

TEA TIME IN ROMANOV RUSSIA: A CULTURAL HISTORY, 1616-1917

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ABSTRACT

Audra Jo Yoder: Tea Time in Romanov Russia: A Cultural History, 1616-1917
(Under the direction of Louise McReynolds)

This dissertation reexamines controversies surrounding consumption, cultural borrowing, and identity in modern Russia through a study of tea as a commodity, a social ritual, and a national symbol. During the Romanov period (1613-1917), tea evolved from a foreign medicine, to an aristocratic luxury, to a household necessity. The samovar, or tea urn, played a central role in this process, having been adopted by Russian nobles in the eighteenth century and imagined as a Russian national symbol by the late nineteenth.

The first Russians to encounter tea were emissaries sent to the courts of Inner Asian and Chinese rulers, and their reluctance to consume tea in ceremonial settings reflected their political and cultural priorities. Back in Moscow, foreign doctors working for the court medical establishment promoted tea as an effective remedy for various illnesses. Western visitors to seventeenth-century Muscovy noted the presence of tea in markets and medical settings, but tea consumption was not widespread.

Around 1700, new English and Dutch technologies for making tea made their way to Russia, signaling tea's transition from a foreign medicine to a fashionable pastime. The samovar, a self-contained apparatus designed to boil water for tea, evolved from seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English and Dutch designs. The device came into use in aristocratic Russian households in the middle of the eighteenth century. The samovar facilitated the development of a distinctively Russian tea culture in the second half of the eighteenth century, when tea

consumption and ownership of tea ware spread. Satirical critiques of tea implicated it in the perceived deleterious effects of westernization and luxury.

Russian tea importation and consumption began to climb steeply in the 1790s and saw sustained growth until the end of the imperial period. Nineteenth-century works of Russian literature transformed “tea” into a discursive space with associations of intimacy, familial harmony, refinement, and sobriety. The samovar became a symbol setting the Russian nation apart from the other peoples of the empire. While tea’s role in Russian society remained contested, most understood tea and the samovar as symbols of authentic Russianness and, in the twentieth century, as touchstones of “old” Russian culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The first Russian known to drink tea was Vasilii Tiumenets, a Muscovite emissary sent to a Mongol khan in 1616. His hosts served him a beverage containing, in his words, “unknown leaves of some sort.” The next record of a Russian encounter with tea dates from the year 1639, when the diplomat Vasilii Starkov attempted to refuse a ceremonial gift of tea, describing it as an “unknown” and “superfluous” item in Russia.¹ Almost exactly three centuries after the incident of Tiumenets and his unknown leaves, in 1915 Sergei Witte, one of imperial Russia’s last great statesmen, stated that encouraging tea consumption in Russia was “highly necessary” (*kraine neobkhodimo*).² Russians had begun to consider tea “necessary” as early as 1837, when the *Journal of Generally Useful Information* proclaimed, “Tea is necessary in Russia, almost like air.”³ Similarly, the narrator of Fedor Dostoevskii’s 1875 novel *The Adolescent* proclaims, “generally the samovar is [the] most necessary Russian thing.”⁴ Even Aleksei Vladimirov, a journalist who composed a virulent antitea pamphlet in 1874, asked in rhetorical frustration, “Why is tea so necessary?”⁵

¹ John F. Baddeley, ed., *Russia, Mongolia, China; Being some record of the relations between them* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1919), 2:54, 2:117-19.

² Quoted in Ia. M. Bukshpan, *Problema Chainoi Monopolii i Mirovoi Chainyi Rynok* (Petrograd, 1915), 16.

³ A. Bashutskii, “Ulushchenie Samovarov,” *Zhurnal Obshchepoleznykh Svedenii* [hereafter ZhOS] 31 (1837), 281.

⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 170.

⁵ Aleksei Porfir'evich Vladimirov, *Chai i Vred Ego dlia Telesnogo Zdorov'ia, Umstvennyi, Nravstvennyi i Ekonomicheskii* (Vilnius: Tip. Bliumovich 1874), 23.

What transformed tea from “unknown” to “necessary” in Russia between the seventeenth century and the early twentieth? How did Russia become a tea-drinking nation over the course of those three centuries? This dissertation answers these questions by offering a cultural history of Russian tea drinking, or *chaepitie* (a word formed by combining the Russian word *chai*, meaning “tea,” and the verb “to drink”), and how it became central to Russian everyday life and visions of nationhood by the time the Russian Empire collapsed in February 1917. The period covered by this dissertation corresponds almost exactly with the rule of the Romanov dynasty (1613-1917). It begins in the early seventeenth century, when the first Russian ambassadors to Inner Asia and China happened upon, and were wholly uninterested in, those “unknown leaves of some sort.” In the eighteenth century, the Russian court and nobility adopted social tea drinking as a marker of the increasingly Western orientation of elite culture. Tea spread to all social classes in the second half of the nineteenth century, when increasing supplies and falling prices facilitated its commodification. The history of tea in Russia during the Romanov era advances scholarship on this complex time by illuminating patterns of continuity and change, and by treating Russia as an integral player in the world tea trade and one of the world’s foremost tea-consuming nations.

Over the three centuries of the Romanov period, Russia developed its own unique tea culture. I use the phrase “tea culture” to refer to the etiquette, customs, rituals, meanings, and material accessories that surround the preparation and consumption of tea. Geographically situated between the two nations often popularly considered the world’s two greatest tea-drinking cultures—China and Great Britain—Russians gradually integrated tea into modern articulations of identity. The three-century history of tea in imperial Russia is not an uninterrupted love affair, as many twentieth-century Russian tea enthusiasts would have their readers believe, but the story of tea’s transformation from an obscure Chinese medicine to an

everyday household staple. That three-hundred-year process sheds light on a wide range of historiographical problems, including Russia's geopolitical and cultural position between East and West, Russian economic development, cultural change, and the autocracy's attempts to maintain hegemony over its vast multiethnic empire.

This is the first full-scale academic history of tea in Russia. Many popular books on tea examine that beverage's impact on various cultures, as their subtitles illustrate: "The Drink that Changed the World" and "The Remarkable History of the Plant that Took Over the World" are two typical examples.⁶ By contrast, while this study takes the agency of the material world seriously, it does not examine the impact of tea on Russian culture. Rather, this is the history of Russia's impact on tea: that is, how cultural, social, economic, and geopolitical conditions distinctive to Russia shaped the way the beverage was received, understood, and consumed. After about 1850, tea's widespread popularity did alter Russian social life and its economic and political trajectory to a degree, but this dissertation concerns itself primarily with the specific historical, cultural, and material circumstances that shaped the development of uniquely Russian attitudes toward tea. Economic conditions, novelty value, and fashion helped make tea an item of mass consumption in nineteenth-century Russia, but as Jordan Goodman has pointed out, these factors alone do not "explain the specific cultural sites that these new commodities occupied."⁷ This dissertation seeks to explain why and how tea came to occupy a prominent and permanent site in Russian culture.

⁶ Alan and Iris Macfarlane, *The Empire of Tea: The Remarkable History of the Plant That Took Over the World* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2003); Laura C. Martin, *Tea: The Drink that Changed the World* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2007).

⁷ Jordan Goodman, "Excitantia: Or, How Enlightenment Europe Took to Soft Drugs," in *Consuming Habits: Deconstructing Drugs in History and Anthropology*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy, Andrew Sherratt, and Jordan Goodman (London: Routledge, 1995), 133.

Put differently, this is the story of how Russians domesticated tea. Seventeenth-century medical practitioners in Muscovy normalized it by including it in the canon of known medicinal plants. Eighteenth-century nobles domesticated it, quite literally, by bringing it into their homes and acquiring the latest accessories used to prepare and consume it. Nineteenth-century authors and tastemakers made tea culturally and discursively Russian by including it in texts that subsequently became touchstones of Russian identity. In the late imperial period, entrepreneurs attempted to make tea Russian in a different way, by growing it in the borderlands of the empire. By the time of that empire's demise in 1917, tea had become, to borrow a phrase from historian Marjorie Hilton, "a conspicuous, contestable symbol that different groups manipulated and mythologized in pursuit of their aspirations and agendas."⁸ In the culture wars of Russia's long nineteenth century (1796-1917), activist journalists saw tea as either the cause of, or the solution to, the pernicious social and economic problems that plagued the empire. By the advent of the twentieth century, however, the vast majority of Russians considered tea to be neither more nor less than a basic fact of quotidian existence, a facilitator of interpersonal communication, and a relational glue.

This dissertation aims, fundamentally, to narrate the history of tea in Russia from its introduction in the early seventeenth century until, by the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, it had become an everyday household staple. It also investigates the social, cultural, and material conditions that caused the samovar, a self-contained vessel designed to heat water for tea, to become discursively "Russian" in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Finally, it analyzes the multiple, evolving, and sometimes contradictory meanings attached to tea drinking

⁸ Marjorie Hilton, *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 31.

in Russian culture during this long three-century period. My study makes no claim to be exhaustive, and endeavors to open up avenues for further research.

Historiography and Methodology

By the late imperial period, drinking tea with a samovar had become a marker of Russian cultural identity. This identity was both imperial and national. In the seventeenth century, when this story begins, Muscovite Russia was a rapidly expanding multinational state that can be described as both an Asian land empire and a European power.⁹ In 1721, Peter I (r. 1682-1725) adopted the title of emperor, and his domain became known as the Russian Empire. The term nation (*natsiia*) also came into use around this time, and in eighteenth-century Russian usage the terms “empire” and “nation” complemented each other. In the nineteenth century, Russia’s increasing ethnic heterogeneity complicated the relationship between nation and empire. Russia’s nineteenth-century nation-building project took place within the imperial core, and its architects never intended it to include all the subjects of the empire.¹⁰ Thus modern Russian national identity, as it was formed and articulated in the nineteenth century, exhibited an imperial dimension. Within the Russian Empire, drinking tea with a samovar came to be understood as a practice distinctive to the Russian nation, and even on occasion as a tool for the assimilation of non-Russian peoples. Without ignoring the problems of empire, this dissertation limits itself to telling the story of how a unique tea culture formed within the modern Russian nation. The history of tea in the non-Russian peripheries of the empire is a subject ripe for further study.

⁹ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 11.

¹⁰ Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller, “Introduction: Building Nations In and Within Empires—A Reassessment,” in Berger and Miller, eds., *Nationalizing Empires* (New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 4-5, 18-19.

This is a cultural history that, because of its subject matter and temporal scope, necessarily touches on economic and political history, as well as the history of medicine and the history of technology. It strives, in part, to show that the latter spheres of inquiry depend on culture for their intelligibility.¹¹ As Sidney Mintz, anthropologist and author of the pioneering monograph *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985) has noted, few historians have investigated the processes by which the rare and exotic become common and everyday.¹² Regarding tea specifically, more anthropologists than historians have undertaken serious academic study, and often investigate the so-called “colonial groceries” (tea, coffee, chocolate, tobacco, and sugar) collectively. As a result, surprisingly few anthropological and fewer still rigorous historical studies consider tea in depth. This study of tea finds its historiographical home in the literature on commodities, consumer cultures, and luxury goods in Europe and the development of a global economy in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Because of the project’s long temporal scope, and the wide-ranging aspects of Russian culture and history touched by tea, each individual chapter engages its own historiographical subfield, but the dissertation as a whole contributes to and engages with these wider realms of inquiry. In doing so, I aim first to normalize Russia as a European colonial power and consumer society, and also to overcome the discursive dichotomy between East and West that circumscribes much of the literature on tea.

Existing scholarly studies of tea belong to the fields described above. John Brewer and Roy Porter’s edited volume *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993) broke new ground in

¹¹ Cf. Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), xi.

¹² Sidney Mintz, “The Changing Roles of Food in the Study of Consumption,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (New York: Routledge, 1993), 262.

the field of consumption and commodity studies and is now considered a foundational text. In it, Sidney Mintz reflects on the role of foodstuffs for scholars of consumption, and John Willis looks at the Asian production of consumer goods bound for Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³ *The World of Caffeine: The Science and Culture of the World's Most Popular Drug* supplies a detailed history of the primary caffeine-bearing plants (coffee, tea, cacao).¹⁴ Historical archaeologist Ross Jamieson writes about how caffeinated drinks created new cultural categories in Europe and became stabilized through everyday practices.¹⁵ In *Consuming Habits: Deconstructing Drugs in History and Anthropology* (1995), historian of medicine Jordan Goodman examines the Europeanization of coffee, tea, tobacco, and chocolate, arguing that these plants served as substitutes for indigenous drugs, but in a way that transformed the role of plants in European cultural life and Europeans' relationship to the natural world generally. In that same volume, historian Woodruff Smith argues that English men and women used tea, coffee, and sugar to create new public and private spaces in which to display their respectability in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an argument he elaborates in his book *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (2002).¹⁶ In an influential volume she co-edited with Helen Clifford entitled *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe*,

¹³ Mintz, "The Changing Roles of Food in the Study of Consumption," and John E. Willis, "European Consumption and Asian Production in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. Brewer and Porter.

¹⁴ Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer, *The World of Caffeine: The Science and Culture of the World's Most Popular Drug* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁵ Ross W. Jamieson, "The Essence of Commodification: Caffeine Dependencies in the Early Modern World," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 269–94.

¹⁶ Jordan Goodman, "Excitantia: Or, How Enlightenment Europe Took to Soft Drugs," and Woodruff Smith, "From Coffeehouse to Parlour: The Consumption of Coffee, Tea and Sugar in North-Western Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Consuming Habits*; Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Also notable is Smith's article "Complications of the Commonplace: Tea, Sugar, and Imperialism," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 2 (Autumn 1992): 259–78.

1650-1850, historian Maxine Berg contributes a study of luxury goods and the Europeans who consumed them, offering valuable insights on tea.¹⁷

The few recent scholarly works focusing on tea exclusively stand out against a sea of repetitive and often inaccurate popular literature on tea. Jane Pettigrew's *A Social History of Tea*, now in its second edition, provides a concise history of tea in Britain.¹⁸ Literature scholar Julie Fromer's *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England* (2008) uses fiction, nonfiction, and advertisements to analyze tea culture and its role in British national identity and gender relations. More so than other works, *A Necessary Luxury* resembles this study in its methodology and principal arguments; Fromer avers that tea was both a necessity and a luxury in Victorian England, and I argue that the same was true of imperial Russia. The four-volume collection *Tea and the Tea-Table in Eighteenth-Century England* (2010), edited by literature scholar Markman Ellis, contains a great deal of primary source material, accompanied by several erudite essays.¹⁹ In accordance with this dissertation's core argument that Europeans exerted a greater cultural influence on Russian tea drinking than its neighbors to the east, the historical and anthropological literature on tea rituals and China and Japan comes into play only rarely.²⁰

¹⁷ Maxine Berg, "New Commodities, Luxuries and Their Consumers in 18th-Century England," in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Jane Pettigrew and Bruce Richardson, *A Social History of Tea: Tea's Influence on Commerce, Culture, and Community* (Danville, KY: Benjamin Press, 2014). Pettigrew's study is the best researched popular history of tea. Two other reliable recent popular works are Mary Lou Heiss and Rober J. Heiss, *The Story of Tea: A Cultural History and Drinking Guide* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2007); Kevin Gascoyne, Francois Marchand, Jasmin Desharnais and Hugo Americi, *Tea: History, Terroirs, Varieties* (New York: Firefly Books, 2014).

¹⁹ Markman Ellis, ed., *Tea and the Tea-Table in Eighteenth-Century England*, 4 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010).

²⁰ Concerning the Japanese tea ritual, see Jennifer Anderson, *Chanoyu: An Anthropological Approach to Tea* (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1985), as well as her published works *An Introduction to Japanese Tea Ritual* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991) and "Japanese Tea Ritual: Religion in Practice," *Man* 22, no. 3 (Sept. 1987), 475-498; Morgan Pitelka, ed., *Japanese Tea Culture: Art, History, and Practice* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Herbert E. Plutschow, *Rediscovering Rikyu and the Beginnings of the Japanese Tea Ceremony* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2003); Soshitsu Sen, *The Japanese Way of Tea: From its Origins in China to Sen Rikyu*, trans. V. Dixon Morris (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998); Paul H. Varley and Isao Kumakura, eds., *Tea in Japan: Essays on*

In all tea cultures, fashion and propriety dictate that tea must be brewed and drunk using specialized equipment, and scholars use tea ware to temporally and geographically differentiate the world's tea cultures. The tea urn, or samovar, introduced into Russia sometime during or shortly following the reign of Peter the Great, would become the most distinctive accessory and symbol of Russian tea culture, setting it apart from other modern tea cultures. In the nineteenth century, the samovar became an icon of Russian cultural identity and a national symbol; as a signifier of "old" Russian hospitality and domesticity it retains its potency today. For this reason, the dissertation devotes considerable attention to the introduction of the samovar and the process of its russification during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Once again, I look to anthropology and also to archaeology for the theoretical framework of my analysis.

Remembering Christopher Tilley's charge not to forget the "materiality" of material culture by treating objects as mere texts, I follow Nicole Boivin in assigning historical agency to material objects and the constraints and opportunities furnished by the material world.²¹ The project advances material culture studies in the field of Russian history by treating the physical objects associated with tea consumption both as source material and as historical agents.

Robert Smith was the first Western historian to research the history of the samovar. Smith reworked his 1982 article "Whence the Samovar?" to form the chapter "Tea and Temperance" in the monograph *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Food*

the History of Chanoyu (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989). Concerning China, Robert Gardella's *Harvesting Mountains: Fujian and the China Tea Trade, 1757-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994) is the most relevant to this study.

²¹ Christopher Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 265; Nicole Boivin, *Material Cultures, Material Minds: The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

and *Drink in Russia* (1984).²² In addition to Smith's article on the origin of the samovar, which elucidates but does not decisively resolve the issue, Soviet authors and museum curators published a number of book-length illustrated albums on samovars between the 1970s and the 1990s.²³ A testament to Russians' continuing interest in the samovar, the technically sophisticated collector's guide, *Samovary Rossii: Populiarnaia entsyklopediia* (Samovars of Russia: A Popular Encyclopedia) went through two editions in less than a year in 2010.²⁴ Early authoritative Russian histories of tea include *Tea and the Tea Trade in Russia* (1892) by the prominent economist Andrei Pavlovich Subbotin, A. Pavlov's *The Tea Trade and Tea* (1860), and I. M. Kulisher's magisterial *History of Russian Commerce to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (1923).²⁵ Finally, for over ten years, Moscow-based historian Ivan Sokolov has been investigating the economic history of tea and tea merchants in nineteenth-century Russia. Chapter 4 will engage his extensive

²² Robert E.F. Smith, "Whence the Samovar?" *Petits Propos Culinaires*, no. 4 (1980): 57–72; Robert E.F. Smith and David Christian, *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Food and Drink in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

²³ A.S. Tikhonova, *Tul'skie Samovary* (Tula: IPO "Lev Tolstoi," 1993); V.P. Varfolomeev, *Tul'skii Samovar* (1978); A.A. Gilodo, *Russkii Samovar* (Moskva: "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1991); I.A. Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary* (Leningrad: "Khudozhnik RSFSR," 1971).

²⁴ L.V. Britenkova and S. P. Kalinichev, *Samovary Rossii: Populiarnaia Entsyklopediia* (Moskva: Khobbi Press, 2010).

²⁵ Andrei Pavlovich Subbotin, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia v Rossii i Drugikh Gosudarstvakh. Proizvodstvo, Potreblenie i Raspredelenie Chaia* (St. Petersburg: Izd. A.G. Kuznetsova, 1892). Also by Subbotin: *Rossiia i Angliia na Sredneaziatskikh Rynkakh. Istoriko-Ekonomicheskii Ediid* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Redaktsii "Ekonomicheskago Zhurnala" Tip. Severnago Telegrafnago Aгенstva, 1885); *Torgovlia Soobshcheniia Vostochnoi Rossii Sibiri* (St. Petersburg: Tip. L. Bermana i G. Rabinovicha, 1885); *Ot Peterburga do Parizha: Putevye i Ekonomicheskie Nabroski* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Svernago Telegrafnago Aгенstva, 1893); A. Pavlov, *Chainaia Torgovlia i Chai* (Moscow: Tip. Lazarevykh Instituta vost. iaz.), 1860; I.M. Kulisher, *Istoriia Russkoi Torgovli do Deviatnadsatogo Veka Vkluchitel'no* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Atenei, 1923).

scholarly output in detail in the context of that chapter's discussion of the nineteenth-century Russian tea trade.²⁶

I argue that throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, a consistent cultural logic governed Russians' thoughtful and selective assimilation of foreign customs, ideas, and technology. Russians adopted the custom of drinking tea on their own terms and in their own time. In the words of anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, "It is a cultural self-realization on a material scale and in material forms never before known, yet not for all that the simple penetration of capitalist-market relations." This project aims to tease apart and describe the "cultural logics" (Sahlins's phrase) that governed the process of tea's integration into Russian culture, and in so doing, argues for cultural continuity across the long period of time considered. As Sahlins has insightfully noted, "the strongest continuity may consist in the logic of the cultural change."²⁷ The same cultural presuppositions that disinclined seventeenth-century Muscovites to drink tea also fueled their descendants' attachment of distinctively Russian meanings, material objects, aphorisms, associations, and superstitions to tea—a creative process that continued into the twentieth century and beyond.

Sources and Scope

Given the profound social, political, and economic changes that characterize the Romanov period in Russia, the nature of the sources consulted varies widely, and each chapter draws from its own distinctive source base. Sources attesting to the presence and use of tea in

²⁶ Ivan Sokolov's primary work on the history of tea in nineteenth-century Russia is *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia v Rossii: 1790-1919 gg* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2011). For a full historiographical discussion of Sokolov's oeuvre, see chapter 4.

²⁷ Marshall Sahlins, "Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of 'The World System,'" in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 412, 415.

seventeenth-century Muscovy are scarce. Chapter 1 adds to our understanding of cultural attitudes and economic priorities in the seventeenth century by examining Russian responses to tea in the diplomatic narratives created by the first Muscovite emissaries in what are now Siberia, Mongolia, and China. It also recounts the career of tea as a medicine at the seventeenth-century Muscovite court using prescriptions and medical treatises preserved in the documents of the Apothecary Chancery. Accounts composed by foreign travelers visiting seventeenth-century Russia supply further evidence of the presence and use of tea there. The chapter also considers what small role tea played in the Russian economy of that period, situating Russia in the context of the early modern global economy and comparing initial Russian reactions to tea with those of their contemporaries in Britain and the Netherlands.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, tea began to transition from a medicinal to a social beverage, and consequently began to make an imprint on cultural production. Chapter 2 argues that the European fashion for *chinoiserie*, imported to Russia under Peter the Great, first led court circles to adopt tea as a social habit in the early decades of the eighteenth century. European atlases, travel narratives, and scientific literature mediated much of the information about China that circulated in eighteenth-century Russia, and these materials furnished the most reliable data on tea available there. The chapter also considers the contribution of Russian sinologists to tea-related knowledge in the eighteenth century. It uses nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and domestic advice literature to argue that a distinctively Russian tea culture arose during the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796).

Material culture takes center stage in chapter 3, which supplies a history of the samovar from its origin in early English and Dutch metal tea wares through its russification in the nineteenth century. Concerning itself exclusively with the physical paraphernalia of Russian tea

drinking, the chapter uses the household inventories of eighteenth-century noble families to argue that ownership of silver, copper, and porcelain tea ware signaled the status and prestige of the owners. Since English tea culture exerted a formative influence on Russian tea culture during the reign of Catherine the Great, the chapter also examines the writings of Russians and Britons sojourning in one another's homelands and remarking on the similarities and differences of their respective tea-drinking habits.

Chapter 4 narrates the economic history of tea in nineteenth-century Russia, a complex story told here for the first time. The chapter relies primarily on materials published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and particularly the sea of journal articles and pamphlets composed to inform the public about the origins of tea or to make a political point about tea tariffs. The chapter also uses government documents to track official efforts to regulate and control the tea trade and combat widespread tea adulteration and other types of tea fraud. The chapter furnishes the information necessary to contextualize later chapters on the cultural history of tea in nineteenth-century Russia, and more importantly, demonstrates how closely developments in the tea trade correlated with social and political changes in the Russian Empire more broadly.

The fifth chapter uses nineteenth-century literature to trace the process by which tea became culturally and discursively Russian. In accordance with this dissertation's argument that the russification of tea was a creative cultural process, it shows how four authors of foundational Russian literary texts, Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Dostoevskii, and Lev Tolstoi, despite their widely divergent ideological commitments, incorporated tea into enduring visions of Russian nationhood. The subsequent inclusion of their works in school curricula and in the

standard canon of “classical” Russian literature reinforced the central place of tea and the samovar in modern articulations of essential Russianness.

Chapter 6 examines the tea debates of the nineteenth century and the controversies surrounding the consumption of tea by ordinary Russian peasants. It uses the writings of journalists, economists, doctors, religious thinkers, and government officials, as well as visual images, to consider moral, economic, and religious arguments both for and against popular tea consumption. A minority of medical voices insisted on tea’s detrimental effects on human health, while others believed that tea strengthened peasants’ muscles for manual labor. Still others posited tea as a potential solution to late imperial Russia’s alcohol problem. All these authors linked the control of tea to the future health of the Russian nation, and by extension, the longevity of the imperial state. Those who believed that tea consumption would destroy the moral and spiritual fabric of the Russian people (*narod*) may have misplaced their concern, but those who connected the fate of the tea trade to the Russian Empire’s political destiny were not far wrong.

A dissertation that purports to cover three centuries of history must carefully define its limits. The narrative begins in 1616 with the earliest mention of tea in Russian manuscript sources, and ends with the collapse of the Russian Empire three centuries later in 1917. Tracing the history of tea over the *longue durée* facilitates the examination of patterns of continuity and change, but also necessitates some omissions.²⁸ This is a cultural history that primarily studies the inhabitants of the western parts of the empire commonly referred to as European Russia. In the chapters covering the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the primary actors are intellectual

²⁸ Cf. Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxxix, xl.

and noble elites, for the simple reasons that they alone could afford such an expensive foreign beverage as tea, and also because the voices and opinions of people lower down on the social scale are largely absent from extant sources. In the nineteenth century, the greater variety of available source material allows for a consideration of peasant tea culture, but again, the discussion largely limits itself to the experience of people living in European Russia. The dissertation engages economic history only to the extent necessary to give the reader adequate background for understanding concomitant social and cultural developments. This study does not examine the logistics of the tea trade, the merchants who conducted it, or the peoples that mediated Eurasian trade routes.²⁹ Seventeenth-century Muscovite elites knew and used tea as a medicine, but after the introduction of European tea ware and tea-drinking customs early in the eighteenth century, tea became primarily a beverage of sociability and its medicinal importance declined. That does not mean that Russians ceased to understand tea as a substance that acted upon human health, but apart from a brief consideration of nineteenth-century medical concerns about tea, after the seventeenth century the dissertation turns its attention away from the history of medicine. Finally, while the project foregrounds material culture associated with tea, it prioritizes the history of metal tea wares and especially the samovar and other water-heating technologies. In contrast to the samovar, whose precise origin remains mysterious and will reward further research, the history of Russian porcelain has been thoroughly investigated.³⁰ In

²⁹ Ivan Sokolov has extensively researched the Russian tea trade and compiled biographical reference works on Russian tea merchants (see chapter 4). Ilya Vinkovetsky studies tea trade logistics and transportation routes, most recently in a paper presented at the 2015 annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) entitled “Governments, Merchant Networks and the Movement of Tea from Chinese Producers to Russian Consumers, 1800-1850s.”

³⁰ See, for example, Irina Bagdasarova, “Catherine’s Porcelain and the Triumph of the ‘Russian Minerva,’” in *Catherine the Great: Art for Empire*, ed. Nathalie Bondil (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2005), 245-59; Asen Kirin, *Exuberance of Meaning: The Art Patronage of Catherine the Great, 1762-1769* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013); T.V. Kudriavtseva, *Russian Imperial Porcelain* (St. Petersburg: Slavia, 2003);

any event, the samovar, not porcelain tea cups or teapots, became the icon of Russian tea culture and a national symbol.

Available source material does not yield a complete answer to the question of why tea, rather than coffee or some other nonalcoholic beverage, became imperial Russia's hot drink of choice. Coffee was popular and available, but never assumed the cultural preeminence of tea; economic factors partially explain this. During the formative period of the eighteenth century, coffee was somewhat rarer than tea.³¹ What is more, as chapters 3 and 4 argue, tea-obsessed England's gustatory habits exerted a strong influence on Russia during the reign of Catherine the Great, the era when a distinctively Russian tea culture came into being. Finally, Russia's conflicts with the Ottoman Empire, gateway to the world's coffee-growing regions, may have intermittently depressed the availability of coffee in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since, until the nineteenth century, Russia lacked a merchant marine with which to obtain its own coffee, the empire depended to a large extent on European middlemen. These factors may have caused coffee prices in Russia to remain high, and the supply to be less stable than that of tea.³² This explanation remains partial and speculative, however, since no secondary literature on

E.N. Petrova and Elena Ivanova, *Porcelain in Russia, 18th-19th Centuries: The Gardner Factory* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2003).

³¹ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 178-79.

³² S. D. Smith offers a similar explanation in an article seeking to answer the question of why, after the boom in coffeehouse culture in seventeenth-century England, the British subsequently and permanently switched their allegiance to tea. First, tea provided more liquid per dry volume than coffee, and hence was more economical. One English pound of tea could yield five gallons of liquid, while one pound of coffee could make only two gallons of medium-strength liquid. Perhaps more importantly, conflicts and local instability in the coffee-growing regions of northern Africa and the Middle East periodically frustrated English commerce in these areas during the eighteenth century, driving coffee prices up. Similarly, as Jane Pettigrew has pointed out, English conflicts with its neighbors, notably France in the beginning and middle decades of the eighteenth century, curtailed English maritime trade in the Mediterranean, intermittently interfering with England's coffee supply from the Levant. Finally, the powerful British East India Company's monopoly on tea kept government duties on tea, and consequently tea prices, low. Thus in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, coffee was less readily available and more expensive than tea. S.D. Smith, "Accounting for Taste: British Coffee Consumption in Historical Perspective," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27, no. 2 (Autumn 1996): 183-214; Jane Pettigrew, *A Social History of Tea*, 43.

the history of coffee in imperial Russia exists, and this in itself is telling. Throughout my research for this project, I searched for coffee, chocolate, and sugar in all the same places I looked for tea, and gathered as much information about coffee consumption in imperial Russia as I could. That I found so little material pertaining to coffee and chocolate says a great deal about the centrality of tea in Russian culture and historical memory. Precisely why coffee never attained the popularity of tea may never be known, but this dissertation does claim to offer an explanation of the cultural and historical factors that made tea a permanent part of Russian life. Coffee and other hot beverages do enter into this story at intervals and offer a useful foil to tea, but are not examined in depth. Finally, in addition to its other attributes, Russian tea culture may be distinguished from others by habits of adding (or abstaining from adding) sugar, honey and other substances to tea, and these additives also receive attention where appropriate.

Russian Tea: Some Background

Tea is an ancient drink made from the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, a subtropical evergreen shrub native to China and the Assam region of northern India. Tea contains caffeine, an alkaloid also occurring in several dozen other plant species that kills bacteria and fungi, and also causes sterility in certain insect species that would otherwise threaten the plants. Ingested regularly by a large majority of humans, caffeine is a pharmacologically active substance and the world's most popular drug.³³ Growers group tea into six classes, black, oolong, green, yellow, white, and pu ehr, which are differentiated by styles of leaf processing, referred to in the tea industry as “manufacture.” Green tea first became popular in Western Europe in the seventeenth

³³ Coffee, tea, and other caffeine-bearing plants contain so many pharmacologically active substances that it is difficult to isolate the effects of caffeine from those of other compounds. Even the method of tea and coffee preparation exerts an influence on caffeine's ultimate effects on human health. Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 235, 272.

century, and was gradually supplanted by black tea in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. References to tea in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Russian sources rarely specify its class, but in general, over the course of the eighteenth century, black tea seems to have gradually replaced green as Russians' tea of choice. Black tea became the Russian standard in the nineteenth century, when tea reached the height of its popularity; when nineteenth-century Russian sources use the word *chai* (tea), they almost always mean black tea. Unless otherwise noted, references to "tea" in this dissertation refer to black tea, that is, fully oxidized *Camellia sinensis* leaves.³⁴

As tea consumption spread around the world, words for it also proliferated. "Tea" is indicated by a single character throughout China, but pronunciations and transliterations between character systems differ, and such distinctions within the vast linguistic and geographic space of China gave rise to different words for tea in other language families. In northern China, tea is known as *ch'a*, but in the south, the word is pronounced *t'e*. Consequently, non-Mandarin-speaking peoples who encountered tea in northern China, Central Asia, and Mongolia tended to refer to the drink as *chai*, which may be a corruption of the northern Mandarin *ch'a* or a slurring of the phrase *ch'a yeh* (tea leaf). The word "chai" is first recorded in Persian, and so it may also be possible that it derives from the Mandarin *ch'a* plus the Persian grammatical suffix *-yi*. From Persian, the word "chai" quickly spread to Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu. In the Slavic and Turkic languages spoken in northern Eurasia, "chai" may have developed independently from the same northern Chinese root. The Portuguese, who first encountered tea in South Asia, still call it *cha*.

³⁴ Hot beverages made from the infusion in water of other plants such as chamomile and peppermint are often referred to as "teas," but strictly speaking, the term "tea" only properly refers to a food or beverage created from the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant and its subspecies. The six classes of tea are differentiated from each other by the degree of oxidation undergone by the leaves during manufacture. The degree of oxidation also affects the amount of caffeine present in the finished tea.

Chinese junks trading in Southeast Asian waters carried the first leaf the Dutch ever saw, and consequently the Dutch referred to it by its southern Chinese pronunciation, calling it *tee*. The Dutch brought the first tea to Europe from the southern port of Xiamen (Amoy). Their English customers followed their example in calling it “tea,” and soon afterward the French tasted their first *thé*.³⁵

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English usage, “bohea” denoted any black tea and derived its name from the Wuyi hills of northern Fujian province.³⁶ In a probable corruption of “bohea,” Russians called good loose black tea *baikhov* or *baikhovyi chai*. The other most common type of black tea in imperial Russia was compressed tea, cakes made from tea dust or pulverized bits of tea leaves forced into molds under high pressure. The Russians called the larger tea cakes “brick tea” (*kirpichnyi chai*) and the smaller ones “tile tea” (*plitochnyi chai*). The Chinese sometimes used small slabs of compressed tea as currency, and the ease with which they could be crumbled up and steeped in hot water made them convenient for travel. As a rule, in Romanov Russia compressed brick tea or tile tea was cheaper and of lower quality than loose leaf baikhov tea, such that tea importation statistics compiled in the nineteenth century tended to divide black tea imports into two categories, one for brick tea and another for baikhov tea.

In East Asia, tea enjoyed great popularity as both a medicinal substance and a commodity for millennia before Europeans “discovered” it in the seventeenth century. Europeans came to trade and use tea quite late in its long history, and the first Russian usage of tea was medicinal, as it was also in Britain and Holland. Chinese sources indicate that tea was commonly used as a

³⁵ The Dutch term *tee* derives from the southern Chinese pronunciation *t’e* (pronounced “tay”), and reached western Europe via the Dutch through the port of Xiamen (Amoy). The English term “tea” and the French *thé* derive from Dutch. See P. Ia. Chernykh, *Istoriko-Etimologicheskii Slovar’ Sovremennogo Russkogo Iazyka: 13,560 Slova* (Moscow: Russkii Iazyk, 1993), 373-74, and Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, xiv.

³⁶ The name “bohea” derives from a black tea produced in the Wuyi hills of northern Fujian province, home to many of China’s best black teas.

drug no later than the third century BCE (and probably centuries earlier). Trade records show that the Chinese sold it to Turkic tribes by 476 CE. Arab merchants knew of tea by 900. Before its heyday in China during the Tang period (618-907), compressed cakes of tea leaves were sometimes chewed, and later they were boiled with onions, ginger, berries, fruit, peppermint and/or various spices; it was also sometimes prepared as a more substantial food, heated together with milk or rice.³⁷ The tradition of preparing tea as a food persists in Inner Asia to this day. Considering Muscovy's proximity to Eurasian tea-drinking peoples, and extensive contact with Mongols between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Russians came to know tea remarkably late, although it is possible, if unlikely, that Russian encounters with tea before 1616 went unrecorded.

Tea as a food, and tea culture in general, declined while China was under Mongol rule, but rose to prominence again under the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), toward the end of which Russians first encountered China and its tea. Whereas Mongols and other nomadic inhabitants of Inner Asia and Siberia retained the practice of consuming tea with milk or butter and various grains as a soupy food, further south, Han Chinese living under the Ming regime exalted tea to the status of a spiritual beverage that transcended the everyday, developing the art of steeping oxidized tea leaves in delicate porcelain bowls. Unlike Turkic peoples, Han Chinese did not consume any additives with their tea. Seventeenth-century Russians observed both Chinese and Turkic tea cultures, referring to the latter (as this dissertation will throughout) as the "Tatar method" of tea preparation. The difference between these two norms of tea consumption mattered to the Orthodox Russians, who abstained from consuming dairy products during times

³⁷ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 31-33. Proper tea preparation under the Tang dynasty required twenty-seven distinct vessels and utensils. Pettigrew, *Design for Tea*, x.

of fasting, and this dynamic would influence the development of a native Russian tea culture. Centuries before that first encounter with tea in the seventeenth century, Muscovites enjoyed hot drinks of their own. *Sbitten'*, first mentioned in Russian sources in the twelfth century, was a popular drink made from honey, water, spices, and sometimes fruit. Along with *medovukha*, a mildly alcoholic brew similar to mead, *sbitten'* remained widespread until tea replaced both as the ubiquitous hot beverage in the late nineteenth century.

As contact between the European maritime powers, Russia, and China intensified in the seventeenth century, the Russians and their fellow Europeans began to develop their own tea cultures that diverged significantly from those they encountered in Asia. By 1670, English, Dutch, and French craftsmen were inventing entirely new technologies for heating water and brewing tea and coffee.³⁸ Scholars argue that the appearance of new European tea and coffee vessels in the second half of the seventeenth century signals the birth of distinctively European tea cultures.³⁹ Similarly, I argue, the introduction of these appliances to Russia in the early eighteenth century sparked the development of Russia's own unique tea culture, which would in turn diverge from the modern tea cultures of Western Europe.

In the nineteenth century, once tea had established itself as a quotidian practice in most Russian households, tea preparation followed a fairly standard pattern. A servant, if present, would take the samovar into the kitchen or outdoors, light the charcoal or kindling in the firebox, and then "blow up" the samovar (that is, blow [*razduvat'*] into the vents in the samovar's base in order to get the chimney to draw). Once the water boiled, the samovar would be brought to the table, where the mistress of the house or the eldest unmarried daughter would take over the tea

³⁸ Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, 79.

³⁹ John Styles, "Product Innovation in Early Modern London," *Past & Present* 168 (2000), 140-41; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 20-24.

preparation. She would first spoon the loose tea into a small metal or ceramic teapot and fill it with boiling water from the samovar to make *zavarka*, or tea concentrate. The teapot could be kept warm by sitting atop the samovar's crown while tea steeped. Once the *zavarka* had been brewed, a small amount of it would be poured into each individual teacup and then diluted with hot water from the samovar. Nineteenth-century Russian tea drinkers typically took their tea with sugar, lemon, and/or fruit preserves. Tea with milk or cream was not unheard of in imperial Russia, but the proscription of dairy products on the many fast days ordained in the Orthodox calendar made this practice less common.⁴⁰ The tea culture of imperial Russia emerged, in short, out of the thoughtful adaptation of foreign customs and technologies to suit their own culturally specific needs and preferences. In this way, tea became Russian.

⁴⁰ Traveling in Russia in the 1860s, the Englishman George Lowth recalled he was once offered cream for his tea in a Moscow public park, but only because the waitress recognized that he was a foreigner. George T. Lowth, *Around the Kremlin; Or, Pictures of Life in Moscow* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1868), 191.

CHAPTER ONE

“UNKNOWN LEAVES OF SOME SORT”: SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MUSCOVY ENCOUNTERS TEA

Introduction

The June 1971 issue of *Soviet Life* magazine featured a two-page, image-packed story on Russian tea culture entitled “Russian Tea: A Tradition Three Centuries Old.” Assigning a unique tea connoisseurship to the inhabitants of Moscow in particular, the article identified the seventeenth century as the beginning of Russia’s love affair with tea. In the year 1638, the article proudly asserts, “an ambassador brought Czar Alexei Mikhailovich 130 pounds of tea from Mongolia. The czar sent the Mongolian khan a hundred sableskins as a token of his gratitude.”¹ The author no doubt wished to convey a sense of cultural continuity across the centuries, symbolized by the comfortable ritual of drinking tea, but the claim is entirely untrue. Aleksei Mikhailovich was not even tsar in 1638; he ascended the throne upon the death of his father Mikhail, the first Romanov tsar, in 1645. Moreover, there is no record of how Tsar Mikhail reacted to the gift of tea. We do know that his ambassador, Vasili Starkov, actually attempted to refuse it, calling the leaves “unknown” and “superfluous” as far as Muscovy was concerned. This took place in 1639. When Starkov finally brought the tea back to Moscow in 1640, he did so only because his Mongolian hosts had compelled him to do so.²

¹ “Russian Tea: A Tradition Three Centuries Old,” *Soviet Life* (June 1971), 23.

² Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:119. This is an extensive collection of diplomatic accounts and other primary source documents in English and Russian. Unless otherwise noted, English quotations from seventeenth-century Russian diplomatic narratives are Baddeley’s.

What motivated the author of the *Soviet Life* article to represent tea drinking as a distinctively Russian practice with an unbroken three-century history? Tea apparently meant little to Muscovites in the seventeenth century, but by the nineteenth century, when the accounts *Soviet Life* relied on were composed, it meant enough to necessitate the invention of an origin myth. How can we account for the discrepancy between how this event was imagined in 1971, and what really happened in 1639? Why were Russians, as this chapter will reveal, uninterested in tea in the seventeenth century? What cultural, economic, and political factors shaped their attitudes toward tea during this crucial time in their history? The pre-existence of a Russian tradition of hot drinks may partially explain their indifference to tea, but other reasons for this indifference lay close to the heart of Muscovy's intense cultural and political struggles in the seventeenth century. More generally, the story of Russia's early acquaintance with tea has much to teach us about global exchange networks in this period.

The first half of the seventeenth century found Muscovy still reeling from the period of dynastic crisis, foreign invasion, and popular unrest known as the Time of Troubles. Upon his election in 1613 as the first tsar of the new Romanov dynasty, Mikhail Fedorovich Romanov took control of a state whose very existence had been in considerable jeopardy within living memory. Poles and Swedes still occupied Muscovite territories and were not driven out until 1617 and 1618, respectively. The reign of Tsar Mikhail's son, Aleksei Mikhailovich Romanov (r. 1645-1676), saw more social and cultural upheaval in the shape of a great religious schism between the established Orthodox Church and the so-called Old Believers, and not coincidentally, a steep increase in the presence and influence of foreigners close to the center of Muscovite power. The reign of Peter the Great straddled the turn of the eighteenth century, and by the time of his death in 1725, the Muscovite era had ended and Russia had become an empire.

This chapter provides the first synthetic history of Russian encounters with tea throughout the seventeenth century, and explores the facets of Russian religious and political culture that influenced Muscovite responses to tea during this period. The first section analyzes tea references found in Russian diplomatic narratives, situating them in the context of rapidly changing geopolitical conditions in China, Mongolia, and Siberia. I then consider the extent to which the emerging Russian medical establishment accepted tea as a remedy for various diseases in the second half of the century, despite ecclesiastical suspicion of foreign medicines as a category. The third section examines the evidence concerning tea as a commodity in late seventeenth-century Muscovy, and reflects on its role in cultural and commercial relations with neighboring powers.

The final section's examination of initial reactions to tea on the part of the British and the Dutch furnishes a transnational perspective that highlights distinctive conditions in Muscovy. As Russia's two largest trading partners, these maritime capitalist powers exercised considerable cultural and economic influence on Russian elites in the seventeenth century, and were simultaneously in the process of becoming China's two largest tea customers. The chapter gives special consideration to tea equipage and methods of tea infusion, because material conditions played a critical role in the evolution of distinctive tea cultures not only in Russia, but in Great Britain and Holland as well. I argue that even though Russians first encountered tea in the course of face-to-face interactions with Mongolians, Siberian Tatars, Han Chinese, and Manchus that took place in the home territories of the latter peoples, England and Holland exerted the greater influence on the actual practice of tea consumption that developed within Muscovy itself by the end of the seventeenth century. The English and the Dutch, and particularly their medical knowledge, seem to have shaped Russian ideas about tea—to the extent that they thought about it

at all—despite the fact that overland trade with imperial China furnished the tea itself. In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I consider Russia to be simultaneously fully European and also driven by its own distinctive cultural, economic, and political concerns and priorities. Seventeenth-century Russia was integrating, sometimes reluctantly, into a rapidly developing world system of economic and information exchange, and the history of tea in Muscovy during this dynamic period is an important and hitherto unexplored facet of that integration. Growth in demand for raw materials, particularly from Great Britain and Holland, fueled a supply response in Muscovy that transformed its economy, which now depended more heavily on foreign trade than ever before, especially for the metals necessary for large-scale military engagements.³

This chapter contributes to the historiography of both seventeenth-century Muscovy and to the literature on emerging global commodity markets. The former has almost entirely overlooked the history of the colonial groceries, and the latter tends to marginalize Russia. Historians and anthropologists have devoted considerable attention to the growth of a world economy in the seventeenth century, investigating the meanings of comestibles of tropical origin and their influence on developing consumer cultures in Holland, France, and Great Britain.⁴ Historians Matthew Romaniello and Tricia Starks's 2009 edited volume *Tobacco in Russian*

³ Jarmo Kotilaine, *Russia's Foreign Trade and Economic Expansion in the Seventeenth Century: Windows on the World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 2, 4-5.

⁴ See, for example, P. Albrecht, "Coffee-Drinking as a Symbol of Social Change in Continental Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 18 (1988): 91-103; Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008); Brian Cowan, "The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered," *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 1 (March 2004): 21-46; Lovejoy, Sherratt, and Goodman, eds., *Consuming Habits*; Anne C.E. McCants, "Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World," *Journal of World History* 18, no. 4 (December 2007): 433-62; Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985); Emma Robertson, *Chocolate, Women and Empire: A Social and Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Smith, "Accounting for Taste"; and Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*.

History and Culture broke new ground on commodity studies in Muscovy.⁵ Historian D. I. Prozorovskii published the first study of tea in seventeenth-century Russia in 1866, acknowledging the scarcity of source material and concluding, correctly, that tea was comparatively uncommon and unknown by the end of the century.⁶ The topic lacked sustained scholarly treatment for about a century until the publication of Smith and Christian's *Bread and Salt* in 1982. Russian historian and tea specialist Ivan Sokolov begins his inquiries in 1790, neglecting the seventeenth century altogether. Concerning the seventeenth-century history of tea elsewhere in Europe, Jane Pettigrew's two studies *A Social History of Tea* and *Design for Tea* are the most thorough and informative.⁷ In contrast, popular histories of tea tend to either gloss over or entirely skip the seventeenth century.

Although sources attesting to the presence and use of tea in seventeenth-century Muscovy are fragmentary, the records that do survive speak of a cultural and economic climate shaped by the interrelated factors of economic protectionism, geopolitics, Orthodox religiosity, cultural conservatism, and historical memory. Prior to Peter the Great's reorganization of the administrative structure in the early eighteenth century, the Russian government was divided into departments called chanceries or *prikazy*. The Posol'skii prikaz, or Ambassadorial Chancery, sent Russian representatives to Mongolia, Siberia, and China who left numerous and detailed accounts, sometimes written down after the fact because of the emissaries' illiteracy. These,

⁵ Matthew Romaniello and Tricia Starks, eds. *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2009), especially the introduction by Starks and Romaniello, and chapters "Muscovy's Extraordinary Ban on Tobacco" by Matthew Romaniello, "Sex, Drink, and Drugs: Tobacco in Seventeenth-Century Russia" by Nikolaos Chrissidis, "Tobacco and Health in Early Modern Russia" by Eve Levin, and "Regulating Virtue and Vice: Controlling Commodities in Early Modern Siberia" by Erika Monahan. This chapter is deeply indebted to this book, and I would like to thank Erika Monahan, Matthew Romaniello, and Tricia Starks for their helpful feedback on early versions of parts of this chapter.

⁶ D.I. Prozorovskii, *Chai po Starinnym Russkim Svedeniiam* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Morskogo Ministerstva, 1866).

⁷ Pettigrew and Richardson, *A Social History of Tea*, and Jane Pettigrew, *Design for Tea: Tea Wares from the Dragon Court to Afternoon Tea* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2003).

more than other sources, reveal the cultural and political factors governing Russians' suspicion of the unknown leaf and the dynamics of their interaction with their tea-drinking hosts. A number of foreign visitors to seventeenth-century Muscovy also composed travel journals and diaries, and though not many of these mention the presence of tea, those that do provide vital information. Virtually all the data we have about the availability and price of tea in Muscovy itself comes from records made by travelers and traders from England and Holland, who displayed a "compulsion to acquire, accumulate and codify information on every kind of physical and social phenomenon" they encountered.⁸ Finally, the records of the Aptekarskii prikaz, or Pharmacy Chancery, contain fragmentary but notable hints about the medicinal use of tea in Muscovy.

Tea came into use in European households in the seventeenth century along with a number of other new foodstuffs. Muscovites could purchase sugar in various forms—loaf, cube, granulated, refined, and sugar candy—from the early seventeenth century, and its use predates their acquaintance with tea. One pound of sugar cost approximately four days' wages, placing it squarely in the category of luxury items, and Russians considered it salubrious. Later, as the quantity of imported sugar rose and its price fell, it began to replace honey as the most common sweetener.⁹ Caffeine would not be isolated and identified as the psychoactive ingredient common to coffee, tea, and chocolate until the nineteenth century, but seventeenth-century observers nevertheless knew these drinks to be stimulants. Whereas the seventeenth century saw the golden age of the coffeehouse in England, no sources attest to coffee prices or coffee-drinking habits in

⁸ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 9.

⁹ Richard Hellie, *The Economy and Material Culture of Russia, 1600-1725* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 93-95; Richard Hellie and Jenifer L. Stenfors, "The Elite Clergy Diet in Late Muscovy," *Russian History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 19; Kulisher, *Istoriia Russkoi Torgovli*, 295; Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 177-78; Ivan Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia v Rossii*, 43.

Russia until the eighteenth century. However, circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that coffee was available in Moscow from the second half of the seventeenth century.¹⁰

Cultural and economic circumstances unique to Muscovy led Russians to approach the new colonial groceries somewhat more cautiously than their European neighbors. Muscovite hesitation to embrace foreign plants, foods, and customs was rooted in a conscious desire to protect their cultural identity, their political integrity, and their eternal souls. Sixteenth-century prescriptive literature had warned of the danger of foreign influence, and the traumatic period of the Time of Troubles reinforced this attitude. Chapter 39 of the *Stoglav*, a collection of pronouncements on ecclesiastical law hammered out by the Russian church council of 1551, had forbidden Orthodox Christians to follow the customs of “lawless” foreigners. The document acknowledges that laws varied among countries, but claims that since Muscovites had received the true (*istinnyi*) law from God, they should not emulate foreigners’ ways.¹¹ The *Domostroi*, a comprehensive sixteenth-century handbook governing the moral, civil, and physical life of the Muscovite household, prioritized the avoidance of “Devil’s games” such as drunkenness, sexual immorality, and sorcery; the logic of Muscovite medical culture would readily have associated tea with the latter. In the world of the *Domostroi*, as Carolyn Pouncy argues, “pickled mushrooms and clean straw reflected the soul as clearly as acts of charity. Everyday details became symbols of one’s moral state, bringing concomitant rewards or punishments.”¹² Seventeenth-century opponents of another recently-introduced “drink,” tobacco, argued on

¹⁰ Chocolate seems to have been altogether absent from seventeenth-century Russia, or is at least absent from the sources. Unfortunately, there is no secondary literature on the history of sugar, coffee, or chocolate in Muscovite and imperial Russia to draw on, aside from the references cited above. See Hellie, *The Economy and Material Culture of Russia*, 85, 87, 94.

¹¹ E.B. Emchenko, ed., *Stoglav: Issledovanie i tekst* (Moscow: “Indrik,” 2000), 302.

¹² Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, trans. and ed. *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 21.

similar lines for the “morally corrupting influence of foreign or new commodities.”¹³ Patriarch Iakim (r. 1674-1690) condemned the adoption of foreign habits that led believers away from truth and caused them to question their faith and the clergy.¹⁴

Even though Russian ambivalence toward tea takes up most of this chapter’s narrative, this history provides us with a frame in which to consider Muscovy’s relations with China, Great Britain, and Holland as moving parts of a complex and increasingly integrated whole. At the dawn of the seventeenth century Muscovy was an essentially landlocked, culturally conservative, and economically unadventurous entity. Yet its geographic location between the ascendant colonial powers and the alluring riches that drew them to the East meant that “backward” Muscovy became both a crucial conduit for trade, and a power that Great Britain, the Netherlands, and China could not afford to leave out of their economic and geopolitical calculations.

Of Teas and Treaties: Sino-Russian Relations in the Seventeenth Century

In the early seventeenth century, and even after Russian expansion reached the Pacific in the middle of the century, Muscovy conducted its relations with China through intervening Mongol and Kalmyk khanates. The shortest and easiest route from western Siberia to China lay through the Altin or “Golden” khanate, which controlled northwestern Mongolia in the seventeenth century. Russians traveling to this area in the initial decades of the century sometimes erroneously believed they had reached China itself, an entity about which they knew

¹³ Matthew P. Romaniello, “Muscovy’s Extraordinary Ban,” 10. Seventeenth-century Russians, like their European contemporaries, “drank” rather than “smoked” tobacco. Nikolaos A. Chrissidis, “Sex, Drink and Drugs: Tobacco in Seventeenth-Century Russia,” in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 26-43.

¹⁴ Chrissidis, “Sex, Drink and Drugs,” 29-30.

virtually nothing until this period.¹⁵ These early encounters between Russia and China took place late in the rule of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the last dynasty consisting of ethnic Han Chinese, and considered the zenith of Chinese tea culture and ceramics.

The earliest reference to tea in a Russian manuscript occurs in the account of the Cossack Vasilii Tiumenets, who had been sent by Prince Ivan Semenovich Kurakin, the governor or *voevoda* of Tobol'sk, to the Altin khan in 1616 to establish relations with China. Tiumenets and his compatriot, the minor official Ivan Petrov, were illiterate, but gave detailed oral accounts of their travels to authorities in Tomsk and Moscow. Tiumenets spoke of generous cuts of meat served on “white dishes”—porcelain, a material then unknown in Muscovy. “For drink,” he recalled, “they brought to the table cow’s milk parboiled with butter, and in it unknown leaves of some sort.”¹⁶ Tiumenets separately mentioned an unknown “red” beverage, which was probably also tea—in this context he likely employed the term “red” (*krasnyi*) to indicate its high quality.¹⁷ The khan gave the tsar on this occasion the first samples of Chinese tea to reach Muscovy, sent home with other rich presents with Tiumenets and Petrov.¹⁸ Unfortunately, no reaction to the gift is recorded.

¹⁵ On Russian confusion about China, and whether their emissaries had reached it, see Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 228, and A.K. Korsak, *Istoriko-Statisticheskoe Obozrenie Torgovykh Snoshenii Rossii s Kitaem* (Kazan: I. Dubrovin, 1857), 6.

¹⁶ Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:54. Baddeley, together with Smith and Christian in *Bread and Salt*, have no doubt that the “unknown leaves” were tea.

¹⁷ Ibid. Smith and Christian believe this to be another tea reference. Further, I agree with them that it is also possible (though perhaps less likely, given the Mongolian setting and the Russians’ limited knowledge of their host culture) that Tiumenets’s description of the drink as “red” was an oblique reference to the Chinese term for black tea, *hun ch’a*, literally “red tea” (*Bread and Salt*, 228). Chinese black tea steeped in water, without the addition of milk, does in fact produce a red liquor (in tea phraseology, “liquor” refers to the color of brewed tea).

¹⁸ Prince Kurakin’s 1617 report to the tsar implies that Tiumenets and Petrov continued on to China, but since the latter were reported to have returned to Tobol'sk in 1617 accompanied by envoys from the khan, Kurakin seems to have communicated with the tsar either in ignorance of the whereabouts of his emissaries, on the basis of false information, or under the erroneous conflation of the Altin khanate with China. See Mikhail Iosifovich Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations between Russia and China* (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translations, 1966), 8.

Desiring to obtain more direct information on China and sensing an opportunity for profitable trade, Prince Kurakin soon organized another embassy, which departed from Tobol'sk in 1618. Led by Ivan Petlin and Petrun'ka Kozylov, the delegation took a different route, making its way through Tomsk and Kuznetsk, crossing the upper Enisei River and eventually reaching Beijing. Once there, the Ming emperor gave Petlin a letter for the tsar, in which he invited more Russians to return with merchandise and further letters from their sovereign. He promised to receive future Russian emissaries with honor. But the letter never reached Moscow, remaining in Tobol'sk for fifty-six years with no one able to translate it.¹⁹ After the promising mission of Petlin and Kozylov, Russian tensions with the Altin khan, together with upheaval and regime change within China itself, stymied Sino-Russian relations for several decades. In 1644, under pressure from peasant rebels and Manchu invaders from the north, the Ming military collapsed and Beijing fell to a rebel army. China's last imperial dynasty, the Great Qing or Manchu dynasty, consolidated its power over the next forty years. The Qing dynasty finally secured its dominion in 1683 and would rule China until 1911.

Thus, by the time Russia and China renewed contact with each other in the 1650s, China had a new ruling dynasty made up of a different ethnic group, the Manchu. Few if any Chinese goods made their way into Muscovy in the intervening years.²⁰ In the meantime, however, the Muscovite emissary Vasilii Starkov left a record of the tea he and his colleague Neverev encountered at the court of a Mongol khan in 1639. Starkov wrote of the tea they were served as of an unknown beverage: "They call the drink *chai*: it consists of leaves, I know not whether

¹⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

²⁰ Ibid.

from a tree, or a herb; they are boiled in water, to which a little milk is added.”²¹ This is the first appearance of the word *chai* in Russian, and there is no evidence that tea has ever been known in that language by any other term.²²

Starkov steadfastly refused the tea offered by his hosts, and his and other Russian agents’ reluctance to drink tea in ceremonial settings impeded the relations they had been sent to establish with their eastern neighbors. In traditional Confucian political theory, China was not one state among many but “civilization itself, surrounded by degrees of barbarism differentiated in terms of the barbarians’ acceptance or rejection of, or indifference to, the ways of civilization, that is, of China.” Aware that conformity with the expectations of ceremonial protocol, and especially the ritual of the kowtow, constituted an acknowledgment of the Chinese emperor’s cultural and political superiority, Russian and Western European envoys often refused to comply with their hosts’ orders. This problem dogged Russian diplomatic relations with China down to the nineteenth century.²³ For Russian-speaking Orthodox diplomats in China, uncertainty as to whether drinking tea violated Orthodox dietary regulations, especially during periods of fasting, compounded the issue.

Starkov’s mission was not off to a promising start. The Russians balked at eating veal, which was forbidden to Orthodox Christians; apparently in response, the khan’s servants attending them declined to serve them any other food. The quality of the tsar’s gifts disappointed the khan, who was further displeased that a number of items he had specifically requested—a

²¹ Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:118. The Russians may have emerged hungry from the state dinner because of their reluctance to touch food they suspected of violating Orthodox dietary laws.

²² Chernykh, *Istoriko-Etimologicheskii Slovar'*, 2:373; Prozorovskii, *Chai po starinnyim russkim svedeniiam*, 4. Chernykh dates the first occurrence of the word *chai* in Russian to the mid-seventeenth century, and no etymological study has hitherto been able to furnish a more precise date for its appearance in Russian.

²³ Mark Mancall, “Russia and China: The Structure of Contact,” in Wayne Vucinich, ed., *Russia and Asia: Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 316-17.

doctor, a monk from Jerusalem, a dwarf, a gun with at least five chambers, some damask, a clock, and a bell—were not among them. To compensate for the deficiency, the khan's officials stripped Starkov and his comrades of almost everything they carried, including their weapons. There was also “a sharp exchange of words,” apparently not the first, over the khan's failure to stand up and bare his head when the Muscovite tsar was mentioned, but Starkov, correctly perceiving that his party was already at a disadvantage, let the matter slide. In apparent contrast to the gifts brought by Starkov, the khan demonstrated his wealth and power by giving the Russian tsar a fabulously expensive suite of presents, including silks embroidered with gold and silver thread, two hundred sables, and other costly furs and textiles. The gifts also contained two hundred packets of tea, equivalent in value to one hundred sables. Starkov objected to the tea, claiming that it was “unknown” and “superfluous” in Russia, but his attempt to refuse the tea was overruled.²⁴ Thus the second documented batch of tea to reach Muscovy did so against the will of its bearers.

Tsar Aleksei launched the first state-sponsored diplomatic mission to China in 1654 but once again, the Russians' reluctance to drink tea hindered relations.²⁵ Armed with a letter to the Chinese emperor, and charged with the task of regularizing diplomacy and trade, the illiterate boyar's son Fedor Isakovich Baikov reached Beijing in 1656. By this time, Russian incursion into lands beyond Lake Baikal and into the Amur River basin had created an urgent need to establish a border with the new Qing dynasty and to subdue skirmishes among the Russian Cossacks and Manchus who were now living in close proximity with one another. Though the embassy failed in its main objectives, the Russians gained valuable information about lands

²⁴ Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:117-19.

²⁵ Nikolai Bantysh-Kamenskii, *Diplomaticheskoe Sobranie Del mezhdru Rossiiskim i Kitaiskim Gosudarstvami s 1619 po 1729-oi god* (Kazan: Tip. Imperatorskago Universiteta, 1882); Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:132.

along the route and about China itself, and managed to conduct some trade. From the 1650s on, trade between Muscovy and China slowly grew, a small number of Russian caravans made the long and difficult journey to Beijing, and the border town of Nerchinsk became the center of their economic interaction.

As Baikov and his companions entered Chinese territory, some officials met them outside the city of Kanbalyk and greeted them with tea.²⁶ Later that same day, continuing the trend established by his predecessor Starkov, Baikov turned down a ceremonial dish of tea. When one of the khan's officials presented him with a cup of tea with milk and butter, Baikov declined it, explaining that his Christian faith did not allow him to consume dairy products during Lent. Upon the Manchus' insistence that he ought to accept this gesture of goodwill from their sovereign, Baikov took the cup in his hands, then promptly gave it back without drinking it.²⁷ Throughout the visit, Baikov and his Chinese hosts refused to play by each other's rules. Manchu officials confiscated Baikov's letter from the tsar, insisting that he kowtow to the imperial arms and seal.²⁸ Having been specifically instructed not to surrender the tsar's letter or to conduct negotiations with anyone except the emperor himself, Baikov refused. The Russians considered it an offense to their sovereign if a diplomatic letter should be opened by anyone but another ruler, while the Chinese had a strict policy of vetting all missives addressed to their emperor, in case they were found to contain anything insulting.²⁹ This problem plagued Baikov's and every

²⁶ Ibid., 2:126.

²⁷ Natalia Fedorovna Demidova and Vladimir Stepanovich Miasnikov, eds., *Pervye Russkie Diplomaty v Kitae: "Rospis'" I. Petlina i Stateinyi Spisok F. I. Baikova* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), 127.

²⁸ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 10.

²⁹ Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:331, 341.

subsequent Russian embassy to China in the seventeenth century. Baikov never got the chance to fulfill his orders not to kiss the emperor's feet, since he was never granted an audience.³⁰

In any event, tea certainly made an impression, though perhaps not an entirely positive one, on the Russians. A crucial aspect of Baikov's mission was to gather information on Asian commodities and trade, and his party could not help but note the prominence of tea in Asian commerce. They had brought the first consignment of Russian merchandise to reach China, which included furs, leather, and diamonds. Baikov presented some of these to the emperor, and sold the rest in exchange for Chinese goods, including tea. At the price of just over 262 rubles, Baikov acquired precious stones, textiles, silver, "and arctic raspberry root and *temzer'* and some tea herb (*travy chiau*)."³¹ Baikov's report also includes tea in a description of the vegetables, cereal grains, herbs, and spices they encountered: "And cooking herbs (*prianykh zelei*) in China are these: pepper, and cloves, and cinnamon, and nutmeg, and ginger, and anise, and a great deal of tea. And the Chinese and Mughals say tea grows on a tree, and every kind of herb grows here." The Russians perceived tea as the most significant and abundant of these. A list of commodities and their prices acknowledged the unknown origin of some of the more valuable items, including gold, silver, precious stones, and spices. The list concluded, "But tea grows on a tree; and is sold at two *zolotniks* the *batman*."³² The repetition of the phrase "tea grows on a tree" seems to be a reflection of something the Russians were told frequently. Evidently tea was an

³⁰ Demidova and Miasnikov, *Pervye Russkie Diplomaty*, 91.

³¹ Ibid., 89. I have not been able to identify *temzer'*, but from the context it must be some kind of medicinal Chinese plant. The word may derive from Chuvash. See also Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 229, citing Korsak, *Istoriko-statisticheskoe obozrenie*, 58.

³² Demidova and Miasnikov, *Pervye Russkie Diplomaty*, 135, 148. A *zolotnik* was a unit of measurement usually used for specie or pearls, and was equivalent to either 1/72 or 1/96 of a Russian pound, or *funt*. A *funt* is equal to 14.4 U.S. ounces. A *batman* was equal to ten, eighteen, or twenty-eight funts. Hellie, *Economy and Material Culture of Russia*, 646-48.

item of such ubiquity that Baikov's scribes had no trouble remembering its provenance and price; yet ironically, it was just about the last product the Russians were interested in importing, and the source of the all-important specie remained mysterious.

Though hard cash proved elusive, low-quality tea was used as currency: "Petty articles they buy with tea, which costs fourteen *bakchas* the *lan*."³³ The Chinese had been using small compressed blocks of pulverized black tea leaves both as currency and as a convenient format for transport since the time of the Tang dynasty. Tea thus compressed for export and exchange was known among the Chinese as "border tea."³⁴ Chinese peasants in the interior preferred border tea to coins and paper money, which diminished in value the further one traveled from the imperial center.³⁵ The Baikov account adds that small purchases were also made with tobacco, which was considerably more expensive than tea; and in any case Muscovite authorities had prohibited the importation and sale of tobacco in 1627.³⁶ Though they never banned the importation or sale of tea, for the Orthodox Muscovites both tea and tobacco fell into the category of lawless foreign customs that were best avoided; probably for this reason, awareness of tea as a staple of Chinese hospitality and commerce did not incline the Russians to drink it. This was unfortunate, since tea was included in the food rations allotted to the diplomats, at the rate of one quarter pound per day. Each member of the diplomatic party received a tea ration

³³ Demidova and Miasnikov, *Pervye Russkie Diplomaty*, 141. I am unable to identify the units *bakcha* and *lan*. Possibly these were Chinese units of measurement.

³⁴ Heiss and Heiss, *Story of Tea*, 11.

³⁵ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 31.

³⁶ Demidova and Miasnikov, *Pervye Russkie Diplomaty*, 123; Matthew Romaniello, "Muscovy's Extraordinary Ban on Tobacco," in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, 9.

except the cooks, who received firewood instead. Their hosts also provided the Russians with generous portions of mutton and beef, to the further detriment of their attempt to keep Lent.³⁷

The uncomfortable relationship between early Qing China and seventeenth-century Muscovy troubled the latter much more than the former. Having secured its dominion over southern and central China, and extended considerable control over Korea and the khanates of eastern Mongolia, the powerful Qing dynasty did not go out of its way to cultivate commercial ties with distant Muscovy. Russian overtures toward China continued, however, and the next Russian mission, led by Perfil'ev in 1658, took the same route as Baikov and again attempted to secure a trade agreement and to settle border disputes. The Muscovite delegation again sold Russian commodities in exchange for Chinese wares, and acquired 360 pounds of the “tea herb” as part of the emperor’s gifts to the tsar; not valuing the tea any more than his predecessors, Perfil'ev sold all the tea in Beijing and bought precious stones with the proceeds.³⁸ Once again the Russians and the Chinese failed to agree on a permanent trade arrangement. The Perfil'ev party regained Moscow in November 1662, having lost most of its Chinese acquisitions to Mongol plunderers.³⁹

For reasons that remain unclear, by about 1670 Muscovite representatives in China seem to have overcome their reservations about tea, and drinking it at court in Beijing no longer seemed so problematic. In 1667, a chieftain of the Siberian Tungus people named Gantimur defected from the Manchu to the Russian side in the border skirmishes that plagued the area around Nerchinsk. In response to Manchu demands that Gantimur be returned, Daniil Arshinskii,

³⁷ Demidova and Miasnikov, *Pervye Russkie Diplomaty*, 127-28.

³⁸ Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:168.

³⁹ Ibid., citing Bantysh-Kamensky, *Diplomaticheskoe sobranie*. The original Russian manuscripts are no longer extant.

voevoda of Nerchinsk, sent an embassy to Beijing consisting of Ignatii Milovanov, Anton Filev, Grigorii Kobiakov, and three others in 1670. Tsar Aleksei had ordered Arshinskii to tell the Qing emperor, through Milovanov, that Russia desired to open regular trade relations with China, and that both Russians and Chinese should be permitted to conduct business with each other on both sides of the border.

