Nationalities Papers, 2017
Vol. 45, No. 5, 798–814, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1308347

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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Making the Korean nation in the Russian Far East, 1863–1926

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(*Received 13 July 2016; accepted 7 September 2016*)

Exploring the history of Koreans in the Russian Far East from the perspective of New Imperial History, the article demonstrates that political activism of Koreans and policies of the Russian (Soviet), Korean, and Japanese governments resulted in consolidation of two visions of their future. The first vision implied unity between the Koreans living in the Russian Far East with those who stayed in Korea, moved to Japan, or emigrated elsewhere and corresponded to the agenda of building a Korean nation. The second vision implied that the bilingual or Russified Koreans aspired to stay in the Russian Far East permanently, ensuring their own livelihood in the new regional frontier. The two currents interlaced in the project of Korean autonomy in a post-imperial state, first the Far Eastern Republic and later the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics. The project involved inclusion of Koreans into the global spread of revolution through the Communist International and left open the issue of the duration of Korean presence in the Russian Far East. Its ultimate failure in 1926 left the Koreans partly excluded from the Soviet system without the institutional benefits of national autonomy.

Keywords: Russian Far East; Korea; empire; nationalism; autonomy

Introduction

Koreans living in the Russian Far East became the first group subject to a Soviet ethnic cleansing in 1937 (Gelb 1995). Their deportation to Central Asia marked a major break in their almost 75-year history in the frontier region of the Russian Empire (the Soviet Union), which itself was only a couple years older. Between the arrival of the first Korean settlers in 1863 and the first decision of the central Bolshevik leadership to stop the Korean immigration in 1926 (Chernolutskaia 2011, 219), regional Korean politicians and intellectuals, as well as Russian (Soviet), Korean, and Japanese officials, devised several alternative futures for the Koreans in the Russian Far East.

There were two major visions of the Koreans' future in the region. The first vision implied their identification with those Koreans who stayed in Korea, moved to Japan, or ended up living in the USA, the Qing Empire (the Republic of China), and elsewhere. This vision corresponded to the project of building a Korean nation, which launched in the late nineteenth century and accelerated after the revocation of the Qing protectorate (1895) and occupation (1905) and annexation (1910) of Korea by the Japanese Empire. The nation-building involved conventional elements of linguistic standardization and

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https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1308347 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cultural homogenization (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991) through print media and schooling in Korean, and political mobilization through national organizations and guerilla bands (Regan and Norton 2005).

At the same time, Korean nation-building preceded industrialization and did not exhibit the gradual development of phases (Hroch 1985; Suny 1993), following the pattern of defensive nationalism in view of the Japanese occupation of Korea (Robinson 2014) as well as Russification (Serebrennikov 1925) and Sinicization (Ho 1998) of respective Korean migrant and settler communities. Korean nation-building in the Russian Far East took place in the face of a nationalizing Russian Empire, and in the context of an external national homeland in Korea (Brubaker 1996), to which many Russian (Soviet) Koreans expected to return, or which could be integrated into a larger Korean political space under a Japanese protectorate (Pak and Bugai 2004).

The second vision was articulated by those bilingual or Russified Koreans who aspired to stay in the Russian Far East permanently, becoming part of the new East Asian frontier yet to take political and economic shape (Stephan 1994; Remnev 2004; Bassin 2006). Most Russian imperial officials welcomed Koreans' efforts to develop agriculture in the newly acquired territories but wondered about their loyalty and potential role in the future of the empire, with many stressing the need for their Russification and Christianization. Despite the homogenizing efforts of its elites, the practices, institutions, and the intellectual atmosphere of the Russian Empire did not openly suppress national aspirations and left numerous opportunities for the Russian Koreans to form a distinct cultural group integrated into the empire through estate or religion instead of language or nationality (Steinwedel 2016).

The two visions overlapped in the project of Korean autonomy in the post-imperial states that followed the Russian Empire, first the Far Eastern Republic (FER) and later the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR), which in 1922 became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In the FER, Koreans were recognized as one of the new republic's minority nations with the right to non-territorial cultural autonomy, following the Austro-Marxists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer's project for the Jewish population of the Habsburg Empire (Bauer 1907; Renner 2005) and implemented for other communities in Eastern Europe and beyond (Nimni 2005). Despite the opposition of the Bolsheviks (Stalin 1946) to the principle of national cultural autonomy, the Koreans retained a form of limited autonomy through specialized organizations and local self-government in the USSR and could be made into one of the territorialized national minorities becoming part of the Bolshevik "architectonic illusion" (Brubaker 1998) of resolving the national question through federalism (Suny 1993).

The project involved inclusion of the Koreans into the global spread of revolution through the Communist International (Comintern) as part of the plan to support anticolonial nationalism and promote the Soviet system in Asia by creating autonomies in the former empire (Sablin 2016). The international objectives of Korean autonomy, however, left open the question of their presence in the Russian Far East after the liberation of Korea from Japan. The ultimate failure to institutionalize Soviet Koreans as a minority nation through territorial autonomy, despite the creation of specialized national organizations, excluded them from the constituents of the Soviet state.

This article contributes to the New Imperial History (Gerasimov et al. 2005) by locating Korean nation-building among four transforming imperial formations: the Russian Empire (the Soviet Union), Japan, the USA, and the Qing Empire (the Republic of China), and exploring Koreans' potential integration into the Russian Empire in non-national terms. Being newcomers to the Russian Far East, Korean refugees, settlers, and political

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1308347 Published online by Cambridge University Press

immigrants first experienced pressure from the Korean government until its collapse and then became subjects of two colonial projects, Russian and Japanese. In this respect the Russian Far East resembled other multiethnic border zones that occasionally left their inhabitants outside state control and provided them with economic opportunities, but also aroused constant concerns among competing authorities aspiring to make them culturally comprehensible and homogenous (Brown 2009).

