

## **North Korean war orphans in Poland between 1951 and 1959**

### Abstract

This dissertation analyses the living conditions of 1200 war orphans from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who resided in Polish orphanages between 1951 and 1959. Poland, like other European states of the People's Democracy, did not directly participate in the Korean War (1950-1953). Belonging to the same ideological and political bloc, however, required fulfilling certain alliance obligations. One of these obligations was organizing foreign humanitarian aid for North Korean children orphaned by military action on the Korean peninsula.

The issue was presented from both an institutional and administrative perspective, related to the overall care and education of North Korean pupils in Poland. There was also a need to place the issue within a wider political and social context, specifically the international context of the transfer of orphaned children to foreign orphanages, which is estimated to number close to 40,000.

Children and young people in North Korea who were orphaned during the war were taken in by most Eastern Bloc countries, including China and Mongolia. The Soviet Union and Albania were the only exceptions. Poland was one of the first countries to implement measures in this area and also took in one of the largest groups of pupils.

The several-year stay of the young Koreans is an interesting example, alongside the parallel 'Greek-Macedonian action', of the Polish People's Republic's policy towards refugee communities in the 1950s. The dissertation focuses on the actions of the communist authorities in Poland regarding the organization of the care system for orphaned children from North Korea. It also examines their attitude towards the circumstances surrounding the arrival of these children, their presence in Polish orphanages, and the creation of the image of DPRK orphans in communist propaganda in Poland.

One of the main aims of the research was to take a closer look at the group of North Korean alumni, including the children's personal stories. An attempt was made to explore the ways in which they developed interpersonal relationships, both with their peers or with the staff of the orphanages, but also with the wider external environment in which they worked. It was

interesting to look at how the cultural diversity of the Koreans influenced their processes of adaptation to new living conditions and what forms this took. An important element of the study was also the attempt to create a collective portrait of the staff of Polish and North Korean origin working in the care and educational institutions run under the special 'Korean Action'.

Using the example of the stay of North Korean children in Poland, an attempt was made to show the development of Polish-North Korean relations, which illustrate the impact of the political and ideological changes that took place after 1953 in the entire Eastern Bloc, including North Korea itself, and which indirectly affected the living conditions of orphans from the DPRK. An attempt was also made to determine how North Korean state policy towards the problem of orphans, its significance in North Korea's domestic and foreign policy, has changed over the years. An important element of the work was an attempt to reconstruct the fate of the children after their return to the DPRK, which finally took place in the summer of 1959.

**Keywords:** Polish People's Republic, North Korea, war orphans, Korean War, Cold War, propaganda, social history, international relations.

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