Description of the Border Areas of Russia with Japan and Their Inhabitants in Witsen's North and East Tartary

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Summary/Abstract: The aim of the Witsen Project is to publish a Russian translation of Noord en Oost Tartarije (North and East Tartary) written in 1705 by Nicolaas Witsen. For thirty years this Amsterdam mayor had collected data on the physical appearance, the fauna and flora and also, more in particular, on the peoples of the northern and eastern parts of Europe and Asia. For this article we used text fragments related to the border areas of Russia with Japan and to the people living there in the 17th century. We quote some relevant parts of the book, give our comments on these texts and clarify these with a number of annotations.
The Japan–Russia border is the de facto maritime boundary that separates the territorial waters of the two countries. According to the Russia border agency, the border's length is 194.3 km (120.7 mi). The two countries do not share a terrestrial border, although they did during the period 1905-1945 when the island of Sakhalin was split between Japan and the Russian Empire (and later the USSR). Sakhalin, the Russian name for the island north of Hokkaido and east of Khabarovsk Krai in the Russian Far East, is a corruption of the Manchu name for a region at the end of the Amur River. The Manchus, native to the territories directly West of Sakhalin on the Asian mainland, would likely have known of the island long before the Russians first explored the East Seas, or the Yamato Japanese finally made their way that far northward. To the east of the island live another people, the Oroks, whom call themselves Ulta. As the Japanese on Hokkaido solidified their grip on the island, they increasingly came to rely on trade with the Ainu as a lucrative source of foodstuffs, furs – and valuable foreign goods.