

## **Latest Trend in Transformation of Korean Diasporas in Russia**

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### **1. Historical Overview**

After gaining Maritime province in 1860 (under Beijing Pact) Russia from geopolitical point of view has become the only European country bordering Korea. In 1864 it happened to be the first foreign state to receive Korean migrants allowing 30 peasants families from famine stricken Northern provinces to settle legally near Posiet harbor in the delta of Tizinhwe-river<sup>1</sup>. In accordance with “Law on Russian and foreign settlements in Amur and Maritime provinces of East Siberia” approved by Emperor Alexander II on May 12, 1861 the first Korean migrants were provided with free land, material support and legal protection from local administration.

Since 1869 peasants migration from Korea to Russia had assumed massive character in spite of strict prohibition from Korean authorities. Increased inflow of Korean migrants and their settlement near the border was treated cautiously by local Russian administration which considered the situation “politically and economically inconvenient” and in 1870 issued an order to move newcomers to the North away from Korean border. Yet local authorities failed to implement this decision and Korean migration to border region continued on growing level: by 1882 Koreans constituted 55% of total population of Maritime province (10,137 Koreans comparing to 8,385 Russians)<sup>2</sup>. In 1882 Russian government decided to stimulate colonization of Maritime province by Russian peasants sending annually by sea 250 families at the expense of the state. The completion of Trans-Siberian railroad in 1900 enhanced this tendency and Russians became dominant nation in this province. By 1902 Russian population grew to 66,320 while the amount of Korean settlers reached 32,380 yet recording a three-fold increase within two decades.

On the other hand establishment of direct diplomatic relations between Russia and Korea upon signing Russian-Korean Treaty on Friendship and Trade on July 7, 1884 as well as Agreement on Border Relations and Land Trade signed on August 20, 1888 brought forward legal problem caused by the fact that two thirds of Korean migrants to Russian Far East remained formally Korean citizens. In order to combat uncontrolled border crossing by illegal migrants and seasonal workers on November 22, 1886 Emperor Alexander III signed the law which envisaged gradual resettlement of Korean peasants from border regions to inner parts of Maritime and Amur provinces and prohibition of further Korean immigration.

Nevertheless this law was not strictly followed by local authorities. In 1900

all illegal Korean migrants to Russian Far East were allowed to take Russian citizenship. The inflow of Koreans continued and even increased after Russian-Japanese war and Japanese annexation of Korea. Thus by 1917 Korean population in Russia already exceeded 100,000 with the majority still concentrated in border regions of Maritime province leaving this vulnerable issue open.

As it was stated in Russian border commissar report to military governor in 1914 “the overwhelming majority of Koreans in Posiet region consider that they are living not in Russia but in “Russian Korea” dreaming of some kind of future autonomy of this region”<sup>3</sup>. Official authorities considered it to be a very dangerous phenomenon as Korean autonomy near Korean peninsular could lure Japan into expanding its protectorate on this territory.

Bolsheviks revolution in Russia in October 1917 and Declaration on rights of Russia’s nations which announced equal rights and free development for all national minorities of Russian Empire inspired many Korean migrants to join pro-Bolsheviks partisan movement in the Far East. By the end of civil war and reunification of Russia’s Far East with the USSR in 1922 Korean population in that region reached 120,000 with only half of them having Russian citizenship. Yet the first years of Bolsheviks in power didn’t bring announced equality in land distribution and awaited national autonomy to Koreans living in the Far East

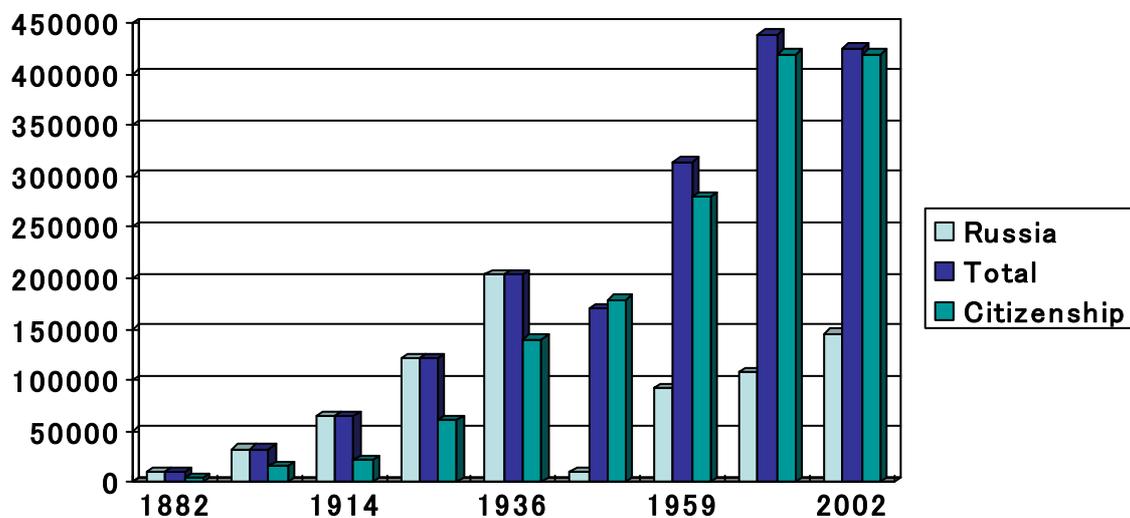
On May 9, 1924 Eastern department of Third Communist International discussed the problem of administrative status of Korean population in the Far East and decided that establishment of national autonomous territory was ill-timed due to international environment and all efforts should be concentrated on controlling equal land distribution for peasants and solving legal problems of Soviet citizenship for Korean migrants.

