

## **REACTION OF THE POPULATION OF THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST TO THE PRESENCE OF CHINESE PEOPLE**

**Ekaterina Motrich  
Economic Research Institute  
Russian Academy of Sciences  
Khabarovsk**

At present the fates of two countries – Russia and China – are connected as never in the past. Whatever changes take place in our countries in the future, whatever happens in them, it is quite evident that an historical breach in the relations of the two countries has occurred. China is Russia's biggest neighbor, and it can be supposed that the impact of changing relations between the two countries will be felt in many spheres of life in Russia, most importantly in the Far-Eastern. The phenomenon of Chinese migration to the Russian Far East has reached such a level that it renders an influence (though not very significant yet) on the various aspects of economic and social life in the region.

The Chinese factor attracts close attention in the Russian community. The fear of "the yellow peril" has always been with the Russian people, but it has become stronger in recent decades. This has happened due to the social-economic development of China, and its rise to the status of a world power, with its anticipated influence (economic, political, demographic, etc) in the world. The Russian fear of the growing Chinese influence is also connected with Chinese migration into Russia. In other words, "the awakening of China," which had been constantly prophesied in Russia since the end of the last century, has turned from a remote prospect into reality, and, as a result, the outward expression of Russian fears is becoming almost a general phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

In 1989, 1,742 Chinese, representing 17.4 percent of the total number of Chinese registered in the USSR, lived in the Russian Far East. By 1990 their number had increased to 15,000, and in 1993, to an estimated 100,000.<sup>2</sup> There are grounds to think that their number is even greater. The majority of Chinese are concentrated in Khabarovsk territory, Primorskiy territory, and Amurskaya region.

The estimates of western intelligence services indicate about one million Chinese left their country legally or illegally during the last two decades. Half of them settled in the USA. The other half are dispersed in other countries and regions. It may be supposed that a certain number of these people chose the Russian Far East as their place of residence. But how many of them are living in there?<sup>3</sup> At present, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 237,000 Chinese are registered in the Russian Far East, and the number of illegal migrants varies from 400,000 to 700,000.<sup>4</sup> An objective quantitative estimate of the number of Chinese in the Russian Far East, as well as in Russia as a whole, does not exist as there are many problems connected with controlling the movement of Chinese people within the Russian territory. Experts estimate the number of Chinese in Primorskiy and Khabarovskiy territories and Amurskaya region to be in the tens of thousands.<sup>5</sup> In the Russian Far East there is an active formation of a Chinese community. The lack of regulation of frontier problems between the two

countries and the imperfection of the Russian legislation, especially on migration, promote this development.

The local population has visual estimates of the presence of Chinese people in their communities and believes that their number is great. But what does "great" mean? The local people's estimates are based on how often they encounter Chinese people. In a sociological survey conducted in 1998-99, 24.9 percent of the respondents said they were in constant contact with Chinese through work, 31.0 percent said they met them in the streets, and 36.6 percent said they met Chinese people from time to time when they went to the market. The contact between the local Russians and the Chinese migrants has since increased. In a 2001 survey, the proportion of the respondents who often met Chinese in the streets was 45.8 percent in 2001, and the proportion of those who encountered Chinese when they went to the market was 46.4 percent. It may be concluded that the presence of Chinese people in Khabarovsk and in the Russian Far East is an objective reality and that the local people are coming into contact with them in various situations.

The local population reacts differently to the presence of Chinese citizens. In our 2001 survey, 12 percent of the respondents, as compared with 13.6 percent in our 1998-99 survey, treat this phenomenon positively, with 24.1 percent (versus 28.2% in 1998-99) of the respondents regarding the presence of Chinese people as a normal phenomenon and thinking that nothing had changed. Twelve percent (versus 17.8% in 1998-99) had an indifferent attitude toward the issue, and 18.1 percent (versus 14.6%) believed that the Chinese came to Russia because they were poor in China, but nevertheless felt they would be better off without the Chinese migrants. As many as 21.7 percent (versus 14.1%) of the 2001 survey respondents regarded the Chinese presence negatively and 3.6 percent (versus 5.6%) considered the matter extremely negatively, seeing a "yellow peril." These numbers suggest an increase in negative attitudes toward the presence of Chinese citizens on our territory. It should be added, however, that the notion of "yellow peril" has existed as a norm since imperial times.

