

“Identity through difference”: Liminal diasporism and generational change among the Koryo saram in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

The article is a case study of the Koryo saram, the ethnic Koreans living in the Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan, to reflect on how notions of diasporas, community and identity have changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It contends that the Koryo saram are best understood through the lenses of diasporic conditions rather than as bounded communities as such an approach allows for greater recognition of heterogeneity within such communities. While many Koryo saram continue to claim some form of Korean-ness, how they related to issues of homeland-orientation and boundary maintenance evidences internal variation and growing in-betweenness. The community’s hybridity (“hyphenization”) and liminality (“identity through difference”) stand out when examining generational differences and are especially evident among the local Korean youth.

Keywords: Koryo saram; Korean diaspora; post-Soviet; Central Asia; Kyrgyzstan; liminality; generational change.

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Introduction

Deported by Stalin in 1937 and later widely regarded as “the model Soviet people” owing to their assimilation and integration in Russified Soviet society, the Soviet/post-Soviet Koreans have shown – over generations and space, through forcible and voluntary migration – remarkable skills of adaptation and survival to new political and cultural environments. The collapse of the Soviet Union engendered yet another experience of dislocation and mobility, this time of borders between peoples, with the establishment of new republics where before there had been one single Soviet state and homeland.

This article examines the case of the Koryo saram,¹ and specifically the ethnic Koreans living in Bishkek, capital city of Kyrgyzstan, to reflect on how notions of diasporas and identity have changed since the Soviet collapse. While the local Koreans’ path to social integration and the process of assimilation have been well covered in the literature,² and increasingly about their distinctiveness vis-à-vis the Koreans of the peninsula,³ we still know very little about their condition of in-betweenness, or liminality and particularly the considerable heterogeneity within the community.

The article pursues two aims. First, it seeks to broaden the analysis of Korean diasporas beyond the more common focus on Koreans in the West,⁴ China,⁵ and Japan.⁶ At about 500,000 (table 1) the post-Soviet Koreans represent the world’s fifth-largest Korean diaspora. In the post-Soviet context, what makes the experience of the Koryo saram noteworthy is that, as Marco Buttino notes, they show how “a deported minority ingeniously adapted to the new environment and was capable of negotiating with the Soviet authorities a respectable position

in the new society.”⁷ The Koryo saram literature has primarily focused on Koreans living in Russia,⁸ Kazakhstan,⁹ and Uzbekistan,¹⁰ or the whole Central Asian region,¹¹ as these are the territories of greater Korean settlement (table 1; map 1).

Map 1 about here

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/73/Caucasus_central_asia_political_map_2000.jpg

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_Central_Asia#/media/File:Central_Asia-fr.svg

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Some attention has been paid to the aims and conduct of Korea’s foreign policy towards the Central Asian region, including the Koryo saram there, although the focus has primarily been on the outside-in (from Seoul towards the region) rather than on the local Korean communities themselves.¹²

Table 1. The Koryo saram in the post-Soviet space

	Uzbekistan (2017 est.)	Kazakhstan (1999 census)	Tajikistan (2010)	Kyrgyzstan (2019)	Turkmenistan (2012)	Russia (2010)
Overall	32,120,500	16,009,597	7,564,502	6,389,500	4,751,120	142,856,536

Majority group	Uzbeks 26,917,70 0 (83.7%)	Kazakhs 10,096,76 3 (63.1%)	Tajiks 6,373,83 4 (84.3%)	Kyrgyz 4,655,64 6 (72.8%)	Turkmens 4,066,969 (85.6)	Russians 111,06,8 96 (80.9%)
Koreans	176.900 (0.55%)	100,385 (0.6%)	600 (0)	17,105 (0.2%)	396 (0)	153,156 (0.11%)

Sources: O'zbekiston Respublikasi Davlat Statistika Qo'mitasi. *O'zbekiston Respublikasining Demografic Holati*. Tashkent, 2017; Агентство по статистике при Президенте Республики Таджикистан, *Перепись населения и жилищного фонда Республики Таджикистан 2010 года*, Душанбе, 2010. Всероссийская перепись населения 2010. *Национальный состав населения РФ 2010*; Комитет по статистике, Министерство национальной экономики, Республики Казахстан, *Перепись населения 2009*. Национальный статистический комитет Кыргызской Республики *Национальный состав населения*. 2019. Türkmenistanyň Statistika döwlet komiteti. *Türkmenistanyň milli hasplary*, Aşgabat, 2012.

In the pages that follow, I zoom in on one of the lesser known cases from the post-Soviet space, namely that of the Koreans of Kyrgyzstan,¹³ in order to broaden the empirical scope of the Koryo saram scholarship. The article thus seeks to move the discussion beyond the important, but by now well-covered issues in the literature, such as the initial migration of the Koreans to Russian territory,¹⁴ and their deportation¹⁵ in favour of a greater acknowledgement and appreciation of intra-group variation.¹⁶

Overall, in this article I take issue with recent trends in the scholarship that seek to establish whether the Koryo saram are “still” Korean or constitute a new, “separate”, Korean nation. Questioning whether the Koryo sarams are “still” Korean or whether their distinctiveness makes them substantially different from the Koreans of the peninsula has gained some traction in the literature,¹⁷ which makes this a relevant issue to engage with. At the same time such an approach (are the Koryo saram still Korean?) perpetuates assumptions of an idea of the Korean nation as primordialist, essentialist, and fundamentally static.

To explore these issues, I draw on insights from constructivist and more critical approaches to the study of identities and diasporas. The work of Rogers Brubaker¹⁸ is especially useful in that it questions assumptions of groupism and groupness still dominating the study of ethnicity and diasporas. Furthermore, the work of James Clifford¹⁹ and Floya Anthias²⁰ appears similarly relevant in shifting the focus away from the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland (and particularly the latter), and towards the condition of the diasporic communities themselves, allowing a diversity of voices to emerge.

Map 2 about here

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyrgyz_administrative.svg

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Methodologically I draw on various rounds of field research conducted in Kyrgyzstan over two decades, most recently in the capital city of Bishkek in 2018 and 2019 (map 2). I consulted archival sources including documents of the NKVD (Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) in the 1930s and 1940s, correspondence between Soviet authorities at the time, and Soviet census data (1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, and 1989) and publications of the local Korean cultural centre, such as the periodical *ильчи/일치* published primarily in Russian with a handful of pages in Korean. In addition, I conducted several semi-structured interviews, in Russian or English, with local Koryo saram. Although the sample was not representative and the findings are more exploratory than conclusive, they speak to the usefulness of single-country case studies.²¹ Although my concern here is to contribute to unpacking notions of groupness in diasporas common in the comparative study of politics and sociology, the article shares with comparative area studies,²² and the area studies sensibilities of much of the Koryo saram scholarship an effort to “understand politics in a local context.”²³

In telling the story of multiple mobilities, contingency and adaptation, the article advances two main arguments. First, it contends that rather than thinking of diasporas as bounded communities, we should think in terms of diasporic conditions and claims, allowing for greater fluidity, contingency, dynamism and heterogeneity in how we approach the study and understanding of identity and identity transformation among the Koryo saram. Such conditions of hybridity and liminality are evident among individual Koreans living in the city of Bishkek. While many Koryo saram continue to claim some form of Korean-ness, this is understood, perceived, negotiated – even contested – differently. Second, my findings show a growing erosion of two of the three dimensions Brubaker regards as crucial in diasporic conditions, namely homeland orientation and boundary maintenance²⁴. This is especially evident when comparing how younger Koryo saram perceive their Korean-ness, also in

comparison with older generations. Taken together, the findings shed light on the hitherto neglected issue of generational change.

The article is divided into five sections. In the next section I review some key terminological and conceptual issues, and lay out the theoretical framework I apply in this article. Next, I ground the experience of Kyrgyzstan's Koreans in the Soviet period and subsequently the post-independence era. In the remainder of the article I discuss the empirics, drawing on fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan, before concluding.

Terminology: What's in a name?

