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Being a “Soviet Korean” in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan

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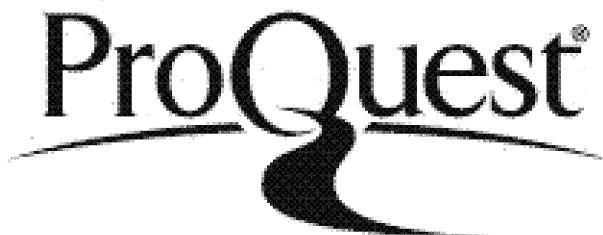


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Abstract

This thesis examines what it means to be a “Soviet Korean” in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. The majority of Koreans in Alma-Ata are the historical result of two displacements, having first migrated to Russia since the nineteenth century and then being deported to Kazakhstan in 1937 by Stalin. The repression was followed by decades of confinement in collective farms. The unlikely Korean presence in Central Asia was to be unveiled to the outside world after *glasnost*, and a change in the international political climate around the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games resulted in unprecedented encounters between the Soviet Korean diaspora community and other Korean visitors. My fieldwork began shortly afterwards, capturing the historical moment of this hitherto unknown section of the Korean diaspora.

Reflecting the minority’s history of persecution and isolation, it is not surprising to find high levels of linguistic and cultural “Russification”. However, the Soviet Koreans constantly compare themselves with “others” and keep a distinct boundary. Following Bloch (1998), I argue for the importance of exploring socio-cultural reproduction in implicit domains. Thus sharing and transmitting cultural identity and memory is not so dependent on languages, narratives and formal education alone. Rather, aspects of “being Korean” are constantly found and reinforced within the community in aspects such as management of resources, articulation of cultural symbols, ways of communication, and sensorial preferences. I concentrate on their history, community dynamics, parent and child relationship, dietary practice, way of communicating and implicit and emotional aspects of “being Korean”.

I elucidate both the experiences and representations of the diaspora covering from pre-migration days in Korea to the present in the new state of Kazakhstan. Korean agricultural and Confucian root is favourably contrasted to the nomadic Kazakh traditions, yet it also bears the stigma of marginality in a Soviet context. Thus “Soviet Koreanness” reflects the traditions of the early migrants which are open to constant repositioning through dialogue with other Korean influences and ethnic groups.

Food and culinary practice in its production and consumption is one of such areas where categories of ethnicity and gender get expressed and boundaries are maintained. Strong emotional responses are noted as they are triggered by sensory experiences and associations. In the section on family I single out the significance of parent-child relationships and associated ideology and emotions. Parental sacrifice, filial piety and guilt are specific parts of “being” a Korean. Education as ethnic identifier, and symbolic component for Korean personhood is examined in an intergenerational context. Finally, I explore Korean emphasis on non-verbal and implicit ways of communication and examine their relationship with notions of personhood, morality and ethnic identity.

Acknowledgements

The thesis is about unusual people who went through an unusual journey and are now found in an unusual place. In imitation of art, my life in the past years has also mirrored some aspects of my subjects as I felt dispossessed, displaced and finally became a diaspora member myself.

Sorting out data and re-living them over the years, I kept marvelling about the generosity of heart that was shown to me in the field. My informants and friends are most likely to shrug my gratitude off, but it was all the more amazing as those were undoubtedly traumatic days for all the people in the field whose intense moral and physical sufferings I vividly witnessed. Yet they opened doors to a stranger and shared the last crumb of bread in the midst of this mayhem and the experience has changed something in me as a person. I hope the seed of those days still keeps growing in me up to this day. Regrettably, I never really managed to articulate my deep appreciation nor kept good correspondence. Now I am calling all the dear names as they come to my mind.

Apart from sheltering and feeding me, Nestai Mansurovna's Suleimanov family provided valuable understanding and insight about the Kazakhs. If it were not for the experience with them, my data today would have been undoubtedly unbalanced and unjust. I should also like to think that the intriguing portions of lamb and their elderly relative's benediction offered helped me to have "a good brain, persuasive tongue and sharp ears".

Much love was also shown to me by the 'other' family Khvans. Like the Suleimanovs, they took care of me sharing whatever they had. Particular credit goes to Liza who gladly shared a room with me and put up with all my idiosyncrasies with good grace. I owe Mrs Khvan gratitude for many things but especially her invaluable companionship and both emotional and practical care. I still remember the traditional Korean rice gruel she made for me when I suddenly fell sick. Of course, this beautiful friendship would not have happened were it not for the most welcoming Mr. Khvan. I also owe gratitude to their extended family who counted me as their own.

Other friends who have made fieldwork so much more exciting deserve to be named; Galya, Sasha, Ella, Traudl, Sveta, Peter, Angela, and Tanya. All my informants but especially the elderly deserve special credit for accounting deportation which is a very painful subject of personal loss and hurt. Dr Ross King, Professor German Kim and the late Professor Songmoo Kho graciously provided useful data in pre-field work research. The *Koryo ilbo* who invited me for my follow-up visit also needs to be mentioned. I also want to recall others whose names and faces are now getting blurred: Two

elderly Korean-majors I met in a night at a Korean theatre, another concerned Korean who told me never to “go about after sunset”, Mrs. Kim who put up with me in Tashkent, an elderly Russian axe-handle maker who offered me a share of his meagre profit, my Russian neighbour “crazy” Alek who disappeared upon his mother’s death. I particularly thank countless people who kindly showed me the way or gave me a lift.

Back to London, my appreciation goes to my supervisor Professor Maurice Bloch for his intellectual inspiration and stimulating discussions. I owe him much in formulating my own ideas and choosing my field site. I also thank Professor Charles Stafford, Dr. Mark Jamieson and Dr. Peter Loizos for advice and encouragement. Dr Leonie Kindness was a remarkable and patient midwife to this overdue delivery as a personal tutor.

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Lastly my heart goes to my long-suffering family. True to Korean fashion, at the risk of sounding like my own subjects, I thank my parents, Antonio and Lucia Shin, my grandmothers, auntie Sunhyǒn, Heebong and Elizabeth. Without their confidence in Providence and dogged prayer, I would not have persisted.

Indeed it has been a long journey from a “human doing” to “human being”. In thanksgiving I enclose the image of the Divine Mercy of Jesus through which I experienced the healing of my person on the third of April 2001. In great trust, I commend all those who suffered and perished under the Stalin’s Reign of Terror to the mercy of God.

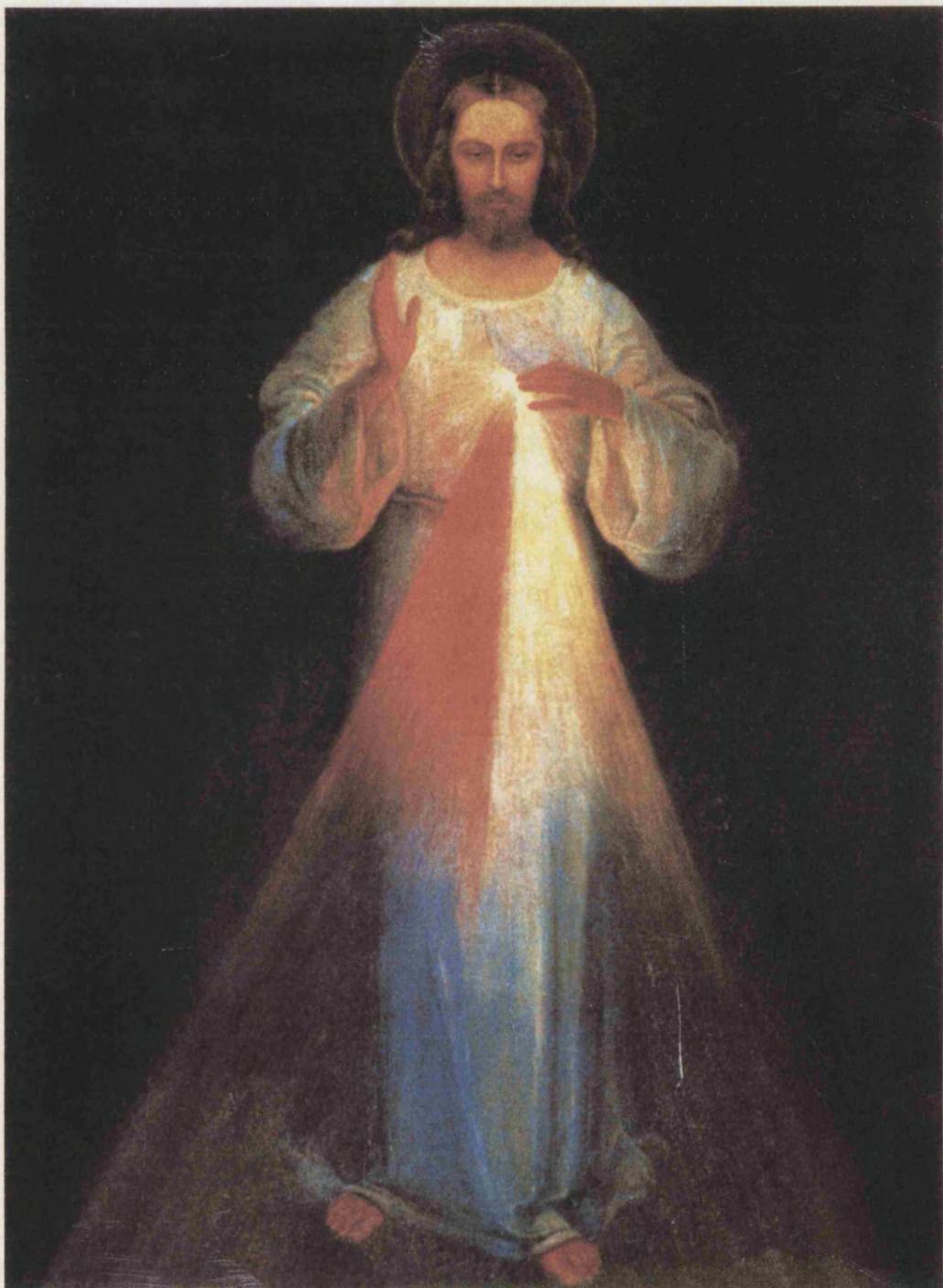
The thesis is dedicated to Mary, Our Mother who I know to be the instrument of all graces. Her being immaculate, all the merits of the dissertation is hers but faults are mine.

Language note

The course of writing and fieldwork involved the use of Korean, Russian and English. Fieldwork was undertaken mainly in Russian, but I used Korean with the elderly informants and English, with some friends who are proficient in English. Russian has been translated to English by the author, where necessary and I make no claim of any special transliteration system. For Korean transliteration into English, the thesis commonly follows McCune-Reischauer system that adopts diacritics with some exceptions allowing convention and personal preference in transliterating their own names.

Korean names have some variations. Normally consisting of a syllable of a surname followed by two syllables of a given name, they have a tendency of being hyphenated even though the given names are not really breakable. To avoid confusion, I put family name first even in traditional Korean names.

Names of the Soviet Koreans are a bit more complicated as they adopt both ways but slightly in different context. For example when they call themselves they keep traditional Korean order with the surname first followed by usually Russified name and patronymic such as Shin Sveta Antoneyvna. At the same time when they abbreviate, the order gets reversed such as, S. A. Shin. I also strive to follow their preference as it strikes me as rather unique for them to preserve the old order unlike other Korean diaspora. To protect my informants, most of them are given pseudonyms.



JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU

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Chapter One Introduction : An Unlikely Presence

In this chapter, I aim to locate Koreans in Alma-Ata by outlining a relevant theoretical, geographical, historical and social context. The early Korean émigré were mainly impoverished peasants of 19-20th century and their community went through extraordinary historical events such as the Russian Revolution, collectivisation, Stalin's Reign of Terror, deportation, De-Sovietisation and Kazakh nation-building. In spite of a series of ruptures in the community history, I argue for a cultural continuity in the realm of cultural symbols and meaning systems. In spite of the severe ethnic repression and its relatively early migration history, the Soviet Koreans share similar socio-cultural patterns with other branches of the Korean diaspora. Furthermore, following M. Bloch (1998), I emphasise the greater significance of cultural transmission in implicit domains and elaborate how the cultural carry-over from pre-migration days of Korea has shaped the way Koreans interpret and maintain the new social and ethnic relations in Russia and Kazakhstan. Especially, fuelled by the Russian/ Soviet concept of *kultura*, the traditional Korean preoccupation with the centre and periphery finds expression in a desire for urban living and pursuit of education. I present Alma-Ata as a space where changes, conflicts and chaos occur as the new order of Kazakh nation-building is layered upon the existing Soviet social order. I end the chapter with the depiction of Korean angst as they interpret the latest Kazakh nationalist move as socially treacherous and culturally backward.

Section One : Theoretical and Ethnographical Framework

The Koreans in the former-Soviet Union have come a long way since their entry into Russian Far East in the 19th Century, having survived the turbulent history of Russia, Soviet Union and post-Soviet states. Having "slaved" their way through Soviet collective farms and schoolrooms, many of them now speak Russian as their mother tongue, and work as highly educated professionals in cities. Beneath their model *Homo Sovieticus* profile, however, lies the layered reality wrought by a ruptured history of deprivation, displacement, and institutional violence.

In examining the lived experience and the identity of Alma-Ata Koreans in the post-Soviet Kazakhstan I focus on historical events, social memory, ethnic relations, cultural practices and symbols. Which socio-cultural systems and symbols did the early immigrant bring with them? What particular cultural ideologies and technologies interplay with historical reality in their new country? How is power

understood and related to? How do people see themselves and relate to others when life was treacherous and arbitrarily controlled ?

This study is a contribution to Korean diaspora studies as well as an addition to the body of knowledge that concerns socio-cultural reproduction among displaced and dispossessed people. Though not representative nor exhaustive, much of the findings are common and applicable to Koreans in other parts of Central Asia. The usages of the anachronistic terms “Soviet Korean ” and “Alma-Ata” are deliberate, as they chronicle the reality of Koreans who were at a historical crossroads of De-Sovietisation. I argue that , in spite of the disconnections caused by political and social changes, a close inspection of the implicit domains of the Korean diaspora reveals a persistence of traditional culture. Unlike assumptions that favour a complete rupture with Korean tradition, I maintain that the minority’s response is very much shaped and organised by Korean cultural notions of state, patriarchy, and personhood. Underpinned by the Confucian social order and agrarian practice, the symbols and meanings of the “past” were transplanted and transformed into a new soil.

I have approached these multi-faceted and often contradictory layers of Koreanness through diverse strands. First , I draw on S. Yanagisako’s insight for analysing cultural systems of immigrants whose original cultural trait is distinctive and whose discourse evolves around displacements. In her study of Japanese American kinship (1985), she stresses historical contextualising and studying of symbols :

“If symbolic systems help people answer the questions and cope with the problems of meaning they confront in their everyday lives, symbolic analysis can only be enriched by a knowledge of the social history that has given rise to these questions and problems. Conversely, we comprehend that social history only if we comprehend the system of symbols and meanings through which people interpret and thereby transform the past ”(1985:1).

Following Yanagisako, I argue that an in-depth reading of pre-migration Korean legacy as well as subsequent historical events is absolutely crucial in understanding the present condition of the diaspora. Only when we discern key symbols and their meanings in the Korean past history, can we understand the present socio-cultural pattern of the Soviet Korean diaspora. For example, generational interdependence and symbols such as rice, guilty children and sacrificial parents betray unmistakable Korean hallmarks that gave meanings to the particular context of the Soviet Koreans. I locate the diaspora’s relentless pursuit of an imagined centre as a part of their understanding of symbolic power within a traditional meaning system.

Like Japanese Americans, early Korean immigrants were mostly impoverished peasants and they brought a very distinct cultural system from home. In essence, the émigré's Korean traditions involve agrarian modes of production and Confucian concepts and practices. In spite of the rupture caused by two displacements and subsequent persecutions, these became an invisible backbone of socio-cultural reproduction of "Koreanness". Korean agricultural expertise and practice of hard labour provided them with a social *raison d'être*, if not a social acceptance in a new land. Together with kinship ideology, the Korean engagement with the land provided the diaspora with a potent symbol of cultural and generational continuity. As a chronicler of the diaspora's history puts it, the Korean agricultural expertise was seen as an "ancestral grace" taught by the ancestors (P. G. Kim & S. Pang 1993:55).

Another Korean experience which haunts Korean memories, narratives and lived experience is the theme of deprivation and abandonment. Though not the sole victims of a painful modern Korean history, the émigré who even risked their lives to escape misery, have a more acute sense of their marginality and deprivation. The memory and discourse of previous misery enables them to develop a specific perspective as "survivors" who are "immunized" and thus become "impervious" to life's further "assaults". Being a Soviet "Korean" involves this disposition and outlook: little can shock them and they have "little to complain about" (Goffman 63, 65).

As for Confucianism, it has functioned more as a diffused cultural practice rather than a systemically articulated and transmitted ideology. As a distinct cultural system, Confucianism posits prescriptive notions of personhood, morality, scholarship, and social order. Though hardly of a literati stock who were jealous practitioners and beneficiaries of Confucianism, the émigré pursued, appropriated and claimed its main tenets as "ethnic capital" in a foreign environment.

The tenacity and adaptability of the Korean past and pre-migration worldview in the present is also well noted in other Korean diaspora. Nancy Abelmann and John Lie (1995) show that much of what Korean Americans do in their new country is still largely structured by the organising principles which are brought from Korea. Thus the concentration of Korean small business is only intelligible by understanding traditional kinship meanings and symbols. They show that cultural logic enables parents who feel constrained in social mobility to opt out for accumulating economic capital for children. The children in return have a duty of completing the family saga by pursuing the educational and professional high road. John Lie tersely critiques K Park's equation of the Korean American dream with establishing successful business. "For many, the Korean American dream is about getting into prestigious universities and getting professional jobs" (J. Lie 1998: 194).

This concentric Korean worldview of centre and periphery is transplanted in American soil, driving Korean Americans unceasingly towards the imaginary centre. Stress on both delayed gratification and collective identity are recognised to be their strategy.

Now I turn my attention to the way power is seen and how it is related to the history and cultural meaning system. In a way, Koreans relate to the Russian/Soviet state as they did to the old Korean kingdom. Like a good “Korean” son who obeys the parental authority, the émigré complied to the often unjust state authority. As if to please an intimidating patriarchal head, the Koreans strived to achieve collective “personhood”, the road to rehabilitation through traditional cultural idioms and symbols. However it is not an entire submission. Even a “good” son can have his way through “re-interpreting” the existing filial ideology (Janelli 1993); Koreans aspired to transcend the temporal power of the state by resorting to intergenerational kinship ideology.

The way Koreans see and relate to “others” in their new land is also profoundly shaped by similar cultural assumptions. Ethnically stratified former Soviet Kazakhstan was a field where traditional Korean class ideology gets juxtaposed with Soviet interethnic relationship. The Korean literati of scholarship and refinement finds a parallel in the “cultured” Russian intelligentsias throughout the Soviet era. Like old Korean literati, these ‘*kulturnyi*’ (cultured) and ‘*bolshii*’ (big) people commanded Korean obedience and respect. This loyalty, however, did not stretch to the ‘common’ Russian folks who were regarded as ambitionless and simple. Likewise, the Kazakhs who were seen as an illiterate and rootless people who occupied the bottom of the Korean social perception even though the Kazakhs had a certain political status vying with Russians in their own land. Thus Korean meaning systems, including social stratification, were transferred in the way Soviet Koreans shape themselves and relate to others, leaving Koreans little desire to emulate Kazakhs as social reference group.

While earlier works on the Koreans of the former Soviet Union tend to focus on Korean cultural continuity in visible aspects of the diaspora (e.g. Suh 1989 , Dzarlgasinova 1993 , Kho 1987 , Min 1992), recent studies emphasise the fluid and contextual nature of their identity (e.g. V. Han 2001, G. Kim & King 2001, G.N Kim & V. Khan 2001). The latter justifiably cautions against assumptions which obscure the distinctive identity of Soviet Koreans such as homogeneity within the diaspora and essentialism of the scholarship. However as they over-emphasise the ruptured explicit domain, these researches make injudicious judgments by ignoring the transformed continuity in embodied, everyday knowledge and actions. V. Han’s bold announcement is one of the bold assumptions: “ Moreover, Koreans in Central Asia show no Confucian social relationships between parent-child, man and woman, husband and wife, seniors and juniors” (V. Han 2001:71).

If “tradition” or “Koreanness” of Soviet Korean is to be equated with linguistic or articulated ideology, we are reducing a vast corpus of everyday reality which includes the way people perceive, act, relate, remember, and know implicitly. While disjunction is evident in the broken Korean body, community, language, and intergenerational communication, the continuity is clearly discernable in an implicit way. Besides, their inherent instrumentalist position and implicit assumption of ever-strategising social actors have a limited validity. Rather my findings suggest the power of invisible elements such as emotion, memory, physicality or sensory reality to be grossly underestimated. Also, methodologically their position has yet to be substantiated by more rigorous ethnographic works. Again, their claim suffers due to the nature of methodology that heavily relies on questionnaires, surveys and ultimately, correspondents’ representation.

In this regard Maurice Bloch offers the next theoretical and methodological framework in unravelling the complex nature of Korean identity as it is lived by Koreans. In *How we think they think* (1998), he marries a perspective of cognition to his ethnography of Zafimaniry of Madagascar in exploring the nature of cognition, language and memory. His main theme is the relation between what is “explicit and conscious” and what is “inexplicit or unconscious” (*ibid*, introduction 7). He validly critiques the assumption and practice of equating language with culture in representing social knowledge. Implicit, everyday knowledge intertwined with physicality, he argues, is a more fundamental backbone of culture than particularly articulated informant’s discourses.

Likewise, the memory of the past and historical knowledge is not to be equated with explicit narratives. He illustrates this point by a Zafimaniry example of non-verbal transmission of historical trauma across generations. Depending on the social contexts and sensory cues, his informants gave different versions of an event to an anthropologist. His young informants’ reimagined past traumatic event and long-term evocative social memories were triggered by physical, sensorial and emotional realities such as topography, smells, sights and mood. Thus Bloch concludes:

“... it means that the presence of the past in the present is much more complex, much less explicit but perhaps much more powerful than the presence of explicit narratives would ever make us believe....Of particular interest to social scientists is that certain memories which appeared to be totally lost can be retrieved when the person concerned reenters the emotional state they were in when the original event occurred (Baddeket 1990: chap.12&15). This means that the past is an ever-changing resource according to the situations or moods in which the persons find themselves, situations and moods which will often be due to organised social contexts (Gilligan and Bower1984)”(1998:118-119).

Bloch's theorisation is particularly insightful to Soviet Koreans who were left inarticulate and disjointed in their oral, literary and ritualistic tradition due to political trauma. In this respect, Mao's China offers yet another broken community which was traumatised by institutional violence and betrayal within. Jing (1996) charts the rise and fall of the Kongs, Confucius' descendants, under Mao. Regarded as a symbol of all things reactionary, the clan became political pawns of Mao's regime and later had to see the destruction of their ancestral remains and tombs by the state dam project. In the post-Mao period, the past was reformulated as the clan assiduously strained their collective memory to construct the temple and restore devotional rituals. While Confucius' descendants re-constructed and memorialised the past through temples, Korean "monument" is embodied in parent-child relationships. I maintain that the core of Soviet Korean identity remains in the intensely charged intergenerational dependency rather than any linguistic or ritualistic presence. Thus, parents' slaving in a field to support their children's study remains a potent cultural symbol of continued identity. As the Kongs' temple building evokes deep poignancy, the collective achievement of Korean personhood is shrouded with intense filial guilt and sorrow. The meanings and symbols of Korean kinship link the past and present with a full emotional force.

Bloch's insight further enables us to capture the subtleties of the Soviet Koreans communicative style. Leaving aside the silence imposed by the historic trauma, the Korean community also shares the general East Asian cultural trait that does not encourage explicit verbalisation. Rather, sensitivity in non-verbal communication is particularly singled out as an integral part of being a mature Soviet Korean. While Soviet Korean narratives are often stilted, disjointed and silenced, the deeper part of their being is coded and transmitted in non-linguistic way. His model enables us to understand the complex totality of Soviet Korean identity by taking account of what goes beyond verbal representation.

Another strand of my thesis is couched on the subject of historical trauma. People often manifest common social responses where actual and symbolic violence pervades social structure and relationship. This applies to diverse groups such as Japanese American Wartime internees, Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, victims of Stalin's *Reign of Terror* and Mao's witch-hunting. Caged in fear, violence and confinement, their condition resonates with Goffman's institutional life based in "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable periods of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (1961: 11).

Though far much shorter in duration (1942 -1945) and less brutal in treatment, the Japanese American internment case runs parallel to that of the Korean diaspora. In America, 110,000 Japanese, foreign and American, were interned in camps for “military necessity” by the U.S government after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour (Harth 2001: 283). Both Soviet Korean and Japanese American minorities were victims of racist states who presumed the guilt of people by an ethnic/racial association with the “enemy”. These traumas became historic watersheds scarring the way the communities related to self, other ethnic groups, and authority. In this social context, ethnic legacy and identity became associated with danger, shame and threat (Nagata 2001). As a result, like Japanese internees, Koreans could not, and did not resist the loss of their ethnic heritage in a visible domain.

Many of the victims are analogous to Goffman’s asylum dwellers who are now free and yet bound. The sentiment is common whether the sufferer is a Jewish survivor or Japanese internee :

“ They [Jews] came out of the oven, but the oven continues to burn within them.” (J .Bastianns quoted in Bar-On 1995 : 61)

“ But “camp” has never been “all over.” We children of the camp continue to measure our lives against where we’ve come from....The experience of America’s concentration camps shaped my generation of Japanese Americans, left its indelible mark on all of us, and kept us bound forever to the image of barbed wire and guard towers. No,...no one really ever leaves this place. I left Manzanar more than fifty years ago, but out there, somewhere on the deserts of America, I’m still a young boy running in the wild” (Tateishi 2001:137 -138).

Being a Soviet Korean also means carrying the mixed sense and history of shame, pride and insecurity. For those in the know, the shorthand for stigma is a kolkhoz, a place of past confinement, deprivation, and alienation . When an informant threw a castaway comment regarding the kolkhoz background of a certain society lady, she conjured the image of an upstart who “passes ” into Soviet respectability, yet lacking effortless grace , good “taste” and breeding. But most strikingly it also implied self –loathing as she added ironically, “ *It takes one to spot one.*”

Security is one of the common issues that haunt trauma victims such as the Jewish or Japanese American internees, and Koreans are no exceptions. Thus acquiring a professional niche and making oneself “indispensable” is the result (Bar-On 1995 : 158). Focussing on the trauma of deportation and subsequent social debilitation, H. Kwon (2001) also attributes the Korean academic and agricultural endeavour to the overcompensation of an insecure minority. He also points out the distorted diasporic

perception of self and authority resulting from severe repression. Dealing with Koreans in Uzbekistan, Kwon's observation remains equally valid to the Alma-Atian counterparts. However, he does not pursue why this particular people chose the avenue of education and intense labours nor does he mention the discourse of displacement and marginality which we can trace back to the roots of emigration.

Furthermore, traumatic experiences get transmitted down generations in the form of shame, guilt, stigma and alienation, according to clinical psychological literature on the Holocaust survivors' descendants (for more data, see Berger 1988). Children sensed and internalised unspoken messages of pent-up senses of bitterness, fear, grief and abandonment that often bound their parents (Bar-On 1995:156). Bar-On's study of three generations of Holocaust victims illustrates the way the "bond of suffering and attachment" binds children even to the dead who do not stop exerting power (*ibid.* 60). One such vulnerable child explains the nature of this past that still haunts her present:

"I'm not aware that I'm being pulled, but I find myself eating compulsively, thinking compulsively, working compulsively, saving money compulsively, simply-and when I realize what I'm doing, I feel bad" (*ibid.* 59).

Studies of Jewish Holocaust and Japanese American Internment have shown that, just like their victim parents, children of such parents are driven to the imaginary centre, fuelled with a sense of alienation as outsiders and also with a mission of fulfilling "unfinished dreams" (Nagata 2001:63, Bar-On 1995:260). The issue becomes all the more consuming to Koreans due to their traditional kinship system and symbols of Confucian ideology and intergenerational bond. Therefore, I conclude that particularly in implicit and symbolic domains, the contemporary Soviet Korean reality reveals the result of dialectic interaction between émigré's Korean socio-cultural tradition and the trauma of displacement and dispossession throughout the political history of Imperial Russia, Soviet Union and the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Historical Overview Of the Soviet Koreans

“The 1917 war in Moscow spilt over to the Far East by 1922 and they ‘did’ tohos. Toho means that you are someone exploiting other’s labour. In 1929 there was a purge of tohos who were many in the Far East.. And then there were the lowly and labourers. But if it were not for the rich, all the people from Chosŏn would have died of hunger. There were lots of ships and in those days if you had a fare then you came here for land and work, which were plenty. Where else could they work? Besides, they worked hard to become rich” (Shura, a Soviet Korean elder).

“We were taken into a carriage. Not a single soul was left. Why? Those who know say that Stalin was guilty but we did not know it then. Now we know that we were innocent” (Hyeok, Soviet Korean elder).

There are about 100, 000 ¹Koreans in Kazakhstan, and around 16,000 live in Alma-Ata. We begin this discussion of the surprising presence of a “Soviet ² Korean” community in Kazakhstan with a selection of haunting quotes from Soviet Korean elders as they share some personal memories about historical events such as Sovietisation and 1937’s deportation. Many impoverished Korean peasants had originally crossed the border from Korea to Russia, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were fleeing from economic hardship, famine, and later, political oppression following the Japanese annexation of Korea.

Although the seeds of heterogeneity and division between those who were more “Russified” and those who were less “Russified” were becoming apparent and Koreans lived and worked scattered , Koreans established a flourishing community in the Russian Far East. It was the heart of geographical , political, and socio-cultural cohesion with Korean media, colleges and schools. This period is remembered by many contemporary Soviet Koreans as “the good old days” even though poverty and exploitation were part of the experience for many Koreans in the Russian Far East.

This period of a thriving autonomous community was short-lived, however. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, the community underwent profound changes. Some suffered under the Communist regime, experiencing dispossession of their property and political persecution. Finally in 1937, the entire community was forcibly deported to Kazakhstan under Stalin’s Reign of Terror. This

¹ In 1989 Koreans comprised 0.6% of the population within Kazakhstan, numbering 103,315. (Zuev 1992:154 -155). Among them, 15.6 % of the Koreans with a population of 16,073 are found in the capital Alma-Ata as the 7th largest ethnic group comprising 1.4%. (ibid. 156).

² The Koreans whose story is told in this thesis generally regard themselves as *Sovietsky* Koreans. Regardless of their origin, their lives are anchored in the city of Alma-Ata which gives a socio-cultural reference point. Therefore I retain the anachronistic term ‘Soviet’, a reality that the informants still strongly identified themselves with despite its political demise. See Table 1.

long journey lasted for about four weeks. The oral histories collected include reports of the horrors of the time spent cramped in trains, designed for animal transportation. The ethnic persecution was carried out around the deportation and the intelligentsias were the first victims. According to some sources, 2,500 Soviet Korean elites were imprisoned and never seen again (Yi & Chōn 1993).

This unusual historical experience of double displacement has obviously and profoundly shaped the way that the community understands themselves and their place in the world. However, little news of the presence of these exceptional people reached the “outside world” until recently, as the Soviet experience ensured that the community was effectively cut off from outside contact for many years.

Only with *Glasnost* in the Eighties did an increasing freedom of travel and information began to occur. Their story, therefore, remains largely untold, and this thesis goes some of the way towards documenting the lived experiences of this hitherto “hidden” branch of the Korean diaspora. The map in page 23 gives an indication of the scale of their extraordinary journey.

Given the importance of the forces of history in the story of the Soviet Korean community, we now outline briefly some of the key stages and events that led the Koreans to Kazakhstan, and some of the events that shaped their lives after their arrival in Kazakhstan.

1392-1910 Chosōn This hierarchical kingdom was based on an agricultural economy and Confucian socio-political system.

19th - early 20th century. Korean migration from the northern part of Korea to the Russian Far East. Economic hardship forced Koreans to reluctantly abandon their homeland and the land of their ancestors. There was renewed migration after the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1905. A cohesive Korean community was established witnessing the development of schools and intelligentsia. Some became “Russified”, speaking Russian, converting to the Russian churches, taking Russian names, and marrying Russians.

1917 Russian Revolution and 1920's Sovietisation. Gradually the Soviet Koreans began to be affected by Communism, and many had their property confiscated by the state. Many Koreans were sent to work on collective farms.

1937 Koreans' deportation to Kazakhstan under Stalin's regime and aftermath. Many were imprisoned and disappeared, particularly the treasured elites. 180,000 Koreans were deported and the majority were re-located in the rural area of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (G. Kim 993 :25).

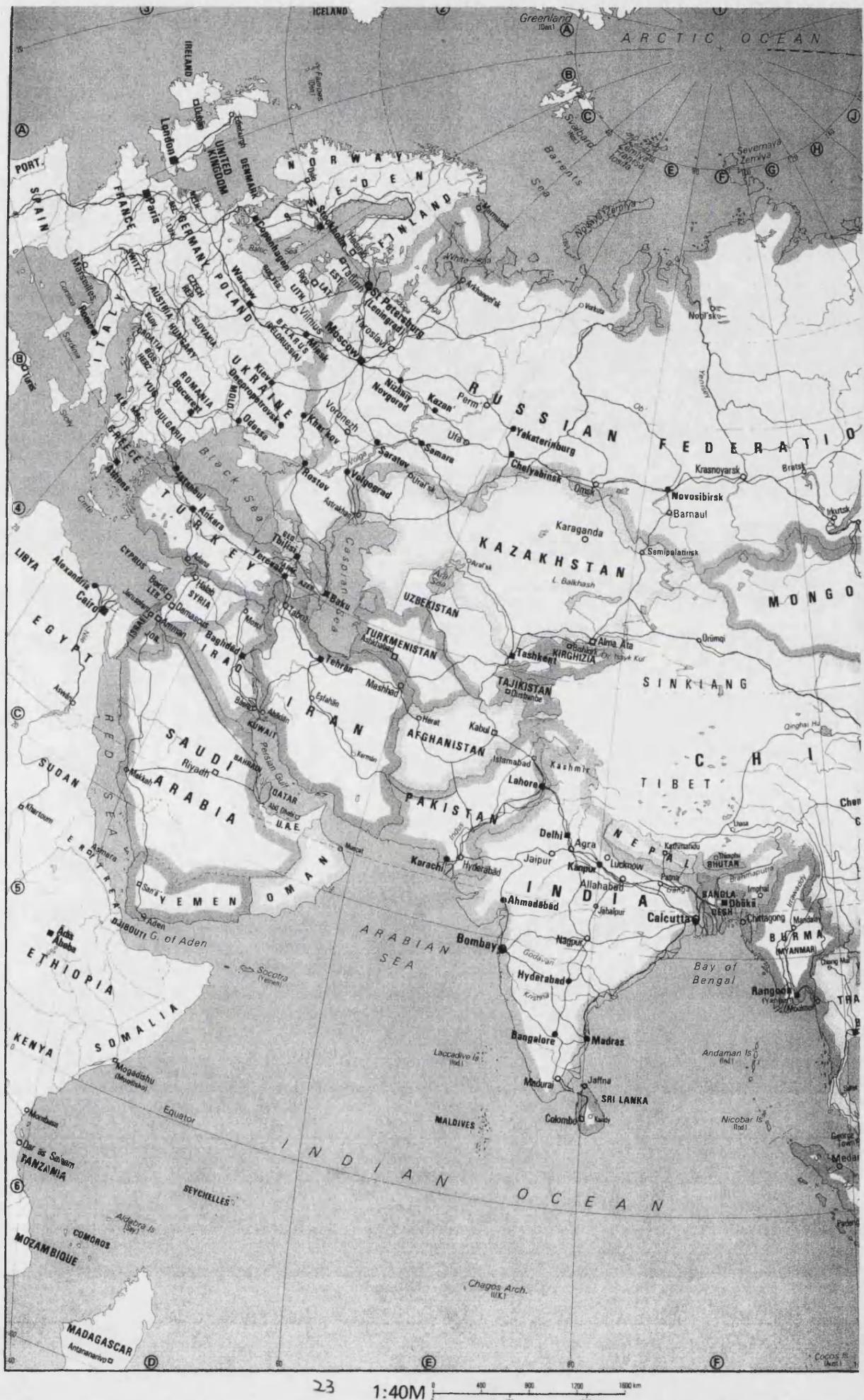
When Koreans encountered the Kazakhs for the first time, they were not impressed with the recently literate and formerly nomadic Kazakhs. They were seen as lacking "kultura", a Russian / Soviet notion for progress in education, hygiene, living standard, manners etc.

Times were hard when the Koreans first arrived, and many lived underground in dugout holes. There was also an oppression of the Korean language, traditions and religion, and Korean books were burned around the 1937 deportation. Eventually they settled on collective farms, and prided themselves that their farms were the most productive and successful. Yet they suffered from limited contact with and travel to the "outside world" until Stalin's death in 1953. Since then Koreans began to emerge from collective farms and over a generation, became the highest urbanised of all nationalities in the USSR with an exception of Jews. Now 84 % of Koreans in Kazakhstan live in urban areas, with only 16 % living among rural population (Khan & Pak 1993:5).

1980s Perestroika and Glasnost. Economic and social reform under Gorbachov took place in an attempt to transform the command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralised market economy. Now law permitted ownership of business in services, manufacturing and foreign trade. It also went with a socio-political openness of the Soviet society . When Seoul hosted the Olympic Games in 1988, the event had profound implications to the Soviet Koreans by paving a way to a Korean boom and a new self-awareness and pride among the Korean diaspora. The period also saw the 1937's Korean deportation being denounced by the Soviet Parliament in 1989.

1991 Demise of the Soviet Union and Independence of Kazakhstan.

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, Kazakhs started nation-building in search for their national and cultural identity. Meanwhile the Russian Parliament declared the rehabilitation of the repressed Koreans in 1993.



Section Two: Introducing the Korean Diaspora

Korean Diaspora

In spite of its considerable size, the majority of Korean immigration is a very recent phenomenon and has received relatively little academic attention in comparison to the Japanese and Chinese diaspora. Recently there has been a burgeoning of diaspora studies as the Korean diaspora has become a remarkable global phenomenon. According to the 1996 data, more than five million overseas Koreans are scattered across 140 countries in five continents accounting for more than 7% of all Korean populations and 11 % of South Korean populations (Tong'ilwon X, 1996). A quarter of South Koreans have a close relative, within third cousin, as diaspora (Choson ilbo 1995: 13). They are the fourth largest diaspora in the world after the Chinese, Jewish and Italian (Kwanggyu Yi 1997b: 1).

However in terms of the ratio and levels of emigration compared with country population, the Koreans are second only to the Jews. Unlike the Jewish diaspora that has a long history of migration, Korean migration is a relatively new phenomenon. The Korean diaspora are found especially in China, and North America, Japan and the former Soviet Union, amounting to 2 million, 1.4 million, 0.8 million and finally 450,000 respectively (*ibid.*).

Many Koreanists distinguish earlier immigrants to China, Russia, Japan and Hawaii who moved in the mid-19th century to the mid -20th century, from the later ones who now form the mainstream of Korean American and European diaspora especially since 1960's. While the former migration was largely driven by starvation and Japanese repression (S. Han & T. Kwon: 1993, K.Yi 1997b) , the latter represented active initiatives in the search for a better quality of life, especially in educational and occupational opportunities. Unlike early immigrants, the later immigrants almost all come from South Korea and have become a relatively young community in their host countries.

Communities vary in their origins and characteristics, and yet, significantly the studies on them show certain converging qualities, which lead them to be portrayed as a “model minority”. The majority of members of the Korean diaspora place great emphasis on education, entrepreneurial orientation and urbanisation, with the notable exception of the stigmatised Japanese Koreans (C. Lee & De Vos 1981, G. Kim 1993 : 27 , Abelmann & Lie 1995).

The greatest numbers of Koreans found outside the Korean peninsula are in China. In several ways Koreans in China share similar backgrounds with the Soviet Koreans. Both of them belong to the earliest migrants who were driven by poverty and the political mayhem in Korea. Just as the Soviet Koreans are still haunted by the tragic 1937 deportation which ruptured their lives irrevocably, so their Chinese counterparts also suffered from severe ethnic persecution during the Cultural Revolution period, which eradicated many Korean rituals and customs. However, unlike the Soviet counterpart, the Koreans in China were given a Korean autonomous region in which to live ; this became the hub of their relatively independent development.

The Chinese Koreans also share the same record of having attained the highest educational standards within multi-ethnic states. While the Soviet Koreans are the most educated ethnic group except Jews, Koreans are the most highly educated minority in China with zero illiteracy (C. Lee 1986, Zuev 1992, K.Yi 1997b :187, Chōn 2002:466). The multiple meanings of education to the Korean diaspora in China has been discerned as an intrinsic good for human development, an instrument of survival and mobility, and a mark of family prestige (C.Lee 1986 :11). Pioneering rice plantation in the area where it was considered not possible, is another common feature (K. Yi 1997b :158).

In contrast, even though there were earlier settlers, such as army brides and labourers to Hawaii, the majority of Koreans in America are relatively new immigrants. Mainly attracted by a better quality of life, they are beneficiaries of the Immigration Act of 1965 which abolished the discriminatory quotas based on nationality origin. Unlike earlier immigrants, these new immigrants possess a higher social and educational background. But due to its relative unfamiliarity with American society, they still display a distinctive model of a strong confinement and ethnic attachment (W. Hurh & K. Kim 1984). Hurh and Kim, nevertheless, argue that they were a result of the closed system found in the host society, setting a tone which becomes familiar in later studies.

Korean Americans also share the similar pattern with the other diaspora in their orientation towards upward mobility and educational enthusiasm (Abelmann & Lie 1995, Keyoung Park 1997). The Korean preoccupation with self-management of small business have been repeatedly dealt with by scholars (e.g. Hurh & Kim 1984, Keyoung Park 1997). Though these phenomena have long been interpreted as “model minority” behaviour, others see it as Korean confinement to structural underemployment between a dominant mainstream group and other less privileged minorities. Like the Jewish, Chinese and Indian diaspora, the Koreans are also linked to the concept of “middleman” (Light & Bonacich 1988).

On the other hand, researchers on Koreans in Japan have long focused on the relatively marginal Korean status in an exclusive Japanese society. The first generation of present Koreans in Japan are the uprooted unskilled labourers and conscripted soldiers from the colonial period. The presence of internal politics and factions severely divide the community. Framing their research within ethnicity theories, Changsoo Lee and De Vos stress the affective domains underneath the Korean-Japanese antagonism where social stereotypes of otherness and inferiority maintain structural discrimination (Lee & De Vos 1981). K. Lee (1984) also elucidates Japan's ambiguity towards the outsider as a reluctant host.

Koreans in Central Asia and Kazakhstan

While there was much attention paid in the area of enculturation of Korean Americans, little was reported from China and the Soviet Union. For a long time, the study of Koreans in the Soviet Union reflected the fate of its subject. As it was a politically sensitive subject inviting firm governmental and ideological control, there was little freedom for even Soviet Koreans to deal with the subject matter academically. In this climate, the early work on the Koreans by Soviet scholarship is confined to a heavily edited framework, and neutral subjects such as language and folklore.

Historical works were carefully processed in strict conformity to the official position that emphasised the convergence of interest between the Soviet regime and its model minority such as anti-Japanese activities and Soviet Korean contribution in agriculture. These works are very revealing in their total omission of any mention of deportation (e.g. S. Kim 1965). Anthropology also had the same modulated frame throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and was mainly confined to descriptive ethnographic work, notably by Dzarylgasinova and Ionova in the Korean settlement area (For more on this topic, see G. Kim & King 2001).

Likewise there was also little attention paid to the Korean minority by scholars outside the Soviet Union, even from the researchers of minority deportation of Stalin's era (Conquest 1960). The Korean presence in Central Asia, a great "novelty", was only to become apparent to the curious glances of Japanese travellers interested in the forbidden route of the Silk Road in 1980s, but they remain short journalistic impressions (Fujino 1980, Tando 1980).

After *Glasnost* the first major monograph, *Koreans in Soviet Central Asia* by Songmoo Kho , appeared in 1987 and there has been a steady increase in Korean diaspora studies within the former

Soviet Union. The majority of these works, however, remain historical. Taking advantage of easier access to hitherto inaccessible archives, they offer new insights into the deportation, addressing the telling omission of the issue by the previous “Soviet” authors (V. Kim 2000, W. Lee & Y. Kim 1994, P. Kim & S. Pang 1993). Again following the political process of de-Sovietisation, ironically, a new genre of “self-awareness” as a Soviet “Korean” became established and flourished. Often taking the form of an autobiographical sketch, such “confessions” began to emerge (e.g. S. Kim in Chōng 1995).

Through the last decade, researchers have produced a more detailed portrait of the people, yet the corpus is not extensive. Studies on Koreans in Kazakhstan still outnumber other researches, and yet as extant work still shows no major discernable difference among different Koreans in Central Asia, the pictures still converge: There is a strong Christian influence by Koreans from South Korea and North America (Chōn 2005). Koreans in Kazakhstan adopt the discourse of “benefited guest” for political survival during the political process of Kazakhisation (Oka 2001). The younger generation, with a more political and economic background, is now taking over the community leadership from the elderly academics (G. Kim & V. Khan 2001). Economically, highly risky but profitable mobile agricultural work is even more sought after among the market-oriented Korean diaspora. They had already displayed daring “capitalist” profit-making tendencies during the rigours of communism (Baik 2001, Keryong Lee 2003).

Min offers an extensive ethnographic coverage on familial tradition and characteristics centred around the theme of rites of passage (1992). Anthropological studies by Yi & Chōn (1993) and K. Chōn (1995) contain descriptions of the Korean community in Kazakhstan, and Chōn (2002) branches out further to a more specialised analysis of agricultural practise, material culture, kinship and rituals.

However, in general there is a paucity of contemporary ethnographic work that marries in-depth analysis and anthropological intimacy. For example the H. Kwon, V. Han and P. Pan’s (2001) research on identity with Uzbekistan Koreans adds socio-psychological insights, but unfortunately their heavy reliance on surveys and questionnaires does not necessarily validate their following analysis.

The hitherto “hidden” branch of the Korean diaspora which is the focus of this thesis shows many convergences and yet some divergences from the Korean diaspora in other areas. Thus the Soviet Korean emphasis on education is also characteristic of other members of the Korean diaspora, as is the role of Koreans in business that gravitates towards family-oriented small entrepreneurship.

What is different for these twice-migrated “Soviet Koreans” is their unique history of experiencing intense cultural persecution under Stalin. A useful comparison can be made with the Japanese diaspora who also share a similar background of agrarian economy and Confucianism with Koreans : 120,000 Japanese Americans also suffered internment of up to four years during the Second World War (Nagata 1998: 434 -435). Though not comparable to much more intense and prolonged Korean suffering, the Japanese American case raises an issue of historical trauma and its intergenerational impact. As in the case of Jewish holocaust victims, the children of these painful events were irrevocably shaped by the parental experiences which were not readily verbalised. Yet they were powerfully and implicitly communicated to children resulting in a psychological sense of insecurity and shame (*ibid.* 443, 448).

The consequences of the Japanese American interment is similar to those experienced by Soviet Koreans after the deportation. Like the Japanese victims, Koreans also endeavoured to conform to the mainstream society at any cost. The avenue that Koreans chose was an all-consuming pursuit of labour and education. Of course there is no doubt that these are the realistic avenues of escape from the ignominious existence of collective farms, but I also link these facts with the traditional Korean notion of personhood and kinship system. Their engagement in education and business must always be understood against the dynamics between forced migration, dispossession and cultural and symbolic construction of personhood. Accordingly, going beyond the pragmatics, they chose to over-compensate in the avenue for symbolic “rehabilitation” of their lost dignity. In light of this unique historical experience, it is fascinating to find over the course of this theses that significant cultural continuity is found, albeit at the implicit rather than the explicit levels.

Section Three: Introducing Kazakhstan, Kazakhs and Russians

“Is it possible that we are doomed to a life of eternal suffering and backwardness? Will the wondrous days illuminated by science and education finally come to the Kazakh people?”

Kazakh poet *Abai Kunanbaev* (1845-1904)

Russians , Kazakhs and *kultura*

Kazakhstan boasts 120 different ethnic groups, but Russians and Kazakhs are the two most prominent groups, consisting respectively of 30.0% and 53.4% of the population (Oka 2001:94). Much of the ethnic composition directly involves the history of Russian/ Soviet colonisation of the Kazakh land and

people. Kazakhstan is named after the Kazakh people, formerly pastoral nomads, who lived in “*yurts*”, a type of tent, and bred sheep and horses (picture 3).

The Kazakh peoples are a mixture of Turks and Mongols, who conquered the region in the 8th and 13th century respectively. These Sunni Muslims have a Mongol appearance and speak a Turkic language. Their lives revolved around exogamous patrilineal clans who had pasture for livestock on their seasonal itinerary. People’s relationships were cemented through tribal genealogy and there was much attachment to lineages and ancestors. The Kazakhs belatedly adopted written language under the Russian influence in the 20th century, prior to which they had an oral tradition (Katz 1975: 222-225). This lack of a literary tradition did much to convince the Koreans that the Kazaks were unenlightened, ignorant and backward.

From the mid 18th century, the Kazakhs were threatened by imperialist Russia, who over the course of the next hundred years, started Russian settlements in Kazakhstan. The Russians claim to have brought “*kultura*”, or civilisation, to the area. The fortress Verny, latter day Alma-Ata, was built in 1853 in the wake of this Russian conquest of Central Asia. While modern infrastructure such as factories and roads were built and operated by ambitious Russians, the Kazakhs remained as herdsmen and their population diminished by 9% between 1902-1913 (*ibid.* 216). One million people died of starvation during the 1921-22 famine. The loss of people and cattle continued through five turbulent years and shaping of statehood into the mid-1930s (*ibid.* 231). In particular, forced collectivisation from 1929 to 1937 resulted in the decimation of herds and the uprooting of people and many Kazakhs fled to neighbouring Xingjian and Afghanistan. Within two years, Kazakhs were already outnumbered by Russians and other Slavic settlers (Khazanov 1995: 158).

Around the Second World War, the Kazakhs were again to become a host to victims of deportation such as Tatars and Koreans and the largest of the group was 840,000 Volga Germans (Russell 1991: 1-3). Furthermore, another wave of massive European colonisation took place as many thousands of Slavs and many industries were relocated in Kazakhstan. Settlers were invited again to cultivate the “virgin lands” of the vast northern steppes in the mid-1950s, consolidating Kazakhstan as a place of various settlers while Kazakhs remained marginal. However, following the establishment of an independent Kazakhstan in 1991, gradual “Kazakhisation” is breaking the age-old patron-subject relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia, and the politics are directly reflected in ordinary Koreans’ lives (pictures 2-5).

