

Early Russian Travel Writing on Japan

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Russians began to obtain a first-hand knowledge of Japan in the mid-eighteenth century, though there had already been indirect contacts for well over a hundred years.¹ The first Japanese to visit Russia appears to have done so at the very end of the sixteenth century: this was a Japanese Christian known as Nicolaus de St Augustino who accompanied the Portuguese Augustinian priest Nicloaus de Melo on a journey from the Philippines charged with a secret diplomatic mission to promote Catholic interests against Constantinople. Passing through Russia en route to Rome, the pair were arrested on suspicion of espionage and confined for several years in a series of monasteries.² The seventeenth-century historical record contains several Russian treatments of Japan and the Japanese,³ but more regular contacts began only towards the end of this century, as a consequence of Russian exploration in eastern Siberia and Kamchatka.⁴ In 1697 the explorer Vladimir Atlasov encountered a shipwrecked Japanese merchant, Denbei, who had been held captive in Kamchatka by the local inhabitants. Denbei was conveyed to Moscow, where he was interviewed by Peter the Great in 1702 and ordered to learn Russian so that he could later teach Japanese to Russian students. Denbei was also able to provide the Russians with a good deal of significant information about Japan.⁵

These early contacts between Japan and Russia took place outside the geographical boundaries of Japan, and indeed by the middle of the seventeenth century the Japanese had deliberately all but cut themselves off from any relations with European powers. In the mid-sixteenth century, partly inspired by Marco Polo's report on the 'measureless quantities' of gold which were supposedly to be found in Japan,⁶ first the Portuguese, then the Spanish and

other western European nations, pursuing their commercial and missionary interests in the East Indies, had established both trading and cultural relations with the Japanese. Christianity, and most especially Catholicism under the energetic leadership of Francis Xavier, found fertile ground, so that at the height of early European influence there were some 500,000 Japanese Christians. However, as the Tokugawa government strove to assert its authority over regional centres in the first decades of the seventeenth century, it came to see Christian influence as a threat to its own hegemony. Accordingly, a series of anti-Christian and anti-European measures were introduced which severely curtailed Japanese contacts with the West. Gradually the European powers withdrew: the British voluntarily in 1624, the Spanish and Portuguese under duress in 1636 and 1638 respectively. The remaining Japanese Christians became the victims of persecution. After 1638 European ships approaching Japanese shores were turned back or destroyed and their crews risked execution; Japanese subjects were forbidden to travel abroad or to return when once they had left Japan. Only the Dutch, their protestant religion being considered less dangerous than the militant Catholicism of the Iberian powers, were allowed to remain. Even so their freedom of action was greatly restricted. They were permitted to engage in trade only through the single port of Nagasaki, where they were confined to the tiny artificial island of Deshima. Annual formalised visits to the Shogun's court in Edo (Tokyo) were the only opportunity the Dutch were given to form any more detailed impression of Japan.⁷

As a result of the Tokugawa 'seclusion policy', for the next two hundred years contact between Japan and the countries of Europe was thus extremely limited. In Japan information about the outside world was largely confined to what could be learned through the Dutch and from Japan's closest Asian neighbours, the Chinese, the Koreans and the inhabitants of the Ryukyu Islands. In Europe knowledge about Japan was equally sketchy and limited to a handful of reports written by travellers in the employ of the Dutch and to encounters with

small numbers of shipwrecked Japanese sailors. The situation only began to change in the middle of the nineteenth century following the more or less forcible opening of Japan to commerce by the Americans.

Nevertheless, from the eighteenth century onwards, ships of other nations did increasingly approach Japanese shores, some by accident, seeking refuge from storms in the north Pacific, some by design. In 1797, for example, a United States ship was used by the Dutch to transport goods from Batavia to Deshima. In 1808, following the British occupation of the Dutch East Indies during the Napoleonic Wars, H.M.S. Phaeton entered Nagasaki harbour in pursuit of Dutch shipping. In 1813-14 Stamford Raffles led an unsuccessful commercial expedition to Japan. Later in the nineteenth century the expanding volume of whalers and other shipping in the north Pacific led to further and more determined approaches by western powers, until following pressure particularly by the American Matthew Perry in the 1850s, Japan signed a series of treaties guaranteeing foreign access to certain ports for reprovisioning and trade.⁸

The Russian contribution to the process of 'opening up' Japan was not inconsiderable. The first Russians to set foot on Japanese soil did so as an offshoot of the Second Bering Expedition led by Martin Spanberg and William Walton, in 1739, though because of inconsistencies in their reports and the inaccuracy of the navigational methods available at that time, it was not clear until many years later that they had done so. For the next fifty years, however, Russian activity in the region was largely confined to the Kurile Islands, which were a relatively new area of influence for the Japanese. Japan proper was briefly visited in 1771 by a group of political exiles from Kamchatka in a stolen Russian ship under the leadership of the flamboyant adventurer Count Benyovszky; and in 1778 an unsuccessful attempt was made to open trade with the Japanese commercial ventures in Hokkaido.

