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Chinese Migration and Cross-Border Practices in the Russian-Chinese Interaction in the Far East: Four Stages of Intercultural Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

Russian-Chinese interaction in the Far East covers relations between the two largest world civilizations: Russia and China. One of its most important features is Chinese migration in the Russian Far Eastern (RFE) border region. This article analyzes the role and importance of Chinese migration as an integral component of the Sino-Russian cross-border interactions that has had varied effects over the past century and a half. Chinese migration is an indispensable condition for the emergence and development of cross-border practices in the RFE and the presence and economic activity of Chinese migrants ensures the continued development of forms of cross-border interaction and, in general, the dialogue between the cultures. To substantiate this thesis, systemic and historical-chronological methods are used to analyze a significant amount of factual and statistical material accumulated by historical research in the works of Russian and Chinese historians and social researchers.

KEYWORDS

Chinese migration, Russian-Chinese interaction, cross-border practices, the Far East, intercultural dialogue

Introduction

Sino-Russian relations have an over four-century history. Today, contacts between Russia and China have become not only a part of global international relations, but also an essential component of an inter-civilizational convergence (Myasnikov, 2017, p. 11). This makes new research on the history of this relationship – particularly in the Russian Far East (RFE) – increasingly important.

Russian-Chinese interaction in the Far East began to develop in the second half of the 19th century. After the signing of the Aigun¹ and Beijing Treaties², there was a wave of Russian migration from Europe to the southern territories of the Russian Far East. Through the development of agricultural, industry, and transport in this border territory, the two civilizations began to converge. It was here that Russian-Chinese interaction was the greatest. At the same time, Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East formed one a distinct, but related subgroup.

This Chinese migration flow, which began in the 19th century, has today become an integral part of the RFE's socio-economic life. And today more than ever, the economic activity and the peculiarities of the interactions of this Chinese migrant population with the Russian population continues to have a direct impact on the development of Russian-Chinese cooperation at all levels. Consequently, the study of Chinese migration continues to be important for the Russian state.

Over the past 150 years, Chinese migration to the RFE has been the most important element in determining Sino-Russian relations. Several cross-border practices in the RFE are important to consider here. Nevertheless, ethnic and migration studies remain “a rag-tag field”, defined by one scholar as “a ragged field of study, not an intellectually unified discipline” (DeTona et al., 2019, p. 7). Scholars have mainly studied the socio-economic aspects of the Chinese migration to the RFE, as well as the peculiarities of the Chinese migrants' legal status. Yet the daily interactions of the Russian population and Chinese migrants, including cross-border practices and dialogue has not yet sufficiently been analyzed.

The purpose of the current article is to analyze the role of Chinese migration in the RFE border area as an integral part of cross-border Sino-Russian practices. Throughout the long history of Sino-Russian relations in the RFE, a cultural dialogue between these two unique cultures has unfolded. While this dialogue is not an explicit part of the common understanding of either culture, it has been recognized to have important effects (Ornatskaya, 2014, pp. 51–52). The current article explores this dialogue through everyday actions and interactions, i.e., situated discursive practices (Linell, 2004, pp. 7–9).

¹ The Aigun Treaty, which was concluded on May 16 (28), 1858, established the Russian-Chinese border, and legally assigned to Russia the areas in the Amur region. The Russians claimed the territory on the left bank of the Amur river to the sea, while the Chinese claimed the right bank. The exclusive rights of Russian and Chinese vessels to sail on the Amur, Sungari, and Ussuri rivers was also established.

² The Beijing Treaty, which was concluded on November 2 (14), 1860, finally secured for Russia the Ussuri territory. The western border between the two countries was also fixed with this treaty. Moreover, Russia received the right to duty-free trade along the entire eastern border.

This dialogue is most obvious in the RFE border, where, due to the geographical proximity of Russian and China, maximum rapprochement occurs. The ongoing contact of these two cultures is highly interdependent in this region and could be interrupted only by force. At the same time, the RFE – traditionally conceived of in Russia as a region far from the central Russia, and thus already alienated from Russian culture in general – is a peripheral area, remote from the cultural and economic centers of both countries. Cross-border practices thus flourish here are considered to be forms of interaction that exceed each state individually.

