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# Soviet Koreans: Redemption through Labour and Sport

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## ABSTRACT

Koreans in the Russian Far East were deported to Central Asia in 1937-38 as 'potential fifth columnists', 'suspicious' or as an 'unreliable' people. This article chronicles their struggles to resettle and establish new lives through labour and sport as a Soviet nationality. The article also covers the period of 1940-1979 and the role of football in Soviet life, as part of the 'defence' of the Soviet Union (*oborona*) and its role in Soviet Korean life. Life in the post Second World War era was clearly one where Russians were 'primus inter pares' among all Soviet nationalities. If there was a 'first among equals' then logically there should also be a 'last among equals' and that was typically the diaspora nationalities. This article establishes that the rise of Soviet sport was financed by the productivity of the working peoples of Central Asia in particular the Korean *kolkhozes* of Uzbekistan. However, even Soviet sport had its biases or preferences. Sport as a 'habitus' of society was and is influenced by each society's views, hierarchies and socio-politics and yet, each society can be changed and influenced by 'new agents' wielding their particular habitus. After the Second World War, Koreans in Soviet sports were regarded as an 'unknown quantity' but typically being of a smaller and a shorter stature, they were not viewed as having as much 'potential' in competitive sports as that of Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians and others. Interviews and oral history provided the context of their struggle to establish that in regards to sports, Soviet Koreans were no worse than other nationalities. Through interviews, the first Korean pioneers in football such as Dmitrii An, Il He and Anton Yoon presented the challenges, setbacks and successes that they faced and overcame. In the end, Soviet Koreans proved that they were one among many 'equals' in regards to football and as 'Soviet men' who created 'model *kolkhozes*' throughout Central Asia.

Keywords: *Koreans, Soviet sport, football, nationalities deportations.*

## INTRODUCTION

From September 1937 to early 1938, a total of 172,597 Koreans comprising 36,681 families were deported to Central Asia and the Caspian region.<sup>1</sup> Officially, the reason for the Korean Deportation, Resolution 1428-326ss was '*the complete suppression of the penetration of Japanese espionage into the Russian Far Eastern region.*' However, this deportation was of an entire ethnicity and occurred almost four years before the USSR entered the Second World War. Incredibly, Koreans even from regions of the sub and near Arctic (where there was almost no chance of Japanese espionage) such as Okhotsk and Magadan were deported to Central Asia.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1: Soviet propaganda photo, deported Koreans, Fall 1937 in Chirchik raions (districts) . Notice swamp and reeds. Woman at rt. cannot force a smile. Photo courtesy of Kim Pen Hva Museum.

Some Koreans were deported to the lower, middle and upper Chirchik *raions* (districts) surrounding Tashkent. At that time, the three Chirchik regions were full of swamps, reeds

<sup>1</sup> V. Kim, *Pravda Polveka Spustia*, Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1999, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> U. Li and E. Kim, *Belaia kniga: o deportatsii Koreiskogo naselenia Rossiii v 30-40kh godakh, tom 1*, Moskva: Interfaks, 1992, pp. 64, 114. These sub and near Arctic Koreans numbered 700.

and otherwise undeveloped fallow land. Koreans immediately began to dredge up the swamps and create homes from bricks made of mud and use the reeds to thatch their roofs. There were snakes, wild boar, hyena, wolves and an occasional Turan tiger that Koreans had to defend themselves from during the first years. Also there were cultural differences, mainly having to do with faith (Islam) and Central Asian cultural identity. When Central Asians saw Koreans eating dog, some became alarmed while others were scared that such people might eat humans as well. Georgi Tai stated that in Kyzyl Orda, Kazakhstan, an entire village of Kazakhs moved away from his group of Korean deportees because of the rumour that Koreans were possibly cannibals. Tai stated to this interviewer twice, '*Yes, I am serious. Previously [arriving after the deportation] we were living in mud dugouts (zemliankas) and because of these rumours, we got homes.*'<sup>3</sup> Chan Ser Yun stated that life was hard upon arrival. He was fifteen years old when he arrived and there were many fistfights between Korean youths and local Central Asians.<sup>4</sup> However, most of the interviewed Korean deportees did not report such deep cultural or physical conflicts. Many Koreans also reported that the local Kazakhs and Uzbeks saw that the Koreans had arrived in a helpless state and helped them survive during the first years by sharing their bread, watermelon and other necessities.