The first official Russian mission to Japan took place in 1792, when Adam Laxman travelled to Hokkaido to return a group of Japanese castaways and to attempt to open up commercial relations. Laxman was received courteously, but told that in order to discuss trade he should proceed to Nagasaki. He was issued with an official certificate allowing a Russian ship to enter that port, the exact significance of which has been much debated, but which was interpreted by the Russians to imply that trade would be allowed.⁹

This article discusses the narratives left behind by members of three subsequent expeditions all preceding the 'opening up' of Japan. The first is the record of Adam Krusenstern, captain of the ship which eventually conveyed ambassador Nikolai Rezanov to Nagasaki in 1804 to take advantage of the permit granted to Laxman.¹⁰ The second is the account of Vasilii Golovnin, who in 1811, while attempting to survey the southern Kurile Islands, was taken captive by the Japanese together with two of his fellow officers and four sailors, and held prisoner on Hokkaido for over two years.¹¹ The third is the Japanese section of the novelist Ivan Goncharov's rather better known narrative, *Fregat Pallada* (The Frigate Pallada). This describes the embassy of Admiral Evfimii Putiatin to Nagasaki in 1853 which, although Goncharov left the expedition before the accomplishment of Putiatin's goal, finally led to the signing of a treaty of friendship and trade between Russia and Japan.¹² These principal sources are not the only existing first-hand accounts of the three voyages, but they have been selected as the most detailed, best known and thus most influential of the narratives available. Other texts, such as Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff's memoir of the Rezanov expedition and Goncharov's travel correspondence, are also referred to in support of particular points.¹³

Recent writing on nineteenth-century European travel writing, and most notably Mary Louise Pratt's book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, has suggested that very often accounts of non-European parts of the world contain within them an identifiably

colonialist discourse in which narrative exploration of the foreign other is inextricably linked with a desire to appropriate that other both ideologically and economically. Given that the Russian texts under discussion here are the records of official government expeditions aimed directly or indirectly at initiating trade between Russia and its largely unknown Asian neighbour, they can usefully be examined in a similar light. Specifically, Pratt identifies two concepts which facilitate this type of analysis and which are readily applicable to the Russian texts. These are 'contact zone', 'the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict',¹⁴ and 'anti-conquest', 'the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony'.¹⁵ The Russian texts, as will be seen, cannot be viewed entirely through the lens of these perspectives, but they do provide a productive interpretive starting point for their analysis.¹⁶

Looking at the Russian narratives it is immediately apparent that the 'contact zone' between the European subject and the Asian focus of observation is extremely narrow. This is true in a double sense: Russian prior knowledge of Japan at the time of the expeditions was extremely limited, and moreover the degree to which the members of the expeditions were able to form a coherent view of Japanese society was also very severely restricted. On the first point Krusenstern notes particularly that at the time of his voyage only two at all recently published works on Japan existed in European languages, treatises by Engelbert Kaempfer, whose sojourn in Japan had taken place between 1690 and 1692, over a hundred years before Krusenstern, and by Carl Thunberg, whose experience dated to 1775, some thirty years before. Kaempfer's book in particular, following its first, posthumous, publication in 1727, proved enormously popular and exercised a very considerable influence over European writing on Japan for the next two hundred years.¹⁷ Kaempfer and Thunberg were both

doctors, German and Swedish respectively, in the service of the Dutch. The Dutch themselves, in order to protect their commercial monopoly, had not, as Krusenstern notes with some distaste, made any of the knowledge they had gained publicly available, even to the extent of producing a reliable map of the approaches to Nagasaki.¹⁸ In addition to Kaempfer and Thunberg, Langsdorff, while equally bemoaning the paucity of up-to-date material on Japan, also notes the availability of work by Pierre-François-Xavier Charlevoix, presumably compiled on the basis of earlier Jesuit sources.¹⁹

Golovnin had at least the additional benefit of Krusenstern's account of his experiences, though he notes with some regret that at the time of his capture he had not read the second part of this work.²⁰ This might indeed have been of particular interest to him as it records Krusenstern's encounters with Japanese and Ainu in Hokkaido on his return trip to Russia from Nagasaki. Goncharov, writing some forty years later, had a slightly richer store of information to draw on as Golovnin left not only the story of his captivity, but also a volume of observations on the country and its people compiled on the basis of conversations with his interpreters and guards. Moreover, another German scholar working with the Dutch, Philip Franz von Siebold, in 1832 published his description of Japan based on his residence at Nagasaki between 1823 and 1830.²¹ Siebold drew a large part of his information from the Japanese who attended the school he was allowed to run between 1824 and 1828 to promote Western learning, particularly medicine.²² Goncharov may also have been familiar with the memoir of Isaac Titsingh, head of the Dutch merchants from 1780 to 1794, whose account of his experiences in Japan was published posthumously in English and French in the early 1820s.²³ Even with these expanded resources, however, particularly since their authors rarely penetrated beyond official Japan, and Golovnin's personal experiences were confined to Hokkaido and the Kurile Islands, Russian knowledge of the country at the time of the Putiatin expedition was far from either comprehensive or up to date. Russian ignorance is illustrated

