



Disputes on the Amnokgang Forestry Company in Russia: Focusing on the Russian Minister to Korea N. G. Matyunin and Entrepreneur F. A. Lybov

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Abstract

Key figures of the Amnokgang Forestry Company, executive director F. A. Lybov (Ф. А. Львов) and Russian minister to Korea N. G. Matyunin (Н. Г. Матюнин), provided explanations for the causes of the Russo-Japanese War. Lybov, the executive director of the Company, argued that the war resulted from two main factors. First, the Company shifted from a private-oriented policy to a state-centered approach. Second, the Company established the Yongampo branch during a period of heightened international attention. In contrast, Matyunin emphasized that the company functioned as a military defense shield, preventing Japanese attacks on the southern branch of Russia's Chinese Eastern Railway. Matyunin argued that the Russian Finance Ministry, by pushing forward with the railway's southward expansion, had provoked the war. Furthermore, he criticized the Russian Finance Ministry and Foreign Ministry for manipulating public opinion by blaming the Amnokgang Forestry Company for the conflict. Ultimately, the Russian government promoted the Amnokgang Forestry Company as a private enterprise, intending to establish the Amnok River as a military boundary with Japan. However, Japan interpreted the company's activities as part of Russia's broader ambitions to dominate Korea. Thus, the Russo-Japanese War stemmed from the conflict between Russia and Japan over the Korean Peninsula, with Japan using the Amnokgang Forestry Company as a pretext for war.

Keywords: Amnokgang Forestry Company, N. G. Matyunin, F. A. Lybov, Y. I. Brynner, Russo-Japanese War, Yalu River

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Introduction

In September 1896, Yuliy Ivanovich Brynner (Ю. И. Бринер), a Russian businessman, established his base in Vladivostok and obtained logging rights in the Amnok River (Amnokgang, or Yalu River) basin through a treaty signed with the Korean government. In March 1903, the Russian government approved the establishment of the Yalu River Forestry Development Company (hereafter, the Amnokgang Forestry Company).¹ However, the Russian and Japanese governments had different views on the company and its role in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905)—the Russian government argued that the establishment of the company was not a primary cause of that war, whereas the Japanese government claimed it to be a contributing factor. At the time, in the early 1900s, the Russian government was economically and militarily exploiting the left and right banks of the Amnok River through the Amnokgang Forestry Company. In response to these aggressive activities, in April 1903 the Japanese government established the Nisshin Gisei Company (日清義盛公司).

On December 27, 1906, following the Russo-Japanese War, Aoki Shūzō 青木周藏, Japanese ambassador to the United States, explained the primary cause of the war to then US Secretary of State Elihu Root as follows: “It is well known that the lumber industry [i.e., Amnokgang Forestry Company], which was carried on in pursuance of the concession claimed by Russian State Secretary [Aleksandr Mikhailovich] Bezobrazov [А. М. Безобразов] and his associates prior to the Russo-Japanese War, was, in reality, a state undertaking pursued by the Russian government. Under the cover of that concession, Russia committed acts of depredation on Korean territory. These acts of aggression became one of the immediate causes of the Russo-Japanese

1. Its Russian names were *Predpriyatiye russkogo lesopromyshlennogo tovarishchestva na r. Yalu*, *Yalutszyanskoeye predpriyatiye* (Предприятие русского лесопромышленного товарищества на р. Ялу, Ялуцзянское предприятие) and *Russkoye lesopromyshlennoye tovarishchestvo* (Русское лесопромышленное товарищество). The Korean and Japanese names for the Amnokgang Forestry Company were, respectively: Amnokgang dumangang sammim hyeopdong yaggwan 鴨綠江豆滿江森林協同約款 and Amuroku-kō shinrin keiei ni kansuru kyōdō yakkan 鴨綠江森林經營ニ關スル協同約款.

conflict and are now matters of history” (NIKH 1998, 1: 389–390).

British journalist Frederick McKenzie held a critical view of Russia’s economic and military expansion in the Far East. In 1902, he argued that the Russian minister to Korea requested the right to connect telegraph lines between Vladivostok and Hamgyeong-do province, similar to Japan’s earlier acquisition of the right to lay a telegraph line along Korea’s coast. As a result, the Russian government obtained logging rights along both sides of the river channel in the area and installed telegraph lines there. It also established a military base at Yongampo 龍巖浦, a riverside port within Korean territory. Despite the protests of various countries, the Russian government eventually deployed troops to the port, making it in effect a Russian military outpost. By 1903, Russia’s aggressive and exclusionary policies in the Far East had heightened international concerns, particularly among British and American merchants.²

In general, Korean research has examined the characteristics of the Amnokgang Forestry Company based on Japanese sources. An empirical study conducted by Kang Young Shim outlines a series of events, including Russia’s acquisition of forestry rights, the establishment of the forestry company, its logging operations, and its role in Russia’s Far East policy, particularly regarding the Yongampo lease issue. Kang also linked Russia’s acquisition of rights in the area to the Yongampo incident and the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (Kang 1988, 479–500).

By dividing Brynner’s forestry concessions in the Amnok River basin into three chronological stages—acquisition, utilization plans, and implementation—Kim Wonsoo showed how the Yalu River crisis was a trigger for the Russo-Japanese War. Additionally, he viewed the establishment of the

2. “The year 1903 found Korea the centre of a very interesting situation. Russia had practically seized Manchuria, although she did not attempt, outside the Liaotung Peninsula, to interfere with local administration there. Her forces were steadily, and apparently irresistibly, advancing upon Korea itself, and it seemed only a question of time before at least Northern Korea must become Russian. The commercial methods of her Eastern officials had created the bitterest opposition among English and American merchants. As the Russians advanced everything possible was done by them to promote their own trading interests at the cost of the foreigners” (MacKenzie 1908, 103–104).

Russian government's forestry company as a response to Japan's Gyeongui 京義 (Seoul-Uiju) Railway concession and claimed that the Russian government used it to expand into Yongampo and Uiju (W. Kim 1998; W. Kim 2010, 125–135).

Based on newly discovered Russian sources, Choi Deokkyoo has claimed that the Bezobrazov faction exploited logging rights issues in the region for domestic political purposes in Russia. According to him, a syndicate composed of the Korea-Russia Bank and the Russo-Chinese Bank planned to acquire the Amnokgang Forestry Company from Brynner (Choi 2001, 14).³

Cho Jaegon has emphasized Japan's involvement in the Amnokgang Forestry Company and the establishment of the Nichi-Shin Gisei Company, arguing that the logging rights to the Amnokgang region represented a significant example of the economic realization of military imperialism and viewing the competition for forestry rights as a form of imperialist struggle. Furthermore, Cho claimed that the Russian and Japanese governments shared a pattern of state-led economic imperialism, where government bureaucracy dictated the activities of private firms for strategic ends (J. Cho 2013, 333–334).

Lee Kyutae argued that Russia's acquisition of logging rights in the Amnok River basin was made possible through the tacit approval and support of the legations of the United States and France in Korea. Lee notes how, on May 17, 1899, Katō Masuo 加藤增雄, the Japanese minister to Korea, claimed that the United States and France were behind Russia's ability to expand its influence in Korea (K. Lee 2013, 201).

