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A Historical and Sociodemographic Analysis

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# Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East

A Historical and Sociodemographic Analysis

OLGA ALEXEEVA

The Far Eastern region of Russia borders on China, and population movements from the People's Republic can be seen as a natural phenomenon. Chinese migration began in the 1860s, when the region was incorporated into Imperial Russia. Interrupted during the Soviet era, migration began again with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The Russian Far East region makes it possible to study the workings of migration dynamics from their beginnings, and to follow all the stages in the building of the community and of its economic and migration networks. This article seeks to give a historical and sociodemographic overview of Chinese migration in the Far East of Russia, and to analyse the various forms of migration seen in the past and in the present.

Migration between China and Russia has a long history. The perspectives for development of this movement are defined by the geographical proximity of the two countries, by the complementarity of their economies, and by their intense political relations, both in the past and in the present.

Russia, which was late in becoming a host country to Chinese migrants, is a special case in the history of population movement in that the violent political changes that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century interrupted the migration process for 70 years. Movement both inside and outside the country was forbidden, and the Chinese community was reduced to a few thousand individuals who were naturalised and completely integrated into Russian society. After the beginning of political and economic reform in the USSR, Russia once again opened itself to Chinese migration, which increased from year to year. While the environment in which this migration took place at the end of the twentieth century differs from that of the nineteenth century, the historical data can be compared as a means of predicting the evolution of this phenomenon in Russia, and to better understand its present-day forms. Today Russia and the Russian Far East region in particular make it possible for us to study the workings of migration dynamics from their beginnings – that is, to analyse how the Chinese initially settle in the host country, and to follow all the stages in the construction of the community and its economic and migration networks.

## Chinese migration to Imperial Russia

The history of Chinese migration in the Russian Far East really began during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the

region was annexed by the Tsarist Empire. The new province included the Amur River basin and the region reaching from the river to the coast.<sup>(1)</sup> It must be said that these new territories were already inhabited by a few native peoples, as well as by a small number of Chinese, especially in the southern river valleys of the Suifeng, the Daobihe, and the Oulahe, and along the coast of the Sea of Japan.

The first Chinese migrants to appear in the region in the early nineteenth century were in fact fugitives who had fled China in order to escape the law, as well as convicts deported by the Qing dynasty authorities.<sup>(2)</sup> Subsequently the region's natural resources attracted hunters, fishermen, ginseng harvesters, and small traders. Some of these decided to stay beyond a season's work, building houses and farming the land. At the time of the signing of the Treaty of Aigun in 1858, which defined the frontier between the two countries, the only concentrated population of Chinese in the region lay in the valley between the Amur Zeya rivers.<sup>(3)</sup>

1. In 1859, the new province was divided into two parts: the Amur region (the Amur River basin) and the region of Primorye (the sea coast). In 1884, when it was separated from the province of Eastern Siberia, it included three regions: Zabaikalye, Primorye, and Amur. The territory of Kamchatka and the Island of Sakhalin were added in 1909. Today the Federal District of the Far East includes the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the province of Amur, the autonomous district of Chukotka, the autonomous Jewish province, the territory of Kamchatka, the province of Magadan, the territories of Primorye and Khabarovsk, and the province of Sakhalin. It amounts to 36 percent of the total area of Russia. The present population of the region is around 6.6 million, which amounts to 4.6 percent of the total population of Russia.
2. S. E. Anikhovskiy, "Kitaici na Dalnem Vostoke Rossii: Etnosociologicheskiy aspekt (vtoraya polovina XIX – nachalo XX veka)" (The Chinese in the Russian Far East: The ethnosociological dimension [second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century]), in A.P. Zabiako et al., *Rossia i Kitai na Dalnevostochnih rubegah* (Russia and China in the border areas of the Russian Far East), Blagoveshchensk, 2006, pp. 103-122.
3. V. G. Dacishen, "Formirovaniye kitaiskoi obshchiny v rossiskoi imperii (vtoraya polovina XIX veka)" (The formation of the Chinese community in the Russian Empire [in the second half of the nineteenth century]), in *Diaspori* (Diasporas), n° 2-3, 2001, pp. 36-53.

In the 1860s, Chinese migration to the Russian Far East was mainly temporary and seasonal, but the flow of migrants increased steadily over time.<sup>(4)</sup> The frontier was still open, and the lack of controls or patrolling by the military contributed considerably to the migration of Chinese to Russia and to the setting up of the first migration networks.

At the time, the Russian government was very interested in the rapid development of the region, and encouraged the arrival of people from neighbouring countries. The Russian local authorities considered them pioneers, and therefore gave them permission to live on Russian soil and to buy arable land, with a 20-year tax exemption. This policy lasted until the end of the 1880s. By then the rapid growth of the Chinese population in the region had begun to seriously worry the Russian government, which feared that China might one day be able to annex certain territories in the Russian Far East on the pretext that they were mainly inhabited by Chinese. In order to reduce the numbers of migrants, the government prohibited them from settling in the districts on the border with China, and a system of residency permits was established for them.

However, the local Russian government, which was still underdeveloped, did not have sufficient resources to control the economic activities and life of the Chinese migrants in this new province. Illicit trade prospered, as did illegal industries exploiting the natural resources in which many Chinese worked: hunting, fishing, mining, and forestry.

Under the terms of the Treaty of Aigun, the Chinese enjoyed the right of extraterritoriality, and thus of immunity that exempted foreigners from the jurisdiction of the country in which they lived. This meant that Chinese who had committed a crime on Russian territory were not tried in Russia, but were extradited to China to be tried and punished according to the laws of the Middle Kingdom.<sup>(6)</sup> Because of the right of extraterritoriality, and above all because of the presence of Qing government officials in Russia,<sup>(7)</sup> Chinese migrants did not really consider this region to be foreign territory, or to see their departure for Russia as immigration. The Qing government energetically encouraged such an attitude; the Chinese authorities regarded the Russians as temporary occupants of the region, where they resided at the indulgence of the Son of Heaven, who would soon liberate those lands.<sup>(8)</sup> This was a major factor in the growth and intensification of Chinese migration to the territory of the Russian Far East, especially in its initial stages.

A new stage in Chinese migration to Russia began at the end of the nineteenth century when the rapid economic development of the Russian Far East called for a large work force, and internal Russian migration was unable to satisfy this demand.<sup>(9)</sup> The two major State projects – the Trans-Siberian Railway<sup>(10)</sup> and the port

of Vladivostok – became the largest consumers of Chinese labour. The goldmines also began to hire the Chinese, and over time gold mining became one of the major occupations of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East.<sup>(11)</sup>

Private enterprise followed the state's example and began to actively recruit migrants. In 1910, there were close to 42,535 Chinese workers in the various sectors of emerging industries in the Amur and Primorye regions of the Russian Far East, amounting to 41 percent of the total number of workers.<sup>(12)</sup> Russian settlers employed Chinese migrants in agriculture in the country and as servants in town. American and German transportation companies, along with Chinese employment agencies, were quick to respond to this major demand for labour, setting up a complete sys-

4. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), Moscow, Muravei, 2003.
5. T.N. Sorokina, *Khoziastvennaya deiatelnost kitaiskikh poddannih ne Dalnem Vostoke Rossii i politika administracii Priamurskogo kraia (konec XIX – nachalo XX vekov)* (The economic activities of Chinese nationals in the Russian Far East and the policy of the government of the region of Priamurye [from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century]), Omsk, Publication of the State University of Omsk, 1999.
6. In practice, people who were sent home often purchased their freedom by paying large sums to local officials, and then returned to Russia. Officially, the right to extraterritoriality was abolished in 1882. However, cases of judgment and punishment of Chinese nationals by the Russian courts were extremely rare. On the one hand, the Chinese never called on the Russian authorities, preferring to settle their problems within their own community. On the other hand, local government never had the financial resources or will to set up the means of controlling or even keeping an eye on the activities of the migrants; cf. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), *op.cit.*, p. 15.
7. Chinese migrants often paid the taxes linked to their activities in Russia to Qing officials rather than to the Russian authorities. Before leaving for Russia, a Chinese man who wished, for example, to go fishing in Russian waters had to go to the office of the Chinese governor in the area bordering on Russia in order to receive permission to harvest seafood. The Chinese official inscribed on the paper the number of boats and workers who were to carry out the work, and then the applicant paid the tax. Every year the Chinese governor appointed special inspectors who went to Russia and checked the papers of Chinese nationals to make sure they were in order. Those who had not obtained permission had to pay the tax and a fine.
8. T.N. Sorokina, *Khoziastvennaya deiatelnost kitaiskikh poddannih ne Dalnem Vostoke Rossii i politika administracii Priamurskogo kraia (konec XIX – nachalo XX vekov)* (The economic activities of Chinese nationals in the Russian Far East and the policy of the government of the region of Priamurye [from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century]), *op.cit.*, p. 110.
9. The main reason was that the transportation of Russian workers from the European part of Russia was very expensive and time-consuming. Moreover, given the harsh climate and extreme living conditions in the Russian Far East, Russians would only leave their traditional homelands unwillingly. The first settlers in the Russian Far East were the Cossacks, who were used to, and had experience of, living on the distant borders of the Empire.
10. According to Chinese sources, a total of 200,000 Chinese took part in the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway between 1891 and 1916; cf. Li Minghuan, *Ouzhou huaqiao huaren shi* (A history of Chinese migrants in Europe), Beijing, Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 2002.
11. I. R. Saveliev, "Les nouveaux immigrants chinois sur le marché du travail russe: Menace ou pari sur l'avenir?" (New Chinese migrants on the Russian job market: A threat or a bet on the future?), in Laurence Roulleau-Berger et al., *Nouvelles migrations chinoises et travail en Europe*, (New Chinese migration and labour in Europe) Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2007, pp. 45-70.
12. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), *op.cit.*, p.23.

tem of recruitment and transfer of Chinese to Russia. Thus, Chinese workers played an important part in the development of the region.<sup>(13)</sup>

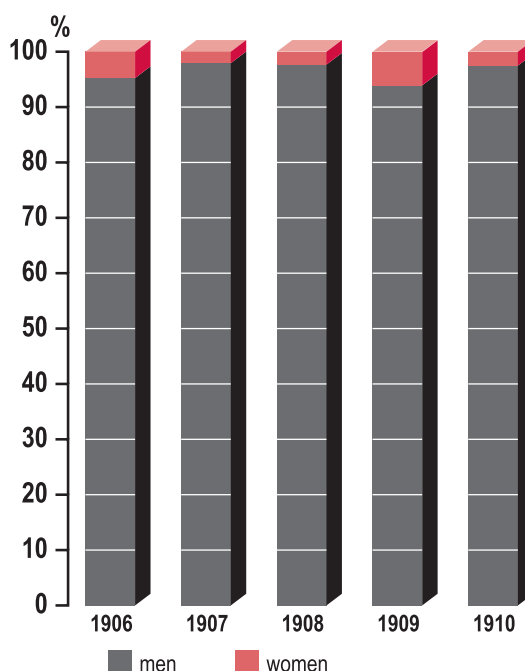
The other major determining factor in the intensification of migratory movement from China was the increase in the population in Manchuria from the end of the nineteenth century. In 1878, in order to counter the Russian advance towards the East, the Qing government decided to lift the prohibition on Chinese settlement in Manchuria and organised massive transfers of settlers from the country's central provinces. The population of Manchuria had grown considerably: for example, the population of the province of Heilongjiang, which stood at 408,000 in 1887, had already reached 1.5 million by 1895.<sup>(14)</sup> Manchuria thus provided an enormous pool of labour able to migrate to neighbouring Russia in search of work. The construction of the new section of the Trans-Siberian railway network between Manchuria and Russia played an important role in increased movement from China by facilitating the transportation of Chinese workers to the big towns of the Russian Far East and Siberia.

It is very difficult to establish today the exact number of Chinese migrants in the territory of the Russian Far East between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, as the Russian authorities did not carry out any systematic census of the Chinese population, and there were major discrepancies in published figures. However, the available data, although incomplete, make it possible to highlight the extent of Chinese migration to Russia during that time. In 1869, according to the information gathered by General Sokolov's mission, the total number of Chinese in the region was 10,600.<sup>(15)</sup> The first Russian universal census carried out in 1897 counted 57,000 Chinese in Russia, of whom 41,000 lived in the Russian Far East.<sup>(16)</sup> This count was carried out during the winter, when the majority of Chinese migrants had finished the season and returned to China; it therefore only took account of those who were in Russia on a more or less permanent basis. In 1910, according to local statistical data, there were 111,466 Chinese in the Russian Far East, while expert estimates put their number at between 200,000 and 250,000.<sup>(17)</sup>

However, this migration was always seasonal in character – around 20 to 30 percent of the Chinese remained in Russia during the winter, while the rest returned to China.<sup>(18)</sup> The season began in May and finished in December. The vast majority of migrants were male, with only a tiny percentage of women (see Graph 1), and most were in their thirties. The Chinese workers came mainly from Shandong, Zhili (a metropolitan province under the Empire, which was later abolished), and Manchuria.

At the end of the nineteenth century, many Chinese communities began to appear in the big towns in the Russian Far East –

**Graph 1. The proportion of women in Chinese migration flows, Region of Primoria, 1906-1910**



Source: V. Dacishen, « Formirovanie kitaiskoi obshini v rossiskoi imperii (vторая polovina XIX veka) » [The formation of the Chinese community in the Russian Empire (second half of the 19th century)], op.cit., p.50.

Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk, and Ussuriysk.<sup>(19)</sup> These groups of migrants coalesced around centres of enterprise, and integrated into the host country without becoming assimilated,

13. Chinese migrants made a major contribution to the region's economy by working and investing; cf. Huang Dingtian, Zhao Junya, "Eluosi yuandong diqu zhongguo yimin zhuangkuang shulun" (An overview of the situation of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East), *Renkou xuekan* (Population Journal), n°5, 2006, pp. 9-12. For more information on the effects of Chinese migration on the economic development of the Russian Far East at the end of the nineteenth century, see John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994.
14. F.V. Soloviev, *Kitaiskoe otkhodnichestvo na Dalnem Vostoke Rossii v epokhu kapitalizma (1861-1917 godi)* (Chinese seasonal migration to the Russian Far East during the capitalist period (1861-1917), Moscow, Nauka, 1989.
15. A. G. Larin, *Kitai v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), op. cit., p. 18.
16. *Ibid*, p. 18.
17. *Ibid*, p. 21; V.V. Karlusov and A. P. Kudin, "Kitaiskoe prisutstvie na russkom Dalnem Vostoke: Istoriko-ekonomicheskii analiz" (The Chinese presence in the territories of the Russian Far East: A historical and economic analysis), *Problemy Dalnego Vostoka* (Problems of the Russian Far East), n° 3, 2002, pp. 76-87.
18. F. V. Soloviev, op.cit., p. 127.
19. S. E. Anikhovskiy, "Kitai v Dalnem Vostoke Rossii: Etnosociologicheskii aspekt (vторая polovina XIX – nachalo XX veka)" (The Chinese in the Russian Far East: The ethnosociological dimension [second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century]), art.cit., p. 104.

while maintaining a very strong sense of identity and building up multiple networks with China (men, diverse goods, and information). Gradually, a Chinese diaspora formed in the Russian Far East, with its own laws and structures of governance, which eluded any control from the local Russian authorities.

