

# A Comparative Study on the Forced Deportations of Two Ethnic Groups: Soviet Koreans and Volga Germans

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## I. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to compare the forced deportations of two Soviet minorities, Soviet Koreans and Soviet Germans, particularly Volga Germans, in the early 19th century. This paper assumes that a comparative study will shed light on social features that might otherwise go unnoticed or be incomprehensible.

Nearly a half century has passed since Soviet Koreans were relocated by force from the Soviet Far East (SFE) to Central Asia. Some recent reports indicate that some of those Soviet Koreans, escaping from the unfavorable ethnic conflicts in Central Asian countries including Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan and even Kazakhstan, are now going back to the very SFE where their ancestors resided more than 60 years ago.

The time is now approaching when we need to think about Korean deportation from the Soviet Far East to Central Asia in 1937 from various perspectives. Although there are several studies on the Korean expulsion across the Soviet Union (e.g., Bugai, 1992, 1996; Sim & Kim, 1998, 1999; Li & Kim, 1992; Pak, 1998; Gelb, 1995; Wada, 1987; Kho, 1990; Stephan, 1994:212; Kolarz, 1954:37–39; Oka, 1998; Lee, 2002a, 2002b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d; Ryu, 1999; Chung, 1995; Lee, 2001), most existing studies tend to emphasize the uniqueness of Korean expulsion, thereby missing crucial factors which explain the origin or processes of forced Soviet Korean deportations in 1937. I believe these existing studies are insufficient in elucidating the effects of the mass Korean deportation.

Instead, this study argues that the mass deportation of Soviet Koreans should be further investigated from a comparative perspective in order to isolate common as well as unique factors that affected minority deportations during the Stalin era.

In this sense, the expulsion of Soviet Germans is an excellent case for comparison to that of the ethnic Koreans in terms of time, destination and process of forced deportations. More than 400,000 Volga Germans in the USSR were deported from the Volga area in 1941 and forcibly dispersed into the thinly populated areas of the Soviet Far East.

To begin, note the similarities between these two minorities. First, the Volga Germans preserved their national culture and language until the final stage of their existence, as did

Soviet Koreans in the 1930s. Second, the Volga German Republic, as a well-organized, large national group having ties of kinship, national sympathies, and support of the Nazi government outside the USSR, was regarded as a threat to the Soviet government. This tendency might also be found with the Soviet Koreans, who emigrated mostly from the Korean peninsula under Japanese rule at the time, and were posing potential threats to the Soviet Union as Japanese subjects. These and other similarities therefore render this cross-ethnic research of Soviet Koreans and Soviet Germans quite valuable, even indispensable, to sort out the generality and uniqueness of any findings, as well as determine the validity of interpretations derived from studies of a single-ethnic group, i.e., the Soviet Koreans.

This paper will explore how forced deportation of the Soviet Koreans in the SFE could be associated, as aforementioned, with the liquidation of the Volga German Republic. Investigation of this issue will elucidate still unexplained parts of the forced deportation of Koreans across the Soviet Union in the 1930s.

## II. Brief Histories of Soviet Koreans and Volga Germans

### Korean Emigration

Korean emigration to the Russian Far East (RFE) began in 1863 (Grave, 1912; Kim, 1965), about 100 years after Germans began their emigration to the Volga region. Around that time, Russia also established its eastern frontiers with Korea and China along with incorporation of the Amur region and the Maritime region by way of the Aigun Treaty in 1858 and the Peking Treaty in 1860, respectively. Following that time, Russian authorities tried to call in their European Russian nationals in order to cultivate vast areas in Siberia and the RFE but ended in failure. Stimulated by the failure, Russian authorities passed a law to allow foreigners as well as Russians to settle in the region. In a trial to settle the RFE, some Russian governors offered new immigrants arable land, economic help and even Russian nationality. The policy was pretty similar to an attempt to settle German immigrants in the Volga region during the rule of Catherine the Great.

Simultaneously a famine in northern Korea prompted residents to flee their homeland to the Russian territory. Despite strict laws prohibiting Korean emigration, Korean emigrants continued to cross the river dividing the two countries. By the early 1880s, over 10,000 Koreans had migrated to the adjoining RFE since 13 families first settled into the Russian territory in 1863.

The period of Korean settlement in Russia from 1863 to 1937 can be divided into five terms. The first term extends from the beginning of Korean settlement in 1863 to 1884, when diplomatic relationship was established between the two countries. During the first emigration term, Korean immigrants were able to easily settle into the region since it was not yet occupied by Russians.