The Field-site: Alma-Ata

The capital of Kazakhstan, Alma-Ata is home to 1 million of Kazakhstan's 16 million residents. In appearance, Alma-Ata is a quintessential Soviet city with wide roads, signature public buildings, and blocks of flats. In agreement with its reputation of being "modern" and "Russified", there are no prominent signs of its Central Asian roots except for its oriental inhabitants, some Kazakh designs in buildings, and the occasional smell of mutton fat and the pungent onions of the kebabs.

It is a far cry from its previous self, the Russian fort *Verny*, which grew into a town within a decade. By the mid-1880's, a Russian traveller marvelled at the transformation from a "treeless place of yurts and cabins" into a 17,000-strong town with handsome "stone" buildings and orchards, all attributed to "Russian" labour (Smirnova1990:17) . Textiles, shoes, furniture, steel, and haberdashery were imported even from distant places such as Siberia, and the city took its shape from the Russian and Ukrainian settlers whose skills built its infrastructure.

The first boy's grammar school was set up in 1876, and Kazakh children joined the school in the late 1890s for the first time. The city was to wait until 1915 and 1929 respectively to see its first motorcar and trains. It became a centre from which Russian groups such as "*The Society Of Adherents To The Enlightenment*" disseminated "kultura" to the indigenous (*ibid.*).

Koreans who have traditionally hierarchical culture showed great conformity to this Soviet script of benign dissemination of *kultura* to "savages". Since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, a process of "Kazakhisation" is taking place that is not an improvement on the old order for many Koreans. Like most Slavic residents in Alma-Ata , Koreans are not happy to see the demise of the Russian language and culture in favour of that of the "inferior" Kazakhs. The pained response of a retired lawyer in his seventies captures the frustration shared by many of my Korean informants. He confessed his antipathy towards Kazakh language and native culture that bordered on " *visceral feeling of aversion and resentment*" in his stomach. After all, to his and many others' eyes, the Kazakhs are political upstarts with no socio-cultural legitimacy to claim loyalty ; they are "deprived people" with no "kultura" at all.

Post-independence Kazakhstan: The Making Of A Nation

Alma-Ata is a space of transition where the Soviet fraternity and Russian dominance gradually give way to a market economy and rising Kazakh self-awareness. In the midst of social upheaval, the fading old order has acquired a sense of morality and security, even though the old sanctum of Soviet patriots' memorials and busts may not conjure the same awe any more. Many dilapidated buildings admired in the Soviet era were now seen as a metaphor of the defeated system they once believed in. Yet, the Soviet Union meant some certainty of life while the present mayhem was perceived as alien and immoral. Common decencies such as offering seats to elderly and mothers were often evoked in the name of the old Soviet era.

However, if the old order and respectability were symbolised by the peeling walls of the once-grand buildings, the opposite power is felt throughout markets and churches. They are now seen as the vanguard of the new order and Koreans, both local and foreign, are seen right at the heart of the new scenery (pic. 10-13).

The process of "Kazakhisation" proceeds on many levels. In old Soviet days, tributes to Kazakhs used to be confined to odd statues of its writers, a few perfunctory street names, and decorative wall murals in the tourist hotels. In the recent re-naming of streets and institutions, as well as currency and notes (pic.2), Kazakh literary and patriotic sons replaced the old Russian/ Soviet names of no lesser than Pushkin, Lenin, and Marx. There follows an illustration of Kazakh money bearing the face of a "national" hero , an Islamic scholar of the Middle Age who was traditionally claimed by neighbouring Uzbekistan.

The celebration of *Naurz*, the Muslim New Year, in 1994 was already a prominent affair with governmental backings. A gigantic *yurt* was erected in the presidential palace with displays of traditional Kazakhs artefacts, and festivals were organised in residential streets and organisations. Doll-like dancers in colourful Kazakh dress danced to guitar-like *dombra* music, and the famous mutton rice *plov* was cooked in makeshift cooking pots and shared in tents. In a street party, I saw a little Kazakh boy wearing a skullcap, reciting the Koran in Arabic to proud applause from the admiring crowd. Throughout the day, there was no mistaking the Kazakhs' growing cultural and political confidence, nor their will to orchestrate the scene for the full view of others.

However, the traditional Kazakh settlement *aul* became a "distant" place to the young urban Russian speaking Alma-Atian Kazakhs, many of whom feel deeply alienated from the rural place where prayers

are said and the Kazakh language is spoken. They also feel constrained at the elders' sanctions against mini skirts and other assorted "modern practices". Urban Kazakhs were quick to express their own disgust of the "uncivilised" country counterparts. Girls often avoided the far end of the tram where recent migrants from Kazakh villages often spoke loudly in guttural Kazakh while spitting roasted sunflower seeds at young female passengers. But beyond being "hooligans", "country bumpkins" and suspects of petty crimes, the rural Kazakh youth are also seen as a medium for blind Kazakh nationalism and reclamation of lost territory. They challenged some of my young female informants for not being "Kazakh" enough in a bus, and one Kazakh girl who could not speak Kazakh was humiliated and slapped in public while the intimidated crowd remained silent. Even Korean women, who have round "Kazakh" eyes, were lectured in a similar fashion for not being properly Kazakh.

Section Four: Methodology

The fieldwork is based on an 18-month stay between August 1993 and April 1995 in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. In spite of many telling me that Alma-Ata is not as ideal as Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, for finding *real* Soviet Koreans, I was interested in the identity of the allegedly "skin-deep" Koreans.

I was extremely fortunate to have lived with two families of similar size, age and educational background but of different ethnicity, one Korean and the other Kazakh. Both families had the same nuclear structure of parents with two children. Much of my field data comes from participant observation, obtained from living with them. Sharing time, space, meals, feelings and mundane routines with them, I acquired a very intimate picture which enabled me to explore the realms of what was often hidden and yet palpable; senses such as smell and taste, the way certain emotions were expressed, and in which views were communicated. My close relationship with the Kazakh family has added a valuable dimension in locating Koreans from outside their social group, without which my data would have been very different.

I was fortunate enough to have access to the families' extended kinship network, as both maintained very close relationships with their siblings, cousins and the elderly. I especially appreciated the presence of a bilingual Korean grandmother for detailed oral histories. While collecting general data with the elderly, I could check embarrassing details such as family scandals and gossip with less inhibited younger people. Both sets of children, ranging from a little schoolboy to a college student, were often sources of revealing and uncensored attitudes and values. These two families were rich

sources of information for me, and I refer to them at various points throughout this thesis. I have therefore produced kinship diagrams to display the relationships that I discuss.

Even though I do not claim the report to be a representational study of local Koreans in Alma-Ata, I sought balance in seeking informants from diverse groups to extract a meaningful essence with their similarities and differences. Part of my network, therefore, included different sets of informants among self-styled “outsiders” who provided cultural critique and more “knowing” discourses. It included Koreans from Tashkent, Sakhalin, and even Pyongyang, whose often-poignant lives nevertheless were anchored in Alma-Ata whether they liked it or not. I also got to know the so-called “intelligentsia” of the city: academics, artists, writers, painters and performers of bohemian fame. Cutting across ethnic boundaries, this set does not directly concern my subject but they were undeniable opinion-makers of the society where my subjects were a part of the mosaic.

Sometimes, I went far beyond the role of a mere participant-observer in cases such as meetings between the Soviet and Chinese Korean family reunions, and a very serious business negotiation between local and Korean American businessman. I found myself ending up as the “translator” of the languages and customs but also as an active commentator of my own culture.

Thanks to local hospitality and my personal network that went far beyond Korean boundaries, I could experience different functions such as the Kazakh New Year celebration and a personal invitation to enjoy a boiled sheep’s head in a Kazakh village. Major Korean rites of passage such as the first birthday, weddings, 60th birthdays, funerals, and the offering for the dead were all attended as well as seasonal rites in the cemetery. I also visited classes at schools and language courses and did a round of observations in places of worship including different churches and an office of a Buddhist sect from Korea. I was also lucky to meet new Korean diviners and fortunetellers who used to operate underground.

I found informal interviews worked better with many people even though I also carried out several formal interviews on kinship terms and history. Questionnaires on religious beliefs and perceptions of the local Soviet Koreans given to South Korean pastors of churches were less successful, as they were cautious about writing their views down. Historical changes also enabled me to have access to hitherto forbidden events and people. I observed that assorted fortune-tellers “came out” during my research, organising séances and retreats to the local people’s amazement. Equally, interviews with a North Korean dissident –cum-fortune-teller, and with an erstwhile Marxist coach to young *Kim Il Sung*, would have been unthinkable in the past.

Thanks to the late Professor S. Kho, I also had access to confidential documents on the 1937 deportation. The latter days saw the publication of these materials from both Seoul and Alma-Ata. Once, I travelled to Uzbekistan, visiting Tashkent and its “typical” Soviet Koreans in markets and suburbs. On another occasion, I had a glorious trip to the once sacred cities of Bukhara and Khiva on the Silk Road. Both trips sensitised me to the cultural legacy of the Kazakhs and the Uzbeks. Within Kazakhstan, I also had a brief glimpse of village life near Alma-Ata while visiting my landlady’s relatives for a few days.

As a South Korean, I had to obtain special permission to travel and stay in Kazakhstan from the South Korean government. With the Cold War and the Soviet shooting of a Korean airplane in 1980s still a fresh memory, the South Korean government labelled the former socialist blocs, including Kazakhstan, as “specifically designated” countries.

The beginning of my fieldwork could not have been more inauspicious. I arranged visa and language tuition through a South Korean-run residential Russian language school set up in a grand sanatorium on the outskirts of Alma-Ata. Little did I know that it would soon impose itself as a self-appointed guardian of “safety” and “propriety”, restricting students from outside contact and travel. I was not even allowed to contact the locals who were holidaying at the sanatorium, let alone go out for research!

A dozen teen-age South Korean students who aspired to upgrade their academic credentials were the only people I could really see. While the youngsters accepted the sanitised confinement, the xenophobic locals were graceless enough to demand that we all be tested for HIV after one among our number developed a rash.

This painful three-month theatre of the absurd paid off its dividends as I later witnessed my former fellow inmates becoming a colourful part of the South Korean presence whose interaction with the local youngsters brought about much change in the local scenery. The South Korean youth transplanted to Alma-Ata by way of educational ambition were, in a way, a poignant variation of “Koreanness” that the locals also shared in their own way.

Since my “escape” from the sanatorium, I deliberately kept a polite distance from fellow South Koreans who were enjoying an inflated missionary and commercial profile among the locals. While my academic background and some connections secured me initial respectability within the expatriate community, my age and gender barred me from an inner sanctum of the “senior” circle, and from much access to male discourse.

I was also anomalous to the local people, both Koreans and others, who found me surreal and entertaining, as I was often the first foreigner they ever met intimately. I did not fit into any of the categories; I was not a Vietnamese who was regarded a poor indentured labourer nor a despised Chinese peddler, purveyor of cheap goods. I did not quite belong to the other “high status” foreigners such as Turkish engineers or American businessmen. Instead I was a “poor lost girl”, a somewhat dubious Europeanised South Korean.

My “foreignness” never completely went away among people who were extremely sensitive to personal style, self-expressions and even physical bearing. My hiding behind unobtrusive clothes for invisibility was, according to my landlady, my illusion. The way I “held up my head” and moved my body gave away my foreign background, I was told. Others saw “otherness” in my readiness to question and argue, especially with bureaucracy. I was also consolidating my reputation as a pig-headed “American woman” by mentioning “principles” in “sticky situations”, which are many and varied in the former USSR. My friends who were ready to interpret my stubbornness as a result of being “spoilt by Westernisation” tried very hard to teach me that articulate integrity was a luxury of the West, and was not particularly congenial to the Soviet climate or Korean sentiment. In contrast, they saw themselves as being cynical, diffident and acutely self-conscious “*Sovietsky*”; resigned citizens of “Our Soviet Union, a country of idiots”, or “absurdity of absurdities”, “a thick nation”, or “sheer sheep” in a clear allusion to Kazakh nomadic tradition.

It was almost frightening to see how my actions or words were so intensely scrutinised and richly interpreted and my caricatures oscillated between a decent young Korean woman and an assertive, self-centred Westerner. My aborted attempt to wear a mini-skirt with a dab of red lipstick was interpreted as an almost immoral deviation from the known roles, and my horrified landlady tried to wipe my mouth and prevent me from leaving the house. The following episode is an illuminating account of peoples’ boundaries and the way they interact with one another in the field. Haunting intimacy and pressure to conform marked much of the social interaction in the field.

It was a typical wintry day, well below minus temperature with lots of frozen snow. A bus stop was jammed with fluffy shawls, furry hats, coats and heavy boots. Soon my stealthy vanity in the form of stocking legs in pumps and a trench coat caught the attention of the beady-eyed Russian babushkas, self-appointed arbiters of taste. They had no qualms about interrogating me in public and even venturing to see what I wore under my skirt. Upon seeing my narrowed eyes, they tried to classify me as a cantankerous outsider from Uzbekistan or Vietnam, a stranger to cold weather and common sense. My aggressive assertion of my familiarity with severe cold only provoked a further lecture about protection of the maternal body. My vehement denial of any intention to become a mother in the near future was to no avail as they condescendingly added, “But darling, one day you will be one and a

mother should look after her body, you know..." I was already under their spell. When I gingerly stepped into a tram, it was not long before I started to feel the full impact of their words. I suddenly felt so naked and vulnerable to so many probing eyes. I started to curl myself up for fear of being thought of as a real "poor naked Vietnamese girl".

On the other hand, just on account of my being a foreigner or a South Korean, I was invited, fed, and spoilt magnificently. After all, I was supposed to be an "interesting" person from an exotic background of "the dream land" Korea of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games with an added "halo" of studying in London. With such credentials, I could hardly go wrong at the beginning. But even when it became clear that I did not have anything to offer unlike other South Korean expatriates or western visitors, most of my informants believed that I deserved to share the last crumb of their bread. Although moved, I often felt the cost of these relationships, at least morally and psychologically, if not fiscally. My endeavour to contribute financially to my hosts was never successful, provoking mutual embarrassment. I ended up paying a nominal sum, which was nonsensical in the face of inflation and the shortage of everyday goods.

Clearly, there were various difficult conditions that affected my material. The collapse of the Soviet Union meant chaos in public standards of living; streets and buildings were kept extremely dark beyond recognition, lamps, phones, taps, and windows were often broken or out of order, state-shops were empty and public transport was erratic. Xerox machines, colour film development service, instant international calls or reliable postal service were clearly not part of their daily lives. The contagion of the "siege mentality" in the midst of hyperinflation and shortage of goods hit me hard and I was certainly "going native". I had become an avid shopper and incurable hoarder of goods. I even caught myself amassing Sainsbury's plastic bags and bulk-buying Mars bars on my short break in London.

Feeling famished *all* the time was another source of pain. On "irritable" days, I used to daydream of absent goods such as pepper or salted butter. The shortage of ordinary things meant having to procure soda from a baker for my freshly drilled tooth and having to cruise the entire town for a bandaid. Physically, I did not mind gaining a stone with a lardy diet, but I shivered at the thought of another shot of the "symbolic hundred grams" of vodka to express "respect" to the hosts. In many cases, I felt that I had to drink even a little bit as drinking was a social currency and a prelude to loosened tongues. Unfortunately while the spirit was welling, my flesh was too weak

The reputation of North Koreans as ready kidnappers did not exactly dampen my spirit but I had to mind dubious activities targeting any gullible persons. Easily lost and poor-sighted, even the daily rounds and a simple visit to the town cost me much time and anguish. One particular annoyance was

my inability to master the trudging gait that was absolutely necessary to survive on the frozen ground in the bitter winter. In a naïve attempt at physical and moral empathy with the local reality, my first-timer's Puritanism tried to eschew the "luxury" of taxis. It was distressing to see my informants suffer in hard times and my little abstinence was an attempt at an atonement of my troubled conscience.

As a result, I was often lost, cold, late and very exhausted and the feeling was not confined to physicality. I found it hard to have a balanced relationship with people who were suspicious of my own or other's motives of making friends. It took a while to overlook an initial friendly gesture followed by some economic proposals. However, I cannot thank Providence enough that kept me intact while rampant crime was affecting ordinary people such as my Russian neighbour who was found bludgeoned to death. The loss of my camera loses significance beside the repeated robberies that emptied the *whole* flat of a compatriot.

For usual communication, I preferred using the Russian language, which was the *lingua franca* to most people. Even though my Russian was not grammatically perfect, I enjoyed it very much and its egalitarian nature suited my relationship with my informants. English was a status language that opened doors to ambitious people who tried hard to catch up with the rest of the world. Meanwhile, the Korean language sometimes presented some dilemmas. As they were not sure of the exact pronunciation, some local Koreans were too self-conscious to use their dialect with me and it took much cajoling to make them speak some words in Korean.

In spite of many people's claim that the local Korean dialect is so different and incomprehensible, I seemed to have little trouble in understanding them. With the elderly Koreans, the Korean language always remained such an emotional medium; it was all the more poignant as they felt that fluent Korean speakers were a dying species. Just the exchange of a few words in Korean sometimes brought tears to the eyes of an elderly stranger during a chance meeting. I could also note a subtle difference in cross-generational communication as Korean language is much more textured in hierarchical sensitivity than Russian. Some local youngsters judged me rather harshly for neither speaking Korean nor volunteered to teach it to them. So I was sometimes called an "egoistka", the grossest accusation that a "Soviet" mind could think of. This latest charge was soon added to the already existing oddball reputation that I acquired in the field. I do not think my data suffered from my lack of understanding of the Kazakh language as most urban Kazakhs speak Russian fluently and some do not even know Kazakh at all. However, my halting rendition of small talk such as "gimme tea" and "me, bread" in Kazakh always warmed the atmosphere as a preliminary to conversation.

Chapter Two “*Planted on a Bare Rock*” : The Journey to Kazakhstan

The past is never dead, it is not even past. - William Faulkner

The previous chapter presented the socio-historical context of Koreans of Alma-Ata in a big stroke and this chapter explores the diaspora’s history in further detail. This history chapter is divided in chronological order , framed by two displacements of the minority’s past. I highlight the two displacements as a key to understanding the unlikely Korean presence in Alma-Ata today and the way these Koreans understand their narratives. The first section illustrates the experience and memory of the old Korean Kingdom the émigré left, followed by idealised pre-deportation days in the Russian Far East. The last period deals with the Stalin’s *Reign of Terror* and its aftermath.

The first section covers the background of the Korean migration to the then-Russian Far East territory that spans the 19th and early 20th centuries. In order to highlight the continued importance of key concepts such as culture, education and personhood, I also delineate socio-cultural structure and presentations of the “old Korea” which is both a repressive authority and also a maternal figure. It is replaced by the Russian Far East as a new home for the émigré who established a self-conscious community with a distinct geographical and cultural boundary. Focussing on peoples’ experiences and recollection on deportation under Stalin’s *Reign of Terror*, the second section shows its aftermath of silence and shame that shaped the Korean attitude towards self and others. It illustrates how the Soviet Koreans re-interpreted their displacement and struggled for rehabilitation in the U.S.S.R through the frame of Korean cultural meanings and symbols. The third section further demonstrates the persistence of cultural symbols and meanings throughout different phases of the community’s history. A theme of remembrance and forgetting which is an important part of Soviet Korean identity is further discussed.

In presenting narratives, I relied much on elderly informants; Ten Segil Nikita Ivanovich (born in 1914), his wife, Magai Ellena Vladimirovna (b.1916) , Khvon Alexandra (Shura) (b.1918) ,Huh Bongsun (b.1921), Cho Hyeok (b.1924), Ahn Stephan Mihailovich , and Hong Kuma Yekaterina Romanovna, (b.1925). Their individual accounts converge into a collective memory and historical events. Some were born in Korea (Segil) while others were born in the Russian Far East. Some were successful (Shura) , others just had plenty to eat and some were poor (Kuma , Hyeok) . All of them remembered the extended Korean family with a more traditional way of life. Some always spoke Korean; others gradually shed it in favour of Russian. Many had to overcome uneasiness with Russians who bullied them in the Far East but nobody could escape the deportation and its aftermath in their lives.

Section One: From Chosŏn to Tsarist Russia and Central Asia

“In 1916 the three Han brothers were driven by starvation from colonised Korea, hoping to make money in Russian factories and forests and return home. By the time they managed to save some money, too many years had passed and already the border was set. The son of the émigré, Sergei grew up watching how his father was consumed by intensifying nostalgia till his death at the age of 79. The son remembers his father repeating “If only I can see my homeland once more, I can die even now in content” (S.Han & V.Han 1999: 22).

In spite of the ravages of the Soviet regime that decimated the intelligentsia, burned Korean language books, and closed Korean schools, “Old Korea” is still implicitly at work among the Soviet Koreans who will still introduce themselves to each other by referring to the village in Korea where their ancestors came from. Old Korea specifically refers to the late period of *Chosŏn*, the ruling kingdom from 1392-1910. Confucianism was the state ideology of the Chosŏn dynasty that structured the whole society in a very fine hierarchy. Confucianism idealised learning and the “refined man of letters” and with an exception of farming, other activities such as trade and manufacturing were suppressed and held in contempt.

More than anything, dire hunger was a chief motivation that drove early Koreans of the Chosŏn Kingdom to migrate from the northern part of Korea to the uninhabited Russian Far East region over the 19th century. This migration caused immense pain for the emigrants, not least because it went contrary to the local ideal of remaining on family land, close to the ancestors. Migration continued over the 20th century, following colonisation of Korea by Japan, leading to a renewed sense of connection with the Old Korea for communities in the Russian Far East. Koreans were considered very “useful” by the Russians, but were regarded with suspicion. Some consciously became “Russified” in an uneasy attempt to gain social and economic advantage. A brief period of remembered stability and plenty followed for the Korean community, referred to by many contemporary Soviet Koreans as “The good old days”.

Following the 1917 revolution, changes gradually came to the Russian Far East. *tohos* or those who allegedly made money from the labour of others were dispossessed, including many Koreans. Many were sent to collective farms, and forced to live in collective houses. Some died trying to flee Russia fearing that their children would be taken by the state. Before the order for the forced deportation to Kazakhstan, 2500 of the intelligentsia and elites were taken from the Korean community, never to be seen again. This decimation of the learned ones is a blow keenly felt even today. This partly fostered an acute sense of loss and self-deprecation among the remaining Soviet Koreans who often repeated, “It

is only the brainless left to survive”. Many Soviet Koreans provide harrowing accounts of the forced deportations and the following journey to Kazakhstan, where many died en route and after.

Upon arriving in Kazakhstan, the Koreans encountered the Kazakhs for the first time. The first impression was not favourable, as the Kazakhs were disease-ridden, illiterate, and seemed “unenlightened” to the Koreans who have had such reverence to literacy and learning. On arrival in Kazakhstan, times were very hard and many lived in underground holes for the first winter. Many died, especially the children and the elderly. However, the Koreans set to work to establish rice-growing and schooling for their children, as an act of symbolic continuity and rehabilitation. They prided themselves on being able to work hard, and their collective farms became outstandingly successful throughout the Soviet Union. In the process, they contrasted themselves with the “rough” Russians and the “ignorant” Kazakhs. The Korean ancestors, however, did not travel so well and it was found that the various rituals to honour the dead were attenuated in the new Soviet Korean context.

Mapping The Old Korea In The Present Of The Community

Most of the time, the fatherland Korea remains deep underneath the visible aspects of peoples’ lives. And yet, it also survives as a part of narratives, memories and their own reconstructed history, remaining as an important point of reference to their identity. The little “ritual” of self-introduction between two Soviet Koreans still often involves an exchange of halting renditions of some Korean province names in a thick Russian accent. As the geographical origin of their surname, these exotic Korean village names become like a secret code of intimacy. Often people add a brief history of their parents as a part of this self-introduction.

To the locals whose roots took place in the Russian Far East, the last kingdom their ancestors came from, takes on a certain mythic, albeit rather tawdry quality as a distant past. Certain themes such as filial sorrow for the forefathers emerge repeatedly against an incoherent background and are shared as an integral part of a common identity as Koreans in Central Asia. *Koryō*, originally a medieval Korean kingdom (918-1392), is used interchangeably with its successor, *Chosōn* (1392-1910), or was simply “there” to signify Korea, both ancient and modern. Beyond its name, the country remains a fragmented abstraction to the locals who suffered from a cultural memory blighted by the Soviet regime that once decimated the intelligentsia, burned Korean language books and closed Korean schools.

Confucian *Chosōn*: Knowledge, Power And Social Order

In order to understand the social structure and cultural meanings of the Korean past that the émigré were immersed in, it is imperative to look into the legacy of Confucianism in Korean history. Looking towards the idealised ancient China and its sages, a particular branch of dogmatic neo-Confucianism took a strong hold in the Korean mind, establishing itself as a state ideology of the *Chosōn* dynasty. This dogmatic branch of Confucianism was strictly enforced as a socio-political norm, and this in turn , fostered moral discipline, hierarchy, asceticism and introspection. Meanwhile, other scholarly discourses were almost forbidden by the state.

The kingdom, content with sobriquets such as a “Little China” or a “Lawful nation of the East”, certainly outdid even the Chinese in its vigorous application of Confucianism. The *Chosōn* dynasty had an ideal of self-isolation, and its xenophobic policy attracted the name of “Hermit Kingdom” from resentful international spectators. One of them was Japan, a perpetual player of the role of “amoral barbarians” in Korean history.

While the *Chosōn* kingdom idolised scholarship of a “refined man of letters and leisure” and severely looked down on virtually anything else, except agricultural production, Japan certainly had no such inhibitions to cripple its manufacturing, commerce, craft and military expansion. In the static world of the *Chosōn* Dynasty where the ideal was a close reproduction of the old, immutable Confucian order, there was no room for respect towards the innovation that benefited Japan. To an indignant Korean collective memory, the militant neighbour remained ungrateful “midgets” and “pirates” who bit the hands of the old benefactor through whom “enlightenment” of Buddhism and Confucianism came. Yet Neo-Confucian Korea persisted in the notion of an immutable “righteous way”, the *raison d'être* of a “proper being”, be it an individual or a nation. This historical discourse on morality and knowledge, so powerfully embedded in Korean interaction with “others”, also finds resonance in the context of the Korean émigré in Russia/ Soviet Union later.

True to its ideological principles, Korean social order was ruled by Confucius precepts and norms, which ordered relationships between sovereign and subjects, fathers and sons, the elders and the younger, husbands and wives. An elaborate system of hierarchy pervaded all aspects of life to keep the boundaries intact and to penalise its transgressions. A distinction in professions, housing, clothes and diets were clear between literati *yangban*, commoners and the enslaved. Transgression of the hierarchy at any level was regarded as a threat to all other layers of the fabric of the society in this fusion of politics, ethics, kinship and social order.

Meanwhile agriculture was a traditional backbone of the national subsistence, and rice cultivation was well established in the Korean peninsula of monsoon climate dating back to the 3rd century. Land commanded intensive and continuous human engagement that fostered collective co-operation. Manufacturing, craft and commerce, in contrast, were held in contempt as a potential threat to the *status quo* of agrarian self-sufficiency. Commercial surplus and profit-making were denounced as causes of material extravagance and concupiscence which went against the *zeitgeist* of restraint and frugality. The fear of the unknown and nostalgia for the idealised past asserted itself in a government's tight grip on the artisans and technicians who could only work for the government's need. Markets and commerce was also very controlled and kept to the minimum level of need. The exclusive agrarian emphasis of a static worldview resisted change and much energy was spent on reproducing the old in its exactness and keeping boundaries.

In terms of social organisation, lineage-based village community was an intimate social and economic unit where an individual was placed according to his lineage and clan affiliation. Ideally, they held a plot of land and worked collectively to tend the paddy fields. With an ideal of patriarchal, patrilineal and patrimonial principle, they also commemorated common agnatic ancestors for whom regular offerings were made in rituals. The result was a highly collective, but also competitive ethos among members of lineages and clans who competed within and without for power and prestige. Scholarship in Chinese literary, philosophical, and historical classics was not only the international intellectual currency of those days but also the qualification to the coveted officialdom.

The coveted scholarly accomplishment demanded many years of rigorous learning, and land meant not only crops for survival, but also the resources to pay for education that leads to moral and temporal power. Thus, a specific link between learning, status, and temporal benefits was firmly established and ingrained in Korean culture and society. As an individual's advancement was to grace the whole family, and Confucian learning and officialdom could provide a collective access to power and glory, it was seen to be all the more alluring to the sons with filial obligations to fulfil. Moreover, as Koreans believed that a person was *made* through learning, and that learning imparted moral superiority, a template of an ideal person was also an embodiment of moral attainment. Though education was almost monopolised and reproduced by elites, the ideology of the triad concerning learning, morality and personhood trickled down the centuries and was indelibly etched into even the lowest strata of the people.

Leaving Old Korea. Departure From The “Land Of The Ancestors”

Chosōn, the last Korean kingdom *circa* 1860 was not a kind place for its people as unmistakable signs of decay were felt everywhere. A Russian traveller at the turn of the 19th century had an extensive list in his travelogue that plagued its people ; child slavery, marauding Chinese bandits, corruption in officialdom and a repressive and arbitrary regime (S. Han & V. Han 1999: 15). It is against this background that the story of early Korean migration to the Russian Far East took place. Even though an extant Russian record repeatedly quoted by researchers of the field dates the first Korean immigrants to the Russian Far East to the year 1860, there is a good possibility that economic desperation propelled people off the arid tip of North Korea as early as 1810 (Chōng 1995 , Personal Communication with I. Park.). In the local Korean narrative poem, the agonising departure of a famished family is thus reconstructed (T. Kim in Y. Shin 1988: 232-236):

“What more fear for poor me leaving my own home, village, and scenery of motherland behind, indeed? Never was the old place of sighs dear to me where my bones were bent in endless toil on an empty stomach. And yet, on this moment of farewell, my crumbling hut, its broken stonewall, a chestnut tree inside, my own aching heart, and a little stream ahead, all seems so new. Oh God. Please look after us, take care of us little ones. Please do not be angry over us miserable wretches who are deserting our homeland in the search for rice...”

While the wife shows reluctance in departure even though she may starve to death, the disillusioned husband retorts wryly; *“O, what god? If he exists, how is it that simple honest folk like us go starving all the time?”*.

The two contrasting voices reveal the sentiment of a people who are torn between survival and an agonising separation from the ancestral land.

The prescriptive norm of the Korean society was the cohabitation and cooperation of descendants of the same agnatic ancestors in the ancestral plot. Though vulnerable to chronic poverty, the kinship affiliation guaranteed a certain level of certitude as the worst scenario was a dispersion of family land, property and people . Under the emphasis of kinship reciprocity and generational continuity , only absolute desperation could drive people out of the community. The separation was seen as abandonment of morality , coded by genealogy and land, in favour of the naked need of physicality. Those who dared to leave suffered a moral peril of “betrayal” and loss of one’s identity. In the émigré’s songs and poems, “Home” continues to haunt Korean émigré as an ambivalent source of intense grief and glad riddance:

“A guest to an alien soil and river, a distant place of strangers, my heart goes home...Alas, how I miss my homeland, village and the chance to return. Painful miles of continent and creeping borders were already set in stealth. Against luminous, flirtatious moonlight, thy voice resounds ever sharply. Separated from parents and brothers, man that I am, my heart breaks. O, how much more wounded heart of my beloved parents’! Lunar lustre touching eastward window, I wake to a restless search, For a vision that is lost, my homeland of my dream” (compiled by C. Chin).

-anonymous poem

Twenty years ago, my homeland Chosōn was a land of masters and slaves. From there in search of modest happiness I was led with a hope to a new terrain of China. Alas, it also remained possessed by the rich. We the poor become eternal labourers. For long the mystery of vast Russian soil had been waving at me, a pauper. (S. Kim 1989: 144-145)

- a 1920’s propaganda song for Korean peasants

To the state authority, the loss of people meant a grave challenge to its paternalistic power as well as a loss of labourers and potential tax collections. To Korea, these desperate peasants were “traitors” who dared to “abandon” one’s own, and their territorial transgressions or commercial activities deserved brutal punishment and unconditional shooting. Already as early as 1864, two Russian “spies” were beheaded and many who hoped to escape poverty met cruel death, sometimes reduced to thousands of bodies piled along the frontier. Behind the Dynasty’s draconic measures towards emigration lay moral xenophobia and panic (K. Yi & K. Chōn 1993: 51).

Where did these desperate people stand in their society? Many of the earliest emigrants were already stigmatised by social and actual “deprivation”. The far northern end of the Korean peninsula where many of the émigrés came from was a wild frontier, a byword for deprivation of many nuances. It was a barren place of constant foreign invasions, state exploitation of limited resources, and chronic poverty. It was also a place of humiliation as a land of political exile, marginality, and strategic human plantation. As the continuous historical documents testified, “hunger”, both physical and metaphorical, was proved to be stronger than fear of the unknown and death .

Already in 1863, twenty households who secretly crossed a border submitted their petition for residency to a Russian authority. The following year saw the establishment of the first Korean village, and soon waves of hungry immigrants came in small groups. The brief period towards the end of November and early December of the lean year 1869 alone saw 4,500 emigrants who risked their lives, crossing the border at night (Wada 1989:41).

Tellingly, these émigrés preferred banishment and starvation on Russian soil rather than return which meant punishment in Korea (Sünghwa Kim 1989:21-23). To them, the Old Kingdom was a source of contradiction. It was a mother whose breast was dry and yet who would jealously keep an emaciated child. It was only as late as 1888, following the signing of the Russo-Korean Treaty of Commerce and Amity of 1884, that Russia finally managed to secure a reluctant Korean involvement on the immigration issue. Entirely relying on their bodies, the émigré, likened to “a wandering cart horse” by a Russian observer, led a very harsh life in the new land, experiencing extreme exploitation on farms and down in the mines. Their diligence was even blamed as a potential cause of Russian denigration into sloth and indulgence (Wada 1989: 45).

And yet, the old land was still found to exert its influence, “Korean traits” of “obedience, politeness and industry” to its runaway sons whose meekness to the new Russian authority surprised observers, including spying Japanese officials (Shin 1989:87). The same resignation and pragmatic conformity were seen to surface again in their attitudes towards authorities, whether it be imperial Russia who exploited their labour, The Soviet who stigmatised them, or Kazakhs who now insist on their birthright in their new republic.

Exile : A Helpless Motherland

In spite of Choson’s desperation to remain an isolated civilisation amidst “barbarians”, the political situation of the late 19th and 20th centuries decided otherwise. Japan, quick to reinvent itself as a moderniser of Asia, managed to establish itself as the sole master of Korea by 1905, after its victory against both China (1894) and Russia (1904-1905) in war. The annexation of Korea in 1910 was followed by exploitative Land reform in 1912, causing much Korean suffering and resistance. A song from the 1920’s mentions “claws” of a “hawk-like Japan” who makes Korea moan:

“Whatever little household goods we had , Its merchants, banks, and grain companies swallowed all up. Home and field have gone to them, leaving , crying children starving and grown-ups frozen in the mid winter cold. How can we stay if we are to survive, and how are we to survive if we leave?”
(Anon , compiled by Chin).

– *Football ballad*

There is no doubt that the political vortex has now definitely added another dimension to the Korean immigration with nearby Manchuria and the Russian Far East as natural destinations to new waves of the immigrants. The existing émigré in the Russian Far East were already divided between those who had acquired land, Russian passport and knowledge of Russian language and those who had not. Now

the community flooded with diverse newcomers who injected a new flush of Korean solidarity, independence and anti-Japanese feelings.

New Korean Village was set up in the Far Eastern port of Vladivostok and became a location for many Korean political, military, educational and cultural institutions and associations. To the local youth, some of the latest Korean defectors were the conveyors of the Korean identity via knowledge of its history and literature. Like the motherland, the latest political exiles evoked ambivalent feelings among the émigré; they were marginal men in this new Russian territory, with no knowledge of Russian or affiliation. Yet, as conveyors of the Korean national zeitgeist, their political charisma commanded reverence from the local Russian Far East Koreans. Representing fierce and other-worldly idealism, and often as teachers in ill-equipped local Korean schools, they inspired awe to many locals as men of letters and resistance. Ch'oi Yekaterina, born in 1918 in a Korean village in the Russian Far East, proudly remembers having a famous writer, Cho Myünghee as a Korean teacher.

“...Master Cho ... used to wander around the hill and composed poems, lost in thoughts of liberation of Choson from the Japs. We children often wondered where on earth this exemplary person came from. We felt respect and familiarity towards him. He had come across the Choson border in Korean clothes...Because of Master Cho’s account of Japanese cruelty and assault, many of his older students went out to join Soviet fighting against Japan in 1945”(Kho 1989: 23).

In her memories, both “Master Cho” and his beloved Korea takes on poignant but romantic colouring. The suffering hero was arrested one night in 1937 never to return, like many other “best” of Koreans who disappeared under Stalin’s regime (*ibid.* 176-7).

Section Two: The Russian Far East: “Good Old days”

Place And Political Policy –“Use” of Koreans

The early migrants’ history unfolds mainly in the Maritime Province that touches Korea and the Russo-Chinese border along the Pacific Ocean (Kho1990:7). Originally Chinese territory, this vast virgin land was taken over by Imperial Russia as late as 1860 through the *Beijing Treaty* between China and Russia (P.Kim & Pang, 1993: 187). Eager to claim its power, the expansionist Russia introduced some initiatives to colonise the land which was home to only two or three thousand original inhabitants and some Chinese and Russian pioneers (Wada 1989:40). In spite of the government’s promise of land and tax exemption, the Russians were slow to come to the no man’s land and were outnumbered by desperate Korean immigrants throughout the 1870’s and early 1880’s. With a count of the Korean

population at more than 170,000 in the Maritime Province by 1927, it was a long way from the modest start of 13 households in 1863 (Kho 1990:13).

Meanwhile, the increasing Korean presence provoked incongruous Russian official responses. On the one hand, they were described as hard working, docile and obedient as in an 1896 official report on the earliest Russified Korean community:

“For the past 15 years that I have been acquainted with Christened Koreans who settled down in the Southern Ussuri region, I came to the conclusion on their moral characteristics, way of life, and usefulness for colonising the Amur region.....They are meticulous, paying the local tax and fulfilling military duties. In their main industry in agriculture, their respect for an arduous working order and precision is evident”.

Another Russian report in 1910 also agrees on their “usefulness”:

“Koreans are useful elements to Russia... They tend to settle down and their deforestation ability is in the Russian interest. Some say that Koreans do not integrate with Russians but it is not true...I was much surprised by their eagerness... ” (Wada 1989: 43-44)

On the other hand, Koreans remained as suspicious aliens whose differences were too unsettling. In his reports of 1908, Governor General Unterberger was not only sceptical but xenophobic, echoing latter-day persecution of the minority:

“...It is extremely important to plant Russians in the region as having Koreans in considerable part of the area means exacerbating our situation” (Kho 1990: 14).

“On the occasions of war with either China or Japan, it is impossible to depend on these peoples’ [Koreans] loyalty. On the other hand, these people offer a fertile ground for organising extensive spy rings” (Wada 1989:46).

“Because most Koreans do not know Russian language, even though some adopted Russian orthodox belief, it is skin- deep. It is basically detrimental to see Koreans’ establishing their own society in Russia as they try to settle down in the land permanently, while not wanting assimilation” (Shin 1989 :87).

While voices disagree on the depth of Korean assimilation, there is a consensus that Koreans are an expedient docile workforce available in the wilderness of virgin land. The majority of Koreans without Russian citizenship suffered most as an easy prey to political arbitrariness and fluctuating economic need. Not even the change of regime into the Soviet Union revolutionised the exploitative perspective towards the minority. They still remained as disposable and exploitable (Wada 1989: 54).

Naturalisation, Russification and Land

In response to the conciliatory Russian government who wanted to tame the inscrutable foreigners, some Koreans responded by Russifying their names, donning Russian outfits and embracing Orthodoxy, thus paving the way of heterogeneity among the diaspora (Wada 1989) . Based on his own family history, a celebrated Soviet Korean writer Anatoly Kim paints a picture of two worlds of the Koreans.

“At that time (circa. 1910’s) Korean villages were divided by two situations. One was the “settled” farmers who came earlier in the Tsarist time in the 19th century, and they had possession and influence. Having land of their own and being christened, they were well Russified, so they could integrate with Russian settlers. The others were poor and landless, those who rushed into Russia in 1910s, around Japanese invasion. These people were deprived peasants who were daily hirelings and tenants” (A. Kim 1987: 29).

As Russian attitudes fluctuated towards the minority, several changes were made concerning naturalisation. According to an 1891 scheme, naturalisation and some land were granted to those who came before 1891, while late-comers were to leave within two years. This restrictive law was later to be replaced by more flexible ones that favoured the “use” of Korean labour, allowing easier naturalisation. The relaxation was reflected in the increase of the Korean population in the Far East. In 1902, the Koreans numbered 32,410, an increase from the 1889’s figure of 23,000 (Wada 1989:44). However, those who were not naturalised could not own land and had to find other ways of gaining access to the land.

Considering the patriotic zeal of the latter-day Korean émigré, it was not surprising that many remained reluctant to develop a fast and full immersion into a Russian identity in spite of the obvious advantages. They also looked askance at the Russified and more established early settlers with certain resentment and envy. The latter, consisting 20-30% of the émigré population already started to produce people who lived comfortably and even as grandly as early Korean merchants in 1910 (S. Kim 1989:32).

There is still much pain re-lived by the children of the early settlers whose identities and memories blurred into those of their “poor” fathers:

“We knew more than anybody else that we could do nothing without land. With one desire for some plot, my father changed his nationality just like that. Overnight, a Korean has thus become a Russian. Then indeed some plot was allocated. My father stared at his allotment as if in disbelief. I was told that he sobbed while walking to and fro and grabbing and letting go of soil...It was like a miracle to my

father, hard to believe. It was not meant to last. They told him the allotment was not free, needed to be paid for. You needed money and where was it? Father again despaired” (Chöng1995:20).

In the end, the narrator’s father ended up resorting to a Russian moneylender. But unable to manage the increasing interest and debt, he finally lost everything.

The station of the majority of Koreans was virtually the bottom of the social hierarchy of the Russian Far East, and theirs was a hard lot. A 1910’s Japanese report on the issues of agriculture and colonisation in the Russian Far East describes Koreans as “gold miners, farmers, especially renters of vegetable and agricultural plot” (ibid. 63). Their greatest achievement was a pioneering rice plantation which was established as early as 1905 in the area. In a severe climate where land defied taming, the painstaking agricultural endeavour carries both real and symbolic importance in the Korean mind even today. As an elderly local historian sees it, the survival and present success of the Soviet Koreans are seen as coming directly from an agrarian background, and from the parental and ancestral transmission of skills. To him, this technique of survival in hard times is termed as “grace from ancestors”, and is indelibly linked with his Korean identity and past (P.Kim & S.Pang 1993:55).

Korean Settlement: “The Good Old Days”

Already within a year of 1874, a Korean village called *Shinhanchon*, literally “New Korea Town”, was established at the eastern edge of Vladivostok (Chöng 1995:169), and soon the compact produced a Korean school, a theatre, and several newspapers harbouring anti-Japanese associations and Korean independence movement activists. The place was a focal point for Korean identity for all those who longed for Korean liberation. There was an unmistakable sense of pride when Segil , a present day Soviet Korean elder remembers it :

“I came to Haesam to study. It was a long journey of ten hours on a big boat. It is a city, better than Alma-Ata, and it was a world-famous place, booming with Russians and Chinese”.

However, this political and cultural space for Korean self –sufficiency and way of life was destroyed by the 1937 deportation, existing now only as a fragmented memory of the elderly. Korean communities, whether big or small, were irreparably broken, and gone was their modest security, one elderly Soviet Korean informant remembers:

“I lived in a little place of 10 households in the country... We had little money but plenty to eat as land and water was good. Potatoes, corns, and pumpkins grew well and we had plenty of salmon... having 5 brothers who worked, we lived well. We had a 43 hectare paddy field, so I grew up eating white rice” (Kūma).

“There were 100 households in a village, all, Korean. We lived in an old fashioned Korean village house, but it had many rooms, eight” (Ellena).

For some like Shura’s family, it was a land of promise through hard work and enterprising spirit:

“In Suchan, my grandfather bought some land from a landlord, a Finn. We worked on our land and the harvest became money as we took it to a big city by ship and sold it. We became rich. We built our own house, kept livestock, grew vegetables, oats, and cabbages, and shipped them to Vladivostok. In the end we had money to buy our own boats. We had 30 farm hands, all from Choson; a lot of them had to escape after getting into trouble with the Japanese. They were fed, clad and received salary. Nothing much left for them after labour and they always lived poorly. Mother had to look after 75 hands as we had 19 boats. She and my elder sister were busy making their clothes day and night. You have to slave that hard if you wanted to stay rich”.

Even though the elderly acknowledge the bitter climate , terror of wild beasts and pillaging Russian and Chinese gangs, these facts remained rather as asides. Neither the memory of isolation and racism, nor the fears of Russians overshadowed the deceptively idyllic picture of “abundant fish and good weather”. Many elderly chose to remember the “good old days” in the Far East.

“We used to have very small Korean melons there, and they just melted in your mouth. Having all sorts of things and them being so common, we didn’t think much of them. Mackerel, anchovies, cod, sole, dace, and abalone... Even seaweed” (Segil).

The list of bounty goes on , linked with an implicit sense of deprivation and discontent of the present “Here” . Central Asia not only comes across as a place of poor provisions but also of fatality whose heat claimed many Korean hearts, unlike the “temperate” and achingly beautiful Far East.

The memory of the Russian Far East, “there in the long time ago”, thus conveys a place of liberality and primordial freedom expressed in terms of material and physical well-being, regardless of the harsh reality suggested otherwise. This air-brushed portrait is also deeply connected to the Korean sense of pain, loss, and an impotence in reproducing Koreanness in a new terrain of paucity.

Meanwhile, a Russified “model village” called Vlagoslovennoe in 1872 was also a sign of stratification among the Korean Diaspora. Initiated by the Russian authority as examples of assimilation, 103 families (431 adults) converted to the Russian Orthodox faith and names. In return, they were favoured with an equal amount of land as their Russian counterparts (Wada1989:75). They were to become a prototype of “pseudo-Russians” and became an object of both envy and mockery by the majority of recent immigrants. Again, oral histories collected in Alma-Ata demonstrate these points:

“One joins the army, gets land and permission to live certain places, but you need to change everything like your name and you got to believe in the Russian Jesus. Only then, you become a Russian. Some first settlers did that. Then it got too much for Russians to take all those who came later. My great grandfather also had a Russian name... My papa and his cousin knew no Korean letters, but of course could speak Korean. One day when I visited the uncle’s house, I met his son who knew not a Korean word while, I, coming from a village knew no Russian. And yet we looked so much alike!” (Ellena).

“My father was an able man and worked for the Russian imperial army. There were many houses, good brick houses, when we served in the army. In the town, people worked in offices, and in the village, Koreans worked in the fields. In Poset, it was like a town and there were more Russians. Then the people started to gossip about, especially, women who spoke Russian like Russian women ..., Shura, Galya, Anya, and Manya,... The way they dressed, the way they looked were just like Russian women, only except the way that these Korean women had a firm control over their sons. There were many who did not know how to speak Korean. They received passports, studied in Russian, worshipped in Russian church, went to their army and had Russian names. There were many Korean army officers in the big army in Nikolskii Vladivostok” (Segil).

There was even an emergence of rich merchants who lived like grand Russians. Anna Lie, known as the ‘belle of the Far East’, whose father was one of the earliest grand merchants, enjoyed a charmed life, a rare privilege even among such assimilated Koreans (pictures 7, 8,9). Remembering elegant soirees and balls of the Imperial Far East, the erstwhile beauty used to lament about Alma-Ata , the lacklustre land of exile in her old age.

Even Christians were different in this growing divergence between town and country, more assimilated and newcomer’s and recent arrivals:

“Some of our in-laws were work-shy Christians. Christians were said to do nothing but pray to Jesus in church, prostrated with their bottoms up, leaving their field full of weeds even when it needed care. Yes, there was a Korean church and a Korean pastor from Korea. Mother used to disapprove, calling them the good for nothing poor. As we were rich and took pity on our sister who married into such a family, we used to send them rice. They were in rags and bare-footed. Meanwhile my husband’s ancestors from Poset went to Russian church and were baptised there.” (Shura).

Gradually, Russia asserted and established itself as a superior purveyor of *kultura* to the Koreans, ranging from language, manners, hygiene and education. It was considered self evident that the “bad” habits of a backward place like Korea needed to be wiped out and its people enlightened in the light of new *kultura*.

“I studied Korean till the 6th grade at the Korean farmers’ primary school. Then I must have thought that there was no prospect in staying in a village feeding cows. I and my mates decided to drop it for Russian education and went to Vladivostok. We entered a free secondary school, but all the Koreans had to repeat a year. Why? To enlighten ourselves. They had to help us with assignments and so on”

(Segil).

“We lived in the Far Eastern house made of straw, sleeping on a mat, without bed, on traditional Korean heated floor... We also had a chamber pot. Well, so what kultura are you on about? When we look back now, that’s how we lived but we thought it was quite good.” (Shura).

While the Koreans made up 30% of the Russian Far East population, their land ownership was less than 0.1% and the majority lived a life of exploitation and marginality (Chöng 1995: 262) . Already, signs of stratification among Korean settlers and the deprived labourers’ plight loomed over the forthcoming event of the October Revolution and following Collectivisation.

Revolution and Collectivisation: Chaos And New Order Of “Soviet”

The new turn of the 1917 Russian Revolution came belatedly to the Russian Far East affecting Koreans most of whom still lived in villages and quarters in Vladivostok. Battles were fought between the White and the Red, the Bolsheviks and foreign allied forces. Though weary of exploitation under the Tsarist regime, the Korean community also experienced division both within and without during the chaos. The majority of Koreans’ allegiance lay more with Korean nationalism rather than communism, but there was certain overlapping political interests between the Bolsheviks and the anti-Japanese Korean leaders. Finally, Sovietisation started to penetrate, establishing Korean socialist and communist parties even in the Far East. Aleksandra Petrovna Kim, one of the revolutionaries of the time, is an embodiment of Korean political activism of the early 1920’s when Koreans accounted for 20 % of the maritime Russian Communist party organisation (Suh 1989:33). The following poem could be more than propaganda , but prevailing sentiment of those days.

“I am a Korean and yet, Soviet citizen. The Far East is my birth place and my fatherland is Soviet Union. Under the imperial Russia, we were nameless...but the firing of October broke the rule and the sacred Soviet regime endowed lowly Koreans with equal citizenship. Since then, we offered our body to our fatherland...” (Kho 1990: 282).

