



# Empire and Odyssey: The Brynners in Far East Russia and Beyond

*Rock Brynner*

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## **Empire and Odyssey: The Brynners in Far East Russia and Beyond** Rock Brynner

For millions of his fans, there is only one Yul Brynner, the most mysterious and exotic star in Hollywood history. But in fact four men were given that same name in successive generations, beginning with Yul's Swiss-born grandfather, Jules, and ending with his son born in New York, Yul Jr., better known as author and historian Rock Brynner. Their lives compose a global odyssey that has come full circle in present-day Vladivostok in Far East Russia, the city built by Jules in the 1880s, where Yul and his father, Boris Julievitch, were born, and which Rock first visited on a lecture tour sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

This is a vast family epic, teeming with exotic adventures, that begins aboard a pirate ship bound for Shanghai; like the fiction of Michener or Clavell, this true story is closely interwoven with history. Within twenty years of his arrival, Jules was the leading industrialist in the Far East, and the empire he created involved tiger hunters, Asian emperors, and most significantly, Tsar Nicholas II; it is revealed here exactly how their business association – and the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok – triggered the Russo—Japanese War that ended three centuries of Romanov autocracy. Under Lenin's government, Boris was the only mine owner to regain control of his vast operation; but his personal dramas in China, Manchuria, and North Korea rivaled the ordeals of Dr. Zhivago. With the Russian diaspora, Yul's childhood took him from Vladivostok to China and then to France, where, as a teenager, he performed in nightclubs with Russian Gypsies while becoming a trapeze acrobat in the circus. He moved to America before he spoke English and within five years was starring on Broadway; ten years later he received the Academy Award for *The King and I*. Yul's only son, Rock, has been a European street clown and a Broadway star, road manager for The Band and bodyguard for Muhammad Ali, as well as a novelist and historian. His numerous visits to Vladivostok, along with his research, have earned him an enduring place in its social history.

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