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The Harbin Connection: Russians from China

Mara Moustafine

The girl without a country:

Miss Rachel Rolbant of the University of California recently sailed for Harbin, hoping to be allowed entrance. She is of Russian parentage, but not a Russian; she was born in China but is not Chinese; her domicile of birth is Manchukuo, but she is not a citizen of that state; she has applied for American papers but has not received them (*North China Daily* 1933).¹

Mara's international family: Jews, Tatars and Russians united in one family in Harbin:

... Mara's family is comprised of three nationalities. It is an unusual family. In this unique city, there once lived people of different cultures, religions and nationalities. Mara recently returned to Harbin from Australia, where she went to live when she was five years old. Yet she considers Harbin to be her "homeland" [*zu guo*] and says "I am a 'Harbinka' [*Ha'rbinren*]" (*Heilongjiang Daily* 7 December 2000).

Introduction

Harbin—the capital of China's northernmost province of Heilongjiang—was once home to a vibrant Russian community, which sprang up there at the end of the nineteenth century, when the region was known as "Manchuria" to Europeans and "*Dongbei*" to the Chinese. At its peak in the early 1920s, Harbin's Russian community numbered around 120,000; some 35,000 Russians lived in other settlements in Manchuria (Stephan 1978: 37-40). For a time, the Russians were a multi-ethnic national minority living in a "Russian world" on Chinese soil. By the late 1950s, turbulent political developments, including the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1932 and the Chinese Revolution in 1949, had driven most Russians out of China. But for many of them, their roots in China became a key aspect of their identity in emigration, both within the Russian diaspora, and within other diasporas to which they emigrated.

The above two extracts from Chinese newspapers encapsulate the key themes of this paper. Focusing on Russian *Harbintsy*,² the paper examines the history of this unique community; its rich ethnic and cultural mix, with particular reference to the Jewish community; the key issues of identity and citizenship which Russian

Harbintsy faced in Manchuria; how *Harbintsy* perceive their identity in emigration; and the attitude of the Chinese authorities towards them today.³

Harbin's Russian history

Harbin's Russian history began in 1898 with the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) across Manchuria, linking the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok.⁴ It was part of a deal struck in 1896 between the governments of Qing China and Tsarist Russia, following China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895. In return for a secret defence pact against Japan, Russia gained an 80-year concession to build and operate the railway—its dreams of eastward expansion and railway imperialism rolled into one.⁵

Administered as an independent enterprise by a company of the same name, the CER was Chinese in name only. Along the route of the railway, the CER secured a narrow zone of extraterritoriality, which effectively became Russia's "colony" in Manchuria. CER headquarters were established near the small village of Harbin on the Sungari river and the city that was built there came to be regarded as the capital of this "colony". "CER" came to signify not just the railway and its administration, but the geographical location of the zone. It was synonymous with "Russian Manchuria".

The CER drew people from the far reaches of the Tsarist empire in their tens of thousands to the largely wild and sparsely populated steppes of Manchuria. Engineers and labourers came to build the railway; clerks, guards and civil servants to work in its administration. Entrepreneurs, merchants and traders came to develop natural resources and provide goods and services in Harbin and other Russian settlements along the railway's route. Chinese "coolies" from the South were also brought in, in large numbers, to work as construction labourers. By the mid-1920s, the number of Russians in Harbin had grown to 120,000, swelled by refugees escaping the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and the ensuing civil war (Stephan 1978: 40).

Harbin was a distinctly Russian city in China. Its architecture was reminiscent of Moscow or St. Petersburg, with onion-domed cupolas, empire-style façades, wide boulevards and touches of *art nouveau*. Every level of society was represented, from former royalty to unskilled labour. Russian was spoken in the streets, shops and theatres, and it was also the language of administration, commerce and education. Street signs and billboards were written in Russian. The only part of Harbin where this was not so was in Fujiadian, where most of Harbin's 300,000 Chinese lived and few Russians ventured (Stephan 1978: 40). For 30 years, Russian Harbin flourished.⁶

In the early 1930s, all this changed. A sequence of political events, driven by the three powers competing for hegemony in Manchuria, turned Russian Harbin upside down. First of all came the Japanese occupation and the establishment of the puppet Manchukuo regime in 1932. In 1945, the Soviet Army occupied Manchuria for a number of years, driving out the Japanese and establishing a Soviet-style administration. In 1949 came the Chinese Communist Revolution.

