

Chapter 2

From Government Structured Integration to Inter-Ethnic Coexistence in Kazakhstan: Maintaining the Koryo Saram Community beyond Historical Challenges toward a Multi- Layered Identity

Jinhye LEE

1. Introduction

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, five Central Asian countries achieved the status of independent republics, each inheriting the Soviet legacy. As independent states, each country began to integrate in its own way. In this context, independent Kazakhstan has pursued two goals in the process of integration: ethnocentrism and the integration of its multiethnic citizens.

I have noticed three aspects in the research on the response to integration policy in Central Asia. Firstly, there is a study on the aspect of the national identity of Central Asia after the Soviet dissolution. The identity of the state and citizens has been formed and maintained on the premise of authoritarianism, thereby promoting national solidarity and stability. This study used films, projects, and elections as the main analysis tools under the supervision and support of the government. Thus, this study may have been limited in grasping the more diverse opinions of citizens on social repercussions.

The second aspect concerns ethnic tensions arising from the land

distribution. It tends to perceive the policy as emblematic of elitism rather than specific nationalism, as land ownership remains concentrated among the elite, rather than being distributed to a specific ethnicity. It further emphasized that the land reform in this country was not determined by ethnic consideration and did not worsen ethnic relations. It employs a hierarchical classification of land ownership, and there is a limitation in specifically grasping the reaction of each ethnic group to the land distribution.



Figure 1. Kazakhstan's Neighbors

Source: www.uzngos.uzsci.net

Thirdly, there is the aspect of citizens' social perceptions and repercussions of national integration by analyzing the factors that determine citizenship and ethnic identity. The higher the citizens' confidence in state agencies, the stronger the support for the two identities. This correlation can be said to have significantly influenced citizens' responses to national integration. The civic identity was assumed to belong to all citizens of Kazakhstan, and ethnic identity was

analyzed only by assuming the Kazakh people's identity. This study does not refer to any ethnic classification within Kazakhstan, and it is also difficult to grasp the specific ethnic response to government policy.

Thus, there are limitations in the current data, as it does not fully reflect the various compositions and demographics, and the most relevant to us is the full ethnic composition of the country. I want to consider how each minority group is responding/reacting to integration, with a particular focus on Koryo Saram, a minority in Kazakhstan.

2. Who are Koryo Saram?

Koryo Saram refers to the Korean Diaspora living in the former Soviet Union, and it is their self-identification. They are just called Koreans in English. But why do we call them the Koryo Saram? It was their self-perception in their community throughout the Japanese colonial period, the Korean War and division in Korea, and the collapse of the Soviet Union.



Figure 2. Migration Routes of Koryo Saram

Source: <https://www.toandfromtheairport.com>

Figure 2 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. 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 a minority in a multi-ethnic state. Currently, in Kazakhstan, there are many sub-categories of Koryo Saram for those minorities and their migrations.

The Koryo Saram community includes those who were settled there by forced migration under Stalin, and then lived there and led relatively stable lives. It also includes Koryo Saram who immigrated from the Far East of Russia or the post-Soviet states for economic activities after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

They are recognized as different entities, and each group has its own name. In other words, they have different identities. It depends on the area of residence or origin of Koryo Saram and is closely related to the history of migration they have experienced. It can be described as a concept that survived throughout the Soviet period and as a newly formed concept after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, both of which coexist in their community.

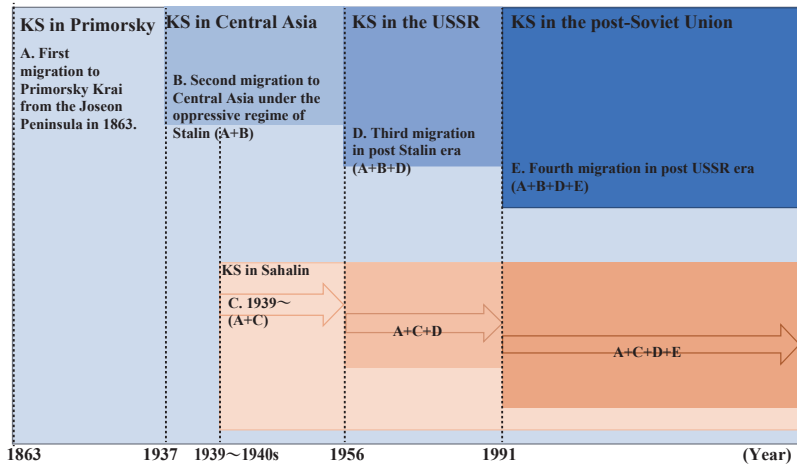


Figure 3. Koryo Saram's Sub Identities

Source: Recreated using (Lee 2022, 81)

3. Kazakhstan's Integration Policy

In 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the five Central Asian countries achieved the status of independent republics. Independent Kazakhstan is simultaneously pursuing two goals: ethnocentrism and the integration of its multi-ethnic citizens. The integration of Kazakhstan is mainly proceeding in two directions. The first is to secure a public domain led by the government based on the Kazakhification of the population, with the adoption of Kazakh history, language and culture. At the same time, it presupposes this as a commonly shared value of the citizenship of Kazakhstan. The second, based on that, it is to guarantee the autonomy of each cultural identity.

