

SOUTH KOREA AND KAZAKHSTAN: PARTICULARITIES OF CULTURAL AND HUMANITARIAN COOPERATION

Youngmin CHU

*Doctoral candidate,
Lev Gumilev Eurasian National University
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

Kalamkas YESSIMOVA

*Analyst,
Public Opinion Research Institute
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

Botagoz RAKISHEVA

*Ph.D. (Sociol.),
Head of Research Projects, Director of
the Public Opinion Research Institute
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

ABSTRACT

The Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea are strategic partners who are currently deepening their partnership. Close cultural and humanitarian cooperation creates an additional foundation for long-term cooperation and expanding political and economic connections. The relationship between the two countries is developing on the basis of the Declaration of General Principles for Relations and Cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea,

and the cultural and humanitarian interactions are regulated by the special Agreement on the Cultural, Scientific and Technological Cooperation. Both documents were signed during the official visit of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the Republic of Korea (15-18 May, 1995). The paper discusses the main elements and peculiarities of the cultural and humanitarian exchange between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea.

KEYWORDS: *Kazakhstan, Central Asia, South Korea, public opinion, humanitarian cooperation, cultural and humanitarian interaction, youth.*

Introduction

On 28 January, 1992, diplomatic relations were established between Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea, and close ties have formed between the two countries in the 25 years that elapsed since. Economic cooperation deserves a special mention, with over 900 joint enterprises founded in Kazakhstan with participation of South Korean capital, of which, according to the Ministry of Investment and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, about 430 are actively operating. The following companies are among the major partners of Kazakh enterprises: Samsung C&T, LG Electronics, LG Chem, SK Corporation, Hyundai, POSCO, etc.; Dong II Highville, Urim, and other construction firms.¹ Cooperation in the political sphere is also maintained. For instance, in April 2018, in Astana the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea Kang Kyung-wha reported that South Korea is hoping for further support and assistance of Kazakhstan as the member of the U.N. Security Council in the reduction of the nuclear arsenal on the Korean Peninsula.²

Cultural and humanitarian ties are an important sphere of the two countries' cooperation. In the years of independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan about 30 joint cultural events have been conducted. The first session of the Kazakhstan-South Korea Commission on Cultural Cooperation was held on 22 December, 2010 in Seoul. The second session was held on 22 November, 2013 in Astana.³

The paper reviews the basic components of the cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the two countries.

Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan

In the initial phase, the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan had played the role of a link, becoming the main actor in bilateral relations. It still plays a significant role in the relations between the two countries. The majority of the *koryo saram* are the descendants of Koreans deported from the Russian Far East in 1937, during the period of political repressions. According to the most recent statistical data, there are 108,117 Koreans in Kazakhstan. The topic of ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan and their role in establishing contacts between the two countries is noted regularly in the course of bilateral ~~summits and intergovernmental meetings.~~

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Koreans in Kazakhstan have been actively participating in the development of bilateral ties and cooperation in the economic sphere, as well in the domains of culture, education and science. The elite of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan maintains tight connections with representatives of South Korean business, which allowed to create a number of large joint enterprises in Kazakhstan. A positive attitude of the Kazakh population towards local Koreans, who are considered hard-working, responsible and law-abiding citizens, was transferred onto Koreans arriving from South Korea.

¹ See: "FACT SHEET on Cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea (15 August)," available at [<http://dep-econom.mid.gov.kz/en/pages/fact-sheet-cooperation-between-republic-kazakhstan-and-republic-korea-august>], 18 June, 2018.

² See: "Glavy MID Kazakhstana i Iuzhnoi Korei obsudili problemy Koreiskogo poluostrova," available at [<https://mir24.tv/news/16301159/glavy-mid-kazakhstan-i-yuzhnoi-korei-obsudili-problemy-koreiskogo-poluostrova>], 14 June, 2018.

³ See: "Kazakhstan i Iuzhnaia Koreia," available at [https://www.inform.kz/ru/kazakhstan-i-yuzhnaya-koreya_a2971960], 14 June, 2018.