The project of Korean national autonomy relied on the experience in self-government (Nam 2001), borrowed from the discourses on democracy, nationalism, and decentralization in Russia and East Asia (Robinson 2007; Von Hagen 2007; Fedyashin 2012). It was challenged by the controversial policies of subjecthood and citizenship pertaining to imperial formations (Lohr 2012) and racism directed at East Asians (Stolberg 2004). Beginning with the arrival of the first Korean refugees and settlers in 1863, soon after the annexation of what later became part of the Russian Far East, this study traces the simultaneous making of the Korean nation and the new region. Both processes became especially intense after Japan defeated the Qing Empire in 1895, Russia lost the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, and Korean nationalists failed to ensure independence at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The study concludes with the abrogation of the special status of the Russian Far East, which existed as the formally independent FER (1920–1922) and the de facto autonomous Far Eastern Region (1922–1926). The transformation of the Far Eastern Region (*oblast'*), which was run by an extraordinary revolutionary government, into the Far Eastern Territory (*krai*), an integral part of the RSFSR, took place on 4 January 1926, the day before the decision to ban Korean immigration paved the way for their exclusion from the Soviet constituents.

The article focuses on the definitions and self-definitions of the Korean settlers and refugees in the Russian Far Eastern colony in 1863–1895, political activism of Korean settlers and immigrants in 1895–1917, and recognition of the Koreans as a minority nation without the right to territorial autonomy in 1917–1926. The article extends the argument made by Huttenbach (1993) by adding the perspective of regional intellectuals and politicians to that of the Russian (Soviet) and Japanese elites. It also revises the conclusions of Byung-yool Ban (1996) by pointing out that the Russian Far East, which together with Manchuria was part of Wondong (the Far East) in Korean political geography, was not just a place of hope for Korean liberation, but also a new homeland for many Koreans who intended to stay there. Finally, it provides a comparative framework for Richard S. Kim's (2011) study of nationalism among Korean immigrants in the USA.

Refugees and settlers, 1863–1895

As early as 1863 the first 13 Korean families settled in the South Ussuri District (*okrug*) of the Maritime Region (*oblast'*), the territories the Qing Empire ceded to Russia in 1860. By 1870 there were six Korean villages in the Russian–Qing–Korean borderland. In 1883 a group of Korean settlers founded the village of Osipovka near Khabarovka (Khabarovsk), the town that the following year became the capital of the newly founded Priamur General Governorship. In 1890, the Korean population of the South Ussuri District reached 11,055, with almost 64% living near Posyet (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 22–30; RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 174, l. 190–191).

Most of the people came seeking refuge from the famines that frequently struck the Kingdom of Joseon in the second half of the nineteenth century (Ban 1996), but some were also attracted by the lack of administrative control and the availability of unoccupied lands in the new East Asian frontier region. Its harsh climate took many lives; some people resettled in Manchuria or back in Korea. Yet the opportunity to evade taxes and freely move

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within the region – only a handful of settlers bothered to apply for land-use permissions – and economic efficiency of Korean agriculture attracted more settlers. Some Koreans engaged in mining and trading, but the majority opted for crop farming (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 22–30; RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 174, l. 190–191).

According to the members of the Khabarovka Korean Society, a community self-government body formed in 1885 under the chairmanship of Evod Semionov, the small lots, "constant crop failures, huge taxes," and despotism of the officials in Korea forced them to move to the Maritime and Amur regions in order to avoid starvation and being punished for arrears. Rumors of the "humaneness" of the Russian administration, huge Russian territory, rich soils, and moderate taxes spread in Korea. The settlers referred to Korea as their "old fatherland" and Russia as the "new fatherland" pointing at their settler rather than refugee status and intention to stay in Russia permanently. The members of the Khabarovka Korean Society appealed to the military governor of the Maritime Region to be accepted into Russian subjecthood, allotted farmland "for eternal usage," and issued a loan for horses, cattle, and tools (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 4, d. 783, l. 31–31 rev.).

The Russian administration certainly did not welcome the lack of control that the Korean settlers praised. Admitting the failure to register the incoming settlers, regulate land use, and collect taxes, regional officials differed in their views of the Koreans. Most agreed on the economic benefits of Korean settlement. Petr Vasil'evich Kazakevich, the first military governor of the Maritime Region (1856–1865), urged to "value" the hard-working Korean settlers who could provide the Russian military in the region with grain (RGIA DV f. 87, op. 1, d. 278, l. 15–16 rev.). Pavel Fedorovich Unterberger, the military governor of the Maritime Region (1888–1897) and later the Priamur governor general (1905–1910), reaffirmed that the Korean population of South Ussuri was helping to supply the military (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 19–20 rev.). Iakov Pavlovich Ome-l'ianovich-Pavlenko, the vice governor of the Maritime Region (1886–1910), stressed the importance of the duties the Koreans paid in kind providing carts and maintaining the roads. Furthermore, he underlined the irreplaceability of the Koreans near Posyet, as the poor conditions for agriculture kept Russians from settling there (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 22–30).

