Urban History, **37**, 1 (2010) © Cambridge University Press 2010
doi:10.1017/S0963926810000106

Harbin in comparative perspective

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ABSTRACT: This article argues that historians have largely neglected the dimension of Chinese–Russian interaction, which was central to the development of Harbin from the emergence of this city in 1898 as an outpost of imperial Russia in Manchuria (north-east China). It goes on to propose a new approach to Harbin history, which, integrating its 'Russian' and 'Chinese' histories during the period prior to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1932, would also place it in a wider comparative context. This comparative approach is illustrated in the article by a consideration of the issue of ethnically segregated living quarters.

Following the rediscovery of the Russian Far Eastern emigration by post-Soviet Russian scholarship in the early 1990s, and after the centennial of Harbin in 1998 had attracted wide international attention,[1] Manchuria (north-east China) and especially the city of Harbin, now the capital of China's northernmost province of Heilongjiang, have become the focus of intensive historical research in Russia, in China and in the West. In April 2008, a special workshop on Harbin was convened at the University of Heidelberg as the first conference to take place under the auspices of the University's new research cluster, 'Asia and Europe in a global context: shifting asymmetries in cultural flows'. In June 2009, collaboration between the Heidelberg cluster, the School of Western Studies at Heilongjiang University and the German Historical Institute in Washington DC led to a second conference, now hosted in Harbin itself. This seems like the right moment to take stock of what we already have, as well as to suggest where we should be going. The main monograph publications by researchers working within different historiographical traditions will be surveyed below, in a brief critical overview that cannot pretend to do justice to the

* A version of the first two sections of this article was presented at the workshop 'Ethnic ghettoes and transcultural processes in a globalized city – new research on Harbin', University of Heidelberg, Germany, 18–19 Apr. 2008. This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant no. 341/06).

[1] See T. Lahusen, 'A place called Harbin: reflections on a centennial', *China Quarterly*, 154 (1998), 400–10.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926810000106 Published online by Cambridge University Press

scholarly achievement that many of these books represent. New directions for a comparative study of Harbin history will then be proposed.

The state of the field: an outline

The growing body of Russian-language publications on Harbin is insufficiently familiar to historians without reading knowledge in Russian. Within it, one may distinguish between research by former residents of 'Russian Harbin'[2] and work by historians of a younger generation.[3] Of the many authors writing on this subject in Russia today, even scholars well qualified to make use of Chinese sources have mostly shown themselves uninterested in the Chinese side of the Harbin story. Rather, especially in the writing of former Harbinites, a nostalgic image of Harbin is frequently enhanced by its portrayal as a city in which common Russian-Chinese life gave rise to a 'dialogue of cultures'. This 'dialogue', however, is intended as shorthand for the assumption that the Chinese, along with the members of other nationalities in Harbin, should have accepted Russian leadership; and as, beginning from the 1920s, the Chinese show signs of independence, they drop out of the historical picture.

Research on Harbin history in the People's Republic of China had to await the mid-1990s to rid itself of the heavily politicized tone which had characterized previous writing on foreigners in China in general and on

[2] Three books by Elena Taskina centre on the cultural life and literary heritage of the Russian emigration: E.P. Taskina and D.G. Sel'kina (eds.), *Kharbin: vetka russkogo dereva* (Harbin: a branch of the Russian tree) (Novosibirsk, 1991); E.P. Taskina, *Neizvestnyi Kharbin* (The unknown Harbin) (Moscow, 1994); E.P. Taskina (ed.), *Russkii Kharbin* (Russian Harbin) (Moscow, 1998; 2nd rev. and enlarged edn, 2005). A tetralogy by Georgii Melikhov began with a survey of the early diplomatic and political history of the Chinese Eastern Railway, to continue with a study of Harbin's transition from a colonial outpost to an emigration centre, an evocation of the daily life of the émigré community and an assessment of the role of the Russian emigration in international diplomacy leading up to the Japanese invasion: see, respectively, G.V. Melikhov, *Man'chzhuriia dalekaia i blizkaia* (Manchuria far and near) (Moscow, 1991); *idem*, *Rossiiskaia emigratsiia v Kitae, 1917–1924 gg.* (The Russian emigration in China, 1917–24) (Moscow, 1997); *idem*, *Belyi Kharbin: seredina 20-kh* (The White Harbin: mid-1920s) (Moscow, 2003); *idem*, *Rossiikaia emigratsiia v mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniiakh na Dal'nem Vostoke 1925–1932* (The Russian emigration in Far Eastern international relations, 1925–32) (Moscow, 2007). In addition to the titles just mentioned, a number of personal memoirs by former Russian residents in China have appeared.

