

Mapping Manchuria Station. Crossing Borders into the “Yellow Land”

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RESÜMEE

Der Aufsatz untersucht Grenzstädte im wörtlichen Sinne, sprich urbane Siedlungen, die unmittelbar an Staatsgrenzen liegen und deren Schicksale durch politische Abgrenzungen von Nationalstaaten oder Imperien bestimmt wurden. Er analysiert die Geschichte des Grenzbahnhofs Man'čžurija (chin. Manzhouli) in den ersten beiden Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts und zeichnet seine Topographie und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung sowie die sozialen Beziehungen der dort siedelnden Menschen nach. Man'čžurija liegt an der Grenze zwischen dem zu Russland gehörenden Transbaikalien und dem Nordosten Chinas. Erst mit dem Bau der Ostchinesischen Eisenbahn, dessen westlichen Endhaltepunkt Man'čžurija markiert, gewann der Ort an Bedeutung. Der Beitrag verfolgt zwei Ziele: Zum einen ist es ein Versuch, den Wert verschiedener historischer Quellengattungen (Reiseliteratur, ökonomische Berichte, Archivakten, Karten, Fotos usw.) für die Erforschung kleiner Grenzorte zu ermessen, zu deren Geschichte die Quellenlage meist äußerst spärlich ist und das Material nicht selten über die ganze Welt verstreut liegt. Ein zweites Ziel dieses Beitrags ist die Erforschung des Charakters von Grenzsiedlungen als spezifischen urbanen Räumen mit einer besonderen Bevölkerungsstruktur. Er identifiziert verschiedene Kontaktzonen und Grenzlinien, die von den dort lebenden Bewohnern gezogen und überwunden wurden.

Most of us have crossed state borders and have our own images of border places in mind. Still, our topographic and mental familiarity, our knowledge of life in border settlements at the periphery of China's Northeast remains blurry. With an analysis of public spaces and some aspects of daily life in a railway settlement at the Sino-Russian border, this article seeks to overcome this gap. It has two aims: First, it explores the limits of knowledge about border settlements at the shared periphery of Russia and China. In other words, it

is an attempt to assess different types of historical sources on these places that are available to us. Second, it analyzes the character of border settlements as a specific urban space and searches for different layers of borderlines, which were drawn and crossed by people in these dwellings during the first twenty years of 20th century. The point of departure is Ernst Cordes' travelogue *Das jüngste Kaiserreich. Schlafendes, wachendes Mandschukuo* (The youngest Empire. Manchukuo asleep and awake), a book beautifully wrapped in yellow linen. Opening the index page the reader can track Cordes' route with his fingertip: On his mid-1930s scamper through Manchuria he took the express train from Siberia. He crossed the border at Manchuria Station (in Chinese known as Manzhouli, 滿洲里) to visit Harbin, then Manchukuo's "New Capital" (新景, formerly Changchun, 長春), and Mukden (Shenyang, 瀋陽). Travelling further south he left the mainstream Baedeker-route of Manchukuo, ignoring the coast and Liaodong Peninsula. Instead, Cordes turned westwards to Jehol (Rehe, 熱河) the "Bandits Province"¹ and finished his journey in Beijing. The majority of travelogue intellectuals of the 1900s to the 1940s chose Cordes' path along the major railway tracks, but most – other than Cordes – went on to Dairen. Few travelers left the colonial dwellings to go further inland and explore native parts of China's Northeast. If they followed Cordes' route, they were usually in search of the region's famous bandits (the *honghuzi*).² Only some crossed borders into "Chinese" Manchuria to visit Haila'er (海拉爾), Qiqiha'er (齊齊哈爾) or Shanhaiguan (山海關), cities of Chinese origin, urban settlements that existed long before the Russians and Japanese discovered and conquered China's Northeast.³ What the traveler saw and his readers read were the cities – again a peculiar part of the region under study. Cordes mimed the ambitious. In the introduction he promises that his monograph is aimed at "readers who through newspaper coverage on the Far East became eager to see what the country over there [*das Land da drüben*], which gets so much attention from the world public, looks like." He goes on and quotes a reader of his books who reminded him that many authors writing about Asia answer "'big, serious world-significant questions. But one never really learns anything real and vivid that gives more than the ordinary Central European's common travel account, that gives a realistic, vital breath of the new Far East.'" Cordes – in his yellow linen book – also asserts to be aware of the Yellow Peril. "Is Europe so old and fatigued that it has to follow the Far East's arousal in fear and danger?"⁴ He plays the sanguine and claims to leave all colonial or xenophobic ballast at home. *Das jüngste Kaiserreich*, published in pro-Japanese Nazi Germany of 1936, is surprisingly critical of Manchukuo. Hence, Cordes' book, although published when

1 Ernst Cordes, *Das jüngste Kaiserreich. Schlafendes, wachendes Mandschukuo*. Frankfurt a. M. 1936, pp. 181-3.

2 See amongst others: Mark Mancall, Georges Jidkoff, *Les Honghuzi de la Chine du Nord-Est (1860–1910)*, in: Jean Chesneaux et al. (eds), *Mouvements populaires et sociétés secrètes en Chine aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, Paris 1970, pp. 297-315.

3 See for example: P. Kropotkin, *Poezdka iz Zabaikal'ia na Amur cherez Man'chzhuriu*, in: *Russkii Vestnik*. 1865, pp. 663-81; N. Garin, *Po Koree, Man'chzhurii i Liaodunskomu poluoostrovu*. Karandazhom z natury. St. Petersburg 1904. The term "Chinese", again, is an imperial oversimplification since there were Manchu, Mongol or Korean parts of Manchuria.

4 Cordes, *Einleitung* (note 1).

Manchuria Station long had reached maturity, should be the perfect starting point to “go native” and to get in touch with the alien country off the beaten path.

