

## Seal Impressions on the 1689 and 1860 Sino-Russian Treaties: Material Culture in Diplomatic Culture<sup>1</sup>

By Chia Ning\*

*This study underscores the crucial role of seal impressions on Sino-Russian treaties, viewing the indifference of seal-created visual information as a significant defect in current treaty scholarship. This research proposes that the analysis of material seals holds equal importance to the textual examination of written articles in comprehending Sino-Russian diplomatic culture. The mandatory use of official seals for signing bilateral treaties in both the Qing and Russian Empires is deeply rooted in their unique civilizations and traditions. From this background, the political culture of these empires guided the treaty negotiators to perceive the seal impressions on treaties not only as mutual commitments to fulfilling the treaty promises but also as a non-linguistic means to engage with their respective relationship positions. As a result, both written articles and visual sigillography are invaluable as primary sources in treaty research.*

### Introduction

The 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed between Qing China (1636-1911) and Romanov Russia (1613-1917) on September 7, 1689, was a pivotal moment in Eurasian diplomatic history. The plenipotentiaries from both sides affixed their seal impressions at the end of the treaty text, signifying the conclusion of a lengthy and challenging negotiation process, which Portuguese Jesuit Thomas Pereira witnessed.<sup>2</sup> While conventional sealing practices are evident in an overview of Sino-Russian treaties up to 1900 (the year the newly established Foreign Affairs Department took over the Qing treaty affairs), the specific function of these seals and visual messages delivered by these seals have been overlooked in the existing treaty scholarship. This study aims to delve into the role of seals in Sino-Russian treaty diplomacy, elucidate the mandatory sealing practice with its cultural and civilization roots, and illuminate the visual information they convey.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, both the Qing Empire and Russia had a seal culture as part of their political culture with roots from earlier traditions and civilizations. Like in

---

\*Professor Emerita of History, Central College, USA

1. The author's sincere thanks go to the Center for Chinese Studies and the East Asian Library of the University of Michigan for the 2023 research grant and The University of Chicago for the 2024 research grant. These grants have assisted this research and writing in many ways.

2. Joseph Sebes, S. J., *The Jesuits and the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689): The Diary of Thomas Pereira, S. J.* (Rome: Institutum Historicum S. I. Via Dei Penitenzieri, 20, 1961), 150, 160, and 162.

many parts of the world, seals were seen “both as material and conceptual entities,”<sup>3</sup> symbolizing “identity and authority.”<sup>4</sup> The seal engraving was full of political considerations and seal application was under strict political and institutional guidance.<sup>5</sup> In treaty affairs, they served as evidence of commitment to the treaty agreements and offered non-verbal signals for the communication between treaty partners apart from the written articles. Regardless of its owner's title rank, the chosen treaty seal finalized treaty terms on behalf of the Qing emperor and the Russian Tsar. Unlike written treaty articles, which detailed border demarcation, population settlement, trade agreements, etc., through readable words, deciphering the implications of seal impressions requires knowledge of seal culture. This study proposes that reading articles and visual sigillography are different primary sources. The visual analysis is as important as the textual analysis for understanding the treaty because the visual skills interpret the material signals embodied in seal impressions. This study contributes a new visual component to balance the text-based perception in the existing Sino-Russian treaty scholarship.

The 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk and the 1860 Treaty of Beijing represented the evolution of treaty seals in two distinct historical periods. The former marked the first-ever treaty between a dynastic power in East Asia and a Europe-centered Eurasian power, signed as they confronted each other in the Amur River region of Northeast Asia. It included written articles, signatures of plenipotentiaries, and seal impressions from official seals below the state level. The Treaty of Beijing followed a similar pattern but with different contents, relationships, and impressions from significantly upgraded seals, setting the style for bilateral treaties thereafter. This illustrates a correlation between the material change, from a local-level official seal in 1689 to a grand state-level seal in 1860, and the relational change, from the Qing engaging Russia “on equal terms”<sup>6</sup> to her decline under Russian dominance and signing unequal treaties. This study initiates the first exploration of this important but previously unnoticed correlation.

---

3. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “In Search of a Semiotic Paradigm: The Matter of Sealing in Medieval Thought and Praxis (1050-1400),” in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*. Edited by Noël Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson (London: The British Museum Press, 2008), 1-7, here 1.

4. Dryburgh, Paul, *Royal Seals: The National Archives Images of Power and Majesty* (Philadelphia: Pen & Sword Books LTD, 2020), 8.

5. This study only explores the official seals, leaving the personal and leisure seals in the Qing and Russian societies as a separate topic to study.

6. John K. Fairbank, ed., *Cambridge of China*, Volume 10 Part I *Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), Chapter I Introduction: The Old Order, 2-34, here 33 and Chapter 7 “Sino-Russian Relations, 1800-62,” 318-350, here 318. Ma Changquan, “Kangxi, Yongzheng liangchao zhong'e huajie yuanze tanxi” [The analytical examination of the rules for the Sino-Russian border demarcation during the Kangxi and Yongzhen reigns], in *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* 25.2 (2015):140-148, here 142-3.

This study integrates material culture and visual expression into treaty analysis, connects material seals and diplomatic culture in the treaty research, and breaks new ground in the Sino-Russian treaty scholarship.

### Treaty Seals, Their Impressions, and the Challenge to Study Them

Jesuit Thomas Pereira's diary recorded the importance of using seals in the Qing-Russian negotiation for the Treaty of Nerchinsk. By agreement, "The chief ambassadors of the respective crowns shall reciprocally give each other two copies of the aforesaid treaty, sealed with their seals."<sup>7</sup> Among the three language versions: Manchu (as Qing was a Manchu-ruled empire), Russian, and Latin, the two delegations affixed their seals to the Latin, the recognized official, version.<sup>8</sup>

In his 1961 book, Joseph Sebes pointed out that "the official Latin copy written in behalf of the Chinese delegation and given to the Russians has been found in the Russian Archives and has been published in *Sbornik dogovorov Rossii s Kitaiem* [Сборникъ Договоровъ России съ Китаемъ, Collection of treaties between Russia and China]. The official Latin copy written on behalf of the Russian delegation and given to the Chinese, however, has not yet been discovered in the Chinese Archives."<sup>9</sup> The Russian sourcebook also collected the Manchu copy but the Russia-to-Qing copies in Latin and Russian remain undiscovered in China.<sup>10</sup>

The two images from the Russian sourcebook (below) show the stark contrast between the large, square-shaped Qing seal, which has an imprint on one side, and the smaller, round-shaped Russian seal, which has imprints on two faces (see the Latin image below). The disparity reflects the Chinese and Inner Asian seal traditions that the Qing inherited versus the European seal tradition that Romanov Russia carried forward.<sup>11</sup> On the Latin version, the clear and readable Chinese seal impression stands out against the blurred and unrecognizable Russian seal impressions.

---

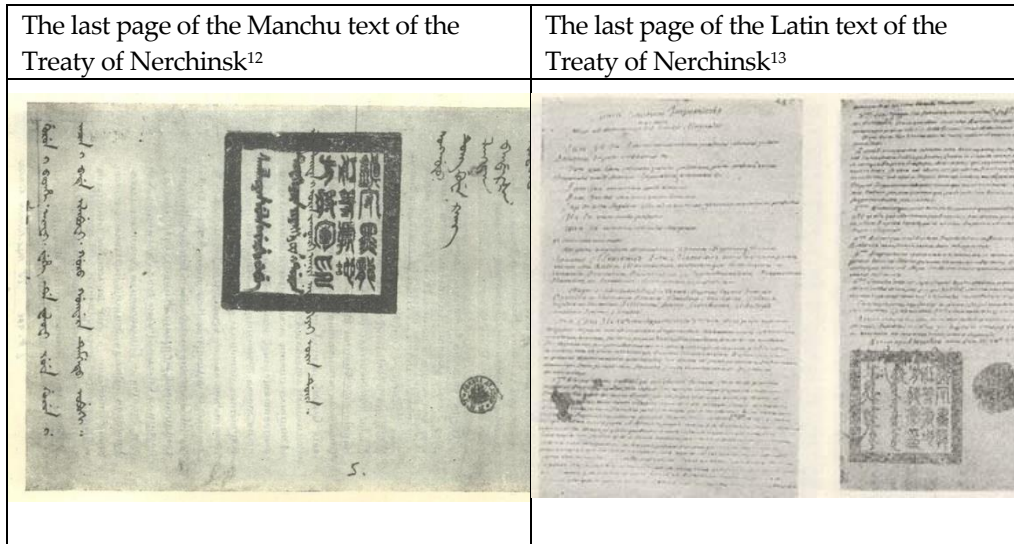
7. Sebes, 285 and 287.

8. For treaty texts in three languages, see Sebes, Chapter VIII, "Text of the Treaty Contained in the Diary," 150-164.

9. Sebes, 151-152, 160, and 162.

10. This is the conclusion from the author's investigation over a decade in mainland China and Taiwan. This writing will not address the controversy about whether the Latin and Manchu copies in exchange by the two delegations are identical or not (see Sebes, Chapter VIII "Text of the Treaty Contained in the Diary," 150-164) but fully focuses on examining the same seal impressions in the Russia-stored Latin and Manchu copies.

