

Migration of Koreans from Central Asia to the Primorye Region under Conditions of Post-Soviet Changes: Motives, Flows, Adaptation Practices¹

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The collapse of the USSR and radical systemic reforms in the post-Soviet states led to a sharp change in the nature of migrations between them. The author analyses the move of the Korean people from Central Asia to the Primorye Region in terms of the directions and volume of migration flows, motivation and adaptation practices of the migrants in the new settlements. It is revealed that this process increased dramatically in the 1990s mainly due to the rise of autochthonous nationalism and the outbreak of the civil war in Central Asia. The author believes that the term “ethnic migration”, which is often used for defining migration flows during the post-Soviet transition period, is a more heterogeneous and complex phenomenon which is influenced by a combination of factors. This article shows that the notion “ethnic” is a surface characteristic of the migration based on kinship relations. Nevertheless, kinship relations did not work as a unitary principle when Koreans decided to migrate but entangled with other various social and economic factors, especially, with the change of citizenship law in Russia in 2002. In particular, this article describes the dynamic formation of different social groups among Koreans depending on the time of their repatriation to the Russian Far East.

Keywords: post-socialism, Primorye Region, migration, Russian Koreans, post-Soviet citizenship.

Миграция корейцев из Средней Азии в Приморский край в условиях постсоветских изменений: мотивы, потоки, практики адаптации.

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Распад СССР и системные реформы, приведшие к кардинальным преобразованиям в постсоветских государствах, послужили причиной резкого изменения характера миграций между ними. На примере корейцев, которые

¹ This article is an edited version of Chapter 2 of my monograph “The Displacement of Borders among Russian Koreans in Northeast Asia” (Park Hyun-Gwi. The Displacement of Borders among Russian Koreans in Northeast Asia. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. 248 p.).

переезжали из Средней Азии в Приморский край, автор рассматривает, как менялись направления и объёмы миграционных потоков, а также мотивации и адаптационные практики мигрантов в местах нового вселения. Прослежено, как доля миграции резко возросла в 1990-е гг., что было связано главным образом с подъёмом автохтонного национализма и началом гражданской войны в Центральной Азии. Автор придерживается мнения, что часто используемый при описании миграционных потоков постсоветского переходного периода термин «этническая миграция» не отражает в полной мере это неоднородное и сложное явление, на которое влияет целая совокупность процессов. В статье показано, что определение «этническая» составляет поверхностную характеристику миграции, основанной на родственных отношениях. Тем не менее родственные связи не были единственным фактором, влияющим на принятие корейцами решения о миграции, — он выступал в комплексе с различными социальными и экономическими обстоятельствами, в частности с изменением законодательства о гражданстве в России в 2002 г. В частности, отмечено динамичное формирование различных социальных групп у корейцев в зависимости от времени их репатриации на российский Дальний Восток.

Ключевые слова: постсоциализм, Приморский край, миграция, русские корейцы, постсоветское гражданство.

One of the characteristics of the explosive growth in migration following the collapse of the Soviet Union is that people have appeared to move as homogenous groups, a phenomenon that has often been termed “ethnic migration” (*etnikeskaia migratsiia*) [1; 10; 2]. Also, the fact that migration was caused by the outbreak of autochthonous nationalism and violent civil wars in the CIS countries has reinforced the specifically “ethnic” character of this movement in which people of certain nationalities were forcibly displaced from their places of residence. However, ethnographic studies have made it apparent that the migration of these people was a complex process resulting from many interlinked factors and that it cannot be neatly categorized according to the conventional terms used in migration studies such as “ethnic” or “forced”. In other words, the ethnographic description enables us to deconstruct the dichotomy of terms such as “pull” and “push” factors in the study of migration [10], thus revealing not only the complexity of social life but also the interweaving of various factors in the displacement and emplacement process.