Koryo saram

'What is in our names?' asks German Kim, a leading scholar of the post-Soviet Koreans, and a Koryo saram himself.²⁵ While the rhetorical question might have well pertained to the actual first names (and patronymics) of the Koryo saram, the broader point actually relates to the ethnonym too. Historically, in local parlance and official policy, Koreans living in Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet republics were called just that: Koreans, (in Russian: sing. Корейец/Koreyets/ pl. корейцы/Koreytsi, adjective: Корейский/Koreysky). This is how the local ethnic Korean population was classified in the censuses. The English-language ethnonym does not distinguish between local Koreans and Koreans from elsewhere (the peninsula or beyond). In Soviet times the adjective Soviet was added to distinguish them abroad. Members of the community, however, prefer to use a different term: Koryo saram (고려사람), or people of Koryō²⁶. The ethnonym literally means Korean people, and is widely accepted among the members of the communities themselves, as well as being used in the scholarly literature. In South Korea, however, the term is not widely used, where Koryoin

(고려인/ 高麗人) is preferred – literally a Korean individual.²⁷ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the terminology has simply reverted to Korean for local census purposes or for self-appellation Koryo saram or, less commonly, Koryoin. The use of the hyphen between adjectives/ethnonyms (e.g. Uzbek-Korean or Kyrgyz-Korean) has become increasingly common. In this article I adopt the term that Koryo saram prefer to use to refer to themselves, and use the simplified spelling of Koryo saram as the transliteration from the Cyrillic alphabet into the Latin one (Корё сарам), instead of following McCune-Reischauer rules. To be clear, as Saveliev recalls, there were essentially three types of Koreans, depending on patterns and timing of settlement on Soviet territory: first, and the largest community among them, were the Koryo saram (also known as Soviet Koreans or continental Koreans/материковые корейцы); second, the Sakhalin Koreans (Sahallin hanin/사할린 한인 or Сахалинские корейцы in Russian), descendants of those that left the southern part of the peninsula in the 1930s and 1940s, then under Japanese rule, to work on Sakhalin island; and lastly the immigrants from the DPRK in the period 1947-49.²⁸

From diasporas to diasporic conditions: contesting groupness

The Diaspora Studies scholarship has broadened its substantive and geographical scope in recent decades, reflecting the expansion, arguably the conceptual stretching, of what groups the term is supposed to include. As Appadurai notes, the notion of “diaspora denotes the transnational movement and ties in with arguments around globalisation and the growth of non-nation-based solidarities.”²⁹ As such, the concept places a strong emphasis on “contingency [and] indeterminacy.”³⁰ Diaspora “involves a conception of identity that avoids the essentialism of much of the discussion on ethnic and cultural identities” and “refocuses

attention on transnational and dynamic processes, relating to ethnic commonalities, which can recognise difference and diversity.”³¹

Much has changed since the term, which semantically comes from the ancient Greek διασπορά (“scattering of seeds”), was first applied to the Jewish dispersal, and later the Armenian one. Because the term now tends to share meaning with cognate groups, such as immigrants, refugees, guest workers and ethnic communities,³² the world has truly witnessed a proliferation of diasporas.³³ A key problem arising from the increasingly loose use of the term is what Brubaker calls its “dispersion [...] in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space.”³⁴ The conceptual over-stretching implies that if everything, all sort of communities more or less dispersed, become diaspora, then nothing is distinctively so. The term therefore loses its discriminating power, making it impossible to distinguish diasporic from non-diasporic communities, (im)migrants *in primis*.

At the risk of simplification, conceptualizations of diasporas can be divided into two approaches.³⁵ On the one hand are those that think of diasporas in a more classical sense, as communities or “bounded entities.”³⁶ The classical definition of diaspora comes from the work of William Safran; a community can be referred to as diaspora if it presents the following six features: a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity defined by this relationship.³⁷ This approach is relevant to the post-Soviet context. Predominant approaches to identity and nation-building across the post-Soviet space have been informed by Stalin’s infamous definition of the nation, which was heavily materialist, essentialist and primordialist. A nation was defined as “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”³⁸ The Soviet emphasis on ethnogenesis has until recently informed the way in which ethno-national groups, including

ethnic minorities and diasporas, including the Koryo saram, were understood, namely as bounded groups. At a first glance there appear to be good reasons for this. The Koryo saram are a small non-indigenous population in Central Asia, whose presence in the region dates back to less than a century ago. They surely have a long history of dispersal that is tragic in origin, which is typical of the other two arch-typical diasporas, the Jewish and the Armenian ones. Forcible resettlement and mobility restrictions fostered alienation in the host territories (Central Asia), at least until they were allowed to move, urbanize and ultimately Russify and assimilate into local societies. The memory of the deportation has strongly shaped the community's collective identity. There were of course problems with the fit between the definition and the Korean case, in that the relationship with the "homeland" has remained problematic. What is the Koryo saram's homeland? The Korean peninsula, as in the Soviet tradition all ethnonational groups were supposed to have a 'historical homeland' (*istoricheskaya rodina*)? Or rather the Russian Far East, where Koreans had settled in the late 19th century and from where they were deported? And if they were ever to return, where would they go? Furthermore, there is an evident problem arising from the application of such an essentialist approach to the Koryo saram: its homeland-centredness. As Clifford also argues, homeland-centrism, and the links – material or symbolic – between the homeland and the diaspora, are not relevant to many communities that experience a diasporic condition. This is because, he continues, a diasporic condition arises from the "... experience of being from one place and of another" is linked "[...]with the idea of particular sentiments towards the homeland, whilst being formed by those of the place of settlement."³⁹ Such an approach allows for what are now called hyphenated identities, highlighting a community's attachment to more than one place.

Anti-essentialist approaches to diasporas, informed by constructivist and more critical sensibilities, have gained traction in recent decades and seem preferable here because they shift

the focus from what diasporas are, or are supposed to be, to what they actually do, or is done in their name; from being (a diaspora) to claiming (to be one). In this respect, a useful way of thinking about this phenomenon is less in terms of diasporas per se, and more as diasporic conditions and diasporism. The diasporic condition is therefore “one where one is constructed in and through difference, and yet is one that produces differential forms of cultural accommodation or syncretism: in some versions, hybridity.”⁴⁰ Helpfully, Brubaker has unpacked the notion of diasporas and other groups by questioning the notions of groupness, groupism and thus their bounded nature.⁴¹ This approach does not render the term or its usage irrelevant, but shifts attention to the political consequences of the articulation of an identity as diasporic. Who diasporizes whom to what ends, and with what results? Diasporas matter because of what they do or what is done in their name, rather than because of what they (allegedly) are.

Such an approach appears preferable for two reasons. The first is because of the consequences of the multiple experiences of dispersals and mobility among several generations of Koryo saram, which forced adaptation to new multi-ethnic contexts. Renegotiation with such environments calls for a new understanding of what home and homeland mean. The second is because Soviet – and still post-Soviet to a large extent – nation-building has been largely a top-down elite-driven affair. The Koryo saram are not an exception, with intellectuals, leaders of the ethnic cultural centres and ethnic entrepreneurs engaged in defining what makes someone a Koryo saram.

In his review of the core features of diasporic conditions, Brubaker contends that three dimensions remain constitutive:⁴² the experience of dispersal, forced and non; orientation towards a real or imagined homeland which remains the source of loyalty and values; and boundary maintenance, that is the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis the host society. First is the question of the importance of dispersion as a defining dimension of the diasporic

experience. Originally, diasporas were communities that emerged out of a forced dispersion. While dispersion and the memory thereof still remain central to diasporic identities, two new aspects have enriched the debate. One is the fact that dispersal may not necessarily have a traumatic or even forced origin, and the other is that – as a result of the reconfiguration political spaces in post-communist Eurasia – dispersion may not only be the result of the movement of peoples across borders, but also the consequence of the movement of borders across settlements. The Russian-speaking communities in the former Soviet space is a clear illustration of this new type of mobility.

The second reason for preferring an anti-essentialist approach to diasporas is that the very relationship with the homeland has started to be called into question. Homeland orientation (in terms of the memory of the dispersion or the commitment to return) dominated classical definitions of diasporas. Homeland remained the ultimate source of identity. Diasporas were homeland-centered communities. Especially on the wave of contributions coming from post-modernism, the salience of homeland orientation has been replaced by an approach that critiques the teleology of return, thus de-centering diasporas⁴³.

