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Colonial Legacies and National Visions: Russian Émigrés and Chinese Nationalism in Manchuria, 1917–1930s

Abstract

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the civil war that followed produced a large number of refugees and an immense movement of emigration from Russia. Several hundred thousands fled the former Russian Empire for China. Most of the refugees and émigrés stayed in Harbin, a railroad city in Northeast China, also known as Manchuria, and a legacy of Russian imperial expansion. Between the 1920s and 1930s, the émigré-refugees and settlers in China reached close to 400,000, the largest concentration of Russians outside the former imperial territorial boundaries of Russia. My project will investigate the formation of Russian diaspora identity in China in relation to Chinese nationalist decolonization efforts, and in relation to Russian resistance and accommodation with regard to Chinese rule. The émigrés were situated between three competing states, Republican China, the Soviet Union, and Imperial Japan, and interacted with all three. My project will therefore take a transnational perspective and bring to the foreground the interactions between the Russians, Chinese, and Japanese. In so doing, the project aims to recover the place of the émigrés in the shaping of Chinese visions of nation-building, in the formulation of Japanese policies on ethnicity under the Manchukuo regime, and in the framing of Chinese and Soviet cross-border concerns.