A Study of Russian Artifacts in the Collection of Imperial Palace in the Qing Dynasty

Abstract: This article systematically examines the Russian cultural relics in the collection of the Qing imperial palace and analyzes the remnants of interactions between the Qing court and the Russian court during the reigns of Peter the Great, Nicholas I, and Nicholas II. Russian cultural relics witnessed significant historical events such as the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Russia, exchange of envoys, and the signing of a series of treaties. They carried the mission of promoting the national cultures and advantageous industries of both countries at that time. In addition, these cultural relics have high aesthetic value and contain reliable and rich historical information.

Keywords: Russian cultural relics; Sino-Russian court interactions; the collection of the Qing imperial palace
or remain unidentified among other foreign cultural relics. Nevertheless, the Palace Museum still houses more than a hundred pieces of Russian cultural relics in its collection.

1 The Dragon Cavalry Sword of Peter the Great

During the reign of Peter the Great, the first emperor of the Russian Empire, significant reforms were implemented in politics, military, and religion, with a focus on Westernization. Additionally, Peter the Great engaged in several wars of expansion, resulting in the need for increased state revenue to cover the immense war expenses. In this context, the abundant profits that could be gained from the rich resources of China in the distant East appeared to be a viable solution. Consequently, Peter the Great dispatched diplomatic missions and trade caravans to China on multiple occasions for the purpose of procurement and trade. In 1707, Peter I issued a special decree that mandated the state’s control over Sino-Russian trade, while prohibiting private trade with China (Тихвинский, 1978). This marked a significant development in the bilateral trade relations between China and Russia during the period from 1618 to 1725, when at least nine official missions visited Beijing. As a result, Sino-Russian trade rapidly expanded, with relics from the collection of Imperial Palace in the Qing Dynasty (hereinafter referred to as “Qing Palace”) serving as tangible evidence of the exchanges that took place between the two countries. Among these relics, the Dragon Cavalry Sword from the 18th century stands out as the earliest discovered Russian artifact, bearing witness to the historical interactions between China and Russia during the reign of Peter the Great.

The Qing Palace collection includes two swords with copper-wrapped wooden handles and cloth-wrapped scabbards, each measuring 105 cm in length, with steel blades and iron handles engraved with decorative patterns. The inscriptions on both sides of the sword near the handle include a double-headed eagle with a crown on one side, and the word “Solingen” below, a city in Germany known for its cutter manufacturing. The other side of the sword bears the inscription “Vivat syn zaar Se mayest Peter alexewits”, which means “Long live the great Tsar Peter Alexeyevich”, with the year “1715” inscribed on the blade as the year of production. Coincidentally, the Krasnoyarsk Museum in Russia also houses a Peter the Great Dragon Cavalry Sword, which upon comparison appears remarkably similar. The difference is that the sword in the Palace Museum is larger in size, with no damage, and has an earlier date of collection (older collection). The one in Krasnoyarsk Museum measures 90 cm in length, with some missing letters in the inscription “Vivat … gn Zaar ePeter Alexssits”, and it was collected in the late 19th century. V. I. Privalikhin, a researcher at Krasnoyarsk Museum, pointed out that the Peter the Great Dragon Cavalry Sword
may have been used as a reward for courageous acts in battle. It is speculated that it was specially ordered in small quantities in the early 18th century in Solingen, a German principality, according to “the highest state directive”, as at that time the German principalities and Russian Empire had jointly fought against King Charles XII of Sweden (Привалихин, 2006, pp. 73–76).

Peter the Great created a regular army, with the Dragoon Cavalry as its main force. By 1708, there were 36 regiments of Dragoon Cavalry. Dragoon cavalry swords were well-known in Europe since the 17th century, but initially they were seen more as an exotic hardware rather than a popular weapon. The first time they were used by a new Russian army unit was during the Russo-Polish Wars (1632–1634; 1654–1667). The new army unit was organized according to European models and was trained by foreign officers, showing outstanding performance in battle. Dragoon Cavalry regiments achieved multiple victories in the Polish and Russian wars against Sweden. The swords were only housed in the State Historical Museum of Russia, the Moscow Kremlin Museum, the State Hermitage Museum, and the Krasnoyarsk Museum; the one in the Palace Museum is the first discovery of its kind outside of Russia.

Based on the inscription “1715” and “Peter alexewits”, it can be inferred that this sword is related to Russian diplomatic missions or trading delegations that visited China after 1715. Considering the missions’ size and identity, the most likely one is the mission led by Lev Izmaylov (1685–1738) from 1719 to 1721. Izmaylov was a captain in the Preobrazhensky Regiment (an infantry regiment created by Peter the Great, which also served as his personal guard), a diplomat, and an envoy. His visit to Beijing is described in detail by Jean-Baptiste Du Halde in his work: On November 22, the scene of envoy Lev Izmaylov entering Beijing was exceptionally grand and magnificent. His entourage consisted of about a hundred people, all dressed in splendid European-style attire, with cavalrymen by his side drawing their swords, which left a novel and extraordinary impression on people (Bantysh-Kamensky, 1982). Received by the then elderly Kangxi Emperor, Izmaylov brought generous gifts, including a mirror with gold-plated and carved frame, a dressing mirror with crystal frame and candlesticks, a rectangular mirror with multiple crystal faces, a self-playing clock from England, a pair of gem-set watches, a compass, four sets of mathematical drawing instruments, four telescopes with portraits of the Battle of Poltava for the Great Sovereign, a microscope, two barometers, as well as several pieces of fur, including mink, sable, fox, arctic fox, and ermine, altogether worth 5,083 rubles and 83 kopeks (Bantysh-Kamensky, 1982). Personal gifts from Izmaylov to Kangxi included a gold pocket watch, an enameled gold snuffbox, a gold box from England, a silver sword from France, a large silver cup with a handle, 24 dogs (12 wolfhounds and 12 French Spaniels), and a Danish horse (Bantysh-Kamensky, 1982). It can be seen that Peter the Great showed his generosity in gifts, of which fur and
glass mirrors were products of his own country, the remainder coming from other European countries.

