



ARCHIVAL INSIGHTS INTO THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF THE KOREAN DIASPORA IN SOUTHERN UZBEKISTAN (1950–1980)

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Abstract

This study explores the educational and socio-cultural integration of the Korean diaspora in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan between 1937 and 1980, based primarily on archival sources. Drawing on materials from the Central State Archive of Uzbekistan and district-level archives of Sho'rchi, Muzrabot, and Jarqo'rg'on, the research examines how Koreans—deported from the Russian Far East—adapted to new living conditions and became active participants in the region's educational and cultural development.

Keywords: Korean diaspora; Surkhandarya region; archival research; Soviet deportation; educational development; social integration; cultural adaptation; Uzbekistan history; collective farms; post-deportation period

АРХИВНЫЕ СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ И СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ АДАПТАЦИИ КОРЕЙСКОЙ ДИАСПОРЫ В ЮЖНОМ УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ (1950–1980 ГГ.)

Аннотация

В данном исследовании рассматривается образовательная и социокультурная интеграция корейской диаспоры в Сурхандарьинской области Узбекистана в период с 1937 по 1980 год, основанная преимущественно на архивных источниках. Опираясь на материалы Центрального государственного архива Узбекистана и районных архивов Шорчи, Музработ и Джаркурган, исследование рассматривает, как корейцы, депортированные с Дальнего Востока России, адаптировались к новым условиям жизни и стали активными участниками образовательного и культурного развития региона.

Ключевые слова: корейская диаспора; Сурхандарьинская область; архивные исследования; советская депортация; развитие образования; социальная интеграция; культурная адаптация; история Узбекистана; колхозы; период после депортации

INTRODUCTION

The late 1930s marked a period of intense political and ethnic transformation in the history of the Soviet Union. Among the many forced deportations carried out during these years, the relocation of Koreans to Central Asia stands out for its scale, motives, and long-term consequences. Between September 1937 and early 1938, more than 172,000 Koreans—

comprising over 36,000 families—were forcibly resettled from the Far Eastern regions to the republics of Central Asia[1,p.]. Although officially justified as a measure to “eliminate the threat of Japanese espionage,” this deportation in fact represented a political decision that uprooted an entire people from their historical homeland and social environment.

The settlement of Koreans in Uzbekistan, particularly in the Surkhandarya region, formed part of this policy and initially took place under extremely harsh conditions. They were placed in areas of swamps, reed beds, and lands unsuitable for cultivation, and had to adapt to a new way of life from scratch. However, through their diligence, discipline, and deep commitment to education, Koreans soon became active participants in the region’s economic and cultural life. Their experience in collective farming, vegetable growing, and rice cultivation made a significant contribution to the development of the local economy.

In Surkhandarya, Koreans were primarily settled in the districts of Sho‘rchi, Muzrabot, and Jarqo‘rg‘on, where the majority worked in kolkhozes and sovkhoses. This process simultaneously generated new social needs in the field of education. The establishment of separate classes and schools for Korean children, along with the growing role of Korean teachers, marked an important stage in the history of public education in the region. Especially during the 1950s–1970s, the steady increase in the number of Korean students and their active participation in higher education institutions across the republic became one of the key indicators of the community’s social integration.

This article analyzes the socio-cultural adaptation of the Koreans after deportation, their role within the education system, and their broader activities in the Surkhandarya region based on historical sources and archival documents. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that this process not only reveals the distinctive features of Soviet national policy, but also sheds light on the mechanisms through which the Korean diaspora preserved its identity, integrated with the local society, and achieved cultural cohesion.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs historical-analytical, source-based, and statistical approaches. The main sources include documents preserved in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Surkhandarya Regional State Archive, and the district archives of Sho‘rchi, Muzrabot, and Jarqo‘rg‘on. In addition, official decrees and annual reports of local schools, collective farms, and departments of public education from the relevant period were examined. Oral interviews with teachers and local residents were also analyzed to reconstruct the social and cultural context of the time. The research examines the socio-cultural adaptation of the Koreans after deportation, their activity within the education system, and the process of interethnic integration in chronological sequence.

RESULTS

The indicators of Korean participation in education across the districts of Sho‘rchi, Muzrabot, and Jarqo‘rg‘on can be summarized as follows:

In Sho‘rchi district, by decree No. 13-R dated October 20, 1958, a seven-year school (No. 52) was established on the Iskra collective farm. Feodor Mogay was appointed as principal, and the state allocated 3,600 soums for textbooks and educational materials. In the 1958–1959 academic year, the school admitted 88 students in grades 1–5, of whom 42 were girls. That same year, four key schools in the district (Nos. 1, 5, 34, and 52) enrolled a total of 137 Korean students, 64 of whom were girls (≈46.7%)[2,p. 57-58].

