheval'skii, From Kulja, Across the Tian Shan to Lob-Nor, 51.

79 Ibid., 53.
Muhammad Yaqub Beg’s military also put up pickets to block Przheval’skii’s expedition from entering certain areas, delaying their mission a number of times. 80 This brings the discussion to the question of why Muhammad Yaqub Beg and the locals were so suspicious of Przheval’skii and the RGO expeditionary crew. In his introduction to this translation, T. Douglas Forsyth, a British scholar who was knowledgeable about exploration in Central Eurasia, stated that the Russians were interested in finding gold in the area around Yarkand, which was close to Kashgar. He also argues that the fact that gold existed there accounted for Muhammad Yaqub Beg’s suspicion of the Russian expeditionary crew. 81

There is no direct reference to the mineral wealth of the area in Przheval’skii’s account, but the mineral wealth of the region was likely one of the concerns and interests of the expedition’s research mission. However, the RGO’s members were not yet trained in geological sciences to the degree necessary to make professional assessments of the mineral wealth of the area. The Geographical Society only took interest in geology to the degree that it was necessary to make assessments about the general geographical characteristics of a region and did not forward the geological research that Humboldt and Murchison had laid the groundwork for earlier in the century. It was not until the 1880s and the founding

80 This happened the first time shortly after leaving Kulja. Despite the fact that Przheval’skii and company had acquired permission from Muhammad Yaqub Beg, they were delayed at a military picket from reaching their first destination on their journey. Przheval’skii and company were made to delay for several days awaiting a reconfirmation of Muhammad Yaqub Beg’s willingness to allow them to progress. Ibid., 49.

81 Ibid., 18.
of the Geological Committee that a professional rather than “amateurish”
approach to geology was underway among Russian natural scientists. The
Mineralogical Society’s efforts prior to the 1870s had failed to produce reliable
data and scholarship.82

Circuitous Routes and Social Distancing

Przheval’skii argued that the local population’s resistance to their mission
could be explained as a lack of understanding on their part of the importance of
science and research to “European” peoples like the Russians. He attempted to
distance himself and his colleagues as progressive Europeans who were above
their Asian counterparts. Note in the following excerpt the way with which
Przheval’skii underscored the inherent value in scientific exploration:

The inhabitants on our line of march had evidently been instructed to
deceive us in everything that we could not see for ourselves; and never
before having set eyes on Russians, about whom they had probably heard
marvelous tales, they fled as though we had the plague, and to the very last
suspected us of dishonesty, seeing that we, “the valued guests” of their
ruler, were treated as spies, and led by circuitous roads in charge of an
escort; their suspicions were too heightened, owing to their not
understanding the object of our journey. Just as it happened in Mongolia
and Kansuh, so now on the Tarim, the semi-barbarous natives could not
believe it possible that we should undergo the hardships of travel, spend
money, sacrifice camels, &c., merely for the sake of seeing a new country,

82 Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: 1861-1917, 396-97.
collecting plants and skins, &c., objects which from their point of view were good for little, if not absolutely worthless. 83

The goal in this passage was in part to elevate Przheval’skii above the environment. He saw his own ideals as innately superior to those of “the semi-barbarous natives.” This technique of social distancing was one way of establishing Russian superiority above the indigenous peoples of Central Eurasia. None of the other explorers involved in this study took as disparaging an opinion of the locals as did Przheval’skii. His opinions echoed the civilizing mission of other international imperialistic projects and foretold another later development, the taking on of the “White Man’s Burden.” For Przheval’skii and company, that “burden” was not actually intended to produce an outcome. That is, the Russian Geographic Society did not intend to impart a scientific-geographic consciousness among the peoples of the areas they explored. Their only concern was to note the disparity between themselves and the Other and draw some strength for their mission based upon knowledge of their differing worldviews.

Scientific Discoveries

Przheval’skii’s account of his journey from Kulja to Lop Nor was heavy on scientific observations and measurements and his account again demonstrated a firm commitment to scientific documentation of the environment:

83 Przheval’skii, From Kulja, Across the Tian Shan to Lop-Nor, 73-74.
After crossing the left bank of the Ili, near the mouth of the Kash (50 versts beyond Kulja), we continued as before to ascend the valley, in this part 20 versts wide, and having the appearance of a steppe plain with a clayey and slightly saline soil, producing Ceratocarpus, dwarf wormwood, and Lasiogrostis; in the more fertile part astragalus, a few kinds of herbs or plants of the order compositae, and small gnarled bushes; whilst the river bank is fringed with thick cane-brake.  

Although Muhammad Yaqub Beg and the local Muslim Chinese were highly suspicious of Przheval’skii’s motivations for exploration in the region, Przheval’skii was above all committed in his write-up to presenting a sterile scientific description of the environment. However, his tendency in this report was to diverge from this information towards ethnographic descriptions, descriptions of personal hunting experiences, or various “war stories.” Though Przheval’skii understood from the scientific language of Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s earlier reports that scientific documentation of the environment was to convey.

Hunting was of course one of his most personal interests and again figured in as a major theme of attention for Przheval’skii in his write-up. He and his expeditionary crew often spent idle time hunting and collected as many skins and specimens of fauna as he could in order to bring them back to the zoological collections in St. Petersburg. He was particularly excited when he managed to procure a skin of the wild camel to take back to the imperial capital.

84 Ibid., 34.
Ethnographic Information from the Lop Nor Expedition

Although Przeval'skii continued to be focused on the collection of natural-scientific and geographical information on this expedition, he again devoted a lot of space in his account to ethnographic descriptions. This included physiognomic observations about the different ethnic groups in the region, national traits, dwellings, clothes, economic life, and other matters. He devoted a particularly interesting passage to discussing the ethnographic makeup of the peoples who lived in villages around Lake Lop Nor, referred to collectively as the Karkurchints. For Przeval'skii, they represented the epitome of isolated peoples who were the farthest away from civilization. He discussed their surroundings and lives in a way that put the reader in a first-person perspective, who viewed the scene as if it were a work of art or as if they were themselves visiting the area. Consider this passage, in which he described what it was like to approach one of these villages.
As the traveller descends the narrow, tortuous channel of the Tarim between rows of huge canes, he suddenly comes upon three or four boats moored to the river bank, and farther on a clear space on which, closely grouped together, stand some square, reed-made enclosures. This is a village. Its inhabitants, startled at the unusual sight of a stranger, have hidden themselves, and are taking a furtive look through their reed walls, but recognizing the rowers of their own people, and their chief among them, they come forward and assist in mooring the boats. You land and look around—nought to be seen but marsh and reeds, not a dry spot anywhere; wild duck and geese are paddling about close to the dwelling-place itself, and an old wild boar is quietly wallowing in the mud almost between the houses. So little does the native of these parts resemble a man, that even the shy wild animal fears him not! Let us enter.85

By positioning the Russian and European reader in the first-person, Przheval’skii enlisted them as virtual participants in his expeditions. Notice the entertaining (?) way that Przheval’skii presented this material. With the alteration of a few words here and there, this passage could have appeared in a popular novel. Przheval’skii continued his ethnographic description of these villages by writing that:

The native of this country is as poor and weak morally as he is physically. His thoughts & ideas are limited by the narrow framework of his surroundings, and he knows nothing beyond...He thinks of, hopes for nothing beyond his native lake, the rest of the world does not exist for him. A constant conflict with want, hunger, and cold has laid a stamp of apathy & moroseness on his character.86

For Przheval’skii, these peoples were ruined by their isolation from civilization. They were very distant to his way of thinking, which was based on a virtual idol-worship of Western scientific practice and the greatness of the Russian state. This was both an awkward and a discerning moment in

85 Ibid., 107.
86 Ibid., 110-111.
Przheval'skii's travels. He exhibited very clearly in this description less a depiction of the Kara-kurchintsi than of himself and of the Russian Geographical Society's explorers sense of social distance from the peoples encountered on their journey. He also wrote that:

Such is the life of the wretched inhabitants of Lob-nor, unknown to and knowing nothing of the rest of the world. As I sat in one of these damp reedy enclosures, surrounded by the semi-nude inhabitants of one of the villages, I could not help thinking how many generations of progress separated me from my neighbors, and what the genius of man has been to raise from such beings as these, whom our remote ancestors most probably resembled, the Europeans of the present day!87

This reflective moment further exhibits the romantic sense of mission that Przheval'skii felt for these endeavors. He felt himself as part of a larger project of heroic proportions which had set themselves off perpetually from the Other. One also notes the dehumanized approach Przheval'skii again took in his ethnographic description of the peoples of Lop Nor. The people do not interact in the narrative, they are strictly observable phenomena. This equates the subjects of these ethnographic descriptions with the descriptions of landscapes, plantlife, and wild animals. Perhaps the only thing that separated these subjects (humans) from the other research subjects is that Przheval'skii and company did not "collect" them as specimens to return to St. Petersburg. Instead, he and his crew recorded as much as they could about their cultural practices. The people, then, were in some ways similar to the land which Przheval'skii as geographer tried to map out: one cannot take the land with them but they can go to great efforts to write down as much about it as possible.

87 Ibid., 114-115.
Despite some setbacks on this mission, mainly as a result of the resistance on the part of locals to the expedition, this second Przheval’skii expedition was again considered a major success. They arrived back in Kulja in early July 1877, after crossing a distance of just a bit over four thousand kilometers (the shortest of Przheval’skii’s four major expeditions).  

Upon returning to Kulja “with a rich scientific booty,” he noted that “I could not but feel that fortune had again favored me wonderfully. In all probability had we started a year earlier, or a year later, our exploration of Lob-Nor would have been unsuccessful; for had it been earlier, Yakub Beg, who was then neither afraid of the Chinese, nor solicitous for the friendship of Russia, would hardly have allowed us to pass beyond the Tian Shan; whereas, had it been postponed until now, the journey would not have been possible, owing to the disturbed state of affairs consequent on the death of Yakub Beg.”

Despite the obstacles encountered on this expedition, both imagined and actual, Przheval’skii and his expeditionary crew were largely successful again, measuring success as the degree to which they were able to gain an informational control over a specific environment. As was the case on his first expedition, this journey to Lop Nor attracted tremendous public interest and increased support.

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88 Murzaev, V Dalekoi Azii, 47.

89 Przheval’skii, From Kulja, Across the Tian Shan to Lob-Nor, 133.
from the RGO for Przheval’skii’s work. The international community also continued to watch Przheval’skii with an interested eye, as his travel account was translated to other languages soon after his write-up was completed. This expedition piqued interest in more future exploration of Tibet, which became for Przheval’skii a subject of personal interest. He was greatly disappointed that he was not able to visit the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, and hoped that on future expeditions he could also “claim” this spot for Russian geographical scientific knowledge. For Russian and Western geographers, his reconnoitering of the Lop Nor basin was particularly significant. As he wrote, “another successful step in the exploration of Inner Asia- the basin of Lob-Nor, so long and so obstinate a terra incognita-has at last been revealed to science.”

As in the conclusion to his first major expedition to Central Eurasia, Przheval’skii again sent a letter to the Academy of Sciences offering to donate the zoological specimens he collected to the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Zoological Museum in St. Petersburg. Again, the scientific booty was significant, claiming in his inventory to have collected over two hundred mammal samples and over six hundred samples of birds.

Although Przheval’skii and the scientific community of Russia and the Russian Geographical Society were very pleased again with the results of this second Przheval’skiiian expedition, there was more and more effort put forward after this to extend the light of science to other areas under scientific darkness. In

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90 Ibid., 31.
91 PFA RAN f. 2, op. 1-1874, no. 1. The letter from Przheval’skii to the Academy of Sciences is dated November 6, 1878, and appears in this collection on list 21. A second letter was dated December 13, 1878 and appears on list 24.
short, the acquisition of new lands for geographical and scientific knowledge often served to generate more interest in collecting more of these newfound territories. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Russian Geographical Society would expand its efforts in Central Eurasian exploration and Przheval’skii continued to receive substantive financial and logistical support for the rest of his short life. Meanwhile, a younger generation of scholar-travelers began to develop careers, many of whom would carry out their own research by following the Przheval’skiiian paradigm of exploration (see below).

**Przheval’skii’s 1879-1880 Expedition**

By the time of his third expedition, later scholars noted that one could identity a Przheval’skiiian school of exploration among his close junior and fellow-scholars. Two of these men, Petr Kuz’mich Kozlov and Vselevod Ivanovich Roborovskii, accompanied Przheval’skii on his final research missions and continued the work of geographical exploration in Central Eurasia themselves following Nikolai Mikhailovich’s death. The students of this school learned from Przheval’skii’s hard-nosed example that the way to achieve a near-legendary

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92 Most recently, the RGO’s 150th anniversary history of the organization recognized this idea. Agafonov and Isachenko, *Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo: 150 let*, 62.

93 Roborovskii joined Przheval’skii on the third and fourth expeditions and Kozlov joined in the fourth mission to Central Eurasia.
status was through highly-ambitious long-term expeditions which accumulated mountains of information and scores of scientific specimens. As Przheval'skii's reputation both within Russia and abroad was being established, he laid the groundwork for other Russian explorers to carry forward the baton of Central Eurasian exploration.

The travel account of this third expedition (1879-1880) was published very soon after the completion of the trip (1883) and was a whopping four-hundred seventy-five pages long. By this point Przheval'skii was not working alone in his compilation of information, as he noted near the beginning of this publication. Przheval'skii acknowledged that he received a great deal of assistance from the thirteen other individuals who accompanied him on this two-year mission. The

94 As in his previous major expeditions, Przheval'skii collected large numbers of zoological specimens and offered these for inclusion in the Academy of Sciences' Zoological Museum. PFA RAN f. 2, op. 1-1874, no. 1. The inventory which Przheval'skii made of zoological specimens collected from this expedition was drawn up in the spring of 1881 and appears on lists 43-47 of this collection.

95 Nikolai Przheval'skii, *Iz zaisana cherez Khami v Tibet* (S-Peterburg: Tip. V.S. Balasheva, 1883). The book was republished during the Soviet era with the editorial work of the historian Eduard Murzaev. Idem, *Iz zaisana cherez Khami v Tibet*. Pod red., so vstup. stat'ei i primechaniami E.M. Murzaeva (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1948). To avoid confusion in the text of this dissertation regarding citing of information from these two editions, I will use a longer-form bibliographic citation, as both sources will be utilized.