### **KOREAN COLLECTIVISATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO SPORT**

Life was especially hard during the Second World War when all the food produced on the collective farms (*kolkhozes*) was sent to the war front. Some of the deported Soviet nationalities were known collectively as the 'unreliable peoples.' As such, Koreans were not allowed to serve as soldiers during the Second World War. Instead, many Korean males of draft age served in 'labour battalions' which perform labour such as cutting trees near the Finnish border. However, after the Second World War, Koreans would earn their redemption as a renowned, powerful and productive Soviet *narod* (people) through the reputation of their collective farms and football.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Georgi Vlasevich Tai, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 4 June 2009. Tai also remembered being asked, '*You eat dog, do you also eat donkey, horse and humans?*'

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Chan Ser Yun, Kolkhoz Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 17 September 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Narod* means people, nationality or ethnic group. In this article, nationality will refer exclusively to ethnic group unless otherwise stated (ie. passport nationality).

Korean collective farms grew wheat, rice, millet, corn, potatoes and kenaf (used to make sacks for agricultural produce). The deportation of Koreans to Central Asia also Russified them as well as other Soviet nationalities because after 1939, Korean as a language of education was replaced by Russian. Koreans in the three Chirchik *raions* were mostly sent to majority-Korean collective farms. However, some Koreans were sent to farms with mixed populations. Koreans deported to small agricultural towns such as Bekobod (about 75 kilometres from Tashkent, outside of the Chirchik regions) studied in Russian, lived side by side with Germans, Chechens, Black Sea Greeks, Finns, Russians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks and Kazakhs. They all studied and worked speaking Russian. Cafeterias offered almost exclusively Russian cuisine as well, soups, borsch, pelmeni (Russian ravioli), and a wide variety of Russian style bread. Russians, Jews, Armenians and other Russian speakers of European background typically received the administrative and urban white collar jobs (*kontornaia rabota*).<sup>6</sup> Koreans received few of the urban administrative jobs until the 1960's.<sup>7</sup>

In the Chirchik/outer Tashkent regions, Koreans constituted typically from 80-90 per cent of the collective farm population in the Korean *kolkhozes* until the 1960's. Koreans worked day and night maintaining the irrigation for their crops. Uzbekistan has very hot weather, blistering sunlight/heat and good soil.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the key to a good harvest was the irrigation. It also helped that Soviet economists measured agricultural production by volume or weight. This was especially the case with kenaf which grew to an average height of 2.8 metres. Lee Yen Ho was 15 when his family was deported in 1937. His father died immediately after arriving in Central Asia. He describes life in the Korean *kolkhozes* thusly, 'When we arrived my father died, my mother survived and we, including the younger children went to work in the fields. If we did not work the *kolkhoz* itself would have thrown us out.' The Korean *kolkhoz* leaders were under strict supervision from Raikom to produce large grain harvests for the war front (during the Second World War) and to increase production to show the capitalist countries that the Soviet Union was every bit their equal. Ok In Pak recalled that she worked seven days a week with no days off usually from 6am to 6pm from

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<sup>6</sup> A. Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, 91.

<sup>7</sup> As the Korean *kolkhozes* grew, administrative, white collar jobs grew as well. These were stocked with Koreans and some Russians, Tatars and Uzbeks.

<sup>8</sup> In the years 2006-2010, Jon Chang, the co-author conducted interviews with roughly 59 Soviet Korean deportees in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The subjects were from 7-24 years of age at the time of their deportation (1937) from the Russian Far East.

1938 to the mid-1950's.<sup>9</sup> Nadezhda Li worked the same schedule as well but when she returned home from a long day of work, she had to cook for her family and then wash clothes. She slept two to three hours every night.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 2: *Detskii Sad* (kindergarten) in the Soviet Union, 1964 in *Kolkhoz Sverdlov*, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Kindergarten consisted of 2 years in the Soviet Union, ages 5-6 and 6-7. Note only one non-Korean, 2nd row, 2nd from left, Kazakh boy. Courtesy of Aleksandr Kim.

Yen Ho Lee was one of few surviving Heroes of Socialist Labour in 2009. He led a labour brigade of 130 men and women harvesting kenaf. He quite humbly stated that it was the kenaf itself that helped him win this award. Kenaf grew to 2.8 meters, production was measured by weight and naturally as compared to rice or wheat, kenaf was heavy and large. As a Hero of Socialist Labour, Lee won an annual trip to the premier Soviet resort in Sochi.<sup>11</sup> Korean *kolkhozes* such as Sverdlov, Politotdel, Uzbekistan and Dimitrov were the four largest by 1960. Sverdlov and Politotdel produced (in aggregate numbers for all crops combined) more than one million roubles of agricultural production in kenaf, grain (wheat), rice, soy and cotton.<sup>12</sup> The two collective farms recorded some of the highest numbers of Heroes of Socialist Labour (somewhere from 11-12 for each *kolkhoz*) in the *entire* Soviet Union. Their leaders were consistently awarded with trips to Moscow as well as becoming Heroes of

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Ok In Pak, *Kolkhoz Pravda*, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 10 June 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Nadezhda Li, *Kolkhoz Severnyi Maiak*, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, June 1, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Yen Ho Lee, *Kolkhoz Sverdlov*, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 30 May 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Note that the Korean *kolkhozes* grew as their main crops kenaf and rice. Cotton was the third crop.

