

МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В ИЗМЕНЯЮЩЕМСЯ МИРЕ

STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND: THE RUSSIAN COMMUNITY IN XINJIANG, AND ITS INTERACTIONS WITH THE LOCAL PEOPLES

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Russian community in a North-Western Chinese province of Xinjiang has made a considerable contribution to the historical and political development of this region, as well as in economic and cultural life of Xinjiang. However, in 1960, almost all Russians left Xinjiang for Western countries or the Soviet Union. In the 20th century, the Russian represented the major part of the local middle class and small businesses because of their absence among the indigenous population. Their relations with the Uighurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and the Chinese have varied according to time and situation, but in general, were quite complex phenomenon. The Western European, Russian and Chinese historians formed different interpretation of the development of the Russian community and its contribution to development of Xinjiang.

Keywords: The Stranger, North-Western China, Xinjiang, the Russian community, economy, intercultural communication

ЧУЖИЕ НА ЧУЖОЙ ЗЕМЛЕ: РУССКАЯ ОБЩИНА В СИНЬЦЗЯНЕ И ЕЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ С КОРЕННЫМ НАСЕЛЕНИЕМ

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Русская община в отдаленной северо-западной китайской провинции Синьцзян внесла значительный вклад в историческое и политическое развитие этой области, а также в экономическую и культурную жизнь Синьцзяна. История ее насчитывала более 200 лет, однако в 1960 г. практически все русские покинули Синьцзян, отправившись в Западные страны или Советский Союз. В двадцатом веке русские представляли большую часть местного среднего класса и мелких предпринимателей из-за отсутствия оных среди коренного населения. Их отношения с уйгурами, казахами, узбеками, киргизами и китайцами менялись в зависимости от времени и ситуации, но, в целом, представляли собой достаточно сложное явление. У западноевропейских, русских и китайских историков сформировались различные интерпретации развития русской общины и ее вклада в развитие провинции.

Ключевые слова: Чужой, Северо-западный Китай, Синьцзян, русская община, экономика, межкультурная коммуникация

The Russian community in China's remote Northwest province Xinjiang (also called Chinese Turkestan) has contributed significantly to its historical and political development, as well as Xinjiang's economic and cultural life. Its roots go back over 200 years, and have lasted until the 1960s, when virtually all the remaining Russians left Xinjiang for various countries in the West, as well as for the Soviet Union. During the twentieth century, Russians formed much of Xinjiang's tiny commercial and professional middle class filling a void, due to a lack of suitable locals. Their relations with local Uighurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kirghiz, and Chinese varied according to time and situation, but on the whole, formed an uneasy relationship. Western, Russian, and Chinese historians have formed different interpretations of the Russian community's development and contribution to the larger province.

The total number of Russians in Xinjiang has varied considerably from a low of 14,000 to a high of 300,000. One can explain this variance largely by asking who composed the Russian community. Whether the Russian community was only ethnic Russians, or did it include anyone, who ever had a Russian or Soviet passport, and lived in Xinjiang. In other words it might include ethnic Russians, as well as Cossacks, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kirghiz, and other Central Asian peoples, who migrated to Xinjiang for various reasons. Religiously, the Russian community was also very diverse, composing mainstream Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Catholics, Baptists, Jews, and of course, Moslems. Russians were one of some 15 separate ethnic groups described in a 1931 report [21]. They lived near and along the western borders of Xinjiang, ranging from the Altai in the north, to Kashgaria in the south, along with communities in the capital Urumqi in the center to Hami in the east. While some Russians were peasant farmers, most lived in Xinjiang's cities and towns, forming some 10% of its urban population, or 6% of the population as a whole [13]. Russian schools, theatres, clubs, cinemas, restaurants, and Orthodox Churches dotted most Xinjiang cities. Correspondents declared Urumqi seemed a Russian city before World War II, where they heard Russian spoken in the streets, in its restaurants, hotels, shops, and offices in the capital [15, p. 82]. Thus Russians formed a noticeable element in Xinjiang's diverse urban life.

The earliest Russians were Old Believers, who fled religious persecution under Empress Catherine II over 200 years ago [14]. The Old Believer Church emerged from a schism in the Russian Orthodox Church in the mid-17th century. Often Old Believers were sent scattering to the outer reaches of the Russian Empire as a result of this divisive split over religious rituals, and some settled in the Northwest hilly Altai region forming villages to keep their faith. As the Russian Empire expanded south and eastwards in the mid and late nineteenth century, Russian merchants moved into neighboring Xinjiang, then called Chinese Turkestan. Thousands of Kazakhs came over to Xinjiang to help the Xinjiang Kazakhs fight the Chinese. Taking advantage of instability within the Chinese Empire, and using the Kazakh emigration as a pretext, Russian troops occupied most of the Ili district in 1871, only returning most of the area to China, the same year it formally incorporated Xinjiang as a province in 1881.

