

Vladivostok and the migration of Korean people to the Russian Empire¹

Vadim S. Akulenko



'Plan of the City of Vladivostok' (1918) published by the Young Men's Christian Association, showing New Koreyskaya Slobodka (B) and Koreyskaya street. <https://tinyurl.com/oldvladivostok>

The first reliable mention of contact between Russian and Korean people dates back to as early as the 17th century. However, these contacts were episodic until the emergence of a land border between the Russian Empire and the Joseon Kingdom in the second half of the 19th century, following the accession of the Ussuri krai region to the Russian Empire under the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 and the Treaty of Peking in 1860. Soon after, Korean peasants began to move on a massive scale into Russian 'Primorye'. It is with these peasants that the formation of a large Korean diaspora in Russia began.

The beginning of this migration is considered to have started in the 1860s. Researchers have not arrived at a consensus regarding the specific date but according to the officially held point of view shared by many Koreanists both in Russia and abroad, the first Korean families appeared in the territory of the Russian Far East in 1863. As many as 13 families secretly escaped from Korea and settled in the basin of the river Tizinhe. Lack of land and natural disasters forced Korean peasants to move to Russia in several waves from the very moment that a common border with Russia was set up, and up until official diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1884. Vladivostok, which was founded in 1860 almost simultaneously with the beginning of the events described above, became one of the destinations of these migrations.

According to V.V. Grave (a Russian foreign affairs official), Korean people had begun to appear in small numbers in Vladivostok and Ussuri krai even before 1863. During the mass migration of Korean peasants in 1869-1870, Rear Admiral I.V. Furuhielm (Governor-General of the Primorskaya Oblast) gave the order that permitted Korean people to work as laborers in the building of a dock in Vladivostok, and for the Treasury to pay all of their transportation costs and other necessary expenses.

By 1876, a significant number of Korean people had settled down in Vladivostok and local authorities decided to resettle them from the center of the growing city to its suburbs. The Koreans chose the marshy area of Semyonovsky pokos as the site of their compact residence, part of which was called 'Koreyskaya slobodka' (Korean settlement). However, it was later decided to move all 'foreigners of the yellow race' out of the Vladivostok to the Kuperovskaya pad (valley). The plan for the creation of "Kitaysko-Koreyskaya slobodka" (Chinese-Korean settlement) near the Kuperovskaya pad (where Khabarovskaya and Amurskaya streets

are presently located) was approved in 1892 by the Governor-General of the Primorskaya Oblast P. F. Unterberger. Koreans followed the authorities' orders, while the Chinese did not. Soon afterwards, Korean-style houses appeared in the place known as 'Novaya Koreyskaya slobodka' (New Korean settlement or Shinhanchon).

In terms of the number of Korean people officially residing in Vladivostok, we know that the Korean population of Vladivostok totaled 420 in 1886 but increased to 457 by 1892.² During the First General Population Census of the Russian Empire in 1897 there were already 1,361 (1,032 men and 329 women) Korean residents in Vladivostok (the total population of which was 28,896), and this number increased to 3,215 (2,138 men and 1,079 women) by 1910. The number of Koreans increased significantly following the annexation of Korea by Japan; in 1911 it reached approximately 10,000 in Vladivostok alone. We can assume that this number remained more or less stable

until the deportation of the Korean people to Central Asia, since the Korean population in Vladivostok was 7,994 people (4,236 men and 3,758 women) according to the 1929 Population Census – among these Koreans, only 3,408 individuals were still living in Novaya Koreyskaya slobodka.⁶

The Koreans of the time tried not to mingle with other ethnic groups. Unlike the Chinese, Koreans preferred to marry within their own ethnic group, thereby preserving the purity of their race. And unlike the Chinese, Koreans were often accompanied by their families when moving to Vladivostok, even for temporary earnings. Therefore, as mentioned by F. F. Busse, it was impossible to expect the assimilation of Koreans by the Russian majority or even their partial 'russification'. In his letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs on 8 March 1908, Governor-General of Primorskaya Oblast P.F. Unterberger remarked that the Koreans, who had lived in the Ussuri krai for more than 40 years, with few exceptions, retained their

ethnicity to the fullest extent and remain "alien people" within the boundaries of Russia.

Unfortunately, the sad events of 1937 – the deportation of Korean people to Central Asia – interrupted the further development of the Korean community in Vladivostok. However, even after the deportation of almost every Korean from Vladivostok, the historical memories of their presence continue to exist amongst the indigenous inhabitants of Vladivostok, even to this day. Parts of Khabarovskaya Street and Amurskaya Street are still called 'Koreyka' and even 'Verhnaya Koreyka' and 'Nizhnaya Koreyka' are still distinguished.

Vadim S. Akulenko Assistant Professor, Department of Korean Studies (Research Fellow, Center for Korean Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, School of Regional and International Studies), Far Eastern Federal University akulenko.vs@dvfu.ru

Notes

- 1 This article is based on work that was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of the Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2015-OLU-2250003)
- 2 № 28. Справка о количестве корейцев и местах их проживания в Приморской области (Reference about the quantity of Koreans and places of their residents in Primorskaya Oblast.) // Корейцы на российском Дальнем Востоке (вт. пол. XIX – нач. XX вв.). Документы и материалы. Владивосток: Изд-во Дальневост. ун-та, 2001. С. 71.
- 3 Унтербергер П. Ф. Приморская область 1856-1898 гг. (Unterberger P.F. Primorskaya Oblast 1856-1898). СПб, 2011. С. 1.
- 4 Граве В. В. Китайцы, корейцы и японцы в Приамурье (Grave V.V. Chinese, Koreans and Japanese in Primorskaya Oblast) // Труды командированной по Высочайшему повелению Амурской экспедиции. Вып. XI. СПб, 1912. С. 417.
- 5 Авилова И.К. Участие корейцев в хозяйственной колонизации юга Дальнего Востока России во второй половине XIX-начале XX вв. (некоторые аспекты проблемы) (Avilova I.K. Korean participation in the economic colonization of Russian Far East in the second half of 19 – beginning of 20 cc.) // История российско-корейских отношений на Дальнем Востоке. Владивосток: Изд-во Дальневост. ун-та, 2001. С. 134.
- 6 Итоги переписи корейского населения Владивостокского округа в 1929 году (Korean population census in Vladivostok in 1929 results). Хабаровск; Владивосток, 1932. С. 78.



Korean outskirts of town near Vladivostok. Source: Turmov, G.P. 2005. Korea on post cards (one hundred years ago). Vladivostok: FESTU Publishing, p. 43.