

What Can Be Seen from Manchuria? Polish Community on the World Map According to the Polish Press for Children and Youth in Harbin (1919–1937)¹

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Abstract

The article concerns the Polish-language press for children and youth published in the years 1919–1937 in Harbin, Manchuria. It aims to trace the Polish emigrants' ideas – especially those reflected by the young generation in the press – regarding their community's national identity and its place on the world map of countries and nations. The article discusses the subjects of raising children in Polish tradition in a multicultural city in Asia, the developing relations between the colony and the homeland and, finally, the project of patriotism promoted by some young Poles in order to take advantage of their place of residence for the sake of their country.

Keywords

Harbin, Polish colony in Manchuria, Polish press, press for children and youth

Kazimierz Grochowski, the author of one of the most significant studies documenting the life of the Polish colony in Manchuria, claimed that local magazines were “the only source for the history of Polish community in the distant Asian lands, and that our [Polish – suppl. by ZS] cultural work among those multitudes of tribes and nations found its, albeit feeble, reflection only in those magazines”.² The presence

¹ This article was originally published in Polish: “Co widać z Mandżurii? Polska wspólnota na mapie świata według polonijnej prasy dla dzieci i młodzieży w Harbinie (1919–1937)”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2024, no. 2, pp. 120–132, <https://doi.org/10.31338/2657-599X.ph.2024-2.8>.

² Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, Harbin in China: s.n. 1928, p. 78.

of the Polish community in Harbin dates back to 1898,³ and the Polish press was published there from 1917 to 1949.⁴ And indeed, in spite of their often unstable nature, in spite of all the technical, formal and substantive weaknesses, the magazines that have been preserved to this day constitute a valuable testimony of the life of the Polish community in Manchuria (not only its cultural life mentioned by Grochowski) and of the attempts to organise it and give it a certain orientation. Even though this phenomenon has already been partially described and subjected to scholarly reflection, little attention has been given so far to its specific aspect concerning non-adult readers or readers who are only entering into adulthood – children and youth (including college youth, who were older and took active part in the Harbinian press). Despite the internal heterogeneity of this group of readers, and the consecutive differences in the profiles, content and form of the magazines addressed to them, the aim of the present article is to read all those magazines as very specific source texts, also because of the role that was sometimes ascribed to the young generation for the future of the Polish colony.

The Polish history of Harbin – a city gathering the Polish community in Manchuria at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, the centre of this community's social and cultural life – began in 1898, the year when the first Poles, employed at the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, came to live there. Over several decades, the Polish colony developed a rich social and cultural life. Harbin was at that time a multinational city, subject to Chinese, Russian and then also Japanese influences. Its history was marked by various political and social conflicts, including armed conflicts in the neighbouring countries – the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian-Japanese War in 1904–1905 or the Chinese-Japanese conflicts. It was within that complex and changeable network of social and political relations that the Polish community in Harbin had to function. The press it published, as the platform of its social life, was an instrument of unification of the Polish community in Manchuria and a means to maintain contact with the compatriots in the Polish lands. Today, those magazines help researchers investigate the transformations of that community's self-image and, due to Harbin's specific location and social-political situation, they also constitute a source of information about the relationships of its inhabitants with the representatives of other nations and with their compatriots living in different parts of the world, as well as about their attitude to the territory they inhabited. In other words, we can learn from those magazines about the foundations of that community's identity, about its

³ After the repatriation conducted in 1949, 450 Poles stayed in Harbin and then progressively left the city. See: Jerzy Czajewski, [Introduction], in: *Polacy w Mandżurii – Poles in Manchuria (1897–1949)* [exhibition catalogue], Szczecin: Archives of Modern Records, with the cooperation of Agencja Wydawnicza Egros 2015, p. 36. On the history of Poles in Harbin, see, inter alia: ibidem, pp. 3–39; Kim Yong Deog, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii 1897–1949*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Promocji Powiatu, Miasta i Gminy PROMO 2001; Marian Katuski, *Polacy w Chinach*, Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax 2001, pp. 37–207.