In the case of Koreans who moved from Central Asia to the RFE in the 1990s, however, they were neither “forcibly” displaced, nor did they “voluntarily” move of their own accord. Rather, the motivation for their movement seems to blur this clear-cut categorisation. I will explore this process of Korean migration through people’s personal narratives in order to show how external factors such as political unrest and economic deterioration in Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union interplayed with social relationships in the migration process. In this way, I intend to show that this intention or agency in the process

of migration in the case of Koreans in the RFE being embedded in their social relations, and particularly in their kinship relations. The people who told me their migration stories tended not to act on an individual basis, but as part of a family or kinship group. As I shall show later, some people such as the male head of an extended family made more autonomous decisions, but most others followed the decisions of close family members. It is also necessary to note that migration itself influenced social relations, as those who engaged in migration had to decide with whom to go and whom to leave behind. In particular, alliance relations appear to form a nodal point in which (dis-) connectedness is articulated, as kinship relations not only connect but also disconnect. This aspect of migration is also crucial in understanding the emplacement process.

A secondary but no less important issue is that of the relation between the timing of the migrants' emplacement and changes in their socio-economic position in the RFE, in particular, the influence of changes in the citizenship law and exclusionary practices towards migrants from the 2000^s onwards. In the second part of this article, therefore, I will show how this relationship can be a crucial social resource in the process of emplacement following the rapid economic and social changes in the RFE after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Again, my aim is to deconstruct the seemingly homogenous ethnicity of Koreans by showing how the economic and social differences among Korean migrants that arose due to the time of their migration to the RFE and their kinship networks were created and how they reflect wider political and economic changes.

This second focus allows us to see that social changes are not limited to the Korean population but are common across the RFE. Rather than investigating the case of Koreans in isolation from the rest of the residents of the RFE, my intention is to more revealingly examine the wider changes that took place during the period of the Korean influx. Ethnographic studies of Koreans in the region show diverse social trends during the period from the 1990^s up to the early 2000^s. The differences that exist among Korean migrants from Central Asia are often not made explicit, but they are vitally important in the process of settling in the region². This process can only be fully understood by considering the timing of their migration as it forms not only the basis of their internal differences but also influences cooperation among people who occupy different social and economic positions.

In particular, through ethnographic cases of different social conditions of migration, I draw on the issue of "inequality and exclusion" in Russia raised by Humphrey. She addresses a peculiar "inequality" in Russia that cannot be explained in terms of "economic exploitation", "class" or "race", but is derived from "exclusionary practices" [8, p. 334]. According to Humphrey, "practices of exclusion' refers to processes such as exile, banishment or limits on residence or employment that radically disadvantage people but do not expel them entirely from society" [8, p. 333]. Such inequalities resulting from exclusionary

² In another paper [9], I used the notion of "cosmopolitan ethnicity", a term borrowed from Richard Werbner [11], to illustrate differences among Korean migrants.

practices cannot be explained in unitary terms, as their boundaries are continually reviewed and reset as historical variants of “dispossession” [8, p. 348]. In addressing such exclusionary practices, she pays attention to the emotional aspect expressed in “the nexus of anxiety” of the “unity” (*edinstvo*) that may extend from the national level right down to a small group of ordinary people in the form of a “collective” (*kollektiv*).

Here I argue that changes in the scale of the “collective” and variations in exclusionary boundaries can be seen in the different treatment extended to Korean migrants in the RFE throughout the 1990^s and the early 2000^s. In the early 1990^s, a specific group formed by migration was accepted as an equivalent of the collective within the continuity of Soviet practices. Thus, a clan or an extended family group was admitted into a village or a city. Some Koreans, however, preferred to remain “outside” of the existing system, as this allowed them to enjoy significant economic opportunities by remaining free from the socialist morality embedded in such a locality or collective. In the later 1990^s, exclusionary practices shifted their focus from the collective as a socio-economic unit to a national one [8, p. 347]. In particular, the change of citizenship law in 2002 signified such a shift and it dramatically disadvantaged those Koreans who migrated from the end of the 1990^s onwards.

While Humphrey insightfully charts a subtle and complex difference in the creation of inequality in Russia, it is my intention to supplement her work by means of ethnographic case studies. Put simply, I am wondering how such “dispossessed” people were able to settle in the RFE and continue living there, despite such exclusionary practices and, in many cases, little economic success. My ethnographic cases show that there were certain tactics and strategies adopted by “the dispossessed” that enabled them to deal with “exclusionary practices” and led to the formation of their own social space through interaction in the form of exchange and sociality. I further argue that there is a certain inversion of exclusion amongst the different groups of Koreans in the RFE based on their time of arrival, i.e. amongst older resident Koreans, newcomer Koreans from Central Asia, and Chinese Koreans.