96 Besides Przheval'skii, the mission also included two officers, Roborovskii and Eklon, who had accompanied him on the previous mission to Lob-Nor. It is interesting to note here that in this mission "Eklon" gets a first and patronymic name: Fedor Leon'tevich (unlike in the last mission).
organization of this travel account was done in order to provide a holistic study of different regions that the expeditionary crew encountered on their journey. Przheval’skii’s account was divided into sections, each of which focus on a particular area and provide information within that subheading on the flora, fauna, geographic features, and ethnographic composition of that region.

**Ethnographic Sketches of Roborovskii**

Of particular interest about this publication is the inclusion of a number of drawings by one of Przheval’skii’s *sputniks* (fellow-travelers) on this trip, Vselevod Roborovskii, whose work represents a sharp contrast to the earlier sketches of Pavel Kosharov, the artist hired to accompany Semenov-Tian-Shanskii on his 1856-57 Tian Shan expedition. Whereas Kosharov’s drawings were focused on the documentation of landscapes, flora, and fauna, Roborovskii’s often depict the various indigenous peoples whom the expeditionary crew encountered on the expedition, while still serving a cataloguing function. One is struck from these drawings in particular by the haunting images of the indigenes, who often appear afraid, passive, or dark. The captions under the sketches in the

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Przheval’skii also mentions three soldiers and five Cossacks who accompanied the mission, as well as a translator of Central Asian languages named Andrei Kolomeitsov and Kulja native Abdul Basid Yusupov (who had also made the journey to Lob-Nor).
published version often add to the essentializing quality of the depictions by not labeling the people in the drawings as individuals, but as “Types of Tibetans” or “Tibetan Woman,” for example. ⁹⁷ Roborovskii attempted to present these individuals from various parts of the Central Eurasian region as newly-found groups of human being that needed to be catalogued and described in the same way that Przheval’skii and company categorized flora and fauna. One cannot help but wonder whether Przheval’skii and company wanted to “collect” these as specimens in the same way that they did plants and animals. These drawings were one way of capturing the essence of the peoples and of augmenting the ethnographic descriptions of Przheval’skii with visual information. The sketches depict frontal and side profile images of Tibetan “types.” The sketch of (a) “Tibetan Woman” shows side-by-side front and back images of a woman dressed in traditional ceremonial clothing. Roborovskii’s sketches are detailed, but the faces are somber and the impression one draws is of looking at a catalogue image of an animal or plantlife. Roborovskii also made some sketches, which also appear in the publication, of landscapes, elements of material culture such as tents or houses, and animals. ⁹⁸ These drawings were closer to the style emulated by Kosharov earlier in the century, but were done in more detail and with a strong dose of realist perspective.


⁹⁸ These appear throughout the 1948 Murzaev publication of Iz Zaisana cherez Khami v Tibet.
In preparing for the journey, Przheval'skii listed a number of objects which the expeditionary crew brought along. These were intended to be used to barter, to present as gifts or as bribes to the many local peoples that they would encounter. Przheval'skii wrote that they spent fourteen-hundred rubles in St. Petersburg on the following items: "a few hunting guns, revolvers, playing machines, pocket watches, folding mirrors, knives, scissors, razors, beads, necklaces and harmonicas, needles, magnets, tinsel, a few magnets (sic), pieces of velvet, a stereoscope, kaleidoscope, 2 small electric batteries and a telephone." Clearly Przheval'skii and company saw the importance of bringing technological items that they felt would draw particular interest from the Central Eurasian peoples.

He opens the third expeditions' account with the following disparaging observation about peoples of the Central Eurasian region:

And so, we again started to leave for the deep Asian lands. Again appeared to me a completely different world, not a bit like we have in Europe! Yes, the nature of Central Asia is completely different! Unusual and wild, (the nature) almost everywhere appears deprived of the life of civilization. But the nomads freely inhabit these lands and do not harm the nature; on the contrary, they nurture it and defend it. And, to everyone it is understood, the people here have lived from time immemorial, in this kind of pastoral life, not particularly concerned about physical tensions...of course, this was all of little use for the infantiles of humanity...(the) conservatism of Asia reached its apogee here!100

100 Ibid., 10.
Przheval'skii spent a lot of time on this expedition ruminating on what he saw as a diametrically-opposed way of life. He demonstrated a sense of awe for the nomads, but there was also a sense of disgust. He saw them as living static historical existences, unlike that of peoples in the West. Przheval'skii wrote that, “In the distant future these nomads will still be living monuments to history of the past.”

His direct encounter with an estimated nine thousand Kirghiz [Kazaks] encamped in Chinese territory in 1800 kibitki [tents used by Central Eurasian nomads] elicited even further awe, social distancing and a not-so-subtle disgust. Przheval'skii wrote, “[Upon coming to these nomads] I automatically thought to myself, [about] when the hordes of these nomads left from Asia to Europe! [I thought of the time] when all those Huns, Goths and Vandals, teamed up to plunder the lands of Gaul and Italy! God only knows how that must have all seemed for the cultured places of Western Europe!”

To the Capital of the Tibetans

The main destination for this third major journey was Tibet, which began to be a major point of personal interest by this point in Przheval'skii's career. He

101 Ibid., II.
102 The exclamation points are Przheval'skii's. Ibid., 20-21.
was especially interested in locating Lhasa, which he often refers to simply as “the capital of Tibet.” High on his list of priorities was making a visit to meet the Dalai Lama.\textsuperscript{103} Although Przheval’skii did demonstrate a certain sense of awe and appreciation of the Tibetans and the Dalai Lama in particular, this does not negate the overwhelming dislike and disgust he had for the majority of Central Eurasian peoples. As in the previous expeditions, he made it very clear that the western civilization that he feels a part of is inherently superior to the way of life of the traditional peoples of Central Eurasia.

As this journey progressed and they inched closer to Lhasa, the expeditionary crew faced increasing opposition to their mission from local inhabitants. During one point of the journey, Przheval’skii and company were forced to halt by the Tibetans upon their approach to Lhasa. Przheval’skii told them that he had received permission to visit Lhasa from the Chinese authorities, but the Tibetans were suspicious of this. At that point, the Tibetans sent a messenger to Lhasa to inquire about Przheval’skii’s visit, and the crew was forced to wait for days for a response.\textsuperscript{104} Ultimately, Przheval’skii and company never reached Lhasa on this expedition. They instead tried to collect as much information about the city and its inhabitants, including the Dalai Lama, from Tibetans. This work was facilitated through their utilization of two translators, including a Mongol who knew Tibetan.\textsuperscript{105} Ultimately, the Tibetans forced Przheval’skii and company to

\textsuperscript{103} For more on Przheval’skii’s quest to find the Dalai Lama, see Rayfield, \textit{The Dream of Lhasa}.

\textsuperscript{104} Nikolai Przheval’skii, \textit{Iz zaisana cherez Khami v Tibet,} pod red., so vstup. stat’ei i primechaniami E.M. Murzaeva. (Moskva: Gos. Izd-vo geogr. lit-ry. 1948), 203-04.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 220-21.
leave Tibet. Upon learning of this news, Przheval’skii made the following comment to the Tibetan messenger:

(I have) been an explorer for many years, but nowhere have I seen such mean and inhospitable people like the Tibetans...I will write about this completely so that the whole world will know; that sooner or later Europeans will come to them.\footnote{Ibid., 225.}

The resentment that Przheval’skii felt and the overwhelming feeling of a mission to bring Lhasa under the realm of European knowledge brings into focus, even more clearly, just how committed Przheval’skii was to both the Russian geographical/ethnographic project and the wider international (European or western) quest for the advancement of science. After the conclusion of this expedition, Przheval’skii set himself to the enormous task of writing up his research report, which appeared in publication in 1883, the same year that he left for a fourth major expedition.

Przheval’skii’s 1883-1885 Expedition

By the 1880s, relations between the Romanovs and the Qing had reached a new low point. This happened as the Russians continued to acquire territory that was not far from the Chinese border. Treaties had been made during the 1850s...
and 1860s annexing territories in the Far East, in the Amur and Primor'e regions.
In 1878, the Dungan or Hui rebellion had come to an end after thirteen years, and
the Chinese began to pay increasing attention to Russian imperialist interests
along its northern border. This led Russia's military experts to assess their
chances in a possible war along the Chinese border. During most of the 1880s,
Russia's leadership put the possibility of a war with China high on their list of
pressing concerns. Przheval'skii's opinions on the relative strengths and
weaknesses of the Chinese military were utilized by the Russians in their
assessments of a possible war.\textsuperscript{107} There were also concerns about the migrations
of nomadic peoples, like the Kazak, across Russian-Chinese borders.\textsuperscript{108}
Therefore, Przheval'skii's fourth expedition took place against this backdrop of
tense Russian-Chinese border relations. This tension was reflected in even more
distrust and lack of support from the locals whom Przheval'skii encountered on
this mission.

\textsuperscript{107} For more information on the Russo-Sino tensions and the Russian assessment of the Chinese
military, as well as Przheval'skii's role in that process, see Bilof, "China in Imperial Russian

\textsuperscript{108} There is an excellent study on China's Kazak population and its history. For information on
the nineteenth century and the migration of Kazaks along Russian and Chinese borders, see Linda
Benson and Ingvar Svanberg, \textit{China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazaks}
(Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 40-55. Dru Gladney is also a leading
authority on this region and its peoples. See Gladney, \textit{Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities,
and Other Subaltern Subjects} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also idem,
\textit{Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic} (Cambridge, Massachusetts:
Having secured a sizeable budget and an expeditionary group totaling twenty-four men, Przheval'skii set off from Moscow in August 1883 to reach Kiakhta, the starting point of his fourth major expedition to Central Eurasia. The main objective of this mission was to reach Northern Tibet and to locate the source of the Huang He River (something that Qubilai Khan had tried to do during the thirteenth century), an area that was seen as completely unknown to Western science. This expedition involved dealing with extreme climactic conditions, including traversing the Gobi during summer and the highlands of Tibet in the worst part of winter. The potential dangers and challenges of the mission seemed to drive Nikolai Mikhailovich even more, bolstered by his success in previous missions. As the group prepared to set out from Kiakhta, he had the following words for the expeditionary team:

Comrades! The work, which we are now starting, is a great work. We are going to research unknown Tibet, to make it the property of science. The state’s tsar and all of Russia, moreover, all of the educated world, will with trust and patience look to us...[we will do this] for science, and for the benefit of our dear fatherland.100

100 The budget for this mission was 43,580 rubles. The expeditionary group consisted of fifteen Cossacks and soldiers, a clerk, a translator, a photographer, and the two helpers (V.I. Roborovskii and P.K. Kozlov). Karataev, Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval'skii, 234.

100 Przheval'skii, *Ot Kiakhty na istoki Zheltoi reki; issledovanie severnoi okrainy Tibeta i put' cherez Lob-Nor po basseinu Tarima*, pod red., so vstup.stat'ei i primechaniami E. M. Murzaeva (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1948), 27. The original publication of this travelogue was published as Przheval'skii, *Ot Kiakhty na istoki Zhetoi reki; issledovanii severnoi okrainy Tibeta i put' cherez Lob-Nor po basseinu Tarima* (S.-Peterburg: Tip. V.S. Balasheva, 1888).
Geographical Naming and Western Superiority

The report of this fourth expedition brings to light the sense of competition that Przheval'skii seemed to have to locate positions on the map either more accurately than Chinese explorers had done or to claim that certain geographical regions had never been "claimed" by Western science. One gets the sense from this travel account that Przheval'skii's mission was to assert a Russian geographical and scientific superiority over the Qing, over the indigenous Central Eurasian peoples, and over western European geographers. In the following excerpt from his travel report, we get a strong sense of the competitive scientific game that Przheval'skii was involved in. This game, as the excerpt below highlights, involved the (re)naming of geographic features

The Chinese have for a long time known about these lakes; the western one they named Dzharin-Nor and the eastern one [is known as] Norin-Nor... But...[the] location of these lakes on geographic maps was established not from any of the Europeans [because] they did not visit [these places], but, [due to my having the] right of the first researcher, I named these places the eastern Lake Russkim (Russian) and the western [lake]—Lake Expedition. Let these first names [serve as] evidence, that the secret bank of the Yellow River was first penetrated by a Russian person, and secondly, strengthen the monument of our expedition here, which has been conquered in order to allow the possibility of scientific writings of these lakes.  

Przheval'skii implied here that Chinese scientific and geographic mapping of the area essentially "do not count." This underscored Przheval'skii's inherent belief that the Chinese civilization was inferior to the Western and Russian forms

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111 Przheval'skii, Ot Kkakhity na istoki Zheltoi reki; issledovanje severnoi okrayny Tibeta i put' cherez Lob-Nor po basseinu Tarima, pod. red., so vstup.stat'ei i primechiiami E.M. Murzaeva (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1948) 198.
of civilization. Although the lakes which Przheval’skii referred to have been
known by the Chinese “for a long time,” their identification and naming of the
lakes was inconsequential, and only by providing a Western and Russian name
and identification of these bodies of water could they be legitimate. The Central
Eurasian names of the lakes were also unimportant or insignificant to him.
Przheval’skii, and the Russian Geographical Society that supported his efforts,
were profoundly interested in competing with Western-European explorers for the
naming and mapping of geographic features. This was indicative of the global
process of the new imperialism of the late-nineteenth century and the “scramble”
for territory contemporaneously in sub-Saharan Africa. Przheval’skii’s interest in
locating the source of the Yellow River on this expedition also defied the validity
of local knowledge. Mongols and Tanguts (northern Tibetans) had long known
about the source location of the Huang He, but Nikolai Mikhailovich needed to
identify this and put the western and Russian stamp of knowledge and
confirmation on its location.

