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# How to Research the Multiethnic Empire and Its Colonial Legacy: a Response Paper to “Reconciling Peoples and Places” by Loretta Kim

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## Abstract

Current and past historical research on Russia and China’s borderlands heavily relies on the concept of ethnicity. Both the Russian and Qing empires ascribed to an “ethnic mode of ruling” in their borderlands, reflected in the estate *inorodtsy* and the Eight Banner system. In view of how strongly state-determined categories of ethnic identification can influence historical analysis, this paper observes that the focus of research is shifting from “ethnicity” to “regionality”. The paper also explores how the communist regimes in Russia and China of the 20th century handled the legacy of the multiethnic empire with the politicization of ethnic groups.

## Keywords

Qing empire – Russian empire – ethnicity – regionality – multiethnic empires – ethnic minorities

## Introduction

Has the era of studying multiethnic empires come to an end? For the past decades, the study of ethnicity and ethnic groups has dominated the historical research on the borderlands between Russia and China. Now, at a time when any nation’s diversity is seen as a powder keg of insecurity that needs to

be resolved in often brutal and restrictive ways, Russia's and China's imperial borderlands and their strategies towards governing their multiethnic constituents are more relevant to historical research than ever. Simultaneously, it has become time to question whether "ethnicity" is still the most useful concept with which to research the multiethnic empire and its colonial legacy. Might it be useful to transition from "ethnicity" to "regionality" when studying the borderlands of the Russian and Qing empires?

In her article "Reconciling Peoples and Places: Perpetual Re-Interpretation in Perceptions of Social and Cultural Identities in Northeast China", Loretta Kim explores how the scope and application of identities as determined by "place" and by "people" have evolved in the modern history of Northeast China. In her paper on ever-changing perceptions of social and cultural identities, Kim explores various phases of categorization of people groups in Northeast China, from early Qing rule in the 1680s to the ethnic categorization project in the 1950s and onward, and questions how imperialistic ambitions and a strive for national unity and territorial integrity have influenced the delineation of these Northeastern communities.

Kim's paper contains broader implications for the historical study of ethnicity and identity. As scholars elaborate on the divide between state-mandated categorization and the lived experiences of ethnic identities, it is also worthwhile to contemplate how this impacts our perception of multiethnicity of the Russian and Qing empires, as well as how the successor states of these empires have grappled with the legacy of colonization that has produced their multiethnic present.

Kim shows how the categorization and the perception of the people of Northeast China underwent several changes over a long timeframe and critically examines the immutability and durability of these ethnic designations. In response to Loretta Kim's paper, I also want to offer possible points of comparison with Russia's history on the perception and conceptualization of ethnicity. Historians of the Russian Far East as well as Northeastern China can be guilty of taking frontier people as predetermined categories of analysis to enable an historical narrative. In its idealized sense, the seemingly neutral term "ethnic group" has so far provided a clearly defined unit of societal organization, whilst still allowing for considerations of complexities, such as arbitrariness on the part of the state and its demands and a high degree of situational and contextual mutability. Some scholars have criticized the way in which ethnic groups continue to be understood as entities in historical research. Can it be that our views on the Russian and Qing empires are "overethnized"?<sup>1</sup> An

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1 R. Brubaker, "Ethnicity Without Groups." *Archives européennes de sociologie. European journal of sociology* 43/2 (2002): 168.

overemphasis on ethnicity, when it is perceived as the determinant of events, can cloud historians' judgments of a situation or event. At the same time, Kim points out, ethnicity can also be de-emphasized intentionally because expressions of ethnicity challenge ideals of national unity.<sup>2</sup> Perceptions of ethnicity, in short, are to be continually re-examined in order to fully grasp the multiethnicity of Russia and China.

