

# The Cossacks of Siberia: Tailoring Identity in Post Soviet Space

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*The Czarist Russian Cossacks invaded our Heilongjian province and built a fortress in Yakutsk and Nerchinsk as a base for further expansion. They looted and killed in Chinese lands, and even ate human flesh like animals. The Manchu troops and various ethnic groups resisted heroically.*

(From a 7<sup>th</sup> grade Chinese history textbook, 2002)

Indeed, in the 21st century, this description of the Cossack people sounds odd, outdated and politically incorrect. As Horvat and Hielscher (2003) document, the depiction of different groups of people in history textbooks is a common source of controversy both within and between nation states. Evidently, current Chinese nationalistic rhetoric describes the Cossack people as savage outsiders to induce a sentiment of solidarity in the face of an unknown and, thus, dangerous enemy. How much do we know about the Cossack people today and what niche do they occupy in the current Russian society? The answers to these questions are still largely unknown.

The questions of who the Cossack people are and how to reveal their human face to the rest of an unaware society captured my consciousness since I first met these people during my fieldwork in Eastern Siberia, in the town of Ulan-Ude, in July 2004. The fieldwork was part of the research leading to a doctoral degree at the International Christian University in Tokyo, Japan. The data were collected in a series of in-depth interviews with the “native” people of the Republic of Buryatia, namely, the Evenki, Buryats and mainstream Russians. Upon arrival to the main site of my research, I realized the actual complexity of the category,

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“mainstream Russians.” This category fell into three subcategories, namely, the Old Believer people, ethnically mixed Russians (called *Siberians*) and the Cossack people. Two male Cossacks, Kisilev Evgenii Viktorovich and Kasyanov Yurii Leonidovich, both leaders in the Cossack cultural revival movement (and, thus, willing to be identified by name), participated in my research and agreed to do in-depth interviews and shared much documentary material on Cossack history.

The main purpose of this article is to look at the current Cossack people’s cultural revival movement and the reconstruction of their identity in post-Soviet space. This article is also part of research in progress on the identity continuity of the people of Eastern Siberia, among whom are the Cossack people. To be correct, they are called the *Zabaikalye* Cossacks (*Zabaikalye* literally means the area behind Lake Baikal). The major source of data in this article is based on the informal interviews with the Cossack people, documentary review and the analysis of the revival movement of the Cossacks of Russia, particularly in Siberia.

The story of the *Zabaikalye* Cossacks is covered in seven sections. The first section analyses the milestones of Cossack history and their arrival in Siberia. The second section considers the foundation of the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army. The third section discusses the problem of the erasure of Cossack identity during the Soviet era. Section four analyses the current identity dynamics and cultural revival movement of the Cossacks. Section five considers the role of the Cossack organizations in the cultural revival movement. Section six discusses the internal and external threats to Cossack identity in the post-Soviet space of the Russian Federation. And finally, section seven provides general conclusions to this article.

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The first Cossack I interviewed, presented a startling combination of symbols of the bygone Soviet era, Cossack culture and the emerging neo-Russian culture which were interwoven into an intricate web of meanings, unintelligible to outsiders. I met Cossack Kisilev Evgenii Viktorovich in his office. The office

would have been a typical one in a former Soviet state enterprise, but with one exception. The then mandatory portrait of Lenin and other Communist Party leaders had been discarded. Instead, a huge oil portrait of the Emperor Nicolas II was installed. In the corner of the office there were two icons of the Virgin Mary and of Saint George the Victor. As was revealed in the interviews later, the Czar and the Virgin Mary are two essential symbols of Cossack spiritual culture.