This inversion of exclusion derives from the duality of the collective in Russia. On the one hand, not being part of a collective leads to a considerable loss of entitlement and protection provided by the larger group but, as mentioned previously, it also provides freedom from the morality and loyalty the collective imposes on its members [8, p. 345]. When operating “outside” the legitimate social spaces, each of the three groups of Koreans exchange with each other what the other party does not have, such as “cheap Chinese goods”, “local connections”, “freedom from anxiety about being excluded”, with such transactions often taking place in the context of the market place and commercial agricultural cultivation. However, this excluded “outside” space is also subject to change due to a continuous review of boundary making. In this article, I will highlight how specifically the reform driven by the federal government of Russia resulted in different social positioning of Koreans, depending on when they migrated to Primorski Krai.

NEWCOMER KOREANS IN THE EARLY 1990^s:
“ORGANIZED” MIGRATION IN CHAOS

As a result of violent conflict in the Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan, in 1989 and the civil war in Tadzhikistan in 1991, the number of Koreans arriving in the RFE increased dramatically in the early 1990^s (see Table 1). Although public discourse about these refugees highlights the chaotic nature of their displacement, the narratives that I collected illustrate that many refugees organised their own travel in large groups, usually as extended families. Let me describe a few cases of extended families in order to provide a better picture of the situation in the early 1990^s.

Table 1

The change of population in Primorskii Krai according to nationality in 1990–1998

Year Nationality	1990–1991	1992–1993	1994–1995	1996–1997	1998
Ethnic Russians	+13 276	–3 552	–6 680	–11 110	–6 290
Ukrainians	+805	–6 796	–966	–1 645	–721
Belarusian	915	–1 311	–678	–452	–238
Azerbaijan	–29	47	276	391	187
Armenian	46	260	854	283	192
Tatar	166	–256	–128	–365	–161
Koreans	1 049	2 482	2 746	1 362	1 147
Chinese	2 172	1 503	2 191
Sum of population change	+20 082	–9 117	–3 137	–10 695	–4 184

Source: [2, p. 157].

The first case is based on my conversations in the Chinese market in Ussuriisk with a clothing trader called Roza Kim, who was in her late 50^s in 2004. She moved to the city in 1992 from Dushanbe along with her mother, her four sisters and their families including their children. They held a “family meeting” and decided to move when civil war broke out. At the meeting, they looked at a map and decided on Ussuriisk as their destination in a fairly random way, although they thought it should have a good climate as it was “on the same latitude as the Cream Peninsula”, having excluded Vladivostok on the basis that it was too big and windy. Following this joint decision to move to Ussuriisk, two men from the five families obtained leave from their work and visited Ussuriisk to see whether the city was suitable or not. On this reconnaissance visit, the men bought two houses for the five families. Roza Kim’s husband subsequently moved to one of these houses and “received” work and was allocated an apartment from his workplace after 3 months. Then, the families sold their houses in Dushanbe and loaded all their belongings into a 20-ton container

that could be transported by train. They flew to Ussuriisk but Roza Kim's two nephews, who were in their early 20^s, travelled by train in order to guard the container. Immediately after the families arrived, Roza Kim was able to get a job as an accountant at a grocery distribution centre in the city without being asked by the director for any documents. Since then, the extended families of her mother's two sisters have also followed them to the RFE.

This case shows the typical pattern of migration to an urban area as a direct result of the outbreak of civil war in Dushanbe in the early 1990^s. Although they were "refugees", to my knowledge very few people registered as such. This was partly due to the fact that the official migration service was only organized in Primorskii Krai in 1995 [2, p. 161]³, but also because there was little practical need for such registration, given the acceptance of these people by the local authorities. People from Dushanbe during this period seem to have been able to find work easily and even received housing from their workplace⁴. In short, even though they were escaping from civil war in Dushanbe, their migration appears to have been well organized and supported by the receiving local authorities. However, such generalizations only apply to people who had the financial means to purchase houses in urban areas, and migrants in rural areas experienced a somewhat different situation. To illustrate this, let me give an overview of a village where many Korean migrants settled in the early 1990^s.