3. Lee Jaehoon viewed the Amnok River forestry concessions as illustrative of Russo-Korean economic relations, arguing that the Amnokgang Forestry Company evolved into a military-strategic asset within Russia's economic framework (J. Lee 2010, 530–531). Cho Hoyeon asserted that the Amnokgang Forestry Company faced a financial crisis starting in June 1903 due to the Russian government's withdrawal of support, which ultimately forced the company to cease operations by October of that year. Furthermore, Cho contended that the cause of the Russo-Japanese War should be attributed not only to the rivalry between Russia and Japan over influence in Manchuria and Korea, but also to the broader competition among the Western powers, which sought to interpret and capitalize the shifting balance of power in East Asia (H. Cho 2017, 68–75).

Recently, scholarly work on the establishment and activities of the Amnokgang Forestry Company based on Russian sources has been published. I. F. Lukyanov critically assessed the company's activities before and after the Russo-Japanese War, arguing that it operated its business at the state's expense in the Far Eastern region. According to Lukyanov, Bezobrazov, with the support of Czar Nicholas II, advanced the company, while the local official, Court Master of the Hunt Balashev (И. П. Балашев), with Bezobrazov's complete trust, actively worked in Qing China to acquire logging rights to the right bank of the Amnok River (Lukoyanov 2008, 472–481).

Wada Haruki 和田春樹, who traced the individuals involved in the Amnokgang Forestry Company, focused on figures such as Czar Nicholas II, Admiral Abaza (А. М. Абаза), state secretary of Russia, who held the title of a high-ranking official capable of proclaiming imperial orders. Wada also highlighted the role of Bezobrazov and others. According to Wada, on March 16, 1903 (March 3 by the Russian calendar), Admiral Abaza, under the orders of Czar Nicholas II, met with the Russian Minister of War Aleksey Kurapatkin (А. Н. Куропаткин) to discuss the deployment of Russian soldiers to the Amnokgang Forestry Company. As cited by Wada, Kurapatkin wrote in his diary, "Abaza informed me [Kurapatkin] that Bezobrazov was employing *honghuizi* 紅鬍子 (local Manchurian bandits) instead of regular soldiers." On March 26, 1903, a special conference on Far Eastern issues took place, attended by Czar Nicholas II, Grand Duke Alexei, the minister of internal affairs, the minister of finance, the minister of the army, the minister of foreign affairs, and Admiral Abaza. During this meeting, Czar Nicholas II and Abaza authorized the establishment of a company and decided on the allocation of state funds for its operation (Wada 2010, 29–33).

However, existing studies have several shortcomings. First, by citing only a limited number of Japanese or Russian sources related to the Amnokgang Forestry Company, they have failed to examine the specific circumstances surrounding its establishment and operations (including funding and management). Second, previous studies have not focused on the debates within Russia concerning the causes of the Russo-Japanese War and their relation to the Amnokgang Forestry Company that took place

after the conclusion of that war. Third, existing studies have failed to trace the materials and activities of the individuals directly involved in the Amnokgang Forestry Company. In particular, they have overlooked such figures as the Russian minister to Korea, Nikolai Matyunin (Н. Г. Матюнин), who directly negotiated with the Korean government for the operation of the Amnokgang Forestry Company, and the entrepreneur Fedor Alexandrovich Lybov (Ф. А. Львов), who served as its managing director. This study will examine the debates surrounding these two figures in relation to the Amnokgang Forestry Company, tracing its true nature, which is often cited as one of the causes of the Russo-Japanese War. By examining the above issues, this study will clarify the reasons for the confrontation between Russia and Japan over the Amnok River basin on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War.

Matyunin's Perspective on the Amnokgang Forestry Company

Matyunin and the Amnokgang Forestry Company

In September 1896, Brynner, a Russian merchant in Vladivostok, signed the first forestry treaty with the Korean government and acquired the logging rights to the Amnok (Yalu) River basin, the Duman (Tumen) River basin, and Ulleungdo 鬱陵島 Island. Later, in August 1898, the Russian imperial advisor, Nikolai Neporozhnev (Н. И. Непорожнев), took over Brynner's logging rights.

Matyunin was a key figure in the operations of the Amnokgang Forestry Company. He served for a long period as a member of the Russian Ussuri Border Commission and held the position of Russian minister to Korea from November 1897 to August 1898. In 1899, Matyunin became one of the owners of the Amnokgang Forestry Company, and in 1900, he personally negotiated with the Korean government for the extension of the company's concession.⁴

4. On June 6, 1890, Matyunin, a South Ussuri border commissioner, was appointed acting

In August 1899, Russia's Czar Nicholas II ordered that the Amnokgang Forestry Company be operated strictly as a private entity. Matyunin, who had been dismissed from his position as consul general in Melbourne, was tasked with this mission on August 13, 1899, through the minister of the imperial court (*minister dvora*). His task was to become the formal owner of the forestry rights in the region, alongside the third-class official Nikolai Neporozhnev, and to raise private Russian capital in collaboration with a certain commercial counselor named M. O. Albert (М. О. Альберт) (Abaza 1905, 55–56).⁵

On October 27, 1899, Matyunin reported that Neporozhnev had secured concessions for mineral resources in Korea. He requested financial support from Sergei Witte (С. Ю. Витте), Russia's minister of finance, and attached the contract between Emperor Gojong and Neporozhnev.⁶

Meanwhile, Russian and Japanese diplomats discussed the transfer of the Amnokgang Forestry Company's rights, with Russia initially expressing openness to a transfer, but later rejecting the proposal. On December 15, 1899, the Japan's minister to Korea, Hayashi Gonsuke 林權助, reported to Japanese Foreign Minister Aoki regarding negotiations with Russia over the transfer of the logging rights to Ulleungdo. The Japanese were seeking to acquire the logging rights to Ulleungdo through these discussions. On December 13, 1899, from St. Petersburg, Matyunin had telegraphed Brynner's representative in Seoul, expressing a willingness to negotiate the transfer of the logging rights for 300,000 rubles over ten years (NIKH 1990, 13: 462–463). But on May 23, 1900, Minister Hayashi in Korea reported to Foreign Minister Aoki that Matyunin was now refusing to sell the logging rights. What's more, Matyunin made known his plans to employ Chinese

Russian consul in Gyeongheung. In November 1897, he was appointed as Russian minister to Korea. On August 13, 1898, he was transferred to serve as consul general in Melbourne, Australia (AVPRI, F. 150, Op. 493, d. 53, pp. 79–87; AVPRI, F. 150, Op. 493, d. 134, p. 150; W. Kim 2010, 40–41).

5. On September 12, 1897, Matyunin asserted to Russian Foreign Minister Mikhail Muravyov (М. Н. Муравьев) that a failure by Russia to annex Manchuria would lead to complications with China and Japan.

6. RGIA, F. 560, Op. 28, d. 282, p. 5.

labor for the logging on Ulleungdo (NIKH 1990, 15: 261).

On December 3, 1900, Minister Hayashi reported to the new Japanese foreign minister Katō Takaaki 加藤高明 on Russia's activities concerning the extension of the logging rights. He stated, "The Russian merchant Brynner obtained a 20-year logging concession in 1896 for Ulleungdo, the upper reaches of the Duman River, and the Amnok River banks. The commencement deadlines were one year after the signing of the patent treaty for Ulleungdo and the upper Duman River, and five years after the signing for the Amnok River. Brynner began logging in Musan 茂山, but due to weather instability, such as flooding, and the border instability caused by the Boxer Rebellion between Korea and China, he was unable to fully implement the logging operations. In 1899, Brynner transferred the logging rights to Matyunin. In 1900, Matyunin discussed the renewal of the 20-year concession with the Korea's minister in Russia, Yi Beomjin 李範晉. Simultaneously, Matyunin sent the following telegram to the Russian minister in Seoul, [Aleksandr] Pavlov: 'Pavlov will request that the Korean government instruct Yi Beomjin to proceed with the renewal agreement'" (NIKH 1990, 14: 402–403).

