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#### V. HAN'S ARCHIVE – A SOURCE FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF ETHNOCULTURAL IDENTITY PROCESSES

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#### *Abstract*

This article is devoted to the problem of ethno-cultural identification in the emigrant community of Harbin which is the center of the eastern branch of foreign countries from the 20s of the last century to the beginning of the 2000s. For a long time, this phenomenon was studied on the basis of archival documents, memoirs of famous historical figures, writers and poets. The source and the material of the research is the recently opened archive of Valentina Han, an ethnic Korean woman brought up in Russian culture, who considered herself to be Russian and was the spiritual leader of the last Russian Harbinites. The archive includes copies of V.P. Han's letters sent to her relatives, friends and acquaintances, letters and copies of letters sent by Harbinites to the USSR, Russia, Australia, USA, etc., greeting cards, letters, documents, notes, etc. of Russian residents of Harbin. Living conditions in Harbin allowed V. Han to get a brilliant education, brought up love for the Russian language and Russian culture, and formed ascetic ideals. Russia as an ethno-cultural setting defined ethnolinguistic, ethno-religious and ethno-psychological aspects of V. Han's personality. Judging by the archive, the spiritual scrapers in the years of trial were the deep Orthodox faith and the desire for education. Valentina Han's archive collection was also perceived as a spiritual mission to preserve the cultural heritage of her relatives and friends. The research was conducted with the help of attribution and textual reconstruction of archival documents, archival heuristics.

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**Keywords:** Harbin, archives, source studies, orthodoxy, ethnocultural Identity.



## **1. Introduction**

The phenomenon of Russian emigration in the Far East has recently been actively studied on the basis of archival documents (Bureau for Russian Emigrants in the Manchurian Empire - BREM) and written sources, which are memoirs of historical figures, famous people, writers, poets (Zabiako, Zabiako, Levoshko, & Khisamutdinov, 2015; Zabiako, 2016). However, the "oral history" of "common people", which are the survived emigrants and their descendants (Zinenko & Ju, 2015; Zabiako & Zabiako, 2018; Zabiako, Zinenko, & Zhang, 2018), their epistolary heritage and private archives, has no less historical value.

One of these collections is the archive of the Harbin Russian Valentina Han (Han, 2005), which belongs to the collection of amateur historian Li Liang: copies of V.P. Han letters sent to her relatives, friends and acquaintances, letters and copies of letters sent by Harbinites to the USSR, Russia, Australia, USA, etc., greeting cards, letters, documents, notes, newspaper clippings, photographs, invoices, statements to the authorities, death certificates, etc.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The research is based on the problem of reconstructing the processes of ethno-cultural identification of emigrants who found themselves after the revolution in China, in Northern Manchuria, and who inhabited the multinational, multi-confessional Harbin from the beginning of the 20s to the end of the last century.

## **3. Research Questions**

Valentina Han's archive as a source; biography of Valentina Pavlovna Han and her family as a typical fate of common Russian emigrants in Harbin; ethno-cultural and ethno-religious processes in Harbin in the XX century; position and self-consciousness of former emigrants during the Japanese occupation, after the formation of the People's Republic of China, during the "cultural revolution", after rehabilitation; the role of Orthodoxy in the life of the emigrant community; ethnicity as a conscious choice.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the work is to study the strategies of ethno-cultural identification of emigrants in the conditions of forced isolation from Russia, economic difficulties of refugee status, political repressions, lack of spiritual support on the basis of archival documents.

## **5. Research Methods**

The study uses methods of archival heuristics and attribution, source analysis, textual reconstruction.

## 6. Findings

Valentina Han was born in a Korean family in Nikolsk-Ussuriysk in 1922 (Kositsyn, 2005). According to other sources, on October 31, 1924, in Changchun (Han, 2005), where her father Pavel Trofimovich Han moved to in 1923. He was born in Vladivostok; there in 1918 he married Valya's mother Elizabeth Pavlovna:

*Being a native of the Primorsky Krai of Russia, he [P.T. Han] in 1923 together with his wife moved to China, Changchun, where in 1924 their daughter Valentina was born. There were no Russians in Changchun at that time, so he and his family moved to Harbin, where I [Georgy Han] was born in 1927, and in 1930 my younger brother Erast was born. (Han, 2008, p.1)*

Soon Valentina Pavlovna's father, a descendant of a poor peasant family, who had three classes of parochial school and two classes of gymnasium, started business and became a wealthy man:

*He was gifted by nature with an analytical mind and a commercial ability, and he was able to dispose of people and find common ground with them. All these qualities contributed to the success of his business, and by the time he was 18 he had led his family out of need. (Han, 2008, p.2)*

Valentina entered the Russian Gymnasium named after Dostoevsky, which after closing became the Gymnasium of the Bureau for Russian Emigrants (BREM), and then was renamed by the Japanese into the 2nd Higher School for Women. She graduated in 1939, entered the Commercial Department of the North Manchurian University and graduated in 1942, receiving a degree of Candidate of Commercial Sciences. From 1939 to early 1946, Valya was studying piano at the First Harbin Music School under the supervision of N.K. Fokina-Sidorova. In 1943 Valentina took sewing courses under the supervision of Zh.T. Ignatovich, and from 1944 to January 1946 she took an Obstetrical and Feldsher course at the Mariinsky Red Cross Community in Harbin. In addition to the Korean language, which she practically did not use in her adult life, Valentina knew the Russian language in which she thought, wrote letters; English language, which she learned at the courses at the Christian Young People's Association (CYPA) college; Chinese language, which she learned during her 12-year imprisonment and exile in China; Japanese language, which, like Russian and English, she taught. "Having such a brilliant all-round education, Valya was already at school imbued with a great love for Russia, for everything Russian and, while being in the Russian environment, she sometimes forgot that she was Korean" (Han, 2005, p.6). Valya was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church and until the end of her life remained a deeply religious person, emphasizing that it was her faith that helped her to survive during the difficult years of mental and physical trials.

In 1945, Soviet troops entered the city, and then, after their departure, troops of the 8th Chinese army, which included Korean divisions. Koreans could not forgive Pavel Trofimovich Han's wealth: "Once they broke into our house, they threw us all out into the street and completely plundered our house, taking everything they could carry away, and what they could not, barbarously smashing and destroying everything" (Han, 2008, p.2), and the Chinese authorities nationalized all the three houses belonging to the family. The Hans had to move from Harbin to the Yakeshi Railway Station. Father, both sons and daughter

got a job in the Department of Forest Concessions of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the Vorontsov Brothers, where Valentina worked as a secretary-machine operator: *"Firstly, the war, the intrigues of the Kuomintang, which forced our family to leave Harbin urgently and go to Yakeshi, where I lived for several years. Secondly, I had to think about my earnings. In Yakeshi I worked as a secretary-machine operator for a Soviet lieutenant colonel, then I returned to Harbin, and my parents with Yura and Eric stayed in Yakeshi. I continued to improve my qualification at the East Economic Department, working simultaneously in the Forest Department of the Railway."* Working in the Department, V.P. Khan also took an active part in the social life of the town, was the secretary of the Local Trade Union Committee and Deputy Chairman of the Union of Soviet Youth: "On the initiative and under the leadership of Valya was built a rural stadium. There was no time to miss, but we still missed Harbin" (Han, 2008, p.3).

In August 1949, Valentina Pavlovna was transferred to work in Harbin, where her parents soon moved as well. In the 50-60s, both brothers moved to Kazakhstan one by one. Valentina tried to get a visa to meet Georgiy, often went to the embassy in Beijing. The "cultural revolution" began and Valentina was accused of "spying for the USSR": "On August 29, 1964, she [V.P. Han] was grabbed in the street and pushed into a car and taken to prison, where she was placed in solitary confinement." (Han, 2005, p.6). For eight years, she was summoned for questioning every day. Only eight years and five months later she got a sentence of ten years' imprisonment and she was allowed to see her mother for the first time. In a letter to a friend, Valya wrote: *"You ask me about my dad and brothers. My dad died in 1973 when I was in prison. He was paralyzed for 8 months and kept calling me "Valya, where are you; why aren't you going home?"* (Harbin Russian Archive Catalog). It took six months before she knew about her father's death from her mother, who at first did not recognize her daughter when she was dating: the years of imprisonment and illness changed Valentina so much. Valya herself was shaken by the look of Elizabeth Pavlovna: "in mourning, with paid clothes, with a poor handover" - her parents sold everything they could for trifling sum in order to somehow survive during her absence.

Being a deeply religious person, Valya was always praying warmly in her imprisonment. In the letter, V. Khan records his visionary experience: *"You know, Milushenka, I saw you in prison in a dream very clearly, you stood in a chapel, brightly lit by many candles, and came to me with comforting words. Another time in prison I also dreamt of the spiritual father Filaret with V. Zernakov standing next to him, they were praying, and then father Filaret blessed me. So I thought that you all were praying for me. A low bow to all who prayed for me is a great sinner. It was the Lord God who punished me for all my sins in my youth. Now my soul has been cleansed of the dirt and vices of life, but certainly not enough yet."*

Later on, she stoically evaluated the years in isolation: *"I wouldn't have so much free time and patience at large"* (Harbin Russian Archive Catalog). Every day, between prayers, she read Chinese newspapers and magazines and Mao Tse Tung's works with the help of Russian-Chinese and Chinese-Russian dictionaries. Georgy Han wrote that by the end of her imprisonment she was already fluent in Chinese (Han, 2005).

In 1975, the authorities sent Valentina to the village for "rehabilitation", where she was given the heaviest and dirtiest job. Her long prison sentence undermined her health to such an extent that the prison doctor passed a harsh sentence: Valya is not a tenant in this world. In Russia and among the Harbinites there were rumors that Valentina died in prison: *"Before she was released from the camp, there was a rumor*

among the "Chinese" that you were dead and everyone who knew you were grieving for you. It was only in 1995 that I received a newspaper from a friend from Novosibirsk that said that you visited Novosibirsk, which could not but please me." (Harbin Russian Archive Catalog).

She was let go to die, but she survived and returned to an empty house: *"I think I was born in a shirt that jumped out of the pot of our "great cultural revolution".* (Russian Harbin archive-catalogue). One of her pen pal exclaimed: *"I bow my head to your sufferings and tortures of the past years. You have endured everything heroically and found new interest and desire to live. Praise your heroic deeds. What a great example to thousands and thousands of men. I saw a lot of them in Stalin's camps, they were wearing men's pants, but they had souls of a worm. Remember, in your youth, you read the poet's expression about people like you: "Such a woman, just like you, died at the stake for France!" [lines from M. Kolosova's poem], comparing herself with Jeanne D'Arc!"*.

In 1982 Valentina Pavlovna was rehabilitated, she was given a two-room apartment, paid a part of her salary of 10 thousand yuan, paid a pension: *"I am even grateful to the fate that now I live very well. I live alone in a 43-square-metre apartment (two rooms, a kitchen, a hall and a toilet)... "*. Despite the external attractiveness, *"personal life did not work out. I married, but very unsuccessfully, so divorced. Everyone has their own concept of happiness. I think happiness is respect and recognition of my abilities in society. And I don't think about personal life anymore, I have no interest"*.

Having experienced incredible hardships and deprivations, unable to build personal happiness, Valentina Pavlovna gave herself to her students. To begin with, she gathered a small group and began to teach Russian. Later, she began to teach Russian at the Polytechnic Institute, and the English language groups were also formed. The children loved their teacher with all their heart, and grateful parents tried to do something nice in return: *"Thirteen or more years, until the end of 1991, I taught Russian, English and sometimes Japanese at home. I earned quite well, though I took the smallest fee from my students in the whole city. They laughed at me, that I take little money, but now many students have already become translators and go to the cities of the CIS with trade delegations. So I did not live my life in vain"* (Harbin Russian Archive Catalog). Later Valentina also began to teach the *"kids to play the piano"* (Harbin Russian Archive Catalog).

In different years 1235 pupils have passed through Valentina Pavlovna's lessons: *"I'm busy with pupils every day and on Sundays I opened the "Salon of spoken Russian" in the Workers' Palace on the Starokharbinskoe highway. I have already spent 5 Sundays. She is already 82 years old. I walk quite energetically so far, but with a cane"*.

After Pokrovskaya church in Harbin was opened (after a long break), V.P. Han began to take part in church and public life; she helps father Gregory, rector of the church, teaches the half-blooded parishioners to sing pious chansonette: *"We have only one Orthodox church in the city, which is Pokrovskaya (this is the former old cemetery, which was demolished, but the church was left behind). It was opened only in last year (1984). Father Gregory, a Chinese man, serves in it, but he speaks Russian, because he was brought up in the Beijing Theological Seminary. He is 59 years old. Pavel Suslov personally provided me with a great help in opening our church, and I have been writing to him for more than 2 years. Very often on Sundays, foreign tourists come to the church to visit the fair and take pictures. Unfortunately, there are not many Russian Harbinites praying in the church, because all of them are the elderly and have*

*difficulty getting to the church. There are many half-blooded people".* Valentina Pavlovna actively promoted the distribution of cassettes with church songs, she shared them with familiar Orthodox Harbinites.

In every letter to her relatives and friends, Valya wrote congratulations in honor of the Orthodox holidays, as well as reported the news of the Orthodox community of Harbin: *"By the way, today is the Day of Remembrance, I went to the cemetery with a group of Russians and half-blooded people remaining in Harbin. We got a full bus. Father Gregory Zhu served at the graves"* (Harbin Russian Archive Catalog).

Valya got many letters with admiring reviews and advice about church affairs in Harbin: *"But for us, Harbin was different. And you are destined to become the keeper of his antiquity, the guardian angel of this handful of Orthodox people gathering under the vaults of Pokrovskaya Church"*. In 1997 Valentina Pavlovna was awarded a diploma from the New York Orthodox community for her active participation in the search for the relics of Bishop Iona Hankouski in 1994.

Valentina Pavlovna Han passed away suddenly on November 8, 2005 from a heart attack. She did not want to be cremated under the Chinese law: *"...our cemetery will probably lose its purpose in the near future, because there are very few Russian old ladies and old men left, and after them, perhaps, the cemetery will be flattened. Now you can't bury orthodox Chinese, Koreans and other nationalities there, except Russians and half-blooded people, so I'm already thinking about what will happen to my body after death. I do not want to be burned in the crematorium, and when placed in storage there, it is necessary to pay annual fees for the ashes, and who will pay fees for me after my death?"*. She is buried near her parents' graves, as she wanted (Han, 2006). There was no priest in Pokrovskaya Church at the time, and Australian Harbinites, friends of Valentina, sent from Sydney a tape recording of the funeral service they had performed on the day of their good friend's death (Han, 2006).

## **7. Conclusion**

The Harbin resident's, ethnic Korean Valentina Han's archive is not only an evidence of the private fate of the Russian righteous person, without whom, as you know, the Russian world does not exist.. Scrupulously collected and preserved in a variety of epistolaries, addressees and margins of various kinds, this archive impartially testifies to the complex and tangled history of common Russian emigrants who remained in China in its daily life. In this life, Russian identity, as a conscious choice, becomes the basis for consolidation around Russian cultural traditions, Orthodox customs, and projections for the future of many Far Eastern emigrants.

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