Within the Chinese diaspora there were several associations of migrants that played the role of intermediary between the Chinese and the Russian government. On the one hand, they supplied translators and interpreters as needed, and disseminated official information at the behest of the Primorye regional authorities. On the other hand, they distributed aid to migrants in difficulty (bankrupt traders, those who were ill or injured at work) and defended the interests of Chinese workers in disputes with Russian employers and the local authorities.<sup>(20)</sup>

The most widespread type of association was the union or professional guild, which brought together people engaged in the same economic activity.<sup>(21)</sup> At the head of the union was a delegate elected by the members, who settled disputes, oversaw the redistribution of the accumulated finances, set the prices of various products, managed communication with the Qing government, laid down the law, and acted as executive. The migrant associations effectively usurped the functions and rights of the civil government and courts by neutralising any intervention on the part of the Russian authorities in the lives and affairs of the Chinese in the Russian Far East.<sup>(22)</sup> Thus, the level of organisation of Chinese migrants in Russia was complex and impressively wide-ranging.

After 1910, the number of Chinese in Russia declined (see Table 1) because of a law passed by the Tsarist government that forbade the employment of foreign labour in public enterprises and the leasing of state lands to foreigners. This measure was especially aimed at Chinese migrants, whose growing numbers gave rise to much anxiety in both the central and local governments. The Chinese population eluded any control by the Russian authorities while being influenced by the Chinese government,<sup>(23)</sup> which could be dangerous from a political, military, and economic standpoint.

Moreover, reference to a “Yellow Peril” was widespread at the time, and the Russian-speaking population in the region maintained a negative attitude towards the Chinese. The situation worsened with the movement of the secret society *yihetuan*, known as the “Boxers,” in 1900, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905,<sup>(24)</sup> when the Chinese were often the victims of prejudice and of xenophobic attacks.

However, with the outbreak of the First World War, Russia was forced once again to resort to Chinese workers in order compensate for the shortage of labour caused by the military conscription of large numbers of Russian peasants and workers. The result was

**Table 1. Numbers of Chinese workers in the Russian Far East, 1910-1914**

Year	Region of Primoria	Region of Amur	Kamchatka Peninsula	Sakhalin Island
1910	60,586	31,648	234	573
1911	57,447	18,541	200	485
1912	53,698	24,156	210	528
1913	48,181	29,818	135	688
1914	38,779	32,787	191	472

Source: T.N. Sorokina, *Khoziastvennaya deiatelnost kitaiskikh poddannikh ne Dalnem Vostoke Rossii i politika administratsii Priamurskogo kraia (konec XIX – nachalo XX vekov)*[Economic activities of Chinese nationals in the Russian Far East and the policy of the government of the region of Primoria (end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century)], op. cit., p. 40.

that Chinese migrants appeared in major Russian cities, including the European part of the Empire. According to Russian official

20. A. A. Alepko “Ekonomicheskaya deiatelnost kitaicev v Dalnevostochnom regione Rossii v XIX – nachale XX veka” (The economic activity of the Chinese in the region of the Russian Far East in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), *Problemi Dalnego Vostoka* (Problems of the Russian Far East), n°4, 2002, pp. 135-144; A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), op.cit., p.25 sq.
21. It was usually traders who organised themselves into this kind of association.
22. Local Russian officials often delegated cases concerning Chinese to the associations to settle, and then recorded their decisions in official Russian documents without verification, since there was nobody who could translate them or verify the procedures involved in the decision or question the migrants; cf. E. I. Nesterova, “Upravlenie kitaiskim naseleniem v Priamurskom general-gubernatorstve (1884-1897)” (The administration of the Chinese population in the region of Priamurye [1884-1897]), *Vestnik DVO RAN* (Bulletin of the Russian Far East section of the Russian Academy of Sciences), n°2, 2000, pp. 40-50; A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), op. cit., p.60.
23. This influence was mainly brought to bear through the associations of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East. Once the Chinese had obtained permission from the Russian authorities to found an association, they had to ask the consulate for registration and approval by Beijing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry and Commerce). The statutes of the association, its name, and the list of members elected to its board of management had to be approved by Beijing. Subsequently, the association sent back to China an annual report on its work in Russia, as well as a report on its economic and financial activities. Beijing then approved the mandates of the president and his deputies. Thanks to the close connections between the associations of Chinese migrants in Russia and the Chinese government, the Chinese population in the Russian Far East was even able to participate in elections for the Parliament in Beijing; cf. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), op. cit., p. 59.
24. *Ibid*, p. 34 ff., Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Another ‘Yellow Peril’: Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, n°2, 1978, pp. 301-330.



statistics, 159,972 Chinese workers were transported on the Trans-Siberian railway between January 1915 and April 1917.<sup>(25)</sup> In 1916, the Chinese Embassy in Russia gave a figure of 100,000, with the same number appearing in the documents of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the years after 1916.<sup>(26)</sup> The Chinese migrants were employed on major railway-building and military fortification projects, in the mining of raw materials in Siberia and the Russian Far East, in the production of arms and other military products, and in agriculture.

In summation, Chinese migration in Imperial Russia had a difficult and complex history. While the Russian government initially favoured the arrival and settlement of migrants in the Russian Far East – they were the pioneers who carried out the earliest and most difficult projects in the region – over time, and with the increase in the Russian-speaking population in these new territories, the attitude of the authorities changed as they saw in the growth of the Chinese population a geopolitical danger and even a military threat. Thus, the Russian government sought to establish a series of measures aimed at reducing the flow of migrants from China, including residence permits, work permits, taxes and tariffs on foreigners. However, the local authorities quickly realised that this policy had only a very limited application, given that the Russian Far East was dependent on Chinese labour, and even worse, that in reality the region and the north-eastern provinces of China made up a common economic entity. This became even more apparent during the First World War.