On May 7, 1903, the Amnokgang Forestry Company was granted a legal foundation under Resolution No. 3 of the special council meeting chaired by Czar Nicholas II. The resolution stated, "The Company is limited to taking preliminary measures for the establishment of a joint-stock company for forest exploitation and laying the foundation for its activities" (Abaza 1905, 87–90). Immediately after the outbreak of the war, and following Japan's forced opening of Yongampo in March 1904, the Japanese government pressured the Korean government in May 1904 to abolish the forestry rights of the Amnokgang Forestry Company.

Matyunin's Report on the Amnokgang Forestry Company

In January 1904, both Russian and Western media reported that the activities of the Bezobrazov faction, which had established the Amnokgang Forestry Company, were a key cause of the Russo-Japanese War. Russian press outlets specifically pointed to Bezobrazov, the state secretary, as being responsible

for the conflict, directly criticizing Russian government officials for their involvement in the forestry company (Glinsky 1916, 333). Most notably, on August 5, 1905, Lybov, who had also participated in the establishment and operation of the company, drafted a document condemning Bezobrazov and submitted it to the Russian government. In this context, Matyunin, who was both a part owner of the Amnokgang Forestry Company and directly involved in negotiating the extension of its rights, recognized the need for a proactive, logical defense regarding the company's activities.

As a result, on October 25, 1905, Matyunin, then deputy secretary of Russia's Far Eastern Special Committee, wrote a report regarding matters related to the Amnokgang Forestry Company. Matyunin judged it necessary to describe his personal involvement in Far Eastern affairs in order to provide a historical overview of the company. Therefore, based on documents stored in archives such as those of the Far Eastern Special Committee, Matyunin wrote a detailed report on his activities, which are summarized in the following section.⁷

*Matyunin's Ideas and Activities on Far Eastern Policy Before and After His Korean Appointment*⁸

In the aforementioned report, Matyunin first records his relationship with Abaza and Bezobrazov. Matyunin met Bezobrazov for the first time in 1899. In November 1902, Abaza was appointed as an assistant to Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich (А. Михайлович) at the newly established Main

7. On September 30, 1903, the Far Eastern Special Committee was established by order of Nicholas II. On October 10, 1903, Nicholas II appointed Rear Admiral Abaza, an aide-de-camp, and State Councilor (4th rank) Bezobrazov as members of the Far Eastern Special Committee. At the same time, Abaza was also appointed as the Committee's secretary-general. On December 12, 1903, Nicholas II approved the personnel regulations for the secretariat and appointed Matyunin, a 3rd-rank official of the Foreign Ministry, as deputy secretary of the Far Eastern Special Committee (GARF F. 543, Op. 1, d. 184, pp. 16–17). Before and after the Russo-Japanese War, the Committee prepared colonial policies for the entire Far East, including Manchuria (H. Lee 2022).

8. Matyunin's account of his activities in regards to the Amnok Forestry Company are taken from AVPRI (F. 150, Op. 493, d. 53, pp. 79–87).

Directorate of Merchant Shipping (Главное управление торгового мореплавания). During his time in this department, Abaza formed a close relationship with Bezobrazov. At that time, Abaza received reports from Bezobrazov on Far Eastern affairs, and Matyunin also submitted an investigation report on the Amnokgang Forestry Company to Abaza. In 1902, Matyunin, along with Abaza, personally met with Bezobrazov to discuss matters related to the Amnokgang Forestry Company.

Matyunin next explained his activities and views on Far Eastern issues, including the Korean problem, and detailed the Russian individuals involved in Far Eastern affairs. Matyunin had served as border commissioner for the South Ussuri region for approximately 25 years. At the same time, he also held the positions of consul in northern Korea and commercial agent in charge of the Manchuria and Korean regions for the Russian Finance Ministry. Between 1897 and 1899, during his tenure as a consul and commercial agent in the region, Matyunin closely monitored the press in China and Korea, while also visiting border areas as part of his official duties. He conducted surveys of the open ports in China, Japan, and Korea. Through interactions with Far Eastern correspondents, Matyunin was able to stay well-informed on the political and economic situation in the region.

Matyunin criticized the lack of a coherent Russian Far Eastern policy based on a report written by General-Lieutenant Iosif Baranov (И. Г. Баранов), military governor of the Russian Far East, in 1881. According to Matyunin, Russia failed to develop a well-defined political plan for the Far East, which resulted in a series of contradictory actions. In particular, Russia was unable to execute a thorough strategy regarding its relations with China, Japan, and Korea. As a result, Russia made several significant mistakes in the Far East, which would culminate in the 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth ending the Russo-Japanese War.

As time passed, Matyunin shifted his focus to Korea. He believed that Korea, due to its geographical proximity to Russia and its internal political vulnerabilities, could serve as a key strategic partner for Russia, fulfilling its need for an ice-free port.

In the summer of 1897, Matyunin faced the risk of being transferred from his position as border commissioner of the Ussuri region. In search of

a new assignment, he took a leave of absence and traveled via America back to Russia. On his way to San Francisco, he met William Pritchard-Morgan (1844–1924), a member of the British Parliament, in Nagasaki. Morgan was returning from China to Europe and America. During his time in China, he had built relationships with prominent figures, including the high-ranking official Li Hongzhang, 李鴻章 who was well known in Europe and America. Matyunin developed a close relationship with Morgan, as both shared an interest in the changes in China brought about by the shock of Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). They believed that white nations should unite against the yellow races. From Li Hongzhang, Morgan had acquired iron ore rights in Fengtian 奉天. However, Li advised Morgan that to exploit these iron ore rights, cooperation with the Russo-Chinese Bank would be necessary. He introduced Matyunin to Algernon Moreing, a London-based engineer, who represented a syndicate. Morgan suggested that Matyunin work together with the Russo-Chinese Bank, and after returning to St. Petersburg, Matyunin sought a meeting with the bank's director, Adolf Rothstein (А. Ю. Ротштейн). However, Matyunin was unable to meet with Rothstein. As a result, he sent a letter to inform Rothstein of the British proposal and began searching for a job.

Matyunin, prior to and shortly after his appointment as the Russian minister to Korea in November 1897, recorded his activities and plans in the report. After graduating from the Imperial Alexander Lyceum (Alexandrovsky Imperial School) in 1870, Matyunin had gone to Siberia, and due to a lack of sponsors in St. Petersburg, he planned to seek employment with the Russo-Chinese Bank. However, Matyunin's colleagues from the Alexandrovsky Imperial School wrote references for him to the Russian Foreign Ministry. Among those who supported Matyunin's joining the Ministry were Foreign Minister Mikhail Muravyov's brother and Count P. Y. Dashkov (П. Я. Дашков). On September 12, 1897, Matyunin submitted a report to Foreign Minister Muravyov (М. Н. Муравьев) regarding the political situation in the Far East, including Korea. On September 30, 1897, at the request of Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Lamsdorf (В. Н. Ламздорф), Matyunin submitted his detailed views on Korean political and diplomatic matters. Following these processes, on November 24, 1897, Matyunin was

appointed as the Russian minister to Korea and received instructions from the Russian Foreign Ministry.

