

Escaping from Bolsheviks, ending up in Japanese military camps: The Armenians in Harbin (1900-1950)

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Current article, for the first time in a Western language,¹ outlines the history of one of many Armenian communities, now disappeared, which might be interesting and useful for the researchers of emigration (particularly, Russian and Armenian) history in China in general and the history of Harbin city in particular. While the history of Russian migration in China is known and well researched, the microhistory of this subgroup remains less studied.

The Armenians were already established in the territory of China in the early Middle Ages. In modern times they had settled in large numbers in different Chinese regions at the end of the nineteenth century and, particularly, in the city of Harbin. Founded in 1898 with the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, the city prospered as a place inhabited by an overwhelming majority of immigrants

from the Russian Empire, including Armenians. With one million inhabitants, Harbin was a city of Czarist Russia's colonial dreams, the rapid growth of which attracted representatives of various nationalities. In the first half of the twentieth century, it was the most cosmopolitan city in the Far East, with 53 different nationalities.² The Russian citizens represented more than 28 nationalities.³ As in 1904, the Russian writer Vasily Nemirovich-Danchenko noted:

“Talking with numbers, dreams with multiplication tables, thoughts on algebraic accounts. Harbin was like this before the war and stayed like that. Only now the newcomers joined the firstcomers, who rushed here from every part of Russia with a single goal: to grab a great deal of money, avoiding the military court and survive healthy and timely. The Armenians, Georgians (Imeretians), Germans, Jews, Russian kulaks [wealthy peasants], and even

¹ My study, presenting the comprehensive history of the Armenians in Harbin and generally in China, is in Armenian: see Արծուի Բախչինյան, Հայերը Չինաստանու: Հայ-չինական պատմամշակութային առնչութիւնները (Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Armenians in China. Armenian-Chinese Historical and Cultural Relations, Yerevan, 2017). The Chinese translation of current article, done by Zhang Xiaoxu (张小旭), was published in “The Northeast History Research” magazine (see 阿特斯维·巴克钦扬, 亚美尼亚人在哈尔滨 (1900-1950) ,东北史研究, no. 4, 2020, pp. 40-61).

² E. G. Sergoyan, The Gathering Place: Stories from the Armenian Social Club in Old Shanghai (Seattle, 2012), p. 27.

³ See Дальний Восток России – северо-восток Китая: исторический опыт взаимодействия и перспективы сотрудничества: материалы международной научно-практической конференции, посвященной 60-летию Хабаровского края, 100-летию со дня начала строительства Китайско-Восточной железной дороги и города Харбина (The Far East of Russia - Northeast China: Historical Experience of Cooperation and Prospects for Cooperation: Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference Dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of the Khabarovsk Krai, 100th Anniversary of the Beginning of the Construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the City of Harbin) (Khabarovsk, 1998), p. 63.

Gypsies all rush in their mad turmoil, thin-
king of at least thousands of rubles.”⁴

Prior to the First World War, the num-
ber of Russian migrants in Manchuria was
43,500, including Poles, Ukrainians, Jews,
Tatars, Georgians, as well as Armenians.⁵
“By 1913, more than 34,000 Russians,
24,000 Chinese and Manchus, 5000 Jews
and others – notably Japanese, Armenians
and Poles – called Harbin home: nearly
69,000 people speaking 45 languages.”⁶
There was a National Council at the Natio-
nal Headquarters in Harbin, the members
of which were the leaders of national
unions, including the head of the Armenian
community, Sargis Grdzelyan (Grdzelov).⁷

Harbin, named Eastern St. Peters-
burg, was considered to be the unofficial
capital of Russian migrants (so-called
white Russians) in the region and the larg-
est Russian enclave abroad of the time. In
1918-1922 the number of Russians in
Mongolia and northern China reached
200,000. On September 8, 1920, the Re-
public of China declared that it no longer
recognized Russian consulates of the
country, and on September 23 severed its

relations with Russia. In one night, Rus-
sians in China found themselves in a
stateless status. Many Russian citizens
adopted Soviet citizenship, while those
who remained stateless, lost their job on
the Far Eastern Railway. When the Japa-
nese occupied Manchuria in February,
1932, captured Harbin and created the
Manchukuo puppet state, and later when
the Russian railway was sold to the Japa-
nese in 1935, full control over the trans-
mitters began. Then a large number of
Russians returned to the USSR (where
many of them were executed as ‘capitalist
spies’), and others (also Armenians) moved
to other Chinese regions, especially
Shanghai, which was a free port.⁸ In Au-
gust, 1945, the city conquered the Soviet
army. In 1946, Harbin fell under com-
munist rule, and in 1949 the Communist
Party of China established the People’s
Republic of China.

Thus, in this city the most populous
Armenian community of China and in the
Far East existed for several decades, thus
being remembered among the national
communities of China and, in particular,
of Harbin.⁹ The Armenians came to Har-
bin mainly through Irkutsk, Siberia and

4 David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914* (1999), p. 115.

5 See Г. В. Мелихов, *Российская эмиграция в Китае: 1917-1924 гг.* (G. V. Melikhov, Russian Emigration in China: 1917-1924) (Moscow, 1997), p. 56.

6 Linda Jaivin, Holiday on Ice: Linda Jaivin on Harbin, China, <http://www.themonthly.com.au/lindajaivinharbinchinaholidayice-lindajaivin3279> (accessed 8 February 2019).

7 See Н. Е. Аброва, *Дальневосточная ветвь русского зарубежья* (N. Ye. Abrova, Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Diaspora) (Minsk, 2007), p. 131.

8 See E. G. Sergoyan, *The Gathering Place*, p. 46.

9 See, for example, Jonathan Goldstein, *The Jews of China: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, vol. 1 (M. E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 192. To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914 (1999), p. 115. Thomas Lahusen, *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space, and Identity* (Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 2, 84-85. Ye. N. Chernolutskaia, ‘Religious Communities in Harbin and Ethnic Identity of Russian Emigres,’ *The South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 99, no 1 (2000), pp. 79-96. В. Н. Усов, *Последний император Китая: Пу И (1906-1967)* (V. N. Usov, The Last Emperor of China: Pu Yi (1906-1967) (Moscow, 2003), p. 190. Ван Чжичэн, *История русской эмиграции в Шанхае* (Wang Zhicheng, History of Russian Emigration in Shanghai) (Moscow, 2008), pp.

Manchuli, from different provinces of Eastern Armenia (Artsakh, Syunik, Javakhk), Georgia, present-day Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus. As Russian-speaking and culturally close to Russians, they were perceived as a branch of Russian immigration,¹⁰ although they maintained their secular and religious independence.

First Armenian Residents in Harbin

In 1901, Tatos (also known as Tadevos, Tevatros) Grigori Ter Hakobyan (Terakopov), founded the Tatos Restaurant on Harbin's Chinese Street (now, Central Avenue). It was the very first Caucasian restaurant in China, and became a brand for Harbin. Here Armenian, Caucasian, and European dishes, mostly unknown to the local population, were served. It was a favorite gathering place of artists, diplomats living and working in Harbin, and well-known public figures.¹¹ While in Harbin, the famous Russian singer Feodor Shalyapin dined in this restaurant. Tatos Ter Hakobyan also founded the first winery in the Far East in the 1920s, also named Tatos. It produced wine from Harbin's black grape and Shandong's white grape. Tatos Restaurant changed its title

and owners several times during the Japanese occupation. Tatos Ter Hakobyan later resided in Shanghai, from where he moved to the USSR at the end of the 1960s along with his German-born wife, Valentina Jarzeva. Ter Hakobyan died at the age of about 100 in Tbilisi in the late 1970s. The signboard of Tatos Restaurant is seen in the fifth part of the "Russians without Russia" documentary film series, presenting the history of Russian emigration, called "A Far East Result."

