

Z.G. Son

Legal Regulation of the Korean Labor Immigrants by the Russian Imperial Government in World War I

Abstract. The article analyzes the conditions of labor migration of ethnic Koreans from Manchuria and China to the Urals of the Russian Empire in 1915–1916, and their experience of interaction with the local Russian authorities. The research is based on the archival materials of the State Archive of the Sverdlovsk region (GASO). This article focuses on the legal and social status of the Korean laborers, their living conditions, habitat, and local conflicts. The study draws on theoretical insights from a range of works on immigration, and the political and economic integration of immigrants. With the onset of World War I, conscription into the Russian Imperial Army drained the manpower reserves, especially in the industries in the Urals. Some industries were under threat of permanent closure. The local tsarist administration petitioned the Foreign Ministry to employ Chinese and Korean laborers in these regions. The results of the research show that the Imperial government did not have a coherent structural plan for the accommodation of Eastern immigrant workers. The government largely improvised, regulating the migration process by issuing various decrees aimed at creating a legal basis for the immigrants. The findings also contradict the earlier Soviet historiography hypothesis about the widespread oppression of ethnic minorities in the Russian Empire. Unlike the Chinese workers who eventually left Russia for Manchuria, the Korean workers chose to stay in Russia after their contractual obligations expired and enjoyed the same rights and privileges as local Russian workers. The research reveals evidence of mistreatment of Korean workers; however, the wrongdoers were local Russian Korean merchants who acted as intermediaries between the local administration and the hired Korean immigrant workers.

Keywords: World War I, the Russian Empire, Manchuria, China, Korean workers, labor migration.

Author: Zhanna G. SON, PhD (History), associate professor, HSE University. ORCID: 0000-0003-0665-1624. E-mail: jgson@hse.ru; jannason@mail.ru

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Early Soviet historiography interpreted the Russian Empire's interethnic and interconfessional relations as invariably oppressive. According to the ideological postulate of the Bolshevik state coined by Vladimir Lenin, "The Russian Empire is a prison of peoples and an absolute evil." In this context, the study of labor immigration in the first half of the twentieth century from Northeast Asia, namely from Korea and Manchuria, is of academic interest, as the process of labor immigration of Koreans from Manchuria and

China during World War I to Russia, including the Urals, remains an understudied topic in historical scholarship. In addition, the Korean diaspora in Imperial Russia represents a unique case because they were not an autochthonous people but came as immigrants in the second half of the 19th century. Under these circumstances and according to the Soviet ideological cliché about the universal oppression of all nationalities, the Koreans should have been one of the most oppressed minorities in the Russian Empire.

The post-communist period offers a fresh chance to re-examine the historical heritage of Imperial Russia with new evidence coming from the previously closed Soviet archives. As a result, the novel interpretations of the imperial past appear, where the ethno-confessional policy in the Russian Empire emerges in a new light as quite flexible, stable, and aimed at preserving the unity of multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionalism. This article, based on archival material from the State Archive of the Sverdlovsk Region (GASO), examines the reasons and conditions for the immigration of Koreans laborers to the enterprises in the Urals during World War I. The research findings demonstrate that state authorities in pre-revolutionary Russia welcomed foreign migrants, in our case Koreans, and provided them with equal rights along with the local Russian population, which contradicts the Soviet thesis about universal and purposeful oppression of all nationalities in the Empire. The cases of mistreatment of Korean migrant workers uncovered by the research focus on Far Eastern Korean entrepreneurs who, acting as the recruitment agents between the migrant workers and the hiring company, often took advantage of their fellow countrymen because they did not speak Russian and did not understand local laws. In the long run, the actions of these agents had resulted in significant financial losses for both the migrant laborers and the hiring companies. In addition, the high social status, societal influence, and financial capital of these Korean entrepreneur-merchants, all of whom were first-generation migrants to the Russian Empire, cast a shadow on the historical validity of the perpetual ethnic oppression that supposedly characterized the Russian Empire.

At the same time, it is important to note that many Koreans did experience nationalist hostility firsthand while living in Russia. However, it is also instructive to emphasize that these nationalistic outbursts were symptomatic of the Soviet, and not the Imperial, period of Russian history. These incidents were the unfortunate byproduct of the state policy of industrialization and collectivization when masses of people were forcibly uprooted and moved across the vast expanses of the USSR as slave laborers, which inevitably led to clashes between local residents and the newly arrived workers. The Soviet authorities made strenuous efforts to mitigate this problem, albeit not always successfully [Son, 2023, pp. 173—208].

This study focuses on the following aspects: the legal basis for the use of Korean immigrant workers, their social environment, working and living conditions, and conflicts. The knowledge of these aspects reveals another previously unknown historical page and adds it to the historical canvas of the lives of Koreans in the Russian Empire, the USSR, and the Russian Federation.

