Edited by Caroline Humphrey

# Trust and Mistrust in the Economies of the China-Russia Borderlands

Amsterdam
University
Press

Trust and Mistrust in the Economies of the China-Russia Borderlands

# Asian Borderlands

Asian Borderlands presents the latest research on borderlands in Asia as well as on the borderlands of Asia – the regions linking Asia with Africa, Europe and Oceania. Its approach is broad: it covers the entire range of the social sciences and humanities. The series explores the social, cultural, geographic, economic and historical dimensions of border-making by states, local communities and flows of goods, people and ideas. It considers territorial borderlands at various scales (national as well as supra- and sub-national) and in various forms (land borders, maritime borders), but also presents research on social borderlands resulting from border-making that may not be territorially fixed, for example linguistic or diasporic communities.

*Series Editors*
Tina Harris, University of Amsterdam
Willem van Schendel, University of Amsterdam

*Editorial Board Members*
Franck Billé, University of Cambridge
Duncan McDuie-Ra, University of New South Wales
Eric Tagliacozzo, Cornell University
Yuk Wah Chan, City University Hong Kong

# Trust and Mistrust in the Economies of the China-Russia Borderlands

*Edited by*
*Caroline Humphrey*

Cover illustration: Bargaining the sale of potato harvest near the Russia-Mongolia border, 2013
Photo: Nikolai Tsyrempilov

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

# Table of Contents

## List of Figures

**Figure 1    Map of north-eastern Russia-China borderland**

# Introduction

Trusting and Mistrusting Across Borders

*Caroline Humphrey*

This book is a collection of essays based on recent fieldwork along the Northeast frontier between Russia and China,[1] and it has two main aims that are closely interconnected. The first is to explore how trust and mistrust are negotiated in a situation beset with doubts and misunderstandings, in a border region where previously hostile states with very different histories, cultures, and languages face one another. The second is to suggest some ways in which these studies can contribute to understanding the import of trust and mistrust in small-scale economic activities. It should be added straight away that the book does not propose a theory of trust of its own to add to the numerous conceptualizations of this idea already available (Luhmann 1979; Gambetta 1988; Hosking 2010; Cook 2001; Hardin 2002; Dasgupta 1988; O'Neill 2002; Baier 2004; Hawley 2014). Rather, it provides anthropological ideas and ethnographic materials that will enable readers to explore and probe these models. What is new here is that, while the great majority of theories of trust assume that actors have a common background of values and expectations, this of course cannot be presupposed across a border like the one between Russia and China – nor, for that matter, *inside* either of these enormously complex countries. As several of the essays document, not only Russians and Chinese but also other peoples of the borderland (Mongolians, Koreans, Buryats, Evenki) have their own ways of enacting and expressing this idea. In short, this book addresses how trust and mistrust are deployed in both making and transcending boundaries.

Not agreeing about ways to create trust is one way to create mistrust. In fact, an unavoidable feature of these borders is the long historical legacy of mistrust between the peoples inhabiting them. Yet, somehow, a certain frontier economy continues to ebb and flow. One key argument made in this book is that both mistrust (as an initial stance towards others) and distrust (as a consequence of being let down) can be socially productive in

a non-normative sense: they enable something else to happen, whether that be the emergence of mediators, processes of testing the untrusted other, or protests that may become political. We aim to illustrate some notable patterns found in this border region and to show how they are shaped – in perhaps unexpected ways – by their multifaceted environment: external economic exigencies, political structures, spatial-geographical circumstances, and the concepts people hold about one another and about trust.

Before introducing the chapters, let me first situate this book in relation to theories of trust and distrust. I am not the first to observe that the literature on this topic is vast and fragmented, with inflows from sociology, political science and theory, economics, psychology, history, philosophy, management and organization studies, and anthropology (for a survey, see Delhey and Newton 2003). It is therefore impossible to provide the (or a) theory of trust. Instead, I outline certain notable relevant contributions below, with the aim of describing the general terrain and some of the main questions that have been debated. Since this book is intended as a contribution to anthropology, the survey to follow, brief as it inevitably is, focuses on anthropology's distinctive approach to the topic of distrust/mistrust. Finally, this Introduction provides an indication of how the various chapters draw upon diverse strands of the literature on trust and make their own suggestions based on the empirical materials.

## Thinking about trust

Political science, economic, and sociological theories have focussed far more on trust than on distrust. A common definition of trust that we broadly follow in this book is: an intention to accept uncertainty and risk based on a positive expectation of others (Dietz, Gillespie, and Chao 2010, 10). The plenitude of recent theories, however, differs greatly in focus and emphasis. Within a broad philosophical stream, one thread examines trust as a foundation of sociality and morality (Baier 2004), while another, exemplified by Onora O'Neill (2002), addresses the 'crisis of trust' in modern society (implicitly, the contemporary West) and asks how 'we' the public can best nurture and support it. Rather than seeing trust normatively in the context of rights and duties, a more psychological approach considers trust to be a matter of the attitude of individuals, depending on their personality, income, age, class, culture, etc. Sociologists, on the other hand, usually conceptualize trust as a property of certain social institutions, or argue more broadly that certain kinds of socio-cultural organization foster

trusting attitudes (Putnam 2000). And political scientists debate the relation between trust and political forms, focussing in particular on democracy, 'good governance', greater perceived political freedom, public safety, and economic performance (Fukuyama 1995). Here, many authors see general public trust as a *consequence*, understood as the outcome of either a civic culture with high levels of shared customs, values, and beliefs that promote institutional and interpersonal trust (Putnam 1993; Hosking 2010), promotion by voluntary associations (Putnam 2000), or the public expectation that democratic institutions will function effectively (see discussion in Mishler and Rose 2005). Pierre Rosanvallon cuts into this debate by observing that conventional arguments about democracy conflate questions of legitimacy (abiding by the rules of democratic representation) with questions of trust (the assumption that politicians will act for the common good). But, he observes, not only do these two not always converge, but durable forms of distrust have been an inherent component of all democracies, however legitimate – and the people's distrust gives rise to positive attempts to impose controls on the political processes carried out in their name (Rosanvallon 2003, x-xi).

We take note of such theories and the generally held view that 'social trust'[2] is good – a positive collective attribute that is essential for the lessening of social conflict, the growth of economies, the execution of contracts, a feeling of security, and reduction in the level of corruption. However, we note that many of the arguments that aim to demonstrate these points are bedevilled by cause-effect problems. For example, do people become more trusting as a result of participating in voluntary groups, or are such groups formed by people who already trust one another? Are businessmen less corrupt because there is more public trust, or is the level of trust higher because businessmen are less corrupt (Delhey and Newton 2003, 102)? The contributions in this book do not take part in causal theorizing about trust in the abstract, but instead address the conditions in which it exists – or fails to exist – in particular circumstances.

This book is concerned primarily (though not exclusively; see Martin, this volume), with trust in regard to economic activities, rather than political, religious, or intimate life. Here we note economist Partha Dasgupta's argument (1988) that *social/public* trust rests on the existence of a background agency, usually the state, that reliably enforces contracts and provides credible and impartial punishment for errant behaviour. We also take

---

2    The term 'social trust' normally refers to the degree to which people say they trust unknown others in a given society.

account of anthropologist Ernest Gellner's proposal (1988) that the absence of such an agency means that people are likely to operate instead through strong *interpersonal* trust.[3] It is fair to say that in neither Russia nor China can such an agency be relied upon by ordinary citizens to enforce the law impartially: erratic regulation plagues Russia in particular. These issues loom large in this book, especially in the chapters by Holzlehner, Santha and Safonova, and Ryzhova. And the issue of non-enforcement is, of course, compounded by the border, with its loopholes in jurisdiction and mutual uncertainty about the regulations on the other side.