The Cossack's face was maimed with a scar which ran across his eyebrow. I saw the scar and thought that this man had teleported from old Soviet films (then the only available source of information about the Cossacks) which portrayed them as merciless, unintelligent and brutal people who fought against the Bolsheviks to stop the rise of Soviet power in Siberia. The whole picture was an oxymoron in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In reality, the scar was the price which Mr. Kisilev paid for being a Cossack. It turned out he was heavily beaten by some skinhead youth, yet another sad reality of contemporary Russia, for wearing the Cossack uniform and, thus, for being proud of his heritage. In that battle he nearly lost his eye. However, another battle of his life was ahead of him: the struggle to restore the Cossack identity erased by Soviet propaganda, the struggle to revive the Cossack culture and the struggle to be called a people.

Conventional wisdom suggests that I look at the historical documents to shed light on some of the economic, social and political aspects of the life of Cossack communities and the role they played in the settlement of Siberia.

## **I. The Arrival in Siberia**

The analysis of the documents available did not clarify this widely contested subject of the Cossacks. It is contested regarding the following issues. Firstly, whether there was a "settlement" of Siberia or there was an "invasion/conquest." (Slezkine, 1994) Secondly, whether the Cossacks occupied "no man's lands, empty lands" (Mastyugina and Perepelkin, 1996), or did they "push" the aboriginal Evenki and other nomadic tribes from their traditional territories.

(Belikov, 1994) And finally, whether there is a Cossack peoples' "cultural revival" (Skinner, 1994), or are the Cossacks a "discontented radical power." (Lieven, 1998)

The Cossacks made their entry into the history of Russia in the period after the rule of the Golden Horde, when the Cossacks were empowered by the Russian Czars to extend Imperial borders and guard them from intrusions. In 1582, the Cossack, Yermak, led a force that claimed all of Siberia in the name of the Russian Czar. (Stephan, 1994) The Cossack's entrance into the Siberian realm had unexpected consequences, both for the Cossacks and for the aboriginal people of Siberia. The newly "discovered" aboriginal people, or in the rhetoric of the early 17th through 20th centuries, the "aliens", were incorporated into the Russian Empire as "subjects" of the Czar. Since that time, the relationship between the government in Moscow and the government in other parts of the empire has been marked by a center-periphery dichotomy. Thus, the Siberian "periphery" and its numerous peoples were seen as "uncivilized," and their age old traditions were labeled "backward." For the aboriginal people of Siberia, the arrival of the Cossacks and various other settler groups brought about changes in the structure of their traditional societies.

The analysis of the documents (Shenk and Kazin, 1912; Kozulin, 1991; *Zabaikalskoe Kazachestvo*, 1991; Zuev, 1994; Kasyanov, 2003; and *Kazachii Vestnik*, 2004) which became available during my fieldwork suggests that the Cossacks played a significant role in the settlement and development of Siberia. This can be gleaned, first, from the analysis of the functions, at times contradictory, which the Cossack people carried out, and secondly, from their settlement patterns.

The multifunctional character of the services the Cossacks provided in Siberia included the following activities which have not been widely discussed in post-Imperial public and scholarly discourses. The Cossacks of Siberia:

1. kept the civil order in new settlements in Siberia (Shenk and Kazin, 1912);
2. protected silver and gold mines, factories, shops and warehouses (Kozulin, 1991);

3. suppressed spots of internal unrest;
4. were involved in the agricultural cycle in farming and tillage (Zuev, 1994);
5. convoyed trade expeditions (*Zabaikalskoe Kazachestvo*, 1991);
6. convoyed religious missions to China (Zuev, 1994);
7. worked as laborers and construction workers;
8. were involved in research expeditions and the secret service (Stephan, 1994);
9. convoyed fugitives, deportees and political prisoners, especially the Old Believers (Bolonev, 2001); and
10. acted as go-between interpreters.

As a political tool, the Cossacks provided a link between the interests of the government in Moscow and the aboriginal peoples of Siberia.

