

Article

# Cultural, Spatial, and Legal Displacement of the Korean Diaspora in the USSR: 1937-1945

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## Introduction

The Soviet deportation of the Russian-Koreans in 1937 greatly altered their legal status, spatial distribution, and everyday culture. It restricted their civil rights, particularly their freedom of movement, and officially denoted them as “administrative exiles.” They did not have the same right to choose their place of residence or freely move from place to place as most other citizens of the USSR. In this respect they suffered from legal restrictions similar to the kulaks deported earlier and the Russian-Germans, Karachais, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks deported later as special settlers. Thus a significant number of Soviet citizens defined by nationality including the Koreans had legal disabilities imposed upon them that made their status inferior to that of the general Soviet population. The NKVD confined the deported Russian-Koreans to the five Central Asian republics, mostly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and attempted to limit movement by them within this region. Although as can be seen below with the significant migration of Russian-Koreans from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan, they were often not successful in this second goal. In addition to restricting the mobility of the Russian-Koreans the NKVD also kept them under strict surveillance as a suspect people. Indirectly this restriction on movement also greatly limited their options for employment and education. During the period of administrative exile the Russian-Koreans remained largely confined to agricultural labor on kolkhozes in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A final formal restriction on their rights prohibited deported Russian-Koreans from serving in the Soviet military. This ban like the movement restrictions did not apply to those few Russian-Koreans living in Moscow and other western areas of the USSR at the time of the deportation. Instead of service in the military, Russian-Korean men were subject to conscription into the labor army to perform onerous work such as mining coal, felling trees, and constructing industrial plants under conditions similar to that of GULag prisoners. The deported Russian-Koreans became the first ethnically defined group in the USSR to have formal legal restrictions imposed upon them by government decree. The imposition of these restrictions clearly violated the 1936 Soviet constitution passed the previous year which banned both collective punishment and discrimination on the basis on nationality. This represented a considerable roll back on the promotion of the rights of small nationalities in the USSR which had been a hallmark of Soviet nationalities policies from the

12th Party Congress in April 1923 up until 1937. In many ways the forced resettlement of Koreans marked the end of this 14 year period of support for moving towards universal national and racial equality in the USSR and the start of repression against a number of small nationalities such as the Koreans and later the Germans, Karachais, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, and others.

Before the collapse of the USSR in 1991 there was little possibility to do research on the forced resettlement of ethnic Koreans in the USSR during 1937. This was due both to a lack of access to the relevant Soviet archives and an inability for survivors to tell their stories either orally to historians or in written form as memoirs. Thus the historiography on this particular event remained extremely limited until the 1990s. In 1992, the first major publication devoted to the 1937 forced resettlement came out in Russia. Compiled by Li U He and Kim En Uns, *Belaia kniga: O deportatsii koreiskogo naseleniia Rossi v 30-40x godakh* was published by Interprask in Moscow that year. This book is largely a compilation of Soviet archival documentation dealing with the 1937 resettlement of the ethnic Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan. It has far more material on the Koreans sent to Kazakhstan than on those sent to Uzbekistan. The source of these archives is largely from the central archives in Moscow particularly the Central State Archives of the October Revolution (TsGAOR) which is now part of the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF). The book is an important source of published official government documents on the 1937 forced relocation of Koreans. But, it is limited in its scope. Not only does it have little on Koreans sent to Uzbekistan, but the primary documentation also has very little on the group after 1938. The decade of the 1940s spent under “administrative exile” and mobilization in the labor army is barely covered at all.

