Hospitality and the Negotiation of Difference: The Role of Food and Drink in the Russian Discovery of Japan

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When Russians and Japanese first met, towards the end of the seventeenth century, as a consequence of Russian explorations in eastern Siberia and Kamchatka, they knew virtually nothing about each other's cultures. The accounts left by the Jesuit missionaries who had been active in Japan in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had little circulation in Russia and in any case were already out of date by the time of the first Russo-Japanese encounters. Eighteenth-century Russians became at least to some extent familiar with the writings of the scholars Engelbert Kaempfer and Carl Thunberg, who had visited Japan in the service of the Dutch in 1690–2 and 1775 respectively,[1] and these were slowly augmented as time went on by more current first-hand accounts, but, even though knowledge among specialists gradually increased, the general Russian view of Japan until at least the end of the nineteenth century remained one of a country that was strange, exotic and perhaps sinister. The role played by food and drink in the Russian discovery of Japan is one focus through which the ebb and flow of this feeling of difference can be conveniently monitored in the writings of Russians themselves.

Lévi-Strauss placed the preparation of food at the centre of his 'science of mythology', seeing the contrast between the 'raw' and the 'cooked' as the prime articulation of the difference between nature and culture.[2] Later social scientists have argued for a close link between food and identity formation in a wide range of contexts.[3] Thus an exploration of attitudes to food in the historical development of relations between culturally disparate nations is especially productive. Certain foods—bread and wine in the Christian tradition, for example—may in one culture combine the material and the spiritual in ways quite unknown in another. The cultural symbolism of food production, preparation and consumption may develop in quite different directions depending on historical, social, political or religious contexts.[4] The Russian discovery of Japanese food culture in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries strikingly illustrates the various points of conflict and convergence in two distinct cultural systems.

A version of this paper has previously appeared in *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, vol. 21, nos. 1–2, pp. 25–40.

1 Kaempfer's *History of Japan* first appeared, in English translation, in 1727. Thunberg's description of his world travels between 1770 and 1779, which included his account of Japan, was first published in Swedish in 1788–93. Both works were translated into other west European languages not long after their original publication.

2 Lévi-Strauss 1970.

3 Scholliers 2001, pp. 7–10.

4 Glants and Toomre 1997, pp. xi-xii.

At the same time Russian attitudes to Japanese food were by no means either uniform or static. The major themes that emerge from the Russian narratives in relation to food and hospitality can be broadly designated economic, political, cultural and aesthetic. Although these categories overlap to a considerable extent, and they are illustrated to varying degrees in the material available, each of them can be seen as central to a distinct stage in the Russian discovery of Japan from a historical point of view. In addition, it will become clear that they are each broadly characterised by a particular phase in the development of the rhetoric or discursive structure of Russian writing about Japan. The present essay thus has anthropological, historical and literary-critical dimensions.

The first Russo-Japanese encounters were with shipwrecked sailors, one of whom, discovered by Russian explorers in Kamchatka, the Osaka merchant Denbei, was conveyed to Moscow in 1702 and ordered to learn Russian so that he could later teach Japanese in a school set up specially for this purpose in St Petersburg. The first Russians set foot on Japanese soil in 1739, and by the time of the first official embassy to Japan led by Adam Laxman in 1792 Russians were already familiar with all of the Kurile Islands down to Ezo (Hokkaido), where Japanese commercial involvement was also beginning to expand. Laxman was received by Japanese officials in Matsumae and, although his overtures on trade were rejected, he was issued with a permit entitling a Russian ship to enter the port of Nagasaki in order to discuss commercial relations further. The second embassy, under the leadership of Nikolai Rezanov, which attempted to make use of this permit in 1804–5, was rebuffed, but Russian contacts nevertheless gradually increased through the first half of the nineteenth century until Admiral Evfimii Putiatin, in the wake of the American Commodore Matthew Perry, was able to secure a treaty of peace and friendship in 1855. From the 1850s Russian engagement with Japan expanded rapidly on parallel lines to that of other European countries and the United States. A consulate was established at Hakodate in 1858; Russian fleets wintered in Japanese ports; a telegraph link between Vladivostok and Nagasaki was laid in 1871; construction of an orthodox cathedral in Tokyo began in 1884. Business relations and tourism gradually evolved up to the collapse of the tsarist government in 1917, with the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 representing only a relatively brief hiatus in the development of 'normalised' relations.[5]