On January 22, 1925 the Convention on basic principles of relationship between the USSR and Japan was signed. It envisaged refusal of support for organizations hostile to the other party which in fact implied Korean partisans on Russian territory as well as anti-Bolshevik forces in Japanese Empire. Consequently on August 18, 1927 central organ of Bolshevik’s party issued a secret directive “On Koreans” which obliged Far East authorities to resettle all Koreans from Maritime to Khabarovsk province. Local administration failed to follow this directive and a decade later the majority of 204000 Koreans registered by 1936 Soviet census continued to live in Maritime province. In line with Soviet national minority policies they were provided with wide range of cultural autonomy and yet denied any territorial status.

Such ambiguous position was cut short on August 21, 1937 by Bolshevik party and Soviet government secret order #1428-326 “On deportation of Koreans from border regions of the Far East”. In accordance with this order over 170000 Koreans within several months were moved to South Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The reasons for such dramatic decision are still disputed by scholars with some of them blaming Stalin’s great power chauvinism towards small nations and others pointing out international factor assuming even the existence of alleged secret agreement between the USSR and Japan. In any case it was a period of unprecedented deportations of Soviet population based on social and national criteria and Koreans fell one of the many victims to this “social experiment”.

After world war II a new wave of Korean migrants of estimated 40000 appeared in Russian Federation mainly from Southern part of Sakhalin isle. The new geopolitical situation (establishment of Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea in 1948 and 1950-1953 Korean war) eased restrictions for those Soviet Koreans deported to Central Asian republics. Since 1953 they were formally allowed to move freely within the territory of the USSR and young generation turned to Russia’s major cities for education. As a result according to the first after-war census in 1959 from 313700 Koreans living in the USSR 91400 were already registered in Russian Federation with remaining majority still concentrated in Uzbekistan (138500) and Kazakhstan (74000)<sup>4</sup>. This proportion preserved till Soviet collapse in 1991 when total Korean population in the USSR reached almost half a million people with 40% attributing to Uzbekistan (183100) and approximately 25% sharing both by Russia (107100) and Kazakhstan (103100)<sup>5</sup>.

#### Korean Migrants in Russian Empire, the USSR and Modern Russia & CIS



Nevertheless, unlike several other repressed minorities Koreans were not formally given Soviet rehabilitation neither in 1950-s, nor in late 1980-s. Only on April 4, 1993 when the USSR already ceased to exist Russian government issued a statement “On rehabilitation of Russian Koreans” which admitted 1937 deportation as an illegal act of Stalinist policy. Yet due to severe economic crises this act was not supported with adequate financial compensation. Moreover it was not followed by similar legislative decisions in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan where the majority of repressed Soviet Koreans was still concentrated.

Inspired by Russian government statement in mid-1990-s various Korean non-governmental organizations initiated the idea of establishing territorial autonomy in the Far East cherished back in 1920-s. Yet consequent developments showed that on the one hand those national aspirations were opposed both by local and central government which was too much concerned at that time with possible disintegration of Russia and on the other hand the majority of post-Soviet Korean migrants preferred to settle in European part of Russia rather than to return to Far East. Official opposition to restoration of Korean autonomy didn't prevent massive immigration of Soviet Koreans from Central Asian republics. Korean population in Russia within a decade increased almost by 40%: reaching according to 2002 census 148146<sup>6</sup>. If we add some 50000 Koreans registered in Russia as citizens of other CIS republics we may assert that estimated 200000 Koreans are settled at present in Russia making it forth largest Korean diaspora in the world.