by Goncharov even as Putiatin's ships enter Nagasaki harbour. The Russians saw small model sailing boats on the water decorated with multicoloured pennants, but were quite unable to determine their significance. Goncharov reports that according to his companions the boats were associated variously with religious rites, superstitious customs, divination, or simply children's play.²⁴ Japanese knowledge of the Russians, of course, was no more advanced. When Rezanov and his companions called at Northern Hokkaido on their return trip to Russia the Japanese they met there refused at first to believe that they were indeed Russians as their hair was not dressed in the queues that had been fashionable at the time of Laxman's visit twenty years before.²⁵

As far as first hand contact with Japanese people and customs was concerned, Krusenstern and Goncharov were almost entirely confined to official receptions and banquets and to communication on official matters and details concerning the reprovisioning or repair of their ships. Krusenstern, indeed, explicitly denies being able to give any satisfactory account of Japan notwithstanding his six months' residence in Nagasaki harbour.²⁶ Goncharov makes the same point when he notes that his account reads like a prisoner's diary: so little opportunity does he have to interact with the world around him.²⁷ None of Putiatin's expedition was allowed to stay overnight on land, and although fifty years before ambassador Rezanov had been given first a barren piece of land about twice the length of his ship on which to exercise and later a house at a place called Megasaki, both of these sites were completely closed in by bamboo palisades or water and strongly guarded to prevent any casual contact with Japanese citizens. Even the collection of information from the Dutch at Nagasaki was prevented. On Krusenstern's first arrival he and Rezanov were visited by representatives of the Dutch settlement, but after this initial meeting all contacts with the Dutch, who were in any case kept virtual prisoners on the island of Deshima, were forbidden

by the Japanese. Krusenstern notes that the Dutch ships, as they left Nagasaki harbour for Batavia, were not even permitted to return the Russians' shouted greetings.²⁸

Golovnin of course spent considerably longer in Japan than either Krusenstern or Goncharov and was able to meet a somewhat larger range of people, indeed to establish quite strong personal relationships with some officials, interpreters and guards. He notes a high degree of interest in the Russians from the wider population and records many unexpected acts of hospitality. While being transported, bound, as required by Japanese law, from one part of Hokkaido to another, the Russians would, for example, be entertained by the inhabitants of the villages through which they passed and were thus allowed at least glimpses of Japanese domestic behaviour. As it was forbidden by law for the Japanese to receive foreigners in the body of their houses, the Russians were accommodated on the verandahs. Although a fiction was maintained that they were forced to rest wherever they could because of the fatigues of their journey, they generally found that lavish refreshments had been prepared in advance.²⁹ Golovnin several times notes a similar insistence on the letter of the law combined with a willingness to circumvent its harsher implications in practice. Further glimpses of the world outside captivity were vouchsafed to Golovnin and his companions when, thinking they would otherwise be detained in Japan indefinitely, the Russians escaped, hoping to be able to steal a boat and thus make their way north to Sakhalin or the Russian Kurile Islands. Before their recapture a few days later they were able to see something of the Hokkaido countryside and of the fishing villages along the coast near Matsumae, though they were naturally not in a position to approach any of their inhabitants. Apart from this, however, their most extensive observations were naturally of the different categories of prison in which they were held.

A further limitation to the contact zone was produced by the inadequacy of the available interpreters, which stands as a metaphor for a more general failure of cultural

communication. Although Dutch was known to be the only European language with which the Japanese were acquainted, Rezanov's embassy did not contain anyone who was fully conversant with it.³⁰ The Russians were forced to rely on the Japanese castaways they had brought with them and the Russian these castaways had learned in exile. The situation with regard to written communication was even more problematic. Rezanov had brought with him a document addressed to the Shogun, the Japanese military ruler, written in Russian and Japanese. The Japanese text, which had been produced by a castaway fisherman in Irkutsk, proved unintelligible to the Japanese officials and the Russians were obliged laboriously to produce a Dutch translation.³¹ Goncharov does not highlight interpretation as presenting any difficulty as Putiatin's expedition of 1853 took the precaution of bringing a Dutch speaker in the person of Konstantin Pos'tet.³² Golovnin, on the other hand, who had not expected to enter into any form of negotiation or explanation with the Japanese, found himself in some embarrassment. Eventually he was able to teach sufficient Russian to a Japanese volunteer and himself learn a certain amount of Japanese. In the early stages of his imprisonment, however, the only way he could communicate with his captors was through two Kurile interpreters, one of whom spoke broken Russian and the other broken Japanese. As neither of the Kuriles was at all well educated and the Kurile language was both unwritten and apparently lacking in terms adequate to convey complex scientific or administrative matters (or at any rate the particular Kuriles on whom Golovnin was forced to rely did not know such terms), this process proved extremely frustrating and time-consuming. Additional complications were caused by the necessity of avoiding certain common words that the interpreters did not know, and by the fact that foreigners were prohibited by law from learning the Japanese writing system.³³ Preparing written documents was particularly onerous until the Russians managed to convince the Kurile-Japanese interpreter that word order could not be identical in Russian and Japanese.³⁴ As, for example, unlike in Russian,