Getting off the train

Like many other travelers, Cordes started his Chinese endeavor at Manchuria Station. Lacking physical boundaries, Manchuria Station is situated in the grasslands at the tri-lateral junction of present Mongolia-China-Russia. It was founded by the time the Chinese Eastern Railway (hereafter CER) was built. Although in some respects strongly influenced by its nomadic surroundings, it became, like Harbin, a colonial city with a multi-cultural population. During ensuing decades, the border crossing became the major economic hub for Sino-Russian commerce, which it remains to the present day. For him, entering China's Northeast at Manchuria Station was everything but ceremonious. “It is the simple, naked little train station of Manchuria, that forms the gate from Soviet-Siberia to Manchuria – now Manchukuo.”⁵ When getting in or leaving Manchuria Station, many passengers witnessed the border settlement only through the safe distance of their train car window. Though some had to get off to change trains, few left the station and crossed the border into the dwelling.⁶ Luckily again, Cordes did get off; he needed a visa for Manchukuo. The reader is therefore able to explore Manchuria Station through traveler's eyes. As Cordes spots numerous soldiers – “[t]wo yellow sorts and one white”⁷ – on the platform he becomes alarmed by the thought of having no proper endorsement on his passport yet. His passport is taken away for consular revision and a White Russian inspects his luggage politely. All his worries are gone. Relieved, Cordes decides to explore the place:

*Manchuria is not a city, but actually just a train station. On one side of the railroad embankment is the small Chinese settlement, consisting of several shabby houses. Some orderly placed cubes stand on the other side, houses of the Russian emigrants. People directly or indirectly live off the railroad. A large number of them are employees of the railroad, customs, or military. About three hundred meters outside the village stand border patrol barracks. A morning breeze lifts a Japanese and a Manchukuo flag. A small Russian church rises in the middle of the emigrant settlement, likewise made of wood. I glimpsed through its windows, which haven't been cleaned in years. This looks like in a lumber-room, was my first thought. [...] Far off the barren mountain range: foothills of the Xing'an going from South to North along the whole western border, separating Manchukuo and Mongolia.*⁸

5 Ibid., p. 17.

6 Vereshchagin, for example, changed trains in 1901 but did not leave the station. A. Vereshchagin, V Kitae. Vospominaniia i razskazy 1901–1902 gg, St. Petersburg 1903, pp. 22–3.

7 Cordes (note 1), p. 18

8 Ibid., p. 19.

Cordes learns from a passerby that the large green building is an abandoned school, which originally used to be the Russian officer's mess hall. He chats with random people, mostly short and odd conversations with men and women who seem to be lost in time. His stroll through Manchuria Station remains brief and soon he returns to the station building. The highlight there is a group of Japanese officers in the station restaurant at the table next to him. The uniformed order lemon tea, ham and eggs. Though the waiter is a Russian, their order is in Chinese. The colonizers have become colonized. "Where are we? I think in Manchukuo? So many peoples being mixed-up, who will understand?!"⁹ Cordes has tasty rotten eggs and inquires the whereabouts of his passports of the Japanese officers who ask him to follow them. Cordes obtains his travel documents in a henhouse, where the visa-office is temporarily set up. The German traveler then heads for the Harbin bound train. For Cordes, as for most travelers, the border dwelling was just a place to change trains. Manchuria Station is gone, crossed off his list.

Curious as the globetrotter Ernst Cordes was, the reader learns at least a few things about Manchuria Station: The reader learns of the border settlement's decline in the 1930s that corresponds with the deterioration of the Soviet-Manchukuo bilateral trade and the militarily increasing tense atmosphere. He is being informed of the settlement's rough topographic layout, people's occupations in this remote border post, such as the Russian waiter or the Japanese soldiers. Besides, Cordes' account unintentionally reveals what kind of borders short-term visitors who disembarked the train for a day or two were not able to cross; he is lucky to get off the train and go into town. With Cordes, the reader enters traveler's places such as the platform, the station restaurant and the visa office, but he sees the church only by looking through its dusty windows. Cordes' stay was too brief to visit the cinema "Illuzion", the bustling shabby bazaar or one of numerous massage parlors. If the reader had opened another Western travelogue, most likely he would have waited at the platform for the departure of the train. In short: Travelogue readers almost always remain onlookers. Through Cordes' hasty and untrained eyes, the reader knows everything a traveler needs to know. Despite getting a glimpse of some interethnic and intercultural encounters, the reader still knows next to nothing. To historians interested in lives of border people, all kinds of border-crossing travelogues are nice to read before bed and yet sources of this genre by themselves remain of little value to the questions historians are usually interested in.¹⁰

Three decades prior to Cordes, Petr Krasnov, assigned by the Russian Minister of War to an investigation trip through East and South Asia, crossed the Russo-Chinese border. As a career officer and productive author, Krasnov turned his travel notes into the book *Po Azii* (On Asia). The observant traveler experienced the border still pleasantly free from "traditional luggage inspection, customs officers, soldiers, and money exchange".¹¹

9 Ibid., p. 21.

10 On the limits of train passengers perspectives as narrated in travelogues see: Sören Urbansky, *Kolonialer Wettstreit. Russland, China, Japan und die Ostchinesische Eisenbahn*, Frankfurt a. M. 2008, pp. 59-69.

11 P. Krasnov, *Po Azii, Putevye ocherki Man'chzhurii, Dal'nago Vostoka, Kitaia, Iaponii i Indii*, St. Petersburg 1903, p. 46.

Unlike Cordes, Krasnov witnessed a border where state sovereignty had not yet been enforced. No one really seemed to care who was crossing the border. “Where are we?” the Russian traveler wondered just as the German visitor did. Russian traces, Russians everywhere. “A white building with the sign ‘Café Moscow’ across the station and next to it the Paramonovs, Ivanovs, Stukins in their kiosks and stalls trading all one could imagine. Shops specializing in haberdasheries, the sale of beer, the trade of canned food [...]” Although Krasnov spotted a long line of shops and first occupied houses, Manchuria Station was not yet a city where everything was in place. The traveler on his explorations around the unfinished train station passed Russian workers, drunk and seedy, a guard, a lady with her child, a salesman on his bike and various other Russian elements. “Where are we?” Krasnov asked again. “And where are the Chinese?” Some kilometers away from the Russian border, it took him some time to see them. “There they are. Over there is a crowd of pigtailed sitting on the platform eating something, and there two Mongols tying up their horses at a stall, chatting with a salesperson standing on a threshold ... that’s it.”¹² To Krasnov, the Russians were on their way to dominate and colonize the Chinese borderlands. With a smell of dirty boots, of *makhorka*, cheap vodka and onions in his nostrils, Russians of all four train classes united and were about to take over, what many of Krasnovs contemporaries already imagined as “Yellow Russia”, of which the border settlement Manchuria Station that was still in the making of was to become the starting point. Again it is a travelogue. Let us leave travelers observations aside.

What now follows is a second attempt to arrive in Manchuria Station, this time through reading newspapers, maps, historical reference books, and some archival materials about Manchuria Station’s municipality in order to assess the value of these source types for city borders as opposed to a travelogue. It is the range of different source types to transcend the borders, and cross borders into the city.