-Tuch'il Kim's poem

That political engagement was soon to be blighted in the history of the minority within a decade, never to return. Unlike the optimistic tone of the poem, the new regime showed little change in their perspectives on the Korean situation. According to a late 1920’s Soviet report:

“Under the Soviet regime, the people still remain cold-shouldered. Unfortunately the age-old prejudice against Koreans since the Tsarist time still has not changed everywhere; ...The old idea dies

hard. Even now many people see Koreans as easy prey to exploitation and a profitable labour force.”

Collective farms were introduced in the process of collectivisation from 1929 till 1932, bringing much suffering and injustice to those who were deemed “rich” *tohos*. Land and possessions were confiscated and people denounced. It was far from a promised vision of plenty and progress.

“From Moscow 1917 the war spilled over to the Far East by 1922, and they “did” tohos. I was too young to know what was happening, I just heard from parents. In 1929 there was a purge of tohos who were many in the Far East.. Toho means that you are exploiting other’s labour. Those who had their own land, house, and big storage barn, lots of livestock, food and farm hand. Below toho are the tenants of the rich Russian landlords. And then there were the lowly and labourers. But if it were not for the rich, all the people from Choson would have died of hunger. There were lots of ships and in those days if you had a fare then you came here for land and work which were plenty. Where else could they work? Besides, it was hard work that made them to become rich. However, even those with two cows were already branded as toho in 1929 and 1930. You’d have to join a communa after the state taking everything. My maternal uncle got struck, all the property were taken” (Shura).

Confusion about the dubious new system was thick in the air and the situation spelled moral evil, causing considerable moral suffering to many Koreans who saw a beastly power who would take over not only properties but also parental and conjugal relationships to the destruction of the Korean patriarchal family.

“They built a big house where several families were all living together. So there was this rumour of this long house. They said that all had to go to work, later come back to be fed there and you’d better be smart to find your niche on the 85- meter pillow. And there is no distinction of my or your wife. Yes, there were such rumours, so many people fled from border to border. Some got shot on the way. Too late, the border was closed. My brother-in-law and his family also got stuck with all the Japanese money on their way to Korea, they couldn’t go. Like so many other Koreans, they had to settle down in China” (Shura).

“I was about five. People would not go to sleep at night and were busy digging the ground to hide rice. Horses were also sold, my bother and I were scared. I remember him crying, saying we would die when kolkhozes took over” (Kūma).

“Then Soyuz came. They built long houses with compartments. After the toho purge, the state first took our private property; we had many horses for travel and cows that worked on land. When we were reduced to poverty of having only one milking cow, even that one was taken. Don’t know where they went. But now they said that collectives were coming. We went to collectives, then became fishermen. People they said that under communism, the state would take the children. They also said that there would be no exclusive wives and children. Many panicked and ran away to

China. My in-laws, an elderly couple and a little child, were one of them. They got killed on a train accident on their escape" (Hyeok).

Sovietisation also meant the public denunciation of traditional authorities and ethnic specialists, both secular and spiritual, such as monks, shamans, acupuncturists. Devotion and ritual for the dead ancestors were criticised and suppressed by the communist party. As Shura put it, "*those who only worshipped instead of obeying Lenin's order to labour, became guilty and extinct. The red army sent them to prison*". To some awe-struck Koreans, the political process was understood as a battle of spirits between Communism and ancient traditional Korean spirits where the former triumphed, driving away the latter. (Chöng 1995: 208-214). As the "new Communist spirit" took over, Russian doctors in a white gown came for jabs and hygiene. Mayday and October Revolution Day replaced traditional Korean festivities such as New Year, and autumn harvest festival since 1925. "*We were enlightened*", said my informants nonchalantly, taking for granted conformity of the Koreans to the new Soviet discourse.

Little by little, Korean villages were transformed by collective farms and people started to feel and experience "changes" in every aspect of their lives. New "norms" for workload were set up, the resources distributed and people switched to the "Russian" style, sporting "modern" dress and hairstyle. The "enlightened" Soviet Koreans thought that they finally belonged to the land they cultivated, and indeed they had good reasons to think so.

Section Three: Deportation to Kazakhstan and Beyond

This section covers the way historical experiences, especially the collective experience of the 1937 deportation, redefined Korean diasporic identity in life in Kazakhstan as its memory became an integral part of their self-perception and their understanding of others. Both individual narratives of the informants and the political history of the Stalin's regime converge into the theme of rupture, betrayal and transformation of the Soviet Korean community. In the face of loss of freedom, dignity and ethnic heritage such as language and ethnic education, the cultural continuity takes place in the Soviet Korean endeavour of "achieving personhood" in a new environment of Kazakhstan. Thus, Koreans have developed a specific way of seeing the world, themselves and others. The present Korean impression of "others", especially "backward" Kazakhs, are illustrated as the convergence of Korean emphasis of hierarchy, the Russians/Soviet notion of "*kultura*", and Korean pride as survivors of all seasons.

Background

According to the 1989 soviet census, Koreans are one of the acknowledged victims of Stalin's deportation along with Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Mesketian Turks, Greeks and Kurds. Koreans comprised 180,000 out of 437,000 of the total deportees and Kazakhstan alone became a place of banishment to 98,454 Koreans (Russell 1991:1, G.Kim 1993:25).

Confined to foreign scholarship, the topic of the 1937 deportation remained as one of the great Soviet taboos and access to archived materials was unthinkable until *perestroika*. Since then, burgeoning studies have been published over a decade on the topic. Discussing the cause, S. Kho's pioneering work focuses on the Soviet xenophobia of the time that suspected Korean as potential ally of the Japanese. Meanwhile, German Kim's historical and economic perspective located the Korean plight against the background of Stalin's *Reign Of Terror* that afflicted the whole Soviet people. Kim delineates a persistent view of seeing Koreans as a useful labour source emphasising the more premeditated measures of the deportation (G.Kim 2001:34).

Certainly, it will be naïve to ignore the calculating nature of the deportation. As the previous section examined, Koreans meant sheer utility ; a cheap, if not so welcome, source of labour who had already proved themselves to be successful pioneers of rice cultivation. Rice was much sought after and its production was almost the monopoly of Koreans who knew how to employ the required techniques and backbreaking labour. Already a decade earlier, there were attempts to move Korean rice farmers to Central Asia "to assist in organisation of rice cultivation and sharing their experience" (personal communication with G. Khvan 1994).

However, economic consideration seemed to be the by-product of the politics of making Koreans the scapegoat rather than as a primary cause. The talk of deportation of the "enemy within" on account of potential Korean treachery was already officially considered as early as 1923 (V.Lee & Y. Kim 1994: 94). The confidential letter signed by Stalin and Molotov, *On issues of Deportation of Korean Residents in Border Area of The Far East Region* of the 21st August 1937, was a mere development of the same theme. The Korean deportation was ordered for the prevention of "Japanese espionage" infiltration of the Far East region (*ibid.* 105).

With Stalin as an absolute power incarnate, his order was carried out though nothing was ever explicitly articulated nor substantiated. Nobody expected explanations but everything was just accepted in this reign of terror. In this macabre concoction of fear and fascination, Stalin's grip

penetrated even the psyche of the victims and it is not uncommon for Soviet Koreans to speak reverentially of the dictator and his days of stability and order. I once met a Soviet Korean teacher who was keen to show his photographic skills, but what struck me most was many and assorted replica of Stalin's glossy photos along with his family snaps. Even though the Korean remained silent about them, it was clear that this dead man was still very much alive, almost obsessing the living man's memory (picture 14). Of course, as Kim pointed out, Koreans were not the only victims, but it should also be reminded that not every nationality was deported as the first case, nor whose destiny was so bound with that of the dictator, either.

The Order: Deportation And The Journey To Kazakhstan

“Some said we were on our way to death, but we were still busy drying bread for journey.” (Heyok)

“Those who could talk and reason were all killed.” (Stephan)

“At midnight we saw the baggage train... Several families had to share the compartment. Nobody protested. We stayed 20 days like that. Many died in a rail track accident. I suffered from constipation for the twenty days. One pregnant woman also lost a child due to constipation. I also suffered from infected nipples and couldn’t feed my child even if I saw it starving. My sister took care of it. When the child soiled, we couldn’t really wash nappy. We had to do with it for 20 days just rinsing and drying the same nappy. The child suffered so much only to die at the age of two.” (Shura)

Korean deportation was preceded by the arrest of 2,500 elites such as communist party members, military officers and “intelligentsias” (Lee & Chon 78). The “Crow”, a black car would come in the stealth of night to take the victims who were often never seen again, like Kuma’s father.

“My dad knew a bit of Russian and was a senior person among people; he used to give good counsel to them. In autumn 1936, they took him at night and imprisoned him without any sentence or judging. He was one of 6 brothers and they were all here but the eldest uncle in Seoul. They accused my father of contacting Seoul. It was not true. Mother was left with 6 children at the age of 40 when he was put to prison.” (Kuma)

The decimation of the Korean intelligentsia and elites are still keenly felt by the survivors whose sense of loss borders on self-hatred. This is suggested in the following quotes from Soviet Korean elders;

“It is only us the brainless that are left to survive”, “We are stupid”, “The best of us were gone”, “We won’t be the same”.

Like Holocaust survivors and Japanese internees, these Koreans suffered from a distorted perception of self and perpetrator. Having thoroughly accepted the authority of state, Koreans blamed

themselves and rarely accused the state explicitly. After all, they were again reminded of their status as disposable outsiders , and the sense of rootlessness still haunts the present Soviet Korean Community. In persecution narratives, brief but bitter comments are often reserved for themselves and present community , being described as “dumb , brainless and spineless” “left-overs” of the persecution in a world where “the best were long gone”. Moreover, people not only align themselves to the state but they sincerely and zealously offered overcompensating productivity in their craving for validation from the authority .

Meanwhile, the order about Korean deportation involved the head of secret police, Internal Affairs People’s Committee, and was carried out by its local representative (Kho 1990:29). The operation started from September till December and my informants were caught so poignantly unaware:

“I got married on the 24th Jan 1937... We had a “new-style” wedding as my husband was a party member. After the feast we ended up coming to Kazakhstan.” (Shura)

“In 1937, we lived with mother- in- law and had two children, Nadja and her brother. Nobody knew anything, it was a secret. We were just taken and it was autumn.” (Ellena)

In spite of the gravity of the tragedy, my informants almost scoffed at my suggestion of panic. However, their initial placidity gradually gave away and their resignation seemed to harbour layers of grief as an utterly powerless, voiceless people. Repression narratives were not often vocalised , but when it happened, people often finished the stories with just pained faces and sighs.

“What scare? Things were done always as they liked. If they wanted to take us what could you do? Against the state? Couldn’t say a word. Then gradually some said we were Japanese spies. On the 19th, they took all people. Told us that we were going to Kazakhstan. We wondered whether others were also going. Didn’t know only Koreans were taken then.” (Shura)

“Don’t know, “big shots” might have known but not us. There wasn’t much talk. Didn’t know where we were going, just told that the state took Koreans. We weren’t scared, as we all were going.”
(Segil)

“We were taken into a carriage. Not a single soul was left. Why? Those who know say that Stalin was guilty but we did not know it then. Now we know we were innocent.” (Hyeok)

The confidential document records the fate of those few who dared to express their sad scepticism such as:

“Kazakhstan is plagued with hunger and deprivation and there is no house. All immigrants will eventually die.”, “We will die on the train journey and won’t survive there, “It is because we have no

big Korean in the important posts.", "Russians order and Korean have to obey." (V. Lee & Y. Kim 1994:189-193)

The police state and its secret agents did not let any of known sentiments to go unpunished, but sent people to prison and other places of no return. In this climate, it did not take more than a word to move people and there was a silent commotion in the air. People expressed no resistance nor complaint, but obediently busied themselves to salvage what little they had.

"One evening in September, a car arrived, and we were ordered to meet for secret meetings. Yes, it was just before the 20th of September 1937. Then party members ordered us to get ready as they were sending vehicles for us. Those that picked corn were busy boiling and drying them, but they went bad or got stolen during the journey. Some killed pigs to boil in saline water for the journey, but how could you eat the still raw flesh? You know I gave birth to a girl on the 16th, my first baby. On the 19th, I was out there sitting at a station for a car with a three- day-old infant. Then on the 20th we were already in a train. On the 19th lorries came. They were packed. They said we were evacuated and so we thought so. After the meetings we packed within 5 days, leaving all the harvest. We took whatever we managed ... clothing, something to eat, blankets and money. We finally arrived at Wondong Nazhejinsky station in lorry." (Shura)

"No preparation, just bread, blankets, some plates, anything else was all left. They told us to go where, soon we sat and the train left". (Segil)

By the executing authority's own admission, the trains were barely equipped and some even had a hole in the roof (V. Lee & Y. Kim 1994:191). As informants put it:

"It was 70 wagons and twenty people went into a compartment. It was empty inside, just boards. What toilet? It was like that for 22 days, and then we were thrown anywhere."

"We first took a steamship and got off at Vladivostok and transferred to wagon. The wagon had two levels with boards to lie down. Several got lost by staying behind because of needing the toilet. Some caught up two or three years later and some died. Scared, I hardly ate, and only passed water when they had a long break. Because of anguish I did not even feel hungry" (Hyeok)

The trains were dark and temperatures rose and fell as they passed through Siberia day and night. Having no facilities for water, heating, cooking or toilet, it was a space of misery that reduced Koreans into animalistic indignity. It was also a place of life and death as mothers gave birth, people got sick, suffered and died. More mundanely, every stop was a chance for relieving one self, getting water or buying something to eat while the elderly and sick stayed helplessly for fear of being left behind outside when the train left. Meanwhile, they also provided a sight as exotic aliens to the Russians as they travelled.

Arrival in Kazakhstan: First Impressions

“I saw Kazakhs for the first time. They were all deformed. Some had no nose, others a twisted mouth, and half of them had tumours. Nobody knew Russian. They loved buying second-hand clothes from Koreans, not having seen a strip of cloth before. Imagine us, fair Koreans selling clothes at a bazaar! We were like intelligentsia to them. They said they loved us coming en masse. They said because of us Koreans, shops were opened for sugar, clothes and tea... Thanks to us, these Kazakhs have become as enlightened as now. They were really miserable then. So what examples could we get from them? We Koreans had to devise our own way to work” (Shura)

“Wolves, jackals and bogs... But we had to irrigate the land for rice. The Korean hands....” (Stephan)

Even though Koreans portray a sympathetic and hospitable picture of Kazakhs, their merits were downgraded by a harrowing first impression that the Kazakhs lived in a “wasteland” in Korean memory. When combined, the Russian/ Soviet discourse of enlightenment and Korean social order involving knowledge and power, provided the Soviet Korean framework in understanding the new environment. In the light of imagined “centre” of Russian power and culture, Koreans of the Far East were ashamed of their marginality, and yet they were “enlightened” people in comparison to the “scantly-clad”, “illiterate” Kazakhs of the steppes. Accordingly, Koreans placed themselves somewhere between Russians and these natives. This impression, once embedded, has stayed on, accounting for such little Korean appreciation or acculturation to the Kazakh influence. The same critical perspective, rather than sympathy, extends to the co-evacuee Kurds.

“Then what’s the name... the dark, primitive ones..., the Kurds also came in 1942. Don’t know what they did. In March they came foraging mountains barefoot in deep snow.” (Shura)

Upon arrival, malaria, dysentery, scorpions, snakes and “hot, bad weather” all claimed numerous Korean lives, especially up to 20 % of the young (Kho 2000 : 34). Like many others, Bongsun lost her younger siblings, and Shura lost her new baby. Again, the state escapes the blame.

“Truly many children died from dysentery. One family I know even lost all eight. There was no medicine. It was unenlightened here. In the Far East also we rarely went to hospital but used to go to Korean traditional doctors.” (Shura).

Rupture And Betrayal

Meanwhile, a witch-hunt for the “enemy within” still continued during and after the deportation, making people afraid of treachery of one another. Even innocent ordinary dialogue and everyday demeanour became ground for accusations and suspicions (S. Han & V. Han 1999: 37). Many were betrayed and denounced , often without any evidence , by neighbours, colleagues and friends. The Korean families were also not spared from the madness of the time and the long-lasting effect of the trauma still runs deep as is the case of following cases , chronicled in memoirs of the Soviet academics.

Pyotr Lee’s grandparents originally came from Seoul to flee from a dire poverty. However, this “foreign” connection implicated grandfather , a simple factory worker in July 1937 who never came back. A decade later his grandmother died, after eight years of paralysis in an unconscious state which was attributed to a pent-up anger caused by the tragedy. Another decade later, their daughter finally received an official notification of his death and a letter of rehabilitation in 1958.

(P. Kim & S. Pang 1993: 255-256)

Sergei Han’s maternal uncle , Kim Pyöngyöng was another kolkhoz labourer, a stranger to politics. He was arrested while sleeping, under the charge of smuggling a Chinese duvet. The anonymous accuser was one of his Korean colleagues. Kim was consigned to the asylum as the state extracted a false confession statement from his wife. Denounced by his wife and two daughters, he was not heard from for decades until his long suffering sister finally found him working as a farm hand in another part of Kazakhstan. Though released, “the enemy of people” was very much a dead man, socially and psychologically whose death was ignored by his wife and children. Only at his deathbed , the sole word finally fell from his hitherto silent man.

“ ...What wrong have I done ? ”

(S. Han & V. Han 1999: 36-40)

Sergei’s uncle was not a unique case. Another unhappy wife took further action in her petition to a local bureaucrat complaining about social ostracism she is enduring :

“... All the people who know me kept away from me for fear of implication. Even now I don’t even know either his [accused husband’s] whereabouts or his charge. ...I who suffer from this situation due to my husband’s past errors, denounce him as a husband. If documental record and evidence finds him guilty, I ask you to inflict a very severe punishment for the sake of our fatherland....”

(V. Kim 2000:151-2).

Like Mao’s Cultural Revolution victims(Jing 1996), the close-knit Korean community was further challenged as they had to live with the revelation of in-group treachery and this experience made association with one’s own community and legacy, a danger to survival.

Planting Rice and Building Schools

“We were homeless and lived in underground hovels. But first we had to build a school. All people went out and joined in” (Bongsun).

Denied the freedom to travel, Koreans were confined to this barren land where severe hunger had already decimated native Kazakhs. Despite provisions by the local authorities, there was a severe shortage of food, houses, work and basic medical care (*ibid.* 116). Having nowhere to stay, some were put in stables full of animal excrement or stayed on the streets (V. Kim 2000: 87). Many had to dig holes in the ground and spent winter and spring in hovels underground.

While telling narratives became an act of atonement for the holocaust survivors (Valensi & Watchel 1991:7), Korean reparation centred on the reproduction of Korean personhood. Failure to educate children meant a grave moral failure towards ancestors and family. In addition, they had further need to atone for the fabricated guilt the state inflicted by proving their worthiness, according to their understanding. Thus, normalising education took priority in the midst of homelessness, hunger and death.

“For a year in hovels, water overflowed over the reed field and we suffered from diarrhoea and children died of contagious diseases. But as you know we Koreans love to persevere in effort especially in education” (Stephan).

Within a few months after the deportation, Koreans already managed to set up as many as 79 makeshift schools, taking in half of the children (P. Kim & S. Pang 1993: 141). However, all Korean schools were soon forced to close, Korean books burned, Korean teachers dismissed, and Korean language replaced by Russian overnight. Having no access to higher education outside of their confinement, many Koreans had to stay in agricultural or teacher’s colleges. Nevertheless, nothing could dampen the parental zeal for children’s education and this painful past is the crux of their understanding of who they are today.

“All the floods, diseases, hard work... Yet, Korean mothers are extraordinary. With whatever burdens, they strived to educate their children. That’s why we have neither beggars, nor dim ones” (Stephan).

Just as education was linked to ancestors, their agricultural skill was seen as an inheritance and blessing from “ancestors” who “taught” Koreans to use their hands to tame the land (P. G.Kim & S. Pang 1993: 55). Koreans organised new collectives and many of them bore the same old kolkhoz names from the

Far East . In a way, it was a collective expression of craving for the continuity and meaning in this harsh, unpredictable and fractured life.

Even during the Soviet-German War and the Second World War, being unworthy of patriotic engagement, these “enemies within” were drafted to the “labour army” with only a few exceptions. Thus the Soviet Korean existence was again defined by labour and their exhausted and broken bodies bore the extreme hardship. Kūma ’s childhood was scarred by starvation and backbreaking slaving. Living on grass and rats, she lost her uncle to starvation. Hyeok’s husband was taken ill, malnutritioned in a mine, Ellena’s brother-in-law lost an arm . Shura’s unusually “privileged” husband, who was drafted to the army, died at the age of 33.

Women’s bodies also could not escape exploitation and mutilation by ignominious labour under draconic discipline. Pregnant and widowed, 25-year old Shura also had to work along with other women on the 400- hectare collective farm. With only one faulty tractor with little petrol, they had to dig land with hoes to accomplish “norms” and “*everybody dug crying.*” One easily got 8- years’ imprisonment and banishment by being late twice and even being 5 minutes late was penalised in the court. Out of fear, women got up at five, walked six km , cooked breakfast on the field and came home at nine.

Driven by zeal for self-validation and longing for acceptance, Korean collectives achieved record-breaking success, consolidating the Koreans’ self-perception of being different from “others”.

“We couldn’t go anywhere without permission, worked day and night and couldn’t even sleep. Under cruel and strict Stalin, people laboured trembling. But hardworking Koreans did not resent it” (Segil)

“We also saw Russian evacuees from Moscow in 1941 war. Those powdered ladies of leisure were howling around not knowing how to work. Also most Kazakhs had no experience in agriculture and died of starvation. But we Korean collectives worked with desperation and ranked as the best.” (Shura)

While “others” perished, Koreans felt they were adept in surviving even in extremities, having endured the severe trials of the pre-deportation era. Their extreme dedication to labour was an act of atonement for uncommitted sins as well as an attempt to win Soviet “respect” and symbolic rehabilitation.

The Dead : What Happened To The Ancestors?

Ancestors had been an undisputed source of blessing and power in agrarian and Confucian Korean society where power lay in land, its fertility and clan organisation (K. Choi 1991). Though weakened, their presence commanded devotion through the upheavals of Russification and Sovietisation. With deportation, however, offerings became a clandestine affair with an air of disillusionment and embarrassment. Instead of being the “proper” dead who should be powerful, the ancestors are now seen as inexplicably absent, just like their descendants, who got persecuted, silenced, banished or went missing. The ensuing spiritual vacuum brought much moral anguish expressed in such comments as

“I will make offerings to ancestors but who else will in the future?”

“We had faith in land and the ancestors, but we were abandoned”.

The anecdotal story of one Ch'agai family collected in Min's ethnographic work on Koreans in Kazakhstan (1992) reads as a metaphor of the discontinuity of the “traditional” social order of the exiled community.

In the days of the Russian Far East, the only 7th successor of Ch'agai clan, a baby, fell sick. The life offering from the previous generation to ancestors was prescribed by the elders. Soon a voluntary sacrifice of an unmarried uncle was offered for the sake of continuity of the family. The child finally resuscitated by drinking blood from the cut finger of the uncle who perished within 7 days. The boy grew up to become an heir and he kept the family seal, revealing its presence to no one but his wife on their wedding night. Years later the family was deported from Vladivostok to Kazakhstan and he died in 1943. Within days his voice demanded his daughter to give him back the seal. Consultation with a shinsōn (Korean diviner) located it in a trunk in a barn that had been kept there from the time of deportation. The spirit had to take it, explained the shinsōn, as there was no more use for this item of inheritance that passes through the eldest males. He had also a puzzling vision of blond hair in the family. Thus the seal was buried in a tomb. Years later, the 8th successor ended up marrying a Russian/Chinese woman, making the 9th heir only half-Korean who bore the Russian surname of his maternal grandmother. He then married a Russian woman who bore the 10th heir who had not a thing Korean on his face, let alone his surname (Min 1992: 55-57).

This story chronicles the process of disempowerment of Korean patriarchy and its ancestors by the penetrating Soviet state in the form of “alien women”. Tellingly, the deportation becomes a watershed, breaking both the hitherto “pure” Korean bloodline and firm authority of patrilineal ancestors. Now, heavily mirroring the life of their living descendants, the previously imperious and demanding ancestors became eerily silent and gave an impression of a hasty departure against the background of deportation. As a result, the collective ancestors lost annual offerings and were consigned to a polite oblivion. Offerings for the dead parents also diminished from regular seasonal and annual devotion to only three offerings after death and a few festive offerings. Ultimately, the story is an allegory of an

irreparable power shift, even in spiritual and moral realms, that the deportation caused among the Koreans and their resignation to the facts.

As implied in the story, the community's practice saw a further separation of parents, an object of affect, from the rest of unindividuated and transcendental ancestors. While ancestors represent potentially dangerous beings who need to be placated in spite of their apparent inefficacy, parents are seen as benign, yet needy objects whose sacrifice and suffering should be remembered with intense sorrow. Around the time when Alek saw his father twice in dreams, his sister Genrieta also felt "heavy" in her heart. On both occasions, the paternal spirit appeared plaintive and the children soon found out that a railing of their father's tomb was stolen. The railing was soon mended but the episode made the children brood as a reminder of "poor dad".

Moreover, contrary to tradition, Alma-Atians emphasise sorrow almost to the exclusion of confidence in gaining blessing and protection in their rituals. One such informant was crying so much throughout her visit to her dead parents' tomb, explaining, "*To us Koreans, this day for the dead parents is a very sad day.*" Even the traditionally merry-making autumn festival is regarded by some as a "sad day" as emphasis shifted from celebration of ancestral benediction to descendants grieving over loss and absence. This change in mortuary rites of invoking parent's individuality and humanity, as Bloch implies, can be read as an expression of a disrupted transition of the spirit to the transcendental order (Bloch 1982).

Restriction of visits to the dead was another addition that passed as a tradition among some locals. An informant explained this as: "*Here we go on parents' memorial day, like Russians and Kazakhs. Other than that we don't go because it disturbs their peace.*" The implication is that even if the devoted children want to go, they have to abide by a fixed rule. This act is meant to be understood as filial consideration towards parents whose need for quiet takes priority over the filial self-indulgence of love. However, the informants conveniently omit the fact that this prohibition spares Korean children from the bother and care that devotional visits demand. Especially in the old hostile Soviet days, Korean had to find excuses to sneak out from work in order to pay homage to the dead with all the food preparations. In a way, the current Alma-Atian devotional curtailment seems to fit very well with Janelli's analysis of Korean filial strategy towards demanding parents, i.e. "reinterpretation" of principles using another worthy causes and avoidance of direct contact (Janelli 1993).

Remembering, forgetting and Present: *We Are All Right*

... a person who does not know the history of his people is a person without memory.

Preface of *Soviet Koreans of Kazakhstan*

The contradiction of the Soviet Koreans clearly revolves around the theme of selective remembrance. On the one hand, no public gathering ever takes place without reference to “Korean tradition” and exhortation of its observance. Whether the occasion be a wedding toast or 60th birthday speech, the community discourse stress their moral duty of remembrance of their commendable Korean root. Despite a carefully managed silence and the composure of the people, the facts indicate a recurrent sense of brokenness, involving “home”, relationships, aspirations, moral order, and the “Korean” tradition that haunt the lives of the minority. The deportation meant bitter disappointment to many intelligentsia who suffered persecution and underemployment. But most of all, hierarchy-sensitive senior men who were the traditional Korean authority, were embittered by the demise of “Korean tradition. It meant an undermining of an old order and undeniable loss of their prestige by “rude” Russians who “taught” “crude” new principles and their faithless Korean followers.

“Speaking Russian we became like a Russian. Now there was no Korean “law” and regulation but all Soviet style. It wasn’t like that before. I used to call father’s brother, 6 years my junior, “uncle” in Korean and did not call by his name. Before, we couldn’t. Now it is like mates.” (Shura)

“Before in the Far East, the elders’ word was law itself. They just sat inside, beckoned and called. Just one tap at the window with their pipe was all that was needed to silence us children.” (Segil)

However, the truth is that the majority of Koreans do not, and can not “remember” or articulate the content of “tradition” in question. The following observation from a local writer portrays the community who pays a nominal homage to its Korean axiom only to quickly slip into “Soviet” repertoire illustrates the facetious and frustrating portrait of his Soviet Korean compatriots.

“ It is interesting to watch Koreans during great festivities. After many official congratulations on the occasion, a surge of patriotic [Korean] pathos goes around the tables with an increasing speed. It usually begins with some authoritative elder who occupies a certain social position by the Soviet standard. In a banquet speech, as a rule, one reminisces about mother tongue, cultural tradition, art and things as they should be, namely what the contemporary Korean are left without. This all sincere declaration is intended as a testimony for the eyes of the growing descendants. But at this, in the celebratory spirit, the orator seems to innocently forget that it was their generation’s load to survive the final severance of tradition and language, let alone art. It was they and their fathers who had to bear all the burden of the policy of social suspicion, and we certainly have no right to blame those who once

obediently drooped their heads and accepted the rules of the established game...Several hours later, directly depending on wine consumption, a surge of patriotic pathos quietens , people start to relax, emboldened, speak more Russian, as if they forgot a word of mother tongue which was never more than inadequate. The remembrance of the good wishes of the elders is lost as quickly and the socialising continues ..." (A. Kang in Song 1993: 67-8)

To him, the continuity is reduced to and locked in the visceral, curative and instinctive dimension of Koreanness in the form of enigmatic Korean grannies. He, like young Soviet Koreans, are at once saddened and frustrated at the gulf between his community's silenced heritage and Russified self.

On the other hand, the Korean reading of the past remains ambivalent .As was earlier elucidated, Korean ethnic legacy and tradition is deeply associated with backwardness and marginality under the norm of the Soviet *kultura* and enlightenment. As often as "tradition" is extolled, equally the dismissive attitude prevails as to Korean customs which go against contemporary Soviet sensitivity such as blatant gender inequality or complex rituals. A "sensible" Soviet Korean is to excise and "forget" the anachronistic offences while cheerfully retaining the rest.

Another point is that many Koreans acknowledge the good fortune of leaving Korean ghettos, language and ethnic education behind in exchange for the predominant culture and language which provided access to the imaginary centre, but are torn between inner shame and guilt at the same time. The community's inner conflict could not have been more revealing than in the following episode.

Once, I happened to overhear two elderly intelligentsia's conversation during a local dignitary's funeral. Oblivious to my presence, the two Soviet Koreans started reminiscing the "journey" from the Russian Far East to Kazakhstan. In a conspiratorial voice, they conceded that though it was "uncomfortable" to admit it loudly that the deportation ended up really doing them "good"; after all, they are now "here" and become "mainstream" by being exposed to the *great* Russian "culture". Then in even more hushed tones, one added ,

" It's true that our lot has become better but we'd better be quiet about it. Of course it is a pity that we have lost our tongue and know no history...But we now have Russian language. We really came a long way from the little corner ... Unless it is for Moscow or Leningrad, we won't move out of this place, will we?"

It is no surprise that the official declaration of Soviet Korean rehabilitation was followed by a boom of Soviet Korean "confession" and "atonement" literature on the same theme.

By learning to *sense* unspoken contradictions and layered nuances of uprooting, Korean children of deportation victims also became participants of suffering. The intergenerational impact from the historical trauma of forced segregation is also well documented in the case of Japanese Americans who had similar situations during the Second World War (Nagata 1998: 435).

As M. Bloch's emphasis (1998) on the significance of non-semantic contextual memory shows, a great deal was communicated in spite of repressed verbalisation among the Koreans. Intense memories were easily evoked by imageries, senses and objects such as mangled hands, the smell of certain foods, places, and agricultural tools. In Valensi and Wachtel's Jewish material, the power of this implicitly transmitted continuity almost borders on spiritual possession of a child by parents (Valensi & Wachtel 1991:344). In a similar fashion, this shared implicit memory burdens children with a call of compensating or solving unresolved parental past.

In the same vein, when middle-aged Ella talks about her "angry" mother who was plucked from a prestigious ballet school as a young girl because of deportation, she also could not escape her own pain of having to live with the bitter shadow of the broken promise, as with many other children of the deportees. Even without being told, the children sense the parental resentment and pent-up sorrow, resolving to make up for the pain. The deportation is seen as the deepest cause of fundamental division between generations who can not understand one another. Thus, in Soviet Korean fictions, the portrayals of the old generations are often characterised by an inarticulate grief, while the young suffer from sorrowful incomprehension (e.g. A. Kang 1990, C. Han 1990)

The feeling was highly contagious as even I have momentarily experienced its emotional logic. One night at a Korean theatre, two local Koreans in their seventies were taken aback by my conversation with other South Korean students. It was the first time for the former Korean-majors to hear "real" Korean language from "real Koreans". Still in a state of disbelief, while one kept a distance as if avoiding the resurrection of the old pain, the other was in tears remembering his old dream of becoming a Korean teacher. By the time he bade us good bye in tears wishing us "academic success", even we felt a momentary connection between our lives as if we had to somehow compensate for their broken dreams.

However, this inner conflict within Koreans who align themselves with Slavic culture exacerbates the pain of having to "compromise" the "standard" by present Kazakhisation. It is a symbolic humiliation for Korean mind as Kazakhs are truly a disadvantaged people, professionally and economically. The majority of Kazakhs remain uneducated peasants in very underdeveloped rural areas , while other

ethnic groups take charge of industrialisation and skilled labour (Khazanov 1995: 160). A divide over introducing Kazakh as a state language within the Kim family at the New Year party in 1993 illustrates the tension in the Korean community and the disturbance of the ethnic *status quo*. While sympathetic Alek saw it as a natural consequence on Kazakh territory, the rest were extremely resentful of having to bother with the “ *limited and poor* ” language of Kazakh peoples who remain “ *cultureless, rootless, wild and primitive nomads.* ”

The suggested proof of inferiority was their lack of enduring visible legacies, and the long absence of a writing system. Once again, the ubiquitous *kultura* was invoked as something that one can “claim” as an inheritance from the past to justify the unequal present. In their resentment, the Kims , like many Koreans, were reproducing the old Soviet ideology under whose frame they felt they had struggled so hard to secure a niche, even at the expense of one’s own language and culture. The resentment was a combination of the buried guilt of foregoing Korean culture and “going backwards” after all the sacrifice. To them, it is a sacrilege to “*go backwards when the rest of the world is striving for the better* ” and “*everything is really absurd here, in this country of fools* ”.

When Alek forced his sister Vera, the vociferous Kazakh critic, to rank the hierarchy of “*kulturas*”, she tellingly articulates:

Alek: ...*what about Korean culture? Is it superior or inferior to the Russian one?*

Vera: *Korea is the country of its own culture and ancient history, even longer than that of Russia. I don't know much about it but definitely I am proud of my roots. Everybody here knows Koreans are smart. It is all in the blood. We are different from those wild simpletons.*

Even though the transition to a market economy and the independence of Kazakhstan translates into a “scandal” of thieving capitalists and Kazakh nationalists to many locals, this boundary of self and self-sufficiency comes across as a common theme among the Koreans, especially the elderly, to fend off any present hardship. While they downplay the current difficulties, they also utilise the tragic past as a reference point.

“*Not so bad, I don't buy at bazaar. I grow things.* ” (Segil)

“*It is ok. It is cold here and transport is bad but nowadays I am not socialising much. I am busy keeping rabbits, chicken and pigs. we also plant cabbages.* ” (Heyok)

“*I am fine. I have lived worse days, without light or gas. No need to cry.* ” (Kuma)

“*We Koreans try to help ourselves everywhere and anytime. We don't just sit helplessly like others. We are Koreans. Even if plucked from soil and planted on a bare rock, we can still survive.* ” (Stephan)

“Elderly Korean parents don’t get abandoned but many Russians do” (Ellena)

The past still shapes the Korean perception of self and others as resilience and self-sufficiency set Koreans apart from the “others”.

Summary

An important part of being a Soviet Korean means having and sharing a collective memory of lived experiences. It has manifested in the way they relate to themselves, other ethnic groups, and the state authority as they go through events of exploitation, persecution, confinement and its aftermath. The analysis establishes the migrants as an exceedingly desperate and deprived people whose sense of “hunger” extends far beyond mere physicality. The theme of marginality and the legacy of Choson haunts the Soviet Korean history and collective memory. I illustrated the continuing relevance of these “carried-over” cultural meanings which shaped the collective Korean response to the new socio-political conditions. The drive for security as “Soviet Koreans” developed and was redefined through subsequent historical events such as Sovietisation and collectivisation. However, the community life was to be severely ruptured again with the 1937’s deportation to Central Asia. The Soviet Korean identification with the advanced “Soviet” *kultura* was accelerated by deportation with Korean endeavour to become a “proper person” within the new socio-political situation. Much of their subsequent achievement in labour and education is such a cultural and emotive quest for their dignity and expression of unarticulated grieving. Thus contemporary Koreans came to establish a specific perspective of seeing themselves as survivors of all seasons. Nonetheless, they could not avoid the bitterness of starting again in the “backward” new state of Kazakhstan. Their identities are shaped by a tension between remembrance and forgetting, continuity and loss, and pride and shame.

Chapter Three Introducing Korean communities in Alma-Ata and the ‘New Korean Boom’

In this chapter, I resume exploring the continuities and transformation of “Korean tradition” by presenting an overview of the Koreans in Alma-Ata. Firstly, I look into the intense Korean aspiration for urban life and the reality that locates Koreans as one of the most urbanised ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union. I link the extraordinary facts with traditional Korean cultural symbols and meanings of personhood, education as well as Soviet ideology of *kultura*. In this context, Alma-Ata, the erstwhile capital of Kazakhstan, becomes an ambiguous place of achievement and social angst. Next, particular attention is paid to look at visible areas such as kinship affiliation, social grouping, language, residence and educational attainment. The final section of this chapter is devoted to the minority’s occupation and activities especially in the light of a “Korean boom” brought by enterprising South Koreans.

Section One: Desire For Urban Living: Centre, Periphery and *Kultura*

While Korean in the Soviet Far East lived more compactly, the deportation dispersed Korean population over a large rural area. However, Koreans aspire to urban living and have made unparalleled efforts to move to cities wherever possible. The proportion of Koreans in Kazakhstan who dwell in cities has been steadily increasing: 73.1% in 1970, 80.4% in 1979, and 84.2 % in 1989 (Zuev 1992:155). Their migration history often suggests a family’s chain migration through children’s educational and occupational connections. As a result, the contemporary Soviet Koreans are the most urbanised minority within the USSR with the exception of the Jews (Kimura 1989:125). This trend is very remarkable against three background factors. Firstly, Korean lives were restricted to collective farms for two decades, only regaining freedom of movement in the late 1950s. Secondly, it was very complicated to change residence under the Soviet regime, with its requirements to pre-arrange works and permission to dwell in new areas. Thirdly, the Koreans contrast most sharply with Kazakhs who resolutely remain in rural areas (Khazanov 1995).

Of course, not everyone shares the Korean suffering and their ascent; when asked about the origin of the Alma-Ata Koreans, some local Kazakh young men were blank.

“Umm, Koreans...they are very hard working people. Very quiet. ..they just happened to be here, for quite some time. Dun no how they ended up here, though”.

Table 2. Urban and Rural Korean Population in Kazakhstan (1970-1999).

	<u>1970</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1989</u>
Urban	59,933	79,985	86,977 (84.2%)
Rural	21,665	17,999	16,338 (15.8%)

Source: Modified from *The Population of Kazakhstan: Annual Handbook 1996, 2000* by Kazakhstan Department of Statistics (quoted in Back 2001:84) and *Sovietski Kareitsi Kazakhstana* (Zuev 1992:156)

Tellingly, proving the powerful pull of the capital, the Korean population records the highest growth rate in Alma-Ata. Meanwhile, the rural areas are experiencing a decline in population as many see the desolation of collective farms and try to escape a taxing rural life. An acute sense of deprivation and shame is attached to rural life among Koreans and many are still haunted by a sense of inadequacy and shame as a result of their roots in the country. Genrieta, one of my key informants, compares her growing up as a *Kolkhoz* (collective farm) girl with her Alma-Atian cousin Ella.

"I was so busy helping out my parents, feeding chickens and taking care of my brothers and sisters. When I visited Ella in Alma-Ata she was like a spoilt princess. She knew how to play the piano like a concert pianist, learnt foreign languages while winning all the gold medals all the way to Leningrad State University" (Genrieta).

Alma-Ata was seen as a civilised place, full of "kultura". This was negatively contrasted with rural and small-town living.

"It was a small world. We did not get to see anything. We were always so busy, working hard. In those days, nobody ever told us to read books. We just borrowed and read on and on under a dim light. My elder brother who learned a lot of things through books taught me never to put my hands in my pocket as he read somewhere that ladies do not do that and I obliged. The only pass-time in those days was going to dances in those flared skirts and cutaway blouses. But I was so shy. So I could not say anything when our Russian teacher once wooed me with roses. In our place, he was an idol, riding a motorbike. Even in the days of such poverty, he was a dandy, wearing such dapper clothes. People said that he comes from an old family in Leningrad. But we were such different people. Another source of glamour was visiting doctors and their assistants. They were different from us and we looked up to them. There was a Korean nurse whom we thought the epitome of chic and how we all wanted to look like her! The whole village got excited with her alleged romance with a doctor. We were hungry for touch of kultura. All I ever had was a ballet performance by the

visiting troupe in my school days. All I remember is the ballerina's laddered tights and dirty ballet shoes" (Genrieta).

Now both cousins live nearby in Alma-Ata as a result of Genrieta's moving to Alma-Ata through marriage to Roberto. Since then, Ella suffered much misfortune from unhappy marriages and financial difficulties while Genrieta did relatively well. Yet, Genrieta's fixation with the deprived past still constantly reproduces itself in her present, especially her relationship with her children whom she scolds rather frequently for not studying.

"Since Roberto and I come from that stupid, backward place, how can my children get the same upbringing and talent from us?"

Equally this "shady" past still hangs like a dead albatross around the former inmates' necks and those who were there can discern it no matter how one tried to "pass" (Goffman 1991:70). When local Korean women want to put down others, the word *kolkhoz* is a ready short-hand for depravity and vulgarity. Thus when a rich businessman's pampered wife Sonya complained of her delicate constitution, her acquaintance told me aside;

"I don't believe it. She used to work and live on the field in kolkhoz. Just because she is now dripping silk and gold doesn't take it away. She was no princess so why now this pretence when we all know where she comes from? Even now you can still see it as she has no taste".

On the other hand, the same hierarchical model also consigns Alma-Ata to a compromise compared to the metropolises of Moscow and Leningrad. More than symbols of temporal success and exclusivity, these cities are also the props in the making of a Korean person with an added halo of the academic aura. There is no more potent symbol of a whole family's rising above adversity than having children studying in those famous institutions. To Anatoly who grew up as a son of an illiterate *kolkhoze* farmer, this fascination with the imaginary centre bordered on obsession:

"Even in the midst of deportation, they were all slaving to get their children educated. Koreans always believe we have to learn to survive wherever we go. Uzbeks and Kazakhs do not... I had also pondered a lot and decided to go to the centre. Even beyond Moscow, all the way to Leningrad, with the real history and culture, the centre... I demanded my parents' support. I wanted more than just student life. I needed to be there, to experience the culture, my mates also thought like that".

As Alma-Ata of obscure *kultura* is regarded as a passion killer for creative angst or academic ambition, many discontent Koreans often echo Chekhov's *Three Sisters* who got wasted in yearning for Moscow. However, unlike in "eastern" Alma-Ata where Kazakhs themselves are Mongoloid, Soviet Koreans risk blatant racism by becoming "exotic", "Orientals", and "barbarians". In their new

context, *Kultura*, a product of Russian/Soviet Imperialism and its imposed modernisation, is a double-edged sword. An elder described this predicament in the following way.

"The great Russian chauvinism is always there in their hearts, especially against the Oriental peoples. As the old Tsars despised us, this attitude still persists in the natives of Leningrad, the old capital, and Moscow. Many Koreans have had the experience of being openly insulted by the public in these Russian cities as "slit eyed Asiatics." (Segil)

Section Two: Community Overview

In the face of an apparent absence of cultural features such as language and religion, an impressive cultural continuity emerged as a particular way of seeing and relating to the self, others and the world. Key words such as “culture”, “learning”, and “respect”, are all very important concepts from their pre-migration days; they are associated with “being a Korean” and still organise and drive Koreans’ lives in Kazakhstan. We now turn to examine Soviet Korean communities in Alma-Ata in some depth, in terms of their social groupings, settlement and housing patterns, kinship and marriage, and language usage.

Settlement And Housing

Within Alma-Ata, Koreans do not necessarily form a visible Korean quarter even though there are some streets where people live around relatives and friends in close proximity. Some Koreans who fled from Tajikistan are now settled in the outskirts of the city. There were also some blocks of flats that used to house Sakhalin Koreans who were invited to work in the local Korean media. After a few decades of families moving in and out, there is still a noticeable presence around. But on the whole their presence is more scattered, mixed with other ethnic groups.

Korean houses were often re-built and extended over a long period of time and I even saw one with an outdoor “Finnish bath” installed. There is a great emphasis on order and tidiness among Koreans and this is strongly reflected in Korean housing. Korean women, especially the older generation is known to be very house-proud and their space is compared with a “drug store” for their clinical cleanliness.

A local joke often reminds people of the different attitudes of different peoples using the metaphor of the house. While Germans are much admired for their decorative skills and pretty houses, Kazakh houses are laughed at their emptiness and bleakness “with occasional goats and sheep bleating around”. On the other hand, the imagery and reality of Korean houses are those of self-sufficiency and productivity, especially the vision of a lush vegetable plot. Many Korean features such as heated floors and utility rooms get lost in urban flats. But whether it is a house, a flat, or a summer house, Koreans have a keen interest in utilising land (pic.25-26).

Family, Marriage, *Pon*

There is much ambivalence in local Korean practise and perception of kinship boundaries. As is noted by many, the traditional norm of patrilineal, patriarchal and primogeniture is replaced by the more egalitarian conjugal and inheritance pattern in the Soviet Union (Baik 2001). However, researchers tend to overlook the psychological and symbolic importance of the old model that still affects especially elderly Koreans (e.g. Yi & Chōn 1993, Chōn 2002). In contrast to bilineal practice, transmitting the family name still means the distinction of “own” and “alien” blood. As an elderly informant owns,

“Of course in heart, a son’s children are dearer because they are of our own blood, because we share the same surname”.

Elderly Sveta’s experience illustrates the same point. She panicked when her daughter’s little girl suddenly had a most unusual fit in her home. The first thing that scared her was that the child belonged to the “other family” and was thus, her guest. Out of desperation, going against her principles, she even took the child to a *shinson* (Korean diviner), who diagnosed a spiritual disturbance. Likewise, the Korean paternal family name also gives official recognition of Korean identity to multiple heritage children.

Clans are traditionally denoted by a place of origin and patrilineal lineages sharing a common ancestry. Carefully subdivided by seniority, they competed against one another for economic and social prestige

(T. Kim 1994). However, with no genealogical records, and often bastardised and even fictitious family names, its traditional authority in organising individual life has been lost in the Soviet Union. The little that survived, such as identification of *pon*, the “place of origin” of the clan, has however been doggedly adhered to even by the young. In contemporary Soviet Union, identifying *pon* is

almost the first ritual when two Koreans meet for the first time. If identity of *pon* is established, that can be quite an emotional affair creating instant intimacy as kin even in the absence of further details. A middle-aged local remembers:

"I am a Kim of Youngwol, there were only five brothers in Kazakhstan of the same pon but we increased as the young got married. That is all really. When I met a person in Tashkent and he turned out to be the same Youngwol Kim. Oh, how he jumped up and down and cried out, saying I was his younger brother....".

Being exogamous, Korean clans avoid the person of the same *pon* in marriage and this taboo has been ingrained very deeply. As another says;

"We can't do that. The same pon means the same bloodline, and thus, brothers and sisters. No right to marry. But the mother's line is O.K as they are "alien" to you. Even if people meet, they switch off their attention to the opposite sex once they know they are of the same origin. It is not a Korean thing to marry one's own".

Even in the one rare case of paternal cousins marrying that I heard of, they lied to their families, who were scandalised; and the young couple had to move away.

Contemporary Soviet Koreans show much lower fertility rates than their earlier generations and contemporary Kazakhs. While the nuclear family is prevalent, attachments to parents and siblings are still expressed in the endeavour to live in close proximity and to have frequent contact. It is also quite a common tendency for the elderly to live with the youngest son, even though the elderly are very self-conscious as this is a deviation from the traditional norm of living with the eldest son.

The marriage pattern is showing a trend towards more marriages outside the Soviet Korean community. According to G. Kim, demographic data from 1989 shows that there were 71,800 married, 6000 widowed, 4200 divorced Koreans in Kazakhstan and the interethnic union was 1600 *versus* 70,200 endogamous marriages. (G. Kim 1993:28) Intermarriages are seen to be rapidly increasing and now account for 20% of unions, especially among the urban young (*ibid.*). Both sexes tend to marry Slavs. "Given" explanations are varied: while Russians are more "open" and individualistic, Kazakhs are still "clannish" in kinship, resisting outsiders. Kazakh dietary avoidance of pork is also a suggested but unconvincing point, as many urban Kazakhs are lukewarm Muslims who have no qualms about eating pork sausages. Rather, given racial and certain traditional commonalities between Koreans and Kazakhs, there seems to be much great resistance from both sides to union, beyond simple religiosity.

An increasing divorce rate and youth problems among the Koreans now seems to converge with the general Soviet pattern, and this has led to a perception of crisis in the local Korean community. Often, these internal problems are ascribed to the outside society, especially "Russians" who infect Koreans with "the appalling trait" of female assertiveness and irreverent youth. Much conflict arises because of the gap between the prescribed Korean womanhood of an obliging daughter-in-law, and the "Soviet" model of the autonomous wife. Nevertheless, in spite of the strident critics of the contemporary Korean Alma-Ata women, the reality remains that they remain very obliging to male headship in the family, and take it for granted that they will take on the double burden of domestic and paid labour.

Education and Language

The educational profile of the minority confirms a long-held belief in their enthusiasm and investment in education. The following table compares Korean achievement against both that of the *general* population of Kazakhstan, and of its capital. Educational standards are higher in the urban areas, compared to rural areas. However, even the most rural Korean rivals the most educated urbanite. The table (adapted from Zuev 1989:161) also singles out Alma-Ata Koreans to be one of the best-educated categories of people. The unequal rate can partly be explained by the undeniably superior educational environment that favours Alma-Atians.

Table 3. Educational attainments of Koreans and others in Kazakhstan and Alma-Ata.

