

STRATEGIES FOR PRESERVING THE CULTURAL VALUES OF KOREANS
IN KAZAKHSTAN: BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary generation of ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan demonstrates a strong sense of ethnic self-identification, with cultural continuity serving as a central component of this identity. Core elements sustaining this identity include the preservation of language, family and domestic rituals, and the celebration of ethnic holidays. This article examines strategic approaches to the preservation of cultural values among Koreans in Kazakhstan, emphasizing the intergenerational transmission of traditions as a foundational mechanism. A notable dimension of this process is the increasing cultural influence of the Republic of Korea, which functions as a symbolic homeland. However, this influence also introduces tensions, as contemporary South Korean cultural forms may obscure or displace the traditional practices developed by deported Koreans since the 1930s. By drawing on academic literature, narrative interviews, and oral histories, this study seeks to identify effective and contextually grounded strategies for sustaining the distinct ethnocultural identity of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Koreans in Kazakhstan, Koryo saram, everyday multiculturalism, Acculturation, Integration.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Korean ethnic communities maintain a visible and active presence across various global contexts, including within the socio-economic fabric of Kazakhstan. The fate of Soviet Koreans was drastically altered in 1937, when, under the August 21st Resolution “On the Relocation of Korean Population from the border regions of the Far Eastern Territory,” signed by V. Molotov and J. Stalin, 200,000 Koreans were forcibly deported “on the grounds of their national affiliation as potential supporters of a potential enemy” to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As a result of this relocation, today the Korean diaspora resides in several post-Soviet states: Uzbekistan – 175,865; Russia – 168,526; Kazakhstan – 109,495; Kyrgyzstan – 18,104; Ukraine – 13,524; Tajikistan – 6,000; Turkmenistan – 3,000 (Korean Overseas Statistics, 2021).

Ethnic Koreans have shaped their collective history alongside the evolving trajectories of Kazakhstan’s diverse populations, ultimately becoming an integral component of the unified Kazakhstani nation. Throughout their presence in Kazakhstan, Koreans have, on one hand, preserved their cultural customs and traditions, passing them down through generations, while also integrating into the polyethnic society comprised of over 120 ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. This article examines the experience of ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan to highlight how cultural identity is preserved within a multicultural society, with a particular focus on the strategic preservation of cultural values rather than solely on the process of ethnic identity formation.

With the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea, the Kazakhstani Korean community entered a phase of ethnic revival, wherein traditional ancestral values began to incorporate elements of South Korean culture. At the same time, Koreans of Kazakhstan, brought up on Soviet and later Kazakh postulates of building statehood, have always remained loyal and committed to the political course of the country. Their diligence, high level of education, and dedication to their work and country allowed them to maintain prominent positions across nearly all spheres of public life throughout their time in Kazakhstan. As a result, conditions emerged in which Koreans in Kazakhstan developed specific strategies to preserve their ethnic customs and traditions amidst influences from both South Korean culture and the national culture of the titular Kazakh ethnicity, as well as through interaction with other ethnic communities residing in Kazakhstan.

Recent academic research has shed light on the complex dynamics diaspora communities face in preserving cultural identity amid a changing socio-political environment. The preservation and understanding of cultural belonging have been examined through studies of Korean diasporas in various countries, particularly through art. Diaspora Korean artists explore the meaning of “Korean-ness” through their paintings, political cartoons, theatre, cinema, documentaries, photography, and multimedia art. Cultural values are conveyed through these art forms, where “emotions within artworks provide insight and justification for the Korean diaspora’s identity through lived experiences.” As a result, cultural values and diaspora identity are reinterpreted through the “myths of the Korean diaspora” (Son and Rhee, 2018).

In the case of Kazakhstan, Kim T. Y. and Jin (2016) emphasize the critical role of cultural events and educational efforts in reviving ethnic consciousness

among younger generations of diaspora communities. The Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan employs a range of strategies, such as cultural festivals, language education, and the use of digital platforms, to sustain cultural practices and foster a sense of community. Particular attention should be directed toward the role of the Korean theatre as a cultural hub that serves not only the Korean diaspora but also the broader multiethnic population of Kazakhstan and the former Soviet Union. This theatre acts as a conduit for both “diaspora-building” and “diaspora integration,” showcasing the vitality of Korean art, literature, and music (Kim, 2019). Furthermore, the cultural policy of the Korean government – especially in promoting the Korean Wave (*hallyu*) – illustrates a commitment to expanding Korean cultural influence globally. Studies on the Korean Wave contextualize how cultural diplomacy and national identity are projected through government initiatives, thereby offering a framework for understanding cultural globalization and the role of policy (Nam, 2013).