This article argues that Chinese migration is an indispensable condition for the emergence and development of the cross-border practices in the RFE. The presence and economic activities of Chinese migrants not only ensure the development of diverse forms of cross-border interaction; they are also integral in fostering of cultural dialogue and cultural diffusion.

A system method was used in this study. This allows me to analyze Chinese migration as a subject of the formation of social cross-border practices of Russian-Chinese interaction in the RFE territories across cultural, historical and geopolitical contexts, and, at the same time, as a coherent system with its own development and homeostasis. Furthermore, a historical-chronological method allows me to consider Sino-Russian relations through the prism of the Chinese migration's effect on the development and transformation of the RFE.

Historical Stages of the Intercultural Dialogue between Russia and China in the Russian Far East

Stage One—“Creation”: the middle of the 19th century through the beginning of the 20th centuries. Completely new patterns were formed in this period of the Russian Empire's development of the RFE in the wake of the Aigun and Beijing treaties. These new patterns crystallized in the emerging contact zone of the RFE border. It was here that Chinese migration flows increased the most. William Petersen has called this migration an “impelled migration” (Petersen, 1958, p. 262): in the middle of the 19th century, the invasion of China by imperialist powers and its transformation into a semi-colonial country led to the emergence of a layer of Chinese coolies who went to work outside their homeland and made up a significant part of Chinese migration. By 1897, there were 43,000 Chinese citizens in the RFE (Wishnick, 2002, p. 42).

During this time, Chinese migrants began to engage actively in the economic life of the region where there was previously a shortage of labor. The settlement of the region by ethnic Russians from the west, however, was slow. From 1861–1891 about 43,000 immigrants arrived in the Amur and Primorye regions. The Russians had followed a military-strategic orientation to the settlement of the RFE which resulted in a mixed population of Cossacks, peasants, and prospectors, but very few workers (Krushanov, 1991, pp. 32–34). This set the stage for an influx of Chinese workers because of the exceptional proximity of the region to China. According to official data, the number of Chinese prospectors in the mines of the mountainous districts

of Amur, Primorye, and Transbaikalia in 1910 reached 25,000 people (Ossendovsky, 1916, p. 20). Chinese labor was widely used in the construction of railways. So, in 1892–1916, 200,000 Chinese people worked on the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway (Li, 2006, p. 121).

Because of socio-economic and geopolitical factors, Chinese migration to the RFE became a hotspot for Russian-Chinese interaction, foreign trade, and Chinese small to medium business. In 1910, in the Primorsky and Amur regions, there were 4,267 Chinese trading enterprises with a total exchange of more than 25 million rubles (Gravje, 1912, p. 362), or 185 million US dollars. Chinese migration also led to the emergence of a host of illegal and semi-illegal activities that have long been rooted in the RFE: smuggling, Honghuzies³, opiate smoking, horse stealing, poaching, and espionage. Furthermore, the Chinese population at this time started to stratify itself into specific trades and professions from merchants, workers, and artisans to tradesmen and smugglers.

This influx of Chinese migrants also led to significant cultural exchange. Russian settlers became more acquainted with the Chinese traditions. There is evidence that the Russian urban population decorated their houses in Chinese-style dwellings (Petrov, 2003, pp. 754–755) and great interest in Vladivostok grew because of the Chinese celebration of the Chinese New Year in that city. Moreover, since the end of the 19th century, Chinese theaters have been an important part of settlements in the RFE. In Vladivostok, for example, there were three Chinese theaters by the end of the 19th century, and in Khabarovsk, there were two theaters. In return, the Chinese people showed interest in the Russian language and culture. They visited Russian libraries, theaters, museums, and concerts, and attended Russian language courses or hired tutors. Among the 1,987 people who visited the museum of the Troitskosavsko-Kyakhtinsky branch of the Amur Department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in 1904, 520 were Chinese (26.2% of the total number of visitors). Chinese children also had the opportunity to learn Russian in the “Vladivostok Nikolayevsk City Russian-Chinese School” (opened in 1897 in Vladivostok), which the Chinese City Society Organization helped create. At the school, Chinese children studied alongside Russians. In 1899, there were 75 Russian children at the school, 15 Chinese children, and 5 children of Russian Koreans. The school also taught Russian children Chinese (Petrov, 2003, pp. 702–705, 729, 755). The development of Russian-Chinese intercultural interaction was facilitated by the opening in 1899 of the Eastern Institute in Vladivostok, where the teaching of Sinology disciplines was pioneered in Russia. Among the faculty of the Institute were several Chinese professors. The activities of the Institute made a great contribution to the development of scientific contacts between Russia and China, and surely contributed to the cultural interpenetration of the two peoples and the formation of their inter-civilization relations.