[3] See N.E. Ablova, *KVZhD i rossiiskaia emigratsiia v Kitae: mezhdunarodnye i politicheskie aspekty istorii (pervaia polovina XX veka)* (The CER and the Russian emigration in China: international and political aspects of history in the first half of the twentieth century) (Moscow, 2005). The prolific publications of Amir Khisamutdinov focus on émigré biography and bibliography: see e.g. his *Rossiiskaia emigratsiia v Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskom regione i Iuzhnoi Amerike: Biobibliograficheskii slovar'* (A bio-bibliographical dictionary of the Russian emigration in the Asia-Pacific region and South America) (Vladivostok, 2001); *idem*, *Rossiiskaia emigratsiia v Kitae: opyt entsiklopedii* (A draft encyclopaedia of the Russian emigration in China) (Vladivostok, 2002). Other scholars in the Russian Far East have published on subjects as diverse as Russian architecture in Manchuria, the situation of the Russians under Manchukuo rule, the institutions of Russian education in Harbin, Russian women in Manchuria, Russian sinologists in Manchuria, Russian books in China and the Chinese historiography of the Russian emigration.

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the Russian presence in the north-east in particular.[4] As Chinese historians moved away from the reaffirmation of Communist doctrine, the Russian emigration in Manchuria also began to be treated through a less stringently ideological prism.[5] The great majority of this research today is carried out in Harbin itself and is based entirely on Chinese sources; much of it still suffers from the overriding agenda that political needs dictate to the interpretation of the past. In China as in Russia, nation-grounded approaches to the history of emigration that are not prepared to regard a person's relocation from the country of his or her birth as anything other than a tragic loss of roots have been particularly detrimental to the analysis of the Russian emigration into China in the twentieth century and the subsequent worldwide dispersal of its participants.[6]

English-language research on Harbin and Manchuria had an early beginning, as Rosemary Quested's monograph opened a vast and until then almost uncharted field.[7] In its panoramic scope and attention to both Russian and Chinese sides of the Manchurian encounter up to the Russian Revolution, this book remains unsurpassed. In the 1990s, research on Harbin in the West was relaunched in an original study of local Chinese historiography,[8] while relevant publications of more recent years have included a first history of the Russian émigré community in Shanghai, which took in many former inhabitants of Harbin,[9] a geopolitical and economic study of the Russian position in Manchuria at the time of its decline[10] and a bibliography of Harbin-printed Russian books.[11] Two monographs have appeared, on Russian Harbin from foundation to World War I, by David Wolff,[12] and on Chinese Harbin from that time to the

[4] A book by the Harbin historian Ji Fenghui was the first to challenge the established view of the Russian emigration as merely the continuation of tsarist-period colonialism: see his *Haerbin xungen* (Harbin's search for roots) (Harbin, 1996). Russian–Chinese cultural interaction was demonstrated on the basis of concrete material in Liu Xinxin and Liu Xueqing, *Haerbin xiyang yinyueshi* (The history of Western music in Harbin) (Beijing, 2002).

[5] E.g. Li Xinggeng (ed.), *Fengyu fuping: Eguo qiaomin zai Zhongguo (1917–1945)* (Floating weeds in the storm: Russian emigrants in China, 1917–45) (Beijing, 1997); Shi Fang, Gao Ling and Liu Shuang, *Haerbin Eqiao shi* (The history of Russian emigrants in Harbin) (Harbin, 1998).

[6] A more extensive analysis of shifts in historical writing in Russia and China is undertaken in M. Gamsa, 'The historiography of Harbin and the imagery of inter-ethnic contact', *Asiatica Venetiana*, 10–11 (2009), 63–79.

[7] R.K.I. Quested, *'Matey' Imperialists? The Tsarist Russians in Manchuria, 1895–1917* (Hong Kong, 1982).

[8] S. Clausen and S. Thøgersen, *The Making of a Chinese City: History and Historiography in Harbin* (Armonk, NY, 1995).

[9] M.R. Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort: The Diaspora Communities of Shanghai* (Stanford, 2001).

[10] F. Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile: The Northeast Balance of Power, 1924–1931* (Basingstoke, 2002).

[11] O. Bakich, *Harbin Russian Imprints: Bibliography as History, 1898–1961. Materials for a Definitive Bibliography* (New York, 2002).

[12] D. Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898–1914* (Stanford, 1999).

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Japanese occupation, by James Carter.[13] Another strain in current writing on Manchuria does not deal with the Russian presence, but covers other important ground on the basis of materials in Chinese and Japanese, further attesting to the rise of scholarly interest in the modern history of this region.[14]

A new concept of Harbin history

How could the Harbin case be brought more fully into the orbit of current academic debate, so as to become relevant not only for historians of modern China and the Russian emigration, but also for scholars working outside the Chinese and Russian fields? We can and should place Harbin in the regional Chinese context; especially during the warlord period, after 1916, this framework is essential for understanding the processes of change that the city underwent. More remains to be done, therefore, to incorporate Harbin more fully into Chinese history. The answer suggests itself, however, that the study of this city's history should also employ a comparative perspective. Brought into being by tsarist Russia in 1898 as the headquarters of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), Harbin would evolve into a fully fledged Chinese city through intensive Sino–foreign contact. This did not happen to Harbin alone; rather, its story has parallels in modern history. Yet the comparative aspect of Harbin's development, central to any complete interpretation of its own history as well as to its consideration by a wider audience interested in urban history, colonialism or transcultural contact, is the one side of Harbin that has received least attention from researchers so far.