Tatos Ter Hakobyan's son, Grigor Ter Hakobyan, was a violinist. After graduating from the Russian Gymnasium of Harbin, he was sent to the United States for a higher education, and then was invited to Italy to perfect his technique for free in one of conservatories.¹²

An unusual story is connected with one of the Armenian employees of Tatos Restaurant. In 1916, young Harutyun Mirzakhanyan escaped from his native village (nowadays, Verin Karmiraghbyur) in Armenia's Tavush province) avoiding marriage and reached to Harbin, where he worked at Tatos Restaurant. After several years his godfather Daniel Babayan traveled to China, found him and took him back.¹³

¹⁰ 81-82. Е. Е. Аурилена, Российская диаспора в Китае: 1920-1950-е гг. (Ye. Ye. Au-
rilenе, The Russian Diaspora in China: 1920-
1950s) (Khabarovsk, 2004), p. 23. **Laura A.Victoir, Zatsepine Victor, Harbin to Ha-
noi: Colonial Built Environment in Asia, 1840 to 1940** (Hong Kong, 2012), pp. 22-23. The Armenians are also remembered in *Meet Me in Harbin* 35-minute Canadian documentary by Thomas Lahoussen and Olga Bakich.

¹¹ In his memoirs, E. Sergoyan testified that his father, Gevorg Sargsyan along with his family, was often remembered as a Russian, rather than Armenian, and, like many others, he had to Russianize his surname (Sergeev) to be better involved in a larger community of

émigrés (E. G. Sergoyan, *The Gathering Place*, p. 30).

¹² Tatos is being remembered among the Russian and Caucasian restaurants of Harbin - Kavkaz, Iveria, Allahverdi, Rogozinsky: see Н. Д. Старосельская, *Повседневная жизнь "рус-
ского" Китая* (N. D. Staroselskaya, The Daily Life of 'Russian' China) (Moscow, 2006), p. 93.

¹³ See Հայ երիտասարդի մը յաջողութիւնը (The Success of an Armenian Young Man), *Husa-
per (Hope-Bringer)*, 8 January 1932.

¹⁴ Testified by my colleague at the Institute of History of National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, Mirzakhanyan's relative, Dr. Artashes Shahnazaryan on 19 June 2017 in Yerevan.

In 1906 the economic situation of the Armenians of Harbin was already so good that they had even provided some money to compatriots who suffered from the pogroms with Tartars in the Caucasus. On May 3, a concert in Harbin's Portsmouth Hotel was held to benefit the compatriots affected by the latest events in the Caucasus. The concert featured members of the local opera group, including the famous Russian-Armenian singer Arshak Kostanyan (1865-1920). The net income from the concert was 1,300 rubles. It was organized by Portsmouth theater owners A. Ulu-khanyan and the Grdzelyan brothers, who provided the hall free of charge.¹⁴

By the end of the 1910s and early 1920s the total number of Armenians in China was about 3000. Most of them experienced a great deal of physical and mental suffering and deprivations reaching China, over the years living in uncertainty in a country so different in language and culture, with few compatriots. As an Armenian refugee wrote: "We walked two nights without stopping by mountains and forests. ...On the morning of November 17, we arrived at a Chinese station, and from there, we arrived at Harbin on the train, with my wife and four friends. That was our journey from Yerevan to Vladivostok, Harbin, about 13,000 versts¹⁵".¹⁶ China-born Armenian Yervand Markarian testified that his mother-in-law reached the Chinese border from Moscow within one year to join her husband in Harbin, selling

¹⁴ See Ալ. Հայկունի, Հեռաւոր Արևելքից (Al. Haykuni, From the Far East), *Alik (Wave)*, 2 June 1906.

¹⁵ One verst is 3500 feet -1,06 km.

¹⁶ Մ. Շարօյեան, Փախստականի մը պատմած մերը. Երեւամէն Խարպին (Չինաստան) (M. Sharoyan, Stories of a Refugee: From Yerevan to Harbin (China), *Haraj (Forward)*, 16 January 1931.

all the jewelry on the way, then illegally crossing the border with other refugees.¹⁷ Refugees from Russia often bribed local authorities in Irkutsk to gain access to the northern part of China.

Because of the massive accumulation of Armenians in Harbin it was necessary to create a national organization to help the needy compatriots. In 1917 the first Armenian organization was established in China. The Armenian National Union of Manchuria was founded in the Armenian prayer house. Dr. Stepanos Migdisyan (Stepan Migdisov), engineer, longtime employee of the Eastern Railroad, Mikayel Ter-Hovakimyan (Mikhail Ter-Ovakimov) and Levon Melik-Ohanjanyan were the founders and leaders of this organization. The Chinese-Armenians called them jokingly "the three whales" on which they rely. In 1919, the Chinese authorities officially ratified the existence and rights of that organization.¹⁸ The main task of the National Union was to help all needy, elderly people and orphans, as well as preserve Armenian identity among community members. To this purpose, various national and cultural events were organized on national and church holidays. The charity campaigns were implemented by the Ladies' Relief Society, which was involved in fundraising and collecting donations. The Board of the Armenian National Union was authorized to examine the disputes between the Armenians and, if necessary, to impose penalties on them. The Harbin Armenians composed

¹⁷ See Kavkaz: A Biography of Yervand Markarian, p. 66-67.

¹⁸ See Meltickian Virginia, Pictorial History of the Armenians in China, 1919-1945, *Hye Sharzhoom (Armenian Movement)*, December, 2003.

a 46-point statute; the first point highlighted “the dissemination and preservation of the idea of national unity for all Armenians living in China.” This statute was published in Russian in Harbin in 1922, and was certified by the Harbin Police Department.¹⁹

When on May 28, 1920 the Republic of Armenia was proclaimed in part of the territory of Eastern Armenia, engineer Levon Surinov (Surinyan) was appointed as consul of Armenia. After May 20, 1919 the first congress of the Armenians of Siberia and the Far East was held in Harbin, bringing together Armenian organizations functioning separately from each other. On May 1 most of the participants arrived in Harbin, and after a five-day informal meeting, an alliance faction was formed. The solemn opening of the congress took place on May 5, with the speech of Levon Safaryan, an engineer of communication roads, and the President of the National Board of Harbin. The Assembly made a report and sent it to the Government of Armenia (signed on June 23, 1919 in Harbin²⁰), appealing to the USA Consul in Harbin for a favorable solution to the Armenians' demands in creation of a large state on the historical Armenian homeland. With businessman Grigor Dzamoyan's initiative, the Armenian National Union opened a joint stock company in Harbin, aiming to establish trade relations between Armenia and Russia, the

Far East, China, and Japan, for sending clothes, sugar, tea and other products to Armenia.²¹ Dzamoyan also developed relationships with foreign representatives in Harbin (those of France, Japan, Czechoslovakia, and Poland). Particularly remarkable was his meeting with the General Commander of foreign affairs of Harbin, governor and General Tan Shu En. The latter was interested in Armenians and, in particular, Armenian literature. Tan Shu En accompanied Dzamoyan to a Chinese prison, to dispel rumors about Chinese prisons; they saw that the prisoners lived in clean cells and were engaged in physical and mental activities. Dzamoyan asked the governor if the Armenian Republic requested the Chinese government for one hundred thousand people to move to Armenia to work, would there be a positive answer. Tan Shu En was delighted by this question and said that in his opinion the Chinese government would address such a request and personally expressed his readiness to apply to the Chinese Foreign Minister in Beijing.²²

In 1920, the Harbin Armenians organized a rally for the purpose of collecting gifts for the Armenian Army. A total of 15 boxes of various items (military uniforms, warm clothing material, woolen covers, gloves, socks, medicine) were received from Japan and sent to the Armenian National Delegation in Paris – an institution

19 See *Устав Харбинского Армянского общества* (The Statute of the Armenian Union of Harbin) (Harbin, 1922).

20 See Վ. Տեր-Պօղոսյան, Վ. Սարդույան, Հեռաւր գաղութ մը մէկուկէս միլիոն գումար և ազգային գորագումն մը կը տրամադրէ հայկ. կառավարութան (V. Ter-Poghosyan, V. Sarduyan, A Distant Community Provides One and Half Million Amounts and a National Regiment to Armenian Government), *Jakatamart (Battle)*, 20 September 1919.