Scientific Specialists and Collections

Przheval’skii again benefited on this expedition from a large corps of trained
specialists in natural sciences. Together they aided him in identifying scores of
flora and fauna specimens, identifying each with the appropriate Latin names.
Many of the species that they identified were “new” finds that had been previously unidentified by western science.\textsuperscript{112} This expedition included an astronomer, an expert in barometric readings, a mountain scientist, an expert on plantlife, a zoologist, an expert on reptiles, and another expert on fish.\textsuperscript{113} Przheval'skii later transmitted these collections to the leading Russian institutions in respective areas. Botanical collections went to the Botanical Gardens, zoological collections to the Academy of Sciences' Zoological Museum, and mineralogical samples were sent to experts at the Geology department at St. Petersburg University. At the end of his published account of this expedition were lists of the Latin names of species that were identified on this journey. These lists included over 200 animal species and over 300 plant species, most of which had their corresponding Russian name or description listed alongside the Latin term.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{112} See, for example, a long list of new findings, which Przheval'skii and company named in Latin. Some of the specimens they identified they were unsure of the correct Linnaean classification, so question marks appear after their naming. Ibid., 111.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 345-59.
Ethnographic Observation

On this final expedition, Przheval’skii again made a number of ethnographic observations, which implicitly demonstrated his participation in a wider project of colonization and subjugation of the region’s peoples. His observations were informative, yet essentializing and reflected the collection of information from local informants or information that may have passed to him by way of casual conversations with locals through his translators. He made observations on the languages of the region, religious beliefs, and drew a number of comparisons between the peoples of Inner Asia and other parts of the Russian Empire and even beyond. He also made some observations about their home lives; their economic lifeways; the prevalence of disease, health, and life expectancies; and many observations about their physical appearance and their clothing. In referring to the Tangut population, he wrote:

Chinese refer to the Tanguts as *kun-morl*, which translates as “redskins.” A few of them have shoulder-length hair and their physiognomy reminds me of the red-skinned Indians of North America, who [one may come across] in pictures; many of them, as with other Tanguts, look like Gypsies, with a dash of the Mongol type. Women here are also completely hideous; they manage the home and children; outside of the home they have no role whatsoever.

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115 In this section, Przheval’skii discusses the health and life expectancy of the people of Lop Nor and the Tarim basin area. He noted that it was not uncommon for older people to live to be in their seventies and even into their nineties. He also found that women typically died younger and more often than men, typically from complications related to childbirth. Ibid., 189.

116 Ibid., 103.
Completing the Final Mission

By the end of this expedition, Przheval’skii again reflected on their contributions to science and the state. Upon crossing the border back to Russia from China, Przheval’skii again had a few words for his expeditionary crew and their accomplishments.

Today for us is an amazing day [as we] crossed [over] from the Chinese border and returned to our native land. It has been over two years from the day that we started out from Kiakhta our expedition…everything was against us, both the nature, and the people…We lived two years, like savages, under the open sky, in tents and in yurts and lived through minus-40-degree [Celsius] temperatures, through the worst heat and the strongest winds.…but [through it all] nothing could stop us. We worked on our task to its completion: went through and researched all of this part of Tsentral’noi Azii [Central Asia], a big part of which no European had ever before set foot upon. My thanks and appreciation to you all, my comrades! I will tell the whole world about your feats. Now I would like to embrace all of you and express my appreciation for your service rightly done in the name of science, and that which we did in the name of the people, whom we glorify.¹¹⁷

This would be the final completed expedition that Przheval’skii made, though several of his sputniks carried out their own future missions to the region, some of whom carried on this project into the early period of the Soviet Union. This final completed expedition had achieved a number of successes. Przheval’skii had stepped foot in some of the highest reaches of eastern Tibet and located a rich find of previously-unidentified flora and fauna. He was also successful in mapping the source of the Huang He River, an accomplishment which was heralded in both Russian and European capitals.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 492.
Although publicly Przheval’skii lauded the success of the mission, and his findings were soon to be celebrated in both Russian and international elite scientific circles, he privately questioned how much longer he could continue to keep up the extremely rigorous lifestyle that this type of exploration demanded. He wrote in his diary, in a moment of poetic inspiration, at the end of this mission:

...the years are piling up and of course there will come a time when it will no longer be possible to endure all the work and deprivations of such journeys. Should it be my lot not to go to the depths of Asia again...let the living images of those unforgettable days resurrect in my imagination...

Once again the storms have passed,
Again the sailor's back unharmed...
Once again he's not been told
That the storms have now calmed.\(^\text{118}\)

**The Przheval’skiiian Paradigm**

When Nikolai Przheval’skii’s missions were finished and his life was over, the RGO held a special meeting to discuss his accomplishments on November 9, 1888. Many kind words were said about his contribution to Russian-geographic knowledge of the Asian continent. One scholar and member of the RGO, A.I. Voeikov, compared the Przheval’skii acquisition of information about the climate of Central Eurasia to that of Western European travelers to sub-Saharan Africa

\(^{118}\) Quoted in Rayfield, *The Dream of Lhasa*, 182.
during the same period. Voeikov boasted that the key difference in these two research efforts was that the western Europeans in Africa had many individuals carrying out individual research on climate, whereas Przheval’skii managed to find out just as much information about the heart of Asia on his own.119

Indeed, when one looks at the accomplishments of Przheval’skii from the standpoint of the amount of raw data that he collected, the amount of “new” information that he and his expeditionary crews acquired about Central Eurasia’s peoples, lands, flora, and fauna is staggering. Consider, strictly from the viewpoint of biology, the total number of biological specimens he acquired for further research. According to his research reports, he collected 15-16,000 plants, which consisted of 1,700 different types. He also wrote that among these plant collections, he had identified 217 new types of plant life (of which 173 were Tibetan and 44 were Mongolian). His zoological specimens were equally impressive: he “collected” 702 examples of mammals; 5,010 birds; close to 1,200 reptiles, amphibians, and various types of lizards; and 643 fish. He also made a small collection of insects during the first and fourth expeditions after being advised to do so by Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii.120

In his history of the first fifty years of the RGO, Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii called the period from 1871 until 1885 “[The] Period of the Expeditions of Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval’skii,” demonstrating Przheval’skii and his

119 Agafonov and Isachenko, Russkoe geograficheskoe obschestvo: 150 let, 59.
120 Ibid., 60.
expeditions' importance in the mind of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii.\textsuperscript{121} Perhaps most importantly, this period oversaw a shift in the RGO's research focus from that of the middle of the nineteenth century. In the earlier period, expeditions focused on Eastern Siberia and the already-acquired lands of the Russian Empire in the Amur-Primorskii region and in Western Turkestan.\textsuperscript{122} During the Przheval'skiian period, the focus shifted to Zungaria and lands of the Chinese Empire, stretching eastward to Beijing, northwards to the Altai and southwards to Tibet.\textsuperscript{123}

Przheval'skiian's impact was greatly felt by those at the center of Russian elite culture. His achievements stirred nationalist and imperialist feeling and he became an icon of Russian imperialist and scientific might. This led Anton Chekhov to the following heroic portrayal of the achievements of Przheval'skiian, whom he compared with British explorer Henry Morton Stanley.

\textsuperscript{121} Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, \textit{Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti}, II: 471-578.

\textsuperscript{122} It is evident that many both in Russia and even in the United States saw the potential value of the Amur and Primorye regions for Russian colonization. This is evident from the following lines written by an American in 1859 to Semenov-Tian'-Shansleli. "To Russia as a colony the Amur can be made to bear something of the same relation that exists between England and Australia, and in view of its occupation on a scale commensurate with its real value I look upon the Amur as holding the key of China." The letter also spoke of the proposal for a Russo-American telegraph project. ARG0, f. 58, op. 4, no. 14.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., II: 513.
One Przheval’skii or one Stanley is worth ten scholarly institutions and one hundred good books. Their moral substance, [their] noble honesty towards what they love, which presents itself in their honor for [their] people and [for] science, their persistence, their fanatical belief in science, make them in the eyes of the people devotees to science, [and] personifications of the highest strength.124

Monuments to Przheval’skii, both physical or structural and conceptual, are plentiful. There are physical monuments of Przheval’skii both in St. Petersburg and Karakol. During the mid-1880s, the Russian Academy of Sciences began discussions on creating a medal in honor of Przheval’skii, which were carried out. In a letter from the Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences circulated about the discussions of creating this medal, he wrote about Przheval’skii that

...the expeditions of N.M. Przheval’skii present one of the greatest phenomena in the overall history of academic travel. He was the first of our European travelers to become acquainted with the very center of the high mountains of Asia and acquaint Europeans with its places, before known only before through scant Chinese sources....[this is how] Przheval’ skii took his place among the greatest travelers of all times and peoples.125

The Russian academic establishment in St. Petersburg also realized that Przheval’skii had drawn tremendous international attention. This led to further

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124 Incidentally, Chekhov also made reference here to the grand scientific and exploratory achievements of fellow-RGO explorer of New Guinea, Nikolai Mikhailovich Miklukho-Maklai. Quoted in Berg, Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let, 91.

125 PFA RAN, f. 2, op. 1-1886, no. 4, l. 1. This memo was dated May 3, 1886. This archival collection also includes drawings of the proposed medal (on list 2). The design they decided on had a profile of Przheval’skii on the front (looking a lot less like Stalin than post-1945-era portrayals of him) and on the reverse side the inscription, “First Researcher of the Nature of Tsentral’noi Azii.”
discussions on the benefits of translating Przheval’skii’s travel reports into foreign languages, such as German and French. This was a product of the climate of increased international cooperation by the RGO among other international geographic societies and the intense competition for exploring territories. The leaders of the Academy of Sciences and the RGO both hoped that Przheval’skii had put them on the international map (pardon the pun) by having their own great explorer.

More specifically, Przheval’skii’s four major research expeditions to Central Eurasia solidified Russian national and imperial interest in the region. By greatly augmenting the store of information for the Russian scientific and intellectual elite, Przheval’skii also spurred on the hope for future research missions to the region, or the possibility of future conquests or political alliances. The image of him as a modern conqueror established a new paradigm for Russian experimental travel and exploration in Central Eurasia. Przheval’skii was responsible for ushering a new period of new imperial travel. The Russian Geographical Society and its explorer-travelers became increasingly active, ambitious, and aggressive. Their attitudes towards the indigenes changed during the period of Przheval’skii’s career, and became more overtly imperialistic. The sense of difference or social distance that one found earlier in Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii’s or even Valikhanov’s reports was accentuated or exacerbated in Przheval’skii’s conception. He also saw the Russian state as part of a wider project of western civilization. He believed, as others would later also, that Russia and the West had a civilizing

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126 PFA RAN f. 2, op. 1-1887, no. 3, l. 9-10.
mission in Eurasia, Africa, and beyond. It was up to the torchbearers of
civilization to shine the light of rationalism, science, and proper manners on the
darkest corners and reaches of the earth. But first there needed to be more men
like Przheval'skii, who could identify the darkest locations, map them, categorize
them, and "know" them. Then others could follow and make the process
complete.
Chapter VI – Representations of Central Eurasia: the Potanins

The Potanins in Eurasia

Aleksandra Potanina (1843-93) and Grigorii Potanin (1835-1920) were a married couple who traveled together on a series of ethnographic and scientific research missions to Western China, Mongolia, and the Russian/Chinese borderlands during the late nineteenth century through the financial and logistical support of the Russian Geographical Society. They each compiled their own research findings and observations, which presented contrasting images of peoples and territories, and whose research reports exhibited different notions of gender expectations. Grigorii’s reports were largely typical of the natural-scientific reports produced by many of the RGO’s (male) scholar-travelers, though he devoted more than the usual amount of written space and intellectual energy to ethnographic interpretations. Aleksandra’s essays reflected an emphasis on conveying information to a general Russian audience, primarily women and children, rather than the elite male intellectuals of the scientific world. Although their contrasting representations are in some ways indicative of a male/female division of expected gender roles, in many ways their reports both indicated an emulation of the scientific observational style fashioned by earlier explorer-travelers of the RGO, such as Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and Nikolai Przheval’skii.
The Potanins exhibited contrasting approaches to their representations of the region, but both contributed to the ultimate goal of the RGO in supporting these missions—reconnoitering *terrae incognitae* to evaluate and facilitate possible future efforts at colonization. And although their modes of reporting their findings are quite different, they approached their subject matters in similar ways, which made them somewhat unique when compared to the other scholar-travelers of this cohort. There was a sympathetic quality to their ethnographic analyses, even during the period which they received the most support from the RGO for their missions, which was in contrast to the work of most of the scholars discussed earlier in this dissertation (with the exception of Valikhanov). For Grigorii, this can probably be accounted for based on his close affiliation with the peoples and nationalist interests of Siberians and Central Eurasians. He was not a strict imperialist and pro-Russian explorer in the mode of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii or Przheval'skii. Grigorii Potanin, both early and late in life (and perhaps even during his expeditionary career), supported the cause of Siberian separatism or regionalist nationalism. By late in his career, he even came to be viewed as a major leader of the nationalist liberation of the Altai region.

Aleksandra’s sympathetic tone in her writings may have been in part from the influence of Grigorii, but one is tempted to draw the conclusion that it was her identification with women in an international sisterhood sense that made her reports sound, at times, sympathetic. Her work often spoke to the challenges of domestic life and projected a sense of sympathy towards women, which could have reflected her own personal views. Although there is this sympathizing
undertone to both Grigorii and Aleksandra's work, one should also not lose sight of the fact that the financial and logistical backing for their travels, and the ultimate goals that the missions worked towards, were in support of increasing Russian understanding of the region's peoples and territories, in hopes of future colonization or diplomatic efforts. The very fact that their research work is now available in published form speaks to the political value of their work.
Figure 10. 1883 photograph of Aleksandra Potanina. (From V.M. Zarin and E.A. Zarina, *Puteshestviia A.V. Potaninoi* [Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1950], 53).
Though Aleksandra Potanina was far from a feminist by today’s standards, nor by the standards of the time, she was one of just a few women who were active in the Russian Geographical Society’s research expeditions to Inner Asia.¹ The RGO was the first national scientific society in Russia to elect women as members, first doing so in 1877. Women were only elected as “cooperating members,” though, meaning that their primary task would be to assist their husbands on “their” missions and provide support. They were free, though, to draw their own conclusions and write reports, though there was little likelihood of them reaching print in scholarly publications. Instead, their writing was largely to be confined to the feminine sphere of publications, meaning essays for women, children, and generally non-scholarly audiences.