In addition, Izmaylov informed Kangxi that the Great Emperor (Peter the Great) particularly liked China’s flat flower luxurious tapestry. Kangxi assured that although such carpets took three years to make in the imperial court, requiring silk, gold, silver, and other materials, he would satisfy the Great Emperor with a specially tailored tapestry. One of the entourage members in the mission was specifically left in China to take care of the tapestry. The value of the felt carpets was 30,000 taels of silver; despite Izmaylov’s proposal, Kangxi did not accept any payment. According to a report from August 3–14, 1725, these carpets were brought back to Irkutsk on May 19–30, 1721 (Cahen, 1980). Bantysh-Kamensky also mentioned that when they were leaving, the Khan’s minister notified him that the flat flower tapestry to be presented to the Great Emperor were being made in the Bogd Khan Palace and would be sent by the Dragon Cavalry stationed in Beijing (Бантыш-Каменский, 1882).

It should be noted that among the recorded gifts personally presented by Izmaylov to Kangxi, there was a silver sword from France, but the Dragon Cavalry sword was made of steel, so it can be concluded that the sword was not personally gifted by Izmaylov. However, the mission had guards and Dragon Cavalry, and one of the Dragon Cavalry remained in Beijing to await the tapestry commissioned for the Tsar, which could suggest a connection. Furthermore, the production time of this sword was in 1715, coinciding with the reign of Peter the Great. Based on the above information, it can be inferred that the Dragon Cavalry sword in the Qing Palace’s old collection is related to this mission. During the reign of Peter the Great, frequent missions were sent to China in an attempt to achieve trade diplomacy for political purposes through the exchange of novel European goods.

2 Two Official Exchanges of Books

2.1 Eight Hundred Volumes of Russian Books

In 1844, in response to a request from Russian missionaries stationed in Beijing, the Qing government bestowed over 800 volumes of Tibetan sacred texts, including the Tengyur and Kangyur, as gifts. Upon receiving the gifted books, Tsar Nicholas I of Russia wrote on them, “Very good. Tell me what these books are, and prepare gifts for return” (Успенский, 2011, p. 249). In return, the Russian government gifted over 357 different books comprising more than 800 volumes, marking the first known exchange of books between the Chinese and Russian imperial courts. The books from China were extensively utilized in Russia and were compiled into the monumental work Buddhist Library. In China, however, the books gifted by the Russian court were
not adequately valued during the Qing Dynasty, and many of them were lost or destroyed.

As recorded in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng (朔方备乘) and Collected Works of Yangjizhai (养吉斋丛录), the books gifted in return to the Qing government covered a wide range of subjects, including literature, history, religion, astronomy, geography, mathematics, biology, geology, metallurgy, medicine, pharmacology, and agriculture, among others. Among them, maps and geographical books were particularly valued by the Qing government. In 1858, Emperor Xianfeng selected 41 volumes of cartographic and geographic books for reading and viewing in the imperial palace, while the rest were kept in the Fanglue Library (方略馆). The gifted books were initially kept in the Imperial Lifan Yuan (理藩院, Office for Relations with Principalities), according to the Palace Museum Archive. Subsequently, they were moved to the Library of the Grand Council of State in 1869 after some twists and turns. By the time of the cataloging conducted by Banduo (班铎) in 1885, out of the original 800-plus volumes, only 682 volumes remained. After the Boxer Rebellion and 1911 Revolution, just over 80 volumes survived and then came under the possession of the foreign affairs department of the Beiyang government. It was not until 1947 that Mr. Zhang Tiexian who worked at the Beijing Library discovered over 40 volumes of Russian books in a book market (Cheng & Li, 2007). According to the author’s investigation, among the over 40 volumes of Russian books currently acquired by the National Library in 1947, only 13 volumes can be confirmed to be from the gifts presented by Russia during the Daoguang period (1821–1850). For the convenience of reference, the list is compiled as follows:

1. The book titled Новейшие открытия, наблюдения и опыты врачей, сделанные в практической врачебной науке в последнее двадцатилетие (translated as Newest Discoveries, Observations, and Experiments in Practical Medicine in the Last Twenty Years) was authored by A. P. Neliubin, a Russian physician, and was published in 1840 in St. Petersburg. It is catalogued in the National Library under the foreign rare book number P93. It is also listed as item 187 in the Shuo Fang Bei Cheng bibliography, titled “New Compilation of Medical Laws”, consisting of four volumes, and as items 537–539 in the Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “New Compilation of Medical Arts”, consisting of three volumes. One copy is preserved in the National Library.

