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DIVISION OF KOREA AS AN ISSUE INSIDE KOREAN STUDIES

AND WAYS OF OVERCOMING IT. THE RUSSIAN VIEW

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1. Introduction

It is a widely spread point of view that Korea was divided into two parts while she was liberated in 1945 and Russian and American armed troops were dislocated there. The cold war, which began in late 1940s, has deepened division of Korea. Then came such tragic events as Korean War. Traditional “regional dislike” (지방감정) between northern provinces and other parts of Korea made question of unification of Korea more complicated.

It is a well-known thing that the question of unification of Korea consists of two big components. The first one is *national* factor such as inter-Korean relations aimed to the goal of unification. The second is *international* factor.

The international factor of the process of unification of Korea is usually regarded quite limited within positions of governments and politicians of four big countries, surrounding Korean Peninsula ? Russia, China, USA and Japan or their allies.

At the same time it is necessary to point out, that *international Korean Studies* are an integral part of international factor of unification of Korea. National Korean Studies of each foreign (to Korea) country influences on local mass media, local politicians and even local governments. So, position of Korean Studies in general and of different scholars in particular on North and South Korea is a matter of creating real support or destruction of the unification process in Korean Peninsula.

Of course, Korean Studies comprises a lot of different particular fields such as Korean language, history, literature, culture etc. So *not all* the

Korean Studies is a matter related with the question of unification of Korea. Only Korean Studies, concerning Korea after 1945 are directly related with the question of unification.

It was not during *all time of modern history* of Korean Studies, that they could influence on the process of unification of Korea. Before late 1980s ? early 1990s when socialism collapsed in Soviet Union and countries of Eastern Europe and the cold war ended, any national (local) Korean Studies worked for the block that their native country belonged. Thus Eastern European countries and Peoples Republic of China supported North Korea and criticized South Korea. The Western World did the opposite. Thus, **since 1945 till late 1980s** any national (local) Korean Studies negated legitimacy of one of Korean states and objectively maintained division of Korea.

The situation in Korean Studies describing Modern History has changed in **late 1980s ? early 1990s**.

For *Eastern* Korean Studies, South Korea stopped to be an enemy country. Any researcher has got freedom to write positively about the Republic of Korea. At the same time in the countries of Eastern Europe, through local, greatly westernized mass media North Korea began to change her local image to the “place of continuous horror” caused by “still living socialism”. The early 1990s has brought to the Eastern Korean Studies some kind of *fashion* of criticizing the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea. Anyway, Russian (East–European) koreanologists has got freedom of choice how to write about Modern Korea.

After end of the cold war, *Western* Korean Studies too has no need to follow “only negative” way of studying North Korea.

Anyway, after early 1990s, after two Korean states became members of the UN, the World Korean Studies has got the freedom of choice how to write about New and Modern history of Korea. That means, that after 1990s Korean Studies became an active factor of the peace process in the Korean Peninsula.

At the **beginning of 21st** century new Russian government under the leadership of the president V.V. Putin has begun a new Korean policy, aimed to maintain balance between relations with two Koreas. This policy has given a good chance for Russian Korean Studies scholars to revise

their position towards North and South Korea and make it more balanced too.

An ideal position of an “ideal Korean Studies scholar” of nowadays, who is writing about Modern Korea, should be *comprehensive* to both Koreas. One can write numerous articles and books about unification of Korea, but if appreciation of one of Korean states is strongly negative, such kind of work helps in no way to the unification. Comprehensive perception of two Koreas is the only way the international Korean Studies could help the unification process of the Korean Peninsula.

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This paper presents concrete examples of Soviet and modern Russian appreciation of North and South Korea and demonstrates examples of how some Russian Korean Studies scholars of nowadays try to show both Koreas neutrally or positively when analyzing some hot issues or how some of them still follow patterns of the period of cold war.

The author of the paper has chosen two big issues of history of Korea to be examples of Russian approach of regarding Korea. They are Korean War and political systems of North and South Korea.

