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STUDY ON THE ROLE OF ETHNIC KOREANS IN KAZAKHSTAN: FOCUSING ON THE ASSEMBLY OF PEOPLE OF KAZAKHSTAN^{iv}

Abstract. Ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan have a positive image and have been mentioned as a main minority group in Kazakhstan. In this regard, this paper tried to find the reason that how they have been successfully integrated into the Kazakhstani society. To find the answer, the article explores the role of ethnic Koreans from Soviet times to independent Kazakhstan. As a result, the two factors might make the result of their stable settlement. First factor is the Koreans' special adaptation ability and friendly characteristics, passed down from soviet Koreans. The second is tolerant and gradual national policies of Kazakhstan and its specialized mechanism-APK.

Keywords: Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, ethnic Koreans, Ethnic minority, Kazakhstan, Soviet Koreans.

Аңдатпа. Қазақстанда этникалық көрістер оңтайлы имиджге ие және этникалық азшылық арасындағы негізгі топ болып табылады. Осыған байланысты мақала олардың қазақстандық қоғамға сәтті бірігуінің себептерін айқындау әрекетіне көрініс береді. Осының жауабын табу үшін мақалада этникалық көрістердің кеңестік кезеңдегі және тәуелсіз Қазақстанда рөлі қарастырылады. Тұрақтылықтың себебі ретінде екі факторды атап өтуге болады. Бірінші фактор – көріс халқының ерекше бейімделушілік қабілеттері және Кеңес Одағында өмір сүрген көрістерден берілген достық қасиеттері. Екінші фактор – Қазақстанның және оның мамандандырылған механизмі ҚХА-ның толеранттылығы мен ұлттық саясатының бірізділігі.

Тірек сөздер: Қазақстан халқы Ассамблеясы, этникалық көрістер, этникалық азшылықтар, Қазақстан, кеңестік көрістер.

Аннотация. В Казахстане этнические корейцы имеют позитивный имидж и являются основной группой этнических меньшинств. В этой связи статья отражает попытку обнаружения причин их успешной интеграции в казахстанское общество. Чтобы найти ответ, в статье рассматривается роль этнических корейцев начиная со времен СССР до независимости Казахстана. Результатом стабильности можно отметить два фактора. Первым фактором является особенная способность к адаптации и дружелюбность корейского народа, черты переданные им от корейцев живших в Советском Союзе. Второй – толерантность и последовательность национальной политики Казахстана и ее специализированного механизма АНК.

Ключевые слова: Ассамблея народа Казахстана, этнические корейцы, этническое меньшинство, Казахстан, советские корейцы.

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In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union caused great changes in the post-Soviet space. A large cluster of republics were divided into 15 different independent countries. Many of these countries have been had multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society through the Soviet times. According to the researcher Koenig, who did several researches regarding multi-cultural society, migration and immigration, maintains that the identity problem of minority ethnic groups by cultural mix transcending borders can become a major source of social conflict and political debate. [1, p.1] This argument shows the issue of minority identity is very delicate thing that can provoke disruption of society and country. In this regard, Kazakhstan which consists of many different ethnic groups was not free from that delicate problem. Generally, minorities are easily marginalized and exposed to discriminated environment in the society. It is not difficult to find examples of it even in neighbor countries. When it comes to the case of China, separate independent movements from Tibet and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region have showed this kind of problems several times already. There may be many reasons for it, but one of the reasons might be the discrimination between titular nation-Han Chinese and other minority groups such as Tibetan and Uygur. It is obvious that conflicts between the

ethnic groups give negative effects on China's stability. There is another example in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan consists of 82.3% Uzbek, 4.8% Tajik, 2.5% Kazakh, 2.3% Russian and 0.6% Koreans. [2] There are considerable opinions that ethnic Koreans in Uzbekistan hope to move to Russia or Korea. In fact, a great portion of immigrated Korean diaspora from Central Asia region is from Uzbekistan. The main reason of it is ethnocentrism by Uzbekistan government; including forming Uzbek-language centered society. Naturally, ethnic minorities be ousted from many policies and confronted discrimination in Uzbekistan. After all, they lost the role in the society and this situation seems enough to arouse social conflicts.