2. The book titled Учение о глазных болезнях (translated as Essentials of Ophthalmology) was authored by Johann Christian Jungken (1793–1875), a renowned professor of ophthalmology and a surgeon at the University of Berlin, Germany. Published in Moscow in 1841, it is catalogued as item 205 in the Shuo Fang Bei Cheng bibliography, titled “Ophthalmology” and as item 542 in the Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Essential Reading on Ophthalmology”.
(3) The book titled Второе прибавление к описанию славяно-российских рукописей (translated as Second Supplement to the Description of Slavic-Russian Manuscripts) was published in 1827 and is catalogued as a foreign rare book with the number P79. It is listed as item 307 in the Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Various Compilation of Literature”, and as item 252 in the Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Compilation of Slavic-Russian Literature”. The author of the book is Pavel Mikhailovich Stroev (1796–1876), a renowned historian, archaeologist, and academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

(4) The book titled Прогулка с детьми по С. Петербургу и его окрестностям (translated as Strolling with Children in St. Petersburg and its Environs) is authored by Victor B. Urjanov, a Russian author, and was published in 1838. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book with the numbers P142 and P149. It is listed as item 105 in the Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Traveling around the World with Children”, and as items 655–656 in the Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Traveling with Children in St. Petersburg”.

(5) The book titled Анекдоты достопамятной войны россиян с французами (translated as Memorable Anecdotes of the War between Russians and French), was published in 1813–1814, with foreign rare book number P109. It is listed as item 85 in the Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Anecdotes in Russia’s war against France” (or item 55, titled “Russian Strategies in the war against France”); and as items 71–74 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Records of Russo-French War”.

(6) The book titled Начертание русской истории (translated as Introduction to Russian History), is authored by the Russian writer Mikhail Pogodin, and was published in 1837. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book number P90. It is listed as item 35 in the Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Essential Reading on Russian History” (or item 32: “Russian National History”; item 37: “Russian History”; items 72–75: “Russian National History”), and as items 126–127 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Essential Reading on Russian Historical Sketches”.

(7) The book titled Введение к изучению ботаники (translated as Introduction to Botanical Studies), is authored by the famous French and Swiss botanist and biologist Alphonse Pyramus de Candolle, and was published in 1837. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book number item P118. It is listed as item 177 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Records of Plants” (or items 570–571: “Complete Compilation of Plants”), and as item 408 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Tracing the Origins of Botany”.

(8) The book titled Описание Санкт-Петербурга и уездных городов С.-Петербургской губернии (translated as Description of St. Petersburg and County
Towns in St. Petersburg Province), is authored by the Russian writer Ivan Pushkarev, and was published in 1839. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book number item P119. It is listed as item 340 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Illustrated Descriptions of St. Petersburg and Other Places”, and as items 322–324 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Chronicles of St. Petersburg”.

(9) The book titled Картинная галерея, или Систематическое собрание рисунков по всем отраслям человеческих познаний (translated as Gallery of Paintings or Systematic Collection of Drawings on Various Branches of Human Knowledge), was published in 1842. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book number item P183. It is listed as item 112 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Illustrated Collection” (or item 110, titled “Illustrated Records of Geographical Figures of the World”), and as items 333–337 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Brief Illustrated Descriptions of Natural History” (or item 681: “Comprehensive Considerations of Things”).

(10) The book titled Путешествие в Южный океан и в Берингов пролив для отыскания северо-восточного морского прохода (translated as Travels to the South Ocean and the Bering Strait for the Search of the Northeast Passage, Volume 2) was written by Otto Kotzebue (1788–1846) and published in 1821. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book with item number P180. It is listed as item 95 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Account of Travels to the South Ocean” (or item 106: “Survey of the South Ocean”; item 102: “Four Voyages to the Northern Seas”); and as item 332 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Account of Four Voyages to the Arctic Ocean”.

(11) The book titled Систематический свод существующих законов Российской империи. Право гражданское (translated as Systematic Compilation of Existing Laws of the Russian Empire. Civil Law, Volume 2, Parts 1 and 3) was published in 1817–1818. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book with item number P172. It is listed as item 6 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “Compilation of Russian Statutes”, and as items 144-146 and 149 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Compilation of Regulations”.

(12) The book titled Свод законов Российской империи, повелением государя императора Николая Павловича составленный (translated as Compilation of Laws of the Russian Empire by Decree of Emperor Nicholas Pavlovich) was published in 1842. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book with item number P24. It is listed as item 1 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng’s bibliography, titled “General Code of Laws of Russia”; and as items 148–150 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Compilation of Regulations”.

(13) The book titled Новый словотолкователь (translated as New Explanatory Dictionary, Volumes 2 and 3) was written by Nikolai Yanovsky (1764–1826) and
published in 1804. It is catalogued as a foreign rare book with item numbers P111–112. It is listed as item 257 (or 266) in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng's bibliography, titled “New Book of Russian Word Meanings”; and as items 1–6 in Banduo’s bibliographic catalog, titled “Hanlin Dictionary”.

All the above-mentioned books bear the seal of “北京图书馆藏书 (Beijing Library Collection)” in Chinese and “National Library of Peiping, Peiping, China” in English. In addition, Zhang Tiexian’s collection includes four volumes (Zhang, 1958), for which a Russian catalog is not provided. The details are presented as follows:

(1) *Calculus*, one volume, No. 447 in Banduo’s catalog, No. 216 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng's bibliography. The book was published by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1831. The original work is authored by the French mathematician Augustin-Louis Cauchy, and translated by Russian mathematician Viktor Bunyakovsky (1804–1864).


(3) *Course on Mineralogy*, one volume, No. 588 in Banduo’s catalog, No.166 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng's bibliography. The original work is published in 1843 in St. Petersburg.

(4) *A Course in Farming with an Appendix to Field Husbandry*, one volume, No. 396 in Banduo’s catalog, No. 146 in Shuo Fang Bei Cheng's bibliography. The book was authored by agronomist S. M. Usov (1796–1859), and published in St. Petersburg in 1837, 312 pages. The book made significant contributions to the popularization of agricultural knowledge.