In the above report, Matyunin considered the southern expansion of the Chinese Eastern Railway to be dangerous. The reason for this was that it would inevitably lead to direct contact between Russian settlers and the residents of Fengtian. Matyunin argued that Russia should annex Jilin 吉林 and Qiqihar 齐齐哈尔. He believed that during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, when Russians were endangered by Chinese attacks, the Russian army should have focused on Jilin and Qiqihar. In late 1897, the Russian Foreign Ministry was planning a more active approach in Korea, and Matyunin supported this strategy, believing that it would ensure Russia's interests. On December 1, 1897, Czar Nicholas II instructed Matyunin to actively carry out his mission in Korea to secure and manage Russia's economic and strategic interests in Korea, focusing particularly on the Amnokgang Forestry Company concessions.

In a January 1898 meeting with Vladimir Vonlyarlyarsky (В. М. Вонлярлярский), a graduate of the Imperial School who was involved in the forestry business, just prior to his departure for Korea, Matyunin shared significant insights regarding the forest concession in the Amnok River basin that had been granted by the Korean government to the Vladivostok merchant Brynner in 1896. Matyunin emphasized that the concession represented not only massive commercial benefits but also political advantages through exclusive control over the border areas between Korea and Manchuria. Matyunin warned that if this concession were transferred to other foreigners, particularly the Japanese, it would present a dangerous prospect for Russia. Matyunin explained to Vonlyarlyarsky that the rights associated with the forest concession could give Russia substantial leverage over key areas, including potential mining rights. With Vonlyarlyarsky, Matyunin also discussed Korea's iron ore and gold deposits, and suggested that if the logging concession proceeded, Russia would likely secure mining rights for these valuable resources.⁹

9. Matyunin's account of his activities in regards to the Amnok Forestry Company are taken from AVPRI (F. 150, Op. 493, d. 53, pp. 79–87).

During his year in Korea, Matyunin exchanged opinions with other foreign residents. From these discussions, he came to realize that the foreign community in Korea had grievances against the Russian government. They believed that Russia, with its political dominance in Korea, was playing the role of spoiler, obstructing other foreigners from acquiring lucrative concessions or privileges. However, Matyunin recognized that even were Russia to acquire mining rights in Korea, it would face significant challenges due to a lack of capital and technology. As a result, he concluded that cooperation with other foreign powers would be essential. By securing these rights and working together with other foreign entities, Matyunin believed Russia could unite the white powers and foster a sense of reconciliation with other foreign nationals, potentially alleviating tensions and encouraging collaboration.

Fourth, Matyunin documented Russian policy toward Korea and the situation in Seoul after his appointment as the Russian minister to Korea in 1897. In late January or early February 1898, the Russian Foreign Ministry delivered a secret memorandum to Matyunin, stating that if Russia were to occupy Port Arthur (Lüshun), it would have to concede Korea. Matyunin promptly submitted a report to Foreign Minister Muravyov, the core of which was a request for Russia not to hold on to Port Arthur. Matyunin argued to Muravyov that Russia must under no circumstances concede Korea to Japan, in compliance with the Yamagata-Lobanov Agreement (1896), which established a shared sphere of influence between Russia and Japan in Korea. He further asserted, "Since Korea itself requested to become a vassal of Russia, Russia must uphold its position as a great power accordingly."¹⁰ Ultimately, the Russian Foreign Ministry instructed Matyunin to support and promote the activities of Russian military instructors, Russian financial advisers, the Russo-Korean Bank, and the Russian Orthodox Church in Korea.

In mid-February 1898, Matyunin departed from St. Petersburg for Yokohama to meet with the Russian minister to Japan, Roman Rosen (P. P.

10. The reference here is to King Gojong's diplomatic appeals for Russian protection, particularly during and after his stay at the Russian Legation in 1896.

Розен), to coordinate future diplomatic activities. Upon arriving in Nagasaki, Matyunin encountered a dramatic shift in Russia's Korea policy, which had changed 180 degrees from previous Russian directives toward a policy of concession. By that time, Russia and Korea had already exchanged diplomatic notes regarding the withdrawal of Russian military instructors and financial advisers. Furthermore, upon his arrival in Seoul, Matyunin was tasked with the difficult mission of dismantling and withdrawing Russia's business ventures in Korea.

In mid-August 1898, Aleksandr Pavlov was appointed the new Russian minister to Korea, and Matyunin was reassigned as consul general in Melbourne. The Russian Foreign Ministry cited efficiency as the reason for the personnel change, but Matyunin was deeply shocked and requested a leave of absence.

Fifth, in the report Matyunin recorded the acquisition of mining rights in Korea following the visit of Imperial Adviser Nikolai Neporozhnev (Н. И. Непорожнев). In October 1898, Neporozhnev visited Korea with the intention of acquiring mining rights in Korea and securing the concessions held by the Amnokgang Forestry Company. While on leave but still residing in Korea, Matyunin actively supported Neporozhnev, recognizing that the business proposal he had made to Vonliarliarsky was being realized.

According to Matyunin, while mining and other business operations in Korea were carried out by private individuals, the actual owner was the Russian government. This arrangement allowed the Russian government to maintain a dominant position in Korea even without the presence of Russian military instructors and financial advisers, while simultaneously adopting a flexible stance toward foreign residents in Korea. In other words, Russia could oversee and represent Korea's mineral resources, while delegating mining development and exploration to foreign residents in Korea. Moreover, the Russian government covered the salaries of the staff involved in these ventures and sought to recover the costs incurred through the acquisition and implementation of these rights. The Russian government also retained the flexibility to select contracting parties based on political interests. These concession holders could, in turn, serve as intermediaries between the Russian legation in Korea and foreign diplomatic missions.

Matyunin believed that Russia's material interests were aligned with those of other foreigners, it would not be difficult to reconcile their divergent political interests with those of Russia. In other words, the Russian government could maintain friendly relations with Europeans and Americans regarding concessions in Korea, such as timber and mining rights. Through such cooperation in concessions, Matyunin assessed that, together with Western powers, Russia could politically control Japan. He further believed that if these shared economic interests of both Russia and the other Western powers in Korea were neglected, it would lead to an inevitable military conflict between Russia and Japan, a scenario that Czar Nicholas II feared might easily come to pass.

According to Matyunin, the collateral required for the mining contracts in Korea was 200,000 rubles, which would serve to guarantee the credit-worthiness of the concessionaires. When compared to the potential political outcomes, these 200,000 rubles were a relatively minor cost. Had the Russian government provided the 200,000 rubles to the Korean government at that time, Matyunin argued, it could have realized the development of Russia's mining operations in Korea. The reason for this was that King Gojong needed funds to support thousands of peddlers guilds (*bobu sangdan* 裸負商團) in Seoul, in order to counter the influence of the Independence Club. Ultimately, Neporozhnev was unable to secure the 200,000 rubles in collateral and was not granted permission to depart for China.

Subsequently, Neporozhnev left Seoul to negotiate a contract for forest concessions in the lower Amnok River region in Manchuria. Matyunin was confident of the success of this venture and the acquisition of forest concessions in the Qing-controlled areas of the Amnok River basin. This confidence stemmed from the fact that a Qing official, with whom Neporozhnev was connected, also showed interest in the forest concessions. According to Matyunin, a Qing official stated that if a certain percentage of the profits were offered, he would abandon his high position and personally engage in the forest business in the Manchurian region. By involving Americans and Germans in this forestry venture, Matyunin asserted, Russia could have secured firm control over the Amnok River and Duman River basins. Moreover, this forestry business would have served as a protective barrier,

preventing the Japanese from attacking the southern branch of the Russian-owned Chinese Eastern Railway.