It must be emphasized that during this historical stage the RFE region was seen as part of periphery by both cultures. This peripherality had a direct impact on the

³ The participants of armed groups, which had operated in Manchuria since the middle of the 19th century until 1949, were called Honghuzies (from the Chinese “Honghuzi” – “red-bearded”). They were mostly either bankrupt migrants, or the Chinese fleeing to Manchuria from hard labor.

development of cross-border contacts. The RFE regional authorities were entrusted with migration control and regulation of migrants' activities; however, as there was no developed migration legislation, serious difficulties and problems arose. This situation was aggravated by the impossibility of accurately registering Chinese migrants (because of shortcomings in statistical work); the isolation of the Chinese community; and, at the same time, the mobility of the Chinese; illegal Chinese penetration into Russian territory; and the cultural specifics of Chinese names and surnames. Local regional authorities were thus largely left alone to make decisions about Chinese migrants.

The Committee on the Settlement of the Far East, established in 1909, developed measures to limit the influx of Chinese migrants. The fee for a passing certificate or visa was increased and the use of Chinese labor in military and railway construction was prohibited. These measures, as well as "The Law about Some Restrictions on Foreigners" (established on June 21, 1910), which prohibited the hiring of foreign nationals with treasury funds, only slightly reduced the number of Chinese workers in the RFE. In 1910 before these measures there were 42,500 Chinese workers in the RFE according to official figures (70% of the total number of Russian workers), while in 1911 there were 36,200 workers (about 50%). However, less than a month after the adoption of this law, significant concessions were made. For example, §4 of the law gave the Council of Ministers the right to allow foreigners to perform urgent work (in case of a shortage of Russian workers). This made it possible for many departments to obtain permits to hire Chinese workers for construction and other works (Romanova, 2000, p. 87). Importantly, these restrictive measures were applied before the outbreak of World War I. On July 25, 1914, the tsarist government temporarily allowed Chinese people to work at enterprises. Subsequently, the number of Chinese workers increased once again. By October 1917, there were about 500,000 Chinese people in Russia, including more than 200,000 in the RFE (Li, 1996, p. 6; Yin, 1997, p. 32).

In general, this first historical stage saw a fairly stable development of cross-border practices. The field of interaction between Chinese and Russian populations expanded, and more forms of cultural contact became routine. Due to civilizational differences, the Chinese migrants did not seek to assimilate into Russian society, but they did actively contribute to the socio-economic processes of the RFE.

Stage Two – "Conversion": 1918–1938. The second stage was not long, but it was exceptionally. After October 1917, a new stage in Sino-Russian relations began. The new Chinese migrants to Soviet territory were now considered to be useful as participants in the upcoming class battles – particularly as the Soviet leadership oriented itself toward the implementation of a world socialist revolution.

Chinese migrants on Russian territory thus became an important element of the Soviet national policy system. The policy regarding Chinese migrants was developed in accordance with the programmatic guidelines of the ruling Communist Party. One goal was to use "revolutionary" Chinese migrants in the implementation of socialist revolutions across Asia. To achieve this aim, varieties of methods were used. First, an international consciousness for the Chinese workers was needed. Protecting the

rights of Chinese migrants on Soviet territory was seen as integral to the process of introducing Chinese migrants to the revolutionary transformations in Russia and further internationalist education.