Leaving the footpaths of globetrotters

Although extremely scattered, the early years of Manchuria Station’s history are most comprehensively described in Russian language regional periodicals that were published in Harbin and Chita. Chinese language newspapers of the period under study such as the Harbin Yuandongbao¹³ had literally no reporting on Manchuria Station. While some of the Russian papers had journalists reporting from the border dwelling, local newspapers did not exist yet.¹⁴ Regional-level reporting on Manchuria Station was much

12 Ibid., p. 48. For another similar description see: Ot Irkutska do Pogranichnoi, in: Sputnik po Man’chzhurii, Amuru i Ussuriiskomu kraiu, Vladivostok 1906. Otdel III, pp. 1–20, here p. 9.

13 This newspaper existed from 1906 to 1921 and was run and partly controlled by the CER. See Frank Grüner and Rudolph Ng’s paper in this issue.

14 The first local papers, issued in the border settlement, appeared only during turmoil of World War I, revolution and civil war. Vostochnaia Azia came out in 1916 or 1917. Man’chzhuriia existed at least during 1918–1921. There are only single issues of these periodicals left in libraries around the globe.

more thorough in the Chita based papers, which might be explained through actual distance to Manchuria Station. But the perception of distance however seems to be even more significant. Although Manchuria Station never belonged to Transbaikalian province, Zabaikal'skaia nov' even included news coverage on Manchuria Station under its "provincial news"-heading ("*po oblasti*").

Time consuming archeological research in libraries and archives throughout Eurasia presents a patchwork of dozens of newspaper clippings, complemented by some archival files, that, once put together, offer a surprisingly informed picture of daily life in a border town that was still in the making. Not a brisk traveler's account, but news from men who had spent some time in town and spoke the language of the locals.

When Cordes crossed the border, Manchuria Station had existed for three and a half decades. Although he visited the border settlement in the mid-1930's, few things had changed since the years before the war with Japan. The quantity and ethnic composition of inhabitants remained astonishingly stable.¹⁵ The settlement also, in terms of geographic magnitude and economic significance, did not grow.¹⁶

But how was the border settlement founded? Like many border settlements, Manchuria Station was built by chance.¹⁷ After negotiations between the chief engineer of the CER's western section Greshov with Chinese authorities in Qiqiha'er, and promises of the Russians and Chinese to the local Mongol population that "only a narrow strip was to be expropriated that would not affect their pastures at all and, additionally, grade crossings were to be built wherever inhabitants indicate such a necessity"¹⁸ in 1900 the right-of-way was granted to lay railway tracks. Manchuria Station was founded at a locality that local nomadic tribes back then still called Nagadan. It was a place they visited rarely with their livestock herds, and of almost untouched nature with wild Przewalski horses that still used to graze on the open meadows.¹⁹

Only one year later, as fall gave way to winter in 1901, the first trains ran along the tracks, though traffic was still temporary. Work on the first section of what was to become the CER – interrupted by the Boxers – had just been finished. People changing from Russian to CER trains often had to wait overnight for their connection at Manchuria Station. They had to be quick to get a room in "Metropol", "Evropa", "Tertumasov" or one of

15 In 1910 some 10,000 people dwelled around the station. See footnotes 61-64. – According to official statistics in 1929 12,954 people lived in Manchuria Station including the following ethnic groups and nationalities: Chinese: 5,053, Russian emigrants: 4,708, Soviets: 2,937, Japanese: 154, Poles: 38, Koreans: 23, and Europeans of various nationalities: 41. See: V. A. Kormazov, *Dvizhenie naseleniia v raione Zapadnoi linii KVzhd (Uchastok st. Man'chzhurii-a-r. petlia)*, in: *Vestnik Man'chzhurii* (1930), No. 4, pp. 51-7, here p. 53.

16 See: *Ekonomicheskii biuro KVzhd* (ed.), *Spravochnik po S. Man'chzhurii i KVzhd*. [Kharbin] 1927; *Opisanie naselennykh punktov, rek, gor i prochykh geograficheskikh nazvanii Man'chzhurii i Vn. Mongoolii* (perevod s iaponskogo), Vol. 1, p. 167.

17 Originally, topographers and engineers projected the CER further north. The line was to cross the Argun River in the vicinity of Staro Tsurukhaitu. But a route further south, even beyond the Abagaitui hills and the Cossack station that had existed for two centuries, proved to be more convenient. Investors would spare a bridge because the Argun leaves the borderline turns east to become as Haila'er an entirely Chinese river.

18 *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv* (RGIA), F. 323. O. 1. D. 1214. Ll. 65-66 obl., quotation on L. 66.

19 Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1908. 25 March.

the other few hotels often already occupied by the “aborigines” inspecting achievements of European culture.²⁰ Other First or Second Class passengers spent the night in the station’s greasy waiting room or sought consolation with a beer from the overpriced buffet – a ruble for the Munich imported bottle. The poor slept *plein-air* on wet soil.²¹

Frontier spirit

When did Manchuria Station enter adolescence? Harbin and Chita based Russian language newspapers tell the story. The settlement developed rapidly and the magic word “boom” reached the steppe. To many observers it was just a question of months or maybe a few years for the border station to become a major commercial center. “Houses grow like mushrooms here after a good rainfall.”²² “New stalls, shops, hotels, and inns are opening almost every day.”²³ But the completion of the permanent station building with its two facades – one for the trains bound for Chita, the other for those bound for Harbin – scheduled to open in 1903 was delayed until after the war against Japan.²⁴ The public bathhouse operated by the CER that opened in 1905 was so overcrowded that people had to wait for hours.²⁵ A new brewery produced the first local beer for thirsty Mongols, Russians, and Chinese. Gambling in the open air attracted players of all nations. Disagreements and small scandals that occur between quarrelsome players wherever cards are on the table were settled in “good” Chinese spoken by the Russians, the same Russian spoken by Chinese” and other forms of pidgin that were native to the people of border.²⁶ A “Railway Theatre” showed hobby spectacles for a selected audience.²⁷ And in “Mauretania”, a variety theatre, people could forget about their daily duties or worries for an hour or more.

The war with Japan accelerated growth even more, as Manchuria Station became the trading center for the bulk of horses, cattle and hay to feed and equip the Russian armies.²⁸ The “housing question” became the most urgent one on the agenda, since the influx of new people created severe shortages of accommodations. People lived in stables or shared lodgings with other families in rooming houses designed for singles.²⁹ In the steppe, tim-

20 Ot Irkutskia do Pogranichnoi, in: Sputnik po Man'chzhurii, Amuru i Ussuriiskomu kraiu, Vladivostok 1906. Otdel III, pp. 1–20, here p. 10.