The Russian imperial government adhered to the following guidelines in implementing state migration policy. The policy towards certain confessions and peoples was flexible and pragmatic in accordance with the ad hoc principle, i.e., depending on the circumstances. The government practiced extensive cooperation with local elites, who

mostly received the rights of the Russian nobility and were included in the administrative system of the empire. The Empire emphasized the predominance of social assimilation over ethnic assimilation proper, which positively affected the political loyalty of the integrated societies and their leaders. It also prioritized ethnic and confessional tolerance in the absence of discrimination, and even created some advantages in the legal position of “foreigners” compared to Russians [Mironov, 2017, pp. 115–186].

In the Russian Empire, the mass resettlement of Koreans in the early twentieth century was a matter of concern to the authorities and the public. The hard-working and enduring Koreans adapted to harsh conditions despite the hardships of the assimilation process. At the same time, they were a cheap labor force. Until 1915, Koreans were allowed to work in the Far East and Siberia, excluding the Ural Mountains [Park, Bugai, 2004]. Depending on the historical period, Russian archival documents grouped the Chinese and Korean migrants under the titles “yellow race,” “orientalists,” or a combination of “Chinese and Koreans.” Therefore, most of the documents refer to both Chinese and Koreans. However, the attitude of the Russian authorities toward Koreans differed because, unlike Chinese, Koreans were allowed to apply for Russian citizenship [RGASPI. Fund 82. Case 1265. Inv. 2. pp. 34–35].

The first information on the Koreans in the Urals, particularly in the Perm province, is mentioned in the newspaper Perm Province Bulletin dated June 2, 1904. Due to the war with Japan in the Far East (1904–1905), the Russian authorities did not allow Japanese subjects to stay in the war zone to avoid cases of Japanese espionage. The government of the Russian Empire issued a document signed by the emperor on the “Provisional Regulations on Prisoners of War in the Russo-Japanese War” [Kamenskikh, 2014, p. 28].

On June 2, 1904, a party of 478 Japanese civilians from the Russian Far East came to Perm. They were ranked as prisoners of war by the Russian authorities: among them were 308 men, 150 women, 20 children, as well as 13 Chinese and 15 Koreans. The arrival of another party consisting of 409 Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese was shortly expected. Newly arrived Koreans were settled in Perm (57), Nyтва (17), Kamyshlov (9), and Ohansk (9). By October 22, 1904, the number of Koreans in Perm amounted to 298 people. After the end of the war, Koreans could return home, but all who wished were allowed to stay [Kamenskikh, 2014, pp. 29–30].

In Soviet-Russian historiography, researchers only mentioned the presence of Koreans in the Urals in 1914–1917. Kim Sŭng-hwa notes that Alexandra Petrovna Kim-Stankevich worked as an interpreter at the Urals factories where there were thousands of Korean workers at the time [Kim, 1965, p. 91; Aleksandra Petrovna..., 2008, pp. 23–24].

Boris Park writes that during the Civil War and foreign intervention (1918–1923), there were up to seven thousand Koreans in the European part of Russia and about five thousand in Western Siberia. Korean laborers worked in eighteen cities of European Russia: Moscow, Petrograd, Bakhmut, Kharkov, Taganrog, Yekaterinoslav, Alexandrovsk, Yekaterinodar, Rostov-on-Don, Novochoerkassk, Pyatigorsk, Armavir, Kiev, Astrakhan, Tsaritsyn, Saratov, Ufa, and Orenburg. Small groups of Korean workers were also present in Tashkent, Baku, Kurgan, Chelyabinsk, Tyumen, Yekaterinburg, Vyatka, Vologda, Yaroslavl, and Arkhangelsk [Park, Bugai, 2004, p. 131].

In 2008, Bella Park wrote about Alexandra Kim-Stankevich's revolutionary activities in the Urals. Presumably, in 1915–1916, Kim-Stankevich arrived at the Nadezhdinskii logging site as an interpreter among Chinese and Korean workers. According to the recollections of Kim Siyan, who worked in the Urals at that time, it follows that Kim-Stankevich was loved and respected by the Chinese and Korean workers because she defended their interests against the factory management. In the days of the February Revolution of 1917, Kim-Stankevich joined the ranks of the RSDRP(b) and soon became one of the leaders of the “Union of Urals Workers,” which included many Korean and Chinese workers [Aleksandra Petrovna..., 2008, pp. 23–24].

In 2014, Mikhail Kamenskikh published a monograph based on documentary sources from the Perm archives on the specifics of the formation, growth, and development of the Korean ethnic group in the Perm region in the 20th and early 21st centuries. He described in detail the stay of Koreans as prisoners of war during the Russo-Japanese War and provided a brief note about the migration of Koreans during World War I. In this book, much attention is given to the modern period of the history of Koreans living in Perm [Kamenskikh, 2014].