## 1 The Complexity of the Multiethnic Empire

By focusing on the complexities of group identities and challenging the *a priori* nature of ethnicity, the very concept of multiethnicity comes under question. Multiethnicity has been the guiding thread in numerous studies on the Russian and Qing empires, as both boasted the coexistence of various ethnic groups and provided a diversity of ethnic identification. Since Andreas Kappeler's seminal work *Russland als Vielvölkerreich*,<sup>3</sup> originally published in 1992, multiethnicity has been a central guiding post for analysis of the Russian empire. The multiethnicity of the Qing has been a prominent feature of the research trend surmised under New Qing History, whose starting point is Evelyn Rawksi's presidential address in 1996 as the new president of the Association for Asian Studies.<sup>4</sup>

Emphasizing certain levels of ethnic differentiation over others and constructing a hierarchy of peoples, with certain privileges and duties vested in each specific ethnic group, was a mode of rule in multiethnic empires. In the Russian and Qing empires specifically, factions of people were administered according to state-assigned ethnic status, which came with its own set of obligations and privileges. The institutionalization of ethnic identity, aided by the categorization through ethnographers often employed by the state, is an important feature of this process as much as the territorialization of ethnic groups. In both empires, clear administrative boundaries were cemented between ethnic groups by frequent census taking and the recording of genealogies and descent lines, as was the case in the Eight banner system for the population of Northeast China.

2 L. Kim, "Reconciling Peoples and Places: Perpetual Re-interpretation in Perceptions of Social and Cultural Identities in Northeast China." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 67 (2024): 597.

3 A. Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (München: Beck, 1992).

4 E. Rawksi, "Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55/4 (1996): 829–850.

In the case of the Qing and the banner system, Mark Elliott even speaks of “ethnic sovereignty” (*zuqun zhuquan*) to refer to the mode of Qing rule that places the Manchu emperors in the framework of different hierarchies, each based on a specific type of authority. In ethnic sovereignty, differentiation is made along ethnic lines.<sup>5</sup> According to his definition, the core feature of ethnicity is its transactional nature: “Ethnicity is something acquired through interaction with someone else, inherently transactional, an aspect of relationship, not a property of a group.”<sup>6</sup>

As Elliott has framed the banner system around the concept of ethnicity, the estate (*soslovie*) for the Siberian native population—the legally defined category of *inorodtsy* (“aliens”)—can also be reframed around ethnicity. Social organization in the Russian empire was based primarily on a legally defined estate hierarchy, wherein the estate remained the main indicator for one’s place in society. According to Jane Burbank, the Russian Empire practiced “an imperial rights regime”, in which particular groups of the population enjoyed rights and privileges and owed the state duties through membership in legal estates.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the *inorodtsy*, the native population of Siberia, these groups were delineated according to their ethnic origins and belonging to an ethnic group.

In official contexts, the term *inorodtsy* was used to designate a set of ethnic minorities who, from 1822 to 1917, comprised a distinct legal category.<sup>8</sup> The Ewenki, Oroqen and Buriats that are also part of the population in Northeastern China belonged to the legal estate category of *inorodtsy*. This estate was essentially surmised as an ethnic category. While Russian peasants belonged to the *krest’ianin* estate, baptized *inorodtsy*—despite their adherence to Orthodox faith, Russian language, and a settled lifestyle—remained in the *inorodtsy* category. This was partly because many considered it economically more beneficial to remain in the category of *inorodtsy*, who were also exempt from military conscription. As a small side note, patterns of food consumption were also an important delineator between Russianness and otherness. According to Yuri Slezkine, when *inorodtsy* were baptized in the Russian Empire, they

5 M. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: the eight banners and ethnic identity in late imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2006): 7.

6 Elliott, *The Manchu Way*: 17.

7 J. Burbank, “An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7/3 (2006): 397–431.

8 J. Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy? The Evolution of the Category of “Aliens” in Imperial Russia.” *The Russian Review* 57 (April 1998): 173.

had to change their lifestyle fundamentally to become Russian. This meant changing their food consumption and their relationship to the land, transitioning to a settled, agricultural lifestyle.<sup>9</sup> One rule for food consumption was the requirement to abstain from consuming raw foodstuffs. In both the Russian and Chinese context, one finds that the connection between food consumption and otherness is reflected in the connotation of eating raw meat. Eating “raw” was a crucial marker for foreignness, for example in the ascribed exonyms “raw-eating” Eskimo and “self-eating” Samoed. Similarly, in the Chinese context, there is the distinction between “cooked” (*shufan*, implying civilized) and raw (*shengfan*, implying uncivilized) barbarians. In both contexts, the assignation of eating raw food was a sign of savagery.<sup>10</sup>

