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CHINESE MIGRATION TO RUSSIA: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Eurasian Migration Papers
Number 3

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Cover Photograph: Chinese and Russian traders at market in Khabarovsk, Russia; photographed by Maria Repnikova

ISBN: 1-933549-54-8

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Reading the Russian news media in the two decades since the demise of communism, one might conclude that the Russian Far East will soon be a Chinese province. Russian commentators consistently warn that Chinese migrants will flood—or have already flooded—into the country's vast and increasingly less populated far eastern regions. The threat is framed primarily in terms of relative demography: the population on the Chinese side of the Russia-China border is 20 times that on the Russian side. At a time when migration is central to political debates in Europe and the United States, the discourse in Russia remains at the extreme edge of the spectrum.

The Russian discourse has been particularly striking given the country's demographic situation. In the decade following 1998, Russia's hydrocarbon-fueled economy was continually short of workers. It was thought that by 2010 to 2015 this shortage could reach crisis proportions, as competition intensified among postsecondary educational institutions, the military, and employers for a reduced pool of high school graduates. By contrast, even before the onset of the current economic crisis in 2008, some Chinese regions, particularly in the south and west, were characterized by lagging economic development, surplus population, and continuing unemployment. Labor migration from China to Russia appeared to be of enormous mutual benefit.

Yet even as Russia's need for labor grew with the oil boom in the early 2000s, the potential for Chinese migration diminished. Despite stark regional differences, China's economic development was breathtaking in its dynamism. Rapid growth altered the economic situation in the northeastern "rust belt" regions bordering Russia, while government policies explicitly sought to spread the benefits of development more evenly across China. Equally important, China's demographic situation was expected to change dramatically in the second and third decades of the 21st century, as the population aged at a rate unprecedented in world history.

In the present paper, we seek to separate the rhetoric from the lived experience of Chinese migration to Russia. We ask why a situation in which labor migration appeared to be a win-win proposition, with Russia needing workers and China having excess supply, did not generate more such migration. As oil prices declined in response to the global economic crisis in 2008 and 2009, migrant workers left Russia in large numbers. The failure to establish a stable community of Chinese migrants in Russia during the boom years makes renewed migration far less likely once the Russian economy recovers.

We believe that the disconnect between Russian rhetoric about Chinese migration and the reality "on the ground" reflects an absence of serious attention to the "push" side of the equation. After framing the issue and noting the disproportion in its importance for the two countries, we locate Chinese migration to the Russian Far East in the broader context of Chinese internal and international migration. We then assess the (quite modest) scale of Chinese migration to Russia since 1991, and discuss obstacles to greater migratory flows on both sides. We conclude by discussing the missed opportunities for stable migration patterns and the rising incidence of Russian migration to China. Timing matters, and the window of opportunity to establish a significant Chinese migration flow to Russia may have passed.

FRAMING THE PROBLEM

Studies of Chinese migration to the Russian Far East have focused overwhelmingly on issues of security, demography, and identity, and on the Russian view of the situation. Russocentrism is understandable, given the relative importance of the issue for the two countries. China has about 200 million internal migrants, and 35 million Chinese live outside China (Kwong 2007). In this context, a half million or million Chinese in Russia are a major concern only if they cause diplomatic problems or social conflict.

Chinese represent a small segment of the migrant population in Russia, though they are of enormous psychological importance in the Russian Far East. Ostensible large-scale Chinese migration has been a staple of Russian media and political discourse since the early 1990s (Shlapentokh 2007). Mikhail Alexseev (2006) devoted an entire monograph to the security di-

lemma provoked by Russian "immigration phobia." Larin (2006) suggests that while the discourse has become more balanced, popular myths remain entrenched. Exaggerated reports in the Russian media and excessive claims by Russian politicians have been widely repeated. Many of these depictions have overstated the number of Chinese in Russia while invoking a familiar litany of problems attributed to migrants: imperiled public health, crime, intermarriage, and their appropriation of jobs from locals. If in the 1990s local and regional officials voiced the most exaggerated claims, in the Putin era excessive rhetoric has been common at the highest levels.

Evgenii Nadzarenko, governor of Primorskii Krai (Maritime Territory) from 1993 to 2001, warned that "Chinese migration would turn the Russian Far East into the 'Asian Balkans'" (Alexseev 2004, p. 345). Victor Ishaev, governor of Khabarovskii Krai, stated in July 1999 that "all the land in Russia's Far East will be bought up by Chinese. …The peaceful capture of the Far East is under way" (Wilson 2004, p. 127). During a visit to the city of Blagoveshchensk in July 2000, former President Vladimir Putin warned the residents that if they did not do something to improve their economy, their children would be speaking Chinese.[1] While almost certainly intended as a way to encourage economic initiative, this sound bite was picked up and repeated as a warning about Chinese migration. By 2005 Putin was far more circumspect, calling for a carefully designed policy to attract migrants, first of all fellow Russians living in other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).[2]

Media reports frequently have exaggerated the number of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East, heightening concerns over a "Chinese invasion." *Izvestiia* published an article in 1993 claiming that there were about two million Chinese migrants in the Far East (Zaionchkovskaia 2005). This would have meant that every fourth person in the region was Chinese. An article in *Rossiiskie vesti* in 2004 claimed that three to four million Chinese nationals resided in Russia, making Chinese the fourth-largest ethnic group after Russians, Tatars, and Ukrainians (Zaionchkovskaia 2005). The well-regarded ecologist Aleksei Yablokov appeared on television to say that there were 10 times more Chinese than Russians in the Russian Far East (Zaionchkovskaia 2005). At a CIS conference on migration at the beginning of November 2008, Russian officials provided an "unofficial" figure of 2.5 million illegal Chinese migrants in Russia, exceeding the es-

timates for Azerbaijanis (2 million), Uzbeks (1.5 million), and Armenians (1 million).[3]

Chinese analysts have discussed the reasons why Russian media exaggerate Chinese migration. The analysts suggest that doing so increases readership while distracting people from the real problems facing the country (Deng 2005). Sergei Grigorievich Pushkarev, director of the Far East Labor Organization, offers a similar analysis: "Russian media are another barrier to attracting more Chinese workers. They present Chinese migrants and workers in a negative way, influencing public opinion and, in turn, the political strategies."[4]

Russians' preoccupation with a supposed impeding Chinese influx derive overwhelmingly from a deeply held belief that demographic imbalance generates migration (Vitkovskaia 1999b, p. 184). While Russians emphasize structural factors, assuming that empty spaces require settlement, migration theory portrays labor migration as a complex and networked process driven primarily by wage differentials and household strategies (Hatton and Williamson 2006; Keely 2000; Leblang, Fitzgerald, and Teets 2007; Massey et. al. 1993). Historically, migration from China has matched what mainstream theorists would predict. "Pioneers" establish initial outposts. If they are successful, they are joined by others from the same region, establishing networks. Beyond a certain point these networks may become self-sustaining, though they are always sensitive to changing economic conditions. Even if it has occurred outside the major global migration flows of the late 19th and late 20th centuries (Hatton and Williamson 2006), Chinese migration to Russia has largely conformed to what migration theory would predict: Chinese have sought economic opportunities, and tended to build on networks established by "pioneers."

Officially, slightly more than six million Russian citizens live in the Far East. The three Chinese provinces bordering Russia have a combined population of approximately 100 million. Russians fear an influx of Chinese seeking land, jobs, and wealth. Yet the world offers other examples of borders with large populations on one side and sparsely settled land on the other. For example, because about 90 percent of Canada's population lives within 50 miles of the U.S. border, there are large areas of lightly populated Canadian territory that are still quite close to the United States. If demographic imbalance automatically translated into large-scale migration, most people living in Burma would be speaking Bengali. In Japan,

Taiwan, and South Korea, population growth and urbanization did not generate large-scale out-migration. Despite substantial out-migration since the late 1980s, the Russian Far East and parts of Siberia may still be *overpopulated* given the cost of development in those areas (Hill and Gaddy 2003; Kolesnikov 2006; Kontorovich 2000).

