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## **CULTURAL POLITICS OF POST-SOVIET KOREANS IN KAZAKHSTAN: DUTIES TO THE STATE LANGUAGE, POWER, AND MEMORIES**

This study reveals the cultural politics of the Post – Soviet Koreans in adaptation difficulty to the new state language – Kazakh. The Soviet Koreans were quickly assimilated into the Soviet language. Driving forces to assimilation were the strong external pressure with repression and violence under the Stalin regime, a breakthrough for survival and settlement, and at the same time voluntary willingness. However, since independence of Kazakhstan, the Koreans have not shown willingness to learn new state language. There was a boundary between the self-language and other language, which was reinforced and reproduced by the experiences and memories of the Soviet society. Moreover, the opening of economic activity to survive in a free market economy system has led to the passive attitude to the duties of state language, despite social pressure and discrimination in public sphere due to the language limit.

**Key words:** Cultural politics, state language of Kazakhstan, Post-Soviet Koreans, self-language versus other language

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### **Қазақстандағы пост-советтік кәрістердің мәдениет саясаты: мемлекеттік тілге, билікке және өткенді еске алуға арналған міндеттер**

Бұл зерттеу посткеңестік корейліктердің жаңа мемлекеттік тілге бейімделу қиындықтарында – қазақ тіліндегі мәдени саясатты көрсетеді. Кеңестік кәрістер тез кеңестік тілді меңгерді. Ассимиляцияға қозғаушы күштер сталиндік режимдегі қуғын-сүргін мен зорлық-зомбылық, тірі қалу және реттеу үшін серпіліс және сонымен қатар ерікті дайындық секілді күшті сыртқы қысым болды. Алайда, тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейін, кәрістер жаңа мемлекеттік тілді үйренуге дайын болмады. Бұл кеңестік қоғамның тәжірибесі мен естеліктері арқылы нығайтылып, көбейтілген тіл мен басқа тілдің шекарасы. Бұдан басқа, еркін нарықтық экономикадағы кәсіпкерлік қызметті ашу мемлекеттік саладағы қоғамдық қысым мен кемсітушілікке қарамастан, мемлекеттік тілдің міндеттеріне қатысты пассивті қарым-қатынасқа әкелді.

**Түйін сөздер:** мәдени саясат, Қазақстанның мемлекеттік тілі, посткеңестік корейлер, өзіндік тілдің басқа тілге қарсылығы.

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### **Культурная политика постсоветских корейцев в Казахстане: обязанности государственного языка, власти и памяти**

Это исследование посвящено культурной политике постсоветских корейцев в период адаптации к новому государственному языку – казахскому. Советские корейцы быстро ассимилировались на советский язык. Движущими силами к ассимиляции были сильное внешнее давление с репрессиями и насилием при сталинском режиме, прорыв для выживания и урегулирования, и в то же время добровольная готовность. Однако после независимости

Казахстана корейцы не проявили готовности изучать новый государственный язык. Это была граница между самоязыком и другим языком, который был усилен и воспроизведен опытом и воспоминаниями советского общества.

Кроме того, открытие предпринимательской деятельности в свободной рыночной экономике привело к пассивному отношению к обязанностям государственного языка, несмотря на социальное давление и дискриминацию в общественной сфере из-за границы языка.

**Ключевые слова:** культурная политика, государственный язык Казахстана, постсоветские корейцы, самостоятельно язык против другого языка.

### **Introduction: Researches on Post-Soviet Koreans**

Since the independence of the former Soviet republics, research on Koreans in Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet independent countries has been illuminated and accumulated in various fields. Much of the research has been attempted by interested Korean scholars and overseas Korean scholars. However, in-depth study on resettlement problems and conflicts in the new independent states has not been conducted enough. One of the reasons is that Korean researchers have approached to the Post-Soviet Koreans from a brotherhood perspective and have their limits on local languages. The dismantling of the former Soviet Union left many conflicts in the republics of multicultural and multiethnic societies. In this context, studies on the diversity and tensions in Korean ethnic group as one of minorities, their adaptation problems, inter-ethnic relations, and socio-political status after independence should be conducted.

