

Article

# Korean and Chinese Settlers and Migrant Workers in the Soviet Far East (1920–1930)

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## Introduction

The enforced implementation of the slogan “The Advancement of Socialism on All Fronts” negatively affected the enactment of Soviet national policy aiming at the internationalization of peoples of the USSR. Internationalization was a combination of the Soviet cultural revolution and the indigenization drive. It must be noted that the cultural revolution in the USSR was aimed at complete destruction of old feudal rules, liberation of women from domestic violence, and universal education. This process was constructive in nature and was represented by a multitude of novel projects and experiments dedicated to a new socialist way of life and social engineering of the so-called *soviet man*.

The indigenization drive was one of the founding principles of the budding Soviet Union that proclaimed the equality of all nations and peoples and supposedly threw off the shackles of the so-called *Great Russian Chauvinism*.<sup>1</sup> This term was the cultural legacy of the Russian Empire where ethnic Russians had considerable social and economic advantages over the non-Russian populace of the Empire. The new Soviet republic did away with this principle, thereby inspiring hopes among the downtrodden national minorities both within the former Empire and abroad and attracting multiple followers from China and Korea. This human influx of new migrants in the Far East region of the USSR, particularly from Korea, had inevitably disrupted the existing national patterns of settlements and provoked nationalistic sentiments among ethnic Slavic settlers arriving from the Western regions of the USSR, sent by the government with the purpose of strengthening the military-economic potential of the Far East.

The objective of this article is to trace the process of adaptation experienced by the eastern workers in the complex and challenging period of industrialisation

in the USSR on the example of the Far Eastern region. The fates of the Korean and Chinese workers in the 1930s USSR were closely intertwined, but with a different finale. Historically, Koreans started to settle on the territory of the Russian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Korea was occupied by the Empire of Japan, this fact precluded many Koreans from returning home, and they had to adjust to the Soviet environment with all its pros and cons. Many of them embraced the Communist ideology. On the contrary, Chinese work migrants were mostly interested in seasonal work and left the USSR when they wanted to. This research shows that the Soviet system was used by the Korean workers to their advantage. It allowed them to create compact ethnic communities in the form of *kolkhozes*, thereby preserving culture and language. This social grouping also allowed for more protection against the manifestations of local nationalism under the umbrella of the Soviet state. Finally, Korean migrants engaged in farming where they excelled, and their achievements were noted by the Soviet state on many occasions.

This article elucidates the origins of nationalism in the Russian/Soviet Far East against the background of inter-ethnic conflicts involving Slavic settlers from Russia and Ukraine and migrants from China and Korea. It also fills the paucity in the research on the plight of Korean migrants in the USSR in the 1920s. The article relies on the extensive use of previously unexplored archival primary sources in the form of documents and directives generated by Soviet state authorities aimed at reducing and countering nationalism on the territory of the Far East region. In addition, this article examines the stick-and-carrot governance techniques. On the one hand, the Party introduced an advanced social lift within the *Bolshevik/Communist party*<sup>2</sup> leadership of the Far Eastern region for ethnic Koreans with the aim of promoting communism among local Koreans in the region, assisting in overcoming the language barrier to improve communication with the local Russian population and combating Slavic nationalism. On the other hand, the Central Committee also quickly generated a set of punitive measures to tackle the problem, including public show trials and exclusion from the Party for any display of nationalism. In practice, however, these punitive measures were seldom applied. In the regions, such cases were either ignored by local authorities or presented as “hoologinism”

<sup>1</sup> Lenin used the term *chauvinism* to describe an ideology of the “dominant exploiting classes of the nation, holding a dominant (sovereign) position in the state, declaring their nation as the ‘superior nation.’” *Great Power Chauvinism* was the term introduced at the dawn of twentieth century and widely used in the socialist/communist and liberal literature to elucidate the dominant attitude of the Russian state and ethnic Russians toward other nations and ethnicities of Imperial Russia, and later the USSR. The Bolsheviks regularly used the derivative of this term, *Great Russian Chauvinism*, as an ideological cliché with a clear-cut negative connotation that was in opposition to the term internationalization. The term lost its importance toward the end of the 1930’s when the patriotic dimension in Soviet state ideology prevailed and the Russian nation was hailed as the main constituent people in the USSR. Instead of *chauvinism*, the author uses a more contemporaneous term nationalism.

<sup>2</sup> The Bolshevik Party was the original name of the organization, later transformed into the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union).

(Zaleskaya and Aktamov 2017, 135). Byung-Yool Ban (2008, 178) also points at the deliberate ambivalence of local Party cadres who “did not follow the policy of indigenisation adopted by the Bolsheviks.”

This indirect form of sabotage was also the consequence of the implemented top-to-bottom resettlement policy. In the 1920s, Soviet central authorities were weak and lacked the outreach to effectively control the national and other peripheries. Local and regional policies were often manifested in strict accordance with the earlier proclaimed principles of national sovereignty and independence. However, this “euphoria” did not last long. Moscow finished toying with sovereignty the moment it could. Stalin saw any deviation from the course set by the Kremlin as “national-deviation contrary to proletarian internationalism” (Chebotareva 2008, 265).

The study of nationalism and chauvinism among Soviet Eastern peoples is conducted based on the principle of historicism as part of the systemic approach. This allows for depicting and analyzing the multi-ethnic relations within the Far Eastern Soviet societal microcosm at different stages of its evolution throughout the 1920s. The use of the systemic approach resulted in structural and functional analyses, elucidating the dynamics of the development of inter-ethnic relations in the Soviet Far East and providing an informed judgment on the failures in the implementation of state nationalities and resettlement policies in this peripheral region of the Soviet Union. The author concludes that the programs and policies launched by Soviet authorities in the Far East were poorly conceived and implemented, causing the intensification of local chauvinism rather than combating it. As a result, ethnic Koreans in the USSR experienced the double-burden of both local chauvinism and state oppression. Joining the local *kolhoz* organizations was the only way to provide means of survival and obtain state protection from local chauvinism. Unlike Koreans, Chinese sabotaged joining *kolhoz*. During the Great Terror of 1937–1938, Soviet Koreans were repressed *en masse*, whereas the Chinese left the country at the behest of the Chinese government.

## Literature Review

The author of the book *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923–1939*, Terry Martin (2011), points at the positive

sides of Bolsheviks’ national policies. According to Martin, the USSR was neither a federation nor a mono-ethnic state. The originality of soviet policy was in the fact that for the first time in world’s history, the USSR supported national minorities’ cultures, languages, elites, and territories to a far greater extent than what it did for its ethnic Russian national majority. The Bolsheviks attempted to combine nationalist and socialist agendas in an economically and politically unified entity. Martin (2011, 220) introduces a new term to describe this entity, “the empire of affirmative action.” He singles out three cultural revolution campaigns that affected the indigenization drive in the USSR: the campaign against *Great Power Chauvinism*, universal education campaign, and the indigenization propaganda campaign along eastern national territories.

Towards the end of the 1930s, there was a marked aggravation of the inter-ethnic tension and conflicts across the country. As a rule, ethnic Slavs initiated inter-ethnic conflicts using force.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the causes for conflicts were rooted in simple facts, such as the living quarters arrangements for ethnic Russian and non-Russian workers.<sup>4</sup> The latter were definitely worse off than ethnic Russians. Often, the workers of non-Russian nationalities slept on bare ground next to gigantic Soviet construction sites.<sup>5</sup> They were paid less than ethnic Russian workers for the same job routine because they did not speak Russian.<sup>6</sup> Non-Russian ethnicities were also discriminated against when it came to the distribution of social welfare.<sup>7</sup> To combat these negative social phenomena, the government launched the campaign against *Great Russian Chauvinism* aimed at eradication of inequality among peoples of various nationalities (Martin 2011). This campaign reached its peak in 1931–1932 and continued in its abated form till 1934 before its complete cessation.

