

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

CHIASSON, Blaine R — *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918–29*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010. Pp. x, 285.

Although the place name Harbin is absent from its title, this is the third monograph in English to address the history of the city that the Russians built in Manchuria (Northeastern China) as the headquarters of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), the extension of the Transsiberian railway which passed through Chinese territory. The previous two monographs told us, respectively, about the Russian city from its foundation to the outbreak of the First World War (David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898–1914*, 1999), and the Chinese city from the mid-1910s up to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria (James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916–1932*, 2002). Now Blaine Chiasson, in the book version of a dissertation originally submitted to Toronto University in 2002 with the subtitle *The Chinese Takeover of Russian Harbin, 1920–1932*, offers us a history of a short intervening period, eleven years in all. His time span reflects his main interest: the administrative functioning of the Special District of the Three Eastern Provinces, created by Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin in 1920.

It is a useful book on that little-studied subject, and one that fills gaps in the existing scholarly literature. Chiasson gives us important information about the original structure of the Harbin municipality (in chap. 2), the reorganization of the police force in the city in the 1920s (in chap. 4, the best in the book), and the drawn-out process by which the Zhang Zuolin regime finally took over the municipal government of Harbin in 1926 (in chap. 7). The author's main argument is that the Special District maintained an attitude towards the Russian émigrés that was essentially pragmatic (the word is frequently repeated) rather than nationalist in its motivation. Indeed, the real adversary of the warlord regime in northern Manchuria was the Soviet Union rather than the quondam representatives of the tsarist empire, who by the 1920s were rapidly evolving into stateless refugees, and the Special District became adept in using the latter against the former. One may question, however, the rationale of Chiasson's persistent use of the term "concession" to describe Russian Harbin before 1917, even though he admits

that the CER zone was “legally, not a concession at all” (cf. 4, Introduction), as well as his description of the city as “founded by two countries” (p. 2) and his portrayal of Russians and Chinese, incongruously, as the concession’s “two founding peoples” (pp. 3, 16, 37).

A solid enough history of an “administrative experiment” (the aim of the author’s study, as he defines it on p. 2), this book, drawing mainly on consular reports and the contemporary daily press, cannot pretend to be any more than that; when the author does venture into comparisons and generalizations, the result is hardly convincing. Thus, calling Harbin in the Introduction “the only city in the world in which communities representing Imperial Russia and the USSR worked and lived closely together” (p. 6), he forgets about Berlin in the 1920s; when he makes the far-reaching claim that “the population of the CER concession was the most highly educated in the former Russian Empire” (p. 205), he offers no data to substantiate it; surely, he lets his enthusiasm for Harbin get out of hand when claiming, in a succession of superlatives for which he offers no supporting evidence, that the Harbin Polytechnic “came to be known as China’s best technical university” (p. 200), that the CER theatre “was considered the best in China” (p. 211) and that Harbin as a whole was “one of China’s most modern, and certainly its most multi-ethnic, city” (p. 221).

In the Conclusion, attempts to extend the findings of an administrative history to the broader field of social history produce statements like this one: “most of the Chinese officials whose names appear in this study spoke Russian, and some had Russian wives” (p. 219). This is seriously misleading: command of Russian was limited to persons who had lived in Russia or received Russian education in China, while the nearest the book ever comes to providing an example of Chinese-Russian intermarriage is through the mention of the colourful Yang Zhuo, a member of the CER supervisory board until his execution on the orders of Zhang Zuolin. His biography was more complex than presented here (p. 113): Yang Zhuo (1887–1927) lived in Harbin with his two wives, a Manchu and a Chinese, raising three children, including a son he had fathered with a Russian woman.

Too many mistakes in *Administering the Colonizer* result from carelessness and the apparent absence of a copy editor: to give only one example, the beginning years in the subtitle of David Wolff’s book (1898–1914) appear as “1989” in the bibliography and in the first endnote to chaps. 2 and 6; as “1848” when given as the source of the map reproduced on p. 17, and as “1998” in n. 45 to chap. 1. Sloppiness with dates causes some confusion about the creation of the Special District: as the author correctly says on p. 159, it was inaugurated on 31 October 1920, but on p. 77 he had said “28 December 1920”, and on two earlier occasions he had given “1921” (pp. 48, 53). It is more disturbing to be told that the Songhua River “flows past Harbin to connect to the Assuri [sic] and flow to Vladivostok” (p. 110; rather than to the Ussuri, it connects to the Amur and flows with it to Khabarovsk). “Jehu” is not a “nickname for an elderly Russian man”, as the author glosses it in a note to an (inexact) quotation from a 1929 article on Harbin in *Harper’s Magazine*, but an old English word to

describe a fast-driving coachman. Neither is “Hoocha,” in one of the mottoes of the book, a “Russian nickname for a Chinese coolie”: the garbled transliteration, found in another English-language source, must refer to *khodia*, a term with a rich and interesting history.

It is regrettable to have to count numerous errors and misspellings, above all in Russian words and titles, and to notice an uncertain use of transcription from the Chinese. Had the author been able or willing to use some of the Russian-language publications on Harbin and Manchuria that have been coming out in a steady stream since the 1990s, he would have found out more about the failed revolution in Harbin in 1917 (on which he touches in chap. 3), or the history of Harbin education (the subject of chap. 8). Chinese studies of Harbin history are also under-used in this work and it is, finally, unacceptable for a book published in 2010 to contain no references to research dating after 2002.

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ENYEART, John — *The Quest for “Just and Pure Law”: Rocky Mountain Workers and American Social Democracy, 1870–1924*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv, 311.

Of all of the fields and sub-fields of American history, U.S. labour history might be the most tangled and contentious. One reason for this is America’s self-congratulatory claims of exceptionalism, and of being a society of haves and soon-will-haves. Another reason is the confusion over the meaning of terms—socialism, radicalism, syndicalism, social democracy, cooperative commonwealth, and so on. Ideological predispositions of many labour historians also contribute to the tensions and complexities of the field. Scholars often presuppose the existence of a worker class consciousness—even a revolutionary class-consciousness—and as a result assign preconceived historical roles and lines to be read in the acting out of those roles. There is great mischief in the belief that working people should have wanted to take over the means of production—preferably violently—and that when they did not, it was because something artificial, almost contrary to nature, had interfered with their natural instincts. In sum, the ghosts of Marx and Sombart still stalk the land of the labour historians.

One of the strengths of John Enyeart’s book is that he avoids these traps; he does not overly concern himself with theories of working-class history. In a revealing sentence more than two-thirds of the way through his book he writes that his primary purpose was to discover “what workers actually wanted” (p. 200), not to frame an interpretation around what he and other historians may have wanted them to want. For the most part, he was true to his word. There are a few times when Enyeart seems really to *want* his Rocky Mountain workers to be “socialists.” How else might one explain the author’s definitions of both “social democracy” and socialism—definitions so broad that even the purely ameliorative aspects of