Table 1

Number of Koreans according to the Census (people)

	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	1999	2009	2018
Koreans	96,453	74,019	78,078	91,984	103,315	99,665	100,385	108,177

Sources: (1) Demoscope Weekly [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_39.php?reg=10], 14 June, 2018.
(2) Demoscope Weekly [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_59.php?reg=91], 14 June, 2018.
(3) Demoscope Weekly [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_70.php?reg=5], 14 June, 2018.
(4) Demoscope Weekly [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_79.php?reg=5], 14 June, 2018.
(5) Demoscope Weekly [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=5], 14 June, 2018.
(6) Various ethnicities in the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of the beginning of 2018 [https://data.egov.kz/api/v2/kazakhstan_respublikasy_halkyny/v2?pretty], 14 June, 2018.

The Association of Koreans in Kazakhstan (AKK) invests efforts in the cultural dialog between North and South Korea. For instance, in 2007 AKK organized the International Festival of Korean Art, and artists from both South and North Korea performed on stage of the Korean Theater.

2018 marks the 80th anniversary of Koreans' residence in Kazakhstan, and the Association of Koreans in Kazakhstan intends to conduct 20 international and domestic projects.⁴

The Attitude of Kazakhstan's Population towards South Korea: Public Opinion

In 2008 and 2016, the Public Opinion Institute⁵ has held a panel sociological survey *The Image of South Korea in Kazakhstan: People's Opinion*. One thousand and two hundred respondents were polled in 14 regions of the country and in the cities of Astana and Almaty, 55.7% of them female, and 44.3% male. The age distribution of the respondents was as follows: most of the respondents belong to the 30-45 age group (33.7%), the second group in size was 18-29 (28%), smaller groups were those representing people 46-60 (27.4%) and 61 and over (10.9%).

Generally, 80.2% of respondents believe that a positive image of South Korea has formed in Kazakhstan.

⁴ See: "Pod odnim shanyrakom. Iz interv'yu vitse-prezidenta Assotsiatsii koreitsev Kazakhstana Sergeia Ogaia," available at [<http://and.kz/site/article/3128>].

⁵ See: "Imidzh Iuzhnoi Korei v Kazakhstane: mnenie naseleniia," Public Opinion Research Institute, 2017.

Table 2

**Image of South Korea
as Seen by the People of Kazakhstan**

<i>Possible Responses</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Share, %</i>
Mostly positive	404	33.7
Positive	558	46.5
Negative	44	3.7
Mostly negative	13	1.1
Undecided / No answer	181	15.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,200</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Respondents were subsequently offered to select the “national products” that they primarily associated with South Korea. The associations of the Kazakhstan residents included household appliances and electronics (52.7%), automobiles (36.8%) and medicine (28.3%).

In the 18-29 age group, the third position was filled by TV series (31.3%), a fact that can probably be explained by the great interest of youth in the film industry. Korean TV series are most popular among women in the 18-45 age group (61.1%). The country’s TV series are among the top five associations that the residents of Kazakhstan have with South Korea (27.3%).

As it is apparent from the data in Table 4, South Korea is primarily of interest to the population of Kazakhstan because of its unique nature and geographic location (19.7%), film industry, theaters, artists (14.3%), historical sites and landmarks (13.8%). Meanwhile, 10.8% of respondents had difficulty in responding to this question due to lack of familiarity with the country.

Table 3

**Major Associations that the People of
Kazakhstan have with South Korea**

<i>Possible Responses</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Share, %*</i>
Household appliances and electronics	632	52.7
Automobiles	442	36.8
Medicine	339	28.3
TV series	328	27.3
National cuisine	198	16.5
Clothing	141	11.8

Table 3 (continued)

Possible Responses	Number	Share, %*
Local Koreans	75	6.3
K-pop**	30	2,5
Undecided / No answer	17	1,4

* The sum is not equal to 100% because the respondents could select several responses.
 ** A specific genre of South Korean rock music popular all over the world.