3 See for example journal: *Revolyutsiya i natsional'nosti* [Revolution and Nationalities]. 1930. No. 2: 910; No. 7: 102–03; No. 8/9: 25–34; 1931. No. 2/3: 76–81; 129–31; No. 8: 18–25; No. 9: 86–91, 151–56; 1932. No. 3: 19–22; 1933. No. 3: 92–96; 1934. No. 1: 80–86; *Prosveshcheniye natsional'nostey* [Enlightenment of Nationalities]. 1930. No. 4/5: 45–49; *Sovetskaya yustitsiya* [Soviet Justice]. 1929. No. 4: 83–85; 1931. No. 2: 29–31; 1931. No. 19: 16–19; 1932. No. 3: 34–35; 1932. No. 11: 8–10; 1933. No. 9: 18; 1934. No. 5: 10–11; 1934. No. 16: 13; 1934. No. 22: 8–9; Martin 2011, 221.

4 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoy istorii, RGASPI) (1930), f. 17, finding aid 113, case 336, list 46, protokol 149; case 725, list 1, protocol 117.

5 State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) (1930), f. 1235, finding aid 141, case 1565, list 24–28.

6 Ibid, case 2278, list 5; Martin 2011, 221.

7 RGASPI, f. 62, finding aid 2, case 2245, list 62; Martin 2011, 221.

In addition to natural migration of ethnic Chinese and Koreans that unfolded throughout the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the USSR accelerated this process by bringing additional workers to the Soviet Far East to bolster its industrialization and *collectivisation* drives. Owing to rapid industrialization, nearly all Soviet industries were experiencing acute labor shortages. At the end of the 1920s, Soviet state authorities decided to bring two thousand Koreans and Chinese to develop the gold-mining industry in the Far East (Zalesskaya and Aktamov 2017). Soviet Far Eastern industrial enterprises were not an exception to the malady of labor-shortages. For instance, Dal'les and Dal'ugol<sup>8</sup> launched petitions for permission to import workers from China and Korea for 4,000 and 1,500 workers, respectively. Only Dal'ugol received official permission to recruit workers in China for 300 people.

Faced with chronic labor-shortages, Soviet industrial managers embarked on their own recruitment drives. There were three ways of recruiting workers in China and Korea, i.e., legal, semi-legal, and illegal. The legal approach was the least desirable as it severely restricted the quotas of how many workers could be imported, so local industrial managers preferred the semi-illegal way. In October 1930, the head of the Far Eastern regional department of labor emphasized that “all eastern workers cross the border illegally. Only the Chinese recruiters have legal permits” (Zalesskaya and Aktamov 2017, 131). As a rule, workers from China and Korea belonged to low socio-economic backgrounds and many were illiterate, which impeded educational and social initiatives undertaken by the state. The adaptation to soviet realities was slow and painful, greatly complicating the process of inter-civilizational communication. The very process of recruiting was ripe with violations of migration laws and triggered the growth of corruption in the industry. There was also a problem of nationalistic sentiments expressed by the local Russian population, which often attacked the Chinese workers. Taking into account the overall deficit of workers across the USSR, these developments negatively affected Soviet industrial growth (Zalesskaya and Aktamov 2017, 134; 137).

Nikolai Bugai (2016) develops a theme of Soviet policy of double standards towards migrants from Korea and China. He points at the uneasy relationship between Asian migrants and Russian and Ukrainian nationals who

were arriving from the European part of the country as a part of the Soviet economic drive. The author explains inter-ethnic conflicts by the existing differences in mentalities and cultures (Bugay 2016). Vladimir Datsyshen (2009) researches the problems that Asian migrants encountered in the Russian Empire and the USSR from the perspective of inter-state relations and emphasizes the important role those migrants played in the economic development of the Far East.

South Korea's historiography has a mixed attitude toward the policy of collectivisation in the USSR in the late 1920s and early 1930s. On the one hand, some researchers believe that Koreans were forced into the *kolhoz* organizations against their will and that local Soviet authorities often did not support the collectivized Koreans. Byung-Yool Ban argues that this attitude was rooted in local nationalism and national discrimination, which was implemented by ethnic Russian members of the local Party, Soviet, and other authorities. He concludes that cultural and political manifestations of Russian nationalism was the main challenge encountered by Korean peasants. Ban focuses only on the Suchansky district of the Primorye region in his research. However, the problems identified by the author were typical for the entirety of the USSR (Ban 2008).

On the other hand, there are research articles dedicated to the process of adaptation of Koreans to the *kolhoz* system across the USSR and the subsequent evolution of the identity of Goryeo people (Kim 2021a, 2021b). Such authors as Chai-Mun Lee (2016), Young-Sang Yim (2007), and Young-Sarm Hwang (2007) emphasize the formation of the identity of Goryeo people in this period and the positive impact of the Korean *kolhoz* building in multinational enclaves. Jon K. Chang (2016) argues that the Soviet state exhibited the so-called “Tsarist continuities,” including nationalism, in its attitude to Koreans and other non-Russian nationalities in the USSR. At the same time, the young communist regime “exerted a tremendous socio-political influence on the Korean community,” carefully grooming a host of ethnic Korean cadres who eventually became the agents of Soviet influence. Finally, the author examines a positive impact that Koreans made on Soviet life in the Far East and Central Asia (Chang 2016). In fact, according to Haruki Wada (1987), Koreans in the Far East became so well-educated and politically motivated that they self-organized and produced a set of political demands, supporting the creation of a Korean National Autonomy in the region.

<sup>8</sup> Dal'les was the Far Eastern Forest Industry, and Dal'ugol was the Far Eastern Coal Industry

## Soviet State Policy in Relation Toward National Minorities

The ethno-political situation in the Soviet Far East was complicated and fragile. The ongoing First World War, the events of the February and October 1917 Revolutions, the outbreak of the Civil War (1918–1922), and foreign intervention (1918–1925) destabilized the region. Mass migrations, common for the entire country during that period, were spontaneous in nature and almost unaccountable in the Far East.

In 1917, the Revolution fundamentally changed the political and socio-economic life of the multinational Russian Empire. The principles of “destruction of classes and complete equality of all citizens regardless of gender, religion, race, and nationality” as well as “the right for self-determination for all nations of member states”<sup>9</sup> were recognized as fundamental by the newly established Soviet state. The solution to the nationalities question was directly dependent on the successes in building socialism. It was believed that national contradictions and differences would be overcome after a successful transition to socialism and elimination of class differences had occurred. However, the events unfolding after the Revolution shattered the somewhat naive hopes that the nascent regime had entertained in regard to the arising problems of nationalism across the remnants of the former Russian Empire.

It is also instructive to remember that the roots of future inter-ethnic hostilities date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the data of the first All-Russian census held in 1897, the Primorye region had 94,864 citizens: 55,220 (58.2%) spoke Russian as their native language and 31,962 (33.7%) spoke Ukrainian. There were 11,462 ethnic Chinese, Korean, and Japanese citizens of the Empire living in the region, but they were not included in the census (Son 2013). These peoples represented the latest wave of migration into the Russian Far East. The rudimentary efforts on behalf of the Russian state to assimilate

these populace were largely ineffective. Thus, the migration inflows of the 1920s only exacerbated the already volatile inter-ethnic situation.

Many citizens of the former Russian Empire tried to cross the land border to neighboring Manchuria or by sea to other countries fleeing the Bolsheviks. In Primorye, refugees settled mainly in urban areas of Vladivostok, Nikolsk-Ussuriysk, and at railway stations. Eventually, this practice resulted in overcrowding. The situation in Vladivostok was the most difficult. In 1917, its population was recorded at 109,500 people. By 1919, the population had almost tripled. Because people arrived from different regions of the country, the ethnic composition of refugees was mixed, including the Balts, the Poles, the Tatars, the Bashkirs, and others. A large group of Russian migrants consisted of 25,000 former Russian prisoners of war from the First World War (Vashchuk, Chernolutsкая, and Koroleva 2002, 57).