21 Zabaikal'ie. 1902. 23 June. – See also: Zabaikal'ie, 1903. 31 October.

22 Zabaikal'ie. 1903. 16 July.

23 Kharbinskii vestnik. 1903. 9 October.

24 See: Zabaikal'ie. 1903. 31 October.

25 See: Zabaikal'ie. 1905. 27 April.

26 Kharbinskii vestnik. 1903. 9 October.

27 See: Zabaikal'ie. 1903. 10 January. – Zabaikal'ie. 1903. 7 March.

28 See: V. Soldatov, Zheleznodorozhnye poselki po Zabaikal'skoi linii. Statisticheskoe opisanie i materialy po perepisi 1910 goda. S predislaviiem i pod redaktsiei D. M. Golovacheva. Vol. 5, Part 1 and Table Appendix. St. Petersburg 1912, p. 312.

29 Zabaikal'ie. 1905. June 6.

ber and other basic construction materials were extremely expensive. Many houses were built of unburned clay taken from the soil and washed away by the first rain.³⁰

During the first two decades, people at the border witnessed not only times of prosperity, but all too often severe setbacks as well. As Cordes observed economic decline caused by international politics during 1930s, Manchuria Station very early experienced the burden of its distinct geographic position. The years following the defeat to Japan were particularly difficult. The disastrous outcome caused great damage to Manchuria Station. With the Russian armies leaving China's Northeast, "the main customer of almost all our economy in the Far East and Transbaikial region had gone".³¹ The construction of the Amur Railway, out of strategic considerations that Japan might sooner or later annex Northern Manchuria and the East-West line of the CER, sucked people, money, and energy out of the border settlement. Prices fell and people who remained could buy almost everything at discount rates. "Houses and flats that just one year ago people were willing to pay astronomical sums for are now boarded up."³² "Wherever one let one's gaze wander among the commercial buildings in the village at all, there will be a 'For Sale' sign".³³

Yet there was still hope among business people of Manchuria Station. Many sought to emancipate the settlement from the railway and war-related industries as well as the dictate of the planned economy by the Russian Ministries of Finance and War. Major enterprises, such as the nearby coal mines of Zhalainuo'er (扎賚諾爾), were still under CER control.³⁴ For decades, the region had been a trading center between the Russians and Mongols and could have been the foundation for future business opportunities. Bandits attacking the unarmed herders and the construction of the railway however, had let the Mongols bypass the settlement since the early 1900s. Plans by business people in the near to the border envisioned secure Mongolian trade routes that were to be guarded by Chinese and Russian soldiers in order to attract trade with Mongol herdsmen once again. The establishment of a caravansary for the trade of horned cattle and as a tax collection post for Russian and Chinese authorities, as well as an international market for cattle that could compete with the traditional trade fair in Guanzhur gave new hope but proved to be fruitless for a long time.³⁵ The turmoil of Chinese Revolution in 1911 and the Mongolian independence movement in Hulunbei'er, disadvantageous customs regulations coupled with more competitive imported goods from Japan all altered the plans. The market, which was first held in 1912, soon got cut out by more favorable trade routes.³⁶ For many years the role of the Mongols, the colonized nomadic natives to this

30 See: Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1907. 29 September.

31 Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1908. 2 March.

32 Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1908. 26 January.

33 Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1908. 2 March.

34 For a historical outline see: L. I. Liubimov, Chzhalaïnorskie kopi, Kharbin 1927, pp. 13-21.

35 Novaia zhizn'. 1911. 6 October.

36 See: Dumy Zabaikal'ia. 1911. 17 March. – Kharbinskii vestnik. 1915. 5 May.

place, was negligible in the urban border settlement. Manchuria Station remained a city populated by Russian and Chinese colonizers.

Other businesses seemed to save the border people from despair and the settlement from depression. The hunting of marmots in the Russo-Chinese borderlands created several thousand jobs during season, a whole new industry of hunters, tanners, and traders and new zones of contact between the Russians and Chinese. It attracted trainloads of Chinese migrants mainly from the Hebei and Shandong provinces that during hunting season left for the steppe.³⁷ Increasing demand caused the price of marmot furs to multiply over the years. The shipment by CER of marmot furs accounted for 1 to 1.5 million rubles annually in the late 1900s. In 1911 however, the Manchurian plague that was transmitted by the animals paralyzed the business. The epidemic first occurred in Manchuria Station where modern infrastructure and hunting ground met. From there the plague spread at full tilt across the railway network.³⁸

Yet it was not the trade of fur or cattle that was most important for the border settlements economy. In Manchuria Station and in other settlements at the Russo-Chinese border, the biggest business was the production, trade and consumption of alcohol. According to estimates of a contemporary, in 1909, only 42,000 buckets³⁹ of Chinese alcohol were brought in and sold in Manchuria Station. "If all the imported alcohol would be drunken by the locals, this village would probably be the most drunk on globe", he noticed. Many borderlanders made a living by smuggling vodka or other goods across the border. Only 17 percent were consumed on the spot, the rest was smuggled onwards to the Russian borderlands.⁴⁰ Despite central government and Russian customs' efforts to crush the business, the reduction of mostly illegal business seems not to have been a major concern of the Russian municipal authorities on the scene. They charged a one Ruble tax for every bucket of vodka that was produced or traded in the village.⁴¹ In 1910, taxes on liquor, wine and beer businesses made up more than two thirds of Public Administration's overall tax income.⁴² Thus the municipal fiscal policy at the periphery rather undermined the central authorities effort to fight smuggling along the porous border.

Alcohol business alone was not enough to keep the border settlement alive. Signs of new hope accompanied the prewar years. On the surface, the border settlement developed within multiple modernities as it added some features that gave the impression of a

37 See: Soldatov (note 28), p. 311.

38 Ibid., pp. 311-2. – For the 1911 plague in China's Northeast see Marc Gamsa, *The Epidemic of Pneumonic Plague in Manchuria 1910–1911*, in: *Past & Present* (February 2006), No. 190, pp. 147–183.

39 Vedro (*bucket*) is a traditional Russian liquid measure. One vedro equals 12.299 liters.

40 According to estimates given in this source only about five percent of Russia-bound alcohol exports went through customs. See: Novaia zhizn'. 1910. 8 February. – On the production, trade, and consumption of alcohol in the Russo-Chinese borderlands see Sören Urbansky, *Der betrunkene Kosake. Schmuggel im sino-russischen Grenzland (circa 1860–1930)*, in: Martin Aust (ed.), *Russland und die Sowjetunion global 1851–1991*, Frankfurt a. M. (forthcoming).

