A Forgotten Diaspora: Russian-Koreans Negotiating Life, Education, and Social Mobility

Jon K. Chang

Abstract This study primarily deals with the Russian-Koreans (also known as "Soviet Koreans") and their attempts to negotiate life, education, and social mobility during Tsarism and the Soviet era (to 1991). As "Russian-Koreans" (their ethnonym in Russian), they were seen as foreigners in Russia even while official Soviet policy preached a "class line" and the brotherhood of all of the proletariat peoples. This primordialist view of the Koreans from the USSR, in part, led to their deportation in Central Asia in 1937. Most Koreans were deported to Central Asian collective farms where their "nationality" (a people) typically formed the majority of the population. The Koreans organized, mobilized their resources, and persevered. Soon, the Korean "kolkhozes (collective farms)" in Central Asia became known as the most productive state farms throughout the entire Soviet Union. Approximately 12 elderly Koreans were interviewed in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. These informants remembered how even the non-Koreans (such as Russians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs) on the Korean collective farms assimilated to their language, culture, and ethos to help build their communities into rich farms with many of the amenities of urban life: finely paved roads, well-built schools, and state-of-the-art hospitals. Some also told of how they utilized the Soviet sports and special educational programs in order to become chess champions and modern dance instructors. The Koreans gained respect from the other peoples of the former Soviet Union because they treated their deportation as merely a "bump in the road" rather than as their denouement.

1 Literature Review

Two of the first academic articles in English about the Russian-Koreans appeared within 5 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Huttenbach (1993) and Gelb (1995) agreed that the Koreans had done quite well after their deportation in

J. K. Chang (✉)
American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA
e-mail: jonntexas@gmail.com

J. GUBE, F. GAO (eds.), *Education, Ethnicity and Equity in the Multilingual Asian Context*, Multilingual Education 32,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3125-1_9

1937. Both groups had worked primarily in agriculture after being exiled to Central Asia; they had done well educationally and professionally and were firmly seen as a community whose members were firmly in the middle class of the Soviet Union and (after 1991) the Central Asian states. Both authors noted that Koreans had been heavily Russified through education and the lack of institutions serving specifically Koreans. (Prior to their deportation in 1937, Soviet Koreans had "cultural autonomy" and their own institutions in the Russian Far East). Natsuko Oka (2001) pointed out that the "Russification" among the Koreans of Kazakhstan was much further advanced than the official figures. Officially in 1999, 25.8 percent of the Koreans in Kazakhstan could still speak Korean. She stated that based on her years of working and living there, she seriously doubted this figure to be accurate. Buttino (2009) conducted fieldwork on Koreans in Samarkand and how they maintained family ties and national (Korean) traditions and negotiated daily life while using primarily the Russian language. Buttino's study most closely resembles this one due to its use of interviews, its focus on a "micro-view" of the Koreans, and in situ fieldwork. This study will demonstrate how the Russian-Koreans came to Central Asia and created "small microcosms" of Soviet Korean life, culture, and language and even assimilated several non-Koreans who grew up on predominantly Korean collective farms. I will examine how education impacted the lives of these subjects allowing them opportunities to travel during the Soviet period and or teach others. In general, higher or specialized technical education gave the recipient-holder greater social mobility and a wider range of life experiences. It had a plus-value during the Soviet period at the individual and the societal levels. In the cases of Gerasim Pak and Larisa Kim, the education that they received in chess and dance (respectively) was passed on later when they taught these subjects informally in Soviet institutions for the youth.

2 Introduction

The Koreans who arrived in Russia in the early 1860s were the first Korean diaspora in a European society. The descendants of the original migrants to Tsarist Russia have lived in the former Soviet Union for some seven generations (Chang 2016). Today, the Russian-Koreans and some of their cultural legacies such as cuisine, rice farming and others are ubiquitous in Central Asia. They are primarily Russian speaking with a smaller percentage, mostly elderly and over 60 years of age, who are bilingual in Korean and Russian. Many Russian-Koreans still strongly identify with the Soviet Union.

The terms "Soviet-Koreans," "Russian-Koreans," and simply "Koreans" will be used throughout this study to refer to Koreans in Russia, the former USSR and now the post-Soviet states in Central Asia. Second, this study's primary focus is on the Soviet period (1917–1991) and post-Soviet periods until around 1995. Russian-Korean (a term used in the Russian language) denotes that no matter how many generations one has spent in the Soviet and post-Soviet lands, one is at core a Korean with Korean customs and culture more deeply understood than a Russian ethos and