In addition to the structural factors that dominate much of their discussion, Russians' assumptions about an impeding influx of Chinese are driven by imperfect information and misperceptions about history, government policy, and the desirability of living in Russia. For instance, some Russian scholars cite the region's history as a basis for their concerns about Chinese intentions. Large swaths of the Russian Far East were part of China before 1860, and experts in both Russia and China have written about the potential for restoring these regions to Chinese control.[5] Local press accounts and casual conversations suggest that Russians perceive the Chinese as intent on regaining ownership of "family" lands. But these fears do not match policy and observed behavior at the national level in either country. For example, the Russian and Chinese governments have cooperated in enforcing visa rules (Zabrovskaia 2008). In contrast to the late 1960s, when Soviet and Chinese forces engaged in armed conflict over islands in the Amur River, the two governments have made significant progress toward settling border and territorial issues. Local objections on the Russian side have been ignored. In a meeting with foreign scholars and journalists in September 2006, President Putin spoke at some length about how successful this process had been.[6] On July 21, 2008, China and Russia signed a border demarcation agreement, with Russia ceding Yinlong (Tarabarov) Island and half of Heixiazi (Bolshoi Ussuriyskii) Island to China, a total territory of 174 square kilometers.

Despite the new border agreement, some Russian analysts insist that the Chinese government has specific plans for territorial acquisitions, perhaps even restoring the 17th-century borders. Many Russians are convinced that China's leaders plan Chinese emigration for strategic purposes. As one provincial-level government official in the Russian Far East said, "If I don't take into account my official position, the fear of Chinese takeover is absolutely normal. Chinese development into a world superpower combined with its high population will naturally lead to territorial expansion and assimilation of our land and us into their own country and culture."[7]

Fear of Chinese population pressure is ironic given that China's one relatively successful demographic program has been to *limit* population size through the one-child policy. There is no evidence of a national program to settle Chinese in Russia. Some regional governments in China do have programs for sending workers abroad, but the numbers involved suggest that Russia is a relatively low priority (Harbin Municipal Government 2007).

While there is no grand strategy, Chinese emigration trends *are* influenced by government policy at both the central and local levels (Xiang 2003). Chinese local governments play a crucial role in sending labor to the Russian Far East, sometimes directly mobilizing worker groups and more frequently facilitating the activity of Chinese businesspeople who organize labor migration.[8] Chinese local officials track the return of their citizens, so workers in government-organized programs are far more likely to abide by the terms of their contracts than those who cross the border on tourist visas hoping to engage in trade or find employment. Criminal groups play a major role in illegal migration and trafficking (Chin 2003), but their activities hardly constitute a strategic effort toward eventual acquisition of the Far East.

Most Chinese who spend time working in the Russian Far East view their stay as temporary. They are sojourners, not settlers. Gelbras (2002) surveyed Chinese in Russia to determine if they wished to remain for the long term, and found that few thought of themselves as permanent immigrants. Recent surveys by Larin (2008) indicate a preference for living in China while doing business in Russia. Yet many Russians remain convinced that potential Chinese migration represents a serious threat. Some, raising the threat to existential proportions, believe that millions of Chinese already reside in Russia. To gain some purchase on the prospects for Chinese migration to Russia, one should view it in the context of broader patterns of Chinese global migration.

THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE MIGRATION

Russian commentators rarely devote attention to the global scale of Chinese migration (Kwong 2007; Liang and Morooka 2004; Skeldon 2004). Most Chinese who move from their birthplace move within China. Along with

government-encouraged migration to western regions of the country, an enormous "floating population" of labor migrants represents both a basis for dynamism in China's economy and a source of massive social problems (Chang 2008; Solinger 1999). The global economic crisis that began in 2008 has accentuated the problems, as many workers have been forced to return home. Compared to the 15 percent to 20 percent of the populace who are internal migrants, the 35 million Chinese living outside the country represent a very small segment of the national population, less than 3 percent. Not all of them are migrants—some are the children of Chinese who left one or more generations ago. The overwhelming majority of international migrants come from just a few regions of China. Most are from families in the coastal provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, and Guangdong, and from a limited number of districts and villages within these jurisdictions.

Chinese who have spent time in Russia are a small fraction of the Chinese diaspora. Although evidence suggests that the behavior of Chinese migrants does not differ from that of other groups, many Russians perceive the Chinese as different. Russians seem to perceive Chinese differently from other groups. Zhang (2003, p. 7) notes the anomaly of Russian scholarly and public opinion viewing any Chinese who visit Russia as "migrants" while applying different terminology to Koreans, Japanese, or Westerners; members of the other groups are considered to be migrants only if they intend to remain in Russia long-term (i.e., after their visas or work contracts expire). Thus, "there are inconsistencies in the popular beliefs of the Russian people, which are also apparent at the scientific level" (Zhang 2003, p. 7). Interviews in August 2007 elicited similar views on the part of Russian scholars and officials.[9] Such findings help to explain the exaggerated claims regarding the number of Chinese in Russia.

THE NUMBER OF CHINESE IN RUSSIA

The number of Chinese visiting, working, or living in Russia has been among the most wildly abused data points in a country known for statistical anomalies. In an interview in 2002, a Russian deputy minister of nationality policy stated, "If you ask me officially, there are 400,000. If you ask me for the real number, it is four million."[10] The mainstream journal *Ekspert* published an article in 2003 revealing "bombshell" results osten-

sibly leaked from the 2003 census: the number of Chinese in Russia was more than three million, making them the fourth-largest ethnic group in the country.[11]

According to the Institute of Asia and Africa at Moscow State University, 200,000 to 450,000 Chinese reside in Russia.[12] Larin (2006) has put the number of Chinese who enter Russia through the far eastern border at 500,000 to 550,000 per year (an increase from 350,000 in 2000). These are primarily tourists and people making personal trips. Between 1998 and 2002, 63,000 Chinese nationals—having overstayed their visas—were "stranded" in Russia. Some of these were students, businesspeople, and workers with long-term contracts. Some left Russia through another border, such as that with Kazakhstan, while some immigrated illegally to Europe. No one knows how many Chinese remained permanently in Russia during those five years, but the number is likely less than 30,000. The number of Chinese residents who have received Russian citizenship in the border territories does not exceed 1,000. Nyíri (2003, p. 244) has noted that the greatest discrepancies in estimates of Chinese migration are in the numbers for the Russian Far East. Some put the total as high as two million (De Tinguy 1998). Gelbras (2002) suggested a range of 200,000 to 400,000; cited by Nyíri (2003, p. 249). Vitkovskaia made an estimate of 200,000 to 500,000, but said that most of these were "commuters." Larin (2006, 2008) has similarly estimated that 200,000 to 400,000 Chinese reside in Russia. Kwong (2007) has suggested that about 100,000 Chinese are in the Russian Far East at any given time, most of them involved in trade.

Data from the Federal Border Service and the Primorskii Krai Committee on Tourism indicate that the overwhelming majority of Chinese legally entering Russia via the Far East return home within the period stipulated by their visas. These data also show that a significant share of those who enter do not spend time in the Far East, but rather, use their tourist visas as a way to get to other parts of Russia, presumably to work for specific periods of time (Zabrovskaia 2008). The Chinese are hardly unique in this respect. South Koreans enter the Russian Far East in smaller numbers, but almost all of them (more than 99 percent) go on to other regions of Russia (Zabrovskaia 2008). It appears that individuals traveling on their own (as opposed to those in contract labor groups) use the Far East as a transit corridor to other parts of Russia. Larin (2008)

confirms that Moscow is viewed as a more difficult place to live, but more rewarding economically.

