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**WŁADYSŁAW KOWALSKI (1870-1940): POLISH PIONEER  
OF INDUSTRIALIZATION IN THE FAR EAST**

The Far East is a geographical term, which commonly refers to East Asia, including Northeast Asia, and the Russian Far East, that is a part of North Asia, not to mention Southeast Asia. Moreover, South Asia is often included for economic and cultural reasons<sup>1</sup>. Although nowadays this expression could be described as archaic and Eurocentric, the phrase Far East came into use in European geopolitical discourse in the twelfth century, denoting the Far East as the most distant of the three eastern regions, beyond the Near East and the Middle East<sup>2</sup>. Before the First World War, within European geopolitics the Near East referred to the relatively nearby lands of the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East indicated northwestern South Asia and Central Asia, while the Far East meant countries along the western Pacific Ocean and eastern Indian Ocean<sup>3</sup>. In a similar way, Chinese people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century called Western countries the Far West, which meant any land or region located further west than the Arab world<sup>4</sup>.

Since Władysław Kowalski (see Fig. 1) was a Polish entrepreneur, employer, trader and philanthropist, principally conducting his business activities from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the late thirties of the twentieth century within the borderland between Russia and Northern Manchuria, therefore it would be useful to apply the term Far East when describing his actions and industrial initiatives in

<sup>1</sup> W.H.D. Adams, *In the Far East: A Narrative of Exploration and Adventure in Cochin-China, Cambodia, Laos, and Siam*, Edinburgh 1879, p. 106-132; *Opportunities in California*, "The Richmond Climax" 1905, vol. 31, May 17, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> O.P. Austin, *Trading with the Far East*, Yokohama 1920, p. 6-8; T.T. Han, *De Industrialisatie van China*, Gravenhage 1922, p. 84-85.

<sup>3</sup> Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (CAW: Central Military Archives), Oddział II Sztabu Głównego (Generalnego) z lat 1921-1939 (Od. II Szt. Gł.: The Second Department of Polish General Staff, 1921-1939), file no. I.303.4.5515, General description of the Far East, 1931, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> P.M. D'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane: Documenti Originali Concernenti Matteo Ricci e la Storia delle Prime Relazioni tra l'Europa e la Cina (1579-1615)*, Roma 1942-1949, p. 50-64; M. Ricci, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*, trans. by T. Billings, New York 2009, p. 71; D.E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, Lanham 2006, p. 8.

that part of the world. Initially, Kowalski began his professional career in a port town of Vladivostok around 1893. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twentieth century, he headed over 500 kilometers northwest towards Harbin, by then a small railway settlement on the verge of becoming a major rail hub<sup>5</sup>. Thanks to the great determination and ambition, he became one of the most influential businessmen across Manchuria. From 1894 until 1936, he employed thousands of manual and administrative workers throughout his timber and mining concessions, residential buildings as well as industrial facilities, such as a veneer factory, steam mills, sawmills, power plants, warehouses and workshops scattered nearby Harbin and the Chinese Eastern Railway right-of-way zone<sup>6</sup>.



Fig. 1. Władysław Kowalski and his wife Helena Zaharoff, early 1920<sup>s</sup>  
Source: Private collection of Jerzy Czajewski, President of the Harbiners Club in Szczecin

Most importantly, Władysław Kowalski was capable of adapting to favorable conditions created by the demanding and yet liberal policy of the Russian authorities in Manchuria, which attracted a number of ethnic minorities from the western reaches of the Imperial Russia<sup>7</sup>. Thus, his enterprises provided long-term employment and stable

<sup>5</sup> M.M. Shoemaker, *The Great Siberian Railway*, New York 1904, p. 155-156; J. Foord, *Railroad Building in Asia*, "Journal of the American Asiatic Association" 1909, vol. 9, no. 9 October, p. 271-272; T. Hoshiro, *Economic History of Manchuria*, Seoul 1921, p. 43-44; R.T. Moyer, *The Agricultural Potentialities of Manchuria*, "Foreign Agriculture" 1944, vol. 8, no. 8, August, p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.4476, Survey of Manchuria, 1925, p. 7-8; *Milling in Manchuria*, "The Northwestern Miller" 1908, vol. 76, no. 3, October 21, p. 155; K. Grochowski, *Po-lacy na Dalekim Wschodzie*, Harbin 1928, p. 47-48.

<sup>7</sup> From the beginning of the Trans-Siberian railway's construction, which took place between 1891 and 1916, Sergei Witte (1849-1915), a highly influential Minister of Finance in Tsarist Russia, had underlined the decisive importance of colonization to the venture's eventual success.

support for a large group of Russian, Polish and Chinese workers in Manchuria, and partially in the Russian Far East<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, this situation proved to be beneficial for other smaller businesses and vendors who could supply the daily needs of his worker for a suitable price. The decision to cooperate with the Chinese Eastern Railway Company in the early years of the twentieth century, quickly becoming its largest supplier, turned out to be the key to his success in the Far East<sup>9</sup>. As a result, Kowalski made millions in business in the area around Harbin after his arrival from Vladivostok.

Before going into further details about personal and professional life of Władysław Kowalski, as well as his achievements in the Far East, it is worth briefly discussing historical events that led to a steady influx of Polish merchants, traders and entrepreneurs into the borderland region between Tsarist Russia and Qing China, and subsequently created an environment in which Kowalski gained a sobriquet “the Polish King of Manchuria”<sup>10</sup>. Contrary to popular imagination, Manchuria, although closely linked to China, was largely underdeveloped compared to the rest of the Empire. Remarkably, the economic development of Manchuria was instigated by the opening by the English of the port of Newchwang in 1858<sup>11</sup>, the Russian occupation of North Manchuria, the Sino-Japanese as well as Russo-Japanese wars, the building of railways by Russia and Japan, not to mention the founding of large-scale ports, such as Dairen and Harbin by Japanese or by Russians<sup>12</sup>.

The modern history of Polish community in Manchuria is inseparable from the Russian-built Chinese Eastern Railway that linked Siberia with Northeastern China<sup>13</sup>, better known by its Russian acronym КВЖД (Китайско-Восточная железная дорога)<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, the contribution of Poles to the creation of the railway line

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Similarly, the question of settlement was related to the building of the Trans-Manchurian railway, officially called the Chinese Eastern Railway. After the suppression of the Boxer uprising in Manchuria (1900), three years went into developing a liberal migration policy. The Finance Ministry's plan attracted a sizable groups of Poles, Georgians, Ukrainians, Latvians and Jews to Manchuria with promises of religious and ethnic tolerance. At that time, Chinese migration, both spontaneous and government-sponsored, began to fill in the Manchurian vacuum as well (S.Y. Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, trans. by A. Yarmolinsky, Garden City 1921, p. 86-89; S. Harcave, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, Armonk 1990, p. 227-228; D. Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914*, Stanford 1999, p. 78-79).

<sup>8</sup> *Far Eastern Affairs*, no. 4, 1997, p. 66; A. Walaszek, D. Bartkowiak, *Polska diaspora*, Kraków 2001, p. 391. M.I. Efimova, *Harsh Vineyard: A History of Catholic Life in the Russian Far East*, Victoria 2008, p. 203.

<sup>9</sup> R. Dyboski, L. Krzyżanowski, *Poland in World Civilization*, New York 1950, p. 107; J. Włodarski, K. Zeidler, M. Burdelski, *Chiny w oczach Polaków. Księga jubileuszowa z okazji sześćdziesięciolecia nawiązania stosunków dyplomatycznych między Polską a Chińską Republiką*, Gdańsk 2010, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> J. Neja, *Polski król Mandżurii*, “Wprost” 2003, no. 9, p. 68-70.

<sup>11</sup> A. Hosie, *Manchuria: Its People, Resources and Recent History*, Boston 1910, p. 191.

<sup>12</sup> T. Hoshiro, *Economic History...*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.2726, Political and military situation in the Far East, 1921-1922, p. 5-7.

<sup>14</sup> С. Харбинский, *Что такое Китайская Восточная ж.д. и куда идут её миллионы?*, Санкт-Петербург 1908, p. 8-10; “Пионерская Правда” 1929, no. 145(403), December 5, p. 4.

and the city of Harbin remains largely unnoticed. In fact, a considerable contingent of Polish engineers, architects and builders<sup>15</sup>, presumably 30% of all the staff involved in the construction<sup>16</sup>, founded the building, administrative, political and economical center of that railway which later on developed into a multinational metropolis and cradle of Polish diaspora in Manchuria<sup>17</sup>. The first mayor of Harbin was Eugeniusz Dynowski<sup>18</sup>, later a long-time deputy mayor of the city<sup>19</sup>. What is more, the city was founded by a Polish engineer Adam Szydłowski on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1898<sup>20</sup>. During the dynamic years involving construction works on the Chinese Eastern Railway, the number of Polish specialists, officials, physicians, clerks, railwaymen and skilled workers was gradually increasing<sup>21</sup>. Most of them were tempted by the prospect of high wages and a possibility to start a comfortable life in Manchuria<sup>22</sup>.

