

Hidden Treasure: North Korean Printed Materials of 1946 – 1950 in Russian Libraries

숨겨진 보물: 러시아 도서관에 소장된 1946~1950 년 북한 인쇄물

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North Korea has come a long way of transformation, and it has not always been the way it has become nowadays. There were several distinct periods in its early history, when it had comparative freedom. In 1945 – 1948 the North has made its first steps to the path of socialist construction and on September 9, 1948, the North has proclaimed establishing of the DPRK.

All this time (1945 – 1950) the North Korea had limited freedom in several spheres in socio- economic life including freedom of religion. There were around 2000 protestant churches, 410 pastors, 518 Buddhist monasteries and 732 monks in 1949. The DPRK also had a huge private sector of economy, which gave more than half of country's industrial production. And the North Korean language schools opened for illiterate elders used term hangul (한글) in the school names: "Hangul hakgyo" (한글 학교).

During the Korea War, the North Korea has lost many original sources of information such as books, journals, newspapers, printed collection of state laws etc. At the same time, the Soviet Union, which was the closest North Korean ally in 1945 – 1950, had all these collections of printed materials preserved in its libraries. They have unique North Korean primary sources, literature, newspapers and other periodicals that are not available both in the two Korean states and, possibly, in other countries of the world.

The paper gives a survey of some of collections of North Korean printed sources and literature preserved in Russian libraries.

For example, the Russian libraries have collections of such periodicals as “Korean newspaper” (朝鮮新聞) “Korean-Soviet Culture” (조소문화), “Gaebyeok newspaper” (開新報) and many others. Russian libraries preserve such rare journals of 1946 – 1950s as “Korean Woman” (조선여성), “Life of Youth” (청년생활) and many others. It is necessary note that even the Library of the Congress located in Washington DC does not possess the full collection of these journals. That means that Russian collection of North Korean periodicals of 1946 – 1950 is unique and has a special value.

As to the Russian North Korean books collections of 1946 – 1950, they also have

unique editions such as 1947 Korean language tutorial for the middle school (국어) or the Collection of North Korean laws issued in 1948 - 1950 (조선민주주의인민공화국 법령 및 최고 인민회의의 상임 위원회 정령집 (1948 년 - 1950 년)).

Thus, Russian collections of North Korean printed publications of 1946 - 1950 are unique and have a special value comparable to the value of Korean medieval manuscripts and woodblock prints.