

Presentation 4

Preserving the Life and Culture of the Korean Diaspora among the Majority: Ethnic Minority Rights in Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era


Jinhye Lee

1. Introduction

I have divided this presentation into six parts. Firstly, I’m going to give a brief Introduction and discuss the existing research on this topic. Secondly, I will describe the Korean Diaspora, or Koryo Saram (KS) in Kazakhstan. Next, I’ll move on to examine the formation of the Koryo Saram Community in Kazakhstan, and how they have established their role as an ethnic minority there. Lastly, I will explain my findings.

Table 1 shows the population and distribution in recent years of Korean Diaspora in the world. According to the statistics by the Korean

Table 1. Korean Diaspora in the World

		2013	2015	2017	2019	Portion (%)
Total 		7,012,917	7,184,872	7,430,688	7,493,587	100
Northeast Asia	Japan	893,129	855,725	818,626	824,977	11.01
	China	2,573,928	2,858,993	2,548,030	2,461,386	32.85
	Subtotal	3,467,057	3,441,718	3,366,656	3,286,363	43.86
South Asia Pacific		485,836	510,633	557,791	592,441	7.91
North America	USA	2,091,432	2,238,989	2,492,252	2,546,982	33.99
	Canada	205,993	224,054	240,942	241,750	3.23
	Subtotal	2,297,425	2,463,043	2,733,194	2,788,732	37.21
Latin America		111,156	105,243	106,794	103,617	1.38
Europe		615,847	627,089	630,693	687,059	9.17
Africa		10,548	11,583	10,853	10,877	0.15
Middle East		25,048	25,563	24,707	24,498	0.33
Source: Recreated using (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea 2019:14)						

government in 2019, there are about 7.5 million Korean diaspora who are spread all over the world. Most of them are concentrated in China, Japan, the USA, and the post-Soviet Region which includes the five Central Asian countries. Europe includes the former Soviet Union, and about 500,000 live in the area.

Table 2. Korean Diaspora in the Post-Soviet

	1989	1999	2009	2011	2013
Total 🧑	439,000	466,000	476,000	476,542	479,310
Russia ru	107,051	125,000	222,027	218,956	171,411
Uzbekistan uz	183,140	198,000	175,939	173,600	171,300
Kazakhstan kz	103,315	105,000	103,952	107,130	107,613
Kyrgyzstan kg	18,355	19,000	18,810	18,230	17,228
Ukraine ua	8,669	9,000	13,001	13,053	13,083
Turkmenistan tm	2,848	3,000	483	884	1,329
Tajikistan tj	13,431	6,000	1,762	1,632	634

Source: Recreated using (Kim 2013: 432)

Table 2 shows the Korean diaspora population of each state in the post-Soviet area. Russia is the state where the largest number of Korean diaspora live, followed by Uzbekistan, and then Kazakhstan.

The Koryo Saram first lived in the former Soviet Union, and it is their self-identification. Map 1 shows the routes of their migration. Koryo Saram migrated to Primorsky Krai from the Joseon Peninsula in 1863 during the Joseon era, and in 1937, they were forced to migrate to Central Asia under the oppressive regime of Stalin, and then they also migrated to other areas such as Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

After the Soviet Union collapsed and the former Soviet Union states gained independence, they were forced to adapt and assimilate into the new political and social systems as minorities in a multi-ethnic society.

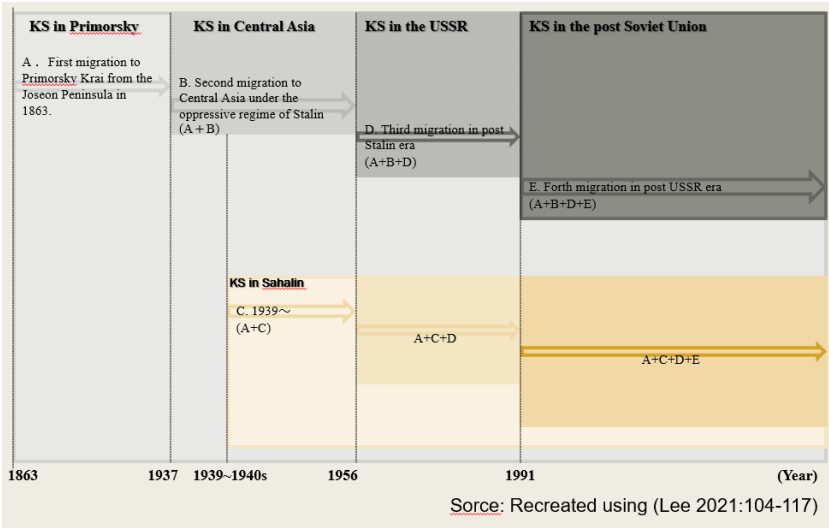
Currently, in Kazakhstan's KS community has many sub-categories including those who settled there under forced migration by Stalin, those



