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**Weaving Shuttles and Ginseng Roots:  
Commodity Flows and Migration in a  
Borderland of the Russian Far East**

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*Abstract:* The breakdown of the Soviet Union has transformed the Russian Far East into an economic, national, and geopolitical borderland. Commodity flows and labor migration, especially from China, have created both economic challenges and opportunities for the local population. The article investigates the intricate relationships between commodities, migration, and the body in the borderland between the Russian Far East (Primorskii Krai) and northeastern China (Heilongjiang Province). Small-scale trade and smuggling in the Russian-Chinese borderland represent an important source of income for the local population. Especially tourist traders, the so-called *chelnoki* who cross the border on a regular basis, profit from the peculiar qualities of the region. The article explores how border economies entangle bodies and commodities on both material and conceptual levels. Chinese commodities and economic activities shape local perceptions as the experience of local Russians with migrant workers from China is mediated through encounters at open-air markets and regular shopping sprees to neighboring China. The intimate entanglement with the border and its commodity flows means that perceptions of, and involvement in, cross-border commodity flows are experienced in a very corporeal form. Chinese labor migration into the Russian Far East is perceived as a threatening consumption of one's own land, population, and resources. The economic and social interchanges in the Far East blur the boundaries between objects and people and at the same time connect the economic actors to the unique geography, flora, and fauna of this borderland.



*For one can go across the border naked but not without one's skin; for, unlike clothes, one cannot get a new skin.*  
- Karl Kraus

## INTRODUCTION

The opening of numerous border crossings along the Russian-Chinese border since the collapse of the Soviet Union has transformed the Russian Far East into an economic, national, and geopolitical borderland. Citizens and traders in the region are invariably affected by cross-border flows of people and commodities. Commodity flows and labor migration, especially from China, have created both economic challenges and opportunities for the local population. Borders divide, but they also bring people and commodities into contact, often in a very material and corporeal form.

In what follows, I explore how bodies and commodities are entangled in “intimate economies” through border crossings between the Russian Far East (Primorskii Krai) and northeastern China (Heilongjiang Province).<sup>1</sup> To explore the intricate relationships between commodity flows, labor migration, and the body, I concentrate on a particular group of borderlanders who profit from the peculiar qualities of cross border flows – the so-called *chelnoki* (literally, “weaving shuttle,” or the tool that is passed back and forth between the yarn threads of the warp in weaving). *Chelnoki* are tourist traders who shuttle merchandise customs-free across the border into Russia on a regular basis. The body figures prominently in their activities, both as a vehicle for cross-border trade and as a central metaphor in the local discourse on Chinese migrant workers in the Russian Far East. Bodily involvement and exposure to cross-border movements account for this corporeal understanding of migration and commodity flows.

Borderlands are zones that tend to produce a variety of social and cultural hybrids. The interchange on material and conceptual levels, along with the blurring of boundaries is the central characteristic of a borderland. Categorical boundaries between humans and objects blur in a border zone as people become commodified and commodities acquire human like qualities. Shuttle traders thus



represent hybrid entities – their bodies are reduced in a cross-border economy to commodity vessels that transport merchandise across the border.

Commodity values and bodies are often transformed in a border zone. People involved in cross-border trade are able to profit from cultural and economic imbalances and bodily desires at the same time. Value difference of certain commodities in China and Russia has also opened economic opportunities for a range of actors. Similar phenomena of value creation in borderlands and entrepreneurial initiatives of borderlanders can be observed along many of the world's national borders, where porous border regimes become “corridors of opportunities” for local populations.<sup>2</sup> Commodity trade and smuggling in the Russian-Chinese borderland is not only based on an economic disparity between everyday commodities of the two countries, but also driven by particular cultural demands. Plants and animals, which are highly valued in Chinese cuisine and medicine as commodities for the body, are prized commodities for entrepreneurs on both sides of the border. Cedar nuts, sea cucumber, and sea urchin are culinary delicacies in the neighboring Asian countries, while bear and tiger parts, ginseng, frogs, and deer antlers are highly esteemed in Chinese traditional medicine.

Despite the fragmented and fluid nature of modern-day global commerce and commodity flows, shuttle traders are part of a process of territorialization, a fact that Donna Flynn addresses as “deep placement.”<sup>3</sup> The economic actors along the border of the Russian Far East are rooted in the geography of the borderland itself. Yet the various borderland entrepreneurs are not only rooted in a spatial sense but also in the sense of being embedded in commodity flows that originate from the very terrain of a borderland. Conceptualized as zones of “habitualization,” borders can have corporeal effects on sojourners and border populations alike.<sup>4</sup> Shuttle traders are intimately connected to the world of commodities and are bodily engaged with the border, as are smugglers, poachers, and sex workers, who all dwell on the peculiar economy of a borderland. A body is not only subject to the border but can also be transformed into an object in becoming a container or vehicle for cross-border trade. Border economies are body economies; shuttle traders are only one example of various hybrid and transitory borderlanders, simultaneously commodity vessels and vital economic actors enmeshed in a flow of commodities and people crossing the Russian-Chinese border.

## A RIDE ACROSS THE BORDER

*Vladivostok – Suifenhe, October 2004.* It is still dawning as the coach leaves the bus terminal in the early morning. Located next to Vtoraia Rechka, a large open-air market at the northern end of the city, the bus terminal is Vladivostok's long-distance transportation hub to various locations in Primorskii Krai and China. The coldness of a late October morning persists, and a fresh layer of ice covers the boardwalks. Vladivostok's suburbs pass by as the bus moves along the arterial road leaving the city to the north. The bus windows are steamed, and I try to keep a patch in the window open to catch a glimpse of the passing urban landscape. Commuter traffic chokes the lanes of the highways that wind through the outskirts of town. Multi-story apartments line the road, their gray silhouettes contrasting with the lightening sky. Merry chatter fills the inside of the bus. Some of the passengers have already opened beers and are discussing the trip that lies ahead.

Most of my fellow travelers are *chelnoki*, shuttle traders on their journey to Suifenhe, the prosperous border town in the Heilongjiang Province just a day trip from Vladivostok. Almost exclusively women, the sojourners in the bus arrived that morning in small groups, each with a person in charge of overseeing the travel documents and customs clearance. The women use the two to three day journey to Suifenhe, organized through a tourist company, to purchase merchandise, mostly clothes and shoes, and import it back into Russia.

After an hour bus ride along the peninsula connecting Vladivostok with the mainland, a wide floodplain begins to extend beyond the road. Waves of gushing wind roll through marshy meadows and patches of reed sway in a cold breeze. Snowdrifts nest in the hollows of the plain, covered by the first snowfall of the season. Dacha colonies and small settlements separated by wide stretches of open farmland, forests, and swampland contrast with the city blocks and apartment complexes of Vladivostok. The landscape drifts by. North of here, on the frozen surface of the Chanka Lake, Akira Kurosawa's character Vladimir Arsenev got lost and was almost killed in a fierce blizzard. Only the reeds, stacked to make a warming shelter, saved the lives of the explorer and his loyal native guide, Dersu Uzala.

After three hours we arrive in Pogranichnyi, 10 miles east of the Chinese border. Looking towards the West, I catch a glimpse of the Laoye-Ling Mountain Range separating Primorskii Krai from the Heilongjiang Province of northeastern China. Rolling hills covered with a thin layer of snow gradually dissolve into the horizon. The inconspicuous border town of Pogranichnyi, with its 4,000 inhabitants, lies tucked into the base of the hills. The wide boulevards are deserted. A cold down-draught from the hills plays with leftover autumn leaves on the pavement. Long, thin icicles hang in rows from the gabled roofs of wooden houses. The central bus station of Pogranichnyi is a rough concrete square. Dust mixes with the diesel fumes of buses. In an hourly rhythm large coaches leave for China. Colorful motifs of Chinese dragons decorate the bus coaches, contrasting with the dusty gray pavement and buildings of the terminal. Chinese pop music sounds from inside.

The terminal is a place of silent activity, a stage where the bustling cross-border trade between Russia and China pauses in its flow. It is a hub where commodities and border traders freeze in motion for a short while, waiting for transport. Large bundles of merchandise, each of the same design and size, are unloaded from buses and piled on the pavement in front of the terminal. Small groups of Russian women accompany the shipments. Perched on their bundles, they sit close together to protect themselves from the cold wind. Next to the bus station and its small adjacent open-air market lies the train station. Freight cars loaded with timber destined for China are lined up on several tracks for hundreds of yards.

After an hour's stop we continue our journey. The border is just minutes away. The driver stops the bus at the end of a line of trucks and buses filled with shuttle traders. The vehicles have to pass one by one through the Russian customs clearance. After an hour's wait, it is our turn. We have to leave the bus and move individually with our personal luggage through customs. The customs office is a bleak, gray concrete block. Wind is pressing hard against the large windows that shake from the strong gusts. I can feel the cold draft inside. A bored Russian inspector stares at the screen of an X-ray machine, and after checking our group, he returns to his crossword puzzle. The inspector at passport control is more alert, slightly confused by my appearance. A German in the Russian-Chinese borderland is a rare occurrence. His eyes move from my passport to my face, then back again, several times. He double-

checks my Russian visa. Then the stamp drops with a heavy thump. We again board the bus, which meanwhile has gone through a separate clearance passage. On the other side of the lane, buses and trucks from China line up. Groups of *chelnoki* drag large bundles from the buses to the customs building.

We continue through no-man's-land. Tall watchtowers on the surrounding hillcrest rise above the brown forest. After several miles the road passes an enormous building site. About a dozen construction cranes, topped with the Chinese national flag, surround the foundation of the future cross-border trade complex of Suifenhe-Pogranichnyi. After we pass the 75 acres of steel and concrete groundwork, we arrive at the Chinese border. As before on the Russian side, a similar customs procedure begins. In contrast to the Russian customs, everything on the Chinese side bears a touch of novelty; the uniforms of the customs officials glitter with golden epaulettes, the customs office is recently built, the floors are of smoothly polished granite, and the waiting rooms are well heated. My group passes the inspections without any problems. Everybody seems to have experienced the procedures many times before. *Chelnoki* are seasoned sojourners of the borderland.

Shortly behind the border begins the city of Suifenhe. Just ten years ago, the city was a small village with only a few thousand inhabitants. Nowadays, Suifenhe is a city of 200,000. As we approach the city I realize the Chinese modernization project in this region is largely founded on the trading boom with Russia. Numerous high-rise apartments and office buildings surround the former town center and sprawl into the surrounding forested hillsides, stripped of its leaves by the advanced fall season. A Buddhist temple, erected on several terraces on an adjacent hill, seems detached from the rapidly grown city. The colossal statue of a chalk-white Buddha draped in an orange cape overlooks the city, its eyes patiently glaring into the blanket of smog hovering over the city's smokestacks. The bus drops us in the middle of town. My fellow travelers leave for their prearranged hotels. I follow a group to the hotel "Tao Juan," a favorite over-night destination for Russian shuttle traders.

Modern day Suifenhe's cityscape is dominated by steel and glass architecture. Large shopping centers flank the streets – the major ones surround the central square in the city's center. Under the granite pavement of the plaza extends a two-story underground shopping mall filled with hundreds of

small stores. Most of the shop signs are bilingual, in Chinese and Russian. Well-known Western brand names ornament the shopping fronts. The city is full of energy, a bustling trading hub thriving on the border zone to Russia. During the day, Russian shoppers stroll in small groups through the city; some of them carry heavy bags. Chinese helpers are abundant at the street corners, offering their guiding or hauling services for a small fee.