2. Description of Korean War in Russian works after early 1990s

and the problem of unification of Korea

(1)

In any war there are two sides of participants ? “our”, which is “true” and an “opposite”, which is “enemy”, which is “wrong”. Allies of countries involved in a war choose which part to consider “true” and which one to consider “wrong”. If historiography is contemporary to the war, it usually follows division into “rights” and “wrongs”. After concluding a peace treatment it takes time correlating to life of one generation until emotions go by and historians get an opportunity to analyze events of the war more or less objectively. Usually by that time many of secret archives become open to public.

At the same time, the way of describing a war can greatly influence on relations between former enemy countries.

The same is the case with the Korean War. Continuous regarding origins of the Korean War as only result of “aggressive policy” of governments and leaders of *one* of Korean states and their allies results in keeping mutual dislike of North and South which objectively slow down the process of unification of Korea.

(2)

Before 1980s all Russian works concerning Korean War were common in deriving origins and course of events in Korean War. They stated that North Korea was invaded by South Korean army lead by South Korean “puppet government”, which realized “imperialist” foreign policy of the USA in the Far East. North Korean army just “reacted” on South Korean “invasion” and “was forced” to cross the 38th parallel and begin armed operations aimed to “liberate” “suppressed” people of South Korea.

This kind of interpretation of origins of Korean War served little to the process of peaceful unification of Korea, because maintained in minds of readers an idea, that South Koreans, especially South Korean leaders, as well as Americans are enemies.

(3)

In **early 1990s**, when Russia “sacrificed” traditional good relations with North Korea in order to get good relations and economical aid from South Korea, many of Russian works, concerning Korean War turned to an opposite perception of the Korean War. This was done because of influence of Western sociology in general and Western Korean Studies in particular. In early 1990s the most popular was an idea of North Korean origin of the war. It was not largely supported by aged Russian koreanologists, who well knew Korean history and culture, but was spread mostly among Russian mass media and persons, not specialized in Korean Studies.

(4)

After **middle 1990s** positions of Russians scholars about origins and character of the Korean War greatly diversified.

Some of them still persisted on “North Korea first invasion” theory. For example, this kind of approach is presented in a guide–book “Republic of Korea”, published in Moscow in 2000, in a brief essay of history of Korea

(pp. 51– 117). Professor A.V. Torkunov has studied and published secret Russian archives, especially letters and telegrams exchanged between I.V. Stalin, Kim Il-sung, Mao Zedong and other principal persons involved in the Korean War, before and during it. This book by A.V. Torkunov also brings reader to an idea, that the initiator of the Korean War was North Korea.

Besides that, even at the beginning at the 21st century there are still historians in Russia, who insist on “South Korea first invasion” theory. They do not belong to koreanologists and study, for example, military history and so on.

(5)

But **newest** and the most popular among modern Russian koreanologists (and not only among them) point of view on the Korean War is “neutral” one. That means, that Russian historians prefer not to discuss the question of the “first shot”, or “who began the war”. They say: it does not matter. The war was objectively predetermined by split of the world into two blocks, by beginning of the cold war and by situation in neighboring countries, surrounding Korea.

One of the first Russian scholars who stressed such “neutral” approach to the question of Korean War was V.D. Tikhomirov, who by the end of 1980s has prepared a book, discussing the question of Korea (The book was published only in 1998, at the time of change of Russian policy towards two Koreas). Besides that, many other Russian scholars of late 1990s, who touched the question of Korean War in their works, emphasized that there is no need to discuss “who” has begun the war.

(6)

Among the most significant recent events showing new Russian tendencies in approach to the Korean War was coming out of the book “The War in Korea, 1950 ? 1953” (Saint–Petersburg, 2000), which contain 926 pages. The book was compiled in 1950s by a collective of military officers guided by S.S. Lototsky for limited use in Soviet Ministry of Defense. It contains the most detailed information about all military operations (North Korean, South Korean, UN, Chinese) and armaments used during the war. Though the preface of the book inclines to the theory of Northern responsibility for beginning of the war (p. 12), the main content of the book has only facts, but no emotions or political appreciations.