The village of Novoselovo in Spassk Raion was a stopping-off point for many Korean migrants from Central Asia in the mid-1990^s. In 1994, a communal apartment (*obshezhitie*) accommodated around 50 families, increasing to around 100 families by 1995 [3]. By 2003, there were 56 Korean households in the village and a total of 108 households if we include the neighboring villages as counted by Marta Ivanovna at my request.

Marta Ivanovna's household was the first to move to Novoselovo in 1990 from Dushanbe, where they had lived next door to Roza Kim's sister. When Marta Ivanovna's family moved to Novoselovo, the sovkhoz provided them with a wooden house for free and offered Marta Ivanovna's husband work in the sovkhoz as an agriculturalist, although he declined the offer. Marta Ivanovna was also offered a teaching job at the secondary school in the village, which she accepted. She is the only Korean in the village working in a state institution. Many other households from Dushanbe are directly or indirectly related to Marta Ivanovna's household.

Roughly, half of the Korean residents of Novoselovo came from Dushanbe and the other half from Uzbekistan, in particular from the area of the Fergana Valley where violent conflicts occurred in 1993. Whereas many of the households from Dushanbe share childhood friendship connections, households from Uzbekistan consist of several extended families. In particular, the extended families

³ The Federal Migration Service of Russia was organised in 1992 and implemented in the provinces in 1995. For more discussion on this subject including the local situation in Primorskii Krai: [2, p. 158–168].

⁴ Not everyone was lucky in this respect, as many had to buy their own houses. That is why many people settled in rural areas where accommodation was cheaper than in the cities.

of six brothers moved to this village and their affine families also joined them. Each extended family of these elderly brothers includes a number of their children's households and they usually refer to this kinship group as a "clan" (*klan*).

Although they are now working in informal agriculture rather than as members of the enterprises that succeeded the old sovkhos, they were able to settle in this village with the permission of the sovkhos⁵. As in this and Roza Kim's case, migration during the early 1990s shows that there was muted consent in accepting a certain group of people within the boundary of a state enterprise or village. This arrangement was not quite the same as "the citizenship regime" discussed by Anderson [6], but I understand his conceptualization of a wider context that is not limited to a single enterprise but encompasses a region. In that sense, the "collective" was still a meaningful category in Primorskii Krai for defining one's position in the local context until the mid-1990s, and thus there were no problems with the legal status of an individual as part of the collective at this stage or for obtaining tacit consent for a group of people to take up residence⁶. This trend appeared to change around the late 1990s when there was a slowdown in the number of so-called "political migrants" from Central Asia, but an increase in "economic migration". This resulted in the invocation of "migration politics" by the state in an attempt to regulate what was viewed as the "chaotic" movement of people driven by arbitrary, economic and personalized motivation. It also sought to establish standards to define the status of "refugees" and "forced migrants" (*vynuzhdennyie migranty*).

While "migration politics" was devised to regulate the movement of people that had resulted from the surge in ethnic conflicts, the situation on the ground during this period was one step ahead of the state's legislation, with the formation of commercial (though not capital) links with the growing entrepreneurial activities of migrant Koreans. In the next section, I shall examine the economic changes brought about by Koreans who settled in urban areas.

FROM MIGRANTS TO TRADERS IN THE MID-1990s

In contrast with the three cases described above, many people began to arrive in the RFE from the mid-1990s onwards as "guests" on an individual and temporary basis shuttling between two regions. Though kin connections remained crucial in motivating them to "visit" this region, what often encouraged them to settle was the unexpected success of their entrepreneurial activities. One such example is a woman called Natalia who owns a fur-coat stall in the Chinese market in Ussuriisk. She first came to Ussuriisk in 1992 as a guest of her cousin. She had no intention of settling in the RFE, but came in order

⁵ In contrast, the neighbouring village did not allow Koreans to settle there.