Socialist Labour themselves for managing the farms. High production was rewarded by Moscow with funds to expand the Korean *kolkhozes* into miniature cities by the early 1960's. Koreans and other collective farmers built roads, larger hospitals, larger hospital staff, larger schools, playgrounds, libraries and other facilities on their collective farms.



Figure 3: Four Korean *kolkhoz* chairmen (directors), L-R, Hvan Mangym (*Kolkhoz Politotdel*), Pen Hva Kim (*Poliarnaia Zvezda*), 3rd man unknown, Dmitrii A. Kim (*Kolkhoz Sverdlov*), circa late 1950's-early 1960's. Note that 3 of the 4 wear medals (w/ star) for Hero of Socialist Labour. Photo courtesy of Kim Pen Hva Museum, Uzbekistan.

### **MANGYM HVAN, KOLKHOZ CHAIRMAN EXTRAORDINAIRE**

Mangym Hvan was the chairman at Politotdel. He was responsible for building one of the most extensive sports complexes and training programmes in any of the *kolkhozes* across the entire Soviet Union. Politotdel began as a Korean *kolkhoz* which also included Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tatars, Russians, Ukrainians and other Soviet nationalities. He wanted Politotdel to show to others in the Soviet Union what Koreans could do and that they could compete with the best in almost any Soviet sport. However sport in Soviet culture was to serve socialism by

'preparing the worker for labour and defence [of the homeland].'<sup>13</sup> In the political economy of collectivisation in Central Asia, it was the institution of collectivised labour, the *kolkhozes* which paved the way for sport. In other words, the high production of the Korean *kolkhozes* funded the various sports clubs, training institutes, equipment, leisure time for training and the salaries for the athletes.

Due to their productivity, the various Korean *kolkhozes* such as Dmitrov, Kolkhoz Uzbekistan, Sverdlov, Politotdel and Poliarnaia Zvezda (the Polar Star later to be renamed Kim Pen Hva collective farm) earned enough revenue to transform themselves from villages to self-contained miniature cities with paved roads, street lights, schools, playgrounds, community centres, hospitals and sports stadiums. Naturally, the *kolkhoz* chairmen also brought in trainers, men who had graduated from Soviet Physical Culture Institutes (universities of physical education) to teach children all of the aforementioned sports as well as boxing and track and field. The collective farm, Politotdel (meaning 'Political division') became the powerhouse of Soviet Korean sport in the entire Soviet Union and that was because of Mangym Hvan.



Figure 4: L. (photo)- Alexei Tsoi, teaching boxing at Politotdel. Tsoi was a Master of Sport in Boxing. R. (photo)- Politotdel (a *kolkhoz* of 3000) playing Class A, Soviet football in 1967 against Turkmenia's finest team from Ashkabad. Dmitrii An, far rt. Photo courtesy of Dmitrii and Klara An.

<sup>13</sup> The exact phrase in Russian was '*Gotov k trudy i oborone*', see M. O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR*, London: Reaktion, 2006, pp. 127-128. Further explanation of sport as socialist physical culture and as preparation for defence, see J. Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977, p. 101.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, Hvan was an instructor at the Raikom Communist Party Institute. Typically, at a CP school, one could meet all of the regional leaders and those that were selected for administrative positions, the *vydvizhentsy*.<sup>14</sup> CP schools taught and examined economics, politics, history and the social sciences from the point of view of class consciousness and Bolshevik socialism.<sup>15</sup> In 1953, Hvan became the chairman at Politotdel. More importantly, he brought to Politotdel his connections from Raikom (the regional committee, that is regional leadership) in order to fund his projects, support his career, develop Politotdel and increase the visibility and the reputation of Koreans in the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Research for this article was primarily conducted at the former collective farms of Politotdel, Sverdlov and Pravda. The following are excerpts from the interviews of three former Korean athletes, Anton Yoon, Il He and Dmitrii An, who witnessed the apogee of the influence of Korean *kolkhozes* in Uzbekistan during the Soviet period.

### THREE KOREAN PIONEERS IN SOVIET FOOTBALL [ORAL HISTORY]

#### Dmitrii An, the first Soviet Korean star of football<sup>17</sup>

[An begins] During the 1940's and 1950's, we [Koreans] lived poorly after Second World War. There wasn't much. The Soviet Union at that time, they did not pay attention to sport [in Central Asia].<sup>18</sup> Koreans did not pay much attention to sport, their major goal was to go to Moscow and St. Petersburg and enter university there. In 1955-1956, at 16 years old, we played football among ourselves at the *kolkhoz* Severnyi Maiak (Northern Lighthouse). In the beginning, we didn't even have a regular ball. We made *chuchelo* (a ball from rags and wool from sheep). Then around 1955-1956, there was a school team and I was picked for the team. Tashkent also created a national team called Pakhtakor and they invited other teams to play against them. They came to Severnyi Maiak and we played against them. We played against the Pakhtakor Molodoi (youth) team. [In a huge upset] We played to a tie at 3-3. I scored

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<sup>14</sup> Vydvizhentsy refers to the new Soviet educated bureaucrats and elite.