Another significant event of recent years was an international conference “The war in Korea of 1950 ? 1953. An outlook after 50 years”, organized in 2000 in Moscow. The conference has demonstrated a large scale of perception of the Korean War with the dominant tendency of “neutral” approach. The papers of the Conference were published in 2001 in a volume “The war in Korea of 1950 ? 1953. An outlook after 50 years”. An article, opening the volume was written by a distinguished Russian koreanologist Yu.V. Vanin. He stated, that the origin of the Korean War is division of Korea in august of 1945 (not any “wrong will” of any “bad” leader of South or North Korea). Then Yu.V. Vanin pointed out, that both of Korean states claimed the whole Korean Peninsula as its territory. That means, that before Korean War there existed *one state* with *two* governments. And both governments made preparations for military solution of Korean question. The war was developed from one of the multiple military conflicts between North and South Korean armed forces on the Onjin half-island, which were quite frequent at the end of 1949 ? beginning of 1950. So, it is hardly possible to determine, who really began the war. (At the same time reader can feel, that notwithstanding an attempt of neutral approach in analyzing the Korean War, sympathies of Yu.V. Vanin still belongs to the Northern part).

Thus, the beginning of 2000s shows, that most of Russian koreanologists prefer not to “make an enemy” from North or South Korea when describing the Korean War. This is a great achievement of Russian Korean Studies.

But they are not so common in position when regard political situation in People’s Democratic Republic of Korea.

3. Description of political system of North and South Korea in Russian

works in early and middle 1990s and division of Korea

(1)

Before late 1980s in studying North and South Korean political systems Soviet Korean Studies had to follow the Marxist theory of social development, according to which the highest stage of development is socialism or communism and the leading power of social development is working class led by communist party. This theoretical basis forced Russian koreanologists to find confirmations of rightness of Marxist theory

in North Korean way of development. The history of DPRK of 1950s ? 1970s was always shown as progressively developing, Soviet ? North Korean relations as always friendly. One of the most typical publications of that time, clearly demonstrating all statements pointed above, was a collective work "People's Democratic Republic of Korea" (Moscow, 1985; 272 p.), edited by Academy of Sciences of USSR.

The same book has two chapters, describing the Republic of Korea and her allies (pp. 210 ? 251). It is natural for 1980s, that South Korea is shown as a society, where military junta, supported by USA, took power and suppresses democracy and human rights there.

This kind of presenting situation in North and South Korea as of two absolutely opposite states, one of which is "right" (North) and another one is "wrong" (South) objectively sustained division of the Korean peninsula. There could not be any alternative by that time. Though DPRK has already proposed a unification formula implying foundation of confederation under a "neutral" name Confederative Democratic Republic Koryo (1980), nobody really believed that "true" socialist North will unite with "wrong" dictatorship South.

National factors of Modern history of Korea were not taken much in consideration by Soviet Korean Studies of that time. Soviet historiography always mentioned some "specific features of construction of socialism in Korean land". But this "specific features" were never clearly explained. One can hardly find out not only any analysis of the *juche* ideas, but even mentions about them in Soviet publications of that time.

As to the Republic of Korea, Soviet publications before late 1980s never took for truth or for an object of thorough study such South Korean realities as "national democracy" or policy of "national revival".

(2)

In **early 1990s** studying political systems of North and South Korea became some kind of a "workshop" for reevaluation future Russian "good capitalist" way of development and denial of "awful socialist" past, which Russia took so many efforts to free from. The symbol of this "wrong socialist past" became North Korea.

In 1993 come out a book, describing economic difficulties of the DPRK, titled as "Foreign economic relations of the DPRK. In searching ways out

from deadlock”. This was a new step in developing Russian Korean Studies, accepting an idea of inefficiency of socialist way of economic development, especially in a country carrying out a policy of “self-reliance” (what means self-isolation) similar to that of DPRK. At the same time it necessary to note, that N.E. Bazhanova, the author of the book, did not criticized the North Korean system in general and has shown no intention to teach North Korean leaders “how to live”.