In April 1917, the Union of Chinese Citizens in Russia was created in Petrograd. In December 1918, it was renamed the Union of Chinese Workers. By the middle of 1920, the Union included more than 50,000 people and had branches in Samara, Saratov, Kiev, Murmansk, Vyatka, Chelyabinsk, Tashkent, Yekaterinburg, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Blagoveshchensk, Chita, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and other Soviet cities (Lin, 1994, pp. 101–102). Under the leadership of the Union, schools for political literacy were created; lectures were given; and communist cells were organized.

On June 25, 1920, the Central Organizing Bureau (CSC) of the Chinese Communists in Russia was created, which carried out propaganda work among the Chinese workers living in Russia. About 1,600 Chinese attended a course at the University of Chinese Workers, while at the Communist University of the East Workers there were about 500 participants. Chinese revolutionaries also had opportunities to get involved with the Frunze Military Academy, the Tolmachev Military-Political Academy, the Higher Artillery School, the Flight Military Theoretical School, the International Leninist School, and the Central Komsomol School (Pantsov, 2001, pp. 230–231, 237).

In 1918–1922, the cardinal socio-economic and political transformations took place in the RFE. Regions and governments changed kaleidoscopically during the civil war. In this difficult situation, however, the flows of Chinese migrants and their economic activities in the RFE border region continued. Because of a shortage of Russian workers, there was need for Chinese labor. During the civil war and intervention, the RFE's ties with the central industrial regions were severed, so the Russian population needed Chinese food and industrial goods more than usual. The successive authorities had their own approaches to regulating Soviet relations with the Chinese people. In the Amur Labor Socialist Republic, Chinese migrants were given equal rights as Russians. During the years of the Far Eastern Republic (FER), the Chinese, who were regarded as a national minority there, were granted the right to create cultural-national autonomy. Enshrined in Art. 121 of the FER Constitution, this right proclaimed: "All the national minorities in the territory of the Republic shall be granted autonomy in matters pertaining to their national culture." (Constitution of the Far Eastern Republic, 1921, p. 54). According to the Constitution of the FER, two conditions were important for the development of cultural-national autonomy: (a) that Chinese migrants be guaranteed all the rights as any other citizens of the FER, and (b) that they were also given the opportunity to preserve their distinctive and traditional characteristics. During the FER period, guidelines were also set for future regulation of Russian-Chinese interaction. Chinese migrants were tacitly divided into "working people" – who needed to be internationalized and revolutionized – and "entrepreneurs" – or those that were not considered as the future revolutionary vanguard in the East and who were allowed to continue their economic activities in the RFE because of the socio-economic situation of the region and because of the historical practices of interaction between the population of two countries.

In 1918–1922, cross-border practices were supplemented by an additional component: Chinese migrants, who participated in the civil war in Russia and, who upon returning to their homeland, passed on revolutionary experience and revolutionary ideas. The Chinese people fought in the Red Guard units of the Grodekovsky, Ussuriysky, Daursky, and other fronts, as well as participated in the liberation of Primorye. The names of the leaders of the Chinese armed groups (e.g., Chen Bochuan, Sun Jiwu, Wang Yingzu, San Hu, Yang Dehai, Li Po, A. Songfu, Sheng Chenghuo, and others) are still famous across Russia. In total, there were 30,000–40,000 Chinese people in the Red Army during the civil war (Kheifets, 1959, p. 79; Li, 1979, p. 42; Li, 1987, p. 230).

After the civil war and intervention, large-scale work to implement the principles of Soviet national policy in the RFE was begun. Chinese migrants were granted the rights of a national minority in the Soviet state. Chinese newspapers were organized; the Latin alphabet was spread among Chinese workers; and clubs were opened (in the late 1920s, in the RFE there were six clubs for Eastern Asian workers, with a total of 1,945 mainly Chinese members) (State Archive of the Khabarovsk Region, fond P-2, inv.11, file 193, p. 17). Party education courses were also organized and libraries for Chinese workers were created. The organization of Chinese theaters in the Soviet Far East became an integral part of the general process of the RFE's cultural development. The most fruitful Chinese theater scene was in Vladivostok, where on March 19, 1931, the unique Chinese Working Youth Theater was created.

