
FORUM

Entanglement and Rivalry: Encountering “the Other” in Harbin’s Education, 1906–1932

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ABSTRACTS

Im Harbin der 1920er Jahre trafen verschiedene ethnische Gruppen und gleichzeitig konkurrierende Konzepte zur Gestaltung von Multiethnizität im Alltag und Bildungswesen aufeinander. Nach der Oktoberrevolution von 1917 verlor das Russische Reich seine extraterritoriale Jurisdiktion im Nordosten Chinas, wo in Ermangelung einer zentralen politischen Macht „rote“ (sowjetische), „weiße“ (zarische) und chinesische Schulen und Universitäten nebeneinander gediehen. Dieses einzigartige Umfeld förderte den interkulturellen Austausch, aber auch die Rivalität zwischen russischen und chinesischen sowie zwischen zarischen und sowjetischen Studenten in hohem Maße.

In 1920s Harbin, different ethnic groups and, concurrently, competing concepts of how to shape multiethnicity encountered each other in everyday life and not least in education. After the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian Empire lost its extraterritorial jurisdiction in North-east China where, in the absence of a centralised political power, “red” (Soviet), “white” (Tsarist), and Chinese schools and universities thrived alongside each other. This unique environment facilitated intercultural exchange, but also rivalry between Russian and Chinese, and between Tsarist and Soviet students to a great extent.

Encounters caused distinction. In 1920s Harbin, dozens of ethnic groups faced each other and so competing concepts of how to locate multiethnicity in the sphere of education emerged. After the Revolution of 1917, the Russian Empire lost its extraterritorial jurisdiction and political administration in Manchuria, where its Chinese Eastern Railway company had represented a state within the state since 1898. This absence of a central political and legal authority created spaces of possibility – now “red” (Soviet), “white” (Tsarist), and Chinese schools and universities could coexist. Thus, Harbin became an experimental field of Soviet nationality policy, a guarantor of Tsarist educational ideals, and a breeding ground for Chinese self-strengthening. Their proponents, however, found entirely different answers to confronting “the other”.

Educational institutions, ethnically segregated and mixed ones alike, illuminate how multiethnicity and multilingualism were to be organised in the classroom. The case of Harbin encourages us to understand Tsarist, Soviet, and Chinese minority policy from the periphery, a place where various governments’ claims to power could only partially be enforced.¹ To what extent did the shift in power, from the semi-colonial to the *informal empire*² of Russia in Northeast China, have an impact on Harbin’s schools and universities? In what ways did the Chinese attempt to impose an order of their preference? How were cultural and linguistic boundaries transcended via foreign language teaching and multiethnic learning communities? And how did those who dreamed of an ethnically homogeneous environment react?

For a long time, Harbin’s history has inspired patriotic narratives in (academic) literature. Each scholarly community assured itself of its national-nostalgic narrative of a “Russian”, “Jewish”, or “Chinese” Harbin in regarding the city as their own possession.³ Not infrequently, such works reproduced the normativity of the civilising mission of their historical protagonists and attributed acquiescent passivity to their objects of conversion.⁴ In contrast, scholarship on railway imperialism, border regimes, and transculturality ex-

1 Still seminal, A. Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, München 2001; T. Martin, *An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism*, in: R. G. Suny/T. Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Oxford 2001, pp. 67–90; Y. Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism*, in: *Slavic Review* 53 (1994) 2, pp. 414–452.

2 J. Osterhammel, *Semi-Colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards a Framework of Analysis*, in: W. J. Mommsen/J. Osterhammel (eds.), *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, London 1996, pp. 290–314, at 290–291 and 297–298.

3 J. H. Carter, *The Future of Harbin’s Past*, in: *Itinerario* 35 (2011) 3, pp. 73–85, at 73–75; M. Gamsa, *Harbin in Comparative Perspective*, in: *Urban History* 37 (2010) 1, pp. 136–149, at 136–137; Th. Lahusen, *A Place Called Harbin: Reflections on a Centennial*, in: *The China Quarterly* 154 (1998), pp. 400–410, at 401.

4 O. I. Eropkina, *Russkaia shkola v Man’chzhurii pervoi treti XX veka. Tendentsii razvitiia i problemy [The Russian School in Manchuria in the First Third of the Twentieth Century. Tendencies of Development and Problems]*, kand. nauk thesis, Rossiiskaia Akademiia Obrazovaniia, Moskva 2002, pp. 19–20; I. V. Potapova, *Russkaia sistema obrazovaniia v Man’chzhurii, 1889–1945 gody [The Russian Educational System in Manchuria, 1889–1945]*, kand. nauk thesis, Dal’nevostochnyi Gosudarstvennyi Gumanitarnyi Universitet, Khabarovsk 2006, pp. 19, 191; L. F. Goverdovskaia, *Obrazovatel’naia i nauchnaia deiatel’nost’ russkoi émigratsii v Kitae 20–40-e gody XX v. [The Educational and Scientific Activity of the Russian Emigration in China in the 1920s–1940s]*, in: *Rossia i ATP* 3 (2006), pp. 150–160, at 160.

plores the transnational experiences of Northeast China’s population.⁵ Contributions to Harbin’s transculturality searched for exchanges in economy, transport, and sport and found them in Harbin’s bazaars, railway stations, and sports fields.⁶ In the spheres of education and culture, however, transcultural encounters were, as Frank Grüner argues, “characterised by a far higher degree of ethnic, religious, or cultural cleavage and exclusivity.”⁷ But, one might ask, are educational institutions not at least as suitable as places such as markets or sports fields for understanding the conditions of coexistence – because of their even more demanding admission criteria (language skills, previous education, socio-economic opportunities) and increased intensity of transcultural exchange (daily, permanent, and regulated)?

Cultural and historical studies have developed a variety of theoretical approaches to transculturality, which are increasingly being applied in historical education research.⁸ While transnational or global history approaches transcend the nation as the object and entity of study and highlight exchange, networks, and entanglement beyond borders, postcolonial studies strive to territorialise the negotiation of cultural differences without disregarding the question of power. By pointing to the spatialisation of encounters in unequal power relations, the latter perspective accentuates the repercussions of experiences of difference in a still national context.⁹ These encounters can occur in different spatial layers; in a concrete place – a “contact zone”¹⁰ – or in the abstract space of negotiating differences and thus identity.