### **Kazakh-led Nation State Construction and Language Policy**

The collapse of the Cold War system and the dissolution of the former Soviet Union meant the freedom and liberation of the indigenous peoples who had been ruled in their territories by the migrants. However, immigrants as non-indigenous people who have already settled in this region have recognized the situation as crisis and anxiety due to the sudden overthrow of social subject forces. Each of the independent republics showed a strong move to restore the repressed ethnic identity that has long been hurt by the reign of the immigrants. Particularly, the ethnic language was the first object to be rehabilitated, and the language of each indigenous people was designated as the state language. The strength and scope of the application of the new state language differed slightly from each independent republic.

The revitalization policy of the Kazakh identity in language was carried out right after the declara-

tion of independence on December 16, 1991. On January 28, 1993, the announcement that «Kazakh language is the only language of the independent Republic of Kazakhstan» and «Russian as a language of communication among the peoples» gave a negative impact to the non-Kazakh speakers. In 1995, the Constitution stipulated that «Kazakh language is recognized as the state language and Russian as an official language» [12], in order to mitigate the resistance and division of the society. However, the more concrete legal apparatus for the state language has been strengthened, and since 2001, Russian language has reduced its weight by issuing regulations that maintain Russian functions only in the cultural sector.

According to *Decree of the President of Kazakhstan on the state program operation and development of languages for 2001 ~ 2010 years*, All work in governmental organizations such as legislative, judicial, and administrative organs should be done with state language [4, 309]. This was a specific enforcement order that obliged the public to use the state language, such as government offices, military and educational institutions. Unlike Uzbekistan, which has adopted the hard-landing strategy in application of new republic language, Kazakh language revival policy, which is part of the construction of a nation-state led by the indigenous people of Kazakhstan, has chosen to gradually establish itself in order to minimize the dissatisfaction, confusion and division. However, the effect of the increasingly intensive national language strategy is that all the work of the public institutions now is mainly carried out in Kazakh. In the case of the Koreans in Kazakhstan, they speak Kazakh language rarely in real life even after 25 years since the designation of the state language. Their social activities and economic activities are inclined to specific areas because of limitation of language.

### **Social Marginalization and Weakening of the Social Status of Koreans**

The reputation on Koreans by other ethnic groups in local society has been «Koreans are dili-

gent and smart.» This is because they had been recognized for their role and position in Soviet society. The former Soviet Union was proud to be regarded as a model showing the highest status and success among the Korean Diaspora [5, 81]. In other words, the Korean people occupied various official positions of the Soviet mainstream society such as government officials and politicians, leaders of education and science academy, agricultural economy leaders, famous sports people and artists.

*The Science, Technology and Culture of Kazakhstani Koreans*, published in 2002 by the Korean Association of Science and Technology of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KAHAK), showed statistics on successful Koreans in each social area of Kazakhstan. Their social status has been falling increasingly since independence. Among them, 613 people were listed as Korean leaders in professional fields. Of these, 96 were born in the 1950s, 46 in the 1960s, and 10 in the 1970s [2, 225]. In this statistic, the number of leaders of the next generation Korean who can influence society is sharply decreasing, and it is not compared with that of the past Soviet society.

Unlike the past, in a suddenly changed social environment and system, the individual life of quality depends not on the state but on the result of each individual economic activity and effort. From the Soviet state-owned enterprises to privatization and the transition to a market economy, various forms of occupation were created by subdividing the economic activity area. In other words, service industries such as wholesale and retail business, food business, construction business, trade business, real estate and leasing business expanded exponentially [1, 92] and increased opportunities for participation in economic activities. What Koreans are rushed into the business area instead of the national institutions is because this area is relatively inclusive and open, so that linguistic diversity is accepted, and in which they feel more free to speak Russian than other field.

For a minority who dreams of becoming an entrepreneur or a powerhouse rather than a civil servant, choice and competitiveness in economic activity depends on whether they are included in the mainstream of society and in what language they use. As a minority, it is difficult to enter public field and the probability of promotion for them is slim, and it is hard to imagine that it will be employed in high-ranking public office. Moreover, the failure to speak the state language does not even satisfy the basic conditions for employment in the public sector of government.

However, those who speak only Russian is not welcomed in a new social environment, Koreans

still regard Soviet language as ‘his own language.’ Despite the consideration of the soft landing policy for the language by the government and even the stigmatization of «who cannot speak the state language,» their new language adaptation has not been effective though they seemed to have enough time to learn it since the beginning of independent country. This is, because there has been an exit for survival in the sphere of economic activity, leading to dilute the desperation of new language learning, and at the same time supporting them to maintain the dichotomous boundary and stereotyped image of self-language and other language.