These events prompted Russian *Harbintsy* to seek refuge elsewhere. To escape the Japanese occupation, thousands left for the international settlements in the Chinese cities of Shanghai and Tianjin.⁷ When the Soviets sold the CER to Manchukuo in 1935, a mass exodus to the Soviet Union followed. After the Chinese Revolution, most remaining Russians emigrated to the Soviet Union, Australia, Israel, Brazil, and Argentina, and a small number to the United States. By the mid-1960s, only a few Russians remained in Harbin.⁸ Today, one 92 year-old woman is the last remnant of the former émigré community in Harbin.⁹

Harbin's cultural diversity—the Jewish community

From its early days, “Russian” Harbin was a community of diverse cultures and ethnicities¹⁰ united by their origins in the Russian empire. Believing that the rapid economic development of Manchuria would require private initiative and investment, the CER administrators and their patrons in the Finance Ministry in St. Petersburg actively encouraged minorities of the Tsarist empire to migrate to the CER zone. To this end, they deliberately created in the zone an environment of tolerance and equal opportunity.¹¹ Settlers of various cultures and religions flocked to Manchuria in search of a better life, among them Jews, Poles, Tatars, Georgians, Armenians, Ukrainians and Lithuanians (Chernolutskaya 2000).

For Jews of the Tsarist empire, confined for over a century to live in the “Pale of Settlement”,¹² Russian Manchuria was the land of opportunity where they could escape poverty and pogroms. The discriminatory laws of the empire did not apply in the CER zone and there was little overt anti-Semitism until the late 1920s. Jews were not restricted as to where they could live, and there were no quotas limiting their numbers in schools and other educational institutions.¹³ Efforts to impose restrictions on them were actively opposed by the CER Chief Administrator, General Horvath.¹⁴

Jews started coming to Manchuria from 1898. They played an early role in developing natural resources and commerce in the CER. They also participated actively in Harbin's municipal affairs—making up 12 of the 40 members on the city council in 1909 (Kauffman 1962). Although there is no evidence of Jews being employed by the CER before 1915, this may have been in deference to the hiring practice in Russian state enterprises, as there was no law to this effect (Wolff 1999: 104, 222). Most Jews who came to Manchuria settled in Harbin, though smaller communities were also established at the stations of Hailar, Manchuria, Mukden and Tsitsihar. By the mid-1920s, they numbered around 15,000. As well as establishing a range of their own community institutions, Jews were active in the commercial, cultural and public life of Russian Harbin.

But life for the Jews deteriorated seriously after the Japanese occupation. The Japanese themselves were not driven by anti-Semitism and publicly maintained good relations with the Jewish community. But they associated closely with militant anti-Soviet Whites, such as the Russian Fascist Party (RFP), whose ideology of anti-Bolshevism and nationalism was laced with virulent anti-Semitism.¹⁵ In the early 1930s, Russian thugs linked to the RFP engaged in a campaign of kidnappings, extortion and murder against wealthy businessmen, mainly Jews, masterminded by the Japanese military police.¹⁶ These events, as well as the takeover of businesses by the Japanese and the rise of anti-Semitism, prompted an exodus of Harbin Jews, mainly to Shanghai and Tianjin. By 1935, Harbin's Jewish community had declined from 13,000 in 1931 to only 5,000 (Bresler 2000: 209).

Russians in Harbin, 1898-1960s: identity and citizenship

Before the 1917 Revolution, when people like my maternal great-grandparents went to Harbin, issues of identity and citizenship were straightforward. They had arrived from the Russian empire on Tsarist passports and regarded themselves as Russians or Russian Jews living in the CER Zone—Russia's “colony” in Manchuria.

During the turbulent years of the civil war that followed the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, thousands of refugees streamed into Manchuria,¹⁷ my father's parents among them. Though the political status of the CER zone remained undecided, anti-Bolshevik White Russians and Chinese warlords were in effective control. But by 1920, the Chinese had withdrawn recognition from Tsarist

representatives to China, and ended Russian extraterritoriality in the CER zone. Russians in Manchuria had become stateless (Quested 1984: 92-93; Bakich 2000).

