

## **Adaptation problems of Korean youth in the USSR (1920-1930)**

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### **Introduction**

Russia is a unique multinational state populated by over 190 nations and ethnic groups, each possessing their own culture and history. The Koreans, who share a common history together with all the nations of Russia and actively participated in the state-building process at all historical phases of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, have experienced fundamental re-evaluation of the traditional concepts and practices.

Each turning period in the Russian history transformed their mentality and sense of national identity. Consequently, the Korean culture and language underwent transformation. With each transition period, their native language became less used in public places, and over time, it was spoken only with family and friends. Thus, the Koreans gradually became integrated into the Russian culture, and Russian language became the language of their communication.

At the forefront of the Korean mentality restructuring were young Koreans who actively participated in the socio-economic and Soviet construction. This article considers the adaptation problems of young Koreans in the Soviet Union in 1920-1930s.

### **The Status of Korean Youth in Korea**

Starting from the Joseon age, the Confucian system of values was dominating the traditional Korean society. This system of values was resting on five interrelations: father – teacher and son (filial piety is the most essential virtue); the ruler and the subject; husband and wife; the elder brother and the younger brother; a friend and a friend. Such system did not imply any equality between people. The entire society consisted of people who possessed an accurately defined social status and a social role prescribed to them. The Confucian canons state that

two absolutely equal people cannot exist in the society. Even the sovereign ruler was not the highest-ranking person in the state because he had to respect his father<sup>1</sup>. However, the sovereign ruler is the messenger of Heaven. The subjects of the ruler a priori lack the right to resist; they can only exercise piety and humility. Throughout the centuries, the relationships between people would be based on these concepts, which were perpetual and unshakeable, and no one could encroach upon them.

In 1921, the reports made by the representatives of the “Korean Federation of the Youth League” and representatives of Korean youth communist cells expressed the requirements to establish human equality in the Korean society. They spoke about granting the rights to women, about poor level of education in schools, and the struggle for independence of their motherland was put on the back burner.

The report notices that after finishing traditional Korean schools: “the youth came out from school solely with a firmly established knowledge of various traditions: veneration of the elders, kneeling down (literally) in front of the superiors, veneration of the deceased, blood feud, etc. It is clear that the Korean youth is not able to develop further with such knowledge, and, therefore, the entire Korea up to the end of the first half of the nineteenth century used to be a primitive country. The entire country – the leaders as well as the masses – have been living in ignorance”<sup>2</sup>.

The history of Korean youth, as the report points out, was tragic indeed. The young people in western countries and parts of Asia (Japan and China) had access to education and involvement in the world culture, material and spiritual progress. Up to the end of the first half of the nineteenth century, the Korean youth, middle class as well as proletariat, were in complete ignorance, “was petrifying in the clueless traditions of the country without any opportunity to acquire at least an

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<sup>1</sup> Kurbanov S.O. The Donghak Ideology and “[The Korean Type Democracy](#)” // Journal of the Center of Korean Language and Culture. Issue 12 / Editor-in-chief S.O. Kurbanov. St.-Petersburg, 2010. P. 217.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of Korean Delegation dd 12 December 1921. RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History). Fund -533, inventory 10, case 1880, page 7.

elementary knowledge”<sup>3</sup>. The reason for this was the lagging feudal Korea, its closedness to other countries.

In the late XIXth century, many new schools were opened by missionaries from Europe and the USA on the pretext of educating the Koreans and transferring them into the “true” belief. In the late XIXth-early XXth century, hundreds of young Koreans left Korea to study in the educational institutions of Japan, China, and America. Freeing themselves from the bondage of national traditionalism, “secular intellectual stagnation”, young Koreans longed for new knowledge and science.

“Many Korean students from proletarian families almost naked ran away to the neighboring countries – Japan, China, Russia”<sup>4</sup> to obtain the necessary education. Another important reason for immigration were the intrafamily relations, which were built up in accordance with Korean traditions. In line with them, everything was inherited by the eldest son, and the younger children had to survive on their own, with a rare exception that the eldest son would help his younger brothers and sisters. The Korean youth saw the need for fundamental changes in family relationships.

The revolutionary appeals proclaimed in Russia in 1917 had an extraordinary impact on young Koreans. They rushed into the young soviet republic to learn “socialism”, dreamt of freeing Korea from the Japanese, to build in their motherland a state that is based on the concept of equality and liberty.