Local people note positive and negative sides of the Chinese presence in the Russian Far East. Among the positive points, they note that Chinese people have revived businesses in trade (52.4%), that the trade activities can promote the future rise of their economy (16.9%), and that the businesses present a good example of diligence (3.6%). In the same survey the question was asked: If the Chinese people are good people, why do you like them? As many as 73.5 percent of the respondents indicated the Chinese hardworking character; 9.6 percent noted their unity and mutual aid; 4.2 percent considered them kind and sympathetic; and another 4.2 percent considered it a positive trait that the Chinese abstain from alcohol.

Among the negative points of the Chinese presence in the Russian Far East, the survey respondents referred to the transfer of money earned to China (36.1%) and the unwillingness of the Chinese to work in manufacturing (1.8%). Almost one-tenth of the respondents (9.0%) noted bad behavior by Chinese people in public places. Among those who noted bad behavior of the Chinese, 50.0 percent indicated untidiness and unwillingness to look after the cleanliness of the city and their residences; 9.0 percent of the respondents believed that the Chinese were in illegal businesses, and 14.5 percent suspected them of dishonesty in business. A small segment of the respondents (1.8%) considered Chinese people bad, malicious, and frightful.

The above data are confirmed by the majority of experts, who observe that the Chinese people have helped recover trade in the city, that masses of rather cheap goods have appeared, as well as vegetables and fruits, which have helped to alleviate the sense of disorder among the local Russians over the inadequacy of their own production. It is often emphasized, however, that Chinese goods are of poor quality and good products are virtually absent. It is also observed that the Chinese sellers in many cases have no certificates for their goods and that they very skillfully cheat, overcharge, or otherwise shortchange the local customers.

Demographic imbalance and its growth are the first warning factor of the presence of the Chinese people in the Far East.

Tabl.1. The Present and Prospective Population

Regions	Years		Changes	
	Jan. 1, 2000 In millions	End of 2010 In millions	In millions	%
Russian Far East	7.2	6.7	-0.5	-6.1
Northeast China (Liaonin, Jilin, Heilongjan provinces)	105.2	120.0	14.8	11.4

Source: *The Demographic Yearbook of Russia*, Moscow, 2000, p. .24; *The Estimated Population of the Russian Federation up to 2015*, Moscow, 1998, p. 7; and information from the State Statistics Committee of the People's Republic of China, 1997.

Thus, the population of the Russian Far East is expected to decrease, while the population of Northeast China is anticipated to increase.

The demographic situation in the Russian Far East is in a crisis: since 1991 a steady decrease in the population due to natural decrease and migration has been taking place. There are 4.9 million people in the south of the Russian Far East, including Jewish autonomous region, Primorskiy territory, Khabarovskiy territory, and Amurskaya region. In contrast, more than 100 million people live in the three neighboring provinces of China, which means that the concentration of the population is 20 times higher there than in the Russian Far East. The Chinese provinces have a much greater population density and the prospects of their development are connected with the growth of their demographic potential. At the same time, the Russian Far East will continue losing its population. A. Privalov aptly compares this situation to the osmotic processes, in which solutions of different saturation, separated by a semipermeable membrane (in our case the state border), gradually become similar in concentration.<sup>6</sup>

Practically every Chinese coming into the Russian Far East—now and in the past—is an economic migrant. As early as the last century industrial workers were required when the Russian Far East started to be developed. Russia turned to Chinese labor power. Chinese workers constructed the port of Vladivostok, worked on the Trans-Siberian Railway and in coal mines, caught fish, hunted for deer antlers, did the gardening, and bred pigs and poultry, providing the population of the region with meat and vegetables.<sup>7</sup> At present the use of foreign labor in the national economy has become a necessary element in the formation of the regional labor market. In the Russian Far East, even under the conditions of an economic crisis, the attraction of foreign labor, primarily from China, is becoming a normal and stable phenomenon.

The Chinese are coming to the Russian Far East on a contract basis to work in agriculture and construction. Lately their participation in the sphere of services has been growing. The production activities of foreign workers are economically profitable. The Chinese workers in agriculture in the rural regions of the Russian Far East are practically the only source of labor in agricultural production in the region.

Factories require foreign workers to fill their vacancies. Therefore it is natural that Asians will dominate certain spheres of production and fill job vacancies, but this was a serious concern of 11.7 percent of the survey respondents in 1998-1999 and of 13.9 percent in 2001. Besides this category, a great number of Chinese come to the Far Eastern territories to trade for one or two months. V. Dyatlov correctly notes, "Chinese people in Russia are a classical labor migration... Their principal goal is to occupy their 'niche' in the economy of the receiving community. They brilliantly reached this goal in a few years, due to their energy, enterprise, willingness to endure hardship, and hard labor, and the ease of violating Russian laws."<sup>8</sup> In this case we can speak about a certain interest of China in intensifying the presence of their people in the Russian Far East.

