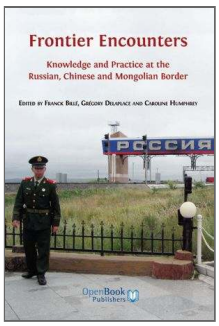


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# 5. Chinese Migrants and Anti-Chinese Sentiments in Russian Society

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# 5. Chinese Migrants and Anti-Chinese Sentiments in Russian Society

*Viktor Dyatlov*

A border is much more than merely a line of contact between state sovereignties. It always constitutes a special form of human ties and relationships, a meeting place for people of different languages and cultures, a ground and resource for their aspirations, life strategies and practices. In this sense, cross-border migrations and migrants constitute a vital component of border conditions and phenomena. Bringing the border with them, as well as within themselves, migrants embody the very situation of contact and conflict.

It is no accident that the well-known Japanese scholar Akihiro Iwashita named his book about the Sino-Russian border *4,000 Kilometres of Problems* (Iwashita 2006): these are not simply problems relating to international relations. Nearly half a century of constant evolution in the region along the Russian border has led to the emergence of a particular lifestyle, psychology and economic practice and behaviour in the eastern regions of the country. This accounts for the difficulty in making the transition from seeing the border as a threat in the 1960s and 1970s, to perceiving it as a resource in subsequent decades. Chinese migrants have played a remarkable, and often paramount, role in this complex set of cross-border relationships.


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The analysis of the present chapter will focus on Chinese migrants to Russia and on Russian attitudes towards them.[1] A significant outcome of the relationship between the host society and migrants has been the formation of a complex set of stereotypes, misgivings, anxieties and phobias. At the same time, this particular constellation becomes a compelling factor in the formulation and management of migration policies, having an impact not only on migration trends themselves, but also on the economic, social and political development parameters of the host society.

Migrant phobia is an inevitable component of a host society's adaptive response to migration. It rapidly incorporates into an already xenophobic social context, occasionally borrowing from pre-existing ethnic, racial and cultural phobias, while modifying its nature and increasing its scope. At times, the category of the "stranger" (Simmel 1971) can also include more people than the representatives of other ethnic and cultural groups. Galina Vitkovskaya convincingly illustrated the existence of migrant phobia in its "pure form", during the process whereby resettled Russians and Russian refugees were rejected and considered as "outsiders" by the Russian host society (Vitkovskaya 1999: 151–91).

A necessary and inevitable mechanism of these ideas is the formation of stereotypes. A stereotype is first and foremost the elaboration of a relationship, less a heuristic evaluation than an appraisal and a way of classifying social information. It comes within the sphere of *a priori* knowledge and existing scientific knowledge. Consequently, stereotypes do not require critiques of sources of information, confirmations, internal logic, nor consistency in individual tenets. Yet it is stereotypes, rather than positive scientific knowledge, that shape social and governmental attitudes to migration processes and to migrants. Reflecting the prevailing attitudes to migrants, stereotypes predominantly articulate around xenophobic ideas.

Stereotypes are complex systems that evolve in time and space. It is therefore important to examine them from the inside, to observe their fluctuations and regional variations. Thus, the study of the dynamics and basic parameters of this set of factors represents a crucial scientific and practical task. In this regard, Russia constitutes a very interesting, and

1 The fascinating issue of Russian migration to China and of past and present Russian diasporas in that country warrants further analysis. While a large body of literature deals with Russian migration to China from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, contemporary migration flows have been undeservedly overlooked by researchers.

possibly unique, case to compare the formation of anti-Chinese phobias and stereotypes through the example of two different historical periods within a single country.

Beginning in the 1990s, it is possible to speak of a "second coming" of Chinese migrants. The first wave occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth century. The two periods were separated by the Soviet era, when the border was closed and the prohibition of seasonal migration led to the disappearance of the diaspora. Not only did the phenomenon itself disappear, but the very historical memory about this Chinese presence vanished as well. It also disappeared because entire social strata were eliminated – strata that carried historical traditions and memory. Consequently, the very image of the Chinese migrant was utterly effaced, and the 1990s witnessed a new encounter, a new and independent attempt to comprehend the phenomenon through the formation of stereotypes.

In both periods, migrants played a vital economic role in the host society and their presence was characterised by highly dynamic demographics. This led to tension and jealous attitudes towards them, and to negative reactions about the presence of migrants and local dependence on them. All this provides a unique opportunity to compare the response of the host society in radically different contexts, to identify similarities and differences within a constellation of prejudices and phobias that have formed independently of each other.