<sup>15</sup> CP is communist party.

<sup>16</sup> B. Kim, *Koreitsy Uzbekistana: kto est kto, spravochnoe izdanie* (Tashkent: Posolstva Respubliki Koreia, 2000), 111-13 for a short biography of Hvan Mangym.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dmitrii An, Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 13 September 2009.

<sup>18</sup> However, Soviet sport, particularly football, was very well developed in Moscow and St. Petersburg even in the 1930's, see R. Edelman, *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Worker's State*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009.

three times. I caught the attention of the Pakhtakor youth coach and he immediately told me to go to the city and begin studying at the football school. I was living at the village (Severnyi Maiak) at the time. Three days a week, I went to train in the city. After training, I walked home at night [around 12 kilometers]. I studied there around three years and finished in 1960. Unfortunately, after finishing three years of football training, they didn't want to promote me to the higher league, the Pakhtakor team. As you know, it was a little harder then, I was the only Korean among many Russians, Uzbeks and Tatars.



Figure 5: Politotdel vs Opponent at old stadium in 1965. Slava Hon (#10) attempts to head the ball. Far left, Dmitrii An slips. Courtesy: Dmitrii An.

So then I went to the Kolkhoz Sverdlov and played for their team. In 1959-1960, the Sverdlov team (a Korean collective farm) was just organizing itself. At the Pakhtakor school, I learned some things that I could teach to the other Koreans. There were also three other Koreans who studied sports culture, we played together and formed an excellent team. In 1960, we beat Pakhtakor. We weren't even in the high national league, we were just an agricultural farm team (he laughs vigorously). We beat the number one team in the republic (Pakhtakor)! Pakhtakor always took the best players from the best teams in the republic [of

Uzbekistan]. Krasnynskii, Abdraiev, Motorin, etc., they were all stars. Then they took me immediately back to Pakhtakor but I went back unwillingly. The coach told me, *'If you won't play for Pakhtakor, you won't play football at all.'*



Figure 6: Politotdel's second stadium, completed in 1970. Source: Mikhail Li.

I wanted to play for a Korean team among my own people, our own ethnic team. We [Koreans] were considered poor, uneducated and illiterate [in the early Soviet period and post-deportation]. Then we rose quickly [as Soviet people]. I wanted to show how Koreans had risen. But after they took me back, each team I played for was always a *podyom* (a step up). Then I left Pakhtakor again and went back to Sverdlov, they had one or two excellent players and trainers. We were in Class B (an intra-republic team) at the time, Pakhtakor was Class A. (which played Soviet teams outside of Uzbekistan). Sverdlov, Politotdel, Dmitrovo and Kolkhoz Okurgan were all rich Korean *kolkhozes* which fielded teams in Class B. They grew kenaf and rice [An implies that kenaf and rice produced the economics in order to fund stadiums, soccer teams, salaries and trainers].

By the 1960's there were approximately six Korean *kolkhoz* teams with paid semi-professional athletes and stadiums. Koreans began to receive more attention, respect and prestige through sports. Thanks to sport, I was able to see all of the USSR by playing for Pakhtakor and Politotdel. We (Politotdel) played in Division A for only 5 years (5 seasons, Fall 1967-Spring 1973). But my younger brother Misha [Mikhail] went everywhere through football; He travelled throughout the entire Soviet Union, America and Italy. As a Korean it was very difficult to struggle to the national team because they don't support you and promote you [he implies ethnic chauvinism]. But Misha went forward and had success. Misha proved that as Koreans, we did not play worse than any other nationality, maybe we even played better. And for that reason they selected him as the captain of Youth USSR team. He only played two games for the Soviet National (select) team. But he was elected captain of the USSR National Olympic team [along with Vladimir Fedorov]. Unfortunately, his plane crashed on August 11, 1979 [before the 1980 Olympics, Mikhail An died in an aviation accident]. In 1979, they [the Soviet National team] went to Los Angeles to play two matches there. The four teams there were Italy, Mexico, USA and USSR. Then there was a sports magazine and on the cover, they put Mikhail on it. I don't have the magazine anymore, I can't find it. Someone took it from us. [In February 1979, Mikhail An went to Los Angeles to play as part of the Soviet Union's 'second string' national team in football. They played against Mexico and won 1-0 with An scoring the only goal. In the second match in Seattle, the Soviet team tied with the United States, 1-1. An again scored the only goal for the Soviet team. The Soviet press reported the second match as a victory against the U.S.<sup>19</sup>]

Q-Did you teach Mikhail An how to play football?

