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HARBIN IMAGE IN THE MEMORIES OF ITS INHABITANTS

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Abstract

The article studies the memories about life in a multinational Harbin of the first half of the XX century. Harbin appeared as a multinational city on the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) in 1898, in the first half of the XX century it becomes a center of Russian migration in Manchuria. Russians who lived in Harbin considered it as a Russian city not only by architecture but also the way of life. All citizens spoke Russian, kept traditions and customs of the pre-revolutionary Russian life, a special type of Russian literature appeared. Chinese population (the Han, the Manchoo, the Mongolian, the Korean and so on) coexisted peacefully with the Russians; children attended the same schools, universities, children appeared in Russian-Chinese marriages. Thus, “Harbinese” appeared – a unique sociocultural and ethno-cultural group of citizens. The materials were collected in 8 field studies in China (Peking, Harbin), Australia (Sidney), Moscow, Saint-Petersburg – places where ex-Harbinese lived. Informants’ memories reflect different stages and sides of the life in Harbin: from the time when Russian citizens appeared there, then emigrants to PRC formation and outcome of the Russians from Harbin. Some informants left written memoirs others repeated their narratives in front of different audiences. Oral recollections of emigrants’ descendants are precious material for researchers on reconstructing the life in this unique city, built by the Russians among the Manchoo swamps and daily life of the Harbinese.

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1. Introduction

In the first half of the XX century Harbin is a multinational, multi-religious center of the Far-Eastern foreign community, built by Russians on the Manchoo land, which showed a unique example of intercultural and inter-religious interaction with retention of own ethnic traditions of Russians and Chinese (Zabiyako, 2016).

2. Problem Statement

The research of migration in the Far East in diachrony would be incomplete if reconstructed on the memories of famous scientists and politicians, poets and writers. The authors of the article turn to oral stories by Harbinese and their descendants – *Memories about the life in Harbin*.

3. Research Questions

The problem of collecting, processing the memories by Harbinese; memories as a part of oral history in Harbin, classification of the main themes of memories, reflecting socio-cultural, ethno-cultural and ethno-religious features of life in Harbin and of Harbinese in the first half of the XX century.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to reconstruct the reality of everyday life in the XX century in multinational Harbin and of Harbinese basing on the memoirs by Harbinese.

5. Research Methods

Cultural-historical, comparative-historical, interview method, methods of participatory observation were used in the research.

6. Findings

Harbin appeared as a multinational city on the China-Eastern Railroad in 1898. In the first half of the XX century it became a center of Russian migration in Manchuria. Russians who lived in Harbin considered it as a Russian city not only by architecture but also the way of life. All citizens spoke Russian, kept traditions and customs of the pre-revolutionary Russian life, a special type of Russian literature appeared. Chinese population (the Han, the Manchoo, the Mongolian, the Korean and so on) coexisted peacefully with the Russians; children attended the same schools, universities, children appeared in Russian-Chinese marriages. Thus, “Harbinese” appeared – a unique sociocultural and ethno-cultural group of citizens. As Harbinese we understand the following groups of people:

1) Those, who came to China to build CER, who set up here before the First October Revolution and the Civil War in Russia. They built CER – engineers, builders, first Chinese settlers – CER workers, operating staff, petty traders in Harbin.

2) Those who came into China from Russia to escape from war and revolution. They were White Russians and their families, intelligentsia, countrymen from Siberia and Far East.

3) Those who came to Harbin from the USSR on business. They were diplomatic officers, politicians, top-ranked specialists (engineers, architects, builders, teachers), who came to help the Chinese to build Communism and develop economy, as well as students.

4) The Chinese who migrated to the North-East and Harbin after Xinhai revolution.

The period of Japanese occupation was a common misfortune for most Harbinese – Russian, Chinese, other nationalities. After 1949 political and social changes appeared in China and CPR was formed. The emigrants were suggested to return back to the USSR, most of them left China. Some of the Harbinese left for other countries: Canada, Australia, the USA and so on.

Political changes in China in the second half of the XX century resulted in that the emigrants came to the USSR on their own will or by force, most of them got in prison and were enclosed, those who escaped political repressions kept silent about their life abroad.