11. The reference works for the Qing seal from the Chinese and Inner Asian tradition are *Ancient Seals: The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum*. Edited by Zheng Mianzhong (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan and Shanghai: Kexue jishu chubanshe, 2008). Wei Jia and Meng Zhaobo, *Zhongguo yin* [Seals of China] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2008). Du Kuisheng, *Zhonghua baoxi tanmi* [Exploration of the Myth of the Chinese Imperial Seals] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2003). Guo Fuxiang, *Mingqing dihou xiying*



The Qing seal impression features Manchu scripts on the left two vertical lines, reading from left to right, and Chinese characters on the right three vertical lines, reading from right to left. The Manchu script, *sahaliyan ula i jergi babe turwakiyara jiyanggiyūn i doron*, translates to “The seal of the general who defends the Black River region.” The Chinese inscription *zhenshou heilongjiang dengchu defang jiangjun yin* means “The seal of the general who guards the Black Dragon River region and its surroundings.” Russians name the river *Sahaliyan ula* in Manchu and *Heilongjiang* in Chinese, as “Amur.” The seal of the Heilongjiang General, a frontier position of

---

[State seals of the emperors and empresses of the Ming and Qing dynasties] (Beijing: Guojia wenhua chubanshe, 2002). The reference works for the European tradition of the Russian seal are *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*. Edited by Noël Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson (London: The British Museum Press, 2008). *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*. Edited by Phillipp Schofield. (Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, 2015). Paul Dryburgh, *Royal Seals: Images of Power and Majesty (Images of the National Archives)* (Philadelphia: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2020). *Seals and Society: Medieval Vales, the Welsh Marches and their English Border Region*. Edited by P R Schofield & E A New with S M Johns and J A McEwan. University of Wales Press, 2016.

12. This image is posted for public use at [https://baike.baidu.com/tashuo/browse/content?Id=c9fdac1d\\_cf71bdd1280ac937&fromModule=tashuo-article\\_bottom-tashuo-feed](https://baike.baidu.com/tashuo/browse/content?Id=c9fdac1d_cf71bdd1280ac937&fromModule=tashuo-article_bottom-tashuo-feed) and also <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/298500490>. Accessed on February 18, 2024. The author of *E'guo laihua shituan yanjiu 1618-1807 俄國來華使團研究 [A study of the Russian delegation to China during 1618-1807]* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), Ye Baichuan, quoted this image from the volume of *The Collection of the Sino-Russian Correspondences of the Seventeenth Century [Shiqi shiji zhong'e guanxi wenjianji]*. See Ye's book, page 199.

13. This image was posted for public use at <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q696094>. Accessed on February 19, 2024. Ye Baichuan's 2010 book (page190) quoted this image page from *The Collection of the Sino-Russian Correspondences of the Seventeenth Century*. Sebe's 1961 book (page 162) listed the reproduction of this treaty image in several treaty collections.

military administrator since 1683, attested to the treaty's validity on behalf of the Qing court.

The Chinese red-ink technique produced a clear seal impression on the treaty paper, while the Russian wax imprinting technique failed to do so. The blurred impressions from the Russian seal pose a significant obstacle to studying it. However, despite this challenge, the seal effectively finalized the treaty. Understanding the mindset behind the seal use in both Manchu and Russian cultures is crucial for comprehending the sealing demand for the bilateral treaty.

The small Russian seal impression on the Manchu text image presents additional challenges to this study. The impression, not clear enough to confirm its visual and written details, differentiates a pictorial design, seemingly the double-headed eagle, in the middle, from a written Russian inscription surrounding it. This design is typical of the Romanov seal and appeared in the 1861 Additional Article to the Convention of Peking between China and Russia,<sup>14</sup> as well as the 1910 "Agreement Concerning the Provisional Sungari River Trade Regulations between China and Russia."<sup>15</sup> In the 1861 treaty, this seal was affixed next to the Qing's Jilin General's seal,<sup>16</sup> indicating that the two official seals could be on the local authority level. If the Manchu copy only needed the Qing seal and the Russian copy needed the Russian seal, as previously quoted sources suggested, this might be the Russian Archive's seal used to receive and store this treaty text. As the identity of this seal will be pending later research confirmation, this challenge does not undermine the fact that the Sino-Russian bilateral treaty required seals to authorize its finalization.

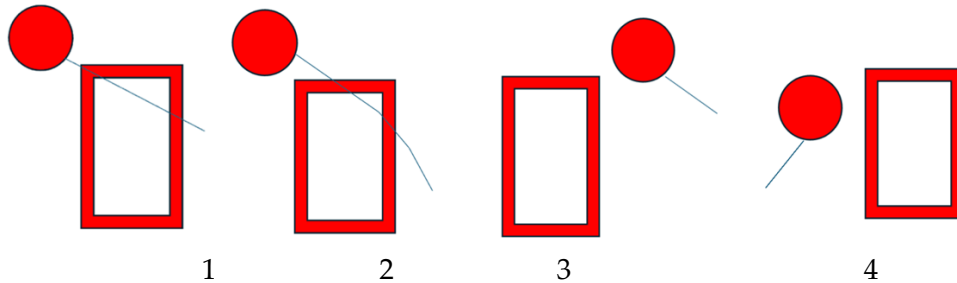
---

14. *Zhonghua minguo waijiaobu baocunzi qianqing ji minguo shiqi tiaoyue xieding – Yingxiang liulan* [The treaties and agreements during early Qing to Republican period which are stored at the Foreign Affairs Department of the Republic of China - Photo image browsing] at website <https://mofaarchiv.es.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/home> (TW in the rest of this paper which stands for *Tiaoyue*/ treaties of *Waijiaobu*/Foreign Affairs Department. No. 910000113, page 12 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljkxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWSuOixkCjdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RIljoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5ljoicHFfZHUyXN0eSJ9#910000113001>.

15. TW No. 910000154, page 8 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?Act=Treaty/search/1-20/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljkxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWuo%2Be1sSJdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RIljoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5ljoicHFfGFuZ3VhZ2UilCj0cGZpbHRlciI6eyJwcV9sYW5ndWFnZSI6eyJ0ZXJtcyI6WyLkv4TmlociXX19fQ%3D%3D#910000154001>.

16. TW No. 910000113, page 6 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljkxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWSuOixkCjdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RIljoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5ljoicHFfZHUyXN0eSJ9#910000113001>.

The digital treaty collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei (TW) has three distinct seal images from different copies of the Treaty of Beijing. All these images display the seal impressions of the two empires in a striking red color, but the affixing positions vary. Additionally, the Russian sourcebook "Русско-китайские Договорно-правовые Акты (1689-1916)" [Russian-Chinese (as agreed-) Legal Acts] presents a fourth seal image on the same treaty text, with the seal positions of the two empires differing from any of the other three.<sup>17</sup> The four affixing positions are clearly demonstrated below.<sup>18</sup>



The diagrammatic sketch of the seal design, developed by the author from treaty images, demonstrates the seal design on the printing face.

Chinese inscription in advanced artistic writing style 欽差大臣關防
Manchu in regular writing style gubci ..... (Only the first script is readable)
Manchu inscriptions in advanced artistic writing style .....(Unreadable)

The Qing seal for the Treaty of Beijing was a vertical rectangle, approximately twice the size of the 1689 Heilongjiang General's seal based on visual judgment from the document images. It is a bilingual Manchu-Chinese seal. The Manchu inscription is vertically engraved on the left. Although not clear enough to transliterate, it should mirror the Chinese inscriptions on the right, *Qinchai dachen*

17. Русско-китайские Договорно-правовые Акты (1689-1916) [Russian-Chinese (as agreed-) Legal Acts]. Пол общей редакцией [Edited by] академика В.С. Мясикова. (МОСКВА: ПАМЯТНИКИ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ МЫСЛИ [Monuments of Historical Thought], 2004), one of the four colored images between page 448 and 449.

18. 1 and 2 from TW with archival number 10000112001 (the Chinese version), pages 18 and 19, 3 from Русско-китайские Договорно-правовые Акты (1689-1916), and 4 from TW archival number 10000112002 (the Russian version) page 27. The differences between these positions on different treaty copies need further investigation for explanation.

*guanfang* which means "The seal in term of *guanfang* for emperor-appointed Minister." The Chinese inscription was engraved using the nine-overlapping style,<sup>19</sup> which is the highest-level writing style for a seal on the state level. A line of Manchu in regular script stands vertically between the two artistic writing parts, and only the script on top, "gubci" (universal), is readable.

The partially readable Qing seal impression was accompanied by a blurred Russian impression, with only the middle pictorial part and surrounding inscription being distinguishable. These two seals add a greater challenge to the study of treaty seals. They, however, still provide crucial visual elements for analyzing why both Qing and Russia elevated their treaty seals to the state level and subsequently became the standard treaty style. Furthermore, the affixing positions of the two seals, which no longer resembled those of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, reflect a shift in sealing practices in a different historical stage. Address these issues deepens the discussion of the treaty engagements between the two empires.

### **An Overview of the Seal Use in the Sino-Russian Treaties**

Placing the 1689 and 1860 treaty seal use into the overall sealing practice of the Sino-Russian treaties will enhance the understanding of their representation. Among the numerous Sino-Russian treaties in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, four treaties do not have the available photo or digital images today. However, the use of seals was referenced within their texts. They are the Treaty of Kyakhta (Kiekhta) of 1727-1728,<sup>20</sup> the Kyakhta Supplementary Treaty amending Article X of

---

19. I am grateful to Mr. Stephen Tsai (Dai Xuewen) in Taiwan for his assistance in reading the Chinese inscription from the Russian sourcebook "Русско-китайские Договорно-правовые Акты (1689-1916)" and identifying it as the nine-overlapping style. For seal inscriptions' writing styles and the seal ranks, see Wu Yuanfeng and Li Jianmin, "Manwen zhuanzi yu guanyin guanshu shuyao" [A summary research of Manchu seal characters and official seals], in *Manyu yanjiu* 72. 1 (2021):23-32, here 27-30 and Kazutada Kataoka Cho, *Chûgoku kan'in seido kenkyû* [The study of the official seal system of China] (Tôkyô: TôhōShoten, 2008) (Tôkyô: TôhōShoten, 2008), 285-288.