In the context of failing to resolve the dispute over Gantimur, whom the Russians refused to extradite, Chinese officials treated Milovanov and his companions to tea in the emperor's presence. The Russians sipped from silver cups while the emperor gazed at them for about an hour, and then he dismissed them after they had each told him their age. Following this peculiar interview, the Russian emissaries dined, and for two weeks afterward were permitted to wander freely around Beijing, provided they were always in the company of Chinese guards. Again tea was part of the daily food and drink allotted to the foreign guests: "They remained five weeks and three days in the Chinese capital, and they received food in sufficient quantities...and, for drink, good red wine and the herb tea, boiled in milk" (*da travy chaiu vareno v moloke*). This time there is no evidence of reluctance to drink tea on the part of the Russian ambassadors, possibly because they were not fasting at the time, or had lived long enough in Inner Asia to have acquired the habit themselves. On the whole, the visit passed quite smoothly, and the emperor even respected the Russians' practice of their Orthodox Christian faith.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the two sides failed to establish regular trade relations, because the Manchu authorities continued to demand the return of Gantimur as a precondition for free trade in the border area. In addition to this fundamental conflict, A. K. Korsak believes that compared with the well-educated,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2:201-202; for the original Russian, see 1:ccxliv.

Chinese-speaking Jesuits who had already become a fixture at the Chinese court, the illiterate Russian emissaries appeared unsophisticated.⁴¹

The Russian embassy to China of 1675-77 aimed to correct that shortcoming. The Moldavian Greek Nicolae Milescu Spătarul, known in Russia as Spafarii, led the delegation, having been appointed in 1671 as chief interpreter for Latin, Greek, and Moldavian for the Muscovite Ambassadorial Chancery. He spoke nine languages and was functional in about thirteen.⁴² In contrast to his predecessors' illiteracy, the cosmopolitan Spafarii made somewhat better progress with the Chinese, communicating in Latin with Jesuits resident in Beijing. Spafarii was empowered to invite the Chinese to send an ambassador to Russia, and once again lobbied for the establishment of permanent trade relations.

His assignment was a delicate one, and beset by the perennial problems of Sino-Russian relations in the seventeenth century. Tedious and complex negotiations concerning precedence and the handling of the tsar's letters to the emperor detained the party for several months at the border. Upon their arrival in Beijing, complicated ceremonial regulations further frustrated the Russians' efforts. Most importantly, the Manchus continued to demand Gantimur's extradition, fearful that his example would encourage other Siberian chieftains to attack the Qing border. Spafarii refused, and the Chinese blocked further trade and diplomatic relations until an answer was obtained from the tsar. They dispatched Spafarii back to Tsar Aleksei with the demand that Gantimur be returned, with the agreement that peace must be maintained along the border, and

⁴¹ Korsak, *Istoriko-statisticheskoe obozrenie*, 15-16.

⁴² Rudolf Loewenthal, "Nikolai Gavrilovich Spafarii-Milesku (1636-1708): A Biobibliography," *Monumenta Serica* 37 (1986-87): 97, 100.

with the order that further Russian envoys must kowtow and obey all Chinese customs, or else there would be no future Russian envoys.⁴³

Despite these difficulties, Spafarii gained a great deal of strategically valuable information for Russia, and his account provides some interesting insights on the tea cultures he and his companions observed in China and Central Asia. The diplomatic party was welcomed to Beijing with tea. Spafarii's account further describes a magnificent imperial ceremony at which tea was served, after an awkward incident involving the Russians kowtowing too quickly and shallowly. Spafarii wrote, "[T]he tea is served in large, yellow wooden cups, and boiled together with butter and milk, in Tartar, not Chinese, fashion. And each and all, when the cups were brought to them, bowed with left hand to the ground, holding the cups in the right; then sat again and drank." This time the Russians consented to drink the tea they were served, and to kowtow, albeit inexpertly, when commanded. Spafarii was miffed that the letters from the tsar had not been read, nor had the emperor inquired after the tsar's health, but his Chinese hosts tried to calm him down, pointing out that a real audience would be granted later, and that everything had been done "merely in pursuance of inviolable custom." On another occasion, the Chinese entertained Spafarii and his companions at the imperial court with tea and sweet fruits served in silver vessels on red lacquer tables. As tea was served, the Russian party was instructed to get down on their knees and bow. Once again Spafarii took the trouble to note, "It was Tartar tea, not Chinese."⁴⁴ These two passages attest to the Russian awareness of the difference between

⁴³ See Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 12-15, and Peter C. Perdue, "Boundaries, Maps, and Movements: Chinese, Russian, and Mongolian Empires in Early Modern Central Eurasia," *The International History Review* 20, no. 2 (June 1998): 263-286.

⁴⁴ Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China*, 2:326, 360-62, 371. Yellow tea ware was reserved for the use of the imperial family.

traditional Chinese tea preparation (without additives) and what they called “Tatar” custom (tea mixed with milk and butter).

After his return to Moscow, in 1678 Spafarii produced a report that included, in addition to the narrative of his sojourn in China, the first account in Russian concerning tea manufacture, classification, and the effects of tea on health. Spafarii did not write the passage on tea himself, but copied it without attribution from an Italian atlas of China (a common scholarly practice in the seventeenth century). The work recounted the Chinese esteem for tea as a stimulant beverage with “strengthening and curative properties”; distinguished between tea grades, pricing, and place of origin; and related that tea alleviated hangovers and indigestion.⁴⁵ The future count Fedor Alekseevich Golovin, who would negotiate the Treaty of Nerchinsk that finalized the border in 1689, was probably the first to read it upon his appointment as ambassador to China in 1686. This is the first account of the health benefits of tea in Russian, but probably exerted no influence on the spread of medicinal tea consumption in Muscovy, since it did not circulate beyond the employees of the government institution for which it was compiled.⁴⁶

In the 1680s, the escalating conflict over Gantimur, rather than the discovery of tea varietals and their medicinal properties, preoccupied the Russians. Gantimur had been baptized into the Orthodox Church and remained at Nerchinsk until his death sometime after 1684. Tsar

⁴⁵ Quoted in Prozorovskii, *Chai po starinnyim russkim svedeniiam*, 4-5. Prozorovskii is here transcribing a manuscript dated 1761 that he found in the Imperial Library (now the Russian National Library) in St. Petersburg. The whole section on tea in Spafarii’s report is a translation, with a few minor alterations, of an article entitled “Characteristics of the Tea Leaf” that first appeared in the Italian Jesuit missionary Martino Martini’s *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Vienna, 1653). Martini’s *Atlas* was reprinted two years later as volume 10 of Joan Blaeu’s *Atlas Maior* (Amsterdam, 1655). Which of these two printings Spafarii used is unknown. When he produced the official report of his mission to China, he translated the tea passage from Latin into Russian and included it without attribution, a common and innocuous practice in the seventeenth century.

⁴⁶ Around forty manuscript copies of Spafarii’s report circulated widely among educated elites in the eighteenth century, but the work was not published until 1910. Barbara Widenor Maggs, *Russia and ‘Le Reve Chinois’: China in Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1984), 116. For a detailed analysis of Spafarii’s literary output, see Gregory Afinogenov, “The Eye of the Tsar: Intelligence-Gathering and Geopolitics in Eighteenth-Century Eurasia” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2015), 47-52.

Aleksei had died in 1676, and after the death of his son, the sickly Fedor III, in 1682, Ivan V and his half-brother Peter I began to rule jointly. Count Golovin's embassy departed from Moscow in early 1686 and opened negotiations with Emperor Kang Hsi's delegation two years later.

Golovin and the emperor concluded the Treaty of Nerchinsk in Beijing in 1689, while Ivan V and Peter I ruled as co-tsars in Moscow. This was the first treaty China had ever signed with a European power, and it outlawed the use of violence in the resolution of future disputes.

The Russians demonstrated their desire to establish regular trade and to end the border skirmishes that had dragged on for more than two decades by their willingness to give up a town called Albazin, which was to be entirely demolished and its inhabitants relocated to Russian territory. The treaty established free trade at last, and Russian merchants became the first Europeans to enjoy extraterritorial rights in China. Trade, however, remained cumbersome and expensive for both parties. Unpredictable Mongol bands still roamed the inhospitable steppes, and transit across Manchu territories remained so logistically difficult, dangerous, and expensive that the Russian government was obliged to participate in the organization and financing of each caravan. The Muscovite treasury's dependence on its Chinese rhubarb monopoly, as well as other commodities such as gold and silver, strongly motivated the government to persevere in its efforts, however costly, to promote trade with China.⁴⁷

Soon after the conclusion of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, in 1694 co-tsars Ivan V and Peter I dispatched an embassy to Beijing under the leadership of the Danish diplomat Evert

⁴⁷ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 18. Rhubarb, sourced in northern China, was prized throughout the early modern world as an effective and gentle laxative. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Russia possessed a virtual monopoly on the rhubarb supply in the West. See Clifford Foust, *Rhubarb the Wondrous Drug* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Erika Monahan, "Regulating Virtue and Vice: Controlling Commodities in Early Modern Siberia," in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 62-63; Anthony Glenn Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva: Chapters from the Lives and Careers of the British in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125.

Ysbrandszoon Ides. Upon meeting a camel caravan of Russian merchants returning from Beijing, the embassy secretary wrote, “they presented us with some Tea, which was very welcome to us, who were grown quite weary of drinking cold Water.”⁴⁸ Regarding tea, the official embassy journal resembles that of Spafarii’s mission in several respects. The secretary wrote familiarly of tea, which the Chinese provided for them as part of their daily food allowances. Ides and the other Russian representatives knew how to kowtow properly, and gratefully accepted many cups of “*Thee* boil’d in Milk” with the understanding that they were being shown hospitality in the Inner Asian, not the Han Chinese, fashion.⁴⁹ By this time, the Russians and their European companions who traveled to the far eastern reaches of Muscovy knew of tea as a drink whose preparation and consumption differed regionally throughout Siberia, Mongolia, and China. Russian merchants now imported small quantities of tea, indicating the presence of a market for it in Muscovy.

The negotiation of a concrete border between the Muscovite and Qing empires in the late seventeenth century dramatically changed the administration of the Eurasian steppe. To paraphrase historian Peter Perdue, this marked the end of centuries of fluidity, fighting and exchange presided over by an independent and nomadic Mongol polity. The Russian and Chinese empires both consistently strove to enforce the terms they had agreed on at Nerchinsk, and the border that treaty established would remain stable for about two centuries.⁵⁰ Indeed, geographer Michel Foucher asserts that the frontiers of the great Eurasian empires in the seventeenth century were the birthplace of the modern bordered state.⁵¹ The mutually

⁴⁸ Everard Isbrand [Evert Ysbrandszoon Ides], *A Journal of the Embassy From Their Majesties John and Peter Alexievitz, Emperors of Muscovy &c. Over Land into China* (London: Printed for D. Brown, 1698), 66.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 88, emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Perdue, “Boundaries, Maps, and Movements,” 263, 271.

⁵¹ Cited in Perdue, “Boundaries, Maps, and Movements,” 263.

advantageous settlement at Nerchinsk ensured the security of both signatories. From the Chinese perspective, the Russians differed sharply from the British, who would subsequently attempt to make the Middle Kingdom into a trading colony.⁵² More importantly for our purposes, the Treaty of Nerchinsk created the economic and geopolitical conditions necessary for the adoption of tea drinking in Russia.

“Drink it to your health”: Tea as Medicine in Muscovy, and Why the Church Wouldn’t Swallow It

In China, tea had been used as a drug centuries before it became a refined social beverage, and seventeenth-century Europeans also understood it as a medicine during the early period of its prevalence among them. But the practice of medicine in general, and the use of medicinal plants in particular, presented problems in some parts of seventeenth-century Europe, and perhaps nowhere more so than in Muscovy. As modern European medicine emerged, doctors tended to distrust older traditions of folk healing, especially when they saw them as antithetical to Christian teaching. Religious authorities in seventeenth-century Russia viewed popular medicine with suspicion because, as historian Russel Zguta has shown, the line between medicine and sorcery was blurry at best.⁵³ Since most internal diseases had no visible pathogenesis, the Russian Orthodox Church believed they had spiritual causes, and the common people generally assumed they had magical causes—which in practice essentially amounted to the same thing.⁵⁴ The church understood God’s supernatural action as the only source of true

⁵² Mark Mancall, “The Kiakhta Trade,” in *The Economic Development of China and Japan: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*, ed. C.D. Cowan (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 48.

⁵³ Russell Zguta, “Witchcraft and Medicine in Pre-Petrine Russia,” *Russian Review* 37, no. 4 (1978), 448.

⁵⁴ See Eve Levin, “Tobacco and Health in Early Modern Russia,” in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 45.

health and healing, and sought to propagate this view among the people. One sermon that survives from the 1680s refers to Jesus as the “true doctor” (*vrach istinnyi*) and the “heavenly physician” (*nebesnyi Vrach*).⁵⁵

The court also had its reasons for being wary of folk medics, and these reflected security concerns. Clean, efficient, and notoriously difficult to trace, poison was a preferred means of political assassination in Muscovy, and could be obtained from healers and herbalists.⁵⁶ Elena Glinskaia, mother and regent to Tsar Ivan IV, had been poisoned in 1538, when her son was only eight years old. Later, Ivan believed his first wife, Anastasia Romanovna, to have been poisoned by hostile boyars in 1560, and his anger over this partly motivated his reign of terror known as the Oprichnina. More recently, during the Time of Troubles, assassination by poison had ended the short reign of Fedor II in 1605. Muscovite authorities may also have been aware that a popular new exotic drink, chocolate, was a favorite vehicle for poison throughout Europe, since its thick texture and strong flavor could mask a variety of additives.⁵⁷ Beginning in the 1550s, the Muscovite government issued repeated prohibitions against the herbal concoctions, amulets, and incantations prescribed by *znakhari*, or folk healers.⁵⁸ The records of malpractice suits in the 1650s, according to historian Clare Griffin’s recent dissertation on the Pharmacy Chancery, “imply that all herbs, without exceptions or distinctions, [were considered] dangerous.”⁵⁹ Other

⁵⁵ Ioann Iakhontov, ed. *Russkii Propovednik semnadtsatogo veka i neskol'ko statei iz ego sochineniia: Statir* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1883), 146, 148.

⁵⁶ Clare Louise Griffin, “The Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century Russia: The Apothecary Chancery” (PhD diss., University College London, 2012), 52, 76. I would like to thank Clare for her incisive feedback on an early draft of this chapter.

⁵⁷ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 55-56.

⁵⁸ Maria V. Unkovskaya, “Learning Foreign Mysteries: Russian Pupils of the Aptekarskii Prikaz,” *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 30 (1997), 9.

⁵⁹ Griffin, “Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge,” 199.

seventeenth-century court cases reveal that among folk healers, herbalists (*zeleiniki*) were the most vulnerable to charges of malpractice.⁶⁰

As the medical arm of the state, the Aptekarskii prikaz, or Pharmacy Chancery, provided care and medicines for the court and the army. Despite ongoing suspicion of foreigners and their ways, the Aptekarskii prikaz hired foreign medical practitioners at great trouble and expense, because of the Muscovite government's evident belief in the superiority of Western medical knowledge.⁶¹ Historians continue to debate the scope of the Pharmacy Chancery's activities. Founded sometime in the 1560s or 1570s, its records survive only from the 1620s, and become sketchy between about 1680 and its replacement by the Meditsinskii prikaz (Medical Chancery) in 1714. Eve Levin and Maria Unkovskaya believe it to have been strictly a court institution, since the majority of its patients were courtiers. M. B. Mirskii and M. K. Sokolovskii argue that the Aptekarskii prikaz served some Muscovites outside the court and the army.⁶² The ambiguity surrounding the extent of the Aptekarskii prikaz's activities complicates attempts to determine the availability and distribution of tea as a medicine in Muscovy.

Whatever the scope of its influence, the Aptekarskii prikaz exemplifies Muscovy's nuanced attitude toward foreign doctors and their treatments. Griffin believes it likely that the Aptekarskii prikaz "either entirely forbade, or strictly regulated, the mention of religious matters in their reports," probably because the authorities did not want the Protestant English, Dutch, and German doctors in their employ to expose Russians to non-Orthodox religious ideas.⁶³ The

⁶⁰ Zguta, "Witchcraft and Medicine," 442.

⁶¹ Eve Levin, "The Administration of Western Medicine in Seventeenth-Century Russia," in *Modernizing Muscovy: Reform and social change in seventeenth-century Russia*, ed. Jarmo Kotilaine and Marshall Poe (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 365.

⁶² Griffin, "Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge," 18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 138.

Muscovite government hired these foreign doctors to diagnose and treat illnesses, and to train Russians to do the same, but explicitly forbade them from discussing natural philosophy or medical science with their patients.⁶⁴ Thus while the seventeenth-century Muscovite court undoubtedly believed in the value and efficacy of Western medicine, the Pharmacy Chancery did not always fully trust its own staff. The dubious status of herbs as a category, together with their association with witchcraft, further complicated the chancery's already delicate position. On occasion, prikaz officials testified at witchcraft trials.⁶⁵ Part of the prikaz's task, then, was to propagate a nuanced perspective: some herbs were medicinally beneficial, others were harmful or poisonous, but all were vulnerable to abuse. As Griffin's dissertation convincingly demonstrates, the Aptekarskii prikaz played an important role in the regulation and dissemination of medical information and of Western knowledge in general.

Sources concerning the medicinal use of tea in seventeenth-century Muscovy are scarce, but those that do survive reveal a complex situation in which Western medical knowledge, Orthodox cultural norms, and the allure of Asian trade were all in play. Following the Baikov diplomatic mission to China in the late 1650s, Muscovites could buy tea at the markets and, like their fellow Europeans, considered it a drug. The Englishman Samuel Collins served Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich as his personal physician from 1659 to 1666, and may have been partially responsible for the medicinal use of tea in Muscovy. As the first personal physician to the tsar, a position he shared with Andreas Engelhardt, part of Collins' job was to provide the court with information about medical conditions and remedies. Like most foreign doctors in Muscovy, Collins did not speak Russian, but composed short medical treatises in Latin that were then

⁶⁴ Unkovskaya, "Learning Foreign Mysteries," 8-9.

⁶⁵ Griffin, "Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge," 200.

translated into Russian and kept in the prikaz's small library. The director of the prikaz, other high officials, and occasionally the tsar himself chose the topics of such reports, with the goal of building up a store of useable medical knowledge.⁶⁶ In one such essay dated June 1664, Collins wrote, "The brew known as *Tay*, or *chai*, or *Thé*, is used by the English and likewise the Chinese and the Hindus as a remedy for *Flatus Hypochondriaci* [gas] as well as the diseases of the head and stomach that cause them."⁶⁷ We can confidently state that a high-ranking Russian official desirous of more information about tea and coffee commissioned this report. Among the physicians of the Pharmacy Chancery, Collins was a particularly prolific author of such treatises; in composing them, he drew on contemporary medical discussions, and his writings resemble other such European texts of the period. As Griffin has argued concerning Collins's writings on coffee, part of his goal was to persuade the reader that tea was not a harmful substance.⁶⁸ That Collins evidently felt he needed to convince Muscovites that tea was harmless implies the presence of negative or suspicious attitudes toward it in Moscow.

Collins apparently considered the use of tea in Muscovy significant enough to merit inclusion in his well-known travel account *The present state of Russia*, published posthumously for a curious English public in 1671. He wrote, "The Chay is that which we call *Teah* or *Tey*, and...the Merchants say they use it (as we do in *England*) with Sugar, and esteem it a rare Remedy in diseases of the Lungs, *Flatus Hypochondriaci*, and distempers of the Stomach; 'tis brought over in papers about one pound weight, written on with *Chinese* Characters."⁶⁹ Thanks

⁶⁶ Ibid., 38, 142.

⁶⁷ Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents (RGADA), f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 734, l. 4.

⁶⁸ In 1665, Collins produced similar reports on valerian and on the negative effects of obesity and strategies for mitigating them. Tsar Aleksei was obese, and Collins was fighting a losing battle to regulate his diet. Griffin, "Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge," 122-24.

⁶⁹ Samuel Collins, *The present state of Russia: In a letter to a friend at London* (London: J. Winter for D. Newman, 1671), 74-75.

to Collins, we know that the Russian court used tea medicinally, and the merchants who imported it also consumed it. Significantly, Collins mentions neither tea prepared with milk and butter, which was normative in Siberia, Mongolia, and northern China, nor tea steeped only in water according to Han Chinese tradition. Collins drew on both personal experience and conversations with well-traveled merchants to claim that Muscovites' medicinal use of tea was comparable to that of England. Already in the mid-seventeenth century, the few Russians who drank tea did so like other Europeans, with sugar.

Though tea was certainly known and valued as a medicine in Muscovy, its relative scarcity and high price limited its use to the court and wealthy merchants. On December 10, 1664, the same year he penned his essay on tea and coffee, Collins prescribed a mixture of tea and chamomile flowers for Prince Boris Aleksandrovich Reianin. Unfortunately, the prescription does not include the nature of Prince Reianin's complaint.⁷⁰ This is the only prescription for tea found in a search of approximately 1,100 prescriptions issued by Collins, Engelhardt, and other physicians of the Aptekarskii prikaz between 1663 and 1701, indicating that tea was extremely rarely prescribed.⁷¹

The Pharmacy Chancery handled the acquisition, processing, and distribution of licit medicines and medical supplies, most of which were of foreign origin and often hailed from London or Amsterdam.⁷² Medicinal plants not gathered in Muscovy or grown in the prikaz's small-scale gardens were generally purchased by medics or merchants sent abroad with shopping lists compiled by the chancery. No such lists examined in its records include tea, suggesting that

⁷⁰ RGADA, f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 737, ll. 67-68.

⁷¹ The prescriptions examined date from the years 1663-66, 1674, 1685, 1689, 1691, and 1699-1701. A more systematic analysis was rendered impossible by time limitations, and by the fact that approximately fifty percent of the prescription records ordered were deemed too fragile for examination by the authorities at RGADA.

⁷² Griffin, "Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge," 34.

the only tea to reach Muscovy in the seventeenth century came overland from Asia rather than through European channels.⁷³ The Muscovite government forbade the importation of foreign medicines without the sanction of the Aptekarskii prikaz. If Muscovy's early ambassadors were aware of this rule, and if they thought of tea as a medicine, then this could partially explain Starkov's objections to the gift of tea and Perfil'ev's selling tea in exchange for precious stones.⁷⁴ Though Collins's evidence suggests that the Aptekarskii prikaz may have maintained a stock of Chinese tea during his tenure as court physician, I found no other record of tea in the documents of the Aptekarskii prikaz or in those of the *Novaia Apteka* (New Pharmacy), established in 1672 to sell medicines to the public.⁷⁵ Other foreign-sourced medicines, including cinnamon, chicory, melissa, calendula, chamomile, and rhubarb, as well as sugar, appear much more frequently in the sources, and were widely used.⁷⁶

The above attests to a steady demand for foreign medicines at the seventeenth-century Russian court. Religious scruples did not prevent the widespread use of herbs, medicines, and the services of folk healers, and economics often overrode other considerations when it came to supply. Despite religious taboos surrounding foreign foods and customs, all strata of Muscovite society seem to have employed folk remedies.⁷⁷ Rhubarb root, grown in the highlands of

⁷³ I examined a total of seven such lists made between 1662 and 1713. Several more were unavailable for perusal because of extensive decay; few others survive. RGADA f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 572, 1318, 1396, 1445, 1513, 1616, and 1631.

⁷⁴ Griffin, "Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge," 34.

⁷⁵ Again, some of the Aptekarskii prikaz's records concerning its expenses and stocks of medicines are currently unavailable to researchers due to their fragile physical condition. The lists of medicines purchased and dispensed by the Aptekarskii prikaz and the *Novaia Apteka* that I examined were RGADA f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 580, 703, 706, 742, 744, 797, 826, 1068, 1338, 1339, 1378, 1383, 1408, 1409, 1410, 1420, 1612, 1613, 1614, and 1615.

⁷⁶ For lists of medicines procured for the Aptekarskii prikaz that include sugar, see, for example, RGADA f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 706 (1663-); op. 2, ed. khr. 1338 and 1338, both from 1682; and op. 2, ed. khr. 1410 (1691-92). Collins was fond of prescribing sugar as a remedy: he prescribed it for the tsar and for his son Aleksei Alekseevich in 1665 (f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 742, 744), and for Tsaritsa Mariia Il'inichna on multiple occasions in 1666 (f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 797, ll. 1a, 5, 6).

⁷⁷ Levin, "Tobacco and Health," in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 46.

northern China, was highly valued as a medicine throughout the early modern world, and was commonly used as a gentle laxative. While Muscovite authorities viewed tea, coffee, tobacco, and indeed all medicinal substances with suspicion, they seemed to have considered rhubarb benign, probably for economic reasons. Sales of imported tea, coffee, and tobacco in the domestic market would have drained precious specie, whereas rhubarb could be exported abroad for profit, and this economic consideration seems to have outweighed any moral or religious doubts concerning it.⁷⁸ Unicorn horn provides another instructive example. Early modern Europeans prized it for its efficacy as a remedy for various types of poisons, and Griffin has shown that there was a great demand, even an “obsession,” for unicorn horn in seventeenth-century Muscovy that was driven not by the advice of Western doctors but by the court itself.⁷⁹ Therefore, the existence of religiously informed prejudices against foreign foods and medicines in Russian culture did not reduce the court’s thirst for expensive foreign substances.

Of course, only a tiny minority of Muscovites had access to tea, and those few drank it privately for therapeutic, not social, purposes. The Novaia Apteka ostensibly made medicines available to the public, but since it existed partly to supply revenue for its financially insolvent parent chancery, its supplies were marked up by 300 percent or more, making them inaccessible to all but a wealthy elite. The store run by the Novaia Apteka was the only apothecary shop in Moscow before 1700. Moreover, the Pharmacy Chancery’s influence did not reach far outside Moscow. Its branch offices operated in Kiev and Novgorod, and the chancery maintained a warehouse at Rzhev; little documentation exists concerning these regional centers, but their

⁷⁸ Monahan, “Regulating Virtue and Vice,” in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 64.

⁷⁹ Most of the “unicorn horns” circulating in early modern Europe were narwhal tusks. Griffin, “Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge,” 132, 141.

proximity to border areas and trade routes suggest that they were intended to serve and supply the army.⁸⁰ At court, visiting foreign dignitaries enjoyed a wide variety of imported drinks and delicacies designed to show off the tsar's wealth and taste, but no record survives of tea being offered in such a setting. Foreign diplomats and other travelers to Muscovy left detailed descriptions the food and drink served by their hosts, which they generally disliked, but these do not mention tea.⁸¹

Nevertheless, seventeenth-century Muscovites may have consumed more tea than the available sources suggest. As Griffin has shown, the abundant petitions for medical treatment that survive among the Pharmacy Chancery's documents come from a cross-section of social strata, ranging from low-level servitors to courtiers and foreign dignitaries—suggesting many Muscovites believed that wounds and illnesses suffered during state service merited treatment through the Aptekarskii prikaz.⁸² We also know that physicians in state employ could treat patients privately. They may have prescribed more tea than the Aptekarskii prikaz's records indicate, since private cases were only documented if a problem arose that required resolution by the prikaz.⁸³ Moreover, most people resorted to self-diagnosis and self-care out of necessity, in an environment where dangerous illnesses were widespread and access to professional medical

⁸⁰ Ibid., 19-20, 175, 378.

⁸¹ I examined all seventeenth-century foreign accounts of Muscovy available in Russian, French, or English that, because of their dating, could reasonably be expected to refer to tea. These include the diary of Koenraad van Klenk, head of the 1663 Dutch embassy to Moscow; the diary of the Scot Patrick Gordon, who served in the Russian army under Tsars Aleksei and Peter I (a habitual tea drinker, but who never mentioned doing so in Russia); Sir Thomas Smith's *Voyage and Entertainment in Russia*; the account of Adam Olearius; the journal of J.G. Sparwenfeld, Swedish ambassador to Russia in the 1680s; the extensive travelogue of the Ottoman Turk Evliya Çelebi; the *Travels* of the Syrian clergyman Paul of Aleppo; and the account of the Dutch traveler Jan Janszoon Struys. There are no tea references in Grigorii Kotoshikhin's *O Rossii v tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhailovicha*; nor are any to be found in Petr Tolstoi's lengthy and detailed travel diary. For a list of such sources I relied upon Marshall Poe's *Foreign Descriptions of Muscovy: An Analytic Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1995).

⁸² Griffin, "Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge," 31.

⁸³ Levin, "Administration of Western Medicine," in *Modernizing Muscovy*, ed. Kotilaine and Poe, 374.

advice limited and costly. Though Chinese and Mongolian rulers had foisted tea upon unwilling Russian emissaries early in the seventeenth century, Moscow-based merchants continued to sell it legally in the capital, and this indicates the existence of demand, however small, for this healing Chinese beverage.

Thus we may speculate that an affluent few bought tea at the markets and used it at home, as a letter composed in 1688 by the merchant Vasilii Grudtsyn suggests. Grudtsyn sent a one-pound packet of Chinese tea to Archbishop Afanasii of Kholmogory, instructing him in the letter “to have it boiled in water, and drink it with sugar to your health” (*prikazat' varit' ee v vode kipiachei i pit' s sakharom vo zdравe*).⁸⁴ This letter agrees with Collins’s testimony in suggesting that Russians did not add dairy products to their tea. Archbishop Afanasii dabbled in the natural sciences, astronomy, and medicine. A few years after Grudtsyn’s letter, he collaborated with Daniel Gurchin to compile the *Reestr iz dokhturskikh nauk* (1696), a rearrangement of an earlier *Pharmacopoeia*.⁸⁵ Archbishop Afanasii presumably perceived no contradiction between his role as a high-ranking church official and his interest in science. Though it was certainly true that the seventeenth-century Orthodox Church maintained a general distrust of foreign medicines and medical practices, the case of Archbishop Afanasii evinces a spectrum of opinion within the church.

The reception of tea as a medicine in seventeenth-century Russia, then, was mixed, and its distribution limited. Church authorities, backed by long tradition, had every reason to fear tea: as a medicine it smacked of sorcery, and as a foreign custom it was at best *skorom* (a food

⁸⁴ RGADA, f. 197, portfel' 7, ed. khr. 30, l. 161.

⁸⁵ Griffin, “Production and Consumption of Medical Knowledge,” 161. Nor are there any tea references the *Reestr iz dokhturskikh nauk*. See Tamara Vasil'evna Panich, *Literaturnoe tvorchestvo Afanasiia Kholmogorskogo: “Estestvennonauchnye” sochineniia* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1996).

forbidden during religious fasts), and at worst sinful. Simultaneously, Collins and other Western doctors working closely with chancery officials and the tsar himself explicitly promoted the use of tea and coffee. Paradoxically, the same aversion to sorcery and magical healing that fired the church's suspicion of medicine prompted Muscovite authorities to actively cultivate another thing the religious establishment discouraged: foreign knowledge and practices, in the form of the Western doctors invited to treat the royal family and to train young Russians. By the end of the century, however, as Grudtsyn's letter suggests, not all Russian churchmen opposed tea in principle. Certainly the developing Russian medical establishment, valuing the knowledge and trustworthiness of Western practitioners above their homegrown counterparts, accepted tea as a therapeutic beverage, regardless of the church's opinion on the matter. Whereas economic considerations ultimately trumped Russian cultural reservations about tobacco, thirst for Western medical knowledge seems to have triumphed in the case of tea.⁸⁶ Historian Eve Levin's argument about tobacco in seventeenth-century Muscovy also applies to tea: "[T]he medical context of tobacco illustrates the complexity of Russia's reception of Western culture. Between implacable hostility and wholesale imitation lay a middle ground of selective engagement."⁸⁷ Western medicine, with tea in its therapeutic arsenal, became the privileged avenue of healthcare for Muscovite elites.

Tea as a Commodity in Seventeenth-Century Muscovy

In addition to the eastern overland routes, foreign goods flowed into seventeenth-century Muscovy from a limited number of other points of entry. Most European products came in

⁸⁶ Monahan, "Regulating Virtue and Vice," in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 76.

⁸⁷ Levin, "Tobacco and Health," in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 56.

through the busy northern port of Arkhangel'sk, and others through Novgorod and Pskov; together the Dutch, English, and the Hanseatic League account for most of Muscovy's foreign trade in the seventeenth century. A few eastern items made their way to Muscovy from the southern port of Astrakhan'. Unfortunately, the most basic type of source material concerning Russian trade in the seventeenth century, customs records, are almost nonexistent except for the decade of the 1670s, and even these provide no geographically or temporally continuous data. No record survives of tea entering seventeenth-century Muscovy by any other conduit than the eastern trade routes. Some tea may have reached Russia through Astrakhan' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but no documentary evidence for this has surfaced. Europeans supplied small quantities of tea to Russia across its western borders in the eighteenth century, and it is possible, even probable, that negligible amounts of tea reached seventeenth-century Muscovy in Dutch and English bottoms through Arkhangel'sk. But this remains speculative since not a single seventeenth-century customs record survives from that port.⁸⁸

As Collins noted, Russian merchants imported tea from Siberia in small quantities no later than the 1660s, where it found a market in Moscow.⁸⁹ Russian trading caravans had been traveling to Beijing periodically since the 1650s, financed either by regional officials acting in the name of the state treasury or by private merchants. Military detachments accompanied the

⁸⁸ Kotilaine, *Russia's Foreign Trade and Economic Expansion*, 11, 64. Persia exerted no documented influence on the Russian tea trade or on Russian tea culture. Muscovy had been conducting direct trade with Persia since the mid-sixteenth century, and by the mid-seventeenth, caravans were passing between Persia and Moscow or Astrakhan as frequently as once a year. Unfortunately, few sources concerning this trade survive. It seems unlikely, however, that much if any of the Russians' knowledge of tea was filtered through Persia, since the tea trade between Persia and China did not reach significant levels until the mid-eighteenth century. To my knowledge, no record exists of tea coming into Muscovy from anywhere other than Siberia or China before 1690. Paul Bushkovitch, *The Merchants of Moscow, 1580-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 92-94; Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950), 172-73; Joseph T. Fuhrmann, *The Origins of Capitalism in Russia: Industry and Progress in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 34-35.

⁸⁹ See Collins, *Present State of Russia*, 74-75, and Prozorovskii, *Chai po starinnyim Russkim svedeniim*, 4.

merchants to protect them against raids by nomadic Mongols. The first state-owned trading caravan, led by a certain Krasikov, reached Beijing in 1670, bearing sables, otter pelts, metal objects, and Russian leather, among other goods.⁹⁰ A second followed in 1674, and its Russian members remained in Beijing for seven weeks to conduct business.⁹¹ Under the new conditions created by the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk, Russian caravans traveled at regular intervals to China, returning an average of three years later having exchanged furs and woolen cloth for gold, silver, precious stones, rhubarb, silk, and negligible amounts of tea.⁹² As noted above, the Chinese considered trade with Russia a peripheral issue compared with the security of the borderlands, especially the ancient Manchu heartland of the Amur River basin. Though the Russian treasury, dependent on the lucrative fur trade, had the greater financial stake in the exchange, it would prove more profitable for the Chinese and remain that way down to the nineteenth century.⁹³

Aside from precious stones few commodities, domestic or foreign, cost more than tea in seventeenth-century Muscovy. Tea leaves were sold by the pound and by the *pud* (equivalent to thirty-six pounds). Between 1672 and 1708, a pound of tea cost between twenty-eight and fifty-six kopeks, with a median price of thirty-three kopeks, making it by far the most expensive beverage on a list of sixty-eight processed and/or imported foods compiled in historian Richard Hellie's authoritative study of commodities and material culture in seventeenth-century Muscovy. The average price of tea, at about thirty kopeks per pound—a week's pay, as calculated by Hellie—placed it utterly beyond the means of most Muscovites. Coffee was a close

⁹⁰ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 12.

⁹¹ Sergei Vladimirovich Bakhrushin, *Nauchnye Trudy*, vol. 3, I, *Izbrannye raboty po istorii Sibiri XVI-XVII vv.* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955), 228. Smith and Christian, citing Bakhrushin, assert that the 1674 caravan was the first, although Sladkovskii mentions one reaching Beijing in 1670 (Smith and Christian, 230).

⁹² Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 230.

⁹³ Anne Lincoln Fitzpatrick, *The Great Russian Fair: Nizhnii Novgorod, 1840-1890* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 52.

second, costing on average twenty-eight kopeks per pound, but unfortunately Hellie found no record of coffee before 1700.⁹⁴ These figures do not account for any tea received as a gift from Chinese or Mongol rulers or, more significantly, for tea dispensed by the Aptekarskii prikaz. Throughout seventeenth-century Europe, apothecaries and doctors exercised control over much of the available tea and coffee. If the same was true in Muscovy, for which data on imports are almost entirely lacking, then Hellie's evidence only accounts for a minority of the total tea available.⁹⁵

Bearing out Hellie's calculation, the Swedish diplomat Johan P. Kilburger bought one pound of tea in Moscow for thirty kopeks in 1674. By this time, a range of types and grades of tea were available for purchase at Moscow markets. Kilburger wrote that Russians called tea "chai" and obtained it from China. Russians believed it a remedy against "fits brought on by bad air" and used it "especially after drinking." Kilburger added some information about Indian and Japanese tea drinking practices, concluding, "And just as much as this drink is common in the Eastern countries, among us Europeans one also finds many lovers of it."⁹⁶ Interestingly, Kilburger did not mention the Inner Asian practice of boiling it with milk and butter, a tradition that would have been familiar to Russian merchants. Kilburger also provides us with one of the very few records of the price of tea in Muscovy. He may have derived most or all of his information about tea in Muscovy from Johan Neuhoff, who had accompanied a Dutch embassy to China in 1655.⁹⁷ Citing Neuhoff's 1669 work *Die Gesandtschaft die Ost-Indischen Compagnej*, Kilburger stated that tea could cost anywhere from five Dutch shillings to one

⁹⁴ Hellie, *Economy and Material Culture of Russia*, 85-87.

⁹⁵ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 95.

⁹⁶ B.G. Kurts, ed, *Sochinenie Kil'burgera o russkikh trgovle v tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhailovicha* (Kiev: Tipografii I.I. Chokolova, 1915), 113.

⁹⁷ Maggs, *Russia and 'Le Reve Chinois'*, 56-57.

hundred guilders, or, in Russian currency, anywhere from thirty kopeks to twenty rubles.⁹⁸ The lower price of thirty kopeks corresponds roughly to Hellie's data, whereas, if Neuhoff's prices are reliable, the most expensive tea in Muscovy, at twenty rubles the pound, was costly indeed.

How was tea brewed and drunk in seventeenth-century Muscovy? The only source that directly addresses this question is the above-mentioned letter by the merchant Vasilii Grudtsyn, which gives instructions for it to be boiled in water and consumed with sugar; the writings of Collins and Killburger strongly suggest the same, that seventeenth-century Russians typically drank tea with sugar. Regardless of how they took their tea, Muscovites boiled water in cauldrons. Cheaper cauldrons were made from copper, more expensive ones from iron, and these seem to have varied widely in size and price.⁹⁹ Though scholars know little about the early history of the great Russian stove, they existed in wealthier homes by the beginning of the seventeenth century. To boil liquid using such a stove, Muscovites would place a cauldron on a skillet and set the skillet directly on the hot coals inside the stove. In summer, they may have hung cauldrons over open fires outdoors.¹⁰⁰

How those few tea-drinking Muscovites brewed their tea is more mysterious. No record of teapots, metal or ceramic, survives that could testify to their presence in seventeenth-century Muscovy, nor does the word *chainik* (teapot) appear in Russian sources until the eighteenth century. Historian and numismatist D. I. Prozorovskii's 1866 study of tea in seventeenth-century Muscovy noted the lack of teapots with horror, stating that without them the proper preparation of tea would have been "unthinkable" (*nemyslimo*).¹⁰¹ Muscovites knew nothing of porcelain

⁹⁸ Cited in Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 230.

⁹⁹ Hellie, *Economy and Material Culture*, 219.

¹⁰⁰ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 16-22.

¹⁰¹ Prozorovskii, *Chai po Starinnyim Russkim Svedeniiam*, 4.

until later in the seventeenth century, and then only in the form of beads and the occasional vase that survived the bumpy overland journey from China.¹⁰² Koenraad van Klenck, head of the 1663 Dutch embassy to Moscow, reported having received a decorated porcelain vase from “some Russian claiming to have brought it from ‘Kitai.’”¹⁰³ Kilburger also mentioned Chinese porcelain being imported to Muscovy.¹⁰⁴ Since Chinese porcelain was not altogether absent in seventeenth-century Muscovy, it is possible that a few Chinese porcelain or clay teapots were present, even though none are documented.

Lacking teapots, porcelain or otherwise, Muscovites had no alternative but to boil tea right in the cauldron. Though early Russian tea preparation resembled what they called the “Tatar method” in this respect, significantly, there is no evidence that Russians added dairy products to their tea in this early period. Nor did they use grains to transform tea into a food, as was customary among the Inner Asian peoples through whom much of their early knowledge of tea was filtered. The standard Chinese procedure for preparing tea, it will be remembered, had developed in the Ming period and involved steeping the leaves in freshly boiled spring water in a teapot. Wealthy Ming tea drinkers would sometimes use filigreed silver discs to hold down the leaves inside their tea bowls.¹⁰⁵ The sources show that seventeenth-century Russians did not follow the example of the Han Chinese, nor of their Siberian and Mongolian neighbors to the north and west, but drank tea like the English and the Dutch, with sugar. Seventeenth-century

¹⁰² Hellie, *Economy and Material Culture*, 194.

¹⁰³ Klenk correctly guessed that this “Kitai” was China, and dutifully recorded the Russian’s account of that far-off place, which unfortunately did not mention tea. Koenraad van Klenck, *Posol'stvo Kunraada fan Klenka k tsariam Alekseiu Mikhailovichu i Fedoru Alekseevichu*, ed. Aleksandr Cherkov (Riazan: Aleksandria, 2008), 337. On porcelain being imported to seventeenth-century Muscovy, see also Korsak, *Istoriko-Statisticheskoe Obozrenie*, 21. Korsak mentions porcelain and dishware but not tea ware.

¹⁰⁴ Kurts, *Sochineniia Kil'burgera*, 152-53.

¹⁰⁵ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 34.

Muscovites did not possess any vessels specifically designed to boil water or brew tea, aside from cauldrons and possibly a handful of teapots. The modern samovar did not appear until the eighteenth century, and the term *samovar*, a word of Russian origin, is not recorded until the 1770s.¹⁰⁶

A variety of cups, bowls, and shallow dishes suitable for drinking tea existed in seventeenth-century Muscovy. The cheapest and most abundant of these were made of wood; copper cups were common, and drinking vessels made from stone, silver, and gold were also available. Though wooden vessels were considerably less prestigious, they may have been better for drinking tea, since a metal cup containing tea would have been much hotter to the touch. Vasilii Vasil'evich Golitsyn (1643-1714) was one of the wealthiest men in late Muscovy. A powerful statesman and adviser to Sofia, who ruled as regent during the minority of her half-brother Peter I, Golitsyn left behind a detailed list of his possessions. He owned a great variety of silver, gold, and porcelain cups, along with saucers, pitchers, and flatware. He could not have been unaware of the existence of tea and coffee, and probably possessed some of their accompanying accessories, though the inventory does not specify whether any of his vessels were intended for tea or coffee.¹⁰⁷

Initial Dutch and English Reactions to Tea in the Seventeenth Century

Quite independently of each other, the Russians and the Dutch stumbled upon tea while each was attempting to establish trade with imperial China, and their first significant interactions with the drug occurred within the same fifty-year period. But the subsequent history of tea in

¹⁰⁶ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 240. The first Russian-made silver teapots appeared in the 1730s. Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Hellie, *Economy and Material Culture of Russia*, 209-210, 600.

these two states could hardly differ more. Their divergent reactions to tea can be explained by different cultural and economic conditions at home. Unlike the Russians with their sbiten' and medovukha, neither the Dutch nor the British possessed a long tradition of hot plant-infused beverages; they drank their everyday staple, beer, at room temperature, and served only medicinal drinks hot.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps for this reason, indifference characterized their attitude toward tea at first, but once the new drink gained a foothold in court and aristocratic circles, a market for tea developed much more rapidly in Great Britain and Holland than in Russia, and spread rapidly to the emergent middle classes. Moreover, while tea evidently enjoyed the support of Russia's embryonic medical establishment in the seventeenth century, and was in fact employed as a medicinal drink, medical opinion did not carry the same cultural weight as it did in Britain and the Netherlands. A Western doctor's approval might recommend tea to an educated Muscovite, and then again it might have the opposite effect. The reception of tea was mixed throughout Europe, but people living in the maritime capitalist countries lacked the deep-seated cultural scruples that made many Muscovites wary of foreign comestibles. Unlike in Muscovy, social, economic, and cultural conditions in Britain and the Netherlands were ripe for the adoption of tea as a healthy, fashionable drink in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Seventeenth-century explorer-entrepreneurs were not the first Europeans to encounter tea. Marco Polo, whose remarkable journey in the late thirteenth century yielded the first detailed European account of China, mentioned tea once in passing, noting in 1285 that arbitrary taxes were imposed upon it. A Venetian collection of voyages and travels dated 1559 contains the

¹⁰⁸ Heiss and Heiss, *Story of Tea*, 335. The English did have posset, a medicinal brew made by boiling milk and adding wine or ale, which curdled it. It was sometimes spiced, and considered a flu remedy. Like sbiten' in Russia, it seems to have been eclipsed by tea in the nineteenth century.

earliest reference to tea in a European printed book.¹⁰⁹ The Portuguese, who were among the first Europeans to reach China in 1517, could hardly have failed to encounter tea in these early travels. Father Gasper Da Cruz, the first Catholic missionary in China, reported in his 1560 account that the Chinese were enamored of “a drink called *ch’a*, which is somewhat bitter, red, and medicinall.”¹¹⁰ Subsequent French Roman Catholic missionaries may have brought the first tea to Paris as early as 1635.¹¹¹ Tea enjoyed a brief blaze of popularity among French elites around 1650, but by the end of the seventeenth century the French had developed, and would maintain, a strong preference for coffee and chocolate. In any event, tea in late-seventeenth-century France was expensive, selling for between seventy and 200 francs per pound.¹¹²

The Dutch first introduced tea to Europe on a large scale. A letter composed by the seventeen directors of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in January 1637 suggests that tea had been known in the Netherlands for at least a few years prior to this date: “As the tea begins to come into use with some people, we expect some jars of Chinese as well as Japanese tea with all ships.” After the Dutch won their independence from Spain in 1648, they began to compete with their former overlords in the lucrative sea routes. A bill of lading from the State Archives in The Hague, dated 1650-51, records the importation of Japanese tea into Amsterdam under the name *Thia*.¹¹³ Dutch consumption patterns differed from those in other Western European states. Their strategy of importing exotic luxuries such as cacao beans, porcelain, and tea in large quantities enabled them to make these coveted commodities available at prices the emerging

¹⁰⁹ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 60-61.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 63.

¹¹¹ G. Schlegel, “First Introduction of Tea into Holland,” *T’oung Pao* 1, no. 5 (second series, 1900), 472.

¹¹² Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 66-67.

¹¹³ Schlegel, “First Introduction of Tea,” 468-69. The Dutch first began trading tea not in China itself, but with Chinese junks they encountered in Java and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

middle classes could afford. Tea had become a fashionable luxury in The Hague by 1640, and the Dutch introduced it into Germany around 1650, where it began to appear on apothecaries' price lists by 1657.¹¹⁴ The Dutch tea trade essentially developed *ex nihilo* in the space of less than half a century, and tea found a ready market among the middle classes by the late seventeenth century. Imports increased so rapidly in the 1660s that the price of tea dropped from one hundred guilders a pound to ten.¹¹⁵ By contrast, the lack of a middle class limited the market for luxury goods in Muscovy to a tiny court and merchant elite, and the needs of the state treasury largely dictated the scale and content of trading caravans. Moreover, the overland character of Muscovy's trade with its Eastern neighbors made the undertaking prohibitively expensive for most private merchants. The Dutch, with their preexistent shipbuilding industry and maritime infrastructure, could import tea much more cheaply than the Russians ever could by land.

The Dutch tea trade attained a fairly large scale by 1667. On January 25 of that year, the Governor General of the VOC wrote: "As last year a considerable quantity of tea has been enforced upon our people in Hoccien, much against their wishes, and as we do not know what to do with this great quantity in our country [India], we have resolved to send a goodly part of it to the Fatherland."¹¹⁶ Thus the VOC brought tea to Europe partly because supply outpaced demand, and this caused tea prices in European markets to fall earlier and more rapidly than economic circumstances in Russia would permit. Economic considerations aside, some consumers in the Netherlands also objected to tea on gustatory grounds: when Dutch physicians attempted to introduce the new drink in the southern town of Dordrecht around 1670, the locals did not enjoy

¹¹⁴ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 57, 66.

¹¹⁵ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 171.

¹¹⁶ Schlegel, "First Introduction of Tea," 469.

the flavor and called it “hay water.”¹¹⁷ It was not until the 1680s that demand for tea in the Netherlands grew large enough for the VOC to take an interest in monopolizing it. Even then, it seems, the VOC began dealing in tea at least partly due to the sheer quantity it found at its disposal.¹¹⁸

Tea first entered England via the Dutch.¹¹⁹ The English East India Company (EIC) left no record of any tea sales before 1644.¹²⁰ Tea appears in English sources from about 1615, and by 1637, well-to-do Londoners could purchase it for the exorbitant price of between six and ten pounds per pound.¹²¹ Tea consumption grew quickly enough to motivate Parliament to impose a tax on it in 1660; by the end of that decade, London coffeehouses commonly also sold tea.¹²² English newspapers and advertisements celebrated tea’s virtues as early as the 1650s and 1660s, and urban entrepreneurs and doctors actively promoted it. Thomas Garraway, proprietor of the Sultaness Head coffeehouse, famously distributed a detailed broadsheet on tea in 1658 that included information about the tea plant’s properties, tea harvesting and manufacture, and the

¹¹⁷ Steven D. Owyong, “No Harm in Tea,” *Tsiosophy* (October 2011), <http://www.tsiosophy.com/2011/10/no-harm-in-tea/>. Owyung is an academically trained museum curator, Asian art specialist, and editor of the online journal *Tsiosophy*.

¹¹⁸ “The tea, which is now imported in so large quantities by private persons, and is presented to some people as also to gentlemen of merit and honor, and such in so large quantities of boxes, bottles and canisters, that it passes all measure, we have resolved that henceforth it will be considered as an article of commerce, specially reserved to the Company alone [...]” The Dutch firm resolved to impose fines on any smuggled tea discovered, and to import 20,000 pounds a year, provided it was good, fresh tea that was properly packed (“tea deteriorated by age and bad tea are naught worth any money”). Schlegel, “First Introduction of Tea,” 470.

¹¹⁹ John Crawford, “On the History and Migration of Cultivated Plants Producing Coffee, Tea, Cocoa, Etc.,” *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* no. 7 (1869), 200.

¹²⁰ The earliest record of a tea transaction by the EIC dates from 1644, and consisted of a token two pounds gifted to Charles II so that he would not feel “wholly neglected by the Company.” Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 67.

¹²¹ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 67; Crawford, “On the History and Migration of Cultivated Plants,” 202.

¹²² Schlegel, “First Introduction of Tea,” 471; Crawford, “On the History and Migration of Cultivated Plants,” 202.

health benefits of tea.¹²³ As in the Netherlands, the ascendant middle classes in Britain possessed both publicly available knowledge about tea and the disposable income with which to purchase it. The vast majority of Muscovites lacked both.

Unlike Russians, Europeans did not have any compelling religious reasons for being suspicious of tea. A few conservative Christian voices, mostly more ascetically minded Protestants, would emerge to oppose tea in the eighteenth century, in the context of Europe-wide debates about the morality of luxury goods. In the seventeenth century, however, most Western Christians did not find the new caffeinated drinks problematic, valuing them for their usefulness during fasts—just as Chinese and Japanese Buddhist monks prized tea for its ability to keep them awake during long hours of nocturnal meditation.¹²⁴ As early as 1600, a group of conservative Italian clerics petitioned Pope Clement VIII to ban coffee, insisting that it could not possibly be compatible with the Christian life, but without success.¹²⁵ Aside from Catholics keeping Lent in a stricter than normal fashion, unlike in Muscovy regularly prescribed religious fasts did not prevent European Catholics and Protestants from consuming tea with dairy products and other additives.

¹²³ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 155; Steven D. Owyong, “The Sultanness Head: Thomas Garway and the Marketing of Tea in Seventeenth Century London,” *Tsiosophy* (November 2011), <http://www.tsiosophy.com/2011/11/the-sultanness-head-thomas-garway-and-the-marketing-of-tea-in-seventeenth-century-london-2/>.

¹²⁴ Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 172. Already in the sixteenth century, Catholic monks in Spain prized chocolate for its ability to keep them awake during meditation (Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 56). In addition to its ability to ward off sleep, caffeine was also known to be an appetite suppressant. This quality seems to have endeared the caffeinated beverages to Europeans in the early modern period, when hunger was common. Goodman, “Excitantia,” in *Consuming Habits*, ed. Lovejoy, Sherratt, and Goodman, 134.

¹²⁵ The Pope thought it only fair to taste the beverage before prohibiting it, and liked it so much that he declared it would be shameful to confine such a pleasure to heathens (Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 68). Similarly, a German Jesuit named Athanasius Kircher living in seventeenth-century Rome doubted that tea could actually deliver the health benefits it was known for. But after trying it, he waxed eloquent on its salubrious effects, calling it “a plant of great virtue...those who have taken up this drink find it hard to do without.” Quoted in Owyong, “No Harm in Tea.”

Though the British and the Dutch adopted the trinity of new caffeinated beverages more quickly than the Russians for both economic and cultural reasons, other Europeans shared Russia's suspicion of tea. Even a few Englishmen objected to tea early on, if only because they considered it alien to their comfortable habits. In 1678, Henry Savile wrote to his uncle, Sir William Coventry, complaining that some of his friends had acquired "the base unworthy Indian practice" of ordering tea after dinner instead of drinking alcohol and smoking.¹²⁶ The French and the Germans, neither of whom developed a love for tea as great as Britain's, convinced themselves of its ill effects on health early on. The earliest and one of the most acrimonious Western opponents of tea was a German, the physician Simon Pauli (1603-1680), who composed an influential treatise in 1635. Pauli accused coffee, tea, and chocolate of causing effeminacy and impotence, and while he acknowledged that tea was a good remedy for headaches and prevented kidney stones, he advised his readers that drinking it was not worth the risk. Tea, in fact, hastened death, especially for people over forty.¹²⁷ Guy Patin (1601-1672), a French physician and dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, also vehemently opposed tea, agreeing with Pauli that tea shortened life.¹²⁸

But these voices were a minority. Most British and seemingly all Dutch doctors enthusiastically lauded the medical benefits of tea. Early on, the Flemish chemist Jean Baptista van Helmont (1577-1644) taught that tea should be used as a purgative instead of leeches or laxatives, because it had the same beneficial cleansing effect.¹²⁹ Dutch advocates of the English

¹²⁶ Quoted in Agnes Repplier, *To Think of Tea!* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), 11.

¹²⁷ Pauli concluded, "As *Hippocrates* spared no Pains to remove and root out the *Athenian* Plague, so I have used the utmost of my Endeavours to destroy the raging epidemical Madness of importing *Tea* into *Europe* from *China*." Quoted in Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 100-101.

¹²⁸ Owyong, "No Harm in Tea."

¹²⁹ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 101.

physician William Harvey's (d. 1657) new and fashionable theory of blood circulation praised tea and indeed anything that was found to stimulate blood flow. The most celebrated proponent of this view, Cornelis Bontekoe (c.1640-1685), did perhaps more than any other single person to promote the use of tea in seventeenth-century Europe. Unlike Pauli and Patin, Bontekoe believed tea could prolong life, or at the very least was not fatal.¹³⁰ The VOC may have commissioned Bontekoe's endorsement of tea, because the company awarded him a handsome honorarium for his work. Another enthusiastic Dutch proponent of Harvey's circulation theory, Dr. Franz De le Boe (1614-1672), championed tea as an excellent blood purifier.¹³¹ A third influential Dutch physician, Nikolas Dirx (also known as Dr. Tulpius, 1593-1674), devoted an entire chapter of his influential *Observationes Medicae* to tea in 1641. The book became so popular that it underwent a second printing in 1652, an unusual feat for a seventeenth-century work.¹³² British doctors, who unlike their counterparts in France enjoyed the respect of the public, generally agreed that tea was healthy and beneficial. Thus when Samuel Collins composed his short treatise on tea for the benefit of the Muscovite court in 1664, he was expressing the dominant medical opinion of his countrymen. In contrast to large reading publics in Britain and the Netherlands, only a tiny Russian educated elite interested in Western medicine had access to Collins's work, which in any case did not circulate beyond the court and the staff of the Apothecary Chancery.

¹³⁰ In his influential treatise in praise of tea, Bontekoe wrote, "I have no scruple in advising [people] to drink fifty or a hundred or two hundred cups at a time. I have often drunk as many in a fore- or afternoon, and many people with me, of whom not a single one has died yet." Quoted in Owyong, "No Harm in Tea."

¹³¹ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 102-3. Some speculate that Bontekoe's enthusiastic promotion of tea had been stimulated by monetary incentives from the VOC in the first place, though there is no direct evidence for this. There seems to be no doubt he was a genuine tea lover.

¹³² Dirx was also famous for being the surgeon in Rembrandt's 1632 painting *The Anatomy Lesson*. Nicolaes Tulp, *Observationes Medicae* (Amsterdam: John du Vivie, 1641), 380-82.

How did seventeenth-century Europeans prepare and consume tea? The earliest European tea drinkers brewed the leaves in unglazed red or brown stoneware pots. Some of these arrived from China with the earliest Dutch tea shipments, and were subsequently widely copied by European craftsmen. Spanish and Portuguese merchants had imported Chinese porcelain in small quantities since the sixteenth century, but its high price limited demand until the seventeenth century, when the Dutch began importing it in sufficient quantities to cause the price to fall. As early as 1615, Chinese porcelain was in everyday use in some Dutch homes. Almost all porcelain in seventeenth-century Europe was late-Ming blue and white ware, and was prized because it was beautiful and easy to clean. Accustomed to their own earth-toned stoneware of red and brown, Europeans had never seen white ceramics before encountering them in China, and did not acquire the technology for manufacturing hard-paste porcelain until the early eighteenth century. The Dutch had mastered the art of soft-paste porcelain about fifty years earlier, but their teapots could not handle the shock of hot water as well as Chinese hard-paste porcelain.¹³³

Between 1669 and 1690, the Dutch and English East India Companies introduced small brown, dark green, purple, and black teapots made from Yixing clay, celebrated in China as the ideal material for teapots. Small white porcelain pots with green, red, and orange designs soon followed. Like their fellow tea drinkers in China, seventeenth-century Europeans sipped tea from small handleless bowls. Europeans began adding handles to their teacups in the eighteenth century, evidently because the fragile cups were too hot for delicate ladies' hands. The English produced their first silver teapot in 1670, and the Russians in the 1730s. The English and French had invented entirely new devices for brewing both coffee and tea by 1670, and chapter 3 will

¹³³ Heiss and Heiss, *Story of Tea*, 336.

discuss these in detail in connection with the origin of the Russian samovar.¹³⁴ The Dutch quickly developed and spread the habit of adding milk and sugar to their tea—something Han Chinese would never dream of doing—and this innovation stimulated the production of sugar bowls and creamers. The European tea service, an ensemble with no East Asian equivalent, began to assume its modern form by 1700.

Finally, whereas the Muscovite government feared that tea importation would drain specie abroad, the British and the Dutch believed their economies stood to benefit from tea importation and domestic tea sales in the seventeenth century. The VOC took advantage of abundant supply and increasing demand for tea in the Netherlands, making a profit and providing growing numbers of the Dutch population with this and other Eastern luxury goods in the second half of the century. The EIC followed suit, and after 1660 the English government gained a new source of customs revenue. Both nations imported approximately 20,000 pounds of tea respectively every year by the end of the seventeenth century.¹³⁵ Though extant sources leave no statistical data about how much tea was sold in Muscovy at the end of the seventeenth century, it was almost certainly far less than the 20,000 pounds imported annually into contemporary England and Holland.

Conclusion

Why did tea not come into widespread use among seventeenth-century Muscovites? The almost complete absence of tea in the records of the Aptekarskii prikaz apart from the writings of

¹³⁴ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 79, 82. Clay from Yixing is still considered the ideal material for teapot construction. True Yixing teapots are assembled by hand, never thrown on a wheel, and even the most inexpensive of these fetch hundreds of dollars each. They are very small in size and are prized for their artistry. Yixing clay also cures with prolonged exposure to specific classes of tea, and thus the teapots can improve the flavor of the tea as they age.

¹³⁵ Schlegel, “First Introduction of Tea,” 470; Crawford, “On the History and Migration of Cultivated Plants,” 202.

European physicians suggests that the Muscovite court used tea medicinally only or primarily because European doctors considered it beneficial. Economic factors and tea's very high price also partially explain the low level of demand for tea in Russia. Muscovite authorities ran the economy according to mercantilist principles, as recent scholarship on Russian reactions to tobacco in the seventeenth century has shown. Like other early modern European states, Muscovy attempted to maintain a protectionist economy through regulation and taxation. To a large extent, the economic interests of the state determined how a new commodity was received, especially if it was foreign.¹³⁶ Russia could not re-export Chinese tea abroad for profit, because the seventeenth century's largest tea markets outside East, South, and Southeast Asia—Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Persia—were already glutted with cheaper seaborne tea. Tea consumed within Russia would only drain specie in foreign markets. Though mercantilist ideas shaped Muscovite economic logic, Russian mercantilism was at best “poor man's mercantilism,” to borrow a phrase from economic historian Arcadius Kahan. According to Kahan, Russia lacked certain conditions mercantilism presupposed: agricultural production for the market; a merchant marine; commodity and money markets with a certain degree of specialization; and the possession of, or at least access to, a colonial empire.¹³⁷ Russia also lacked proto-industrial towns, private trade, and a nascent middle class.¹³⁸ These missing preconditions of mercantilism and industrialization also partially account for the fact that no consumer culture developed in Muscovy during this period. Few Muscovites had the time or money to spend on costly foreign

¹³⁶ Romaniello, “Muscovy's Extraordinary Ban,” in *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Romaniello and Starks, 10-11.

¹³⁷ Arcadius Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer, and the Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 236.

¹³⁸ See Styles, “Product Innovation in Early Modern London,” 124-69, and Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 19-25.

luxuries. Given the economic forces working against consumer goods in general, they reasonably felt they had no use for tea as a commodity.

The dearth of information on tea, and the limited distribution of what little information existed, also prevented it from penetrating deeply into Russian awareness in the seventeenth century. Aside from the textual traces that survive in travel accounts and the records of the Aptekarskii and Posol'skii prikazy, only two treatises on tea from the period survive in Russian, those of the foreigners Collins and Spafarii. Collins's report, and others like it, were reserved exclusively for the court and Pharmacy Chancery doctors and officials. Spafarii's work on tea did not see publication until 1910, though approximately forty manuscript copies of his works are known to have circulated in Russia in the eighteenth century.¹³⁹ Seventeenth-century Russia lacked newspapers, advertising, and the efficient transportation networks required for the spread of print culture. Compared with this, the British and the Dutch could access an extensive literature on tea by the end of the seventeenth century, as well as visual images representing its consumption in fashionable settings.

It would be a mistake, however, to state the causes of Russia's unique relationship to tea solely in terms of what Russia lacked. The most powerful cause of Russia's ambivalence toward tea in the seventeenth century undergirded the others and was also, arguably, its greatest asset: a rich cultural tradition steeped in Orthodox piety. Russian culture celebrated the plant kingdom as part of the divinely ordained natural order, as historian Valerie Kivelson's close examination of the exuberant decorations adorning seventeenth-century litigation maps demonstrates.¹⁴⁰ On the whole, Orthodox religious culture was "a moral system [that] provided a vocabulary and set of

¹³⁹ Maggs, *Russia and 'Le Reve Chinois'*, 116.

¹⁴⁰ Valerie Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom: The Land and Its Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

standards that the tsar's subjects could and did invoke in their interactions with authorities, public or private.”¹⁴¹ Muscovites understood the phenomena of the physical world as manifestations of abstract ideals. Like the sacraments of the Church, eating and drinking were modes of interaction with a higher spiritual reality. As such, when performed rightly they could bring a person closer to God, but when done wrongly, they alienated one from God, the church, and the wider society. Similarly, neither the church nor the government chanceries regulating medicine cared to draw a concrete line between witchcraft and scientific knowledge. In the minds of most Orthodox Russians, a sturdy association between foreign foods, *skorom*, and sorcery combined to create a powerful deterrent against dabbling in plants and practices of foreign origin. Finally, why should Muscovites adopt a foreign plant infusion when they already had their own, and sweeter ones at that? Compared with the ancient brews of *sbiten'* and *medovukha*, the salty, soggy leaves eaten by Siberian Tatars simply may not have appealed to them.

Already in the seventeenth century, tea was caught up in Muscovy's escalating cultural, political, and economic involvement with its eastern and western neighbors. By the time Peter I assumed power alongside his brother Ivan V in 1682, “Russia already had a culture of reform and innovation which had grown out of an awareness of Russia's weakness *vis-à-vis* her Western neighbors and a growing interaction with foreign merchants and other visitors.” Yet at the same time as Muscovy was enacting significant reforms and involving itself ever more deeply in the economic and geopolitical affairs of the wider European community, it retained a “risk-averse

¹⁴¹ “Introduction: Daniel Rowland and Muscovite Cultural History,” in *The New Muscovite Cultural History*, 12.

culture” characterized by “exceptional political and cultural conservatism.”¹⁴² In the seventeenth century, the newly minted Romanov dynasty still struggled to stabilize the state after the disastrous Time of Troubles, just as entanglement with the West was becoming both more desirable and unavoidable. As the history of the Aptekarskii prikaz abundantly demonstrates, seventeenth-century Muscovites hungered for Western knowledge and innovations, but took great pains to regulate and contain them. They sought to cultivate economic, political, and cultural ties to their Eastern and Western neighbors, but felt it was crucial that they do so in a controlled way. The resulting tension between the push for reform and westernization and a deep concern for political security and cultural integrity—Russia’s perennial conflict between ideology and political expediency—infuses the history of seventeenth-century Muscovy and the fate of tea in Russia generally.

With so few tea drinkers, and lacking its own specialized equipment for brewing and serving tea, seventeenth-century Muscovy cannot be said to have possessed its own distinctive tea culture. And yet, as soon as Russians encountered tea either at home or abroad, it took on particular meanings dependent on the context of the encounter. Seventeenth-century Muscovites did not uncritically accept ideas about tea drinking from either their Eastern or Western neighbors, but evinced a nuanced attitude toward tea and used it in ways that suited their needs, preferences, and priorities. The history of tea in seventeenth-century Muscovy supports Levin’s description of Russia’s attitude toward the West, and we may add, the East, as “selective engagement.” As Muscovy struggled to define its place in the rapidly globalizing seventeenth-century world, the acceptance of tea as a medicinal and eventually a recreational beverage

¹⁴² Jarmo Kotilaine and Marshall Poe, “Introduction: Modernization in the Early Modern Context: The Case of Muscovy,” in *Modernizing Muscovy: Reform and social change in seventeenth-century Russia*, ed. Kotilaine and Poe, 1-3.

gradually began to supplant the religiously and economically informed prejudice against foreign foods.

CHAPTER TWO

THAT NOBLE LEAF: TEA AS LUXURY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

Introduction

Jane Vigor (1699-1783) attended a court birthday celebration in St. Petersburg in 1734.¹ Vigor had moved to St. Petersburg in 1728 with her husband, the British consul-general to Russia and an agent of the Russia Company. Vigor described a magnificent hall warmed by stoves and filled with the fragrance of live blooming myrtle and orange trees. “The beauty, fragrance, and warmth of this new-formed grove, when you saw nothing but ice and snow through the windows, looked like enchantment, and inspired my mind with pleasing reveries,” she gushed. Tea and coffee were served in adjoining rooms, and Vigor half expected to see “the shepherds and nymphs of Acadia.” She imagined herself to be “in Fairy-land, and Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* was in my head all the evening.”² Throughout her account, Vigor depicted Empress Anna’s (r. 1730-1740) court as the height of elegance and civility, and she traveled all over European Russia drinking tea in the homes of nobles and clerics. Whereas the use of tea only half a century previously had been largely medicinal, by the 1730s tea had made the transition from obscure foreign medicine to aristocratic luxury.

The influence of Western European states such as France, England, and Prussia, both in terms of administrative structures and cultural practices, had been keenly felt during the

¹ Although Vigor does not specify, this was probably Empress Anna’s birthday, January 28.

² Jane Vigor, *Letters from a Lady, Who Resided Some Years in Russia, to Her Friend in England* (London: J. Dodsley, 1777), 93-95.

reforming reign of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. The reign of his son Peter I (1682-1725) continued the process of cultural and administrative westernization, and more importantly for our purposes, coincided with a key transitional period in European tea culture. Silversmiths in London and Amsterdam developed new machines for brewing tea and coffee between 1670 and 1700. (Peter visited both cities on his Grand Embassy of 1697-1698.) Representing the latest advancements in both technology and luxurious design, scholars also understand these vessels as marking tea's transformation from foreign medicine to elite pastime.³ Although Peter evinced no personal liking for tea, thanks in part to his fascination with European gadgets, new tea-table technologies and new modes of social tea drinking made their way into Russia during his lifetime.

While many wealthy Russians began to drink tea socially in the eighteenth century in ways that reflected the habits of their European neighbors to the west, a degree of discomfort with, and even opposition to, the beverage persisted. In contrast with their forbears of the previous century, however, those eighteenth-century Russian writers who critiqued the practice of drinking tea did so on the grounds that it was Western, not Eastern. While most considered tea an innocuous occupation for wealthy nobles, they worried that lower-class tea consumption would upset the social and economic order. This attitude toward tea typified contemporary European understandings of luxury. Throughout the eighteenth century, a consensus on the definition of luxury and the criteria separating luxuries from necessities eluded intellectuals. On the one hand, European Enlightenment culture viewed luxury as a positive social force and an instrument of progress and civilization. At the same time, it feared luxury's potential corrupting

³ Helen Clifford, "A Commerce with Things: The Value of Precious Metalwork in Early Modern England," in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 160.

influence, and displayed some reluctance to abandon older critiques of indulgence and idleness. A young Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), for instance, had argued that luxury ruined taste and fostered moral corruption.⁴ Some of his Russian contemporaries would have agreed with him.

