[Article]

Macao and Canton as seen through Russian–German eyes in 1805/6

Frieder Sondermann

Abstract

The stopover of the two Russian ships “Nadeshda” and “Neva” in Macao and Canton (towards the end of their first circumnavigation between 1803–1806) has been thoroughly described first of all by the leader of this expedition, Adam Johann von Krusenstern, and by the captain of the “Neva” Jurei Lisianskii. Yet the impact of this futile Russian effort to expand its foreign trade options in the Far East seems to have been negligible and counterproductive—therefore largely forgotten. Some other original texts and historical illustrations shed more light on this episode.

A. Pictures from China by Tilesius and Horner

I would like to point out some of the reasons for Russia’s eastern expansion and present some hitherto unknown sources related to this effort.

My starting point has been a partial edition of unpublished diaries and illustrations by the German naturalist Wilhelm Gottlieb Tilesius (1769–1857) from the city archives in Muehlhausen and the Kustodie at the university of Leipzig.2

It is always interesting to compare contemporary official – and therefore censored – edited accounts of this voyage with the unofficial–uncensored material (Hermann Ludwig von Loewenstern, Makar Ivanovich Ratmanov3 and Tilesius). The astronomer Johann Kaspar Horner (1774–1834) did not leave an extensive diary, but he was also good at drawing. He kept some illustrations from China which can now be found at the Ethnographical Museum Zuerich (VMZ).4 Georg Heinrich Langsdorff published his insights and findings in two volumes and gave his collected materials to different institutions.

1 This article is based on a presentation given at the “International Conference on Private Merchants of the China Trade 1700 to 1842” (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China in November 2013).


4 Völkerkunde Museum Zürich (VMZ) Horner Collection, Sign. : 820. Philippe Dallais has rediscovered them.
museums, but he never made it to South China, because he had left the expedition in 1805 and taken another course.

Let’s first re-examine the reasons for and the actual handling of this expedition. The trip to Japan was not part of the original proposal by Krusenstern to test the feasibility of providing the far eastern provinces of Russia by ship instead of going overland all the way through Siberia. The newly settled territories in northern Alaska needed settlers, food, health care and construction materials. Selling or bartering Alaskan pelts and furs for goods from China was the best incentive to finance this costly new type of enterprise - as Captain Cook’s crew had found out in 1779 during the third expedition and described in their account from 1785.5

Krusenstern’s priorities were

1. to train Russian crews for worldwide voyages and to help setting up naval support centers on the Siberian coast;
2. to check the potential of cheaper and speedier ocean cargo to Russian provinces plus profiting from new Chinese trade connections;
3. to chart already occupied territories + to discover new places (map-making as political territorial claim).

Added directives and objectives by the Russian American Company (RAC) were

4. to improve RAC business and secure the livelihood of colonies (Rezanov as member of the RAC board of directors, Shemelin as deputy manager);
5. to open trade relations with Japan and China.

As Krusenstern was a well-read seafarer and a very capable cartographer, he envisioned new discoveries and scientific explorations along the way, thus continuing what Captain Cook and others had done before. That is why he selected and engaged Horner as experienced cartographer and Tilesius as a proven illustrator for biological research. Tilesius effectively became the official illustrator and later published many specialized scientific articles.6 But he did not accomplish a comprehensive account - unless one takes into consideration his lectures to students at Goettingen and Leipzig university.

5 Voyage to the Pacific Ocean; undertaken by the command of his majesty, for making discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed under the direction of captains Cook, Clerke and Gore, in his majesty’s ships the Resolution and Discovery; in the years 1776, 1777, 1779, and 1780. Vol. I and II written by Captain James Cook; Published by Order of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, Vol. III by Captain James King; Second Edition. H. Hughs, London, 1785, vol. III, chap. IX, p. 437.

I am very grateful to Prof. Sterba for his excellent cooperation, since he has studied Tilesius’ work for many years.
Through his illustrations we can get visual information about the places that the two Russian ships visited. What the captain used in his official account (Krusenstern-Atlas, completed in 1814) were mostly illustrations that gave new insights into unknown places (geography), people (ethnography) and nature (life sciences).

While searching for more pictures from Japan I realized that Tilesius had also captured some unpublished views of Macao and Canton in southern China. And since he had planned to write a book about the topography of these two places (see footnote 2) he added further extensive remarks on the back of these watercolors7 which make them even more interesting as documents of a long-gone past, before well-known British artists like George Chinnery (1774–1852) who established his residence in Macau after 1825, Thomas Allom (1804–1872) or the French Auguste Borget (1808–1877) and — last but not least — their Chinese colleagues like Spoilum (Guan Zuolin, 1770–1805) and Lamqua (1801–1860).

In a private note Tilesius mentions another Chinese artist by name: “Aschunkwa” [Ashunqua] whom I have not been able to identify.8

Most of Tilesius’ Chinese landscape views were not published in the Krusenstern-Atlas (being too expensive and the subjects commonly known already), but they still deserve our attention. So let us first register the illustrations used for publication by Krusenstern: five landscapes, the orang-utang twice, a craniological study, and human physiognomies.9

These illustrations warrant a separate talk with more details about the places mentioned and the descriptions given by Tilesius (for instance “Dec. 12 . . . views taken with the Camera obscura from Bachmann’s garden” in the notebook diary). Two of his original small sketchbooks are still con-