Map 1. Migration Routes of KS

who started living in Kazakhstan and led relatively stable lives, and KS who immigrated from the Far East of Russia or the post-Soviet states for economic activities after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Table 3).

Table 3. Koryo Saram’s Sub-Identity



They are recognized as different entities and each group has its own title. In other words, they have different identities. The emergence of different titles depending on the area of residence or origin of the KS is closely related to the history of migration they have experienced, so far. It can be described as a concept that survives throughout the Soviet period and as a newly formed concept after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, both of which coexist in their community nowadays.

2. Research on KS

To date, there has been minimal research on the ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan such as Germans, Uighurs and KS. A number of minorities have different and complex factors depending on their relations with their historical homeland and international situations in terms of maintaining their respective ethnic cultures and forming their identities.

However, few attempts have been made to compare the changes of various ethnic minorities from that perspective. Instead, they stopped short of revealing the individual and specific characteristics of the ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, most attention has been paid to the question of the KS's history of migrations, especially, the forced migration to Central Asia in 1937. To fill in the missing pieces in the study of the KS, some researchers have been trying to approach the topic from other angles, such as through literature analysis, engaging in anthropological and sociological research, and area studies.

However, there are only a few studies on other aspects of their lives, for instance, the social effects of becoming independent of their community, including the ethnocentric approach to integration after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and attempts to conduct an empirical study on the social dynamism of the KS community.

There are only a few brief studies on topics such as the formation and maintenance of their life as a ethnic minority, and in order to gain more access into that part of their history, more research needs to be carried out.

I will focus on the discourse of how the Korean diaspora of the former Soviet Union, the KS, have been preserving their lives surrounded by the pressures of integration into the multiethnic post-Soviet states after the collapse of the Soviet Union, through a case study analysis of the KS in contemporary Kazakhstan.

3. Who are the KS in Kazakhstan?

Picture 1. A poster of the People's Unity Day on May 1



Source: <https://www.parlam.kz/ru/blogs/unzhakova/Details/6/59037>

In 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the five Central Asian countries achieved the status of independent republics. Among them, independent Kazakhstan simultaneously pursuing two goals: ethnocentrism and the integration of its multi-ethnic citizens. Namely, the integration in Kazakhstan is largely proceeding in two directions. The first, it is to secure a public domain led by the government based on the Kazakhification by Kazakh people, Kazakh language, and Kazakh history and culture.

At the same time, it presupposes this as a common value of the citizenship of Kazakhstan. Second, based on that, it is to guarantee the autonomy of each cultural identity.

Table 4. Perception of their mother tongue of the ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

		What's your mother tongue?	
		The language of one's historical motherland	It is different from the language of the motherland
Total 🧑 %	16,009,597 (100)	14,965,571 (93.5)	1,044,026 (6.5)
Kazakh	100,969,763 (100)	9,982,276 (98.8)	114,487 (1.1)
Russian	3,793,764 (100)	3,748,325 (98.8)	45,439 (1.2)
Uzbek	456,997 (100)	435,833 (95.4)	21,164 (4.6)
Ukrainian	333,031 (100)	52,549 (15.8)	280,482 (84.2)
Uighur	224,713 (100)	190,956 (85.0)	33,757 (15.0)
Tatar	204,229 (100)	104,234 (51.0)	99,995 (49.0)
German	178,409 (100)	30,413 (17.0)	147,996 (83.0)
Koryo Saram	100,385 (100)	36,108 (36.0)	64,277 (64.0)
Turk	97,015 (100)	900,065 (92.8)	6,950 (7.2)

Source: Recreated using (Қазақстан Республикасы Статистика агенттірі 2011: 11-25)

Table 4 shows the perception of their mother tongue of the ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. According to statistics from the Kazakhstan government, when asked what they think is their own mother tongue is, 36% of the KS said it is the language of their historical motherland. 64% of the KS said it is different from the language of their historical homeland. It means that they think their mother tongue is Russian.