20. See Сборникъ Договоровъ России съ Китаемъ. 1689-1881 гг.: Издание Министерства Иностранных Дел [Collection of Treaties between Russia and China. 1689-1881. Publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (Санктпетербургъ 1889, Reprint by New York: Bamboo Books, 2012), 72-3. On page 60, the Russian seal, marked "Печать" inside a circle, represented the Russian seal, but it didn't include the design details in this copied version of the treaty text. On page 83, the Qing seal was marked with a square shape, representing the Chinese seal. On p. 83, the Qing seal was marked out with a square shape, the shape symbol of the Chinese seal. Also see Die Verträge Zwischen Russland und China 1689-1881: Faks. D. 1889 in Sankt Peterburg erschienenen Sammlung mit d. Vertragstexten in russ., lat. U. franz. Sowie chines., mandschur. U. mongol. Sprache/hrsg.u.eingel. von Michael Weiers. (Boon: Wehling, 1979), 17.



the Treaty of Kyakhta of 1768,<sup>21</sup> the Treaty of Kuldji of 1851,<sup>22</sup> and the Treaty of Tarbagatai, also known as the Treaty of Chuguchak of 1864.<sup>23</sup> The Russian copy of the Treaty of Tianjin 1858, which is included in the TW image collection without a Chinese copy, does not display a seal impression but the treaty text did mention the seal used on them,<sup>24</sup> to which copied treaty text in Russian sourcebook confirms the presence of Qing and Russian seals.<sup>25</sup>

The following treaty images, all bearing seal impressions, prove that all Sino-Russian treaties required the seal. These treaties are the Additional Article to the Convention of Peking between China and Russia of 1861,<sup>26</sup> Convention of Peking for Land Trade between China and Russia of 1862,<sup>27</sup> The Revised Convention of Peking for Land Trade between China and Russia of 1869,<sup>28</sup> Treaty of Khovd of 1869,<sup>29</sup>

---

21. Сборникъ Договоровъ России съ Китаемъ, 84-86.

22. Сборникъ Договоровъ России съ Китаемъ, 96-102 and 103-109.

23. The Chinese version of the treaty at the website of The Russian Research Center of Beijing University <https://www.russiancenter.pku.edu.cn/yjcg/kywj/258053.html>.

24. TW No. 910000789001 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWSuOixkCjdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RlIjoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5IjoicHFfZHUyXN0eSJ9#910000789001>. Also see Сборникъ Договоровъ России съ Китаемъ. 1689-1881 гг. pp. 153-158.

25. Сборникъ Договоровъ России съ Китаемъ. 1689-1881 гг., pp. 122-130, 131-141, and 153.

26. TW No. 910000113001 and No. 910000113002 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWSuOixkCjdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RlIjoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5IjoicHFfZHUyXN0eSJ9>.

27. TW No. 910000114001, page 14 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWQjOayuyJdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RlIjoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5IjoicHFfZHUyXN0eSJ9#910000114001>.

28. TW at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWQjOayuyJdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RlIjoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5IjoicHFfZHUyXN0eSJ9#910000116001>, 910000116001, page 15.

29. TW at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWQjOayuyJdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RlIjoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5IjoicHFfZHUyXN0eSJ9#910000117001>, No. 910000117001, page 14. This is the Russian version image, and it has only the Russian seal impression. The missing Chinese version should have the Qing seal impression on it.



Treaty of Livadia or Treaty of Ili of 1879,<sup>30</sup> Treaty of St. Petersburg of 1881,<sup>31</sup> Protocol of Gulimtu between China and Russia of 1882,<sup>32</sup> Convention on Border Demarcation of Sary-Ulan-Chibar between China and Russia of 1883,<sup>33</sup> Li-Lobanov Treaty of 1896,<sup>34</sup> Notes extending the Telegraph Agreement between China and Russia of 1896,<sup>35</sup> Complementary Declaration of the telegraph Contract of 1892 Between China and Russia of 1897,<sup>36</sup> and Convention for the Lease of Liaotung Peninsula

30. TW at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZWFyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlcil6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwX2Rlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQioiJwV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOnsibW9kZSI6ImlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNIldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000118001>, No. 910000118001 page 15.

31. РУССКО-КИТАЙСКИЕ ПЕРЕГОВОРЫ О ВОЗВРАЩЕНИИ КУЛЬДЖИ. ЛИВАДИЙСКИЙ (1879) и ПЕТЕРБУРГСКИЙ (1881) ДОГОВОРЫ Archived 2008-04-14 at the Wayback Machine \ \ в кн. Моисеев В.А. Россия и Китай в Центральной Азии (вторая половина XIX в. - 1917 г.). - Барнаул: АзБука, 2003. - 346 с. ISBN 5-93957-025-9 стр 199. And TW No. 910000119004, page 2 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZWFyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlcil6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwX2Rlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQioiJwV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOnsibW9kZSI6ImlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNIldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000119004>.

32. TW No. 910000120 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZWFyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlcil6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwX2Rlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQioiJwV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOnsibW9kZSI6ImlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNIldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D>.

33. No. 9100001250001 the Russian version with the Russian seal and No. 9100001250003 the Manchu version with the Qing seal.

34. TW No, 910000111003 page 3 and 14 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZWFyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlcil6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwX2Rlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQioiJwV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOnsibW9kZSI6ImlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNIldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000111003>.

35. TW No, 910000132001, 910000132002, and 910000132003 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZWFyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlcil6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwX2Rlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQioiJwV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOnsibW9kZSI6ImlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNIldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000132001>.

36. TW at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/21-40/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZWFyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlcil6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwX2Rlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQioiJwV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOnsibW9kZSI6ImlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNIldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000132001>.

between China and Russia of 1898.<sup>37</sup> There were treaty texts only with the Qing seal, not the Russian seal, such as the Protocol of Kashgar between China and Russia of 1882<sup>38</sup> and the Contract for the Joint Venture on Gold Mines in Sinkiang between China and Russia of 1899.<sup>39</sup>

A document supporting a treaty, in Chinese term of *ziyue* (child of a treaty), may not include the use of a seal, as seen in the 1894 Convention on Erection of Frontier Tables at Chuguchak between China and Russia.<sup>40</sup> In subsequent agreements related to major Sino-Russian treaties, local-level seals continued to be used. For example, the 1861 Additional Article to the Convention of Peking between China and Russia was signed by the Qing Minister of the Board of Revenue Chengchi and the Jilin General Jingchun. This document supported the 1860 Treaty of Beijing and followed the 1689 Nerchinsk pattern, where a frontier general in the negotiation team, under a court-appointed high-ranking official, used a local general's seal to finalize the agreement. The design of this seal was identical to that of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, with the only differences being that "Jilin" replaced "Heilongjiang" and the Manchu inscription was engraved in an artistic script due

---

mlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000134001, No, 910000134.

37. TW at

38. TW No. 910000121 at [39. TW No, 910000139001 at \[40. TW No, 910000131 at \\[30\\]\\(https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/21-40/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpBHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQiOiJwcV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOmsibW9kZSI6ImkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000139001.</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=\\)\]\(https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/21-40/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpBHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQiOiJwcV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOmsibW9kZSI6ImkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000139001.</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=\)](https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/1-20/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwIjpbIjlxMCIsljlxMyJdLCJwcWZpBHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwcXRlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZmllbGQiOiJwcV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkV4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOmsibW9kZSI6ImkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNldHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000121001. This Manchu and Russian combined text image file shows the Qing seal on the back side of page 1. It did not show the Russian seal.</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

to the Qianlong emperor's seal reform in the eighteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Another example is the Treaty of Kazakhstan Jurisdiction between China and Russia of 1884. It was signed by the local military governor, *Canzan Dachen*, in Xinjiang (or Central Asia) on the Qing side. This governor's seal, styled and designed the same as the 1689 Nerchinsk seal, was affixed to the treaty text.<sup>42</sup> These examples, whether supporting additional treaty agreements or local settlements, indicate a side reference that the Kangxi court considered the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia as a local matter.

The mandatory use of seals in the major Sino-Russian treaties signifies the importance of visual representation and communication through seal impressions. The distinct seal ranks and styles in the 1689 and 1860 treaties directly reflect the different stages in the history of the Sino-Russian relationship. This analysis introduces a new component to treaty scholarship.

### Visual Representation of the Seal Impressions

Scholars in European seals studies have emphasized that material seals worked for "encounters between different entities," "enabled dialogue between myth and politics," "facilitated interchange in cases of enmeshed identities,"<sup>43</sup> transmitted "expressions of identity," and "provide[d] information about institutions and people in position of power."<sup>44</sup> These points suit the Sino-Russian treaty seals. The exchange of seal impressions was a distinct form of communication, separate from the written language used in treaty articles. Both the Qing and Russian seals bore a written language unit as a seal inscription to mark the political authority of a seal. The seal impressions facilitated a non-verbal sensation, symbolically confirming the agreed promise in written articles and declaring the mutual status between the two empires.

---

41. TW No. 910000113001 Page 6 at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/undefined/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwLjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwXlcm1zIjpbIuWSuOixkCJdfV0sInNvcnRieSI6eyJtb2RIIjoiaWRfYXNjIn0sImZhY2V0c2J5IjoicHFfZHIuYXN0eSJ9#910000113001>.

42. TW at <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/search/1-20/eyJhY2NudW0iOiIiLCJzZWZyY2giOltldLCJkdGdyb3VwLjpbIjlxMCIsIjlxMyJdLCJwZWZpbHRlciI6W3sicHFmaWVsZCI6InBxX2R5bmFzdHkiLCJwXlcm1zIjpbIuWFiee3kiJdfSx7InBxZml1bGQiOiJwV9jb3VudHJ5IiwicHF0ZXJtcyI6WyLkv4QiXX1dLCJzb3J0YnkiOmsibW9kZSI6ImlkX2FzYyJ9LCJmYWNIIdHNieSI6InBxX2NvdW50cnkifQ%3D%3D#910000126001>, No. 910000126001.

43. Bedos-Rezak, "Cultural Transactions," 3.

44. Elizabeth A. New and Philipp R. Schofield, "Introduction," in *Seals and Society: Medieval Vales, the Welsh Marches and their English Border Region*. Edited by P R Schofield & E A New with S M Johns and J A McEwan. (University of Wales Press, 2016), 1, 5-6, and 8.

The Qing and Russian seals, coming from different cultural backgrounds, varied in size, shape, artistic design, and inscription content. These differences served political purposes within their respective cultural contexts but did not diminish the common need for a treaty seal to establish bilateral relationships. The seal impressions on the treaty text conveyed signals rooted in the political culture and system of each empire, which present-day scholars must understand to interpret their significance.