- 5 On “railway imperialism” see S. Urbansky, *Kolonialer Wettstreit: Russland, China, Japan und die Ostchinesische Eisenbahn*, Frankfurt am Main 2008; D. Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898–1914*, Stanford 1999. On border experiences in Harbin or along the Sino-Russian/Soviet border, see S. Urbansky, *Beyond the Steppe Frontier: A History of the Sino-Russian Border*, Princeton 2020. On Harbin as a transcultural space, see D. Ben-Canaan/F. Grüner/I. Prodöhl (eds.), *Entangled Histories: The Transcultural Past of Northeast China*, Cham 2014; J. H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916–1932*, Ithaca 2002; B. R. Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria’s Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918–1829*, Vancouver 2010; S. Hohler, *Fascism in Manchuria: The Soviet-China Encounter in the 1930s*, London 2017; M. Tamanoi, *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire*, Honolulu 2005.
- 6 F. Grüner, *In the Streets and Bazaars of Harbin: Marketers, Small Traders, and Peddlers in a Changing Multicultural Land*, in: *Itinerario* 35 (2011) 3, pp. 37–72; S. Urbansky, *Mapping Manchuria Station: Crossing Borders into the “Yellow Land”*, in: *Comparativ* 22 (2012) 5, pp. 87–105; S. Hohler, *Go Team Harbin: Sports, Borders and Identity in the 1930s*, in: *Comparativ* 22 (2012) 5, pp. 60–71.
- 7 Grüner, *In the Streets and Bazaars of Harbin* 2011, p. 38. Further see O. Bakich, *Charbin: „Rußland jenseits der Grenzen“ in Fernost*, in: K. Schlögel (ed.), *Der große Exodus: Die russische Emigration in ihren Zentren 1917 bis 1941*, München 1994, pp. 304–328, at 327; M. Gamsa, *Cross-Cultural Contact in Manchuria: Approaches to Lives in Between, 1900s–1950s*, in: *History and Anthropology* 30 (2019) 5, pp. 563–580, at 570.
- 8 A detailed overview of the diversity of theoretical approaches to historical educational research is provided by E. Roldán Vera/E. Fuchs, *Introduction: The Transnational in the History of Education*, in: E. Fuchs/E. Roldán Vera (eds.), *The Transnational in the History of Education: Concepts and Perspectives*, Cham 2019, pp. 1–47. For further examples of transculturality in historical educational research, see H. Niedrig/Ch. Ydesen, *Writing Postcolonial Histories of Intercultural Education*, Frankfurt am Main 2011; B. Bagchi/E. Fuchs/K. Rousmaniere (eds.), *Connecting Histories of Education: Transnational and Cross-Cultural Exchanges in (Post-)Colonial Education*, New York 2014.
- 9 For a recent plea to apply the questions of postcolonial studies to contemporary German history, see A. Eckert, *Postkoloniale Zeitgeschichte?*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 17 (2020) 3, pp. 530–543.
- 10 M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London 1992, p. 6.

Postcolonial studies often assume a (post-)colonial context of power relations beyond doubt, a context in which it is certain who has to conform to whom.¹¹ Harbin, however, was characterised by an asymmetric power relation of its own kind – a peculiar asymmetry of shifting domination; multiple times, the rulers and the ruled changed positions. After the turmoil of the 1911 and 1917 Revolutions in China and Russia, the question of political power over the city, located on the periphery of the two empires, remained unresolved. In Harbin, educational actors thus had room to manoeuvre that they would hardly have enjoyed elsewhere. This context allowed and caused cultural transfers in both directions.¹² In the interwar period, education in Harbin was, at the same time, a place where young people of Russian, Chinese, and other origins learned together, as well as a space where competing “red”, “white”, and Chinese teaching concepts clashed. And they did so in an ever-changing environment of political predominance.

1. Power and Education

Reading his lecture “The History of Harbin’s Educational System,” N. P. Avtonomov, professor at the Harbin Pedagogical Institute, highlighted in the early 1930s wherein the link between power claims and educational utopias manifested: “Every epoch has its own school”.¹³ In the first half of the twentieth century, Russia, China, and Japan fought for dominance in Northeast China and each tried to impose its own educational policy. Harbin’s education was thus characterised less by the absence of government attempts to establish order than by the absence of a state that could enforce these claims in the long term.

As a result of the Russian defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894/95, the Emperor of China, hoping to contain Japanese influence in Northeast China, granted the Russian Empire the right to build two railway lines on Chinese territory. At their intersection, the Chinese Eastern Railway company (*Kitaiskaia Vostochnaia Zheleznaiia Doroga* [KVZhD]; *Daqing dongsheng tielu* 大清東省鐵路), which exercised the Russian Empire’s extraterritorial status, founded the city of Harbin. In 1898, the year the city emerged, the KVZhD had already opened a school for its employees’ children, which also offered evening classes to Chinese pupils.¹⁴ The young city grew quickly and was in need of further schools. In 1906, the Chinese Eastern Railway set up an Education Department, an administrative body to supervise the then five primary and four secondary schools far away from the Tsarist education authorities. The curricula of the Russian Empire marked the standard of

11 See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London/New York 1994.

12 See P. Burke, *Kultureller Austausch*, W. Burkhardt (trans.), Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 13.

13 N. P. Avtonomov, *Vazhneishie voprosy istorii russkogo prosveshcheniia po dannym kraevoi shkoly* [The Most Important Questions of the History of Russian Enlightenment According to Figures from Local Schools], in: K. I. Zaitsev (ed.), *Sbornik Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Instituta (1925–1937), Kharbin 1937*, pp. 163–180, at 164.