Still, many officials expressed their distrust of the Koreans, foregrounding the threat presented by the predominance of the "yellow race" in the newly acquired territories (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2001), given that the extraterritorial status of the former Qing subjects granted by the Treaty of Aigun (1858) already loosened their control. Besides, the Russian Empire granted foreigners land use and trade rights comparable to those of Russian subjects without the need to convert to Orthodox Christianity and swear an oath of allegiance to the tsar (Lohr 2012). In 1871, Nikolai Petrovich Sinel'nikov, the governor general of East Siberia (1871–1874), which included the Maritime Region until 1884, welcomed the Korean settlement but suggested holding it in check. He also cautioned regional authorities against allowing Korean settlement contiguous to the border, ordering them to settle among Russian villages (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 1, d. 325, l. 12–12 rev.). Not all officials distrusted the Koreans. In 1881, Iosif Gavrilovich Baranov, the military governor of the Maritime Region (1881–1888), claimed that ill-conceived policies toward the favorably predisposed Koreans in Russia, whom he called "our Koreans," were the main source of their alleged disloyalty (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 69a, l. 2–5 rev.).

The proponents of restrictive measures prevailed. In 1886, the tsar banned Koreans and "other newcomers from the Chinese and Korean lands" from settling close to the border (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:48–49). This measure followed a trend in the Pacific region, including efforts by the USA government to limit Chinese immigration with the

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Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, but also reflected the desire of the Kingdom of Joseon to control its subjects. The signing of the Russian–Korean Treaty in 1884 divided Russian Koreans into three categories. Those who arrived before 1884 had the right to Russian subjecthood and could stay permanently; those who arrived thereafter were considered Korean subjects and were supposed to leave; those who worked in Russia as seasonal migrants could continue doing so with Korean passports (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 22–30).

The Russian officials could not, however, enforce the restrictive measures and control the movement of the Koreans. Besides, the administrators of the Maritime Region changed their attitudes after the adoption of the Regulations on Land Trade with Korea in 1888 (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:56–65). Before the ratification of the treaty, Omel'ianovich-Pavlenko referred to the "political unreliability" of the Koreans, who were expected to side with the Qing Empire in the case of war, and suggested they be resettled from the border and the lands they occupied be transferred to settlers from European Russia (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 4–17). In 1890 he defended the Koreans, claiming that there was no need for their resettlement, as the Koreans living in the South Ussuri District demonstrated "no affection" for Korea, had no religious connections to it, and valued their economic conditions in Russia. In the case of war, their transportation services were to be invaluable for the Russian military (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 22–30). Andrei Nikolaevich Korf, the Priamur governor general (1884–1893), continued the restrictive line and reiterated the idea of resettling all Koreans away from the border but admitted that this could not be done immediately due to their economic indispensability to the region and supported the Russification of Koreans as an alternative (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 58–60).

Russification, which became central to official policies of the nationalizing Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century and intensified after the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway commenced in 1891 (Dameshek et al. 2007), included making the Russians regional majorities, linguistic Russification of non-Russians, and their conversion to Orthodox Christianity. In practice this meant the spread of two institutions in Korean settlements, the school and the church. Omel'ianovich-Pavlenko suggested reconfiguring Korean settlements, which consisted of sparse family houses, to match the layout of compact Russian villages and feature Russian-style schools, stores, and other public buildings. He also suggested banning Chinese from living in Korean settlements (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 22–30). Finally, Russian Koreans were expected to cut their hair and dress according to European style to be distinguished from the Qing Koreans, whom the Hunchun authorities ordered to dress like the Chinese, and the Joseon Koreans (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 2, d. 1048, l. 113).

Early expectations that the Koreans would be quickly assimilated with the Russians did not pan out. In 1894, Unterberger admitted that most Koreans became Orthodox Christian only formally, did not attend church, and did not even know their baptismal names. Their way of life did not become Russian. There were no intermarriages between Russian and Korean settlers. Constant arrival of new settlers further obstructed Russification. Those Koreans who settled in Manchuria, by contrast, quickly adopted the Chinese way of life (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 81–89 rev.).

The complex structure of the Russian Empire, which allowed several alternative scenarios for integration, did not necessarily foster Russification. At first, Koreans were treated as aliens (*inorodtsy*), the estate to which most indigenous groups in Asian Russia belonged. Although they continued to be referred to as aliens, Baranov suggested including the Koreans into the estate of peasants and made Russian subjects in 1881 (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 69a, l. 2–5 rev.). Omel'ianovich-Pavlenko supported the need to make

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the Koreans of the first category (those who settled before 1884) Russian subjects and members of the peasant estate in 1890 (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 22–30), but Unterberger postponed their inclusion into subjecthood (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 36–38).

The third alternative was to make the Koreans part of the privileged Cossack estate and entrust them with guarding the borderlands. Dmitrii Gavrilovich Arsen'ev, the military governor of the Amur Region (1892–1897), voiced this idea in 1894, but the Korean population of Blagoslovennoe protested through their elected representatives Stepan Nikit'evich Nikit'ev-Tskhai and Nikolai Il'ich Pan and appealed for inclusion in the peasant estate with land allotment. Sergei Mikhailovich Dukhovskii, who succeeded Korf as the Priamur governor general (1893–1898), complied with the request and ordered the acceptance of the first large group of Koreans into Russian subjecthood (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 128–129 rev.).

