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Uzbekistani Koreans in the Labor Army during World War II¹

(Historiography of the Problem)

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The basic document related to mobilization, including Koreans, to the Labor Army was the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR by February 13, 1942, "On mobilization for the wartime period of able-bodied urban population for work in industry and construction". In connection with the mobilization of the agricultural population to the army or for industrial work there appeared a deficiency of labor in the countryside. On April 30, 1942 KP (b)² Central Committee of Uzbekistan and SNK of the UzSSR on the basis of the Resolution of VKP (b)³ Central Committee and SNK of the USSR by April 19, 1942, "On the order of mobilization for agricultural works in kolkhozes, sovkhozes⁴ and MTS of the able-bodied population of cities and countryside" adopted the resolution according to which since May 1, 1942 under the SNK of the UzSSR, oblispolkoms⁵, gorispolkoms⁶ and rayispolkoms⁷ the departments on mobilization of able-bodied population for agricultural works were created. All able-bodied men, not working in the enterprises of industry, transport, employees of state and

¹ The paper is written on the materials collected within a project "Soviet Koreans in the Labor Army During World War II" (2004) granted by Academy of Korean Studies (Pundan, Korea).

² CP (b) – abbreviation, Communist Party (of Bolsheviks)

³ VKP (b) - abbreviation, All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks), name of Communist Party till 1952. Since 1952 KPSS – Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

⁴ Sovkhoz – state agricultural farm.

⁵ Oblispolkom - Oblast (Province) Executive Committee.

⁶ Gorispolkom – City Executive Committee.

⁷ Rayispokom – Rayon (District) Executive Committee.

public institutions, pupils of senior forms in schools and students of high education schools were subject to mobilization. In the Tashkent oblast, where the Korean population lived, such a department under the decision of the Executive committee of the Tashkent Oblast Soviet of workers' deputies of was established on June 19, 1942.

By the Decree of the SNK of the UzSSR by December 5, 1942 under Sovnarkom UzSSR, oblispolkoms and gorispolkoms special bureaus for accounting and assigning of labor force were organized. In the Tashkent oblast, where the Korean population lived, on January 29, 1943 under the Resolution of the Executive committee of the Tashkent Oblast Soviet of workers' deputies the Tashkent Oblast bureau for accounting and assigning of labor force was established.

Outside the Republic the Uzbekistani people worked in Moscow, Tula, Gorky, Yaroslavl, Leningrad, Kuibyshev, Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, Perm, Orenburg, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk oblasts, Bashkir ASSR, Komi ASSR, Udmurt ASSR, Krasnoyarsk krai and Khabarovsk krai.

Thus, as to April 15, 1943 at the enterprises and construction sites of the Ural worked 32,630 of the Uzbekistani people: in Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, Perm, Orenburg oblasts, Bashkir ASSR and Udmurt ASSR.⁸ By the end of 1943 for work in industry to areas outside the UzSSR, 155,000 people were mobilized.⁹

In Sverdlovsk area the Uzbekistani people worked in the cities of Sverdlovsk, Nizhni Tagil, Kamensk-Uralskiy, Alapaevsk, Krasnouralsk, Revda, Pervouralsk on metallurgical, chamotte (coal clay) factories, mines, peltry procure and lumber camps, at "Uralmash", "Uralchimmash", "Uralaluminium", "Uralmashstroy", "Sverpromstroy" and others.¹⁰

In the Chelyabinsk oblast the Uzbekistani people worked at Kirov plant, metallurgical plants in Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk, Zlatoust,

⁸ TsPA IML, f.17, op 88, d. 256, l. 52-54. – See: Ibragimova A.Yu., Dyadyura L.P. Uzbekistantsy na predpriyatiyakh i stroikakh Urala. - “Obschestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1980, № 5. p. 44.

⁹ Istoriya rabochego klassa Uzbekistana. V. II. Tashkent, 1965. p.96.

¹⁰ Sverdlovskiy oblastnoi partiinyi arkhiv, f. 4, op. 38, d. 60. – See: Ibragimova A.Yu., Dyadyura L.P. Uzbekistantsy na predpriyatiyakh i stroikakh Urala. -“Obschestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1980, № 5. p.45.

etc. About 70% of workers worked in the construction of power stations, railways, metallurgical objects (“Magnitstroy”, “Chelyabmetallurgstroy”, “Dorstroy”, “Yuzhtyazhstroy”, etc.). Part of the Uzbekistani people worked at the collieries of Korkino and Kopeisk.¹¹ **In the Perm area** the Uzbekistani people worked in the mines of Kizelovsk basin, in Berezniki and Salikamsk, Chusovoe and Perm, Kizel and Gubakha.¹² **In Bashkir ASSR** the Uzbekistani people worked at a locomotive-repair factory of Ufa, enterprises of the petroleum industry.¹³ **In Udmurt ASSR** the Uzbekistani people worked at the defensive enterprises.