Returning to the USSR, Harbinese tried to be like common Soviet people. When the political regime in Russia changed in 1990, an association “Harbin” appeared in Novosibirsk and later in Chelyabinsk. An association “Russians in China” appeared in Yekaterinburg. The purposes of the associations were simple: communications, moral support, memoirs publication, search of lose touch and necrologies.

Newspapers, magazines released by the associations were the main way of uniting Harbinese. Basic editions were: Almanac “Russian Atlántida” a printed body of the association “Harbin”, released in Chelyabinsk; Informative messenger “On Manchoo bald peaks” and messenger “Harbin”– by association “Harbin” released in Novosibirsk. “Russian in China” was released in Yekaterinburg by the unanimous association.

Being in different countries Harbinese kept in touch, wrote letters, postcards on holidays, and rarely visited each other.

During the early 1990 Russian scientists tried to reconstruct blind-spots in the history of the Far East migration. For a long time, rare memories about life in China, in particular in Harbin by writes, public men, journalists (Pereleshin, 1987; Slobodchikov, 2005; Volin, 1982) were the main material to reconstruct the life of Russians in China in Harbin in particular. Late, Melihov (1991, 2003) appeared. Memories published in periodicals by Harbinese, their collection of letters in archives, other side notes are of special interest for Harbinese historians (Ablova, 2005; Goncharenko, 2009; Hisamutdinov, 2001, 2010; Kradin, 2010).

In Chinese historiography the interest to Harbin is connected with state politics in economy and tourism appears at the end of XX – beginning of XXI century (Li, 1998; Shi et al., 2003). Recently, Russian and Chinese scientists found a common aim important for international relations – to reconstruct daily life in Harbin and of Harbinese as an integral part of Russian and Chinese history (Ju et al., 2019; Li, 2009).

In this context oral stories (memories) by Harbinese are of primary importance. Memories are “speech in life” (Arutyunova, 1998). Memories as a genre and way of keeping historical and ancestral

memory have been studied in works by S. U. Nekludova, I.A. Razumova, A.P. Lipatova, I.A. Golovanova and others. In this article the concepts “oral story” and “memories” are synonymous.

Nowadays it is important to systemize memories by Harbinese as a whole context of Harbin oral history in the first half of the XX century. This material is a result of five international folklore expeditions in 2015–2019. (November 2015, participants: Ju Kunyi, YA.V.Zinenko, S.N. Levoshko; June 2017, participants: Ju Wei, Ju Kunyi, S.N. Levoshko, A.A. Zabayako, Zhang Chuang; November 2017, participants: Ju Kunyi, S.N. Levoshko, A.A. Zabayako; June 2018, participants: Ju Kunyi, S.N. Levoshko; November 2018, participants: Ju Kunyi, Zhou Xinyu ; June 2019, participants Ju Kunyi, Ju Wei, A.A. Zabayako, Zhang Chuang; August 2019, participants: Ju Kunyi) to Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Sidney, Pekin, Harbin, Riga where most former and present Harbinese live who keep friendly relations. Memories collected in expeditions are processed, catalogized and refill the “Centre for the Study of the Far Eastern Emigration” of the Amur State University.

Oral stories were collected by the interviews which turned into a friendly talk. Memories of our informants reflect different stages and sides of the life in Harbin: from the time when Russians came and became emigrants, till the time when CPR was formed and Russians left Harbin. Some informants left written memoirs and some of them told their narrations several times in front of different audiences.

The authors of the article met many children of emigrants, born in Harbin, and took their interview. Despite being advanced in years, respondents still have clear mind and their speech is organized by the norms of the Russian language. Memories of Russian emigrants’ descendants are precious material for researchers on the reconstruction of everyday life in Harbin.

Inna Innokentievna Medvedeva (1923 d.o.b.) was born in Blagoveshensk, her family migrated to Harbin in 1929. She graduated from Gymnasium in 1940. In 1941 she entered the College of Young Men Christian Association (IMCA), which she graduated from in 1943. In 1946 she returned to the USSR. Nowadays she lives in Saint-Petersburg.