⁶ At this time, house prices in Central Asia were comparable with those in the RFE. In the late 1990s, however, house prices in Central Asia collapsed, while those in the RFE began to rise dramatically. This made it harder for migrants in later years to settle in the RFE.

to escape personal financial hardship. She used to teach history at secondary school in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, but in the early 1990^s, along with many other school teachers, she tried shuttle trading during her vacations to supplement her income. She borrowed 2,000 dollars from an acquaintance and imported some angora shirts from China, but the venture was unsuccessful, and she lost money. She was in trouble, as there did not seem to be any way to pay back the debt. Then, her cousin in Ussuriisk suggested that she visit him, so she came with her husband as “guests” during the school vacation. She bought vegetables from Chinese Koreans and sold them in the market. This proved to be very successful with a long queue of customers every day. After only one visit, she was able to pay back her debt when she returned to Tashkent. She continued this seasonal activity for another a couple of years, which enabled her to buy a flat in Ussuriisk and move there permanently with her family in 1995.

Such success stories usually feature the common elements of having a relative already in the RFE and collaborating with Chinese Koreans. It means that opportunities for economic gain arose from connections with Chinese Koreans, who came to the RFE at a similar time as the influx of Koreans from Central Asia. Migrant Koreans were in a good position to benefit from cooperating with Chinese Korean traders, as they share certain cultural features which functioned as the basis for their collaboration.

Foremost, Russian and Chinese Koreans are usually able to communicate together in Korean dialect, as their common ancestors came from the northern part of the Korean peninsula and they interacted together until the Russian Koreans were displaced in 1937. While I was unable to communicate properly with Russian Koreans in the Korean language due to strong vernacular differences with my South Korean dialect, they continuously emphasised their ease of communication with Chinese Koreans⁷. Despite much lament about the loss of native language ability since perestroika, many Koreans of the second generation of those who experienced the 1937 displacement were capable of understanding the vernacular language of the Chinese Koreans, as their parents used to speak Korean at home. Typically, they say, “At home our parents spoke in Korean and we answered in Russian”. Thus, their Korean language ability was a great asset in obtaining Chinese products to sell on the streets in the mid-1990^s⁸. This situation changed somewhat from the mid-1990^s onwards, however, as many Chinese Koreans began to establish their own connections with local Koreans. As a result, newcomer Koreans from Central Asia from the end of the 1990^s began to work as hired traders on the stalls in the Chinese market and I shall discuss this later in the article.

⁷ The vernacular Korean language used in the northern part of Korea is called “Yukchin” Korean. “Yukchin” means “six settlements” and refers to the fortress towns which were established in the 15th century by the Chosun Kingdom, not only to protect it from invasion by various groups of “alien people” beyond the Korean Peninsula but also to assimilate them by settling them in these towns.

⁸ The Chinese market operated as an open market on the outskirts of Ussuriisk until it was established on a site at the boundary of the city in 1996.

LATE NEWCOMERS AND PROBLEMS WITH DOCUMENTS

Many Koreans who came to the RFE before the mid-1990^s had achieved a relatively stable way of life, both economically and politically, by the time I arrived to conduct my fieldwork in 2003–2004. As in the cases of Roza Kim and Marta Ivanovna, they had been helped by being admitted as “a collective” by the villages or by state enterprises in the city, and they also benefitted from the opening of borders and the influx of Chinese goods and trade. In contrast, many of those who arrived in the late 1990^s onwards were struggling and experiencing hardship. What had happened to bring about this change?

One factor was that Chinese Korean traders did not need any new connections as they had already secured their place in the region by the late 1990^s with the establishment of the Chinese market at the outskirts of Ussuriisk. A second and more important factor was the amendment of Russian citizenship law in July 2002, which not only disadvantaged migrants who arrived after this time but also earlier arrivals who had not gained citizenship. This amendment aimed to restrict the unregulated inflow of migrants to Russia and made it harder to obtain Russian citizenship. According to the previous citizenship law that was passed in February 1992, a citizen of the former Soviet Union could change their old Soviet passport to a Russian one simply by attaching a slip to it, or it was even possible to buy a Russian passport. Hence, migrants from the “near abroad” (CIS countries)⁹ did not have any difficulty in obtaining citizenship. Rather, the more difficult issue was the residence permit (*propiska*), which formed the basis of many other documents and rights. Once one had a residence permit, citizenship could be obtained after three years’ residence in Russia.