The “Labor Army”, as a special theme, started to receive coverage in Soviet literature only in the 1980s and 90s. The majority of works is devoted to the participation of Soviet Germans in the Labor Army.¹⁴

¹¹ Chelyabinskiy oblastnoi partiyniy arkhiv, f. 288, op. 3, d. 574. – See: Ibragimova A.Yu., Dyadyura L.P. Uzbekistantsy na predpriyatiyakh i stroikakh Urala. – “Obschestvennyye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1980, № 5. p.44.

¹² Ibragimova A.Yu., Dyadyura L.P. Uzbekistantsy na predpriyatiyakh i stroikakh Urala. – “Obschestvennyye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1980, № 5. p.45.

¹³ Ibid. p.46

¹⁴ Bugai N.F. Nemtsy v structure proizvoditelnykh sil SSSR: trudovye armii, rabochie kolonny, bataliony (40-e gody) // Nemetskiy rossiiskiy etnos: vekhi i istorii: Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. M., 1994; Bikmatov R., Zabolotskaya K. Trudarmeitsy-nemtsy na shakhtakh Kuzbassa v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny // Nemetskiy rossiiskiy etnos: vekhi i istorii: Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. M., 1994; Rempel P.B. Deportatsiya nemtsev iz evropeiskoi chasti SSSR i trudarmiya po “sovershenno sekretnym” dokumentam NKVD SSSR 1941-1944 gg. // Nemetskiy rossiiskiy etnos: vekhi i istorii: Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. M., 1994; Gerber O.A. Istochniki izucheniya problemy ispolzovaniya prinuditelnogo truda mobilizovannykh nemtsev v ugolnoi promyshlennosti Kuzbassa v 1940-t gody // Rossiiskie nemtsy: problemy istorii, yazyka i sovremennogo polozheniya: Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. Anapa, 20-25 sentyabrya 1995 g. M., 1996; Kurochkin A.N. “Trudarmiya”: istoriografiya i istochniki // Rossiiskie nemtsy. Istoriografiya i istochnikovedenie. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. Anapa, 4-9 sentyabrya 1996 g. M., 1997; Kirillov V.M. Spetsotryad № 18-74 (sud’by nemtsev-tagilchan) // Istoriya repressii na Urale v gody sovetsoi vlasti. Tezisy nauchnoi konferentsii 25-26 oktyabrya 1994 g. Ekaterinburg, 1994; Shefer E.A. Nemetskaya trudarmiya Sverdlovskoi oblasti // 50 let Pobedy v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. Ekaterinburg, 1995; German A.A., Kurochkin A.N. Nemtsy SSSR v “trudovoi armii” (1941-1945gg.). 2-e izd. M., 2000.

A number of articles have been written about the participation of the Uzbekistani people in the defense industry, including outside the republic in so-called “construction battalions.”¹⁵ Also it is necessary to note collective works.¹⁶

The most serious research about the mobilization of the Uzbekistani people in the country’s construction and defense enterprises during World War II is L.P.Dyadyura's Ph. D. dissertation, “The Use of Labor Resources of Uzbekistan in the Defense Industry of the Country (1941-1945)”, defended in 1989. Dyadyura considered such issues as the role of mobilization of labor resources in the crash development of the military national economy, conditions of life and work for the mobilized workers, a differentiated approach in work with various groups of workers taking into account their ethnic peculiarities, use of ethnic labor skills in the industrial activity of mobilized workers, etc. The author had put into circulation previously unused documents kept in the Central State Archive of Uzbekistan: from the archival funds of the Council of People’s Commissars¹⁷ (F. 837), of the People’s Commissariats¹⁸ of Finance (F. 93) and Trade of the Uzbek SSR (F. 91), of the Representatives of the State Planning Committee (F. 2513) and People’s Commissariat Procurement of the USSR (F. 2073), of the Chief

¹⁵ Parchina M.F. Partiinaya organizatsiya Chelyabinskoi oblasti – organizator trudovogo pod’yoma rabochikh iz Srednei Azii v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny. – Sbornik trudov kafedry istorii KPSS Chelyabinskogo politekhnicheskogo instituta. Chelyabinsk, 1961. Vyp. 3; Ibragimova A.Yu., Dyadyura L.P. Uzbekistantsy na predpriyatiyakh i stroikakh Urala. – “Obschestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1980, № 5; Khalmuminov K.T. Deyatelnost gosudarstvennogo apparata UzSSR v usloviyakh voennogo vremeni. – “Obschestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1985, № 5; Ziyadullaev S.K. Promyshlennost Uzbekistana v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny. – “Obschestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1985, № 5; Dyadyura L.P. Truzheniki Uzbekistana na predpriyatiyakh i stroikah RSFSR v dni voyny. – “Obschestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1985, № 5.