By examining these strategies and their implications, this article contributes to the broader discourse on cultural resilience and the adaptive nature of diaspora cultures in a globalized context. It underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how communities balance cultural continuity with change, offering insight into the mechanisms of identity preservation amid global pressures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Issues related to the preservation of an ethnic group’s cultural values have been studied through the lenses of acculturation and assimilation theories. One of the earliest works by Redfield et al. (1936) defined acculturation as “the phenomenon resulting from continuous, firsthand contact between groups of individuals from different cultures, which leads to changes in the original cultural patterns of one or both groups.” Later, in the 1960s, M. Gordon equated acculturation with assimilation and identified seven types of acculturation: Cultural assimilation (the process of adopting the language, dress, daily behavioural norms, values, and standards); Structural assimilation (the mass inclusion of minorities into clubs, groups, and institutions of the dominant society); Identificational assimilation (formation of social identity based on integration into institutional structures of the dominant group); Attitude reception assimilation (the absence of prejudice from the dominant society toward members of an ethnic group); Behavioural assimilation (elimination of discrimination toward ethnic minorities); Civic assimilation (absence of value-based conflict); Selective or partial acculturation, which is characterized by the adoption of certain aspects of the dominant culture without necessarily abandoning one’s own cultural values or ethnic identity (Gordon, 1964).

However, the most relevant framework for understanding the experience of Koreans in Kazakhstan is proposed by J. Berry (1997), who defines acculturation as “the process of maintaining one’s traditional ethnic culture while participating in intercultural exchanges.” Such an acculturation strategy appears to be the most appropriate for Koreans living in Kazakhstan’s multiethnic society.

These strategies have been further validated as mechanisms for the successful acculturation of Koreans into the dominant culture in more recent research. For instance, Baldanova (2014) argues that “a successful example of acculturation is the preservation of traditional values while also accepting the values of the dominant society by the Korean people. This highlights the relevance of stud-

ying the cultural and historical foundations of acculturation strategies used by Koreans in dominant cultures.”

As such, strategies for maintaining cultural traditions have been explored in a number of academic sources, offering insights into how ethnic Koreans have preserved their customs and cultural heritage. Research on the acculturation of Koreans within the dominant culture, in the context of the historical and cultural origins of the Korean ethnic group, is well documented in Kazakhstan, Russian and international academic literature. The preservation of cultural values among Koreans in Kazakhstan represents a nuanced negotiation between the forces of tradition and the imperatives of innovation. This complex process has attracted scholarly attention, with researchers such as Kim G., Kang G., and Han V. offering pivotal analyses on how the *koryo saram* – ethnic Koreans in the post-Soviet space – have managed their cultural identity in the face of external pressures and evolving diasporic realities.

Kim’s scholarship foregrounds the significance of cultural institutions, particularly the Korean theatre, as vital arenas for the sustenance and transmission of collective memory, art forms, and language practices within the diaspora. Established originally in Vladivostok and subsequently moved to several Kazakhstani cities due to Soviet-era deportations, the theatre has functioned as both a cultural haven and a bridge between generations. Over its 90-year history, it has not only fortified cultural retention among Koreans but has also facilitated meaningful intercultural dialogue within Kazakhstan’s polyethnic milieu. Kim (2019) asserts that the theatre’s ongoing relevance lies in striking a balance: upholding traditional performing arts while adapting to contemporary socio-political currents – a synergy that catalyzes both “diaspora building” and “diaspora integration” amid emerging challenges such as linguistic assimilation and generational shifts.

Khan (2021) systematically explores multiple dimensions of historiography concerning Central Asian Koreans, including general historical developments, participation in the Great Patriotic War, the organization of Korean collective farms, entrepreneurial activities in agriculture, and the broader Korean movement. In addition to historical narratives, the monograph focuses on ethnographic themes such as daily life, rituals, religious practices, culinary customs, and other features of the Korean community. It also engages with linguistic analysis, literary studies, visual and performing arts, as well as the dynamic processes of identity transformation. A key focus of the study is the emergence of the *koryo saram* as a distinct sub-ethnic group and the conceptualization of a “meta-nation,” reflecting a globalized phase in the evolution of the Korean people. Khan underscores the importance of adhering to rigorous academic standards and explicitly critiques pseudo-scientific and non-professional contributions that have appeared in the field of Korean studies. This monograph not only provides an organized synthesis of existing research on the Korean diaspora in the region but also proposes innovative conceptual frameworks for analyzing ethnic identity and cultural transformation within transnational and post-Soviet contexts.

Scholars have noted that, despite the achievements gained through acculturation strategies during the Soviet period, when Koreans earned respect through their diligence, they simultaneously experienced cultural losses, including erosion of their native language and traditions. “Koreans became valued members of the

Soviet military-industrial complex. During Soviet rule, thousands of Korean collective farmers were awarded the medal 'Hero of Socialist Labor'. All of this demonstrated the degree of their usefulness and integration into Soviet society. The initial reasons for their forced relocation and the 'sense of resentment' were gradually erased by the economic success of the deported people" (Diener, 2006).