Later however, the Korean government granted Neporozhnev priority rights to newly available mining concessions. Since Neporozhnev lacked the necessary funds, he had to settle for a document that recognized his right to negotiate with potential investors or operators who had the actual capital and technical means to develop the mines. This priority right could provide significant benefits to the concessionaire who acquired the exclusive rights.

American Leigh S. J. Hunt expressed his willingness to participate as a joint venture partner in these mining concessions, and offered more than the 2.5 million rubles proposed by Neporozhnev. Hunt's terms did not include the working capital to be paid as an advance. Hunt's participation as a joint venture partner would mean that, alongside Russia, the US government would also bear political responsibility toward the Korean government. Matyunin argued that such a mining venture would undoubtedly have evolved into a more significant political tool in Korea.

Matyunin's Pre- and Post-War Perspectives on Russia's Far Eastern Policy and the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War

Sixth, in his report, Matyunin assessed Bezobrazov's Far Eastern policy. Upon arriving in St. Petersburg in early 1899, Matyunin began his interactions with Bezobrazov. Matyunin fundamentally believed that Russia needed to strengthen its military power in the Far East. He also judged that, in order to attract the political sympathy of the great powers, Russia should involve them in the development of natural resources in both its existing territories and newly acquired lands.

According to Matyunin, Bezobrazov fully agreed with his views. Bezobrazov supported Matyunin's perspectives on the political situation in the Far East following Russia's occupation of Port Arthur, as well as the political and military significance of the forest concession in the Amnok River basin. Bezobrazov conceived and developed a plan for managing the national economy in the territories Russia had occupied.

By taking into account the flaws in Russia's mining regulations and the

inefficient administrative system of the local authorities, Bezobrazov drafted a plan for an economic policy. This plan sought to guide the activities of entrepreneurs in alignment with the Russian government's political objectives, aiming to generate economic benefits without placing a burden on the state treasury. According to this plan, Bezobrazov argued that the necessary funds to maintain the Russian military in Manchuria could be provided. He prepared the plan in the spirit of the adage "if you want peace, prepare for war," reflecting a strategic approach to securing both economic and military objectives.

Seventh, Matyunin criticized the policies of the Russian Foreign Ministry and Finance Ministry concerning the Amnokgang Forestry Company and similar enterprises in the report. Bezobrazov applied methods for achieving national objectives under the guise of private enterprise, similar to the methods previously implemented by Britain and others. As with the mining concessions, Matyunin took over the timber rights from Neporozhnev and proceeded with the venture as a private business. However, despite his efforts, the Russian Foreign Ministry, less than a year after his appointment, reassigned Matyunin from his position as Russian minister to Korea to the post of consul general in Melbourne, Australia.

Matyunin argued that the Amnokgang Forestry Company's failure to develop forestry concessions in Korea was the fault of the Russian Foreign Ministry. He emphasized that when investing in large-scale enterprises, the most crucial factors were not the value of the company itself, but rather the authority and trust placed in the individuals executing the project. Matyunin criticized the officials from the Russian Finance and Foreign Ministries, claiming they failed to properly investigate and implement the company's business in 1899, resulting in no tangible outcomes. Subsequently, Matyunin stated that his own independent activities regarding the company were also brought to a halt.

Eighth, in the 1905 report, Matyunin responded to domestic and international criticism of the Amnokgang Forestry Company. According to Matyunin, both Russian and Western media reported in January 1904 that the activities of Bezobrazov's faction, which established the company, were "the cause of the war." Matyunin argued that "all Russian publications have

long supported such extremely unjust and malicious slander.” He believed this to be a vile conspiracy by those truly responsible for the Russo-Japanese War, who were temporarily attempting to avoid public scrutiny. Matyunin emphasized that such a conspiracy obscured the true meaning of the war and significantly weakened Russia’s ability to respond. He warned that if such malicious slander regarding national issues were left unchecked, Russia risked repeating the failures of the war.

As a solution to this issue, Matyunin proposed in his report that a special committee in the Duma be formed to investigate the domestic and international criticism directed at Bezobrazov’s faction. He noted that Czar Nicholas II had instructed his aide-de-camp, Richter (Рихтер), to investigate the overall situation of the Russo-Japanese War. However, Matyunin expressed concern that the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Finance Ministry might obstruct the truth about the war to justify their actions over the previous decade. He feared that the government ministries had lost the public trust and that results based on their records would not satisfy anyone, including Nicholas II. Therefore, Matyunin proposed that the materials and drafts collected by Richter be handed over to this proposed special committee of the Duma. Matyunin argued that if this special committee conducted the investigation into the Russo-Japanese War, figures like Abaza and Bezobrazov could correctly substantiate the actions taken over the past six years under the orders of Nicholas II. He asserted, “Only this could free them from the absurdly severe slander that has unjustly tarnished their reputation.”¹¹

11. AVPRI, F. 150, Op. 493, d. 53, pp. 79–87. Abaza claimed that at the time, the Russian minister to Korea, Matyunin, not only facilitated the activities of the Russian exploration team but also exerted influence on the expansion of other concessions. Emperor Gojong entrusted Nikolai Neporozhnev with the task of reorganizing Korea’s Royal Household system according to the Russian model and agreed to grant him administrative authority over the development of mines owned by the king. Since these mines were developed in the name of the Korean government, Neporozhnev was entitled to receive a fixed percentage of the profits from the mining operations. The exploration team secured all necessary data related to the concession business, conducted surveys in northern Korea, and sought to expand the rights granted by the Korean government. However, in August 1898, Matyunin was unexpectedly transferred to Melbourne as a consul. Bezobrazov argued that Matyunin’s reassignment was due to pressure from the foreign minister and

Consequently, Matyunin proposed the following assessments of Russia's Far Eastern and Korean policies. Firstly, the Russian military should merge the Jilin and Qiqihar regions in order to prevent the threat from the Chinese. Secondly, the Russian government should acquire a warm-water port in Korea, based on Korea's strategic geographical location and its internal political vulnerabilities. Thirdly, by obtaining mining and gold mining rights in Korea and collaborating with foreign powers, Russia could unite the Western powers and maintain friendly relations with Europeans and Americans. Through such cooperation in Korea, the Russian government could politically control Japan together with the West. If Russia neglected these rights in Korea, Matyunin maintained, it would soon lead to a military conflict with Japan. Fourthly, Matyunin urged the Russian government to not only maintain the occupation of Port Arthur but also to comply with the Russo-Japanese Agreement and never concede Korea to Japan.

Entrepreneur Lybov's Perspective on the Amnokgang Forestry Company

On August 5, 1905, Fedor Alexandrovich Lybov, the executive director of the Amnokgang Forestry Company, submitted a petition to the Russian Finance Ministry after failing to recover the funds he had invested in the Amnokgang Forestry Company. In addition, he composed a document condemning Bezobrazov, which can be summarized as follows¹²:

First, Lybov outlined the individuals involved in the acquisition of logging rights along the Amnok River. Matyunin, the border commissioner for the South Ussuri region, obtained the rights to harvest timber on the left bank of the Amnok River, the right bank of the Duman River, and Ulleungdo for a period of fifteen years, under the name of the Vladivostok

other senior government officials. Moreover, Bezobrazov believed that the Foreign Ministry had maintained a policy of passive observation in Korea for five years, from 1898 to 1903 (Abaza 1905, 50–54).