In addition to the above, according to Brubaker, there is “a tension in the literature between *boundary-maintenance* and *boundary-erosion*.”⁴⁴ While more classical approaches have emphasised how diaspora members have struggled to preserve and emphasise the boundaries between in-group and out-group, post-modern approaches such as those of Clifford and Anthias have emphasized the notions of hybridity, expressed through hyphenized ethnonyms (e.g. Korean-American, Kyrgyz-Russian, Korean-Chinese etc.) and inbetween-ness or liminality. This is especially relevant to the Korean context as it explicitly recognizes, and values, heterogeneity and diversity over essence and coherence.

Beyond his focus on diasporas, Brubaker has insightfully questioned notions of groups and groupness, which are too often unproblematically taken-for-granted,⁴⁵. What he takes issue

with is a tendency, in academia as much as beyond, to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogenous and externally bounded groups as “basic constituents of social life, fundamental units of social analysis.”⁴⁶ The problematization of groupness evokes ⁴⁷ the notion of Bourdieu’s performative character, whereby “by invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being.”⁴⁸ What follows, therefore, is that we tend to “treat groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given.”⁴⁹ Quite the contrary, groupness, according to Brubaker, should be treated “as an event, as something that happens.”⁵⁰ In ultimate analysis, groupness may or may not happen.⁵¹

In light of the above, asking whether the Korean diaspora forms a “single transnational community” or whether the Koryo saram have evolved into a “separate Korean nation” is, it seems to me, immaterial. While the Koryo saram may have constituted a more homogenous and bounded community when they settled in the Russian Far East from the 1860s onwards, the farmers and peasants that migrated at the beginning were soon joined by political dissidents in the early 20th century,⁵² divergent socio-spatial geographies have led to the emergence of different smaller Koryo saram communities. Rather than privileging the point of origin or the relationship with it “the diaspora experience [...] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a concept of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite difference; by hybridity.”⁵³

Context: the Soviet and post-Soviet Koreans

Whether as individuals or entire households, Koreans moved from the northern part of the Korean peninsula and Manchuria to the Russian Far East from 1863 onwards. Migration to the Far East began towards the final decades of the Chosŏn era (1392-1910), when farmers started

to flee abuse by landowners, moneylenders, drought in 1863 and famine in 1869-1870.⁵⁴ The prospect of land grants, economic subsidies and even the acquisition of Russian citizenship attracted growing numbers of Koreans to the territories of Primor'e and Priamur'e.⁵⁵ Some villages, like Pos'et, were 95% Korean, with printed weekly newspapers, schools, technical colleges and hospitals. Others in the Vladivostok okrug, like Khankai, Grodekov, Pokrov, Shkotovo, Suchan also had substantial Korean populations.⁵⁶ The first three decades saw a surge in the Korean presence in the Russian/Soviet Far East. From over 50,000 people in 1910 (100 villages), numbers had almost doubled by 1925 (90,000), 170,000 in 1927 and between 1923 and 1936 there was an average increase of 17% per year.⁵⁷ By 1935 about 200,000 Koreans were living in the Russian Far East. However, by 1931 Korean immigration to the Soviet Union had virtually ceased. Geopolitics played a large part in this. The opening decades of the early 20th century saw an oscillation between welcoming and more hostile policies from Tsarist Russia first and later the Soviet Union, mostly dictated by Russian/Soviet-Japanese relations. Russia's strategic concerns over a growing Japanese presence and influence in the Far East raised the question of the allegiance of the Korean population of the border regions. Tsarist Russia had already begun relocating Koreans that had settled in the Far Eastern regions after 1884 outside the border regions.⁵⁸

The single most important event in the Soviet history of the Korean population was the 1937 deportation (*deportatsiya/pereselenie*). Resolution 1428-326cc of the Soviet People's Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, adopted on 21 August 1937,⁵⁹ subsequently reinforced by Resolution 1647-377cc passed on 28 September of the same year,⁶⁰ led to the near-complete wiping out of the Korean presence in the Far Eastern provinces.⁶¹ Over the space of two months (September and October) Koreans were all placed on trains and deported to Soviet Central Asia, mostly – though not exclusively - in the southern provinces of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR) and the Uzbek

Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR). Recipient of the new inflow of Koreans were the oblasts (provinces) of Tashkent, Kyzyl-orda, Almaty, and the Russian SFSR provinces of Astrakhan and Stalingrad.⁶² As the Great Purge or Great Terror (also known as *Ezhovshchina*, or Era of Ezhov, from the name of the head of the NKVD, Nikolai Ezhov) got under way between 1936 and 1938, this was the first full-blown deportation of entire peoples in the Soviet Union, although there were smaller-scale precedents⁶³ in 1930/31, 1935, and that of the Buryats in 1936.⁶⁴ There were earlier, aborted, attempts at relocating Koreans away from border regions, dating back to 1926 and 1928 but decisions to that effect were not implemented, with plans effectively abandoned in 1931.⁶⁵ Formally, Koreans were not accused of any crime, and thus were not bundled alongside other ‘punished peoples’ (*nakazannye narody*), unlike the Germans, Chechens, Volga Tatars and others.⁶⁶ The nature of the deportation was pre-emptive, as – the Soviet argument went – the local Korean population might have become involved in espionage in favour of the Japanese, but were not accused of any crime.⁶⁷ Thus, initially, the legal status of the deported Koreans was that of “internal exiles” (*ssylka/poselentsy*). They were confined to the Central Asian countryside (with some exceptions),⁶⁸ where they were tied to the land and worked in local (Korean) collective farms, primarily cultivating rice. The procedures accompanying their deportation, as laid out in Resolution 1428-326ss also made it clear that they were entitled to take property with them during resettlement, claim compensation for the valuables and property left in the Far East; the document also refers to the fact that proper arrangements and assistance would be set in place on arrival.⁶⁹ Uniquely in the experience of the Soviet deported peoples, those Koreans willing to leave the Soviet Union were to be allowed to do so, as long as they were not working in the secret police themselves.⁷⁰ Reality turned out to be much harsher than what appeared on paper and the deportation, as Pohl notes, “greatly altered their legal status, spatial distribution and everyday culture.”⁷¹ Upon arriving in

Central Asia some Koreans did nevertheless move, leaving the Kazakh SSR for the Uzbek SSR, either for family re-union or because of the milder climate there⁷². In practice there were both differences between the administrative exile category and the special settlement regime, and some areas of overlap. Similarly to the nations deported later, Koreans suffered from legal restrictions as to the place of residence, but were not placed in special camps. They could not live in the Central Asian SSRs where they had been resettled and nor were they allowed to live in border districts there. They were also subject to surveillance by the NKDV to which they had to report regularly. The deported Koreans were also barred from serving in the army; rather they were forced to serve in the labour army, constructing industrial plants or working on mines. Initially some ethnic institutions were retained, including Korean schools, a theatre and the Korean Pedagogical Institute, a newspaper and a publishing house, though many of these were later abolished. The situation changed in 1945, when the Council of People's Commissars extended the special settlement regime to the deported Koreans (Decision n. 35, 8 January 1945). In an order dated 2 July 1945 Beria recategorized Koreans as special settlers (*spets-pereselentsy*).⁷³ They were not allowed to leave the region and not issued new passports without the five-year limit to exile. They were prevented from studying science or other technical subjects at universities and lost many of their ethnic institutions. Following the death of Stalin in 1953 and de-Stalinization under Khrushchev (1953-1962), such restrictions were gradually lifted from 1954 onwards.⁷⁴ This led to a steady urbanization and Russification of the Soviet Koreans, particularly from 1970 onwards, as evidenced by the Koreans' linguistic Russification shown in subsequent Soviet censuses.⁷⁵ A minority chose to return to the Far East. Official rehabilitation, however, only much later, with the USSR's supreme Soviet recognising that eleven of the thirteen ethnic groups deported by Stalin, including the Koreans, "constituted illegal and criminal repressive acts"⁷⁶

and the Law on Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples only signed by then Russian President Boris Yeltsin and approved by the Russian Parliament in April 1991.⁷⁷