Simultaneously many separate articles, negatively regarding North Korea, began to appear in numerous Russian professional periodicals like “Vostok” (Orient) and many others.

At the same time, early 1990s has brought a numbers of Russian books, which quite positively presented developing economy and society of the Republic of Korea.

Nevertheless, in early 1990s Russia, busy with her internal economical and political problems, did not produced many works about North or South Korea, and her Korean Studies did not give much positive or negative impulse on the process of unification of Korea. North Korea was described with more pessimism and South ? quite optimistic.

(3)

The **middle of 1990s** has brought to Russian Korean Studies a short period of extreme criticism of “North Korean political regime”. In 1995 in Moscow was published a collection of articles by one author, A.N. Lankov, united in a book titled “North Korea: yesterday and today”. The book consisted of different articles based on materials of primary sources and many interviews with witnesses and participants of events of North Korean history. It presents a lot of new and important facts. But evaluation of events is filled with too many negative emotions. The most emotional article of this book is titled “Kim Il Sung: an attempt of biographical essay”. There the author writes (without any proof) that Kim Il Sung “liked” serving in Soviet army in 1940s (p.17), that he raised to power in North Korea by chance (p. 23), then he begin to “enjoy” his power (p. 23), little by little changed into extremely “ambitious politician” (p. 27). According to another article of this book, Kim Il Sung was a “dictator” (p. 120) who possessed “skills of plotting” (p. 145). At the same time the book does not explain any cultural, historical or political reasons caused phenomenon of Kim Il Sung. The reader of the book just feels hostility both to the person of Kim Il Sung and to North Korea herself.

Of course, such kind of research spreading dislike to North Korean society helped in no way the deed of unification of Korean peninsula. But this book was not the only one case of anti-North Korean publication. One may say, that it was a tendency in Russian Korean Studies of middle 1990s.

(4)

In 1996 the Institute of the Far Eastern Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences) has published a collection of articles united by the title "Urgent Problems of Korean Peninsula". Among 10 articles 3 were devoted to DPRK. All of them were of the very critical type. Of course, North Korean society is not ideal and has many aspects to be criticized. But here authors describing North Korean society often use word "regime" (p.23, 115 etc.) ("North Korean regime") which meaning is extremely negative and dispute the legitimacy of North Korean state itself. An article by E.I. Petrov, presenting "modern political system of DPRK" (pp. 96 ? 115) is reducing all complicated North Korean problems to influence of a coward ruling "Kim's clan". E.I. Petrov also claims North Korean concepts of "independence" (which begins its history at least from the last third of the XIX century) and "self-reliance" as only "demagogical slogans" (p. 114).

There is no need to cite numerous Russian articles of that time. Important thing is that such kind of articles aroused antipathy to North Korea, her leaders and even people ("silently suffering because of political regime") and helped nothing for unification of Korea.

(5)

At the same time Russian publications about Republic of Korea showed a slow but steady tendency of recognition of South Korean model of social and economic development. In 1996 V.M. Mazurov has published a monograph "From authoritarianism to democracy (experience of South Korea and Philippines)". From one hand, the book has shown real process of democratization in the Republic of Korea, but from the other hand, gave foundation for new Russian policy of friendship towards South Korea: South Korea was "wrong" country in the past and Soviet criticism of it was right. But now new processes of democratization are changing the Republic of Korea and Russia has "moral rights" to maintain close relations with that country.

A book by S.S. Suslina "Republic of Korea on the post-industrial stage of development" came out in 1997 and proved new Russian perceptions of

South Korean economic model as “right” and of North Korean “totalitarian-cult system of socialism” (p. 216) as “wrong”.

(6)

Only at the **end of 1990s**, when Russian policy to North Korea slowly began to change, Russian Korean Studies has shown a new tendency in ways of studying modern Korea. Besides, it is necessary to point out, that at that time Russian society began to pay more attention to Korean question. Korean departments of Russian universities became more and more popular and research papers about Republic of Korea and DPRK became more professional.