The whole venture, of strategic importance for Russian Empire<sup>23</sup>, was overseen by the Main Board of the Chinese Eastern Railway Company. The board consisted of six members and was elected by the Tsarist government on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1896 in Saint Petersburg. Curiously, between 1896 and 1903, position of the vice president within this institution was held by a Pole, namely Stanisław Kierbedź, who was responsible for the successful development of the project<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, many Polish engineers, railway workers and specialists, whom Kierbedź knew from the time of works on construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, found employment in managerial positions both in St. Petersburg as well as Vladivostok, and especially

<sup>15</sup> Г.В. Мелихов, *Маньчжурия далекая и близкая*, Москва 1991, p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> A. Winiarz, *Główne kierunki i formy aktywności Polaków w Mandżurii w latach 1897-1949*, [in:] *Polskie ślady na Dalekim Wschodzie. Polacy w Harbinie*, ed. A. Furier, Szczecin 2008, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> E. Kajdański, *Fort Grochowski*, Olsztyn 1982, p. 184-186; M. Cabanowski, *Tajemnice Mandżurii. Polacy w Harbinie*, Warszawa 1993, p. 11; K.Y. Deog, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii*, Kraków 2001, p. 46; M. Kałuski, *Polacy w Chinach*, Warszawa 2001, p. 60-62; H. Kuromiya, A. Peplowski, *Między Warszawą a Tokio. Polsko-japońska współpraca wywiadowcza 1904-1944*, Toruń 2009, p. 315.

<sup>18</sup> At the outset, Harbin's town council was dominated by Poles and Germans. The magistrate adopted a key plan for the construction of Harbin, which was developed by Polish engineer, Konstanty Jokisz, in the closing months of 1898 (K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 55; "Biuletyn Polskiej Izby Handlowej w Harbinie" 1932, no. 5, p. 3; "Listy Harbińskie" 1932, no. 5, p. 2; E. Kajdański, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie. Inżynier Kazimierz Grochowski, Czyngis-chan i złoto barona Ungerna*, Warszawa 2014, p. 30).

<sup>19</sup> M. Kałuski, *Polacy w Chinach...*, p. 63-64.

<sup>20</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN: Central Archives of Modern Records), Kolonia Polska w Mandżurii (KPM: Polish Colony in Manchuria), file no. 66, History of the Polish colony in Manchuria, edited by Kazimierz Krąkowski, p. 7; K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> "Pamiętnik Charbiński" 1923, vol. 1, p. 23-24; "Listy Harbińskie" 1932, no. 5, p. 2; "Biuletyn Polskiej Izby Handlowej w Harbinie" 1932, no. 5, p. 3; A. Jabłońska, K. Krąkowski, *Z dziejów Polonii harbińskiej*, "Przegląd Orientalistyczny" 1961, no. 2, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 6-15; M. Cabanowski, *Tajemnice Mandżurii...*, p. 5-14; K.Y. Deog, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii...*, p. 46-49; A. Winiarz, *Główne kierunki...*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> G. Krahmer, *Syberia i znaczenie wielkiej kolei syberyjskiej*, Warszawa 1898, p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> "Inżynier Kolejowy" 1926, no. 8-9, p. 239; E. Kajdański, *Długi cień wielkiego muru. Jak Polacy odkrywali Chiny*, Warszawa 2005, p. 248-252; idem, *Wspomnienia z mojej Atlantydy*, Kraków 2013, p. 12.

in Manchuria. At that time, many other Poles, engaged in the operation of the Chinese Eastern Railway, occupied equally exposed posts within the ranks of the company. For example, Zenobiusz Aleksander Rugiewicz functioned as a Director of the Main Board in St. Petersburg since 1905<sup>25</sup>. Accordingly, Teofil Hirszman, Stefan Offenber, Karol Weber, Mikołaj Kazi-Girej, Aleksander Łętowski were among the most notable Polish engineers and experts accountable for the expansion of the projected wide-gauge railway line around Harbin<sup>26</sup>.

The list of Polish technologists and skilled workforce involved by the Tsarist government in the construction of the railway line and Harbin's infrastructure was considerably longer. Thus, amid the most prominent figures were engineer T. Zbydniowski and Stanisław Nernheim, directly responsible for supervision over the construction of municipal water supply systems, sewerage system and tramway lines<sup>27</sup>. Over the years, Poles occupied significant positions related to economy, banking, medicine, administration and the judicial system within the local structures of the Russian authorities in railway's right-of-way zone<sup>28</sup>. Among the Polish designers who left their mark on Harbin's architecture were engineer Ignacy Cytowicz, who planned the city's main railway station, engineer Ignacy Nowakowski, designer of numerous Art Nouveau buildings, engineer Jan Obłomiejewski, Head of the Department of City Development and his deputy engineer Klemens Kmita<sup>29</sup>.

In addition to an endless stream of railway workers of Polish origin<sup>30</sup>, Harbin hosted many dedicated Polish military and civilian doctors. In 1907, Tadeusz Nowkuński became the chief doctor of the Central Railway Hospital which was one of the first institutions created in the city, next to the meteorological station and post office<sup>31</sup>. There were other notable doctors working in this hospital, who came from the territory of former Congress Poland, namely Józef Czaki, Marian Kozubowski and Waław Łazowski. Moreover, a large number of Polish physicians, such as Jan Modrzewski<sup>32</sup>. However, Polish community was extremely diversified, and therefore consisted mostly of builders of the railway line<sup>33</sup>, people looking for a better business environment, such as Władysław Kowalski, the approximately 1,500 refugees from Kolchak's dis-

<sup>25</sup> "Listy Harbińskie" 1932, no. 5, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> M. Janik, *Dzieje Polaków na Syberii*, Kraków 1928, p. 35; K. Symonowicz, *Miraże Mandżurskie*, Warszawa 1932, p. 181-182.

<sup>27</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 16, Polish Welfare Committee, (lack of date and pagination).

<sup>28</sup> J. Tokarski, *Przez Syberię, Mandżurię i Japonię do brzegów Oceanu Spokojnego*, Lwów 1911, p. 54; W. Theiss, *Dzieci syberyjskie. Dzieje polskich dzieci repatriowanych z Syberii i Mandżurii w latach 1919-1923*, Warszawa 1992, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> E. Kajdański, *Wspomnienia z mojej Atlantydy...*, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> S. Nernheim, *Polonia harbińska (zarys historyczny)*, "Daleki Wschód" 1934, no. 7(57), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> E. Таскина, *Неизвестный Харбин*, Москва 1994, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> T. Radzik, J. Skarbek, A.A. Witusik (eds.), *Słownik biograficzny Lublina*, Lublin 1993, p. 186.

<sup>33</sup> Private collection of Jerzy Czajewski, Selected memories from the life of Emilia Czajewska, manuscript written by Emilia W. Czajewska, August-October 1980, p. 1-2; Private collection of Leonard Spychalski, Story of my Harbin, manuscript written by Leonard Spychalski, (lack of date), p. 1-23.

persed 5<sup>th</sup> Siberian Rifle Division<sup>34</sup>, 1920<sup>s</sup> immigrants, principally former workers of the Warsaw-Vienna railway, who reached the region in pursuit of work, and political exiles or their descendants<sup>35</sup>. Besides soldiers of the Polish 5<sup>th</sup> Siberian Rifle Division, the Polish colony in Harbin also consisted of veterans of the Russo-Japanese conflict and former conscripts to the Chinese Eastern Railway Guard<sup>36</sup>.

