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The factual head of the Japanese government, Matsudaira Sadanobu, declared the ritual and the law as the foundation for receiving Adam Laxman's expedition, the first Russian mission to Japan. The article attempts at understanding the meaning he ascribed to those notions through the lens of several sources related to Laxman's expedition.

Keywords: Adam Laxman's expedition, history of Russian-Japanese relations, foreign policy of the Tokugawa shogunate, diplomatic protocol, Matsudaira Sadanobu.

The Russian ship *Ekaterina* carrying Adam Laxman's expedition dropped the anchor in the Nemuro Harbor off the northeastern extremity of the Hokkaido Island on October 9, 1792. The primary objectives of the expedition were to bring home Japanese castaways and to establish trade relations with Japan.

Matsudaira Sadanobu (1759–1829) hailed the decision to bring survivors of a Japanese ship's wreck to their home country. "They (Russians) arrived today, and behaved properly¹. So, we should create no impediments and [act] consistent with the ritual and the law" [Yamashita Tsuneo (ed.) (2003a) p. 153], Sadanobu said in his "Guidelines for Interaction with the Russians". He also said in his memoirs more than 20 years later, "They [the Russians] brought gifts and a letter from the government. Opinions differed, and the case did not look simple. The use of force seemed untimely. We decided to convey [our stance] to them on the basis of the ritual and the law" [Matsudaira 1969, p. 165]. This article studies the ritual and the law on which Matsudaira Sadanobu relied through the lens of several texts related to Laxman's expedition.

The arrival of Laxman's expedition caused active correspondence between officials in Nemuro, Matsumae, and Edo. The mission was not totally surprising to the Japanese administration. The Ainu spread the rumor that the Russians might pay a visit, and Tokunai Mogami, an explorer of northern territories, delivered the news to bakufu in 1791 [Mogami 1972, p. 453–454].

The first report on the arrival of the Russian ship in Nemuro was sent to bakufu in the tenth month of the fourth year of Kansei (November–December

* Supported by the Grant of the President of the Russian Federation (project MK-3996.2018.6)

¹ The term *seimei*, [rectified names], was used in the original. Rectification of names, i.e. reconciliation of names with the essence of things and phenomena, is a central concept of Confucian philosophy.

1792). The report was authored by Yunosuke Matsumae, the elder son of daimyo Michihiro Matsumae. The report told the story of Daikokuya Kodayu and his companions. It also said that the Japanese were questioned by an official of the Matsumae clan upon their arrival [Pozdneyev 1909, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 49–50].

The next report by Yunosuke Matsumae said that the expedition members wished to bring the Japanese sailors, letters, and gifts to Edo, but were stopped in Nemuro for the time being. “They said they would be waiting for a response until the fourth or fifth moon of next year, and will go to Edo should the response not be given. They will be waiting here until instructions are received” [Pozdneyev 1909, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 50]. Yunosuke Matsumae sent officials to Nemuro and told them to resolve the matter peacefully if possible.

The bakufu seated in Edo sent the following answer to the report by Yunosuke Matsumae: “Bring here the Japanese castaways. Keep the Russians in Nemuro, give them rice and sake, be polite, and treat them kindly and attentively. As to receiving the Japanese castaways, I [Matsudaira Sadanobu] am sending officials, Rokuemon Ishikawa and Daigaku Murakami” [Pozdneyev 1909, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 51]. According to Yoshimitsu Koriyama, a historian of Russian-Japanese relations, the very fact that negotiations with Laxman were conducted by officials designated by bakufu, rather than representatives of the Matsumae principality, should be seen as the expedition’s success [Koriyama 1980, p. 131; Cherevko 2010, p. 208–209].

Negotiations between Laxman and *bakufu* officials were due to take place in Matsumae. The Russian delegation sailed to Hakodate in order to be escorted to Matsumae by land from there.

The local *daikan* met the expedition in Hakodate, and ordered to tow the Ekaterina to the harbor. Laxman and his companions accompanied by *daikan* and six officials came to the home of a local merchant. The Russians cleaned themselves up, had a seafood meal, and were ceremoniously escorted back to the ship [Laxman 1961, p. 135–136]. The Russians were offered luxury smoking appliances, silver for Laxman and lacquered for other mission members, at another dinner [Laxman 1961, p. 137].