Another important niche which the Cossacks occupied in the Siberian realm was land ownership and cattle breeding. From the time of their settlement, the Cossacks, as frontier guards, received payment from the Czarist government. Initially the payment was done in money, pelts and forage. However, through the course of centuries, chunks of “empty” land became the major system of payment for their service as frontier guards. The government legally empowered the Cossacks to explore and occupy lands suitable for agriculture free of tax. Individual Cossacks had land possessions. However, their lands were considered to be the property of the whole Cossack regiment. (Shenk and Kazin, 1912) Thus, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Cossacks of Siberia, along with the Russian Orthodox Church, were the biggest land owners in Siberia. (Zuev, 1994)

The second factor that provides us a link to understanding the role of the Cossacks in Siberia is the complexity of their settlements. The *Zabaikalye* Cossacks lived in permanent self-sufficient settlements called *stanitsa*. These settlements had their own governor (called Ataman), laws and regulations. The Cossack settlements had equal male and female populations. The Cossack community had a highly developed social protection system. This system manifested itself in educational and financial benefits, which were available

upon request. For instance, widows and Cossack children and especially Cossack orphans were entitled to free education and annual allowances. Formal education was not limited to the Cossack people only. The Cossacks established schools for the children of the aboriginal people of Eastern Siberia whose parents joined the Cossack regiments and, thus, became part of the Cossack people and their settlements. One of the schools established by the Cossacks in Eastern Siberia was the Russian-Mongolian School. The aboriginal people studied Religion, Russian Grammar, Calligraphy, Mathematics and Military Science.

## **II. Foundation of the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army**

The Chronicles of the Cossack Army (Shenk and Kazin, 1912, p. 293) tell that an Act of the Czar established the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army in 1851. The Chronicles say that four of the regiments were made up of Russian Cossacks, one regiment was made up of the aboriginal Evenki (or Tungus) people and another regiment consisted of the Buryat people. The Evenki Cossack regiment predated the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army and was first formed in 1760. The Buryat Cossack regiment was formed out of the nomadic horse breeding Buryat people. Both the Evenki and Buryat people participated in guarding the borders of the Russian Empire.

Membership in the Cossack regiments became a strategy for survival for the aboriginal Evenki and nomadic Buryat people. Membership guaranteed exemption from the *yasak* tax, protection against external enemies, provided steady income, and secured possession of land. The Buryat and Evenki Cossack regiments actively participated in the Napoleonic Wars of 1807-1812 and ended up in Paris. The *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army, together with the Buryat and Evenki Cossack regiments, participated in the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878. In 1900 they fought in China and Korea, in the cities of Qiqihaer and Hingan. They also fought against the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, in Manchuria, in Mukden and in Port Arthur. As a sign of benevolence and respect the Czar awarded the Buryat and Evenki Cossack regiments with honorary banners. Their regimental flags are kept in the museum of the Don Cossacks in

the city of Novocherkassk.

By the time of the Revolution of 1917, the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army was the largest of the six Siberian Cossack armies and the fourth largest among the 13 Cossack Armies of the Russian Empire. (*Zabaikalskoe Kazachestvo*, 1991) Each regiment of the Cossack Army had a chief, usually a member of the Emperor's family. The chief of the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army was the heir to the Russian Imperial throne, Great Knight Alexi, the son of Nicolas II. In 1918 the Emperor and his family, including their teenage son, Alexi, were mercilessly murdered in Yekaterinburg.

### **III. The Soviet Period**

The Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War that followed the Revolution had a profound effect on the cultural continuity of the Cossack people across Russia, and especially on the Cossacks of Siberia. The newly formed Bolshevik government attempted to physically and culturally exterminate these people. The American researcher Skinner (1994) pointed to a key document on Bolshevik persecution of the Cossacks. The document is a directive signed by the Communist Party leaders in January 1919. The directive says,

It is necessary, considering the experience of a year of civil war with Cossackdom, to recognize as the only correct policy the most ruthless fight against the leaders of Cossackdom by their universal extermination. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct ruthless mass terror against all Cossacks who have directly or indirectly participated in the fight against the Soviet power.