Luxury has been called “the keynote debate of the Enlightenment,” and was “a key issue at the heart of intellectual discourse in political economy, moral philosophy, literary culture and aesthetics throughout the eighteenth century.”⁵ With the dress and diets of Russian courtiers and nobility much altered in appearance thanks to Peter’s reforms, the luxury debates of the eighteenth century took on an additional dimension: critiques of westernization. The moral and philosophical discussions about luxury undertaken in eighteenth-century Russia’s nascent print culture tended to subsume luxury under the category of westernization, implicated tea in these questions, and often used the beverage as a test case. The tension between tea as a harmless pastime and tea as a decadent indulgence tainted by associations with colonialism would persist in Russia until the end of the nineteenth century.

But that tension is not the only paradox of eighteenth-century Russian tea culture. Knowledge about China, entering Russia through travel narratives, atlases, and other works produced at home and in Western Europe, made the small reading public aware of tea’s Chinese heritage. Merchants traveling overland from China supplied Russia with most of its tea. Yet Russian fiction, journalism, poetry, and theater of the eighteenth century understood drinking tea to be a thoroughly Western practice. Accounting for this apparent contradiction illuminates

⁴ Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, “Introduction,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2, 5.

patterns of continuity and change in Russian culture in the eighteenth century, and also sheds light on the nature and extent of the westernization undergone by Russia's upper classes.

As the previous chapter made clear, the few Russians who drank tea in the seventeenth century already did so like other Europeans, with sugar, and largely at the behest of European physicians. Eighteenth-century Russians who took tea continued to do so under the influence of European, rather than Asian, cultural norms, and by the end of the century tea was a quotidian luxury in wealthy Russian households. That "special eighteenth-century virtue," imitation, guided Russian nobles as they drank tea according to the fashion of their Western counterparts and invented their own new traditions to accompany it.⁶ By the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796), the tea habit had been present long enough and was sufficiently well-established to accumulate distinctively Russian accessories and associations. I argue therefore that a distinctively Russian tea culture, that is, one displaying characteristics that differed from Western European, Inner Asian, and East Asian tea cultures, emerged during Catherine's reign, thanks in part to new discourses about luxury that put a Russian spin on contemporary conversations about moral and economic philosophy.

This is the first of two chapters that consider Russian tea drinking in the context of a Europe-wide developing consumer culture and luxury goods market in the eighteenth century. After a brief overview of the economic history of tea in eighteenth-century Russia, the chapter turns its attention to two different conceptions of China, found in the intellectual tradition of sinology and the decorative chinoiserie style, to which Russians could turn for information about tea and cues that shaped their attitudes toward it. The third section analyzes the multilayered meanings and associations attached to tea in the literary genres of prose fiction, poetry, comedy,

⁶ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 20.

advice literature, and memoirs. The presence of coffee alongside tea in many of the sources examined in this chapter indicates that, although a distinctively Russian tea culture arose during the reign of Catherine II, tea had not yet eclipsed coffee and assumed its place in Russian culture as the social caffeinated beverage of choice.

This study of the tea culture of the eighteenth-century Russian nobility finds that they displayed their social status by “imitating Europeans while remaining Russian.”⁷ Similarly, in Michelle Marrese’s words, they exhibited an “unproblematic cultural bilingualism.”⁸ Wealthy Russians drank tea like other Europeans without abandoning older Russian foods, beverages, or the traditions of Orthodoxy. The very cultural bilingualism educated Russians enjoyed created the opportunity for writers and intellectuals in the second half of the eighteenth century to reflect critically upon westernization, of which tea was one facet, and to assess its perceived effects. Studying the culture of tea in eighteenth-century Russia reveals further that cultural bilingualism remained unproblematic as long as it was restricted to wealthy nobles. When household servants or merchants aspired to become tea drinkers, some eighteenth-century writers reacted with satirical scorn. Plays, poems, and novels—themselves recent developments heavily dependent on Western prototypes—sometimes satirized tea drinking as an import of questionable moral value that could do great damage in the wrong hands. Other types of literature, including advice manuals, memoirs, and travel diaries, reveal that tea had already become domesticated in the lives of those few who could afford to make a habit of expensive foreign luxuries.

⁷ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, abridged one-volume edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 42.

⁸ Michelle Lamarche Marrese, “‘The Poetics of Everyday Behavior’ Revisited: Lotman, Gender, and the Evolution of Russian Noble Identity,” *Kritika* 11, no. 4 (Fall 2010), 705.

Tea and the Tea Trade in Petrine Russia and Beyond: A Brief Overview

The Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed in 1689, had established a relatively stable border and diplomatic relations between Russia and the Celestial Empire. Government officials and merchants alike took great interest in the caravan trade with China. The young Peter the Great, who would rule jointly with his half-brother Ivan V until the latter's death in 1696, brought this new branch of commerce under government control, declaring a state monopoly on the most valuable furs, sable and the rare silver fox. The state organized and funded the caravans, requiring each to include a merchant serving as agent, a state commissioner, four tax officers, and one Guards officer with a one-hundred-Cossack security force under his command. With the departure of each caravan, a new one was already being planned, due to the length of time involved in the cross-continental trip. In 1706, in order to prevent private merchants from competing with the state caravan trade, Peter explicitly forbade merchants to send their own furs or any other private merchandise to China with the caravans. Thus, while the 1693 caravan carried 41,900 rubles' worth of state merchandise and 113,620 rubles' worth of private goods, the 1710 caravan carried exclusively government-owned merchandise valued at 200,000 rubles.⁹ The Chinese made far more money from this trade than the Russians did; Russia had little more than furs and broadcloth to sell, while the Chinese exported a rich array of fine silks, tea, tobacco, medicinal plants, precious stones, pearls, gold, and silver. Needless to say, the market for such items in Russia was quite small. Russia did not import much tea under Peter the Great—unfortunately sources indicating just how much do not survive—and the inhabitants of sinospheric Siberia, including Mongols, Kirghiz, Kalmyks, Buriats, and the growing Russian population, drank more tea than people living in European Russia.

⁹ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 20, 22.

European states sent representatives to Peter's court to assess Russia's China trade and to weigh their own prospects for participation in, or competition with, this lucrative enterprise. Foy de la Neuville, a person about whom scholars know little, but who published what historian Lindsey Hughes believes to be a genuine account of Russia in 1698, assured his readers that the Dutch had nothing to fear from Russian competition on the Chinese market. "[T]he Muscovites are too poor to buy the rich merchandise of those realms," he wrote, "and can only bring back trinkets such as odds and ends of silk cloth, tea, little wooden vases and similar small wares and baubles."¹⁰ Johann Georg Korb (1672-1741), an Austrian secretary of legation at Peter's court, noted the arrival of a Kalmyk trader bearing luxury goods such as tea, tobacco, star anise, and fine textiles.¹¹ Friedrich Christian Weber, who represented British interests at the Russian court between 1714 and 1719, also referred to Kalmyks trading in tea and other "Chineze Stuffs."¹² The Englishman John Perry, a habitual tea drinker, observed the presence of tea among imports from China.¹³ In 1710, his fellow countryman Charles Whitworth reported that Chinese goods coming into Russia included "damasks, callicoes, blew linnen, gold, tapistry, China ware, and drugs." "China ware" almost certainly included tea ware, and "drugs" tea.¹⁴

As for Peter himself, there can be no doubt of his familiarity with European tea and coffee culture, to which he was exposed repeatedly during his Grand Embassy of 1698 and 1699. While in Amsterdam, Peter worked in the Dutch East India Company wharves and warehouses,

¹⁰ Foy de la Neuville, *A Curious and New Account of Muscovy in the Year 1689*, trans. Lindsey Hughes (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1994), 70.

¹¹ Johann Georg Korb, *Diary of an Austrian Secretary of Legation at the Court of Czar Peter the Great*, trans. and ed. Count MacDonnell (London: Cass, 1968), 282-83.

¹² Friedrich Christian Weber, *The Present State of Russia* (London: Cass, 1968), 1:155.

¹³ John Perry, *The State of Russia under the Present Czar* (London: Cass, 1967), 80.

¹⁴ Charles Whitworth, *An Account of Russia as It Was in the Year 1710* (Twickenham: Printed at Strawberry-Hill, 1758), 90.

where he undoubtedly saw tea and porcelain being unloaded and sold. The official journal of Peter's sojourn in Holland reports the purchase of porcelain dishware in Amsterdam, a prestige material since Europeans had not yet discovered the secret of its manufacture. Stopping in Delft en route to London, the embassy journal remarks on the manufacture of "Delft porcelain" (*delftskaia portselina*).¹⁵ During his short stay in England, Peter reportedly frequented coffeehouses, which also sold tea, in the garb of a sailor.¹⁶ In one possibly apocryphal anecdote recorded by Jakob von Staehlin, Peter insisted that admission to his Cabinet of Curiosities in St. Petersburg be free of charge, reportedly stating, "[I]t is my will and intention not only that every body enter gratis, but also, whenever a company comes to see the cabinet, that they be offered, in my name, and at my expense, a dish of coffee, a glass of wine, or some other refreshment, in this repository of curiosities."¹⁷

Peter was no tea drinker—he preferred his alcohol and tobacco. Numerous detailed accounts of social functions at Peter's court record an abundance of wine, beer, and vodka, but do not mention tea.¹⁸ In keeping with the longstanding tradition of European travel accounts concerning Muscovy, foreign commentators such as Perry and Weber wrote disparagingly and at length about the drunkenness of Russians and the frequent alcoholic binges of Tsar Peter. Their censure sometimes contrasted Russian drinking culture with their own preferences for hot caffeinated beverages: Weber related an unpleasant memory of being served vodka with his

¹⁵ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bogoslovskii, "Petr I v Anglii v 1698," *Institut Istorii. Moskva. Trudy* 1 (1926): 394, 396, 403.

¹⁶ Andrei Konstantinovich Nartov, "Dostopamiatnye povestvovaniia i rechi Petra Velikogo," in Evgheni V. Anisimov, ed., *Petr Velikii: Vospominaniia, Dnevnikovye Zapisi, Anekdoty* (St. Petersburg: Kul'turno-prosvetitel'skoe obshchestvo "Pushkinskii Fond," 1993), 253.

¹⁷ Jakob von Staehlin, *Original Anecdotes of Peter the Great: Collected from the Conversation of Several Persons of Distinction at Petersburg and Moscow* (Dublin: Printed by J. Rea for P. Byrne and J. Jones, 1789), 95.

¹⁸ See, for example, Iu. N. Bespiatykh, *Peterburg Petra I v Inostrannykh Opisaniiakh: Vvedenie, Teksty, Kommentarii* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1991), 145, and Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, 1:224.

breakfast one morning at Peter's court, rather than the tea and coffee he had been expecting.¹⁹

One unique account composed by a mandarin named Tulishen, one of a group of six emissaries from the Chinese emperor K'ang-hsi traveling in the Urals and along the Volga River in 1712, noted that Russians were "hunters after wine" and did not drink tea.²⁰

To return to the China trade, toward the end of the 1710s, Manchu foreign policy disrupted the Russian caravan trade. The Chinese authorities prioritized territorial expansion, the consolidation of their power at home, and the security of their land and sea borders, and they feared that Russian transit through, and economic activity in, Mongolian territories would weaken their influence there. The Manchus also struggled to subdue Dzungarian tribes in Central Asia, and part of their motivation for signing the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 had been to neutralize the Russians in this conflict. Moreover, other foreigners threatened China from the southeast, and the Chinese experience with European powers, and especially the British, who were already importing large quantities of opium in blatant contravention of Chinese law, taught them to be wary of unrestricted trade. In this atmosphere of heightened security concerns, the Manchu authorities prohibited a Russian caravan from selling its wares in Beijing in 1717, and turned another away at the border in 1718.²¹

Chinese merchants as well as their Russian counterparts found this situation unsatisfactory. Chinese courtiers prized furs from Siberia, which were incorporated into the ceremonial dress they were required to wear in the imperial presence.²² While Chinese

¹⁹ Perry, *The State of Russia under the Present Czar*, 228-29; Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, 1:93-94.

²⁰ Tulishen, *Puteshestvie Kitaiskago Poslannika k Kalmytskomu Aiuke Khanu, s Opisaniem Zemel' i Obychaev Rossiiskikh*, trans. Aleksei Leont'evich Leont'ev (St. Petersburg, 1782), http://az.lib.ru/l/leontxew_a_l/text_1762_ajuka_oldorfo.shtml.

²¹ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 23.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

government officials' enthusiasm for trade with Russia was lukewarm at best, the market for expensive furs among courtiers drove Chinese merchants' eager desire to sell their merchandise to the Russians, and the unreliability of the Russian fur supply, imposed by their government's cautious foreign policy, frustrated them. For the Russian part, Peter the Great's administration did everything in its power to maintain a friendly relationship with the Chinese, perceiving this as an important precondition for economic development both in Siberia and closer to the new capital, St. Petersburg. Peter worked tirelessly to promote industry and commerce, establishing silver and lead mines in the Nerchinsk area. Ever the seafarer, he aspired to establish maritime trade with China through the southern port of Canton, a dream which would not come to fruition until more than a century later.

During this same period, in the late 1710s, Peter began to see certain disadvantages in the state monopoly on the caravan trade: the high overhead costs and the large commitment of time and military personnel, resources he felt he could not spare at the height of the Great Northern War. Reversing his 1706 policy, Peter transferred the management of the state caravans into the hands of private merchants. He also ordered his agents to compile lists of commodities imported into China from other countries, with the aim of diversifying the Russian goods that could be sold there.²³ But real progress in economic relations with China eluded Peter. The Chinese emperor received his ambassador Izmailov in 1720, and even gave him a *shuba* (fur coat) off the emperor's back, but the embassy ultimately failed. Izmailov and his party, like their seventeenth-century counterparts, were out of their depth when it came to Chinese court ceremonial, and declined to comply with Chinese diplomatic protocol.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 24, 26.

²⁴ Korsak, *Istoriko-Statisticheskoe Obozrenie*, 25.

Peter died in 1725 and his second wife, Catherine I, reigned until her own death in 1727. On one occasion in 1723, Catherine had sent some Chinese tea to her daughters Anna and Elizabeth, instructing them in the accompanying letter to “drink it in health.”²⁵ Early in Catherine’s short reign, in June 1725, an embassy departed for China under the command of Count Savva Lukich Vladislavich (Raguzinskii). Negotiations began in Beijing and were concluded at the border two years later. By that time, Tsar Peter II (r. 1727-1730) had succeeded Catherine I. Peter II and Emperor Yung Cheng ratified the Treaty of Kiakhta, signed in October 1727, in June 1728. This treaty, more than any previous development, sealed amicable relations between Russia and China, securing equal trading rights for both sides. Still wary of free trade because of English incursions in the south, Yung Cheng’s government reserved the right to restrict the frequency and size of Russian trading caravans.²⁶ The treaty established the border town of Kiakhta as the site of economic exchange between the two empires. The Russian government sent state caravans to Beijing under the new agreement in 1728, 1731, 1735, 1740, and 1754. The Treaty of Kiakhta ushered in what later writers would call the “Kiakhta system,” which persisted until the Great Reform era of the 1860s.

Customs tariffs from the reign of Peter’s niece Empress Anna Ioannovna (r. 1730-1740) reveal the types of tea imported to Russia at Kiakhta under the new treaty. The best green tea was called *zhulan*, apparently after a shrub of that name native to northern China whose leaves were sometimes used to flavor the tea. The Chinese often scented the lower grades of green tea with jasmine flowers and called it *monikho* after the word for jasmine. Another type of low-quality compressed green tea was *lugana*, the name probably a corruption of the Mongol word

²⁵ V. Kashpirov, ed., “Iz Perepiski Petra I i Ekateriny I so svoimi docher’mi. Sbornik istoricheskikh statei i materialov,” in *Pamiatniki Novoi Russkoi Istorii* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Maikova, 1871), 1:381-82.

²⁶ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 27.

nagana, meaning green. Russians called good loose black tea *baikhov* or *baikhovyi chai*, and it came both in large containers and in small packets. Finally, *khaar*, or “stone tea,” was not *sensu stricto* tea at all, but seems to have consisted of a certain grass seed that was mixed with abalone shell (“stone”) and used medicinally.²⁷ As the Russian taste for tea developed at the end of the eighteenth century, two types of black tea predominated: baikhov was the better and more expensive sort consumed by those who could afford it, and native Siberians and slightly less wealthy Russians drank low-quality compressed brick tea or tile tea.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Russian tea imports and tea consumption slowly grew. When Anna died in 1740, Peter’s daughter Elizabeth I seized power from the regents of the infant Ivan VI several months later in 1741. Empress Elizabeth’s principal contribution to Russian tea culture was her founding of Russia’s first porcelain factory in 1744. Russian tea importation began to grow significantly, however, only during the reign of Catherine the Great. Between 1757 and 1784, the principal imports from China, in order of volume, were cotton and silk textiles, followed by raw silk, sugar candies, tobacco, tea, and anise. In the 1770s and 1780s, tea was still an item of relatively minor importance in the China trade; during this period Russia imported approximately 450,000 pounds of loose black tea and 612,000 pounds of brick tea annually.²⁸ The Russian gentry and wealthy merchants consumed the good quality loose baikhov tea; based on the population of these groups, approximately one pound of tea was available per person per year during this period.

Russia’s tea supply, however, could be unreliable. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Kiakhta trade suffered a series of temporary interruptions due to diplomatic spats with the

²⁷ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 232-33; M.D. Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe opisanie Rossiiskoi kommertsii*, vol. 3, ii (St. Petersburg, 1781-1788), 48.

²⁸ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 52; Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 234.

Chinese. One began just when Catherine ascended the throne in 1762, and ended four years later; another interruption lasted less than a week in 1775, and another for two years from 1778-80. Trade stalled yet again for almost seven years beginning in 1785. We know that the English sold high quality loose black tea imported through London in Russian markets during the periods when direct trade with China was cut off, although data concerning such imports is sketchy.²⁹ Chinese tea imported to Russia through London had traversed a distance almost equivalent to the circumference of the earth; the existence of a market for such well-traveled (and expensive) tea in Russia evinces demand and indicates that tea consumption had become a regular habit among the wealthy classes. Smaller amounts of tea also reached Russia through the cities of Amsterdam, Lubeck, and Hamburg, although unfortunately, no data exists on eighteenth-century tea imports over Russia's western borders.³⁰ Nor did tea play any known role in the Anglo-Persian transit trade across Russian territory in this period.³¹ At the other end of the Russian Empire, Buriats and Kalmyks living in Siberia could comfortably rely on smuggled brick tea and Chinese textiles regardless of whether or not the official Kiakhta trade was operating.³²

Russian tea imports began to rise dramatically at the end of the eighteenth century, when the habit began to skyrocket in popularity. Imports of baikhov tea more than tripled in the decade between 1792 and 1802.³³ In 1798, brick tea imports stood at almost 936,000 pounds. The geographical distribution of tea consumption is not known, but this increase in the importation of

²⁹ Herbert Kaplan, *Russian Overseas Commerce with Great Britain During the Reign of Catherine II* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996), 198-202, 233.

³⁰ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 233; Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe opisanie*, vol. 6, ii, p. 242.

³¹ A.V. Demkin, ed., *Russko-Britanskii Torgovye Otnosheniia v XVIII veke: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1994), 31-43.

³² Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 233; Korsak, *Istoriko-statisticheskoe obozrenie*, 71.

³³ Korsak, *Istoriko-statisticheskoe obozrenie*, 110.

cheaper compressed tea indicates growth in demand among people of lower socioeconomic status. While nobles in Moscow and St. Petersburg drank baikhov, native Siberians and Tatars consumed the less expensive brick tea.³⁴ Strong growth in Russian tea imports would continue almost unabated until the traumatic period of the First World War, the revolutions of 1917, and the Russian Civil War decimated the purchasing power that allowed Russians to consume imported Chinese tea.

A Tale of Two Chinas: Tea, Sinology, and Chinoiserie in Eighteenth-Century Russia

Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries began pouring their overwhelmingly positive reports about Chinese society and culture into Europe, and their accounts contained much information about tea. Jesuit writings on China helped generate both the intellectual tradition of sinology and the craze for chinoiserie that gripped the crowned heads of Europe beginning in the 1670s. Not coincidentally, tea's fashionability at European courts peaked in the last three decades of the seventeenth century. Together, the phenomena of sinology and chinoiserie, filtered through European sources, account for much of the information about tea available to educated Russians in the eighteenth century.³⁵

Yet Russia's history of direct overland contact with China, and the political and economic complexities involved in maintaining a long land border with the Celestial Empire,

³⁴ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 234.

³⁵ The Russian Orthodox Church maintained an ecclesiastical mission in Beijing from the early eighteenth century on, but the mission exerted no discernible impact on the development of eighteenth-century Russian tea culture. No documents produced by the mission were published until the nineteenth century; the Russian priests in Beijing were poorly educated and sometimes illiterate, much like their peers at home. For these and other reasons, contact between the mission and Russian officialdom was sporadic at best. Moreover, as historians Eric Widmer and Barbara Widenor Maggs have shown, Russian high society relied heavily on the opinions of French *philosophes* concerning China, and the Russian government tended to value the opinions of European scholars over those of its own sinologists. See Maggs, *Russia and "Le Rêve Chinois"*, 7, 10, 16, and Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, 1976).

meant that Russia's image of China in the eighteenth century was more nuanced than the idealized *Chine* of contemporary European literature. Unlike European accounts of China, produced mostly by Jesuits who held a deep admiration for Chinese culture, literary sources concerning China produced in Russia contained much that was negative in the eighteenth century.³⁶ Two different Chinas coexisted in eighteenth-century Russia: the powerful pagan empire on the other side of the wild Siberian borderlands, and the idyllic Cathay of European imaginations. Both of these Chinas were known to contain tea, but only the latter made its consumption attractive to Russians.

Barbara Widenor Maggs, author of a study on Russia's literary image of China in the eighteenth century, argues that Russia's conception of China depended more heavily on Western European accounts than on those of its own diplomats and missionaries. Similarly, Eric Widmer's study of the Russian ecclesiastical mission in Beijing has shown that eighteenth-century Russian commentators on China tended to give European accounts greater attention and respect than those generated by their own countrymen.³⁷ The same holds true for Russia's conception of tea. Although Russia had maintained direct diplomatic and economic relations with China since the mid-seventeenth century, with few exceptions, Russian reports on China and its tea did not begin to be published until the last two decades of the eighteenth century, and many would not become available to the Russian reading public until the nineteenth century. Historian Nikolai Bantysh-Kamenskii, for instance, completed a five-volume compilation of Russian seventeenth- and eighteenth-century missionary and diplomatic accounts on China in

³⁶ Maggs, *Russia and 'le Rêve Chinois'*, 4-5.

³⁷ Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking*.

1784, but this important collection would not see publication until the 1880s.³⁸ Consequently, in Russia both sinology and chinoiserie developed decades after their European precedents, and this helps account for the fact that Russian tea culture developed later than the tea cultures of Western Europe.

Tea and Sinology in Eighteenth-Century Russia

“Everyone knows they don’t drink coffee in China,” wrote Gerhard Friedrich Müller in 1755.³⁹ Müller (1705-1783), one of Russia’s earliest and most prolific sinologists and also the father of modern Russian historiography and ethnography, made this comment in a footnote to the first essay in Russian concerning travel accounts of China. In the course of a detailed discussion of Fedor Isakovich Baikov’s diplomatic mission to China in the 1650s, Müller described Baikov’s refusal of a ceremonial dish of tea on the grounds that the tea contained milk and butter, foods forbidden during Lent. Müller praised Baikov for taking a stand against kowtowing and for his refusal to prostrate himself before a Chinese “idol.” Educated in Leipzig, Müller had come to Russia in 1725 and cofounded the Russian Academy of Sciences. He spent the decade between 1733 and 1743 traveling throughout Siberia and studying its peoples, languages, and geography. Müller published a number of articles and primary documents concerning Sino-Russian relations at a time when up-to-date information on China was rare in Russia.

³⁸ Maggs, *Russia and ‘le Rêve Chinois’*, 8. This was Bantysh-Kamenskii’s *Diplomaticheskoe Sobranie Del Mezhdru Rossiiskim i Kitaiskim Gosudarstvami s 1619 po 1729-oi god* [...], 5 vols. (Kazan: Tipografiia Imperatorskago Universiteta, 1882).

³⁹ Gerkhard Fridrikh Miller [Gerhard Friedrich Müller], “O Pervykh Rossiiskikh Puteshestviiakh i Posol’stvakh v Kitai,” *Ezhemesiachnyiia Sochineniia*, no. 2 (1755), 34.

Thanks largely to Müller's efforts, the first reliable accounts of Chinese tea began to appear in Russia in the mid-eighteenth century. Four of the earliest sinological works published in Russian, described below, in addition to the many works available in French, Latin, German, and other languages, provided Russian readers with their first accurate information about Chinese tea. Müller's book based on his decade of Siberian travel, *A Description of the Kingdom of Siberia*, appeared in 1756. In a section on Chinese products, Müller included a detailed description of several different grades and types of tea, along with their prices at Kiakhta. He stated that during his residence there, the best green tea fetched between two and three rubles per pound at the border; a lower-grade black tea cost between fifty-five and eighty kopeks per pound.⁴⁰ By the time these teas reached Moscow and St. Petersburg, the price of both would have climbed significantly, making tea drinking an expensive habit: a Japanese sailor in Russia in the 1780s reported that Chinese tea cost between one and five silver rubles per pound.⁴¹ Another important eighteenth-century Russian sinologist, Aleksei Leont'evich Leont'ev (1716-1786), published *A Report on Tea and Silk* in 1775. Leont'ev translated a few simple Chinese poems, and supplied the earliest Russian-language account of Chinese tea cultivation. The work also included some basic information about Chinese herbal medicine.⁴²

A third early and important source of information on Chinese tea, Jean Baptiste du Halde's *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique, de l'empire de la Chine*, had been composed in the 1730s, and appeared in a four-volume Russian translation

⁴⁰ Gerard Fridrikh Miller [Gerhard Friedrich Müller], *Opisanie Sibirskago Tsarstva* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Akademii Nauk, 1756), 145-47.

⁴¹ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 234.

⁴² Aleksei Leont'evich Leont'ev, *Uvedomlenie o Chae i o Shelke. Iz Kitaiskoi Knigi Van' Bou Kiuan' nazyvaemoi* (St. Petersburg, 1775). Unfortunately, all I know about this book is from Maggs, *Russia and 'le Rêve Chinois'*, 105-106. The Russian National Libraries in both Moscow and St. Petersburg denied me access to the volume.

between 1774 and 1777. According to Maggs, this publication was one of the most significant contributions to eighteenth-century Russians' understanding of China. Du Halde, like Müller and Leont'ev, included detailed descriptions of Chinese tea varieties and methods for preparing them; a glossary of Chinese words included many words for different types of Chinese tea. Du Halde, himself a Jesuit but not a missionary, portrayed China favorably according to the tradition of Jesuit accounts, presenting tea drinking as a refined habit of a refined people.⁴³ Finally, Mikhail Chulkov, whose prose fiction will be discussed below, compiled a seven-volume work on Russian trade, which he published between 1781 and 1788. Chulkov's work reveals that the Russian authorities considered tea a luxury item, and as such taxed it heavily. In volume four, Chulkov lists 166 commodities and their tariff rates. The tariff on tea, at four kopecks per thirty-six pounds (one Russian *pud*), was surpassed only by that on saffron, at five kopecks per pound. Imported coffee, less expensive than tea, was taxed at the rate of one kopeck per *pud*.⁴⁴

Thus an educated eighteenth-century Russian reader seeking to learn about tea could, if he or she chose, access accurate and relatively up-to-date information about the enigmatic kingdom of China and its traditional beverage. The message about tea contained in these works was mixed. On the one hand, Müller praised the seventeenth-century diplomat Baikov for resisting conformity with Chinese cultural traditions when these violated the strictures of his Orthodox Christian faith. The other works, in addition to providing information about tea cultivation and nomenclature, portrayed Chinese tea drinking as a refined pastime and established tea's status as a luxury good. More significantly for the growth in Russian tea

⁴³ Jean Baptiste du Halde, *Description Geographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique, de l'empire de la Chine* (Paris: Chez Henri Scheurleer, 1735), vol. 1, 24-27, 498, 503, 521. The work was published in Russian as Diu Gal'd, *Geograficheskoe, istoricheskoe, khronologicheskoe, politicheskoe i fizicheskoe opisanie Kitaiskii imperii i Tatarii Kitaiskii*, 4 vols (St. Petersburg, 1774-1777).

⁴⁴ Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe Opisanie*, 4:304-309.

drinking, the attention tea received in European works on China made Europeans' keen interest in the beverage clear. The existing source material does not allow us to gauge Russian responses to such texts, but the evidence strongly indicates the predominance of European rather than Inner or East Asian influences on Russian understandings of tea in the eighteenth century. Most of eighteenth-century Russia's knowledge of tea came through European channels, and its availability was largely a function of the high demand for literature from Europe in eighteenth-century Russia.

Tea and Chinoiserie in Eighteenth-Century Russia

Peter the Great introduced the chinoiserie decorative style to his new capital of St. Petersburg, founded in 1703, with the result that in Russia, the fashion for chinoiserie predated the availability of accurate information about China by several decades. As a result, already during Peter's reign, Chinese decorative styles had little or nothing to do with Russia's actual relations with its imperial neighbor to the east. In Western Europe, by contrast, literature on China appeared in advance of, and served as the precondition for, the development of the fashion for chinoiserie. The trendsetters of eighteenth-century Russia evinced little interest in adopting new drinks and behaviors directly from China, but they did embrace the European chinoiserie style of architecture and the decorative arts, and this became an avenue for the entrance of social tea drinking into eighteenth-century Russian genteel culture. Chinoiserie as a cultural phenomenon and a political tool in eighteenth-century Russia awaits its historian. Here, I will briefly consider how chinoiserie helped provide a niche for tea drinking.

While Peter himself did not harbor any personal liking for tea, he did bring chinoiserie to Russia for the first time. Peter employed symbols of power derived from the visual language of

Western absolutism, using Western forms of art and architecture as signifiers of his nobles' participation in the Europeanized scenario he created.⁴⁵ Peter consciously emulated Louis XIV of France (r. 1643-1715), modeling his palace and gardens at Peterhof after Versailles. In the early 1670s, Louis had become the first European monarch to have a small Chinese pleasure house constructed in his royal gardens at Versailles, and the French court's obsession with everything Chinese, including tea, peaked in the second half of the seventeenth century. In France and Germany, royal courts held a virtual monopoly on the chinoiserie craze, but in England and the Netherlands, it extended into popular fashion as early as the late seventeenth century.⁴⁶

Hence Peter's emulation of Louis XIV's court culture, and European decorative styles more generally, included Chinese themes. Peter created the first chinoiserie room in Russia for his wife, Catherine I, at Monplaisir in Peterhof. The relatively simple chamber featured lacquer-lined walls hung with porcelain in a manner similar to the *Porzellankammer* in the Charlottenburg Palace at Berlin.⁴⁷ Europeans had never seen porcelain until they encountered it in China, and quickly learned to prize this white, translucent material they were unable to produce themselves. Even after European scientists discovered the secret to porcelain manufacture in the first decade of the eighteenth century, the material retained its prestige and remained comparatively rare and expensive until mass production techniques drove prices down in the nineteenth century. Like other European monarchs, Peter frequently displayed large porcelain vessels at court social functions as a sign of his wealth and power.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 21, 28.

⁴⁶ Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: J. Murray, 1961), 53-56; Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, 66, 68-69.

⁴⁷ Honour, *Chinoiserie*, 117.

⁴⁸ Bespiatykh, *Peterburg Petra I*, 145.

In addition to the opportunity it afforded to display his wealth and taste, Louis XIV used chinoiserie to send a message about the universality of his power—a strategy that would certainly have appealed to Peter. Chinoiserie at the court of Louis XIV in the late seventeenth century, like other aspects of court culture, was intended to glorify the monarch. The foreignness and unfamiliarity of Chinese art heightened its attractiveness and hinted at the power and refinement of that distant empire. Appropriating Chinese decorative forms allowed Louis, Peter, and other eighteenth-century European monarchs to graft China's prestige and mystique onto themselves.⁴⁹ The journal of the 1720 Polish embassy to St. Petersburg suggests that Peter's Chinese decorations at Peterhof successfully communicated this message. The account describes the Chinese room at Monplaisir with unmistakable admiration, noting its beautiful and exotic decor, which made a strong impression upon the author. The description concludes, "This monarch encompasses everything" (*V etom monarkhe zakliuchaetskia vse*).⁵⁰

Subsequent eighteenth-century developments show that Peter's example and continuing European influences sustained the fashion for Chinese decorative styles in Russia. Catherine the Great's estate at Oranienbaum became the second Russian imperial palace after Peter's Monplaisir to feature chinoiserie, quite possibly in conscious imitation of Peter. Immediately upon her accession in 1762, Catherine introduced Chinese decor to Oranienbaum under the supervision of the architect Antonio Rinaldi. Catherine also caused an entire Chinese palace to be constructed there, and commissioned the Bolognese artist D. Barozzi to paint a large mural of a Chinese wedding on the ceiling of its Grand Chinese Room (*Bol'shoi Kitaiskii Kabinet*).⁵¹ Italian artists and architects mediated this early Catherinian chinoiserie.

⁴⁹ Honour, *Chinoiserie*, 56.

⁵⁰ Bespiatykh, *Peterburg Petra I*, 155-56.

⁵¹ Maggs, *Russia and 'le Rêve Chinois'*, 110.

Whereas French design had shaped Petrine chinoiserie, that of later Catherinian Russia predominantly reflected English influence. Less well known than Catherine's general passion for landscape design is her specific interest in Chinese gardening as interpreted by the English. "In a word, my Anglomania rules over my plantomania," she wrote to Voltaire in June 1772.⁵² Catherine sent the architect Vasilii Neelov, who had worked in landscaping at Tsarskoe Selo since the 1740s, on a six-month visit to England in 1770, and he brought back the English fascination with all things Chinese. In 1771, Catherine sponsored the publication of a chapter on Chinese gardening from William Chambers's *Dessins des Édifices, Meubles, Habits etc. des Chinois*.⁵³ In his *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, Chambers wrote that Chinese buildings in oriental gardens were spaces in which refined ladies could drink tea and converse.⁵⁴ That same year, 1771, Catherine acquired a French translation of Thomas Whatley's influential *Observations on Modern Gardening*, a work shot through with Chinese themes.⁵⁵ Catherine had Neelov design a Chinese summer house called Large Caprice along the road to Tsarskoe Selo, which was completed in 1772. Neelov also collaborated with Rinaldi on the latter's Chinese village on the grounds of Tsarskoe Selo. By the time of its completion under Charles Cameron, this fanciful ensemble included fifteen small buildings, many of which survive today. Finally, in 1777, work began on a three-story Chinese theater at Tsarskoe Selo.⁵⁶ In sum, current English fashion shaped the Chinese stylistic elements of Catherine's gardens at a time when English tea consumption was growing exponentially. Moreover, an English writer on Chinese landscape

⁵² Quoted in Adreas Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden: Politics and Landscape Design in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 48.

⁵³ Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden*, 56.

⁵⁴ William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London, 1772), 28.

⁵⁵ Simon Dixon, *Catherine the Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 210.

⁵⁶ Maggs, *Russia and 'le Rêve Chinois'*, 110.

design whose works Catherine read and actively promoted, William Chambers, explicitly connected Chinese gardens with tea drinking.⁵⁷ Catherine herself habitually drank both tea and coffee, and tea may have been one of the activities Catherine and her associates enjoyed in her Chinese pleasure houses and oriental gardens.

Catherine had followed Peter's example by dabbling in chinoiserie, but she put it to different political use. Gardens like those at Tsarskoe Selo continued to represent an idealized vision of the Russian state, but whereas Peter calculated that his chinoiserie would send a message about the extent of his power, Catherine expected her nobles to engage in the sorts of quiet, enlightened pastimes enjoyed by their peers in the West.⁵⁸ "For the westernised gentry of European Russia," Smith and Christian noted, tea was "one of those luxury items which signalled and alienated them from the mass of eighteenth-century Russians."⁵⁹ Like other expensive gentry pastimes, tea served as a marker of social distinction, reserved for those with the education necessary to appreciate it and the good breeding needed to successfully execute such rituals.⁶⁰

Of the two Chinas present in eighteenth-century Russian culture, the one imagined by Europe predominated. Demand for European literature far outpaced any Russian interest in Asian cultures, and in any event Russia's direct experience of China presented a Middle Kingdom that was less idyllic than that described in European reports. The fact that chinoiserie predated the intellectual tradition of sinology in Russia supports the view that European fashion, rather than any direct cultural influence coming from the east, shaped Russian attitudes toward

⁵⁷ Pettigrew and Richardson, *A Social History of Tea*, 45.

⁵⁸ Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden*, 41.

⁵⁹ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 234.

⁶⁰ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 64.

tea drinking in the eighteenth century. The same had been true in the seventeenth century: Russian diplomats in Asia disdained tea, but courtiers back in Moscow embraced it on the advice of their European physicians. Chinoiserie fostered Russians' understanding of tea as an expensive luxury consumed by royal and noble elites. Peter the Great used chinoiserie as a symbolic language of power. Catherine the Great, whose chinoiserie may have been inspired by Peter's, used it for different political ends. She encouraged the nobility to see their everyday lives and their leisure activities as an extension of the court culture in the capitals, and sought to exercise authority over rural Russia in part through their influence.⁶¹

“The Vapors of Manchuria”: Tea in Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature

The eighteenth century saw the birth of secular literature in Russia. Poems, plays, essays, advice literature, memoirs, and novels from that era furnish the best evidence about the feelings of eighteenth-century Russian tea drinkers about the beverage and the meanings they attached to its consumption. Whereas Russian attitudes toward tea in the seventeenth century had been mixed, those writers who questioned tea in the eighteenth century did so for different sets of reasons, directing their critiques westward rather than eastward—and indeed also inward. Tea had become a trapping of Westernized aristocratic luxury, and as such, satirists singled it out for criticism, especially when people of lower socioeconomic status aspired to drink tea. Other writers saw tea as a harmless and refined pastime, a pleasure rightfully enjoyed by nobles wealthy enough to consume it habitually. Tea made its presence felt in every genre and political perspective of eighteenth-century Russian literature.

⁶¹ John Randolph, *The House in the Garden: The Bakunin Family and the Romance of Russian Idealism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 24.

Satirizing Tea

Critics consider Mikhail Chulkov (1743-1793) one of the fathers of Russian prose fiction. A *raznochinets*, a category that included the lower court and governmental ranks, Chulkov also wrote a seven-volume history of Russian commerce featuring detailed data on the tea trade. He published the first part of *The Comely Cook, or The Adventures of a Depraved Woman*, considered the first modern Russian novel, in 1770; the second part was never published and possibly never written. *The Comely Cook* was the first Russian picaresque, or episodic piece of prose fiction, and also the first Russian work belonging to the European genre of the “rogue novel,” with a fallen woman as its heroine.⁶² Scholars often refer to *The Comely Cook* as the Russian *Moll Flanders*, because both exhibit the same episodic structure and themes of adventure and sexual license.⁶³ The first-person narrative relates incidents in the life of a young widow whose husband had died at the Battle of Poltava in 1711. The protagonist, Martona, conducts love affairs with a number of men, and her fortunes fluctuate according to the socioeconomic status of her current beau. The novel stops short of satirizing Russian society as a whole, but singles out tea drinking as an activity characteristic of morally depraved people.

Early in the novel, Martona takes a job as a cook in the house of a government secretary. While the secretary spends two hours each morning in prayer, his wife, an alcoholic, positions herself outside his room and accepts bribes. Then the couple sit down to tea and discuss the

⁶² William Edward Brown, *A History of Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 545; J.G. Garrard, cited in David Gasperetti, *Three Russian Tales of the Eighteenth Century* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 25.

⁶³ Emma Lieber, “Investigations into the Unpoliced Novel: *Moll Flanders* and *The Comely Cook*,” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 575; Harold B. Segel, ed., *The Literature of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Dutton, 1967), 2:26.

morning's illicit income. Martona quickly becomes the secretary's lover.⁶⁴ In this scenario, the outward appearance of propriety and piety masks underlying corruption, and the seemingly innocent occupation of drinking tea serves as the setting for discussions of ill-gotten gain. The secretary's wife eventually dismisses Martona from the household, not because she has discovered the affair with her husband, but because her own suitors begin to be distracted by Martona's beauty. Martona loses no time in finding another lover, an elderly retired colonel, who conducts his first interview with her over tea.⁶⁵ That the tea table serves as a site for conducting immoral business implicates the beverage itself in corruption and deceit, and tea's status as a luxury item disconnects it from older, more wholesome Russian traditions.

Tea plays a similar role in Denis Fonvizin's celebrated comedy *The Brigadier*, which he completed in 1769, one year before Chulkov's novel appeared. Fonvizin (1745-1792) virtually invented the Russian comedy, and his work anticipated nineteenth-century realism.⁶⁶ In *The Brigadier*, Fonvizin uses the activities of the people in the opening scene to reveal each one's moral character. The eponymous brigadier's son, a self-absorbed dandy called Ivanushka, sits drinking tea with affected gestures (*kobenit'sia*). Flirting with him from across the table, the frivolous Avdotia Potapovna theatrically (*zhemanit'sia*) pours out tea for herself, somewhat incongruously attired in a coronet and her dressing gown. Her daughter, the virtuous Sofiia, sits demurely embroidering in a corner. Throughout the play Sofiia, the personification of maidenly honor, refrains from the more fashionable French, speaking only Russian and engaging in activities traditionally appropriate for Russian women. The contrast with the proceedings at the

⁶⁴ Mikhail Chulkov, *The Comely Cook, or The Adventures of a Debauched Woman*, in Gasperetti, *Three Russian Tales*, 71-72.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶⁶ Brown, *History of Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature*, 219.

tea table on the other side of the room could not be greater, where the superficially Frenchified (and married) Avdotia Potapova accepts sexual overtures made in absurdly bad French from the shallow Ivanushka. Later in the play, when Sofiia's suitor, the patient Dobroliubov, desires to speak to her father about his honorable intentions, the latter interrupts him rudely, saying, "Right now I can't say one thing or another. Better let's go and have a little cup of tea" (*Poidem-ka luchshe da vyp'em po chashke chaiu*).⁶⁷ In this scene Sofiia's father's insistence on a tea break delays the progression of the plot, conveying a subtle message about the beverage's usefulness. Throughout the comedy, the depraved characters drink tea while those who are morally upright do not. At the end of the play, poetic justice is done when Dobroliubov and Sofiia finalize their engagement. Thus in *The Brigadier*, drinking tea is an idle pastime indulged in by people with short-sighted pretensions to refinement. Westernization has penetrated only to the level of their clothes and expensive habits, which serve no useful purpose, but corrupt them morally and drain them financially.

Perhaps the best known Russian satire implicating tea is Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev's *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790), a harshly critical account of social injustice in Catherinian Russia. The son of a nobleman, Radishchev (1749-1802) wrote prose and poetry, and his political views inspired succeeding generations of radical intelligentsia. The narrator of the *Journey* relates stories of suffering, corruption, and oppression from each station along the post road between Russia's two capitals. At one stop early in the traveler's journey, the stationmaster lies to him about the availability of horses and tries to get rid of him by sending him into the *traktir* (inn) to drink tea. Throughout the book, Radishchev treats tea and coffee as luxury items likely to degrade the moral character of the consumer. A Frenchman

⁶⁷ Denis Fonvizin, *The Brigadier*, in Segel, *The Literature of Eighteenth-Century Russia*, 2:322, 353.

interviewed by the narrator recalls a cushy teaching job he once held with a salary of 150 rubles and whose perks included a servant, a carriage, and generous annual allowances of tea, coffee, and sugar.⁶⁸

Radishchev even expanded his social critique to include a condemnation of slavery, on which global commodity markets depended, bemoaning the “sweat, tears, and blood” required for the production of colonial products. He refers to coffee as being “the fruit of the sweat of unfortunate African slaves.” For Radishchev, the nobility’s habit of consuming tea, coffee, and sugar exploited both faraway Africans and ordinary Russian serfs. In one episode of the *Journey*, a serf boy refers to sugar as a “lordly food” (*boiarskoe kushanie*). When asked to elaborate, the boy explains, “It is lordly because we have no money to buy it with, while the gentry use it because they do not have to earn the money for it. It’s true that our bailiff buys it when he goes to Moscow, but he too pays for it with our tears.”⁶⁹ Radishchev’s condemnation of luxury comestibles throughout the *Journey* serves the dual purpose of highlighting the gentry’s lack of moral character, and revealing the consequences of their lust for colonial goods: the oppression of people all along the supply chain, from African slaves to Russian serfs. In addition to the evidence about the meanings of tea in Russian culture, Radishchev confirms that tea was commonly available at posting stations in the eighteenth century, and that salaries sometimes included rations of tea, coffee, and sugar.⁷⁰

When Catherine read Radishchev’s *Journey*, she immediately banned the work and ordered all copies of it to be confiscated and burned. She had Radishchev arrested and sentenced

⁶⁸ Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, trans. Leo Weiner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 42, 211.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 157, 219.

⁷⁰ See also Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova*, trans. Kyril Fitzlyon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 40.

to death, and his sentence was later commuted to Siberian exile. He reached the site of his exile, the small town of Ilimsk, in 1792, and lived there for five years with his second wife and their children. Until his arrest, Radishchev seems not to have realized the risk involved in his vehement critique of Catherinian Russia in the *Journey*, and under questioning, insisted he had no intention of inciting peasants or anyone else to rebellion against the Russian government. In exile, Radishchev worked energetically to regain favor with Catherine, devoting himself to studying the local people.⁷¹ As part of this effort, he composed the essay *Pis'mo o Kitaiskom Torge* (Letter on the China Trade) in 1792. Radishchev's attitude toward tea in this essay, addressed to Catherine, is much the same as that propounded in the *Journey*. In February of that year, the Kiakhta trade had just begun to function again after an interruption that had begun almost seven years previously, in 1785.

In this context, Radishchev opined that trade with China was not economically advantageous for Russia, and was even more critical of tea than he had been in the *Journey*. Its prevalence, especially in Siberia where so many merchants traded it, was painfully obvious. "Of the ubiquity of tea consumption I have no need to speak," he wrote disparagingly. "How all of Russia has developed a habit for it is known to all." Radishchev claimed that the majority of tea imported from China did not reach markets in European Russia, where it could benefit the Russian economy, but remained in Siberia, and particularly in areas beyond Lake Baikal inhabited mostly by Buriats and a few Russians. Radishchev described these people as savages (*dikie narody*) with an unhealthy addiction to tea that subjected them to the pernicious action of luxury and caprice. When the Kiakhta trade was interrupted (as it frequently was in the

⁷¹ Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 544-45.

eighteenth century), Radishchev claimed that Siberians would pay three to four times the price for tea imported via Europe, at the expense of their livelihoods (such tea would have made a circuitous journey indeed). The people would sell eggs, cows, horses, and grain to pay for tea, to the point that they ran out of seed grain and agricultural production ceased. They would turn to other herbs only if this alternative source of overpriced tea dried up. Citing the lessons of history, Radishchev warned that such popular addictions were not only morally, but also politically dangerous, because a lack of the coveted commodity could easily lead to rebellion.⁷² In Radishchev's view, peasant tea consumption would not only upset the social order, but also damage the economy. The inability of peasants to make wise decisions when presented with luxury goods, together with fears about their addictive nature, inheres in his argument. The idea that luxury goods could lead to financial ruin was as old as the first-century Roman philosopher Pliny, and later generations of Russian writers would use similar reasoning to claim that peasant tea consumption endangered the agricultural economy.⁷³

“[T]hough I do not wholly approve of this sometimes disadvantageous trade,” Radishchev concluded, “I do myself gladly drink several cups of tea daily.”⁷⁴ Radishchev enjoyed the right to drink tea because his doing so did not threaten the productivity of the local economy. Reading between the lines, we may also infer that Radishchev believed his noble status entitled him to the beverage. At the end of his letter Radishchev acknowledged that in some ways, trade with China benefited local populations economically. This minor hypocrisy on Radishchev's part is emblematic of the uneasy place of tea in eighteenth-century Russia, and

⁷² Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev, “Pis'mo o Kitaiskom Torge,” in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v 3 Tomakh* (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1941), http://az.lib.ru/r/radishew_a_n/text_0090.shtml.

⁷³ Berg and Eger, “Introduction,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 8.

⁷⁴ Radishchev, “Pis'mo o Kitaiskom Torge.”

luxury across Europe generally. Tea's status as a wholesome and beneficial beverage depended, then, on who consumed it, and the manner of its consumption. This sometimes resulted in writers displaying a seemingly contradictory attitude to the Chinese drink.

This was true of the writings of Aleksandr Petrovich Sumarokov (1717-1777), who brought Russian literature into what is known as its classical period. An enlightened member of the landed gentry, Sumarokov believed it was his duty as a nobleman to partner with the monarch in governing the country. The poet's role, for Sumarokov, was to set an example and serve as a teacher of society.⁷⁵ During the period between 1756 and 1770, Sumarokov took a break from drama and composed a number of "parables" (*pritchi*) in free verse. Two of these will serve to demonstrate his mixed attitude toward tea drinking. In one, "Nedostatok Vremeni" (Not Enough Time), Sumarokov lampoons an idle young nobleman who claims not to have time for service to the state. He is not a member of the social body, but a wart that disfigures it ("*Ne chlen on tela—borodavka*"). The young man does nothing but eat, sleep, drink tea, and smoke. Every day is a masquerade for him—that is, he is failing to perform the duties intrinsic to his status as a nobleman.⁷⁶ He hoards his tea for himself and does not share it with others. Sumarokov here associates tea with idleness and misspent time and wealth, and he understood both of these to carry serious political implications.

In contrast, another of Sumarokov's parables, "The Despairing Widow," portrays tea drinking as an innocent pastime conducive to chaste love. The poem tells the story of a widow unable to let go of her husband's memory, preserved in a wooden statue that stands outside her house. At length she develops a friendship with another man. One day, when the woman needs to

⁷⁵ Brown, *History of Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature*, 112-15.

⁷⁶ Aleksandr Petrovich Sumarokov, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1957), http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow_a_p/text_0340.shtml.

heat up some water for tea, she allows her male friend to chop off the statue's arm for fuel. This proves to be the first step in the widow's process of healing from her grief, and eventually the whole statue of her dead husband is dismantled and used for firewood. The last two lines of the poem recapitulate the tea incident as the turning point in the widow's attitude toward her suitor:

She told him to throw [the statue] away,
And after her tea she considered him suitable.⁷⁷

Here, sharing tea creates a new and honorable intimacy, which possible now that the widow has moved on from her grief for her late husband. For Sumarokov, then, drinking tea could be both an idle pastime of the indolent rich, and an edifying social activity.

Tea as Luxury

Part of tea's appeal as a luxury item in eighteenth-century Russia, as elsewhere in Europe, lay in its exotic connotations. A poem composed by the renowned fabulist Ivan Andreevich Krylov suggests a rote association between tea, China, and fabulous wealth. His 1795 poem "Message on the Usefulness of the Passions" (*Poslanie o pol'ze strastei*) argued that the arts and sciences would be bland without passions like greed, love, and fear. Where would world exploration be, Krylov inquired rhetorically, without delectable wines and textiles to tempt traders into exotic ports? "Passion for luxury has bound the world together more tightly," he wrote. In the lines following, Krylov lists, as if spontaneously off the top of his head, several commodities and their origins: furs from Siberia, coffee from the Levant, and tea from China.⁷⁸ In Krylov's mind, tea was China's most iconic export, and could be used as a stand-in for Chinese products generally.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ivan Andreevich Krylov, *Stikhotvoreniia*. http://az.lib.ru/k/krylow_i_a/text_0230.shtml.

Iakov Kniazhnin (1740-1791), one of the most prominent authors of tragedies and comedies during the reign of Catherine, portrayed China and its tea in even more romantic terms. In Kniazhnin's one-act comic opera of 1772, *The Miser (Skupoi)*, a servant woman named Marfa pretends to be a rich countess in order to deceive the miser, Skriagin, into marrying her. Marfa's co-conspirator, Prolaz, sings an aria extolling the wealth of Marfa's faraway (and nonexistent) villages, whence she can expect a handsome income:

Her villages, so they say,
Are many, and lie
Right next to China,
There, where there is so much tea
Where tea and horses run.
There, they say,
There are mountains, mountains of gold
And there the streets shine
All over with precious stones.
If a man wants to bake something,
One stick of cinnamon will heat the stove,
And his boots are soled using cloves;
Not kvas, but Madeira he enjoys.⁷⁹

Another aria later in the opera describes Chinese boats and caravans arriving at Marfa's fantastical villages bearing gold and silver.⁸⁰ Comically, when Skriagin inquires as to the exact amount, Prolaz pleads ignorance. China has little to do with the plot of the comedy, serving only as an image of unimaginable wealth. Prolaz endues this idealized China with all the luxuries he can think of: gold, tea, spices, and oddly, Madeira, which eclipses the native Russian kvas. Significantly, in Kniazhnin's comedy, Russia, rather than Europe, serves as a foil to the exotic East. Indeed, Russian conventions, such as the assumption that the Chinese must cook with stoves, circumscribe Prolaz's ability to imagine China. This distinctively Russian perspective on

⁷⁹ Iakov Borisovich Kniazhnin, "Skupoi: Komicheskaiia Opera v Odnom Deistvii," in *Komedii* (St. Petersburg: Giperion, 2003), http://az.lib.ru/k/knjazhnin_j_b/text_0150.shtml.

⁸⁰ Kniazhnin, *Skupoi*, 43.

China and its tea constitutes one aspect of the native Russian tea culture that was emerging under Catherine.

Other eighteenth-century Russian literature portrayed tea as a more quotidian indulgence enjoyed by members of high society. Catherine the Great was herself a prolific author, and her play *Nedorazumenie* (Misunderstanding), which premiered in 1789, mentioned tea and lemonade being served after a dance at a ball.⁸¹ Princess Ekaterina Dashkova, who had participated in the coup that deposed Peter III and brought Catherine to the throne in 1762, and later headed the Russian Academy of Sciences, wrote in her memoirs about Peter III hosting gatherings at which tea and punch were served.⁸² Another of Russia's earliest memoirists, the noblewoman Anna Labzina (1756-1828), stressed the frugality of her early life by claiming, with a tinge of self-righteousness, "Tea was unknown to us." Later in life, Labzina drank tea on a regular basis both at home and at social gatherings.⁸³ A short comedy by Sumarokov features several characters squabbling over the time of day and whether it is time for tea, indicating the existence of a standard tea time in Russia.⁸⁴

Tea may indeed have been an everyday beverage for some Russians, but this did not eclipse its status as a luxury. Aleksandr Ablesimov (1742-1783), a writer who had served in the same company as Aleksandr Sumarokov and occasionally contributed to the latter's journal *The Industrious Bee*, wrote a poem about a young noblewoman whose family had fallen on hard times. In consequence, she marries into the merchant class, but misses drinking wine, turns up

⁸¹ The incident takes place in Act IV, scene 3. Catherine II, *Sochineniia Imperatritsy Ekateriny II*, ed. A.I. Vvedenskii (St. Petersburg: Izdanie A.F. Marksa, 1893).

⁸² Dashkova, *Memoirs*, 45.

⁸³ Anna Evdokimovna Labzina, *Days of a Russian Noblewoman: The Memories of Anna Labzina, 1758-1821*, ed. Gary Marker and Rachel May (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 6.

⁸⁴ Aleksandr Petrovich Sumarokov, "Vzdorshchitsa," in *Dramaticheskie Proizvedeniia* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990), http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow_a_p/text_0450.shtml.

her nose at vodka, and refuses to give up her former tea habit. At the end of the poem, the young woman begins drinking her tea with vodka, mixing habits from both parts of her life and demonstrating that she has finally adjusted to her new social milieu.⁸⁵ In this poem, regular tea drinking serves as a marker of upper-class status, yet seems debased when diluted with vodka.

No discussion of eighteenth-century Russian literature would be complete without mentioning the pastoral idyll and its most talented wordsmith, Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin (1743-1816). Derzhavin has been called the greatest poet of eighteenth-century Russia, and he wrote of tea in his 1807 masterpiece “To Eugene. Life at Zvanka.” The addressee was Derzhavin’s friend Bishop Evgenii Bolkhovitinov, and the poem describes scenes at Zvanka, Derzhavin’s estate on the Volkhov River in Novgorod province. The poem blends Slavic tropes—peasant women reaping in the fields, cabbage soup, caviar the color of amber—with classical images and references to the modern commodities of tea and coffee.⁸⁶ In a possible reference to steam from a samovar, Derzhavin described the vapors of Manchuria (tea) and the Levant (coffee) wafting from the house. Rambling along the banks of the Volkhov,

We watch how the red day runs over the water
And under the sky we drink fragrant tea.⁸⁷

Outdoor tea drinking in a natural setting seems to have been a favorite pastime for Derzhavin, as it may also have been for the pleasure seekers in Catherine’s Chinese gardens at Tsarskoe Selo. Though Catherine had been dead more than a decade by 1807, the enlightened rural lifestyle

⁸⁵ Aleksandr Onesimovich Ablesimov, “Dvorianka v Kupchikhakh,” in *Stikhovornaia Skazka (Novella) XVIII - nachala XIX v.* (Leningrad, 1969), http://az.lib.ru/a/ablesimow_a_o/text_0040.shtml.

⁸⁶ Brown, *A History of Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature*, 381, 402.

⁸⁷ Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin, *Stikhotvoreniia*, ed. I.I. Podol'skaia (Moscow: Pravda, 1985), http://az.lib.ru/d/derzhawin_g_r/text_0010.shtml.

Derzhavin described in this poem would have gratified her desire for the nobility to spread enlightenment and culture out in the provinces.

Tea in Advice Literature

The question of whether tea was appropriate for children entered into eighteenth-century Russian debates about *vospitanie*, or childrearing. Catherine II and other Russian writers participated in a politicized discourse on *vospitanie* premised on the idea that the correct formation of children's moral, physical, and intellectual selves could produce long-term benefits for the state. Tea's role in this discourse was new in the reign of Catherine. Earlier eighteenth-century advice literature, such as *Iunosti chestnoe zertsalo* (The Honorable Mirror of Youth), published on the order of Peter the Great in 1717, had barely mentioned dietary issues, much less tea. One of the primary players in the *vospitanie* debates was Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov (1744-1818), who had been an early student of Moscow University, founded in 1755. A pioneer of Russian journalism, Novikov is best remembered for his satirical attacks on Catherine in his journal *The Drone*. Catherine even set up her own journal in part to respond to Novikov's witty and penetrating critiques of her reign.

In his 1783 seminal essay "On the Upbringing and Guidance of Children," Novikov encouraged his readers to raise their children according to the advice of doctors and other professionals rather than older traditions. At the same time, however, he criticized those parents who fed their children expensive foreign foods just because they were fashionable, recommending a diet that more closely resembled peasant fare than Western foods.⁸⁸ In the

⁸⁸ Anna Kuxhausen, *From the Womb to the Body Politic: Raising the Nation in Enlightenment Russia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 11-12, 81-82.

mornings, he permitted parents to give their children tea with milk and sugar or with dry bread. Novikov cautioned that the strong coffee habitually consumed by adults was very dangerous for children. If parents insisted on serving their children coffee, they could limit its ill effects to weakening the child's stomach by diluting it with hot water. Novikov concluded that the best drink for children at any time of day is water.⁸⁹ In including tea (albeit with qualifications) in a diet plan that was supposed to resemble simple country fare, Novikov revealed how ordinary and quotidian tea had become for the members of his class. Although his audience could take luxuries such as tea for granted, his advice suggested that refined habits such as tea required skill and bodily maturity, and were therefore best left to the discerning adult members of Russian high society.

Princess Dashkova penned another important essay on childrearing, arguing that *vospitanie* meant cultivating a child's physical, moral, and educational capacities. Catherine borrowed this tripartite understanding of *vospitanie* in her *Instruction* to Prince Nikolai Ivanovich Saltykov on the upbringing of the Grand Princes (1784), and also adopted them for state institutions such as her Smolnyi Institute for the education of noble girls.⁹⁰ Dashkova wrote that parents often desired to raise their children according to the fashion of the nobility (*blagorodno*), which meant providing five pounds of sugar and one pound of tea per month per child—more than one gallon of liquid tea per week. Dashkova condemned this mindset, stating that a woman would be a better wife, mother, and lady if, instead of learning French badly, she would apply herself to mastering her native language and cultivating a love for the Fatherland.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Nikolai Novikov, *O Vospitanii i Nastavlenii Detei (Pribavlenie k Moskovskim Vedomostiam 1783-1784)* (Moscow: Pravda, 1983), http://az.lib.ru/n/novikow_n_i/text_1783_o_vospitanii.shtml.

⁹⁰ Kuxhausen, *From the Womb to the Body Politic*, 22.

⁹¹ Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, "O smysle slova 'vospitanii'", in *Stat'i*, ed. G.I. Smagina (St. Petersburg, 2001), http://az.lib.ru/d/dashkova_e_r/text_0040.shtml.

It is no accident that Dashkova jumps immediately from a discussion of tea and sugar to a critique of superficial westernization. For Dashkova, tea, sugar, and speaking French were not damaging per se—Dashkova herself spoke better French than Russian and drank great quantities of tea—but could become harmful if families sought fashion and upward mobility instead of pursuing their patriotic duty. The inculcation of virtue—a central priority for Dashkova, for Catherine herself, and for Russian Enlightenment culture in general—mattered more than the specific content of a child’s diet.⁹² Proper *vospitanie* was a question of having one’s priorities in the right order. Intangible qualities such as virtue and a desire to serve the state should take priority over the enjoyment of luxury goods for their own sake. There was nothing wrong with the latter, so long as it did not distract parents’ and children’s attention from the former.

Other types of eighteenth-century advice literature foregrounded hygiene when it came to domestic tea consumption. Sergei Vasil’evich Drukovtsev (1731-1786), considered the father of Russian cooking literature, published a household advice manual in 1773 that included instructions on the sanitary preparation of tea and coffee. Drukovtsev commented on the recent rise of tea and coffee out of obscurity and into everyday life. Even peasants, he wrote, would consume the beverages if given the opportunity. Drukovtsev cautioned that tea leaves must be stored in a dry place away from ambient odors. He displayed a somewhat ambiguous attitude toward the healthfulness of tea. Reminding his readers that tea was harvested in hot climates by people with sweaty hands, he advises rinsing the tea leaves before steeping them, so as to avoid contracting diseases. As a cautionary example, he recounted the story of a previously healthy

⁹² Marcus C. Levitt, *The Visual Dominant in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 125.

person who had drunk tea and subsequently come down with a sore throat. Still, he concluded, there is nothing better than tea and coffee in the morning, or in cold weather.⁹³

Andrei Gordevich Reshetnikov copied text from Drukovtsev's manual when he compiled his compendium *Liubopytnyi Khudozhnik i Remeslennik* (The Inquisitive Artist and Craftsman) in 1791. He includes the same comments about the need to store tea in an odor-free environment, mentions the sweaty palms of tea harvesters, and recommends rinsing tea leaves before using them. Reshetnikov presumed that knowledge of tea was universal among his readers: "Seemingly there is no need whatsoever for any comment on how to make tea," he wrote, calling it an "everyday beverage."⁹⁴ In contrast to Novikov and Dashkova, who prioritized children's moral formation, the works of Reshetnikov and Drukotvsev promoted health and hygiene without assigning much moral value to the mere act of tea drinking.

Russians Drinking Tea Abroad

Princess Dashkova's memoirs contain many references to social tea drinking both at home in Russia and abroad, and these merit special attention because of her status and influence both during and after her lifetime. A leading tastemaker and representative of Russian culture under Catherine, both at home and abroad, Dashkova's writings made her activities, tastes, and preferences available to contemporaries and to readers of her memoirs after her death.⁹⁵

Dashkova's tea-drinking habits made an impression on those who drank tea with her, in addition

⁹³ Sergei Vasil'evich Drukovtsov [Drukovtsev], *Ekonomicheskoe Nastavlenie Dvorianam, Krest'ianam, Povaram i Povarikham* ([St. Petersburg?] 1773), 41-43. Curiously, the better known pioneer of eighteenth-century Russian cooking advice literature, Vasilii Alekseevich Levshin, included sugar and coffee, but not tea, in his encyclopedic work *Slovar' Povarenniy* (Moscow, 1795).

⁹⁴ Andrei Gordevich Reshetnikov, *Liubopytnyi Khudozhnik i Remeslennik* (Moscow: Tip. A Reshetnikov, 1791), 222-24.

⁹⁵ Levitt, *Visual Dominant*, 125.

to furnishing important information about Catherinian tea culture. As one might expect, Dashkova drank tea frequently with friends all over Britain while supervising her son's education at the University of Edinburgh. In Paris, she entertained the celebrated sculptor Étienne Falconet with tea. Away from home in the greatest cities of Europe, Dashkova took special pride in tea of Russian provenance. Stopping in Rome on her way home from extensive travels, Dashkova wrote of entertaining artists with Chinese tea specially sent from Russia for the purpose.⁹⁶

A brief digression here: other evidence besides Dashkova's account suggests that China tea imported through Russia was of fine quality compared to that available in contemporary Europe. Because Chinese authorities carefully controlled the tea trade, Russian merchants at Kiakhta may have had access to higher grades of tea, unlike the European traders in Canton who bought tea in much larger quantities.⁹⁷ Count Francesco Algarotti, a Venetian scholar and art collector who visited St. Petersburg in June 1739, wrote that he was "surprized to find here a sort of tea, exquisitely well flavoured." He continued, "This tea comes from China to Petersburg by the caravans; that is said to be what keeps it so fresh: as it is a very delicate plant, the smell of the hold of a ship always corrupts it a little."⁹⁸ Tea is in fact vulnerable to ambient moisture and odors, as Algarotti noted, so it is possible that the loose tea reaching European Russia in the eighteenth century was of higher quality and in better condition, being spared the humidity and potential soaking of sea travel, than that available in Western Europe. More importantly, the testimony of Algarotti, published in 1759, and the evidence of Dashkova's memoir both suggest

⁹⁶ Dashkova, *Memoirs*, 150, 160, 173.

⁹⁷ Gardella, *Harvesting Mountains*, 30.

⁹⁸ Francesco Algarotti, *Letters from Count Algarotti to Lord Hervey and the Marquis Scipio Maffei, Containing the State of the Trade, Marine, Revenues, and Forces of the Russian Empire [...]* (Dublin, 1770), 1:24.

that Russian tea was distinguishing itself abroad with a reputation for high quality in the second half of the eighteenth century. Dashkova's tea-drinking habits impressed the notable figures with whom she drank it, and the written record of her activities informed future generations of Russian readers and tea drinkers.

Another noble traveler and writer, Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin (1766-1826) rambled all over Europe drinking tea and coffee in 1789-1790. Karamzin's account of this journey, *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, helped establish him as one of the most celebrated literary figures of the eighteenth century. Karamzin's aesthetic sensitivity and emotional depth endeared him to his readers.⁹⁹ The *Letters* indicate that Karamzin, who enjoyed celebrity status even during his lifetime, was a discerning consumer of both tea and coffee before he began his travels, and his readers could not have failed to note that Karamzin took tea and coffee for granted as part of a genteel lifestyle. He preferred coffee in the morning, and often took a break for tea and rest in the afternoons. On reaching Poland on his way to Berlin, Karamzin wrote that tea and coffee were available at almost every posting station, but were not always of high quality; settling in for a long stay in Geneva, he bought and maintained a supply of tea and coffee for his personal use. In a long passage on Zurich, Karamzin praised the Swiss for their "sound morals" and "piety," crediting the women with chastity and the men with a good work ethic; the passage further records the Swiss enjoying tea and coffee "during friendly conversation."¹⁰⁰ A habitual tea drinker himself, Karamzin regarded tea drinking as a wholesome and refined pastime, conducive

⁹⁹ David Gasperetti, "Introduction: Mikhail Chulkov, Matvei Komarov, Nikolai Karamzin, and Eighteenth-Century Russian Literary Culture," in *Three Russian Tales of the Eighteenth Century*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveler, 1789-1790*, trans. Florence Jonas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 37, 53, 129, 142, 144.

both to rest and to good conversation. Karamzin, like Dashkova, drank tea both at home and abroad, and considered it a quotidian practice.

Drinking tea was, then, an act that carried a range of connotations in eighteenth-century Russia. At the very highest levels of society, as the evidence from Catherine herself and from Princess Dashkova has shown, drinking tea was an unproblematic and quotidian practice, and a habit shared across lines of gender and nationality. For Derzhavin, the classicist, and Karamzin, the romantic, tea was a beverage to be enjoyed with friends in idyllic natural surroundings.

References to tea in the literature of Catherinian Russia suggest that the beverage did not trouble the members of the very highest circles of Russian society, to whom tea had been available as a medicine for about a century. Explicit attacks on tea were rare; some satirists mentioned it in the context of critiques of superficial westernization. Writers critical of Catherinian politics and culture, such as Radishchev and Fonvizin, implicated tea in the social damage done by westernization, which, in their view, lured the wealthy into frivolity and wasteful expenditure at the expense of state service. In Radishchev's view, tea could also lure peasants into making bad decisions that could negatively affect Russian agriculture.

Other literary voices examined in this section also held diverse views on tea. Writing about *vospitanie*, Novikov and Dashkova did not object to tea in principle, but subordinated it to the higher good of raising children for faithful state service. The works of Chulkov, Fonvizin, Sumarokov, and Radishchev cautioned the Russian reading public about the moral danger of luxuries such as tea, which they frequently associated with what they saw as the more pernicious aspects of westernization. For Radishchev in particular, this danger extended beyond the soul of the tea drinker, to the bodies of the slaves and serfs who produced it for the wealthy. Cookbook authors Drukovtsov and Reshetnikov feared the bodies of tea harvesters, believing them to be

sweaty and unclean, implicitly making themselves superior. Tea's reputation as a beverage of the wealthy rendered it vulnerable to attack by those who disliked the perceived social inequality and cultural depravity of Catherinian Russia, yet its consumption was becoming so commonplace by the 1790s as to be almost unavoidable in respectable social settings.