During the second term (1885-1893), Russian migration policy regarding Koreans took shape. After the establishment of diplomatic ties between Korea and Russia in 1884, Russian authorities classified Korean immigrants into three categories. The first category

included those Koreans who had settled in the RFE before 1884 and desired to obtain Russian citizenship. They were granted Russian citizenship. The second category was those Koreans who entered the RFE after 1884. They were supposed to leave Russia within two years. The final category consisted of those Koreans who were staying temporarily in Russia. They were not granted any legal rights (Kho, 1990; Wada, 1987). This kind of categorization was an expression of apprehension about the increasing number of Korean immigrants in the RFE. Since the Russian migration policy was implemented, many Korean immigrants in the RFE either returned to Korea or migrated to Manchuria.

From the beginning of the third term (1894–1910), Russia encouraged the immigration of Russians into the RFE in an attempt to boost its influence in the RFE. At the center of pushing for these measures was General Unterberger, who was appointed as the governor general of the Maritime Province in 1905. Based upon the danger of the Yellow Peril, he carried out a policy to control Koreans in the RFE. For example, he pushed for strict measures such as regulation of Korean naturalization, tight control on Korean employment in the fishing and mining industries and prohibition of leasing public land to Koreans with Russian citizenship (Lee, 1991:11).

The fourth term of Korean settlement in Russia (1911–1917) witnessed a surge of Korean emigrants who were engaged in the Korean independence movement following the annexation of the Korean peninsula by Japan.

The fifth term is from 1918 to 1937, when the forced deportation of Soviet Koreans took place. On the heels of the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Siberian War of 1918–22, Koreans actively took part in political activities in the region. Many Korean nationalists were engaged in military activities, siding with the socialist tendencies of the Reds in their fight against the Whites in the RFE Civil War. Once the Civil War ended, however, the Soviet government turned its back on Russian Koreans. Not only having rejected the long-awaited issue of a "Korean Autonomous Region," the Soviet authorities had rather taken steps to stop the flow of Korean immigration into Russia. Furthermore, they tried to resettle Koreans in the Maritime Province, either in the Amur or Zabaikal region, citing lack of arable land or pro-Japanese elements among Soviet Koreans in the Maritime province.

## **Volga German Emigration**

The history of the Volga Germans who were deported during the era of Stalinist rule can be dated back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In July of 1763, at the invitation of Catherine the Great, the Russian Empress, Germans began to settle in the Volga Valley and thus were called the Volga Germans. The migration of those Germans at the time lasted only four years (1763–1767).

Some of the important emigration motives of Soviet Germans include extraction of heavy taxes by the domestic government, religious persecution, and poverty due to the ravage of their farmland after the Seven Years War (1756–1763). Despite the disastrous Seven Years War, which left the entire population in dire destitution, the princess in Germany continued to force extraction of heavy taxes, labor service and military duty, which triggered a mass exodus.

In contrast to the situation in Germany, the manifestoes of December 4, 1761 and July 22, 1763 by the Russian Empress Catherine II, which invited foreign labor forces to the region, proved quite enticing. The Volga Germans were provided what they wanted most: the chance to obtain arable land, exemption from military service and heavy taxation, freedom of religion and loan assistance for stable settlement. As with the Soviet Koreans in the Russian Far East in the 1860s, most Volga Germans began their lives in Russia as farmers, though some of them eventually became craftsmen.

Later, between 1764 and 1864, German villages and towns, which started from the original 104 settlements and which were allocated more than 6,000 square miles of land, numbered 190 both in the Volga region and in areas of Samara and Saratov (Vvedensky, 1958:49). The migration process by Germans, however, was not always so smooth. As German emigrants began to flood into those areas around 1767, German authorities had taken steps to impede the exodus, leaving thousands of outgoing German emigrants stranded, a phenomenon seen with the Korean emigration to the Russian Far East that was strictly prohibited.

By 1890, arable land was dwindling in the Volga region because of the increasing population, so some German emigrants were sent to Siberia. The Volga Germans were deprived of their privileges due to economic difficulties, prejudice and persecution. As a result, by the early 1900s thousands of Volga Germans emigrated to places in the New World such as Nebraska and the Dakotas in the United States, as well as Winnipeg in Canada.

Later, on October 19, 1918, a Volga German autonomous Oblast took shape out of Volga German settlements and on January 6, 1924, Lenin permitted a Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic to be inaugurated as a showcase to advertise new nationality policy of the Soviet government and to entice support from Germany.

In 1933, the Volga German Republic consisted of 382,500 Germans (66.4%) with the remaining one-third consisting of Russians (20.4%), Ukrainians (12%) and other ethnic groups (1.2%). In 1939, two years before the republic was abolished, there was a total population of 605,000, with the German population at more than 400,000 (Vvedensky, 1958:49).