Dimitrii-- No, I was 11 years older, I had already left the house. He taught himself. Then there is Innokentii An who was 14 years younger [the youngest brother] and now a professional coach in Korea [End of Dimitrii An Interview].

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<sup>19</sup> 'Sbornaia Rossii po futbolu: An Mikhail Ivanovich (Russian National Football Selection: An Mikhail Ivanovich)', Available at <<http://www.rusteam.permian.ru/players/an.html>> (retrieved 14/07/2011).

**Il He, a long time athlete, trainer and physical education teacher at Politotdel.<sup>20</sup>**

Q-Can you tell me about how you got started in sports?

Il He- My dad played football in the RFE (Russian Far East), that I remember. He was born in Korea. He learned to play football in the RFE. He came to the RFE from Korea when he was 12, 13 years old [arriving in 1919]. He told me once about learning football in middle school or high school.

Q-Why did you chose the Physical Culture Institute?

Il He- My whole life, I wanted to be an athlete and a coach. Sport was just the most interesting subject for me. When I was a child, we played *lapta* (a Russian form of baseball) but for the most part, I mainly played football.

Q-How about judo or tae-kwon do?

Il He--There was none of that at the time in the 1940's and 1950's in the Soviet Union.

Q- How about describing to us, an average day at the Tashkent Physical Culture Institute (Il He's university)?

The whole week I was busy, then we trained (the football team). Classes were from 9am to 3:30 pm. Then we practiced for the institute's football team. We were the strongest team of all the universities in Uzbekistan [from 1955-1959].

Q-How many Koreans were in this institute?

Il He--Three out of ninety total students.

Q-How many Koreans played for the institute's football team?

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Il He, Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 21 April 2010.

Il He-- I was the only one during the time I studied there. In the 1950's, football and boxing were the most popular sports in the USSR.

Q-What role did sports play in the USSR?

Il He-Sport allowed the Soviet people to show that they were educated and strong. As athletes, we wore badges that said ,'*GTO, gotov/trudy/oborone* (ready/to labour/to defend).'

Q-What do you mean by defend? To defend against capitalist countries?

Il He-Yes.

Q-When did Hvan Mangym first organize a team at Politotdel?<sup>21</sup>

Il He--The [Korean] *kolkhozes* had already risen. Then someone like Mangym began to think of life beyond just working. He didn't receive an order to do it, it was just on his mind. He wanted ways for people to work, and other ways for people to live. And this was through sport.

Q-What was the higher goal of sport [for Hvan Mangym]?

Il He-To show that Koreans could do anything that Russians, Uzbeks and Kazakhs could do. For that reason, he wanted 100 per cent Korean teams. [But he never enforced this. Talent took primary concern, for this reason, the Politotdel teams never had more than four Korean players.] There is no reason just to be a wealthy *kolkhoz* and save the money, one should use the money as well. He played the biggest role in the growth of sport among Koreans. Also Dobyin Shegai played a big role too. Hvan Mangym brought him to Politotdel to work as a trainer as well. Dobyin Shegai finished a Physical Culture Institute in Rostov-Na-Don. The first team at Politotdel was organized in 1959. Dobyin Shegai and I were two of the first players on that team. On that first team, there were four Koreans, the others were Uzbeks,

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<sup>21</sup> Note that in the interviews, Hvan Mangym is named with surname first which follows the East Asian tradition. Hvan Mangym and Kim Pen Hva were typically referred to by surname first. Hvan is the Russian transliteration of Hwan/Hwang.

Russians and Tatars. Of the first four, it was myself, Dobyng Shegai, Hon Slava [and Anatolii Lyan].

Q-What was your salary as a football player?

Il He-It was 120 roubles per month. But when I was a football player, I earned a half day's pay which worked out to be 72 roubles per month as a teacher and 150 roubles per month as an athlete in 1959. At that time, I was married and had a child (Two hundred roubles per month in 1960 was a substantial salary).

Q-How many times did you practice per week?

Il He- We practiced 4-5 times a week, 2-3 hours per day. When the weather was good 3 hours, when it was bad, we just played out in the street. Hvan Mangym bought our team balls and uniforms. We had everything including weight equipment. There was also a track.

Q-Can you tell us more about the An brothers, the two greatest Soviet Korean footballers?

Il He- Dmitrii An was tall and strapping. He headed the ball very well and jumped higher than everyone else. Mikhail An saw the field very well. Wherever you ran to, he could anticipate this a few steps ahead of time and put the ball [the pass] in the proper place. He worked in combination with Fedorov and Khadzipanagis. They knew each other very well as players. He also played very well in the air. He was a strong technical player and overall a very smart guy. Players like him come along only once in a lifetime. Out of many, many players, he was unique. He was like our Pele. In one hundred years, there is only one Mikhail An. Korea now has many great players but you can't compare them with An [End of He Il Interview].