In the evening, the lobby of the hotel fills with groups of *chelnoki* on their way out for dinner into town. I start a conversation with a woman in her early twenties, a *pomogaika*, a helper, who works as a hired shuttle trader for a Russian import company. Ksenia arrived today with her sister and several of her aunts from a small town in the Russian border district for an overnight trip to Suifenhe. Tomorrow they are already heading back to Pogranichnyi, each loaded with 50 kilograms of merchandise for the wholesale dealer who pays her 200 rubles and covers her transportation and accommodation. Ksenia shows me her Russian passport: dozens of Chinese immigration stamps fill the pages. A resident of Zharikovo, a small town in the Pogranichnyi Raion on the Russian side of the border roughly 40 miles from Suifenhe, Ksenia has been in Suifenhe more than 50 times, yet never before in Vladivostok. Many of her friends and relatives are involved in the shuttle trade with China. In the rural regions along the border to China, shuttle trading represents one of the few income opportunities, especially for women. The high demand for cheap Chinese goods sold on the open-air markets of the Russian Far East has created a whole infrastructure of transporters, a fact well-known to Ksenia: “The Chinese markets in the region thrive on the backs of the helpers [*pomogaiki*]. We do all the work, but the others get rich. But what can I do? I need to make some living.” After our short conversation she leaves with her relatives for a Chinese food dinner.

I step outside into the evening. Activity in the streets has slightly ebbed, but many shops and department stores are still open. I pass by an opening ceremony for a new fur shopping center. Flower bouquets surround a small speaker’s platform. A red inflatable arch framed by dragon heads reaches over the large glass doors of the entrance. Above, golden letters spell *Gorod Kozhi* “*Novii Vostok*” (City of Pelts “New East”). Seven stories high, each floor is filled with dozens of small boutiques for leather and fur clothes. The furs are imported from Russia, manufactured into coats in China, and then

exported back to Russia. On a small stage, several Russian models in bikinis and fur coats freeze in the cold wind, waiting for their act. A DJ plays loud music, several speeches follow, and then firecrackers explode, baptizing the new mall.

## COMMODITY FLOWS IN A RUSSIAN-CHINESE BORDERLAND

### *The Chelnoki*

My first encounter with shuttle trade was during a period of participatory research in Vladivostok, where I shared conversations and observations with street traders and market stall owners in several of the city's open-air markets. As part of an anthropological project on informal economies and ethnic interaction in the Russian Far East<sup>5</sup>, I first understood the shuttle trade as a phenomenon that seemed to be peripheral to the markets' economies, constituting an economic network that supplies the region's open-air markets. These so-called *kitaiskii rynki* (Chinese markets) were filled with merchandise from neighboring China. However, I soon realized the centrality of the trade in the region's overall cross-border economy, and I also became aware of the multiple levels and 'shades of gray' that characterize the formal and informal cross-border trade between Russia and China.

The system of shuttle trade is based on the legal pretext of a federal resolution from August 1, 1996 that allows private persons to import merchandise toll-free into the Russian Federation up to 50 kilograms and/or US\$ 1000 in value.<sup>6</sup> This law sustains an entire branch of informal traders, the so-called *chelnoki*. Shuttle trade is of course not confined to the Russian Far East — it is present in many border regions of the former Soviet-Union.<sup>7</sup> Trader tourism in the post-Soviet sphere is mostly the result of a collapsed local small-goods industry and a demand among the population for imported goods.<sup>8</sup>

Essentially, two different classes of shuttle traders exist in Russia: *naemnye chelnoki* (hired shuttle traders) and *svobodnye chelnoki* (independent shuttle traders). Hired shuttle traders in Russia are also called *pomogaiki* (helpers) or *kemely* (camels), signifying their secondary role in the overall cross-border trade.<sup>9</sup> The life and journey of a hired shuttle trader starts in most cases with a

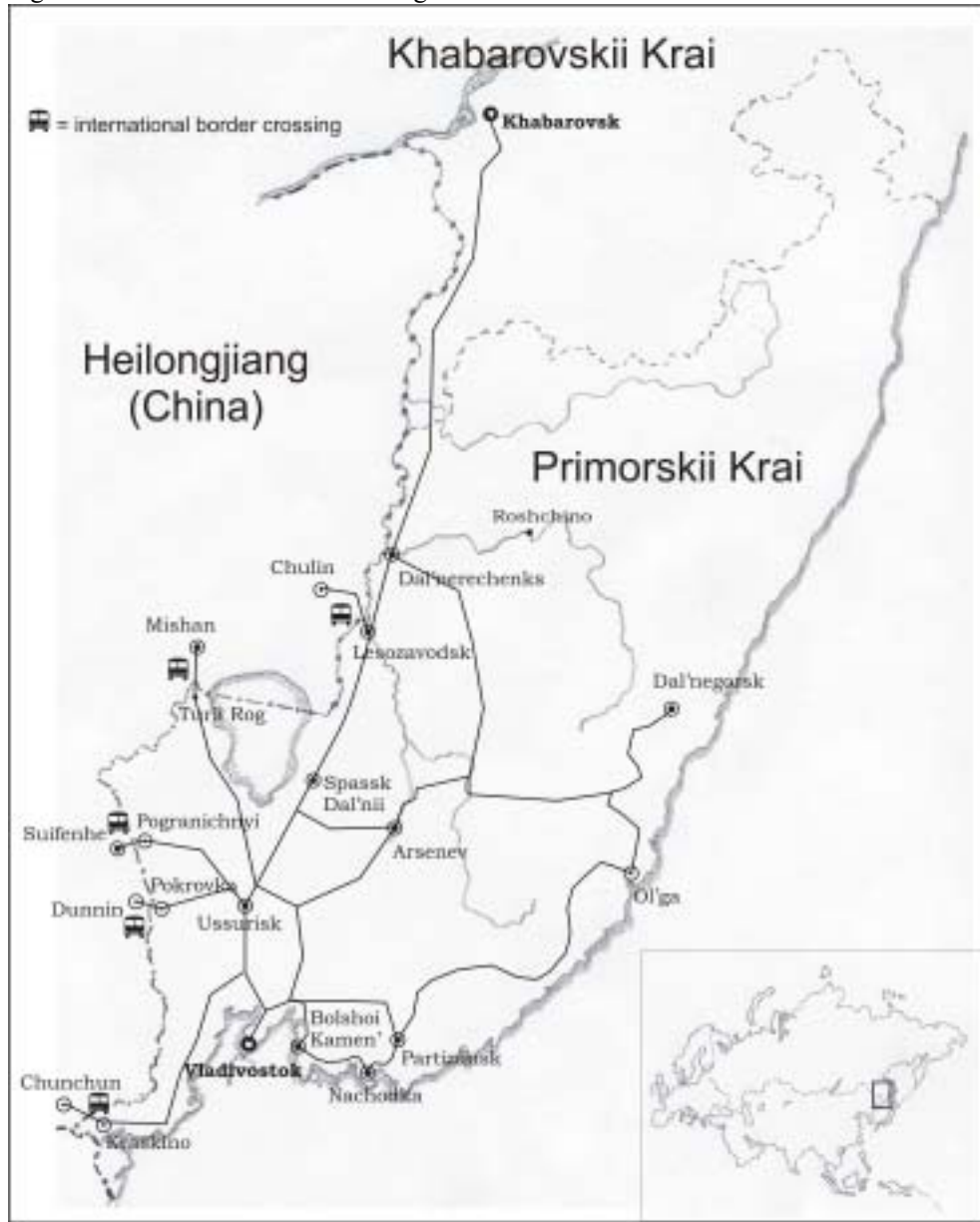
*turisticheskaia firma* (tourist company), which assembles the shuttle traders through word of mouth or newspaper advertisements. These tourist companies normally assemble groups between 20 and 40 people, which are then sent to China where individual group members receive cargo destined for Russia up to the personal 50-kilogram allowance. In that way, wholesale dealers are able to import large quantities of merchandise from China essentially tax free.<sup>10</sup> The tourist company provides for bus transportation, arranges accommodation in a hotel, and deals with the necessary border formalities.<sup>11</sup>

All major towns in Primorskii Krai have several tourist companies that facilitate shopping tours to the Heilongjiang Province, mainly Suifenhe and Harbin. Ussurisk, 60 miles north of Vladivostok, is the main center for shuttle traders in Primorskii Krai. The city's central location and its relative proximity to China (only a two hour bus ride to the trading center of Suifenhe) have made it the hub of cross-border trade in the region. Five different border crossings connect Primorskii to the neighboring Chinese province (see Figure 1). Two of the border crossings are usually accessed from Ussurisk. One, the border crossing at Pogranichnyi, is a combined railroad and road border crossing; the other, Poltavka, features solely a road connection.

Upon arrival in Suifenhe, a group of shuttle traders checks directly into a hotel. Usually, the arrival is after lunch, and a first meeting with the organizer is arranged over dinner, where details of the handing over of the cargo are discussed. The next morning the group receives the cargo for the *optovik* (wholesale dealer) in Russia in packages of 20, 30, or 50 kilograms. Occasionally the cargo has already been loaded into the bus. When the group arrives back in Russia the cargo is handed to the wholesale dealer and the shuttle traders receive their wages. Wholesale dealers play a central role in the system. They organize the cargo, arrange the cargo carriers through a tour company, and redistribute the merchandise after its arrival in Russia.

Primorskii has become an important transit location for commodities originating in China, and it now functions as a commodity hub for the entire Russian Far East. Wholesale dealers based in Primorskii deliver goods to more marginal locations such as Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, or Chukotka, where retail prices are almost twice as high as in Primorskii. The widespread use of hired shuttle traders reduces transport costs and bypasses import taxes. Almost all of the merchandise imported with the

Figure 1: International border crossings in Primorskii Krai



help of *chelnoki* is destined for sale in open-air markets or for the boutiques of newly established shopping centers.

The other way to participate in the Chinese-Russian shuttle trade is to work as a *svobodnii chelnok* (independent shuttle trader) without being dependent on a tourist company. The journey is self-organized, usually with a Chinese multi-entry visa that is valid for either six months or one year, and personal capital is invested for the purchase of merchandise in China, which is then individually trans-



ported over the border into Russia. Although the profit margin is larger when compared to the hired shuttle traders who receive a salary, more self-initiative and larger investments are usually required from the independent traders. Often, two or three helpers are employed to maximize the amount of imported goods, thus increasing the profit margin. These small shuttle trader groups are often formed around kinship networks, although an enlargement of trading operations can include a whole set of social relations among sellers, buyers, and customs officers.<sup>12</sup> For independent shuttle traders, the main hurdle consists in finding a wholesale dealer who is willing to buy the imported merchandise. Social networks are therefore crucial in finding reliable business partners.

Viktor, a 24-year-old native of Ussurisk, has a university degree in Japanese language and has taught part time as a language instructor at the Vladivostok University. As a student, he worked for two years as a shuttle trader, first as a hired and later as an independent *chelnok*, taking the Ussurisk-Suifenhe trip on many occasions. Unable to survive on the meager income from this job, he switched to a better paying job as a salesman for a large dealership, which imports car tires from Japan. On several occasions we had conversations about his former profession as a shuttle trader. He always stressed the importance of social networking:

It is very difficult for an independent shuttle trader [*svobodnii chelnok*] to sell merchandise to wholesale dealers in the market if you are unknown. You need connections [*sviasi*] and acquaintance [*znakomstvo*] with the right people. If you are unknown in the business, nobody trusts you or wants to deal with you. It is like every other business in Russia; connections are the most important thing.

Thus independent shuttle traders require a high degree of social networking skills. Hotels in Harbin or Suifenhe, where groups of shuttle traders stay, play an important role as social nodes for independents interested in networking with potential Russian or Chinese wholesale dealers. Experience and a wide network of personal relationships are important for long-term success. Independent *chelnoki* who lack the necessary connections are often forced to sell directly to stand owners in Russian open-air markets, a strategy that bears considerable economic risks in terms of securing the sale of one's merchandise. Another way for independent shuttle traders to turn over their merchandise is to

independently own one or several market stands or boutiques, thus securing future sales. Still, the economic risks are high.