14 A. Pliakov/B. El'tekov, *Zheleznodorozhnye shkoly dlia detei grazhdan SSSR* [Railway Schools for Children of Soviet Citizens], in: *Vestnik Man'chzhurii* 8 (1930), pp. 33–43, at 33; O. Bakich, *Russian Education in Harbin*, in: *Transactions of the Association of Russian-American Scholar in the USA* 26 (1994), pp. 269–294, at 271.

their efforts.¹⁵ In 1913, the Russian census counted 43,691 Russians and 23,639 Chinese in Harbin, which had by then become an international treaty port; in all, 53 nationalities and 45 languages were represented.¹⁶ Jews (from 1907), Poles (from 1913), and later also Tatars, Japanese, Koreans, British, and Germans maintained their own schools, teaching children in the respective national language.¹⁷

After Russia lost its extraterritoriality along the railway line as a result of the October Revolution of 1917, the Chinese government created the “Special Region of the Eastern Provinces” (*Dongsheng Tebiequ* 東省特別區) in 1921 and, thus, administrative bodies that sought to replace the KVZhD structures in Harbin. Their employees were not supposed to be Russophile Chinese, like those who had worked in the railway company, but bureaucrats free of loyalty to Russia. In fact, however, it was not Beijing that controlled Manchuria, but the warlord Zhang Zuolin 張作霖 (1875–1928).¹⁸ The turmoil of the Russian Civil War eventually brought over 200,000 people to Harbin, mainly Russian opponents of Soviet rule, and with them teachers and professors who founded schools and universities.

Initially, the Tsarist ideal of education persisted until the young Soviet Union succeeded in placing the KVZhD under a joint Soviet-Chinese administration in 1924. The staff and teaching content of the railway schools were quickly Sovietised. From then on, only Soviet and Chinese citizens were allowed to teach and learn there, and to do so according to the Soviet blueprint. In order to distance themselves from “red” railway schools, “white” immigrants, who had become stateless by then, founded their own schools. They could remain faithful to the old Tsarist curricula, since they were under the control of the Chinese Ministry of Education and not the KVZhD Education Department.¹⁹ After 1917, Chinese territorial associations and Christian communities also took the opportunity to set up modern Chinese primary and secondary schools.

At the same time, the Chinese government increasingly exerted its influence on the Chinese Eastern Railway and its educational work. In December 1927, it incorporated the KVZhD Education Department into the Chinese Ministry of Education.²⁰ Even before that, the Education Department had been under the control of the Chinese Municipal Administration.²¹ But from then on, the 48 KVZhD schools along the railway line were not only inspected by Chinese officials, but also administered by them.²² When Chinese

15 Pliakov/Él'tekov, *Zheleznodorozhnye shkoly dlia detei grazhdan SSSR 1930*, p. 33; *Nachal'noe obrazovanie na Kitaiskoi Vostochnoi Zheleznoi Doroge (1907/8 uchebn. g.)* [Primary Education along the Chinese Eastern Railway (In the Year 1907/08)], Kharbin 1908, pp. 23–24.

16 O. Bakich, *Russian Émigrés in Harbin's Multinational Past: Census and Identity*, in: Ben-Canaan/Grüner/Prodöhl (eds.), *Entangled Histories*, pp. 83–99, at 87.

17 S. T. Ternavskii (ed.), *Ves' Kharbin na 1926 god: Adresnaia i spravocnaia kniga* [The Entire Harbin in 1926: Address and Reference Book], Kharbin 1926, pp. 121–122; *Nachal'noe obrazovanie na Kitaiskoi Vostochnoi Zheleznoi Doroge i Ussuriiskoi Linii (1908/9 uch. g.)*, Kharbin 1910, p. 21.

18 Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, pp. 95–97.

19 Bakich, *Charbin*, pp. 318–319.

20 Pliakov/Él'tekov, *Zheleznodorozhnye shkoly dlia detei grazhdan SSSR*, p. 34.

21 Ternavskii, *Ves' Kharbin na 1926 god*, p. 111.

22 *Shengshixue jiang shicha ge xuexiao* 省視學將視察各學校 [Provincial School Inspector Will Visit All Schools], in:

authorities finally enforced the rule that Russian public institutions had to operate in Chinese and dismissed 500 Soviet teachers in 1929, the Soviet leadership responded with military intervention.²³ Although the *status quo ante* was restored and the KVZhD Education Department was again separated from Chinese structures, the Chinese government insisted that children of ethnic Russians who had taken Chinese instead of Soviet citizenship had to attend Chinese schools.²⁴

When Japan occupied Northeast China and established the Manchukuo regime in 1932, Harbin had 70 Russian schools and a large number of international learning institutions. Unlike in many European cities with Russian diaspora, opposing educational concepts were able to coexist in Harbin as long as no central authority was able to establish educational uniformity.²⁵ This was to change quickly with the Japanese occupation. From 1932 onwards, only primary schools were allowed to teach in Russian, while secondary schools had to teach in Japanese.²⁶

2. Entanglement and Rivalry

In the ever-changing field of colonial interests, the sensitive question of how to confront “the other” was of particular importance. For the orders of the cultural originate in the encounter itself – it is only in the exchange with “the other” that people reify the difference of human existence, form perceptions of self and other, and thus establish the necessity of transferring the experience of difference into an order. By encountering, people ascertain what they understand as “the own” and “the alien”; it is in the encounter that orders reify wherein the certainty of their persistence is threatened.²⁷

2.1. Before 1917: KVZhD and City Council Operate Schools

China, Japan, and Russia were not the only actors in Northeast China vying for interpretive sovereignty in the field of education. Among Harbin’s Russians, different approaches to giving multiethnicity a place in education competed. Even before 1917, the KVZhD and city council, the Russian self-governing body of the civilian population, championed different concepts on who should be taught with whom and in which language. The curriculum of the railway schools did not provide for compulsory foreign language teaching.

Yuandongbao 遠東報, 15 November 1918; Paiyuan diaocha xiangxiao 派員調查鄉校 [Sending Staff to Investigate Rural Schools], in: Yuandongbao 遠東報, 21 November 1918.

23 F. Patrikeeff, *Railway as Political Catalyst: The Chinese Eastern Railway and the 1929 Sino-Soviet Conflict*, in: B. A. Elleman/St. Kotkin (eds.), *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History*, Armonk 2010, pp. 81–102, at 81.