## Chinese migrants in the Soviet Union (1917-1991)

After the 1917 Revolution, the number of Chinese in the Russian Far East diminished considerably. When the Civil War broke out in Russia, thousands of Chinese workers already on Russian soil found themselves trapped in various Russian cities with no work and no money, nor any hope of being able to return to China.<sup>(27)</sup> In these difficult conditions, some means of survival had to be found. According to the experts, between 30,000 and 40,000 Chinese were enrolled in divisions of the Red Army.<sup>(28)</sup> The majority of migrants were not interested in politics, but became soldiers in order to avoid dying of cold and hunger in a foreign land. Another portion of the community, the more or less prosperous Chinese merchants and entrepreneurs who had settled in Russia, became the object of revolutionary violence; their possessions and property were requisitioned, and their enterprises subjected to heavy taxation.<sup>(29)</sup> Political chaos, the instability of the general economic situation, the devaluation of the ruble, and rising crime made entrepreneurial activity impossible. Most of these Chinese migrants therefore left the Russian Far East, abandoning all their posses-

sions in order to return to China.<sup>(30)</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese population experienced the same horrors as the Russian population: the period of military communism (elimination of private enterprise and confiscation of property), collectivisation, the hunt for foreign spies, and Stalinist terror. Chinese migrants fled the USSR to return to China or to go to other countries such as Japan, the United States, and Canada. The census of 1923 counted 50,183 Chinese living in the Russian Far East, while that of 1937 counted only 24,589.<sup>(31)</sup> The political campaigns launched by Stalin at the end of the 1930s, which shattered the lives of millions of people in Russia, also affected the remaining Chinese communities.<sup>(32)</sup> In the year 1938 alone, 11,000 Chinese were arrested and 8,000 forcibly deported to the Western regions of the USSR.<sup>(33)</sup> By the end of the 1930s, the Soviet press no longer mentioned Chinese migrants in Russia; they disappeared from official documents, and the destiny of those who survived the concentration camps remains unknown.<sup>(34)</sup>

In the decade following the proclamation of the People's Republic in 1949, a few thousand new Chinese entered the USSR, almost all of them students.<sup>(35)</sup> However, most returned to China once their studies were completed.<sup>(36)</sup> Those who remained were sub-

25. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), *op. cit.*, p. 68.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
27. The Russian Empire broke up into several small states ruled by different governments; the railway networks, severed by the front lines, no longer functioned; and all economic activity in the country came to a halt. This situation made the evacuation of thousands of Chinese workers impossible.
28. A. G. Larin, "Chinese in Russia: An Historical Perspective," in Gregor Benton, Franck N. Pieke et al., *The Chinese in Europe*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998, pp. 281-300; Deng Lanhua, Zhang Hong, "Eluosi huaqiaoren yu elianbangde yimin zhengce" (Chinese migrants in Russia and the migration policy of the Russian Federation), *Huaqiaoren lishi yanjiu*, n° 2, 2005, pp. 25-37.
29. N. G. Koulinich, "Kitaici v sostave gorodskogo naselenia Dalnego Vostoka Rossii v 1920-1930 godi" (The Chinese in the urban population of the Russian Far East in the 1920s and 30s), *Problemi Dalnego Vostoka* (Problems of the Russian Far East), n° 4, 2006, pp. 120-129.
30. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), *op. cit.*, p. 97 ff.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 120 ff.
32. N. G. Koulinich, "Kitaici v sostave gorodskogo naselenia Dalnego Vostoka Rossii v 1920-1930 godi" (The Chinese in the urban population of the Russian Far East in the 1920s and 30s), *art.cit.*, p. 127.
33. I. R. Saveliev, "Les nouveaux immigrants chinois sur le marché du travail russe: menace ou pari sur l'avenir?" (New Chinese migrants on the Russian job market: A threat or a bet on the future?), *art.cit.*, p. 48.
34. Chinese specialists mention that a certain number of Chinese migrants were deported to China at the end of the 1930s; cf. Huang Dingtian, Zhao Junya, "Eluosi yuandong diqu zhongguo yimin zhuangkuang shulun" (An overview of the situation of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East), *art.cit.*, p. 10.
35. Between 1951 and 1962, more than 11,000 Chinese obtained qualifications in the universities of the USSR; cf. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today: A historical overview), *op. cit.*, p. 153.
36. Chinese cadres who studied in the USSR played an important role in the socialist development of the People's Republic. Unfortunately, they were also among the first victims of the Cultural Revolution, as they were severely punished for their Soviet past.

ject to the general laws concerning residence and naturalisation. Their numbers were too low to require any specific attention on the part of the authorities: according to the data in the census of 1989, there were 11,335 Chinese living in the USSR, and of these, 7,303 considered the Russian language to be their mother tongue.

With the deterioration in relations between Beijing and Moscow, Chinese students were no longer sent to the USSR. The Sino-Soviet split became an established fact after 1965, and the launch of Mao's Cultural Revolution finalised the freezing of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Chinese migration to Russia ceased until the *rapprochement* between the two states towards the end of the 1980s, when a flood of Chinese followed agreements between China and the USSR that allowed Soviet enterprises to hire workers from the People's Republic. In the period between 1986 and 1992, more than 70,000 Chinese entered Russia and were employed under contract in 154 factories and enterprises, mainly located in the regions on the border with China.<sup>(37)</sup> Most of these workers came from the three provinces of north-eastern China: Heilongjiang, Liaoning, and Jilin.

The promulgation of *Perestroika* in the Soviet Union, and the restructuring of the Russian economy, created a short-lived demand for labour and sustained a strong flow of Chinese migration towards the Russian Far East. Moreover, reforms in the People's Republic of China also set off major population movements of migrants both inside and outside the country looking for work, better living conditions, and opportunities to create enterprises or invest their savings. At that time, the general economic and political climate in both countries favoured Chinese migration to Russia.

## Chinese migration to the Russian Federation since 1991

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Russia underwent profound political, economic, and social changes. Russia's demographic transition accelerated, and its crisis became more apparent<sup>(38)</sup>: the Russian population declined, with that of the Russian Far East diminishing by 16.5 percent compared to the figures recorded during the previous Soviet census in 1989. The deficit of deaths to births approached a million per year, and with the working population also quickly declining, demographic forecasts were highly pessimistic.<sup>(39)</sup> All this resulted in Russia accepting massive migration from the countries to its south.<sup>(40)</sup>

In this context, the subject of these migrants, from their arrival in Russian territory to their integration into Russian society, has become highly topical and important, while at the same time remaining difficult to explore due to insufficient data of varying

reliability. The issue is also surrounded by strong political sensitivity and high social tension, which affects the collection and the quality of official information.

The attitude of the Russian government towards Chinese migrants has gradually changed. Initially the "emotional" point of view predominated, and there was talk of the "Yellow Peril" and of the forthcoming annexation of the Russian Far East by China. However, with Russia's economic development and the emerging shortage of labour,<sup>(41)</sup> political discourse has become increasingly rational and pragmatic.

Since the end of the 1990s, the Russian government has passed a series of restrictive laws aimed at slowing the flow of migrants and better controlling population movement through the creation of work permits and migration cards, implementation of a process of compulsory residential registration, and other measures. Some highly publicised measures have been aimed at specific groups of migrants, such as a law forbidding foreign traders from selling in markets. Theoretically, this law would make it possible for Russian citizens to take over the jobs that would be made available as a result. However, Russians did not want to sell fruits and vegetables 12 hours a day for a modest salary, and the law was de facto nullified.<sup>(42)</sup>

This policy appeared in a highly charged social context, against a backdrop of significant increase in racism and xenophobia, with migrants on the front line as victims. In surveys carried out in the