12. The source for this summation is RGIA, F. 560, Op. 28. d. 340, pp. 1–13.

merchant Brynner. Subsequently, Matyunin moved the Amnok River forestry business to Saint Petersburg. Matyunin enlisted M. O. Albert (М. О. Альберт), a former president of the Neva Shipyard, as a new collaborator. Albert had previously worked with the merchant Brynner on business ventures. Matyunin and Albert formed strong cooperative ties with Abaza, Bezobrazov, Vonlyarlyarsky, and Neporoznev. A notable commonality among them was their shared background in the Cavalry Guard Regiment (Кавалергардский полк).

Lybov stated that they lacked business acumen but were fond of formulating idealistic plans. In order to withdraw funds from the state treasury, they sought to secure both “public consensuses” and a “strong protective shield” in advance. They succeeded in enlisting Count Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov (И. И. Воронцов-Дашков), which enabled them to gain powerful patrons. They used the political significance of the border issue as a pretext, linking it with the matter of nationalizing 3,000 Korean households, and were granted a subsidy of 250,000 rubles from the Russian government’s treasury.

In order to secure more subsidies, they transformed their private agreements into public contracts. Pavlov, then the Russian minister in Seoul, and a Russian secret agent named Meiro (Мейро), with the permission of Emperor Gojong, transferred Brynner’s contract to Neporoznev. According to Article 10 of this contract, “The validity period of the contract is set to 20 years, starting from the day the administrative body is organized. If the administrative body is not established by 1901, the contract will lose its effectiveness.”

After receiving the subsidy, members of the Bezobrazov group organized an expedition to spread rumors. In reality, Bezobrazov commanded an expedition composed of soldiers, scholars, forest officers, and surveyors. The expedition included Bezobrazov, Neporoznev’s secretary Yudenich (Юденич), the *Novoye Vremya* (New Times) journalist Syromyatnikov (Сыромятников, pen name Sigma), the surgeon E. N. Akinfiev (И. Н. Акинфьев), the railway engineers (surveyors) Mikhaylovsky (Н. Г. Михайловский) and Safonov (А. П. Сафонов), the forest officer Tikhonov (В. А. Тихонов), a Captain Zvegintsev (А. И. Звегинцов), and a Lieutenant

Colonel Korf (H. A. Корф), among others. According to the contract, the Amnokgang Forestry Company's forest rights along the Amnok River were set to expire in 1901, but due to the Boxer Rebellion of (1899–1901), the contract was extended for an additional two years to 1903. The Amnokgang Forestry Company confirmed its operations for 1903, and the rights holders ensured their claims by using pressure and coercion to solidify their control.

Second, Lybov criticized the Russian Finance Ministry and Foreign Ministry. He first argued that he was a private entrepreneur with a personal interest in timber harvesting in Manchuria, and that he had no personal connections with any officials. At that time, Finance Minister Witte attempted to exert control over Manchuria through the Finance Ministry's Far Eastern entities, such as the Chinese Eastern Railway and the Russo-Chinese Bank, but failed. Lybov claimed that the Russian government departments were in conflict in Manchuria, with no department willing to relinquish control over the newly opened lands to another. He also asserted that the Russian Foreign Ministry not only failed to offer assistance but, in fact, caused significant difficulties.

Third, Lybov recorded the establishment process of the Amnokgang Forestry Company. Lybov claimed that Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Madritov (A. C. Мадритов) of the Russian General Staff was instrumental in helping Lybov avoid difficulties. During the process of preparing for the timber rights in the region, Lybov came under Madritov's command and became involved with the Bezobrazov faction, which was pushing forward with the Amnokgang Forestry Company. However, Bezobrazov, Abaza, and Matyunin did not proceed with the project, citing a failure to receive government subsidies. Lybov, utilizing his position as a private entrepreneur, sought to attract American capitalists to invest in forestry rights in the area, aiming to monopolize timber rights in the Far Eastern region. Additionally, Lybov petitioned the Beijing government for forestry rights and engaged in negotiations with Qing authorities.

Meanwhile, a Qing general in Fengtian promised Madritov forestry rights in the region. This Qing general sought to use Madritov to recover rifles and ammunition that had been seized by the commander-in-chief of the Kwantung Army, General Evgeny Alekseyev (Е. И. Алексеев). The

forestry rights had a bribery-like character from the Qing side. However, Madritov did not view the Qing general as an adversary and was completely ignorant of the Qing's timber policies. The Qing officials pretended to offer special favors while promising the forestry rights, but in fact, all Qing officials held the rights to carry out timber operations along the Amnok River. Nevertheless, Madritov reported to Bezobrazov, claiming that the Qing authorities in Fengtian were extending special favors to him. Madritov concluded, "To obtain the forestry rights, negotiations with the Qing authorities are necessary, and I must leverage the Qing general in Fengtian." Lybov decided not to expose the Qing's deception for the time being.

Fourth, Lybov recorded that in 1903, the Amnokgang Forestry Company shifted from a private-centered to a state-centered entity because of aggressive Russian policy in the region. He provided the following reasons for this change.

Firstly, in early 1903, the Bezobrazov faction used the Amnokgang Forestry Company to support Russia's aggressive policies. This was due to the special trust that Czar Nicholas II placed in Bezobrazov. Notably, Nicholas II had issued secret instructions to Bezobrazov regarding an investigation into the Chinese Eastern Railway. Abaza and Matyunin harbored hostility toward Finance Minister Witte. Furthermore, Bezobrazov opposed the private-led approach that Lybov had proposed.

Secondly, Lybov managed funds through the Russian Foreign Ministry, receiving 125,000 rubles, of which 107,000 were spent on bribes. However, due to a shortage of funds, Lybov began to arouse the suspicion of the general in Fengtian. As a result, Lybov demanded at least 180,000 rubles from the Russian government. By November 1902, the company was in a position where it had to begin timber harvesting operations.¹³

13. In August 1902, Lybov established a joint-stock company with a capital of 2.4 million rubles to secure a 25-year logging concession on the right bank of the Amnok River. One-third of the company's shares were to be transferred to the Qing government as part of their agreement. The president of this joint-stock company was Abaza, who received an annual salary of 30,000 rubles. Matyunin served as the vice president with an annual salary of 20,000 rubles, while Lybov held the position of managing director with an annual salary of 18,000 rubles (Lybov 1906, 58–75; Lukoyanov 2008, 444–445).

Abaza, through the commander-in-chief of the Kwantung Army in Saint Petersburg, Alekseyev, proposed to Lybov that the forestry rights be transferred to the Ginsburg Company (Гинсбург и К), with the condition that Lybov would receive 12 percent of the net profits from the company. Meanwhile, Bezobrazov was appointed state secretary (статс-секретарь) and granted extraordinary powers by the Czar to oversee Far Eastern affairs, and the shareholders of the company received 2.5 million rubles at the orders of Czar Nicholas II. As a result, from November 28, 1902, to January 12, 1903, a M. H. Ginsburg (М. Х. Гинсбург) used approximately 70,000 rubles for the operating costs of the Amnokgang Forestry Company. Afterward, Ginsburg was excluded from the management of the company and, at Alekseyev's request, was appointed as a commercial advisor.