Conclusion

Russia's cultural intercourse with Europe, rather than Asia, in the eighteenth century shaped its attitude toward tea and the practices related to its consumption. Russia had an underlying cultural affinity and a longer history of interaction with Europe that it did not share with China. The necessities of maintaining good diplomatic relations and a stable border with the Celestial Empire meant that political expediency rather than cultural curiosity drove Russian interest in China. Eighteenth-century Russians had no compelling reason to admire or emulate Chinese culture until European fashion inspired them to do so, and in any case Europeans created or mediated most of the information on China available in Russia. Nevertheless, tea imported directly from China remained Russia's primary supply, and sinological works made reliable information about tea available to those who cared to seek it. Sinology furnished factual information about tea, but the values and cultural associations connected with its consumption came from the West. For this reason, as Russia developed its own distinctive tea culture over the course of the eighteenth century, Russian tea culture resembled the tea cultures of Western Europe more closely than those of Inner or East Asia.

This does not mean, however, that Chinese culture shaped eighteenth-century Western European tea cultures to a significantly greater extent than in Russia. Arguably, Europeans had undertaken more sustained cultural contact with China through Jesuit missionaries in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it is certainly true that European merchant adventurers penetrated more deeply into the Chinese economy than their Russian contemporaries.

Nevertheless, scholars who study eighteenth-century European tea cultures have detected “little or no Chinese or Japanese cultural baggage” associated with the growth of tea consumption in Western Europe.¹⁰¹ Rather, from the very introduction of tea Europeans, and the British in particular, adapted tea-related concepts and designs to suit their own tastes using the resources available to them.¹⁰² Russians did the same. Sinology may have paved the way for chinoiserie in Western Europe, but the latter could not have been more thoroughly European. Russia received them in reverse order, demonstrating that the niche for tea drinking created by chinoiserie could not have come directly from China. The same cultural creativity that birthed chinoiserie in the West manifested itself best in the technology and material goods associated with tea, and the translation of those goods and technologies to Russia is the subject of the next chapter.

Tea’s status as an imported foreign luxury exposed it to satirical scorn throughout Europe in the eighteenth century. In the West, philosophers, economists, and other thinkers struggled to come to a consensus on the definition of luxury and the criteria by which luxuries could be distinguished from necessities.¹⁰³ The Russian luxury debates were conducted in somewhat different terms. In Russia, journalists, poets, fiction writers, tastemakers, and other authors did not so much wrestle with the definition of luxury. Rather, in striving to come to terms with the moral and economic implications of westernization, they dealt with luxury indirectly. In eighteenth-century Russia, luxury inhered in westernization. One could not live a westernized

¹⁰¹ Willis, “European Consumption and Asian Production,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. Brewer and Porter, 141.

¹⁰² Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 20.

¹⁰³ Berg and Eger, “Introduction,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 13.

lifestyle without wealth enough to habitually consume expensive imports; hence questions of consumption and luxury necessarily concerned westernization. Many of the Western imports that reached Russia during and after Peter the Great's reign, including tea, were luxury items. Yet the fact that a growing market for such a commodity existed in eighteenth-century Russia suggests that by the end of the century, in some affluent households, tea was beginning to make the transition from luxury to necessity—although again, no single voice monopolized these concepts.

One aspect of the luxury debates that Russians and their Western neighbors shared was a concern that the spread of luxury consumption to people of lower socioeconomic status threatened the social, economic, and even the political order. Most of the writers examined in this chapter maintained the comfortable assumption that tea remained exclusive to the court and the wealthiest nobles. When Radishchev wrote from his Siberian exile that he had no need to speak of the ubiquity of tea drinking in Russia, even among peasants living close to tea's homeland, he implied that the spread of tea consumption down the social ladder was a shameful and unwelcome development. Similarly, in *The Comely Cook* Chulkov presented his protagonist Martona as a morally degenerate social pretender with no real right to indulge in the luxuries rightfully belonging to her socioeconomic and moral superiors. Of the two, Radishchev more clearly articulated his anxiety about the consequences of the social leveling of Russia's tea-drinking population. Other writers, such as Fonvizin, instead of drawing a direct connection between tea consumption and societal chaos, lampooned people who drank tea in an assumed and affected style and without the true grace and refinement associated with nobility. As in Chulkov's fiction, when this sort of person aped his or her betters, moral debasement was sure to follow. Aleksandr Sumarokov, with two very different portrayals of tea in his poetry, introduced

the idea that tea could be harmful if it remained merely a selfish indulgence of the indolent rich, but could also contribute to the well-being of society by facilitating chaste romantic love and ultimately marriage.

Finally, to say that the formation of Russian tea culture owed more to European than Asian cultural influences in the eighteenth century is not to imply that Russian tea culture was a carbon copy of a Western import or a direct result of Peter the Great's personal agency. Conditions unique to Russia had shaped attitudes toward tea since its introduction in the seventeenth century, and these attitudes constituted one aspect of the distinctively Russian tea culture that arose during the reign of Catherine the Great. Eighteenth-century Russian writers who critiqued tea did so as part of larger commentaries on westernization and luxury. Those who endorsed it did so merely by consuming it, and in so doing established tea as the beverage of the wealthy and fashionable. Still others, notably Novikov and Dashkova, acknowledged the appropriateness of tea for refined adults but encouraged caution when giving caffeinated beverages to children. None of the writers featured here considered tea appropriate for all people at all times. It is not surprising that Radishchev produced the most nuanced and sophisticated critique of tea, since his writings date from the end of the eighteenth century. Alone of the eighteenth-century writers examined in this chapter, Radishchev condemned tea because the global tea market oppressed slaves in faraway countries, and articulated in detail exactly how peasant tea consumption threatened Russia's economic interests. Yet he himself could not give up his tea habit. Radishchev anticipated the nineteenth-century tea debates, whose participants would also connect tea consumption with Russia's future path, its economy, and the role of the peasantry in Russian society. By the end of the eighteenth century, like Radishchev, Russian society as a whole was becoming addicted to tea in spite of itself.

CHAPTER THREE

MAKING SAMOVARS RUSSIAN: TEA WARE AND NOBLE IDENTITY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

Introduction

“Russia is a European state.” Thus Catherine the Great began the first chapter of her *Nakaz*, or Instruction, which she wrote to guide the legislative commission she convened in 1767. Throughout her reign, Catherine skillfully used decorative objects to substantiate her statement about Russia being European, a claim that historian Simon Dixon has asserted was cultural rather than geographical.¹ A teapot made in Moscow in 1776 furnishes a supreme example of the Catherinian synthesis of contemporary design, classical references, and political symbolism. Made by an unknown silversmith, the design of the *jet d’eau* teapot could well have been influenced by the celebrated sculptor Étienne-Maurice Falconet, who resided in St. Petersburg from 1766 until 1788. Falconet had overseen models production at the Sèvres porcelain factory, which, from 1765, produced a set of porcelain vases “à *jet d’eau*” for the dauphin, Louis XVI. Appearing in the shape of a classical urn, the teapot harmoniously represents a fountain of water featuring three jets and two undulating pools. The principal vertical jet culminates with the finial on the lid, shaped like the peak of a fountain, and the handle and spout form two other sprays of water emanating symmetrically from the teapot’s base. Where the handle meets the body of the pot, the flowing water evoked by the handle’s shape morphs into a small bunch of leaves, reminiscent of plants lining a rippling pool. The

¹ Dixon, *Catherine the Great*, 172.

overall effect is balanced, and the craftsmanship impeccably executed. Recalling the fountains at Peterhof, which were modeled after the fountains of Rome, the teapot refers unmistakably to humanity's ability to tame the natural world. Its neoclassical design, like so much other eighteenth-century tea ware, harnesses the intellectual and aesthetic prestige of ancient Greece and Rome.² The fact that this vessel was designed for a Chinese drink adds another layer of meaning, evoking the riches of the mysterious Orient and the economic accomplishment of bringing tea to Europe.

Although the owner of the teapot is not known, each one of its semantic strata reflects Catherine's personal tastes and political priorities. Shaped like the fountains that were so central to eighteenth-century garden design, and with its finely wrought leaves, the teapot embodied Catherine's love for gardens, spaces she used to convey an idealized vision of the Russian state.³ It referenced her Anglophilia and her love for chinoiserie simply by virtue of being a teapot. Its neoclassical design dovetailed with her interest, shared across eighteenth-century Europe, in Greek and Roman antiquity. The *jet d'eau* teapot harmoniously blended all these associations, to say nothing of its testament to the owner's wealth, good taste, and familiarity with the latest in Western contemporary design. In short, this eminently eighteenth-century vessel proclaimed along with Catherine, "Russia is a European state."

This chapter traces the career of metal tea wares in eighteenth-century Russia. Later, in the nineteenth century, the samovar became the iconic and ubiquitous symbol of Russian tea culture, overshadowing other vessels, but samovars were far from common in the eighteenth century. Most Russian tea drinkers of that era showed off their power and wealth not with

² Kirin, *Exuberance of Meaning*, 172-75.

³ Schönle, *The Ruler in the Garden*, 41.

samovars, but with silver, porcelain, and even gold teapots and kettles. Metal tea wares were introduced into Russia from England and the Netherlands in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, and the samovar somewhat later; but the chapter devotes particular attention to the origin and development of the samovar because the mythology that grew up around it in the nineteenth century has effectively eclipsed its true origin and history. A samovar is a metal urn-shaped vessel featuring a charcoal brazier in its base and, above this, a central interior chimney or tube through which hot air travels and heats the water chamber. The hot water is dispensed through a tap rather than a spout. The terms “tea urn” and “samovar” are interchangeable, though I generally use the latter when referring specifically to tea urns manufactured in Russia. “Samovar” derives from the Russian words *samyi*, meaning “self” or “same,” and *varit’*, “to boil.” There is no doubt of the word’s Russian origin, and there is no evidence of the term being used to designate a vessel for coffee, *sbiten’*, or any other beverage aside from tea in the eighteenth century.⁴ Samovars for coffee existed, but sources always specify them as such (e.g. *samovar dlia kofe* or *kofeinyi samovar*). I foreground metal, rather than porcelain, tea ware because the former, rather than the latter, serves to differentiate Russian tea culture from the other tea cultures of Europe.

While the circumstances of the introduction of metal tea wares into Russia remain opaque, I demonstrate that they originated outside its borders, a fact that most Russian scholarship on samovars tends to elide.⁵ I explore how the Russian samovar emerged out of older

⁴ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 237.

⁵ Most Russian works on samovars, while acknowledging the ancient origin of the device’s basic technological concept, ignore the contemporary tea ware of Russia’s neighbors and trading partners. Perhaps wishing to preserve the undiluted Russianness of the samovar, these works often begin their narratives of samovar history with vague statements about samovars “appearing,” such as: “The Russian samovar as we know it today appeared (*poiavilsia*) in the first half of the eighteenth century” (Brittenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 9), and “The first samovars appeared (*poiavilis’*) in Russia, in all likelihood, only in the eighteenth century” (Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 7).

Dutch and English technologies for preparing and serving tea and coffee. I also examine the material conditions necessary to boil water and brew tea in wealthy Russian homes, conditions that help to explain why the samovar became a permanent everyday accessory in Russian households. Throughout, English tea culture serves as a comparative framework for the study of Russian tea culture, first, because English tea culture exerted a formative influence on Russian tea culture in the eighteenth century, and second, because the history of English tea ware is well documented and has been thoroughly studied.

This study of the little-understood eighteenth-century career of the Russian samovar and other metal tea wares necessarily brings together several historiographical streams. Since the late 1980s, historians, economists, sociologists, and anthropologists have engaged in a theoretically reflective and interdisciplinary dialogue on luxury goods, consumerism, and the decorative arts in Europe between 1600 and 1800.⁶ Recent scholarship on consumerism in eighteenth-century Europe interprets the phenomenon as a *mentalité* projected onto social relationships and political philosophies. This literature demonstrates that material culture and interiors were central to politics and representations of power in the eighteenth century. In Russia, as elsewhere in Europe, eighteenth-century intellectuals took pains to rhetorically divide luxuries from necessities, conducting intense debates over the nature and location of the boundary between them.⁷

⁶ See, for example, Arjun, Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Berg and Clifford, eds., *Consumers and Luxury*; Berg and Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*; Brewer and Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods*; Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, eds., *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Kathryn Norberg and Dena Goodman, eds., *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the European and American Past* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*.

⁷ Berg and Clifford, eds., "Introduction," in *Consumers and Luxury*, 1-2.

The historiography on the lifestyles of the eighteenth-century Russian nobility focuses more on politics, social relations, and cultural trends than on luxury goods and consumer culture. Richard Stites's *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia* (2005) examines the power dynamics of the fine arts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Priscilla Roosevelt's *Life on the Russian Country Estate* explores the rural aristocratic manor as a site of courtly ritual, display, and interaction between elite and folk cultures.⁸ In *The House in the Garden: The Bakunin Family and the Romance of Russian Idealism*, John Randolph argues that the state sanctioned the development of aristocratic domestic life as a legitimate sphere of political activity and cultural display.⁹ Other authors, such as literature scholar Marcus Levitt, emphasize display as a characteristic feature of Russian Enlightenment-era culture.¹⁰ In contrast to these studies, which provide a more generalized analysis of the social, cultural, and political roles of the aristocratic Russian home, this chapter uses the history of a specific set of objects to deepen our understanding of quotidian life within it.

Works on eighteenth-century applied and decorative arts in Russia tend to focus narrowly on the history of individual media without much historiographical synthesis or theoretical reflection.¹¹ The recent works of I. N. Iurkin on metals manufacturing in the Tula region during and after the reign of Peter the Great are a welcome exception to this trend.¹² Perhaps because of

⁸ Priscilla Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate: A Social and Cultural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁹ Randolph, *The House in the Garden*, 3.

¹⁰ See Levitt, *Visual Dominant*.

¹¹ See, for example, S.V. Gnutova and M.S. Shemakhanskaia, *Khudozhestvennyi Metall Rossii* (Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2001); Gol'dberg, T., F. Mishukov, N. Platonova, and M. Postnikova-Loseva, *Russkoe Zolotoe i Serebrianoie Delo XV-XX vekov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1967).

¹² Iurkin, I.N. *Tul'skii Zavod Demidovykh, 1695-1782: Iz Istorii Stanovleniia i Razvitiia Domennoi Metallurgii Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996), and *Petr Zheleznyi: Petr Velikii i Tul'skii Krai: Fakty, Gipotezy, Dokumenty* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2012).

the language barrier, works on the decorative arts in eighteenth-century Russia have not made a significant impact on Western academic discourse, a lack I aspire to rectify. One notable exception is the richly illustrated and scholastically rigorous 2005 edited volume *Catherine the Great: Art for Empire*.¹³ Another is the recent illustrated volume *Exuberance of Meaning: The Art Patronage of Catherine the Great, 1762-1769* (2013), which thoughtfully explores how Catherine commissioned, purchased, and bestowed metal and porcelain tea and dinner wares to express favor and convey political messages.¹⁴ As these works make clear, the decorative arts in eighteenth-century Russia did not merely ape their Western counterparts, but served political purposes tailored to Catherine's specific interests.

Few scholars have studied the history of the samovar in depth. E. A. Ivanova's introductory essay in a samovar exhibition album published by the Russian Museum in 1970 dated the appearance of the Russian samovar to the approximate middle of the eighteenth century but did not investigate its origin further.¹⁵ The British historian Robert Smith researched the invention of the samovar in the late 1970s, and to date, Smith remains the only Western scholar to consider the question of the samovar's origin, and indeed the history of tea in the Russian empire in general. Smith was unable to pinpoint the emergence of the Russian samovar, but came close to the truth when he concluded that the Dutch were most likely responsible for introducing the charcoal-heated hot water urn to Russia.¹⁶ Another book on samovars compiled by A. A. Gilodo in 1991 utilized archival sources in Moscow, Arkhangel'sk, Tula, and Nizhnii Tagil. Gilodo discovered fragmentary archival references to samovars as early as the 1740s, but

¹³ Bondil, ed., *Catherine the Great: Art For Empire*.

¹⁴ Kirin, ed., *Exuberance of Meaning*.

¹⁵ Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 7.

¹⁶ Smith, "Whence the Samovar?", 67.

acknowledged that the exact nature of these vessels is unknown, and that surviving mid-eighteenth-century examples closely resemble English tea urns.¹⁷ By far the most comprehensive study is the recent collaborative effort headed by Liudmila Britenkova, senior researcher at the Museum of Russian Samovars in Tula. Her *Samovary Rossii: Populiarnaia Entsiklopediia* is truly encyclopedic, and agrees with the Gilodo volume in locating the earliest Russian samovar manufacture in the 1740s, although in the absence of specimens dating from that period, precisely what the word “samovar” meant is impossible to determine. The book appears to have made extensive use of archival material, primarily from repositories in Tula and the Urals, but unfortunately does not cite its sources.

These scholars are divided on the question of whether the charcoal-heated tea urn emerged first in Russia, or was introduced from abroad. The Russian works listed above, together with a number of twentieth-century articles appearing in Soviet publications such as *Nauka i zhizn'* (Science and life) and *Krestianka* (Peasant woman), tend to sidestep the issue while implying that the samovar has never been anything but Russian, with the result that many Russians today believe that the vessel was invented by Tula metalworkers.¹⁸ The truth is more complex. The key to understanding the origin of the samovar must be sought not in Russia, but in England and the Netherlands, where silversmiths first designed and manufactured new types of metal tea-brewing equipment in the final decades of the seventeenth century. The samovar's proper context is the Europe-wide elite consumer culture, made possible by developments in industry and technology, into which eighteenth-century Russian nobles were rapidly integrating.

¹⁷ Gilodo, *Russkii Samovar*, 8-9.

¹⁸ See, for example, G. Kirillova, “Samovar Kipit—ukhodit' ne Velit: K Istorii Proizvodstva Samovarov,” *Nauka i Zhizn'*, no. 4 (1967): 94–96; A. Longinov, “Samovar, Samovarchik, Samovarishche...” *Krestianka*, December 1981, 5; I. Luchkova and A. Sikachev, “Zachem Arkhitektoram Zanimat'sia Samovarami,” *Nauka i Zhizn'*, no. 12 (December 1978): 118–23; “Chai da Sakhar!” *Nauka i Zhizn'*, no. 4 (April 1967): 120–21.

The well-documented history of European tea-table technologies reveals that the samovar emerged as part of Europeans' ongoing efforts to design stylish and convenient ways to prepare new and fashionable beverages. The English and Dutch silversmiths who crafted the first tea urns could not have foreseen that the vessel they engineered would remain a permanent fixture in the Russian domestic interior and cultural imagination long after the fashion for owning them faded in their own lands.

Because this is the first study to carefully investigate the origin of the tea urn in Western Europe, the first section conducts a brief survey of early Dutch and English tea silver, attempting to uncover the logic behind the evolution of the tea urn in the early decades of the eighteenth century. I take the trouble to explain the development of Dutch and English tea urns primarily to support my argument about the Western origin of the samovar, and also because existing secondary literature on tea ware lacks such a synthetic narrative. I continue by tracing, as far as possible, the routes by which these Western technologies made their way into Russia and influenced the development of Russian silver and copper manufacturing. The second half of the chapter examines the available evidence on the rise of the Russian tea urn, or samovar, during the reign of Catherine, with special attention to the selective adaptation of European tea wares to suit the particularities of Russian interiors.

Unlike previous studies of the Russian samovar, which focus primarily on samovar manufacture and design, I undertake a careful examination of the practical application of tea-brewing technologies in elite Russian homes. In the absence of textual descriptions and visual images of Russian tea-drinking in the eighteenth century, I rely heavily on the household inventories of eighteenth-century Russian noble families. The Golitsyn family, one of the oldest, wealthiest, and most prominent noble clans in early modern and imperial Russia, were some of

the eighteenth century's earliest and most prolific tea drinkers. One of the four main branches of the Golitsyn family, the Mikhailovich Golitsyns, played a particularly important role in the culture and politics of Catherinian Russia. These Golitsyns also left behind some of the most numerous, detailed, and long-running household inventories of any Russian noble clan. The documents cover the period between 1729 and the 1860s, and while they do not always specify the exact house or estate being inventoried, they do allow the historian to reconstruct the Golitsyns' acquisition of expensive tea wares and, in some cases, furnish evidence about how the objects were used and understood. This underutilized source base provides unique insights into the meanings and social and political uses of tea ware in eighteenth-century Russia.

The Evolution of Dutch and English Tea Urns

The basic technological concept behind the samovar is ancient. A cache of pots found at a burial site in Azerbaijan, dated approximately 1600 BCE, includes a large clay vessel with a central tube. From the soot found on the interior surface of the tube, archaeologists infer that heat and smoke had passed through it for the purpose of efficiently warming the food within the main chamber of the pot.¹⁹ A vessel called *huo-go* in China and *sin syol lo* in Korea features a central tube in which charcoal is burned, and a surrounding open-topped chamber for stew (figure 3.1).²⁰ The ancient Romans made use of the *authepsa*, a bronze vessel on legs with an interior fire box, for cooking food (figure 3.2). A similar device, called the *caeda*, was fitted with a tap and used

¹⁹ Tufan Akhundov, "Birth of the Samovar? A Puzzling Archaeological Find in the Foothills of the Caucasus," *Azerbaijan International* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2000), 3.

²⁰ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 48; I.A. Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 7; Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 237; Luchkova and Sikachev, "Zachem Arkhitektoram," 119.

for preparing and serving drinks made with hot wine.²¹ Despite widespread speculation by Russian samovar enthusiasts, whether any of these preexistent technologies influenced the structure of the modern tea urn is not known; in all likelihood the vessels described above developed independently of each other. Ancient influences on the modern tea urn are in fact discernible, but are stylistic rather than technical in nature, and will be considered below.

Regardless of whether or not they based their work on known precedents, seventeenth-century Dutch and English silversmiths applied brand new designs and manufacturing techniques to tea and coffee vessels. As the world's foremost European tea consumer in the eighteenth century, and also the world's foremost industrial power, England led the world in the manufacture of tea- and coffee-making equipment, both in terms of manufacture and design. Tea consumption jumped sixfold in the middle of the eighteenth century, and doubled again by the end of the century, creating an enormous impetus for the manufacture of new products and accessories to accompany tea drinking. Whereas many associated the French with luxurious and fashionable design, the English displayed remarkable technical virtuosity and excelled at developing new gadgets for everyday convenience. English policymakers actively promoted the development of new products, seeking to cultivate a national taste that would displace perceived French and Asian advantages in the arena of luxurious design. The British particularly excelled in the manufacture and export of metal vessels of all kinds, and over the course of the eighteenth century, consumer goods made of various metals became a characteristic British product. Both policymakers and manufacturers explicitly identified these products with Britishness.²²

²¹ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 47; Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 7; Luchkova and Sikachev, "Zachem Arkhitektoram," 119.

²² Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 95, 150, 155-57, 189.

In the final decades of the seventeenth century, the appearance of English tea wares in silver was a natural development, given the status of tea as a rare and expensive luxury and the established role of silver ownership as a marker of nobility.²³ In addition to its intrinsic value as specie, those wealthy enough to own finely worked silver used it for status and display. Helen Clifford has argued that politeness and refinement—both of the self and of fine silver—had to be displayed in order to be fully appreciated.²⁴ Scholars argue that the appearance of vessels specifically designed for tea also signaled its transition from exotic drug to social pastime.²⁵ Silver tea ware was unique to Europe in the seventeenth century. The use of silver teapots was rare in seventeenth-century China, and contemporary Europeans may have been entirely ignorant of their existence. Silver, as the Chinese well knew, is not the ideal material for teapots because it adversely affects the tea's flavor, dissipates heat quickly, and may burn the hand of the user. Discerning seventeenth-century Chinese tea drinkers much preferred Ming porcelain, then enjoying the height of its popularity and artistic merit. The more common brown or black Yixing clay predominated in teapots across the Celestial Empire, with the result that all the teapots known to reach Europe in that period were made of either clay or porcelain. Early European silver teapots, then, were experimental novelties, and scholars consider the English translation of the Chinese ceramic teapot into silver to be an archetypal example of how English entrepreneurs promoted the acceptance of innovation by combining the familiar with the new.²⁶ As historian Maxine Berg put it, "[A] silver teapot was made of an established prestige material, and

²³ Elizabeth de Castres, *A Collector's Guide to Tea Silver, 1670-1900* (London: Muller, 1977), 16; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 163.

²⁴ Clifford, "A Commerce with Things," in *Consumers and Luxury*, ed. Berg and Clifford, 160.

²⁵ Elka Schrijver, "Europe's Earliest Silver Tea-Kettle," *The Connoisseur* (October 1969), 81.

²⁶ Styles, "Product Innovation," 141.

connected the drinking of an exotic beverage with an elite market and the cultural practices of gentility.”²⁷

Documents attest that the manufacture of silver teapots first took place in London in 1667. Hallmarked examples survive from 1670 and are housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (figure 3.3).²⁸ Teapots are vessels in which tea leaves are steeped, whereas kettles are used to heat water for tea. From this early period onward, teapots can be distinguished from tea kettles and coffee pots by the presence of a perforated screen separating the spout from the body of the vessel, designed to prevent tea leaves from being poured into the cup. The earliest teapots often featured a wooden handle, sometimes covered with leather, intended to protect the user’s hand from heat.²⁹ In 1693, the noted Amsterdam silversmith Pieter de Keen made Europe’s oldest surviving tea kettle, which bears a Dutch Lion assay mark.³⁰ A similar English example survives from 1694. The papers of an Amsterdam notary testify to the existence of another Dutch tea kettle from the 1690s that was stolen.³¹ American tea kettles survive from the first decade of the eighteenth century, and appear in archival documents as early as 1701.³²

Tea kettle stands emerged right around 1700. These served several purposes: to protect the surface of the table from heat, to stabilize the expensive vessel, and to hold in place a small spirit lamp which, when lit, could keep the water within the kettle hot.³³ The “tea frame and kettle” purchased by the Bankes family of Kingston Hall for two pounds in 1693 may be the

²⁷ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 163; Styles, “Product Innovation,” 146.

²⁸ Styles, “Product Innovation,” 146-47; De Castres, *A Collector’s Guide*, 13; Pettigrew, *Design for Tea*, 35; Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 82; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 163.

²⁹ De Castres, *A Collector’s Guide*, 26.

³⁰ Schrijver, “Europe’s Earliest Silver Tea-Kettle,” 83.

³¹ Pettigrew, *Design for Tea*, 43-44.

³² De Castres, *A Collector’s Guide*, 13.

³³ Schrijver, “Europe’s Earliest Silver Tea-Kettle,” 82; De Castres, *A Collector’s Guide*, 32.

earliest documented example, though it is difficult to know what precisely the “frame” was. The spirit lamps fitted to these early kettles were not powerful enough to bring cold water to a boil; a servant would fetch hot water for the kettle from the kitchen, and the spirit lamp would keep the water hot. Tea kettles on stands with spirit lamps were popular among the tea-drinking elite in the first several decades of the eighteenth century, and depictions of these early tea tackles, surrounded by people holding small porcelain tea bowls, are typical of English family portraits of the 1720s and 1730s. During this decade, as tea exploded in popularity across Britain, silver tea kettles became more ornate and their designs began to evolve according to contemporary fashion trends.³⁴ When the French rococo style became popular in the 1730s, rococo teapots and tea kettles featuring flowers and scrollwork appeared in short order.³⁵ Simultaneously, as tea became more widely available and its price fell, more people across all social strata in Britain drank it in increasing quantities. As a direct result, tea kettles grew larger and larger, but stopped growing in size when they became cumbersome for ladies to lift and pour.³⁶ In this way, tea-table technologies followed the demands of social behavior.

To heat a larger amount of water, a taller receptacle that could dispense hot water without having to be lifted from the table was needed. Such a device would have to feature a tap instead of a spout, since it was not designed to be tilted—tilting a large vessel full of hot water resting on a small table presented obvious dangers. Tea urns with taps rather than spouts had existed since the turn of the eighteenth century, albeit much smaller in size and without built-in heaters. The earliest tea urns, like the earliest kettles, were designed to stand over a spirit lamp, and were first manufactured in Holland. A gilt urn made in the Netherlands around 1700 featured three

³⁴ Pettigrew, *Design for Tea*, 32, 44-45.

³⁵ De Castres, *A Collector's Guide*, 28.

³⁶ Pettigrew, *Design for Tea*, 45; De Castres, *A Collector's Guide*, 48.

chambers for coffee, tea, and chocolate, each fitted with its own tap (figure 3.4). The vessel would have stood over a spirit lamp, and smaller pots for tea, coffee, and chocolate could be replenished from its separate chambers.³⁷ The Amsterdam silversmith Otto Albrink produced an early silver specimen in 1714 that featured one chamber for coffee and was designed for use with a spirit lamp (figure 3.5).³⁸ A Dutch silver urn made in 1729 by Andele Andeles, probably made for coffee and housed at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, features a perforated base indicating a built-in heat source.³⁹ This vessel is one of the oldest of its type and is the immediate forerunner of the modern charcoal-burning hot water urn. One of the first known tea urns with a built-in spirit lamp was owned by Sir John Campbell, Third Earl of Breadalbane and Holland, who served as ambassador to Russia in the 1730s. Campbell may have served as an ambassador of English tea drinking as well as representing the interests of the English court.⁴⁰ Pierre Archambo created the ornate silver vessel in 1742-1743, after Campbell returned to England, and which featured the Campbell coat of arms and a tap in the shape of a bird's head.⁴¹ English tea urns with interior cylindrical box irons emerged around 1740 (figure 3.6).⁴²

The spirit lamps often used with small kettles no longer sufficed to warm the urns of larger capacity that were beginning to supplant table-top tea kettles in popularity by the middle of the eighteenth century. A solution presented itself in enclosing a charcoal brazier in the base of the urn, and an internal charcoal brazier offered the further advantage of being able to boil

³⁷ Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O89145/urn-unknown/>.

³⁸ Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93393/urn-albrink-otto/>.

³⁹ Herbert Brunner, *Old Table Silver: A Handbook for Collectors and Amateurs* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1967), 175.

⁴⁰ I hope that further research might confirm this.

⁴¹ Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O157642/hot-water-urn-archambo-peter/>.

⁴² Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O90600/urn-unknown/>.

water at the table without recourse to a servant fetching it from the kitchen. Use of a charcoal brazier required a perforated base and an internal chimney to draw off hot air and smoke. In addition to its larger capacity, the charcoal-burning urn had other advantages over tea kettles on stands. Most spirit fuels available in the first half of the eighteenth century, aside from the expensive spirits of wine, gave off an unpleasant smell.⁴³ Moreover, drafts could easily blow out the tiny flames of spirit lamps, and for this reason, some earlier kettles had been fitted with paneled sides that surrounded the entire stand and lamp (figure 3.7).⁴⁴ But these extra parts would have been cumbersome, and the substitution of a charcoal brazier for the spirit lamp inside a fully enclosed and self-contained vessel would have been a natural development in terms of both efficiency and convenience.

Now well established in its modern form, the English tea urn reached the zenith of its popularity in the 1760s, just when neoclassicism in the decorative arts was at its height. Excavations at the newly discovered ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum had begun in the 1730s and 1740s, and the ancient artifacts uncovered there fascinated the European *beau monde*. The classical vase in particular captured the English imagination in the 1760s and 1770s, and the resemblance of tea urns to Greek and Roman vases is not coincidental (figure 3.8).⁴⁵ In 1784, the Comte de la Rochefoucauld noted that ownership of tea pots and tea cups “based upon Etruscan and other models of antiquity” provided the wealthy with “an opportunity to display their magnificence.”⁴⁶ The architect William Chambers, whose work Catherine II admired and had

⁴³ Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O90600/urn-unknown/>.

⁴⁴ Pettigrew, *Design for Tea*, 44-45. Detachable screens surrounding spirit lamps were known as windshields or draft excluders.

⁴⁵ De Castres, *A Collector's Guide*, 48;

⁴⁶ Quoted in Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 150. Antique vases were popularly called “Etruscan,” after the ancient pre-Roman culture, but they were in fact Greek, having been manufactured there and imported into Italy. Jenny Unglow, “Vase Mania,” in Berg and Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 153.

translated into Russian, designed neoclassical urns (figure 3.9). So popular was the classical urn that craftsmen like the prominent manufacturer Matthew Boulton soon adopted the ornamental shape to a wide array of more functional objects, such as candelabra, clocks, perfume burners, and tea urns. The latter were sometimes even known as “tea-vases.” Boulton freely admitted that his designs were not original, but wholesale copies of Greek vases in accordance with the demands of contemporary fashion.⁴⁷ The neoclassical English tea urn of the 1760s and 1770s rode a wave of simultaneous economic and cultural trends: the continuing growth of tea drinking, technological advances in metals production, and a cultural obsession with classical vases. The confluence of an exotic Asian beverage with neoclassical design and technical innovation made the tea urn “an icon of the eighteenth century.”⁴⁸ While there is no evidence that the Roman *caeda* and *authepsa* exerted a technological influence on the modern tea urn, there can be no doubt that tea urns’ outward appearance was heavily indebted to eighteenth-century interpretations of ancient designs.

In sum, Dutch and English silversmiths produced both lamp-heated tea kettles with spouts and tea urns with taps by 1700. Larger hot water urns with interior box irons had emerged by 1729. Modern charcoal-burning tea urns, the equivalent of the samovar, appeared no later than 1740, and the fad for neoclassicism in the decorative arts fueled their popularity in the 1750s and 1760s. Archival documents attest that the earliest known samovars manufactured in Russia did not emerge until the 1740s. The existence of tea urns made by Dutch and English silversmiths decades before this, stamped with dates and supported by clear documentary evidence, makes it unlikely that the “samovars” manufactured in the Urals in the 1740s,

⁴⁷ Unglow, “Vase Mania,” 154, 156.

⁴⁸ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 164.

whatever their shape, were the original inventions of Russian craftsmen. Metal tea and coffee wares in Russia derived from Western precedents, but quickly took on meanings and uses of their own.

The Origins of Metal Tea Ware in Russia

In June 2014, the online newspaper *Russia Beyond the Headlines* covered a tea-themed exhibition at the All-Russian Museum of Decorative Arts in Moscow. The article asserts that the “Russian tea ceremony” originated during the era of Peter the Great, claiming that “[f]rom that moment on, tea consumption became constant in Russia.” The article cites three different theories on the origin of that icon of Russian tea drinking, the samovar. In one, Russian craftsmen copied the vessel from Chinese prototypes; in another, Peter the Great himself brought the first samovar to Russia from the Netherlands. In the third, “historically verified” version, the workers at Russian copper manufactories in the Urals invented the samovar in the 1740s. The prominent industrialist Nikita Demidov had brought Tula metalsmiths to work in his Urals factories, and “[i]t was they who invented the samovar.”⁴⁹

This article reflects not eighteenth-century realities, but a set of persistent cultural myths surrounding the samovar that developed much later. The concept of a “Russian tea ceremony” dates no earlier than the internet age and is misleading; while imperial Russian tea preparation certainly involved the performance of social rituals, nothing in Russian tea culture corresponds to the ancient religious tea rites of China and Japan. Tea consumption was comparatively rare, and samovars even rarer, in Russia until the nineteenth century. English and Dutch silversmiths,

⁴⁹ Dmitriy Romendik, “The Legendary Samovar: Russia’s 300-Year Tea Tradition,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, June 25, 2014. http://asia.rbth.com/arts/2014/06/25/the_legendary_samovar_russias_300-year_tea_tradition_37701.html.

rather than Tula metalworkers, developed the first tea urns. One of the theories for the samovar's origin cited in the article may be correct, however: circumstantial evidence suggests that Peter the Great may in fact have introduced the first metal tea and coffee wares to Russia from Holland or England around the turn of the eighteenth century. If he did, it was not out of any specific interest in tea, but rather his general fascination with contemporary European technologies. The earliest metal tea and coffee vessels in Russia certainly did hail from England and the Netherlands in the first decades of the eighteenth century, even if Peter did not personally oversee their importation, and these objects signaled tea's transition to an elite social beverage.

In Russia as in Western Europe, ownership of metal tableware, particularly of pewter and silver, had served as a marker of elite status for centuries. Conspicuous public display of such luxuries may date from the reign of Peter. One of the well-known "Preobrazhenskii series" of portraits of Peter the Great's associates, painted between 1695 and 1705, depicts the clerk Aleksei Vasil'kov alongside silver and pewter dishes containing exotic foods and beverages. Vasil'kov was one of only three non-noble men to appear in this series, and it is tempting to speculate that the unknown artist intended the silver tableware to lend prestige to the subject. Vasil'kov's shaven face and the inclusion of silver certainly lend a Western air to the painting. From the sixteenth century, and possibly earlier, large round silver serving dishes, sometimes bordered with precious stones, had played a prominent role in Muscovite court ceremonial. In the early eighteenth century, these circular dishes assumed the oval shapes then popular in the West, as Russian metalsmiths incorporated them into European-style silver serving sets. After about 1700, the ornamentation on Russian gold and silver objects aligned with Western European styles and proceeded to evolve in accordance with changes in Western fashions. Peter himself set

an example for his courtiers to follow by commissioning the very first Russian-made silver table service in 1711.⁵⁰

After about 1650, sources attest to the increased presence of both European- and Russian-made tableware of silver and other prestige metals in Russia. The inventory of Vasilii Vasil'evich Golitsyn's possessions made upon his fall from power in 1690 includes a number of braziers (*zharovni*) for cooking and warming food, at least one of which was probably made of silver.⁵¹ This indicates that the wealthiest Russian nobles knew and owned self-contained vessels for heating food during this period, though nothing is known of their design or origin. European silver wine fountains, which closely resemble modern samovars, are also known to have existed in the homes of elite Russians from the first decades of the eighteenth century. Prince Vasilii Lukich Dolgorukii, Peter's ambassador to Denmark, owned one.⁵² In the first half of the eighteenth century, many early works of the London-based silversmith Paul de Lamerie, considered one of the greatest silversmiths of the century, came to Russia. Notable among these is a wine fountain he produced in 1720-21. Between 1745 and 1758, the English silversmiths Nicholas Sprimont, Thomas Hemming, and Fuller White collaborated to produce the Oranienbaum tea and coffee service, consisting of seven exquisitely wrought pieces featuring chinoiserie motifs.⁵³ Thus, it would be a mistake to attribute the importation, manufacture, and display of silver tableware to Peter's personal agency alone. That English and Dutch silversmiths manufactured the first modern tea and coffee machines during his reign, around the time of his visit to those countries in 1697-98, is coincidental. Again, the introduction of silver tea wares to

⁵⁰ Gol'dberg et al., *Russkoe Zolotoe i Serebrianoie Delo*, 24, 88, 91.

⁵¹ Hellie, *Economy and Material Culture of Russia*, 591.

⁵² Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 8; Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 13; Smith, "Whence the Samovar?", 65.

⁵³ Larissa Dukelskaya, *The Hermitage: English Art, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Century* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1979), 5.

Russia under Peter was less a function of Peter's personal liking for tea (he evinced none) and more a product of his general enthusiasm for Western European gadgets.

Solid evidence of habitual tea consumption and the ownership of silver tea ware among the Russian nobility dates to the first decade after Peter's death. Archival documents reveal that the Mikhailovich branch of the Golitsyn family were among the first habitual tea drinkers in Russia, and inventories of their possessions made between 1729 and the 1790s attest to the range of tea wares available to wealthy eighteenth-century Russians. A list of silver dishes dated 1729 includes one plain silver teapot of English make, along with other tea and coffee vessels of Dutch and German provenance.⁵⁴ The inventory specifies that the Golitsyns' English silver teapot had a wooden handle, as did the earliest English silver teapots (figure 3.3).⁵⁵ The 1729 inventory also includes one stamped silver teapot of Russian (*Moskovskii*) make weighing over two pounds, as well as a slightly smaller plain coffee pot, also of Russian origin. The inventories include the weight of these and other silver vessels to indicate the large amount of silver used to make them. The vessels described above are the earliest documented tea and coffee vessels manufactured in Russia, and the Golitsyns almost certainly had them custom made. Secondary literature dates the first silver teapots produced in Russia to the 1730s, but the Golitsyns' 1729 inventory allows us to date the genesis of this industry slightly earlier.⁵⁶ One extraordinary glass teapot survives in the Russian Museum from the late 1730s, and was decorated with the imperial monogram. By 1742 the Golitsyns also owned a variety of silver coffee pots, silver tea cups, tea spoons, and sugar bowls.⁵⁷ The modern tea service, which eventually evolved to include

⁵⁴ RGADA f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104.

⁵⁵ Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, 79, 82.

⁵⁶ Britenkova, *Samovari Rossii*, 27; Gol'dberg et al., *Russkoe Zolotoe i Serebrianoie Delo*, 94.

⁵⁷ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104, ll. 1-4, 11.

creamers, sugar bowls, specialized spoons, strainers, and other accessories, did not coalesce until around the middle of the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ The variety of tea accessories owned by the Golitsyns at the early date of 1742 testifies not only to their extraordinary wealth, but to their lifestyle on the cutting edge of fashion and technology.

The earliest recorded tea kettles in Russia appear in a Golitsyn inventory dated April 1740, which lists one small and one large tea kettle. Described as “teapots with burners” (*chainik s konforkoi*), these vessels probably closely resembled English and Dutch kettles equipped with stands and spirit lamps, which had emerged at the turn of the eighteenth century (figure 3.10).⁵⁹ Tea kettles on stands with spirit lamps remained in use in the nineteenth century; one appears in Tolstoi’s novel *Anna Karenina*.⁶⁰ The Golitsyns’ kettles probably originated in Russia, since their household inventories tend to specify the country of origin for vessels purchased abroad. Alongside these “teapots with burners,” the Golitsyn inventory for 1742 lists a “white silver English heating teapot” (*chainik zzharovnaia aglitskoi [sic] raboty beloi serebrenoi*).⁶¹ How or whether the “English heating teapot” differed in function or structure from the Russian “teapots with burners” is impossible to determine, since early in the history of both English and Russian metal tea ware, multiple terms existed for the same vessels.⁶² The handwriting on the 1740 Golitsyn inventory differs significantly from that on the 1742 inventory, suggesting that the lists were drawn up by two different individuals, which could also help explain the discrepancy in the description of the tea kettles. In any event, the multiplicity of terms for similar vessels testifies to

⁵⁸ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 241; de Castres, *A Collector’s Guide to Tea Silver*, 34.

⁵⁹ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104, ll. 1, 4.

⁶⁰ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Louise and Alymer Maude (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 466.

⁶¹ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104, l. 18.

⁶² The first English tea kettles of the late seventeenth century were sometimes referred to in household inventories as “furnaces.” Pettigrew, *Design for Tea*, 43.

their novelty. From the second half of the eighteenth century, tea kettles on stands with burners would come to be known in Russia as *bul'otki*.⁶³

The available sources do not supply an answer to the question of what fueled these early Russian tea kettles. Nobles wealthy enough to own tea kettles manufactured abroad presumably also had the means to acquire the kinds of spirit fuels necessary to burn spirit lamps. Hemp and flax oils, together with seal oil and sperm whale oil, were also available to Russian consumers in the eighteenth century, although lamps designed for interiors usually held wax or tallow candles. Some icon lamps presumably burned oil with the use of a wick, but in general, while a variety of fuel oils was certainly present in eighteenth-century Russia, documentation specifying their use is sparse.⁶⁴ The use of fuel oils did not become widespread in Russia until the nineteenth century, and this helped to ensure that spirit-fueled tea kettles remained a rarity in the eighteenth.

While the Golitsyn inventories indicate that Russian silversmiths—and also European silversmiths resident in Russia's capital cities—were producing silver teapots and kettles for a tiny elite market by the late 1720s, the manufacture of Russian copper samovars began somewhat later, and not in Tula, but in the Urals. The imperial government required Russian copper works operating in the first half of the eighteenth century to produce coinage. The German-born engineer Georg Wilhelm de Gennin (1676-1750), who had been recruited into the Russian army by Peter's associate Franz Lefort in 1697, managed the state copper manufactories in the Urals for twelve years in the 1720s and 1730s. In the factories he oversaw, Gennin introduced the practice of offsetting the cost of minting coin by manufacturing turned and cast copper dishware for the domestic market, as well as the large pots and tubes required by

⁶³ Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 13.

⁶⁴ Hellie, *Economy and Material Culture of Russia*, 175, 218.

distilleries—technologies prerequisite to the development of Russian samovar production. Gennin’s innovation soon spread to other Urals copper works.⁶⁵ Beginning in the 1740s, the Russian government imposed tariffs on “tea and coffee pots, candlesticks, trays, holders and similar small items,” indicating that commerce in metal tea ware, imported and otherwise, was significant enough to make taxation worthwhile.⁶⁶

The word “samovar” first appears in a Russian document from 1740. At the customs house in Ekaterinburg, a soldier named Zakhar Gilev detained Timofei Pushniakov, who ran a metals factory in the region, and several of his compatriots for transporting, among other things, a “tin-plated copper samovar” (*samovar mednyi, luzhenyi*). The reason for the detention remains unclear. The Ekaterinburg authorities may have seized the goods, which also included several large copper vats, because tariffs hadn’t been paid on them or they were not properly documented. Or they may have believed Pushniakov to be prioritizing the manufacture of dishware for the retail market over the copper coin the government required him to produce. Whatever the situation, this is the earliest document attesting to samovar manufacture inside the borders of the Russian Empire.⁶⁷ Grigorii Akinfevich Demidov, grandson of the great industrialist Nikita Demidov, owned the earliest known Russian samovar manufactory, which was producing copper samovars by 1745 in a village called Suksun in the Perm’ region.⁶⁸ In 1746, a monastery near Nizhnii Tagil owned “two green copper samovars with tubes” (*dva*

⁶⁵ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 105.

⁶⁶ Smith, “Whence the Samovar?”, 66, citing Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe Opisanie*, vol. 6, i, 375.

⁶⁷ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 105-106.

⁶⁸ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 113; Gilodo, *Russkii Samovar*, 8, citing documents housed at the Nizhnii Tagil branch of the Sverdlovsk regional archive (GASO).

samovara s trubami zelenoi medi).⁶⁹ The copper works at Suksun, along with those in Nizhnii Tagil, were among the first copper production sites in Russia.

The design of these early “samovars” of the 1740s remains mysterious. They may have resembled cauldrons with interior tubes more closely than proper tea urns.⁷⁰ Or they may have been simply tea kettles with spirit lamps, like those listed in the Golitsyn inventories for 1740-1742.⁷¹ While documentation is somewhat lacking, it seems likely that the first Russian samovars were based on European designs. Unfortunately, no such vessels survive from the 1740s, and the oldest extant examples of Russian copper samovars date to the early 1760s and resemble contemporary English tea urns in almost every detail. A German engineer, Gennin, had played a decisive role in introducing copper dishware production to the Urals factories that made the first samovars. Moreover, during his tenure as head of the state factories at Ekaterinburg, Gennin employed a number of engineers and assistants from Hamburg, Saxony, Brandenburg, Hanover, and the Netherlands.⁷²

Of the samovar-like devices (*samovariashchie sosudy*) that appeared in Russia very soon after they were first developed in Western Europe, the *sbitennik*, or *sbiten' pot*, is the most distinctive. *Sbitenniki* resembled a large teapot but featured an interior charcoal box and tube like a tea urn (figure 3.11). Some have speculated that the *sbitennik*'s design resulted from the combination of a distillation tube with an English teapot.⁷³ *Sbitenniki* emerged in the middle of

⁶⁹ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 113.

⁷⁰ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 113; Gilodo, *Russkii Samovar*, 8.

⁷¹ Britenkova acknowledges that the earliest Russian “samovars” may have actually been tea kettles, not tea urns. Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 28.

⁷² Georg Vil'gel'm de-Gennin (Georg Wilhelm de Gennin), *Opisanie Ural'skikh i Sibirskikh Zavodov* [1735](Moscow: Gos. Izd. “Istoriia Zavodov,” 1937), 79.

⁷³ Gilodo, *Russkii Samovar*, 10.

the eighteenth century, and their origin, together with their relationship to the development of Russian samovar production, remain unclear.⁷⁴ A Golitsyn inventory made sometime after 1758 includes a vessel described as a red copper teapot with feet, an object whose outward appearance would have been essentially identical with that of a *sbitennik*.⁷⁵ The fact that this object is not called a *sbitennik* in the Golitsyn inventory suggests that the object may have predated the word, and this may in turn suggest a non-Russian origin for the vessel. Liudmila Britenkova's authoritative book on samovar history posits the *sbitennik* as the missing link in a linear evolutionary chain from teapot to tea urn, but the evidence of earlier Dutch and English tea ware refutes this theory.⁷⁶

Part of the confusion surrounding the origin of the samovar stems from the fact that the word "samovar" did not become the standard Russian term for a tea urn until the 1770s. "Water-heating vessel" (*vodogreinyi sosud*) was an early Russian phrase used to denote any device that could be used to heat water. Before "samovar" became the norm, they were known variously as *vodogrei* (water heater) in Tula, *samogar* (from an old word for "cinder") in Iaroslavl', and *samogrei* (self-heater) in Viatka.⁷⁷ A 1769 inventory of table silver belonging to the Kochubei family lists one *chainyi vodavar'* (tea water boiler).⁷⁸

Archival evidence of samovar ownership among the eighteenth-century Russian nobility is fragmentary and attests to a range of designs and terminology. The Demidovs owned a green copper samovar in 1789.⁷⁹ In 1795, the Iusupov family had several copper contraptions for tea

⁷⁴ Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 11.

⁷⁵ RGADA f. 1263, op. 2, d. 24, l. 28.

⁷⁶ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 32.

⁷⁷ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 9, 28, 103.

⁷⁸ RGADA f. 1445, op. 1, d. 143, l. 1.

⁷⁹ RGADA f. 1267, op. 7, d. 39, l. 2.

and hot water, including one samovar, a “teapot for water,” and two copper “cubes for distilling water” (*kubikov dlia gnaniia vody*). These last may have been reservoirs for hot water designed to rest inside a stove, which the English called “coppers.” The Iusupovs also owned a yellow English ceramic tea service.⁸⁰ In 1792, the Shcherbatov family boasted porcelain tea services from England and Saxony, together with two copper samovars and a third equipped with a cast iron hot plate.⁸¹ Curiously, no vessels described as samovars appear in the Golitsyn family inventories, but a list of silver objects compiled sometime after 1758 includes several teapots, candlesticks, and a number of turned, plain, and patterned urns (*urny*).⁸² Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Golitsyn had served as Russia’s ambassador to England from 1755 until he returned to Russia to assist with the coup that brought Catherine II to power in 1762. Aleksandr Mikhailovich, whose purchases of English tea silver will be discussed in more detail below, was probably familiar with the English term “tea urn,” and thus it is possible that one or more of the urns appearing on this inventory were tea urns. Aside from this possible exception, the phrase *chainaia urna* (tea urn) does not appear in eighteenth-century Russian sources.

The rise of the term “samovar” in the 1770s may be associated with the establishment of the celebrated Lisitsyn samovar workshops in Tula (Ivan Lisitsyn, 1778) and Moscow (Grigorii Lisitsyn, late 1770s).⁸³ Arms manufacture in the town of Tula, two hundred miles south of Moscow, began in the seventeenth century with the establishment of a Dutch iron foundry. Late in the seventeenth century, the Dutch were exporting almost a thousand cannon back to the

⁸⁰ RGADA f. 1290, op. 3, d. 20, ll. 4, 10, 11.

⁸¹ RGADA f. 1289, op. 4, d. 189, ll. 1-2.

⁸² RGADA f. 1263, op. 2, d. 24, l. 8.

⁸³ Smith, “Whence the Samovar?”, 63.

Netherlands annually, and selling the inferior pieces to the Russian military.⁸⁴ Peter the Great established a state arms manufactory in Tula in 1712, and gave manufacturers the right to purchase iron ore independently and to produce goods for the domestic market. As in the Urals, metals production for the state did not yield a high profit margin, but luxury consumer goods did. Catherine's interest in Matthew Boulton's products resulted in a marked English influence on the luxury goods produced at Tula during her reign.⁸⁵ The arms and decorative arts industries helped transform Tula from a small settlement into an important provincial city, and by 1808, eight distinct samovar manufactories operated there.⁸⁶ Later in the nineteenth century, Tula became known as the samovar capital of imperial Russia.

The above constitutes almost all that is known about eighteenth-century Russian samovar production, and several puzzles remain. Exactly when and where charcoal braziers were introduced into the bases of Western European tea urns remains a mystery. This development must have taken place between about 1735 and 1750, and since evidence is lacking, we must acknowledge the possibility that Russian metalsmiths introduced this innovation. After all, the use of a charcoal brazier rather than a spirit lamp was a prerequisite for the spread of self-heating tea vessels in Russia, since charcoal was cheap and abundant, and the use of liquid fuel oils was not common.⁸⁷ But the fact that some of the first known Russian samovars feature box irons, like English tea urns, would seem to lessen the likelihood of this. It is perhaps more likely that

⁸⁴ W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy, and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), 4.

⁸⁵ Tamara Rappe, "Catherine II and European Decorative Arts," in *Catherine the Great: Art for Empire*, ed. Bondil, 242.

⁸⁶ Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 119-20.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

Russians developed that hybrid vessel, the *sbitennik*, sometime after 1750, since nothing quite like it appears to have existed in Western Europe in the eighteenth century.

Thus the history of the true Russian copper samovar is on firm documentary footing only from the 1770s, about a decade after the neoclassical tea urn had enjoyed the height of its popularity in Britain. The weight of evidence strongly suggests that the Russian samovar, extant in some form as early as 1740, evolved from English and Dutch silver tea urns, which had existed since 1700 and had assumed their larger, modern form no later than 1729. The historian Anthony Cross, who has spent much of his career researching Anglo-Russian interactions in the eighteenth century, asserts that the Russian samovar was a variant of the English tea urn.⁸⁸ We may confidently conclude that the modern charcoal-burning tea urn did not appear *ex nihilo* in mid-eighteenth-century Russia, as much of the Russian literature on samovars states or implies. Instead, for a brief moment between the 1760s and the end of the century, tea-drinking elites in Britain, Russia, and many points in between all gathered around the charcoal-burning neoclassical tea urn. The simultaneous decline of the English tea urn and rise of the Russian samovar in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is the subject of the next section.

Tea Urns into Samovars

When the word “samovar” and its synonyms came into Russian usage in the middle of the eighteenth century, they all conveyed the same, novel idea: the heating of water indoors without the use of a Russian stove, or *pech'*.⁸⁹ Occupying a massive space both in the folk imagination and in the domestic interior, the Russian stove supplied the basic frame of reference

⁸⁸ Cross, *Banks of the Neva*, 18. I am grateful to Professor Cross for his kind reaffirmation of this statement in a personal email communication to me dated October 16, 2014.

⁸⁹ Ivanova, *Russkie Samovary*, 16; Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 103.

when it came to heating.⁹⁰ In a roundabout way, the stove's central role in Russian heating and cooking exerted a formative influence on the development of a distinctively Russian tea culture beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century. Between roughly 1770 and 1840, the ubiquity of the Russian stove helped ensure the continued popularity of samovars in Russia, while the iconic English fireplace contributed to the downfall of the tea urn in Britain. After 1800, the tea urn gradually became dissociated from its roots in Western Europe and inextricably embedded in Russian culture. In this instance, the unique characteristics of the Russian domestic interior affected cultural change.

In exploring the causes of the English tea urn's decline, it must be noted that wall fireplaces, popular despite their inefficiency, had become standard in English country houses by the medieval period and would remain so until the end of the eighteenth century. Like many other Europeans, the English used brick-lined ovens for baking, and open fires for all other cooking. The end of the eighteenth century saw the introduction of modern cooking stoves and cooktop surfaces in some kitchens. Even then, open fireplaces remained a fixture in many homes across the socioeconomic spectrum, and not only in kitchens, but in sitting rooms and bedrooms as well.⁹¹ The English fireplace had been a primary site of social interaction for centuries, and its import only increased in the eighteenth century. The proliferation of fireplace accessories such as fenders, irons, small brooms, trivets, and scuttles signaled the rise of the fireplace as a site of

⁹⁰ See Snejana Tempest, "Stoveloire in Russian Folklife," in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁹¹ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 246-63.

social interaction and display—just like the tea table, which experienced its own explosion of accessories in the eighteenth century.⁹²

Thus, when the fashion for drinking coffee, and later tea, first developed in the seventeenth century, the English heated water for these beverages in cauldrons over open fires (figure 3.12). Since both cauldrons and large, open, indoor fireplaces were ubiquitous, this process was easy and relatively quick. Historians of tea, coffee, and chocolate have neglected to observe that the new colonial beverages' meteoric rise in seventeenth-century England may be partly attributed to the fact that pre-existing English material culture and the configuration of public and private interiors were convenient for heating water. For this reason, when the self-contained charcoal-burning tea urn appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century, fashion and the allure of new technology, rather than efficiency, sustained its popularity. The craze for classical vases, combined with a sharp rise in the amount of tea consumed, created a heyday for the English tea urn in the 1750s and 1760s. When neoclassicism declined after about 1770, the tea urn's popularity declined with it.

Since both tea and fireplaces had become symbols of English national identity by the second half of the eighteenth century, it was perhaps only natural that the two should become more closely connected in the popular imagination as time went on. The kettle, rather than the tea urn, embodied this connection. In his celebrated 1839 book *Tea: Its Effects, Medicinal and Moral*, a physician by the name of George Gabriel Sigmond articulated a sentiment that had apparently been growing in early nineteenth-century English tea-drinking circles:

Alas! For the domestic happiness of many of our family circles, this meal [tea] has lost its character, and many of those innovations which despotic fashion has introduced, have changed one of the most agreeable of our daily enjoyments. It is indeed a question amongst the devotees to

⁹² Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (December 2002), 885.

the tea-table, whether the bubbling urn has been practically an improvement. Upon our habits, it has driven from us the old national kettle, once the pride of the fireside.⁹³

Whether English tea drinkers of the previous century had considered the kettle “national” is open to debate, but there is no question that Sigmond’s work helped to cement the tea kettle as a national symbol in the English imagination. Sigmond acknowledged that fashion, rather than practical considerations, had been responsible for the tea urn’s rise, and called for a return to the more efficient kettle.

And that is exactly what happened. Once the novelty and fashion of the tea urn had worn off, English tea drinkers reverted to the older and, for them, more efficient kettle. Tea urns continued to be used in England and across Europe throughout the nineteenth century, but acquired an obsolete and ornamental connotation. There was no question of the kettle’s practical superiority, and tea urns would never again rival them in popularity or symbolic import. After the turn of the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of virtually all English homes, from grand manors to working-class row houses, had access to one or more of three easy options for indoor water heating: hanging a kettle or cauldron in an open fireplace, heating a kettle on a cooktop surface, or drawing hot water from a copper inside the stove. The latter two, cooktop surfaces and coppers, were common even in middle- and working-class Victorian homes.⁹⁴ Compared to this, lighting a charcoal-burning tea urn was tedious, dirty, and time-consuming. This job was best performed by a servant in the kitchen, a further strike against tea urns, since habit and propriety ordained that the lady of the house should brew tea herself at the tea table for her family or her guests.

⁹³ George Gabriel Sigmond, *Tea, Its Effects, Moral and Medicinal* (London: A. Spottiswoode, 1893), 88-89.

⁹⁴ Ruth Goodman, *How to Be a Victorian: A Dawn-to-Dusk Guide to Victorian Life* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2013), 263.

The main heating and cooking apparatus of Russian interiors was very different. Surprisingly little is known about the history of stoves and cooking methods in medieval Russia. Until about 1600, domed clay stoves seem to have predominated. Flat-topped stoves often described in the sources as “Dutch” appeared in the late sixteenth century, soon after glazed tiles of Italian origin appeared in Ukraine. These were generally constructed from clay, and more rarely, brick or stone. In the seventeenth century, the production of glazed stove tiles accelerated in the cities of Moscow, Velikii Ustiug, Kaluga, and Chernigov. Flat-topped, tiled stoves are known to have existed in wealthy Russian homes somewhat earlier, in the sixteenth century. One 1682 document refers to the refurbishing of a bread-making establishment that contained sixteen cooking stoves but only two open hearths.⁹⁵ In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, open hearths were not unknown, but stoves predominated, and modern cooktop ranges remained unusual until the second half of the nineteenth century.

The authors of travel journals about eighteenth-century Russia, almost without exception, comment on the ubiquity and sheer size of Russian stoves. John Bell, a Scottish diplomat who first came to Russia in 1714 and later journeyed on to Beijing, divided Eurasia into stove-using and non-stove-using peoples. His first impression of Tatars was, “They use no stoves, as the Russians do.”⁹⁶ The notorious Venetian Giacomo Casanova, who visited Russia in 1765, wrote that Russia was a land of stoves, and that only Russians know how to build stoves properly.⁹⁷ Jacques Jubé, who spent three years serving as a tutor in Russia during the reigns of Anna and

⁹⁵ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 18-23.

⁹⁶ John Bell, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Peking, 1719-22*, ed. J.L. Stevenson (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), 11.

⁹⁷ Giacomo Casanova, *The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt*, trans. Arthur Machen (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894), vol. 5, 502.

Peter II, described stoves at length in his book on the habits and customs of Russians.⁹⁸ Elizabeth Justice, who spent three years as a governess in a wealthy English family in St. Petersburg during Anna's reign, noted that the Russian "Peach" (*pech'*) was "a compleat Way of warming a Room."⁹⁹ Visiting foreigners immediately noticed and became interested in the stove's centrality to Russian interiors. Almost universally in European eighteenth-century foreign travel accounts of Russia, the stove figured prominently in descriptions of how Russian and Western European lifestyles differed.

The English in particular often compared the relative merits of the Russian stove and the English fireplace in their diaries and letters, and many English expatriates considered the lack of fireplaces to be one of the defining characteristics of life in Russia. Many English families living in St. Petersburg longed for fireplaces so acutely that they went to the expense of having them installed in their homes. As early as the reign of Peter the Great, the English engineer John Perry, who published his account of Russia in 1716, described Russian stoves with an engineer's eye for detail, and in the same passage, recounted his attempt to make "a Fire after the English Fashion."¹⁰⁰ The account of James Brogden, a young Englishman with a variety of commercial interests who visited Russia as part of a European tour in 1787-1788, reveals that his familiarity with the Russian stove's reputation predated his arrival there. Brogden complained that in some places, Russian stoves were not as effective at heating interiors as he had been taught to expect, and that in others, it was all he could do to withstand excessively heated rooms. Knowing very little Russian, Brogden frequented the houses of English merchants and other expatriates in St.

⁹⁸ Jacques Jubé, *La Religion, Les Moeurs et Le Usages Des Moscovites* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation and the Taylor Institution), 1992, 160-65.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Justice, *A Voyage to Russia* (York: Thomas Gent, 1739), 21.

¹⁰⁰ Perry, *State of Russia under the Present Czar*, 109-112.

Petersburg, and remarked that hardly any of them lacked English-style grates and fireplaces.¹⁰¹

Lady Elizabeth Craven (née Berkeley, 1750-1828), a prolific author of plays and travel journals, published an account of her journey through Russia in 1789. “Dans le ligne Anglais,” Craven wrote of what is now called the English Embankment, “...I find English grates, English coal, English hospitality, to make me welcome, and the fire-side cheerful.”¹⁰² As far as wealthy eighteenth-century Russians were concerned, their craze for all things English reached such a pitch of intensity under Catherine that some Russian nobles mimicked their English neighbors by reconstructing their entire houses, not just their fireplaces, in the English style. Even in the relatively remote town of Iaroslavl’, James Brogden was surprised to find that the home of a local noble family contained “a very handsome suite of Apartments furnished entirely in the English manner—English furniture, Clocks, Barometer by Dolland & even a Library of the best English & french [*sic*] authors.”¹⁰³

Other English writers judged the comforts of life in Russia based on their ability to take tea properly. Upon arriving in St. Petersburg, Elizabeth Dimsdale was relieved to find that balconies on the English Embankment were wide enough to drink tea in the open air.¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth’s husband, the physician Thomas Dimsdale, inoculated Catherine the Great and her grandsons, the future tsars Paul and Alexander, against smallpox in 1769. Less celebrated is the tea Dimsdale drank with his wife while the boys were under observation for possible negative

¹⁰¹ James Cracraft, “James Brogden in Russia, 1787-1788,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 47, no. 108 (January 1969), 232.

¹⁰² Elizabeth Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople* (London: Printed for G.G.J and J. Robinson, 1789), 125.

¹⁰³ Cracraft, “James Brogden in Russia,” 240.

¹⁰⁴ Cross, *Banks of the Neva*, 12.

side effects after the inoculation.¹⁰⁵ James Brogden, en route to Moscow from Petersburg, and Elizabeth Craven, traveling in Tatar lands, each traveled with a complete tea equipage. Both boasted that milk was the only product they needed to purchase along the way in order to complete the daily tea menu.¹⁰⁶ English people living or traveling in eighteenth-century Russia drank tea and built themselves fireplaces in order to enjoy domestic comfort and to assert their Englishness in a foreign environment. When Elizabeth Justice wrote that there was “no Part of the World where the English live better than they do at *Petersburgh*,” she meant that they lived as they did in England.¹⁰⁷

Russian high society’s fascination with all things English peaked under Catherine, who freely confessed to her own “Anglomania,” and the British living in St. Petersburg willingly supplied wealthy Russians with the goods necessary to indulge their interest. Russian Anglophilia in the eighteenth century may be partially attributed to the Anglo-Russian commercial treaties of 1734 and 1766, which led to a precipitous increase in both English goods and English people in Russia. An English shop called Hubbard’s on Vasilievskii Island advertised the sale of many imported items, including “tea and coffee machines.” Elsewhere in St. Petersburg, in the 1790s, one could buy English-made nickel-plated tea urns (*nakladnye samovary*).¹⁰⁸ The reader will recall that vessels for brewing tea and coffee had appeared on Russian tariff schedules beginning in the 1740s. In 1782, the category that included these items was expanded to include Old Sheffield plate, a popular material for tea urns.¹⁰⁹ The English also

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Dimsdale, “The Journal of Elizabeth, Third Wife of the First Baron Dimsdale, on a Journey to Russia in the year 1781,” 28.

¹⁰⁶ Cracraft, “James Brogden in Russia,” 238-39; Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ Justice, *A Voyage to Russia*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Cross, *Banks of the Neva*, 16-17.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, “Whence the Samovar?”, 67, citing Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe Opisanie*, vol. 6. Sheffield plate, invented in 1743 by the English cutler Thomas Boulsover, was made by plating silver onto copper. Items made from Sheffield

supplied leaf tea to Russia during those periods in the eighteenth century when the overland tea trade through Kiakhta was interrupted.¹¹⁰

The Catherinian affinity for English lifestyles, which included *chinoiserie* and food culture, helped to fuel Russian nobles' growing love for tea in the second half of the eighteenth century. James Walker, whom Catherine appointed court engraver upon his arrival in St. Petersburg in 1784, related an amusing incident in which a Princess Golitsyn and two of her sisters arrived uninvited at his family home, expecting a full English supper with beefsteak. Not having any beef on hand, the Walkers secretly sent to a neighbor's for a roast and managed to pull together an elegant dinner, with tea and music following. The evening's entertainment immensely pleased the Golitsyn sisters, and Walker recalled, "In short, it was one of the most embarrassing yet merriest days I ever passed in my life."¹¹¹ In that same year, 1784, the prolific memoirist Andrei Timofeevich Bolotov (1738-1833) spent a weekend at Mikhailovskoe, the country estate of the prominent statesman Mikhail Nikitich Krechetnikov (1729-1793). Bolotov recalled that at Mikhailovskoe, Krechetnikov and his guests structured their day around English habits and mealtimes. Mornings began with tea and an English-style breakfast. After a day of strolling through the parks and touring Krechetnikov's English garden, the party enjoyed afternoon tea outdoors under a pavilion erected for the purpose.¹¹²

But one English object would exert a permanent and profound impact on Russian culture long after Russian Anglophilia had faded: the tea urn, already known in Catherinian Russia as

plate were less expensive than solid silver, and the method quickly spread and led to further experimentation with silver plating and alloys. The first known English tea urn in Old Sheffield plate was made in 1762.

¹¹⁰ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 233; Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe Opisanie*, vol. 6, ii, p. 242.

¹¹¹ Anthony Cross, *Engraved in the Memory: James Walker, Engraver to the Empress Catherine the Great and His Russian Anecdotes* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993), 110.

¹¹² Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate*, 118.

the samovar. Unlike other aspects of English tea culture, the samovar remained popular in Russia primarily because, unlike in England, it was the easiest and most convenient method of boiling water indoors. The first chapter of this dissertation described how, in order to heat water, the first tea drinkers in seventeenth-century Muscovy would have placed cauldrons on top of skillets inside Russian stoves.¹¹³ The amount of time and equipment required to heat water inside a Russian stove, which was designed to cook food slowly, at declining temperatures, and without direct contact with the heat source, made the process inconvenient and ill-suited to social gatherings. Cooktop surfaces and Western-style wood- and coal-burning stoves appeared in Russia at the turn of the nineteenth century, soon after they appeared in England and America. But since these new technologies made the preparation of traditional Russian staples such as black bread difficult, they were widely adopted only toward the end of the nineteenth century, and then primarily in urban areas.¹¹⁴

Throughout the eighteenth century, then, variations on the enclosed stove were the norm even in elite Russian households. In these conditions, the samovar represented a great leap forward in terms of efficiency. The Russians embraced the tea urn for the same reason that the English ultimately rejected it: convenience. English fireplaces and cooktop stoves made the tea urn obsolete, whereas in Russia, the continuing prevalence of the Russian stove made the samovar the easiest and most practical option when it came to boiling water. “The preparation of the samovar and the sound of its hissing,” noted food historian Joyce Toomre, “became as culturally laden in Russian literature as the teakettle whistling on the hob in English

¹¹³ Cauldrons were not placed directly in the ashes, but on top of skillets or some other flat metal surface. Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 22.