37. I. R. Saveliyev, "Les nouveaux immigrants chinois sur le marché du travail russe: Menace ou pari sur l'avenir?" ("New Chinese migrants on the Russian job market: A threat or a bet on the future?"), *art.cit.*, p. 49.
38. In the Soviet era, Russia's demographic decline was partly concealed by the very high birthrates in the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus, thanks to which the general coefficients were always positive.
39. For example, forecasts estimate that between 2015 and 2020 the decline in the working population in Russia will be around 1.5 million per year.
40. According to the experts, the migration potential of the CEI countries is around 8 to 10 million, which would not cover even half of the shortfall in the working population in Russia over the next 25 years. The countries of South and Southeast Asia will thus become the main "migration donors"; cf. G. A. Zayonchkovskaya, "Pochemu Rossii neobkhodima immigratsionnaya politika" (Why Russia needs an immigration policy), in G. A. Zayonchkovskaya et al., *Metodologiya i metody izucheniya migratsionnykh processov* (Methodology and Methods of Studying Migration Processes), Moscow, Centr migratsionnykh issledovaniy (Center for Migration Studies), 2007, pp. 114-141; *Politika immigratsii i naturalizatsii v Rossii: Sostoianie del i napravleniya razvitiya. Analiticheskiy doklad* (Immigration and Naturalisation Policy in Russia: Present State and Possible Development. An analytical report), Moscow, Fond "Nasledie Evrazii," Centr strategicheskikh issledovaniy Privolzhskogo federalnogo okruga (Centre for Strategic Studies of the Federal District of Privolzh'ie), 2005; Vladimir Kontorovich, "Can Russia Resettle the Far East?", *Post-Communist Economies*, Vol. 12, n°3, 2000, pp. 365-384.
41. According to G. A. Zayonchkovskaya, around 42 percent of the enterprises in Russia today suffer from a shortage of labour; cf. G. A. Zayonchkovskaya, "Pochemu Rossii neobkhodima immigratsionnaya politika" (Why Russia needs an immigration policy), *art.cit.*, p. 118.
42. After this law was passed, all the Russian markets where only foreigners worked remained empty for several weeks, after which the migrants found a solution: they registered their enterprises under the name of Russians in exchange for a small salary, and then reopened their business as before.

1990s in the Russian Far East, 20 percent of Russian respondents stated that they had a negative attitude towards Chinese migrants, and 26 percent believed that China was a threat to Russia.<sup>(43)</sup> For their part, the Chinese believe that this attitude is a genuine obstacle to all those who want to do business in Russia.<sup>(44)</sup>

The Russian government has recently decided to change its immigration policy and to create conditions favourable to the arrival of migrant workers. A new simplified registration procedure has been established for foreigners who wish to come and work in Russia, and resources have been found to create an amnesty for illegal migrants who are already on Russian soil.<sup>(45)</sup> This political change made it possible to reduce the number of illegal workers and to stimulate the arrival of migrants by legal means.<sup>(46)</sup> However, the Russian population still has difficulty accepting the idea that immigration is necessary, and movements on the extreme right continue to resort to xenophobic rhetoric during political campaigns.<sup>(47)</sup> This shift in Russian migration policy since the collapse of the USSR has influenced the development of migration movements and the formation of Chinese communities in Russia, especially in the Russian Far East.

The exact number of Chinese in Russia today is unknown.<sup>(48)</sup> Politicians and the Russian press give various estimates, which are always high, ranging from 2 to 5 million.<sup>(49)</sup> These figures are not confirmed by an analysis of the official data (the statistics of the State institutions that issue visas and residence and work permits, as well as those of the border checkpoints, plus the estimates of illegal immigration made by experts), which show that the total number of Chinese who settled in Russia between 1992 and 2007 does not exceed 500,000.<sup>(50)</sup> According to the statistics of the Federal Migration Service, which do not include illegal immigration, 235,000 Chinese were registered in Russia with temporary residence permits in 2007, along with 103,000 registered with work permits and 1,323 who obtained permanent residence permits.<sup>(51)</sup> Around 200,000 to 350,000 of these Chinese migrants are dispersed throughout the Russian Far East, with the rest living in the big towns and cities of Siberia (Krasnoyarsk, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk) and in the European part of Russia (Moscow and Saint Petersburg).

Who are these migrants? What are their reasons for choosing Russia as a host country? In order to answer these questions, a group of researchers led by Vilya G. Gelbras carried out a series of surveys among Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East, the results of which make it possible to describe the sociodemographic profile of these migrants.

Most migrants in the Russian Far East come from the province of Heilongjiang. These made up 90 percent of the total in 1990, but over time their proportion of the total has diminished, to about 60 percent in 1999, while the number of migrants coming from the

provinces of Jilin, Liaoning, and Shandong has increased.<sup>(52)</sup> The province of Heilongjiang borders the Russian Far East, and its territory comprises several free zones that are seen as major outlets for the foreign trade of the People's Republic. The Chinese have set up production and trading zones there that are aimed at the Russian market, including fruit and vegetable farms, warehouses and distribution centres, and a large number of light manufacturing industries. Moreover, as major local state enterprises in the province were in the process of being restructured, thousands of Chinese workers lost their jobs,<sup>(53)</sup> with the result that going to work in the Russian Far East has become a key source of livelihood for part of the working population of Heilongjiang.

If one draws up a profile of the average Chinese migrant to the Russian Far East, he is a man (almost 60 percent), between 20 and 35 years old (82 percent are under 40 and 35 percent under 25), with a fairly high standard of education (14 percent have been in higher education, 42 percent in secondary education).<sup>(54)</sup> The majority of migrants are single, including 60 percent of the men and 44 percent of the women. No doubt this is because the decision to move to another country is more difficult for someone

43. V.G. Gelbras, *Kitaiskaya realnost' Rossii* (The Chinese reality of Russia), Moscow, Muravei, 2001.

44. Among other obstacles, Chinese migrants also pointed to corruption, high crime levels, and abuses committed by the Russian police; cf. V.G. Gelbras, *Kitaiskaya realnost' Rossii* (The Chinese reality of Russia), *op.cit.*, p. 104; Elizabeth Wishnick, "Migration and economic security: Chinese labour migrants in the Russian Far East," *art.cit.*, p.78.

45. G. A. Zayonchkovskaya, "Pochemu Rossii neobkhodima immigratsionnaya politika" (Why Russia needs an immigration policy), *art.cit.*, p. 119.

46. G. A. Zayonchkovskaya, "Novaya migratsionnaya politika Rossii: Vpechatleniye rezultati i novye problemi" (Russia's new migration policy: Impressive results and new problems), *Centr migratsionnikh issledovaniy* (Centre for Migration Studies), <http://migrocenter.ru/science/science027.php> (last visited 19 September 2008).

47. G. A. Zayonchkovskaya, "Pochemu Rossii neobkhodima immigratsionnaya politika" (Why Russia needs an immigration policy), *art.cit.*, p. 121.

48. The last census, which was taken in 2002, counted 35,000 Chinese on Russian territory.

49. The figures published in the Russian press are not always reliable, because the methodology of the calculations is not known, and estimates are often the result of guesswork by people with no experience of statistical calculation. These data are often used as the basis for political speculation on the theme of the "Yellow Peril."

50. V. G. Gelbras, *Rossia v usloviakh global'noi kitaiskoi migratsii* (Russia and Chinese migration on a global scale), Moscow, Muravei, 2004; interview with G. A. Zayonchkovskaya, *Demoskopye Weekly*, no. 297-298, 2007, <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/> (last visited 11 July 2008).