In 2021, a group of academics, including Andrei Avdashkin (Chelyabinsk State University, Chelyabinsk); Alexei Antoshin (Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia Boris Yeltsin, Yekaterinburg); Mikhail Kamenskikh (Perm Federal Research Center of the Ural Branch of RAS, Perm); Sung-jae Lim, Irina Musinova, Sergei Smirnov (Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia Boris Yeltsin, Yekaterinburg); So San-bom (Busan University of Foreign Languages, Busan); Valerii Thai (Deputy Chairman of the Ekaterinburg City Public Organization “National Cultural Autonomy of Russian Koreans,” Yekaterinburg); and Irina Fan (Institute of Philosophy and Law, Ural Branch of RAS, Yekaterinburg), conducted research on the role of diaspora communities in the socio-economic and cultural development of Russia and Korea in the twentieth century. They published a monograph entitled “Russians in Korea and Koreans in the Urals: History and Modernity” [Russkie v Koree..., 2021, p. 192]. In the section on Koreans in the Urals, there is no information about Koreans from Manchuria and China who worked at the factories of the Yekaterinburg region during World War I. The next wave of Korean migration to Russia occurred during World War I, when the Urals factories experienced a shortage of workers due to mobilization. For the first time, this article introduces documents from the State Archive of the Sverdlovsk Region on the legal status of Korean workers, their social status, working and living conditions, and the conflicts with the factory management and local authorities involving Korean workers.

This article relies on methods that allow for a comprehensive analysis of the role of Eastern immigrant workers in the host community, namely historical, source study, and textual analysis. The problems of Eastern workers are considered from the perspective of the principles of historicism within the framework of the systematic approach. This methodology made it possible to analyze the relationship between the authorities of the Russian Empire and foreign immigrants based on the archival lists of Korean workers who arrived from Manchuria and China to the Urals.

Theory: This study draws on the theoretical insights of a number of existing works on immigration, immigrant integration, and ethnic economies, including, but not limi-

ted to, the work of Jose A. Cobas [Jose, 1987, p. 143—161], “Ethnic Enclaves and Middleman Minorities. Alternative Strategies of Immigrant Adaptation?”, the theory of immigrant enclaves proposed by Alejandro Portes and Robert D. Manning in *The Immigrant Enclave: “Theory and Empirical Examples”* [Portes, Manning, 2012, p. 216—227].

Methods: The chronological analysis allows us to trace the evolution and changes in immigration policy and identify the cause-and-effect relationships between these changes. The legal framework of Russia’s imperial migration policy and the normative framework for the political status of Korean immigrants were studied using a normative approach. To address the tasks set in the study, statistical analysis, following the methodology of descriptive statistics, was used based on official statistical resources, laws, and government documents.

Legislative Basis for the Use of Korean Labor in the Urals

With the outbreak of World War I, Russia’s domestic situation changed dramatically. Conscription led to a significant reduction in the number of workers in various industries in the Urals, Central Volga region, and Central Russia. As a result, the idea arose to replace the conscripted Russian workers with laborers from Asian countries, specifically Chinese and Koreans.

On March 15, 1915, in Petrograd, at the meeting of the Council of Ministers, the conditions for the use of “yellow race” labor in Russia were considered. These rules came into force on April 4, 1915. On April 22, 1915, the Minister of Trade and Industry received a petition from the General Directorate of the Estate, Prince S. Abamelek-Lazarev, for the delivery of several thousand Chinese and Korean workers to the Urals at the expense of the treasury. The petition stated that the Kizelov coal mines of Prince Abamelek-Lazarev, if provided with 3,000 workers, could increase the monthly production of coal by 3 million poods [Kitajskie rabochie..., 2010, p. 25].

In the circular of the Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated August 31, 1915, number 41283, signed by Prince Shcherbatov, it was noted: “To Governors, Town Governors and Chiefs of Regions. By agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and on the basis of Article 158 of the Statute of Ministries, it is recognized as necessary, temporarily, until a special order, to allow unimpeded passage into the Empire of those Chinese subjects, as well as Koreans, who are invited to work for our metallurgical or coal mining enterprises, on the condition that these persons present their national passports, provided with a visa from our consular authorities. This visa must specify the name and surname of the person sent to Russia, his age, his nationality, as well as information on which factory or mines the person is invited to work at. No other passport formalities established for the Chinese and Koreans by the existing laws or orders of the higher local authorities, not excluding the obligation to exchange the documents by which they were admitted inside the Empire for Russian tickets, are not obligatory for the persons of the mentioned category”. [Kitajskie rabochie..., 2010, p. 25].

There were petitions and requests from various regions asking for permission for workers from the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan to enter European Russia. On October 26, 1915, the governor of Perm province, Lozina-Lozinskiĭ, issued a Man-

datory Resolution “On the Conditions of Admission to Work in the Industrial and Mining Enterprises of Perm Province of Chinese and Korean Workers.” This document applied only to one province, including the Nizhne-Tagilsk and Lunevsk district administrations. The petitions for the right to bring workers from Manchuria to the Tula province and the Donets Basin were rejected. The decree also forbade the employment of Chinese and Koreans who did not have national passports with visas from Russian consulates. The Perm governor personally approved a sample of the settlement books that established the conditions for the hiring of Chinese and Koreans. The terms of employment and internal regulations were approved by the district engineer or factory inspector and had to be obligatorily translated into a language understandable to each worker [Kitajskie rabochie..., 2010, p. 26].

