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Cosmopolitan Xenophobia: Cultural Dynamics of Consumption and Ethnic Interaction in Vladivostok, Russia

Abstract:

The central focus of my dissertation research is how, in the Russian city of Vladivostok, urban space and metropolitan knowledge are being negotiated and reformulated between the diverging and converging ideological forces of xenophobia and cosmopolitanism. The dichotomous interdependence of these two concepts has a long history in Russia. From the 1850s to the present reforms and social transformations depended on an increased dialogue with other nations and influences from the surrounding world. Reformers looked at alternative models outside of Russia in fields from banking to human rights. Yet, nationalistic counterterms and official xenophobia opposed these cosmopolitan tendencies. Now, Vladivostok is a city in change. The reopening of its commercial port for international shipping lines, the migration of Chinese traders into the city, the opening of markets to the influx of foreign goods, and the development of new political structures have led to fundamental transformations. This study will investigate how the local Russian population of Vladivostok perceives and responds to transnational movements and new commodity flows, what strategies they develop in reaction to these transformations and how their reactions and strategies are expressed in everyday life. By focusing on spatial strategies in the configuring and reconfiguring of Vladivostok's urban landscape, I want to understand how spatial mobility and place-making are connected to cultural changes and new patterns of consumption.