**Anton Yoon was a goalie for Kolkhoz Dmitrov and one of the first athletes trained by Il He<sup>22</sup>.**

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By 1967, we start to raise our level of football and Koreans began to be invited by all clubs throughout the Soviet Union. By the 1960's Koreans were 20 per cent of the population of Tashkent Oblast (referring to outside the city of Tashkent, the Lower, Middle and Upper Chirchik regions). So as to bring recognition to Koreans, we began creating sports teams in all kinds of sports: chess, checkers, wrestling, football. Sport also played a major role in Soviet society.

Q- Sport was used to show that socialism was greater than capitalism, is that correct?

Anton Yoon- Yes, if you will remember at that time, the US and USSR almost all the great sporting events during the entire 1960's-1970's and during all the Olympics took 1st place or thereabouts.

Q-Now tell us about your playing career?

Anton Yoon--I played football from 1958 to 1962 [corrects to 1964]. In 1962, I was 20 years old, it was time to live as a man and a normal life. I didn't see a great future for myself in sport. I began to go to night school in the Middle Chirchik region. At the same time, I was working at a plant (during the day). In 1963, I began playing for Kolkhoz Dmitrov (as a goalie). I was invited to play by the Kolkhoz chairman, Kim Pervanan. They were organizing a team, the salaries were good and I decided to join them. At the end of 1964, I brought home 700 kilograms of rice to my family. My parents asked me, '*Where is this from?*' I am the oldest son, I had to help my own family. This rice was paid at the end of the season as a bonus. [Dmitrov was a rice-only collective farm].

Q-What was your salary per month in addition to the rice?

Anton Yoon- It was 200 roubles per month. At that time in 1963-1964, it was a huge sum of money. In 1964, I entered the Physical Culture Institute (in Tashkent) but then in 1965, I

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Anton Yoon, Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 19 April 2010.

[switched majors and universities] and entered the Agricultural Institute. The scholarship to study at the Physical Culture Institute never materialized. In 1970, I finished my degree and became an agronomist.

Q-What about Hvan Mangym? What were his reasons for developing sport among Koreans in Politotdel?

Anton Yoon- Hvan Mangym is responsible for many things. He developed sports in Politotdel such as chess, checkers, football, wrestling and tennis. He also brought trainers to teach people how to play competitively. His goals were not so simple. It was to bring a sense of recognition and accomplishment to our Koreans in Uzbekistan. He was the first to create the Chen Chun musical and dance ensemble. He was the first to create the Politotdel football team which played first in Class B and then Class A. He even created a field hockey team for women which won first place in all the USSR. Hvan Mangym's goal was to show that the Koreans could do anything [Yoon later added, 'that Russians or other nationalities could do']. The goal was to show that Koreans were hardworking and could reach all levels. Guests from all over the USSR were brought to our *kolkhozes*.<sup>23</sup> They brought them to our *kolkhozes* to show that everything was clean, all the houses and streets were clean and immaculate. There was culture, gas, light, everything was reflective of Koreans.

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<sup>23</sup> Jon Chang had the opportunity to see the youth guest hostel in the Sverdlov. Residents told of how young students from socialist countries such as China, Vietnam and various African nations were brought to the Sverdlov hostel to live and study Russian for one year or so. Then they would leave and enter an institute or university. The Korean *kolkhozes* were often selected because they were like miniature self-contained cities.



Figure 7: L. (photo)- Politotdel's Cultural Centre which contained a library, auditorium, banquet hall, dance hall and theatre. R. (photo)--Statue above the 'Centre' signifying the harmony of the nationalities. Korean woman, centre, Uzbek man rt., Russian man left. Source: Jon Chang, August 2008.

Q-Do you have anything to add about Mikhail An?

Anton Yoon--In 1979, he died. By the time of his death, he had led Pakhtakor [An Uzbek team which at that time was playing in the International Class, a league above Class A, which of course, played only among Soviet and Soviet bloc teams] to the highest finish that they had ever had in the Soviet Union's highest league, sixth place overall. He was the captain of Pakhtakor. Everyone respected him for his strong will, his leadership and his beautiful passes. Everyone was amazed at his exact passes. For us Koreans, we could see that his mind was sharp [End of Yoon Interview].