Through which processes have two urban communities, speaking different languages and living in segregated environments, constructed their mass images of each other, and updated them with the passage of time? How did emigration, and change in political circumstances, affect people's perception of themselves and of their neighbours? If these research directions have not so far been fully pursued in relation to Harbin, this has been mainly because studies of this city have tended to concentrate on either one of the two parties, the Russian or the Chinese.

The lack of sufficient research on Sino–foreign interaction in the first half of the twentieth century is surely not limited to the history of Harbin

[13] J.H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916–1932* (Ithaca, 2002).

[14] Among these publications are R. Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000); T.R. Gottschang and D. Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor, 2000); Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904–1932* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Ronald Suleski, *Civil Government in Warlord China: Tradition, Modernization and Manchuria* (New York, 2002); M.A. Tamanoi (ed.), *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire* (Honolulu, 2005). The journal *East Asian History* published a special issue (no. 30, Dec. 2005) on 'Manchuria as a borderland'.

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and Manchuria: 'The personal relationships between people of different ethnic origin and nationalities who worked and lived together is a much understudied field in Harbin, as in the rest of China.'[15] To quote another historian, 'Above all it is the history of the interaction between Chinese and foreign sojourners in China that is the missing story of modern Sino–foreign relations'.[16] An interesting and important part of this 'missing story' can be made to emerge through a close study of Russian–Chinese relations in Harbin, and their consideration in a comparative context.

Rather than regard Harbin as *sui generis*, the site of a unique multicultural experience, comparison can be fruitfully drawn between Harbin and other cities that were the scene of Sino–foreign interaction: Shanghai and Tianjin (Tientsin), with their large foreign concessions, but also such northern ports as Qingdao in Shandong (leased to Germany in 1898) and Dalian in Liaoning (leased to Russia in 1898, when it was named Dal'nii; ceded to Japan in the end of the Russo-Japanese war in 1905), furnish useful case studies. Before 1917, Russian and Chinese people shared their daily lives also at a number of locations in the Russian Far East, in particular in the territory, north of the Amur and east of the Ussuri rivers, which had been part of the Qing empire before being annexed by Russia in 1860.[17] The problem of contact between the community of émigrés and the local population arose, after the October Revolution, in all the European centres of 'Russia abroad'.[18] The functioning of the CER as a large foreign-dominated organization in China during the twilight of the Qing, and its transformation under the republic, call to mind a comparison with the British-managed Imperial (by its new name after 1912: Chinese) Maritime Customs Service.[19]

A historical understanding of an émigré community cannot be gained in separation from the urban space in which it lived.[20] Despite deliberate

[15] S. Thøgersen, 'Competing Chinese views on the historical role of the Russians in Harbin', *Revue des études slaves*, 73, 2–3 (2001), 316.

[16] William C. Kirby, 'The internationalization of China: foreign relations at home and abroad in the republican era', in F. Wakeman, Jr, and R.L. Edmonds (eds.), *Reappraising Republican China* (Oxford, 2000), 202.

[17] An exploration of such contacts was offered in the early chapters of J.J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, 1994).

[18] See, for example, C. Andreyev and I. Savicky, *Russia Abroad: Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918–1938* (New Haven, 2004), which opens with a chapter on 'Relations between Czechs and Russians'. Outside the Russian and Chinese contexts, comparative insights into the workings of a city that served as the meeting place of different ethnic groups may be found, for example, in Mark Mazower's recent history of Thessalonica: see *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York, 2006).

[19] See D. Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854–1949* (London, 2006). Hans van de Ven focuses on the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, so as to demonstrate the historical importance of late Qing and republican China's interaction with foreign countries, in his 'Globalizing Chinese history', *History Compass*, 2 (2004), 1–5.

[20] This is a key argument in Karl Schlögel's work: in this context, see especially his monumental study of Russian-German Berlin, *Berlin Ostbahnhof Europas. Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1998). The application of the spatial approach to the

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isolationism on both sides to the inter-ethnic encounter, no full *isolation* could have existed: to get as close as possible to the full picture, we need to see it with the eyes of both Russians and Chinese. There can, accordingly, be no history of 'Russian Harbin' as distinct from that of the 'Chinese Harbin'; beyond the use of sources in the two main languages, it is essential to re-examine the conceptual framework in which Harbin has so far always been classified as part of either 'Russian' or 'Chinese' history. By the same token, one cannot write a satisfactory history of Shanghai as only a Chinese city – any more than describe it only in terms of an international metropolis.