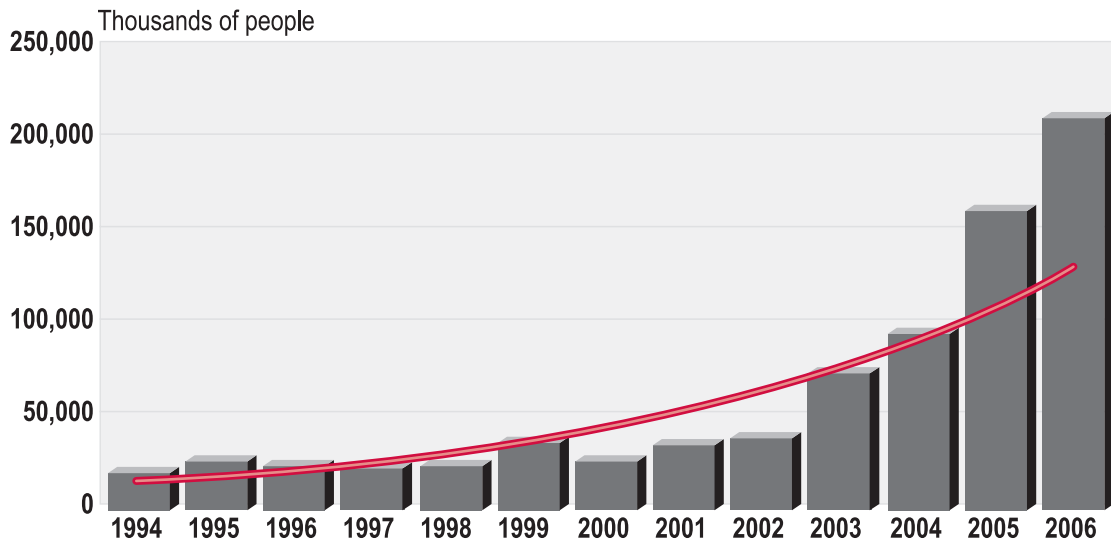
51. "Kitaici ne smogut sozdat svoie 'Kosovo' na Dalnem Vostoke Rossii, schitaet expert" (According to the experts, the Chinese will not be able to create their own 'Kosovo' on the territory of the Russian Far East) was the title of a news section on the site of the press agency *Khabarovsk-Novosti* (Khabarovsk News) on 4 April 2008 (last consulted on 27 June 2008).

52. V. G. Gelbras, *Rossia v usloviakh global'noi kitaiskoi migratsii* (Russia and Chinese migration on a global scale), *op.cit.*, p. 85.

53. According to official Chinese sources, there were 313,000 unemployed persons in the province of Heilongjiang in 2005; cf. China Statistical Yearbook, Beijing, 2006.

54. V. G. Gelbras, *Rossia v usloviakh global'noi kitaiskoi migratsii* (Russia and Chinese migration on a global scale), *op.cit.*, p. 92 ff.



**Graph 2. Numbers of Chinese workers having obtained a Russian work permit, 1994 – 2006**

Source: Federal Migration Service (Federalnaya Migracionnaya Sluzhba), link: <http://www.fmsrf.ru/start.asp>

who is married than for someone who is single; but marital status is also related to age, and the predominance of single people is thus not surprising, given the relative youth of the overall flow.

Most of the Chinese migrants live in the Russian Far East in order to work: 43 percent are employees and 28 percent are entrepreneurs; students, the other major group of migrants, make up about 29 percent of the total population.<sup>(55)</sup> The main motivation for Chinese to move to the Russian Far East is economic: the opportunity to improve living standards, and to increase income.<sup>(56)</sup>

In general, one can distinguish several stages in the development of Chinese migration to the Russian Far East since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1990-1991, Chinese migrants began to move to the regions bordering on China to work and trade.<sup>(57)</sup> Then, for a short period between 1992 and 1994, free movement between the two countries was allowed, which set off a phase of virtually uncontrolled migration.<sup>(58)</sup> Between 1994 and 1999, the Russian government passed a series of laws to reduce and control these population movements.<sup>(59)</sup> In the early 1990s, a range of categories of Chinese migrants could be distinguished in the overall flow:

- Entrepreneurs who wanted to invest and take advantage of the favourable economic conditions, and whose intention was to settle in Russia more or less permanently, if not always legally;
- Small traders who entered Russian territory on tourist visas and travelled constantly back and forth between China and Russia, carrying their goods;
- Temporary workers under contract, with few qualifications, employed in construction or farming;

- Migrants in transit on the way to Western Europe;
- Chinese students registered at Russian universities.<sup>(60)</sup>

When the financial crisis hit Russia in 1998, the number of Chinese migrants suddenly dropped: traders lost everything, and demand for Chinese labour in the region declined. One can see the period between 1998 and 2000 as a transition phase: the migrants sought new ways to develop their activities and tried to

55. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

56. Elizabeth Wishnick, "Migration and economic security: Chinese labour migrants in the Russian Far East," in Tsuneo Akaha et al., *Crossing national borders: Human migration issues in North-east Asia*, Hong Kong, United Nations University press, 2005, pp. 68-92.

57. Shen Lihua, "Guanyu Eluosi yuandong zhongguo yimin wentide sikao" (Reflection on the question of Chinese migration in the Russian Far East), *Dongbeiyi luntan* (The Northeast Asia Forum), Vol. 14, n°4, 2005, pp. 70-75.

58. For example in 1992, around 500,000 Chinese crossed the Russian border; cf. James Clay Moltz, "Regional Tensions in the Russia-Chinese Rapprochement," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, n°6, 1995, pp. 511-527. The following year their numbers had increased again — 751,000 Chinese entered Russia in 1993, cf. V.V. Karusov and A. P. Kudin, "Kitaiskoe prisutstvie na russkom Dalnem Vostoke : istoriko-ekonomicheskii analiz" (The Chinese presence on the territories of the Russian Far East: An economic and historical analysis), *art.cit.*, p. 80. However this does not mean that all these Chinese remained in Russia; according to the experts, in 1992-1993 there were between 50,000 and 100,000 Chinese resident in the Russian Far East; cf. V. L. Larin, "Poslanci Podnebesnoi na Dalnem Vostoke: otvet alarmistam" (The Emissaries of the Celestial Empire in the Russian Far East: An answer to the alarmists) *Diaspori* (Diasporas), n°2-3, 2001, pp. 256-292.

59. The measures taken were fairly effective, and in 1998, for example, 99.6 percent of the Chinese who entered the territory of the Russian Far East returned to China within the time permitted; cf. Mikhail Alexeev, "Ugrozaet li Rossii kitaiskaya migratsiya?" (Is Chinese migration a threat to Russia?), *Mirovaya ekonomika i megdunarodnie otnoshenia* (The World Economy and International Relations), n°11, 2000, pp. 97-103.

60. V.G. Gelbras, *Kitaiskaya realnost' Rossii* (The Chinese reality of Russia), *op.cit.*, p. 75 ff.

A trader in the Chinese market,  
Irkutsk, 2005  
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adapt to the economic and legal changes.

In the early years of the new millennium, the profile of Chinese migrants changed gradually: the number of unskilled workers employed under contract increased; the sphere of activity of the migrants grew wider; and Chinese communities emerged in all major cities of the region. In 2006, 210,000 Chinese workers were registered as having been granted official permission to work in Russia, ten times the number in 1994 (see graph n°2). The exponential trend revealed on the graph shows a steady rate of growth in the annual increase. Statistically it means that there is no factor slowing this process.

The establishment of Chinese communities in the Russian Far East began in the early 1990s with the massive arrival of Chinese students who came to learn the Russian language and various professions in the region's universities.<sup>(61)</sup> Most of them either quickly abandoned their studies to start their own shops or enterprises, or began engaging in small-scale business activities in tandem with their studies.<sup>(62)</sup> These migrants made up the first stratum of the emerging Chinese community in the Russian Far East. They built up the first networks, which drew other migrants from different social categories. Some of them then moved to Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and other major Russian cities to set up businesses in various sectors and expand their networks to the far ends of Russia.<sup>(63)</sup>

Another important event in the development of Chinese migration to the Russian Far East was the signing of an agreement between Russia and China that allowed the nationals of both countries to enter and move freely on their neighbour's territory. This political move triggered a major flow of Chinese migrants, among whom were many small traders and entrepreneurs wanting to seize the opportunity to make money.

