

The Korean Plans of Russian Imperialism

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ONE OF THE VITAL Far-Eastern problems of our times is the destiny of Korea. Liberated from the Japanese yoke, Korea "in due course shall become free and independent," it was agreed at the Cairo conference. Soviet Russia had not been represented at this conference and at that time her claims and plans concerning Korea remained unknown.

Later it was agreed that Russia, if she entered into the war with Japan, would occupy temporarily the northern part of Korea, and the United States the southern part including the capital, Seoul. It was not foreseen, however, how the inter-allied control was to be organized in order to protect Korea and to let her prepare herself for self-government. It was not anticipated, evidently, that the proposed division of Korea into two parts could become a lasting one nor that it would be too difficult to consolidate the zones under a unified government, even after the Moscow agreement on Korea of December, 1945, and the establishment of the Joint Commission in Seoul.

Yet less was it foreseen that the northern part of Korea since the establishment of the Soviet control would become impenetrable for Americans. Japan seemed to be the only competitor of Russia in Korea and any discord between Russia and the United States in Korea looked improbable to many observers since Japan, once defeated, was to be driven out of the Korean peninsula. Nobody paid attention to Lenin's assertion that the United States was seriously interested in the fate of Korea and intended to "snatch this dainty morsel away."¹ Soviet Russia, where every word of Lenin's is considered a prophesy, had, evidently, her own point of view on the future of Korea, and, therefore, her lasting occupation of North Korea should not have been a surprise.

¹ Lenin, "Collected Works," (Russian ed.), Vol. XXV, pp. 501-2.

The northern part of Korea has the richest ore reserves of the region. It is estimated that it has about 20 million tons of high grade iron ore and more than one billion tons of low grade ore. Manchurian reserves, for example, are estimated at 800 million tons. Experts estimate that production of iron ore could already exceed 6.3 million tons, slightly more than the production in Manchuria and six times as large as Japanese production in 1936.

In the northern part of Korea are also situated all the important sources of electrical power, the potential capacity of which is estimated to be 2.2 million kilowatts. By March, 1938, stations in operation had a capacity of 668,000 kilowatts, while stations under construction were calculated upon a capacity of more than 800,000 kilowatts.

Among other minerals and ores, aluminum, lead, and lithium (the lightest metal) occupy the more important places in Korean resources.

According to Soviet data, the Japanese organized in the northern part of Korea a giant chemical industry, the so-called Kenan chemical combine, and also carried on production of high quality steel (electro-metallurgy), and of aeroplane parts.²

Occupation of this important region by the Red Army reminds Koreans of the aggressive actions of the Czarist government not so long ago. It would be of some use, therefore, to recall some facts of Korea's fateful history and of the competition of the foreign powers in Korea.

I

Japan and Russia, Competitors in Korea

IN THE NATIVE KOREAN LANGUAGE, Korea is called Choo-sen which means "Land of the Morning Calm."³ Its history does

² *Tikkii Ocean*, 1938, No. 3, pp. 86-91.

³ The name of Korea derived from the Ko-ryu dynasty which ruled A.D. 918-1392.

not warrant this poetic name. As a bridge between the continent and the Japanese isles, Korea was subjected to foreign invasions many times.

Russian-Japanese competition in Korea began at the end of the nineteenth century. Russia was not interested at first in Korea's destiny. The Russian General Staff sent some expeditions to Korea to explore that exotic country, but evidently without any aggressive intentions. On the contrary, in 1890 Lieutenant Colonel Vebel of the Russian General Staff, in his report of an official tour in Korea, emphasized that Russia had no territorial interests in Korea and any change of the map in that direction could only mean useless expenses "on the land of no need to Russia."⁴ In 1894 another author, Matunine, repeated that "Russia cannot and must not have any covetous views on the Kingdom of Chosen." "Annexation of Korea," he wrote, "would require considerable losses of people and resources and presumes at the same time Russian domination in Manchuria." The best Russia could do, Matunine thought, would be to strengthen Korean independence, by the aid of conventions with China, Japan, and, if possible, the United States.⁵

In the meantime, the Japanese started to infiltrate into Korea. The newcomers were unscrupulous. Private businessmen who arrived to make fortunes stopped at nothing. Official representatives did not hesitate to adopt any means for attaining their political aims. In 1895, by the order of a Japanese general, Miura, the queen who supported the Chinese orientation and influenced the king, was killed. The king, afterwards emperor, took refuge in the Russian Legation. China was unable to assist Korea and Russian influence became powerful.