During this period, small clusters of Korean pupils also appeared in other schools:

School No. 5 (A.A. Zhdanov) — 5 Korean students (grades 1–4);
School No. 10 (Lomonosov) — 61 Korean students among 461 total;
School No. 34 (Alisher Navoi) — 4 Korean pupils (grades 5–7);
School No. 6 (Krupskaya, Qumqo‘rg‘on) — 3 Korean students (grades 1–4)[2,p. 74].

Altogether, about 90 Korean children of various ages were receiving formal education. At Karl Marx School No. 1, in 1957–1958, there were 4 Korean students in grades 1–4, 8 in grades 5–7, and 5 in grades 8–10, totaling 17 (9 of them girls). In 1952, P. I. Ogay was appointed as principal and opened upper classes (grades 8–10) specifically for Uzbek girls. To retain teachers, social support mechanisms were introduced — newly appointed staff who lived in storage or auxiliary rooms were provided with housing within three days, the school was granted the authority to purchase houses for staff, and the district’s State Bank branch allocated up to 20,000 soums in loans[3,p. 238].

By a decree issued on April 26, 1954 (No. 191), Principal P. I. Ogay was warned for low female enrollment rates, prompting intensified home-to-home campaigns. In 1956, 437 students graduated from the school, including 54 girls (40 of them Uzbek)[4,p. 85]; the school ranked first in the district and fourth in the region. The chemistry and biology teacher Pak Anastasiya achieved 100% academic performance in her subject and was awarded by the regional Department of Public Education.

Between 1956–1960, numerous graduates from School No. 1 entered prestigious higher education institutions — among them: Kan Yuriy (Ryazan Agricultural Institute), Li Anna (Tashkent Pharmaceutical Institute), Kan Andrey (Shahrisabz Agricultural College), Kim (Dnepr Stalin University), Xegay Anna (Tashkent Medical Institute), Pan Lyudmila (Qarshi Pedagogical Institute), Kan Klava (Ryazan Agricultural Institute, 1959), Li Boris (Leningrad Electrotechnical University), Sen Sergey (mechanic at Iskra kolkhoz), Ogay Anatoliy (Kyiv Hydrotechnical Institute, 1960), Pak Kostya (Novosibirsk Agricultural Institute), Li Yuliya and Li Zoya (teachers at School No. 52), and Kan Mariya, Kim Pavel, Chen Anatoliy, Li Viktor (workers at Iskra kolkhoz)[5,p. 13].

By 1963, 336 Korean students were enrolled across eight general schools in Sho‘rchi, but by 1964, this figure had dropped to 187 due to labor migration to new rice-growing farms along the Amu Darya (notably Iskra, Pogradichnik, and Rassvet), as well as family relocations to the Tashkent region and Kazakhstan. For instance, during the 1963–1964 academic year, Kim Valeriy, a 7th-grade student at School No. 5, moved with his family to the Karaganda region[6,p. 11].

In 1966, the majority of Korean students (185) were concentrated in Karl Marx School No. 1, a result of migrations from collective farms to the district center and the rise of the kobondi practice (tenant farming and market-oriented vegetable production). By 1974, the number of Korean students in Sho‘rchi had declined to 69, and the Iskra school became dominated by local Uzbek pupils. In 1976, after nearly 20 years, Feodor Mogay handed over his post as principal to Muhammadiyev. By 1980, only 54 Korean students were registered across the district. In Jarqo‘rg‘on, a resolution dated February 6, 1959 granted 1,000 hectares of swampy land to Korean farmers on a three-year lease. Amid these resettlements, there were 141 Korean students in the 1962–1963 school year and 188 in 1963–1964. Distribution by school was as follows: Lunacharskiy School No. 1 — 50 students; Makarenko School No. 2 — 38; Pravda School No. 5 — 48; Alisher Navoi School No. 7 — 52[4,p. 123-125].



In Muzrabot, the Gagarin School No. 21 admitted 89 Korean students in 1961; by the end of the academic year, 15 graduated, and 9 entered various higher education institutions across the republic. In 1965–1966, the school had 658 students in total, of whom 269 (≈35%) were Korean. However, in subsequent years, enrollment gradually decreased: 201 in 1969, 189 in 1970, 176 in 1974, 178 in 1976, 154 in 1977, and 102 in 1980[7,].

Overall, between 1955 and 1980, the majority of Korean graduates from the Surkhandarya region entered universities and specialized institutes across Uzbekistan and the USSR. Of the total approximately 1,500 Korean students who completed general education in the region, 16 graduated with gold medals, and about 65% continued their studies in higher education—a clear reflection of the community’s intellectual advancement and social mobility through education.