Nation-building and nationality policies under Soviet rule

The Soviet Union was administratively structured, formally, as a federal state. Crucial to its organization was the link between ethnicity and territory, whereby each ethno-national community was expected to be endowed with its own territory. There was a hierarchy of administrative units with Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) with the Russian, Kazakh, Uzbek, Ukrainian ones at the top of this hierarchy endowed with relatively higher (though still limited, in practical terms) levels of autonomy, descending all the way down to autonomous republics (e.g. the Karakalpak ASSR within the Uzbek SSR), autonomous regions (the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region in the Tajik SSR), autonomous territories, and districts. While officially countering nationalism as a reactionary and backward phenomenon, the Soviet authorities crystallised and even promoted nationality (*natsional'nost'*, built on ethnicity at its core) as a central category to classify and count people (its citizens).⁷⁸ The ultimate aim was for a supra-national Soviet people (*sovetsky narod/sovetsky chelovek*), a non-national category to supersede national divisions. This meant that, for example, as James Critchlow aptly put it in reference to the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, Uzbek children would go to Uzbek schools where they were taught in Uzbek language, would later read Uzbek-language newspapers and listen to radio programmes in Uzbek.⁷⁹ The Uzbek SSR had its own institutions, besides schools, including theatres, parliament, a flag and a constitution. All Soviet citizens were reminded, from an early age onwards, of who they were (or who the authorities had decided they would be). Ethnic institutions helped foster and maintain a sense of national belonging. Ultimately, the relevant entry in one's own passport (the *piataya grafa*, or fifth line) crystallized one's own ethnicity. In short, the Soviet language of self-determination and debate

over nationality issues crucially framed how populations were organized and how their national consciousness was, to some degrees, promoted.⁸⁰ Francine Hirsch called this a double assimilation policy (2000): first of groups into nations and then subsequently into the aforementioned Soviet people. The disintegration of the Soviet state occurred before this process was completed.

What did this all mean for the Soviet Koreans? As a dispersed population without its own national territory on Soviet soil, they had some of these ethnic institutions, but not all. Crucially, they were not endowed with a national territory, as Korea (under Japanese rule 1910-1945 and then the two Koreas) was regarded as their historical homeland(s). Thus, petitions for territorial autonomy in the Far Eastern regions of the Russian SFSR was not granted on the grounds that an external, historical homeland already existed (“Korea”).⁸¹ As such there was no cadre policy either since there was no land where Koreans could enjoy a *primus inter pares* status, where they could be regarded as the “titular nation” (*titul'naya natsiya*) in Soviet parlance. Koreans, and other smaller groups among them, started to be referred to as one of the diasporas/ диаспоры, a term that was also used, confusingly, to refer to groups with a history of dispersal to settler groups (such as the Russians) or local indigenous communities (like the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan). The everyday reality for Soviet Koreans was one of steady Russification, in the form of their assimilation into Russian language and culture.

Koreans in Soviet Kirgizia and post-independence Kyrgyzstan

A minuscule Korean presence was first reported in Central Asia already in the 1897 census, around Pishpek (today's Bishkek) and Przhevalsk (now Karakol, in the eastern part of the country).⁸² As table 2 shows, the presence was still negligible in the 1920s (1926 census) and began to increase in the late 1930s (1939 census). Some activists from the Korean national

independence movement, such as Petr Semenovich Tsoy (чкк дзе кен/Chke Dze Khen , 최재현) arrived in Soviet Kirgizia in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸³ Another 130 Koreans arrived in 1934-38.⁸⁴ As the numbers of Koreans in Soviet Kirgizia grew somewhat between the census of 1926 and that of 1939, some were left wondering whether Koreans had also been deported to this Soviet republic too in 1937, a question raised in Gennady Li's work.⁸⁵ According Li, there was no plan to deport Koreans to the Kyrgyz SSR, although this did not prevent some individuals from being forcibly relocated there. Census data, as observed above, show that the Korean population rose from 9 in 1926 to 508 in 1939. In the archival material I examined there is no reference to the Kirgiz SSR being the destination of the deportation which were listed as the "South Kazakhstan region, the regions of the Aral Sea, Balk⁸⁶ash and the Uzbek SSR"). That said, given that at least initially some Koreans did leave the Kazakh SSR southwards it is possible that some ended up in Soviet Kirgizia. Li also mentions the presence of some Koreans in Kyzyl-Kiya and Sulyutka in southern Kyrgyzstan (oday's Batken's province).⁸⁷ As these areas border Uzbekistan and some Koreans were resettled in the Uzbek side of the Ferghana Valley it is also conceivable that they also moved voluntarily, especially since in Soviet times the boundaries between Soviet republics (SSRs) were administrative only.⁸⁸ As mobility restrictions were lifted from the mid-1950s onwards Koreans could move from the countryside to cities and across SSRs. This led to a more noticeable Korean presence being established in the Kyrgyz SSR. Numbers grew over time as Koreans abandoned agricultural activities in favour of employment in urban centres. From 1959 onwards the local Korean population increased further. A more significant migration to the Kyrgyz SSR began in the second half of the 1950s.⁸⁹ The numbers remained fairly stable until the 1990s, when in line with broader patterns of post-Soviet migration, many members of minority groups left the place where they were living. The number of Koreans in Kyrgyzstan initially declined, before increasing again in the 2000s.

From the Soviet experience, Kyrgyzstan “inherited a legacy of complex ethnic politics,”⁹⁰ which included the presence of cross-border minorities and a number of territorial oddities such as enclaves (small pockets of land formally under Uzbekistani and Tajikistani sovereignty) and exclaves (portions of territory in neighbouring Uzbekistan). Although the post-independence authorities have sought to emphasise continuities between post-independence Kyrgyzstan and pre-modern Kyrgyz tribal confederations – many of which were not really associated with the territory of today’s Kyrgyzstan. Within its current boundaries Kyrgyzstan is very much a recent formation; its origins date back to the Soviet period, when the national-territorial delimitation of 1924-36 reshaped the political and administrative space of the Central Asian region in a way that resembles the way this looks today.⁹¹ Initially the Kyrgyz entity was set up as an autonomous region within the Russian SFSR and erroneously called Kara-Kyrgyz, as the Kazakh ASSR was called Kyrgyz instead. In 1936 the status of the region was upgraded to that of a full union republic (SSR), at the same level of the Russian, Uzbek, Kazakh and other SSRs.

Table 2. The Koryo Saram in the Kirgiz SSR/Kyrgyzstan (population, %)

Eth nic grou p	1926	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	1999	2009	2013	2018	2019
Over all	993,0 04	1,458, 213	2,065, 837	2,932, 805	3,522, 832	4,257, 755	4,822, 938	5,362, 793	5,663, 133	6,256, 730	6,389, 500

Kyrg	661,1	754,32	836,83	1,284,	1,687,	2,229,	3,128,	3,804,	4,099,	4,587,	4,695,
yz	71	3	1	773	382	663	147	788	433	430	646
	(66.6)	(51.7)	(40.5)	(43.8)	(47.9)	(52.4)	(64.9)	(71)	(72.3)	(73.3)	(%)
Kore	9 (0)	508	3,622	9,404	14,481	18,355	19,784	17,299	16,753	17,074	17,105
an		(0)	(0.2)	(0.3)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.3)	(0.2)	(0.2%)	

Source: ЦСУ СССР (Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик. *Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926 года.* Москва.: Издание ЦСУ Союза ССР, 1928-29. ЦСУ СССР (Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик. *Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926 года. Национальный состав населения по регионам республик СССР.* ЦСУ СССР (Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик. *Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР.* ЦСУ СССР (Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик. *Всесоюзная перепись населения 1959 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР.* ЦСУ СССР (Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик. *Всесоюзная перепись населения 1939 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР.* ЦСУ СССР (Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик. *Всесоюзная перепись населения 1970 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР.* ЦСУ СССР

(Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик. *Всероссийская перепись населения 1979 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР*. Национальный статистический комитет Кыргызской Республики. *Национальный состав населения*. 2019.

Table 3. The Koryo saram in Kyrgyzstan (2009; by province/city/administrative division)

	Total	Bishkek	Chuy	Issyk kul	Talas	Naryn	Jalalabad	Osh city	Osh region	Batken
Korean	17,299	12,014 (69.4%)	4388 (25.3%)	133	70	1	237	327	47	82

Source: Национальный статистический комитет Кыргызской Республики.