### **Young Koreans in the USSR: Culture and Education**

The young Soviet republic proclaimed as the basic state-building concepts the equality of nations and peoples, liquidation of oppression, social fairness, satisfaction of the needs of the masses. At the same time, application of strict repressive measures was unavoidable with relevance to those who did not perceive

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Report of the United Korean Youth Organization. Page 13.

in a due manner the new social system, new order and the established regime of power.

In 1917–1922, there was a significant increase in the flow of Korean migrants to the Far East territory. The failed March 1st uprising in Korea in 1919 caused a new wave of mass escape of Koreans to Russia. In 1917, 52.3 thousand Koreans were recorded in the south agricultural area of Primorye, in 1923 there were already 91.6 thousand. Especially high was the increase of Korean population in Olginsky (99.3 %) and Posyetsky (97.7 %) districts of Vladivostok county and also in Nikolsk-Ussuriysk county (77.2 %). The average age of the immigrants was varying between 18 and 30 years<sup>5</sup>.

According to the census statistics, 9308 Korean households were registered in Primorye Governorate in 1917 and 18 407 households in 1922. In terms of quantity, the Korean population distribution dynamics, even though incomplete, can be described in the following way. Primorye Governorate accounted for 104 660 citizens of Korean nationality (27 197 were Russian subjects), where 93 696 people accounted for rural population, 10 964 – for urban population (workers and lower middle class). Many Koreans (up to 20 %) settled in a dispersed way, in separate farms (“khutor”).

The policy of the Soviet government regarding the Chinese and Korean citizens residing on Russian territory was expressed in the special letter of the People’s Commissariat of the RSFSR of Foreign Affairs dated 4 December 1918, which was signed by Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs L.M. Karakhan and Chief of the East Department of People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs A. Voznesensky. This appeal to all the Soviet power authorities, VCheka (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation and Sabotage) and local Cheka offices stated that most citizens of the countries at the East of Russia truly support the Soviet power to involve the Asian democracy in the common battle against imperialism. Therefore, all conditions

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<sup>5</sup> Ref.: Son Zh. Russian Koreans: the absolute power and rightlessness of an ethnic community: 1920 – 1930. M., 2013.

should be created for their residence on the Russian territory. The letter also highlighted the “need to be extremely cautious with the numerous citizens of Eastern countries”.

Thus, Koreans, especially young Koreans, received every support from the Soviet government. The Soviet Decrees on land, workers insurance, eight-hour working day, and equality of rights granted to all citizens, were applied also to Korean peasants and workers. This could not but motivate young Koreans to take active part in the battle for the establishment of the Soviet power in the Far East.

The Soviets defined their own priorities in the inter-ethnic relations: the bolshevist ideology was built on the class-related basis of international culture predominating the national culture. The main directions of social and economic development of the country (industrialization, collectivization, cultural revolution, etc.), which were proclaimed by the state in the 1920-1930s as the principal ones, forced the population out of the circle of their ethnic values into the circle of values related to the united category of the “Soviet people”.

In 1920-1930s, every public, political and cultural activity of the population was taken under control by the state party authorities. The public activity forms that were developed as national self-expression but were not initiated “from top” were considered unacceptable and were labelled as “nationalistic bourgeois”. A serious concern for the state power was uncontrolled consolidation of ethnic groups and spreading within these groups of the ideology that differed from the official one.

The main target set by the state leaders for building the new society and bringing up a “new Soviet person” was abolition of illiteracy including among national minorities. The archival documents from that period give evidence that a big activity was carried out to overcome the cultural backwardness of the small-numbered peoples living in the outskirts of the country.

At the head of the cultural and educational activity relevant to the Koreans of the Far East Region were local public education authorities and the Korean section of the governorate committees of AUCP(b) [All-Union Communist Party

(bolsheviks)]. To ensure successful control over the activity of Korean schools, in April 1923, the governorate commissioner in charge of the affairs of Korean schools in Primorye Governorate was assigned at the Governorate Board of Education, as well as county and district commissioners.

At the beginning of July 1923, there were 224 Korean schools with 12 822 students in Primorye Governorate, including 40 state schools (2334 students) and 184 national schools (10 488 students) that existed on the money provided by the parents<sup>6</sup>. Out of all Korean schools, only in four schools the teaching was in Russian. In the rest of the schools, the learning process was only in Korean (basically in the districts primarily populated by Koreans who were not Russian subjects) or in Korean with Russian taught as a separate school subject. However, by the mid-1920s it became clear that Korean school graduates did not meet a relevant demand in the Russian-speaking environment. Therefore, Russian language was introduced in the majority of schools<sup>7</sup>.