Dukhovskii also ordered to make the Koreans of the first category (11,311 of the total 18,400 Korean population of the Priamur territory in 1895) living in the Posyet and Suyfun areas Russian subjects with full rights and obligations from 1 January 1896, and promised to do the same for those of the second category (2400) who led a settled lifestyle and had good recommendations from local authorities. In 1895, 3196 Koreans became Russian subjects. Another 4339 followed in 1896. Unterberger postponed further acceptance, as local officials "had to attend to other more urgent matters" (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 94, l. 144–145 rev.).

Dukhovskii also ordered his subordinates to intensify the assimilation efforts making the Koreans "loyal, grateful, and useful sons of Russia, which gave them refuge" (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:106–107). The inclusion of Koreans into Russian subjecthood in 1894–1895 did not mean that the Russification project succeeded. Peasant self-government, which required only a handful of Koreans to speak Russian in order to provide mediation, self-organized schooling in the native language, and the unregistered Korean migrants who frequently worked as farm hands made the Koreans culturally distinct from other Russian subjects (Nam 2001). Despite legal equality, unequal land use and preferential treatment of Russians who were granted the lands cultivated by Koreans made the Koreans' plight like that of many other non-Russians in the empire (Dameshek et al. 2007). They were often subject to racial discrimination and segregation together with the Chinese (RGIA DV, 919, op. 1, d. 22, 32–62).

Subjects and immigrants, 1895–1917

The acceptance of the first large group of Koreans into Russian subjecthood was accompanied by changes in the political status of the Kingdom of Joseon and the increasing importance of the Japanese Empire. The defeat of the Qing Empire in 1894–1895 vindicated the Japanese government's modernizing efforts. Although the Triple Intervention (1895) challenged its imperial ambitions, transferring the Liaodong Peninsula to Russia in 1898, the Japanese government did not abandon its plan to take over Korea (Dudden 2005).

Korea itself became an arena of two competing discourses, racial (Confucian) and nationalist. Some intellectuals claimed that the Confucian countries (Korea, the Qing Empire, and Japan) had to unite against the Western barbarians. Others claimed that an alliance with Japan would undermine the country's independence. Despite widespread anti-Japanese sentiments, which grew stronger thanks to the Donghak Peasant Movement (1893–1895) and the murder of Queen Myeongseong (1895), Japan remained an important catalyst for political discussions in Korea. Its international effectiveness promoted

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Meiji-style reforms, but the Independence Club, which designed Korea's transition to a constitutional monarchy in 1896–1898, was disbanded by Gojong. Although the proclamation of the Great Korean Empire in 1897 made Korea only a nominally equal participant in regional relations, the attempts to depart from the Sino-centric world bolstered Korean nationalism or *minjok* (Robinson 2007, 23–29; Tikhonov 2012).

The new name of Korea did not hamper Russian and Japanese attempts to bring it under their control, though the competition between the two was mitigated by a series of agreements in 1896 and 1898. The Russian Empire acknowledged Japanese interests in Korea (and halted the incorporation of Koreans into Russian subjecthood) in exchange for Japan's recognition of Russian interests in Manchuria in view of the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, but Russia did not abandon its ambitions entirely. The situation changed after the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902) and formulation of a new Japanese policy toward Korea, which demanded that Russia recognize its predominance there (Pestushko 2014).

Despite the continuous growth of the Korean population in the Priamur General Governorship, which in 1901 officially was 32,298 (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:6), the resettlement of some ethnic Korean subjects from Russia back in Korea was portrayed as a sign of their political "unreliability." Racial discourse of the "yellow peril" (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 5, d. 1354, l. 73–73 rev.) accompanied the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, especially during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901). The railway was supposed to become the main instrument of Russification of North Asia, stop the "Buriatization" and "Iakutization" of the Russian settlers, and herald the great movement of the Russian people eastward. Sergei Iul'evich Witte, the finance minister and an architect of Russia's Asian policy, viewed the construction of the railway as part of the European civilizing mission (Hsu 2006).

The Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) not only obstructed the mission but also brought new groups of Koreans to Siberia. According to Lee In-seop (Li In Seb), a Korean partisan, around 1000 Koreans were taken prisoner during the Russian retreat from Manchuria as the command mistook them for Japanese. The Japanese occupation of Korea in 1905 resulted in massive political emigration, which intensified after the annexation of Korea in 1910 (RGIA DV, 919, op. 1, d. 22, 32–62). The Japanese government launched a massive settlement campaign. Together with political repressions, the arrival of Japanese settlers made many Koreans again seek refuge in the Russian Empire. The Japanese Empire did not oppose and even sponsored Korean emigration, since it promised potential claims for the new territories populated by Asian peoples in view of the emerging pan-Asianism (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:7; Dudden 2005).

The Russian authorities met the new wave of Korean immigrants with great caution. They did not employ Chinese and Korean workers during the construction of the Amur Railway. Unterberger urged "energetic measures against the influx" of Koreans to Russia that threatened a "certain danger to the rightful way and development of the society's life" (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 1, d. 6104, l. 7–8 rev.), but attempts to limit Korean immigration failed. In 1910, the Maritime Region alone officially hosted 51,454 Koreans, of whom only 14,799 were Russian subjects (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:11).

The Russian government's concerns about the unity of the Japanese and Koreans were discredited by the growing anti-Japanese activities of Korean insurgents, who started forming guerilla bands in the South Ussuri area. By the summer of 1908 more than 1000 fighters had crossed the Russian–Korean border. These detachments planned to join forces with the anti-Japanese Righteous Army and start a full-scale uprising in Korea. Korean immigrants formed organizations to attract funding and other support from the Koreans of the Russian Empire. Petr Semenovich Tsoi, who resettled in Russia at the

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age of nine, and the political immigrant Lee Bum-young (Li Bomiun) became the leaders of the Korean insurgents (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:9–10).