(Quoted in Skinner, 1994, p. 1032)

The policy of mass terror against all Cossack people continued for several decades. In the personal interview with the Cossacks of Zabaikalye conducted in 2004, one of the Cossack interviewees pointed to a widely unknown fact that in the Soviet Union until 1947, killing a Cossack person was not considered

an infringement of the law. The Cossacks, as remnants of the Czarist regime, were stigmatized as outlaws of the society. Thus, a veil of silence and avoidance covered the Cossack culture and people.

Cossack Kisilev, whom I interviewed in Ulan-Ude, learned about his Cossack background from a letter which he received at the beginning of the 1990s. Mr. Kisilev was convinced that it was a letter from the KGB. The story is typical:

My father told me that it was forbidden to talk about the Cossack Army, forbidden to mention anybody from among their relatives who were Cossacks. My grandparents secretly buried all evidence of them having been Cossacks. They buried sabers, burned uniforms and family photos.

(Interview with Cossack Kisilev, 2004)

The fear and frustration due to being arrested, shot or labeled a collaborator and an “enemy of the Soviet people” (and, thus, deserving torture and death) was very strong among the Cossack people.

There are other historical materials written mostly by Soviet refugees about the hidden histories of the people who were virtually erased from the historical narration of Russia. These materials were published in the journal, *Genocide in the USSR*, in Munich in 1958. One of the articles (Glazkov, 1958, p. 242-251) reveals the then untold story of the Cossack people whose territories were seized, their communities eliminated and people exterminated. This kind of story is crucial to an accurate understanding of the identity dynamics of the Cossack people of Eastern Siberia.

#### **IV. The Cultural Revival: Reconstructing Identity**

The break up of the Soviet Union provided a window of opportunity for the Cossack people to “reincarnate” their cultural traditions. As the Cossack cultural revival movement gained momentum in the beginning of the 1990s, the governmental authorities unclassified and disclosed information about the



victims of repression in Siberia.

As matters stand in 2005, there are three major projects aimed at reconstructing Cossack identity. To use Castell's (1997) term, the "project identity", manifests itself in the projects: the rehashing of history, "inventing traditions," and the "reincarnation" of new heroes. Let me analyze each of these projects separately.

First, there is the obvious rehashing of the history of Siberia. There are two competitive groups which are actively involved in a new interpretation of the history of the settlement of eastern Siberia. These groups are the Buryat and the Cossack people. The re-construction of history gave birth to the revival of the warrior tradition in each of these two groups. The Buryat people's warrior tradition stems from their collective memories and the Buryat people's close links to the Mongolian warrior tradition as direct descendants of the Mongolian leader, Genghis Khan. (Chimitdorzhiev, 2001)

The Cossack people's warrior tradition also stems from their collective memories expressed in the functions the Cossack people traditionally carried out in Siberia. Asked what constituted the male Cossack identity, Mr. Kisilev replied, "We are warriors, and this attitude is in our blood. Being a Cossack is the way of the warrior." (Interview with Cossack Kisilev, 2004) Indeed, each of the above mentioned groups of people represents the history of eastern Siberia and their people as "creators", protectors and heirs to present-day Siberian physical space.

In addition, the tailoring of the Cossack identity necessarily involves the "reincarnation" of new heroes, who had been old foes during the Soviet era. This process has affected all groups of people living within the confines of the former Soviet Union. For instance, the Cossack people have "resurrected" and restored honor to the name of Ataman Kolchak, the head of the White Army, who fought against the Red Army during the Civil War in Siberia from 1918 to the 1920s. For more details on the role which Admiral Kolchak played in the resistance movement in Siberia see Pereira (1996, p. 104-150).

As a result of the re-construction of history, Cossack people are involved in a second project, to employ Anderson's (1983) concept phrase, the "invention

of traditions.” This involves three major areas: the oral tradition, the military tradition and camaraderie.