In 1924, the Primorye Province Committee of the RCP(b) [Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks)] determined the main directions of cultural activity with regard to Koreans: schooling, editorial activity, arrangement of clubs and opening a theater, political education, abolition of illiteracy, anti-religious propaganda. A target was set to make the Korean school fully state-owned (at that moment only 38% students were taught in state schools).

The arrangement of work in Korean schools was connected with big difficulties. There was a lack of schools, teachers, and textbooks. Nevertheless, the authorities and local Korean residents took all efforts to improve the education system. Ya. Gramanik, the chairman of the Far East Revolutionary Committee, pointed out the following in his report to the department of nationalities at the Presidium of VTsIK (All-Russian Central Executive Committee): “The academic year of 1924–1925 has been the first year of planned work devoted to abolition of illiteracy in the Far East. Despite the difficult conditions of working with national

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<sup>6</sup> Ref.: *Pak B.D.* Koreans in the Soviet Russia... C. 135– 36.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

minorities, yet there are improvements: 6 350 Koreans, 75 Chinese, 16 Tatars and 294 natives (250 Buryats and 44 Goldi and Gilyaks) have been taught to read and write»<sup>8</sup>.

In 1925–1926, the Far East Political and Educational Department planned to teach reading and writing to illiterate 8055 Koreans, 560 Chinese, 80 Tatars and 380 natives (Gilyaks, Oroqens, Goldi and Buryats), semiliterate 662 Koreans and 30 Buryats, in total 9767 people corresponding to 11 % of the overall number of illiterate and semiliterate people<sup>9</sup>.

For the purpose of teaching Korean students, in 1925–1926, 3000 copies of an ABC-book was published in the Korean language. For the next academic year, this ABC-book was revised to improve its contents, and 15 000 copies were published in Vladivostok. Concerning the semi-literate Koreans, compilation and publishing of a special reader book in Korean was under consideration for the next year<sup>10</sup>.

Documental evidence shows the aspiration of Koreans for education. This national trait of the Koreans made them special compared with other ethnic groups and made it possible to quickly arrange and set up the education process in two Korean training colleges and a teacher training institute.

The training was conducted at the Nikolsk-Ussuriysk Teacher Training College at the Korean department, and starting from 1927 at the Nikolsk-Ussuriysk Korean Teacher Training College. In 1930, a college was opened in Posyet, and in 1931 the Korean Teacher Training Institute was arranged in Vladivostok. In 1933–1934 academic year, 287 primary, 40 junior secondary and two full secondary Korean schools were functioning in Primorye and Ussuriysk regions, with the total of 26 698 students.

During the first five years, 420 teachers graduated from the Korean Teacher Training College in Nikolsk-Ussuriysk. While 8 Koreans were doing studies in

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<sup>8</sup> GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation). Fund 1235, inventory 120, case 61, page 2, 2reverse, 3, 3reverse–9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

higher educational institutions in 1924-1925 academic year, in 1935 Vladivostok Korean Teacher Training Institute gave diplomas to the first 17 Korean graduates. In 1936, there were 16 graduates, including 8 teachers of history and 8 teachers of physics and mathematics. In 1937, the teacher training institute already had 87 graduates, including 29 teachers of history, 42 teachers of physics and mathematics, 16 teachers of environmental studies.

The difficult political and economic conditions in the late 1920s – early 1930s in connection with collectivization, sabotage and peasant uprising caused by distortions in the national policy, lead to sharp inter-ethnic hatred and weakened the positions of the Soviets. Professional propaganda staff were required to support the Soviet power.

At that stage, the attention of the communist party was re-focused on the preparation of the party and soviet activity organizers. The transition to total control was ongoing.

Of particular attention is the fact that party purge was continuing at the beginning of 1930s, the first generation communists were expelled from the party. Those who took active part in the establishment of the Soviet power became unwelcome and were subject to repressive actions. Their place was taken by young people, who were fanatically devoted to the communist party and the Young Communist League.

On the territory of the Union of SSR, there were still to be found some population groups who did not accept the Soviets, did not accept the new paradigms of the ruling party. To combat them, a new young generation of “Soviet propagandists” was brought up at party schools. In the Far East, young Koreans were at the forefront, actively joining the rows of the Young Communist League and AUCP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)].