The National Museum of China also houses a batch of books that were transferred from the Imperial Palace. The details are recorded as follows:

(1) *On the Record of the Turkish War (ОписаниеТурецкойвойны)*, Volumes 1 & 2, written by A. P. Mikhaylovsky-Danilevsky; Foreign Language Book item: 故 367: 1, 367: 2; Rare Book item: 善 129. St. Petersburg, 1843.

(2) *A Collection of Exemplary Drawings for Exercises in Drawing Mountains (Собрание образцовых чертежей для упражнения в черчении гор)*; Foreign Language Book item: 故 360; Rare Book item: 善 686. St. Petersburg, 1827.

(3) *Guide for Trigonometric Survey Calculations (Руководство для исчислений тригонометрической съемки)*, written by F. F. Shubert; Foreign Language Book item 故 358; Rare Book item 善 685. The General Staff Military Printing House, St. Petersburg, 1826.
(4) Atlas of Historical Genealogical Chronological Geography (Исторический, генеалогический, хронологический, географический атлас), with only 68 remaining pages; Foreign Language Book item: 故 371; Rare Book item: 善 135. The Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences, 1809.

(5) World Panorama (Всемирная панorama), Foreign Language Book item: 故 364; Rare Book item: 善 684. Riga, 1835.

(6) Ancient World Atlas (Атлас Древнего мира), with only seven out of 18 remaining maps in the preface and index; Foreign Language Book item: 故 355; Rare Book item: 善 131. St. Petersburg, 1843.

(7) Eastern Hemisphere and Western Hemisphere Maps (Восточное полушарие и западное полушарие). Foreign Language Book item: 故 372; Rare Book item: 善 691. 1831.


(10) Constantinople and the Turks (Vol. 2) (Константинополь и турки. Часть вторая), including 161 pages of content, two pages of index, 48 illustrations with one missing frontispiece illustration, and one map. Foreign Language Book item: 故 363; Rare Book item: 善 127. St. Petersburg, 1843.

(11) Greece (Греция), authored by Johann Anton Friedrich de la Croix, including 30 pages of text and 30 pages of illustrations. Foreign Language Book item: 故 362; Rare Book item: 善 128. Riga, 1837.

(12) Emperor Peter the Great (Император Петр Первый), 112 pages with 28 portrait illustrations. Foreign Language Book item: 故 357; Rare Book item: 善 688. Moscow, 1837.

(13) Map of Europe With Border Parts of Asia and Africa (Карта Европы с пограничными частями Азии и Африки), with a cover sleeve. Foreign Language Book item: 故 370; Rare Book item: 善 136. Imperial Russian Military Topographic Depot, 1821.

(14) Atlas of the Russian Empire (Атлас Российской Империи), including full 64 pages of illustrations but incomplete cover page. Foreign Language Book item: 故 369; Rare Book item: 善 137. Imperial Russian Military Topographic Depot, 1838.

(15) The Russian Empire in Europe (Российская Империя в Европе), including one illustration with a cover sleeve. Foreign Language Book item: 故 373; Rare Book item: 善 132. St. Petersburg, 1841.
(16) *Industrial Map of European Russia* (Карта промышленности Европейской России), including a cover sleeve. Foreign Language Book item: 故 374; Rare Book item: 善 133. Moscow, 1841, color lithograph in Russian.

(17) *World Maps*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Картинь света. Часть 1, 2), including 228 pages with four pages of index. Foreign Language Book item: 故 365; Rare Book item: 善 134. Moscow, 1836.

(18) *Economic Botany—Descriptions and Pictures of Plants Beneficial or Harmful to Humans* (Хозяйственная ботаника заключающая в себе описания и изображения полезных и вредных для человека растений), authored by N. P. Shcheglov, two volumes, including 450 pages and an additional 33 pages of illustrations index in Vol. 1, and 356 pages and an additional 29 pages of illustrations index in Vol. 2, with only a few remaining illustrations. Foreign Language Book item: 故 366: 1, 故 366: 2; Rare Book item: 善 687. 1828.

(19) *Atlas of Krusenstern’s Voyage* (Атлас к путешествию Крузенштерна), including 100 engraved maps and three large fold-out maps. Foreign Language Book item: 故 368; Rare Book item: 善 692. St. Petersburg, 1813, lead-printed.

(20) *Switzerland* (Швейцария), including 100 pages of text with 24 pages of illustrations and annexes. Foreign Language Book item: 故 359; Rare Book item: 善 130. 1837.

Based on the above, it can be seen that the majority of the books in the collection of the National Museum were among the “Atlas and Geographical Illustrations” selectively read by Emperor Xianfeng.

In summary, there are currently 13 volumes in the collection of the Ancient Books Department of the National Library of China, 20 pieces/volumes in the National Museum of China, and four volumes in Zhang Tiexian’s collection, totaling 37 volumes/pieces, which are the remaining portion of the originally discovered 800 volumes of gifted books. These books reflect the cutting-edge works in various fields of Europe and Russia at that time. The gifted books initially attracted attention from the intellectual community, and after the translation of the book list, literati and officials eagerly copied them, seemingly refreshing the minds of people in the imperial court and civil society. And there has always been advocacies for translation. In the 11th year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1885), the censor Zhao Erxun (赵尔巽) suggested to the Grand Council that the gifted books be translated into Chinese and printed with engraved plates by the Tongwen Guan (同文馆). Yet the then chief examiner of the Tongwen Guan, the American missionary W. A. P. Martin, held a negative opinion. The Grand Council eventually decided that the old books from Russia were not as comprehensive and influential as the new books from Britain, Germany, and France, so there was no need for translation. Hence, the Qing government did not adopt the suggestion for translation and did not attach enough
importance to the gifted books. Prior to the Opium War, Russia’s expansion in China was still in the exploratory stage, and the translation of these books had significant implications for the development of various fields in China at that time. After the Second Opium War, with a deeper understanding of China, Russia’s expansion became more audacious. The first official book exchange between China and Russia undoubtedly occurred at this historical juncture.