In June 1924, after protracted negotiations, China finally recognised the Soviet government. The two powers agreed that henceforth they would jointly administer the CER, and that Chinese law would apply. But in practical terms, the Soviets were in control of the administration of the CER, including the railway, schools, hospitals and other institutions.¹⁸ It was decreed that only Soviet or Chinese citizens could work for the CER, a reasonable requirement for what was effectively the civil service in the CER zone. Many Russians took the Soviet option simply to preserve their jobs. They were jokingly called “radishes”—Red on the outside, White on the inside. A relatively small number took Chinese citizenship (Lensen 1974: 17-18; Bakich 2000: 57-58).

By the early 1930s, with their old Tsarist passports obsolete, Russians who did not work for the CER administration also started to consider their citizenship. Their choices were to register as Soviet or Chinese citizens, or to remain stateless. Out of patriotism to the old Russia and opposition to the Bolsheviks, most *Harbintsy* chose to remain stateless—“White émigrés”. A few became Soviet citizens out of sympathy for the revolution. Quite a number of long-term settlers, like my mother’s family, chose the Soviet option simply to avoid being stateless in the turbulent times in which they lived. Registering as “Soviet citizens” did not entitle these people to full rights as Soviet citizens, or even the right to emigrate to the USSR, merely the protection of Soviet consular representatives in China.

At this stage, these citizenship choices had little impact on the lives of Russian *Harbintsy*, other than in terms of their employment opportunities. They continued to live side by side, to mix socially and to do business with each other. But the division into White émigrés and Soviets would have far-reaching consequences during the 13 years of Japanese occupation (1932-1945) under the guise of the Manchukuo puppet regime (Bresler 2000: 204; G. B. Melikhov 1997: 199-200).

As the Japanese endeavoured to gain control of the CER and drive the Soviets out of Manchuria, CER employees and other Soviet citizens became the victims of attacks and arrests (Lensen 1974: 212-236). But the harassment of Soviets and the polarisation of the Russian community into White émigrés and Soviets became most pronounced after the Soviet Union sold the CER enterprise to Japan in March 1935, losing its influence in Manchuria for the next decade (Lensen 1974: 237-334). The sale prompted the departure of some 30,000 families for the USSR, most of them employees, but also others who felt there was no future for Russians in Manchuria.¹⁹ Others, including more than half of Harbin’s Jews, left for other cities in China, notably the international settlements in Shanghai and Tianjin. By the end of the 1930s, the Russian population of Harbin had dropped to around 30,000.²⁰

As a mechanism to control the Russian population in Manchuria, the Japanese established the Bureau of Russian Émigré Affairs in Manchukuo (BREM) in 1934. Nominally under Russian control, it was headed by a succession of White Army generals and run by members of the RFP and their sympathisers. All adult émigré Russians were required to register with the BREM by filling in lengthy biographical questionnaires. Only then could they receive identity papers, residence permits, employment cards and travel documents.²¹ In the later years of the occupation, Russian émigrés were issued with identification badges—at first, they were striped white, blue and red like the Tsarist flag, but later, at the instigation of the Japanese authorities, these were replaced by round, white aluminium disks, with numbers, which the wearers labelled “dog tags”.²² Soviets were instantly conspicuous because they had no badges.

Among the most effective measures that the BREM used to “encourage” Soviet *Harbintsy* to renounce their citizenship and become émigrés were the denial of employment and education to Soviet children. In 1937, the Harbin Soviet school was closed down and Soviet students were subsequently excluded from émigré schools. In the face of such pressures, many Soviets, including former employees of the CER administration and some prominent merchants, saw no option but to “convert” to émigré status. By the 1940s, through departures and conversions, the number of Soviet *Harbintsy* had dwindled to around 1,000 (Stephan 1978: 176).