	%ge of the Whole Population which received Higher Education (those unfinished)	Koreans of the same category
Kazakhstan	13.1 (1.4 %)	28.5 (2.4 %)
Alma-Ata	29.7 (3.0 %)	43.5 (3.8 %)

Source : Adapted from Zuev (1992:162) .

Soviet Koreans are very keen to adopt the Russian Language, and in fact show the highest rates of language uptake among all Soviet minority ethnic groups (Kimura 1989:129). It is tempting to attribute the fast shedding of the mother tongue to the draconian cultural repression experienced by

the Koreans. However, in spite of much grievance over the loss of Korean within the community, historical records and personal testimonies suggest Korean initiative in pursuing Russian as a means of further advancement. According to 1989's national census on self-reported linguistic knowledge, 95% of Koreans knew Russian, 51.7 % Korean and 1.1% Kazakh (Oka 2001 99-100). My personal experiences suggest that figure for the Korean speakers seems grossly inflated as the majority of Koreans use Russian in daily life; there are not many who are sufficiently proficient in Korean to call it their mother tongue. The figure is probably due to the ambiguous wording of "mother tongue" in the survey, as Oka suggested (*ibid.*).

Reduced to a spoken dialect without a literary basis, even when it gets used in daily conversation among some Koreans in a family context, the language has lost its more sophisticated functions and nuances. The situation often led to a profound communication gap between different generations, as innermost feelings were often lost in the "secondary tongue." The current situation alienates the majority of local Koreans from Korean theatre, literature, radio and newspaper where "proper" and literary Korean is "performed."

Associations

Since Perestroika, the new political climate enabled more visible ethnic activities and organisations and in 1988, the Korean Cultural Centre in Alma-Ata became the first such Korean organisation. Soon, many other cities such as Moscow and Tashkent also followed suit with ethnic organisations. The Cultural Centre of Alma-Ata now has 800 members, and mainly concentrates on cultural matters by organising Korean language classes, organising Korean celebrations, sponsoring publications and representing the official "face" of the local Koreans. In contrast to the Cultural Centre of pro-South Korean tendency, the Association for Promoting the Unification of Korea (ASOK) leans on North Korea by arranging trips to Pyongyang and disseminating a North Korean agenda.

However, the majority of Soviet Koreans, even those whose names appear on the membership list, remain somewhat indifferent to the organisations. The traumatic past of repression of ethnic politics also fosters apathy towards collective representation. Apart from some vague guilt over the lost mother tongue, many people saw no "real" need for such organisation and suspected them to be a "self-promoting niche for some self-appointed big Koreans" in the name of the disinterested rest.

There is also a clandestine organisation of anti-North Korean defectors. They are very discreet about their meetings and activities, but their contacts are said to extend to Washington officials.

In contrast to the general apathy about official affiliations, local Koreans have intricate informal social networks, often based on their locality after the Deportation. Even though many now live away from the collective farms, this tie seems to be powerful, and second only to kinship ties, which often overlap. Even though the younger generation might not share the same intense solidarity, they are still within the extensive network that gets utilised for marriage and business. It is usual for Alma-Ata Koreans to spend considerable time visiting their contacts in villages and receive them back in the city in return. Many Korean life-cycle occasions – such as an infant's first birthday, a wedding of the young, the elder's 60th birthday, funerals and rituals for the dead – are the focal point of these meetings, where social credits are meticulously recorded and reciprocated. Failure to repay attendance and material help jeopardise a person and the family, even to the point of ostracism and exclusion. Recent hyperinflation, soaring travel costs and the demise of common currency all put Soviet Korean people under enormous social and psychological pressures in balancing fiscal need and competing social obligations.

Section Three: Occupation, Activities, and 'The New Korean Boom'

Rise of Koreans

In the wake of the Soviet Union's break-up and the ensuing economic chaos, Soviet Koreans have found themselves to be in a position of new ascendancy. From the rise of Korean "boutiques", to Korean churches, to the sudden increasing popularity of Korean *Shinsongs*, or diviners, the Soviet Korean community has recently experienced something of an occupational and cultural boom. It is this phenomenon that we explore in this section.

Apart from the practitioners of the esoteric arts, there are some others who specifically cater for Korean needs, such as rice cake makers. As all Korean celebrations should have at least one or two varieties of rice cakes, the market demand is always there. Korean dog restaurants also have that clannish feel, an almost half-embarrassed and half-secretive atmosphere. As many Koreans do not live in villages where dogs were easily procured and cooked, this is a handy, if expensive place for gratification. However, this culinary aspect of "being Korean" is more fully explored in a later chapter on food, so is merely mentioned here as part of the new "Korean Boom".

In congruence with statistics showing remarkable Korean academic standards, they have also shown prominent upward occupational mobility in the Soviet Union. This shift from collective farms to professional occupations changed much of the Koreans' self-perception. Thus, many younger Soviet Koreans are used to seeing Koreans only in comparatively successful positions. For example, one of the culture shocks for a local Soviet Korean college student who visited Seoul was to see "all sorts of Koreans". Many marvelled at Koreans doing "simple" jobs such as taxi driving and street sweeping in Seoul, which is "extremely rare" in Kazakhstan. Being "simple" goes beyond the mere physicality of the job undertaken, but includes the idea that one may be resigned to one's station without further endeavour for self-development.

In the midst of the feverish transition into a market economy, the meaning of work and its attached values have changed radically. The security that comes with jobs in a planned economy has started to crumble at the rise of commerce, trade and enterprises. Yesterday's prestige in the elite quarters of party, academia and specialised fields, is losing ground in a market where profits justify all. With wages losing purchasing power in the face of daily hyperinflation, and people getting paid in arrears, the authority of the once-almighty workplace has lost its awe. The situation has driven more and more ordinary people into taking other side jobs, commonly petty trades.

It was equally common that many employees stole time from various employers, "quietly doing their own thing." Koreans were not different from others in suffering in the new economic disorganisation, but their response and resources seem to differ (Baik 2001). Their already-famous independent farming enterprises became more daring: they use them as a dependable option for survival and for the accumulation of capital in the transition to a market economy.

While privatisation started and natural resources were traded to foreign enterprises, ordinary people had to bear unprecedented inflation and instability. Added to the pre-existing Soviet disorder between goods and people, new consumerism further made people obsessed with acquisition. In the fever of consumerism and commercial adventure, markets were visibly expanding everywhere from homes, streets and even to the graveyards for sale, storage, barter or self-employment.

During my fieldwork, it was common that whenever there was any kind of meeting, be it a wedding reception or a relatives' reunion, the conversation ran in the same groove: resentment of the new and reminiscence about the old days, followed by enthusiastic exchange of the "business tips". Whether they actually can afford things is not as important as "keeping an eye out" and roaming around in a

feverish pursuit of goods, whether it be a pair of stockings or a scarf from Turkey. In this climate, Soviet Korean clothes shops pass as prestigious “boutiques” selling cheap clothes, fashion jewellery and cosmetics. They are also a centre of pilgrimage for many devotees who are determined not to let go of this space of “fantasy”. Also, the most desirable spaces were devised by South Koreans who set up a Korean restaurant and a burger shop that became a talk of the town. Prohibitively expensive to the locals, they became places for self-conscious consumers to “save up” to go for intensely public consumption. With these fashionable eateries, and Korean electric and consumer goods flooding into local markets, Korea is seen as a coveted face of capitalism that Kazakhstan should emulate.

While state-run shops are poorly stocked, markets and bazaars are full of goods bartered or peddled from Dubai, Pakistan and India as well as Seoul. Marlborough tobacco, German liqueurs, Korean chewing gum, Mars bars and Chinese track-suits flooded kiosks, bazaars and markets. There is a further notable Korean presence selling “carrot salad” and other processed vegetables. But it is *blaholka*, a gigantic open market in the suburbs, which become a serious battlefield of cutting edge commercial activities. Under the socialist system, the very act of making profit was a crime *par excellence*, condemned as “speculation” and the offender was labelled as “a parasite”. That is why, when an elderly informant became a cigarette vendor, it scandalised her whole family as a moral aberration. Also, when another informant had to show foreign guests around Alma-Ata, he even refused to go in the market place out of principle. While it is associated with theft, petty crime and moral stigma to the older generation, it is a place of excitement to the young.

Church

The South Korean presence is most notable in the rise of about twenty Korean churches, all established by South Korean or Korean American missions. There were not only mainstream Protestant denominations but also the Adventist Church, Reverend Moon’s Unification church and even a notorious *Dami* sect that scandalised Korea with its millennium Doomsday preaching.

Mainly renting space at public buildings such as schools, each church has slightly different members according to the language of worship and orientation of pastors. In spite of variations in details, the missions have attracted all sorts of people who have many-fold needs. For the elderly, these Korean churches offer respect and the emotional satisfaction of listening to the long-lost mother tongue, while the young enjoy a chance to socialise and have a chance to taste the “outside” (pic 12).

The Korean American funded Pentecostal church was especially popular for its organised youth programs and lively worship across ethnic groups. Already, they have impressed locals by taking many youngsters to retreats in Leningrad over the years. More Korean youths have opportunities to meet other Koreans on an unprecedented scale, giving them an increased sense of "feeling Korean". In some churches with established bilingual services, there are considerable numbers of Slav believers who welcome any chance of Christian worship as well as some Kazakhs.

Churches are also one place where a reversed social order is apparent: Koreans (who are often South Koreans rather than locals) are seen to be in leadership roles over Kazakhs and Russians. This frequently leads to a "Korean" way of doing things, often reproducing paternalistic and hierarchical South Korean values as locals start to learn. It is no longer a novelty to see a Russian or Kazakh using a few Korean religious terms such as "pastor" and "praise" as they get enthusiastic about the liveliness in these churches. Korean-speaking pastors lead a congregation, often with the aid of interpreters, and a number of influential people such as the director of the Korean educational centre and several teachers, as well as South Korean students, take a prominent role in worship.

There was, at times, concern that South Korean Pastors would talk down to and patronise Soviet Koreans, even the Soviet Korean elders. The pastors' reputations range from "intelligent, dedicated, honest" to "eulogising South Koreans who talk too much, talk down to Soviet Koreans, rigid, unsophisticated and even immoral". Yet none can deny their powerful influence upon the congregation. When there was a party, a family friend publicly denounced churchgoers in front of elderly Christian Olga who remained sheepish. Her family was also teasing that she was now "preparing a good seat" for what was to come. Yet she was still adamant in her affection for a South Korean pastor she called "*moksanim*", meaning a pastor, in Korean, and clutched his present, a plastic folder bag.

Reflecting Korean churches that have frequent meetings, they organise regular meetings for bible class, youth activities, Korean and sometimes English classes, and choir practice; there are also fellowship meals that appeal to many. Korean churches also devote much time to worship and praise songs. Almost all my informants mentioned songs that moved them, "*melting and loosening the heart*" in their becoming Christians. As one informant explained: "*when my heart got restful and mellowed then God came in*". For the older Koreans, there is an added emotional intensity in churches where the Korean language is heard. The combination of the long-lost mother tongue of childhood, and religious sentiment, brought forth a deep and powerful emotional response, and I

often saw otherwise very restrained elderly Koreans sob and cry. Even “atheist” youngsters told me they got attracted to churches “*to listen to and sing songs*” to feel “*something in hearts*”.

As well as a reputation for being “trendy and happening” places, churches are also associated with capitalism and a new order. The importance of divine blessing in material prosperity was an important theme in this discourse with America and South Korea being supreme examples of this predilection. Indeed, many networks were made and some deals seem to take place among the local Koreans and foreign Koreans in church. Even my otherwise skeptical landlady started to wonder whether her blighted financial situation was a result of ignoring this divine and ecclesial favour.

On the other hand, critics of churches commented that they “bought” believers who were lured by the chance of free foreign travel, useful business contacts and social functions. To many avowed atheists and communists, the religious boom meant nothing more than cheap emotional gratification and economic opportunism. Some elderly believers were also torn between traditional devotion for the dead ancestors, and the strict injunction against ancestral devotion from Korean Protestant churches.

“We were let down by your Korean pastors whom we expected to teach us the right way of serving God and the ancestors. And you say it is all wrong. Now even our youngsters won’t listen to us”
(Kūma, South Korean elder).

Churches nevertheless keep growing and imprint a clear impression of conviviality, prosperity, modernity, and opportunities “out there”. But most of all, they were very successfully taking deep roots in peoples’ lives as in elderly Lema’s case. Named after Lenin and Marx, this erstwhile self-acclaimed “Russian communist” lived her whole life as a thorough *Homo Sovieticus*, openly rejecting her Korean roots and committed to the regime whose deportation shattered her personal life. On my visit to her dark, stuffy little flat on one frosty day, I found the same lady copying Korean characters in childish script and practising hymns in Korean with a heavy Russian accent with utmost seriousness. She did not explain the reason of her dramatic conversion, but even her relatives who were hurt by her life-long scorn for anything Korean, could not be cynical any more. Her story is only one among many similar ones.

“Scholars” and “Specialists”

There is a deep Korean preoccupation with education and at a deeper level, the traditional triad of scholarship, morality and status, which has Confucian roots. Transplanted into the Soviet system, invisible inheritance such as educational assets or social networks were often more coveted than mere material assets which could be removed at any time. Much Korean respect is shown to those “who dabble with a pen” as opposed to those who make a living by “digging the land”. Reflecting the traditional “literati” ideal, and also the post Soviet social stratification (Swafford 1987:292-294), the highest Soviet Korean honour has been reserved for academics. To be remembered as “a man of brains”, “a self-taught man” or “the one who gets consulted by others” is close to the ideal among the early Korean settlers. The symbolic power of learning and educational attainment is obvious across the generations. Obliging parental wishes of “having a scholar in the family” was the most common reason for Korean academics in making their career choice.

Moreover, making oneself useful and indispensable was another obsession to the Koreans who experienced the arbitrariness of history. Parents often scold their children with a mantra of “specialist jobs for survival in the unpredictable future”. In spite of average salaries, their academic background converts into moral integrity and all-round capabilities. Senior male academics are firm favourites in choices for leadership of many ethnic organisations such as the Association for Koreans of the Soviet Union, the Moscow Korean association, and the Cultural Centre of Alma-Ata, to name but a few. Almost all the heads held a doctorate and their deputies were fellow academics (G. Kim & V. Khan. 2001). Even though the ordinary Koreans were indifferent to the organisation and there was a constant rumour of corrupt leadership, people took it for granted that prominent professors are the right sort of the representatives. In contrast, the latest craze for “business” was seen as a dangerous distraction for many “short-sighted” young Koreans, who trade timeless goods in the form of educational achievement for ephemeral material goods.

Businessman

While the traditional antithesis of the “scholars” used to be manual workers who exploit their own body, the new economic situation also added another layer of “businessmen” to this category. The term “business” carries many-fold nuances, ranging from serious players in international trade to those who glean extra roubles by retailing Mars bars. Often the term passes as a euphemism for many small retailers, petty speculators and suspect traders conjuring up a popular image of vulgarity, self-aggrandisement and deception. Even a solid entrepreneur like Leonid, a vice chairman of an

international company, finds the new capitalist system most taxing as it demands extreme “craftiness”.

In comparison, Boris, a food factory manager who turned into a businessman, appears to enjoy being “a big man”, procuring coveted foreign goods, and arranging costly events such as his mother’s anniversary offering and *shinson*’s retreat. However, his sister-in-law commented that more and more he socialises with other prominent “businessmen” who enjoy a similar privileged lifestyle of foreign holidays, expensive English tutors for their children and conspicuous entertaining, while invitations to the immediate family have dried up. However, like many others, he is also rumoured to be paying credit for other credits and is also pressed by the mafia who try to extort money.

“Nongsajil”

The Korean word *nongsajil* means agricultural work and sometimes also refers to a seasonal agricultural venture. Agricultural endeavour has long been associated with Korean identity as a blessing and wisdom handed down from ancestors for survival (P. Kim & S. Pang 1993). The experience of *sovkhоз* and *kolkhoz* forms the common background of many local Koreans who have produced more “Labour Heroes” than any other nationalities in proportion to population.

In 1961, it became sovkhоз from kolkhoz. In sovkhоз, one has to work from March through a whole year unlike seasonal workers who work during summer, harvest rice and give to the state. Sovkhозes usually do rice and the more you produce more you get. Our sovkhоз has 4000ha of land and 700 odd households, the majority is Korean. In March, we irrigate and plant cabbages and tomatoes. Last year we did onions and it was very hard job. You have to think hard about demand and supply and choose well. Many grow own vegetables and find it hard to sell. Also the soil is tired. There is so much to do. We have machine drivers, planters, water suppliers, and labourers in the fields, harvesters and I am a tractor driver. We relax in winter, playing cards. I read books, novels. (Kim Volodya, Soviet Korean farmer, born 1930.)

Seasonal farming is another byword for Korean agricultural endeavour famous all over the Soviet Union (T. Baik and A. Yi 2002:142). Often families and friends work together under the supervision of a leader, *brigada*, who hunts for good soil and rents land from local farms. To maximise profit, people go all the way to the Ukraine Caucasus and Siberia, and push to have the earliest harvests to take to market. One person can be in charge of 2-6 ha., depending on ability, and virtually spends seven odd months in makeshift accommodation in the fields. Many processes are done manually, often demanding long hours of daily labour under the heat.

Because of the extreme working conditions and specialised techniques, this is virtually a Korean monopoly. It is also risky as much depends on weather and the balance of supply and demand. Nevertheless, it still attracts even well educated young Koreans who need to make big money in a relatively short time. It is said that three years of labour can procure a house, and people usually spend the money on education for their children and familial functions (Keyong Yi 2003). Even though Koreans are one of the highest educated minority groups in the former Soviet Union, public perception still associates them with farming, especially onions. Not knowing who I was, two Kazakhs once tried to explain to me who the local Koreans were.

“There are quite a few Koreans here in Alma-Ata. They have these little slit eyes, so you can see them easily. Somehow several decades ago, they started to come to live here. They are onion-growers and also they grow vegetables, watermelons and rice. They are very rich. But we are poor”.

Upon my naïve question as to why they would not do the same, the Kazakhs shook their heads in pity as if I, a presumed “Vietnamese student”, missed an obvious point:

“Because they work so, so hard. They grow things. So they are rich. We also wish to make money like them but hate to work like that”.

Even among the more educated people like a middle-aged Kazakh lecturer couple of my acquaintance, there is this impression of hardworking Korean farmers who quietly hoard money. Once when I visited them, the husband, who was peeling an onion, made a point by bringing it to me with a rhetorical question: *“You like this, don’t you? Because all Koreans grow onions...”* His wife was somewhat embarrassed by his broad generalisation but did not fail to recall some Korean students she taught whose parents did *nongsajil*. She tactfully mentioned how backbreaking the whole enterprise was and how well provided for their children were, often wearing much coveted “leather jackets”. Even though her real opinions of the adventurous farmers are closer to “ferocious economic adventurers and speculators”, she only comments about a generational gap between hard working Soviet Korean parents and the “spoilt” youngsters who only think about consumption.

Nongsajil is a natural development following the daring Soviet Korean agricultural sub-contract during the Soviet era. As a 1960s newspaper report illustrates, there is an unmistakable Korean mark in this often condemned “parasitical” and “speculative” agricultural act (*Central Asian Review* 1962:152). It is also an ambiguous subject to the local Korean mind.

On the one hand, “*nongsajil*” gives a certain sense of liberty to people. While the other jobs reflect the extreme rigidity of the old Soviet work system, it allows an individuality and daring, thus

excluding it from being one of the “simple” blue-collar jobs. It is seen to require not only obvious agricultural expertise, but also many special qualities such as business acumen and rigorous discipline. In the time of Kazakh “positive discrimination” that restructures the ethnic hierarchy, even the disillusioned white-collar Koreans who know nothing about “*Nongsajil*” get attracted to the idea of having an option for an unpredictable future. Even many urban Koreans feel a visceral affinity to it. Having a rural connection through their kin, upbringing and memories, it is easy for Koreans to see into the reality of the seemingly profitable job. “If the money is so good, why do you think it is only Koreans who end up doing the work? Because nobody else will dare to slave so much” is a common cry from the embittered local Koreans who strongly feel that monetary turnover is very modest compensation in comparison to the painful input.

On the other hand, *Nongsajil* spells an unmistakable sense of shame and inferiority in the Soviet social hierarchy where the farmers, especially of the collective farms, rank at the bottom of the social ladder, to which is added the Korean contempt of manual labourers. Often perceived as uncouth and uncultured, the workers are sometimes associated with the “fast lifestyle” condemned for materialism and consumerism with its cash-rich intensive labour cycle. It is not surprising that many farmers desperately wish for a glorious escape from this environment for their children. With the new business boom, many farmers now also aspire to go into “business” with the pooled resources of their family labour and capital, leaving the backbreaking agricultural labour behind. However, even a frowned-upon venture can gain much respect when it is used for supporting children’s education; the transient temporal goods obtained by the means of undesirable physical labour become acceptable as it is sublimated to serve the higher order of kinship and inheritance.

Interpreter

With increasing contact between South Korea and Kazakhstan, especially after the 1988 Olympic games, the word “Korean” started to shed the old stigma of backwardness, while acquiring a new positive association of modernity, and cultural and economic confidence. In this new environment, demands began to grow for linguistic and cultural go-betweens for South Korean governmental organisations, churches, conglomerates, restaurants and individual traders. Jobs such as local staff at the South Korean Culture Centre attracted more prestige due to its governmental connection. These much-coveted posts were filled by various groups of people including North Korean defectors and the elderly local Koreans, but the best jobs went mostly to Sakhalin Koreans, as they are fluently bilingual with a South Korean accent and have a good command of written Korean.

Exaggerated rumours about lucrative jobs and perks enjoyed by the Sakhalin Koreans soon became annoying to the envious “Koryō saram”. Quite a few local Koreans expressed open antagonism towards the Sakhalin Koreans in Alma-Ata. On top of the pre-existing antipathy of having a different background, they now also felt that Sakhalin Koreans were monopolising contacts with other Korean Diaspora by making good use of their hitherto disparaged “Koreanness”.

On the other hand, the new employment context for the Soviet Korean interpreters was not as rosy as it first seemed. Some begrudged the forced subservient role towards “spoilt foreign Koreans”. The wage paid sometimes suggested that exploitation was occurring, and yet the work never quite lost its lustre, since the wage was often paid in coveted US dollars and was accompanied by other opportunities to strike profitable friendships. Already, many local people were impressed by the “success story” of a Sakhalin lady who maximised her interpreter position. A former journalist, she accepted social underemployment by working for a South Korean restaurant and kept networking with key entrepreneurs in Seoul. Finally, she managed to become a local partner for a South Korean clothes company, co-hosting a “glamorous” fashion show. Her story has a distinct Korean finale as people gasped at her when her son’s place at a prestigious university in Seoul was arranged through her “contacts”.

The new Korean boom also affected academia and educational establishments. It was not unusual for scholars to be transformed into “Korean” specialists, hoping for some groundbreaking opportunities in their career development. Even though the Korean fever definitely rekindled local interest and appreciation of things Korean, the phenomena has not necessarily benefited the “old Korean experts”. Rather, the erstwhile authorities and arbitrators of Korean custom such as the elderly and local “Korean” writers and *shinson*, fortune-tellers were busy, re-positioning themselves with an emphasis on local knowledge in the face of contested authenticity.

***Shinson*, Soviet Korean Diviners**

If communism has somewhat eradicated traditional Korean shamans who would officiate at séances, it still did not quite get rid of the lesser practitioners of traditional esotericism, and these figures are now experiencing a “new boom.” Thus Margarita, a middle aged woman whose “extra-sensory” ability “cures” people and communicates with “higher Power”, was re-discovering her Korean roots and decided to go for further studies in South Korea for shamanistic training. Likewise, a certain Mr

Lee, a North Korean who lived locally since the 1940s, practised a different type of fortunetelling. His clients were mainly Koreans but also included some others who came to his “office” at home. Having studied in a university in Tokyo when young, he used the ancient Chinese esoteric *I-ching* in his art of fortune telling, and claimed to have spiritual inspiration. He also claimed to be a Christian but became disillusioned by “provincial” South Korean pastors. After all those years, he still kept a thick Korean accent and his focus was still on Korean matters.

The most apparent part of this new Korean boom in fortunetelling is the *Shinson*, often an elderly lady who divines with beans. However, stigmatised and persecuted as immoral frauds, they had to go underground during the Soviet regime. Some devotees would still pay a rather nervous visit over various matters such as marriage compatibility and fortunetelling. One of my informants, rich from *Nongsajil* and subsequent speculation, had to organise a day trip to go all the way to a distant village because the “big” *shinson* in Alma-Ata died long ago without leaving a successor. It is also a precarious business. According to the recollection of an elderly informant, one of her friends who wanted to be an apprentice *Shinson* was chosen from a group. They received a spiritual gift from a bearded elderly man in a vision. The unforeseen death of a son, however, disillusioned her friend, but as soon as she quit the *shinson* apprenticeship, her family suffered from a series of “bad” deaths.

During my fieldwork, I also came across an octogenarian lady, Anna K, who came out as a “*shinson*”. Everybody who knew her to be a former seamstress was shocked at first, but attitudes changed over time. Her command of Korean and Russian was shaky but it was interesting how her clients strove to use Korean during a consultation. Skilfully maximising all “Korean props” such as Korean costume, cards, and language, she was clearly impressing many local Koreans by appearing as an “authentic” and “exotic” “Oriental” Korean. I was particularly impressed by her use of “Oriental script” in prescribing a talisman for her courting clients. In her absence, her admiring clients urged me to decipher what was written as “it must be something deep and in Korean”. As I denied it, they surmised it to be either Japanese or Chinese. When I who know these scripts firmly denied the possibility, my irritated informants started to doubt my linguistic competence, not her authenticity (pic. 15).

Soon she established a clientele of wealthy “businessmen” who patronised her and formed a pseudo-filial relationship with her. People were very respectful as she mobilised her spiritual sons, mainly rich businessmen, to organise a costly retreat in a mountain resort place. However, my landlady Genrieta, whose brother-in-law Boris was deeply involved with Anna K, had a reservation. As a favour to Boris who held a sumptuous 80th birthday party for her, Anna offered a free

consultation to Genrieta. Genrieta took the opportunity and was happy to hear that her dead mother-in-law was looking after the family, especially Genrieta's children who would be very "learned". However, Genrieta was ashamed that she "sank" so low as to resort to the nonsensical "superstition" because of her agony over newly launched family "business" of petty trading. She also sharply pointed out the gap between old *shinsons* who only accepted small presents of eggs and vodka, and business-minded, this-worldly Anna.

Not all Soviet Koreans are equally enthralled with the new economic order and the new opportunities that it presents. I end this chapter with the words of a Soviet Korean elder who was born in the Russian Far East. In many respects, this mild-mannered and soft-spoken former postman could be the model Korean elder. He and his wife have lived in their present house on the outskirts of Alma-Ata for thirty odd years, re-building it into the present state of efficiency and comfort while bringing up two bright children, one of whom became an academic. My informant emphasised that he and his wife can get by with their modest pension and self-sufficient vegetable plot, even though it meant life without any frills.

However, he was incensed to see the Soviet Union falling apart with prices soaring every day in shops and factories. Moreover, he reads the current economic system as a moral story of the poignant defeat of idealism, and was genuinely very distressed at the demise of social support of the needy in health care and education. This unsavoury manifestation of the newly-introduced market economy he equated to "speculation, greed and corruption".

The memory of Stalin is still vivid in his mind and seems to recur more frequently in these days of "scandal". Even a half a century later, the old man still shivered at the thought of that regime's severity and injustice, yet curiously he lacks resentment or criticism. Rather, there was an unmistakable nostalgia for the old regime in his voice as he talks about the present "scandal" that compares unfavourably with the past economic and social security. The old dictator's name still remains a coded byword for dependability and legitimate discipline to him even though his personal and academic ambition was shattered by deportation.

Summary

Following their arrival in Kazakhstan, the Koreans experienced various forms of oppression of their culture, such as the closure of ethnic schools, suppression of Korean language and the destruction of Korean language books. The trauma is still visible in the community's language, kinship and social organisation. However there is also a discernable presence of tradition in other aspects such as

agricultural engagement, educational attainment and urban residence. Korean occupation with the imagined centre is apparent in all the minority's endeavour, especially through an urban, educated life style which is associated with culture, dignity and opportunity.

Since *Perestroika*, *Glasnost* and following the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988, Soviet Koreans have experienced something of a revival. South Korean economic success and their presence updated the image of "Koreanness" among the local Koreans and many aspects of "Koreanness" became re-evaluated. A plethora of new churches set up by "other" Koreans became very popular, Korean language and Korean studies was back in style. In this new socio-economic climate with the rise of South Koreans, knowledge of the Korean language has become a valuable commodity, and new avenues have opened up for fluent Korean speakers. Even in the art of traditional divining , its new practitioners were keen to appropriate ethnic props such as Korean language and scripts. In general, ethnic Koreans are also found as competent businessmen in the new market economy. For example, an entrepreneurial agricultural business *Nongsajil* now becomes an established path in accumulating capital. However, the process is not smooth, as it inevitably involves shifts and clashes of power. Particularly the Korean elders speak wistfully of Soviet order and predictability , lamenting about their undermined position as authoritative voices in ethnic matters.

Chapter Four Korean Fission And Fusion In Alma-Ata

Following the previous chapter, this chapter looks at different groups of Koreans in Alma-Ata. Particular attention is given to the impact of “other” Koreans, especially South Koreans, upon the local Koreans. In this way, I illustrate the ways in which the local Korean perception on “Koreanness” was re-adjusted and the new identity as a “Soviet Korean” emerged.

The first section explores “Soviet Koreans” of a broader sense. This category includes Sakhalin Koreans and integrated North Koreans in addition to the main Koreans who were earlier immigrants. In contrast, section two deals with “outside Koreans” such as mainland Koreans and other Korean diaspora. I aim to show their history, cultural logic, group dynamics and power relationship, especially against the backdrop of social transition. I specially focus on South Koreans, a product of the recent political openness of both South Korea and the former Soviet Union. I maintain that their unprecedented influence on the Soviet Koreans became pivotal in generating discourses about Korean and Soviet Korean identities among the local Koreans.

What Is In The Name?

The term “Korean”, “*Kareits*” in Russian, covers all ethnic Koreans in the local Korean mind. In Korean it can be either “*Chosŏn saram*” or “*Koryŏ saram*” literally meaning people of *Chosŏn* and *Koryŏ* referring to old names of Korea. Having moved on from the previous dynasties into a present Republic of Korea, contemporary South Korea uses “*Hanguk saram*” for the same meaning while North Korea loyally stands by the old name of *Chosŏn*. While the majority of Koreans have little knowledge of Korean history and complain of the confusion caused by the different names given by different political regimes, there are some who are politically conscious and use the term as a signifier of political orientation.

Broadly speaking, the term “*Koryŏ saram*” covers all Koreans in the multi-ethnic context. Specifically, it singles out this group of Soviet Koreans who are scattered in the various former Soviet republics as the result of deportation in 1937 from the Russian Far East, from others, such as Koreans from mainland and the Sakhalin. The terms *Koryō* used for Korea, “*Koryō saram*” for Soviet Koreans themselves are noticed as early as the 1920s (Kho 1990 : 44). In recent years, “*Koryō saram*” in this narrow meaning seems to have gained currency especially within academia (Kho 1990, G. Kim 2001).

). I find the usage a little contrived, if useful, as most local Koreans themselves use it in much broader way, interchanging with Chosŏn saram with no special distinction.

At present three categories of Koreans may be identified in the local Korean mind interacting with them in their daily lives: Soviet Koreans, North and South Koreans and other Korean diaspora. The category of “Soviet Koreans” consists of Sakhalin Koreans , assimilated North Korean defectors and the narrowly defined “*Koryō saram*”, the group that had gone through the deportation under Stalin's regime. “Korean Koreans” are the Koreans from mainland Korea, both the South and North .Though not openly used , the term, “*nejichi*” of a derogatory nuance, is sometimes heard among the locals. The word “*neji*” meaning “inland”, its connotation gives a sharp verbal distinction of “us” and “them”. Other Korean Diaspora, though not many in number, are mostly from China and America. In a local market it is not uncommon to come across Chinese Koreans who are small-time entrepreneurs and traders of consumer goods. They come all the way from China, usually by train, to Alma-Ata. Korean Americans, on the other hand, fare better as most high-profiled “businessmen” and zealous missionaries.

Meanwhile, though politically defunct, “Soviet Koreans” remained as the most inclusive term and was still very much alive by covering Sakhalin Koreans, integrated North Koreans, as well as the mainstream “*Koryō saram*”. Differences among geographically separated Koreans in Uzbekistan, Russia and Kazakhstan were still not evident to warrant totally separate categories or new self-awareness.

Meanwhile, the government of the new Republic of Kazakhstan is trying hard to formulate a new national identity and sense of solidarity to replace the old Soviet regime. In Kazakhstan, as the Koreans' primary loyalty had never belonged to the land of Kazakhstan, Koreans responded to the new political agenda with a certain aloofness and apprehension. Co-existence with Kazakhs being rather a forced “marriage of convenience” than the matter of choice, Koreans have not developed a special affinity with the local Kazakhs. Furthermore the Korean estimation of Kazakhs as backward people who lack *kultura* gave little motivation to assimilate to the Kazakhs.

#A domestic scene in the Khvan family illustrates this sentiment. The family gathered together to watch the 1994 Winter Olympic Games in Norway on T.V. Their conversation was peppered with sarcastic comments at the sight of the new light blue flag of Kazakhstan and its teams. Throughout the view, general emotion of the family was a combination. of nostalgia towards the great Soviet Union and passive disapproval of its successor – an “ immature and quickly fabricated” state which, to the

family's eyes, had little *raison d'être* and legitimacy. The family finally got excited when "their team", invincible as ever, won a gold medal - it was the Russian team.

It is more likely that this sentiment towards the Union and its good old days will gradually evaporate as local Koreans adapt themselves to the irretrievable changes. Yet, it is a question of whether this vacuum of allegiance will be replaced by affinity and identification towards the new republic. Thus, throughout the thesis, I use the seemingly anachronistic term "Soviet Koreans" to convey the importance this term still bears in the mind of the local people.

Sakhalin Koreans : Reversed Fortune

Sakhalin is an island in the Soviet Far East which the Soviet Union took from Japan after the Second World War. The Koreans presently living in the region were victims of Imperial Japan which annexed Korea and conscripted Korean labourers during the 1930s and 1940s. Most of them were exploited in coal mines, fishing grounds and forest areas. After the War, more than 43,000 helpless Koreans were detained by Soviet authorities despite their wishes to return to Korea. While the Japanese resident in Sakhalin returned to Japan, in accordance with an agreement between the U.S.A and the Soviet Union only those Koreans who had married Japanese women found their way into Japan while the majority remained ignored in the international political scene. (K.Kim & K.Chön 1993:348-349).

The late 1980s more tolerant climate in Korea and the USSR enabled people to visit to meet long-lost relatives in Korea on invitation. A rough estimation suggests that among the population of 35,191, 5% of Sakhalin Koreans still refuse to take Soviet citizenship and remain stateless in the hope of returning to Korea someday. Another 25% opted for North Korean nationality and the majority of 70% are Soviet citizens (*ibid.*) There has been a movement of the people toward mainstream Soviet society by way of education and urbanisation.

In contrast with the "*Koryō saram*" who had immigrated mostly from the northern part of Korea a century ago, the Koreans in Sakhalin were newcomers from several provinces, especially the south of Korea. Because of their late arrival and southern origin, their culture and language are still very close to those of South Korea unlike those of the "*Koryō saram*", the descendants of earlier immigrants. Under the Soviet regime, they were the disadvantaged latecomers who did not know the Russian language nor understand Soviet society. Moreover they were also treated as suspicious and unreliable people by Soviet administrators. They could not understand Russian well enough to claim their own rights, were

penalized for corresponding abroad and had to take a series of brainwashing communist ideology classes.

“*Koryō saram*” from Central Asia who had already established themselves in the Union that were called to work as a “go-between” for communicating and supervising the newly arrived Koreans working as translators, administrators, and monitors for the Soviet authority. The Sakhalin Koreans suspected Koreans from Central Asia to be hateful Russian instruments of spying and persecution of their own nationality.

As a middle aged *Koryō saram* informant Pak Sergei testified, the situation caused a deep- rooted mistrust. A strong sense of distinction and alienation existed right from the start between the two Korean groups. His family moved to Sakhalin when he was still young as his father was appointed as headmaster to the Sakhalin Korean children. The segregation was also reflected in school children as the two groups beat each other while “*Koryō saram*” adults kept a silent but frosty distance, keeping their own social circles and had only limited personal contact with the newcomers. While he remembered the time, his other “*Koryō saram*” friend frowned mentioning his visceral antipathy towards this “very different people”.

Truly the last people the Central Asian Koreans wanted to be associated with was these “backward” and “alien” Koreans (*ibid.*370-371). To their eyes the newcomers were nothing but a helplessly marginal people who had dangerous credentials and ignominious cultural and social status in the Soviet Union. The sentiment was understandable as they were just struggling to establish themselves as respectable “Soviet citizens” after the experience of traumatic deportation and confinement.

Ironically, the knowledge of the Korean language, which lost relevance in Soviet Korean life, played an important role in changing the status quo between the Sakhalin Koreans and the “*Koryō saram*.” The group dynamics were reversed especially in the area of sophisticated Korean language, the Achilles’ heel to many Central Asian Koreans. In the 1960s, Alma-Ata experienced an influx of Sakhalin Koreans invited to work for a Korean newspaper and radio program. In an attempt to enhance an tolerant image to minorities, the republic of Kazakhstan encouraged this move. Since most Central Asian Koreans under the age of 60 did not possess written command of Korean, many of the journalistic jobs went to the Sakhalin Koreans and the local government provided them with accommodation in Alma-Ata. Some of them still live in these flats, although many are now dispersed throughout various areas of the city. Sakhalin Koreans also worked as Korean speaking actors , singers and other entertainers belonging to the “*Chosŏn theatre*” , the only ethnic Korean troupe and theatre in

the Soviet Union, thus having a niche utilising Korean legacy that is lost to the majority of Central Asian Koreans.

Today, in appearance these Sakhalin Koreans have adopted the local Korean culture and Russified names. Many of them, especially the young, now command fluent Russian. In the local community, it has become difficult for the “*Koryo saram*” to distinguish the Sakhalin Koreans as they are not as visibly “foreign” as they had been earlier. Yet they are known to maintain a close social network among themselves and still to have apprehension towards the Central Asian Koreans.

The matter of conflict is often formulated in the language of Korean authenticity. While in the past the local Koreans were said to laugh at the new comers’ thickly accented Russian and unfamiliarity with Western manners. On the other hand, the Sakhalin Koreans never miss pointing out the less-than-perfect protocol of local Korean rituals, “crude” Northern Korean dialects and manners of the local people. Even today Sakhalin Koreans complain that they are being cold-shouldered by the local Koreans for being “different”, “too Korean”. A middle-aged singer from Sakhalin resents that she was ousted from the theatre by jealous local artists who spoke poor Korean and added she was not the only victim of the discrimination. A former journalist in her mid-50s also confirms the difficulties the Sakhalin Koreans have experienced, being treated as inferior and inarticulate beings under the Soviet system where there was no respect for being “genuine” Koreans who observe the “correct” language and traditional manners.

The Sakhalin Koreans are wary of the “sudden” enthusiasm about anything Korean among the local Koreans. They consider this “Korean boom” very opportunistic as the local Koreans always took great pride in being Soviet citizens rather than being Koreans associated with the miserable and backward homeland. One woman from Sakhalin said;

“Be cautious of the local Koreans. How long have they really been Koreans? Where are yesterdays’ true communists and faithful Soviet citizens who preached to us? They used to look down upon us and South Koreans. Now they are just courting you for your money. They may smile in front of you but you never know what they say behind your back.”

It was from another Sakhalin Korean that I learned the pejorative local slang of “*nejich’igi*”, *ones from the inland*, for mainland Koreans.

Meanwhile an influx of South Korean presence through firms, traders and missionaries into Kazakhstan again changed the existing status quo. Understanding little of the local Korean dialect and even less Russian, the South Koreans naturally resorted to Sakhalin Koreans, who commanded good

literary as well as spoken Korean. The popular imagination is that while the economic fiasco of the Union affected everyone, those who worked for foreign companies enjoyed much better and secure salaries as they were likely to be paid in U.S dollars. But it was not only money that attracted the people to these jobs. Invisible resources such as easier access to information, business “know-how”, and building the right connections were also considered important. Some astute Sakhalin Koreans were quick to trade with South Koreans for whom they worked as translators and local aides. Others also enjoyed company-sponsored free business trips to South Korea where they obtained consumer goods which could be resold at much higher prices in local markets in Alma-Ata.

Furthermore, the Sakhalin employees can exercise a certain arbitrary power to benefit their own kin and friends. For example, two out of three local aides at the Korean Educational Centre were Sakhalin Koreans, and they were rumoured to have used their influence to fill other jobs such as drivers, maids and language tutors with their nephews, sister-in-laws and friends. They also acted as “go-betweens” for those who aspired to seek favour from the resourceful South Koreans. Numerous “*rags to riches*” stories concerning Sakhalin Koreans caused envy and resentment among the *Koryo saram*. A middle aged Sakhalin-born Mrs.K, is a good example.

Exaggerated though these “overnight success” story may be, it shows the current high profile of Sakhalin Koreans in South Korean- funded churches, administrational bodies, companies and mass media. Not surprisingly, the role reversal has been acutely felt by the “*Koryo saram*” who felt an acute sense of alienation and jealousy. Openly accusing Sakhalin Koreans of nepotism, and monopoly of the South Korean networks, the local Koreans nevertheless admitted the ascendancy of the other group through the Korean language skills which they had not particularly wanted to pursue. Moreover the whole reversed fortune also carried the symbolic value of rehabilitation of Sakhalinese dignity.

When a renowned architect Min Vassily invited me on his 50 years birthday party, it was an intimate family affair with only his children Lyona, Igor, his Sakhalinese wife Aeja, her visiting mother Mrs Lee, and his own parents. Vassily’s family were one of the oldest and most prestigious local Korean families, famous for having produced generations of academics and scientists. While his parents, suave Soviet intelligentsia with a touch of cosmopolitanism, and others chatted on in Russian, Mrs Lee remained silent and reverential towards her affine. Because of my presence the conversation switched into Korean. While the elderly Mins could speak decent Korean, they became quite self-conscious in front of a South Korean and a Sakhalinese who started to speak in Seoul accent. As I informed the changes of old streets, schools and palaces of Seoul Mrs Lee has last seen 40 odd years ago, there was a visible transformation in this once modest old lady. It was as if her memory began to be defrosted and she remembered all paraphernalia of old Seoul in great excitement. She was not any more a clueless and quiet alien consigned to the corner, even if that magic moment might last only for an evening. Her son-in-law and his parents now tried hard to catch whatever they could manage from our meandering conversation from literature to traditional pancake recipes with great respect. As Mrs Lee graciously explained these things to her local Korean in-laws, years of her marginality seemed to fade out.

With the passage of time, the two groups have tended to converge unlike old days when marriages between the groups were out of question. According to my observations, while the first and second generation of Sakhalin Koreans in Alma-Ata still maintain distinctively Korean manners, customs and Confucian values as compared to their local Korean counterparts, their children quickly absorb local Korean perceptions and values. Speaking either poor or only little Korean and open to interracial marriage which is still a taboo in Sakhalin, the Sakhalin Korean's younger generations are more like their local counterparts from Central Asia. Many Sakhalin parents deplore their children growing up as typical "Soviet Koreans" ignorant of own language and traditional customs. In reality, the parents rarely take any decisive measures to alter this. This complacency seems to come partly from parents' difficulty in getting social and cultural support from mainstream society in many areas such as corporeal punishment, using Korean language and manners at home, intermarriage, and vocational preference. However knowing their children are going to live in Central Asia, parents also become permissive as they have experienced what it was like to be a peripheral people in their past.

Olga, a twenty two year old Korean major student at a local university, and her Sakhalin-born and educated mother epitomise this relationship. Although her mother, a former reporter of a Soviet Korean newspaper and now a translator in a South Korean casino is a "very traditional Korean", she was unable to persuade her daughter to speak more Korean and behave as a traditional Korean woman as Olga found her mother's wishes anachronistic and contrived. But a more serious source of conflict is Olga's half-Kazakh, half-Uigur boyfriend whom Olga wanted to marry. Although he is a decent young medical student from a good family, Olga's mother opposed the match on the ground that Olga should marry only a Korean. She explains that her natal family in Sakhalin will be very upset and disappointed about the union. Olga also knows of a similar case when a Korean girl's marriage to a Russian brought public disgrace to the girl's parents who had come from Sakhalin. The brides' relatives in Sakhalin not only turned down the invitation to the wedding ceremony but also sent a telegram condemning the union. Olga, however, expected her mother to soften up over time as the unfortunate case was rather extreme and the situation was changing even in Sakhalin nowadays.

Min Vassily's wife and Olga's mother both knew each other from Sakhalin days. Lyona's mother, who is a decade younger than Olga's mother shows the changing trend of Sakhalin Koreans. She met her husband Vassily at a prestigious art school in Leningrad where both of them studied together. Unlike Olga's mother, she spoke Korean rather poorly and confessed her becoming more "Russified" after mixing with Russians. Yet it was obvious that she was far more strict and conservative in bringing up her children than local Korean parents. Whenever Lyona stayed out a bit late with friends, her mother would make many calls scolding her to come back early making her daughter feel embarrassed. Like Olga's mother, Lyona's mother was very much concerned about the manners and politeness of her child and did not mind publicly reprimanding Lyona. Her husband, a middle aged local Korean, thought the upbringing too harsh but the mother seemed to be determined.

North Korean Immigrants: “What Kind Of People Will Leave Their Own Blood And Flesh?”

The majority of North Koreans living in the Union were first admitted as labourers during the 1940s and 1950s. Apart from the labourers, there are also a few elite political defectors, students and dissidents who took refuge in the Soviet Union over the years. No accurate numbers about these contract labourers are known due to North Korean secrecy, but those who remained in the Soviet Union are estimated at around 10,000. Extreme poverty in North Korea drove them to the Soviet mines, fishing fields and forests. Some emigrated from the Russian Far East and settled in Central Asia. Even today, there are a few North Korean labourers who escape all the way from North Korean slave logging farms in Siberia.

One influential informant shivered at the account of such a fugitive who sought refuge under his wing. In spite of fear of implication, the local Korean hid him because he took pity on his “poor compatriot.” After a period of hiding, the hapless North Korean became bold enough to work for South Korean church, taking a visible role as an interpreter. The rumour went that somebody secretly reported him and he was arrested by the local police and was taken back to the North Koreans. His last moment howling and writhing was etched in local Korean memory. “I wasn’t there when it happened but they say that the lad was like a mad person, completely lost in panic. He howled like a beast begging our police to shoot him before the North Koreans beheaded him with an axe. The North Koreans do not “waste” bullets for easy death for these “ betrayers”, the lad yelled...”

The majority of North Korean defectors prefer to lead quiet lives among the local Koreans. It is probably because of North Korea’s low-profile in the Soviet Union, and also because of possible retaliation from North Korea which is suspected to be responsible for some missing North Korean dissidents who spoke up. Some, however, manage to maximise their Korean background and knowledge as a cultural referee for “authentic” Korean tradition. Mr. Yang, who defected as a student to Leningrad 30 years ago, now works as an editor of a local Korean newspaper “Koryo Ilbo” Another former student defector, Mr. Choi, whose aversion to the totalitarian life in North Korea led him to the Soviet Union, is working as a consultant and adviser to the Korean repertoire theatre. There is an even more interesting case of a Mr. Lee who makes his living as a fortune-teller. Still concerned about his family in North Korea, he was very discreet in voicing his opinion against North Korea, unlike his fellow defectors who expressed their condemnation and resentment toward the North regime. Although I found it hard to believe his authenticity as a master of Chinese esotericism, his flowing Chinese script seems to have impressed a lot of local Koreans who usually know nothing of the practice.

Anna K, the 80-year-old former seamstress introduced earlier, who recently and suddenly “came out” as a “*shinson*” also attracts rich clients who believe her to be a traditional Korean shaman. She claims to be from North Korea by origin and, even further, her childhood as an adopted daughter in a Japanese family in Manchuria. Regardless of the verity of her statement, she was adept in promoting her “authenticity” and “Oriental mystique” with mumbled Korean and exaggerated authoritative attitude. Her clients particularly seemed obliged to use Korean in that particular context with her, even though she would gladly repeat and explain some obscure points in Russian when clients were lost.

Overall, these North Korean defectors have been accepted into local society and limited as it is, they have established themselves some position as consultants of Korean decorum, manners, rituals and traditions by the local people. Being articulate and confident about Korean culture, these people have exclusive and authoritative voice in these matters and these are the spheres even the most successful and high-profiled Soviet Koreans stoop to defer to. For example, they were the ones asked to write Chinese or Korean script on a red strip of cloth for a dead person in traditional Korean funerals. Even though people do not understand the characters, they are regarded as important and insisted upon.

In spite of all the years spent in the Soviet Union, these old North Koreans often appear caustic towards Soviet Koreans who they think of as being “ill-bred, amoral, provincial and tasteless”. Preserving the Korea they escaped decades ago in their memory as a reference, their intolerance stretches almost everywhere: They hate to watch local Korean youngsters calling their elders by their names, Korean girls flirting, women “domineering” over men, and people “messing up” kinship terms. Unlike cautious Mr. Yang, the local Korean newspaper editor who eschewed commenting on local manners, one of the well known North Korean informants vehemently confided in me his contempt toward the “*soulless, rootless, skin-deep fake Koreans*”. These old defectors remain very nationalistic and conservative in their views. Their favourite subject is Korea: the good old days, the customs which have disappeared, the controversial issues in its history, and the prospects for unification of the two Koreas. As avid readers of anything written in Korean and about Korea, they are quite well informed about the current situation of both Koreas, and are genuinely concerned with Korean affairs which actually bear no great significance in their lives.

Knowing their vulnerability in the local Korean community, the North Korean defectors always practice discretion in communicating with the local Koreans. They are only too aware that they are considered “outsiders” whether they have married local Korean women or not. I once heard an old local Korean complaining about the arrogance of the North Koreans who clashed with them over a detail of the celebration of a baby’s first birthday. He concluded that the North Koreans were ungrateful

to the people who embraced them and were impertinent to think that they knew best about Korean tradition. Then he rhetorically added;

“After all, what kind of people are they, having deserted their own parents and family! We have nothing moral to learn from these people.”