The interviews and fieldwork expressed many of the nuances and the hierarchies of Soviet life and how those interviewed expanded the horizon and expectations for national minorities within the Soviet Union. In this case, Dmitrii An spoke about the difficulties that the Koreans had in establishing themselves as 'Soviet men' in the field of sport.<sup>24</sup> He said of that time period (1950's-1960's), 'As a Korean it was very difficult to struggle to the [Soviet]

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<sup>24</sup> This is a translation directly from Russian. By the term 'Soviet men', this article also refers to Soviet men and women. This nomenclature is unfortunate. Perhaps the greatest Soviet Korean athletes were women. Several Korean kolkhoz teams from across Uzbekistan won national (all-Soviet) women's field hockey championships. One such team was (reputedly) from Politotdel and a second from Andijan, Uzbekistan. This story will be the subject of a future article.

national team. There was no support.<sup>25</sup> Dmitrii was usually a reserve player while attending the Pakhtakor Youth School and on the Pakhtakor Youth Team. After finishing the school in 1960, he was let go and not put on the Pakhtakor Senior Team. Yet once Sverdlov (along with An and other Koreans) defeated Pakhtakor 3-1 in 1960, Pakhtakor immediately wanted An back. Dmitrii went back to Pakhtakor as a starter and with a large salary. Mikhail An had difficulties too. He was a top scorer in the Soviet 'international class' league play since 1970. But he was not promoted to the Soviet National Team until 1979 despite being the captain for the Soviet National U-20 team. Gelb and Martin spoke about a cultural divide in Soviet life between Eastern Slavs and Asians and those deemed 'Asian.'<sup>26</sup> Paraphrasing Bourdieu, the sports field reflects the 'habitus' of the society at large, its structure, power relations, beliefs and biases.<sup>27</sup> Koreans were an unknown quantity in Soviet sport in the 1950's and 1960's. Smaller in stature and build, some may have believed that Koreans could not compete against Slavs or other Soviet nationalities.<sup>28</sup> This belief was to change during the 1960's and 1970's. Korean players stood out in Uzbekistan while playing for the *kolkhoz* teams Sverdlov and Politotdel and the representative Soviet league play team, Pakhtakor. Some eleven different Koreans played for the Politotdel team during the five years that it was in Class A according to Dmitrii An.

## CONCLUSION

By the 1970's and 1980's, the atmosphere surrounding football games between the collective farms resembled that of festivals or a holiday. The richest collective farms could afford the

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Dmitrii An.

<sup>26</sup> M. Gelb stated, 'As their tsarist predecessors, Communist officials understood Koreans to be natural allies against Japanese imperialism, but nonetheless remained suspicious of them as Asians.' See, M. Gelb, 'An Early Soviet Deportation: The Far-Eastern Koreans', *Russian Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3, 1995, p. 394. Martin stated, 'However, the east/west dichotomy was nevertheless preserved as a cultural distinction (one that could at times contain much of the content of the old racial divide).' [East signifying Asia and West signifying Europe], see T. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Habitus is practice taking place by agents in a social field. Agents construct or alter fields of habitus naturally (without conscious strategy) by infusing the said 'field' with their mentalities, form and practice, see P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 27, 121, 129-130. The above paraphrase come from D. Burdsey, *British Asians in Football: Culture, Identity and Exclusion*, New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup> As an example of an 'Asian stereotype' in football is the British Anglo-Asian player, Ricky Heppolate. Patrick Ismond said of Heppolate, that he and other talented Asian athletes in football 'were partially frustrated by entrenched, negative perceptions about their limited motivation, physical frailty and limited mental capacities [competitiveness]', see P. Ismond, *Black and Asians Athletes in Sports and British Society: A Sporting Chance?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p.47.

best teams. The more productive the *kolkhoz*, the more likely it could also pay for and build a large stadium. Sverdlov and Politotdel produced annual harvests of over 1 million roubles during the 1960's to the early 1980's.<sup>29</sup> Naturally, the biggest rivalry was between Sverdlov and Politotdel. But all nationalities came to the games whether Uzbek, Russian, Ukrainian, Korean, Greek and Kazakh, because one, Stalin had deported nearly every nationality (ethnic group) to the various republics of Central Asia and two, players of different ethnicities could be found in the rosters of all the Korean teams. Finally, football had become the Soviet Union's most popular spectator sport and remained so until the end of the Soviet Union. Typically, only 2-4 players on the Korean *kolkhoz* teams were Koreans. The teams recruited by talent especially since the players doubled on the collective farms as trainers and were paid higher salaries than many other type of employees. The Koreans wanted the best trainers for their children as well. Players earned 200-300 roubles plus half of a teacher's salary for their work as trainers or physical education teachers. For example, a teacher in Central Asia in the 1980's-1991 earned up to 180 roubles per month with up to 45 days of vacation time per year.<sup>30</sup> Sasha Kim reported that on Saturday or Sundays when the football games were held in the 1970's and 1980's, the Sverdlov stadium would be packed with buses and bicycles. Vendors would also be outside selling barbecue and beer. Some of the football fans would marvel at the facilities that the Koreans had built. Football was the hook to bring in spectators to visit Politotdel, Sverdlov, Kim Pen Hva, Kolkhoz Uzbekistan, Dmitrov and others.<sup>31</sup>