Национальный состав населения. 2019. Численность постоянного населения по национальностям <http://www.stat.kg/media/files/9cd9d7ee-78f0-413e-885d-80f914049ebf.pdf>

As Buttino notes in reference to the Korean population in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, the story of the Koryo saram is one of “how a deported minority ingeniously adapted to the new environment and was capable of negotiating with the Soviet authorities a respectable position in the new society.”⁹² Since the Soviet collapse, due to a combination of uncertainty over status and the possible rise in local ethnic nationalism and – more generally – the social and economic hardship that affected all groups in post-independence Kyrgyzstan, some Koreans left, as the dwindling numbers show (table 2). At the same time some have moved from the neighbouring

republics due to its overall more open social, economic and political environment. At just over 17,000, Koreans represent around 0.2% of the country's population.

As I have argued elsewhere, “the story of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan is one of unexpected independence and statehood, a fragile – ‘imperilled’ – sovereignty.”⁹³ From the outset, Kyrgyzstan was confronted with several challenges. A market economy had to be created from the ashes of the Soviet command economy in a context that was still largely rural and agricultural. A common national identity had to be created when the titular group was itself divided along tribal and regional lines and had no clear idea as to what kind of approach to nation-building it would promote, whether ethnic or civic. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan, like its neighbours in the region, was home to a culturally and ethnically plural society. Kyrgyzstan emerged from the Soviet experience as an ethnically diverse country, with the titular group – the Kyrgyz – demographically constituting a bare majority. Two large minority groups stood out, the Russians and the Uzbeks.⁹⁴ Askar Akayev, the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan (1990-2005) sought to reject the sort of nationalising policies that would have elevated the status of the titular group above that of others⁹⁵, favouring – with some ambiguities – a more internationalist approach. The state promoted the notion of “Kyrgyzstan – our common home” (*Kyrgyzstan: nash obshchii dom*), where all groups would feel equally welcome and protected. However, over time, a “dual identity narrative”⁹⁶ during the Akayev years gradually gave way to the rise of Kyrgyz nationalism, first under Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005-2010) and later on under Almazbek Atambayev (2011-2017).

What were the implications of post-independence turbulence and nation- and state-building strategies, and the consequent changes for local Koreans? The Koryo saram were not the Kyrgyz nation's significant other. Initially these were the ethnic Russians, and later the Uzbeks, following Russian out-migration, especially in the 1990s, and relative demographic decline vis-à-vis the titular group. As table 3 shows, Koreans currently number less than 20,000

in the country and are overwhelmingly concentrated in the northern part of the country (about 95%), and particularly in the capital city of Bishkek (almost 70%) and the surrounding Chuy province (about 25%). They are a highly urbanised, educated community, and well integrated in local societies. As such, politically and demographically, they have posed no threat to the titular group.

Cultural revival started for the local Koreans, as for many ethno-national communities in the late Soviet period, in the late 1980s, when cultural centres and associations were established for minority groups (somehow controversially they were never set up for majority groups, on the assumption that state institutions would somehow promote them). The “Chinson” Association for the Koreans of Kyrgyzstan was founded in 1989. Links with South Korea were established in the 1990s. As examined elsewhere,⁹⁷ Seoul established a wide range of educational programmes aimed at the promotion of Korean language and culture, educational opportunities including scholarships, grants and exchange programmes. These were not explicitly designed to specifically support the Koryo saram, and the whole local population was invited to learn more about Korean culture. Language courses proliferated, also fuelled by the success of Hallyu (Korean wave), Korean dramas, K-pop, films, food and cosmetic products. Korean shops now line many of the streets of Kyrgyzstan’s capital city, Bishkek.

Identity transformation among today’s Koryo saram

“Koreans are Korean everywhere; [being Korean] is about blood”, passionately argued Gennady Li, a well-known local writer in Bishkek as we met in the ‘Korean House’ (*Koreisky dom*), one of the cultural institutions where the more engaged Koryo saram population gathers in town.⁹⁸ Li, born in the Uzbek SSR in 1940, spent time in Moscow in 1960-1965, before

relocating to Soviet Kirgizia. His remarks were about Koreans, but reflected a broader approach to identity promoted during Soviet times (ethnogenesis), essentialist and primordialist, which still resonates among some today. Viktoriya, a 65-year old lady active in the Society of Koreans of Kyrgyzstan, an organization represented in the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan, echoed Li's comment: "traditions, values, culture, food. All Koreans share those; it does not matter what age they are."⁹⁹

This view stood in stark contrast to remarks by young local Koreans, though. "My parents tell me I am Korean, my grandparents tell me I am Korean as they recall their tragic experiences as children during the deportation from the Far East, but I don't feel the same. I lived in Russia and I feel closer to them [Russians, author's note]. I also studied and lived in America and South Korea. I am full of doubts, I do not know who I am", says Nataliya, a 19-year old resident of Bishkek.¹⁰⁰ As she recalls her own identity dilemmas and struggles with her sense of (multiple) belongings, in fact her in-betweenness, I am reminded of the sheer diversity of opinions among the Koryo saram, or the post-Soviet Koreans, and the way in which they articulate and express, and negotiate their Korean-ness and senses of us-ness and other-ness. The two views above also illustrate how older-generation Koreans are more inclined to emphasise diasporic identities as claims and stances, and are aware of their role in this process, whilst younger Koreans are more visibly open to notions of hybridity and hyphenated identities, or even abrupt identity changes like that of Nataliya, above. Despite such obvious and growing differences, both generations have grown up in multi-ethnic societies, the Soviet one and the post-Soviet republic which, by and large, continue to be ethnically and culturally diverse environments. While there is a growing inter-generational gap, much remains shared too.

Dispersal

The memory of the deportation, its direct experience for the older generations and the way its narrated and passed on across generations, remains an important dimension of the Koryo saram's diasporic condition, although the extent to which this is a defining moment depends on individual experiences and especially the generation. All young Koreans I spoke to in Bishkek recalled stories they had been told by their grandparents" "I know the events took place a long time ago, but this is still part of who we [Koreans of the former Soviet Union] are and what makes us different [from other Koreans]", says Valeriy, a young undergraduate student at a local international university¹⁰¹.

At the same time, with the more elderly members of the older generations dying and new waves of international mobility, from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan, from Kyrgyzstan to Russia or South Korea or the United States intensifying, it is likely that this memory will gradually fade away, like other aspects of Koryo saram-ness that have long become extinct, such as language (Koryo mar). "Language represents the most important element of a culture, element of self-identification" writes Li,¹⁰² and yet, Koreans in post-Soviet Eurasia have felt no less Korean even without language use and proficiency.

Homeland orientation

If ties with the homeland, a sense of longing and belonging, the need to either restore or return to it were key element of traditional diasporic identities, these are clearly not applicable to the case of Bishkek's Koreans. How Koryo saram relate to the notion of homeland is, by contrast, blurred and contested. "My home is where I was born" local Koreans all seem to concur. The strongest parallel between the younger and older generations is an attachment to territory, wherever they may be living. Gennadi Li emphatically proclaimed it thus: "our homeland