⁴ See: Adam Winiarz, “Bibliografia prasy polskiej na Dalekim Wschodzie w latach 1917–1949”, *Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej* 1986, A. 25, no. 1, pp. 125–135.

ideas concerning the place it held on the map of the world at a unique moment for the Poles of regained independence and the beginning of statehood. The press addressed to children and youth is a particular document, a testimony of ideas that were only being formed: passed on to children or consciously chosen by them, in the case of youth who actively participated in creating the magazine's content and made their own choices of what to read. We need to bear in mind that in most cases the Polish press for children and youth in Manchuria was not published independently: it was supplemented to other magazines or included as a separate section (hence, it depended, to some degree, on the editorial board's orientation), or was a short-lived enterprise – therefore, more can be said about the projected programmes than about their actual realisations, but even those may lead to interesting observations.

Obviously, the Polish press in Harbin cannot offer a full picture of that community's life, if only for the reason that it does not span the whole period of the Poles' activity on that territory – as mentioned above, it was published in the years 1917–1949; as for the press for children and youth, it was in print only from 1919 to 1937, and that with little regularity, not throughout the whole period (in some years, none of the published titles included any content for children and youth; most of such publications appeared as late as in the 1930s). Moreover, there are two important circumstances related to this time span that should influence our perception of the social significance of the studied texts. Firstly, the readers of those magazines were next generations living in Manchuria, who – at least in some part born far away from homeland – had only an indirect knowledge of their country and could build their national identity only on this knowledge. This modelled the profile of a writer and a reader and enhanced the need to consciously unify the Polish community and to sustain its national identity in the press. Secondly, although the rich social and cultural life of the Polish colony in Harbin is often highlighted, the culmination of its development occurred in the period prior to the publication of most of the magazines discussed here. In 1934, in one of the issues of the local magazine *Daleki Wschód* [The Far East], Stanisław Nernhejm, who was describing the history of the colony, enumerated two “blows” received by the Polish community in Harbin. According to him, the first one was the departure of the richer part of Polish inhabitants to the, by then, independent homeland in 1920; the second one was the year 1925 when, in consequence of an agreement between China and the USSR of 1924, only the citizens of these two countries could work for the railway company,⁵ which deprived a large part of the Polish community of their source of income. Most of the press for young readers was published after those crises, at a moment of deterioration of the economic situation of the entire Polish community, which, for Nernhejm, resulted in the colony's “downfall”.⁶

⁵ See: Stanisław Nernhejm, “Polonia harbińska (zarys historyczny)”, *Daleki Wschód* 1934, no. 7, pp. 3–4.

⁶ See: *ibidem*, p. 5.

Section for children – “extension” of Poland

The above-described specific conditions of life of the Polish community in Harbin created, on the one hand, numerous opportunities for developing international relationships, but on the other, they stimulated the strengthening of relationships between the Poles, who, in consequence, perceived their existence in the East in terms of a fight for identity, to some extent. In these circumstances, strong emphasis was laid on the patriotic upbringing and the formation of identity of the young generation, part of whom never got to know their homeland otherwise than through the tales and memories of elders.

A Harbinian magazine that permanently offered a section for children was *Przegląd* [Review] (published in 1919–1921). Even its subtitle – *Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dzieci* [National Literary-Social-Economic Biweekly with a Section for Youngsters] – underlined the content it offered for the youngest readers. It was not an independent magazine for children, but only a section of a magazine addressed to adults. This section was not always clearly separated (towards the end of the magazine’s publishing, even its name disappeared), but it was relatively extensive, often supplemented with illustrations and – except for several issues – permanently present in the magazine. In the foreword from the editorial board, we read: “We are opening in our magazine a section, the lack of which is most acutely felt by parents – a section for children”,⁷ and then we learn about its goal and its intended form:

[...] in order to make it easier for the parents to bring up their children in pure Polish national traditions, we open this section for children. The section will include tips on children’s upbringing, amusing activities, purely Polish games, songs, nursery rhymes for name’s days, short stories, fairy tales, games with singing, riddles, physical experiments, etc.⁸