Tabl.2. The Chinese People Recruited for Work in the Russian Far East

Region	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Primorskiy territory	7895	8349	8292	6968	7179	6374	7708
Khabarovsk territory	...	3251	1206	819	802	973	...
Amurskaya region	...	699	954	663	758	634	...
Kamchatskaya region	193	328	212	46	89	28	54
Jewish autonomous region	...	...	293	...	542	467	...

Source: *Parameters of Economic and Social Development, Jewish Autonomous Okrug, Birobidzhan, 1997*, p. 38; *Work and Employment, Jewish Autonomous Okrug, Birobidzhan, 1999*, p. 13; *Work and Employment, Jewish Autonomous Okrug, Birobidzhan, 2000*, 16; *Work and Employment in Primorskiy Territory, Vladivostok, 1997*, p. 28; *Work and Employment in Primorsky Territory, Vladivostok, 2000*, p. 31; *Work and Employment in Primorsky Territory, Vladivostok, 2001*, p. 35; *Khabarovsk Territory in 1999, Khabarovsk, 2000*, p. 40; *Work and Employment in Khabarovsk Territory, 1992-1999, Khabarovsk, 2000*, p. 46; *Work and Employment in the Amur Region, Blagoveshchensk, 1999*, p. 47; *Work and Employment in the Amur Region, Blagoveshchensk, 2000*, p. 44; *Work and Employment in the Kamchatka Region, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, 1997*, p. 63; *Work and Employment in the Kamchatka Region, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, 2001*, p. 79.

What opportunities are seen by the Chinese coming to the Russian Far East in regard to their further presence? 30.1 percent of the Chinese respondents in 1998-99 and 36.8 percent in 2001 answered that they were going to expand their business in the Russian Federation after accumulating a certain amount of starting capital. 26 percent were planning to return to China and to start their own businesses there. What does this testify to? China shows a stable intention to use the Far Eastern territories of Russia as a market for Russian natural resources and Chinese consumer goods and investment.<sup>9</sup> China seeks the right to long-term rent of the Russian Far-Eastern lands.<sup>10</sup> Chinese authorities use the export of their labor force to realize these policies, aimed at a further occupation of the Russian Far-Eastern region, by winning strong economic, commercial, and demographic positions there. This may seriously influence the economic and geopolitical condition of the Russian Federation.<sup>11</sup>

The Chinese people have received a sufficiently positive experience of residing in Russia, including its Far East. They justify their long-term residence and their intentions of consolidation on the Russian territory by business necessities, the length of training,

and other pretexts. The orientation of the Chinese to a permanent or long-term residence on the Russian territory is evident in the results of a survey of the Chinese living in Khabarovsk. The survey reveals a reduction in the proportion of Chinese who live by themselves (from 71.1% in 1998-1999 to 52.9% in 2001) and an increase in the share of those who live with their spouse and children (16.8% and 34.6%, respectively). What attracts the Chinese to Russia? First and foremost is the unemployment in the People's Republic of China and job opportunities in Russia. In 1999, the unemployment rate was 3.5 percent of the economically active population in Liaoning, 3.3 percent in Jilin, and 2.5 percent in Heilongjiang.<sup>12</sup> 38.2 percent of the survey respondents in 2001 answered that living in Russia was profitable, in comparison with 14.5 percent in 1998-1999.

The Chinese people's wishes to live on the territory of the Russian Federation permanently or for a long period, or to visit the region actively on business or even as guests are evident in the changes in the shares of Chinese who rent a living space from Russian citizens (from 28.9% of the respondents in 1998-1999 to 40.4% in 2001), those who live in hostels of Russian organizations (from 18.4% to 10.4%), and those who live in their own apartments (from 7.5% to 8.8%). These data show a significant number of Chinese legally inhabiting Russian cities, and the growing settlement of the Chinese people in Russian residential areas, i.e. their purchase of apartments with the right to further ownership. It can be assumed that these actions frequently represent the formation of mortgage value for the fulfillment of business operations in the absence of other sources of finance or guarantees. In the meantime, an increasing number of Russian citizens are concerned about the Chinese people's residential status. The proportion of Russians concerned about Chinese occupation of local dwellings increased from 4.7 percent in 1998-99 to 6.0 percent in 2001. The share of Russians who are worried that Chinese are replacing Russians in job placements also increased from 11.7 percent in 1998-99 to 13.9 percent in 2001.