Table 1 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 native language

only 36% of Koryo Saram said it is the language of their historical homeland. 64% of them said it is different from the language of their historical homeland.

Table 1. 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 агенттігі 2011, 11–25)

Table 2. Russian Language Level of the Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.

| | Able to converse | | | 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 агенттігі 2011, 314–321)

Table 2 indicates the Russian language level of ethnic groups. 98% of Koryo Saram are able to speak Russian, and 96.9 % of them said they could read it. Also, approximately 95.5% of the Koryo Saram said they could write in Russian.

Table 3. Kazakh Language Level of the Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.

| | Able to converse | | | Able to read | | | Able to write | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|------|------|--------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Total (urban, rural)% | 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 | 8.6 | 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 3 shows the Kazakh language level of ethnic groups. 43.% of Koryo Saram were able to speak Kazakh, among them, only 14.1% of them said they could read it. Also, 10.5% of Koryo Saram said they could write in Kazakh.

4. Fieldwork (2015–2018)

Through my fieldwork, I observed how each minority group responded to integration. How did Koryo Saram change after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and after each republic gained independence? To examine their response to inter-ethnic coexistence, we must first focus on the activities of major organizations leading

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Kazakhstan's Koryo Saram society, which was centered in Almaty, Kazakhstan (Figure 4). Through an interview survey with officials from the Koryo Saram's organizations, I examine their current status under the multiethnic policy.



Figure 4. Almaty Korean Cultural Center. Source: Author

Table 4. Interview Subject Data

| Name of the Organization | Name of Interviewee (designation) | Sex | Age | Date |
|-------------------------------|--|-----|-----|------------------------------|
| Almaty Cultural Center | A. Executive of the Assembly, Vice Chairman of Korean Cultural Center, Professor | M | 60s | Nov. 11, 2016; Aug. 10, 2018 |
| Korean Association | B. Vice chairman, Vice Chairman of the Cultural Center | M | 20s | Dec. 14, 2015 |
| | C. Chairman | M | 40s | Aug. 10, 2018 |
| Korean Youth Association | D. Chairman | M | 20s | Dec. 14, 2015 |
| Koryo Ilbo (Korean Newspaper) | E. Chief editor | M | 40s | Dec. 14, 2015; Aug. 10, 2018 |
| | F. Vice editor | F | 70s | Dec. 3, 2015; Aug. 10, 2018 |
| Korean Theater | G. Director, Vice Chairman of the Assembly | F | 60s | Dec. 24, 2015 |
| | H. A singer who belongs to theater | F | 50s | Dec. 24, 2015 |
| Korean Radio Station | I. Director | F | 50s | Dec. 11, 2015; Aug. 10, 2018 |
| Korean Television Station | J. Director | F | 60s | Dec. 18, 2015; Aug. 10, 2018 |
| Korean Weekend School | K. Director | F | 70s | Dec. 23, 2015 |

| City and State | Name of Interviewee (designation) | Sex | Age | Occupation | Date |
|----------------|--|-----|-----|------------|--------------|
| Ansan, Korea | L. Former chief editor of Koryo Ilbo, permanent returnees to Korea | M | 60s | Unemployed | Jun. 6, 2018 |
| Seoul, Korea | M. Professor, Kazakh National University | M | 60s | Professor | Jun. 7, 2018 |

The details are shown in Table 4. The fieldwork survey was conducted three times in Almaty, Kazakhstan, once in Ansan, Korea, and once in Seoul; the interviews were mainly conducted with officials and individuals of the organization.

Officials from Kazakhstan's Koryo Saram were asked the following questions: a) Is it true that there are great concerns about potential factors for ethnic disputes in Kazakhstan, a multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union? b) Why do you think Kazakhstan has promoted integration relatively well since its independence? Most of the respondents answered in association with the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK), recognized their position as an ethnic minority, and considered the identity of the Koryo Saram as citizens of Kazakhstan. The answers could be summarized into four categories: the role of the Assembly, a change in the perception of ethnicity in conjunction with the change of its name, the relationship between the Assembly and the Koryo Saram's organizations, and the direction of its organizations.

(1) The Role of APK

First, regarding the role of the Assembly, the Kazakhstan government has emphasized multiethnic coexistence to integrate non-Kazakh people. Rather than unilaterally pushing for multiethnic integration centered on Kazakhs, they have emphasized strategies to ensure multiethnic culture. In addition, interviewees mentioned the president's discrimination-free policy and its excellence in governance and stressed that the Assembly is the center of Kazakhstan's integration policy. They answered that its existence greatly contributes to the integration of a multiethnic citizenry. Also, they indicated that the Assembly aims to eliminate possible multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious disputes.