The actual content of the section for children corresponded more or less to the above declaration (except for the tips on children’s upbringing and physical experiments, which cannot be found there). As reasons for opening this section and selecting this kind of content, the editorial board indicated the low availability of Polish books, the constant contact of the children of Polish emigrants with children of other nationalities and the naturally resulting adoption of the foreign games and songs as well as the need to instil Polish traditions in the youngest ones (to begin with games, for instance), because:

The national [...] upbringing of children in the parental house is the moral basis, the lynchpin in the life of a future Polish citizen. By unfathomable ways, the culture of the nation penetrates the child’s

⁷ “Od Redakcji”, *Przegląd. Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dzieci* 1919, no. 1, p. 9.

⁸ Ibidem.

soul, becomes a souvenir of his most precious memories, because they are memories of the youth, the treasure of his life.⁹

Thus, this section was supposed to be an aid for the parents in the formation of “pure” Polish identity of children, a substitute for the national environment in which their peers were growing up in the Polish lands. In principle, it did not include any texts familiarising children with the local realia, the local social, political or natural conditions. The content was limited to matters related to Poland, stemming from Poland or created there, or else deemed universal, unrelated to any specific country (for instance, Andersen’s fairy tales). It was symptomatic that texts about Poland or originating from Poland were printed in Manchuria without any additional explanation or information about the Polish nature, traditions, social conditions, etc., even though – let us remind – the little readers had no chance of knowing them from experience. So, the section was not meant to reflect the reality in which the readers lived, but to create it and, thereby, to build their identity and their sense of community. Therefore, it seemed to be an extension of Poland on the Manchurian ground. After all, this was in line with the orientation of the whole magazine announced in its first issue, in which the lack of sufficient contact with the homeland was emphasised and the following declaration was made:

Our purpose is not at all to create here, in the Far East, a magazine intended for a long distance, for many years to come. No! We will continue to release this magazine into the world until the complete liberty of communication with our Country is achieved, until we will be able to draw directly from there, from Poland, our thoughts and spiritual strength.¹⁰

The ideological shape of the magazine does not surprise us too much: meant to educate the young generation in the spirit of patriotism far from homeland, it was somewhat similar to the press in the partitioned Poland that sought to compensate for the lack of statehood and was focused on education and self-education – besides, Kazimierz Grochowski underlined that initially, in Manchuria it was necessary to educate and bring up children in the national spirit exclusively at home, because until 1908, there was no school in Harbin that lectured in Polish.¹¹ Yet, such profiles and purposes of press publication may seem curious in the years 1919–1921, at the time when the Polish state already existed. As the creators of the magazine contended, the contacts with the Second Polish Republic were still impeded. The Polish consulate in Harbin was established as late as in 1920.¹² Therefore, this profile of the magazine’s section may be perceived as a continuation of the fight for national freedom. It was largely understandable and

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ “Do czytelników”, *Przegląd. Dwutygodnik narodowy literacko-społeczno-ekonomiczny z uwzględnieniem działu dla dzieci* 1919, no. 1, p. 3.

¹¹ Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, pp. 82–83.

¹² See: Jerzy Czajewski, [Introduction], pp. 17–18.

reflected the course of changes in the life of the Poles on that territory. They still felt the unwaning desire to return, they were preparing the youngest ones for that moment. The distant Poland was a bit like the biblical Promised Land, where perhaps their children – born far away from it – would once be given the chance to live. The above-cited Grochowski wryly reproached his countrymen for this tendency:

Such is indeed the psychology of a Pole in a foreign land that he may well have lived somewhere, say at Lake Baikal or at the estuary of the Chang Jiang, for 40 years, and for all those 40 years he is preparing to return to Poland. And even his son, who was born here, and who has seen no other face than that of a slant-eyed Chinese and a Siberian peasant – he is also always preparing to go back to Poland, even though he has no idea what he will be doing there once he arrives.¹³