In 1999 another important collection of documents on the 1937 forced resettlement of Koreans from the Soviet Far East came out. Compiled from documents found in the Uzbek archives in Tashkent, V. D. Kim’s *Pravda—polveka spustia* is difficult to find since it was published in Uzbekistan and not Russia. Nonetheless, it fills in many of the gaps left by the *Belaia kniga*, particularly with regards to the Koreans that arrived in Uzbekistan both directly from the Soviet Far East and those that moved from Kazakhstan. Together these two document collections along with those dealing with Soviet national deportations in general such as Iosif Stalin—*Lavrentiiu Berii: “Ikh nado*

*deportirovat'*: *Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii and Stalinskie deportatsii 1928-1953* provide a solid documentary base for understanding the outlines of how the Stalin regime relocated the Koreans to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and their general material conditions and legal status during 1937 and 1938.

Scholarly monographs on the forced resettlement of the Koreans in the USSR during 1937 did not start to be produced until sometime after the publication of the first document collections. Two monographs stick out as noteworthy. The first is *140 let v Rossii: Ocherk istorii rossiiskikh koreitsev*. This book presents one of the most complete narrative histories of the ethnic Koreans in the Russian Empire and USSR. Based upon the newly available archival sources this monograph covers the entire history of the ethnic Koreans in Russia and Central Asia. It does a particularly good job of explaining Soviet policy towards the Koreans living in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan during the 1940s, a period of time that is almost completely neglected in the earlier published document collections mentioned above. The second notable monograph dealing with the 1937 forced resettlement of Koreans in the USSR is Jon Chang's *Burnt by the Sun: The Koreans of the Russian Far East*. Chang relies upon both important new archival as well as oral sources to provide a comprehensive history of the group under Soviet rule. His interpretation that Soviet policy towards the Koreans continued many of the racist aspects of Tsarist Russian policy and that racism was a key component of the forced resettlement is an extremely important milestone in challenging the dominant paradigms in Soviet studies as represented by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Francine Hirsch, and Terry Martin.

This article seeks to synthesize the earlier work detailed above to provide an analysis of the effects of the forced resettlement upon the Korean population of the USSR. In particular it draws upon the published documents of the *Belaia kniga* and *Pravda—polveka sputsia* along with the narratives of *140 let v Rossii* and *Burnt by the Sun* to look at the geographical dispersal, legal restrictions, and cultural loss imposed upon the Koreans of the USSR by the forced resettlement. The focus of this article is on the consequences of the resettlement rather than the motivation of the Soviet government in undertaking the removal of the Koreans from the Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. But, in so far as the motives of the regime are touched upon here, this article follows the interpretation argued by Chang. That is institutionalized racism continuing from the Tsarist era created a framework through which the Soviet state interpreted the security situation in the Far East in a manner that viewed

ethnicity in a primordial fashion.

Spatially the deportations dispersed the Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East across Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The compact settlements of Russian-Koreans around Vladivostok, particularly in the Pos'ets Raion permanently ceased to exist. The deportation also permanently ended the large Russian-Korean presence in Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, and other cities. In the years immediately after the deportation the Russian-Koreans became an almost entirely rural people without a significant urban population. Later new urban concentrations of Russian-Koreans would develop in Central Asian cities like Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Alma-Ata, and even Bishkek. The deportations almost completely removed the Russian-Koreans from the mainland of the Soviet Far East. Initially, the NKVD sent the largest number of deportees to Kazakhstan and the remainder to Uzbekistan. But, during the years of administrative exile migration of Russian-Koreans from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan changed this. The 1959 Soviet census showed the largest number of Russian-Koreans in the USSR living in Uzbekistan by a significant margin followed by Kazakhstan. The population in other republics remained marginal.

The deportations had a profound effect on accelerating the loss of certain elements of traditional Korean culture and promoting further acculturation into the dominant Russian dominated Soviet culture. While it is true that acculturation was already proceeding before the resettlement, the loss of Korean language schools and other institutions after 1939 significantly intensified the loss of literacy and fluency in the language among younger generations. Their immersion in completely Russian language educational and later work environments led to a massive shift from using Korean to Russian. In the Soviet Far East the Russian-Koreans had access to a wide range of official Korean language institutions such as schools and publications. These had been established by the Soviet government as part of its indigenization (*korenizatsiia*) campaign during the 1920s and 1930s. Initially, unlike in the case of later Soviet ethnic deportations, the Soviet government reestablished Korean language schools, publications, and other institutions in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for the deported Koreans. By the end of 1939, however, these had all been eliminated. This ultimately resulted in Russian replacing Korean (*Koryo-mal*) as the primary language of the Russian-Koreans in the USSR in the decades after the death of Stalin. The deportation of the Russian-Koreans sped up the creation of a hybridization of Korean and Soviet Russian culture that had already been

