

Demographic factor of the influence of Russian culture in the Northeast of China

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Abstract

Russian culture has had a significant impact on the culture and demographics of Northeast China, particularly in Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces. This impact spans various historical stages, including Sino-Russian trade and migration during the Qing Dynasty, the complex Sino-Soviet relations of the 20th century, and the exchanges following the opening of the Sino-Russian border. This essay explores these influences through seven major aspects: population migration and settlement, architecture and urban planning, language and education, religious influence, cuisine and cultural practices, economy and trade, and demographic impact.

Keywords:

Russia, China, culture, demography, migration, language, religion, everyday life, economics

1. Population Migration and Settlement

Historical Migration

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Russians migrated to Northeast China due to political turmoil, civil war, and other factors. These immigrants settled primarily in cities like Harbin, forming significant Russian expatriate communities. This wave of migration brought cultural, architectural, and social influences that have left a lasting mark on the region (Han & Liu, 2020). The Russian community established schools, churches, and businesses, creating a vibrant expatriate enclave that influenced local customs and lifestyles.

The influx of Russian immigrants transformed Harbin into a bustling cosmopolitan center, often referred to as "Oriental Moscow" or "Little Paris." By the early 20th century, Harbin was home to one of the largest Russian communities outside Russia, with over 100,000 Russians living in the city. This significant population presence led to the establishment of Russian-language schools, newspapers, and cultural institutions, fostering a rich cultural exchange (Ben-Canaan, Grüner, & Prodöhl, 2022).

Демографический фактор влияния русской культуры на Северо-Восток Китая

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Аннотация

Русская культура оказала значительное влияние на культуру и демографию Северо-Восточного Китая, особенно в провинциях Хэйлунцзян, Цзилинь и Ляонин. Это влияние охватывает различные исторические этапы, включая китайско-российскую торговлю и миграцию во времена династии Цин, сложные китайско-советские отношения XX в. и обмены после открытия китайско-российской границы. В данной статье автор рассматривает эти влияния через семь основных аспектов: миграция населения и расселение, архитектура и городское планирование, язык и образование, религиозное влияние, кухня и культурные практики, экономика и торговля, а также демографическое воздействие

Ключевые слова:

Россия, Китай, культура, демография, миграция, язык, религия, повседневность, экономика

Contemporary Migration

Following the opening of the Sino-Russian border, there has been an increase in the flow of people between the two countries, including laborers, students, and businessmen. This ongoing exchange continues to reinforce the cultural and demographic ties between the two nations (Business Insider, 2022). Modern migration trends have seen a diversification of the Russian presence in Northeast China, with new waves of migrants contributing to economic activities and cultural exchanges.

The establishment of economic zones and trade agreements has facilitated this migration, with Russian entrepreneurs setting up businesses in cities like Harbin and Dalian. Similarly, Chinese workers and students have moved to Russia, contributing to a vibrant exchange of skills, knowledge, and culture. This contemporary migration has not only enhanced economic cooperation but also deepened the cultural connections that date back over a century.

2. Architecture and Urban Planning

Harbin's Architecture

Harbin is renowned for its Russian expatriate community and its numerous Russian-style buildings, such as St.

Sophia Cathedral. These architectural styles have had a lasting impact on the local urban landscape and cultural atmosphere. The city's architecture is a physical testament to the deep-rooted Russian influence (Han & Liu, 2020). The St. Sophia Cathedral, built in 1907, is one of the most iconic examples of Russian Orthodox architecture in China. Its Byzantine-style domes and intricate brickwork highlight the Russian architectural heritage and serve as a major tourist attraction, symbolizing the historical ties between the two cultures.

In addition to the St. Sophia Cathedral, Harbin boasts many other examples of Russian-influenced architecture, including the old Harbin Railway Station, the Jewish New Synagogue, and numerous residential buildings. These structures feature distinct architectural elements such as arched windows, decorative cornices, and ornate facades, reflecting the aesthetic preferences of their Russian designers. This architectural legacy contributes to Harbin's unique charm and draws visitors interested in its historical and cultural heritage (Xue & Ding, 2018).