cultural mores. All the national minorities of Russia and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) are termed in this manner. Thus, Greeks, Poles, and Germans are, respectively, Russian-Greeks, Russian-Poles, and Russian-Germans (rather than as Greek-Russians, Polish-Russians, German-Russians). There is some sense of "primordialism" in this social and sociological praxis. The view of the Koreans from Russia or the former Soviet Union as "Russian-Koreans" sees them as "foreigners" rather than as "natives." This is seemingly only a small semantic difference (rather than as "Korean-Russians"), yet during times of flux, upheavals, and war, "nativist" sentiments and even state policy can easily be mobilized against "foreign" peoples as "internal enemies" or as fifth columnists. Valery Tishkov, a noted Soviet ethnographer, explained the notion of primordialism: "The Russian social science tradition, especially with respect to interpreting ethnicity is heavily dominated by the primordial approach. Its adherents see ethnicity as an objective "given," a sort of primordial characteristic of humanity" (Tishkov 1997). Therefore, a primordialist view of race was not officially acknowledged, and yet, these views of race or "nationality" did carry over from the Tsarist period into Soviet socialism (Mogilner 2008). The Soviet and even post-Soviet term "nationality" refers to a "nation," although the Soviets claimed that these "peoples" were judged by only sociohistorical traits and not racial ones. Nevertheless, "nationality" was listed on line five on all Soviet passports through 1991 and on post-Soviet Central Asian passports in the titular languages but not in Latin (e.g., in Uzbek or in Russian). Note that in 1993, Uzbekistan switched from Cyrillic to the Latin script (Allworth et al. 1998). Joseph Stalin defined nationality as a "historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Stalin 2003, 1935). However, this is quite problematic because the mass passportization of Soviet citizens after 1933 defined one's nationality with one or two words which referred only to the individual's ethnicity. It is and remains impossible to interpret and decipher how much of a role the "sociohistorical" factors of Soviet nationality (Hirsch 2002) on one's passport played in the Soviet era. An individual's "social class" was the only sociohistorical factor listed on some (and possibly even a majority) of the Soviet passports in Russia and the USSR's major urban areas until sometime in the 1950s. Class was not however on all Soviet passports from the 1930s to the 1950s (Rayfield 2018). For all practical purposes, at least on the passport, "nationality" equals "ethnicity" or "race." There are clearly some differences between official ideas and on-the-ground interpretation by everyday people of the Soviet and post-Soviet term "nationality." It oscillates between being defined as "race" and "ethnicity" and a socialist definition of "people" based more on cultural factors than race (Chang 2016; Weitz 2003).

This chapter examines how the Koreans have employed education along with their own transnational identity and practices as a means to integrate, obtain marketable skills, and pursue occupational and social mobility throughout their history. The term "transnational" in this study is primarily an internal quality that is based on an individual's (and sometimes, collective) decision making, determination, initiative, abilities, and communication skills rather than defined by markets, capital, and modern technologies. The reason for this should be obvious, and "transnational" as an internal ability affords the individual and or their communities (if the

event was a collective one) a much greater sense of "agency" and initiative than a "transnationalism" based on markets, technological progress, and fluid capital. This chapter will also elaborate on other Soviet nationalities such as Russians, Uzbeks, and Uyghurs who learned Korean culture and language while growing up on the Korean *kolkhozes* or Soviet collective farms in Central Asia.

The Soviet Koreans were a deported people who were seen by the state as good workers, but as dubious Soviet citizens with unknown political loyalties. Therefore, the "view from below," that is, their social history and the daily, lived "interpretation" of state policies and Soviet communism, can best be understood through oral history interviews conducted in situ and fieldwork (Chang 2016; Ritchie 2003). It is those interviews which will be referenced in this chapter. It is hoped that the original oral histories shed light beyond what has been previously written and theorized (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Korean men in their finest (Russian) clothes, 1920 Vladivostok. Note ship's captain costume in back row, one of the most popular of the day. (Photo courtesy of Serafima Kim)

3 Methodology

This qualitative study employs the Annales School's *longue durée* method for a historiography of the Russian-Korean ethnic minority from the 1917 (the beginning of the Soviet Union) until the early 1990s (Howell and Prevenier 2001). The data was obtained directly from the informants' oral histories. Furthermore, this author, J. Chang, conducted fieldwork and interviews in Central Asia from 2005 to 2010 and 2014 in Russian and sometimes (with the help of a translator) in Korean. Oral interviews were preferred over archives in order to capture the "agency," initiative, and creativity of the Soviet minority peoples such as the Koreans. This author conducted several structured interviews in Central Asia with 12 subjects regarding questions which moved the interviews through diachronic time and space. Interviews conducted in situ afford this study a greater range of opinions, self-doubt, and contradictions, which, in turn, can provide greater depth and complexity. The Soviet Koreans and or Russian-Koreans are a diaspora people situated in Russia, and the former USSR and the interviews were conducted primarily in Russian. Thus, many of various words, names, and loan words used by the Russian-Koreans were not transliterated using any of the popular Romanization systems for the Korean language. Instead, this study follows the Library of Congress' system of Russian transliteration (Romanization).

4 Soviet Koreans Under Soviet Indigenization: *Korenizatsiia*

In October 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution overthrew Russia's Provisional Government which had replaced the Tsar in February 1917. The Bolsheviks represented a socialist platform of territorial and "cultural autonomy" for all of the Russian empire's peoples. Cultural autonomy meant that the national minorities or nationalities were to be provided schools, books, and teachers in their own national languages. Unfortunately, a civil war broke out in Russia in 1918 which lasted until the end of the Intervention around October 1922 in the RFE. Only in 1923, the Bolsheviks began their cultural autonomy program in education and social policy programs, which they called *korenizatsiia*, that is, indigenization.

Indigenization marked a distinct break from Tsarism because of its attempt to implement socialist social policies to remedy past inequities and the creation of ideologically mobilized communities, identities, and loyalties. The former missionary schools and schools in Korean language were seized by the state and converted to both public and private schools. Generally, religious study was banned, but privately, it seemed to have continued well into the late 1920s (Kenez 1999). Nevertheless, some of the Korean villages continued to remain Christians and hold secret worship and prayer even in the 1930s. Gum Soi Kim (2009a) in her interview stated that she became a Christian sometime around 1933–1934 and that several people in her village remained Christians. She lived in the Korean village of Si Cha

in the Suchanski *raion* (district) in the RFE. There were also covert cases of Tsarist era professors teaching religious courses and coursework in the universities in Moscow through 1928. These professors and intellectuals were purged steadily during the 1920s, but especially from 1928 to 1932 (Fitzpatrick 1979).