Table 4

Most Interesting Sides of South Korea for the People of Kazakhstan

Possible Responses	Number	Share, %
Unique nature of this country, its geographic location and distinctive features	236	19.7
Film industry, theater, artists, directors	171	14.3
Historic sites, architecture, monuments and other landmarks	165	13.8
National cuisine	120	10.0
“Korean economic miracle”	60	5.0
The country’s sports achievements, athletes and sporting events	53	4.4
Natural Korean cosmetics	49	4.1
Folk culture (songs, dances, rituals, clothing)	46	3.8
Korean fashion	34	2.8
Citizens of South Korea (Koreans)	23	1.9
Music, composers, performers	17	1.4
I have no interest in this country	96	8.0
I don’t know much about this country, can’t answer	130	10.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,200</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Meanwhile, 744 respondents (62%) have answered affirmatively when asked whether they would like to visit South Korea, and 456 (38%) did not express such a desire.

Korea's image in Kazakhstan is comprised of the following elements:

1. Products "Made in Korea" are extremely popular in Kazakhstan (electronics, automobiles, cosmetics, etc.).
2. Korean TV series, performers and pop music are very popular. Under the influence of K-pop, a new music style, namely, Q-pop, emerged in Kazakhstan. Its founders are the members of Ninety-One band (Kazakh boys-band).
3. State visits, such as the visit of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in November 2016, are raising a wave of interest towards Korea.
4. A major contribution to the development of cultural relations is made by the Embassy of South Korea in Kazakhstan and the Korean Cultural Center.
5. Medical tourism to Korea is growing more attractive for Kazakh citizens.
6. Cultural affinity, similarity of languages (Altaic languages), traditions and rituals, general Asian kinship.
7. Korean cuisine is very popular in Kazakhstan, the number of Korean stores, restaurants, coffee houses is growing notably.

Certain aspects of Korea's image in Kazakhstan can be discussed through the prism of the results of a sociological survey of young people.⁶ The share of youth in Central Asian countries is currently rather high. For instance, 25% of Kazakhstan's population is comprised of people between 14 and 29 years of age.

In order to survey the opinions among youth, a comparative sociological study was conducted in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The surveys were conducted according to a single method, with a 1,000 respondents between 14 and 29 years of age in each country. The project was developed and realized by the Public Opinion Research Institute (Astana, Kazakhstan⁷), on commission from the Central Asian regional office of Friedrich Ebert Foundation⁸ and was based on the methodology of the German research project Shell Youth Study, conducted in Germany since 1953. Professor K. Hurrelmann, one of the founders of Shell Youth Study, was the research consultant on the project.

Table 5 presents the respondents' answers regarding the establishment of relations between South Korea and the countries participating in the project. It is apparent that young people from all four countries regard the relations as positive and believe that closer ties should be the goal. Kazakhstan's youth (52.4%) believes that the relations should remain "in their current state."

⁶ See: B.I. Rakisheva, *Molodezh Tsentralnoi Azii. Sravnitelny obzor (na osnove sotsiologicheskogo oprosa)*, Scientific editors Klaus Hurrelmann and Peer Teschendorf (Berlin, Germany), Almaty, 2017, 90 pp., available at [<http://www.fes-centralasia.org/ru/statja/ffeh-predstavljaet-sravnitelnyj-analiz-issledovanij-serii-molodezh-centralnoj-azii.html>].

⁷ Public Opinion Research Institute was established in 2013 by a group of sociologists with over 19 years professional experience. The institute specializes in studying public opinion, and conducts marketing and sociological surveys (see the Institute's website address: [<http://www.opinions.kz/>]).

⁸ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Friedrich Ebert Foundation) was set up in 1925 under the political will of the first democratically elected President of Germany Friedrich Ebert. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Central Asia began its work in 1993, its office in Kazakhstan (Almaty) was opened this same year, a year later it was opened in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek), in 1997 in Uzbekistan (Tashkent), in 2004 in Tajikistan (see the Foundation's website address: [<http://www.fes-centralasia.org/ru/>]).