In 1917–1922, the region’s ethnic composition drastically changed owing to the inflow of Koreans into the territory of the Far East. The failed March 1st uprising in 1919 resulted in a new mass flight of Koreans to Russia. In 1917, the number of Koreans registered in the rural areas of Southern Primorye was 52,300. By 1923, this number had increased to 91,600. A particularly significant increase of the Korean population was reported in Olginsky (99.3%) and Posietsky (97.7%) district of the Vladivostok region, as well as in the Nikolsk-Ussuriysk region (77.2%). The foreign immigrants also included Chinese nationals whose inflow eventually decreased owing to political cataclysms and economic disruptions in Russia (Chernolutsкая 2002, 58). Table 1 demonstrates changes among major ethnic groups in the Primorye region.

**Table 1.** Population Dynamics of Russians, Ukrainians, Koreans, and Chinese in the Primorye in 1926–1939

	1923		1926		1931		1939	
	People	%	People	%	People	%	People	%
Russians	163,067	31.0	209,740	36.7	330,000	40.7	676,866	74.6
Ukrainians	203,627	38	148,768	26.0	222,300	27.4	168,761	18.6
Koreans	101,938	19.4	145,511	25.5	159,100	19.6	-	-
Chinese	37,608	7.2	43,513	7.6	32,100	4.0	-	-
Others	19,580	3.7	24,499	4.2	67,400	8.3	61,178	6.8
Total	525,770	100	572,031	100	810,900	100	906,805	100

**source:** *Etnomigratsionnye protsessy v Primorye v 20 veke (Ethno-migrational Processes in Primorye in the 20<sup>th</sup> century)*, p. 71

<sup>9</sup> *Kommunisticheskaya partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza. Kommunisticheskaya partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza v postanovleniyakh i resheniyakh s'ezdov, konferentsiy i plenumov TSK (1898–1988 gg.)*/KPSS; Institut marksizma-leninizma pri TSK KPSS; Pod obshch. red. A. G. Yegorova, K. M. Bogolyubova. 1983–1990 [Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the Resolutions and Decisions of Congresses, Conferences and Plenums of the Central Committee (1898–1988) / CPSU; Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CPSU; Under total ed. A. G. Egorova, K. M. Bogolyubova. - 9<sup>th</sup> ed., additional and corrected. 1 t. M.: Institute of Marxism-Leninism. 62].



The Soviet Union's ill-conceived and poorly implemented state nationalities policy worsened the existing ethno-political crisis and exacerbated the contradictions between the well-to-do and the poor. Moreover, the ethnicized tensions also occurred between the wealthy peasants and their farm tenants if one of these groups was ethnically predominantly non-Russian or non-Slavic.

The forced processes of industrialization, *dekulakization* (*raskulachivanie*),<sup>10</sup> and forced *collectivization*<sup>11</sup> adversely affected inter-ethnic relations throughout the USSR. The Soviet offensive campaign against the well-to-do peasantry aggravated the existing racial strife patterns and triggered the manifestations of *great-power* (that is, Russian) *chauvinism* in villages with racially mixed populations (Chebotareva 2003; Markedonov 2005; Tishkov 2012).

In almost all regions of the Soviet Union, these changes brought about irreversible processes associated with ethnic discord and local (cultural) nationalism. In this situation, the Far Eastern Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks assigned the controlling functions to the party supervisory board. It was established as part of the regional committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks to improve the situation in the districts and national areas of the Far Eastern Territory. However, the state of anarchy and chaos in the relations between Moscow central government and remote areas thwarted and paralyzed state and regional activities aimed at national reconciliation. For instance, local authorities often failed to properly comply with the resolutions on the implementation of nationalities policies in terms of national minorities (Son 2013, 166–67; 185–89).

## Resettlement Policy in the Soviet Union

The ensuing economic devastation after the Civil War, famine, and chaos that engulfed the country forced people to leave their homes in search of a better life,

triggering spontaneous mass resettlements. In 1924, to regulate these migration flows, the country's leadership created the All-Union Migration Committee under the USSR Central Executive Committee.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the All-Union Migration Committee under the USSR Central Executive Committee, there was the Migration Department under the NKVD Main Camp Administration (GULAG). It was tasked with settling and creation of an agricultural base in the Baikal-Amur railway construction areas, as well as in other main construction sites of the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup>

The Russian Empire's discriminating policy of *unreliable* peoples continued in the USSR. Those nations and ethnic groups that lived in the borderlands—i.e., Poles, Finns, Turks, Germans, Chinese, and Koreans—were viewed as *unreliable* should any military hostilities arise between Russia and their countries of national origin. On the one hand, the authorities pursued a set of affirmative action national policies regarding Soviet national minorities and embarked on a campaign to battle nationalism. On the other hand, the minorities populating Soviet borderlands were subject to deportation and resettlement in the country's interior. Therefore, in the 1920s–1930s, the contradictions between Soviet domestic and foreign policies became more acute and pronounced.

The resettlement policy of the Soviet government was aimed not only at settling the regions for the purpose of their development, but also at purging the foreign nationals or stateless foreign migrants from the sensitive border areas. This was due to the concerns that these ethnic minorities may turn out to be unreliable in the case of war. In the Far East, the *Easterners* were considered unreliable. In this regard, the Chinese and the Koreans were offered to move inland away from the border areas. Not surprisingly, the majority of *Easterners* either refused or did not have the means to move. In addition, the proximity to their homelands often created an illusion of inseparability with their native countries. The resettlement of the Koreans inland was planned at the national level and was postponed every year due to the lack of funding.

The five-year resettlement plan (1928/1929–1932/1933), which was

10 *Dekulakization* was the process of gradual destruction of all capitalist elements in agriculture, marking the liquidation of Russia's rich peasants as a class. This process unfolded between 1925 and 1932.

11 *Collectivization* was the subsequent part of the *dekulakization* process, whereby single peasant households were united in state farms to increase productivity. This process continued between 1928 and 1937.

12 Russian State Archive of Economics (Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv ekonomiki, RGAE) (1924), f. 5675, finding aid 1, case 1.

13 On June 10, 1936, the USSR All-Union Migration Committee came under the jurisdiction of the USSR NKVD by the decision of the Soviet government. Consequently, the Migration Department of the USSR NKVD was formed and existed until 1939. The USSR Main Migration Board existed until 1953.

developed by the All-Union Migration Committee in relation to peoples to be resettled, stated that “the new task of the resettlement organizations was to carry out joint settlement activities in relation to displaced people of the same nationality and in the same areas according to the directives pertaining to the common principles of land use and management adopted by the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the USSR Central Executive Committee.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, it turned out that it was almost impossible to organize and remove masses of people into new and uninhabited places based on their ethno-national belonging. Due to severe economic crisis, widespread famine, a lack of housing, and uncultivated land, racial tensions rapidly aggravated between foreign immigrants and locals.

The policy of resettlement of the Soviet peoples became an integral part of the state nationalities policy in the 1920–1950s (Son 2013, 247). Planned resettlement did not yield the desired outcome, primarily due to the ill-conceived nationalities policy, which was created for relocating the poorest social groups. Most of the displaced people did not take root in the new places, labor reserves did not compensate for the costs, and the national economy did not gain the desired advantageous outcomes from the resettlement policy. On the contrary, the entire Soviet Union witnessed outbursts of rampant nationalism as a consequence of the resettlement policies.

The mass inflow of displaced Russians and immigrants into Primorye created conditions for the emergence of ethnic discord. The newly relocated Russians were irritated by the presence on the Russian territory of the *Yellow-race*<sup>15</sup> peoples who lived there for more than a decade, adapted to local climatic conditions and everyday life and were often fully engaged in the social and economic development of the region.

