

# **Borders in Daily Life and the Press: Harbin's Russian and Chinese Newspapers in Early Twentieth Century**

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## **RESÜMEE**

Russische und chinesische Zeitungen, die in der multikulturellen Stadt Harbin zwischen 1900 und 1932 erschienen, stehen im Zentrum dieses Beitrags. Eine vergleichende Analyse von russischen und chinesischen Presseorganen soll Aufschluss darüber geben, wie die unterschiedlichen Bevölkerungsgruppen Grenzziehungen zwischen den Kulturen und grenzüberschreitende Phänomene im Alltag der mandschurischen Stadt kommunizierten. Im Mittelpunkt dieser Studie steht die Frage, wie sich Russen und Chinesen in einer kulturellen Kontaktzone wie Harbin gegenseitig wahrnahmen und wie sie in einem von konkurrierenden Herrschaftsansprüchen, Werten und Lebensentwürfen bestimmten Raum Grenzen aller Art konzeptualisierten. Exemplarisch werden solche Prozesse mit Blick auf „Epidemien“, vor allem hinsichtlich der verheerenden Pestepidemie von 1910/11, und „Wirtschaft“ untersucht. Beide Untersuchungsbereiche waren von umfassenden Interaktionen und Verflechtungen beider Bevölkerungsgruppen sowie von Konkurrenzsituationen und Konflikten geprägt. Es zeigt sich, dass es zwar durchaus stereotype Bilder vom anderen gab, dass diese wechselseitigen Wahrnehmungen aber keineswegs statisch waren und in spezifischen Kontexten durchaus unterschiedlich, sogar widersprüchlich ausfielen. Interessant ist daher mit Blick auf bestimmte diskursive Praktiken nicht nur die Frage, was in welcher Weise kommuniziert wurde, sondern auch die Frage danach, welche Bereiche des gemeinsamen Alltags nicht thematisiert wurden. Das multilinguale Pressewesen war Ausdruck der sozioökonomischen und kulturellen Diversität der kosmopolitischen Stadt Harbin. Mehrere Dutzend Zeitungen und Zeitschriften vor allem in russischer, chinesischer, japanischer und englischer Sprache, die in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts erschienen – in der Zeit von 1917 bis 1932 weitgehend unbehelligt von Zensur –, bilden einen unikalen Quellenbestand für Untersuchungen über kulturelle Identitätsbildungen sowie Eigen- und Fremdwahrnehmungen von Bevölkerungsgruppen in multikulturellen Gesellschaften.

Harbin was a cosmopolitan city for much of its history until the Second World War. Inhabited by Chinese (both Manchu people and Han Chinese), Russians, Japanese, Jews and Poles, as well as peoples of many other nationalities, Harbin emerged as a vibrant border town among three empires – China, Russia, and Japan. Situated in northern Manchuria along the tracks of the Chinese Eastern Railway, which stretched from Ulan-Ude and Chita via the Russian-Chinese border cities of Zabaikal'sk and Manzhouli across Manchuria to Beijing, Harbin was founded by Russians in 1898 in the course of their economic expansion in the Far East. The town served as a railway depot and administrative centre of the Russian Chinese Eastern Railway (CER in the following).<sup>1</sup> It was a strategic commercial and military base for all its rulers: first the Russians, then Chinese, and ultimately the Japanese, who took over the city in 1932. Harbin, as the hub of the Chinese Eastern Railway, attracted huge volume of regional and international trade unsurpassed by any other cities in Northeast China for many years.

The first generation of newspapers in Harbin was thus born under this historical context. Inherently multilingual, numerous papers in Russian, Chinese, Japanese, English, and other languages were printed and circulated freely throughout Manchuria and beyond. As Russian and Chinese newspapers in Harbin went through different phases of development, they both faced certain level of censorship before 1917, enjoyed more freedom afterwards. These newspapers constitute a unique corpus of primary sources on the history of Harbin and Manchuria in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the newspapers serve as an excellent source for understanding predominant discourses and opinions of all sorts, including the local interpretation of “border” and relationship between Chinese and Russian<sup>2</sup> populations in Harbin. The editorials offer local, sometimes explicit, opinions about the other cultures or ethnicities. The news coverage reflects day-to-day intercultural relations. Even the advertisements provide historians material in studying culture- or nation-based marketing.

Drawing on Russian and Chinese newspapers printed in Harbin between 1900 and 1932, this paper traces the city's print media and investigates how different communities interpreted the idea of border and sovereignty. While Harbin has been reconstructed as a purely Chinese city in official Communist historiography,<sup>3</sup> this paper argues that the

1 Some of the notable works treating the early history of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) and Harbin include: Olga M. Bakich, *A Russian City in China: Harbin before 1917*, in: *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 28 (1986) 2, pp. 129-48; idem, *Charbin: „Russland jenseits der Grenzen“ in Fernost*, in: Karl Schlögel (ed.), *Der Große Exodus. Die Russische Emigration und ihre Zentren 1917 bis 1941*, München 1994, pp. 304-28; Olga M. Bakich, *Origins of the Russian Community on the Chinese Eastern Railway*, in: *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 27 (1985) 1, pp.1-14; James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin. Nationalism in an International City, 1916–1932*, Ithaca 2002; Evgenii Kh. Nilus, *Kitaiskaia Vostochnaia Zheleznaiia Doroga: Istoricheskii Ocherk, 1896–1923*, Harbin 1923; Rosemary K. I. Quested, *“Matey” Imperialists? – The Tsarist Russians in Manchuria 1895–1917*, Hongkong 1982; Boris A. Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria (1892–1906)*, trans. Susan Wilbur Jones, Ann Arbor 1952; E. P. Taskina (ed.), *Russkii Kharbin, Moscow 2005*; David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station. The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898–1914*, Stanford 1999.

2 “Russian” or the “Russians” means in this context both ethnic Russians as well as members of many other nationalities who immigrated to Harbin from the Russian Empire.

3 See Søren Clausen/Stig Thøgersen (eds), *The Making of a Chinese City: History and Historiography in Harbin*,

multilingual press in Harbin pointed decidedly to the contrary: Russians saw Harbin as a Russian city until at least 1917. Then, starting with the October revolution and the incremental decline of Russia's dominance in northern Manchuria, the self-perception of Russians in Manchuria was altered, even though Harbin remained a Russian city in their mind. The Chinese, too, recognized the Russian suzerainty of the city, albeit Chinese nationalism and the effort for reestablish Chinese sovereignty increased importantly during the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> Taking these supposed coexisting or conflicting perceptions of Chinese and Russian sovereignty in Harbin into account, the question arises whether Russian and Chinese newspapers printed at that time demonstrated any rigid understanding of a border separating the two peoples? Or alternatively, instead of focusing on the perception of borders, it also could be questioned whether or to what degree the Harbiners seemed to have understood that their economic prosperity relied heavily on the cooperation from both sides. Kinds the central question of this paper is which of borders or demarcations between Chinese and Russians can be observed in Harbin's daily life and how had they been communicated in Russian and Chinese newspapers?

To answer these questions two aspects of Harbin daily life deserve particular attention, namely epidemics and the economy. While the focus on an epidemic like the North Manchurian plague in Harbin and Fujiadian (1910/11) serves to analyze Chinese-Russian relationship under extreme circumstances, the investigation of Harbin trade sheds light on Sino-Russian relations on a daily basis.