Table 5

**Opinions of Youth from Central Asian Countries
on the Preferable Relations of their Country with South Korea (%)**

<i>Answers Selected by Respondents from:</i>	<i>More Close Relations</i>	<i>More Distant Relations</i>	<i>Relations Should Remain in Current State</i>	<i>Undecided / No Answer</i>	<i>Refuse to Answer</i>
Kazakhstan	20.8	19.6	52.4	1.3	5.9
Kyrgyzstan	27.1	19.8	43.3	4.1	5.7
Uzbekistan	51.6	3.9	34.0	0.8	9.7
Tajikistan	31.8	13.6	41.5	4.1	9.0

Young people of four Central Asian countries were asked questions regarding the possibility of continuing their education in various countries, and it has become apparent that the share of respondents from Kazakhstan is the lowest among those who would like to study in South Korea. The language barrier is a possible reason (education in South Korea is primarily conducted in Korean), along with a low level of awareness of South Korean higher educational institutions among prospective students.

Table 6

**Attractiveness of Various Countries
for Continuing Education among the Youth of
Central Asian Countries (%)**

<i>Possible Responses</i>	<i>Respondents from Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Respondents from Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Respondents from Uzbekistan</i>	<i>Respondents from Tajikistan</i>
Russia	29.6	26.0	25.1	42.2
United States of America	23.7	31.1	18.8	16.1
EU countries	16.3	9.6	15.2	7.7
China	14.6	6.8	5.4	8.3
Central Asian country	5.2	3.8	4.0	6.8
South Korea	0.2	0.5	5.7	0.2
Turkey	0.2	1.7	—	0.6
Malaysia	0.1	—	—	0.1

Table 6 (continued)

<i>Possible Responses</i>	<i>Respondents from Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Respondents from Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Respondents from Uzbekistan</i>	<i>Respondents from Tajikistan</i>
Singapore	0.1	—	—	—
UAE	—	0.7	—	—
Japan	—	0.1	—	—
Canada	—	0.1	—	0.2
Other countries	—	—	—	2.8
None	0.6	—	18.5	0.6
Undecided / No answer	9.4	19.6	7.3	14.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Cooperation in the Educational Sphere

One of the most quickly developing directions of cultural exchange between Kazakhstan and Korea is that of language studies. Between 2004 and 2017, over 200 Korean students completed a course in Kazakh language at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (Seoul). The interest in studying the Kazakh language in South Korea is constantly growing.

Table 7

Foreign Students in Korean Higher Education Institutions

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Receiving Higher Education</i>	<i>Studying Korean Language</i>	<i>Studying Other Languages</i>
Total	123,192	86,729	39,450	13
China	69,413	52,300	17,113	0
Korean diaspora members	174	163	11	0
Vietnam	15,771	5,145	10,626	0
Mongolia	6,115	3,171	2,944	0
Japan	2,711	2,097	614	0

Table 7 (continued)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Receiving Higher Education</i>	<i>Studying Korean Language</i>	<i>Studying Other Languages</i>
Uzbekistan	2,601	1,617	983	1
U.S.	1,543	1,390	153	0
Indonesia	1,466	1,289	177	0
Pakistan	1,395	1,315	80	0
France	1,277	1,188	89	0
India	1,259	1,125	134	0
Taiwan	1,176	897	279	0
Malaysia	1,155	1,001	154	0
Bangladesh	890	848	42	0
Kazakhstan	873	738	135	0
Russian Federation	866	609	257	0
Nepal	792	695	97	0
Germany	791	778	13	0
Philippines	720	609	111	0
Other countries	12,378	9,917	2,449	12

Source: [https://www.immigration.go.kr/doc_html/attach/imm/f2017//20170324279568_1_1.hwp.files/Sections1.html], 28 February, 2018.

In Kazakhstan, Korean is taught at the leading universities, such as the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University (Astana), Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty), Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University (Almaty), Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages (Almaty), Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research (Almaty), Kazakh Academy of Transport and Communications (Almaty). Exchange students from South Korea are studying at these institutions as well. The language school of the Korean Cultural Center of the Embassy of Republic of South Korea in Astana is also popular, with up to 300 people studying there annually. There's always a waiting list to sign up for a course at this school, which testifies to the popularity of the Korean language among the youth.

Aside from the language courses, approximately 700 students from Kazakhstan study at different levels of South Korean higher educational institutions annually.

