

# Russian orthodox mission in Korea until 1917

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## Abstract

This article explores the history of the Russian Orthodox mission in Korea. A chronological framework is established for the period 1884, when official diplomatic relations between Russia and Korea were instated, to 1917. A territorial framework of research includes the Ussuri territory where Koreans settled and the territory of Korea.

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## Introduction

In 1860, according to the contract signed between Russia and China, the Ussuriisk territory was recognised as a territory of Russia, and thus, Russia has shared an extensive border with Korea along the Tumangan watercourse. The active migration of Koreans to the territory of Russia with the purpose of establishing settlements began at that time ([6], p. 21). While the resettlement of Koreans in the Ussuriisk territory began in 1864, it experienced a significant increase beginning in 1869 due to the food shortage and hunger crisis in Korea. Since then, Koreans continued to move to Russia. Some of the Korean settlements were located on the coast of the Sujfun and

Mayha rivers. As part of the arrangement, seed and cattle were given to the immigrants when they arrived in the new settlements. However, soon after arriving, approximately 100 of the Korean families (approximately 500 persons), moved to a new location on the Samara River, near the village of Ekaterino-Nikolskoj, which was located on the Amur River. This new Korean settlement, named Blagoslovennoe, would soon become one of the centres of Orthodoxy for Koreans of Priamurie. In 1884, the Russian–Korean friendship treaty and trade agreement as well as official diplomatic relations are established ([6], p. 21). Some researchers estimate that there were 450 thousand Koreans in Russia by the end of the 20th century [5].

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The Russian government gave immigrants 12 thousand roubles upon their acquisition of land. Each family was also given a cow, agricultural tools, etc. The Cossacks living in the next village helped the Korean immigrants build their houses and requested very low payment for

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their efforts. In September of 1871, the church was built during the same time that houses were being constructed in Blagoslovennoe. The governor general of Eastern Siberia allocated the resources necessary for the building of the temple. Initially, the church was consecrated in the name of St. Nikolay Chudotvortsya, but when the heads of the church were deposed, the church was consecrated in the name of St. Alexander Nevskiy ([1], p. 151).

Among the Koreans who settled in Blagoslovennoe, approximately 40 persons had been previously baptised. Thus, their spiritual care was assigned to priest Ioann Gomzjakova from the village of Ekaterino-Nikolskoj. He was also assigned the task of educating those Koreans who had not accepted Orthodoxy. In the rural church, priest Ioann christened three boys at the request of their parents. However, many parents decided to refrain from christening their children until they were more familiar with the Orthodox dogma ([1], p. 151). In February 1872, priest Ioann christened 11 adult Koreans living in Blagoslovennoe; in May, he christened 29 more; and in June, he christened an additional 49 people. All of those christened had been given a manual by priest Ioann that explained the Orthodox dogma. Thus each family had received an icon. "After former experiences of sincere aspirations of Koreans to sacred belief it was impossible to doubt the sincerity of those who chose to be christened. It was reported in the then press. All Koreans understood what it was to remain loyal to a former belief for which they obviously did not feel any special attachment, and they did not agree with their new position among the Russian Christian population" ([1], p.153).

In 1864, the governor general of Eastern Siberia, M.S. Korsakov, allocated resources for the first Korean school. The school was opened in 1868 in the Korean village of Tizinhe located on the southern edge of Ussuriisk. In the winter of 1871/72, eleven Korean boys were sent to a school located in the village of Mihajlovo-Semenovskiy. There, studying together with the children of Cossacks, they learned to speak the Russian language. Additionally, three Korean boys were brought up in the spiritual school located in Blagoveshchensk. The committee of an Orthodox missionary society in Blagoveshchensk provided the resources for the building of a school for Korean children that opened in May 1872. "The people were excited about the opportunity to go to school for the first time. Even adults expressed a desire to sit down with children and learn the Russian alphabet. This was reported in the Russian press. The teacher who was appointed to teach was a young man who specifically

trained for a teaching post at first in Blagoveshchensk and then in Irkutsk. He teaching incorporated new teaching methods" ([1], p. 152).

One of the first concerns regarding the opening of an Orthodox mission on Korean soil was that of the secretary of the diplomatic mission, N.A. Shuisky, who felt that it could result in a geopolitical problem (Cho ChoHvan, 1997, pp. 53–54). On January, 3rd, 1897, the Russian Charge d'Affaires in Korea, Z.M. Polyanovsky, prepared a report in which he specified the urgent need to open a mission. Writing to approximately 150 Orthodox members in Seoul, Russia and Korea (Cho ChoHvan, 1997, pp. 60–61), he stated, "For example, there is the possibility that I could die without repentance, which is an awful misfortune for the Orthodox inhabitants of Seoul and for Christians as well". His plea convinced the diplomat to open an Orthodox mission ([11], p. 180).

Missionary activity among Koreans was initiated by the prelate Innokenty (Popov-Veniaminov) Ivan Evseevich Popov-Veniaminov (1797–1879), a bishop from Kamchatka from 1840 to 1868 (metropolitan Moscow) and Kolomna (since 1868). He introduced and conducted missionary activities among the Aleuts and the local people of Kamchatka. Travelling across Kamchatka on many occasions, he investigated the life and the beliefs of the local people and eventually created the missionary society. In 1865, the Koreans who had settled near the Novgorod harbour were baptised. By the end of the 1870s, there was independent Korean parish in South Ussuriisk edge. In 1868, the first missionary school for Korean children was opened in the village of Korsakovka, and the first church was constructed using the resources provided by the Koreans (Shkarovsky, 2009).

Priest Valerjan (uniate) was the first priest to welcome the Korean newcomers. Later, another priest, ZahariyTjyapkin, arrived, but he was not successful in Posiyet and was soon transferred to the distant port of St. Olga where he soon died (Cho ChoHvan, 1997, pp. 16–17). In the autumn of 1870, priest John Vereschagin was appointed arch-priest of Vladivostok, a position he held until his death in July of 1872 (Cho ChoHvan, 1997, p. 17). His appointment filled the missionary needs in the area surrounding Vladivostok and on the coasts of the Tizinhe and Yanchihe rivers, running into the Posetsky passage. Priest John Gomzjakov serviced the village of Blagoveshchenskoe, which was located further to the north, near the Amur River where approximately 500 unbaptised Koreans lived under rather violent conditions. Priest Vasily Pjankov was appointed to an area near Lake Khanka on

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