7 These extensive explanations are not included in this paper.
8 Leipzig Kustodie, Tilesius Collection Nr. 167v: “but even the best portrait of a 16 year old female Chinese in the national dress drawn by the skilful artist Aschunkwa in Canton, was broken into 16 pieces when unpacked in 1807 in Petersburg. It was the tenth and youngest wife of the old Ponkiqwa, the oldest gentleman of the hong, who had allowed me to draw her portrait, because I had shown my pleasure at his jealousless trust towards me concerning him and his cute favorite.”
9 Published illustrations about China used in the Krusenstern-Atlas

   Ansicht der Stadt Macao in China [Tab. LXXXIX]
   Die Camoens Grotte in Macao [Tab. XC]
   Das Boot des Hoppu von Canton [Tab. XCI] [with pagoda on the right side]
   Ansicht von Bocca Tigris in China [Tab. XCII] [some Chinese boats and one European ship]
   Ansicht des Canals von Honan und Fati in China [Tab. XCVIII]
   Der Orang Utang aus Borneo [Tab. XCIV]
   Der Orang Utang nebst seinem Wärter einen Caffer [Tab. XCV]
   Schädelform der Chinesen [Tab. XCVI]*

served in the Moscow State library. As far as Chinese motives are concerned we find that Tilesius had sketches from eye contact with Chinese people in Nagasaki as well as in Macao and Canton, which record his first impressions of them.¹⁰

15v [lateral view of a Chinese with long pigtail]
17r “the first Comprador and his servant”
17v “the second comprador fr. Macao”
18r “the Ladrone pilot near Macao”
42r “Chin. Ship” [half-finished sketch of a Chinese junk in Nagasaki]
42v “a Chinese sailor in Nangasaki” [with Tilesius’ description]

But most of his much bigger and still unpublished illustrations from China are kept at the Kustodie of Leipzig university. Prof. Sterba has already sorted the remaining illustrations and put them in chronological order by checking the different locations (see footnote 6).

As it was rather unusual for Tilesius not to memorize his daily surroundings in his sketch-book, we can safely assume that some of the material from China got lost later. Tilesius mentions another diary with illustrations. This sketchbook (“Reisebuch Teil 3”) is lost or missing, so we do not know for sure what else he took notice of.¹¹

There also is a two-week gap in his diaries, as they do not mention much of his later activities in Canton (after a visit to Ponkiqua’s = Poankeequa’s estate).

According to Tilesius’ numbers on the original illustrations in the Leipzig Kustodie the picturesque assembly of Chinese sceneries may have included more than 50 different illustrations. What we can gather from the remaining drawings, is, in short, that he produced views and vistas of the voyage from Macao along the Pearl River up to Whampoa, the EIC (East India Company) factories, the Danish bankshall, some plants, and a Chinese temple.

When the Russian expedition arrived in late 1805, Macao was a trading place known to Europeans for more than 250 years, so – at least for the captain, who had already been to China 7 years ago – this port could not be as thrilling as the discovery of unknown islands in the Pacific ocean. Many other scientifically inclined people had searched this area of South China for new plants and animals before

¹⁰ See list at National Library in Moskau, fond 178. M. 10693a, about 18×10 cm. Some of the illustrations have been published in the Russian edition about Krusenstern’s voyage (Vokrug sveta s Ivanom Kruzenshternom … Ed. A.V. Kruzenshtern, O.M. Fedorova, and T.K. Shafranovskaia, St. Petersburg 2005) and in an article in the Russian journal “Bosmotschnai kollektija” 2001 Nr. 3 (6) p. 122-131 presented by Ekaterina Barysheva und Irina Fomenko [http://orient.rsl.ru/ru/magazine/content/2001/3].
¹¹ He mentioned the „Kuntsai coffin”, the interior of temples, pagodas and bonzes on the back of ill. 169v. For Panquiqua’s youngest wife see footnote 8.
the arrival of these two Russian vessels. The area had already been thoroughly charted.

Tilesius, by now officially in charge as historiographer of this voyage and using his artistic talents to document the places visited by the Nadeshda, soon made up his mind to collect material for the official publication – and to compose his private “travel account”, for which early on he had already registered the approval of longtime residents from the EIC, seemingly unaware of the recent stays and publications about this region by British, French and Dutch men. Tilesius may have figured that he could always surpass these predecessors by means of his superb artistic illustrations.

Lacking even a basic knowledge of Chinese and only being able to communicate in simple English (or Dutch) it must have been difficult for him to collect extensive firsthand information in Canton. While in Macao he got some Chinese support through the help of the Dutch supervisor Bachmann (Bagman): a tailor Ahoi and a servant or shirtmaker named Allon are mentioned in the smaller Macao diary at the Stadtarchiv Mühlhausen. Having been to Portugal in 1796/7 meant that he spoke the Portuguese language. His bigger diary, most of it compiled and reworked in later years, relied on these immediate personal memos, but even more on printed & somewhat outdated European sources.

Among other souvenirs he also had bought some Chinese drawings in Canton, but their present whereabouts are not known. While preparing his sketches for publication in the Krusenstern-Atlas (1814) Tilesius got help from a professional expert: the artist Philippson from Rome. Tilesius certainly always drew inspiration from other artists for his Nukahiwan as well as Chinese scenes and copied their settings for use in his own paintings. Compared to later artists his drawings of the Chinese buildings seem to miss some oriental flair and characteristics. The copper etchings were mostly executed in western style by pupils at Klauber’s printing shop in St. Petersburg – one of the reasons why he complained about their quality and small size.

Tilesius’ main interest was academic, so the ethnological portraits were more important than everyday life scenes. Using contemporary maps (like Heywood’s) is essential for pinpointing his standpoint, because the riverbed and landscape changed due to floods and human construction.