## A Brief History of Harbin's Press

### The Russian Press

Shortly after the founding of Harbin in 1898, the city saw its first Russian newspapers.<sup>5</sup> A majority of these early newspapers, such as the *Kharbinskie vesti* (Harbin News, founded in 1900) and the *Kharbinskii listok* (Harbin Leaflet, founded in 1902) were in print for only a short time.<sup>6</sup> Similar to what other press organizations in the Russian Empire experienced prior to the October Manifesto in 1905, the Harbin Russian press was censored by the Tsarist regime.<sup>7</sup> Another structural similarity between the Harbin Russian press

Armonk 1995; Thomas Lahusen, A Place Called Harbin: Reflections on a Centennial, in: The China Quarterly 154 (1998), pp. 400-10.

4 Carter, Creating a Chinese Harbin, passim.

5 For more detailed information about the Russian Press in Harbin, see Olga Bakich, Harbin Russian Imprints. Bibliography as History, 1898–1961: Materials for a Definitive Bibliography, New York 2002, pp. 1-47; idem, Charbin: Russland „jenseits der Grenzen“ in Fernost, pp. 321-2; Shaohua Diao, Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi pechati v Kharbine, in: Revue des Études Slaves 73 (2001) 2-3, pp. 403-45; Amir A. Khisamutdinov, Po stranam rasseianiia. Chast' 1: Russkie v Kitae, Vladivostok 2000, pp. 161-71; Tat'iana V. Kuznetsova, Russkaia kniga v Kitae (1917–1949), Khabarovsk 2003, pp. 44-57.

6 Bakich, Harbin Russian Imprints, pp. 8-9.

7 Ibid., p. 11. For more information about the press within the Russian Empire, see L. McRenolds, The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press, Princeton 1991; J. Walkin, Government Controls Over the Press in Russia, 1905–1914, in: The Russian Review 13 (1954), pp. 203-9.

and its counterparts elsewhere in the Russian Empire was the source of its financing. In the earlier years the newspapers had been state enterprises, which received full monetary support from the government. In the case of the official Russian press in Harbin, the Russian Ministry of Finance sponsored these publications through the CER. At the same time, private Russian newspapers appeared in Harbin already since 1900, but only after 1905 were some of these papers published on a regular basis. One example of such a private newspaper was the *Vestnik vostoka* [Herald of the East], which was founded in 1907 and merged together with another newspaper, *Deviatyi val* [The Ninth Wave], into the successful newspaper *Novaia zhizn'* [New Life, 1907–1929] in November of the same year.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, as the majority of private papers did not achieve the consistently large circulation of official Russian press, our focus remains the official ones.

The first of these official papers was named the *Kharbinskii vestnik* (Harbin Herald). It was published by the CER Commercial Section from 1903 until 1917.<sup>9</sup> After the October Revolution, the *Kharbinskii vestnik* was renamed in December 1917 as the *Zheleznodorozhnik* [Railway Worker] and the *Vestnik Man'chzhurii* [Manchurian Herald] in 1918. Their publications continued subsequently under other names until March 1920.<sup>10</sup>

Standing in a much more financially secured position compared to private newspapers, the *Kharbinskii vestnik* as the official CER press achieved high Russian standards of reporting, layout, and printing. In the beginning, the paper was published three times a week, and after February 1906 it was issued daily.<sup>11</sup> With a circulation of 17,000 copies in 1904/05, the *Kharbinskii vestnik* was read by readers not only in Harbin but also across the entire Russian Far East and Siberia. The CER officials in charge of this newspaper described its most important objective in the first issue of June 10, 1903 as “an exhaustive investigation of economic interests of the Far East and an accurate presentation of the CER’s duties and responsibilities concerning trade and industry.”<sup>12</sup> Tasked with huge responsibilities of informing all railway personnel and of reaching out to the population within the purview of the CER, the publishers of the *Kharbinskii vestnik* quickly realized that a single, Russian-language newspaper was insufficient to achieve the given objectives. It became apparent from the early days of the *Kharbinskii vestnik* that a Chinese section would be of enormous help for connecting with the Chinese population in Harbin and across the CER-controlled region. In the first two years of its publication, the *Kharbinskii vestnik* printed only advertisements in Chinese. Around 1905 and 1906, internal discussions were held concerning the publication of a standalone Chinese newspaper.<sup>13</sup> The goal of such a Chinese newspaper under the CER management would

8 Bakich, *Harbin Russian Imprints*, p. 10.

9 Diao, *Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi pechati v Kharbine*, p. 405.

10 Bakich, *Harbin Russian Imprints*, p. 423.

11 Diao, *Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi pechati v Kharbine*, p. 407; Bakich, *Harbin Russian Imprints*, p. 423.

12 Diao, *Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi pechati v Kharbine*, pp. 405-6.

13 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, No. 656, 19 January (1 February) 1906. Cf. also Diao, *Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi pechati v Kharbine*, pp. 405-6.

be the “converging interests of the Russian and Chinese population under the area of the CER.”<sup>14</sup> In 1906, these repeated discussions resulted in the CER-managed, Chinese-language newspaper the *Yuandongbao* 遠東報 (The Far Eastern Paper), and the CER hired the Russian Sinologist Aleksandr Vasil'evich Spitsyn<sup>15</sup> as the paper's editor in chief. How closely Spitsyn followed the original objectives drawn by the CER officials should be discussed later in this paper.

Until 1917, the importance of the *Kharbinskii vestnik* traces back to its large circulation and readership. As an official CER communication tool, it disseminated a rather accurate representation of Tsarist policies in general and CER administration in Harbin in particular. Furthermore, as Shaohua Diao argues succinctly, the *Kharbinskii vestnik*, despite its official characteristics, constitutes an indispensable primary source for the urban history of Harbin.<sup>16</sup>

In Russia, the years between 1905 and 1907 witnessed a period of political and social upheavals. Among them were the key developments of political parties and the press across the country. The events at that time constituted not only the founding of numerous political parties,<sup>17</sup> but also the rapid growth of political journalism within the empire.<sup>18</sup> Although the social and political conditions of Harbin, a young city located at the empire's border, differ significantly from other inland cities of the Russian Empire, one can observe much progress in the Russian press in Harbin from 1905 onward. The political liberalization in Russia after the publication of the October Manifesto resulted in more press institutions in Harbin, above all newspapers, including the private *Novyi krai* (New Territory), *Kharbin* (Harbin) and *Novaia zhizn'* (New Life).<sup>19</sup> These independent papers, such as the anti-tsarist *Novaia zhizn'*, represented liberal political viewpoints and followed more liberal or “democratic” approaches to reporting than the official CER

14 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, No. 656, 19 January (1 February) 1906.