## The "Yellow Peril" at the turn of the twentieth century: a Russian variant of a global syndrome

The motives of the emergence, levels of tensions and basic parameters of anti-Chinese sentiments in late-imperial Russia cannot be understood outside the context of a specific set of motives and circumstances. Russia, perhaps for the first time in her history, was faced with a spontaneous, massive and highly concentrated influx (or "salvo") of migrant workers. These migrants differed drastically from Russia's inhabitants in terms of cultural characteristics, structure and way of life, behaviours and habits. The main stream of Chinese (and Korean) migrants was directed to a newly attached and sparsely populated territory, poorly integrated into the Far East Empire. Further, this region bordered China – a "sleeping giant" in the representations of the time. This led to strong anti-migrant sentiments.

These local Russian circumstances were repeatedly strengthened through their juxtaposition with the potent global syndrome of "Yellow Peril". The modern period gave rise to a phenomenon of "great xenophobia": great both in terms of its global character and of its regulating impact on the behaviour and in terms of the number of people involved. I share Lev Gudkov's opinion regarding the emergence of mass phobias, namely that the "emergence and development of symbolic 'enemies' are becoming models of particular reactions to processes of mass creation, initiated by modernising transformations in traditional societies" (2005: 17). The enemy becomes an essential tool of consolidation "of a fundamentally new social form – a poorly-managed plasma of mass resentment and indignation…" (ibid.: 19) as a result of the destruction of social order.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the "Yellow Peril" syndrome emerged as a global phenomenon and gained its appellation (see, for instance, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2009). In the United States, its formation was motivated by concurrent factors. A massive influx of Chinese workforce provoked strong anti-immigrant sentiments, a wave of commonplace racial hatred and violence. These sentiments were amplified and shaped by a well-developed mass culture. The syndrome became part of an ideological and political process embedded in mass culture (comics, films, criminal and fantasy novels). A powerful trend formed within mass culture – from the caricatured hero of the Yellow Kid to the image, which survived throughout the twentieth century, of the "sinister Dr Fu Manchu", a character in a series of detective novels and several films.[2] Dr Fu Manchu was a mystical Oriental, cunning and crafty, who possessed both incredible intellect and vast erudition; having received a European education, this made him especially terrible (Nepstad 2000). He was an absolute villain, intent on destroying European peace. He was a creature rather than a man, but an individualised creature, a colourful and unique personality.

In Germany, the syndrome evolved without common and recurrent contact with Chinese immigrants or China. It formed part of a geopolitical

2 For more on the Yellow Kid, see Sasha Sherman's "Zheltyi malchik v zheltoi reke", in *InterNet Magazine*, 15, available at: www.gagin.ru/internet/15/index.html (accessed 11.5.2012). Sherman writes that "in 1896, the caricaturist Richard Felton Outcault drew a character called "Yellow Kid" [...] He was an odd character, bald, lop-eared and snaggletoothed. He grinned mockingly. An ancestor of the Simpsons and of Beavis and Butthead, he was probably one of the first drawn characters in pop culture. His yellowness is attributable to the Sino-Japanese war of 1895, drawing for the first time the attention of the West to Japanese militarism and causing a wave of jingoist hysteria, which he parodied".

doctrine, based on ideas of statehood and racial and civilisational categories, together with a global perception of a "war of the worlds". Emperor Wilhelm II actively and intensively developed and disseminated the geopolitically-constructed syndrome of the "Yellow Peril" (Perepiska 1923: 8–10, 42–48; Wilhelm II 1923: 38–39). Planned and commissioned by him, a drawing was created in 1898 where a "group of women, portraying the main European nations, look in horror at the terrifying figure of a Buddha rising in the East, while an angel, standing on a mountain top, points at the figure with a sword in his hand. The drawing was accompanied by the following legend: 'Peoples of Europe, protect your most precious wealth'". The drawing was presented to Nicholas II with a note: "I beseech you to kindly accept this drawing sketched by me, representing the symbolic figures of Russia and Germany standing guard on the bank of the Yellow Sea to preach the Gospel, the truth and the light in the East" (Remnev 2004: 66).