In contrast, different aspects are observed in Kazakhstan. There are 66.48% of Kazakh, 20.61% of Russian, 12.85% of Uzbek, Ukraine and German and 0.6% of Korean live in present Kazakhstan. [3] Similar ratios of ethnic Koreans live in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Despite the numerical inferiority, ethnic Koreans in this country were frequently mentioned as one of the main ethnic groups consists of Kazakhstani Society. Furthermore, they have positive image from the nation. Lyubov Ne, who is a director of Koryo Theater (A theater of ethnic Koreans) mentioned that 'Koreans in Kazakhstan have a reputation for being one of the hardworking

and respected ethnic groups in the country. [4, p.147]

If so, how ethnic Koreans have been successfully integrated into the Kazakhstani society, although they were a minority ethnic group? The purpose of this article is to find the answer of this question. Firstly, I will start with historical process regarding how Koreans came to the Soviet regions and present Kazakhstan. Next part offers the role of ethnic Koreans during Soviet times and Independent Kazakhstan. In this part, the role during independent Kazakhstan will be explored through the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (under APK); this is because, APK, established by president Nazarbayev's personal initiative, has been implementing as a main mechanism to preserve ethnic harmony and national integrity. Last part will examine all information from each part and make analysis in order to find the answer of main question.

1. How Ethnic Koreans Start to Settle in Kazakhstan Territory?

According to the official documents from Soviet Union, it seems like that Koreans started to move into Far-East of Russia from around 1860s for the first time. The main background of their movement was economic difficulties by corrupted Joseon feudal dynasty, harsh exploitation from ruling class, etc. At the same time, the flux of population from the outside was necessary and helpful for Imperial Russia to solve the problem of labor shortage in Far-East region. Therefore, the Koreans, who had been usually engaged in agriculture, may be considered as a useful resource to develop the region. In 1869, more Koreans moved into the region because of flood and severe famine in Joseon dynasty. The population of the Koreans in the Far-East of Russia was 12,875 in 1891 and the number increased in 1899 to 23,000. In 1902 the population was 32,380, which shows 2.5 times increased number during 11 years in the region. After that period, Koreans left their homeland and moved to the Russian territory by other different factors. These are Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905 and Japan's forced occupation of Korea (Daehan Empire) in 1910. At that time, anti-Japanese movements proceeded to extensive regions among overseas Koreans. From this time, influx of Korean independence activists as well as farmers increased to the region. The Far-East of Russia became one of the centers of anti-Japanese movements for Koreans. Consequently, Posyet district was the most heavily populated area

by Koreans in Russian territory; for example, there existed 30,000 Koreans, while only 3,000 Russians resided there in 1917. The style of the houses and living environment were also overwhelmingly Koreans', therefore official records from Imperial Russia mentions that it is hard to distinguish whether it is Russia or Korea. [5] In 1917, Russian revolution occurred and this event had a great influence on the Koreans life. The Koreans gave Bolsheviks great supports for the revolution. The reason why they gave support was that czarist Russia did not accept Korean independence activists to their territory because they heavily concerned with Japanese government. Therefore, Koreans had to trust that the revolution and Bolsheviks will bring better environment to them, unlike czarist Russia. Bolsheviks promised an apportionment of land for Koreans. Finally, Soviet Union was born in 1992, but Bolsheviks did not keep their promise for the Koreans. In 1923, I.A. Kubyak, who was the General Secretary of the Far East region of the Communist Party Central Committee, denounced that Koreans are same as Japanese colonialists therefore they should be expelled from the Far East. After this strong claim, Soviet government deported about 700~800 Korean labors to Japan.[6, p.222] Furthermore, Soviet government arrested Korean leaders on suspicion of participating illegal organization, and they were imprisoned and executed right before enforcement of the deportation. From this event, about 2,500 Soviet Korean leaders were sacrificed. The interesting thing is that these Koreans were mainly chiefs of Communist party, military officers and intellectuals who have showed loyalty to the Soviet regime. Ironically, they were executed by the Soviet. From a common sense, it was incomprehensible. So, we can guess that eliminating Korean leaders, who have possibility to lead 200,000 Koreans and organize opposition movements toward the government and its policy, were necessary to be purged to implement the deportation policy smoothly. [7, pp. 185-187]