41 See: RGIA. F. 323. O. 1. D. 1027. L. 16 obl.

42 The total tax income in 1910 was 91.220,75 Rubles of which 63.520,25 Rubles came from alcohol business. See: RGIA. F. 323. O. 1. D. 1027. Ll. 46–48.

small bit of 20th century urbanity. Telephones first appeared in the summer of 1911.⁴³ Kerosene lamps illuminated parts of the Transbaikal side and were soon to be replaced by electric streetlights that were powered by a Siemens & Halske plant.⁴⁴ In 1914, two banks opened for business.⁴⁵ The construction of a brick church began which replaced the old wooden structure – which Cordes visited during his stroll some 20 years later – that became a missionary school.⁴⁶ After the Mongols of Hulunbei'er declared independence from the Republic of China in early 1912, trade with the Mongols also grew at an unprecedented rate, a rate that, according to old inhabitants, “was even more extraordinary than during war with Japan”.⁴⁷ The streets of Manchuria Station were packed with camels. Numerous corporations like the all-Russian tea company Gubkin-Kuznetsov or the fur-trading firm Batuev & Zimmerman sent agents to pay Mongols advances. Even foreign enterprises like the Leipzig-based fur and raw materials Biedermann Company set up businesses. Latest rumors said that a new railway link between Urga (Ulan Bataar) and Manchuria Station would be built to further stimulate business.⁴⁸ High-spirited local politicians demanded from CER administration in 1913 a juridical city status that should not be inferior to that of Harbin. The authorities in St. Petersburg however, declined the proposal. That very year the Russian Empire celebrated the Romanov dynasty's 300th anniversary. Manchuria Station was to be renamed “Romanovsk” in order to “let the people in the distant borderland [*dalekoi okrainy*] remember this great moment in Russian history eternally”.⁴⁹ Again war, this time in Europe, destroyed all aspirations.

Delimiting urban borders

What is known about urban topography of dwellings at the Sino-Russian border? Manchuria Station is situated at the Kulidzhi Creek that flows into the Argun River. Because the creek valley is wide and its surface is flat, it divides the settlement in two parts. Manchuria Station, like Harbin and other settlements along the CER, was encircled by the boundary of the right-of-way strip (*polosa otchuzhdeniia*). Bulging at Manchuria Station, the “zone” was 5002 *desiatin* (5462 ha) in size.⁵⁰ The most concise information on statistics and the urban shape of Manchuria Station during its early years can be found in a voluminous reference book with statistics on Transbaikal railway. Published in 1912, it gives a precise description of the settlement's structure.⁵¹ It does not give a journey

43 See: RGIA, F. 323. O. 1. D. 1028. Ll. 14-15 obl.

44 See: RGIA, F. 323. O. 1. D. 1031. Ll. 165-166.

45 See: Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1914. 9 July.

46 See: Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1914. 24 June.

47 Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1914. 10 January. – Some observers were less sanguine of the new boom. See: Novaia zhizn', 1914. 12 February.

48 See: Novaia zhizn'. 1914. 16 January.

49 RGIA, F. 323. O. 1. D. 1031. Ll. 38-43, quotation on L. 39 obl.

50 See: Kavakami Tosichiko (ed.), Promyshlennost' Severnoi Man'chzhurii, in: Materialy po Man'chzhurii, Mongolii, Kitaiu i Iaponii. No. 33, Harbin 1909, p. 91.

51 Soldatov (note 28).

impression like one would find in travelogues, nor does it report on local news like the papers, but rather it gives a description of the settlement's urban layout and describes the different neighborhoods. The Zarechnyi village, beyond the “alienated” zone's borders, was part of the Chinese Empire and is north of the narrow river. The main part lies to the south of it. With few trees and sparse vegetation, the soil is generally not suitable for agriculture. Climate and geology meant hardship for the population. “In general the station's surroundings half resemble a desert. Inhabitants of the state treasury buildings are supplied by a water pipe, inhabitants of the private village get their water from the pump house or at the springs.”⁵² The Kulidzhi dried out in summers and water shortage remained a serious problem for people, cattle, and whenever a fire broke out.⁵³ Manchuria Station was not only divided by nature, but also by infrastructure and semi-colonial boundaries, which reveal the strong influence of the rail company as a political agent. The settlement consisted of four parts: First the Chinese side (*Kitaiskaia storona*), situated south of the railway tracks, second, the Transbaikal side (*Zabaikal'skaia storona*) north of it, third, the bustling private village (*chastnyi poselok*) with its individual housing and independent enterprises directly bordering the Transbaikal side, all of which fell after the extension of the zone within the right-of-way boundary. Finally there was the village beyond the stream (*Zarechnyi poselok*) – outside the right-of-way boundary on the other bank of Kulidzhi. Compared to Cordes' biased description of Manchuria Station as “shabby houses” opposed to some “orderly placed cubes”, Soldatov's reference book gives a less unprejudiced and quite detailed description of the settlement's different quarters:

*On the Chinese side state-owned, mainly brick houses are built accommodating railway workers and servants. It is home to the CER's station facilities, namely: the church, hospital, school, public assembly, library [...], police head-office and other institutions. The train station is home to the post, telegraph, and customs office. That part of the village with its broad symmetrical streets has quite original buildings [...] many of which are residential houses, small villas for 1-2 families, surrounded with gardens [...]. Behind the state-owned village, closer to the hills, a large, private village originally had been planned.*⁵⁴

In September 1904, a CER commission had projected a whole city there with “everything a decent city needs”. Avenues and boulevards were named after heroes of the still ongoing Russo-Japanese War.⁵⁵ But these streets existed only on the maps. Because of the war with Japan, they remained castles in the air and by 1906, projected estates had almost entirely been leveled again.

There are still some unfinished houses left but the majority of owners gave up their property, since there is not a bit of hope for further quick development of the village. On [the

52 Ibid., p. 309.

53 See: Kharbinskii vestnik. 1908. 13 September.

54 Soldatov (note 28), p. 310.

55 Zabaikal'skaia nov', 1907. 29 September.

Chinese] side there are only three private houses in total. The Transbaikal side consists of a state-owned village within the borders of the alienated zone of the Transbaikal railway and developed with governmental houses for railway employees and administrative structures of the railway. The private village that was planned beyond the Transbaikal railway zone, designed with wide parallel streets is almost entirely developed. Among the buildings there are many brick structures, especially many made of clay. This is the main part of the village in terms of population and economic importance. Here are all the shops, businesses, and the busy bazaar. The private village hosts the following institutions: a Missionary Church [of the Russian-Orthodox Mission in Beijing – S.U.], the municipal secondary school with four classes, a primary school, two Russian and one Chinese public assemblies, the municipal self-government, and other municipal institutions such as a fire brigade, slaughterhouse, hospital, veterinarian and library. The greater number of shops are liquor or grocery stores and textiles, there is also one small bookstore, two drugstores and a pharmacy.⁵⁶