15 A native of Tambov Province, Aleksandr Vasil'evich Spitsyn (1876–1941) graduated with honors from the Chinese and Manchu Department of the Oriental Institute in Vladivostok in 1906. Before his tenure at the *Yuandongbao*, he edited the Russian-financed Chinese newspaper *Shengjingbao* 盛京報 in Mukden. As the Russian army retreated up north after the Russo-Japanese War, Spitsyn followed and in 1906 founded the *Yuandongbao* in Harbin. For more than three decades, Spitsyn played an important role between Russian and Chinese communities. On one side, he was a key confidant of General Khorvat, the CER chief, and represented him in negotiations with the Chinese. On the other side, he was advisor to Bi Guifang 畢桂芳 and Bao Guiqing, two governors of the Heilongjiang Province. Locally, he was member of the Harbin Municipal Council and remained a respected member of the community even after Russians lost power in the region. Spitsyn died in Harbin in 1941. Only limited scholarship has been dedicated to Spitsyn. On Spitsyn's relationship to both Russian and Chinese political circles, see Quested, “Matey” Imperialists, pp. 241 and 244-46. On Spitsyn's educational background and its contribution to his approach to Sino-Russian cooperation, see Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, pp. 155-59. On primary sources concerning Spitsyn, see Lahusen, *A Place Called Harbin*, p. 404. Spitsyn's CER personal file is currently located in the Khabarovsk Regional Archives (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Khabarovskogo Kraia), f. 830, op. 3, d. 2019.

16 Diao, *Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi pechati v Kharbine*, pp. 407-8.

17 Cf. H.-D. Löwe, *Das Spektrum der Parteien*, in: G. Schramm (ed.), *Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, Vol. 3: 1856–1945, Stuttgart 1983, pp. 392-419.

18 Cf. C. Ferenczi, *Funktion und Bedeutung der Presse in Rußland vor 1914*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* (1982) 30, pp. 362-98; Walkin, *Government Controls Over the Press in Russia*, pp. 203-9.

19 Diao, *Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi pechati v Kharbine*, pp. 409-14.

media outlets.<sup>20</sup> Concerning the dissemination and reader acceptance of these Russian newspapers until 1917, the *Kharbinskii vestnik* and *Novaia zhizn'* probably carried the most weight since they significantly shaped the public opinion in Harbin.<sup>21</sup>

During the Tsarist period between 1900 and 1917, 45 Russian newspapers and 32 Russian magazines appeared in Harbin.<sup>22</sup> The ever-growing number of Russian publications demonstrates a dynamic development of the press in Harbin after the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution, even though Harbin was a newly established and still rapidly expanding city.<sup>23</sup> As such, one can agree with Olga Bakich regarding the progress of the Russian press after 1917 in Harbin: "In Tsarist Russia, the Harbin periodical press was rather small: some 25% of newspaper (45 of total 182) and 9 % of the journals (32 of 338) were published in that period."<sup>24</sup>

After 1917, the Harbin Russian press underwent further important developments. First, the October Revolution of 1917, the subsequent Civil War, and the massive movement of migrants out of Russia (especially the anti-Bolshevik "Whites" constituting a large portion of the Harbin population) fundamentally altered the situation in Harbin. On one hand, Russia lost its dominant social and political position in the city. On the other, the CER continued operating under the new joint Sino-Soviet administration in accordance with the 1924 treaty between China and the Soviet Union. These changes, however, did not lead to an "emancipation" of the Chinese population in Harbin. Instead, they created new dilemmas for the Russian residents in the city. The new classification of Russian-speaking residents in Harbin according to their political orientation and nationality caused much fragmentation among the people. Once perceived as a rather homogeneous group, the Russian-speaking Harbiners were now categorized as people with full Soviet citizenship, as claimants of Soviet citizenship, as Chinese residents with Russian nationality, or as stateless individuals.<sup>25</sup> Such categorization went further according to their political affinities: the anti-Bolsheviks, monarchists, patriot-nationalists, democrat-liberals, socialists, pro-Soviets, and later also fascists. Thanks to these diverse groups of Russian-speaking residents, fluid political circumstances, and free of Tsarist censorship, the Harbin Russian press enjoyed a period of unprecedented growth from 1917 until 1924. The development of these subgroups reflects the vibrant and diversified growth of Russian newspapers in Harbin. Certainly it is not surprising to observe the highest level of publication of Russian newspapers in the period between 1920 and 1922.<sup>26</sup> Among the 135 Russian newspapers and 299 Russian magazines published in Harbin

20 Ibid., pp. 413-14.

21 Ibid.; Bakich, *Charbin. Russland jenseits der Grenzen in Fernost*, pp. 321-2.

22 Bakich, *Harbin Russian Imprints*, p. 47.

23 For the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905 in Harbin, see Frank Grüner, *The Russian Revolution of 1905 at the Periphery: The Case of the Manchurian City of Harbin*, in: Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal/Frank Grüner/Susanne Hohler/Franziska Schedewie/Raphael Utz (eds), *The Russian Revolution of 1905 in Transcultural Perspective: Identities, Peripheries, and the Flow of Ideas* [forthcoming].

24 Bakich, *Harbin Russian Imprints*, p. 8.

25 For more information on different categories of Russians in Harbin since 1920, see *ibid.*, p. 14.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 32-9, 46-7.

from 1918 until 1945, most appeared before 1931. Then during the Manchukuo period (1932–1945), this high number of publications dropped drastically.<sup>27</sup>

Some newspapers from the period before 1917, such as the *Kharbinskii vestnik*, *Vestnik Man'chzhurii*, *Novaia zhizn'*, and *Novosti zhizni*, survived the political upheavals to different extent. Among the numerous new publications in the 1920s, *Zaria* [Dawn, 1920], *Rupor* [The Mouthpiece, 1921] and *Gun-bao* [The Public Newspaper, 1926] were the most popular newspapers among the Russian readership in Harbin: "The first two [*Zaria* and *Rupor*] were anti-Soviet, moderately liberal, independent of specific political forces, and aimed at providing international and local news, socio-political commentary, literary works, satire, and reports of local scandals and sensations."<sup>28</sup> The *Gun-bao*, the only newspaper with both Chinese and Russian editions, was financially supported by the joint Sino-Soviet administration of the CER, because it apparently "supported the Chinese administration and restoration of Chinese sovereignty in the Northeast in general and in Harbin in particular."<sup>29</sup>

### The Chinese Press

The press as a communication tool to the masses arrived late in China. Coastal cities such as Shanghai and Hong Kong saw their first foreign-managed Chinese-language newspapers in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> In the north, however, Chinese newspapers did not appear until the last years of the Qing Dynasty. Harbin and indeed Northern Manchuria, did not have any newspaper until the Russians arrived. The first Chinese newspaper in the region, the *Yuandongbao*, was born in 1906 under CER management and continued to be managed by Russians until its closing in 1921.<sup>31</sup> Some other Chinese newspapers were published sporadically during this same period, but none came close to the scale, circulation, and influence achieved by the *Yuandongbao*.<sup>32</sup> Importantly, most other Chinese newspapers rarely lasted more than a year and their copies are lost. The *Yuandongbao* was the only widely-read Chinese newspaper in Harbin and Northern Manchuria during this period, and a significant portion of its issues have been retained in good condition until today.

27 Ibid., p. 46.

28 Ibid., p. 34.

29 Ibid.

30 For the development of newspapers in China see: Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872–1912*, Cambridge, MA 2004; Rudolf Wagner (ed.), *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910*, Albany 2007.

31 Microfilms of the *Yuandongbao* can be found in the City Library and the Provincial Library in Harbin. However, neither library has a complete collection of the newspaper from 1906 to 1921. For example, issues before 1910 are not available in the libraries.