Ukrainians represented the second largest group. Their numbers rapidly increased in the Far East in the late 1920s. Displaced Ukrainians encountered the same set of challenges associated with living arrangements at the new location, harsh climatic conditions, low level of education, and economic hardships. Eventually, these problems started to manifest in hostility towards foreigners from neighboring countries (i.e., China and Korea). For instance, Ukrainians wrote complaints to the Far Eastern Regional Committee of the

AUCPB about the lack of housing and schools. From their standpoint, the *Easterners*<sup>16</sup> had their own ethnic schools and better living conditions compared with the Ukrainians.<sup>17</sup>

In the report on the work among the Korean population of the Far Eastern Territory between October 1, 1926 and October 1, 1927, which was prepared by the Commissioner for National Minorities under the Presidium of the Far Eastern Territory Executive Committee Kim Giriong (Kim Guil-Len), it is stated that according to the 1926 census, the population in the Far Eastern Territory was 1,881,351 people; of those: Russians – 1,174,915, Ukrainians – 315,203, Koreans – 162,366, Chinese – 80,157, Belarusians – 41,124, Poles – 8,163, Tatars – 6,073, Buryats – 8,646, Jews – 7,733, Moldovans – 3,732, Germans – 2,452, Latvians – 2,514, Lithuanians – 1,066, Yakuts – 1,224, Mordvins – 2,712, Gypsies – 894, native Siberians (aborigines) – 54,423, other small nationalities – 7,954 people.<sup>18</sup>

The *Easterners* accounted for more than 20% of the Far Eastern Territory population.<sup>19</sup> The active settlement of the Far Eastern Territory by the Russian population from Russia’s central regions caused frictions and confrontation both among the regional leadership and the population. Korean communists who were commanding officers of the partisan units took an active part in the liberation of the Russian Far East from the White Guards and foreign intervention. After the war, they held leading positions in the regional Communist nomenclature. By the end of the 1920s, changes were taking place in the power structures, and with the increasing number of migrants from Central Russia, the percentage of Russians in the governing bodies also increased. Archival documents demonstrate that indigenous minorities were allowed to occupy up to 40% of the leadership positions in a given vicinity or enterprise, while the Slavs were supposed to occupy 60%.<sup>20</sup> Owing to the language gap, Korean communists were appointed to leadership positions and sent to work with the Korean population in regional centers and rural areas (Son 2013).

16 The term “yellow-race peoples” disappeared after the Revolution and was replaced by the Easterners.

17 GARF, f. 1235, finding aid 120, case 60, list 35.

18 GARF, f. 1235, finding aid 120, case 60, list 29.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

14 RGAE, f. 5675, finding aid 1, case 7, list 10ob.

15 *Yellow-race* people is an official term that is sporadically used in the archival documents of Tsarist Russia. However, its usage was rather limited.

Open hostility of the newly arrived displaced people from the European part of Russia and Ukraine towards the *Easterners* forced the party governing bodies and Soviet regional authorities to take measures to resolve inter-ethnic relations. For this reason, the Soviet government temporarily suspended the planned resettlement of peasants to the Far East in 1930. It was decided to abandon individual resettlement and move to resettlement of compact *kolkhoz* collectives and *artel* cooperatives.

In 1931, the ethno-national questions in the Far Eastern Territory were considered at the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional Party Conference, the Plenum of the Territory Executive Committee of the AUCPB, the 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Congress of the Soviets, and the 2nd Plenum of the Territory Executive Committee. The decisions taken made a certain breakthrough in the implementation of state policies in terms of ethno-national relations. In terms of the region's Soviet state construction, 15 ethno-national executive committees (13 Ukrainian, 1 Jewish, and 1 Korean) were created. In addition, 600 national village councils were established (300 Ukrainian, 176 Korean, 3 Jewish, and 1 Chinese).<sup>21</sup>

The report "On Investigating the State of Socialist Construction Among the National Minorities of the Far Eastern Territory" (October 14, 1931) states that "the work on creating national village and township councils was performed very slowly. Thus, in Vladivostok, it took two years to resolve the issue of establishing a Korean village council." In the village councils of Primorye, Ukrainians accounted for 19.3%, Koreans – 16.2%, Chinese – 0.3%, and in the town councils: 0.6%, 9.0%, and 6.3%, respectively.<sup>22</sup> Using the national, town, and township and village councils, the national minorities, including the *Easterners*, asserted their interests doing their best to improve their lives in the Far Eastern Territory.

## The Easterners

Before the Revolution of 1917, in the records of Imperial Russia, the Chinese and the Koreans were referred to as the *yellow people* or Asians. After the Revolution, they were reclassified as *Easterners*. In all official documents of

that time, the Chinese and the Koreans were collectively termed as *Easterners*. Chinese and Korean diasporas appeared in the Russian Far East in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Regional shortages of labor resources were often compensated by low-cost labor from the neighboring countries.

Unlike the Chinese, the Koreans mostly practiced agriculture and were sedentary. Moreover, the Koreans moved to the Russian Far East as families rather than single migrant workers, seeking to become Russian citizens with intent to stay there for good (Son 2017). That practice differed from the situation prevalent among the Chinese migrants. Most of them were men who arrived in Russia for employment purposes, and the Russian authorities perceived them as a temporary labor resource. As a rule, the Chinese sent all their earnings back to their homeland. Among the Chinese, there were workers, artisans, private traders, farmers, tradesmen, and smugglers (Zalesskaya and Aktamov 2017, 131–37). According to the All Union Census of the Soviet Union (1926), the proportion of foreigners who lived in the Far Eastern Territory of the Soviet Union along with the other representatives of ethnic communities was as follows: Koreans – 169,000; Chinese – 77,000; Japanese – approximately 1,000 people. In 1926, the number of the Chinese and the Koreans in the Vladivostok district was 43,513 (7.6%) and 145,511 people, respectively.

Despite the growing population of the Far Eastern Territory, the role of the Chinese in the development of its economy remained significant. This is demonstrated by the following figures. The Chinese accounted for 21.5% of the economically active urban population of the Far Eastern Territory and 35.2% of the total number of urban workers. These were mostly coolies: loaders, heavers and carriers, porters, miners, leather dressers, and food industry workers. In these trades, the Chinese accounted for more than half of those employed, along with the Koreans and the Japanese. Overall, the Chinese accounted for more than 90% of all *Yellow-race* workers. In 1923, Vladivostok remained the site with the largest concentration of the Chinese minority (23,159 people), which represented almost half of the total Chinese population in the Far East and 21.7% of Vladivostok's residents (Larin 2009, 112).

The bulk of the Korean population in the Far Eastern Territory was concentrated in three districts of the Southern Primorye province, namely Posietsky, Suchansky, and Suifunsky. Up to 90,000 Koreans lived there, who accounted for 80% of the total number of Koreans. These people mostly

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.



practiced farming. Korean peasants were subdivided into *kulaks* (wealthy peasants) (5–6%), middle peasants (25–30%), and poor peasants—land-poor, landless, farm servants—(65–70%). Korean intellectuals accounted for 5–7%, and the petty bourgeoisie accounted for up to 10%. Many Koreans who lived in towns engaged in speculation, smuggling, and petty trade. There were few workers among them. Up to 900 people were employed in tobacco and food enterprises as well as in loading operations at the port. In the area of Olga village, Koreans worked on forest concessions (Son 2013, 212–13).

After October 1917, Russia's Chinese and Korean ethnic groups were included in the community of national minorities of the Soviet state. The leadership of the USSR recognized their role in the economy of the country (especially in the Far East). At the same time, Soviet central authorities recognized the fact that the presence of sizable ethnic enclaves in the Far East affected Soviet foreign policies and was often an apple of discord between the USSR, China, Japan, and colonial Korea. The Bolsheviks emphasized the importance of the established historical interactions of the population from the border regions of these states with the USSR. The recognition of the equal status of the Chinese and Korean national communities contributed to their further integration into the social fabric of Soviet Russia. Since the *Sovietization*<sup>23</sup> of the Russian Far East, ethnic Chinese, and Koreans were given adequate assistance in finding employment. Chinese observers noted that “the relief of the fate of the Chinese workers coincided with the establishment of Soviet power in Russia, which protected the interests of workers regardless of their nationality” (Larin 2003, 74–75).