Given the rapid shifts and economic turbulence of recent years, particularly the dramatic expansion of the Chinese economy, the zigzag of the Russian one, the mobility of exchange rates, and the greatly increased income polarization of the populations in both countries, economic actors are faced with great uncertainty and a bewildering plethora of factors to take into account. Here, surely, the classic formulation by Georg Simmel is relevant. Simmel describes trust ('confidence') as 'a hypothesis regarding future behaviour, a hypothesis certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct', and suggests that peoples, eras, and societies vary in the particular combination of knowledge and ignorance that is sufficient to generate trust (1950, 318-9). Following Simmel, Niklas Luhmann proposed an influential argument: trust, he suggests, has a functional value; it simplifies the perceived complexity of reality, enabling actors to behave as if the future were predictable and thus initiate activities (Luhmann 1979). Here one can see a certain similarity with approaches by economists, who likewise often conceptualize trust as a resource – an unusual one that does not get depleted as it is used, but rather tends to increase. In this interpretation, trust becomes an element in a rational strategy: agents work out subjective probabilities regarding the future actions of others and act accordingly. Trust is seen as a product of experience and it is is constantly updated in accordance with calculations about the probability of default or satisfactory completion of a given partner (Dasgupta 1988).

This book works at something of a tangent to these ideas, because it operates on a very different knowledge base. If the classic sociology is based on wide historical reading and the logic of action drawn therefrom, the economic theory is usually an exercise in working out the consequence of rational decision-making in invented situations, e.g., Prisoner's Dilemma

3    As Dasgupta further argues, these two points are closely connected: 'If your trust in the enforcement agency falters, you will not trust persons to fulfill their terms of an agreement and thus will not enter that agreement' (Dasgupta 1988, 50).

questions. In contrast, the knowledge base of this book is personally observed ethnography, and the questions asked are not just about decisions (to transact or not, etc.), but instead concern the social, moral, and political dimensions of economic activity. This greatly widens the material to be taken into account, including, for example, the habitual ways of life of different cultures, political structures, inherited ideological shibboleths, indigenous trust-related concepts, stereotypes about others, and the local value systems that shape the motives people have for cooperating with others. Our contributors, who rely mainly on the disciplinary background of socio-cultural anthropology, therefore leave aside certain debates that have flourished elsewhere, such as the question of how – in the abstract – to exclude 'personal trust' (relationships between family, friends, and lovers) from the 'rationality' underlying economic theories. It has long been established in anthropology (Zelizer 2005) that economic calculation is thoroughly mixed up with personal relations, and the interesting question – explored in the chapter by Park – is how people in particular circumstances draw their own frail boundaries while dealing with this mixture. This book thus follows distinctively anthropological approaches in resisting homogenous and a-temporal concepts of trust. While recognizing that there are important general points to be made, such as Luhmann's argument (1979, 25-9) that trust is achieved through reading the symbolic systems that interpret the world selectively and carry out the work of simplifying reality, rather than discussing such 'communication' in the abstract, the chapters show that trust in practice is a feeling that is only arrived at in particular socio-cultural settings – and maybe for not very long. And, furthermore, the signs may be deceptive or misunderstood. As Alberto Corsin Jimenez suggests (2011), trust relying on signals always goes hand-in-hand with masquerading, with movements in and out of opacity, and therefore always has mistrust as its shadow. If trust is the outcome of culturally specific performances, it will be doubly problematic in trans-border situations where there are radical differences in social strategies and ideas about what should be revealed and what hidden.

## Thinking about distrust

In fact, it is distrust rather than trust that is most evident across the China-Russia-Mongolia-Korea borders, and yet some of the same questions arise. Is this distrust a matter of dealing with unfamiliarity and problems of communication – for these populations were essentially cut off from one

another for decades during high socialism and have only recently made some relatively limited contacts? Or is it a remnant of earlier state ideological battles? Is it simply a widely present feature of socio-political relations in these societies? Or is it some mixture of these? If one looks at the sociological literature on distrust for guidance (this being considerably smaller than that on trust), one finds that general works on the topic share one feature with trust theory: the preponderance of discussion in the abstract. Arriving at a theory of 'distrust' as a human propensity through abstracting from particular cases also means leaving behind much of the rich material that is the basis of anthropology. Nevertheless, we have found much value in the debates in this literature. One concerns the relation between trust and distrust. Much of the trust literature rarely addresses distrust in its own right, but tends to envisage it as a lack – a simple absence of trust, or the opposite of trust. However, Diego Gambetta's seminal study (1988, 218) suggests the fruitful idea that we should instead be considering a scale, in which various forms of trust hover between 'blind trust' at one end and 'outright distrust' at the other. Trust thus appears as a variable 'threshold point' in a given context, rather than as an absolute. Then there are the sociological and economic approaches, also discussed by Gambetta, that point out that distrust need not be seen as necessarily in opposition to trust, but can instead be its functional equivalent. Luhmann (1979), for example, maintained that in certain contexts a suspicious attitude could also mobilize a prediction of the future, while later Russell Hardin (2004) and Karen Cook, Hardin, and Margaret Levi (2005) argue that mistrust can be a positive spur to action based on the constant attempt to guess the intentions and capacities of others. This line of thought led to the idea that distrust also can be understood as a range, varying from 'hard' (paralysing) distrust to 'prudent' distrust that allows for certain interactions, an idea that is taken up in the chapter by Namsaraeva in this volume.

By contrast, the anthropology of distrust, which has a long history,[4] has examined it as emergent within a concatenation of moral ideas and practical

---

4    A classic study is Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1956), which describes the inhabitants of a South Italian village as convinced that success can only come at the expense of others. Prey to suspiciousness, lying, gossip, and betrayal of everyone outside the close family, they are mired in what Banfield calls 'amoral familism', which ties them into a socially and economically paralyzing mistrust. Another well-known work dealing with distrust is Colin Turnbull's study of the Ik (1972), which depicts an even more toxic endemic mutual enmity. Turnbull was for a long time disbelieved, but his ethnography has been confirmed in many ways by Christian Gade, Rane Willerslev, and Lotte Meinert, who document the faltering 'half-trust', laced with concealed enmity, that is invoked by Ik farmers in the face of fluctuating violence

tactics. This theme has recently received a burst of new interest in the form of studies of subjectivities associated with mistrust, deception, uncertainty, and opacity. This is the arena of diverse misgivings that pervades even a provisionally given trust – for we can never know with certainty what is on another's mind. Joel Robbins (2008) has pointed out – admittedly amid controversy (the 'opacity of mind' debate) – that certain Pacific Island cultures assume that it is difficult, if not impossible, to read the minds of others. In other words, they question the presumed universal human interest in delving into others' thoughts and motivations. With such withdrawal from gauging other's future actions, there may be little value placed on trust and little investment in prediction and planning in such societies. Our case is something like the opposite of this. In both China and Russia, a consequence of decades of Party grandiloquence that is clearly contradicted by the evidence of one's eyes has been not only popular cynicism and lack of trust in the government, but also indeed the desire to attempt to penetrate to other people's true thoughts, to 'tear off the masks' (Fitzpatrick 2005). In China, people invoke the expression *biao li bu yi* ('the outside and the inside are not the same') as a criticism of others' subterfuges (Steinmüller 2016, 2). But discourses of truth and sincerity of course pre-dated the opacity of the socialist and post-socialist governments. They can be seen as age old cultural-philosophical resources for reflection by Russian, Mongolian, and Chinese people.

Reflection not only on the motives of others but also on oneself as a person who is also likely to be acting in an untrustworthy way. As one Chinese microblog concerning a murky affair reads: 'Isn't the taste of keeping your conscience in the dark while acting like a dog hard to take?' (quoted in Latham 2016, 163). In both countries, the evaporation of high socialist ideals – which, it is generally thought, earlier generations believed in – was followed by a dominant discourse of moral decline, in which people situate themselves, one way or another, in an unprincipled world (Osburg 2016, 51). Mistrust, and the difficulty of trusting or being trustworthy, are part of this.