Work as an independent shuttle trader demands a range of skills. Beyond social networking abilities, intimate knowledge of current and future fashion trends is indispensable. Viktor explained this specific knowledge:

What kind of goods the *chelnoki* bring to the market very much depends on the season and on fashion trends. Fashion constantly changes. For instance, new shoes are already out of fashion after two months, replaced by new models. The same applies to leather goods. The Chinese who trade in the markets in China dictate more or less the fashion. For instance, they say, now this is the new product, absolutely new fashion. They also look at the amount Russian buyers are purchasing and so see what is currently fashionable. Television commercials also play an important role. For instance, people see on television an Adidas commercial for a new pair of sneakers. The Chinese are very good in copying that specific model, and people are looking out for it. Of course it is not the real model, just a copy. When the people see that model, they think, "Oh, I have seen that on television; I want that shoe." My father had a market stand in Ussurisk. He first went to China [for merchandise] and went later on to Turkey. He knew exactly which fashion is good and which doesn't sell. You have to feel how a product is selling.

The *chelnoki* system provides opportunities for participants who can skillfully use insider knowledge and personal relationships. Viktor mentioned the case of his cousin:

My cousin first worked as a hired *chelnok*, and then he acquired a visa [for China] and began to work on his own. But first you have to work for a company, as a hired *chelnok*, in order to understand the business and the market, to see everything with your own eyes. Then, if you have acquainted yourself with Chinese dealers, know where to find the cheap goods, found out the best way to bring the merchandise to Russia, and collected enough experience, you may do it on your own. The same applies to the Russian counterparts. Every time the bus stops at the border for a couple of hours, people go and eat and begin to talk to each other. This is where you meet with other *chelnoki*, and it is the time to work on connections. After all these experiences it is easier to work on your own.

A female entrepreneur I interviewed in 2002 started her career in the early 1990s as a simple hired shuttle trader, crisscrossing the border to China on a regular basis. Later she invested her profit and worked as an independent, adding trips to southern Chinese cities and Korea, thereby increasing her profit margin substantially. Currently she imports used cars from Japan. This economic biography of

a former hired shuttle trader is typical. The system follows a simple logic of capital accumulation and investment. Successful entrepreneurship creates vertical economic mobility. Capital and knowledge, acquired as a hired *chelnok* for a company, can be invested in an independent business. The increase of venture capital is usually accompanied by spatial expansion, which means more distant and profitable destinations. A common step for an independent *chelnok* based in Primorskii is to expand his or her shuttle sojourns from the border town of Suifenhe to Harbin, where merchandise of higher quality can be purchased. Other destinations are even more profitable but require more investment to cover the travel and transportation costs. Some of the region's experienced shuttle traders with sufficient capital travel as far as Beijing, Japan, Korea, or Turkey.

The increase of venture capital and spatial expansion has produced new forms of cooperation among the *chelnoki*. As a first step, independents include close friends or family members in their business. Resources are then pooled to increase the amount of purchases in addition to the extra weight allowance that comes with each member of the group.<sup>13</sup> A next step is often to increase group size even more by employing several shuttle traders who buy goods on behalf of an independent trader. At this point the circle closes and the independent *chelnok* turns into a wholesale trader employing shuttle traders to import merchandise on a larger scale.

The bodies of the individual *chelnoki* play a paramount role in the shuttle trade. Equated with the 50-kilogram weight allowance for tourists, the bodies of shuttle traders are commodified as transportation vessels in the context of cross-border trade. The body-as-vessel dominates the logic of that peculiar form of trader tourism. Yet the body of a shuttle trader not only functions as a transportation vessel for merchandise up to the allowed weight limitation but also is regularly used as a hiding place for smuggled contraband.

Layered into the gray economy of shuttle trade is another commercial activity resulting from lower commodity prices in China. The smuggling of vodka from China into Russia, the so-called *vodichnii biznes* (vodka business), provides extra income for some hired shuttle traders, supplementing their relatively low pay.<sup>14</sup> A variety of methods are used to smuggle vodka into Russia on a small-scale. One is to tape vodka bottles to the body underneath a layer of clothing. For this technique, specific

Chinese vodka is used, which is sold in flexible plastic bags. An experienced smuggler can tape up to ten bags to his or her body without raising too much suspicion at customs. The other way is to use the ventilation shafts of the buses, which usually have room to hide up to two cases of vodka, or approximately 40 bottles. To conduct this side of the business successfully, shuttle traders need to acquire specific knowledge about which bus drivers are willing to partake in the smuggling, where cheap vodka is sold in China, and where to sell the contraband in Russia. As is the case with independents, personal relationships and recurring transactions with known traders and drivers are keys to success. Usually the contraband is sold in open-air markets to traders who offer the vodka under the table to known clients.

The boundary between legal and illegal cross-border trade is blurred. Cross-border trade between Russia and China can be divided into three ideal types: formal trade, shuttle trade, and smuggling. In reality, however, divisions are unclear, and legal and illegal activities merge. In a strict judicial sense, the business of the *chelnoki* operates inside the law, thanks to the legislation on personal weight allowance for tourists. Yet the large-scale use of hired shuttle traders by trading companies, which import thousand of tons of merchandise by using the personal weight allowance of ‘tourists,’ subverts the regime of import taxation in Russia. In addition, some shuttle traders use their regular sojourns to China to smuggle alcohol back into Russia. In these cases, the crossing of a single shuttle trader can integrate different forms of legal and illegal conduct – a *chelnok* is legally importing merchandise into the country but also smuggling illegal contraband. Cross-border trade thus consists of multi-layered routes where the legal blends with the illegal in a single transportation channel.<sup>15</sup>

### *Border Economies*

Anthropological case studies on trader tourism where sellers and buyers masquerade as tourists demonstrate the importance of borders and border zones in production, trade, and consumption.<sup>16</sup> Trader tourism has become an essential part of the economies of the post-Soviet successor states, supplying open-air markets with a variety of merchandise. Vladivostok and the Russian Far East are no exceptions. Far from being passive players in a borderland dominated by Chinese entrepreneurs, shuttle

traders and other border entrepreneurs have to negotiate different roles and strategies. Trader tourists have to interact with different social and ethnic groups, and they therefore transgress group boundaries on a regular basis.<sup>17</sup> Cases of informal cross-border trade in different regions of the world have underscored similar notions of highly agile economic actors in borderlands. The “practice of flexible sojourning” in cross-border trade is a creative and strategic way for border residents of different social backgrounds to use the potential of a border in an active and dynamic way.<sup>18</sup>

Shuttle trade is only one aspect of overall cross-border transactions between China and Russia. The marginal geography of Primorskii Krai and the region’s exposure to multiple national borders are commercially used on many levels, encompassing both legal and illegal activities. The breakup of the Soviet Union has also created new supply chains to already established markets in East Asia. For instance, the formerly secluded bio-resources of Far Eastern waters and mountains are now in reach of Chinese and Japanese markets. Culturally driven demand for specific culinary delicacies and medicinal products in those countries is considerable, and the differences in consumption standards and value have created one-dimensional trade alleys. Meanwhile, historic resource-use patterns reemerge: sea cucumber gatherers are back, diving once again along the coast of Primorskii Krai, and some inhabitants of villages in the taiga of the Sikhote-Alin mountain range are once more trapping and poaching bears, tigers, and sables for Chinese middlemen. These different markets and economic activities have a few things in common. As economies that cut across national boundaries, they thrive in the borderlands, incorporate actors from different countries, and interconnect them through various commodity flows.

Lacking a viable and competitive small goods industry, Primorskii is forced to import a variety of goods from its Chinese neighbor. Commodities offered in the many open-air markets throughout the region present a cross section of the categories of imported goods made in China (e.g., clothes and shoes, fur coats, electrical appliances, plastic toys, fishing equipment, household goods, furniture, carpets, food products, fruits, and vegetables). Since the late 1980s – in 1988 China signed an agreement with the Soviet Union on visa-free cross-border travel – Chinese traders have imported food products and consumer goods to supplement the Soviet economy tormented by chronic shortages.<sup>19</sup> In

the early 1990s open-air markets dominated by Chinese nationals were opened in the larger cities in Primorskii (Vladivostok, Ussurisk, Nakhodka), where a wide variety of imported goods from China were sold. According to a retail trader I interviewed in Nakhodka in 2002, during the early years after the Soviet collapse the profit margin on Chinese goods sold in the Russian Far East was around 80%. This dropped in recent years to a still substantial 50%.

Since early 1994, Chinese economic activities in the Far East and Siberia have been curbed by the Russian state. This was followed by a crackdown on foreign retail traders.<sup>20</sup> Chinese economic activities seem to have consolidated over the same period, however, as an increasing number of Chinese traders switch their capital from retail trade to joint ventures with Russian companies. While the number of Russian and Chinese joint ventures increased substantially after 1994, the number and output of these joint ventures began gradually declining in 1996.<sup>21</sup> During my field research in Vladivostok in 2002 and 2004, Vietnamese nationals had replaced most of the Chinese retail sellers in the city's open-air markets. Nevertheless, major Chinese trading centers still exist in other towns (especially in Nakhodka and Ussurisk), and they continue to be important for local consumers.

Embedded in the overall trade between Russia and China, shuttle trade between the two countries constitutes the backbone of the importation of Chinese consumer goods into the Russian Far East. Official imports from China into Primorskii Krai amounted during 2002 to \$363 million. The principal imports were electrical appliances, apparel, produce, fruits, and vegetables.<sup>22</sup> Exports from the region to China in 2002 amounted to \$244 million. Shuttle trade is estimated at around the same value as official imports, which means that the *chelnoki* import merchandise on an annual basis into Primorskii in the amount of \$300 to \$350 million. The main products were ferrous and non-ferrous metals and metal products (38.6%), timber (22.7%), and fish (14.2%).<sup>23</sup> During the last years, several attempts have been made by China and Russia to establish free-trading zones along the border to increase trade.<sup>24</sup> The latest attempt, the free-trading zone of Pogranichnyi-Suifenhe, which was under construction in 2004, provides for a visa-free trading center on 75 acres.

Chinese imports are not the only commodities entering Primorskii Krai. Other Asian Pacific countries participate in the flourishing cross-border trade with Russia. Japan, for instance, is the largest

car importer into the Russian Far East. Used cars from Japan almost exclusively dominate Vladivostok's streets, and the city has one of the highest per capita rates of car ownership in the Russian Federation. Japanese cars enter Russia's Far East mainly through three ports – Nakhodka, Vostochnii, and Vladivostok. Shuttle trade with Japan in computers, electronic accessories, and car parts is also partly tied to car imports and is visibly thriving in the port zones.