The interaction between Russian colonialists and émigrés, members of other nationalities such as the Japanese and the Jews and migrants from the northern Chinese provinces cannot be adequately explained by recourse to the abstract notions of 'Russia and China'. Recognizing the impact that politics and international relations have upon individual lives, it would still be worthwhile to introduce a distinction between impersonal states and human agents, separating the motives of people from those of their governments.[21] The study of social, cultural and economic contacts, as they developed between 'Russians and Chinese' in Harbin over more than three decades of common life before the Japanese occupation had introduced another key player on to the scene, may allow a new understanding of the dynamics of historical change in this multi-ethnic city. Turning to Harbin as a riverine treaty port (which it became in January 1907) will reveal Harbin's own variety of the '"nonstate" Sino–foreign relations that made an enormous, if short-lived, contribution to China's modern development'.[22] This holistic perspective would also possess wider, comparative relevance.

The study of Harbin can profit from earlier research on such broad questions as the attitudes of Russian émigrés towards their non-Russian environments, and on the reactions of Chinese to foreigners in the late Qing and the republican period (1911–49). It can also shed new light on these general issues for the wider public by bringing forth the Harbin case

Harbin case has now been proposed in K. Schlögel, 'Reading time in space: mapping cultural junctions', paper presented at the conference 'Global challenge and regional response – early twentieth-century northeast China and Harbin: their social, cultural, economic and political encounters with the world', Heilongjiang University, Harbin, 19 Jun. 2009.

[21] An approach distinguishing between 'Britain' and 'Britons' (some of whom would call themselves 'Shanghailanders' – the English parallel of the Russian *kharbintsy*) is taken by R. Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900–1949* (Manchester and New York, 1999). J. Reardon-Anderson, *Reluctant Pioneers: China's Expansion Northward, 1644–1937* (Stanford, 2005), notes that the few available studies of 'China's borderlands during the Qing and Republican periods share a state-centered approach. . .while dealing only tangentially with the motives and behaviors of the Chinese who moved to and settled in these regions' (160); they 'say little or nothing about Chinese society in these border areas' (162).

[22] W.C. Kirby, 'Intercultural connections and Chinese development: external and internal spheres of modern China's foreign relations', in F. Wakeman, Jr, and Wang Xi (eds.), *China's Quest for Modernization: A Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, 1997), 217.

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which, despite growing interest, remains relatively little-known. As things stand at the present time, too much of our research on Harbin has taken the beaten track of national history: we have had Sinologists writing on the Chinese city, and Slavists writing on the Russian, as if these were really two different places. Following this track, we would replicate the approach still regrettably predominant in Chinese and Russian historiography, a tunnel vision that has discouraged the admission of outside influence on a history believed to belong to only one nation. The 'Russian' and 'Chinese' histories of Harbin were much too closely entangled to justify this approach and the division of academic labour. Few other cities in either one of these two countries could match Harbin in being natural candidates for a historical enquiry of a comparative and transnational, or cross-national, kind.[23]

Harbin in comparison

In the opening chapter of a volume of articles on cities in modern China, Joseph W. Esherick proposed their following classification: the treaty port, the capital city, the interior city, the tourist city, the railway city, the industrial city, the frontier city. He preferred to place Harbin apart from any of these categories, however, calling it and Changchun (now the provincial seat of neighbouring Jilin province; formerly the capital of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo) 'an intriguing colonial variation on [the] dual city theme'.[24] In the same volume, Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom grappled with the comparability of Shanghai: suggesting Los Angeles,[25] or 'the Hong Kong of its day', he went on to ask whether one should, at all, 'look for comparability or just emphasize uniqueness?'[26] Opting for the first choice, he then put forward 'five roads to comparison'. Continuing from here, we can note in turn that Shanghai and Harbin had more in common than the fact of their growth (in the case of Harbin, foundation) due to the arrival of Western imperialism. Attracting foreigners, both these cities drew to them

[23] Subsuming them under the broad heading of 'a comparative perspective', I will not enter here into the differences between the methods of enquiry just mentioned. Among the stimulating chapters in D. Cohen and M. O'Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York and London, 2004), cf. M. Miller, 'Comparative and cross-national history: approaches, differences, problems', which argues that, despite having different objectives, 'cross-national and comparative histories are complementary rather than competing methods' (in *ibid*., 126).

[24] J.W. Esherick, 'Modernity and nation in the Chinese city', in *idem* (ed.), *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900–1950* (Honolulu, 1999), 6. D.D. Buck, 'Railway city and national capital: two faces of the modern in Changchun', in Esherick (ed.), *Remaking the Chinese City*, 68, also applies to Harbin the concept of the 'dual city' (cf. 78), referring to a city clearly divided into Western and Chinese areas of settlement.