The material for this article is drawn primarily from memoirs written by Russians who visited Japan between Adam Laxman's embassy at the end of the eighteenth century and the eve of the First World War, and from reports of Russo-Japanese contacts in the St Petersburg press published during the period 1862–74.[6] Chronologically these accounts cover the beginnings of Russian acquaintance with Japan and the development of closer knowledge based on increasingly complex commercial and cultural ties. The authors are initially naval officers on voyages of exploration or discovery, and the early narratives include Laxman's official report on his embassy of 1792,[7] and the account left by Ivan Krusenstern, the captain of the ship which took Nikolai Rezanov's embassy to Nagasaki

5 Wells 2004a; Lensen 1959; Fainberg 1960.

6 Bannai 2005.

7 Laxman 1961.

in 1804.[8] Another valuable source is the memoir of Vasilii Golovnin, who in 1811, while attempting to survey the southern Kurile Islands, was taken captive by the Japanese together with two of his fellow officers and four sailors, and held prisoner on Ezo for over two years.[9] A fourth important early narrative is the Japanese section of the novelist Ivan Goncharov's popular travelogue, *Fregat Pallada* (The Frigate Pallada), which describes the first phase of Putiatin's Japanese expedition of 1853.[10] Later accounts have been left by a wider range of observers, who were increasingly able to gain experience of a broader section of Japanese society, and who often travelled on their own behalf rather than as representatives of the Russian government. Memoirists include doctors,[11] scientists[12] and professional writers.[13] One later perspective comes from a prisoner of war captured at the battle between Russian and Japanese naval forces at Tsushima in 1905,[14] while others are travel accounts illustrating the rise of group tourism in the early years of the twentieth century.[15] The theme of food appears across this range of sources.

The Economic and Political Dimensions of Food

The earliest phase of Russo-Japanese contact in the eighteenth century was dominated by economic concerns, and specifically by the need to provision Russian ships and colonial outposts as Russian interests expanded eastwards across Siberia and into Alaska and California. Russian attention had perhaps first been drawn to Japan by the claims of Marco Polo and other early travellers that it contained limitless quantities of gold and silver.[16] In practice, however, early Russian exploitation of the North Pacific was based almost entirely on fur trapped in Russian America and sold into European Russia or the lucrative Chinese market.[17] Kamchatka and the Kurile Islands were included in the fur trappers' sphere of operations and it was here that Russians first encountered Japanese. From an early stage Japan was recognised as a convenient potential source of foodstuffs and other goods for the supply of Russian America and the eastern reaches of the expanding Russian continental empire.[18] In point of fact Russians never actually succeeded in exploiting Japan as a source of basic foodstuffs: indeed much later, Russia was specifically prohibited by the commercial treaty of 1858 from exporting grain from Japan for its Siberian colonies.[19] Nevertheless, economic considerations of this kind, and specifically those relating to food, certainly informed all early Russian approaches to Japan, and are

8 Krusenstern 1813, pp. 251–87.
9 Golovnin 1973.
10 Goncharov 1959.
11 Zarubin 1881.
12 Krasnov 1895.
13 Garin-Mikhailovskii 1958.
14 Semenov 1910.
15 Kobiakova 1914; Grakova 1914.
16 Polo 1958, p. 244.
17 Gibson 1976, pp. 3–37.
18 Lensen 1959, p. 62; Fainberg 1960, p. 95; Kornicki 2001, pp. 19–20.
19 Lensen 1959, p. 487.

reflected in the long lists of agricultural and other plants, livestock, birds, fish and marine animals which abound in, for example, the account of Ezo left by Laxman, or Golovnin's descriptions of the southern Kurile Islands.