It must be said that in the early 1990s the Russian Far East was a very profitable market for Chinese small traders supplying the region with essential goods at low prices.<sup>(64)</sup> The local population, which had been more or less abandoned to political chaos by the central government, was experiencing extremely difficult conditions. All government aid programs had been cut, state factories and enterprises could not adapt to economic change and had ceased to function, and the *kolkhozes*, in the process of restructuring, no longer provided enough agricultural products. In this situation, the clothing and food products brought from the People's Republic by Chinese traders literally saved the lives of many inhabitants of the Russian Far East.<sup>(65)</sup> It is true that the quality of these products was not very high, but in the midst of widespread shortages, they provided a means of survival, and thus Chinese consumer goods became staples for a majority of the inhabitants of the Russian Far East.

Experts estimate that between 50,000 and 100,000 Chinese lived



in the Russian Far East in 1992-1993.<sup>(66)</sup> The local Russian authorities were unprepared to receive such a large number of migrants, and could neither control nor register these population movements. Illegal trade flourished, along with illicit exploitation of the forests, and gleaning and cut-rate purchase of raw materials. All this led to the Russian government deciding in 1994 to reinforce border controls and restore compulsory visas for all professions and for all Chinese, with the exception of guided tour groups. However, this measure did not really change the rates of migration between the two countries, as Chinese migrants continued to enter Russia legally as tourists, then stayed behind to work illegally. In

61. Li Minghuan, *Ouzhou huaqiao huaren shi* (A history of Chinese migrants in Europe), *op.cit.*, p. 550.

62. Recent surveys of Chinese students in Russia find that 50 percent of M.A. students are "fakes," with the figure reaching 90 percent for students on Masters programs. Only 20 to 30 percent of Chinese students in Russia receive a qualification at the end of their training; cf. Deng Lanhua, Zhang Hong, "Eluosi huaqiaoren yu elianbangde yimin zhengce" (Chinese migrants in Russia and the migration policy of the Russian federation), *art.cit.*, p. 29.

63. In the course of a survey of Chinese migrants in Saint Petersburg in 2006-2007, I met several people whose experiences were similar. For example, one of the owners of a chain of Chinese restaurants in Saint Petersburg came to Russia for the first time in 1993, registering at the University of Blagoveshchensk to study Russian language and literature. He originally set up a small business to pay for his studies, but times were hard and he went broke several times. Some years later he obtained his degree as well as a small amount of capital, which he sought to invest elsewhere. He went to Saint Petersburg and opened his first restaurant, all the income from which he invested in a second restaurant, and so on. He is now preparing to open another restaurant in one of the Baltic countries, which is to say, inside the European Union.

64. However, at the beginning, transport problems as well as border posts that were inadequate in number and in ability to handle large movements of goods and people slowed the development of cross-border trade; cf. James Clay Moltz, "Regional Tensions in the Russia-Chinese Rapprochement," *art.cit.*, p. 523.

65. Huang Dingtian, Zhao Junya, "Eluosi yuandong diqu zhongguo yimin zhuangkuang shulun" (An overview of the situation of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East), *art.cit.*, p. 10.

66. A. G. Larin, *Kitaici v Rossii vchera i segodnia. Istoricheskii ocherk* (The Chinese in Russia in the past and today. A historical overview), *op. cit.*, p. 156.



the 1990s, between 30 and 50 percent of Chinese tourists remained in Russia longer than authorised.<sup>(67)</sup> The police and immigration service responded with numerous campaigns of arrest and expulsion of illegal residents, which prevented this phenomenon from developing further.

The migration of traders, who at the time made up most of the flow, was initially temporary and pendular: they crossed the border several times a day, carrying their stock a little at a time in order to avoid the tax on goods demanded by Russian customs. Gradually, with the disappearance of small family businesses and the formation of larger economic structures with wide-ranging networks on both sides of the border, the Chinese began to employ teams of Russians called *fonari* ("street lamps") or *kemeli* (from the English word camel) to deliver the goods in exchange for payments of 10 or 20 euros. Tourist agencies began offering Russian citizens trips to Chinese border towns at half price, or even free, in exchange for the 35 kilos of products they were allowed to bring back into Russia free of tax. Under this system, groups of 35 to 40 tourists are accompanied by a "guide" who controls the entire process. The Russian tourists spend two days and a night in China (the hotel paid for by the agency), visiting local casinos, restaurants, and spas. At the end of their stay, the guide takes them to a special warehouse, where they are each given a bag already filled with the necessary goods, and they then cross the border and give their bags to the "guide." Some become *fonari* for the money, while for others tourism is the main motivation.

The scale of this phenomenon is impressive; according to China's official Xinhua news agency, around 1.2 million Russians visited the border town of Suifenhe in 2006, an average of 3,400 people per day.<sup>(68)</sup> Many of these Russian tourists are really *fonari* or *kemeli*,<sup>(69)</sup> although genuine tourism between the two countries is also growing. This is an example of the undeclared activities of Chinese migrants in Russia, which are not subject to the laws of the host country. Generally speaking, however, their activities seem to be well integrated into the economic fabric of the region. From the mid-1990s, in major cities of the Russian Far East there appeared Chinese markets where Russian consumers could buy anything from a toothbrush to a washing machine (see photos 1 and 2). Many of the Chinese traders avoided declaring these goods and paying taxes to the local authorities, thus working outside the formal Russian economic system. These markets quickly became complex organisations with restaurants, illicit casinos, hotels, left luggage facilities, and so on.<sup>(70)</sup> But this era of pioneer traders seeking business opportunities in the opening of the borders between China and Russia is past, with most migrants now employed by large and medium-size Chinese companies. They have become cogs in a complex structure of trade in goods between the two countries, functional elements in transnational

trade networks. The considerable increase in trade between the two countries reflects this evolution. According to official Russian statistics, the volume of cross-border trade between the People's Republic and Russia increased from \$1.8 billion in 1998 to \$8.35 billion in 2007, reaching 20 percent of the total trade between the two countries<sup>(71)</sup>.

The migrants are gradually emerging from their traditional economic niches (trading and ethnic restaurants) and seeking to invest the money they make in Russia in other economic sectors in the Russian Far East – mainly in agriculture and construction. These two sectors of the economy are now the largest employers of