Aleksandra made a significant contribution to the process of reconnoitering Central Eurasia, providing a “feminine perspective” to the extraction of data. An examination of her and Grigorii’s research reports reflect elements of the gender expectations of the time, and their implications for imperial ventures. The role of women in these traveling expeditions and the larger process of Central Eurasian imperialism can be discussed within the wider context of gender history. As Joan Scott has argued, many French feminists during the nineteenth century lived lives that both upheld and challenged conventions of gender and women’s place. She argued about women of the period that, “on the one hand, they seemed to accept

¹ Other prominent women in the RGO included Olga Fedchenko, who accompanied her husband on missions to Turkestan, and Aleksandra Efimenko, who made ethnographic reports on the Lapps, Karelians, and Samoeds. Vucinich, Science in Russian Culture: 1861-1917, 86.
authoritative definitions of gender; on the other hand, they refused these
definitions. Potanina, like the French feminists of Scott’s study, presents an
interesting case of both adherence to convention and non-conventionality. Her
place in the story of the Russian exploration of Central Eurasia also adds a degree
of complexity to our understanding of the diverse backgrounds of the individuals
who contributed to this project. Potanina’s role in the project was, as Scott
contends about French feminists, a paradox. In Potanina’s case, she subverted
traditional nineteenth-century expectations of Russian women by becoming active
in exploration and scholarship. At the same time, she upheld and conformed to
expected female gender roles by accompanying and supporting her husband on
his active research expeditions. Her facilitative role, as a traveling homemaker of
sorts, reaffirmed her place as a nineteenth-century Russian woman. The types of
research reports which she wrote, while in some ways quite radical and out of the
ordinary for a woman of the time, did not stray beyond the expectations of what a
woman could write about. Her vignettes on clothing, domestic issues, children,
women, religious practices, festivals, public cultural performances and other
topics were acceptable for female discussion, as they seemed to not tread in the
“male territory” of economic life, political organization, or the mapping of
space—topics which male scholars in the Russian scientific corps were expected
to address in their essays and reports. Potanina’s discussions avoided topics
which she was considered unsuitable to comment upon and instead focused her

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2 Joan Wallach Scott, Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man (Cambridge and
discussions on topics that could be acceptable for a woman of the time to discuss. Aleksandra’s perspective on Central Eurasian women, domestic life, and cultural practices also served to link the scientific traveling project with a broader audience. Whereas educated and elite men could digest the masculine reports on the quantity of said fauna in a particular region or the suitability of lands for settlement or agricultural pursuits, Aleksandra’s essays could be read by the masses. Therefore, works like hers may have had a more significant impact on the popular understanding of the region than these initial scholarly observations. In short, Potanina’s essays were on the vanguard of the next wave of informative description, a body of literature that would serve to inculcate the common Russian with a dichotomous (we versus them) understanding of their relationship to the peoples of Central Eurasia.

A shift in regional focus for the RGO

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Russian Geographical Society’s scientific, ethnographic, and geographic expeditions to Central Eurasia had reached a pinnacle in terms of the number of expeditions, the length and distance of those travels, and the influence that individual explorers could exert within the empire. Many in the upper ranks of the Geographical Society began
pushing for more expeditions into areas beyond even nominal Russian control. By the late-1870s and the launching of the expeditionary careers of the Potanins, the Russian military had virtually eliminated all opposition to the Russian colonization of Turkestan and Central Asia, victories that were in part attributable to the earlier work of scholar-travelers, whose reports had paved the way for later military expansion. The Russians established the Turkestan government at Tashkent in 1867 and solidified Russian control over the western Turkic peoples and territories. With this move, the RGO and the Russian elite began to attribute less priority to western research expeditions. Instead, the Turkestan military government assumed authority for expeditions within this colonial space. Turkestan leader Konstantin von Kaufman decided to conduct a “thorough study...[of their] new and scarcely explored region.”³ There was less need for roving bands of scholar-travelers, as settled scientists could do the work more effectively and thoroughly, receiving instructions from the stationary military government rather than the more-autonomous intellectual freedom that the earlier expeditions to the region had fostered. Expeditions in Turkestan became more controlled, focused, and geographically-contained.

With the Central Asian lands under firm imperial control, the empire was buoyed and colonial or imperial focus began to gradually shift to Inner Asian lands to the east of Russian Turkestan, particularly during the 1870s and 1880s. This interest arose in part out of a perceived weakness in the Qing Empire, who was dealing with incursions from Europe and a string of rebellions in the Qing’s

³ See Brower, *Turkestan*, 43-56. Quoted material on 47.
central and western territories during the second half of the century. In anticipation of the Qing’s seemingly-imminent collapse, some in the RGO pushed for documentation of Mongolia, Tibet, and the other western and northern regions of China. The Russians began to see these regions as potentially-strong future natural resource bases and a possible area of Russian settlement and colonization. The ongoing Great Game with Great Britain also fueled interest in exploring those territories in order to deflect a feared northward advance by the British into western China.⁴ Some also argued, particularly in Britain, that the Russians had hopes of snatching the jewel from the British imperial crown. According to this assumption, the Russians would first take Central Asia and then march into South Asia in order to tap into the enormous resource base available there. The Russians were also concerned that the British may turn their colonial and imperial ventures to the north, so a Russian forward move into Western Qing territories could forestall future British moves into the region and establish this as a Russian zone of colonial activity.

Besides the potential of sending expeditions to the region for colonial concerns, there was still a fair deal of interest among Russian scholarly elites in locating and identifying relatively-unknown geographic, natural-scientific, or cultural aspects of the region for the global benefit of science (nauka) and to push Russia, or so they hoped, to the forefront of national-scholarly contingents. In fact, by the 1870s there was a noticeable upping of the stakes in global scientific

⁴ For more on the Great Game, see my discussion of this diplomatic, military, and territorial competition in Chapter Two of this dissertation.
competition. By this period, Russia’s Western competitors had established natural-scientific and geographic missions into China’s interior. The French sent the missionaries Évariste Huc and Armand David into China, Mongolia and Tibet. German geologist Ferdinand von Richthofen had traveled across much of the country. And the British had sent many travelers, including Robert Fortune and Robert Swinhoe, who visited Manchuria and the China Sea islands. Having already gained their so-called “entry ticket” into the most “civilized” of European nations, the Russian Geographical Society was eager to compete with their Western counterparts in the reconnoitering of China, Mongolia, and Tibet. It was believed that by being the first to send an expeditionary leader into unknown or unmapped territories, the state and its geographic society could gain the important prestige that went alongside the wider global-imperialist struggle or competition of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. J.A. Hobson and V.I. Lenin would later describe this stage of imperial competition as an economic manifestation, but the impetus for natural scientific and geographic expeditions into potentially “colonize-able” lands went much deeper than pure economic interests. The spirit of cultural and intellectual competition, on a national level, was also very much a factor.


Nikolai Przheval’skii’s successful research expeditions of the 1870s and 1880s were crucial in ushering in this new period in the RGO’s exploration of Inner Eurasian territories. His example drew future scholar-travelers to explore the Inner Asian “heart” for the direct benefit of the state. This so-named “school of Przheval’skii” was driven in part by Russia’s newfound involvement in the international competitiveness associated with the “New Imperialism.” Xinjiang became a major site of colonizing interest for the Russians during the 1870s, as the rebellion of Muhammad Yaqub Beg cleared the way for Russian colonial initiatives in Qing territory. The Russian military followed up on earlier research expeditions by sending their military into the upper Ili valley and seized this territory from the Qing in 1871. But six years later, the Qing repressed the Yaqub Beg rebellion. The Qing reassertion of power in the region forced a potential diplomatic and military standoff between them and the Russians. Negotiations were initiated between the two powers over the Ili territory, and in 1881 the Russians agreed to relinquish most of their gains, retaining only a sliver of territory in the western part of the river valley. This was one of only a few cases

7 Among the notable scholar-travelers who followed in Przheval’skii’s footsteps were Vselevod Roborovskii and Petr Kozlov.

in the modern history of the Russian Empire in which they relinquished gained lands. The “scramble for territory” in Central Eurasia was now officially on, coinciding with the race for African colonies, and the Russian Geographical Society’s expeditionary leaders were to be at the forefront of the Russian project of expansion into the dark heart of Asia.

Influences on the Potanins

Although many of the successful RGO scholar-travelers of the late-nineteenth century were closely allied with Nikolai Przheval’skii, this was not the case with the Potanins. Grigorii Potanin’s career was mainly supported by that other paternal figure of the RGO, Petr Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, who was responsible for launching the careers of so many RGO scholar-travelers earlier in the century. Potanin had attended school at the Omsk Cadet Corps alongside his comrade Chokan Valikhanov in western Siberia, and while studying there was discovered by Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii during the 1850s. Just as Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii saw the potential that Valikhanov had, as a Kazak inorodets, to explore the region for the RGO, he identified similar potential in the young Potanin. RGO exploration and documentation, so Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii reasoned, could be

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most effectively executed by people who had a wide familiarity with the territory that would become the focal point of their research. Just as Valikhanov's upbringing on the steppes of northern Kazakhstan and among the Middle Horde Kazaks made him an able scholar-traveler of Greater-Horde Kazak, Kyrgyz, and Uighur territories, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii found that Potanin could bring similar acumen to his own future travels in the region.

Potanin's background made him uniquely suited to the task. He was born the son of a Cossack on the banks of the Irtysh River, on the periphery of the Russian Empire, in 1835. From early on, Grigorii cultivated an intense interest in the region's peoples and histories, an interest that he would further in his own professional research. Potanin read widely, but particularly enjoyed the adventure and travel stories that captured the interest of many of the youth who became RGO scholar-travelers. The stories of European and Russian travelers to faraway lands like the Canary Islands and Madagascar captured his attention, as did Nikolai Karamzin's popular and highly-influential History of the Russian State.10 His interest in exploration and travel was further fostered during his education in Omsk at the Cadet Corps. His friendship with Valikhanov and other students from the region encouraged him to learn more about the cultures, folklore, and histories of Siberians and Central Eurasians.

Upon their meeting, Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii urged Potanin to leave Siberia for St. Petersburg, where he could be properly trained in botany and other natural sciences that were considered useful and critical for success as mid-century

10 Vladimir Afanas'evich Obruchev, Grigori Nikolaevich Potanin. Zhizn i deiatelnost', 22.
scholar-travelers. But it was Potanin's strengths in his study of ethnographic characteristics and an overall knowledge of the Central Eurasian region that made him, for Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, such a valued member of their organization.

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii wrote that

Potanin combined rare qualities among the explorers of Inner Asia: battle-hardened work and great health...sufficient acquaintance with the local languages and on good terms with the natives; very good knowledge in the areas of geography and natural sciences; a wide acquaintance with the geographical literature on Siberia and Inner Asia; but more than anything—love and devotion to the practice of science [nauka].

Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii also wrote that in his initial meetings with Grigorii he was interested in the long-term future of Potanin, and hoped that he would get the opportunity to travel to St. Petersburg and properly train to become a scholar-traveler. Potanin was also struck by the interest that Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii took in his future career and Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's admonition to him that if he stayed in Siberia he could only aspire to become a Cossack officer, and that "nothing will ever become of [him]." Through Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's support, Potanin found passage to the capital by joining a trade caravan that was carrying gold from Siberia to St. Petersburg in 1858. He then took up study at Petersburg University in botany, but his academic training there was short-lived, as his involvement in radical political circles landed him in trouble with the

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11 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Dostoevskii, Istorii poluvezkovo deiatel'nosti, II: 550.
12 Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Puteshestvie v Tian'-Shan' v 1856-57 gg., 81-82.
13 "Grigorii Nikolaevich Potanin...Vospominaniia..." Red. Nikolai Nikolaevich Ianovskii i dr. Literaturnoe nasledstvo Sibiri VI: 95.
14 Berg, Vsesoluznoe geograficheskoe obschestvo za sto let, 98.
administration, which expelled him in 1861. The Russian state administration also did not take kindly to Potanin’s political overtures, and sent him into a decade of political exile.

Siberian Separatism and Exile

Potanin’s career as an RGO explorer would have begun much earlier had he not become involved in political discussions in the capital. However, during his student days Potanin grew less interested in his natural-science studies and more involved in political radicalism. Grigorii befriended many of the socialists, revolutionaries, and Siberian nationalists who congregated in the university town, many of whom had been earlier childhood friends of Grigorii. Many, Potanin included, began to espouse ideas about the liberation of Siberia from Russian control. Potanin was part of a particular circle (kruzhok) of radicals who were mostly from Siberia, many of whom had also studied earlier in Omsk. Like many Siberian (and Russian) youth of that generation, Grigorii dreamed of Siberia’s separation from its despotic western colonizers, seeing Siberia itself as

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15 The original Omsk-St. Petersburg kruzhok consisted of Potanin, Valikhanov, the Buriat Innokentii Pirozhkov, Churkeev, F.N. Usov and others. They were concerned with political plans for the future of Siberia, the study of the region, and the service of their people. Valikhanov, Sobranie sochinenii, IV: 749.
an El Dorado of sorts. Potanin’s continued involvement in radical political circles after his departure from St. Petersburg landed him in jail in Omsk for three years. This was followed by three years as a convict in Sveaborg, Finland, and four years in exile in Volgogodskii guberniia.

**Background on Aleksandra Lavrskii**

Potanin’s involvement in the Siberian separatist movement draws further attention to the diverse backgrounds and political interests of the RGO explorers and travelers. Although his expeditions and the information that he later gathered about the region was precious to the Russian state’s efforts at further colonization, his own roots were in opposition to the Russian Empire. Only after his reconciliation with the Russian authorities and following about a decade of exile and imprisonment did Potanin become a converted supporter of the empire, though only temporarily and never wholeheartedly.