Timber, especially hardwoods, is another major export article from Primorskii, and Chinese companies have invested substantial amounts for harvest and export rights in the local timber industry. One of the largest multi-national pulp companies, Chinese-based *Asia Pulp & Paper*, signed a one billion dollar contract in 2004 to harvest timber and construct processing facilities in Primorskii. Illegal logging and export is endemic. Approximately 70% of timber exports to China is considered illegal.<sup>25</sup> Organized crime groups, often in cooperation with customs officials, establish fictitious companies to receive official export permissions, which are then used to disguise illegal exports.<sup>26</sup> Illegal logging and timber smuggling are big businesses. Approximately 9.2 million cubic meters of timber is illegally exported from Russia to China annually.<sup>27</sup>

### *Poaching Economies*

The Russian Far East's fishery industry is plagued by similar problems of illegal commerce. Complex schemes of poaching and document fraud involve Russian fishermen, customs officials, and Japanese seafood import companies, which are the main recipients of maritime resources from Russia. A comparison of the registered catch in Russia with the numbers of marine products entering the Japanese market annually confirms the scale of illegal fishing in the waters of the North Pacific.<sup>28</sup> Economic losses from illegal catches of Kamchatka crab, blue crab, and mintai in the Russian Far East are estimated as more than \$750 million per year.<sup>29</sup> Russian poachers use two main methods, essentially a combination of poaching and smuggling. One is based on a scheme where a ship without the mandatory quotas or licenses uses false documents to import their illegal catch to Japan or other Asian countries. Another is to surpass the allowed quota and to transfer the excess catch on a foreign trawler on the high seas. So-

called ‘Flying Dutchmen,’ or Russian ships calling to foreign ports, mainly in Japan, play a key role in the illegal harvest of maritime resources in the Far East.<sup>30</sup> Sailing under the Russian flag, they harvest marine resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone, which stretches 200 nautical miles from territorial waters, without going through normal customs clearance. The poaching operations are highly organized criminal activities, often involving several ships, the cover of official companies, and the complicity of customs officials.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout its history, the Russian Far East, especially the regions bordering on China, has been exposed to various trans-border movements of merchandise and migrants alike. Poaching and illegal extraction of local resources have their own ecological history and continuity in a region where for more than 150 years Russians and Chinese have sustained a commodity flow of rare products from the taiga and the coastal zone. Already in the 19th century, the Ussuri and Amur region was populated by a variety of adventurers – brigands, ginseng collectors, gold diggers, fugitives, and alcohol smugglers.<sup>32</sup> Camps of Chinese ginseng collectors and fugitives spread into the mountainous forest of the Sikhote-Alin Range, and Chinese merchants conducted extensive trading with the local indigenous population, exchanging hunting equipment, food supplies, alcohol, and opium for ginseng, *panty* (antlers-in-velvet), and furs (mainly sable). The harvesting and gathering of plants and animals for culinary and medicinal purposes was particularly profitable for Chinese seasonal workers. The Russian ethnographer Vladimir Arsenev, who led several expeditions into the remote, forested Sikhote-Alin, estimated the annual number of Chinese ginseng collectors in the Ussuri region to be around 30,000 at the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>33</sup> Along the coast, Chinese *trepang* (sea cucumber) collectors were also highly active.<sup>34</sup> Only the consolidation of Soviet rule in the Far East during the 1930s put a temporary hold onto the export of bio-resources from the Russian Far East to China.

The breakdown of the Soviet Union and the opening of the border to China led to a resurgence of the cross-border trade of local flora and fauna. The hunting and gathering of endangered species and the illegal harvest of plants contributed significantly to the growth of the post-Soviet shadow economy in the region. Consumers are almost exclusively in China, and Chinese middlemen are wholesale buyers,



while local Russians who possess an intimate knowledge of the terrain and whereabouts of the different species do the harvest or hunting.

Several animal species have again become economically profitable for poachers and smugglers (see Figure 2). Among the coastal maritime fauna, *trepang* (sea cucumber) is of high demand in China. The harvest of sea cucumbers in Primorskii has a long history that dates back at least to the 19th century, when Chinese seasonal workers combed the shallow bays for the valuable animal. Although pollution and over-harvesting has led to a depletion of stocks in the region, several areas to the northeast of Vladivostok still harbor economically viable sea cucumber populations. Nowadays, the poaching of sea cucumbers is almost exclusively in Russian hands. The economic collapse of the small-scale fishery industry in many coastal villages has left few solutions for a debilitated working population, and as a result poaching has become a survival strategy for many. Yet even in the remote bays and coves at the foot of the Sikhote-Alin mountain range, over-harvesting has taken its toll. Several years ago, the daily harvest of a poacher brigade could reach up to 1,200 sea cucumbers. In 2001 the catch dropped to between 400 and 500.<sup>35</sup> Organized criminal groups allegedly control the illegal sea cucumber trade, operating as middlemen between poachers and Chinese wholesale dealers who

Figure 2: Major poached species in Primorskii Krai and designated use

Species	Designated use
Sea cucumber ( <i>Apostyhopus japonicus</i> )	Culinary and medicinal use
Sea urchin ( <i>Strongylocentrotus intermedius</i> )	Culinary use (especially in Japan)
Amur tiger ( <i>Panthera tigris altaica</i> )	Medicinal use
Brown bear ( <i>Ursus arctos horribilis</i> ) Himalayan black bear ( <i>Ursus torquatus</i> )	Culinary delicacy (especially paws) Medicinal use (gall bladder bile)
Ginseng ( <i>Panax ginseng</i> )	Medicinal use
Frogs	Medicinal use
Antlers-in-velvet (of different deer species)	Medicinal use

organize transport and smuggling into China. High competition and depleted sea cucumber populations have put considerable economic pressure on the poachers. Some of them have already left for a more profitable business – the harvesting of sea urchin roe for export to Japan.

Several species of terrestrial fauna are also in high demand by Chinese wholesale dealers. The Amur tiger is mostly valued for its skin and bones. Almost extinct during the mid-20th century, the rare cat is regularly stalked by poachers in the forest of the Sikhote-Alin, who extract the precious parts for sale to Chinese middlemen. In China, tiger bones are used for aphrodisiacs and medicinal products, and liquor derived from tiger bones is a valuable wedding gift for a bridegroom. Brown bears and the Himalayan bears are equally endangered by poachers, who are mainly interested in specific parts, particularly gall bladders, which is a source of medicinal bile used in Traditional Chinese Medicine for a large number of purposes. Bear paws are regarded as a special delicacy in Chinese cuisine. The young, bloodshot antlers (antlers-in-velvet) of Manchurian deer (*panty* in Russian) are used as medicinal ingredients. Frogs are also regularly harvested – Chinese wholesale dealers are willing to pay up to 10 rubles per frog, which is valued in China for its extractable fat.

One of the most highly priced items on the black market for bio-resources in Primorskii is the ginseng root. The mountainous, deciduous forests of the region offer ideal conditions for these rare roots.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that large-scale agricultural farms in China, Korea, and the US produce the root for the international medicinal market, the wild form of ginseng is far more valued and is accordingly higher priced. Large and old ginseng roots fetch the highest prices – an average root can be sold for \$200, while large and anthropomorphic looking roots can easily reach several thousand dollars.<sup>37</sup>

Cedar nuts are yet another seasonal source of income in many rural areas. During the fall, cedar nut collectors swarm into the cedar woods of Primorskii to collect cones and extract the nuts. Groups that go for weeks on a gathering spree erect base camps in the forest where they extract the nuts from the cones and shells; weekend collectors carry portable graters and screens. During the early fall, cedar nut collectors line up at train stations with their heavy bags. Their faces and hands are blackened by resin, and train platforms are covered with nutshells. Many children are among the gatherers. The dirty and strenuous work is very profitable. Chinese buyers pay between 20 and 50 rubles per kilogram of

shelled nuts. Prices can rise during the winter months to 100 rubles. Experienced collectors are thus able to earn as much as \$1000 to \$2000 per season. Almost the complete annual harvest in Primorskii is exported to China, where cedar nut oil is valued for its nutritional value and for therapeutic purposes.

Chinese wholesale traders buy a variety of species for export to China in the villages of the Sikhote-Alin. Purchase prices vary, but the income can provide a skilled harvester with a good living. Below are the buying prices of a Chinese trader in Roshchino, a small town located in a mountainous river valley in the north of Primorskii Krai (see Figure 3).

The volume of contraband these middlemen traders turn over is considerable, as a police raid in Vladivostok illustrated. In spring 2004, a cache of more than 5,000 kilograms of deer antlers was discovered in several containers in a storage area near an open-air market in the center of Vladivostok.<sup>39</sup> In another raid by local customs inspectors, an equally staggering amount of animal parts was found in a truck at the border station of Poltavka. Owned by the Chinese company “Kamaz,” the confiscated truck was carrying 768 bear paws, 1,660 squirrel pelts, 1,600 sable furs, 2,180 black squirrel hides, 388 kilograms of dried sea cucumber, 49 kilograms of frog fat, and 64 reindeer penises.<sup>40</sup>

Figure 3: Average prices for poached animals and plants (paid by Chinese wholesale buyers to Russian sellers in Roshchino, Primorskii Krai, 2004 prices)<sup>38</sup>

Item	Price in rubles per unit (28 rubles = 1 \$US; 2004)
Cedar nuts	20-50 R / kg (shelled nuts) 100-120 R / Bag (nuts with shells)
Snake	100 R / meter
Frogs	5-10 R / frog
Gizzard of musk-deer	200 R / gram
Bear paw	5,000 R / kg
Ginseng	240 R / gram
Pelts:	
Mink	1000 R / pelt
Black squirrel	500 R / pelt
Siberian polecat	500 R / pelt

There are conflicting popular images in Primorskii of the border population's role in the trade between China and Russia. One image portrays shuttle traders and poachers as unintentional helpers of Chinese middlemen who exploit the national resources for personal gain. The local Russian population is here seen as a compliant victim of Chinese economic predation.<sup>41</sup> Poachers are stigmatized as predatory exploiters of Russian resources and willful accomplices of foreign entrepreneurs. However, despite the illegal nature of poaching and the depletion of endangered species, others welcome the economic benefits for the local population from a 'secure' cash income. For many in rural areas, poaching is seen as an economic survival strategy. Excluded from the economic boom of the late 1990s, which was mainly profitable for urban centers like Vladivostok, the mostly rural population found needed employment in the gray sector of shuttle trade, poaching and smuggling.

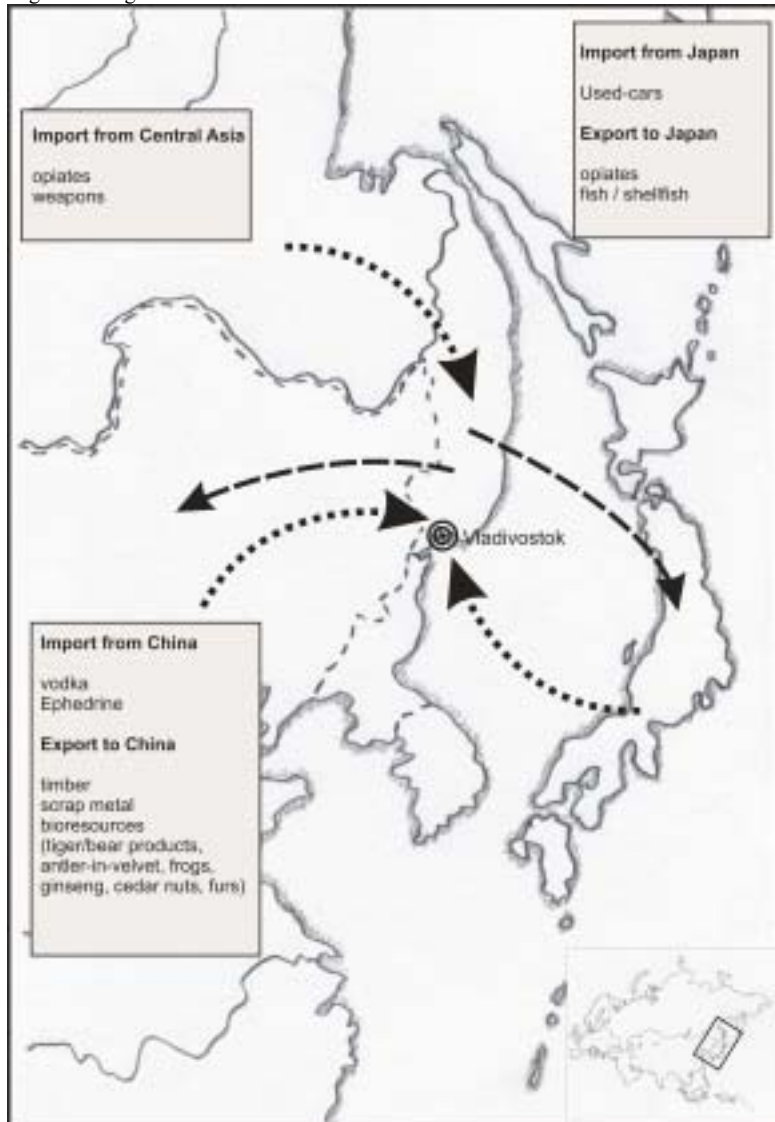
Other illicit economies flourish along the borders of the Russian Far East as well (see Figure 4). For instance, the export of scrap metal has become a lucrative business for port cities like Vladivostok and Nakhodka with large loading facilities. Since high demand in the Asian market, especially in China, has substantially increased the price of steel, Vladivostok's fishery harbor has turned into a large interim storage for scrap metal from Siberia and the Russian Far East. Abandoned industrial complexes from Soviet times have become gathering grounds for scrap metal collectors, particularly thanks to the depletion of the former Soviet navy and fisheries fleet in the Pacific.

