Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Perception of home in the process of migration and transmigration: the experience of
Russian teachers in Heihe, China

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
In
Social Anthropology
At Massey University (Manawatu)
New Zealand

Dolguileva Alina
2012
ABSTRACT

By carrying out qualitative research, I explore the experience of being involved in transmigration and living on the border of two cultures. Three Russian teachers who work and live in Heihe, China were interviewed and asked how they redefine their practices of ‘home’ as transmigrants. Understanding of ‘home’ involves complex construction and reconstruction of ideas about ‘home’ which are unique for each individual and it is this that makes the basis for the comparison.

The research was based on material gathered mostly through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Each interviewee’s story shows that there are different strategies being applied by people living away from their original homes.

I explored the idea that these people develop their relationship to home through relating to both material and non-material aspects simultaneously. Therefore physical spaces, other materiality and food, and non-material aspects such as social networks, communication and practices are all interwoven. The research explored that ‘home’ involves both ‘fluidity’ and ‘fixedness’ of place. The experiences of this particular group of multi-local people and their relationship to ‘home’ and ‘host’ country will add a useful dimension to the understanding of other Russian migrants who live in Heihe. And in addition, the experiences of these people will add to general ideas about translocality in other countries across the world.
Acknowledgements

This research has been a great journey for me, because I have got to know many fantastic people who contributed to this research in one way or another. I want to say a big thanks to my supervisors, Robyn Andrews and Trisia Farrelly, who supported me throughout all stages of my research. They have provided me with valuable feedback and have encouraged me to be more critical in what I have written and how I have analysed my data. I am grateful that they have directed me and helped me to narrow my research topic. Their guidance and their advice was always useful.

Also, I want to thank my large, extended family, who supported me from the beginning to the end of my fieldwork. Especially huge thanks go to my husband and my mother who helped with my children during the fieldwork and when I was busy writing the chapters of my thesis.

I would like to express my appreciation to my research participants and all other people who I spoke to about this research. My research participants opened their hearts and shared their life stories with me, which have left many positive memories. This has been a fascinating experience and I am grateful to them for their time and interest in this topic.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. i  

Acknowledgements................................................................................................................... ii  

TABLE OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.................................................................................... iv  

Chapter 1: Introduction............................................................................................................... vi  
  Background ................................................................................................................................ 1  
  Research Aims ............................................................................................................................ 3  
  Theoretical background ............................................................................................................... 4  
  Heihe ........................................................................................................................................... 6  
    Geographic area and climate .................................................................................................... 6  
    Historical context .................................................................................................................... 7  
    Heihe city today ....................................................................................................................... 10  
  Cross-border migration ............................................................................................................ 13  
  Research in this region ............................................................................................................. 16  
  Thesis overview ....................................................................................................................... 17  

Chapter 2: Methodology .......................................................................................................... 18  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 18  
  Methodology and methods........................................................................................................ 18  
    Research participants ............................................................................................................. 23  
    Data collection ....................................................................................................................... 24  
    Ethical issues ......................................................................................................................... 25  
    Problems ............................................................................................................................... 27  

Chapter 3: Research Participants ............................................................................................. 29  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 29
TABLE OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Ferry boat Amur 2010 on the way from Blagoveshensk to Heihe (Blagoveshensk city on the background) (Source: author) ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 2: Map of Russian and Chinese border. (Two stars show Heihe and Blagoveshensk which are separated by the river) (Source: Google maps) .................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 3: Heihe city at night taken from Blagoveshensk (Source: Stegancev, 2007) .... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 4: Statue in the Heihe waterfront (Source: author) ....................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 5: Central shopping street of Heihe (Source: author) ....................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 6: Shopping mall Huafu and other shops with Russian names (Source: author) Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 7: A Siberian bear and Chinese panda (Blagoveshensk city can be seen in the background) (Source: author) ........................................................................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Figure 8-9: Waterfront area near the new park (Source: author) ............. Error! Bookmark not defined.