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A Good Pitch for Busking: Czech Compatriots in Manchuria, 1899-1918

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Introduction

Busking is the practice of performing in public places for tip and gratuities and the people engaging in this practice are called buskers.¹ This art form was a common means of employment for many Czech entertainers and musicians throughout the history. Most of them wandered from place to place and at the end of the nineteenth century Czech buskers came to Manchuria.

Despite of this significant fact, busking, until now, have been viewed as having marginal importance even by historians who elaborated on Czech compatriots in Manchuria because the unstable character of buskers' lifestyle and their entertainment business activities² made it difficult to find reliable evidence.³ Principal source of this paper is the book *Východočeské otrokářství* [Slavery in east Bohemia], written by Bohuslav Gebauer in 1906. Gebauer's book

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¹ Busking is a British term used in many areas of the English-speaking world. The place where buskers perform is called a pitch. The term busking was first noted in the English language around the middle 1860s in Great Britain and it derives from obsolete French *busquer* 'seek', Italian *buscare* or Spanish *buscar*. Originally in nautical use in the sense 'cruise about, tack', the term later meant 'go about selling things', hence 'go about performing'. In American English buskers were commonly called minstrels and troubadours. The most equivalent term in Czech language for a busker is 'šumař' from the German 'schümer' (Ex-word: Oxford Dictionary of English 2003); (Rejzek 2001: 630).

² Generally speaking, busking performances can be just about anything that the audience find entertaining. Buskers may do musical performance, dancing, and singing; recite poetry, story-telling, clowning, puppeteering, fortune-telling, magic, card tricks, fire eating, juggling etc.

³ The period under study took place before the advent of recording, and the origin of the entertainment industry. However, few songs and music performed by buskers can be found in the Czech folklore tradition.

is relied on for its historical value, especially for the notes taken by the author while working in court where he had heard of many buskers' cases. However, according to this book the image of Czech buskers is generally mediocre.

The first systematic evidence of Czech compatriots in Manchuria was gathered by the Czechoslovak consulate in Harbin during the presence of the Czechoslovak legionnaires in the Chinese Eastern Railway Zone who were employed in the inter-Allied intervention (1918-1920). After the establishment of Czechoslovakia in October 1918, new identity cards and travel documents were needed for compatriots in Manchuria (former Austrian or Russian citizens) who chose Czechoslovak citizenship. However, by this time, the phenomenon of wandering buskers was in decline. In 1920 during the evacuation of the Czechoslovak legionnaires from Siberia, many Czechoslovak citizens decided to return home with them on ships from Vladivostok. After that, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague no longer considered significant either the agenda of the consulate in Harbin or the situation of the Czechoslovak colony in Manchuria.

The aim of this paper is therefore twofold. First, to make a fresh point of view regarding the personal character as well as the professional activities of Czech buskers in Manchuria because the stereotypes as well as the historical perspectives had changed since the time of Gebauer. Second aim is to analyze the role which wandering buskers played in a process for the establishment of a proper Czechoslovak colony in Manchuria between the two world wars, because at the same time they gradually disappeared. The most significant source of information for this part was the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in Prague.

The reader will be confronted with many interesting facts or paradoxes deriving from the very complex international and local setting of the region and cultural differences. As evidence, I cite many publications in the form of memoirs, old travel books, and scientific works. Major contributions to my work were many articles, news reports, and individual thoughts often in the form of diaries of direct observers.

Czech Emigration to Imperial Russia

Emigration from the Czech lands to the Russian Empire started in the second half of the nineteenth century and was based on three factors: demographical, economical, and political. The rapid growth of the population in the Czech lands, which at that time were a part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Central Europe, caused the shortage of land, whereas in Russia after the abolishment of serfdom in 1861, land became gradually available also for colonists from abroad.⁴ The tsarist government lured foreign colonists with many attractive proposi-

⁴ The Czech population in the first half of the nineteenth century had been given new land within the Austro-Hungarian Empire at its frontiers, especially in today's Romania, Croatia, and Bosnia. At the same time, emigration to the United States started, which continued until the first half of the

tions such as the right to buy land at low prices, the right to establish manufacturing corporations, local self-administration, religious freedom, and exemption from paying taxes and military conscription.⁵ Apart from the Russian “muzhiks,”⁶ the Czechs were Catholics but the tsarist government welcomed them because of the similarity of both Slavic languages and the generally high skills in land cultivation.