21 See Գեղամ Պետրոսյան, Հայաստանի Հանրապետութիւնները Սիբիրի և Հեռաւր Արևելքի ոչ խորհրդային պետական կազմակերպութերի մաս (1919–1920 թթ.) (Geğham Petrosyan, The Relations of Republic of Armenia with Non-Soviet State Formations of Siberia and Far East (1919–1920) (Yerevan, 2006), p. 231.

22 See The Armenian Representative in China, *Joghovrdi dzayne (The Voice of People)*, 4 August 1920.

established in order to defend the interests of Armenians.

The Armenian Church of Harbin

The history of the Armenian Church in China and generally in the Far East is interesting and less explored. The only Armenian Church in China that was active for a few decades existed in Harbin city. An Armenian wooden chapel was functioning in Novi Gorod district of Harbin, yet we do not know the date of its foundation; the first information we have is from 1905. Before they had this chapel, the Armenians of Manchuria attended the local Russian churches.²³

As reported in a letter from Harbin to "Mshak" (Toiler) Armenian daily, on January 22, 1905, in the Portsmouth Hotel of Harbin the delegate of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Endzak archimandrite performed a service and gave a sermon. Those present, about 200 Armenians, were re-connected to their national church after having some 10-12 years of a wandering life in foreign lands.²⁴ Armenian singer Arshak Kostanyan performed Armenian songs at the event for the first time in China.²⁵ On June 19th of the same year the Armenian religious leader of Siberia, Archbishop Aristakes Khemchyan, held a liturgy in the hall of Jalal beg Altunyants. In his sermon he spoke about the massacres of the Armenians

that had taken place in Baku, Nakhichevan and other places that year, and then a requiem service was held in memory of the Armenian victims. The Harbin Armenians collected 2363 rubles, which was transmitted through the Russian-Chinese bank to their compatriots.²⁶

Before having a priest, the Armenians of Harbin appealed for their religious needs to the community leaders. In 1910, Priest Yeghishe (Artashes) Rostomyan (1868-1932) was appointed as the spiritual leader of the Armenians of Siberia and the Far East, with residence in Vladivostok. A graduate from Nersisyan School in Tiflis, Rostomyan worked in the North Caucasus and Turkestan; in 1918, by the decision of the General Assembly of the Armenian community of Vladivostok, Yeghishe Rostomyan, along with his wife and four children, moved to Harbin, becoming the religious leader of the Armenians in China.²⁷ Priest Rostomyan regularly visited the Armenian-populated places of the Far East at a pontifical mission. When in 1922 42 Armenian refugees were transported to Vladivostok from Baghdad by the British, the Harbin Armenian Committee authorized the priest Rostomyan to travel to Vladivostok to study the state of refugees and organise their help.²⁸

In 1915-1916 Chinese-Armenians asked permission from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the governing body of

23 About the Russian church in China see Dina V. Doubrovskaya, 'The Russian Orthodox Church in China', in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, (ed.) Stephen Uhally Jr., Xiaoxin Wu (M.E. Sharpe, 2000), pp. 163-178.

24 Ա. Փիրումեանց, նամակ Խարբինց (A. Pirumyants, Letter from Harbin), *Mshak (The Toiler)*, 28 January, 1905.

25 Ibid.

26 See Խ. Թաթովեան, Յ. Քաջորեան, Ռ. Լենցեան, Նամակ Խմբագրութեան (Kh. Tatulyan, H. Kachurtan, R. Levonyan, A Letter to the Editor), *Mshak (The Toiler)*, 28 July 1905.

27 See Նորակազմ Մանջուրյա հայերը, հայութեան Միքայելեան Ա. (The Armenians of Newly Formed Manchukuo, compiled by A. Mikayelyan), *Hairenik (Fatherland)*, 15 February 1933.

28 See Հայկական կեանք (Armenian Life), *Azg-pahak (Nation-Guard)*, 27 February 1922.

the Armenian Apostolic Church, to build an Armenian Church in Harbin, with a letter bearing 83 signatures, raising the necessity and importance of keeping Armenians in China from assimilation. After receiving a positive answer from Etchmiadzin, a fundraising by the Chinese-Armenians began. Especially generous was Karapet Aspetyan from Harbin, who donated 750 rubles. Other Armenians of Harbin and Changchun collected 1207 rubles for the construction of the church.²⁹ By the way, Karapet Aspetyan, who had confectionery and chocolate factories on Kitayskaya Street in Harbin, declared that he willed his two houses, estimated at half a million in gold, to the Armenian government to open schools in Yerevan at their expense. However, this project was never fulfilled.³⁰

In 1918, the administration of Eastern Railroad provided 2500 square meters of free space to the Armenians at the corner of Liaoyang (Liaoyanskaya) and Sadovaya streets in Harbin to build a church. Engineer Mikayel Ter Hovakimyan was involved in supervising the construction of the church and adjacent buildings and supplying construction materials. On September 5, 1923, the foundation of the site took place, during which Priest Yeghishe

Rostomyan gave a speech and read the patriarchal wishes. On November 18, 1923, St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church was opened with adjacent buildings, which included the priest's lodging, a school for Armenian pupils and a hall for various activities. The church was built of brick. The main hall was 119 square meters, the priest's room 55 square meters, the dwelling house for the poor was 22 square meters, and the adjacent garden occupied 1908 square meters.³¹ This spacious orchard was particularly rich in cherry trees and walnut trees.

The whole Armenian community, as well as many foreigners (Russians, Georgians, Jews, Poles and others), was present at the opening ceremony of the church. On the occasion of the opening, the Armenians of Harbin sent a telegram to the Catholicos of All Armenians, Gevorg V Tpkhisetsi, and received his blessings by telegram on the following day.³² In 1925, the Chinese authorities officially recognized the church as the Armenian Gregorian Church of Harbin.³³ It became the only church and also the seat of the Armenian communities of Manchuria and China. At Christmas time the members of the Armenian Youth Union of Harbin toured all the Armenian homes and chanted hymns.

29 National Archive of Armenia, file 409, list 1, act 4712, document 13.

30 See Հայաստանի Անդամագույշը Սիբիրում (The Representative of Armenia in Siberia), *Haraj (Forward)*, 31 August 1920.

31 See A. A. Хисамутдинов, Российская эмиграция в Китае. Опыт энциклопедии (A. A. Khisamutdinov, Russian Emigration in China. The Experience of the Encyclopedia) (Vladivostok, 2002), pp. 21-22.

32 See Հայերը Չինաստանի մէջ (Armenians in China), *Hairenik (Fatherland)*, 15 February 1924.

33 Ю. Н. Ципкин (ред.), Духовная жизнь Дальнего Востока России: материалы региональной научно-практической конференции, посвященной 2000-летию христианства, Хабаровск, 24-26 октября 2000 г. (Yu. N. Tsipkin (ed.), The Religious Life of the Far East of Russia: Materials of the Regional Scientific and Practical Conference Dedicated to the 2000th Anniversary of Christianity, Khabarovsk, October 24-26, 2000) (Khabarovsk, 2000), pp. 87-89.

The Armenian Church of Manchuria and the Far East was subject to the spiritual authorities of Armavir and the North Caucasus in Russia. In 1925, by the order of the Supreme Spiritual Council of Etchmiadzin, the Armenian Church of Manchuria and the Far East began to be subjected directly to Etchmiadzin. This caused some dissension between some displaced Armenians and Etchmiadzin, which were later expanded.

In 1924, the Supreme Spiritual Council of Etchmiadzin sent Archimandrite Ruben Manasyan (1886-1955) to the Far East to raise funds for the renovation of Etchmiadzin Cathedral and collect the proceeds of the Mother See of Etchmiadzin. At first the local Armenians received him warmly and collected money and gifts for Etchmiadzin. On October 20, 1924 the Armenians of Manzhouli city sent a letter of gratitude to the Catholicos, expressing satisfaction for having a delegate from Etchmiadzin in their town. The letter was signed by Tadeus Sirunyan, President of the Armenian National Board of Manzhouli and Hamazasp Pshakyan, its secretary. However, this same Pshakyan later wrote in his memoirs that the Reverend Archbishop conducted provocative activity in China, with the goal of turning the Armenian diocese of the Far East into a separate diocese and becoming

a primate of it. The community was divided into two parties: those who were with the Archimandrite and those who were against him. Both sides repeatedly sent letters of complaint to Etchmiadzin.³⁴ A confrontation and mutual hatred began among the Armenians in Harbin, many of them even stopped greeting each other on the streets. According to Priest Rostomyan, the Soviet government sent spies on behalf of Manasyan to split the Chinese Armenians.³⁵ In February 1925, Ruben Archbishop left China, and even though he had remained there only three months and 18 days, he managed to keep the Armenians divided for six years. Only a meeting, organized by the efforts of Doctor Migdisyans on April 24, 1932 in Harbin, ended the conflicts between the Armenian organizations of China.³⁶

According to a contemporary witness, in the mid-1930s the Armenian Church parish of Harbin had about 400 families. Yet after priest Yeghishe Rostomyan's death on October 11, 1932,³⁷ the Armenians in China were deprived of a spiritual pastor for five years. They had to fulfill the rites of weddings, baptisms, and funerals at Russian and English Churches. However, the Russian Church in China was not always benevolent with the Armenians. In Harbin and elsewhere it often refused to provide the Armenians places or priests,³⁸ while the Armenians of Harbin

³⁴ See National Archive of Armenia, file 409, list 1, acts 4706, 4717, 4724, 4728.

³⁵ See Ե. թ. Ռոստոմյանց, Հայոց Չինաստանի և Մանչուրիայի մէջ (priest Ye. Rostomyan, The Armenians in China and Manchuria), *Hairenik* (Fatherland), 16 December 1930.

³⁶ See կասպ, Լուրեր Խարբինէն (Kasp., News from Harbin), *Haraj* (Forward), 14 May 1932.

³⁷ Certainly, it was Yeghishe depicted as the Armenian priest in the novel "Children" by

China-based Russian novelist Nina Fyodorova: "The match cracked and illuminated the face of a tall person with unusual and strangely beautiful eyes - the face of an ascetic, with the eyes of happiness" (Нина Фёдорова, *Дети* (Nina Fyodorova, Children) (Frankfurt-am-Mein, 1958), p. 114).

³⁸ For instance, when the priest's wife died, and Rostomyan asked the Russian Archbishop to perform the funeral ritual, the latter refused to come to the Armenian church, "and the poor

often offered their church to Lutherans before they had their own church.

The council of the Harbin Armenian Church appealed to Etchmiadzin, asking for a priest for whom they could provide housing, service, fuel, etc.³⁹ Finally, by the approval of Khoren I Muradbekyan, Patriarch of All Armenians, and Torgom Goushakyan, Armenian Archbishop of Jerusalem, Archimandrite Asoghik Ghazaryan (1909-1978) was called to serve as the Armenian spiritual pastor of the Far East. Asoghik, born in the village of Behesni in Kharberd, was the only one in the family who survived the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Empire. After a three-year walk with a few relatives, he finally settled in Basra, Iraq. Then Asoghik entered and received his education in the monastery of Jerusalem, getting a spiritual degree and devoting himself to celibacy. On April 12, 1937, 28-year-old Asoghik arrived at China, Shanghai, where he was welcomed by 150 local Armenians. On April 27, Asoghik traveled to Harbin, his residency, on his way stopping in smaller towns to meet local Armenians. On May 2, Armenians in Harbin celebrated Easter and offered a liturgy in the church.⁴⁰ The Shanghai and Harbin press, especially Russian-language newspapers, wrote articles about the Armenians and their new spiritual leader.

Rostomyants had the double grief to make the funeral ritual of his own wife. This attitude of the Russians is very surprising. Providing a Christian church is a godlike act, especially toward a sister church, like ours” (Թէոդիկ-որդի, Չինական ասմական (Teotik-son, Chinese Letters), *Hayastani kochnak* (Bell of Armenia), 7 August 1937, p. 773).

³⁹ See: Մանչուրիային քահանայ կ'ուզեն (They Want a Priest from Manchuria), *Azdarar (Herald)*, 4 July 1935.

⁴⁰ See *Լորեր Մայրագոյն Արեւելքի հայութեամս* (News from the Armenians of Far East), *Sion (Zion)*, 1937, June, no 6, p. 195.

From the very beginning the Chinese-Armenians loved and respected this young, handsome, charismatic clergyman; even local Russians showed him respect on the streets and called him archimandrite.⁴¹

By the efforts of Asoghik archimandrite, the neighboring territories of the Armenian Church were expanded by the generous donations of Armenian community figures (Simon Eloyan, L. Avetisyan, A. Elyasov and others). In the early 1940s, the church had 155 visitors.⁴² In 1938, Asoghik Archbishop collected 10,000 yens for the Armenian Church from Harbin, Tianjin, Changchun and Dalian Armenians.⁴³ Asoghik Archbishop's visits to the Armenians in mainland China were successful; the youth gladly followed him, as the desire to speak in Armenian was big. The climate in Northern China was very harsh; the cold sometimes was minus 45 degrees Celsius and the average temperature was -25-30.⁴⁴ Thus, under such severe climatic conditions the Armenian clergyman continued his activity.

During the Second World War, from 1941 to 1945, Asoghik, being a citizen of Jerusalem, which was under British mandate in the 1930s. He was imprisoned in a Japanese concentration camp for British

⁴¹ See E. G. Sergoyan, *The Gathering Place*, p. 77,

⁴² See *Духовная жизнь Дальнего Востока России* (The Religious Life of the Far East of Russia), p. 90.

⁴³ See Թէոդիկ-որդի, Ասողիկ վարդապետ Թիէն-ցին մէջ (Teotik-son, Asoghik Archimandrite in Tianjin), *Hayastani kochnak* (Bell of Armenia), 2 April 1938, p. 32.

⁴⁴ Հայերը Ռ. Արեւելքի մէջ (The Armenians in Far East), *Arevelk (Orient)*, 13 March 1938.

and American citizens in Mukden (currently, Shenyang). The clergyman, a survivor of the Armenian genocide, suffered many hardships in the hands of the Japanese. Getting released from the concentration camp, he stayed in China until 1949, remaining a highly respected person by the people. In his letter, written on October 19, 1945 to the Catholicos of all Armenians, Gevorg VI, Asoghik stated that while in the Japanese prison for four years, he was cut off from the world and learned about the election of the Catholicos from the Armenian soldiers of the Soviet Army who came to China with the Russian army and liberated them from the camps.⁴⁵ Bishop Asoghik later served as prelate in Australia, India, New York and Iraq.

The Harbin Armenians, whose number dropped dramatically after the war, remained without a spiritual leader after Asoghik's leaving. In August, 1957, the Armenians of Harbin summoned a meeting with 22 participants. In view of the fact that for many years the Harbin Armenian Church did not have a permanent or temporary pastor, and most of the community had migrated to different countries, there was an offer to sell the Grigor Lusavorich church building and share the amount. Many opposed this proposal and did not come to a final decision. The Chinese authorities, having learned of this dispute, declared that they could not sell the building because of the fact that the state was given the land free of charge. In

⁴⁵ National Archive of Armenia, file 409, list 1, act 4736, document 1.

⁴⁶ See **Virginia Meltickian**, Pictorial History of the Armenians in China, 1919–1945, *Hye Sharzhoom (Armenian Movement)*, December, 2003. See also: *Armenians in Australia and New Zealand*, compiled by **Aramais Mirzaian**, Sydney, 1966, p. 217-218. The only survived photograph of Harbin Armenian

1959 the building of the Armenian Church passed to the Chinese government, which turned it into a textile factory. In August, 1966, during the Cultural Revolution of the People's Republic of China, when all the churches of Harbin were demolished, the Armenian Church and its surroundings also shared the same destiny. The items of the Armenian Church (icons, garments) were taken to the yard and were burned.⁴⁶ The Armenian cemetery was also demolished with the purpose of digging trenches.

Today the Saint Sophia Russian Church in Harbin (built in 1926-1932), now a museum, is where the photographs of multicultural architectural monuments of the city are exhibited. The photograph of the Armenian Church is absent...

As writer Toros Toranian testified in 2001, Mr. Azat Martirosyan, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to China has been involved in the issue of allocating the local Armenians a prayer house in Harbin. The Chinese officials have offered to provide another place for the construction of a chapel, as a new building was built on the location of the former one. The Chinese officials have shown willingness to build an Armenian chapel if initiated by Armenians.⁴⁷

Community Life in 1920-1940s

Thus, in the early 1920s, thousands of Armenians settled in the north of China

Church is included in this volume (idem, p. 217).

⁴⁷ See **Թորոս Թորանեան**, *Ուղևորութիւն դէպի Թայվանու և Չինաստան* (Toros Toranean, Trip to Thailand and China) (Aleppo, 2004), p. 106.

and, particularly, in Harbin: some of them hoped to return to their birthplaces or to move to the United States, but these hopes were not fulfilled due to the establishment of Soviet rule in part of Armenia's territory and the restriction on Armenians entering the US. Some Armenians tried obtaining Chinese citizenship, but in 1920 the government announced their citizenship would not be recognized. In 1922, the Soviet Union cancelled the citizenship of all Russian citizens who had left the country without permission.⁴⁸ Even foreigners born in China were considered stateless. Thus, the Armenians began to adapt themselves to new conditions, but like other migrants, with minor integration into Chinese life, being in close connection with other Russian-speaking communities.

The Armenians were able to adapt to Harbin relatively easily and become self-sufficient in a short time. Several years after establishment in the city, Armenian shops, factories, pubs, and restaurants, such as the Palas hotel, owned by H. Mkhitarian, "Armenia" and "Adayants" shoe factories, Atoyan brothers' shoes factory, P. A. Sookoyants' household goods store, Z. Avetikov's Samson Restaurant of Caucasian cuisine, Aspetyan's pastry shop, etc. were opened in Harbin's main Kitaiskaya street and the port. The Armenians of Harbin were mainly engaged in small scale trade; they were successful traders and confectioners. The latter is

noteworthy because Armenians immediately used the fondness of the Chinese for sweets and established many confectioneries, bakeries and sweets shops, preparing Chinese, Caucasian and European cookies. The Armenians of China began to be mentioned in written sources of the time as owners of confectioneries and cafés.⁴⁹ In 1926, among the Harbin Armenians, there were many craftsmen, four doctors, one lawyer, four engineers and students.⁵⁰ The statistics of 1928 give more precise numbers: 17 artisans, seven people dealing with renting rooms, six students, five employees of different institutions, three bakers and one lawyer.⁵¹

The Armenian migrants were mostly members and supporters of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) party (Dashnaksutyun), somehow persecuted by Bolsheviks and having strict anti-Soviet orientation. They continued their activities in China, disseminating ideas of the party and educating the generations with the ARF spirit and receiving the party's press from all around the world. There is a testimony that even in China 1520 young Armenians formed a group following the Tseghakronism (carrier of race) national and political movement.⁵² It is noteworthy that even in remote China they were sometimes persecuted. When a consensual agreement was signed in Beijing in 1924, according to which the Chinese Far East Railway passed under Chinese-Soviet control, Soviet

⁴⁸ See E. G. Sergoyan, *The Gathering Place*, p. 46.

⁴⁹ See Manchuria: A Semi-monthly Publication of the Manchuria Daily News, vol. 4, Issues 120, 1939, p. 897.

⁵⁰ See Որոտ, Հայերը Չինաստանի մեջ (Vorot, The Armenians in China), *Hairenik (Fatherland)*, 25 April 1926.

⁵¹ See Գողթնեցի, Խարապինի հայ գաղութը (Goghtnetsi, The Armenian Community of Harbin), *Haraj (Forward)*, 9 October 1928.

⁵² See Համազասպ Պասկեան, Համովասմեր և պատահարներ (H. Psakyan, Meetings and Incidents), *Hairenik (Fatherland)*, 1963, no 2, p. 45.

presence grew stronger in Harbin. The Bolsheviks began to penetrate into China; members of the ARF party were cautious and began to hide. More than 800 people were arrested in this period, with two Armenians among them.⁵³

On December 13, 1925, the Union of Ukrainian and Armenian Students was set up in Harbin, the main goal of which was to pursue the state and national independence of Ukraine and Armenia, and to acquaint the Ukrainian public with the Armenian Cause and the Armenian people. In this regard, the Union aimed to organise lectures, especially considering the political and economic situation in Ukraine and Armenia.⁵⁴

On November 21, 1926 the first Armenian school in the Far East was opened in Harbin, mostly by the efforts of community leader Stepanos Migdisyan. That day was a great joy for the Armenians; many of them were crying, being overwhelmed with joy that from that time on they would be not confronted with assimilation and alienation. For the occasion, a liturgy was served at the Armenian Church, and 33 students were registered the same day. Priest Yeghishe Rostomyan was the teacher. The school had mainly Armenian subjects: language, history, geography, and Bible history. All expenses of the school were covered by the community administration. In 1928, the Armenian school students successfully passed the final exams, prompting everyone to wonder how they had been able to do so in eight months.⁵⁵

On June 19, 1927 the annual general meeting of the Armenian community of Harbin took place. The members of the Board were also elected, the "three whales": Migdisyan, Ter-Hovakimyan and Melik Ohanjanyan, as well as dairy farmer V. Nazaryan and merchant A. Sargsyan. They reported that the number of pupils in the Armenian school is 28.⁵⁶