Criticism of the current model of upbringing and a new programme of patriotism

The remarks in the above quotation were made by Grochowski in the context of his discussion of the Polish press in the Far East – according to him, Polish mentality explains the lack of complete collections of local press in the homes of Polish emigrants in Asia. Yet, he spoke in a similar vein about the school education, which was criticised sometimes for the unconditional reproduction of the national system, the graduates' lack of preparation to function in Asia and the fact that it unnaturally created and sustained the desire to depart to Poland.¹⁴ What used to be a natural desire to return (before Poland regained independence), now sought at all costs – in the new circumstances of the construction of Polish statehood – was sometimes estimated as unfavourable, not only for the returning emigrant, but also for the country. At this unique moment, representatives of the Polish nation in Harbin became, in addition, representatives of the state, and this new role demanded, in a way, a reconstruction of the idea they used to have about their place on the map of the world. Indeed, even though the boundaries of their country appeared on the maps, the Polish community continued to exist also beyond those boundaries. And it is precisely in this context that we can interpret the voices that arose in Manchuria in the 1920s and 1930s, critical of the existing model of education, which directed the young Poles' thoughts only towards the Second Polish Republic. In the above-mentioned article of 1934, Nernhejm wrote:

In spite of the considerable sacrifices from the part of the local society, the Government of the Polish Republic, and even the Poles from other emigrant territories – Henryk Sienkiewicz Middle School did not fulfil its most important task, i.e., it did not give the young people it educated any

¹³ Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, p. 77.

¹⁴ See: Stanisław Nernhejm, "Polonia harbińska", pp. 4–5; Jan Jaworski, "Szkolnictwo polskie w Harbinie", *Daleki Wschód* 1934, no. 7, pp. 5–7.

preparation for the struggle for survival in the difficult local conditions. Too rigidly relying on the programme of the Polish schools, it artificially created in the young people the urge to return to their homeland. Boys and girls who graduated from the middle school instinctively recognised that what they had been taught would be of no use for them in the work in the Far East. In the current year, the budget savings resulted in the interruption of the aid that the middle school had been receiving from the country. This hard blow for the Polish school education in Harbin may, however, produce blessed effects in the future. Indeed, it will have to be completely reorganised and adapted to the local conditions and challenges of life.¹⁵

In some respects, his remarks repeat Grochowski's observations from his book of 1928 – only in this case, they concern the methods of educating Polish children in Asia. However, as we may presume, these methods were closely related to the mentality of a Polish emigrant described by Grochowski, which clearly has not changed during the years that elapsed between these two texts. Such remarks, together with certain signals included in the magazines for the youth (created – let us note – by young people who had probably been educated in the criticised spirit and who might be former readers of the section for children in *Przegląd*), can be interpreted as a new programme of patriotism.

Indeed, at first glance, in some of the magazines for the youth published in the 1920s and 1930s, just as it was in the case of the above-described section for children in *Przegląd*, the rhetoric of fight for all that is national and of nostalgia for the homeland still prevailed; the remoteness from the Polish land, the constraint to live abroad and the financial difficulties were highlighted. However, upon closer examination of those texts and after a careful reflection on the profiles and purposes of those magazines, a significant change can be discerned in the manner of conducting this fight, or at least an attempt to reorient it, undertaken by young people who sought to adapt to the life in Manchuria, which they did not learn in the Polish school, and to develop new methods of working for the benefit of the (now independent) homeland. Those magazines, albeit often short-lived and dependent, were nonetheless relatively large in number, which testifies to the need for organising Polish life among the youth.

Even a glance at the titles gives an idea about their character:

- *Harczerz Polski w Azji* [Polish Scout in Asia] – supplement to *Polski Kurier Wieczorny* [Polish Evening Courier], three issues in 1919, publ. Kazimierz Żarski, ed. Waław Piotrowski;
- *Młoda Myśl. Organ młodzieży polskiej Dalekiego Wschodu* [Young Thought. An Organ of the Polish Youth of the Far East], published in 1923, 1927–1928, publ. Sekcja Zjednoczonych Organizacji Młodzieży Polskiej Dalekiego Wschodu [Section of the United Organisations of the Polish Youth of the Far East], ed. Andrzej Zaleski (from no. 3, 1927);
- *Czuj Duch* [Be Prepared] – scout supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* [Polish Weekly], published in 1932;

¹⁵ Stanisław Nernheim, "Polonia harbińska", pp. 4–5.