Food and work equipment provided against wages could be issued by the enterprise only at prices approved by the mine or factory supervisors. It was forbidden for other factories to outsource Chinese and Koreans, who were specifically brought to work at the expense of the hiring enterprises. The Eastern workers hired to work in private enterprises of mining industries, as well as other industrial enterprises, had to obey the general rules of the internal order on an equal basis with the Russian workers. This included the length and distribution of working hours and the observance of all company management rules. Unauthorized avoidance of work, early demands for changes in terms of employment, and leaving work before the end of the term established in the employment contract were categorically forbidden. The supervision of compliance with the terms of this mandatory decree and the drawing up of protocols in case of violations were entrusted to the officials of the Mining and Factory Inspectorate and the police. Eastern workers who violated these terms were subject to administrative fines of up to 3,000 rubles or arrest for up to three months [GASO. Fund 621. Case 292. Inv. 1. p. 4ob.].

On December 10, 1915, Governor Lozina-Lozinskii issued a new, expanded Mandatory Resolution titled “On the Conditions of Admission of the Chinese, Koreans, and Persians to Work in Industrial, Mining, and Other Enterprises, for the Purchase of Forest Materials, as well as for Hire from Private Individuals within the Confines of the Perm Province” [GASO. Fund 621. Case 292. Inv. 1. pp. 1–3ob]. This document indicates that Persian nationals were added to the list of Chinese and Korean workers, and the scope of foreign labor was also expanded. The conditions for the admission of foreign workers to the Perm province became stricter regarding the required documents for entry into Russia and the certificates of medical examination for the workers. The initial experience of accepting Oriental workers revealed that many of them had fraudulent documents and were deemed unreliable [GASO. Fund 621. Case 292. Inv. 1. pp. 1–3ob]. The responsibility for strict control of documents was placed on the recruitment agents who hired and delivered the Eastern workers. This document requirement did not apply to individuals who already resided in Russia and had received certificates of trustworthiness from the police. Additionally, the importation of workers of other nationalities into the Perm province through intermediaries without special permission from the governor was prohibited.

The decree from December 10, 1915, consisted of twenty-six paragraphs detailing the conditions for admitting Chinese, Korean, and Persian workers into the Perm province. It also repealed the decree issued on October 26, 1915 [GASO. Fund 621. Case

292. Inv. 1. pp. 1—3ob]. A key requirement in this document was that those responsible for delivering foreign workers for specific jobs were obliged to recruit and bring to the Urals only those workers with the skills needed by the company that ordered the foreign workforce. If the worker brought in lacked proper documents, had documents in someone else's name, or did not possess the required profession, the contractor was obliged to deport the worker immediately at the contractor's expense after drawing up a report. If the “person to be removed” had been taken into custody by that time, the recruitment agent had to cover the costs of escorting the worker back to his homeland [GASO. Fund 621. Case 292. Inv. 1. pp. 1—3ob].

Each agent bringing Chinese, Korean, and Persian workers to the Perm province was required to make a deposit of no less than 1,000 rubles (for 500 people) to the local police department for each individual enterprise. Two rubles were to be paid for each worker. Settlements with hired workers were to be based on pay slips [GASO. Fund 621. Case 292. Inv. 1. pp. 1—3ob]. From the moment the payroll was issued, the workers were considered accepted by the company, and the agents who had delivered them were exempt from further liability. If the workers were not admitted to the enterprise, the agents were obliged to return them home at their own expense.

The heads of enterprises were strictly forbidden to employ: “1. those sick with contagious and ‘sticky’ diseases; 2. individuals in working conditions dangerous to life or harmful to health, without implementing the necessary precautions; 3. to allocate premises previously occupied by sick individuals without thoroughly disinfecting them, under the responsibility of a doctor” [GASO. Fund 621. Case 292. Inv. 1. pp. 1—3ob].

The heads of enterprises were required to maintain interpreters fluent in both Russian and the native language of the workers, at a rate of at least one interpreter per 100 workers. Additionally, enterprises were required to keep a sufficient number of guards, at their own expense, to maintain order and tranquility among the workers, as well as to guard the workers and prevent their escape, both at the workplace and during transportation. Factory management was obligated to provide the local police with information about all Chinese, Koreans, and Persians who had arrived, including their numbers, and to submit their documents within twenty-four hours. All documents of foreign workers were to be kept in the company's office and were not to be given to the workers under any circumstances. At the end of the hiring period, Eastern workers were to be sent home in an organized manner. Each enterprise was to establish a special fund to cover the cost of transporting these workers home, amounting to 30 rubles per foreign worker. This amount was to be withheld from the workers' earnings during the first six months of employment. Furthermore, it was emphasized that workers should not be lured from one enterprise to another [GASO. Fund 621. Case 292. Inv. 1. p. 2]. The responsibility for overseeing adherence to the rules of this mandatory decree, maintaining work order in industrial and mining enterprises, and preparing protocols for any violations fell to factory officials and the Mining Inspectorate, while the local police were responsible for other violations of the mandatory decree.