The Chinese seal tradition started from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046-771 B. C.) and developed into a stabilized style and system during the Qin (221-206 B. C.) and the Han dynasties (202 B. C. - 9 A. D. and 25 - 220 A. D.).<sup>45</sup> Under the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty, the Tibetan language appeared as the seal inscription for imperial seals, starting the non-Chinese inscription.<sup>46</sup> The Manchu at its power rising stage started the Manchu inscription for the seal of the Khan and Manchu-Chinese combined inscriptions during the Shunzhi reign (1643-1661).<sup>47</sup> By the late seventeenth century, The Qing in late seventeenth century had established an official system with seals hierarchically ranked from central to local for official business under the law.<sup>48</sup> Official seals in the Qing domestic governance were under the regulations of *Daqinghuidian* (Collection of official statutes of the Qing dynasty). The Board of Rites, one of the Six Boards in the Qing imperial administration, managed their designing, engraving, issuing, utilizing, restitution, storing, or destroying.<sup>49</sup> In Romanov Russia, *Pechatnyi prikaz* or Seal-keeper's Department "affixed the princes's (tsar's) seal to official documents ... as a means of authentication of a document." Defined by Code 1497 (a collection of laws introduced by Ivan III, r. 1462-1505) and *Ulozhenie* of 1649 (the law code under Tsar Alexei, r. 1645-1676), this Department was "an independent division of the Treasury. It acted as the depository for important state documents confirmed by the state's seal. As these also included foreign treaties, the seal-keeper (*pechatnik*) was often the same person as the head of the Ambassadorial Department (*the Poso'skii prikaz*), the ministry of foreign affairs."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the political operation of governing the empire, Qing and

---

45. Zhu Xiangxian, 243-6.

46. Zhu Xiangxian, 254-6 and Xue Lei, *Yuandai guanfang yinzhang yu zhidushi yanjiu* [The study of official seals and the history of its system in the Yuan dynasty] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2020), 11.

47. Guo Fuxiang, *Shouming yutian* [The heaven-granted fate] (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2009), 18-19.

48. The non-official personal seals are not under discussion in this study.

49. *Daqinghuidian* (Collection of official statutes of the Qing dynasty), the Qianlong edition, juan 28 at the University of Michigan's <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=465300&remap=gb> lines 112-125, and *Libu zeli* (Regulations of the Board of Rites) (Changsha: Hainan chubanshe, 2000), juan 40-43.

50. Ferdinand Feldbrugge, *A History of Russian Law: From Ancient Times to the Council Code (Ulozhenie) of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich of 1649*. (Boston: Brill, 2017), Chapter 31 "The Tsar's Government," 809-810.

Russia alike, required official seals in the governing affairs, of which treaty relationship was kind.

From ancient history up to the Qing, an official seal functioned as an “item to show trust” *shixinzhiwu*” to build trust and reliance.<sup>51</sup> From this seal culture and practice, when the seal use was extended to the treaty relationship, the Qing expectation from the seal was *yongzhao xinshou* (keeping the trusted promise forever),<sup>52</sup> *yongchi weiping* (as the evidence for being reliable forever),<sup>53</sup> and *gaiyin weiping* (imprinting the seal impression as the evidence [of promise-keeping]),<sup>54</sup> all carrying the wish that Russia would fulfill the promise written in the treaty. The Russian plenipotentiary Fyodor Alexevich Golovin (Theodor Alexeyevich Golovan), on the other hand, also required that each side provide the other with a signed and sealed treaty copy in their native language,<sup>55</sup> reflecting the same expectation to have Qing keeping the treaty promise.

With such a background in the Qing and Russian empires, the treaty seal impressions bore each empire’s political culture and governing system. As sigillography elucidated “the political ambition of medieval rulers,”<sup>56</sup> the treaty negotiators with the same seal mindset sighted that “allusive and symbolic elements”<sup>57</sup> from the seal type, size, shape, inscription, and the artistic particulars in combination would pass the sensation of each empire’s “self” position to the “other.” Historical records hardly gave detailed written recounts about this sensation. Still, present research scholars should understand that in both Qing and Russia, a treaty seal was not a random pickup but an institutional choice for an important political event.

This study keys in a new Sino-Russian case to support the existing global “new diplomatic history.” This history embraces the material and visual culture in

---

51. Zhu Xiangxian, 13, 151, and 173. Xue Lei’s *Yuandai guanfang yinzhang yu zhidushi yanjiu* shows the importance of the Yuan dynasty’s official seal system in Chinese history.

52. *Zhong’e bianjie tiaoyueji* [A collection of the Sino-Russian treaties] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973), “Zhong’e kebuduo jieyue” [Treaty of Khovd] of 1869, 47-8, here 48.

53. *Zhong’e bianjie tiaoyueji*, “Zhong’e Woliyasutai jieyue” [Treaty of Uliyasutai] of 1869, 49-50, here 50.

54. *Zhong’e bianjie tiaoyueji*, “Zhong’e gaiding tiaoyue” [Treaty of Revision] of 1881 which was also called the Treaty of St. Petersburg in Russian and the Treaty of Ili in Chinese, 53-58, here both the treaty text and note 1 of page 58.

55. Bei Zhangheng, *1689 nian diyige e’zhong tiaoyue* [The first Russo-China treaty of 1689]. Translated from Прасковья Тихоновна Яковлева, *Первый русско-китайский договор 1689 года*. Москва, Изд-во Академии наук СССР, 1958, Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973, 184 and 188–9.

56. Phillipp Schofield, “Introduction,” in *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*. Edited by Phillipp Schofield. (Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, 2015), vi.

57. Jessica Berenbeim, “Medieval Treaties and the Diplomatic Aesthetic,” in *Seals: Making and Marking Connections Across the Medieval World*. Edited by Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press and AR Humanities Press, 2018), 213.

medieval seal studies<sup>58</sup> while examining the “widespread, though differential, presence of seals and sealing practices between 400 and 1500 CE” in China, Southeast Asia, Arabia, Sasanian Persia, the Muslim empire, the Byzantine empire, and Western Europe. It has concluded that “seal operations” and “processes mediated by seals” led to “representation, authorization, identification, transmission, translation, negotiation.”<sup>59</sup> The Sino-Russian case of this study conduces the global comparison from medieval times into the early modern diplomatic world.

## The Analysis of the Seals of The Treaty of Nerchinsk

### The Qing Treaty Seal

Behind the visual seal impression on the treaty text, there is a package of knowledge of official seals in the Qing political system, which inherited heavily from the Chinese and Inner Asian seal traditions with Manchu input. This system determined why using a frontier general’s, rather than an emperor-granted state, seal for this important treaty. Since China’s Qin and the Western Han dynasties, a set of hierarchically organized terminology differentiated the seal levels of authority in the dynastic political system. *Xi* referred to emperor-monopolized state seals with an alternate term *bao* which the woman emperor Wu Zetian’s reign (690 – 705) of the Tang dynasty (618 – 907) started. *Yin* was the seal for the governing boards at court and the upper-level local authorities. The emperor granted the *guanfang* (defending the border pass) seal, particularly for provincial governors (*xunfu*) and a governor-general (*zongdu*) who supervised more than one province. *Tuji* was for the lower-rank officials, and *tiaoji*, for with no official posts.<sup>60</sup> This hierarchically classified seal system was placed into the imperial *Li* (ritual) system, closely associated with the official bureaucracy, and practiced under direct court supervision and guidance.<sup>61</sup> Thus, treaty seal selections had system-based “thoughts” behind them, institutional regulations to guide them, and practical reasons to choose them.

The seal of the Heilongjiang General was on the *yin* level for a Manchu court-created frontier position. As a regional seal, it did not match the status of the emperor-appointed plenipotentiaries of the treaty negotiation. Pursuing peace with the Russians so the Qing could focus on fighting against the threatening Jun

---

58. Berenbeim, 213.

59. Bedos-Rezak, “Cultural Transitions,” 2-3.

60. *Qinding daqing huidian* [The imperial compiled statutory encyclopedias of the Qing], the 1899 edition through University of Michigan’s HathiTrustDigital Library scanned by Keio University (Japan), juan 34 full text 15, #88 and juan 35 full text 15, #80-83 for *guanfang*, page numbers were not marked.

61. For a detailed discussion and key reading materials on the Chinese and Inner Asian seal traditions, see Chia Ning “Liangjin manwen tiben yu qingdai he zhongguo minzushi zhong de guanyin wenhua,” 2017, 9:39-56.

Gar (Zunghar or Dzungar) under Galdan Boshugtu Khan (1644-1697), the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722) appointed Songgotu (Ch. Suo E tu) - a prominent official of the Kangxi court and the emperor's uncle-in-law - and Tong Guwe Gang (Ch. Tong Guogang), Commander-in-chief of the Bordered Yellow Banner and Kangxi emperor's uncle on mother side - to lead the negotiation delegation. The mission and positions of these powerful officials should deserve a state-level seal from the court if following the cases of the Grand General, called *Dajiangjun* 大將軍 for a military campaign out of the Capital, to whom Manchu emperor granted a state seal with a grand ceremony.<sup>62</sup> The high-ranking treaty delegation, however, did not receive such remuneration.

The seal selection related to Heilongjiang General's administration duty in the Amur River region. The Kangxi court established this military position in 1683 to deal with the Russian raids. Since then, Russian affairs, such as managing the military defense, offering supplies for the frontier garrisons, and arranging the Russian captures, fell under this General's responsibility.<sup>63</sup> The emperor also assigned this General as the first contact person when the Russians intended to communicate with the Manchu court<sup>64</sup> since the Khalkha-occupied Outer Mongolia and Zunghar-dominated Central Asia could not open such contact by then. Sabsu (1635-1705), the first Heilongjiang General, joined the delegation of treaty negotiation under the leadership of emperor-appointed plenipotentiaries. This General's seal as the treaty seal did have logical reasons but certainly unmatch the status of the negotiation mission and the delegation heads. It reflects the Kangxi emperor's mind of treating this first treaty with Russia as a matter on the local, rather than imperial, level of event.