Abelsky (2006) quotes Andrei Zabiako, head of the Religious Studies Department at Amur State University in Blagoveshchensk, who conducted surveys in the region: "The number of Chinese in any given place within the Russian Federation corresponds to the number that makes economic sense to the Chinese themselves. No more and no less." Zabiako points out that the Chinese themselves have an interest in limiting migration by their compatriots. Greater numbers mean greater competition: "They are forced to vie for trading space, scarce resources, and finite demand on the part of the Russian consumer."

Russia is not the first choice for most Chinese seeking work abroad, and Chinese are not necessarily the preferred foreign workers among Russian employers. Some Russian employers and regional officials prefer to deal with North Korea. In the first years of the 21st century, some 11,000 to 13,000 North Koreans per year came to the Russian Far East, most for seasonal or short-term work lasting up to three months. These workers generally are not included in the Russian border service statistics, and are registered only by local officials (Zabrovskaia 2008).

Despite modest numbers cited by serious observers, extreme estimates of the size of the Chinese migrant presence in the Russian Far East continue to appear, even from commentators who speak reasonably on other policy matters. In early 2006, Evgeniy Kolesnikov (2006), a consultant for the international engineering and architecture firm Royal Haskoning, stated that the number of Chinese in the Russian Far East had grown from about 2,000 in 1989 to nearly one million. Kolesnikov claimed that only 25 percent of these individuals were registered. This would mean that every fifth person living in the region was Chinese. Kolesnikov's assertions were self-contradictory: he cited surveys indicating that "half live with their families, more than half speak Russian, 70 percent of the youth plan to live in Russia, and their children are studying in Russian schools," while also stating that the Chinese "do not mix with the local population." The Council of Europe repeated the figure of one million in late 2008, at a time when the number was declining.[13] Whatever the number of Chinese migrants, the significant issues are where they go and what roles they play in Russia.

STREAMS OF CHINESE MIGRATION TO RUSSIA

Three major streams have dominated the migratory flow of Chinese to Russia since 1991: traders, who tend to be adventurous, entrepreneurial, and highly mobile; laborers, who most often work under contract for specific periods of time; and a less numerous group of "intellectual" migrants, studying or conducting research abroad or working in white-collar professions. Each stream reacts to changing conditions in sending and receiving sites, with migration patterns reflecting an interaction among economic conditions, family strategies, and evolving networks. Traders, workers, and student and professional migrants differ in their goals and degree of interaction with the local population.

Traders

Traders run the gamut from *chelnoki* (individuals, often traveling on tourist visas, who drag sacks of goods across the border) to wholesalers with highly developed commercial infrastructures. Many know at least some Russian. Most tend to be highly mobile, always ready to move on when new opportunities arise. Women make up nearly half of Chinese traders, a strikingly different demographic from that of male-dominated agriculture and construction work.[14] In some cases Chinese have displaced Russian workers, creating tensions.

Foreigners selling goods at markets represent a special subset of traders, and they have been the target of legal changes aimed at reducing their presence. While legislation that took effect in 2007 was prompted by conditions at markets in Moscow and other large cities, the restrictions have had important consequences everywhere in Russia (Lukianova, Riazantsev, and Pismennaia 2008, pp. 100–101). Limiting the number of foreign workers in the retail sector was supposed to create more transparent retail markets and exclude illegal migrants. Foreigners were initially banned from selling alcohol and medicine, and after April 15, 2007, were prohibited from selling anything at retail markets. A foreign trader could continue working only if he or she hired a Russian to handle the cash transactions or moved to an indoor kiosk.

The legislation has had an impact on Chinese traders, but it has not always improved conditions for either the traders or the local Russian population. For instance, it has increased Chinese traders' sense of insecurity about their future in Russia. Many remain unaware of the specific meaning of the law and of their legal rights, relying on other Chinese workers for information (Larin 2008).[15] Another consequence of the 2007 law has been greater Chinese segregation and social isolation. It also has caused financial losses; Chinese traders either have to sell their goods at low prices and leave Russia or hire Russian sellers, paying them daily salaries and a percentage of their retail profits. In summer 2007, the daily salary paid by a Chinese trader to a Russian seller in the cities of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk was about $8, in addition to 7 percent of gross trade revenue.[16]

Despite the problems, many Chinese traders have sought to continue working in Russia. (In some towns as many as 80 percent of Chinese retail workers have stayed.) They circumvent the new restrictions by registering their own businesses, transforming their outdoor trading stands into indoor kiosks, or hiring Russian salespeople. Although profits have decreased, in mid-2008 many Chinese traders were still earning about twice what they formerly made in China, an incentive to continue working in Russia.[17]

Many local residents are dissatisfied with the effects of the new legislation. Reduced numbers of Chinese retailers and their higher costs under the new rules have caused prices to rise. Russian market retailers complain that their own profits have been reduced because fewer people shop at the markets when Chinese goods are unavailable. There may be some positive impact in providing more jobs for Russians, but this strategy is inefficient and uneconomical. Russian workers are not useful to Chinese sellers, often slowing transactions rather than facilitating business. The legislation also has resulted in increased smuggling of goods and illegal trade across the border. Transparency and profitability in the legitimate retail industry have diminished as a result of the new law, while corruption has increased.

In addition to restricting foreigners' trade activities, the Russian government reduced the allotment for individuals bringing goods from China. As of 2006, the limit was lowered from 50 to 35 kilograms. This new regulation appears to have hurt border trade. According to some Chinese officials, trade in the border cities of Suifenhe and Heihe decreased by half or more in the wake of the new limit (Xia 2007b). Despite the problems, some Chinese companies working with Russia see benefits in the smaller

allotments. Company managers in Suifenhe have stated that these policies are beneficial to large Chinese businesses, as they should have greater opportunities to export goods that previously were sold by individual traders.[18] This favorable reception could be a sign of collusion between Chinese business interests and Russian officials.

Laborers

Chinese laborers work primarily in construction, agriculture, and forestry. They generally come to Russia under fixed contracts for specific periods of time. They tend to be the least visible of the Chinese in Russia, often living in barracks and rarely venturing out on their own. The resulting lack of social contact between these workers and Russian residents contributes to Russian myths about Chinese migration. In these exaggerations' most extreme form, some commentators suggest that millions of Chinese live in secret settlements deep in the woods, unknown even to the Federal Security Service.[19]

Most laborers are recruited in groups to work on specific projects and tend to live and eat at or near their work site. For security reasons and because of their lack of Russian-language skills, most Chinese workers are not permitted to leave their work site without supervision.[20] Chinese workers receive only limited training prior to going to Russia, ranging from a few days to two months and rarely including language training.[21]

Some Russian migration specialists suggest that migrants compete with Russians in the labor markets. They assert that particular jobs have become "reserved" by the migrants over the years and thus are available only to them. According to these scholars, jobs have been taken through fierce competition with local residents (Mukomel 2005). Migration theory suggests that this is a common pattern (Massey et. al 1993). This view seems to be widespread among the public, with 35 percent holding negative opinions about migrants primarily because of the belief that migrants take away the jobs of Russian residents (Mukomel 2005).