Between 1868 and 1880, a wave of about sixteen hundred Czechs moved from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to Russia, especially to Volhynia Province, a rural area in Western Ukraine, then bordering with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Vaculík 1997: 15). Some Czech villages here were built on “green land,” others, next the existing Ukrainian or Polish settlements, having their own schools and churches. The Czech colonists made their living by land cultivation or started to run small businesses and engage in craftwork. Later they founded mills, machine plants, and breweries. Other groups of Czechs settled in the Caucasus.⁷

The policy of the tsarist government of populating new territories was a result of Russian expansion. At the end of the nineteenth century, Imperial Russia finally began the process of its industrialization. This led to another wave of Czech immigration especially to the new urban centers in the Russian Empire, which offered many working opportunities for skilled professionals.⁸ Statistics suggest that there were about one hundred thousand Czechs at the end of the nineteenth century (Jednář 2001: 53). Most of them lived in big cities such as Kiev, St. Petersburg, or Moscow, whereas some colonists in Volhynia Province had already become Russian citizens.⁹ Due to completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Irkutsk, the Czechs spread from the European part of Russia to Siberia and finally, to the Russian Far East. In 1899, the first Czechs came to Manchuria.

twentieth century (Jednář 2001).

⁵ After 1881, the tsarist government adopted more stridently anti-national policies also against colonists from abroad (Sunny 1997: 660).

⁶ In Russian: Мужик refers to a Russian peasant usually in pre-1917 Imperial Russia. The term connotes a certain degree of poverty, meager nature, and lack of education as most muzhiks were serfs before the agricultural reform in 1861. After that date, serfs were given parcels for working the land and became free peasants, but their quality of lifestyle had not changed much (Gaudin 2007); (Polard 2008); (Sato2006).

⁷ According to the first population census made in Russia in 1897, there were 3,360 Czech colonists in the Caucasus region. Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], “Češi v zahraničí” [Czechs abroad], miscellaneous reports, box no. 1 (hereafter, only AMZV, CA).

⁸ Bradley 1985; Bater 1986.

⁹ A long stay in Russia was not the only factor in the Czech colonists taking Russian citizenship. In the case of Volhynia Province, the Czech diaspora was not the only one. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were about two hundred thousand ethnic Germans. But in 1915 as a result of the outbreak of the First World War, their land was seized by the Russian government and the German colonists were expelled, whereas the Czech colonists became Russian citizens and joined the Russian army fighting against the Germans and the Austria-Hungarian Monarchy (Keller 1968-1973); (Dönninghaus 2002); (Bradley 1991).

Although the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was a multiethnic state, in which the predominant Slavic population was deprived of equal political rights, the political reasons for many Czechs going to live either temporarily or permanently in the neighboring Russian Empire have been regarded as less determining than economical and demographical factors. However, it is necessary to say that, Russia at that time being the biggest and the only independent Slavic country, many Czechs sympathized with Pan-Slavic ideas and the Russian drive to become a world power.¹⁰

The Chinese Eastern Railway

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire expanded mainly by building railroads.¹¹ After the eastern section of the Trans-Siberian Railway was completed, a decision was made to connect it with Vladivostok, the seaport on the Pacific coast in the Russian Far East. The shortest alternative turned out to be a route via Chinese territory known in the West as Manchuria. The tsarist government took advantage of China's weak position after its defeat in the war against Japan and in 1896, a concession was hence extracted from China to build a railroad in the northeast of China.¹²

The Chinese Eastern Railway (C. E. R.) completed in 1903 was officially a Russo-Chinese company but in reality, it was an instrument for the economic and political penetration of Russian influence into northern Manchuria. The territory along the railway was taken out of Chinese jurisdiction and run as a Russian concession, which caused opposition from China. The same situation was applied to the administrative and technical operations network. The majority of the skilled professionals were Russians, and new urban centers were established along the railway having a more or less typical Russian provincial character expressed most clearly in the architecture (Bakešová 1997: 9).

The C. E. R. was a source of many working opportunities while it was under construction

¹⁰ A movement in the mid nineteenth century aimed at unity of all the Slavic nations under Russian rule. It was also used as a political tool by the Russian Empire (Kohn 1960).