Fifth, Lybov filed a lawsuit for damages against Ginsburg in the Commercial Court of Saint Petersburg. Later, Lybov withdrew the lawsuit following an agreement with Ginsburg. Lybov explained the reasons for his claim for damages, criticizing Bezobrazov, Abaza, and Matyunin. The reasons included the plundering of the logging rights in the region, the destruction of the company, the issue of employment costs over a period of one year and six months, and the responsibility for the outbreak of the war.

Sixth, Lybov identified the Russian Finance Ministry and the Bezobrazov faction as the causes of the Russo-Japanese War. Japan thoroughly prepared for war, while the Finance Ministry established branches in the Far East, thereby provoking the war. "The bureaucratic tyrants of the Bezobrazov faction, by replacing the position of the Finance Ministry, swiftly destroyed the 'Manchurian state' in a very short period," Lybov asserted, adding, "The saying 'if you want peace, prepare for war' is advice that a wise person gives to a foolish neighbor." In addition, Lybov noted that Nicholas II had optimistic expectations regarding the forestry rights. Lybov recorded that in February and April of 1903, the bureaucratic mindset, centered on the state and planned by Matyunin, and the greed of Abaza and Bezobrazov, combined to lead to the fateful decision of war. Lybov claimed that as the period for the forestry rights in Korea came to an end, the Bezobrazov faction chose war.

Seventh, Lybov claimed that the Bezobrazov faction had been pushing

forward a plan to acquire Manchuria and establish Korea as a protectorate just before the Russo-Japanese War. Lybov delineated the organization and activities of the Bezobrazov faction, which provided the causes for the war, as follows:

First, Rear Admiral Abaza, in the fall of 1902, successfully won the favor of the person responsible for the secret funds of Czar Nicholas II in Livadia (Yalta). Furthermore, Abaza assured Foreign Minister Vladimir Lamsdorf (В. Н. Ламздорф) that the forestry rights in the Amnok River basin had been secured. Lybov had obtained the timber rights for the left bank of the river for a period of 25 years from three Qing officials in Fengtian. However, due to the political situation in 1902, timber harvesting was postponed. The Bezobrazov faction, adhering to the principle of *everything for itself*, concluded that Lybov was no longer needed.

Second, in early 1903, the Bezobrazov faction began constructing villages in Yongampo, along the Korean coast, using timber felled by the Qing. The logs that had been cut were transported down the Amnok River to Shahekou 沙河口, Dadonggou 大東溝, and Yongampo. Lieutenant Colonel Madritov and Court Hunting Minister Balashev, both associates of Bezobrazov, selected for their military vigor and aggressive leadership to effectively counter Qing officials at the site, intended to counter the Qing officers. Balashev participated in the organized faction aiming to plunder everything in Manchuria, and he sought a prominent position at Port Arthur. On Bezobrazov's recommendation, Balashev was assigned to manage the affairs of the company.

Third, the Bezobrazov faction established and managed the Amnok-gang Forestry Company based on bribery and fraud. They pursued a plan for Russia to acquire Manchuria and establish Korea as a protectorate. The Russian Foreign Ministry and Finance Ministry opposed the Bezobrazov faction's plan. They formed an alliance with Interior Minister Vyacheslav Plehve (В. К. Плеве), appointed Evgeny Alekseyev as the governor-general of the Far East, removed Finance Minister Sergei Witte from power, and clashed with War Minister Aleksey Kuropatkin (А. Н. Куропаткин) while advancing their plans.

Fourth, Bezobrazov not only consulted Alexeyev in advance but also

organized a special Far Eastern Special Committee. He personally presented his plans to Nicholas II at a railway station in Skvernitse, Poland.

Fifth, Major General of the General Staff, Konstantin Vogak (К. И. Борак), and the director of the Asian Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Nikolai Hartwig (Н. Г. Гартвиг), also joined the Bezobrazov faction. Vogak, well-versed in Far Eastern affairs, had the ability to actively rally participants. Hartwig facilitated communication and coordination with the Foreign Minister. Bezobrazov enlisted Count Vorontsov-Dashkov (И. И. Воронцов-Дашков) and the businessman V. M. Vonlyarlyarsky (В. М. Вонлярлярский) to participate. The two men, long-time friends of Bezobrazov in the forestry business, became shareholders of the company.

Eighth, Lybov recorded that Rear Admiral Abaza provided the decisive moment that led to the Russo-Japanese War. Lybov believed that the clause in Russo-Japanese Agreement from January 1904, which stated “to remove the border areas of Korea and Manchuria from the neutral zone,” was a source of discord that contributed to the failure of peace negotiations with Japan. Above all, Abaza ambiguously and falsely explained Russia’s terms to the Japanese legation in St. Petersburg, which, in effect, was an act of treason and led to an unexpected diplomatic rupture. Lybov emphasized that the Duman River and Amnok River formed the border between Korea and Manchuria, and it was along these rivers that the “problematic” forestry rights were situated. According to Lybov, figures like Abaza, Bezobrazov, Vogak, Matyunin, and Vonlyarlyarsky revealed their ambitions through the forestry rights along the Duman and Amnok Rivers. Abaza sought to acquire the forestry rights in the Amnok River basin in exchange for conceding the neutral zone. He even believed that war could be justified to secure the forestry rights in the region.

Ninth, Lybov explained the reasons for the failure of the company, describing the events of the summer of 1903, when the transportation of timber from the Amnok River estuary led to an international dispute and Japan’s backlash. Lybov recorded the activities of Madrithov, which played a significant role in provoking this conflict as follows:

International law classified the transportation of timber, excluding the commercial activities, as illegal. However, the company proceeded with the

unlawful shipment of timber. Balashev and Madrithov, labeled as “political thugs,” required a valid explanation for the timber transport they executed along the Amnok River. Lybov promptly informed Matyunin about the issue with the timber transport, and the Russian Foreign Ministry was also made aware of the situation. Although the Russian Governor-General of the Far East Alexeyev recognized the issues with the company, he implicitly approved the actions. Key figures supporting Bezobrazov, such as Abaza and Matyunin, lost consistency in their commercial stance.

Predatory logging by Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese had long been occurring on the left bank of the Amnok River. However, in July and August of 1903, the Amnokgang Forestry Company intensified its logging activities in Korea and began transporting rafts. This action, if not based on prior agreements related to the forestry rights in the region, was an event that could lead to international conflict. Meanwhile, the Japanese also engaged in logging along the Amnok River, using fake permits issued under the name of the Qing government, which they had directly obtained from Beijing.

In November 1902, when organizing logging in Fengtian, Lybov focused more on the sale of timber rather than on logging itself. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Madritov, just before the timber was transported, chased away Japanese loggers who were engaging in predatory logging within his territorial boundaries. To prevent the Japanese from logging along the Amnok River, Madritov mobilized *honghuizi* and launched an attack on the Japanese on Mount Maoershan 帽兒山 in Yanji, which is near the Korean frontier. As a result, 40 workers involved in the logging were killed, including 7 Japanese. This attack sparked a commotion in both Tokyo and Seoul. Consequently, the Japanese became even more vigilant regarding the Amnokgang Forestry Company. It was, as it were, a case of *a thief stealing a club from another thief*.