In the recent literature, anthropologists have questioned the previous consensus that trust is unequivocally a virtue and distrust is automatically

from Turkana raider herders and the 'double, tricky relationship' involved when people are dependent on others more powerful than themselves (2015, 417). On a different continent, Olivier Allard describes the mixture of hope and anxiety that pervades Warao interactions with national bureaucrats via documents. Warao villagers thoroughly distrust officials demanding demographic data, and yet Allard shows that they themselves make creative use of unreliable documents, such as registration forms, to claim various kinds of state support, with the accompanying rhetoric 'we the Warao are helpless...' (Allard 2012).

a harmful thing. A collection of essays (Allard, Carey and Renault 2016) points to thinkers and whole bodies of social opinion according to which mistrust can, on the contrary, be a civic and political virtue: suspicious alertness provides protection from dangers, and vigilance can be a public duty in the exercise of controlling power. In such views, trustfulness – i.e., the absence of mistrust – looks naïve. These authors build on Luhmann's argument that a mistrustful attitude, because it does not simplify choices like trusting, but on the contrary keeps the difficult complexity of the real world in view, may lead not to paralysis but to practical, useful knowledge in situations of uncertainty. Indeed, 'as a strategy, mistrust is an ability, an art with its virtuosos, and can lead to a systematization of behaviour or steps taken towards the real' (Allard, Carey, and Renault 2016, 2, my translation). A further notable contribution has been made by Matthew Carey's recently published *Mistrust: An Ethnographic Theory*.[5] Carey's study is based on fieldwork in the Moroccan High Atlas, where peasant society is beset by chronic suspiciousness, with communicative strategies based on obfuscation and dissembling, and frequent accusations of deceit and betrayal. Here there is an ineradicable mistrust, not just of outsiders but also enveloping the very closest people, because the villagers feel that no one can be known entirely. Thus, trust and mistrust appear in Carey's work not as abstract values but as cultural-moral stances towards life and the self. Trusting, Carey observes, implies a willingness to place oneself in a degree of dependency on the person trusted, but at the same time it can be a way of managing others, because trusting requires compliance from those we trust (lest it be lost forever). On the other hand, the Moroccan stance of *mistrust* is different: it is part of a philosophy of rugged autonomy and moral equality that assumes both oneself and other people to be free and fundamentally uncontrollable. However, these two stances are not mutually exclusive; in practice, each implies its shadow: 'where people assume others can be known and trusted they also know that this is not always the case, and where they assume others are inscrutable they are also aware that some people are less unknowable than others' (Carey 2017, 14-15). We have found no society in the northeast Asian borderlands that has quite the intensity of internal mistrust of the Moroccan High Atlas, and in north Asia hierarchical relations of one kind or another – rather than 'rugged autonomy and moral equality' – are prevalent. Yet Carey's observations

---

5    Carey (2017) distinguishes between 'distrust' and 'mistrust', observing that while the two are very close in meaning, distrust is likely to be based on a specific past experience, while mistrust describes a general sense of unreliability.

about the light and shade interweaving trust and mistrust are relevant to many of the chapters (especially Humphrey, Park, Bayar, and Namsaraeva).

## Trade in a politically fragmented borderland

There is a gap in studies of northeast Asia that this volume hopes to repair. Relatively few anthropological studies address trust and distrust in economic interactions across international borders, and none in English, as far as we know, have dealt with this theme in relation to the China-Russia-Mongolia border. While recent studies by historians and anthropologists (Van Schendel and Itty 2005; Tagliacozzo 2005; Reeves 2012; Billé, Delaplace, and Humphrey 2012; and Reeves 2014 to name but a few) have investigated border sovereignty, migration, and subjectivities, and have interrogated earlier assumptions about the politics of states at Eurasian international borders, the question of trust, though mentioned, is not addressed centrally. Another literature does compare the levels and dimensions of 'social trust' within post-socialist societies using diverse models, but does not look at interactions between these countries (Mishler and Rose 2001; Delhey and Newton 2003). Yet another body of literature focuses on social trust – and its absence – in Russia and China, but again focuses on each country separately (e.g. for Russia: Oleinik 2005; Mishler and Rose 2005; Shlapentokh 2007; Mühlfried 2014; and for China: Weiying and Rongzhu 2002; Wang and Liu 2002). Thus, trust/mistrust and cross-border economies in northeast Asia remain to be studied together.

It would be natural to expect a volume on trust in economic practices to focus on trade and traders. While Tobias Holzlehner's chapter is largely devoted to illegal trade in Vladivostok, the book as a whole takes a broad compass and draws attention to other economic activities in the borderlands, such as mining, real estate speculation, construction, migrant labour, long-distance trucking, sex work, wildlife poaching, online mediation, and urban marketplaces. Nevertheless, trade broadly understood – both small- and large-scale – is central to the cross-border economy and is part of all of the above-mentioned activities. So this introduction provides an overview to fill the ethnographic gap concerning the various kinds of trade along the length of this border, outlining various forms of legal, a-legal, and illegal trade and noting how problems of trust are managed in different ways within them. The landed sites of cross-border trade differ from Vladivostok with its complex and unique maritime situation. And yet, despite geographical variations along the frontier, I argue that it is the *political* formation of

the international borders and their changing regulations that have shaped the distinctive patterns of trade and their developments over time. What follows will not be quantitative economic data (the difficulty of producing a statistics-based account is discussed in Ryzhova 2013[6]), but will instead focus on the social dimensions of trade, i.e. the relatively distinct kinds of traders, their networks, and their practices. The forms of trust/distrust found in trading can be seen as something like a repertoire, which can be taken up and indeed used in different contexts, such as business investment or labour management.

Because the border was sealed for decades between the late 1950s and the early 1990s, during which the only 'trade' consisted of official state-to-state transfers, earlier mercantile and trading traditions fell into disuse. This was less marked in China than in Russia, since in the latter state socialism was older and more deeply embedded and had brought with it a strongly negative attitude toward 'speculation' (as private trade was called). This national difference is reflected in what happened after the 1990s, when crossing points were opened and trading started up. The Chinese government strongly promoted small-scale private trade ventures across its borders and simultaneously encouraged provincial border administrations to make international agreements on their own account (see Namsaraeva, this volume). This Chinese state-led liberalization made rapid inroads into the demoralized, de-industrialized wasteland of what Hyun-Gwi Park has called the 'state-neglected liberalization' of Siberia and the Russian Far East (2016, 377). The result was a sharp economic imbalance, in which the vast majority of goods, especially consumption items, came from China, and the purchasers came from Russia. Compounding this situation was Russia's long historical obsession with sovereignty (Sakwa 2011) and its fear of an influx of Chinese population and influence, anxieties that have scarcely slackened in recent years. A consequence was that Russia neglected local economic prosperity in favour of the paramount importance of border security. Around 2010, Russia closed numerous border-crossing points along its borders with Mongolia and China. Strict controls were placed on Chinese migration into Russia, with a panoply of visa and work quota requirements, and after 2007 'foreign' citizens (affecting mainly the Chinese) were debarred from the

---

6    Ryzhova (2013, 250) documents large inconsistencies between the official figures for imports and exports given by Russian and Chinese sources. Each side gives a large figure in US dollars for their exports and a smaller one for their imports. The vast amount of 'illegal' trade over this border is unaccounted for in these figures. Other sources, such as the customs' services, are also unreliable.

right to trade in Russian marketplaces. The reasons for, and consequences of, this security mania, and its expression in Russian popular mistrust of the border city of Manzhouli and distrust of 'Chinese traders', are the subject of Ivan Peshkov's chapter in this book.