Researchers also examine the concept of "otherness" within the Korean diaspora in the post-Soviet space. By analyzing the mobility of the Korean diaspora categorized into "continental" and "Sakhalin" Koreans scholars have identified patterns of movement based on diasporic networks. The relaxation of movement restrictions during the Soviet period, the limitations imposed by newly formed national borders after the USSR's dissolution, and the establishment of diplomatic relations among CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries after gaining independence all mark stages that illustrate the complexity of creating a coherent "diasporic space." Saveliev concludes that "the gradual degradation of ethnic ties may lead to further assimilation" (Saveliev, 2010).

Contemporary scholars point out that Kazakhstan has managed to develop a "flexible approach to citizenship and relatively peaceful interethnic relations." This success is attributed to a "subtle combination of Soviet legacy and renewed Kazakh national identity" (Seidikenova et al., 2020). However, the authors also critique the "ambiguity of citizenship notions during the Soviet period, which was marked not only by deportations, evacuations, voluntary and forced migrations, but also by rhetoric portraying of Kazakhstan as a 'promised land,' benefiting from Soviet friendship" (Seidikenova et al., 2020). It is noteworthy that such a strategic approach can be derived from Kazakhstan's unique experience. It is no coincidence that the element of "flexibility" is emphasized: "Koreans skillfully navigate the process of Kazakhization, integrating into public life on one hand, while preserving their original culture on the other. By occupying important socio-political positions, representatives of the diaspora fully validate the normative principles set forth in legal documents regarding a democratic society with a high degree of interethnic harmony and open access to institutions of power and governance" (Markova, 2021).

Academic research has also highlighted strategies adopted by non-titular ethnic groups for cultural preservation within Kazakhstani society. Based on ethnographic materials, researchers have identified strategies developed by activists of Tatar cultural associations "to manage the status quo and preserve cultural proximity." While the popularization of Kazakh heritage was used to reinforce the legitimacy of the titular nationality (i.e., Kazakh identity) and assert its hegemony within the Republic of Kazakhstan, other nationalities were also encouraged to develop their own cultures and participate in nationwide celebrations of unity and interethnic harmony during official state festivities (Davenel, 2012). For example, research into Tatar cultural events, which featured traditional costumes, dances, and songs revealed that Tatar folklore is celebrated by Tatars in Kazakhstan as a way to express cultural distinctiveness. As a result, Davenel (2012) noted that "Tatar folklore is defined as a strong ethnic marker." According to Davenel, one of the key strategies of the Tatar community involved the role of ethnic associations and the authority of specific individuals. The Tatars created a "non-political organization whose sole objective is the preservation and promotion of their national language and traditions. ... By occupying public

spaces during state events and showcasing Tatar culture in schools and social institutions, the president of the Tatar association asserts their visibility and therefore their authority in the city” (Davenel, 2012). In the absence of strong support from the governments of Tatarstan and Kazakhstan, the vitality and operations of Tatar associations largely depend on the dedication and leadership of individual activists. The success of the association is also closely tied to its visibility in the local context (Davenel, 2012).

Another study (Oh, 2012) explores the discourse surrounding the preservation of culture and identity in two diasporas – the Korean and Ahiska-Turkish communities – and their efforts to revive cultural life following Kazakhstan’s independence in 1991. Drawing on fieldwork findings, the article examines the survival and manifestation of diasporic nationalism in the increasingly nationalizing contexts of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As non-titular ethnic minorities have become “marginalized” due to the processes of nationalization and indigenization in both countries, Koreans have faced “serious challenges in achieving a sense of national identity due to their Sovietization” (Oh, 2012). Soviet Koreans established numerous language education institutions throughout the republic. In the early 1990s, there was a notable boom in Korean language learning among Soviet Koreans, with numerous Korean language courses organized by Korean cultural centres and Korean missionary churches. Many of these language centres were created with the assistance of the South Korean government, which also provided Korean books, dictionaries, computers, and other technical support (Oh, 2012). A major solution for cultural preservation among the Korean diaspora has been “the establishment of various Korean cultural centres and associations in Kazakhstan. In major cities such as Almaty, Kyzylorda, and Shymkent – home to significant Korean populations – Korean cultural centres were established. All of these associations emphasized the revival of the Korean language, customs, and traditions as their primary goals and missions” (Oh, 2012).

Another strategy for preserving the cultural values of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan is related to mobility between Central Asia and Russia, and between Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea. The Korean population in Kazakhstan has shown relatively low net migration toward South Korea.

Recent studies also highlight the impact of narrative framing, both in local community initiatives and through engagement with South Korea. Gorbunova (2020) demonstrates that the South Korean media’s evolving portrayal of the diaspora has contributed positively to the self-image of *koryo saram*, valorizing their resilience and their role as cultural and economic intermediaries between Kazakhstan and Korea. This shift in external narrative has reinforced the community’s strategies for maintaining their heritage while embracing innovation in response to globalization and modernity.