(*nasha Rodina*) is Kyrgyzstan; we are Kyrgyzstani”, an expression reminiscent of his publications (*My Kyrgyzstantsy*, we are Kyrgyzstanis).¹⁰³ The interesting aspect of this is that Li had lived in other Soviet republics, having been born in the Uzbek SSR before going to university in Moscow, and only subsequently settling in the Kirgiz SSR. At the same time, he also felt it necessary to add a note clarifying that “Korea is our (the Koreans’) historical homeland, this is where we come from.”¹⁰⁴ Viktoriya, who as a retiree volunteers at the Korean national cultural centre, an institution affiliated with the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan (*Assembleya Naroda Kyrgyzstana*, created by former President Akaev in 1997, to give institutional representation to the country’s ethnic minority groups), agreed on an unspecified and imagined Korea (North? South? Chosŏn?) being the ultimate homeland. In reality, whilst for historical diasporas the relationship with the homeland is crucial, alongside a myth of return, this appears to be an increasingly less relevant aspect of the identity and self-perceptions of the local Korean youth. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, local Koreans have experienced a dual wave of de- and re-territorialization of their identities, well noted both in the literature on the Koryo saram¹⁰⁵ and Koreans abroad more generally.¹⁰⁶ Initially, the opening of previously sealed boundaries and a discovery of links with South Korea led to greater enthusiasm for the country. Over time, however, the different historical experiences and cultural products available to Koreans from the peninsula and the Koryo saram meant that a phase of disenchantment followed.¹⁰⁷ Although this point holds true across generations, younger Koryo saram expressed a sense of ‘confusion’ and ‘disorientation’ in relation to the place they consider as homeland. Some, like the younger Viktoriya, confess changing their ‘homeland orientation’ depending on where she lived.¹⁰⁸ As she has lived in Russia, Kyrgyzstan and the United States, she admitted being confused and not knowing where she belongs or which place, if any, she would consider as her home(land). Viktor, by contrast, strongly emphasised his attachment to Kyrgyzstan given the similarities, he mentioned, in the

cultures and traditions between the local Koreans and the other local communities, whereas whenever he visited South Korea he felt a remarkable cultural distance, also of values: “Kyrgyzstan is more traditional, Koreans in South Korea are different from us. I feel a foreigner there.”¹⁰⁹ Nataliya felt evenly split between Kyrgyzstan and Russia, a country she felt culturally closer to than Kyrgyzstan due to her being a Russian-speaker without advanced knowledge of the Kyrgyz language.¹¹⁰ While more systematic assessment of identity perceptions among local Koreans are needed, this exploratory overview of self-perceptions among local Koryo saram youth suggests that attachments to Korea and a perception that this is a historical homeland are visibly decreasing over time. The local Korean youth is much more open to acknowledging multiple loyalties, attachments and affiliations, without these being static and unchanging.

Boundary maintenance

The Koreans of Kyrgyzstan are more prone to embrace multiple identities, as both Koreans and Kyrgyz, Russian, or Uzbek, contextualizing the perception of Korean-ness in a very personal, yet malleable way. Hybridity, in other terms, is something that perhaps, over generations of survival in and adaptation to evolving multi-cultural environments, has come to accompany the Koryo saram. Often regarded as key identity markers, language and religion do not serve the purpose of maintaining the boundaries between the local Koreans and their “others.” Koryo mar is virtually an extinct language, only spoken – not written – by an increasingly small number of elderly Koreans.¹¹¹ As a result of their assimilation and integration into Russian/Soviet society, Russian was, and is the main language of choice of local Koreans, although Korean language has become increasingly popular in the whole

Central Asian region as a result of South Korea's cultural diplomacy and educational exchange, promoted by the Korea Foundation and the Academy of Korean Studies, among others. Interest in Korean culture, including language, is increasing especially among the local youth, but this has more to do with pop culture than shared cultural references with young South Koreans. Religion is no more of a glue: Koreans profess various confessions of Christianity or no faith, and despite the growing presence and influence of Korean missionary groups, this has not translated into visible mass conversions, although data on religious affiliation among Koryo saram are more scarce compared to those on language knowledge.

Overall, the cultural referents seem to be different from those of South Koreans, but also of older generations of local Koreans. In Soviet times ethnic institutions had the important role of preserving, promoting or reviving national culture, in whatever way this might have been defined. Crucially, tuition in a group's language, media, schools, theatres, and other aspects crucial to group identity, served the purpose of reinforcing both the members' identity and sense of belonging and accentuating their difference (boundaries) from outsiders. Yet, if there was a common thread in my interviews with young local Koreans, it was their difficulty to relate to those very Soviet-era institutions such as the Korean national-cultural centre (OKK, *Ob'edinienie Koreytsev Kyrgyzstana*). Apart from a generational issue (they felt that the ethnic associations were just "a place for people of a certain age"¹¹² what they could not relate to was the emphasis on "traditional" dresses, food or culture more generally. Not that these were not of interest, and many young Koreans recalled celebrating Korean traditional holidays such as *ch'usök* at home, but they seemingly struggled with cultural performances where all ethnic minorities were routinely asked to express and celebrate "their national culture." This assumption of "one-ness" rendered the generational gap particularly acute, raising the questions of whether old and new understandings of Korean-ness had much in common with each other. It was thus apparent that boundaries between Koreans and other

groups have been progressively eroded. This is due to the combined influence of their gradual Russification, which resulted in their assimilation in the broader Russian or Russian-speaking group, and also the number of mixed marriages.¹¹³

In lieu of conclusion: ex uno plures?

Over decades in Soviet and post-Soviet times, the lives and identities of the Koryo saram have been shaped by different and divergent socio-spatial geographies. The Soviet Union was a multi-national environment they gradually got used to and integrated in, while experiencing distinctive aspects of Soviet life in their different socio-cultural milieu. The disintegration of the Soviet state and the emergence of fifteen successor states rendered such differences among Koreans even more apparent and acute.

While most of the Koryo saram scholarship has focused on the differences between them and “other” Koreans, typically from the peninsula, in this article I have focused on the emerging differences among the Koryo saram of the same *locale* themselves. The Koryo saram of Bishkek (and the surrounding areas) have experienced upheaval and forced adaptation for generations as a result of multiple experiences of mobility. Due to the limited scope of this study, the findings are tentative and could be subject to more systematic probing in future research , for example through either large scale surveys or thorough ethnographic investigations.

Although the memory of the deportation remains an important feature of the diasporic condition, local Koreans relate very differently to the other two dimensions identified by Brubaker. Consistently with the findings of more recent studies of diasporas, the relationship

with the homeland – alongside very different understanding of what the homeland is – has progressively diminished. Similarly, rather than seeking to preserve their boundaries with the surrounding cultural milieu, the Koryo saram have, through assimilation, seen those boundaries erode. This is especially evidence among Koreans of about twenty and thirty years of age. Findings suggest a clear tendency among the young Koryo saram to hyphenize their identities, as Korean-Kyrgyz, Korean-Uzbek, Russian Korean or else. The broad tendency towards re-territorialization of diasporic identities is something that other scholars have noted in relation to, for example, the Koreans of New Malden in London or Kazakhstan’s Koreans.¹¹⁴ The Koryo saram perceive, articulate and negotiate their Korean-ness differently in a way that is reminiscent of Stuart Hall’s notion of “identity through difference.”¹¹⁵ As such they can be understood as liminal diasporic communities, where their primary affiliations are constantly in flux, subject to change, contestation and re-negotiation. To conclude, the question thus is not whether the Koryo saram are or are not (still) Korean. Shaped by increasingly distinctive historical geographies, the Koryo saram tell a story of contingency, survival, adaptation and – at its core - human agency.

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Endnotes

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¹³ For an exception see the work of Gennadiy P. Li. *Moya Planeta. Vospominaniya, razmyshleniya, ocherki, staty, publitsistika*. (Bishkek, 2014). Gennadiy P. Li. *My Kyrgyzstantsi. Kniga 1* (Bishkek, 2017). Gennadiy P. Li. *My Kyrgyzstantsi. Kniga 2*. (Bishkek, 2017). Gennadiy P. Li. *My Kyrgyzstantsi. Kniga 3* (Bishkek, 2017) and Geron N. Li. *Koreytsy v Kyrgyzstane*. Bishkek: KVA, 1998.

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¹⁴ Vyacheslav Kim. *Kore Saram k 150-letiyu pereseleniya koreytsev v Rossiyu* (Tashkent: Ayvanlain, 2014). Elise S. Ahn, "Tracing the language roots and migration routes of Koreans from the Far East to Central Asia," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 18 no. 4 (2019): 222-235. Ross King. "Blagoslovennoe: Korean village on the Amur, 1871-1937," *Review of Korean Studies*, 4 no. 2 (2001): 133-176. Alexander I. Petrov, "Koreans in Russia in the Context of History of Russian Immigration Policy," *International Journal of Korean history*, 12 (2008): 157-197. Pak. Koreitsy v rossiyskovy imperii. Pak, Koreitsy v Sovetskoy Rossii: Pak and Bugai. 140 let v Rossii.