By 1934, 388 Koreans graduated from Soviet party schools. The graduates from these schools were sent to party cells of enterprises, agricultural and fishery collective farms (kolkhoz), to district party boards as propagandists, to machinery and tractor stations, to political departments of state farms (sovkhoz) and cultural



and educational institutions. All these actions contributed to the consolidation of party ideology at the local level.

During the research, the author of this article discovered that in the period from 1931 up to 1937, by the decisions of the Board of Regional Committee of AUCP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)], provincial-level Committees of AUCP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)] of Khabarovsky, Amursky, Ussuriysky, Zeysky, Kamchatsky, Nizhne-Amursky, Jewish and Sakhalin provinces, over 400 Koreans were assigned to the positions of the instructors at the province and district committees of the communist party<sup>11</sup>.

The graduates of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), 352 in number<sup>12</sup>, were distributed between various party and Soviet authorities. In the same period, 14 Koreans were assigned to the position of People's Court judges<sup>13</sup> and 4 – to the positions of prosecutors and deputy prosecutors<sup>14</sup> in the areas densely inhabited by Koreans, 80 – chairmen/presidents of rural councils (selsoviet) and collective farms (kolkhoz), 51 – managers of machinery and tractor stations, 49 – school principals, teachers and people in charge of cultural and educational activities. Indeed, Koreans were active participants in all activities of the Far East region. Practically all minutes of the meeting of the Board of Regional Committee of AUCP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)] contain evidence of assignment of the Koreans to the positions in all spheres of national state and Soviet building activity in the region (Ref. table).

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<sup>11</sup>Prepared [on the basis of](#) archive papers. RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History). Fund 17, inventory 21, case 5419–5431, case 5459–5471, case 5467–5486, case 5513–5528, case 3638–3668, case 5563–5565, case 5569–5572, case 5576–5588, case 5595–5604, case 1174–1207, case 5545–5553, case 5612–5628.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

**Koreans assigned to the positions of People's Court judges, People's Court prosecutors, assistant prosecutors, teachers, presidents of collective farms. 1935–1937**

Far East region districts (province-level committees of the communist party)	Instructors at province and district committees of the communist party	People's Court judges	Prosecutors, assistant prosecutors	School principals, officers in charge of cultural and education activities, teachers	Presidents of collective farms, district executive committees	Managers of machinery and tractor stations	Students of KUTV, propagandists
Primorsky	120	(c 1931) 5	(1931) 3	17	13	27	139
Khabarovsky	16			5	7	3	3
Amursky	11				5	2	4
Ussuriysky	129	6	1	16	34	14	200
Zeysky	2				1		
Kamchatsky	3					1	
Nizhne-Amursky	4	1		1		1	
Jewish	21			6	12	2	1
Sakhalin	18			2	8	1	3
Total	341	14	4	49	80	51	352

*Source:*

RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History). Fund 17, inventory 21, case 5419 – 5431, case 5459-5471, case 5467 – 5486, case 5513 – 5528, case 3638 -3668, case 5563 – 5565, case 5569 – 5572, case 5576 – 5588, case 5595-5604, case 1174-1207, case 5545-5553, case 5612-5628.

The table data give evidence that in the second half of the 1930s' decade, young Koreans acquired more influence over the political and public life of the Far East region, took relatively stable positions in the party system, state, industrial and educational segments.

Regarding the cultural development, it is remarkable that during this period (up to August 1937) the Korean language and Korean literature were undergoing a vivid process of flourishing and development. This is explained by the fact that in the colonial Korea, the Japanese language and Japanese culture were forcedly promoted. For the Koreans in the Soviet Far East, a possibility for artistic growth was given to the writers and poets of the new generation, such as Cho Ki-chon, Joung Soung Joung, Chae Joung, Kim Joon, Lee Giersu, Tae Changchun, Jeong Hwala, Kae Bonung.

The poets Tsoi Horim and Cho Myeong Hee were widely popular. Starting from 1934, Tsoi Horim was at the head of the Far Eastern Regional Union of Writers. Cho Myeong Hee is rightfully considered the pioneer of the literature of Soviet Koreans. In 1925, he was one of the active organizers of the proletarian art federation in Korea. In 1929, he escaped from the persecution of the Japanese government, he immigrated to the Soviet Union where he continued his literary activities.