Furthermore, in recent years, increased attention has been paid to the interactions between ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. For example, the sociocultural status of Koreans in Kazakhstan and their relations with the Turkish community have been examined (Lee, 2020). Lee (2020) noted that “the Korean people of Kazakhstan make significant efforts to preserve their ethnic origins while also quickly adapting to the social changes of modern life.” Overall, researchers have consistently noted the political loyalty of Koreans in Kazakhstan. Recent studies have highlighted key themes such as “the Korean diaspora as a subject of Ka-

zakhstan's national policy" and "the Association of Koreans in Kazakhstan as an initiator of public and humanitarian programs in the country." Markova characterizes Kazakhstani Koreans as "an organic part of Kazakhstan's democratic society" (Markova, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology of this research involved analyzing materials from official sources of the Korean diaspora (data from ethnic media resources, as well as protocols and official speeches), archival sources, and interview data from second and third-generation ethnic Koreans. Written sources were collected from the archive of the Union of Legal Entities "Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan," as well as from official historical materials related to the Korean community organization. Interviews were drawn from the ongoing research project "Memory," initiated by the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan in collaboration with the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Segments of interview transcripts were selected based on key terms such as "traditions," "culture," and "customs."

This study focused on the ethnic Korean population (*koryo saram*) residing in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with purposive sampling employed to ensure the collection of rich, contextually relevant data aligning with the research goals [2]. The sample consisted of 16 participants – 11 women and 5 men – spanning an age range from 38 to 85 years. The cohort encompassed three generational groups: (1) first-generation deportees and settlers (80 years old and above), (2) second-generation individuals born and raised in the Soviet era (aged 80 to 45 years old). All participants were long-term residents of Almaty, the historical and contemporary centre of the Korean diaspora's cultural, educational, and social activity in Kazakhstan. Inclusion criteria mandated self-identification as ethnically Korean, residence in Almaty for at least five years, and willingness to share personal and familial experiences regarding cultural traditions, adaptation strategies, and identity. Participants were recruited using a combination of referrals from Korean cultural associations, snowball sampling among community members, and direct contact during cultural events. This strategy aimed to capture a diversity of perspectives, with attention to gender balance, age, and varying degrees of cultural engagement.

A total of 16 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted between February and April 2025. Interview sessions ranged from 60 to 100 minutes and were held primarily at participants' homes or community cultural centres to foster a comfortable atmosphere, promote rapport, and facilitate open dialogue – a key requirement in qualitative interviewing. This approach aligns closely with the localist perspective, which treats interviews as dynamic social encounters co-constructed by researcher and participant. The interview guide included open-ended questions around themes of cultural value preservation, adaptation mechanisms, generational perceptions, and social integration, with scope for participant-led elaborations. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The study strictly adhered to principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality. Prior to participation, respondents received written and oral information about research objectives and assurances of anonymity; opportunities for withdrawal were communicated at all stages.

Determining sample size in qualitative research is guided by the concept of saturation – the point at which further data collection no longer yields new themes or insights. Data collection continued until informational redundancy was observed – the last five interviews produced no substantially new categories or responses – fulfilling this criterion. The choice of sample size and composition is aligned with recommendations in current qualitative methodology literature, which emphasizes depth over breadth and the purposive inclusion of diverse yet information-rich informants. Given the specific historical and sociocultural focus of this study, the sample size was deemed adequate for achieving nuanced understanding and for facilitating case-oriented, interpretive analysis.

Based on interviews with members of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, researchers have explored family histories, language preferences, and definitions of “home” among ethnic Koreans “within the post-Soviet context and a homogenizing state.” These findings offer valuable insights into strategies for preserving the history and culture of the diaspora through the “reclaiming and reinterpretation of diasporic memory.” Cultural values are passed down from generation to generation among Kazakhstani Koreans. Family stories are “retold, rewritten, and reinterpreted” in light of “the migration experiences and paths of different generations” under changing historical circumstances. As a result, intergenerational relationships to language and identity are shaped (Ahn, 2019). Thus, the issues of preserving ethnic culture as part of ethnic identification have been approached from various scholarly perspectives. The authors of this study attempt to explore these issues through discourse analysis of official documents from the public organization representing ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan, as well as interviews with Kazakhstani Koreans from different generations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The cultural values of Koreans in Kazakhstan such as language, traditions, customs, and holidays, have always remained at the centre of the Korean community’s focus in Kazakhstan. The mentality of Koreans changed in response to the challenges of one and a half centuries of living outside their historical homeland, but their basic values remained more or less stable (Sim, 2006). The findings of this study highlight a non-linear process of identity negotiation and acculturation, shaped by local integration, generational change, and transnational engagement with South Korea. The interviews reveal that second – and third-generation Koreans in Kazakhstan have developed contextual ethnic identities, with situational language use. Ethnicity in this context is neither rigidly preserved nor dissolved but negotiated fluidly through language, memory, and local social integration. Furthermore, while most *koryo saram* are historically descended from the northern regions of the Korean peninsula, South Korea has emerged as a symbolic cultural homeland, especially following Kazakhstan’s independence. Additionally, at the institutional level, the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan and its initiatives serve as key structures for maintaining ethnic identity while supporting integration into Kazakhstani civic life. The *koryo saram* experience exemplifies selective integration: adoption of Kazakhstani civic norms and multilingual adaptability coexists with the preservation of core cultural elements such as foodways, rituals, and affective memory. This supports multidimensional models of acculturation in which integration and cultural persistence are not mutually exclusive but are instead mutually reinforcing.

PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL VALUES

A central question confronting researchers concerns the extent to which Koreans in Kazakhstan have preserved their ethnic identity, how they construct and perceive that identity, and the ways in which family values and cultural traditions are sustained and transmitted across generations. From interviews with second – and third-generation Koreans, it becomes clear how life in multicultural Kazakhstan has influenced the self-identification of the study participants. For instance, one of the interviewees, TKN (female, 75 years old) shared her family's life during the Soviet period:

We lived like one big family with the Kazakhs, honestly, there were no fences, no locks... Our neighbours were Aliya and Gal-ya, born in 1951, a year younger than me, and we lived happily together! There were five Korean households, the rest were Kazakhs, and one was Russian. Naturally, we spoke Kazakh with them! We didn't know Russian, only Korean or Kazakh. So, I communicate well with Kazakhs, and now I speak Kazakh with them, with Russians – Russian, with my grandmothers – Korean. I know these languages well.

This excerpt highlights the absence of fences and locks, symbols of social or ethnic isolation. It suggests an open, integrative community where representatives of different ethnic groups – Koreans, Kazakhs, and Russians – lived in close proximity, shared daily practices, and languages. Such coexistence can be described as practical multiculturalism, typical of rural and small urban communities in the Soviet Union, especially in Central Asia. Ethnicities were distinguishable but not isolated; cultural boundaries were permeable and flexible. The excerpt also indicates a dynamic, situational identity: the informant switches between three languages depending on the context – Kazakh with Kazakhs, Russian with Russians, and Korean with the elderly. This reflects contextual ethnic identity, built not on opposition but on flexible navigation between cultures. This identity model is characteristic of the post-deportation generation of Koreans in Kazakhstan, who were forced to adapt to a new environment but still found ways to preserve elements of Korean culture – primarily language, culinary traditions, family customs, and rituals.

The story of another participant, KGA (female, late 60s – early 70s), provides testimony to the personal and collective motivation to preserve and revive the Korean language and cultural memory, as well as the active civic initiative at the local level. Here's how she described it:

We heard a lot of Korean [language], my grandmother spoke it, but we didn't know the language, it was within us. When I became an adult and started learning Korean, I was so happy, I read [words and realized] – oh, I know this word, and I know that one, I've heard it! So, it wasn't too difficult to learn Korean. ... When my granddaughter turned 6, I heard that the education centre in Almaty teaches children Korean, so I took her there. I really wanted my granddaughter to know the Korean language. When I brought her to the lessons, I wondered, where should I go [while waiting for the granddaughter to finish her classes]? So I sat in on the lessons... and I really liked it, such interesting les-

sons! At that time, a volunteer from Korea, Sonya-seonsaengnim, was conducting the classes, and she was a kindergarten teacher from Seoul with extensive experience. It was very interesting, so engaging! I liked it more than my granddaughter did. I asked her, could you come to us [referring to a town in the Almaty region], I can only take my granddaughter to lessons, but there are many Koreans in Kapchagay. I said I would try to organize everything. She [Sonya-seonsaengnim] contacted the director [of the education centre], and they sent us two teachers. So, in the summer, when they were free, we organized [a group of students] and started with five people, and now we have a school. This year, we have 40 people, but two years ago (before the pandemic), we had 120 students. Can you imagine, for such a small town, it's a lot! We have both adults and children, as well as Kazakhs and Russians.

From this passage, it can be concluded that language can be preserved as a memory, an emotional trace, or a sound experience, even if it is not fully transmitted functionally. In this case, the Korean language serves as a cultural code, not so much instrumental as identificational. As the informant grows older, a desire arises to reclaim this lost code, and the process of language learning becomes an act of internal recognition of ethnicity and cultural heritage. Additionally, KGA's individual interest transforms into a collective initiative. The starting point is her concern for passing the language on to her granddaughter, but gradually it transforms into a social project that involves dozens of people. This is an example of local activism within an ethnic minority, where Koreans in Kazakhstan take on the role of agents of cultural preservation. From this example, we can also conclude that the revival of language and culture does not occur in isolation but with support from South Korea. This underscores the importance of a transnational Korean space, where historical diasporas and the metropolis collaborate in the cultural and educational sphere. Such support not only contributes to the preservation of language but also strengthens the sense of belonging to a global Korean identity. Moreover, the fact that the Korean language program in Kapchagay is open not only to ethnic Koreans but also to representatives of other ethnic groups signifies a hybrid model of cultural heritage, where Korean culture becomes a shared resource in a multicultural environment. Ultimately, such practices promote intercultural dialogue and social cohesion, going beyond ethnic exclusivity.