On May 1, 1916, the governor of Perm Province introduced amendments to his mandatory decree issued on December 10, 1915. The new requirements aimed to enhance the control exercised by local authorities. Korean and Chinese nationals arriving in the region were to be transferred from the recruitment agents to the factory managers.

It was the responsibility of those employing these foreigners to report all new arrivals within a 24-hour period and to maintain a daily record of all Oriental workers in the company. The document emphasized that the transfer of Chinese and Koreans from one employer to another was permitted only with special permission from the governor or his commissioner, granted on a case-by-case basis. Violations of this ordinance were subject to administrative penalties of up to 3,000 rubles, arrest, and imprisonment for up to three months [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. pp. 8–9].

On March 15, 1916, the Russian Council of Ministers adopted Rules consisting of ten articles regarding the use of Korean and Chinese labor in the Empire. The Rules stipulated that the closest supervision over the recruitment of the “Yellow Immigrants,” as well as reference and intermediary activities, was to be entrusted to the Reference Bureaus on the Labor Question in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk, under the authority of the Governor-General of Priamursk. These bureaus would also establish offices in Harbin, at the Manchurian Station, and other locations. The third article granted a privilege to the Yellow Immigrants, stating that “instead of national passports being taken away and sent to the place of work, the Party Chief will be given a certificate of identity” at the border point. This article significantly facilitated the entry of foreigners from Manchuria and China into the Russian Empire.

On September 27, 1916, additional rules for the use of “yellow race” labor were introduced. According to these rules, such labor was permitted in the European part of the empire, with the exception of the war zone. Workers received several benefits, including the following:

- 1) Russian passports were replaced by national passports with visas obtained at the Harbin Consulate General;
- 2) Transportation by railroads was provided in individual cars at the IV class tariff;
- 3) Food rations were provided at stopping points along the way;
- 4) Free medical care was available;
- 5) The right to duty-free passage for articles of clothing, footwear, household implements (boilers, grates, mats, blankets, etc.), and work tools intended for the workers;
- 6) The right to duty-free passage on the return of their earnings, regardless of the amount [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. pp. 10–12ob.].

Thus, the legislative basis for using the labor of Asian workers in Russia, in general, and in the Urals, in particular, was formed during the process of employing foreign labor as a forced measure caused by World War I. The resolutions issued on the use of Korean labor affected various aspects, including the passport regime, transportation of workers to their workplaces, working conditions, wages, food, and accommodation. All legislative and administrative decisions emphasized that the working conditions and wages of Korean workers should be exactly the same as those of Russian workers.

Koreans and Russian Passports

An interesting document discovered in the State Archives of the Sverdlovsk Region is the report of a worker recruitment agent named Ponosov, who was sent to the Far East by the Bogoslovskii Mining District. The author of this report made an agreement

with recruiting agents, or local entrepreneurs, namely Nikolai Kim, a merchant of the Vladivostok second guild; Ivan Kham; Mikhail Ogai; and Yakov Kim, a peasant of Yanchihinskaia volost', Krabe village, Primorskaia oblast'. These agents organized a partnership for the recruitment of workers from China. They were all naturalized, assimilated ethnic Koreans who became Russian citizens, lived on the outskirts of Vladivostok in the Korean slobodka, had their own houses, and were engaged in large enterprises such as logging, excavation work, and transportation.

Interestingly, Ponosov specifically emphasized that Nikolai Kim had no property (movable or immovable), but enjoyed great popularity among the Korean people [GASO. Fund 45. Case 263. Inv. 1. p. 7]. Ponosov's point about Kim is both intriguing and contradictory because Kim was a second guild merchant. According to the reform of 1785, a second guild merchant was supposed to have declared capital ranging between 5,000 and 10,000 rubles. This merchant rank also allowed for the ownership of commercial riverboats, industrial plants, and factories. Many Koreans had become wealthy by the beginning of World War I. For example, Ivan Kim, who lived on Blagoveshchenskaia Street, and Nikolai Kim, who interacted with Ponosov, owned houses in Vladivostok on Fontannaia, Kitayskaia, and Komarova Streets. Nikolai Tsai had houses on Aleutskaia and Pekinskaia Streets, and Elisei Khan owned houses on Svetlanskaia and Lazareva Streets [Petrov, 2001, p. 46, 135, 218, 295]. It appears that Ponosov misled the administration of the Bogoslovskii Mining District, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Further, Ponosov writes: "Why did I choose Koreans? Because they are the only ones who can guarantee a good day's work. Besides, according to the information I gathered during my travels across the Korean-Chinese border to forest concessions, I saw and heard that most Koreans are better woodcutters and gardeners than the Chinese. For other work, however, they are unfit and worse than the Chinese. For logging, the Chinese are not strong enough and generally do not like to work in forest concessions. I have received all of this information from more knowledgeable people in the field" [GASO. Fund 45. Case 263. Inv. 1. pp. 1–8ob].