When Russian explorers and embassies began to visit Japan itself, and to enter into formal contact with organs of the Japanese government, rather than simply making chance encounters with Japanese sailors on the islands to Japan's north, questions relating to food began to assume a more clearly political aspect. After the expulsion of the Spanish and the Portuguese in the 1630s, the Japanese government had forbidden Japan to all Europeans apart from the Dutch, who were allowed limited access through the single port of Nagasaki. This 'seclusion policy', however, was enforced with varying severity at different times and places as foreign ships did in fact approach Japanese shores. On these few early occasions, food and drink, through the reprovisioning of Russian vessels, provided a material justification for contact. William Walton, for example, the commander of a Russian ship attached to the Second Bering Expedition of 1739, entrusted with establishing the precise location of Japan, sent a party on shore in the province of Awa to obtain fresh water, and was able to use this occasion to establish contact. The Russians were received politely by a group of Japanese and were later able cautiously to return their hospitality on board ship.[20] Many years later, in 1811, when Vasilii Golovnin wished to assure the Japanese he encountered on the islands of Iturup (Etorofu) and later Kunashir (Kunashiri) that his intentions were not hostile, he did not mention the survey he was undertaking, but again relied on the unanswerable claim that the main reason for his presence was the search for a suitable harbour in which to take on water and other supplies. At Kunashir, Golovnin sent on shore a barrel divided into two sections—one containing a glass of water, some firewood and a few grains of rice to indicate his needs, the other coins and other objects to confirm his intention to pay. In this way he was able to use a shared understanding of need in order to establish contact without the troublesome and potentially ambiguous necessity of resorting to the framework of language.[21]

Once some sort of rapport had been established, the exchange of hospitality—as the natural lubricant of social and political discourse in both Russian and Japanese cultures—became the normal background against which negotiations between Japanese officials and Russian explorers or envoys took place. The traditional Russian belief that a personal relationship mediated by food and drink was bound to continue undoubtedly contributed to the urgency with which commensality was established.[22] The scale of Russian hospitality was necessarily small at first and restricted to a relatively low level of Japanese official. In the presence of higher authority, indeed, even junior Japanese officials were sometimes reluctant to be seen consorting with the foreigners. Thus Laxman, who during the winter of 1792 spent several months in quite close association with the Matsumae domain officials residing at the outpost of Nemuro, notes that once officials arrived from the Edo *bakufu*, the local Matsumae representatives no longer found it appropriate to visit the Russians.[23] When in the 1850s, Admiral Putiatin entertained Japanese on board the

20 Ibid., pp. 53–54; Waxell 1952, pp. 78–79.

21 Golovnin 1973, pp. 49–50.

22 See Smith and Christian 1984, pp. 319–20.

23 Laxman 1961, p. 123.

Pallada, it was principally local officials and interpreters who appeared.

While tea, unsurprisingly, was commonly offered by both sides, Russians and Japanese alike seem to have gone some way towards accommodating each other's tastes. Goncharov notes that the Japanese on the *Pallada* were served largely sweet things for which he says they had a particular liking.[24] Laxman was offered wheat flour if his men should object to a diet of rice,[25] and even Golovnin during his long captivity in Japan was offered some approximations of Russian fare prepared by Japanese cooks.[26] When in 1853 Putiatin and his party made a formal visit to the Japanese on land, they were offered, as well as Japanese refreshments, a European-style luncheon including several kinds of wine, presumably obtained from the Dutch.[27] As diplomatic relations grew more formalised and complex in following decades, so the exchange of culinary compliments also became more elaborate.[28] During a visit to Nagasaki by the Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich (a younger son of Tsar Alexander II) in 1873, for example, the Russians were entertained by the local governor to a European-style dinner (albeit an eccentric one to the Russian mind, being characterised by large numbers of interchangeable dishes). The following day the Russians returned this hospitality by inviting the governor and other Japanese dignitaries to a Japanese-style banquet in a Nagasaki restaurant.[29]