Vladivostok has become an important reloading point and export hub for heroin from Central Asia over the past decade. With the closure of Iran's border to Afghanistan in 1998, shipments of opium and its derivatives from Central Asia and Russia increased to European and East Asian markets. Vladivostok mainly functions as a bottleneck for the import of heroin into Japan. Smugglers use regular freight routes between Japan and the Russian Far East to hide their contraband in conventional shipments to Japanese ports. On the receiving end, Vladivostok and the Russian Far East are locations for the importation of ephedrine from China. Ephedrine pills are transformed in simple local laboratories into the meta-amphetamine ephedron (*moolka* or *marsifal* in Russian slang), which is becoming more and more popular among Russian drug-users.

Primorskii, and especially Vladivostok, are increasingly becoming a destination for Chinese tourists. Chinese tourists come to Vladivostok for several reasons. Affordable accommodation and living expenses in Russia create a relatively inexpensive tourist destination for a newly emerging Chinese middleclass. Comparatively cheap gold jewelry, gambling, and Russian women are also a magnet.

As is the case with shuttle trade, bodies play a prominent role in these peculiar border economies. The body-as-commodity appears in palpable form as Russian women offer their bodies to Chinese tourists. Most of the major hotels in Vladivostok offer nightly striptease shows exclusively for Chinese tourists. Sauna clubs offer a complementary program. Cultural and legal differences

Figure 4: Illegal cross-border flows in and out of Primorskii Krai



between Russia and China (prostitution and gambling are strictly illegal in China) have created a flourishing underground industry in many of the larger cities of the Russian Far East. Additionally, increasing numbers of Russian strip dancers and prostitutes are traveling to China to offer their services in local restaurants and bars. For Russians employed in the sex trade, work in the northern provinces of China is often a stepping-stone to more profitable business in Shanghai or Macao.<sup>42</sup> Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, trafficking networks, often in unison with organized criminal groups, have established far-flung networks throughout East Asia.<sup>43</sup> The bodies of Russian women have turned into a priced commodity adding to the flow of goods and people crossing Russia's border in the Far East.

## **BORDERLAND MIGRATION**

### *Migration Flows in the Russian Far East*

The breakdown of the Soviet Union fundamentally changed the border landscapes of Eurasia. Administrative boundaries between Soviet republics were transformed into international borders, and former tightly regulated and controlled borders became porous and permeable for commodities and people alike. As a result, large-scale migration flows from the Soviet successor states to Russia, and inside the Russian Federation itself, have become a prominent feature during the last 15 years.<sup>44</sup> Regional conflicts and wars after the Soviet Union's collapse increased the migration of labor migrants and refugees into the Russian Federation.<sup>45</sup> More recently, economic incentives have become increasingly important in explaining migration, including in the Russian Far East.

Migration into the Far East, and more specifically its southeast, of course was not restricted to the post-Soviet era. As one of the last acquisitions of Imperial Russia, migrants from Russia, Ukraine, and adjacent Asian countries settled the region during the 19th century. The population of the former Amur and Primore regions was a diverse ethnic mix.<sup>46</sup> Russian settlers, Chinese merchants, Korean farmers, Japanese barbers, Manchurian brigands, and indigenous hunters lived side-by-side in the river

valleys and forested mountains. Russia only consolidated its power in the region during the second half of the 19th century. During the 1860s, Cossack groups and Russian settlers began to move into the area and soon outnumbered the local indigenous population.<sup>47</sup> The economic opening of China after the Opium Wars, and Japan's gradual adaptation to western trade in the mid-nineteenth century, promised the Russian Far East a bright commercial future. The Amur River would be its main artery, and Nikolaevsk, at the mouth of the river, would be its hub. It was a time for dreamers and visionaries who used the successful colonization of the American West as a model.<sup>48</sup> They were not, however, the first newcomers to advance into that area. Chinese fishermen and farmers had already founded villages along the coast and in the fertile valleys of the Amur and Ussuri before Russian sailors discovered the natural harbor of Vladivostok in 1855.<sup>49</sup>

During the second half of the 19th century, several factors led to an increase in Chinese settlers. A rebellion in Manchuria (1864-66) drove many Chinese refugees into the region, while a steady stream of Russian settlers made it increasingly lucrative for Chinese merchants to establish trading posts in Russian settlements. The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway in the 1890s and gold mining in the Amur basin also attracted many manual laborers from China.<sup>50</sup> Chinese agricultural settlements quickly spread along the Zeya and Suifen river valleys and into the Khanka plain. The number of Chinese rose to over 40,000 by the 1890s.<sup>51</sup> Over ninety percent of the Chinese population was male, a sign of relative recent migration and its mostly seasonal character.

The special political status of Chinese citizens in Primore and Priamur, granted through the Treaty of Beijing in 1860, led to the creation of several autonomous settlements with a high degree of self-government. By the end of the 19th century, three different groups of Chinese migrants could be distinguished: merchants, farmers/field hands, and hunters/trappers.<sup>52</sup> Economic activities were characterized by a high degree of seasonality in the Ussuri region – farming during the summer months and fur trapping during the fall and winter. At the beginning of fall, sable hunters would come in large numbers from urban centers (Vladivostok, Nikolsk, and Khabarovsk) and China (Manchuria) to the Ussuri region. The settlements were strategically placed in the river valleys of the Sikhote-Alin mountains, where fertile soil allowed for profitable agriculture (mainly wheat and opium), and at the

same time provided close access to indigenous settlements, which meant proximity to good hunting and fur trapping areas. By the end of the 19th century, Chinese merchants had established a far-reaching system of debt peonage and exploitation, which forced indigenous communities into compliance with traders' demands. Chinese traders and settlers dominated the region's economy, monopolizing trade with the indigenous population, which left little room for Russian small businesses. Chinese merchants played a pivotal role in the region's economic life, both as suppliers for Russian settlers and as middlemen for local products. Vladimir Arsenev stated that "between 1911 and 1917 no Russian village in the Ussuri and Priamur region existed without a Chinese trading post."<sup>53</sup>

The situation for Chinese traders in the Russian Far East changed dramatically after the Russian Revolution. Trading houses were closed and Chinese property was confiscated. As a result, many Chinese left the city. Drastic measures were proposed. In 1928, Arsenev reported to the office of the Far Eastern VKP (All-Russian Communist Party):

We don't have time to turn people into Soviet citizens and wait until they change their opinions and characteristics. With our close connections to Manchuria and Korea we have a danger of conflict on our borders with the Korean and Chinese people. The struggle against this includes the possibility of bringing many people from the European part of the USSR and Western Siberia without regard to their nationality. But the Koreans or Chinese must be resettled to the center of our country, and/or to the West and North of the Amur.<sup>54</sup>

Nine years later, Arsenev's recommendation was carried out. Organized displacement of Korean settlers started in September 1937. Under the pretext that Koreans were acting as spies for Japan, settlements were cordoned off and the entire population arrested and deported to Central Asia. The *Kitaiskaia Operatsia* (Chinese Operation) followed. Conducted by the NKVD between 1937 and 1938, the operation resulted in the arrest of the entire Chinese population in the Far East and their subsequent forceful deportation to China.<sup>55</sup>

After the Second World War, the Chinese-Russian border became increasingly fortified, and cross-border movement was heavily restricted. The relationship between the two countries reached a low point during the 1960s, especially after the border clashes on Damansky/Zhenbao Island in 1969.



In addition, Vladivostok as the strategic harbor of the Soviet Union's Pacific Fleet was closed to foreigners between the late 1930s and 1992. Nonetheless, the first wave of contemporary migrant workers into the Russian Far East began arriving from China during the mid-1980s when new laws allowed Russian state enterprises to sign contracts with Chinese partners.<sup>56</sup> In Primorskii, Chinese workers were mostly employed as construction workers and auxiliary farm labor. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a second wave of migrants arrived, and the number of border crossings increased by a factor of almost five.<sup>57</sup>

The years following the Soviet collapse were characterized by almost no state control of immigration, and as a result a growing number of entrepreneurs and traders entered the Russian Far East under the guise of tourism. From 1994 to 1998, the Russian state tried to curb and control the migration flow, especially illegal overstays on tourist visas. During this latter period an occupational shift occurred in the Chinese migrant population. More Chinese migrants started to work as traders than in construction or agriculture.<sup>58</sup> In addition, well-educated and connected Chinese entrepreneurs arrived and founded growing numbers of import-export companies in Primorskii.

The financial crash of the Russian ruble in 1998 launched yet another wave, the fourth since the late 1980s, of Chinese visitors. During the summers of 1999 and 2000, the Russian Far East, and especially Vladivostok, witnessed a large increase of Chinese tourists from neighboring Heilongjiang Province. Despite reduced consumer demand after the financial crisis, many Chinese businessmen had by now established profitable import and export businesses, ranging from wholesale import of Chinese merchandise to the export of Russian timber.

#### *A "Yellow Peril"?*

The migration of Chinese traders into Russian cities, the mushrooming of open-air markets, the influx of foreign goods, and the development of new political structures led to fundamental transformations in post-Soviet Russia.<sup>59</sup> Although the region's economy benefited from Chinese traders who provided urgently needed food supplies and consumer goods, the cross-border flow of people, goods, and

services created security concerns and socio-economic grievances among political elites and local residents. Public and official perceptions of these processes are framed and summoned in reference to a new “yellow peril.”<sup>60</sup> Reversal of population growth, growing rates of unemployment, and emigration of ethnic Slavs to central regions of the Russian Federation have reinforced the fears of those who believe the Russian Far East is under dire demographic pressure from China.