In Russia, the modes of stereotyping in the USA and Germany merged together, and were reinforced by a distinct sense of insecurity in the Russian Far East. This distant outlying region – barely assimilated into the rest of the country, and isolated from the metropolitan area – was on the edge of a giant China, which had the potential to invade. China was still "asleep", and was perceived as a territory rather than as a bearer of sovereign power. However, it was potentially strong on account of its large population and its nationalistic tradition. The Russians wondered: what will happen if the sleeping giant awakes? The notion of a "yellow" expansionist Japan emerged following the Russo-Japanese war. The frightening consequences of a unification of China and Japan on the basis of race and the prospect of their joint "yellow expansion" were actively debated. These ideas clashed when tens of thousands of (mostly temporary and seasonal) Chinese migrant workers arrived, without whom the economic life, development and protection of the Russian Far East were impossible.

An important part of Russian tradition was the attitude towards the Chinese as an undifferentiated mass into which individuality dissolved. Epithets such as "crowd", "ants", "locusts" or "midges" were used to describe the Chinese. The description of the Chinese painted by the political writer A. Verezhnikov in *Sovremennik* is filled with depersonalising imagery:

> A Chinese crowd in blue rags, with the same beardless, yellow faces, wandering as far as the eye can see. It does not plot, argue, nor contradict… speaking with the same sibilant, squeaking voice… In this crowd there is no leader, no ring-leader, no individual standing out from the rest… No proud, bold, daring voices…. Every figure in a Chinese crowd moulded the

> same as the rest, like factory items… But in this indifference, half-sleep and somnolence one can detect an enduring patience for the right moment, a concealed suspicion. And it looks as if they are just about to start stirring all at once, that they will start moving their slanted eyes, rise and go. And they will go… dozens turning into hundreds, hundreds into thousands… and they will keep going, breeding and multiplying (Verezhnikov 1911: 124–30).

This sketch evokes complex feelings of contempt, fear, disgust and alienation as well as a little pity towards the Chinese. It does not promote relations to humans, but to locusts, to aliens – indeed, in another passage, the author notes they have "the look of creatures from a whole other planet".

All this led to the formulation of a phobia, combining the geopolitical element of the German variant, the results of extended competitive contacts with migrants, and the fear of losing the Far Eastern region as a result of "Sinicisation", as well as a sober awareness of the area's complete economic dependence on migrants. These various elements merged into forms of daily racism, migrant phobia and geopolitical fears, rising to levels of mystical feelings of an impending war. Vladimir Solovyev's complex philosophical constructions became the theoretical foundation for this (Solovyev 1990: 233, 635–762; Solovyev 1993: 233; Kobzev 1984: 189–91).[3]

These constructions also led to a powerful and highly effective metaphor – that of "Panmongolism". This image helped reinforce the syndrome of "Yellow Peril" through the concept of the "Mongolian yoke". From the nineteenth century to the present time Russian public consciousness, official ideology and school curricula have been dominated by the notion that the "yoke" would be the worst disaster in the country's history. Panmongolism does not relate in any way to actual Mongols. The mystical "Mongols" of Panmongolism are symbolic of ideas of "yellowness", "invasion" and "yoke", which coalesce into a general but pervasive fear of a "war of the worlds". Even propaganda leaflets, whose main idea was that, without foreign capital, Russia would lose the Far Eastern region, referred to the "impending Mongolian yoke" (Panov 1906). Within the discourse of the "Yellow Peril", a wide spectrum of opinions formed, but the mystical element, the fear of an impending mass war, was almost always present. Its typical symptom – an invasion of "yellow hordes" – became a familiar theme in the then popular genres of popular literature such as science fiction (Koshelev 2000).

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3 These constructions rested on eschatological notions of "threat from the East" or "Yellow Peril" as instruments of future deaths in Russia and generally leading to the annihilation of the old world.

The widespread sentiment was that the Chinese are "too numerous" and that the "yellow" population of the Russian Far East was growing at a faster rate than the Russian. The authorities saw the presence of the Chinese as a threat to national security, and there was particular concern about the lack of order and planning of the migration process, the huge scale of illegal infiltration, and the actual extra-territoriality of nationals of neighbouring empires (Arseniev 1914). Amur Governor-general Gondatti put it in this way:

> As for the political dimension of the question, being firmly anchored in their national culture, maintaining spiritual ties to their homeland, raising on foreign lands the faithful sons of their fatherland, and not feeling an especially strong urge to assimilate into the surrounding population, the Chinese constitute, in this as well, an element of downright hostility" (Dvizhenie 1997: 69–71).