But what about actual trade practices? With few crossing points open for trade along the thousands of miles of the Sino-Russian border,[7] the result is bottlenecks, queues, and rich opportunities for rent taking by border officials. The impasse at checkpoints applies primarily to goods travelling overland from China to Russia.[8] This consists of an enormous variety of clothing, footwear, electrical/digital items, agricultural products, machinery, textiles, furniture, and home goods. From around 2010 the problem of bottlenecks has become ever more pronounced, especially at Manzhouli-Zabaikal'sk. For one thing, transport infrastructure cannot cope with the increased flow: the Trans-Siberian Railway, though improved in some sectors, is unable to manage the increased number of wagons, and the Russian roads are slow and rough. For another, the process of inspection, customs, etc., at key crossing-points is extraordinarily inquisitorial and expensive. Up to 500 wagons may wait at Zabaikal'sk (the Russian border town adjacent to Manzhouli) waiting for customs clearance, and it can take up to six months for one to pass through (Namsaraeva 2014, 119). The China-Mongolia border is far easier to cross, for both goods and people. But the Mongolia-Russia border also has many hindrances, notably the small number of official crossing points, high tariffs, the time limitation on Mongolian citizens' visits to Russia, and the special visa required for trading.[9] All of this shapes the patterns of overland trade in the region. If we interpret 'trade' broadly and include smuggling and poaching, it is possible to delineate five notable variants, which I briefly describe below (though the material being patchy along this lengthy border, I have only been able to mention some; no doubt others exist).

The first type involves long-distance routes and large-scale container consignments by train or road-transport that are organized by major companies, usually based in metropolitan cities. These companies, both

---

7    Road and rail crossing points differ. The Zabaikal'sk-Manzhouli crossing is the only one where both coincide; it therefore has the greatest flow of goods and people, and the most problematic bottleneck.

8    China has smoothed the path of its imports from Russia, most of which are bulk materials such as oil, gas, machinery, coal, and timber.

9    Since November 2014, the regulations for citizens of Mongolia have been lightened; there is now a visa-free 'tourist' border-crossing regime, but with a limit of 30 days and no permission to trade.

Russian and Chinese, usually work through brokers and/or 'expeditors' to make the necessary confidential arrangements with the border officials to get their goods through. Operations at this scale are regarded with a mixture of awe and dislike by small traders. One day Sayana Namsaraeva saw an important and haughty-looking Russian woman sweep through the Manzhouli customs area, accompanied by two well-dressed, obsequious Chinese men. 'She's a top customs broker,' people whispered, 'and those guys will do everything for her, money, hotels, cars, restaurants... because she'll help them get their goods passed.' Looking at the scene, a small trader commented, 'Here every meter on the border is bought', and he implied that the Chinese were likely to be part of a mafia-type criminal network with a long partnership with this woman, who could be trusted because she had demonstrated her worth to them over the years. However, using brokers may not improve matters much: after all, they themselves add another cost to the notoriously high bribes taken by customs, not to mention the barriers that can be erected by security agencies, sanitary inspection, certification of the goods, warehouse payments, etc. Recently, the broker function has been officialized, so alongside a number of rapacious private firms there is now the Customs Brokerage Centre in Zaibaikal'sk, which charges up to 10 percent of the value of the goods. This brief account provides some regional contextualization for several of the chapters (Bayar, Ryzhova, Holzlehner, and Namsaraeva), which describe brokers and mediators and the need for them to concoct some temporary, time-specific, and fragile two-way trust between mutually suspicious actors who nevertheless have a strong interest in making a deal.

The Manzhouli-Zabaikal'sk crossing has the reputation of a 'hell' for companies on both sides (Namsaraeva 2014, 119). Viewing the border as a particularly vexatious 'complication' in the lengthy trajectory between origin and destination, a top-end Russian businessman exporting to China tends to need extremely high-level contacts in Moscow,[10] and even then he may well complain of sometimes having to fly down and sort out the Brokerage Centre personally (ibid., 120). Meanwhile, his Chinese counterparts have been increasingly washing their hands of the whole situation and switching to routes via Kazakhstan, where the border procedure is relatively simple. Despite being a far longer route via a third country, Chinese goods arrive in central Siberia ten days faster this way. In short, large-scale

---

10   An example is Igor Chaika, son of the General Procurator of Russia, who discussed his problems setting up an export company for the Chinese market in foodstuffs. http://www.rbc.ru/interview/business/01/03/2017/58b6e1789a794726962d2c8b.

trade is beginning to abandon the northeast Asian border crossing routes. This entire situation has deleterious effects on the Siberian and Far East economy, as it raises prices on many items that appear in such a circuitous manner. It also affects the practices of other kinds of traders.

The general operation of 'shuttle-trade' has been well described in the regional literature, yet the constraints and affordances of particular traders remain little known in sources in English. I briefly describe the example of 'Darima', a Russia-based Buryat trader whom Sayana Namsaraeva and I met in Manzhouli in 2013.[11] Her business is local, consisting of receiving orders for consumption goods from village shops or boutiques in shopping-malls in Buryatia, assembling a team of carriers, buying the goods in Manzhouli, and taking them back to Russia for distribution to the clients. Darima and her team often make the trip back and forth several times a day. The need for a team comes from the Russian border regulation that individual travelers may only carry up to 35 kg of luggage[12] without paying exorbitant customs duties, while low wholesale prices in China are given only for bulk consignments and each shuttle firm is in competition with the others to offer low prices to the Russian consumers. The entire business rests on trust: first, Darima has to trust her carriers, who are almost all women ('women are more reliable, careful, and cooperative') and who call themselves 'camels' in distant reference to the trade caravans that used to wind their way from China to Russia in the past. Darima relies on her camels not to damage, steal, or replace the goods with inferior items, and to be able to physically do the heavy lifting. The team has to travel together in a cramped minibus, eat together, sleep together, and negotiate with the Chinese sellers, so this trust rests on repeated, intimate, and arduous experience; there is no way Darima would take on someone who phoned out of the blue and asked to join her team. Second, she has to trust the customs officer, to whom she has paid some 5,000 rubles per box in advance and with whom she has made a private arrangement to wave her consignment through. The whole situation is fraught with anxiety, for both the camels and the customs officer have to 'play their part' in case an inspector appears on the scene. This is why before crossing the border the boxes of goods have to be opened and redistributed in packages to each camel, 'as if' they might be an individual's luggage. Darima is in charge of this operation, and she instructs each carrier to learn by heart that she has 7 shirts, 9 pairs of trainers, 22 boxes of nappies, 3 quilts,

---

11    See Holzlehner, this volume, for the analogous situation in Vladivostok and Ryzhova (2013, 246-78) for a detailed description of the shuttle-trade at Blagoveshchensk-Heihe.

12    This weight limit is changed from time to time, with immediate effect on the shuttle traders.

etc.; she told us how she had been rudely criticized by the customs officer when an inept camel failed in the performance of 'these goods are mine' and forgot what she had in 'her' luggage. The customs officer meanwhile has to perform the role of strict inspector, in the knowledge that an anti-corruption drive is (selectively) under way in Russia. He needs to remember that all boxes with a pink ribbon belong to Darima, and to make sure that he is on duty in a quiet area at the time promised. Following the transit, the bundles have to be re-packed as if newly acquired, checked and counted, and then sent on to the shop-owner clients. Finally, Darima has to trust the person who placed the order. We witnessed the moment when she received a phone call that a previous consignment had arrived in Chita. Only following this would she be paid for that trip. Darima does not have a large reserve; only after receiving confirmation of the money for the previous venture does she pay the customs officer for the next trip and her camels for the one they have just accomplished. Darima knows the border like the back of her hand, each customs man, 'each dog, each cat', as she said. Quite often 'her' customs man will ask her to get something for him from China on the side, either as a friendly present or as part of the payment for his service.