32 Although much research has been done on the Chinese press in the late Qing and early Republican era, a limited volume of scholarly literature is dedicated to the Chinese press in Manchuria, and even less to the Harbin press. An overview of the historical Chinese press in Harbin was published as part of the local gazetteers. See Haerbinshih difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Haerbin shizhi* [Harbin Gazetteer], Vol. 25, Harbin 1997.



The creation of the *Yuandongbao* traces back to its predecessor in southern Manchuria. The Russian army printed the Chinese-language newspaper *Shengjingbao* 盛京報 in Mukden until 1905.<sup>33</sup> After their defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, the Russians moved north, and General Nikolai Linevich, commander in chief of the Russian forces in the Far East, handed over the printing press of the Chinese newspaper to the CER. The CER's general manager, General Dimitrii Leonidovich Khorvat, seized this opportunity and launched a new Chinese newspaper, the *Yuandongbao*, with a number of objectives. Above all, this new Chinese newspaper was to play a role in the rapprochement of the two empires and their peoples. In addition, the *Yuandongbao* would attempt to improve Russia's image in Manchuria after its inglorious loss at the hands of the Japanese. The *Yuandongbao* was also supposed to counteract the growing presence of Japanese-backed newspapers in the Far East. Furthermore, as a practical matter, the newspaper, with its daily train schedule and related CER advertisements, would bring in more Chinese customers to the railway, which was still being operated by the Russians.<sup>34</sup>

Khorvat retained the service of two key staff members of *Shengjingbao*. The editor in Mukden, A. V. Spitsyn, became the manager and editor-in-chief of *Yuandongbao* in Harbin. Gu Zhi,<sup>35</sup> the Chinese editor of *Shengjingbao*, continued to work in the same position for *Yuandongbao*. Il'ia Amvlikhovich Dobrolovskii<sup>36</sup> became the Spitsyn's assistant. The new *Yuandongbao* staff put out the paper's first issue on March 14, 1906, printing 1,000 copies.<sup>37</sup> Four years after its first publication, *Yuandongbao* tripled its daily circulation to 3,000 copies, when the 1000<sup>th</sup> issue was celebrated on May 19, 1910.<sup>38</sup>

*Yuandongbao* was financially supported by the Russian Finance Ministry, which allocated 170,000 rubles through the CER as the paper's annual budget.<sup>39</sup> With this strong sup-

33 Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, p. 160.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

35 Gu Zhi 顧植 (1874–?), a Shanghai native, was the main Chinese counterpart of Spitsyn and Dobrolovskii in Mukden and, for two years, in Harbin at *Yuandongbao*. After his tenure at *Yuandongbao*, he moved to Changchun to manage another Chinese newspaper *Jichangribao* 吉長日報. Details about his life remain largely unclear, but his congratulatory message to *Yuandongbao* on its 10-year anniversary was published, in which he briefly describes the founding of *Yuandongbao* and mentions the paper being a joint venture between Spitsyn and him, with the shared goal of enriching North Manchurian culture and of making contributions to Sino-Russian friendship. See *Yuandongbao*. 1916. 15 March.

36 Like Spitsyn, Il'ia Amvlikhovich Dobrolovskii (1877/8–1920) also studied at the Oriental Institute in Vladivostok. Upon leaving Vladivostok, he worked as a translator in the Russian Army during the Russo-Japanese War. After the war, Dobrolovskii assisted Spitsyn at *Yuandongbao* and became a regular correspondent for the Russian Telegraph Agency and for *New Time* [*Novoe vremia*], a popular paper in St. Petersburg. He co-founded the Society of Russian Orientalists in Harbin and dedicated much time locally. Dobrolovskii published widely on Manchuria. His major works include Heilongjiang Province of Manchuria [*Kheiluntsziaskaia provintsiiia Man'chzurii*], Harbin, 1906; General Brief Description of the Heilongjiang Province [*Vseobshchee kratkoe opisanie Kheiluntsziaskaia provintsiiia*]; and Transcription of Chinese Place Names in Manchuria [*O transkriptsii kitaitskikh nazvanii v Man'chzurii*]. For detailed description of Dobrolovskii's work, see *Vestnik Azii* (Herald of Asia) 48 (1922) 1. This was an issue dedicated to him by the Society of Russian Orientalists. Also see Roza P. Tamazanova, "Zhurnal 'Vestnik Azii' v sisteme russkoiazychnykh periodicheskikh izdaniy v Man'chzurii" (Harbin, 1909–1917 gg.), Ph.D. dissertation; Moscow 2004.

37 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1913, 4 December.

38 Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, p. 161.

39 Heilongjiangribaoshe xinwenzhi bianjishi, *Dongbei xinwen shi*, Harbin 2001, p. 21.



port and its CER connections, *Yuandongbao* was able to maintain a large network of reporters and pay to reprint stories from expensive foreign news outlets such as Reuters. For a long time, the newspaper had reporters across Manchuria and in every major city in China, Russia, and abroad who served multiple purposes: They reported on the news for *Yuandongbao*, but they also solicited subscriptions and actively sought out potential advertisers. The paper was circulated not only in Russian-controlled northern Manchuria but also in southern Manchuria, where the Japanese sphere of influence was located. Though the target audience of *Yuandongbao* was in northeast China, it reached well beyond Manchuria. For example, newspapers in Shanghai often reacted to what *Yuandongbao* had to say, which means people in places as far away as Shanghai were reading it. *Yuandongbao* did not contradict the general Russian policy in the Far East. Its pro-Russian stance reached its zenith during 1912, when a *Yuandongbao* editorial argued for the independence of Outer Mongolia from China. The Chinese denounced *Yuandongbao*, and as a result the paper's sales dropped 30 percent and Spitsyn received multiple death threats. However, *Yuandongbao*'s reputation rebounded, as Spitsyn took several measures to modify the newspaper. He expanded the number of pages in *Yuandongbao* and included an extra page of entertainment written exclusively in vernacular Chinese, so that even the lower classes could read the paper with ease. Criticism against Chinese policies would be toned down, and anti-Russian news items introduced. All these measures yielded positive results in a short time.

On December 17, 1913, *Yuandongbao* marked its 2,000<sup>th</sup> issue by printing portraits of prominent Chinese figures congratulating the paper. Even Xiang Xiling 熊希齡, the prime minister of the Chinese Republic, sent in his best wishes. On March 14, 1916, the paper celebrated its tenth anniversary with congratulations from officials, businesses, schools, and organizations of both Chinese and Russian communities. The year 1916 also saw the pages of *Yuandongbao* expand to twelve and the circulation reach a new volume of 5,000 — making it the largest among the twenty Chinese newspapers in the region. Except for its major rival, *Shengjingshibao* 盛京時報 — the Japanese-financed Chinese newspaper based in Mukden — *Yuandongbao*'s influence in the region and beyond was unparalleled.

During the last week of February 1921, *Yuandongbao* published a short notice on its front page indicating its forthcoming end and announcing that subscriptions would be refunded.<sup>40</sup> The paper claimed its cessation was a CER order and did not explain the reason behind it. In fact, an agreement had been reached a few months back between the Chinese and the Russians. *Yuandongbao* was to end not because of financial reasons, as it was still a viable commercial enterprise and financially dependent from CER.<sup>41</sup> Instead, the closing was political and was not under the control of Spitsyn and his Chinese colleagues. The Chinese government had begun a rollback of Russian privileges in Harbin, which included *Yuandongbao* and other CER publications, the Society of Russian Ori-

40 *Yuandongbao*, 1921, 25-28 February, p. 1.