### III. Deportation Motives

Regarding the causes of forced deportation of Soviet Koreans and Volga Germans, there is a common factor: Soviet governmental fear about espionage committed by the Soviet Koreans and Volga Germans for the Japanese and Nazi governments respectively. It is difficult to deny this factor, but this explanation may be insufficient to fully explain the origin of the deportations. What is missing in this explanation is a deep-seated context upon which ethnic cleansing of these two ethnic groups is based. The context is interconnected with conflicts over collectivization in the late 1920s. These conflicts led to ethnic hostilities between Russians and ethnic minorities, including the Soviet Koreans and Volga Germans, followed by concerns of the Stalinist regime over cross-border

ethnic ties and counter-revolutionary activities. As a result, both Soviet Koreans and Volga Germans were deported by force.

Among other reasons for deporting Soviet Koreans from the RFE to Central Asia are the establishment of a Korean autonomous region, the reclamation of wasteland in Soviet Central Asia, and international environment.

In this section, espionage theories of Soviet minorities and ethnic conflicts over collectivization will be reviewed. Other causes will also be mentioned briefly.

## 1. Soviet Korean and German Espionage Theory

One of the most convincing theories for deportation of Soviet Koreans and Germans is the espionage theory. According to this theory, the Stalinist regime was suspicious of cross-border ethnic ties among minority nationalities. Especially during the 1930s, worried about potential spies of ethnic groups, Soviet authorities intensified their repression against those groups in the nation.

First, consider the Soviet Koreans. The Stalinist regime suspected many Koreans, disguised as area residents, were dispatched to the SFE by the Japanese secret service. An article about these suspicious Soviet Koreans was carried in the daily *Pravda*. The *Pravda* alleged that Japanese fifth columnists disguised themselves not only as Buddhist monks and fishermen, but also as Koreans and Chinese.

To this end, the alleged connection between Korean espionage and the forced Soviet Korean deportation was plainly stated in "The Resolution No. 1428-326ss of the People's Commissars Council and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union about the eviction of Korean population from the border regions of the Far East." The resolution, which was signed by I. Stalin and V. Molotov, states that "in order to prevent the penetration of Japanese spies into the Far East Region," all Soviet Koreans should be transferred from the border region in the SFE to the vicinity of the Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash in Southern Kazakhstan and the Uzbek SSR.

Therefore, most studies conclude that the Soviet Koreans were deported from SFE to Central Asia because of the Korean espionage theory. Behind the espionage theory are several incidents that made the Stalinist regime feel uneasy about its security. They include the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, the Japanese invasion of the SFE in 1918, the Manchurian incident on September 18, 1931, the establishment of Manchukuo by Japan in 1931 (Kho, 1990:28; Kolarz, 1954:38) and the pro-Japanese uprising in 1932 in the Mongolian People's Republic following the Japanese invasion of the Chahar Mogols territory (Forsyth, 1992:321-22).

The deportation of the Volga Germans also demonstrates a connection with the espionage theory pretty well, as does the case of the Soviet Koreans. The outbreak of World War II on September 1, 1939 presaged the occasion of turning all Germans into "enemies of the state" in the Soviet Union. The invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany on June 22, 1941 served as an excuse to deport Germans in the Volga region and other areas.

Even before Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, however, there were several instances in which the Stalinist government was suspected of Soviet Germans. For instance, in 1933, when missionaries of the German Evangelical Church were banished from the Soviet Union, they were alleged to have carried Nazi propaganda. When some German actors of the traveling theatres performed for the Soviet Germans along the Volga region, they were also regarded as spies for the Nazi government (De Jong, 1956:130).

Concerned that the Soviet German settlements were within sixty miles of the Soviet western border, the Soviet government deported many Soviet Germans from the Caucasus area to Northern Russia and Siberia during the period of 1935 to 1938 (De Jong, 1956:130). Fearing Soviet German loyalty in the Volga German ASSR, deep in European Russia, to Nazi Germany, the Stalin regime sent large numbers of Soviet German elite into the Gulag camps between 1938 and 1939. According to statistics, the number of Soviet Germans in Gulag camps increased rapidly from 998 in 1938 to 18,572 in 1939 (Getty, Rittersporn and Zemskov, 1993:1028).

Panic of the Stalinist regime was extreme when there were rumors that Germans or German agents, who were dressed in Russian uniforms or as farmers, were functioning well ahead of the incoming German soldiers. The situation was pretty similar to the one in which there were tales of Soviet Koreans disguised as Buddhist monks or fishermen working as Japanese spies in the SFE. How things changed for the worse is well shown to be the very moment when the Soviet army retreated from the frontiers to the thresholds of Moscow, Leningrad and Rostov after bloody losses over the five previous months. Soviet authorities were convinced that German spies were working inside the nation.