The wider politics of the border, notably the freezing out of Chinese traders, means that virtually all of the shuttle traders are Russian citizens (though some are 'place men' to provide an official face for a business that is in fact Chinese-owned). It is rare for them to speak Chinese, although among the few who do some have made substantial profits, gradually branched out, created more substantial logistics or transport companies, and rose into the category of large, long-distance traders mentioned earlier. Meanwhile, the border regime has given rise to another, even humbler type of trade: the more entrepreneurial cash-strapped inhabitants of the border region, very often Mongols, who have taken to ad hoc, unsanctioned vending in Russia in large numbers. They operate as individuals, but are linked changeably to shops and marketplaces, often in out-of-the-way towns and villages. Unlike the shuttle traders who have settled routines and a certain esprit de corps despite the competition between them, these people do not see themselves as 'traders', but instead dip in and out of business; they undercut prices by their flexibility, their willingness to travel and substitute for one another, and their 'unnatural' (as the Russians see it) ability to work hard, live cheaply, and withstand hardship. The Mongols benefit from the fact that their easier southern border means that Chinese goods are lower priced in their country than in Russia, and from their ability to negotiate end-lessly complicated loan arrangements with friends and relatives. But their trading in Russia is constrained by regulations, especially the short time

and prohibition on (legally) engaging in business without a special visa. This means, as one man explained to me, that their strategy is the fastest possible sale of the maximum number of goods at rock-bottom prices, and then a quick getaway with the small profit. Travelling back and forth, the same people carry information and samples of Russian goods that are in demand in Russia to the Chinese workshops making fakes that are based in Mongolia or in Inner Mongolia at Erlian. They then take the 'genuine Russian products' back to sell throughout Siberia (Sodnompilova 2010: 14): this is an example of the metamorphosis of material at borders that resonates with the transformation of stones into precious 'jade' discussed in the chapter by Safonova and Santha. These traders do not trust one another, according to local accounts. As one Mongol vendor said: 'We would never pool money and allow just one of us to go to Manzhouli to buy the goods – because we don't trust one another. The Kyrgyz can "raise" around 20,000 rubles in one day [for such a trip], but that's unthinkable for us' (Sodnompilova 2010, 18).

It is these Kyrgyz traders, my next category, who have taken advantage of the ousting of the Chinese to dominate the market places and malls throughout Eastern Siberia and towns in the Far East. During the 1990s-early 2000s, the 'Chinese markets' in cities like Irkutsk were regarded by municipal authorities as 'crime-promoting spaces' and by the townsfolk as useful but alien closed enclaves. And indeed, the Chinese traders lived and sheltered on site, rarely venturing into the city for fear of xenophobic attacks. Several municipalities then moved these 'Chinese markets' into places on the outskirts. But meanwhile, as the Chinese themselves melted away, the Kyrgyz and other Central Asians took over, first setting up their own ethnically distinct 'trading rows' of stalls and later separate Kyrgyz-named malls within the new, now more 'open' and publicly acceptable market areas (Horie and Grigorichev 2016). They could succeed because, as citizens of former Soviet countries, they were not classed as 'foreigners' and were given privileges that allowed them easily to obtain trading permits or Russian citizenship. With better knowledge of the Russian language and culture than the Chinese, they could also better counter hostile attitudes. Further, they benefitted economically from the previously mentioned switch of Chinese wholesale consignments to routes in Central Asia. Purchasing goods in Central Asian border markets, or even from Moscow or Novosibirsk, Kyrgyz traders could still sell more cheaply in Siberian towns than the shuttle traders who have to cope with the exigencies of Zabaikal'sk-Manzhouli. Some former shuttle traders in Ulan-Ude told us that they had given up on the trek across the border to China and now preferred to travel to Irkutsk to buy wholesale from the Kyrgyz.

In many ways, the Kyrgyz resemble the Afghan traders discussed by Magnus Marsden in his book *Trading Worlds* (2016), first of all because of the social institutions they have in place that ensure trust. The Kyrgyz operate in small teams of kinsfolk. The great distances of their routes require each team to place a trusted person in cities or markets that are far apart. Yet in this situation, merely being a relative is not enough. Cross-border operations require facility in calculating exchange rates, reliable accounting of stock and credit, the accurate communication of changing conditions, and so forth – in other words, being trusted goes hand-in-hand with the need to develop the skills that enable you to actually perform the trading tasks. Furthermore, as Marsden writes, such traders need to be internationally oriented actors, akin to diplomats (2016, 21), for they also need to negotiate the potential hostility of the local populations.

In Eastern Siberia both Russians and Buryats see the Kyrgyz traders as competitors, endowed with their own somehow unfair and alien cohesiveness. An example is 'the *sharia* bank', which is said to enable the Kyrgyz to transfer money by purely oral agreements, usually by mobile phone. It is not clear that any such bank exists, and it may be a figment of the imagination of the locals; yet, the expression stands for arrangements whereby Kyrgyz and other Central Asian traders can make purchases and payments across a border without actually transferring money, through accounts held in balance with a trusted person on the other side. The system appears to be similar to the informal 'flying banks' by which the Chinese repatriate their profits across the border, a practice that has been lessened but not eradicated by the change in Russian law in 2003 allowing officially registered banks to operate in both yuan and rubles (Ryzhova 2013, 270). The practice among Central Asians of eschewing written contracts and doing business through a handshake (*po ruku*) works particularly to their advantage in China. As a director of a Siberian market said, 'Often the Chinese will advance a valuable commodity to them to sell, requiring payment only later, which they would not do for a Russian entrepreneur' (Varnavskii 2010, 48). Such preferential person-to-person trust, combined with their own international backing, enables the Kyrgyz traders to accommodate to the circling sharks (mediators, brokers, expediters) that take pickings from less adept businesses. Traders and migrant workers put pressure on cheating mediators who come from the same community as themselves by means of shaming, gossip, and ostracism from their families back home (Urinboyev and Polese 2016, 198-201). This point is illustrated in Ryzhova's chapter on the Internet trade between Russia and China. Here, to a great extent because of the language problem (i.e. understanding Chinese websites),

Russian purchasers have been obliged to use local intermediaries. While they *had to* trust these brokers, it was meanwhile not in the latter's interest to default – and Ryzhova describes how an initial experimental trust placed in such firms run by relatives and friends could gradually transform into a firmer trust based on experience.

The Kyrgyz trading teams, composed almost entirely of close kin, are usually managed by a family elder, who may well operate at a distance and remain in Kyrgyzia. These trust ties therefore rest on complex concatenations of affect, obligation, status, and respect over time and generations. The actors stand to lose far more than their stake in a particular deal. For example, Sayana Namsaraeva and I met a young Kyrgyz girl, sitting all alone in her stall in the market in Ulan-Ude, who said the business was owned by her maternal uncles. She worked for them unpaid, being provided with only minimal food and a sleeping spot, because the agreement was that sometime in the future they would provide her dowry, which would enable her to make a good marriage. As for the relations between Kyrgyz businesses, they try to avoid competition and help one another as *zemlyaki* ('people from one place'); they trade next to one another in markets, socialize together, pray together, and bury their dead in a separate cemetery. Varnavskii's study of the Kyrgyz traders in Krasnokamensk indicates that Islam is even more important to them than ethnicity and is an essential part of the moral understanding that underpins their mutual trust. Explaining who was sent to China to buy the goods on behalf of the others who had clubbed together to provide the money, a trader said, 'It doesn't have to be a Kyrgyz. Could be a Kyrgyz, or a Tajik or an Uzbek. What is important is that he must be a Muslim!' (Varnavskii 2010, 49).