In spite of intensive Russification, the Harbin Poles not only preserved their faith and language but also greatly contributed to the economic development of North-eastern China<sup>37</sup>. After the downfall of the Russian Empire in 1917, the majority of Poles in Harbin decided to apply for Polish citizenship and retained it during the entire existence of Polish community in Manchuria. In 1931, for instance, approximately 1,685 Poles (82.81%) residing in Harbin possessed Polish citizenship. Passports of other countries were obtained mainly due to financial reasons. Accordingly, 70 Poles (3.44%) accepted the citizenship of the Soviet Union, 58 Poles (2.85%) received Chinese citizenship, while 222 people of Polish origin (10.90%) declared themselves as stateless<sup>38</sup>. The main pillars of Polish presence in Manchuria, apart from the Chinese Eastern Railway, were the Polish Catholic Mission, the Polish Diplomatic Mission, various charity organizations, especially the so-called Polish Tavern (*Gospoda Polska*), and a large group of private entrepreneurs<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> The Polish 5th Siberian Rifle Division was formed on the Russian territory in 1919 during the First World War, but the unit was attached to the White Russian formations and fought mostly in the Russian Civil War. The core of the division was composed of POWs of the former Austro-Hungarian Army and local Poles. The latter were descendants of Poles forcibly resettled to Siberia after failed November Uprising, January Uprising and other struggles with Imperial Russia. On 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1919, at Taiga, the Polish Legion made a stand against the Red Army but suffered heavy losses. Most of the once 16,000 men strong division were taken as prisoners of war or died during forced labor in the mines. A group of about 1,500, led by Colonel Kazimierz Rumsza, managed to evade capture and reached Harbin on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1920 (H. Bagiński, *Wojsko polskie na Wschodzie 1914-1920*, Warszawa 1921, p. 536-598; L.E. Vining, *Held by the Bolsheviks. The Diary of a British Officer in Russia, 1919-1920*, London 1924, p. 215).

<sup>35</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 6, Appeal to the Delegates of the Polish War Committee in Russia, Vladivostok, March 12, 1919, p. 12-13.

<sup>36</sup> The Chinese Eastern Railway Guard Force was established by the Main Board of the Chinese Eastern Railway Company in 1897. Soon, however, the unit was transformed into the Trans-Amur Region of the Border Guard Corps in January 1901. The main objective of the guard was to defend the property and employees of the railway company along its right of way belt in Manchuria. After the conversion into the Trans-Amur Border Guard Corps, the force consisted of 25,000 men (H. Bagiński, *Wojsko polskie na Wschodzie...*, p. 78-79; J. Białynia-Chłodecki, *Ćwierćwiecze kolonii polskiej w Charbinie na Dalekim Wschodzie*, Lwów 1923, p. 5; "Daleki Wschód" 1934, no. 7, p. 1). By then, the unit was under direct jurisdiction of Sergei Witte, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Empire. Roughly 15% of all the officers within the Trans-Amur Region of the Border Guard Corps were of Polish origin (K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 15-16).

<sup>37</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 1, Military Union of Poles in Manchuria, Statute, May 27, 1917, p. 1-4.

<sup>38</sup> AAN, Konsulat Generalny RP w Charbinie (KGRP: The Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Harbin), file no. 5, List of Polish communities abroad, correspondence, February 21, 1931, p. 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> J. Neja, *Polacy w Mandżurii*, "Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej" 2002, no. 3, p. 34.

By 1903, Harbin's Polish community had grown to 7,000<sup>40</sup>. At the same time, Harbin occupied more than 20 square kilometers<sup>41</sup>. At its peak between 1917 and mid 1920<sup>s</sup>, the Polish enclave in Harbin numbered over 10,000 people<sup>42</sup>, who enjoyed a relatively peaceful environment on Chinese soil. For a time, many smaller towns and villages along the Chinese Eastern Railway's route additionally encapsulated from 6,000 to 10,000 Polish settlers in Northern Manchuria<sup>43</sup>. Beginning in 1924, the number of Polish citizens in Harbin dropped drastically. Former soldiers and prisoners of war had been repatriated to Poland. However, Poles left Harbin mainly due to declining labor market and the subsequent restrictions imposed on them by successive governments exercising control over the city<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, Polish population in Manchuria declined to approximately 5,000 settlers in the late 1920<sup>s</sup>. In 1930, the Polish community in the region comprised a total of only 2,000 pioneers, and roughly half of them stayed in Harbin<sup>45</sup>. After Japan seized Southern Manchuria in 1931 and the outbreak of war in the Pacific, more Polish citizens decided to leave those areas. Between 1935 and 1949, the number of Polish residents of Harbin was steady, coming to approximately 1,500 persons<sup>46</sup>. Until 1958, most of the remaining Poles were gradually leaving Manchuria to settle in Poland, the United States or Australia<sup>47</sup>.

The Polish Diplomatic Mission in Harbin was, in fact, a Polish consular office operating between 1920 and 1941. The diplomatic post was established in order to protect the economic interests of Polish businessmen in Manchuria and for the benefit of the Polish community involved in the management of the Chinese Eastern Railway, without formal approval of the local authorities<sup>48</sup>. Over the years, the diplomatic mission was referred to as a Consulate (1920-1924), the Delegation of the Republic of Poland (1924-1939) and a Consulate General (1939-1941). Its territorial and factual competences as well as objectives also changed several times. First, the post was under direct supervision of the Polish Legation in Tokyo, then the Polish Legation in Shanghai, and finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in War-

<sup>40</sup> AAN, MSZ, file no. 10389, Report on the Poles in the Far East, 1925, p. 5; A. Jabłońska, K. Krąkowski, *Z dziejów Polonii...*, p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> L. Victoir, V. Zatsépine, *Harbin to Hanoi. The Colonial Built Environment in Asia, 1840-1940*, Hong Kong 2013, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> В.А. Анучин, *Географические очерки Маньчжурии*, Москва 1948, p. 39; В.П. Петров, *Город на Сунгари*, Вашингтон 1984, p. 8-10.

<sup>43</sup> САУ, Од. II Сzt. Гł., file no. I.303.4.2725, Polish Colony in Siberia, 1921, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup> A. Aleksandrowicz, *Mandżuria, jej przeszłość, teraźniejszość, kraj i ludzie*, Warszawa 1937, p. 107.

<sup>45</sup> AAN, MSZ, file no. 10389, Report on the Polish Colony in Harbin and Manchuria, written by Edward Skowroński, Polish Delegate in Harbin, on May 19, 1931.

<sup>46</sup> "Echo z Dalekiego Wschodu" 1934, no. 3, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 66, History of the Polish colony in Manchuria, edited by Kazimierz Krąkowski, p. 103-110; A. Jabłońska, K. Krąkowski, *Z dziejów Polonii...*, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> W. Skóra, *Organizacja i pierwszy okres działalności polskich konsulatów w Harbinie i Włdywostoku w latach 1920-1924*, [in:] *Polskie ślady na Dalekim...*, p. 75-100.

saw<sup>49</sup>. The Polish Diplomatic Mission in Harbin was led by a stream of dedicated and sensible diplomats, such as Michał Morgulec (1920-1922)<sup>50</sup>, Karol Pindór (1922-1928)<sup>51</sup>, Konstanty Symonolewicz (1929-1930)<sup>52</sup>, Edward Skowroński (1930-1931), James Douglas (1931-1933)<sup>53</sup>, Aleksander Kwiatkowski (1932-1938)<sup>54</sup> and Jerzy Bogumił Litewski (1938-1941)<sup>55</sup>. Following a close cooperation between Poland and Japan in the early 1930<sup>s</sup>, Polish consulate in Harbin became involved in the operations of Polish intelligence that were often coordinated with the actions of Japanese spy services. The bilateral cooperation was aimed at providing an effective defense against the USSR<sup>56</sup>. However, the Polish Diplomatic Mission in Harbin terminated its activities in December 1941, as soon as consul Jerzy Litewski was evacuated from Manchuria to Japan, and then transported to London in November 1942<sup>57</sup>.

With great eagerness, Polish residents of Harbin established various businesses, such as factories<sup>58</sup>, industrial enterprises, restaurants, import-export offices, workshops, warehouses, bakeries and shops<sup>59</sup>. Those with less means, as well as the

<sup>49</sup> M. Mroczkowska, K. Szczepaniak, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski. Informator*, vol. 3: *Azja, Zaukaskie, Australia i Oceania 1918-2009*, Warszawa 2010, p. 45; W. Skóra, *Placówki MSZ Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej w Harbinie w latach 1920-1941 na tle dziejów Chin i Mandżurii (Mandżukuo). Szkic do problemu*, [in:] *Na szlakach dwóch światów. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Jerzemu Hauzińskiemu w 45 lecie pracy naukowej i dydaktycznej*, ed. A. Teterycz-Puzio, Słupsk 2016, p. 700-717.