In March 1918, the People's Commissariat (Narkomat) of Justice issued a decree protecting the rights of Chinese nationals. The letter dated by December 4, 1918, originated in the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) and addressed the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage (VChK, the political police), the Council of Deputies (Sovdep) and local political police bureaus, stating that “the Chinese and citizens of other Eastern countries residing in Russia cannot be classified as members of the bourgeois classes and considered to even a smallest extent responsible for the policies of their corrupt home governments” (Larin 2009,

79–80). The letter also emphasized the need for an “extremely careful attitude towards numerous citizens of Eastern countries in Russia.” Regardless of their economic status, Soviet Chinese and Koreans were granted equal rights with other foreigners (Larin 2009, 81). However, by the mid-1920s, only 6,387 Korean workers were employed in the industry of the Far Eastern Territory. At the same time, the so-called “industrial cooperation,” or the artisan cooperatives, was developing. It was composed of Russian (42%), Chinese (23.2%), Korean (8.9%), and native Siberian (0.7%) artisans. The share of Chinese and Koreans who lived in towns and industrial settlements of the Far Eastern Territory was 64% and 8%, respectively. The Koreans settled down mainly in rural areas (92%) (Son 2013, 219).

Demographic changes in favor of potentially “less reliable” immigrants from Asian countries (China and Korea) as well as economic reasons served as impetus for organizing a planned resettlement of people from Russia's central regions to the Far East. On January 5, 1926, the following decision was made at the meeting of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (People's Commissariat) of the USSR: “Given that the spontaneous settlement of the Far East by the Chinese and the Koreans is a serious risk, the Commission deems necessary to primarily work out colonization from the interior provinces.”<sup>24</sup>

In the 1920s, the Soviet policy in relation to the Chinese and Korean populations was articulated according to the program theses of the Bolshevik party. To implement socialist transformations and economic development, the sparsely populated Far East needed labor resources. The Chinese and Koreans, who had lived in this region for decades, were the key to solving the problem of the shortage of employees and rural workers. Various approaches and methods were used to build up the desired internationalist consciousness of the Chinese and Korean workers. The USSR was the first state in world history which developed a range of sweeping affirmative action programs aimed at national minority development, and affirmative action was one of the characteristic features of the early Soviet state (Martin 2011, 32). The main goal of this policy entailed the propaganda of communism among ethnic enclaves of Chinese and Korean settlers in the Soviet Far East, as well as the advancement of communist ideas in China and Korea, which was occupied by the Japanese.

23 *Sovietization* was the gradual process of the establishment of local Soviet authorities across the regions of former Imperial Russia.

24 State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii, GARF) (1926), f. 1235, finding aid 120, case 52, list 23.

Chinese and Koreans were introduced to the revolutionary transformations taking place in the USSR and provided with further internationalist education: their specific interests were taken into account, their rights were protected, and financial support was provided in various areas of their daily activities. The protocols of the sessions of the presidiums and bureaus of Maritime Province's Primorsky Provincial Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (*Gubkom*<sup>25</sup>) contain information about the hands-on work approach with the Chinese and Korean populations. At each meeting, the current problems of the Chinese and Koreans were discussed, and measures were taken to improve their living conditions in the Far East.

The international importance of the national question and the role of national minorities during the transition period from capitalism to socialism were emphasized by Stalin at the XII Party Congress: "While proceeding with the New Economic Policy<sup>26</sup> (*NEP*), it is necessary to gather breath, heal the wounds of the advanced proletariat, strengthen the relationship with the peasant population, and engage in further activities vis-a-vis the Eastern peoples in order to further combat global capitalism."<sup>27</sup> The document states that the objective of the Bolshevik party is to monitor the correctness of relations with the Eastern proletariat, i.e., the Chinese and Koreans to prevent in every possible way the resurgence of the *great-power* (Russian) and local defensive chauvinism.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 2.** Population Changes in the Primorye for 1914–1926

	1914		1923		1926	
	People	%	People	%	People	%
Russians	307,751	75.4	366,694	69.7	358,508	62.7
Koreans	61,694	15.1	101,938	19.4	145,511	25.5
Chinese	32,580	8.0	37,608	7.2	43,513	7.6
Others	6045	1.5	19,530	3.7	24,499	4.2
Total population	408,070	100	525,770	100	572,031	100

**source:** *Etnomigratsionnye protsessy v Primorye v 20 veke (Ethno-migrational Processes in Primorye in the 20<sup>th</sup> century)*, p. 68

25 *Gubkom* and *Obkom* represented the hierarchy of bureaucratic units within the regional committee nomenclature of the Communist Party starting from 1929.

26 NEP was Lenin's New Economic Policy introduced in 1921. It replaced the policy of war communism that was conducted during the Civil War.

27 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3626, list 319.

28 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3626, list 320.

Table 2 demonstrates that in the early twentieth century, the largest group among the national minorities was Koreans. Over the course of thirteen years (i.e., 1914–1926), the number of residents in Primorye increased by 1.4 times. The Korean diaspora grew by 2.4 times. Its proportion in the general population make-up increased from 15.1 to 25.5% and it was the fastest growing diaspora among the selected groups in the statistical reports.

Among the Korean population, 88.5% lived in rural areas, and 11.5% lived in urban areas. In percentage terms to the whole population of the Primorsky region, 18% of the Chinese lived in urban areas and 1.3% in rural areas. Koreans constituted 6% of the total urban population of the Primorye, and 22% lived in rural areas respectively. In 1925, 49% of the Korean population had Soviet citizenship, and most of the others applied for citizenship.<sup>29</sup> As for the Chinese national group, they rarely claimed Soviet citizenship.

## Chinese

The protocol of the presidium of the Primorsky *Gubkom* of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks from February 12, 1925 states: "The proximity of the border and the fluidity of the Chinese mass (abroad and back) create an unfavorable environment for work, because most Chinese consider their stay in the Primorye as temporary, and the criminal nature of the so-called *hunkhusnichestvo* (when local Chinese nationals who lived in the border areas raised their respective incomes through a variety of criminal activities conducted on Soviet soil). The main mass of people with whom it is necessary and possible to conduct work is the proletariat, which has long settled in local enterprises, and part of the grain growers, who are permanent residents of Primorye."<sup>30</sup>

Prior to the arrival of Soviet authorities in the Far East and until 1925, Chinese merchant societies organized public life and followed the directives of the Chinese consulate.<sup>31</sup> The Chinese merchant societies used intimidation and, sometimes, repressive measures against local Chinese workers. First Chinese

29 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3626, list 320.

30 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3627, list 24.

31 *Ibid.*

merchant societies appeared in the Far East of the Russian Empire in 1891. They were open to the Chinese expats living in the Russian Empire and engaged in business and trade only. After China's revolution of 1911, Chinese merchant societies grew in numbers and influence across the Russian Empire (Larin 2009, 56). There were also Chinese secret societies in Russia, and they engaged in politics alongside commerce and business (Larin 2009, 57). The presence of a bourgeois newspaper, a Chinese theater, and a school was at odds with the official propaganda of communist ideas.

In 1925, there were only thirty three members and candidates of the Russian Socialist Democratic Revolutionary Party (the future Communist Party of the Soviet Union) among the Chinese population. Of those, twenty five people were in Vladivostok, three in Spassk, two in Nikolsk-Ussuriysk, one in Suchan, and one in Artyomovsk mines. Of the thirty three Party members, five people understood Party rules and programs, learned the immediate tasks of the Party, and could engage in leadership work in the Party, Komsomol (the Party Youth League), and trade union organizations. The rest exhibited a low level of political indoctrination.<sup>32</sup>

Among 10,000 Chinese workers, very few spoke Russian and the majority did not understand it at all. Ninety percent (90%) of Chinese workers were illiterate. The conditions for the Chinese workers were worse than those enjoyed by the Russian workers, both in housing conditions and remuneration. In some places, the premises were unfit for human habitation, yet the Chinese workers lived there.<sup>33</sup> As a result of the reported maltreatment and other abuses, local Party authorities generated the following resolution consisting of nine points.