Fear of Chinese migration into Russia dates back at least to the end of the 19th century when the Russian discourse about Chinese migrants was framed by two catchphrases: *zheltaia opasnost'* (yellow peril) and *zheltii vopros* (yellow question). A major problem for Russian authorities in the Far East at the time was economic competition from Chinese workers and traders. V.V. Grave, the representative of the Russian foreign Ministry in Vladivostok at the beginning of the 20th century, stated in a report that important occupations (i.e. retail business, fishery, carpentry, smithies, and dock work) were completely in the hands of Chinese and constituted the city's “*khronicheskii nedug*” (chronic disease).<sup>61</sup> The causes for this ‘disease’ were obvious to him – under-representation of the Russian population, a weak border, and too many Chinese. So too was the cure: forced Russian settlement, infrastructural improvements, incentives for Russian and European investments, increased border security, and a strengthening of the local administration. Grave concluded his account with pessimistic undertones: “During my travels in the Amur Region, one could hear that all the Russians went bankrupt; and to the question of who got rich, one would receive a stereotypical answer: the Chinese.”<sup>62</sup>

Similar arguments are prevalent in post-Soviet Russian discourse about the Far East. Victor Larin, director of the Vladivostok Institute of History, analyzed print media coverage of Chinese migration into Russia between 1993 and 1995 and counted more than 150 articles referring to a “yellow peril” in the region.<sup>63</sup> Proponents of the “yellow peril” argument often cite the demographic imbalance between the southern districts of the Russian Far East – Primorskii Krai, Khabarovskii Krai, and Amurskaia Oblast – and the adjacent Chinese Heilongjiang Province. In the three Russian regions, the population numbers about five million, compared to 100 million across the border in China. The perceived threat of Chinese demographic pressure is accentuated by unfavorable demographic developments in the Russian Federation as a whole. A falling fertility rate, combined with increasing

mortality, has led to a significant decrease in Russia's population. From 1992 to 1998, Russia's population declined by approximately 1.4 million, and out-migration of ethnic Russians from northern and eastern regions of the Russian Federation has magnified the perception of further population decline.<sup>64</sup> The population of Primorskii Krai fell in 2006 by 13.7% (approximately 2 million).

It is important to distinguish here between perceived and real threats. Hardly any reliable information exists on the size, composition, and behavior of the Chinese population in Russia.<sup>65</sup> Population statistics, especially of immigrants, are often used by local elites to apply political leverage on federal authorities in Moscow and to manipulate local public opinion for political gains. An assessment by the Carnegie Moscow Center concluded that the number of Chinese migrants in Russia is only some several hundred thousand.<sup>66</sup> Official estimates of Chinese migrants, in contrast, mention around half a million, but these numbers appear inflated, over-counting shuttle traders during their multiple entries into the country. Indeed, an opinion survey conducted in September 2000 by Mikhail Alekseev in cooperation with the Center for the Study of Public Opinion at the Vladivostok Institute of History, Ethnography and Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Science confirmed that local authorities significantly overstate the scale of Chinese nationals in Primorskii.<sup>67</sup>

Perceptions of a vast tide of Chinese migrants are nurtured by rumors of China's territorial claims on certain parts of Primorskii that date back to the border clash at Damansky/Zhenbao Island on the Ussuri River in March 1969. In addition, there is a growing sense in Russia of economic aggressiveness on the part of Chinese traders, reflected in other surveys, which adds to the fear of being overwhelmed by Chinese migrants.<sup>68</sup> Articles in the local press have claimed that up to 150,000 illegal immigrants have settled in Primorskii Krai, as part of a total of up to two million Chinese nationals in the Russian Far East. For instance, a report published by the newspaper *Vladivostok* in 1996 stated that from 1993 to 1995 almost half a million Chinese nationals had traveled to Primorskii Krai, but that only a third of them registered while the rest moved on to other parts of the Russian Federation.<sup>69</sup> However, the report was not made available to the public, and the sheer impossibility of counting all these illegal immigrants make these numbers highly suspect.

More realistic figures show a different picture. Most Chinese nationals who enter Primorskii visa-free on tourist permits are engaged in cross-border trade or local business. Although the total numbers of Chinese visitors who entered Primorskii on tourist permits rose gradually from 40,000 in 1994 to almost 80,000 in 1998, the numbers who failed to return dropped significantly, from 15,000 in 1994 to below 300, during the same period.<sup>70</sup> The federal migration service estimates that the daily number of Chinese in Primorskii is no more than 5,000, which is about 0.25% of the local population.<sup>71</sup> This number seems to be very low, and I would suggest an estimate between 15,000 and 25,000 Chinese, legal as well as illegal, currently living in Primorskii. Including the numbers of Chinese tourists, there are probably no more than 100,000 Chinese in Primorskii at any given time.

Contrary to public opinion, Chinese migrants have not harmed Russian residents economically, and in some major cities (including Vladivostok) they have clearly created economic benefits for local residents as well as government officials. In Ussurisk, for example, the Chinese trading center has become one of the three major sources of revenue for the local government. In general, revenues from cross-border trade enhance the local tax base and provide the larger public with eagerly needed goods. Recent years have shown a sharp drop in anti-Chinese media coverage in Primorskii. This trend parallels the regional change of political elites in 2001, when Sergei Darkin replaced Evgenii Nazdradenko, who was known for his anti-Chinese bias, as the new Governor of the region. On the political level, economic incentives seem to override xenophobic sentiments today, in part due to the recognition of the importance of growing economic and geopolitical ties to China. The notion of a 'yellow peril' is slowly being replaced in official discourse by references to a 'yellow future,' which reexamines the region's peculiar economic and geopolitical situation under a more constructive and positive light.<sup>72</sup>

### *The Corporeality of Xenophobia*

Nevertheless, anti-migrant feelings espoused by official agencies and local media are still widespread.<sup>73</sup> Many express fears that mass resettlement from China will intensify competition for jobs in Russia, drain

the country of hard currency resources, create social problems, increase crime, and endanger the Russian population's health.

A variety of stereotypical images of Chinese persist in the media as well as in everyday discourse. Negative stereotyping of Chinese in local media was especially prevalent in the 1990s, when the region was going through the extremes of economic transition. During that time, journalists as well as intellectuals in Primorski Krai framed their fears of an overwhelming Chinese economic domination by depicting Chinese individuals and companies as predatory resource extractors.<sup>74</sup> Chinese were regularly featured in the local media as consumers of precious commodities, from local bio-resources to Russian women, and at the same time seen as the importers of poisonous commodities that threatened the health of the Russian population.

Images of a hungry neighbor, posed to consume the Russian Far East, which during the 1990s ran like a thread through the press coverage of Chinese-Russian relationships, are still common. A largely nativist point of view dominates this discourse. Chinese are imagined as an amorphous mass, similar to migrating swarms, ready to consume its helpless host, and they are frequently referred to metaphorically as migrating birds, locust, or cockroaches.<sup>75</sup> Representing naturalized fears, the Chinese presence in the Russian Far East is imagined almost as a biological fact of unavoidable osmosis. Incidents of polluted rivers, caused either by Chinese industrial accidents or by Chinese poachers who occasionally poison rivers to kill and catch frogs by the thousands, only underscore the perception of an ecological threat that stems from the very presence of Chinese in the Russian Far East.<sup>76</sup>

The peculiar borderland environment in Primorski Krai and the involvement of the local population in cross-border commodity flows fostered an understanding of commodity and migration flows that is largely based on bodily metaphors. Chinese are seen as consumers of Russian bodies (i.e. women), animals, or plants. In addition to this predatory image, Chinese are perceived as dangerous bodies that have the potential to spread contagious disease among the Russian population. Local newspapers regularly accuse Chinese migrants of spreading diseases or selling poisonous commodities.<sup>77</sup> Outbreaks of cholera and other diseases in Primorski are repeatedly blamed on Chinese migrants or on poisonous Chinese commodity imports like children's toys, cooking utensils, or

household items. Chinese are thus conceptualized as contagious bodies and polluters who endanger the very health of Russian society. The threat of a polluted environment and xenophobic fears are fused into a general anxiety of a border environment occupied by polluted (and polluting) bodies and commodities.<sup>78</sup>

The conceptual intermingling of migrating bodies, commodity flows, and pollution comes as no surprise. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has shown in her study of cultural conceptions of contamination that pollution is essentially “matter out of place.”<sup>79</sup> The multiple transgressions of borders in the Russian Far East thus create a multitude of objects and bodies that are out of place, and these in turn are perceived as polluting agents that endanger the very foundations of society. Xenophobia in the Russian Far East can thus be seen as a moral discourse accompanying rapid economic and political change, and as a local comment on recent trans-national commodity flows and labor migrations. Objects and bodies are transformed to contagious substances and perilous strangers, not only by transgressing borders but also by blurring borders.<sup>80</sup>

The negative notions and preconceptions towards Chinese traders and migrants that regularly spin in the media find their equivalent in everyday talk. On numerous occasions I was confronted by local Russians with their blunt view of the role of the Chinese in Primorskii. “The Chinese eat everything,” or “the Chinese take away our resources and leave us nothing but trashy commodities” were frequently expressed notions.

In a post-Soviet economic environment, where most of the consumer goods on local markets are provided by Chinese or originate in China, it comes as no surprise that xenophobic sentiments are closely connected to consumption and everyday encounters in open-air markets. These markets represent vital sites of social interaction and places where the local Russian population interacts on a daily basis with members of different ethnic groups – traders from the Caucasus republics, Central Asia, and China. The quality of goods originating from China is a much-discussed topic among regular market shoppers. Chinese merchandise, especially clothes and shoes, are usually regarded as being of lower quality than Russian or Western products, yet this view is not applied indiscriminately. Russian traders with personal experience of wholesale markets in China often stress the high quality standards

that Chinese apparel manufacturers have adapted in recent years. As one experienced Russian stall owner noted, “The quality of Chinese merchandise can be very good, although most of it doesn’t make it to Russia; it is sold in China or in the West.”

There are also negative judgments about vegetables from China, which allegedly are highly contaminated by pesticides. During the winter months almost all of the vegetables in local food markets are imported from China. Only during the summer season does local produce appear, albeit intermittently, as one woman who runs a little vegetable stall in one of Vladivostok’s open-air markets explained to me:

Because of the foreigners our people don’t plant their own gardens. They beat us down with the price and that is why our fields are empty, although we have a lot of farmland here in Primorskii Krai. And even if they [local farmers] come here to the market, the transportation costs are too high and they are not given a place in the market. That I know for sure. The people who come from the Caucasus, they are nice people, I like them personally, but our people cannot compete with their prices, even though our agricultural possibilities are not worse or are even better than theirs. (Russian, female, 63 years)

Consumers are very conscious about the origins of products and food items offered in the open-air markets. Questions about the origins of produce are asked on a regular basis. “*Eto nashi* (are these ours)?” is the most frequent question asked by Russian consumers in markets filled with foreign commodities.<sup>81</sup> Compared to Soviet times, when the consumer was at the receiving end of a state-orchestrated distribution system, in post-Soviet time product choice is at the center of consumption behavior.<sup>82</sup>

To a certain degree, economic imperatives push xenophobic sentiments to the background. Still, misconceptions and prejudice are commonplace, especially in everyday talk. The following responses of shoppers interviewed at one of Vladivostok’s largest open-air markets are illustrative:

I don’t like the Chinese in the market; they are too aggressive, always trying to push their goods on us. But if we would buy all our clothes in the shops, our money would not be enough. (Russian, female, 16)

I don't like that the Chinese make so much money here and the Russians [*rossiiany*] stay without jobs. But what would we do without the Chinese here? (Russian, male, 20)

Of course, the quality of vegetables from China is lower, but what can you do here in the winter? There are no other vegetables in the winter beside the ones from China. The Chinese feed us. You see, I have nothing against the Chinese, they just work here and they are good workers. (Russian, female, 45)

There are a lot of foreigners on the market, but we depend on them. The Russian products are just more expensive, even the Chinese products that are sold by Russians are more expensive. I can even bring back and exchange jeans that I have bought [at a Chinese stall] and that do not fit well. (Russian, female, 50)

It is important to see these statements in the context of contemporary labor migration in Russia, where the perception of migrants by the local population plays an important role in value judgments about commodities in open-air markets. Despite the strongly negative images of the Chinese other, economic incentives usually override xenophobic notions.

