

Korean Diaspora: Beyond Colonialism and Cold War

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The conference „Korean Diaspora: Beyond Colonialism and Cold War“, organized by the section of Korean Studies at the University of Tübingen, was an international conferences on modern Korean history in Germany. Although the conference focused particularly on the practices, discourses, and experiences of the Korean diaspora, it approached the border-crossing exchange and mobility of people as an integral part of the history of the modern world. In Korea as elsewhere, transnational flows of migration and diaspora constructions reveal prevalent challenges of today's nation states. To inquire the political, social, economic, and cultural demands by migrants and people living in the diaspora, it enables us to raise questions of integration, solidarity, and conflict during the process of the formation of heterogeneous societies.

Experiences and practices of migration and diaspora highly pervade the history of modern Korea. Furthermore, they are closely connected to global orders of modernity, colonialism, the Cold War, and globalization. The histories of Korean migration and diaspora thereby highlight the influx of Korean workforce and goods throughout Asia, Europe and the Americas, and furthermore illustrate the global connections between the Koreas and the world. The conference assembled historians, political scientists, sociologists, and Korean Studies specialists, thus tackling the issue of Korean migration and diaspora from a trans-disciplinary perspective, and was held bilingually in English and Korean. Case studies of Korean Diasporas in Japan, China, Northeast and Central Asia, Germany, the United States, and the Koreas were combined with theoretical reflections on migration and diaspora beyond the meta-narratives of colo-

onialism and cold war.

The first panel „Colonialism and Migration“ focused on the nexus between Korean migration and the history of the Japanese empire in Japan, Northeast Asia, and Hawaii. In the first paper, SOON WON PARK (Seoul) addressed the transformation of the Koreans in Japan from their status as colonial subjects to „Alien Residents“ in Japan during the U.S. occupation of Japan. This ambiguous legal status was, according to Park, furthermore affected by the *reversed course* U.S. Cold War politics, in which the Korean community with its close ties to the Japanese Communist Party and other mostly socialist Japanese activists during the wartime period was not perceived as victims of Japanese colonialism, but rather further persecuted as a left-wing social movement. BYUNG YOOL BAN (Seoul) was presenting problems arising from Korean migration to Russian Far East since the end of the nineteenth century. Through the long migration history of Koreans who had successfully settled and become Soviet citizens, many Korean leaders and elites had come to play significant roles in the Soviet Communist Party, administrative agencies and the army. However, in the 1930s Russia Far East was bordering with the Korean peninsula and Manchuria as part of the expanding Japanese empire and complicated the everyday lives of Korean migrants, whose histories have been almost unexplored. In his paper, WAYNE PATTERSON (De Pere, WI) used the framework of Japan's imperialist security policy to integrate the issue of Korean emigration to Hawaii as an additional reason for Japan's expansion. In 1903 Koreans were brought to Hawaii as strike-breakers against Japanese plantation workers and forced them subsequently to migrate further within U.S. territory, predominantly to California. The resulting influx of Japanese migrants in California forced, according to Patterson, the Japanese government to intervene in order to prevent a Japanese Exclusion Act and a loss of Japan's national prestige. Japan could also successfully establish diplomatic representatives in Hawaii, which enabled Japan to appear as „benevolent“ representative to handle Korea's diplomatic affairs in Hawaii, and due to its benevolent façade Japan was not objected to takeover Korea in

1910 by the United States. MICHAEL KIM (Seoul) highlighted the ambiguities of Korean citizenship in Manchuria, which were part of a broader transnational history of migration to North East Asia. The issue of citizenship was thereby closely entwined with the emergence of modern states such as Manchukuo in 1932 to tackle the vast numbers of unregistered and stateless individuals, who were moving uncontrolled across the borders of the North East Asian states. Thus the census registration in Manchukuo played a central role in the administration of many Korean migrants and their citizenship in that region.

In the second panel, titled „Cold War and Migration I“, DEUNG-JOONG KIM (Gwacheon, Republic of Korea) examined population migration within the Korean peninsula during the Korean War. Kim points out that such migration played a major role in forming the establishment of South Korean and North Korean societies. While focusing on defectors from the North, mostly anti-communists, Kim shows how they filled important positions in administration, army, youth organization, church, literature and arts fields and were highly influential on political relations and the developing social frame which subsequently formed and altered South Korea. VALERIY KHAN (Tashkent) portrayed the life, identity and achievements of Korean migrants, so-called Koryo-saram or Soviet Koreans, during the Soviet and post-soviet period in Central Asia. Khan showed that a lot of Korean migrants achieved high positions in the Soviet administration and state economy, but the emergence of post-Soviet states pushed many of them out of their privileged ranks and sometimes forced them to migrate further to Russia. In his paper, JEAN YOUNG LEE (Incheon, Republic of Korea) scrutinized the transformation of Korean migrants in Northeast China during the early phase of the Cold War. In the three periodical stages of decolonization and nation-building in China and Korea (1. Liberation and Civil War 1945-1949; 2. Korean War 1950-1953; 3. Social Reform Period 1953-1957), Lee argues that the ethnic Korean migrants underwent a change in their status from that of foreigners to an ethnic minority in the Chinese nation state. This transformation, however, was not