We see from the case of the Kyrgyz that their success rests in part on competence but much more on the depth of the trust they call upon and perform for one another, which is embedded in a web of long-standing social relations and moral accountability. This has the effect of enfolding their internal economic transactions within a variety of other relations, of kinship, national identity, place of origin, and religion. This example is particularly relevant to the chapters by Bayar and Park, which discuss Mongolian and Korean attempts to establish trust for economic purposes via the use of kinship. Both papers are instructive, for they show that, contrary to the suppositions of authors (e.g., Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 2000) who assume that 'traditional' kin obligations are the very root of trust, even the very closest of such ties have to be confirmed by explicit guarantees concerning a given venture (the Mongolian case), and further, the two sides of an agreement may have different understandings of the kinship

relation in question (the Korean case). Such detailed analysis is important, because it is easy to be misled by actors' rhetoric about their wonderfully unbreakable kin ties, while their practice reveals subtle calculations not only about the future behaviour of kin but also about the economy in which everyone has to sink or swim.

Finally, I should briefly mention the traders who specialize in illegal practices, actors who are central to the chapter by Tobias Holzlehner. Trade is 'illegal' either because the goods themselves are forbidden in a given country, or because the complex, multiple certification necessary to acquire, possess, transport, or sell them has not been obtained. As customs' websites show, goods are also counted as *kontrabanda* in Russia if they are legal but undeclared at customs, declared under false pretences (counterfeits), or declared in wrong amounts. An immense variety of consignments fall into these categories. The 'shape' of trade networks is determined by the nature of the goods and the regulations to which they are subject. Difficult-to-obtain products without an export license, such as the Siberian-mined stones smuggled into China as 'jade' (Safonova and Santha, this volume), poached wildlife items like tiger parts or bear's paws (Holzlehner, this volume), or the transport of illegally mined gold, require the elaboration of long secretive networks that link hunters, miners, etc., in the depths of the taiga to purchasers in China via brokers. Such specialized networks often have their own obscure routes that bypass the official crossing points, including 'trans-shipping' at sea, whereby cargo, fuel, crew, or fish catches can be moved from one vessel to another out of sight of the authorities.[13] However, for many common items that circulate illegally in Russia (currency, drugs, untested medicines, weapons, or fake branded products) the field is more open and the shape of the network may be less attenuated. In fact, any of the previously mentioned kinds of traders may be tempted to take part – for example, the Mongols' participation in the production of fake goods mentioned earlier.

Yet all illegal operations ratchet up the intensity of trust needed, as the penalties are severe (including the death penalty, for drug trafficking in China). Let me return to the shuttle trader Darima, for an example, and the ambivalent 'evidence' that such cases arouse. Darima, it is said, was recently caught at Zabaikal'sk transporting illegal drugs (*har tamhi* in Buryat, an expression that might cover anything from heroin to newly invented chemical drugs). She was jailed, and had to pay a huge sum to extricate herself

---

13   https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/9653-Transshipping-spurs-trade-in-illegal-fishing-led-by-Russia.

from the situation, equivalent to 3 or 4 years of her profits. When she got out of prison she was unable to return to the shuttle trade, as everyone knew she had been arrested. Because her trust-relation with customs had been broken, no one would have confidence in her any longer. She soon quit the region and moved far away to Novosibirsk. But she maintains that she was innocent: she had not carried drugs, and she attributes the accusation to having offended a customs officer, either by not paying him what he asked for, or by cheating him about the value of her goods, which risked his professional position.[14] The episode remains unclear – like much that happens on this border – just as whom, exactly, Darima had to pay to be released from prison remains obscure. Yet despite the cloudiness that surrounds this case, it is further evidence that trust is additive in terms of action. As Matthew Carey points out, if I trust you to deliver the goods on a given date, then I can rent storage space, arrange meetings with potential buyers, and so forth (Carey 2017, 9). Conversely, loss of trust (which is by no means the same as canny mistrust) is subtractive: if Darima has lost the trust of her customs officer partner, clients will no longer engage her team and her entire business unravels.

Darima's unfortunate case also shows, as Ryzhova argues for Blagovesh-chensk-Heihe (2013, 275), that the networks involved in illicit trade are not uniform webs but are composed of people carrying out different and unequally potent functions.[15] The client ordering the goods, the supplier, buyer, transporter, broker, 'place man', receiver of the contraband goods, and the various licensers, who may operate according to the rules or take a substantial cut, each have quite different relations to the police, the law, and the ultimately powerful Russian Federal Security Bureau. All of these roles operate on trust, but trust resting on different premises and involving far greater vulnerability for some than for others. The livelihoods of thousands of people in Siberia and the Russian Far East depend not only on laws promulgated and constantly changed in Moscow, but also on how these regulations are enacted on the ground by the more powerful actors in these networks. A change that from a distance looks quite small – an alteration in the tariffs for import of cars, or a rise in the rent taken by licensing officials – can arouse such popular anger that public protests ensue, as described

---

14   The declared value of goods is used to calculate the sum customs officers transfer to state coffers, as well as the shares they take for themselves and their seniors.

15   The private brokers ('unofficial robbers') tend to diminish the internal coherence of the network, while the move of Chinese owners to establish their business on the Russian side, covert as it has to be, tends to strengthen it, though this very fact makes it more difficult for any outsider to enter the given market (Ryzhova 2013, 277).

in Holzlehner's chapter.[16] Yet even though relations between citizens and officials are constrained and unequal, crucial elements of their economic agreements rest on trust; as Humphrey argues in her chapter, the breach of trust is an emotional matter and it is this that gives rise to public fury.

## Concluding thoughts

It should be noted that the vast majority of people in these borderlands who earn their living by trading do not think of themselves as traders. Mrs. Kim, for example, who appears in Chapter 10, used to be a civil servant and a member of the Chinese Communist Party: she began her trading almost by accident, and after the collapse of her Russian venture in her 60s, she returned to life as a housewife in Yanji, albeit always alert to ways of earning money on the side.[17] On both sides of the border, many dealers and shop workers are well-educated people earning money for a particular purpose, paying off a debt, or filling in a gap between other jobs. Trading is thus often not an end in itself or explicitly rationalized into a set of named business practices, and it is more likely to be an episode in a life lived with other values in mind.

Just as many actors are reluctant to call themselves traders, they also usually leave unsaid the way in which their business depends on trust. One of the aims of this book has been to explore the different 'shapes' of trust among people of diverse cultures, and the chapters introduce ideas and vocabularies from Russian, Chinese, Mongolian, Korean, and Evenki actors. Our ethnography indicates that while people may *operate* through

16    Kyrgyz are unusual among traders in their willingness to take collective public action, such as their protest in 2003, signed by 33 people, against the raising of the daily bribe taken by a member of the sanitary police in Mezhdurechensk. http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1046773320.