Chinese workers were involved in the trade union, cooperative, and Stakhanovite movement. In 1931, of the 50,000 Chinese workers in the region, 6,300 were registered as members of trade unions (12.6%), as well as nearly 3,000 Chinese migrants were employed in the handicraft industry (State Archive of the Khabarovsk Region, fond P-2, inv.9, file 73, p. 191; State Archive of the Primoriye, fond P-67, inv.1, file 82, p. 108).

In the 1930s, the Chinese collective farms became a regular phenomenon. In 1932, there were 13 Chinese collective farms in the region, in which about 3,000 Chinese migrants worked together (Zaleskaia, 2009, pp. 272–273).

Furthermore, more schools were opened for Chinese children (by 1928, there were four first-level Chinese schools in the Soviet Far East) and labor schools were opened for adults. By January 1, 1932, 809 Chinese migrants and 3,828 children of Chinese migrants were studying in the official educational institutions of the region (State Archive of the Khabarovsk Region, fond P-2, inv.9, file 73, p. 126). Additionally, the unique Far Eastern Regional Higher Chinese Leninist School was founded on March 1, 1933, which offered educational opportunities specially created for Chinese workers who were previously unable to obtain secondary and higher education. This emphasis on education enriched the structure of the study system and contributed to its success. Many of these Chinese people educated on Soviet territory subsequently became active participants in the revolutionary movements in China (Zaleskaia, 2009, pp. 311–312).

This progressive work stopped in the middle of 1930s, however, when the international situation forced Soviet leadership to choose the security of the region over social development. During this time, Chinese migrants were severely victimized,

and in 1938 they were even expelled from the Soviet Far East. For almost half a century, the RFE borders were closed.

This period marks the beginning of **Stage Three – “Lockdown”**: 1938–1988. During this period all the cross-border practices were significantly interrupted. In fact, during this stage there were virtually no contacts at the intercultural level.

Russian-Chinese border interactions resumed again with the opening of borders in the late 1980s. This marks the beginning of **Stage Four – “Regeneration”**: from the end of the 1980s (1988) to present. The first tourist exchange occurred in September 1988, when the USSR and the PRC exchanged the first tourist groups. Two groups of people – numbering 40 each – made a day-long trip on visa-free exchange from Blagoveshchensk (in the center of the Amur region) and Heihe (on the USSR-Chinese border).

Subsequently, the migration flow across the Russian-Chinese border began to re-emerge and Chinese migrants started developing entrepreneurial activity again in the RFE. Chinese migrants assessed the potential and prospects of the RFE market, established channels for the transportation of goods for trade in Russia, and developed various forms of business organizations. At the same time, the Chinese migrant population constantly communicated with the Russian population. At the end of the 20th century, new cross-border practices started to unfold on border territories including “shuttle” (or “people’s”) barter trade, joint Russian-Chinese enterprises with foreign (Chinese) investments, cross-border tourism, cultural relations, and – as before – smuggling, “gray” customs, illegal cross-border currency transactions, etc.

While cross-border contacts re-emerged with active barter trade, over several years larger-scale business activities also developed in the RFE. For example, Chinese shopping centers increased in Russian cities, and there was a lively trade in a wide variety of goods. The Russian financial crisis of 1998 significantly displaced many Russian entrepreneurs, but this only opened up more space for Chinese entrepreneurs. The same situation repeated after the Russian financial crises of 2008 and 2014. During these times, Chinese migrants developed their businesses drawing extensively on ethnic resources and ethnic networks. Among Chinese migrants, marriage with Russian women was also a common way to obtain full rights in Russia. When married to a Russian woman, a Chinese migrant was able arrange his business in the name of his wife, and thus pay much less rent and other taxes, as well as receive legal protection for their business on Russian territory (Zaleskaia, 2019, pp. 37–38).