[25] J.N. Wasserstrom, 'Locating Old Shanghai', in Esherick (ed.), *Remaking the Chinese city*, here 195. Cf. *idem*, 'Comparing "incomparable" cities: postmodern L.A. and Old Shanghai', *Contention: Debates in Society, Culture, and Science*, 5, 3 (1996), 69–90, an essay seeking to refute 'exceptionalist' approaches to urban history.

[26] Wasserstrom, 'Locating Old Shanghai', 198.

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larger numbers of Chinese migrants.[27] The history of both gives rise to questions which can best be tackled with the help of the perspective that a comparative approach provides.

Can Harbin be considered representative of Chinese historical development, or should the city rather be conceptualized as an anomaly within the nation-state, and studied in the context of the successive foreign influences upon it?[28] Like Shanghai, Harbin was both Chinese and foreign, and, rather than an exceptional phenomenon, it was one of several centres of urban modernization in China. Shanghai, opened for foreign trade under the terms of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, is regarded as China's 'window to the West' and the uncontested national leader in the import of 'modernity' since the late nineteenth century. While there has been far less clarity on the runner-up, Shanghai was not alone. Canton (Guangzhou), the only Chinese port in which trade with Western merchants had been officially conducted before the first 'unequal treaties' led to the opening of 'treaty ports' in the aftermath of the Opium war of 1839–42, was a rapidly modernizing metropolis also in the republican period.[29] In 1932, a Western observer described Harbin and Dairen (Japanese name of Dalian, by then the second largest port in China after Shanghai) as 'far ahead' both of the old capital Beijing and of Nanjing (the capital of Nationalist China), and as upcoming rivals of Shanghai.[30]

At that time, and throughout the first half of the century, cities in China were not easily classified as either 'provincial' or 'central', as the entire country was in a state of political and social flux.[31] Rather than establish hierarchies of modernity, therefore, or measure 'modernization' only by such technical aspects of it as the year in which roads were covered and tramcars were introduced, we may probe the workability of a recent suggestion by C.A. Bayly: 'an essential part of being modern is thinking that you are modern. Modernity is an aspiration to be "up with the times". It was a *process* of emulation and borrowing.'[32]

[27] Cf. the parallel study of Shanghai and St Petersburg, as magnets for peasant migration and settings for the development of new urban identities, in S.A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge, 2008).

[28] This question is raised about Shanghai in Wen-hsin Yeh, 'Shanghai modernity: commerce and culture in a republican city', in Wakeman and Edmonds (eds.), *Reappraising Republican China*, 121–40, here 127. Already Sidney D. Gamble, in the Preface to his *Peking: A Social Survey* (London, 1921), xiii, argued that the treaty ports 'could hardly be called Chinese cities'. Problems of urban modernity are at the centre of work surveyed in Kwan Man Bun, 'Chinese urban history: four cheers', *Urban History*, 29, 2 (2002), 254–61.

[29] See, for example, V. Kit-yiu Ho, 'The limits of hatred: popular attitudes toward the West in republican Canton', *East Asian History*, 2 (Dec. 1991), 87–104.

[30] Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict*, 2nd rev. edn (New York, 1935), 260.

[31] David Strand, '"A high place is no better than a low place": the city in the making of modern China', in Wen-hsin Yeh (ed.), *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley, 2000), at 100–1.

[32] C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004), 10 (emphasis in the original).

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In this sense, we could regard Harbin as a city composed of people who (differently, and at different times) 'thought that they were modern'. Tsarist Russia was moving into Manchuria not merely in order to facilitate the railway connection between Chita and Vladivostok, or gain access to Chinese markets; it was also justifying its policy in ideological terms. If one may doubt how relevant ideas on Russia's historical mission in Asia were to the Russian settlers who arrived in Harbin, and those of them who settled along the stations of the CER, their move was 'modern' in itself. It was a relocation, not of necessity but of choice, by persons representing a much wider range of their home society than the predominantly merchant-missionary contingent of Westerners in China. Many among them were motivated by the belief that a period of life and work in Manchuria held brighter prospects than the more traditional paths which life within Russian borders could offer.[33]

In Manchuria, these migrants were faced by Chinese who were migrants too: peasants, who had come from the impoverished northern provinces, Shandong and Hebei, in search of opportunity in the newly developed region. 'Modernity' was not a part of their vocabulary, and their decision to leave their native place was mostly made collectively, rather than individually.[34] Arriving in Harbin, they encountered an urban landscape unlike anything they had ever seen; settling in the city, they challenged, and in the course of time domesticated, its 'foreign air'. Their migration was to count as one of the largest human movements in modern history and would make Manchuria, not only Harbin, Chinese.