By the end of the nineteenth century, thousands of Russians and Kazakhs had crossed the porous border living, working, and trading in Xinjiang. Active Russian communities had formed in Kashgar, Chuguchak, Ghulja, Khotan, and Urumqi, with extensive Consulate compounds in Kashgar, Chuguchak, and Urumqi. For example, the Russian Consulate in Kashgar had a large 40 room Consulate, gardens, parks, post office, barracks for troops, and Russian Orthodox Church [1]. A Russian newspaper called *Semirchensky Oblast Vedomosti*, began in 1911 in Kashgar [2]. Ethnic Russians were doctors, merchants, soldiers and farmers forming a predominant element in Xinjiang society; while Kazakhs remained herders and peasants. From 1910 on many Russians settled onto what had been grazing lands of nomadic Kazakhs in border regions. In 1911 China erupted into revolution as the Qing dynasty was overthrown. That revolution caused a rise in anti-foreign feelings among the Xinjiang peoples. In 1912 the Chinese army looted and set on fire much of both the Russian and British quarters in Kashgar and Khotan, causing extensive loss of life and property. Consequently, to protect foreigners, the Russian government rushed some 1000 Cossack cavalry to Xinjiang [3]. Prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917 ethnic Russians and others from the Russian Empire formed a necessary part of the fabric of Chinese Turkestan, dominating the economy and social and cultural life of the province.

The Russian Revolution and subsequent Civil War, 1917-1921, transformed Xinjiang, as well as the Russian community [23]. The Tsarist ruble, the currency of choice throughout Xinjiang, declined considerably in value, as inflation ravaged Russians and non-Russians alike, who were all hungry and many did not know how they would survive. Large numbers from the former Russian aristocracy, intelligentsia, and middle classes gathered in Urumqi and other cities [4]. In the summer of 1918 the first defeated Cossack units retreated into Ili with their wives and families. Within two years some 7000 White troops and other refugees poured into Xinjiang [26]. The Whites were the anti-Communist units fighting the newly established Communist government's troops called Reds. While most

were disarmed by the local authorities, other former White soldiers became bandits, threatening a complete break down of authority throughout Xinjiang. Because the Bolsheviks threatened their nomadic way of life, some 100,000 Kazakhs fled Soviet Central Asia into Xinjiang [8]. In 1921 a Russian trading society formed to ostensibly care for the tens of thousands of Russian refugees in Xinjiang. However, the head of the society forced these very poor, hungry refugees into paying him some 15% of their meager income as membership fees, but kept much of the money himself [20]. Many Russians, who could get out, made their way to coastal Chinese cities, including Hong Kong, and eventually emigrated to the West. By 1921 upwards of 200,000 ethnic Russians, Cossacks, Central Asian peoples of all classes and backgrounds had fled to Xinjiang, where they had to make a new life in a strange land. Those White officers and soldiers, who returned to the Soviet Union, were usually executed or imprisoned in a concentration camp. Those who stayed in Xinjiang were often stateless, insecure, and had to make their peace with the Chinese provincial authorities, who often manipulated and ill-treated the now-stateless Russians, especially the White officers and troops. Consequently most Russian refugees hated the Chinese authorities [13].

Out of necessity, the Russians, and other former peoples of the Russian Empire, had to make peace with the Xinjiang Provincial and local authorities, and become members of the community. Of all the groups in Xinjiang during the pre-World War II era, the Russians were the ones with the most skills and education. Whites served as drivers, mechanics, blacksmiths, trained provincial troops, and served as soldiers and officers for Xinjiang warlords. Possessing advanced skills, other refugees formed an elite in Xinjiang serving as doctors, scientists, engineers, merchants, teachers, and artisans. Uzbeks and Kazakhs became traders, carpenters, builders, leather and metal workers. All found themselves in a country more culturally and politically even more backward than the country from which they had to escape [9, p. 145–147]. In 1930 and 1931 a new wave of Soviet Kazakh emigres fled the terrors of Stalin's collectivization, and crossed into Xinjiang by the tens of thousands. In 1924 the Soviet Union signed a treaty with China, which provided for the establishment of Consulates in Urumqi, Kashgar, Ghulja, and Chuguchak, along with trading offices in those cities. They then formed the nucleus for a new community of Russians, ones who served the Soviet government as diplomats, traders, and advisors, teachers, engineers, and workers to assist the Xinjiang authorities. While initially there was understandable hostility between the two Russian communities, the White *emigres* and loyal Soviets, that hostility lessened over time as children of the Whites grew to adulthood and all faced similar challenges trying to make a living in a far distant land.