Japanese verbs normally come at the end of the sentence and the equivalent of prepositions routinely follow the words they govern, the difficulty of achieving this should not be underestimated. Krusenstern notes a similar concern among Japanese officials for formal precision in written communication. When Rezanov wished to present a report to the Japanese Emperor (Shogun), as well as a translation into Dutch the Nagasaki authorities required a copy of the Russian text ‘written with such accuracy that every line was to terminate with the same letter as the original’.³⁵

A further difficulty with interpretation noted by Golovnin resulted from the fact that the political motivations of the Russians and the Kurile interpreters were not always identical. It happened, for example, that in the explanation of certain actions one of the interpreters chose to exculpate himself in the eyes of the Japanese by falsely accusing the Russians of anti-Japanese intentions. It was therefore very difficult for Golovnin to know at first whether his words were being deliberately distorted.³⁶

Except in one case which will be mentioned later, the purpose of Russian visits to Japan in the first half of the nineteenth century was pacific. It was at the same time coercive in that the visitors would simply not accept that the wish of the Japanese government to close their country to Europeans was legitimate. It is at the intersection of these two aspects of the discourse of Russian exploration that the trope of ‘anti-conquest’ becomes visible in the construction of the benignity of the European subject even as it strives to assert its authority and the superiority of European values. To put the matter slightly differently, in the terms proposed by Syed Manzurul Islam, the narrative produced is to a greater or lesser extent ‘sedentary’ travel writing in which the establishment of ‘a vantage point from which to carry out a representation of difference’ is of crucial importance.³⁷

Not surprisingly it is in the two diplomatic missions that this strategy is most clearly apparent. The Laxman permit carried by Rezanov no doubt gave Krusenstern some

expectation that his 1804 mission would be favourably received. Yet rather than treat the Japanese on terms of equality, his narrative persistently interprets difference as hostility. He takes great exception, for example, to the Japanese style of formal salutation (touching one's head to the ground from a prone position) and especially to the compromise adopted by the Dutch, consisting of a right-angled bow held until permission was given to straighten up, which he describes as degrading.³⁸ Krusenstern reads Japanese security measures, such as impounding the Russians' gunpowder and firearms, and severely restricting their movements, both in Nagasaki harbour and on land, as insults, though in fact Rezanov was afforded a favour unprecedented even in European diplomacy, as Krusenstern himself acknowledges, when he was allowed to take an armed guard with him on shore.³⁹ Bureaucratic delays caused by procedural inflexibility, complex divisions of responsibility and the necessity of referring decisions to the Shogun at Edo are also interpreted as deliberately obstructive. While complaining of the mistrustfulness he sees in Japanese behaviour, Krusenstern, like the other travellers, is quick to point out Japanese generosity in providing both provisions and materials for necessary ship repairs. On the other hand, his narrative omits events which indicate Japanese tolerance and good will: for example, the episode related by Langsdorff, in which the Russians made a paper hot air balloon and inadvertently allowed it to drift dangerously over the land.⁴⁰

Goncharov's double vision takes a particularly pervasive form. He is an acute observer of the complex negotiations on matters of protocol designed to protect the dignity of both sides. Where should meetings be held? What refreshments should be offered? Should chairs be provided for the Russians? If so who should provide them? Should the Russians remove their boots in Japanese interiors? But perhaps because he was not himself a diplomat, Goncharov remains personally detached from any of these niceties and persistently asserts that beneath the effects of cultural difference the Japanese are identical to the Russians, or

nearly so. He recognises, for example, a familiar type of an old man in the kindly and intelligent demeanour of one of the envoys from Edo and acknowledges a standard of civilisation in the Japanese, to which, apart from a few details of manners and dress, Europeans could take no exception.⁴¹ In several lengthy digressions Goncharov shows himself quite sensitive to the political complexities underlying Japanese attitudes to the West, and in particular to the difficulty of achieving modernisation or change within the framework of the existing rigid constitutional system.⁴² Elsewhere, he is at pains to explain and justify certain Japanese cultural practices which may seem strange to the European eye – such as the custom of bowing from a kneeling position or removing one’s shoes on entering a building – in terms of the broader context of Japanese customs and social relations.⁴³

At the same time, however, there is a sense in which Goncharov treats Japan as not quite belonging to the real world. Almost his first mention of the country is as ‘tridesiatoe gosudarstvo’, as a ‘far-off land’ in the expression used in Russian folklore to indicate a magical kingdom.⁴⁴ Japan is called ‘a locked casket whose key is lost’.⁴⁵ The Russians and the Japanese are the fox and the stork in Aesop’s fable, each unable to function within the other’s terms of reference.⁴⁶ The Japanese officials are ‘porcelain dolls’, whose thinking cannot be penetrated; their behaviour is a ‘magical ballet’, ‘a scene taken from some fantastic ballet or opera’, which Goncharov is watching from the stalls of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and in the reality of which he is unable to believe.⁴⁷