Yet laborers rarely have the desire or networks to stay for long terms. Individual Chinese workers may return to Russia several times, but permanent settlement is unusual. While salaries are higher in Russia, the cost of living is also much higher. This makes the barracks lifestyle more ac-

ceptable, since it permits workers to save more of their wages. Most have families in China. Like émigrés everywhere, they experience cultural and psychological discomfort that is exacerbated by a hostile reception from many Russians. Chinese are concerned about Russian prejudices. In interviews and informal conversations, some express a preference for going to Kazakhstan or the southeastern Russian republic of Buriatiia, where their physical appearance is less distinctive. Preference for "Asian" regions is particularly strong among those with higher education, reinforcing the likelihood that Chinese migrants do not raise the human capital in Russia's Far East.

One of the great myths surrounding Chinese migration involves marriage. Russians are fond of repeating that Russian women want to marry Chinese men because they work hard, bring home their pay, do not drink, and do not beat their women.[22] This myth is reinforced by the sharpening gender ratio imbalance in China, with some China demographers claiming that by 2020, 8 percent of Chinese men will be unable to find wives (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). It gains added impetus from the demographic situation in Russia: since Russian men of marriageable age die at unusually high rates, the proportion of women over age 35 who are single is unusually high for a European country. Yet this often-repeated social legend says far more about domestic relations in Russia than about Chinese migration. Based on interviews with the director of the Far East Migration Center, Viktor Saikov, the number of Chinese-Russian marriages in Russia appears to be quite limited.[23] Official data likewise do not indicate a significant number of Chinese-Russian weddings.

Students and Knowledge Workers

Students and professionals represent the smallest group of Chinese in Russia, though they are regarded most favorably by officials and the local population (Larin 2008). Although a few universities have made efforts to attract Chinese students, Russians have failed to exploit a significant potential market (Pismennaia 2008, p. 81). In part this reflects ambivalence about encouraging more Chinese to come to Russia and concerns about the obvious language divide. But it also stems from the difficulties foreign students have experienced due to growing xenophobia and a skin-

head movement that often enjoys tacit—and sometimes even open—police approval. On a broader level, the Russian education system has failed to compete effectively with those of Australia, Europe, and the United States in attracting Chinese students. Russian institutions are only now waking up to the global competition in education services (Pismennaia 2008), and their recruiting efforts pale in comparison to those of the hundreds of agencies that market Europe's educational services to prospective Chinese matriculants (Laczko 2003, p.12). Australian schools are equally aggressive. Russia is competing for Chinese students not only with Western and more developed Asian countries, but also with other CIS countries, particularly Kazakhstan. Chinese students often feel more comfortable studying in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia than in Russia.[24]

For highly skilled migrants and those seeking educational opportunities, pull can be as important as push. Yet Russia has difficulty retaining its own highly educated young people. More than a quarter-million young Russians have created a "Moscow on the Thames" community of Russian expatriates in London, with their own newspapers, entertainment magazines, and websites.[25] In the global competition for highly skilled professionals, Russia remains less attractive than several other parts of the world. Even when high salaries are offered, quality-of-life issues make Russia a less desirable option. Educated Russians are more likely to move to China than are educated Chinese inclined to live in Russia. This picture adds up to a quite limited scale of Chinese migration to Russia, particularly to the Far East, which has the country's lowest population density. The obstacles on the Russian side, already a major deterrent, have been reinforced by significant changes on the Chinese side.

OBSTACLES TO GREATER MIGRATORY FLOWS ON THE RUSSIAN SIDE

One of the effects of Russia's economic difficulties in the 1990s was a limited demand for labor. Most Chinese who came to Russia were traders selling inexpensive goods or transients exploiting porous borders to reach Europe. After 1998, as Russia's economy revived and some Chinese regions continued to lag economically, it would have been plausible to expect greater labor migration from China to Russia. The push and pull factors

were reasonably aligned. Yet, despite wild claims by some on the Russian side, migration was quite modest.

What explains this missed opportunity? We have already noted the fraught atmosphere created by exploitation of the migration issue by Russian news media and politicians. At least four other factors are important: restrictive and frequently modified Russian legislation that has exacerbated bureaucratic obstacles; the availability of a large alternative work force, which includes many Slavs and Russian-speakers, in the countries of the former Soviet Union; lagging economic development in the Russian Far East; and the related weak regionalism in Northeast Asia. These limiting factors have prevented development of Chinese communities that could support long-term migratory flows to Russia. With the global economic crisis that began in 2008, the window of opportunity for establishing migration networks has closed, and will remain shut for at least several years.[26]

Legislative and Bureaucratic Obstacles

We have already noted, in the present paper, that laws aimed at curtailing the activities of foreign vendors at markets in European Russia had a negative impact in the Russian Far East. It has been a common pattern. Chinese efforts to send workers to Russia encounter persistent bureaucratic hurdles. Obtaining work permits and visas is a lengthy process, with approvals often delayed, leaving workers stuck at border towns on the Chinese side waiting for their documents.[27] To obtain a visa for less than 180 days, a worker needs to pay a 30 percent fee in addition to the visa price. In addition to paying for the visa, workers must pay a number of taxes, including pension taxes (Xia 2007a). The time and money that go into acquiring formal registration cause many workers to enter Russia on tourist visas. Quite a few are detained by Russian police, which causes problems for enterprises in Russia, particularly when agricultural laborers are unable to collect the harvest on time (Xia 2007a).

Problems stemming from visa and work permit regulations on the Russian side were reiterated in interviews with Chinese government officials in Suifenhe, Heihe, Dongning, and Manzhouli. Chinese officials expressed a strong interest in increasing bilateral labor cooperation, but said

they felt helpless when confronting Russia's bureaucracy.[28] Chinese scholars point to Russia's high tariffs and nontransparent tariff policies for production materials and personal goods brought to Russia by Chinese workers as further obstacles to increasing bilateral labor cooperation (Hongbin 2007). The unfavorable tariffs dissuade some Chinese traders from even going to Russia.[29]

On both sides of the border, some encouraging signs during 2007–08 pointed to both regularization of population movement and improved administration (Larin 2008). In Russia, new organizations established by some local governments to deal with the increasing presence of foreign workers had a positive impact. For instance, in 2007 Khabarovskii Krai established an interdepartmental commission (*Mezhvedomstvennaia kommissiia*) including members of the provincial government, local representatives of the national immigration service, employers, and other members of the business community to address issues involving foreign workers.[30]

In some areas of the Russian Far East, particularly Primorskii Krai, quotas for Chinese workers are set below the market demand because immigration service officials share alarmist perceptions and seek to minimize the flow of Chinese labor into the country.[31] By contrast, Khabarovskii Krai raised quotas for Chinese workers from 6,000 in 2006 to 11,000 in 2007 (Teliushkina 2007). The power to set quotas has shifted from Moscow to the Far East. Viktor Saikov of the Far East Migration Center successfully collaborated with other migration organizations and responsible officials in the Far East to secure permission from Moscow to set the quotas at the provincial level rather than endure the lengthy bureaucratic approval process in Moscow.[32]

Alternative Sources of Labor

Russia's immigration policy focuses primarily on encouraging expatriate Russians to repatriate, even though the potential for this is largely exhausted. The second priority is to attract Russian-speakers from other CIS countries (Korobkov 2007; Riazantsev and Grebeniuk, 2008). In late 2002, then-President Putin delivered a speech on migration issues, noting,

> We are in a better situation compared with other countries, as we have an obvious reservoir, from which we could take people for Russia. These people have our mentality, often speak Russian as their mother-tongue. We have common cultural and confessional routes. These are the Republics of the former Soviet Union and we should do everything in order to win them over. (Nozhenko 2006)

In 2006, the government approved the National Program on Support for Voluntary Migration of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian Federation. Under this program, the Russian government promises to provide financial support and help "in obtaining citizenship and social benefits upon return to the motherland" (Banjanovic 2007). It was reported in mid-2007 that some 20,000 people had already applied (Banjanovic 2007). Nozhenko (2006) has expressed doubt that the program will achieve its objectives, saying that it was introduced too late and does not even include a precise definition of compatriots. Experience in the 1990s suggests that Russians returning from the "Near Abroad" represent a classic NIMBY (not in my backyard) issue; Russians are overwhelmingly in favor of compatriots returning, but do not want them to receive preferences in housing and employment (Pilkington 1998). Lidiia Grafova (2006), a leading advocate for migrants, reviewed efforts in the 12 regions to implement pilot projects to match immigrants to jobs. She found that the sole "privilege" common to immigrants in all of these jurisdictions was being allowed to come to Russia without facing the usual bureaucratic obstacles. Immigrant workers' average salaries were barely above the official survival minimum; housing was provided in dormitories or hotels. "The general impression of the program is the following: Russia is trying to fill the holes in its economy, cynically exploiting the patriotic feelings of compatriots."