41 Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, p. 232.

entalists, and the Municipal Council. These and other rights in the city were to be taken away as the Chinese gained more political clout in Harbin.

After the fall of *Yuandongbao*, the Japanese-backed Chinese newspapers filled the void. *Shengjingshibao*, published in Mukden since 1908, and *Dabeishenbao* 大北新報, published in Harbin since 1922. They reflected the Japanese policies in the Far East and, with political backing of Manchukuo, both newspapers did not face any serious competition and remained the most read Chinese newspapers until 1944. Much different from *Yuandongbao*, the Japanese-back Chinese newspapers allowed only pro-Japanese items appear and did not reveal much interracial dynamics as its Russian predecessors once did.

## Two Examples from Harbin Russian and Chinese Press: Focusing on Epidemics and Economy

### Epidemics in the Russian Press

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, residents of Harbin experienced a number of natural catastrophes and epidemics. The cholera broke out twice, in 1900 and 1932. The pneumonic plague arrived in Harbin in 1910. The city witnessed flooding around 1910 and in 1932. Each of these natural disasters poised tremendous danger to the multiethnic population of the city. Catastrophes also challenged the city administration; Russian and Chinese leaders would scramble to establish emergency help, to provide medical care, to improve sanitary standard, and to enact policies which could help the city in case of another catastrophe. All these activities were happening while cultural differences appeared up front between the Russian and Chinese communities. The pneumonic plague would highlight these cultural differences. A comparative examination of the actions among these two peoples in Harbin would illustrate how different ethnic, national, and cultural groups of people lived together under these extreme circumstances. How did they perceive each other in difficult times? Did they communicate to one another and did they cooperate? Or did these events create or even strengthen an us-versus-them mentality? How did Harbin residents alter or even overcome their pre-plague image of the other during and after the catastrophe. For Harbin, all these seem to be open questions. Their answers can hardly be one standard theory that is applicable to all border towns in Northeast Asia. Yet they would tell us more about the daily life in Harbin where living under border was an everyday issue that all residents had to confront with. To this end, a selected set of examples from news reports should be examined, and news coverage on the 1910 plague would serve as the basis of study.

The pneumonic plague of between 1910 and 1911 in Manchuria was one of the most devastating epidemics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Different estimates put the number of deaths between 42,000 and 60,000.<sup>42</sup> In Harbin, where about 30,000 people resided, the num-

42 See Mark Gamsa, *The Epidemic of Pneumonic Plague in Manchuria 1910–1911*, in: *Past & Present* 190 (2006), pp.

ber of casualties reached 1,500, almost all of them Chinese.<sup>43</sup> Among the dead, only 40 were Europeans and 31 of them belonged to the medical crew. In the neighboring Chinese city Fujiadian, which stood outside of CER purview, the situation was even more dramatic. About one-third of the population fell victims to the plague, which counted between 7,000 and 8,000 people.<sup>44</sup> Most of these victims came from the lower class of the Chinese society. From the Russian and American point of view, the speedy spread of this disease had to do with the unsatisfactory standard of hygiene in the area where the Chinese were living.<sup>45</sup> To oversee and coordinate the fight against the plague more effectively, the Central Sanitary Executive Commission of the city of Harbin established a Plague Bureau. Under the direction of this office, disinfection teams were deployed; plague hospitals, quarantine stations, and isolated quarters were set up; hygienic standards across the city were monitored; traffic of people (Chinese, above all) and goods were closely watched; and, gatherings in public places were banned.<sup>46</sup> In this context, the regular contacts and trade between Harbin and Fujiadian were temporarily severed. Only Europeans could travel freely between the cities without being inspected. In Pristan', the commercial district within Harbin where the plague hit hardest, bazaars and markets were closed in the interim.<sup>47</sup> The most critical comments were made regarding the poor hygienic standards in Harbin's Chinese quarter and in Fujiadian. Appeals from the Russians were loud and clear that the Chinese ought to rectify the situation as soon as possible. These appeals received a great deal of attention from the press and the city government.

The Russian press carried important implications in this situation, because the papers reported on daily basis new ordinances and other initiatives from the Central Sanitary Executive Commission. Above all, the official CER Russian newspaper *Kharbinskii vestnik* and Chinese newspaper *Yuandongbao* must have contributed to this end.

Reporting on the plague, the Russian press did not hesitate to offer its explanation for the general situation. In words which left no doubts, an article from *Novaia zhizn'* on October 28, 1910 summarized the Russian perspective succinctly: "We see that the plague mostly appears among the Chinese."<sup>48</sup> However, the Russian press was equally clear that, given the proximity between the two peoples, the plague poised a serious threat towards the Russians and other Europeans, too. While the Harbin's Russian newspapers reported

147-183, 154; Cornelia Knab, *Plague Times: Scientific Internationalism and the Manchurian Plague of 1910/1911*, in: *Itinerario* 35 (2011) 3, pp. 87-105; Carl F. Nathan, *Plague Prevention and Politics in Manchuria 1910-1931*, Cambridge, MA 1967.

43 The Epidemic of Pneumonic Plague in Manchuria 1910-1911, p. 154.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

45 U.S. National Archives: Harbin Consular Files. Vol. 6. Dispatch No. 125, Harbin, China, January 28, 1911, pp. 56-60 (Plague in North Manchuria).

46 U.S. National Archives: Harbin Consular Files. Vol. 6. Enclosure with dispatch No. 129, Harbin, China, February 7, 1911, pp. 75-82 (Plague Bureau of the Central Sanitary-Executive Commission: Description of the Measures Adopted Against the Plague in the City of Harbin).

47 *Ibid.*

48 *K bor'be s chumoi*, in: *Novaia zhizn'*, 1910, 28 October.

daily what kind of actions were taken by the CER administration and the city government, more and more questions concerning the Chinese reactions (in Fujiadian and other area along CER under Chinese jurisdiction) to the plague showed up on the Russian-language press, “Just what steps have the Chinese authorities been taking against the plague!”<sup>49</sup>

In the same article, Chinese would be accused of failing to act against the plague. The Chinese leaders, according to the writer, left their due responsibilities to their Russian and European counterparts. The Chinese simply expected that certain measures would be taken; some personnel and means would be arranged at once to fight the epidemics and to save the Harbin population.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese authorities should have explained clearly to their people the danger of and solution to the plague, even if they had to impose some punishment on certain individuals. The Chinese did not isolate the places where many Chinese gathered and did not prevent Europeans from going to those locations. Generally speaking, *Novaia zhizn'* recommended that Europeans avoid making contacts with the Chinese. However, as the Russians and Chinese lived and worked everyday side by side, such a recommendation for most Harbin residents was simply inapplicable.