17    When the borders opened and Chinese citizens were allowed to travel abroad, Mrs. Kim went with her husband, a rice farmer, to Kazakhstan just to look around. They took some Chinese-manufactured goods to sell and were so surprised at their popularity that Mr. Kim even sold his own clothes and shoes. The Soviet Koreans gave them 100 invitations to Russia, which they sold to their neighbours on their return to China. They made so much money on this first trip that they decided to take up trading full-time. They went to Omsk for a few years and then moved to Ussuriisk. Their business combined contacts in China supplying them with electrical kitchen appliances, along with contacts in Moscow with 'black people' (Central Asians, Caucasians) who supplied DIY goods for them to sell. On their return to China, Mr. Kim opened a factory to manufacture an energy-saving boiler he had invented and patented, and Mrs. Kim looks after her garden. The couple are devoted Christians (Hyun-Gwi Park, personal communication).

relations of trust and mistrust, they rarely make use of the corresponding linguistic terms, especially in reference to themselves. Rather, actors mention familiar kinds of relationships that are tacitly understood to imply trust. Examples are *anda* ('blood-brother', 'buddy') among Mongolians, *guanxi* ('making useful contacts') among Chinese, *hyŏngnim* ('brother' among Chinese Koreans), and 'companionship' among Evenki. Each of these implies its own kind of moral economy that stands as an ethical counterweight to naked commercial individualism (see Osberg 2016, 51 for the case of *guanxi*). If a high-flown and morally loaded word for 'trust' is deployed in public it may immediately arouse distrust, as in the case of a Chinese construction firm trying to win clients in Russia described in the chapter by Humphrey. By contrast, the de facto building up of *guanxi* can happen across political and cultural boundaries, as Namsaraeva's chapter shows, even in the absence of much in the way of language. In fact, the ethnography suggests that trust often operates subconsciously, in the same way as liking a person one meets, or taking a dislike to someone else for no reason one can easily explain. Sign systems (after Luhmann) hung out specifically to demonstrate trustworthiness or reliability may simply not register, especially if they are the product of a different culture; and, on the other hand, they may be understood only too well – as tactics – and therefore fail in their aim. Yet, even if actual living trust works to a great extent intuitively, this does not mean that it can be left to the discipline of psychology. For 'intuitions' arise from the lessons, experiences, and discourses of long ago that subconsciously influence people, and these are the product of the history of their societies. This is why I am very glad as editor that several chapters in our book, especially those by Peshkov, Namsaraeva, Park, and Holzlehner, provide historical accounts that give depth to, and, in some ways explain, their descriptions of the present.

We should note, however, that the fact that people do not often talk about trust in their daily lives does not mean that the ways such a concept is rendered semantically are unimportant. On the contrary, as Martin's chapter shows in the case of Russian, different understandings of *doverie* ('trust') have profound import for motivating ethical attitudes. Also, if we look at Martin's analysis of *doverie* in comparison to the connotations of the English 'trust' this begins to suggest a divergence in what we might think of as the cosmological place of trust in different cultures. As Martin has commented to me, we could ask whether the English-language 'trust' is merely a secularized Protestant theological concept. Perhaps. But could one not argue conversely that its usage in early modern commercial society was always more economic than religious. It was used in quasi-religious ways (see

'In God we trust' on the US dollar), but might these not be a re-transposition of the prevailing economic idiom of 18th century mercantilism back onto relations with God? In Russian, on the other hand, the religious root of trust – *do-verie* ('before faith') – is unmistakable, whereas the economic-commercial applications of the term seem opaque. Indeed, ethnography in Russia suggests that when taking practical decisions religion-infused *doverie* can often be an inappropriate word, and people will reach for a range of other ideas that suit the economic situation, such as *nadezhnyi* ('reliable', 'promising', 'hopeful') or even *avos'* ('taking a chance'), as discussed in the chapter by Humphrey. If *doverie* is indeed about transposing or extending the relations adopted towards God onto relations with people, then the lack of hand-wringing about its absence in the marketplace is more understand-able – as is the need for a countervailing Russian video campaign to remind people that *doverie* exists in real life, despite the prevailing norm of cynicism and the popularity of the idea of post-truth.[18]

This question of the moral landscape in which trust is situated should be born in mind when reading the chapters that mention the analogous concepts in Chinese (Namsaraeva) and Korean (Park). These reveal a con-trast between trust as something like a substance (the Chinese-originated Korean term is 신용/信用 *sin-yong*, 'credence, credit') and trust as an emo-tion, hope, or belief (the Korean indigenous term is written/Romanized as 믿음 *mid-eum*, also used as a verb, 믿다 *midda* for 'believing in' another person).[19] *Sin-yong* is mainly used as a noun: something that one attributes to another person and can be 'lost' (diminished), whereas *mid-eum* can either exist or not exist. Bernard Williams was a philosopher unusually attuned to anthropology, and his comments on trust are pertinent here:

> Those who treat it [trust] as having an intrinsic value must themselves be able to make sense of it as having an intrinsic value. This means that its value must make sense to them from the inside, so to speak: it must be possible for them to relate trustworthiness to other things that they value, and to their ethical emotions. [...] We have to see what these other values may be that surround trustworthiness, values that provide the structure in terms of which it can be reflectively understood. (Williams 2002, 91-2)

18    The series of films is aimed to remind people: you may not realize it, but you do trust people like air-traffic coordinators, grey-haired engineers, or invisible call-centre operatives. https://snob.ru/selected/entry/121233.

19    In Mongolian, *naidvartai,* the expression most often translated as 'trustworthy', is based on the verb *naida-* ('to hope'), which implies that there may be idealism, but little certainty, attached to the act of trusting.

The chapters in this volume indicate a range of 'other values' (profit, rationality, hope, security, kinship obligation, etc.) held in different cultures that surround and give sense to trust and mistrust. But importantly, all of the essays one way or another point to the centrality of *personal fidelity* when people attempt to create trust, or make it work for them, or bewail its loss. To my mind, this lends support to Williams' argument about the close connection of trust and truth, and specifically truth as a virtue that people uphold. 'Truthfulness is a form of trustworthiness' (Williams 2002, 94). When someone trusts another person, he or she takes on board an implicit promise from that person, 'I will do it', which could be expressed in any language, or indeed not through words but in an understanding conveyed in other ways (a glance, a nod). He or she must judge that promise to be sincere and accurate – or, more specifically, must understand the sincerity not as something guaranteed by obvious self-interest, for that might abruptly change direction, but as something proceeding from a disposition towards sincerity as a virtue (ibid: 95) that these actors hold in common. The ethnography presented here suggests that we should add that the sincerity guided by this disposition should be directed to me, the giver of trust.

An important conclusion that emerges from this book is that for a person to be able to be truthful in this way, they must have sufficient personal autonomy to make such a commitment and possess the ability to carry it out – and yet for a wide range of reasons most people of the borderlands do not believe that others have such individual autonomy and/or ability. These others may be conceptualized as a group whose internal bonds forbid true sincerity outside it (see the chapter by Peshkov and my earlier comments about attitudes toward Kyrgyz traders), or in the case of an individual business person, it may be obvious that their ability to be trustworthy and actually execute an agreement is compromised by external economic events, such as changing exchange rates, international sanctions, etc. (see the chapter by Humphrey). And, as shown in the devastating chapter by Safonova and Santha, ordinary actors' knowledge of the working of Russian power hierarchies has the effect of denuding actors of their capacity to be autonomous: any person is understood as subject to political pressure from those with greater clout, depriving all of these others of the ability to be sincere (to me), or to carry out whatever they had promised. There are perhaps cultural implications here too. For there are expectations about personhood and sociality built into the understanding of the way society works in general, as well as into specific ideas and practices (Russian *doverie*, Chinese *guanxi*, Korean *dobe*), that must inflect relations of trust/mistrust.

These expectations structure the transactions, rather than being structured by them.[20] With these considerations in mind the prevalence of mistrust becomes more understandable. It does not lie in comprehensive negativity and pessimism, nor in the 'refusal of all values and norms on which the earlier socialist system had been based' (Oleinik 2005 57), but rather, on the contrary, in having ideas of virtue, such as trust and truthfulness, but experiencing difficulty in finding someone to whom they apply.

## Acknowledgements

## References

Allard, Olivier, 2012. Bureaucratic anxiety. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2(2), pp. 234-56.

Allard, Olivier, Carey Matthew and Renault Rachel, 2016. De l'art de se méfier. *Tracés*, 31, pp. 7-20.

Baier, Annette C., 2004. Demoralization, trust, and the virtues. In Cheshire Calhoun (ed.), *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 176-90.

Banfield, Edward C., 1958. *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. New York: Free Press.