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12 See footnote 1, p. 5f. and 18 about the British Macartney embassy, the Dutch Titsingh delegation to Peking and longtime resident Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes’ book.
13 Likewise, Krusenstern had to sell his collection of expensive Chinese paintings to pay back loans because of high inflation. Horner gave his souvenirs to the newly established Zurich Museum.
14 See a letter from Tilesius to Horner, 15th of May, 1809, from ZBZ (=Zentralbibliothek Zürich) Ms. M. 5. 118.
16 Tilesius, Leipzig Collection Nr. 147 and 150. Horner did so too. For copies of Chinese originals see Horner collection, VMZ Nr. 4_6 and 4_7.
The sheer number of the Chinese population and their innumerable small sanpan boats must have been overwhelming, because even though they are mentioned in writing, they are never fully pictured in this German small-town citizen’s drawings.

B. Trade relations between Russia and China around 1800

Tilesius did not show much interest in trade, as he notes: “Staying in Canton is hardly bearable for one or two days for a foreigner not being a merchant or disliking trade as such”. Little wonder that his remarks about trading issues consist of personal shopping lists rather than a trader’s perspective. Nevertheless he put down some notes about the busy merchants and handicraft men in Canton.

Hermann Ludwig von Loewenstern, on the other hand, the young 4th officer on board the *Nadeshda*, always took notice of discussions between the ship’s “trade delegation” (which included Rezanov, his commissioner Shemelin and court councillor Fosse) and the crew. His diary has quite a few remarks about this topic – before and after Rezanov was rebuffed by the Japanese, which necessitated a different strategy for the RAC:

“Resanoff has yet another new plan for trade. Two ships should leave Kronstadt every year. The one should go fully loaded to Japan where a factory should be built, sail from there with Japanese goods to Peter-Paul’s Harbor, take on a load of furs in Kamtschatka, and then sail to China, where in turn a new factory loads the ship with Chinese goods and sails back to Kronstadt. The other ship sails straight to Manila, loads mainly sugar and whatever the country has to offer, also takes this load to Peter-Paul’s harbor, where it gets furs with which to obtain a cargo from the factory in China for Petersburg. Peter-Paul’s Harbor should become the emporium of the American company, and two ships from Ochotsk and two ships from Kodiak are to be used to transport the goods, and even as far as Irkutsk everything should be supplied through Peter-Paul’s Harbor. If one takes into account the costs and difficulties of establishing and building three new factories in addition to Peter-Paul’s Harbor, having six ships at sea, manning, and stocking them, and just as many and even more to be kept ready to

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17 Sondermann 2013, p. 20-21 (see note 1).
18 Mühlhausen Archives, Tilesius Collection, Nr. 660 “VI Kaufläden in Canton und Chinesische Werkstätte” p. 13-17. I am thankful to Prof. Sterba for this hint.
sail in order to prevent the newly established trade from {not} stopping, and the buying and stocking of goods in the factories, so that the ships do not unnecessarily wait around to be loaded. That would force a little monarch to go bankrupt if unsuccessful, and the typhoons would add to the miscalculations, etc.” (on 19/31 March 1805) 19

“Schemelin, the fool, is also beginning to make plans, if trade does not work out here, to sail to Manila and to use our money there.” (ibd., p. 380, around the end of October 1805 in Macao)

Christiaan Coenraad Bagmann, the agent of the Dutch factory in Macao envisioned a more realistic project in which he himself as head of the former Dutch factory could play an important part:

“His [Bachmann’s] plan for Russian trade is as follows: six Russian merchant ships have to be in commission so that two ships can arrive in Canton every year. The expenses of establishing a factory are too large. Business could, however, be carried out through agents; and he would be most willing to be the Russian agent. He is requesting of us to let him know fourteen days before we depart from Canton because he is planning to write to Amsterdam through us, and the letters are important to him.” (ibd., p. 383 on 6/18 Dec. 1805)

After the unpleasant end of the stay in Canton Loewenstern noted:

“Castles in the sky - trading between Russia, India, and China. You would have to sail with an appropriate cargo from Kronstadt to Manila, exchange the cargo there and supply Kamtschatka and Kodiak with products from there, from Kodiak sail with a cargo of furs to China and from there with tea, etc., sail back to Kronstadt. It might be even more advantageous to take tar, pitch, wood for masts, iron, hemp, sailcloth, etc., to Bengal in order to sell the cargo there, load cotton, and sail to China where you buy tea, etc., and can return straight away - or buy goods for Kodiak, from Kodiak sail a second time to China with furs and then with a cargo of tea, nankin, and silk return to Russia.

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According to the first plan - castles in the sky or fantasies of the brain - you would have to leave Russia early in the year, at least at the beginning of May. You could be in Manila in December by way of Cape Horn; two to three months would suffice to conduct enough trade. In February of the next year, you could leave Manila. At the beginning of March, you could be in Kodiak, unload there, and load furs, would still have time to sail to Kamtschatka where you would have to leave by September in order to be in Canton at the right time. You would sail from Canton in January, and in July or August, you should be back in Kronstadt. The voyage would take two and one half years.

According to the other plan, you would have to leave Russia as well early in the year. You could be in Bengal by the beginning of November and have completed business by January. You would reach Canton by March, complete business there in May, and be in Kodiak in July. You would have to leave Kodiak again in September to arrive for a second time in China in December in order to be able to reach Kronstadt as above in August. This voyage would also only require two and one-half years. One would have enough opportunities to trade.” (ibd., p. 404, on 11/24 February 1806)

Trade between Europe and China by sea was an idea with a long history. The first treaty about borders and trade between Russia and China goes back to the year 1689 when they met at Nerchinsk and regulated border as well as trade issues. In 1727 the treaty was renewed at Kiakhta with more favorable terms for Russian traders. But even then this always meant slow and burdensome transport by land.