Russian officials split on the question of the Korean insurgents and political immigrants. On the one hand, they obviously opposed the Japanese government. On the other hand, the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907 made them suspicious of underground political activity, which in the case of the Koreans also involved execution of "Japanese spies." Border Commissar Evgenii Timofeevich Smirnov nevertheless suggested turning "a blind eye to" to the Korean insurgents in 1908, since the Japanese were "no friends of Russia" (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 3, d. 1160, l. 2–5). Although Smirnov feared the situation could lead to complications with Japan, he remained in contact with Lee Bum-young and other political leaders and suggested providing the Korean insurgents with asylum and medical help (RGIA DV, f. 1, op. 3, d. 1160, l. 105–106 rev.; RGIA DV, f. 1, op. 3, d. 1160, l. 174–174 rev.).

The Korean insurgency was by no means coherent and in 1908–1909 it came to a major split between Lee Bum-young and Tsoi. A further blow came with the order from the head of the Russian government, Petr Arkad'evich Stolypin, to take drastic measures against the anti-Japanese movement in 1908. Nikolai Li, whose detachment sponsored by Tsoi became the reason for the split, was to be extradited to Japan. Lee Bum-young (Korean subject) and Tsoi (Russian subject) were to be exiled to Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk, respectively (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 3, d. 1160, l. 222–224).

But no drastic measures followed. In view of the repressive Japanese policies in Korea (Dudden 2005), Russian War Minister Vladimir Aleksandrovich Sukhomlinov advised Stolypin to use Korea "in the interest of state defense," which inter alia involved support for the Koreans in the Russian Far East, formation of a legal Korean national society, and sponsorship of educational and missionary activities in Korean. Although Unterberger did not openly oppose the initiative, he cautioned against creating a national society due to the failed assimilation efforts and reiterated the "yellow peril" argument. He also claimed that political immigrants formed a new group of Koreans in the Russian Far East different from the earlier Korean settlers. The immigrants wanted to bring all Koreans "into a single whole," while agricultural settlers were more interested in their own economic well-being (RGIA DV f. 702, op. 1, d. 676, l. 1–4 rev.).

The two groups differed in their attitudes toward the Russian Far East. For the Korean political immigrants and insurgents, it was a temporary base of operations before Korea was liberated, but for many settlers who had lived there for decades it was their new homeland. But there was no clear division between the two groups in the process of building a Korean nation through education and publishing newspapers, magazines, and brochures in Korean, self-organization, and mutual assistance. In 1908, Korean intellectuals founded the Union of Korean People in Vladivostok under the presidency of Nikolai Petrovich Iugai (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 4, d. 2259, l. 284).

Stolypin's demand in 1908 to stop anti-Japanese agitation did not help his later efforts to make the Korean national movement an instrument of Russian Asian policy. The formation of the Korean National Association in San Francisco in 1909, which by the end of that year had 12 branches in the Maritime Region, provided the basis for alternative nation-building, featuring Protestantism and orientation to the USA. In 1910, the formation of the Military Organization uniting South Ussuri insurgents mitigated the split among different Korean factions. The same year a major meeting of some 2324 Koreans in Vladivostok adopted a resolution calling for the liberation of Korea (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:10). To counteract underground activities, the Russian government sanctioned the establishment of the legal Korean Labor Development Society under Tsoi in 1911. By 1914, it had 13 branches across the Maritime Region (Nam 2001).

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The protests of the Japanese government resulted in some measures taken against the political immigrants. Lee Bum-young was exiled to Irkutsk in late 1910 but was allowed to return to Vladivostok the next year. The anti-Japanese stance of many Koreans in the Russian Far East distinguished them from other East Asians in the eyes of many officials. To shore up the loyalty of the Korean population, the regional authorities welcomed the initiative of Korean villagers to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Korean settlement in 1914. The organizing committee planned to erect a monument to Alexander III, the tsar who gave refuge to the Koreans, in Posyet, issue scholarships, and build a boarding school for Korean children. The beginning of World War I, in which Russia and Japan were allies, prevented the celebrations from happening. Most of the Korean organizations involved in anti-Japanese agitation, including the Korean Labor Development Society, were shut down in 1914, although most of them continued underground activities (Nam 2001; Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:11–12).

World War I brought a new group of Koreans to the Russian Empire. In 1916, the government changed its approach to "yellow labor" and hired some 100,000 Chinese workers for railway construction. The Agriculture Ministry prepared a project of resettling some 200,000 Koreans and Chinese in European Russia (Lohr 2012). Many Koreans worked at the rear of the Russian army and in the Urals (RGIA DV, 919, op. 1, d. 22, l. 32–62).

Reverses in official policies toward Korean immigrants had far-reaching effects for Korean nation-building. Having outlawed the Labor Development Society, the government actually encouraged its radicalization and convergence with the Korean National Association. Koreans' opposition to becoming Russian subjects gained momentum, even among many who were already integrated into the Russian Empire, such as those who founded the Union of Korean People in 1908 (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 2, d. 2178, l. 14–16). The Korean National Association made the Russian Far East part of the transboundary network spanning across the USA (California and Illinois), Mexico, and Manchuria, and uniting its members through education, missionary activities, and business interests. At the same time, the Korean National Association did not enjoy a monopoly on imagining the Korean nation, as many Korean settlers who were better integrated into the Russian Empire were reported to gradually lose interest in the organization, whereas some Koreans also worked for the Japanese government (RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 5, d. 143, l. 98–114).