My mother’s family were among those who retained Soviet citizenship throughout the Japanese occupation, as my grandfather insisted that being stateless—“a citizen of nowhere”—was too risky in the face of Japanese aggression. The price was the Japanese takeover of his meat business and my mother’s exclusion from school and youth activities. Still, the family fared much better than friends and relatives, who were imprisoned as alleged Soviet agents or beheaded by the Japanese in Hailar on the eve of the arrival of the Soviet Red Army in August 1945.²³

But the oppressiveness of the Japanese occupation also weighed heavily on most émigré *Harbintsy*, particularly after the outbreak of the Second World War. In addition to cultural subservience to the Japanese “Imperial way” (“*ōdō*” in Japanese; “*wang dao*” in Chinese), the émigré community was expected to help build Japan’s new East Asian Order through the conscription of young men into military detachments and the deployment of some in cross-border raids against the Soviet Union. Most émigrés found themselves deeply alienated when Japan’s Axis partner, Germany, invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. By the time Japan launched its Pacific war, even the most anti-Soviet Whites who had made common cause with Japan in the hope that White Russian rule would be restored in the Soviet Far East were under no illusions that Japan was pursuing anything other than its own interests.²⁴

When the Soviet Red Army arrived in August 1945 to “liberate” Manchuria from the Japanese, they were welcomed with flowers and euphoria by most *Harbintsy*, regardless of their political tags. Still, thousands of innocent émigrés were rounded up and deported to prison camps in the USSR, along with Japanese collaborators.²⁵ Most others who chose to do so were able to register as “Soviet citizens” (without rights). Among the exceptions were some former Soviet citizens who had converted to émigré status. For them, their statelessness became a source of constant insecurity.

While the Soviet occupation of Manchuria only lasted until April 1946, Soviet influence over Russian *Harbintsy* was maintained until the early 1960s through the Society of Soviet Citizens. In the mid-1950s, *Harbintsy* were invited, then pressured, to repatriate to the Soviet Union as part of Khrushchev’s “Virgin Lands” campaign.²⁶ Many of these hapless patriots found themselves stranded in the steppes of southern Kazakhstan or the snows of Siberia, though most were later able to find jobs in urban centres.²⁷ Those of us who were luckier joined other Russian *Harbintsy* in places such as Australia, Brazil, Israel, Canada, Japan and the United States. By 1964, fewer than 500 Russians remained in Harbin (Clausen and Thøgersen 1995: 160).

As relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated in the 1960s, those Russians who had not managed to get out of Manchuria were once again left in a vulnerable position. In my own family, the same relative whom the Japanese had imprisoned in the 1940s was now incarcerated for 15 months by the Chinese—again, because of his Soviet citizenship. Regrettably, bureaucratic wrangling between Australian immigration and security authorities as to whether to admit this “Soviet” to

Australian shores had not been resolved in time to prevent his arrest. Thankfully, reason prevailed, and the family was safely in Australia by the time the Cultural Revolution erupted in China in 1966.

During the Cultural Revolution, Russian *Harbintsy* who had stayed behind found themselves under attack as “foreign devils”, forced to witness Red Guards desecrate some of their holiest religious institutions²⁸ or imprisoned as “Soviet spies”. Today only one of the old Russians still survives, holding tightly to her memories of the “Russian world” that once existed there. Some Russian Orthodox descendants still gather to pray at the sole Orthodox Church allowed to operate. But since the Chinese priest died a year ago, there is no priest to conduct services there anymore (*Russkie v Kitae* 2001).

Russians from Harbin: identity in emigration

In emigration, Harbin and China have remained central to the identity of most Russian *Harbintsy*—though not always by choice or with positive effect. For many of those who migrated to the Soviet Union after the sale of the CER to Japan in 1935, the Harbin label proved to be a death warrant. Leaving Japanese-occupied Manchuria on overcrowded trains strung with banners reading “Mother Russia, receive your children”, they never imagined how bitter their homecoming would prove to be. At the height of Stalin’s purges in September 1937, a special NKVD operation was launched to arrest *Harbintsy* (by then, defined as all former Russian employees of the CER or returnees from anywhere in Manchuria) as “Japanese spies”.²⁹ According to previously unpublished statistics provided by the Russian human rights organisation, Memorial, 48,133 people were arrested under this order; 30,992 of them were shot, and most of the others were sent to labour camps.³⁰

For those *Harbintsy* who emigrated to the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin period, or went to countries outside the former Soviet Union, their identity as “Russians from China” has had a more positive association. Asked about their ethnic identity, most Russians and Russian Jews from Harbin identify themselves not just as “Russians” or “Jews”, but as Russians or Russian Jews “*from China*”. In their literature, they describe themselves as the “Chinese” branch of the Russian or Jewish diaspora. Why is this?

