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World War II Memorial 'Evocative of Chinese Flag' Causes Outcry in Siberia

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The administration of a city in Siberia has agreed to change the design for the planned renovation of a World War II memorial, after local residents complained that the drawing seemed to celebrate the flag of China rather than to honor Red Army soldiers, Russian media reported.

Images of red banners with golden stars stoked contention as they appeared during renovation works on a World War II memorial in the city of Chita, in the Zabaikalsky region, local news site ZabMedia reported Thursday. According to the site, the city administration will add a Soviet hammer and a sickle to the monument in response to the complaints.

The memorial comprises five pillars, each symbolizing a year of the war fought between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany between 1941 and 1945. At the early stages of the ongoing renovation, the image of a red banner with a golden star was added on the side of each pillar. Locals denounced the new design as too evocative of the Chinese flag, which features four

smaller stars arranged in a semi-circle and flanking a larger star, according to ZabMedia.

Local Communist leader Yuri Gaiduk called the images "open blasphemy against the memory of our forefathers," the site reported.

"There is nothing left from the previous images [on the memorial]," Gaiduk was quoted saying. "The symbol of the Soviet Union and of the victory against Nazism — the hammer and sickle — is gone. Instead of it, a single star on a red field has appeared."

Local television channel ZabTV also jumped into the fray, with one correspondent saying on the air that the images were "bewildering." According to the journalist, the perceived resemblance to the Chinese flag is "very symbolic in itself, because the renovation works are being carried out by Chinese workers, among others," ZabMedia reported.

Gennady Shchukin, head of the local veterans' association, said that the architect behind the renovation had defended his project arguing that the star symbolized the Soviet victory, the site reported.

"Nobody is arguing with that, but placing a single star on a banner, without the hammer and sickle, is sure to stir trouble," Shchukin was quoted saying.

The city administration threw in the towel on Thursday, with local authorities promising the city will make the due corrections, Zabmedia reported later in the week.

"A hammer and a sickle will be additionally applied to the walls," a spokesperson for the city administration said.

While Moscow has been seeking closer ties with China amid Western sanctions over the Ukraine crisis, some Russians have displayed fear of becoming subjugated to the powerful and populous neighboring nation.

The governor of the Zabaikalsky region had proposed earlier this year to lease 150,000 hectares of land to a Chinese company for 49 years. Lawmakers and activists in Moscow protested the proposal, claiming Russia could end up losing part of its territory to China.

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