However, the new amendment of 2002 meant that even with a residence permit there were many other obstacles to surmount in order to obtain Russian citizenship. Firstly, it required at least seven years consisting of two years’ temporary residence (*vremennoe prozhivanie*) when registration had to be renewed every three months followed by five years permanent residence (*vid na zhitel'stvo*). Secondly, the citizens of CIS countries had to nullify their old citizenship to gain Russian citizenship; this was a matter beyond the control of the individual and was rather a diplomatic matter between Russia and the country in question. This became a serious problem for people who arrived from Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan, as these countries did not want their citizens to move freely to Russia, although Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan reached agreement with Russia in 1999 and 2001 respectively not to hamper changes in citizenship. Thirdly, in addition to the many documents that had to be handed in and the fees that had to be paid, migrants were required to have HIV and other medical tests carried out every three months and to pass a Russian

⁹ Despite the geographical remoteness of the RFE and Central Asia, it is described as the “near abroad”. Aware of this incongruence, Vashchuk et al [2] suggest that we use “new abroad” for CIS countries and “traditional abroad” for other foreign countries.

language exam. As a result in the first half of 2003, only 213 people were able to obtain Russian citizenship throughout the whole of Russia [4].

I met many people who suffered hardship as a result of this change in the Russian citizenship law and I would like to describe a couple of representative cases. Vera Tsoi was born in 1967 and I met her in the Chinese market where she had a fur-coat stall. She used to be a music teacher in Uzbekistan but stopped work in 1996 because she no longer received a salary. She was involved in migration cultivation for three years in a southern region of Russia but was not successful. During 1998–99, there was violent conflict in Uzbekistan and her mother urged her to take her children and go to Russia, as there was “no future for the children” at home [10]. She moved to Saratov near Moscow in 2000 and worked as a sales assistant at a Korean deli there. In 2002, her cousin urged her to come to Far East and she moved to Ussuriisk with the promise of his help¹⁰. He arranged a stall in the market for her and guaranteed to pay the rent of 7,000 rubles a month if she was unable. However, her greatest worry was citizenship for her children, as without this she would have to pay foreign student fees for their higher education, which was beyond her means. Her husband went to South Korea as a migrant worker a couple months before I interviewed her, but she had received a call to say that he had been unable to find a job there.

Another woman called Valya Chen (born in 1948) came to Ussuriisk from Samarkand, Uzbekistan in 1999, thanks to her sister. She works as a hired trader at a clothes stall for the Chinese Korean owner with a daily wage of 200 rubles (slightly less than seven US dollars). When I asked her about citizenship issues, she complained a lot about her legal status, saying that she was fed up with going to the police station. When I met her, she was applying for permanent residence, but she was worried about getting citizenship even after five years’ permanent residency, as the Uzbekistan government was forbidding its citizens to renounce their previous citizenship. Thanks to her sister, she had been able to obtain a residence permit by registering herself and her daughter at her sister’s flat. She had not sold her house in Samarkand so she still had the possibility of returning home, but this would also be complicated, as she had already withdrawn her residency permit (*vypisalas*) from registration in Samarkand.

During Soviet times, residence permits and other welfare benefits were granted as “a bundle of rights” connected with one’s job [5]. This system was devised to control where people lived and worked, but at the same time guaranteed a basic level of welfare provision. It did not encompass the entire population, with some people such as Korean migration cultivation practitioners and Korean repatriates to the RFE in the 1950s remaining outside of the system. One might even say that such “outsiders” were tolerated and included on the margins of society as they served to fill in gaps in the official

¹⁰ I often heard the statement from my interlocutors: “I would not have come to Ussuriisk if my sister (brother, daughter, cousin etc.) had not been living there”.

Soviet economic system. As Humphrey [8, p. 333] noted, the system did not “expel” these people “entirely from society”, but left them in an unstable position with certain disadvantages.