without tension and from the late 1950s onward the Chinese Government implemented campaigns to integrate the Korean minority stronger into Chinese nationalism. YOUNG HWAN CHONG (Tokyo) talked about the legal situation of the Korean diaspora in Japan after the end of World War II in 1945 throughout the U.S. occupation of Japan until 1952. Based on an analysis of the „Foreigners Registration Law“, Chong identified practices of colonial rule in the administration of Korean diasporic communities by Japanese authorities even after the liberation of Korea in 1945. While most of the Korean migrants originate from the regions which are now part of the North Korean territory, their struggle for equal civil rights is often neglected by the South Korean government, whose attitude towards them remains hostile.

YOU JAE LEE (Tübingen) opened the third panel „Cold War and Migration II“ with a transnational entangled everyday history of North and South Korean migrants to East and West Germany during the Cold War period. Comparing North Korean students in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and South Korean mineworkers in Western Germany, Lee questioned the propagated success stories of „Socialist solidarity“ between North Korea and the GDR as well as the capitalist „development aid“ program between South Korea and West Germany. Both processes of educational and economical exchange resulted not in the desired „repercussions“ to both Korean countries, but rather created „hybrid identities“ of the migrants in the Korean Diaspora in both German states. Therefore, Lee argued that it is important to take a closer look at the everyday lives of the Korean migrants beyond the meta-narratives shaped by the coordinates of the Cold War. YONSON AHN (Frankfurt am Main) addressed another major group of Korean migrants to Germany: she looked at the 12,600 Korean nurses and nurse assistants, who were sent to West Germany mostly by the South Korean government during the 1960s and 1970s. As Ahn highlighted were aspects of gender most influential for the identity formation of the nurses in West Germany. NADIA KIM (Los Angeles, CA) presented her paper „Finding Our Way Home: Korean Americans, Homelands Trips, and Cul-

tural Foreignness“, which tackles the ambivalent experiences of young Korean Americans in their diasporic communities in the United States. Although Asian Americans are according to Kim usually „positively“ racialized in the United States, they face discriminatory problems in the U.S. as well as in South Korea: on the one hand, Americans perceive American Koreans as bearing a *racial* identity as Koreans, while South Koreans „honed in on their American *cultural* identity“ on the other hand.

The forth panel „Diaspora Formation and Life World“ started with a theoretical presentation on Koreans in China, Japan, and the United States, in which JI-YEON YUH (Ivanston, IL) asked (surprisingly not earlier in the course of the conference), „what does it mean to talk about Korean diaspora?“ Yuh stated that approaching Korean diasporas is most definitely not to locate Korean minorities within particular nation-states, but rather following studies presented by Robin Cohen,¹ that diasporic communities and networks are globally and transcending the coordinates of nation states. Furthermore, it is always necessary to historicize the Korean diaspora, since its meaning and practice shifted and changed over time, e.g. from the colonial period to the postwar era of the Cold War with to separated Korean states. To study diasporas, however, „offers the possibility of crafting a flexible identity“ beyond the boundaries of the nation state „in the broad expanse of the global and envisioned as simply belonging.“ ERIN AERAN CHUNG (Baltimore, MD) highlighted the two distinct histories of political incorporation of the Korean diasporic communities in Japan and the United States. While Koreans in Japan are „highly assimilated“, but „structurally foreign“ due to still prevailing restrictive Japanese citizenship policies, the U.S. granted Korean migrants full citizenship legally, but racialized them as „foreign“ on linguistically and cultural distinct basis. Although Korean communities in both countries were marginalized in different ways, they both developed strategies of political participation, which shows that we have to broaden our perspective on citizenship and socio-political participation of diasporic groups beyond the conventional

notion of their political activism for citizenship acquisition. In the last paper, DANIEL SCHWEKENDIEK (Seoul) brought attention to the problematic history of Korean adoption, which is highly important since South Korea has placed more children for overseas adoption than any other country in the world. Schwekendiek concluded, however, that the Korean project of overseas adoption failed, considering that most Korean adoptees receive psychotherapy, show signs of identity crises and evolve high suicide rates compared to what Schwekendiek called other „transracial adoptees“.