Moscow envisioned that it would construct each nationality during *korenizatsiia* through granting each group territorial autonomy, education in one's native language, guaranteed educational and institutional representation for national minorities, and the expression of arts, literature, and media (film, theatre, and print) in one's native language and written by and about one's community. *Korenizatsiia*'s ultimate goal was, however, to turn Soviet national minorities into loyal Soviet cadres and fill many Soviet institutions with the young Communist Party cadres. This, in turn, would produce Soviet nationalities such as the Greeks, Germans, Koreans, Chinese, and others who were national in form (in appearance), socialist in content (ideologically). The USSR boasted that it was a "state of [many] nations." It claimed that only socialism united all of the various peoples within its borders who were "national [ethnic] in form," but "socialist in content [ideology]."

In 1923, the Soviet Union was in the process of establishing one of the most progressive [educational, institutional, and occupational] platforms for national minorities and indigenes in the entire world (Chang 2016). The appeal of *korenizatsiia* was also through representation of the Soviet *natsmen* (Russian for "national minority"). For example, one could see Koreans of every stripe, whether rice farmer or bureaucrat, on the local radio and in the newspapers because each ethnic group had their own newspaper, radio station, and other forms of cultural institutions and media. Neighbors and friends were also state officials, bureaucrats, and political police such as the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD, which was the Soviet political police). This program summed up the allure of Bolshevism because the representation of one's nationality among the Soviet leadership meant that there was a high degree of social mobility and the feeling of access to Soviet leadership, media, arts, and institutions. This decentralization of representational power ameliorated the less glamorous stints of queuing up for commodities, corruption, terror, repression, and general disillusionment with news, data, and officials.

The decentralization of representational power was the positive side of *korenizatsiia*. One major weakness was its inability to differentiate between Koreans from China, Japan, USSR, and peninsular Korea. To some Soviet cadres and leaders, all Koreans were equally "Korean," which was not Marxist, but rather a view based on "essentialized race," in other words, primordialism. This idea also ascribed to all Russian Koreans some degree of political loyalty to peninsular Korea, which was a Japanese colony during *korenizatsiia*.

During *korenizatsiia* as a process of forced or mandatory public education, Korean language became the medium of instruction for the majority of Koreans except in the urban areas where one could choose whether their child was enrolled in a Russian or a Korean language institution. However, the ideas and lessons promulgated in Soviet Korean schools and institutes were strictly socialist. This meant that lessons regarding Marxist and Russian literature were standardized to teach Pushkin, Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, but in the Korean language. These lessons would

focus on class distinctions with a historical materialist foundation. Schools, universities, and workers' night schools (*rabfaks*) were the key to building the new generation of young, vigilant, and well-trained revolutionary socialists, often called *vydvizhentsy* (Chang 2016).

In the 1923–1924 school year, 716 Korean students went on to higher education in institutes, technicums (technical institutes), and universities all across the Soviet Union. This figure was to increase tremendously from 1923 to 1937, the period of Korean *korenizatsiia*. In 1924–1925, Koreans had a higher proportion of school children than the Russian population. In the Vladivostok district, Korean students outnumbered Russians 156 to 152 per thousand population. This led a local newspaper *Sovetskii Primore* to remark "Now isn't that strange?" (Pak 1995). By the late 1920s, Koreans had a plethora of magazines, newspapers, and other media in Russian and Korean to choose from. By 1935, there were nine newspapers and six journals in Korean language. The nine Korean language newspapers were named as follows: *Avangard*, *Workers*, *Peasants Gazette*, *Red Star*, *The Path of Lenin*, *The Path of Stalin*, *New World*, *Culture,* and *Stalin's Tribunal* (Kuzin 1993, p. 98).

Cultural change in the Russian-Korean communities came with population growth and a large increase in the demand for general, technical, and higher education. By 1936, there was an estimated 204,000 Koreans of a total population of 2,273,000 in the Russian Far East (Bugai and Pak 2001; Stephan 1994). The Korean population had increased from 106,000 in 1926 to 170,000 in 1929 (Bugai and Pak 2001). 25,043 Koreans were enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the RFE. They made up 12.5 percent of the total primary and secondary school population (Bugai and Pak 2001, p. 234). By 1935, there was a Korean section in the Far Eastern University, two Korean pedagogical institutes, one Korean Pedagogical Institute for workers of Vladivostok which was a 4-year university (established in 1931 with 780 students), a Korean section in the Khabarovsk Agricultural Institute, a Korean section of the Soviet Party School which was established in 1927, and, finally, the Korean Pedagogical Institute of Nikolsk-Ussuriysk which was a 4-year institute with approximately 420 students (Bugai and Pak 2001; Kuzin 1993).

The Korean Pedagogical Institute of Nikolsk-Ussuriysk was regarded as the crown jewel in the Korean community and seen as representative of how quickly they had risen as a Soviet people. All students there were Koreans and all courses were in Korean language according to Serafima Kim (2009c). Koreans were doing so well educationally that a Korean Soviet Party School also opened in Nikolsk-Ussuriysk in 1930, which had 372 Korean students by 1933. There was also an explosion of books being printed in the Korean alphabet. Over 200 Korean villages now had their own libraries in 1932. By 1934, there were 36 Korean authors who were regularly being published, 22 of whom had their works published in both Russian and Korean. Of the 20 most popular books by Korean authors, the print run ranged from 5 to 176 thousand. The Korean section of the state RFE publishing house employed ten people in production and still could not keep up with the demand (Pak 1994; Kuzin 1993).

Gerhard Simon (1991) noted that, typically, Soviet nationalities with several institutes of higher education were granted the status of an autonomous Soviet

socialist republic or a union republic. The Koreans did not receive either due to their being a diaspora nationality continually linked to a supposed Japanese-led juggernaut that was using the Chinese and Korean peasants of the RFE as espionage agents.