Socialists and nationalists, 1917–1926

The February Revolution of 1917 allowed for legalization of political activism. In March 1917, Luka Innokent'evich Kim, Kim Chi-bo, Nikolai Ivanovich Kim, and other Koreans living in Vladivostok pledged their allegiance to the new government in Petrograd. Progressive Russian intellectuals welcomed the Koreans as "citizens of Revived Russia" which became their "second fatherland" (RGIA DV f. 1, op. 11, d. 405, l. 24–25). The transformation of the Russian Empire involved appeals to the ideas of decentralization, autonomism, and federalization. Koreans participated in creating revolutionary and civil self-government bodies, public safety committees affiliated with the Russian Provisional Government, rural *zemstvo* assemblies and administrations introduced to Asian Russia in the summer of 1917, and soviets as bodies of class self-government (Von Hagen 2007).

National aspirations remained the main driving force behind self-organization immediately after the February Revolution. In 1917 the All-Russian Society of Koreans formed in Nikolsk-Ussuriiskii uniting Russian and foreign citizens. Moon Jang-bom (Mun Zhanbom) chaired its executive committee. The same year Nikolsk-Ussuriiskii hosted the first

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All-Russian Congress of Korean Civic Organizations, which, like many other organizations of Russian national minorities, discussed the representation of Koreans in the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, self-government, and schooling. Unlike most other minority associations, the congress featured many non-Russian citizens and exhibited a major split between proponents of different visions of Koreans' future in post-imperial Russia. Radical socialists left the congress, while the remaining delegates created the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Korean National Societies (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:15; Sablin and Korobeynikov 2016).

Koreans who were employed by imperial officials during World War I embraced radical ideas. Aleksandra Petrovna Kim, born to the family of a Korean interpreter in the Nikolsk-Ussuriiskii District (*uezd*), became one of the first Korean Marxists. Together with Lee In-seop (and according to him), she translated the program and charter of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party and the manifesto of the Communist Party into Korean (RGIA DV, 919, op. 1, d. 22, l. 3–31).

Hopes for peaceful imperial transformation vanished after the Bolsheviks took over Petrograd during the 1917 October Revolution, disbanded the All-Russian Constituent Assembly in early 1918, and started replacing alternative self-government bodies with soviets. A. P. Kim became one of the Bolshevik leaders in Khabarovsk, which from the spring of 1918 hosted the practically autonomous Far Eastern Council of People's Commissars (Dal'sovnarkom) under Aleksandr Mikhailovich Krasnoshchekov. In the spring of 1918, political immigrants formed the first Korean Socialist Party under the leadership of political immigrant Yi Dong-hwi (Li Donkhvi), Kim Gyu-myong (Kim Giumen), and others under the auspices of the Dal'sovnarkom in Khabarovsk (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:15).

Recalling the events of 1918, Krasnoshchekov stressed the role of the Dal'sovnarkom in recognizing "the hundreds of thousands of Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese" living in the region "as equal brothers" and eliminating "all racial differences" (GAKhK f. R-1121, op. 1, d. 1, l. 1–15 rev.). Most Korean politicians, however, remained cautious about the Bolsheviks. The second extraordinary All-Russian Korean National Congress, which was held in Nikolsk-Ussuriiskii, chaired by R. I. Kim, and included Yi Dong-hwi and Tsoi as honorary chairmen, resolved to observe "strict neutrality" in the interparty struggle in Russia in June 1918. Krasnoshchekov's speech at the congress and promises made to the Koreans did not change the prevailing opinion of the congress. The All-Russian Korean National Council resolved to recognize the Regionalist Government of Autonomous Siberia as the only rightful authority in Siberia before the convocation of the All-Siberian Regional Duma and the Siberian Constituent Assembly (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 2:11–13).

The Russian Civil War split the Koreans, like many other groups of the former empire. The Soviet government was overthrown in Asian Russia by the Allied Intervention and Russian anti-Bolsheviks. The Japanese Army occupied most of the Trans-Siberian Railway east of Baikal by the fall of 1918, while its Russian allies captured and executed many Far Eastern Bolsheviks, including A. P. Kim (RGIA DV, 919, op. 1, d. 22, l. 3–31). The Japanese intervention in the Russian Far East, which involved occupation of Posyet in late 1918 (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 2:14–17), brought the experiences of Koreans in Russia and Korea together, making many of them ally with the Bolsheviks. At the same time, it revived talk of the "yellow peril" among Russian politicians, including some Bolsheviks who complained that with so many Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese, the Russian Maritime Region looked like a foreign territory (GAKhK f. R-1121, op. 1, d. 1, l. 1–15 rev.).

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Despite the Bolsheviks' promises to ensure the right to national self-determination, many Korean politicians put their hopes on global liberalism and its proclaimed intentions to restructure the world order channeled by Woodrow Wilson (Manela 2007). In Korea, the March First Movement of 1919 responded to the ruthless oppression of the first colonial decade and appealed to the Paris Peace Conference. The Korean National Council in Nikolsk-Ussuriiskii published the Declaration of Independence of Korea on 17 March 1919, while Tsoi and Yi Dong-hwi were elected representatives of the Russian Koreans to the Paris Peace Conference (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:15; 2:20–29).