The interviews and fieldwork were absolutely crucial in order to gain insight from a *natsmen's* (national minority) point of view. This view regarding ethnic hierarchies in Soviet sport had to be coaxed out because marginalisation and discrimination are typically discussed with reluctance. None of the three former Soviet Korean footballers wanted to sound embittered or strike a 'sour-grapes' cord in a story of hope and triumph. Yet, the hierarchy had been established since the mid-1930's when Russians and Russian culture were typically treated as 'first among equals' in the Soviet Union. Here is an example from the Soviet Uzbek National Anthem of 1978 (Note that the 'Salute to the Russians' was the first line of the anthem):

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Vladimir Sergeevich Kim, Kolkhoz Politotdel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 14 September 2009. Vladimir Kim during the Soviet period was a deputy director and professor at the Tashkent Gosplan Institute for economic and agro-economic planning. Gosplan means state planning.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Anatolii Kim, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 1 March 2007. Mr. Anatolii Kim taught physics in secondary schools in Chechnya.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Aleksandr Kim, Kolkhoz Sverdlov, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 27 April 2010.

Salute to you, Russian people, our Great Brother! Greetings our genius Lenin, dear one! You have shown us the road to freedom, the Uzbek has found glory in the Soviet homeland.... [pre Revolution] We did not see light in a sunlit country, We lacked water alongside rivers.... Lenin was the Guide, peoples [nationalities] are thankful to Lenin the Guide!<sup>32</sup>

Dmitrii An and others confirmed that despite an official Soviet line of only 'class differences', ethnic stereotypes and hierarchies existed within the Soviet Union and Soviet sport. Koreans used football and their collective farms as 'fields of contestation' in which they presented and reconstructed themselves as 'first among equals'. The addition of 'Soviet Korean habitus' created alternatives in the Soviet mindset and form. It did not overturn the Soviet predilection for Russians and Ukrainians as 'first among equals' but rather provided a more diversified model of 'Soviet men' and socialism. Koreans provided an alternative model that indeed sometimes Soviet Asians could come first in football or collective farm production in the latter half of the twentieth century. In this way, they influenced the larger Soviet society and remoulded the public's perception of Koreans.

Although Koreans and other diaspora nationalities like the Soviet Germans and the Greeks were not given autonomous regions of their own after Second World War, they treated their homes and communities as if it were their native soil.<sup>33</sup> Most of the other Soviet nationalities were given autonomous regions of different sizes. For example, in the case of fifteen nationalities such as Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, they were given 'union republics' which had their own constitutions, native language schools and First Secretaries who were representative of the native populations.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the Koreans focused on making their small communities into shining examples of their labour and loyalty to the Soviet Union. People marvelled that their collective farms could look like the urban areas and offered so many of the amenities of the Soviet city. Upon entering Politotdel on game day, spectators saw a holiday-like atmosphere with food aplenty, paved streets, stadiums, schools and street

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<sup>32</sup> S. Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000, p. 250.

<sup>33</sup> Paradoxically, although Germans and Koreans were not given autonomous regions due to being labelled 'politically unreliable', they were deported and later, organized into collectives which were predominantly of their same ethnicity.

<sup>34</sup> The First Secretary is the leader of a 'union republic.' Union republics in theory had the right to secede from the Soviet Union. There were fifteen union republics in the Soviet Union (e.g. Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan).

lights. They also saw large tractor stations, facilities for Soviet agronomy and animal husbandry, an endocrinology centre where research was being conducted and a hospital.<sup>35</sup> These amenities and institutions convinced any doubters that Koreans were hardworking, productive people who were part and parcel of the USSR and who in their own way (through feeding the war effort) were responsible for Soviet victories during the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> The public and state sentiment regarding Koreans changed from 'unreliables' to 'industrious stalwarts (*trudolubivyi*)' by 1970's. This is their story and one of the great successes of Soviet socialism.



Figure 8: L. (photo) General Secretary of the Soviet Union visiting Politotdel in 1970. Left, Leonid Ilich Brezhnev, Gen. Secretary, USSR; to rt., behind Brezhnev, in black suit, Sharaf Rashidov, First Secretary, Uzbekistan; to rt. in white shirt, Hvan Mangym, Chairman Politotdel. R.(photo)-The three examining the 1970 cotton crop. Photo courtesy: Mikhail Li.

<sup>35</sup> The information on the endocrinology centre as well as population statistics for Politotdel was given during an interview with Vladimir Sergeevich Kim.

<sup>36</sup> In Russian, the Second World War is also called the 'Great Fatherland War.'