24 Pliakov/Él'tekov, *Zheleznodorozhnye shkoly dlia detei grazhdan SSSR*, p. 35.

25 See M. Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939*, Oxford 1990.

26 Bakich, *Charbin*, p. 319.

27 J. Baberowski, *Dem Anderen begegnen: Repräsentationen im Kontext*, in: J. Baberowski/D. Feest/M. Lehmann (eds.), *Dem Anderen begegnen: Eigene und fremde Repräsentationen in sozialen Gemeinschaften*, Frankfurt am Main 2009, pp. 9–16, at 9–11.

In smaller schools along the railway line, French and German were taught, but no Chinese. In Harbin’s municipal schools, on the other hand, English and Chinese had been compulsory subjects since 1908. The Second Municipal Primary School also established a Russian preparatory course for children of Chinese parents.²⁸

Neither the age of the schoolchildren nor the size of the institutions was decisive in these different orders of multiethnicity. To be sure, the Russian schools along the railway line were rather small as were its local Russian communities. But even railway schools, which were similar in size to the two Harbin municipal schools with over 200 pupils, did not teach Chinese.²⁹ Undoubtedly, there were hardly any teachers in the Manchurian villages who could have mediated between the cultures. Sui Mou šin’, who taught Chinese at both municipal primary schools, had attended the Russian School in Beijing.³⁰ In the years after the turn of the century, however, this kind of bilingualism was the exception in Northeast China.

The decisive factor in the KVZhD’s Education Department not giving priority to Chinese language teaching before 1917 was the railway company’s mission. In 1923, the railway’s official historiography stated:

*Everything foreign and alluvial has fallen away, only the healthy, absolute core of the powerful factor of culture and economy remains; the [rail]way carries this mission today with great honour.*³¹

The Chinese Eastern Railway company, which embodied the Russian state in Northeast China, saw itself as the bearer of a civilising mission – the preservation and dissemination of the Russian language and culture. Chinese lessons in primary schools in Manchurian villages with barely a dozen Russian pupils could hardly be reconciled with the priority of creating a Russian environment for the children of Russian railway employees, given the already lively transcultural exchange there. Since many railway employees lived in Northeast China with the intention of returning to the Tsarist Empire at the end of their service, teaching Chinese could not be a priority.³²

The situation was different where the conditions of acquiring education were different. In the municipal schools, where children of Russian craftsmen and merchants who saw their future in Harbin studied, Chinese was already being taught before 1917 and a Russian preparatory course for Chinese children was offered. Its graduates did not want to be prepared for attending secondary schools in the Russian Empire, but for a life in the multiethnic city of Harbin.

28 Nachal’noe obrazovanie 1908, pp. 24, 236; Nachal’noe obrazovanie 1910, pp. 23–25, 204–205.

29 Nachal’noe obrazovanie 1910, pp. 25–27, 39.

30 Ibid., pp. 39–51.

31 E. Kh. Nilus’, Istoricheskii Obzor Kitaiskoi Vostochnoi Zheleznoi Dorogi 1896–1923 g.g. [Historical Survey of the Chinese Eastern Railway, 1896–1923], Kharbin 1923, p. 4. Equally self-affirming: P. S. Tishenko, Kitaiskaia Vostochnaia Zheleznaia doroga 1903–1913 gg. [The Chinese Eastern Railway, 1903–1913], Kharbin 1914.

32 Children of non-railway employees could only be educated at railway schools after permission had been granted, see: Shi Fang 石方, Liu Shuang 高凌, and Gao Ling 劉爽, Haerbin eqiaoshi 哈爾濱俄橋史 [A History of the Russian Emigrants in Harbin], 2nd edn, Haerbin 2003, pp. 287–290.

The “pragmatic flexibility” of the Tsarist nationality policy, with which the multiethnic Russian Empire confronted its ethnic minorities at home, was also evident beyond the imperial borders.³³ In semi-colonial Harbin, Russian institutions coexisted that pursued contrary concepts of shaping the interethnic contact zone. Even the KVZhD’s Education Department found different answers for primary and secondary school students. While the railway company dispensed with optional Chinese language instruction in its primary schools, it was compulsory for boys and girls attending KVZhD’s Commercial School.³⁴ Before 1917, however, the Commercial School was the only educational institution to provide Chinese as a compulsory subject; with 894 pupils (1912/13), it was the largest secondary school in Harbin.³⁵ Furthermore, a preparatory course for children who had attended Chinese primary schools was established and the Chinese government granted 30 scholarships from 1911 onwards.³⁶ Some of these bilingual graduates later became leading figures in the KVZhD and the local Chinese administration.³⁷

2.2. After 1917: “Red”, “White”, and Chinese Schools

The Russian Revolution of 1917 put interethnic coexistence in Harbin on a new basis, as the change of power in the Tsarist Empire brought about new loyalties and conflicts in its Northeast China exclave. Russia lost its extraterritorial rights along the railway line. And in addition to 200,000 civil war emigrants, an increasing number of Chinese craftsmen and merchants headed to Harbin. Its educators had to face the new realities of a rapidly growing city.

When the Chinese Eastern Railway was placed under Sino-Soviet administration in 1924, the Soviet Union’s nationality policy of affirmative action found its echo in Harbin. On the multiethnic fringes of the Soviet Union, schools teaching in national languages had already been established in the Union republics from 1923. And numerous smaller ethnic minorities were educated in their mother tongue, as the Communist Party celebrated its “national carnival”.³⁸ In a similar vein, the newly “red” KVZhD Education Department established schools for the children of its Chinese employees and, conversely, also encouraged Harbin’s Russian student body to learn the language of the Chinese population. The newly appointed head of the KVZhD Education Department, the Moscow-loyal N. V. Ustrialov, promoted this “red” priority.³⁹ The Soviet indigenisation

33 A. Kappeler, *Historische Voraussetzungen des Nationalitätenproblems im russischen Vielvölkerreich*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 8 (1982) 2, pp. 159–183, at 164.