Although the private village with its many wooden houses probably remained the liveliest district with the majority of the 326 businesses of the dwellings around Manchuria Station, in the interwar-period many of its houses had been abandoned and fallen into disrepair. The situation in Zarechnyi village beyond Kulidzhi stream was even worse. Shacks were of poor quality and the shantytown was demolished in late 1910. By that time parts of the settlement under the management of Transbaikal railway were handed over to the CER administration and unified with the CER village. Still, the division between private and governmental districts in the settlement remained, thereby underlining importance of the rail company as political agent.⁵⁷

The overall impression of the dwelling in Soldatov's reference book, Corde's travelogue and the newspaper clippings, is that of a rather aesthetic, cultivated Chinese side, with small fountains, and an uninviting Transbaikal side "covered with dust, where houses stand naked like in the steppe" was shared by many visitors and journalists.⁵⁸ Again different source types imply different perspectives. Travelogues, newspapers and contemporary reference books are to be used complementary to combine of a variety of sources that can be claimed to be reliable.

The village around the railway station of Manchuria had features that are usually prevalent in cities at borders or frontiers, such as the several hotels, quite poor in standard and exceptionally expensive⁵⁹ or a population that predominantly lived off the border. Additionally, Manchuria Station was home to institutions that could only be found in some of the hybrid, semi-colonial settlements along the CER right-of-way strip in North Manchuria. Among them were the immigration post with the adjoining hospital, the Russian barracks, the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs and the estates of the Chinese

56 Soldatov (note 28), pp. 310-1.

57 Ibid., pp. 311-2.

58 Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1914. 3 June.

59 See: Soldatov (note 28), p. 311.

customs head officer, the chief officer of the Chinese police, and the Chinese prefect all of which were situated in the private village on the Transbaikal side north of the tracks. Furthermore, in order to regain control of the borderlands, Chinese authorities some kilometers south off Manchuria Station built their own small fortified settlement Lubinfu (臚濱府) with barracks for Chinese soldiers.⁶⁰

Who lived in this town in the making? The accuracy of censuses taken in border settlements is a myth. The official 1910 census counted 8,550 people at Manchuria Station of which almost three quarters lived in the private village (6,165) and the remaining part (2,385) in the state-owned district. The Transbaikalian census takers, in charge because in 1910, some parts of the village still belonged to the Transbaikal railway, admitted, that mainly the Chinese migrants (many of whom left the settlement for the steppe during hunting season) were out of statistical reach.⁶¹ Newspapers further concealed that other Russian authorities striving against Transbaikal railway authority hampered the counting of people in parts of the settlement.⁶² Other sources estimate the number of dwellers in 1909–1910 between 12,000 of which 40 percent were labeled as Chinese⁶³ or even 25,000 including 60 percent Chinese and other foreign nationals.⁶⁴ Again, the study of different materials challenges official statistics.

Descend into Demimonde

Plans, maps, and descriptions of urban topography in reference books enable the historian to make a virtual stroll through a settlement that still exists but has now many times as many inhabitants as before. Population statistics offer an idea of quantities; social, ethnic, and national proportions. The impression becomes more precise than with only the reading of travelogues and yet historians still lack the mental image of “what life was like” in the border settlement. They still know little about which ethnically, culturally, religiously, socially, or economically defined zones of contact existed at Manchuria Station. They need to consider archival materials to go track down contact zones and cross borders in a border city.

Issues of conflicts between Russians and Chinese members in the Municipal council,⁶⁵ or of Chinese businessmen protesting against taxes imposed by Russian authorities⁶⁶ are two topics that could serve as examples of areas of interaction that have already been studied in the case of Harbin and would most likely confirm what is already known. A historiography often tells stories of antagonism, and seldom stories of cooperation between the Russians and the Chinese. This article will focus on crime, since crimes are

60 Ibid., pp. 311–2.

61 Ibid., p. 311.

62 See: Zabaikal'skaia nov', 1910. 24 June.

63 Kavakami (note 50), p. 92.

64 See: Zabaikal'skaia nov', 1910. 24 June.

65 See: Dumy Zabaikalia, 1912. 15 February, 27 July, and 28 July.

66 See: RGIA, F. 323. O. 1. D. 1026. L. 156 and delo 1029. L. 28.

often committed across ethnic boundaries and friction tends to be grievous. The history of crime thus offers an adequate angle to identify borders within border towns.

Already before the Russo-Japanese War, lack of proper discipline was common among local police staff. Officers recruited from the Zaamurskii District Special Corps of Border Guards (*Zaamurskii okrug ot del'nogo korpusa pogranichnoi strazhi*) went out and “while boozing with their buddies they could be spotted in every single tavern, in restaurants and various other institutions or tottering in the streets”.⁶⁷ The war washed all kinds of suspicious “elements” from other peripheries of the Russian Empire and China to the Manchurian border. Released exiles from Nerchinsk *katorga* or from Sakhalin mingled with folk recruited from discharged servants, laid off railway workers, ruined merchants people suspicious to local authorities that, according to a governmental report “either on their way from Russia proper to Manchuria or in the opposite direction, were stranded temporarily or took up permanent residence in the border settlement due to lack of funding or missing passports”.⁶⁸ General public, stirred up by local media, soon found the chief culprits: People from the Caucasus (*kavkaztsy*). Was it a stereotype of refugees that exists in Russia until this very day? Petty crimes like mugging or burglary were common, even murder was not rare. Police all-too-often remained inactive. Normal people became victims, like a certain Mr. Grif, shot and strangled by a group of Ossetians, or like Romual'd Surovetskii, a salesman of sewing machines, killed in his house not far from the public *bania* on a September night in 1905. The murderers left with money and other valuables. Locals demanded stronger police presence.⁶⁹

It is striking that although Chinese, as shown by the statistics, made up a significant if not the major share of people in the border settlement, they rarely became the bogey in public Russian discourse of Manchuria Station's early stages of crime history. Marginalized in newspapers, they pop-up rarely in articles or commentaries. Most of Manchuria Station's Russians and Chinese lived in different isolated quarters rarely socializing with “the others” in daily life. Pravdin, a local Russian journalist who published occasionally in Zabaikal'skaia nov', describes a scene of theft he observed near the railway tracks. In a pidgin-conversation with the Chinese delinquents, he asks the men what they are “carrying”? The Chinese answer him as follows: “Our little, little found wood, our found coal.” Pravdin provides his readers with his translation of the verb “to find” in the next sentence: “steal”.⁷⁰ In opposite to other semi-colonial urban spaces of China's Northeast, the Chinese seem to not be a major cause of fear to the Russian public of Manchuria Station. The “bad guys” in Russian local media are Georgians, or men from Ossetia and Chechnya. To what extent stereotypes influenced reports on crime is difficult to evaluate. The illegal activities of the Chinese targeted construction materials of plaque-contaminated or abandoned houses or public property like timber and coal from the CER

67 Zabaikal'ie. 1904. 13 February.

68 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF). F. 102. DP. 4. O. 1908 g. D. 21, Ch. 6. L. 69 and Ll. 76 obl.-77 (quotation). – See also: RGIA, F. 323. O. 1. D. 1027. L. 101.