Being able to draw an ideological distinction from Russians from the Soviet Union was certainly useful in the days of the Cold War, when most *Harbintsy* arrived in Australia and other Western countries. But there was then—and still is—more to it than that. Otherwise, why would *Harbintsy*—even those living in Russia today—still emphasise their “China connection”, long after the Soviet Union’s demise? Distaste for what some may regard as the chaos or uncouthness of the “new Russia” is an insufficient explanation. For most *Harbintsy*, their Harbin origins are a positive defining point in their identity.

Evidence of this may be found in the network of Harbin associations and publications around the world. In Australia, alumni of the Harbin Polytechnical Institute, Harbin’s main tertiary institution, have been meeting regularly and publishing a journal for over 30 years. Other publications have emerged, such as *Russian Harbintsy in Australia*. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, active “Harbin” associations sprang up very quickly in a number of Russian cities, suggesting that informal networks existed long before. Now, their periodicals, with names like *In the Hills of Manchuria*, *Russians in China*, and *Harbin*, have a substantial following among *Harbintsy* around the world. Their pages are laden with histories of Russian institutions and life in China, personal reminiscences, searches

for erstwhile friends, necrologies and nostalgia. *The Bulletin of Igud Yotzei Sin*, the Far Eastern Jews Association, established in Israel 51 years ago with branches all over the world, serves a similar purpose for Jews from China.

Is this an identification with China, or with the Russian or Jewish Harbin that the *Harbintsy* created, then lost? A review of the publications suggests the latter. During their years in Harbin, most Russians and Russian Jews lived in a predominantly Russian world, with little thought for the China around them. Few studied the language seriously or delved into the culture. Most of their interactions with Chinese were confined to their domestic assistants, tradesmen and merchants, who spoke pidgin Russian, or with educated Russian-speaking Chinese (Epstein 2000). For most of the Russians, the Harbin of their memories and memoirs is the lost world of pre-revolutionary Russia preserved in the Manchurian hills.³¹ For Russian Jews, their China is one where “Jews could be Russians”, free to participate fully in either or both cultures.

There were some exceptions—including my parents. Unlike most of their contemporaries, they graduated in Oriental Studies, were fluent in Chinese, and worked closely with the Chinese in the 1950s. Here in Australia, my father’s study has always been crammed with Chinese books and dictionaries, and with ink and calligraphy brushes. Chinese journals would arrive together with *Time* and *Newsweek*. Chinese was the language my parents spoke with Chinese friends or when they did not want me to understand what they were saying.

Growing up in such an environment, it is little wonder that China and Harbin have always been inextricably tied to my sense of identity. Though I left Harbin as a child too young to have a memory of the place, it left me with a sense of difference and diversity. When I told a Chinese journalist that I considered Harbin my “homeland”, my identification was not with some “lost world” of Russia, but with the multiethnic and pluralist mix of “Russian Harbin”. What other place could have produced a child with direct roots to Byelorussian Jews, Tatar Muslims and Orthodox Russians, and whose forebears also straddled both sides of the Soviet/White émigré political divide?

The Chinese attitude towards “Russian” Harbin

For the Chinese, Harbin’s Russian past has long been caught up in the intricacies of the historical, political and ideological rivalry between Russia and China. The demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 eliminated the ideological dimension, and the relationship with Russia is now developing along more pragmatic lines. But Tsarist Russia’s exploits in Manchuria, including the establishment of Harbin as the headquarters of the CER, are still portrayed as acts of colonial aggression in China.

Nevertheless, the role Russians played in Harbin’s development is increasingly acknowledged.³² Renewed efforts are being made to preserve old Russian buildings, and Harbin’s daily newspaper, the *Heilongjiang Daily*, runs regular features about former *Harbintsy*. Whether through architecture or people’s stories, Harbin’s Russian history is being preserved.

Not surprisingly, the centenary of Harbin’s establishment in 1998 presented the authorities with a political dilemma. Plans for a joint Chinese-Russian academic conference in Harbin and Khabarovsk were scuttled by Beijing and the centenary went unmarked in China (Berton 1999a). Or did it? Given the Chinese propensity for indirectness and symbolism, the timing of two events in the heart of the old Russian area of Pristan (Daoli) was most significant.