- *Harcierz Polski. Dwutygodnik Drużyny Harcerskiej w Harbinie* [Polish Scout. Biweekly of the Harbin Scout Group]¹⁶ – four issues in 1937;
- *Biuletyn Polskiego Koła Akademickiego Badania Chin. Dodatek orientalny do "Tygodnika Polskiego"* [Bulletin of the Polish Academic Club for the Study on China. Oriental Supplement to *Polish Weekly*], twelve issues in 1930, ed. Stanisław Macedoński;
- *Akademik Polski w Chinach* [Polish Scholar in China] – supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* [Polish Weekly] published 1932–1933 (32 issues altogether), ed. Koło Akademików Polskich w Chinach [Club of Polish Scholars in China];
- *Głos Studenta* [Student's Voice] – supplement to *Listy Harbińskie / Daleki Wschód* [Harbinian Letters / The Far East], an organ of Polskie Koło Studenckie w Harbinie [Polish Student Club in Harbin], published 1932–1933.¹⁷

As can be seen, it was mainly organisations that stood behind the magazines for the youth. Interestingly, Nernhejm saw the hope for the future of the Polish colony in Harbin in the members of one of those organisations. He wrote:

The "Union of Polish Youth" groups those elements on which the future existence of the Colony should be based. The young people gathered there, conscious of the changed conditions, try to orient their efforts in two directions: 1. raising state awareness, 2. adapting to the current economic conditions.¹⁸

These two principles and the programme of a new patriotism may guide us in our reading of the magazines and articles written by and for the youth.

Harbin – an (inter)national meeting place

In the press for the youth, the construction of national identity and of the community of Polish life in Manchuria was no longer based – as it had been in the section for children in *Przełąd* – on texts from Polish culture and on family life, but on the numerous organisations functioning within the Polish community, the large number of which Grochowski explained with "our outstanding individualism" and the "diversity of elements" in the Polish society.¹⁹ Among those organisations, there were several youth and academic groups. Even though Grochowski denied the fact that the multitude of diverse organisations is a sign of the society's heterogeneity,²⁰ the youth magazines

¹⁶ In the original, the name of the city is spelled "Charbin".

¹⁷ This list of magazines, number of issues, years of publication, editors and publishers follows the bibliography elaborated by Adam Winiarz. See: Adam Winiarz, *Bibliografia prasy polskiej*.

¹⁸ Stanisław Nernhejm, "Polonia harbińska", p. 4.

¹⁹ See: Kazimierz Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, p. 73.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

clearly show that there was a desire to centralise or unify them. A notable example is provided, for instance, by *Harcercz Polski w Azji*, which speaks about the attempts of centralising the scout organisations in Siberia,²¹ or *Młoda Myśl*: in line with the latter's founding principles, it was supposed to be an organ of the Polish youth of the Far East, combining the three largest youth organisations in Harbin at that time: the scout district, Związek Młodzieży Polskiej [Union of Polish Youth] and Straż Maryi [Guard of Mary].²²

The desire to establish cooperation between Polish organisations sometimes resulted in their special treatment in comparison to other nationalities (although it did not rule out contacts with them). Many groups included “Polish” in their name (e.g., Polish Scouting, Union of Polish Youth). At times, the Poles avoided contact with those compatriots who yielded to the influence of other cultures:

Almost all Polish youth in Harbin withdrew from the non-Polish scouting organisations and it works fervently, with great patriotic zeal, in the Polish Scouting. [...] We have nothing in common with the Russian scouting organisation, which is practically another version of the former “Poteshnyi” troops.²³