Food, of course, was power from a purely pragmatic point of view, since the early Russian visitors were almost entirely dependent when in Japan on the generosity of their hosts for provisions and fresh water. The Japanese were often able to exploit this weakness to their own advantage. Central to this strategy was the consistent refusal to accept any form of payment for the supplies they provided, thereby immediately creating a sense of obligation among the Russians. Provisions were often delivered explicitly as gifts,[30] and particular concessions were made from time to time by the Japanese as a sign of favour which was simultaneously an expression of power. Laxman's crew, for example, was presented with a barrel of *sake* by the mayor of Hakodate to commemorate their safe arrival there in 1793.[31] Laxman himself was later presented with the lavish gift of one hundred sacks of rice following his audience at Matsumae with envoys from the shogunal government.[32] The food regime given to Golovnin and his companions in captivity varied significantly (as did other aspects of their treatment) depending on the precise state of the negotiations concerning their release at any given time.[33] In the 1850s Putiatin's party placed regular orders for food and other items with the Japanese authorities in Nagasaki, but from Goncharov's account it seems that the Japanese retained a certain degree of con-

24 Goncharov 1959, p. 20.

25 Laxman 1961, p. 130.

26 Golovnin 1973, pp. 206–207.

27 Goncharov 1959, p. 163.

28 One factor at play here was the need, particularly on the Japanese side, to integrate Japan into the community of modern nations through a shared language of diplomatic hospitality (see Steele 2003).

29 Bannai 2005, p. 87.

30 Krusenstern 1813, pp. 266, 285–86; Goncharov 1959, pp. 148, 168–69.

31 Laxman 1961, p. 135.

32 Ibid., p. 140.

33 Golovnin 1973, pp. 206, 236.

trol in the matter of supply by never bringing quite precisely what was asked for.[34]

On different occasions the Japanese showed many other signs of attentiveness to the foreigners in respect of food which can also be interpreted as displays of power. For example, when in 1793 Laxman travelled overland from Hakodate to Matsumae to meet envoys sent from Edo, the Japanese provided official food-tasters who ate from every dish offered to the Russians on their journey in order to allay any possible fears of poisoning.[35] When in 1812 the Japanese chose to allow Golovnin and his fellow captives to walk through the streets of Matsumae for exercise, the prisoners were closely guarded as Japanese regulations demanded, but strict rules were waived as a mark of favour when it came to questions of food and drink. As it was forbidden for the Japanese to receive foreigners inside their houses, the Russians were often entertained by local inhabitants on their verandahs. An official fiction was maintained that they were forced to rest wherever they could, but they generally found that lavish refreshments had been prepared for them in advance.[36]

Japanese food politics with regard to the early Russian visitors was by no means universally benign, however. Occasionally the Japanese chose to use their control of the food supply, or indeed the mechanisms of hospitality itself, to obstruct or deceive. When in the 1790s the local Japanese authorities in northern Ezo wished to discourage Laxman from his intention to proceed to Matsumae, the unavailability of polished rice for his journey to Matsumae was one reason advanced in order to detain him.[37] In 1811 it was during a banquet in the fortress on the island of Kunashir, to which they had been invited by the local commandant, that Golovnin and his companions were taken prisoner.[38] In the 1850s Putiatin was pressed to stay in Nagasaki to await the response to his embassy from Edo with the suggestion that if he wished to leave no supplies would be made available for his journey.[39] Even after the signing of the treaties with the western powers in the 1850s, Japanese officials could see the giving and receiving of hospitality by foreigners as a possibly sinister political act: when in 1859 the Russian traveller Sergei Maksimov tried to invite a Japanese acquaintance back to his ship in Hakodate harbour to treat him to sweets and champagne, the unfortunate man was refused leave to go by the Japanese customs officers and even fined for having had the temerity to ask for permission.[40]