Table 5. Russian Language Level of the Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.

	Able to conversation			Able to read			Able to write		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
Total %	94.4	96.7	91.4	88.2	92.9	82.2	84.8	90.2	77.9
Kazakh	92.0	95.4	88.8	83.5	89.7	77.4	79.1	85.9	72.4
Russian	98.4	98.4	98.6	97.7	97.7	97.6	96.7	96.8	96.6
Uzbek	92.9	95.3	91.3	78.6	82.1	76.1	68.3	73.4	64.7
Ukrainian	98.9	98.7	99.2	98.0	97.8	98.1	97.1	96.9	97.4
Uighur	95.8	96.4	95.3	88.2	91.1	86.0	81.8	85.4	79.0
Tatar	98.4	98.5	98.2	96.4	96.9	95.0	94.7	95.2	93.1
German	99.0	98.9	99.1	97.8	98.1	97.4	96.9	97.1	96.6
Koryo Saram	98.0	98.0	98.0	96.9	96.9	96.8	95.5	95.5	95.7
Turk	96.1	92.5	97.5	87.8	79.8	90.9	83.6	75.1	87.0

Source: Recreated using (Қазақстан Республикасы Статистика агенттірі 2011: 314-321)

Table 5 indicates the Russian language level of ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. 98% of the KS able to converse in Russian, which represents the average figure for both urban and rural areas. Among them, 96.9% of the KS said they could read it, and figures of the KS who lives in urban is 0.1% higher than numbers of the KS who lives in rural area. Also, 95.5% of the KS said they could write in Russian.

Table 6. Kazakh Language Level of the Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.

	Able to conversation			Able to read			Able to write		
Total %	74.0	67.7	82.0	64.8	57.3	74.5	62.0	54.3	71.8
Kazakh	98.3	97.9	98.8	95.4	94.7	94.2	93.2	92.1	94.2
Russian	25.3	25.6	24.6	8.8	8.8	6.5	6.3	6.2	6.5
Uzbek	95.5	94.0	96.6	74.2	70.5	63.6	61.7	59.0	63.6
Ukrainian	21.5	23.7	18.5	7.2	7.6	5.0	5.2	5.3	5.0
Uighur	93.7	89.9	96.7	70.5	64.3	66.0	60.8	54.1	66.0
Tatar	72.6	71.4	76.1	40.0	38.0	46.1	33.7	31.5	40.4
German	24.7	26.9	22.5	10.5	11.0	7.7	7.9	8.1	7.7
Koryo Saram	43.4	42.7	47.5	14.1	14.0	11.8	10.5	10.2	11.8
Turk	91.0	85.1	93.2	51.3	46.0	45.3	43.4	38.5	45.3

Source: Recreated using (Қазақстан Республикасы Статистика агенттігі 2011: 314-321)

Table 6 shows Kazakh language level of ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. 43.4% of the KS are able to converse in Kazakh, and figures of the KS who lives in rural is 4.8% higher than the numbers of the KS who lives in urban. Among them, 14.1% of the KS said they could read it. Also, 10.5% of the KS said they could write in Kazakh.

Because the KS has been already Russianized during the Soviet era, their use of the own language was low, and a higher percentage recognized Russian as their first language. Mother tongue education was banned from 1937 during the Soviet era, and no public schools for KS were established after Kazakhstan's independence. They have been educated in Russian, their own language remains only in spoken form, and very few people can speak their own languages.

4. Formation of Their Community in Kazakhstan: The Koryo Saram choose to stay in Kazakhstan

Map 2. Kazakhstan's Neighbors



In this part we will examine how KS formed their community in Kazakhstan, where the dissolution of the USSR and independence took place, based on the following three factors,

- Non-Kazakh's Migration from Kazakhstan,
- KS's Migration in the Former Soviet Union,
- Ethnic origin of the KS in Kazakhstan, and their major cultural organizations.