However, the Russian attitude toward Korea soon changed

⁴ *Sbornik Geographicheskib Materialov*, No. 41, 1890, pp. 142-252.

⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 58, 1894.

radically. The sound judgments quoted above gave way to quite opposite views. Lieutenant Colonel Alftan of the Russian General Staff, after his trip in Korea at the end of 1895 and in January, 1896, published a report in which he asserted that it was necessary for Russia to annex Korea because Russia wanted to have ice-free ports on the Pacific and general conditions would never be more favorable for this action.⁶

This report evidently reflected the new trend of Russian policy. Instead of co-operating with other powers to strengthen Korean independence, as was suggested by Matunine, Russia used her influence to oppose the realization of the idea of an open port (which was suggested by Great Britain and the United States), and appropriated a port on the northwest coast for herself, renaming it Port Nicholas.

These aggressive plans of Russia stimulated Japanese penetration into the Korean peninsula. Intending to strike roots in Manchuria, Russia was compelled to concede to the Japanese claims. She acknowledged Japanese interests in Korea, reserving some possibilities for herself. The Russian Minister, Prince Lobanoff, signed an agreement with the Japanese representative to respect the independence of Korea and to send troops to Korea only by mutual agreement. But the Russian policy toward Korea, formerly careful and benevolent, became at that time adventurous. According to the well documented study of Russia's policy at this period by the Soviet historian, B. Romanov,⁷ the Minister of Finance, Witte, and the Czar himself had fostered ambitious and aggressive plans for the Far East and maintained improvident projects, such as obtaining large timber concessions on the Yalu River and acquiring, as I have mentioned, Port Nicholas.

⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 69.

⁷ B. Romanov, *Russia v Manchurii*, Moscow, 1928. In March, 1898, after an arrogant note from De Speyer, then Russian Minister in Seoul, the Russian Korean bank was closed and the Russian military advisers and financial expert assigned to the Korean Government were relieved; M. Frederick Nelson, "Korea and the Orders in Eastern Asia," Baton Rouge, La., Louisiana University Press, 1945.

Thus, although she was the only country which could oppose Japan's influence, Russia remained inactive and showed herself interested rather in the economic exploitation of Korean weakness.

There is no need to repeat the well known story of how all these plans were ruined and how Japanese exploiters took Korea into their hands. During the Japanese domination many Koreans tried to emigrate to Russia, looking for asylum. But the Russian administration did not favor Korean immigration. Some governors of the Far Eastern Provinces were definitely opposed to Korean colonization of the scarcely populated Maritime Province until it would be settled by Russians from European Russia. This attitude changed only about the second decade of this century. In 1920, after the unsuccessful uprising against Japanese domination, 3,000 Koreans crossed the Russian frontier at one time. Ten years later there were about 160,000 Koreans in the Ussuri region of the Maritime Province alone.

A new trend in Russian policy toward Korea began with the Russian Revolution. The U.S.S.R. is absolutely disinterested in the things that interested "colonizers of the Romanov period," writes one Soviet author. What it is interested in is illustrated by the following data. In 1860, in the interests of defense, Czarist Russia obtained from China a narrow strip of land about 40 miles wide and 300 long on the border of Korea. Bolshevik Russia found a use for it; according to the same author, "this strip can and will be a lighthouse and a place of refuge for all revolutionary elements out of neighboring countries."⁸

In 1926 there were 671 members of the Communist Party among the Koreans in the Maritime Province and 163 Comso-

⁸ Lebedev, *Po Sovetskoi Koree* (In Soviet Korea), *Novii Mir* (New World), 1930, No. 6.

mol (Communist youth) cells.⁹ After twenty years, the influence of communist propaganda must have increased considerably, for the new generation of Russian Koreans compose the nucleus of future leaders of the Korean Communist movement.