During the 1930s the Russians, both *emigres* and Soviets, played a major, in fact, predominant role in Xinjiang's political, military, economic, and social life. The Chinese, utilizing the very good military skills of the Cossacks, organized special units of White troops, commanded by former White officers to support one warlord after another in their attempts to achieve power, or defeat rebellions. In 1932 Governor Chin Shu-jen armed White Russians to stop an attack on Urumqi by General Ma Chung-yin, who wanted to overthrow Chin. After a three-day battle in February, the Russians played a major role in saving the city and Chin [11]. However, the ambitious and powerful General Shang Shih-Tsai organized several thousand White Russians to overthrow Chin in 1933 and 1934. Their participation in the military struggle on the side of General Sheng was an important factor in his victory over first Governor Chin Shu-jen, and then the General Ma Chung-yin in 1934 [9]. Most Whites did not want to join Shang's army, but were forced. If any Whites refused, Shang threatened to arrest them, and send them and their families back to the USSR, where they faced certain imprisonment there [15,141]. White detachments suppressed rebellions against Shang in 1936, 1937, and in 1940. For their assistance, Shang was in the debt of both the Soviet Union and the White Russian community in Xinjiang. For that Shang gave land, horses, and tractors to the Russians, who prospered. Those Whites, who became Chinese citizens, gained equal rights with other groups.

The height of Russian influence, power, and wealth occurred during the 1930s. Russians, both emigres and Soviets, played a major role in Xinjiang's political, military, eco-

conomic, and social life. One of the main centers for Russians was the border city of Ghulja, which had a Russian language cinema. The Russian Consulate in Kashgar, another center, had a swimming pool, tennis court, and “all imaginable luxuries.” Russian was taught as the main foreign language in all the schools and universities in Xinjiang. Almost all doctors, pharmacists, and teachers were Russians, mostly people from the Soviet Union working in Xinjiang on contracts [24]. Under Sheng Russians dominated the economic life as almost all Xinjiang trade was with the Soviet Union, far more than with China itself. Russians had “advisors” in all the departments in the Provincial administration, including the hated and brutal secret police. Russians had officers in the Xinjiang army, and piloted Xinjiang’s tiny air force. Foreigners other than Russians were not allowed to live in the province [10, p. 1478–1483]. Most of the few cars and trucks in Xinjiang were Russian. A few Russian newspapers were established in Ghulja and Urumqi to serve the growing Russian community. At a time when conditions in the Soviet Union were brutal, a report described the salaries for Russians as quite good as people had ample food and consumer goods [22]. When I was in Moscow a few years ago, I interviewed an elderly woman, who lived as a young girl in Xinjiang during the late 1930s. She recalled that her family lived in a large house in the Consulate’s compound, with servants, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and a volleyball ground. Even when locals had trouble finding bread, she remembered the Russians enjoyed large meals and often held parties [7]. White Russian doctors were highly respected, and served not only the Russian community, but also wealthy Chinese, Kazakhs, and Uighurs. All the state pharmacies were under Russian guidance after 1932. The Russians built a hospital in Urumqi, and maintained medicines and supplies there. In Xinjiang, there were virtually no Chinese or Uighur doctors. They had their own organizations, schools, churches, and tried to preserve their cultural identity. The Russian club in Urumqi was a center of the social and cultural life for the Russian community, and hosted lectures, dances, and had a theatre, concerts, ballet, restaurant, and cinema[6]. Thus the Russian community—both White Russians and Red Russians—filled a crucial niche in Xinjiang’s political, economic and social life.

The turning point for Xinjiang and its Russian community came with the advent of World War II. In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union, inflicting heavy losses on the Soviet military. Sheng Shih-Tsai watched defeat after defeat, retreat after retreat. Believing the Germans would win the war, Sheng turned on his Soviet benefactors ordering all Soviet advisors, diplomats, soldiers, etc. to leave Xinjiang in June 1942. Within a few months thousands of Soviets, the “Red” Russians, who had filled a critical void, departed from Xinjiang. For example, when the Russians left, so did all the doctors, medicines and equipment causing a medical disaster [13]. Yet, Sheng, himself, was overthrown by pro-Soviet separatists in Ili in November 1944. Xinjiang, just like the rest of China, became embroiled in a huge civil war between the KMT, which Sheng sided with, and the CCP. During 1949 Communist armies took Xinjiang, and the “independent” pro-Soviet East-Turkestan Republic joined the PRC. The White Russian community witnessed massive change, which it was not altogether happy about. Its idyllic time was drawing to a close. The victory of the Communists in Xinjiang marked the beginning of the end of the Russian community. Signifying this, on November 10, 1949 large groups of refugees, mostly White Russians, arrived at the border with India [12].