1) Non-Kazakh's Migration from Kazakhstan

The figures for Russians returning to Russia from 1991-1992 in the early period of the collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of each country are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The Return of Russians to Russia

	Russian (1989)		Return of Russians to Russia (1991-1992)
	Number (10 thousand)	Russians in each country (%)	
Ukraine UA	1,130	13	Minority
Belarus BY	130	22	Minority
Kazakhstan KZ	620	38	107,950
Kyrgyzstan KG	92	21	56,960
Uzbekistan UZ	170	8	92,964
Turkmenistan TM	33	9	15,571
Tajikistan TJ	39	7	61,464

Source: Recreated using (Nakamura 1994: 387)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large-scale migration of Russians in Central Asia occurred. Regarding the Russian outflow after Kazakhstan's independence, it emphasized two factors. The first is that the change in Russian status in Kazakhstan created various restrictions on life in Kazakhstan concerning the use of Russian, which was the existing official language. Also, due to changes in Kazakhstan's language law, non-Kazakhs became dissatisfied with learning of the Kazakh language and the changing of Russian-style names of streets and places to the Kazakh-style names.

The second is the problem that occurred during the settlement of overseas Kazakhs (Oralman) who returned to Kazakhstan. The north and northeast are the main residences of Russians. When the Oralman returned to the place and received government support during their settlement process, the Russians were opposed to it.

In other words, Russians were opposed to the government-led Kazakhification, such as the language and the Oralman policy. The

integration, centered on the Kazakhization, is the main cause of the outflow of non-Kazakh Russians after its independence.

It is also argued that economic motivation is a more important factor in their migration. After its collapse, the former Soviet Union states suffered from serious economic conditions in these societies, but many people moved to Russia because they believed that life there would offer them relatively better prospects.

Meanwhile after its independence, during the 1990s, more than 500,000 Germans in Kazakhstan returned to Germany, and the number of Germans who returned to Germany from the former Soviet countries was also on the rise as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Germans who returned to Russia from the former USSR

Year	Federal Administration Office		
	Applications	Accepted Applications	Actual Immigration
1990	-	-	-
1991	19,288	12,583	-
1992	19,232	15,879	-
1993	14,299	15,785	16,597
1994	27,704	16,466	8,811
1995	29,824	22,777	15,184
1996	17,302	13,211	15,959
1997	21,098	12,931	19,437
1998	11,251	12,233	17,788
1999	24,854	15,549	18,205

Source: Recreated using (Dietz 2000: 640)

Germans chose migration for the same reason as the Russians. In addition, the international news of the reunification of East and West Germany (October 3, 1990) provided a strong motivation for their migration along with the German government's policy of accepting

overseas Germans. Both Russia and Germany were establishing immigration policies in the early days of Kazakhstan's independence.

The most important condition for the Russians and Germans in Kazakhstan wishing to return home after independence was that there was a policy of accepting them in their respective homelands.

2) KS's Migration in the Former Soviet Union

Meanwhile, the KS accounted for a smaller percentage of the total population than the Russians and Germans in Kazakhstan in the early days of independence. Their rural communities collapsed due to the consolidation of collective farms, which used to provide collective dwellings, and the change in operating patterns to state-run farms. At the same time, the KS community was quickly urbanized and scattered.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the historic homeland of South and North Korea did not come up with policies to accept them.

The policy of accepting overseas Russians and Germans returning to Russia and Germany, their main emigration sites and their historical homelands, has become a major factor in calling for their return to their homelands. Moreover, the Russians and Germans are considered to have "chosen" their return. However, the KS did not have such an option, so their only choice was to stay in Kazakhstan at that time.

Picture 2. Koryo Saram Kimchi in Almaty, Kazakhstan



Source: Author

After the collapse of Soviet Union, the KS moved for a better environment and to avoid the confusion caused by the integration policy of each country. The main migration areas were Russia and South Korea.

One of the main migration sites for the KS was Russia. In Russia, the unstable political environment caused by nationalism, civil war, and ethnic conflict and the unstable economic environment caused by unemployment in each country, served as a push factor in the KS's migration to Russia.