According to Ponosov, Koreans willingly worked at enterprises with Russian management and refused to work for Japanese and Jews. Korean workers especially loathed the Japanese, who forced them to abandon their homeland and live in Russia on Russian passports. Before concluding a contract to recruit Koreans in accordance with the Perm governor's information circular on Chinese, Koreans, and Persians having national passports, Ponosov asked the vice-governor of the Primorskiï region for clarification. He was informed that Koreans enjoyed special rights with the Russian government and were issued passports signed by Russian consuls and vice-governors, granting them the right to reside throughout the Russian Empire. Koreans were issued annual passports at the vice-governor's office and paid eight rubles for each passport with a photo at the governor's cash desk. Koreans were also taken to regions forbidden to the Chinese and Persians, such as the Donets Basin and the region of Tula. At the end of the passport validity period, they were allowed to obtain a new passport at the office of the governor of the province where they lived and worked [GASO. Fund 45. Case 263. Inv. 1. pp. 1–8ob].

Labor shortages during World War I were felt around the world. The competition in the Chinese labor market was incredibly intense. Thousands of Chinese workers were sent to England and America, causing prices to soar. If the cost for recruiting one worker was 40—50 kopecks in 1915, including skilled laborers, then by 1916 the cost had risen to 2 rubles for skilled laborers, and the price of recruitment for an unskilled laborer rose to 1 ruble or more. In 1914, the average monthly salary of a single (non-married) male worker was 36 rubles in the Russian Empire, and a cow could be bought for 3 rubles [GASO. Fund 45. Case 263. Inv. 1. pp. 1—8ob].

These recruitment prices provide evidence of how much the local Korean recruiters earned for their middleman recruiting services. On May 2, 1916, a contract for the supply of one thousand healthy, hard-working, and knowledgeable lumberjacks for the Nadezhdinskiĭ Plant was signed by Ponosov, the director of the blast-furnace shop of the Nadezhdinskiĭ steelworks, the Bogoslovskii mining district, and the following recruitment agents: the two Kims, Ham, and Ogai. After the arrival of Korean workers in the Bogoslovskii Mining District, a contract was made between the same hiring agents and the Bogoslovskii Mining District Directorate on August 3, 1916 [GASO. Fund 45. Case 263. Inv. 1. pp. 1—8ob].

According to the contract, the 1,000 workers were distributed as follows:

1) 600 woodcutters were assigned to the Petropavlovsk forestry. The monthly felling norms were 8 cubic fathoms from October 1 to March 1, and 9 cubic fathoms per worker from March 1 to October 1.

2) 400 workers were assigned to other jobs in the district, paid in accordance with the established rates in the contract. The workers had pay-books in the statutory form, in which the terms of employment, advance payments, fines, etc., were recorded [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. pp. 8].

In this contract, the working and living conditions of the workers were specified in detail. It is important to note that workers received free meals from the company while they were meeting their logging quotas. The felling norms were as follows: from October 1 to March 1, 8 cubic fathoms per month, and from March 1 to October 1, 9 cubic fathoms per month. Each worker received the following provisions: flour — 10 pounds; salted fish (the cheaper kind) — 15 pounds; lean butter — 4 pounds; millet — 10 pounds; common cabbage or potatoes — 25 pounds; salted meat — 4 pounds; salt — 2 pounds; and various supplies (in money or in kind) — 1 pound. (For Koreans, the felling rate was reduced from 9.66 cubic meters to 9 cubic fathoms) [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. p. 8].

According to the terms of the contract, 24 rubles per month were paid for each worker. The recruitment agents were required to deliver 4,800 cubic fathoms of firewood per month from October 1 to March 1, and 5,400 cubic fathoms per month from March 1 to October 1. If the specified norm was reduced by 10 %, the industry management had the right to demand that the agents replace the underperforming workers with others within one to one and a half months. Sick workers received free treatment and meals during their illness [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. p. 8].

Strict control was established over the distribution of provisions. If surpluses of food were found to be given to other workers, the industry management could reduce the food rations. Workers were expected to build houses for themselves at their places of

work. When workers went on strike or refused to work, they were denied food and evicted from their homes. Within ten days, the recruitment agents were required to replace these workers [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. p. 9].

The firewood harvested was accepted by the management office twice a month: from the 1st to the 5th and from the 15th to the 20th. The office was required to have a sufficient number of accountants and clerks to account for and oversee the work of the loggers. Within three days, data on the receipt of firewood, workers' calculations, and payment lists were to be generated. In the event of a delay, the recruitment agents were fined 100 rubles [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. p. 9].