5 State Policies Toward the Soviet Koreans and Their Education After Deportation

The *korenizatsiia* period in the RFE was the absolute apogee for the Koreans and their "cultural autonomy" and sociopolitical representation, but it ended abruptly on 21 August 1937 with the Resolution 1428–3266ss approved and signed by General Secretary Stalin and Chairman of the Ministry of People's Commissars, Vyacheslav Molotov. The resolution was entitled "On the exile of the Korean population from the border regions of the Russian Far Eastern region" and called for the deportation of all Koreans from the RFE to Central Asia and the Crimea. The same resolution stated that Koreans were being deported because of the need to "suppress the penetration of Japanese espionage," though Soviet authorities had not caught any Soviet Koreans who could be verified as agents of Japanese intelligence. By November 1937, the Korean deportation was essentially finished; a total of 172,597 Koreans (36,681 families) were deported from the RFE. Only some 600–700 remained in the RFE who were to be deported ad hoc through the beginning of 1938; around 2000 remained on North Sakhalin (Chang 2016). The Koreans were sent off to Central Asia with a memo signed by People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs NKVD agents Meer and Dalkrai. The NKVD head, Liushkov, reported the fulfillment of his duties stating, "On October 30, from the city of Vladivostok's station was sent the last assembled echelon 501 ordinal 125/62 with the suspicious Koreans" (Kim 1999).

The Korean's fidelity and willingness to defend their Soviet homeland should never have been questioned. However, this "problem" was not due to anything that the Soviet Koreans might have said or done. The origin of this problem lay in the fact that the Stalinist regime and its political elites continually regarded its "national minorities" and non-Eastern Slavic natives as potential fifth columnists despite the avowals to follow a Marxist or socialist "class line." As an example, during the First World War, the problem of "political loyalty" required that the state removed and expropriated the properties of 1.5 million Jews, Poles, Russian-Germans, and (to a much lesser extent) Chinese and deported them from the western borders of the Russian empire to Siberia and Central Asia, then known as Turkestan. The Chinese were primarily guest-laborers in Russia, and only 15 thousand were deported outside of the Russian empire as possible German spies (Chang 2016). These unfortunate deportees were labeled as "enemy aliens" and as "internal enemies" during the First World War. Mostly importantly, these labels and categories by the Tsarist state were reinvigorated and recycled by the Soviet regime during the 1930s with very few changes. In regard to the Jews, Poles, and Germans, a minority of each of these

communities had long ago assimilated as "Russians" and yet were still deported as "enemy aliens" or "internal aliens" (Lohr 2003)! This is a strong sense of primordialism that extends even to Russian syntax since these people are known as Russian-Poles, Russian-Germans, and or Russian-Chinese in Russian. In less primordialist societies such as in North America (in English), these same peoples would have been known as Polish-Russians or Chinese-Russians signifying Polish or Chinese on the exterior but "Russian" by culture and language internally (Chang 2016). Lenin and Stalin repeatedly proclaimed cultural and linguistic autonomy for every ethnic group (known as a "nationality") during the first years after the Bolshevik Revolution (Smith 1999). However, by the early 1930s, the Soviet Union believed that it was surrounded on all borders by inimical, anti-communist states such as Finland, Germany, and Poland on its western borders and the Japanese empire (in Korea and Manchukuo) to the east. By 1936–1937, Stalin was actually promoting the idea of the fifth columnists in the USSR and the fact that they needed to be purged. His regime labeled the Koreans repeatedly as "those suspicious people," an "enemy nation," and "undoubtedly cadres of Japanese espionage" (Chang 2016). Additionally, the category of "enemy nations" referring primarily to the diaspora peoples within the USSR was bandied about by Stalin and the Politburo to encourage the idea that some kind of punitive actions had to be taken toward the Soviet diaspora peoples (Khlevniuk 2015). This led to the Korean deportation in 1937 and the deportation of many others.

The loyalty of the Soviet Koreans had been established since the First Word War when 4 thousand fought in the Russian Army. They actively fought the Japanese during the Intervention (1918–1922) with 4–5 thousand fighting as Red Partisans and another 2 thousand who fought without an affiliation. John Stephan lists 48 Korean Red Partisans units, some of them as large as 700 men (Stephan 1971). Koreans fought again in the Red Army during the short Sino-Japanese War of 1929. A renowned Red Army unit among the Korean community, the 76th Riflemen's regiment which was composed mostly of Russian-Koreans stayed in Manchuria for the postwar "mop up" operations against Chang Hsueh-Liang's Manchurian army from September to November 1929 (Pak 2006). Then, almost adding insult to injury, it was Soviet Korean NKVD units made up of Korean officers who worked alongside regular NKVD units to evacuate and deport the entire Korean population from the RFE (Khisamutdinov 1993).

The deportation of the Koreans to Central Asia signaled the end of two processes: indigenization through education and the end of their rapid recruitment or promotion as "national cadres" in Soviet institutions. The "flagship" of Soviet Korean higher education, the Korean Pedagogical Institute of Nikolsk-Ussuriysk, was transferred to Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan. However, after one academic year, it became the Kyzylorda Pedagogical Institute, and the medium of instruction was changed from Korean to Russian. Also Kazakh language instruction became an option, and the institute was now open for all nationalities.

After their deportation, the Koreans continued to use the Korean language as the medium of instruction for 1 or 2 years depending on the location. Several of our interviewees gave their accounts regarding the changes to their language of instruc-

tion. Pyotr Pak (2009b) stated that Korean language education continued for 2 years after the deportation. Nikolai Shek (2008) stated that it lasted for only 1 year. Then all schooling was transferred to Russian language as the medium of instruction and either 1 or 2 h per week of Korean lessons as a foreign language.

