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History of the Polish Colony in Harbin in the context of historical events on the territory of the Middle Kingdom in the years 1895 - 1966

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Abstract of the doctoral dissertation

The creation of the Polish colony in the XIX and XX century in Harbin was associated with the construction of Eastern Chinese rails system, which has its central point located in the city of Harbin, erected on the 16th of May 1898 by the Polish engineer Adam Szydłowski. The history of the tsar's investments is affiliated with China's defeat after the war with Japan (1895) and acquiring Russian military assurance as well as financial resources allowing them to pay off their contribution in the war. This marked the creation of the extraterritorial railway system crossing Manchuria connecting the Russian city of Czyta and Vladivostok.

The administrative center of the newly built railways was Harbin, and many Polish technicians and engineers were found among its constructors, such as Stanisław Kierbedź, the nephew of the establisher of Vistula's first steel bridge erected in Warsaw in 1864. The author of the first city plan was the Polish engineer Konstanty Jokisz. The overwhelming batch of Polish workforce hired at the Manchurian construction working on the Trans-Siberian Railway as well as political exiles who took part in the January Uprising.

The construction period of Harbin gave birth to many work opportunities and opened up the possibilities of quick promotion for many Polish individuals, who willingly colonized the rising facility, settling down after leaving the territories of the Russian Empire. The colony rapidly reached 7000 citizens, from which many played important roles such as the officials position. Harbin's first station was a building, which unfortunately didn't uphold until today, was planned by Ignacy Cytowicz. Many other characters took part in Manchuria's development, such as Dr. Feliks Jasiński, who constructed Harbin's first hospitals and medical centers, Dr. Aleksander Wasilewski, the founder of the Luis Pasteur Bacteriological Center or the ethnographer Kazimierz Grochowski, builder of several Chinese mines. In the areas of

Manchuria we had Józef Gieysztor who later played the role of a professor at several colleges in Warsaw, as well as Dr. Janusz Korczak. According to the priceless studies of Mark Cabanowski, Marian Kałuski and especially Edward Kajdański, a famous writer and journalist born in Harbin, the Poles created Manchuria's first steam mills, sugar and cigarette factories, boiler rooms and metallurgical plants, as well as the first brewery called dubbed after the Wróblewski namesake. An unbelievably interesting fact about the first sugar factory however; following its creation by the Association of Lublin Landlords produced its sugar using beetroots which grew from imported Polish seeds.

Harbin's Polish community was being filled by, among others, veterans of the October Revolution, soldiers and officers of the 5th Division of the Polish Infantry lead by the colonels Kazimierz Rzymasa and Walerian Czuma. In the year of 1920 the number of Polish inhabitants living in Harbin counted a staggering 20 thousand. That same year the Consulate of the Republic of Poland was created. The first consul of the RP in Manchuria was Józef Targawski, an ex-diplomat in the Empire of Japan. The city had only two churches, where the first one finished construction in 1909. Several schools were built as well, but the most renowned one is Henryk Sienkiewicz's Secondary School which ceased its activity in 1949. The Poles possessed their own automobile, sport clubs and social institutions, for example the Organisation "Polish Guesthouse", Polish Scouts, Polish Dormitories or the Union of Polish Youth assembled in 1921. A little known curiosity about the 1920's in Harbin; the connection of the Harbin-Ciechocinek railway, in which the city's inhabitants travelled to health resorts using Pullman wagons.

During the period of 1925-1930 the number of Polish residents fell to about 3500 people. This was caused mainly by the Soviet-Chinese agreement from 1924 which stated that only Soviets and Chinese locals had the right to work on the railways. This wasn't everything however, as big numbers of Polish citizens decided to repatriate back to their country. There were many other reasons as for the decline of the Polish population in Harbin, and those would be the worsening political and economic situation in its territories, the outbreak of the Chinese civil war, the proclamation of Manchukuo as a country as well as the outbreak of the second Chinese-Japanese war (1937-1945).

The last well known historical documentation of the Polish presence in Harbin were the repressions directed towards non-Asian minorities by the Chinese government (from 1949), which resulted in the Cultural Revolution (1966).