¹⁵ Nikolai Bugai. *Iosif Stalin-Lavrentiyu Berii: 'Ikh nado deportirovat'*. Moskva: Druzhba Narodov, 1992. Viktor A., I.V. Berdinskikh and V.I. Verem'yev. *Sistema spetsposelenii v Sovetskom Soyuze 1930-1950-kh godov*. Syktyvkar: Uro Ran, 2015. Otto J. Pohl. *Ethnic cleansing in the USSR, 1937-1949*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. Otto J. Pohl. "Stalin's genocide against the 'repressed peoples'." *Journal of Genocide Research* 2.2 (2000): 267-293. Otto J. Pohl. "Cultural, spatial, and legal displacement of the Korean Diaspora in the USSR: 1937-1945." *Review of Korean Studies* 21.1 (2018): 171-188. Otto J. Pohl. "Soviet apartheid: Stalin's ethnic deportations, special settlement restrictions and the Labor Army: The case of the ethnic Germans in the USSR." *Human Rights Review*, 13(2005): 205-224. Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001. 2019. Terry Martin. "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing." *Journal of Modern History* 70 (1998): 813-861. Michael Gelb. "An early Soviet ethnic deportation: The Far-Eastern Koreans," *Russian Review*, 54 no. 3 (1995): 389-412. Jon K. Chang. "Tsarist continuities in Soviet nationalities policy: a case of Korean territorial autonomy in the Soviet far east 1923-1937," *Eurasian Studies Society of Great Britain and Europe Journal*, 3 no. 1 (2014): 1-35. In-Jin Yoon. "Forced relocation, language use, and ethnic identity of Koreans in Central Asia," *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal*, 9 no. 1 (2000): 35-64.

¹⁶ German N. Kim. "Correlations of ethnicity, identity and religiosity of the young generation of Korean diaspora," *International Journal of Global Diaspora Studies*, 2 no. 2 (2016): 21-34.

¹⁷ Peter Kokaisl. "Koreans in Central Asia – a different Korean nation," *Asian Ethnicity*, 19 no. 4, (2018): 428-452.

¹⁸ Rogers Brubaker. "The 'diaspora' diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28 no. 1 (2005): 1-19. Rogers Brubaker. "Ethnicity without Groups," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* XLIII no. 2 (2002): 163-189. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper. "Beyond 'identity'." *Theory and Society*, 29 no. 1 (2000): 1-47.

¹⁹ James Clifford. "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 no. 3 (1994): 302-338.

²⁰ Floya Anthias. "Evaluating 'diaspora': beyond ethnicity?" *Sociology*, 32 no. 3 (1998): 1-24.

²¹ Thomas Pepinsky. "The return of the single-country study," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22 (2019): 187-203.

²² Ariel I. Ahram., Patrick Köllner, and Rudra Sil, eds. *Comparative Area Studies. Methodological Rationales and Cross-Regional Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). David Szanton, ed. *The politics of knowledge. Area studies and the disciplines* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2004).

²³ Pepinsky, "The return," 188.

²⁴ Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' diaspora".

²⁵ German N. Kim. "What is in our names?" *Konguk University Journal*, 12 (2008): 153-175.

²⁶ Although some may assume some association with the *Koryŏ* dynasty (고려; 高麗) which ruled over the Korean peninsula from 918 to 1392, this and the Koreans living in post-Soviet Eurasia have, self-evidently, nothing to do with each other.

²⁷ Kim. "Correlations of ethnicity:" 22.

²⁸ Saveliyev. "Mobility Decision-Making."

- ²⁹ Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1.
- ³⁰ Paul Gilroy. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack!* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1987), 33.
- ³¹ Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed. *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 1-2.
- ³² Khachig Tölölyan. "The nation-state and its others: In lieu of a preface." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1.1 (1991), 4-5.
- ³³ Robert Cohen. *Global Diasporas. An introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008). Stephen Vertovec. "Towards post-multiculturalism? Changing communities, conditions and contexts of diversity," *International Social Science Journal*, 61 (2010): 83-95. Stephen Vertovec. "Three meanings of 'diaspora', exemplified among South Asian religions." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 6 no. 3 (1997): 277-299. Gallia Lindenstrauss. "Transnational communities and diasporic politics." In, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2010, DOI 10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.353.
- ³⁴ Brubaker. "The 'diaspora diaspora'," 1.
- ³⁵ Matteo Fumagalli. "Diaspora," in George Kurian, ED.. *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (CQ Press/Sage, 2010).
- ³⁶ William Safran. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora. A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1 no. 1 (1991): 83-84. Gabriel Sheffer. *Diaspora Politics. At home abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- ³⁷ Esman's definition is also commonly used and broadly echoes Safran's approach: 'a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin, either because of social exclusion, internal cohesion or other geopolitical factors. It is never assimilated into the whole society, but in time, develop a diasporic consciousness which carries out a collective sharing of space with others'. Milton J. Esman. "Diasporas and International Relations," in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds. *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- ³⁸ Stalin defined a nation as 'a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture'. Iosif Stalin. *Marxism and the National Question (Марксизм и национальный вопрос)* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954 (1912)).
- ³⁹ Clifford. "Diasporas."
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Brubaker. "Ethnicity without Groups." Brubaker and Cooper. "Beyond 'identity'."
- ⁴² Brubaker. "The 'diaspora' diaspora:" 5.
- ⁴³ Hall. "Cultural identity and diaspora."
- ⁴⁴ Brubaker. "The 'diaspora' diaspora:" 6.
- ⁴⁵ Brubaker. "Ethnicity without Groups:" 163.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 164.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 165.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 166.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 168.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Brubaker. "The 'diaspora' diaspora:" 2.
- ⁵⁴ Diener. "Homeland as Social Construct." Alexander C. Diener. "Diasporic stances: comparing the historical geographic antecedents of Korean and German Migration Decisions in Kazakhstan," *Geopolitics*, 14 no. 3 (2009): 462-487. Gelb. "An early Soviet ethnic deportation."
- ⁵⁵ H.G. Park. The migration regime among Koreans in the Russian Far East," *Inner Asia*, 15 (2013), 77-99. Park. *The Displacement of borders*. Henry R. Huttenbach. "The Soviet Koreans: Products of Russo-Japanese imperial rivalry," *Central Asian Survey* 12 no. 1 (1993): 59-69.
- ⁵⁶ Saveliev. "Mobility decision-making."
- ⁵⁷ For more details on immigration to the Russian/Soviet Far East see Pak. *Koreitsy v rossiyskoy imperii*. Pak, *Koreitsy v Sovetskoy Rossii*; Pak and Bugai. *140 let v Rossii*.
- ⁵⁸ German N. Kim. "The deportation of 1937 as a logical continuation of Tsarist and Soviet Nationality Policy in the Russian Far East," *Korean and Korean American Studies Bulletin*, (2001): R19-R44.
- ⁵⁹ The term used in the resolution is actually "vyselenie" (eviction). Postanovlenie SNK SSSR I TsK VKP(b) . 1428-326ss 'O vyselenii koreiskogo naseleniya pogranychnykh raionov Dal'nevostochnogo Kraya', 21 August

1937, available at <https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1021140>. In this resolution Stalin and Molotov ordered the secret police to deport all Koreans living in the Vladivostok region and the adjacent territories.

⁶⁰ Postanovlenie n. 1647-377ss Soveta Naodnykh Kommissarov Soyuzs SSR, 28 September 1937, available at <https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1021151>. In this resolution Molotov ordered that all remaining Koreans in the Far Eastern region (Dal'nevostochnyi Krai) to be deported.

⁶¹ To clarify, only Koreans living in the Far East were deported. By then some Koreans had settled in the western regions of the USSR, but those were not forcibly resettled and neither were legal restrictions imposed upon them.

⁶² Huttenbach. "The Soviet Koreans."

⁶³ Kim. "Deportation of 1937."

⁶⁴ Caroline Humphrey. "Deportees in society. Ssyl'ka and spetsposelenie in Soviet Buryatia," *Inner Asia*, 21 (2019): 38-60.

⁶⁵ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 317-319, 323-324. Although ethnic tensions were present – and intensified in the 1930s – conflict at the time revolved around land possession.

⁶⁶ Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR*.