Although the demonstrations and riots that continued in Korea into the summer of 1919 met with international sympathy, including from Japanese liberal intellectuals (Hanneman 2007, 59, 71; Manela 2007, 210), they did not achieve Korean independence. Kim Kyu-sik of the newly formed Shanghai-based Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and other Korean politicians from China, the Russian Far East, and elsewhere managed to reach Paris, but their efforts to win international support for Korean self-determination claims failed despite some assistance from the Chinese government (Manela 2007, 205).

In 1920 the territories east of Baikal became part of the FER. Its creation involved several violent clashes involving Koreans and Japanese, such as the Nikolaevsk Incident of March–May 1920 and the Japanese attack on Russian socialist authorities on 4–5 April 1920 (RGIA DV f. R-919, op. 1, d. 22, l. 32–62). Together with the failure at the Paris Peace Conference, the violence in the Russian Far East made nationalist organizations turn to socialist ideas. In 1920 the Korean National Council published the second Declaration of Independence, which connected the anti-imperialist struggle of the Koreans to the global Communist agenda. Such an appeal was welcomed by the second Congress of the Comintern (Korean socialists were represented by Park Jin-sun [Pak Din-sun] there), which proclaimed the need to join forces with oppressed colonial nations. Korea was supposed to become a gateway for exporting revolution to Asia and beyond (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 2:342–348; Sablin 2016).

The spread of socialism among Koreans did not result in the creation of a unified party. In 1919 Nam Man-chun (Nam Man Chkhun, Pavel Nikiforovich Namm) created a new socialist organization in Irkutsk, the Korean Section of the Bolshevik organization there, which rivaled the Far Eastern group. Yi Dong-hwi's organization, which was re-institutionalized as the Korean Socialist Party in Shanghai in May 1919, laid the foundation for the Korean Communist Party, which cooperated with the Comintern in 1921. Despite the attempts to unite the party in 1922, the differences between the Irkutsk and Shanghai groups on the matter of relations with nationalist organizations made the Comintern disband the party in 1923. The united Communist Party of Korea was reestablished in 1925, but the Japanese police hampered its activities in 1925–1926 (Robinson 2007).

In the Provisional People's Assembly of the Far East, convened by the coalitional socialist government in Vladivostok in 1920, and the Constituent Assembly of the Far East, convened in Chita in 1921, Korean delegates joined peasant factions that cooperated with the Bolsheviks or the latter. Ilia Sergeevich Khvan, a deputy in both parliaments, was part of the constitutional commission on indigenous rights (RGIA DV f. R-4676, op. 1, d. 84, l. 7–7 rev.). The decisions of the commission were incorporated into the constitution of the FER, which recognized the Koreans as one of the republic's nations and granted them the right to cultural national autonomy (Osnovnoi Zakon 1921).

The idea of non-territorial cultural national autonomy was developed by the Austro-Marxists (Bauer 1907; Renner 2005) and introduced to Siberia and later the FER by the Jewish Labor Bund. According to the draft Law on the Autonomy of National Minorities Living in the FER, developed by the Mensheviks Karl Ianovich Luks and Ian Ianovich

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Petrovich, all citizens of the FER belonging to a particular nation were united into a countrywide Autonomous National Union. Citizens of other states could also join such non-territorial communities (RGIA DV f. R-1468, op. 1, d. 41, l. 49–51).

The Autonomous National Unions, which were subordinate to the Ministry of National Affairs, had the right to issue legislation for their members, represent respective nations, organize schooling in native languages, collect taxes from their members, and resolve other economic, cultural, and administrative issues. They were to be run by elected National Assemblies and National Councils. All citizens of the FER over 18 belonging to a particular nation with no voting restrictions could participate in the elections. Foreign citizens living in the FER had active voting rights. Self-government bodies gained the status of official institutions (RGIA DV f. R-1468, op. 1, d. 41, l. 49–51).

Defending the project in the spring of 1922, the Ministry of National Affairs pointed out that it included active voting rights for foreigners because national belonging did not depend on citizenship and was determined by self-determination, which was especially relevant for the Koreans. Non-territorial autonomy was based on the existing local bodies of self-government, the national councils in the case of the Koreans (RGIA DV f. R-1468, op. 1, d. 41, l. 52–52 rev.).

The Ministry of National Affairs got in touch with Korean communities and political organizations but never managed to have the bill passed. The Bolshevik Far Eastern Bureau (Dal'biuro) rejected it, suggesting two separate laws for the Koreans and Jews instead. Such bills were later rejected as well. The FER did not legalize the Korean National Council. The Dal'biuro declined its appeal on 23 November 1921, because of the organization's alliance with non-Bolshevik socialists and suggested registering only organizations of Korean workers (Nam 2001). On 10 July 1922, the Bolsheviks rejected the plan to legalize local Korean societies (GAKhK f. R-18, op. 1, d. 12, l. 15–15 rev.).

The issue was not resolved before the annexation of the FER to the RSFSR in November 1922. Cultural national autonomy did not fit the Bolshevik approach to national self-determination, which was supposed to take territorial forms (Stalin 1946). The Korean population remained one of the largest groups in the newly formed Far Eastern Region and therefore could potentially qualify for territorial autonomy. In 1923, there were 124,000 Koreans in the Maritime Province alone, of whom 33,765 were Soviet citizens (Troitskaia and Toropov 2004, 1:19).