The situation is well demonstrated by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on August 21, 1941, more than two months after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. The decree, which was published in all the newspapers on September 8, 1941, pointed out the necessity about the deportation of the Soviet German as follows:

According to reliable information received by military authorities, there are thousands and tens of thousands of diversionists and spies among the German population of the Volga Region, who are prepared to cause disturbances in these regions at a signal from Germany. No Germans (living in the Volga districts) ever reported to Soviet authorities the presence of such great numbers of diversionists and spies. Therefore, the German population of the Volga regions is covering up enemies of the Soviet people and the Soviet power. If diversionist acts were to take place under orders of Germany by German diversionists and spies in the Volga German republic or neighboring regions and there were bloodshed, the Soviet government would be forced, according to martial law, to adopt measures of reprisal against the entire German population. In order to avoid such undesirable occurrences and to forestall serious bloodshed, the presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR has found it necessary to resettle the entire German population of the Volga regions... (*Deportazii narodov*, 1992, p. 34)

## 2. Ethnic Conflicts over Collectivization

In addition to the espionage theory, another explanation for the deportation motive of the Soviet Koreans and Volga Germans is based on the ethnic conflicts over land issues and collectivization.

Conflicts over land issues between Soviet Koreans and Russians broke out during collectivization. The causes of the conflicts were, among other things, a result of discriminatory measures of local Soviet authorities against Korean kolkhozes, such as privileged benefits to Russian kolkhoz members in terms of land allotment, agricultural machinery and credits at the expense of Korean members (Kolarz, 1954:36). In Russo-Korean joint kolkhozes such as 'Third International' and 'Suifun Valley,' Korean members were totally excluded from the kolkhoz management (Wada, 1987:42). As a result, conflicts sometimes developed into the assassination of Koreans and arsonist acts against Korean kolkhozes by Russians.

These conflicts regarding ethnic antagonism and discrimination made some Soviet Koreans hesitant about the collectivization system itself. Venting their deep anger against the violence and discrimination of Russian collective farmers, some Korean members refused to participate in collective farming, which carried heavy taxes. Rather, they preferred farming leased land (Li & Kim, 1992:43). Sometimes Korean collective farmers were active in leading campaigns to abolish collectivization in the Vladivostok region (Kolarz, 1954:36-7), a movement amounting to counter-revolutionary activities in eyes of Soviet authorities. Therefore, ethnic conflicts over collectivization occurred, which resulted in the tragic consequence of Soviet Korean deportation.

At the same time, similar ethnic conflicts between the Volga Germans and Russians could be found. In the course of collectivization, NEP was suddenly overturned. The indignation of NEP "losers" was directed toward ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union, including ethnic Germans. Ethnic Germans were often regarded as kulak, as a Central committee indicated. Sometimes ethnic Germans were even labeled as "kulak colonizers to the marrow of their bones." Therefore, those branded as kulak were subjected to harsh treatment by the Stalin regime.

The maltreatment of Soviet Germans by the Stalin regime resulted in mass emigration of ethnic Germans abroad. In particular, forceful grain requisitions during collectivization in the winter 1927-1928 triggered massive emigrations of Soviet Germans rather than activating a foreigners' immigration wave. It happened in September 1929 that about 4,500 Soviet Germans went to Moscow to ask for exit visas to get out of the Soviet Union. They told their harsh experiences and repressive treatment in the Soviet Union to investigation officers from the German embassy in the country. This happening ended in the emigration of 5,461 ethnic Germans overseas and deportation of the remaining 9,730 to their original residential region (Martin, 1998:21-2). Here we can see the roots of the forced deportation.

The massive ethnic German emigration out of the Soviet Union was not permissible since it demonstrated that the Communist Soviet Union was unattractive to cross-border

populations. Therefore, in order to thwart the emigration movement of Soviet Germans in the border region, the massive expulsion of Soviet Germans was born.

### **3. Other Deportation Motives**

Among other reasons for the deportation of Soviet ethnic minorities, and in particular, the Soviet Koreans, are characteristics of the totalitarian Stalin regime, the reclamation of wasteland in Soviet Central Asia and the establishment of a Korean autonomous region. Let's discuss these issues briefly.

First, the expulsion of Soviet ethnic minorities is not incomprehensible during the period of the so-called Great Terror. Under the Stalin regime rule, all basic personalities were required to be transformed into 'homo sovieticus,' a mass personality for the command industrial society (Zaslavsky, 1995:48). Thus, this view suggests that the brutality of the Stalin regime is reflected in the forced deportations of Soviet ethnic minorities (Lee, 2002a).

Next, according to the argument for wasteland reclamation in Soviet Central Asia, one of the reasons for the forced deportation of Soviet Koreans was the Soviet regime's desire to use the Korean labor force in cultivating the vast deserted reedy regions of Central Asia (Pak, 1998:274; Kim, 2000:264; Lee, 2002b; Kho, 1990:28-9). In fact, during the period of 1931 to 1933, more than 1.5 to 1.7 million Kazakhs died from famine, epidemics and bitter agricultural collectivization, while more than 1 million left the country (Jang, 1999:156; Kim, 2000:264). Therefore, it was imperative to recruit a large enough labor force to develop these deserted regions. One of the solutions to get sufficient labor was the forced transfer of Soviet Koreans from the SFE to Central Asia.