The Soviet's deportation policy executed from September 1937, Koreans started to move into Kazakh SSR in October. The Soviet did not provide Koreans with having enough time to prepare for this unreasonable journey. As a result, most Koreans were moved under poor conditions, 554 Koreans died in the process. [8]

Figure 1: Deportation Route of Soviet Koreans in 1937



Source: <http://news.join.com/article/2926712>

The Koreans arrived in Ushtobe, located in the southern part of the Kazakhstan, pass through the Vladivostok-Khabarovsk-Chita-Irkutsk-Krasnoyarsk. After that they were relocated to different cities of Kazakhstan such as Kostanay, Karaganda, Kyzhylorda and also to Tashkent, and Samarkhand in Uzbekistan. According to the report for Stalin by Molotov Yezov, who was in charge of Korean's deportation policy, 'the migration of Soviet Koreans is almost completed in October 25, 1937. Total 36,442 households 171,781 Koreans was moved by trains. About 700 Koreans are remained in Far East region, they are going to be supposed to be moved in November first this year by trains. The number of Koreans allocated to Uzbek SSR (Socialist Soviet Republics) is 16,277 households (76,525 people), to Kazakh SSR is 20,170 households (95,256 people). From this time, ethnic Koreans started to live in Central Asian region regardless of their will.

2. The Role of Ethnic Koreans

2.1 Ethnic Koreans during Soviet Times and Their Role.

The Soviet and Kazakh SSR did not have proper plans to settle them in the new place right after the deportation because it happened abruptly and implemented rapidly. Ethnic Koreans were suffered from harsh winter of Kazakhstan. It was some time before several attempts to settle them. After some time, 28 Korean Kolkhoz were created. In some cases, about 500 households of Koreans, who were located in Kazakhstan, should move again to Stalingrad region for fishery by order of Soviet government. [5, pp. 5-9] However, in most cases, Soviet government instructed Kazakh SSR government to form Kolkhoz in consideration of Soviet Koreans' abilities in agricultural sector.

The chairman of Council of People's Commissars in Kazakhstan asserted that Soviet Koreans should be located in the site of rice farming,

in that they are outstanding in agricultural sector. According to his assertion, Koreans should be mainly re-migrated intensively to the southern part of the Kazakhstan, where rice farming and grain production is possible. Also, the local government dissolved existing Kolkhozes and reorganized it for Soviet Koreans. [8] In this unfavorable environment, ethnic Koreans started to participate in farming in accordance with Soviet policies. The surprising factor is that the Koreans presented successful results in rice farming sector within 2 years of the deportation. They also actively cooperated with Soviet to produce huge amounts of rice for war materials during the Second World War. So, they became an appropriate example of the Soviet's propaganda to encourage the entire Soviet people. In the Soviet side, the Koreans were considered as a valuable example of successful settlement of the deportation policy, and their lives were introduced overall Soviet Union. [9, p.58] There are several representative Korean Kolkhozs; for example, 'AvanGarde(Авангард), the 3rd international (Третий интернационал) in Kyzhylorda region. Till now, the typical image of ethnic Koreans in post-Soviet region contains 'farming' and 'hard-working nation', because the Koreans presented considerable achievements in agriculture field. In January 1957, Korean ethnic group liberated from restriction of residence by Khrushchev. It was a start that the agriculture centered ethnic Korean society extended to various fields. Young generation of the Koreans could have a chance to get high quality education in cities based on economic success of their parents. It is famous story about Koreans that they built a 'school' first when they settled in Kazakhstan even before having their own houses. It reflects the Koreans' strong enthusiasm for education and their next step also followed by this aspiration. From this time, more Koreans started to live in cities, not countrysides.