The Russians arrived at the negotiations venue in the company of 16 officials from Edo and Matsumae; their full escort consisted of 450 people. Laxman, navigator V. F. Lovtsov, and volunteer A. I. Koch, a son of the Okhotsk commandant, travelled by *norimono*, a kind of palanquin. Translator E. I. Tugolukov, geodesic sergeant I. F. Trapeznikov, merchants V. N. Babikov and I. G. Polnomoshnyi, and five more Russians were riding horses, each in the company of two junior officials. There was also a saddled horse in case Laxman wished to ride [Laxman 1961, p. 137]. The travelers made several stops, during which the Russians were given a ceremonial welcome and invited to spend the night at local homes. In Hakodate, Matsumae, and every village

where the mission stopped, its residence carried the “Russian house” sign [Fainberg 1960, p. 61; Preobrazhensky 1990, p. 307].

For the purpose of the expedition’s convenience, the Japanese decorated the lodging in the European style. Laxman lauded “chairs made especially for us” [Laxman 1961, p. 128] at one of his meetings with Japanese officials. The house accommodating the Russian guests in Matsumae “had tables, benches, beds, and no floor mats”. As to the ritual of negotiations, the Japanese told the Russians they should take off their shoes and either sit on their knees or “lie on the side” [Laxman, 1961, p. 139] during the meeting. Laxman strongly rejected those rules, and insisted that each side should keep to one’s traditions [Laxman 1961, p. 139].

Japanese researcher Michiko Ikuta explored how much Laxman’s demand was met. According to her, the Japanese did not push for following their ritual and even tried to act in accordance with Russian traditions. Describing the first day of those negotiations, the researcher said that some Japanese officials sat on folding chairs, instead of *tatami*. The “oversight inspectors” *ometsuke* rose to greet Laxman on the second day of negotiations and approached the Russian ambassador to thank him for the gifts given on behalf of I. A. Pil² (the distance between the negotiating parties was about 8.5 meters at the first meeting), which was another sign of acceptance of European traditions. In the opinion of Michiko Ikuta, Japan was demonstrating unwillingness to trade with Russia orally and in writing despite the fact that certain messages were favorable for the Russians. Meanwhile, the language of ritual was remarkably cordial [Laxman 1961, pp. 140, 143; Ikuta 2006, pp. 68–69, 77–78].

Laxman said he appreciated that his companions and he “were received in the best possible manner and given full support” [Laxman 1961, p. 143] in Nemuro, Hakodate, and Matsumae. This comment is a rather precise description of the way the Japanese treated the Russian mission.

Still some suspicion about the mission remained.

For instance, Edo officials Yasuzo Tanabe and Denjiro Takusagawa and their companion, doctor Gen’yan Imai, said they were very worried when they traveled to Nemuro, while Kumazo Suzuki, another official who visited the mission in Nemuro, told E. I. Tugolukov that he was “desperate” when he was preparing for his voyage, and “his farewell party and himself were in tears” [Laxman 1961, p. 124]. The fears rooted in stories told by the Dutch, who said that Russia was cruel towards foreigners. After they made sure that the expedition was well-disposed, Yasuzo Tanabe and Denjiro Takusagawa sent a letter to Edo and expressed hope it would change the government’s prejudiced attitude towards the Russians [Laxman 1961, p. 124].

² Pil’, Ivan Alferyevich (approx. 1730–1801), Russian statesman, governor general of the Irkutsk and Kolyvan’ vicegerency (1788–1794), on whose behalf Laxman’s expedition was officially operating.

Another noteworthy episode happened when the mission was sailing from Nemuro to Hakodate. It was initially agreed that the Russians would sail to the Edomo harbor on the southeastern coast of Hokkaido, instead of Hakodate. Perhaps, the Japanese feared the Russians might breach the agreement, so they asked some of the Ekaterina crew members to board the Japanese ship. Laxman was insulted and said the Japanese did not need to fear and “could take the amanat”³ from the Ainu, but not from “educated officers of the Russian empire fulfilling their mission” [Laxman 1961, p. 134]. The agreement resulted in a failure: the fog prevented the expedition from landing in Edomo, and after the fog was gone the cross-wind made the return to Edomo impossible [Laxman 1961, p. 136].