6 Three Soviet Koreans and How Education Improved Their Lives

This study will now examine three Koreans who attended specialized Soviet schools or study programs dedicated to sports or dance. Gleb Semyonovich Li (2009) and Gerasim Sergeevich Pak (Pak 2009a) were approximately 2 and 4 years of age when deported to Central Asia in 1937. They remember spending much of their adolescence playing chess in clubs which were sponsored by different Soviet sports societies. Some of these clubs were sponsored by different worker's societies, military, and university and some by particular neighborhoods. Li and Pak would attend chess training sessions and receive instruction after school through all of the aforementioned societies, institutes, and clubs. Chess in the Soviet Union of the late 1940s and early 1950s was ubiquitous (Karpov 1991). The Soviet Union was very strong in chess and treated chess as a sport, which would help the nation be "ready to labor and to defend [against capitalist-imperialists]" (Pearson 1990). It possessed a number of publishing houses which allowed Soviet children to learn chess and buy books, which taught them chess strategies from basic to advanced. There were also books which reconstructed the matches between famous world and Soviet grandmasters of chess. The books could be bought cheaply as well as the chess sets. The cities of Urgench and Nukus were far away from the center of Soviet Uzbek life in Tashkent, but most of the amenities of Soviet life were brought to Nukus and the Khorezm area.

Gleb Li and Gerasim Pak began in local clubs and then moved up to chess clubs which were sponsored by labor organizations, factories, universities, and the like. After 1953, both were able to travel to regional and all-union chess tournaments. They played matches constantly in order to keep moving up on the local and regional rankings in Uzbekistan, Central Asia, and Russia. These tournaments, the travel, and the small stipends were paid by the state. Eventually, both Li and Pak became Master of Sport and Candidate Master of Sport, respectively, in chess. Pak stated:

> I had some natural abilities in math and physics so this is the department in which I enrolled at the Nukus Pedagogical Institute [Uzbekistan]. This allowed me to continue playing competitive chess matches throughout my years at the university.

Pak also became a chess instructor at the *Dom Pionerov* [*dom* means house; the *Pionerov* or *Pionery* means Pioneers which were a youth communist organization from 10 to 15 years of age] in Urgench, Uzbekistan (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Gerasim Pak, 1990, chess instructor at the *Dom Pionerov* in Urgench, Uzbekistan. Dom means house; the Pioneers were a youth socialist group from ages 10 to 15. (Photo courtesy of Gerasim Pak)

Larisa Valentinovna Kim (2010) was involved with a Korean dance troupe of young women from her collective farm, *Pravda*. The group named Miya Ri ("mountain flower" in the Hamgyong dialect of Korean) performed in front of many other Korean *kolkhozes* in and around Tashkent. At age 14 in 1969, Larisa left the farm to go to the city of Tashkent and study dance at the Choreographic School of Tashkent. She was fortunate in ways that Pak and Li, who grew up in the 1950s, were not because by the 1960s, Soviet Central Asia was relatively developed and could offer many of the same amenities as one could find in the western side of the USSR. Additionally, specialized education, sports, and dance schools had opened throughout the USSR beginning in the late 1950s (Il He 2010). In 1962, Tashkent opened an *internat* which was a boarding facility or dormitory for gifted and sports-related students. Larisa stated that in the 1960s, life was quite good for students at the specialized schools. She received a student stipend for room and board at the *internat* along with some 200 or so other students. The stipend also covered her travel expenses to return home on the weekends by bus. The *internat* was full of students from all over Uzbekistan who were receiving specialized sports, dance, or gifted education.

By the 1960s, the Soviet Union employed recruiters to search every city and region for the best young prospects in sports, gifted students in math, physics, and dance. The recruiters would attend the competitions and offer the most outstanding competitors (usually those who placed in the top three) scholarships to study at the sports

schools in Tashkent. Larisa managed to win entrance which guaranteed her a stipend to the Tashkent Choreographic School. At this time, the school offered only two divisions, ballet or national dances. She chose the latter specialization. There, she studied the general subjects such as math, literature, science, and history (Savelyeva 2014).

In addition, Larisa Kim studied courses on interpretative dance, the kinesthetic of dance, Spanish dance, Turkic dance (various), Russian dance (various modern and classical), dances of Northern people (Nanai dance), Mongol dance, and Uzbek dance. She stated that every performance had at least one rendition of Uzbek dance since they lived in the Uzbek SSR. In 1973, at age 17, she finished the choreographic school and did not continue onwards in the Tashkent Choreographic Institute which offered a diploma. Her first employment after her graduation was with *Kyr Kyss* (meaning "40 beauties" in Uzbek) a dance troupe from Nukus, Uzbekistan, which had other Koreans in it, but performed mostly Uzbek and Turkic dances. In 1976, Larisa Kim began performing in a Korean *kolkhoz* dance and vocalist ensemble called Chen Chun. Kim stated that this was perhaps the most exciting period of her life:

> We traveled all over Central Asia, visiting and performing in Korean *kolkhozes* in Kazakhstan, Kirgizia and Uzbekistan. Everyone was happy to see us. It was like receiving a standing ovation every night [at every performance].