These were the major factors in the migration not only of the KS but also of other ethnic minorities from the former Soviet countries to Russia. In addition to these external environmental factors of KS's migration, the particular push factors inside the KS's community have contributed to the outflow of its population to Russia. These factors are the urban-oriented lifestyle, the high level of educational zeal, and the success-oriented characteristics of the KS.

In addition to the fact that Russian is spoken in each region of Russia, in moving to Primorsky there was the psychological factor of nostalgia for the historical hometown where the ancestors of the KS used to live.

In the 1990s however, there was a major lack of foundation for policies to accept the KS in Korea, but the introduction of the visiting employment system in 2007 led to an increase in KS's migration to Korea.

The 1988 Seoul Olympics, the normalization of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Korea in 1990, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 served as a direct trigger for the KS to become interested in South Korea and in migrating to Korea.

During the Soviet era, KS were more engaged in exchanges with North Korea than with South Korea, and they had Soviet nationality and recognized South Korea only to a limited extent. However, the above series of events served as an opportunity to give a more positive impression of their existing image of Korea and the migration to Korea was recognized as a means of realizing the hope that they would be able

to pursue a better life and gain new opportunities after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Currently (2020), it is impossible to determine the exact population of the KS living in Korea because no census has been conducted. However, with the introduction of the “visitor employment system” in 2007, “statistics on overseas Koreans” (F-4) visa¹ issued only to overseas Koreans among foreigners from former Soviet Union countries and those who hold the “visitor employment” (H-2) visa can be used to gauge their size.

The largest number of KS with F-4 visas is in the order of Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. H-2 visa holders are in the order of Uzbekistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, and an overwhelming number of Uzbekistan nationals can be seen. Although F-4 and H-2 holders are steadily increasing overall.

In the case of Uzbekistan, not only the KS but also other ethnic groups have moved to other countries to live as migrant workers for various reasons, such as the political and economic instability common in former Soviet countries, the political situation of stronger nationalism, and especially low-wage issues².

As seen above, the KS of Kazakhstan chose to stay in Kazakhstan in the early days of unstable independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are two factors that this can be attributed to: First, there was a lack of foundation for the acceptance of overseas Koreans in Korea, the historical homeland of the KS, unlike Russia and Germany, which had policies to accommodate their overseas people. It has been confirmed that the number of KS moving to Korea has been on the rise since 2007 due to the introduction of the visitor employment system. However, the majority of the KS’s population that flows into Korea are from Uzbekistan, compared with a relatively small migration of KS from Kazakhstan to Korea.

¹ Visa issued to Koreans of foreign nationality for the “Qualification of overseas Koreans” required to enter and stay in Korea (IOM 2015:34-5).

² Interview with N (Dec. 12, 2016), O (Dec. 10, 2016), S (Dec. 8, 2016).

Secondly, the political and economic situation in Kazakhstan has stabilize compared to other former Soviet countries. Kazakhstan, like other former Soviet countries, has been pushing for Kazakh-centered integration. However, the relatively stable political environment without disputes and the economic situation with active foreign investment have further strengthened the foundation of the Kazakhstan's KS, who chose to stay³.

They insist that their ethnic origins began from the forced migration in 1937. They also claimed that various organizations which they have, theater, radio, television, and newspapers, and their elite leaders since they moved from the Primorski, have formed and led their community.

3) Establishing Their Role as an Ethnic Minority in Kazakhstan

The first point I would like to mention in Part 5, is that the KS in Kazakhstan themselves are seeking their own role in terms of their historical homeland, especially in terms of their activities in connection with South Korea. I would also like to mention the following three factors that have strengthened cooperation.

First, the change in perception of the two Koreas before and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, secondly, the opening of the Korean Education Center in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the support of the Korean government, and finally, the 'Korean wave' and the construction of Almaty Koreatown.

Firstly, the establishment of diplomatic relations and cultural contacts between Kazakhstan and South Korea are being made through the Kazakhstan's KS themselves, and they have served as a bridge between the two countries⁴. As exchanges between Kazakhstan and South Korea increased after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Also the 1988 Olympics were held in Seoul, diplomatic relations between Korea and the Soviet Union were established in 1990, and the center of the KS's exchanges with their historical homeland was shifted to South Korea

³ Interview with Q (Nov. 23, 2016).