Goncharov treats Japanese behaviour with the devastating irony that he was accustomed to direct at other subjects in his fiction. True, Goncharov mocks Russian inability to cope with Japanese customs as well, but such comments as the following, on the imminent breakdown of the seclusion policy, show that irony can easily be implicated in political self-interest. To Goncharov the Japanese are like children: pursuing their seclusion policy they

have got out of their depth through their inexperience and lack of wisdom. They must look now to European instructors to find a way out of their impasse:

Like a playground intrigue, [the seclusion policy] has collapsed instantly with the appearance of the teacher. [The Japanese] are alone, without help. There is nothing for them to do but break out in tears and say ‘we are guilty, we are children’ and like children put themselves under the guidance of their elders.⁴⁸

A similar paternalism is indicated by Goncharov's reaction to the scenery of Nagasaki harbour. He feels uncomfortable with what he sees as the unmediated presence of nature and wants to tame it by introducing all the attributes of nineteenth-century European civilisation:

in my thoughts I covered all these hillocks and groves with temples, cottages, pavilions and statues, and the waters of the harbour with steamships and thickets of masts; I populated the shores with Europeans; I already saw paths of a park, galloping horsewomen, and closer to the city I envisioned Russian, American and English factories.⁴⁹

He is offended that the Japanese do not know how to use Nagasaki properly. If it was taken away from them the city could become a great and bustling port in the European style.⁵⁰

The reasoning behind Goncharov's thinking here can be understood more clearly by reference to *Fregata Pallada* as a complete work, as a comparative interpretation of the peoples of the globe seen on a world tour. In his travelogue as a whole Goncharov is ruled by a conception of progress and civilisation based firmly on European models and strongly linked with Christianity. Goncharov consistently views the different nations which he encounters in terms of their ‘age’ on a scale of their development towards civilisation. If the

English, with their highly developed industrial society and commercial instincts are indisputably 'adult', and the inhabitants of the Ryukyu Islands are seen as subsisting in 'childlike' innocence, the Japanese occupy an intermediate stage. While in many ways they are 'children', nevertheless the openness of many individuals to learning from the West suggests that they may in time emerge from their mental 'torpor' and, with suitable guidance, achieve equal maturity with Western nations.⁵¹

If Goncharov has been accused of presenting a superficial and often patronising account of the Japanese, Golovnin's work has been seen as a good deal more penetrating and serious.⁵² On occasion he admits to a natural impatience with the intrusive and apparently gratuitous questioning to which he is subjected, and he objects to the importunate requests made of the Russians for souvenir specimens of handwriting on fans.⁵³ He is at the same time deeply impressed by the politeness of his Japanese captors and strives hard to understand their motivations and laws, even when these seem considerably at odds with European values and practices.⁵⁴ Yet even Golovnin, for all his sympathy with the Japanese, is not entirely immune to the orientalism of his times, as can be seen from his actions before his capture. Proceeding circumspectly about his task of charting the southern Kurile islands, Golovnin landed on Iturup (Etorofu), disingenuously claiming that he expected to meet there only Kuriles, though he must surely have realised that the islands were under Japanese control.⁵⁵ After an interview with the local Japanese commander, Golovnin was given permission to proceed to the town of Urbich to replenish his supplies. Golovnin notes that he deliberately concealed his true reason for being on Iturup on the grounds that the Japanese would not be able to understand it,⁵⁶ and instead of going to Urbich as instructed turned south with the intention of surveying Kunashir and the strait between that island and Hokkaido. Golovnin's arrest, even if there is some question of the extent to which it was officially sanctioned,

would seem a natural consequence of his flouting of Japanese laws regarding foreign shipping.

One particular feature of Golovnin's narrative is his exposure, as here, of his conscious deception of the Japanese on certain issues. Thus, knowing that the Japanese had a great thirst for knowledge about the west and that they were liable to ask innumerable supplementary questions if given any information at all, he deliberately gave misleading answers on some topics and concealed the true content of a particular technical book in his possession to avoid possibly days of translation and explanation.⁵⁷ He exaggerated the number of sailors under his command, and on several occasions he deliberately provided mistranslations of documents which he thought might prove prejudicial to the Russians' chance of release. In particular, Golovnin was concerned to dissociate himself and the Russian government from the attacks made in 1807 on Japanese settlements on Iturup and Sakhalin by Nikolai Khvostov and Gavril Davydov. These naval officers were acting under instructions from Rezanov, apparently in revenge for what he saw as the poor treatment he had received in 1804, and, although in fact they did not have the explicit support of St Petersburg at the time of the raids, they certainly did not turn out to be without friends in government circles after the event.⁵⁸ It was important for Golovnin, however, to insist that Russia had only peaceful intentions towards Japan and that Khvostov and Davydov had acted in a private, not an official capacity. In distorting the meaning of various papers Golovnin was of course acting in his own personal interests; he was also attempting to increase the likelihood of an eventual trading relationship with the Japanese.