As regards the historical development of sea-trade relations between Russia and China, we have to mention the Hungarian count Moritz Benjowski [Maurice Benyovszky] (1746–1785) who hijacked a Russian ship in his Kamchatkan exile and escaped to Macao in September 1771. There he managed to sell pelts and got some much-needed cash – because he also sold the Russian ship and payed off the crew in order to continue his voyage back to Europe on a French merchant ship.

On October 3, 1771 he wrote:

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20 According to the original manuscript at the Estonian Historical Archives (EAA) in Tartu, EAA font 1414-3-4 (pag. 171v and 172r) this date should be 11/23 Feb. 1806.

21 See Fr. Manuel Teixeira „Count Moric Benyovszky : A Hungarian Crusoe in Asia” in : Asian Studies 1966, p. 127-134. Compared to Krusenstern’s deal : The cargo from the “Neva” was sold for 178000 Spanish dollars (piastres), and the small lot from “Nadeshda” for 12000 Piaster. But the most expensive lot of sea otter pelts only got an offer of 20 piasters, so it was put back on board and shipped to Europe. Lisiansky said that 30000 sea-bear pelts were ruined by water even before arriving at Macao.
A certain Mr. Gohr, Captain in the service of the English Company came to see me and made me offer of services on the part of the Directors and a free passage to Europe provided that I would bind myself to entrust my manuscripts to the Company, and engage to enter into their service and made no communication of the discoveries I had made. This proposition so evidently disgusted me; but I was contented to answer that I was very sensible [sic] of the obliging offer made but that as I had accepted those of the French Directors it was not in my power to change my determination. Disappointed, Mr. Gohr “took his leave in an affected manner.”

But Benyovsky persistently refused to sell his self-proclaimed insider knowledge about this new trade connection between Russia, Alaska and China to these British merchants. Such offers just prove that the time must have been ripe for these new northern Pacific trade projects, and the EIC wanted to be the leader of the pack.

In 1788 Krusenstern served under captain Grigory Ivanovich Mulowsky (1757–1789) on board the Mstislaw, when the Russian captain was killed in action and could no longer pursue his planned Pacific expedition under tsarina Catherine II. This voyage could have become the best way to end the lack of Russian goods for the settlers in Alaska and it would have been worth such long trips. By that time the other international traders from the EIC and the American private enterprises were already doing it with a profit.

The (in)famous trader Grigorii Ivanovich Shelikhov (1748–1795) had also conceived the idea of such a trade triangle or square (including Manila) and made propositions in 1787.

One of the main objectives not always clearly stated was the protection of Russian commercial interests against foreign traders. As the English (EIC) and free American merchants had started to deal directly with the natives along the west coast of America, the Russians rightly considered this

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22 This could be John Gore (c. 1729–1790) who came to Macao on Cook’s third expedition in 1779 - but at a later date. Benyovsky’s claims are not always to be taken at face value. He made up or falsified some of these stories.
23 The quote is taken from Fr. Manuel Teixeira (see note 21, p. 131).
24 For contemporary news about the Mulovsky expedition see the article by Robert J. King “The Mulovsky Expedition and Catherine II’s North Pacific Empire”, in: Australian Slavonic and East European Studies, vol 21, Nos 1-2 (2007), p. 97-122 (internet version). Another German source is Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung Dec. 8, 1787, Nro. 294a col. 639, which was the correction of an article in Num. 253 from Oct. 22, 1787, col. 199f.
encroachment as a direct threat to their newly acquired territories in Alaska. It was difficult enough to subdue the hostile natives. If they were furnished with British or American guns, it would make the task of controlling them even more difficult.

Krusenstern's own plan of an ocean-going Russian mercantile marine connecting the north Pacific trade with China and the Baltic seaports was conceived while returning from his first trip to the Far East on the British ship Bombay Castle, and he first explained it to Russian politicians in 1799 right after his return to Russia. But it was ill-timed and failed to catch the attention of Czar Paul I. or Soimonov, the minister in charge of foreign trade.

Krusenstern tried again in 1802 handing in a long memorandum to the new trade minister Nikolai Rumiantsev. This time he showed off his English language abilities and basically proposed the same arguments in English.

And surprisingly Rumiantsev had an open ear for these plans. He later even actively pursued the same ideas as foreign minister - and by means of his private investments.

In 1802 Krusenstern’s proposal was approved, under the new emperor Alexander I. But by that time the RAC had already been fully established for more than two years, and Krusenstern now had to fathom its strength, goals and peculiar interests, which he did not even mention in his paper. The crucial point with all these far-fetched projects was the role of the monopolistic RAC.

Who should be in charge of such expeditions with commercial, diplomatic as well as scientific goals: The Russian government or private traders?

It was quite normal to set up a private company for international trade - like the Dutch and British as well as the other European nations had done before. But the main point was the extent of diplomatic power for this enterprise. So far the private Russian traders had always acted as conquerors in the new territories. Legislative and executive powers were not always shared with government officials during this trade offensive. The abuse of power became apparent little by little. Measles, alcohol, cruelty against - and the resulting rapid decline of - the native population were clear signs of mismanagement and lack of governmental control.

