



## **Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program**

### **Research Report**

*The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.*

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#### **Race, Modernity, and the Making of Russia's Europe in Harbin, 1898-1924**

##### **Topic of Research**

My research topic concerns the formation of Russian identity in the Russian Far East from 1895 to 1924. In 1895, the construction of the Russian state-financed Chinese Eastern Railroad (CER) began. The CER -- which passed through the Chinese territory of Manchuria to tie the Siberian Railroad to Vladivostok -- marked the beginning of assertive tsarist policies aiming to consolidate Russia's far eastern territories and extend Russian control into Manchuria. By 1914, the impact of these policies was reflected, in part, in the steady increase of migrants from European Russia; in the decrease of new Chinese and Korean settlements in the Russian Far East; and in the growth of Russian cities in this region, especially the city of Harbin in Manchuria. The fall of the tsarist state following the 1917 Revolution slowed the momentum of Russian appropriation of the Far East, and opened up opportunities for the Chinese to challenge Russian presence in Manchuria through, for example, the overturning of Russian extraterritorial rights and successive efforts to take over the Russian-run CER. Until 1924, when the Soviet state reasserted Russian rights over the CER, the post-1917 period in both Manchuria and the border regions of the Russian Far East saw a reversal of the previously established social order between the Chinese and the Russians at various sites of contestation for control and power, such as the railway line of the CER and the city of Harbin.

My project will trace the ways in which Russian identity at the empire's far eastern frontier was shaped by ideals of colonial expansion, by images of Europe and Asia, and by Russian interaction with the Chinese and Koreans in the region -- who were identified by the tsarist state as both a threat and a necessity to Russian dominance in the Far East. My topic will further explore whether this identity -- founded on the fusion of

empire-building and frontier development -- survived into the period of Soviet rule, and whether it formed a common thread between tsarist and Soviet regimes.

I would like to note that while the issues I will examine remain the same, the geographical scope of my project has expanded from my original focus on the Manchurian city of Harbin to one that encompasses not only northern Manchuria, but also the border regions of the Russian Far East. This change resulted from my work in the archives of St. Petersburg and Moscow, which convinced me that the importance of Harbin as a center of Manchuria can be better understood through a deeper awareness of the parallel development of the Russian Far East, to which it was economically and culturally tied. Harbin remains a central site of investigation for my topic, but I have modified my project to give more weight to the broader regional context.

### **Contribution to the Field**

While some work has been done on the Russian Far East, the question of how the Russian Far East became russianized has not yet been raised. In asking this question, my project aims to study how the Russian identity that emerged at the far eastern frontier was constructed and inculcated, who became bearers of this identity, and how this identity shaped Russian policy makers' conceptions of the criteria for defining the administrative and legal category of the Russian subject.

My project will explore the relationship between Russian visions of imperial expansion in the Far East and a new-found concern with the "racial" integrity of Russians in far eastern regions – a concern inspired by the fear that newly annexed Russian territory would be overrun by the "yellow race." While the consensus in Russian historiography is that "race" – defined as a biological model of understanding difference between social groups – exerts little influence in Russian conceptions of the "other," I propose to show otherwise. In addition, I will not only consider "race" in a biological sense, but will also redefine the term to include conceptions of cultural essentialism. Recasting "race" in this way will allow me to capture -- whether or not the term "race" is explicitly employed – racialized constructions of difference informed by Russian self-perception as European and modern, in opposition to notions of backwardness symbolized by Asia.

By extending the period of my investigation past 1917, I will be able to trace the ways in which -- with the decline of the economic and political status of Russians in the Far East and Manchuria following the fall of the tsarist state -- racial categories were destabilized and the "Europeanness" of Russians in the region was called into question.

### **Summary of Approach and Research Methodology**

My research follows four principle themes. The first deals with Russian efforts to populate and develop the Russian Far East and focuses on tsarist policies to prevent Chinese and Korean migration to Russia. This section will examine Russian conceptions of the "yellow race," a term often employed to refer to Chinese and Koreans, and the ways in which "race" became a useful category for policy makers. It will also consider the conflicting pull between, on the one hand, the labor requirements of frontier development and the growth of a market economy, and, on the other, Russian ambivalence about both market competition and the increased mobility of Chinese and Korean migrants. This ambivalence was expressed in the implementation of immigration regulations directed against Chinese and Koreans, and in the way Russian publications linked contagion to the mobility of migrants during the outbreak of the plague in Manchuria in 1910 along the CER line. Both of these cases provide a key to the way Russianness was delineated. For this section, I will study tsarist policies

concerning Chinese and Koreans in the border region of the Russian Far East, as revealed in documents including immigration statutes, the writings of policy advocates, petitions to the tsarist government from Russian enterprises requesting permission to hire Chinese and Korean laborers, and published reports and official correspondence concerning the plague on the CER line.