Despite the frustration over the alleged idleness of the Chinese authorities, Harbin's Russian press pointed out that only with the Chinese cooperation could the plague be effectively contained. When the Chinese authorities in Fujiadian demonstrated their willingness to cooperate with their Russian counterpart in fighting the plague, the editors of *Kharbinskii vestnik* expressed their relief.<sup>51</sup>

Russians in Harbin, having enjoyed semi-colonial status above the Chinese, felt their own vulnerability for the first time. Being caught quite off guard, Russians realized that their privileges depended on the cooperation with the Chinese population. Before the crisis in 1910/11, such awareness of their own limitation should not be understood as a matter of course within the Russian community in Harbin. The imminent threat posed by the plague evidently forced the Russian community to rethink its relationship with the Chinese neighbors. The official paper *Kharbinskii vestnik* made this readjustment clear: the sealing off and isolation of Fujiadian must be understood as both a temporary solution and a last resort. Such a policy was not intended to humiliate the Chinese, but only to achieve the necessary steps in stopping the pest. In an almost apologetic tone, the article at the end clarified the isolation of Fujiadian:

*We never supported chauvinistic policies; clang of arms has always sickened us. A friendly coexistence with China, which we have preached for all along, is exactly what we are trying so hard to achieve right now.*<sup>52</sup>

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1910, 4 November.

52 *Izoliatsiia Fudziadiana*, in: *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1910, 17 November.

Although it had been published in a Russian paper, this remark was addressed to the Chinese population of Harbin and Fujiadian, which reacted in parts intensely to the Russian means of compartmentalization. According to *Kharbinskii vestnik*, especially the Chinese paper of Fujiadian, *Dongchui Gongbao* 東陞公報,<sup>53</sup> sharply criticized Russian measurements and compartmentalization, as they were felt to be a degradation and deprivation of rights for the Chinese population.<sup>54</sup> It can be seen from several reactions in the Russian papers in Harbin, that *Dongchui Gongbao* called for boycotts of Harbin self-government measurements, because they allegedly did not serve the struggle against the plague but rather aimed at Russian gain and the goal of suspension of Chinese sovereignty in Fujiadian.<sup>55</sup>

The polemical and implacable controversy between Russian press in Harbin and Chinese press in Fujiadian can be read as an indication for the fact that in the process of crisis management of the plague epidemic cultural borders in mutual understanding of Chinese and Russians were reached and overstepped. This brought along the spread of a foe image and respectively a demonization of that other group. This foe image shows in the numerous anti-Russian depictions in which *Dongchui Gongbao* antagonized its readers against the Russians, for example this one: "The Russians regard the Chinese as animals, this can be seen, inter alia, from the fact that the sent veterinaries to fight the plague in Fujiadian."<sup>56</sup>

Nationalist and chauvinist undertones can likewise be spotted in the depictions of the Russian press, although their coverage was otherwise marked by objectivity, the Chinese population was blamed for the spread of the plague and defamed as a group. In the context of the plague the picture of the Chinese grows increasingly negative. What is more, the picture of the Chinese can be distinctly distinguished from the depiction of the Chinese before and after the plague.

## Epidemics in the Chinese Press

*Yuandongbao*, like its Russian counterparts, dedicated many pages to cover the pneumonic plague in Harbin between 1910 and 1911 and public health directives could be read daily. In the early phase of the plague, some reports detailed the joint Sino-Russian effort in combating the plague. For instance, on November 20, 1910, *Yuandongbao* recorded that the Russian medical personnel and CER's chief of Chinese affairs inspected

53 *Dongchui Gongbao* (Dongchui Public Paper) was founded by Wang Dezi 王德茲 in March 1910 with the express purpose to oppose *Yuandongbao*. The original of *Dongchui Gongbao* is lost. The Russian and Chinese press, namely *Kharbinskii vestnik* and *Yuandongbao*, had referred to it either explicitly or implicitly. Like many other Chinese newspapers from Fujiadian, the publication of *Dongchui Gongbao* did not last more two years. Until 1921, the leading Chinese paper in Harbin and vicinity remained *Yuandongbao*. For this reason, our discussion of the Harbin Chinese press focuses on *Yuandongbao* only. For more details of the early Chinese press in Harbin, see *Haerbin shizhi* 哈爾濱市志 (Harbin City Gazette), Vol. 25, Harbin 1994.

54 See, e.g. Fudziadianskie oratory, in: *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1910, 18 November.

55 See, e.g. Novaia Zhizn', 1910, 17. and 18 November.

56 Cited by Novaia Zhizn', 1910, 17 November.

Fujiadian.<sup>57</sup> A few days later, the newspaper informed its readers that Chinese students would be separated from the Russian students at the Harbin No. 2 Primary School and Dr. Roger Budberg would visit the affected families soon.<sup>58</sup> However, the focus of reporting shifted to the Chinese – the impact, consequences, and solutions to the plague. On March 22, 1911, the paper reported that 7,214 deaths accumulated in Fujiadian.<sup>59</sup> Nowhere could the reader know how many Russians in Harbin were affected. On March 14, 1911, *Yuandongbao* detailed the actions taken by the Fujiadian's Health Authority against the plague: stopping all traffic in and out of the Chinese community, having a team of Chinese doctors from Tianjin and Peking inspecting the hygiene situation in Fujiadian, burning down several buildings which had been lived by the infected, etc.<sup>60</sup> On January 14, 1911, the paper reported a groundbreaking change of burial practice, which would help curb the epidemics. Dr. Wu Liande 伍連德 (1879–1960), the British-educated Chinese-Malaysian who became the Imperial Commissioner overseeing all plague-related policies, successfully petitioned the Qing court's approval of cremation.<sup>61</sup> The paper applauded such an initiative and praised Dr. Wu and his team for rescuing the Harbin population. Russian involvements in all these events, however, were disproportionately obscure even on this Russian-financed Chinese newspaper. Indeed, there were few news clips in 1911 reporting Russian doctors' participation in the quarantine and inspections. When their activities were reported, they were usually written in fact-of-the-matter-style, without praising or criticizing them. For example, on March 14, 1911, *Yuandongbao* reported under the title "Russian Doctors Inspecting Fujiadian":

*On Sunday afternoon, a team of Russian doctors visited Fujiadian and inspected the hospitals and quarantined buildings. They were accompanied by local anti-plague specialists. The Russian doctors did not make any comments, but lamented how deserted the city has become.*<sup>62</sup>

Such a report was not characteristic of the news items covering the plague. Generally, Russians were either entirely out of the picture or became the neutral subjects in the reports. Border, a concept which diseases do not recognize, found quite a consistent reception in the Chinese newspaper. Based on what *Yuandongbao* reported about the plague, one cannot miss the emphasis that the plague, from the Chinese perspective, was primarily a Chinese issue. Being outsiders, Russians had little, if any, say on this matter and Dr. Wu was fully capable of handling the matter.

Unlike the Russian press, some of which criticized the Chinese openly, the Russian-sponsored *Yuandongbao* showed no negative feelings explicitly. However, observing the gener-

57 Cited by Gamsa, *The Epidemic of Pneumonic Plague in Manchuria 1910–1911*, p. 150. *Yuandongbao*, 1910, 20 November.

58 Cited *ibid.*; *Yuandongbao*. 1910. 24 November.

59 *Yuandongbao*, 1911, 22 March, p. 3.

60 *Yuandongbao*, 1911, 14 March, p. 3.

61 *Yuandongbao*, 1911, 14 January, p. 3.