Table.1 The changes on residential district of ethnic Koreans based on the census in 1959, 1970 and 1979. (according to the administrative district at that year)

Oblasty	1959		1970		1979	
	urban	country	urban	country	urban	country
Almaty Oblasty	6180	14321	599	3792	989	3721
Zambyl	3331	2152	6908	2135	9549	1816
Kyzhylorda	9235	5065	10279	3150	11032	1471
Taldykurgan	-	-	6251	6263	6732	5483
Guruev	2014	490	2359	344	2679	267
Karaganda	10978	1056	12811	580	10288	350
Kostanay	21185	1161	2359	371	2679	381
Chelinograd	-	-	1449	37	1625	333

(Source: Kim G. The Development of Korean Immigrants Culture and Society in Kazakhstan, Cross-Cultural Studies, Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies, 1995, p.214)

Especially, prominent increase of moving into cities among ethnic Koreans was observed in the latter half of the 20th century. According to the census by Soviet government, residential rate of the

Koreans in rural area reached 80% of total population of the Koreans between 1937~1940. On the contrary, the Korean population in urban area was up to 80% in 1979. [10, p.213] From 1950 s

young generation of the Koreans started to get good education in major cities and it made fruitful results. The Koreans who got specialized jobs in various fields gradually showed up in the society after 1960s. After that, they formed an elite group in 1970~80s, also they became a major group of ethnic Koreans who can play the leading role for activities to recover individual national identity, which were occurred all over the USSR in 1980s. The example of representatives ethnic Koreans at that time are I.R Kim, who is a prominent economist and served as Minister of Finance of USSR during 1961~1974, Kim Nelly, who was a national gymnast of Montreal Olympic in 1976, popular actor Kim Jin in 1960s and a famous geological engineer Choi Ya Gob. It shows that the Koreans overcame poor surroundings by the deportation and if anything, grew up as a recognized member in the society of Kazakh SSR. Through this process they have been acted as Middlemen Minority, who connects Russians with Kazakhs from center to Kazakh SSR. In this context, eminent ethnic Korean professor Kim German, who has did various kinds of researches regarding ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan, maintains that ethnic Koreans got positive and favorable image from main ethnic groups. In addition, there are a lot of examples that the combination of Russian-Korean or Kazakh-Korean for the position of director and vice-director in business and other governmental sectors and this combination have achieved excellent outcomes. [11, p.223] In sum, ethnic Koreans have played role not only as well-adapted minorities but also as a bridge between other ethnic groups in their society.

2.2 Ethnic Koreans in Independent Kazakhstan and Their Role in Assembly of People of Kazakhstan(APK).

With the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, all ethnic groups in each republic lost their strong sense of belonging as Soviet citizens, which had been deeply rooted in their minds. Consequently, Central Asian countries looked for a new identity that would bind them together. In order to forge a new national identity, political elites in all five Central Asian countries decided to implement a nation-building policy based on ethnicity, since ethnic nationalism was a convenient and promising strategy, capable of providing a sense of stability by uniting majority groups around the common and powerful link of ethnicity. [12, pp.1-2] Most Central Asia countries emphasized representativeness of their titular nation and try to present legitimacy of the country by certain titular nation. In Kazakhstan, Kazakhs also, as the titular or eponymous nationality, saw themselves as the sole indigenous nation of the sovereign republic in independent Kazakhstan. [13, p.8] In this climate, ethnic Koreans confronted another unfavorable situation that they were forced to find different identity in Kazakhstan society as one of the non-titular nations. Naturally, structural changes on leadership happened in the society and ethnic Koreans faced a conflict between existing identity- Soviet citizen and new identity-

citizen of independent Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the event that Kazakh language got a status as an official state language provided the Koreans with sense of social crisis, in that they can speak only Russian language, not new state language-Kazakh. Thus, these abrupt changes meant for ethnic Koreans that if they do not try active adaptation, such as learning the state language, to new system, they could not keep their social status, which is achieved during Soviet times anymore. [11]