Viewing Russia as a tribute country with no difference from other subordinate entities surrounding the Qing Empire, even though unrealistic,<sup>65</sup> affected the Qing seal selection. In the observation of Thomas Pereira, "From the beginning of the world, China had never received foreigners in its Empire except as tribute bearers. ... They thought everything was part of the China which they called proudly Tien hsia, that is to say 'all under heaven.'" The Europeans, like any other from Asia,

---

62. *Qinding daqing huidian*, juan 3, University of Michigan full text 2 under *mingjiang chuzheng shou chiyin* [seal-granting to the emperor-appointed general for military mission]. The Statutory Encyclopedias' juan 35, <https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E6%AC%BD%E5%AE%9A%E5%A4%A7%E6%B8%85%E6%9C%83%E5%85%B8/%E5%8D%B7%E4%B8%89%E5%8D%81%E4%BA%94>.

63. *Kangxi chao shilu* [The veritable records of the Kangxi reign], juan 113 <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=833954&remap=gb>, lines 298, 308, and 321.

64. *Lifanyuan gongdu zeli sanzhan* [Three documentary editions of the Regulations of the Lifanyuan] (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2010), Volume 1, 171.

65. For a discussion of this issue, see Chia Ning, "Lifanyuan and Libu in the Qing Tribute System," in *Managing the Frontier in Qing China: Lifanyuan and Libu revisited*, eds. Dittmar Schorkowich and Chia Ning (Boston: Brill, 2016), Chapter 5, 144-184, here 163-165.



would not be allowed to come to the Manchu court “unless they subjected themselves to the infamy of vassalage.”<sup>66</sup> The 1655 letter of Shunzhi emperor (r. 1634-1661) to the Russian Tsar in 1655 stated this viewpoint,<sup>67</sup> and the later Qianlong court (16726-1795) claimed the Russians “came to pay tribute” (Ma. albabun jafajiha) to the Kangxi court from 1676 on.<sup>68</sup> The atlas-making of the Yongzheng reign (1723-1735) ideologically dictated, as Mario Cams’ study shows, that “the Russian Empire could only enter the eighteenth-century Yongzheng imperial map as it had entered official Qing discourse in the seventeenth century, as a *waifan xiaoguo*, a ‘little state among [our] outer vassals.’”<sup>69</sup> The failure of the 1805 Russian embassy due to refusing the tribute ceremony to the Manchu emperor<sup>70</sup> and the 1842-compiled *Jiaqing chongxiu yitongzhi* (the Jiaqing edition of the comprehensive gazetteer of the Great Qing) saw the Qing strengthening rather than changing this viewpoint.<sup>71</sup> The dynastic power of China had the tradition of using seals in relationship with the “tribute” entities. It was always granting a seal to the closest tribute entities<sup>72</sup> rather than signing an agreement by using an official seal. For the first time, the Qing court signed a border and peace agreement in the early modern diplomatic manner called the “treaty” with a highly competitive power but still being identified as a tribute entity on the land called *Oros*, the Manchu term for Russia. For such an event, the Kangxi court selected the local seal.

---

66. Sebes, 207 and 209.

67. *Qingdai zhong'e guanxi dang'an shiliao xuanbian* [Selected (Manchu) archival records of Qing-Russian relations] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), Volume 1, 18.

68. Xie Sui, *Zhigongtu Manwen tushuo jiaozhu* [Annotated Manchu Version of Illustrations of Tributary Peoples]. Annotated by Zhuang Jifa (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1989), 96. *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples: A Cultural Cartography of Empire*. Edited and Translated by Laura Hostetler and Wu Xuemei. (Boston: Brill, 2022), 86.

69. Mario Cams, “Reimagining Qing Space: Yongzheng’s Eurasian Atlas (1727–29)” *Late Imperial China* 42.1 (June 2021):93-129, here 97, 121-123.

70. Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 10 Part I, Chapter 7 “Sino-Russian relations, 1800-62,” 318-350, here 322-3.

71. *Jiaqing chongxiu yitongzhi* [the Jiaqing edition of the comprehensive gazetteer of the Great Qing] (1842, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986 reprint), Volume 34, 27233-27255, here 27236 and 27238.

72. Zhu Xiangxian, 156 recorded that Han Xuandi granted a seal to Xiongnu. Kataoka Cho, 287 recorded that Qing granted seals to tribute countries, Korea, Annan/Vietnam, and Xianluo. The Zhu annotated volume combined different editions from Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong, and the Republican times. For a complete discussion, see He Xinhua, *Zuihou de tianchao: Qingdai chaogong zhidu yuanjiu* [The last heavenly dynasty: The study of the Qing tribute system] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2012-13), 334-350.

## The Russian Treaty Seal

A high-standing official seal system in Russia was also well-established in Russia in the late seventeenth century. This system had its origin in the Byzantine Empire through the marriage between Grand Prince Ivan III (b. 1440, r. 1462-1505) and Byzantine princess Sophia Palaiologina (1449-1503) in 1472. By that marriage, according to Gustave Alef's study, the Muscovite State "adopted the two-headed eagle on a newly created state seal" from the Byzantine tradition. A 1497 seal, made of wax with two sides of printing surfaces, was "attached to a treaty by a thin cord." On one side of this seal was the two-headed eagle image with a circular inscription "Grand Prince Ivan by God's Grace Sovereign of All Rus." On the other side was a horseman wielding a downward pointed spear toward a winged dragon with a circular inscription "And Grand Prince of Valad[imir], and Mosc[ow] and Nov [gorod], and Psk[ov], and Tve[r] and Ugo[ra], and Viat[ka], and per[m], and Bol[gar]." This seal style continued through the Romanov dynasty until the Russian Revolution in the early twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> In John H. Lind's discussion of the Great State Seal of Russia used by Ivan IV (b. 1530, r. 1533-1547, Tsar 1547-1584) for a treaty, the seal, with a two-sided design centered at the double-headed eagle image, became "a source illuminating the imperial ideology of Ivan's Muscovite State." Ivan IV used this Great State Seal "in support of his claims of territorial expansion during the Livonian War [January 17, 1558-May 26, 1583]."<sup>74</sup> This seal practice was identical to the late medieval world of European diplomacy, in which sealed treaty documents "were exchanged between sovereigns engaged in the negotiation and ratification of treaties." "Through these documents, which formally conclude diplomatic negotiations, two chanceries exchange impressions of their seals of central government."<sup>75</sup> From this background, the Russian seal to authorize the Treaty of Nerchinsk was not an arbitrary selection.

The following visual examples of the Tsar's seals attached to the seventeenth-century Charters to the nobles help to identify the level of the Russian treaty seal in 1689<sup>76</sup>.

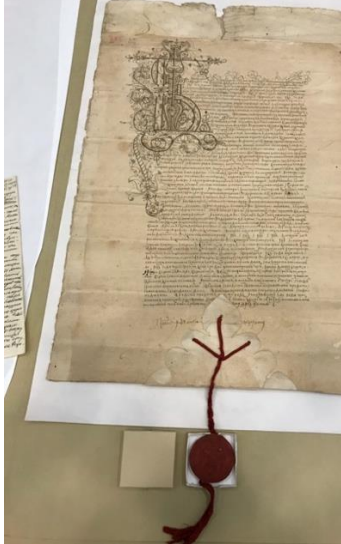
---

73. Gustave Alef, "The Adoption of the Muscovite Two-headed Eagle: A Discordant View," in *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 41.1 (1966):1-21, here 1.

74. John H. Lind, "Ivan IV's Great State Seal and His Use of Some Heraldic Symbols During the Livonian War," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 33, H. 4 (1985): 481-494, here 481, 485-6.

75. Bedos-Rezak, "Cultural Transactions," 11 and Berenbeim, "Medieval Treaties and the Diplomatic Aesthetic," 213-4.

76. These Charters are from the Allen MSS collection of the Lilly Library, Indiana University. Photos were taken by the author in the summer of 2019.

<p>Year of 1649 (#29-4) 3 August 1649 - 29-4: Alexei Mikhailovich, Tsar, 1645-1676. The charter granted lands to G.I. Byelkin for services to the Tsar's father in wars against Poles, Lithuanians, and Circassians.</p>	<p>Year of 1682 (#29-10) 9 December 1682: Peter the Great, Tsar. Charter on printed form granting lands to Semyon Ivanovich Lyubovnikov for his services in the wars against the Turkish Sultan and the Khan of the Crimea.</p>	<p>Year of 1690 (#29-17) Peter the Great, Tsar. Charter on vellum granting lands to Stepan Otrokhov of Chernigov.</p>
		
<p>Seal was attached on the back</p>	<p>Seal was attached on the back</p>	<p>Seal was attached on the back</p>
		

These charters, as political documents, would not have legitimacy if a Tsar’s seal was not attached, the same practice in Qing China that an official document would not have any applicable authority if no official seal was affixed to justify it. The Russian seal practice was also like the great seals in “England, Scotland, and later Great Britain, ... royal sealing practices have had a deep impact on all sections of society since the eleventh century.” This impact “shaped visual culture in Britain and latterly around the world.”<sup>77</sup> From the textual to the style of the seal, these Russian charters were similar in one way or another to the British seals from the

77. Paul Dryburgh, *Royal Seals: The National Archives Images of Power and Majesty*. (Philadelphia: Pen & Sword Books LTD, 2020), 114.

eleventh century to the early twentieth century.<sup>78</sup> They were comparable to several seal images of England's "Ratification of the Treaty of Windsor" with kingdoms of Portugal and France during the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which "visual language often plays as central a role in encounters,"<sup>79</sup> demonstrating the European style of the Russian seal. From mindset to style and practice, the Russian seal system followed medieval Europe in that "a primary function [of] medieval seal impressions was to validate and authorize the contents of letters and documents."<sup>80</sup> The level of the seal for the Treaty of Nerchinsk, if judged by its size (since details on the seal face were blurred), was not likely the Tsar's seal on the level for the Charters.