However, this does not mean that relations with representatives of other nations were completely severed. Anna Faryńska, in her article on the scientific and cultural cooperation of Poles (not only the youth, of whom we speak here) with other nations in Harbin, concludes:

The Poles eagerly cooperated with inhabitants of Harbin, which resulted in the creation of numerous initiatives with the aim of gaining knowledge about the history and culture of other countries and nations, both European and Asian. To a large extent, this was the effect of the specific atmosphere of the city, which was a melting pot of nations from all over the world.²⁴

Indeed, there are many examples of cooperation between nations, also in the youth press – much attention is dedicated in the discussed magazines to international contacts, presented as necessary and positive (perhaps except for relations with Germans and Russians). But still – at least in the youth magazines, which, as mentioned above, tried in part to propagate modern thinking about Polish patriotism and the place of a Pole in Asia and in the world – those contacts often had two very characteristic features. Firstly, they would be evoked in the context of representing the Polish state or nation before other

²¹ See: Karol Zaleski, “Organizacja Harcerstwa Polskiego (Skautyzmu Polskiego) w Azji”, *Harcercz Polski w Azji* 1919, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 2–3.

²² See: “Od Redakcji”, *Młoda Myśl* 1928, no. 1/5, p. 1.

²³ Władysław Byliński, “Polskie drużyny harcerskie w Azji”, *Harcercz Polski w Azji* 1919, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 6.

²⁴ Anna Faryńska, “Relacje Polaków z innymi narodowościami w wielokulturowym Harbinie w kontekście współpracy naukowej i kulturalnej”, in: *Konstanty Symonowicz – orientalista, dyplomata, opiekun Polonii Mandżurskiej. Materiały z sympozjum naukowego zorganizowanego w Polczynie-Zdroju 10 czerwca 2010 r.*, ed. Adam Winiarz, Szczecin: Książnica Pomorska im. Stanisława Staszica 2012, p. 78.

nations, secondly, in the context of the broadly understood finding or winning a proper position for Poland on the international stage, even of Polish expansion in Asia. These two features can be included in the changing profile of a patriot. This model of patriotism may be a response to the above-mentioned Grochowski's postulates and the principles listed by Nernhejm, and it was promoted by part of the youth writing for the press.

Nation's representation – state's representation – expansion of political power

In *Czuj Duch*, a supplement to *Tygodnik Polski*, we can find quoted excerpts from the speech of Michał Grażyński, the president of the Polish Scouting Association (ZHP), regarding the scouts' activity outside the country. He indicated two principles of the functioning of Polish scouting abroad:

1) to enter the international ground in such a manner that the Polish Scouting Association will play there a role corresponding to its strength and the position of Poland, so that, by contributing the values it developed to the overall achievements of scouting thought, it gives his voice a proper value and gains ears that want to hear it;

2) to win the position it deserves in the scouting family, so that it is a worthy representative of the Polish national colours on that territory and becomes a factor cooperating, within its possibilities, in the strengthening of Polish authority abroad.²⁵

This is an example of one of those texts that pointed to the role of Poles in Asia – to represent their country, already present on the map of Europe, to understand their coexistence with other nations and countries (now – on equal terms, as representatives of independent Poland), to ensure that Poland is present on the international stage and, finally, that it holds the place that has been denied to it for so long. Thus, the idea was to strive for expansion (admittedly, based on cooperation and devoid of hostility). This term, among others, appeared in the Polish youth press in Harbin, not necessarily in the sense of land conquest, but augmenting the economic and political power, winning an influential position in international relations.