As I mentioned before, Kazakhstan also try to build their country on the basis of ethnic nationalism, but because of the unfavorable demographic situation and language issues, stemmed from the Russian Empire and Soviet era, it was necessary for them to create a new mechanism that encompasses all existing ethnic minorities as well. According to the statistics, Kazakhstan consists of 42% of Kazakh, 37% of Russian, 5% of Ukraine, 5% of German, 2% of Uzbek and 7% of other ethnic groups in 1993. [14] It clearly shows that there exists more non-titular nation than titular nation-Kazakh. Therefore, Kazakhstan government had to embrace other ethnic groups into the process of establishing new independent Kazakhstan. In this regard, there was need for developing special practical mechanism in order to keep peaceful inter-ethnic relationship and strengthen social integrity. As a result, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan officially suggested the creating of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (APK) at the first Forum of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, held in 1992 to commemorate the first anniversary of independence for Kazakhstan. Afterwards, in March 1995, the "Assembly of People of Kazakhstan" was established by a presidential decree as a presidential consultative body. At the first meeting of APK, the president mentioned that 'the most important mission as a president is promoting social stability and national unity' and he strongly emphasized on national unity by harmonious inter-ethnic relationship. It presented the clear intention that Kazakhstan government will not use unilateral way on implementing national policy related multi-ethnic and multi-cultural issues. In actual, they showed that they are going to gradually develop their own special solutions in multi-ethnic situation through a new mechanism – APK. Then what is APK in this context? It was established by a presidential decree as a presidential consultative body in its first step. It can be considered an official and unofficial channel to express the opinions from minority ethnic groups to Kazakhstan government in order to discuss on inter-ethnic issues. The APK was instituted to strengthen the inter-ethnic and inter-confessional communications, further advance inter-ethnic relations to a higher level based on these experiences, and develop solutions on these issues in Kazakhstan's own way.[15] The APK is hierarchically structured. First, there is a state-level APK at the top, which is comprised of APK session and APK council. As the first president and president-for-life of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who structured and designed the APK,

is a life-long chairman of the APK. The president makes final decision of nomination and dismissal of a vice chairman, two deputy chairmen and other members of APK. In this system, the activities of ethnic Koreans are quite outstanding. In fact, during the 22nd session of the APK, Lyubov Ni, a director of the State Republic Korean Theater of Musical Comedy nominated as a first lady chairperson of the APK in April 2015. It implies that Kazakhstan government cares about equal opportunities for various minority groups. At the same time, the sense of existence of the Koreans is noticeable in Kazakhstani multi-ethnic society, even though they comprise just little part of the society.

APK members consist of over 300 representatives of various ethnic groups, who are academics, artists, writers and social activists of various nationalities. According to a publication 'Nursultan Nazarbaev: The Concept of Peace and Public Consent', which was published in 2011, there are 329 members in APK. It explains that 'the members are composed of 90 Kazakhs, 61 Russians, 21 Koreans, 19 Tatars, 19 Germans, 17 Ukrainians, 17 Azerbaijanis, 15 Uyghurs, 10 Uzbeks and other 120 minority ethnic groups. [16] If we consider small proportion of the Koreans in the entire population, we might infer that the participation of ethnic Koreans somewhat active because the name of Korean is involved with other major ethnic groups, such as Russians, Tatars and Germans.