Cultural and Aesthetic Dimensions

The economic and political aspects of food in the Russian discovery of Japan were clearly aligned to practical considerations of relative advantage. The cultural and aesthetic aspects, by contrast, revolved around primarily psychological concerns. From a Russian point of view there were several aspects of Japanese food culture which made it seem particularly alien. First of all was the absence of the staple bread, without which, as

34 Goncharov 1959, p. 148.
35 Laxman 1961, p. 137.
36 Golovnin 1973, pp. 308–309.
37 Laxman 1961, p. 131.
38 Golovnin 1973, pp. 67–75.
39 Goncharov 1959, p. 182.
40 Maksimov 1871, pp. 402–403.

numerous Russian proverbs attest, a meal was scarcely thought to be a meal at all.[41] The Japanese dietary equivalent, rice, appears to have been relatively little eaten in Russia, the preferred grains being rye and later wheat: rice does not appear, for example, in the official market price lists maintained by the St Petersburg city police in the eighteenth century.[42] Secondly, the Japanese consumption of fish and vegetables to the almost total exclusion of meat was associated with the restrictions placed on Orthodox Christians by the practice of fasting.[43] Japanese food was thus conceptualised on one level as inherently penitential rather than everyday. Thirdly, food was widely seen as a measure of prosperity and ascribed an economic value in itself. In particular, there is evidence that Russian peasants were closely aware of the relationship, in their own dietary environment, between what they ate and the amount of work this would enable them to accomplish.[44] In the Japanese context the Russians' ability to interpret the economic significance of particular foods in this way was disrupted. While none of these considerations may have been foremost in the minds of the educated Russians who were the authors of the extant accounts of early Russo-Japanese contact, it is still likely that they continued to influence them at a deeper psychological level.

This said, the earliest Russian writers on Japan, Laxman, Krusenstern and Golovnin, make virtually no evaluative comments about Japanese food. They may note differences between Japanese and European culinary traditions—that the Japanese use rice 'instead of' bread, for example, or that the Japanese drinks are green tea without sugar, and *sake*—but their descriptions are emotionally neutral. This is perhaps not surprising given the conventions within which these early narratives were written: they belong to an established genre of travel writing by military and naval officers, which was read by contemporaries more for its plain accounts of everyday life in remote parts of the world than for either its sensationalism or its social analysis.[45] Although they are by no means free of a subtext promoting Russian superiority,[46] this is focussed in the political and economic arena, not notably in the social or cultural sphere. From the 1850s, however, the rhetoric of the Russian texts begins to change. As the economic and political ambitions of the early envoys come to be fulfilled with the signing of the commercial treaties, and as Russians come to a closer direct understanding of Japan, so the Russian writers begin to focus more particularly on questions of cultural difference. This trend was reinforced by developments in the genre of travel writing in early nineteenth-century Russia, as elsewhere, away from a supposedly objective narrative viewpoint towards a narrative mode which privileged the subjectivity of the author. Thus, while travel writing continues to dwell on what is different from Russia or Europe in Japan, there is a new, reflexive interest in some writers in the effect of travel on the travellers themselves.[47]

In some respects Goncharov's account of Putiatin's expedition in 1853–5 represents a transitional stage in this development. The devastating satire which characterises