long underway in the Soviet Far East. This hybridization favored the Russian over the Korean elements in certain key cultural spheres such as language.

## The Deportation

The NKVD deported a recorded total of 172,597 Russian-Koreans (36,681 families) from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan during fall 1937. The deportations began on 9 September 1937 (Li and Kim 1992, 103-04). The last echelons set out on 3 November 1937 (Kim 1999, 76-77). Most sources give the total number of ethnic Koreans forcibly resettled in this operation as 171,781 (36,442 families) drawing upon a telegraph sent by Yezhov to Stalin and Molotov. This telegraph states that the operation was completed on 25 October 1937 with the exception of around 700 Korean special settlers in the remote areas of Okhotsk and Kamchatka scheduled for removal on 1 November (Li and Kim 1992, 114-15). The actual difference between these two numbers is 816 people (239 families) and includes 583 people (176 families) deported from Kamchatka on 30 October 1937. On 1 November 1937, the NKVD sent another 96 people (40 families) from Nizhni-Amur Oblast and 112 people (21 families) of labor settlers from Khabarovsk Oblast westward. The NKVD loaded the final 25 Koreans deported in fall 1937 on 3 November (Kim 1999, 76-77). The NKVD cleared the Soviet Far East of virtually its entire Korean population in the fall of 1937.

The exact date of the decision to deport the Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East is unknown. Proposals to remove them had been circulating for some time before 1937 (Chang 2016). The resolution ordering the first mass resettlement of Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, however, is dated 21 August 1937. Resolution number 1428-325ss of the SNK (Council of People's Commissariats) and the Central Committee of the VKP (B) (All Russian Communist Party [Bolshevik]) of this date bears the title "On Exiling the Korean Population from the Border Raions of the Far Eastern Krai." It is signed by the head of the SNK, Molotov and the head of the Central Committee of the VKP, Stalin. This resolution orders the VKP, executive committee, and UNKVD of the Far Eastern Krai to remove all Koreans from the border raions of their territory starting with Pos'ets and resettle them in southern Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by 1 January 1938 (Li

and Kim 1992, 64-65). It should be noted that this resolution did not apply to all Russian-Koreans in the Soviet Far East. The resolution only applied to those living in raions bordering Korea, China, and Mongolia. Although this did constitute a significant majority of Russian-Koreans living in the Soviet Far East, some 135,343 people from 28 different population points. The two largest were Po'set Raion with 24,000 Russian-Koreans and the city of Vladivostok with 20,622 (Li and Kim 1992, 67-68). Unlike some later national deportations such as the Kalmyks, North Caucasians, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks, the Korean deportation took place in stages. This also occurred in the case of the Russian-Germans and Russian-Greeks, and is a function of the already dispersed nature of these diasporas in contrast to the compact settlement patterns of the indigenous nationalities deported by the NKVD.

