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Destroyed and Forgotten: Revisiting the History of the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Magneto-Meteorological Observatory in Beijing in the 20th Century

Abstract

The article is to study the history of formation and development of the unique library of the Beijing Magnetic Meteorological Observatory governed by the Russian Imperial Academy of

Sciences. Nowadays, researchers increasingly focus their attention not just on history of institutes themselves, but also on history of their communications with and incorporation into the scientific institutional community. Studying the library of the Beijing Magnetic Meteorological Observatory (BMMO) and its books provide a better understanding of its place in the network of magnetic meteorological observatories of the 19th century Russian Empire, which has determined the novelty of the work. The author has introduced into scientific use new archival documents and data from the St. Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Academy of Sciences and from the Russian National Library. The article analyzes activities and history of the Observatory, which was located on the territory of the Russian Orthodox mission in Beijing (China) from 1848 to 1914. For the first time in Russian and international historiography, not only the formation history of the library of the Beijing Observatory has been analyzed, but also the contents and structure of the library stock and its uniqueness. The author has demonstrated variety of its scientific life. As the library was destroyed in the Yihetuan Movement in 1900 and the 1917 Revolution in Russia, the article covers the second half of the 19th century. Its methodological basis modern basic principles of historical research (scientific objectivity, historicism, consistency, historical-genetic approach, etc.), as well as methods of social history of science (relationship between the science and the state, between the science and other social institutions, etc.). It uses the methods of statistical processing of large databases (the sampling method and the method of grouping and summarizing the materials of statistical observation) to analyze the books in library. The research fills the gaps in scientific knowledge on 19th century China and introduces data on the activities of the Imperial Academy of Sciences institutions (Magnetic Meteorological Observatory as well as its library as auxiliary apparatus). Studying the history of scientific research in China can enrich the scientific ties between two countries and allow us to rethink the historical legacy of Russia and China.

Keywords

Beijing Magnetic Meteorological Observatory, Russian Orthodox mission in Beijing, archival heuristics, historical legacy of Russia and China, Imperial Academy of Sciences, Beijing, Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian National Library.

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