⁴ Interview with B (Dec. 14, 2015), C (Aug. 10, 2018).

from the North. However, although the frequency of exchanges with North Korea has decreased compared to the past, they have continued to take place⁵. Since its independence, the KS of Kazakhstan have emphasized not only their role as citizens of the multi-ethnic country of Kazakhstan but also their role in strengthening cooperation and friendship between Kazakhstan and their historical homeland, South Korea.

The second point I would like to mention is the opening of the Education Centre at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Kazakhstan in 1991 and the Korean government's support for the KS's organizations served as factors that solidified exchanges between the two countries and the role of Kazakhstan's KS as intermediaries. The Education Centre is engaged in educational and support programs for the spread of Korean language and Korean culture⁶.

Thirdly, I would like to mention the impact of the Korean Wave, which is spreading worldwide. The Korean Wave's contents are also rapidly spreading in Kazakhstan. Also, the first Korean town in the former Soviet Union is under construction in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Plans have been postponed because of COVID-19, but in the future they hope it will be a place where Korean culture can be spread to Kazakhstan⁷. The formation of a Koreatown is expected to be an important factor in strengthening the role and position of the Korean and Kazakhstan's KS along with the spread of the Korean Wave. As seen above, factors such as a positive changes in perception of Korea, active links between KS's organizations and the Korean Education Center, and the influence of the Korean Wave, have contributed to the solidification of the role of the KS in the process of seeking roles between Kazakhstan and Korea.

⁵ Interview with B (Dec. 14, 2015).

⁶ For more information, see the homepage (www.koreacenter.kz).

⁷ It is scheduled to open in February 2020 in Almaty mall, Jandosava Saina, Almaty City, Kazakhstan (see www.cistoday.com February 25, 2019) (It was postponed by the influence of Covid-19).

5. Conclusion

This presentation has researched about how the KS in contemporary Kazakhstan have built and preserved their life and culture after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

I have drawn the following conclusions. They had to preserve their life as Kazakhstan's KS, who experienced the collapse of the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan's independence and chose to stay in Kazakhstan. The methods underlying the preserving of their life are summarized in two ways.

Firstly, the KS in Kazakhstan had formatted their community in Kazakhstan as they chose to stay in Kazakhstan. There are basically three patterns for the formation and preservation of the basis of ethnic minority status after the USSR's collapse: first, going back to their historical homelands, second, moving to other countries within the former Soviet Union, and the third, staying where they were by acquiring citizenship of the newly formed states.

Secondly, the KS have established their role as an ethnic minority in Kazakhstan. They have used various organizations formed in Kazakhstan to seek and strengthen the exchange role between Korea and Kazakhstan, their historical homeland. The following three factors enhanced the role they intend to develop themselves. First, the change in perception of the two Koreas before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union; second, the opening of the Korean Education Center in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the support of the Korean government; and finally, the Korean Wave and the construction of Almaty Koreatown.

To sum up more simply, the life and culture of the KS in Kazakhstan has been formed based on their choice to stay in Kazakhstan. It has been preserved by their relationship with their historical homelands, their status as a minority, and their ethnic foundations within Kazakhstan, and it is also in a constant process of transforming. Thank you for listening.

Jinhye Lee

Presentation 4. “Preserving the Life and Culture of the Korean Diaspora among the Majority: Ethnic Minority Rights in Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era”

Dr. Lee received a PhD in Area Studies, from Kyoto University in 2019. She is a foreign postdoctoral fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and is presently engaged in Korean Diaspora research at the Asia-Japan Research Institute, Ritsumeikan University, Japan.

Dr. Lee specializes in research on the Korean Diaspora (*Koryo Saram*) in Contemporary Kazakhstan. Her dissertation “Social Transformation of the Korean Diaspora (Koryo Saram) in Contemporary



Kazakhstan” explored the acculturation of Koryo Saram in the post-Soviet Union as a minority in Kazakhstan and a part of the Korean Diaspora. Her current study analyzes the social integration and transformation of the Koryo Saram, the Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan from the Perestroika period, just before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, to today’s Kazakhstan, after its independence.