Kim also traveled to Mongolia and several times to North Korea as part of Chen Chun troupe. She stated that her average salary was 200 rubles per month which was an excellent salary at the time. In comparison, the average collective farmer earned 120 rubles per month (Larisa Kim 2010) (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Larisa V. Kim (third from the left) 1970 at the collective farm *Pravda* as part of *Pravda*'s youth dance troupe called "Miya Ri" (Little Mountain Flower). She later helped found *Chen Chun*. Note that some of the dresses are slightly different. *Pravda* received the materials. Then, their mothers shared a general design and began sewing according to their own interpretation and the availability of materials, lace, cloth, etc. The dresses took long hours to complete. (Photo courtesy of Larisa Kim)

7 Non-Koreans' Korean Culture and Language

This section describes the informal education and integration of non-Koreans to Korean language and culture after the 1937 deportation. The deported Koreans were placed in collective farms (*kolkhozes*) surrounding the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. Soviet Koreans were typically the overwhelming majority in the Korean *kolkhozes*.

Perhaps one of the most interesting phenomena in Korean *kolkhozes* was that the non-Koreans' integration or even, perhaps, assimilation to Korean culture (Berry 2003). This author visited the former Korean *kolkhozes* called *Sverdlov*, *Uzbekistan*, *Pravda*, *Staryi Leninskii Put* (the Old Lenin's Way), *Leninskii Put*, *Politotdel*, *Iik Ota*, and others which surrounded Tashkent. In most of the collectives, the population was majority Korean through the late 1970s to early 1980s. These collective farms remained from 50% to 70% Korean through 1991. The non-Koreans children and young adults on these collectives had assimilated to varying degrees with Korean life and lifestyle (*byt*) and learned the Korean language. The following interviews were conducted in Korean with several of the non-Koreans (Fig. 4).

Atabek Zamov (2009) was a Uyghur man who had come with his family as refugees from China to the USSR and Uzbekistan in the early 1960s to the collective Kim Pen Khva, formerly called the North Star collective farm. Atabek's family arrived in Uzbekistan when he was 10 years old and he soon learned Korean. During school, all classes were taught in Russian and all the Korean students spoke in Russian. When at home, afterschool and during sports activities (but not during Pioneer or Komsomol group meetings), the children spoke in Korean. In this manner, Atabek and the others who were interviewed learned Korean. Atabek spoke Korean fairly fluently with little or no accent. He married a Korean woman and his daughter married a South Korean. He did not feel that it was a problem to have

Fig. 4 Anna Ivanovna Tsoi, left. Sabirzhon Zuparov, right. (Photos by author)

assimilated to the Korean culture rather than maintaining a stronger Uyghur identity. The fact that Uyghurs are a diaspora nationality within Central Asia and had few cultural and educational programs for them probably played a large role in his primarily voluntary assimilation.

Another research participant, Sabirzhon Zuparov (2010), was perhaps the best Korean speaker of all the non-Koreans who were interviewed. He spoke Korean rather fluently. Sabirzhon is an Uzbek born in 1958 on the collective *Severnyi Maiak* (Northern Lighthouse). His parents had joined this collective farm when they were young adults and could understand Korean but spoke it poorly. When Sabirzhon was young, he was left in the care of an elderly Korean couple while his parents worked in the fields. Thus, he spoke Korean all day. Sabirzhon stated that he spoke Korean more than any other language until he was about 12 or 14 years old. He would even speak with his parents in Korean while they responded to him in Uzbek.

Sabirzhon stated that while in the Soviet army, he continued to speak Korean with other Korean recruits and officers. I asked him, "Do you also feel Korean since you speak Korean and have lived with Koreans all your life?" To which Sabirzhon replied:

> Yes I do, I feel both Uzbek and Korean. I grew up speaking Korean most of my life. I was good friends with all of the Koreans here. We were good friends and our friendships were deep.

Asked about the issue of intermarriage with Koreans, he answered:

> Even if I had wanted to, I could not. First, my parents would not have allowed it. Second, I am an Uzbek, we have our ways and traditions [but], as a matter of fact, we were all good friends here. Those were good times here. Maybe there was a certain Korean girlfriend, but I just would not have been able to.

Although Sabirzhon had more inclusive feelings about identifying as a Korean when younger, when he reached adulthood, his considerations became much more focused around his core identities (as a Muslim and an Uzbek) and intermarriage was no longer possible for him.

Anna Ivanovna Tsoi (2009) is a Russian who came to *Severnyi Maiak* (Uzbekistan) from Russia in 1944 when she was 5 years old. She stated, "I have been speaking Korean since I was five." Anna married a Korean man surnamed Tsoi who has since passed away. Both of her sons were raised in *Severnyi Maiak* and can understand Korean but speak it poorly. She added:

> My children understand and speak it, but with an accent [Russian]. Our Koreans today speak it poorly as well. I maintain the Korean customs. For the most part, I continue to eat Korean food every day, rice with kimchi and seaweed kimchi [*megi cha* in Hamgyong Province dialect or hae ch'o].

Anna also said that there were other Russians and Ukrainians on the collective farms in general who also grew up speaking Korean, but they began leaving by the mid-1980s and many more left Uzbekistan after the independence in 1991. They returned to Russia and the Ukraine. One of Anna's sons has gone to Russia and is currently living and working in the Primore (the RFE) while the other son is in Tashkent (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 Sabirzhon Zuparov's 4th class photo, 1969 at *Severnyi Maiak*. Sabirzhon was absent this day. Note only 2–3 non-Koreans in the photo. Nearly all students are wearing the Pioneer's neckerchief. (Photo courtesy of Sabirzhon Zuparov)

On the Korean *kolkhozes*, everyone partook of celebrating the Korean festivities of *Tano* and *Chusok*. Koreans brought out symbols of their traditional ways such as the hand-mill for grinding rice to make sticky rice cakes. Sabirzhon stated that he too participated in this turning of the hand-mill and all of the other Korean traditional games as a child and teenager. The hand-mill not only represented Koreans, but was also symbolic of one group of people becoming a "collective." It was noticeable that Sabirzhon maintained his national and cultural identity much more strongly than Atabek. Sabirzhon had family and relatives outside of the Korean *kolkhozes* which reinforced this identity and the need to maintain honor and tradition.