In 1935, the first book of collected Korean literary works was published in Khabarovsk under the title "Nodongdjai Kohyang" ("The Motherland of Toilers"), in 139 pages. It contained the article by Vasily Kim "What Young Writers Learn From Maxim Gorky", poems by Tsoi Horim, Cho Dong-gyoo, O Song Muk, Anatoly Han, Chon Dong-hyok, Kim In Saeb, Tae Changchun, Kan Chureok, Jung Il Reong, Cho Myeong Hee and others, as well as songs and other pieces of work by Soviet Korean authors.

In September 1932, a portable Korean theater was created. It was intended to perform a mission of the agitator and propagandist of the "new life, new international society in the Far East" among its national audience. The theater lasted for a little more than six months, and because of unskilled management, it

was dismissed and restored again in July 1933. The chief theater director was Tsoi Keel Chong, the chief art director – Wan Il Choo. The stage company included 18 people – 15 actors and 3 actresses, among whom were 5 Komsomol (Young Communist League) members, 2 AUCP(b) members and one applicant to AUCP(b). The young enthusiasts, while performing in the new housing areas and collective farms (kolkhoz) of the Posyet district, during the 6 months of theater existence produced 18 presentations, among which 11 were free of charge<sup>15</sup>. It is notable that alongside the proletarian culture, the theater also developed the national dramatic art.

The sovietization of Koreans and building of new life could not but bring changes also to the music culture of the Koreans. Revolutionary marches and songs disintegrated the music environment. A famous singer of Korean national songs, Jong Soung Joung<sup>16</sup> stood for traditional performance of Korean melody, trying to maintain the national color. This approach was rejected by his avid opponent, the revolutionary poet Cho Meyong Hee<sup>17</sup>. He criticized the Korean traditional music, considering it backward-looking, incapable of being at the forefront of the ongoing progress. With increasing frequency, the song lyrics remained without change, but the melody became different. A popular singer, Lee Hamdock<sup>18</sup> was one of the chief adaptors of old Korean songs to the Soviet style, and these melodies are still living among the Russian Koreans today.

During this transition period, national Korean songs were sang by the older generation of Koreans with traditional melody. However, gradually they were forced out as anti-Soviet. During the process of Korean population assimilation in the Russian culture, the sovietization of the region, the melody and the rhythm of songs were changed. Soviet and Korean melodies mixed in the Korean songs, this was a bright evidence of connection of the two cultures.

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<sup>15</sup> Son Zh. Russian Koreans: the absolute power and rightlessness of an ethnic community: 1920 – 1930. Moscow, 2013. Pp. 223 – 235.

<sup>16</sup> *Kim Bo Hee*. Musical Activity of District Korean Community Centers in the Soviet Union. (소비에트 시대 고려인 소인예술단의 음악 활동. 김 보 희). Seoul, 2007. P. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. P. 45.

There is very little evidence regarding the activity of Korean artists in this period. The Far Eastern press informed that in May 1936 the first artist exhibition was held, which was also attended by Korean artists: Byong Wo Ryong, Lee Woonho and Grigory Kim <sup>19</sup>. Moreover, the “Song Bong” (“The Vanguard”) newspaper published notes in Korean on the contemporary artists— Alexander Beck, Kim Kee Suong and Pavel Chong <sup>20</sup>.

An important role during the process of building the new society belonged to the mass media. On 1 March 1923, a newspaper in the Korean language was founded in Vladivostok under the title “Song Bong” (“The Vanguard”), which was the Korean section authority at Primorye Governorate Board of RCP(b). The same year in May, publication of the “Sin Seng Hwal” (“the New Life”) magazine began, which previously was published in Korea under the same title but was banned by the Japanese authorities. The magazine published the current news about the inner life of Korea and notes about the national liberation movement. Apart from this, publications in Korean included “Moonhwa” (“The Culture”), the “Nodongja” (“The Worker”), “Nonong Sinbo” (“The Peasant Newspaper”), the “Tona Konsang Singmoong” (“The Easter Commune Journal”), etc.