The work of Korean workers at logging sites was marred by several issues: they did not receive their wages on time, were unaware of the amounts they should be paid for their labor, and did not understand the deductions made from their wages. As a result, the Korean workers were anxious and unable to work in peace. Eventually, the Korean recruitment agents proposed to the county office that all payments be made directly to the Korean workers, bypassing the recruitment agents who were causing excessive problems and commotion [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. pp. 9–10].

On October 1, 1916, the contract from May 2, 1915, was terminated at the request of the Korean workers. The reason given in the document was that the recruitment agents were unable to arrange for timely payment and to explain to the workers how much was being withheld from their wages and for what, as well as how much they were entitled to for their labor [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. pp. 9–10]. Koreans who worked in the Bogoslovskii mining district were, for the first time, contracted directly by the district. Eventually, all Korean workers hired by the agents under the contract of May 2, 1915, were ceded to the Bogoslovskii Mining Company, and the obligations binding the recruitment agents to that department were terminated. The agents received a commission of six rubles for each worker, totaling 1,500 rubles (250 people). The remainder of the money was applied to settle the agents' debt to the County Administration, amounting to 26,098 rubles and 94 kopecks. The Korean recruitment agents left an outstanding debt of 45,000 rubles with the Bogoslovskii Society. According to the contract, this amount was to be withheld from the Korean workers [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. pp. 12–12ob.]. It appears that only the Far Eastern Korean recruitment agents Nikolai Kim, Ivan Kham, Mikhail Ogai, and Yakov Kim benefited from this business endeavor, making substantial profits. They were completely dishonest with their fellow countrymen, the mining company, and the local administration. Large sums of money were owed to the latter, while the Korean workers were also in debt, losing thousands of rubles of their hard-earned income.

Korean loggers could get a return ticket to Harbin in the 4th class train after two years of work, and only the top 10 percent of workers got it after one year. The directorate was obliged to give return tickets to everyone who cut 100 cubic fathoms in a year, thereby encouraging Koreans to work harder and return home sooner. Koreans were also paid extra money for cleaning logging sites and burning litter and branches at 5 kopecks per cubic meter cut, which was not introduced for other foreign workers [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. p. 11]. The district administration saw Koreans as hardworking, disciplined, and law-abiding workers and treated them fairly favorably.

Qualifications and Discipline of Korean Workers

Among the Koreans were many people who had not previously engaged in physical labor, much less logging. These included a graduate from a mining school in America, two paramedics, and several tradesmen and other professions. These people had nothing to do with laboring. Some Koreans had come from their homeland in search of easy profits and thought that in Russia they would be fully provided for and receive a salary in exchange for not doing much work. When they were forced to perform manual work, they turned out to be incapable of it, and began to agitate their comrades, inciting them to make all sorts of demands, urging them to stop working altogether if their demands were unsuccessful. Considering this circumstance and to prevent further misunderstanding with Koreans, the bailiff of the Nadezhdinskii plant was instructed to immediately begin identifying the instigators and agitators causing confusion among Koreans, and to arrest these Koreans one by one, under the guise of transferring them to other jobs, to protect order [GASO. Fund 45. Case 274. Inv. 1. pp. 12–20].

According to the terms of their contracts, at the end of the one-year term of work, Korean, Chinese, and Persian workers were entitled to a return fare of 30 rubles, 10 rubles travel money, and 4 rubles 50 kopecks for the days of awaiting remuneration to be sent home, for a total of 44 rubles 50 kopecks paid from the funds of the Bogoslovskii mining and processing society. At the same time, they were offered an alternative to stay and work in Russia as free workers. The archival documents reveal that most Korean workers who worked at the Bogoslovskii mining district preferred the second option. A document dated June 30, 1917, narrates how the 89 Korean workers of the Bogoslovskii mining district expressed a desire to stay in Russia and work as “free” laborers on an equal footing with the Russian workers. They were sent to the Novo-Spasskii workshops at the Nadezhdinskii plant. On July 15, 1917, forty-five Korean workers who labored at the Filkinskaia coal enterprise also expressed their wishes to stay in Russia. The same day, sixty-two Korean workers of the blast furnace shop at the Nadezhdinskii plant decided to become free workers in Russia [GASO. Fund 45. Case 1. Inv. 1099. p. 8]. Finally, on July 22, 1917, thirty-six Korean workers with their foreman-translator Kim Chan-bok of the Bogoslovskii mining district, after completing a year's stay, received return fares, board, and other payments, but chose to stay in Russia. The list with the names of 177 Korean workers who stayed in Russia is stored in the State Archive of the Sverdlovsk region [GASO. Fund 45. Case 1. Inv. 1099. p. 15, 15ob., 16, 18, 18ob., 19].