While the estate hierarchy remained in place until 1917, the Great Reforms of 1860s and the 1870s initiated a reconceptualization of ethnicity in the Russian empire. Amongst these new developments of modern citizenship, ethnicity became an important category according to which political actors classified the empire’s population and thus, consequently, the population began to identify itself by ethnicity in political life. In the Russian imperial context, the formation of the category of ethnicity cannot be separated from its employment in politics. According to Steinwedel, after 1890, and especially after the Revolution of 1905, the two terms *narodnost’* and *natsional’nost’* became increasingly crucial to discussions of all groups in the Empire’s body politic. Ethnic conceptions developed through political practices, which endowed them with meaning. With the Revolution of 1905, the concept of national sovereignty became intrinsically tied to the ascription of ethnicity, which developed into concepts of nationality. At the same time, ethnic categories such as *narodnost’* and *natsional’nost’* were relevant mostly to political elites who could participate in imperial decision-making institutions.<sup>11</sup>

In the early 20th century, ethnic nationalism was on the rise in the borderlands. During the Soviet Union and the regime of autonomous national republics, ethnic nationalism among non-Russian nationalities led to the strengthening of ethnic and territorial republican identities, at the expanse

9 Y. Slezkine, “Naturalists Versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity,” *Representations* (Berkeley, Calif.) 47 (1994): 180.

10 F. Dikötter, *The discourse of race in modern China* 近代中國之種族觀念 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 7.

11 C. Steinwedel, “To Make a Difference: The Category of Ethnicity in Late Imperial Russian Politics, 1861–1917.” In *Russian modernity: Politics, Knowledge and Practices*, ed. D. Hoffmann (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000): 80.

of the all-Russian (*rossiiskii*).<sup>12</sup> There is a persistent argument in Russia that the regime of the Soviet Union artificially propped up ethnic minorities by exploiting national movements for their own ends in the Civil War and beyond. Through the Bolsheviks' policy of localization (also: *korenizatsiia* = indigenization) in the 1920s and 1930s, a system of national republics was set up and the boundaries between ethnic groups became politicized nationalities. This persistent argument has even found its way into Putin's rhetoric: In the Kremlin's opinion, this process of localization led to the consolidation of Ukrainian culture, language and identity and secured at the state level the Ukrainian nationality as separate from the Russians.<sup>13</sup>

A similar assumption is addressed in Kim's paper: In contrast to the imperial situation where the borderland population is perceived as diverse separate and overlapping identities between sociocultural groups, in the early 20th century sub-populations that previously existed without formal recognition from administrative authorities began to embrace and assert identities that converted their social cohesion into a tool of political power.<sup>14</sup> This narrative dates back to the legitimization efforts of the Russian and Chinese Communist parties, which emphasized the liberation and emancipation of minorities by the common struggle led by the Russian or Chinese Communist party and in turn legitimized their power monopoly. This narrative also firmly establishes the Communist parties in their position of power.<sup>15</sup>

## 2 Ethnic Diversity: the Legacy of Colonization

"China's ethnic unity" is a guiding principle of policy making in the PRC, as it is intrinsically tied to the idea of China's national sovereignty. Both these policies of "ethnic unity" and "national sovereignty" are attempts to solve what China does not want to confront in its own history: the multilayered legacy of colonization by the Qing imperial expansion, the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party) and the CCP.

12 A. Khazanov, "Ethnic Nationalism in the Russian Federation Boston." *Daedalus* 126:3 (Summer, 1997): 136.

13 V. Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", 2021 <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

14 Kim, "Reconciling Peoples and Places: Perpetual Re-interpretation in Perceptions of Social and Cultural Identities in Northeast China": 582.

15 E. Barabantseva, "From the Language of Class to the Rhetoric of Development: discourses of 'nationality' and 'ethnicity' in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 7/56 (2008): 578.

China's relation to the concept of colonization is complex and contentious, as is Russia's. The Russian and Qing empires were the result of imperial expansion and colonization.<sup>16</sup> The current borders of both countries date back in large part to the territorial conquests made in their imperial past, as do their diverse populations, particularly at the borderlands.

