

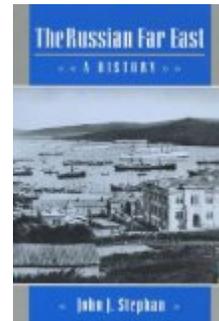
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John J. Stephan. *The Russian Far East: A History*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996. 482 pp. \$31.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-2701-3; \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-2311-4.

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Stephan's book on the history of the Russian Far East will not disappoint those who are familiar with his earlier works on Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. It is a thoroughly documented and highly informative work in the best tradition of scholarship which is, unfortunately, becoming rare in our present age. Stephan has examined a vast array of source material in the Russian, Japanese, Chinese as well as English languages. As a book that represents the culmination of a quarter-century of research, as the author puts it, it will be the definitive work on the topic for many years to come. No doubt, it will be a source book for data and information for researchers and students working on related topics. In twenty-eight chapters the author covers the entire history of the Russian Far East from the Chinese millennium to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Two themes may be identified that endow the Far East with a particular quality of its own. The first is the sense of regionalism that developed early in the Far East. As Stephan points out, exploration of the Amur Basin was first pushed by Siberian governors rather than by St. Petersburg (p. 36). After the Far East was separated from Siberia in 1884 its governors wielded extraordinary powers and even conducted diplomacy with neighbouring countries (p. 55). Distance from St. Petersburg reinforced regionalism in the Far East while proximity to China and Japan gave the area an East Asian orientation that distinguished it from European Russia. Stephan devotes Chapter Eleven to the "stirrings of a regional consciousness" and notes that Stolypin in 1910 warned that a "rough democratic society" may grow up east of the Urals which could "crush European Russia" (p. 92). Chapter Sixteen covers the Far Eastern Republic (1920-1922) which was Lenin's buffer state intended to gener-

ate pressure upon Japan to withdraw its military units from the Far East. According to Stephan, Lenin's charade infected the Far East with a "regionalist virus" (p. 155). The theme is revived again in the final chapter where the author identifies the phenomenon of regionalism in the Far East today. The relationship with Moscow is seen within the Far East as "colonial" as Moscow, for example, leases fishing rights to foreigners and collects the hard currency earnings (p. 295). Stephan also notes, however, the strength of localism in the Far East, Khabarovsk against Vladivostok, for example, which prevents the formation of a common strategy against Moscow (ibid.). The second theme is the "Asianness" of the Far East which distinguishes it from European Russia. Stephan notes the Chinese influence in the area and the extravagant claims raised by China after the 1969 clash with the Soviet Union when Priamur and Primorye were called "historically Chinese possessions" (p. 18). Chinese were always a presence in the Russian Far East as Stephan explains in Chapter Nine on "East Asian communities." The Chinese were farmers and coolies; one third of the population of Khabarovsk was Chinese until 1900 and 90% of the workers in Vladivostok shipyards were Chinese by 1900 (pp. 72-73). The Koreans in the Far East got on better with the Russians than the Chinese, some studied Russian and converted to orthodoxy (p. 75). The Japanese, however, avoided agriculture and were photographers, barbers as well as hotel owners and managers (p. 76). "Yellow peril" fears gripped the Far East towards the end of the nineteenth century and in 1900 Governor Gribisky ordered the Cossacks to remove the Chinese. No expulsion of the East Asians was complete and thorough until 1936 when some 165,000 Koreans and 25,000 Chinese were removed. The Koreans were seen as a Trojan horse

for Japan's Kwantung Army and were resettled in Central Asia (p. 212-13). Today, the presence of a Korean minority in Uzbekistan is one reason for South Korean interest in that country and for the Chaebol's efforts to establish production plants there. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the Chinese presence in the Far East has become an important issue, though more for Moscow than for local areas concerned. This point was not developed by the author and perhaps it was beyond the scope of this excellent work but it is worth mentioning the political controversy which has erupted in Russia today over this issue.

There are those in the West as well as in Moscow who think that the Far East is being steadily lost to Russia on the basis of migratory movements alone. This fear was raised during the April 1994 hearings in the Russian Federal Assembly on the Chinese presence in the Far East. Ironically Far Eastern representatives during those hearings regarded the Chinese presence as an economic necessity in terms of trade and customs revenues. Fears about the ethnic dilution of the Far East and the consequences for Moscow's relationship with China were expressed by representatives of central organs in Moscow. Significantly, Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party has played upon this issue which may be raised yet again in Russian politics.

In any case, these two factors underlay the particular uniqueness of the Russian Far East and the reader wonders whether the Far East, as it moves towards "engagement with Pacific Asia" will stay Russian. The author himself surmises that it may either become a "laboratory for metropolitan experiments" or may affiliate with an autonomous Siberia or may stand alone (p. 300). Should Russia collapse, though the likelihood of that has diminished since 1992, the obvious beneficiary would be China and it may be that the Far East will become an economic extension of China's northern provinces.

One important event in the Far East's history which could have received greater coverage in the book was the impact of the completion of the Trans Siberian Railway in various stages. The Trans Siberian Railway opened up the Far East and resulted in greater Russian pressure upon Manchuria, Korea and Japan as Russia strove to assert its Pacific interests. It may be too much to say that Russia became a Pacific power as a consequence of the Trans Siberian Railway but certainly European Rus-

sia's consciousness of its Pacific role was considerably strengthened by this development. The author notes that before this link with European Russia was completed some officials in the nineteenth Century travelled to the Far East from St. Petersburg via New York and San Francisco (p. 65) which was indicative of its distance and isolation. Finance Minister Sergei Witte wanted a railway entirely on Russian soil but was compelled to change his mind when surveys revealed the difficulty of following the Amur/Ussuri Rivers (p. 58). The railway connection ran through northern Manchuria to reach Vladivostok through the Chinese Eastern Railway which remained Russian until Stalin sold it to Japan in 1935 to avoid friction. Only in 1916 when a bridge was completed across the Amur at Khabarovsk could the Trans Siberian Railway run entirely on Russian soil (p. 108). Perhaps the consequences of the completion of railway for the development and settlement of the Far East could have been treated in a separate chapter that could have focused upon the role of communications (or their absence) in the history of the Far East. The author has included some interesting information on the Baikal-Amur Railway (BAM) which was planned by Stalin in 1935-36. Construction continued over subsequent decades utilizing the labour of 50,000 Japanese POW's many of whom died there (p. 246). The BAM Railway was officially completed in 1984 and is still not fully operative (p. 206). Nonetheless, for a work that strives to be comprehensive within 300 pages of text not all themes could have equal treatment.

Researchers and Ph.D. students will benefit from the eleven appendices which provide copious supporting data about the Far East in fifty pages. The appendices include an administrative chronology of the Far East, information on population, senior Russian officials, 1822-1922, biographical notes, Communist Party membership 1907-1986, Far Eastern party secretaries and a glossary of place names. The book also includes maps on such things as Chinese place names and the administrative divisions of the Far East which add to the quality of the work.

In summary, this is an essential reference work on the Russian Far East that bears the imprint of painstaking attention to detail and a meticulous examination of the source material in various languages. This is not a book that the normally censorious reviewer can find fault with in this respect.

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