34 I. G. Baranov, *Prepodavanie kitaiskogo iazyka v russkoi nachal’noi i srednei shkole Osobogo Raiona Vostochnykh Provintsiï* [Teaching the Chinese Language in Russian Primary and Secondary Schools of the Special Region of the Eastern Provinces], in: *Vestnik Man’chzhurii* 7–8 (1929), pp. 8–13, at 9.

35 *Ékonomicheskoe biuro KVZhD, Statisticheskii ezhegodnik 1924* [Statistical Yearbook 1924], Kharbin 1924, p. 95: In 1912/13: 579 boys and 315 girls; in 1922/23: 645 boys and 529 girls.

36 Ternavskii, *Ves’ Kharbin na 1926 god*, pp. 115–116.

37 *Ob’edinenie inzhenerov okonchivshikh Kharbinskii Politekhnikeskii Institut* (eds.), *Politekhnik 10. Iubileinyi Sbornik* [Polytechnic 10th Anniversary Compilation], Sydney 1969, p. 116.

38 Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment*, p. 439.

39 Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, p. 191.

policy of the 1920s, which “rooted” ethnic minorities in their national culture and put their Russian neighbours under obligation, thus diffused into Northeast China.

In 1925, Chinese lessons were introduced in all KVZhD schools – at least as an optional subject.⁴⁰ Although the four-year primary schools remained exempt, the three-year upper primary schools all employed a native Chinese teacher from 1925. And Harbin’s secondary schools, such as the Technical Secondary School, the First Railway School, and the Russian-Chinese Artisan School, as well as the grammar schools that KVZhD maintained at the railway points of Pogranichnaia, Imian’no, and Bukhedu, had also integrated Chinese foreign language instruction into their curricula by the mid-1920s.⁴¹ Conversely, the upper primary schools the railway company had established for the children of its Chinese employees appointed Russian teachers to instruct the Chinese-speaking student body in the *lingua franca* of the KVZhD.⁴² Through its prospective educational efforts, however, the Chinese Eastern Railway was only able to partially meet its demand for bilingual workers. At the end of the 1920s, it thus planned to offer 2,400 of its employees (1,450 Russians and 850 Chinese) language instruction to last several years.⁴³

On the other hand, “white” private schools in Harbin exile strove to preserve what seemed to have perished with the Tsarist Empire – a “Russian culture” understood as orthodoxy, loyalty to the Tsar, and historical heroism. For the monarchist emigrants, preparing the next generation for the fight for an “other” Russia meant preserving Tsarist grammar schools that primarily taught Russian philology, history, and religion.⁴⁴ The Pushkin School (1924) and the Dostoevsky School (1926), for example, came into being after the KVZhD Education Department had abandoned religious instruction at the railway schools in 1924 and dismissed teachers who were loyal to the Tsar. The patriotic education at these private schools was directed against the communist rulers in Moscow and not the ethnic communities of Manchuria. In Harbin, where one planned to stay only temporarily, “white” private schools thus continued to teach French, English, or German.⁴⁵ Learning the language of the Chinese population, on the other hand, seemed to many parents to be a “superfluous burden”.⁴⁶ Those who still wanted to learn Chinese had to raise their own funds and, as the former Harbin pupil Nina Mokrińskaia remem-

40 K. Filipovich, Organizatsiia kursov inostrannykh iazykov dlia agentov KVZhD [The Organization of Foreign Language Classes for KVZhD Agents], in: Vestnik Man’chzhurii 7 (1927), pp. 18–21, at 18; Zhao Xigang 趙喜罡, Eluosiren zai Haerbin de xuexiao 俄羅斯人在哈爾濱的學校 [Russians in Harbin’s Schools], in: Dong Yueqin 董月勤 (eds.), Waiguo ren zai Haerbin 外國人在哈爾濱 (Haerbin wenshi ziliao 哈爾濱文史資料 Vol. 24), Haerbin 2002, pp. 94–102.

41 G. I. Semënov, Russko-Kitaiskoe Remeslennoe Uchilishche: Vospominaniia [The Russian-Chinese Craft School: Recollections], in: Ob’edinenie inzhenerov okonchivshikh Kharbinskii Politekhnikheskii Institut (eds.), Politekhnik 11, Sydney 1984, pp. 33–35, at S. 34.

42 Ternavskii, Ves’ Kharbin na 1926 god, pp. 12–13.

43 Filipovich, Organizatsiia, pp. 18–19.

44 Raef, Russia Abroad, pp. 47–49.

45 Ternavskii, Ves’ Kharbin na 1926 god, pp. 119–121.

46 Baranov, Prepodavanie, p. 10.

bers, were all too quick to forego it in times of economic hardship.⁴⁷ In 1926, only one of the thirteen private secondary schools in Harbin offered Chinese lessons.⁴⁸

The primary task of school education, as M. N. Ershov, professor at the Harbin Faculty of Law, stressed in his article “The School and the National Problem” (1926), was to convey the “origins and motives of the historical existence of a people”.⁴⁹ According to Ershov, this was especially true for schools in exile, because:

*Russian schools in exile [...] must take into account the lessons of their own epoch: without national ideology, without national consciousness and national education, there is no nation and no state.*⁵⁰

Clashing with the Soviet presence in Harbin, the “white” *émigré* community took refuge in a rhetoric of resistance that prioritised the ideal of nationalist self-strengthening in education. In Harbin, too, the nation filled the gap that emerged after communities had been displaced.⁵¹

Annual reports and Festschriften issued by *émigré* schools ostentatiously omitted any reference to China and exile life, and thus testify that the Tsarist followers tried to mentally escape the Harbin contact zone as they dreamed themselves into the past.⁵² On 6 June 1925, Alexander Pushkin’s birthday, the First Mixed Secondary School celebrated a “Day of Russian Culture”. The programme reveals what the school community believed its cultural order to be. After certificates were awarded, the school community sang the unofficial anthem of the Russian Empire, “*Kol’ slaven*” (“How Glorious Is Our Lord in Zion”), recited poems and celebrated with folkloric songs.⁵³ Displaying Russianness was not limited to a melancholy reminiscence of a tradition believed to have disappeared. In two ceremonial speeches, the teachers galvanised their pupils into fighting against the Bolshevik state. The Russian Revolution had “dealt a blow to Russian culture”, and so Vladimir Pavlovsky demanded: “Russian [...] devote all your strength to the destruction of Russia’s suffering”.⁵⁴ And his fellow teacher added, “if Russia needs your life – give it with joy!”⁵⁵

47 N. G. Mokrińskaja, *Moja žizn’: Detstvo v Sibiri, junost’ v Charbine 1914–1932 gody* [My Life: Childhood in Siberia, Youth in Harbin 1914–1932], New York 1991, pp. 128, 141.