## CONCLUSION

Border economies entangle bodies and commodities on both material and conceptual levels. Chinese commodities and economic activities shape local perceptions as the experience of local Russians with migrant workers from China is mediated through encounters at open-air markets and regular shopping sprees to neighboring China. Xenophobia in Primorskii Krai is a product of the border experiences of the local population, both in terms of personal involvement in cross-border trade and as recipients and consumers of commodities originating in China. The intimate entanglement with the border and its commodity flows means that perceptions of, and involvement in, cross-border commodity flows are experienced in a very corporeal form. Chinese labor migration into the Russian Far East is perceived as a threatening consumption of one's own land, population, and resources. The other, the stranger, and the foreign trader are perceived through the commodities with which they are associated. Xenophobia attaches itself to commodities, which in turn acts as a catalyst for negative perceptions of cross-border flows. Objects of desire become contagious commodities that harm or corrupt consumers. Polluted



rivers, poisoned frogs, and toxic vegetables contribute to a xenophobic discourse based on the materiality and corporeality of cross-border exchange.

The commodity is an ambivalent figure here. As the cross-border trade between Russia and China (e.g., Primorskii Krai and Heilongjiang Province) shows, a range of different commodity flows and layers, both legal and illegal, exists. In addition, the border population is involved in cross-border trade and commodity exchange, from shuttle traders to the shoppers buying Chinese commodities in the open-air markets of urban centers. Along with reinforcing negative images of aliens, varying degrees of entanglement also empower commodities to inhibit xenophobia. As shown, economic incentives in the form of cheap consumer products or opportunities to participate in the cross-border trade create avenues of understanding and mutual respect between the citizens of the two countries. Commodities can separate, but they can also unite in the intimate economies of a border zone.

The very distinction between commodities and bodies can be blurred as well. People can acquire object-like qualities, and objects can acquire human-like qualities. Borderlands are prime sites of hybridization, a locus of multiple identities and changing forms.<sup>83</sup> In the case of Russian-Chinese border exchanges, different hybrids evolve from vital economic interactions across the border. The exotic flora and fauna of the region, their commoditization in the course of border crossings, and their successive incorporation into another value system transforms those commodities into highly prized objects in the cultural framework of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Plants and animals are transformed to medicinal commodities for the human body. The valuable wild ginseng is a particularly hybrid form, a commodity-as-body, that acquires more value the closer it resembles an actual human form. Value can also be subtracted, as is the case with Chinese commodities that are ascribed with poisonous traits (e.g., allegedly poisonous plastic toys, or pesticide polluted vegetables originating in China).

Commodities are not the only things affected by the unique environment of the borderland. *Chelnoki* are commodified as transport vessels, the body-as-vessel, equated with the standard weight of 50 kilograms of merchandise, the only asset being their own body. Colloquial denominations (i.e. *pomogaiki*, *kemely*) for cross-border carriers palpably reveal this instrumentalization and commodification. The body functions here as a temporary site for commodities or contraband on the

move. At last, the body itself can turn into a commodity. It is the principle of body-as-commodity which underlies the mechanisms of sex trafficking to China and Asia, and which fuels the business of hostesses and strip dancers that caters to Chinese tourists in the cities of the Russian Far East. After rapid social and economic change has deprived a population of its income and property, the body stands out as a last reserve, an indispensable, ultimate belonging.

Bodies and objects are entangled in the peculiar economies of a borderland in a process of conceptual intermingling in which bodies are commodified and objects can acquire human-like qualities. Commodity flows and migration across the Russian-Chinese border affect border populations and cross-border sojourners in an immediate and corporeal way. This fact is expressed in the body-based activities of shuttle traders as well as in the local perceptions of Chinese migrants and their merchandise. The individual body is the main mode of transportation in the system of shuttle trade and corporeal understandings of migration flows dominate the discourse on the stranger in the Russian-Chinese borderland. The economic and social interchange in this Far Eastern region, both on a conceptual and material level, blurs the boundaries between objects and people and at the same time intimately connects the economic actors to the unique geography, flora, and fauna of this borderland.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I follow here Ara Wilson's usage of the term "intimate economies" to emphasize the intricate interlinkages between economic systems and social life. See Ara Wilson, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, tycoons, and Avon ladies in the global city* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> Donna K. Flynn, "We Are the Border: Identity, exchange, and the state along the Benin-Nigeria border," *American Ethnologist* 24, 2 (1997), 313.

<sup>3</sup> Flynn, "We Are the Border," 312.

<sup>4</sup> Dieter Haller, for instance, shows how cross-border smuggling between the British enclave of Gibraltar and Spain forms the habitus and body style of young men involved in tobacco smuggling. See Dieter Haller, "The Smuggler and the Beauty Queen: The border and sovereignty as sources of body style in Gibraltar," *Ethnologia Europaea* 30, 2 (2000), 65.

<sup>5</sup> In 2004, I conducted 12 months of research in Vladivostok and Primorskii Krai as part of my dissertation fieldwork supported by a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

<sup>6</sup> The 1996 law was slightly changed in 2003, with the result that merchandise declared under the individual weight allowance has to be accompanied personally across the border and the personal weight allowance for 'tourists' can be claimed only once per week. Since 2005 conditions have fundamentally changed. In the fall of 2005, 15 of Primorskii Krai's largest tourist companies that facilitated shuttle trade between China and Russia were banned from organizing visa-free tours, and a new federal import law was enacted in February 2006, which specifies that individual persons can import only up to 35 kilograms per month. This law, if enforced in its present form, will bring the shuttle trade between China and Russia to a grinding halt.

<sup>7</sup> According to different counts, the total number of shuttle traders in Russia ranged between four and six million during the mid-1990s. Up to 10,000 shuttle traders operate in Primorskii Krai on a regular basis. See Viktor Serdiuk, "Chelnoki ostanutsia bez pomogaek, a zaodno i bez raboty," *Vladivostok*, July 19, 2002. In 1999, 209,300 Russian tourists crossed the border from Primorskii Krai to China. The number of Chinese shuttle traders is difficult to estimate, mostly because a large part of Chinese nationals who work as shuttle traders enter the Primorskii Krai on a tourist visa or use the visa-free travel regime for groups. In 2001, 154,500 Chinese tourists were registered visiting Primorskii Krai. See Maria I. Barannik, *Kriminologicheskie i pravovye problemy borby s nezakonnoi Migratsiei* (Vladivostok: VTsIOP, 2002), 44.

<sup>8</sup> Yulian Konstantinov, "Patterns of Reinterpretation: Trader-tourism in the Balkans (Bulgaria) as a picaresque metaphorical enactment of post-totalitarianism," *American Ethnologist* 23, 4 (1996), 777.

<sup>9</sup> Hired helpers are a characteristic of many borders, where bodies are used in many ways for the placement of commodities or contraband. For instance, in South and Central American drug couriers to the United States and Europe are called *las mulas* (the mules).

<sup>10</sup> Thus a group between 30 and 40 people, which constitutes a full busload, is able to import between 1,500 and 2,000 kilograms per trip. Russian customs estimates the daily loss of import taxes from shuttle trade in the Russian Far East as high as US\$ 700,000. See Vasilii Avchenko, "Kombinator iz Suifen'khe, ili Imperiia podnebesnoi khitrosti," *Vladivostok*, August 13, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Tourist companies are able to provide visa-free tours according to an agreement signed by Russia and China in February 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Humphrey, "Traders, 'Disorder,' and Citizenship Regimes in Provincial Russia," in *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, ed. C. Humphrey (Ithaca: Cornell

University Press, 2002), 77.

<sup>13</sup> The pooling of money is especially common among traders who on an individual basis import used cars from Japan.

<sup>14</sup> Compared to Russia, vodka sells for approximately half the price in China, which amounts to a profit of approximately 20 rubles per smuggled bottle. The legal import quantity is two bottles.

<sup>15</sup> Carolyn Nordstrom speaks in this context of “entangled roads,” thus characterizing cross-border trade routes where the formal and the legal mix with the non-formal and the illicit in one channel. See Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twentieth-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 93.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996); Andrea P. Cheater, “Transcending the State? Gender and Borderline Constructions of Citizenship in Zimbabwe,” in *Border Identities: Nation and state at international frontier*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191-214; Chris Hann and Ildiko Beller-Hann, “Markets, Morality and Modernity in North-East Turkey,” in *Border Identities: Nation and state at international frontier*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 237-262.

<sup>17</sup> Yulian Konstantinov, Gideon M. Kressel, and Trond Thuen, “Outclassed by Former Outcasts: Petty trading in Varna,” *American Ethnologist* 25, 4 (1998), 736.

<sup>18</sup> George Lin and Pauline Tse, “Flexible Sojourning in the Era of Globalization: Cross-border population mobility in the Hong Kong-Guangdong border region,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, 4 (2005), 889.

<sup>19</sup> Mikhail A. Alexseev, “Chinese Migration in Primorskii Krai: An assessment of its scale, socioeconomic impact and opportunities for corruption,” Working Paper, November 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Caroline Humphrey, “Traders, ‘Disorder’, and Citizenship Regimes in Provincial Russia,” in *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, ed. C. Humphrey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 92.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail A. Alexseev, “Are Chinese Migrants at Risk in Primorskii Krai? Monitoring interethnic relations with opinion and event data,” paper presented at the 5th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University, New York, 13 April 2000, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Dimitri Khabalov, “Kompanii vytesniaiut chelnikov,” *Konkurent*, April 8, 2003, electronic document, <http://www.konkurent.ru/list.php?rub=11&indiv=595>, accessed June 18, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Since the early 1990s, Sino-Russian cooperation, mainly initiated by the government of China’s Heilongjiang province, has been encouraging a network of free economic zones along the Russian-Chinese border (e.g. the Tumen River Development Program). Other projects, like the Greater Vladivostok Free Economic Zone Project was initiated as a Japanese-Primorskii Krai response to the Moscow supported Tumen project. See Gaye Christoffersen and Tamara Troiakova, “The Greater Vladivostok Project: the Russian Far East’s opportunity for integration with the Asia-Pacific,” *Rossiiia i ATR* 1 (1993), 71-77.

<sup>25</sup> Ernest Filippovskii, “Tamozhnaia sgovorilas’ s militsiei perekryt’ kanaly kontrabandy lesa,” *Kommersant*, September 18, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Corruption and complicity with smugglers are widespread inside the customs department. For instance, in the summer of 2004 a trial opened against the head of the customs inspection of Gordekovo (Pogranichnyi), Ruslan Bashko. He was accused of facilitating in 2003 the tax-free import of merchandise (i.e. pig meat, fur clothing, and shoes) from China into Russia with a total value of approximately US\$ 300,000. See Aleksei Chernyshev, “Kontrabandnyi kanal napravili v sud: Nachaln’nik tamozhni obviniaetsia v postavkakh promtovarov iz Kitaia,” *Kommersant*, July 1, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Vladivostokskii Tsentr po izucheniiu organizovannoi prestupnosti, “Organizovannaia prestupnost na Dal’nem Vostoke, Obzor pressy 2005,” electronic document, <http://crime.vl.ru/docs/obzor/>

obzor\_2005.htm, accessed June 19, 2006, 59.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, in 2004, the complete crab harvest in the Far Eastern Basin was registered at 2050 tons according to Japanese customs, yet the import of crab during the same period amounted alone on Hokkaido to 27,600 tons. See “Brakonery bez barerov,” *Vladivostok*, 9 Novemebr 2005.

<sup>29</sup> “Far Eastern Fishing,” *Russian Regional Report* 11, 7 (19 March 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Brad Williams, “The Criminalization of Russo-Japanese Border Trade: Causes and consequences,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 55 (5), 2003, 713.

<sup>31</sup> See Alexei Vaisman, “Trawling in the Mist: Industrial fisheries in the Russian part of the Bering Sea,” TRAFFIC species in danger report (November 2001), 66-67.