First, there is the “invention” of the oral tradition of singing. Songs seem to be an important source of Cossack history and spirituality. The Cossack people’s solidarity is enhanced by singing. The other interviewee, the Ataman (Head) of the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army and Cossacks, Kasyanov Yurii Leonidovich, collected and recorded popular songs among the *Zabaikalye* Cossacks. One can glean from the textual analysis of Cossack songs that their songs serve as a repository of the oral history of the Cossack people. The analysis of the songs allowed me to identify four important themes.

Theme one refers to significant historical trajectories which include the “beginning,” that is, the settlement and development of Siberia, conflicts with the Chinese Empire, the Russo-Japanese War, clashes with the Japanese Army in Manchuria, and the “end”, that is the civil unrest after the Revolution of 1917.

Theme two identifies territorial borders significant to the Cossacks of Siberia. Siberia is identified as the Cossack Motherland, Lake Baikal is their “father”, and the Siberians are the “people of that land.” (Kasyanov, 2003)

Theme three represents other symbolical elements of the Cossack identity: roads and horses. Frontier people, the Cossacks have been constantly on the move. Roads are described as the “way to freedom” and the “way home.” Horses are described as “brothers”, as the “mother in the steppe”, as a “deadly weapon” and as a “friend to talk to.” (Kasyanov, 2003)

The last important theme of the Cossack songs is faith and loyalty to “Mother Russia”, trust in God, Jesus Christ, and loyalty to the Czar of Russia. It seems that songs helped Cossacks transform painful sorrow, grief for dead soldiers and great fury for their losses in battles.

The second important sphere of the “invention” of the Cossack traditions is the re-invention of the Cossack military tradition which involves weaponry, uniforms and camaraderie. During the interview, Ataman Kasyanov proudly showed me his Cossack uniform, weapons, knives, and three sabers (his own, his father’s and his grandfather’s). The sword was a symbol of Cossack masculinity

and a matter of male pride. Similar to the Japanese samurai sword, the Cossack saber was given to a Cossack as a sign of benevolence and in acknowledgement of his accomplishments. Each Cossack regiment in Russia has a specific uniform. The colours of the stripes on the pants differentiate one regional Cossack Army from another.

For some people wearing a Cossack uniform has become a fashion. For some it indicates the return of the Cossack traditions, and for other people it is a symbol of masculinity and Cossack solidarity.

And finally, it is camaraderie that enhances male Cossack solidarity. The Ataman of the *Zabaikalye* Cossacks explained, “I have received many awards, but the most honorable and valuable award is to know other Cossack people.” (Interview with Ataman Kasyanov, 2004) The motto of the Cossacks of Russia eloquently explains the importance of solidarity for the male Cossack identity, “There are no more sacred ties than those of camaraderie.” (*Kazachii Vedomosti*, 2004) The Cossack Army and Cossack camaraderie induced feelings of pride, harmony between different Cossack people living across thousands of miles and belongingness to the same country. It also was a way of protecting the country from internal and external enemies living outside of the Imperial reach. The “objects” of protection were the Cossack Motherland, Russia’s territorial integrity, and the Cossack families and their children.

Not much has changed today. The Cossack people’s solidarity and group cohesion are tested in the field. The voluntary participation of the Cossacks in military conflicts in post-Soviet space is specific only to the Cossack people. It is extraordinary, because this participation is voluntary. In Russia, it is the regular army and militia that are empowered to protect Russia’s domestic order. The regular army is formed on the basis of the mandatory two year conscription of males (as soldiers and low ranking officers) who have reached the age of 18 years old. The Cossacks do not belong to the Russian regular army. However, they organized the Cossack Army whose regiments are based on the previously existing (before the Revolution of 1917) Cossack Armies.

The Ataman of the *Zabaikalye* Cossacks joined the Cossack troops in the

war in Chechnya, in South Ossetia and in the Pridnestrovie (Moldova) conflicts. The Ataman explained the reasons:

As a Cossack, I have to protect my Motherland from enemies, because I had sworn under military oath. I cannot leave my country and my people in trouble and sleep quietly in my apartment. I cannot keep on passively witnessing the break up of this country. I need to make a difference.