48 Ternavskii, *Ves’ Kharbin na 1926 god*, pp. 119–121.

49 M. N. Ershov, *Shkola i natsionalnaia problema* [The School and the National Problem], Kharbin 1926, p. 48.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

51 See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

52 *Lubileinyi illiustrirovannyi al’bom Russkago Kharbinskago priiuta-uchilishcha, byvshii Russkii Dom* [Illustrated Anniversary Album of Harbin’s Russian Boarding School, Former Russian House], Kharbin 1928, p. 3.

53 *Prazdnovanie “dnia russkoi kul’tury” v 1-m Kharbinskom Smeshannom Real’nom Uchilishche* [The Celebration of the “Day of Russian Culture” in Harbin’s First Mixed Secondary School], Kharbin 1926, pp. 1–2. In addition, poems entitled “Pushkin”, “Kiev”, “Moscow”, “Saint Petersburg”, “Rus”, and “Russia and Western Europe” were recited.

54 V. Pavlovskii, *Znachenie “dnia russkoi kul’tury”* [The Significance of the “Day of Russian Culture”], in: *Prazdnovanie “dnia russkoi kul’tury” v 1-m Kharbinskom Smeshannom Real’nom Uchilishche*, Kharbin 1926, pp. 2–3.

55 A. Andogskii, *Vekhi Russkoi Kul’tury* [Landmarks of Russian Culture], in: *Prazdnovanie “dnia russkoi kul’tury” v 1-m Kharbinskom Smeshannom Real’nom Uchilishche*, Kharbin 1926, p. 13.

A strong nation able to resist the influence of foreign powers was also envisioned by Chinese school founders. In the 1920s, Western-style schools emerged all over the country that broke with the form and content of classical education in China.⁵⁶ In Harbin, where a Chinese private secondary school and an Evening Business School were established, the nationalist aspiration “grew out of simultaneous opposition to and cooperation with” foreign influences.⁵⁷ The interpreter of Russian and Christian educator Deng Jiemin 鄧潔民 (1890–1926), for example, founded a Chinese private school in 1918, the name of which reveals its agenda:⁵⁸ *Donghua* 東華 (literally “East China”) can be read metaphorically as “The East is Chinese” and thus stands less for a geographical entity than for the claim that the Harbin hinterland was part of the Chinese nation.⁵⁹ Deng, whose chosen name *Jiemin* translates as “Purify the citizens”, called for donations to this cause, for instance in the largest Chinese-language newspaper in Northeast China, the *Yuandongbao* 遠東報, that the KVZhd had founded in 1906:

*Gentlemen, do you long for a rich nation? Do you long for a powerful nation? Then support the Donghua School! Do you long for the promotion of local culture in Harbin? Do you long for the development of education in [North] East China? Then support the completion of Donghua School!*⁶⁰

The propagated strengthening of Chinese identity was to be achieved through reform education.⁶¹ Not Confucian philosophy, but modern natural sciences and economics, enriched with Chinese literature, history, and geography, formed the canon of the Donghua School. Instead of teaching Russian, the former interpreter of Russian Deng chose English as the foreign language to be taught.⁶² The official curriculum was supplemented by study groups, such as a patriotic association, a rhetoric club, a Standard Chinese society, and an English club, which all fostered education for the purpose of “saving the nation”.⁶³

In line with a China-wide movement to oppose imperial education ideals and its classical scholarly language, Harbin educators propagated contemporary vernacular as the language of writing and instruction. The Beijing variant of Chinese, which had been

56 Cai luan'pei, *Uspekhi vysshego obrazovaniia v Kitae za 15 let respubliki* [The Achievements of Higher Education in China in the 15 Years of the Republic of China], in: *Vestnik Man'chzhurii* 5 (1927), pp. 71–73. KVZhd's academic journal, *Vestnik Man'chzhurii*, published this article by the President of Beijing University and former Minister of Education, Cai Yuanpei, in Russian.

57 Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, p. 3.

58 Zuzhi Donghua shangxiao 組織東華商校 [Establishing the Donghua Business School], in: *Yuandongbao* 遠東報, 2 March 1918.

59 Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, p. 54.

60 Haerbin Donghua xuexiao mujintuan qishi 哈爾濱東華學校募金團啟事 [Announcement of the Donghua School's Fundraising Committee], in: *Yuandongbao* 遠東報, 8 November 1918.

61 B.C. Keenan, *Educational Reform and Politics in Early Republican China*, in: *Journal of Asian Studies* 33 (1974) 2, pp. 225–237, at 226.

62 Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, pp. 32, 41, 43, 60.

63 Meng Xianyu 孟憲宇, *Nianqing jiaoyujia Deng Jiemin* 年經教育家鄧潔民 [The Young Pedagogue Deng Jiemin], in: *Heilongjiang shizhi* 黑龍江史誌 24 (2013), pp. 56–59, at 57.

elevated to the status of *guoyu* 國語 (“state language”), was intended to level out the regional dialects of domestic Chinese migrants and serve as a symbol of identification with the federal state. In March 1921, the administration of the Special Region of the Eastern Provinces announced linguistic requirements for all Chinese schools: “The Education Department decrees Standard Chinese to be the uniform language of instruction.”⁶⁴ For the year 1930/31, the Chinese administration even planned to introduce Chinese as a compulsory subject in all Russian schools. After five years, Russian pupils were expected to have mastered around 1,000 characters and a vocabulary of 2,000 to 3,000 words.⁶⁵

2.3. Harbin’s Universities

In the first half of the 1920s, institutions of higher education were founded in Harbin: the Polytechnic Institute, the Faculty of Law, the Pedagogical Institute, and the Institute of Oriental and Economic Studies.⁶⁶ The first three of these universities provided preparatory courses for prospective Chinese students and even graduated students of Chinese origin.