<sup>32</sup> Robert H. G. Lee, *The Manchurian Frontier in Ch'ing History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 79-96.

<sup>33</sup> Vladimir K. Arsenev, *Kitaittsy v Ussuriskom Krae* (Khabarovsk: Tipografia Kantseliarii Priamurskogo General'-Gubernatora, 1914), 123.

<sup>34</sup> Vladivostok's Golden Horn Bay was originally settled by seasonal Chinese sea cucumber gatherers at the beginning of the 19th century. Those earlier settlers named the shallow and sheltered bay Hai Shen Wei, which literally translates as sea cucumber bay.

<sup>35</sup> Aleksandr Mal'tsev, “Brakonery,” *Vladivostok*, July 20, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> The locations of patches of ginseng roots in the forests are strictly guarded secrets, and stories about hidden ginseng plots deep inside the forest populate the local rural folklore. For instance, the father of an interviewee kept several ginseng roots as a retirement savings hidden in a remote garden plot, and on several occasions I was told of farmers who hunted with guns for Chinese ginseng poachers in the woods.

<sup>37</sup> The anthropomorphic appearance of a ginseng root has a major influence on its value. A good form, that is human like, represents a powerful spirit, and thus signifies more potency. The Chinese word for ginseng is composed of two characters, *ren shen* (human ginseng), thus underscoring its human-like qualities. Sea cucumber, on the other hand, is *hai shen* (sea ginseng). I thank Harald Sorg for this insight.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Julia Girnika and Nina Tsarevoi, Vladivostok, August 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Andrei Goriainov, “Kitaitsev vsiali za roga,” *Vladivostok*, March 17, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Vladivostokskii Tsentr po izucheniiu organizovannoi prestupnosti, “Organizovannaia prestupnost na Dal'nem Vostoke, Obzor pressy 2004,” electronic document, [http://crime.vl.ru/docs/obzor/obzor\\_2004.htm](http://crime.vl.ru/docs/obzor/obzor_2004.htm), accessed June 20, 2006, 68-69.

<sup>41</sup> A journalist in Vladivostok, for instance, angrily expressed in an article on resource exploitation in Primorskii Krai the role of his fellow countrymen, “We, like usual, play the role of stupid resource suppliers [*tipykh postavshchikov syr'ia*].” See Akeksandr Losev, “Orekhovyi pozhar,” *Vladivostok*, November 11, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> L. D. Erokhina, “Primorskie seks-rabyni na mezhdunarodnom rynke” (Vladivostokskii Tsentr po izucheniiu organizovannoi prestupnosti, 2001), electronic document, <http://www.crime.vl.ru/index.php?p=898&more=1>, accessed June 20, 2006, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Louise Shelley, “The Trade in People in and from the former Soviet Union,” *Crime, Law, & Social Change* 40 (2003), 242-243.

<sup>44</sup> Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> For instance, in 1994 approximately 500,000 refugees from territories of the former Soviet Union found shelter in Russia. See V. I. Mukomel, “Demograficheskaia posledstvia etnicheskikh i regional'nikh konfliktov v SNG,” *Sotsiologicheskie Issledoivania* 6 (1999), 66.

<sup>46</sup> Amurskaia Oblast' and Primorskaia Oblast' were part of the Priamur Governor-Generalship, which encompassed the entire Russian Far East in the 19th century. Primorskaia Oblast' or short Primore literally means “against the sea,” and is commonly translated as Maritime Province. Today, the area of the former Amurskaia and Primorskaia Oblast' includes the administrative regions of Amurskaia Oblast',

Evreiskaia Avtonomnaia Oblast', Khabarovskii Krai, and Primorskii Krai.

<sup>47</sup> Predominantly Manchu-Tungus people had settled in the river valleys and mountains of the Maritime Region. At the turn of the century, the total indigenous population was approximately 10,000. The 1926-27 All-Union census recorded 5,757 Nanais, 1,357 Udeghes, and 405 Orochi. See M. G. Levin and L. P. Potapov, *The Peoples of Siberia* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964), 694, 737, and 750.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographic Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 146.

<sup>49</sup> Lothar Deeg, *Kunst & Albers Wladiwostok: Die Geschichte eines deutschen Handelshauses im russischen Fernen Osten (1864-1924)* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1996), 51.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Another 'Yellow Peril': Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian reaction before 1917," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, 2 (1978), 311.

<sup>51</sup> High mobility of the population and unhindered cross border travel from Manchuria make it difficult to calculate the actual numbers. Yet estimations of Chinese in the Russian Far East show a rapid increase at the end of the 20th century: 6,000 (1878), 14,500 (1885), 40,000 (1890s). See Dieter Landgraf, *Amur, Ussuri, Sachalin (1847-1917)* (Neuried: Hieronymus Verlag, 1989), 506.

<sup>52</sup> V. V. Grave, an official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, distinguished three different groups of Chinese on his journey through the Priamur Region in 1910: (1) Merchants, (2) seasonal worker, (2) hunters and gatherers, criminals, and brigands. See V. V. Grave, *Kitaitsy, Koreitsy, i Iapontsy v Priamure* (St. Petersburg: Tipografia V. O. Kirshbauma, 1912), 27.

<sup>53</sup> Vladimir K. Arsenev, *Russen und Chinesen in Ostsibirien* (Berlin: August Scherl, 1926), 178. For the Ussuri region, which included the city of Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Ussurisk, and Nikolaevsk, Arsenev's demographic calculations of Chinese based on local municipal and police registers counted for the period between 1905 and 1910 130,000 merchants, 200,000 farm workers, and 15,000 hunters and trappers. *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>54</sup> Cit. in Amir A. Khisamutdinov, *The Russian Far East: Historical Essays* (Honolulu: A.A. Khisamutdinov, 1993), 119.

<sup>55</sup> The "Chinese Operation" was executed in three steps – December 1937, February 1938, and March 1938, with the final stage including the arrest of the Chinese population in Vladivostok. Khisamutdinov, *The Russian Far East*, 121.

<sup>56</sup> Viktor Larin, *Kitai i Dal'nii Vostok Rossii v pervoi polovine 90-kh: Problemy regional'nogo vzaimodeistviia* (Vladivostok: Dal'nauka, 1998), 107.

<sup>57</sup> The most frequented border crossing in Primorskii Krai, the Grodekovo border post near Pogranichnyi, registered in 1991 46,000 border crossings, and in 1992 already 200,000. Although these numbers include the frequent and multiple border crossings of Chinese tourist traders, they nevertheless illustrate the substantial increase in border traffic between Russia and China. See Angelina S. Vashchuk et al., *Etnomigratsionnye protsessy v Primor'e v XX veke* (Vladivostok : DVO RAN, 2002), 200.

<sup>58</sup> N. Barineva, "Trudovaia migratsia na Dal'nem Vostoke," *Ekonomist* 3 (1997), 15.

<sup>59</sup> Galina Vitkovskaya and Zhanna Zaionchkovskaia, "Novaia stolypinskaia na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossii: Nadezhdy i realii," in *Neterpimost' v Rossii: Starye i novye fobii*, eds. G. Vitkovskaya and A. Malashenko (Moskva: Mosk. Tsentr Karnegi, 1999).

<sup>60</sup> Viktor Larin, "Yellow Peril Again? The Chinese and the Russian Far East," in *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*, eds. S. Kotkin and D. Wolff (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1995); Galina Vitkovskaya, "Does Chinese Migration Endanger Russian Security?" Carnegie Moscow Center Briefing Papers, Issue 8 (August 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Grave, *Kitaitsy, Koreitsy, i Iapontsy v Priamure*, 232.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>63</sup> Larin, *Kitai i Dal'nii Vostok Rossii v pervoi polovine 90-kh*, 74-75.

<sup>64</sup> Theodore Gerber, "Russia's Population Crisis. The Migration Dimension," PONARS (Program

on New Approaches to Russian Security Policy Memo Series) Memo No. 118 (1999), 1.

<sup>65</sup> The latest All-Russian Census, conducted in 2002, is here of little help either. According to the census data, 3476 Chinese were resident in Primorskii Krai in 2002, a number that by no means reflect the present reality. See Federal'naia Sluzhba Gosudarstvennoi Statistiki, "Itogi vserossiiskoi perepisi naselenia 2002 goda," electronic document, <http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=17>, accessed 9 June 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Vitkovskaya "Does Chinese Migration Endanger Russian Security?" 1.

<sup>67</sup> Half of the interviewees estimated the percentage of Chinese in the Primor'e to be between 10% and 20% and projected an increase to up to 40% in the next five to ten years. A large proportion of respondents (55%) believed that the Chinese pose a strong threat to Primorskii Krai. See Alekseev, "The Chinese are Coming: Public Opinion and Threat Perception in the Russian Far East," PONARS (Program on New Approaches to Russian Security Policy Memo Series) Memo No. 184, 1-2.

<sup>68</sup> Mikhail A. Alekseev, "Are Chinese Migrants at Risk in Primorskii Krai? Monitoring Interethnic Relations with Opinion and Event Data," Paper presented at the 5th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University, New York, 13 April 2000, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>70</sup> In addition, the number of legally employed Chinese citizens ranged between 7,000 and 8,000 from 1994 to 2001, suggesting a stable and limited flow. See Mikhail A. Alexseev, "Chinese Migration in Primorskii Krai: An Assessment of Its Scale, Socioeconomic Impact and Opportunities for Corruption," Working Paper (November 1999), 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> Mikhail A. Alekseev, "The 'Yellow Peril' Revisited: The impact of Chinese migration in Primorskii Krai," PONARS (Program on New Approaches to Russian Security Policy Memo Series), Memo No. 94 (1999), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Aleksandr Tkachev, "Zhel'taia zavtra," *Zolotoi Rog*, July 27, 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Daniel Rancour-Lafferriere, *Russian Nationalism from an Interdisciplinary Perspective: Imagining Russia* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Lukin, "The Image of China in Russian Border Regions," *Asian Survey* 38, 9 (1998), 823.

<sup>75</sup> See, for instance, Vladimir Oshchenko, "Kogda uezzhaiut kitiatsy, ostupaiut morozy....," *Vladivostok*, January 30, 2001; Iulia Ignatenko, "Zhuravly v Podnebes'e," *Vladivostok*, July 25, 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Recently, the label of "environmental terrorism" has been applied to Chinese poachers in Primorskii Krai. See Ekaterina Liukonina. "Sosedi traviat primortsev kak tarakanov," *Vladivostok*, January 23, 2007.

<sup>77</sup> For instance, Nikolai Kutenkikh, "Miaso iz Kitaia zarazheno iashchurom?" *Vladivostok*, August 28, 1997; "Kitaiskie kerosinskie radiatsiei," *Vladivostok*, February 14, 1997.

<sup>78</sup> Sarah Hill has documented similar associative conflations of environmental perceptions and negative reactions to migrants in the US-Mexico borderland. See Sarah Hill, "Purity and Danger on the U.S-Mexico border, 1991-1994," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105, 4 (2006), 777-799.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 40.

<sup>80</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 25-26.

<sup>81</sup> Melissa Caldwell has shown clearly how Russians are strongly guided in their consumption strategies by the dichotomous concept of *nash* (ours) and *ne nash* (not ours). See Melissa Caldwell, "The Taste of Nationalism: Food politics in post-socialist Moscow," *Ethnos* 67, 3 (2002), 309-311. This dichotomy has a long history in Russian thought that traces back to Soviet times. See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The last Soviet generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 103.

<sup>82</sup> Caroline Humphrey, "Creating a culture of disillusionment: Consumption in Moscow, a chronicle

of changing times,” in *Worlds apart: Modernity through the prism of the local*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 45.

<sup>83</sup> Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, 1 (1992), 6-23.