2.2 The Chinese Version of *Journey to the East of His Imperial Highness the Tsesarevich 1890–1891*

The Chinese version of Путешествие на Восток Его Императорского Высочества Наследника Цесаревича 1890–1891 is translated as “皇太子东游记 1890–1891” (*Journey to the East of His Imperial Highness the Tsesarevich 1890–1891*, hereinafter referred to as *Journey to the East*). The book describes the unprecedented educational journey from 1890 to 1891 of the last Tsar of the Russian Empire, Nicholas II Alexandrovich (1868–1918) during his time as the Tsesarevich. The tradition of the “educational journey” for Tsesareviches dates back to the time of Peter the Great. This journey lasted for 9 months and included visits to Greece, Egypt, India, Thailand, Burma (now Myanmar), China, Japan, and other countries, which helped to strengthen the diplomatic relations between the Russian Empire and other countries. The author of the book is Esper Esperovich Ukhtomsky (Эспер Эсперович Ухтомский). In Qing dynasty literature, he was also referred to as “邬多穆斯基”, “邬克托穆斯基”, “邬王”, “邬克托”, “邬克托木斯基”, “邬和他木斯科”, “邬赫唐斯基”, and other names, depending on different translation. He was commissioned to write this account, in which he recorded the receptions, geography, military, and historical and cultural aspects of the countries visited during the journey.

The book was published over a period of six years (1893–1898) in deluxe and regular editions, and it was available in five languages: Russian, English, German, French, and Chinese. The Russian edition was first published in 1893 under the title Journey to the East of His Imperial Highness the Tsesarevich 1890–1891, but after the coronation of Nicholas II in 1894, the title was changed to Путешествие Государя Императора Николая II на Восток (в 1890–1891), translated as Journey of the Tsar Nicholas II to the East (1890–1891). In 1897, an official version was published, which was used as an official textbook and distributed throughout the country. The Chinese version was published in 1898 in a print run of three volumes. Unlike the Russian edition, the Chinese version only covers his travels and experiences in China, with little mention of other countries.

Under the commission of the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary to China M. N. Giers (М. Н. Гирс, 1856–1932), D. D. Pokotilov (Д. Д. Покотилов), the then official of the
Russian Ministry of Finance, presented to the Emperor and Empress of the Qing Dynasty on September 30, 1899 (Схиммельпеннинк ван дер Ойе, 2009). For this reason, Pokotilov was summoned and honored by Empress Dowager Cixi and Emperor Guangxu (Хохлов, 1999). After extensive research, the author finally found, in the Vol. 4 of the Third Compilation of “Report on the Inventory of Forbidden City Collections” (故宫物品点查报告), two copies of *Journey to the East* itemized 2628, which corroborates the information in the above-mentioned literature. Due to the transfer of cultural relics and other reasons, these two books were found in the Palace Museum Library and Peking University, respectively. In addition to the two copies presented to the Qing imperial court, a third copy of the Chinese version was printed slightly later and ordered by the Russian Tsar to be kept in the Imperial Library of Russia. In 2018, Dr. Anastasia Komolova from the Kremlin Museum found the third copy in the Russian National Library (formerly the Imperial Library of Russia). So far, all three Chinese versions have been located.

The three copies appear to be consistent in the cover and content, with the only difference being that original covers sleeves of the two copies in China are presumably lost. The cover of the books is exceptionally exquisite, with embossed, gilded, rectangular gold-framed and decorative floral patterns, the design of which is similar to the Qing Dynasty enamel cloisonné. The paper used in the inside pages is similar to modern copperplate paper, with lead printing and meticulous binding. There are 111 pages of text in Chinese, totaling 18,955 Chinese characters, without page numbers. The calligraphy of the Chinese text is elegant and beautiful, showing a deep understanding of Chinese calligraphy. There are 479 illustrations (some in color) in the book, including photographs, engravings, lithographs, and watercolor paintings. The author of the watercolor paintings is N. N. Karazin (Н.Н. Каразин, 1842–1908), a distinguished painter, anthropologist, writer, geographer, traveler, and war correspondent, whose grandfather was the founder of Kharkiv University. The photographs were taken by photographer Vladimir Dmitrievich Mendeleev (Владимир Дмитриевич Менделеев, 1865–1898), who was the eldest son of the famous Russian chemist D. I. Mendeleev. After his trip, V. D. Mendeleev wrote letters to his father praising the amiable character of the Tsesarevich. The photos taken on this trip were included in this book by Ukhtomsky. There were originally more than 200 photos, which are now kept in the National Library of Russia. The cover and title page of the Chinese version contain the following information: book title, “俄太子东游记”; the author, “王爵吴克托穆斯基”; the publisher, “德来泽城璞洛喀次书坊藏板”; publication year, “光绪戊戌年” (1898).