Nevertheless it would be a calamity for the Koreans if Soviet Russia uses the Communist movement in their country as an instrument by which to achieve its own domination over Korea.^{9a} At least for the next post-war period, Soviet Russia is not able to better the economic conditions and satisfy the post-war needs of Korea.

II

Korea's Post War Needs

THE KOREAN PENINSULA is situated on the same latitude as Italy—it is even two or three degrees further south—and it resembles Italy somewhat by its configuration. Like Italy, it is shut in by a rugged mountain range across the northern end of the peninsula, and its backbone of mountains runs the length of the country as the Appenines do in the Mediterranean nation. Like Italy, Korea is a very picturesque country. The mountains situated in the central part are called the "Diamond Mountains" because of the rare views from their summits. On the slopes of these mountains there are many monasteries, poor and neglected as the country itself.

But in spite of its geographical similarity, Korea is very different from Italy in many respects. She is subjected to cold and warm winds from the continent and her climate is far from mild. The southern part of the peninsula suffers from inundations; the northern is mountainous and less favor-

⁹ Anossov, *Koreitsi v Ussuriiskom Kraie* (The Koreans in the Ussuri Region), Habarovsk, 1928.

^{9a} Early in 1946, the Korean Communist, Pak Heun Yung, demanded inclusion of Korea in the U.S.S.R. (See William Ziff, "Two Worlds," New York, Harper, 1946, p. 218).

able for agriculture. The struggle for existence on this peninsula is sufficiently hard.

Of the total Korean area of 54.4 million acres, the cultivated land amounts to 10.8 million, one-fifth approximately, and further expansion of farm land has been considered very difficult and costly.

Because of the shortage of arable land, farmers in the mountainous regions practice an original "fire-field" system of cultivation. They clean some sections of forests at certain intervals, burn the stumps, and use the ground to grow such crops as millet and potatoes. The fertility of these lands rapidly diminishes and the farmers shift to another part of the forest, leaving the previous one to rest and slowly to develop into forest again. The period of resting for several years enables the soil to recover and afterwards to be brought again into cultivation for one or two more crops. This system is called in Korea "Kaden."

Kaden-min, or farmers who work these lands, are the poorest ones "driven by hunger from place to place and taking shelter in log cabins." During the decade 1927-36 the number of farm families engaged only in working the "fire-fields" increased from 29,000 to 96,000 (that is, they include not less than 400,000 persons). In these circumstances labor in Korea is very cheap and, consequently, mechanization, as in all countries with an abundant manpower, has been retarded.

Isolated during many centuries, Korea on the eve of its subjugation by the Japanese was doomed to stagnation. She did not know of progress made elsewhere. Methods of agriculture and implements remained old-fashioned; industry was not developed; manners and customs were obsolete. Her population remained illiterate and poor. Thus general conditions were exceptionally favorable for typical colonial

plundering and the Japanese pursued that policy in every possible way. Means of communication, such as railroads, shipping, and telegraph, and commerce, education, and other fruitful fields fell under their control.

It would be unjust not to acknowledge many achievements of Japanese administration in Korea. Some power stations of very large capacity were undertaken, as well as large-scale irrigation projects. The gross value of manufactured goods rose from 327 million yen in 1929 to 1.8 billion yen in 1941 (partly, however, due to war demand and inflation). Exports in 1939 surpassed 1 billion yen. Gold production for 1941 amounted to 200 million yen.¹⁰

Yet the general picture of colonial plundering in Korea has not changed essentially.

According to the information given by the Japanese themselves, about 48 per cent of Korean peasants are in a state of extreme poverty, if they are not actually starving. A Japanese writer, Setsue Uenoda, asserted that the sufferings of peasants in Korea were much more severe and administrative questions there were much more serious and crucial than was generally known in Japan. He referred to a report prepared in the office of the Governor General of Korea, according to which 1.2 million peasant families, or 6.2 million persons, at the time of the study, were involved in very heavy debts.¹¹

The springtime is the hardest period in the life of the Korean peasant. At this period, so important to the farmer, many of the peasants have nothing in their hoards, and feed themselves upon grass and the bark of trees. This time is called in Korea "Chun-kung," which means the starvation or "spring suffering."