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16 For more on the popular and intellectual imagination of Siberia in this period, see Bassin, “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (June 1991): 1-17; see also idem, *Imperial Visions*.

17 In total, Potanin was either imprisoned or held captive from 1865-74. Obruchev, Grigoriii Nikolaevich *Potanin. Zhizn’ i deiatelnost’*, 6.
During his period in exile, Potanin first became acquainted with Aleksandra Lavrskii (1843-1893), whose own brother was also serving time in Vologodskii guberniia and through whom the couple met. Aleksandra’s brother, Konstantin Lavrskii, was the main editor for the local newspaper (Kamsko-Volzhskoi gazety) and an active student organizer who became a friend of Grigorii’s during their mutual time in exile in Nikol’sk. Both of Aleksandra’s parents had received Orthodox theological training. She traveled back and forth the two hundred or so miles frequently between Nikol’sk and her family’s home in Nizhniy Novgorod and Grigorii and her also carried out a correspondence by mail. Their friendship developed into a courtship, and they were married in 1873 in Nikol’sk. The Potanins were rarely apart in the twenty years of their marriage, which would include a lot of very treacherous travel.

Aleksandra was born in 1843 in the city of Gorbatov, near Nizhniy Novgorod. Her father left home when she was still young, and was instead raised by her mother, Ekaterina Vasil’evna. Many women took part in raising Aleksandra, including close friends of the family. She took an early interest in folk tales and stories told by neighbors in the surrounding villages. She also became interested in travel stories. Travel and folklore became lifetime interests of hers. In 1866, Aleksandra was hired by the women’s diocese school as a teacher and she gained the reputation as good, honest, and “widely sympathetic” governess.\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) As quoted from one of her colleagues. Vladimir Markovič Zarin and Elizaveta Aleksandrovná Zarina, *Puteshestviia A.V. Potaninoi* (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo geogr. lit-ry, 1950), 16.
Aleksandra, then, was educated and from a politically-conscious and active family. These influences would serve her well later.

When the Potanins met during Grigorii’s exile, one of Potanin’s close friends (who also became an important explorer-traveler in his own right), N.M. Iadrintsev, noticed that as the relationship between Grigorii and Aleksandra developed, Grigorii changed. He became more serious about developing a future career in scientific exploration. His life, “took on [new] meaning, [as they made] new plans, [and] such energy was breathed into this strong nature.” In short, the Potanins’ new relationship led Grigorii down a new career path. He left behind his days as a student protester and put aside (for the time being) his aspirations about Siberian independence and support of Siberian nationalism. Together, they planned a future involving scientific exploration, and Aleksandra became very supportive of this new life. Soon after their marriage, Grigorii Potanin was freed to move to any city except for St. Petersburg, so they moved temporarily to Aleksandra’s home city of Nizhniy Novgorod in 1874. But within a year Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii was prepared to send them on their first major research expedition together.

19 Ibid., 17.
Initial Journey

In between his school years and his decade of exile, Potanin made his first professional research expedition. Semenov-Tian'-Shanski had recommended that the astronomer Carl Struve bring Potanin along on his 1863-64 RGO-sponsored expedition to the mountainous regions along the border of Russian and Qing territory in Central Eurasia. The purpose of this expedition was to chart geographical coordinates along the border area between the Altai and the Tian Shan Mountains. Potanin’s participation in this expedition followed the general pattern which has been described throughout this dissertation. Early in a potential scholar-traveler’s career they would be invited to participate on an important expedition, though under a senior scholar-traveler’s direction. If they could successfully perform on this expedition, they had the potential to later lead their own expedition. If that expedition, under their own direction, was in turn successful, they would be assured of a lifetime of logistical and financial backing for scientific research exploratory missions. This initial 1863-64 expedition served as important training for Potanin’s later expeditions, which were all led by him. However, the path to success was not a smooth one for Grigori Potanin. It was upon the mission’s completion, and his subsequent appointment to a position in Omsk, that he was arrested for his participation in the Siberian separatism.

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20 In particular, they were to visit Zaisan, the Black Irtysh, and the Tarbagatai Mountains. Berg, 
Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let, 98-99.
movement. Potanin's early career, therefore, exemplified a tension between the urging and pushing by Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii to foster Potanin's career along the expected path to becoming a fully-fledged RGO scholar-traveler and Potanin's sympathies for Siberia and its peoples. Potanin became dedicated to the peoples of Siberia in a way that was unique for the scholar-travelers of this dissertation. His career could most readily be compared to that of his childhood friend and associate Chokan Valikhanov, who also eventually departed from the expected career path. The paradox between Potanin's support for Eurasian narody and his desire for the prestige and fame that RGO exploration could bring was only reconciled following his ten-year incarceration. Potanin would later channel his energies into documenting the lifeways and cultures of many Central Eurasian peoples through the institutional support that the Geographical Society could provide. Ethnography became for him a path to square his own interests and love of the study and preservation of the cultural traditions of Siberian peoples with the livelihood that the empire could provide.

But even during the years of his imprisonment, Potanin managed to further his own academic research, compiling information on the tribes of the Tomsk region. Grigorii Nikolaevich also composed an ethnographic and travel essay titled "Ethnographic Notes on the Path from the city of Nikol'sk to the city of Tot'm," which he sent to the RGO for their approval and, he hoped, publication in 1872. Although the RGO found his report insightful enough for publication, they delayed doing so until 1899, likely out of fear of punishment from the imperial
administration, given Potanin’s history with the separatism movement. Grigori
Potanin continued to forward the results of his research to the still very-interested
elites of the RGO and maintained close ties with them despite his exile. By
maintaining this close connection, he was able to continue his career in
exploration and scientific research following his release.

At the end of his decade of imprisonment and exile, Potanin’s marriage to
Aleksandra Lavrski and his newfound freedom steered him down a new career
path. He willfully submitted to the plans of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii and began
to become engaged in full-scale research expeditions through the support of the
Geographical Society. But rather than, like most of the previous RGO scholar-
travelers, leave his wife “at home,” Aleksandra Potanina accompanied her
husband on four of his five major research expeditions. Only Grigori’s fifth
expedition was done without her, as the fourth expedition was marred by the
tragedy of her death.

The Russian title of the article is “Etnograficheskie zametki na puti ot goroda Nikol’ska do goroda Tot’my”
and was published in the journal *Zhivaia starina*. 
The Potanins in Mongolia

In 1874, Grigorii and Aleksandra were supported by Semenov-Tian'-Shanski to move to St. Petersburg, where Grigorii was employed in the final stages of the ongoing RGO translation project that Semenov-Tian'-Shanski had himself initiated years before. While in Petersburg, the Potanins also made preparation for their first RGO-sponsored journey to Mongolia. They studied the available literature on the region there, conversing with anyone who had knowledge of the region. St. Petersburg’s intellectual community was all abuzz over the success that Przheval’skii was already achieving in exploration. The Potanins took note of the methodology that Przheval’skii’s crew had employed on their initial expeditions, and also developed knowledge about scientific classification and the collection of scientific specimens, subjects which Grigorii Potanin had studied over a decade earlier during his brief time as a student at St. Petersburg University. Potanin was responsible in helping with the final preparations for the fourth

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22 This was a Russian translation of Carl Ritter’s multivolume work on the physical geography of Asia. Ritter, Zemlevedenie Azii. Geografiia stran, nakhodiashchih sia v neposredstvennykh snosheniakh s Rossiui, t.e. Kitaiskoi imperii, nezavisimoi Tatarii, Persii i Sibiri. Perevedena s dopolneniamisluzhashchimi prodolzhaniem Ritterova truda, na osnovanii materialov, obnarodovannykh s 1832 g. i sostavlennymi P. Semenovym. 9 v. (S.-Peterburg: Izd. imp. Russkago geogr. ob-va, 1856-74).

volume of the Russian translation of Carl Ritter’s *Zemlevedeniia Azii* (*Physical Geography of Asia*). The Ritter text had long been an important one to translate and master for prospective scholar-travelers. By working closely on this text, young scholar-travelers became indoctrinated in global geographic knowledge. By making this close study of Ritter, Potanin and others both absorbed the information and theory that Ritter presented and were able to re-direct that information for the benefit of Russian geographical science. Potanin and others’ thorough acquaintance with Ritter’s observations made them more attuned to what information needed to yet be found and where to direct their exploratory energies. Ritterian translations served as another stage in the rite-of-passage to becoming an RGO scholar-traveler. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii had earlier earned a prominent position in the Geographical Society with his translation and forewords to *Zemlevedeniia*. During this time, Potanin also participated in a brief research expedition to the Crimea with Professor Inostrantsev, which provided him with more field experience prior to Potanin’s first expedition to Mongolia.24 His work with Inostrantsev, who was a geologist by training, was also carried out in the capital. Inostrantsev informed Potanin about mountain geology, in consultations at the university.

While in St. Petersburg, Aleksandra Potanina acquainted herself with the works of the great Russian masters of realist painting, including Ilya Repin, Vasilii Vereshchagin, and Ivan Shishkin.25 Her patronizing of the arts was seen

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as a respectable outlet of activity for the wife of a scholar in the capital. Besides fulfilling some gender expectations, she also accompanied her husband in visits to research laboratories and became acquainted with the scientific methodologies that were important for potential travelers. Aleksandra also facilitated her husband’s career by participating in the party circuit of St. Petersburg, entertaining and socializing with the intellectual, political, and cultural elite. Her sociability was often mentioned later by both Potanin and his colleagues as important to their success. In short, Aleksandra became a well-liked personage, which must have benefited her husband’s career in many ways.

In 1876-77 and again in 1879-80, the Potanins journeyed, through the support of the RGO, to northwestern Mongolia and Tuva. During these expeditions, Grigorii kept a travel diary and later wrote up the results of the ethnographic and geographic information collected on these journeys, essays and reports that would garner a great deal of immediate attention in Russian elite circles. Aleksandra collected plants for a herbarium and assisted her husband in his ethnographic and scientific research and in more mundane day-to-day matters. She also kept her own notes, which would later appear in published form. The Potanins also made an extensive ornithological collection and helped to later draw up the first detailed map of northwestern Mongolia, while also establishing geographical coordinates and making barometric measurements.26

26 Ibid., 37.
Potanian Propaganda

Whereas Aleksandra’s work went largely unnoticed by contemporaries (most of her writings were only published posthumously), Grigorii’s travel reports and research analyses were published during his lifetime and he was a well-recognized figure in the imperial elite. His travel reports were later re-edited and re-published during the Soviet Union, during a period of high interest in heralding the feats of nineteenth-century Russian scholar-travelers immediately following the Great Patriotic War. Potanin’s research reports on his nineteenth-century expeditions achieved even greater notoriety during the Soviet period, particularly during the time when the USSR was anxiously asserting its suzerainty over the Central Asian republics. Potanin was painted as a friend of Siberians and Central Asians, who both identified with them and with the project of extending Russian political hegemony over Central Eurasian lands. Grigoriy Potanin’s career

27 The first diary was published initially in 1881-83. See Potanin, Ocherki Severo-Zapadnoi Mongolii rezultaty puteshestviia, ispolnennago v...godakh po porucheniu Imperatorskogo russkago geograficheskago obschestva G.N. Potaninym (S.-Peterburg: V. Bezobrazov, 1881-1883). For the collection of these two diaries as well as his 1899 diary of his fifth and last journey, to the Greater Khingan, see Potanin, Puteshestviia po Mongolii (Moskva: OGIZ, Gos. izd-vo geog. lit-y, 1948). For a compilation of Potanin’s work that was probably published just prior to the Great War, see Potanin and Maria Andreevna Lialina, Puteshestviia G.N. Potanina po Mongolii, Tibetu, i Kitaiu Russkie puteshestvenniki-izsliedovateli (S.-Peterburg: Izd. A.F. Devriena, [1912?]).
presented a somewhat useful case study for the Soviets during their state-building time, and as Communist rhetoric reached its apogee. There was little in the way of heroine-making, though, during the Soviet period of Aleksandra Potanina, though she would have presented an effective model of Soviet womanhood, as a woman who “knew her place” and actively supported the process of sblizhenie among narody.

Although Potanin’s mode of reporting information was similar to, and in no small part derived from, the work of Nikolai Przheval’skii, his attitude towards the peoples of the region was in stark contrast. Whereas Przheval’skii’s implicit goal in documenting the cultures and ethnographic characteristics of the region’s peoples had been to denigrate them and debase their “level of civilization,” Potanin’s work largely elevated Central Eurasian peoples and cultures, holding them up as objects worthy of some admiration and worthy of a positive kind of curiosity. The Soviet scholars who resurrected Potanin as an object of study during the middle part of the twentieth century located him as a sympathizer of the plight of Siberian and Central Eurasian peoples, a convenient trope. Potanin exhibited a very different attitude towards the peoples whom he portrayed than those in the Przhveval’skiiian mode, particularly after his retirement from formal large-scale expeditions. However, the sum total of his work and its value for the state and the scientific community was every bit as contributive to Russian imperial colonization and hegemonic efforts. Although Grigori Potanin received a great deal of scholarly attention during the Soviet period, he was also quickly heralded in the Russian Empire’s elite at the time of his initial travels. Following
the first publication of his essays on northwestern Mongolia in 1881, the RGO awarded Potanin with its “big golden medal” for his remarkably-detailed study.\textsuperscript{28} Numerous awards and accolades would follow later in the century.

Andrei Znamenski has written recently on Altaic ethno-nationalism, and located Grigorii Potanin within the group of early-twentieth century scholars from Siberia who promoted Siberian nationalism, albeit indirectly, through their scholarly findings. Znamenski finds that Potanin’s work in regionalist ethnography and his close collaboration with Altai regional scholars and intellectuals supported regionalism and ethnic nationalism. Potanin’s so-called “Oriental hypothesis” was a crucial element in this. Potanin concluded, based on his many years of ethnographic fieldwork in the region, that the Judeo-Christian spiritual heritage owed its roots to Inner Eurasian traditions. He did this through a comparison of mythology and legends, comparing medieval European, Christian, and Hebrew stories with ones from Mongolia and southern Siberia.\textsuperscript{29} Znamenski further found that Potanin’s intellectual work laid the foundation for a regionalist autonomous revolutionary movement, beginning in 1917. Potanin even became a member of the autonomous Altaian Mountain Duma that forged the interests of native peoples of the Altai and Siberian regionalists. The movement eventually

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\item \textsuperscript{28} Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, \textit{Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel’nosti}, II: 483.
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushleft}
flew with the firm establishment of Soviet rule in the area in 1922. However, Potanin’s role in a Siberian intellectual and nationalist movement late in life was an extension of the sympathetic ethnographic work that he carried out in the nineteenth century in Central Eurasia, a process that began with the Potanins’ journeys to Mongolia.