DISCUSSION

The activity of the Korean diaspora within the education system of Surkhandarya region is one of the most significant indicators of their socio-cultural adaptation following deportation. The processes observed between 1937 and 1980 demonstrate that although the Korean population was initially settled in collective farms, they did not confine themselves to agricultural labor. Instead, they became deeply engaged in the spheres of enlightenment and education. Statistical data from the districts of Sho‘rchi, Muzrabot, and Jarqo‘rg‘on reveal a rapid rise in literacy rates among Koreans, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, in the 1958–1959 academic year, 137 Korean students were enrolled across four schools in Sho‘rchi district—clear evidence that, just twenty years after deportation, education had become widespread among Korean children.

The success of the Korean community in education was largely rooted in their national mentality—diligence, discipline, and a strong belief in learning. During the process of educational centralization, Korean teachers such as P. I. Ogay, Feodor Mogay, V. M. Kim, and Ten Grigoriy made major contributions to the development of local education. They not only taught but also took initiatives in improving school infrastructure, securing housing for teachers, and ensuring the availability of textbooks and learning materials. Thanks to these efforts, by the late 1950s, separate schools for Korean children were established in Sho‘rchi and Muzrabot districts, and mechanisms for state financial support were introduced.

The proportion of Korean girls in education—46.7% in Sho‘rchi and 48.9% at the republican level—reflects a positive outcome of interethnic integration. Unlike many Soviet peoples with patriarchal traditions, Koreans actively encouraged girls’ education, which led to their growing participation in higher education by the 1960s[8,p.]. According to statistical data, between 1955 and 1980, around 1,500 Korean students completed school education in Surkhandarya, and approximately 65% of them continued their studies at universities and institutes across Uzbekistan and the Soviet Union. These figures vividly demonstrate that social advancement within the Korean diaspora was achieved primarily through education.

From a demographic standpoint, a decline in student numbers became evident from the 1970s onward. This was due to economic factors such as the relocation of Korean families to new rice-growing farms, migration to Kazakhstan and the Tashkent region, and the expansion of the kobondi practice (tenant farming and market gardening)[9,p. 269]. Moreover, many young Koreans who graduated from higher education institutions preferred to settle in larger cities, which reduced the proportion of youth remaining in Surkhandarya. However, this



decrease should not be interpreted as a decline in the diaspora's cultural or educational role, but rather as an indication of their growing economic and social integration.

The findings of this study show that despite the hardships of deportation, Koreans viewed education as a tool for national revival and stability. They transformed schools not only into centers of learning but also into spaces for social adaptation and intercultural communication with the local population. Consequently, Korean schools in Surkhandarya played an important role not only for the diaspora but also in the broader history of the region's educational development. In this way, the Koreans managed to turn a historical tragedy into a source of strength through knowledge and enlightenment.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis demonstrates that, despite the tragic nature of the deportation of Koreans to Uzbekistan—particularly to the Surkhandarya region—this community succeeded in adapting to its new social environment within a relatively short period of time and became an active component of local society. Their national values, grounded in education, diligence, and discipline, produced remarkable results in the field of learning. The steady growth in the number of Korean students in Sho'rchi, Muzrabot, and Jarqo'rg'on districts during the 1950s–1960s, the establishment of dedicated schools, the high participation rate of girls, and the active pursuit of higher education among graduates all confirm the successful socio-cultural integration of the Korean diaspora.

Korean educators such as P. I. Ogay, Feodor Mogay, Yugay Mikhail, and Ten Grigoriy played a crucial role not only in improving the quality of instruction but also in developing school infrastructure and providing material support to teachers. Their initiatives led to significant improvements in education across the districts, allowing Korean students to achieve leading positions both locally and regionally. Particularly notable is the fact that between 1956 and 1980, 16 Korean graduates received gold medals, and over 65% continued their education at higher institutions — a vivid demonstration of the community's determination to strengthen its social standing through knowledge.

From the 1970s onward, the decline in the number of Korean students was primarily driven by economic and demographic factors — urban migration, the expansion of the kobondi (tenant farming) system, and increasing urbanization. Nevertheless, the Korean communities of Surkhandarya preserved their cultural identity, integrated harmoniously into local society, and contributed their experience to the advancement of the regional education system.

In general, the experience of Koreans in Surkhandarya is not only significant for understanding the consequences of Soviet deportation policies but also provides valuable insight into the processes of socio-cultural adaptation and integration of ethnic groups. This historical trajectory illustrates that education serves as a decisive factor in restoring human capital and ensuring the successful incorporation of national communities into broader society.

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