41 Smith & Christian 1984, p. 255.

42 Munro 1997, pp. 35, 38.

43 Bannai 2005, p. 13.

44 Smith & Christian 1984, p. 327.

45 Schönle 2000, pp. 6–7.

46 Wells 2004b.

47 Blanton 2002, p. 19.

his work is directed at Russians and Japanese alike. If he is amused to note that the Japanese who were entertained on the *Pallada* tucked pieces of bread and biscuits into their sleeves to eat later or to give to their friends, he is also quick to reflect that Russian ladies of an earlier age similarly filled their reticules with sweets at other people's houses.[48] If he is slightly surprised to be given sugared carrot at a Japanese reception, he also takes delight in describing the disappointment of Russian sailors drinking down a glass of water with which they had been presented, believing it to be vodka.[49] At the same time, Goncharov's insistence that Japan does not quite belong to the real world—it is a 'magical kingdom', 'a scene from some fantastic ballet or opera'—and that the Japanese are 'children' who do not know how to make proper use of their own country,[50] helped to create a tradition in Russian discourse on Japan which encouraged the assertion of European values as superior and fostered a certain condescension towards Japanese cultural traditions.

Some examples will show different ways in which this superior point of view was expressed with regard to food. Mrs Albrecht, the wife of the Russian doctor attached to the newly established consulate in Hakodate, left an account of an overland journey from Edo to Hokkaido in 1861. She describes the food provided for the travellers by the Japanese cooks in some detail, but quite negatively, characterising it as simultaneously sour, bitter and sweet, and 'medicinal' in taste, and noting thankfully that since the Russians had brought their own provisions with them they were not for the most part forced to resort to Japanese fare.[51] The doctor Ivan Zarubin, writing of a stay in Nagasaki in 1880, also describes the Japanese food he consumed at the house of a local Japanese acquaintance as 'sickly-sweet', and if not precisely inedible, then at any rate 'an extraordinary mish-mash' which did not leave you feeling you had eaten a proper meal.[52] Zarubin also expressed dissatisfaction with the unfamiliar fruit that he was given on his first arrival in port: loquats which were not as nice as the apricots they resembled, woody and tasteless pears, mulberries which at first he mistook for familiar raspberries, but whose flavour he found disappointing.[53] Many Russians, like Mrs Albrecht, opted out of Japanese food altogether. Midshipman Kornilov, an officer with Nikolai Murav'ev-Amurskii's 1859 expedition hoping to negotiate for Russian control of Sakhalin, would eat only the eclectic combination of shrimps and watermelon in an Edo restaurant. On another occasion, on the outskirts of Edo, he notes that the pleasure afforded by the view from the hotel where the Russians rested was considerably enhanced not by the Japanese refreshments that were offered, but by the pie, roast meat and wine which they had themselves brought with them. It might be mentioned in passing that while Japanese food was not to Kornilov's liking, he was nevertheless certainly impressed by Japanese levels of service.[54]

Once Russians were present in Japan in significant numbers, they often reacted against the 'strangeness' of their Japanese surroundings by developing self-contained institutions of their own. Of particular interest in this respect is the Russian 'colony' of In-

48 Goncharov 1959, pp. 17, 19.
49 Ibid., pp. 161, 164.
50 Ibid., pp. 7, 41, 124.
51 Albrecht 1861, pp. 73–74.
52 Zarubin 1881, p. 324.
53 Ibid., p. 312.
54 Kornilov 1860, pp. 117, 119.

osa, which was established at Nagasaki during the 1860s when large numbers of Russian ships habitually spent the winter in Japanese warm-water ports. When the botanist Andrei Krasnov visited Nagasaki in the early 1890s, Inosa was already past its heyday, but it still boasted more than one restaurant in the Russian style where the homesick Russian sailor might obtain caviar, smoked sturgeon, cheese, *borshch* and other Russian dishes in rooms decorated with photographs of Russian ships or a portrait of the tsarevitch.[55] Interestingly, the point of contrast on which Krasnov dwells is not between Russia and Japan—he takes for granted that Russian tastes are not compatible with Japanese—but rather between Russia and the décor, cultural style and mores of England, which at this period dominated east Asian ports, and which the Russians found cold and unwelcoming. Meanwhile, long-term Russian residents of Inosa acquired Russian-speaking Japanese 'temporary wives' on the pattern of Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*, and reproduced the conditions of Russian domestic life as closely as possible. Krasnov notes with some surprise the clutter caused by the accumulation of tables, chairs and samovars in Japanese interiors and the incongruity of the 'wives' preparing Russian delicacies with Japanese equipment.[56]