Neither side had counted on staying in Manchuria, however, at the time of coming there, and the mentality of the temporary sojourner was thus something that Russians and Chinese shared. They also shared a wish well-familiar from the global history of emigration: to recreate the old world in the new. Much like the English in Shanghai, Russians in Harbin did their best to construct a Russian town, complete with every attribute familiar to them from their home country. In so doing, they transformed the foreign region in which they settled. The Chinese settlers went to even more remarkable lengths to transplant Shandong villages to the Manchurian landscape, but those of them who reached Harbin were confronted with architectural and technological modernity, as well as with alien codes of behaviour, in a sudden shock that must have been similar to the experiences of those, mostly southern, migrants who flocked to Shanghai.

Following the end of the civil war in Russia in 1922, Harbin underwent a basic change, as from a colonial headquarters and centre of the armed White resistance in the Far East it metamorphosed into an emigration

[33] A very useful analysis of three generations of Russians in Manchuria is Olga Bakich, 'Emigré identity: the case of Harbin', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 99, 1 (2000), 51–73.
[34] See Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*.

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haven. The people who arrived in Harbin from Russia in the post-revolutionary years were escaping a new form of socialist modernity, the onset of which they rejected. In the temporary home that they found in Harbin they therefore strove to preserve the old cultural and religious world then rapidly being demolished in the Soviet Union. By contrast, growing numbers of Chinese by the 1920s were inclined to regard Manchuria as their long-term abode. Influenced by rising anti-imperialism and nationalism in China, they were also made more aware of belonging to a country, rather than only to a region.[35]

Now the forward-looking side in their relationship with the Russians, and long the clear majority in Harbin, the Chinese proceeded to take over the city administration in 1926. Even in these years, however, and even to a greater extent in this nationalist age than at the time when Russian authority in Harbin was maintained, the perceived channel to modernity for some young Chinese was education in Russian-established institutions, in which Russian teachers still taught. Such channels were not offered by the visible symbols of Chineseness, which the warlord regimes of General Zhang Zuolin and (after 1928) his son Zhang Xueliang attempted to promote in Harbin in the form of a Buddhist and a Confucian temple.[36] The preference for pragmatic over ideological considerations manifested itself after the invasion of Harbin by Japanese forces in 1932: the Chinese population of the city proved no different from the rest of the north-east in being, by and large, ready to work with and for the new power,[37] which founded the 'state of Manchukuo' to hold the region firmly under its control until the end of World War II.

Some of the many comparative contexts, in which the Harbin case may be placed, have already been indicated. We have sketched out the lines along which a fuller comparison of Harbin with Shanghai, and other treaty ports in China, could be conducted.[38] Turning now to a central aspect of life in Harbin, we shall attempt to throw into comparative relief a phenomenon, which otherwise might be interpreted in stereotyped fashion: the ethnic separation of populations that gave Harbin the character of 'a dual city'.

The main town of Harbin in the 1900s consisted of three districts: Pristan' (The Wharf; Chinese name Daoli), Novyi gorod (New Town; Nangang) and Staryi gorod (Old Town; Xiangfang). In that first decade of Harbin's

[35] See Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*.

[36] Describing these initiatives in detail, Carter's ch. 5, 'A Chinese place', *ibid*., takes them too much at face value. Nationalist feeling may have been less important in the construction of the temples (from 1924 to 1929) than had been political calculation, and competition between two successive Chinese administrators.

[37] Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth*, esp. chs. 3 and 4.

[38] This comparison need not be limited to ports within a single country: cf. the special issue on port cities in *Comparativ*, 17, 2 (2007); and Leonard Blussé, *Visible Cities: Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the Coming of the Americans* (Cambridge, MA, 2008). Contemporary Chinese cities are examined in comparison with cities across the world in J.R. Logan (ed.), *Urban China in Transition* (Oxford, 2008).

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existence, the only Chinese permitted to reside in the main town were those who owned shops there.[39] The majority of the Chinese population therefore lived in Fujiadian (also called Daowai), then still a satellite town located beyond the railway line, but within walking distance from the Russian-dominated city. By the time of Harbin's construction, ethnic segregation was a policy that municipal authorities in the Russian Far East had long sought to implement, though it was also one they had found frustratingly difficult to realize.[40] In the older possessions of the Russian empire, the same standard was maintained in urban centres in Central Asia: in late nineteenth-century Tashkent, for example, a canal split between the native and Russian sections (just as the railway line separated Fujiadian and Harbin) and the native inhabitants commuted daily to the Russian town.[41]

As new towns, Harbin and Dal'nii provided an opportunity for putting segregational principles into practice also on Manchurian soil. The creation of separate living environments for the Russian and Chinese populations was implemented in Dal'nii (Dalian) before its loss to the Japanese and evacuation of the city's Russian community.[42] In Harbin, labour migration into Pristan'/Daoli had proved impossible to regulate, and the settlement of streets in this riverside quarter by Chinese impossible to prevent, already by 1910. Segregation thereafter remained largely in place, but was a matter of social choice and economic reality (Chinese workers moving into Daoli could not have afforded the costs of living in Nangang) rather than administrative dictate.