The APK session is the supreme meeting and held at least once per year as needed when requested by the president or a third of the APK members. There are smaller APKs on the levels of oblast (province), major city, and raion (district), which are lower-ranking constituents of the APK. Within those smaller APKs, there are regional APK session and council. Akim, the mayor or governor in Kazakhstan, chairs the regional APK. We can easily find local-level APK branches in every 14 oblasts and 2 special cities- Almaty and Astana. This factor means that the APK has been operated in a nationwide scale. Almost all ethnic cultural centers are affiliated with local- level and country-level of APK. In general, the directors of the cultural centers are involved in local-level of APK, and some of them have a membership of country-level of APK. There are 33 of Republican and Regional ethno-cultural associations: for example, Kyrgyz association, Dugan cultural center, Jewish association and, of course Korean association exists on the list. In the local level, the total number of Ethno-cultural associations in 14 oblasts and Astana and Almaty city is 463, among them associations related to ethnic Koreans were 24. The associations exist in every oblast and city. Of course there should be more evidence and analysis of their activities, it is obvious that the Koreans actively participated APK related activities. Furthermore, there have been only 3 theatres which obtained status of state republican theater by the government and Korean theatre of

musical comedy got this status with ethnic German and Uyghur. It also represents that the cultural-social activities of ethnic Koreans are officially guaranteed by the government as a major minority group.

APK have been developed as an institution in the direction of more independent and professional. In March 2007, the APK got constitutional status and their role broadened from social-cultural parts to the political part. APK received the right to elect 9 deputies to the Majilis of Parliament. By this right, APK members could have opportunity to speak their voice in the government's decision making process. The 9 deputies from the APK were from various ethnic minority groups and a delegation of ethnic Korean is also a member of the deputies. Roman Kim, who was a former president of ethnic Korean association in Kazakhstan, nominated two times to the Majilis of Parliament. The first term was from 2012 to 2016, and the second was from 2016 to present time. As a result, all these factors and situations reflects that ethnic Koreans play active role on discussing inter-ethnic relations in APK boundary and sometimes comprise opinions of other ethnic minority groups in the middle by leading positions in the APK.

When it comes to historical part, ethnic Koreans moved to Russia's Far-East region due to economic and political reasons from 1860s and they tried to settle in the land. In 1910, the Koreans supported Bolsheviks to be a part of the Russian Revolution and get official permission to reside in the territory, but the disordered and confused situation from their home country- Dae Han Empire made them political victims between Russia Empire and Japan. Consequently, the Koreans were deported from the Far-East of Russia to Central Asia, at the same time, their social status was deprived. Although their despair and hopeless situation, they kept struggling to improve their lives in the strange land. Eventually, they reached at successful result in rice farming sector within 2 years of the deportation, and the good image from the success gave influence on them to get better social status. In 1950s, the restriction on residence was lifted and the younger generation of the Koreans moved to the cities by virtue of successive settlement of the old generation. As the result, ethnic Korean elite group was formed with experts and professionals from various fields and they took certain roles in their society between 1970 and 1980. Usually, they acted like a Middlemen Minority, which linked major ethnic group with minorities. Furthermore, it seems that ethnic Koreans' role as Middlemen Minority did not stop in present independent Kazakhstan. In fact, the ethnic Koreans look like being considered as a noticeable minority group in Kazakhstan society, even though their population accounts for 0.6% of entire population. There are several evident activities in APK, which plays a key role in inter-ethnic relations of the country. For example, an ethnic Korean

representative was nominated two times as a deputy of Majilis of Parliament and also another person served as a deputy chairman of APK. It means ethnic Koreans, as a minority, have right to express their own opinions in an official way within the government system. In addition, there are many cultural centers and associations related ethnic Koreans all across the country and the Korean theatre of musical comedy belongs to three state republican theatres acknowledged by the government. In sum, although ethnic Korean in Kazakhstan experienced unexpected and unintended changes from the outside several times,

they get settled in Kazakhstan territory relatively well. The reason of it can be divided into two factors and the result comes from combination of them. The first factor is Koreans' great adaptability and friendly characteristics. This unique feature was a fundamental factor to establish positive background image to restore their social status and to make good relationship with other ethnic groups. The second one could be effective national policy of Kazakhstan. It is true that APK, which is a main mechanism of national policies, has contributed to provide ethnic minorities with favorable environment to be part of the society as a member.

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