69 See: Zabaikal'ie, 1905, 20 November. – Zabaikal'ie, 1905, 16 December.

70 Nasha malo-malo drova nakhodili, nasha ugol' nakhodi, in: Zabaikal'skaia nov'. 1911. 16 March.

storehouses, thus a kind of "self-service"-culture that was not unpopular among Russian subjects too. If Russians and Chinese competed at Manchuria Station, it was usually the bottom of society, fighting for stolen coal, timber, or the service charge for luggage transport at the railway station. And if they fought, in most cases it was the Chinese that were the vulnerable.⁷¹

The crime scene of Manchuria Station became an issue of national importance in Russia after the Sobolinsk post and telegraph office was raided in 1908 and more than 210,000 rubles were seized by the bandits. Again these outlaws were subjects of the Russian but not the Chinese Empire. As soon as the issue got attention from the political center, one finds historical evidence preserved in national archives for minor settlements at the shared Sino-Russian periphery such as Manchuria Station that is usually lost or out of the reach of historians.

In a 1908 letter to the Ministry of the Interior Police Department (*Departament Politsii Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del*), the Military Governor in Chita describes Manchuria Station as a "reservoir" (*priton*) of criminals triggering crime in the whole Transbaikal area. Authorities were sure that the outlaws lived and hid in Manchuria Station as in other criminal cases before. Just to mention one case here: On July 24, 1908, a group of armed Caucasians (*kavkaztsy*), in this case, escaped exiles, raided the Tsagan-Oluevski Cossack post and stole horses. Seven bandits were arrested and it turned out that "these folks [...] arrived from Manchuria Station where they not only illegitimately live but some of them also received residence permits from the local police."⁷² In his letter mailed to St. Petersburg, the Transbaikal Military Governor draws a gloomy conclusion:

A chronic of crimes committed at Manchuria Station would show best what kinds of elements find refuge there and how vigorous local police prosecute them. On the number of cases of robberies and theft against Mongolian nomads committed by Russian nationals near Manchuria Station, information can be obtained from the local consulate, rumors say figures are tremendous. Even more enormous is the number of burglaries and murders in Manchuria Station. I have no exact data on that. According to personal surveys I can just name several: For instance, 1) armed robbery of the postal train Manchuria–Harbin in the vicinity of the station, 2) larceny of Podliasok's pharmacy, 3) of Pakhatinskii's and 4) Partin's houses, 5) several cruel murders with theft. And finally 6) policeman Merzhinskii's assassination. Whole gangs of robbers committed all crimes except for the last. In none of the cases were the delinquents found. [...] Taking into account the high number of policemen and soldiers stationed in Manchuria village [...] then the situation of public security and order can only be described as bad, to put it mildly.⁷³

71 For example fights between Chinese and Russian porters at the train station usually ended in favor of the Russian for the simple reason that the (Russian) railway police refused to help the Chinese and sent them away with the phrase: "Get lost, monkey!" Zabaikal'ie, 1903. 1 July.

72 GARF, F. 102. DP. 4. O. 1908 g. D. 21, Ch. 6. L. 70 obl.

73 GARF, F. 102. DP. 4. O. 1908 g. D. 21, Ch. 6. L. 70 obl.-71.

Police officers recruited from the Zamuiskii Border Guards remained insufficient to meet criminality during the first years. Their posts were located exclusively in the administrative village, two kilometers off the settlement's private districts that were guarded by seldom and defenseless patrols. The situation improved through structural changes in 1909 and 1910. The recently inaugurated public administration rented special observation posts within private village boundaries and provided them with lower rank police forces. These posts were now able to ask for help from special patrols immediately sent after first signs of danger. The private settlement was then divided into three police districts, the Chinese side, the eastern part, and the western part of the private village, each of which was directed by a police officer supported by some lower ranks. Zamuiskii Border Guards still provided police staff. The budget came from Manchuria Station's Public Administration. Railway Police was a second police force that controlled public order in the administrative village. A special Chinese police force was in charge of Chinese subjects in the settlement. In the early 1910s, these structural changes led, according to official documents, to a significant reduction of crime.⁷⁴ But with World War I, Manchuria Station was struck again by organized groups of criminals, raiding people's homes, shops, and storehouses, forcing citizens to stay indoors and shopkeepers to close their shops and the public administration to provide its servants with guns after nightfall.⁷⁵ The local history of crime demonstrates that offenses predominantly occurred within the community of Russian subjects at Manchuria Station rather than across borders of different national groups.

Other components typical for settlements with high numbers of visitors made up of more men than women, as well as with a vibrant nightlife, were prostitution, gambling, and the consumption of alcohol. Alcohol made up not only the biggest share in municipal sales taxes because of production and sale to the Russian borderlands as mentioned above, but consumption was high as well. In 1911, Manchuria Station counted about 200 grocery and liquor stores (one store per 50 inhabitants) selling beer on tap, 7 or 8 wine taverns, 7 to 10 restaurants with "private rooms", up to 30 canteens, most of them clustered around the bazaar, selling Chinese *baijiu* and Russian *vodka*, and, needless to say, girls that entertained clients in various ways. All these institutions were open around the clock and generally packed with customers.⁷⁶ More and more things went out of control. After a fight between customers of a bazaar-canteen during Easter week in 1911, the municipal council put the problem of the sex industry on the agenda. Customers had attacked each other, one brandishing an axe, the other throwing glass bottles of which one by mistake almost killed children playing on the street. In a lively discussion among the council's members, it was decided without a single vote of opposition to prohibit the services of prostitutes to men under the age of 40 years as well as to ban the lodging of prostitutes in canteens and restaurants. Restaurant owners that would not obey the lat-

74 See: RGIA, F. 323. O. 1. D. 1027. L. 101-101 obl. – Soldatov (note 28), p. 311.

75 See: Kharbinskii vestnik. 1915. 6 January.

76 See: Zabaikal'skaia nov', 1911. 4 June.

ter rule would lose their license. The municipal, council in collaboration with the police and medical committee, began to search for a suitable place in the village to run the sex business.⁷⁷ The record stops here and it is up to the historian to imagine how things developed further. Archival materials, in combination with newspaper articles, reveal a quite wide-ranging picture of Manchuria Station’s dubious side. Also in this case, police files in combination with news of crime reveal that it was not the Chinese, but various shady “elements” from the Russian Empire, that both the authorities and the border people feared most. Far more work needs to be done with respect to this understudied aspect, especially the role Russian nationals with a bad reputation played in comparison to Chinese nationals not just in Manchuria Station but in China’s Northeast in general.

