

BOOK REVIEWS

Burnt by the sun: the Koreans of the Russian Far East, by Jon K. Chang, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2016, 273 pp., \$68 (hardback), ISBN 9780824856786

In 2017, many engaged in marking the centennial of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. In universities, scores of invited lectures and presentations were planned, popular media sources ran special series, and libraries and galleries planned for how to mark 100 years since workers seized power from tsarist control. At this moment, it is particularly illuminating to read Jon. K. Chang's well-researched book on the Soviet treatment of Soviet Koreans in the Russian Far East. In Chang's retelling of the stories of Soviet Koreans and their racialized place within the Russian Imperial and Soviet projects, we learn that Soviet emancipation was entangled in (not simply opposed to) the racial logics of European and U.S. capitalist imperialism.

Chang's book is chronologically organized, starting with the incorporation of the lands known as the Russian Far East (RFE) during tsarist rule (1863–1917). The origin of Korean presence in that region is linked to their emigration from the Hamgyong Province due to famine and other social constraints, though Asian traders had long traveled the arid lands of the Ussuri/Primor'e. The Russian empire-treated Koreans and Chinese in the RFE as productive "colonizing elements" as they joined Russian (Slavic and European descent) settlers in establishing Russian control over the Primor'e and eastern portions of the empire. However, the presence of Korean settlers was also cast within the imperial government's "yellow question" (*zhelty vopros*) and thus Koreans were treated with suspicion and as outsiders. Unlike the Russian settlers who were granted plots of land and incentives for making their homes in the RFE, Koreans were taxed and their economic prosperity was viewed as a potential geopolitical threat (especially vis-à-vis China and Japan). Chang explains that the imperial approach to Koreans as a productive presence yet still *other* was tied to geopolitics as well as linked to nativist beliefs about Russian (ethnic) resources.

In the proceeding chapters, Chang details how Koreans adapted to and were targeted by the Soviet regime, including their mass deportation from the RFE in 1937. Chang persuasively argues that while the Bolshevik revolution ushered in new discourses about self-determination and anti-colonialism, the imperial approach to the *other* was continued through the Soviet experience. Despite having "displayed their loyalty to the state," Soviet Koreans remained suspect in the eyes of the government because they were first and foremost seen as Asian (and thus foreign). The Soviet tactic for building a multi-national empire is best articulated in its domestic program of *korenizatsiia* (nativization). The Soviet regime aimed to transform national groups into Soviets by providing territorial autonomy and citizenship – both of which the Koreans lacked at the time of the Bolshevik revolution. Using archival material, oral histories, and secondary sources, Chang chronicles the positive and ultimately tragic sides of the *korenizatsiia* program for Soviet Koreans in the RFE.

In Chang's text, there is much to praise. The oral history accounts of Soviet Korean deportation are extraordinary and add rich complexity to the story of the Soviet project and the Soviet Korean experience. Ultimately the program of *korenizatsiia* would not

save even those Soviet Koreans who had proven their loyalty to the Soviet state, including NKVD officials who were marshaled to monitor their co-ethnics in the RFE. Chang argues that while repression against many groups occurred during the 1930s, Soviet Koreans were never viewed as insiders due to the very nature of *korenizatsiia*. He writes:

Korenizatsiia accentuated national/racial differences by assigning and awarding different benefits, rations, jobs, promotions, and scholarships based on one's nationality. This would actually reinforce old tsarist ways of looking at race, nationality, and the categories of "alien" versus "native." The gulf between the latter two categories was extremely difficult to bridge for many Soviet Asians and diaspora nationalities. (82)

Thus, while many nationalities would suffer from deportation (for example, Germans and Poles were deported from western Ukraine and Belarus to eastern Ukraine and then later to Kazakhstan in 1936), Soviet Koreans were (for a short time) given the option to leave the USSR. Chang takes this implicitly to suggest that unlike non-Asian nationality groups, Soviet Koreans (as well as Soviet Chinese) were treated as *other*.

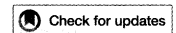
Thousands of Soviet Koreans were deported to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and over 2000 were arrested and repressed (159). This story of Korean emigration and Soviet Korean deportation is well researched and adds an important scholarly perspective on Soviet nationalities policy. The evidence detailed in *Burnt By the Sun* is most forcefully wielded in Chang's argument about why Soviet Koreans were deported. In particular, he contends that theories of "Soviet xenophobia" which describe the Soviet fear of foreign influence fail to recognize what Chang calls "tsarist continuities." That is, the Soviet regime continued to think along tsarist lines in relation to Asian ethnic groups. Thus, the language of "nationalities" covered the underlying ethnic and racial essentializing that programs like *korenizatsiia* had aimed to make irrelevant. I found Chang's argument of "tsarist continuities" persuasive and I expect more scholarly debate will emerge as a result of it. In those conversations, I would suggest further analysis of *korenizatsiia* as a colonial project of indigenous peoples as well. In this regard, more attention should be paid to how Korean (and other) groups participated in the colonization (and making) of (Soviet) Russia.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2018.1473354>



Great catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the shadow of genocide, by Thomas de Waal, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2015, \$29.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0199350698/\$29.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0190904784

The Armenian genocide was one of the most significant cases of mass violence in the twentieth century. Despite the fact that a century has passed since this great catastrophe, it is still a matter of international and domestic politics. The book, *Great Catastrophe*, which aims to examine "how different eras and political agendas shaped the Armenians, changing relations between Armenians and Turks, the politics of genocide," and the developments regarding this issue in recent decades provides important insights concerning post-genocide politics and nationalism for the general reader and for scholars specializing on this subject.