The mass of the peasants is illiterate and passive and bears

¹⁰ Arthur C. Bunce, "The Future of Korea," *Far Eastern Survey*, April-May, 1944;
A. J. Grajdanzev, "Korea in the Postwar World," *Foreign Affairs*, April, 1944.

¹¹ *Transpacific*, April 26, 1934.

its hard lot with resignation. It would be correct to say of them, as it has been said of other Far Eastern peoples, that "they merely exist, they do not live." In 1938 only about one out of five or one out of four farms had cattle of working age; only one out of three farmers kept pigs; only 37,000 farmers out of 3,052,000 had horses and only 2,959 farms kept sheep.

As to industry, its development is faced with a persistent shortage of machinery and tools, of materials and of skilled labor. Textile and metallurgical industries, especially, are not yet developed and require not only capital but also engineers and skilled workers. Imports amounted in 1939 to more than 850 million yen. This total, although it includes various materials for Japanese war needs, illustrates how great is Korea's dependence on imported foreign goods. To pay for her imports Korea must not only bring about the development of her agricultural and extractive industries but must limit consumption as much as possible, for her exports consist mostly of agricultural products, ores and minerals and the value of her imports exceeds that of her exports.

Economic difficulties in Korea were aggravated by the fact that about 2.5 million Koreans, or one-tenth of the country's population, were earning their bread abroad. Among them were more than one million Koreans who had been working in Japan, mostly as unskilled workers, miners and agricultural laborers. They remitted about 120 million yen a year to Korea. At present they could hardly be employed in Japan and will insist on returning home, if their repatriation has not already been effected.

Soviet Russia can neither supply Korea with textiles and machines nor import Korean agricultural products, nor can she provide capital investment for the development of Korean industry. These considerations must limit the validity of any Russian claims toward Korea.

III

The Future of Korea and the Soviet Union

THERE ARE IN KOREA two kinds of organizations which have been trying to bring essential changes in the social and economic life of the country. The first, led by the so-called Chun Do Kyo, organization of autonomists, is moderate and inclined to compromise. Its partisans are often called "nationalist-reformists." To this organization could be added the peasant's society, Nong Min Hoi, which tries to improve the conditions of peasantry through co-operatives, agronomics, etc. The second, consisting mostly of Communists, is leading the revolutionary movement in Korea. Although this party in Korea proper was routed, it had centers in China and in the U.S.S.R.

The original program of the Communist Party, as published in one of the Soviet publications,¹² consists of four points: (1) the complete independence of Korea, expropriation and nationalization of all Japanese enterprises; (2) the government of workers and peasants; (3) confiscation without compensation of all private and other estates; (4) eight-hour working day.

In 1936 the Korean Provisional Government sheltered in China succeeded in consolidating the Korean political parties. A declaration of unity was signed and the Provisional Government was reorganized on the basis of a coalition of four parties: The Independence Party, led by Syngman Rhee and Kim Koo,¹³ was represented in the Cabinet by seven members; the National-Revolutionary Party by five; the Communist Party by one.

The new program of the Korean Communist Party did not

¹² *Materiali po Natsionalno-Colonialnim Problemam* (A Guidebook on National and Colonial Problems), Moscow, No. 4, 1934.

¹³ Kim Koo was the President of the so-called Korean Provisional Government organized during the war in China. Syngman Rhee and Kim Koo are at present the Korean leaders in the American-occupied zone and are attacked as "traitors" in posters calling for their "extermination" in the Russian-occupied northern zone.

include a demand for the organization of a government of workers and peasants, one which would be identical to the Soviet Government. The party's aims embraced the following:

To confiscate the property of all Japanese imperialists and traitors and deprive all those who served the Japanese of their property, rights and privileges;

To afford special protection for business enterprises of those citizens who have opposed fascism;

To institute an agrarian revolution and to redistribute the land among the tenant farmers;

