

THE KOREAN-CHINESE PRESENCE IN USSURIISK AND VLADIVOSTOK: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS

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Introduction

The rise of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East has come parallel to an influx of Korean-Chinese people (*Chaoxianzu*). The Korean-Chinese people have never been a main topic of research concerning human security and migration in the Russian Far East. There are several reasons for this. First, the number of Korean Chinese people is relatively small compared to the much larger number of Han Chinese among the foreign migrants in the Russian Far East. Second, it is difficult to follow the Korean Chinese for research in the Far East. Some Korean Chinese people are living with other ethnic Korean residents including Korean Russians, South Koreans and North Koreans. But it is widely believed that people of other ethnicities are living with Han Chinese; therefore, their ethnic identity cannot be easily revealed. Third, the problems of cross-border migration are deemed important enough to be highlighted in the bi-lateral politics between Russia and China. A joint declaration signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, on May 27, 2003 shows deep concern towards the uncontrolled movement of Chinese people into Russia. However, Korean Chinese people are ethnically Korean but Chinese by nationality at the same time. So, the Korean Chinese people are ethnic minorities even among the Chinese migrant communities in the

This is a work in process. The author welcomes comments.

Russian Far East.

The issue of the Korean Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East can be one of the most important features of the Chinese migration. First, historical memory is vivid among the ethnic Korean settlers in the Russian Far East. They recall that Korean Russians were scapegoats in the international politics between Japan and the Soviet Union during the 1930s, the Stalin era. Although most of the Korean Russians in the Soviet Far East were Russian citizens, they were deported to Central Asia under the accusation that they were alleged spies for Japan. Korea was colonized by Japan in 1910, but most Korean Russians became naturalized in the Soviet Union well before the 1930s. At present, some Korean Chinese people (Chinese nationals of Korean ethnicity) worry about their status and identity in the Russian Far East. Second, the Korean Chinese people are intermediaries between the Han Chinese and the Koreans, including Korean Russians, South and North Koreans, in the Russian Far East. Also, many of them are local representatives of Han Chinese wholesalers in China. This “middleman” role of the Korean-Chinese people in multi-ethnic Russian Far East may be a good indicator of the real ethnic fabrics and foreign direct investment (FDI) patterns associated with the influx of Chinese into the Far East. Although the role of the Korean-Chinese people may not be influential enough to be considered by Russia and China, shared characteristics, such as cohabitation with Russians, the ethnic identity of Koreans, and the national identity of Chinese citizens could prove to be useful for maintaining a peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence in the future Russian Far East.

My preliminary research on the Korean Chinese people in the Russian Far East in 2002 shows that two Korean Chinese groups originating from Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces of China are found in the Russian Far East, but most of them are concentrated in Primorskii Krai. Especially in the market place of Ussuriisk, Korean Chinese people have a strong presence as

vendors of vegetables and other consumer goods. Other groups, growing in number, are found in urban areas such as Vladivostok, many of them working for Chinese-Korean joint venture companies. Those mainly from Heilongjiang are perceived as being of mixed Han Chinese background more so than the Korean Chinese people from Jilin Province. That may be because the latter group may be blending more with other ethnic Korean groups. In any case, Korean ethnicity is not perceived as being very strong; indeed, using the Korean language may be the only representation of Korean identity. It would certainly be interesting to review any response from the local Russian government and residents, but at this point this type of information is unavailable.

My research consisted of a survey, the first survey concerning the Korean-Chinese presence in the Russian Far East from the predominantly Russian perception.¹ The survey was conducted from July to August 2003 in two cities, Vladivostok and Ussuriisk, where the largest concentrations of Korean Chinese are found. The collected surveys numbered 151.

This survey has some limitations. First, the purpose of the survey was to collect information on the Russian perception of the Korean Chinese presence in the Russian Far East. At this stage, it is difficult to conduct surveys on the Korean Chinese people *per se*. Initially, I planned to interview some people of Korean Chinese background in the market place of Ussuriisk, but soon I found it exceedingly difficult due to many factors: the Korean-Chinese people's reluctance to complete the pilot survey (which was in Russian), their feelings concerning their illegal status, the threat of the local Mafia, as well as the Chinese *Laoda*, and the difficulty of finding interviewers or interpreters who speak the three relevant languages-- Korean, Chinese, and Russian. Second, most of the interviewers that were available to me were female college students. Therefore, their age and gender groups are over-represented in the survey. For example, there are 23 young female students represented among a total of 27

women. The number of men in this age group comes to only 6.