The Chinese version of *Journey to the East* is distinct from versions in other languages. Firstly, the book depicts the firsthand experiences of the Tsesarevich during the Qing Dynasty, vividly showcasing a direct historical witness to the exchanges between the Chinese and Russian courts during the Qing Dynasty.
Secondly, the Chinese version was commissioned by the Russian Tsar and only printed in three copies, whose imperial-level design reflects exceptional value. Thirdly, the book was written by the Prince Esper Ukhtomsky, a prominent Orientalist of the Russian Empire, and was transcribed by a Chinese calligrapher and printed in Leipzig, Germany. The book covers important figures in China and Russia, and touches upon ethnology, geography, and natural resources, making it an important cultural heritage of the Chinese-Russian exchange.

In recent years, other cultural relics related to the visit of the Russian Tsesarevich to China have also been discovered. *The Collected Poems of Zhang Zhidong* (张之洞诗文集) contains two poems describing the grand reception of the Tsesarevich. One poem, titled “Book Gifting to the Tsesarevich Visiting Hankou in the Qianchuan Pavilion” (太子来游汉口享燕晴川阁索书即席奉赠), goes:

Flying wheels from the west have crossed the sea  
Carrying auspicious bells to compare with the Decheng  
On a sunny day, the Qingchuan Pavilion unfurls its splendid curtains  
As flowers bloom and rainbow flags welcome the Han River  
Magnificent views of the three territories await the bold adventurer  
As the happy union of two countries is celebrated with joy  
From this day on, the grand achievements are recorded and spread  
As the rivers and skies clear for thousands of miles (Zhang, 1928, p. 256)

Another poem titled “The Young Companionship of the Greek and Russian Princes” (希腊世子俄太子之戚, 来同游者, 年甚少), goes:

On high spirits they ride, plucking fragrant grass on Chu’s land  
Banners and flags soaring high, in the sea and sky’s command  
Amidst singing parrots by the spring, they row beneath the night’s light  
Together drinking wine, by the water’s edge so bright.  
Men of both countries connect, hearts bound as one  
Women in silks, of which the colors bright  
But like Sima of Southern Han’s age, I feel  
About, I yearn and appeal (Zhang, 1928, p. 256)

These poems vividly depict the cultural exchange between China and Russia during the Qing Dynasty, and the Qianchuan Pavilion gained more fame for hosting the Russian Tsesarevich. Zhang Zhidong’s handwritten version of the poem “Book Gifting to the Tsesarevich Visiting Hankou in the Qianchuan Pavilion” was once collected by Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang, and was donated to the National Museum of China before Yang Jiang passed away, adding fresh materials to the reenactment of the Russian Tsesarevich’s trip.

In commemoration of his journey, in 1891, Tsar Alexander III commissioned the jewelry company “Fabergé” (Фаберже) to create the “Azov Commemorative Egg”,

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*Note: The above translation is based on the original text and is not verbatim.*
which was modeled after the half-armored ship named “Azov” on which the Tsesarevich had traveled. This was the seventh imperial egg created in Russia. Its delicate craftsmanship was embodied in every detail, including the ship’s meticulously replicated equipment, the platinum boat, anchor and chain, spider-web-like gold wire mast, and tiny letters spelling of Azov. The Egg is currently housed in the Moscow Kremlin Museum, serving as a memento of the Tsesarevich’s journey to the East and showcasing the artistic achievements of Russia.

Unfortunately, despite its promotion, Tsar Nicholas II’s journey to the East did not lead to a change in Russia’s aggressively expansionistic policies towards China after his ascension to the throne. The Chinese version of the book was only printed in three copies, while the English, French, and German versions were openly distributed, highlighting an uneven attitude towards different countries.

3 Russian Silverware

In 1897, in response to Li Hongzhang’s attendance at the coronation of Nicholas II, the Qing court sent Esper Esperovich Ukhtomsky as an envoy to China.

During the Ukhtomsky’s trip from the planning stage, departure, landing in Shanghai and Tianjin, until the audience at the Hall of Literary Glory (文华殿), there were related reports along the way, which were detailed in the newspaper Shen Bao (申报).

On the 25th of the previous month, Wu Keshi (Ukhtomsky) went to the Hall of Literary Glory to meet the Emperor, presented the credentials and the precious gifts bestowed by the Tsar of Russia, and requested an audience with the Empress Dowager Cixi. Subsequently, according to an imperial edict from the Empress, on the 27th, he once again went to the Hall of Literary Glory and presented the letter from the Russian Empress to the Chinese Empress, which was then passed on to the Empress Dowager Cixi for her perusal. The gifts to the Empress were listed as follows: a diamond-studded star of the order of Catherine the Great, Moscow’s finest brocade fabric, a crown inlaid with gold and diamonds, a complete set of silver combs, a lapis lazuli table, a treasure needle, an antique fan, and a pair of phonographs. The gifts to the Emperor included a silver statue of a loyalist with an ancient jade throne, a blue lapis lazuli tile with a blue lapis lazuli base, four pieces of top-quality arctic fox fur, a precious wine flask and sixteen cups, a cloisonné enamel piece, a carved silver eagle wine vessel with six cups, and a fruit box. In addition, six precious items were presented to the Gong Mansion and the Qing Mansion; eight items were presented to Li Fuxiang; three items were presented to each of the officials of the Zongshu. This also reflects the deep friendship between China and Russia. (Shenbao, 1897, June 7, p. A2)

The above passage details the two occasions in which Ukhtomsky presented himself before the Emperor in the Hall of Literary Glory, as well as a list of gifts given. This account was corroborated by the account in “Li Hongzhang's European and
American Visit Records” (李鸿章历聘欧美记), both reporting that the total value of these items was approximately 400,000 gold pieces (Zhong, 1980).