The discourse of anti-conquest is by no means the only site for inscription of power relations or the negotiation of cultural difference which appears in the texts under consideration. As should be clear from the above example they dwell also on relations between different Russian interest groups. Somewhere behind Krusenstern's narrative lies the

history of a heated conflict between Rezanov and the officers of the ship on which he sailed concerning the nature of his command and the tenor of his instructions from the emperor.⁵⁹ Golovnin relates a confusion of cultural boundaries which took place in the mind of one of his junior officers as he broke down psychologically under the strain of imprisonment. This officer, Fedor Mur, in direct defiance of Golovnin's orders, had been the first to make contact with the Japanese on Iturup.⁶⁰ This rash action, which Golovnin at first put down to mere youthful impetuosity, was perhaps symptomatic of Mur's later mental instability. When it became clear that the captured Russians were not to be released quickly or perhaps at all, and that part of the reason for this was anti-Russian feeling engendered by the raids of Khvostov and Davydov, Mur began to deny his Russianness, emphasising the German part of his ancestry, to inform on his fellow prisoners to the Japanese, and to adopt as far as possible Japanese manners and modes of dress. Mur's behaviour, though apparently failing in fact to ingratiate him with the Japanese, severely complicated Golovnin's plan for escape. Mur refused at first to participate, but then briefly changed his mind, before withdrawing from the plan and avoiding the company of the other Russians altogether. Golovnin was then obliged to conceal all further preparations for the escape from him for fear he would betray the plan to the Japanese. Mur seems to have become increasingly irrational as time went on, and particularly after it became clear that the Russians were finally to be released, to the extent that he began deliberately to make false or misleading statements to the Japanese calculated to compromise the Russians' position. After his return to the Russian mainland in early November 1813, Mur obsessively expressed his remorse for his behaviour, shunned the society of his fellow officers and lived chiefly with the native inhabitants of Kamchatka, until, a few weeks later, more and more subject to depression, he shot himself while on a hunting expedition.⁶¹

At one point in his memoir, in an uncharacteristically self-conscious aside, Golovnin remarks that a novelist could only with difficulty imagine the unlikely sequence of events in which the Russians had been involved. The only element missing, he claims, is the opportunity for one of the officers to win the affections of a distinguished Japanese lady who would help them to escape.⁶² If anything, however, Golovnin underplays the romantic and the exotic in his account of Japan, choosing not to pass on and possibly embroider the stories of others, but to confine himself to his 'own observation and experience'.⁶³ Like Krusenstern's, Golovnin's narrative belongs to an established category of travel writing by military or naval officers, which was read at the time as much for its plain accounts of everyday life in remote parts of the world as for either its sensationalism or its social analysis.⁶⁴ In their concern to set down an authentic record of both events and geographical information which would be useful to future expeditions, both Golovnin and Krusenstern follow the pattern of the official ship's log; personal or reflective comments, while they are certainly present, are given a distinctly subordinate role.

The situation with Goncharov is quite different. As an established man of letters, he was much more deeply aware of questions of literary affiliation and prepared to manipulate or challenge them. In choosing to present his material not as a simple memoir, but in the ostensible form variously of letters to his friends in Russia and of a personal diary, for example, Goncharov immediately aligns himself with the well established epistolary tradition in literature. It has been noted, too, that *Fregat Pallada*, with its constant denial of the exotic, contains a parody of the sentimental, Karamzinian style of travel writing.⁶⁵ Certainly, Goncharov's juxtaposition of descriptive narrative and personal reflection, historical explanation and political speculation; his particular combination of comedy and moral seriousness, all suggest that on one level he is responding to Karamzin.⁶⁶ At the same time, as suggested above, *Fregat Pallada* promotes Goncharov's own particular aesthetic and

ideological perspective, whether this is seen as fundamentally realist or, as Henrietta Mondry persuasively suggests, referring to the universal character types found in Goncharov's writing, as primarily classicist.⁶⁷

Detailed discussion of the generic peculiarities of Russian travel writing is outside the scope of this paper, but in conclusion it is worth noting one discourse that is conspicuous by its absence from the early nineteenth-century accounts of Japan which have been under discussion. This is the construction of Japan as an aestheticised object which was popularised in the later nineteenth century by Pierre Loti and Lafcadio Hearn, reinforced by the vogue for *japonisme* in art, and also reflected in later Russian travel writing on Japan.⁶⁸ In this vision everything about Japan is small, delicate and elegant, doll-like and above all not to be taken seriously. In particular, femininity became the prime focus of the exotic gaze. This perspective is perhaps foreshadowed in Goncharov's use of the term 'ballet' to describe the elaborate ceremonial of Japanese diplomatic hospitality, and in his characterisation of the Japanese as 'children', but it is altogether missing from Krusenstern and Golovnin. Part of the reason for this is no doubt that none of the Russian explorers gained any real knowledge or experience of Japanese art or music or literature. Neither did they come into contact to any extent with Japanese women, certainly not with women of the cultivated classes. The official world which the Russians encountered was exclusively male. Aside from some general comments about Japanese dress, Krusenstern does not mention women at all, though Langsdorff notes that there were many women among the sightseers watching the foreign ships enter and leave Nagasaki harbour, and comments unfavourably on the practice among married women of blackening their teeth.⁶⁹ Golovnin also includes a few incidental references to women seen in the distance, and notes that after the Russians' escape and recapture some of the women in the villages through which they passed shed tears of sympathy for the captives.⁷⁰ Those few women observed by Goncharov, he characterises, in