The actual deportation of the Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan did not start until 9 September 1937. Between 9 and 23 September 1937, the NKVD deported some 8,000 Russian-Korean families in 39 train echelons (Li and Kim 1992, 89). Already by 10 September 1937, a full 20 echelons carrying close to 6,000 Russian-Korean families were on their way to Uzbekistan. The same day the Soviet Uzbek government agreed to take another 12,000 deported Russian-Koreans for a total of 37,000 people. However, out of the original 6,000 households the local authorities could only provide lodging for 720 of them and even these lodgings required repair (Kim 1999, 32-33). This severe lack of housing for the deported Koreans also manifested itself in Kazakhstan. Out of the almost 6,000 Russian-Korean families deported from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan the local authorities could initially only provide housing for 1,000 of them (Li and Kim 1992, 89). The first wave of Russian-Korean deportees from the Soviet Far East numbered 21,296 people to Kazakhstan and 30,003 to Uzbekistan for a total of 51,299 (Li and Kim 1992, 111). By 22 September 1937 a full 12,000 of the nearly 30,000 Russian-Koreans dispatched to Uzbekistan had arrived (Kim 1999, 43). The NKVD began a second wave of deportations of Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on 24 September 1937. This wave was scheduled to last until 3 October 1937 and encompassed 24,000 people (5,400 families) bringing the total of people subject to deportation up to over 75,000 (Li and Kim 1992, 111). The exact count of deported Russian-Koreans arriving in Uzbekistan from the Soviet Far East by 12 October 1937 was 29,043 people (5,780 families) in 20 train echelons (Kim 1999, 67). This

number had grown to 35,748 people (7,246 families) in 25 train echelons by 20 October 1937. This represented about half the total number of Russian-Koreans deported from the Soviet Far East by this time, 73,390 people (15,660 families) in 53 echelons (Kim 1999, 69). The deportation operation accelerated as it progressed. Before the end of October, the Soviet government had removed over 170,000 Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East.

The resolution ordering the deportation of the Russian-Koreans remaining in the Soviet Far East did not come until 28 September 1937, over a month after the initial decree to remove the population from the border districts. SNK resolution 1647-377ss "On Exiling Koreans from the Territory of the Far Eastern Krai" was signed by SNK Chairman, Molotov and Administrator of Affairs of the SNK, Patrunichev. Unlike the earlier resolution of 21 August 1937 it was not jointly sponsored by the Communist Party and lacks Stalin's signature (Li and Kim 1992, 80). Instead a separate resolution of the Central Committee of the VKP (B) followed the SNK resolution (Li and Kim 1992, 81). The SNK resolution orders the remaining 21,000 Russian-Korean households in the Soviet Far East to be deported to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Most of these households, 12,000 were slated for deportation to Kazakhstan and the remaining 9,000 to Uzbekistan (Li and Kim 1992, 80). This second resolution aimed at the Russian-Koreans living away from the Soviet borders with Korea and China, and hence a far less credible security threat on merely geographical criteria sets the treatment of the nationality apart from earlier deportations. For the first time in Soviet history the overwhelming majority of a group defined by nationality was subjected to forcible resettlement and subsequent curtailment of their former rights as Soviet citizens. It was not merely a cleansing of the Soviet borders of members of a distrusted ethnic minority. It was a full scale ethnic cleansing of Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East.

The ethnic cleansing of the Russian-Koreans from the mainland of the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had been almost completed by 25 October 1937. A report to Stalin and Molotov by NKVD chief Ezhov summarized the operation. A total of 124 train echelons carrying 171,781 Russian-Koreans (36,442 families) had been dispatched from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A mere 700 Russian-Koreans subject to deportation remained in Kamchatka and Okhostsk. Already 76 of the train echelons had arrived at their destinations (Li and Kim 1992, 114-15). The forcible resettlement of the vast majority of the Russian-Korean population in

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had been completed.

The final wave of Russian-Korean deportations from the Far East in 1937 took place on October 30<sup>th</sup>. On this date the NKVD loaded the last remaining Russian-Koreans to be deported onto train echelons. These Russian-Koreans came primarily from Kamchatka: a total of 583 out of the last 816 deportees. Another 96 came from Lower Amur Oblast, and the final remaining 112 were labor settlers deported to Khabarovsk Oblast during *dekulakization*. The NKVD sent these final exiles to Kazakhstan. Thus in total the NKVD deported 172,597 Russian-Koreans (36,681 families) from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan during September and October 1937 (Kim 1999, 76-77). This removed the final 700 Russian-Koreans referred to earlier in Ezhov's report from the region and resettled them in Kazakhstan. Almost none of the secondary literature makes reference to this final deportation, and the original report by Meer of 3 November 1937 has only been reproduced from the Uzbek archives by V. D. Kim.