### Present distribution of Korean diaspora in Russia



## **2. Latest Transformations within Russian Korean Diaspora**

As mentioned above Korean diaspora in Russia in the last two post-Soviet decades has almost doubled mainly due to inflow of Soviet Koreans from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other CIS republics. According to estimates Korean population in Russia has recently reached 200000 with 4 major areas of settlement: Maritime and Khabarovsk regions (45000), Sakhalin isle (43000), Northern Caucasus (40000) and Moscow region (30000) with remaining 50000 dispersed among major cities in European part of Russia and Siberia.

Moscow region diaspora is the fastest growing, most powerful economically, most influenced politically and most diversified group of Korean migrants in Russia. In line with above mentioned deportation law of 1937 Moscow region had to be cleared of Korean nationals and this directive was reported to be implemented by late 1945<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless with after-war Soviet engagement on Korean peninsula educated Koreans were welcomed back to Moscow. Soon as restrictions on free movement were eased they were followed by many talented and ambitious young Koreans who took their chance for social lift through getting quality higher education in the capital. Those intellectuals as well as some North Korean defectors in early 1960-s laid the basis for Moscow Korean diaspora which till late 1980-s had hardly exceed few thousands.

The new inflow of Korean migrants to Moscow coincided with perestroika and consequent collapse of the USSR when politically and economically active Koreans from regions took their chance to move to the capital. That was also the time when first South Korean migrants: students, businessmen and missionaries appeared in Moscow. By late-1990 there were already 20000 Koreans including several thousands of South Korean citizens in Moscow region.

The second wave of post-Soviet Korean migration to Moscow region started after 1998 default. As Moscow region was the first to revive economically many young Koreans from CIS countries, particularly Uzbekistan rushed there for jobs provided to them by ethnic Koreans, mainly South Korean businessmen. Usually those migrants registered as CIS residents in Moscow or neighboring regions, applied for Russian citizenship and within a certain period obtained it. As this procedure was not transparent and the number of CIS Koreans applying to it increased President Vladimir Putin issued on December 23, 2005 a directive “to put into practice simplified order of acquiring Russian citizenship by ethnic Koreans from CIS countries with former Soviet citizenship.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus at present in Moscow region we have rather complicated mixture of so

called Soviet Koreans which consists of second- and third-generation Moscow residents, newcomers from Russian regions of late 1980-s and early 1990-s and ethnic Koreans from CIS republics who are in initial stage of their legalization in Russia, temporary residents from South Korean and small and very closed groups of Chinese Koreans and North Korean. The last three groups are very independent and do not intersect with each other while 3 segments of Soviet Koreans are much more integrated into one community. The newcomers from CIS countries are quite easily adapted to Russian environment due to good command of Russian language and long-time acquired Soviet mentality. Thus those 3 segments of Soviet Koreans are gradually integrating into one community. Yet at the same time they are rapidly assimilated due to lack of Korean language knowledge (less than 2% could command Korean, therefore Korean national newspaper “Russian Koreans” is published in Russian) and prevailing urbanization trends.

Thus unlike predictions and expectations of mass return of Soviet Koreans to the land of their ancestors in Maritime province Moscow region has become most welcomed destination for young generation of Korean migrants in Russia and CIS. It could be reasoned by the facts that in this region they could easily find support from various civil associations and non-government organizations, they could be provided with jobs particularly from actively investing South Korean companies and they could have more chances to continue their education. Yet such huge megalopolis like Moscow accelerates assimilation process with increasing number of international marriages, absence of compact living areas and little access to national (especially language) education. From the point of view of living prospects for most of the third- and fourth-generation Koreans born in CIS countries Russia and Moscow in particular are more attractive target for settlement than much more developed and comfortable South Korea.

### **3. Factional Trends in Soviet and Post-Soviet Korean Diaspora in Soviet**

Declaration on equal rights and free development for all national minorities of Russian Empire adopted by Bolshevik’s government in 1917 initiated wide-spread movement for national self-identification among Koreans. Yet from the very beginning those attempts were plagued by fierce factional struggle. As a vivid example we could take discords within Korean communist party movement. On May 15, 1921 in Irkutsk Korean communist party was founded by separate communist organizations existing in Soviet Russia and a week later several other Korean socialist and communist groups announced creation of Korean communist

party in Shanghai. Both parties claimed their sole legitimacy and blamed other for being adventurous and even spying societies. In October 1922 Third Communist International made attempt to reconcile struggling factions at a meeting in Verkhneudinsk. As this meeting failed it was decided to dismiss both parties and start preparations for foundation of a new communist party on Korean territory. In fact such factional struggle along with constant share of numerous illegal migrants was partially responsible for failure to create Korean national autonomy in 1920-s and to some extent gave the authorities formal pretext for 1937 deportation.