At the same time, our participants identified themselves as ethnic Koreans from Kazakhstan. For example, PAS (female, 76 years old) expressed this in the following way:

Now my children live far away [outside of Kazakhstan], but they all consider themselves Kazakhstani. I go there and try to speak to them in Russian. When my grandson turned one, I went to visit him for his first birthday. After that, I've been spending six months there every year. The children don't know much about Korean culture. But there, in America, they are more familiar with Kazakhstani culture. We go to Chinatown for the Eastern New Year. There, Koreans – it's all young people in all the centres [probably refers to cultural centres]! Whereas here, only elderly people come, they sing songs, dance, and I say: "Well, it's exactly like in Kazakhstan!"

Although PAS's children lived abroad (in this case, in the USA), they retained a national identity connected to Kazakhstan rather than an ethnic Korean one. This highlights that for many ethnic Koreans, especially in the second and third generations, "Kazakhstani-ness" becomes a more significant identity than their ethnic origin. This may be related to the fact that their socialization occurred within Kazakhstan's multiethnic context, where ethnic differences are often integrated into the civic community. As PAS noted, her children were not well-versed in Korean culture, which points to a gap in cultural transmission, especially abroad. This is typical for third-generation diasporas, particularly when the language and cultural practices were not institutionalized in the family or educational environment. This situation confirms the observation that in the context of migration, ethnic cultures often give way to national (in this case, Kazakhstani) or global (American) cultures. For migrants from Kazakhstan, especially members of minority groups, a "Kazakhstani" identity turns out to be more recognizable and useful in the international environment than a Korean one. It creates a sense of commonality, especially when Korean culture is no longer fully embraced by the descendants.

INFLUENCE OF SOUTH KOREAN CULTURE

As it was illustrated in the cases above, the influence of South Korean culture on the Kazakhstani Korean community has become increasingly pronounced over the past decade. Considering the historical origins of ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan – primarily from the northern regions of the Korean peninsula – it is plausible to hypothesize that elements of North Korean cultural and linguistic content have influenced the development of their community identity. "Despite this geographical origin (although the Korean peninsula was not yet divided at that time), most Kazakhstani Koreans 'chose' South Korea as their kin state. In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, South Korea has almost exclusive representation among the local Korean community" (Oka, 2006).

Over time, South Korean culture – disseminated through diplomatic initiatives and economic partnerships – began to permeate the cultural landscape of Kazakhstani Koreans, who actively engaged with and adopted various elements of Korean cultural expression. This process has been underpinned by South Korea's longstanding commitment to cultural preservation and heritage promotion. The first comprehensive document on the preservation of historical and cultural heritage in the Republic of Korea was the *Agreement on the Preservation of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Korea* (1982), which emphasized the necessity of preserving the cultural heritage within South Korea. The agreement included the concept of "cultural values" as: "state, national, and world heritage with historical, artistic, scientific-technical, and natural value, created by nature and humanity" (Lazareva, 2018). As a result, the early years of Kazakhstan's independence marked a period of cultural revival for ethnic Koreans, during which efforts to reclaim and revalorize ethnic traditions gained renewed momentum.

To promote the global recognition of Korean culture, the Korea Foundation supports international performances by designated bearers of South Korea's intangible cultural heritage (Lazareva, 2018). South Korea not only stimulates the preservation of cultural values but also supports ethnic Koreans in building businesses, through both South Korean entrepreneurs and government organizations. Oh (2012) notes that "the driving force behind the current active ac-

tivities of the Korean diaspora is the abundance of well-educated intellectuals and constant material support from the homeland, i.e., South Korea.” All of these developments unfolded within the framework of perceiving Kazakhstan as a homeland by the ethnic Korean community. However, this perception was marked by a degree of ambivalence, shaped by the complexities of Kazakhstan’s geopolitical landscape. Ahn’s (2019) study of Kazakhstani Koreans across different generations revealed that successive political regime changes – ranging from Tsarist Russia to the Soviet Union and finally to independent Kazakhstan – significantly influenced notions of belonging and homeland among members of the community. “Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, independent Kazakhstan” – as well as the emergence of South Korea in the global economy and the distancing from North Korea, led to a “view of South Korea as the guardian of the ‘Korean’ language, culture, and history” (Ahn, 2019).

Official sources from the Korean diaspora (data from ethnic media resources, as well as protocols and official speeches) demonstrated the presence of the South Korean diplomatic mission, alongside the role of South Korean culture in various areas of societal life.

Our president stated that ethnic cultural organizations should become “living bridges” for interaction with historical homelands. Over the past 25 years, we have actively built relationships with the Republic of Korea. Today, we have achieved recognition. This is evidenced by the large number of delegations from the Republic of Korea. All delegations talk about the importance of Kazakhstani Koreans surviving under difficult conditions, and how today, Kazakhstani Koreans are recognized and respected. Today, it is necessary to move from “empty talks” to real actions. Social, cultural, and business projects should be launched in all regions of Kazakhstan (Kim, 2015).