First of all, the former Church of St. Sophia was refurbished, complete with Orthodox crosses on its domes and a large bell from the desecrated St. Nicholas Cathedral mounted in its bell tower. St. Sophia was opened in the second half of 1997 as the Harbin Architectural Museum, just in time for Harbin's centenary. The motive was, of course, to attract tourists. But the building has now become a symbol of Harbin, and the museum inside it is a testament to the city's Russian history.

The second notable event was a celebration the Harbin authorities organised in mid-1998 in Zhongyang Street, the main street of Daoli (formerly Kitayskaya Street in Pristan), so dear to Russian hearts. Ostensibly, it was to celebrate the anniversary of its conversion into a pedestrian mall a year earlier. But it just happened to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of both the street and Harbin.³³

Compared with the complexities that confront Chinese authorities in grappling with Harbin's Russian past, the issue of the former Jewish community is relatively straightforward, at least since diplomatic relations with Israel were established in 1992. In ideological terms, the Jews who came to live in Harbin are regarded simply as subjects of the Tsarist empire, who sought refuge from hardship and persecution.

Preserving vestiges of their former life in Harbin has now become a priority, endorsed by the provincial and municipal governments. As well as the intrinsic historical and cultural value of the work, the aim is clearly to attract Jewish tourists and investors. The effort is being spearheaded through the newly-established Jewish Studies Centre of the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, and there are plans to transform one of the former synagogues into a permanent Jewish museum. In 2000, after many years of lobbying by the Association of Far Eastern Jews, Harbin's large Jewish cemetery was restored and over 500 graves identified. Now the gravestones have been photographed and made accessible on the internet.³⁴

The most recent sign that the Chinese may be starting to reclaim their Russian sons and daughters came in an open letter to former *Harbintsy* from a Chinese academic about a series of books he is editing for publication in Harbin in the near future. It is addressed to "Dear Chinese Russians! Dear *Harbintsy*", and seeks support for the publication of a five-volume Chinese-language collection entitled *The literature of Chinese Russians*.³⁵

Conclusion

Identity is a fluid construct, affected by power relations between states, as well as by one's personal experience of culture. For the *Harbintsy*, there was no single identity, but rather a range whose parameters included religion, tradition, political orientation and accident. While living in China, the factor that united them all was their origins in the Russian empire. In emigration, the reverse proved to be true. However removed they may have been from the reality of the China around them, for most *Harbintsy*, their life in China became the defining element of their Russian identity.