Billé, Franck, Delaplace Gregory, and Humphrey Caroline (eds.), 2012. *Frontier Encounters: Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border*. Cambridge: Open Book Publisher.

Carey, Matthew, 2017. *Mistrust: an Ethnographic Theory*. Chicago: HAU books.

Cook, Karen (ed.), 2001. *Trust in Society*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Cook, Karen, Russell Hardin, and Margaret Levi (eds.), 2005. *Cooperation Without Trust*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Corsin Jimenez, Alberto, 2011. Trust in anthropology. *Anthropological Theory*, 11(2), pp. 177-196.

20   For a similar point made in the context of discussion of the moral economy of Chinese underground networks, see Osburg (2016, 56-7).

Dasgupta, Partha, 1988. Trust as a commodity. In Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*. London: Basil Blackwell, pp. 49-73.

Delhey, Jan and Kenneth Newton, 2003. Who trusts? The origins of social trust in seven societies. *European Societies*, 5(2), pp. 93-137.

Dietz, Graham, Nicole Gillespie, and Georgia T. Chao, 2010. Unravelling the complexities of trust and culture. In *Organizational Trust: A Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-41.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila, 2005. *Tear Off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth Century Russia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fukuyama, Francis, 1995. *Trust: the Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press.

Gade, Christian B.N., Rane Willerslev, and Lotte Meinert, 2015. 'Half-trust' and enmity in Ikland, Northern Uganda. *Common Knowledge*, 21(3), pp. 406-419.

Gambetta, Diego (ed.), 1988. *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*. London: Basil Blackwell.

Gellner, Ernest, 1988. Trust, cohesion and the social order. In Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 143-57.

Hardin, Russell, 2002. *Trust and Trustworthiness*. New York: Russell Sage.

Hardin, Russell (ed.), 2004. *Distrust*. New York: Russell Sage.

Hawley, Katherine, 2014. Trust, distrust and commitment. *Noûs* 48(1), pp. 1-20.

Horie, Norio and Konstantin Grigorichev, 2016. Evolyutsiya kitaiskikh rynkov v Sibirii: peresborka "kitaiskosti" i otkrytie "zakrytykh" lokal'nostei [Evolution of Chinese markets in Siberia: the re-assembly of "Chineseness" and the opening of "closed" localities]. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294764401.

Hosking, Geoffrey, 2010. *Trust: Money, Markets and Society*. London, New York, and Calcutta: Seagull Books.

Latham, Kevin, 2016. Differentiating cynicisms: irony, cynicism and the new media in contemporary China. In Hans Steinmüller and Susanne Brandtstadter (eds.), *Irony, Cynicism and the Chinese State*. London: Routledge, pp. 155-173.

Luhmann, Niklas, 1979 [1968]. *Trust and Power*. Chichester: Wiley.

Marsden, Magnus, 2016. *Trading Worlds: Afghan Merchants Across Modern Frontiers*. London: Hurst and Company.

Mishler, William and Richard Rose, 2001. What are the origins of political trust? Testing institutional and cultural theories in post-communist societies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 34(1), pp. 30-62.

Mishler, William and Richard Rose, 2005. What are the political consequences of trust? A test of cultural and institutional theories in Russia. *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(9), pp. 1050-1078.

Mühlfried, Florian, 2014. A taste of mistrust. *Ab Imperio*, 4(2014): 63-68.

Namsaraeva, Sayana, 2014. Zabaikal'sk I Kyakhta: istoricheskie I sovremenniye paralley v prigranichnykh torgovykh anklavakh v transportnykh koridorakh mezhdu Rossiei I Kitaem [Zabaikal'sk and Kyakhta: historical and present-day parallels in trade enclaves in the transport corridors between Russia and China]. In L.V. Kuras (ed.), *Prigranichnyi urbanizm: imperskaya I postimperskaya praktika*. Ulan-Ude: IMBT, pp. 110-125.

Oleinik, Anton, 2005. A distrustful economy: an inquiry in foundations of the Russian market. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 39(1), pp. 53-74.

O'Neill, Onora, 2002. *A Question of Trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Osburg, John, 2016. Morality and cynicism in the 'grey' world. In Hans Steinmüller and Susanne Brandtstadter (eds.), *Irony, Cynicism and the Chinese State*. London: Routledge, pp. 47-62.

Park, Hyun-Gwi, 2016. One River and Three States: The Tumen River Triangle and the Legacy of the Postsocialist Transition. *Asian Perspective*. July-September 2016, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 369-392.

Putnam, Robert, 1993. *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Putnam, Robert, 2000. *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Reeves, Madeleine (ed.), 2012. *Movement, Power and Place in Central Asia and Beyond.* London and New York: Routledge.

Reeves, Madeleine, 2014. *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Robbins, Joel, 2008. On not knowing other minds: confession, intention and linguistic exchange in a Papua New Guinea community. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 81(2), pp. 421-9.

Rosanvallon, Pierre, 2008. *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ryzhova, Natalia, 2013. *Ekonomicheskaya integratsiya prigranichnykh regionov* [Economic integration of border regions]. Khabarovsk: IEI DVO RAN.

Sakwa, Richard, 2011. Russia's identity: between the 'domestic' and the 'international'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63(6), pp. 36-48.

Shlapentokh, Vladimir, 2006. Trust in public institutions in Russia: the lowest in the world. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 39(2), pp. 153-74.

Shlapentokh, Vladimir, 2007. China in the Russian mind today: ambivalence and defeatism. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59(1), pp. 1-21.

Simmel, Georg, 1950. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff. Glencoe, Illinois. Free Press.

Sodnompilova, Marina M., 2010. Migratsionnye protsessy v Baikal'skom regione: dominiruyushchie formy trudovoi deyatel'nosti mongol'skikh grazhdan v

Buryatii [Migration processes in the Baikal region: the dominant forms of labour activity of Mongolian citizens in Buryatia]. In B.Z. Nanzatov (ed.), *Transgranichnye migratsii v prostranstve mongol'skogo mira: istoriya I sovremennost'* [*Transborder migration in the Mongolian world: history and the present-day*]. Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, pp. 8-29.

Steinmüller, Hans, 2016. Introduction to Hans Steinmüller and Susanne Brandtstadter (eds.), *Irony, Cynicism and the Chinese State.* London: Routledge, 3-13.

Tagliacozzo, Eric, 2005. *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865-1915.* New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Turnbull, Colin, 1972. *The Mountain People.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Urinboyev, Rustamjon and Abel Polese, 2016. Informal currencies: a tale of Misha, and informal practices among Uzbek labour migrants in Russia. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 24(3), pp. 191-206.

Van Schendel, Willem and Abraham Itty (eds.), 2005. *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Varnavskii, P.K., 2010. 'Nikakikh problem net, yazyk znayu plokho, s dokumentami vse v poryadke': strategii adaptatsii migrantov iz Tsentral'noi Azii v Zabaikal'e (na primere goroda Krasnokamenska) ['There are no problems at all, I know the language badly, the documents are all in order': adaptation strategies of Central Asian migrants in Zabaikalia, the example of Krasnokamensk]. In B.Z. Nanzatov (ed.), *Transgranichnye migratsii v prostranstve mongol'skogo mira: istoriya I sovremennost'* [*Transborder migration in the Mongolian world: history and the present-day*]. Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, pp. 30-58.

Wang, Shaoguang and Xin Liu, 2002. The base of trust: a rationalist interpretation. *Sociological Research.* http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTOTAL-SHXJ200203002.htm.

Weiying, Zhang and Ke Rongzhu, 2002. Trust in China: a cross-regional analysis. *Economic Research Journal.* http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTOTAL-JJYJ200210007.htm.

Williams, Bernard, 2002. *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay In Genealogy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zelizer, V., 2005. *The Purchase of Intimacy.* Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.