During the raid, the *honghuizi* looted over one *pu* (about 16 kg) of gold from Korean farmhouses. In response, Madritov ordered his Cossacks to whip the *daotai* 道臺 (circuit intendant) of Fenghuangcheng 鳳凰城, Yuan Dahua 袁大化. Yuan Dahua was the plenipotentiary representative of the Qing government and had been involved in negotiations with Lybov concerning the granting of forestry rights. He had also worked with Lybov to

draft the agreement for the establishment of the Sino-Russian Timber Company, which was set to carry out logging operations east of Fengtian.

Tenth, Lybov argued that the complete abandonment of the Russo-Chinese Joint Stock Company proposal by Bezobrazov and Matyunin led to significant backlash from both China and Korea, ultimately eroding Chinese trust in the Russians. According to Lybov, Bezobrazov's actions played a substantial role in intensifying anti-Russian sentiment within the Chinese government, particularly during the Russo-Japanese War period. Furthermore, in 1902, the Korean government requested permission from Matyunin through Meiro to log five thousand trees for the restoration of Gyeongungung Palace. Matyunin, after consulting with Lybov, initially agreed to the request, but later rejected it, citing the Amnokgang Forestry Company's plans to conduct logging operations during the winter.

Eleventh, Lybov claimed that the establishment of the company's branch in Yongampo, an area unrelated to forestry, led to significant issues. Korea, China, and Japan were commercially interconnected, and Russia's Yongampo branch became the focus of international attention. In response, the Japanese government set up a forestry company and a lumber warehouse near Dadonggou 大東溝 on the Chinese coast, with Japanese residing there. In retaliation, Madritov, using a minesweeper, attacked the Japanese residential area. The Japanese military also positioned minesweepers at the lower reaches of the Amnok River, escalating the potential for war. Lybov argued that the establishment of the Yongampo branch in 1903, during a time of international scrutiny, was the primary cause of the Russo-Japanese War.

Ultimately, Lybov attributed the causes of the Russo-Japanese War as follows. First, the Amnokgang Forestry Company had shifted from a civilian-driven to a state-driven policy. Second, Bezobrazov's faction protected the forest rights of the company, conceding the neutral zone along the border between Korea and Manchuria. Third, the Amnokgang Forestry Company established its Yongampo branch at a time when international attention was focused on the region. Additionally, Lybov outlined key events leading to the war, which included the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway and South Manchurian Railway and the occupation of Port Arthur. These events, according to Lybov, were central to the escalation that

ultimately led to the conflict.¹⁴

Conclusion

The key figures of the Amnokgang Forestry Company were its Executive Director Fedor Alexandrovich Lybov and Russian Minister to Korea Nikolai Matyunin. Lybov pointed to the Amnokgang Forestry Company as one of the causes of the Russo-Japanese War.

However, Matyunin emphasized a different perspective. He argued that the Amnokgang Forestry Company served as a military defensive barrier for Russia, protecting the southern line of the Chinese Eastern Railway from Japanese attacks. Matyunin claimed that it was the Russian Finance Ministry's construction of the southern branch of the railway that had provided Japan with a justification for war, thus triggering the conflict. Matyunin further criticized his short tenure and the Russian government's failure to maintain trust in Korea, attributing this to the interference of the Finance Ministry and Foreign Ministry. He contended that these government bodies fueled public opinion that blamed the Amnokgang Forestry Company as the primary cause of the war. Ultimately, Lybov focused on highlighting the negative aspects of Bezobravov's faction to defend his own interests and win his legal battles. In contrast, Matyunin sought to absolve Bezobravov's faction from the war's responsibility, directing his criticism at the Finance Ministry and the Foreign Ministry instead. Both figures, though seemingly aligned in their views on the importance of the AFV, differed in their strategies for addressing the causes of the Russo-Japanese War.

Czar Nicholas II, who faced domestic and international criticism of the Amnokgang Forestry Company, ordered an investigation to clarify the facts. As a result, on June 2, 1906, Vladimir Cherevansky (В. П. Череванский), a member of the State Council and the Far Eastern Special Committee, prepared a report titled "An Overview of Russia's Relations with China and

14. RGIA, F. 560, Op. 28, d. 340, pp. 1–13.

Japan Prior to the Armed Conflict between Russia and Japan.” Among the sections of this report, “Reconnaissance in Korea and Operations in the Amnok River Basin” offered an assessment of the overall organization and activities of the Amnokgang Forestry Company. This part of the report included opinions from key individuals involved in the company, such as Rear Admiral Abaza and Court Master of the Hunt Balashev. Thus, this report partially served to defend the position of Bezobrazov’s faction, offering a more favorable perspective on the company’s actions.

Cherevansky, having identified the problems of the company, criticized in his report the Bezobrazov’s optimistic attitude, excessive financial demands, and unauthorized actions at the local level. Cherevansky concluded that the organizer of the company lacked any particular understanding or knowledge of the political realities in the Far East. The organizer underestimated Japan and maintained an overly optimistic view of Far Eastern affairs. Furthermore, Cherevansky highlighted the company’s excessive financial demands.

Cherevansky criticized managers of the company for demanding the company’s expansion into the areas along both banks of the Amnok River and for overstepping their authority by seeking to extend operations into the steamship, coal, and railway industries. The organizer hoped to establish a “patent company” with government subsidies and revenue from the salt monopoly business in Manchuria, aiming to become a monopolist capitalist in the region. Moreover, the Bezobrazov group even negotiated to secure railway concessions between Seoul and Uiju, exceeding the scope of the original business plan.

In the report’s conclusion, Cherevansky argued that a financial and accounting investigation into the managers of the company should be conducted to determine whether the forestry business, which had been initiated for specific purposes and under particular circumstances, had adhered to its founding principles. At the same time, Cherevansky asserted that the Japanese press and ruling class regarded the company as a front for Russia’s attempt to dominate Korea. Japan expressed intense opposition to the activities of the company, with the Japanese press adopting a nationalist tone and accusing Russia of using the company as a cunning scheme to seize

control of Korea. Some even claimed that Russia was on the verge of launching a full-scale expansion into the Yellow Sea. In response, Cherevansky defended Russia's management of the Amnokgang Forestry Company by highlighting Japan's manipulation of public opinion. Ultimately, Cherevansky sided with Matyunin in his internal investigation, asserting that Japan was the fundamental cause of the Russo-Japanese War.¹⁵

Ultimately, the Russian government pursued the Amnokgang Forestry Company as a civilian enterprise with the strategic intent of establishing the Amnok River as a military boundary with Japan. However, the Japanese government interpreted the activities of the Amnokgang Forestry Company as evidence of Russia's intention to dominate Korea. Just before the outbreak of the war, the Russian government proposed a compromise to Japan, offering to concede territory south of the Amnok River to protect Russian military forces and railways in Manchuria. However, the Japanese government could not accept this proposal, because it planned to expand beyond the Amnok River into the Gando region. The Amnok River served as the intersection of continental power, represented by Russia, and maritime power, represented by Japan, functioning as a military defensive line for both countries. Therefore, the primary cause of the Russo-Japanese War was the strategic conflict between Russia and Japan over control of the Korean Peninsula, centered on the military contact zone of the Amnok River. Furthermore, Japan used the Amnokgang Forestry Company as a justification for the war.

15. Memorandum by State Councilor Cherevansky, "An Overview of Russia's Relations with China and Japan Prior to the Armed Conflict between Russia and Japan," with comments by Rear Admiral Abaza and court master of the hunt along with Cherevansky's responses to these comments (GARF, F. 543, Op. 1, d. 190, pp. 1–55).

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