A rather different perspective on the question of food emerges from the memoir of Vladimir Semenov, a naval officer attached to the staff of Admiral Rozhestvenskii, during the Russo-Japanese War. When Rozhestvenskii's flagship was sunk at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905, the surviving officers, including the admiral, were taken as prisoners of war to Japan.[57] In his account of this episode, and in particular of the Russians' journey by train from the hospital at Sasebo to their final place of detention in Kyoto, Semenov pays a great deal of attention to questions of food. His views are coloured not only by the usual European suspicion of Japanese dishes and customs, but also by a very highly developed sense of his own importance. The Japanese military authorities appear to have made some attempt to provide European-style meals for the Russians on their journey, but by Semenov's account they largely failed, either through poor organisation or lack of understanding. One meal is described as unappetising and repulsively presented, another as elegantly displayed rather in Japanese than European style, but entirely inadequate in bulk for European appetites. Luckily for the stomachs of Semenov and his companions, the Russians were able to supplement their Japanese provisions first by purchasing some American canned produce from a railway refreshment seller, and later by forcing the Japanese colonel in charge of their transport to telegraph ahead for provisions of boiled eggs or beefsteaks and potatoes. The one positive remark Semenov makes about the Japanese hospitality he was forced to accept concerns the members of the ladies' patriotic associations who provided the Russians with tea and cakes at stations en route. He compares these volunteers favourably with their Russian counterparts and is particularly impressed that it occurs to them to serve the foreigners not with Japanese green tea, but with China tea presented in European cups with saucers.[58]

55 Krasnov 1895, pp. 64–65.

56 Ibid., pp. 68–70.

57 That the Japanese authorities were well aware of many of the problems noted by Semenov with the supply of food to Russian prisoners of war has been shown by Naoko Shimazu in her account of the prisoner-of-war camp at Matsuyama (Shimazu 2005, pp. 375–76).

58 Semenov 1910, pp. 95–6, 104–109.

Semenov's food worries did not cease on his arrival in Kyoto. Here too he found Japanese provision inadequate—he even speculates that the Japanese government was profiteering out of the money provided by Russia for the maintenance of its prisoners. He quickly discovered that although the Japanese cook assigned to the Russians was prepared to make private arrangements about what he served in exchange for extra payment, his skills in European cookery were distinctly limited. In this respect Semenov's pride as an officer clearly worked against his material interests. During the day, the Japanese were prepared to let their Russian prisoners out of the temples in which they were confined, on condition that they signed a statement that they would not try to escape. Semenov interpreted this requirement as an insult to his dignity and therefore refused to sign. Consequently he was unable to eat a regular European-style lunch at the Miyako Hotel along with officers from other Russian ships.[59]

In his memoir Semenov thus rejects Japanese food with a considerable degree of vehemence. This is no doubt partly because of his status as a defeated officer and a natural hostility towards his captors. It is perhaps also symptomatic of the underlying insecurity which can be seen in many Russian writers in the second half of the nineteenth century at the rapidity of Japanese modernisation. The speed of industrialisation and social change which occurred in Meiji Japan—and which certainly contributed to Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War—frequently seemed to highlight Russia's own social and economic backwardness vis-à-vis Western Europe and America.[60]

By the 1890s, Russian texts had also begun to be influenced by an aestheticised view of Japan fed in part by the European vogue for *Japonisme* in art.[61] In this perspective everything about Japan is small, delicate, elegant and doll-like: writers often comment on the extraordinary tidiness of Japanese houses or farms and the clumsiness of European furniture in Japanese rooms, for example. Nikolai Garin-Mikhailovskii, visiting Nagasaki in 1898, takes this position to the extreme when he describes his first impressions of Japan through the lens of Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*: 'these are not people, but figurines—figurines of yellow ivory borrowed from the shelves of art galleries—figurines of people and their houses, reflections of that sugary pink-tinted reality so often found in elegant albums of Japanese colour photography.'[62]