Data suggest that return migration may have peaked. In 2005, about 508,000 returnees became Russian citizens under special provisions to accelerate the naturalization process. In 2006, the number was estimated at 350,000 to 400,000. In the first half of 2007, just 171,000 returnees took advantage of the special one-year waiting period for citizenship. President Putin extended the program into 2007, and many doubted that he would introduce legislation to prolong it again (Zhelenin 2007). In 2008, however, the Duma did approve extension of the special arrangements.

Although most migration to Russia is from former Soviet republics, representing 56 percent of all labor migrants in 2006,[33] the maximum immigration potential of the Russian diaspora probably does not exceed four million, mostly from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Zaionchkovskaia 2005; cf. Riazantsev and Grebeniuk 2008). The most optimistic views, based on the questionable assumption that Russians from Ukraine and Belarus will flow back to Russia, predict up to 5.2 million immigrants arriving by 2025. But many potential immigrants are ambivalent about returning to Russia (Zaionchkovskaia 2005). As in the case of the Russian diaspora in the Baltics, Russian policy is split between encouraging them to return and keeping them in place as a means of leverage on neighboring countries' governments.[34]

Large numbers of potential non-Slav immigrants are still available in the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, even if a declining proportion of them speak Russian. Along with Ukraine and Moldova, these states have provided most of the legal and illegal migrants to Russia since 1991 (Korobkov 2007; Laruelle 2008). They include both workers and refugees. Some estimates put the number of legal and illegal migrants at 10 to 12 million before the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008, placing Russia second only to the United States in the number of migrants received. This is quite a shock for a country that does not perceive itself as open to immigration. The migrants from Central Asia and especially the Caucasus have been a source of serious tension, with the cultural and lifestyle problems common wherever migrants appear exacerbated in the Russian context by the wars in Chechnya, concerns about terrorism, and conflicts over outdoor markets. For instance, the restrictions that have created difficulties at markets in the Far East were aimed primarily at "southerners" in Moscow. That millions of people, especially young men, from Central Asia and the Caucasus continued to work in Russia despite difficult conditions and prejudice suggests that the economic stimuli remained strong, at least until the second half of 2008.[35]

Those viewing Russia as a country offering economic opportunities do not necessarily see those opportunities in the places where Russians would like them to go. Russian analysts assume that immigrants from elsewhere in the CIS would be willing to reside in remote regions, such as Siberia and the Far East, rather than settle in European Russia. However, even Russians born in the Far East have departed in droves. The region lost 15

percent of its population between 1995 and 2005, not counting those who formally retained their local registration but lived and worked elsewhere (Lankin 2006).

Even if six to seven million emigrants from former Soviet republics were to move to Russia by 2025, their presence would not offset the country's population decline. Russia would still need to attract immigrants from other countries, entering into competition with more developed labor markets such as the United States and the European Union. In light of these circumstances, Chinese migrants, particularly from Northeast China, represent one of the best options for the long term. Yet Russia may have missed the opportunity to achieve a self-sustaining stream of Chinese migration. Migration theory indicates that once "pioneer" migrants establish themselves in a foreign country, their presence lowers the transaction costs for others. At some point, the migration flow becomes self-sustaining (Hatton and Williamson 2006; Leblang et al. 2007; Massey et al. 1993).

Some Chinese specialists have criticized Russia's policy of favoring CIS migrants, suggesting there is still potential for migration from the Chinese side (Ping 2006). Scholars in Heilongjiang Province have outlined strategies for improving the image of Chinese workers in Russia, including increasing cultural exchanges and providing better worker training in hopes of more opportunities to export labor to Russia. These scholars note that Chinese have been willing to persevere in Russia's harsh climate and difficult economic environment. However, lagging economic development in Russia's Far East dims the prospects for attracting migrants who bring high levels of human capital.

Lagging Economic Development in the Russian Far East

With the possible exception of some major infrastructure projects, it is not clear that great numbers of workers are needed in the Russian Far East. Kolesnikov (2006) points out that local extractive industries do not require a large supply of permanent residents. Demand for labor will grow only if the region develops its agriculture and non-extractive industries, undertakings that will require significant investment over an extended period of time. Economic development plans for Vladivostok focus on a conference and convention center to be built on an offshore island in time to host a

conference of the Association of South East Asian Nations in 2012. But like the Konstantinovskii Palace outside St. Petersburg, the center will probably have only a limited impact on the rest of the city.[36] Timely completion of the project remains uncertain (Bohlen 2008). Infrastructure development in the Russian republic of Sakha (Iakutiia) focuses on a rail line in the southern part of the republic, another project requiring a limited number of workers for a finite period of time. Further development will require additional investment.

Statements by local labor organizations suggest that the Far East did not experience a labor shortage during the Yeltsin or Putin presidencies, and that the economic crisis that began in 2008 likely means there will be even less demand for workers. In late 2007, the independent trade union Profsvoboda protested that local workers were being ignored, or were even being replaced by Chinese, as Transneft, the state enterprise responsible for Russia's oil pipelines, recruited labor to build a pipeline from Eastern Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. Only 200 locals were hired, along with 1,800 Chinese. About the same time, the oil and gas company Surgutneftegaz announced plans to hire 2,500 Chinese contract workers in the Russian Far East (Blagov 2007). Profsvoboda's unprecedented appeal was disseminated by the Republic of Sakha news service, a sign that local officials shared the concerns raised by the trade union. Profsvoboda pointed out that Transneft had hired the 1,800 Chinese despite the presence of 50,000 unemployed workers in Sakha, representing 10 percent of the local labor pool. Although Transneft spent state funds to train Chinese workers, it ultimately had to break the contract because of poor performance by the Chinese. Profsvoboda suggested that Transneft could have better invested the funds in training local residents.[37]

Despite the dire demographic situation in Russia in general, and the Russian Far East in particular, some migration specialists in the Far East believe that it is possible to stabilize the region's population without attracting large numbers of immigrants. L. A. Krushanova, of the Far East branch of the Russian Academy of Science, contends that a higher birthrate can be achieved through the government's program of improving health care services and offering subsidies such as capital for apartment purchases. Krushanova claims that this strategy was successful in the first half of 2007, with the death rate in Primorskii Krai decreasing by about 9 percent and the birthrate increasing by an equal amount.[38] Other Russian experts and

Western demographers attribute the higher birthrate to a larger number of women in the prime childbearing-age cohort, a situation that will alter drastically in the coming decade.[39]

The conflicting accounts point to a continuing contradiction between those seeking to regularize and encourage mutually beneficial labor migration and those who view Chinese migration as a threat. As migration theory would predict (Massey et al. 1993, pp. 450–51), the problems are exacerbated by a situation in which illegal migration provides a source of income for security personnel and cheap labor for employers. These developments, in turn, create institutional interests that favor the existing arrangements, and that, consequently, contribute to weak regionalism.