The Ekaterina fired a gun to notify the Japanese about her departure from Hakodate. An official from Matsumae caught up with the Russian ship and expressed the authorities’ dissatisfaction with the gunfire. Explanations were given, but a few days later, Laxman noticed two Japanese ships monitoring the Ekaterina’s voyage [Laxman 1961, p. 146].

The Russian mission was given a kind and ceremonious welcome, but some caution was exercised. Judging by Laxman’s journal, a number of restrictions and bans were imposed on the mission members.

First and foremost, the Russians were strictly prohibited from meeting with local residents. According to Laxman, the Ekaterina was surrounded by numerous boats upon its arrival in Hakodate. The curious Japanese approached the Russian ship and asked for permission to board, yet designated officials pushed them away using iron sticks, threw logs at them, and “beat those people without mercy just to keep them off” [Laxman 1961, p. 135]. It was said in the end of the journal that “for the purposes of surveillance and prevention of any disturbance city residents could cause [to mission members]”, a Japanese ship was anchored near the coast from the day the expedition arrived in Hakodate till the day it went home [Laxman 1961, p. 146].

While describing their arrival in Matsumae, Laxman said homes “had their doors open and were packed with spectators of both genders” [Laxman 1961, p. 139], which showed how much interest common Japanese had in the mission. A cloth hung on the fence around the mission’s residence was aimed to prevent any communication between the Russians and the local population, and 60 guards were standing at the house gate [Laxman 1961, p. 139].

Expedition members were not permitted to freely move around Hakodate. All Laxman was permitted to see was the northern coast near the Hameda village, currently a district of Hakodate, in the company of an official. The Russians were not allowed even to wash their clothes on the shore [Laxman 1961, p. 136].

³ Amanat – something given for safe keeping. In this case: a hostage held to ensure the fulfillment of an agreement.

Obviously, attempts to demonstrate goods brought by Russian merchants, let alone to start bargaining, resulted in failure. The officials said that trade required a special permission of *bakufu*, and added that any mistake in the fulfillment of obligations could cost a life [Laxman 1961, p. 144].

Given the Ainu uprising on the Kunashir Island in 1789, the administration of the Matsumae principality feared that the Russians might get close with the Ainu. The Japanese officials stayed in Nemuro for winter in order to prevent attempts at such communication, although they usually spent the winter in the principality's capital, Matsumae [Laxman 1961, p. 119]. The supervision over contacts between the Russians and the Ainu was a task of Kumazo Suzuki and Doctor Kengo Kato, who arrived from Matsumae in December 1792 [Laxman 1961, p. 121–122].

For its part, *bakufu* tried to take control over communication between the Russians and the Matsumae principality burdened by the watchful eye of the central government [Fainberg 1960, p. 56]. Laxman noticed that Matsumae officials stopped visiting the Russians after the arrival of officials from Edo, as they feared accusations of illegal contacts with the foreigners [Laxman, 1961 p. 123]. When the head of the Russian mission said he wished to have a face-to-face with the Matsumae prince to personally thank him for hospitality and give him gifts, *ometsuke* said the prince was just following orders from *bakufu* and the visit was not necessary. It was allowed, though, to hand over presents via an official. According to the journal, gifts for the Matsumae prince were selected with special care to make the due impression on the head of the territory bordering Russia [Laxman 1961, p. 143–144].

Summing up intermediate results, we should say that on the orders from Matsudaira Sadanobu the Japanese were very polite and courteous with the Russians since the day the expedition arrived and till the day it left home, which might be the result of his focus on the ritual. At the same time, certain actions of the Japanese demonstrated their caution and suspicion. For instance, contacts between the Russians and local residents were firmly stopped, and communication with Ainu and officials of the Matsumae principality was restricted.

We should now proceed to the second element of the rules laid down for negotiations with the Russians, the law. The law mentioned by Matsudaira Sadanobu often implies the country-closing edicts [Pozdneyev 1909, Vol. 2, Part 3, pp. 114, 123; Kutakov 1988, p. 74], which said that foreign vessels could visit Nagasaki only. As early as in 1635 all Chinese merchant vessels were ordered to arrive in that port, and in 1641, two years after the ban on visits by Portuguese vessels, the trading station of the Dutch East India Company was moved to Nagasaki. It was the city visited in the 17th century by ships from Southeast Asia, Portugal, and England, which offered trade resumption.