A practical expression of this aestheticised vision, which embraces food as much as other cultural artefacts, can be seen in the quest for an authentic Japanese 'tourist experience' from a surprisingly early date. Shopping for lacquer or silks, the visit to a shrine or temple, traditional entertainments and the Japanese meal are the invariant motifs of European travel-writing on Japan from the 1860s onwards. One particularly striking manifestation of self-conscious tourist zeal can be seen in the surviving accounts of an early Russian group tour which took place in the summer of 1913, organised by the Moscow-based

59 Ibid., pp. 127–28.

60 Wells 2004a, pp. 23–24.

61 Molodiakov 1996, pp. 93–107; Wichmann 1981.

62 Garin-Mikhailovskii 1958, p. 378. While Garin-Mikhailovskii notes that his initial view of Japan was coloured by his reading of Loti, an important theme in his narrative is the degree to which his observation of the Japanese people, their way of life, habits of industry and their espousal of modernisation led him to revise his opinions.

Society for the Propagation of Technical Knowledge. As they travelled around Japan the fifty members of the Russian group were exposed—or exposed themselves—to a series of cultural experiences, several of which involved food. On at least one occasion they were treated to a carefully stage-managed Japanese dinner. A meal in Nikko is described as follows: 'We put up at a Japanese hotel. Our Japanese guides took off their European clothes and put on *kimono* 着物; some of us tourists followed their example. We all sat down to eat behind small tables on the floor. This novel arrangement somehow put everyone in a good mood.'[63]

Another participant in the same tour describes a meal served in a dining room in Gifu equipped with European-style tables and chairs, which, she says, offend the eye by their incongruity in a Japanese room. 'It would be better to sit on the floor and feel definitively Japanese,' she concludes.[64] Japanese food itself is not always to the taste of the Russian visitors, she further reports. They demand salt with their meal, for example, find Japanese sweets inedible, and look with considerable suspicion at some of the dishes with which they are presented.[65] However, they approach everything Japanese with a sense of wonder and anticipation. Just as they marvel at the rice fields or the bamboo and lotuses they see from their train window, so they address themselves enthusiastically to the slightly risqué and certainly adventurous task of investigating new foods. As the same excursionist notes after surveying the contents of her train *bentō* 弁当 (boxed lunch): 'A great deal of pleasure lies in prospect: to try all these delights and pronounce our considered "tourist" opinion.'[66]

The changing Russian discourse on Japanese food and hospitality from the beginnings of Russo-Japanese contact to the early 1900s reflects the evolution of Russian attitudes to Japan more broadly during that period.[67] A focus on practical considerations—the economics of supply, the politics of access to Japan and the niceties of diplomatic relations—gives way to a more ideologically and culturally determined perspective. At first the Russians clearly recognised their dependence on the Japanese for assistance and provisioning in the north Pacific, and treated them more or less as political and cultural equals. By the mid-1880s, however, as Russia, with the other western powers, began to assert political and economic authority over Japan, so the discourse of food, like the discourse on Japan more generally, frequently dismissed Japanese traditions and habits as inferior. Then, by perhaps the 1890s, the economic and cultural supremacy of European values had become firmly established, and it was possible for Russian discourse on Japan to ascribe a positive, aestheticised value to Japanese food and culture. One discourse, however, does not entirely drive out another, so that the Russian narratives of Japan, in their approach to food as in their attitudes on other matters, are often contradictory. They remain, for this very reason, a valuable and intriguing source for the study of the development of intercultural relations and the formation of images of Japan in Russian minds.

63 Grakova 1914, pp. 132–33.
64 Kobiakova 1914, p. 232.
65 Ibid., p. 230.
66 Ibid., p. 230.
67 Wells 2004a.

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