Russia's multiethnicity is the process of centuries of imperial expansion, a process that is still not acknowledged as having been "colonial" in nature. As Alexander Morrison put it: "Only in the Russian case do you encounter an allergic reaction to the very word 'colonial' (*kolonial'nyi*), something increasingly enforced by the state."<sup>17</sup> Morrison refers to Russia's National Security Council decreeing the undertaking of measures against the "falsification of history" (*protivodeistviia fal'sifikatsii istorii*) such as the "Speculation on the Colonial Question" (*spekuliatsii na "kolonial'nom voprose"*).<sup>18</sup>

The avoidance of the terms "colonial" and "colony" is widespread in Russia: The original title of one of the most influential works from the 19th century on Siberia is "Siberia as a colony" by the equally well-known *oblastnik* (member of the Siberian separatist movement, *oblastnichestvo*) Nikolai Yadrintsev, an outspoken critic of Russian colonialism in Siberia. In the contemporary series "Russian Imperial Library" (*Rossiiskaia imperatorskaia biblioteka*) that republishes scientific literature in deluxe editions for the public, this work was published as "The history of the opening up of Siberia" (*Istoriia osvoeniia Sibiri*).<sup>19</sup>

In the PRC, the term "colonial" is even more controversial, as colonialism is a Western concept, translated into Chinese as *zhumin fuyi* during a time when the Qing Empire was suffering from the attacks of British and French colonialism and the devastating effects of the Opium War. To apply this term to the Qing Empire is seen as the imposition of a Western concept onto Chinese history, an act of colonialism itself. While the eminent historian Ge Zhaoguang refers to the Qing as a "colonial enterprise",<sup>20</sup> at the same time he insists that

16 For the sake of this paper, colonization is defined as the process of incorporation of land and people into an framework of unequal power relations as well as the transformations of settlement and land reform that go with it.

17 A. Morrison, 'Russia's Colonial Allergy', *Eurasianet*, 2016 <<https://eurasianet.org/russias-colonial-allergy>>.

18 V. Hamroyev, 'O Roli Tochnosti v Istorii', 2016 <<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3131019>>.

19 N. Yadrintsev, *Istoriia osvoeniia Sibiri* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2021).

20 Ge Zhaoguang, 葛兆光, "Between Name and Reality—the Debate on "Sinicization", "Colonization" and "Empire." [名实之间—有关「汉化」、「殖民」与「帝国」的争论] *Fudan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 6 (2016): 1–11.

the concept of empire must be adapted and altered if it is to include the Qing case, or not be applied at all.

In particular, reflections on the multiethnic nature of the Qing empire must confront the problem of how to conceptualize *Zhongguo*. Gao Zhang points out that the Manchu emperors expanded the definition of *Zhongguo* by using the term to refer to all the empire's subjects as *zhongguo zhi renmin*. He argues that China's modern national identity as a multiethnic unified state stems from this re-interpretation by the Qing.<sup>21</sup> A conceptualization of Qing history as a "colonial empire" is therefore also seen as a threat to the territorial unity of China when it comes to the territories that were conquered under the Qing. Instead, in the PRC, the history of the Qing Empire is framed by the narrative of "unification" (*tongyi*) or "great unification" (*dayitong*), that tells the history of Qing imperial expansion as a shared common past of all ethnic groups present in the PRC.

Policies guided by the "unification narrative" are rooted in long-held beliefs in the long existence of some form of national unity on the territory of China that has its origin in antiquity.<sup>22</sup> The English abstract of a book on Tungus foreign dynasties in China's history, such as the Manchu of the Qing empire, hits all the talking points of this state-driven narrative: "This book believes that Tungus made outstanding historical contributions to establishing and defending the frontier of homeland, developing the Northeast, managing the North, constructing the whole country and promoting the integration of Chinese nationality within multi-ethnic groups."<sup>23</sup> Another historian of the Northeast, Lan Yanchao frames the history of the Northeastern nationalities in the Butha-Eight Banner system, a distinct banner division for hunting populations of Northeastern China, as integral to the national historical narrative. She points out that the officers and men of the Butha-Eight Banners, ethnic Daur, Solon, Evenki and Oroqen soldiers, made great efforts in the process in safeguarding the borderlands and defending the country, which laid a solid foundation for the security and stability of the border of the Qing Dynasty.<sup>24</sup> To further illustrate the state-mandated perception of ethnicity, in an article published in 2023, a PhD student of

21 Gang Zhao, "Reinventing China: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century." *Modern China* 32/1 (2006): 3–30.