However, there was no special law or any other document restricting communication with foreigners to the port of Nagasaki until the late 18th

century. Thus, the image of Nagasaki as the only place permitted to be visited by foreign vessels was rather a custom, perceived as a law. This is proven by the fact that during negotiations with the Russians in 1778–1779 officials of the Matsumae principality responded to the proposal of starting trade by saying that “if they wanted to trade, there is a place, Nagasaki, of this same country, where people come from all over the world for trading, and this is where they should go to trade” [Polonsky 1871, p. 461]. Perhaps, Matsudaira Sadanobu, who learned about the precedent from reports of the expedition to the land of the Ainu in 1785–1786, believed the Russians could be convinced to do so.

Documents presented to the Russian side after negotiations in Matsumae included the permission of a visit of one Russian ship to Nagasaki, and the “formal warning”, which was called in Russian “The List Signed by His Majesty of Tenzin-Kubo in Regard to Foreign Ships’ Visits to the State of Japan”⁴. Given that the Russian translation of this text differed greatly from the original, and the archaic language was difficult for modern readers to understand, let us offer a new translation.

“From olden times, [Japan] has had a national law requiring that vessels of foreign countries, which have no diplomatic relations [with Japan], arriving in Japan be either seized or forced to leave; the law is still in effect. It is not allowed to disembark in any other harbor but Nagasaki even if the vessels bring home our castaways. Should a vessel of another country drift to our shore, we decided way back that even if the vessel belonged to a country, which has diplomatic relations [with Japan], [those castaways] should be returned to their country from the Nagasaki harbor by Dutch ships. Whenever those castaways break our law, they should be held [in Japan] and not allowed to go home. Also, since the day of the country’s establishment, whenever [vessels] from countries having no diplomatic relations [with Japan] drift to our shore, such ships are destroyed, and such castaways stay [in Japan forever] and are not allowed to go home. However, considering your effort to bring our castaways from afar and realizing that [you] have been unaware of laws of our country, you are allowed to return home as you are, but you should not visit these lands [the so-called Ainu land, and the Matsumae principality] ever again.

You have brought a letter from your government but your country has no diplomatic relations [with ours] and we do not know the title of your ruler, have no knowledge of your oral and written language, and are unaware of the difference between your nobility and low-born, which makes the choice

⁴ There is a published translation of this document. List predpisannyi ot yego Tenzin-Kuboskogo velichestva o uzakonenii v gosudarstve Yaponskom v rassuzhdenii prikhoda inostrannykh sudov [The List Signed by His Majesty of Tenzin-Kubo in Regard to Foreign Ships]. Text see: [Arhiv knyazyza Vorontsova 1880, Vol. XXIV, p. 411–413]; The Japanese government’s list to Laxman prohibiting sailing along Japanese coastline. In [Makarova 1989, p. 314–315].

of a correct ritual difficult. What is deemed to be respectful in our country, your country may see as rude, there is no way we can know this, so we cannot allow an exchange of letters between governments. This time we cannot refuse to [accept] our castaways, but we cannot allow diplomatic relations with these lands [Matsumae] either.

Neither can we allow your visit to Edo. This is because since the old days, we have never allowed even those countries, which have diplomatic or trade relations with us, to visit [arrive to] without permission other places than the designated ones. Should you choose to disobey, you will be treated harshly everywhere, and, given that [your] language is not understood in all harbors of our country, you are risking an even bigger harm. You kept telling us that the ruler of your country has ordered you to sail directly from the Ainu lands to Edo; if we are not mistaken, you will disobey the order of your ruler by doing so. The reason is the law [which requires] that whenever a foreign vessel arrives, it should be treated harshly along the entire coast: the vessel should be either detained or put under fire; you will put yourself in the harm's way if you seek friendly communication. You will violate the order of your own ruler by doing so. If you refuse to accept every rule we have just explained to you, we will arrest all of you and act in accordance with the law of our country. There will be nothing we could do even if you regret your behavior.