Documents affixed with seal impressions had become a regular practice in pre-1689 Sino-Russian communication.<sup>81</sup> When a Russian envoy visited the Qing court in 1676 under the Tsar's instruction, he informed the Kangxi court to use a seal to settle the mutual agreement.<sup>82</sup> When the Russian local authorities in the Amur River region contacted the Qing local authority, seal use was also the routine for mutual communication. Nerchinsk, established in 1654 and gained an independent administrative status under its *Voevod* (general or governor) in 1658, had become the center of the surrounding Russian towns in the 1670s.<sup>83</sup> Arshinski (Аршински), *Voevod* of Nerchinsk, used his black wax seal whenever he communicated with Qing authorities in writing.<sup>84</sup> To respond to the Qing Commander-in-chief (*dutong*) of the Nen River, who went to Nerchinsk to deliver the Kangxi emperor's letter to the Russian Tsar in 1670, *Voevod* of Nerchinsk sent his envoy to Beijing by carrying a letter with his seal impression.<sup>85</sup> The letter from the Russian authority in Albazin (Albazino), north of Heilongjiang/Amur River, to the Solon commander-in-chief

---

78. The image examples from the Western European countries during the medieval times can be found in Dryburgh, *Royal Seals*: 31-55, 72-73, and 83-106 and in Schofield's *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*, 9,12, 68-9, 90, 102, and 161.

79. Berenbeim, "Medieval Treaties and the Diplomatic Aesthetic," 218-230.

80. Andersen, "Archaeology and Sigillography in Northern Europe," 193.

81. Many cases are found in Nikolai Nikolaevich Bantysh-Kamenskiĭ, *Diplomaticheskoe Sobranie Del' Mezhdu Rossiiskim' i Kitaiskim' Gasydarstvami s' 1619 po 1792-ĭ God* [Дипломатическое Собрание Делъ Между Россійскимъ и Китайскимъ Государствами съ 1619 по 1792-й Годъ] [Diplomatic affairs meetings between the Russian and Chinese states from 1619 to 1792] (Казань: Типография Императорскаго Университета, 1882).

82. *Qingdai zhong'e guanxi dang'an shiliao xuanbian*, 26-30.

83. Bei Zhangheng, *1689 nian diyige e'zhong tiaoyue* [The first Russo-China treaty of 1689]. Translated from Прасковья Тихоновна Явлева, *Первый русско-китайский договор 1689 года*. (Москва, Изд-во Академии наук СССР, 1958), (Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973), 14.

84. *Voevod* Arshinski's black wax seal was mentioned in *Shiqi shiji e zhong guanxi* [Russian relations with China during the seventeenth century]. Translated from Русско-китайские отношения в XVIII веке Tome 1 [Russo-Chinese Relations in the 18th Century Volume 1] by Foreign Language Department, Xiamen University. (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1981), 403.

85. Bei Zhangheng, 111.

along the Nen River did the same in 1677 by following the instruction of the Tsar.<sup>86</sup> All these examples prove that the Russian seal used for diplomatic affairs with the Qing was institutionalized. Thus, it was the Russian institutionally required procedure that “After each delegation signed the treaty with signatures, they affixed seals on each language text.”<sup>87</sup>

On the ideological ground, the “Tributary system has been clearly of great importance”<sup>88</sup> in Russia’s relationship with the Qing empire, as it did so from Qing to Russia. The Tsar instructed the Russian envoy to advise the Qing court in the 1670s that many rulers had already submitted their entities to the mighty Tsar, who should be the monarch of the world. The Manchu ruler should do the same to pay tribute to the Tsar and receive the Tsar’s grace and protection.<sup>89</sup> Both the Qing and Russian courts tried to navigate each other into their desired status hierarchies in a tribute term. Such thinking about the seal affected the selection of the treaty seal.

The universal practice of using seals for relationship building in the larger Eurasian cultural environment further helps us understand the seal used for the Qing-Russian treaties. Noda Jin and Onuma Takahiro’s *A Collection of Documents from the Kazakh Sultans to the Qing Dynasty* has revealed that the Central Asian Kazakhs adopted the format of the Oyrat Documents when they sent written correspondence to both Qing and Russian courts. In that format, the seal appeared on the right top of the front page of the documents.<sup>90</sup> The format of Turkic Documents to Russia, “highly influenced by official Russian documentation,” also had “Signatures (Tu. *qol*) and seals (*muhr*) ... often required in documents submitted to the Russian authorities.” When writing to the Qing authorities, either the Military Governor or *amban*, “seals were important components of this type of document,” even details could differ from writing to the Russian authority.<sup>91</sup> Seals for signing bilateral treaties between Qing and Russia naturally followed this sealing practice for the written correspondence between the Eurasian entities.

All this information explains why the completely blurred Russian seal impressions on the Latin version had to be there and worked for finalizing the Treaty of

86. *Qingdai zhong’e guanxi dang’an shiliao xuanbian*, Volume 1, 24 and 44.

87. “Diary of Thomas Pereira” in *Shiqi shiji e zhong guanxi*. Volume 2, Part 2, 1075.

88. Ye Baichuan and Yuan Jian, “The Sino-Russian Trade and the Role of the Lifanyuan, 17th-18th Centuries.” In Dittmar Schorkowitz and Chia Ning, eds., *Managing Frontiers in Qing China: The Lifanyuan and Libu Revisited* (Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 254-289, here p. 261.

89. *Qingdai zhong’e guanxi dang’an shiliao xuanbian*, Volume 1, 22-23 and *Gugong e’wen shiliao: Kangqian jian e’guo laiwen yuandang* [Documents in Russian Preserved in the National Palace Museum of Peiping: Kanghsi-Chienlung Period] (Beiping: Guoli beiping gu gong bowuyuan, 1936), p. 267.

90. Noda Jin and Onuma Takahiro, *A Collection of Documents from the Kazakh Sultans to the Qing dynasty* (TIAS: Department of Islamic Area Studies Center for Evolving Humanities, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology) (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo, 2012), 5-6. I developed the seal imitation based on Fig. 0.2 on page 6.

91. Noda and Onuma, 5-7, 11-12, 17, 22, 28, 43, 48, 58, 62, 75, and 84.

Nerchinsk. Before written sources or other evidence are discovered to clear up that seal's identity, there are several options to identify this treaty seal. When the Tsar appointed Golovin as the treaty plenipotentiary, he could grant Golovin a treaty seal. As a high-status nobleman intimate to the Tsar, Golovin could have a seal of his own and be instructed to use it for signing the treaty. In addition, when "the Russian Court had appointed Theodore Alexeevich Golovin as High Ambassador Plenipotentiary" in 1686, the Court named "Ivan Vlasov, simultaneously Governor of Nerchinsk and adviser to Golovin"<sup>92</sup> an important member of the Russian treaty delegation. In Pereira's Diary, Vlasov was heavily involved in settling the Qing delegation in Nerchinsk before the treaty talks. Inside the Russian tent for peace negotiation, his seat was set next to Golovin's.<sup>93</sup> Such information brings Vlasov's Nerchinsk seal into the possibility of the treaty seal. If true, this seal would match the seal level of the Heilongjiang General who was the designated contact official for the Russians to communicate with when arriving at the Qing border. These three inferences, however, do not exclude the three other possibilities: the seal from the *Voevod* of Yenisei, to whom all the information from Nerchinsk and Albazin would report;<sup>94</sup> the seal from the *Voevod* of Yakutsk, where resided the most important Russian official in the region who directed expansion to the east and south;<sup>95</sup> and the seal from the *Voevod* of Tobolsk, whose resident city was the historic capital of the Siberian region and the base for the Russian Eastward exploration, and, importantly, his seal was used for the later Treaty of Kyakhta in 1727.<sup>96</sup>

With mysteries about the Russian seal for the Treaty of Nerchinsk, the blurred visual impressions have still sparked valuable specifics to this Russian treaty seal in the background of culture and seal system. Such knowledge greatly helps our understanding of the Treaty of Nerchinsk and the Sino-Russian treaty relations.

## The Analysis of Seals of The Treaty of Beijing

### The Qing Treaty Seal

A key part of this treaty seal is its ranking terminology, *guanfang*. A specific seal that the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) issued to the emperor-appointed high posts, both civilian and military,<sup>97</sup> the Qing court granted it broadly to banner officers, Grand Ministers or Grand Generals in frontier regions, officials on security-related

---

92. Sebes, 71 and 73. Bei Zhangheng, 128.

93. Sebes, 199, 217-9, and 227.

94. Bei Zhangheng, 132.

95. Bei Zhangheng, 12-13.

96. *Qingdai zhong'e guanxi dang'an shiliao xuanbian*, Volume 2, 519.

97. Zhu Xiangxian, 143 and 171.

positions, and appointees on special missions.<sup>98</sup> High officials above the third pin or rank (Qing had nine ranks with the first on top), especially on defending and frontier posts, were qualified to receive this rank of seal,<sup>99</sup> The increased importance of this seal reflected in facts that the emperor-appointed diplomatic ambassadors used *gangfang* seal for signing treaties with the Western countries in the nineteenth century, and it became the seal for the Foreign Affairs Department established in 1901.<sup>100</sup>

The writing style of the seal inscription serves as an indicator of the seal's rank. Qianlong emperor's Manchu writing reform in the middle of the eighteenth century created thirty-two new writing styles and re-engraved all official seals matching the official seal hierarchy with the writing style hierarchy in 1753, for both the Manchu and Chinese seal inscriptions.<sup>101</sup> The upper-level *guanfang* seal could be as high as just next to the emperor and the prince of the first rank, who share the style at the very top of the style hierarchy for official seals.<sup>102</sup> For the 1860 treaty seal, the Manchu writing style on the seal should match the Chinese inscriptions with the most advanced artistical writing style (according to Stephen Tsai). This confirmed that the Qing court greatly upgraded this treaty seal when comparing it with the 1689 local-level seal for the Treaty of Nerchinsk.