At present, a significant challenge persists in the coordination and communication among various Korean institutions, both within Kazakhstan and internationally, including with counterparts in South Korea. This lack of coherence extends across public organizations and ultimately affects interactions at the level of everyday community members. Despite the huge amount of information about Koreans and Korea available on the internet, it is not systematized or adapted for users, and therefore works ineffectively. A simple example: there is no clear description of the traditions and customs of *koryo saram*, and the data from all sources differ. Many cannot find the simplest things, such as how to celebrate a child’s first birthday, *hangabi* (anniversary) (Kim K.S., 2015), as well as other customs, and even how to properly conduct funerals (from an interview with President of AKK – Shin Y., 2022).

While nowadays ethnic Koreans can easily access information regarding traditional Korean customs, considerable variation and disagreement persist among local *koryo saram* communities, particularly along regional lines based on their place of origin. These divergences reflect the heterogeneous historical and cultural trajectories of ethnic Korean groups, shaped by the specific socio-cultural environments of the areas in which they settled. In many cases, traditional Korean practices have been hybridized with local customs, complicating efforts to distinguish between what might be considered “authentic” Korean traditions

and what has emerged through cultural syncretism. A notable example involves the practice of shaving the heads of babies. Some *koryo saram* assert that this is a traditional Korean custom intended to promote healthy hair growth, while others contend that the practice is not originally Korean but rather borrowing from Central Asian cultural norms. This indicates the need for interaction between the Korean ethnic community and the historical homeland, its cultural postulates, and daily life. The main reason for this need is likely to be the preservation of the “rules and postulates” of authentic Korean traditions, especially in the life cycle.

In this context, South Korea is increasingly conceptualized not as a historical, but as a symbolic “homeland” – serving as a source of cultural, linguistic, and identity-based legitimacy for the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan. Here we see tension between cultural globalization and local authenticity, where South Korean culture is perceived as a standard, but its adaptation requires mediators, institutions and a sustainable diaspora infrastructure among *koryo saram*. At the same time, Kazakhstani Koreans feel the need not just to consume culture, but to preserve and transmit it in a reasonable manner, while also reproducing and adapting it to the realities of life in Kazakhstan. The key challenge is to create a coherent, accessible, legitimate system of ethnocultural education and communication capable of uniting generations, regions and the diaspora with the “historical homeland.” This requires not only external assistance but also internal institutional development of the ethnocultural associations and local initiatives themselves.

ASSOCIATION OF KOREANS OF KAZAKHSTAN AS A CIVIC AND CULTURAL BRIDGE

One of the key strategies employed by Kazakhstani Koreans is the preservation of Korean cultural heritage within the broader context of Kazakhstani society, wherein shared civic and ethical values are actively cultivated. A vital approach to preserving Korean cultural identity in Kazakhstan is the proactive engagement of the diaspora within Kazakhstan’s civic and institutional structures. Among the most significant of these are the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK) and the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan (AKK). These entities not only provide platforms for cultural continuity but also serve as mechanisms for integration into Kazakhstan’s sociopolitical landscape and for fostering transnational ties with South Korea.

In general, the APK plays a key role in promoting interethnic harmony, civic unity, and loyalty to the state. As emphasized by the APK, ethnocultural associations are expected to contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to national integration efforts. These contributions include participation in initiatives that build social cohesion and reinforce Kazakhstan’s shared civic values.

At an online meeting with members of the Board of the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan (AKK), Mr. Marat Azilkhanov – Deputy Chairman of the APK and Head of the Secretariat of the Assembly under the Administration of the President – emphasized that ethnocultural associations should not only focus on preserving their own history, culture, and traditions but must also engage in integration-oriented projects aligned with the national agenda. He underscored the need for a heightened level of civic engagement under current conditions, advocating for the protection of shared values such as mutual respect, support

for the Head of State, and social tolerance (Minutes, 2022). Furthermore, Mr. Azilkhanov cited the example of the Association of Entrepreneurs, emphasizing that its activities should generate economic benefits for society at large. He highlighted the importance of involving members of the Korean community – including those from their historical homeland – in the Association’s initiatives. This involvement, he noted, extends beyond financial investments to encompass broader domains of collaboration. He also stressed the necessity of strategic planning to ensure the effective and comprehensive utilization of available resources (Minutes, 2022).