The right to territorial autonomy was discussed by the Meeting of Korean Toiling Peasant Deputies of the Khabarovsk District in late 1923. On hearing a report on Soviet nationality policy, the delegates asked about the possibility of a Korean autonomous republic in the RSFSR. First, the reporting official explained that only those groups that made up two-thirds of the population of a particular territory had the right to an autonomous republic. After the delegates asked if such a republic would be established if the Koreans reached the needed population share in the Maritime Province, the official claimed that since most of the Koreans were Japanese subjects, creating such a republic could trigger Japanese claims for the whole Russian Far East (RGIA DV f. 2422, op. 1, d. 1487, l. 3–5).

Although the possibility for territorial autonomy was dismissed, the extraordinary regional government, the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee (Dal'revkom), followed the directives of the People's Commissariats for Foreign and Internal Affairs and resolved to introduce a simplified procedure for the naturalization of those Koreans who resettled in the Russian Far East before 1918. The new regulations included inter alia waiving the requirement to have a national passport, in most cases a Japanese one (RGIA DV f. 2422, op. 1, d. 1487, l. 57). The new regulations were also supposed to minimize the pressure on regional authorities, which in 1923–1924 received 18,497 appeals for Soviet citizenship

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from the Koreans, of which 12,783 were satisfied. Yet, 65,000 of some 170,000 Koreans living in the Russian Far East had no Soviet citizenship by 1926 (Vasil'chenko 2011, 134).

Despite the lack of provisions on non-territorial autonomy, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs approved a countrywide Korean organization, the Union of Koreans Living on the Territory of the USSR, in 1924. According to its charter, the union aspired to "protect the interests of its members, raise their cultural level, and organize mutual assistance." All Korean immigrants over the age of 18 could join, and 15 members could form a provincial branch. The Union of the Koreans had the rights to purchase and rent property and carry out transactions. Furthermore, it could issue certificates of national belonging that could serve as the basis for residence permits to be granted by Soviet authorities. Its competences in representing its members before administrative bodies of the USSR; opening evening and Sunday schools; establishing clubs, libraries, cooperatives, agricultural communes, orphanages, and medical stations; publishing magazines, newspapers, and brochures in Korean; and struggling for the moral well-being of its members (against drinking, opium consumption, and gambling) made it very close to the Korean National Union that was never established in the FER and hence a central body of a de facto Korean national cultural autonomy (RGIA DV f. 2422, op. 1, d. 1499, l. 2–4).

The organization was created on the basis of the Moscow Union of Korean Workers in 1922 but included people of different backgrounds. In 1925 the union encompassed 50 Korean organizations with a total membership of 9906. Officials refused, however, to open a branch in the Maritime Province (Fatgakhova 2002). The Koreans were institutionalized as a national group in the Far Eastern Region in a different way. The Dal'revkom featured a position of plenipotentiary for Korean Affairs, taken up by Nikolai Ivanovich Kim-Giriong, and the Korean Commission. In 1925 the Maritime Province had 32 Korean District Rural Soviets. This de facto autonomy went against the legislation of the RSFSR but was claimed to be proved by practice. The Korean Commission passed the resolution of the issue to higher authorities, appealing before the All-Russian Executive Committee to sanction the existence of special Korean soviets (RGIA DV f. 2422, op. 1, d. 1487, l. 80; RGIA DV f. 2422, op. 1, d. 1487, l. 110–111).

Representing Far Eastern Koreans, Kim-Giriong nevertheless supported the official policies directed at limiting Korean immigration to the Maritime Province, which again became relevant in view of the anticipated settlement from European Russia (RGIA DV f. 2422, op. 1, d. 1487, l. 112–120). Furthermore, he went against the Union of the Koreans when the organization attempted to absorb the Korean organizations in the Russian Far East. Its appeal to create a genuinely countrywide association of Soviet Koreans would practically mean establishing their autonomy, but it was not satisfied and the union was disbanded in 1926 (Fatgakhova 2002).

Together with the decision to ban Koreans from immigration to the USSR adopted on 5 January 1926 (Chernolutskaia 2011, 219), the dissolution of the organization marked a major shift in Soviet policy. The full incorporation of the Far Eastern Region into the legal space of the RSFSR in 1926 meant the end of the de facto Korean autonomy in the region and left them with no legal means to claim the Russian Far East their territorialized "second fatherland." The transnational role of the Koreans in spreading the revolution to Asia became less important with the adoption of the Socialism in One Country principle in 1924–1925.

Conclusion

In 1926, Soviet officials answered the main question of Korean nation-building in the Russian Far East, namely, if the region was a temporary refuge or a permanent fatherland.

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Despite the desire of many Korean settlers to remain in the Russian Far East, the government defined them as a foreign nation and refused to grant autonomy. This meant the exclusion of the Koreans from the constituents of the Soviet state, leaving them without the benefits of national autonomy, such as schooling, printing, and other activities in Korean. In 1937, some 175,000 Koreans were forcibly relocated to Central Asia.

After World War II, the Soviet government rediscovered the international importance of the Koreans, which led to the Korean War (1950–1953) and establishment of the North Korean state, which outlived the USSR. In the 1950s, the rehabilitation of Koreans allowed for their return to the Russian Far East, yet it did not become a center of large Korean settlement again. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the recognition of the right to cultural national autonomy allowed for establishing the Federal National Cultural Autonomy of the Russian Koreans.

Acknowledgements

The article was prepared within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), the International Research Project "Comparative Historical Studies of Empire and Nationalism," in 2016 and supported within the framework of a subsidy granted to the HSE by the Government of the Russian Federation for the implementation of the Global Competitiveness Program.

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https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1308347 Published online by Cambridge University Press