Among the Armenian organizations of Harbin were the affiliate of Dashnatsutyun party, the National Union, the Youth Artistic Union, the Artsiv (Eagle) Sport Union (founded in 1925; the members participated in the Olympic Games in September and were awarded prizes), the Armenian Youth Club, The Armenian Ladies' Union (the head was Doctor Anna Yagupyan, the secretary, Shushanik Poghosyan: the Union was organising Armenian language courses), the Armenian Theatrical Company (presenting performances in Armenian and Russian) and a group of Armenian musicians. The Armenian unions of Harbin always celebrated national and church holidays, organising events, accompanied with national songs and recitation, at the chapel and community center. They always celebrated the Independence Day of Armenia on May 28. On May 28, 1933, the representatives of the Georgian, Russian and Manchurian communities of Harbin also attended the Armenian festivity. The President of the Armenian National Council, Migdisyan, Chairman of the Georgian Community of Harbin, Dr. N. Jishkariani and the repre-

53 Idem.

54 See Գաղութահայ կեանք (Armenian Community life), *Nor arshaluys* (New Dawn), 25 February 1926. Հայ ուրբայնական միութիւն մը (An Armenian-Ukrainian Union), *Hairenik* (Fatherland), 21 March 1926.

55 See Զինաստանի հայկական դպրոց (The Armenian School of Harbin), *Hairenik* (Fatherland), 13 July 1928.

56 See Խարբինի հայ գաղութը (The Armenian Community of Harbin), *Hairenik* (Fatherland), 31 July 1927.

sentative of the Russian embassy executive body, Ye. V. Lutchev, were among the speakers. After the official speeches, the Armenian Youth Union of Harbin presented a small literary program. There were more than 150 attendees that evening.⁵⁷

On November 24, 1929, an Armenian concert was held with the aim of promoting interest and bringing together the Armenian community. It is interesting that only four of the 20 singers were Armenians; the rest were Russians. There were only 50 Armenians among 230 people in the auditorium. The Armenian songs were enthusiastically received, and the Chinese manager asked for the songs to be performed on the radio as well. Thus, for the first time the radio listeners of South China, Japan, Siberia and other countries had the opportunity to listen to Armenian songs.⁵⁸

During this period, the Armenians of Harbin, like all the people in China, were exposed to some economic troubles due to the fact the local currency was low against gold and the Japanese yen. Despite this fact, the Armenian school continued its activities for the fifth year, the number of students grew, and a number of foreigners expressed their desire to study at the Armenian school.⁵⁹ In the 1930s, three quarters of the Harbin Armenian school students were foreigners who wanted to learn Armenian. In a report of 1932, it is written that about 250 Armenian families, from

57 See Կասպ, Մայիս 28ը Խարավինի մէջ (Kasp, May 28 in Harbin), *Haraj* (Forward), 24 June 1933.

58 The Հայերը Մանչուրիոյ մէջ (Armenians in Manchuria), *Husaper* (Hope-Bringer), 14 February 1930.

59 See Ե. ք. Ռոտսոնութեանց, Հայերը Չինաստանի և Մանչուրիայի մէջ (priest Yeghishe Rostosyan, The Armenians in China and Manchuria), *Hairenik* (Fatherland), 16.12.1930.

different parts of the Caucasus, including a small number of Armenians from Erzurum, Van and other places in Western Armenia (now in Turkey), lived in Harbin and Shanghai.

In November, 1931 a prominent Armenian translator and renowned Iranian diplomat Hovhannes Khan Masehian died in Harbin. He had been appointed ambassador to Japan in 1930, but resigned because of severe illness. He passed away in Harbin, on his way from Tokyo to China. He was buried according to Islamic ritual in Harbin, causing the indignation of the local Armenians. The Armenian National Department of Harbin demanded Khan Masehian's coffin. After presenting relevant documents, the board members took the coffin to the Armenian Church in the presence of the local Armenian community.⁶⁰

The Harbin Armenians did not stay away from cultural life. From 1919 to 1922, Armenian and Russian amateur actors staged a number of theatrical performances in Harbin, mostly in the Harbin Hall of commercial gatherings or at the Churin Club. On February 2, 1921, the popular Armenian play "Pepo", by Gabriel Sundukyan, was presented at the Harbin Hall of commercial gatherings, staged by the Armenian veteran actress Varvaré Melikyan.⁶¹ Later, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Harbin Armenian Youth Club presented a series of amateur performances, like

60 Համազասպ Պսակեան, Հանդիպումներ և պատահարներ (Hamazasp Psakyan, Meetings and Incidents), *Hairenik* (Fatherland), 1963, no 2, pp. 46-47.

61 See Բախտիար Յովակիմեան, Պետոն Չինաստանում (Bakhtiar Hovakimyan, Pepo in China), *Hayk* (Armenia), 8 May 1996.

“Anoush” opera, “Anahit” drama, “Arshin Mal Alan” musical, etc. They were staged by Mrs. Karine Pshakyan Plavkova, who was also the main actress.⁶²

The Harbin Armenians and foreigners often had the opportunity to hear the singing of Artsvik Rostomyan (1909-1927) during various events. This singer, who passed away quite young, was the only Armenian girl in China who was able to speak, read and write Armenian fluently, which was extraordinary for someone who grew up in the Far East.⁶³

On April 6, 1930 the Harbin Armenians celebrated the forty-year anniversary of the literary career of renowned Armenian writer Avetis Aharonyan. On their behalf, a congratulatory letter was written and sent to Aharonyan⁶⁴.

Although most of the Armenians in China were self-sufficient, there were also a few poor people. Thus, in 1925, six Armenians benefited from the services of Harbin’s boarding school.⁶⁵

Who was who among the Harbin Armenians

Hovhannes and Sargis Grdzelyans (Ivan and Sergey Gredelovs), from Tiflis, settled in China in 1897. They had a large factory of confectionery and candies and a bakery, and, as it was mentioned, they managed the Portsmouth Theater.⁶⁶

Simon Eloyan, from Yerevan (born 1874), moved to China after the Russian

revolution in 1917, escaping from Bolshevik terror. He established a chocolate factory in Harbin and managed several restaurants in different cities. He made a large donation to the Armenian Church of Harbin. In 1960 he moved to Australia with his family.⁶⁷

Vagharshak Tsitsaghyants (born 1886) from the Artsakh region of Armenia went to Harbin in 1909 to work at his elder brother’s fur clothing store. During the First World War, Vagharshak served at the Caucasian front and fought in Erzurum. Back to Harbin, in 1917-1922, as a merchant he started trading between Harbin and Siberian towns (Novosibirsk, Chita, Vladivostok), as well as between Chinese cities (Dalian, Mukden) and Port Arthur. In 1941 he moved to Shanghai; in 1952, with his family, he settled in Australia.⁶⁸

American-Armenian author E. J. Sergoyan, in his “The Gathering Place: Stories from Ancient Shanghai Armenian Public Club” (2012), presented personal stories and photographs of Armenians who migrated to China. His grandfather, Levon Sargsyan (1866, Baku -1933, Harbin), settled in Harbin and opened a small cafeteria. His son Gevorg Sargsyan (1912, Baku - 1991, USA), later renamed Sergoyan, spent some time in Harbin, where he studied at the Missionary School.

The six-volume edition of the Russian Diaspora obituaries (available on <http://forum.vgd.ru/341/81776/>) also included the names of a number of Armenians who died

⁶² See Virginia Meltickian, *Pictorial History...*, idem.