North Koreans: Pride And Prejudice

Due to the extreme rigidity of the North Korean regime, my information about North Korean citizens in Alma-Ata is confined to very limited observations and indirect information's given by local Koreans. Moreover the North recently withdrew many of its students and diplomat fearing “corruption” from the “compromised” Soviet regime. Nevertheless their presence is always a standard ingredient on public occasions and national Korean celebration such as “Korean New Year” and the Independence Day in August. Wearing *Kim Il Sung* badges on lapels and keeping a distance, they cut distinct figures among others. Some other North Koreans were also sent by the North Korean government on a mission to teach Korean language and traditional folk dancing to local Koreans.

Among the locals there is always certain solidarity with “other” Koreans for being a fellow Korean but many Soviet Koreans especially feel close to, though not enthusiastic about, Northern Koreans. They are aware that they not only share ideological ties but also common accent, customs and cuisine. Even though Korea was still one country when the ancestors of the majority of local Korean emigrated from its far northern tip of the peninsula, the local Koreans often conceptualise it according to present geopolitical terms and consider themselves from “North Korea”. The regional differences between North Korea and South Korea get further exaggerated by the local Koreans who do not see any greater difference between mainland Koreans and themselves.

Therefore many Soviet Koreans felt an “obligation” toward needy and helpless North Koreans. For example when the local Korean actors saw the destitution of a visiting North Korean theatre troupe, they provided the North Koreans with accommodation and meals and raised funds to help them. The director of local Korean theatre recalls;

“It was painful to see them suffer in this way. Anyway we decided to do something. After all, they were from the fatherland and we are all Koreans.”

A local Korean film director still remembers the sensation a North Korean football team caused in his elderly mother three decades ago. She insisted to treating the whole Korean team with her

“invigorating Korean food” that she would specially cook for the Koreans. Unfortunately, her wish was denied as the director was unable to get permission to have personal contact with “these foreigners” from suspicious Soviet bureaucrats. She still believes that the North Koreans lost the game as they could not get proper Korean food.

However, relationships between North Koreans and local Koreans are also fraught with many hierarchical implications of the same “centre” and “periphery”; pride and snobbery is a mutual suspicion. The North Korean attitude of proud “nationalism” and self-imposed isolation are seen by the local Koreans as a block in furthering friendship. While North Koreans have no qualms of playing the “compatriot” card where they posit themselves as purveyors of Korean orthodoxy, the local Koreans question their self-appointed guardianship. After all the local Koreans are proud of their culturally and materially superior Soviet background and feel embarrassed about this destitute but “awkward country cousin” who insists on both ideological and ethnic “purity”. In a multi-ethnic society, the local Koreans get ashamed by “obsessed” North Koreans whose scandals expose them to “others” as one “Kim” put it:

“Oh, I cringed when the younger Kim succeeded the old one, his father, like a dynasty in a communist country! To make things worse, the local Russians teased me, saying “Oh you are another Kim, so you must be a relative. When is your turn coming then, over there, eh?”... I just wanted to hide.”

Likewise the dire poverty of North Korea also makes the local Koreans ashamed by association as another put it:

“We used to think that South Korea was all full of prostitutes for Americans. So we used to think what fatherland is this? One is corrupt and the other is starving. And they are fighting. The shame of it in front of others...”

In spite of the rhetoric of communism the traditional Korean cultural theme of patriarchy and hierarchy become a real focal point of the North Koreans resulting alienation of the local Koreans. When a local journalist had an extremely rare chance of having a chat with a North Korean visitor over bottles of vodka, the *vino veritas* that came out quite shocked the Soviet Korean:

“As soon as he was in a mood, the North Korean became very friendly and told me certain things about their life. He said “At the end of the day, we are all Koreans. Even though we say it is socialist country, of course we still beat our women like dried cod and I bet you do the same here. That’s the proper way of treating our women isn’t it?”

The portrait of a Mr Kim, a North Korean language teacher at a local university, is such embodiment of the “authoritarian” and “old-fashioned” attitude of North Korean nationalism to his local Korean

students. While he barely conceals his admiration of the affluence of the Soviet union, he is said to despair over his Soviet Korean students who are not, by his standards, “polite” enough to elders, not “serious” in studying, and not “respectful” towards him, the teacher. He was further scandalised to see students laughing at his suggestion of toast to Kim Il Sung's longevity on the *Great Leader's* birthday. Ironically the same conflict pattern arose between his South Korean colleague, a Mr. Lee, and his local students.

Of course there are some local Koreans whose nostalgia to the old Soviet regime extends to the North. To them, it is still the “authentic Korea” with no Western, Japanese and capitalist corruption. However, the latest contacts with these mainland Koreans, whether from the North or South, exposed much more commonality than previously suspected by the hapless locals.

South Koreans: *Bitter Sweet Aliens*.

While the previous local Korean self-perception was almost entirely dependent on other nationalities, the interaction with South Koreans sensitised the local perception of “Koreanness” and “Soviet Koreans” that had previously not been challenged. The South Koreans in Alma-Ata are roughly categorised into three groups; missionaries, students and traders. Since the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988 that brought great self-confidence and global recognition, South Korea has taken a revolutionary step to improve its relationship with socialist countries including the Soviet Union. Soon traders with modest capital flocked to Kazakhstan in search of its huge demand for consumer goods. Big conglomerates such as Daewoo and Samsung also wanted to take advantage of its low wage, highly educated manpower, vast natural resources and potential huge markets for their products. South Korean missionaries who are already well known for their aggressive evangelism throughout the world were instantly attracted to the huge number of potential converts.

Meanwhile many Korean youths who were unable to find suitable college places in Korea also joined the queue to the unknown land. The logic was that knowledge of Russian would give them a relative edge over other Koreans who have been studying mainly in America and Europe. Russia, they reasoned, being as important as America, they could take advantage of this new academic territory with far less competition. Besides, their money stretched much further than in other places. Many South Korean students started to enrol at the relatively cheap local colleges but their real ambition, however, was to “move on” to prestigious universities such as Leningrad State University or Moscow State

University which allegedly softened its rigorous standards to foreign students who would pay with U.S currency.

Often these three South Korean groups were interconnected through churches who helped students to find places in local colleges as well as giving information to hopeful traders wishing to try their luck in Alma-Ata. In general there was this pervading sense of being driven to a “backward and peripheral” place common to most South Koreans in Alma-Ata. Staff of established companies often mention the anxiety of being out of the most important posts, while a Buddhist sect missionary declared his marriage to a local Kazakh woman was to facilitate spreading his message to the “forsaken” place. Even in the tall tales of small traders who often bragged about their chequered life history, the Alma-Ata features as “a margin of the world”. The worst victims of the self-deprecation, frustration and shame were the young students who were appalled to see the mayhem of the old Soviet. Looking down at the local people and culture as “sordid and poor”, the only consolation of the youngsters was enjoyment of somewhat elevated social status as “superior and affluent” foreigners among the locals. Some young Korean students close relationship with the local youth of the opposite sex was frowned as a mere pastime dalliance.

South Korea and its people were previously a *terra incognita* to the local mind, definitely not a part of the Soviet Korean life in Alma-Ata. The only impression they had was the usual propaganda of a war-torn country, full of orphans, beggars and prostitutes for American “imperialists”. My presence took many local Koreans by surprise as they had never met and talked to a foreigner in their life let alone a South Korean. In excitement of seeing another Korean, they used to ask again and again the same questions in disbelief: food, clothes, houses, and customs in South Korea as well as my personal life. My educational background gave me credibility as a “serious” minded person, merit to my parents and confirmation of Korean commonality to the locals. The local Koreans often exchanged meaningful nods with one another, exclaiming :

“Look how well we Koreans are doing everywhere! She wants to be a scholar and her father supports her. Isn’t he great? It is really typical Korean way.”

The elderly were specially moved to speak Korean with me and intrigued that I understood them better than their own children who did not understand literary or abstract Korean phrases.

Things, however, quickly changed as the locals came in contact with more South Koreans as pastors, language teachers, fellow classmates and business partners at work. Commenting on rigidly

hierarchical interactions between different age sets, classes, and gender of the South Koreans, my hosts shook their heads in relief and resignation:

“You Koreans over there are so complicated. I don’t think I can live like that. We became like Russians here, free and simple”.

Reservation before the elders, frequent and deep bowing and repetitive honorific Korean endings are all such concrete “otherness”. Though looked at with great curiosity and certain admiration, the “tradition” of hierarchy, thus often translates into a meaningless constraint that they have shed and can happily do without.

Gradually, however, these hierarchical aspects were not only understood but reproduced among the locals who continuously interacted with the South Koreans in places where the South Koreans took hegemony such as churches, Korean classes and South Korean companies. Even traditional ethnic celebrations were taking more and more formalised South Korean mores. The locals emulate Korean practices in using Korean terms of address and deep bowing, albeit surreptitiously. Even Slavic and Kazakh employees of the South Korean companies learned to show deference by standing up and greet the South Korean management with bows and calling them with reverential Korean titles attached to their rank. An ambitious female Kazakh graduate was very humiliated to just make tea for male staff whilst being paid less than half of local male staff in a multi national Korean company. The locals also learned to “read” and cater for the senior persons mood as a part of respecting their authority.

The exposure to the South Koreans also confirmed their sense of difference and sometimes marginality. Even though it was not until the 16th century that genealogical record of established families in Korea emerged and ruling elite *yangban* was only a tiny minority, it does not stop many contemporary South Koreans claim to erstwhile grand *yangban* status. Tracing one’s root as a Korean often exposes the descendants of the early immigrants as “rootless” and common as opposed to *yangban* who possess noble ancestry and cultural refinement.

Upon hearing a family history of a South Korean who still arranges elaborate ancestral devotion throughout the year, a local Korean suddenly responded :

“Oh you come from old cultured yangban, and we here from the lowly of the North. My ancestors could have been your servants and I, yours.”

Several local Koreans who had a chance to visit South Korea often try to find out more about their family origin and lineages with help of clans, with a result of discovering very little. Even then, South

Korea in this sense is still a custodian of an essential part of their self which is beyond their own understanding.

On the other hand, the South Koreans are at the forefront of market and consumerism through establishing the first fast food shop in Alma-Ata , T.V factories, “boutiques” and casinos. I was embarrassed when local Kazakhs asked me to teach them how to “*do businesses*” on hearing my being a South Korean. However as much as South Koreans enjoyed an inflated reputation as superb capitalists, this image was also dogged by aggressiveness and callousness.

While South Koreans regard the locals as untrustworthy workers who often do not keep one's words, ironically the new relationship with South Koreans locates the local Koreans into the place where the local Koreans consigned Russians and Kazakhs. Feeling doubly betrayed by South Koreans who signify both capitalism and ethnic allegiance, many develop a discourse of resistance resorting to the Soviet ideology. As they criticise “materialistic” and heartless South Korean employers, especially small entrepreneurs, they consciously adopt the frame of fraternal and idealistic “*Homo Sovieticus*” versus immoral capitalists and individualists. The imagery of exploitative South Korean foraging does not stop at material level but extends to dignity of a person and a group:

A single father Ivan was very hurt by the way he was treated by local South Korean traders. Even though he could just manage to swallow his pride in kowtowing to them as a handy man, the final straw was when he was late one day as he had to arrange care for his son who suddenly fell sick. In spite of his account and apology, the South Koreans went berserk, heaping him with insults. Ivan vowed not to go back for the sake of his own dignity as a person as no one deserved such treatment. His other local colleague was equally incensed to have to apologise to a South Korean staff. Even when it was not his fault, he was asked to write a letter of contrition because he was a younger person.

I had a chance to observe a staff meeting at a Korean theatre where the director and coordinators were discussing production of a new play. There was a debate on the South Korean characters such as a fraudster from Seoul and a selfish scholar in the script. In spite of an opinion to keep the original story, the director was not happy about a character of a “South Korean history PhD candidate” who extracts academic material from hapless local Koreans. Glancing at me and speaking in Russian, he said the characterisation made him feel very “uncomfortable” and as he feared offending supportive South Korean, he asked for a revision.

In this representation, local self assertion comes from adopting mainstream Russian/Soviet frame of “*kultura*” in relating to South Koreans. Thus the South Koreans become the unmistakable face of the old irrational, cruel and exotic East while the Soviet Koreans get positioned as near to the imagined West of rationality and progressiveness. South Korean provincialism is especially framed with their unfamiliarity with western manners and customs. Underneath tie and suit, they are noted to “burp, slurp

and smoke" while eating, speak loudly, and do not know how to appreciate fine things in life whether it be a line of Mayakovski or creamy pastries.

The local resistance to South Korean hegemony also takes the subtle form of questioning the South Korean's cultural orthodoxy in matters Korean. Thus pressure of cultural conformity to Seoul is challenged while the local Korean "illegitimacy" gets justified.

"When South Koreans came and told us that we were not doing things in the right way I was ashamed. But when I went to South Korea, they themselves had all different rituals and customs. So why we should not as Soviet Koreans?" (Boris)

Their initial enthusiasm turned sour finds variation in food and language: in spite of the fact that the Seoul accent carries great prestige and becomes a marker of upward social mobility, local Koreans also assert that the Seoul accent sounds so "cloyingly" sweet. Likewise "sugary" South Korean food might taste easy on palate at first, but it being "mixed up" with Japanese influence, it is not as "pure" as local Korean cuisine.

Chinese Traders And Korean Americans

Other Korean diaspora such as Koreans from China and America have become visible in the past few years but the local perception and treatment of the two categories of Koreans were very different mirroring status of the home countries. Most of the Koreans from China are amateur small traders who excuse themselves temporarily from their work and travel through Alma-Ata with consumer goods. Despite much commonality with Soviet Koreans, they are much looked down on even by the local Korean community who share the same xenophobic suspicion and contempt as others. Not knowing Russian, but speaking fluent Korean, they often approach local Koreans for renting a room and accessing other information and try to make a quick return by selling track suits, jumpers, and bags. The backgrounds vary from a researcher from Beijing, a communist bureaucrat in a Korean autonomous region, to village peasants but all of them are the product of the new political and commercial relaxation of the Chinese government. Even as they frankly told me not to bother with their fake goods, the "traders" were very disillusioned by the "Soviet Union" and offered their critique of the local Koreans who are aloof and sometimes exploitative. The Koreans from China were unanimous in their praise of the changing China and its abundance of goods and especially, "plenty of good food" unlike the Soviet Union.

Heshin, who is 36 came from prestigious Beijing city. She is considered to have a privileged background, having a father who is a professor and herself a researcher after graduating from an elite university. Having obtained a long three-month break with an excuse of visiting relatives, she travelled by train with five other people for five days which was beset with anxiety and fear of bureaucrats and gangs. Thoroughly worn out by the fatigue of having to mind a stall from three in the morning to get a good spot in a freezing outdoor market, she was desperate to go home even that meant losing even original investment. She thought, however that Alma-Ata is not a bad place to sell as consumers are very naïve and do not even know how to bargain. Meanwhile a local customer was deciphering a label of “Paris, Made in Italy” in a patent bag in the stall with great fascination.

They are aware of their own vulnerability to crime, local exploitation and low opinion. The usual charge of having no “*kultura*” is attached. Local Koreans often declared that they are completely different sorts of people for having poor personal hygiene and habits. Bongsun who is in her seventies explained:

“As my acquaintance introduced these Chinese Koreans to me, I agreed to rent a room. But they were so different from us. You can even tell by their dark, small and shabby appearance. They traded at open markets. Squatted on the bed without linen, they also messed about in the toilet with their dirty laundries. They also put a television on the sofa. I told them straight away to get out, as I did not care about the money”.

Many local Koreans have long-lost relations in mainland China, and it is not unusual to see notices in newspapers of relatives looking for one another. The relationship across border bears double historical trauma; while the Soviet Koreans were singled out for deportation, their counterparts in China were purged during the Cultural Revolution for contacting Soviet Korean relatives. This time when Genrieta had a visitation from thrice removed cousins from mother’s side, the possibility of some joint business was high on the agenda in their conversation even though they could not really communicate due to lack of Korean from the Soviet Korean side.

Acutely embarrassed as a “deficit” Korean, Genrieta kept groaning about her “poor” Korean food and poor Korean skill. But she and her family was greatly interested in observing the “Chinese” relatives. The middle aged sisters showed deference to Genrieta’s husband in a traditional Korean manner by waiting for him to start eating and also by taking a wine glass aside to drink. Their Soviet cousin who was intrigued, declared that such “Korean” mores do not exist in Soviet Union. Meanwhile acknowledging that Soviet Koreans have “superior” life style and standards, the Chinese visitors felt them to be very alien and “rootless”, not knowing one’s language and lacking Korean decorum.

In contrast, Korean Americans enjoyed the highest profile, a reflected glory from belonging to the “richest” “country. Though most of the Korean Americans I met on the field were relatively recent immigrants who are more comfortable in speaking in Korean and were affiliated with the Korean niche

in the society, the “prestige” of United States somehow conferred them halo of being “very different”. They were strongly associated with Christianity, material prosperity and capitalism even more than South Koreans. The most popular church in Alma-Ata is established by Korean American Pentecostals and sects such as the Seventh Adventist Church and Revered Moon’s Unification Church were also busy to attract believers. They had an edge over South Korean institutions for being able to offer English lessons and prospects of visiting America to some committed locals.

Their affluence was seen as a direct result of Divine blessing (see Keyoung Park 1997) even though a few articulate it as crudely as Oshin, a self acclaimed “businesswoman” from L.A : “*You got to believe in God to prosper.*” She encouraged local “business” contacts to go to church and arranged their visit to America. Soon I heard one of her local friends, a “businessman” saying the same thing to a crowd of local Korean acquaintances.

“I have been to America and they all go to church. We also have to believe in God to prosper. Look at South Korea and America! And look at what happened to us! They are all very rich capitalists. They all believe in God. It is even written on American coin. So they received God’s blessing.” (Boris)

Interestingly his impassioned preaching was made during a *shinson*’s retreat he organised but even the *shinson* who claimed to be a traditional Korean fortune-teller also manipulated the Bible and the authority of the Christian Church. She not only displayed a thick Bible in a conspicuous place of her “office” but also told her clients to donate ritual offerings of chicken to the local church after the ritual.

As much as America, Christianity, modernity and temporal success are rolled into the presence of Korean Americans, they also represent the “real” face of capitalism and the market. Lena, whose husband Leonid was a vice president of a well known local company, describes her impression of Korean Americans to be very “professional”. Over the time, the couple got to know “James”, self-made Korean entrepreneur from America. Lena was very impressed his “Americanness” ; he was described as “a suave dresser” with sleek manners. Even his face , she declared , was “American” , different from other South Koreans’.

But when I met him, he could not have been more “Korean”, by volunteering all the personal details of his life history starting from the name of his *alma mater* to a tragic death in his family a few years ago. But turning to Leonid, he became very menacing, lecturing him on how to dress and how to fire all unnecessary “friends and pals” of the company members. Further to “teaching capitalism and work ethnics” the Korean American also offered the quiet Soviet Korean his opinion on the education of Leonid’s only daughter.

After establishing his wife's credential as an "earnest" mother who sent her own two daughters to Ivy League universities, he even volunteered to offer free guardianship for Leonid's child in the United States. He also assured that he and his wife already looked after other "Soviet" children. Their parents were budding entrepreneurs and influential politicians in Russia where he had business interests. During the aggressive and confrontational talk from the American "James", Leonid looked intensely uncomfortable and ashamed, but could not but resign himself to his lot as if it was a necessary baptism of fire before entering the "proper business world".

Summary

The majority of the Korean population in Alma-Ata descended from the early migrants who underwent deportation and subsequent confinement in Central Asia. Social changes brought Sakhalin Koreans who are much more recent immigrants and have a significantly different community history and culture from the first Korean group. Along with North Korean defectors, the Sakhalin Koreans were seen more to be "Korean" and thus, backward and occupied a marginal status in the Soviet regime. Their expertise in ethnic culture and tradition was grudgingly recognised but was never enough to redeem their marginality.

However, with the advent of the Korean boom brought by South Koreans, in stark contrast to their history of draconic isolation, the recent political change and globalisation has resulted in Soviet Koreans' unprecedented contact with outside world. The local Korean community witnessed streams of "other" Koreans, especially South Koreans, coming as traders, missionaries and students and becoming a part of the Korean mosaic in the local landscape. At the same time, communication exposed the local Koreans to the dynamics of the Korean diaspora and hierarchy imposed by the economic and political world.

While previously having lived daily life as a "Soviet citizen", the latest trend made the local Koreans question their own identity as never before. In the midst of "other" Korean groups, a self-awareness as a "Soviet Korean" started to emerge, "Koreanness" was contested, and new boundaries and a hierarchy began to emerge. In the process, Soviet Koreans realised the marginality of the particular Korean tradition they inherited and become aware of their vulnerability concerning mainland Koreans. Ironically, in this situation, they also found themselves defined by the same negative characteristics they used to attribute to Kazakhs and Russians. However, local Koreans refused to remain passive spectators. In their bid for cultural legitimacy within the Korean diaspora, the Soviet Koreans started to

employ the themes of cultural hybridity and the “purity” of their Korean tradition, in order to overcome yet another charge of marginality.

Chapter Five *Being forever a Child* : Parent And Child Relationships

The previous chapters located Koreans in Alma-Ata in terms of history, contemporary life and relationship within and without the community. In this chapter, I move on to discuss the kernel of the Soviet Korean personhood, the relationship between parent and child to which other Korean relationships are subjected

The chapter is divided into two sections. Section one illustrates how the ideology and practice of filial piety and parental sacrifice is constructed in the Soviet Koreans intergenerational relationship. In this context, I pay special attention to the ways in which particular emotions and symbols are associated with the relationship and how the rhetoric is internalised, enacted and negotiated. The second section elaborates the Korean theme of morality of learning and kinship, drawing out from the previous discussion of parental obligation in social reproduction.

Section One: Life Intertwined “I, My Parents’ Child”

Soviet Koreans are brought up to remember that they are born different from “others”. This distinct sense of self is closely linked with family and ancestors, and thus transcends their immediate surroundings. In particular the relationship between parents and children is crucial to understanding what it means to be a Soviet Korean in Alma-Ata. This accentuated relationship is seen to transcend death and is shrouded with an intense emotion:

“Father’s Chosön name is Pak Sungch’il, Pak, of Kangwondo Ch’unch’ön. The pon comes down to every generation. When young they used to ask me what is your name and I would answer, Pak Segil. Then they would say remember who is your father, what is your pon”. (Pak Segil, born 1914)

“My pon is Kangruk, my father’s name is Huh Sungun, a Soviet Labour Hero. He was born in 1893. My mother, Khvan of Ch’ungju, in 1899”. (Huh Bongsun, born1921)

To many Soviet Koreans who had never met any foreigners in their life I was a novelty who was intensely inspected. Often the first and many other following questions were about my parents: Are they alive and well? How old are they? What do they do for living? Where and with whom do they live? Will they visit me? How would they cope by having a child so far away? They believed that I was gravely deprived by being away from my parents and offered an obligatory pained look and invitation to their homes even though we had only met for five minutes. They also tried to find out if anybody,

who might go to Seoul, where my parents live, could give news to my “poor” parents that I was well. Unfortunately, I provoked much disbelief by not only responding too cheerfully but also by naively stating my satisfaction with time away from my parents. My local friends often contrasted the absence of my “sadness” over a “long” separation with my parents with their intense suffering in similar situations.

The inappropriate nature of my response to absence from my parents came out clearly in my failed friendship with Yura, a young student from a village in Uzbekistan who once kindly invited me over for a “*pure Korean meal*” made from his mother’s provisions. Soon he started to sense my inadequacy in this intensely emotional commiseration as temporary orphans. His sympathy towards my presumed hardship was further challenged when I asked for butter for bread instead of his mother’s lovingly made soy paste. I was like a “Russian woman” he noted, concluding that my stay in U.K was the cause of this “Europeanization”.

But when I expressed my contentment in my life in Alma-Ata *sans* parents, it proved to be the last straw in our relationship. A few months later, when he was sulking over my not using the Korean language, he “suddenly” slipped his verdict about my integrity.

“You are just so selfish. You are an egoist. Just look at yourself. How can you be so content when you are away from your parents! You don’t even miss them.”

At the time I dismissed his outburst as merely a bout of bad temper and a retarded individuation of his personality, but later it gradually dawned on me that his indignation was part of a much deeper disapproval and that it was indeed a problem of individuation but coming *from my side*. A similar sentiment about the morally dubious nature of a person found far from parents was also evident in a debate over the minute details of a mortuary ritual. An otherwise very mild local man suddenly delivered the same indignant verdict against a North Korean who had a different opinion from his.

“Just because he comes from Korea does not mean he knows all the rules. Besides, he is a deserter of his parents and family. How can one who left them be normal? What morals and tradition can this sort of person teach?”

These experiences demonstrate the centrality of this relationship between parents and children in defining the local Korean identity.

Parenting: The Ideal Of Controlled Growth

Soviet Korean parents regard themselves as controlling the growth into personhood of their children, much as rice is carefully planned for and tended. This is contrasted with the *laissez faire* approach of local Kazakhs to their children. The traditional Korean kinship tampered by Confucianism posits an ideal of patriarchy, patrimony and virilocality. The collective identity is linked by lineages and clans who also venerate ancestors who have power over the living through their blessing. This notion of generational continuity, *dae*, is embodied in each eldest male who becomes a successor, providing a transcendental bond across generations.

“Debt” is a central concept in this intergenerational relationship as the Confucian notion of *hyo*, filial devotion, is derived from filial indebtedness towards parents and the ancestors who are the source of life. The parental act of self sacrifice manifests itself in making provisions and guiding children through to personhood. However, children can only attempt a partial paying back as life and nurturing is seen as too great to be reciprocated. Reproducing the same sacrifice for their children and producing “persons”, at least, is seen as the ultimate, if incomplete, offering for ancestors.

In Alma-Ata, the above traditional norms largely remain as principles as much depends on individual circumstances such as children’s jobs, residence and spouses. There is also more emphasis in equality in conjugal roles and sibling relationships. Instead of exclusive authority of eldest sons as successors, many younger sons took over the job of staying with parents as practical heirs, and many daughters assume active roles.

For example, the Khvan family had to devise a solution of caring for an old mother. Everything went “wrong” as the eldest son married to a Russian wife who brought her own mother to live with her. It was regarded as a disgrace and the family thought the eldest son a ‘fool’ but there was nothing much they could do about it. The two daughters were married and were seen as outsiders in comparison to the brothers. The second son was divorced and was not “suitable”. The third son had a wife who was fragile and “difficult”. So the youngest son Roberto and his wife Genrieta ended up living with the mother till her death. This flexibility is seen as hallmark of “*Here, we do things the Soviet Korean way*” as opposed to the somewhat frozen notion of “*There, you do things the Korean way*”.

Nevertheless, people still feel sensitive about being seen outside of norms as filial obligation is still much defined by birth order and gender. Even though cohabitation with daughters is not rare, many elders still see it as a shameful aberration from an ideal especially when there is a son around. When a

married daughter nursed her sick mother to give relief to her sister-in-law, the elderly lady wanted to go “home” where she lived with the eldest son as she felt “uncomfortable” at her son-in-law’s house.

Having children is seen as natural like growing into adulthood and getting married but also as security for old age. Children “complete” the conjugal union and they are often regarded as more important than spouses as some say: “A husband remains a stranger but a child is your own.” The importance of the welfare of children was often cited as a deterrent to divorce even by long-suffering wives.

The bond between parents and children is extremely strong extending into characters, abilities, moral qualities. When a toddler threw a tantrum demanding sweets and a cuddle, his maternal aunt immediately blamed his father’s “difficult” character that was inherited. Likewise people were ready to establish a link between “self-indulgent” characters and their ethnically mixed parentage. As transmission of these inheritance accounts for much of children’s success and failings, tracing the person’s inequity to parents is common in all stages including advanced ages. When a middle aged local woman did not want to travel for her husband’s grandfather’s funeral, her husband’s family was scandalised. Pointing out that she neglected her duty especially as the wife of the eldest grandson to the deceased, her affine immediately attacked her parents in their 70s *“who should have taught her better”*.

For Soviet Koreans, then, upbringing of children is an integral part of intergenerational moral obligation. This sense of “teaching” children through a good example is a particularly serious parental duty in a Korean household. Even extramarital affairs should wait until children get “properly” brought up. The end result of such education, seen as a radical difference between Koreans and Russians, is explained in terms of filial reverence towards parental authority. While Koreans frown at Russian children’s “rough talk” towards their parents, Korean ways are summed up as *“the kids never talk back like ill-bred Russian children”*.

The theme of parental intervention manifests itself in parental influence in children’s choice of career, studies, friends, spouses or sexual behaviour. People often directly cite parents as their reason for important choices in their life course. A promising pianist Ella gave up her ambition to specialise in music at her father’s request, while academics Tim, Stephan, and Sergei attributed their career solely to a parental desire to see “a scholar” in a family. However while Ella again obeyed her father’s wish by marrying a Korean, Samson rebelled by marrying an unsuitable divorcee. Whether children obeyed or disobeyed their parents, the parental presence and their expectations, spoken or unspoken, are acutely felt and govern the children’s lives.

Like growing rice, much planning and watchfulness is required in this anxious Korean parenting. Often it is associated with overprotection and control as “*the parents always keep the kids tidy, respectful and independent even when the family is poor and taking care of all the kids unlike negligent local parents*”. Korean parenting is seen as controlled compared with the more relaxed parenting of the local Kazakhs. Thus when a five year old boy asked to watch TV during his fathers’ birthday, he was reduced to tears by the severity of the reprimand from his father. In contrast, Kazakh upbringing is portrayed as messy but laid-back, *lassaiz faire* affair. Koreans showed great surprise as they saw the Kazakh children being not immediately picked up when crying, nor being changed when they soiled clothes. I also encountered many boisterous Kazakh children who ran, tumbled, wrestled and pushed each other around till late without adult supervision. When adults were around they seemed very indulgent and relaxed in the presence of their children. These children were uncontrolled by Soviet Korean standards, but my friend Ella admitted with surprise, “*Still they grow well*”.

Filial Piety *Hyo*, And Parental Love

As parents fulfil their responsibilities by bringing up their children to personhood, a filial debt is built up that the children can never repay to their parents. This debt is partly discharged only by bringing up one’s own children, who will then honour one’s parents as the ancestors. However, in Kazakhstan the powers of the elders and ancestors are found to be attenuated.

At the heart of Korean rites of the passage lies the code of reciprocity between generations. There are four main life-stage rituals: the first birthday, marriage, 60th birthday and the offering for the dead. At each of these stages of “making a person” both parents and children’s lives define each other. The first two rituals accentuate “giving” from parents to children and the rest, from children to parents. At every stage, an extremely strong moral sense of repaying the “debt” to parents pervades and strong feelings were provoked when the occasions were not staged properly as is the case of the Yi Toma’s family. Their 60th birthday celebrations of the parents was so “poor” that those who attended agreed that it was a scandal, indicating both morally inadequate children and morally suspect parents who had raised the inadequate children.

However the reciprocity is a skewed one as its consummation is seen to be impossible. As filial “debt” starts to clock up from birth and increases hopelessly throughout the process of upbringing, the child

remains an irredeemable debtor. While parental love and sacrifice is seen to be great and natural, filial devotion is regarded as requiring work, and thus needs to be perfected.

In Alma-Ata, an explicit emphasis on giving all for one's children is part of everyday conversation. Parents' help is seen as necessary for survival and helping children "*down to the last kopeck, and spoon*" is a norm. Even though Koreans express the ideal of reciprocity as "*taking from parents till marriage and then giving afterwards*", filial dependency extends further into adulthood. Many of my informants who are married and middle aged count on parents for housing, childcare, financial help and network of contacts to ease life. In this climate, the suggestion of filial independence is not only alien but also morally suspect as a denial of the responsibility to one's parents.

In the Soviet Korean case, however, I spent much time not only listening to parental resolution of what they would do and give to their children but also how much they received from their own parents. It indicates that Korean parental duty clearly derives from their filial obligation. Parents' clinging to temporal goods is seen not only as selfish but sometimes even dangerous to children. When a woman in her late 80s lost a middle-aged child, the elderly mother blamed herself for "taking" years from the child. In the same vein, the summit of Korean personhood 60th birthday *hwangap* celebration is considered improper to those who lost children early.

Filial devotion, *hyo*, involves many aspects including practical caring, visiting, working or shopping for parents. It is common for young college students to contribute what little they earned from menial part time jobs to parents, and daughters also helped by doing chores such as washing and cleaning as well as bringing heavy shopping bags full of tins and bottles. There is often an extremely intense emotional attachment, as the following quote shows:

"I was at an all- Russian boarding school in Karaganda. We had terrible living conditions in the students' hall. My parents used to send eggs in flour by post. I was so homesick and used to sell my blood for some holidays and breaks. While others used to go dancing every Saturday in flared skirts and cut away blouses, I helped mum. My elderly parents were alone in a big house left with my little sister, and they used to wait for my return in spring. I sold blood to pay for the journey home, and they used to kill chickens for my homecoming. Later when I got married and worked, I used to take my little daughter and another sister in a bus to go to my parents place to help out. We worked hard, then came back home to wash, did laundry and other work. Now I wonder how I managed" (Genrieta).

Hyo also involves becoming a "proper" person through marriage, education and reproduction. Moreover, it also extends to the interior disposition of being alert and attentive to parents unspoken needs. Keeping parents happy and their heart in peace is a very important matter. While boasting of her

“obedient” children who are in their forties, an elderly Soviet Korean mother repeated to me this point

“All my children are so good. Whenever they come and go, they always let us know. And they never fight nor quarrel, so we are free from anxiety and worry.”

There is much pain involved as many local Koreans struggle with the ideal of a perfect child and almost everybody experiences themselves as falling short of the ideal. As S. Paik’s psycho-analytical observation confirms, the Korean theme is a “struggle to obey” as the loyal subject and the filial son, “whose exemplary virtue is their suppression of self in the course of obedience” rather than individuation (Breen 1999:38). The most common failure is caused by “prodigal” children like Edik and his wife who shopped liberally in dollar shops, bought a Jeep and accumulated a dollar debt by gambling. Children with mixed parentage were often frowned on for their alleged improvidence with money that should be used “helping out” parents. But the most emotive example of filial dissipation remains as Korean men who marry out and move away from the ethnic community. As a pillar and beneficiary of the family’s continuity, their dissipation of parental care hurts more than any other treachery.

The general filial sentiment is gratitude, yet there is also undercurrent resentment against parents who do not provide due care. The unhappy voices usually come from affine, particularly spouses. The following case illustrates the code and morality of reciprocity between parents and children.

#Lena and her husband Leonid were resentful towards Leonid’s parents. They were seen as manipulative and unfair, always taking and never giving. The responsibility for caring for the parents should have fallen on the eldest son but as he married a Russian woman and later had a divorce much to the dismay of his family. Meanwhile Leonid and Lena looked after Leonid’s elderly parents for ten years. This was a trying time for Lena. Nevertheless, the parents gave a flat to the elder son who “even in his 50’s had “never helped” family and parents. Also contrary to local norms that encourages liberal gift from parents to children, the younger son was not even given a token “carpet” when he moved out as he was deemed rich. As if it is not bad enough, the parents still frequented Lena’s functions without any sign of appreciation. The latest scandal was caused by the fact that the parents and the older brother came “empty handed” to Lena’s only daughter’s birthday party. Lena was resigned as they are still his parents, but still felt let down and could not but compare them to her own parents who “did and gave everything” for their children. Leonid was also hurt but reckoned it as “No help was given so no duty of paying them back.”

In spite of the emphasis on *hyo*, the reality of parents and children often reveals a vulnerability of parents. They are aware of their position in a wider Soviet society where they experience not only lack of affirmation but active undermining of their authority as Korean parents. Already the Russian word *uvadzai*, meaning “respect”, replaces Korean *hyo* that applies exclusively only to parents and children relationship. When women’s work and care for the elderly becomes a burden, parents appear to be

almost “afraid” of children and potential situations of losing face. Thus they constantly monitor and adapt their position. Their challenge is to strike a right balance in playing two positions ; While on one end, parents play resigned, helpless and sometimes “wronged” characters, on the other hand, they also have to complement the position with acts of gracious, self-controlled and resourceful “elders” whose thoughtfulness spare unnecessary filial burdens. Some of the contradictions of being a Soviet Korean elder in Kazakhstan are apparent in the case study below.

Kim family was very upset to learn that their elderly grandmother Tonya sneaked into the bazaar and secretly sold cigarettes for a little profits . She stood furtively in a freezing bazaar, her face hidden under a scarf... The family was scandalised by the discovery that the elder was involved in such a “despicable speculation”. Though ashamed about the exposure, Tonya was adamant as she saw the aged need something to encourage the children to “court” them. In other words the elders could no longer rely on the good will and devotion of the younger generation, but required some temporal attraction to draw their descendants to them.

Elders were sometimes found to be active agents for change, thus Soviet Korean parents sometimes prefer to make excuses that will let the younger generation tamper with traditional obligations, as in the following case. An elderly local Korean widow held a ritual to mark the death anniversary of her husband. Many members of the family and friends were there except the deceased's only son who was known to be a promising businessman. Though one would expect that the only son would be there as the chief celebrant , he was “on a business trip”. The scandalous absence of the only son was surprisingly excused by the widow. The mother proudly declared that as her son was absent due to his work obligations, “*this would please his father, because my son is good at what he does*”.

Construction Of Victim Parents And Guilty Children : Han

The debt between parents and children remains always unpaid, and thus there is a cultural construction of children as guilty debtors, and parents as victims.

“..... Have I been a good child? ... I was always devoted to my parents and was loved by them. I have been always considerate and polite to them. I do not quite remember ever being rude. Even if I was right, I did not argue with my parents. I was a good student. I tried to lessen my parents' burden during the university and indeed could finish it with minimum parental support. I worked as an assistant to a department after a graduation, but decided to stay with my parents. They rejoiced that their son has become a teacher, a job that commanded a local esteem. Then I moved out to a city. Since then, I never spent a holiday for myself or for leisure's sake. I used it when my parents needed me most, during harvest season. I also used to visit them often. That made their day. Thus, as a son, I was loved and loved. But does it suffice to make a good son? No, a reflection on my life with my parents concludes otherwise. I did not live up to their expectation. I am an ordinary person without talent. My parents passed away without witnessing a “talented” son's successes. Even on the last day of their life,

*they closed their eyes with a firm conviction of the son's bright future... Forgive me father! I uncovered my own sin with a loud cry in front of a few hundred people who saw him off on his last journey. Forgive me, mother, your only, beloved son, and the son who also loved you. But I could not fulfil my obligation as a child and always caused sorrow and worry. You have given every bit of yourself to me, yet, I am scourging myself as I write. Indeed I am an ungrateful child as my filial piety failed to protect my aged parents, I am inadequate and immoral... and now I want to resurrect my own parents' names by signing mine with their names; Stefan Kim, son of Sōngjun and Anna." (S. Kim's *A Confession of a Soviet Korean*. Chōng 1995:372)*

Why and what is this collective grief and guilt that haunts Korean children? The answer lies in the practice of blurred boundaries between parent and child. Through the mechanism of intergenerational overidentification, and especially through “feeling sorry for” parents, children learn to identify with parents in an intensely emotional way. Due to socialisation process, the generated emotions appear “natural” and they fill the gap of ideological representation of parents as the authority worthy of obedience and vulnerable beings in the Soviet reality.

Unlike the pity of the powerless as an emotional idiom in Philippino *Bicol* cultural representation (Canell 1999), Korean filial compassion has much more hierarchical nuances. Even as victims, they are still not on par with children who may have achieved greater moral and temporal success.

Han is by no means exclusively confined to the parent-child relationship but the affiliation is certainly the most common source of the sentiment. A mixture of bitterness, regret, resentment, sorrow and, pity, *han* is an unconsummated and repressed desire that gets “knotted” or “harboured”. The emotion belongs to a wronged victim whose forbearance, resignation and passive aggression get communicated in an indirect way offering the “victim” culturally legitimate avenues for expressing erratic emotionality and overblown acts of overcompensation.

Han is different from pure “regret” which implies that he may do otherwise next time: the *han*-holder may still have to choose the old way even if another chance is given. In a family context, it is formulated as filial *han* and guilt for falling short from ever being able to repay the filial debt to parents who have made such sacrifice. *Han* also provides parents with ways of presenting themselves as the helpless victim especially through life histories wrought with injustice and unfairness of life (Ch'oe 1991). In the next section, I want to draw attention to a particular way that parents are seen as poor victims and also the process of how this emotional mechanism of *han* perpetuate itself over generations (Breen 1999). Just like children are seen to inherit aptitude and other qualities from parents, they are subject to parents or ancestral “*han*” with a moral obligation to “solve” it.

Our Poor Parents

On one hot summer's day, I was meeting a middle-aged teacher Lena and her elder sister, who was about sixty. The former head teacher of a secondary school lived in a suburb of the city in a big house. Her rather retiring husband showed me around the outdoor the beautiful and well-kept house, complete with outdoor sauna gleaming with fresh paint and meticulously finished with fragrant timber. His wife was in the back of the house working on a big vegetable plot which exudes an impression of an enviable self sufficiency.

In comparison with Lena who was her junior by two decades, the elder sister, though amiable, was reserved. However at my casual mention of her mother she suddenly exclaimed. "*Oh, you have met her? Our mother?*" When I complimented light-heartedly on the elderly lady's lucid mind at ninety, the daughter now went into quite a different mood and having worked quietly round the vegetable plot now became quite animated. The hitherto reserve was forgotten and her words flowed freely;

"She brought up five of us all. The work she did for us! She was the one who worked to educate all of us. Got us all to university."

Then after a moments pause, she asked, "*Have you seen her hands? My mother's hands!*" Then the daughter's voice started to break. It startled me very much as I found the transition too immediate and intense. Meanwhile others were looking away but did not seem to think anything extraordinary happened.

Unfortunately, I did not quite notice the old lady's hands but I have seen several elderly Korean "babushkas" sitting around a table with hands on their chins with a far away look in their eyes. Their hands looked often short and squat, giving an impression that fingers were stumps with some other ends and bits worn out and missing. But theirs are also very nimble hands that take pride in speedy and accurate execution in the most manually demanding tasks such as sorting small seeds, slicing hard carrots or the most obstinate piece of meat into fine shreds. The elder sister was pointing out an intense emotional reality behind these telling hands I so often encountered without emotional engagement.

Deprived Victims of the World

Local Koreans implicitly see their parents as “broken” or “wrongs” people whose self-realisation of great potential was checked by arbitrary power whether it be history, a state, or personal circumstances. But in an usual interplay of historical events and individual lives, the boundary often gets blurred. Illiterate parents are seen as anything but “simple” but were subject to life-long slavery to the land. Reminiscing his uneducated father, Anton portrays a man who had to travel all over Russia to appease his keen intellectual hunger. But he had no proper means to reach the desideratum. When he came back, he made sure to “break his bone” in labour to support all of his ten children to universities and graduate schools.

Even successful parents remain as victims of underemployment. Ella and Georgi firmly believed that if it were not for his Korean ethnicity, their deceased father, a brilliant party member, could have risen to a ministerial rank. Samson also believes that his elderly father, a judge and a constitutional lawyer, was the real “worker” while “others” who were engaged in politics and rhetoric would claim his merits. This narrative of “unrequited” dream of parents often results in children’s re-living the parental trauma with acute emotional engagement. It also makes children have an intense sense of the moral obligation to settle parental *han* through their own lives. Almost always, children admire the silent and persevering way their “wrongs” parents fare in life, but some parents’ deprivation go deeper into the realm of depravity as in the following narrative of an opium dealers’ daughter.

“My father was a well-known opium trader. He used to pay his commission to the growers in advance. Once collected, opium was hidden in all sorts of peculiar ways and taken through the Chinese border. While so many people attempting to do it, only a few escaped the arrest and confiscation by the Chinese frontier guards. Women even tried to hide it in their private parts but there was only so much you hide there. Once, my father even implicated my mother. She followed him because of her need for survival. Father took her behind the house and took something out from heaps of dried straw. It was an infant. It was said to be dead. Mother was told to carry it on her back. Mother obeyed not knowing what went on. The dead baby was rolled in clothes and was tied on her back, covered with a swaddling quilt. It was as if the baby was asleep. Father arrived at the Chinese border carrying a little bundle with mother at his side. They were told to stop by the guards. Cunningly, father was said to have made a story that they were immigrating to China, driven by poverty in the Russian Far East. Then he was told to open the little bundle by the border guards. It was said that there were only soiled old clothes. When they uncovered the quilt over the baby’s head, it closed its eyes as if in sleep. So they passed the border successfully. After a while, father was said to ask mother to put the child down. She was told that there was a bag of opium in the child’s stomach. Mother was shocked. Indeed, father somehow managed to get hold of a dead child and slit his stomach to put opium inside. So much they strived to survive and yet after being ripped from all the hard-won fortune, they were put in a train to come to live here only to die and now I have reached the age of my turn to go.” (Chöng, 1995:182-183)

“Good” Mothers, “Slaving” Fathers and “Insatiable” Children

While Korean fathers have an ambivalent image as a distant, strict yet committed provider, Korean mothers in memory are embodiment of gentleness and peacefulness. They are unlikely heroines who triumph against all odds of hunger, malnutrition, wars and other uncertainties of life. Described commonly as a “good” person with a “kind” heart who carry “peaceful” air by many Koreans, the ideal local Korean personhood finds its most concrete expression through memories of a mother.

She not only nourishes children at the expense of her body by hard work but also sustains them by carefully cultivated peaceful disposition and dignified suffering against the arbitrary and treacherous outside world. Unlike others whose *han* poses a social hazard and natural disasters, Korean mothers are portrayed as almost the only agency whose benignity sublimates *han* caused by injustice and evil (K. Ch'oe 1991:137). This traditional image of mothers as a fragile yet invincible bulwark also finds potent examples among the Soviet Koreans. Han Sergei, a former academic, remembers his sacrificial mother in his autobiographical piece titled *A battle for survival*:

There was a severe shortage of labour force. Men were all drafted for the “Labouring army” leaving women, children and a few men who were not fit to be taken to a collective farm. Mother had to raise seven children all alone. The youngest were yearling twins. Though they were still breast-fed, mother could not keep looking after them. Due to too much workload at a collective farm, she used to feed them by coming home twice a day. Besides we had an elderly grandmother and an uncle whom we had to take care as if they were little children. She used to prepare our meals before going to work. We were to live on it little by little the whole day. But we were so hungry that we used to look forward to mother's coming back. She always skipped one meal provided by the collective farm to take it back for us. She always came home with a smile no matter how exhausted she was. Our little feast used to start with her saying, “Guess what I have brought for you today!” It was only later that we learned that she was giving up her own meal for us. Upon knowing this fact, my elder sister suggested that mother should share the meal but mother just said. “No, help yourselves. I have already eaten too much. The portion in a canteen is simply too much... I brought this because I could not finish on my own... She never rested at home after a day's work at a farm. She appeared indefatigable. We never saw her taking her temper out on us. Only when I grew up to become an adult, I could understand how trying it must have been for her.” Even after the loss of one of her twins to dysentery, and a whole night's crying with a dead baby at her bosom, she went to work next morning and came home still working with no more sign of grief. It was only when the father came home after several years she again cried out her sorrow to her husband (S. Han & V. Han 1999 : 93-98).

The perennially suffering and yet hoping mother is also a subject of memoir of another elderly academic:

Once I was very sick. Mother asked for a shaman's help but I was getting no better. She went again to ask. Probably having read the doom on her face, the shaman predicted my death and no cure. My poor fragile mother who believed in superstition was in a shock. She ran home for hours through wilderness. She lost her shoes in the mud and slushy snow. Completely soaked from head to toe, and

bare-footed, she ran back to find me still alive. Thus passed sleepless nights and my mother's love healed me.

This mother again saved her son from torrents of river by throwing herself in even though she could not swim. (Chöng, 1995:368). The maternal aspects of nourishing and healing, nevertheless, pales in significance in comparison with their influence in matters to do with education as is discussed in a later section.

Paradoxically the parents' educational aspirations resulted in greater geographical and occupational mobility in subsequent generations widening the gap between parents and children. Often they do not share the language, locality or profession any more and the situation provides a common theme of parents who suffer from displacement and alienation in contemporary Soviet Korean writings (Kho 1990:87, Kim 2003:550). The elderly are often obliged to leave "a big house with a plot" in a village where they enjoyed Korean company in order to join children who are "researchers, doctors and engineers" in a city. Often the elderly wither in an urban setting, having nothing in common with a new extended family. This parental plight is most acutely embodied in a figure of widow mothers who wait for the daily return of sons in quiet desperation. These suffering mothers are indelibly etched in common memory of the local Koreans.

Roberto's late mother, "poor" wandering Mrs Khvan, was remembered by his wife Genrieta. Even though they were amiable with each other, they could not really share their deepest thoughts as Genrieta's Korean was too poor and the old lady's Russian was shaky. Genrieta always felt they were too different and they spent most of the time in separate rooms and only shared minimal contact. While she was recollecting her late mother-in-law, Genrieta was visibly shaken confessing how little she knew about this lady and how little she had in common with her even after a decade of cohabitation. In her memory the frail lady is imprinted as a waiting mother who kept awake till the return of her son every day. Even when he was late after a good night out with his workmates which were frequent, she still kept her silent vigil. Stefan Kim and his life history as a son also comes to the same poignant climax of a waiting mother and ensuing filial guilt:

I had taught as a teacher for more than a decade in an agricultural village living with my parents. Then this extended family disintegrated and I moved into a city. Forgive me, mother. You have lived the life of a caged bird in my flat during your last three years. I insisted on living in a city where I lived off money made from selling off my parent's old home. What did I give you in return for your familiar, Korean surroundings, mother? My mother was always lonely among a Russian speaking grandson and a busy son. Only when she was about to leave, could I realise the loneliness. One day I asked mother who was waiting for me around the window. "What are you staring at, mother?" "I have been waiting for you as you usually come home this way." My mother, who was sick and silent for the last three years of her life, saw me off to work by moving from one corner of window to another and waited

till I disappeared beyond a green fence. She would wait around the window for hours till I came back. Everyday, day by day. It was only when she had the second stroke that I started to bow to my mother by the window leaving for work. Then it dawned on me that I would soon lose mother and she would now leave me forever. (Chöng1995:370-371)

On the other hand, fathers emerge as a much more aloof figure who kept measured emotional and social distance. Instead their integrity as persons and fathers comes from their life- time commitment to work and provisions for the family. Never sitting still and always finding chores to do even at old age, a father's image is of the one who "teaches" with his own example of industry and conscientiousness. Many informants were at pains to convey this moral quality behind their fathers' backbreaking labour in a collective farms, fisheries, and mines. Also in his own way, the remembered father was a "respected" figure whose advice was sought after in the community. So in a way, this "honest" commitment to work and their modest success in the field was seen as making up for what was lacking in their formal education , a crucial quality as a "proper human being" in a traditional Korean discourse.