---

98. *Qinding daqing huidian*, University of Michigan's HathiTrustDigital Library, juan 35 full text 15, #80-83 for *guanfang*, page numbers were not marked. *Qinding daqing huidian shili* [Imperially Authorized Collected Institutes and Precedents of the Great Qing], 1886 edition through University of Michigan's HathiTrustDigital Library scanned by Keio University (Japan), Juan 321, full text 119, under Libu zhuyin, #13-14, #19-23, #28, and #38, the page number is not marked. Also see Du Jiaji, "Qingdai guanyin de tedian jiqi suo fanying de zhiguan zhidu bianhua" [The characteristics of the Qing official seals and its reflection of the official system under the change], *Lishi jiaoxue* 587, No. 22 (2009):5-16, here 5.

99. Fuge, *Tingyu congtao* [Talks collected while listening to the rain] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), juan 5, the section of *Shuaiyin guanfang* [the military general's seal which is called *guangfang*] <http://www.guoxue123.com/biji/qing/tyct/006.htm>.

100. Kazutada Kataoka Cho, the list of the Qing official seals 432-436, and the list of the seal images 458-475. Among the list, seal images 318-321 represent the seals for the emperor-appointed ambassadors and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

101. *Qinding daqing huidian shili*, Juan 321, full text 119, #36 under Qianlong thirteenth and fourteenth year, the page number was not marked. For the seal re-engraving, see *Qinding daqing huidian shili*, Juan 321, full text 119, #31 and #36 under Qianlong fourteenth to seventeenth year. For the 1743-1748 discussion, see Wu Yuanfeng and Li Jianmin, "Manwen zhuanzi yu guanyin guanshu shuyao." Wu Yuanfeng, "Manzhouwen yu manzhouwen guji wenxiang zongshu" [A summative introduction of Manchu language and the historical works written in Manchu language], *Manzu yanjiu* 1 (2008):99-128, here 100-101. Ren Wanping, "Qingdai guanyin zhidu zonglun" [Comprehensive study of the official seal system of the Qing dynasty], in Yan Chongnian edited *Manxue yanjiu* 5 (2000):419-451.

102. For the Manchu writings styles and for the *gangfang* seal in particular, see Kazutada Kataoka Cho, 285.



The size of the 1860 *gangfang* seal offers another important reference to study this treaty seal. By the Ming dynasty, the size of an official seal had been firmly established as a marker of official status and rank.<sup>103</sup> Phillip Schofield stated in his study of seals in Western Europe that a seal was “an important indicator of social status.” Rulers “could use the size of their seal to challenge, symbolically at least, the authority of those deemed otherwise their superiors.”<sup>104</sup> The large 1860 treaty seal visually alluded to a sense of might of the Qing Empire. However, the Treaty itself dealt with the Qing failure in the Second Opium War (1856-1860). By then Russia, together with Great Britain and France, signed another round of unequal treaties with the Manchu court. The Qing lost huge territory to Russia by this treaty. In this humiliating reality, the Qing still struggled to sustain the past “superiority” and a large and artistically advanced seal was meant a competing signal to the aggressive Russia, even only symbolically. In the severe but ineffective strive of the Qing rulers for their ritual supremacy over the Western powers, ritual superiority, to which the seal belonged, was at the center.<sup>105</sup> The Manchu rulers’ mindset to the seal application opens a window to peek at their seal arrangement.

The time of this seal to be engraved offers further information to learn about the change of treaty seals in a different historical stage. According to Ren Wanpin and Kazutada Kataoka Cho, the seal with an added line of inscription between the Manchu inscription on the left and the Chinese inscription on the right emerged at the beginning of the Xianfeng reign (1850-1861), reflecting a declined seal system after 1840.<sup>106</sup> In a changed international environment, the Manchu court engraved this upgraded seal for the new diplomatic needs. When the Treaty of Beijing was one of the biggest hits of Western humiliation on China, the Qing-Russia relationship, like it was in the overall international diplomacy, no longer allowed the Manchu court keeping a seal that graded the Western powers, with Russia among them, as China’s tributaries. A side reference to the past negotiation for the Treaty of Kyakhta in 1727 helps us understand the Russian thinking for the treaty seals of this time. In 1727, the Russian officials in the Far East did not have the Tsar-issued state seal with the imperial symbol but only used their local seals to stamp on official papers or letters. They presented their request to the court of the Tsar that an official seal impression with the double-headed eagle – the Russian imperial symbol - would help improve their official management in Selenginsk and Nerchinsk because the

---

103. Zhu Xiangxian, 259.

104. Schofield, “Introduction,” vi.

105. The representative reference for the Qing ritual struggle to maintain “superiority” over the Western countries is Wang Kaixi, *Qingdai waijiao liyi de jiaoshe yu zhenglun* [The Discussion and controversy on the Qing diplomatic protocols] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009).

106. Ren Wanping “Qingdai guanyin zhidu zonglun,” 429 and Kazutada Kataoka Cho, 337-8.

highest level of seal symbol would raise local people's respect upon them.<sup>107</sup> This reference offers clues that the seal level would impact both the user and receiver. The local-level seal as that of the Treaty of Nerchinsk would insult the imperialist Russia in 1860.

In sum, the high-ranking *gangfang* seal would satisfy Qing and Russia for different reasons in 1860. Details of the seals, as discussed above, serve as the primary source for historians to scrutinize the treaty seals, examine the relationship impact on seal selection, grasp the political thinking behind the visually seen seal impressions, and understand the seal change in the given historical circumstance.

## The Russian Treaty Seal

The 1860 Russian treaty seal was, like that of the Qing seal, much upgraded above the 1689 seal for the Treaty of Nerchinsk. The four images on the original treaty texts show its size (still much smaller than the Qing seal but much larger than the 1689 treaty seal), style (with a pictorial large part in the center and surrounded by Russian words along the round edge), color (roughly matching the red-ink impression of the Qing seal from printed image), and the long tassel all visually become cognate to the Tsar's Charter seals and also similar to the state seal of Ivan IV, which is exhibited at the Museum of History and Reconstruction of Moscow.<sup>108</sup> All these Russian seals have shown the visual characteristics of the Western European seals, "the largest space on a seal was occupied by its motif. It conveyed the seal's central message." And they "were made of wax."<sup>109</sup>

To be an unequal treaty to the declining Xianfeng court (1851-1861), the Treaty of Beijing confirmed the 1858 Treaty of Aihui/Aigun by which Russia took over the Outer Khingan Range – a part of Qing Manchuria – and further snatched away another part of the Qing Manchuria – the present-day Russian Maritime Province Primorskii Krai with Vladivostok as the major city of the Russian Far East. Russia was able to become a Pacific power.<sup>110</sup> Qing tribute ideology and the idea of Qing-centered superiority over all under the heaven had no ground to continue in such reality. The upgraded Russian seal with a full show of the imperial style was affixed

---

107. *E'zhong liangguo waijiao wenxian huibian, 1619-1792* [Collection of the diplomatic documents between Russia and China, 1619-1792]. Translated by The Russian Studies Department, the People's University of China from Nikolaï Nikolaevich Bantysh-Kamenskii, *Дипломатическое собрание дѣл между Россійским и Китайским, 1882* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1982), 173.

108. The image of this seal was posted on web at <https://sputnikmediabank.com/media/730514.html>. Further reference can be found at website <https://picryl.com/amp/topics/seals+of+ivan+iv> for the seal images from the book *Great Seal of Moscow*.

109. Jörg Peltzer, "Making an impression: Seals as signifiers of individual and collective rank in the upper aristocracy in England and the Empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries," in Schofield edited *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*, 63-76, here 63-4.

110. See map at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_of\\_Aigun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Aigun).

in position to the Qing seal in four different ways, as demonstrated previously. When comparing these affixing positions with that on the Treaty of Nerchinsk which appeared on the same horizontal line (even the seals were in different sizes and shapes) with a sense of equal relationship, the Russian arrogancy over the Qing is visually obvious, fitting the reality of the Sino-Russian reality in 1860. From selecting the seal to affixing the seal positions, “competitive symbolism” between the medieval European entities by using their seals in the mutual relationship<sup>111</sup> involved. As the written communication created a readable dialogue in which Russia forced the Qing to accept the articles to Russia’s advantage, the visual communication, in a perceivable way, visualized the Russian superiority and domination over Qing China.

### Conclusion

Seal impressions would not have appeared in Sino-Russian treaties without representation and purpose. Changes in treaty seals over time were not arbitrary, but rather intentional. Scholarship is obligated to explore the non-verbal cues embedded in these treaty seals and present academic insights into the human impulse to seal documents, the associated historical practices, and their significance in human culture. It is time not to leave the sealing practice in Sino-Russian treaty diplomacy without an explanation for its mandatory existence.

The visual information on treaty seals is far from being meaningless symbols. These symbols embodied profound knowledge of history, culture, intellectual heritage, institutional intention, and political pursuits from each empire. This knowledge clarifies the reasons for the effectiveness of treaties when the seals were applied and for understanding the motives behind the evolution of treaty seals across historical periods. Utilizing both written and visual primary sources of treaties and comprehending the treaty content expressed in words and visual symbols advances the treaty scholarship. The unsolved challenges from the unreadable key seal impressions do not impede the development of visual studies in treaty scholarship.

This exploration will pave the way for scholars in the realms of Qing history, Russian history, international treaty history, and material culture in treaty diplomacy to work collectively and conquer the challenges posed by this study of the treaty seals.

---

111. Nicolas Vincent, “The seals of King Henry II and his court,” in Schofield edited *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*, 7-34, here 23.