Finally, the forced migration of Soviet Koreans was initiated by a Soviet regime attempt to silence the Korean movement to set up a Korean autonomous territory in the SFE (Martin, 1998:19-20; Bugai, 1992:97; Chung, 1995:222). The movement progressed slowly but steadily, so by the late 1920s, a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) discussed the issue formally (Bugai, 1992:97). The Soviet regime had to take immediate action to stop the movement, since the Stalin regime believed Soviet Koreans could be used as Japanese agents against the nation.

## **IV. Forcible Deportation Development**

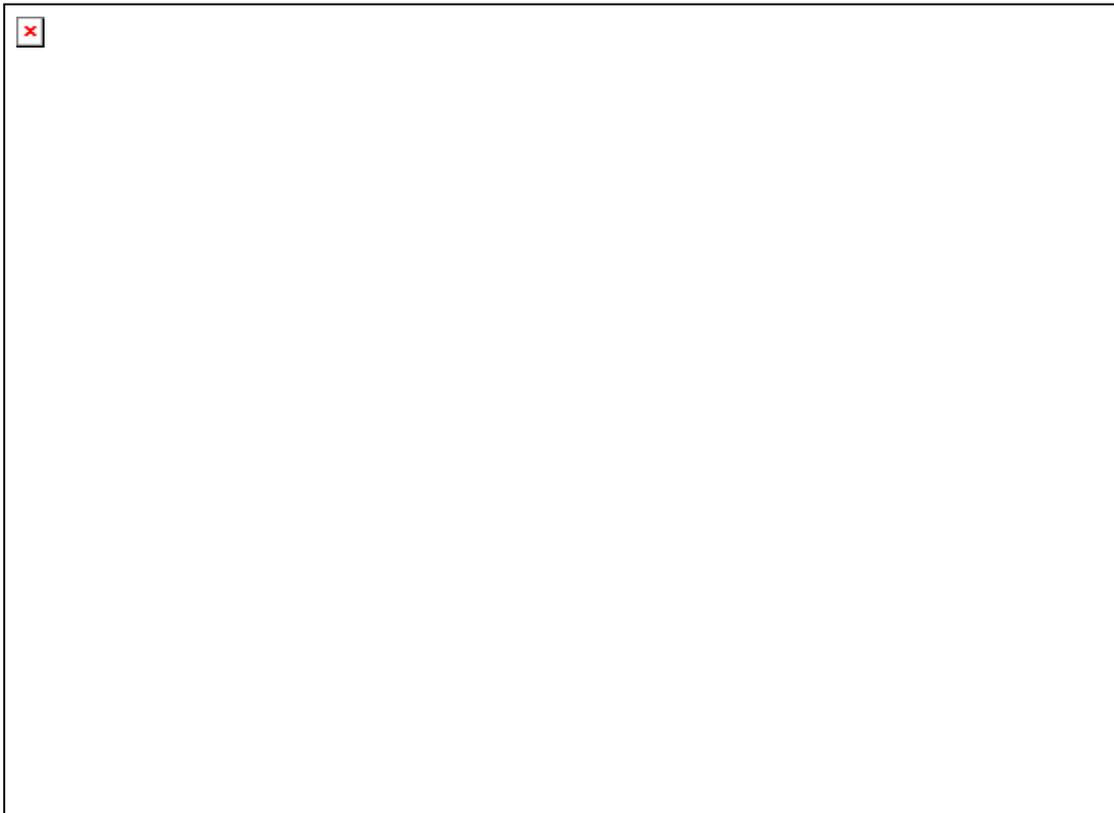
### **Soviet Koreans**

Soviet Korean deportations were carried out in two stages. The first stage was concerned with the removal of those Korean residents along the border, according to the Resolution (No. 1428-326ss) of the People's Commissars Council and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, issued on August 21, 1937. The resolution asked for several measures to prevent the penetration of Japanese agents into the Soviet Far East. It requested the Far East Regional Party Committee, the Executive Committee and the Regional Department of NKVD to expel all the Korean residents from 23 districts in the

SFE and to transfer them to the vicinity of the Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash in Southern Kazakhstan and to the Uzbek SSR. In addition, the deportation was to start immediately and be completed by January 1, 1938.