### **Contradictory Attitude on State Language, and Stereotypes of ‘Self-language’ and ‘Other language’**

The attitude of accepting and practicing Kazakh language was not consistent. They stated without hesitation that Kazakh is the state language, and that it is a natural duty to follow under the governmental language policy. However, they have actually turned away from learning the Kazakh language. There was a high dichotomous boundary distinguished by «own language (Russian) and other language (Kazakh)’. To the Korean Diaspora, Russian language implies their glory and pride which have built self-esteem and sense of presence, though they are assets of the past. Koreans had to be thoroughly assimilated and submissive to the Soviet social system, having suffered from extreme wounds and suffering from oppression and deprivation of survival ground after forced migration. In addition, the Korean language, which was the mother tongue, was shrunk by the closing of the Korean ethnic school by the Soviet power right after forcible deportation, and they began to assimilate in the Soviet language in earnest. The Korean style name, which they used in Wondong (Far East), was named and renamed into Russian, and gradually their Russian style names were getting popular [8; 9; 10].

Through the Second World War, many labor heroes of Soviet Koreans were born, which were significantly higher in the number of heroes than that of other ethnic groups in terms of the population ratio, thereby gradually revealing the increase of ethnic prestige and status. Their performance of rice cultivation in the Soviet Colhoz was remarkable, and they became a social model of Soviet society to be imitated in that period. In the process of strong Sovietization and Russianization, their target of imitation was Russian and Russian language. Russian language allowed to get better education and suc-

cess and to become a competitive citizen entering the Soviet mainstream society. Koreans are proud to say that they still have Russian mentality with Russian language and spirit.

Soviet society was basically an equal society for all people, and Soviet power was focused on mass production of Homo sovieticus. However, racism and casteism, which had been considered as the objects to be eliminated though, were working implicitly. The mainstream and first class people of the Soviet were Russians, and indigenous peoples such as Kazakh and migrants were regarded as second-class. By the way, the Koreans were identified with Russian and had a sense of superiority over the Soviet system and society. This is why many people in the older generation are longing for the past and are now recognizing that they are no better than the past.

At present, Kazakh language is a mandatory language to learn, but it is perceived as an 'inferior' language. They have such a view that Kazakh is the language of the 'illiterate people' that was originally without letters, and they still regard as state language not competitive. The fixed image and boundaries of 'the civilized and the uncivilized' empowers to justify the superiority of self-language and to struggle to defend their own cultural asset.

### Conclusion

S. Hall's definition of culture is an arena of struggle where no victory is guaranteed and is a political act. His cultural studies are to examine how peripheral or subordinate subgroups protect and overtake their cultural space to the dominant group, and to constantly reveal the contexts of power relations existing in society [3].

The struggle of Koreans to defend their language in front of state language obligations has been

abolished. The Koreans showed self-contradiction of the obligation of dismissal by saying that they accept the state language but do not practice it. They advocate without complying with national policies. As a Kazakh citizen, they blamed themselves for not doing their duty, and they agreed that the government gave them enough time to learn Kazakh and allowed them to use Russian and Kazakh at the same time in official sphere. For much consideration from the top, they felt sorry for not following official law. This mismatch of words and actions of Koreans in the language obligations is due to their pride and firm belief in the excellence of self-language, and is due to the confrontation situation in which they cannot resist the state power. The Koreans also expressed their unwillingness to hurt the long-established benevolent relationship with indigenous Kazakh, who became a dominant nation. But the failure to reveal their voices before the power of the state is because the tyranny of the ruling power under Stalin regime created a brutal repression of the Soviet people, and the fearful experience of this has been imprinted on the Korean unconscious from generation to generation.

The study showed how Koreans have protected their language and cultural boundaries while revealing the authenticity of their linguistic identity, which led to dilute willingness to challenge new state language. Through this study, identity is a political process to exclusively essentialize self-culture along with the certain context, rather than being essential. And it implies that the boundary between the two cultures are further strengthened by producing stereotyped images of the self and others from collective memory, experience, and imagination in which allow them to grab the glory of the past. However, protecting self-culture as a minority was a tough struggle to undergo self-contradiction and internal conflict.

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