- 1) Given the insufficient growth of the Party organization, the extremely poor performance of the Party cells, and the shortage of Party cadres, the main task was to induce the workers to join the Party and organize activities of the communist cells.
- 2) Given the lack of the cadres, to request through the Far Eastern Bureau (*Dal'buuro*) of the Central Committee of the Republican Unitary Enterprise to delegate 2–3 specialists capable of conducting the Party work with a knowledge of the Russian language.

- 3) To request the *Dal'buuro* to include an instructor into the Regional Committee (*Gubkom*) for work among the Chinese.
- 4) The publishing department of the Regional Committee to solve the issue of Chinese-language publishing for the Chinese and to strengthen the Party influence on the newspaper *Rabochiy Put'* (The Workers' Path).
- 5) To raise with the *Dal'buuro* the question of the allocation of special funds for publishing work in relation to the Chinese.
- 6) To support the Komsomol cells and the Chinese clubs with real leadership and Party influence.
- 7) In trade union work, to pay special attention to increasing membership and enhancing professional propaganda. The Communist faction of the City Council of Trade Unions needs to solve the issue of regulating remuneration and improving housing conditions to eliminate the system of *starshynky*<sup>34</sup> and contractors.
- 8) To strengthen the cooperative activities among Chinese workers by opening special Chinese shops (stores).
- 9) To concentrate the core activities among the Chinese in urban areas: Vladivostok, Nikolsk-Ussuriysk, Artyomovsk, and Suchan mines.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, Soviet authorities were actively involved in Sovietizing the Chinese population. State funds were allocated to build schools and to publish textbooks, newspapers, and magazines. However, the Chinese population did not have any special desire to learn and adapt to the Soviet reality. The report by Liang Pa-Di on the state of Chinese workers states: "Chinese workers are influenced by the reactionary part of the Chinese population. The Chinese merchant society is essential in Vladivostok. This society prohibits workers from joining the Labor Union, threatening that these workers will no longer be able to return to their homeland."<sup>36</sup> There is a two-fold explanation for this reluctance on behalf of the Chinese to assimilate into Soviet realities. On the one hand, Chinese diasporas in the USSR were tightly controlled by the Chinese government. China took measures against the *Sovietization* and adaptation of the Chinese population in

32 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3627, list 24.

33 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3627, list 25.

34 *Starshynky* are Chinese women who spoke Russian and served as a link between employees and employers. They were not involved in production but received 10–15% of the remuneration of each employee. Due to the lack of knowledge of the Russian language, Chinese workers turned to *starshynky* for assistance in finding employment.

35 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3627, list 26.

36 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 5375, list 85.

the Soviet Far East. On the other hand, similarly to the tsarist period, the main goal of the Chinese was to earn money and send it home to their families.

At the same time, the regional economy needed cheap Chinese labor. By 1923, 6,591 Chinese were involved in the gold industry of the Far East (51.2% of the total number of workers in the industry). In 1924–1925, 3,715 people were employed in gold mining in Sretensky District, including 1,724 Eastern workers (46%).<sup>37</sup> In 1925–1926, 4,063 people were employed in gold mining in Sretensky District, including 1,514 Eastern workers (37%).<sup>38</sup> The qualitative composition of the Easterners, who were mainly the Chinese, was heterogeneous. Former Chinese mercenary soldiers, broke merchants, artisans, and peasants who did not possess sufficient capital to buy land in their homeland, as well as Chinese beggars and the unemployed, became workers in the mines.<sup>39</sup>

On November 1, 1935, there were fourteen Chinese *kolkhoz* organizations in the Far East. Five of them were located in the Amur region, two in the Khabarovsk region, and seven in the Ussuri region. These *kolkhoz* organizations exclusively engaged in vegetable farming. Overall, there were 1,200 Chinese *kolkhoz* members. Many were married to either Russians or Ukrainians. Their children spoke Russian with rare exceptions. In 1936, Chinese consulates re-assessed the record of the Chinese population living in the Far Eastern region. All ethnic Chinese, who did not have any documents but lived in the USSR for ten years and longer, were handed out Chinese passports. Many of these people worked in the *kolkhoz* organizations (Zaleskaya 2009).

At the same time, local Soviet authorities also contributed to dissatisfaction of Chinese workers with their lives in the USSR. For instance, in June 1936, in one *kolkhoz* organization, a chairman offered all of his Chinese workers to accept Soviet citizenship. Otherwise, he threatened them with expulsion from the *kolkhoz*. However, there was only one citizen of the USSR out of 48 Chinese workers at the collective farm. As a result, they refused to work and left for China, despite the fact that the original threat made by the *kolkhoz* chairman

was annulled at the higher level of local communist government. In 1936, other Chinese *kolkhoz* members also started to leave their respective organizations.

## Koreans

Unlike the Chinese, the Korean population increased quickly in the Soviet Union. The number of Koreans grew tenfold compared with the pre-revolutionary period (Son 2013). The fundamental problems, which were addressed by the Primorsky Provincial Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, included the land issue for the Korean population. Another important issue was addressed in relation to the inter party and fractional strife. There were fierce discussions on the ways of liberating the Korean Peninsula among the Korean communists and nationalists. For instance, Korean nationalist communists campaigned to continue the anti-Japanese struggle. However, the mainstream Korean communists followed the line of the Bolshevik Party aimed at the economic development of the Soviet Far East.<sup>40</sup>

Protocol No. 7 of the session of the Presidium of the Primorsky Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks held on January 14, 1926 stated that the *Sovietization* among the Korean population was going well. In the region, 50 large district rural councils (*Selsoviets*) and 35 smaller rural councils were organized. The former had four councils consisting of both Russian and Korean communists, and the latter had thirteen councils with Russian and Korean communists. They consisted of 1,493 council members, including 88 members of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, 389 Komsomol members, and 1,016 non-party members. In total, there were 139 women.<sup>41</sup>

By 1926, there were twenty two Korean party cells in the Primorsky Party Organization. The total number of Korean communists was 532 people. Korean communists were very young. Rank and file Korean communists were not experienced communist fighters. First Koreans joined the ranks of RKP(b) in 1917, and the rest followed in 1918. The first Korean national joined the Party in 1917 and the rest joined in 1918 and later. There was a lack of Party

37 The Russian Empire and the USSR (until World War II) did not differentiate between Koreans and Chinese. In the former, the officialdom referred to them as the *yellow race*, and the USSR chose the term *Easterners*.

38 State Archive of the Trans-Baikal Region (Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Zabaykal'skogo kraya, GAZK) (1930), f. P-71, finding aid 1, case 312, list 7.

39 GAZK, f. P-71, finding aid 1, case 564, list 9.

40 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3626, list 221, 222, 223.

41 RGASPI, f. 17, finding aid 21, case 3628, list 14.



literature in Korean and not enough cadres suited for mass *Sovietization* work among the Koreans.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in the 1920s, the Primorsky Provincial Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks addressed the following issues pertaining to the Korean population, namely land management, political education, and fractional struggle. The Koreans were not faced with the task of returning to their homeland, which was occupied by the Empire of Japan. Korean communists tried to improve the lives of the Korean people in Russia as much as possible, including efforts to combat Russian nationalism.

The fact that ethnic Koreans were also the hostages of the situation whereby they literally had no place to return can explain their participation in the *Soviet collectivisation* drive. Soviet economic reforms introduced in the Soviet Far East territory in 1923 (single agricultural tax) were extremely unpopular with the local peasantry. In 1924, a peasant anti-Soviet uprising took place in the Amur region, one of the farming areas in the Far East. The uprising numbered around 5,000 participants and was quickly put down by the Red Army's regular units (Golovin 2000, 62). Regional grass-roots peasant uprisings continued into the mid-1930s.

At the same time, there were exceptions to the otherwise consistently hostile acceptance pattern on behalf of peasants concerning Soviet agricultural reforms. The establishment and the subsequent strengthening of Soviet authority in the Far East acted as an additional attractive stimulus for Korean immigrants, especially for those from the poorest social strata, because the USSR declared international support to all workers and the downtrodden. In the 1920s, Koreans started to massively migrate to the USSR taking advantage of the porous state border. The peak migration period was between 1917 and 1929, when 71.5% of all Korean households crossed the border out of the entire number of Korean immigrant households that arrived in the Russian Empire/USSR between 1860s and 1929. Moreover, 38.7% crossed the border just in 1928–1929. Over 100,000 ethnic Koreans migrated to the USSR during the 1920s: a third of these migrants had temporary status and documents, and the rest became Soviet citizens (Son 2013).