contradiction to later established opinion, as very unattractive, again referring to their blackened teeth.⁷¹ It was only later, once European economic influence in Japan had been firmly established and more sustained interaction with all levels of Japanese society was possible, that aestheticisation became a dominant interpretation. By then of course the power relationship had changed; Russia was no longer a supplicant at Japan's door but was seeking to assert a form of control not only over politics and economics, but also in the cultural sphere.

Notes

¹ Parts of this article, in different form, have been included in 'Introduction: Japan through Russian Eyes – History and Context', in David Wells (ed.), *Russian Views of Japan: An Anthology of Travel Writing*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, pp. 1-31.

² K.E. Cherevko, *Zarozhdenie russko-iaponskikh otnoshenii XVII-XIX veka*, Moscow: Nauka, 1999, pp. 14-21.

³ See L.M. Ermakova, 'Opisaniia Iaponii v staropis'mennoi russkoi kul'ture XVII veka', *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, vol.18, 2001, pp. 175-203.

⁴ For a detailed account of the early history of relations between Russia and Japan see George Alexander Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan: Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697-1875*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959 (reprinted New York: Octagon Books, 1971); Esfir Fainberg, *Russko-iaponskie otnosheniia v 1697-1875 gg.*, Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoi lit-ry, 1960; K.E. Cherevko, *Zarozhdenie russko-iaponskikh otnoshenii XVII-XIX veka*, Moscow: Nauka, 1999. On early contact in the Kurile Islands see John J. Stefan, *The Kurile Islands: Russo-Japanese Frontier in the Pacific*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, pp. 36-50, 61-5, 73-80. See also Peter Kornicki, *Castaways and Orientalists: The Russian Route to Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Venice: Università Ca' Foscari, 2001.

⁵ Lensen, *Russian Push*, pp. 26-31; Cherevko, *Zarozhdenie russko-iaponskikh otnoshenii*, pp. 38-66.

⁶ *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans., and introd. Ronald Latham, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, p. 244.

⁷ See C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

⁸ For a general survey of Japanese relations with European countries, see G.B. Sansom, *The Western World and Japan: A Study in the Interaction of European and Asiatic Cultures*, Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1977; W.G. Beasley, 'The Foreign Threat and the Opening of Japan', in *The Cambridge History of Japan. Vol. 5, The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 259-307.

⁹ See A.A. Preobrazhenskii, 'Pervoe russkoe posol'stvo v Iaponiiu', *Istoricheskii arkiv*, 1961, no. 4, pp. 113-48. Laksman's own account of his voyage is appended to Preobrazhenskii's article.

¹⁰ A.J. von Krusenstern, *Voyage Round the World in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 & 1806*, 2 vols, London: John Murray, 1813, vol. 1, pp. 251-87.

¹¹ V.M. Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan, 1811-1813*, 3 vols, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1973.

¹² The Russian sections of Goncharov's travelogue were originally published as *Russkie v Iaponii v kontse 1853 i v nachale 1854 godov: iz putevykh zametok I.A. Goncharova*, St Petersburg, 1855. They are cited here from I.A. Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1959, vol. 3.

¹³ G.H. Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World during the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, and 1807*, 2 vols, London: H. Colburn, 1813-14; B. Engel'gardt (ed.), 'Putevye pis'ma I.A. Goncharova iz krugosvetnogo plavaniia', *Literaturnoe nasledie*, vol. 22-24, 1935, pp. 309-426. Langsdorff travelled with the Rezanov expedition as a naturalist.

¹⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Pratt's third analytic tool, 'autoethnography', 'instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with the colonizer's own terms*' (*ibid.*), is undoubtedly applicable to the Japanese case, but remains outside the scope of this essay.

¹⁷ Kaempfer's work on Japan did not appear in his lifetime, but was first published, in English translation, in 1727 (E. Kaempfer, *The History of Japan*, trans. J.G. Scheuchzer, London: The Translator, 1727.). Versions in other European languages appeared not long afterwards. For a brief account of the book's publication history and for notes on its reliability as a historical source and on ideological accretions in the first English translation, see E. Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, ed., trans. & annot. Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, pp. 7-11, 20-1. Thunberg was published first in Swedish as *Resan til och uti kejsaredömet Japan* (vol. 3 of *Resa uti Europa, Africa, Asia, förrättad åren 1770-1779*, 4 vols, Upsala: J. Edman, 1788-93). It is likely that Krusenstern used the following French edition: *Voyages de C.P. Thunberg au Japon par le Cap de Bonne-Esperance, les Isles de la Sonde, etc.*, 3 vols., Paris: B. Dandre, 1796.