Father's preoccupation with labour that borders on self-exploitation is also acknowledged to have propelled children from the collectives and Korean ghetto into "jobs with pens" in cosmopolitan cities as citizens of the "Sovietsky Soyuz." While parents gained moral credit by offering their physical bodies, leathery, furrowed faces and leper-like hands, the children re-live their aspirations as their own.

The Korean ideal and its strategies of interdependence between generations also operate powerfully in the minority's troubled relationship with the Soviet state. On one hand, the state is an authority who commands due respect and obedience even when it is seen as wrong and arbitrary. On the other hand, the minority' s kinship system that accentuates generational continuity ensures an indirect but sure way of overcoming temporal power such as state.

Section Two: The Morality of Learning

Education And Personhood.

As one of the most educated groups in the former Soviet Union, the number of Koreans who received higher education is twice as many as average population in Kazakhstan and these facts resulted in the creation of an urban professional identity (Zuev 1992:162). In the light of this intense Korean occupation with education, this section examines the way traditional kinship, Confucian ideals, Korean identity and the Soviet emphasis on education interact with one another in the local Korean life.

In the history chapter, I have already pointed out the cultural legacy of Confucian Korea and the connection between personhood and learning. Since learning was presented as a gateway to the “other” world of dignity and morality, the deprivation of education was seen as one of the greatest scourges. As a result, even early on in the Korean immigration history, funds were pooled for private tuition and schools were established by the poverty-stricken immigrants (P. Kim & S. Pang 1993 , H. Pak 1995:55). Under the circumstances, education meant to Koreans an exit from marginality symbolised by manual labour at a collective farm and avenue of rehabilitation and respectability as full members of the Soviet society.

This quasi-religious faith in scholarship and learning is equally prevalent among contemporary Koreans and most of the Korean diaspora. It is widely agreed that the Chosōn dynasty and its Confucianism has much to answer for in the shaping of the discourse. The official ideology of the society dictated knowledge and education to be an essential element in making a “whole person”. It is also linked to *hyo*; by learning one becomes appreciative of parental grace and also repays good portion of filial debt by performing an intrinsically moral act. As loyalty to one’s country is an extension of filial piety under Confucian moral principle, learning is also a symbolic and practical act of patriotism. The émigré s newspaper at the turn of the 20th century was flooded with exhortation for learning.

“...without relaxation, we should diligently make money in order to educate our children and youth”.

Education is the crux of “civilisation”, and “survival”. It was an obligation of Koreans in Russia that was given priority even before anti-Japanese military training (Pak1995: 54-55).

But the concept of learning remained vague, covering acquisition of manners, good tastes, and the desired interior disposition to scholarship gained by formal education. All aiming moral virtue, in

theory, a little distinction existed between different types of learning in Korean mind. With the advent of mass education and its temporal benefits, the formal education became more singled out as a focus for Korean attention. Already official reports by Russian and Japanese authority commented on the extraordinary educational zeal of the poor Korean immigrants. As early as 1896, the settled Koreans donated “enormous” sum of money in establishing Russian schools (Wada 1989 : 43) , and the illiterate parents appeared as if the their whole *raison d’ être* was to support their children’s studies (Chöng 1995: 71).

The specific discourse of personhood and education pervades many levels of the minority community. For example the list of leadership of ethnic organisations reads like a faculty of a university, mainly consisting of elderly male academics. Even though sometimes suspected of snobbery and corruption people feel obliged to show deference as their academic titles assume proven moral currency and authority. Parents whose children are academically successful also enjoy similar deference as it is seen as an obvious affirmation of their own personhood. Reciting the litany of academic achievement of children is the highest tribute for celebrations such as the 60th birthday and the parents are regarded as blessed elders who “cultivated and harvested” fine children.

The importance of education is further demonstrated in this love story.

#When a kolkhoz worker, Edik, fell in love with Venera, a celebrated beauty, her father flatly rejected him on the grounds of his lacking education. After a scandal of threatening her family with a for, Edik vowed to make himself worthy of his love. The secondary school drop-out took years to “carve” his personal worth. Once his “brain” was “unblocked”, he even proceeded further and finished post-graduate studies. Now suitably “serious” and “enlightened”, the persevering suitor finally passed the screening of the father.

“Far Sighted” Parents

Koreans attribute their educational and professional success to “unusual” parents. Having internalised intellectual values, while they may be “simple” “slaves to the land” with little schooling, these parents are never “common”. Memories of parents focus on this contrast between their vulnerability and aspirations for the things beyond immediate gratification. This is evident in the following stories by Genrieta and Samson.

“They worked hard but found time to read many books, keeping up with the latest news to tell their children. My mother was a “mere” technical college graduate and a shop assistant but always looked nice with a good posture, wearing high heels. Even though she was not educated that well and was

nobody special, she and father, a farmer, instilled this love of reading, especially classics they religiously collected, and devoured. Thanks to the ethos they provided, none of us are now manual workers” (Genrieta).

“Remember that my grandfather was a mere collective farmer, but he worked so hard to support his ten children through university degrees. In this sense he was by no means simple, He showed his children how to try hard and work towards their goals. His children are now doctors, professors and accountants”(Samson).

Similar to Stafford’s analysis of the Taiwanese case, Soviet Korean childhood is an ongoing process,(Stafford 1995) binding Korean parents as their parents’ children themselves with an obligation to repay their debt to ancestors by producing “proper” persons. In the kinship dynamics where the notion of self extends to generations of patrilineal kin, “cultivation” of a child becomes a prized compensation or atonement across generations. This long term perspective in collective identity-in-making likens educating children to the agricultural act.

Both farming and growing children demand meticulous planning, long term provisions and backbreaking labour commitment. In a kinship structure that prescribes parents’ sacrifice and filial response, the acquisition of higher education confers morality on both givers and receivers signifying harvesting of the choice fruit. By responding to the parent’s enthusiasm a child contributes to the long-term goal of a family. Korean “cultural heroes” include the poor young man who becomes a pride to his parents and family by becoming part of the ruling literati through hard work and learning. Like rice and its derivatives that are offered in the ritual for ancestors, a learned person becomes a fit offering for the collective ancestors.

Exemplary parental figures of the Korean cultural tradition abound with mothers who openly renounced natural affection for the greater cause of educating their sons. Their exhortation, sacrifice, and chiding and corporal punishment are still much admired, if not strictly copied, as prescriptive parental discipline. Reminiscing the effort involved in his middle- aged son’s education, Samson’s father said that he “did his part, his moral obligation” such as providing special music lessons and supporting his son’s post-graduate studies in Moscow.

At the end of life, a Korean should be “free” from egoistic accumulations, ready to face the ancestors. Accumulation of the material is only good when it gets converted to access symbolic assets such as education of the young. On the other hand, appropriation or worse, dissipation of goods for personal gratification is seen as disturbing the morality of the transaction of kinship. In a wake of post-Soviet chaos, many parents were distressed by “business” boom that excited their children. It was because

unlike academic credentials that “feeds” the corporate family cycle, “quick money-making” was seen as a dangerous distraction from the proper, time-consuming “Korean” way. These points are exemplified in the following stories.

A middle-aged Leonid is a very high profile “businessman” but his father, himself an academic, still wishes his son to “inherit” his thesis material on the subject of metallurgy accrued over years. Leonid had previously quit his prestigious Moscow Ph.D after 2 years.

#Samson, a lecturer, is another son who is dogged with filial guilt over unfinished Ph. D in Moscow. He is seen as “dissipating” his time by not pursuing his unfinished degree that he left more than a decade ago. This academic failure is seen as a serious hindrance, preventing him from progressing into the next stage of his personhood. The intergenerational cycle is not fed by this eldest son who shies away from settling down and taking care of parents. The father’s constant refrain is; “*If only he finishes it I don’t care afterwards what he does*”.

Parental Duty

As is seen in Japanese records on early Korean settlers, this strong moral sense of educating children runs from the beginning of the émigré’s history continues as a common thread to many Koreans’ lives.

“...*They (the second generation of Korean immigrants in the assimilated area) show great enthusiasm towards education and this tendency was passed down from their parents whose sole purpose seems to be to provide education for their children. Given the fact that these parents are almost illiterate, their educational zeal is very extraordinary.*” (an official report to Japanese Viceroyalty quoted in Chöng 1995:70)

“*There are many Korean parents who showed parental zeal through self sacrifice for their children’s academic success over other concerns. Mine were among them. They grew to think that their son was destined for a higher purpose beyond an ordinary village existence as they saw me struggling with books till the first cock crowed in the morning. How could my illiterate mother and self taught father who barely read and write know reading was an ordinary affair of all teachers and philologists? Then they persuaded and helped me to continue my study in a city and took the burden of my own family on their already taxed shoulders. So I, a 40 year old breadwinner, continued to be supported and dependent on them in many ways with not a shred of conscience*” (S.Kim 1995:370).

As both parenthood and childhood are ongoing processes and studying demands much time and commitment, the elderly are not exempt from supporting mature children’s education. One of my informants was in tears at the news of her cousin’s paralysis due to exhaustion on the field. While the old victims’ desperation to support his Leningrad –based son’s study added more pathos, no one ever questioned the validity of the motive. His case was another Korean body that was properly, if tragically, “hollowed”.

The content of provision expands further to special English tuition, extra-curricular music lessons and sending children to Moscow or Leningrad. By comparing oneself with others and even one's own parents, many Koreans are often crippled with guilt for not reproducing "enough" ideal parenthood. When Genrieta decided to sell the much-needed family summer house for her daughter's post-graduate course in Seoul, she felt relieved to think she was "finally" providing some "modest" support to her daughter who had been "neglected."

Education, a symbol of the social and moral status of a family, is of course an item of inheritance *par excellence* in the Korean community. However, in the former Soviet Union education has a special value as a vehicle of social mobility, security and capital. In the Soviet system while material inheritance had a limited appeal, education is co-related with residential, occupational and economic advances. It was shorthand for a "free" and "respectable" lifestyle worthy of aspiration for an insecure minority.

Most local Korean academics I met attributed their career choice to their parent's intense desire to have a "scholar" in the family. With its symbolic value as a pinnacle of personhood, it is often considered to be of value far surpassing any monetary gains involved. If necessary, people are ready to take generations to achieve scholarly excellence. As one young scholar put it "*It is never the money thing as you know with Koreans*". He also complied with the parental call to achieve Korean personhood for the family. "*My mother so badly wanted one of us to become a scholar*". What counted was a shared glory and achievement where parents are expected to be the real authors of the filial achievement. It is in the same vein that my informants were very impressed by *my parents* as soon as they learned of my academic background: "*Excellent, your parents have done so well!*"

Often parents' own or ancestors' memories are conjured up as tragic figures whose potentiality could not be realised in times of acute deprivation. By recalling them, Korean parents transmit an internalised sense of "unfinished business" of the previous generation to the next accompanied with a sense of inadequacy. Bongsun and her husband was one of them.

"At the 7th grade, knowing little Russian, we were sent to Russian school. What with war in 1941, what could the people like us do? So we have no education. So we did farm work, what else? But my four children all got educated, we didn't save things and they are my riches. My husband said to them: "I am uneducated so you must study". He was strict and wouldn't even allow going to pictures and we couldn't even watch TV."

Reminded of their “otherness”, Soviet Korean children soon get the message that they have to be self-sufficient, self-effacing and alert to fend for their precarious existence. They cannot survive if they remain as “simple” as Kazakhs and Slavs. Genrieta puts it like many other Korean mothers I have seen:

“I have no illusion about my child. He is not brainy. I just want him to become specialist such as an engineer or doctor to fare a modest independent life. If something happens and Kazakhs tell us to go, where would we poor Koreans go? My child just can’t be relaxed as other Kazakhs or Russians. ”

The internalised parental expectations and examples invariably generate very intense emotions that usually magnify parental sufferings. Otherwise taciturn people suddenly get high- pitched and excited as they “remember” the parental zeal and sacrifices made for education. *“Imagine! A simple peasant who brought all his children to be educated!”* was a constant echo from appreciative informants but the initial enthusiastic voice often gave way to silence and sighs .

Parents are hardly mentioned without perceptible sigh of grief and people uncommonly burst into tears, often choked by surging emotion. No matter who they are, they all plead guilty with their pained look and remorseful and downcast eyes. One of my informants confesses to having a “lump” in his chest when he thinks about his failure of not repaying his “debt” towards his parents who had pinched every penny to support his Ph.D in Moscow. He dropped out of university a decade ago. Similarly I saw how an innocent question about parents triggers a stream of tears from otherwise poised former headmistress. She kept repeating *“Have you seen her hands worn out like a stump, the hands of my mother! ...She slaved for our studies”*.

Paternal Threat and Gripping Mothers

The Soviet legal and cultural system gives greater recognition to mothers in matters such as the custody of children and alimony, compared to the traditional Korean kinship system. Korean mothers are associated with the roles of educator, advocate, social organiser and manager especially of emotions inspiring much filial affection. Complementing maternal emotionality, Korean fathers are characterised with a distant dignity. While mothers represent a negotiable and emotionally accessible face of parental authority, fathers assume a strict, distant and feared role. Unlike spontaneous and an intimate portrait of mothers, people’s impression of fathers tends to be brief and restrained as “quiet, fair and committed”. Duly respected as a head of a family who retains their aura by cultivated distance, much of his authority has been reduced in a world where inheritance of land and status are irrelevant.

Episodes of a children's story book, *A Seashell of youth* by a local Korean abounds in the local's perception of traditional family roles, especially the idealised father figure. In the story, a boy grows up learning and accepting the meanings of family, duty, gender, scholarship and morality (V. Yōgai 1991) In this journey into Korean personhood, he often turns to his benevolent mentor, his grandmother, who explains and eases the thrust of the abrupt patriarchal presence and authority. It charts the transformation from a carefree Korean boyhood to gracious manhood and charts the significance of his schooling in this process:

When the time came for him [the boy's father] to go to school, as he was the smartest around the area, the elderly predicted his grand future and neighbours collected money to send him a better school.... And as a better student he was invited to teach noble children at the imperial house and transcribed state documents. Everybody was proud of him and frequently, even the elderly people came for his advice. He strived to help everybody. People admired his upbringing. He spoke clearly and modestly, and was firm. He did not smoke and never drank. The whole day he served at the grand house and at night, he went to the seaside and practised hieroglyphics. During the daytime, he did not have time. At the imperial house, only he knew how to write so beautifully and was given the most important documents. One day, even an emperor praised him and gave him very expensive brushes and lots of paper as gifts. But he kept going to the seaside and practising words on sand. Only there at night, he could write and only there he could soon see whether the characters were beautiful or not. The folk story has it that the magical moonlight only helps those who want to work. Often, your father used to spend a whole night kneeling, not realising the morning was broken. Then he dragged his tired feet and hurried home so that he could change his wet socks with nobody watching him and went to the palace. Maybe, the enchanted light and the work made him ill. He started to cough very much. Fearing him infecting the noble children, the palace became concerned, and now he became teacher of all provinces (*ibid.* 10-14).

The legacy of the idealised Korean fatherhood is embodied in books, the greatest treasures in life, according to the grandmother. His father's agony was not in his imminent death but inability of "handing down his own knowledge" to his child and others. This is also the same father who cut off his son's slipper as the boy turns five years old in another episode. Again it is grandmother who comes to the aid of the boy to explain that it is only a symbolic act, for a boy to grow to be a man who knows no retreat (*ibid.* 20-21). In this way, father was re-enacting an old story of a wise governor who boosted the wartime morale of his frightened subjects by ordering that the soles of their shoes be cut off. The father wanted the boy to always "remember" the lesson of no turning back from commitment and battle of life.

Personally, I have not come across these stories and rituals in either mainland Korean or Soviet Korean sources. Yet, the story is revealing much of what my informants think about an ideal Korean father. He is a man of commitment and little words, a man of work and self control. He never stops striving for the

goal; perfection of his learning and its transmission. At the same time there is no doubt of his threatening and abrupt authority that pushes a child to his limit.

Sons, the most likely recipients of intense maternal devotion, almost all have collective memories about mothers who encouraged them to strive for scholarship and higher learning. Mothers, who often softened the demands of blunt and monosyllabic fathers, appear more appealing. They make a discreet alliance with children, who find a sympathetic ear in their mothers: they cajoled, appealed, sighed and solicited with utmost zeal that escaped few Korean children. An old local Soviet Korean once told me that this is precisely what marks a Korean mother:

"You see, they carry all things on their head and back, but with a firm hand on their children for their schooling".

The imagery of this fragile, over burdened yet all the more determined mother still seems to haunt many local men's consciousness as a driving force.

"..... Just study well. Nothing more is needed..... We never had anybody learned in our family. Both your father and I were born poor and our parents used to work as farmhands for the gentry. Of course, we learned a little bit since we came to Russia, but basically, we are all ignorant folks. That is why I really want to have somebody very learned in our family." (Han Sergei on his illiterate mother) (S. Han & V. Han 1999:101)

Meanwhile the real mothers can be very vocal and strident before fading into a gentle image, worthy of veneration. As Koreans complain themselves, Korean women's' meeting is all about new tutorial rates and extra tuition and so on. They also acknowledge that Korean mothers can be overprotective and controlling and yet it is seen to be much superior to the laid back Kazakhs approach. Also particularly common is everyday ritualistic maternal scolding over studies. I often saw Korean mothers telling the children that the "poor helpless people like Koreans" who have nothing to rely on should always prepare for the worst by studying hard. Upon anxious mothers' emotional tirade, children sometimes protest against too much pressure and scolding as they feel they always fall short of lofty parental expectations. What surprises me though was how obedience and resignation reign even in the midst of sulking and sobbing.

As a mother of two, Genrieta regularly monitors her children's progress at school, often reducing children to tears. She was the one who consulted experts, counselled what to read for the degree, arranged extra coaching and is willing to sell a dear family dacha for financing a child's postgraduate course. Nevertheless she feels lacking in comparison with her parents who in her eyes sacrificed

everything. Genrieta is also deeply upset that unlike other “enlightened” parents, she has not provided cultural extras such as extra English or music lessons.

The mother is considered to be so zealous that even death cannot wither her. In a short story, the narrator hurried to meet a dying mother who has lived alone in Alma-Ata. At this moment of extreme emotion, the mother is seen with grey hair, a wan face, and scrawny wrists. However, the last maternal image that is printed was that of a *strong* mother who carried her sick daughter to school on her back in spite of a great distance (Yang 1990:42). The strong maternal presence is ever more present in Soviet Korean version of *tol* ritual.

***Tol* Ritual**

This first ritual that commences one’s life cycle is a rather elaborate affair. Even the young who do not speak Korean or understand the exact meaning of customs are happy to let their elders organise the affair for their new born baby and enjoy the day. Many relatives and family friends come from a distance and even not so close associates can pop in as a big gathering is believed to be more auspicious for the baby’s future.

This is the first formal ritual, where a child officially receives both social recognition and parental devotion and in return he is also officially received into the path of becoming a Korean “person”. Those who have not survived this stage remain like a shadow which was once here and now gone without being incorporated into a collective memory and identity.

A table is set with various items such as a pen, a bowl of haricot beans, some raw rice, a book, a notebook, thread, some money, traditional cake made of highly prized glutinous rice, toy guns for boys and a needle and a pair of scissors for girls. Before noon, a baby clad in new clothes is brought to the set table. Everybody waits in anticipation to see his future by the first item picked up by the little unsuspecting yearling who innocently dribbles his way through the proceedings. The meanings of the presented items on the table are quite straightforward in this combination of agrarian and literary symbols. A pair of scissors is for a girl who will be endowed with good domestic skill while a miniature bows or weapon, for a boy who will be valiant. Beans ensure you to have a smooth recovery from measles, rice a materially comfortable future, and thread, long life. Needless to say, it is a pen or a book that all Korean parents hope that their child will pick up. Whether the future holds the same story or not, it immensely cheers up parents as if they already have a “bright young scholar” with an impressive academic affidavit who will be a “big shot”. He will be controlled in his demeanour and speech, polite to everyone who comes for his advice and help and bring “respect” to his family and friends. Not too surprisingly, there is an element of wishful setting arrangement of the table that puts “academic items” in a more strategically accessible places but some babies are very determined to grasp something bright and edible, much to the to the sighs and laughter of adults.

Interestingly, moreover, one local tradition suggests even more blatantly a shadow of an omnipresent mother in the use of sieve used in this ritual. On this occasion, local Korean custom dictates that money should be brought as a gift to the child and after the ritual, the mother or grand mother would collect the gift money in a woven wicker basket which is a substitute for an old fashioned sieve. Money is hidden away and the basket remains.

The custom is said to trace its root to a success story of a young man whose mother supported his study by making sieves with horsehair (Yi & Chōn 1993). He finally became rich enough to be legendary. But we all know the real hero or rather heroine of the story is the mother behind him. The story adds more sense of desperation and urgency by describing a relationship between a “poor”, “old”, “single” mother (a widow) and her “only” son.

Her plight gets accentuated by the fact that she had to collect fine threadlike horsehair by hand and make sieves. But her painstaking menial job had a grander purpose of supporting the son’s “study” and she was to play a catalyst in a transformation. With his cooperation, she manages to convert her physical sacrifice into a solid moral and temporal currency of learning and scholarship. So rather than being a pitiful victim of a deprivation and resignation, the mother actively fuels the process of double transformation of herself and son.

Summary

The Korean kinship that emphasise generational continuity, especially the parent –child relationship still exerts a profound influence upon the Korean minority. Thus, one’s core identity is defined by ongoing filial status a propos parents. Certain representations are constructed in sustaining the kinship ideology and practice of parental control and filial obedience. This involves framing the parent–child relationship in a particular way; while a parent becomes a vulnerable victim whose sacrifice is much lauded, a child is made into an almost amoral or even immoral being who needs constant control to be a proper person. The rhetoric is deeply embedded in people’s lives, enabling them to highlight emotions such as filial remorse and guilt. This pre-existing cultural system further converges into the minority’s traumatic history resulting in Koreans’ sharing with Jewish Holocaust victims and Japanese American camp internees, certain themes; an intense intergenerational bond, parental suffering, and a child with a mission to compensate parental misery. Education, in this context, becomes an intensely desired medium of transformation , both personal and intergenerational.

Chapter Six *Illicit Love : Soviet Korean Dietary Practice*

In this chapter, by presenting intimate details of people's dietary practice, I aim to delineate the overall theme of what is hidden and yet exerting great power in the contemporary life of Alma-Ata Koreans. I argue that the reproduction of Koreanness and its transformation take place in the realm of food and dietary practice, and also that the phenomenon is all the more powerful as these aspects are intimately intertwined with sensorial experiences, memory and associations. The chapter is divided into three sections according to these themes. To provide a balanced view, the first section is devoted to contextualising the local dietary practice, both Korean and non-Korean, then move on to the Korean dietary practice in both everyday life and life course. The second section is concerned with an analysis of dietary evidence in light of ethnicity. Particularly it explores and relates to the symbols, values, emotions, social order, culinary "grammar", practices on production, consumption, accumulation and exchange. Thus, Korean food is used as a powerful medium for ethnic differentiation both at a symbolic and physical level. Finally, in the third section, I narrow my focus on the dangerous power of Korean food through its marginal, alien and subversive aspect.

Section One: Food in its context

A Day At Nestai Suleimanova's

The little kitchen, awash with sunshine, is flooded with Kazakh traditional melodies from a little wireless. The kitchen, kept open during day and closed at night, is a place for normal family meals and a chat with close friends over bowls of milky tea. On grander occasions such as celebrations and formal meals for guests, a bigger table is unfolded in a living room and the usual red plastic tablecloth gets exchanged with a neatly pressed white cotton one. On the table there are always provisions for tea such as metal kettles; a big one for boiled water, and little one for small amount of strongly brewed tea that is to be diluted. The son's favourite weak plain tea is in a glass jar without a lid. Lids are hard to get and are in great demand for storing pickled tomatoes, cabbages and gherkins. Forks and knives are kept in another glass bottle, along with piles of tea bowls. Brown wheat bread which accompanies meals and tea is kept in an open plastic bag on top of a fridge to be sliced whenever needed.

Nestai, a 45 year old Kazakh housewife, lecturer and mother of two does basic grocery and food shopping at shops around her flat. Sometimes the daughter Aknura is sent to buy some milk. She takes an empty bottle with her like any shopper who needs to provide bags, cans and bottles for goods. In spite of disturbing rumours about tuberculosis-ridden cows, the family still needs it everyday for milky tea as Kazakhs do not drink plain tea unlike others. The family has tea after every meal and normally drinks two or more bowls at a time until it gets very weak. Jam or other sweets are sucked with tea and honey is added as a treat on buttered bread if available.

Nestai keeps a few empty Indian tea tins with pictures of an elephant and a tea -plucking Indian beauty in a sari. Likewise, she also keeps some bright coloured wrapping paper, a reminder of imported

sweets in her fridge even after the contents were gone long ago as "They are pretty and nice to look at." They remind her of the times of foreign holidays. "Oh, how bountiful America was!" She remembered her surprise at the sight of an "ordinary" college canteen in America piled with vegetable and fruits.

The sugar available here, this Chinese sugar, the only option in the current shortage, is sitting in the bottom of a bowl refusing to melt and causes her much annoyance. It elicited much resentment in Alma-Ata where "bread and butter and tea with sugar" is a byword for a bare subsistence. Coupled with scandals of poisonous Chinese Vodka and synthetic clothes, local frustrations were concocting the latest rumour of pretty but contraceptive-containing Chinese caramels. The sugar was more evidence of the Chinese as shameless purveyors of gilded rubbish to the "Soviet people" who once had "standards" in life. An increasing number of Chinese traders in local markets are quickly becoming an eyesore to disillusioned locals. I myself was told to go back to *my* country, China with my "poor quality sugar".

I inadvertently mentioned my sympathy towards presumed hardship of local Korean farmers. She retorted that they are obviously making good money as onion growers. Last year, she saw a sharp-eyed Korean recruiting a half-witted Russian neighbour Oleg to work in a far away onion field. When gullible Oleg came back, he was very exhausted but no richer. She also mentions her Korean student Yanna and her onion-growing parents who must have spoilt her with a Turkish leather jacket, the envy of the whole class.

Today, breakfast is two boiled sausages and hearty portion of mashed potatoes she had prepared earlier. Sometimes sausages are accompanied with fried potatoes or very oily macaroni. For self-professed Muslims whose proud display of the Koran is a centrepiece of their living room, their religiosity is rather pragmatic. They often frown at "some Muslim fanatics and fundamentalists" and have no qualms in having sausages, as pork sausages are not "real" pork and they are not "ardent pursuer" of pork "like Russians". It is not surprising to see this presumed ethnic divide in meat preference being reproduced in the ethnic relationship by abusive terms such as Russian "pigs" or Kazakh "sheep."

Eaten with bread and butter, breakfast is quite substantial but tastes rather bland. Luckily, Nestai has some pepper in reserve bought from a state-run shop long ago. She insists on avoiding shopping at commercial shops and markets where various goods are sold at exorbitant prices. The pepper's vaguely greyish appearance is its only claim to its name and still its presence renders a touch of luxury which even the most exclusive hard currency restaurants can not afford. Nestai boils spaghetti then adds an enormous amount of yellow liquid, the traditional "cooked" butter of the nomadic Kazakhs.

When Nestai has gone to work taking a sturdy plastic bag for any chance goods she might find on the way, Aknura comes back at 1 o'clock from "No. 18 School", just a few minutes walk from her 5 storey flat. She could have lunch at the school canteen but her mother has doubts about its hygiene and value. The girl, now frowning at her portion of fried noodle takes only a small portion. Tall and willowy, she is determined to go on a diet. Young girls like her sometimes scold one another for not taking enough food while monitoring their size as they fear to grow into a shapeless womanhood, quite ubiquitous in the former Union. But now she is happy to mount a thick slab of butter on bread. Still hard, this portion comes from a huge block that occupies half of a deep freezer that stands in a doorway, next to huge cuts of lamb and beef. (pic 17)

In a dramatic comparison, the inside of the big family fridge looks rather empty. Again there is chunky defrosted lamb to be cooked sometime along with milk, margarine, butter, condensed milk tins, three small mayonnaise bottles, and an enormous jar of raspberry jam. Two red peppers and a jar of pickled carrots stand out as the only vegetables in the midst of immense amounts of dairy products and meat. The pickled carrots were Nestai's attempt to re-create the popular Korean salad and she recounted her trouble with peeling and shredding the carrots. Even with a slicer, it was a monotonous and

labour-intensive job. I flinched to see her douse the “Korean carrot salad” with oil, before serving to make it more palatable. She complained that her creation does not taste the same as the local Koreans’ in bazaars. She thinks it such a lucrative Korean monopoly to sell a bagful for a mighty 25 roubles when average local monthly wage is 5000 roubles. (pic. 13) Nestai is very sure that Koreans keep some short-cuts as trade secrets from non-Koreans and half-jokingly asks me as a favour to find out some short-cuts for her: “*Since you are also a Korean, our Koreans will tell you. Be a spy for me*”.

Meanwhile a Kazakh neighbour has brought a sack of rice, dried melon and dried beef as a thank-you for using the phone at Nestai’s on a few late nights. His visitors, relatives from the countryside must have brought these dried Kazakhs delicacies. She is particularly impressed by the rice, quickly sizing it up to be about 2.5 kg. This present is very appreciated even though she does not use more than 5 kg for two and a half months, and her usual recipe is modest rice porridge in plain mutton broth. It will be handy if she fancies something elaborate like rice and mutton *plov*, a celebratory dish fit to invite others over to enjoy.

Her husband Ismogambit, an economics lecturer, comes home very tired from work, but after getting changed he goes out to the balcony to help Nestai. Now he offers me an onion, saying “I know you Koreans like these onions. Don’t you?” Even aware of the local Koreans agricultural enterprise of onion-growing that brought this association; I still find it amusing that he includes me with the local Koreans.

In the balcony, there are big pieces of horse meat. Fortunately, Nestai’s family have good contact with Kazakh shepherds in the countryside who agreed to provide beef and mutton also. Otherwise, they would have to buy that joyless carcass, if there is any in a state shop, or pay a fortune at a bazaar, which is beyond their means. To them whose traditional fare features much meat they cannot imagine a decent meal without it. Even chicken is not the most exciting item either. Only a few days ago, the couple took time cleaning reasonably-priced chickens bought from a state- shop. They were lying on the table with their tiny heads drooping, complete with anaemic feet and spectacular claws all intact yet nobody gets remotely reminded of their sheer rawness as it is the usual way of being sold at shops.

Around the corner there stands already twenty “champagne” bottles, sparkling wine brought by Nestai’s cousin for Doulet’s imminent wedding. Mogambit will also have to remind his contact at a shop of his promise of a favour of reserving decent Vodka. Little by little other necessary food will be added by many relatives. There is an assuring presence of horse meat, the most desirable and cleanest meat for Kazakhs. This particular meat will make a prized sausage, *Kaz* (pic.18) There is a pervasive smell hanging in the air everywhere around the flat that gets ingrained to hair, clothes and furniture. The family is oblivious to it and it takes an alien nose to realize the potency of its unmistakable combination: rancid fat and blood. Now there is another layer of flesh and grease while dinner is being cooked.

The father peels a few potatoes and onions in front of television while mother boils a chunk of beef on its bone with potatoes and carrots. A thin round dough is added and just before serving, she slices it into pieces. Nestai has finished cooking a popular Kazakh dish *Beshbermak*. She served it in a big round tray with plain boiled potatoes arranged around.

The meal is very much appreciated by everybody. But, Nestai senses something of my discomfort, and gently asks what is wrong with me while her husband tries to make me have another bowl of soup, ladling even more fat which is the “essence” of the richness they appreciate so much. (pic.19) Obviously none of the happy family suspect the culprit is excessive fat and flesh, all the more potent in the absence of seasoning with its haunting smell. I just mumble feebly as something inside me, deeper than mere good manners, forbade me from saying how my heart sank watching a thick, luridly yellow film set in soup.

After tea, while the others are under the spell of a new Mexican soap, I volunteer to wash the dishes only to wage another battle with omnipresent animal fat.Flushed and desperate for no “logical” reason, now I quickly tell the family that I would have some fresh air outside for a while only to be followed by the son Doulet carrying a bin downstairs. Exchanging an amiable chat with a neighbours’ boy, he is joined by another neighbour, a Russian pensioner remembering her days as a chemistry major. In the midst of this Chekhovian soliloquy, Doulet patiently waits and keeps an eye on my “illicit mini-excursion” as he is worried that it is too dark and late. Walking back home in a sombre mood, it suddenly dawned on me that what prevented me from spelling out the truth was none other than my great affection towards the family and implicit identification of their food as a core of their identity.

Men, Women, Children and Daily food

Many observers of the Soviet Koreans agree that continuity of Korean culture is most visible in the area of food and related practice. It is a point made all the more striking against the background of the minority’s loss of its language and many other cultural practises (Kho 1992, Yi & Chon 1993). However, the view of seeing food habit as a barometer of one’s ethnic identity gets challenged by an old North Korean defector who points out the disparity:

“Scratch these skin-deep Soviet Koreans and you will find a Russian except for the tongue”.

There was considerable variation and eclecticism in the way local Koreans related to food. Russian beetroot soup is served with Korean pickles as well as Kazakh doughnuts in daily meals. Grand cakes and imported chocolates are standard features as much as Korean rice cakes in celebrations such as weddings or the 60th birthday, *hwangap*. In general, younger urban Koreans are more open to other people’s food, while the elderly or village dwellers who can afford more Korean produce and have a stronger network of supply enjoy more traditional food. Whatever the outside view is, most Koreans relate to Koreanness in the way they organise and consume their food: the contents involved may not be exactly “traditional”, but its structure and symbolism that makes it so (Douglas 1975).

At least in the ideal, men are expected to procure “big” provisions such as chunks of meat or special “treats”, while women are in charge of smaller provisions and grocery shopping. As many goods of reasonable price are available to only those in the know, it is especially important for men to have good contacts and sociability to obtain even daily necessities. In reality, however, this divide gets blurred as most Soviet women who work full time also shoulder multi- tasks as a provider, cook and manager. Dragging her exhausted body loaded with shopping after work, one informant wryly likened Soviet womanhood to a camel.

There is no explicit stigma attached to men's cooking but there is a consensus across the ethnic divide that cooking is mainly a woman's chore and the sense is particularly strong among Korean men who regard it as the essential Korean wife's duty even if she is engaged in full time work, as the following quotes make clear.

"Why should I cook when I have a wife?" (Gavril)

"A good wife is the one who keeps cooking and washing up for others for the whole day with her sleeves rolled up" (Samson).

"How can a Russian wife cook this delicacy for you?" (Korean elder to a boy).

As many Soviet children grow up with working mothers, Korean men are no strangers to preparation of food. Though they enjoy a reputation as a good provider at the head of a family, married Korean men become shy of cooking as a daily task as they say "*Korean men don't cook.*" They are still expected to help out with domestic chores but the duty of "going into the kitchen" firmly remains with Korean women. Many associate this "uncooperative" Korean male attitude with an imagery of a man lying on a sofa with folded arms and feet up. The authoritarian Korean males coded in the description of this wayward posture contrasts with obliging Russian husbands who "care and help", when sober. Yet many women commonly justify this with a view that men have no time as they work hard outside, and their jobs are more stressful.

Occasionally, even such Korean men take initiative in cooking, especially in a display of male camaraderie or making some bravura ethnic dish such as dog stew. On such occasions men take control of the kitchen, bossing women around and testing the seasoning.

The preparation of Korean food takes a lot of effort as procuring all the condiments and materials needs orchestration even before actual cooking. Given the limit of commercialisation of Korean food, women also have to maintain active networks among kin and friends to obtain pastes, sauce, dried goods, seasoning, and other ethnic specialities. Moreover, unlike the notion of the one platter meal of "others", the Korean meal format requires a variety of little side dishes which demand extra care. Even after consumption, the generally strong smelling Korean food needs to be sealed and stored in individual containers.

Another important aspect is the Korean food's nuance of respect. Seniors are treated with extra propriety as women make sure that their food is extremely hot. In funeral gatherings, it is also Korean women's lot to set individual portions of each food for every new guest as a sign of "respect". In

catering for the rightful demands from men and the elders, women's own needs are often set aside. I even saw a local Korean hostess hurriedly "upgrading" the whole lunch menu from "ordinary" Russian food to hearty Korean fare as soon as she learned that there was going to be the presence of a Korean male guest at the last minute. Undoubtedly his presence carried more gravitas as she explained a man needs "proper food" and it would be "uncomfortable" to treat him with just "ordinary" food he could get anywhere. Therefore it is little surprise that even though the local Korean women are fond of their own ethnic food, many do not think it worth so much pain unless it is really necessary. Some wives cooked Korean food only because of demanding husbands.

Genrieta was surprised to see her husband demanding more and more Korean food. She noticed that he expected and demanded "a decent Korean meal" more than ever since she started do her accounting job. If she shows objection, he gets cross and the wife now misses the times when things were "simpler" when the family lived on meat, potatoes and Russian cabbages "like Russians". Now that rice is served, she also has to devise a few side dishes unlike the "care-free" Russian meal. For this reason, now she has made preserved pickle kimchi and shares it with her husband's siblings while keeping an eye on any handy soy paste from elderly relatives from the countryside.

The preparation of many Korean side dishes requires repetitive and arduous sorting, fine slicing and pounding actions which demand much patience and dexterity. The qualities of "precision" and "conscientiousness" required are also precisely identical to the ones ascribed to a "good Korean housewife." This taxing female role in Korean families is taken for granted without question or protest. Daughters grow up helping their mothers with cooking and learning to take charge of related domestic chores. Boys tend to be exempt from actual cooking or washing up itself even if they often get sent to fetch bread or milk around the corner and sometimes help out mothers doing dishes in absence of girls.

As they learn from fathers, their contribution in the kitchen is usually only a token help.

Ella, the long suffering wife to a "traditional" husband Gavril sighs that her four year old boy is already picking on her after seeing his dad repeatedly putting down her food and refusing to help with chores.

Many Korean boys are also subject to the elder's half-joke reminder such as "*How will a Russian wife cook you this nice Korean food?*" They grow up watching their grandmothers, mothers and sisters slaving over Korean stew or carrot salad forming a firm association of comforting Korean food with an image of a silent woman working away in the kitchen.

Like many other families, a more substantial or ethnic dish is expected for dinner, ending with tea and sweet among the local Koreans. The breakfast can be a hearty affair of porridge, sausage, eggs, bread cheese and tea but it is not uncommon for some Koreans, especially the elderly, to include soup and

pickles. Lunch can be something cooked such as macaroni or a repetition of breakfast when one is at home. But usually when eaten outside home, it becomes cold baguette of cured sausage or cheese with sweetened Indian tea. Though the traditional reserved manners at table during mealtime are gone, the presence of elderly male relatives or guests usually brings forth visible reserve even from the young. I also have noticed that the Korean families tend to be much quicker in their spending time over meals than others as too much “chatting away” over meals or tea is frowned upon as “idling away” associated negatively with laid back Kazakhs and verbose Russians.

Feasts: Official Making Of A “Korean Person”

As is in Korea, the tradition of life feasts strongly defines Soviet Korean personhood in Alma-Ata . Based on traditional adaptation of Confucian rites of passage, the locals observe feasts for the first birthday, the wedding, and completion of grand cycle of 60th birthday called *hwangap* and a farewell ritual for the dead. While parents are obliged to offer the first two, children are to “repay” them with libation and bowing in the latter ones emphasising a person’s interdependency with parents through the prescribed stages till his final integration with ancestors (pic. 20-23).

These “banquet tables”, are symbolic props for these stages in “becoming” a person and a metaphor for intergenerational flow of temporal and moral good. Regardless of individual ethnic commitment, these prescribed feasts are observed with great concern among local Koreans. While the “cycle” rituals acknowledge the biological progression, they firmly subjugate each phase under the fixed social frame of “becoming” a proper person. Fitting to its significance, these occasions require colossal orchestration of food and work against the reality of everyday struggle in finding even daily staple. Other observers of Soviet Koreans have recorded detailed description of the feasts and here I will confine my attention more to *hwangap*, a focal point of the intergenerational affiliation (for more of the description of rituals see Dsharylgasisovna1993 , Min 1992, Chon 2002).

In the *tol* ritual, parents prepare the prescribed feast table for the child’s first step of social integration. While a carefree child is to pick an item which will predict his future, the parental “monitoring” is busy at work ensuring favourable location for items such as books and pens to catch the infant’s attention. When little Lena was celebrating her *tol*, all the women congregated in her mother’s kitchen while her father’s friends, and her grandfather’s companions also separately occupied a room and a living room respectively. The parties, divided by gender and generation, only came together when her “pick” was about to start. For weddings, a decorated rooster remains *de rigueur* centrepiece of the matrimonial

feast table according to the Korean custom. The young couple offer libation to parents, and the elders give benedictions in return. *Hwhangap* which marks a grand consummation of the life cycle is the first filial “paying back” ritual and is followed by the offering for the dead. Before the coffin gets taken out and also after the burial takes place, the dead receive the offering. They are traditional items such as rice, spirit, sweets, a bowl of water, fruits and some vegetable, and later shared as communion.

A thirty year old local Korean’s account of *hwangap* pretty much sums up its elements; “Sons prepare the party, tables get set, and everybody bows to the elderly”. When I showed much sympathy for one local woman who mentioned the forthcoming mother-in -law’s *hwangap*, she said gravely, “*Yes it is bad, very bad.*” She later tried to dilute it by a nervous laugh but in reality, the feast drains the whole family with years of preparation. It is seen as a quintessential Koreanness as their life is seen as “*slaving so hard for years to stage our big dos.*” When I visited a little village around Alma-Ata, a couple was still entertaining guests till the small hours for a whole week after the wife’s *hwangap*. Especially the elderly were still busy with detailed critiques of the function in detail.

When Samson’s father Anton celebrated his feast, he told his eldest son Samson not to worry as he was to arrange things. “After all nowadays sixty is not really that aged”, he opined. So a few years after the actual date, Anton himself decided the timing. He and his wife bought vodka, and also bought a pig at a very good price through Anton’s friend in a Korean collective farm. For the feast that took place in a restaurant, about 200 guests were invited. 130 came from Anton’s side and 70 from his wife’s, many of whom were colleagues at university. Some of children’s mates came as well. It was a truly collective orchestration; relatives contacted Anton’s wife to ask what contribution they could make and things were allocated among themselves. Anton’s fifth brother volunteered for marinated fish, his third sister, carrot salad, and sixth brother, cognac supply. A chicken was also bought from a farm by a cousin. Anton’s brother-in-law took in charge of sticky rice cake and Anton’s two sons, their cousins and several Korean young men had to pound 30kg of sticky rice. While they ordered cutlet steak, Kazakhs horsemeat sausage, fish roe and two special cakes from the restaurant, the rest of the food including noodle, dried vegetable soup, assorted vegetable salad, boiled pork meat and chicken were prepared by the family. Even though the son does not know how much cash gift was given to parents, he reckons that it must have paid the major expenditure of the restaurant arrangement of 200 guests and four Korean men music band. Guests as a family brought cash envelops and handed them to Anton’s family as soon as they arrived. Samson already started at five in the morning to arrange the food, then he had to pound the sticky rice with other men. Two female cousins and paternal aunts were around to help. Then he came home to fetch his parents. Already people were waiting around the door, and many guests were in the hall. Anton and his wife sat behind the central table which was decorated with carnations, gladiolas and roses. Their friends of the same age set were seated around them and siblings sat on the left table. The master of ceremony was Samson’s female cousin’s fifty- year- old husband who spoke in Russian. As he started to introduce first Anton and later his wife, guests started to eat and drink. Around 11: 30, three of Anton’s siblings, and his sister-in-law from different cities and villages arrived. Then the eldest son Anton and his wife offered his parents vodka and spoke simple words of congratulation and gratitude. The second son also did the same. When offering libation, children pointedly used two hands as a mark of respect. Then parents gave a speech followed by relatives and other volunteers who reminisced about how they got to know one another. When the toasts finished they proceeded to all sorts of dances such as disco and waltz. By 11 pm the exhausted family came home. Anton commented about the day: “All is well done; we are through the big deal now.”

Demonstrating decorum in food presentation is an important part of claiming prestige. Along with the prosaic Pan-Soviet staple of cheese, sausage and bread, prestige items are added such as German chocolate, ‘Pepsi’ cola, oranges and caviar. Nevertheless it is the range and quality of Korean food that determines the respectability of the occasion. Though many Alma-Atian Koreans opt out for having a restaurant celebration, essential items such as rice cakes and assorted vegetables are still not provided and are left to the organisers. Especially the rare rice cakes and pork sausage disappear very quickly as sheepish mothers wrap some potions for their children at home. The presence of dried fern or seaweed from the Russian Far East is shorthand for great effort as they are expensive and hard to find. Coming from the Russian Far East, they are more than culinary fancy but also a link to the past. Especially to the elderly who have already suffered so much loss in their life, seeing and having them on table is conjuring and consuming the bygone “old time” in the other place. For these reasons *hwangap* is a family occasion when their social network is exploited, wealth flaunted, and solidarity displayed. As it takes a great amount of money and labour, close cooperation among children and relatives are necessary. Little commercialisation also means great strain on Korean women, many of whom associate the feasts with excessive demand imposed upon them.

As the feast is particularly linked to filial moral obligation of paying back, it is particularly subject to group pressure and thorough community inspection. The opinion in return influences the reputation of parents themselves as they are the ones who are responsible in shaping the children’s disposition and ability. In spite of *hyo* ideology, contemporary Soviet Korean parents are as much contributors to one’s own feast if not the greatest. For that reason, it can bring much moral suffering to parents who have unwilling or poor children and often it is delayed, sometimes even for years. The feast has grave moral significance as it reproduces the intergenerational order; familial respectability, ethnic commitment and moral credibility.

Yi Toma and his brothers organised their parents’ *hwangap* which turned out to be ill-fated and shameful in people’s memory. Commenting on how “ordinary” the preparation was, one critic specially pointed out the absence of Korean food as a proof of the unworthiness of the occasion which scandalised all the guests. As a result Toma, the eldest son who was in charge lost face and more seriously his elderly parents’ common sense was questioned as everyone thought they “really” should have coached the children better. Even though the Yis were not well off, the occasion being too great a risk to merely “get by”, many people are still mystified as to why they had to stage it at all. Even after several years people think that the ill-fated celebration would have been better deferred or even not celebrated at all rather than so poorly presented.

However the imagery of the generational transmission of life essence through the act of “feeding” is not confined to such special occasions. While feeding is a concrete expression of the religiosity and

ethnic identity of Jewish women in Middle East (Sered 1988), the elderly Korean feeding the “young” conveys an extra sense of desperation as if it is the last resort of intergenerational transmission of identity which is reduced to biological and visceral dimension.

For a typical contemporary Soviet Korean like Kang, quoted below, who writes in Russian, his own tradition that he is alienated from is embodied in a wise enigmatic elderly Korean women who only opens her face when “feeding”. What gets “fed” to the young “speechlessly” in her humble kitchen is “Korean tradition”, equally alien and enigmatic:

It must be said with confidence that Korean old women are an aesthetic phenomenon, not yet learned by anyone, an enigma escaping unread before our eyes. Peering into their motionless, wrinkled faces, I was always surprised at the impossibility of establishing contact with them. First, due to the language barrier, second, there is some magical, bewitching immobility in their faces, mummy-faces that take away with them the mystery of the whole people into nonentity. I am profoundly sure that they carry the remains of culture, folk-lore, traditions, and fragments of some broken mirror of art in the wrinkles of their faces, clothes, palms, in the black slits of their eyes, where, alas, it is impossible to understand anything-those are mask-openings through which disappearing History and Culture still look at you. They impart to us their vital energy only by means of domestic or kitchen utensils, meals at length- through what they can concretely help you- to feed, to cure, to comfort, theirs a fully sated silence which will never be broken. (A. Kang 1993 :33)

The idiom of feeding in intergenerational relationships finds the most dramatic expression in the story of the Cha family, which is discussed further in chapter five. In this oral transmission from the Russian Far East, a man sacrifices his life for his nephew, an infant-heir of the family and the act is symbolised in the elder’s feeding the child with his blood from a severed finger. The sense of hunger among the younger generations is particularly related to the many-fold ruptures that the community had to undergo. In a way it is a metaphor of the unrequited transmission of cultural and social tradition of the “lost” generations.

Section Two: Beyond the Visible

Hidden Continuity: Hot, Wet And Mature

Behind their complex hybridity ,distinct rules and patterns govern Korean dietary habit (Douglas 1975). Traditional Korean food shows a fixed pattern of rice, soup and garnished side dishes. Presented altogether, they are repeated three times a day without much variation (Yun 1997:28). This format of staple, soup and seasoned side dish persists in the way Koreans mix and match various items

from Russian and Kazakh food even when they opt out for the simple “Russian” way of tea, bread or porridge.

Temperature, maturity and dryness of food are particular traditional concepts that are central as organising principles of the Korean diet. Hot, moist and fermented properties satisfy the notion of a “proper” meal in contrast to cold, dry and raw qualities. Its propriety also confers its status as social currency of showing “respect” to elders or special guests. This format of “proper food” is also an object of “special” hunger and is thought of as an important part of one’s emotional and physical well-being. Many Koreans admit that they also have “learned” to consume meat, fat, oil, sugar, and dairy produce from Russians and Kazakhs. However they also make it clear that these “fatty” and “sugary” food, typical indulgence objects, gives only false satiety and even sickness in excess. Even though Soviet Koreans now “learned” to enjoy them now and then, their ultimate comfort food remains savoury soup. It is not surprising that so many of my informants felt it a moral obligation to feed another Korean who is “deprived” of “proper Korean meals.” Even upon my denial of such need, they insisted upon a distinction between mere gratification of body and the more complex need for Korean food; While bread and butter might meet mere physical need, only “proper” rice and spicy soup “really” count for one’s emotional sustenance.

#When a young Korean Yura invited me over a “pure” Korean meal, he offered a slice of bread to appease our hunger while we were waiting for the Korean vegetable stew to simmer and rice to be cooked on the flickering gas in his bleak kitchen .With a sigh, he held the bread and almost shuddered muttering “Oh I really don’t like this, so dry, so cold.” Then to my surprise he spread soy bean paste, his mother’s produce, onto bread, making a peculiar combination. Wincing, he explained that the bread became just edible only because of the paste. He was surprised when I asked for butter instead. Seeing my fondness for bread and butter he stated that he did not “really” understand its taste and kept wondering why the “real Korean” should eat “like a Russian.”

For my friend, who was hungry for a hot, savoury meal with liquid, the combination of the dryness and coldness of rye bread was a total opposition and understandably distasteful. By adding the familiar ingredients of savoury home-made soy paste, he was trying to disguise the unattractiveness of cold bread and was surprised that I added more woe by opting out for “greasiness” instead of the redeeming piquancy of the soy paste. The improper food is not only a source of intense feeling of deprivation but also a social hazard. When Ella, a busy university lecturer and mother, offered reheated old rice to her “traditional” husband Gavril, he sulked over the lukewarm rice. He felt his headship of the family was not respected when his exhausted wife did not bother to offer piping hot rice, cooked afresh.