22 Barabantseva, "From the Language of Class to the Rhetoric of Development": 572.

23 Gao Kaijun, 通古斯族系的兴起 [*The Rise of the Tungus*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2006): 5.

24 Lan Yanchao (兰延超) and 李德山 Li Deshan, "清代布特哈八旗编设的历史作用 [The Historical Roles of the Establishment of the Butha Eight Banners in the Qing Dynasty]." *Academic Exploration* 6 (2014): 121.

the Northwest Minzu University presents common words in Solon Evenki and Buryat Mongolian as a confirmation of Xi Jinping's political concept of "common destiny" (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*) and as a confirmation of the pluralistic unity of the Chinese nation.<sup>25</sup>

This shared commonality—a melding of characteristics as Kim calls it—is the solution to China's paradox of multiple ethnic groups all belonging to one ethnonational group (*zhonghua minzu*).<sup>26</sup> Minorities and their cultures exist not on their own, but rather as part of the Chinese nation and are defined by their relation to the Han majority culture.

The notion of multiethnicity and multiculturalism has continuously been employed in China's state-building project. From the founding days of the PRC, China has been conceptualized as a multinational state and at the heart of this conceptualization lies the notion of *minzu*. Given how crucial as this multiethnicity is to the Chinese state, it is no wonder that the central government in Beijing must keep tight control on how ethnic groups and identities in China can be expressed, defined and delineated. State elites interpret ethnic matters and accordingly draft their policies in the light of the preferences and needs of the regime.

During the early years of the PRC the nationality question (*minzu wenti*) was reframed in class terms, to place the emphasis on uniformity rather than diversity. When the project of ethnic identification was undertaken in the mid-1950s, it emphasized the liberation and emancipation of minorities under the leadership of the CCP. In the reform period of the 1970s, the term "nationality question" of the socialist period was swapped with "ethnic question" and after that, "inter-ethnic relations". Simultaneously, the translation of *minzu* in official government statements has shifted from "nationality" to "ethnic group" as the English equivalent.<sup>27</sup> Bulag also notes that there has been a shift to redefine the minorities not as nationalities, but rather as "ethnic groups"<sup>28</sup>

Bulag points out that recognition of ethnic groups as "nationalities" entails recognition of their history of incorporation and colonization. The ethnic approach to diversity treats minority groups as a "category", wherein the groups' legitimacy rests upon their relationship to the dominant majority. In

25 Wuriqimuge, "Common words for Solon Evenki and Buryatia Mongolian." *SHS Web of Conferences* 168 (2023): 6.

26 Kim, "Reconciling Peoples and Places: Perpetual Re-interpretation in Perceptions of Social and Cultural Identities in Northeast China": 589.

27 Barabantseva, "From the Language of Class to the Rhetoric of Development": 573–578.

28 U. Bulag, "Alter/native Mongolian identity. From nationality to ethnic group." In *Chinese Society, Change, conflict and resistance* (2nd edition), ed. E. Perry and M. Selden (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003): 247.

the ethnic approach, it also becomes more important to maintain boundaries, instead of bothering to define cultural and ethnic characteristics that make up a group identity.<sup>29</sup>

In regard to Xinjiang, Schluessel observes that the Qing civilizing project and its effect of bringing the multilingual, multiconfessional local society closer to Han-Confucian values indeed resembles forms of Euro-American colonialism.<sup>30</sup> Similar to Kim, Schluessel seeks to disentangle certain established ideas about ethnonational identity and the borderlands. His approach connects ethnicity and groupness to everyday processes of negotiation, pointing to how labels of ethnic identity were constantly under negotiation. Kim and Schluessel both point out that shifting identities complicate the process of writing history about them, as well as the fact that people regularly shifted between categories.<sup>31</sup>

In the Qing empire, several borderlands share experiences of colonialisms, such as the Northeast, Xinjiang, and Taiwan. Taiwan's transformation from "savage island" to "Chinese province" is described by Teng as an important example of non-European imperialism.<sup>32</sup> A comprehensive comparison of Qing empire-building in these borderlands promises to reveal not only new insights into the Qing, but a necessary expansion of our understanding of colonial empires. This might have been obscured so far by the multiethnic lens.