The second stage was concerned with the eviction of Koreans from regions further inland, according to the Resolution 1647–377ss, issued a month after the first one. The number of Korean deportees was mentioned in a letter of Ezhov to Molotov. It stated that 171,781 persons (36,442 families) would be transferred in 124 trains by October 25, 1937. Among those Koreans that remained were about 700 special settlers in Kamchatka and Okhotsk, who were also to be removed on November 1, 1937. Destinations of the Korean deportees were Tashkent, Kzyl–Orda, Ushtobe, Alma–Ata, Frunze, Samarkand, Dushanbe, Bukhara, Urgenz, Ashkhabad and Taganrog (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Deported Soviet Korean Destinations**



## Volga Germans

The deportation of Soviet Germans started with the Volga Germans. On August 28, 1941, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet issued a decree (*Ukaz* no. 21–160) in which the Volga Germans would be relocated to Kazakhstan, Novosibirsk Oblast, Omsk Oblast, Altai

Kray and other regions. The decree, which was signed by Chairman Kalinin and Secretary Gorkin, accused tens of thousands of Volga Germans of having the intention to cooperate with Nazi Germany, and thus hostile toward the Soviet regime. The decree declared the relocation to be necessary to prevent Soviet Germans from participating in such harmful acts in future, as described in the following:

A treacherous enemy has attacked our country. In order to avoid fratricide, the German population of the Volga German Autonomous Socialist Republic will be deported to rear areas. Every deportee will have the right to take with him one ton of baggage. Livestock and other property will be left behind. The proprietors will be granted appropriate compensation on arrival at their destination for property left behind. Employees of institutions and organizations will be given travel allowances for ten days.

Actual deportation of the Volga Germans was carried out during the period of September 3 to September 20, 1941. As a result, 447,168 Volga Germans were relocated.