Third, I did not have any chance to educate the Russian interviewers in the Russian Far East before they conducted the surveys. Therefore, the surveys were not scientifically categorized according to the place of residence, date, or age group. Consequently, only 25 among 151 interviewees are from Ussuriisk. Therefore, the results of the survey overwhelmingly represent the city of Vladivostok.

In spite of these limitations, this survey can provide some useful information about the Russian perception of the Korean Chinese people. Also, this survey can be compared with other surveys about the Russian perception of Chinese migration in general.

Analysis of Russian Interviewees

Completed surveys were collected from 151 interviewees. Among them, 46 are men, 102 women. Subjects under the age of 30 represent almost two-thirds of the sample. Among this age group, 32 are female university or college students. Because the interviewers were mainly female students from the Far Eastern University of Law and Economics, they interviewed their friends and colleagues (mostly people in the same categories as themselves). Hence, the disproportionate demographic breakdown of the respondents.

The survey consists of 22 questions, including nine questions that request a written answer. Due to my time constraints and lack of education for the interviewers prior to interviews, the observations below are preliminary.

The following three tables show the profiles of the 151 Russian residents of Vladivostok and Ussuriisk who returned completed surveys.

Table 1. Age and Gender of Respondents

Age / Sex	Total	Men	Women	No answer
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10 – 19	34	6	27	1
20 – 29	64	21	41	2
30 – 39	21	7	14	
40 – 49	16	5	11	
50 - 59	8	4	4	
Over 60	5	2	3	
Grand Total	151	46	102	3

Table 2. Occupations of Respondents

Occupation	Number of respondents	Ratio (%)
University students	40	26.6
Office workers	22	14.6
Service sectors	18	12.0
Education	13	8.6
Professionals	15	10.0
Semi-skilled workers	6	4.0
Skilled workers	7	4.6
Unemployed	3	2.0
No answer	3	2.0

Table 3. Level of Education of Respondents

Level	Middle school	High school	University	Graduate School
Number	20	26	98	4

The occupations of the interviewees vary from “college student” to “unemployed”. Unfortunately, however, there are not many semi-skilled (manual) workers represented in the survey. Instead, white-collar workers, including professionals, are the majority in this sample. Because the usual job of the Korean-Chinese people is vendor in the marketplace, more cases of semi-skilled workers should have been included. A more representative sample would help us estimate the Korean Chinese people’s share of the job market. Also, two-thirds of the respondents are women, making the sample not representative of the Korean Chinese population in Vladivostok and Ussuriisk.

Brief Comments on the Survey

I now introduce the questions I asked in the survey, the distribution of the respondents’

answers, and finally, my brief comments.

Question 1. Can you differentiate between ethnic Chinese and ethnic Koreans? Please choose the most appropriate description: clearly, somewhat, rarely, never, or do not know.

Table 4. Ability to Differentiate between Ethnic Koreans and Ethnic Chinese People

clearly	somewhat	rarely	never	Do not know
77	51	13	8	2

Question 2. Do you know of a group of people called Korean Chinese?

Table 5. Recognition of “Korean Chinese”

Yes	81
No	70

Question 3. If you know about the existence of Korean Chinese people, who do you think they are, Koreans or Chinese?

Table 6. Beliefs about the Ethnicity of the Korean Chinese

Ethnic Koreans	Chinese	Do not know
87	43	21

Most of the Russians in the present sample reported that they did know the difference between Korean and Chinese people. But almost half of the respondents reported that they do not know about the existence of the Korean-Chinese population. Also, their answers seem to indicate many of them are confused about the ethnic identity of the Korean Chinese. It also appears that more educated people are able to differentiate between Koreans and Chinese more clearly than less educated people (See Table 7).