Conflicts Involving Korean Workers

However, the harsh working conditions did not suit Koreans everywhere. The working year was 350 days. Korean workers were given 15 days off per year—five obligatory non-working Russian holidays and, at their request, no more than 10 days for Korean holidays. The working day lasted 10.5 hours, plus time for lunch. A Korean laborer had to work 3,570 hours per year, an average of 1,000 hours longer than the work year in the Ural mining plants during the late 19th and early 20th centuries [Fund 621. Case 301. Inv. 301. pp. 88–88ob.]. It should be noted that the police of the Russian Empire were

instructed not to use force against the Eastern workers. This decision was made by the governor of the Verkhoturiskii district, who expressly demanded that all conflicts be resolved peacefully through persuasion and negotiation.

The report of the Verkhoturiskii district officer to the Governor of the Perm region details an incident where 588 Koreans, hired by the Morozovskii and Nadezhdinskii forestry, stopped working on June 1, 1916. They demanded their monthly wages for June and the abolition of timber-cutting norms. However, all Koreans were provided with shoes and clothes in lieu of their wages, which exceeded their monthly earnings. The monthly wood-cutting rate of nine cubic meters for Koreans proved too demanding due to the unfamiliar nature of the work. Additionally, the report notes that the stipulation to work for wages rather than piecework led them to believe that regardless of their output, they should be paid their wages in full according to the contract. For instance, Koreans from the Morozovskii forestry took goods worth 7,000 rubles from the first day of work and produced firewood worth only 2,500 rubles. Due to this significant expenditure and very low labor productivity, the forestry department refused to pay their salaries or release other products on account of their wages. This refusal caused dissatisfaction among the Koreans, leading to their demands for the abolition of the firewood chopping norms and the payment of wages [Fund 621. Case 301. Inv. 301. pp. 88–88ob.]. On June 19, 1916, 180 Koreans at the Nadezhdinskii forestry district did not report to work and demanded an increase in their wages, a revision of their wood-cutting rates, and better nutrition. The Koreans' mood was volatile and could have easily escalated into a riot. On June 20, foodstuffs (sea cabbage and chum salmon) were received from Vladivostok for the Korean workers, as ordered by the factory management. With these provisions supplied, the workers agreed to continue working under the same conditions [Fund 621. Case 301. Inv. 301. pp. 88–88ob.].

The bailiff of the Nadezhdinskii plant reported that on June 26, 27, and 30, 1916, forty-nine Korean workers from the Bogoslovskii mining district stopped working, demanded changes to the terms of their contracts, and became instigators among other Korean workers [Fund 621. Case 301. Inv. 301. pp. 88–88ob.]. On July 9, 1916, the main agitators were arrested and jailed under Article 21 of the Law of Order. The leader of this unrest was Filipp Son, a peasant from the Nikolsk-Ussuriskii district [Fund 621. Case 301. Inv. 301. pp. 90–90ob.]. According to a law passed on December 10, 1915, the arrested individuals were to be deported to Korea without the right of return to Russia. Unfortunately, it is impossible to trace the fate of this group of Koreans further through the Russian archives. Nevertheless, the arrest had an immediate pacifying effect on the remaining Korean workers, who became more compliant and resumed their work. It is instructive to note that the Korean workers were not afraid to fight for their rights, and the local government and imperial police refrained from using force. Instead, the authorities consistently pursued a policy of negotiation and reconciliation. As a result, Koreans were offered contract terms similar to those of Russian workers.

Conclusion

The thesis of the oppression of non-Russian nationalities in tsarist Russia and the accounts of the allegedly cruelly exploited Eastern workers, which were prolific in Soviet

historiography, are refuted by this research. The studied reasons and conditions of the immigration of Koreans as a labor force to the enterprises of the Urals during World War I allow us to draw the following conclusions: 1. The legal framework and the peculiarities of the Russian Empire's immigration policy for the use of Korean workers allowed them not only to obtain Russian domestic passports but also to work in any industry and in any region of the Russian Empire without returning to their homeland. 2. It is instructive to emphasize that the working and living conditions of Korean workers were comparable to those of Russian workers. 3. Among the Koreans who came to the Russian Empire were representatives of different social classes. Most were peasants without professional education, but there were also some educated Koreans, craftsmen, etc. The latter category had the most difficulty adapting to hard manual labor. 4. Conflicts primarily arose due to the employer transferring immigrant workers from one job to another lower-paying job. Additionally, recruitment agents often committed errors, perhaps even intentionally, in billing statements and did not properly instruct the workers about their rights and responsibilities. Nevertheless, Korean workers were successful in defending their rights, while the local government and the police refrained from using force.

This study reveals only a small part of the history of Korean immigrants in the Urals during the pre-revolutionary period. At that time, Yekaterinburg was one of the centers of the revolutionary labor movement. Korea was colonized by Japan, and Japanese authorities persecuted and brutally suppressed any attempts at resistance. Future research could explore how those Korean immigrants who voluntarily stayed in Russia became actively involved in the revolutionary struggle. In their memoirs, many Korean communists reflected that they became revolutionaries under the influence of local Russian revolutionaries in the Urals and actively participated in the 1917 Revolution and the anti-Japanese struggle in the Far East.

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