“Koreanness” was also manifested in the way the food was prepared. Many ingredients often go through time-consuming processes of chopping, sautéing, parboiling, grounding, marinating,

fermenting, simmering and vigorous mixing with various condiments instead of “instant” deep-frying or rawness. This transformation in taste, texture and appearance, often beyond recognition of the original state, imparts a distinctively Korean flavour and appearance. Even mere salad often adopts similar pattern of being dried, cooked, and garnished with condiments of salt, oil, vinegar and soy sauce as a more desirable way of “preparing” vegetables. The addition of various seasonings, especially fermented soy sauce and paste give the characteristic flavour to Korean food which contrasts with “greasy and meaty” Kazakh or “dairy” Russian food. The stimulation of the spicy, salty and mature Korean taste is attributed to the “addictive” quality that induces withdrawal symptoms of moodiness and restlessness. Though much suspected by “others”, the maturation through fermentation is very much appreciated by Koreans. Almost all Korean food such as soy paste, soy sauce, *chǔngp'yoñ*, carrot salad, *kimchi*, marinated fish depend on the complicated manipulation of time. The complex flavour of Korean food is seen as nuanced and mature, and in reminiscent of the Levi-Straussian triangle, the Soviet Koreans often proudly point out that they “taught” their “sophisticated” taste to the natives who only knew a bland infantile palate (Levi-Strauss 1970).

Morality Of Food: Produce As Imparted Self

As my Kazakh host and the youngsters at the bazaar made so plain, Koreans are mainly identified as producers and growers of grain, vegetables and fruits. The presence of assorted and “processed” vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, mushrooms, and the more “exotic” bean sprouts and ferns is another visible marker on any Korean occasion and Korean “carrot salad” is a common feature at a bazaar. While non-Koreans often see agricultural work as a quick and lucrative way of making money, even urban Koreans who pay for the produce still do not think their produce are exorbitantly priced considering what it costs the farmers. Especially *nongsajil* is seen as the most taxing work that requires more than 10 hours hard physical labour in extreme weather. Respect for agricultural labour, discussed in an earlier chapter, means that early in life, Koreans are taught to appreciate even a small grain of rice and not to be wasteful.

The frugal essentialist approach to life rather than aesthetics or gastronomic indulgence is thus linked to Korean food and contrasts with “others”. Korean fare that can be pared down to plain rice, vegetable soup and pickles is connected to a sense that Koreans can “manage” with much less than others. In hard times of hyper-inflation and shortage of meat and other goods, Korean food, a byword for great resilience, is reliable company. This minimalism is seen to single them out as “survivors” among other people: “*Let others fall flat as they need meat and milk. As for us Koreans, we get by with a bag of rice*

and bean paste. It stretches" (*A Soviet Korean pensioner*). Admittedly many local Koreans are now accustomed to having meat often, but this desire is seen as something that can be controlled, if necessary, rather than controlling Koreans themselves. In contrast, Kazakhs are seen as especially vulnerable in their dependency on animal protein. Likewise Koreans' acquired taste for sweets and cakes, a Russian speciality, is seen still as belonging to "others", a luxury that Koreans can "do without". A similar sense of plainness also pervades Korean houses which are very orderly yet devoid of frills or decoration. This frugality in connection with consumption of food traces back to memories of days in the Russian Far East such as in Yi Ch'angrok's narrative.

He witnessed as a small boy how his wealthy self-made grandfather still could not bear to have any other side dish than soy paste diluted in water. When the Soviet regime took power, the extremely parsimonious and industrious old man was accused of "exploitation". With his whole family dispossessed and banished, the old man went blind. (Ch'ong 1995 :204-208)).

Above all, women are required to practise this frugality in managing the household, especially in the preparation and consumption of food. Apart from not wasting resources, they are expected to control and stretch the budget far ahead to minimise unnecessary expenditure. This translates into pressure for them not to spare themselves from laborious searching, shopping, preparing, storing and sharing food appropriately. Thus when middle-aged divorcee Eliza freely professed her resorting to commercial pickles and other staples on demand, this carefree statement scandalised her Korean male associates at the dinner table. It was read as her open "liberation" manifesto from a taxing cultural gender expectation.

However the virtue of frugality needs to be balanced against equally strong social demands of equality and hospitality. Unless tempered with generous sharing among kin and friends, it gets disparaged as "egoistic miserliness", risking grave social ostracism. The balancing act between the two poles needs great sensitivity and good sense, and Koreanness consists in getting the right balance. Even South Koreans and Korean Americans are suspected to be rather poor managers of this social grace and a wealthy Korean American businessman shocked his hosts by bringing his share of *kimchi* and scraping it back after dinner. In contrast Soviet Koreanness certainly means bounty that symbolises their emotional generosity and by extension, moral superiority. As they say "*We Soviet Koreans have big hands, a big heart as we open our fridge, take all that is there and give to all.*"

In terms of kinship boundary where commensality becomes a visible sign, Koreans position themselves somewhere in between nuclear and more individualistic Russian families and Kazakhs who have a wider, and stronger collective demand.

A Korean woman who has a sister married to a Kazakh likens her Kazakh relatives to “devouring locusts” who exhaust whatever resources they find on their trail. Her 10 year old daughter also allegedly “struck off” Kazakhs as potential marriage partners for fear of inviting a legion of intrusive and demanding affine. The child described it as “visiting here and partying there at somebody’s cost, eating up all the food”.

Often this suspicion of wastefulness or over-generosity rests squarely on non-Korean spouses. “Kazakh” or even “half-Russian” spouses are commonly seen as well-meaning but improvident mistresses who are not shrewd enough to juggle the conflicting demands of an individual family and wider kin. While Koreans see it as necessary to plan within the limitations, non-Koreans are seen as impulsive consumers given to immediate gratification of the needs of the moment.

Genrieta felt ambivalent to see a “well-prepared” birthday table for her 70- year old mother. The sumptuous table was prepared by Manya, Genrieta’s half Russian and half Korean sister-in-law. While everybody enjoyed the hearty Korean fare complete with “imported chocolates and cherry liqueur”, she also could not but shudder to think how much this extravagant meal costs her “poor” hard-working’ brother. She remembered other ways that his hard won money got quickly “wasted” by Manya’s “thoughtless” spending habit. Another Russian sister-in-law, Anna , is also seen as in perpetual need but never learned to manage within the budget. Genrieta concluded that it is very much a Russian trait that both sister-in- laws are much given to momentary whims of heart and have no “shame” in going around and talking about their subsequent neediness. In contrast, when her own sister Vera went almost broke to entertain a brother-in-law from Moscow, it was seen as an individual act of touching “generosity” that did not spare “the last penny”.

Metamorphosis

In this social construction of Koreanness in dietary practise, food becomes a metaphor of a world view that accentuates disciplined production, saving and transformation. This again is structurally and consciously pitted against the *laissez faire* and *carpe diem* approach of Kazakhs and Russians. Often local Korean women envy their carefree Russian neighbours who have little concern for the next meal as all they need is to “fry potatoes and make tea.” “The Russian way” dispenses with the burden from both organising provisions in advance and also from thorough manual execution.

Koreans are well versed’ in the virtue of the minute, monotonous preparation of Korean food in cultivating persevering disposition. From early on girls are told from mothers and grandmothers that their fine slicing and dicing will get a fine husband, coarse skills calling for coarse men. They are repeatedly ingrained with the moral that the finer things in life, whether it is soy paste, rice cake or good personal relationships, demand the pain of labour and waiting. Interestingly Korean women who married an American military man also remembered the same thing with dumplings. :

...She began to talk about her childhood memories of stuffing dumplings with her mother. Like many other Korean mothers, her mother would tell her that if she made pretty dumplings, she would marry a wonderful man and have a beautiful daughter. Eager for that promised future, she would carefully stuff the dumplings into half-moons, dimpling the edges just so. Other women nearby nodded in recognition, for they too had similar memories...he nodded in satisfaction, saying, "Yes, yes, it's an old tradition, perhaps it will never die out. (Yuh 2002:205).

Of course preserved food is not an exclusive Korean monopoly as is seen in Russian pickles and Kazakh cheeses. But what is unparalleled among others is the Koreans' conscious focus and symbolic manipulation of "taking time and effort" for further gratification. This cultural concern for transformation is also evident in the seemingly incoherent interpretation at the first birthday ritual, *tol*. Among the prescribed items that are to "predict" the infant's future, rice and sticky rice cake have become a focus of contradicting interpretation.

What does the sticky rice cake, *ch'alttok*, signify to Koreans? Made from appreciated rice, traditionally it crowns all auspicious occasions. Its significance and demanding nature is captured well by a Soviet ethnographer who observed Koreans through 1950's and 1960's:

Several weeks may be required, not to speak of the help of kinsfolk and friends, to cope with such important family feasts. Korean dishes demand both energy and time: ... chholttok keeps three women busy for several hours in advance, and certain of the complicated concoctions are still more exacting ... (Dzarylgasinova 1967, 212-218)

Given the agrarian background of Korea where rice reigns supreme, it is little surprise that rice grains and its glorious product, sticky rice cake, is a traditional symbol of plenty (e.g. Chon 2002, Dzyarylgasinova 1993) However, coexisting with the version are contradictory local accounts where rice or sticky rice cake became a bad omen of ill health and poverty in future (Min 1992: 19 , Kho 1990) These variants are not given any further local explanations but underneath the variants lie a cultural preoccupation with transformation which uses symbols of rice as raw material, and the rice cake as end product. On one hand, sticky rice cake is a desired result of invested material, time and effort which nevertheless should be kept away from an infant who first needs to learn to work and study before claiming his enjoyment. A child's attention on the consolation first, reverses the order of the way Koreans do things. Moreover it further spells a dangerous and impulsive and uncontrolled nature which can jeopardise transactions in the life cycle.

On the other hand, the opposite account of stigmatising rice but not the cake reads as metaphor of metamorphosis where raw rice represent immature, unconsummated and uncultivated livelihood. Unless subject to the transfiguring and civilising rigour of grinding, pounding, kneading and steaming,

the “raw” rice remains basic and common fill for daily necessity. Likewise, a proper Korean person is made only through refining education and discipline.

Sticky rice cake is only a part of the elaboration. Another obligatory rice cake *chǔngp'yōn*, is another arduous affair of rice, sugar and yeast mixture which takes a minimum of eight hours just to swell before anything else is done. The aforementioned Soviet ethnographer takes a tone of incomprehension at the Korean orchestration of endless endeavour:

A compulsory menu for the festive table is the confectionery called kwazl, or waffles, and there is a saying among Koreans that a wedding without waffles is no marriage but a pointless ceremony... For the ordinary wedding 800 to 1,200 waffles will be usual, and a special anniversary will be the excuse for anything up to 2,000....Five women will take an entire week making the waffles for a wedding.

(Dzarylgasinova 1967:212-218)

The enigma she has missed actually lies in this specific Soviet Korean view of organising life according to *aspiration for the future*: a concern about the next profitable move, whether it be marinating radish, planning a seasonal agricultural venture or envisaging a future academic endeavour. All markers of festivity, respect, hospitality and prestige in the form of bean curd and rice cake are potent symbols of delayed gratification, a triumphant manipulation of time over nature.

Often with these foods, it is almost impossible to tell what they really originally were as almost all of them hardly keep the original shape, texture or even taste after much cutting, cooking and seasoning. Meanwhile other's food is caricatured as the Russians' fried potato and milk and Kazakhs' dough and meat, conveying their mediocrity and “uncomplicated” nature. Like their food that gets made at the spur of the moment, the “others” are seen to have the similar immediacy and simplicity in their way of speech and self-expressions.

Different attitudes to alcohol also “make” Koreans different from “others”. In general, heavy drinking in the Soviet culture is layered with many cultural nuances. While heavy drinking can anaesthetise pain or lubricate social relations, it also signifies “humanness”. The attitude of “letting go” to the point of self-destruction often gets romanticised as the dissipation of a “too good a man with a heart”. Against this mainstream discourse, Korean are sometimes seen as lacking emotional spontaneity and expressiveness, rendering them somewhat socially unattractive and suspect. Spirit is not just a self-gratifying substance to Koreans but also traditionally an item associated with respect to elders and guests in prescribed life cycle feasts and social transactions. Koreans learn from elders how to consume alcohol; “Koreanness” is in a measured posture and conduct even in intoxication, thus:

“When we drink, we don’t let ourselves go. We hold ourselves” (Samson). Korean response to the emotional and alcoholic indulgence, however, is ambiguous. In the midst of horror, pity and contempt, there is often a hint of envy and awe in the “other’s world”. While they are to “remember” who they are and where they come from, others are seen to freely forget the past and future for the moment.

While it is in no way uncommon for a Korean woman to consume alcohol and it is pretty much condoned on social occasions, women are still very self-conscious about it and it is usually seen as an alien thing even by others. When on a social occasion a local Korean lady was pressured to drink together with a Uzbek visitor, her taut reply that repelled him was her ethnicity card *“I am a Korean woman, and we Korean women don’t drink. That is it”*. Likewise when well-inebriated college girls were having a smoke in the toilet, during a wedding, the “unusual” laxity brought down censure from the scandalised Russian babushka warden: *“Aren’t you ashamed you girls, Korean girls to boot!”*

Men of Hungry Looks

In Soviet Korean culture there is a specific Korean men’s hunger along with the younger generation’s hunger. In accordance with many cultures where the female act of feeding is an offering of nurturing, the soviet Koreans also have a strong sense of women’s emotional care taking through providing their food. Ironically while Korean brides of American soldiers are distressed for not being allowed to slave over elaborate Korean recipes as decent Korean wives and mothers (Yuh2002), Soviet Korean women often see it as a burdensome patriarchal demand from men and elders who see it as due reward. To Korean men and seniors who feel deprived of their traditional status, Korean food becomes an acknowledgment of their authority. The appreciation assuages the hurt made by a “hostile” outside world that does not “respect” them. It is also intimately linked to a good “Korean mother” who heals and nourishes by administering food, calmness and kindness. (see chapter 5) This inevitable association of ethnic food with the nostalgia of lost childhood and maternal security has a strong evocative power which can be triggered at any time.

At the beginning of my field work in the sanatorium, I observed how a curly haired Kazak approached my South Korean classmates. Since the girls sensed a certain air of intensity, they tried to avoid him with the pretext of their poor Russian. Yet frustrated, flustered and sorrowful, the middle-aged “Kazakh” would not go away repeating certain cryptic words as if they are some secret codes. Upon his persistence, the girls relented and finally through repeated words they identified the murmur to be the litany of Korean food such as noodle, dumpling and kimchi.. To everybody’s amazement he further declared himself as half- Korean by having a Korean mother who fed him with Korean food when young. He then apologised profusely for not being able to speak the mother tongue. At this point he was completely overwhelmed by his emotional concoction of nostalgia, frustration, and sorrow. The desperate rendition of the Korean menu became almost as if it is the only umbilical cord to his deceased mother and his qualification as half Korean.

There is an implicit expectation for Korean women to step into a maternal capacity as she cooks “emotionally charged” food for survival, security and encouragement. Thus deprivation of Korean food in a Korean conjugal relationship can have the serious implication of a woman’s withdrawal of affection and respect to the man who is entitled to these. However, the demand ceases in cases of mixed marriages. Being an alien wife to the local Korean is a precarious affair, open to many silent critics. The formula of the mixed conjugal relationship again faithfully reproduces ethnic stereotypes; Slavic wives are too “haughty” to bother while Kazakhs are too “stupid” to learn. Both perpetuate an image of alien wives who can not provide for the most primordial needs of their men. Reflecting the minority status of Koreans in society, Russian and other Slavic spouses are not really expected to neither cook nor learn to cook for husbands. A few Russian wives who readily cook Korean food are very exceptional cases rather than the norm and they have a similar background of having much lower social, financial, and educational status than their Korean husbands.

Often a cause of the proliferation of Korean men of “hungry” looks is said to be blind sexual attraction to “leggy blonds”. “Marrying out” to Russian women is often interpreted as unwise trading of the emotional security of one’s own food and women, for an impulsive gratification of passion. As the passion inevitably cools and Russian girth and bossiness increase, men are seen to live with the domestic reality of their youthful improvidence which only brings diminished returns with the passage of time. As Russian language and culture unquestioningly become a norm to the men’s children and wives, the men’s need for Korean food and way of relating to others can not but recede in the set up where there is no conjugal and filial accommodation.

On the other hand, he is allegedly suffering from ever-increasing longing for his own childhood food. As the restlessness and melancholy take a toll, the end result is the common presentation of “hungry” Koreans at the mercy of a “domineering alien shrew”. As eating at a local Korean restaurant easily costs a third of an average monthly salary, these husbands do not have much choice between depending on kin or enduring deprivation thus provoking much pity and deplored from other Koreans. “Behaving” Russian is not necessarily confined to ethnic Russians only. Even when a spouse is not Russian, behaving in a way that snubs Korean food easily qualifies her as such by Koreans. On the other hand, the general willingness of Kazakh wives is not always appreciated either. Their laid-back body movement spells inadequacy to irritable Koreans who are trained to be nimble and precise since childhood. Lacking speedy and fluent physical coordination is equated with laziness or even lack of intelligence. I was very shocked at the cynical attitude of a young Korean who openly criticised his “witless” Kazakh wife who was busily preparing a Korean meal for us.

Thus food is a potent clue to how people relate to others, a barometer of conjugal solidarity, power relationship, and loyalty to the partner's group. As a silent communication, it conveys "social dynamics", much of which is "hard" or "impolite to verbalise" (K. Chang 1977: 375) . For example, over the past few decades, there has been an awkwardness around Khvan family's gatherings over Korean food. On each occasion the Russian wife of the eldest brother pointedly demanded only a plain chicken without ever touching any food on the table. Even though she says "such beautiful words for the toast", the rest of the family felt hurt and humiliated as the "Russian woman's gesture spells rejection and disrespect towards the husband's family".

In a chapter *Cooking American, Eating Korean* (2002: 126-153), Yuh illustrates that the food and self go hand in hand especially in intermarriage dynamics of the Korean military brides to American soldiers. As American husbands marginalise the women's Korean background, Korean food gets also stigmatised as a source of shame, something that the women have to give up. The women's forced alienation from self, ethnicity, language and food results in wives' solitary and clandestine consumption of their ethnic food. The "dominant" Russian spouses of Soviet Koreas also succeed in "neutralising" Koreanness to a certain extent by confining Korean food to an "outside" activity, in restaurants or kin situations. The hunger of men in this sense is a craving for affirmation of Koreanness as well as of his authority as head of a family. When thwarted, this unfulfilled but ever increasing need can bring forth disruption and is even seen to trigger marriage break-ups.

The nourishing and emotive aspect of Korean food, often perpetuated in the context of gender, takes the concrete form of stew. Served with rice and made of soy paste and other ingredients such as dried vegetables and bean curd, it is perceived as "proper" and gratifying comfort food. What with trouble of procuring ingredients and cooking, it also carries an emotional note of care, indulgence and treats, if not strictly respect. That was also why an elderly local Korean Mrs. Shin fretted very much at the thought of "poor" North Korean "brethren" going without "proper" food on their friendly football match tour to Kazakhstan. She was utterly convinced that if only she could cook these "hot stew", it will be a sure tonic and morale booster, enough to beat the local Kazakhstan team.

Often for the one who is struck with the particular "hunger", the succour comes from other Korean women. By almost role- playing the traditional "indulgent" women who graciously accommodate men's need, they offer them a momentary escape and break from the "burdens" of reality. Many Korean women of different ages and backgrounds seemed to have such a circle of "needy" brothers, sons, family friends who often fall into the category of acutely deprived married-out men. Among the

culinary repertoire, spicy stew is particularly seen to impart a certain positive essence from the giver and becomes a “real” sustenance as a morale and energy booster. Even though the feeding is of limited duration and does not truly reflect a solid relationship, the effect of consumption of emotional rapport and lost social order is real. Likewise Korean military brides act out their suppressed appetite for forbidden Korea by creating a momentary escape through boisterous holiday-making (Yuh 2002)

Eliza , a divorced middle-aged journalist does not particularly associate with Koreans nor does she have a strong sense of attachment to her ethnic group. However she takes great trouble to stock Korean ingredients to treat her only brother, a builder married to a Kazakh. He turns up from time to time at her door to be fed. As in many other cases, she sees him as a “poor”, “vulnerable” and “silently suffering” victim who works so hard but is not appreciated. This is an indirect indictment to his well-meaning but “inept” Kazakh wife who keeps getting pregnant despite having already brought her other children from a previous marriage. On my question as to whether the wife could cook for the brother, Eliza who is otherwise very tolerant visibly scoffed. She rhetorically questioned that if the wife were not “clued up” in such a basic matter as family planning, what chance has she got to devise a satisfying meal for the husband.

Running through the picture is this constant imagery of man and his life source being fast drained by this “lax and inept” alien wife who is literally seen to break her husband’s back. The sister Eliza is left with a “broken heart” seeing him consume his food “in silence” and go away “quietly”. She feels helpless but consoles herself with the fact that at least her treat of stew will “keep him going” all right till he is next round. Her stew is a metaphor of her monopoly in emotional gratification and reproduction.

Having It All: Soviet Korean Tastebuds

With the arrival of significant numbers of South Koreans a sense of self consciousness has begun to emerge among the locals. They were already told or left to deduce that their hitherto cherished Korean customs and language are bastardised versions of what is “authentic”. Now the local food also faces the same verdict from hapless South Koreans who deplore its “greasy, bland and provincial taste”, ironically an epithet used by the local Koreans against “other’s food.

Lack of South Korean appreciation of local Korean fare was especially hurting as they often did not fully understand the cost and labour involved. On the other hand, South Koreans are left with odd bits and pieces such as plain rice with water or julienned carrots presented to them with ritualistic solemnity

from the local Koreans. As these items do not even qualify as presentable the recipient gets left aghast at the farcical “elevation of the humble”

Sharing much the same taste in food and its practise often brings the local Sakhalin Koreans and South Koreans closer together.

#On one occasion, a Sakhalin-born informant specially procured the Korean delicacy of marinated fish roe especially for my visit. Knowing its rarity, I was very touched by her generous sharing this delicacy while she was reminiscing nostalgically about her home in Sakhalin. Even though we only had met for only a brief time, our sharing the same taste and accent made her feel closer to me and this otherwise quite reserved lady confided her difficulties in this alien place.

Like accents, recipes can be an emotionally charged source of division among Koreans and group conflict takes the idiom of food. Even an elderly Mr. Chōng, one of the most reserved and gentlest man I met on the field, could not resist a sharp comment about local Kimchi with a look of visceral disgust: “*I can't stand what locally passes as kimchi!*” Then he added with conspiratorial tone to me, “*But we make it right.*”

In response, the local Koreans manage to formulate their *raison d'être*. Often they point out their ready access to meat as an indicator for a better “quality of life” as a contrast to Korea where meat commands a high price and is thus beyond the reach of many people. The idiom of food gives local Koreans an embodiment to the critique of South Koreans life of competition and stratification.

When Liza spent some time as an exchange student in Seoul, she suffered from lack of money and ended up being a lodger at a shabby, cold place that gave her “very bad” food. Nevertheless she made a point by occasionally going to “Kentucky fried chicken”, an unpardonable extravagance beyond her means in Korean mentality. She saw it as a protest against what she perceived as an affront to her basic needs and integrity as a person. She was still luckier than Lena who was sent by her father in the hope of “picking up” some Korean language while doing light chores in Seoul. The “light work” promised by a South Korean contact turned out to be heavy labour in a factory and Lena was exploited and fell ill. Her father nearly broke down when he told me that his only daughter is now suffering from an ulcer caused by malnutrition. “She wasn't fed all right there ...”

In a most visceral way these locals offer the most direct indictment of the callous capitalism of South Korea where “only money” counts and the poor and weak only get scraps. This South Korean hard-heartedness is seen to be extended to social relationship by some local people who made a home in South Korea through marriage or work. Feeling trapped in a rigid social and familial hierarchy and nostalgic towards a “free” and “easygoing” home, they prepare central Asian fried rice and Russian fried potato to commiserate and cry together. In contrast, their home in Alma-Ata signifies where rich food is still within the reach of all and shared by all with little social distinction.

Counteracting Seoul's monopoly of orthodoxy also involves local people's repositioning themselves from marginal presence in between Korea and USSR to a "knowing" cosmopolitan, a cultural middleman of globalisation. Their ability to "mix and match" from a rich multi-cultural milieu as opposed to the insularity of Koreans of the peninsula has become a salient point: "*Here [Alma-Ata] we live with everybody and eat everybody's food. We have the best pick of all.*"

Accordingly their acculturated food habit has become something to be celebrated rather than a suspect hybrid. This sentiment is common especially among the young and middle aged who openly claim their need to have rich and varied meals rather than mere repetition of Korean food. Even a self -claimed Korean "traditionalist" Samson shook his head saying,

"Everyday I have been cooking bean stew and rice. Now I am fed up. I can't just live on Korean food. Now I need some fried meat".

Differences that mark the local dietary practise are also re-constructed to accentuate their knowingness of the Western culture. Manners such as avoiding slurping, gracious table talk or men's ostentatious serving to female neighbours on the table are seen as such "learned" sophistication from Russia culture. Acquired taste for richness and sweetness represented by fatty meat and confectionary also adds this sense of refinement and opulence, complementing the "savouriness" of Korean meals. These additions are considered to be "enrichment, not bastardization.

Moreover, the local Koreans also daringly started to question the "authenticity" of South Korean cuisine by complaining of its allegedly sugary taste which they regard as a Japanese colonial legacy. In contrast, their local cuisine's blandness becomes a real proof authenticity, all the more for its apparent provinciality and artlessness. The similar metaphor is found in perception of languages. The local Koreans' shame of poor command of Korean is seen somewhat compensated for when they point out how "corrupt" contemporary South Korean speech is, riddled with English and Japanese loan words.

Section Three: Food , Subversion and Ethnicity

Risqué Affair : *One Man's Potion, Another's Poison*

I have illustrated how certain combinations of properties in Korean soup and fermented pickles evoke an emotionally nuanced social script. But the merit of the Korean food is seen to go beyond comfort and replenishment of energy as more active curative property is attributed to special food such as dog fat, antler's horn, bear's pancreas, ginseng or even humble rice gruel. Though commonly appropriated in oriental medicine, these "exotic" items are clearly beyond the imagination of ordinary Kazakhs and Russians and identified as distinctly "Korean" in Alma-Ata. The remedy of distilled dog fat sold in the back street of a market by Koreans is more accessible to the local Koreans unlike many aforementioned items which come from Russian Far East. The processed dog fat is meant to restore energy but also cure many ailments including consumption. This "curative" aspect, however, can extend to something as humble as plain rice gruel. Prescribed to a person as a basic sustenance who is not well, its pared down simplicity is believed to detoxify the body. Like many foods associated with healing, it is particularly associated with a caring mother. When I suddenly fell sick, it was the gruel that my concerned landlady Genrieta offered, stepping into my absentee mother's role. It was also the same recipe that comes from her mother, evoking Genrieta of her mother's feeding herself as a sick child. However in spite of their alleged efficacy, these foods remain deeply Korean carrying intense "otherness" which is associated with suspicion and revulsion.

In spite of the Korean claim that Korean food is a popular cuisine to all people, it has remained a rather inscrutable, darkly exotic domain apart from a few "obvious" signature dishes such as carrot salad and noodle. Non-Koreans who are often seen sniffing and turning over objects metamorphosed beyond recognition are standard features in any Korean gatherings. Many say that they are apprehensive of "painfully strong spices" but they also wanted to make sure things are in a safe, edible category. Much of these negative impression towards Korean food stems from the people's unfamiliarity with its distinct sensorial sensation. A few dishes may appear in a colourful finery of finely sliced carrots and green vegetables in all its glory, but the majority remain inscrutable, limp brown or terracotta substances. Koreans are acutely aware of this adverse impression of their food such as strong-smelling, brown coloured, dense textured soy paste. However their usual response is an unmistakable sense of resignation as Koreans do not particularly expect to be understood by "others", nor have much desire for self-vindication or .exposition of the facts. Instead, there is silent stoicism, and a shrugging of shoulders over their condition of perpetual misunderstanding by others.

As many local people carry provisions during travelling in the Soviet Union, Koreans commonly carry comfort food like bottles of soy paste in their journey . As a local Korean reached for the prized item which he regarded as his “petrol”, the other passengers in the compartment were simply struck with visceral horror at the smell and sight of the object.

Humour is another devise of diluting tensions combined with “knowingness” over deceptive appearance and reality.

A group of local Koreans were remembering an apocryphal story of a Russian doctor and a Korean burn patient who was smeared with soy paste, an old emergency folk remedy. The highlight of the narration peaked in the congregations' impetuous giggling at the Russians horror of mistaking the paste with excrement.

Equally, the smell of local Korean food also functions as a clear and emotive boundary mechanism both within and out of the community. “Dog- eating” and “foul” stench of kimchi have become an established ingredient in media sketches of contemporary Korea (e.g. Wright 1998, Clarkson 1998).

Alma-Atian Koreans are all the more insecure of their neighbours irritation, real or imagined, at the “Korean smell” generated by liberal use of fermented pickles, bean paste and garlic. The inner tension and anxiety easily breaks out under pressure.

I observed a domestic quarrel breaking out between spouses over the smell of Korean food. While a wife was busy ventilating her flat for fear of becoming those “smelly Koreans, her husband demanded a quick tofu stew for his brother on holiday. Then the elder brother’s Russian chauffeur came to fetch the infamous soup, and the wife was mortified and profusely apologised for the “terrible” smell. Tellingly the Russian did not even rhetorically deny her statement but added condescendingly that he was “by now accustomed” being married to a Korean. To add insult, he further assured her that “it is the same smell in all Korean houses”.

In contrast to other people’s visceral aversion to ambiguous smell, appearance and taste of Korean food, the very same sensation triggers Korean association with childhood, notion of self and other enshrined memories.

“Because of my Dad’s privileged position as highly qualified lawyer; I spent my infancy and early childhood in a typical Russian city where there were only Russians. Having never seen any one like me, the people doted on me. Even my little mates treated me as if I were a little dolly. I didn’t think it was anything racial though. Of course I must have known I was different looking from others but speaking Russian and surrounded by all Russians, I idly thought I was just one of them. I was in fact rather vain because of all the fuss made. However, it all finished suddenly when I was still a toddler at a kindergarten. On the day my family must have eaten kimchi at breakfast. In the middle of a class, this big Russian matron stopped and suddenly started to sniff around. With a big frown she announced that there was a terrible stench from “someone” that needs to be investigated. We were all lined up to blow

our breath one by one..(the informant paused and grinned) In front of the others I was singled out and sent right back home" (Samson).

The informant was laughing while recounting the story but his fuller account also implied a series of intense emotional pain and adjustment before his final maturation as a Soviet Korean man. Korean food and its liminality, in this process, is an unavoidable reminder of one's condition as a minority. The Korean food's association with angst, shame and yet subversive desire is also common theme in their diasporic experience outside Soviet Union (K.Yee 1997) . Pungent kimchi spells ostracism and bullying from others. Being connected to backward Koreanness, it becomes an item of renunciation upon conscious integration of Japanese Koreans and Korean military brides in US (in Lie 2000 :204 , Yuh 2002) .

Local Koreans are not immune to "others" smell either. Thus they will freely discuss the "sour milky smell" of a Russian house and "fleshy" smell of the Kazakhs. The seemingly innocuous dietary difference can quickly slip into a more intimate realm. The smell of ubiquitous sour milk, blended with armpit smell is an active passion killer for some Koreans who are otherwise happy to pursue "good-looking" Russian women. Likewise, I have observed how local teenage Korean girls were physically shuddering while mentioning Kazakh's "fleshy" body odour. Though primary and irrational, it was hard to find a more immediate boundary marker than this revulsion towards the olfactory presence of rancid fat and blood. While personal familiarity with other people and their food can gradually ease tension, the sensory reception and its conditioned interpretation is still a potent reminder of different backgrounds, specifically, between nomadic Kazakhs and agricultural Koreans.

Illicit Pleasure: Consumption of Dog

The traditional Korean practice of eating dog is also found among the local Soviet Koreans. Traditionally, a dog is kept for security and is encouraged to be ferocious. As a domestic animal, it is not an object of special affection but rather an occasional source of affordable meat, a welcome change in the otherwise modest Korean diet of staple, vegetable and seafood. Even though the meat is regarded as common and ritually "unclean", it is believed to be efficacious in restoring energy and withstanding heat according to traditional folk medicine.

In the field, however, I could not but notice the ascendancy of the meat as a special treat that evokes celebratory atmosphere and emotional intimacy. I have not come across any sentiment of revulsion among the local Koreans and even the minority of people who said that they “*did not care much for dog meat*” were also at pains to articulate it as personal taste rather than aversion to the dietary custom of eating dogs. They were even found surreptitiously joining others on collective occasions such as family gathering over dog stew.

Dog is undoubtedly a very popular dish among the local Koreans. Even poor students like Yura from Tashkent saved what little money he had to treat himself with this delicacy. He and his Korean friends would patronise a dog restaurant in Alma-Ata twice a month. Yura further lamented that it used to be as frequent as four times a month in his native Tashkent village. Even though those who came from the Korean collective farms who have easy access to the cuisine miss the treat most badly, its popularity is not confined to specific age or gender. For example when forty odd Koreans had a choice of either having soup noodle or the dog stew at a meeting at a Korean restaurant, all of them unanimously chose the latter without hesitation while I was the only one who asked for noodle. The treat was for the local Korean teachers from various parts of Kazakhstan who were attending the three-day Korean teachers re-training program at the Korean Educational Centre. During the mealtime, I became very self-conscious of my choice and fretted over my possibly dented credential as if I, allegedly an “authentic Korean”, somehow let other Koreans down disgracefully.

Two common recipes for dogs, stewing and dressing with spicy garnish, bear all the hallmarks of Korean preference; hot liquid, heavy spices and “transformed” meat. It is an elaborate dish consuming time and effort in organising ingredients, preparing and cooking with much laborious care.

According to Chön’s participant observation of killing and cooking a dog, his village informants undertook a laborious process of skinning, disembowelling, carving, repeated soaking, simmering, chopping, marinating, shallow frying, parboiling and seasoning. Even when the traditional process of searing and scalding was omitted, the whole process took more than six hours of continuous work. In the cooking of the 15kg dog, a father was in charge while son, daughter and her husband helped out by preparing seasonings such as garlic, onion, salt, pepper, vinegar, coriander and oil. His brother in law also brought a big table. As the recipe dictates constant checking and long simmering on a very low heat for the best “taste”, the cooking of dog meat is indeed a very demanding process (Chön 2002). After the arduous process the meat is finally ready to be finely shredded and mixed vigorously with a dressing of liberal garlic, salt, hot oil and vinegar. True to the “Korean” dietary format, it is served with its soup and boiled rice.

Luckily my urban informants’ family could obtain already cleaned dog meat through well-connected “businessman” uncle Boris, who spared his brother Roberto ordeals of the village counterpart. Nevertheless the process of simmering and dressing remains still the same.

When Roberto brought the meat, he takes charge of the cooking while the slightly daunted Genrieta is assigned a simple job of arranging a pot. For the moment, this otherwise very friendly man is frowning in his concentration and almost curt towards his wife who nervously waits on his orders. His siblings were invited and his eldest brother came as usual without his Russian wife. Her absence was taken for granted but Boris had to explain others that his Korean wife was still recuperating from the previous nights prolonged card game session. Nobody really seemed to miss the absentees and it almost seemed to add a greater intimacy and conspiratorial feel to the function. Brothers and sisters are now busy talking about the latest opening of the South Korean funded casino, and the eldest sister's latest fall that bruised her badly. As their youngest brother's wife Genrieta brings a big bowl of steamed rice and soup, Nasja, the elder sister-in-law, specifically asks her to bring a meat dish first, which made Genrieta grumble inaudibly behind her coy smile. She does not know why it is served one after another, but that is the usual order of the presentation. Later, 11 year-old Stas comes back from school and eats his hearty portion contentedly sitting with his elderly uncles and aunts. They occasionally made a fuss over him and Uncle Boris's present of foreign chewing gum pleases the boy. This "businessman" uncle who already treated him with imported chocolates and a packet of cereal, drops a hint that he might be getting a computer next time. Unusual for his finicky appetite, the happy boy whose mealtime was a constant struggle with his mother pleases her this time by finishing his portion. Genrieta, who busily obliges herself in serving "in-laws" still stands around the exit of the living room in spite of others' invitation to sit down. Even after two decades of marriage, she still looks shy as a young bride. But as soon as her "in-laws" left after eating and thanking her for the troubles, she calls her maternal cousin Ella who lives nearby. They chat about the wedding arrangement of Ella's 18-year-old daughter. Without so much as to sitting down, Ella hurriedly finished her portion in a chaotic kitchen and receives some as a gift to her husband at home. Meanwhile, at Ella's, her cranky husband Gavril kept grumbling about his wife to me in Korean but as soon as the piping hot stew arrives with steaming rice, he became contented immediately. Greatly appreciative, he even sends Genrieta a gift of a chunk of bean curd, the local Korean delicacy made by his elderly parents.

Early on in their life, Koreans are exposed to dog meat and learn to associate it with Korean exclusivity, intimacy, comfort, and conviviality (Epstein 1978). The package of familial security, the sensory conditioning that associates comfort with hot meat stew, and its memories, becomes an all the more potent bulwark against the "outside world", and this familial solidarity also smoothly extends to the wider sense of loyalty to Koreanness.

#At her meeting with long-lost Chinese Korean cousins, my landlady Genrieta prepared elaborate Korean soup noodle heaped with finely sliced vegetable and shredded meat. The "Chinese" guests, a young couple and their sister soon started to have a jovial time over rounds of wine and songs with their anxious-to-please Soviet relatives.. Ironically, being the only one who could understand both parties, I had to translate their talk. When the ice broke with food and drink, a Chinese cousin wondered whether the local Koreans can eat dogs without worrying too much of offending "others". Back in China, she added, she and others pop in to villages to enjoy it several times a week. Recognising a familiar word for dog stew, Genrieta repeatedly asked me to translate that she is not personally keen on the meat at all. It did not go down well with her husband Roberto who gave her a brief, stern look. Smiling again back to the guests he hastily confirmed its popularity in a halting Korean as if it is an ethnic pledge and an assurance of Korean commonality to his Chinese visitors. Soon the excited congregation were in an animated joint discussion of the relative merits of different colours of dog, with light brown being the favourite. Genrieta was left visibly taken aback with their expertise and gushing zeal.

As much as it is a binding force within, the dog stew is also divisive issue in relationship with others. Everybody in Alma-Ata is aware that calling other people's epithet using their favourite food is a serious offence in a multi-ethnic environment. When it happens, it tends to come inaudibly through clenched teeth or within a earshot of the safe company of one's own. Unlike abusive terms of "swine" for Russians or Kazakhs' "sheep" which are still within the norm of edibility "dog-eater" for Koreans has an added nuance of alienation as the Korean dietary non-conformity gets further singled out. Regardless of his likes or dislikes, Korean dog eating, is a topic a local Korean is bound to encounter sometime throughout life provoking reactions that ranges from blatant abuse to discreetly raised eyebrows. The worst offenders are Russians outside Central Asia who stretch the corner of the eyes to make slit eyes and call Koreans "negroes" and "dog-eaters" while Kazakhs are suspected of provocation in their dogged attention to the Korean practice especially in the time of Kazakhs ascendancy.

Genrieta feels threatened by the growing pressure of Kazakhs squeezing others out of a job at her accountancy company and is keenly aware that the "dog" issue can be manipulated in undermining Korean credibility. In the tense climate, she questions the motives of Kazakh colleagues persistent questioning on the subject of Korean dog consumption. She feels instinctively obliged to defend the practice as she regards Kazakhs' snigger as a personal attack on her own person and Koreans as a group. Despite her personal dislike of the dietary habit, she does not mention it and puts on a nonchalant face to show her ethnic allegiance, but she gets disturbed and hurt inside.

Because of its intense ethnic affiliation and nonconformity, in some cases it becomes an ultimate token of loyalty exacted from non-Korean spouse in "if you love me, then love my dog stew" fashion. There was a case of a local Korean woman who insisted her Uzbek husband try the dog stew but I also witnessed how two young Korean men, Yura and Dima, conspiratorially and persistently induced Dima's Kazakh wife to admit that she was also no stranger to the cuisine. Meanwhile the young Korean husband sat with his arms folded under his armpits watching his Kazakh wife preparing Korean soybean paste soup, rice and salads. I felt uncomfortable at his attitude as I knew both of them had just come back from an outdoor market after having worked together on a bitterly freezing day. But the Korean men seemed to want to make an impression that this is all part of "taming the alien shrew"

In its evasive defiance, the cultural practise of consumption of dogs runs parallel to Korean's agricultural activity, *nongsajil*. Both "notorious" Korean practises etch Koreans as outsiders who run counter to Soviet economic and cultural ideology. The disparity, quiet it may be, also etches

ambivalent feelings within a Korean about oneself; a sense of acute difference, secret shame, intimacy, emotional and material relief; the experiences often activate more self-protective social and emotional distance from a “hostile” outside world. Furthermore these counter-cultural practices also become a part of learning to accommodate, accept and even celebrate who and what they are as mature Koreans.

When his father prepared the soup and meat and his mother set the table with his favourite Korean food such as pickles and soup noodle, happy little Stas had no problem eating his stew to his heart’s content among his doting uncles and aunts. But not everybody’s course of initiation runs as smoothly as his. Some, like Samson experiences it as a rude awakening to a Korean reality and a call to grow up.

I was about nine or ten when “it” happened. I thought one of my uncles brought some kind of meat from his farm. Adults gathered together and started to prepare cooking. But there was something secretive in their demeanour. I could sense that something strange was going on so I asked what was this all about and adults were saying that it was just ordinary cooking. I instinctively knew that it was not true and they were hiding something from me. Later, I happened to come across the remains of the dog. It shocked me very much. After all I was just so young and all that I knew about dogs was that they were man’s best friends. And my own relatives were killing and eating one! I was struck with grief and embarrassment. But as the time passed, I grew to learn to accept it. Enough of the childish sentimentality. I even ended up enjoying it. My father in Tashkent often drives as much as a few hours with his mates to all the way to a farm just for the treat. Actually when I go back I’d like to join him”.

Going through grief, incomprehension, anger, shame, and more shame for self-denial of his “own”, a child often bids his farewell to a carefree black and white vision and glimpses dark recesses of the “Korean” grown-up world. With time and the presence of reassuring adults, a youngster normally works through a journey of resignation, tolerance, acceptance and final enjoyment. As Korean food becomes Korean American military wives’ symbol of self-assertion against dominant male American ideology, Korean diet both hurts, cures, disturbs and comforts, and includes and excludes (Yuh 2002).

Facing the ambiguity is a symbolic initiation of self as a Korean person. As a child works through the unsavoury facts of a dog’s death, and some Korean men belatedly appreciate nourishing Korean women, one learns to savour Koreanness as times goes by. It is a taste of adulthood and self acceptance. The Soviet Korean attempt at discreet subversion, albeit exaggerated, goes on even further, as they boast about “teaching” some Kazakh and Russian “converts” to appreciate the dog meat and stew. “Once” these Russians and Kazakhs “gave it a go”, these hapless non-Koreans are said to become “addicts” and give a credence to a much maligned food in return.

Summary

Urbanisation and modern life produced certain convergences in the everyday lives of “Soviet citizens”, but as the sketch of an Alma-Atian Kazakh family’s dietary habit shows, it does not necessarily flatten ethnic divergence. The implicit Koreanness is subtly transmitted through sensory experiences, symbolic associations and memories. As well as it’s being a physical necessity and reality, it is also central to the construction and reproduction of notions such as self, ethnic group, gender, hunger and satiety. Thus, set against the Koreans’ relative loss of language and culture as a community, food became an all the more potent medium for defining, negotiating and coding identities and boundaries. Moreover, the community’s dietary practice shows that it is not a mere passive consumer of the past or keeper of static “tradition”. Soviet Korean food also serves as an apt metaphor of the Soviet Korean self; not a passive victim but a creative and, if necessary, subversive survivor. Today, local Korean food, both in everyday life and rituals, is the result of this selective hybridity chronicling their journey into Russia and Central Asia.

Chapter Seven Art And Morality of Communication

The theme of defining Koreanness in terms of controlled planning, labouring, production and consumption has already been explored throughout previous chapters. In the previous chapter the embodied dimension of being Korean is further discussed in relation to this symbolic structure, particularly in the area of the dietary practice of the minority. The theme again finds a variation in the way Koreans relate to and communicate with people. This chapter examines the way Koreanness is constructed and distinguished from that of “others”, especially Russians, in the context of communicating emotions and using words. Even though Kazakh ascendancy was begrudgingly accepted, they often recede into the background while Russians constitute the quintessential “others” *vis-à-vis* Koreans. The reasons could be two-fold; first, in the local Korean ethnic hierarchy model, Russians are the only group for reference and emulation. Second, in many respects, the Russians provide a clear contrast for Koreans to delineate themselves against, rather than Kazakhs.

The latter section picks up a strand of socialisation and morality within the family context; Though no more lumped together with formal education, the domestic social training still comes under the traditional notion of education and is still found exerting a significant influence in the minority’s contemporary life. Knowing how to discern, express, highlight, and withhold certain emotions and verbalisations is seen as a crucial part of Soviet Korean personhood and morality which sets them apart from “others”. Again, reminiscent of chapter five, the whole process clearly mirrors the Korean kinship ideology, particular that of parent and child. Thus, I elucidate the special significance attached to training communicational sensitivities and relate them to the Soviet Korean notions of personhood and ethnicity.

Section One Disciplined Heart

Real Work : Head and Hands Vs. Heart

Even though Korean objection against Kazakhs and Russians is based on their alleged inadequacy as workers and improvident consumers, Russians are particularly frowned upon for “sitting for tea for ages and talking away” and “going to a buffet” to catch up with friends. Their hard work gets “wasted immediately on stupid things that take their fancy”. Even worse, “care-free” Kazakhs who “like to sing folksongs and visit relatives almost everyday”, are accused for their aspiration of playing a “boss” persona, complete with “professional” suits and briefcases, while claiming credit for other people’s

effort. In contrast, Koreans define themselves with “restlessness” of mind and body. They find it hard to justify “just sitting” and “doing nothing” or being “content”, and even elderly Koreans do not easily learn how to relax “always having to do something”.

Like Lena’s sister (Chapter five), many Koreans emotionally talk about wearing out bodies in labour, particularly their hands. To an elderly informant who showed me her knotted fingers, it is the embodied resume and principle of life :

“I worked on the field for all my life, wearing them out. You will find many Koreans in my generation have the same hard, rough hands. We irrigated and tamed the barren land to grow rice and vegetables, and you have to wait for a long time before the harvest. Only we Koreans can do this hard job, slavery to the land. The lazy Kazakh should be grateful for all the vegetables, fruits and grain we have taught them to grow.”

Korean affinity to the land is associated with physicality such as their stooped backs , posture of squatting, and a low Korean wooden stool. Agricultural labour is also seen to “crush” Koreans to the “marrow and bone” and occasionally, it was even claimed, the “heart” through over-exhaustion. Even the contemporary urban and educated Alma-Atian Korean cannot escape the haunting image as they see themselves as a result of such crippled hips and backs of their parents. Korean occupation of ceaseless aspiring, planning and enacting is represented as a movement described as being “always on the move” and “on the roll” and this constant manoeuvre is associated with *gol* , brain in Korean, that disciplines and restrains. *Nongsajil* is regarded as such a work that demands both nimble hands and a calculating head, attracting many even against the Soviet climate of criminalising profit-making.

On the other hand, *dusha*, soulful heart, is a traditional Russian cultural ingredient that permeates the whole society but is seen more to influence Kazakhs and Russians, rather than Koreans. *Dusha* makes people generous, emotionally exuberant, and living for the moment with magnitude; throwing Potlatch-style parties, not sparing time and toil for friends, giving away one’s last crumb to others, and forgiving and forgetting easily are all considered to be its manifestation and it is much adored. Even a degrading alcoholic binge and accompanying emotional over-indulgence is often romanticised as “enacting” a tragically “wasted” figure whose “otherworldly” heart could not bear the petty and hard life. The centrality of exuberant “heart” is aptly pointed by Anna Wierzbicka :

“...from the point of traditional Russian culture, states such as “joy”, “worry”, “grief”, “delight”, and so on constitute most people’s normal state and that absence of “emotions” would be seen as indicating a deadening of a person’s dusa (“heart / soul”). (1999: 17-18)

Blurred with other attributes such as “human”, “fraternal”, and “Soviet”, the notion of *dusha* and seeking such emotional exuberance and intimacy manifests in the ways that people express themselves in everyday interactions through calling pet names, using terms of endearments, and dramatic rhetoric and acts.

This everyday social ritual now further takes on moral and almost spiritual tones in this time of political and economic transition as a byword for “humane” quality against time-keeping or “business-mindedness” of “heartless and soulless” capitalism. Exchanging passionate talk and sympathy are thus important social currencies and should take priority over other commitments. Frequent expressions such as “*work does not run away to forest*” and “*so what*” “*to hell with it!*” are seen as enough justification in situations that require no further validation. So it comes as no surprise when Rosa, a Russian neighbour came with a bottle of vodka to my landlady, Genrieta, her old neighbour for “*dusha*” camaraderie.

The first thing I noticed was Rosa’s alarming physical and verbal intimacy with my landlady who, in stark contrast, was almost wooden and stiff. In Anglo Saxon culture, it could be seen as very intimate, almost a sexual act but it was very clear that it was not meant to be as such by both women. Rosa was like a puppy following reluctant Genrieta to the kitchen. The Korean only managed a half-wry and half-awkward smile. Within a short space of time, Rosa bombarded the even more taciturn Genrieta with endearments such as “my beautiful Genyanka, my darling, darling friend”, cajoling her to sip vodka without much success. Even I was not spared from this exuberance as she loudly inquired about a “charming, lovely and slender little girl”, pointing at me. Then she casually introduced her life history that was extremely traumatic; She was born as a result of her grandfather’s raping of her mother and was subsequently deserted under a Yule tree. Sincere in her tone, however she was still quite jolly in her narration. By this stage, I was so embarrassed and confused but felt even worse by realising I was really the only who was so ill at ease; Rosa was in a blissful oblivion in her Shakespearean soliloquy and Genrieta remained in weary cynicism. Fortunately, Genrieta’s persistent icy response finally saw off Rosa and by that time the bleached blonde finished her “*dusha work*”, she virtually looked like a clown smeared in red lipsticks.