Table 7. Ability to Differentiate between Chinese and Koreans by Education Level

	University educated	Middle school educated
Clearly	58	7
Somewhat	30	7
Rarely	8	3
Never	2	2
	98	20

Question 4. How often do you meet Korean Chinese people?

Table 8. Frequency of Contact with Korean Chinese People

Everyday	41
Once a week	22
Once a month	23
Rarely meet	23
Never meet	24
No answer	18

Question 5. Where do you meet Korean Chinese people? You can have multiple answers.

Table 9. Places Where Respondents Meet Korean Chinese People

Places Where Respondents Meet Korean Chinese	Number of Respondents
Market	44
Workplace	33
Associations	3
Market and workplace	38
Workplace and associations	5
Market and associations	3
Market, workplace, and associations	12

Surprisingly, more than one-fourth of the Russians in the sample report meeting Korean Chinese people every day. The market and the workplace were reported to be the places where one is most likely to meet Korean Chinese people. Also, at least 23 Russians report an association, probably outside the work environment, with Korean Chinese people. This may

show that Korean Chinese residents have become common in the communities where the respondents live. Also, it also seems to support the assumption that the primary occupation of many Korean-Chinese is vendor in the market place. Almost two-thirds of the Russians in the present sample reported meeting Korean Chinese in the market place.

Question 6. What is your impression of the Korean-Chinese people you have dealt with at or through work? Please use up to three words.

Generally, the Russian respondents' impressions of the Korean Chinese people they have encountered in their work environments are positive. The favorable adjectives used to describe them include: polite, hard-working, good, positive, versatile in many languages, intelligent, and warm. Some negative answers include: impolite, incorrect, crowding, and "so-so". Two respondents referred to the Korean Chinese people as Chinese-like and one respondent noted that they were the same as Koreans. But almost two-thirds of the respondents did not answer because they do not meet Korean-Chinese people in the workplace, as previously indicated.

Question 7. What is your impression of the Korean-Chinese people you have dealt with outside your work environment? Please use up to three words.

Unlike Question 6, almost two-thirds of the respondents answered Question 7. Their answers to this question may be good indicators of the stereotypes of the Korean Chinese people that the Russians have. Many answered with favorable adjectives: polite, kind, honest, industrious, positive, good, warm, interesting, curious, progressive, and friendly. But some respondents answered in very negative ways: dirty, crowding, they speak too fast, and boring. One individual stated, "boring like other ethnic Koreans."

Question 8. Excluding short-term visitors, about how many Korean Chinese people do you think are residing in your city?

Table 10. Impression of the Size of the Korean-Chinese Population (in Vladivostok/Ussuriisk)

Over 1,000	500-1,000	200-500	100-200	50-100	Fewer than 50
44	33	26	7	15	13

Question 9. Do you think the number of Korean-Chinese people in your local area has increased, or remained about the same?

Table 11. Impression of the Korean-Chinese Population Change

Change	Rapid increase	Slight increase	No change	No interest
Number	38	45	5	38

I do not have the official number of the Korean Chinese population in the Russian Far East. In the paper presented last year, the maximum number of the Korean Chinese population in the whole region of RFE was estimated at around 30,000.² But in Primorskiy Krai, two-thirds of the local Russian residents estimated that the number exceeded 500. That estimate is a reasonable figure because at least 150 vendors in market place of Ussuriisk are of Korean Chinese ethnicity. These vendors probably have partners and children. Also, more than 300 Korean Chinese office workers, including the local representatives of Chinese and Korean firms in Vladivostok, have been accounted for. So, all these people together could bring the population up to more than 500.

Question 10. Do you know that ethnic Koreans have several sub-divisions?

Table 12. Recognition of Sub-Groups of Ethnic Koreans

Yes	No	No answer
78	70	3

Question 11. Can you recognize these sub-groups? You can have multiple answers: (1) local Korean Russians including Korean Russians from Sakhalin Island, (2) Korean Russians from Central Asia, (3) North Koreans, (4) South Koreans.