"Discourse of Difference"

Whereas from these initial expeditions, Grigorii wrote his reports largely in the expected style of an RGO scholar, Aleksandra’s work on the region is reflective of the sharp gender expectations of the time, which even extended to the publication of travelers’ observations. As observed by scholars of female colonial travelers including Mary Louise Pratt, Alison Blunt, and Sara Mills, although women’s observations in colonial traveling contexts were typically reflective of the “discourse of difference,” racial or ethnic superiority still pervaded the discourse of their accounts so that traveling women also contributed to the construction of authority and power. Women’s travel narratives present a

30 Znamenski, “Power of Myth,” 44.

31 On women and travel in colonial contexts, see Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991); see also Alison Blunt and Gillian
particularly interesting subject of curiosity for historians, as their work often underscores more clearly the many discourses that they were negotiating. Sara Mills’ work particularly emphasizes that female travel writings were complex because of the element of femininity which their reports often needed to emphasize. Rather than projecting overtly imperialist or racist accounts, their work had to contain a degree of tentativeness and was thus “less able to assert the ‘truths’ of…rule without qualification.” Feminine travel accounts had to project a sense of their own frailty as well, both physical and intellectual. This needed to be projected in order to uphold gender expectations.

Aleksandra’s reports were written for a more general audience, mainly women and children, but still reflected an emphasis on establishing the peoples of Mongolia as a clear other. In an essay which Potanina wrote on Mongolia, she emphasized a sense of geographic and cultural distance between Russia and Mongolia. Her authorial tone reflected this sense of distance to both female and younger Russian readers. She wrote that

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Mongolia is located in Asia, between our Russian state, China, and Tibet. The Mongols live here, people who are different from us: the color of their skin is yellow, their cheek bones are prominent, their eyes are narrow, their hair is always black and they rarely have beards...\[34\] [Italics added by the author of this dissertation]

This excerpt highlights the sense of difference that Aleksandra Potanina felt in relation to the people that she studied. She tried to highlight for her audiences this sense of difference and, in the process, was contributing to the process of creating an idealized or colonized other. In an essay on the Tuvans, Aleksandra Potanina revealed part of the "allure" of visiting Central Eurasia. She wrote that

thanks to the allure of writings...we made a closeness and familiarity with different wild corners of Africa, America, or India and the [result was that the only] leftover practically-unknown lands, [were those] located in regions of our Russia and close by. The lands of the Uriankhai [Tuvans] are precisely of that type, which ...are rarely known to Russian readers.\[35\]

Although her reports were directed at a general audience, she maintained the sense of a distinct cultural distance between herself and the peoples she encountered, something which was often emphasized to her Russian reading public. Her observations often took on the form of generalizations on national physical characteristics. In discussing the Tuvans, she found, for example, that "[the Tuvian women] were prettier than the Mongols, with a few Tatar types; black vivid eyes and black moustaches on the older men made them attractive,

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34 Potanina, Iz puteshestvie po Vostochnoi Sibiri, Mongoliu, Tibetu i Kitaiu; sbornik statei (Moskva: Izd. Geog. old-niia Imp. O-va liubitelei estestvoznanienia, antropologii i etnografii, 1895), 72.

35 Zarin and Zarina, Puteshestviia A. V. Potaninoi, 39.
and on the young people you could see a real attractiveness.36 Through discussions of clothing, religious practices, home life, and related topics, Aleksandra presented a contrasting picture of the Central Eurasian peoples. But there was still an undertone of authority and of a civilizing mission.

"Coming Together" of Peoples

Grigorii Potanin's publications on Mongolia and the Mongols focus more attention than Aleksandra's on the physical or natural-scientific elements of the natural environment. As exemplified in the model of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's travel accounts, Potanin's work focuses on movement through, and documentation of, the space. Much of his Mongolia travel accounts describe the geographic features of the space, detailed as he passed by or through them. His account followed chronologically, and provided the reader with the sense of movement through the space. Grigorii Potanin also devoted much of his write-up of this expedition and subsequent ones to ethnographic discussions, including a great deal of information on folklore.

Potanin published the following observations about the value of his 1879-80 expedition to the attention of the Geographical Society's members:

36 Ibid., 40.
Gansu, as the place where [we] started our expedition, appealed to my interest, [because of what this] area represents from an ethnographic perspective, presenting a mix of Mongol, Turkic, Chinese, and Tangut tribes. Being [already] acquainted with the shamans of northern Mongolia, their rituals and beliefs and having acquired some skills in the collection of information about those peoples, I reckoned [to go] to southern Mongolia to find completely new material to compare with my collections on northern shamans...[this research] could be the first answer to the difficult question over the origins of the Mongol nation and the direction of its settlement. 37

Along with his colleagues on the expedition, Rafaelov and Orlov, Potanin established the geographical coordinates of locations and became the first to create a map of northwestern Mongolia. Besides this, the Potaninian expeditions to Mongolia established large collections of herbs and plants, mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, crustaceans, mollusks, insects, and rocks, all of which provided useful insights into the region’s economic potential and the potential for settlement. Potanin’s reports also shed light on what he termed the “coming together” (sblizheniia) of Russians and the people of the region. He noted that upon their initial arrival, they were treated with hostility (vrazhdebnno), but that now their relations had become quite “amicable.” 38 Potanin painted an optimistic picture, indirectly, of the possibility of Russian colonization in Mongolia. Rather than seeing the mission there as paving the way for future Russian colonization (as Przheval’skii had before), Potanin emphasized that there could be a “coming together” of peoples that, he implied, would bring greater benefits to both the Russian and Mongolian populations. The Potanin expeditions to Mongolia also


38 Obruchev, Puteshestvie Potanina, 91.
collected information on the peoples of the region, which were published by the RGO.\footnote{Originally published as “Ocherki severo-zapadnoi Mongolii” in 1881 and 1883. Berg, \textit{Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obschestvo za sto let}, 100.}

While Grigorii Potanin and his assistants on the mission focused their attention on geographical and natural-scientific information, Aleksandra Potanina’s attention was frequently on domestic matters, both in carrying out those related to her and Grigorii as well as documenting the home lives of the peoples that she met. The space which she describes in her essays is primarily that of the domestic sphere. Whereas Grigorii focused on describing the geographical or natural-scientific aspects of the environment, Aleksandra described interiors of homes, interiors of public performance spaces, and the appearance of peoples and their clothing styles. There is a stark male/female divide in the way that they encounter the spaces of Inner Asia, as reflected in their essays. Her writings, which were only published post-mortem, reflect this emphasis on domesticity. Grigorii later noted the contributions that she made to their expeditions and praised her above all else for her modesty and practicality. He wrote that

The main thing [that] she showed in service of the expeditions was her practicality. Often she saved me from oversights, which I easily could have made as a result of my carelessness. For example, the caravan was...to cross a location, [but was soon to be] deprived of fuel, she found out about this in good time and arranged to buy a supply of it [before we made our crossing]. These kind of problems related to the expeditions she often solved, therefore she [was] fully deserving of the silver medal [which was] awarded to her by the Geographical Society. Because of her modesty, once, she as a joke said that she received the medal for washing.
clothes. She expressed this because during the time of the expeditions she washed not only her own clothes, but also mine.  

Aleksandra not only washed her and her husband’s clothes. She established close relationships with women throughout their travels and cultivated these close ties in order to relay this information to the women and children that she targeted in her writings. By establishing close connections with women, Aleksandra was able to gain access to information that Grigorii could not. Her essays, with titles like “Mongolia and the Mongols,” and “Among the Shirongols” provided information on religious customs, celebrations and important holidays, marriage customs, clothing, home life, trade, physiognomic characteristics, and material culture. Her essays also reflected her personal experiences in living among individual ethnic groups.

The Potanins in China

The third and fourth expeditions of the Potanins were carried out through China. In 1883 Przheval’skii traveled on his fourth major expedition, which was to Tibet. The Russian Geographical Society decided to offer the Potanins to

40 “Grigoriu Nikolaevich Potanin...Vospominaniia...”, 76.
research the eastern areas of Tibet and the neighboring provinces of Gansu and Sichuan, both of which would not be on Przheval’skii’s path. These third and fourth Potanian expeditions lasted from 1884-86 and 1892-93. The Potanins left on a frigate from Kronstadt in August of 1883, traveled around Europe and through the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean before arriving in Batavia by March of 1884. From there they sailed to China, visiting Tianjin and then Beijing, from where their first Chinese overland expedition began. The expedition followed the path of the Great Wall westward, stopping to see countless Buddhist monasteries and other cultural sites along the way. The roles for Grigorii and Aleksandra in China were again clearly-defined: Grigorii and his assistants, translators, hunters, and guides would attempt to glean concrete data about the region in order to forward scientific knowledge of little-known areas of strategic importance. Aleksandra again would serve a facilitative role, attending to day-to-day needs while also cultivating close relations, to what degree she could, with the local women and children. Although, as on all of these major expeditions and in general those of the RGO in Central Eurasia, the expeditionary crew included translators who were typically individuals from the region. But this did not always ensure that regional dialects could be mutually understood. This made for some difficulties in “understanding” the locals, as Aleksandra later noted in describing the difficulties of communicating with a Shirongol family.

Unfortunately, our acquaintance with the people around us was very difficult. We didn’t understand a single word of Shirongol language, and they couldn’t understand our Mongol-Khalkas speech. Our servant Ochir,
a Mongol from Ordos, also could not understand the Shirongols and explained to them, as much as he could, in Chinese.\textsuperscript{41}

In describing how she tried to overcome this problem in an essay titled "Chinese women," she said that her strategy was to simply "look at Chinese culture" and collect as much information as she could through simple observation. She admitted the obvious imperfection of this style of observation, but also found it to be the only method possible. Mary Louise Pratt would likely agree that this was indicative of Potanina's use of her "imperial eyes."

On their Chinese expeditions, the Potanins frequently stopped to visit Buddhist monasteries, small local settlements, and other places of interest culturally. The 1884-86 expedition resulted in a rich collection of cartographic, botanical, zoological, and ethnographic information. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii later referred to Potanin's natural-scientific collections as "veritable treasures." The research reports for these expeditions were originally published by the RGO in 1893, in two volumes. The first volume contained information on geography, botany, zoology, and ethnography. The second volume was devoted to folklore of Mongols, Tanguts, and Chinese.\textsuperscript{42} In the meantime, following the success of their expeditions, the Potanins took up residence temporarily in Irkutsk, where they oversaw the Eastern Siberian office of the Geographical Society.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Potanina, Iz puteshestvie po Vostochnoi Sibiri, Mongolii, Tibetu i Kitaiu, 113.

\textsuperscript{42} Berg, VsesoiuVloe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let, 100.

\textsuperscript{43} Obruchev, Grigorii Nikolaevich Potanin, 210.
Tragedy in China

The last expedition that the Potanins traveled together on was in 1892 and 1893. This time the Potanins journeyed to Sichuan and the eastern part of Tibet, again via Beijing. They were accompanied by the zoologist M.M. Berezovskii and the geologist and later historian of the RGO, Vladimir Obruchev. This expedition also included a Buriat named B.P. Rabdanov, who was to serve as a translator. By the time the expeditionary crew reached the city of Beijing, Aleksandra Potanina was already showing signs of sickness. The crew spent about a month in Beijing in the company of the Russian embassy, hoping that she could be cured of her illness prior to their departure. Although the embassy doctor strongly recommended Potanina to rest in Beijing until her recovery, she refused to do so, “[as] she didn’t want to stop her husband, who was used to her company and care.” Therefore, the group moved westward, despite her sickness. By the time they reached Tibet a few months later, her condition had worsened. By this time, they were far away from any Russian center of settlement. The group tried to return to Beijing by traveling northeast, in the hope that they could save her, but this travel seemed to only make things worse. Before they could reach Beijing, she died on October 1, 1893. The exact cause of her death is

44 Note that Obruchev is an important primary and secondary source of information about the Potanins, whose work appears throughout this bibliography.

45 Obruchev, Puteshestvia Potanina, 148.
unknown, as this is not mentioned in any of the sources. The group later built a grave for her and buried her at the Russian borderland outpost of Kiakhta, along near Mongolia. After her burial, Potanin returned to St. Petersburg, and only participated in one more expedition following her death.

Shortly following her death, in 1895, Grigorii Potanin traveled to the Kokchetau area of Kazakhstan to visit the homeland of his childhood friend Chokan Valikhanov. In his essay about this journey, titled "In the iurta of the last Kirghiz tsarevitch" he marveled at the natural beauty of the Kazak steppe and demonstrated a connection to the landscape that he and Aleksandra had studied for so long. He wrote that "this area with its high wooded mountains, with mountain rivers and many large fresh lakes, open pine forests, birch forests and meadow steppes—in a word, an area fertile and very rich [and] picturesque corner [of the earth]." It seemed that Grigorii had located a new identification with the Central Eurasian landscape and peoples that developed later in life into a return to his earlier interest in the separatist movement. In the same way that Russians had increasingly identified with landscapes and the picturesque throughout the nineteenth century, Potanin began to exhibit a similar connection with the Central Eurasian landmass.