67. V. L. Larin "Poslantsy Podnebesnoi na Dal'nem Vostoke – Legal'nye i nelegal'nye" (Legal and illegal emissaries of the Celestial Empire in the Russian Far East), *Demoscope Weekly*, no. 69-70, 2002, <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/> (last visited 11 July 2008).
68. "Prigranichnii Kitai: 'transformacia metodov trgovli' i 'kitaiacia rossian'" (China's borderland: Changes in commercial methods and the sinization of the Russians), headline on the news site *Regnum* dated 19 April 2008, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/989270.html> (last visited 24 June 2008).
69. Thus, in 2003, 51,600 Russian citizens transported 3,600 tons of goods at an eastward customs cost of 445.3 million rubles (around US\$17 million) from China to Russia via the customs at Blagoveschensk; cf. N.I. Philippov, S.Y. Prosvirnov, *Les échanges internationaux migratoires de la région de l'Amour à la limite de deux siècles* (International migrant trade in the Amur region between two centuries), [http://www-aidelf.ined.fr/colloques/Budapest/Seance2/S2\\_PhilippovProsvirnov.pdf](http://www-aidelf.ined.fr/colloques/Budapest/Seance2/S2_PhilippovProsvirnov.pdf) (last visited 19 September 2008).
70. The Chinese market at Ussuriysk is a good example of this kind of organisation: it is made up of 1,280 stalls and 40 sheds, and expert estimate that it provides permanent employment to around 2,000 Chinese. In a special area are several refrigerators and a veterinary clinic; there are also three left luggage facilities, a parking lot, two restaurants and a hotel. Chinese markets of the same kind are to be found in several Russian cities and towns. For example, I have seen similar markets operating in the course of my surveys in Irkutsk in 2005 and Saint Petersburg in 2006-2007. The Chinese market in Irkutsk, nicknamed "Shanghai" by the local population, has been studied in detail by experts from the State University of Irkutsk; cf. V.I. Diatlov, R. Kuznetsov, "Shanghai" v centre Irkutsk. Ekologia kitaiskogo rinka ("Shanghai" in the centre of Irkutsk: The ecology of the Chinese market), in V. I. Diatlov and et al., *Baikalskaya Sibir: Iz chego skladiwaetsia stabilnost* (The Siberia of Baikal: What stability is made of), Irkutsk, Natalis, 2005, p. 166-187.
71. "Ob'em prigranichnoi trgovli meghu RF i KNR za 10 let viros do \$8,35 mld" (The volume of cross-border trade between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic has grown over the last decade to \$8.35 billion), headline on the news site *Regnum*, 11 June 2008, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1013657.html> (last visited 24 June 2008).





The Chinese market in Irkutsk, 2005: Chinese farmers selling vegetables they grew in Russia.

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Chinese labour, as was the case over a century ago; around 90 per cent of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East are employed as farmers and unskilled labour. <sup>(72)</sup>

Russian agricultural cooperatives (the former *kolkhozes*) cannot attract enough Russians to work the land — wages are low, the work is hard, and the young have all departed for the cities. The employment of Chinese workers, who also appear to be more disciplined and professional, has become commonplace.

Moreover, farms run by Chinese are beginning to appear. The migrants lease land from the *kolkhozes* or bankrupt Russian farmers in return for rent or a share of the crops. This is very similar to the situation in the Russian Far East at the end of the nineteenth century, when Russian settlers from the central provinces had difficulty cultivating land in a region where conditions differed from those with which they were familiar. The Chinese peasants did not have this problem, since their environment in China was similar, so the Russian settlers decided to lease their lands to the migrants, who cultivated them “Chinese-style.” At first the lands were leased for only a few years, “to improve the quality of the soil,” but gradually, given the profits to be made, the Russians began to extend the leases. Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century, a very peculiar situation could be seen: Russians leased land from the State and sublet it for twice as much to Chinese, who lived on the land in the country while the Russian owners set-

tled in town. Curiously enough, a century later, the trend is the same: inhabitants of the big towns and cities in the Russian Far East are moving to the European part of Russia in search of a better quality of life, while rural residents are taking their place in the region’s towns and cities, and Chinese are settling in the rural areas (see photos n°3 and n°4).

The construction industry is another sector that attracts Chinese entrepreneurs, primarily because improved living standards and rising incomes have led to a boom in the housing market. Chinese migrants began by establishing enterprises to import building materials produced in China, which are much less expensive than their European equivalents. Then came the demand for labour. The local Russian population tends to spurn manual labour on building sites, which is considered demeaning, ill-paid, dangerous, and dirty. Chinese employment agencies sprang up in the provinces bordering Russia like mushrooms after rain, offering Russian employers a wide choice of skilled and unskilled labour prepared to work for low wages in hard and often inhuman conditions. Finally, big Chinese construction companies appeared in the Russian Far East, where they have built large numbers of build-

72. I. R. Saveliev, “Les nouveaux immigrants chinois sur le marché du travail russe: Menace ou pari sur l’avenir ?”, (“New Chinese migrants on the Russian job market: A threat or a bet on the future?”), *art.cit.*, p. 57.



Selling vegetables cultivated in Russia and imported Chinese fruit in the Chinese market in Irkutsk in 2005.

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ings and shopping centres. These companies handle a project from beginning to end, supplying materials, tools, and machines as well as the Chinese labour, <sup>(73)</sup> and are playing an increasingly important role in the economic development of the region.

At present, the proportion of Chinese who have settled permanently in the Russian Far East is relatively low. Surveys point to the increasing number of migrants who have lived in Russia for more than five years, despite the precariousness of their status, <sup>(74)</sup> but reversible, pendular, and continuous mobility between China and Russia continues to dominate Chinese population movement. The average length of stay of Chinese workers and farmers in the Russian Far East fluctuates between eight and ten months per year, while that of traders is shorter, one or two months, but repeated several times a year. At the same time, migration patterns are continually diversifying, and Chinese migrants are developing increasingly varied professional pathways in various sectors of the labour market.

## Conclusion

Chinese migration in the Russian Far East is a complex phenomenon, with deep historical roots. The evolution of this phenomenon is closely tied not only to the development of economic and political relations between Russia and China, but also to the gen-

eral conditions within each country.

The history of Chinese migration to Russia has been punctuated by a number of tragic events, and was even abruptly curtailed. It nevertheless resumed its course after several decades. This recent resumption shows that Chinese immigration to the Russian Far East is a natural phenomenon that is destined to continue, since the reasons for the movement of the Chinese population today are practically identical to those at the end of the nineteenth century. All the same, the three phases of Chinese migration to Russia took place in different economic, political, and social environments. At the end of the nineteenth century, Russia was in full economic expansion, while China was in an extremely fragile situation under the domination of the colonial powers. Migration was organised in part by Russia, which brought numerous Chinese workers into its territory. During the Soviet period, migration between the two countries was seriously disrupted by politics: its development and characteristics depended on the highly complex and specific relations between China and the USSR. Today, with China in development and Russia seeking to recover from a pro-

73. For example, the "Shimao" enterprise in Vladivostok, and the "Huaifu" company in Blagoveshchensk.

74. V. G. Gelbras, *Rossia v usloviakh global'noi kitaiskoi migratsii* (Russia and Chinese migration on a global scale), *op.cit.*, p. 88.



found crisis, Chinese migration finds itself in a situation completely opposite from that prevailing at the end of the nineteenth century. Migration seems to be part of the economic strategy of China, which regards it as a form of cooperation between the two countries.<sup>(75)</sup>

As the territory most geographically distant from Moscow, the Russian Far East also remains politically and economically isolated, as in the past, from the country's central regions. Local industry is weak, and forestry and mining are almost the only major industries. Local government has taken on autocratic and nepotistic forms that the federal government has been unable to control. China, meanwhile, is very close by, and the economies of the

Russian Far East and of the provinces of north-eastern China have become increasingly complementary.<sup>(76)</sup> The Russians exchange their raw materials and natural resources for food products and consumer goods and abundant Chinese labour, always available and not subject to competition.<sup>(77)</sup>

Chinese migrants play a major role in the development of these processes: they have restored the economic, social, and cultural links between the two regions that were broken after 1917. Their activities ensure that these will continue, and in the long run become stronger. •

• Translated by Michael Black

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76. Anne de Tinguy, "Chinese Immigration to Russia: A Variation on an Old Theme," in *The Chinese in Europe*, Gregor Benton, Frank N. Pieke, et al., Basingstoke, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998, pp. 301-319; Dmitry Trenin, *Russia's China Problem*, Moscow, Carnegie Center, 1999.
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