¹⁶ Uzbekistan v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny (1941-1945 gg.). Tashkent: Fan, 1966; Vklad trudyaschikhsya Uzbekistana v pobedu v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine. Tashkent: Fan, 1975; Uzbekskaya SSR v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny (1941-1945 gg.). Tashkent: Fan, 1981-1985. v. 1-3

¹⁷ Council of People’s Commissars, or Sovnarkom in Russian, or SNK (abbreviation) – name of the Soviet Government (1917-1946).

¹⁸ People’s Commissariats, or Narkomat in Russian – name of ministry in the Soviet Government (1917-1946).

Administration of Arts of People's Commissariat of Culture of the Uzbek SSR (F. 2087), of the People's Commissariat State Control of the Uzbek SSR (F. 2290) for 1941-1945. Also she used documents from the Tashkent Oblast Archives¹⁹ (F. 652), as well as Russian archives and periodicals from the World War II period.

Although fundamental research—albeit, in a limited number of works—has been conducted about the Labor Army as a whole, including the participation of Soviet Germans in it, the participation of Soviet Koreans in the Labor Army is one of the most insufficiently studied themes.

In the book by journalist Kim Brutt “The Winds of Our Fates”, published in 1991, just a half-page is devoted to Labor Army men. Kim writes that the Labor Army consisted of “semi-military formations with semi-prison regime,” and that Korean Labor Army men worked in the mines of Vorkuta, Karaganda, Angren, Lyangar, on Ural timber fields, and in the building up of defense structures near Stalingrad.²⁰

In the book of the Kazakhstani scholars German Kim and Dmitry Men, “The History and Culture of Koreans in Kazakhstan,” published in 1995, only two lines are devoted to Labor Army men.²¹ However it is necessary to note that in their footnotes, the authors provide important information: during World War II, among the 37,544 people working in Karaganda's mines, 2,141 were Koreans.²²

In Georgiy Kan's monograph “History of Koreans of Kazakhstan” also only one page is devoted to Korean Labor Army men.²³ Nevertheless, it is the first academic work in which the participation of Koreans in the Labor Army starts to be studied on the basis of archival documents. The author used the documents from the Central State Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan (F. 1146, op. 1, d.

¹⁹ Oblast – (designation of administrative division of the USSR) province.

²⁰ Kim B. *Vetry nashih sudeb*. Tashkent, 1991. p. 32-33.

²¹ Kim G.N., Men D.V. *Istoriya i kultura koreitsev Kazakhstana*. Almaty, 1995. p. 125, 142.

²² *Ibid.* p.142.

²³ Kan G.V. *Istoriya koreitsev Kazakhstana*. Almaty, 1995.

267, 282, 292)²⁴. In particular, he specifies that the call-up for the “working column” began in February 1942 and was carried out through *voenkomats* (military registration and enlistment offices). He also marks that documents on the formation of the Korean working columns were produced by the Military commissariat of Kazakhstan, specifically addressing “the formation of working columns from administratively deported persons and former prisoners.”

Such nominal lists of “men of the 3rd Construction Administration of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs²⁵ of the USSR, Construction Column N 547, arrived from the military registration and enlistment office of Guryev province” are shown in the third volume of the “Collection of Archival Documents on the History of Koreans of Kazakhstan”.²⁶ The given lists were found in the State Archives of Atyrauz province (F. 198, op. 1, d. 261, 294).

The major source in reconstructing Korean participation in the Labor Army are the memories of the participants themselves – Labor Army men. For example, there is a paper on former Labor Army man, Kazakhstani Kim Grigoriy Markovich, presented at an international conference in Almaty in 1997.²⁷ Kim G.M. differentiates the concepts “participant of the Labor Front” and “Labor Army man from deported peoples”, stating that the latter were not free people.

According to the author, during the war about 20 thousand Korean men were mobilized for the Labor Army in Kazakhstan. Only teachers and those having special permission (*bron’*) were excepted from participation. As a Labor Army man, Kim G.M. stayed three years in the Komi ASSR, in the Uhto-Izhim camp.