¹⁸ Krusenstern, *Voyage*, vol. 1, pp. 251-3.

¹⁹ Langsdorff, *Voyages*, vol. 1, p. 203. Langsdorff evidently refers to Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire de l'établissement, des progrès et la décadence du christianisme dans l'Empire du Japon*, 3 vols, Rouen: J.J. Le Boulenger, 1715, and *id. Histoire et description générale du Japon*, 2 vols, Paris: J.M. Gandouin, 1736. An adaptation of this was still current in the 1840s: *Histoire et description du Japon, d'après le P. Charlevoix*, 4th ed., Tours: Ad. Mame, 1844. Earlier accounts by the Jesuit missionaries existed, and it seems that the Russian travellers consulted them, but these ceased by 1638.

²⁰ Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 10.

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- ²¹ Philip Franz von Siebold, *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan*, 2 vols, Leyden: The Author, 1832.
- ²² See Grant K. Goodman, *Japan and the Dutch: 1600-1853*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000, pp. 184-9.
- ²³ Isaac Titsingh, *Mémoires et anecdotes sur la dynastie régnante des Djogouns, souverains du Japon*, Paris, 1820; id., *Illustrations of Japan*, London: R. Ackermann, 1822.
- ²⁴ Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, pp. 8-9.
- ²⁵ Krusenstern, *Voyage*, vol 2, p. 51. See also Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 142.
- ²⁶ Krusenstern, *Voyage*, vol. 1, p. 253.
- ²⁷ Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 56.
- ²⁸ Krusenstern, *Voyage*, vol. 1, p. 256.
- ²⁹ Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 308-9.
- ³⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages*, vol. 1, pp. 231-2.
- ³¹ Lensen, *Russian Push*, p. 147; see Langsdorff, *Voyages*, vol. 1, pp. 230, 234, 240.
- ³² See Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 30.
- ³³ Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 227; vol. 2, p. 80.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 227-31, see also vol. 2, pp. 116-17. The Japanese authorities seem to have preferred as close a correspondence as possible between original and translated texts notwithstanding the difficulties of achieving such a result while remaining intelligible.
- ³⁵ Krusenstern, *Voyages*, vol. 1, p. 256.
- ³⁶ Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 176-7; see also p. 112.
- ³⁷ Syed Manzurul Islam, *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, p. viii.
- ³⁸ Krusenstern, *Voyage*, vol. 1, pp. 261-2; see Langsdorff, *Voyages*, p. 232.
- ³⁹ Krusenstern, *Voyage*, pp. 254-9.
- ⁴⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages*, vol. 1, p. 293.
- ⁴¹ Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, pp. 127, 19.

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- ⁴² Ibid., pp. 38-43.
- ⁴³ Ibid., pp. 49-50.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 7.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 8.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 30, 46.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 44, 30; Goncharov, 'Putevye pis'ma', p. 397.
- ⁴⁸ Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 41. See also Lensen, *Russian Push*, pp. 343-4.
- ⁴⁹ Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 124.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 36.
- ⁵¹ For a detailed exegesis of this aspect of Fregat Pallada, see E. Krasnoshchekova, *Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov: mir tvorchestva*, Sankt-Peterburg: Pushkinskii fond, 1997, pp. 134-220.
- ⁵² Lensen, *Russian Push*, pp. 343-4.
- ⁵³ Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 147-9; see also pp. 62, 156.
- ⁵⁴ E.g., *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 117-18, 140, 186, 221, 242-3.
- ⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 18-20.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 22.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 169, 213-14.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 152-6; Lensen, *Russian Push*, pp. 174-5.
- ⁵⁹ See Lensen, *Russian Push*, pp. 134-6.
- ⁶⁰ Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 159.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 218-24.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 254.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, preface (unnumbered page).

⁶⁴ Andreas Schönle, *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey, 1790-1840*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁵ Milton Ehre, *Oblomov and his Creator: The Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 142-53.

⁶⁶ See Krasnoshchekova, *Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov*, pp. 153-67.

⁶⁷ Henrietta Mondry, "A Formalist Reading of the Chapter on the Cape Province from Goncharov's Book *Frigate Pallada*", in *The Waking Sphinx: South African Essays on Russian Culture*, ed. H. Mondry, Johannesburg: Library, University of Witwatersrand, 1989, pp. 130-44.

⁶⁸ See, for example, N.G. Garin-Mikhailovskii, "Po Koree, Man'chzhurii i liaodan'skomu poluostrovu", *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1958, vol. 5, p. 378.

⁶⁹ Langsdorff, *Voyages*, vol. 1, pp. 248, 251, 267.

⁷⁰ Golovnin, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp.106, 125; vol. 2, pp. 21, 37, 40.

⁷¹ Goncharov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 59.