Table 13. Recognition of Sub-Groups of Ethnic Koreans

sub-group	number of respondents	sub-groups	number of respondents	sub-groups	number of respondents
1	3	1, 2	9	1, 2, 4	4
2	6	3, 4	3, 4	1, 3, 4	4
3	1			2, 3, 4	5
4	10			1, 2, 3, 4	17

Slightly more than half of the respondents reported that they know there are several sub-groups among the ethnic Koreans. Only 17 respondents reported knowing all sub-ethnic groups of Koreans. Others only reported knowing Korean Russians or Koreans from North Korea, or South Korea. It should be stated that Korean Russians can be regarded as Russians, whereas North and South Koreans are regarded as foreigners.

Question 12. How often do you meet ethnic Koreans?

Table 14. Frequency of Contact with Ethnic Koreans

Everyday	104
Once a week	20
Once a month	13
Rarely meet	9
Never meet	1
No answer	4

Question 5. Where do you meet ethnic Koreans? You can have multiple answers.

Table 15. Places Where Respondents Meet Ethnic Koreans

Places	Number of Respondents
Market	44
Workplace	33
Associations	3
Market and workplace	3
Workplace and associations	5
Marketplace and associations	38
Marketplace, workplace, and associations	12

Compared with Table 4 and Table 5, Russians report that they meet ethnic Koreans more often than they meet Korean-Chinese. Two-thirds of the respondents reported that they meet ethnic Koreans everyday. Curiously, however, the places where they meet ethnic Koreans are almost identical to the places where they meet Korean Chinese people. The result probably shows that the respondents who do not know about the existence of Korean-Chinese people have confused ethnic Koreans with the Korean Chinese.

Question 14. What is your impression of the Korean Chinese you have dealt with at or through your work? Please use up to three words.

Almost half of the respondents answered this question using favorable or unfavorable adjectives. Ninety percent of the respondents gave favorable adjectives: active, industrious, intelligent, good, responsible, curious, cheerful, and humorous. Ten percent used very aggressive words that were unlike their words describing their impression of the Korean Chinese people: flamboyant, dirty, flashy, and unwilling to join the seminar. Finally, one person said “Russian-like”, which is difficult to understand in terms of whether the respondent sees that as positive or negative.

Question 15. What is your impression of the Korean Chinese people you have dealt with outside of your work? Please use up to three words.

Like the answers above, the Russian respondents answered favorably on the impression of ethnic Koreans outside of their work environment: positive, good, industrious, intelligent, responsible, active, humorous, accurate, kind, polite, friendly, interesting, cheerful, clean, quiet, and entrepreneurial. But some answers were negative: selfish, childish, and talkative.

Question 16. Excluding short-term visitors, about how many ethnic Koreans do you think are residing in your city?

Table 16. Impression of the Size the Ethnic Korean Population

Over 1,000	500-1,000	200-500	100-200	50-100	Fewer than 50
75	31	20	7	4	8

Half of the respondents thought that the population of ethnic Koreans numbered more than one thousand. But strangely, around 40 people thought that the number was less than 500. Probably, these people do not differentiate between Koreans and Chinese people. Actually, the population of ethnic Koreans in Primorskii Krai is well over 3,000.

Question 18. Do you think the number of Korean-Chinese people in your local area has increased, or remained about the same?

Table 17. Impression of the Ethnic Korean Population Change

Change	Rapid increase	Slight increase	No change	No interest
Number of respondents	38	67	13	33

Russian residents reported noticing the increase of ethnic Koreans almost the same way as they reported noticing the increase of the Korean-Chinese people. In general, however, they thought that the ethnic Korean population had increased slightly. But compared with the influx of the Chinese, the size of the ethnic Korean population is very small in numbers.

Question 17. Have you ever attended any ethnic Korean events? If yes, please give details.

Table 18. Attendance of Ethnic Korean Events

Yes	No
84	69

Surprisingly, 84 among 151 Russians reported attending ethnic Korean events. Many of them see the Annual Ethnic Korean Festival or other ethnic Korean food festivals. Some have ethnic Korean friends and visit them in places like cathedrals, churches, homes, etc. Some are learning the Korean language and regularly meet with ethnic Koreans for study or work purposes. About ten people reported visiting Korea. This seems to point towards a very positive base for future relationships between Russians and Koreans.