In February 1950, the Soviet Union and the new People’s Republic of China signed a treaty of friendship and alliance. As a result of that treaty, once again, thousands of Soviet advisors returned to Xinjiang. But this would be only a temporary spring for the Russian community. Starting in 1956 relations between these two Communist superpowers deteriorated. The Soviet government encouraged Russians to leave for the Soviet Union, offering them economic incentives, as many White Russians preferred to emigrate to the West [18]. At the beginning of 1956 there were some 43,000 legal Soviet citizens in Xinjiang according to Soviet records, and some 200,000 to 300,000 stateless White Russians. As the Chinese government was embarking on a path of radical reform, they would like the Russians

to remain in Xinjiang, as they were invaluable to the economy. Yet, by the end of the 1950s all the Soviet advisors returned to the USSR, leaving few legal Soviets left in Xinjiang.

By 1961 Soviet Consulates in Urumqi, Ghulja, and Kashgar all closed, and with their closure, virtually all-remaining Soviet citizens left as well, including diplomats, journalists, merchants, and Soviets married to locals. At this time of growing tensions, who were Chinese and who were Soviet citizens? Some people claimed to be Soviet citizens, but had no documents. Some Soviets married locals, and the question was whether their children were Chinese or Russians. The Chinese declared that any without documents were Chinese, and could not leave; likewise their children. As to ethnic Russians who were stateless (White Russians), those who were Christian could leave, and those who were Moslems could not leave China. These rules were formulated during discussions between Chinese and Soviet officials in Xinjiang.

Politically and religiously repressed, tens of thousands of desperate, hungry, poverty stricken Uighurs, Kazakhs, and Russians fled across the long Soviet-Xinjiang border into Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the spring 1962. Chinese historians claim these people were enticed and even forced across the border to embarrass the Chinese government during a time of great difficulty. In fact, Chinese historians claim that the Soviet government organized counter-revolutionary activities to destabilize Chinese rule over restive Xinjiang. However, a noted Russian Sinologist dismisses these charges [5]. Prof. Galenovich states this is false. He noted that Soviet citizens resident in Xinjiang were forced to become Chinese, faced discrimination, could not move or live freely, lost jobs, ration cards, were arrested, and thrown into prison or labor camps.

That situation, which began in the late 1950s, continued to deteriorate throughout 1961. In early 1962 a Chinese decree stated that all people who have relatives in the Soviet Union must move inland some 20 kilometers, and had to register with the police. People were pressured to repudiate their Soviet citizenship. Then, in the spring 1961 rumors spread that the Xinjiang-Soviet border was open [19]. Those rumors, as well as fearing imminent arrest, and seeing no hope to legally leave Xinjiang, a massive exodus began of some 60,000 to 70,000 refugees. They were both Soviet and Xinjiang citizens, who crossed, as the border itself was not guarded from mid-April to mid-June. Only then did the Chinese army arrive and took control of the border region [17].

In May 28 a large crowd gathered in front of the Communist Party Headquarters in Ghulja, and requested permission to cross the border. The Chinese army responded by shooting into the crowd. Many deaths resulted, including women and children, the exact number remain unknown to this day. The Chinese forced the Soviets to close their remaining consulates and trade offices in Urumqi and Ghulja in June. The Soviets responded saying it was not their problem people were fleeing famine. The Chinese provincial government then fomented anti-Russian feelings around the province. At that point there was another exodus of Soviet citizens from Xinjiang. By May 1963 another 35,000 Uighurs, Kazakhs, and Russians left for the Soviet Union. China was furious with the Soviet Union over this exodus. The Soviets continued to state they could not physically stop people, who wanted to leave China. They declared how could Soviet border guards and troops use guns against citizens of a fellow socialist country [16, p. 2–3, 8–12]. In the meantime, in Kazakhstan the refugees faced wet and cold weather conditions. The Soviet Union had to suddenly build refugee camps to house, feed and provide medical care for those who did not have family members in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, which cost the Soviet and regional governments dearly.

In 1966 China once again embarked on a new political experiment, the Cultural Revolution, which only caused more chaos in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China. Anti-foreign feelings in general, and anti-Russian feelings in particular, in Xinjiang, caused the flight of virtually all White Russians, who remained in Xinjiang. As the author noted in the British and Hong Kong archives, many of these White Russians transited through Hong Kong on their way to Canada or Australia. According to the 2002 census, today perhaps 9000 Russians remain in Xinjiang, forming a tiny percentage in the rich province of some 18.4 mil-

lion people, a shadow of a once flourishing and very significant community for Xinjiang's economic and cultural development [25]. While there was some intermarriage between Russians and non-Russians, including Uighurs, Kazakhs, and Chinese, there was little integration among the communities, who generally remained apart from each other, holding to their own customs and way of life. Thus, relations between ethnic Russians and others in Xinjiang were largely limited to the public sphere.

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