Urban Planning

Early Russian immigrants brought European urban planning concepts, which influenced the development layout of cities like Harbin. This planning included wide boulevards, public squares, and a mix of residential and commercial areas, contributing to the unique urban character of these cities (Xue & Ding, 2018). The influence of Russian urban planning is evident in the structured layout of Harbin, with its grid-like street patterns and well-planned public spaces. This approach to urban design has facilitated the city's growth and modernization, making it a key economic and cultural hub in Northeast China.

The city of Harbin, under Russian influence, was planned with a European sensibility that emphasized accessibility, aesthetic appeal, and functional public spaces. Key features included the broad Central Avenue (Zhongyang Dajie), which remains a major commercial and cultural thoroughfare lined with historic Russian and European-style buildings. The urban planning principles introduced by the Russians have endured, influencing subsequent Chinese urban development strategies in the region.

3. Language and Education

Language Influence

In places like Harbin, Russian was once the primary foreign language, with many schools offering Russian courses. Many older generations can still speak Russian, reflecting the deep linguistic ties that have developed over the years (Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, 2018). The prevalence of the Russian language in educational institutions and daily life underscored the close cultural and political relationships between the two countries. This linguistic connection has also enabled greater cultural understanding and collaboration, particularly in the fields of science and technology.

During the early 20th century, Russian was commonly spoken in Harbin, and it was not unusual for business transactions, social interactions, and educational instructions to be conducted in Russian. Schools established by the Russian community offered a curriculum based on Russian educational standards, further entrenching the language in the region. Even today, Russian remains an important language for trade and tourism in Northeast China, with many signs and menus in Harbin bilingual in Chinese and Russian.

Educational Exchange

There is frequent educational exchange between China and Russia, with many Chinese students choosing to study in Russia, especially in the fields of science and technology. This exchange helps to foster mutual understanding and collaboration between the two nations (Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, 2018). Collaborative programs and scholarships have facilitated the exchange of knowledge and expertise, enriching the academic and professional landscapes of both countries. These educational exchanges have also led to the formation of networks and partnerships that continue to influence bilateral relations.

Institutions such as Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT) have historically collaborated with Russian universities and research institutes. This partnership has been instrumental in advancing scientific research and technological development in China. The exchange programs often focus on engineering, space technology, and medical research, areas where Russian expertise is highly valued. These academic collaborations have also promoted cross-cultural understanding and lifelong professional relationships between Chinese and Russian scholars.

4. Religious Influence

Eastern Orthodoxy

Russian Orthodoxy has a presence in places like Harbin, with multiple Orthodox churches and related religious activities historically. These religious institutions not only serve the spiritual needs of their congregations but also act as cultural centers that preserve and promote Russian heritage (Business Insider, 2022). The presence of Orthodox churches, such as the Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God, highlights the religious diversity brought by Russian immigrants. These churches have become important landmarks and community hubs, offering a glimpse into the religious practices and traditions of the Russian diaspora.

The architectural beauty and historical significance of these churches have made them key attractions in Harbin. They host various religious ceremonies, cultural festivals, and community events, keeping the traditions of Russian Orthodoxy alive in the region. The churches also provide a sense of continuity for the descendants of Russian immigrants, maintaining a spiritual and cultural link to their heritage.

5. Cuisine and Cultural Practices

Culinary Culture

Russian cuisine, such as bread and borscht, is popular in Northeast China. Traditional Russian foods and cooking methods have integrated into the local culinary culture, adding to the region's diverse food landscape (Business Insider, 2022). The popularity of Russian dishes, including pelmeni (dumplings) and blini (pancakes), reflects the deep culinary exchanges between the two cultures. Russian restaurants and bakeries in Harbin continue to attract locals and tourists alike, offering an authentic taste of Russian gastronomy.

Harbin's food scene is a testament to its rich cultural tapestry, where Russian culinary traditions blend seamlessly with local Chinese flavors. The city's restaurants often feature Russian delicacies like beef stroganoff, smoked fish, and various pastries, which have become staples in the local diet. The culinary exchange also extends to beverages, with Russian vodka and kvass (a fermented drink) being popular among the locals.