Today, Russia implements a special state policy in the RFE through the Territories of Advanced Development and the Free Port of Vladivostok. The aim of this policy is to increase the profitability and reduce the risks of foreign investors. Eighteen Territories of Advanced Development with special tax and customs status have already been created. Russia’s implementation of major new investment projects in the RFE, as well as China’s promotion of the “One Belt and One Road” Initiative, the Heilongjiang development of the “Three Bridges – One Island” plan all suggest rapidly increasing cross-border interaction. All this creates more opportunities for the formation and development of new cross-border practices, such as cross-border e-commerce,

the development of financial infrastructure, the use of national currencies in mutual settlements, etc.

In fact, the share of Chinese foreign direct investment in the Pacific Russia is still less than 1%, of which two-thirds is directed to the Trans-Baikal region for the construction of the only major Chinese plant in the Pacific Russia: the Amazar Pulp and Saw Mill (APSM). This means there is still much room for development. Furthermore, the share of Chinese investments in APSM and Free Port of Vladivostok is only 16.3 billion rubles (\$259 million) and 1.67 billion rubles (\$25.7 million). In total, Chinese businesses have invested less than \$300 million across 45 projects. Primarily, this Chinese business is attracted to the extraction and primary processing of raw materials rather than the development of industry (Larin, 2020, p. 21).

Despite the proclamation of favorable business regimes, Chinese investors remain frightened by systematic problems: a small local market, the limited economic power of the region, the small population, and the lack of transport infrastructure. According to Chinese experts, the underdeveloped Russian border transport infrastructure has always been the main factor limiting the development of Sino-Russian trade and economic cooperation. Many of the border port infrastructures are also dilapidated, and the capacity of the border ports is not commensurate with the cargo flow and the volume of cargo transportation, which leads to a large delay in cargo (Guo et al., 2017, p. 76). Moreover, the Russian legal system seems to be too complicated for Chinese migrants. Sophisticated Russian tax and customs laws often negate the benefits that the Territories of Advanced Development and the Free Port of Vladivostok regimes offer to potential investors.

At the same time, regional leaders acknowledge that without the cross-border practices of Chinese migrants, the economy of the RFE would lose significant infusions and income, and the Russian population would lose the opportunity to purchase cheap everyday goods and a whole range of products. One attempt to close the borders resulted in immediate protests. In the summer of 2003, when fatal SARS⁴ cases were first registered in China, 11 customs points were closed on the Amur River by order of the federal government, and the import of Chinese goods was limited. Less than a week later, a picket was organized in front of the Amur government building, the participants demanded that customs be opened, as almost all consumer goods were experiencing a shortage and the prices in the city markets has increased significantly. At that time, the borders reopened very quickly.

Today the situation is much more serious. On January 30, 2020, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin signed an order to close the Russian border in the RFE to prevent the spread of a new type of coronavirus (COVID-19). Beginning March 18, Russia further restricted the entry of foreigners and stateless persons.

Such unprecedented measures were not taken during the spread of SARS and bird flu, which still had generally negatively effects on the development of cross-border trade and economic relations. Many Russian firms and private entrepreneurs have suffered losses, especially on imported goods for their business from China. Since these measures have been put in place, RFE economic actors have been

⁴ Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

forced to reorient themselves to Russian factories that offer goods at prices at least twice as expensive, and with high delivery costs. Moreover, the closure of freight transport links with China has also led to a shortage of Chinese vegetables. Freight traffic has been opened and this may solve the problem of vegetable shortages (Ob'em importa kitayskih ovoshchey, 2020). However, other goods have not yet been allowed to cross the border (the only exception are parts for a Gas Processing Plant being constructed in the Amur Region). The education industry has also experienced negative consequences because of the closure of the border. Chinese students who had returned home for Chinese New Year were not able to return to RFE universities. With the border now closed on orders from Moscow, this has all ground to a halt, leaving the city frozen in limbo. Businesses that depend on China are shriveling, hotels once full of Chinese guests stand empty and the local university, once a magnet for paying pupils from China, is struggling to cope as hundreds of its students who went home for the Lunar New Year holiday find themselves stranded. Ms. Li Lihua, a Russian-speaking Chinese businesswoman, who has been working in Blagoveshchensk since the 1990s, said this is the worst economic situation she has encountered (see: Higgins, 2020).