The Far Eastern Regional Executive Committee (*Dal'kraispolkom*)

developed a strategy to collectivize “national minorities and natives” across the region. According to it, 21,455 out of 29,144 households were to be collectivized by October 1, 1930, affecting 76.6% of all households. As a result, nearly every Korean settlement in the region had its own *kolkhoz* by 1929–1930. Toward the end of 1931, 50% of all Korean households were collectivized. Two hundred collective farms were created, uniting 11,728 households that constituted 50,188 people.<sup>43</sup> In the Khankai region, 68% of all Korean households, or 3,468 out of 5,100 were collectivized. Korean members from local *kolkhoz* organizations farmed 42,537 hectares of soil. In the Posietsky region, 90% of all ethnic Koreans joined the collective farms. In 1932, six Korean *kolkhoz* organizations in the Chernigov region of the Far East included 90% of all Korean households. There were eight Korean *kolkhoz* organizations in the Suchansky region of the Far East, making up 28.5% from the total number of all collective farm organizations.<sup>44</sup>

Towards the end of 1934, the collectivization drive aimed at ethnic Koreans in the USSR was over. Kim Afanasii, the head of the political department at the Posietsky machine and tractor station, reported on the first successes of *collectivisation* to regional authorities. Comrade Kim stated the local *kolkhoz* organizations fully provided themselves with grain for consumption and the next year's harvest, paid off the accrued debts to the machine and tractor stations, and preliminary fulfilled the quota for grain deliveries to the state.<sup>45</sup>

All in all, the *collectivization* drive created the environment of opportunities for ethnic Korean migrants in the USSR, providing them with a familiar occupational niche in the economy of the Far East. Korean peasants were given an opportunity to live and work on land. In turn, this sedentary way of life and the emerging social contract with the Soviet state inspired hopes that Koreans won't have to leave their places of habitat. Compact ethnic Korean dwellings in the form of *kolkhoz* organizations were also an effective solution to the challenge of maintaining Korean national identity, especially under the duress of local nationalism.

<sup>43</sup> *Seonbong*, October 7, 1931.

<sup>44</sup> *Seonbong*, April 12, 1931; May 11, 1931; July 12, 1931; October 28, 1931.

<sup>45</sup> *Tikhookeanskaya zvezda*, January 2, 1934.



**Table 3.** Korean Population by Regions of the Far East Region for 1935–1936

Name of the region	Population
Zeisk	300
Amur	4,200
Jewish Autonomous Region	3,600
Khabarovsk	30,500
Ussuriisk	66,100
Primor'e	88,400
Nizhnii Amur	3,000
Sakhalin	3,200
Kamchatka	200
Total in the Far East Region, incl. northern regions	199,500
Total in the Far East Region, excl. Sakhalin, Kamchatka, and Nikolaevsk-na-Amure	193,100

source: RGVA. Fond 33879. Opis' 1. Delo 115. List 16

### Far Eastern Party Leadership's Campaign against Manifestations of Nationalism

In the late 1920s, the USSR launched a *campaign against nationalism*. This was brought not only by the Soviet *indigenization policy*, but also by the uncontrolled migration of population and by the ill-conceived resettlement policy, which was pursued throughout the Soviet Union with the aim of improving the economy and the national defense capability. At the 9<sup>th</sup> Far Eastern Regional Party Conference in early 1929, it was noted that there were still cases of contemptuous and mocking attitudes towards Chinese workers by the Russian population, and individual and mass beatings of Chinese by Russians. The Chinese were still addressed by such pejorative and racially tinged terms as “*khodya*,” “*fazan*,” “*manza*,”<sup>46</sup> and “*kitaeza*,” inherited from the Russian Empire. The Russians, including Russian chief executive officers, continued to use racially pejorative jargon, such as “*moya khodila*,” “*tvoya rabotay*,”<sup>47</sup> etc.,

46 “*Manza*” was a pejorative term derived from “*manzi*” 蠻子, “slave-barbarian,” or the old and contemptuous term for the natives of southern China.

47 “*moya khodila*” and “*tvoya rabotay*”: The non-Russian populace often spoke in broken Russian owing to the lack of education and practice. Ethnic Russians appropriated this slang as their own and often used it to address the non-Russians in a contemptuous manner.

when speaking to Eastern workers.<sup>48</sup> Because of that, Chinese workers were often afraid to visit public places and participate in events. Among the Chinese population, there were rumors that someday the Russians will drown the Chinese in the Amur River.<sup>49</sup>

A range of penalties was proposed for the manifestations of nationalism, including expulsion from the Communist Party and condemnation by a *social court*, i.e., local assembly with paralegal powers. In practice, these measures were not applied or were used very rarely. These cases frequently did not reach the court or were mentioned in reports as hooliganism. Chinese workers at the Suchan mine even put forward a proposal to “provide separate mines for Eastern workers.”<sup>50</sup>

Communist cells at enterprises, which used Chinese labor, made numerous rulings. According to them, every Party and Komsomol member was obliged to combat nationalistic sentiments against the Chinese workers. However, the position of the Chinese did not improve. Continuous lower remuneration, worse working and living conditions, and worse supply of goods for the Chinese workers compared with those of Russian workers were all considered as practical manifestations of nationalism.<sup>51</sup> Their clothes, footwear, food, and accommodation were poorer than those provided to Russian workers. A scornful and rude attitude towards Eastern workers and humiliation of their personal dignity were reported as well.<sup>52</sup> When allocating work for the unemployed, the labor departments and employment agencies secretly gave preferences to the Russians contrary to all the Party and Soviet directives. There was a perception among Russian employers that labor productivity of the Chinese workers was lower than that of their Russian colleagues and that there was a need to preserve the social phenomenon of *starshynky*.<sup>53</sup>

At Artyomovsk mines, in terms of remuneration, the salary of a Russian

48 Same as above.

49 *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, September 20, 1930; February 19, 1930; February 29, 1932; August 10, 1933.

50 State Archive of the Khabarovsk Region (Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Khabarovskogo kraja, GAKhK) (1929), f. P-2, finding aid 11, case 419. List 11.

51 State Archive of the Trans-Baikal Region (Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Zabaykal'skogo kraja, GAZK) (1930), f. P-590, finding aid 1, case 15, list 14.

52 *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, October 23, November 12, 1930; January 17, February 7, February 8, March 29, 1931.

53 *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, February 19, 1930.

worker was 4.63 rubles per day in January 1930, while Eastern workers earned 2.92 rubles per day.<sup>54</sup> There were no hospitals servicing the mines and the workers' level of hygiene was extremely low as there were no bathhouses. The deliveries of food to the mines were often delayed. The harassment of Chinese workers by their Russian counterparts was commonplace. They were assaulted at their workplaces, pushed out of lines in diners and shops, and forbidden to attend Russian clubs. They were referred to by the means of derogatory slang, such as "*khodya*," "*fazan*," "*Chan Kaishi*," etc. The living conditions of eastern workers were deemed unsatisfactory nearly across all mines of the Far East. In addition, their workday exceeded 12 hours, and they only had 2 days-off per month (Zalesskaya and Aktamov 2017).

By 1930, the problems of nationalism reached the highest degree of urgency across the USSR. Every meeting of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR in almost all country's regions was devoted to addressing the issues related to nationalism and subsequent policy making. The resolution of the USSR Central Executive Committee from April 20, 1930, stated: "In the field of national policies, ensure consistent implementation of national policies and the comprehensive service for the national minorities together with the economic and political development of the whole region."<sup>55</sup>

This measure did not yield the desired outcome. Thus, the authorities adopted a proactive attitude after the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, which was held in June–July 1930. It called to combat two main challenges in the national question—the *great-power (Russian) chauvinism* as the main danger and the local (non-Russian) nationalism (Son 2013, 176). In Primorye, this campaign was conducted under the banner of combating the oppression of Eastern immigrants. Among the participants were the Party and Soviet authorities, the prosecutor's office, and local Communist newspapers. The latter consistently revealed the facts of negative attitudes towards the Chinese and the Koreans.