²⁴ The documents in the Soviet and Post-Soviet archives have following system of keeping: number of fund (*fond*, for example, F. 1146), number of inventory (*opis*, for example, op. 1), number of D. (*delo*, for example, d. 267) and number of L. (*list*, for example, l. 27).

²⁵ People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs or NKVD (abbreviation) – Ministry of Police.

²⁶ *Istoriya koreitsev Kazakhstana. Sbornik arhivnykh dokumentov*. Volume 3, Almaty-Seul, 2000. p. 177-182.

²⁷ Kim G.M. *Koreitsy-trudarmeitsy v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*. – “Izvestiya koreevedeniya Kazakhstana”. Almaty, 1999. Vyp.6

The Labor Army theme became a subject of the popular article, “The Truth about the Labor Army” (nearly 5 typewritten pages), written by Khvan Lyudmila Borisovna from Nukus University and published in small fragments in the Uzbekistani newspaper “Koryo Sinmun”.²⁸ The article is devoted to the participation of Koreans of Karakalpakstan in the Labor Army. According to the author, the Koreans of Karakalpakstan basically were mobilized to Leningrad and Perm provinces, to Komi ASSR and Nizhni Tagil. The author gives short stories of four Labor Army men, nowadays living in Nukus—Chen Bon Ho, Hon Valeriy Nikolayevich, Kim Peter and Kim Hak Sen. Chen Bon Ho was mobilized to Leningrad province for mine labor, the others - to Komi ASSR for timber cutting.

The article has a popular character and is more built upon emotional estimations, rather than on documentary facts and strict analysis. The given material is drawn from L. Khvan’s brochure, “Koreans of Karakalpakstan: Yesterday and Today,” which includes references to some publications and archival documents from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Karakalpakstan (F. 322, op. 1040, d. 701).²⁹

Based on his memoirs about staying in the Komi ASSR, a paper by Ugay Chersik from Chirchik was recently presented at a conference in Seoul.³⁰ The author reveals such concrete details of Labor Army men’s lives in Uhto-Izhim camp as norms of eating, character of clothes, workday schedule, etc.

The collected material (archival documents, the literary sources and interviews) allows us to draw the following conclusions concerning Korean participation in the Labor Army.

1. According to the sources available today, Koreans in the Labor Army worked in Kazakhstan, in the mines of Karaganda; in Uzbekistan, in the mines and the construction of cement works in Angren, the construction of hydroelectric power station on the Bozu

²⁸ Koryo Sinmun, 2003, № 13, 14; 2004, № 1,3

²⁹ Khvan L. Koreitsy Karakalpakstana: vchera i segodnya. Nukus, 2004.

³⁰ Ugai Chersik. Koreitsy Rossii v gody voyny 1941-1945 gg. – War and Overseas Koreans. Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Seoul, 2004.

River, construction of an electromechanical factory in Chirchik and Begovat metallurgical plant; in Russia, in the mines of Vorkuta, on the construction of defensive works by Stalingrad, on tree felling sites in Komi ASSR, as well as in Leningrad and Perm oblasts, in Nizhni Tagil and in some other areas.

2. The mobilization to Labor Army was carried out by military registration and enlistment offices (*voenkomats*). According to the interviewees, the mobilized Koreans, sent beyond the boundaries of Uzbekistan, were told that they would be directed either to the front, or to military training, and then to the front. They learned only at the place of arrival that they would work in the Labor Army,

3. The status of specific re-settlers affected the places of assignment for the Koreans in the Labor Army. Most of them worked in Komi ASSR and were attributed to the system of corrective-labor camps under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. The Koreans in these zones worked together with prisoners and representatives of other repressed peoples. Living and work conditions were similar. There were cases in which Korean Labor Army men perished in the hands of prisoners.

4. Carrying out mobilization in national republics for work at enterprises and construction sites in Russia, the Central Committee of VKP (b) and the Soviet government demanded from Narkomats, the local Party, Soviet and economic organizations to provide all necessary conditions for effective work, and that they felt less uncomfortable being far from native places.

In May 1943 Central Committee of VKP (b) and SNK of the USSR made a decision to inspect all factories for operating conditions and the living conditions of people mobilized from Central Asia and their improvement. These questions were repeatedly discussed at the bureau sessions of Oblast Party Committees of Russia, where the Uzbekistani people worked.