The Polytechnic Institute, founded in 1920 as the “Russian-Chinese Technical Institute” (*Rusko-Kitaiskii Tekhnikum*, *Zhong-E gongye xuexiao* 中俄工業學校), in many respects served as a contact zone.⁶⁷ To train its own engineers, the KVZhD financed a transcultural institution, in the tradition of which today’s *Harbin Institute of Technology*, China’s leading technical university, still exists.⁶⁸ Already in the year of its foundation, the Polytechnic Institute launched a preparatory course for 30 graduates of Chinese secondary schools to gain additional knowledge of “arithmetic, geography, Russian, Chinese, drawing and handicrafts”.⁶⁹ Those who passed, as rector L. A. Ustrugov advertised, were enrolled in their subject of study “without entrance examination”. External applicants of “both sexes and all nationalities” were admitted directly if they had obtained their matriculation standard elsewhere.⁷⁰ To cover tuition fees, the Chinese government even granted scholarships to both regular students and propaedeutic seminarists of Chinese descent.

64 Ge xiao tian yong guoyu 各校添用國語 [All Schools Apply the State Language], in: Binjiang Shibao 濱江時報, 17 March 1921.

65 Baranov, *Prepodavanie*, p. 11.

66 Bakich, *Charbin*, p. 319.

67 N. P. Kalugie, *Politeknicheskii Institut v Kharbine. Istoricheskii obzor* [The Polytechnic Institute in Harbin. Historical Survey], in: *Ob’edinenie inzhenerov okonchivshikh Kharbinskii Politeknicheskii Institut* (eds.), *Politekhnik* 10. Iubileinyi Sbornik, Sydney 1969, pp. 1–13.

68 *Haerbin gongye daxue xiaoshi bianxieshi* 哈爾濱工業大學校史編寫室 (eds.), *Haerbin gongye daxue jianshi, 1920–1985. 哈爾濱工業大學簡史 1920年–1985年* [A Short History of the Harbin Institute of Technology, 1920–1985], Haerbin 1985; Ma Hongshu 馬洪舒, *Haerbin gongye daxue xiaoshi, 1920–2000 哈爾濱工業大學校史 1920–2000* [A History of the Harbin Institute of Technology, 1920–2000], Haerbin 2000.

69 *Zhong-E gongye xuexiao guanggao* 中俄工業學校廣告 [Announcement of the Russian-Chinese Technical Institute], in: *Yuangongbao* 遠東報, 14 October 1920.

70 L. A. Ustrugov, *Rusko-Kitaiskii Politeknicheskii Institut* [The Russian-Chinese Technical Institute], in: *Ob’edinenie inzhenerov okonchivshikh Kharbinskii Politeknicheskii Institut* (eds.), *Politekhnik* 10. Iubileinyi Sbornik, Sydney 1969, no pagination.

In the summer of 1925, the first Chinese, Pei Iu-da, graduated alongside 35 Russians from the university’s second graduate cohort.⁷¹ In the same year, Chinese students launched their own student association.⁷² In 1926/27, 485 Russian and 111 Chinese students were studying construction engineering and electromechanics, and another 99 Chinese students were in the preparatory course. In 1930, 123 Chinese took the preparatory course.⁷³ One fifth of the students of an academic discipline and one third of the student body in total (including preparatory courses) were Chinese. And conversely, the university employed several foreign language instructors to teach Chinese, such as Liu Zerong 劉澤榮 (1892–1970), who had gone to school in Batumi (Georgia) and studied in Saint Petersburg.⁷⁴

The Faculty of Law also facilitated lively transcultural exchange. Initially, the university was founded in 1920 with the support of the KVZhD, the city council, and societal organisations to create a “cultural oasis” for emigrated “white” professors, as its dean Georgi Gins pointed out.⁷⁵ Soviet and Chinese demands, however, led to a change in dealing with “the other”. As a result of the Sovietisation of the KVZhD Education Department, the proportion of Soviet professors grew, as did the pressure on their “white” colleagues. Soviet law was integrated into the canon and a preparatory course for 40 Chinese secondary school graduates was established in 1926. In 1928, 106, and in 1929, 137 students took part, while in 1928 a total of 935 students of ten different nationalities were enrolled at the Faculty of Law.⁷⁶

Finally, in 1929, the officials of the Special Region of the Eastern Provinces began to commit “the other” to Chinese predominance when they incorporated the Faculty of Law and appointed a Chinese dean. Initially, the status of foreign language classes in Chinese for Russian students was enhanced. In 1929, 49 lawyers and economists, including four Chinese, graduated from the Faculty of Law – their final exams included a compulsory Chinese language exam.⁷⁷ By then, seven of 44 lecturers were Chinese, including È Tszun-Lian’, who had studied Russian and Law in Beijing.⁷⁸ At the same time, the canon of the preparatory courses shifted, as Wang Tifu 王替夫, who had attended them since 1928, recalls: “Proven patriots” taught Chinese geography, history, and law as well as Sun Yatsen’s “Three Principles of the People”. Russian, on the other

71 Ibid., p. 11.

72 Gao Chengru 高成儒, *Wo suo jingli de haerbin xuesheng huodong* 我所經歷的哈爾濱學生生活動 [My Experiences in Harbin’s Student Movement], in: *Haerbin wenshi ziliao* 哈爾濱文史資料 Vol. 5, Harbin 1984, pp. 6–19, at 6.

73 Kalugie, *Politeknicheskii Institut v Kharbine*, pp. 7–8, 13.

74 M. Gamsa, *Mixed Marriages in Russian-Chinese Manchuria*, in: Ben-Canaan/Grüner/Prodöhl (eds.), *Entangled Histories*, pp. 47–58, at 115.

75 G. K. Gins, *Iuridicheskii Fakul’tet v g. Kharbine 1920–1930* [The Faculty of Law in Harbin 1920–1930], in: *Izvestiia Iuridicheskogo Fakul’teta. Iubileinyi geviatyi tom 1920–1930* (1931), pp. 308–314, at 308.