**Table 2. Origin of Deported Germans from the Volga and Saratov Regions**

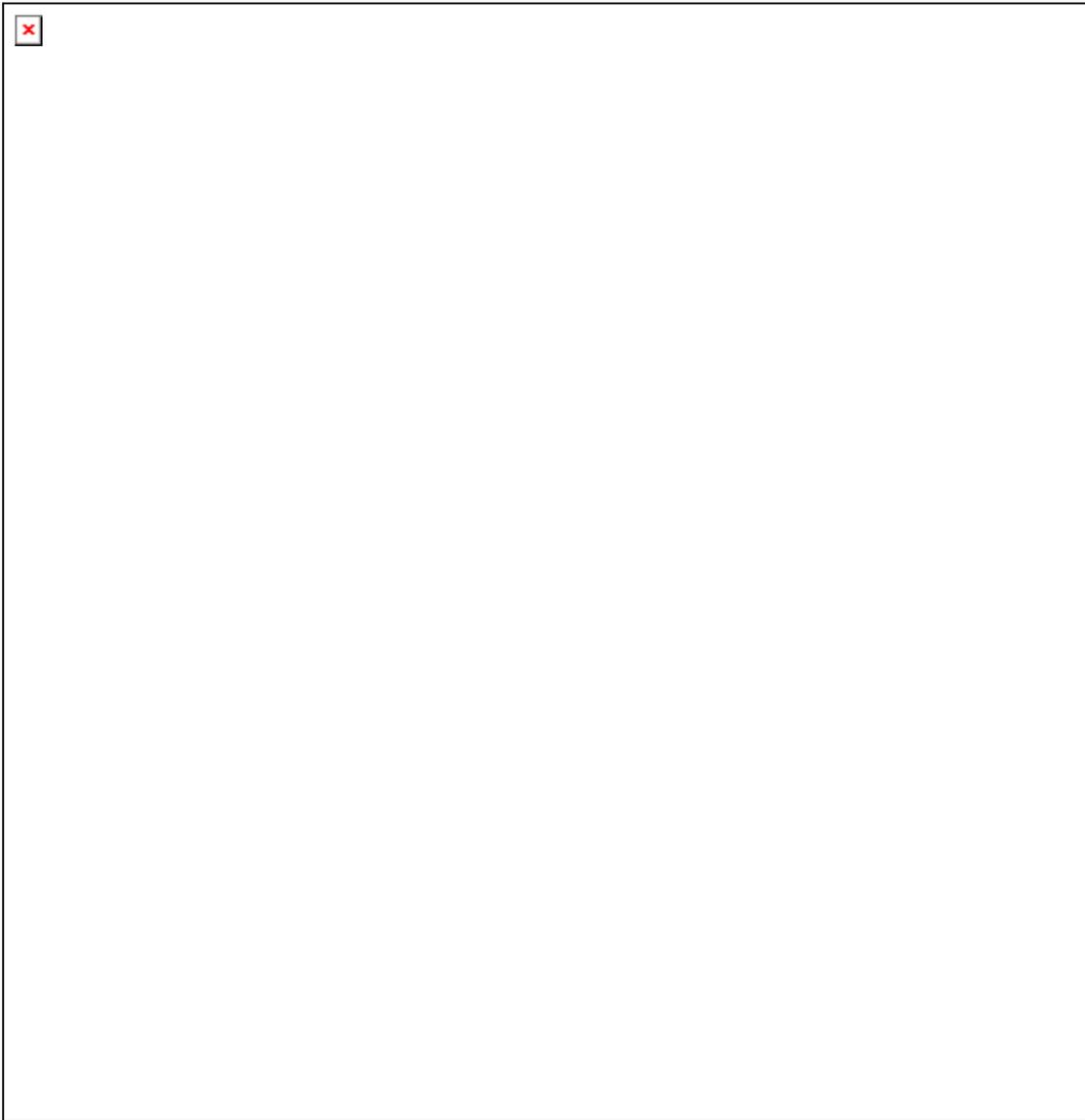
**(Number of trains)**

Destinations	Total Number	Number of Exiles from Volga	Number of Exiles from Saratov
Altai	87,755(37)	78,183(33)	9,572(4)
Krasnoyarsk	77,705(33)	77,705(33)	
Novosibirsk	87,816(37)	74,299(31)	13,517(6)
Omsk Region	83,023(31)	70,284(26)	12,739(5)
Kazakhstan (Total)	88,627(38)	65,103(28)	23,524(10)
Akmola	30,317(13)	28,005(12)	2,312(1)
Kostanay	16,095(7)	13,712(6)	2,383(1)
Pavlodarsk	21,131(9)	4,562(2)	16,569(7)
Severno-Kazakhstan	21,084(9)	18,824(8)	2,260(1)

Total	424,926(176)	365,574(151)	59,352(25)
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Source: Hanya (2000:11)

Figure 2. Deported Soviet German Destinations



Sources: Based on De Jong (1956:129) and Hanya (2000:11)

Next, the NKVD, which initiated the Volga German operation, continued to work with the deportation of Soviet Germans in other parts of the nation. On September 22, 1941 another decree was issued for the removal of the German population from the North Caucasus including Ordzhonikidze Kray, Krasnodar Kray, the Kabardino–Balkar ASSR, the North Ossetian ASSR and Tula Oblast.

Thus, by the end of 1942, the number of deported Soviet Germans totaled 1,209,430, most of whom were relocated from their settlements in Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasus to special settlements in the Siberian and Asian parts of the Soviet Union (See Figure 2). The initial geographical distribution of those German deportees is as follows: 467,700 to Kazakhstan, 110,000 to Altai, 75,000 to Krasnoyarsk, 130,000 to Novosibirsk, 85,000 to Omsk, 3,402 to Buryatiya, and the balance to other eastern and northern locations. A similar distribution can be seen with the destinations of those German deportees in the Volga and Saratov regions, as shown in Table 2.

## V. Discussion

Based on the comparative study of Soviet Korean and Soviet German deportation above, the following will not be discussed.

First, one of the most important theories behind the Soviet Korean and Soviet German deportation is the espionage theory, in which both ethnic minorities were regarded as being suspicious because of their relationships with Japan and Germany, respectively, countries with which the Soviet Union was contending at the time. However, what should be noted here is that the deportations were a preventive rather than punitive measure. That is, forcible expulsion was used as an excuse to combat the possibility that Soviet Koreans or Soviet Germans would become diversionists or spies for Japan and Germany, respectively. This point becomes clear when we look at Supreme Soviet resolutions for the deportation of Volga Germans and Soviet Koreans. One resolution accused the Volga Germans of retaining tens of thousands of diversionists and spies who were devoted agents of Nazi Germany. In order to distance and protect those agents from Nazi Germany, it was argued that Volga German expulsion was an imperative measure. In addition, Resolution No. 1428–326ss, which called for the expulsion of Soviet Koreans, indicated that, “in order to prevent the penetration of Japanese spies into the Far East Region,” Soviet Koreans should be relocated from the border region in the SFE to Central Asia. The reason this preventive measure needs to be noted is because it allows for different interpretations about what the Stalin regime considered espionage or suspicious acts by Soviet minorities in the 1930s and 1940s.

Second, the espionage theory is the only theory thus far in the literature to explain the deportation of ethnic minorities, in particular the Soviet Koreans. As was shown above, however, ethnic conflicts over the collectivization policy are also a persuasive reason to explain the deportation. The explanation indicates that ethnic conflicts over collectivization between Russians and the Soviet Koreans might have led to deportations of ethnic minorities (Lee, 2002a). This is based on the assumption that collectivization in the 1920s resulted in ethnic hostilities, although it was not supposed to have taken an ethnic dimension.

This point is almost ignored in the existing studies of ethnic deportations during the Stalin rule. The transition process from conflicts due to collectivization to the deportation of ethnic minorities is described in Figure 3. This theme was also acknowledged by Walter Kolarz, an expert on ethnic studies of the SFE. He indicates that ethnic conflicts between ethnic groups during collectivization resulted in “drastic measures,” by which he meant the deportation of Soviet Koreans in 1937:

Figure 3.