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- ¹ Rachel married Vladimir Kofman and stayed in Shanghai until 1952, when they migrated to Australia.
- ² “*Harbintsy*” is the Russian word for “people of Harbin”, cf. Berliners, New Yorkers, Muscovites. It applies to any nationality, not just Russians. While the paper focuses on Russian *Harbintsy*, many of their experiences were shared by Russians living elsewhere in “Russian Manchuria”.
- ³ This paper draws on material in Moustafine 2002.
- ⁴ On the origin of the name Harbin and early Russian life there, see Georghy Melikhov (1990); Shu (1995).
- ⁵ For a background to the CER and early history of Manchuria, see Qusted (1982); Wolff (1999); G. B. Melikhov (1991).
- ⁶ See Taskina (1994) for an insider’s account of Russian life in Harbin until the mid-1950s; and Balakshin (1958) for an account of émigré politics between 1917 and 1945. Bakich (2000) provides an interesting analysis of identity issues.
- ⁷ The Japanese did not take over these cities until the end of 1937.
- ⁸ According to Clausen and Thøgersen (1995: 160), there were 450 Russians left in Harbin in 1964.
- ⁹ Efrosinia Andreyevna Nikiforova came to Harbin from Siberia as a teenager in the early 1920s and has lived there all her life, working as a pharmacist for many years. She still has Russian citizenship.
- ¹⁰ According to the 1913 census, there were 22 nationalities living in the commercial Pristan district of Harbin (half of them minorities of the Tsarist empire) (Levitsky 2000: 47).
- ¹¹ See Wolff (1999: 78-90) for an interesting discussion of the internal debate in Tsarist government regarding settler policy in the CER
- ¹² The western border area of the Tsarist empire, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.
- ¹³ On the Jewish community, see Bresler (2000); Shickman-Bowman (2000); and Wolff (1999: 96-109).
- ¹⁴ An instance when Horvath thwarted such an attempt by the Governor-general of the Far Eastern Province, Gondatti, was described by the former leader of the Harbin Jewish community, Dr A. I. Kaufman, in a lecture on 17 February 1962, reprinted in the *Bulletin IYS* 336 (2001.5-6): 39 (in Russian).
- ¹⁵ Stephan’s *The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce in Exile 1925-45* (1978) is a fascinating account of the role the RFP played in the politics of Manchuria. The roots of their ideology and collaboration with the Japanese is described on pages 55-78.
- ¹⁶ For a first hand account, see Vespa (1938); Stephan (1978: 78-90) includes an account of the infamous Kaspé case; Bresler (2000: 209) notes that eight of the 12 people kidnapped between 1932 and 1934 were Jews and four of them were murdered. Among them was Myron Kofman, the father-in-law of Rachel Rolbant, mentioned in the extract at the beginning of this paper.
- ¹⁷ According to Bakich (2000: 56), between 100,000 and 200,000 Russian émigrés flooded into Harbin during this period, though many moved on to other cities in China and beyond. Stephan (1978: 40) puts Harbin’s Russian population at 120,000 in 1922, plus some 13,000 Jews.
- ¹⁸ This situation prevailed for the next seven years, except for a brief period during the Sino-Soviet conflict in 1929 (Lensen 1974: 13-81).
- ¹⁹ Exact numbers of “returnees” are unknown and estimates vary between 21,000 and 100,000. See discussion in Merritt (1998).
- ²⁰ This figure is based on Japanese data given in *Contemporary Manchuria* (1978: 20); Clausen and Thøgersen (1995: 116).
- ²¹ Breuillard (2000) provides a useful outline of the functions of BREM, as does Stephan (1978: 173-178). Captured by the Soviets in 1945, the BREM files are now held in the Khabarovsk State Archive.
- ²² Poles and other citizens of the former Tsarist empire were issued with yellow badges.
- ²³ 42 bodies of Soviet citizens were later unearthed in a mass grave.
- ²⁴ By this time, they had discovered that the Japanese did not include the Russians among the five races for whom they were building Manchukuo (Bakich 2000: 62).
- ²⁵ Bresler (2000: 211); and Kaufman (1973); and Pasternal and Raleigh (1983) describe the experiences of two victims.

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- ²⁶ An intensive agricultural project to encourage young people from all over the USSR to develop the vast grasslands of Kazakhstan and Siberia that had never been farmed before. The programme was extended to Soviet citizens in China in 1954.
- ²⁷ Memoirs of some *Harbintsy* who heeded the call have been published in Russian-language publications such as *Na Sopkah Manchzhurii* (In the Hills of Manchuria) and *Russkie v Kitae* (Russians in China) in the mid-1990s.
- ²⁸ St. Nicholas Cathedral was blown up by Red Guards in August 1966.
- ²⁹ Operational Order No. 00593 was issued on 20 September. My forthcoming book, entitled *Secrets and Spies: The Harbin Files*, details what happened under this operation to six members of my grandmother's family based on their NKVD files obtained from the State Archives in Nizhny Novgorod and Khabarovsk. The German, Polish and Harbin operations were the NKVD's three major "national" operations aimed at liquidating potential enemy spy bases in the USSR. Merritt (1998) provides an interesting analysis in the context of the purges.
- ³⁰ These statistics, based on research work by A. B. Roginsky and O. A. Gorlanov of Memorial's Research and Information Centre, were provided to the author in May 2002.
- ³¹ Stephan (1978: 43): "Like excised tissue preserved in formaldehyde long after the parent body has perished, the émigrés of Harbin persisted, a lifelike fragment of the pre-revolutionary era".
- ³² See the history section of the Harbin Institute of Technology website at <<http://www.hit.edu.cn/english/survey/wpnew/survey2.htm>>.
- ³³ Peter Berton describes this occasion in the third instalment of his article in *Bulletin of Igud Yotzei Sin* (English-language supplement). See Berton (1999b).
- ³⁴ The Huangshan Cemetery website is at <<http://www.hrbjewcemetery.com/>>.
- ³⁵ The editor of the series is Professor Li Yanlen, Tsitsihar University, Heilongjiang Province.