The Soviet government allocated funds of necessary food products for the establishment of *chaikhana*³¹ and national canteens. In June 1943 the SNK of the USSR ordered funding allocations for green

³¹ Chaikhona (Uzb.) – traditional tea house, popular among Uzbeks.

tea, rice and mutton for people mobilized from Central Asia.³² Thus, at the mines of “Vostsibugol” under the decision of the Irkutsk obkom of VKP (b) in a centralized manner food products for the organization of 7 *chaikhana*s were allocated. Similar *chaikhana*s and national canteens under the decision of the Moscow Obkom of VKP (b) were established at the projects of the association “Mospromstroï”. For the workers-Uzbeks working in Sverdlovsk oblast alongside with warm clothes, one wagon of green tea was allocated. From funds of Uzbekistan in summer and autumn of 1943 for the Uzbekistani people working at the enterprises of Moscow, more than 119 thousand roubles were allocated for food products; for those working in Moscow oblast, 100 thousand roubles were allocated.³³

The enterprises where the Uzbekistani people worked, were visited by representatives of the Party, Soviet and trade-union organizations of Uzbekistan. For example, with the help of representatives of Central Committee of the KP (b) of Uzbekistan at the Omsk automobile tires factory and slate mines of association “Volgostroislans” (Syzran), nourishment for workers - Uzbeks was improved. At the VIIth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Trade Union of workers of industrial construction of Ural and Western Siberia held in December, the Chairman of the Uzbek Republican committee of this trade union recommended and passed the following measures: supply the workers-Uzbeks not with shovels but with Uzbek hoes (*ketmens*), introducing the Uzbek bread (*lepyoshka*) into the ration, the organization of a Uzbek music ensemble.³⁴

To the enterprises where the Uzbekistani people worked actors and poets from Uzbekistan also came. Two art brigades of “Uzgosfilarmonia”³⁵ visited Novosibirsk, Omsk, Chelyabinsk, Nizhni Tagil, Orenburg, Kuibyshev, Orsk and Perm. A front art brigade from

³² Lyubimov A.V. Torgovlya i snabzhenie v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny. M., 1963. p.117

³³ Dyadyura L.P. Truzheniki Uzbekistana na predpriyatiyakh i stroikakh RSFSR v dni voiny. -“Obschestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane”, 1985, № 5. p.21-24.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 23.

³⁵ Uzbek State Philharmonic Society

Uzbekistan made performances before Uzbekistani workers at the enterprises of Moscow and the Moscow oblast.

For Uzbek and Karakalpak workers, delivery of the Uzbek newspapers “Kyzyl Uzbekistan”, “Pravda Vostoka”, “Fotogazeta”, “Kyzyl Karakalpakstan”, “Khoresm khakikaty”, “Lenin yuly”, and small libraries of literature in the Uzbek and Karakalpak languages were organized.

According to the reminiscences of Korean Labor Army men, such policies (delivery of newspapers, concerts of agitprop brigades, delivery of additional food products, taking into account peculiarities of national cuisine, etc.) in relation to the Koreans were not accomplished.

5. According to the interviewees, among the Korean Labor Army men, working near to places of residence (for example, in the Tashkent oblast), numerous cases of desertion took place. In this connection, special representatives were sent to the Korean kolkhozes to make the Koreans return to the places of their mobilization.

5. The Korean Labor Army men working outside Uzbekistan had the opportunity to receive grocery parcels and remittances. However, according to informants, these were isolated instances.

6. The Korean Labor Army men, working within the boundaries of the republic and assigned to civil departments for valorous labor were awarded with honorable diplomas of the Supreme Soviet of the UzSSR. Indicative of this is the awards list for participation in the construction of the hydroelectric power station on the river Bozsu: of 507 people awardees, 46 are Koreans.³⁶ Others Koreans were awarded with Honorary insignia from Narkomats.³⁷

According to interviewees, the Koreans mobilized to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs during the war were not recommended for awards (decoration).

The Korean Labor Army men (though not all) in 1945 were awarded with the medal “For Valorous Work in Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945”. In 1965 – with the anniversary medal “20 Years of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945”. In 1975 – with an anniversary medal

³⁶ TsGA RUz, f. 837, op. 1, d. 3746, l. 375.

³⁷ Ibid. l. 388

“30 Years of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945”. In 1985 – with an anniversary medal “40 Years of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945”.

In 1995 the participants of war and labor front, including Labor Army men, by the enactment signed by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan were awarded with an anniversary medal “50 Years of Victory in the War of 1941-1945”.

The Korean Labor Army men also received certificates for privileges for labor during the war.

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