To seek co-operation with all other countries in the world on the basis of equality and mutual assistance in the pursuit of the peace and happiness of mankind.¹⁴

If in the preceding quotation "Germans" was substituted for "Japanese," this program would correspond literally to the Soviet pattern so well established in all countries occupied by the Red Armies in Eastern Europe. It cannot be doubted, therefore, that this program will get full support from the side of Moscow, which probably inspired it. Moscow is interested here as elsewhere in a social upheaval and in the creation of a new ruling group which could facilitate a rapprochement between Soviet Russia and the future independent Korean State. Under present world conditions Russia has no need of any kind of possessions in Korea, nor even of any new ports on the Korean Peninsula, even though Russia's great port, Vladivostock, is just 100 miles from the northern corner of Korea.

Korea's independence is necessary for general world security. As an independent country Korea will be, in Sumner Welles's judgment, a "stabilizing factor" in "the new international system which must be constructed in the Pacific." However, at the present time this country especially needs

¹⁴ Rev. T. Oliver, "Korea, Forgotten Nation," Washington, Public Affairs Press, 1944.

some improvement in its well-being. Korea is in great need of reorganization of her economy, of capital investments, machines, fertilizers and various kinds of supplies. In 1939 Korea imported yarns, textile raw materials, tissues and clothes that cost her 320 million yen; metals, metal manufactures, machines, vehicles, etc., costing 550 million yen; chemicals, drugs and explosives costing 50 million yen; and various kinds of cereals, foodstuffs and oils costing 230 million yen.¹⁵

Only by working in co-operation could the great powers assist Korea to overcome all her difficulties. Meanwhile the position of Soviet Russia in the Korean problem is causing some fear. Soviet Russia has already free access to ice-free Port Dairen and has no need of Korean ports either for trade or for defense, as no threat to her interests exists any longer, thanks to United States arms, from the side of Japan. Besides she cannot invest capital in Korean industry nor import products of Korean agriculture and industry. What could then be her motives for occupying the northern half of Korea?

As was mentioned above, this part of Korea is a valuable source of important strategic raw materials, especially of iron ore of a high quality; in such a way it is a natural supplement to southern Manchuria, where iron ore resources are not so rich. Korea exported from this northern part in 1939 ores, metals, and minerals for 200 million yen, an amount indispensable to pay for highly needed imported commodities.

Here, amid the mountains and forests of the section, were concentrated the Korean revolutionary forces and from here extended connective threads to the Korean revolutionary centers abroad, in Soviet Russia and China.

With these facts in mind, it would seem easier to determine what goals Soviet Russia, holding northern Korea in her hands, can aim at.

¹⁵ Figures of 1939 certainly include some materials imported by the Japanese for war needs; nevertheless, they characterize the needs of Korea itself.

There she can destroy or control the war industry, in order not to let any foreign country have there an arsenal in the immediate neighborhood of Russia. During the transitional period she can even remove from there the most valuable equipment, as she did in Germany and Manchuria; and this she has done.

But one would be foolhardy to suppose that this security goal is the only objective of the Soviet policy in Korea.¹⁶ Some more far-sighted plans can be discovered if one pays attention to the close economic connection of northern Korea with southern Manchuria, both being under the control of the Soviets.

Whereas southern Korea, if separated from the northern part, is doomed to remain a poor agricultural country dependent upon imported manufactured products (to pay for which she must essentially reduce nutrition), the northern part can be supplied with various foods from Manchuria in exchange for its valuable iron and other raw materials. Manchurian industry is its natural customer.

If the Soviets succeed in appropriating a decisive share in the South-Manchurian economy, as they evidently intend to do, they will restore and support the system of exchanges between Manchuria and northern Korea as it was established during the Japanese domination. In this case northern Korea can become independent both from her metropolitan and foreign markets.

In the meantime the Soviets can organize in northern Korea the Korean leftist elements and create there a nucleus of a future government for a united Korea with a Soviet orientation. A special paper, *Chwang Lo (Right Way)*, published at present in the Soviet-occupied area of Korea, spreads the

¹⁶ "It can be imagined that the Russians would have ideas of their own as to how Korea might be administered. The sort of governments that will arise in Eastern Europe, where Russian influence is going to be dominating, are a pattern of Soviet policy"; (Wilfrid Fleisher, "What to do with Japan?" Garden City, N. Y., 1945, pp. 86-7).