(2) Change in the APK's Name

Second, the Assembly was named the “Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan” until 2007 but was renamed the “Assembly of People of Kazakhstan” in 2008. After its name was changed, *narod* (people) was changed from its plural form to singular. It did not include Kazakhs until 2007, but it was changed to include Kazakhs following social concerns of discrimination against non-Kazakhs. The Assembly was a device that implied a distinction between Kazakh and non-Kazakh, but the distinction disappeared after the 2008 name change to imply “one citizenry (nation).”

Moreover, the term minority is not officially used in Kazakhstan because there is a nuance of discrimination in the word. The meaning of the word *narod* is more important than the concept of minority in Kazakhstan.

The important issues for Kazakhstan's people are not about “minority” or “majority,” but “the status of ethnic identity” and “the status of civic identity.” It was pointed out that the relationship between the two identities is closely related to the role of the Assembly.

(3) The Relationship between the APK and the Koryo Saram's Organizations

The Kazakhstan government provides economic support to each ethnic organization belonging to the Assembly which allows each ethnic group to enjoy the benefits. This relationship, however, may make it difficult for ethnic organizations to become completely independent of the government and voice their own political position. Through our fieldwork, we found that most of the representatives of major organizations of Kazakhstan's Koryo Saram are executives of the Assembly and are obliged to act according to the guidelines of the

Assembly once they join. Thus, despite the inter-ethnic competition and practical benefits, their activities are bound to be limited. However, the Koryo Saram actively compete among their organizations for entry into the Assembly.

(4) The Direction of its Organizations

Koryo Saram's organizations under the jurisdiction of the Assembly are divided by "fields." Each organization oversees different fields, focusing on one common ideology.

This common ideology means that each ethnic group supports integration into one Kazakhstan citizenry while preserving its respective culture within a limited scope demarcated by the government. More importantly, these individual cultures are all recognized as part of Kazakhstan's culture. They agree that all ethnic groups share and respect not only their own culture but also each other's ethnic culture, which makes coexistence possible.

In fact, representatives of the Koryo Saram's organization were supporting the activities of the APK. At the entrance of the Koryo Saram Association, an explanation of the APK's activities and organizations was prominently displayed on the wall. The Koryo Ilbo, Koryo Saram's newspaper, and the Korean Youth Association are subordinated to the Association. Moreover, their media belongs to the state-run television channel and is operated by the government. Koryo Ilbo was reorganized as the voice of the Korean Association in 2000.

The Korean Theater was located on the outskirts of Almaty from 1968 to 2018. However, after the theater director became the vice president of the APK, the theater moved to the main street in 2018. Is it possible to say that this has nothing to do with the relationship between the APK and the Koryo Saram-related organization mentioned above?

5. Structure of Koryo Saram's Organizations

All the ethnic groups are competing for the recommendation and approval of the APK, as the official procedure of the admission is not disclosed, and most of its members are composed of the APK.

Koryo Saram are actively participating for representation in the APK. Calling attention to the organization's rich history of political and cultural participation, the respondents emphasized the strong relationship between the two sides and the role of Koryo Saram in the cultural exchange between Kazakhstan and Korea. Koryo Saram have solidified their position as an ethnic minority, and they maintain their own identity in cooperation with the government.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to outline the results and limitations of this study. We began by asking how each minority group reacted to integration. Three aspects were identified: Firstly, Kazakhstan's Koryo Saram are themselves actively involved in the political realization of their identity. This has been realized through the Assembly and its various ethnic organizations. Secondly, Koryo Saram have formed and maintained their own identity through the protections conferred by the government. Finally, these protections have, in turn, allowed Koryo Saram to strengthen their status as an "equal ethnicity" in Kazakhstan.

The limitations of the study are as follows: Most of the Koryo Saram's organizations fall under the provisions of the Assembly; in some cases, they are overseen by multiple executives of two or more organizations. They cannot secure independence in their activities, and there are practical restrictions. In future research, it will be necessary to broaden the perspective for a deeper analysis of the social integration

of Koryo Saram. Moreover, future research should also expand the research subjects to the general public rather than only elite groups, and to some NGOs rather than ethnic organizations that have relationships with the government.

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2. Dr. Jinhye LEE



Chapter 2. From Government Structured Integration to Inter-Ethnic Coexistence in Kazakhstan: Maintaining the Koryo Saram Community beyond Historical Challenges toward a Multi-layered Identity

Degree: Ph.D. in Area Studies (Kyoto University), 2019.

Affiliation: Research Assistant Professor, Kinugasa Research Organization, Ritsumeikan University

Specialized field: Area Studies in Central Asia, South Korea, Japan

Publications:

1. Jinhye, Lee. 2022. *Futatsu no Ajia wo Ikiru: Gendai Kazafusutan ni okeru Minzoku Mondai to Kōraijin Koryo-Saramu Deiasupora no Bunka Henyo (Living in Two Asia: Ethnic Minorities in Modern Kazakhstan and Cultural Transformation of Koryo Saram Diaspora)*. Kyoto: Nakanishiya Publishing. (In Japanese)
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Recent Research Interests: Diaspora, Ethnic Minority, Return Migration, Multicultural Symbiosis