Weak Regionalism in Northeast Asia

Economic relations across the Russia-China border have grown as both sides' economies have developed, yet economic interactions still consist mostly of trade, and rarely expand to include investment and production. In her 2004 book on post-Soviet Russian-Chinese relations, Jeanne L. Wilson titled a chapter on economic relations "The Weakest Link." Russian authorities evince a preference for national-level agreements such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization over more modest local arrangements that could nonetheless foster more substantial cross-border ties. Xiangming Chen (2005, p. 176) suggests that limited integration is due mainly to Russia's lack of decentralization. Russia's Far East has been highly dependent on and controlled by Moscow, a relationship that inhibits cross-border integration through local initiatives. Rozman (2004) characterizes Northeast Asia as a case of "stunted regionalism."

Weak regional linkages have been cited by Chinese analysts, Russian politicians, and NGO directors in the Far East as a major reason for the low level of migration in the region. Li Chuanxun, a Russia specialist at Heilongjiang University, has stated that currently the Russian Far East does not need more workers, given its slow rate of economic development and small population.[40] On the Russian side, E. N. Teliushkina, a trade official of the Khabarovskii Krai government, views the number of Chinese workers who have been attracted to the region as corresponding to current demand and the level of economic development.[41] In her view, as the region

develops more, there will be a higher number of foreign workers. Such assessments assume that a vast pool of Chinese will remain available to be tapped whenever Russia needs them. This is increasingly less likely.

WEAK PUSH FACTORS ON THE CHINESE SIDE

While Russia might benefit from Chinese labor, there is no evidence that large numbers of Chinese have a strong desire to work in Russia. Trade and contract labor are important for some Chinese, but the numbers are in the tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands, much less millions. To overcome the difficulties on the Russian side requires substantial push on the Chinese side. Our data suggest that the push factors are not particularly strong, and weakened between the 1998 economic crisis and the one that began in 2008. Economic development in China has made Russia a less attractive destination for many workers, particularly those in the border regions. The physical dangers to Chinese in Russia posed by, among others, errant law enforcement personnel and xenophobes, are also a major deterrent. Doing business in Russia remains difficult, particularly for foreigners. Chinese have many other options. Perhaps more significant, China faces its own demographic crisis, stemming from the one-child policy, which is likely to limit emigration in the coming decades.

Insufficient Economic Opportunity in the Russian Far East

Migration theory emphasizes the economic opportunities in the receiving country (Hatton and Williamson 2006). China's economic development, at least up to 2008, made these forces increasingly less significant for many Chinese. Russians are only beginning to appreciate the dynamism of China's economy.

Although China's Northeast has a reputation as a "rust belt" region because of its long reliance on state-owned enterprises, media and government sources reported economic growth during 2004–07. Gross domestic product in Heilongjiang Province increased 12.1 percent in 2007 from the previous year, amounting to nearly $70 billion.[42] The industrial base in

China's Northeast has been substantially restructured and has attracted significant foreign investment. Foreign investment in Heilongjiang Province grew at an annual rate of 19.67 percent over the past two years.[43] Most of this investment went into the manufacturing sector, including raw materials, chemicals, electromechanical products, advanced agriculture, automobiles, and technology.[44]

During 2007–08, Northeast China experienced a shortage of highly qualified labor. The demise of the system of secondary-level technical education in the region contributed to a shortage of workers with technical skills. An internal report on unemployment issues in 2006 prepared by the city of Harbin noted that the unemployment rate of 3.53 percent was 1.07 percentage points lower than the rate forecast by the municipal government.[45] Given Northeast China's relatively robust economy and tight job market, the idea that China might be able to complement Russia's diminishing labor force may be unrealistic.[46] Improvements in Northeast China's economy mean that future Chinese migrants to Russia likely will be increasingly drawn from southern or more populated provinces, making contract labor more likely than migration.

Concerns about Safety in Russia

If they get past predatory Russian border enforcement personnel, Chinese migrants still have to worry about the skinhead movement and a rise in the prominence of nationalist groups in Russia.[47] Chinese media have reported murders of Chinese workers in Russia, including the homicides of six Chinese businessmen in the city of Chita in 2006. In December 2008, a video was posted on the Internet showing the beheading of a Chinese man in another Russian city, Cheliabinsk.[48] Chinese scholars point out that it is unreasonable for Russians to fear massive Chinese migration when Chinese do not even feel safe going to Russia (Deng 2005). Directors of labor-exporting companies interviewed in border towns in Heilongjiang Province confirmed that physical safety for their workers was their chief concern.[49]

Managers at some Chinese labor-exporting companies have cited the unreliability of their Russian partners as an obstacle to increased labor cooperation. According to Fen Intse, a manager of a Manzhouli labor-ex-

porting company, Russian partners did not pay his workers 30 percent of the time, imposing serious costs on his company.[50]

Alternatives for Migratory Work

Chinese who wish to work abroad have a broad range of alternatives. For many, Russia is the fourth or fifth choice in a hierarchy of resort, behind the United States, Europe, elsewhere in Asia, and urban areas of China itself. Most Chinese workers would prefer to go to other Asian countries, such as Singapore, where they can earn nearly $3,000 a month versus an average of less than $300 per month in Russia (as of 2007). Chinese workers interviewed in the Russian Far East confirmed that Russia was not their first choice as a work destination. Some ended up working in Russia after failing to find jobs in Japan or South Korea.[51] Within Russia, the Far East is not the favored destination. Most Chinese would rather go to Moscow or St. Petersburg (Larin 2008). Although general conditions in those two cities are less inviting, the economic opportunities are far greater—an assessment we would expect from Chinese who view themselves as sojourners.

For workers from Heilongjiang Province, labor migration is primarily oriented toward Chinese cities such as Dalian and Beijing. The Heilongjiang provincial government has established annual goals for sending labor to other Chinese cities, which suggests that transborder labor exports are not among their top priorities. The 2007 Harbin municipal government internal report on unemployment does not include any specific goals for labor exports to Russia or to other foreign countries. Other measures for battling joblessness are discussed in detail, though, including unemployment insurance, entrepreneurship bonuses, and infrastructure projects in small towns and rural areas.

Although the numbers involved are modest, work in Russia has been important for some Chinese. More than 20 towns in Heilongjiang Province are involved in labor cooperation projects with Russia, and the scale of labor export to the Russian Far East grew slowly in the early 2000s. In the spring of 2005, more than 5,000 workers were sent to Russia from the province (Ping 2006). Whether this trend will continue will be determined in part by China's economic and demographic situation.

DEMOGRAPHY

Even if conditions could be created to attract Chinese to work in Russia, China's own demographic situation increasingly makes labor migration less likely. Data from the United Nations Population Division indicate that the size of China's working-age population will peak in 2015 and begin to decline shortly thereafter (Bergston, et. al, 2006). Labor shortages were evident in some parts of China, such as Guangdong Province, in 2004 and 2005 (Bergston, et. al, 2006). Reports from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences warn that labor shortages will become significant by 2010.[52] The need for a strong labor force to maintain China's economic growth will make organized policies on outward migration even less likely.

The shift in the configuration of the age pyramid as the full impact of the one-child policy is felt means that the burden on China's working-age population will, by the 2030s, become the most daunting in the world. Lack of a well-funded pension system exacerbates the problem, forcing the elderly to rely on their children or on the "informal" safety net. In 2002, only 55 percent of the urban work force and 11 percent of the rural work force were covered by China's public pension system (Jackson and Howe 2004). This system will come under increasing pressure by 2020, when some young adults from the initial single-child generation will have to care for two parents and four grandparents.