46 Quoted in ibid., 159.

The End of an Era

Following the death of Aleksandra, Grigorii Potanin’s expeditionary days were nearly over. He made one final expedition to the Greater Khingan Mountains in 1899. He then retired from these expeditions and devoted the rest of his life to contemplation of his research findings and to other matters. Grigorii made folklore and culture the focus of his later studies, an interest which at least one scholar has equated with his latent Siberian nationalism.48 By 1886, Potanin had earned the Constantine Medal from the RGO, its highest honor, and made him an honored member of the organization (officially for his expedition to Eastern Tibet and “for his activities in promotion of geographical science”).49 Although during most of the time of his expeditions, the Potanins were seen as supporters of the Russian colonial or imperial project in Central Eurasia, once the expeditions ended, it was clear that Grigorii no longer identified with this movement. Instead, he became more detached from national organizations and stuck to regional associations, like the Society for the Study of Siberia that he organized in Tomsk in 1915.50 The Tomsk Society drew its members from the new generation of indigenous Siberian scholars that came of age during the revolutionary period. The political motives and interests of the members of this

48 Znamenski, “Power of Myth.”
49 Obruchev, Grigorii Nikolaevich Potanin, 274.
50 Ibid., 275.
organization were in stark contrast to those involved with the national Geographical Society. His essays from his later years also represented his departure from the observational style and research focus expected of an RGO scholar-traveler. One of his major intellectual interests in later years was to explore the genesis of certain myths in European societies, which he often found could be traced to Central Eurasian historical roots. His work on Central Eurasian folklore had clear political implications. Instead of identifying with the scientific, western, and “Russian” approach of identifying and cataloguing lands, flora, and fauna, Grigorii was essentially de-centering his approach and looking for the source of historical and cultural “truth” in Central Eurasia itself.

This final shift in the focus of Grigorii Potanin’s scholarly work, and the passing of Aleksandra, signalled the end of an era for the work of the RGO in Central Eurasia. Russia’s mounting problems, both domestically and internationally, brought an end to the idealistic support of research expeditions. Although the scholars in the “school of Przheval’skii” continued carrying out research expeditions into the early Soviet period (see Chapter 5), traveling expeditions became less important, less extensive, and were less supported. The mechanisms of the Stalinist state and its burgeoning infrastructural capacities also made traveling expeditions obsolete. The USSR withdrew from a colonizing approach and instead focused on establishing firm control over the “empire of nations” that the Russian Empire had put at the Soviet Union’s disposal.

51 See Francine Hirsch for more on the approach to information-gathering under the Soviet government. Hirsch, Empire of Nations.
Although there was then a stronger need than ever to gain insights into the ethnographic characteristics of the Central Eurasian nations, there was less concern about territorial knowledge. Focus instead became gaining control over peoples through collectivization schemes, forced migrations, and the coronation of local elites to high positions in the Soviet political apparatus. Much of this work could be done out of Central Eurasian Soviet capitals and cities like Tashkent, Alma-Ata (Almaty), Pishkek (Bishkek), Ashgabat, and others. Soviet “specialists” in ethnography or natural sciences could be sent out to villages from the metropoles to conduct their focused research, which they believed would provide a more thorough and “scientific” knowledge of the empire. In short, the ambitious and idealistic projects of the past were now passé. In the end, it was questionable the degree to which Grigorii Potanin chose to participate in these research missions for the benefit of the state. Given the tone that his work and his research interests took, particularly following the completion of these expeditions, one is tempted to draw the conclusion that he participated on these expeditions, per Valikhanov, for his own career benefit. He likely saw that the logistical and economic/financial backing that he could garner for his research expeditions would be inestimably higher if he worked for the Russian Geographical Society and the other national organizations that supported research expeditions. But once the fabric of the national empire started to fray, Potanin no longer participated in this collaborative effort. He instead focused on his own ethno-national, political, and personal pursuits.
Chapter VII – Russian Scholar-Travelers in Global Historical Context

The Age of Central Eurasian Exploration

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire gained tremendous insight into the Central Eurasian landmass. The research expeditions that the Russian Geographical Society, the Russian military, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had supported made key contributions to the process of gaining an informational advantage in the region, which translated to some important territorial gains later. Early in the period, the expeditions of individuals like Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, Valikhanov, and others had paved the way for a successful colonizing effort in what became the Russian colony of Turkestan, territories that would remain under Russian and Soviet control for nearly 130 years. The expeditions carried out in the latter part of the century to territories in Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Western China also brought a fair amount of scientific, ethnographic, and geographic knowledge to Russian elites, but the state was unable to follow up with the territorial gains that had been earlier made in the western part of Central Eurasia. Instead, the latter expeditions led by Przheval’skii, the Potanins, and others (including those in the aforementioned Przheval’skiian school of exploration), ultimately served as more of a service to the scientific and academic communities and a bolstering of the Russian national image abroad than to the immediate colonizing efforts of the Russian state.
By the dawn of the twentieth century, the future of scientific exploration of the type that was so successful during the nineteenth century was deemed tenuous at best. Setbacks came in the form of an unsuccessful colonial war with Japan, the birth of several nationalist movements in various regions of the Russian Empire, and a political revolution in 1905. The confident days of the nineteenth century turned to the conservative, turbulent and forlorn days of the early twentieth. Russia's entry into the Great War brought the colonial project into new relief, and the rise of Turkish intellectual and transnational movements both within and beyond the territory of the Russian Empire brought with them some unfavorable developments for the future of Russian involvement with the Turkic and Muslim peoples of Central Eurasia.

The Russian Empire's involvement in scientific and ethnographic missions of research reflected its wider participation in global affairs during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Central Eurasian "Great Game" experience brought the Russians into an extended period of diplomatic and cross-national competition, which brought Russia more into the web of global scholarly activities (international academic conferences, exhibitions, publications). The Russians began holding up the exploits of particular travelers and particular expeditions as evidence that they could compete intellectually and economically with their Western European and Qing Chinese counterparts.

This final chapter will place the Russian participation in exploration and scientific research into wider global context. This chapter will include a brief discussion of the Russian experience with oriental studies and relate their practices in this area to the
practice of orientalism in other national states. It will conclude with some suggestions for some future comparative analyses.

Orientalism and *vostokovedenie*

There have been a number of arguments advanced in the past about the degree to which the oriental scholars of the Russian Geographical Society were somehow unique when compared to their colleagues in other global imperial contexts. Nathaniel Knight has been the scholar whose work is most associated with the assertion of this viewpoint. Knight employed the example of a Russian oriental scholar and RGO member in Orenburg, Vasilii Vasil'evich Grigor'ev, to illustrate the point that Russian orientalists were not the servants of the empire or the crude essentialist interpreters of “Eastern” peoples and cultures that Edward Said had argued British and French oriental scholars were.\(^1\) Said had, of course, argued that the practice of oriental studies was inherently connected with the larger processes of colonialism and imperialism. The work of oriental scholars was to encapsulate information about Middle Eastern or Asian peoples, thus confining them to compartmentalized characterization that could be conveniently “understood” by colonial or imperial elites. Instead, Knight had argued that Vasilii Grigor’ev and other Russian oriental scholars felt that they were “uniquely

\(^1\) Said, *Orientalism*. 
positioned" to study Asian cultures and peoples from a "distinct perspective" as Russians were closer, he argued, than other European nations to "the Asiatic element." Knight also found that Said had constructed a binary East/West discourse that he found was not evident in the Russian Eurasian case. Knight wrote that Russia never fit into this dichotomous categorization, as "Russia... was not only the subject of Orientalist discourse, but also its object." Knight essentially argued that Russian history had followed a *sonderweg* trajectory, and that it made little sense to compare its approach to its colonies or to its colonized peoples along the same lines of analysis that Said had used to construct his findings.

Professor Knight also called into question the assumption that he found made in an earlier journal article that the practice of Russian *vostokovedenie* was done strictly for imperial purposes. Knight argued that for the Russian *vostokoved* like Grigor'ev, their assignments in imperial backwaters, like Russia's outpost at Orenburg, were laborious and that many orientalists were too involved in mundane day-to-day activities to be effective agents of empire. Because of their disconnectedness from the imperial center, these scholars often languished in bureaucratic tasks and were largely unable to bring real benefits to the state through their oriental scholarship.

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2 Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg." Quoted material on 79.
3 Ibid., 77.
5 Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg."
Knight's article was seen as a challenge to many who study Russian Central Asia and who have mined its considerable treasures of western/eastern interactions. Among those who took exception to Knight's findings was Adeeb Khalid, known for his work on the transnational Jadid intellectual movement in Central Eurasia. Khalid responded to Knight's criticism by asserting that the Russian imperial context was not significantly different from the situation in the French and British imperial settings that Said's work focused on. He found that, although the Russian orientalists often did spend much more time living and acquainting themselves with the cultures and peoples that they studied than some Western European counterparts, they were still in effect supporting the kind of discourse that Said described.

6 Khalid, Jadidism.

7 Khalid, “Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism” KR 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 691-99. Maria Todorova also contributed to this debate by engaging the topic of Russian Orientalism within the wider context of Eastern European history. See Todorova, “Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid” KR 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 717-27. It should be added here that some Russian historians have also begun to engage in this ongoing debate over the place of Russian orientalism globally. See, for example, the following essay on the orientalist V.P. Nalivkin. Sergei Nikolaevich Abashin, “V.P. Nalivkin: ‘...budet to, chto neizbezhno dolzhno byt'; i to, chto neizbezhno dolzhno byt’... Kriizis orientalizma v Rossiiskoi imperii?” in Aziatskaia Rossiia: liudi i struktury imperii. Sbornik nauchnykh statei. K 50 letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia professora A.V. Remneva, red. N.G. Suvorova, 43-97 (Omsk: Izdatel'stvo OmGU, 2005). For another example of a Russian scholar engaging in the Russian orientalism debate, see Elena Andreeva, “Travelogues by Berezin: A Nineteenth-Century Russian Traveler to Iran” in Society and Culture in Qajar Iran, ed. Elton L. Daniel, 163-88 (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2002).
to travel as far as British or French orientalists to encounter the other, *vostokoveds* still viewed the peoples of their study in an essentializing and polarized way.

In this study, I have advanced the position that the scholar-travelers who were supported and employed by the RGO generally supported the cause of empire, albeit for different purposes. Some, like Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Przheval’skii, seemed to carry out their ethnographic research in support of the empire’s colonizing objectives. Przheval’skii presents a most exemplary example of this kind of essentializing discourse, and was an individual who, had Edward Said elected to include Russian accounts in his study, would prove an ideal type of sorts in this area. Przheval’skii carried the banner of Russian and Western civilization into the “Asiatic” lands of his journeys, and found their cultures and societies to be inherently inferior and in need of a healthy dose of Christian and European refinery. But there were different shades of support for the colonizing project. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii’s reports contained little in the way of essentializing ethnographic analysis, but his inherent assumption of an ethnic or national hierarchy suggested his implicit participation in this larger project. Valikhanov’s case was, as admitted earlier, a complex one as well and further blurred the lines of labeling these scholar-travelers as exhibiting outright support for colonialism. He upheld the model of an elite Russian scholar-traveler, only to betray that same model later and call into question his own participation in the colonial project. Valikhanov’s support for the project, as I suggest, may have been to forward his career and allow him with the financial and logistical backing necessary to carry out a life of academic research, which focused towards the end
of his career (and his life) more and more on compiling histories and folklore from Central Eurasians. The Potanins made the matter even more complicated. Grigorii Potanin’s participation in Siberian or regional nationalist movements at the earliest and latest stages of his career made his support of imperial efforts questionable at best. He, like Valikhanov, took advantage of the opportunity provided by backing from the RGO to advance his own projects, which were often not supportive of empire. Aleksandra Potanina seemed closer to the model of a colonial collaborator, through her support of her husband’s expeditions and her essays that shed light on the social situation of Central Eurasian women and families in a way that pigeonholed regional peoples as innately inferior to Russian civilized society. But we have to be careful to not include her as a classical imperial collaborator, given the evidence of her compassion and a degree of empathy for the women and children she encountered.

The position which Knight took up of the relative effectiveness of the Russian vostokoved also deserves some attention here. Although there were those employed by the RGO, like Valikhanov, who had language and cultural skills that made them uniquely suited to making cultural analyses of the “other,” many of those employed in this project were not nearly as capable or equipped for the task. Many, like Przheval’skii and Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii, lacked even the most basic language skills necessary to make any kind of informed analyses. Oftentimes, their translators and guides were similarly incapable of assessing much, particularly when the expeditionary crews journeyed far away from their members’ or guides’ homelands. Therefore, it is questionable the degree to which
the Russian orientalist was better prepared for doing ethnographic analyses. The ethnographic corps in Turkestan, which was hired by the military Governor-General there, were likely much better-focused on ethnographic matters than the scholars which have been described in this study. The multifaceted nature of their work and the sheer physical challenges that they had to overcome on these often-treacherous and long-term journeys often meant that there was little time for a thorough ethnographic analysis. Generally, the latter explorers in the RGO devoted more attention to ethnographic reports than those from earlier in the century, who tended to devote more space in their reports to natural scientific and geographic information.

The discussion should also address Knight’s findings that the oriental scholars of the Russian Empire were too isolated and preoccupied with mundane tasks to carry out their work effectively (and “in the service of empire”) in the hinterlands. This may have been the case for those largely immobile scholars like Grigor’ev who were assigned to cities and colonial outposts like Orenburg. But in the case of the traveling scholars of the Russian Empire, many of them had extended time to make observations about peoples (and thus support the empire in the process). The typical Central Eurasian journey lasted around at least a year. Although much of this time was spent on the road, these expeditionary scholar-travelers faced little in the way of day-to-day distractions that would deter them from the focus of their work. Their focus tended to be on their academic work, and mundane matters of administration were only taken up during lulls between travels, as Valikhanov did work at the Western Siberian office at Omsk.
Therefore, from the information presented in this study, I conclude that the Russian orientalist was not particularly better-suited than their Western European colleagues to make analyses of the other. I would instead normalize the Russian experience in this area, and argue that it was probably fairly typical of that of most oriental scholars of the time worldwide. There were some employed by the state and the Geographical Society who were in a good position to make some analyses, but they were not any better-suited for this job than others. I would agree with Knight, though, that generalization is often difficult in these matters, but that should take nothing away from the possibility of extending Said’s cogent description of oriental discourse to the Russian case.

