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“He Was an Agent of Japanese Intelligence.” Fates of Chinese Migrants in Investigative Files of the Repressed in the 1930s: Archival Materials of the Chelyabinsk Region

Abstract

The article draws on documents from the United State Archive of the Chelyabinsk Region to examine biographies of Chinese migrants repressed in 1937-38. Although main location of the Chinese in the Urals in the 1920-1930s was the Middle Urals (Perm and Sverdlovsk), their presence has been traced in the Chelyabinsk region. Comprehensive reconstruction of Chinese migration in the USSR demands introduction of these sources to scientific use. The 1930s archival documents, primarily the investigative files of the repressed, demonstrate socio-demographic features of the Chinese and their most typical biographies in the pre-war

USSR. They were mostly of the Soviet era wave of migration, originating from the Shandong province. Some adapted well in society, married Russian women and had children. However, many remained illiterate, engaged in heavy physical labor. Qualitative analysis of personal files shows main trajectories of Chinese migration to the South Urals from the Far East or from large cities (Moscow, Irkutsk, Khabarovsk, etc.), where Chinese communities appeared in the 1920s. State pressure on the Chinese community strengthened in the late 1920s ? early 1930s, forcing them to change their place of residence. Political changes in the USSR made the Chinese abandon their private enterprises and trade, their main niche in the 1920s. In 1937–38, a wave of repression rolled and, according to our estimates, almost half of the Chinese in the Chelyabinsk region were declared “spies and agents of Japanese intelligence.” The biographies of the repressed testify that under favorable conditions they could have contributed to creation of an organized Chinese community, since they had influence over Chinese migrants, as well as experience of organizational work and of participating in the Civil War.

Keywords

Migrants in the USSR, Chinese, socio-demographic features of the Chinese, repressions, investigations, sources, Urals, Chelyabinsk.

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