(Interview with Ataman Kasyanov, 2004)

Apart from being the Ataman of the *Zabaikalye* Cossack Army, Mr. Kasyanov, is also the Head of the State Railway Transportation System of the Republic of Buryatia. As a Cossack, he takes vacation leave when there is a call to go to areas of conflict.

Lieven (1998), a correspondent for the London *Times* in the former Soviet Union, who was commended for his coverage of the first Chechen War in 1994, described the Cossacks, whom he had encountered in Chechnya, as an “unsatisfied radical power in its desire to restore Russian hegemony over the former Soviet Union.” (Lieven, 1998, p.223) His view contains certain elements of truth. The anti-Semitism of the Cossacks interviewed during the fieldwork, their preoccupation with military uniforms and sabers in the age of globalization, and some of the Cossacks’ controversial political views (such as the Cossacks as “creators” of Russia) make one have doubts about the sustainability and tenacity of their cultural and military traditions.

It is agreed that the Cossack participation in the Chechen conflict is contradictory; today we are witnessing the re-construction of their identity on the ruins of the Soviet Colossus. As matters stood as of 2004, the Cossacks had gathered in their Circle in the Siberian city of Omsk to distance themselves from “political games” and to organize themselves in a powerful organization and to plan their future.

There has been an obvious shift in the strategies which the cultural revival movement of the Cossack people employ. The “Robin Hood-like” (Skinner,

1994) impulsiveness has changed into planned reconstruction of the Cossack identity, involving the political, economic and social aspects of life of the Cossack communities. As a result, the Cossacks are the only group of people who see their place as a people within the confines of the Russian Federation, while other ethnic groups may emphasize secession from Russia. The Cossacks are the only group of people who emphasize their contributions and service to Russia.

Another traditional means of enhancing group cohesion among the Cossack people is their organization called the Big Circle.

## **V. The Cossack Organization: The Big Circle**

The Big Circle of the Cossacks of Russia is an umbrella organization that includes descendants of large and small Cossack armies, organizations and people of quite different views of what the Cossack ways are. The 6th Big Circle (Congress) of the Cossacks of Russia was held from June 24-26 in 2004 in the city of Omsk. This last Big Circle hosted 949 Cossack delegates, who represented smaller Cossack organizations. The Cossack Big Circle adopts resolutions, reports and recommendations binding on all Cossack organizations.

There were two significant changes in the organization of the 2004 Big Circle of the Cossacks. First, it was the first time in the 400 year history of the Cossack peoples that the Big Circle gathered all Cossack representatives together to discuss the major issues facing the Cossack people living across Russia and in other former Soviet Union countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Another significant change was in the place the Big Circle was held. It was decided to relocate Cossack meetings to the Eastern parts of the Russian Federation and Siberia. The practice of holding important meetings in European Russia was a legacy of the Soviet Union, where Moscow was the center of decision-making, and other administrative areas were subordinate to the center. The consequences of relocating the meetings from Europe to the heart of Siberia apparently put more emphasis on and brought more importance to Siberia

and the Siberian Cossack regiments, the largest among the Cossack armies. This allowed a shifting from the center vs. periphery paradigm to a paradigm emphasizing the territorial continuity of all administrative divisions. This fact itself bridged the Cossack people living in Siberia with the Cossack people living in the European part of the Russian Federation.

## **VI. Internal and External Threats to Cossack Identity**

The Big Circle of the year 2004 identified the main issues the Cossack communities are facing today. (*Kazachii Vestnik*, 2004, p.2-5) These issues can be divided into internal and external threats to Cossack identity continuity.

**Internal Threats.** The analysis of the bulletin (*Kazachii Vestnik*, 2004) allowed me to identify the following internal threats: internal divisions within the Cossack people, education of the young Cossacks and attempts at returning the Cossack lands.