On the one hand free (capitalistic) trade like in Holland or England was unachievable in an autocratic and economically backward country like Russia. The RAC had been set up only a few years ago. Money was supplied by high officials in the government as shareholders, which would lead to a

27 The French version is mentioned by Olga Fedorova 2012, p. 382f. (see note 3).
28 See Estonian Historical Archives at Tartu, EAA font 1414-3-38.
conflict of interest. While the government lacked the means to expand trade with the new territories (war within Europe caused a high inflation rate), it still wanted to profit from the trading by this private company, which acted like a provincial government (see the controversial figure of Alexandr Andreevich Baranov in Novo-Arkhangel’sk/Sitka). The main tradable goods were pelts, certainly not ore or sophisticated machinery. In order to expand trade even within Russian territory, huge investments into transportation (ships, magazines and ports) and manpower (settlers and qualified sea-men) would be necessary. In 1802 the RAC managed to employ experienced navy officers for the trade between Ochotsk and Sitka. It lacked funds and manpower to do that by itself. The officers were “on loan”.

As a result of his own experience with the undiplomatic executive Rezanov and his fellow trade companions, Krusenstern had taken a rather critical and disapproving stance as regarded the ability of the corrupt RAC to further the well-being of subjects and regional economy in the best national interest. Besides, one of the reasons why the RAC had to expand was the un-sustainable way of extracting natural and human resources in the new territories. Optimizing profits for a select group of privileged shareholders by exploiting undernourished and sickly Russian settlers as well as Siberian or Alaskan natives (creoles) certainly was not what Krusenstern had in mind: He wanted these victims of incompetence to benefit from the new trade prospects.

So when he published what little he was allowed to say in the two volumes of his book and in the introduction to Davidov’s notes he knew that this would not gain him any friends in the mighty RAC. His stagnant professional career may have been the result of lobbying by powerful opponents with financial interests in this company. The main message from Krusenstern to the Russian government was: Beware of the RAC!

It comes as no surprise that, after the split with Rezanov in the summer of 1805, Krusenstern might have felt free to decline active support for the trade dealings by representative Fedor Ivanovich Shem-


33 [Gavril Ivanovich Dawidoff:] *Wörter-Sammlungen aus den Sprachen einiger Völker des Östlichen Asiens und der Nordwest-Küste von Amerika. – Bekannt gemacht von A.I. v. Krusenstern Capitain der Russisch Kaiserlichen Marine*. St Petersburg. Gedruckt in der Druckerey der Admiralität 1813. Published together with admiral Shishkov’s edition of Davidov’s travel to North America who had to leave out the most poignant parts about the mismanagement of the RAC.
elin (1755 – after 1818) with the Chinese authorities. At least that is the impression one gets from the complaints expressed in Shemelin’s book (1816 + 1818) about Krusenstern hindering the successful accomplishment of his own plan while dealing with the Chinese in Canton. But Krusenstern’s main concern was not supporting the RAC for single-handedly controlling trade in the North Pacific region as well as foreign relations. He had made his point by showing that Russian ships (under the flag of the navy!) could technically and successfully achieve what he had proposed. Shemelin’s account tries to justify the sale of furs at Canton against Krusenstern’s advice.34 The captain had a heavier responsibility: to set his ships free from growing Chinese diplomatic harassment. Because of his cordial relations with James Drummond, chief of the East India Company at Macao, he got the Russians out of this danger. So we have to take Shemelin’s comments with a grain of salt. Here is Krusenstern’s short comment in a letter to Horner (Ass 1 May 1820):

Did I write you that our Shemelin has written a thick book against me? It has the title *Voyage round the world* and the directors of the RAC who still cannot forgive me for uncovering some truths in my book, concerning the administration, have let this shameful book be printed at their expense. I have deemed it below my dignity to take notice of it.35

With Shemelin being just a subservient employee of the RAC it is evident that the Russian minister Rumiantsev played a pivotal role: at the peak of his career around 1810 (before his heart attack) he was a plenipotentiary politician, a shareholder of the RAC and a private sponsor of scientific expeditions. He had to coordinate deliberations between different government offices and find common grounds for concerted action between them (navy, defense, trade, foreign, budget) and the profit-oriented private enterprise.36

I am still trying to figure out what Krusenstern really thought of him. After Rumiantsev’s death in 1826 he wrote to Horner:

“I also have deeply felt the loss of Romantsoff. Towards me he was always a faithful benevolent friend. Among all the people who knew him more closely, Krug and myself were the

35 Zentralbibliothek Zürich (ZBZ) Horner Collection, Ms. M 5.
36 See the information about Rumiantsev’s disclosure of Russian trade figures in his *Tableaux du commerce de l’empire de Russie (1802-1805).* St. Petersbourg; S.E. LeComte 1808, with excerpts about trade with China in the *Politisches Journal* 1807, p. 1240.
ones into whom he put the most confidence."

But in a letter to the astronomer (12 IV. 1808) soon after the voyage had ended, he made some mysterious remarks:

“Even though the expedition not only did not fail, but also achieved things, which no one in Petersburg was allowed to suspect, and about which the fewest had even a faint knowledge, that we were lucky in Japan and in China, where it seemed premeditated by the wise precaution of those being in control that we should perish, instead we luckily and without disgrace wriggled out of it, furthermore that the Nadeshda furnished the only example in the history of seafaring so far of not losing any member of the crew (neither through mishap nor sickness) within 3 years, it still does not seem to have produced an adequate impression on the government, because no one among us was truly rewarded, we only received what had already been given to those from the Neva, and that could therefore not be refused to us without committing an injustice stinking to heaven, which after all they could not really commit. But I am getting into something that I never ever wanted to ponder again.”