The Chinese were perceived as fertile soil for so-called *hunhuznichestvo* [Chinese banditry] on a large scale (Nadarov 1896: 183–204). They were accused of taking their vices to an extreme. Opium dens and gaming houses were frequently described as the centres of Chinese slums (Schrader 1897). These slums were seen as hotbeds of poor sanitation. L. Bogoslovsky wrote that norms of hygiene are "foreign to the undeveloped mind of the Chinese" and, given the cost of housing, inaccessible to them; this created diseases, high mortality and the constant threat of epidemics (Bogoslovsky 1913: 20–33). A huge concern was the smuggling of *khanshin* (poor quality millet-based alcohol). The Chinese were frequently accused of carrying out predatory plundering of the wealth of the Ussuri *taiga*, illegal mining and gold smuggling. Exploitation by Chinese traders, poachers and bandits was deeply resented by the indigenous population of the province, and examples abound of violence, torture, murders and various forms of servitude (Nadarov 1887; Arseniev 1914).

The majority of problems linked to Chinese immigration were assessed in terms of "yellow labour". Specialist publications contain a qualified analysis of this state of affairs: industrial and regional dynamics of the practices of the Chinese and Korean workforce, levels of remuneration, cost structure and scale of financial outflow from the country (L. G. 1916: 140–71; Mezhduvedomstvennoe; Grave 1912; Matsokin 1911: 1–20; Panov 1910: 53–116; Predvaritel'nye 1924). China was able to export a low-cost, disciplined and seemingly unlimited workforce that was capable of quickly mastering new trades and spheres of activity. It was believed that this hindered settlement of the region by Russians, and increased "Sinicisation",

could lead to Russia's loss of the region. These beliefs existed in parallel with the understanding that without the "yellow" workforce, development of the region was impossible. This resulted in conflicts between various agencies and their specific interests.

The successful entrepreneur, public figure and political writer Spiridon Merkulov, argued that the official estimates of the number of Chinese in the region were too low (Merkulov 1911, 1911a, 1912). He suggested that the Chinese workers took their money back to China, which undermined the financial stability of the region. He also suggested that the "yellow labour" constituted an insurmountable barrier to the influx of Russian settlers. According to Merkulov, the extreme cheapness of the Chinese workforce was a result of its technical archaisms, particularly in the mining and manufacturing industries. He noted that Russian peasants and Cossacks lease out their land to the Chinese, and therefore reduce their own participation in productive labour. This leads to problems of parasitism, drunkenness and degradation among them. Chinese workers were becoming a source of social conflicts – strikes, and clashes with Russian workers. Part of the problem of a "yellow workforce" was also located in competitive relations in the sphere of commerce. Many authors noted that the Chinese, on account of their energy, entrepreneurship, work ethics and corporatism, monopolised a significant part of the small and medium retail business in a relatively short time.

Alarmism and the notion of a "Yellow Peril" were dominant but they were not the only approach to the problem under discussion during that time. There were authors who perceived the presence of the Chinese as a necessary part of life of the region. They sympathetically described the dire conditions typical of their life and work, disapproved of the arrogant and contemptuous attitudes displayed towards them by the authorities and by a significant portion of society, and protested against widespread abuses. Without this workforce, the fast and inexpensive establishment of the necessary infrastructure to ensure Russia's rule (cities, ports, roads, railways, agricultural and industrial production and mining) was impossible. Unless it was adequately developed economically, militarily and politically, the region would inevitably be lost by Russia. Such a position was taken by Merkulov's constant opponent, A. Panov (1910: 53–116; 1912: 241–82; 1912a: 171–84). In his writings, we find a sober and far-reaching thesis:

> Chinese influx does not present the spontaneous character with which it is usually credited. It is not the ineluctable aspiration responsible for the movement of glaciers, landslides, sea currents or the flow of lava against

> which human will is powerless. It is merely the most natural of economic phenomena, regulated, like any other phenomenon, by the laws of supply and demand, and it is therefore both possible and necessary to deal with it on an economic basis – by changing the conditions of the labour market (Panov 1912a: 251).

Similarly, Maxim Kovalevsky generally believed that "currently Chinese labour is characterised by seasonal work, it does not threaten the region with permanent settlement of Chinese in our eastern regions and is, therefore, unable to inspire serious political concerns" (1909: 423–37).