<sup>50</sup> S. Łoza, *Czy wiesz kto to jest?*, Warszawa 1938, p. 502; *Odnaczenie chińskie dla P. Patka*, "Gazeta Lwowska" 1928, no. 132, June 12, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> J. Golec, S. Bojda, *Słownik biograficzny ziemi cieszyńskiej*, t. 2, Cieszyn 1995, s. 179-180.

<sup>52</sup> AAN, Prezydium Rady Ministrów (PRM: Presidium of the Council of Ministers), file no. VIII-255, Personal records, 1931, p. 123-124. Konstanty Symonolewicz (1884-1952), undoubtedly, was one of the highest rated Polish diplomats in Harbin by members of the local diaspora. Symonolewicz started his career as an employee of the Russian consular service in which he worked as an official in the Russian diplomatic mission in Beijing (1912). Between 1913 and 1920, he served as a consular official in Qiqihar. In the same year, he began working for the Polish foreign service. He was entrusted with the following functions in Harbin (1920-1930): Secretary of the Consulate, Vice-consul, Consul, Deputy Delegate of the Polish Republic in China, Head of the Polish Delegation in Harbin, and de facto Head of the Consulate in Harbin (1928-1930). Furthermore, Symonolewicz wrote two books dealing with the Polish community in China, namely *Miraże mandżurskie*, Warszawa 1932 and *Moi Chińczycy. 18 lat w Chinach*, Warszawa 1938 (S. Łoza, *Czy wiesz kto to jest...*, p. 710; W. Skóra, *Służba konsularna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Organizacja, kadry i działalność*, Toruń 2006, p. 342).

<sup>53</sup> CAW, Akta Personalne i Odnaczeniowe (APO: Personal Records and Decorations), file no. KN 2.08.1931, Collection of Personal Records, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> AAN, PRM, file no. VIII-247, Personal records, 1931, p. 109-110; W. Michowicz, *Organizacja polskiego aparatu dyplomatycznego w latach 1918-1939*, [in:] *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. 4: *1918-1939*, ed. P. Łossowski, Warszawa 1995, p. 46; W. Skóra, *Służba konsularna...*, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> *Wybory Delegata na III Zjazd Polaków z Zagranicy*, "Tygodnik Polski" 1939, no. 23, June 4, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> H. Kuromiya, A. Peplowski, *Między Warszawą a Tokio...*, p. 327-431.

<sup>57</sup> *Polska służba zagraniczna po 1 września 1939 r.*, Londyn 1954, p. 113.

<sup>58</sup> "Tygodnik Polski" 1939, no. 15, April 9, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> "Listy Harbińskie. Numer Noworoczny" 1932, no. 1, January 1, p. 8.

younger generation, including neophyte entrepreneurs, found employment among the affluent representatives of the community. The more destitute were assisted, first on an individual basis, and then gradually, by organized church-supported charitable institutions and societies, including the Roman Catholic Charitable Society (Rzym-sko-Katolickie Towarzystwo Dobroczynności), which was set up in 1903<sup>60</sup>. Equally helpful was the association Polish Tavern<sup>61</sup>. This organization not only provided financial support, but also helped to settle disputes among different members of the Polish community and went as far as developing specific forms of justice, such as the Citizens Jury (Sąd Obywatelski)<sup>62</sup> and the Court of Honor (Sąd Honorowy)<sup>63</sup>. These legal institutions were commonly made up of highly respected individuals with relevant knowledge and a possible interest in the outcome of a given proceeding<sup>64</sup>. In 1927, for instance, the Court of Honor was composed of Fr. Gerard Piotrowski, Władysław Kowalski, M. Fabisiak and F. Chmielewski<sup>65</sup>. However, they decided about trivial matters, which raised little controversies.

During the early years of Harbin's existence, many Catholics turned to the French Catholic missions for their spiritual needs<sup>66</sup>. However, local Poles decided to build their own church. In 1901, Church Committee, including Seweryn Wachowski,

<sup>60</sup> *Stowarzyszenia polskie w Charbinie*, "Pamiętnik Charbiński" 1923, vol. 1, p. 18. The Roman Catholic Charitable Society was the first officially recognized Polish association in Harbin and Manchuria. However, the first unofficial Polish society in Harbin, called the Church Committee, was established in 1901. Its main goal was connected with raising funds for construction of a Catholic church in Harbin (K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 73).

<sup>61</sup> The Polish Tavern was initially involved in gastronomy and entertainment ("Praca. Pismo Postępowe Demokratyczne" 1918, no. 8, May 12, p. 10). However, in a short time, it developed into a social, cultural as well as educational institution, focusing mainly on multiple ways of integrating the whole Polish community. The association operated exclusively in Harbin from 1907 to 1949. Thus, over the years, this organization initiated the first Polish school, conducted language courses for various members of the Polish diaspora, and organized charity fundraising. In addition, the association held formal dinner dances at least once a year in order to raise money for the poor. The organization fell into several distinct sections dealing with schooling, work with youth (Polish Youth Association), culture (Theater Group), and sports (hockey, volleyball, football and yachting teams). The Polish Tavern was the first Polish secular association in Harbin (K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 54-62; J. Neja, *Harbin jako przestrzeń życia i działalności Polonii mandżurskiej*, [in:] *Polskie ślady na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 58-65).

<sup>62</sup> K. Frycz, *Wyrok Sądu Obywatelskiego*, "Listy Polskie z Dalekiego Wschodu" 1918, no. 7, July 7, p. 8-13.

<sup>63</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 28, The Association "Polish Tavern" in Harbin, p. 5-8.

<sup>64</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 11, The weekly *Polish Letters from the Far East* issued by the Polish Political Council of the Far East and Eastern Siberia, p. 89-93.

<sup>65</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 62.

<sup>66</sup> French missionaries served in Manchuria since the fifteenth century the prayers at the French mission were, of course, conducted either in French or Latin. Thus, Polish Catholics had a limited access to priests, religious services and ceremonies, such as marriage, baptism or First Communion (*Historia Parafii Polsko-Katolickiej w Charbinie (Chiny)*, "Pamiętnik Charbiński" 1923, vol. 1, p. 22; M. Wojciechowicz, *Placówka wschodnia w Harbinie*, [in:] *Marianie 1673-1973*, eds. J. Bukowicz, T. Górski, Rzym 1975, p. 244-268; J. Tyczka, *Na wschodzie i na zachodzie*, Warszawa 2003, p. 77-85).

Stanisław Gabriel, Wacław Łazarski and Władysław Rembertowicz<sup>67</sup>, was established to raise the necessary funds for the construction of a Catholic church in Harbin<sup>68</sup>. The Committee and its volunteers organized a variety of charitable events, such as lotteries, plays and costume balls, in order to collect donations<sup>69</sup>. The cornerstone for a new neo-Gothic style church was placed on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1906 on a lot handed over by the CER management<sup>70</sup>. In this way, the construction of a Catholic church began and was completed rather quickly in the following year<sup>71</sup>. Between 1901 and 1907, the CER company allowed the city's Polish community to use one of its buildings as a chapel and Fr. Szpiganowicz, Polish military chaplain, was responsible for the celebration of religious services<sup>72</sup>.

In 1921, Jean-Baptiste-Marie Budes de Guébriant (1860-1935)<sup>73</sup>, Superior General of La Société des Missions Etrangères<sup>74</sup>, came to Harbin and Vladivostok as an apostolic visitor appointed directly by the Pope Benedict XV<sup>75</sup>. The Bishop was warmly welcomed, among other officials, by Michał Morgulec, Polish consul in Harbin<sup>76</sup>, and clergy present in the city<sup>77</sup>. During his stay, on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1921, Bishop de Guébriant came to the conclusion that the number of Catholics in the city had grown significantly and that St. Stanislaus Church could no longer accommodate all of them. His wish to build a second Catholic church was fulfilled with assistance of the CER enterprise and Władysław Kowalski<sup>78</sup>. The solemn dedication of the future church took place on 3rd September 1922. By then, another Church Building Committee was established, headed by Władysław Kowalski, who personally donated the sum of 4,000 Mexican dollars<sup>79</sup>. In 1925, the church building was completed and named in honor of St. Josaphat<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> K.Y. Deog, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii...*, p. 67.

<sup>69</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> J. Kil, K. Graczyk, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii – analiza historycznoprawna*, "Z Dziejów Prawa" 2013, vol. 6(14), p. 124.

<sup>71</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 16, The Polish Guardian Committee, Documents certifying ownership of the church buildings in Harbin, 1922, p. 120; M. Cabanowski, *Tajemnice Mandżurii...*, p. 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Historia Parafii Polsko-Katolickiej...*, p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> A. Hastings, *A World History of Christianity*, London 1999, p. 396.

