

The Agricultural Development of Villages in the Russian Far East in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

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Although Northeast Asia, including the Russian territory, has been recognized as one of three major frontier destinations in the age of global migration since the second half of nineteenth century, less attention has been given to migration to Northeast Asia than to the Americas and Southeast Asia due to its geographical isolation. However, the analysis of such migration in Northeast Asia not only provides insights into the structure of the Russian Empire but also into the population structure of Eurasia through its comparison with other regions.

Recent studies have shown that the movement of people, goods, foods and materials from East Asia accelerated the economic development of the Russian Far East before the October Revolution. On the other hand, the percentage of the Russian population kept increasing from the mid-nineteenth century to the First World War: from 63.5 percent in 1885 to over 80 percent in 1914. Teruyuki Hara, an eminent Japanese historian of the Russian Far East, has tried to illuminate the relationship between the Russian “dependence” on East Asia and the “independence” of the Russian Far East, using the words “Nyu-A” (入亜, enter Asia) and “Datsu-A” (脱亜, leave Asia). He examined the structure of shipping trade on the Sea of Japan before the Russo-Japanese war and concluded that at the time of the Russo-Japanese war the use of the term “dependence” had reached its peak and the Russian quest for “independence” started in earnest.

Considering the model presented by Hara, this paper examines the relations between Russian peasants and Chinese and Korean laborers in villages in the Russian Far East to shed light on Russo-Asian economic relations before the October Revolution. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Russia acquired the left bank of the Amur in the Amur oblast (district) and the right bank of the Ussuri (in the Maritime oblast) from the Qing Empire, which facilitated Russian settlement in the new territory. The inflow of Russian peasants caused an increasing influx of Chinese and Korean migrants into the Russian territory, because the Russian settlers, principally from Ukraine, were unfamiliar with their surroundings in the Far East and had to rely on Chinese and Korean labor for cultivation. These relations will allow us to analyze the agricultural development in the Russian Far East before the October Revolution from an Asian perspective.