The activity of all regional publishing houses was strictly censored by political editors. The staff of “Krailit” (Regional Literary Publishing House) prepared detailed overviews of the editions they were in charge of, focusing on the deviation of one article (piece of literary work) or another from the common party policy. The main tool of political education for the Koreans of the Far Eastern region was the “Song Bong” (“The Vanguard”) newspaper. Lee Yen Dyung, a “Krailit” employee, wrote in one of his overviews about what this newspaper should be: “...The newspaper should be a political body of the Regional Party Board, ... collective agitator, propagandist and organizer of Korean toilers of the region “<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> The Song Bong. 12 June 1936.

<sup>20</sup> The Song Bong. 2 April 1936.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The Soviets took all measures to get rid of traditional customs and practices among Koreans. National Korean festivals were used for political and anti-religious propaganda. All traditional Korean festivals were banned, only family-related ones remained, i.e., birth of a child, wedding, 60-year anniversary and funeral. Such state of affairs was characteristic of all national minorities in Russia.

Among the numerous archival documents, the following two decisions of the Bureau of Primorye Province Board of AUCP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)] attract attention: decision on the work of Korean Teacher Training Institute dated 15 December 1934<sup>22</sup> and decision on Korean and Chinese theater dated 25 September 1935.<sup>23</sup> Both documents state the special role and significance of the arrangement and Soviet leadership interest in further development of education and cultural centers in the Far Eastern region for Koreans.

Within the system of public education and cultural development of Korean toilers in the Far Eastern Region, the Far Eastern Korean Teacher Training Institute created in 1931 was at the leading place. The main purpose of creating the institute was “moulding of highly-qualified and cultural teaching staff armed with the basics of contemporary science and Marxist-Leninist theory for Korean secondary schools of the Far Eastern Region”<sup>24</sup>.

In the 1930s, it turned out that 95% of the teaching staff in Korean secondary schools had secondary or incomplete higher education. The task was set for the institute to ensure accelerated preparation of qualified teachers. The establishment of two Korean teacher training colleges in the far East and the Korean Teacher Training Institute in Vladivostok is the proof not only of the high intellectual level of Korean population, huge eagerness to study, but also of recognition by the state. These educational institutions were arranged and financed by the state. For example, the Bureau of the Far Eastern Province Board of AUCP(b), aiming at further development of Korean educational institutions, decided to give 500 thousand rubles for the construction of a dormitory for 480

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<sup>22</sup> RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History). Fund 17, inventory 21, case 3638, page 232.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Case 3640, page 170.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Case 3638, page 232.

students in 1935-1936 and purchase of the necessary equipment for rooms and laboratories<sup>25</sup>.

One of the important decisions made by the bureau was creation of in-house printing office, expansion of translation and publishing activities, arrangement of the translation of textbooks and study books into Korean.

The Korean national theater – the first theater in the Soviet Far East – acquired the status of all-Union significance. The decision on Korean theater reports that during the three years of its existence, the theater completed a significant work. The created plays reflected the life and battle of Korean toilers for the independence of Korea: “The Torch of Tien-Feng-Dong”, “The North-Eastern Highway”, “Tien Hakmock”, “Jung Hengdeng”. The following performances about life, about participation of Korean toilers in the construction of socialism in the Far Eastern region were put on stage: “The Key”, “The Land Boundary”, “Skipper Shae Sangsaebee”, etc. The popularity of Korean theater was high, the theater gave performances in 5 districts of the Far Eastern Region (attended by 47 500 people) only in 1934 and in the first six months of 1935 (24 000 people).

The Koreans were noted for special attitude to the military service. Over 15 thousand Koreans participated in the battle for liberation of the Far East from foreign invaders and for the establishment of the Soviet power, united into 49 partisan units, including 4 regiments under operational control of the 5<sup>th</sup> People’s Revolutionary Army. During these years, a nucleus of politically and militarily trained Korean internationalist revolutionists was formed.

Young Koreans were drafted into military service in the Red Army up till the autumn of 1937, where they fulfilled their military duty with dignity, reinforcing the defense capacity of the state, guarding the state border. During the conflict on the KVZhD (Chinese Eastern Railway), the deputy chief of staff of rifle regiment 278, captain Grigory Terentyevich Pak, was awarded with an Order of Wartime Red Banner. On 17 May 1937, the Executive Committee of the Far

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Eastern region, in line with the instruction of the presidium of the USSR Central Executive Committee (TsIK), handed over the orders of Red Star to six commanders and political education officers of the Special Red Banner Far Eastern Army for the success in military, political and technical skills. Among the awardees was commander of rifle company Kim Soon Gook<sup>26</sup>.