<sup>74</sup> J.P. Wiest, *Jean-Baptiste-Marie Budes de Guébriant (1860-1935)*, [in:] *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. G.H. Anderson, Grand Rapids 1999, p. 267-268.

<sup>75</sup> J. Kil, K. Graczyk, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii...*, p. 125.

<sup>76</sup> *Rozwój stosunków polsko-chińskich (1917-1936)*, "Polityka Narodów 1937", vol. X, no. 3, p. 148; *Rocznik Służby Zagranicznej RP*, Warszawa 1935, p. 85.

<sup>77</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32-34.

<sup>79</sup> At the time, 1 Mexican dollar equaled approximately ½ US dollars. The total cost of the church building was estimated at 14,000 Mexican dollars (*ibidem*, p. 48; A. Majdowski, *Kościół katolicki w Cesarstwie Rosyjskim. Syberia, Daleki Wschód, Azja Środkowa*, Warszawa 2001, p. 232).

<sup>80</sup> B.Z. Wojas, *Dzieje Polonii Charbińskiej*, "Zeszyty Historyczne" 1974, vol. 30(250), p. 13.

The Polish Catholic Mission in Harbin existed from the beginning of the twentieth century to the demise of the Polish community in late 1950<sup>5</sup> and managed to initiate several useful institutions, such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society (1909), a primary school (1912), a shelter for homeless and elderly, and a small parish library (1913). However, its greatest achievement involved a successful opening of the Polish secondary school on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1915, which was renamed to the Henryk Sienkiewicz Secondary School<sup>81</sup> in the following year<sup>82</sup>. All the same, Harbin was not a religiously homogeneous place (see Table 1). The city boasted Muslim mosques, Jewish synagogues, Protestant churches for Baptists and Lutherans, Buddhist temples, and many ethnic associations grouping the local nationalities<sup>83</sup>. Although Polish residents of Harbin formed a close group, consisting primarily of Catholics, they were not religiously homogeneous.

Table 1

Religious division of Polish citizens in Harbin, 1930

Religion	Number of followers	Percentage of followers
Catholics	1696	83.34
Greek Catholics	7	0.34
Orthodox	114	5.60
Karaites	4	0.20
Jews	200	9.83
Protestants	14	0.69
Total	2035	100.00

Source: AAN, MSZ, file no. 10389, "The Polish colony in Harbin and Manchuria". Report of Edward Skowroński, Polish Delegate in Harbin, May 19, 1931

The Chinese Eastern Railway drew people from the far reaches of the Tsarist Russia in their tens of thousands to the largely wild and sparsely populated steppes of Manchuria. Entrepreneurs, merchants and traders came to develop natural resources and provide goods and services in Harbin and other multinational settlements along the railway's route<sup>84</sup>. Chinese people from the South were also brought

<sup>81</sup> Both the Henryk Sienkiewicz Secondary School and the Polish Tavern received financial support from the Polish government in 1920<sup>5</sup> and 1930<sup>5</sup> (AAN, MSZ, file no. 5963, Report on Polish school in Harbin, p. 1-12).

<sup>82</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 16, The Polish Guardian Committee, documents certifying ownership of the church buildings in Harbin, 1922, p. 120; A. Jabłońska, K. Krąkowski, *Z dziejów Polonii...*, p. 163; M. Cabanowski, *Tajemnice Mandżurii...*, p. 16.

<sup>83</sup> CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.5443, Study of political relations in the Far East, 1936, p. 74; O. Bakich, *A Russian City in China: Harbin before 1917*, "Canadian Slavonic Papers" 1986, vol. 28, no. 2, June p. 143.

<sup>84</sup> R. Dyboski, *Siedem lat w Rosji i na Syberii (1915-1921). Przygody i wrażenia*, Warszawa 1922, p. 33.

in, usually in large numbers, to work as construction laborers. For the Poles, especially within Imperial Russia, who were confined for more than a century to live under the harsh rule of neighboring empires, Manchuria was the land of opportunity. Eventually, some of them would spread further and become instrumental in the development of Polish companies across the region<sup>85</sup>.

Władysław Kowalski was born on 27 June 1870 in a small village of Podolia<sup>86</sup>. His life was an example of fate shared by many other Poles, who were able to take advantage of favorable conditions for the development of entrepreneurship at the turn of the nineteenth century in Asiatic Russia<sup>87</sup>. Władysław Kowalski came from a family of impoverished petty nobility, which suffered Russian repressions in the aftermath of the January Uprising (1863-1864). In his teenage years, Kowalski was forced to work physically for his own subsistence. In this way, Kowalski raised money for a voyage to Vladivostok<sup>88</sup>, where he came via Odessa at the age of twen-

<sup>85</sup> W. Komorowski, *Daleki Wschód w międzynarodowej polityce gospodarczej*, Warszawa 1931, p. 316-317.

<sup>86</sup> А. Петренко, В.Ф. Ковальский – выдающийся хозяйственник Маньчжурии, “На сопках Маньчжурии” 1996, no 34, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Many Poles, partly political exiles and partly voluntary emigrants, being gifted with a spirit of enterprise, built up large industrial undertakings and made great fortunes both in European Russia and in the Russian Far East, such were: Ignacy Jasiukowicz (1847-1914), who became, in 1888, managing director of the South Russian Metallurgical Works on the Dnieper and reorganized them on modern lines; the architect Iwan Żółtowski (1867-1959), who built some of the most sumptuous modern palatial homes in the residential districts of Moscow; the industrialist Władysław Żukowski (1868-1916), who played a prominent part in the Central Russian Industrial Committee during the First World War; Alfons Kozieł-Poklewski (1809-1890), who worked his way up from modest beginnings to ownership of a large portion of the numerous mines and metal works in the Ural mountains; Ignacy Sobieszczanski (1872-1952), who owned coal mines in the neighborhood of Irkutsk; and, of course, Władysław Kowalski, who earned millions in business at Harbin (*Ignacy Jasiukowicz. Źródła powodzenia*, “Przegląd Techniczny” 1913, no. 49, December 4, p. 641-643; *Wspomnienia pozgonne. Ś. p. Władysław Żukowski*, “Przegląd Techniczny” 1916, no. 49/50, December 13, p. 462; S. Lubodziecki, *Polacy na Syberii w latach 1917-1920. Wspomnienia*, “Sybirak” 1934, no. 3/4, p. 5-8; R. Dyboski, L. Krzyżanowski, *Poland in World Civilization...*, p. 106).

<sup>88</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, Vladivostok was a major location of import, mostly comprising cottons and woolens. Furthermore, Vladivostok, with total population of 38,000 in 1897, was a seaport that, on the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway, was destined to become as important as Southampton, just as Talienwan was supposed to become another Hong-Kong or Hamburg (A.R. Colquhoun, *Overland to China*, New York 1900, p. 122; J. Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book 1908*, London 1908, p. 1418). In comparison, between mid 1900s and late 1920s, Harbin gained a wide array of nicknames encapsulating its dynamic growth, such as “Paris of the Orient” (D. Hasegawa, *Picturesque Manchoukuo and Mongolia*, Harbin 1941, p. 88). By 1935, Harbin had become an established multiethnic city with over 450,000 inhabitants (J. Jaworski, *Mandżuria*, [in:] *Encyklopedia nauk politycznych*, vol. III, ed. E.J. Reyman, Warszawa 1938, pp. 866-867). However, the process of transformation into an international urban center was launched much earlier. In 1913, Harbin, owing to the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, had a total of 68,549 people, mostly of Russian and Chinese descent. In May 1903, construction of CER had already brought a population of 83,000 to the

ty-three and quickly found himself among the Polish community. Every large construction project requires the development of an adequate infrastructure and the formation of the Chinese Eastern Railway was no exception<sup>89</sup>.

Władysław Kowalski came to Manchuria in the early years of the twentieth century driven by the possibility of high profits and expansion within the Manchurian timber industry, which offered a huge potential market for wood suppliers closely related to the Chinese Eastern Railway<sup>90</sup>. The topography of Manchuria was defined by a broad central plain surrounded by a horseshoe of mountains that contained abundant and valuable timber<sup>91</sup>, furs, medicinal plants, minerals and natural resources<sup>92</sup>. The soils of the plain, aeolian in the west and alluvial in the south and east, were fertile and relatively free of stone. By then, soy was Manchuria's principal crop<sup>93</sup>. In 1908, the economic upswing caused by the explosive growth of soybean exports from Northern Manchuria put an end to hard times for Harbin. City's opening to foreign residents on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1907 aided international trade.