In addition, the book In Old Beijing, written by V. V. Korsakov, a doctor of the Russian missionary group and a journalist, also provides specific descriptions of the gifts, and reveals the deeper meanings of these items from the perspective of the Russians. The following is a translation of the original text.

One of the gifts presented to the emperor was a sculpture made by the Ovchinnikov factory, depicting the liberation of Bulgaria. The gift given to Empress Dowager Cixi included the Catherine Medal, which was specifically designed for non-Christians and studded with diamonds worth over 5000 rubles, a set of silver bathroom utensils, a serpent-shaped crown made of gold and set with a large ruby. The gifts were undoubtedly a grand gesture at the time, as the Chinese had a great appreciation for precious stones. Other gifts included a white satin fan with a painted golden border, a lapis lazuli small table, and a phonograph. Empress Dowager Cixi was interested in all new inventions and had installed electric lights and telephones in her palace. She had also imported a phonograph from Paris last year, and had electric boats and cars in her garden. Additionally, many fabrics were given as gifts to the empress, including gold and silver silk satin, woven brocade, gold and silver ripple silk, and velvet. Prince Gong was given six cup-shaped containers made by the Grachev factory, a pair of rose quartz vases, a Fabergé silver rooster vase, a lapis lazuli small table, and a stone dressing table. Li Hongzhang was given a set of silver tea utensils, a pair of silver glass bottles made by the Grachev factory, a diamond-studded hat, a statue of Peter the Great, and a snuff box. Li Hongzhang must have been very pleased with the gift of the statue of Peter the Great, as, like all Chinese people, he would have seen the hidden meaning behind the gift. Undoubtedly, he was an outstanding figure in China, and the gift of the statue of Peter the Great would have greatly honored him. (Корсаков, 1904, pp. 200–202)

After examining the literature and inspecting the Palace Museum’s cultural relics, it was found that a silver knight statue (银义士像), an oriole-engraved silver wine vessel (錾莺银酒匜), a decorative silver fruit and sweet box (盛花果盒全具), a pair of silver cloisonné plates, and a pair of silver tree-shaped double-eared washbasins are closely related to the current recruitment. The first three were recorded as gifts presented to Emperor Guangxu. Furthermore, the silver cloisonné plates by Ovchinnikov and the silver tree-shaped double-eared washbasins by Grachev Brothers were found to be consistent with the literature description, indicating that they are also part of the gifts presented during this visit.

According to the Russian inscriptions, the above-mentioned relics were produced by the Fabergé, Ovchinnikov, and Grachev Brothers. Fabergé is known for its exquisite craftsmanship, ingenious design, and use of jewel inlays and luxurious decorations, making it a hallmark of imperial treasure manufacturing in Russia. The products of the Ovchinnikov factory have fascinated royalty worldwide, mainly using ancient Russian and modern artists’ paintings as their inspiration. The revival of the cloisonné enamel craft is not only associated with Russia but also closely related to Ovchinnikov’s efforts in Europe. The Grachev Brothers company was
established in 1866, and its silver art products are renowned both domestically and internationally, having won numerous awards at world expositions.

(1) The Silver Knight Statue (银义士像)

The Silver Knight Statue, found in Russian artifacts, is a historical sculpture created by the Ovchinnikov factory. The statue stands at 1.5 m tall and weighs several hundred kilograms. According to the literature, the sculpture depicts a Russian knight riding on a tall horse, accompanied on the left by a barefoot Russian peasant in sandals holding the reins of the horse, while on the right, a standing woman kisses a corner of a flag while holding a child, who holds a shield with the emblem of Bulgaria. The entire group of figures is placed on a granite base, with silver figurines representing Montenegro and Bulgaria on either side. This group of sculptures was created in Russia, signifying a historical event unrelated to China, and may not have been fully understood by the Chinese people. The sculpture was valued at over 7,000 rubles. (Корсаков, 1904, pp. 200–202)

During the early 20th century, Russian gold and silver products were at the forefront of global craftsmanship and production. This period saw the emergence of numerous famous craftsmen who created excellent works, with silver sculpting being one of the most representative. The focus of silver sculpting is primarily on character modeling, utilizing molded casting to represent an entire scene, which is composed of multiple molded casts. Subsequently, hammering, chiseling, or relief-making methods are used to depict the finer details of the characters, such as hair and beards, or to illustrate their expressions. The Silver Knight Statue was created using the aforementioned methods, and is considered a masterpiece of Ovchinnikov. Through the Silver Knight Statue, the Tsarist government aimed to express its unwavering support of China during a time of internal and external difficulties for the Qing government, portraying Russia as defending China like a knight, just as it defended Bulgaria.

(2) The Silver-Inlaid Double-Eared Three-Legged Double-Headed Eagle Vessel (银贴花双耳三足双头鹰盖炉)

Formerly known as the “oriole-engraved silver wine vessel” (錾莺银酒匜), this vessel has a height of 61 cm and a diameter of 53 cm. It is three-legged, with two ears and a bulging belly. The belly is decorated with silver flower and grass pieces, and the neck is adorned with an “S” pattern. On either side is a double-headed eagle emblem. Its flat lid is narrow at the top and wide at the bottom, with a large three-dimensional double-headed eagle on the top. The inside of the lid bears the Russian inscription “К.ФАБЕРЖЕ (K. Fabergé)”. The decoration of this wholly gilded object conforms to the luxurious style typical of the Fabergé company, which was usually famous for creating exquisitely decorated Easter eggs for the royal family, but not for objects of this size and scale. Given the important matter of an audience with the Chinese
emperor, artistic expression was required to be even more exquisite. The relief
double-headed eagle on the belly and the double-headed eagle sculpture on the top of
the lid present the Russian national emblem in a three-dimensional form. The
appearance of the national emblem twice on one object emphasizes the national
characteristics and also reflects the symbol of Russian imperial power.