Communist ideas and propaganda against the democracies, and an unknown young man educated in Soviet Russia and decorated with Soviet medals heads there a corresponding political movement and organizations. A new political party is now being organized in Korea under the name of "People's Republic." This party, fostering radical activities, creates the impression that it is a constituted government, and is issuing orders and instructions in conformity with the leftist program.¹⁷

Soviet Russia holds in her hands the whole area of Port Arthur and Dairen, including not only a considerable part of the Liaotung peninsula but also the adjacent islands in the western, eastern, and southern parts of the Korean gulf,¹⁸ having at the same time control over northern Korea. Therefore, even if the supposed plans of domination over the Manchurian economy fail, the Soviets can neutralize every inimical movement in Manchuria and influence the economic as much as the political life of that country.

To enlarge the sphere of Soviet influence in Asia and to increase it on the account of the bourgeois countries is, evidently, a program maximum of the Soviet policy both in Asia and in Europe. In Korea as everywhere else the Soviet forces seek to achieve that goal by undermining the prestige and influence of their recent allies. Not to allow any State, neither European nor Asiatic nor American, to exploit the Korean strategic resources in a neighborhood immediately adjacent to the Soviet Union, or to have a war industry there, that may be a program minimum of the Soviets.

¹⁷ Since February 9, 1946, according to the information of *Pravda*, Communist Party organ (May 22, 1946, No. 120), a Provisional People's Committee for the Northern Korea was established with the functions of the Central Government Organ, having Kim-Il-Sung as Chairman. The Communist Party, the Democratic Party, and the Independence Party, now reorganized in a New People's Party, are friendly and co-operative, presenting a united front.

¹⁸ A map of the whole area of Russian domination around Port Arthur and Dairen, according to terms agreed upon between the U.S.S.R. and China on August 14, 1945, is published in the *Viedomosti* of the Supreme Council, No. 59, September 2, 1945.

Though the Soviet Union's intentions are not imperialistic in the strict sense, their practice looks like a new kind of, so to say, "ideocratic" imperialism. Excluding every kind of opposition to the Soviet Union in the different countries and replacing neutral or inimical governments by puppet regimes strengthens in a practical way the might of Soviet Russia no less than did the old-style imperialism when it openly annexed foreign territories.

The future destiny of Korea depends upon the policy of the three other great nations, the United States, Great Britain and China, under whose joint collaboration with the U.S.S.R. in control and protection of the liberated political forces in Korea, the organization and restoration of the Korean State are promised. If they succeed in raising the living standards of the Korean nation¹⁹ and in creating there a healthy political and economic climate, it will be probable for Korea to unite under a regime acceptable to the democracies.

The post-war needs of Korea are very great. Fortunately, the liberation of this country occurred without serious destruction, save where Soviet Russia looted plants. But during the war Korea was prevented from importing many necessities, new machines, hand tools, fishing equipment, medicines, etc. The country is in a great need of processing facilities, fertilizers, rail-making equipment, motor vehicles, etc.²⁰

If the United Nations succeed in relieving, rehabilitating and reconstructing the southern part of Korea, having at least three-fifths of the whole population of the country, then Soviet Russia, sooner or later, will be forced to conciliate her interests with the wishes and interests of the majority of the Korean people. The awakened Asiatic nationalism and racial

¹⁹ "If Korea is to be protected by a group of nations, it must be in the name of the welfare of the Korean people and should be by disinterested parties"; (Charles Iglehart, "America and the New World," New York, Abindong-Cokesburg Press, 1945, p. 128).

²⁰ See some approximate calculations in the *Korean Economic Digest*, Los Angeles, Calif., 1944, No. 1. A general enumeration of different items of imports needed by Korea in the post-war period is given by Robert Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

sensitiveness to every kind of discrimination threatens the red imperialism not less than the old colonial empires.

The unification of Korea is indispensable for restoration of her well-being and her existence as an independent State.

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