Question 19. What kind of impact, if any, does the presence of Korean people in your local area have on your community? Please choose the most appropriate description. If you have any reason to choose, please answer it.

Table 19. Perceived Impact of Ethnic Koreans on the Local Community

Impact	Number of respondents
Very positive	31
Positive	32
Not influential	36
Negative	4
Very negative	2
Do not know	44

The balance of assessment was only slightly favorable, with 63 thinking that the ethnic Koreans had a very positive impact on the local community. Eighty respondents believed there was no impact or simply did not estimate. Those who reported a positive impact may have done so mainly for economic reasons, such as Korean investment into the Russian Far East and joint ventures. Some described a cultural impact, such as exchanges of cultures and ways of living. But the majority of the Russian respondents wrote that the impact of ethnic Koreans was very limited because (1) the population of Koreans was very small, (2) they were foreigners and could have much of an impact Russian society, (3) they easily accepted Russian way, and 4) their occupational roles were limited. On the other hand, those who noted negative influences of the Korean presence in their community gave the following reasons: “They are stealing our jobs”, and “I do not like Koreans.”

Question 20: Do you feel friendly and positively towards South Korea?

What makes you feel like that?

Question 21: Do you feel friendly and positively towards North Korea?

What makes you feel like that?

Question 22: Do you feel friendly and positively towards China?

What makes you feel like that?

Table 20. Affinity towards South Korea, North Korea, and China

Affinity towards:	South Korea	North Korea	China
Very friendly	57	9	18
Somewhat friendly	79	66	70
Somewhat unfriendly	1	15	16
Very unfriendly	0	2	6
Do not know	7	38	11
Do not care	2	30	29

Most Russian respondents in the sample said that they felt very friendly or somewhat friendly towards South Korea. There was no difference between men and women. In general, the Russian respondents said that they felt friendly towards Chinese, but one-third of the 151 respondents answered negatively, including those who chose “do not know” and “do not care.” The ratio of dislike was the highest in the case of North Korea. Half of the Russian respondents said they felt friendly towards North Korea and the other half responded either neutrally or negatively.

Affinity varied by age. Younger generations did not have any particular distrust towards the three groups. Some expressed discontent towards China, but not in a strong way. On the other hand, older generations had very positive attitude towards China.

Russian respondents reported thinking that South Korea was a country advanced in economy and did not have any harmful impact on Russia. The Russians who had visited South Korea answered that Koreans were kind to Russians and that the country was very clean and its people were well educated. They also reported noticing that Koreans had special relations with Korean Russians.

On the other hand, the respondents’ views on North Korea varied. Many of them did not appear to understand the very closed and isolated North Korean political system, including

the nuclear weapons program. But many had tentative views on North Korea; they said that North Korea had potential to be developed, that North Korea did no harmful action to Russia, and that only the political system was wrong. They also said that Korea was one country.

The respondents' views on China were more off-key. Many respondents said that they admired China for their economic achievement as a socialist system, China's cultural heritage, and the Chinese people's talent. But others complained that the Chinese made irresponsible claims in the Russian Far East and created disputes, including territorial disputes. The Russian respondents said that the Chinese did not respect the Russians and that the Chinese were destroying the natural environment of the Russian Far East. Some respondents also wrote that they hated the Chinese migration to Russia. But amazingly, the Russian respondents still had favorable attitudes towards China.

Notes

¹ I could not personally visit the Russian Far East to conduct these surveys. Russian students in the Far Eastern University of Law and Economy carried out the interviews with 151 local Russians. I would like to express my gratitude to them, especially Miss Munhee Jeon, to a part-time lecturer of the Korean language program, for their efforts.

² Jeanyoung Lee, "The Korean Chinese (*Chosonjok*) in the Russian Far East: A Research Note," in Tsuneo Akaha, ed., Human Flows across National Borders in Northeast Asia, Seminar Proceedings, United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, November 20-21, 2002, Monterey, CA: Center for East Asian Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, January 31, 2003. p. 165.