This kind of approach is seen, most clearly and professionally, in a report by the representative of the Ministry for foreign affairs, Vladimir Grave (1912). The main conclusion of this report is that the use of "yellow labour" carries with it a host of problems and dangers, but that it is both inevitable and necessary. It is consequently essential to regulate and guide its use, creating and perfecting a legal framework for it, as well as providing public institutions, and preparing highly qualified staff. The anonymous author of the article "Siberian Collection" strongly opposed this view, arguing that:

> … the Russian population, who do not share anything with the Chinese in terms of character, way of life and culture, look at the Manzi, in their folk expression, as creatures without a soul and, to some extent, even standing outside the law.[4] Differences in so many dissimilar civic traditions, religion, civilization and character, such as between Russians and Chinese, are seen everywhere, in all countries, and are accompanied by most severe difficulties which everywhere must seriously be taken into consideration… It is necessary… to withdraw needless criticisms of the Chinese and show that they also are people and that they have the right, just like anyone else, to legal protection insofar as they are equal, as is recognised by fundamental laws and not popular arbitrariness. In other words, it is essential to remove the Manzi from this improper position, for his own sake as well as for the sake of proper living conditions in the colonies of the Russian Far East" (L.-n. 1904: 77–108).

Nonetheless, the negative outlook was clearly dominant, and was openly and unambiguously stated in the brochure by P. Ukhtubuzhsky:[5]

> It is well-known that the yellow peoples nourish an organic hatred towards Europeans, and to us Russians in particular… They dream… of conquering the world… Invasion by the yellow races of the rich region of Siberia has

4 "Manzi" was the name given to the Chinese in the Russian Far East in the nineteenth century.

5 "P. Ukhtubuzhsky" is a pseudonym. The author's real name was Nikolai Dmitrievich Obleukhov.

> already begun. It is true that it is, as we say here, a 'peaceful' economic invasion, but through this peaceful invasion, Russians are being displaced by the yellow races who seize commerce, industry, wages, and so on… God guides people. Those nations who protect Good and Truth will be victorious. If Russia, carrying the light of Orthodoxy, faces in Asia the yellow races wallowing in the darkness of paganism, there cannot be any doubt as to the outcome of this struggle. Symbolising the 'Lord of the whole world', the Cross will overcome the Dragon (1913: 64–65, 75, 85).

## Contemporary Russia: the threat of "Chinese expansion"

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Russia's inhabitants once again came into massive and regular contact with Chinese migrants. As a result of market reforms, openness to the outside world and the establishment of good neighbourly relations and cooperation with China, there has been a massive influx of Chinese migrants, accompanied by robust economic activity. Migrants play an important role in the small retail trade, construction and agriculture of Russia. They facilitate the import of Chinese consumer goods to Russia and the export of certain raw materials to China. Their role in the Russian economy clearly surpasses their physical presence, which varies in accordance with economic conditions and fluctuates between half a million and one million people a year. A more accurate assessment is made difficult by an imperfect census system, the important role played by illegal migration and the fact that this migration is predominantly temporary (seasonal and pendulum migration). Nonetheless, permanent Chinese communities are beginning to emerge in Russia's principal economic centres.

Due largely to a Chinese influx, Russia is gradually becoming a country of in-migration, and this may represent a radical turning point in its transformation. An intensive process of reflection and evaluation of the phenomenon is taking place in public consciousness in order to fill a "blind spot" through a radical transformation of worldviews. The sudden appearance of masses of migrants from China in the early 1990s was, for the vast majority of Russians, not just unexpected but an enormous shock. The presence of Chinese in pre-revolutionary Russia and the experience of living with them had been wholly forgotten. Despite the vast quantity of pre-revolutionary texts, still physically present in libraries, the intellectual tradition of research on the issue had been interrupted and had fallen into oblivion. The ideological atmosphere and the country's phobias were now radically different.

The image of Chinese immigrants formed anew. This image reproduced a number of components from the previous century: that the Chinese are hardworking, simple and adaptable, with a sense of entrepreneurship. However, these qualities, positive ones in principle, are often painted negatively: hardworking (but at the expense of us patriots); self-reliant (but clannish and, again, detrimental to us).

Despite the massive presence of Chinese migrants in Russia, locals have not yet formed daily routine relationships with them. There is no familiar neighbourly and professional interaction, and no common work activity. Regular communication occurs only over the counter. This is a highly specific position, especially in a post-socialist society still affected by a powerful anti-market bias. Few incentives still exist to ensure that an individualised image of the Chinese emerges. This may seem odd considering the vast number of journalistic publications, reports and statements by political leaders and officials, and the growing number of scientific studies that exist. Chinese migrants are also regularly featured in television programmes, newspapers and special films. Nonetheless, there are no *faces*, including on television. There is no interest in the individual person, his life or his destiny. Russia is concerned not so much with the Chinese as people, but merely in the problems they are seen to embody. Before the revolution, the image of the Chinese was significantly richer in detail (even if some of this detail involved stereotyping). Today, the Chinese migrant has become a function, an abstraction.