¹¹⁴ V.I. Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1978), 13-14; Joyce Toomre, “Introduction,” in *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets' A Gift to Young Housewives* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 37-38.

literature.”¹¹⁵ The material conditions of domestic interiors shaped the distinctive tea cultures of England and Russia, and led to the kettle’s becoming a national symbol in England, and the samovar in Russia. As a distinctively Russian tea culture developed during the reign of Catherine, the samovar quickly became its focal point. The growth of tea drinking in eighteenth-century Russia owed a great deal to widespread English influence on Russian fashion, noble behavior, and luxury technologies, but once established, Russian tea drinking quickly took on a life of its own. The samovar, on its way out in the West, seemed to have been designed for the specific needs of stove-bound Russian homes, and as a result, its popularity increased dramatically.

The fact that etymologically Russian words like *chainik* (teapot) and “samovar” appeared within about a decade of the arrival of Western tea ware in the first half of the century suggests that these foreign technologies found a niche in Russian life and language very quickly. It is also perhaps significant that Russian tea drinkers never differentiated linguistically between a teapot and a tea kettle, as the English did; a kettle was just a *chainik s konforkoi* (teapot with burner) for most of the eighteenth century, and even today, a *chainik* is both a teapot and a tea kettle. Long after the tea urn’s popularity faded in Western Europe, and the fashion for all things English declined in Russia, the tea urn, russified as the samovar, continued to serve the water-heating needs of tea-drinking Russians because it was the most efficient and practical technology available.

The stove’s indirectly causing the samovar to become a fixed feature of elite Russian households is not pure domestic-environmental determinism. Cooktop surfaces did exist in eighteenth-century Russia, along with English open fireplaces that were common in many

¹¹⁵ Toomre, “Introduction,” in *Classic Russian Cooking*, 17.

expatriate households and in some wealthy Russian households, especially in St. Petersburg. It is possible that some noble Russian tea drinkers could have heated kettles over open fires if they chose. Some of them presumably did. Yet these uncommon instances of open fires and cooktop ranges did not exert any discernible influence on the development of Russian tea culture. This may have been because the tea urn's popularity peaked at the same time as Russian Anglophilia. A more likely explanation is economic: open fireplaces and ranges were less efficient than Russian stoves and required more fuel, whereas the charcoal required to fuel a tea urn had always been cheap and abundant. Thus by a process resembling natural selection, Russians chose the samovar.

The Social and Political Life of Russian Tea Ware

Art historian Mimi Hellman has found that, in eighteenth-century France, objects such as chairs and tables “were active protagonists in an elaborate game of cultivated sociability.”¹¹⁶ This section uses household inventories, insurance claims, grocery lists, expense records, and menus to tease out the cultural and social connotations of Russian tea drinking. Most tea drinkers in eighteenth-century Russia were nobles who performed their status, in part, through the ownership and gifting of expensive and fashionable goods, including tea ware. Woodruff Smith has argued that social and cultural frameworks both shaped and were shaped by consumption in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Smith asserts that the complex status hierarchy of Europe during this period manifested itself in fashionable consumption behavior.¹¹⁷ Catherine's Charter to the Nobility of 1785 both bestowed a collective identity on the Russian nobility and

¹¹⁶ Mimi Hellman, “Interior Motives: Seduction by Decoration in Eighteenth-Century France,” in *Dangerous Liaisons*, ed. Bolton and Koda, 15.

¹¹⁷ Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, 2-3, 25-27.

invited them to showcase their enlightenment with opulent living.¹¹⁸ Catherine also sought to exercise authority indirectly through the lifestyles of nobles living on their country estates.¹¹⁹ During Catherine's reign, nobles owned, used, and displayed tea ware as a marker of status and refinement.

Modern tea and coffee services—matching sets that included tea and/or coffee pots, sugar bowls, sugar tongs, and creamers—had originated in Europe and remained comparatively rare there until the 1760s.¹²⁰ Hellman has argued that in the eighteenth century, an era when most luxury goods were still made by hand (and this was true of tea silver), a matching set of anything from upholstered furniture to candlesticks represented precision and skill in craftsmanship. In this era before mass production, owning matching sets of household accessories sent a message about the good taste and wealth of those who could afford to have them made by the most talented craftsmen.¹²¹ Woodruff Smith has called tea and coffee services “one of the most important and dynamic ensembles of consumer goods in eighteenth-century Europe.”¹²² Services made from silver and gold in particular, as were those belonging to a number of Russian noble families, represented the very latest technological innovations in European metallurgy and design. In addition to the silver teapots already described, some of their services featured cups made of gold and silver. The 1742 Golitsyn inventory even lists one “teapot of costly gold” (*chainik tsenno zloto*).¹²³ Another inventory compiled in 1758 or soon thereafter lists several sets

¹¹⁸ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 64.

¹¹⁹ Randolph, *The House in the Garden*, 24.

¹²⁰ de Castres, *A Collector's Guide to Tea Silver*, 20.

¹²¹ Mimi Hellman, “The Joy of Sets: The Uses of Seriality in the French Interior,” in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Goodman and Norberg, 129-53.

¹²² Woodruff Smith, “From Coffeehouse to Parlour,” in *Consuming Habits*, 161.

¹²³ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104, l. 30.

of Chinese and European ceramic ware for tea, coffee, and chocolate, totaling 466 pieces.¹²⁴ By 1801, another of Russia's wealthiest families, the Iusupovs, had separate tea services for at least four of their residences.¹²⁵

Ownership of such large quantities of tableware conveyed a strong message about the Golitsyns' wealth and their ability to keep up with the latest European fashions. Indeed, European fashion predominated in the Golitsyns' tableware: services and individual pieces made in England and Saxony far outnumbered those originating in China. Authentic Chinese pieces were, however, rarer in eighteenth-century Russia, and reflected the English taste for chinoiserie. Undated lists of the Golitsyns' coffee and tea ware probably compiled around 1742 or 1743 include rare Chinese porcelain teapots. Another undated list indicates a complete Chinese porcelain tea service for twelve.¹²⁶ According to an inventory made at the time of her death in 1768, Dar'ia Ivanovna Shelepeva (née Griuk), widow of the prominent statesman Dmitrii Andreevich Shelepev, owned a flowered Chinese porcelain tea set that included two teapots, one white and the other blue. The careful enumeration and description of these items, and their inclusion in the inventory, speak to the prestige of such objects.¹²⁷

The Golitsyns' inventories do not simply attest to their ownership of extensive collections of tea and coffee ware in metals and porcelain, but also suggest that the family used them on a regular basis. Breakage could easily occur in shipment when the family moved seasonally from one house to another, and fragile cups could also be broken in the course of habitual use. Broken or damaged items appear year after year in the running lists of the family's property, and were

¹²⁴ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 24, ll. 1-3.

¹²⁵ RGADA f. 1290, op. 3, d. 53, ll. 2-7, 26-32.

¹²⁶ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104, l. 54.

¹²⁷ RGADA, f. 1270, op. 1, d. 138, l. 1. Shelepeva also owned some coffee cups, which are listed on l. 4.

not discarded. For example, the inventory for 1742 lists ten teacups with lids, of which one lid was broken. Further down the list, two large porcelain teacups are recorded, both of which were broken (*razbitie*).¹²⁸ A trunk of yellow Dutch earthenware contained a chipped teapot.¹²⁹ The fact that broken pieces were retained and carefully counted, a phenomenon consistent across the eighteenth-century household inventories examined, shows how much the family valued these items. Breakage also indicates that they were moved and handled, and this in turn suggests that the Golitsyns' tea and coffee services were used and not just intended for display.

One Golitsyn in particular lived in London for a few years in the middle of the eighteenth century and drank both tea and coffee before, during, and after his stay in Britain. Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Golitsyn (1723-1807) was a prominent statesman and diplomat related to the Naryshkins (Peter the Great's mother's family) on his mother's side. Under Catherine he served in the College of Foreign Affairs, and eventually became a senator. Golitsyn began his career as part of the Russian embassy to the Netherlands in 1742. He subsequently served in Paris and was transferred to London in 1755. He would reside in England until 1761.

Though we know comparatively little about Golitsyn's activities in London, even his official ones, we do have snippets of information about his possessions and his spending habits.¹³⁰ By 1757, having lived in London for about two years, Aleksandr Mikhailovich owned a respectable quantity of silver, including two silver coffee pots, a creamer, a sugar bowl, and sugar tongs.¹³¹ Other undated lists of items he purchased in London include a number of teapots

¹²⁸ RGADA f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104, l. 20, 21.

¹²⁹ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6104, l. 25.

¹³⁰ Anthony Cross, *"By the Banks of the Thames": Russians in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), 13.

¹³¹ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6105, l. 2.

and teacups.¹³² In March 1761, he bought half a pound of Bohea tea from a grocer in Gerrard Street, along with some sweet almonds, raisins, sugar, some soap, and some spices.¹³³ Later that same year, shortly before his departure for Russia, Golitsyn purchased a faience service and a coffee pot.¹³⁴ Before he went home, he had large amounts of silver and other luxury items such as mirrors and furniture made to order in London and shipped to both St. Petersburg and Moscow.¹³⁵ (Custom orders of silver tea services were the norm for those who could afford to purchase them during this period.¹³⁶) Back in Russia in 1767, a short list of silver for his personal use included vessels for all three of the fashionable caffeinated beverages: a teapot, a coffee pot, and a chocolate pot, together with a sugar bowl.¹³⁷ A later inventory of Golitsyn silver dated 1773 lists what may have been the very same four vessels.¹³⁸

The Golitsyns shared the common habit of drinking coffee with other aristocratic Europeans, and like other European tea and coffee drinkers, they preferred to brew their hot beverages by the most convenient means available. To illustrate, a receipt in the Golitsyn family papers dated January 23, 1765, records ten rubles spent on an unspecified amount of coffee. A second receipt, dated the very next day, January 24, records the purchase of an iron pan (*skovoroda*) specifically designated for the daily preparation of coffee.¹³⁹ The pan may have been for roasting, rather than brewing, coffee, since most eighteenth-century coffee drinkers bought

¹³² See, e.g., RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6105, l. 57.

¹³³ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6163, l. 13.

¹³⁴ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6163, l. 62.

¹³⁵ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, dd. 3457, 3458, 6106.

¹³⁶ De Castres, 28.

¹³⁷ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6105, l. 98.

¹³⁸ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6330, l. 2.

¹³⁹ RGADA, f. 1263, op. 2, d. 85b, ll. 74-75.

the beans raw and roasted them at home. We know from other lists of their household possessions that the Golitsyns had owned a variety of top-quality, European-made vessels for brewing and serving both tea and coffee decades before this, and silver pans had been available in Russia since the late seventeenth century.¹⁴⁰ Yet in this instance, by employing humble Russian cast iron for an imported luxury, the family apparently turned to the simplest and most practical option for preparing their daily coffee. This evinces a willingness on the part of Russian noble families to bypass those fashionable Western technologies that they found to be less convenient. It also suggests that the Golitsyns used their finer silver and gold implements for display and entertaining, and preferred simpler utensils for everyday private use. The fact that Russian society as a whole did not forego the samovar in this way suggests, again, that it proved to be the most practical option.

That the Golitsyns, who owned gold and silver teapots, were not above using a cast iron pan for their daily coffee suggests that tea and coffee were served more than one purpose in eighteenth-century Russia. In addition to being used for brewing hot beverages and for display, tea ware belonged to a more general category of luxury goods subject to symbolic rituals of exchange. Teapots were comparatively rare and valuable objects, and members of the Russian gentry sometimes bequeathed them to each other in their wills. The Shcherbatovs inherited a teapot from Ignatii Kuz'min in 1744.¹⁴¹ When the statesman Mikhail Nikitich Volkonskii died in 1788, some of his property passed to the Golitsyns. This included both a fine silver tea service and two copper teapots described as “ordinary” (*ordinarnykh*).¹⁴² Thus as the eighteenth century

¹⁴⁰ Gol'dberg et al., *Russkoe Zolotoe i Serebrianoie Delo*, 99.

¹⁴¹ RGADA f. 1289, op. 1, d. 249, l. 1. There's also a Shcherbatov family inventory from the early 1790s that includes an extensive silver tea service, together with tea accessories in porcelain and copper. Several samovars are also mentioned. RGADA f. 1289, op. 4, d. 189, ll. 1-2.

¹⁴² RGADA, f. 1263, op. 1, d. 6400, ll. 33, 37.

progressed, Russian nobles' tea ware become increasingly bifurcated into categories for luxury and everyday items. As tea consumption gradually became more common among the upper classes, they used simple copper and even iron vessels for everyday tea and coffee, and fine silver and gold pieces for display and entertaining.

Comparatively inexpensive copper tea ware had existed alongside foreign and domestic tea silver at least since the 1740s. Copper tea ware not only provided a simple, everyday option for elite tea drinking families, but also gave people somewhat lower on the social scale the opportunity to own these prestigious items. A 1789 inventory of the possessions of one Vasilii Tkachev, an employee in the Petersburg office of the prominent Demidov family, illustrates Tkachev's social aspirations. The short list of his possessions includes clothing belonging to his wife and children, together with six green teacups (presumably of copper), a white ceramic teapot, two silver teaspoons, and a green copper samovar.¹⁴³ The Demidovs themselves owned a set of tea silver, as well as clay and porcelain tea services. The Demidovs also owned several children's tea sets, indicating that in this household at least, drinking tea was a family affair.¹⁴⁴

The above belies the transition of tea and coffee from occasional luxury to everyday indulgence in the wealthiest circles of imperial Russia. Yet on the whole, noble families still numbered tea and tea ware among their most valuable possessions. In the aftermath of the Pugachev Rebellion of 1773-1775, Catherine authorized Petr Panin to assist families whose livelihoods had been destroyed by the revolt, and he ultimately distributed almost 100,000 rubles to just over 1,000 families. New branches of the Nobles' Bank also opened in Orenburg, Kazan, and Nizhnii Novgorod to provide loans for reconstruction.¹⁴⁵ A number of wealthy families and

¹⁴³ RGADA f. 1267, op. 7, d. 39, ll. 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ RGADA f. 1267, op. 1, d. 395, ll. 2-3; f. 1267, op. 8, d. 1309, ll. 8-9.

¹⁴⁵ Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, 269.

individuals living in battle zones filed claims for compensation for the loss of tea, coffee, and their accessories due to fires or looting. One affluent innkeeper from the town of Dubensk reported losses that included dishware made of silver, pewter, copper, porcelain, and crystal, as well as eighty-three rubles' worth of tea and coffee.¹⁴⁶ A certain Ivan Iamatov claimed to have lost over five hundred rubles in silver, copper, and pewter dishware, together with 133 rubles' worth of tea and sugar.¹⁴⁷ A widow from Penza province filed a claim for the theft of tea, coffee, sugar, and various other "beverages" (*napitki*), probably alcoholic, worth over 250 rubles.¹⁴⁸ Another widow lost an amount of silver dishware equal to the value of her house (both were worth 250 rubles).¹⁴⁹ In general, these lists of claims tended to be short, and often also included, not surprisingly, icons, hard cash, horses, and houses. Clearly, tea and coffee, together with the vessels required for their preparation and consumption, were among the most valuable items these people possessed.

These findings correlate with the evidence from eighteenth-century Russian literature that drinking tea was an indulgence of Westernized nobles, and a practice aspired to by people somewhat lower down on the social scale. Conspicuous consumption of silver and porcelain tea ware in particular signified noble status, although toward the end of the century, more affordable tea wares in copper became more common in the domestic market. Even so, drinking tea with specialized equipment epitomized luxury and refinement, combining European high fashion (neoclassicism and chinoiserie), colonial products (leaf tea and sugar), and the very latest technology.

¹⁴⁶ RGADA f. 1274, op. 1, d. 205, l. 545.

¹⁴⁷ RGADA f. 1274, op. 1, d. 205, ll. 566-67.

¹⁴⁸ RGADA f. 1274, op. 1, d. 205, ll. 574-75.

¹⁴⁹ RGADA f. 1274, op. 1, d. 205, l. 279.

Conclusion

These two chapters on the eighteenth century have argued that the reign of Catherine the Great was the formative period for Russian tea culture. A number of factors came together during this period to shape its distinctive path. From about 1700, Russian fashion and the decorative arts synchronized with contemporary developments in Europe, although they retained some distinctive characteristics. Crucially, the technologies necessary for the production and processing of luxury materials such as silver and porcelain also arrived in Russia during this period, and were heavily influenced by Dutch, English, and German innovations in these fields. The rise of neoclassicism in England, and the Anglomania Catherine shared with other Russian tastemakers, drove the ascendancy of the tea urn in both empires. The tea urn appealed to Russian elites under Catherine on a number of levels. It satisfied the craze for classical vases, chinoiserie, tea itself, and everything English in one elegant package. And because most Russian homes were not well equipped to boil water quickly, it ultimately proved to be the most efficient and economical option.

Historians tend to shy away from environmental determinism, for the obvious and entirely valid reason that it tends to eclipse human agency and culture. Yet two tea cultures that were initially evolving more or less along the same lines diverged because of the material conditions of their domestic interiors—the stove and the fireplace, respectively—and the older traditions associated with them. The physical characteristics of British and Russian interiors were, of course, only one factor among many that shaped their distinctive tea cultures. Yet it was most certainly not cultural conservatism that caused Russians to hang on to the samovar long after their fellow Europeans had abandoned the tea urn. Had a reluctance to experiment with foreign customs exerted a strong influence on noble behavior, they would not have drunk tea at

all, but stuck with that more traditional, widely available, and cheaper hot beverage, sbiten'.

Instead, both the Russians and the British hung on to their beloved adopted beverage, tea, and embraced the vessels for its preparation that were the most economical in terms of time and energy.

While it is true that Russia's richest and most powerful families possessed the money and connections necessary to stay abreast of the latest Western European fashions, Russia's overall rate of consumption of both tea and tea accessories remained relatively low until the nineteenth century. There were economic reasons for this that, again, only the very wealthy were able to overcome: the relative scarcity and higher price of tea in Russia, because of the cost of transporting it overland from China. Russia also lacked a middle class of consumers and an advertising industry, which together could stimulate demand for retail products like tea accessories. Thus tea and tea ware remained comparatively rare and expensive in Russia at the end of the eighteenth century. Russia's nascent tea culture may have been very visible to the gentry, visiting foreigners, and those who aspired to be connected with them. But tea consumption did not extend beyond wealthy nobles, with the exception of Russians living close to China in Siberia and those merchants involved in the tea trade.

Thus it is striking that, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Russian writers, artists, and other tastemakers looked back on the eighteenth century as the dawn of Russia's love affair with tea. They were correct in the sense that a distinctive Russian tea culture had begun to develop under Catherine, and that the samovar was its distinguishing feature by 1800. But they erred in assuming that tea was a popular and beloved beverage in the eighteenth century. In fact, eighteenth-century tea culture represented everything that nineteenth-century Russian liberalism rebelled against: an orientation to worldly pleasures and wholesale imitation of Western trends.

Why then wasn't tea thrown out in favor of sbiten' or kvas? Why should the samovar, an expensive and eminently eighteenth-century luxury item designed for a foreign drink, be mobilized as a national symbol during the cultural ferment that accompanied the Napoleonic Wars? Why did tea stop being Western and become "Russian" in the nineteenth century? Evidently, the fashion for tea drinking that had developed under Catherine had gained enough momentum that, when its availability increased and its price fell at the turn of the nineteenth century, tea lost its status as a Western luxury.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE “THIRD RIVER”: THE TEA TRADE AND RUSSIA’S “TEA PROBLEM” IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

Introduction

In February 1915, Sergei Witte delivered a speech on the question of government tea trade regulations in which he stated: “Needless to say, any stimulant to the spread of tea consumption is highly necessary.”¹ That Witte devoted time and energy to the question of the empire’s tea supply during the deep crisis of the First World War speaks volumes about the centrality of tea in Russian social and cultural life. That same year, looking back on the nineteenth-century tea trade in a pamphlet published by the Ministry of Finance, M. E. Siniukov bemoaned the fact that what he called Russia’s “tea problem” remained unsolved: How to meet Russian demand for inexpensive, authentic Chinese tea—*Camellia sinensis* rather than fraudulent surrogates—in a way that was politically and economically sustainable?²

Between 1790 and 1890, Russian tea imports grew from about 250,000 pounds annually to more than seventy-two million pounds.³ Russians consumed approximately three hundred times more tea at the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 than they had at the death of Catherine the Great in 1796. People living in Nizhnii Novgorod, home of Russia’s largest annual trade fair, called tea the “third river” after the Volga and the Oka.⁴ Throughout the long nineteenth century,

¹ Quoted in Bukshpan, *Problema Chainoi Monopolii*, 16.

² M.E. Siniukov, *Chai i Nasha Chainaia Problema* (Petrograd: Tip. Ministerstva Finansov, 1915).

³ Korsak, *Istoriko-Statisticheskoe Obozrenie*, 110; Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 377.

⁴ Quoted in Stites, *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts*, 249.

Russian tea imports grew so rapidly and on such a large scale that government regulation and infrastructure struggled to keep up. This problem grew to crisis proportions in the twentieth century, when revenues from duties on tea supplied one quarter of the imperial treasury's customs revenue.⁵ The problems accompanying the rapidly growing ubiquity of tea raised questions such as how the imperial authorities could protect Russia's overland tea trade and its fragile political relationship with China in the face of the rapidly expanding maritime trade in European colonial tea. How could widespread tea smuggling, fraud, and tea adulteration be effectively curtailed? Most importantly, how could the Russian government maximize revenues from the tea trade while simultaneously securing a reliable supply? The answers to these questions impacted the very fate of the Russian Empire, as this chapter will reveal.

Few historians have investigated the history of the tea trade in Russia. In the 1960s, Mark Mancall and Mikhail Iosifovich Sladkovskii wrote about the nineteenth-century Russian tea trade in the context of larger studies on Sino-Russian political and economic relations. Robert Smith and David Christian briefly considered the tea trade in a chapter of their 1984 book *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Food and Drink in Russia*. Most recently, historian Ivan Sokolov has been researching tea merchants and the nineteenth-century tea trade for more than a decade, drawing extensively on newspapers, journals, memoirs, archival material, and private and museum collections.⁶ In 2011, Sokolov published his doctoral (*kandidat*) dissertation as *Tea and the Tea Trade in Russia, 1790-1919*.⁷ This remains his most general and wide-ranging work, supplementing thematically organized narrative sections with a great deal of quantitative data,

⁵ Anton Frantsevich Grubarevich-Radobylskii, *Chai i Chainaia Monopoliia: Opyt Issledovaniia osnov Oblozheniia Chaia v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Ministerstva Finansov, 1908), 3.

⁶ I owe a debt of gratitude to Ivan for his friendship, for sharing his research with me, and for giving me a tour of tea-related sites in Moscow in 2013.

⁷ Ivan Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia v Rossii: 1790-1919 gg.* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2011).

extensive bibliographical material (including annotated lists of archival fondy), and many images. While Sokolov does not engage in much argumentation or theoretical reflection, he presents the Russian tea trade as an understudied phenomenon very visible to contemporaries, and that permeated many aspects of Russian social and cultural life in the nineteenth century.

Sokolov's greatest achievement lies in his exhaustive research on tea merchants. In 2009, he published his first bibliographical guide to imperial Russian tea merchant families, tracing their ancestors and descendants from 1700 down to the twenty-first century.⁸ Updated and expanded iterations of this project followed in 2012, 2013, and 2014.⁹ Sokolov has also published article-length studies of individual tea merchants and their economic and cultural activities.¹⁰ Other essays treat topics such as the rise of sugar consumption in Russia, Russian attempts to grow tea in the Caucasus, representations of tea drinking in visual art, and the fate of the tea trade during the First World War.¹¹ Sokolov has also minutely studied and catalogued late imperial Russian tea advertisements, lead tea seals, and tea packaging.¹² Throughout his many publications, Sokolov's main concern has been to reconstruct as thoroughly and accurately as

⁸ Ivan Sokolov, *Chaetorgovtsy Rossiiskoi Imperii, Chleny ikh Semei, Predki i Potomki: Kliuchevye Predstaviteli: 1700e - 2005 gody: Bibliograficheskii Spravochnik* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2009).

⁹ Ivan Sokolov, *Chaetorgovye Firmy Rossiiskoi Imperii i ikh Tovarnye Znaki. Kratkii Spravochnik*. (Moscow: Sputnik, 2012); *Rossiiskie i Inostrannye Chaetorgovye Firmy na Chainom Rynke Rossiiskoi Imperii, 1790e-1920e gg. Ikh Torgovye Znaki, Plomby i Terminologiya* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2013); *Liudi Chaia* (Moscow, 2014).

¹⁰ Ivan Sokolov, "Mikhail Ivanovich Kislinkii: Ot Kadrovogo Voennogo do ziatia odnogo iz Krupneishikh Chaetorgovtsev Rossiiskoi Imperii," in *Razlichnye Aspekti Russkoi Istorii i Kul'tury: Mezhekul'turnyi Dialog* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2012); "Semeinoe Delo Chaetorgovtsev Shvetsovykh" and "Tri Pis'ma Tovarishchestva 'Karavan' iz Chastnoi Kollektzii," in *Aktual'nye Problemy Russkoi Istorii, Kul'tury i Pedagogiki: Mezhekul'turnyi Dialog*, ed. Ivan Alekseevich Sokolov (Moscow: Sputnik, 2012).

¹¹ Ivan Sokolov, "Chai i Chaepitie v Russkoi Zhivopisi Dvukh Stoletii: Nachalo XIX - konets XX vv," in *Nauchnyi Molodezhnyi Ezhegodnik*, vyp. 5, chast' 2: Aktual'nye Voprosi Gumanitarnogo Poznaniia (Moscow: Sputnik, 2010); "Oskolok belogo kamnia," "Chai i chainaia torgovlia v epokhu 'Velikikh potriasenii': Russkie revoliutsii i Pervaia mirovaia voina," and "Rossiiskii Chai s Kavkaza," in *Chainye Zametki* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2014).

¹² Ivan Sokolov, *Chai i Vodka v Russkoi Reklame XIX - nachala XX vekov* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2008); "Novye plomby chaetorgovtsev, chaetorgovykh kompanii i tamozhen, cherez kotoroye prokhodili grazy chaia, iz chastnoi kollektzii," "Chetyre novye plomby iz chastnoi kollektzii," in Sokolov, *Chainye Zametki* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2014).

possible the logistics of the Russian tea trade, the biographies of the people involved in it, and the material ephemera it generated. His work has greatly expanded our understanding of this important and hitherto little known aspect of late imperial Russian life, and opened up promising avenues for further study.

While his *oeuvre* thoroughly investigates many aspects of the imperial Russian tea trade, nowhere does Sokolov provide a chronological narrative history covering the nineteenth century, nor does he situate the tea trade in the broader context of Russian social and economic history. This chapter supplies such a synthetic narrative, and also seeks to fill several lacunae in Sokolov's work, gaps resulting from the fact that he largely confines his research to the city of Moscow and its environs. The three most significant of these are, first, the story of the Commission on the Abuses in the Tea Trade, a project created by Tsar Nicholas I in the 1840s, and whose documents are housed at the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg (one of the few major Russian archives in which Sokolov has not worked). The second is the history of the prospective state monopoly on the tea trade, first proposed in the late nineteenth century and considered again during the acute financial crisis of the First World War. Third, though Sokolov works extensively with nineteenth-century Russian newspapers and advertisements, he has not consulted the short-lived St. Petersburg weekly newspaper *Chainyi Vestnik* (Tea herald), devoted exclusively to financial, economic, and agricultural matters related to the tea trade.

The history of the tea trade in Russia's long nineteenth century may be divided into three phases: 1790-1812, 1813-1860, and 1861-1917. During each of these periods, tea importation and consumption experienced a burst of intense growth. The first of these occurred in the 1790s, the second in the 1840s, and the third in the 1880s and 1890s.¹³ Not coincidentally, the years

¹³ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 48.

marking transitions between these periods, 1812 and 1861, correspond to two of the most significant developments in imperial Russian history: the Napoleonic invasion of 1812, and the Great Reform era of the 1860s. The chapter contains sections on each of the three phases in the history of the Russian tea trade, and a final fourth section considering Russian attempts to grow tea in the Caucasus. What follows reveals how closely the Russian tea trade was connected with, and demonstrative of, larger political, economic, cultural, and social changes.

Phase I: 1790-1812

The Treaty of Kiakhta had founded the eponymous border town and designated it the official site of economic intercourse between China and Russia in 1727, and until the Great Reform period of the 1860s Kiakhta was the only conduit through which goods could legally pass between the two empires. In the nineteenth century, the “Kiakhta system” came to signify the whole of Russia’s historic relationship with imperial China, and “Kiakhta tea” served as shorthand for legally imported Chinese tea. In the twentieth century, after the Great Reforms and the Trans-Siberian Railway had rendered the Kiakhta system obsolete, the town acquired a patina of nostalgia for the lost Russian caravan tea trade.

Tea had remained the rarefied luxury of court circles until Russian tea imports suddenly began to rise steeply in the 1790s for reasons that are not entirely clear. While statistics on Russian tea importation before the 1790s are almost wholly absent, some general observations can be made. Between about 1760 and 1780, Arcadius Kahan detected a general shift in the emphasis of Russian luxury imports from textiles to colonial foods and beverages. Kahan speculated that the falling price of textiles freed up the wealthy to spend more on colonial

imports like tea and sugar.¹⁴ During that same period, from the 1760s through the 1780s, a significant portion of the tea entering the Russian Empire had been imported through Western Europe and especially through England. Concurrently, frequent interruptions in commerce at the border town of Kiakhta, the only authorized site of Sino-Russian trade, increased the relative importance of tea importation through Europe. Widespread destabilization following the French Revolution of 1789, however, probably adversely affected the amount of tea reaching Russia from the West.¹⁵ As a result, the Middle Kingdom again became Russia's primary source of tea, and duties on tea importation a growing source of revenue for the imperial treasury. Between 1762 and 1785, tea had comprised a mere 15 percent of Russian imports from China.¹⁶ After 1790, when the Russian and Chinese governments came to a new agreement about the border between their empires, the China tea trade rose rapidly to prominence and would continue to grow steadily. In 1792, the Russian Senate announced the opening of free two-way barter trade at Kiakhta, and consequently, reliable statistics on Russian tea importation date from that year. From that time forward, the Russian government began keeping more detailed records on imports generally, and tea quickly became one of the key commodities in the Sino-Russian trade.¹⁷ Catherine the Great herself designed a new tariff system to protect the Kiakhta trade shortly before her death in 1796, but after she was gone her son Paul I dismantled this plan along with many of his mother's other policies.¹⁸ The Kiakhta trade seemingly did not stand in great need of such protection at this time, however, for it grew by 49 percent between 1798 and

¹⁴ Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer, and the Knout*, 192, 197.

¹⁵ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 29-30.

¹⁶ Mancall, "The Kiakhta Trade," 30.

¹⁷ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 31.

¹⁸ Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer, and the Knout*, 240.

1800.¹⁹ In 1800, the Russian government passed a law stipulating that all trade at Kiakhta must be carried out by barter only, in order to prevent specie from draining abroad.²⁰

In an effort to stimulate the economy, which had fallen into disarray during his father's short and turbulent reign, Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) lost no time in lifting restrictions on imports and exports, a measure which doubtless added a further stimulus to the growth in Russian tea importation and consumption. That situation changed in 1807, when Alexander entered into a deeply unpopular alliance with Napoleon. The agreement with Napoleon entailed Russia's joining the Continental System, which was designed to cut off British political and economic relations with the rest of Europe. Alexander's alignment with Napoleon and the exclusion of Britain from the Continental System probably increased the prominence of French merchants in Russian markets.²¹ But Alexander's administration proved unwilling or unable to enforce measures against British contraband, and tea imported through England continued to flow in illegally through Russia's western borders. A January 13, 1807, regulation forbade foreigners from holding shares in Russian companies, and this would have curtailed the activities of the large number of French merchants then active in the Russian tea trade, many of whom were apparently Catholic.²² The Franco-Russian alliance broke down because of Russia's unwillingness to aid French aggression against Austria in 1808 and 1809, and in 1812 Napoleon

¹⁹ Mancall, "The Kiakhta Trade," 31. In response to such aggressive growth in Far Eastern trade, in 1799 Paul chartered the Russian-American Company, Russia's first joint-stock company, and charged it with the project of establishing Russian settlements in North America. Throughout its history, the Company would play an important role as a supplier of Chinese tea on the Russian wholesale market.

²⁰ *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (hereafter *PSZ*) 26, no. 19328; Kulisher, *Istoriia Russkoi Torgovli*, 297; Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 61-62.

²¹ The presence of French tea merchants in Russia may also have been due in part to Paul I's selective reversal of some of Catherine's anti-French policies.

²² This did not render the Russian merchantry homogeneous, however, as its ranks already included a number of Jews, Baltic Germans, and Muslims. Ivan Sokolov, *Rossiiskie i Inostrannye Chaetorgovye Firmy*, 7.

invaded Russia. Russian troops, led by General M. I. Kutuzov, defeated Napoleon in the fall of that year, but not before Moscow had burned to the ground. Unfortunately, the loss of the archives held at Moscow's Roman Catholic Church in the great fire of 1812 severely limits our demographic knowledge about the French tea merchants who were active in the Russian Empire during the complex period leading up to the War of 1812.²³

Meanwhile, in the first two decades of the nineteenth century Russian tea imports from the east rose unchecked, and despite the logistical difficulties and steep overhead costs, high profit margins on retail tea sales within the Russian Empire motivated more and more merchants to invest in the China trade.²⁴ This in turn resulted in further growth in Russian tea imports, and consequently retail prices began to fall. By the time of Alexander's death in 1825, tea already comprised more than 87 percent of Russian imports from China.²⁵ The geopolitical position of China in the early nineteenth century also indirectly contributed to the flowering of the Russian tea trade. While Sino-Russian relations were sensitive and sometimes rocky, increased colonial pressure exerted by Great Britain on China's southern coasts motivated the Middle Kingdom to strengthen its ties with Russia, Britain's economic rival and a rising sea power.²⁶

Thus the dawn of the nineteenth century ushered in the golden age of Russia's fabled caravan tea trade with China. The Kiakhta system owed its success to the long, comparatively peaceable, and mutually advantageous history of Sino-Russian relations, which had begun with the Treaties of Nerchinsk and Kiakhta in 1689 and 1727, respectively. This relationship long

²³ Sokolov, *Liudi Chaia* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2014), 10.

²⁴ Sokolov, "'Po chasham temnoiu strueiu uzhe dushisty i chai bezhal...'" in *Chainye Zametki* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2014), 64.

²⁵ Mancall, "The Kiakhta Trade," 31.

²⁶ Mikhail Iosifovich Sladkovskii, *The Long Road: Sino-Russian Economic Contacts from Ancient Times to 1917* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981), 162, 167.

predated, and contrasted sharply with, the unequal treaties that Britain and other Western powers would coerce China into signing in the nineteenth century. That the Kiakhta trade operated by barter only meant that the value of goods exchanged was approximately equal, and this would have important consequences for the Russian tea trade later in the nineteenth century. While the relationship entailed political benefits for both Eurasia's great land empires, a general Chinese disinterest in Russian exports may have stymied the Kiakhta system had it not been for the demand for furs among courtiers in Beijing.²⁷ Russian merchants exchanged furs, raw canvas, processed leather, and other items at Kiakhta for tea, porcelain, silk fabrics, and other goods, which they then transported by a number of different routes to Nizhnii Novgorod for sale at the annual fair.²⁸ From there, merchants distributed tea throughout European Russia. The city of Moscow boasted the largest concentration of tea merchants and tea companies until the Russian Empire's collapse in 1917.²⁹

The history of the Russian tea trade illustrates the interconnected nature of political and economic developments at opposite ends of the Russian Empire. The table below reveals the direct impact of Russia's war against Napoleon on Russian tea imports from China.³⁰

Table 1
Baikhov tea imports via Kiakhta

²⁷ Mancall, "The Kiakhta Trade," 27.

²⁸ Fitzpatrick, *The Great Russian Fair*, 9.

²⁹ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 98.

³⁰ Korsak, *Istoriko-Statisticheskoe Obozrenie*, 110. See also Korsak, p. 71, Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 233, and Pavlov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 57.

Year	Baikhov tea imports via Kiakhta (in pounds)
1792	246,996
1797	460,764
1802	776,916
1807	1,438,956
1811	1,670,580
1812	874,044
1813	2,432,988

The table indicates that between 1792 and 1811, Russian tea imports roughly doubled every five years, until Napoleon's invasion of Russia cut tea imports almost in half in 1812. The year following Napoleon's defeat, 1813, saw a spectacular recovery in Russian tea imports from China. It should be borne in mind, however, that not all the tea imported from Kiakhta reached the fair at Nizhnii Novgorod or the market stalls of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Merchants probably sold a significant percentage of it, how much is unknown, in Siberia.

Russian tea culture had been born during Catherine the Great's reign, which also saw the height of Russian enthusiasm for, and identification with, Western Europe. In addition to disrupting Russia's tea supply from the West, the French Revolution of 1789 dampened many Russians' enthusiasm for Europe. The war with Napoleon in 1812 further damaged Russian ties to Europe and Russia's perceived identity as a European state, and an intensive cultural search for Russian national identity followed. Despite the fact that Russian tea culture had evolved from

Western precedents, changing Russian attitudes toward Europe in the wake of 1789 and 1812 did not shake Russia's growing enthusiasm for tea.

Phase II: 1813-1861

The Kiakhtha tea trade recovered rapidly from the temporary disruption it suffered due to the War of 1812. Vigorous growth in tea imports motivated the Russian government to levy a much heavier tariff on the leaves in 1816.³¹ As tea import volumes continued to grow, prices continued to fall, allowing ever wider segments of the Russian population access to tea. During the decades following 1812 tea consumption in Russia exploded in popularity. Demand grew so high, and the trade so lucrative, that an astonishing variety of fraudulent tea operations arose and thrived.

Aside from levying taxes on tea imports, at this early stage the Russian government made no effort to regulate the tea trade. In the aftermath of the War of 1812, Russian nobles and intellectuals occupied themselves with more fundamental political questions. The government did not permit public discussion of political dissent, but by 1820 a number of aristocratic army officers who had seen Western Europe during the war formed underground political societies, which varied in their degree of radicalism but were all dedicated to social and political liberalization. When Alexander I died unexpectedly and without an heir in November 1825, a small group of conspirators subsequently known as Decembrists hastily launched an attempt to overthrow the imperial government. Poorly planned and halfheartedly executed, the Decembrist Revolt failed, and Alexander's youngest brother Nicholas assumed the throne in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Russian cultural production during his critical thirty-year reign

³¹ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 62.

implicated tea in debates about Russia's cultural and political relationship with the West. Throughout his reign, Nicholas I focused on bureaucratic and military affairs, prioritizing political stability over economic progress. Despite the regime's reluctance to invest in transport infrastructure, tea consumption quickly grew in popularity, particularly in urban centers. In the 1830s, Russian tea imports continued to rise steadily, though not as rapidly as in the first decade of the century. The two principal types of tea imported were baikhov, the higher quality loose tea, and inexpensive compressed brick tea. The table shows that between 1837 and 1862, the more expensive baikhov tea was imported at roughly twice the volume of brick tea, indicating that many, if not most, Russian tea drinkers during this period were prosperous enough to afford the higher quality leaf.

Table 2
*Average annual tea imports through Kiakhta, in pounds*³²

Year	Baikhov tea	Brick tea
1837 - 1841	5,196,996	2,394,180
1842 - 1852	7,415,172	3,693,924
1854 - 1856	6,689,736	3,340,872
1857 - 1862	11,553,156	4,871,088

Political conditions in both China and Europe affected the Russian tea trade, as the table reveals. Internecine fighting in northern China in 1853, together with the Crimean War of 1853-1856,

³² Nikolai Karlovich Krit, *Materialy dlia Obsuzhdeniia Voprosov o Chainoi Torgovle* (St. Petersburg: Tip. V.N. Maikova, 1864), 49.

caused the average annual amount of tea imported into Russia to fall significantly for the years 1854-1856. After the Crimean War ended, the tea trade quickly recovered, just as it had following the War of 1812.

In 1837, the Russian government acknowledged tea's rapid rise in popularity by legalizing the sale of brewed tea in popular eating establishments (*kharchevny*). The prohibition of liquid tea sales in public houses prior to this may have reflected the conviction, surviving from the eighteenth century, that colonial luxuries were not suitable for peasants; this was consistent with Nicholas's desire to keep the social status quo, and particularly serfdom, intact. The text of the 1837 legislation is a landmark in the history of tea in Russia. In it, the imperial authorities overtly sanctioned the growing visibility and popularity of tea by saying that it had become "almost an item of first necessity. Itinerant craftsmen and all kinds of people have become accustomed to it and have need in our severe climate for a drink that can warm them...[T]here is hardly a peasant in our wealthier provinces who does not own a samovar and drink tea, and therefore demand it when they visit *kharchevny*." The text of the law added that the availability of tea in *kharchevny* might also have the added benefit of discouraging public alcohol consumption.³³ This was the earliest Russian articulation of the idea that tea could serve as a temperance beverage. If the law's claim about wealthier peasants owning samovars and drinking tea was accurate, then the rise in tea's distribution and accessibility in the half-century period between 1790 and 1840 was indeed rapid. Moreover, in expressing the need for a hot beverage in Russia's cold climate, the text of the legislation implied that tea was the only, or at least the primary, such beverage available in Russia. This was certainly not the case, as hot drinks such as

³³ PSZ vol. 38, no. 29197, 628-29. See also Alison Smith, *Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 95.

sbiten' and medovukha had been present in Russia for centuries, and coffee and chocolate were also available. Evidently, tea had already eclipsed these other beverages in the minds of Russia's lawmakers and possibly also in the popular imagination. Thus Ivan Sokolov correctly argues that tea assumed its distinctive place in Russian culture during the period between about 1800 and 1840, a process that will be considered in detail in chapter 5.³⁴ In short, in the space of fifty years, the preferred luxury drink of the gentry had come into widespread general use even among prosperous peasants. The 1837 law both made legal provision for growth in tea consumption in popular public spaces, and rhetorically promoted it.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Ministry of Finance and its subsidiary, the Department of Manufacture and Internal Trade, struggled to protect and perpetuate Russia's overland tea trade with China. Unfortunately for Russian officialdom, however, the great distances and challenging logistics of the Kiakhta trade kept the price of legally imported tea high. Even before the tea left China, the cost of transporting thirty-six pounds of leaf (one Russian *pud*) from the tea-producing regions to Kiakhta cost around ten rubles, while transporting that amount of tea from those same tea-producing regions to the nearest oceanic port was only 1.32 rubles.³⁵ Inside the Russian Empire, in the 1840s it cost more than six silver rubles to transport thirty-six pounds of tea from Kiakhta to Moscow. The cost of transporting the equivalent amount of tea from Guangzhou to London by sea cost between thirty and forty kopeks.³⁶

In the eyes of the Russian government, the Kiakhta trade's perceived political and economic advantages outweighed the practical difficulties and high cost, and in order to protect

³⁴ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia v Rossii*, 63.

³⁵ Mancall, "Russia and China: The Structure of Contact," 325-26.

³⁶ Sladkovskii, *The Long Road*, 175.

it Russia banned all tea imports through Europe, by sea or by land, in 1822. Tea continued to flow in illegally through the Russian Empire's western borders, however, depriving the treasury of a large amount of income it would otherwise have generated from the collection of import duties. During the short period of Russia's participation in Napoleon's Continental System, Alexander I had set a precedent by his inability, or unwillingness, to enforce measures against British contraband entering his domains. Russians called British contraband tea "Canton tea" because it originated from the English trading post at Canton. The faster rate, lower cost, and higher volume made possible by sea transport allowed the English and Dutch East India Companies to sell tea in European markets at prices far lower than Russian merchants could charge for "Kiakhta tea." Tea imported overland from Kiakhta had a shorter distance to cover, but the longer amount of time necessary, the high number of middlemen, difficult terrain, and unpredictable relations with intervening peoples made for high levels of risk and high overhead costs. This also meant that the price of tea imported by the British and the Dutch fell faster than tea prices in Russia, even though the volume of tea imported into Russia grew rapidly. In the face of these economic realities, for decades the Russian authorities strove unsuccessfully to eradicate the smuggling of Canton tea and to promote sales of Kiakhta tea.

Government officials began to give serious thought to this problem in the 1830s. A series of Ministry of Finance documents concerning illegal tea imports across Russia's Prussian border noted the widespread sale of Canton tea in Russia's western provinces by merchants claiming it was Kiakhta tea. The Department of Manufacture and Internal Trade resolved to combat this problem by monitoring merchants to ensure that all tea sold in the western provinces had been processed in the customs houses of either Moscow or St. Petersburg. Tea lacking customs documentation from one of the two capitals was subject to confiscation. The officials also

decided to detain any person found to be transporting more than twenty pounds of tea on suspicion of their dealing in contraband.³⁷ The presence of tea on ships trading in Russian ports was such a sensitive issue that in 1834, both English merchants and the Russian American Company had to obtain special permission to stock duty-free tea for the consumption of their sailors in the amount of one pound per person.³⁸

The scale of the trade in smuggled Canton tea is impossible to determine, but judging by the amounts confiscated by Russian authorities, sales were brisk. Russian customs officials confiscated 30,168 pounds of smuggled tea at the empire's western borders in 1848. Seven years later in 1855, they confiscated ten times that amount, and these numbers undoubtedly reflected only a small fraction of the total.³⁹ Ivan Sokolov estimates that in the middle of the nineteenth century, up to 1/3 of the tea available for sale in Russia was contraband.⁴⁰

From the 1830s to the end of the century, the Russian government experimented unsuccessfully with different tea packaging systems in an attempt to regulate the trade and combat smuggling. In 1836, it promulgated a new regulation requiring that all tea sold in Russia's western provinces bear special packaging and seals (*plomby*), but the rule seems to have been widely ignored.⁴¹ In 1843, a former member of the Ministry of Finance, State Councillor Leontii Markovich Samoilov, proposed that small tea dealers in the western provinces not be allowed to sell tea in open shops, but his suggestion fell on deaf ears. That same year, a former

³⁷ Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 18, op. 4, d. 136.

³⁸ RGIA, f. 18, op. 5, d. 487, ll. 1, 3.

³⁹ Krit, *Materialy*, 149.

⁴⁰ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 110.

⁴¹ Ivan Sokolov, "Kitaiskii chai pod plomboi chastnoi i kazennoi: ot bor'be s fal'sifikatsiei i kontrabandoi chaia v XIX v., do sovremennoi chastnoi kolektsii," in *Nauchnyi Molodezhnyi Ezhegodnik*, vyp. 4, chast' 3: Razlichnye Aspekty Russkoi Istorii i Kul'tury (Moscow: Sputnik, 2009), 79.

member of the Moscow Department of Manufacture and Commerce, Baron Aleksandr Kazimirovich Meiendorf, presented his idea of establishing a private agency to oversee merchants and prevent contraband trade across Russia's western borders. The Ministry of Finance received his plan favorably, but never implemented it, apparently because it depended too heavily on the initiative and participation of the merchants themselves.⁴²

Enforcing special tea packaging in the western provinces alone failed, so the authorities decided that such a measure could effectively protect the China trade only if it were implemented throughout the empire. But the government's attempt to enforce the 1836 regulation closer to the source of legally imported tea in the Far East met with stiff and immediate opposition. Apparently, the government-mandated lead seals on tea boxes were easily lost or broken during loading and unloading, and seldom survived the vicissitudes of long-distance transport. Missing or broken seals resulted in heavy fines, and tea merchants lost no time in making it clear that the system was not working.⁴³ A Kiakhta merchant named Pilenkov developed another plan in 1844, under which Kiakhta tea would be imported exclusively under special new packaging featuring the imperial insignia. Other prominent tea merchants, such as Vasilii Nikolaevich Basnin and Valentin Semenovich Prianishnikov, endorsed this plan, but some Moscow tea dealers objected to it on the grounds that buyers would not be able to smell the tea through the packaging and thus gauge its quality. Opponents of the "*banderol*" (wrapper) system argued further that dishonest dealers could easily sell adulterated tea under the new packaging. To circumvent this problem, an official named Domontovich suggested that wholesale tea dealers only be allowed to sell tea in standardized boxes, and then only to the owners of retail tea establishments, who would then sell

⁴² Krit, *Materialy*, 154-55.

⁴³ Sokolov, "Kitaiskii chai pod plomboi chastnoi i kazennoi," 79-80.

tea to consumers in specially marked packaging. Retailers under this system would, moreover, be issued special caps to wear as a sign of their legitimacy. But this idea was deemed too expensive and impractical and was never implemented.⁴⁴ Ultimately, despite the large amount of potential revenue at stake, the Ministry of Finance was simply unwilling to commit to or invest in a standardized packaging system for Kiakhta tea.⁴⁵ This attitude typified the fiscal conservatism of both Tsar Nicholas I and his finance minister, E. F. Kankrin, who felt they could not risk temporary financial strain for the sake of long-term gains.⁴⁶

In addition to large-scale smuggling, tea adulteration was another widespread phenomenon accompanying the rapid growth of tea consumption in the Russian Empire. This problem was not new in the nineteenth century, but had existed since the earliest days of the tea trade in Russia under Catherine the Great.⁴⁷ The two most common ways to adulterate Chinese tea (*Camellia sinensis*) were the drying and resale of used tea leaves, and the substitution or admixture of the leaves of other plants. Adulterated or otherwise compromised tea was sometimes referred to under the general term *rogzhskii chai* or “bast tea.”⁴⁸ *Ivan chai*, otherwise known as *Kaporskii chai* after a town outside St. Petersburg that was home to a veritable cottage industry producing it, was one of the most common tea surrogates. Made from the dried leaves of a common plant, willow herb (*Epilobium angustifolium*, also sometimes known as fireweed),

⁴⁴ Krit, *Materialy*, 155-56.

⁴⁵ RGIA, f. 18, op. 4, d. 648.

⁴⁶ Walter McKenzie Pintner, *Russian Economic Policy under Nicholas I* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 7.

⁴⁷ In his biography of Catherine the Great, Jean-Henri Castera illustrated the corruption of Russian merchants by relating a story about a German noblewoman buying one pound of tea from a Russian merchant. Despite having carefully inspected the box of tea before buying it, she later discovered it to contain sand covered with a thin layer of tea leaves on top. Jean-Henri Castera, *The Life of Catharine II Empress of Russia. With seven portraits elegantly engraved, and a correct map of the Russian Empire* (London: Printed for T.N. Longman and O. Rees; and J. Debrett, 1799), 258-60.

⁴⁸ Sokolov, “Po chashkam temnoi strueiu,” 64.

kaporskii chai at least had the virtue of being harmless to human health. Other common and relatively benign tea substitutes included cherry, poplar, and oak leaves, as well as dog rose (*Rosa canina*), black willow (*Salix nigra*), and sloe (*Prunus spinosa*). Tea adulteration was also common within China itself; tea imported through Kiakhta sometimes contained the leaves of the native Chinese plants *Chlonranthus inconspicuus* or *Camellia sasanqua*, the latter belonging to the same family as the tea plant. To complicate matters further, inhabitants of the Caucasus and peasants elsewhere in the Russian Empire sometimes knowingly drank an infusion of whortleberry (*Vaccinium arctostaphylos*) leaves. In the almost total absence of regulation, authorities were not always able to determine whether or when merchants selling whortleberry leaves, *kaporskii chai*, and other tea substitutes were fraudulently attempting to pass them off as authentic Chinese tea.⁴⁹

Most of the plants substituted for tea did not pose significant health hazards, but attempts to disguise them often did. Dishonest merchants sometimes colored used tea leaves or tea surrogates using toxic aniline dyes derived from coal tar. They also sometimes mixed in sand, steel shavings, or flour paste to add weight. Catechu, an extract of the acacia tree high in tannins, could be added to make such mixtures resemble tea more closely in color and flavor.⁵⁰ Great Britain had dealt with similar problems in the eighteenth century, during the period of steepest growth in tea consumption. There, adulterated teas, including dried and resold used tea leaves, were known as “lie teas,” and “glazed teas” were tampered with to improve the color of the

⁴⁹ A.V. Pel', *Fal'sifikatsii i mery bor'by s nimi. Dve publichnyia lektsii* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie K.L. Rikker, 1889), 18-21; ZhOS, “O poddelke chaia” (no. 6, 1835), 335-36; Sokolov, “Kitaiskii chai pod plomboi chastnoi i kazennoi: ot bor'be s fal'sifikatsiei i kontrabandoi chaia v XIX v., do sovremennoi chastnoi kolektsii,” in *Nauchnyi Molodezhnyi Ezhegodnik*, vyp. 4, chast' 3: Razlichnye Aspekty Russkoi Istorii i Kul'tury (Moscow: Sputnik, 2009), 79.

⁵⁰ Ivan Alekseevich Sokolov, “Kitaiskii chai pod plomboi chastnoi i kazennoi,” 79; Karp Dmitrievich Dmitrov, *Kakoi chai pit' krest'ianam* (Moscow: I.D. Sytin i Ko., 1893), 6; ChV 15 (January 1899), 192.

liquid. Adulterated British teas were likewise tinted with catechu and various chemical dyes. The British government had been as powerless against tea adulteration in the eighteenth century as the Russian government was in the nineteenth. Parliament passed laws against tea adulteration in 1729, 1731, 1743, and 1777, and yet contemporary reports suggested that up to two-thirds of all tea sold in Britain was adulterated.⁵¹ Compared to this, Russia may have fared somewhat better. A study conducted in St. Petersburg in 1898 found that between twenty-one and thirty-five percent of tea sampled contained foreign substances.⁵² More importantly, the parallels between tea industry problems in England and Russia indicate that this aspect of Russia's economy was evolving on a similar track to capitalist Britain's. It also alerts us to the presence of an enterprising, if unscrupulous, class of entrepreneurs willing to experiment with tea adulteration methods and the means of disguising them.

In 1842, annual tea consumption in Russia reached 5.4 million pounds, and throughout the decade of the 1840s, the Russian tea trade experienced another boom.⁵³ By 1845, it was obvious to Samoilov that the majority of tea drinkers in Russia's western provinces were sipping contraband Canton tea and not Kiakhta tea. He renewed his endorsement of Pilenkov's proposed *banderol'* system, but again without success.⁵⁴ That same year, Tsar Nicholas himself ordered the creation of a special Commission on Abuses in the Tea Trade. Formed on April 23, 1845, under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Commission was governed by a board consisting of high ministry officials, merchants, botanists, and the current Director of the Russian American Company, Vladimir Gavrilovich Poltkovskii. The Commission sent representatives

⁵¹ Coffee adulteration was also widespread in Britain. Two of the most common additives to coffee were acorns and powdered horse liver. Smith, "Accounting for Taste," 206-207.

⁵² ChV 8 (November 1898), 102.

⁵³ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 32, 48.

⁵⁴ Krit, *Materialy*, 156.

all over St. Petersburg to investigate alleged violations in the tea trade, and to study the properties of the popular tea substitute *kaporskii chai*. They worked with local police (another branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) to monitor tea sales in markets and shops throughout the northern capital, and inspected tea in sealed packaging to judge its authenticity. In some cases, the Commission's representatives secured the arrest of persons found to be fraudulently selling *kaporskii chai* as Chinese tea, and for selling mixtures of the two. The Commission concluded its reconnaissance on March 12, 1846.⁵⁵ Based on its research, the Commission recommended that in Russia's western provinces, tea only be sold in special one-pound and one-half-pound boxes that had been verified and sealed by the Moscow and St. Petersburg customs houses. Essentially, the Commission concluded that something very similar to the tea packaging regulation of 1836 should actually be enforced. They proposed to give tea merchants six months to organize their trade according to the new (old) regulations, and allowed shopkeepers to maintain one open half-pound box of tea for inspection by potential customers.⁵⁶

The extent to which the Commission's recommendations were carried out is difficult to determine. Ultimately, the project failed. Typically for state bureaucracies in Nicholaevan Russia, the Commission carried out extensive reconnaissance, generated a great deal of paperwork, and accomplished little. Nikolai Karlovich Krit, who collected materials and statistics concerning the Russian tea trade for use by the Department of Manufacture and Internal Trade, pointed out that the official packaging could be easily counterfeited, and that opportunities for the tea seller to cheat the buyer still abounded.⁵⁷ Moreover, the fact that this exotic fashionable luxury had so recently fallen sufficiently in price to become accessible to

⁵⁵ RGIA, f. 1503, op. 1, dd. 1, 2, 4.

⁵⁶ Krit, *Materialy*, 157-58.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

much larger segments of the population meant that a large proportion of tea consumers could not differentiate pure Chinese tea from adulterated mixtures or surrogates even after tasting it. But the beverage's prestige attracted people to it all the same, ensuring ever increasing demand. Tea was not cheap even at the end of the nineteenth century, when authentic loose tea sold for around one silver ruble per pound or more.⁵⁸ Throughout the century, poorer people anxious to imitate the habits of their social superiors were particularly vulnerable to abuses in the tea trade, since they were eager to acquire the fascinating leaves at prices much lower than authentic tea could possibly sell for.

Around 1850, tea comprised 8 percent of all imports into the Russian Empire, but the Kiakhta trade faced a number of internal and external threats.⁵⁹ By the early 1850s, tea smuggling and adulteration had become so pervasive that they threatened the very existence of the China caravan trade. England and France, fighting against Russia in the Crimean War, also posed a real threat to Russian possessions in the Far East. While border disputes along the Amur River and in Xinjiang hampered Sino-Russian relations, Russia staunchly maintained its ecclesiastical mission in Beijing, the only such foreign delegation allowed to remain in China's capital at that time. In 1853, in this increasingly tense and complex geopolitical climate, the Ministry of Finance began to seriously consider enforcing the *banderol'* system throughout the empire. While government officials, merchants, and economists continued to debate the best methods of combating abuses in the tea trade, all agreed on the need for far-reaching reforms to ensure the availability of safe, authentic tea at reasonable prices. Many smaller tea firms objected

⁵⁸ ChV 15 (January 1899), 192.

⁵⁹ Kulisher, *Istoriia Russkoi Torgovli*, 301; Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 58.

to the *banderol'* system, however, on the grounds that larger companies could better afford the higher overhead costs.

In 1854, at the height of the Crimean War, the Ministry of Finance made a last-ditch attempt to stimulate the Kiakhta trade, possibly motivated by the need for more revenue. It repealed the 1800 regulation stipulating that transactions at Kiakhta be concluded by barter only, allowing Russian merchants to buy tea and other Chinese goods with gold and silver specie. Prior to this time, barter trade at Kiakhta, regulated and closely supervised by the Russian and Chinese governments, had proceeded without significant capital flows in either direction. Commerce at Kiakhta had always been more profitable for China than for Russia, and the Russians knew this, but the tightly regulated nature of the transactions had maintained an artificial balance of trade. Now, the abolition of the barter system subjected the Kiakhta trade to market forces for the first time, and with disastrous results for Russia: the balance of trade immediately lurched radically in favor of the Chinese. Worse, the presence of Western European goods in China's southern ports, forced in by military might and backed by strong capital investments, now dealt a devastating blow to the demand for Russian goods in China.⁶⁰ For these reasons, lifting the barter-only rule, a measure intended to shock the Kiakhta trade back to life, ultimately sounded its death knell.⁶¹ Thus the regime of Nicholas I made one final, unsuccessful attempt to maintain the status quo and protect its perceived interests in defiance of prevailing economic and geopolitical trends. The 1854 abolition of barter trade at Kiakhta also constituted an admission that, although Russian and Chinese interests still more or less coincided, the economic system created by the Treaty of Kiakhta more than one hundred years earlier in 1727

⁶⁰ Mancall, "The Kiakhta Trade," 21; Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 61-62; Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 88-89; Gardella, *Harvesting Mountains*, 34; Kulisher, *Istoriia Russkoi Torgovli*, 297.

⁶¹ Mancall, "The Kiakhta Trade," 25.

could no longer compete in the global economy. Regardless of the degree to which the Russian authorities understood the obsolescence of the Kiakhta system, Russian economic policy did not adapt effectively or quickly enough to a geopolitical landscape in East Asia that had been profoundly altered by European colonial activity and the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860).

In 1855, the year after the abolition of barter trade at Kiakhta, Nicholas I died in the midst of the Crimean War and was succeeded by his son, Alexander II. The fact that the 1854 loosening of restrictions at Kiakhta had backfired made the tea trade crisis all the more acute. That Russian officialdom turned its attention to the tea trade during the Crimean War signals just how important tea consumption had become in Russia. In 1855, with a new tsar, the Crimean War lost, and its tea supply in jeopardy, the Ministry of Finance faced two alternatives: implement the *banderol'* system throughout the empire, or legalize the importation of inexpensive Canton tea over Russia's western borders. Ministry officials once again conceded that the *banderol'* system was the best way forward. They also entertained hopes that the new regulations would restore both customs revenues and Russian exports to China.⁶²

While the bureaucratic machine in St. Petersburg moved slowly toward implementing the *banderol'* system in the late 1850s, Russia and China entered into a series of three treaties that significantly altered the conditions of their economic and political relationship. The two empires signed the Treaty of Aigun in 1858, which further liberalized the Kiakhta trade and made some progress on the border disputes. The Treaty of Tientsin, ratified in 1860 by France, Britain, Russia, and the United States, ended the Second Opium War and opened up more "treaty ports" in China to foreign trade. Western Europeans and Americans now gained by force the

⁶² Krit, *Materialy*, 158-61.

extraterritorial and trading rights in China that Russian merchants and clerics had obtained peacefully and enjoyed for more than a century. While Russia had not established the treaty port system, it readily participated in it once the opportunity arose, and this participation placed it on the same footing as the Western powers actively working to colonize East Asia. Most importantly for the tea trade, under the Treaty of Tientsin, Sino-Russian trade could now be carried out by sea as well as over land. Finally, the Treaty of Peking, concluded in November 1860, both settled the border between Russia and China, and provided for the establishment of a number of new trading posts along the frontier. A new era of commerce had dawned, but since neither empire possessed a large navy, both retained a vested interest in maintaining the overland trade.⁶³

The right of Russian merchants to import tea from China by sea, granted by the Treaty of Tientsin, transformed the Russian tea trade and signaled the decline of the Kiakhta system. As of 1861, Russian maritime ventures importing tea through the southern port of Odessa would be able to sell the leaf much more cheaply than those bringing it overland from Kiakhta. Russian merchants working the old caravan routes would be pushed out of the market, since they would not be able to lower their prices enough to compete with seaborne tea. Moreover, the legalization of maritime tea importation made it possible for Russian tea merchants to compete with their counterparts in Western Europe for the first time. Under these new conditions, cheaper seaborne tea would inevitably flood Russian markets, and for this reason the Ministry of Finance concluded that it was now pointless to continue the ban on tea imported through Western Europe. In any event, experience had shown that the Russian authorities were powerless to curtail large-scale tea smuggling, and the impending proliferation of trading posts along the Chinese border

⁶³ Sladkovskii, *The Long Road*, 199-204.

and along its coasts would render regulation all the more difficult and expensive. And so on March 30, 1861, within weeks of the abolition of serfdom, Tsar Alexander II legalized tea importation by sea and by land across the Russian Empire's western borders. The law set tariffs on the newly legalized Canton tea at rates twice as high as tariffs on Kiakhta teas, in a final attempt to protect the now-doomed overland China trade. This law, Russia's "great tea reform," came into effect in April 1862.⁶⁴

Despite the fact that it liberalized trade, the great tea reform of 1861 was consistent with the conservative fiscal policy thought necessary to stabilize and perpetuate autocracy in Russia. In the late 1850s, Alexander II, who had come to power just as the Crimean War was drawing to a close, together with his advisers, designed a program of reform that included the abolition of serfdom, education reform, a new judicial system, and limited self-government in the provinces (the *zemstvo* system). Enacted in the 1860s, Alexander's Great Reforms represented concrete steps toward social equality and the liberalization of censorship and education, yet they remained limited and incomplete. The emancipation of the serfs in 1861, for instance, did not effectively alleviate rural poverty, nor increase Russia's agricultural productivity. Bruce Lincoln has argued that the Great Reforms helped to create a civil society, but failed to reconcile that nascent civil society with the unlimited power of the monarchy.⁶⁵ The Great Reforms were necessary responses to new developments the autocracy would have averted if it could, such as the concentration of workers in industrialized areas and growing social consciousness in both rural and urban Russia. Alexander intended the Great Reforms to respond to unavoidable realities while leaving the unlimited power of the tsar intact. In the same way, the great tea reform of

⁶⁴ *PSZ*, vol. 36, no. 36785, 518-19. See also Krit, *Materialy*, 167-68.

⁶⁵ Lincoln, *The Great Reforms*, 118-19.

1861 reluctantly responded to new and unavoidable economic realities—European colonial activity in East Asia and the growth of commodity markets at home—but its architects preferred that the outdated Kiakhta system should remain intact. Like the Great Reforms, revisions to tea trade regulations made token concessions to economic and geopolitical change, but would ultimately fail to equip this sector of the Russian economy to adapt effectively to modernity.

Phase III: 1861-1917

The Kiakhta system had proven remarkably robust, lasting with only temporary interruptions from 1727 until 1860. The treaties of 1858-1860 ended the golden age of the caravan tea trade, and Kiakhta would never regain its central role in Sino-Russian commerce. The legalization of maritime tea importation had opened the floodgates. In 1866, only four years after the great tea reform went into effect, a full three-quarters of the wholesale tea available at the Nizhnii Novgorod fair had come by sea.⁶⁶ In the late 1860s, commentators began to notice that as a result of the new maritime trade, fabrics, rather than tea, had become the most prominent commodity at the Nizhnii Novgorod fair.⁶⁷ All pretense of an empire-wide tea packaging system was finally abandoned in 1866, although calls to reinstate one would continue to surface periodically until the end of the century.⁶⁸ The Suez Canal, opened in 1869, dealt another blow to the solvency of the overland tea trade by bringing major international shipping lanes much closer to Russia's southern port of Odessa.

⁶⁶ Fitzpatrick, *Great Russian Fair*, 54.

⁶⁷ Kulisher, *Istoriia Russkoi Torgovli*, 298.

⁶⁸ Sokolov, "Kitaiskii chai pod plomboi chastnoi i kazennoi," 79. See also Vasilii Klimushin, *O Banderol'noi Sisteme na Chai* (Moscow: Tip. Kol'chugin, Volkhon, and Voeikov, 1891).

Despite all this, customs revenues from the Kiakhta trade remained vital to the Russian economy, and the government continued to support and promote it throughout the 1860s and 1870s. Tea and other comestibles imported from China found a ready market in Siberia, and this made the Kiakhta trade worth maintaining, even though transporting Chinese products all the way to European Russia by land no longer yielded high profits. In addition, the Crimean War, together with the sale of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands to the United States in 1867, temporarily slowed the development of Russian commercial shipping in the Far East.⁶⁹ The Russian American Company, an important supplier of tea in the Russian wholesale market, had been exchanging sea otter pelts for tea at Kiakhta and, through British and American middlemen, at Canton. After the sale of Russian America to the United States, the Company, deprived of its economic *raison d'être* and deeply in debt to the Russian government, ceased its activities soon afterward, and liquidated what remained of its assets in 1881.⁷⁰

Russian imports from China by both sea and land, and tea imports in particular, grew rapidly in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Regular sea voyages between Vladivostok and Odessa began in 1880, and ushered in Russia's third tea boom of the long nineteenth century. By the mid-1880s, Russian shipping itineraries along this route included stops at Shanghai or Canton to purchase tea. In 1885, Russian ships brought 4.4 million tons of tea from China to Odessa; by 1893, that number had jumped to more than 11.5 million tons. Meanwhile, rapid population growth in the Siberian and newly acquired Central Asian territories of the Russian Empire ensured continued demand for Chinese goods and foodstuffs imported by land, since a large portion of the empire's population now lived closer to China than to centers of

⁶⁹ Mancall, "Russia and China: The Structure of Contact," 325-26; Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 93, 134; Sladkovskii, *The Long Road*, 175.

⁷⁰ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 166-67.

resource distribution in European Russia—a phenomenon ripe for further study. In the early 1890s, the value of Russian imports by sea from China—between thirteen and fourteen million rubles annually—matched the value of overland imports from China for the first time. By 1914, Russian maritime imports from China exceeded the overland trade, but only by a small margin.⁷¹

Russian tea processing facilities operating inside China in the second half of the nineteenth century supply a striking and little-known chapter in the history of the global tea trade. By 1868, several of the largest Russian tea firms had established three brick tea factories in the city of Hankou, the first such foreign enterprises to function inside China. These factories purchased tea dust and fannings (tiny fragments of tea leaves sifted out of higher grade teas), the unwanted byproducts of Chinese tea processing facilities, and compressed them at high pressure into inexpensive, easily transportable tea bricks. The firms then exported the brick tea to Russia for a tidy profit, benefiting from the fact that import duties on brick tea were lower than duties on leaf tea. By 1878, three of the six Russian brick tea factories in Hankou used steam-powered machinery. While this small, specialized Russian enclave exerted virtually no influence on China's vast and logistically sophisticated tea industry, the Russians did introduce mechanized production systems to parts of rural China for the first time. The factories multiplied and spread, and by 1917 nineteen Russian brick tea factories operated in Hankou and Fouzhou. Uniquely for European economic activity in China, the Russian tea companies owned the land they worked on, benefited local economic interests, and posed no threat to Qing sovereignty. Moreover, their success prompted Chinese entrepreneurs to set up competing companies. One such facility at the Fouzhou Navy Yard was the first indigenous modern industry in the province. Russian tea processing plants in China, however, faced certain challenges. In 1876, two factories had to be

⁷¹ Mancall, "Russia and China: The Structure of Contact," 326-27.

moved to different locations because the local population felt alarmed by their presence, possibly because they feared foreigners, and threatened to burn them down.⁷²

Even so, before 1895 the Russian tea industry in China represented the second largest foreign investment in the country, after shipbuilding and repair, and the economic and political relationship between China and Russia remained generally advantageous for both. Russian companies were the only foreign economic agents operating freely in rural China, and by the 1890s, Russian tea firms employed more than 7,000 Chinese workers. Great Britain, formerly China's largest tea customer, proved unable to achieve full colonial control over the Middle Kingdom, despite its success in opening up China to foreign trade after two Opium Wars. When Britain consequently shifted its attention to promoting tea production in India and Sri Lanka in the middle of the nineteenth century, Russia's Chinese tea factories and its continuing demand for Chinese tea played a crucial role in shoring up China's declining share in the global tea market. In 1890, Russia consumed more than thirty-five percent of all Chinese tea exports.⁷³ The Russian brick tea factories in China continued to increase their output until the First World War and the Russian Revolutions of 1917 destabilized Russian tea firms to the extent that they could no longer maintain operations abroad.⁷⁴

Throughout the nineteenth century, gradual improvements in transport infrastructure facilitated the spread of tea consumption in the Russian Empire.⁷⁵ In the early 1840s, despite the protestations of finance minister E. F. Kankrin, Nicholas I had initiated the construction of a

⁷² Mancall, "Russia and China: The Structure of Contact," 327; Gardella, *Harvesting Mountains*, 69-74.