## **Distribution in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**

The NKVD sent over half the Russian-Koreans deported to Uzbekistan to the Tashkent Oblast. Out of 74,500 people (16,307 families) deported from the Soviet Far East to Uzbekistan a full 37,321 (7,861 families) initially arrived in Tashkent Oblast. The next largest contingent landed in the Kara-Kalpak ASSR with 12,831 people (2,993 families) followed by Samarkand Oblast, 9,147 people (1,940 families), Fergana Oblast with 8,214 people (823 families), and Khorezm Oblast with 5,799 people (1,197 families). None of the other oblasts in Uzbekistan received over a thousand Russian-Korean deportees in 1937 (Bugai 1992, 31-32). The Uzbek SSR, however, was only the second largest recipient of Russian-Korean deportees in 1937.

It took some time to finally satisfactorily settle the relocated Russian-Koreans in Uzbekistan and integrate them into the economy. But, by January 1939, they had been organized into 46 new *kolkhozes* with 5,563 households, another 5,111 Russian-Korean households had joined 212 already existing local *kolkhozes*, and finally 364 households had been placed in four fishing *kolkhozes* (Pak and Bugai 2004, 269). Unlike in Kazakhstan the Russian-Koreans in Uzbekistan were almost entirely agrarian still in 1939.

Kazakhstan received the largest number of Russian-Korean deportees initially. The single largest number of deported Russian-Koreans sent to Kazakhstan, well over half, ending up in South Kazakhstan Oblast with 43,181 initially resettled. The next largest number of Russian-Koreans deported to Kazakhstan were resettled in Karaganda Oblast with 14,792 people. Other oblasts in Kazakhstan to receive Russian-Korean exiles included North Kazakhstan Oblast with 9,350 deportees, West Kazakhstan Oblast with 9,017, Aktiubinsk Oblast with 7,666, Alma-Ata Oblast with 7,851, and Kustannai Oblast with 3,746 (Khan 2009, 61). Many of these deportees, however, would later migrate to Uzbekistan.

The economic occupations of the Russian-Korean deportees in Kazakhstan had become more diverse than that of Uzbekistan by 1939. Out of a total of 18,085 Russian-Korean households in the republic at this time 7,205 worked in 61 newly organized kolkhozes, another 4,018 had joined already existing local kolkhozes, and 1,331 worked in fishing kolkhozes. In addition to this agricultural work 1,039 Russian-Korean households belonged to industrial-craft artels and 4,492 were headed by industrial or office workers, many of them in urban areas (Pak and Bugai 2004, 269). Despite these urban workers in Kazakhstan, the vast majority of Russian-Korean deportees became integrated into the kolkhoz system of agriculture in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

## **Internal Movement in Central Asia**

The Koreans were not only the first Soviet nationality in which the vast majority of the population was subject to resettlement. They were also at the time the largest group of any type forcibly resettled in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Initially the NKVD sent most of the deported Koreans to Kazakhstan, 95,256 people (20,170 families) versus 76,526 (16,272) to Uzbekistan (Li and Kim 1992, 114-15). This division, however, did not hold for long. After the deportation many Koreans began to move from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan to join their relatives due to better material conditions in the latter republic. Between the end of 1937 and 1 April 1939 the number of Korean families in Kazakhstan decreased from 20,530 to 18,495. A significant number of these Koreans had migrated from Kazakhstan to live with relatives in Uzbekistan (Li and Kim 1992, 152). In particular, Koreans resettled on kolkhozes in