⁶⁷ There is some debate in the literature as to whether the drivers of the cleansing of the Korean population from the Far East was ideologically (as opposed to racially-defined) Soviet xenophobia, as Martin argues (*Affirmative Action Empire*) or whether there was a racial dimension to the move, consistently with earlier Tsarist policies, as contended by Chang (*Burnt by the Sun*) and G. Kim ("The 1937 deportation").

⁶⁸ Buttino notes that some Korean families were deported to urban centres, such as Samarkand (Buttino, *Samarcanda*, 252).

⁶⁹ Articles 3-7.

⁷⁰ Article 5 of Declaration 1428-326ss states that "no obstacles should be created" for Koreans wishing to leave the Soviet Union. At the same time the rapid succession in declarations by the Council of People's Commissars and the NKVD in August and especially September points to the shift away from relocating "only" Koreans settled in border districts to removing all Koreans from the Soviet Far East (see Decisions 1428-326ss 21 August 1937; 1527-349ss 5 September 1937; 1539-354ss 8 September; 1571-356ss 11 September 1937; and 1647-377ss 28 September 1937. Small pockets of remote Korean villages remained, for example near Okhotsk and north Sakhalin island (Chang, *Burnt by the Sun*, 158). About 2,500 Koreans were not deported but arrested and executed (*Ibid.*, 159).

⁷¹ Pohl, "Cultural, spatial and legal displacement of the Korean diaspora," 172.

⁷² Pohl, "Cultural, Spatial, and Legal Displacement", 180-181.

⁷³ Khan, *Kore Saram: Kto my?*, 59. For the text of the decision n. 35 of the Council of People's Commissars made on 8 January 1945 see Bugai, *Iosif Stalin-Lavrentiyu Berii* 231. On the special settlement regime as a legal category see the work of Viktor N. Zemskov. *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR*. Moscow: Nauk, 2005; Otto J. Pohl. *Ethnic cleansing in the USSR, 1937-1949*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. Otto J. Pohl, "Stalin's genocide against the 'repressed peoples'." *Journal of Genocide Research*

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30-40kh godakh. Moskva: Interprask. Nikolai F. Bugay. *Iosif Stalin-Lavrentiyu Berii: 'Ikh nado deportirovat'*."

Moskva: Druzhba Narodov, 1992. Viktor A. Berdinskikh, I.V. Berdinskikh and V.I. Verem'yev. *Sistema spetsposelenii v Sovetskom Soyuze 1930-1950-kh godov*. Syktyvkar: Uro Ran, 2015. Berdinskikh, Viktor. *Spetsposelentsy: Politicheskaya ssylka narodov sovetskoi Rossii*, Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obrozenie, 2005.

⁷⁴ From 1954 the Council of Ministers began to pass a number of decrees which relaxed the requirement to report to the NKDV regularly, exempted children up to 16 years of age from the restrictions applied to the special settlers category, and even regulated the issuing of passports and the registration requirements (Polian, *Against their will*, 183-184). As Klimkova notes, at times the official terms changed (officially special settlers applied during 1930-1933 and 1944-1954) or were used interchangeably (such as *spetsposeleniia* and *spetsssylka*, the latter meaning special exile; or *spetsposelentsy* and *spetspereselentsy*) (Klimkova, "Special Settlements", 106, footnote 3).

⁷⁵ For a full list of the sources consulted see in the bibliography under: ЦСУ СССР (Центральное статистическое управление при Совете Министров Союз Социалистических Социалистических Республик).

⁷⁶ Pohl, "Stalin's Genocide", 268.

⁷⁷ Российской Советской Федеративно Социалистической Республики

“О реабилитации репрессированных народов(В редакции Закона Российской Федерации от 01.07.93 г. N 5303-I).

⁷⁸ Ronald G. Suny, and Terry Martin, eds. *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Terry Martin *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). Francine Hirsch. “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of ‘Soviet’ National Identities,” *Russian Review* 59 no. 2 (2000): 201-226. Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ James Critchlow. *Nationalism in Uzbekistan. A Soviet Republic’s Road to Sovereignty* (Boulder, Co.: Westview).

⁸⁰ Of course with significant variations throughout the whole Soviet period, oscillating between waves of Russification to promotion of national distinctiveness.

⁸¹ Ivan Sablin. “National autonomies in the Far Eastern Republic: post-imperial diversity management in Pacific Russia, 1920-1922,” *History and Anthropology*, 28 no. 4 (2017): 445-460. Ivan Sablin and Alexander Kuchinsky. “Making the Korean nation in the Russian Far East, 1873-1926,” *Nationalities Papers*, 45 no. 5 (2017): 798-814.

⁸² Gennadiy P. Li. *Moya Planeta. Vospominaniya, razmyshleniya, ocherki, staty, publitsistika* (Bishkek, 2014), 178.

⁸³ Ibid. 179.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 180.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See the letter sent by Ezhov to the heads of the Kazakh and Uzbek SSRs’ NKVD on 24 August 1937 (<https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1021142>).

⁸⁷ Li, *Moya Planeta*, 278.

⁸⁸ This is also consistent with the point made by Pohl that Koreans moved across the region, most notably from the Kazakh SSR to the Uzbek SSR between late 1937 and April 1939 (Pohl, “Cultural, Spatial and Legal Displacement:”, 180).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 126-127, 180-181, 200-201.

⁹⁰ Julie A. George. “Expecting Ethnic Conflict: The Soviet Legacy and Ethnic Politics in the Caucasus and Central Asia,” in, Amanda E. Wooden and Christoph H. Stefes, eds., *The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Enduring Legacies and Emerging Challenges* (New York: Routledge Press, April 2009), 75-76.

⁹¹ Arne Haugen. *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁹² Buttino. “Minorities in Samarkand:” 719.

⁹³ Matteo Fumagalli. “Semi-presidentialism in Kyrgyzstan,” in, Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup. *Semi-presidentialism in the Caucasus and Central Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016),173. Matteo Fumagalli. “Stateness, contested nationhood, and imperilled sovereignty: the effects of (non-western) linkages and leverage on conflicts in Kyrgyzstan,” *East European Politics*, 32 no. 3 (2016): 355-377.

⁹⁴ Fumagalli. “Stateness”, 357.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 358.

⁹⁶ Marlene Laruelle. “The paradigm of nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving narrative, the sovereignty issue, and political agenda,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 45 no. 1-2 (2012): 39-49.

⁹⁷ Fumagalli. “Growing inter-Asian Connections.” Fumagalli. “South Korea’s engagement.”

⁹⁸ Interview with Gennadiy Li, Bishkek, 27 March 2018.

⁹⁹ Interview, Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, 25 March 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Bishkek, 28 March 2018.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Bishkek, 26 March 2028.

¹⁰² Li. *Moya Planeta*, 270.

¹⁰³ Interview, Bishkek, 27 March 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Diener. “Homeland as Social Construct.”

¹⁰⁶ HaeRan Shin. “The Territoriality of Ethnic Enclaves: Dynamics of Transnational Practices and Geopolitical Relations within and beyond a Korean Transnational Enclave in New Malden, London,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 108 no. 3 (2018): 756-772.

¹⁰⁷ Kim and Khan. "The Korean movement in Kazakhstan."

¹⁰⁸ Interview, Bishkek, 25 March 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Bishkek, 26 March 2018.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Bishkek, 26 March 2018.

¹¹¹ German N. Kim. "Education and diasporic language: The case of Koreans in Kazakhstan." *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 27 (2009): 1-21.

¹¹² Interviews, Bishkek 20-28 March 2018; Bishkek, March 20-24 March 2019.

¹¹³ The impact of inter-ethnic marriages on the self-identification of the Koryo saram, its role in accelerating the assimilation in Russified Soviet society and, after independence, further hybridization or even acculturation in local societies has been noted in the literature. For more on this see: Buttino. *Samarcanda*; Natalya Yem and Stephen J. Epstein. "Social change and marriage patterns among Koryo Saram in Kazakhstan, 1937-1965." *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, 28.2 (2015): 133-152. Marina I. Kozmina. "Comparative analysis of inter-ethnic marriages in Korea and among the Korean diaspora in Central Asia." *International Journal of Central Asian Studies*, 16 (2012): 39-59.

¹¹⁴ Shin. "The territoriality of ethnic enclaves."

¹¹⁵ Hall. "Cultural identity and diaspora."