62 *Yuandongbao*, 1911, 14 March, p. 3.

ally outspoken attitude of the Chinese editors of *Yuandongbao*, the lack of attribution of the plague to any particular cause, and subsequent appraisal of Dr. Wu's performance, one might argue there were acrimonious feeling also from the Chinese side, but complying with the Sino-Russian cooperative editorial policy, any negative commentaries on the Russian reaction to the plague could not have appeared in *Yuandongbao*. Chinese criticism could be, however, read in newspapers printed elsewhere in China.<sup>63</sup>

### Economy in the Russian Press

Topics concerning Harbin's economic development as an administrative and economic center of Northeastern China appeared often in the Russian-language newspapers in Harbin. *Kharbinskii vestnik*, the official CER information outlet, had a state goal of bringing the general welfare of the entire region (Chinese and Russian) into consideration.<sup>64</sup> Its reporting reflects such an objective. Examples can be found in pieces discussing the availability of food and consumer goods and articles investigating the Russian positions in regional trade and industry. As it was part of CER, the focus of *Kharbinskii vestnik* remained primarily Russian-related and its effectiveness of crossing border in exploring the economic interests of both people continued to be unclear.

In practice, neither *Kharbinskii vestnik* nor other Russian newspapers were up to the task in bringing attention to both Russian and Chinese population in Harbin. The deeper reason behind the unaccomplished border-crossing was not because of the lacking of a stated goal of connecting Russian and Chinese interests, but because of the fundamental perspective of Russian position in the region: the Russian commercial interests *are* Harbin's commercial interests. This perspective did not always reflect the reality. In fact, trade and industrial development of Harbin relied in many ways on the broad cooperation among Russians and Chinese who shared common goals and joint strategies.<sup>65</sup> Such cooperation, however, were rarely, if ever, reported in the Harbin's Russian press. To illustrate this point, the following section will provide an example from the Russian press.

Already in the first years of printing, the Harbin's Russian press – such as *Kharbinskii vestnik* – portrayed Chinese, Japanese, and other people as competitors in businesses.<sup>66</sup> The reports, which were largely one-sided discussions, focused on economic disadvantages of the Russians in the area and elicited a sharp us-versus-them mentality. The Russian press showed its particularly strong fear against business competition from the Chinese. On December 1, 1906, *Kharbinskii vestnik* carried an article with this beginning:

63 For example, see Shenbao and Shibao.

64 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1903, 18 October.

65 See Frank Grüner, In the Streets and Bazaars of Harbin: Marketers, Small Traders, and Peddlers in a Changing Multicultural City, in: *Itinerario* 35 (2011) 3, pp. 37-72, in particular pp. 42-45.

66 *O mestnoi torgovle* (On local trade), in: *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1903, 22 June.



*In our newspaper, we have already made our conviction known many times, that the most dangerous competition for our (Russian) industrialists and merchants do not stem from the Japanese, not from other foreigners, but from the local Chinese population. So strong are the business sense of the Chinese and their close-knitted nature among themselves. Equally strong is the development of their chambers of commerce. The Chinese are tough competitors for us because of their fidelity, hardworking nature, endurance, patience, and readiness to accept minimum level of profit. These characteristics of them are particularly apparent, when they are home with their countrymen together.<sup>67</sup>*

The tone, in which many pre-1917 Russian articles addressed business issues in Harbin, can be described as sharply competitive and not cooperative vis-a-vis the Chinese:

*On these already known matters, we would like to emphasize again, that we (the Russians) want to strengthen our industry and trade development in Manchuria. However, we must pay attention to the competitions from the locals (the Chinese), because lack of such attention would lead to a bitter end for us.<sup>68</sup>*

After such an opening, the editor of *Kharbinskii vestnik* argued for a closer cooperation with the Chinese on site and adopting Chinese business strategies. It is interesting to note that, although Russians at this point still enjoyed semi-colonial privileges in Harbin, the Russian press repeatedly discussed the commercial disadvantages of the Russian business community.

Russian newspapers presented a rather ambivalent picture of Russian economic role in Manchuria. Despite the fact that Russians were the main contributors to Manchurian modernization, such as bringing technical experts into the region and making major investments, Russians could not compete with the Chinese on the long run. When *Kharbinskii vestnik* reported on Chinese businesses, it showed certain fear, that “our (Russian) commercial interests would be sooner or later taken over by them,” specifically by the credit of the Russo-Asiatic Bank.<sup>69</sup>

Numerous examples from the Russian press also pointed to deep skepticism and begrudging attitude towards Japanese business activities in Manchuria, regardless of the actual market share of the Japanese in regional trade, in financial sector, and in the expected railway expansion. On August 10, 1908, *Kharbinskii vestnik* published an article titled “The Conquest of Northern Manchuria by the Japanese” which sounded quite ominous: “The Japanese have conquered South Manchuria with arms; they will take Northern Manchuria with economic means.”<sup>70</sup>

In general, one can argue that the pre-1917 official Russian press, instead of observing Harbin economy as one collective, emphasized diverging economic interests among Russians, Chinese, Japanese, and other groups of people. Market competition among and

67 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1906, 1 December.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1906, 2 December.

70 *Kharbinskii vestnik*, 1906, 10 August.

different cultural aspects of peoples were depicted up-close. In this sense, concerning both small trade within Harbin and regional and international trade connected with Northern Manchuria, the Russian press such as *Kharbinskii vestnik* reinforced rather than challenged the concept of border in the Harbiner's mind.

This competitive perspective commingled with the overall Russian perception of their own cultural superiority. The idea of Russia's civilizing mission in China was frequently articulated in Harbin Russian press, as the article "Twenty Years in Manchuria" from *Vestnik Man'chzhurii* (Manchurian Herald) exemplarily shows:

*We, the Russians have brought to this region [Manchuria] a higher culture than that of the Chinese, we have given the native masses our technological knowledge and skills, we have taught them how to perfect their working methods, we have expanded their intellectual horizons (there is already a group of Chinese intellectual youths who have graduated from the Russian school), we have helped the rich productive potential of the country to find a perspective, and we have guaranteed its supply of imported products. In a word, neither the sovereign of the country nor the native population have the slightest justification to accuse our colony of exploitation, and of draining northern Manchuria of its resources in the course of the last twenty years. In this respect, the politics of Russia fundamentally and beneficially differ from the traditional colonial politics of the majority of other states.*<sup>71</sup>

The Russian elites in Harbin were convinced that by mobilizing all of its powers Russia made Manchuria a modern and prosperous region for the good of China and its population. This can be seen as credo and at the same time as a legitimization of Russian imperialist politics. In general, it is certainly not an exaggeration to state that the conviction of Russia's civilizing mission in China represented the core of Russian identity formation and imperial consciousness in Manchuria.<sup>72</sup> The Harbin Russian press played a major role in establishing this mindset among Russians in Harbin.

## Economy in the Chinese Press

Almost on a daily basis, *Yuandongbao* delivered news on Russian economy. Tsarist economic policies received priority treatment and they were usually printed as headlines – and in positive light. Such treatment was especially salient during WWI, when Russia issued government bonds and *Yuandongbao* encouraged the purchase of the bonds.<sup>73</sup> In

71 *Vestnik Man'chzhurii*, 1918, 3 (16) January.

72 See Frank Grüner, Russians in Manchuria: From Imperial to National Identity in Colonial and Quasi-Colonial Space, in: Simon Wendt/Brian D. Behnken (eds), *Transcultural Perspectives on Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Twentieth Century* [forthcoming].