Representatives of the Edo government have come to your place [of stay] to explain the laws of our country, do justice to the trouble you took to deliver our castaways from afar, and make sure that people of your country understand what we have just said. It looks like you [who have delivered our castaways] have orders to hand them over to Edo government members, but there is no reason why you cannot do that here [in Matsumae]. You can say you will refuse to hand over the castaways you have brought here if you are not allowed [to sail] to the place you want because of the law of our country. We will not take those castaways by force, but this does not mean that we have no compassion with the people of our country. However, this is not a reason to breach the national law. You are free to do whatever you want, having understood all of the above. If we decide to bring here the other two castaways you did not transport this time because of their sickness, you should not do so in the same manner. You should understand we will not accept them anywhere but in Nagasaki. Even if you bring them to the Nagasaki harbor, you cannot sail within the range of visibility of our country, but you should travel in the high sea instead. As we have told you, all harbors have received the order, and you should not take this lightly or act dangerously. Even if you arrive in the Nagasaki harbor, you will be unable to enter [the harbor] unless each of your ships has a written permission. What is more, you should go to Nagasaki and follow the instructions of local authorities if you aspire for something else, although it would be difficult to establish without proper grounds diplomatic and trade relations with countries other

than the ones designated earlier. [Now] you should clearly understand what we have told you in detail, and leave immediately”. Translated from the text: [Yamashita Tsuneo (ed.) 2003b, p. 361–365].

The document shows that the legislation repeatedly cited by the authors has two main provisions: the seizure or forcible expulsion of ships of foreign countries, which have no diplomatic or trade relations with Japan, and the ban on visits of foreign ships to any ports but Nagasaki. We have mentioned before that the second provision was actually a custom related to the edicts of the 1630s, which shaped up the foreign political system of Tokugawa’s Japan. The first requirement was legalized one year before the arrival of Laxman’s expedition. The regulations regarding foreign ships were released in 1791, following the appearance of the British ship *Argonaut* near the southwestern coast of Honshu. The document runs as follows:

“A foreign ship has been recently seen at the sea near the provinces of Chikuzen, Nagato, and Iwami. For more than eight days the ship was seen far from the shore and approached the coastline. [...] First, the ship gear should be seized, the vessel should be escorted to Nagasaki, and further instructions should be requested. From now on, whenever a foreign ship is detected, we should put personnel on standby and after [the ship] makes the first appearance, we should not use force right away, but send a written inquiry or an investigator to look into the case’s circumstances. If [the foreign ship] resists our actions, the ship and its crew should be destroyed, or we can embark the ship, engage in a fight, and axe the crew. Arrest is also possible. You can use guns if necessary. But if they reply to the written inquiry, or no impediments are created to the work of our investigator, we should stay calm, even if we have to tie up the foreign ship by deception, seize ship gear, escort the crew to the shore, guard the crewmembers, prevent the ship from leaving, and request the government for further instructions as soon as possible. In case of any resistance, the crew should be arrested and put in prison. It is unknown what religion the crew of a foreign ship may have, so no one but the guards should be allowed even to look at them. These instructions should be followed if no more than one or two foreign ships show up. If there is a flotilla of several ships, or if there are few ships but they present a danger from the very beginning, you should act consistent with the circumstances. If such incident happens, you should inform the neighboring lands as soon as possible, mobilize people, gather ships, and sail off.” Translated from the text [Yokoyama 2013, p. 8–9].

As we can see from a comparison of these two documents, Matsudaira Sadanobu might have feared a conflict with such a powerful state as Russia and objected to applying those regulations to the mission. It was decided to provide the Russians with everything they might need and give them the status of guests, but to keep the Russian ship from visiting the unprotected Edo harbor [Cherevko 2010, p. 211]. Analyzing the actions of the Japanese cen-

tral government after the Russian ship's departure from the Japanese waters, we can see that the most important result of the Russian mission's visit was the realization that the capital, Edo, and the adjoining waters were unprotected. Matsudaira Sadanobu personally inspected provinces adjoining the Edo Bay. We should also say that the central government's document was rather cunning: the regulations put into place only one year ago was presented as a national law in effect from long ago.

The Formal Warning was the first document of its kind, which attempted at explaining principles of the foreign policy of the Tokugawa clan's central government. In contrast to the Explanatory Note received by N.P. Rezanov in 1805, where fundamentals of the foreign policy were presented in a more detailed and uncompromising manner, the Formal Warning was situational: the Japanese authorities declared that they were following the national law in effect for a long time but were flexible. It would difficult to establish diplomatic and trade relations without proper grounds, but it was still possible, and Laxman received permission for the arrival of one Russian ship in Nagasaki.

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