The Uzbek identity was further reinforced by the state structure and Soviet education in Uzbekistan, which taught about the brotherhood of the Soviet peoples, but also that "this land which was shared by all was Uzbek land." This was further reinforced by the Soviet Union's political system. The USSR demonstrated a startling bias against the diaspora nationalities (such as Poles, Greeks, Germans, Iranians, Chinese, Finns, and Koreans) who lost all of their autonomous territories within the USSR and most of their gains during *korenizatsiia* after the Second World War (Naimark 2010). Furthermore, Sabirzhon's national identity as an Uzbek seemed to be strengthened by his religious one as a Muslim (Bennigsen and Wimbush 1986). This in fact is the course that most of the Central Asian states have chosen after the end of the Soviet Union, that is, that national culture would be shaped and reinforced by, albeit their own Islamic religion and traditions which include some pre-Islamic shamanistic, Zoroastrian, and other practices. In post-Soviet Central Asia, Islam has played a much larger role in the formation of national

culture and identity. For example, Islam Karimov, the former President of Uzbekistan, took his oath as President (year not stated) with his hand on both the Koran and the Uzbek constitution (Sengupta 2003). Regarding Islam influencing the formation of national identity and culture, Dagikhudo Dagiev (2014) wrote, "As in post-Ottoman Turkey, Islam plays an important role in the newly independent states of Central Asia. In these countries Islam remains not only a major factor in the formation of national culture, as it does in modern Turkey…."

8 Conclusion

Russian-Korean identity appears to have been formed through a complex mixture of primordialist ("I am Korean by blood") and transnationalist views of race and nationality. This admixture has produced a people that curiously see their ethnogenesis as having taken place outside of Korea, thus, a Korean diaspora people having been formed in *Vondo* (the Russian Far East). Maia Kim (2009b) who was born in 1937 stated, "For my parents, their homeland was the Primore. They put down roots there, they were raised there." Chan Nim Kim (2009) who was born 1929 stated, "I would have liked to have taken a look around there [peninsular Korea], but I was a Soviet citizen and proud to have been from the USSR and now an Uzbek Korean."

However, when questioned further, the Korean interviewees sometimes explained that the Primore area and the particular time period (the 1920s to 1930s) were like living in Russia, but surrounded by Koreans, a sort of "second Korea." These elderly Koreans (80–94 years old when interviewed in the years 2006–2010) as far back as even their grandparents stated that they were a people derived from Korea but, certainly, defined themselves as of a "mixed culture and life (*smeshnaiia kultura i smeshnyi byt*)."

A salient characteristic of Russian-Korean life and ethos was the plus-value assigned to higher education. They above all wanted the social mobility that higher education granted. In 1926, one of the Soviet Korean leaders, Kim Mangyom, told the local Communist Party leadership (of the Primore) that "the mood [desire] of the Koreans is in favor of Russian language education or at least Russian as one of the separate subjects in school." This went against the state's policy of *korenizatsiia.* A second Korean leader, N.F. Ni, went even further stating, "The Koreans want to master Russian customs, life and language. Their parents want the language of instruction in school for their children to be Russian (Pak 1995)."

Why was this so? It was Russian that was spoken in all the Soviet courts and used by Soviet police officers. Russian was the language of instruction in the best Soviet universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg and the instructional medium which would afford their children the best chance at working as a Soviet cadre. At any rate, Korean language instruction was terminated in 1938–1939 and replaced by Russian. The end goal for the Koreans from the very beginning of the Soviet Union was social mobility and a greater degree of life and career choices especially in comparison with the previous generations. This was best achieved through general and

higher education in Russian which the Soviet Korean leaders and parents recognized as early as 1926 (Gelb 1995; Chang 2016; Krieger 2006). Thus, my primary findings from the interviews and fieldwork are that the Soviet Koreans are a diaspora people who were formed from their interactions with non-Korean peoples, languages, practices, values, and milieus. Figuratively, they understood that they were actors in a Russian play (society) wearing Korean masks. Some people saw them as out of place. After their deportation to Central Asia, they understood that language (whether Russian or Korean) was simply a tool by which their community could transmit their values which were already established as "Korean with other major influences."

In Central Asia (after 1937), the Koreans were deported and reconstituted in Soviet economic units called *kolkhozes* made up of primarily Koreans. As they were very productive agriculturally, they were able to sustain their cultural traditions and ways of life which were various gradations of a unique hybrid culture, while some practices remained purely Korean and Russian. The collective farms were their centralized sites of institutional, economic, and cultural power and representation (Chang and Park 2013). In turn, during the Soviet period, the Koreans informally transferred and taught (to varying degrees) their lifestyle, traditions, farming, and language to non-Koreans within their cultural space(s)—the aforementioned farms. That which was deemed foreign merged with local elements bringing both into greater proximity, increasing their interactions, multiplying their social capital, and creating new local entities with mixed characteristics.

References

Allworth, E., Bohr, A., Wilson, A., Law, V., & Smith, G. (1998). *Nation-building in the post-soviet borderlands: The politics of national identities*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bennigsen, A., & Wimbush, S. E. (1986). *Muslims of the soviet empire: A guide*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Berry, J. W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K. Chun, P. B. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research* (pp. 17–38). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Bugai, N. F., & Pak, B. D. (2001). *140 let: Ocherk Istorii Rossiskikh Koreitsev [140 years: Essay on the history of Russian Koreans]*. Moskva: IVRAN.