A growing gender imbalance, also exacerbated by the one-child policy, adds to the complications. For affluent Chinese, sonograms have replaced female infanticide as the means to guarantee that their one child is a male. The normal male-female ratio is about 105 to 100. By 2000, the gender ratio in China had reached 117 males for every 100 females.[53] Hudson and den Boer (2004, p. 186) suggest that the large number of single men, totaling about 30 million by 2020, might threaten China's prospects for stability, spurring growth in sex trafficking and other crimes and possibly making violence a more likely phenomenon. Others contend that many of those "surplus" males will need to stay home to care for their parents and grandparents.[54]

Given the projected demographic scenario in China, it is therefore plausible to expect population flows in the opposite direction. If China experiences shortages of skilled labor and people with high human capi-

tal, Russians might provide some of the needed personnel. We have already noted, in the present paper, both the thin character of regionalism in Northeast Asia and the increase in cross-border economic activity during 2005–08. Instead of a massive flood of Chinese into Russia, greater cross-border interaction has led to substantial growth in the number of Russians working and living in China. This phenomenon is counterintuitive for Russians accustomed to viewing China as "underdeveloped." But China is *both* a less expensive place to live *and* a place where development has been more rapid than in many regions of Russia. China has replaced Egypt as the second most popular destination for Russian tourists. (Turkey remains number one.) In addition to the growing number of Russians studying and working in China, pensioners are finding it attractive to sell their property in Russia, move to China, and live on the difference.[55] In border cities such as Heihe, new apartment buildings are attracting Russian buyers. Russian families in the Far East are sending their children to Harbin and other cities to learn Chinese in the hope that they will forge careers in business. Chinese universities and industrial laboratories are recruiting Russian specialists. Unlike Russian universities, they do not discriminate against foreign degrees. According to Sapozhnikova (2006), nearly all the Russian students who went to China after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 remained there. Those who go now and succeed in learning the language likewise tend to stay.[56] In Beijing, some 5,000 Russians have created a "Russia town" around the Iabao Lu market. Sapozhnikova reported that the Russians who were moving to take advantage of economic opportunities were among the "most talented and entrepreneurial." It is not unreasonable to think that the number of Russians living in China could eventually exceed the number of Chinese residing in Russia.[57]

WHAT COULD CHANGE THE PICTURE?

Many of the opportunities for substantial and mutually beneficial Chinese labor migration to Russia have been missed, and rapidly changing economic conditions mean that there likely will be far fewer opportunities in the future. The economic crisis that began in 2008 will inhibit migration, at least in the short term, as demand for labor decreases. Might something change the situation to encourage greater migration?

Four factors have the potential to alter the modest scale of Chinese migration to Russia: thicker regional integration, revised attitudes, economic upheaval, and ecological disaster in Northeast China.

Thicker Regional Integration

It is possible that over time local authorities will formally or informally manage to establish closer ties, producing greater opportunities for population movement. If the economic crisis, ongoing in 2009, eventually leads to greater regional independence, the Far Eastern governments might find ways to expand cross-border ties. But thus far, economic conditions on both sides make large-scale migration unlikely. There is a path dependency in existing patterns that can be altered only by purposive action. The failure to establish solid networks during the boom years will have a lasting impact even if economic recovery is rapid.

Revised Attitudes

Even without more intensive regional development, changed attitudes, particularly on the Russian side, could help to establish an environment more conducive to labor migration. This would require a cognitive shift on the part of Russian political leaders. But as we have indicated in the present paper, there is not much basis for believing such a change is imminent.

Economic Upheaval

Economic upheaval could have significant consequences. Continued improvements in employment and living standards in China's Northeast depend on the country's ability to sustain a remarkable record of economic growth. China's demand for resources was one of the factors driving the commodity price boom in the early 21st century. If the economy in Northeast China experiences significant retrenchment while the Russian Far East prospers, the pull/push factors could shift in favor of greater migration. In the latter part of 2008, clear evidence emerged of economic

problems as global demand for Chinese exports declined. Factories in the southern industrial zones began to lay off workers and even to shut their doors.[58] However, economic conditions in Russia deteriorated even more quickly, creating fears of unemployment there. This has produced a crisis for migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia.[59] Many Chinese migrants left Russia in the wake of the 1998 economic crisis (Vitkovskaia 1999a). The current economic crisis is likely to have a similar impact. Fewer traders are crossing the border, and Chinese officials have expressed concern about the consequences of reduced opportunities in Russia.[60]

Ecological Disaster in Northeast China

Ecological disaster on the Chinese side of the border could also alter the equation. If the 100 million or more people in China's three northeastern provinces found themselves without adequate water supplies, significant population movement could result (Economy 2004, 2007; Shapiro 2001). But migration is not the only possible solution; buying the needed resources would remain an option.

CONCLUSION

Chinese labor and transit migration (rarely immigration) to Russia is diverse, and its patterns have shifted over time. We can identify specific "streams" of migrants, many associated with particular sending and receiving sites, along with some interesting "niche" destinations such as Buriatiia. While it is impossible to generalize across an area as vast and complex as the transborder region embracing the Russian Far East and Northeast China, some trends are clear. Overall, the limited scale of Chinese labor migration to Russia has the appearance of a missed opportunity rather than a threat. Our data confirm what most serious analysts have found: the plausible estimates of Chinese working in Russia do not match Russian perceptions, or the frightening numbers bandied about by some Russian politicians and media sources. The estimated number of Chinese who wish to live in Russia permanently is even smaller.

Popular myths about Chinese migration to Russia's Far East are pervasive and, like all myths, difficult to kill. They include assumptions that population imbalances and "empty" spaces inevitably result in population movement; that China's leaders are carefully managing Chinese migration to regain territories lost in the 19th century; that vast numbers of Chinese are prepared to return to resettle ancestral territories; and that hordes of impoverished Chinese workers are desperate for the "good life" in Russia. The mythology and Russian official and popular reactions have deterred Chinese labor migration during a period when it might have been possible to develop productive cross-border relationships. The changing situation in Northeast China and the ongoing global economic crisis make significant labor migration to Russia less likely. While China will experience serious unemployment as millions of workers in the coastal industrial zones return to their villages, Russia's industry is in even worse shape. There is no prospect for significant demand for labor in the short term. Even if oil prices rebound while China's economy stagnates, economic development in the Russian Far East is likely to lag.

Our data further suggest that the net effect of Russia's immigration/emigration nexus is a net decline in human capital. Along with traders, students, and entertainment workers, a growing share of the Russians working in China are individuals with a higher education and professional skills. Most Chinese working in Russia are doing manual labor or are engaged in retail trade. Better-educated Chinese tend to locate in European Russia, viewing it as a stepping-stone to more western parts of Europe. Chinese who do well in the Russian Far East either return to China to establish businesses or move to western Russia or Europe, to be replaced, if at all, by people with fewer skills.

Our data also confirm Chen's (2005) portrayal of the Russia-China border as Asia's least successful example of transborder integration. Larin's (2006, p. 48) characterization of the Russia-China border as an unusual situation of close geographic proximity but vast cultural distance remains accurate.

Finally, while practical difficulties persist on both sides of the border, the problems appear far more serious on the Russian side. This reflects a combination of corruption, self-interest, weak administrative capacity, and psychological factors. Russians evince a 19th-century attitude toward

the issues, while many Chinese have moved on to the 21st century. Some of the Chinese we interviewed suggested that, as one said, "there are not many examples of migration from the more developed country to the less developed country." Yet myths continue to trump reality. In a theory akin to spontaneous generation, Russians continue to believe that empty territory attracts migrants from a more populous neighbor. Available cases suggest that this is hardly an automatic process.