Where attempts at the segregation of populations were stricter and more successful, they have been described as 'urban apartheid'; such harsher segregation policies in the British and French colonies, and in South Africa,

[39] Quested, *'Matey' Imperialists?*, 102; Clausen and Thøgersen, *The Making of a Chinese City*, 31. The Chinese names of these city districts all have meanings of their own, and are not translations of the Russian.

[40] See the excellent recent study by E.I. Nesterova, *Russkaia administratsiia i kitaiskie migranty na Iuge Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii (Vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX vv.)* (The Russian administration and Chinese migrants in the south of the Russian Far East, late nineteenth – early twentieth century) (Vladivostok, 2004).

[41] J. Sahadeo, 'Epidemic and empire: ethnicity, class, and "civilization" in the 1892 Tashkent cholera riot', *Slavic Review*, 64, 1 (2005), 117–39, at 117. The continuity between Harbin city planning and earlier Russian urban experience in Asia is often ignored, but realization of it helps make Harbin less 'unique' than commonly claimed: thus the name of its best-known street, Kitaiskaia ulitsa (Chinese Street), was familiar from several Siberian and Far Eastern cities. Even Harbin's 'Nakhalovka' (from the Russian *nakhal'stvo*, brazenness) was a generic name for town quarters settled without legal permission; see, for example, R.G. Suny, 'Tiflis: crucible of ethnic politics, 1860–1905', in M.F. Hamm (ed.), *The City in Late Imperial Russia* (Bloomington, 1986), here 254.

[42] This division of the city was noticed and described by visitors before the Russo-Japanese war: see P. Labbé, *Les Russes en Extrême-Orient* (Paris, 1904), 206–8; H.M.J.A. Enselme and É.A.H. de Bouillane de Lacoste, *A travers la Mandschourie. Le chemin de fer de l'est chinois* (Paris, 1903), 47.

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have been the subject of many studies.[43] In occupied Manchuria in the 1930s, the Japanese would also isolate themselves, by means of 'green belts', from the native Chinese population, as part of their planning of new Changchun, capital of Manchukuo.[44]

The examples above were all drawn from situations in which the foreigner and the native could be clearly told apart; with the exception of the Japanese occupants, the foreigners were all Caucasian intruders into already populated Asian cities. Let us turn, however, to the history of the region with which we are concerned. Rather than being a particular feature of treaty-port life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ethnic segregation had a history of its own in northern China, where it was not connected to Western presence: '(I)n many cities in northern China over many centuries, different nationalities lived in their own districts.' Thus in the first capital of the Manchus in Manchuria before their conquest of China, Shenyang (whose Manchu name, Mukden, is still known today for being revived by the Japanese in the 1930s), the inner city was reserved for Manchus and the outer for Chinese. The same policy was then maintained by the triumphant Qing dynasty in Beijing.[45] Separation between bannermen (members of the 'banners', the military and administrative units encompassing both Manchus and the Han Chinese who joined them) and commoners was the cornerstone of the Qing land policy in its original homeland from the late seventeenth century.[46] Until as late as 1860, Manchuria (and the frontier province of Heilongjiang – until 1904) remained officially closed for Han settlement.[47]

By looking at Harbin from several comparative perspectives (Russian and Chinese urban history and imperial expansion, the framework of urban policy in multi-ethnic environments), we arrive at a conclusion different from the one we might have reached by eschewing comparison and focusing only on information from the Harbin scene as furnished to us by sources in Chinese or in Russian. Comparison, it should be added, is not the same as generalization; and comparative thinking not in any way incompatible with attention to the particular detail, such as the biographies of individuals or the history of local institutions. But the understanding

[43] Cf. O. Georg, 'From Hill Station (Freetown) to downtown Conakry (First Ward): comparing French and British approaches to segregation in colonial cities at the beginning of the twentieth century', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 32, 1 (1998), 1–31.

[44] Qinghua Guo, 'Changchun: unfinished capital planning of Manzhouguo, 1932–42', *Urban History*, 31, 1 (May 2004), 100–17, here 108.

[45] Qinghua Guo, 'Shenyang: the Manchurian ideal capital city and imperial palace, 1625–43', *Urban History*, 27, 3 (2000), 344–59, quote on 355. As early as in 1644, the first year of their rule over China, 'the Qing ordered that the conquerors live apart from conquered subjects': see E. Rawski, 'The Qing Empire during the Qianlong reign', in J.A. Millward *et al*. (eds.), *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (London, 2004), 16. An edict banning Han Chinese residence in the Inner City of Beijing was issued in 1648.

[46] C.M. Isett, 'Village regulation of property and the social basis for the transformation of Qing Manchuria', *Late Imperial China*, 25, 1 (2004), 124–86, here 135.