There is one aspect of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century image of the Chinese that remains: the vision of them as an undifferentiated mass. Their large numbers constitute the basis of the construction of various fears about "demographic expansion" and the "Yellow Peril". What has shifted, however, is the emphasis placed on the assessment of group loyalties. This is largely due to the radical transformation of the role of China. If at the turn of the twentieth century, China was considered as a space rather than the actual medium of a sovereign power, today such a view is essentially impossible: China is now a superpower whose economic and military might is primordially directed outwards (if only due to the pressure of a huge and rapidly increasing population and the general limitations of its own resources). Migrants are seen as an absolutely loyal and obedient instrument, as the tentacles of this giant state. By contrast, in the constructions at the turn of the twentieth century, the Chinese were perceived as less state-bound: they dissolved not into the state, but into the group, into the "race".

The term "yellow", which was dominant at the turn of the twentieth century, has fallen almost completely out of use. It survives in the phrase "Yellow Peril", but essentially as the component of an established term. This disappearance is unlikely to be due to political correctness. It is, rather, the outcome of a peripheralisation of the powerful racial discourse that prevailed at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries in analyses of social relations and problems. However, the transformation of "Yellow Peril" into "Chinese threat" does not signal the disappearance or weakening of a phobia as such: its cornerstones are concepts of "expansion", "exploitation" and "criminality".

The widespread notion that Chinese migration constitutes a crucial tool of expansion was a purposeful, planned and organised idea, implemented by the state and by a population completely mobilised and organised through the state. In this construction, migrants themselves do not appear as individuals possessing their own motivations, free will and choices, but as integral organic extensions of the state. The old and widespread metaphor of "ants", implying mass, innumerability, orderliness and subordination of the individual will of the Chinese, remains.[6] This metaphor conveys another dimension: ants, while intelligent creatures, are not human. They are not guided by human logic and morality, and therefore attitudes towards them can be built outside of this context. An extreme expression of this approach is seen in the assessment of the problem of Chinese migrants and Chinese in general in terms of "biomass".

There is a widespread notion that Chinese authorities have a "plan" concerning migratory expansion into Russia. This plan allegedly includes a system of state organisation, planning and regulation, and is implemented through coercion and incentives (including the financial reward to the migrant obtaining permanent leave to remain in Russia). This thesis is widely represented in the media as well as in statements by officials and politicians, and in scientific work. Leonid Rybakovsky, Olga Zakharova and Vladimir Mindogulov played an enormous role in the shaping of this view:

> China has huge territorial claims against Russia and stimulates in every possible way the penetration of her citizens into Russian territory, building a basis for their legal presence. At the same time, the economic activities of these Chinese citizens bring colossal profits… The main goal of China's entry into Russia, regardless of its forms and channels, is its integration

6 On "Chinese ant-hills" see, for example, A. I. Gertsen (1967: 67–68).

> into economic activities, acquisition of property and land, i.e. the creation of economic and legal preconditions for the legal seizure of territory… In spite of the fact that, currently, Chinese immigration into the Russian Far East is predominantly of an illegal nature, the existing system of penetration provides a process for the settlement and legalisation of illegal migrants (Rybakovsky, Zakharova and Mindogulov 1994: 35–36).

The phrase "small groups of a hundred thousand people each" is an old Soviet joke from the time of Sino-Soviet military confrontation, and represents one of the principal notions of demographic expansion. The question of Chinese migrants cannot be a small affair, since there can never be few Chinese. Therefore, given the scarcity of the Russian population in general, and in the east of the country in particular, there is a sense that the Chinese will simply absorb the local population and will become the majority group. Strictly speaking, they have already absorbed it. And further away from the Chinese border people, Siberian and far eastern cities are thought to have been already settled by the Chinese.

Over the years, the most discussed migration-related question in Russia has been: how many Chinese people live here? No accurate statistics exist and none are anticipated. Reasons for this are obvious: illegality, inefficiency of state structures designed to count migrants, and lack of interest in obtaining authentic information. Estimates range from 300,000 to six million a year. The maximum estimates, which appeared in the early 1990s, have consistently been quoted in newspapers, speeches of officials, and even in scientific journals. The calculations of serious scientists and statements by border authorities, which indicate that the gap between entry and exit numbers is only a few percent (and this means that the illegal portion is not as great as is frequently imagined), are simply ignored. Estimates of several millions of migrants are already ossified, and form the basis of mass ideological constructions as well as solutions by the authorities. They confirm the authority of scientific and government experts.