A Tentative Diagram of the Origins of Forced Deportation  
of Soviet Koreans/Germans

Conflicts Over
Ethnic Hostilities

Harsh Treatment
Collectivization
Against Soviet
Koreans/Germans

Mass  
Emigration  
Counter-  
Revolutionary  
Activities of Soviet  
Koreans/Germans  
Concern Over  
Cross-Border  
Ethnic Ties

Forced Deportation  
of Soviet  
Koreans/Germans

Source: Based on Lee (2002a:40)

The Communist Youth League participated in beating up the Koreans. The latter aired their indignation against the outrages committed by Russian collective farmers by turning against the collective farm system itself. As an expression of protest Korean peasants took the initiative in disbanding a number of collective farms in the Vladivostok countryside. . . . Nevertheless, the events, which marked the initial period of collectivization in the Vladivostok area, constitute an essential part of the background, explaining those drastic measures, which the Soviet Government took a few years later against the Koreans and other Asiatic minorities (Kolarz, 1954:36–37).

A similar pattern can also be found in the ethnic relationship between Russians and the Soviet Germans in this comparative study. Unfavorable effects of the collectivization policy were directed at the Soviet Germans, setting off their massive emigration movement. These movements would have been quite embarrassing to the Soviet authorities, which hoped that their relationship with the ethnic groups, especially in the western part of the Union, could serve as attractive Communist models for their ethnic brethren abroad. Thus, we can assume that the forced deportation of the Volga Germans may have been engineered to curb a huge tide of Soviet German emigration.

Third, Soviet Korean and Soviet German deportation needs to be discussed in terms of what Terry Martin calls the Piedmont Principle. The Piedmont Principle as described by Martin (1998:17) is 'the Soviet attempt to exploit cross-border ethnic ties to project Soviet influence abroad.' Therefore, the forcible deportation of ethnic minorities demonstrates a failure of the Piedmont Principle.

In the late 1920s, the Soviet Union wanted to exert its influence on its border regions (*pogranichnye raiony*), since it considered border regions a testing ground by which neighboring country workers could judge the Soviet Union. In order to accomplish its goal, the Soviet Politburo took measure to provide its western border regions with a number of privileges in salaries, economic and cultural investment, supply of goods, and budget. However, the collectivization policy side effects such as coercive grain requisition and horrible repression triggered a Soviet minority emigration rather than an enticement of those minorities. For instance, in September 1929, thousands of Soviet Germans demanded exit visas to go abroad; 5,461 Soviet Germans in fact did emigrate. This kind of emigration took place with the Soviet Koreans in the SFE, too. Ethnic tension as a result of collectivization led more than 50,000 Soviet Koreans to flee back to their motherland between October 1929 and March 1930 (Wada, 1987:40).

These ethnic minority emigration movements in the border regions were unacceptable to the Soviet regime since they demonstrated failure of the Piedmont Principle. In order to stop such emigration, which could tarnish the image of the Soviet Union, deportations of ethnic Soviet minorities in the border regions may have been devised.

Fourth, another possible origin of Korean deportation is the Soviet fear of the Soviet Korean campaign to set up an autonomous administrative region in the SFE (Martin, 1998:19–20; Bugai, 1992:97; Chung, 1995:222). In other words, the forcible relocation of the Soviet Koreans may have been motivated by the Soviet regime's fear about the activities of ethnic Koreans to establish a Korean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). According to this theory, granting a Korean ASSR was unthinkable by the Soviet authorities, since ethnic Koreans were regarded as unreliable and suspicious. Thus, the congregation of these Koreans could have been dangerous. This argument, however, does not seem to be too persuasive. In 1928, a Korean national district, although not a formal Korean ASSR, was already founded in the Possiet area. The ratio of Koreans among residents in the Korean national district was 90%, and the number of ethnic Koreans in the area went up to the level of 24,000 in 1937 (Wada, 1999). Thus, from these examples, it is not quite convincing to argue that the Soviet authorities' fear of the establishment of a Korean ASSR was among the crucial reasons for the forced Korean deportation in the Soviet Union.

In addition, whether an ASSR of ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union was established or not did not seem to be such a crucial factor in the explanation of the ethnic deportation under the Stalinist regime. An ASSR of minorities in the Soviet Union could be abolished at any time if necessary. For instance, the German ASSR along the Volga was abrogated when the Soviet regime no longer wanted it. Specifically a Volga German ASSR was set up on January 6, 1924 to shore up its image as a model of Soviet nationality policy, but it was officially cancelled by a decree issued by the Soviet authorities in September, 1941, in order to obstruct the return of deported Germans to their homeland (Pohl, 1997:77).

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