Unfortunately factional trends in Korean diaspora has prevailed in the post-Soviet period as well. Gorbachev's "glasnost" and "perestroika" policies paved the way for establishment of various non-governmental organizations within newly emerging civil society. On May 5, 1989 Moscow Association of Koreans was registered and started preparations for unifying convention. On May 19-20, 1990 the founding congress of All-Union Association of Soviet Koreans was held and elected Professor Mikhail Park as its first President. Yet this attempt to consolidate Soviet Koreans was a failure as consequent disintegration of the Soviet Union led to formation of numerous other factional organizations.

On October 6, 1991 Association of Russian Koreans was created in Moscow and on November 1991 All-Russian Confederation of Korean Associations was established in Khabarovsk. In February 1992 International Confederation of Korean Associations was founded as a legal successor to All-Union Association of Soviet Koreans. On July 24, 1992 Moscow convention of All-Russian Confederation of Russian Koreans renamed it into Eurasian association of Koreans and a year later (in July 1993) into United Association of Russian Koreans. In November 1993 International Korean Association "Unity" was established and almost simultaneously "Pominryon" (All-Nation Unity) Association of Koreans appeared. Creation of all those separate organizations was based on personal ambitions and financial support from various South Korean institutions as well as North Korean government.

New surge of activities started after adoption of Russian law "On national cultural autonomy" in 1996. On October 19, 1996 Federal National Cultural Autonomy of Russian Koreans was established with Deputy of State Duma Yuri Ten as a chairman and in January 1999 4<sup>th</sup> convention of United Association of Russian Koreans announced creation of All-Russian Association of Koreans which was registered as non-governmental civil organization on July 15, 1999. At present this association which is actively supported by Russian and South Korean governments

claims to be a leader in unifying social activities of Russian Koreans. It publishes regular newspaper “Russian Koreans” in Russian language and set forward ambitious plan of construction a \$150 million Russian-Korean Cultural Center in Moscow<sup>9</sup>.

Lately there have been attempts to revive activities of Federal National Cultural Autonomy of Russian Koreans which stagnated after Yuri Ten’s death in 2003. 5-th congress of this organization was held in Moscow in November 2009. Yet disputes between supporters and critics of All-Russian Association of Koreans resulted in failure to elect a new chairman showing once again fractional tendencies in Korean national movement in modern Russia.

#### 4. Conclusions

A short review of history of Korean migration to Russia showed us astonishing similarity of attitude towards this phenomenon both by Imperial, Soviet and present Russian governments which could be defined as “seesaw” policy. This inconsistent policy on the one hand has welcomed Korean immigration to Russia and admitted their positive contribution to society development and right for national autonomy and on the other hand has treated Korean attempts of national self-identification as a potential threat to country’s integrity. On the other hand constant factional tendencies have prevailed during the whole history of Korean national movement in Russia. In fact such factional struggle along with before mentioned “seesaw” policies of local and central authorities were major reason for failure to create Korean national autonomy in 1920-s and to establish territorial autonomy in Russia’s Far East in 1990-s.

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<sup>1</sup> Koreans on Russian Far East. Second Half of XIX Century – Beginning of XX Century. Documents and Materials. – Vladivostok, 2001 (Корейцы на российском Дальнем Востоке. Вторая половина XIX- начало XX века. Документы и материалы. – Владивосток, 2001), p.19

<sup>2</sup> Park B.D. Bugai N.F. 140 Years in Russia. Essay on History of Russian Koreans. – Moscow, 2004 (Пак Б.Д., Бугай Н.Ф. 140 лет в России. Очерк истории российских корейцев. – Москва, 2004), p.47

<sup>3</sup> Same, p.92

<sup>4</sup> German N. Kim History of Korean Immigration. Book 2. 1945-2000. Part 1 – Almaty, 2006 (Ким Г.Н. История иммиграции корейцев. Книга вторая. 1945-2000 годы. Часть I – Алматы, 2006), p.110

<sup>5</sup> Same, p.110

<sup>6</sup> Bugai N.F. Russian Koreans: Issues of Economy and Culture – Moscow 2008 (Корейцы России: вопросы экономики и культуры – Москва, 2008), p.462

<sup>7</sup> Park B.D. Bugai N.F. 140 Years in Russia. Essay on History of Russian Koreans. –

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Moscow, 2004 (Пак Б.Д., Бугай Н.Ф. 140 лет в России. Очерк истории российских корейцев. – Москва, 2004), p.259

<sup>8</sup> Bugai N.F. Russian Koreans: Issues of Economy and Culture – Moscow 2008 (Корейцы России: вопросы экономики и культуры – Москва, 2008), p.364

<sup>9</sup> “Russian Koreans” newspaper, #108, November 2008 («Российские корейцы», №108, ноябрь 2008), p.2