¹¹ Otte; Neilson 2006.

¹² In 1895, China lost in war to Japan influence over the Korean peninsula and needed to obtain credit to pay indemnity to some of the prestigious Western banks operating in China. China finally received a loan from the Bank of Paris, only on condition that the finances of the Imperial Court would be kept under surveillance. The initiative was then taken by Russia and the Russo-Chinese Bank. Russia, which expanded to the Far East, agreed to act as financial guarantor for China if given the right to build a railroad via the northeastern territory in order to connect its Trans-Siberian Railroad with Vladivostok Port on the Pacific coast. After initial talks held in Peking, a senior Chinese imperial bureaucrat Li Hongzhang (李鸿章) was invited to St. Petersburg in 1896 for the coronation of the new tsar Nicolas II. Consequently, a secret treaty was signed between Russia and China including military assistance in case China needed help. The Chinese Eastern Railway was to be built intersecting northern Manchuria from the Manchuria station to Pogranichnaya with a branch line from Harbin to Dalnyi (Dalian 大连) on the Liaoning peninsula (辽宁半岛) (Quested 1982); (Leong 1976: 10-12).

and also later when manpower was required for its operation and maintenance. Other jobs were to be found in newly constructed factories, banking houses, shops, etc., which were built along the railway in the so called *polosa otchuzhdenia*¹³—the zone of expropriation. Extraordinary business opportunities attracted many people to this thinly populated region. Among the newcomers and various nationalities from many parts of Russian Empire were the first Czechs.

In 1899, the Czech family of Erml was making a concert tour of Siberia but could not return to Khabarovsk because the Sungari River was frozen. Therefore, they settled in Harbin and two other Czechs from Volhynia also arrived: J. Motyčka, a butcher from Lucko, and J. Vomáčka, a watchmaker from Dubno. Two years later, two more compatriots came: J. Bartl, a businessman, and J. Vacek with her daughter (Dubovický 1989: 106). According to Russian and Chinese statistics, Czech compatriots always created numerically only a small part of the Russian and later international population in Harbin and other stations along the C. E. R. Zone.¹⁴ However, this was still an important ethnic group. Czech people, such as musicians, craftsmen, businessmen running small enterprises, and engineers, were prominent in their professions. A very important group were the brewers who played a great part in developing the brewing industry in northeast China, especially in Harbin. It is remarkable that in many cases, the business activities of the first Czechs in Manchuria appeared in connection with music performance.

Wandering Buskers

The well-known Czech saying that “every Czech is a musician” was quite realistic because, not only in China but also in other parts of the world, many famous or less well-known Czech musicians and composers lived and worked. The Czech music tradition produced several composers who became famous worldwide. Apart from that, a very specific group of musicians was to be found among the so-called harpists¹⁵ who made their living by wandering from place to place, usually in groups, playing their musical instruments and singing popular songs in return for tips and gratuities. Their performances varied according to each group or individual musician, but in general, they were referred to as wandering buskers, fiddlers or scrapers. The pejorative meaning of this expression indicates that they recruited themselves from the bottom of society, which at the turn of the twentieth century regarded this profession

¹³ In Russian: полоса отчуждения.

¹⁴ For a detailed breakdown of Harbin population by ethnic groups, see the Chapter “Colonial Demography: Harbin 1913” (Wolff 1999 90–96); Apart from Russian and Chinese sources on populations in the C. E. R. Zone, Japanese statistics in most cases provided data only on Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans inhabitants and “other foreigners” as a group (*Kantoshu narabini Manshu Zairyu Honpojūin oyobi Gaikokujin Jinko Tokeihyo* 關東州並滿洲在留本邦人及外國人人口統計表 Tokyo 1909–).

¹⁵ This Czech term is considered rather old-fashioned today. It was derived from the harp, the musical instrument on which these musicians used originally to play.

to be a dishonest and unstable form of living.¹⁶

The leader of such a group was called a principal or “harpister.”¹⁷ His role was to hire young apprentices ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-five from poor families. He usually gave them some form of musical education and later, payment. Therefore, many members of these buskers’ groups came from poor social backgrounds and joining such a group was a way to escape from their misery. Harpist families and their recruits originally came from villages in eastern Bohemia, namely Hradec Králové, Níchanice, Nový Bydžov, and Chlumec (Gebauer 1906: 9).

The territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire such as Galicia, Moravia, and Hungary often provided enough space for their performances. But in many cases, they set off on their travels a long way from the Central-European Monarchy.¹⁸ They played everywhere they found a willing public to listen to them. The most frequent destinations were the Balkan Peninsula, Turkey, and Russia. From Russia to Siberia, they went to Manchuria and China proper.

The fin de siècle was the most prosperous time for wandering buskers in Manchuria because the mass concentration of people in the C. E. R. Zone, particularly railway workers, Russian railway guards, civilian employees, and various tradesmen, gave many opportunities for work, which was in short supply, in the form of entertainment and relaxation. Best qualified for this profession among the other ethnic groups were Czech buskers because their profession enabled them to adapt most suitably to local specific conditions, which resembled the Gold Rush in the Klondike.

A book by Bohuslav Gebauer, who was an adjunct at the court in Nový Bydžov, eastern Bohemia, at that time, is full of interesting evidence about these wandering buskers and their individual experiences, which were brought to the court in the form of legal proceedings against their employers. It also provides subjective evidence of the wild conditions in Manchuria and other parts of China at that time. Gebauer also cites the words of a known traveler of Czech origin, Eriq Stanko Vráz,¹⁹ who was visiting Manchuria at that time and met many buskers personally during his trip.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Czech society in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was completing its process of national renaissance. One aim of this national movement was to demonstrate that Czech people match other developed nations in Europe, especially the Germans, in terms of science, culture, and music. Gebauer’s picture of wandering buskers was therefore generally mediocre because they spread a rather negative image of the Czech nation abroad. Gebauer was present in many sessions at court where former apprentices of the

¹⁶ Modern buskers usually stylize themselves as being unemployed, homeless or beggars but they are not. Therefore, even until now some people heckle and stigmatize buskers as such regardless of their social status.

¹⁷ Gebauer used this expression in his book.

¹⁸ By this term, the Austria-Hungary Monarchy is meant.

¹⁹ This name is actually a pseudonym. His real name is not known.

“harpists” complained about mistreatment by their masters. Physical abuse and brutal beating of young wandering buskers were common, as was starvation and cases of forced prostitution in the hope of earning more money for the principal.²⁰

Warlike Profit

Wandering buskers profited most from the army. In the history of Manchuria, two big military operations took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first was the revolt of Yihetuan (义和团运动) known in the West as the Boxer Rebellion (1898–1901), a backlash directed against the foreigners in China. The Great Powers sent an international army to suppress it. The biggest part of this international contingent was sent by Russia, which subsequently occupied Manchuria leading to another military conflict between Russia and Japan. In both cases, the loser was China. Even in the Russo-Japanese War when China was not directly involved, the war was laughed about on Chinese territory, which had negative consequences for this declining empire. During the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion, wandering buskers became direct witnesses of one of the greatest tragedies in Chinese modern history though the scale of retaliation was smaller in Manchuria than in inner China.

It was a strange feeling to hear ordinary Czech people speak about Peking, Tianjin, or Shanhai-kuan so casually as if they were cities in their home country. Along the railway from Tianjin to Peking where in 1900 Admiral Seymour was pressed by the Chinese rebels, now on both sides of the railway, thousands of decapitated heads are lying rotting. And names like Brabec, Honěk, Hyblík, Okrouhlí, Nedvídek, and Pekárek from Nechanice with their groups are travelling there just like this (Gebauer 1906: 9).