Cultural Activities

Russian festivals and cultural activities, such as circuses and ballet, also influence Northeast China, enriching the local cultural life. Events like the Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival often feature Russian cultural elements, attracting tourists and fostering cultural exchange (Business Insider, 2022). These cultural activities not only celebrate Russian heritage but also contribute to the multicultural identity of the region. Performances by Russian artists and participation in cultural festivals enhance mutual appreciation and understanding between the two communities.

The Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival, one of the largest of its kind in the world, often showcases Russian-themed sculptures and hosts Russian performers. The event draws millions of visitors each year, highlighting the enduring cultural connections between China and Russia. Additionally, Russian circuses and ballet companies frequently tour Harbin, bringing world-class performances that are eagerly anticipated by local audiences.

6. Economy and Trade

Border Trade

Sino-Russian border trade is very active in Northeast China. Russian goods, such as timber and machinery, enter China, while Chinese light industrial products are exported to Russia. This trade is a critical component of the local economy and reflects the close economic ties between the two countries (Xue & Ding, 2018). The bustling trade activities at border cities like Suifenhe and Manzhouli underscore the economic interdependence between China and Russia. These cities have become vital trade hubs, facilitating the exchange of goods and services and driving regional economic growth.

The trade relationship has evolved significantly over the years, with both countries benefiting from the exchange of raw materials, manufactured goods, and technological know-how. Joint ventures and cooperative enterprises have

been established to leverage the strengths of both economies. The border trade has also fostered a mutual understanding and respect for each other's business practices and cultural norms.

Cooperative Projects

The two countries' cooperative projects in energy, transportation, and other fields, such as cross-border railways and pipelines, further promote population and cultural exchanges. These projects enhance economic interdependence and foster deeper bilateral relations (Xue & Ding, 2018). Major infrastructure projects, such as the China-Russia oil pipeline, highlight the strategic partnership between the two nations. These collaborations not only boost economic development but also create opportunities for cultural and social interactions, strengthening the overall relationship.

The construction of cross-border infrastructure like the Heilongjiang River Bridge has facilitated easier movement of goods and people, enhancing trade efficiency and connectivity. These projects have also created job opportunities and spurred economic development in the border regions, contributing to the prosperity and stability of both countries.

7. Demographic Impact

Ethnic Integration

The Russian ethnic group is one of China's ethnic minorities, mainly distributed in the Northeast. These Russian people contribute significantly to the cultural diversity of the area, bringing their unique traditions and customs to the local cultural mosaic (Chen, 2024). The integration of Russian communities into the broader Chinese society has enriched the cultural and social landscape of Northeast China. The preservation of Russian customs and traditions, alongside Chinese practices, creates a vibrant and diverse cultural environment.

The Russian minority in China, officially recognized as the "Russian ethnic group," continues to celebrate their heritage through festivals, traditional clothing, and cultural events. This community has established cultural associations and societies that promote the teaching of the Russian language and the preservation of Russian folklore, music, and dance.

Marriage and Family

Sino-Russian intermarriage is relatively common in border areas, forming cross-cultural families and further promoting cultural integration. These marriages often lead to bilingual and bicultural households, enriching the social fabric of the region (Chen, 2024). Cross-cultural marriages have fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of both cultures, contributing to the harmonious coexistence of different ethnic groups. These families play a crucial role in maintaining and promoting the cultural heritage of both nations.

Children from these families often grow up fluent in both languages and familiar with both cultures, acting as bridges between the two communities. These bilingual and bicultural

individuals are valuable assets in promoting bilateral relations, understanding, and cooperation.

Conclusion

Russian culture has influenced Northeast China in various ways, from historical to modern times, and from culture to the economy, deeply embedded in various aspects of local society. This influence is evident in the region's architecture, urban planning, language, education, religious practices, cuisine, and cultural activities, as well as in the active economic and demographic exchanges between China and Russia. The rich cultural exchanges and historical ties between the two nations have created a unique and vibrant cultural landscape in Northeast China, showcasing the enduring legacy of Russian influence.

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