Ties in the Scientific Sphere

It turned out to be extremely difficult to find experts on Korean studies in Kazakhstan. Despite the presence of the Korean Studies Center at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty), a school of Korean studies hasn't yet been formed in the country, since there are few experts and research associates with thorough familiarity with the Korean language. The situation is only slightly better in South Korea—there are several centers and institutes for the studies of Central Asian countries. In 2005, the Association of Experts on Kazakhstan was established in the Republic of Korea, and there are specialists in the country who are fluent in Kazakh language and specialize in studying Kazakhstan.

Nonetheless, higher educational institutions and research institutes in both countries are making efforts to support and develop ties in the scientific sphere: young Korean scientists are defending their master's theses and doctorates in Kazakhstan, scientists from Kazakhstan are also receiving scientific degrees in various spheres of science in South Korea.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the countries are not yet sufficiently active in developing their cooperation in the educational sphere. Getting closer through education is one of the most efficient forms of developing bilateral cooperation. It is entirely clear that the educational collaboration between Kazakhstan and South Korea has great potential and development opportunities that are not used to the fullest extent. A promising vector of cooperation is the establishment of a joint Kazakh-South Korean university, similar to the successfully functioning Kazakh-British and Kazakh-American Universities, as well as joint high schools similar to the Kazakh-Turkish lyceums. The establishment of such institutions will create a foundation for the implementation of a poly-lingual educational strategy, announced in Kazakhstan, wherein the education is supposed to be conducted in four languages—Kazakh, Korean, English and Russian.⁹

There is currently a vital need to consider the possibility of launching a joint research project or center on studying various aspects of Kazakh-Korean relations, which would help consolidate the efforts of the existing experts and create the conditions for the training and further development of scientists and specialists. These centers and projects could operate based on grant programs, financed by the state or committed private structures of both countries, which would assist in improving the quality of scientific analysis and expertise of bilateral relations.

The cooperation between the two countries is currently focused on the power sector, nuclear industry, construction and finance. Due to this fact, it seems feasible to approve government contracts in the framework of the Bolashak program, which prepares young professionals in the above-mentioned spheres in South Korea, aiming to create a human resource reserve for participation in joint projects.¹⁰ The Bolashak program has been established by the Decree of the President of Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev dated 5 November, 1993. The program aims to prepare specialists for the priority spheres of the country's economy. It entails academic education, practical internships in the leading international companies and universities.¹¹

⁹ See: R.E. Kudaibergenova, "Kazakhstan i Iuzhnaia Koreia: novye gorizonty sotrudnichestva v oblasti obrazovaniia," available at [<http://group-global.org/ru/publication/22203-kazahstan-i-yuzhnaya-koreya-novye-gorizonty-sotrudnichestva-v-oblasti-obrazovaniya>], 24 March, 2018.

¹⁰ See: *Ibidem*.

¹¹ For more on the Bolashak program, see: [<https://www.bolashak.gov.kz/ru/o-stipendii/istoriya-razvitiya.html>].

As for the development of tourism, the existing flow of medical tourists to Korea needs to be institutionalized and systematized. This flow is currently of a chaotic nature, there is frequent deception on the part of intermediaries and translators. It would be rational to create a unified national medical tourism operator, which would refer patients through tried and tested channels fully accompanied from airport to the hospital and back, with total exclusion of the entire chain of intermediaries.

Despite the small drop in popularity of the Korean wave (*hallyu*), the soft power of the Korean culture is still felt in Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, the familiarization with the culture of Kazakhstan is revived only in the run-up to official events.

Experts note the need to form a positive image of Kazakhstan in South Korea, first and foremost, as the leader of the international anti-nuclear movement. One of the vectors may be the active presence of Kazakhstan in South Korea's information field, including joint pre-production of documentary and feature films.

Cultural and humanitarian collaboration is a significant element in solidifying the relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea, which currently requires expansion and enhancement. Cultural and humanitarian cooperation is capable of directly affecting the quality of the growing political and economic rapport between the two countries, which we are now witnessing.