## Bibliography

- Alef, G. "The Adoption of the Muscovite Two-headed Eagle: A Discordant View," in *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 41.1 (1966):1-21.
- Ancient Seals: The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum. Edited by Zheng Mianzhong. Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan and Shanghai: Kexue jishu chubanshe, 2008.
- Andersen, M. "Archaeology and Sigillography in Northern Europe," in Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak, ed., *Seals: Making and Marking connections Across the Medieval World*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press and AR Humanities Press, 2018.
- Bedos-Rezak, B. M. "Cultural Transactions: An Introduction to Medieval Seals from Global Perspective," in *Seals: Making and Marking Connections Across the Medieval World*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press and AR Humanities Press, 2018.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "In Search of a Semiotic Paradigm: The Matter of Sealing in Medieval Thought and Praxis (1050-1400)," in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*. Edited by Noël Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson (London: The British Museum Press, 2008), 1-7.
- Bei, Z. *1689 nian diyige e'zhong tiaoyue* [The first Russo-China treaty of 1689]. Translated from Прасковья Тихоновна Яквлева, Первый русско-китайский договор 1689 года. Москва, Изд-во Академии наук СССР, 1958. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973.
- Berenbeim, J. "Medieval Treaties and the Diplomatic Aesthetic," in *Seals: Making and Marking Connections Across the Medieval World*. Edited by Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press and AR Humanities Press, 2018.
- Cams, M. "Reimagining Qing Space: Yongzheng's Eurasian Atlas (1727-29)," in *Late Imperial China* 42.1 (June 2021):93-129.
- Chia, N. "Liangjin manwen tiben yu qingdai he zhongguo minzushi zhong de guanyin wenhua" [Two Manchu *tiben* and the official seal culture in the Qing and the Chinese history], in Shen Weirong, ed., *Xiyulishiyuyan yanjiu jikan* [Historical and Philological Studies of China's Western Regions]. Beijing: Zhongguo remin daxue guoxueyuan, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Lifanyuan and Libu in the Qing Tribute System," in *Managing the Frontier in Qing China: Lifanyuan and Libu revisited*, eds. Dittmar Schorkowich and Chia Ning (Boston: Brill, 2016).
- Die Verträge Zwischen Russland und China 1689-1881: Faks. D. 1889 in Sankt Peterburg erschienenen Sammlung mit d. Vertragstexten in russ., lat. U. franz. Sowie chines., mandschur. U. mongol. Sprache/hrsg.u.eingel. von Michael Weiers. Boon: Wehling, 1979.
- Dryburgh, P. *Royal Seals: The National Archives Images of Power and Majesty*. Philadelphia: Pen & Sword Books LTD, 2020.
- Du, J. "Qingdai guanyin de tedian jiqi suo fanying de zhiguan zhidu bianhua" [The characteristics of the Qing official seals and its reflection of the official system under the change], in *Lishi jiaoxue* 587, No. 22 (2009):5-16.
- Du, K. *Zhonghua baoxi tanmi* [Exploration of the Myth of the Chinese Imperial Seals]. Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2003.
- E'zhong liangguo waijiao wenxian huibian, 1619-1792 [Collection of the diplomatic documents between Russia and China, 1619-1792]. Translated by The Russian Studies Department, the People's University of China from Nikolai Nikolaevich Bantyshev.

- Kamenskiĭ, Дипломатическое собрание дѣл между Россійским и Китайским, 1882. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1982.
- Fairbank, J. K. *Cambridge of China*. Volume 10 Part 1 *Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Feldbrugge, F. *A History of Russian Law: From Ancient Times to the Council Code (Ulozhenie) of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich of 1649*. Boston: Brill, 2017.
- Fu, G. *Tingyu congtan* [Talks collected while listening to the rain]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984.
- Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals. Edited by Noël Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson (London: The British Museum Press, 2008).
- Gugong e'wen shiliao: Kangqian jian e'guo laiwen yuandang [Documents in Russian Preserved in the National Palace Museum of Peiping: Kanghsi-Chienlung Period] (Beiping: Guoli beeping gu gong bowuyuan, 1936.
- Guo, F. *Mingqing dihou xiujin* [State seals of the emperors and empresses of the Ming and Qing dynasties]. Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubanshe, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shouming yutian* [The heaven-granted fate]. Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2009.
- He, X. *Zuihou de tianchao*: Qingdai chaogong zhidu yuanjiu [The last heavenly dynasty: The study of the Qing tribute system]. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2012-13.
- Jiaqing chongxiu yitongzhi [the Jiaqing edition of the comprehensive gazetteer of the Great Qing]. 1842, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986 reprint.
- Kangxi chao shilu [The veritable records of the Kangxi reign], juan 113 at <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=833954&remap=gb>.
- Kazutada Kataoka, C. *Chūgoku kan'in seido kenkyū* [The study of the official seal system of China]. Tōkyō: Tōhō Shoten, 2008.
- Libu zeli [Regulations of the Board of Rites]. Changsha: Hainan chubanshe, 2000.
- Lifanyuan gongdu zeli sanzhan [Three documentary editions of the Regulations of the Lifanyuan]. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2010.
- Lind, J. H. "Ivan IV's Great State Seal and His Use of Some Heraldic Symbols During the Livonian War," in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* "Neue Folge, Bd. 33, H. 4 (1985): 481-494.
- Ma, C. "Kangxi, Yongzheng liangchao zhong'e huajie yuanze tanxi" [The analytical examination of the rules for the Sino-Russian border demarcation during the Kangxi and Yongzhen reigns], in *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* (China's Borderland History and Geography Studies) 25.2 (2015):140-148.
- New, E. A., and P. R. Schofield. "Introduction," in *Seals and Society: Medieval Vales, the Welsh Marches and their English Border Region*. Edited by P R Schofield & E A New with S M Johns and J A McEwan. University of Wales Press, 2016.
- Noda, J., and O. Takahiro. *A Collection of Documents from the Kazakh Sultans to the Qing dynasty* (TIAS: Department of Islamic Area Studies Center for Evolving Humanities, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology). Tokyo: The University of Tokyo, 2012.
- Peltzer, J. "Making an impression: Seals as signifiers of individual and collective rank in the upper aristocracy in England and the Empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries," in Schofield edited *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*. Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, 2015, 63-76.
- Qinding daqing huidian. the 1899 edition through University of Michigan's HathiTrustDigital Library scanned by Keio University (Japan).

- Qinding daqing huidian shili. [Imperially Authorized Collected Institutes and Precedents of the Great Qing], 1886 edition through University of Michigan's HathiTrustDigital Library scanned by Keio University, Japan.
- Qingdai zhong'e guanxi dang'an shiliao xuanbian. [Selected (Manchu) archival records of Qing-Russian relations]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981.
- Ren, W. "Qingdai guanyin zhidu zonglun" [Comprehensive study of the official seal system of the Qing dynasty], in Yan Chongnian edited *Manxue yanjiu* 5 (2000):419-451.
- Русско-китайские Договорно-правовые Акты (1689-1916) [Russian-Chinese (as agreed-) Legal Acts]. Пол общей редакцией [Edited by] академика В.С. Мясикова. МОСКВА: ПАМЯТНИКИ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ МЫСЛИ [Monuments of Historical Thought], 2004.
- РУССКО-КИТАЙСКИЕ ПЕРЕГОВОРЫ О ВОЗВРАЩЕНИИ КУЛЬДЖИ. ЛИВАДИЙСКИЙ (1879) И ПЕТЕРБУРГСКИЙ (1881) ДОГОВОРЫ Archived 2008-04-14 at the Wayback Machine \ \ в кн. Моисеев В.А. Россия и Китай в Центральной Азии (вторая половина XIX в. - 1917 г.). Барнаул: АзБука, 2003.
- Сборникъ Договоровъ России съ Китаемъ. 1689-1881 гт.: Издание Министерства Иностранных Дел [Collection of Treaties between Russia and China. 1689-1881. Publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. Санктпетербургъ 1889, Reprint by New York: Bamboo Books, 2012.
- Schofield, P. "Introduction," in *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*. Edited by Phillipp Schofield. Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, 2015.
- Seals: Making and Marking Connections Across the Medieval World. Edited by Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press and AR Chumanities Press, 2018.
- Seals and Society: Medieval Vales, the Welsh Marches and their English Border Region. Edited by P R Schofield & E A New with S M Johns and J A McEwan. University of Wales Press, 2016.
- Seals and their context in the Middle Ages. Edited by Phillipp Schofield. Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, 2015.
- Sebes, J. S. J. *The Jesuits and the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689): The Diary of Thomas Pereira, S. J.* Rome: Institutum Historicum S. I. Via Dei Penitenzieri, 20, 1961.
- Vincent, N. "The seals of King Henry II and his court," in Schofield edited *Seals and their context in the Middle Ages*. Havertown, PA: Oxbow Books, 2015, 7-34.
- Wang, K. Qingdai waijiao liyi de jiaoshe yu zhenglun [The Discussion and controversy on the Qing diplomatic protocols] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2009).
- Wei, J., and M. Zhaobo, *Zhongguo yin* [Seals of China] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2008).
- Wu, Y. "Manzhouwen yu manzhouwen guji wenxiang zongshu" [A summative introduction of Manchu language and the historical works written in Manchu language], in *Manzu yanjiu* 1 (2008):99-128.
- Wu, Y., and L. Jianmin, "Manwen zhuanzi yu guanyin guanshu shuyao" [A summary research of Manchu seal characters and official seals], in *Manyu yanjiu* 72. 1 (2021) :23-32.
- Xue, L. *Yuandai guanfang yinzhang yu zhidushi yanjiu* [The study of official seals and the history of its system in the Yuan dynasty]. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2020.
- Ye, B. *E'guo laihua shituan yanjiu 1618-1807* [A study of the Russian delegation to China during 1618-1807]. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010.
- Zhao, Y. *Yanbao zaji* [Eaves Exposure Miscellaneous Notes]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982.

- Zhong'e bianjie tiaoyueji [A collection of the Sino-Russian treaties]. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973.
- Zhu, X. (Qing writer), *Yindian [Dictionary of Seals]*. Annotated by Fang Xiaozhuang. 1722, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011 reprint.
- Xie, S. *Zhigongtu Manwen tushuo jiaozhu* [Annotated Manchu Version of Illustrations of Tributary Peoples]. Annotated by Zhuang Jifa. Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1989.
- Zhonghua minguo waijiaobu baocunzi qianqing ji minguo shiqi tiaoyue xieding – Yingxiang liulan [The treaties and agreements during early Qing to Republican period which are stored at the Foreign Affairs Department of the Republic of China - Photo image browsing] at website <https://mofaarchives.npm.gov.tw/index.php?act=Treaty/home>.