The push factor that *could* generate a significant movement of Chinese to the Russian Far East is ecological disaster. China's record in protecting the environment is abysmal. If water shortages or other forms of environmental degradation were to make life in China's border regions unviable, population movement could be significant. As in Central America and Southeast Asia in the aftermath of hurricanes or typhoons, these would be "environmental refugees" rather than labor migrants.Barring extraordinary circumstances, the number of Russians living and working in China may, in time, outstrip the number of Chinese doing so in Russia. Given that prospect, the history of Chinese migration to Russia in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is likely to be portrayed not as a major population shift but, rather, as a missed opportunity.

Notes

1 Takafumi Nakai, "President Putin's Understanding of the Far East," ERINA-The Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia, Chronicle, http://www.erina.or.jp/en/Opinion/2000/Russia/nakai.htm, accessed October 22, 2008.

2 "Putin Says Russia Needs a More Liberal Migration Policy," BBC Monitoring International Reports, March 2005 from a Channel One broadcast.

3 Malumian, Marietta, "Podkhody k nelegalam raznye, tsel odna," [Approaches to Illegals Differ, but the Goal is the Same], *Novoe vremia,* No. 110, November 6, 2008.

4 Interview, Vladivostok, July 9, 2007.

5 Karlusov and Kudin 2002; Deng 2005. Marks (1991, pp. 153–54) notes similar unfounded concerns about an influx of Chinese in the decades before 1917.

6 One of the authors attended the meeting. Russia and China signed a formal agreement on border demarcation in 2008. Li Xiaokun, "China, Russia Sign Border Agreement," *China Daily*, July 22, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-07/22/content_6865847.htm.

7 Interview with Elizaveta N. Teliushkina, vice minister of the Department of Economic Development and External Relations of Khabarovskii Krai.

8 Interviews with directors of labor-exporting firms in the cities of Heihe, Suifenhe, Dongning, and Manzhouli.

9 One of the authors conducted extensive interviews with Russian scholars and officials, as well as Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East, during August-September 2007.

10 Author interview, Moscow, April 2002.

11 Ekspert, 23 September 2003.

12 *Demoscope Weekly,* 27 October-4 November, 2001.

13 "Migration and Mobility in the Eurasian Region – Prospects for the Future," Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Resolution 1639 (2008).

14 Interviews with directors of labor-exporting firms in Heihe, Suifenhe, Dongning, and Manzhouli.

15 Interviews from the Russian Far East, 2007.

16 Interviews at Vladivostok and Khabarovsk markets, August 2007.

17 Interviews, Chinese markets in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk, August 2007.

18 Interview with Sun Chanbing, director, *Suifenhe Pengbo Jingji Maoyi Gongsi*, May 12, 2007.

19 E. V. Gilbo, "Russia in the 21st Century: A Geopolitical Tragedy?" http://www.headway.us/read.php?i=243.

20 Interview with Xufu Qi, director of *Feisiliao gongsi*, Heihe, May 23, 2007.

21 Interviews with company managers and government officials in Suifenhe, Heihe, Dongning, and Manzhouli.

22 This legend has been repeated in a number of interviews with both government officials and ordinary people.

23 Interview withViktor Vladimirovich Saikov, Khabarovsk, July 13, 2007. Saikov's impression is supported by Chinese government officials in Heihe and Suifenhe, as well as Professor Viktor Diatlov, a migration and diaspora expert at Irkutsk State University.

24 Interviews with Chinese students at three universities in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province.

25 For a sampling, see http://rupoint.co.uk; http://www.russianlondon.ru/newspaper and http://www.russian-society.org.uk.

26 Cui Xiaohuo, "Relax Border to Help Region," *China Daily*, November 27, 2008.

27 Interviews with managers of Chinese labor-exporting companies.

28 Interviews with government officials responsible for bilateral trade and labor cooperation in Heihe, Suifenhe, Dongning, and Manzhouli.

29 Interviews reveal that not all bureaucratic difficulties are on the Russian side. According to Viktor Saikov, the director of the Far East Migration Center in Khabarovsk, many Chinese workers apply simultaneously just before major Chinese holidays, such as the Lunar New Year, and must wait while large numbers of visas are processed.

30 Interview with Teliushkina Elizaveta N., vice minister of the Ministry of Economic Development and External Relations of Khabarovskii Krai, Khabarovsk, July 12, 2007.

31 Interview with Sergei Pushkarev, director of the Far East Labor Migration Organization and former head of the Primorskii Krai Migration Services, Vladivostok, July 9, 2007.

32 Interview with Viktor Saikov, July 13, 2007.

33 *Demoscope Weekly,* January 1-January 20 2008.

34 The Russian government distributed Russian passports to large numbers of people in South Ossetia and Abkhazia not because they wanted these individuals to move to Russia, but to provide additional reasons for intervention. A similar phenomenon is evident in some Ukrainian regions, particularly Crimea and Ruthenia.

35 Numerous reports beginning in September 2008 indicated that the global economic crisis was reducing demand for migrant labor in Russia, curtailing remittances and inducing many migrants to return to their homeland.

36 Plans for a new federal university in Vladivostok include using the complex as a conference center and as housing for visiting scholars. Blagov 2007; "Depopulation of Far East Extremely Dangerous for Russia - Putin," Itar-Tass, October 18, 2007.

37 Rosbalt-Sever, December 11, 2007.

38 Interview with Larisa Aleksandrovna Krushanova, Vladivostok, July 9, 2008.

39 "Birth Rate in Moscow to Decrease in Years Ahead," ITAR-TASS, May 6, 2008.

40 Interview, March 27, 2007. This assertion supports the findings of Hill and Gaddy (2003) Kontorovich (2000).

41 Interview with Elizaveta N. Teliushkina, vice minister of the Ministry of Economic Development and External Relations of Khabarovskii Krai, Khabarovsk, July 12, 2007.

42 *Guanyu Heilongjiang Sheng 2007 Guomin Jingji he Shehui Fazhan de Jihua Zhixing Qingkuang ji 2008 de Guomin Jingji he Shehui Fazhan*

de (cao'an) de baogao, available via http://www.northeast.com.cn, accessed June 10, 2008.

43 *Xinhua News Agency*, July 24, 2005.

44 *Xinhua News Agency,* December 15, 2004.

45 Harbin Municipal Government 2007. Wishnick (2003) used data on the economic condition of China's Northeast to demonstrate the push factors that might encourage migration. The cities chosen, however, are not the most helpful for comparative purposes: Beijing, the capital, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, the latter two being economic showcases that have attracted massive numbers of (often illegal) migrants from other regions of China. If one adds some other provincial capitals from the interior, the Northeast does not appear that unusual.

46 Interview with Li Chuanxun, June 20, 2007.

47 Interview with Li Chuanxun, June 20, 2007.

48 UCSJ *Bigotry Monitor,* Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2, 2009. http://ucsj.org.

49 Interviews conducted in the Russian Far East, May-July, 2007.

50 Interviews with Fen Intse, manager of Zhongguo Manzhouli Guoji Jingji Jishu Hezuo Gongsi, Manzhouli, June 27, 2007.

51 Interviews with Chinese construction workers, Ulan Ude and Khabarovsk, June, 2007; Larin 2008.

52 "China Faces Labor Shortage," Asia Times Online, May 16, 2007, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/IE16Cb01.html).

53 Bergsten, et. al., 2006, using data from China's 2000 national census.

54 Interview with a group of Chinese journalists, Washington DC, October 2005.

55 This has been confirmed through interviews with Chinese company managers in border towns, as well as local residents and Chinese scholars.

56 Informal interviews with Russian students in Harbin during 2006–07 indicate that this is also true for many who have difficulty with the Chinese language.

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• *Mihratsiia i tolerantnist v Ukrainy* [Migration and Tolerance in Ukraine], Kyiv: Stylos Press, 2007, edited by Yaroslav Pylynskyi. [Ukrainian; no longer available in printed form]

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