76 A. A. Kamkov, *Otchet o sostoianii Iuridicheskogo fakul’teta. S 1-go marta 1920 po 1-e marta 1930 goda* [Report on the Situation of the Faculty of Law from 1 March 1920 to 1 March 1930], in: *Izvestiia Iuridicheskogo Fakul’teta. Iubileinyi geviatyi tom 1920–1930* (1931), pp. 315–326, at 317.

77 Gins, *Iuridicheskii Fakul’tet*, p. 312.

78 Kamkov, *Otchet o sostoianii Iuridicheskogo fakul’teta*, p. 320.

hand, being taught by an “elderly Russian lady”, had received little student interest.⁷⁹ In the autumn of 1929, the Faculty of Law was finally divided into a Russian and a Chinese branch, with the former no longer being allowed to accept new students. The military intervention of the Red Army in the winter of 1929 eventually restored the *status quo ante* of a joint teaching endeavour. In 1930, 5 out of 31 graduates were of Chinese origin, in 1931, 3 out of 25.⁸⁰

After his reinstatement, the Dean of the Faculty of Law, Georgi Gins, who had served in the “white” government of Alexander Kolchak during the Russian Civil War, emphasised the mutual importance of transcultural learning:

*The usefulness (for the Russian cause) of teaching the Chinese youth in Russian educational institutions cannot raise any doubts. [...] On the other hand, the successful study of China by Russians is conducted most effectively with [...] the participation of Chinese.*⁸¹

Only a few months after Gins’ plea, the conditions for transcultural learning in Harbin were to change again as the colonial predominance shifted at the expense of Russian institutions as a result of the Japanese occupation of Northeast China.

3. Conclusion

Permanent and institutionalised encounters of Chinese and Russians in Harbin’s education were by no means the extraordinary phenomenon they are commonly regarded to be.⁸² For pupils, students, and lecturers of both ethnicities met and faced each other with an intensity that could only flourish under the conditions of volatile power. Considering the conditions of intercultural learning in the (semi-)colonial context, a third of the entire student body and one tenth (to one seventh) of the graduating classes being Chinese, scholarship-funded propaedeutics, and compulsory foreign language learning were by no means exceptional phenomena. On the contrary: the variety of modes of exchange in 1910s and 1920s Harbin and the quality its youth, despite disparate illiteracy rates,⁸³ was able to experience shows considerable entanglement – an entanglement that increased

79 Wang Tifu 王替夫 and Shen Ke 沈珂, *Wo jiyizhong de fazheng daxue 我記憶中的法政大學* [The Faculty of Law in My Memory], in: *Haerbin wenshi ziliao 哈爾濱文史資料*, Vol. 19, Haerbin, no date, pp. 142–147, at 143.

80 N. P. Avtonomov, *Iuridicheskii fakul'tet v Kharbine: Istoricheskii ocherk, 1920–1937* [The Faculty of Law in Harbin: Historical Report, 1920–1937], in: *Pravo i kul'tura. Sbornik v oznamenovanie vosemnadtsatiletnego sushchestvovaniia iuridicheskogo fakul'teta v gorode Kharbine, 1920–1937*, Kharbin 1938, pp. 1–84, at 62–65; N. N. Nikiforov, *Kratkii otchet o sostoianii iuridicheskogo Fakul'teta ORVP po Russkomu ego Otdeleniiu s 1-go marta 1930 g. po 1 iuliu 1931 g.* [A Short Report on the Situation of the Faculty of Law concerning its Russian Division, from 1 March 1930 to 1 July 1931], in: *Izvestiia iuridicheskogo Fakul'teta. Iubileinyi geviaty tom 1920–1930 (1931)*, pp. 327–336, at 330–331.

81 Gins, *Iuridicheskii Fakul'tet*, p. 310.

82 Gamsa, *Cross-cultural Contact in Manchuria*, p. 570. See Bakich, *Charbin*, p. 327; Grüner, *In the Streets and Bazaars of Harbin*, p. 38.

83 In 1934, 54 per cent of the Chinese and 11 per cent of the Russian population were illiterate: Xin Yuan, *Intercultural Speakers in Harbin: The Sociolinguistic Profile of Chinese Pidgin Russian*, in: Ben-Canaan/Grüner/Prodöhl (eds.), *Entangled Histories*, pp. 35–45, at 42 Fn. 41.

over time and the course of education and did not consist of a one-directional transfer of knowledge from Russians to Chinese only.

Increasing exchange created intensified distinction. Since no government was able to enforce its full regulatory power, different concepts of how to deal with multiethnicity in education could coexist. “White” schools distinguished themselves from “red” schools, Chinese from Russian institutions. Although the colonial competition for Northeast China always set changing frameworks, it was the local educational actors who fought the battle for the legitimacy of knowledge and thus defined the concrete conditions of education in their institutions of learning. Their ideas of how multiethnicity and multilingualism were to be organised reflected the spatial orders of their educational utopias – sometimes with, sometimes without “the other”.

The precondition of this multifaceted encounter, both on a concrete level as well as in the abstract sphere of identity construction, was the fragility of political order – an order that was claimed by many sides but could not ultimately be enforced by anyone. Unlike (post-)colonial contexts of clear-cut relations of domination, people in Harbin could seek entanglement or evade it, they could draw a distinction or resist doing so. Thus, the entanglement of Russians and Chinese, of “white” and “red” learners, was only partially a forced strategy of social advancement where alternatives existed. Admitting Chinese students to Russian educational institutions, on the other hand, was the attempt by an informal empire to take account of the new realities. The hegemonic position, once securitised by legal extraterritoriality, was thus to be perpetuated in the area of knowledge production, i.e., by training the technocratic elite of the future.⁸⁴ The Chinese government hoped for the same when it claimed this last bastion of Russian supremacy in the late 1920s and shaped Harbin’s education on its own terms. Homi Bhabha once argued that it was the “force of ambivalence” that allowed colonial discourses to persist in changing historical contexts. In Harbin, one could reply, it was the ambivalence of force.⁸⁵

84 See Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, pp. 184, 202.

85 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 66.