⁷³ Mancall, "Russia and China: The Structure of Contact," 327, and "The Kiakhta Trade," 31; Gardella, *Harvesting Mountains*, 70.

⁷⁴ Gardella, *Harvesting Mountains*, 110, 142-43.

⁷⁵ Graham Dix, "Non-alcoholic Beverages in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Petits Propos Culinaires* 10 (1982), 27.

railway linking Moscow and St. Petersburg.⁷⁶ In the 1880s and 1890s, motivated by a desire to connect the Far East with industrial centers in European Russia, the government began to form plans for a trans-Siberian railway. Authorities also hoped that a rail line connecting Siberia with Moscow and St. Petersburg would stimulate the China trade, in light of the fact that Russia's trade deficit with China had been growing steadily since the abolition of the barter system at Kiakhta in 1854. Between 1881 and 1890, Russia's trade deficit with China amounted, on average, to twenty-three million rubles annually. Russian merchants vocally advocated the construction of a trans-Siberian railway, and they finally prevailed upon the new tsar, Alexander III, in May 1882.

Alexander III had succeeded his father, Alexander II, when the latter was assassinated in a terrorist attack carried out by a revolutionary organization in March 1881. The 1890s saw a boom in Russian finance and industry generally, and the tea trade in particular. With a background in business and railways, Sergei Witte ably managed the Ministry of Finance from 1892 to 1903, facilitating private enterprise, industrialization, and the state-sponsored exploitation of natural resources. Witte energetically promoted both shipping in the Far East and the construction of the trans-Siberian railway, with the ambition that heavy investment in Far Eastern commerce and infrastructure would allow Russia to dislodge the British from their position as middlemen in the export of Chinese tea to Western Europe.⁷⁷ Andrei Pavlovich Subbotin, prominent economist, editor of the *Economic Journal*, and author of a number of important works on the tea trade, also argued for the construction of more rail connections linking the two extreme ends of the Russian Empire, describing the lands beyond the Urals as “a

⁷⁶ Pintner, *Russian Economic Policy*, 133.

⁷⁷ Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations*, 87-88, 98.

new America” waiting to be economically exploited.⁷⁸ Thanks in part to Witte’s efforts, Russian tea imports and tea consumption grew considerably in the 1890s. Not coincidentally, right around the time the trans-Siberian railway was finally completed in 1901, tea consumption in the Russian Empire reached one pound per capita annually.⁷⁹ Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, tea’s transition from a luxury item to an everyday household staple was complete.

But Russian economic gains in the Far East soon suffered a fatal blow under Tsar Nicholas II, who had assumed power when his father Alexander III suddenly died in 1894. Between 1898 and 1904, against Witte’s better judgment, Nicholas antagonized Japanese interests in China and Korea. Russia entered into an ill-advised war with Japan in 1904, and its defeat in 1905 undermined Russian imperial expansion in the Far East. The loss of the Russo-Japanese War caused price inflation, unrest in the army, and a decline in government prestige. These in turn helped spark the Revolution of 1905, which began as a peaceful demonstration of St. Petersburg factory workers and culminated with widespread strikes, peasant unrest, and mutinies in the navy. These dangerous conditions forced Nicholas II to make concessions and to create a bicameral legislature with limited powers. The State Duma went through four iterations before the Russian imperial government ultimately collapsed in February 1917.

As the Russian Empire entered the turbulent twentieth century, tea consumption had become universal, but the old “tea problem” remained, and new ones appeared. Founded in 1843, within forty years the K. and S. Popov Company on Kuznetskii Most in Moscow had become one of the largest tea conglomerates in Russia. In 1878, disturbed by reports that its tea had dropped in quality, the Popov firm uncovered the existence of a copycat operation selling low

⁷⁸ Subbotin, *Torgovya Soobshcheniia*, 2-3.

⁷⁹ Dix, “Non-alcoholic Beverages,” 24.

quality tea in packaging identical to that used by the Popovs. Since two brothers also bearing the surname Popov ran the sham company, the larger and legitimate tea company found itself in a curious position and without legal recourse of any kind. So it responded by changing its logo and packaging in 1882, only to discover soon afterward that the pseudo-Popovs had updated their packaging to match. A district court tried the two “false” Popov brothers for opening a retail establishment without permission and fined them two hundred rubles each in April 1883, but they had resumed their fraudulent activities by November of that year. In 1885, customs officials in St. Petersburg intercepted ammunition boxes full of *kaporskii chai* bound for the imitation Popov operation in Moscow. In 1886, the Moscow police discovered a warehouse stocked with *bast* and *kaporskii chai*, which the false Popovs were continued selling under counterfeit packaging identical to that of the legitimate Popov firm. A much-publicized 1887 trial finally resolved the matter. The court convicted the false Popovs of fraud and exiled them to Siberia.⁸⁰

In the waning decades of the Russian Empire, the old problems of tea fraud and adulteration persisted, and new issues arose. Problems with the tea trade posed a growing threat to the solvency of Russian government itself, since in the twentieth century revenues from tea duties came to supply one quarter of all the state treasury’s customs revenue.⁸¹ The same challenges that beset the Russian economy generally also affected tea companies. Labor unrest plagued the tea industry between 1905 and 1907. After the Revolution of 1905, tea warehouse workers expressed discontent with their wages, while consumers demanded lower tea prices.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Delo Moskatel'shchikov Br. Aleksandra i Ivana Popovykh, Torgovovshikh Chaem i Pod Firm'iu "Br. A. i I. Popovy," Obviniavshikhsia v Moshennichestvakh, Vyrasivshikhsia v Fal'sifikatsii Raznykh Produktov Izvestnykh Firm' i v Poddelke Etiketov Chainoi Firmy Br. K. i S. Popovy. Stenograficheskii Otchet'* (Moscow: Izdanie “Novosti Dnia,” Universal'nyi tipografii, 1888), 3-127.

⁸¹ Grubarevich-Radobylskii, *Chai i Chainaia Monopoliia*, 3.

⁸² Sokolov, “Chai i chainaia torgovliia v epokhu ‘Velikikh potriasenii’: Russkie revoliutsii i Pervaia mirovaia voina,” in *Chainye Zametki*, 84.

But duties on tea remained high—up to 200 percent the price of tea—preventing the retail price of authentic Chinese tea from falling as supply increased.⁸³ This situation placed the government in a difficult position. Duties on tea imports supplied a significant and ever increasing amount of much-needed revenue, but high tea prices exacerbated both public unrest and the perennial problems of tea adulteration and smuggling, problems large enough in scale to threaten the security of the legitimate tea trade.

But instead of committees of bureaucrats in the Ministry of Finance, Russia now had a new administrative organ to deal with such questions. In discussing the state budget for 1907, several members of the State Duma acknowledged that the government taxed items of popular consumption disproportionately heavily, and recognized the existence of a demand to lower taxes on such commodities, and especially on “first necessity items” such as tea. In a pamphlet published by the Ministry of Finance in 1908, a former customs official who had lived in Kiakhta, Anton Frantsevich Grubarevich-Radobylskii, argued that lowering the duty on imported tea would increase, rather than decrease, state revenue, because lower tea prices would stimulate a rise in consumption. But characteristically, despite the opinions of some Duma members, Nicholas II’s government proved unwilling to risk even a temporary drop in revenue for the sake of long-term gains. As an alternative, the authorities considered imposing a state monopoly on the tea trade in an effort to solve these problems. In an official note, Finance Minister V. N. Kokovtsov wrote that revenues from state monopolies, such as those that already existed on vodka and railroads, had the potential to grow more rapidly than other sources of government revenue.⁸⁴ As the Russian government weighed this option in the years leading up to the First

⁸³ Grubarevich-Radobylskii, *Chai i Chainaia Monopoliia*, 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3, 5.

World War, the prospect of investing time and money in such an uncertain venture prevented it from taking any concrete action.

When Russia entered the First World War in August 1914, the government closed its liquor stores in an effort to prevent drunkenness among soldiers during mobilization. Contemporaries often highlighted the drunken state of Russia's troops during the Russo-Japanese War, desiring to prevent another humiliating defeat.⁸⁵ Wartime prohibition came at great cost, however, depriving the treasury of approximately one quarter of its total annual revenue, or about 700 million rubles. With state revenues from the vodka monopoly severely curtailed, revenues from tea duties became more critical. A government tea monopoly now appeared more attractive than ever, but M. P. Kolomiitsov, considering the question in 1916, estimated that establishing a tea monopoly would cost the state approximately 200 million rubles. Moreover, Kolomiitsov, more realistic than Grubarevich-Radobylskii, cautioned that such a monopoly would take several years to become profitable.⁸⁶ Once the war began, a state tea monopoly would have been too little too late.

The expense of mobilizing for the First World War created an unprecedented economic crisis in Russia. Unable to finance the war on its own, the Russian government resorted to taking out loans and printing money; these measures caused rampant inflation and steep increases in retail prices. Both Russian imports and exports dropped dramatically, and the devaluation of the ruble combined with the population's decreased purchasing power caused tea prices to climb and sales to fall. This contributed to a shift in emphasis back to the old Asian tea delivery routes, but

⁸⁵ Patricia Herlihy, *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 67.

⁸⁶ M.P. Kolomiitsov, *Chai: Mirovaia Torgovlia Chaem i Vopros o Kazennoi Chainoi Monopolii v Rossii* (Moscow: Tip. Tovarishchestva Riabushinskikh, 1916), ix-xiv.

problems like a shortage of railway carriages in Siberia beset the tea supply from the east. A tea shortage ensued. Many people reverted to using the leaves of various local plants, and all kinds of tea fraud and adulteration soared. These problems only grew more acute as the war progressed. To add insult to injury, cheap Japanese compressed green tea began to push Russian compressed black tea out of Far Eastern markets. Meanwhile, the war in Europe had virtually severed Russia's tea supply from the west. War cut off Russian tea dealers in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris from their associates. Closer to home, some of Russia's oldest and largest tea conglomerates came under attack because of their German roots. An ambitious group of Petrograd tea dealers attempted to take advantage of wartime shortages and Russia's alliance with Britain to import tea directly from India, but their scheme never got off the ground. By 1916, Russia's internal and external tea trade, like the government itself, was on the verge of collapse.⁸⁷

At the end of the imperial period, the stability of the tea trade had become linked to the political stability of Russia generally because a majority of Russian subjects now consumed tea habitually. By the close of the nineteenth century, tea had come to play a significant role in the peasant household economy.⁸⁸ Peasants comprised a majority of soldiers in the Russian army, and they expected to be supplied with tea as part of their regular rations. By the advent of the First World War, tea occupied such a prominent place in the Russian diet that the state included tea (but not coffee) on lists of wartime necessities.⁸⁹ Yet despite repeated calls for tea to be incorporated into regular military rations, this was never done, and the government provided its

⁸⁷ Sokolov, "Chai i chainaia torgovliia v epokhu 'Velikikh potriashenii,'" 84-99.

⁸⁸ James Y. Simms, "The Crisis in Russian Agriculture at the End of the Nineteenth Century: A Different View," *Slavic Review* 36, no. 3 (1977), 384.

⁸⁹ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 102, op. 1915, d. 130 (3), l. 161. I thank Colleen Moore for this reference.

troops with tea only on special occasions and during cholera outbreaks, when drinking water was known to be unsafe.⁹⁰ In this small way, the Russian military's lack of a regular tea supply contributed to the disintegration of its loyalty to the tsarist regime, which proved pivotal during the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

Similarly, the wartime tea crisis fueled popular unrest. Tea was hardly necessary for survival, but scarcity in itself, as historian Barbara Engel has pointed out, "was usually less important than the meanings people attached to it." Her study of subsistence riots during the First World War has shown that peasants would sometimes become violent when faced with a lack of the fruit drops they were accustomed to putting in their tea. While subsistence riots did not involve as many people as the industrial strikes, Engel argues that both workers and peasant rioters shared a notion of justice that was connected to the availability of consumer goods.⁹¹ In the midst of calls for drastic reductions in customs duties for the purposes of lowering tea prices and fighting fraud, some observers detected a destructive agency wielded by the government. Busily engaged in maximizing its own revenue, the autocracy was understood to be ignoring the needs of its soldiers, its workforce, and its subjects generally. Throughout the late imperial period but especially in the last two decades of the regime, the tsarist state alienated people by failing to take action that would ensure public access to a safe, reliable, authentic tea supply. Wartime scarcity, including tea shortages among peasants, soldiers, and workers, along with the government's failure to take full advantage of potential revenue from tea sales, ultimately contributed to the demise of the Russian Empire.

⁹⁰ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 91-94.

⁹¹ Barbara Alpher Engel, "Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I," *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 4 (December 1997), 711-721.

Solving Russia's Tea Problem with Russian Tea

In the second half of the nineteenth century, journalists believed growing tea within the bounds of the Russian Empire to be the best possible solution to Russia's tea problem, and a number of wealthy landowners and entrepreneurs undertook to establish domestic tea plantations. Some contemporaries, such as the prominent tea merchant Konstantin Sememovich Popov, understood the provision of inexpensive, authentic tea for Russian workers and peasants almost as a justice mission.⁹² Others saw access to cheap tea as a public health issue: M. M. Zenzinov argued that the peasantry needed more tea in its diet because of that beverage's property of strengthening the muscles for manual labor.⁹³ In his pharmaceutical dissertation, V. G. Kolokolov cited reports of Russian soldiers being sustained by hot tea during the Russo-Japanese war.⁹⁴ Russia clearly needed more tea, and tea cultivation in Russia would provide a host of economic and social benefits. It would promote a more favorable balance of trade: the hundreds of millions of rubles that Russians spent on tea annually would remain within the country. Tea plantations would develop the economy of the southern borderlands. Shorter distances, lower transport costs, fewer middlemen, and the avoidance of import duties would result in much lower tea prices. Lower tea prices would place tea within the purchasing power of peasants and poor people, and this in turn would remove incentives for smuggling, fraud, and adulteration.

The only lands suitable for tea cultivation accessible to Russian entrepreneurs lay in a narrow corridor along the Black Sea coast of present-day Georgia, between Batumi and

⁹² "O chainykh plantatsiakh na Kavkaze, prinadlozhashchikh Konstantinu Popovu i deiatel'nost' ego," *Chainyi Vestnik* [hereafter ChV] 1 (October 1898), 5.

⁹³ M.M. Zenzinov, *Chai i Poshlina* (Moskva: Tipografii N.I. Grosman i G.A. Vendel'shtein, 1909), 5.

⁹⁴ V.G. Kolokolov, *K Voprosu o Chae Russkikh Plantatsii. Russkii Chai i Nekotorye Sorta Kitaiskago i Tseilonskago Chaia Moskovskikh Firmov. Diss. Na Step. Magistra Farmatsii* (Moskva: Pech. S.P. Iakovlev, 1906), 2.

Ozurgeti. Growing tea in the Caucasus was an imperialist enterprise, in which the local inhabitants hardly figured at all. Writers and tea entrepreneurs alike regarded the region as an agricultural *tabula rasa*. The botanist A. N. Krasnov began his work on tea-growing regions of the Caucasus by stating that it was a wild, underpopulated, unproductive wasteland before Russians started trying to grow tea there.⁹⁵ When discussing the involvement of local people, authors often assumed or implied that Russian peasants would move to the area in order to undertake tea cultivation.⁹⁶ A manual covering all aspects of tea cultivation and processing, published in Russian in 1901, considered native Georgian people only as potential tea growers and laborers.⁹⁷ In addition to its potential economic benefits, tea cultivation in the Caucasus was also a component of the Russian civilizing mission.

In the 1830s, the decade when the Ministry of Finance first began to consider tea smuggling and tea adulteration to be serious problems worthy of state intervention, government officials began casting around for an alternative to total dependence on China for Russia's tea supply. At this time the British, too, actively sought out advantageous places to grow their own tea, and enthusiasm for discovering new territories for tea cultivation ran high across Europe. In 1836, Russia's consul general in Rio de Janeiro wrote enthusiastically to his superiors about the possibility of growing tea in Brazil.⁹⁸ Similarly, in 1838, the weekly *Zhurnal Obshchepoleznykh Svedenii* (Journal of Generally Useful Information) ran two articles on the successful cultivation of tea in France. The journal reported that an agronomist in Angers, a certain M. Leroy, kept tea

⁹⁵ A.N. Krasnov, *Chai nye Okrugi Subtropicheskikh Oblastei Azii* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tip. Glavnago Upravleniia Udelov, 1898), 2:1.

⁹⁶ I. Gai-skii, "Mysl' o sredstve uluchshiti' sel'skoe khoziaistvo v Kavkazskoi oblasti," *ZhOS* 18 (1837), 173.

⁹⁷ V.O. Simonson, *Prakticheskoe Rukovodstvo k Rasvedeniiu Chainago Kusta i Vydelke Chaia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tip. V.F. Kirshbaum, 1901); Vladislav Ivanovich Masal'skii, *Chai nia i Drugiia Iuzhnyiia Kul'tury v Zapadnom Zakavkaz'e* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Sankt-Peterburgskaia Gradonachal'stva, 1899), 30-31.

⁹⁸ RGIA, f. 18, op. 2, d. 907, l. 1. Unfortunately, no reply is extant.

bushes alive for six years, and concluded that the feasibility of growing tea in France was supported by a number of other sources.⁹⁹ Articles about the transplantation of food crops to nonnative regions were common in the *Zhurnal Obshchepoleznykh Svedenii*; corn and coffee are two recurring examples. Collectively, these articles imply that if products such as corn and tea had been successfully cultivated outside their native habitats, then Russia quite possibly stood to benefit economically by their introduction.

The 1840s saw the first small-scale Russian attempts to grow tea bushes along the Black Sea coast. By then, tea imports had risen to around 10.8 million pounds annually—more than ten times what they had been in the 1790s—and tea consumption was no longer limited to the wealthier classes.¹⁰⁰ In 1847, Prince Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov, governor-general of the Caucasus since 1844, ordered several tea bushes brought from China and planted them in a botanical garden near Ozurgeti in what is now the Guria province of Georgia.¹⁰¹ In the 1850s, his adjutant Prince Eristov transplanted some of these to the Chakhaturi settlement in the same *uezd*, where he experimentally prepared tea from the leaves in 1861.¹⁰² Vorontsov, an influential figure who had rebuilt Tbilisi to be a European city, died in 1856. The last of Vorontsov's original tea plants apparently died in the 1860s, although some bushes descended from these seem to have survived at least until the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ “Vozrashchenie chaia,” *ZhOS* 36 (1838), 291.

¹⁰⁰ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 234-235.

¹⁰¹ Masal'skii, *Chainyia i Drugiia Iuzhnyiia Kul'tury*, 9.

¹⁰² This was most likely Nikolai Dmitrievich Eristov, who served as adjutant to Prince Vorontsov from 1849. Krasnov, *Chainye Okrug*, 2:607.

¹⁰³ P. Linde, “Kul'tura chaia v Kutaisskoi gubernii,” *ChV* 38 (July 1899), 422; Masal'skii, *Chainyia i Drugiia Iuzhnyiia Kul'tury*, 24-27.

Would-be Russian tea planters, however, made real strides toward commercial cultivation only in the mid-1880s. In 1885, A. A. Solovtsov and N. K. Zeidlits established a small tea plantation in Batumi using tea bushes, seedlings, and seeds acquired from Hankou. Their efforts attracted some notice at the Nizhnii Novgorod exhibition that year, although the resulting tea, produced by primitive methods and without the requisite knowledge, was deemed unsatisfactory. Despite the fact that Solovtsov ran his estate badly and never did produce palatable tea, contemporaries considered him a pioneer of Russian tea cultivation. His project brought the existence of thriving tea bushes in the Caucasus to the public's attention and laid the groundwork for further attempts.¹⁰⁴

If any company could make Caucasian tea cultivation successful, it was the Popovs, who ran one of the only tea firms in Russia large enough to compete on a global scale. Popov's tea-growing initiative in the Caucasus was the largest in terms of capital investment and acreage, as well as the most thoroughly researched. Between 1889 and 1893, Popov sponsored a botanical expedition to virtually every tea-growing region on the planet—China, Japan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Java—visiting tea plantations and processing facilities. From China he brought back tea seeds, bushes, at least one Chinese tea master, and several skilled Chinese tea workers. Having also made several exploratory visits to the Caucasus, in 1892 Popov settled on the Chakva River basin as the best site for his tea plantations and acquired three tracts of land totaling more than eight hundred acres. Popov's workers gathered their first harvest in 1895, processed the small yield of about twenty pounds, and subjected the leaves to testing. The following year, the Popov plantation produced thirty-seven pounds of tea, again experimentally,

¹⁰⁴ Masal'skii, *Chainyia i Drugiia Iuzhnyiia Kul'tury*, 9.

and exhibited it at Nizhnii Novgorod to mixed reviews.¹⁰⁵ The yield from Popov's estates quickly grew, totaling 1,080 pounds in 1897 and 2,250 in 1898.¹⁰⁶ By the time his heavily advertised "first Russian tea" (*pervyi russkii chai*) hit the market in 1898, Popov had spent approximately one million rubles on the enterprise.¹⁰⁷

The imperial government, for its part, also exerted considerable efforts to promote Caucasian tea cultivation. In the 1890s the state funded a scientific expedition to China, Japan, India, and Sri Lanka so that botanists could study tea plants in their various habitats. Several years after Popov established his tea estates, the Ministry of Imperial Domains founded its own plantation in the Chakva region, which, although it had only 540 acres under cultivation, quickly outstripped Popov's operation in total annual output. The Ministry of Agriculture also maintained a scientific outpost for the study of Russian-grown tea in the village of Zvani in the Ozurgeti district. In 1913, the Ministry of Agriculture contributed almost 4,000 rubles toward the construction of a facility to process leaves produced by local smallholders.¹⁰⁸

Russian tea production grew very quickly during that first decade between 1895 and 1905. In 1902, total output was around 60,300 pounds, with the imperial estate accounting for 37,800 and Popov making up most of the remainder. In 1905, total tea production in the Russian Empire had risen to almost 144,000 pounds, with the imperial estate producing about 2/3 of that amount and Popov 1/3, respectively.¹⁰⁹ By 1913, shortly before the First World War and the Russian revolutions severely disrupted Caucasian tea cultivation, the amount of tea produced had

¹⁰⁵ Gubarevich-Radobyl'skii, *Chai i Chainaia Monopoliia*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ "O chainykh plantatsiakh na Kavkaze," 5.

¹⁰⁷ Linde, "Kul'tura chaia v Kuttaisskoi gubernii," 423.

¹⁰⁸ J.J. Kral, "The Tea Gardens of Russia," *Russian Review* 2, no. 4 (October 1916), 192.

¹⁰⁹ Gubarevich-Radobyl'skii, *Chai i Chainaia Monopoliia*, 54.

reached 259,200 pounds. To put that number in perspective, that same year Russians consumed more than 166 million pounds of tea.¹¹⁰ In other words, in 1913 Russia was producing only 0.2 percent of the tea it consumed.

Though the volume of tea produced remained quite small up until the collapse of the Russian Empire, the press celebrated the successful cultivation of “Russian tea” and praised its quality. Confidence ran high that, in the future, Caucasian tea cultivation would grow aggressively.¹¹¹ The pharmacist Kolokolov wrote that some of Popov’s teas were roughly comparable to certain Chinese and Ceylon varieties, while others were much lower in quality.¹¹² V. I. Masal’skii, who produced a work on crops introduced to the Caucasus on behalf of the Ministry of Farming and State Property, opined that Popov’s tea exhibited a pleasing flavor, had good liquor (color) and bouquet (aroma), and stacked up quite favorably to the middling sorts of Chinese tea.¹¹³ Popov and Solovtsov exhibited their teas at the 1898 Nizhnii Novgorod exhibition, where they were subjected to the scrutiny of two different panels of experts, which included one professional tea taster from Moscow. The experts concluded that Russian tea was no worse than Chinese tea, and even better than certain lower-quality Chinese types; that the outward appearance of processed tea leaves grown in Russia was better than that of Chinese teas; and that Russian tea was eminently suited for blending with various types of Chinese teas.¹¹⁴ In

¹¹⁰ Kral, “Tea Gardens of Russia,” 191.

¹¹¹ See, for example, S.N. Timofeev, “Chai i Voznikaiushchaia Ego Kul’tura Na Kavkaze,” in *Sbornik Svedenii Po Kul’ture Tsennykh Rastenii Na Kavkaze*, vyp. 3, ed. I.Z. Andronikov (Tiflis: Tip. K.P. Kozlovskii, 1895), 14; Genrikh Zemler, *Chai, Razvedenie Ego v Kitae, Indii, Iaponii i Na Kavkaze [...]* (Moscow: Izd. V.N. Makaruev, 1889), 18; and “Russkii chai,” *ChV* 15 (January 1899), 192.

¹¹² Kolokolov, *K Voprosu o Chae Russkikh Plantatsii*, 241-42.

¹¹³ Masal’skii, *Chainyia i Drugiia Iuzhnyiia Kul’tury*, 16.

¹¹⁴ “Russkii chai,” 192.

other words, the tea grown on the Black Sea coast was really not very good, but almost everyone involved had a vested interest in its success and sought reasons to praise it.

Despite what was almost universally hailed as a very promising beginning, the high cost of the finished tea hounded the fledgling Russian tea industry. The price of labor was one major factor: one day's labor in the Caucasus cost more than five times that in China, and tea laborers' wages in Japan and Southeast Asia were even lower than in China.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Russia's tea plantations in the Caucasus simply did not produce tea on a large enough scale to compete with other tea-growing regions. One author, writing in *Chainyi Vestnik*, estimated that for homegrown tea to compete with imported tea, Russia would need about as much acreage under cultivation as Sri Lanka. Russia at this time had approximately 1,600 acres under tea; Sri Lanka had 372,000. To compound the problem, the writer doubted whether that much acreage suitable for tea existed within Russia's borders, and even if it did, capital and entrepreneurs were lacking. Finally, even if Russia were able to produce tea on such a scale as to be able to export it, it would be extremely difficult to undersell Chinese tea.¹¹⁶

Many commentators agreed that placing Caucasian tea cultivation in the hands of many small growers, as opposed to a few large ones, would both expand production and create livelihoods for local populations. Some were quite optimistic about this strategy. Masal'skii naively believed that since the inhabitants of the Caucasus were already accustomed to making the common tea surrogate *kaporskii chai*, they could easily adapt to growing real tea.¹¹⁷ M. P. Kolomiitsov expressed the consoling thought that it had taken the British fifty years to really get their tea plantations off the ground in India, and that limited results at this early stage were to be

¹¹⁵ Kral, "Tea Gardens of Russia," 193.

¹¹⁶ "O Russkom chae," ChV 30 (May 1899), 359.

¹¹⁷ Masal'skii, *Chainyia i Drugiia Iuzhnyiia Kul'tury*, 16; Pel', *Fal'sifikatsii*, 19.

expected.¹¹⁸ Writers in *Chainyi Vestnik* tended to be less sanguine, pointing out that even if all continued to go well with Caucasian tea cultivation, it would still be many years until the homegrown tea came into regular use among Russia's general population.¹¹⁹ Moreover, even if the bulk of Russian tea cultivation were to be placed in the hands of small local producers, the government would need to establish regulations both to protect these growers against exploitation, and also to ensure they could not sell their tea at excessively high prices.¹²⁰

Russian tea cultivation in the Caucasus continued to grow steadily until it was decimated during the traumatic period between 1914 and 1920. Only a small fraction of Russian tea-growing lands, in fact, escaped total destruction during the Russian Civil War. Citizens of the young Soviet Union consumed far less tea than subjects under the old regime, almost certainly because of short supply rather than decreasing demand. In the early 1920s, the Soviet government launched a plan to revive and expand tea cultivation within its borders, with the goal of becoming totally self-sufficient in tea production. Tea cultivation expanded into Krasnodarskii Krai and Azerbaijan; experimental but ultimately unsuccessful tea stations were set up in the Carpathian Mountains, in the Crimea, and in what is now Chechnya. By the time of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the latter was producing 44 percent of the tea it consumed. The Soviets did not significantly exceed this level in the postwar years, and when China came into the orbit of communism, new trade policies and possibilities prompted the Soviets to abandon the idea of emancipating themselves from tea importation. For much of the twentieth century, Russian tea consumption lagged behind prerevolutionary levels. On the eve of the First World War in 1913, tea consumption in the Russian Empire had been around one pound per person per

¹¹⁸ Kolomiitsov, *Chai: Mirovaia Torgovlia*, xiv.

¹¹⁹ "O Russkom chae," 359.

¹²⁰ "Russkii chai," ChV 44 (August 1899), 475.

year; that figure plummeted to under a quarter of a pound between 1920 and 1940, and had risen to only two-thirds of a pound by the early 1960s.¹²¹

In the late nineteenth century, transforming tea into an agricultural product of Russia seemed a natural development, given how culturally Russian tea had become over the course of the nineteenth century. “It is so pleasant to hear the words ‘Russian tea’ (*ruskii chai*), ‘tea grown within the borders of Russia,’” one author enthused in *Chainyi Vestnik*.¹²² The Popov firm extensively advertised its product as the “first Russian tea” (*pervyi ruskii chai*). Others affectionately referred to Caucasian tea as being grown “in Russian soil,” connecting tea with this ancient and multivalent symbol of Russian identity.¹²³ Ultimately, despite these hopes, Russian tea cultivation never successfully reduced its dependence on imports.

Conclusion

This brief survey of the history of Russia’s nineteenth-century tea trade sheds new light on old historiographical debates and opens up avenues for further research. The early history of the trade highlights the vigorous entrepreneurship of merchants eager to invest in this risky, expensive venture. Between 1790 and 1812, political considerations in the Far East, more than any other single factor, drove the Russian policies that affected overland trade with China.

In the 1790s, both fashion and economics fueled tea’s rapid rise in popularity.¹²⁴ Whereas eighteenth-century Russian tea drinkers understood the beverage as a luxury specific to Europe, by 1812, tea consumption in Russia seems to have largely detached itself from strong cultural

¹²¹ Robert M. Bone, “Soviet Tea Cultivation,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 53, no. 2 (1963), 172-73.

¹²² “O Russkom chae,” 359.

¹²³ “O chainykh plantatsiakh na Kavkaze,” 5.

¹²⁴ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 234.

connections with either East or West. Of course, Russians prosperous enough to drink tea habitually knew of the European affinity for this beverage that came from China. But now, for the first time, political baggage and cultural associations coming from either direction seemingly had little impact on the vigorous growth of tea consumption in Russia. Geopolitical circumstances and armed conflicts did occasionally impede the availability of tea, but ideology did not lessen demand. In the two decades between 1790 and 1812, tea lost much of its foreignness, though for most, it would remain a luxury item for much of the nineteenth century.

In the middle period, between 1813 and 1861, the 1837 law legalizing tea sales in *kharchevny* marked a watershed in the history of Russian tea consumption, because it constituted government recognition of tea's widening popularity. Furthermore, the text of the law reveals that, by that time, tea had eclipsed other hot beverages, both colonial (coffee, chocolate) and domestic (*sbiten'*, *medovukha*). With this law, the government also implicitly endorsed tea as a beverage suitable for all social classes, and hinted at its potential usefulness as an alternative to alcohol decades before the temperance movement got underway in the last third of the nineteenth century.

The finance ministry's ill-fated struggle to regulate the tea trade and curtail fraud and smuggling in the middle of the nineteenth century confirms that the Russian government's fiscal conservatism, aimed at preserving centralized autocratic power, prevented it from effectively administering its huge territory. This in turn allowed wealthy tea merchants to exercise significant power in this rapidly growing sector of the Russian economy. The failure of the *banderol'* system illustrates both government ineffectiveness and the agency of tea merchants. The Ministry of Finance was unwilling to invest in a consistent empire-wide system of tea regulation, and in any case did not have the money or manpower to enforce one. Under these

conditions, tea merchants, by controlling the capital that would ultimately affect the amount of revenue flowing into the state treasury, influenced government policy. Their opposition to various tea packaging and labeling schemes directly impacted the action of the state. We must also include all kinds of tea fraud in the category of entrepreneurial activity connected with the tea trade. Throughout the nineteenth century, people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds found creative ways to supplement their income by taking advantage of the high demand for and relative scarcity of tea. Finally, it must be acknowledged that in light of the ubiquity of tea smuggling and fraud, it is impossible to know precisely how much of the “tea” consumed in nineteenth-century Russia was actually *Camellia sinensis*.

Continued growth in tea imports and tea consumption between 1862 and 1917 reveals that, despite heavy tax burdens, the standard of living and purchasing power of people from all social classes improved.¹²⁵ Yet acute problems plagued the Russian tea trade. Legalizing the importation of maritime tea did not solve the “tea problem,” and the perennial rise in demand for tea motivated people to engage in fraud and smuggling, as the persistence and sophistication of the celebrated “false Popov” operation in the 1880s demonstrates. Despite his general optimism about the government’s ability to maximize revenues from tea sales, Grubarevich-Radobylskii plaintively admitted that it was impossible to know whether new tea regulations would work until the government tried them.¹²⁶ Even though economists and researchers working for the Ministry of Finance gathered extensive data on the tea trade and forecasted its continued growth, and despite the hundreds of millions of rubles in revenue at stake, the imperial authorities simply refused to take on any risk whatsoever. The situation may have been different if Tsar Nicholas II

¹²⁵ Simms, “The Crisis in Russian Agriculture,” 389-90.

¹²⁶ Grubarevich-Radobylskii, *Chai i Chainaia Monopoliia*, 174.

had not removed Sergei Witte from the position of finance minister in 1903. By the beginning of the First World War it was too late for any serious consideration of a government monopoly on the tea trade.

In both the Crimean War and the First World War, Russia fought against Western powers that threatened territories at both the eastern and western extremities of its empire. Both these conflicts threw problems with the Russian tea trade into sharp relief, revealing how closely the security of the tea trade was connected with Russian territorial integrity and financial solvency. This explains why, despite its reluctance to act, the Russian government devoted so much attention to seemingly peripheral tea-related issues during both wars. In the nineteenth century, Russia functioned as both a traditional and increasingly anachronistic Eurasian land empire, sharing some of the interests and priorities of imperial China, and a European colonial power and consumer society. Its prominent role in the tea trade is an enormous blank spot in the literature on global commerce and colonialism during that critical and complex period, and should alert us to the obsolescence of the binary, so prominent in tea historiography, of European demand and Asian supply.

CHAPTER FIVE

INVENTING RUSSIAN TEA DRINKING IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

Introduction

Works of poetry and fiction integrated tea and the samovar into articulations of Russian national identity in the nineteenth century. Rich and evocative tea imagery abounds throughout nineteenth-century Russian literature, but here I have chosen four of the best known authors, whose works influenced other writers and exemplify wider trends. In this chapter I argue that Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Dostoevskii, and Lev Tolstoi played a critical role in creating the enduring myth of tea's Russianness.¹ Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) had a troubled relationship with the tsarist authorities because of his commitment to reform, yet composed poems, novels, and stories that are considered foundational texts of Russian literature. Pushkin considered tea a marker of Russian colonial supremacy in the southern borderlands. In his fiction, he created images of intimate familial tea drinking that resonated throughout the century. A contemporary of Pushkin, the Ukrainian-Russian writer Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) published a number of satires and enjoyed a successful literary career until excessive ascetic practices brought his life to a premature end. While Gogol sometimes critiqued tea drinking as idle and pretentious, his fiction also enthroned the samovar as a national symbol. Fedor Dostoevskii (1821-1881) continued the tradition that Pushkin had established of associating tea with domestic harmony, although his political and religious conservatism contrasted with the poet's liberalism.

¹ Audra Yoder, "Myth and Memory in Russian Tea Culture," *Studies in Slavic Cultures VIII: Memory* (2009), 65-89.

Lev Tolstoi (1828-1910) wrote two of the world's greatest novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, before developing a distinctive philosophy that rejected state and religious institutions in favor of an organic connection to the land and the peasantry. Though his personal ideology could hardly have differed more sharply from Dostoevskii's, Tolstoi portrayed tea in a similar way, as a ritual without which Russian family life was unimaginable.

National identity formation is a "process of cultural self-definition," and in analyzing the role of these authors in helping to create Russian national identity and installing tea within its system of symbols, I emphasize cultural processes rather than institutions.² This process of self-definition necessarily excludes others. For Pushkin more so than the other writers examined, proper tea drinking (that is, with a samovar) is a heritage of the Russian inhabitants of the empire, to the exclusion of non-Russian peoples. Pushkin uses tea and the samovar to differentiate Russian and non-Russian identities within the empire, and to establish the Russian nation as its primary civilizing force. For all four of these giants of Russian literature, Russian national identity does not extend to all the inhabitants of the empire. With historians Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, I understand Russian identity not as "a 'thing' to be located, described, and explained," but "a field of cultural discourse."³ I argue that tea became Russian when the literary works analyzed in this chapter made tea something more than just a beverage or a commodity. Russian literature of the nineteenth century transformed tea into a field of cultural discourse. "Tea" became a semantically laden system of associations evoking family, warmth, conversation, economic well-being, and a comfortably regular domestic rhythm.

² Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 14.

³ Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, "Introduction," in *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*, ed. Franklin and Widdis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xii.

Similarly, the tea table ceased to be merely a piece of furniture and became a sphere of interaction and a discursive space. These works also reveal how the tea table became a gendered space where men and women performed the roles ordained for them in order to reinforce social cohesion.

Similarly, the samovar functions simultaneously as an instrument of tea preparation, a symbol of sociability, and an emotional barometer. Located at the center of the discursive and social space of the tea table, the samovar does not merely stand inert, but actively *does* things. The samovar came alive in nineteenth-century Russian literature, to the extent that it almost became a fictional character in its own right (as indeed it did in Maksim Gor'kii's children's story "*Zhil-Byl Samovar*" (Once upon a time there lived a samovar). In the cultural world of Russia's nineteenth century, samovars heat water and make tea, but they also sing, hum, hiss, boil over, give off warmth, and, more ominously, grow cold. For this reason, writers often characterized people as having samovar-like qualities, and vice versa. Early in Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, a countess is nicknamed "our sweet samovar" (*nash milyi samovar*) because of her tendency to bubble up with excitement.⁴ A character in Anton Chekhov's 1889 play *Ivanov* states, "A man's like a samovar, old boy. He doesn't always stand on a cold shelf, there are times when he gets stoked up and starts fairly seething."⁵

I look to literature both for evidence concerning the attributes of Russian tea culture in the nineteenth century, including practices and material culture, and also because it served as the mechanism that normalized tea drinking and embedded it permanently into the Russian cultural

⁴ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 96.

⁵ Anton Chekhov, *Ivanov*, in *The Oxford Chekhov*, trans. and ed. Ronald Hingley (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 2:204.

and historical imagination.⁶ The nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia revered writers as cultural prophets, “conferr[ing] on the arts a transcendental truth that validated their own hegemonic position.”⁷ Pushkin’s 1826 poem “The Prophet” served as an early argument for the poet’s responsibility to “[shape] the spiritual and moral destiny of the nation.”⁸ As the prominent literary critic Vissarion Belinskii put it in a letter to the novelist Nikolai Gogol in 1847, “The titles of poet and writer have long since eclipsed the trumpery of epaulettes and fancy uniforms in Russia.”⁹ While the authors considered in this chapter represented widely divergent ideological viewpoints and lived in different periods, each left an indelible mark on how subsequent generations understood chaepitie and its essential Russianness.¹⁰

The transformation of tea into a field of cultural discourse specific to the Russian nation coincided with wide-ranging debates about Russia’s identity and its orientation toward the rest of the empire and the world. They began when, in 1836, Petr Chaadaev published his first *Philosophical Letter* in the journal *Teleskop*. Chaadaev wrote that Russia was an uncivilized, culturally bankrupt country with no past and no future. Chaadaev’s letter helped spark debates, the Slavophile-Westernizer controversy, over whether or not Russia’s future path should align with the West. The Slavophile-Westernizer debates formed part of a larger cultural project

⁶ Cf. Sigurd O. Schmidt, “Great Works of Literature as a Source of Historical Knowledge,” *Russian Studies in History* 47, no. 1 (summer 2008), 14-29. Schmidt quotes Vladimir Kabanov as saying, “Literature affords us the opportunity to know how people dressed and what they ate and drank. Knowing that, one may, in turn, speculate on the most diverse aspects of human life” (24).

⁷ Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 8. See also David M. Bethea, “Literature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, ed. Nicholas Rzhevsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161.

⁸ Pamela Davidson, “The Moral Dimension of the Prophetic Ideal: Pushkin and His Readers,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 3 (Autumn 2002), 490.

⁹ Vissarion Grigorevich Belinskii, “Letter to N.V. Gogol” in Marc Raeff, ed. *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 134.

¹⁰ Pierre Nora writes, “Memory has never known more than two forms of legitimacy: historical and literary.” Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* no. 26 (Spring 1989), 24.

reaching back to the Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812, when “the status and significance of Russian nationality suddenly and thenceforward attained a greatly enlarged stature in the minds of educated Russians.”¹¹ Prior to this, of course, Russians had possessed a rich assortment of older cultural, political, and religious symbols, centered around the figure of the tsar, Russian Orthodoxy, and their Byzantine heritage, but we may date conscious and systematic efforts to construct a national identity for Russia to the first half of the nineteenth century. These same decades witnessed a precipitous increase in the amount of tea imported to Russia, and a consequent decrease in tea prices that allowed tea consumption to begin its inexorable extension to ever wider swathes of the population. The simultaneity of these two processes, one economic and the other cultural, created conditions amenable to the incorporation of the “invented tradition” of Russian tea drinking into new literary expressions of identity.¹²

Yet the question of Russia’s identity and future path remained far from settled throughout the nineteenth century, and Russia’s status as a multiethnic empire added another layer of complexity to the problem. As Hubertus Jahn has pointed out, the “official nationality” policy created by Nicholas I’s education minister Sergei Uvarov, resting on the three pillars of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality,” confused contemporaries. The first two components of Russia’s official identity needed little explanation, but the third, *narodnost'*, was unclear. Did this term, with its root meaning “people” (*narod*), refer to ethnic Russians, or to all the nationalities of the Russian Empire? As this chapter will show, in the 1830s, at the same time that Uvarov was developing his national identity program, Pushkin implicated tea and the

¹¹ Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 59.

¹² Eric Hobsbawm defines an invented tradition as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

samovar in questions of empire, perceiving no contradiction between Russia as a Slavic heartland, and Russia as a multinational Western empire with a civilizing mission.¹³ Pushkin maintained a consistent attitude toward tea, representing it as simultaneously fully Russian and fully Western, grouped with older Russian comestibles yet understood to be distinct from them. Pushkin made tea Russian negatively, by portraying it as not Tatar or Cossack or Kalmyk, and of the four authors surveyed here, his work alone gave Russian tea culture a colonial dimension. Pushkin also made tea Russian positively, by associating it with older Russian traditions, particularly in *Evgenii Onegin*.

In contrast to Pushkin, who understood tea as specifically Western, after the middle of the nineteenth century writers such as Tolstoi and Dostoevskii tended to cast tea as a distinctively Russian beverage and practice. In the works of Gogol and Dostoevskii in particular, the samovar accrued decidedly Slavic characteristics, but overindulgence in tea could nevertheless signal a most un-Russian moral laxity. Crucially, the tea urn's falling out of fashion in Western Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century meant that by the time Tolstoi and Dostoevskii produced their most famous novels, Russians used samovars more widely than any of their neighbors. The samovar's being more or less unique to Russia by the late nineteenth century assured its role as the icon of Russian tea culture, newly nationalized by the acquisition of its field of evolving meanings and associations.

Pushkin, Tea, Identity, and Empire

¹³ Hubertus F. Jahn, "'Us': Russians on Russianness," in *National Identity in Russian Culture*, ed. Franklin and Widdis, 55-61.

Alexander Pushkin's influence on subsequent Russian literature and culture is difficult to overestimate. In Slavicist Stephanie Sandler's words, Pushkin "created modern Russian culture," and "the example of his life and work is perceived as giving meaning to the nation's identity."¹⁴ Similarly, Soviet literary critic Lidiia Ginzburg wrote, "Pushkin is the pivot on which Russian culture turns, he connects the past to the future. Take away the pivot and the connections will disintegrate."¹⁵ Born into a noble family in the very last year of the eighteenth century, Pushkin composed some of Russia's most well-known and beloved poems, stories, and fairy tales before a wound sustained in a duel ended his life early in 1837. Decades later in 1880, shortly before his own death, the novelist Fedor Dostoevskii delivered a celebrated speech at the unveiling of a monument to Pushkin in Moscow in which he asserted that Pushkin appeared as a great national poet, the first of his kind, who first revealed an array of "Russian types" he had uncovered among the people (*narod*).¹⁶ Pushkin created some of the most memorable characters in Russian fiction, who did indeed become iconic literary types. More to the point, they were tea-drinking types, and as such, some of Pushkin's most famous personalities helped set the tone for the role tea would play in subsequent nineteenth-century Russian literature.

But before turning to Pushkin's fictional works in poetry and prose, let us examine Pushkin's own attitudes toward tea and the samovar, revealed in several telling passages in his autobiographical travelogue *A Journey to Arzrum*. Pushkin had been banished to the southwestern borderlands of the Russian Empire in 1820 as punishment for a political poem entitled "Ode to Liberty" that he had circulated in manuscript among his friends. The four years

¹⁴ Stephanie Sandler, "'Pushkin' and identity," in *National Identity in Russian Culture*, ed. Franklin and Widdis, 197, 199.

¹⁵ Quoted in Sandler, "'Pushkin' and identity," 197.

¹⁶ Fedor Dostoevskii, "Pushkin (Ocherk)", PSS, vol. 26 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), http://az.lib.ru/d/dostoewskij_f_m/text_0340.shtml.

of Pushkin's exile produced his romantic southern poems, which helped to establish the Caucasus Mountains as an exotic escape in nineteenth-century Russian literary culture. In Belinskii's words, Pushkin "discovered the Caucasus."¹⁷ It was here that Pushkin also began work on his monumental novel in verse, *Evgenii Onegin*. In 1829, Pushkin undertook a second, unauthorized journey south in the wake of the beautiful Natal'ia Goncharova's refusal of his proposal of marriage. Russia was again at war with Turkey, and Pushkin's nonfiction account of his travels, published in 1835 as *A Journey to Arzrum*, furnish a rare glimpse into the poet's own thoughts and impressions. This time, however, the dramatic scenery and social life of the frontier bored him.

On a basic level, Pushkin considers Russia to be European and Western, and the Caucasus to be Asian and Eastern. En route to Tbilisi, he remarks that the "transition from Europe to Asia is felt more keenly with every hour that passes."¹⁸ Accordingly, early in the first chapter, Pushkin uses the customs of the local people as an example of how not to make tea, citing their backward tea-making as evidence of their oriental otherness. Visiting a Kalmyk settlement and chatting with a young woman there, Pushkin recalled:

Tea was boiling in the cauldron [*kotel*], together with mutton fat and salt. She offered me her ladle. As I did not wish to refuse I took a mouthful, trying to hold my breath. I do not think that any other national cuisine [*narodnaia kukhnia*] could possibly produce anything more vile. I asked for something to take the taste away. I was given a small piece of dried mare's flesh: I was glad even of that.¹⁹

In this passage, Pushkin describes what other Russians had called the "Tatar method" of preparing tea as a high-calorie food, common in the Caucasus as well as in Central Asia and

¹⁷ Quoted in David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) 63.

¹⁸ Alexander Pushkin, *A Journey to Arzrum at the Time of the 1829 Campaign*, in Alexander Pushkin, *Tales of Belkin and Other Prose Writings*, trans. Ronald Wilks (London: Penguin, 1998), 134. Unless otherwise noted, all English quotations from *A Journey to Arzrum* refer to this edition.

¹⁹ Pushkin, *Journey*, 135.

Siberia. The procedure for tea preparation, rather than the mere fact of tea consumption, marks the practice in the poet's mind as revolting and brutish. Pushkin turns a Western colonial gaze on the Kalmyk other, adding intellectual mastery to the military appropriation then taking place.²⁰ Just as Caucasian peoples' practices of tea preparation signaled their barbarity, appropriately enough the post-conquest civilizing solution lay in the introduction of proper Russian tea equipment, as Pushkin noted just paragraphs later: "What can one do with such people?... The effect of luxury might favour their subjugation: the samovar would be an important innovation in this respect."²¹ Pushkin here confirms the samovar as a specifically European cultural force, having already clarified that "Russian" (*russkii*) is a subcategory of "European."

It follows that luxury in its civilizing capacity, exemplified in *A Journey to Arzrum* by the samovar, also belongs exclusively to the Russian/European patrimony. Pushkin makes this clear in the last chapter, in which he writes,

I know of no expression more meaningless than the words: Asiatic luxury. This saying probably came into existence at the time of the Crusades, when poor knights, having left the bare walls and oak chairs of their castles, saw for the very first time red divans, colourful carpets, daggers with coloured gemstones on their hilts. Nowadays one can say, Asiatic poverty, Asiatic swinishness and so on; but luxury, of course, is one of Europe's possessions. In Arzrum you cannot buy for any money what you can easily find in a grocer's in any small town in Pskov province.²²

One of the markers of Eastern cultural depravity, then, was the absence of the European luxuries that had already permeated rural Russia. Although tea had first entered Europe precisely as an "Asiatic luxury" two centuries previously, for Pushkin uniquely European innovations such as the samovar had elevated tea to cultural heights it could never achieve in the fat-saturated cauldrons of the Russian Empire's Muslims. In this way *A Journey to Arzrum* created a space for

²⁰ Cf. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 8. The passage also serves as further evidence that the tea traditions of Russia's southern and eastern neighbors did not exert a formative influence on Russian tea culture.

²¹ Pushkin, *Journey*, 138.

²² *Ibid.*, 172-73.

the samovar at the center of Russia's fundamentally European cultural identity. Throughout Pushkin's oeuvre, tea and the samovar serve as symbols of Russia's status as a branch of European culture and a colonial power.

Belinskii called Pushkin's great novel in verse, *Evgenii Onegin*, an "encyclopedia of Russian life."²³ Tea-drinking scenes in *Evgenii Onegin*, like those in Pushkin's nonfictional *Journey*, present a specifically European mode of tea consumption as a signifier of refinement and luxury. At the same time, tea in *Evgenii Onegin* takes on a particularly Russian flavor by dint of its integration with older Russian culinary and social traditions. Written and published serially between 1823 and 1831, *Onegin* tells the story of an eponymous protagonist who has recently inherited an estate from a late uncle. Pushkin takes pains in the first chapter to show the reader that the young and frivolous Evgenii enjoys a luxurious European lifestyle, evinced by his dining habits, his possessions, and his clothes. Throughout the novel, Pushkin associates tea with characters who are more in touch with their Slavic roots, and omits tea from his detailed description of Evgenii's personal habits. Evgenii consumes both luxury goods originating in Europe and the colonial imports then in fashion there. For instance, he frequents the best French restaurants in St. Petersburg, and indulges in the best French wines, Strasbourg pies, Limburger cheese, and pineapple, that favored treat of eighteenth-century Russian elites. He owns an expensive watch by a celebrated French watchmaker, and in his room, he displays all the standard luxury goods shipped in via the Baltic ports from London and Paris: pipes of Turkish amber, porcelain, bronzes, crystal phials of perfume, and steel personal grooming tools. Finally, the narrator notes that words do not exist in the Russian language to describe Evgenii's

²³ V.G. Belinskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: OGIZ, GIKhL, 1948), http://az.lib.ru/b/belinskij_w_g/text_0200.shtml.

fashionable wardrobe of European pieces (*No pantalony, frak, zhilet, / Vsekh etikh slov na russkom net*). Evgenii's flamboyant European lifestyle disconnects him from traditional Russian culture, and perhaps for this reason, his cosmopolitan debauchery soon leads to ennui. Alone of all the characters in the novel, Evgenii drinks coffee habitually, and always in solitude; this serves as another marker of his European habits and his boredom. Evgenii's immersion in high European fashion, described at length in the first chapter, contrasts sharply with the interiors and lifestyles he encounters in the countryside upon relocating to the estate of his late uncle in the second chapter. Tiled stoves in his new house, those ancient symbols of warmth and East Slavic domesticity, make the place seem decrepit.²⁴

Evgenii soon strikes up an acquaintance with another young nobleman named Lenskii, and through him meets a neighboring gentry family with two daughters, Ol'ga and Tat'iana Larina; Lenskii loves the elder, Ol'ga. An "unproblematic cultural bilingualism" characterizes the Larins' country lifestyle, which effortlessly combines ancient Russian customs with fashionable European patterns of consumption.²⁵ In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and Russia, eligible young women had the duty of preparing and serving tea as a means of displaying good breeding in front of potential suitors.²⁶ As Larin's eldest unmarried daughter, Ol'ga pours out the family's evening tea, an intimate and casual gathering at which friends and neighbors are often present. Evening tea is a respectable European ritual, but one that the head of the household feels comfortable attending in his dressing gown. In the stanza immediately

²⁴ Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse*, trans. James E. Folen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11, 14, 15, 16, 35, 100, 164, 224. The example on p. 224 is from one of the stanzas Pushkin omitted from the published novel, where Evgenii travels to Odessa and drinks Turkish coffee while there.

²⁵ Marrese, "'The Poetics of Everyday Behavior' Revisited," 705.

²⁶ Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, 40; Woodruff Smith, "From Coffeehouse to Parlour," in *Consuming Habits*, ed. Lovejoy, Sherratt, and Goodman, 159.

following the first description of the Larins' nightly tea time, the reader learns that the family also clings to ancient Russian traditions such as *maslenitsa* (the springtime festival preceding Lent), the prescribed religious fasts, and kvas. Throughout, the narrator makes a clear distinction between ancient (*starinnyi*) Russian customs and more recent fashions and habits introduced from Europe, and portrays the Larins as entirely at home in this blended world. Significantly, while Onegin occasionally spends his evenings at the Larins', not once in the novel does the reader actually catch Onegin with a cup of tea in hand.²⁷ He drinks coffee only, and that in isolation. At tea time he is present but detached.

Tat'iana soon falls in love with Evgenii, and confesses her love to him in a letter; the morning after sending it, her distress confines her to her room, necessitating her morning tea being brought up on a tray.²⁸ That evening, in a beloved and oft-quoted stanza, the family gathers for their evening tea as usual. Unquestionably, this passage is the definitive encomium to tea in all of Russian literature.²⁹

Dusk fell; on the table, shining,
Hissed the evening samovar,
Warming the Chinese teapot;
Above it swirled a light steam.
Poured out by Ol'ga's hand
In a dark stream into the teacups
The fragrant tea already ran,
And a footboy served the cream.
Tat'iana stood before the window,
Breathing on the cool glass,
Having become thoughtful (my soul!)
And with a charming finger wrote
Upon the fogged glass

²⁷ Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, 51, 52, 58.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁹ For confirmation of this, see, for example, Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 60; N.P. Ivashkevich and L.N. Zasukhina, *Iskusstvo Chaynogo Stola* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990), 43; Gilodo, *Russkii Samovar*, 24; and Britenkova, *Samovary Rossii*, 221.

The cherished monogram O.E.³⁰

Ol'ga, in her eldest daughter's role as president of the tea table, serves the tea. Note also that the family takes their tea in the English style, with cream. Later in the nineteenth century, the samovar's hissing (*shipet'*), thanks in part to this passage, became an evocative and multivalent sound to the Russian ear.³¹ Together, Tat'iana's breath fogging up the windowpane and the steam from the samovar connote something mysterious and almost holy, not unlike incense. Derzhavin may have been the first Russian poet to describe samovar steam in his masterful 1807 poem "To Evgenii. Life at Zvanka," which referred obliquely to "the vapors of Manchuria." That poem also furnished Pushkin with the phrase "fragrant tea" (*chai dushistyĭ*), which Tolstoi too would later borrow.³² In Pushkin's stanza, the word "soul" (*dusha*) sounds very similar to "fragrant" (*dushistyĭ*), with which it shares a common root, reinforcing the spiritual quality of the atmosphere. Whereas Derzhavin's idyllic tea-drinking scene takes place *en plein air* in the context of male companionship, Pushkin situates his indoors and associates it with a different sort of intimacy, that of a quotidian family gathering. What Pushkin accomplished with this passage and its oblique reference to Derzhavin was to establish a literary tradition of tea imagery that would endure to the end of the imperial period.

The next tea-drinking scene in the novel appears in another favorite passage, after Onegin has rejected Tat'iana's overtures and Lenskii has become engaged to Ol'ga. Much to Tat'iana's

³⁰ My translation of Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin*, chapter 3, stanza 37, <http://www.bibliotekar.ru/rusPushkin/80.htm>. Compare these lines by the eighteenth-century English poet William Cowper: "Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast, / Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round, / And, while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn / Throws up a steamy column, and the cups, / That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each, / So let us welcome peaceful evening in." William Cowper, *The Task*, Book IV, in *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cecil A. Moore (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), 869-70.

³¹ Toomre, "Introduction," in *Classic Russian Cooking*, 17.

³² Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin, *Stikhotvoreniia*, ed. I.I. Podol'skaia (Moscow: Pravda, 1985), http://az.lib.ru/d/derzhawin_g_r/text_0010.shtml.

embarrassment and Lenskii's discomfiture, Evgenii appears at a name day party for Tat'iana and flirts openly with Ol'ga. Interrupting his account of the evening's events, the narrator indicates the centrality of tea in the patterns of daily life: "I love to determine time by dinner, tea, and supper."³³ If *Evgenii Onegin* is "an encyclopedia of Russian life," as Belinskii claimed, then the rhythms of that life were marked out by daily tea time. On this particular evening, the Larins' guests enjoy tea with rum as a refreshment between dances, but soon Lenskii's angry exit in search of dueling pistols disrupts the gaiety of the ball. Lenskii challenges Onegin to a duel, and Onegin kills him; subsequently both Ol'ga and Tat'iana marry well, the latter making a brilliant match to a St. Petersburg prince with close connections to the court. Years later Tat'iana, now unattainable, captivates the hapless Onegin. In a reversal of their earlier situation, Onegin writes Tat'iana a love letter, but at the end of the novel she chooses to remain faithful to her husband. Throughout *Evgenii Onegin*, tea signifies familial harmony and social conviviality. More importantly, the Larins, the novel's primary tea drinkers, maintain a close connection to old Russian culture, and by extension, associate tea with the best aspects of westernized Russian polite society.

Similarly, Pushkin's prose novel *The Captain's Daughter*, published just weeks before his death, portrays tea as the quotidian drink of genteel Russians. Pushkin sets this historical novel in the 1770s against the backdrop of the Pugachev rebellion. By the end of the imperial period, it had entered the standard secondary school curriculum and thus became part of "the cultural legacy of the average educated Russian."³⁴ Pushkin had begun gathering information about Pugachev and also about Stenka Razin, leader of an important seventeenth-century peasant

³³ My translation of Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin*, chapter 5, stanza 36, <http://www.bibliotekar.ru/rusPushkin/82.htm>.

³⁴ Dan Ungurianu, *Plotting History: The Russian Historical Novel in the Imperial Age* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 4.

revolt, as early as 1824. In 1833, Pushkin conducted research in the state archives on the Pugachev rebellion, and that same year, he drafted a nonfiction historical work about Pugachev. He composed *The Captain's Daughter* in late 1835 and printed it in his own journal, *The Contemporary*, in December 1836.

The protagonist and narrator, Petr Andreevich Grinev, hails from a rural gentry family, and his father sends him off to join the army in Orenburg at the age of sixteen. Leaving home with his elderly former tutor and servant Savelich, Grinev brings along a box of tea things and rolls for the journey, which signify for him the comfortable home he is leaving behind (*pogrebets s chainym priborom i uzly s bulkami i pirogami, poslednimi znakami domashnego balovstva*). His first night away from home, after getting drunk and losing the astronomical sum of one hundred rubles at billiards, Grinev vents his anger on Savelich by refusing the morning tea he has already prepared. Continuing their journey, Grinev foolishly orders his *iamshchik* (coachman) to press on even though a blizzard threatens to overwhelm the travelers. When the storm overtakes them, Savelich rebukes his master by complaining that they could have been back at the inn drinking tea to their hearts' content—until a mysterious stranger appears in the whiteout and safely guides Grinev and his companions to the next posting station. Upon arrival, Grinev feels a need for tea more intense than he has ever experienced before. Having ordered some, the grateful Grinev offers a cup of tea to his enigmatic new acquaintance, who wears loose Tatar trousers and a dark beard under his glittering eyes; but after tasting the tea, the man grimaces and requests vodka instead, saying, “Tea’s no drink for us Cossacks” (*chai ne nashe kazatskoe pit'e*).³⁵ Thus in the first two chapters of the book, Pushkin establishes tea as a

³⁵ Alexander Pushkin, *The Captain's Daughter*, trans. Robert Chandler and Elizabeth Chandler (New York: New York Review Books, 2007), 9, 11, 16, 18-19. Unless otherwise noted, all English quotations from *The Captain's Daughter* refer to this edition. The twentieth-century poet Marina Tsvetaeva wrote, “I must say that even on the second, third, hundredth reading, when I already had the whole thing memorized, it would always happen that I

domestic comfort, a daily need for young gentlemen like Grinev, a social currency, and a cultural asset exclusive to westernized Russians. Later in the narrative, the reader learns that the mysterious guide who helped Grinev escape the blizzard is Emel'ian Pugachev himself. His refusal of a cup of tea from Grinev's hand is a microcosm of his rejection of European Russian culture and the legitimate authority of Catherine the Great (Pugachev claimed to be her dead husband, Peter III, and the rightful tsar). Throughout the novel, Pugachev and his associates periodically indulge in drunken and destructive dissipation, but predictably, they never drink tea.

Pugachev and his followers aim to steal and appropriate much that westernized Russians held sacred: imperial authority, land, the loyalty of peasants, and not least, their Western heritage in the form of Grinev's tea things. After Grinev arrives at his assigned outpost near Orenburg, Fort Belogorsk, he falls in love with the daughter of Captain Mironov, commander of the fort. Trouble brews when Grinev's parents initially refuse to consent to the match, and then Pugachev attacks Fort Belogorsk and overthrows it. In the midst of this deep crisis, Grinev's elderly servant Savelich has the audacity to present Pugachev with an itemized list of Grinev's possessions that have been stolen or destroyed by the rebels. All the items listed are clothing or textiles, save for the chest containing Grinev's tea service; the tea things, along with his dress uniform and fine linen, are Grinev's most valuable and valued possessions.³⁶ Because of his prior acquaintance with Pugachev, the pretender allows Grinev to return to Orenburg, where he joins the general and other gentlemen of civilian authority to deliberate on the best course of action.

would be invariably and continuously torn up with fear that Grinev would not give Pugachev vodka instead of tea, and that he wouldn't give him the hareskin coat, and that he would listen to that fool Savelich and not to himself, to me." Marina Tsvetaeva, "Pushkin i Pugachev," http://www.tsvetaeva.com/prose/pr_pushkin_i_pugachev.

³⁶ Ibid., 72. Savelich's list of purloined property resembles real claims for losses suffered in the Pugachev rebellion made by people living in the affected areas. Conducting research in the state archives in 1833, Pushkin may well have seen these lists, which did in fact contain claims for stolen tea ware and are now held in RGADA, f. 1274, op. 1, and discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The officials and Grinev drink tea during their council of war, a scene that reinforces the cultural divide between the legitimate Russian authorities and Pugachev's vodka-swilling gang (despite the fact that one of the Russian officials drinks his tea with copious quantities of rum).³⁷

Tea-drinking scenes do not appear in the most action-packed sections of the story, as one might expect. At the end of the novel, after the Pugachev rebellion is finally quelled and Catherine herself clears Grinev of suspicion for his personal acquaintance with Pugachev, Grinev's parents consent to his marriage to Captain Mironov's daughter. Pushkin saved one chapter from his first draft of *The Captain's Daughter*, which contains an alternate ending in which some of the fighting takes place at the Grinevs' estate while the captain's daughter, Mar'ia Ivanovna, is there. The chapter must have pleased Pushkin, else he would have destroyed it with the rest of his first draft of the novel; critics later valued the chapter for this reason, and also for its vivid description of the later stages of the Pugachev uprising. In it, the rebels hold Grinev's parents and Mar'ia Ivanovna captive in their own barn, and in a dramatic scene, Grinev and some Hussars rescue his parents and the captain's daughter as the barn burns. That same day,

In the evening we all gathered in the drawing room, around the samovar, and began talking merrily about the dangers we had escaped. Mar'ia Ivanovna was pouring out the tea; I sat down beside her and from then on paid no attention to anyone else. My parents appeared glad to see the tenderness between us. That evening still lives in my memory. I was happy, entirely happy—and how many such moments are there in our poor human lives?³⁸

Here, as in *Evgenii Onegin*, an evening gathering around the samovar epitomizes security and familial intimacy. In the very next sentence, the serfs on the Grinevs' estate congregate the following morning to ask forgiveness for joining the Pugachev rebellion. The elder Grinev forgives them, and harmony between gentry and serfs is reestablished, paralleling the familial

³⁷ Ibid., 77-78. Rum, like tea, was another fashionable colonial product, in contrast to the native Russian vodka.

³⁸ Ibid., 128.

reunion of the previous day, and the peasants promptly depart to work in the fields. Here and throughout the novel, tea remains exclusive to upper-class westernized Russians, and appears in the context of the restoration of the proper familial and social order.

The timing of these works proved fortuitous for tea's integration into Russian culture and national identity. Pushkin completed and published all three works discussed above late in his career, in the 1830s, shortly before the rapid increase in Russian tea importation and consumption that began in the 1840s. Pushkin died in 1837, the same year the imperial authorities permitted the sale of tea by the glass in popular eating establishments. Chapter 4 described the economic developments that made the decades between 1800 and 1840 the key period for the absorption of the tea habit into daily life among Russians who could afford it, and one is tempted to speculate that the rough correspondence of this period to Pushkin's lifespan is not entirely coincidental. The late eighteenth century had seen the birth of distinctively Russian tea traditions among wealthy nobles, and the first four decades of the nineteenth can be considered the period of tea's popularization and cultural russification.

More concretely, Pushkin's works set two important precedents for tea imagery in Russian literature that would continue throughout the nineteenth century. Pushkin was the first writer to establish drinking tea with a samovar as a distinctively Russian practice, giving it connotations of respectability and refinement. Tea had certainly not lacked associations with gentility in the eighteenth century, but that era had understood tea as an imported European innovation rather than something specific to Russia. Significantly, Pushkin's lifetime coincided with the decline of the tea urn's popularity in Europe and the rapid rise of the samovar in Russia. While Pushkin's portrayal of the samovar did not dissociate it from Europe, in *A Journey to Arzrum* and *The Captain's Daughter* Pushkin made the samovar Russian by making it

emphatically *not* Kalmyk or Tatar or Cossack. In these works, drinking tea with a samovar is a luxury belonging specifically to Russian (*russkii*) polite culture, to the exclusion of other peoples living under the sway of the Russian (*rossiiskii*) Empire. In both *A Journey to Arzrum* and *Evgenii Onegin*, the particularities of tea preparation, centered on the samovar, mark the practice as Russian. Second, Pushkin was the first Russian writer to associate tea with familial harmony and intimacy. The memorable scenes of families gathering around the evening samovar in *Evgenii Onegin* and *The Captain's Daughter* are the first of their kind in nineteenth-century Russian literature, but they would be far from the last. The link that Pushkin forged between the samovar and intimacy would prove a durable one. He not only described a uniquely Russian tea culture, but played a central role in creating it through his influence on subsequent Russian writers and Russian culture generally.

Tea Drinking in Gogol's *Dead Souls*

Like Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol died young, but not before bestowing a distinctively Slavic flavor on Russian tea drinking. Born in Ukraine, but having spent approximately half his life in Russia, Gogol wrestled with the weighty question of his own national affiliation but eventually came to accept his “hyphenated identity.”³⁹ Gogol's satirical novel *Dead Souls* seems to have been intended as the first in a trilogy, but Gogol burned the second part shortly before his death. This work, according to Belinskii, “wrested Gogol from the province of Ukrainian culture and made him Russian genuinely, unequivocally, and irrevocably.”⁴⁰ More than any other work, *Dead Souls* (1842) exemplifies Gogol's attitude toward tea and his understanding of its place in

³⁹ Edyta M. Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol*, 246.

Russian national identity. Slavophiles in particular promoted *Dead Souls* and helped establish it as a “national novel.”⁴¹

Dead Souls reads like an encyclopedia of Russian everyday life and material culture in the 1840s. The protagonist, Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov, travels around the Russian countryside tricking landowners into selling or giving him deeds of purchase for serfs or “souls” who have died, but whose names have not yet been struck from estate records. Chichikov ultimately plans to mortgage these nonexistent peasants and pocket the money. The Russian Empire Chichikov traverses is awash with tea. Describing a tavern where merchants would repair “to drink their customary two cups of tea,” Gogol noted that “Every traveller has a very good idea of what these public rooms are like...in short, everything was the same as everywhere else.” Merchants drink tea in inns and make business deals over steaming cups of it; landowners welcome Chichikov into their homes with tea; a landowner named Nozdrev visits Chichikov in his rooms and is delighted to find him at tea, because he is dying for a cup; another landowner named Tentetnikov typically enjoys his tea accompanied by a pipe. Tea lubricates many if not most of the social interactions Gogol depicts in the novel, and his characters, like the narrator of *Evgenii Onegin*, measure their day by tea time.⁴² Throughout the novel, Gogol portrays tea as a central fact of quotidian existence, and a standard expression of hospitality.