What may have been the secret mission? For one thing the Russian government’s territorial claims needed accurate maps. The RAC thought of occupation in terms of profit and company secrets, but for the government claiming land had to be proven by good map-making which could be published and shown to international competitors. So in the years following his own expedition Krusenstern served as untiring adviser to Count Rumiantsev for many other scientific expeditions into the unknown northern territories. The ill-fated expedition to the Kurile islands (1810–1813) by Vasily M. Golovnin tried to clearly draw the borderline between Russian and Japanese possessions around Urup Island as buffer zone.

Rivalry between different Russian governmental departments and lack of co-ordination between ministers like Rumiantsev and Pavel Vasilievich Chicagov may have been the main reason why this trade project turned into a failure. A concerted action plan supported by the top-level people in charge may have fared better. But new trade routes to China would seriously derail RAC’s control of these dealings.

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37 ibd., (see note 35). Johann Philipp Krug (1764–1844) was a historian of Russian history and specialist for old coins living in St. Petersburg. Tilesius kept in contact with him for many years.
38 ibd., (see note 35)
In all probability, the blame on diplomatic blunders made in preparation of the trade initiative with Japan and China, has to put on the Russian government. It had selected the wrong leaders and did not thoroughly coordinate the trade initiative in the Far East. Full disclosure of all the relevant documents has never been achieved. So one may come to the conclusion that there was something to hide from public or scientific screening.

Great Britain, though officially an ally of Russia in the fight against Napoleon, had to keep in mind the fears of the EIC, which had reached a position of unrivaled economic supremacy in the Far East. If Russia would expand its position like the enterprising Americans, English merchants would have to grudgingly share profitable markets with new competitors. Even selling the surplus exported tea and textiles from China to countries bordering the Baltic Sea would become nearly impossible. So Mr. Drummond’s intervention on behalf of the Russians was not an act of necessity and it is praised by Krusenstern as the action of a gentleman.

It is also interesting to see how a single French merchant whom the Russians met at Macao tried to overcome the slump in trade with China (between 1794 and 1815). Jean Alexandre Salèles had to be content with the lack of official support by his government and his memo after Napoleon’s exile did little to put him in a better position.

Dutch trade had once dominated the Far East between Batavia, China and Japan. But it came to a halt after 1796 when the trading post in China was closed. While Mr. Bagman remained stationed at the outpost in Macao, the VOC had gone bankrupt by 1800. Like for Spain the days of Dutch glory had withered. Portugal did not want to rock the boat, and certainly was not in a position to dictate terms of trade with China. Any wrong action against China would see the colony of Macao getting cut off from the lifeline of continuous food supply.

Notwithstanding the external problems involving Chinese unease about getting squeezed by an aggressive Russia pushing the frontier along the Amur river further south, the internal problems in Russia far surpassed mere diplomatic or trade frictions and European wars with the neighboring countries (Napoleon).

40 There certainly must be more unpublished archival documents showing the dealings between the parties involved, as Konstantin S. Jachontov and Hartmut Walravens have pointed out: Katalog mandjurischer Handschriften und Blockdrucke in den Sammlungen der Bibliothek der Orientalischen Fakultät der Sankt-Petersburger Universität. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2001. They mention several documents about official Russian-Chinese contacts between 1804-1808, i.e. a letter from captain J.A. Krusenstern to the custom officials of Kuangtung, dated Dec. 7, 1806.

41 He is mentioned by Tilesius and Loewenstern (see footnote 1, p. 12).

The Chinese government had not been properly informed by the Russians about the purpose of the two different delegations - a failure of the Russian ministries rather than the archimandrite Sophronius (Gribovsky), residing in Peking between 1794-1807. And Krusenstern did not know that Count Jurii Golovkin’s mission to China (by land) had already utterly failed, when he mentioned its arrival to the Chinese.

Any Russian interested in foreign trade knew that tea (and some other goods like silk) for more than a hundred years had been imported from China by way of Kiachta - a time-consuming and costly endeavour, which had been interrupted ever so often. The history of state-controlled trade between China and Russia had been full of ups and downs and followed a simple pattern of demand and supply.43

Quite a few points had to be taken into consideration:

Chinese demand was difficult to fathom - the delivery of a sustainable supply of pelts from the Russian territories in northern America was becoming more difficult - pacification and protection of native hunters in Alaska needed support by the government - increased presence of Russian naval forces for the protection of its ships and trading posts in the Pacific against American, Spanish and British competitors became a necessity - cooperation with future trading partner Japan and shifting trade routes with China was desirable, but all these objectives were not achieved.

Krusenstern had received specific questions by the Economic councillor von Wuerst44 which he tried to answer in his book, referring to remarks he had received from English merchants. One of his informants was Peter Dobell (1772-1852) who had silently assisted Krusenstern when things got messed up prior to the Russians’ departure from Canton, as John Dundas Cochrane reported in 1824.45 In 1812 (just after Krusenstern had published the written account of his voyage) Dobell tried to get trade between Macao/Canton and Kamchatka re-started.46 He later became a respected advisor to the Russian government and proposed the Spanish colony of the Philippines as a new cornerstone in the setup of trading posts for the Siberian half of Russia.

Another even more ambitious project was envisioned by Georg Anton Schaeffer (1779–1836), look-
ing for a prefiguration of the TPP by including Hawai‘i in the international exchange of goods in the Pacific. Since he was employed by the RAC, this trading company had to pay heavily for Schaeffer’s diplomatic and semi-militaristic actions. In December 1816 Otto von Kotzebue did not want to get the Rurik involved in these hazardous affairs. Just like his mentor Krusenstern he was a proud member of the Russian navy and did not want to support the private enterprise of the RAC.