On the other hand, the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan serves as the central institutional body representing the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan. It promotes the Korean language, traditions, and intangible heritage through educational and cultural initiatives, while also participating in national policy platforms such as the APK. The AKK fosters ties with South Korea via partnerships with overseas organizations, enabling access to resources and expertise. All initiatives and directives presented to the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan – whether during parliamentary sessions or government meetings – have been thoroughly examined and deliberated by the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan. These discussions have taken place across regional branches, within the Board of Trustees, and during meetings of the Presidium, reflecting the Association’s commitment to active engagement in national policy frameworks. The Head of the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan – Mr. Ogay S. – affirmed that the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan was prepared to actively participate in all relevant processes and to contribute to the country’s advancement, despite existing challenges. The Association, he emphasized, expresses its full readiness to support initiatives aimed at national development. Furthermore, Mr. Ogay stated that the purpose of his address was not merely to voice an opinion but to offer concrete proposals from the Association on how to enhance the effectiveness of both the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan and ethnocultural associations more broadly. In response to recent public discussions questioning the continued relevance of the Assembly, he clarified that the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan maintains a clear and unequivocal stance: the Assembly remains essential and continues to play a vital role in the state’s socio-political framework (Minutes, 2022).

Furthermore, Mr. Ogay noted the importance of using the resources and potential of ethnocultural associations. He expressed the view that today the potential of ethnocultural associations is underused.

Each ethnic group is a kind of bridge between Kazakhstan and their historical homelands. This potential needs to be strengthened today, and the work of ethnocultural associations should be directed not only at the development of culture and traditions, but also at attracting potential programs and implementing them inside Kazakhstan. Today, ethnocultural associations as ‘living bridges’ can bring maximum benefit from abroad for the development of our country, becoming a kind of ‘social ambassadors of their historical territories’. If this direction is strengthened, then each ethnocultural association can bring enough benefit to Kazakhstan (Minutes, 2021).

Thus, the official data and activities of the public organization representing Koreans of Kazakhstan illustrate a set of strategic approaches to cultural preservation. These include a demonstrated commitment to the state policy of Kazakhstan, the pursuit of unity and solidarity with all ethnic groups residing in the country, and the intention to contribute meaningfully to the development of Kazakhstan as their adopted homeland – a country that, nearly ninety years ago, welcomed ethnic Koreans through the hospitality of its people. Among the initiatives of the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan, a particularly noteworthy project is the establishment of the “AKK Networking” platform. At the III Republican Forum in 2021, Mr. Ogay reported that the platform had been in development for three years and had reached 178 registered members. He emphasized that the primary objective of AKK Networking is to consolidate professional leaders from the third generation of Koreans in Kazakhstan (Minutes, 2021). This strategy not only supports the preservation and transmission of cultural traditions but also fosters closer communication and intergenerational engagement among younger members of the community. It is noteworthy that all events organized by the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan were held with the participation of representatives from the diplomatic missions of the Republic of Korea. Furthermore, these events received support from the Overseas Koreans Foundation, which maintained a representative office in Almaty.

Overall, the preservation of Korean cultural traditions in Kazakhstan is characterized by a comprehensive, institutionalized, and integrated approach. At the core of these efforts is the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan, which functions as a key actor in maintaining Korean heritage while aligning with Kazakhstan’s national policy of civic unity and multicultural inclusion. The AKK engages in cultural preservation, while simultaneously playing an active civic role by participating in the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, supporting state-led integration agendas, and contributing to national development goals.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Kazakhstani Koreans is an example of successful integration without assimilation in a multicultural society. Ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan remain a recognizable cultural group, actively participating in the social, economic and civil life of the country. Their identity is not static – it is restored, activated and transformed through language, family memory, life cycle rituals and various forms of cultural exchange. Of particular importance in this process are linguistic capital, intergenerational transmission of traditions, as well as networks within Kazakhstan and with South Korea. Korean culture, partially lost at the level of everyday practices, is preserved as a symbolic and emotional heritage, actualized in the context of transnational dialogue. As such, in multinational and polycultural contexts such as Kazakhstan, ethnic Koreans have demonstrated acculturation through selective integration – adopting aspects of the broader Kazakhstani and Russian social environment while simultaneously maintaining distinct linguistic, familial, and cultural traditions. This mirrors the multidimensional models of acculturation, which recognize integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization as simultaneous possibilities, rather than mutually exclusive outcomes. Moreover, younger Koreans may display more adaptive integration – balancing inherited values with pragmatic adaptation to the prevailing cultural milieu. This underscores Koreans as a paradigmatic case

of acculturation, where adaptation and cultural persistence are co-constitutive rather than oppositional processes.

Furthermore, as demonstrated through the activities of the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan and supported by interviews with participants, the Korean community acts as an integral part of the Kazakhstan's multiethnic society – “part of a single whole,” contributing to the cultural diversity of the country. As such, the Korean experience reflects not a static outcome but a dynamic interplay of strategies, consistent with the pluralistic and context-dependent nature of acculturation. The Koreans in Kazakhstan do indeed stand as a compelling illustration of acculturation: their community embodies the strategies by which diaspora groups adapt, integrate, and persist within new social and cultural terrains, demonstrating that acculturation is a complex process that encompasses, rather than erases, diversity within and between generations.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study involving human participants has completed and fulfilled the ethical guidelines requirements. The participants provided written informed consent before taking part in the study and were informed about its objectives.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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