**Travel and Science in Comparative Context**

From the information presented in this dissertation, there are some possibilities for future comparative studies which could be of some interest to those who study the history of science, ethnography, and colonialism/imperialism. These are only suggestions. There has been increasing attention in recent years to the importance of travel to colonialism and imperialism worldwide.8 Among

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8 Anthropologist James Clifford, for example, has discussed the close relationship that travel had to the process of ethnographic research and has illuminated some postmodern connections in his work. See James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and London:
those who study the Russian and Soviet empires, relatively little work has been
done to connect these themes, or to compare the Russian use of travel to that in
other national contexts. Tourism (turizm) is one area that has received
considerable attention, but as Louise McReynolds has pointed out, leisure travel
should be considered very different from scientific travel. 9 Basically, leisure
care came to the Russian orbit later than in Western Europe (by the 1870s in
Russia and by the middle of the nineteenth century in the west) and reflected the
establishment of a fully-fledged bourgeois middle class. Turizm developed into a
state-run affair in the Soviet Union, but still reflected the presence of a sizeable
middle class. 10 But the type of travel carried out by the individuals in this study
was more state-directed and did not require the presence of an affluent middle-
class. The state instead sponsored these missions, which were usually carried out
by elites (like Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii).

The connection between Russian scientific travel and colonialism/imperialism
deserves more scholarly attention, particularly given the recent spate of

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9 Louise McReynolds, “The Prerevolutionary Russian Tourist: Commercialization in the Nineteenth
Century” in Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds., Turizm: The Russian and East European
10 On the development of Soviet Inturist and its capitalist aspects, see Shawn Salmon, “Marketing
Socialism: Inturist in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s” in ibid., 186-204.
publications on science, travel, and imperialism among those who study the
history of other national states. \(^\text{11}\) This is no place to provide an exhaustive
bibliography of those works, but instead to draw some preliminary analyses of
where the Russian experience with this kind of scientific travel may relate to
similar projects in other national contexts. \(^\text{12}\) In general, I find that the Russian
utilization of scientific research expeditions came relatively late compared to
similar developments in other national and imperial states, both to the west and to
the east of the Russian Empire.

Mary Louise Pratt's study highlighted Western Europeans' utilization of
scientific research expeditions from very early on, which employed the Linnaean
descriptive language, collections of flora and fauna, ethnographic analyses, and
mapping of distant and little-known or unknown territories. The Western
European shift to what she called a "planetary consciousness" was well
established during the Enlightenment era, initiated with the La Condamine
expedition of 1735. \(^\text{13}\) This shift ushered in a period of increased involvement in

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\(^\text{11}\) Daniel Headrick's studies connecting science and imperialism are an important starting point for any
bibliography on the importance of science to colonizing or imperial projects. See idem, *The Tentacles of
Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (New York: Oxford University
Press, 1988); see also idem, "The Tools of Imperialism: Technology and the Expansion of European
Colonial Empires in the Nineteenth Century" *JMH* 51, no. 2 (June 1979): 231-63; see also idem, *The Tools
of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford

\(^\text{12}\) The most thorough attempt to date to compare the Russian Empire with others has been Dominic Lieven,

\(^\text{13}\) Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 15-37.
scientific research expeditions among Western European nations. These were typically sent overseas, and often involved trekking over long stretches of territory away from the coastlines. The research methodology of these missions was firmly in place by the dawn of the nineteenth century, just as revolutionary activities in the Americas and the Atlantic region colonial possessions of Europe hung in a tenuous balance. The scientific expedition became a key element of European conquest of territories throughout the nineteenth century, including the new colonial acquisitions in the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. 14

The Western European states that employed scientific research expeditions during the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Great Britain and France serving as the most representative examples) can be compared to the Russian case, but usually not at the same point in time. Although the Russians were involved in research missions, many of which were under the direction of the Academy of Sciences since the time of Peter the Great, most of the Russian (i.e., non-German) researchers did not exhibit a global scientific consciousness until the middle of the nineteenth century. It was only then that the ideas of the German geographers and the techniques of Western European scientific research became fully transferred

to Russian educated elites, during an idealistic time in Russian history. There was a crucial turn towards western science in Russia at mid-century, just as the RGO was founded and as interest in Central Eurasian territories was piqued. For the next couple of decades, Russian scientists labored to incorporate western methodologies and there was increasing collaboration during this period. But for most of the time from the 1850s until the 1870s Russian research expeditions more closely resembled those of Western Europe from much earlier. However, it seems by the 1870s or so, that the Russian Empire had “caught up” with western methods of doing research expeditions, which may have been caused by more collaboration with international scientific organizations and a greater awareness of the importance of research expeditions for the advancement of Russian national interests. But it seemed that Russian research explorations began to more closely resemble what was being done in the west. Przheval’skii and the kind of work that he carried out could be closely compared with that of Stanley or Livingstone, for example. Grigorii Potanin’s ethnographic research could also be compared to that of many western European ethnographers in sub-Saharan Africa or the Pacific during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Aleksandra’s feminine perspective on travel was likewise not dissimilar to that of many European women who ventured into colonized territories during the late nineteenth century.

But Russian historians have long enjoyed the discussion of the relative lag of Russia versus its western neighbors. Perhaps it would be more interesting in the future to investigate the comparison of the Russian Empire in Central Eurasia with the Qing Chinese experience there. The Qing, as has been pointed out here
earlier, had for a long time realized the importance of sending traveling missions into their colonial interiors, and the study of the Qing Empire’s employment of colonial imperial methods that linked with science and travel has been a major topic of recent scholarly interest. The contemporary Qing scholars have been at the forefront of recognizing the importance of mobility to maintaining and extending control over Inner Eurasian empires. This is in part because the Qing largely established their rule in frontier lands through the practice of imperial touring, a practice which can be seen as an important antecedent to the imperial scientific expedition. The Qing scholars have also linked these notions of empire with the importance of the visual perception of the space, something that also could be compared in future studies and relates to the mapping of the space and collections of flora and fauna. During the nineteenth century, British scientists became very active in investigating Qing Chinese territories and natural-scientific items of interest. The activity of these British naturalists and explorers in China may be another area of interesting comparison with the Russian-led explorers and travelers of this study, particularly given the regional proximity of their work and the relative status of the national empires. Some work could also be done to connect the competition between and among the British, Russians, and

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15 See Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise*; see also Perdue, *China Marches West*.

16 See Chang, *A Court on Horseback*.

17 The aforementioned study by Ely could be compared to the following source by Forêt, to get a sense of the national perceptions of landscape and how this related to the urge to capture and control colonial possessions. See Ely, *This Meager Nature*; see also Philippe Forêt, *Mapping Chengde: The Qing Landscape Enterprise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000).

18 Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing-China*. 
Qing Chinese for scientific knowledge of their vast inner territories, but this would require a future study.
### Appendix A

**Major Land Expeditions and Travels of Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Expedition/Travel</th>
<th>Points of Interest, Destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1853-54</td>
<td>walking tours between university work in Berlin, traveled to southern Germany and Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>17 expeditions up Mt. Vesuvius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856-57</td>
<td>RGO-endorsed expedition to Omsk, Altai, Barnaul, Semipalatinsk, Kopal, Verniy/Almaty, Lake Issyk Kul, Tian Shan Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>inaugural journey of trans-Caspian railway From Uzun-Ada to Samarkand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B

**Major Land Expeditions and Travels of Chokan Valikhanov**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Expedition/Travel</th>
<th>Points of Interest, Destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>under direction of Governor-General of Western Siberia; expedition led by K.K. Gutkovskiy to Kopal in southern Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>under direction of Governor-General of Western Siberia; expedition led by Governor-General Gasfort to Semirech’e and Tarbagatai in Central Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>under direction of Governor-General of Western Siberia; expedition led by Colonel M.M. Khomentovskii to Lake Issyk Kul, Ili River, Ala Tau Mountains, and Kyrgyzstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>travel to Kulja by the Ili River in Eastern Turkestan (Qing China) to investigate trade and diplomatic situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857-58</td>
<td>expedition suggested by Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii to Governor-General Gasfort in 1856; secret expedition to Kashgar and surrounding region in Eastern Turkestan to investigate Hui rebellion and recent death of Adolph Schlagintweit; visited Verniy, Semirech’e, Kashgar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>participated in General Cherniaev’s military campaign at Auli-Ata (Dzhambul)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C
### Major Land Expeditions and Travels of Nikolai Przheval'skii

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Expedition/Travel</th>
<th>Points of Interest/Destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>field research in Ussuri River region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870-73</td>
<td>first expedition sponsored by the RGO, referred to as the “Mongolian Expedition”, visited Urga (Ulaanbaatar), the Mongolian Gobi, eastern Mongolia, Kalgan (Zhangjiakou), northeastern China, Ordos, Huang He River, Beijing, Gansu, Lake Koko Nor (Qinghai Lake), northern Tibet, Tsaidam (Qaidam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-77</td>
<td>second major RGO-sponsored expedition, referred to as the “Lop Nor Expedition” or the “Zungarian Expedition”; visited Kulja, Korla, the Tarim basin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>third major RGO-sponsored expedition, referred to as the “First Tibetan Expedition;” Zaisan, Lake Ulungur, Kham, upper reaches of Huang He River, Lake Koko Nor (Qinghai Lake), Mongolian Gobi, Urga (Ulaanbaatar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883-85</td>
<td>fourth major RGO-sponsored expedition, referred to as the “Second Tibetan Expedition;” Urga (Ulaanbaatar), Mongolian Gobi, Gansu, Huang He River, Tsaidam, Lake Lop Nor, Lake Issyk Kul, Karakol (Przheval'sk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>final RGO-sponsored expedition; took trans-Caspian railway to Samarkand, traveled to Bishkek, Verniy (Almaty), Karakol (Przheval’sk)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D

### Major Land Expeditions and Travels of Grigorii Potanin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Expedition/Travel</th>
<th>Points of Interest, Destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>military expedition from Semipalatinsk to Kopal, Zungarian Ala Tau, Ili River, Kulja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863-64</td>
<td>upon recommendation of Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and through support of the RGO, expedition led by Carl Struve; visited Lake Zaisan, Irtish River, Tarbagatai, border area between Altai and Tian Shan Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-77</td>
<td>first major expedition to Mongolia; visited city of Zaisan, Mongolian Altai Mountains, Kobdo (Khovd), Mongolian Gobi, eastern Tian Shan Mountains, Eastern Zungaria/Chinese Turkestan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>second major expedition to Mongolia; Kobdo (Khovd), Tuva, Uriankhai region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883-86</td>
<td>expedition to China via Suez Canal and Batavia on Java; visited Tianjin, Beijing, Great Wall, Chinese Buddhist monasteries, Huang He River, Ordos, Amdo, Lanzhou, Gumbum Monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>expedition to China and Tibet; Kalgan (Zhangjiakou), Urga (Ulaanbaatar), Mongolian Gobi, Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>exploration of the river and lake area bordering Mongolia and Manchuria, including the Greater Khingan Mountains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E

**Major Land Expeditions and Travels of Aleksandra Potanina**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Expedition/Travel</th>
<th>Points of Interest, Destinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1876-77</td>
<td>expedition to Mongolia; visited city of Zaisan, Mongolian Altai Mountains, Kobdo (Khovd), Mongolian Gobi, eastern Tian Shan Mountains, Eastern Zungaria/Chinese Turkestan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>second major expedition to Mongolia; Kobdo (Khovd), Tuva, Uriankhai region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883-86</td>
<td>expedition to China via Suez Canal and Batavia on Java; visited Tianjin, Beijing, Great Wall, Chinese Buddhist monasteries, Huang He River, Ordos, Amdo, Lanzhou, Gumbum Monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>expedition to China and Tibet; Kalgan (Zhangjiakou), Urga (Ulaanbaatar), Mongolian Gobi, Beijing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary

aksakal: literally “white beard;” denotes a man in Turkic communities of experience and honor; could be translated as “elder”

aul: Central Eurasian community or group of families

batyr: traditional Kazak or Kyrgyz hero or warrior of great renown

Evrasiistvo: “Eurasianism;” intellectual movement in 1920s and 1930s Soviet Union whose adherents viewed the Russian and Soviet empires as transcending categories of European or Asian classification

ekzemplier: Russian term for scientific specimen, often used in reference to collections of flora or fauna

guberniia: Russian term for province

manap: elder, leader, or sultan of a Turkic community

inorodets: literally “foreigner;” typically used in this historical context to refer to non-Russians living in the Russian empire

iurta: traditional dwelling for nomadic Turkic or Central Eurasian peoples

Kishkentai zhuz: literally “Younger or Little Horde;” Kazak nation which lived across a broad swath of territory in contemporary western Kazakhstan

kruzhok: literally “circle;” can also refer to a political discussion group or faction

kumys: fermented mare’s milk; traditional beverage of many Central Eurasian peoples

narod, narody (pl.) a slippery term to refer to a group of people, or the mass of people; often invoked in political contexts; has connotations of reference to the common people; similar to the German volk

Orta Zhuz: literally “Middle Horde;” Kazak nation which lived across a broad swath of territory in contemporary northern Kazakhstan

piket: picket; or a station for soldiers; used in Western China by the Qing to monitor the countryside
samopoznanie: literally “self-knowledge;” the idea that the Russian state needed to learn more about its own territories and peoples during the nineteenth century

sblizhenie: a Russian term used to refer to the cultural “coming together” of peoples or nations; often used in the context of colonization; important term for the Russians, though often used in a political or propaganda context, in referring to the cross-cultural “understanding” that colonization could bring; often used in reference to expeditions in Central Eurasia, which are seen as aiding in the process

Sredniaia Aziiia: literally “Middle Asia;” territory of the contemporary nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; sometimes also refers to territory of Afghanistan

Tsentral’naia Aziiia: literally “Central Asia;” territory of contemporary Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet

Uly Zhuz: literally “Greater Horde;” Kazak nation which lived across contemporary southern Kazakhstan, northern Kyrgyzstan, and parts of Uzbekistan

Vnutrenniaia Aziiia: literally “Inner Asia;” any lands in the interior of Asia

vostokoved: Oriental scholar

vostokovedenie: Oriental Studies
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