As Kim has highlighted, state-imposed policies on how to conceptualize ethnic groups can warp our understanding of the mutability of identities that are constantly in flux. From her paper it becomes apparent not only that the ethnic groups as expressions of group identity are constructed, but also the region of Northeast China is a consciously conceptualized spatial framework.

The Northeast as a region seems to be at odds with the traditional framework of ethnic identities in China, which is also reflected in its absence from the traditional system of Chinese cuisine. The Northeast's "otherness"—even when it comes to Northeastern Han people—in part dates back to its shared histories and experiences of the Sino-Russian borderland; first and foremost, the interactions with people across the border have influenced food preparation and consumption. Ethnic and regional identities have been formed by interactions and experiences of shared resources and cultural knowledge

29 Bulag, "Alter/native Mongolian identity. From nationality to ethnic group": 229.

30 E. Schluessel, *Land of Strangers: the Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020): 5.

31 Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*: 19.

32 E. Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683–1895*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center 2004) 7.

with people not just in Northeastern China, but also from the Russian side of the borderland.

When comparing food customs associated with peoples legally recognized as separate ethnic groups, it becomes clear that the production of food does not lend itself to the delineation of ethnicity. Food and its preparation are universal across cultures.<sup>33</sup> The fact that foodstuffs and modes of preparation can be found in different groups' diets highlights the transactional nature of food. Food and language are both highly transferable and speak to the continued interaction between people, who adopt loanwords and modes of food preparation from each other. Food exemplifies cross-cultural interaction as much as language does.<sup>34</sup> Framing the Northeast's history as regional history offers an escape from making it part of a Chinese national narrative. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that interactions are not limited to the region of the Northeast, but also occur across the border, a border that was established by dividing communities and shared places.

### Conclusion

The underlying questions brought up through the critical analysis of multiethnicity remain: what is "regional" and "ethnic" and how they overlap or diverge? Do these overlaps counteract the differentiation of groups through ethnic classification? Do regional identities offer an opportunity to go beyond the state prescribed limitations imposed on the study of ethnicity? Might it be useful to transition from "ethnicity" to "regionality" when studying the borderlands of the Russian and Qing empires?

The state greatly influences expressions of ethnicity, by either promoting or repressing categories of ethnic identification. The Russian and Qing empires can both be described as ascribing to an "ethnic mode of ruling" in their borderlands, most clearly reflected in their usage of the estate *inorodtsy* and the Eight Banner system. A short and insufficient exploration into how the communist regimes in Russia and China of the 20th century have handled the legacy of the multiethnic empire with the politicization of ethnic groups has shown that current regimes seek to downgrade nationalities—and their

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33 Kim, "Reconciling Peoples and Places: Perpetual Re-interpretation in Perceptions of Social and Cultural Identities in Northeast China": 596.

34 Kim, "Reconciling Peoples and Places: Perpetual Re-interpretation in Perceptions of Social and Cultural Identities in Northeast China": 589.

histories of national self-determination—to ethnic groups that are intrinsically part of either Russia's and China's nation.

Fluid identities are a source of insecurity for a coherent national identity and authorities are therefore reluctant to accept the changing character of regional and ethnic identities. For them it is important that the cultural interpretations of the center take precedence over local manifestations of identity. Kulyk has shown that in post-Soviet Ukraine, boundaries between nationalities have begun to blur and the meanings of ethnic connotations have shifted from ethnic to civic as well as from ethnocultural to regional.<sup>35</sup> As Kim makes the argument with Northeast China, the conceptualization of groupness has shifted from ethnic to regional, and both the frameworks on “cuisine” and “region” can be utilized to show the coherent history and discernible characteristics of a region.<sup>36</sup> Soon, it may be necessary to replace the framework of ethnicity with regionality, and to re-examine assumptions on multiethnicity in the imperial context.

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35 V. Kulyk, “Is Ukraine a Multiethnic Country?” *Slavic Review* 81:2 (2022): 318.

36 Kim, “Reconciling Peoples and Places: Perpetual Re-interpretation in Perceptions of Social and Cultural Identities in Northeast China”: 597.

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