Buttino, M. (2009). Minorities in Samarkand: A case study of the city's Koreans. *Nationalities Papers, 37*(5), 719–742.

Chang, J. (2016). *Burnt by the sun: The Koreans of the Russian Far East*. Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press.

Chang, J., & Park, J. (2013). Soviet Koreans: Redemption through labour and sport. *The Eurasia Studies Society Journal, 2*(3), 1–21.

Dagiev, D. (2014). *Regime transition in Central Asia: Stateness, nationalism and political change in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan*. New York: Routledge.

Fitzpatrick, S. (1979). *Education and social mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gelb, M. (1995). An early soviet ethnic deportation: The far-eastern Koreans. *Russian Review, 54*(3), 389–412.

He, I. L. (2010). Interviewed by J. Chang, Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 23, April.
Hirsch, F. (2002). Race without the practice of racial politics. *Slavic Review, 61*(1), 30–43.
Howell, M., & Prevenier, W. (2001). *Reliable sources: An introduction to historical methods*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Huttenbach, H. R. (1993). The Soviet-Koreans: Products of Russo-Japanese rivalry. *Central Asian Survey, 12*(1), 59–69.
Karpov, A. (1991). *Karpov on Karpov: A memoir of a chess world champion*. New York. Toronto: Atheneum/Maxwell Macmillan.
Kenez, P. (1999). *A history of the Soviet Union from the beginning to the end*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Khisamutdinov, A. A. (1993). *The Russian Far East: Historical essays*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii & CeRA Press.
Khlevniuk, O. (2015). *Stalin: New biography of a dictator*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Kim, V. D. (1999). *Pravda polveka spustia* [*The truth a half century later*]. Tashkent: Uzbekiston.
Kim, G. (2009a). Interviewed by J. Chang, Avangard, Uzbekistan, 7 June.
Kim, M. (2009b). Interviewed by J. Chang, Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 14 September.
Kim, S. (2009c). Interviewed by J. Chang, Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 7 September.
Kim, L. (2010). Interviewed by J. Chang, Kolkhoz Pravda, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 26 April.
Krieger, V. (2006). *Rein Volga Irtysh: Iz istorii nemtsev tsentralnoi azii [Rein Volga Irtysh: From the history of the Germans of Central Asia]*. Almaty: Daik Press.
Kuzin, A. (1993). *Dalnevostochnye koreitsy: Zhizn i tragediia sudby* [Far Eastern Koreans: Life and tragedies]. Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dalnevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo.
Li, G. (2009). Interviewed by J. Chang, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 8 May.
Lohr, E. (2003). *Nationalizing the Russian empire: The campaign against enemy aliens during World War I*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Mogilner, M. (2008). *Homo imperii: Istoriia fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii, konets XIX- nachalo XX vv.* [Homo imperii: The history of physical anthropology in Russia, end of XIX-beginning of XX century]. Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
Naimark, N. M. (2010). *Stalin's genocides*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Oka, Natsuko (2001). The Korean diaspora in nationalizing Kazakhstan: Strategies for survival as an ethnic minority. In Koryo Saram: Koreans in the former USSR [special issue] edited by German N. Kim and Ross King. *Korean and Korean-American Studies Bulletin, 12*, 2/3: 89–113.
Pak, B. D. (1994). *Koreitsy v Rossiiskoi imperii [Koreans in the Russian empire]*. Irkutsk: IGPI.
Pak, B. D. (1995). *Koreitsy v Sovetskoi Rossii, 1917-konets 30-Kh godov [Koreans in soviet Russia, from 1917 to the end of the 1930s]*. Moskva-Irkutsk: IGPI.
Pak, B. D. (2006). *Kim Pen Khvai kolkhoz <Poliarnaia zvezda>* [Collective farm Kim Pen Khvai <Polar Star>]. Moskva: IV RAN.
Pak, G. (2009a). Interviewed by J. Chang, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 4 June.
Pak, P. (2009b). Interviewed by J. Chang, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 August.
Pearson, L. (1990). *Children of glasnost: Growing up soviet*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
Rayfield, D. (2018). Email correspondence between author and D. Rayfield, 13 July.
Ritchie, D. (2003). *Doing oral history: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Savelyeva, T. (2014). Interviewed by J. Chang, Hong Kong, 27 May.
Sengupta, A. (2003). *The formation of the Uzbek nation-state: A study in transition*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
Shek, N. (2008). Interviewed by J. Chang, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 9 August.
Simon, G. (1991). *Nationalism and policy toward the nationalities in the Soviet Union: From totalitarian dictatorship to post-Stalinist society.* (K. Forster and O. Forster, Trans.) Boulder/ Oxford: Westview.
Smith, J. (1999). *The Bolsheviks and the national question, 1917-23*. London: MacMillan Press.

Stalin, J. (2003) [1935]. Marxism and the national and colonial question. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific.
Stephan, J. J. (1971). The Korean minority in the Soviet Union. *Mizan – Central Asian Review, 13*(3), 138–150.
Stephan, J. J. (1994). *The Russian Far East: A history*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Tishkov, V. (1997). *Ethnicity, nationalism and conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The mind aflame*. London: Sage Publications.
Tsoi, A. (2009). Interviewed by J. Chang, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 28 May.
Weitz, E. (2003). *A century of genocide: Utopias of race and nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Zamov, A. (2009). Interviewed by J. Chang, Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 25 May.
Zuparov, S. (2010). Interviewed by J. Chang, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 25 April.