Austria-Hungary participated against the Boxers with four battle ships and five hundred sailors in the international intervention. The Chinese Imperial Court was pressed by the Western powers to sign unfair treaties and pay indemnities. In this manner, the Austrian Monarchy was eventually given a concession in Tianjin (天津). Among the Austrian sailors sent to China was also a small group of Czechs. Some of them later did their sentry duty at the Austrian legation and also came into contact with many buskers from Bohemia. Gebauer in his book writes:

The group left for Tianjin and from there to Peking. Anna Z ran away from the group there. She found her compatriots—three Czech sailors in the Austrian detachment of the international garrison. First, she picked on officer Chorvát, then on a helmsman. Finally, she was thrown out of the garrison by the sailors. Then she was recruited by Violette, who ran a brothel in Peking; however, the conclusion is unknown. She contracted blennorrhoea and during this illness, she was

²⁰ These stories were the subject of his book.

treated by a military doctor from the Austrian detachment. According to Vráz, his name was Dr. Josef Čoudek, a frigate physician who in 1902 was working in the Austrian legation. The consul took her passport and she was deported home. But she escaped at Taku (大沽). The Austrian consul sent a squad of sailors after her. She was arrested and deported home via Shanghai to Singapore and Trieste (Gebauer 1906: 69).

During the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) some 1.3 million Russian troops had been transported to Manchuria.²¹ Among them were many military bandmasters of Czech origin. They often came from the south front to Harbin for supplies and always stood in the brewery built in 1903 by Erml (Dubovicky 1989: 106). Harbin was designated the Russian Army's northern base for the war while the medical corps occupied the southern outskirts of the town with tents for thousands of wounded soldiers (Wolff 1999: 54).

In 1905, a member of parliament in Vienna, Václav Kľofáč, arrived in Manchuria as a war correspondent for *Národní Listy* [The National Gazette]. In his reports are references about wandering buskers whom he met in Siberia for the first time on his way to Manchuria. Kľofáč was not impressed with their second-rate performance or the contents of their songs based on the national sentiments of the oppressed Slavic nations. Eventually, a debate in the Austrian parliament was held after his return, which called for restrictions on the issuance of travel documents for such elements. Their music was regarded as bland and a discredit to the national reputation.

As busking had grown to be a controversial enterprise, there have been numerous legal cases about regulations and laws that have restricted the rights of buskers. However, there were many ways of overcoming these restrictions because the same and new groups of musicians went abroad even after such official discussions. The evidence can be found in the files of the archives of the former Austria-Hungarian consulate in Harbin, which were later submitted to the Czechoslovak authorities after the dissolution of the monarchy. Three Czech buskers according to their Slavic names complained at the Austrian consulate about the bad treatment they received from the Russian police after some minor incident in a bar. They accused the Russian officials of abusing their power and of brutality.²²

We can see that the image of wandering buskers was tarnished; however, not every one of these people came to a bad end. Some of them were able to earn money and from their savings, they bought or invested in business, buying small businesses, land, or commercial

²¹ Never before had armies of such vast numbers as those of the Russo-Japanese War been pitched against one another: about 120,000 Russian troops and border guards had been stationed in the Far East before the war started; by its end some 1.3 million had been transported to the region. As for the Japanese, their numbers rose from 300,000 at the start to about 900,000 at the end of the war (Nish 1985:2).

²² Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí ČR [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic], file: Sibiřské archivy [Siberian archives], box no. 4, protocol no. 105 (hereafter, only AMZV, SA).

concessions, and sometimes also brothels. A typical example of prosperity was the aforementioned Ferdinand Erml, who ran a brewery in Harbin and became a speaker for the Czech colony in this city. After the Czechoslovak consulate in Harbin was closed down in 1925, contact between the Czech colony and the Czechoslovak legation in Peking was made through his mediation.

The Czechoslovak Colony in the C. E. R. Zone

The prosperity of most small businesses set up by former wandering buskers depended on the changing economic and political environment not only in the Railway Zone but also in Russia and China. During the Great War, the rush of wandering buskers eager to earn quick money had stopped and they were replaced by genuine musicians. The Czechoslovak consul general in Harbin wrote in his report about the buskers as follows:

Among the remaining Czechoslovak citizens, there are also adventurous and criminal elements. However, it is a pleasure to say that the element of wandering buskers well known here until the Great War has been reduced remarkably. With a few exceptions, it has almost vanished. The fact is that all of the musicians numbering twelve are playing in two of the best orchestras in Harbin.²³

First-rate musicians performing in Harbin for some time were for example the violinist J. Ploška, the pianist F. Souček, and the cellist B. Sýkora (Dubovický 1989: 106). However, the full list of Czechoslovak citizens living in Harbin from 1919 to 1922 comprises several dozens of people from the eastern part of Bohemia, originally musicians. They were living in different places along the C. E. R. still playing or running small businesses such as trading. At the station of Manchuria, it was the family of Súra a Havlíček, and in Harbin, it was the family of E. Dvořák, F. Fišera, J. Doležel, K. Řehka, E. Drážný, Hronova, and Soltyšova. The Novotný family had settled in Changchun, as had the Sýkora, Truska, Ciller, Honc, Stancel, and Poddaný families. All of them were originally musicians. At the Anda station lived B. Pulkrábek. At Pograničnaya, Josef Urban worked as a brewery master (Dubovický 1989: 106). Those who could not make their living had a chance to return home for free with the repatriating Czechoslovak army in 1920.