The second theme concerns the interconnection between Russian ethnography -- the study of the other -- and Russian pedagogy, or, that is, theories concerning the education of Russians. It will follow the founding visions and the activities of institutions dedicated to both the education of Russians growing up on the frontier and the promotion of ethnographic and linguistic knowledge of the east. My investigation of these institutions will focus on Russian ethnographic studies of Asians; on Russian representations of what is Russian, expressed through trade exhibitions and ethnographic museums; and on Russian ideas of self-cultivation and national identity, reflected in educational curricula and pedagogical discussions. The source material for this section consists of the journals of the Society of Russian Orientalists (founded in Harbin in 1909), the Society for the Study of Manchuria (founded in 1922), and the Russian Pedagogical Society (based in Harbin); school catalogues of and official communications on the Eastern Institute in Vladivostok and the Harbin trade school; and Russian official and popular publications on the land and people of the Far East.

Engaging the issues of colonialism and decolonization, the third theme concerns the way in which the erosion of the two forms of tsarist power in Manchuria -- the ruble and police control -- changed economic and social relations between the Russians and the Chinese after 1917, and how these changes influenced perceptions of Russians' status as colonizers and Europeans. Russian efforts to shore up its value -- for example, discouraging withdrawals from the major Russian bank in Manchuria -- prompted protests and countermeasures by Chinese merchants, and a Russian attempt to reform the ruble was halted by objections from Chinese, Japanese, and European commercial interests in the region. As for Russian police power, the disintegration of the tsarist military force and the growing presence of Chinese troops led to numerous clashes between Chinese soldiers and Russian civilians, described by Russians as incidents of Chinese "insubordination." The shift in power relations between Russians and Chinese, reflected in part in these incidents, was formalized by the Chinese republican government's revocation of Russian extraterritoriality in 1920, and by Chinese assumption of police authority in Harbin. I will examine the disputes over the ruble and conflicts over the jurisdiction of Russians and Chinese in the context of rising Chinese claims for control over Manchuria. Sources for this section will include reports from Russian consulates in Manchuria, articles in the Russian journals mentioned above, and items in the popular press in Russian and other languages.

The building of Harbin, and the production of urban space -- in a socially stratified and ethnically divided city shared by Russians and Chinese inhabitants -- will be my final theme. I will explore sites ranging from Russian ceremonial public spaces to the segregated Chinese district to understand how Harbin's spatial organization reflected both Russian and Chinese conceptions of social order, and how this order was challenged and defended, particularly after 1917. In this investigation, attention will be paid to the use of various symbols in the lexicon of self-representation, both Russian and Chinese, with reference to signs of modernity such as the railroad and European architecture, and of tradition, such as orthodox churches and Confucian temples. In addition, the use of legal devices, such as zoning laws and building codes, and

administrative measures, such as those concerning land grant and sanitation will also be studied. This material I hope to collect during my coming trip to China.

### **List of research sites:**

#### 1. St. Petersburg:

Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii archive (RGIA): f. 323 - Chinese Eastern Railroad;

f. 391 - Resettlement Department of the Ministry of Interior; f. 560 - Ministry of Finance; f. 632 - Russo-Chinese Bank; f. 630 - Russo-Asiatic Bank.

Rossiiskaia Natsional'naia Biblioteka (RNB): policy advocacy essays and Duma speeches on the Russian Far East and the CER; CER publication on the plague in Harbin; and popular pamphlets on the far eastern frontier.

Biblioteka Akademii Nauk (BAN): journals of ethnographic, pedagogical and other professional societies in Harbin and the Russian Far East from 1910s to 1920s; and popular ethnographic works on Manchuria.

#### 2. Moscow:

Archiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii (AVPRI): f. 301, o. 818/1-2 - Consulate General in Harbin; f. 304, o. 756 - Consulate in Tsitsikhar; f. 327, o. 579 - Diplomatic Section of the Priamur General Governorship.

Gosudarstvennyi archive Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF): f. 818 - G.A. Planson; f. 102 - Police Department.

Gosudarstvennaia publichnaia istoricheskaia biblioteka (GPIB): histories of the CER, published 1908, 1914; CER publications in Harbin, 1920s; yearbook of primary education at CER, 1916.

The library of Institut nauchnoi informatsii po obshchestvennym naukam (INION): business directory of Harbin, 1925.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

The russification of the Russian Far East and Russian colonization of Manchuria were achieved by a combination of state policies aimed at consolidating the rule of the Russian empire and social and cultural practices informed by ideas of Europe's mission in Asia. In the process of russifying and colonizing this region, Russians acquired a frontier experience that helped shape the definition of Russianness. In late-imperial European Russia, conceptions of Russian identity often referred to the ethnicity of ethnic Russians, and to religion and autocracy as the basis of this identity. As such, it was not an identity shared by all subjects of the multinational Russian empire. I argue that in the Russian Far East and Manchuria, Russianness took on meanings related to the identification of Russians as the modernizers of the empire's Asian frontier and as the carriers of European values and habits. This conception offered the possibility of a more inclusive identity, one that could be ascribed to ethnic European non-Russian subjects of the empire, as it shifted the emphasis from religion and ethnicity to language and culture. On the other hand, the cohesiveness of this identity was dependant on its boundedness, which, in this case, meant the differentiation of Russians from the "yellow race." This type of differentiation clarified the limit, for the time and place my project investigates, of the potentially inclusive idea of the empire's multinationality.

### **Future Research Agendas**

My next project will be to study Russian ethnographic, geographic, and orientalist institutions whose work concerns the Far East, and to examine how these institutions evolved during the transition from the late imperial era to the early Soviet period, and how they incorporated Soviet ideology.