Uzbekistan received much greater compensation in kind for grain abandoned in the Soviet Far East than those in Kazakhstan. A complaint written by Kim Gen Sek of Kanton Kommune kolkhoz in Kzyl-Orda Oblast of 6 August 1938 to Molotov noted that some Koreans in Uzbekistan had been compensated up to 100% for the grain left in the Soviet Far East while many in Kazakhstan had received absolutely nothing. Among those given no grain or bread in exchange for the vouchers given to them for grain left in the Soviet Far East were the inhabitants of Kanton Kommune (Li and Kim 1992, 168-69). Koreans living in Kazakhstan moved both with permission from the Soviet authorities and without. Requests for permission took the form of letters to the NKVD. On 10 February 1938, Nadezhda Kim, a Russian-Korean living on Shelkov sovkhoz in Khoja-Abad district in Uzbekistan wrote to the district NKVD commander asking for permission to travel to Karaganda Kazakhstan and return with her husband, brother's wife, and three other relatives (Kim 1999, 127). The migration from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan greatly altered the division of the Korean population between these two republics. The 1959 census showed only 74,000 Koreans in Kazakhstan versus 139,000 in Uzbekistan (Matley 1994, 110). Uzbekistan still has a significantly larger Korean population than Kazakhstan even today as a result of this early migration.

## **Administrative Exile**

The Soviet government did not place the deported Koreans under special settlement restrictions the way it did the kulaks earlier or the Germans, North Caucasians, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks deported later. Instead it placed them under administrative exile, a separate legal category from either special settlers or full Soviet citizens. This has created some confusion in the literature. But, it is clear that in 1937 the Soviet government made a decision not to add the Russian-Koreans to the already three million special settlers in the USSR (Pak and Bugai 2004, 250-51). The Koreans were unique among the nationalities deported in their virtual entirety in not being classified as special settlers. Their status as administrative exiles included many, but not all of the restrictions imposed upon special settlers. Like special settlers the Soviet government severely restricted the freedom of movement and choice of residency of the exiled Koreans. On 3 November 1938, the Council of People's

Commissars (SNK) of Uzbekistan passed a resolution restricting the voluntary movement of resettled Koreans within the territory of the Uzbek SSR. They could not move even from raion to raion within the republic under normal circumstances. Although the same resolution stated that they were to be given permission to move to cities to attend higher education (Kim 1999, 123). In practice most Russia-Koreans remained confined to their assigned raion during the late 1930s and 1940s.

The legal status of the deported Koreans had much in common with the much larger special settlement contingents: most notably the restrictions on residency and movement. But, in other respects it differed. Upon arriving in exile in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan their status was not declared to be indefinite and then later permanent after 1948 like the deported Russian-Germans, Kalmyks, North Caucasians, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks. Instead the Soviet government issued them with special passports that restricted them to living in their assigned places for a term of five years (Bugai 1992, 22-23). The Soviet government started issuing these passports after 10 September 1940 and they stated either “Given the right to only live in the confines of the Uzbek SSR” or “Given the right to only live in the confines of the Kazakh SSR” (Bugai and Pak 2004, 249). Until 1941, the deported Koreans could only live in the assigned raions specified in these passports. After 1941 they were only restricted to living within the confines of their assigned republic (Khan 2009, 59). On 2 August 1946, the Soviet government issued the Russian-Koreans new passports without the residency restrictions. However, seven months later on 3 March 1947, the government again issued new passports to the Russian-Koreans containing residency restrictions. These new passports prohibited them from living outside the Central Asian Republics or in the raions of those republics bordering foreign states (Bugai 1992, 22-23). Only in the mid-1950s after Stalin’s death did the Russian-Koreans receive the same residency rights as most other Soviet citizens.