"The Chinese can only give birth to Chinese" is a phrase by the popular writer of the Soviet period, Peter Proskurin. Part of the threat of Chinese migration is the potential for mixed marriages as an instrument of demographic expansion. Especially threatening is the strategy of "naturalisation though marriage", through which many illegal immigrants (as well as their children and relatives) acquire legal status through marriage, including bogus ones. On the implications of this phenomenon,

Leonid Rybakovsky and his co-authors write, unequivocally yet somewhat incorrectly:

> Historical experience shows that, at various stages in the development of the Far East, the specificity of the population of the Russian Far East, and particularly the specific policy of neighbouring countries, including Japan, give a real chance to a positive outcome of these long-term, well-costed actions for the natural assimilation into the population (Rybakovsky, Zakharova and Mindogulov 1994: 23).

Available estimates suggest that the number of such marriages is negligible – however, this is of no significance for the authors of these constructions. What is important – although no one has demonstrated that culture is based on "blood" – is the idea that the Chinese gene is powerful and spreading. This is a recent fear: in pre-revolutionary times, the overwhelming majority of Chinese migrants were seasonal so did not start families and did not settle.

As early as the start of the 1990s, a persistent myth about the existence of compact settlements of Chinese in the Russian Far East started to emerge, claiming that numerous settled areas are already populated predominantly by Chinese. The further one goes from the Far Eastern region, the more stable these representations. A large number of journalists, politicians and officials write and speak of these settlements as if they were a self-evident and indisputable fact, but without providing any names. Further, they offer a frightening picture of how these Chinese enclaves will demand autonomy before attempting a "reunification" with China. In 1996, Konstantin Sorokin noted as an evident and unquestionable fact the "growth of uncontrolled 'creeping' migration of Chinese into Russia (there are about 2 million of them in our country), the formation, especially in the Russian Far East, of 'Chinatowns' not subject to Russian laws, the massive purchase of real estate by Chinese entrepreneurs east of the Urals, facilitated by the passivity of local and central authorities" (1996: 107). In 2005, Alexander Khramchikhin was no less adamant:

> [The] East of Russia (in the best case scenario, the space to the east of Lake Baikal, possibly up to the east of the Yenisei River, and at worst, to the east of the Urals) will become, in the space of a couple of decades, a giant 'Kosovo'… It will be settled by Chinese and will become part of China economically, financially, administratively and politically. Formally, it will be considered Russian (until such time when a president in the Kremlin finally cedes de jure what has been already lost de facto) and the few citizens of Russia still living there will reside in ghettos. China understands very well that Russia

> will cede her own East, despite living from its resources. China is well aware that it will not survive without the appropriation of surrounding territories. China wants to live and therefore follows the only possible path ensuring its survival (2005: 61–64).

As in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contemporary thinking about Chinese immigration conforms to common ideas that migrants will inevitably and automatically make claim to the resources of the host society. What this implies is that the volume of resources remains essentially the same, thus the emergence of new people will automatically take them away from the existing population. A few common clichés about Chinese migrants are widespread:

- they take jobs away from Russians;
- they take away/steal Russian forests, metals and other natural resources; and
- they divert capital away from Russia.

Intimately linked to the overall set of migration myths is the belief in the absolute and inherent criminality of Chinese migrants (Vitkovskaya and Panarin 2000: 267–38). Specific to this particular discourse is the existence of China's ominous "triads".

## From "Yellow Peril" to "China threat": from "enemy" to "opponent"

Although the idea of the "China threat" carries similar connotation to "Yellow Peril", it still indicates a shift in thinking between centuries. It is not merely, if at all, a question of differentiated treatment in the relationship to "Yellows" – and it is unlikely that anyone today would regard the Chinese, Japanese and Mongols as a single community with common interests merely on the basis of race. The fear of the "Yellow Peril" was based on the idea that "Yellows" represented an enemy with inhuman, alien logic and motivations for their actions.[7] The "stranger"

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7 A typical example is that of the Norwegian polar explorer and social activist Fridtjof Nansen, who demonstrated his humanitarian nature in a giant-scale assistance to refugees and displaced persons in a famine relief effort in the Volga region following World War I. Nansen organically and completely naturally thought in terms of racial differences, confrontation and inevitable battle between "races" for a mutual annihilation (Nansen 1915).