According to the naming rules for cultural relics, it is named the “Silver-Inlaid
Double-Eared Three-Legged Double-Headed Eagle Vessel”. Usually made of gold or
silver and decorated with silver floral patterns, this type of object is called “братина”,
which was popular in Russia from the 16th to the 19th century as an alcohol container
at grand banquets. It was also used as a valuable gift. The shape and size of the vessels
varied, with some having a cone-shaped lid and generally accompanied by 6–12 cups.
The literature mentions that the six accompanying cups are now missing.

(3) Silver Engraved Flower Double-Eared Six-Foot Elliptical Plate

In the literature, this object is referred to as a “fruits and sweets box”, with a
height of 18 cm, length of 93 cm, and width of 45 cm. The plate has laurel flower
crowns as its ears, and is decorated with patterns of Lycoris leaves and bouquets
around its body. This plate was itemized as “吕1945” in the list of post-war inspection.
According to the “Report on the Inventory of Forbidden City Collections”, it was
originally stored in the Hall of Mental Cultivation (养心殿), referred to as a “silver-
plated copper fruit and sweets container” (The Palace Museum and the Kulangsu
Gallery of Foreign Artifacts, 2017). The place of its storage, the Hall of Mental Cultiva-
tion, where the emperors handled political affairs and daily life, demonstrates its
importance to the emperor. This object was used for decoration or display of fruits.
The Imperial Palace is added on Russian artistic elements through such rich and
exotic objects.

(4) Silver Cloisonné Plates

The plates are 0.5 cm high and 13.5 cm in diameter and come in a pair. On the
bottom of the plate, there is a double-headed eagle badge, while its wide rim is
decorated with cloisonné inlays and embellished with wave, floral, and other
decorative patterns. The decoration on the rim is particularly striking, with varie-
gated blue, green, and yellow colors. The outer bottom of the plate has an 84 silver
hallmark, indicating a silver content of 87.5 %. The inscription “П. Овчинниковъ (P.
Ovchinnikov)” was commonly used by the Ovchinnikov factory at that time. The
Ovchinnikov factory pushed the art of cloisonné to its limit, filling the gaps in the
exquisite silverware with various colors and giving it a unique Russian style.

Karsakov mentioned Ovchinnikov’s cloisonné silverware in his book In Old
Beijing, stating that
each person in the Office of General Management was given a diamond-encrusted hat and various gifts, including cloisonné silverware and glassware made by Grachev Brothers and Ovchinnikov factories. Among some finely carved jade vases, two of them were exquisitely crafted small ones made of green jade worth 2200 rubles. There were also silver cups with animal heads. Other ministers, in addition to the aforementioned, also received gold watches on chains and long robes. The total value of the gifts exceeded 70,000 rubles. (Корсаков, 1904, pp. 200–202)

(5) Silver Tree-Shaped Washbasins with Double Handles

The washbasins are 43 cm in height and 33.5 cm in diameter. They are made entirely of silver and come in a pair. The lower body is shaped like a tree, with branches and leaves stretching out and supporting a silver plate. The silver plate is decorated with rope-like patterns, creating the effect of woven fabric. One of the washbasins features four deer under the tree, with two adult deer looking up and two fawns searching for food. The other washbasin depicts two bears under the tree, one walking and the other sleeping. The tree and the base are stabilized by screws (The Palace Museum and the Kulangsu Gallery of Foreign Artifacts, 2017). The bottom of the silver plate bears the numbers 84 and 1893, and inscription “Грачевъ”, representing 84 silver, the year 1893, and the name of manufacturer the Grachev Brothers Factory. These silver pieces, made by the Grachev Brothers Factory, showcase the brilliant craftsmanship of Russian silverware manufacturing.

During his reign, Nicholas II had a special fondness for silverware and recruited outstanding craftsmen from Europe to produce exquisite silver pieces. His aesthetic taste surpassed many of the European royalty. This can be attested to by the abovementioned cultural relics from the old collection of the Qing Palace. The three artworks from three royal suppliers, serving as diplomatic gifts to showcase the pinnacle of Russian silverware craftsmanship.

4 Conclusions

The Qing imperial collection of Russian cultural relics not only served as a carrier and witness of cultural exchanges between China and Russia, but also reflected the different cultural values between two countries. During the reign of Peter the Great, huge profits were obtained through trade with China to solve the problem of large-scale military spending. He was willing to make concessions in the dispute over ceremonial gifts, reflected the German-made sword of the 18th century Dragon Cavalry. The Russian books gifted to the Emperor Daoguang mostly reflected the advanced areas of European scientific and technological progress and national development. The Chinese version of Journey to the East of His Imperial Highness the Tsesarevich 1890–1891 was only printed in three copies, while the English, French,
and German versions were officially published and distributed. The silver gift items highlighted European elements, indicating that since Peter the Great, the Russian Empire hoped to gain recognition from Europe, while extracting profits from the East. The European influence in the material and cultural exchanges between the two countries is prominent, which also led to minimal Russian influence on the material level in the Qing imperial court.

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