Elena Petrovna Taskina (1927–2019) was born in Harbin; she left China in 1955. She graduated from the gymnasium and college in Harbin, then the Institute in Russia. Her parents were not political emigrants – her grandfather came to the CER at the beginning of the XX century, got married, and her mother was born. E.P. Taskina is a Harbinese in the third generation. In the middle of 50-th she moved to Moscow with the family.

Tatiana Vasilievna Chaikina (1927 d.o.b.) was born in Harbin. Her family moved to Harbin due to Revolution, her father was a White Russian. She studied at school, and then graduated from Secondary Medical School of Red Cross in Harbin. Nowadays she lives in Harbin.

Vera Nikolaevna Pan (1929 d.o.b.) was born in Harbin in a Russian-Chinese family. Her father was a dealer. Parents met and got married in Russia at the end of 1913 and came to China together. Vera studied in a Russian school. In 1959 together with her Chinese husband she came to the USSR. Nowadays she lives in Saint-Petersburg.

Olga Victorovna Zagoskina (1935 d.o.b.) was born in Harbin. Her grandfather from the father’s side was a rich merchandiser in Saint-Petersburg. The family migrated to Harbin in 1930. She studied in the secondary school № 3, and then worked in Harbin polytechnic institute. Nowadays she lives in Saint-Petersburg.

Margarita Pavlovna Taut (1936 d.o.b.) was born in Harbin in the family of Russian emigrants. Her father is a graduate of Khabarovsk Cadet Corps, after the Revolution came to Shanghai, then to Harbin. His mother was a Colonel's daughter of the Russian Imperial Army, a participant of Russian-Japan, First World and Civil wars. Her family together with her grandfather migrated to Harbin in 1920. Margarita finished a Soviet school in Harbin in 1954. She worked in Heilongjiang University. In 1960 together with her family she moved to Tashkent and nowadays she lives in Moscow.

The main themes of Harbinese memories are:

1) Family history. Stories how a family came to China, to Harbin. They create a picture of different social, political and economic circumstances. We have a chronological order of the history how Russians developed Northern Manchuria, due to the building of CER, new economic freedoms, Russian-Chinese marriages, and compelled escape of Russians to China after the revolution, Civil war in 30-th years of XX century (Ju, 2019; Ju et al., 2019; Zinenko & Ju, 2015).

2) School stories. They tell about the system of education in Harbin, different possibilities in Harbin for children of school age despite their nationality and religion. Parents could choose the system of education due to their political and educational ideas. A special part is devoted to school years during the Japanese occupation (Ju, 2019; Ju et al., 2019; Zinenko & Ju, 2015).

3) Relations with Chinese. Stories about the position of Chinese in the first half of the XX century in Harbin, positive mutual influence, friendship motives and internationalism which determined interethnic relation between Russians and Chinese (Ju, 2019; Ju et al., 2019; Zinenko & Ju, 2015).

4) Holiday culture. Life in Harbin combined Russian and Chinese components. Big attention in memories is given to Russian and Chinese traditional holidays (Christmas, Easter, Chinese New Year, Duan-U and others). (Ju, 2019; Ju et al., 2019; Li, 2017; Zinenko & Ju, 2015).

5) Religion. Harbin was a center of the Orthodox life in Northern Manchuria. During the first half of the XX century 24 Orthodox churches were built, Harbinese Eparchy was organized which helped to keep Russian holiday culture and religious traditions (Zinenko & Ju, 2015).

The speech of every informant contains properly Harbinese components (specific pigeon vocabulary, obsolescences, inherited from parents, and linguo-cultural layers, connected with their further life in Australia, the USSR, China).

7. Conclusion

Thus, the research determined main themes of memories about the life in Harbin in the first half of the XX century. Basic motives, images and plots, represented by our respondents, mostly repeat the materials published in periodicals in Harbin, which shows strivings to keep memories about Harbin in the first half of the XX century. Memories about Harbin collected in international field expeditions are a precious, topical material. Harbinese pass away and their living testimonies pass away with them.

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