First, the internal division into “registered” and “hereditary” Cossacks was seen as a threat, because it discontinued the Cossack people. This needs explanation. There are two constructed groups of Cossacks. One group is called the “registered” Cossacks. This group refers to anyone (usually not of Cossack origin) who officially registered with the “registered” Cossack organizations. These “registered” organizations are financially and logistically supported by the federal government. The Law on Cossacks recognized the existence only of this one “registered” Cossack group. The “registered” Cossacks did not and do not participate in military conflicts across the former Soviet Union.

The second group of Cossacks is called the “ancestral” Cossacks. They are those people whose parents and grandparents were Cossacks (belonged to Cossacks either by virtue of descent, inheritance or lived in Cossack settlements before the Revolution of 1917). The “ancestral” Cossacks are generally excluded from decision-making opportunities because the Law on Cossacks does not recognize the existence of the “ancestral” Cossacks. The Cossack people, who consider themselves as belonging to Cossackdom, responded to this exclusion by organizing into a powerful force with their own organization, called the

Big Circle. The Circle has meetings called “ The All Russia Big Circle of the Cossacks” and are held once every four years.

To date, the “ancestral” Cossacks are an “illegitimate” child of a surrogate mother of the Czarist epoch in post Soviet space. The Law on Cossacks granted the right of existence only to the “registered” Cossacks. This decision automatically excluded the “ancestral” Cossacks from exercising their right to have a country, their right as a people to have land, their right to identify with their cultural tradition and to transfer Cossack ways to future generations.

Secondly, the Cossacks display great concern over their cultural continuity as expressed in the education of the younger generations of Cossacks. As a result, the Cossacks opened up Sunday Schools, increased the number of Cossack Cultural Centers and organized the Cossack Cadet Corps across Russia.

Thirdly, the Cossacks are actively involved in the “return” of their property that was confiscated after the Revolution of 1917. Land was one of the main properties. It was the land that belonged to their ancestors, and as direct heirs, they consider themselves heirs to this property.

However, the attempts to return their “ancestral lands” have run into legal issues and resistance from the federal government. As a counter step the government excluded the “ancestral” Cossacks from the Law on Cossacks and did not recognize them as a people, nor their rights to land.

**External Threats.** The Cossacks strongly identify themselves with Russia, Slavic people and their cultural traditions. Therefore, external threats to Russia are considered threats to the Cossack people.

The external threats were clearly articulated in the Resolutions of the Big Circle adopted in June 2004. The threats included:

1. NATO’s military threat to Russia;
2. the “growing Chinese dragon” as a threat to Siberia;
3. various territorial disputes, including those with Japan in the Far East;  
and
4. environmental deterioration.

Therefore, the Cossacks see these external threats to Russia as threats to the

identity continuity in their communities.

As a result of the erasure of the Cossack identity from the memory of the people, the discontinuity in the Cossack community is strong. In response, the Cossacks are employing community building activities, including the organization of holidays, religious celebrations, and awards ceremonies where people are recognized for contributions to the re-development of the Cossack Army and for achievements in military affairs. The Council of Atamans created a new medal called “Platovskaya.” This award was established to commemorate the revival of Cossack organizations. The Hetman Platov, after whom the award was named, was the leader of the Cossacks of the Don. He and his army overthrew Napoleon during the Napoleonic Wars of 1807-1812. (Cresson, 1919, p.170-195)

Ardent attempts at acquiring recognition to be legally called a people are a major part of the Cossack people’s cultural revival movement. It is probably one of the most contested areas, because the importance of being called a “people” is grounded in the recognition of the rights of the Cossacks to land, in the struggle for the return of their confiscated property, and in the restoration and revival of material culture and spiritual traditions.