Yet another adventurous merchant by the name of Peter Gordon sailed all the way from Calcutta / India to Kamchatka in a small vessel, only to find out in 1818 how difficult it was to get around the trade restrictions set up by the RAC. But eventually the RAC crumbled under this kind of mismanagement. Its core business of fur trade was not profitable enough to enjoy steady growth. Ironically it had to rely on English and American ships for logistical purposes.

Langsdorff had played with the idea of accepting an offer to become civil governor of Kamchatka, as he had proposed some reforms to change the fate of the natives there. Public criticism and a bad press for the RAC was also voiced in a review of Langsdorff’s book:

This reviewer is most ardently convinced that any measure taken by the Russian government against the company is and can be nothing but illusory. If the country does not want to sully its hands with more blood, the government must abolish the compagney and get all those involved in this murderous business to the place where they belong: in the cart, to the gallows, and on the wheel. Any other investment of the compagney’s assets without much question will bring bigger cash advantages to the empire. On top of that there is no nation which bears such unspeakable costs from its manner of trade as the Russian since Pjoitr the Great, who expected the most immense wonders from foreign trade.

In 1813 Horner talked to a journalist about his evaluation of the Rezanov delegation to Japan and put the blame for the failure squarely on the ambassador’s incompetence. When the journalist published this private and confidential assessment in a French journal, Horner hastily denied ever allowing the publication, but later on (in 1818) he gave semi-private lectures about this subject to Swiss citizens. He felt that the whole setup of the RAC operations in Alaska had wrong priorities, and

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47 For a very recent dubious publication about Schaffer, see the internet ads from Lee B. Croft GEORGE ANTON SCHAEFFER: Arm Wrestling Kamehameha. 2013.
48 See the contemporary article in The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany Vol. VI, October 1818, p. 355-359.
50 For details see Frieder Sondermann “Joh. Casp. Horner über Japan (I) (1818)” In: Tohoku Gakuin Daigaku
schooling the young natives should play second fiddle to their training and need for hunting skills in Alaska.

A critical or downright scornful evaluation of the Chinese mission headed by Golovkin had already been published by Julius Klaproth in 1809, who had been a member of this Russian delegation during the first stage. He repeated his slightly altered assessment in the German journal *Die Zeiten* in the summer of 1812. At the end of his text Klaproth proposed a Russian attack in Northeastern China through which the Mandshu government could be forced to accept new trading conditions due to the added pressure from a South China rebellion.51

Klaproth did not hesitate to repeat his updated judgement of the delegation more than 15 years later in his article for the well-established *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*.52 By that time the Chinese emperor was under pressure indeed, not only from internal strife but also from the EIC with its economic leverage leading to the “opium wars”.

Outlook

Who can be blamed for the failure of the Russian–Chinese trade negotiations in Macao and Canton? These encounters were not official diplomatic exchanges but regular trading procedures, since neither Shemelin nor Krusenstern were accredited as official Russian negotiators.

The above-mentioned Klaproth was a man of great vision. Time and again he published articles about Russia’s relations with China.53 One of these articles about the history and possible future development of trade between Russia and China merits our special attention, because it was published in France, Germany and England.54

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51 See Klaproth “Einige Betrachtungen über Rußlands Tendenz und Politik”, in: *Die Zeiten* 1812, July, p. 90-102. Excerpts from his earlier pamphlet appeared the following month in issue 8, August, p. 256-272 and issue 9, September, p. 343-357, here p. 354 about the attack. Krusenstern had also mentioned the all-too-apparent rebellion in the South, but he did not openly fantasize about a military attack in the north.

52 See his articles there on December 7, 1825, Nro. 292, S. 1165f. and the following two issues, p. 1170f. and 1174f.

53 For further references see Hartmut Walravens *Julius Klaproth (1783-1835) - Leben und Werk* Wiesbaden 1999, for instance on p. 109 (Nr. 112) in the *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages* (NVA), or on p. 116 (Nr.126), in the *Moskovskij Telegraf* 1826, or on p. 124 (Nr 158d) in the *Neue allgemeine geographische Ephemeriden* 1825, on p. 124 and ibd. (Nr.160) again in the French NVA.

54 He published it first of all in French as „Commerce de la Russe avec la Chine, écrit en 1823“ in the *Nouvelles annales des Voyages* (NAV) 1828, 2,1 (=série 2, tome X) (coll. 40), p. 273-298 ; then almost simultaneously a shortened German translation appeared in Cotta’s *Das Ausland. Ein Tagblatt* 1828, 2. Hefi, Nr. 247-249 from September 3, 4 to 5, p. 985ff, 991f. and 994ff), so it may have been revised by the journal’s members. Only a few months later it was reprinted in full length in the *Neue allgemeine geographische und statistische Ephemeriden*
(316) I have reason to think, that one special object of Count Goloskin’s (Golovkin) mission was to persuade the Chinese to allow Russian vessels to trade to Canton, or some other southern port; and I see no reasonable motives which could have existed for refusing this request. With a little circumspection and address, it might have been attained; particularly at a period when the Mandshous, vexed by various insurrections in China, would not have dared, by rejecting a serious and firm demand from Russia, to offend that Power, and thereby draw down upon themselves a new enemy, whom already they secretly feared.