Extensive forests also abounded and their estimated extent was 138,452 square miles (358,589 km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>94</sup>. Furthermore, Manchuria was rich in minerals, the output of which in 1936 was as follows: coal – 7,108,282 tons, limestone – 477,350 tons, iron ore 993,143 tons, magnesite – 55,386 tons. In 1932, the output of pig iron was 368,181 tons and of coke, 416,306 tons. Further, in 1932, 1,412,554 tons of oil shale were produced, the yield of crude oil being 70,631 tons<sup>95</sup>. Manchuria's natural resources attracted an unending stream of different nationalities within the Russian Empire, for example Poles, Georgians or Ukrainians<sup>96</sup>, which created an acceptable environment for economic activity in the region<sup>97</sup>.

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railway zone, 44,576 of whom were recorded as residents of Harbin (O. Bakich, *Émigré Identity: The Case of Harbin*, "The South Atlantic Quarterly" 2000, vol. 99, no. 1, p. 51-73; О.Г. Гончаренко, *Русский Харбин*, Москва 2009, p. 37-64).

<sup>89</sup> A. Wełniak, *Reemigranci polscy z Mandżurii w Elblągu*, "Rocznik Elbląski" 2009, vol. XXII, p. 174.

<sup>90</sup> *Gothaisches Jahrbuch für Diplomatie, Verwaltung und Wirtschaft 1928*, Gotha 1928, p. 458-459.

<sup>91</sup> In the early 1900<sup>s</sup>, lumber production and forest products constituted the most profitable branch of industry in Manchuria (CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.2725, Timber industry in Siberia and the Far East, 1921, p. 29-33).

<sup>92</sup> *Knaurs konversations Lexikon*, Berlin 1932, p. 945.

<sup>93</sup> Y.T. Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932*, Cambridge 2001, p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> In 1937, the forest was estimated at 88 million hectares and the timber resources at 3,700 million cubic meters. Similar data was presented in the first decades of the twentieth century and in the early 1940<sup>s</sup>. As a result, the timber industry, next to the mining industry, became one of the most profitable industrial sectors in Manchuria (J. Scott-Keltie, *The Statesman's Year-Book...*, p. 852; M. Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book*, London 1940, p. 779).

<sup>95</sup> M. Epstein, *The Statesman's Year-Book*, London 1936, p. 775.

<sup>96</sup> At the same time, Han Chinese homesteaders flooded Manchuria as well. Between 1927 and 1929 alone, an estimated one million settlers arrived each year, surpassing the number of Europeans who landed annually in the United States at the peak of its immigration wave (M. Meyer, *In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China*, New York 2015, p. 3-4).

<sup>97</sup> CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.2716, Press clippings concerning political situation in the Far East, 1922, p. 395.

Undoubtedly, the most influential Polish businessman in Harbin as well as Manchuria, conducting his economic activity under various names, such as Leśne Przedsiębiorstwo W. Kowalskiego (Timber Company of W. Kowalski), V.F. Kovalsky, or simply Yablonia Timber Company<sup>98</sup>, was Władysław Kowalski<sup>99</sup>. Nevertheless, other merchants, entrepreneurs and specialists of Polish origin also had a fair share in the exploration of Manchurian market and its natural resources<sup>100</sup>. The early years of Harbin's existence were marked by increased activity of Polish entrepreneurs. Thus, Adam Czajewski founded a vodka distillery in Harbin<sup>101</sup>. A family of Polish Karaites, Eliasz Łopatto and Abram Łopatto, focused on the tobacco industry and established the first factory of cigarettes, one of the largest in China (see Fig. 2)<sup>102</sup>. Moreover, Michał Wróblewski started the first large-scale beer brewery in that region<sup>103</sup>. Another company founded by Poles, namely Władysław Kowalski and Dynowski, developed the first steam-driven mills<sup>104</sup>. Furthermore, Bohdan Broniewski built a substantial sugar factory, for which the equipment was supplied by a Polish firm called Szpotański, Borman and Swede, as well as another Polish company, that is a steam boilers factory owned by Krasiński<sup>105</sup>. Apart from the equipment, many specialist were brought from Poland to work in the sugar company. The sugar beet cultivation, however, took place in Manchuria<sup>106</sup>. In this way, a group of Polish managers introduced sugar beet cultivation to the Chinese farmers of the area, which was previously unknown in China<sup>107</sup>. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Polish entrepreneurs who operated on a much smaller scale remain largely unrevealed<sup>108</sup>.

<sup>98</sup> H.T. Montague Bell, H.G.W. Woodhead, *The China Year Book 1919*, London 1919, p. 101; H.G.W. Woodhead, H.T. Montague Bell, *The China Year Book 1921*, Tientsin 1922, p. 782; *Handel zagraniczny. Zapotrzebowanie towarów dla Mandżurii*, "Tygodnik Handlowy" 1924, no. 23, June 6, p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> K.Y. Deog, *Kolonia polska w Mandżurii...*, p. 47-48.

<sup>100</sup> W. Skóra, *Sytuacja materialna Polonii mandżurskiej w 1929 roku (w świetle raportu konsula RP Konstantego Symonowicza)*, "Przegląd Orientalistyczny" 2010, no. 3-4, p. 125-135.

<sup>101</sup> M. Kałuski, *Polacy w Chinach...*, s. 41.

<sup>102</sup> These two wealthy Harbiners of Trakai origin often sent considerable sums of money to support the Polish Karaites of Vilnius and Trakai in the 1920s. In 1936 the group of Polish Karaites in Harbin organized the Society of the Polish Karaites in Manchukuo. The Polish consul agreed to support the Society and helped to register it with the government of the country (M. Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*, Warsaw 2015, p. 189-190).

<sup>103</sup> Książnica Pomorska (KP: Pomeranian Library), Zbiory specjalne (ZS: Special Collections), file no. 3392, Extracts from the land and mortgage registers, 1917-1939, p. 1-12.

<sup>104</sup> M. Cabanowski, *Tajemnice Mandżurii...*, p. 12-13.

<sup>105</sup> CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.4476, Report from the visitation of Manchuria, written by Lt. Col. W. Jędrzejewicz, September 30, 1925, p. 7-8; W. Syzdek, *Na mandżurskim szlaku*, "Życie Warszawy" 1988, no. 1, January 8, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> B.Z. Wojas, *Dzieje Polonii Charbińskiej...*, p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> R.K.I. Quesed, *"Matey" Imperialists: the Tsarist Russians in Manchuria 1895-1917*, Hong Kong 1982, p. 211; A. Winiarz, *Główne kierunki...*, p. 34.

<sup>108</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 192; M.R. Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort. The Diaspora Communities of Shanghai*, Stanford 2001, p. 29-30.



Fig. 2. Contemporary view of the former cigarette factory owned by Łopatto brothers

Source: Private collection of Jerzy Czajewski, President of the Harbiners Club in Szczecin

The wealthiest Pole in Manchuria leased huge forest areas from the Chinese government and conducted extensive business activities<sup>109</sup>. Before coming to Manchuria, Władysław Kowalski worked on the construction of the Ussurian section of the Trans-Siberian Railway, linking Vladivostok with Khabarovsk<sup>110</sup>, which was about 770 km long<sup>111</sup>. However, it did not take him long to understand that supplying wood was the most profitable activity. Therefore, he engaged all his efforts in felling the forests across Manchuria. The money gained in this way, was gradually being invested in the development of his future establishments. In 1911, Kowalski received his first official timber concession from the local authorities and called it Yablonia<sup>112</sup>. The concession was located 241 km east of Harbin<sup>113</sup>.

<sup>109</sup> F. Kusiak, *Osadnictwo reemigrantów z Mandżurii na ziemiach Polski Zachodniej i Północnej w 1949 roku*, "Sobótka" 1994, no. 3-4, p. 241-243.

<sup>110</sup> V. Volpicelli, *Russia on the Pacific and the Siberian Railway*, London 1899, pp. 333-334.

<sup>111</sup> A. Williams, *The Romance of Modern Engineering. Containing Interesting Descriptions in Non-Technical Language of the Nile Dam, the Panama Canal, the Tower Bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Trans-Siberian Railway, the Niagara Falls Power Bermuda Floating Dock, Etc.*, London 1912, p. 156.