## **VII. Conclusions**

The analysis of the research data suggests that the current cultural revival movement of the Cossacks of Siberia is preoccupied with critiquing history and with making new history. This supports the idea that the history of a particular people is the foundation for their identity continuity and identity resurgence. The revival process has taken shape through active learning about the history of Cossack families, about the military history of the Cossack army, about Cossack heroes and enemies. This obvious “obsession” of people with re-constructing their history is based on the fact that their small cultures were excluded and erased as historical agents.

Even though the Cossacks have a wide spectrum of attitudes and opinions about domestic and international issues and display different behaviors, they



share a common value, which they believe consists of defending their country from its internal and external enemies. This issue appears to be an important interface for all Cossack males.

Protection of one's own people and protection of the country became a solidifying factor for the Cossack people in their decision to participate in domestic military conflicts. Participation in conflicts is also a testing ground for the re-constructed Cossack identity and its male solidarity.

The next characteristic of Cossack identity construction is that this process is highly politicized. There are few realistic concerns over economic development, little concern over creating equal opportunities for growth, little concern over the future of civil society or for development planning. There is little beyond the slogans of "Russian unification," under the patronage of the "creators" of Russia, the Cossacks. These slogans enhance chauvinism, boost xenophobia and drive people with multiple ethnic identities to different ethnic camps, with rigid ethnic borders.

Another tendency of the cultural revival is the profound orientation of all projects toward the past, not the future. The Cossack group identity stems mostly from what the Cossack people were like in the past. This preoccupation with the past makes the Cossack people blind to the fact that much of their "traditional" identity has been transformed and eliminated by the different technological, geopolitical, environmental, economic and social realities of the emerging consciousnesses of contemporary people living in multiethnic Russia.

However, it is the word, "Renaissance," that captures the essence of the Cossack cultural revival in the Russian Federation. It seems being called a Cossack is something more than just another ethnicity in the long list of nationalities that exist in post-Soviet space. A "Cossack" has come to signify a name, an identity, imbued with honor, tradition and spiritual resonance. The Cossacks are a social group that may play a pivotal role in the Russian Federation, particularly in unstable times, like the times which may be approaching where Russia, China, Korea and Japan are increasingly jockeying for influence over Siberian energy resources.

\* The author wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Center of Excellence Project at the International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan, which made her fieldwork possible.

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## シベリアのコサック： ポスト・ソビエト空間に適合するアイデンティティ

### < 要 約 >

エレナ・コズーリナ

本論では、ロシア連邦のポスト・ソビエト空間において、シベリアのコサックのアイデンティティがどのように再構築されているかを論じる。分析にあたっては、20世紀初頭にソ連当局によって人々の記憶から殆ど抹消されてしまった、コサック・アイデンティティの再構築を目指す文化再生運動に着目する。この再生運動の過程は、シベリア史の再構築、およびコサックの文化的・精神的・軍事的伝統の再構築という形で明白に立ち現れる。特に、コサックの軍事的伝統の新たな再構築は注目に値する。というのも、ロシア全土の軍事的な紛争や、旧ソ連諸国の紛争に、コサック兵が自発的に参加することが論争を巻き起こしているからである。

本論の主要データは、コサックの人々に対する非公式なインタビューと文献資料の分析、そしてロシア、特にシベリアにおけるコサックの社会運動の分析を基盤としている。資料は、2004年に東シベリアで行ったフィールド・ワークの際に入手したものである。

本論は、「ザバイカル」・コサックについて七節にわたって論じるものである。第一節では、彼らのシベリアへの進入について分析する。第二節では、「ザバイカル」・コサック軍の創設について考察する。第三節では、ソビエト時代におけるコサック・アイデンティティの消滅について論じる。第四節では、現在の「ザバイカル」・コサックのアイデンティティのダイナミクスと文化再生運動を分析する。第五節では、文化再生運動におけるコサック組織の役割について考察する。第六節では、ロシア連邦のポスト・ソビエト空間におけるコサック・アイデンティティを脅かす、内的・外的な要因を論じる。最終節では簡潔に結論を述べる。