But like many eighteenth-century Russian writers who came before him, for Gogol tea drinking could be either a praiseworthy or a contemptible practice, depending on the character of the tea drinker and the manner of consumption. The many satirical scenes in *Dead Souls* often use tea to make a point about the moral or spiritual depravity of certain characters. Their souls

⁴¹ Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol*, 240.

⁴² Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 19, 55, 57, 58, 92-93, 217, 223, 280, 318.

are even deader than the deceased peasants they relinquish to Chichikov and his get-rich-quick scheme. The steward of one landlord Chichikov visits early in the novel aspires to an upper-class lifestyle. He shaves his beard, wears a frock coat, and is “all too familiar with feather beds and bolsters.” He schmoozes with the richer peasants, oppresses the poorer ones, sleeps in until nine o’clock in the morning, waits for the samovar, and drinks tea. Another slothful gentleman with a messy house and a badly run estate spends an hour each morning rubbing his eyes, then noncommittally sips tea, coffee, cocoa, and milk alternately; having finished his breakfast routine, he stands at his window with a cold cup of tea in his hand. He allows his tea to go cold just as he wastes his life and the resources entrusted to him. Later in the novel, someone tells an anecdote about a businessman whose assets had once totaled half a million rubles, but who then concludes that his wealth entitled him to a life of idleness. Neglecting his business interests, he spends entire days drinking tea in a tavern and goes bankrupt. Seeing the error of his ways too late, he takes a job as a humble shop assistant, swears off tea altogether, loses weight, and devotes himself to prayer. In this vignette, a man’s moral and spiritual redemption hinge on giving up his tea habit.⁴³ While Gogol’s critique of tea drinking resembles eighteenth-century literary precedents that associated tea with laziness and wasteful living, Gogol evinces no anxiety about the upward social aspirations of would-be tea drinkers. For him, people from all strata of society are equally capable of wasting time and money on tea and enjoying the trappings of refinement without integrity.

Yet Gogol clearly did not consider tea in and of itself to be harmful, and he embroidered *Dead Souls* with samovar imagery that casts tea in a positive light. In one scene, a man in a rural shop selling sbiten’ from a samovar has a face so red “that from a distance one might think that

⁴³ Ibid., 42-43, 264, 359.

there were two samovars in the window, were it not that one of the samovars had a beard as black as pitch.” Similarly, Gogol describes a peasant’s belly as being like a gigantic samovar. Another samovar at a village inn has fallen into decay to the extent that it appears to be covered with hoarfrost. In one olfactory scene, a wizened old woman walks to her local market each morning and dries her stockings on the samovar after she returns home.⁴⁴ Such images indicate, first, that Gogol understood the samovar to be such a ubiquitous object that it sprang to mind readily when he sought to make comparisons and describe individuals. Second, they betray his belief that samovars had penetrated deep into everyday life in rural Russia. His readers would take such imagery at face value and form their own assumptions about the samovar-ridden Russian provinces.

In one of the novel’s most famous passages, which historian Christopher Ely has called “one of the most interesting and influential statements about the Russian landscape written in the nineteenth century,” Gogol includes the samovar in a compendium of things understood to be quintessentially Russian:⁴⁵

And once more at either side of the highroad there was a quick succession of milestones, station-masters, wells, strings of village-carts, drab villages with samovars, peasant women,... freshly ploughed black furrows flashing by on the steppes, a song struck up somewhere far away, the tops of pine-trees in the mist, the peal of church bells fading away in the distance, crows as thick as flies, and a horizon without end...Russia! Russia! [*Rus! Rus!*] I see you, from my wondrous beautiful afar: I see you now.⁴⁶

Every image and vignette in the passage represents something Gogol or some other traveler could have actually seen from a carriage window, but it is difficult to imagine “drab villages with samovars” (*serye derevni s samovarami*) as a merely visual image. How could one spot

⁴⁴ Ibid., 18, 71, 100, 236.

⁴⁵ Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 98.

⁴⁶ Gogol, *Dead Souls*, 231.

samovars in distant villages seen from the road? Instead, Gogol seems to be conveying an automatic association, an almost subconscious connection, between Russian villages and samovars, as though samovars were the defining feature of such villages in Gogol's mind. In addition, the word *serye* here translated "drab" primarily means "gray," invoking a striking contrast between villages whose wooden weathered cottages are gray with age, and the bright gold color of copper samovars. Samovars, then, inhered in rural Russia just as much as peasant women, bast shoes, and black soil. They shone like little gold stars in an otherwise colorless and unremarkable landscape. Given that tea still enjoyed the status of a luxury item, and samovars even more so, when Gogol published the first edition of *Dead Souls* in 1842, it is remarkable that he should consider the samovar a national symbol. Even if Gogol did not think in precisely those terms, later generations of his readers certainly did. As Ely puts it, in this passage Gogol "[cemented] the vision of vast open space as a fundamental trope of Russia's national self-image."⁴⁷ And Gogol positioned samovars prominently within that space, making this one of the key texts for the establishment of the samovar as a national symbol in Russian cultural imagination and historical memory.

Gogol also wrote of the samovar as adorning urban Russia in *Dead Souls*. In the midst of a description of the early life of the idle landowner Tentetnikov, Gogol inserts an aside about the enjoyments of St. Petersburg. He vividly describes a cold, snowy, stormy night, whose whiteness is penetrated only by a light shining hospitably from an upper story window. The passage continues,

[I]n a cosy little room lit by modest stearine candles, to the singing of the samovar, a conversation that warms the heart and the soul is carried on, a bright page of some inspired Russian poet is

⁴⁷ Ely, *This Meager Nature*, 115.

being read, of a poet whom God has bestowed on Russia as a heavenly gift, and the youthful heart throbs ardently and loftily as it never does even under southern skies.⁴⁸

In this passage Gogol associates the samovar with the earnest conversations and tender emotions inspired by great Russian literature. Here, as in Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*, Gogol invokes the sound of the samovar rather than a visual image of it. Indeed most of the passage describes sounds rather than pictures: a conversation, a poem read aloud, the beating of a young heart. As in Pushkin's works, the samovar's ability to keep water hot for a long period of time facilitates long conversations and consequently, intimacy. Note too that while Gogol opens the passage with a reference to the pleasures of St. Petersburg, he describes a small domestic gathering rather than the large-scale entertainments, such as balls, for which the imperial capital was better known. In Gogol's hierarchy of value, poetry read and discussed in comfortable, unpretentious surroundings over tea is a more wholesome and authentically Russian activity than idle pastimes that require posturing and attention to current fashion.

Thus in *Dead Souls* the samovar symbolizes authentic Russianness in both rural and urban settings. Yet like his eighteenth-century predecessors, Gogol understood tea and the samovar as luxuries vulnerable to abuse by coarse, unrefined persons as well as by the wealthy. Gogol used tea in *Dead Souls* to lampoon the idle and frivolous, describe everyday life, exemplify hospitality, and symbolize community—in short, he treated it as an inalienable element of Russian existence. Russian writers working later in the nineteenth century, whose work Gogol heavily influenced, would follow his example.

⁴⁸ Gogol, *Dead Souls*, 270.

Drinking Tea in Crisis and Calm: The Novels of Fedor Dostoevskii

Fedor Dostoevskii continued the trend of associating tea with domestic intimacy that Pushkin had initiated. In his first novel *Poor Folk* (1846), which established his reputation as a writer, Dostoevskii incorporated the samovar into passages that read like laundry lists of Russian national symbols. One of the novel's protagonists, Varvara Alekseevna, on two occasions writes to her friend Makar Alekseevich with childhood reminiscences about longing for home while at boarding school: "I would sit in our little room, by the samovar, together with my own folk; it would be so warm, so good, so familiar. How tightly, how warmly I would embrace Mother, I would think." Similarly, later in the novel, Varvara writes nostalgically about home life in her native village:

In the morning I would rise as fresh as a daisy. I would look out of the window: the fields would be covered in frost; the delicate hoarfrost of autumn hung from the bare branches; there would be a thin covering of ice on the lake....The sun shone on everything with its brilliant rays, which would break the thin ice like glass. Everything was light, brilliant, happy! The fire would be crackling in the stove once more; we would all seat ourselves close to the samovar....A *muzhik* would ride by on his best horse, on his way into the woods to gather firewood. Everyone was so pleased, so happy!⁴⁹

In this scene, the samovar sits at the center of a world in which nature and different social classes live in complete harmony, a rural idyll in which everything occupies its proper place. In a similar passage in *Crime and Punishment* (1866) invoking the comforts of Russian domesticity and home cooking, Razumikhin, a close friend of the protagonist Raskolnikov, describes the irresistible pull of love that draws people together, comparing it to "the end of the world, an anchor, a quiet haven, the hub of the universe, the tri-ichthyic foundation of the earth, the essence of *blinis* [crepes], of juicy *kulebiakis* [savory pies], of the evening samovar, of quiet lamentations and snug, fir-trimmed jackets, of warm stove-couches—yes, as if you had died, but

⁴⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Poor Folk and Other Stories*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 22, 97.

were still alive, with the simultaneous advantages of both!”⁵⁰ The samovar here is a fundamental feature of the goodness of the universe—a specifically Russian universe, recognizable as such by means of the samovar and the best Russian cooking. Together, the stove and the samovar manifest the “anchor,” the “quiet haven,” the “hub of the universe.” The connection between the stove and the samovar in the nineteenth-century Russian cultural imagination, reinforced by literary references such as this one, helped make the latter seem as old and primordially Russian as the former.

If a warm and bubbling samovar signifies harmony and well-being, samovars expiring and tea going cold symbolize decline and disorder. In *The Devils* (1872), a recovering alcoholic named Captain Lebiatkin remarks that samovars, like everything else in this world, and ultimately the sun, eventually go out, tying the life cycle of a samovar’s fire to the inevitable dimming of the cosmos. Toward the end of the novel, an unwelcome visitor remarks to Kirilov that his tea has gone cold, and this “means that everything is upside-down.”⁵¹ Everything is indeed upside-down for Kirilov, who has committed to kill himself in the service of the secret revolutionary organization to which he belongs. Kirilov’s tea has gone cold, along with his will to live and contribute productively to society.

Given the samovar’s position in the heart of the Russian domestic universe, Dostoevskii presents it in his novels as an indispensable remedy in any emergency, whether it be medical, or social, or both. Early in *The Adolescent* (1875), the teenage protagonist’s young female neighbor hangs herself in her room. A group of neighbors persuades the distraught mother to spend the night in the landlady’s room, and a samovar is immediately ordered. “The samovar proved very

⁵⁰ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 259.

⁵¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 268, 606.

useful,” the narrator notes, “and generally the samovar is a most necessary [*neobkhodimo*] Russian thing, precisely in all catastrophes and misfortunes, especially terrible, unexpected, and eccentric ones.” Later in the novel, when the adolescent spends an entire night outside in the freezing winter, a friend drags him inside the rooms of an acquaintance who lives nearby, saying “Quick! They must have a samovar going...he’s frozen, this is a friend of mine...he slept all night in the snow.”⁵² In *The Devils*, the wife of a character named Shatov returns to him after a long separation, and he is embarrassed that she has caught him without any tea or a samovar in the house. Shatov runs to the house of his neighbor and friend, Kirilov, asking for tea, and the latter betrays no surprise whatsoever at Shatov’s sudden desperate need for a samovar. Happily, Kirilov has one boiling already and quickly supplies Shatov with a hot teapot and some bread. Quite a different kind of emergency arises two chapters later when Shatov’s estranged wife is found to be in labor (with someone else’s baby) at one o’clock in the morning. Frantic, Shatov immediately sets out in search of the two things deemed most necessary at such a time: a midwife and a samovar.⁵³ Characters of different social classes across Dostoevskii’s fiction all consider the samovar a necessary object to have on hand in all of life’s great events, from birth, to love, to death.

Given the perception of tea’s necessity and centrality in all aspects of social life, the impoverished and downtrodden characters who populate Dostoevskii’s novels feel shame at their inability to afford tea or to drink it with decency and propriety. In *Poor Folk*, Makar Alekseevich writes, “You know, my darling, it is rather embarrassing not to be able to afford to drink tea; the people here are well-off, so one feels embarrassed. Varenka, one drinks tea for the sake of others,

⁵² Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2003), 170, 338.

⁵³ Dostoevsky, *The Devils*, 567, 578.

for form's sake, in order to keep up appearances." Here, Makar feels his respectability and honor in the eyes of others hinge on his ability to afford tea. The opinions of his neighbors and acquaintances outweigh his own comfort. Makar personally seems not to care for tea, or at least pretends not to, for later in the novel he remarks bitterly, "Why write about someone that he sometimes has no money, that he can't even afford tea? As though everyone were under some kind of obligation to drink tea!"⁵⁴ In *The Devils*, the lack of a samovar signals the poverty of the lodgings occupied by the aforementioned Shatov.⁵⁵ On two different occasions in *Crime and Punishment*, the servant of Raskolnikov's landlady brings him weak tea made from already used tea leaves and served in a cracked teapot. Another scene in *Crime and Punishment* finds two women ordering tea in a wretched Petersburg tenement. The ragged servant who eventually serves the tea does so in such a dirty and disorderly manner that the ladies feel ashamed.⁵⁶ Finally, in *The Idiot*, someone asks the protagonist Prince Myshkin whether he is capable of drinking a cup of tea decently in polite company as a way of assessing his civility.⁵⁷ Dostoevskii's characters understood the ability to drink tea respectably, and the ability to afford both the leaves and decent accessories to accompany its consumption, as markers of human dignity and adequate means.

In Dostoevskii's last novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the now well-established trope of intimate familial tea drinking is conspicuous by its absence. The novel contains some of the richest tea imagery in all of Dostoevskii's works, and many of its key events and most memorable moments take place over tea. The book tells the story of Fedor Pavlovich Karamazov

⁵⁴ Dostoyevsky, *Poor Folk*, 7, 67.

⁵⁵ Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, 150.

⁵⁶ Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 61, 103, 263-64.

⁵⁷ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Penguin Books, 1955), 503.

and his three sons, Ivan, Mitia, and Alesha. Fedor Pavlovich's fourth son, Smerdiakov, is illegitimate and lives in Fedor Pavlovich's house as a servant. Ivan personifies materialistic nihilism, Mitia is consumed by a passion for women and song, and Alesha exemplifies humility and piety. Eventually Smerdiakov kills Fedor Pavlovich, but Mitia is tried and wrongfully convicted of the crime. Tellingly, whereas family gatherings around the evening samovar epitomize domestic harmony throughout Dostoevskii's other novels, not once does the Karamazov family drink tea together. Instead, Fedor Pavlovich and his sons take their tea in private rooms in isolation, and this powerfully indicates a fundamental disorder that will eventually result in murder and destruction. The one exception to this general rule is a long conversation between Ivan and Alesha that takes place in a tavern, during which Ivan shares his Grand Inquisitor poem with Alesha and they share some tea. Ivan suggests they order food as well, quipping to Alesha, "You don't live on tea alone, do you?"⁵⁸ Dostoevskii uses this exchange over tea between Ivan and Alesha to set forth some of the main philosophical themes of the novel.

Here and elsewhere, the predominant attitude toward tea in Dostoevskii's fiction is positive. Those who would see it as a decadent luxury do so out of hostility and not out of any genuine religious feeling. Father Zosima, Alesha's elderly spiritual mentor who lives in a nearby monastery, exemplifies holiness and a redeemed life. Father Zosima's death throws Alesha into grief and confusion, and the rapid putrefaction of his corpse brings posthumous shame on the elder. The monks in the monastery, together with the townspeople, believe that the bodies of truly holy people do not decompose, and sometimes even give off pleasant aromas. For some of

⁵⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Strous and Giroux, 1990), 228-29.

the monks and many in the town, the fact that an overpowering stench emanates from Father Zosima's body mere hours after his death indicates that he wasn't so holy in life after all. On two different occasions, monks disposed to think ill of Father Zosima accuse him of loose living because he enjoyed tea. One charges Zosima with having enjoyed cherry preserves with his tea, which some ladies had sent him; he subtly implies that Zosima carried on an inappropriate relationship with these women, asking, "What is a monk doing giving tea parties?" Another remembers that ladies used to bring Father Zosima candies for his tea, claiming, "he was a tea sipper, a glutton, filling his stomach with sweets and his mind with arrogant thoughts."⁵⁹ The monks wishing to tarnish Father Zosima's reputation have nothing substantial on which to base their accusations, but, deaf to Zosima's essential message about Christian love and reconciliation, they seize on tea as the most concrete evidence of vice in his life.

Zosima himself did not abstain from tea, as the above illustrates, instead considering it a potent tool of spiritual and social reconciliation. As a youth in the Cadet Corps, the young Zosima comes into some money and employs a servant named Afanasii whom he mistreats and physically abuses. After his religious conversion years later, Zosima meets Afanasii by chance in a marketplace. Afanasii and his family scrape together a meager living by hawking goods in the market and live together in a single room. Afanasii treats his encounter with Zosima as a festive occasion, sends for his wife, and entertains the wandering monk to tea. In this scene, spiritual reconciliation takes place over tea between members of two different social classes. After tea, Afanasii gives Zosima fifty kopeks, an enormous sum for a poor man, as a donation to the monastery. Recounting this story leads Zosima into a discourse on Christian relations between masters and servants, and he exhorts his disciples to treat all people with equal love and respect.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 333, 336.

Hearing Zosima's teaching on this topic at social gatherings, people would say to him, "What? Shall we sit our servants on the sofa and offer them tea?" Zosima replies, "Why not...at least once in a while?"⁶⁰ For Father Zosima, sharing tea creates intimacy and serves as a powerful symbol and vehicle of reconciliation across boundaries of social class and past conflict. Those who accuse Zosima posthumously of worldliness on account of his tea habit completely miss the central point of his teaching.

The one scene in *The Brothers Karamazov* associating tea with genuine vice occurs on the fateful night of Fedor Pavlovich's murder, when Mitia goes on a spree to a nearby town, throwing away large sums of money on music, dancing, women, food, and drink. Not caring about the consequences of his actions, since he intends to kill himself at dawn, Mitia treats everyone he sees with tea, and keeps three samovars boiling all night long.⁶¹ The trio of samovars here represents extreme excess. In Father Zosima's case, Dostoevskii portrays social tea drinking as an innocent pastime despite the monks' murmuring, which arises out of malice rather than true piety. Mitia's lavish spending, by contrast, betrays his desire to dampen existential despair with worldly pleasures.

Just as the Karamazovs' failure to take tea together demonstrates familial discord, Dostoevskii uses tea imagery to indicate mental illness in two of the brothers, Ivan Fedorovich and Smerdiakov. After Mitia is charged with his father's murder, a servant remarks that Smerdiakov seems to be going crazy, and cites his refusal to touch his tea as evidence of this. A short time later, Smerdiakov privately confesses to Ivan that he killed Fedor Pavlovich, then expresses surprise at Ivan's professed shock and ignorance. At the beginning of the fateful

⁶⁰ Ibid., 295-98, 316-18.

⁶¹ Ibid., 402-403, 432.

encounter between Ivan and Smerdiakov, Dostoevskii sets an ominous tone by describing Smerdiakov's small and badly dented samovar, which has gone out on the table. As the above made clear, elsewhere in Dostoevskii's fiction, samovars that go cold often bode ill. The conversation with Smerdiakov precipitates Ivan's own mental illness, which parallels Smerdiakov's in that it initially manifests itself in Ivan's refusal of his tea. Soon Ivan experiences a nightmarish vision of the devil, who sits across from Ivan like a "sponger" (*prizhival'shchik*) who has come "to keep his host company at tea." In an ironic twist, the atheist materialist Ivan Karamazov entertains Satan to tea in a horrific parody of the peaceful tea-times the Karamazov family never shared. At one point in this diabolical interview, Ivan flings a glass of tea at the devil in anger. Eventually Alesha finds Ivan raving, and breaks the news to him that shortly before, the maid had gone into Smerdiakov's room to clear away the samovar and found that he had hanged himself from a nail on the wall.⁶² The unfortunate servant, Marfa, finds that Smerdiakov's life has gone cold just like the samovar full of tea he never touched. As for Kirilov in *The Devils*, cold, undrunk tea prefigures suicide. Throughout *The Brothers Karamazov*, the family's failure to have tea together, and individual Karamazovs' refusal of it in specific situations, is symptomatic of the evil that will eventually result in murder, suicide, and madness.

Throughout this fictional works, Dostoevskii took the samovar for granted as a national symbol connoting familial well-being, decency, respectability, and adequate means. Negatively, samovars going out or cold, untouched tea often serve as bad omens or indicate the presence of evil. On occasion Dostoevskii did treat tea as a luxury, especially when it came to his impoverished characters, but unlike many instances in *Dead Souls* this does not necessary imply a connection between tea drinking and vice or sloth. Pushkin and Gogol had established many of

⁶² Ibid., 612, 621, 634, 636, 650.

the particular characteristics of Russian tea drinking; the works of Dostoevskii elaborated on and reinforced them.

Tea, Morality, Gender, and the Family in Tolstoi's Fiction

Count Lev Tolstoi wrote his great novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* in the 1860s and 1870s, and these iconic works portray the samovar as a central fixture of Russian interiors and social gatherings. After about 1880, Tolstoi began to develop and express a philosophy involving the rejection of the institutional church and state, a commitment to personal poverty, and a strict ascetic morality. Tolstoi enjoyed enormous influence worldwide in the last decades of his life, and his portrayal of tea drinking helped shape subsequent Russian understandings of the practice. Despite the strict asceticism of his later years, reflected in his writings after 1880, Tolstoi never singled out tea for criticism, treating it instead as a harmless, everyday social ritual, so omnipresent as to be almost invisible. In Tolstoi's works, the tea table became more than just a piece of furniture, taking on a metaphoric dimension as a space of sociability centered around the samovar.⁶³ For Tolstoi, more so than for Pushkin, Gogol, or Dostoevskii, the tea table was also a gendered space, in that while his male characters drink just as much tea as women, the female hostess bore the responsibility of presiding at the samovar and preparing tea. Tolstoi's references to tea drinking in the context of family gatherings also established women as the "moral nourishers" of the next generation.⁶⁴ Finally, Tolstoi portrays tea as compatible with religious devotion and a holistic connection to the land and the peasantry.

⁶³ Ellis, "General Introduction," in *Tea and the Tea-Table*, 1:xxi.

⁶⁴ Julie Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), x.

In *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877), Tolstoi created images of tea drinking that would define understandings of Russian gentry lifestyles for generations to come. The opening scene of *War and Peace* describes a glittering soirée at which the bewitching young Princess Bolkonskaia draws attention to herself by tripping lightly around the room in her elegant dress and seating herself in the center of everything near the silver samovar.⁶⁵ A similarly memorable scene in *Anna Karenina* features a drawing room with dark walls and thick carpets that absorb light, contrasted with a brightly lit tea table at which the hostess sits down and gracefully draws off her gloves in order to pour out tea. Positioned at the social and geographical center of the space, the tea table presents a vivid picture in the reader's imagination of its immaculate white tablecloth, silver samovar shining in the candlelight, and delicate translucent porcelain cups, all of which stand out brilliantly against the darker surroundings.⁶⁶

With such descriptions Tolstoi not only evoked striking visual images, but also asserted that such scenes typified the social lives of his aristocratic characters. Describing an evening gathering later in *War and Peace*, Tolstoi notes that the soirée “was as like as two drops of water to every other soirée, with the same conversation, tea and lighted candles.” Several sentences later, he reiterates the same picture of “the hostess at the tea-table on which there were exactly the same kind of cakes in a silver cake-basket as the Panins had at their party. Everything was just as it was everywhere else.” At the end of the scene, Tolstoi repeats yet again that this soirée exactly replicated every other soirée. “Everything was similar,” he wrote, down to “the samovar and the tea cakes.”⁶⁷ Tea did not merely characterize the lifestyle of Tolstoi's characters, it defined it. Recall that Gogol had asserted in reference to tea drinking in taverns that “everything

⁶⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 9.

⁶⁶ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 119.

⁶⁷ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 552, 555.

was the same as everywhere else.”⁶⁸ For Gogol, drinking tea typified the public social life of all taverns; for Tolstoi, tea epitomized all private social gatherings.

Just as Pushkin’s refined Onegin likes to measure time by meals and tea, tea structures the daily rituals of Tolstoi’s characters. They take tea constantly, so much so that Louise and Alymer Maude, who produced a classic English translation of *Anna Karenina* in 1918, sometimes deliberately mistranslated “tea” into English as “breakfast” when it took place in the morning, so as not to confuse readers about the time of day.⁶⁹ A main character in *War and Peace*, Pierre Bezukhov, visits Moscow after it was destroyed by fire during the Napoleonic war. Pierre notes the objects people have chosen to rescue from their homes, doubtless the ones they considered most important: feather beds, icons, and samovars, representing the rituals of sleep, worship, and tea that delineate their lives.⁷⁰ Samovars are as central an attribute of the Russian household as the implements necessary for sleeping and praying.

For Tolstoi, as for Dostoevskii, tea time featured prominently in a distinctively Russian vision of childhood and family life. Andrew Wachtel credits Tolstoi with shaping subsequent Russian conceptions of aristocratic childhood. Tolstoi’s “personal myths of childhood became the foundation on which practically all future Russian works on the subject were constructed.”⁷¹ In the large households with multiple children featured in both *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, the children have their own separate tea time with their tutors and governesses.⁷² On one occasion in *Anna Karenina*, a mother warns her children about bad behavior by telling them that

⁶⁸ Gogol, *Dead Souls*, 19.

⁶⁹ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 395, 703.

⁷⁰ Tolstoi, *War and Peace*, 1095.

⁷¹ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 57.

⁷² See, for example, *Anna Karenina*, 66, 508; *War and Peace*, 1382.

if they broke their cups, they would have nothing with which to drink tea.⁷³ In both novels, tea serves as an important element in the daily routines on which children thrive, as well as a metaphoric construct useful for instructing them in proper behavior.

Tolstoi made the strongest connection between tea and childhood in his earliest fictional works, a series of three novels entitled *Childhood* (1852), *Boyhood* (1854), and *Youth* (1857). Samovars mark key transitions in the novels, which follow the inner life of a young boy named Nikolenka. In his first-person narrative, Nikolenka introduces his mother for the first time on the morning that he and his brother are scheduled to depart for school in Moscow. Distracted by the thought of being separated from her sons, she allows the water from the samovar's tap to overflow the teapot and run onto the tray beneath. Nikolenka adores his mother, whose beauty and devotion epitomize maternal care. Tolstoi portrays her emotions on this occasion as strong enough to overpower an action as rote and automatic as filling the teapot. Later that same day, the family enjoy one last outdoor tea party together before the boys depart for Moscow with their father. "At the sight of the cart [laden with tea things] we voiced uproarious joy, for to have tea on the grass in the woods, and generally where nobody had ever had tea before, was considered a treat."⁷⁴ Nikolenka's memories of his last day at home center around tea and the samovar, which were integral to his conception of both familial love and the enjoyment of nature.

In these passages the samovar signals Nikolenka's transition from his home on the family country estate to school, but it also serves as a symbol of the continuity of domestic life. Nikolenka's mother dies at the very end of *Childhood*, but the family samovar, which he closely associated with her, remains. The first scene of *Boyhood* finds Nikolenka home from Moscow

⁷³ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 717.

⁷⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*, trans. Alexandra and Sverre Lyngstad (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 8, 25-26.

and describing a familiar scene: “The samovar is already on the boil in the passage, and Mitka, the postilion, is blowing into it, red as a lobster.”⁷⁵ Some of Nikolenka’s most vivid and treasured memories center on drinking tea with his family, both at home and in the open air of the countryside, and these memories meld with two of the primary turning points in this life—his departure for study in Moscow and his mother’s death. The samovar symbolizes both continuity and change, and the fact that they can sometimes coexist—an important life lesson for a growing boy.

Unlike Gogol, Tolstoi’s fiction indicates that he did not associate tea with idleness and vice. Nor does Tolstoi treat tea as a morally problematic luxury, perhaps in part because many of his characters are nobles wealthy enough to be free of concern about its cost. Mar’ia Nikolaevna Bolkonskaia, one of the principal characters in *War and Peace*, welcomes religious pilgrims, whom she calls “God’s folk” (*bozh’i liudi*) to her estate despite her father’s orders to turn them away. She entertains them with tea while they discuss spiritual matters. In another metaphysical register, Pierre first learns about freemasonry by conversing with a mysterious stranger during a nocturnal tea-drinking session at a remote posting station. Grieved and disoriented by his failed marriage, and convicted by his traveling companion’s character and ideas, Pierre joins the freemasons as a result of this encounter, set against the gentle hissing of a midnight samovar.⁷⁶

Tolstoi’s 1890 short story “Father Sergii” comes closest to treating tea as a luxury, but even here, devoutly religious people drink it without scruple. Over the course of the narrative, the eponymous main character’s tea drinking tracks with his spiritual journey. The young Prince Stepan Kasatskii abandons his life of privilege after learning that his fiancée is a former lover of

⁷⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁶ Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 408, 457, 460.

Tsar Nicholas I, whom he deeply admires. He joins a monastery, adopts the name Father Sergii, and becomes a hermit increasingly well known for his piety. Early in this solitary phase of his life, Father Sergii drinks the tea pilgrims bring to him as a gift. As time passes, he leads a progressively austere life, signaled by his refusal of tea and his eventual transition to eating rye bread only once per week. Later, having fallen into ill health, Father Sergii eats nourishing, though Lenten, food, and resumes drinking tea. Despite his growing reputation, the hermit struggles with lust and boredom, and after a merchant's young daughter seduces him, he leaves his hermitage and becomes an itinerant beggar. Just as Tolstoi himself rejected external forms of Christianity while remaining deeply religious, as a wanderer Father Sergii attains a higher level of spiritual perfection than he had as a member of an organized religious order. He now rejects tea for good, once while stopping at the home of a relative, and again in the very last scene of the story. A party of nobles in a fine carriage, accompanied by a French traveler, accost Father Sergii and his traveling companions on the road. Displaying his humility, the once-famous monk plays along with their assumption that he does not understand French. The Frenchman gives the pilgrims twenty kopeks each, specifying his desire that they use it for tea rather than for lighting candles in a church. Father Sergii surreptitiously gives the money to one of his fellow beggars, who is blind. In this story, Tolstoi does not portray tea as morally suspect in and of itself, indicating on the contrary that it was considered appropriate Lenten fare. Instead, Father Sergii treats it as “superfluous” (*izlishnii*) to a life of pious simplicity.⁷⁷ He does abstain from tea as he grows in holiness, but this is a side effect of, not a precondition for, his spiritual development.

⁷⁷ Leo Tolstoy, “Father Sergius,” in *Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy*, trans. Louise and Alymer Maude (New York: Perennial Classics, 2004), 526, 533, 544, 546.

Tolstoi's story condemns selfish indulgence even if it takes no outward form, prioritizing inner sanctity above outward displays of devotion.

Tea consumption does not necessarily preclude personal holiness for Tolstoi; he also incorporates it into scenes that depict his unique vision of a holistic agricultural lifestyle. In *Anna Karenina*, gentleman farmer Konstantin Levin's personal development parallels Tolstoi's own journey into ascetic renunciation of wealth and his attraction to Russian peasant culture, which he considered more authentic and wholesome than that of the upper classes. On one occasion, Levin attends his hay fields in order to oversee the haying and to ensure honest dealings among the peasants. Levin converses with a local beekeeper as both enjoy watching the busy activity of men and women gathering hay. Twice the beekeeper remarks to Levin that what they are harvesting is tea, not hay, because it is so fragrant. Later in the novel, while on a journey, Levin stops to feed his horses at the home of a prosperous peasant. The peasant's house and yard are clean, tidy, and well-maintained, and the members of his family are fresh-faced, well-dressed, and polite. When Levin proposes that they drink tea together, his host demonstrates the frugality that has served him so well, replying, "Why I don't know! We have had tea once today," but he ultimately gives in for the sake of his guest. Against the background of a humming samovar, Levin converses with the peasant, and learns that his sensible and innovative agricultural practices parallel those Levin aspires to implement on his own estate. The encounter makes an impression on Levin that never leaves him. Subsequently he sends his sister-in-law on a journey and entrusts her to the care of this same peasant family, with whom she takes tea.⁷⁸ Tea is just as wholesome as the fruit of honest labor, and is fit to be enjoyed as part of a rural lifestyle that honors both the land and the people who tend it.

⁷⁸ Tolstoi, *Anna Karenina*, 247-48, 292-94, 544.

Like Gogol, Tolstoi carefully applied himself to living a moral life informed by religious principles (although Tolstoi, unlike Gogol, ultimately disconnected these principles from the institutional church). “Father Sergii,” wherein tea is considered appropriate to drink during Lent, appeared in print in 1911, around seven decades after the publication of *Dead Souls*. That Tolstoi did not satirize tea as an idle pastime or a sinful indulgence suggests that the practice enjoyed widespread acceptance in his lifetime, and also indicates that Tolstoi himself did not consider tea consumption morally problematic. Tolstoi’s fiction perpetuated the close association between domestic intimacy and the samovar, possibly partly because of the example set by Pushkin and others. Although Tolstoi did not portray tea drinking or serving tea as an activity exclusive to women, he did position his female characters as presidents of the tea table, both in the context of small family gatherings and large public entertainments. At children’s teas, women’s place at the samovar emphasized the moral dimension of their role as providers and nurturers. Tellingly, the adulteress Anna Karenina never serves tea to her son or to any other children. Anna has abdicated her female role as “moral nourisher” in favor of her affair with Count Vronskii. In social contexts, women presiding at the tea table supplied good conversation as well as tea, and set standards for polite behavior. Finally, nobles such as those who populate Tolstoi’s fiction were a disappearing breed in the late nineteenth century, and after the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, the Russian aristocratic lifestyle vanished altogether. Tolstoi’s portrayal of the tea table as the social and cultural center of the universe shaped memories of *ancien régime* Russia in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The literary works examined in this chapter reveal that nineteenth-century Russian tea culture shared some characteristics with the previous century, but had also developed new and distinctive features. As eighteenth-century household inventories and claims for property loss reveal, owners of tea and tea ware numbered these among their most valuable and valued possessions. Similarly, fictional characters in *The Captain's Daughter*, *War and Peace*, and several of Dostoevskii's novels consider tea ware, and particularly samovars, as valuable assets in homes across the socioeconomic spectrum. As in the eighteenth century, those fictional works appearing in the first half of the nineteenth century treated tea as a Western luxury, but tea's association with both luxury and the West declined as the nineteenth century wore on and tea's popularity grew. Some figures in the fictional stories examined here mobilize tea as a tool of upward social mobility, but unlike their forbears of the eighteenth century, nineteenth-century writers evinced no anxiety about this. Perhaps most importantly, the close association between tea and domestic harmony was new in nineteenth-century literature. Pushkin created this trope, and others followed his example. Along with their tie to family life, tea and the samovar first gained a specifically Slavic flavor in nineteenth-century literature, and this would endure into the twentieth century and beyond.

The four authors featured in this chapter worked in two distinct phases of nineteenth-century Russian tea culture: Pushkin and Gogol in the first half of the century, when tea had not yet been fully russified, and Dostoevskii and Tolstoi in the second half, by which time the Russianness of tea and the samovar were well established. Even though Russia's political climate in the first half of the nineteenth century could hardly have differed more sharply from the Catherinian era, Pushkin operated very much in the mindset of Catherinian tea culture. Pushkin

would have agreed with Catherine that fine tea ware conveyed the message, “Russia is a European state.” Similarly, for Pushkin tea utterly lacked any association with China, nor did Pushkin acknowledge its eastern origin, of which he could not have been unaware. Admitting that tea was a Chinese drink would have disrupted Pushkin’s comfortable synthesis of tea as simultaneously fully Russian and fully Western. In Pushkin’s oeuvre, the non-Russian peoples of the empire, most of whom were Muslim, either did not drink tea at all, or did so in a backward and distasteful fashion. Either way, for Pushkin tea was part of Russia’s patrimony as a Western colonial power. Gogol, for his part, seemed to mix eighteenth- and nineteenth-century teaways. Gogol portrayed tea as very Russian, even specifically Slavic, and treated it as an unquestionably quotidian beverage. Yet tea also appears in satirical passages, reminiscent of eighteenth-century precedents, that critique unnecessarily opulent lifestyles. In Gogol’s works, tea was in the middle of its transition from luxury to necessity.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Dostoevskii introduced the innovation of using tea imagery negatively, and specifically samovar metaphors, to foreshadow evil. Nothing like this appears in Russian literature before him, although there would be plenty afterward, particularly in the works of Anton Chekhov. In many of Chekhov’s short stories and plays, superstitions accrue to the sounds emitted by samovar, as when a buzzing or rattling sound was understood as an ill omen.⁷⁹ In *War and Peace* Tolstoi, like Pushkin in *The Captain’s Daughter*, helped indelibly install tea in Russian historical memory by including it in fictionalized narratives of historical events. Owing in part to the historical novels of Pushkin and Tolstoi, from the late imperial period and even today, many people, including seasoned scholars, tend to

⁷⁹ See, for example, “My Life,” “The Dependents,” “Three Years,” and “The Cherry Orchard.” In “The Cherry Orchard,” the eighty-seven-year-old butler Firs connects the samovar’s buzzing (*gudet’*) with misfortune: “*Pered neschast’em tozhe bylo: i sova krichala, i samovar gudel besperech’.*” Anton Chekhov, *The Plays of Anton Chekhov*, trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: HarperFlamingo, 1997), 358.

believe that the Russian tradition of drinking tea with a samovar emerged earlier than it did.⁸⁰

Once it took hold in the Russian imagination, the image of the samovar as a central feature of family life proved durable over the decades, and after 1917, featured prominently in memoirs about lifestyles that were lost after the revolution.⁸¹

Evidence concerning Russian tea culture in the eighteenth century, including fiction and literature, is not complete enough to elucidate the gender dynamics of the tea table before 1800.

That changed in the nineteenth century, and the novels of Tolstoi in particular reveal that the tea table was a gendered space. The female hostess or the eldest eligible woman enjoyed the prerogative of preparing and serving tea in mixed company, performing as they did so their role as actual or potential wives, mothers, and nourishers in both a moral and a physical sense.

Although presider at the family tea table was a female role, in all the works examined, men drink tea just as often as women and are equally likely to order or prepare it for themselves when alone or in exclusively male company. Men often drink tea in restaurants, taverns, and posting stations, whereas women are less likely to drink tea in public. The gender dynamics of Russian tea drinking are also present, albeit less explicitly, in the works of Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoevskii, and they are consistent with Tolstoi's. Although Russian tea culture provides such hints about differentiated gender roles and expectations in the nineteenth century, unlike in contemporary Britain, drinking tea did not have a reputation as an exclusively or even primarily female pastime in Russia. In general, English tea culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries evinces

⁸⁰ Under the pseudonym C.P. Lesley, historian Carolyn Pouncy published a historical novel, *The Golden Lynx* (Willingford, PA: Five Directions Press, 2012). In it, sixteenth-century Muscovites drink tea. Pouncy conducted rigorous research while writing her novel, and made an educated guess in including it in the book. She discusses this in her article "History, Real and Invented," *Kritika* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 349-50.

⁸¹ See, for example, Alexander Poliakoff and Deborah Sacks, *The Silver Samovar: Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution* (Nottingham: Atlantida Press, 1996); Moira Clark, *Reflections in the Samovar* (Chandlers Ford: Merton Marque, 1992); Mariamna Davydoff, *On the Estate: Memoirs of Russia before the Revolution*, ed. Olga Davydoff Dax (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

sharper divisions along gender lines than Russian tea culture ever did. British men tended to drink tea only in mixed company or in their capacity as fathers and husbands, and almost never touched the stuff in public or in exclusively male company.⁸² As if to prove the universality of Russian tea drinking, in *War and Peace* Tolstoi explicitly asserted that mixed evening tea parties typified the life of every Russian household.

In the eighteenth century, physical conditions specific to Russian interiors made the samovar the most efficient piece of water-heating technology available long after its fashionability waned elsewhere, and nineteenth-century Russian literature was the crucible of the samovar's cultural russification. Perhaps unconsciously aware of the role that the great Russian stove had played in ensuring the samovar's enduring popularity, the two remained entwined in the minds of nineteenth-century writers. But the connection between the stove and the samovar was not static. Evgenii Onegin has no use for the enormous stove in his country house, because it evokes for him the obsolescence of a backward Slavic past. Throughout Pushkin's works, the samovar remains thoroughly European. While the cultural legacy of tea in eighteenth-century Russia is keenly felt in the works of both Pushkin and Gogol, nowhere is there any hint of eastern cultural baggage accompanying tea. Instead, Gogol explicitly incorporated the samovar into passages that later became foundational to Russian identity. Whereas the samovar and the stove represented the West and Russia respectively for Pushkin, decades later in Dostoevskii's fiction, the stove and the samovar appear equally Russian, serving as twin sources of warmth and nourishment (physical and moral) in the home. Tolstoi famously remarked in the opening line of *Anna Karenina* that all happy families resemble one another, and in much the same way,

⁸² Markman Ellis, "Introduction," in *Tea and the Tea-Table in Eighteenth-Century England*, 1:xxxix-xl.

nineteenth-century Russian literary depictions of happy family tea times contain many similar images that would become standard fare in conceptions of essential Russianness.

CHAPTER SIX

PEASANTS INTO TEA DRINKERS

Introduction

In an 1894 morality tale by M. S. Potapov, a peasant man from a village outside St. Petersburg awakens one morning to the sound of his children clamoring for tea. Preferring that they should drink kvas, and inwardly uncomfortable about the standard of luxury his family has come to expect, the husband reluctantly indulges his wife and children with a hot breakfast around the samovar. Over tea, the man's guilty thoughts return to a poor invalid he had recently encountered, and he decides to fulfill his Christian duty by visiting the sick man. To his dismay, however, the peasant finds that even the impoverished invalid has fallen victim to the allure of luxury. In the man's dirty and disorderly *izba* (cottage), a broken teacup, instead of a lamp, sacrilegiously stands in front of an icon. The protagonist urges the sick man to send for a priest, but the latter protests that he has no money to pay a priest. Gesturing to the large, leaky samovar in the center of the room, the indignant visitor exhorts the invalid: "Sell this copper idol here and buy some candles, holy oil, and other household necessities." Aghast at the prospect, the sick man and his wife spurn the idea of life without tea, even though the habit exacerbates their poverty. The invalid's wife complains, "The samovar's on the table, and there's bread in the market, but we have no money to buy food."¹

¹ M.S. Potapov, *Samovar—Na Stole, a Khleb na Bazare: Proza i Stikhi iz Byta Krestian* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Mendelevich, 1894), 1-9.

Turning away from this fictional narrative to address his readers directly, Potapov continues with a description of the spiritual and economic dangers of tea consumption among the peasantry. The author explains that while poverty often results from the sins of the *narod* (people), poverty nevertheless works for good because it causes poor people to turn to God for help. But a worse situation arises when peasants impoverish themselves by setting up the samovar daily in imitation of the well-to-do. When peasants invest in samovars instead of horses, Potapov warned, and put cream from their half-starved cows into their tea, other peasants are encouraged to do the same, and rural poverty deepens. Worse still, peasant dependency on tea drives them to sell their much-needed seed grain in order to buy it.²

Potapov's pamphlet, published in 1894, reflected the disastrous famine of 1891-1892, during which peasants had in fact sold their seed grain and their livestock to feed their families. It is perhaps doubtful that many agriculturalists used precious resources to purchase tea during the crisis, and even less likely that tea consumption exacerbated the disaster; nevertheless, Potapov's worries reflected current realities. Focused as he was on the present and future, he may not have been aware that he was expressing a century-old fear, first voiced in Radishchev's 1792 essay *Pis'mo o Kitaiskom Torge*, that peasants' addiction to tea could jeopardize Russia's grain supply and contribute to social and economic instability.³ Radishchev had written his essay while in exile for composing one of the earliest and most explicit condemnations of serfdom. About three decades after the 1861 abolition of serfdom, Potapov voiced a similar concern about emancipated peasants' ability to manage their fiscal affairs without guidance. In the tradition of other eighteenth-century and some nineteenth-century satirists discussed in earlier chapters of

² Ibid., 10-12.

³ Radishchev, *Pis'mo o Kitaiskom Torge*, 17.

this dissertation, Radishchev had condemned luxurious indulgence on the part of all people regardless of social class. In contrast, Potapov wrote that people with larger, stable incomes were welcome to drink as much tea as they liked, because their tea consumption did not threaten their livelihoods.⁴ The gulf between the peasantry (*narod*) and educated society (*obshchestvo*) informed the arguments of Potapov and others about the appropriateness of peasant tea drinking. Potapov may have agreed with V. A. Manassein, professor of medicine at the Medical-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg, that imitation—in this case, peasant imitation of upper-class tea drinking—was a function of an underdeveloped mind that would eventually fade as human evolution progressed.⁵

From the very beginning of tea's transition from luxury good to everyday staple, peasants aspired to be tea drinkers. While doubtless some peasants could not afford to consume authentic Chinese tea regularly at any point in the nineteenth century, many strove to acquire it for special occasions or consumed surrogates or substitutes, knowingly or unknowingly. An 1845 temperance work acknowledged that the samovar indicated material well-being among merchants and *meshchanie* “and even sometimes for peasants.”⁶ The 1837 claim in the law code that “hardly a peasant in wealthier provinces...does not own a samovar and drink tea” may have been somewhat optimistic and premature, but nevertheless indicates demand for tea and samovars among lower-class Russian subjects.⁷ “Peasant,” of course, was a heterogeneous and rapidly changing category in the nineteenth century that could include free peasants, various

⁴ Potapov, *Samovar—Na Stole*, 12.

⁵ Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 141.

⁶ A.G. [pseudonym of N. Gersevanov], *O p'ianstve v Rossii i sredstvakh istrebleniia ego* (Odessa: Gorodskii Tipografii), 1845, 121-22.

⁷ *PSZ* vol. 38, no. 29197, 628-29.

categories of serfs before 1861, and indeed the vast majority of Russia's inhabitants, rural and urban, whether engaged in agricultural, commercial, protoindustrial, or industrial forms of production. The authors examined in this chapter, however, tended to group all peasants into one homogenous category. Likewise, Russia's first empirewide census, conducted in 1897, identified 84 percent of the adult male population in fifty European provinces as peasants.⁸

This chapter investigates how journalists, economists, religious thinkers, pedagogues, reformers, doctors, and others understood the implications of the spread of tea drinking to all strata of Russian society in the nineteenth century. Whereas earlier critiques of tea often condemned it regardless of the socioeconomic status of the tea drinker, many late imperial thinkers connected specifically lower-class tea drinking with a host of social and economic issues. By the time Potapov published his edifying pamphlet in 1894, tea had become widely available and cheap enough to come within the grasp of the peasantry. As tea consumption continued to spread, moral, medical, and economic concerns about the deleterious effects of tea on Russia's population persisted, as Potapov's and other works reveal. These negative voices were in the minority, however, as most contemporary Russians understood tea to be harmless, if not beneficent. A majority of the authors examined in this chapter insisted on peasants' fundamental right to inexpensive, unadulterated Chinese tea, both as a healthy dietary supplement and an alternative to alcohol. Depending on whom one reads, tea was either a cause of, or a solution to, the social problems that plagued late imperial Russia.

This chapter demonstrates how issues surrounding peasant tea consumption were woven into the fabric of wider social and political debates in late imperial Russia. Some understood

⁸ Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 100-102.

peasant tea drinking as a form of deviance. Historian Daniel Beer writes about theories of social deviance that reflected anxiety about the effects of modernity on the physical and social health of Russia. Operating on the assumption that the peasantry was “a significantly different social animal than the educated elites,” some professionals believed that this difference necessitated either that peasants should not drink tea at all, or that they should drink only inexpensive brick tea.⁹ Similarly, many in the medical establishment understood the peasant body to have different needs because of its natural role as agricultural laborer; many medical voices linked the physical and moral health of the individual body to Russia’s general civic health, as historian Laura Engelstein has argued in *The Keys to Happiness*.¹⁰ Those who advocated for greater peasant tea consumption often did so out of the conviction that tea would strengthen peasants’ muscles for hard work, and the perceived inability to control peasant tea consumption made these reformers nervous about Russia’s economic future. Like the agricultural cooperatives historian Yanni Kotsonis analyzes so effectively in *Making Peasants Backward*, the tea debates of late imperial Russia represented conflicts over the right to speak about and for the peasantry and strategies for exercising control over peasants.¹¹ Peasant voices themselves were absent from these conversations and, whether they advocated or condemned peasant tea drinking, all agreed on the basic premise that peasants were backward and needed guidance on how and whether to consume tea.

Russia’s transformation into a tea-drinking nation in the nineteenth century took place so rapidly and so visibly that it provoked a great deal of comment both from contemporaries who

⁹ Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 21.

¹⁰ Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 225.

¹¹ Yanni Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 3.

welcomed the change and saw potential in it for good, and from those who believed its effects to be harmful to the empire as a whole. While some conservative commentators may have exaggerated the role of tea in the empire's social crises, nineteenth-century Russia was indeed a society in rapid flux. The abolition of serfdom, industrialization, urbanization, and increased literacy made for a more closely connected, more diverse, and information-rich urban society than Russia had ever seen before. For several decades now, historians of late imperial Russia have turned their attention to advertising, mass communications, leisure activities, and commodities, demonstrating the presence of a strong and rapidly growing consumer culture.¹² The spread of tea drinking may be numbered among the rapid changes late imperial Russia faced, and those who believed that tea opposed traditional Russian values had over a century of past critiques of tea to back them up. In their view, access to tea needed to be limited in order to protect the majority of the population from its pernicious moral, medical, and economic effects. Another, newer perspective posited tea as a nutritious beverage and a healthy alternative to alcohol, and championed better regulation of the tea trade to ensure the availability of unadulterated, genuine, inexpensive tea to everyone.

Sources for this chapter include popular fiction, folk songs, paintings, photographs, pamphlets, journal and newspaper articles, religious tracts, medical studies, and medical advice literature. Most of this evidence represents outside observers' perceptions and opinions of the role of tea in the economic, cultural, and moral life of lower-class Russians. Material culture

¹² Jeffrey Brooks and Louise McReynolds have drawn our attention to the spread of mass media and the commercialization of leisure, while Christine Ruane has explored the development of fashion. Marjorie Hilton has discussed the advent of modern retailing in Russia, and Sally West has produced a valuable study of advertising in late imperial Russia. Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); McReynolds, *Russia at Play*; Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Hilton, *Selling to the Masses*; Sally West, *I Shop in Moscow: Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Tsarist Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

created by peasants, including folk art and surviving household objects, provide a compelling exception. Popular fiction, folk songs, and some pamphlets were intended for widespread popular consumption, while journal and newspaper articles, together with medical literature, were aimed at an educated audience and often contained prescriptive guidance on how people of inferior socioeconomic status should be expected or encouraged to behave. Some of the articles and pamphlets considered here also set forth recommendations for government policy, and critiqued the inaction of the tsarist authorities when it came to regulating the tea consumption of the *narod*. The health of the nation, in both a medical and a metaphorical sense, lay at the center of concerns about mass consumption and its potential to break down social distinctions.

Perhaps most importantly, the ideas of the writers surveyed in this chapter constitute a broad acknowledgment that the rapid and almost universal spread of tea drinking carried powerful implications for the future of Russian society. The meanings and consequences of Russian tea consumption were contested and believed to carry moral weight. The tea question—whether the masses should drink tea, and what kind, and how much—touched all aspects of the human person and society, including religion and spirituality, morality, economics, labor, and health and reproduction. In a very real sense, the conviction that the control of tea could affect the resolution or deterioration of the real and perceived social problems of late imperial Russia drove each of the arguments analyzed in the pages that follow. All understood such control to be both desirable and possible.¹³

¹³ Cf. Kate Transchel, *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895-1932* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 43.

Peasant Tea Culture

Regardless of what proportion of peasants in the Russian Empire actually drank tea on a regular basis, the samovar-toting, tea-guzzling Russian peasant became a well-established trope in nineteenth-century popular culture. Recall Nikolai Gogol's vivid descriptions of pot-bellied peasants resembling samovars in *Dead Souls*. Even if many lower-class Russian subjects could not afford to drink authentic, unadulterated tea on a regular basis, most contemporaries seem to have assumed or believed they could and did. For example, a short story composed for a peasant audience and set during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 depicts a group of Russian soldiers suffering from heat and thirst near a battlefield. The soldiers rejoice at the arrival of a man named Ivan with something on his shoulder glinting in the light of the sun: a samovar. As the men enjoy their much-needed tea and refreshments, someone accidentally knocks over the samovar and it rolls down a hill to within reach of the nearby Turkish forces. Unhesitatingly risking his life, Ivan jumps up and runs down the hill toward the Turks in pursuit of the samovar, and his companions give him up for dead after watching him disappear behind enemy lines. The soldiers, having lost their appetite, mourn Ivan's loss until he miraculously reappears, samovar in hand, and climbs the hill to rejoin his companions. The men have the samovar boiling again within half an hour. Pelted with questions about his exploit, Ivan declines to recount exactly how he recovered the samovar, stating simply, "No one takes our samovar away, Turks be damned!"¹⁴

Ivan, whose name and colloquial speech patterns signal that he is the Russian everyman, heroically triumphs over adversity with ease and a smile. The antagonists, the anonymous Turks,

¹⁴ K.V. Tkhorzhevskii, *Samovar Turki Ukrali: Chtenie dlia Soldat i Naroda* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Trenke i Fiusno, 1894).

threaten not only the lives of the Russian soldiers and the territory they are defending, but also Russian cultural identity in the form of the samovar. To its peasant audience, this story conveyed the idea that drinking tea with a samovar is a distinctively Russian practice, and as such, merits protection from foreign incursion. The tale simultaneously entertains, teaches a lesson about bravery and integrity, and reinforces the samovar as a symbol of Russian national identity. Drinking tea with a samovar, far from being an elite practice in this story, is represented as part of the basic patrimony of all Russian people. It meets the soldiers' bodily needs and builds morale. The contrast between this short story and the one cited at the beginning of this chapter could not be sharper, though both were published in the same year, 1894. In Potapov's morality tale, the samovar represents the decline of both peasant morality and the peasant economy, whereas in this story, the samovar serves as a repository for traditional Russian values and a cultural touchstone in the midst of crisis.

No sooner had a new artistic medium, photography, entered Russia, than photographers created images that had the same effect of associating lower-class Russians with samovars. Nineteenth-century visual images of samovars and tea drinking, like their literary counterparts, helped to shape contemporary and future understandings of Russian tea culture. Historians Valerie Kivelson and Joan Neuberger call this process "seeing into being," whereby "Russians turn to the visual in order to summon a new reality into being" and "use the experience of viewing as an engine of historical or eschatological transformation."¹⁵ In this case, staged genre photos of peasants and samovars helped establish tea drinking as a Slavic practice with almost folkloric connotations. The photographer William Carrick (1827-1878) lived in St. Petersburg

¹⁵ Valerie A. Kivelson and Joan Neuberger, eds., *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 6.

most of his life, graduating from the Russian Academy of Arts in the early 1850s with a degree in architecture. Carrick became interested in photography during a trip to his native Scotland, and opened a photography studio in St. Petersburg in 1859 with fellow Scot John MacGregor. Initially, Carrick and MacGregor's business faltered, since St. Petersburg lacked both the abundant sunlight then needed to develop photographs, and a middle class that could serve as a clientele. In the early 1860s, faced with a shortage of paying customers, Carrick took ordinary people off the streets of St. Petersburg and photographed them in his studio. Carrick called the resulting series of cartes-de-visite "Russian types," and these both furnish valuable images of ordinary people in everyday dress, and reflect Carrick's conception of what constituted "typical" Petersburg residents.¹⁶

Two photos Carrick took in the 1860s as part of this series prominently feature samovars. In one, a man in a sheepskin coat and peasant haircut leans jauntily against a table set with a samovar and ceramic teaware, gazing confidently into the camera. Since Carrick sought to capture most of his "types" engaged in their occupations, this man may have been a street vendor who sold tea by the glass. A second, similar photograph shows the same man, this time with a companion of similar dress and hairstyle who is seated at the table pantomiming the action of sipping tea from a saucer. The man from the first photograph again gazes directly at the camera, resting one hand on a teacup and gesturing proprietorially toward the samovar with the other. Regardless of these men's real occupations or social status, their haircuts, sheepskin coats, and felt boots visually mark them as peasants. These well-known and widely reproduced images helped establish the samovar as a central facet of peasant culture in the popular imagination.

¹⁶ Felicity Ashbee and Julie Lawson, *William Carrick, 1827-1878* (The National Galleries of Scotland, 1987), 8-9; Audra Yoder, "Making Tea Russian: The Samovar and Russian National Identity, 1832-1901" (MA thesis, Miami University, 2009), 45-46.

Other nineteenth-century posed genre photographs included the samovar in a suite of visual symbols of Russianness, despite the fact that peasant tea consumption was of relatively recent vintage and far from universal. In one image created around 1875 by a photographer identifiable only as B. Avanzo, six smiling peasants in their best clothes are grouped around a table outside a thatched cottage enjoying tea and vodka (figure 6.1).¹⁷ One man grins as he strums a balalaika, while another ceremoniously places a shining samovar on the table. A third pours vodka into delicate glasses as two women look on. The photographer intended every element in the photograph, from the birch trees in the background to the rich carving around the cottage window, to indicate material well-being, conviviality, and the enjoyment of distinctively Russian traditions. Another photograph taken at least five years later by an unknown photographer depicts a similar scene of quiet prosperity, epitomized by the highly polished samovar proudly displayed at the center of another well-laid outdoor table (figure 6.2). In this scene, a town-dwelling family with six children pose rather more rigidly so as not to impede the photographer's view of their samovar. Both images clearly intend to convey the affluence and refinement of the sitters. For both these photographers and their subjects, the samovar symbolized both affluence and participation in a shared, distinctively Russian tea culture.

Ignorance of such a universally enjoyed beverage and social activity became the object of gentle ridicule in a folk song published in 1910. Its lyrics described the comic plight of a household servant who does not know how to prepare tea and acts on the assumption that it is some sort of stew. The refrain, repeated after each of the song's ten verses, ran, "Chai, chai, chai, chai / Ai da chai, chai!" Upon being ordered to make tea by his master, the bewildered

¹⁷ This photograph is of unknown origin and was found pasted inside the album of Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii's photographs owned by the Library of Congress.

manservant improvises a concoction that includes tea leaves, carrots, onions, and parsley root. Discovering his servant's mistake, the master angrily punishes him, yet the unfortunate servant remains oblivious of where his fault lay. The song concludes,

I thought and I thought and I pondered all night
On what my mistake could have been;
At long last, near dawn, I arrived at the truth—
I'd forgot to put salt in his tea.¹⁸

The humor of the song resides in the servant's amusing misconceptions about how tea was made, and also in the idea that anyone could be so out of touch as to be ignorant of the procedure. Given the relatively high price of tea even in the last decade of the imperial period, however, undoubtedly there remained many peasants who knew tea only abstractly as a luxury.

One eyewitness account, however, suggests that peasant tea consumption was already normative and well established shortly after the emancipation. George T. Lowth, an English gentleman who travelled around the Russian Empire in the late 1860s, described the Russian "passion for tea" at length, remarking that "all Russia drinks tea morning, noon, and night." At an inn outside Moscow, Lowth described peasant tea drinking as decorous and sober.

[At] a number of small round tables, and sitting round these were peasants, men and women, in little sociable parties, and on all the tables were teapots, tea-cups and saucers, small, and of pretty and various patterns. All these people were drinking their tea, and on no one table were there bottles or glasses. None of the young men were drinking vodka or kvas, nothing but tea.

Whereas many of the most memorable references to tea in nineteenth-century Russian fiction tended to depict its consumption in private domestic settings presided over by women, Lowth's account describes public tea drinking as an activity shared by both genders in a clean, alcohol-free setting. The passage continues:

It [tea] is a passion among these people. At all hours of the day, in the *cabarets* of Moscow as in those of the country, if you look in on passing, you will see these people, big working men,

¹⁸ Zhorzh Kurtelin, *Ai-da Chai: Narodnaia Pesnia. Samaia Polnaia Pesnia "Oira" i Mnogo Drugikh Noveishikh Modnykh Pesen* (Odessa: Tipografii "Izdatel'," 1910, 3-5.

drivers of droschkies, women and children—there they are drinking tea, tea *veniente die*, tea *decedente*—“from morn till dewey eve!” In a French *cabaret* they would all be tippling red wine; in a German *Gasthaus* all soaking beer. If you ask the Russians they will tell you that the only drinks they care for are vodka (brandy) and tea. Wine and beer are too cold.

Lowth observed Russian tea drinking to be a universal habit among all social classes and age groups. In referring to the other national beverages of Europe, Lowth betrayed his assumption that tea was just as stereotypically Russian as wine in France and beer in Germany. He even went so far as to claim that the Russian preoccupation with tea outstripped that of his native England. Finally, Lowth reinforced the spurious claim that Russians loved tea because of its ability to keep people warm in a cold climate, which property wine and beer both lacked.¹⁹ As early as the 1837 law that legalized this sort of public tea drinking, the Russian government itself had helped to propagate this myth.

The above attests to the ubiquity of tea in late imperial Russian popular culture and in the cultural imagination. Tea made its way into peasant material culture as well, and not only in the form of accessories for tea preparation and consumption. As art historian Alison Hilton’s research into peasant domestic possessions has shown, the two most symbolically laden types of objects in the peasant house were those connected with preparing and storing food, and those used for making and preserving clothing. Peasants decorated both types of implements with images of samovars from the first half of the nineteenth century on. For instance, the distaff (*prialka*) was a ubiquitous object in peasant houses, and also happened to be among the only peasant domestic objects preserved well enough and in sufficient quantities to be thoroughly studied.²⁰ A *prialka* consisted of a single piece of wood or two joined pieces, featuring a broad

¹⁹ The phrase “tea *veniente die*, tea *decedente*” is a playful allusion to Virgil’s line “*Te veniente die, te decedente canebat*.” Lowth, *Around the Kremlin*, 165-66, 249, 267.

²⁰ Alison Hilton, “The Peasant House and its Furnishings: Decorative Principles in Russian Folk Art,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Russian/Soviet Theme Issue 2, 11, no. 2 (Winter 1989), 17, 19.

upright blade usually topped with a comb to hold flax fibers and fixed to a base on which the spinner, always a woman, sat while she worked. In the first half of the nineteenth century, tea drinking scenes featuring samovars began to appear carved or painted on *prialki* with greater and greater frequency, a development well attested both in academic studies and in many surviving examples held in museum collections.

In the nineteenth century, as historian Anthony Netting has argued, Russian peasants “digested” the new realities of urbanization, the growth of a cash economy, and social change through folk art. The appearance of samovars in peasant art and especially on *prialki* is a quintessential example of this phenomenon, as Netting acknowledges. One of the most ancient and frequently occurring compositions in peasant folk art and on *prialki* is a homage scene known from the sixth century AD and featuring two human forms flanking a central vertical fertility figure, often a woman or a flowering tree. Significantly, in examples dating as early as 1835, peasants (to borrow Netting’s term) began to “domesticate” this scene into two figures facing each other over a samovar, the latter having assumed the place of honor formerly reserved for the tree of life, the sun, or the earth mother. In both the ancient and modern representations, the scene is peaceful and harmonious, rather than disjointed. What is more, even in twentieth-century Russian folk art, deviation from ancient compositions like this one remained the exception rather than the rule.²¹

The samovar symbolized hospitality, sociability, and material well-being, and the evidence of decorated *prialki* strongly suggests that peasants seamlessly incorporated tea drinking and the samovar into their domestic, aesthetic, and social lives, regardless of how common peasant samovar ownership was (or wasn’t). Tea drinking was a social occasion, like

²¹ Netting, “Images and Ideas in Russian Peasant Art,” 48, 50, 63.

the rural evening gatherings called *besedy* or *posidelky*, when women gathered together to spin and talk or sing, sometimes accompanied by men with musical instruments. Distaffs were easily transportable, and peasants often carried them about while visiting, which may account for the fact that the larger modern spinning wheels never replaced them in Russian peasant society. Both tea parties and scenes of more traditional evening gatherings appeared frequently on *prialki*, along with weddings and dances. Decorations on *prialki* were intended in part to protect the users and bring good fortune; as a symbol of prosperity, the samovar fit neatly into this cultural schema.²² This was no blind and indiscriminate emulation of fashion, but a thoughtful and selective assimilation of symbols by traditional methods. It is also an example of how, in Louise McReynolds's words, "commerce affected culture" and exerted an impact on how peasants behaved in social situations.²³

Even in the absence of the object itself, peasants appropriated the samovar's symbolic capital, just as they sometimes resorted to tea substitutes like *koporskii chai* and other readily available native plants. Similarly, lower class tea enthusiasts sometimes produced homemade versions of more expensive tea implements. They often painted their carved wooden plates and platters white or yellow in imitation of porcelain. Turned wooden *Khokhloma* tableware, painted with cinnabar and tin or lead and then covered with varnish to give an impression of gilt ceramic, was produced in the Nizhnii Novgorod region and was popular throughout the empire.²⁴ An 1897 painting by Klavdii Vasil'evich Lebedev (1852-1916) entitled *In the Motherland (Na Rodine)*

²² Hilton, "The Peasant House and its Furnishings," 14, 18-20, 25. Folk art reflected samovars, and samovar design also reflected folk art. Ancient dipper-type vessels (*kovsh*) were often shaped like swimming birds, and consequently in the nineteenth century, samovar designs appeared echoing this motif by making the spout of the samovar into a bird's head, so that the vessel resembled a bird leaning forward or swimming.

²³ McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, 5.

²⁴ Hilton, "The Peasant House and its Furnishings," 18.

features a group of peasant women gathered around a homemade samovar cobbled together out of what appears to be scrap metal. The painter's choice to situate the improvised samovar at the visual focal point of the painting, together with the work's evocative title, make the samovar seem like an inalienable element of primeval Russianness.

In the nineteenth century, as more and more people from rural Russia moved to urban tenements that lacked the symbolic and physical architecture of village life, in both a literal and a figurative sense the samovar replaced the great Russian stove as the center of warmth and familial well-being in the home. As chapters 3 and 5 revealed, the relationship between the samovar and the great Russian stove dated to the eighteenth century, when the presence of enclosed tiled or stucco stoves in domestic interiors ensured the enduring popularity of the samovar as the most convenient means of heating water quickly. In the nineteenth century, the samovar became the primary source for Russia's most common hot beverage, just as the stove had been essential for producing the ancient brews *kvas*, *sbiten'*, and *medovukha*. The foregoing has shown that peasants invested the samovar with rich symbolism of ancient provenance not unlike that which the stove had possessed for many centuries. Consciously or unconsciously, in lower-class urban Russia, the former become something of a surrogate for the latter.

While Russian traditions of tea drinking had developed relatively recently in literature and other forms of cultural production, there was nothing superficial or artificial about the Russianness of nineteenth-century lower-class tea culture. Eric Hobsbawm notes, "we should expect [the invention of tradition] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed."²⁵

Samovar lore both reflected innovation and flexibility in peasant culture, and was a response to a

²⁵ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 4.

very real waning of older Russian lifestyles. And while samovars acquired all sorts of powerful emotional associations in the popular imagination, the content of tea-related traditions remained imprecise. To use Hobsbawm's words, "[t]he nature of the values, rights and obligations of group membership" inculcated by samovar use were fluid, and yet "the *practices* symbolizing it were virtually compulsory."²⁶ As Hobsbawm has theorized, in the case of Russian tea culture, the symbolically charged signs of community membership were more important than any ideology or agenda the community may or may not have shared. The significance of tea drinking, epitomized by the samovar, "lay precisely in [its] undefined universality."²⁷

Historian Elise Wirtschafter was certainly right to argue that "traditional" peasant society "remained viable" in the late nineteenth century. She writes, "Its strength derived not from insularity or the ability to prevent change, but from the successful incorporation of new economic, social, and cultural experiences into existing relationships and customs."²⁸ Peasant appropriation of tea drinking, both literally and symbolically, illustrates her argument. The samovar as symbol, reminiscent of the ancient image of a fertility goddess with upraised arms and large belly, and perpetually warm like the great Russian stove, seems to have made sense in the peasant cultural universe. While it seems clear that drinking tea appealed to lower-class Russians on a number of levels, some contemporaries vigorously opposed peasant tea consumption.

²⁶ Ibid., 10-11, emphasis in original.

²⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁸ Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*, 116.

Tea on Trial

Laura Engelstein has argued that a “struggle for public power and cultural influence waged between the old regime and the new social forces unleashed by the state’s own program of modernization” marked the late imperial period. Liberal and conservative voices fought for influence over the powerful new forces of commercial culture, urbanization, and individualism, and tea became caught up in these battles for social control.²⁹ The tsarist government’s inability to effectively regulate the tea trade doomed Russia’s tea supply to perpetual instability.

Similarly, a perceived inability to control popular tea consumption made many contemporaries anxious. Depending on their political orientation, nineteenth-century Russian thinkers formulated economic, religious, medical, and moral arguments both for and against tea and its consumption by the masses. Depending on to whom one listened, tea was either good or bad for health, social stability, and even agricultural production; yet despite their differences of opinion, almost all the authors surveyed here implicitly desired to preserve older socioeconomic divisions. Some wanted to do this by restricting access to tea to the upper classes. Others acknowledged the right of peasants to purchase and consume tea, but wanted to mobilize peasant consumption for the purpose of increasing the productivity of their labor. For most, it was important that peasants consume in ways appropriate to their socioeconomic status, and in their minds the well-being of Russian society as a whole took priority over the rights and opportunities of peasants as individuals.