## **Labor Army**

After the deportation of the Koreans in the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the USSR had two military clashes with the Japanese Empire. The clashes at Lake Khasan in 1938 and Khalkin Gol in 1939, however, did not

last long and there was never simultaneous military conflict between the USSR and Germany in the west and the USSR and Japan in the east. Instead, the 13 April 1941 Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact was held for the entire period of the war between Nazi Germany and the USSR from 22 June 1941 to 9 May 1945. Thus soldiers from the Korean homeland and Manchuria, both under Japanese rule, were never mobilized to fight against the USSR during the war against Germany. In 1942 the Stalin regime began the partial mobilization of Russian-Korean men in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan into the labor army. Those Koreans designated as “administrative exiles” were banned from serving in the Red Army and other military formations. In practice this meant that only those few Koreans in the USSR that had avoided deportation in 1937 could serve in the Soviet military. Most of the Koreans eligible for military service had thus been living in western regions of the USSR prior to 1937. But, these men formed only a small portion of the entire Korean population of the USSR. The vast majority living in the Soviet Far East, were forcibly resettled as “administrative exiles” in 1937, and were thus legally barred from military service during World War II. The government conscripted Korean men resettled in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan into forced labor columns as a form of “alternative service.” The first mobilization of Koreans for the labor army took place in February 1942. This conscription took place through the normal military boards used to induct soldiers into the Red Army. The NKO (People’s Commissariat of Defense) then handed the mobilized Koreans over to the NKVD for work in forced labor projects (Khan 2006, 63-66). During the month of March 1943, the government mobilized 7,765 ethnic Koreans for work in the labor army. It sent most of these men, 5,135 to work in coal mines in Tula Oblast near Moscow and much of the remainder, 2,622 to mine coal in the mines of Karaganda, Kazakhstan. Additional Korean labor army conscripts worked in construction on the Farhad hydroelectric station and the Begovat metallurgy factory, both in Uzbekistan. Another 1,500 mobilized Koreans worked in the Ukhta labor camp in the Komi ASSR. Koreans in the labor army lived and worked under conditions similar to those of Gulag prisoners. The NKVD housed them in barracks and fed them 700 grams of bread, cabbage soup, and oat kasha a day all the while forcing them to engage in inhumane labor under strict discipline (Pak and Bugai 2004, 314-17). The forced labor endured by these men in the labor army represented one of the most difficult trials faced by the Russian-Koreans exiled to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

During the dismantlement of the labor army, surviving Russian-Koreans discharged from the labor columns received the classification of special settlers rather than administrative exiles. On 2 July 1945, the NKVD released the Korean labor army conscripts working in the People's Commissariat of Coal. The NKVD reclassified them as special settlers and allowed those employed in the Tula coal basin to leave and join their families in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Pobol and Polian 2005, 97). This reclassification of Russian-Koreans released from the labor army as special settlers did not apply to the vast majority of the population who remained administrative exiles in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Although it did create some confusion in the NKVD on this point. An NKVD report from 11 January 1945 mistakenly classified the deported Russian-Koreans as special settlers and not administrative exiles (Bugai 1992, 31-32). A 1949 report by the head of the special settlement section of the NKVD confirmed that the vast majority of Russian-Koreans had never been special settlers (Bugai 1992, 22-23). Legally they had always been "administrative exiles."

The Soviet government released the conscripted Russian-Koreans from the labor much earlier than the Russian-German majority. The Stalin regime did not discharge most of them and allow them to join their families as special settlers in Kazakhstan and Siberia until 1948. Nonetheless, the Russian-Koreans conscripted into the labor army were released only two months after the defeat of Nazi Germany.

## **Linguistic Russification**

The cultural changes in the Russian-Koreans as a result of the deportations only became apparent many years later. But, the replacement of Korean with Russian as the primary language of the group is the most apparent maker of these changes. Around 100,000 Russian-Koreans had moved from Kazakhstan and Central Asia to the RSFSR by 1970. In the census that year only 66.8% of them claimed Korean as their native language and 33% identified Russian as their mother tongue. In the 1979 census these numbers had significantly shifted towards fewer Korean and more Russian speakers. That census recorded a minority, only 45.2% of Russian-Koreans in the RSFSR claiming Korean as their native language versus 54.6% claiming Russian. Finally, the last Soviet