⁶³ See Խոստմալից օրիորդի մը մամը (The Death of a Promising Young Lady), *Hairenik (Fatherland)*, 12 November 1927.

⁶⁴ See Գողթեցի, Համես զաղութի մը կեաբը (Goghtnetsi, The Life of a Modest Community), *Haraj (Forward)*, 6 May 1930.

⁶⁵ See Ночлежная статистика (Night Shelter Statistics), *Novosti zhizni (News of Life)*, 14 January 1926.

⁶⁶ See Ablova, Far Eastern Branch..., p. 74.

⁶⁷ See Ibid, p. 74-75.

⁶⁸ See Armenians in Australia and New Zealand, p. 75.

in Harbin: Ivan Sogroev (in 1920), his brother Tigran Sogroev (in 1943), officer Stepan Amasyan (in 1923, Harbin), Karapet Kabak, Hovhannes Stepaniants (both in 1928), and Misha Alikhanov (in 1931).

Ruben Shermazanyan, who was a member of the Government of Republic of Armenia, moved to Harbin in 1921 and became a member of the Far East Republic. His brother Levon (1877, Tiflis - 1941, Shanghai) was a Russian officer, who also moved to Harbin after the Russian revolution.

Grigor Yeghoyan, from the old Armenian city of Kharberd (now in Turkey), was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. In his memoirs "The Story of My Life," written in 1952, he wrote how he had escaped from the Genocide and reached Harbin.⁶⁹

In the 1930s, the biggest importer of coffee from Brazil to China was Karapet Hovhannisyan. He owned Mokka Coffee Company in Harbin, a Brazilian coffee shop in the center of Harbin (which had a branch office in Shanghai), as well as the Santos Cafe, offering Brazilian coffee and Swiss chocolate.⁷⁰ In 1949, Hovannisian lost his wealth and business and left China with his Russian wife.

Russian White Army Colonel Hakob Bagiyants was also in Chinese emigration. He acted as deacon in the Armenian church of Harbin. Bagiyants was killed in 1936 by Honghuzis (armed Chinese robbers and bandits in the areas of the eastern Russia-China borderland) in San-Sin (Shitouchezi).⁷¹

⁶⁹ See **Krikor Z. Yeghoyan**, *The Story of My Life*, p. 28, see http://issuu.com/dianaapcar.org/docs/memoir_the_story_of_my_life_by_krikor_z_yeghoya/1 (accessed 9 February 2019).

⁷⁰ See **E. G. Sergoyan**, *The Gathering Place*, pp. 58, 64.

Electrical engineer G. K. Kecheyants graduated from Harbin's Gymnasium and Harbin's Polytechnic Institute. In 1952, he moved to the United States from Brazil.

Aram Melik-Vardanyants was the editor of the Russian section of the *Gung Bao* newspaper, in Chinese and Russian, published in Harbin in 1926-1937. He also edited *Prozhektor* (Spotlight) Russian weekly in 1933.

Stepanos Migdisyan (Stepan Migdisov, 1867-1933) was the President of the Armenian National Board, a medical inspector, and an honorary member of Harbin's Police court, headed Harbin's health care for some time. A graduate of Moscow Medical University, he was sent to China in 1910 to deal with the epidemic of plague. S.G. Migdisov played a key role in the medicine of Harbin in the 1920s and early 1930s. He did not serve the city government, but answered directly to the police department and the chief of the Special Area of the Eastern Provinces. The Armenians of Harbin are obliged mainly to this person for having their church, school and youth sports association. Migdisyan also succeeded in establishing an Armenian clinic, arranging free medical care for poor Armenians and foreigners. For his successful activity, Migdisyan was awarded with orders by the Chinese government. In 1924, he was appointed as Medical Inspector of Manchuria, and for several years he was the chief police physician of Harbin. Wishing to consolidate

⁷¹ See **С. В. Волков**, *Генералы и штаб-офицеры русской армии. Опыт мартирологии* (S. V. Volkov, *Generals and Staff Officers of the Russian Army. Experience Martyrology*), vol. 1, Moscow, 2012, p. 75.

his leadership in the medical world of Harbin, Dr. Migdisov began to publish a weekly supplement to the official Gung-Bao newspaper in 1927. This medical newspaper received the full name Gung-Bao Medical Weekly and was published until the early 1930s. A boarding school operated in Harbin, named after Migdisyan. In 1929, the Armenians in Harbin celebrated the doctor's jubilee with Chinese, English, Japanese, Polish, Georgian, Russian and Ossetian representatives at the event. Chinese newspapers featured articles on the jubilee.⁷² On that occasion, even a separate Russian periodical was published.⁷³ Stepanos Migdisyan died in 1933 as he was receiving a blood transfusion. For more than ten years, Harbin Armenians commemorated the anniversary of Migdisyan's death. In 1944, on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of his death, the Russian *Vremya* (Time) newspaper wrote: "A man of unforgivable generosity, he did not make any difference between the nationalities of the patients... The memory of this noble doctor of the old Russian school is so far celebrated by many Russians in Harbin. His bright name is remembered with gratitude by those whom doctor Migdisov saved from death during his long years of service at the police."⁷⁴

In the 1930s, Vano Hakobyan and Sedrak Puchinyan were the owners of restaurants in Harbin. Leonard Nazarov (Levon Shahnazaryan), another Armenian in

⁷² See Յորելեան թ. Ստեփանոս Մշտոյանի (Dr. Stepanos Mghtoyan's Jubilee), *Hairenik* (Fatherland), 2 March 1929.

⁷³ See *Газета-сборник, посвященная 30-летию врачебной деятельности ныне покойного д-ра С. Г. Мигдисова* (Newspaper Anthology, Dedicated to the 30th Anniversary of the Medical Activity of the Late Dr. S. G. Migdisov), Harbin, 1933.

Harbin, was the chief engineer of the US General Gordon vessel in the 1940s.⁷⁵ In 1934, Gurgen Yengoyants was the head of the youth division of the Bureau of the Russian Deportation of the Manchurian Empire in Harbin, while the arbitrator was another Armenian, Lev Melik.⁷⁶

Gurgen Nagolyan served as a lieutenant colonel in Manchurian army. As a Russian refugee, he lived in Harbin, where he got a higher legal education, fluently mastering Chinese and Japanese. In the late 1920s, he served on the Far East Railroad and later he entered the Manchukuo Armed Forces. In 1936, he served in the special brigade of Manchukuo army, which consisted of Russian émigrés (known as the Asano Brigade). In the mid-1940s, Nagolyan led the Reservists' Union. After Japan's defeat, Nagolyan was seen in Soviet uniform in the streets of Harbin: it was discovered that he was actually a Soviet intelligence agent, a member of the People's Committee of Internal Affairs. After the Soviet Army entered Harbin, he completed various assignments for the Soviet government, combining military affairs with some commercial businesses and soon became the owner of several cinemas in Harbin. Gurgen Nagolyan died in the 1950s, in the USSR.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Жизнь национальных колоний. Армянская (Life of National Communities. Armenian), *Vremya* (Time), 8 November 1944.

⁷⁵ See *Kavkaz...*, p. 109.

⁷⁶ See *Life of National Communities...*, idem.

⁷⁷ See А. Окороков, *Русские добровольцы* (A. Okorokov, Russian Volunteers), Moscow, 2007, pp. 203-207, П. Балакшин, *Финал в Куме* (P. Balakshin, Final in China), San Francisco, vol. 2, 1958, p. 144.