In the final discussion, the pitfalls and chances of approaching Korean diaspora were addressed. While recent research has put too much emphasis on the victimization of Koreans which often reproduced a strong nationalistic understanding of „Koreaness“ through the focus on ethnic Korean minorities and their often violent migration experiences (such as forced labor migration during the colonial period), the analysis of Korean diaspora also offers possibilities to approach in-between spaces of nation-states and ideologies, as well as the empowerment of social movements. You Jae Lee therefore advocated to investigate the everyday practices and agency of people living in the diaspora, and to write decentralized and trans-national histories beyond the confines of the nation-state, colonialism and the Cold War. There was also much agreement on Ji-Yeon Juh's comment that diaspora is very different from terms like migration or citizenship, because it involves much more emotions through the „homeland fantasies“ by the people living in the diaspora. However, as Kien Nghi Ha (Tübingen) reminded us, it has to be kept in mind that diasporas are never homogeneous and always shaped by specific power/knowledge formations in imbalances of center and periphery, such as the issue of European Asians who are often not acknowledged as „Asians“ living in the diaspora.

A further pitfall of the concept of diaspora derives from the term itself, which (as the individual papers and discussions indicated) is not clearly defined despite the recent boom

¹ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, London u.a. 1997.

in diaspora studies– which, however, can be seen as a chance as well. The most apparent epistemological gap in the application of the still very fuzzy concept of diaspora remains in the focus on either (1) ethnic distinguished diaspora formations within seemingly properly defined nation-states or (2) the comparative and trans-national aspects of human mobility, hybrid identity practices and their global entanglement beyond nationalistic and ideological determination. Very thought provoking was You Jae Lee's comment that diaspora is not solely an academic term („diaspora as concept“), but also a political one used by social movements in their struggle for civil rights („diaspora as project“). Discussions on Korean diaspora therefore involve further questions of (global) civil society and global governance, which are not limited to the coordinates of nationalism, colonialism, and Cold War, and it is necessary to develop stronger comparative/trans-national/and global history perspectives to approach the histories of Korean diasporas and of (both) modern Korea(s).

Conference overview:

Opening: You Jae Lee (Head of Korean Studies, University of Tübingen); Taejin Yi (President of the National Institute of Korean History); Jaejin Choi (Korea Foundation, Berlin Office)

Panel 1: Colonialism and Migration; Chair: Klaus Antoni (University of Tübingen)

Soon Won Park (Sungkyunkwan University): Forced Labour to Japan

Byung Yool Ban (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies): (Re)Migration of Koreans to Russia and to Central Asia

Wayne Patterson (St. Norbert College): Korean Immigration to Hawaii and Japanese Imperialism: A New Look at the Imposition of the Protectorate in 1905

Michael Kim (Yonsei University): The Issue of Citizenship and Family Register of Korean Migrants in Manchuria

Panel 2: Cold War and Migration I; Chair: Gunter Schubert (University of Tübingen)

Deug-Joong Kim (National Institute of Ko-

rean History): Diaspora in Korean Peninsula in the Period of State-Building – ‘Displaced Persons to North and South Korea’, ‘Refugees’ and their Political Impacts

Valeriy Khan (Academy of Science of Uzbekistan): Life, Identity and Achievements of Koryo Saram in Central Asia

Jean Young Lee (Inha University): Cold War and its Effect to the Korean-Chinese Society in China (1945-1957)

Young Hwan Chong (Meiji Gakuin University) The Legal Situation of Koreans in Japan and Colonialism after the World War II (1945-1952)

Panel 3 Cold War and Migration II; Chair: Sun-ju Choi (University of Tübingen)

You Jae Lee (University of Tübingen): Development and Solidarity: Korean Migration to East and West Germany

Yonson Ahn (University of Frankfurt): „Yellow Angels“: Gender and ethnic Identities of former Korean nurses in Germany

Nadia Kim (Loyola Marymount University): Finding our Way Home: Korean Americans, „Homeland Trips,“ and Cultural Foreignness

Panel 4: Diaspora Formation and Life World; Chair: Kien Nghi Ha (University of Tübingen)

Ji-Yeon Yuh (Northwestern University): Lives at the Crossroads: Koreans in China, Japan, and the United States

Erin Aeran Chung (Johns Hopkins University): Korean Diasporic Citizenship: Two Tales of Political Incorporation in Japan and the United States

Daniel Schwekendiek (Sungkyunkwan University): The History of Korean Adoption 1950-2000

Panel 5: Final Discussion; Chair: You Jae Lee (University of Tübingen)

Chances and Pitfalls of Korean Diaspora Studies

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