The Czechoslovak colony in northeast China developed in the twenties of the last century. After the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in the 1930s, a rapid decline followed. During this time, all who could leave did leave, and only the poorest remained. The Second World War (1939–1945) and Civil War in China (1946–1949) closed this region to the outside world for more than ten years. The situation of the people who remained became critical. The Czechoslovak colony finally disappeared in the 1950s when the few remaining colonists were repatriated.

²³ AMZV, SA, Harbin, box no. 3, report dated 3.6.1920.

Conclusion

The presence of Czech compatriots in Manchuria was a product of Russian expansion into this region, in accordance with the peak of Czech emigration from Austria-Hungary to Imperial Russia. Wandering buskers came to Manchuria because the construction of the C. E. R., as well as the wars launched on this territory, offered relatively easy money to be earned. Some of them earned a substantial income others made only pocket change. The income from busking, however, depended on many conditions including the type and quality of the performance, the composition of the group and the audience, the weather, the location and the political changes.

After the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Russian position in Manchuria had deteriorated both economically and politically. The C. E. R. Zone was no longer an El Dorado in the Far East. Instead, the Railway Zone was full of refugees and impoverished people, so there was no room for adventurers and their lavish earnings. This was the reason that wandering buskers were forced to leave or settle down. Most of them returned home together with the Czechoslovak corps' evacuation from Siberia in 1920.

After the collapse of the inter-Allied intervention, many Czechoslovak legionnaires with their Russian wives and children decided to stay in Harbin and other stations along the C. E. R. Zone. The Czechoslovak colony in Manchuria became more numerous in number and relatively stable for nearly a decade before another conflict broke out. Therefore, the role of wandering buskers for the establishment of the Czechoslovak colony in Manchuria was more than temporal. Moreover, their passing and adventurous character represents a typical demonstration of the modern age, full of dramatic socioeconomic and political changes, followed by a rise in nationalism, struggle for world power, and war, which creates economical migration as a consequence.

Illustration

The Czechoslovak Legionnaires dressed like wandering buskers. A photo taken from the chronicle *Za svobodu: obrázková kronika československého revolučního hnutí na Rusi, 1914-1920*, vol. 4 (Praha: Památník Odboje, 1929), p. 289.

Editorial note

I use the simplified Chinese form for Chinese characters and Chinese pinyin for their transcription into the Latin alphabet. Local names such as Harbin or Peking are written but do not correspond to this norm.



Ve volné chvíli. — Potulní zpěváci.

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大道芸のための良き場：満州におけるチェコ人同胞 1899-1918年

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本稿では、1899年から1918年までの間、中国東北地方(満州)で活動したチェコ人の音楽演奏家たちの足跡をたどりつつ、19世紀末から20世紀はじめのこの地域におけるチェコ人移民の活動を明らかにする。中東鉄道の建設に伴い、満州の過疎地域がロシアの拡張政策の対象となり、それに伴ってチェコ人(その中にはチェコ系ロシア移民も含まれる)も、その数は多くなかったが、この地域に現れ、その一部はこの地域に移民として定住した者もいた。その中心には大道演奏(バスキング)を生活の糧とするチェコ人たちがいた。この人びとについては、「流浪の演奏者」というかなり否定的なイメージで語られることが少なくなかった。しかしながら、この人びとはこの地域固有の条件に適応した人々であった。また、この人びとの活動は当時のこの地域をめぐる複雑な国際関係、すなわち、ロシア帝国の移民政策、日露戦争などと連動していた。本稿は、これまで顧みられることのなかったチェコ人移民の存在をとおして、この地域の歴史に新たな光を当てるものといえる。