Russian concerns about the suitability of tea for consumption by Orthodox Christians, especially during the frequent periods of fasting ordained in the ecclesiastical calendar, dated from the earliest Russian encounters with tea in the seventeenth century. In the Russian Empire,

²⁹ Engelstein, *Keys to Happiness*, 2, 422.

this problem was unique to Orthodox Christians, who sometimes expressed doubt as to whether tea should be consumed on fast days. Since Orthodox dietary law explicitly forbade dairy products during fasts, many Russians eschewed the habit of adding milk or cream to their tea. By contrast, Islamic and Jewish dietary regulations presented no obstacles to tea consumption by faithful Muslims and Jews, while animist people groups living in Inner Asia and Siberia possessed tea traditions that long predated the Russian familiarity with tea. By the middle of the nineteenth century, most mainline Russian Orthodox church authorities had reached the consensus that tea was appropriate for consumption by Orthodox Christians, even on fast days.³⁰ Mainstream Russian Orthodox acquiescence to tea may have been simply a pragmatic adaptation to changing cultural conditions; and in any case, evidence dating from as early as the seventeenth century reveals that some Orthodox priests, monks, and bishops readily embraced tea, as earlier chapters of this dissertation have shown.³¹

While the majority of nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox did not consider tea sinful, and many tea merchants were Old Believers, some conservative mainstream Orthodox and some Old Believers objected to tea on religious grounds well into the twentieth century.³² Old Believer antitea rhetoric frequently employed a play on words involving the Russian words for tea (*chai*) and despair (*otchaianie*). One such aphorism, recorded by the renowned Russian lexicographer Vladimir Dal', ran "*Kto p'et chai, tot spaseniia ne chai*" (He who drinks tea despairs of salvation). Another Old Believer colloquialism collected by Dal' claimed that tea, coffee, and tobacco brought "perdition spiritual and bodily" (*paguba dushevnaia i telesnaia*); similarly, another lumped tea, coffee, tobacco, and the newly-introduced potato into a category of

³⁰ Sokolov, *Rossiiskie i Inostrannye Chaetorgovye Firmy*, 7.

³¹ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 95.

³² *Ibid.*, 94.

foodstuffs which, the saying inaccurately claimed, were pronounced anathema by the Seven Ecumenical Councils.³³

Other believers maintained that tea may not be explicitly sinful, but was likely to impede personal holiness. A nineteenth-century account of the teachings of the eighteenth-century St. Serafim of Sarov quoted him as saying, “By no means is anyone allowed to consume alcoholic drinks and tobacco; so far as possible, abstain even from tea.”³⁴ Others, rather than condemn the beverage outright, considered tea and sugar to be *skorom'*, that is, comestibles forbidden on fast days but permissible at other times. Around 1900, the ethnographer S. V. Maksimov wrote that “the peasants consider it to be an unforgivable sin to drink tea with sugar during a fast: tea itself is a semisinful drink, while sugar is unconditionally *skorom'*, because, in the understanding of the peasants, it is made out of animal bones....In general, the peasants, especially the elderly...would sooner die than defile their souls with *skorom'* food.”³⁵ Another peasant saying reveals the class dimension of this dynamic: “Lords and dogs eat *skorom'*.” Along these lines, Maksimov recorded the claim that “only we little peasants can fulfill the fasts, because the learned people and the nobles won’t—they couldn’t last a day without tea and beef.”³⁶ Yet strong evidence of peasant attraction to tea throughout the nineteenth century weakens the claim that most or all peasants understood tea to be *skorom'*.

³³ Vladimir Dal', *Poslovitsy Russkogo Naroda v Dvukh Tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1984), 1:31.

³⁴ Father Superior Parfenii (Petr Ageev), *Skazanie o stranstvii i puteshestvii po Rossii, Moldavii, Turtsii i Sviatoi zemle*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Tip. Aleksandra Semena, 1856), quoted in Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 95.

³⁵ The myth about sugar being made from animal bones seems to have proceeded from the practice of refining sugar using bone char. The misunderstanding may also have been reinforced by sugar's ivory or white color. Quoted in Levnid Heretz, “Fasting in Russian Peasant Culture,” *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Glants and Toomre, 72.

³⁶ Quoted in Heretz, 75.

The works of Bishop Arkadii (Andrei Rodionovich Shaposhnikov, 1810-1868) typified Old Believer opposition to tea. Toward the end of his life, Bishop Arkadii wrote a short treatise against tea, coffee, sugar, and tobacco, in which he forbade Christians to consume tea on the grounds that the Chinese used it in their pagan sacrifices. For this reason, Arkadii included tea in the category of substances that were “unclean” according to Levitical law. Citing the fourth-century church father John Chrysostom, Arkadii reminded his readers that the flood of Noah had resulted from indulgence in worldly pleasures. Using the familiar *chai/otchaianie* play on words, Arkadii concluded, “Whoever drinks tea despairs of God and will be three times accursed” (*Kto piet chai, tot otchai ot boga, i trizhdy anafemstvovan da budet*).³⁷ Soon after, in 1874, a broadside produced with the permission of the Moscow Spiritual Academy appeared refuting Arkadii’s view. Most of the space of the poster was taken up by passages in Church Slavonic from the works of John Chrysostom and St. Paul about the nature of sin. At the bottom of the poster, the author concluded that “Some Old Believers preach in vain that tea, coffee, potatoes and similar things are damned, but that kind of preaching proceeds from people who have defiled minds, souls, and consciences.”³⁸ Both the Old Believers who opposed tea and the mainstream Orthodox who defended it used religious texts to accuse each other of desecration, suggesting that in this debate, a desire to influence hearts and minds outweighed any specific concern about tea.

³⁷ Nauchno-Issledovatel'skii Otdel Rukopisei (NIOR), Russian State Library, f. 247, no. 649, ll. 17, 21, 28. I am grateful to Roy Robson for bringing this source to my attention.

³⁸ I.M. Stat'in, *Vypisano sie iz knigi besed Sv. Ioanna Zlatoustogo na poslaniiia Sv. Apostola Pavla, beseda 12-ia na poslanie k Timofeiu i beseda 3-ia Titu o iastii, chto grekh i chto ne grekh, vo oproverzhenie myslei propovednikov, yolkuishchikh o chae, kofe, kartofele i chto vse eto prokلياتotsenz* [Moscow?], 1874.

Medical debates about tea in the late imperial period betrayed a belief in the connection between individuals' bodily and moral health and the health of Russian society as a whole.³⁹ Despite religious scruples about worldly luxuries, foreign plants, and medicines, tea had been used medicinally in Russia since the seventeenth century, in accordance with the European medical consensus that tea was a healthy, or at least innocuous, beverage. In Russia, while tea had made the transition from foreign medicine to elite luxury early in the eighteenth century, it had not entirely lost its medical connotation in the nineteenth century. Mainstream medical opinion in both Western Europe and Russia generally regarded tea as a healthy, bracing drink suitable for consumption by the sick, the elderly, and invalids whose constitutions were too weak for solid food.⁴⁰ For example, in a household pharmaceutical reference work he compiled in the 1890s, Nikolai Vakulovskii gave instructions on brewing tea, adding that it was beneficial for the digestion and as a remedy for diarrhea.⁴¹ In a 1909 work that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, M. M. Zenzinov asserted that tea strengthened the brain and muscles.⁴²

Nevertheless, a vocal minority of doctors and writers of popular medical advice literature in Russia insisted that tea was dangerous to human health. Widespread tea adulteration may have exerted a significant impact on medical debates about tea and health in Britain and throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some doctors recording what they believed to be the detrimental health effects of tea may in fact have been observing the results of adulteration rather than symptoms caused by tea itself.⁴³ Since a large portion of the tea for sale in Russian

³⁹ Cf. Engelstein, *Keys to Happiness*, 225.

⁴⁰ Anon., *Chai, ego Upotreblenie i Pol'za* (St. Petersburg, 1884), 23.

⁴¹ Nikolai Nikolaevich Vakulovskii, *Drug Sem'i: Narodnyi Lechebnik* (St. Petersburg: A. Kaspari, 1896-1897), 1:348.

⁴² Zenzinov, *Chai i Poshlina*, 3-5.

⁴³ Roy Moxham, *Tea: Addiction, Exploitation, and Empire* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), 32.

markets was known to be adulterated with substances ranging from toxic aniline dyes to sand and steel shavings, many people must indeed have become very ill from drinking tea laced with harmful additives.⁴⁴ As early as 1834, an article in the journal *Drug Zdraviia* (Friend of health) reported the story of a man who, after having drunk thirty cups of strong black tea, began to laugh uncontrollably and quote poetry.⁴⁵ More ominously in 1907, V. A. Grachev published a pamphlet on the perils of tea. Drinking hot tea causes one to sweat, Grachev reasoned, enlarging the pores and opening a passageway for cold air to enter into the depths of the body. Drinking tea and visiting the *banya* (bathhouse) posed similar dangers to health, because both caused the pores to expand, allowing cold, damp air to penetrate the internal organs. Exposure of the interior of the body to cold, in turn, could cause a variety of illnesses, including inflammation of the brain, heart, kidneys, eyes, ears, or throat, pneumonia, pleurisy, catarrh, and arthritis. If none of these ailments resulted in the death of the tea drinker, Grachev warned, then the victim was likely to suffer from them chronically until the end of his or her life. Grachev advised total abstention from tea, but conceded that drinking lukewarm tea in small quantities in the morning, and never with meals, could mitigate its ill effects. For Grachev, tea posed a danger to public health. He concluded his booklet by noting that Russian people formerly lived longer because they drank water, kvas, and beer warm and in moderate quantities, whereas widespread tea consumption was to blame for contemporary people's short, sickly lives. Grachev therefore dedicated his work to the edification of families, the government, and Russian society at large, insisting that his advice was a key to the well-being of future generations.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ivan Alekseevich Sokolov, "Kitaiskii chai pod plomboi chastnoi i kazennoi," 79; Dmitrov, *Kakoi chai pit' krest'ianam*, 6.

⁴⁵ Cited in Alison Smith, *Recipes for Russia*, 51.

⁴⁶ V.A. Grachev, *Vliianii Chaia na Zdorov'e. Kak Sleduet Pit' Chai: Znaniia Sokrashchaiut Stradaniia Liudei* (Moscow: Tipografiia V. Chicherina, 1907), 1-5, 11-13.

The work of Dr. Aleksandr Vasil'evich Vasil'ev (1832-1889) concerned future generations more directly. Vasil'ev's dissertation for his medical degree, published as a pamphlet in 1871, summarized his research on the effects of tea consumption on the quantity and quality of human breast milk. Vasil'ev noted that wet nurses tended to drink large quantities of tea, sometimes for the explicit purpose of increasing the quantity of their milk. Contrarily, Vasil'ev's experiments on dogs and his observation of breastfeeding women led him to conclude that drinking tea decreased the overall amount of milk yielded, while at the same time increasing the relative percentage of fat and one type of protein. While his findings suggested that tea was not the ideal beverage for nursing mothers, Vasil'ev admitted that tea's effects could be counteracted by drinking large amounts of water.⁴⁷ He refrained from commenting further, but his work reflected a larger concern that the rapid spread of tea consumption among ever wider swathes of the Russian population posed a potential danger to public health.

For other authors of antitea literature, health concerns were only the beginning. Historian Marjorie Hilton has pointed out that the potential effects of consumerism on Russian cultural traditions troubled many nineteenth-century aristocrats and members of the intelligentsia. She writes, "Many intellectuals worried that the emergent mass market and urban entertainments encouraged self-indulgent materialism and threatened authentic folk traditions and culture."⁴⁸ A number of these thinkers focused their concerns on tea. The seminary-educated publicist and educator Aleksei Porfir'evich Vladimirov (1830-1905) insisted that "the four scourges of civilized races" arose from colonial and trade contacts with "wild" (*dikii*) peoples with a low level of culture. Tea from China, coffee from the Levant, the tobacco of American "redskins,"

⁴⁷ Aleksandr Vasil'evich Vasil'ev, *K Voprosu o Vliianii Chaia na Kolichestvo i Kolichestvennyi Sostav Moloka* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Iakov Treia, 1871), 20-21, 26.

⁴⁸ Hilton, *Selling to the Masses*, 26.

and distilled alcohol from Arabia were degrading and degenerating contemporary Western society. Of the four, Vladimirov singled out tea as the most lethal, both morally and medically. Revealing a rare familiarity with the early history of tea in Russia, Vladimirov wrote that the first Russians to encounter the perfidious leaves were right to suspect tea consumption to be immoral. According to Vladimirov, whereas the English and Americans drank tea with breakfast and again later in the day with food, and the French took it only as medicine, Russians drank tea indiscriminately at all times of day and after dinner. Pubs and popular eating establishments (*traktiry* and *kharchevni*) were full of tea-drinkers from morning until night, and many Russians habitually drank between five and ten cups of tea daily.⁴⁹

In Vladimirov's view, tea's narcotic properties made it attractive, even addictive. Like many of his contemporaries in Russia and elsewhere in Europe, Vladimirov believed that a substance called theine was the medically active ingredient in tea. The Dutch chemist Gerardus Johannes Mulder had proved that caffeine and theine were chemically identical in 1838. Despite this discovery, caffeine and theine were popularly believed to be different substances, or were at least treated as having different properties, until the end of the nineteenth century, when the term "theine" fell out of common usage.⁵⁰ Vladimirov thought theine was a powerful drug that affected some people like opium, and others, like alcohol. He cited examples of people being transported to ecstatic states and becoming unconscious of their words and actions after drinking tea. Intellectual workers like lawyers, writers, and teachers were particularly susceptible to

⁴⁹ Vladimirov, *Chai i vred ego*, 1-5.

⁵⁰ The young German physician Friedlieb Ferdinand Runge had first isolated caffeine from coffee in 1819. In 1827, Geigers Oudry extracted and isolated a substance from tea leaves that he called "theine." Even though Mulder had proved that caffeine and theine were in fact the same substance in 1838, many medical practitioners continued to assume that caffeine and theine affected people differently. Popular recognition of caffeine as the stimulant common to coffee, tea, chocolate, South American maté, and other plants would have to wait until the early twentieth century. Weinberg and Bealer, *World of Caffeine*, xxi, 122.

theine, which rendered them utterly unable to think or work. Vladimirov devoted two chapters of his pamphlet to enumerating the diseases and maladies caused by tea. These included laziness in both physical and mental labor, artificial spiritual ecstasy, and premature and excessive sexual excitement. While chemical and biological research conducted in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has revealed the many health benefits of tea, studies have shown that large doses of caffeine can in fact cause symptoms similar to those Vladimirov described.⁵¹ He also blamed tea for the literary affliction of garrulousness, which he believed resulted in both an excess of fiction and lies in the popular press, and a propensity to consume and believe the same.⁵²

In a chapter on the economic dangers of tea, Vladimirov echoed Potapov's morality tale in warning that Russians spent too much of their money on tea, money that was, moreover, draining abroad. Poor people were compromising their ability to work by breakfasting on tea and sugar. Finally, Vladimirov wrote that the Russian economy was suffering because of the general population's tea-induced degraded spiritual state. Instead of tea, Vladimirov concluded, people should sleep and exercise normally, consume simple, healthy food and drinks, and spend their free time on reading, music, painting, and sculpture. Why was tea "necessary" (*neobkhodimo*), Vladimirov asked rhetorically, when so many more edifying activities were available? "Our fathers drank neither coffee nor tea," Vladimirov wrote, "and were stronger than us in body and soul." He concluded by challenging his readers to abstain from tea for one month in order to discover a richer, healthier life and free themselves from slavery to tea. To this end, he outlined a four-step program designed to gradually wean the body off the pernicious beverage. Vladimirov ended on the same note as Grachev by encouraging his readers to raise strong, healthy children

⁵¹ Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, 270-71.

⁵² Vladimirov, *Chai i vred ego*, 10-15.

on fresh, room-temperature water.⁵³ Abstention from tea, for both authors, would ensure the well-being of Russia's future generations.

Russian doctors were not alone in their concerns about the effects of tea on human health. A vocal minority of medical professionals working in nineteenth-century Western Europe and the United States also expressed concern about the possible ill effects of excessive tea drinking. The English physician John Cole published one of the most widely cited warnings about tea in the medical journal *Lancet* in 1833, in which he warned his readers that tea could cause a numbing of the back of the head, visual impairment, an unsteady gait, a weak pulse, and vertigo. "I may add here," he continued, "that the mind does not escape, but partakes of the disorders of the body, as is seen by the temper becoming peevish and irritable, so as to render the sufferer a torment to himself, and all those about him."⁵⁴ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as modern medical theory and practice gradually replaced the much older humoral theory, a wide variety of medical opinions about the effects of caffeine on the body appeared across Europe. Russian scientists and doctors participated in these debates and evinced an equally diverse range of opinions about the effects of tea and caffeine on human health. Of course, these concerns did little to mitigate the rapid spread of tea consumption to wider and wider swathes of the population.

To be sure, tea merchants and retailers had a vested interest in producing good press for tea. *Chainyi Vestnik* was one of many short-lived commercial publications in late imperial Russia dedicated to bolstering the image of merchants and promoting commercial transparency, and was one of the first such periodicals to emerge before the 1905 Revolution.⁵⁵ In January 1899, the

⁵³ Ibid., 31-36.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Weinberg and Bealer, *The World of Caffeine*, 120.

⁵⁵ Hilton, *Selling to the Masses*, 111-12.

weekly began a series of articles on medical research into tea's effects on the human body. The first of these acknowledges that while tea undoubtedly did most people a great deal of good, the question of tea's healthfulness was far from resolved, since some doctors advised their patients to drink tea, while others forbade it. There was even a name for a malady resulting from excessive tea consumption: *teaism* (*teinizm*).⁵⁶ The second article in the series analyzes one hundred cases of teaism, the most common symptoms of which were constipation, back and chest pain, nausea, dizziness, depression, and headaches. The article identifies two substances found in tea that could potentially be responsible for such symptoms: tannins and caffeine. A technical discussion of the chemical properties of both compounds follows.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the paper folded before the series could be completed, but not before it had published other articles analyzing the chemical properties of tea, as well as strategies for isolating and extracting caffeine from tea using ether and chloroform.⁵⁸

Whatever the basis for their fears, late imperial Russian antitea sentiments reflected broader anxieties about modernity. In the minds of many contemporary observers, tea, as a commodity and a social practice, formed just one moving part in a feedback loop of pernicious modern phenomena. For the Old Believer Bishop Arkadii, tea drinking constituted a straightforward offense against ancient religious laws. For Vladimirov, tea caused unnaturally intense sensations, both spiritual and sexual, and fueled the popular literature that spread these contagions even further. Grachev's alarm was limited to public health, while underlying Vladimirov's antitea vitriol were racism, xenophobia, and anxiety about the effects of capitalist modernity. Concerns about tea often started with relatively concrete public health issues, but

⁵⁶ ChV 14 (January 1899), 179.

⁵⁷ ChV 18 (February 1899), 227.

⁵⁸ ChV 7 (November 1898), 85.

were soon extrapolated to include the social and political health of the nation. It was as though Vladimirov had chosen tea as a scapegoat on which to pin his concerns about sexual license, a perceived degradation of popular culture, the consumption power of poor people, and new forms of religious expression. In one way or another, each of these men blamed tea, in whole or in part, for various social ills. In each case, a concern for Russia's future and the well-being of individuals and Russian society as a whole led them to administer stern warnings about the consequences of tea consumption.

These negative voices were, however, a minority. Other contemporary authors expressed similar concerns about Russia's future and the health of the body social, but mobilized these concerns to promote, rather than discourage, tea consumption. Although popular culture took peasant tea drinking for granted, or at least peasant aspirations to become tea drinkers, some contemporary observers believed this was not enough and sought to promote and encourage higher rates of tea consumption among peasants. In 1893, Karp Dmitrievich Dmitrov composed a short pamphlet addressing the question of what kind of tea Russian peasants should be drinking. Dmitrov surveyed the various "teas" consumed by the lower classes, which included *chainyi vyparki*, or previously steeped tea leaves that had been dried and resold, as well as the native plant referred to as *Ivan-chai* or *koporskii chai*. Although *Ivan-chai*, along with other popular plant infusions like licorice root and wild strawberry leaves, did not threaten human health, too often, Dmitrov warned, the inexpensive "tea" available to less affluent consumers contained dangerous additives such as sand and steel shavings. In an effort to protect tea drinkers from adulteration and fraud, Dmitrov provided his readers with a list of reputable Moscow tea

firms that could be relied upon to supply unadulterated Chinese tea. He also described the shape and size of authentic tea leaves in order to help the reader visually identify them.⁵⁹

Dmitrov's goal, which he described as an important people's affair (*narodnoe delo*) for Russia, was to get peasants drinking compressed tea. Bricks of compressed tea could be purchased for about fifty kopeks per pound, a price far lower than that of loose tea, and presented the additional advantage of being difficult or impossible to adulterate. (Vasilii Klimushin, another author of pamphlets concerning the Russian tea trade, also pointed out in the early 1890s that brick tea possessed the singular virtue of being almost totally fraud-proof, unlike the middling sorts of *baikhov* tea, among which one could find virtually everything except Chinese tea.⁶⁰) Though Dmitrov did not provide a systematic program for promoting brick tea consumption among the peasantry, he asserted that the first step was to make peasants aware of their ability to afford authentic Chinese tea in the form of tea bricks. Even those Russians who don't drink tea, Dmitrov noted, acknowledge its usefulness and health benefits, especially for working people. Tea's benefit for the peasantry lay primarily in its ability to strengthen those who are naturally weak, and Dmitrov ended his pamphlet by calling upon the peasantry to drink more brick tea.⁶¹ In contrast to Vladimirov and Potapov, both of whom insisted that peasant productivity declined when they consumed tea with sugar, Dmitrov's pamphlet strongly implied that the empire as a whole would benefit from the increased productivity of a peasant workforce fueled by safe, unadulterated tea. Dmitrov's argument may have been closer to the truth: scholars have acknowledged the importance of tea with sugar as a source of inexpensive calories for the

⁵⁹ Dmitrov, *Kakoi chai pit' krest'ianam*, 1-12.

⁶⁰ Vasilii Klimushin, *Plitochinii Chai* (St. Petersburg: Otdel'nyi ottisk iz zhurnala *Nasha Pishcha*), 1892, 6.

⁶¹ Dmitrov, *Kakoi chai pit' krest'ianam*, 10, 14, 15.

working poor in Western Europe.⁶² Significantly, although Dmitrov's Russian peasants stood in need of advice about what kind of tea to buy, his pamphlet took it for granted that peasants are consumers able to make informed choices about their purchases.

Another endorsement of peasant tea consumption can be found in a work aimed at a popular audience that went through numerous editions and printings between 1873 and 1914. In it, Evgenii Fedorovich Reinbot answered the question posed in his title, "Tea: Whence it Comes to Us," by explaining that China, the home of tea, lay south of Siberia.⁶³ Like many other nineteenth-century authors of works on tea, Reinbot introduced his pamphlet (richly illustrated in the earlier editions) by remarking that one would be hard pressed to identify a more universally enjoyed beverage. Reinbot's was one of many popular all-about-tea pamphlets circulating around Russia in the late imperial period, and covered topics such as tea cultivation and manufacture, the story of how tea came to Russia, and how much tea was drunk in the various trading towns. Reinbot gently advised his readers that other (alcoholic) beverages give great cheer, but these often bring us bitterness, whereas tea is reassuringly above reproach. Reinbot's affirmation of peasant tea consumption was more subtle than Dmitrov's, and stopped short of connecting popular tea consumption with economic productivity; yet like Dmitrov, Reinbot implicitly acknowledged peasants as consumers possessing the right to make informed choices.

In his 1909 work on tea tariffs, M. M. Zenzinov explicitly stated that tea's ability to strengthen the brain and muscles was crucial for the diet of Russia's peasant labor force. For Zenzinov, more effective regulation and lower import duties on tea would result in an increase in

⁶² See Smith, "From Coffeehouse to Parlour," in *Consuming Habits*, 148; Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 108-17.

⁶³ Evgenii Fedorovich Reinbot, *Chai i ego Pol'za. Iz narodnykh chtenii Vysochaishe Utverzhdennoi Kommissi* (St. Petersburg: Dosug i delo, 1875), 5. The earliest edition, *Chai: Otkuda on Idet k Nam* (St. Petersburg: Postoiannyi Kommissii Narodnago Chtenii, 1873, second printing 1881), contains almost identical text.

the amount of unadulterated, inexpensive tea available, and this in turn would exert a bracing influence on the workforce. Complaining (erroneously) that tea adulteration was unique to Russia, and claiming (also erroneously) that Russian taxes on tea were the highest in the world, Zenzinov blamed the tsarist government for prioritizing revenue over the protection and regulation of Russian industries. Zenzinov doubted that the embryonic Russian tea plantations in the Caucasus would ever be able to produce enough tea to meet the empire's needs, and pointed out that in any case, the quality of tea produced was lower than that imported from China. Because of excessive tariffs, Zenzinov concluded, the interests of the people were suffering, and they were not receiving the quantity of tea necessary to provide them with the muscular energy necessary for their work. The Russian people were not getting enough tea.⁶⁴ The workforce Zenzinov worried about seemed to consist not of independent and rational consumers, as for Dmitrov and Reinbot, but remained subject to economic forces manipulated by the state. For Zenzinov, the peasant workforce possessed agency insofar as it produced what the empire needed to function, but ultimately, Zenzinov placed the responsibility for adequate peasant tea consumption on the tsarist authorities.

Despite the diversity of opinions surveyed here, implicitly all agreed on the need of ordinary people for guidance on what to consume, both in the sense of what they should purchase, and what they should ingest bodily. More broadly, the opinions of people writing nonfiction works about tea in late imperial Russia coalesced around a connection between tea consumption and Russia's fate, whether they understood that fate in primarily spiritual, moral, or economic terms. There is no consensus here, however, on the crucial question of whose responsibility it was to shape and transform society, or who could be blamed for its ills. Nor was

⁶⁴ Zenzinov, *Chai i Poshlina*, 3-10.

there consensus, and in some cases no engagement, with the issue of how exactly to accomplish the authors' desired ends. Tea pamphlets usually stopped short of offering actionable advice on how to put their convictions into practice. For many, the temperance movement was the practical arena in which tea could prove its ability to actually transform Russian society.

“The Beneficent Chinese Beverage”: Tea as an Alternative to Vodka

Nineteenth-century Russian commentators found a number of reasons to promote tea consumption among the peasantry, as the previous section has shown. The same trends of urbanization, modernization, and industrialization so often blamed for Russia's alcohol problem also facilitated the spread of a potential solution: tea.⁶⁵ For many, fighting alcoholism became the best and most urgent reason to encourage lower-class tea consumption. The idea that tea could provide a sober alternative to alcohol had been widespread in Western Europe since the eighteenth century, but tea did not become prevalent enough in Russia for this idea to catch on until toward the middle of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ The author of a book on temperance published anonymously in 1845 praised the spread of tea drinking, arguing that consumption of tea, coffee, and sugar could greatly diminish the prevalence of drunkenness in Russia:

The beneficent Chinese beverage has begun to penetrate the wealthy population of the interior of Russia; the *iamshchiki* [postal road drivers] of the Petersburg-Moscow route drink it almost every day; one cannot but rejoice over it; this is the most permissible of luxuries, and a trend that by all means we should promote. The main way of showing hospitality is tea; it is an amazing gift to drink several cups of tea with the accompaniment of a lump of sugar, long known to the Russian person.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 73.

⁶⁶ Jordan Goodman, “Excitantia,” in *Consuming Habits*, 137.

⁶⁷ A.G., *O p'ianstve v Rossii*, 122.

The author pointed out the desirability of promoting the Russian sugar beet industry, which could in turn stimulate tea and coffee consumption. Like virtually all nineteenth-century Russian temperance writers, he believed that alternative beverages and activities must be provided in order to entice people away from vodka. The idea that tea consumption could serve as a desirable alternative to vodka emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century, and gained in popularity as the century wore on. By the late imperial period, the phrase “for tea” or “tea money” (*na chai*, *na chaek*, or *chaevye den'gi*) had replaced “for vodka” as the standard expression to denote a tip, but Ivan Sokolov believes the “tea money” to have been more often than not a euphemism for vodka money.⁶⁸ Around the turn of the twentieth century, tea assumed a central role in the Russian government’s attempts to control vodka use and drunkenness among its lower-class subjects.

The historical literature on alcohol in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russia acknowledges that tea played a role in the Russian temperance movement, but does not explore this role systematically or in depth. Patricia Herlihy’s detailed study of vodka and political reform in late imperial Russia frequently mentions tea houses as a central feature of the state’s efforts to promote public sobriety, but does not describe their activities or assess their effectiveness.⁶⁹ Two other excellent monographs, David Christian’s *Living Water* and Kate Transchel’s *Under the Influence*, make convincing arguments about the relationship between drinking, class conflict, and cultural modernization, but do not discuss the place of tea in the

⁶⁸ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 237; Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 64-65.

⁶⁹ Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*.

temperance movement.⁷⁰ Before the publication of *Living Water*, Christian, along with Robert Smith, coauthored the only study to consider tea and alcohol together.

Kate Transchel argues that Russia did not have a drinking problem until the upper classes expressed their dismay concerning it in the late nineteenth century, and that consequently, its development could not be measured in terms of actual alcohol consumption.⁷¹ Similarly, Herlihy believes that condemnations of Russia's drinking problem were probably more urgent than they were accurate.⁷² Russian alcoholism, then, was both a rhetorical construct and a social reality. Vodka was first known in Russia in the sixteenth century.⁷³ In the eighteenth, Catherine the Great had augmented state revenue by auctioning off a limited number of licenses for exclusive rights to sell alcohol in certain areas. This tax farming system soon came to generate one quarter of all state revenue.⁷⁴ By 1800, vodka formed an integral part of Russian social life.

The importance of tea and vodka in Russian culture and fiscal policy in the nineteenth century parallel each other in several significant ways. Many people understood the two beverages as polar opposites, and came to think about one in terms of the other. Vodka was often measured in terms of teacups and teaspoons. The progressive psychiatrist V. M. Bekhterev, for instance, opined that a healthy adult could consume one tea glass of vodka per day safely, but later lowered the amount to several teaspoons.⁷⁵ In terms of economics, vodka was not easily produced in homes, but had to be bought, and this drew peasants into the market and contributed

⁷⁰ David Christian, *Living Water: Vodka and Russian Society on the Eve of Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Transchel, *Under the Influence*.

⁷¹ Transchel, *Under the Influence*, 39.

⁷² Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 4.

⁷³ Christian, *Living Water*, 5.

⁷⁴ Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 5-6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

to the growth of Russia's small cash economy. The government had a vested financial interest in regulating vodka but had great difficulty doing so. The same can be said of tea after 1800: as an imported commodity, it could not be produced domestically, but had to be bartered or bought on the market for cash. Customs revenues from tea came to supply a significant portion of state revenue, but the state found it almost impossible to regulate. The tax farming system, like the tea trade, was rife with corruption that the authorities were seemingly powerless (and also sometimes simply unwilling) to curtail. But whereas a serious conflict of interest developed in the government's need for vodka revenue and its imperative to maintain a healthy and orderly population, tea presented no such problem.⁷⁶

The moralizing Nicholas I found the state's involvement in the vodka trade embarrassing, but he had no choice but to consider the interests of the producers, who controlled the source of what was now one third of state revenue.⁷⁷ The text of the 1837 law permitting the sale of tea in *traktiry*, by expressing the hope that increased tea drinking might decrease vodka consumption, suggests, first, that the government already perceived public drinking as a problem at that early date. Second, it supplies the earliest Russian articulation of the idea that tea could provide a desirable alternative to alcohol.⁷⁸ And yet, as Smith and Christian point out, only in the 1870s would tea be cheap and abundant enough to present a realistic alternative to alcohol consumption.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, by the middle of the century this dream was alive. An 1858

⁷⁶ Christian, *Living Water*, 5, 8, 35-36, 38, 46.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷⁸ *PSZ*, vol. 38, no. 29197, 628-29.

⁷⁹ Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 236-37.

pamphlet featuring statistics on alcohol consumption quoted a French source to the effect that tea, coffee, and sugar could be effective “antidotes” to drunkenness.⁸⁰

On the eve of the Great Reform period, in 1858-1859, liquor riots and boycotts highlighted the fact that the lower classes considered vodka a necessity and a right, and were willing to take political action during times when vodka was scarce. The same would become true of tea during the First World War, when the tea supply ran low. In the late 1850s, as the country struggled to recover from the financial, military, and psychological disaster of the Crimean War, both the tea supply and the vodka supply were in crisis. In 1863, the state abolished the tax farming system as one of the Great Reforms. The government replaced tax farming with an excise system, under which both distillers and retailers of vodka were taxed according to production and sales. An increase in vodka consumption and in the number of retail establishments resulted, and this in turn caused vodka prices to fall even further, increasing the public’s access to it. The state forbade employers to compensate their workers with vodka in 1866, but this did little to curb consumption.⁸¹

In short, despite the perceived desirability of tea as an alternative to alcohol, changes in financial policy during the Great Reform era worked in favor of vodka and against tea, in that vodka prices remained significantly lower than tea prices. The supply of both was increasing, and together the two beverages provided the state with up to half its total revenue, but customs duties kept the price of tea artificially high. The price of vodka, of course, was hardly subject to market forces alone. As an imported commodity that could not be produced domestically (until the Caucasian experiments of the 1880s and 1890s, and then only on a minuscule scale), tea was

⁸⁰ M.P. Zablotskii-Desiatovskii, *O P'ianstve v Rossii* (1858).

⁸¹ Christian, *Living Water*, 8-9, 379; Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 6.

bound to remain both less abundant and more expensive than vodka. This proved to be the case up to the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917.

In 1894, the Russian government changed its fiscal policy regarding vodka once again, abolishing the excise system and replacing it with a state monopoly on the liquor trade designed by Sergei Witte. The idea for a state liquor monopoly had emerged during the reign of Alexander III, but its implementation was delayed until after Nicholas II had ascended the throne in 1896. Witte believed that a government alcohol monopoly would give the authorities greater control over the quantity and quality of liquor sold to the public, emphasizing that effective regulation, rather than an increase in revenue, was the goal. Retailers could now legally sell spirits only in government stores that sold no food, and this of course caused customers to become intoxicated more quickly and thoroughly. Rapid growth in bootlegging was another unintended consequence of the liquor monopoly. Five years after its implementation, the authorities found that the monopoly had contributed to a general increase in vodka consumption.⁸²

In 1895 the state created the Guardianship of Public Sobriety and entrusted it with the supervision of liquor sales and advocacy of responsible drinking behaviors. Critics of the Guardianship, such as Lev Tolstoi, objected to this government temperance program on the grounds that it had been created to address a problem that the government itself had helped to create.⁸³ The Guardianship's strategy was to provide alternatives to drinking in the form of spaces for entertainment, education, public dining, and the consumption of non-alcoholic beverages such as tea. The Guardianship sponsored and partially funded entertainments such as tea houses, cafeterias, reading rooms and libraries, concerts, public readings, promenades, and

⁸² Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 6.

⁸³ Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 15-16; Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 74.

small theaters.⁸⁴ As Herlihy has shown, the state naively believed that “bread and circuses” would succeed in diverting public interest in hard alcohol.⁸⁵

Tea houses, or *chainye*, formed a central aspect of the Guardianship’s efforts to entice the public away from bars and liquor stores, and they are also a widespread but understudied phenomenon of late imperial Russian urban life. The state allowed tea houses to open at five o’clock in the morning or earlier, and to stay open late into the night, with the goal that they should remain open for a greater part of the day than public drinking establishments. Many *chainye* were de-facto flophouses where ideally, those in need of a night’s lodging could enjoy wholesome entertainments away from the temptation of alcohol. In this way, for Russia’s urban poor, tea houses met a real need, particularly during the winter months. Workers also often gathered in *chainye* to meet potential employers. Tea houses typically contained small libraries, but whether these contributed to public literacy is doubtful, since they did not offer instruction to their overwhelmingly illiterate customers. Gramophones, billiard tables, and tobacco sales probably attracted more tea house customers than the libraries. Most importantly, tea houses sold cheap tea. The price for one glass of tea and three lumps of sugar stood at five kopeks in 1902.⁸⁶ A Guardianship tearoom in Khitrov Market, one of the poorest areas of Moscow, could accommodate 136 people at a time, and an average of 651 visitors per day took advantage of its services. The tea house served most of its customers in the morning, and individuals spent, on average, 5.5 kopeks. Tea was served in white cups bearing the guardianship’s monogram.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 83.

⁸⁵ Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 15.

⁸⁶ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 79-88.

⁸⁷ Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 25.

But like other aspects of the Russian government's efforts to curb public drinking, the tea house system backfired in more ways than one. For one thing, in late imperial Russia it was still cheaper to buy one's own tea and brew it at home than it was to purchase tea by the glass in a tea house; the *chainye* provided cheap tea, but it wasn't the cheapest tea available. Some customers took advantage of the inexpensive meals served in tea houses for the express purpose of saving money for vodka.⁸⁸ *Chainye* were often filthy and ill-maintained. Ivan Sokolov, who has conducted extensive archival research concerning Moscow tea houses, writes that they sold alcohol under the table almost without exception.⁸⁹ Similarly, Patricia Herlihy found that proprietors of *chainye* often used them as fronts for liquor sales, thus avoiding the fees and oversight with which legitimate liquor stores had to contend.⁹⁰

The tea house was, in fact, an almost ideal setting for a whole spectrum of illegal activity. Unlike bars and liquor stores, tea houses were supposedly wholesome and orderly places, and because they were the face of state-sponsored urban temperance, police paid them little attention. In practice, the government neither oversaw nor regulated tea houses. In 1899, city authorities discovered a Moscow tea house to be a front for a prostitution ring. More ominously still from the government's perspective, urban tea houses quickly became hotbeds of underground political activity. Workers often gathered in tea houses, which were concentrated in the poor urban areas where they lived. More often than not, tea house libraries stocked politically subversive literature.⁹¹ In sum, tea houses formed an important and visible aspect of late imperial urban life,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁹ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 79-88.

⁹⁰ Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 170, note 69.

⁹¹ Sokolov, *Chai i Chainaia Torgovlia*, 79-88.

but they worked against the government's goals of public order and sobriety. Ultimately, *chaiyne* also helped undermine the imperial state's goal of preserving autocracy.

Like the tsarist authorities, many temperance writers in nineteenth-century Russia believed that vodka consumption would naturally decrease as tea consumption increased, and frequently used this as an argument for the reduction of import duties on tea. Of course, Russian rates of tea and vodka consumption never fluctuated in inverse proportion to one another, though many temperance reformers and evidently the Guardianship itself assumed they would. People often consumed the two together in one sitting, as a local newspaper reported in 1883. In that year, a peasant hunting party in Tambov *guberniia* reportedly returned from the forest and commemorated the hunt by indulging in beer, tea, and vodka.⁹²

In a 1902 pamphlet, Apolinarii Egorov asked rhetorically, How often do we see men stumbling out of taverns drunk? Women and children passing by, he protested, should not be exposed to such things. Yet Egorov bemoaned the fact that women and children themselves were not immune to the pernicious effects of intoxicants. He acknowledged the fact of children's smoking with horror, and wrote that women could be seen in public with cigarettes in their mouths as though they were proud of it. Egorov even admitted (with plentiful punctuation) to having seen people smoking in church! He regarded alcohol and tobacco as two "poisons" that were killing Russian people and draining the country's resources. The "antidote" to both these poisons, Egorov concluded, was tea. Whereas smoking and drinking vodka compromised people's health, tea strengthened the digestive, circulatory, and nervous systems. Moreover, according to Egorov, statistics showed that people who drank tea were at lower risk for "suicide, insanity, and other crimes." God willing, Egorov wrote, little by little tea would take the place of

⁹² Ibid., 52.

vodka in Russian villages. He called for the establishment of more tea houses to help accomplish this.⁹³

Egorov exemplified the belief that increased availability of cheap tea would result in a decrease in alcohol consumption. Egorov used two arguments to support this claim. First, he implied that awareness of tea's self-evident health benefits would automatically compel vodka drinkers to consume tea instead. Second, he connected higher rates of tea consumption with successful temperance movements in Western countries, noting that Britain and Holland, along with the current or former British colonies of Australia, Canada, and the United States, had higher tea consumption rates than Russia. For Egorov, the simple fact that the British considered tea the best alternative to alcohol was strong evidence in favor of this idea. He also wrote of one American state, which he did not identify, in which liquor was not obtainable without a doctor's prescription, and pointed to the presence there of a physically healthy, morally upright population. His pamphlet shows that in relation to the perceived rivalry between tea and vodka, Russians still looked to Britain and the Netherlands, the two powers that had most formatively influenced the development of Russian tea culture. Egorov raised the question of how a person accustomed to alcohol could successfully transition to tea, but apparently did not find it necessary to provide an answer apart from the arguments described above.⁹⁴

Although Egorov's answer to the question of how vodka drinkers would switch to tea leaves much to be desired, he was one of the few writers in nineteenth-century Russia who even bothered to pose the question. Authors of other popular pamphlets on Russia's drinking problem simply offered *prima facie* statements that vodka consumption would go down as tea

⁹³ Apolinarii Egorov, *Dva Iada: Vino i Tabak. Chai, kak Protivoiadi* (Voronezh: S.P. Iakovlev, 1902), 3-19.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10, 12-15.

consumption increased. This was the view of the anonymous author of the 1845 pamphlet on drunkenness in Russia discussed above, who referred to tea as “the beneficent Chinese beverage” and “an amazing gift.” For all his high praise of tea, however, he recommended beer as the ultimate vodka substitute.⁹⁵ Another anonymous pamphlet published twenty years later in 1865 also proffered both beer and tea as alternatives to vodka, and suggested measures to lower the prices on both as a means of combating drunkenness.⁹⁶ In a popular work that went through several editions between 1860 and 1900, an author identifiable only as Dr. Kokh weighed the relative merits of grape wine, beer, vodka, coffee, tea, chocolate, and water. For Kokh, the fact that all these belonged to the general category of beverages seemed to outweigh the fundamental differences between the caffeinated colonial beverages and alcohol. Kokh admitted that room-temperature water was probably the most natural and healthy liquid anyone could drink, but praised the other beverages for their attractive flavors and other good qualities. While he did issue a stern warning against drunkenness, Kokh wrote that for a healthy adult, all these beverages could be beneficial in moderation.⁹⁷

Whereas most authors contented themselves with moral arguments and casuistry, V. I. Pokrovskii actually crunched the numbers in 1900. In an article entitled “Toward the Question of the Competition between Tea and Alcohol in Russian Public Consumption,” published in the journal of the Russian Society for the Preservation of Public Health, Pokrovskii used statistics on Russian tea and vodka consumption, together with pricing data and customs rates, in an attempt to determine whether supply infrastructure and pricing could really allow tea to compete with

⁹⁵ A.G., *O P'ianstve v Rossii*, 122.

⁹⁶ O., *O P'ianstve v Rossii* (Moscow: Katkov i Ko., 1865), 15.

⁹⁷ Kokh, *Chto Mne Pit': Vodku, Vino, Pivo, ili Vodu, Chai, Kofe, ili Shokolad? Sovremennyi Vzgliad na Pol'zu i Vred etikh Napitkov* (Moscow: v. Tip. Vedomostei Moskovskoi Gorodskoi Politsii, 1860), 121-31.

vodka in public consumption. Pokrovskii calculated, correctly, that the Russian population spent more on alcohol than on tea annually in 1900. Russians purchased 110 million rubles' worth of tea and 360 million rubles' worth of vodka each year. His statistical evidence led him to the same conclusion that many others had reached before him, namely, that the government should lower import duties on tea in order to increase popular consumption. Pokrovskii never claimed in so many words that increased tea consumption would automatically cause alcohol consumption to go down, but the idea informs his discussion throughout the article.⁹⁸

By 1914, Sergei Witte and the tsar himself became convinced that the Russian state monopoly on vodka was no longer defensible. In a January 1914 speech, Witte attacked the scheme he had created, and Tsar Nicholas II also came to oppose the vodka monopoly around that same time. As Kate Transchel has pointed out, by introducing prohibition at the beginning of the First World War, the tsarist government essentially forfeited control over the vodka trade as the population sought alternative sources of alcohol.⁹⁹ Justifiably concerned about the sobriety of its peasant soldiers, the Russian Empire banned alcohol but also failed to provide a reliable tea supply for the army. Wartime prohibition redoubled calls for the establishment of a government tea monopoly, which some economists and government officials now believed capable of significantly offsetting the loss of hundreds of millions of rubles' worth of vodka revenue. A tea monopoly may have given the Russian state a degree of control over the tea trade, which it had been struggling unsuccessfully to regulate throughout the nineteenth century. And under prohibition, tea consumption in some Russian provinces did actually increase.¹⁰⁰ But the severe

⁹⁸ V.I. Pokrovskii, "K Voprosu i Konkurentsii Chaia i Alkogolia v Potreblenii Russkago Naroda," in *Zhurnal Russkago Obshchestva Okhraneniia Narodnago Zdravii* 12 (December 1900), 1047-49.

⁹⁹ Transchel, *Under the Influence*, 69.

¹⁰⁰ Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire*, 137-41.

logistical and financial obstacles that threatened the very continuation of the Russian tea trade during the First World War could not have been solved quickly or cheaply. Even before the war began, the government had possessed neither the money nor the manpower to create and enforce a tea monopoly, and it seems doubtful that such a measure would have significantly mitigated the widespread problems of tea smuggling and adulteration.

Ultimately, tea did not prove a potent weapon in the war against lower-class drunkenness in Russia. Most promoters of tea as an alternative to vodka failed to offer practical strategies for replacing alcohol with tea. Even if such strategies had been developed, the tsarist authorities lacked the funding, personnel, and possibly the will to implement them effectively. The failure of government-sponsored tea houses to deter lower-class urban dwellers from alcohol, together with the fact that they often proved counterproductive to the government's aims and values, suggests that enforcement was the crucial missing element. Moreover, especially toward the end of the imperial period, there were very real problems with tea supply. Even in the unlikely event that tea had been capable of filling the void left by alcohol, it may never have become cheap or abundant enough to do so.

Conclusion

Whether social commentators liked it or not, however, the evidence presented above indicates that tea consumption formed an aspect of national identity in nineteenth-century Russia. Evidence from a variety of sources testifies to the existence of a peasant tea culture that was understood to be authentically Russian, despite its contested status and regardless of actual tea consumption rates among Russian peasants. If nothing else, the permanence of the samovar

in Russian homes and imaginations after its introduction in the eighteenth century speaks volumes about its utility, symbolic as well as practical.

The prominent role of tea in Russian culture, domestic rituals, and economic life was contested even as it was developing. The tea debates of the nineteenth century formed one component of larger conversations about the social control of peasants and other people of lower-class background before and after the 1861 emancipation. Despite the diversity of opinion, thinkers on all sides of the issue believed that peasant education and moral edification were necessary to control popular tea consumption. All attempted to discern the common good and, in many cases, betrayed an implicit desire to maintain older social distinctions. They also shared a basic tendency to view peasants as passive. Indeed, in late imperial Russia, few understood peasants as possessing power or agency, aside from the destructive agency wielded by the *kulak*, or rich exploitative peasant. The morality tale by M. S. Potapov that introduced this chapter, with its stern warning about the deleterious moral and economic consequences of peasant tea consumption, embraced an essentially Slavophile view of the *narod* as the repository of primeval values and uncorrupted by the West.¹⁰¹ By becoming a tea drinker, Potapov's peasant became an independent consumer, and in so doing, necessarily forfeited the spiritual and moral heritage in which the value of his class principally lay. In a sense, participation in the modern postemancipation consumer economy threatened to transform this innocent muzhik into a kulak. While Potapov's protagonist instinctively resists the corrupting allure of the consumer economy, epitomized by tea and the samovar, he finds himself struggling in a world where most of his compatriots have proven unable to resist its influence on their economic and moral lives.

¹⁰¹ Cathy Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52.

Potapov's voice was a minority among those examined in this chapter, yet he shared the majority view that peasants required guidance and lacked the ability to make wise economic decisions on their own.¹⁰² Peasants should consume in ways appropriate to their socioeconomic status: either no tea at all, or inexpensive brick tea. Rather than prioritizing peasant economic rights or well-being, all seem to have been concerned rather with Russian society and the macroeconomy.

The perceived moral, economic, and political crises of late imperial Russia ultimately derived from anxieties about the breakdown of older social distinctions and by extension, cultural traditions. Elite social status had become connected with luxury goods and the consumption of colonial commodities in the eighteenth century, and nineteenth-century Russian society, like other European societies, continued to associate ownership and use of consumer goods with high social standing. Now, with consumer goods available to everyone, some members of the elite classes feared the socioeconomic leveling that accompanied mass consumption. Since peasants had become consumers, emancipated from serfdom and other limits on their economic, social, and geographic mobility, it seemed obvious to many that the economy, traditional values, and Russian society as a whole were breaking down. In Elise Wirtschafter's words, "Most official and intellectual commentators painted a dismal picture of a collapsing agrarian economy and dissolving peasant institutions, and for decades images of crisis and despair dominated discussions of prerevolutionary society."¹⁰³ As early as 1977, however, a study by James Y. Simms found no evidence that supported the existence a general agricultural crisis in the late imperial period, and instead indicated strong growth in peasant purchasing power.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Wirtschafter's much more recent study found "no evidence of pervasive

¹⁰² Ibid., 158.

¹⁰³ Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*, 116.

¹⁰⁴ Simms, "The Crisis in Russian Agriculture," 389-90.

patterns of impoverishment or disintegration. Change there clearly was; massively disorienting crisis there clearly was not.”¹⁰⁵

Similarly, both the evidence presented in chapter 4 and the authors surveyed in this chapter attest to a perceived tea crisis in the last decades of the *ancien régime*. While rates of tea importation and consumption were rising vigorously, and the purchasing power of ordinary people was also growing, tea prices remained high and tea fraud pervasive, and these factors exacerbated the sense of crisis. For some, the tea crisis, real or imagined, was emblematic of greater crises touching all aspects of life in Russia. Since the crisis was understood to impact all strata of society, universally applicable solutions were sought. Those who condemned tea made it a scapegoat for deeper anxieties, whether these were religious, moral, or economic on the surface. For many, as for Potapov, these concerns blended together, as he blamed tea for both the moral and economic degeneration of the peasantry. At the other end of the spectrum, Dmitrov and Zenzinov believed that insufficient tea consumption among the peasantry would have consequences detrimental to the whole empire’s economy. Blaming the government authorities for keeping tea prices artificially and unfairly high, and thus inaccessible to the very people whose productivity depended on it, Zenzinov connected the economic crisis with politics.

To some extent, all the authors surveyed here were uncomfortable with peasants’ new status as consumers, either because they insisted that peasants should not be consumers at all, or because they believed that as consumers, peasants required guidance in order to make choices that would benefit the economy as a whole. The latter view reveals that in the minds of some observers, peasants could freely consume commodities and yet remain in the socioeconomically inferior role of laborers and producers. If the purpose of increased peasant tea consumption was

¹⁰⁵ Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*, 116.

an increase in the productivity of their manual labor, this was an instance in which the more recent economic phenomenon of mass consumption could actually contribute to, rather than erode, the maintenance of older social and economic divisions.

CONCLUSION

Mariamna [*sic*] Adrianovna Davydovna, née Lopukhina, and her family fled Russia for Constantinople in May 1919. They eventually moved to Rome, then France; finally Mariamna emigrated to the United States in 1949 and died there in 1961. Descended from the family of Peter the Great's first wife and married to the grandson of Decembrist Vasilii L'vovich Davydov, Mariamna spent her childhood and youth at her family's various estates in Tsarskoe Selo, Poland, and Ukraine (all of which, tellingly, she referred to as "Russia"). Memories of singing samovars and cosy family tea times run through Mariamna's memoirs and watercolors, serving as a touchstone of her lost life in imperial Russia. Stopping at an inn on a long journey between estates, "We ordered a samovar, which in no time at all was steaming and singing on our table." Later, "When we went to have tea with the aunts, Lev carried Alionushka [Mariamna's husband and daughter] in his arms. She wore a hat that covered her ears, and red mittens. In the aunts' living room it was warm and cosy."¹ Samovars await half-frozen parties as they return from driving or shooting in the winter; they bubble and boil at every family gathering; they appear alongside other popular symbols of Russianness such as troikas and birch trees. In the Davydovs' domestic world, all the elements of intimate familial tea drinking that Pushkin and other nineteenth-century writers had helped to instill in Russian culture came alive. Many years later when the Russian Empire no longer existed and Mariamna wrote her memoirs from a new homeland, tea and the samovar stood out prominently as symbols of the life she had left behind.

¹ Davydoff, *On the Estate*, 72.

This dissertation has endeavored to explain how, over the three centuries of Romanov rule, succeeding generations of Russians transformed tea from an unknown foreign medicine into an inalienable element of their everyday existence. Tea came to Russia from abroad, but not as a result of capitalist domination or colonial penetration. Rather, Russians adopted the practice of drinking tea and in so doing, adapted its usage to their own tastes, needs, and preferences. Tea's foreign origin did not prevent it from becoming authentically Russian by a creative cultural processes this project has striven to illuminate.

Orthodox Christianity impacted the earliest reactions to tea in the seventeenth century by disinclining, but not entirely deterring, seventeenth-century Muscovites from trying with foreign comestibles. The Orthodox prohibition of dairy products on fast days made the tea cultures of the people groups living in between China and Russia, which centered around the preparation of tea with milk or butter, less attractive to Russians traveling in those regions than they might otherwise have been. Seventeenth-century Russians had no reason to react positively to the tea cultures they encountered in Central Eurasia, and good reasons (in their own estimation) to avoid them. Yet despite a religiously inflected penchant for cultural conservatism, and political priorities that discouraged capitulation to foreign customs, Muscovites remained open to engagement with foreign foods and drugs. This openness depended heavily upon context. Russian emissaries traveling in lands to the east were hardly looking to expand their culinary repertoire, but back at home, court elites experimented with substances freely, informed by the knowledge of the European doctors whose presence and advice they had solicited.

The distinctive economic and geopolitical conditions facing Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also exerted a formative influence on the genesis of Russian tea culture. Unlike their contemporaries in Western Europe, Russians could not depend on a reliable tea

supply because of periodic interruptions in the Kiakhta trade, some of which lasted for years at a time. The long distances and high number of middlemen made tea expensive in Russia, as indeed it was also in contemporary England and the Netherlands, but unlike its two primary trading partners, who also happened to be Europe's largest tea importers, Russia lacked a middle class and upwardly mobile consumers capable of driving growth in the domestic tea market. And in general, Russia was less well off economically than the other tea-drinking nations of Europe. There is no evidence that Russians living in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries balked at drinking tea once they understood it to be a fashionable European custom, but economic factors delayed its full domestication until the nineteenth century.

Another crucial factor, material conditions specific to the Russian domestic interior, helped chart the course of Russian tea culture by favoring the samovar over other water-heating technologies. The prevalence of enclosed stoves, combined with the relative lack of cooktop surfaces in kitchens and fireplaces in rooms where people gathered to drink tea, made the samovar the most efficient and attractive technology available for heating water and keeping it hot. This not being the case in Western Europe, the charcoal-burning hot water urn soon fell out of fashion once the mania for classical vases that had fueled its popularity waned. Although the Dutch and the English had invented the samovar and introduced it to Russia early in the eighteenth century, by the late nineteenth century European samovar use had become more or less restricted to Russia, allowing Russians to claim, rightly, that the samovar defined their own unique tea culture. The samovar became for modern Russians what the stove had been for their early modern ancestors: the center of warmth and nourishment in the home.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, critiques of westernization and modernity also made their mark on Russian tea culture. Europeans mediated the adoption of tea drinking as a

social pastime in Russia and as a result Russia received tea at a double remove from its culture of origin, China. For this reason, unlike the British, who felt keen anxiety in the nineteenth century about Chinese cultural influence tainting their national beverage, Russian anxiety about tea manifested itself in attacks on westernization, which associated tea with moral laxity, the breakdown of social distinctions, and economic waste.² In the late imperial period, professionals either critiqued or praised tea, implicating it in the industrialization, urbanization, and social change that marked that turbulent time. Yet the fact that nineteenth-century pro- and antitea writers alike connected the beverage with the health of the nation and Russia's future path indicates that it had already become too firmly ensconced in Russian life and consciousness to be eradicated.

Russian tea drinking evolved alongside new gender roles in the eighteenth century, but available source material does not permit a thorough investigation of gender dynamics in eighteenth-century Russian tea culture. However, we may safely surmise that Peter the Great, in taking noble women out of seclusion in the *terem*, stuffing them into Western dresses, and making them attend balls, also made his female courtiers into tea and coffee drinkers. Satirical attacks on tea in eighteenth-century Russia targeted male and female tea drinkers equally, and in general, unlike in contemporary Britain, Russians did not seem to understand the tea table as a site of frivolous female gossip. Instead, in the nineteenth century, women took on the role of provider and nourisher at the tea table, a role almost universally depicted as respectable. Possibly because Russia, unlike England, never developed a public male coffeehouse culture, gender divisions, while unmistakably present, did not mark Russian tea culture in the nineteenth century as strongly.

² Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 35-46.

The tsarist government promoted tea, either implicitly or explicitly, throughout the nineteenth century, but not always to its own advantage. The state took a significant step toward normalizing tea by legalizing its sale in public eating establishments in 1837. The law both acknowledged the popularity of tea, and endorsed it by linking growth in tea consumption to a potential decline in alcohol consumption. Nicholas I's government seems not to have realized that public tea drinking had the potential to help foster a public sphere and to facilitate the free exchange of ideas, which it feared. Later in the century, tea became a primary weapon in the state's official fight against drunkenness. But the authorities unintentionally undermined the stability of Russia's tea supply, and by extension, the economy as a whole, by keeping tariffs high and by failing to implement an effective strategy for combating tea smuggling and adulteration. Contemporary British histories of tea represented the beverage as dependable and secure, a reliable part of everyday life in an unstable world.³ In Russia, by contrast, the tsarist government's failure to efficiently regulate the tea trade meant that tea was more expensive and less reliable, in terms of both supply and purity, than it was in Britain. The instability that plagued the Russian tea trade down to the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 ensured that tea remained an economically and politically contested commodity. Tea may not have been so controversial in Russia had it not been for the economic and political challenges of managing an overland tea trade that spanned half the circumference of the earth, to say nothing of a vast and complex internal tea market that was prohibitively expensive to regulate. Moreover, even after the emancipation of 1861, for many, controlling the economic activity of peasants, and particularly their tea consumption habits, remained a means of combating real and perceived economic and moral crises.

³ Ibid., 1.

In general, the problems of the tea trade mirrored the problems of modernity. Russian tea culture blossomed alongside new modes of sociability that developed in response to increasingly complex networks of exchange made possible by railroad travel, expanding literacy and print culture, urbanization, and the limited provincial self-government introduced by the Great Reforms. The solution of growing tea in the borderlands of the Russian Empire represented a cultural synthesis—a literal russification of tea—a potential economic boon, and a source of imperial pride. Unfortunately for the budding Russian tea industry, geography and history, in the form of world war, revolution, and civil war, undid the Russian tea plantations in the south. Despite the perennial economic and regulatory problems faced by the tea trade, Russian tea drinking became a modern social institution eminently suited to the needs of modern Russian society.

A new “national” literature grew out of the same modern conditions that facilitated the spread of tea drinking. In the nineteenth century, I argue, literature played a key role in making tea culturally Russian. Literary works portraying tea in a positive light had not been entirely absent in the eighteenth century, but the russification of tea in literature really got off the ground with Pushkin. Among his many contributions to Russian culture, Pushkin almost single-handedly created the mythology of domestic tea drinking. Virtually every other influential fiction writer, poet, and playwright in imperial Russia elaborated on Pushkin’s basic model, and collectively they made tea Russian and secured its place in the cultural imagination. Pushkin’s works tied tea to Russia’s identity as an imperial power, and lent an ethnic dimension to tea’s Russianness. This created the opportunity for Gogol and others to give tea and the samovar a distinctively Slavic flavor, which both made Russian tea drinking seem older than it was, and served to distance it from the Western influences that had shaped its development in the eighteenth century.

The factors that shaped the development of Russian tea culture, however, only partially explain its permanence. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins argues that in some situations, the introduction of new commodities can represent “a *development* in the cultural terms of the people concerned.” Novel commodities, Sahlins observes, sometimes resonate with a culture to the extent that they facilitate a new kind of “cultural self-realization.”⁴ Something like this occurred when tea became Russian. Tea drinking would not have become permanent unless it did in fact represent a development, rather than a detriment, in Russian culture. That the process of domestication took approximately two centuries does not discount the main point, that Russians made tea their own by choice and because they liked it. In the words of Erik Homburger Erikson, the German-born American developmental psychologist who coined the term “identity crisis,” “Values do not persist unless they work, economically, psychologically, and spiritually.”⁵ To “values” we may also add “technology” and “national symbols.”

Of course, not everyone agreed that tea “worked” in Russia, and some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers perceived it as a destructive intrusion. But over time, Russian society as a whole accepted tea and represented the samovar as essentially Russian. The fact that the samovar worked so well in Russian homes as a piece of technology probably also contributed to the permanence of tea in Russian life. Once again, the basic concept of the samovar, something that remains hot for a long period of time and gradually declines in temperature, paralleled the basic premise of the traditional Russian stove and therefore needed little or no interpretation to be understood and appreciated. In the late nineteenth century, many professionals who engaged in the agrarian question believed the Russian peasantry to be inherently collectivist. The

⁴ Sahlins, “Cosmologies of Capitalism,” 415, emphasis in original.

⁵ Quoted in Netting, “Images and Ideas in Russian Peasant Art,” 50.

samovar, which could heat a large quantity of water and serve a number of tea drinkers over a long period of time, fit neatly into the idea that Russian society was (or should be) communal.

Even though the samovar functioned physically and culturally very like a miniature Russian stove, I submit that during the process of tea's adoption, Russians did not consciously understand or interpret tea as a substitute for older hot herbal beverages made in the stove such as sbiten' and medovukha. In arguing this, I agree with Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, who assert that new luxury goods like tea and coffee represented modes of consumption and self-fashioning that were entirely new. By contrast, Jordan Goodman has contended that caffeinated beverages served as substitutes for indigenous drugs in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it appears that in Muscovy, as a drug tea complemented, rather than replaced, other botanical medicines.⁶ Even though Russians first knew and used tea as a drug, tea did not occupy the same category as drugs native to Russia, and quickly transitioned into something much more influential than any medication, Russian or foreign. Around the turn of the eighteenth century, tea in both Western Europe and Russia took on cultural and social functions that were wholly novel. That this development took place during the reign of Peter the Great is entirely coincidental. Once social tea drinking had caught on, the mildly addictive nature of caffeine may partially explain its tenacity. Also, as mentioned above, the fact that tea facilitated new networks of exchange, which in turn facilitated the further spread of tea, contributed to its permanence and a belief in its necessity.

More generally, what were the "cultural logics" (Sahlins's phrase) that governed the process of tea's integration into Russia?⁷ How can we trace cultural continuity through the great

⁶ Berg and Eger, "The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates," in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Berg and Eger, 9-10; Goodman, "Excitantia," in *Consuming Habits*, ed. Lovejoy et al., 127.

⁷ Sahlins, "Cosmologies of Capitalism," 416.

economic, political, and geopolitical changes that occurred over the long reign of the Romanov dynasty? First, the factors that attracted Russians to tea remained relatively stable over this long period. Europeans normalized tea for Russia, first as a medicine and later as a social beverage. Although controversies raged about the possible negative consequences of importing European customs and culture to Russia throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the wars over Russia's cultural identity vis-à-vis Europe did not dampen Russian enthusiasm for consuming customs and comestibles imported from the West. Everyone from Peter the Great's courtiers to early-twentieth-century workers and peasants understood tea as a refined and fashionable pastime. Whether they approved of it as such depended on their ideological commitments. Russian arguments against tea also remained relatively consistent over this long period. Those who objected to tea did so on the grounds of its foreignness, its perceived opposition to traditional Russian values, and the belief that peasants' hard-earned rubles were better spent elsewhere. Others presented a more nuanced view, namely, that tea was only appropriate for certain classes of people, usually for those who owned land and, before 1861, serfs.

Finally, since neither tea nor modern tea wares are native to Russia, one of the fundamental questions that necessarily guided the research of this dissertation is, from what direction and by what routes did tea and tea ware enter Russia? Since in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Russian commerce and travel were oriented on an east-west, rather than a north-south, axis, the question had to be, Does Russian tea culture derive historically from East or West? Yet as this dissertation has made clear, immediately upon entering Russian territory, both the beverage and the specialized equipment designed to accompany it took on distinctively Russian meanings. Russian tea culture was indeed influenced from outside, and those influences have been carefully traced here, but arguably from the seventeenth century on, tea became

Russian. Russian tea culture, like Russia itself, defies the categories of East and West that have shaped both the historiography of tea and the historiography of Russia. Beginning in the nineteenth century down to the end of the imperial era, Russian thinkers, writers, politicians, and ordinary people asserted that tea was both Russian and necessary. They were right.



Figure 3.1. The vessel known as *huo-go* in China and *sin-syol-lo* in Korea, used for stew. Public domain.



Figure 3.2. A Roman *authepsa*. Public domain.



Figure 3.3. The oldest surviving English silver teapot, 1670. The inscription (not visible in this photo) explicitly identifies this as a tea vessel. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.4. A gilt urn with separate chambers with taps for dispensing coffee, tea, and chocolate, made by an unknown Dutch metalsmith around 1700. A small spirit lamp could be placed underneath to keep the contents warm. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.5. A silver coffee urn made in 1714 by the Amsterdam silversmith Otto Albrink. A small spirit lamp could be placed underneath. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.6. An early English tea urn in copper, 1750. This lampless version was heated by an interior cylindrical box iron. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.7. This German kettle, made around 1750 in Saxony, features a screen around the base designed to prevent drafts from blowing out the spirit lamp underneath. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.8. In 1694, London-based engraver Charles de Moelder was dreaming up designs for silver vases. The basic shape could be adapted to a variety of uses, including tea urns. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.

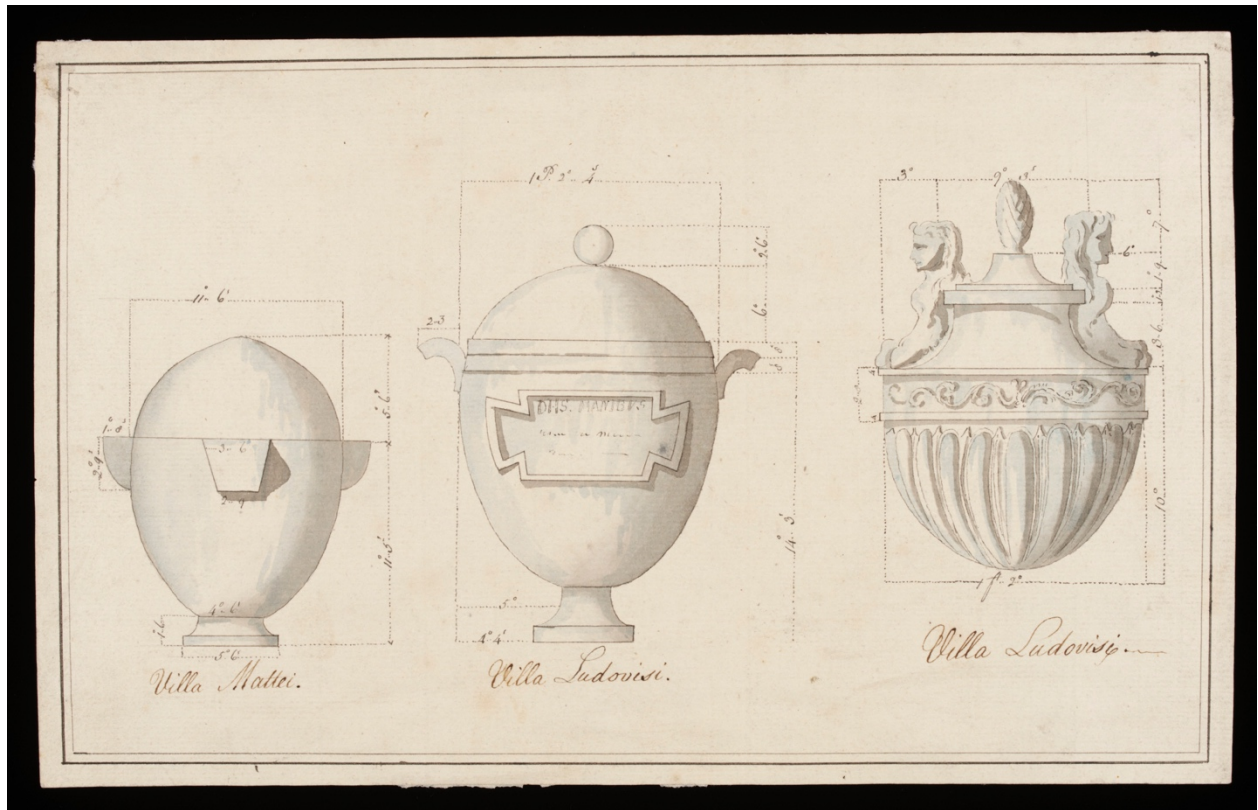


Figure 3.9. William Chambers, whose work Catherine II admired, designed classical vases. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.10. The vessel described in the 1742 Golitsyn inventory as a “white silver English heating teapot” was probably similar to this contemporary tea kettle with stand and spirit lamp made by George Wickes in 1742-43. Licensed for educational use by the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 3.11. A late eighteenth-century *sbitennik* at the Museum of Russian Samovars in Tula. Public domain.



Figure 3.12. Illustration of the interior of a London coffeehouse, c. 1700, clearly showing hot water boiling over an open fire and a number of coffee pots standing on the hearth. Public domain.



Figure 6.1. Staged genre photo of peasants seated around a samovar, c. 1875. B. Avanzo, photographer. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Prokudin-Gorskii Collection, 2001705716.



Figure 6.2. Posed photo of family gathered around samovar, made sometime after 1880. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, 89714845.

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