Professionalism in Korean Studies, when studying present situation, means that a researcher is competent not only in information of the nearest past, but also is fluent in Korean language and knows well Korean history and sources of cultural specific features, can regard any economical or political issue in the context of historical and cultural development of the country.

4. New tendencies of Russian Korean Studies, concerning Modern

Korea, in late 1990s ? beginning of 2000s

(1)

Even in late 1990s Russian Korean Studies still maintained “emotional” division of Korea into “right” South Korea and “wrong” North Korea. At the same time, some of Russian authors became to develop a new, with no negative emotions, look at the processes in Northern part of the Korean Peninsula.

In 1997 Russian Academy of Sciences has published a collection of articles under the title “Russia and Korea. Modernization, reforms and foreign relations”. In this collection of articles V.I. Denisov, an author of numerous articles and monographs about Korea, has presented a revolutionary abstract about perspectives of Russian ? North Korean relations. Here he has stated importance of revitalizing of traditional relations between Russia and DPRK. But what is most important, the abstract contained no criticism, no negative emotions towards North Korea. On the contrary, V.I. Denisov blamed previous position of Russian

diplomacy, which has blown traditionally good relations between two countries (p 28). Then the author has proclaimed new line of Russian external policy: developing good relations with both Korean states, taking in mind the peace process of the Korean peninsula (p. 30).

Here it is necessary to note, that in 1997 V.I. Denisov, the author of the abstract [of article], was *an acting ambassador* of Russian Federation in DPRK. Thus, his article expressed not only his private opinion as a researcher, but an official position of Russian diplomacy.

Was it “by chance”, that it was V.I. Denisov, who declared necessity of balanced, “good” attitude to both North and South Korea? Suppose not. By that time V.I. Denisov was not only a diplomat, but (1) a scientist and (2) had long experience of life in North Korea.

Besides V.I. Denisov, some other Russian koreanologists continued to develop “both good” formula while studying Modern history of the Republic of Korea and DPRK. And all of them had the following common points: they were professional researchers; they had living experience both in North and South Korea; they were Russian residents.

(2)

In many cases, the lack of living experience is a good foundation for creating myths, negative or positive. Western researchers, majority of whom, never lived in North Korea for long period of time and never enjoyed “free life” there, are mostly liable for creating negative myths about DPRK.

Of course, if society is “wrong” it is wrong and no living experience can change the truth. What can be the real base for new, more balanced look at the DPRK? The answer is: Korean long history and profound traditions.

Korea has a long history, which lasted for several millenniums. Of course, modern civilization brings many new realities, which do not correspond to any tradition and sometimes deny traditions. But there is no society, no state, which does not have any traditional roots. North Korea is not exclusion.

Any attempt to trace elements of tradition in modern North Korean society can bring researcher to understanding the *rea/* character of North Korean society, which does not limit within a concept of “wrong” “political regime”.

(3)

The author of this article (S.O. Kourbanov) has made an attempt to trace roots of traditional Confucian thought and elements of new Korean religion *chondogyo* (a “study of Heaven way”) in North Korean *juche* ideas. First he has made a presentation of his new look on *juche* ideas in 1997 at the St.–Petersburg State University during an international conference, devoted to 100th Anniversary of Korean Department of this University. But that time his presentation produced no reaction among listeners and readers. It was only in 2000, *after* historical summit of president of the Republic of Korea Kim Daejung and leader of DPRK Kim Jeongil, when S.O. Kourbanov’s idea of tracing traditional roots in North Korean ideology began to attract public attention. This year he has presented a paper “Elements of traditional Far Eastern thought in North Korean *juche* ideas in 1980s ? 1990s”. This publication has attracted attention of editors of Moscow popular–science journal “Vostochnaya kolleksiya” (Oriental collection) who proposed to S.O. Kourbanov write an article under the title “*Juche* ideas: Confucian tradition”. The article has come out in late 2001. The same year (2001) S.O. Kourbanov has presented a paper about elements of tradition in the *juche* ideas at the Keimyung University of the Republic of Korea.