appears not in the guise of a concrete enemy with very real interests and constituting a serious, possibly lethal, threat. He becomes the personification of "absolute evil", the embodiment of utter foreignness and fundamental incompatibility. He's the equivalent of the Devil. With him, any kind of negotiation, bargain or compromise is impossible. His logic simply cannot be understood. Conflict with him involves total confrontation, a mortal war that can only end with the annihilation of one of the parties. Gudkov argues:

> The issue is not about specific nuisances or individual actors – an antagonist, an opponent, a socially dangerous individual, i.e. about actions that are predictable and understandable through their own specific reasons. To ensure an actor becomes an "enemy", he must have a number of general characteristics: uncertainty and unpredictability, asocial force, ignorance of all regulatory or conventional constraints. With the emergence of the "enemy", conventional systems of positive reward and incentives for cooperation do not work, or take second place… From the enemy emerges a storm, a mortal danger to the very existence of the group (2005: 12).

The limits and lethalness of the threat follows from the fact that its vector is an individual of a fundamentally different world, an intelligent, reasoning creature that is not a human being.

With the disappearance of the epithet "yellow", racial discourse becomes peripheral in the analysis of social relations and problems. Racism, of course, remains, and racial differences continue to inform and reflect the nature of human connections and relationships, but the widespread notions of an unbridgeable gulf between races, and the vision of other races as aliens, has generally gone. The object of fear does not merely become concrete, it also becomes more rational. The "enemy" is becoming the "opponent", and the imagined "war of the worlds" is transforming into a conflict between states and peoples. The horrifying vision of a collision between civiliations gives way to fears about Chinese expansionism, about an influx of migrants. The conception of "threats" translates onto a rational plane.

This shift could have far-reaching consequences. As a phobia becomes rationalised and as its mystical and transcendental component becomes peripheral, its mobilisation force is significantly reduced. Very indicative in this sense are the dynamics of anti-Chinese sentiments among the population of Siberia and the Russian Far East; peaking in 1990, they drastically decrease later with the intensification of economic and human contact with China and the Chinese. Moreover, recent studies show that migrants come to be regarded as an important resource which then requires protection

(Blyakher and Pegin 2010: 485–501). This may become a guarantee, if only with respect to a rational immigration policy by the authorities. By using xenophobic sentiments as an instrument of power, occasionally contributing to their formulation and dissemination, the ruling elite are not immune to a boomerang effect. Sometimes they themselves become infected by the completely irrational fears created partly by them, thus leading them to irrational actions and decisions – often with disastrous consequences.

One of these consequences is clearly stated in the title of the book by David Shimmelpennink van der Oye (2009): *Towards the Rising Sun: How Imperial Myth-making Led Russia Into War with Japan*. It was precisely the syndrome of "Yellow Peril" that led to the catastrophe of the Russian-Japanese war. Similarly, Officer of the Imperial Russian Army Baron Roman Ungern von Sternberg attempted to organise a "new Mongol invasion" against a "rotten Europe" (Jozefovich 2010). This farcical, but nonetheless bloody, episode in the Civil War waged in Siberia came about partly out of the sincere belief of its instigator that a "yellow invasion" was inevitable and that it may be instrumentalised.

A complex combination of arrogant beliefs in the superiority of the "white man" and powerful latent fears about an all-sweeping and devastating "yellow wave" gave rise in 1900, at the time of the Boxer Rebellion in China, to an extraordinarily intense panic in the vicinity of Blagoveshchensk. The panic of the population and the confusion of the authorities led to a pogrom in the course of which thousands of Chinese residing in the city were drowned in the waters of the Amur river (Dyatlov 2003: 123–41). Against this background of fear in the face of immigration, the completely irrational decision made by contemporary Russian authorities to prohibit foreigners from trading on open markets appears fairly innocuous and does not have such fatal consequences.

Thus the unique situation of two distinct waves of Chinese economic migration to Russia, waves separated by the deep chasm of the Soviet era, shows that the migrant phobia can find overlapping but ultimately different forms of expression. Indeed, very different fears and prejudices can be concealed behind a historically formed concept such as the "Yellow Peril", and the profound cultural differences setting apart the Chinese migrants and the Russian host society can possibly give rise to a "war of the worlds". This has far-reaching consequences. If migrant phobia is undergirded by a conflict of interest, rather than fears predicated on ethnic survival, then the emergence of peaceful coexistence and cooperation is a perfectly realistic outcome.