[47] See R.H.G. Lee, *The Manchurian Frontier in Ch'ing History* (Cambridge, MA, 1970).

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of local details has much to gain from their juxtaposition with other cases, within and across national borders.[48] The situation which obtained in Harbin, at first through Russian policy but very soon as the result of choices made by the two main communities in the city, was not new to either side, and suited both. Russians certainly expected to live separately from Asians. Northern Chinese were familiar with ethnically separate districts within their major urban centres. While most of the Chinese with whom the Russians came into contact in Manchuria were villagers with no prior experience of city life, for these social groups in China the notion of living in proximity to foreigners was particularly alien.

Bachelor migrants like them, who had come to North America from villages in southern China, settled there in Chinatowns that were not only evidence of the racial discrimination they suffered, but also reflected their social cohesion and unwillingness to give up, through assimilation, the way of life which had been theirs at home. In Harbin, few of the Chinese peasants who had arrived in the city in search of work would have had any inclination to develop contacts with the Westerners by settling in their midst, although the proportions were reversed: it was rather the Russians who inhabited a Chinatown of sorts, an imagined 'Russian town' into which a growingly independent Chinese metropolis made constant intrusion.

Urban segregation, when not enforced by a discriminatory order, is not necessarily negative in so far as it allows communities the freedom to preserve their favoured way of living. For all the internal divisions within them, this isolation from each other was precisely what the majority of Russians and Chinese in Harbin preferred, although, as has been argued above, historians will be ill-advised to ignore the web of cross-ethnic interaction that still enabled Harbin to function as one city. What could have been the evolution course of an urban society such as this? A scholar of 'mixed cities' has identified five possible scenarios: assimilation, pluralism, segmentation, polarization, cleansing.[49] The existence span of the ethnically mixed Russian-Chinese city of Harbin was much too short, and the intervention of political factors into social life too frequent, for the mutual apprehensions of its inhabitants to give way to something like the first two of these scenarios. Segmentation would probably be the most appropriate term to characterize Harbin society in that period. Then, during the Japanese occupation begun in 1932, a third actor assumed the

[48] Cf. P. Baldwin, 'Comparing and generalizing: why all history is comparative, yet no history is sociology', in Cohen and O'Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History*, 1–22, esp. 11.

[49] F.W. Boal, 'Questions from a frontier city', paper presented at the conference 'Together but apart: ethnically mixed cities – a comparative approach', Tel Aviv University, Israel, 10 Nov. 2004. The 'frontier city' was Belfast, where, as of 2001, 75 per cent of the population lived in segregated (Protestant or Catholic) areas rather than in mixed neighbourhoods, a ratio higher than ever before in the city's history. Cf. F.W. Boal, 'Belfast: walls within', *Political Geography*, 21 (2002), 687–94.

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role of the immediate and threatening 'other' for the city's Russian and Chinese populations.

When the Soviet Red Army inflicted on Japan in Manchuria the last defeats of World War II, hastening Japan's expulsion from the region as from the whole of China, it came to hold power in Harbin for eight months from August 1945 to April 1946. These months were also used for a Soviet cleansing operation, aimed at 'White Russians' and at suspected collaborators of the Japanese. Under the Communist rule, which spread out from Manchuria in 1946 to establish itself over the rest of the country, Russians were back in Harbin as 'Soviet experts' during the 1950s, but by the end of that decade these new arrivals had departed from China in the wake of the Sino–Soviet rift. So did all but a tiny group among the Russian émigrés in the city. The xenophobic Cultural Revolution, which erupted in 1966, left this last handful of foreigners in Harbin bruised and humiliated. It also caused heavy damage to the visible traces of the city's Russian past, its churches and cemeteries.

Efforts to restore or rebuild what was then destroyed were launched in Harbin (amid more destruction, now due to a building boom) in the 1990s,[50] while the latest initiative with regard to the Russian architectural heritage has been the construction of a theme park. The new Russian Culture Gardens, in which replicas of the Harbin cityscape of the 1900s would be displayed, complete with wooden churches and onion domes, were scheduled to open in summer 2009 and expected to draw 300,000 tourists every year.[51] An ethnically homogeneous Chinese city since the 1960s, Harbin today is also a city, which the national course of opening policies, on the one hand, and local processes, on the other, have set on a path of re-evaluating seemingly settled questions of its history and identity.

[50] See Yukiko Koga, '"The atmosphere of a foreign country": Harbin's architectural inheritance', in A.M. Cronin and K. Hetherington (eds.), *Consuming the Entrepreneurial City: Image, Memory, Spectacle* (New York and London, 2008), 221–53.

[51] Kanglei Wang, 'When replicas turn real: China reconstructs its Russian past', *The Yale Globalist*, 31 Oct. 2008. At this writing, the gardens have not yet opened to the public. For providing additional information on this and other recent ventures of the Harbin memory industry, I thank Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan of the School of Western Studies, Heilongjiang University.

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