There are two conflicting tendencies in the perception of the Russian population. On the one hand, there is an understanding of the inevitable necessity to live and work together with the Chinese. On the other, there is a fear of the expansion of the Chinese presence in the Russian Far Eastern territories. The residents of the Russian Far East witness the bold behavior of Chinese people in their territory. Many Chinese take advantage of the imperfection of the Russian legislative-legal acts concerning the stay of foreign citizens on its territory, and do not hurry back home upon expiration of the official terms of their stay. For example, in 1998, the Russian authorities expelled 3,240 illegal Chinese from Primorskiy territory and 228 from Khabarovsk territory in 1999.<sup>13</sup> Using false documents or through dummy agents Chinese illegally acquired real estate, smuggle drugs, and obtained the Russian currency, strategic raw materials, and various parts for industrial equipment. Some Chinese were engaged in illegal fishing in Russian territorial waters, and were arrested by Russian frontier guards when they pulled in to Russian shores. Chinese poachers are not in the least afraid of our frontier guards, as they are sure the guards do not present any threat to them.<sup>14</sup>

The survey in 2001 asked the respondents, "Should Russia give the Chinese people residence, work, citizenship, and the right to purchase land?" 48.2 percent said they were opposed because they believed that the formation of a Chinese settlement in the important military-strategic area of Russia must be regarded as a negative phenomenon. When asked "How do you estimate the character of Russian-Chinese

relations?" 35.5 percent of the respondents in Khabarovsk said China represented a threat to Russia, as compared with 34.7 percent who gave the same answer in the 1998-99 survey. Only 18.1 percent in the 2001 survey said they hoped that China was Russia's reliable partner (18.8% in the previous survey). Another 13.9 percent of the respondents said that the People's Republic of China was neither a friend nor an enemy, but did not represent a danger to Russia, as compared with 16.4 percent in the previous survey. At the same time, nearly half of the surveyed population (48.8%) were in favor of granting Chinese people the right to legal protection if necessary (52.6 % in the 1998-99 survey).

Khabarovsk Krai Governor Viktor Ishaev claims that China has a program for development of the Russian Far East. According to Mr. Ishaev, "They [the Chinese] are not going to be at war, but they say that they will come and settle" [in the Russian Far East].<sup>15</sup> The local Russian people feel that Russia could lose the territories of the Russian Far East as a result of a "silent" expansion of China. A 1998 survey of Russian citizens in Primorskiy territory showed that half of the respondents held this view. The majority of those surveyed (28%) believed the territories would go to China as a result "of a peaceful penetration of Chinese citizens."<sup>16</sup> Many analysts and experts express the opinion that Chinese migration can be considered a form of "peaceful expansion." Zhirinovskiy presented an extremely hard-line view on this issue during his visit to Irkutsk and said, "One day they [the Chinese] will pass through the border as tourists, dealers, teachers . . . , and without a single shot will occupy Siberia and the Russian Far East."<sup>17</sup> To prevent such a development, a *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda* article in August 2001 reminded its readers that in 1907, *Priamurskie Vedomosti* had warned, "The character of future Russian-Chinese relations at the frontier seems to be one of the major problems of the Russian Far East's future, as the vital interests of Russia are connected with the fate of the latter. . . . Either we will cultivate agriculture, establish manufacturing industries and trade in our neighboring countries together or we will become mutual antagonists, and they will surpass us in the field of peaceful work—everything depends on this. If the latter happens, the gift of prophecy is not even necessary—it is clear that Russia will not hold out . . . in Primor'e."<sup>18</sup>

In modern conditions, probably, one should not be afraid of the appearance of Chinese people and other people with an Asian profile; one should be prepared for this and start thinking about this perspective right now. In this respect one cannot but agree with E. Shulepov, chairman of the Khabarovsk Regional Association of Businessmen, who answered the question of whether one should be afraid of an Asian profile by saying, "It is necessary to comprehend how to "russify" the Chinese people, the North Korean people, and the Vietnamese people—all those who by their economic and cultural potentials present an interest to us as a cheap labor force."<sup>19</sup> At the same time we should not forget the caution expressed by P.A. Stolypin as early as in 1908 when the number of Chinese in the Russian Far Eastern region quickly increased. Speaking in the Duma he said, "Soon the Russian Far East will be Russian in name only." Therefore, it is not accidental that the majority of respondents and experts in today hold the opinion that in the future it is necessary to limit the terms of stay for Chinese who temporarily reside in our territory and not to extend their visas. They believe that foreign citizens who have come to Russia, including Chinese, should return home on the expiration of the term of their visas and again go through the visa application procedure for coming to Russia.