census in 1989 recorded only 36.5% declaring Korean and 63.1% declaring Russian as their native tongue (Pak and Bugai 2004, 319). The Koreans in Kazakhstan had slightly different figures, but they still show a huge shift from Korean to Russian. In 1970, 64% of Russian-Koreans in Kazakhstan claimed Korean as their native language. This declined to 56% in the 1979 census and again to 52% in the 1989 census (Pak and Bugai 2004, 320). These figures greatly overstate the level of Korean language competency among the Russian-Koreans. But, they are useful in showing the steady linguistic Russification of the group during the Soviet era. The development of a hybrid Soviet Russian and Korean diaspora culture became more Soviet and more Russian over time, particularly after their dispersal amongst non-Koreans in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the elimination of Korean language institutions in the late 1930s.

## Conclusion

The 1937 Soviet deportation of the Russian-Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan greatly altered their geographical or spatial, legal, and ultimately cultural existence. They went from being concentrated in the Russian Far East, particularly in Pos'ets Raion and in the city of Vladivostok to being spread across Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan far to the west and distant from the borders of Korea and Manchuria. Legally, the Stalin regime restricted the civil rights of the Russian-Koreans. They no longer had the same rights as most other Soviet citizens, prisoners and special settlers being two exceptions, regarding free movement, choice of residency, and military service. After two years of exile in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan they also lost their rights to Korean language education, media, and other institutions. The loss of these latter rights had a profound influence in accelerating the acculturation of the Russian-Koreans into a Russian speaking hybrid culture. This process had started in earnest in Tsarist times, picked up speed during *korenizatsiia*, and continued throughout the entire Soviet era. But, the dispersal of the population throughout Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the Soviet government's elimination of Korean language schools after 1939 precipitated a strong intensification of these trends. Eventually, the Soviet government removed the restrictions of administrative exile regarding movement, residency, and military service. They also restored a

limited number of Korean language institutions in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The geographic and cultural transformation of the Korean diaspora in the USSR, however, were never reversed. Unlike the deported North Caucasians, Kalmyks, and eventually even Crimean Tatars there was never a mass return of Russian-Koreans from Kazakhstan and Central Asia to the Russian Far East. Nor has there been a reversal of the linguistic Russification of the population. They remain largely a multiply displaced diaspora with a hybrid culture composed primarily of Russian and Korean elements.

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## Abstract

Korean migration to the Russian Empire and USSR occurred mainly during the years between 1869 and 1931. These Koreans came both directly from the peninsula itself and from Korean settlements in Manchuria. They remained overwhelmingly concentrated in the Russian Far East until 1937. From 9 September to 3 November 1937 the NKVD (Peoples' Commissariat of Internal Affairs) of the USSR loaded around 172,000 ethnic Koreans into train cars and sent them to the Kazakh and Uzbek SSRs. This action cleared the eastern regions of the RSFSR (Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic) of the vast majority of its Korean population and created a significant diaspora in Central Asia. The official justification for this operation was the claim that the ethnic Koreans could serve to hide spies and saboteurs sent from the Japanese Empire. The relocated Koreans suffered from severe material deprivations during their initial years in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The Soviet government also placed its citizens of Korean ancestry relocated to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan under a system of legal restrictions termed "administrative exile." Finally, after 1939 they eliminated almost all Korean cultural institutions until years after the defeat of Japan. These factors made adaptation by the Koreans to their new areas of settlement difficult. Nonetheless, they managed to eventually overcome these obstacles and successfully integrate into the social, economic, and even political spheres of Soviet Central Asia. This paper will examine the early years of the Korean diaspora in Central Asia from 1937 to 1945. It will look at how the forced resettlement and subsequent material and legal disadvantages during these years transformed the group from its previous existence in the Soviet Far East. The paper will also address the role of geopolitical conflict in Asia between the USSR and Japan in determining Soviet policy towards this ethnic minority.

**Keywords:** USSR, NKVD, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan