In the 1950s, approximately 100,000 Russians repatriated to the Soviet Union from China. It was the largest repatriation ever of Russians born abroad. Many were the children of those who fled Russia following the defeat of the White Army in the Civil War. These voluntary repatriates were not persecuted upon repatriation, unlike smaller waves of voluntary and involuntary repatriates from China in 1935 and 1945-1948. During the Soviet period, no articles were published about them in the Soviet press; officially, they did not exist. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, they formed associations and began publishing newsletters. On the basis of hundreds of contemporaneous autobiographies in these newsletters, oral histories, and other memoirs, this article argues that repatriates born in China see themselves as distinct from Russians born and raised in the Soviet Union. Their collective identity—which verges on defining themselves as a new ethnicity—demonstrates how a diaspora within its own historic homeland, without a state to back them, and without an intellectual elite to lead them, can craft its own identity even after being silenced by almost half a century of state censorship. Yet repatriates do not believe that they will stay distinct from local Russians forever; they see themselves on a mission to convert local Russians into the “true” Russians, imbued with prerevolutionary values and traditions, that they see themselves as embodying. The article focuses on their explanations for why they repatriated, their recollection of their initial arrival in the Soviet Union, their sense of otherness from local Russians, their concept of homeland, and their mission. Retrospective sources, including Communist Party reports, diaries, and letters, are employed to gauge the extent to which the passage of time has shaped repatriates' memories. Lastly, the experience of Russian repatriates from China are
contrasted to those of repatriates of various nationalities to other historic homelands and of other nationalities to the Soviet Union.

Key words: Russian diaspora, return migration, Soviet Union, ethnicity construction, China

I am from a typical Russian family, which in its heart preserved the way of life, morals and attitudes of pre-revolutionary Russia. Our entire life, the entire tenor of our family was structured around the aegis of Orthodoxy . . . In our family we were brought up to love our homeland, to love Russia. Russia embodied radiance. We were also brought up with the belief in the necessity of returning to our homeland. Toward this goal our family inculcated in us such traits as practical mindedness, steadfastness, decency, responsibility, humanity, industriousness, and lack of coddling. (qtd. in Medvedeva 1994, 3)

Olga Frolova, who repatriated voluntarily from her birthplace in China to the USSR, along with roughly 100,000 Russians between 1954 and 1960, made this statement in 1994.2 Recent research has demonstrated that ethnic return migration is usually plagued with difficulties due to the cultural differences that develop when people previously united live apart for generations (Tsuda 2009, 7, 11; Stefansson 2004, 8). In democratic countries, civil rights and a free press ensured that ethnic return migrants are able to publicize their plight, form civil organizations, and publish self-help guides; democratic governments usually also actively work to counter negative stereotypes about ethnic return migrants (Shepard 2006; Watt 2009, 9–10). Yet while Stalin's death in 1953 ensured that Frolova and her fellow repatriates were not shot, as were the majority of adults among the 21,343 voluntary repatriates from China in 1935, or arrested, as were many of the adults among the 6,027 voluntary repatriates from China in 1947–1948, they were never part of official Soviet discourse. The only popular references to Russians in China were as anti-Soviet bandits or spies in adventure literature; no mention was made of repatriates in the Soviet press; repatriates were forced to remain silent until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet despite the fact that they offer a unique perspective on the identity and acculturation of voluntary, unrepressed repatriates under a totalitarian regime, and despite the fact that they are the largest group of Russians born abroad to repatriate to the Soviet Union, they have remained neglected by historians. In post-Soviet Russia, Russians who fled the Bolsheviks are in vogue, but so are studies of Stalinist victimization; scholarship on repatriates from China have therefore focused mainly on those who were repressed under Stalin (Ablazhei 2008; Chernolutskaja 1996; Onegina 1995; Merritt 1998).3
In post-Soviet Russia there has been an explosion of autobiographical writing and of the publication of autobiographical texts written in the Soviet Union. Repatriates are no exception. In addition to publishing book-length memoirs, in the major cities of the Urals and Siberia, where the largest clusters of repatriates live, repatriates publish newsletters filled mainly with brief memoirs about China and the experience of repatriation. Their memoirs, however, differ from the post-Soviet memoir genre of “local” Russians (those born and raised in the Soviet Union), which focuses on events those who repatriated in the 1950s missed—the Stalinist purges and World War II (Paperno 2009, 24–25). Rather than joining a community of victims, these repatriates seek through their autobiographical narratives to construct a collective diaspora identity in which they are active agents. The evolving nature of their identities allows us to witness the shifting, ambiguous, and often contradictory nature of diaspora identities in construction as repatriates have moved through the process of repatriation in the unique historical circumstances of Soviet and post-Soviet history.

On the basis of hundreds of these recently written autobiographies, oral histories, and letters, this article will argue that voluntary, unrepressed repatriates born in China have seen themselves as distinct from local Russians since repatriation. As I will attempt to show, their collective identity has, bolstered by years of forced silence followed by a flurry of newsletters and formal associations, developed to the point where it verges on being a distinct ethnicity. Yet many repatriates, as we will see, did not always believe that they would stay distinct from local Russians forever; at times they have seen themselves on a mission to convert local Russians into the “true” Russians they saw themselves as being. Their mission has deep roots within Russian history regarding how Russians who see themselves as an elite treat the masses. Because most of those still living after 1991 were those who returned in the 1950s, this article is heavily, but not exclusively, dependent on their autobiographies and interviews. In addition, retrospective sources—including Communist Party reports, Soviet-era memoirs, diaries and letters—will be employed to gauge how the passage of time has shaped repatriates’ memories.

The Russian Diaspora in China

To build the Chinese Eastern Railroad (CER) and spread its influence in Manchuria, the Russian Imperial State founded the city of Harbin in 1898 on land leased from China. By 1913 there were at least 45,000 subjects of the Russian Empire living in the city of Harbin alone. Most of the myriad of nationalities who inhabited the Russian Empire constituted Harbin’s population; if not ethnically Russian, most settlers were Russian speakers. Following the loss of the White Army in 1922 in the Russian Civil War, scores of refugees, who have come to be known
as "White Russians," fled across the border. At its height in the mid-1920s, the Russian population of Harbin constituted roughly 200,000. The Russian diaspora in China was unique among other White Russian diaspora communities for a number of reasons. First, Harbin was run as a Russian colonial zone, with its own police and laws, until 1920. Though never technically part of the Russian Empire, it thus resembled Poland, Finland, the Baltic countries, and Bessarabia, former parts of the Russian Empire that were not under Bolshevik control before World War II. Like these regions, Harbin possessed a Russian infrastructure, including Russian schools and higher education institutions as well as places of worship of all the dominant religions of the Russian Empire. But unlike other former parts of the Russian Empire, Russians remained part of the ruling class, one could argue, even after the Japanese occupied Manchuria in 1931. Whereas Russians living in former parts of the empire experienced growing discrimination, Russian cultural, religious, and educational institutions, based on prerevolutionary curriculums, flowered in Harbin throughout the 1920s, and suffered only slightly during the subsequent Japanese occupation. It was possible for Russians in Harbin to engage in white-collar professions without learning another language, and those who worked for the CER lived prosperously until 1935, when the Japanese bought the railroad.

Because the Soviet Union operated the CER from 1924 until 1935, Harbin was also the only place in the world where stateless White Russians and Soviet citizens lived in the same city in large numbers. But not all Soviet citizens were Communists. After 1924, only Soviet and Chinese citizens could work on the CER. Many White Russians, either frightened by the unstable political situation in China or due to racism, were reluctant to take Chinese citizenship; they preferred to become Soviet citizens to retain their jobs. In Harbin they were commonly referred to as "radishes": red on the outside, white on the inside. Prerevolutionary Russian settlers and "radishes" frequently intermarried with White Russians. But whereas "real" Soviets often lived in different neighborhoods and studied at separate schools, most of their teachers in these schools were White Russians, and all Russophone children played together; "radishes" and "real" Soviets also worked alongside each other at the CER where Soviet workers lived as bourgeois a material existence as their fellow workers (Pisarevskaia 2001, 70-96).

In addition to Harbin, tens of thousands of Russian peasants lived in the Chinese countryside, especially alongside the Soviet border. Russian Cossacks had begun settling this area in the 1890s; Russian peasants escaping Stalin's forced collectivization of agriculture fled there as late as the early 1930s. A significant White Russian community also existed in Shanghai, numbering at its height in the mid-1930s approximately 25,000. Several thousand Russians populated each of several other Chinese cities, such as Tientsin. Russian primary and secondary schools existed in most of these cities, but many Russian parents sent
their children to foreign schools to bolster their prospects of post-graduate employment at the Western firms that employed most Russian émigrés in China engaged in white-collar work outside of Harbin. In terms of social estate background, there were more peasants and less aristocrats among Russian émigrés in China than in European countries, which also boasted large White Russian diaspora communities. Because of racial differences there were also fewer intermarriages and less assimilation into the local population.

White Russians in China were generally more politically conservative than Russian émigrés in Europe; very few Russian socialists or liberals emigrated to China. Most émigrés in China were monarchists. Émigrés in China were also the most religious of White Russians, particularly in the countryside. More Russian Orthodox churches and monasteries were built in Manchuria in the 1920s and 1930s than anywhere in the world. Even those who had settled in China before 1917 and were pro-Soviet tended to be religiously observant. The Russian Fascist Party was founded in Harbin in 1931, and reconnaissance missions from China across the Soviet border to plan military attacks against the Red Army continued into the early 1930s (“Reconnaissance” 1931–1933). Some émigrés in China believed the Japanese promise of the establishment of an émigré Russian state in Manchuria or Siberia after victory, and welcomed the Japanese as a buffer against the increasing efforts in the 1920s of the Chinese to increase their control over Harbin. The Japanese generally treated Russians who were not Soviet citizens and who did not oppose them well, but economically life under the Japanese became more difficult for Russians; many Harbiners moved to Shanghai to seek a better life. And the increasing Japanization of Russian Harbin—the celebration of Japanese holidays, the mandatory teaching of Japanese, and bowing to the Japanese emperor in all schools—was highly unpopular (Bakich 2000, 61–64).

Once Russia entered World War II the Russian émigré community in China split, just as it did throughout the world. But patriotism seized a large segment of the Russian population in China, blurring the previous distinction between Russia and the Soviet Union, a switch that was facilitated in 1943 by Stalin’s opening of Orthodox churches and restoration of the Patriarchate, placement of Tsarist epaulettes on officers’ uniforms, and his use, beginning in 1943, of the word “motherland” (ro-dina), the word émigrés used to refer to Russia, which had been previously absent from Soviet discourse. Numerous young men in China volunteered at Soviet consulates to fight and were turned away. When the Red Army entered Harbin in 1945, church bells rang and the Russian population generally greeted them as liberators. Patriotism gripped even those Russians who had worked, voluntarily or involuntarily, for the Japanese; few fled and the Soviets quickly arrested thousands, along with any peasants they could find who had fled collectivization in the Soviet Union, and most émigré leaders and prominent intellectuals,
and shipped them to the gulag as collaborators and traitors. The émigré press was subsequently disbanded.

The first wave of voluntary repatriates from China left in 1935. They were Soviet citizens—mainly from among those who had lived in Harbin before the 1917 Revolution—who had lost their jobs at the CER after the Soviet state sold it to the Japanese when the city was already gripped by massive unemployment. Most Soviet citizens who remained in China after 1935—and many did—revoked their Soviet citizenship. The several thousand who repatriated in 1947–1948—the second wave of repatriates from China—were drawn from Russians living in Shanghai and Tientsin, the largest constellation of a worldwide repatriation of Russian émigrés returning to a victorious motherland. Buoyed by patriotism, many had become Soviet citizens during the war. Russians from Manchuria, generally suspected of collaboration with the Japanese (and, in the view of several repatriates, needed by the Soviet government to remain in China as its unofficial representatives in the newly Communist China it sought to control; Butorin 2012; Kirsanov 2012), were not immediately allowed to repatriate after the war. Hundreds of desperate, patriotic, and naïve teenagers from Manchuria nevertheless crossed the border illegally, only to be arrested immediately (Ablazhei and Adams 2003, 213–4), and thousands in Manchuria petitioned the Soviet consulate to be allowed to repatriate. In 1954, after Stalin’s death in 1953, during Easter services—the most popular and important holiday in the Russian Orthodox Church—the announcement of the right of all Russians in Manchuria to return to their historic homeland was read in Orthodox churches by representatives of Soviet consulates.6

The Sovietization of Manchuria following 1945 helped spawn the largest of the three waves of repatriation in the 1950s, as did the Chinese Communist revolution. Although the Chinese government never formally expelled its Russian population, the new regime was eager to rid itself of foreigners whom it saw as vestiges of the informal colonialism that had penetrated China. In 1952 the Soviet government, having reasserted its control over the CER when it occupied Manchuria in 1945, bequeathed the railroad to the Chinese. Russians lost their jobs at the railroad, as did many other Russians working in other sectors of the economy. In Tientsin and Shanghai, foreigners left en masse in 1949, closing their firms. The only burgeoning sector of employment for Russians was as Russian-language teachers to their new socialist brothers. However, higher educational institutions in Harbin that had employed Russian as the language of instruction gradually switched to Chinese. While religious organizations continued to flourish, in 1946, all émigré schools were closed; the only Russian education available was in Soviet schools, some of which were staffed by teachers sent from the Soviet Union. All Russians were issued Soviet documents in 1945, and for the vast majority, who had been stateless until then, this was the first time they were legally protected by a state. In 1937, a Soviet club for youth
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had been opened in Shanghai; such Soviet clubs were opened in Harbin and throughout Manchuria in 1948. These popular clubs showed Soviet films, staged Soviet theater productions, held dances and concerts, sponsored information sessions, provided some financial support for needy Russians and Russian students, and distributed propaganda literature. Yet Soviet intelligence reports reveal that after the right to return was announced in 1954, Harbin became a hotbed of wild rumors and panic, ranging from tales of children being separated from their parents, who would be sent to labor camps, to the Red Cross descending to whisk all Russians to the West (Ablazhei 2007, 221; Intelligence Reports 1952–1955, 101, 125). 7

The Soviet state not only allowed mass repatriation in 1954, refusing virtually no applicant, but it made it significantly easier for émigrés to repatriate than to emigrate to other countries. It paid for repatriates’ return to the USSR, including the cost of transporting whatever possessions they wished, and gave each family several thousand rubles of start-up money. Jobs and housing in state farms were to be arranged and waiting for them. While thousands of Russians from Manchuria and from other parts of China had emigrated before 1954—most famously more than 6,000 stateless Russians from Shanghai who were willing to live in limbo in tents on an island in the Philippines between 1948 and 1951 before receiving visas to Australia and the United States rather than repatriating—once the right to return was announced in 1954, the Society for Soviet Citizens and the Chinese government were reluctant to issue Russians exit permits to any country besides the Soviet Union. Once relations between the Soviet Union and China soured in 1957, the Chinese readily granted exit permits, a development that couldn’t have been anticipated by Russians in Manchuria (Zarina 2006–2007, 67, 73; Kondrashev 2012). In terms of options, it was possible to secure visas and even free passage to several countries in South America and Australia through the World Council of Churches, but the Russian émigrés had to pay their own transportation to Hong Kong and take significant initiative. Altogether, as many as a third of the Russians who had lived in China emigrated to capitalist countries beginning in the 1920s.

The Decision to Repatriate

Those who repatriated held diverse political beliefs, were educated professionals as well as manual laborers, and came from families who belonged to privileged and unprivileged social estates in prerevolutionary Russia. The question of why they decided to repatriate to the Soviet Union is discussed by some, but not all, memoirists. Among those who returned in the 1950s, no one mentions ideological factors, such as belief in Communism, and few cite external international factors, such as fear of Chinese nationalism or civil war (Komendant 2010, 44; Shamshurina 2002, 11). Although there is considerable evidence of “push,”
repatriates who discuss the decision to return usually cite a combination of personal factors, emphasizing that the decision to repatriate was their choice to make as active agents (pull not push). Only a few depict themselves as repatriating against their wishes, to satisfy homesick parents or grandparents (Sharokhin 2007, 39; Domodedov 2012; Ponikarovskaya 2012), or as the only chance to reunite with their fathers who had been arrested in 1945 (Bender 2012; Sokolov 2012).

As has been the case with Crimean Tatars returning to the Crimea in recent years, the decision to return was mainly made by the younger generation born in China (Uehling 2004, 9–10). Their parents, if they had lived through the revolution and Civil War, were usually more reluctant. To keep the immediate family together, and because the younger generation had their lives ahead of them, the older generation agreed to return (Berzin 2001, 57; Bakhtina 2002, 24; Voiloshnikova 2001, 62). The most commonly cited factors for wanting to repatriate include patriotism and the opportunity to study in a Russian-language higher education institution (which one didn’t have to pay for). A few repatriates describe repatriation to the USSR as a natural progression; by 1954, other foreigners in China, including most Poles and Jews from the Russian Empire, had returned to their historic homelands, implying that it was time for Russians to do the same (Komendant 2010, 43; Shemanskii 2001, 57; Pishchikova 2004, 44). Many of those who do not discuss the decision to repatriate appear to be those youths for whom the decision was self-evident (Dzemeshkevich 1998, 150). Numerous memoirists and virtually all those interviewed recall being taught as children, as Olga Frolova was, that their years in China were temporary; their duty was to return eventually to their historic homeland. Even the daughter of a fascist leader, shot in 1945, is convinced that her father, a Russian nationalist, would have supported her decision to repatriate (Andreeva 2012). Because repatriation had been denied since 1935, there was also a widespread fear that the possibility to repatriate would soon be taken away (Zagoskina 2005, 55).

Most repatriates state that they were not completely ignorant in China about the political and economic situation in the USSR. Yet some who were too young to recall peasants fleeing dekulakization during the compulsory collectivization of agriculture beginning in 1929 or to remember reading the émigré press insist that they knew nothing about the gulag (Krokhmal’ 2012a); a few surmise that their parents did not want to frighten them or turn them against their historic homeland (Frolova 2002). Yet those who did not believe that forced collectivization and Stalinist terror were fabricated—as Soviet propaganda claimed—could reconcile repatriating by believing that the war had liberalized the USSR; for those who repatriated in the mid-1950s, they believed Stalin’s death would bring positive changes. The partial Sovietization of the Russian diaspora in China after World War II and the presence of large numbers of Soviet citizens in Harbin before 1935 made the Soviet Union
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seem much more familiar than the capitalist countries to which Russians in China who did not want to repatriate were planning to emigrate. In an oral interview in 1999 one repatriate, a Soviet citizen since his birth in Harbin in 1927, stated that in 1955, despite having friends who left for Australia and Brazil, “I decided to go the USSR because most of what I knew about it I had learned from movies and from Soviet people with whom I had socialized” (Gol'denburg 1999).

Most memoirists did not address why they did not emigrate to capitalist countries, and none discussed the third option of staying in China, which a small minority of Russians exercised. All acknowledged that the decision whether to repatriate or emigrate divided the Russian diaspora in China into two hostile camps. One repatriate implied which side she felt had the ethical advantage: she recalled that those who were repatriating were proud and boisterous, while those who were emigrating were secretive and quiet (N.P. Razzhigaeva 1999, 36). Most of those interviewed in 2012 were hard pressed to explain the differences between the two camps except to note unanimously that those who had actually experienced life in Stalinist Russia rarely repatriated. Many cite how family members were literally torn apart, seemingly forever, and that even husbands and wives—sometimes their own happily married parents—argued bitterly over whether to repatriate and occasionally left for different sides of the Iron Curtain, splitting up their children between them (Domodedov 2012; Kameneva 2012; Stogova 2012). Those interviewed who identify specific factors cite those that memoirists addressed: those who were wealthy or already had relatives in the West, and thus would not be starting entirely from scratch, were more likely to emigrate to capitalist countries (Safronov 2012; Shemanskii 2001, 57; Sharokhin 2007, 37–9), while those who ended up repatriating did not relish having to emigrate to a “third” country and learn a new language (Kamenev 2012a; Razzigaev 2012).

Recalling the Initial Reunion with the Historic Homeland

The majority of repatriates arrived between 1954 and 1956 as part of the so-called Virgin Lands campaign to work on newly opened state farms in Kazakhstan, the Urals, and Siberia. What they didn’t know was that the other “enthusiasts” were national minorities—such as Chechens, Ingush, and Estonians—who had been deported to these areas for alleged collaboration during World War II. According to reports generated by Communist Party investigations, the repatriates were greeted by uninformed locals who had only been told their new neighbors were arriving from China, which naturally led them to believe they were Chinese. Locals were then confused that the repatriates’ skin was white, which led them to be nicknamed “White Chinese,” but were then even more confused that they were native speakers of Russian. Many treated the repatriates with fear and distrust, calling them “white bandits,
traitors, parasites." But what high party officials were most concerned about were the wretched living conditions they found the repatriates living in: many had no housing and no food for days at a time. Not all had received the money they had been promised (Pohl 1999, 269-73; Kal'chenko 1954, 42). When in 1956 all rural dwellers were issued the passports they had been denied since internal passports were first issued in 1934, most repatriates (along with other rural dwellers) left for major cities. Most repatriates enrolled in higher educational institutions or, if they were older, attempted, in some cases successfully, to work in the professions they had practiced in China.

The border crossing is recounted by virtually all repatriate memoirists, and not only because of their tears of joy at being physically reunited with their historic homeland. It was at the border, as they switched from comfortable passenger trains to freight trains, that they began to realize how idealistic they had been about the reality of Soviet life. Most describe how they were asked for their books and records, and how these were often confiscated. One repatriate realized only months later, when he became more acquainted with Soviet life, that they had basically been robbed; the soldiers had carefully put the confiscated items aside to sell, trade, or keep for themselves (Andreev 2006, 65). Many recalled being told by guards to be careful of potential robbery, and some repatriates describe being robbed of many of the invaluable goods they brought with them from China at stations, shortly after being settled on the farms, or once they initially settled in major cities (Bender 2012; L.V. Peshkova 2005, 75; Krokhmal' 2005, 70). Repatriates from all three waves recalled being shocked upon arrival to see uniformly ill-dressed men and women, signs of the rampant poverty the country was suffering, and the lack of gender differentiation regarding physical labor (Berkovskaia 2008, 123; Komendant 2010, 45). Another preliminary warning that their preconceived notions of their homeland were skewed came when they were approached by locals at stations: no one would believe they had returned voluntarily (Komendant 2010, 43; L.V. Peshkova 2005, 73-4; T.V. Peshkova 2006, 65). One memoirist who repatriated after Stalin's death remembered an old man asking him if they were insane to leave a city like Harbin (Sukhovol'ski 2009, 39).

Letters to relatives confiscated by the Soviet Security Organs that were written immediately after repatriating by some second- and third-wave repatriates stated that they felt they had been tricked by propaganda into believing that a good life awaited them, and that they wished to return to China. They also complained about the low cultural level of the population, and not just on the state farms ("Spetssoobshchenie" 1948, 142-4, 148; Pushkareva n.d.). Many memoirists and interviewees recall one of their strongest first impressions as hearing men swearing; Russian men in China never swore in front of women and children, and many repatriate children thought swear words were part of a local
dialect (Glushchenko 2012; Komendant 2010, 45; Mirandov 2009, 7). One, who repatriated in 1947, claimed that in contrast to the Soviet Union, in Harbin and then in Shanghai Russians spoke “exclusively Turgenev’s language” (T. Semenova 2001, 5). The manners and moral of locals, particularly women, also shocked repatriates (Sharokhin 2007–2008, 40; L. V. Peshkova 2005, 74; Kameneva 2012). One repatriate wrote that he realized right away that this was not the Russia his parents had been telling him about his whole life. It was only upon arriving in the USSR that he realized that the prerevolutionary customs, values, and religiosity that Russians had preserved in China had been eradicated from Soviet Russia (Ogorodnikov 1997, 6). Repatriates naïvely believed that Russians in the Soviet Union would remain unchanged, despite the tumultuous changes that had taken place since 1917.

Most memoirs, particularly those published in the 1990s, dwell more on the culture shock they experienced than on the material hardships they initially suffered. Some mention the state farms only in passing; one recalled that it was a “cruel experience” that he wouldn’t delve into (Sal’nikov 1999, 6). Memoirs published more recently, however, describe the material deprivation they suffered in greater detail. It was difficult to adjust to living without electricity or to get used to dirt floors. Since rural dwellers lived off the food they grew in their own gardens, and little food was sold anywhere nearby, repatriates were forced to sell or trade their clothes and other belongings for food (Sel’kov 2006, 21; Krokhmal’ 2005, 71–2); once they left the state farms and moved to major cities, many had to continue selling their belongings before securing decent employment (Efanova 1998, 201; L. V. Peshkova, 2012a). Although they had been promised housing upon arrival on the state farms, it was often not ready when they arrived, and sometimes they were dumped with their baggage (which included large items such as pianos that were often ruined as they sat under the pouring rain) in the middle of nowhere, with no transportation waiting. One memoirist recalled, as did numerous others, that they had to live in tents as they were the ones expected to build the farm. Luckily, it was summer, and among the prisoners they found themselves living among were western Ukrainians who had fought with the fascists, but knew how to construct buildings. Like others, this repatriate describes being stunned by the widespread injustice of Soviet society; the first house built was not given to families with small children, but to the farm director (Andreev 2006, 65–7). One repatriate blames the organizers who brought them to the farms, but she also blames repatriates for being so naïve about how hard working on the farms and adjusting to rural life would be both physically and morally (Komendant 2010, 46). In fact, repatriates from rural China had much less difficulty adjusting to the state farms; on the other hand, they were shocked by the lack of work ethic or rational organization employed on the farms (Safronov 2012; Kuznetsov 2012).
The collective guilt second- and third-wave repatriates felt for having missed the war helps explain why they did not emphasize their initial material suffering in the USSR in the immediate years following the Soviet collapse. One woman, who never left the farm on which she was initially settled, recalled in a 1994 interview that they never wore the fancy clothes they brought with them. She ended up making pillowcases out of a taffeta dress with lace. She remembered having to dress like everyone else, but did not complain about this: “We were ashamed, people were badly dressed, it was only eight years since the war” (Trushchelova 1996, qtd. in Pohl 1999, 274–7). After all, it was the war that, more than any other factor, fostered the patriotism behind the decision of many to repatriate. Such guilt is also expressed in contemporaneous letters and diaries (“Spetsoobshchenie” 1948, 147; Il’ina 2004, 216).

Yet in the last ten years repatriates have published much less about the war and more about their fathers and brothers who were arrested in Manchuria in 1945. In 2002 one repatriate even reminded his fellow repatriates from Manchuria that 1945—the year of victory over Germany—was not a year for them to celebrate (Lagunov 2002, 71). Like Soviet people, they too had suffered due to the war, but not through the same experiences. Now that they have had two decades to recall their collective past and rejoin one another publicly, they have become bolder about complaining about their own suffering, including having to adjust to a significantly lower standard of living after repatriating. In a 2006 memoir one repatriate stated that the war couldn’t be used any longer as an excuse for the deficit of goods they found when they repatriated ten years later; every country fought in World War II, he stated, and in Harbin the stores were full ten years after the war (Sel’kov 2006, 21).

As more time passes since the fall of Communism, the fear among repatriates is noticeably lessening. Most of their earlier memoirs exhibit the self-censorship and selective memories that other scholars have found among groups who eventually found a place in the Soviet system (Shulman 2008, 24). And while not all repatriates had successful careers, the majority who completed their higher education in the Soviet Union—the majority who have written memoirs—did. As I learned when interviewing repatriates in 2012, fear is still present, and it is often difficult to distinguish between fear and genuine pro-Soviet sentiment. The current editor of one repatriate journal, born in the Soviet Union in 1955, immediately after her parents repatriated, acknowledges that the editorial board of her journal, which did not begin publication until 1998, initially wanted to publish only pleasant memories. She attributes the older generation’s desire to avoid mentioning the gulag, or the fact that they had been émigrés (preferring instead to emphasize their connection to the railroad, which was how many repatriates, even if they had close relatives who had fought in the White Army, commonly explained throughout the Soviet period why their families had lived in
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China), to lingering fear and their own lack of knowledge of what had happened in the Soviet Union under Stalin (N.G. Razzhigaeva 2012c). The absence of guilt many repatriates now feel, not only about the war but about having lived in emigration, is evident in a 2009 memoir in which one repatriate recalled with anger signs that greeted them at the border in 1954 stating: “Homeland—forgive us, we are your prodigal sons” (Sukhovol’skii 2009, 39).

Repatriates have also begun to recount more incidents in which they were treated with suspicion and discriminated against, particularly when they first arrived and visibly stood out (Nadeliaeva 2009, 6; L.V. Peshkova 2005, 75). A few who arrived in the 1950s explained that the threat of violence was not from the state, but from vicious local Russians from whom they rented a room in lieu of any official available housing; they literally feared these “landlords” would murder them for allegedly being spies or for having lived a formerly bourgeois life (Kamenev 2012b, 62; Efanova 1998, 227). Vladimir Borodin, who moved to the Soviet Union in 1947 from Tientsin at the age of eleven, recalled in a 1999 interview that when they arrived in Perm, “We found out that we are suspected to be spies—even kids . . . The neighbors, they were reacting to us like we were from Mars. We came from up in the blue, different people, different dresses, different shoes, different mentalities, very suspicious.” He maintained that he was forced by his peers at school to explain what his life had been like in China, and when he told them it had been good, they beat him (Borodin 1999a). Nor did this discrimination—or at least fear of it—always cease over time. Another repatriate recalls that in the village in Siberia where she has lived since the mid-1950s, the locals continued to call them “White Guardsmen and women” and “indolent bourgeois” until 1991 (Meredilina (Ponomareva) 2012, 66). And one repatriate wrote me in 2012 that to this day, her daughter’s husband’s family does not know that both her daughter’s parents were born and raised in China, even though her daughter has been married to this man for thirty-five years (Krokhmal’ 2012b).

Alterity: Defining Oneself as an Internal “Other”

The sense that they stood out, and continue to stand out to this day, pervades repatriates belonging to all waves. One repatriate describes how male repatriates on the state farms looked like spies in shorts and sunglasses, neither of which were then worn in the USSR (Myslina 1999). Unable to find goods in stores, repatriates continued to wear the clothes and shoes they had brought from China for years. Older relatives from China who sewed repatriates’ clothes were unable to learn to sew local styles, so their clothes differed from what locals wore long after their clothes from China had worn out (Kameneva 2012; Maksimovskaya 2012). Their behavior also marked them. Repatriates describe being stared at when kissing the hands of women in the street or letting
women on buses before boarding themselves (Dzemeshkevich 1998, 164–5; Guliaeva 2000, 72; Kamenev 2012a). Repatriates can sometimes still tell each other part. One woman from the Manchurian countryside recognized a repatriate from Shanghai in the 1990s by her comportment (Bystrova 2012).

Despite the silence imposed on them by the state, post-war repatriates formed their own informal network throughout the Soviet period, networks on which all Soviet citizens depended to survive. They helped each other obtain housing and procure employment (“Navstrechu” 2009, 2; Kameneva 2012; Zverev 2012). They held reunions in their homes and visited friends from China, despite living in different parts of the Soviet Union (Bystrova 2012; Zubareva 2009, 3; Litvintsev 2011, 162). In his unpublished memoirs written in the 1980s, one second-wave repatriate from Shanghai described how when a repatriate recognized someone from Shanghai with whom he was not previously acquainted on the streets of Sverdlovsk or Kazan, he would greet the person as a close friend. In Sverdlovsk, an informal “Shanghai club” met weekly in one repatriate’s apartment in the late 1940s, where they discussed the differences between “us” and “them,” not in political terms, but in terms of cultural nuances. These conversations, which he also regularly had with individual friends from Shanghai, often developed into arguments, but these arguments were vital to assist him in adjusting to life in the USSR and interacting rewardingly with locals (Serebrennikov 1987, 46–7, 80).

For those repatriates who lived in areas where there either were no fellow repatriates, or where they were unaware of each other’s existence, making friends with locals was more difficult. In his aptly titled memoir “A Stranger among His Own,” Nikolai Sharokhin describes how he felt from the beginning a need to discuss his disillusionment with Soviet society, something which local Russians would not have appreciated, especially since he was mainly disillusioned with them. Without fellow repatriates to vent to, he felt the need to cut himself off socially, quelling his loneliness by writing his memoirs and essentially escaping into his own Harbin (Sharokhin 2007–2008, 65–7).

In the case of the city of Cheliabinsk, repatriates were able to create a more corporal replica of Harbin. Two students from the Harbin Politechnical Institute who enrolled in Cheliabinsk Politechnical Institute to complete their studies wrote to all their friends from HPI still on the state farms to join them at the institute in Cheliabinsk. They all came and settled permanently in the city; a lifelong community was established (Butorin 1998, 16–7). A similar phenomenon occurred in Novosibirsk, where repatriates in one region held weekly dances in their homes to which only fellow repatriates were invited (Kameneva 2012). Numerous repatriates recall that while they had good relations with their colleagues at work, and even befriended some local Russians, they either never socialized at home with local Russians or if they did,
they spent holidays only with fellow Russians from China. One repatriate explained why they kept to themselves. At a gathering in the 1970s when they started to reminisce about how well they had lived in China, the only local Russian present, the second wife of a widowed Harbiner, became hysterical, screaming “You’re lying!” (Krokhmal’ 2012c).

The sense of otherness, of not being able to fully trust the local population, is evident in a letter the poetess Elena Vladi (1927–1990) wrote to a fellow repatriate in 1988. She begged her never to send her poems for publication to any Soviet journals; she didn’t want locals to read her poetry: “I don’t want foreign (chuzhie) people to laugh at and criticize me,” she wrote. Locals had no concept of Harbin and just called them all “white émigrés” if not worse, she complained. She cited her neighbor, who in lieu of any nearby relatives was close enough to her to have been entrusted by Vladi’s brother in Australia with the funds to arrange Vladi’s funeral, as evidence: “no matter how much I explain to her about our fates, she wouldn’t change her opinions ... it is hard for me to find a common language with her.” Vladi preferred to have her poems, which were nostalgic odes to Harbin, circulate in samizdat (self-published) publications among repatriates (Vladi 1988). Vladi, who repatriated to Tashkent with her Russified Korean husband in 1956 only to watch him die three years later, wrote in 1974 to another repatriate: “As I look around me I realize that my views on life in general differ from the norm. It is hard for me to live surrounded by those whom I do not understand and who don’t understand me ... I don’t know about you, but I miss here the traditions that pervaded our childhoods. Everything here is not that way, here daily life is completely foreign to me ... Russians are not what they were, and Russia is no longer the same.” While her relatives in Australia could live abroad “in the Harbin way” holding balls, this was forbidden in the USSR. She explained that she dealt with this alienation by retreating into her own world, the world of her memories of Russian Harbin, as Nikolai Sharokhin did, a type of “internal emigration” that scholars of the Soviet period have associated with dissidents of the late Soviet period and anti-Bolshevik intellectuals after the revolution (“Mir” 2004, 8–9; Ivanova 2000).

As one repatriate notes, the degree to which repatriates adapted depended on their age, gender, upbringing, degree of religiosity, political views, and personal character (L.V. Peshkova 2012b). The older generation, some of whom never worked in the Soviet Union, were able, and had to, adapt less (N.G. Razzhigaeva 2012a; Grigorev’na 2012). Men had an easier time than women since they performed the chores of Soviet daily life much less frequently (L.V. Peshkova 2012c). One repatriate recalled that her divorce from a local Russian occurred primarily because of the differences between their Soviet and émigré upbringing; her husband had no patience for her cultural interests and considered her unaccustomedness to the demanding rigors of housework in the Soviet
Union to be laziness (Mar'inskaia 2012). Numerous women who repatriated unmarried never married, for in the words of one repatriate “how could one compare local and repatriate men?” (Kameneva 2012). Repatriate men who married local women were considered by their wives to be great catches (N.G. Razzhigaeva 2012b), and these men have assimilated more than other repatriates (Sokolov 2012; Safronov 2012; Patrin 2012). Because most repatriates of consenting age married those they were dating right before repatriation (fearing they would never see each other again), most adult repatriates did not have to face such challenges. Even widowed repatriates have tended to remarry fellow repatriates (“Zoia” 2009, 7; Mishin 2012).

While feeling oneself a foreigner in one’s historic homeland was painful, since repatriates held a generally negative view of local Russians, their otherness became a source of pride; most repatriates argue that they are the real Russians. Ethnic return Hungarians who lived in Romania also argue this, citing their preservation of traditions and purity of language, but in their case they were separated from their historic homeland for centuries (Fox 2009, 194–5). Borodin explained how much more Russian he and other repatriates felt among Russians who lived their entire lives in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia:

It is Russia now, but most people are not really Russians, they are still Soviets way deep in their hearts and minds. Frankly, I just can’t get over the idea, though I know it is ridiculous, that real Russians were in China, the emigrants of the White Army. I am not ashamed of my past at any time. I was not the one who was building the Soviet regime. My parents were democratically minded and were always against totalitarianism, and I was brought up that way. My parents decided to come back, because they thought that there would be freedom after the war. They were greatly mistaken and disappointed, but nothing could be done . . . I was an alien in this country for many years. It didn’t really bother me. Now there are many, who say the same things as I do, but I am not sure they think the same way I do. (Borodin 1999b)

To one Harbiner who repatriated in the second half of the 1950s, some of the locals he had to interact with when he first arrived were not even human, but “living beings who had the external looks of human beings” (Kamenev 2005, 64).

Since they contrast themselves collectively to local Russians, it is not surprising that they do not hesitate to assign collective, positive traits to themselves as a group. They portray themselves collectively as extraordinary individuals. In a few cases this is presented as a defensive reaction against having been maligned for decades. One Harbiner praised his kind but also alluded to the critical way they had been viewed in the Soviet period: “we have our own ‘style,’ a distinctive way of conducting ourselves, the ability to see things in the best light in a difficult situation,
to recklessly part with all our money, without destroying ourselves.
Harbines’ is a marker that inspires pride throughout the world... No! We are not ashamed to be Harbines!” (Shelelov 2000, 4).

Repatriates consider themselves extraordinary and the embodiment of Russianness because they were born and raised outside of the Soviet Union. First, their upbringing, as the Frolova quote at the beginning of this article underscores, inculcated in them prerevolutionary Russian values and traditions. Vladi wrote a friend that repatriates were able to endure the poverty and pain that pervaded life in the Soviet Union without becoming cruel as local Russians did due to their different upbringing and their religious belief (“Mir” 2004, 9). This upbringing included a responsible work ethic their family members had brought with them from capitalist Imperial Russia to China (Safronov 2012; Bender 2012).

Second, living outside of one’s historic homeland as émigrés had other advantages. Like post-Soviet Russians who lived or still live in the non-Russian former Soviet Republics, repatriates argue that living abroad made them more patriotic than Russians who lived their entire lives in Russia (Pilkington 1998, 59–60; Sazanova and Razzhigaeva 1998, 34; Niforov 2000, 10). Others argued that living in emigration and then repatriating forced them to develop a superior professionalism, sense of initiative, and industriousness, which made it possible for them to quickly adapt to new surroundings and to survive both in China and the Soviet Union. The education they received in China in émigré or Western institutions, which they often view as superior to education in the Soviet Union, also enabled them to land on their feet after repatriation, as did the bravery they feel they had to learn to surmount the obstacles with which only émigrés and repatriates are confronted (Butorin 1998, 17–8; Taskina and Mukhin 2008, 5).

This bravery also stemmed from having lived the first part of their lives in a country freer than the Soviet Union; they weren’t petrified to complain to the Soviet Security organs as local Russians were, despite the price they paid (Kameneva 2012; Gordievich 2012). They also paid a price for their higher morality. One woman explained that she was fired, despite being very successful at her job, for refusing to take bribes (Mar’inskaia 2010, 62). Another repatriate described that it was only when he attended the fiftieth anniversary of the factory where he worked from 1957 to 1975 in 2001 that he learned that he had been considered a “white rabbit” by coworkers. They told him they had never understood why he didn’t use his position for gain like everyone else did. Despite many temptations, he argued he had thus managed to retain his honor and self-respect. He states with pride that he never got used to living in the Soviet way (Kirsanov 2012, 26).

Despite the fact that the experiences of Russians in Harbin and in the Westernized cities of Shanghai and Tientsin, not to mention the Chinese countryside, differed significantly, as did the realities that awaited each wave that repatriated, this sense of collective identity extends to
any Russian from China, and has increased since the fall of the Soviet Union. Yes, formal gatherings are occasionally marred by conflict. In Ekaterinburg, Harbiners, who don’t know foreign languages, do not appreciate it when repatriates from Shanghai sing English songs (Domodedov 2012), and a few repatriates, successfully turned against each other by the Soviet Security organs, have refused to have anything to do with each other (Gordievich 2012; Stogova 2012). Yet the various associations and repatriate newsletters that mushroomed across Russia after Communism fell unite all Russians from China; members of all waves and former residents of all parts of China publish in all repatriate newsletters and have participated in various national congresses. Articles and letters published in On the Hills of Manchuria, the most widely circulated newsletter, include contact information, and authors receive many letters and make new acquaintances. Despite informal networking in the Soviet period, some repatriates, married to local Russians, lived in cities where they did not know any other Russians from China. Without these associations they would have remained lost; now some of them lead such organizations (Kuznetsov 2012; Domodedov 2012). The joy these civil organizations have brought such repatriates is evident in the following 2000 letter to one newsletter: “I’m not going to try and describe the emotions which gripped me upon meeting my fellow country-men. I heard all of those phrases and names familiar to me since childhood. It was as if I had visited our unforgettable homeland after a long absence... how it [the association] brings all of us ‘Russian Chinese’ together!” (Chekhovich 2000, 4).

This sense of kinship with Russians from China also extends to those who chose not to repatriate. Describing when Russians from China gathered in Moscow from different countries to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the CER in 1998, one repatriate wrote: “The fates of all turned out differently but when we met we were all equal” (Dobrynin 1998, 4). From the start, repatriate newsletters sought to reach out to Russians from China who had remained abroad, whom many had feared writing while the Soviet Union existed (Dykhov 1994, 2). Russians from China living on other continents publish, especially recently, in these newsletters; the authors include Russian Jews who, after Russians and Ukrainians, constituted the third-largest ethnic group from the Russian Empire in China. Numerous repatriates have visited their relatives, friends, and former schoolmates in these countries since the fall of the Soviet Union. One repatriate described in 1997 how the Russians from China whom he visited in San Francisco maintained the “real” Russian way of life, including language, faith, and diet (Ogorodnikov 1997, 6). Russians from China in the US, Israel, and Australia have maintained a distinct identity within the diaspora, publishing their own newsletters often immediately following their departure from China, which mainly took the form of alumni bulletins. The sense that the world knew more about Russians from China outside of Russia due
to these bulletins was one factor behind initiating the publication of repatriate newsletters (Shuvalov 2000, 33), and it also inspired some repatriates to write their memoirs (Serebrennikov 1980–1988, 10).

While some repatriates I interviewed agree that they had more in common with Russians from China in the diaspora than they do with local Russians (Grigorev'na 2012; Klipinitser 2012), the different experiences the two groups had after parting ways in China has taken some toll. Many repatriates feel that despite their best intentions, Russians from China who did not repatriate do not fully understand them. One repatriate mentions the “heated arguments” she had with friends in Australia; they peppered her during her visit with questions about the changes that had taken place since the fall of the Soviet Union (V.V. Semenova 2000, 67). Nor have the wounds that they suffered when deciding whether or not to repatriate healed. Each side still feels some need to justify its decision. One repatriate recalls his father’s cousin’s visit to the USSR in the 1970s from Australia. His father, upset that his cousin was bragging about how well they lived there, blurted out: “and what do your boys work as? Truck drivers? All three of my children received a higher education. And, thank God, we speak our own language here” (Litvintsev 2010). Another repatriate in her post-Soviet memoir referred to those Russians from China living outside Russia as “our foreigners” and recalled a friend in China who, despite receiving a visa in the 1950s, did not let “rich Australia” seduce his Russian soul; instead he repatriated (Dzemeshkevich 1998, 169–75). When asked, several repatriates stated that those who did not repatriate were not patriots (Staritsyna 2012; Kameneva 2012). One Russian from China who did not repatriate, in turn, wrote in to one newsletter in 2000 claiming that repatriates whitewashed the Soviet experience, never mentioning those repatriates whose careers were not successful or what it was like to have to lie about your true feelings (Iastrebova 2000, 18).

Repatriates are less ambiguous about including the various nationalities of the Russian Empire who lived in China in their collective identity. An ethnic Russian repatriate noted in his memoir that Harbin was not Harbin without not only Russians and Chinese, but also Greeks, Jews, Tatars, Ukrainians, Koreans, Georgians, and Japanese (Livitskii 1998, 148–51). Repatriates are able to reconcile this multiethnic vision of Harbin with their contention that Russians in China preserved prerevolutionary Russian culture because all of these minorities were, for the most part, Russian speaking. As one repatriate, describing the school he attended in Harbin, recalls: “The whole tenor of life in school was purely Russian, but that did not deter individuals of other nationalities from studying there” (Dobrynin 2001, 32). Many of the minority nationalities of the Russian Empire living in Harbin did not, in fact, know any other language besides Russian. The majority of the large number of Ukrainians in Harbin self-identified themselves as Russians, and like ethnic Russian repatriates, either repatriated to the USSR or emigrated.
from China to capitalist countries (Cipko 1992). Whereas Georgians in Harbin continued to self-identify as Georgians, even the official head of the Georgian community in Harbin was married first to a Pole, and later to a Russian; neither of his children, who both repatriated to the Soviet Union (his son, the writer Levan Khaindrava, to the republic of Georgia; his daughter, the poet Lidia Khaindrova, to the Russian republic), spoke any Georgian; both wrote all of their work in Russian. While many Georgian men ended up in China as part of the retreating White Army, very few Georgian women did. Several repatriates I interviewed and with whom I have corresponded are products of internmarriages by a Russian parent or grandparent with one or more of the various nationalities of the Russian Empire, including Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and Germans.

Writing in *On the Hills of Manchuria* from Poland, one native of Harbin, born to such a mixed marriage between a Russian mother and a Polish father, but who retained enough of a Polish identity to repatriate to Poland, asserts that he, and implicitly all Harbiners, belong to a single nationality: "Who am I? A Pole? A Russian? No! I am a Harbiner!" (Spykhal'skii 1998, 5). Indeed, this collective identity borders on its own nationality, as specific differences in language and manners have given way to more essentialized notions of character. And it is not limited to Harbiners. In 2012 one repatriate described this nationality for all Russians from China in *On the Hills*: "All Russians who ended up in China and found in it a surrogate homeland, regardless of where they lived, can be called Harbiners because a Harbiner is not only defined by geography, but by a special type of commonality along people. They are a nation, yes, a nation, regardless of whether they are Russian or not." She then related a story about a Harbiner who enrolled in Zurich University. When she was asked by a professor where she was from, she responded "I am a Harbiner" to which the professor asked "What, is that some kind of nationality?" to which the young woman responded with a smile "Of course." The author then addressed her readers "and doesn't it seem to you that this particular young woman gave us all the correct response" (Osipenko 2012, 8). Another repatriate recently compared Harbiners to the oldest diaspora of all, which consistently resisted assimilation: "Harbiners are like Jews, they don't lose contact with their own kind" (Kosareva 2012).

**Choosing a Homeland**

The concept of homeland (*rodina*) is particularly tricky for repatriates because it is usually employed by Russians to signify birthplace. In contrast to the roughly 10,000 Russians from China still living in the diaspora, many of whom consider China their motherland (Ikuta 2010, 225), repatriates struggle to articulate what constitutes their homeland. While repatriates have differentiated themselves—and felt themselves estranged from—local Russians, they did, after all, decide to voluntarily
Russian Repatriates from China to the USSR

return to their historic homeland. Their process of splintering their national identity has entailed a transformation of their theories of homeland to the point where it has ultimately become so complex that it alters the concept.

Repatriates use homeland in a variety of ways. Sometimes a single repatriate uses it several different ways. They rarely employ "historical homeland," even though it would seem to be the most logical choice to refer to Russia. When they do use "historical homeland," they utilize it alongside other forms to refer to China, such as the Soviet-era expression "small homeland" (malaia rodina), which means the village, town, city, or particular geographic region one is from, as opposed to the Soviet Union, which was one's implicit "large" homeland (Mirandov 2009, 6). They are thus juxtaposing China and Russia, to which they feel a hybrid sense of belonging (Shelelov 2000, 4; Taskina and Mukhin 2008, 5). In one case, a repatriate refers to China as his "second small homeland" (Anishchenko 2009, 6). But because they experienced exile, rather than just migration, this hybridity is not seamless. The complex feelings China evokes is evident in the narratives of repatriates who refer to Harbin as, "far," "foreign," but "near" and "our own" or "stepmother and motherland" all in the same sentence (Laletina 1998, 4; Butyrskikh 2011, 58). Another repatriate takes the most radical approach of all by adopting the dreams of prerevolutionary colonizers and Russian fascists; he refers to Manchuria as Russia, solving all his dilemmas about the location of his homeland (Sukhovol'ski 2009, 43). Yet another repatriate associated homeland ostensibly with birthplace, but really with happiness: "I lived in China for 27 years, and those were the best years of my life. Many fell in love there and got married. Your homeland is not where you live, but where you were born. Russia is our second homeland" (Kariakina 2011, 8).

For some repatriates the idea of two homelands, a natal and an ancestral, is illogical, and they are divided between referring to Russia or China as their homeland (G.K. Peshkova 2007, 81; Guliaeva 2001, 5). One woman, who returned in 1958 to her mother's hometown of Kaluga, where her mother's family had been noble landowners, rejects outright the notion that China, which was eager to rid itself of Russians, seen as vestiges of imperialism, by the time most of them left, could be a Russian's homeland: "'where one is born, there one proves useful.' For us, for those born in Harbin, this proverb doesn't apply. Harbin could not become our homeland. Every one of us searched for his place in the world. I was lucky: I am in Russia, in the city where my mother's father is buried" (Pishchikova 1997, 24). Yet clearly she has a localized notion of homeland. This localized understanding explains why some other repatriates identify their homeland as the villages or cities in China where they had been born (Sofronova 1998, 3; Volkova 2009; Klipinitser 2012). Yet another former noble, born in the Russian Empire, was never allowed to visit the estate where he was born after he repatriated in 1954;
it was now located in a restricted zone. And since he had been politically opposed to the Soviet state, the Soviet Union could not serve as his homeland: "And what homeland, the Soviet Union?" (Sel'kov 2006, 21). After repatriating in the 1950s with his mother to her birthplace—which she had always considered her homeland—and seeing her walk its streets shaking and crying as she realized her Tiumen' was long gone, Nikolai Sharokhin realized that the Harbin of his era—which unlike other Russians he had never considered his homeland when living there—was Russia, while Tiumen' no longer was. Yet because this Harbin—which he did not consider part of China—no longer existed, he was tortured by the thought that he had no homeland (Sharokhin 2007-2008, 65-8). 

**Internal Missionaries in Their Historic Homeland**

Recent research on homeland migration demonstrates that homecomings are usually "future orientated social projects" (Stefansson 2004, 4, 11). For repatriates struggling to find a homeland, this project took on particular meaning. Every repatriate has a story to tell about kind locals who helped them along the way, whether an employer who overcame his fear by hiring them or a neighbor who assisted them in a dire moment of need. For example, a woman who repatriated at the age of twelve in 1947 recalls a classmate who helped her hide her Orthodox cross when the school doctor vaccinated them, as well as a teacher who took her aside and warned her that her father would be arrested if she continued talking in class about how well they had lived in China (Petrova 2012). Some repatriates have even given some locals what they consider the highest of compliments, remarking that a few female (never male, they emphasize) spouses of repatriate friends are "just like Harbiners" (Popov-Presnov 1987, 2; Mishin 2012; Staritsyna 2012). But besides members of the local population who were uncorrupted, even repatriates who castigated other local Russians in the strongest possible terms did not believe that they were beyond redemption. One repatriate, who was arrested in late 1940s, having allegedly stated that local Russians were no better than animals, was also quoted as stating: "Why is it like this? Because of what their lives are like. The conditions of their daily life have destroyed them" (quoted in Vertiletskaia 2004, 168). Before 1917—only a few decades before—"Soviet" Russians had been just like repatriates; their characters were not immutable, their morality had been disfigured by the socioeconomic conditions created by the Soviet state. Damage done to "Soviet" Russians could be reversed through exposure to "real" Russians. Historically, Russians have not had a developed biological concept of Russian national identity; prior to 1917, Orthodox missionaries and scholars debated whether Russian as one's primary tongue or being an Orthodox Christian was the primary criterion to define Russianness (Geraci 2001, 76–81). It is thus not
incongruous that repatriates could espouse a sense of their own ethnicity and also believe others could be "converted" (or "reconverted") to this ethnicity (an apt way of thinking about the process, since local Russians had, for the most part, lost their connection to the Russian Orthodoxy émigrés in China had preserved). One repatriate I interviewed emphasized the plausibility of such conversions when we discussed how many repatriates recalled being asked if they were from Leningrad, once the Imperial capital, St. Petersburg, whose residents have traditionally been known for being highly cultured and well mannered. He noted that given the high mortality rate in the city during the blockade and the purges of the 1930s, only 10% of the post-war population of Leningrad was from, or descendants of, people from that city. Thus simply by living among a small minority of native-born Leningraders, migrants, mainly from the Russian republic in the Soviet Union, who had obtained residence permits to move to Leningrad to study or work, had assimilated into traditional Petersburg culture and successfully adopted it as their own. The city is still, after all, to this day known for its universally cultured residents (Ivashinnikov 2012). Repatriates could, ostensibly, therefore transform Sovietized Russia into the homeland they wanted it to be.

Ironically, repatriates—whose parents belonged to the full spectrum of social estates that existed in Imperial Russia before 1917—have cast themselves in the role of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia, the educated members of society who dedicated themselves to saving the masses. While many "Soviet" Russians were just as educated—if not more educated—than repatriates, because all "Soviet" Russians were deprived of a "true" Russian upbringing, repatriates felt themselves superior to them and could categorize all of them—regardless of their level of education or social background—as the masses. One even directly compared himself and his fellow repatriates to the prerevolutionary populists in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. Like noble populists, he bemoaned that their only knowledge of the world the masses lived in had been garnered through books (Serebrennikov 1987, 72, 85). In a diary entry from 1947, much like the populists who went "to the people" in the 1870s, another repatriate described how sorry she felt for, and how she yearned to get close to, the poorly dressed people she saw everywhere (Khaindrova 2003, 59). Like the even more numerous Armenian repatriates to post-war Armenia, they can be seen as attempting to save "Soviet" Russia (Pattie 2004, 116–7).

One repatriate attempted to explain how a uniform culture—one closely resembling that of Russian aristocrats—could have pervaded the large, socially diverse community of Russians in Harbin by claiming that all social classes in Harbin spoke prerevolutionary "Petersburg" Russian due to the old-fashioned education they received in Harbin schools, where many of the teachers were Russian nobles (Taut 2001b, 36–8). Although it was uncomfortable for her to correct the friendly local Russians with whom she worked after leaving the state farm, one
repatriate recalls that she had no choice since she couldn't tolerate their grammatical errors anymore. She brought a dictionary with her so that they couldn't argue with her and fined everyone one kopek, setting the funds aside for a lottery, for every mistake, or misplaced stress on a word. One refused and said he would speak as he always had, another said that she would learn for free, but the others all paid, albeit reluctantly (Kosareva 2011, 72).

Alongside language, the second aspect of prerevolutionary culture that repatriates could restore in Russia—and the other historical criteria for defining Russian national identity—is the Russian Orthodox faith. Writing in 1995, one repatriate, citing a book he had read about how the mission of the Russian emigration was to bring Orthodoxy to new regions of the world, stated that those who had returned to Russia could return true Orthodoxy to post-Soviet Russia by teaching what they remembered about their lives and the lives of their parents in China: “and this will be our legacy” (Svistunov 1995, 1, 3). Elena Vladi was even brave enough to proselytize during the 1970s; she imparted her piety to a neighborhood boy, Tolik (Nikobazde 2000, 30). Numerous repatriates recall telling coworkers about Orthodox holidays and customs (Kameneva 2012; Petrova 2012). However, they do not always feel that other Russians have listened to them, and this angers them. One repatriate, for example, complains how she had tried numerous times to explain to local Russians how one holds a proper Orthodox funeral. No one believes her that one could have a proper Russian Orthodox funeral without alcohol, as they had always done in China (Taut 2001a, 19–20).

Repatriates also culturally civilized other Russians, both formally and informally. One second-wave interviewee recalls his aunt's work as a teacher of English at a technical college in Perm. Having lived in Tientsin, where she was courted by an English aristocrat (whom she refused to marry because she was homeward bound), she was adored by her students, who told her: “You were teaching us not only English, you were teaching us culture, how to behave, how to dress” (Tymashev 1999). Repatriates could not only teach local Russians about the West, they could also serve as a bridge to the lost world of Imperial Russia. The neighbors of one elderly repatriate, born into the nobility, took care of her in Moscow throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and adored her because she was a “real noblewoman” (Il'ina-Lail' 2007, 276). Repatriates' civilizing mission was not, however, limited to inculcating foreign or prerevolutionary culture considered illicit during the Soviet period. One repatriate describes with pride in her memoir how the “Soviet” husband of one Harbiner told her how his wife and her fellow repatriates had changed the life of state farm workers, teaching them manners, housekeeping, cooking, and hygiene (Dzemeshkevich 1998, 226–7). In this case, the fact that the Soviet civilizing mission was based, in part, on the prerevolutionary Russian intelligentsia's mission to the people

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rendered repatriates' attempts to recreate Imperial Russia in the Soviet Union essentially the same as some of the defining aspects of an ideal Soviet citizen (Furst 2010, 12, 23, 202, 236).

A customary section in repatriates' obituaries lists the Soviet medals the individual earned ("Elena" 2009, 7; "Georgii" 2002, 7; "Petr" 2000, 7). Numerous repatriates I interviewed prepared scrapbooks about their professional achievements to show me (Kirsanov 2012; Staritsyna 2012). Whereas the emphasis on Soviet professional success can be viewed as repatriates' desire to present themselves as ideal Soviet citizens, it can also be seen as fulfilling one of the missions of "Russia Abroad." Russia Abroad was the extraterritorial nation numbering approximately 2 million émigrés to which the parents of repatriates who were White Russians belonged, and which was represented in China by all Russian Orthodox churches, émigré newspapers, and émigré educational institutions. As stated by émigré leaders in Paris in the 1920s, there were three missions to which Russia Abroad was devoted. They included: youths receiving specialized higher education abroad that would enable them to rebuild Russia once they returned; preserving prerevolutionary culture and cultivating a Bolshevik-free Russian culture that could eventually be brought home; and disseminating Russian culture abroad among foreigners (Bunakov 1930, 3; Gippius 1930, 14). The professional successes of repatriates in the USSR, particularly regarding professions for which they were uniquely suited, such as the teaching of foreign languages and engineering that required familiarity with Western technology, fulfilled the first of these goals. Yet the second and third goals have not been unimplemented either. As we've seen, Russian repatriates from China perceive themselves as carriers of prerevolutionary Russian culture and thus fulfill the second mission of Russia Abroad. By bestowing that culture to "Soviet" Russians, they are fulfilling the third goal, one of a civilizing, or colonizing mission. Since the repatriates considered themselves a distinct ethnicity from local Russians, local Russians can be viewed as foreigners in need of Russification.

Like the prerevolutionary intelligentsia of all political affiliations, the alleged mission of repatriates was to serve the people, not to accumulate material wealth. Many repatriates who could not initially secure employment claim that the tremendous anguish they experienced was not because housing and ration cards were contingent upon employment, but because they felt that they were of no use to anyone (Dzemeshkevich 1998, 197; Sharokhin 2007, 42-3). In a 2003 letter written to a fellow Russian from China living in Australia, one repatriate agreed that it was hard for Russians from China wherever they went, but emphasized that after acquiring the language of one's host country, life became much easier for those who went West. Unlike them, she did not end up with a lucrative pension, and had only received a decent salary when she worked in the Far North, which had adversely affected her health. Yet, like virtually all the repatriates I interviewed, she did not
regret repatriating: “The enthusiasm of working ‘for the good of the motherland’ was not obliterated. However, this enthusiasm could never have been destroyed. My parents loved their motherland and instilled it into my blood. No matter where I worked, everywhere I gave myself entirely to the task at hand” (Pishchikova 2003).

The collective bravery that they attribute to themselves could assist in their mission to save Russia, and could also render them Soviet heroes. The daughter of one repatriate recalls how when her mother, a doctor, arrived on the state farm, she categorically refused to engage in manual labor. Because of the lack of medical doctors in the area, she was allowed to work as a doctor, and as a doctor she declined no one care; she often came to the rescue of women and children beaten by drunken husbands. Her work brought her into conflict with local authorities. She fought them on all fronts, constantly complaining that there were no adequate medical supplies. Known as a free thinker, she at one point, out of sheer exasperation, threw an inkwell at a local boss. Local authorities informed on her to the KGB, but when the KGB agent arrived, he refused to arrest her, telling her to stay as long as she could on the state farm, as there were not enough people like her in the Soviet countryside (Loboda 2004, 2-4). Repatriates were not dissidents, who were always a tiny minority in the Soviet Union. They see themselves as patriots, who enthusiastically chose to return to their historic homeland, never accepting the émigré belief in two distinct Russias (Soviet Russia and Russia Abroad). Instead, they attempted to breach the chasm between prerevolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

In a memoir he attempted to publish in a Soviet newspaper in 1978, a second-wave repatriate who had escaped arrest and served with distinction as a naval captain explained how well and uniquely suited repatriates from China were to play the critical role of insider and outsider in Soviet society:

Among young people who arrived from China, there still aren’t any academicians [reserved for a handful of the most prominent scholars in Russia], but there are Ph.D.s and professors, there are writers, artists, composers, actors, specialists in industry, linguists, doctors, teachers . . . All of them, having swallowed in their youths the bitter pill of a dramatic life change, became useful, valued citizens of Socialist Russia . . . They are able to insightfully critique, because they have lived under both socio-economic systems that exist in the world. And thus they often see that which a citizen of the country born here wouldn’t notice. (Nikiforov 2000, 16)

In a diary entry written nineteen years earlier, a third-wave repatriate also described this unique “third” role repatriates could play. You
couldn't make a Soviet citizen out of someone who had lived abroad for forty years, he concluded, but as Russians who knew the old Russia and loved their motherland, they also possessed insight that foreigners could never have. They hadn't simply lived abroad; those from Harbin had lived until 1945 in the closest replica of prerevolutionary Russia that has ever existed. Whereas Soviet citizens had been taught not to critique their world, life in the emigration had been all about scrutinizing one's environs, one's present as well as one's past (Morozov 1959, 2–5). Ironically, this role as insightful critics on Soviet life—the role repatriates privately played but were not allowed to play publicly—is one that ethnic return migrants have performed in democratic societies, a role that benefits both repatriates and their historical homeland (Watt 2009, 10).

Ethnicity, subject to redefinition, has been shown to splinter upon return migration in other countries. Repatriates' expectations about reuniting with locals of the same previous ethnicity are so high that any differences that have developed are magnified (Tsuda 2009, 7, 11, 16). Thus, like many other ethnic return migrants, Russian repatriates from China developed a new ethnicity based not on shared ancestry, but on cultural differences and shared experiences. They had lived separately from other Russians for a relatively short span of generations, and unlike many other migrants, had maintained their cultural heritage and language. But the cataclysmic changes that occurred in Russia after they left rendered this meaningless, much as the even briefer separation between East and West Germans has been asserted to have created two separate German ethnicities (Howard 1995). Yet unlike East Germans after unification, repatriates were forcibly silenced and completely marginalized through censorship. If they had been part of public discourse and openly assisted in their process of assimilation, most, given their initial enthusiasm, would have acculturated naturally while contributing something new to Soviet life; for repatriates did not want—or expect—the alterity they experienced. They repatriated to unite with their historic homeland. But once faced with a totalitarian system that would not yield, and convinced of their own superiority while experiencing guilt for having missed the war, they attempted to bridge the gap between themselves and local Russians in the manner of members of Russia's guilt-ridden intelligentsia before 1917, by both serving and leading the Russian masses covertly. Yet once the Soviet Union collapsed, forty years of silence took its toll. Repatriates have sought more to unite with Russians from China abroad than to publicly claim their place in post-Soviet discourse. Despite the flurry of interest in them by young Russians—evident in Internet postings—they generally argue that their time has passed. They refer to themselves as the last of the Mohicans. Now elderly, they have turned inward, cultivating their distinct ethnicity through autobiographical narratives they share with each other.
Notes

1. A version of this article was presented at the international colloquium Subjectivity and History, held at the European University in St. Petersburg on 7–10 June 2010. I would like to thank Robert Geraci and Victoria Thompson for their comments on a more recent draft, as well as Natalia Ablazhei, Patricia Polansky, Nadezhda Razzhigaeva, and Sergei Smirnov for providing me with access to a number of my sources.

2. In this article, “Russian” is used to refer to people who were born, or the children of those born, in the Russian Empire, who were almost exclusively Russian speaking and considered themselves culturally Russian.

3. The exceptions are the work of Natalia Ablazhei (besides her 2008 article cited above) and Bruce Adams. Their work differs from my approach in that they adopted a more quantitative approach, analyzing primarily state documents (Ablazhei 2004, 2006; Adams 2002; see also their works cited in the body of this article). Adams especially also focused on the repatriation of non-Russian speakers to the Soviet Union from China (Adams 2008). In addition to extensive archival research in émigré archives, phone interviews, correspondence with repatriates, and thirty-six semi-structured oral interviews and archival research I conducted in Russia in May and June 2012, this article is based in part on structured oral interviews and archival research that Adams conducted in the 1980s. Tragically, he died before he could take full advantage of his own material for publication. Some of the documents that he copied in the state security archives are now closed to researchers; many of those he interviewed have since died. All of his research materials are open and available to scholars for future research at the University of Hawaii.

4. Their newsletters include: On the Hills of Manchuria (Novosibirsk, 1993–); Russians in China (Ekaterinburg, 1994–); and Russian Atlantis (Cheliabinsk, 1998–). None are on sale; they are distributed through repatriate networks. Although there are a couple of other repatriate newsletters, these three have had the longest publication runs and are the only ones still published. Many second-wave repatriates, who were not allowed to live farther west than the city of Kazan, initially settled in the Urals, and these were the cities to which many third-wave repatriates moved after they were allowed to leave the State Farms (most of the farms were near these cities). Because the Russian emigration in China was composed of many Siberians, due to geographic proximity, these cities were also where many of the families of repatriates had lived before the 1917 revolution.

5. I am defining ethnicity in the Weberian subjective sense of a perceived similarity in terms of heritage, shared experiences, physical appearance, and culture.

6. The decision to allow Russian émigrés to repatriate to the Soviet Union remains shrouded in secrecy, and the Politburo may not have left documents explaining its decisions on this matter. A popular interpretation is that the Soviet state needed manpower after losing so much of its population during the war. Given that Soviet losses were approximately 26 million, this interpretation does not convince me. It seems more likely that the Soviet state saw repatriation as a means to weaken "Russia Abroad," that alternative diaspora nation that had so vexed its leaders in the 1930s that they regularly had émigré leaders assassinated or kidnapped. A second likely explanation is that once tens of thousands of individuals began protesting at Soviet consulates to be allowed to enter the worker's paradise, the Soviet Union would have been disgraced internationally and not have lived up to its mission if it had continued to refuse them.

7. These intelligence reports, purchased by Holy Trinity Seminary in 2011 from a private seller in Harbin, are Russian-language weekly reports, accompanied by Chinese-language summaries, by a Russian informer who had infiltrated the Russian Orthodox clergy in Harbin (he regularly attended Diocesan meetings) and appears to have been working for the Chinese Communist Party.

8. To this day Russians are one of the fifty-six official ethnicities in China. Numbering several thousand, virtually all are products or descendants of intermarriage—a rare phenomenon, but more common between Russians and Chinese than between Chinese and other Europeans—and live in northwestern China near the Russian border. While most of the Russian diaspora had left China by 1860, some repatriated as late as 1968 and hundreds were leaving for Australia as late as the 1970s and early 1980s (Lukashkin 1972–1984). Russians who remained in China were targeted during Mao's
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Cultural Revolution. Within the last few years, the handful of Russians who never left Harbin have all died.

9. Involuntary repatriates also publish in these newsletters and participate in associations and congresses. The extent to which the identity of involuntary and repressed repatriates from China is remarkably similar to that of voluntary repatriates discussed is beyond the scope of this article, but will be discussed in the monograph I am currently writing, tentatively titled The Real Russians Return: Repatriates from China to the Soviet Union.

10. Ironically, the Soviet state briefly labeled Harbiners in 1938 as a distinct ethnicity when it issued orders to arrest all of them (Martin 2001, 343).

11. Repatriates often cite the destruction of Russian Orthodox churches and of the main Russian cemetery (which is now a park) in Harbin during the Cultural Revolution as proof that Russian Harbin no longer physically exists.

12. According to his son, the national newspaper Sovetskaia Rossiia did not refuse publication of this exceedingly pro-Soviet memoir; editors requested that the memoir be edited. The author died before he could accomplish this.

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