In short, the COVID pandemic has halted a significant part of cross-border practices between the territories of Russia and China, and will undoubtedly have negative consequences for the development of relations between the two countries in the future. Unfortunately, China's success in stopping the COVID epidemic on their territory will not be enough to neutralize this decrease in total trade turnover or the consequences of months of border closures and the slowdown of interregional and intercultural interaction. Losses will continue to be felt even after the official end of the pandemic, and it is already obvious that such extraordinary circumstances will seriously hinder the development of cross-border practices in the future.

Discussion and Results

This article argued that Chinese migration has played a crucial role in the historical process of Sino-Russian relations in the RFE. Chinese migration has functioned as an actor in the practice of cross-border contacts and the forming of a special relationship between these two civilizations. It analyzed the historical stages of this interaction over the last century and a half and the characteristics of these cross-border practices at each historical stage was discussed. These practices act both as a "soft power," and as a factor in overcoming the periphery status of the RFE territories. The article showed that in the absence of Chinese migration flows to the RFE border region, cross-border practices cease. And when the flows resume, the cross-border practices reappear although they take new form to adapt to the socio-historical conditions.

The results suggest that the interaction between the two civilizations should be considered as a significant factor for cultural, historical and geopolitical devilmont of the RFE territories, and, at the same time, as a form of interaction across societies and cultures. Russian-Chinese interaction has been influenced by many internal factors

of the systems of Russian and Chinese societies, as well as Sino-Russian relations at the interstate and interregional levels. In this process of forming cross-border practices, the penetration of traditions and customs from one culture to another can be observed. These processes of cultural diffusion do not lead to the formation of a single culture, but to a dialogue between cultures. Thus, the RFE region can be characterized as a unique territory for the development of sociocultural practices in the process of contacts between Russia and China. Due to Chinese migration flows, cross-border practices are an important aspect of the RFE social life and an integral part of the interaction process between Russian and Chinese civilizations. The continued promotion of successful and mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and China requires yet more study, characterization and analysis, as well bilateral work to deepen and optimize cross-border interaction and minimize its negative sides.

Conclusion

Chinese migration in the RFE border region is an essential component of Sino-Russian relations at all levels. During the historical development of these relations, Chinese migrants and the Russian populations in the RFE took on many different roles over the past century and a half, including trade (and smuggling), guest labor, land cultivation, participation in the civil war, the perception of revolutionary ideas, etc. The cultural exchange component was an integral part of all these cross-border practices: there was familiarity with the traditions and customs of the foreign culture in both cases, as well as linguistic exchange. In other words, Sino-Russian relations in the RFE have developed through a process of mutual recognition, habituation, and coexistence. Without this cultural dialogue, it would have been impossible to develop this interactional way of life. Because of transcultural practices, the Russian-Chinese border region has accumulated a unique experience of cohabitation and cooperation between the peoples of the two countries. The study of this interaction is extremely important for understanding migration trends, their regulation, and the formation of a tolerant environment for different ethnic groups and their interaction.

Given the unprecedented increase in China's influence in the world and the unique geopolitical proximity of Russia and China in the RFE, Chinese migration has the powerful potential of an actor of new cross-border practices. The cross-border practices that have emerged are poised to become an effective mechanism in the development of the RFE territories. However, the question remains, will the Russian authorities at various levels be able to implement consistent and effective social and economic measures in the RFE? This all depends on the economic policy pursued by the Russian government as to whether the presence of Chinese migrants and the influx of Chinese investments will contribute to the development of the RFE territories, or whether the raw materials orientation and peripherality of the RFE region will ultimately overwhelm economic development. If the latter, then in the not-too-far future, China may finally lose all interest in the Russian-Chinese cross-border practices.

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