In agriculture, the most common manifestations of economic inequality were observed in land lease relations. In 1930, virtually every issue of the regional

Far Eastern *Krasnoye Znamya* (Red Banner) and *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda* (Pacific Star) newspapers delivered materials depicting these incidents.<sup>56</sup> The All-Union communist party *Pravda* newspaper repeatedly raised this problem (August 4, 1930; December 10, 1930). The questions of "combating chauvinistic attacks against Eastern workers" were considered at nearly all Communist Party meetings and conferences of the region. For example, in January 1931, the Joint Plenum of the Far Eastern Territory Executive Committee and the Regional Supervisory Board of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks considered that "the vestiges of great-power chauvinism are expressed in essentially wrong colonialist views on the labor of Eastern workers" (Yakovleva 1967, 100–01).

On July 21, 1930, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars adopted a resolution *On the Practical Implementation of the Nationalities Policy in Relation to the Chinese and the Koreans in the Far Eastern Territory*. According to this document, 123 cases were considered by the courts of the Far Eastern region in 1930, and other 88 cases were initiated concerning the racially motivated denials of the material, cultural, social, and political services to the Easterners, including litigations in the Olginsky, Posietsky, and Suchansky districts (Vashchuk, Chernolutsкая, and Koroleva 2002, 91).

One of the reports issued by the Dal'kraikom's administration states as follows:

...among the most harmful social anomalies widely accounted for among Chinese and Koreans are the following: opium smoking, poppy growth for opium making, the maintenance of illegal prostitution, gambling, and morphine usage dens as well as illegal hostels for homeless Chinese and Koreans." The main obstacle for authorities is that the real owners of the dens operate through their extensive networks of figureheads that the militia operatives have to deal with. The real culprits escape punishment and continue their criminal activities. Tight network conspiracy among Koreans and Chinese also complicates the matters, partly owing to their personal interests and partly because of the organizational revenge, which is widely practiced. All these lead to the fact that in a short span of time, the liquidated den re-emerges again, often in the same building. Domestic

54 *Doklad Dal'nevostochnoy kontrol'noy komissii i Raboche-Krest'yanskoy inspektzii X Dal'nevostochnoy partiynoy konferentsii*, October 1929–April 1930.

55 GARE, f. P-3316, finding aid 2, case 1073, list 21.

56 *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda*, January 1, 1931; January 3, 1931; January 13, 1931; January 14, 1931. <https://fessl.ru/tozsite/>.

crimes include, among the Chinese, the theft and purchase of females, foot bandaging for girls, heavy and purely Asian in nature exploitation of their countrymen, and unfair bondage deals. The latter prevail among the Koreans. These deals include the organization of fake working crews, whose members are ruthlessly exploited by the *starshinky*, and the rent of the sown areas. A circumstance conducive to exploitation is the illegal crossing of the border by the Koreans and Chinese, which happens often with their subsequent placement among their fellow tribesmen, the old-timers on the territory of the Far East Region. The latter use the illegal status of newly arrived to exploit them. It must be noted that the Russian populace in the region also resort to unfair bondage deals with the Chinese and Koreans.<sup>57</sup>

The Far Eastern Soviet administration combatted all of these social phenomena, which negatively affected the sovietisation of the region and, correspondingly, triggered discussions whether all eastern workers should be deported from the USSR *en masse*. Toward the end of the 1920s, the Soviet authorities embarked on the process of resettling part of the local Korean population. At the same time, the authorities started to squeeze the Chinese migrants from the region. Their hiring by the industries was severely restricted, Chinese laborers were replaced with Russians, Chinese households were confiscated, the dens were liquidated, money changers and smugglers were arrested, and people suspected of espionage were executed. All of these factors only increased nationalistic sentiments exhibited by the Slavic people.

## Conclusion

The heterogeneous composition of the *Easterners*, their inferior social group status, low level of literacy, and the lack of the Russian language mastery significantly hampered educational and awareness-raising work among them. In addition, it was extremely difficult for them to adapt to Soviet realities, which was manifested in the inter-civilizational interaction between the Russians and the *Easterners*. At the same time, immigrants from the European part of Russia and Ukraine who arrived *en masse* in the 1920s in the Far Eastern

region also belonged to the disadvantaged category of people. They had a low level of education as about 90% of them were illiterate. When they first encountered people of a different race, most of whom did not speak Russian, the establishment of friendly inter-ethnic relations was nearly impossible. The *Easterners* aroused hostility in them, further developing into aggression.

During industrialization and collectivization, similar modernization processes took place in the Far Eastern region of the Russian SFSR and in other regions of the USSR. The military and political situation in the Far East and the economic characteristics of the region led to the priority development of the defense, resource industries, and agriculture. However, *the great-power chauvinism* remained the primary problem in the relations between the *Easterners* and Russian and Ukrainian workers. Because of the scornful and mocking attitudes and single-person and mass beatings by the Russians, the Chinese and the Koreans were afraid to attend public meetings and take part in social and public events.

Due to a general shortage of labor and a ban on the use of foreign power in the defense industry, Chinese labor played a significant role in the resource industry, and Korean labor played a major role in agriculture. What differed the two groups was their opportunity to return to their respective homelands. Chinese workers could do it freely and, therefore, preferred seasonal jobs and shunned away from *kolkhoz*. When confronted with the choice of either accepting Soviet citizenship or leaving the country, they chose the latter.

The plight of Koreans was different. Against the backdrop of the general instability of the region, collectivization was the only, albeit bitter option for the Korean farmers, despite the fact that the collectivization drive in the USSR is considered as a supreme example of state violence against the peasantry. The overwhelming majority of ethnic Koreans did not possess any command of the Russian language, and banding together allowed them to work and survive. Collective farms addressed the main issues that concerned the Korean immigrants. Firstly, the land issue was resolved. Secondly, joining a collective farm was perceived by the Koreans as a state guarantee that they would not be arbitrarily ousted from their settled lands. Thirdly, collective farms were the enclaves that consolidated the Korean ethnic minority and enabled the Koreans to assert their national and cultural identity in the context of resurgent *Russian chauvinism*.

<sup>57</sup> Russian State Historical Archive of the Far East, f. P-2413, finding aid 4, case 1732, list 2 – 2 ob.

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## Abstract

In the late 1920s, the Soviet Union launched an official campaign against the so-called “*Great Russian chauvinism*.” As a result, the Bolshevik Party embarked on a relentless offensive against this phenomenon. Decisions related to the support of national minorities were made at governmental and regional levels across all regions of the country. Soviet *indigenization policy* and the ill-conceived population resettlement policy contributed to the rise of nationalism. Resettlement was conducted on the entire territory of the Soviet Union with the aim of improving the economy and the national defense capability. The indigenous Slavic population often did not wish to accept the resettled people. In the Far East of the Soviet Union, the so-called *Easterners*, represented by the Chinese and the Koreans, often endured destructive consequences of local nationalism. Despite this negative experience, the majority of Koreans accepted the official Soviet discourse proclaiming the unity and equality of all nations and participated in the overall Soviet social-economic development and its *collectivisation* effort. In the Far East, joining a Soviet collective farm (*kolkhoz*) was the only option of survival for Koreans who were deprived of the right to return to their homeland. *Kolkhoz* was a safe space where Koreans could band together under state protection against local nationalism. It also gave Korean peasants a chance to work on land in consolidated ethnic units, preserving their language and culture. The Chinese population was primarily represented by seasonal workers. Unlike Koreans, they could freely move back to China at any time. As a result, Chinese were reluctant to join *kolkhoz* and avoided accepting Soviet citizenship.

**Key words:** the Chinese, the Koreans, USSR, the Far East, minorities, local nationalism, Russian chauvinism