73 Common policy addresses concerned with the issues of war bonds, regulations of interest rates, and new economic initiatives in other parts of the Russian empire. For examples, see issues of *Yuandongbao*, 1910, 1 August, p. 1; 1911, 14 March, p. 2; 1916, 11. March 11, p. 1; 1921, 27 February, p. 2.

addition, the Chinese newspaper made regular reports on cross-border trading activities such as smuggling and tariff rates.<sup>74</sup> These reports reflected the general editorial principles of Spitsyn.

While the concept of “border” revealed itself in what the Russian press published, *Yuandongbao* did much to demonstrate it in what was not written. In fact, neither Russia nor Russians was the focus beyond the frontpage of *Yuandongbao* and, for all practical purposes, only Chinese-related economic events were printed, even though Russians certainly played a crucial role in the Harbin economy. Commercial transactions were at least until 1918 predominately in Russian hands.

*Consequently, [...], the bulk of the commerce of Harbin, as the administration of the municipality, is in Russian hands; there are 192 Russian firms out of a total of 235, and the Russians number over 92 per cent of the total foreign population of some 35,000 during the year of 1912.*<sup>75</sup>

Thus, it was surprising that a few weeks would pass by without even a single article concerning Russian business activities appearing on *Yuandongbao* – both locally in Harbin and regionally in Manchuria. One might have the impression after reading some issues of *Yuandongbao* that Russian commercial endeavors in Harbin were almost nonexistent and Chinese firms practically dominated Harbin commerce. A few examples are given below to illustrate the obvious *Yuandongbao*'s neglect of Russian participation and contribution to Harbin economy.

Banking was one of the most important areas where Russian participation was influential in Harbin commerce. The Russo-Asiatic Bank 俄亞銀行, which closely associated with the CER and had its headquarter in St. Petersburg, was the second largest bank in China in early 1900s.<sup>76</sup> One cannot find any news report or editorials dedicated to this important bank in Harbin. Instead, Chinese banks such as the Agricultural Bank of China 農業銀行, Sinhua Savings Bank 新華儲蓄銀行 – which were much smaller on operational scale – received coverage, when their branch openings and stock offerings took place.<sup>77</sup> The second area of Russian business, which contributed to the vibrant economy in Harbin, was the department stores. An important example was the Tchurin Department Store. Founded by E. Y. Tchurin, this store was the “oldest and most influential Russian commercial enterprise in Manchuria.”<sup>78</sup> Both Russians and Chinese were customers of this department store; however, its activities were curiously not reported in *Yuandongbao*. Finally, the business of transportation should not be disregarded, as ships regularly carried all kinds of products to and from Russian ports such as Vladivostok.<sup>79</sup> Russians

74 *Yuandongbao*, 1910, 4 September, p. 2.

75 Report for the Year 1912 on the Trade of the Consular District of Harbin, 5, in: British Foreign Office, No. 5123.

76 Zhaojin Ji, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China's Finance Capitalism*, New York 2003, p. 70.

77 *Yuandongbao*, 1917, 13 March, p. 7.

78 *The China Monthly Review*, 1936, p. 170.

79 John Coulter, Harbin: Strategic City on the “Pioneer Fringe”, in: *Pacific Affairs* 5 (1932) 11, p. 969.

remained the major business partners to Chinese entrepreneurs in Harbin. However, nowhere were the accidents, disputes, and agreements concerning the transportation business to be read in *Yuandongbao*. It is probably hard to imagine, through weeks and months, there was no newsworthy commercial events in and around Harbin – at ports, harbors, train stations, warehouses – related to Russian businesses and personnel.

The absence of reporting on the Russian business community seemed to reinforce the concept of border in *Yuandongbao*. Such concept, however, aligned itself along with the traditional nation-state definition of border. In discussing “border” and the people on the other side being named “*eren*” (Russians), *Yuandongbao* concentrated on the Russians far from Harbin, who were living in European Russia, for example in St. Petersburg, or in the Russian Far East. The Russians just a few miles away, living in Harbin, did not receive their due share of attention. While the official policy of *Yuandongbao* must have put Sino-Russian cooperation in the forefront, the two diverging approaches of handling “Russians” in the news show the true editorial attitude of the Chinese editors under Spitsyn: On one hand, the front page satisfied what the official policy, reporting Tsarist policies in the best light possible; on the other hand, in the rest of the newspaper, the Chinese writers showed what they truly interested in – i.e., the Chinese community – and how they perceived the Russian population in Harbin. *Yuandongbao*'s coverage of Chinese commercial activities and non-coverage of Russian business events suggest that the Chinese and Russian commercial communities were two distinct groups. These two communities were by no means integrated. However, instead of the hostile attitude demonstrated by the editorials of *Kharbinskii vestnik*, the Chinese showed not much interest in the Russian enterprises and did not observe them as a serious threat to the point where they deserved daily coverage.

## Conclusion

An examination of the Russian and Chinese presses in Harbin suggests strong demarcation between the two peoples, despite of their spatial proximity, economic interdependence, and daily transcultural entanglements. Russian residents in Harbin, just like their Chinese neighbors, saw themselves as two separate collectives and mainly concerned with their own interests. Especially the Russians, saw the other basically as competitor or even a serious threat to their livelihood. Such a phenomenon was particularly dramatic during the pneumonic plague between 1910 and 1911, when the Russian press openly criticized the Chinese community. Along the same line, reports on trade further illustrated such delineation between Russians and Chinese. In other cases written by the press, both Russian and Chinese paid little if any attention to the other culture.

Showing their self-perception and perception of the other, the Russian and Chinese newspapers left no doubt in their writing about the nature of their local Sino-Russian relationship: Two groups would be represented as distinct entities with clear cultural boundaries. Under normal circumstances, the Russian and Chinese press portrayed their

neighbors as the *other* (but not as an enemy) and showed no particular interest in highlighting Sino-Russian cooperation. In addition, the Russian press communicated the idea of Russian cultural superiority over the Chinese, in particular during the period of Russian dominance of Manchuria until around 1920. The tone, however, changed dramatically in times of crises. Russian and Chinese newspapers, namely *Kharbinskii vestnik* and *Dongchugongbao* criticized the other in a much more nationalistic and hostile manner. Despite such an aggressive tone, both Russian and Chinese press organs encouraged cooperation and pragmatism in overcoming critical situations. Not surprisingly, this pragmatic approach was especially noticeable from a transcultural newspaper such as *Yuandongbao*.

Through the lens of newspapers, the paper investigates everyday life in Harbin between the two peoples. From this study, one might reasonably argue for a tendency: Russians and Chinese understood themselves above all as representatives of a certain culture or even a country – this is at least what the newspapers communicated to their readers. The discursive confrontation between the two populations, each with its “own” interests, fear, cultural identity, and perception of the others, almost always served as a polarizing force instead of a uniting agent. Under the best circumstances, the Russian and Chinese newspapers in Harbin reported about the neighboring people in a neutral, indifferent manner. Even the hybrid newspaper *Yuandongbao* did not achieve what was supposedly its number-one task: bringing together the interests of both communities. Reading between the lines of the Russian and Chinese newspapers, one might get the idea of daily life in Harbin being part of the vibrant life of a “border town.” Further research on the social fabric of Harbin has to prove the overall picture, given by the press, that borders rather than cross-border processes and transcultural entanglements were predominant in Harbin daily life.