Young Koreans took active part in the establishment of Soviet power in the Far East, liberation of the region from foreign invaders. After the establishment of Soviet power, Korean communists and Komsomol members, together with the Russian communists and Komsomol members, contributed to the sovietization of the region (held key positions actually in all state authorities at the local level).

### **Political Repression of Young Koreans**

The dual policy of Soviet authorities practiced in the 1920–1930s also applied to Soviet Koreans. In other words, the so-called carrot and stick approach was used. On the one hand, there was tolerance to the life and activity of Koreans, providing them with all what was needed for labor and building. On the other hand – total control and suspicions of “Japanese espionage” were pursuing the Koreans throughout the entire period of Stalin regime.

Heavy losses of intellectual elite occurred during the mass-scale Stalinist purges. Practically all of the Korean intellectual class in the Far East became a victim of this repression. Out of the total number of Stalinist purge victims belonging to Korean nationality (6385) were higher and secondary school students – 292 (4.6 %); professors at higher educational institutions and higher technical qualification institutions, scientists, schoolteachers – 277 (4.3 %), the majority of whom were teachers of the Korean language; engineers and technicians – 140 (2.2 %); rural professionals (agriculturists, zootechnicians, etc.) – 24 (0.4 %); doctors and medium-grade medical personnel – 36 (0.6 %); people of art (actors, writers, artists, musicians) – 31 (0.5 %); religious workers – 5 people.

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<sup>26</sup> Tikhookeanskaja Zvezda [The Pacific Ocean Star] journal. 24 May 1935.



In terms of age, the data are as follows: 44 condemned people were under 18 years of age, 850 – between the ages of 18 and 25, 1910 – between the ages of 26 and 35, 3030 – between the ages of 36 and 60, 284 – over 60 years of age, and 267 with no data regarding the age.

Place of birth		Age	
Russia	1829	Under 18	44
Korea	3984	18 - 25	850
China	307	26 - 35	1910
Japan	29	36 - 60	3030
No data	236	Over 60	284
–	–	No data	267
Total	6385	Total	6385

*Source:* Prepared based on martyrology data: “Victims of Political Repression in the USSR among Koreans. 1934–1938”. Books 1–14; Lists of the Victims of Political Repression. [Online source]. Access: <http://www.memo.ru/memory/spiski.htm> 08.06.2009; Stalin’s Lists. [Online source]. Access: <http://stalin.memo.ru/images/intro.htm> 04.06.2009. (Selection made by the author)

Among the purged Koreans (6385), 1829 people were born in Russia, the rest came from various provinces of Korea (3984). Therefore, only 1/3 of Korean population was born in Russia, could more or less understand and speak Russian; the rest studied Russian as a foreign language. For the Koreans of the Far Eastern region, lack of knowledge of the Russian language remained the main problem during the sovietization of the region.

In total, 2804 Koreans under 35 years of age were politically repressed under the accusation of espionage in favor of Japan. Among the arrested people, there were students, teachers, scientists, engineers, doctors, people of art, etc. Currently, they have been rehabilitated based on the law of the Russian Federation adopted in 1991 on rehabilitation of the victims of political repressions.

## **Conclusion**

In the 1920–1930s, the adaptation of young Koreans into the Soviet society, which was new for all people of the Union of the SSR, was proceeding easier than for the older generation of Koreans. The Korean youth fully and completely

confided in the Soviets, being fully aware that the Soviet Union was their motherland. The young people were at the forefront of the Soviet society building process in the Far East, among which there were foremost workers, Stakhanovism movement winners, who were the awardees of high distinction governmental awards.

This was opposed by the older generation that still remembered the deeds of arms in the battle against the Japanese and that have not given up hope for fast liberation of Korea from Japanese colonialism. The conditions of life and work in Korea continued to be under the heel of Japanese imperialists. The Koreans on their own land remained rightless, hungry, deprived appendages of the society.

In the Soviet Union, young Koreans were provided with conditions for receiving an education and a profession. The Korean youth had an opportunity to obtain free education, job, and career growth. The high adaptability of young Koreans allowed the increase of communication activity, free manifestation of talents and capacities in the economic and cultural segments.

The inner world of young Koreans was formed under the impact of two national cultures, the Russian and the Korean, in constant communication and interconnection with the cultures of other ethnic groups inhabiting the Russian Federation. The culture of Korean people has integrated as a separate element into this cultural garland of the multinational state.