(4)

Rise of attention in Russia to North Korea not as to “dictatorship communist regime”, but as to society with deep historical background reflects new trend in Russian Korean Studies and social sciences in general: an attempt to revise old approach to North Korea in order to find more peace and harmony in developing Russia ? Korean (South and North) relations.

The statement above is not only a personal opinion of the author of this article. Another one illustration of the statement could be activities of a joint Russia–South Korean journal “KoRus Forum” (한러 Forum), founded in 2000 and published in Moscow. It is a bilingual periodical and introduces most important current events of Russia and Korea, both of North and South. Among authors and interviewers of the journal are such well–known persons as former Soviet president M.S. Gorbachov, Deputy–Director of the 1st Asia Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs G.D. Toloraya, ex–ambassador of Russian Federation in DPRK V.I. Denisov, Head of Center of Korean Studies of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences) V.P. Tkachenko and others. The “KoRus Forum” presented the most detailed and most balanced in evaluations chronicle of visit of the leader of DPRK Kim Jeongil in Russian Federation in July–August of 2001 (2001, No 12). The journal often publishes travel sketches of those

specialists, who visited lately North Korea. Publications about DPRK in the journal introduce both positive and negative realities of North Korea, but all are full of optimism about future development of this country.

Of course, publications about North Korea does not occupy majority of space of “KoRus Forum”. The journal presents principal news and most interesting topics about life in the Republic of Korea too, inter-Korean dialogue and process of unification of Korea. It won't be mistake to say, that “KoRus Forum” is a “model publication”, showing how to maintain balanced approach in regarding two Koreas. On its pages the journal has overcome division of Korea. And what is most important, many of authors, who present their publications in this journal, are not ordinary researchers, but high rank officials and acknowledged scholars.

(5)

A new book by V.P. Tkachenko, the Head of Center of Korean Studies of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, titled “Korean Peninsula and interests of Russia” is a good proof of new positive tendency in Russian Korean Studies. The country, which V.P. Tkachenko criticize most of all is Russia, not any of two Koreas, which are presented quite soft and correctly.

At the same time it is hard to say, that by beginning of 21st century *all Russian Korean Studies* has overcome problem of sustaining division of Korea by misbalanced approach to North and South Korea. The conference “Korean Peninsula and challenges of the 21st century”, held in the Institute of Far Eastern Studies (Moscow) on March 26 ? 27, 2002 has demonstrated, that there are still researchers who appeal for foreign interference in situation in DPRK, but they are minority.

The old-fashioned negative approach to North Korea is still kept by those Russian scholars, who live, work and publish their works outside Russia.

The author of this article believes, that balanced approach in analyzing realities of North and South Korea, avoiding any *emotional* criticism and always taking in mind historical and cultural (that means *nationa*) background will be dominating in Russian Korean Studies.

5. Conclusion. Actual tasks of the world Korean Studies in the contest of unification of Korea

New political and economical situation in the Korean peninsula, new stage of more intensive inter-Korean relations at the beginning of 21st century gives Korean Studies of the world an opportunity to help the peace process in Korea. Russian experience of changing position of Korean Studies from “one to support and one to reject” to “both to support” demonstrates possibility of such kind of changes. Necessary conditions for such changes are:

- Personal will of a koreanologist to achieve balanced approach to North and South Korea;
- Attempts of tracing roots of different social, economic, politic etc phenomena of Korea in the past;
- Personal (preferably long-time) living experience in North and South Korea;
- Changes of external policy towards two Koreas in the resident country of a researcher.

The last condition may not be fulfilled. On the contrary, the “reformed” Korean Studies can give some influence and help to change external policy of the country, where researcher lives.

And the most important thing for any person, studying Korea (and it does not matter, whether he studies North or South, Ancient or modern Korea) is comprehension that the object of his/her studying is *the same Korea, which he/she loves*.