Conclusion

This article attempted to map Manchuria Station during the first two decades of its existence, its topography, economic development, and people’s interactions. This early stage of development sheds light on understudied border cities at the periphery of China’s Northeast. For historians today, as for Western travelers in the past, borders into China are not easy to cross. The article attempted to value different types of historical sources on these places that are available to us, sources that shape our limited knowledge of small border settlements.

The journey started with Western and Russian travelogues that in language and judgment often remain biased. Travelers routinely arrive with certain ideas in mind, or worse, prejudices of a culture that they try to prove upon arrival. Often enough, the visited place simply serves as scenery for own mind games as the British author Maurice Baring honestly admits. “All I can hope to do is to give a faint shadow of the pictures that have imprinted themselves on my memory [...] such as one obtains at a railway station by putting a penny in the slot of a small machine.”⁷⁸ On the other hand, outsiders tend to be more curios than, for example, a journalist or a state official – locals acquainted with the borderland that over time got partially sighted. The practice of Japanese officers giving an order in Chinese to a Russian waiter might have seemed normal to a local journalist. To a German traveler however, this kind of stereotype-affirming interethnic encounter was certainly new. Yet the contact zone of the traveler and the native is usually the train station, and travelogues only sporadically cross borders beyond its limits.

The picture becomes more comprehensive if one reads newspapers and archival files, studies maps and photographs. Chita and Harbin-based Russian language papers both had some news coverage, but Chita journalists certainly did a better job. Articles, commentaries, and letters to the editor provide historians with a thorough reporting of the

77 See: RGIA, F. 323. O. 1. D. 1028. L. 181.

78 Maurice Baring, *With the Russians in Manchuria*, London 1906, preface p. IX.

settlement's general development, and offer insights to the discourse of the Russian public. Newspapers are eye-openers for certain prevalent problems like crime.

There are just a few accessible records left in national archives which concern Manchuria Station before the October Revolution, mostly preserved in CER or police record groups.⁷⁹ Municipal files offer information on the general development, the local economy, and scandals, but from a different angle than newspapers. Police files give insights into various facets of demimonde. Most important is that newspapers, as well as archival records, help to cross borders into contemporary public discourses. Reference books belong to another genre, which usually covers whole regions like Manchuria's Russian semi-colonial North or Transbaikalia, and, if the historian is lucky, have at least a few pages on Manchuria Station too. Reference books are crucial for statistics, administrative features, or topography descriptions. They are of much less value for the research of encounters between common people. The same holds true for the limited "other sources" such as maps and photographs. Again, there are very few of them.⁸⁰ On their own virtually useless, they help in combination with other materials to "see" the texts one reads in newspapers or archival files. Maps are a significant supplement for the visualization of urban topography that is narrated in travelogues and reference books. Through photographs, researchers are able to see how people dressed, and are able to read shop signs. It was through photographs, not texts that I first understood how tiny and marginal Manchuria Station was.

The sources mentioned so far are – with the exception of one map – of Russian or Western origin. Of course, Chinese customs and police officials did, like their Russian counterparts, document their duties. Still, the unprivileged historian is unable to study the traces they left.⁸¹ At least in the case of Manchuria Station, the knowledge remains limited to Russian and Western perspectives and it is difficult for us to assess how Chinese contemporaries perceived the border city. The unprejudiced and unrestricted use of all different types complementary to each other is imperative to cross at least some borders.

Just like other settlements in the Russo-Chinese borderlands, Manchuria Station boasted various ethnic and cultural contact zones that often resulted from economic incentives. Commercial life during the border settlement's early years however remained rocky, as

79 Other aspects beyond the focus of this paper, such as the Russian customs at Manchuria Station, are well covered in regional archives. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Chitinskoi oblasti (GACHO). F. 107: Man'chzhurskaia tamozhnia (1902–1916).

80 I was only able to trace two detailed maps of Manchuria Station. The first was issued in February 1908 and depicted the future development of the settlement as envisioned by its Russian planners. See: RGIA. F. 323. O. 1. D. 1026. L. 9. The second is a Chinese map published in 1920s. There is many photographs of the station building but very few on other parts of the dwelling. The best pictures, I know of, were taken by US Vice Consul to Mukden (Shenyang) Gerald Warner during the mid-1930s. URL: <http://digital.lafayette.edu/collections/eastasia>.

81 Attempts to get access to local and regional Archives in Manzhouli, Haila'er and other cities by the author in summer 2009 proved to be futile. When authorities granted admittance the sources they offered were historically of minor value. Justifications for the loss of "real" sources ranged from creative to flimsy, but could not be proved. Also in Russian archives many sources disappeared. For the Russian case see Sören Urbansky, *Auf in die Provinz! Recherchen in Russlands Regionalarchiven*, in: *Osteuropa* 59 (2009), No. 11, pp. 121–30.

it was strongly affected by wars, epidemics, customs policies and other external factors. The economic ups and downs in turn were mirrored by the influx and efflux of different groups of people. Though Manchuria Station had become a multi-ethnic microcosm within just five years time, cultural entanglements between subjects from the Russians and Chinese Empires were often limited to the train station and the bazaar, to restaurants, gambling houses and other public urban spaces. Separated by the railway tracks, the Chinese side and the Transbaikal side as well as the fortified settlement of Lubinfu kept their distinct characters up to the year of 1917, and partly administrative borders remained quite intact. Also the roles which different ethnic groups inside in the town were assigned to play were clearly defined.

These invisible borders reflect the social fabric of Manchuria Station. In a border town that was made up of separated urban communities, many dwellers did not have enough interest to pick up a foreign language or to marry across ethnic boundaries. This was the case partly because fluctuation of people was generally high, and partly because cross-cultural fraternizations were rarely tolerated people proved unwilling to integrate. Even with the knowledge of some pidgin, few Chinese were able to mingle with the Russian community and vice versa. The Mongols remained aliens in town. Ethnic or national division however did not necessarily result in aversion against "the others." When Russians raised the issue of crime at Manchuria Station, Chinese rarely became the scapegoats in their public discourse. Hence, Manchuria Station was, at least not in every aspect, Harbin en miniature.