The new citizenship law in practice since 2002 represented the disintegration of such “a bundle of rights”. As Buckley [7, p. 915–916] points out, while the *propiska* and the passport system¹¹ were “a transmitter between collective and individual interests in the distribution of the population” during Soviet times, they also seem to have acted as “a vehicle” in the privatisation and capitalisation process in contemporary Russia by requiring people to be private homeowners and individual workers in order to conform to its directives. It is now no longer possible to “receive housing” (*poluchit' zhil'о*) and “allocated work” (*ustroit' na rabotu*) in Russia; instead one needs to buy a house and find employment. However, employment seems neither to be conceived as it was during the days of the Soviet system, nor conceptualised in a Western capitalist way. Instead most people work in a private family business or are employed as day labourers, as in the case of Koreans who work in the Chinese market as hired staff. Reflecting this difference, people use the verb “hire” (*nanimat'*) which highlights the temporary and interpersonal aspect of the work contract, which is arranged between two private persons (*chastnoe litsо*) rather than between an economic body and an individual. Thus, although the citizenship law and migration regulation was modeled after the Western European system, it has resulted in a very different situation on the ground.

The citizenship law change also affected people who moved to the RFE long before July 2002, as many Koreans failed to change their citizenship “in time”. There were two reasons for this delay. Firstly, if one had a residence permit, many Koreans could not see that Russian citizenship provided any further benefits. Pensioners processed their citizenship change quickly in order to receive a pension, albeit a minimal one¹², but many people of working age, especially men, did not bother with the process. This created problems with freedom of movement, especially outside of the Russian Federation, as in the case of Katya and Sasha, a couple living in the village of Novoselovo. Katya and her sons changed their Soviet citizenship to a Russian one in Tashkent before their departure by simply going to the Russian consulate, but her husband Sasha did not bother¹³. Even after coming to Novoselovo, he made no attempt to apply for citizenship as he was working “in the field for himself” and could see no benefit from it. However, in the winter of 2003, when he wanted to go to South Korea for migration work, he discovered that his “green passport” from Uzbekistan could not be used to apply for a visa for South Korea.

¹¹ On the introduction of passport system in the RFE, see: [5].

¹² Many elderly Koreans were unable to claim their full pension, as they did not bring the necessary documents from Central Asia. They received the minimum amount, generally around 600 roubles per month.

¹³ Katya and her children may have been motivated to apply for citizenship due to the fact that the Soviet state, and subsequently the Russian Federation, provided welfare benefits for each child in a family.

Another reason for failing to apply for citizenship stemmed from a deep sense of belonging to the former Soviet Union. Despite the declaration of independence by the CIS countries, people did not think of them as separate countries — although this sense of belonging became somewhat ambiguous when my Korean interlocutors were faced with various disadvantages and problems after their migration, especially with the restrictions imposed by the new citizenship law. Despite such problems, an interesting attitude displayed by newcomer Koreans is their persistent optimism. Although Sasha was quite up set by the fact that he could not go to South Korea, he was not overly concerned about the matter, saying: “It will be sorted out soon. I heard that President Putin will announce something to solve the problem”¹⁴. His optimism was based on the awareness that ethnic Russians from CIS countries shared the same problem and that ordinary Russians had complained that the new law put “our compatriots” (*sootechestvenniki*) from CIS countries in a difficult position. In other words, Koreans in Central Asia never viewed themselves as inferior to the autochthonous people and believed themselves to be playing the same role as Russians in developing Central Asia. This notion of affiliation with the ethnic Russians in Central Asia influenced their perception of their position in the RFE. Newcomer Koreans often said to me: “Russians are the cleverest, most beautiful and good-natured people among the many nations”. However, they also told me that “Russians in Central Asia are totally different from those in the RFE”, reflecting their negative experiences since migration. This perception of Russians in two different regions shows how it creates a dynamic notion of “Russian-ness”. The newcomer Koreans who came to the RFE in the late 1990^s envisioned “Russian-ness”, based on their experience from transactions with Russians in Central Asia and projected such perception in the process of emplacement in Primorskii Krai, despite disadvantages caused by new legislation on Russian Federation’s citizenship.

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¹⁴ In fact, Putin announced various measures to simplify the citizenship application process for migrants from CIS countries in 2003 and early 2006.

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Дата поступления в редакцию 18.11.2019