<sup>112</sup> A small settlement located within the concession, where he built a luxurious residence, hospital, school and library containing books and newspapers imported directly from a distant homeland, became a center of his private life. Kowalski lived there with his wife, Helena Zaharoff, whom he married in 1908, and his two daughters, namely Ada and Victoria. The villa was completed in 1919, but Kowalski only lived there for 8 years and was forced to move out due to financial problems (J. Neja, *Polski król Mandżurii...*, p. 68). The two-storey villa with a swimming pool and tennis court, built in the neoclassical style, survived to this day and currently serves as the Heilongjiang Memorial Hall of Inspection by Revolutionary Leadership. On February 27, 1950, Mao Zedong worked and lived here on his way home from a visit to Moscow (J. Wasilewska-Dobkowska, *Sztuka Chin*, Warszawa 2009, p. 57).

<sup>113</sup> H.G.W. Woodhead, H.T. Montague Bell, *The China Year Book 1914...*, p. 103.

Thus, his company became a major supplier of wood, mainly railway sleepers, not only for the expanding CER infrastructure<sup>114</sup>, but also for construction entrepreneurs operating within Harbin and smaller towns in the railway's right of way zone (see Fig. 3)<sup>115</sup>.

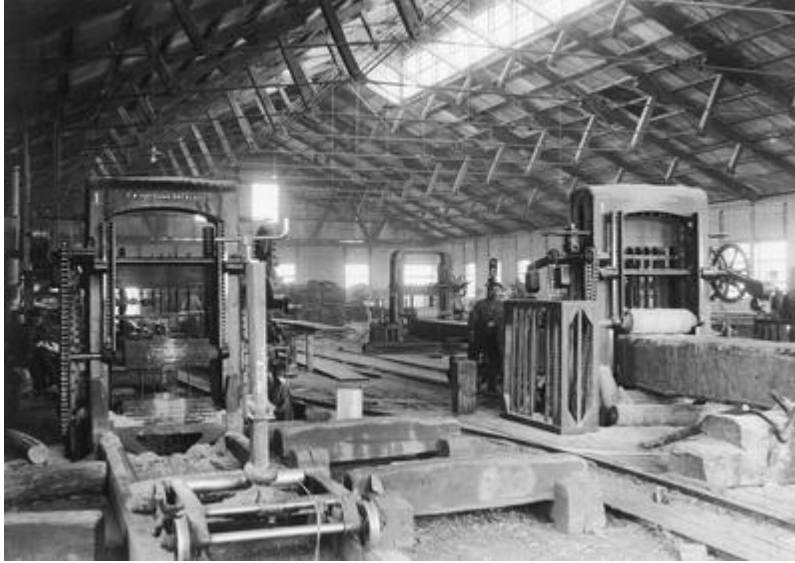


Fig. 3. Work at sawmill owned by Władysław Kowalski, Yablonia concession  
Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe (National Digital Archives), file no. N 1-Z-297-7

Władysław Kowalski began his activity on the Chinese Eastern Railway as a Russian subject of Polish origin in 1899 and actively participated in social as well as cultural life of the Polish community in Harbin<sup>116</sup>. Kowalski generously sponsored a wide array of charitable, educational and church organizations, such as the Polish Tavern, actions of the two Polish Catholic parishes and a Polish Secondary School in Harbin<sup>117</sup>. Soon he became one of the leading figures of the local Polish community (see Fig. 4)<sup>118</sup>. However, economic achievements of Władysław Kowalski in Manchuria were only possible through the patronage and friendship with General Horvath, whom he met in Vladivostok at the end of 1895<sup>119</sup>. By then, Dimitri Horvath dis-

<sup>114</sup> T. Kawata, *Glimpses of East Asia*, Tokyo 1928, s. 38.

<sup>115</sup> J. Rowiński, J. Szczudlik, *Z historii kontaktów polsko-chińskich (do 1945 roku)*, "Azja-Pacyfik" 2005, vol. 8, p. 26.

<sup>116</sup> M. Kałuski, *Polacy w Chinach...*, p. 41-42.

<sup>117</sup> J. Neja, *Polski król Mandżurii...*, p. 69.

<sup>118</sup> A. Winiarz, *Główne kierunki...*, p. 42.

<sup>119</sup> Dimitri Leonidovich Horvath (1859-1937), Director of the Chinese Eastern Railway from 1902 to 1920, was born in Poltava Province, Russia. He was a scion of old Russian gentry family with Hungarian ancestry. By training an engineer, he went on join the army and served in the

played great organizational abilities, and was soon promoted to serve as a head of the Chinese Eastern Railway. At the same time, he sought capable wood suppliers for the rapidly expanding railway infrastructure in the Russian Far East<sup>120</sup>.



Fig. 4. Present-day view of the former residence belonging to Władysław Kowalski

Source: Private collection of Leonard Spychalski

Kowalski, together with Frank and Kiliański, was among the first businessmen who began the timber industry in Manchuria. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Kowalski became one of the most important contractors of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the richest entrepreneur in North China<sup>121</sup>. From 1903 to 1906, Kowalski was engaged in the construction of several steam flour mills in Harbin<sup>122</sup>. Back then the first place in manufacturing industry across Manchuria was taken by

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Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 (П.С. Тищенко, *Харбинская старина*, Харбин 1936, p. 15). His first experience building railways came years later, when he was involved in construction of the Trans-Caspian Railway. In 1895, Colonel Horvath was appointed director of the Ussurian Railway, which was then under construction. Seven years later, he was made General and chief of the Chinese Eastern Railway (P.S.H. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911-1931*, Durham 1959, p. 114-120). As a head of CER, Horvath was seen by certain officials and military officers as an autocrat, whose political influence in the railway zone lasted for much of his time in that position (L. Maynard, *Harbin. General Features*, "Special Consular Reports" 1913, no. 59, p. 163). In his relations with local population Horvath was homely and democratic. In 1919, for instance, he readily accepted the independence of Poland (E. Kajdański, *Wspomnienia z mojej Atlantydy...*, p. 18). Without his permission, Władysław Kowalski would never become the main contractor of the Chinese Eastern Railway Company (Г.В. Мелихов, *Белый Харбин: Середина 20-х*, Москва 2003, p. 76).

<sup>120</sup> H. Shukman, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, Oxford 1988, p. 324; G. Melikhov, *Glimpses of Old Harbin*, "Far Eastern Affairs" 1990, no. 4, p. 175.

<sup>121</sup> I.A. Mikhoilov, *North Manchuria and the Chinese Eastern Railway*, Harbin 1924, p. 181-183; F. Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile. The Northeast Asian Balance of Power, 1924-1931*, Oxford 2002, p. 200.

<sup>122</sup> *Milling in Manchuria*, "American Miller and Processor" 1910, no. 1-6, vol. 38, p. 309.

flour-milling<sup>123</sup>. In early 1920<sup>s</sup>, the railway zone contained in all 35 flourmills, which milled up to 300,000 tons of wheat. At least 24 of these mills were situated in Harbin and approximately six were owned by Władysław Kowalski. Besides flour, his mills produced manna and buckwheat grits. Out of the flour produced, about  $\frac{2}{3}$  were brought to the CER beltway and the remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  was consumed directly at the points, where the mills were located<sup>124</sup>.

On the eve of the First World War, Kowalski decided to increase the range of services provided by his company. To this end, he built a veneer factory, the only such a manufacture in Northeast China. Hence, in the mid 1920<sup>s</sup>, he turned out to be among the most influential manufacturers and exporters of timber and veneer in Manchuria<sup>125</sup>. His timber products were sold on Manchurian market as well as exported to Japan, Australia, North and South America<sup>126</sup>. During the years of the First World War and ongoing conflicts within Russian Empire, the factory was still rapidly expanding. This was possible owing to an excellent work management that was implemented in the leased timber concessions. The whole process was based on a well-developed internal transport network, covering railway lines with a length of nearly 200 km<sup>127</sup>. The railway system connected different logging places and sawmills<sup>128</sup>.

Timber concessions<sup>129</sup> covered an area of approximately 6,157 km<sup>2</sup>, and stretched along eastern line of The Chinese Eastern Railway<sup>130</sup>, which connected Harbin and Nikolsk-Ussuriyskiy<sup>131</sup>. At its peak in the beginning of 1925, his company provided employment for almost 10,000 workers across northern parts of Manchuria<sup>132</sup>, including Poles, Russians and the Chinese. Moreover, the reserve stock of timber, especially firs, pines, cedars and oaks, across his concessions was estimated

<sup>123</sup> Milling in Manchuria, "The Northwestern Miller" 1908, no. 76, p. 155.

<sup>124</sup> Economical Bureau of CER, *The Chinese Eastern Railway and its Zone*, Harbin 1923, p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> "The Timberman" 1927, vol. 28, no. 7-12, p. 35.

<sup>126</sup> J. Neja, *Polski król Mandżurii...*, p. 69.

<sup>127</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p.192.

<sup>128</sup> J. Neja, *Polski król Mandżurii...*, p. 68.

<sup>129</sup> Konstanty Symonolewicz, Polish consul in Harbin between 1929 and 1930, in his secret report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw presented the following description of timber concessions belonging to Władysław Kowalski: Yablonia – 2,430 square versts, Imienpo – 450 square versts, Hailin and Hengtaohotzu – 1,030 square versts, and also Mulin – 1,500 square versts, which gives a total area of 5,410 square versts (AAN, MSZ, file no. 11686, Secret report of Konstanty Symonolewicz, Head of Polish Delegation in Harbin, November 19, 1929, p. 3-16). After 1835, 1 square verst was estimated at about 1,138 square kilometer (K. Brown, *A Biography of No Place. From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*, Cambridge 2003, p. 242) and therefore a total area of these concessions was approximately 6,157 km<sup>2</sup>. Most importantly, similar description was given by Kazimierz Grochowski, who stated that the Timber Company of Władysław Kowalski stretched over an area of 5410 square versts (K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 192).

<sup>130</sup> CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.4432, Survey of Manchuria, September 30, 1925, p. 8.

<sup>131</sup> AAN, KPM, file no. 11, Fragment of announcement in the weekly *Listy Polskie z Dalekiego Wschodu* (lack of date and pagination).

<sup>132</sup> H. Kuromiya, A. Peptoński, *Między Warszawą a Tokio...*, p. 317.

at nearly one billion cubic feet<sup>133</sup>. This area produced fire-wood, larch wood sleepers, telegraph poles and supporting stanchions for mines. Interestingly, between 1921 and 1924, Kowalski also leased a mining concession from the local government<sup>134</sup>. The scale of his establishment was best evidenced by a wide range of expenses incurred during the initial years of its implementation. By 1923, Władysław Kowalski had invested a total sum of 10,100,000 dollars in his enterprises within the entire region<sup>135</sup>. Only timber concessions leased by Skidelsky and Popoff, who also tried to expand their enterprises into various sectors of Manchurian economy, could match with business carried out by Kowalski. However, they never managed to develop such a wide range of industrial activities<sup>136</sup>.

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and decrease of Russian influence in the region, Władysław Kowalski used his Polish passport as a tool of diplomatic immunity for his economic activity. Increasing corruption, lawlessness<sup>137</sup> and the outbreak of a severe worldwide economic depression in 1929<sup>138</sup>, which weakened the financial standing of his establishment, led Kowalski to a desperate decision. Thus, he committed several Chinese officials, followed by Japanese profiteers, to the company and ceded half of the company's assets to them in order to solve the financial problems<sup>139</sup>. Soon, however, the greed and predatory policy of his new partners only worsened the situation of the enterprise, which found itself on the verge of bankruptcy in 1930<sup>140</sup>. In 1936, the Japanese authorities, despite frequent protests of Polish diplomatic missions in Harbin and Tokyo<sup>141</sup>, took over timber concessions previously awarded to Władysław Kowalski (see Fig. 5). Similar measures were used in the case of mining concession, with an area of 4,000 square kilometers<sup>142</sup>,

<sup>133</sup> At the time, the reserve stock of timber in North Manchuria was estimated at 136 billions of cubic feet. Out of this quantity only one thirty fourth part (4 billions) was actually exploited (Economical Bureau of CER, *The Chinese Eastern Railway...*, p. 17; K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 192).

<sup>134</sup> Economical Bureau of CER, *The Chinese Eastern Railway...*, p. 18.

<sup>135</sup> K. Grochowski, *Polacy na Dalekim Wschodzie...*, p. 193.

<sup>136</sup> "Journal of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers" 1924, no. 5, p. 77.

<sup>137</sup> Efforts of the Timber Company owned by Kowalski were often harassed by the Honghuzi ("Red Beards"; Rus. Хунхузы) outlaws. While active mostly in Manchuria, the Honghuzi gangs originated in China proper, as most members were former soldiers or unemployed laborers and peasants. They raided foreign settlers and plagued Russian troops, mainly during the 1870-1930 era. These nomads were already present around Harbin during the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (L.L. Seaman, *From Tokio through Manchuria with the Japanese*, London 1905, p. 161; K. Symonolewicz, *O chunchuzach*, "Pamiętnik Charbiński" 1924, vol. 2, p. 17-22; KP, ZS, file no. MW 25, Photocopies of photographs from the collection of manuscripts, p. 5).

<sup>138</sup> J.S. Olson, *Historical Dictionary of the Great Depression, 1929-1940*, Westport 2001, p. 327.

<sup>139</sup> A. Winarz, *Wychowanie fizyczne i sport w życiu Polonii mandżurskiej*, "Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza. Pedagogika" 2011, vol. 20, p. 354.

<sup>140</sup> J. Neja, *Polski król Mandżurii...*, p. 70.

<sup>141</sup> CAW, Od. II Szt. Gł., file no. I.303.4.2015, Report on the attitude of Japanese authorities towards Polish citizens in Manchukuo. September 22, 1937 (lack of pagination).

<sup>142</sup> "Echo z Dalekiego Wschodu" 1939, no. 3, p. 17.

belonging to Kazimierz Grochowski<sup>143</sup>. In the end, Władysław Kowalski, bankrupt and brought to a state of extreme nervous exhaustion, died of a heart attack on 22 November 1940 in Harbin<sup>144</sup>. His wife and two daughters, however, left Manchuria in 1942.

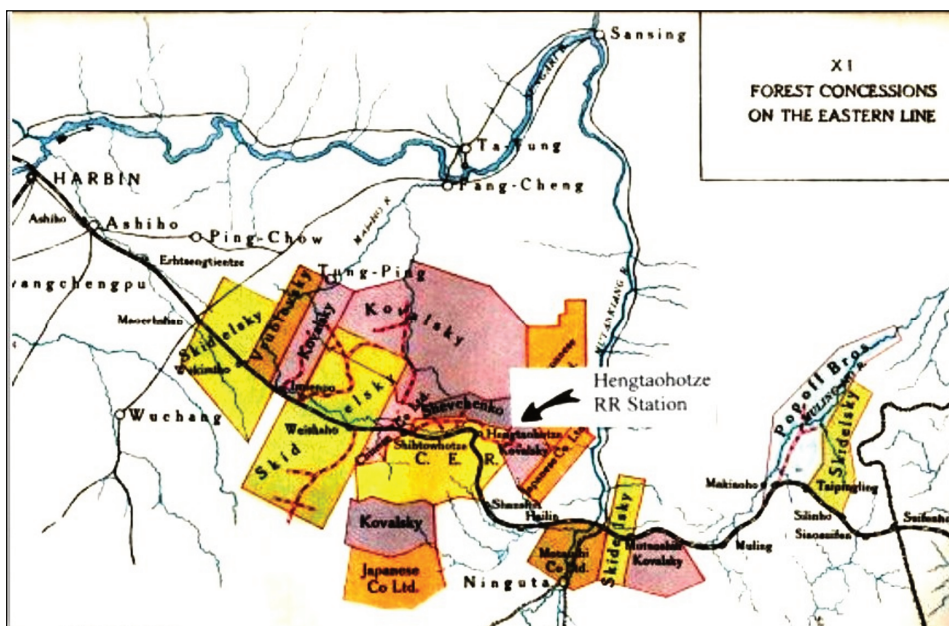


Fig. 5. Map of concessions owned by Kowalski, marked with pink color

Source: Private collection of Jerzy Czajewski, President of the Harbiners Club in Szczecin

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<sup>143</sup> A. Aleksandrowicz, *Mandżuria, jej przeszłość...*, p. 167.

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#### Summary

### **Władysław Kowalski (1870-1940): Polish pioneer of industrialization in the Far East**

Władysław Kowalski was a Polish entrepreneur, employer, trader and philanthropist, principally conducting his business activities from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the late thirties of the twentieth century within the borderland between Russia and Northern Manchuria. His life was an example of fate shared by many Poles, who were able to take advantage of favorable conditions for the development of entrepreneurship at the turn of the nineteenth century in Asiatic Russia. Thanks to a great determination and ambition, he made millions in business and became one of the most influential business magnates across Manchuria.