But, had the Russian embassy been composed and directed otherwise than as it was, the object of it would not have been attained; since, at the very time when negotiations were going on to obtain from China the liberty of trading to Canton, and without any previous warning, two Russian vessels entered that port, in the face of all treaties. It might have been foreseen, that the first step publicly taken by Russia to trade to China, could not be viewed with indifference by England and America, and that they could neglect no means of rendering it abortive. In this, Captain Krusenstern assisted by his inconsiderate entry to Canton; and it is well known that, if he had remained two days longer in the Tigris, the order dispatched from Pekin to make him a prisoner, with all his men, would have arrived in time to be put in force. As the English, who, without saying any thing about it, foresaw all this, attached no moment to things being carried to such extremities, they advised the captain to leave Canton—their only end, which was to exclude the Russians from that port, having been fully attained.

(317) [...]

(318) [...]

The trade by sea with China would give Russia the advantage of being able to sell in the south of Europe, at a good profit, (that is, at a better profit than the Danes and the French, who are obliged to pay for them in money,) the merchandize of China, and especially tea, obtained in exchange for American furs. That would cause a considerable annual influx of capital to Russia, and no other European nation would be able to compete with her in this commerce.

But, in consequence of the failure at Canton, some other expedient must be found. [...]

The English version was published in The Oriental Herald, and Journal of General Literature vol. 20, No. 62. February 1829, p. 311-321. It must have caused quite a sensation in Europe. In the same journal No. 63 (March 1829) the discussion about the Russian trading position from Kiachta was continued in the article “The trade with China”, starting on p. 381, and quoting from a testimonial by Mr. Tate in the House of Commons in 1821 (p. 388-391).
It only remains to find a place not too distant from China, and otherwise sufficiently commodious. To think of Manilla would be a mistake; for in every European possession in Asia, it would not only be impossible to act freely, but the rights of custom would be strictly enforced. It would therefore be much better to establish a colony in some island of the Indian Ocean, and make it an entrepôt for the trade with China.

[his suggestion: the Japanese Bonin-sima, or Monin-sima]

Without infringing any rights, Russia might occupy them, and found a colony upon them, that might become the principal entrepôt of the trade between Kamtschatka and China.

[a second entrepôt: Okinawa or the great Loo Koo, with two ports at Napa-Kiang and Koui]

If it were desirable to establish a factory still nearer China, one of the isles of the great Patchoung-chan might be selected, which is but 6º of latitude to the east, and lies near Formosa. Perhaps means might be found of placing an entrepôt on the eastern coast of Formosa, whence an almost direct communication might be opened with China, since the western part of the island belongs to her. […]

This commerce might very soon become very flourishing and profitable, but it ought at first to be set on foot, or at least firmly established, by the Government itself. A company of merchants would be liable, out of an excessive thirst of gain, to stifle it in its infancy; and would not, moreover, in Russia possess those means of establishing a colony which are at the disposal of the Government.

The heads and officers of marine to be sent thither, should be distinguished by their moral qualities, their firmness, their courage, their moderation, their integrity, and their benevolence towards the people with whom they might come in contact, and should be instructed to confine their soldiers in the forts, to prevent them from committing disorders.

The near vicinity, also, of Bonin-sima to Japan, might probably afford an opportunity for forming relations of amity and commerce with that empire, an object in which Resanov failed; unless that the blameable conduct to which that envoy was irritated by the spirit of revenge, after his recall from Japan, has rendered any reconciliation between the two countries for a long time impossible.

[Klaproth’s plan for trading objects: opium from Karahissar and watches made from silver]
with Chinese dials – very important: an interpreter of the Chinese language, chosen from the bureaux of the empire at St. Petersburgh, and Chinese domestics from Batavia or Manilla, who might serve as ordinary interpreters.]

This bellicose scientist was sitting in his Parisian study and proposing trigger-happy military action. But the military officer Krusenstern knew better what war was all about. So he tried to establish fair trade with China by peaceful means.

Loewenstern had judged the RAC’s dreams in 1805 “castles in the sky”. He would have put the same label on what Klaproth propagated more than twenty years afterwards. He would also have denied blaming Krusenstern for the failure. Economic, territorial or diplomatic ties with the East Asian neighbors remained secondary for a long time to come.

Acknowledgement:

I am grateful to the libraries for allowing me to use their materials.

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55 John Crawfurd (1783–1868) as a British writer was a lobbyist for free trade. In March 1830 he tried to belittle Klaproth in a public hearing. See Reports from the Select Committee of the House of Commons vol. 1, 1830 March, p. 470f. : “But I should not think that M. Klaproth’s opinion was worth a farthing. I should think that a recluse scholar, residing in Paris, could be no judge of the merits or demerits of a great political question, touching the interests of this country.”
„National portraits of the Kaffir slaves in the service of the Dutch factory
A. Vincent (8) from Matschau in Mosambique
B. Joachim (14) from Maku in Mosambique
C. Joseph (16) from Gambana in Mosambique
D. Emanuel (20) from Goa in Africa
E. a Kaffir by the name of Uso (24) in the service of M. Metcalfe
F. a half-caste, fathered by a Malay and a Chinese mother on Java“ (Kustodie Leipzig, Tilesius collection 151)
View from the EIC guest house overlooking the inner harbor of Macao  

(VMZ 820_4_05)

Overlooking the guesthouse and the inner harbor  

(Kustodie Leipzig TIL 145)
“The first comprador and his servant” (Russian State Library, Moscow)
"The ladrone pilot at Macao"
Chinese chop about water bucket delivery (left), and name chops from Chinese merchants (Loewenstern’s diary, EAA font 1414-3-4, Nr. 18)
Northern Macao, Chinese village facing Ilha Verde (7)
View of Macao from the north