In some of the youth magazines – especially in press organs of academic communities – there were also interesting attempts to learn about the culture, history, customs of China and other countries geographically close to Manchuria. Hence, such topics as correct transcription of Chinese characters to Latin alphabet, Chinese music, Chinese New Year's customs, and even Chinese mail post. In my opinion, this interest, which may to some extent confirm the above-mentioned thesis of cultural openness, often had in fact a different, very specific motivation, closely related to the

²⁵ "Walny Zjazd Z. H. P. w Warszawie", *Czuj Duch. Stronica Harcerska*, no. 2, supplement to *Tygodnik Polski* 1932, no. 522, p. 3.

expansionist ambitions of becoming a political power. The establishing of Polskie Koło Krajoznawcze w Chinach przy Związku Młodzieży Polskiej [Polish Club of Local Geography and History in China at the Union of Polish Youth] was explained in the following manner by one of the authors of *Młoda Myśl*: the goal was “to fill the acute gap that has long been felt among our youth, namely the lack of serious interest in the country in which we live [...]”,²⁶ further he added: “The section has been working unwearingly for two years, hoping that in the future, it will yield a whole team of competent persons, who will be serving Poland faithfully and will benefit the Polish colony in China”.²⁷ The object of this curiosity was not knowledge in itself or cultural exchange – the goal was to get to know the country in order to draw concrete benefits for Poland, above all through tightening the Polish-Chinese trade relations. Interestingly, according to the author, the need of such education and cooperation had not been noticed by anyone, except for the youth.²⁸ Thus, he outlined the image of a rather hermetic older generation of Polish emigrants (hence, perhaps, Nernheim’s hope in the youth). The most important concrete topics discussed by the youth were, firstly, the need for economic development through trade cooperation with China and secondly – the interesting theme of predictions concerning the future role of the Far East in the history of the world.

The eyes of the whole world are currently turned towards the Far East, towards the enormous Pacific Basin, covering the gigantic area of over 160 million square kilometres, which harbours innumerable natural treasures and is inhabited by one third of humanity.

The moment is coming when the centre of the world history will move here. We the Poles, as a nation striving for the position of a political power, must take active part in the general expansion, but in order to act – one must know.²⁹

We are this handful of the front guard that should pave the way for further hosts of workers studying the matters of the Far East, because we can know better than anyone else what great significance the Far East has for Poland.

The present events that we are witnessing are but thunderbolts announcing a storm here in the Far East, which nonetheless will pass and the fair weather of nations’ cooperation in the Pacific Basin must follow.³⁰

These geopolitical predictions of the young people constitute a very interesting gesture of relocation of the central point of the map from Europe to Asia where they lived. They suggested that attention should be paid to their role as representatives of

²⁶ G. Sadkowski, “Z życia młodzieży polskiej w Harbinie”, *Młoda Myśl* 1928, no. 1/5, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ See ibidem.

²⁹ B. Michowski, “Słowo wstępne”, *Głos Studenta*, no. 1, p. 1, supplement to *Listy Harbińskie* 1932, no. 6, p. [5].

³⁰ Idem, “Koleżanki i koledzy”, *Głos Studenta*, no. 1, p. 2, supplement to *Listy Harbińskie* 1932, no. 6, p. [6].

the Polish state in that distant outpost, which was underestimated but could be of key importance in the future. They were no longer expressing only hardships related to their situation of emigrants – who were far from the homeland, whose contact with the community was impeded – but also showed the potential of this position, the effects that could result for Poland from a change of perspective that was possible thanks to Harbin.

From nostalgia for the homeland to the expansion of political power

In the 1920s and 1930s, striving for greater political power was not exceptional in the European context, but in the case at hand, it was particularly significant. In Manchuria, the cultivation of Polish identity, which was being strengthened, among others, in the Polish press for children and youth, was constantly perceived in terms of a fight, but one that had evolved. After Poland regained independence, when it established its own sovereign statehood and became aware of it, when it began to maintain contacts between the free country and the distant Polish colony, some young authors in the press sought to transform the nostalgia for the country that a little while ago had not existed into a sense of obligation of a Pole living abroad towards his country. A Pole who represented his nation, and now also his country, had an impact on the formation of the country's image among other nations and also on the augmentation of the country's economic and political power. In this way, Harbin became not only a place of temporary exile, nor merely a space for international, multicultural meetings, but also a distant outpost of the Polish state, a special "observation point", which made it possible to see the world events from a different perspective.

References

The query comprised the following magazines:

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