In the 1940s, an Armenian Irina Zaradiadi was one of the teachers of the S. Francis French-Russian Monastery.⁷⁸

Armenian Genocide survivor Hamazasp Psakyan came to Manchuria via Siberia. From Harbin, he corresponded with the Diaspora Armenian press, sending information about the Chinese-Armenian community. He also wrote articles about the political situation in China, especially when China's relations with Japan became strained, and Japan captured Manchuria. Along with his colleague Melikyan Hamazasp Pshakyan he published the "Avetis" (Good News) Yearbook with caricatures.⁷⁹ In 1953 he moved to the USA.

Psakyan's eldest daughter, singer, publicist and radio commentator Karine (Krina) Psakyan (1918, Kars - 2003, San Francisco) studied at the Harbin Russian School and Manchuria Music Hall. She took part in the events of the Armenian and Russian communities of Harbin with Russian and Armenian songs. After graduating from the Harbin Conservatory (class of Osipova-Zakrzhevskaya), she became a singer for the Harbin Philharmonic Orchestra (dramatic soprano) and won Russian press praise. From 1939 to 1944 Karine Psakyan represented the Armenian community of Harbin at the Russian section of the Union of Women Supporting Civil Defense. In 1940, she married Alexander Plavkov, a journalist for the Kharbinskaya Vremya (Harbin Time) newspaper. Plavkov was captured by Soviet troops in 1945 during the Chinese occupation and

exiled to death in Siberia. Karine Psakyan, as a prisoner's wife, was deprived of her job and, with her son, Vladimir (born in 1944, in Harbin), moved to Shanghai. After 1945, Karine Psakyan returned to Harbin, where she headed the Armenian Club for a short time. In 1957 she settled in the United States, where she was engaged in music and journalistic activities.

Community's sunset

During the Second World War, the Chinese-Armenians found themselves facing a new danger. In 1943 Imperial Japan, by a special order, considered the Armenians living in the Far East as the enemies of Japan. The Armenians of China, Indonesia, and Singapore suffered from Japanese occupation and attacks, their houses and possessions were plundered; most of them were isolated in concentration camps and prisons. The main reason of Japan's hostility was the fact that the homeland of Armenians was a part of Soviet Union, the enemy of Japan, so the Armenians, like the Russians, as unreliable elements, were made to bear on their arms the sign with the Latin S letter (Soviet).⁸⁰

Chinese-Armenians were freed from concentration camps on August 19, 1945. According to Asoghik archimandrite, the total number of Chinese Armenians before the war was 600, while in 1947, only 300 remained. The situation of the Armenians in Shanghai was relatively good, yet about

⁷⁸ See Л. Кривченко, «Я обращаюсь с требованием веры и с просьбой о любви» (L. Krivchenko, "I Address with a Demand of Faith and the Request for Love), *Inye berega (Other Shores)*, no 3 (31), 2013, p. 44.

⁷⁹ See Համազապատկեան Պաշկեան, Համերիպումներ եւ պատահարներ (Hamazasp Psakyan, Meetings

and Incidents), *Hairenik (Fatherland)*, 1963, no 2, p. 40.

⁸⁰ See Աշոտ Աբրահամյան, Համազապատկեան Պաշկեան, Համերիպումներ (Ashot Abrahamyan, A Brief History of the Armenian Communities), vol. 2 (Yerevan, 1967), p. 372.

150 Armenians in Harbin had economic difficulties.⁸¹

After the proclamation of the People's Republic of China, the Armenians began to leave the country. The total number of Russian migrants in China was around 15,000, of which two-thirds had Soviet citizenship. They were united by distrust in the future and the wish to migrate to the United States.⁸² Specifically, foreigners of Harbin (Russians, Poles, Germans, and French) either repatriated or moved to the United States, Australia or South America, and a small part to Europe. It was the same for the foreigners of China, what country to move to, as they were wishing finally to get any citizenship and end the status of statelessness.

In 1948, 16 Armenians were repatriated from China to Soviet Armenia.⁸³ In 1951 about 125 Armenian families still lived in China (Harbin, Shanghai, Hailar, Tianjin). Their economic situation was insufficient, as before they were engaged in small trade. Among them there were also surveyors and attorneys. The Harbin Armenians continued to celebrate church holidays, living relatively united as one family. Mixed marriages were frequent (largely with Slavonic nationalities), while marriages with Chinese was strictly excluded.⁸⁴

At the beginning of the 1960s there were no longer any Armenians in China.

As mentioned before, the Harbin Armenian Church was also destroyed after the Armenians left. Thus, the Armenian presence in China in the twentieth century almost vanished. The only exception to this is the aforementioned Tatos, China's first Caucasian-style restaurant, which still continues to operate. This restaurant, located on 127 Zhongyang Dajie, is preserved by the state. It is mentioned not only in Russian, but also in international guidelines as a recommendation for tourists. Chinese owners seek to maintain the atmosphere, keeping old objects (gramophone, coffee grinder, twentieth century newspapers, etc.) constantly pointing out the fact that it was founded by an Armenian. There is also a big picture of Mount Ararat on the wall of the restaurant.⁸⁵

Today's Harbin Armenian

To conclude, it is also worth mentioning that in the twenty-first century, many Armenians were established in different cities of China, yet very few in Harbin. Today the Armenian inhabitant of Harbin, Abraham Gostanian (born 1957, Aleppo), works as a producer of the biggest dance shows in the Far East, running the Agosta Artist Company. Gostanian is a graduate of Yerevan Choreography College; in 1983 he established Azat Gharibian Folk Dance Group, in his birthplace of Aleppo, and led it for ten years. At the invitation of Hong

81 See Armenian National Archive, file 409, list 1, act 4736.

82 See A. A. Хисамутдинов, Русские эмигранты на Филиппинах (A. A. Khisamutdinov, Russian Émigrés on Philippines), *Voprosy istorii (Questions of History)*, 2003, no 7, p. 141.

83 See Մի խումբ բայերի վերադարձը Չինաստան (The Return of a Group of Armenians from China), *Etchmiadzin*, 1948, no 1-2, p. 45.

84 My Tianjin-born neighbor in Yerevan, Zinaida Stashevskaya of Polish-Russian origin,

now deceased, told me that for the Russian/European migrants in China, marriages with Chinese, unlike today, was not even a matter of debate, based on the extreme cultural diversities and the racial discrimination of the Russians and Europeans.

85 See Harbin Restaurants, <http://www.chinatravelsavvy.com/destinations/harbin/restaurants/> (accessed 7 February 2019). Here Ter Hakobyan's name is misspelled DelAknovy.

Kong-based Armenian businessman Jack Maxian, he left for the Far East to perform various show business projects. After working in Malaysia and South Korea, he organized dance and circus shows in various Chinese cities: Shenyang, Aomin, and Harbin. Since 2008 he has organized shows for two months running during Harbin's famous Ice Sculptures Festival (two shows daily with 3,000 spectators). Circus artists from southern China, Russia and European countries participate in the shows. Thus, despite the lack of an Armenian community, thanks to Abraham Gostanyan, today there is an interesting Armenian presence in Harbin...

Summarizing, we can say that the case of the Armenian community in Harbin is a typical 20th century migration history, the emergence and disappearance of which was the result of the turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century. Its history is not typical for the history of Armenian migration of the last century, as most of the Armenian communities worldwide were the result of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, while the Harbin Armenians were refugees from the Russian Empire, avoiding the Bolshevik persecutions. However, it is a typical sample of an Armenian Diaspora community, possessing its main components: church, school and national organizations, in spite of its short existence.