Exaggerating the “yellow peril” thesis seems unnecessary and even harmful for the long-term interests of Russia. However, in a geopolitical sense, the interests of Russia and China are far from identical, and friction between the two countries in certain areas is quite possible. It is necessary to develop good-neighborly relations on the basis of equality, trust, and partnership, which will correspond to the vital national interests of the two countries. It is necessary to develop in every possible way political, trade, economic, scientific, and cultural relations between Russia and the People’s Republic of China. According to A. Arbatov, a deputy of the State Duma and an outstanding expert in international relations, “[T]rade, mutual security, and development of political relations with China are a major interest to Russia...”<sup>20</sup> We assume that in the future China, either directly or indirectly, will play an ever increasing role in the fate of the Russian Far East, both in terms of global and state politics and development of this territory. Prospects for the development of friendly relations between the Russian Far East and China will promote further prosperity in the two world powers—Russia and China.

---

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dmitriy Trenin, *Chinese Problems in Russia*, Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998, p. 7.
- <sup>2</sup> L.L. Rybakovskiy, O.D. Zakharova, and V.V. Mindagulov, *Illegal Migration in the Border Regions of the Far East: History, Present Days and Consequence*, Moscow, ISPR, RAS, 1994, pp. 15 and 19; I. Fedotov and L. Selivanov, "The Phantom of 'Demographic Imperialism'," *Migration*, March 1997, p. 5.
- <sup>3</sup> "The Yellow Tribe," *Expert*, Special Issue on China, p. 19.
- <sup>4</sup> "The General Misfortune," *Izvestiya*. February 16, 2001.
- <sup>5</sup> V. Gel'bras and D. Trenin, "Chinese in Russia," *Izvestiya*, January 26, 2000, p. 7.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Privalov, "On the Eastern Affairs," *Izvestiya*, June 2, 2000, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> V. Gel'bras, D. Trenin, "Chinese in Russia," *Izvestiya*, January 26, 2000, p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup> V.I. Dyatlov, "The Chinese People in Irkutsk," *Migration*, March 1997, p. 9.
- <sup>9</sup> P. Baklanov, *The Geographical, Social-economic and Geopolitical Factors, the Chinese Migration to the Russian Far East. The Perspectives of the Russian Far-Eastern Regions: the Chinese Factor*, Moscow, 1999, p. 37.
- <sup>10</sup> "The Frontier Guard Isn't a Profession, It Is a Fate," *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, May 27, 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> A. Filonov, *The Frontier Policy of Russia in the Far-Eastern Region: the Population, Migration and Labor Market*, Moscow, 1999, p. 38.
- <sup>12</sup> *China Labor Statistical Yearbook. 2000*, Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2000, p. 86.
- <sup>13</sup> A.V. Dmitrenko. Observance of national interests as the factor of national and international policy in Primorskiy territory," in *Russia-China-Japan in Northeast Asia: Problems of Regional Interaction in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Vladivostok, 2000, p. 45; E.L. Motrich, "Foreign Labor in Khabarovsk Territory," in *Russia-China-Japan in Northeast Asia: Problems of Regional Interaction in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Vladivostok, 2000, p. 63.
- <sup>14</sup> S. Volkov, "The Fog Didn't Help," *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, October 5, 2000; "The Features of Chinese National Fishing," *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, October 28, 2000.
- <sup>15</sup> V. Gel'bras and D. Trenin, "Chinese in Russia," *Izvestiya*, January, 26, 2000, p. 7.
- <sup>16</sup> M. Alekseev, "Is There a Danger of Chinese Migration for Russia?" *World Economy and International Relations*, December 2000, p. 48.
- <sup>17</sup> "Vostochno-Sibirskaya," *Pravda*, August 27, 1994.
- <sup>18</sup> "Contemplation During Leisure Hours about the Age of Dragon," *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, August 31, 2001, p. 7.
- <sup>19</sup> E. Shulepov, "Is It Necessary To Be Afraid of an Asian Profile?" *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, June 28, 2000, p. 2.
- <sup>20</sup> A. Arbatov, "A Choice without a Choice," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 1998. No. 4, p. 13.