Though much admired in characters in Russian literature, this mercurial bouncing from pathos and bathos particularly makes local Koreans ill at ease; Liza interprets her Russian cousin’s “demonstrative” behaviours that change “so soon” as inconstancy and insincerity. In this respect, Russians are often likened to a vulnerable child or an adolescent whose weakness lies in restraining their impulsiveness. Amoral rather than immoral, they are even somewhat secretly admired for their ability in “letting go”, being “simple” and “free” as against “serious” duty-bound Koreans. However, no doubt, both of them are busy with “work” of their own.

“Koreanness” : Soft Or Hard?

“My character is Russian while my daughter and husband’s is soft.” (a middle aged Korean woman).

“Umm... there is something coarse in Russians. The way they talk back even to their own mothers...they are not like yielding Korean women.” (a local college girl who has Korean /Russian parentage)

“Korean mothers look soft, but oh, their grip on their children!” (an elderly local Korean man).

“Don’t get taken in by the local Koreans, we might appear all easy, but in truth, we are a fierce people” (a local Korean academic).

Being a Korean is very much tied with the quality of being “soft”; one does not voice his opinions loudly, does not dispute nor fight easily. Rather he yields to others, speaks gently, has finely tuned sensitivities, and cares for parents and others in need. Although both Koreans and non-Koreans recognise these qualities, the delicate graciousness is more expected from women than men, and the young rather than the old. “Soft” Korean women are more reserved in their gestures and the way they relate to men and elders. They must always show decorum. Children also remained “submissive” when the ritualistic maternal chiding went on. Sometimes, the scolding would literally reduce children, including university students, to whimpering or crying, but active confrontations were peculiarly rare. Even when the harassed children resorted to verbalisation, it was rather a fragmented pitiful whine than arguing or self-advocacy. These children were being “soft”.

The “soft” quality and the restrained physical demeanour also readily expand to the bigger field of inter-ethnic relationships. A soft-spoken Korean is a good contrast to a Kazakh who self-consciously stretches and moves his body with a certain air of swagger. Russians also claim their expansive presence through sudden exaggerated gestures and *volatile postures such as* clenched fists and swinging arms. My Kazakh landlady was referring to the stereotypical images when she mentioned contrasting “humbleness” of Koreans. Mentioning one of her Korean colleague’s names, she opined:

Most Koreans are very sincere and humble, but this one is very ambitious. He boasted to me that he could manage a good command of English within a month.

But it was not ambition but his confident talk about it that robbed the Korean of the “soft” quality in Nestai’s eyes.

The alleged Korean softness also has its critics; the “Korean” posture of slumped shoulders and turned down heads are read as pragmatic conformity and servile resignation. In *An Alien’s complex*, a local Korean writer Kang Alexander delineates such Korean softness which manifests even when they are confronted or wronged:

“He would sooner drop his eyes and continue his work. As a matter of fact the posture of meekness with low drooped head, but stoically upright back is the Korean’s natural pose, be it a peasant of the 13th century or a junior research associate of the 20th century” (A. Kang in Song 1993:31).

On the other hand, there is an equally pervasive but almost contradictory sense that Koreans are “hard” people; their minds are always spinning to work out and promote their station in power relationships. In a feverish pursuit of the “goal”, they get exposed as being bad tempered, aggressive, and even callous. Most crucially, their “long” memory makes them hard-hearted as they neither forgive nor forget. Their revenge might take time but during the “strategic withdrawal” period, they remain duplicitous, holding the grudge inside but assuming otherwise outside.

In spite of a hint of harsh Koreans such as the “sharp-eyed Korean onion grower” in Nestai’s suggestive account (See chapter six), the negative impressions usually came from local Koreans themselves as if the unflattering “hard” side is kept away from others’ view. By the time I was getting more familiar with my subjects, they started to confide these “skeletons” in their cupboard in a half-joking, half-serious way. It was at one of the relaxed friends’ meetings among local Koreans that a middle-aged Korean entertained others by this joke:

“Well, we all know that Tatars have the most terrible temperament among all Soviet nationalities. And one day a Tatar happened to meet this scary she-bear and they got married. Who else their issue be but us we Soviet Koreans, ha ha ha...”

The in-house joke made everybody laugh, who further confided in one another in a conspiratorial manner that they are indeed the “hardest” of all people. As this hardness is the secret of their survival in a harsh environment, but nevertheless is not socially desirable in Soviet society, the response was an ambiguous mixture of certain regret and pride. When a Soviet Korean elderly lady softly but resolutely spoke about presumed hardship of non-Koreans due to the latest hyperinflation of food price, she was embodying this “hardness” bordering on hatred: *“Let all others fall flat on the face to the ground. But we Koreans are all right, we can just live on rice.”*

I will further elucidate that these seemingly contradictory representations are two sides of a notion of being a Soviet Korean.

Section Two Art of Silent Communication

“Home-Made”: You Know At A Glance

Being an ideal Soviet Korean means being a relating person who learned to discern emotions and either conceal or express them appropriately. The Soviet Korean occupation of being and staying as an obedient child manifests itself in the way communication takes place. As much as formal education is crucial in reproducing Korean personhood, this learning to appreciate and reproduce appropriate feelings are an integral part of training a child in a “Korean home”. In the heart of all lies “sincerity” of heart, which carries out duties in a controlled manner, not given to indulgence, gratification and dissipation. In contrast, they see “others” as being very relaxed in dealing with their children. Many local Korean women showed dismay at the way Russians tolerate their children talking back in a “rough” way and were further scandalised by liberal Jewish mothers who talked about their sex life with children.

Unlike Russians who are “free” individuals, Korean self perception is strongly bound by the intergenerational notion of *dae* and its moral obligations. The obligation to family that includes dead ancestors and the strong fusion of parent and child identity strongly oblige Korean parents to take social and moral responsibility of educating the children’s sensitivities, and they become the primary teacher and recipient of the “emotional caretaking”. When a woman in her seventies boasted about her four “considerate” middle-aged children, her moral could not be clearer. As you sow, so you shall reap. As she and her husband trained them properly since an early age, her adult children turned out to be sensitive and caring “unlike others who are rough”. As a concrete act of such care, they never go anywhere without first informing their parents. Even when they go away, they also make sure to phone their parents to spare them any emotional upset.

By “quietly” observing “how” the others conduct themselves and talk, the Korean elders confided, they locate the person and the family on a map of propriety and morality. The “breeding that gets inherited” also implies the ubiquitous notion of *kultura* and even class, *yangban*.

“The way one speaks gives away one’s station. We all know when people are gathered together you know who yangban children are and who are commoners’. In our family, both my grandpa and pa, all of us are descendants of yangban. Now we are the only generation who strictly kept its way... Speech and action shows the whole family. The proper ones don’t indulge in vain words”. (Kūma)

Unfortunately, one of the South Korean pastors has lost his credit among the *local* elders by ignoring the rule.

#During his enthusiastic sermon, he inadvertently made a few unfavourable comments about his parents who were against his conversion to Christianity. This comment took the local believers aback who started to question his personal integrity and “domestic training” he received by his parents. The local elders were particularly upset as they looked towards “real” Koreans to validate the traditional Korean sentiments and moral in the absence of other outside help.

The “breeding” is also seen as a determining force similar to biological make-up. Often mixed children are seen to be diluted in their Koreanness, lagging behind in sensitivity and filial consideration . Like Genrieta, numerous Korean informants unanimously blamed Russian parentage of mixed children as a “contaminating” influence that result in self-centredness and “thick-skinned” children who do not know how to reciprocate:

My sister- in-law Manya who is half Russian and half Korean is an incorrigible spender of my brother 's wages. And she talks a lot and whines a lot. My mother, who worked hard all her life, quietly suffers from Manya 's way of life. But it is the upbringing that matters and you cannot correct it now. Yul, Manya 's eleven year old daughter is like her half Russian mother than her “quiet” Korean dad. The child is more a Russian, because her mum, Manya, spoilt her to be a selfish egoist. ”

The “Russian” breeding is seen to interfere with the Korean focus of staying somebody’s child and internalising and expressing its emotionality through emotive identification with the parents. It is regarded as inimical in developing a sense of belonging to a bigger self, a paternal family line, which obliges a sensitive interaction to the outside for “keeping face”.

Non-verbal communication is particularly emphasised as a “normal” way of inculcating shared meanings as opposed to resorting to explicit expression. As a second generation Japanese-American puts it: “Very little was said, but you just understood.”, “you learn just by observing them and the way they live” (Yanagisako 1985: 171). In the absence of the hierarchically nuanced Korean language, the parents still sensitise children to rules of “respect” through deportment ,movement and deliberate verbal reserve until they are ingrained as a natural disposition. As Arlie Hochschild (1983) illustrates, achieving the smooth operation between cultivated inner work and appropriate expression is hard work. The local Korean parent resorts to an emotional appeal more than ever through sensitising children to empathy and harmony. They know all too well that idioms of *hyo* and filial obligation cannot be found in the time and society they live in.

Fathoming The Implicit

The politics of communication and emotion are extremely sensitive issues to Koreans while these subtleties elude non-Koreans. Often a source of moral hazard, they provide an idiom of “Korean” contention between the elders and younger, men and women, emotional insiders and outsiders. For example, when a son-in-law doggedly avoids addressing his parents-in-law, he is also vetoing their moral authority as parents. Likewise, elderly local Koreans felt slighted and got angry by “the way” a South Korean visitor sat, laughed and joked in their presence. The same moral indignation got stirred when a young teenager asked for a cigarette with hands in pockets and without greetings to an elderly Korean who retorted:

“You scoundrel, do you not have parents and brothers and sisters? Do you not see who your seniors are? How is it that you dare to ask for a cigarette from strange elders at an age when you should be busy studying?” (Kho 1987 :71)

Being discursive in self-expression and able to fathom others’ implicit intention is part of this “finesse” as a Korean. The ability is also connected to being “thin-skinned”, which means being both conscientious and conscious of others, unlike “thick-skinned” and “thick-nerved” “aliens”. When Russian neighbours habitually ask for a small favour such as borrowing matches and other things, Koreans have a quiet contempt towards the ill-provided people who do not know the art of self-sufficiency nor shame of “begging”. The culprits are even guiltier by either their inability or reluctance of sensing the unhappy mood of the neighbours.

As Korean parenting inculcates delicateness in both physicality and disposition, a delicate way of communication through emotional knowingness sets them apart from “crude” and “uncultured” people. As a Korean child grows to appreciate dexterity in a finely sliced carrot salad or the meticulous handling of seedlings in the field, a Korean is to exercise refinement in constant monitoring of nuances and inflections. Early Korean settlers in Russia who were otherwise known to be very docile, nevertheless, surprised a foreign observer by their hypersensitivity for such nuances. To the old Koreans, those subtleties were the keys of fathoming social hierarchy, and the ultimate dignity of their personhood that extends to one’s family. Thus, it was their moral duty to regurgitate the offence until reparation. For that reason, Koreans admit themselves as having a “long memory” where all the nuances of social interactions get kept. Thus, Koreanness is associated with an act of meting out an appropriate measure to the present situation according to the past record that had been remembered, and analysed. The proverbial Korean sensitivity can quickly degenerate into “tiresome” “Korean” acts of “plotting intrigues”.

After a meeting of a certain Korean studies group, local scholars were busy congregating with “allies” to analyse what was said, how people moved their glances and what people actually meant. The only person whose opinion was taken literally was a half- Russian and half- Korean. He was recognised by all others to be “straightforward like a Russian” and his past record proved as such. Meanwhile, discussing the intricate messages of a colleague, Lena who had previously shied away from Koreans complained about a “headache” she started to have since her taking more part in socialising with co-ethnics.

In families, Korean children are soon sensitised to “read between the lines” and learn to communicate in an implicit way from a young age. In this context, neglect or ignorance of what is going on in another’s heart is an offence. When parents are involved, it becomes all the more grave as a further breach of *hyo*, which stipulates “emotional care” such as minding unspoken needs, sparing of trouble and offering comfort.

Though local Korean parents are quite happy to show natural affection using pet names and hugging children, there is still strong restraint in emotional and verbal expression. Korean children often complain about this lack of explicit parental affirmation and compliment, yet they accept it as the “Korean” way, which is characterised by its hidden commitment that runs deeper than mere words and rhetoric.

Restraint is seen as good, rather than direct confrontation, even when occasions of conflict arise. By refusing to get engaged, they secure time to cool off and spare mutual faces.

When Genrieta had a very unpleasant row with her cousin over business, she preferred to keep it to herself, even though she was falsely accused. She especially did not want their elderly mothers to “suffer” as a result. So she patiently waited for third party mediation while suffering silently. Meanwhile, she started to suffer from depression, drastic weight loss and disturbed sleep.

Unfortunately the “delicateness” is not always reciprocated or appreciated. It is hopelessly helpless in the face of a person who does not share the same moral or communicational code. This becomes a common source of frustration and anger among the local Koreans.

When exhausted Ella offered stale rice to Gavril at a meal, he did not say a word. Ella had a look at him and with a sincere apology she promised him to cook rice afresh and went into the kitchen. She mournfully told me that it was hard for her to always read his mind as he never asked but expected his needs to be met without necessarily telling her. When she failed, he got angry and started to sulk in silence, which made her very ill at ease. The psychology lecturer perceptively surmised that it was probably because her husband regarded verbalisation as beneath his superior position.

Tellingly, for Vissa, it was a “moral” core that should be inculcated by parents since young to form a “natural” part of the heart. He concluded that when one needed verbal prompting in these matters, the culprit was already beyond reformation and could only be consigned outside the realm of “human decency”. Though pregnant silence is again the severest sanction and the last resort of the offended “victim”, it is not so adequate a measure in a contemporary Korean family.

#Gavril was scandalised when his teen-age stepdaughter Natasha started to stay out late and disobeyed his instruction to stay home. When it was repeatedly ignored, he finally meted out the “blank” silence as if she did not exist even in her presence. It did not achieve any desired affect for the beleaguered stepfather. Instead, Ella’s relatives commented that he was a “very typical Korean”.

In many cases, I observed the similar pattern of rhetoric and conflict between men and women, the old and the young. In the majority of cases, the wronged and crossed “victims” enacted the role of self-appointed executors of morals while the opponent played it down as being “petty”, “hard”, “old-fashioned” and “Korean”.

The theme of Korean preoccupation with form over content was also pointed out by Janelli’s perceptive study of a contemporary South Korean village (1993). In his study, the crux of the matter lay in “how”, rather than what was communicated, and this allowed a socially lubricating form of ambiguity and deception. Thus Janelli identifies acceptable and effective filial strategies of sabotage, deception and misrepresentation, all of which use discursiveness.

In this sense, it is not surprising that Koreans relate better to the discursive and less-verbalised form of expressing themselves such as songs. Korean songs, especially “sad” ones, are highly effective vehicles for conjuring up a commonly accentuated emotionality of *han* and sorrow. Even though Korean language remains as Greek to many young Koreans, they were equally under the spell of the atmospheric intimacy the Korean songs created. I have observed that in many individual and public occasions such as birthdays, *hwangaps* or relatives’ reunion, listening to and singing Korean songs were important ways of reproducing the emotional common denominator and group solidarity.

When there was a reunion of long lost relatives from China, the “Soviet” side Roberto and Genrieta were ill at ease, feeling inadequate as Koreans in front of “the proper Koreans”. Their confidence was visibly restored when they managed to sing old Korean folk songs. The impact of these plaintive songs was immediate. Soon there was a sharing of a common denominator of delicious grief in the congregation. Even otherwise boisterous children who were bored became visibly shaken, displaying solemn and dutiful expressions. But once this atmosphere was reached and commonality was ascertained, they could now safely diverge into other merriment.

As sorrowful traditional Korean songs conjure up a concoction of association, memory, and emotion among people, the atmosphere subtly blurs the boundaries of kinship, ethnicity and statehood.

Quiet Korean : Dangers of the Explicit

To Koreans, verbal exposition is suspect most of the time, and this spells trouble. People complained that they had to mind “every nuance” while talking to Koreans. Parents constantly chided their children of the inferior quality of verbalisation by repeating, “*Do you really need to be told?*”

The Korean antipathy goes even further by regarding verbalisation as actively devaluing the genuineness of emotion. People often frowned when describing the Russian ills as “*lya-lyaing*”, a continuous empty talk and promises.

Genrieta’s natal family was having a cordial gathering. The Korean son-in-law Roberto ventured his opinion in a pensive comment to his Jewish/Russian brother- in–law Yevgeni . “*Isn’t it so good to see our children being together, so different but so friendly with one another! They are indeed our future, aren’t they?*” Even though Yevgeni agreed good-naturedly and also said something similar, Roberto’s wife Genrieta could not stand his “oratory.” Everybody was drinking and he did not go on, yet she later criticised him for gibbering “silly and useless” words which were beyond the station of his life. He remained quiet.

In stark contrast , eloquence and speech is celebrated in mainstream Soviet/ Russian culture and virtually all meetings and encounters abound in toasts, literary recitations, jokes and personal observations. The following is an example of the Russians having an “interesting and creative” pastime, according to my Korean informants, who in return describe themselves as people who “*don’t know how to amuse themselves.*”

The No. 18 primary school teachers were enjoying themselves at a staff fellowship meeting over bowls of tea, stale biscuits and some Chinese caramels. There was a whiff of theatricality in the air as they had a round of speeches. I almost felt as if I was in a literary saloon or a cultivated soiree in the midst of these teachers who were adept in formal manners and elegant speeches. The peal of their sonorous and endless recitation of poems of Pushkin and Lermontov felt very dramatic against the peeling walls and crumbling decoration of the school.

In contrast, it is often remarkable how Koreans tend to cut short these “rhetoric” occasions. But even Genrieta could not fault Roberto for being *too “fancy and contrived”* on a New Year’s party in their home. Proposing a toast with to some “serious” family guests, he solemnly declared:

“This is the year of the Dog, according to the traditional Korean calendar. I propose that, like dogs, we all work hard and thus have plenty to eat”.

When one comes across an occasionally refined orator, the reception tends to be mixed; his skill is coveted and applauded, but there is a perceptible sense of “weariness” in the receiver and “alienness” of the orator.

#Once a teenage Korean girl took the trouble to recite the poem of Soviet poet Mayakowski on my visit to her mother, my local Korean companions were getting almost embarrassed. Later, they criticised the girl for “going on too much.”, with an implication that she was Russian-like in her choice of “performance” and in being unaware of weary audiences.

The suspicion of rhetoric is well illustrated in this mother’s homily to her eleven year old son who was twisting his body while trying to deliver a “toast” on her birthday:

“Don’t bother with big words, just be simple and wish something very important, like good health and happiness. That’s it.” As all she needed was “just a few sincere words”, not “lengthy, pretty words.”

Though lamented as a “Korean thing”, which largely plagues children and courting men, this shyness and inarticulateness is also favourably interpreted as being sincere and delicate:

As grandmother Tonya’s children gathered for her birthday, her grandchildren were asked to congratulate her with songs and speeches as is customary. The son Alek’s quarter-Russian daughter Yulya immediately straightened her posture and made rather precocious and affected speech for her age. It was also evident that the child already knew the impact of theatricality in both gesture and words and she made good use of them. Meanwhile it took much cajoling and persuasion for her “Korean” cousins to deliver some halting, diffident mumblings and half-hearted songs. Afterwards they were very embarrassed and sorry for themselves and cross with others who forced them. Upon their blushed exit, their mother blamed the “Korean complex”. Nevertheless in private, it was Yul who was deplored by her paternal aunts. They thought that they had already detected a manipulative streak in the confident niece who already knew how to “sweet talk” and had coquettish manners. The Korean aunts again concluded that her Korean /Russian mother was to blame for this dangerously bold and “thick”-skinned “performer”.

Instead of speech, Koreans use more charged silence and body movement such as trudging gaits and stooped shoulders in expressing their deep and hidden pain. On these occasions, ornate speech is tantamount to sacrilege.

When a local family made the third death anniversary offering for the late Mr. Magai, all close family members cried. (pic.23) Some even convulsed in pain and there was a certain rawness that later became pitiful resignation. Words were not coherent but painfully articulated and often broken. All of this accentuates the fact that this was a moment too deep for words, not to be cheapened by well-versed rhetoric. When the two elements met, it did not please some observers as in Peter’s funeral.

#When a much loved half-Korean , half-German lecturer Peter L died suddenly, the bachelor did not have an immediate family but a younger brother who came from other city and Peter's colleagues at a university helped much in organising his funeral. Reflecting his popularity, there were all kinds of people of different ethnic and social backgrounds. While Koreans just wept with heads down and few words, his Russian friends started to offer valediction with great skills and one even recited a piece of self-composed poetry. His childhood friend, a Russian in her late fifties was thought to have made a moving tribute by saying “ If only we could give our own lives for yours, Our dearest Peter. You will never be forgotten by us, your brides forever!” But Koreans disapproved it, as it was “too Russian” a funeral for a Korean person ; there were “too many friends, flowers and words”, instead of the spasmodic crying of relatives with alternating silence.

Restraint as a moral quality is also visibly at work in the avoidance of complaining or whingeing. The “Russian talk” about their misery and plea for help cause triple offences for indulging in self-pity, exposing it and lastly, begging for help. Though Koreans are no strangers to scandal and gossip, there is a great fear of “taking the rubbish out” especially concerning family. So Ella’s candid talk about her life and family to me is another evidence of her “unworthiness” as a Korean to her husband, Vissa, who openly condemned her for being a “thick-skinned Russian woman”.

Ironically, the Korean emphasis on self-control puts great pressure on Korean elders who are anxious not to lose credibility and respect from others. When the young also gain a reputation for being “modest” by not speaking in front of the seniors, the result is often generational segregation.

Edik had to sit through his 20th birthday celebration like a wooden doll in the midst of all the guests who were his parents’ friends and relatives. Throughout the lengthy meal, the youth hardly spoke, almost appearing to fear to spoil the great occasion but remained attentive and courteous. He also kept to himself, only to speak when addressed. When I expressed my sympathy towards his “boring” position, the seniors assured me that the youngster would have fun later with his age- set friends at another party.

In actual fact, Edik was doing very well by demonstrating his correct upbringing by abstaining from speaking that befitted a modest junior person. For the same reason, even adult children do not “go on” too much in their wishing-well speech on their parents’ jubilees for fear of appearing “self-regarding” and “proud”.

The same pattern of generational segregation was so remarkable in infant Lena’s *tol* party. I could not but notice that there was a sharp segregation among the people; The elderly men including Lena’s grandfather took over the most comfortable living room while Lena’s father and his friends, only a few in numbers, diffidently hovered around in another room. They appeared almost scared to step into

the other's space and when they had to interact, there was tension to "perform" respectably. They visibly relaxed with jokes and laughter only when left alone.

Korean elders are extremely discerning in mixed company as crossing or sharing the "territory" with the young is seen as a potential source of over-familiarity, leading to a demystification of their authority. So when an egalitarian conviviality rules, the elders are expected to make way for merrymaking of the young as in weddings. The same mutual avoidance and other "strategies" in Korean kinship was discerned by Janelli (1993). However, his account gives an impression that these strategies are too premeditated and actors too consciously calculating. What is missing in his otherwise plausible work is the great extent to which emotion and communication is embedded in the parent-child relationship. Against the "hostile" outside world, the extent to which parental authority exerts its influence depends on the emotional intensity that it can stir so spontaneously in a filial "heart".

Filial *han*

As was demonstrated in Chapter five, the parent-child relationship is the most privileged affiliation in Korean kinship; there is much emphasis on both inculcating filial feelings and externalising what goes on in one's heart in this specific context. In stark contrast to otherwise reserved Korean behaviour, public outbursts of filial passions of sorrow and guilt are not only common but also expected and fostered. Even though talking about oneself shows a want of modesty, talking about one's parents is not only common but is also an expected practice as well.

Born into a cycle of generations, the concept of *dae* reinforces intense identification between parent and child within a Korean family. Again, *hyo* ideology's stipulation of the filial emotional caretaking naturally fosters the empathy towards parents. However, the system forces a Korean child to remain always indebted to his parents, never achieving full reciprocation of the parental "graces". His debt increases even more by all too human but individualistic preoccupations, that distract him from the path of filial obedience.

Along with the concept of a "debtor" child who shares everything with his parents, the second mechanism of parents being framed as "wronged victims" also governs the parent-child relationship powerfully among the local Koreans. Whether the agent of the tragedy is unavoidable historical contingencies, states, or personal circumstances, this formula elicits fierce loyalty, sympathy, pity and

pathos. They often divert possible direct opposition and expositions of the source of power. So those conformed emotions are highly articulated at the expense of aggression and discord (Levy 1984).

The theme of filial compassion even goes into the realm of sexuality. When a university student Liza was repeatedly courted by her old Russian school friend who suggested sleeping together, her reason of refusing his proposal was her “poor parents”. She felt very flattered and tempted, but “somehow”, such behaviour felt like “hurting” her parents even if they would never find out. She remembered how hard her parents worked for their children and “suffered” since they opened the family “business” in the midst of economic chaos. They were already too “pitiable” to be treated badly. Furthermore, even though it was not clearly articulated by Liza , her way of thinking also makes it clear that she was “guarding” the moral decency of parents by controlling her sexuality .

Likewise, when Ella described her “kind-hearted” female cousins, Genrieta and Vera, she also related their being good daughters to their sexual naivety. According to Ella, because they have “soft” hearts towards their parents, who they knew to have “suffered and worked” all throughout their lives, they stayed obedient virgins till marriage. The “good” daughters were compassionate to their “poor” parents who already had so much suffering in their lives and did not rebel even secretly in their hearts. Their chastity was a “genuine” result from their “sincere” heart. But their youngest sister who later married out was described as having a bold heart, “not like the other two”.

If we follow Levi (1984), *han*, sorrow, guilt, anxiety, loss, harmony and gratitude can be identified as highlighted senses and emotions in a Korean family and they accentuate the inequity of children as contrasted to the liberality of parents. Even though the dominant sentiment is a filial guilt for being an inadequate child, on some occasions, negative emotions of aggression and anger easily parade under the legitimate avenue. When aggression is internalised under the mantle of filial sorrow, it manifests as self-defeating anger and self-hatred, while externalised aggression often blames the spouse as a source of divided loyalty. The filial *han* also provides a crucial incentive for the Soviet Korean commitment to work and study as a way of compensation.

Remembering parents, whether dead or alive, happens in great frequency and intensity and in both ordinary and ritualistic settings. The condensed parent-child discourse and its emotions can get easily triggered by certain material, physical conditions or sensory inputs such as labouring on a plot in hot weather, assuming a “Korean” posture like squatting, revisiting collective farms, seeing a Korean agricultural instrument and hearing accented Russian. Anniversaries of the dead or the child’s own rites of passages are also apt reminders as one gets reminded that every stage of his life is intertwined

with his parents. The “remembered” parents, including those who are still alive, are often idealised in this highlighted memory. Ambitious, scolding mothers and distant fathers get air-brushed and become prime examples of “hallowed” parental bodies for “selfless” sacrifice. The child pales in comparison and this makes him “sad” and even more “appreciative” of his parents. He sighs, looks away, and breaks the conversation, or cries, manifesting the telltale filial “reactions”.

As the angry elders of the previous section exemplified, this culture-specific pattern between parents and children readily extends beyond its confines, setting appropriate tones in the other social orders. My encounters with the local “elders” illustrate how they readily established their relationships towards me, evoking a certain set of “charged” words, gestures and atmosphere.

I got acquainted with Sophia, a mother of two in her mid fifties at a local resort place. Throughout our brief encounter over several days, we talked a lot as amiable friends. Ashamed of her poor command of Korean, she chose to speak in Russian until the time of parting came. She suddenly patted me on my head, a gesture of endearment from a caring senior, while bidding a farewell to me in the local Korean dialect: “Study hard.” It was the first and last Korean she ever spoke to me. I detected a hint of sadness in her hoarse voice in spite of her inscrutable face. My own triggered emotion made me realise that she was re-defining our relationship from friendship to a charged filial relationship.

Almost the same thing happened when other South Korean students and I met local elders at a local Korean theatre. After hearing of our academic careers, one of them even started to sob. He then stroked our heads and repeated exactly the same words like a mantra “as Korean parents” would do. The expression and reproduction of the han/hyo also takes place in community levels. Though there is a lesser enthusiasm in ornate speech making among Koreans, the exception is their specially formatted “paying homage” part to their roots. A typical occasion was the celebration of the Korean liberation of the 15th of August. Jointly organised by the local Korean associations, many local Korean dignitaries started to make speeches and virtually all had the same reminder of the local Korean debt to their remarkable parents and extolled to keep the virtue of respecting elders as expansion of filial relationship. In speaking of the privileged hyo and its derivative virtues and sentiments, people were very eloquent and did not mind rhetoric.

The latest addition to the “genre” of a “remorseful child” is Soviet Korean memoirs. While accusation-type literature mushroomed after the Jewish holocaust, the de-Sovietisation has brought about “confession” as its equivalents. Mainly authored by elderly male academics, the Soviet Korean memoirs are peculiarly penitential in tone; they allocate the most tender and most emotional part to “remembering” their parents. They make a public literary confession and self-flagellation as guilty children but the sentiment now gets extended to their “Korean” roots, including their fatherland. Thus,

expression of filial sorrow and gratitude became a currency in ethnic solidarity and moral authority. While meeting the communities' need to declare its *hyo* ideology, this penitential literature towards one's parents and ancestral roots also endorsed the stature of the writers who are worthy and able to air the key sentiment on behalf of the community.

While writing and public speaking is a highly formalised way of expressing filial sentiments beyond the realm of ordinary Koreans, a more common way is talking much about their parents with others in everyday life. Though the themes of iniquitous children and gracious parents are still there, variations can be added to the repertoire such as how much the narrator strove to "pay back", and how much he would do the same for his children. As my fieldwork went on, I started to notice more and more the presence of children while the narrators, mostly their parents, went on 'filial reminiscing'. As a narrative is shared, other listeners also share a pervading sense of grief and melancholy. Though they are indirect experiences, the repetitive exposure to the poignant parental narratives and its pathos sensitises the children to the degree of almost re-living the pains. Starting from an early age, this internalisation makes people highlight the patterned sentiments and thus, they become "natural".

Genrieta would recount how strong was her attachment to her parents ; She sold blood to buy tickets for homecoming , helped her hardworking parents while her Russian classmates were busy with dancing and dating; travelled to work for her ageing parents even as a full time working mother with a toddler. When Genrieta repeated this story with great emotionality, complete with breaking voice and an occasional excitement , her children were still very engaged and often riveted with occasional synchronising sighs, even though they had listened and knew the whole story many times.

As a core of Korean personhood, the *hyo* ideology and its accompanying emotional manifestation thus set them apart from "others" and provide the most consistent idiom of cultural continuity. Going back to my story with Yura on parents (chapter five) reveals my manifold inequities; I not only failed to conjure up the appropriate distress but also showed a completely wrong one of contentment/relief. I further "slighted" him by not even bothering to slip into an acceptable emotional expression for social decency. I "refused" to take his "emotive" invitation to the common repertoire, and showed a distancing from my Koreaness. In retrospect, given the situation, it was little wonder that I became not only "different", but also "lesser" Korean, and very likely a lesser human being, in his "discerning" eyes.

Summary

Control and discipline is largely associated with being a Soviet Korean in the midst of “others” who are seen as lax and indulgent. I traced the repeated theme in the area of social expression of emotions in both deportment and verbalisation. Yet, the end result of a soft-spoken, but hard-boiled Soviet Koreanness is without ambiguity ; it is a key quality that was selectively accentuated for surviving for all seasons, but it is also a deeply alienating barrier that puts them ill at ease with “others”, socially and psychologically. My discussion further analyses the Soviet Korean emphasis on implicit and discursive ways of communicating with others and maintains that this preoccupation is expected to be learned at home. Thus, passive gestures, indirect and restricted verbalisation are often preferred among Koreans over forthright words and ornate rhetoric. This knowledge of communication is also linked to the moral authority and power relationship , often resulting in a deep conflict in the community’s ever-changing social order. Lastly, I argue that being Korean also involves not only the knowledge of how to communicate but also, to a lesser extent, what to communicate. I have shown that much of it is dominated by the affiliation between parent and child with all its intensity.

CONCLUSION Being A Soviet Korean

The Soviet Koreans in Central Asia have developed a distinct identity that derives from an unusual history of ethnic persecution, violence and segregation. The dramatic history of the early Korean migrants and their descendants’ community spans through Imperial Russia, the U.S.S.R and finally, the Republic of Kazakhstan. As a readily exploitable workforce, the Korean minority remained vulnerable aliens. Their precarious position took a further plunge in Stalin’s era when terror and purge was the norm of the day. The state stigmatised the minority and stamped on their ‘land, community, language, schools, and customs. The institutional violence culminated in the act of deportation of the minority to Central Asia , followed by more repression, and humiliating confinement for decades.

The contradiction of “Soviet Koreanness” stems from the historic rupture; the core of Korean identity is about constant reminding of one’s relationship vis-à-vis others, such as parents and patrilineal ancestors. There is also great deal of discourse of following Korean “tradition” and “ways” among the Soviet Koreans. However in reality, what visibly anchors the émigré’s life as a community, such as Korean cultural practices, organisations and language, were all severely truncated by real and symbolic violence. In this case, why and how do we argue for the cultural continuity of people who seemingly embody the homogenised Soviet ideal of *Homo Sovieticus*?

In a way, the Soviet Korean history and identity can be read as the narrative of affiliation; theirs is a story of struggling to stay obedient and to align to the even oppressive authorities. I argue that the way the minority frames their situation and finds a solution bears a hallmark of Korean tradition. Thus, the Soviet Korean minority stands out from numerous Soviet ethnic groups by demonstrating a distinct socio-cultural pattern of intense educational zeal, urbanisation and preference for economic self-sufficiency, and this is very much in common with other Korean diaspora. I maintain that their convergence into this common pattern is not an arbitrary, independent phenomenon, but a manifestation of the continuity and transformation of the Korean culture they have brought. In their research on Korean Americans, Abelmann and Lie (1995) rightfully stress the significance of the “emigration package” Korean immigrants have brought with them, and their continuous tie with Korea. Though the history of Russo-Soviet immigration is older and the Soviet minority’s contact with the motherland had been severely limited, my observation also agrees with their findings that the minority’s ongoing resilience and strategy of survival is a carry-over from their Korean past. In a way, Koreans are also comparable to certain institutionalised inmates who fare unperturbed by the harshness of confinement, as they already had been immune to worse hardship before (Goffman 1991).

I am not, however, positing an immutable tradition. Rather, in line with other studies on Asian diaspora (Yanagisako 1985, Adler 1998, Watson 1975), I emphasise the extraordinary resilience of cultural meanings and symbols and point that they are selectively reinforced and transformed within the particular Soviet historical context. Without looking into these historically embedded symbols and principles, defining these Soviet Koreans through external markers such as absence or presence of Korean language, ethnic education, organisations, remains superficial, even though undoubtedly such deprivation was a significant loss to the community.

I drew an inspiration from M. Bloch in my attention to the fact that the reproduction of Korean personhood does not only take a verbal pathway. As his perceptive study (1998) on cultural transmission and cognition has illustrated, logical and language-based cognition is only a fraction of what constitutes a much bigger picture of human cognition and social transmission of knowledge. Bloch argues that memory can not be reduced to only oral transmissions and there are other ways that bypass articulation and visibility. Following from his argument, I maintain that much of Korean cultural manifestation explicitly lies outside verbalisation, and hence, focussing on the implicit domain is all the more relevant. Further, in arguing that “Soviet Koreanness” is found in the way one does things, moves one’s body, cultivates certain dispositions, sensitivities, and feelings, I have explored such diverse aspects as non-verbal expressions, sensorial experiences, rules of expressing

emotions, and use and control of the body. Throughout the exploration of such aspects, certain themes and symbols repeatedly arise; they are etched in the way Koreans organise life, see the world, relate to others, and understand the notions of power and morality.

In the history section, I focussed on such cultural symbols and meanings of the pre-migration community, and the way they resurfaced through the minority's experiences in the Russian Far East, Stalin's repression and current de-Sovietisation. The convoluted history explains the ambivalent Korean perception of their ethnic roots as both an asset and burden. Furthermore, I elucidate that the institutionalised violence which was at once physical, symbolic and psychological, has influenced the way the traumatised Koreans relate to one another and to the outside world. The historical trauma under Stalin went into the collective process of numbing and the Korean voices remained disconnected, contracted and impassive. In spite of much silence about victimisation, the legacy of fear, diffidence, self-loathing and insecurity was observed in many of the subsequent generations.

However, not everything was negative. In their attempts to survive in the climate of stigmatisation and fear, the minority successively relied upon their traditional notion of personhood. Envisaging themselves as journeying on the path of "proper personhood" as against the "common" Russian and Kazakh mass, the minority intensified their efforts to rehabilitate themselves through their cultural avenue of education and labour. As a result, the Soviet Korean self emerges as a survivor who is impervious to historical vagaries. To them, the chaotic present, though deeply demoralising, is manageable.

The minority is selective, though not altogether consciously, in claiming tradition in their conceptualising Soviet Korean self. While certain aspects of Korean traditional cultural practice are appropriated, "forgetting" and distancing from them is also obvious in their articulation of the Soviet Korean self. This process is not a smooth nor coherent one. For example, while the collective ancestors were seen as anachronistic since their subjugation to the Soviet authorities, the parent-child relationship has not lost its importance with all its intense emotional power.

Hierarchy and power is another recurrent theme of the Soviet Korean world. Linked with education, morality, urbanity and kinship, this highly stratified traditional Korean social order inevitably bred a very particular Korean emphasis on an imagined centre, periphery and the countless positions in between. The minority was haunted by the acute sense of marginality and deprivation they brought from Korea and this was even more intensified by their experiences in Russia and the Soviet Union. However, this Korean perspective also created the unique Soviet Korean sense of hierarchy in

understanding and relating to a new social structure. Thus, the Kazakhs who lacked the Korean sense of *kultura* were consigned to the low strata of the society in a Korean paradigm, while elite Slavs occupied the status of social and educational emulation.

Again, reflecting the Korean experience, education remains an object of intense aspiration for self-validation in a new society whose recognition it craved. To these twice- displaced people who have experienced dispossession and humiliation , education is the symbol of restored dignity as well as an item of inheritance and instrument of security. For this reason, I observe that the diaspora could not resist the loss of mother tongue in favour of the greater Korean end of becoming a “proper person” through learning. The Soviet Korean bitterness in the face of de-Sovietisation comes from this very particular context; they grieve much over the seemingly wasted striving towards a now-anachronistic “Soviet” centre for which they shed their mother tongue and customs. The grievance is all the more excruciating as they witness the new socio-cultural order that favours the “backward” Kazakhs.

The notion of a life cycle and its rituals still very much punctuates the stages of Korean life, giving a meaning and structure to each life-stage. The different stages of life involve a reception with banquet tables that define the symbolic journey towards fuller personhood. In enacting the life cycle, one is reminded of one’s symbiosis with others and mutual moral obligations. It is also a symbolic conformity to the path of Korean personhood. Thus the fast moving, hard working Koreans have to constantly exhaust their bodies by planting, marinating, growing, selling, studying, waiting, until they finally accumulate and transfer temporal goods in order to exchange them into gains in a superior moral sphere; intergenerational social reproduction. Once this goal is achieved, the Korean elder can afford to slow down, in speech and demeanours, into the stillness and softness of a ripe old age. He has little fear of meeting death as he has successfully strived to prepare for the next stage of life.

The Soviet Korean notion of personhood is particularly anchored by the way a person relates to his parents and, by extension, ancestors. Being Korean means , most of all , not forgetting that one is always a child of his parents. As a Korean child, one is bridled with *hyo* and *dae*, and plods through the path of personhood, often sacrificing immediate gratification and pleasure. Practicing acts of filial piety and learning to highlight emotions of regret is a specific part of identity as a Korean.

At the same time, family is also used as a powerful medium of resisting the oppressive regime. In the face of social and cultural uprooting by the hostile state, the Korean community drew strength from family for not only economic survival but also an existential assurance of continuity of an extended

self. To a certain extent, even the way the minority relates to a political authority with apparent conformity is analogous to the way they relate to parental authority. As filial sons and loyal subjects, they endeavour to stay obedient. However, while seeking affirmation, they also try to overcome control by quiet subversion and reframing the situations according to their interest (Janelli 1993).

The way one senses, talks, keeps silent, matures is another important way of being and reproducing Soviet Korean identity. Again, I also maintain that the contrast between the implicit and explicit looms large in the area of communication. I have already demonstrated that the way the Korean minority relates to and communicates with others is largely governed by control of direct verbalisation and emotional expression. Therefore, the ability to use discursive, physical and often silent ways of communion is an essential part of domestic training as well as a crucial quality of being a “proper” Soviet Korean.

The parent-child relationship which is central to Korean personhood proves to be an important exception to the general rule of emotional self-control. There is a culturally patterned emotion of filial sorrow and its free expression. Thus, being able to highlight and express this emotion is regarded as an integral sign of Korean maturity. The issue of communication is also fraught with great social tension and resentment as it is very much tied up with the question of authority and power in social relationships.

It is also about the way one gets “hardened” and solid as one matures throughout the adversities of life. This is expressed in the idiom of body usage; one’s body should be quick, always on the move, mind active, eyes darting about, vigilant for any opportunities for self-improvement, not sparing nor caring much about worn out hands or broken back.. The “hard” Koreans need to concentrate to produce, grow, save with an aim of transforming material goods into the morally acceptable item of social reproduction. This social reproduction is always to be understood against the backdrop of the history of double displacement, the influence of the legacy of an agrarian past, Confucian ideals relating to educational attainment, and the primacy of the parent-child emotional bond. All these are expressed not necessarily through the comparatively simple verbal forms of communication, but through the smells of Korean food, the inclined head of a tired mother, the hands that have worked too hard, and the striving for educational attainment necessary to become a proper Korean Person.

Pictures, Tables, Kinship diagrams, And Bibliography

TABLES

Table 1. Koreans in USSR

year	1959	1979	1989
USSR total	313,7000	388,9000	439,0000 (100%)
Uzbek SSR	138,5000	163,9000	183,100 (41.7)
Russia SSR	91,4000	97,6000	107,100 (24.4)
Kazakh SSR	74,000	92,000	103,300 (23.5)
Kirghiz SSR	3,6000	14,000	18,000 4.1)

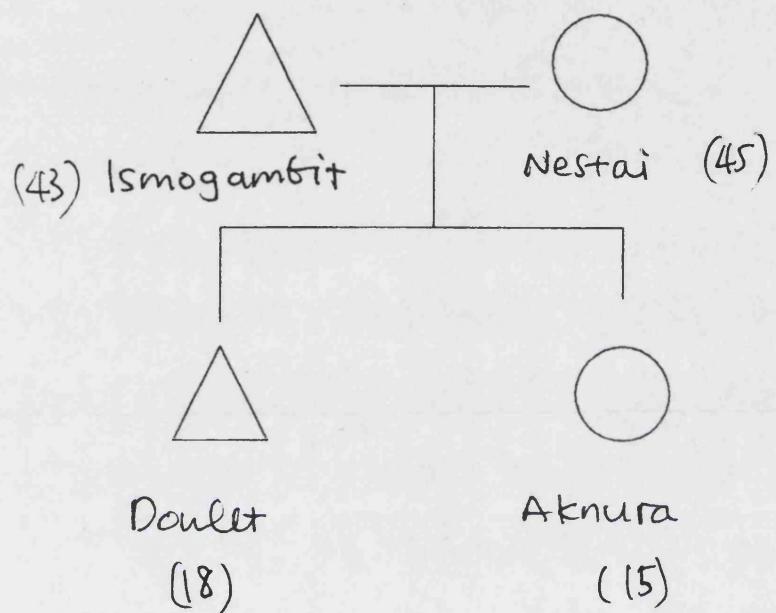
Source : modified from *Sovetski Kareitsi Kazakstan* (Zuev 1992 :154)

2 Rural and Urban Distribution of Korean Population in Kazakhstan (1970-1999).

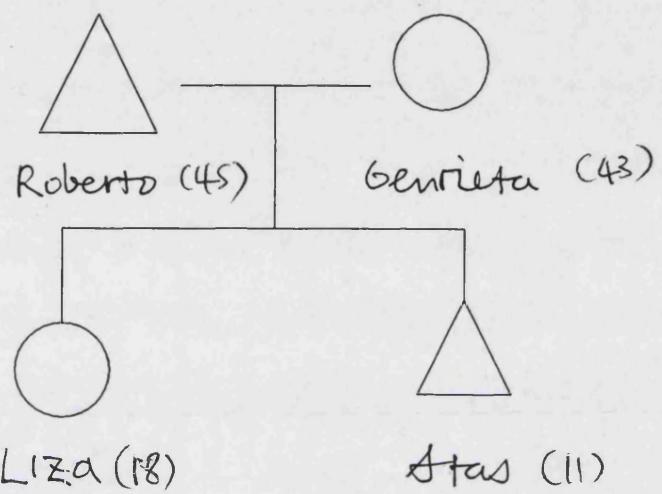
	1970	1979	1989
Urban	59,933	79,985	86,977 (84.2%)
Rural	21,665	17,999	16,338 (15.8%)

Source: Modified from *The population of Kazakhstan: Annual Handbook 1996,2000* by Kazakhstan Department of Statistics (quoted in Back 2001: 84) and *Sovetski Kareitsi Kazakstan* (Zuev 1992 :156)

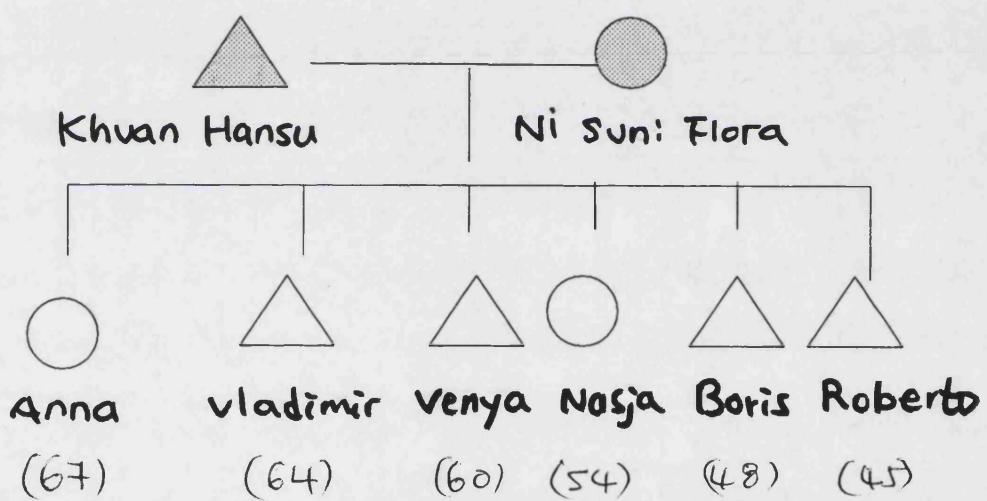
The Suleimanovs



The Khvans



Khuan Roberto's natal family



Genreta's Natal family

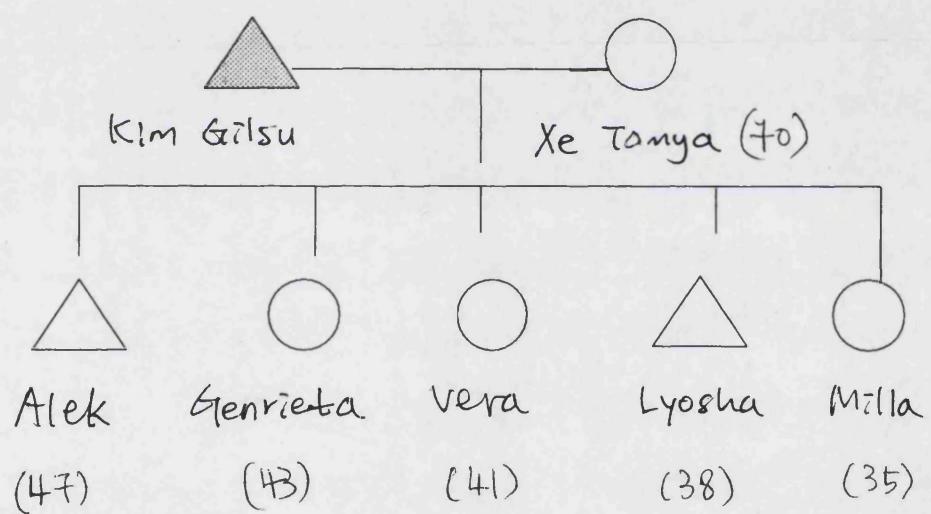


Table of Major Informants' Households

Husband	Wife	Son	Daughter	Others
Alek 46	Manya 45 (K/R)	Dzenya 17	Yulya 11	Tonya 70: A's Mother
Yevgeni 44 (R/Jew)	Vera 42	Alyosha 5		
Boris 46	Sveta 46			
Vob 18	Vika 17			
Samson 44	(divorced)			
Segil 79	Ellena 77		Nadja 56 (div.)	
	Eliza 45 (div.)		Masha 14 (R/K)	
Mikhail 45 (R)	Gulshan 42 (Kz)		Maya 14, Andrea 4	
Chesin Yi 70	Margarita 68			
Peter 56 (K/ Ger) (single)				
Valentine 66	Asha 66 (R)			
Robert 18	Yulia 18			
Dima 23	Gulnara 23 (Kz)			
Yura 18 (lives with friend as a student)	Vitali 18, Slava 18			
Victor 42	Jemma 41			
Gavril 43	Ella 42	Leo 4		
	Lema 69 (widow)	Georgi 40 (div.)		
	Anna K, shinson 80 (?) (widow)			
Slava 45	Tamara 44	Ivan 14	Olya 12	
Vissa 75	Sana 73		Lyuda 40 (div.)	
	Nora 25 (div.)		Galina 5	
Vassily 44	Aeja 44	Igor 5	Lyona 18	
Sergei 46	Lara 42		Alyona 17, Mira 15	
Kukin 66	Oksana 65			
	Mija 50 (div.)	Sanya 17	Olga 19	
Leonid 42	Lena 45		Galya 10	
Vladimir 40	Sveta 40		Vera 12, Tolya 11	
Chagbom 77	Heok 73	Tim 39 (single)	Janna 43 (widow)	Pechal 11, Pavel 10 (Janna's)
Vitali 18	Oksana 17			
Timofei 25	Natasha 18			
Anton 45	Zinaida 38 (R)	Max 18 (R), Tolik 7	Elya 12	

(R) = Russian, (Kz) = Kazakh, (Ger) = Soviet German, (Jew) = Soviet Jewish

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН ҰЛТТЫҚ БАНКІ





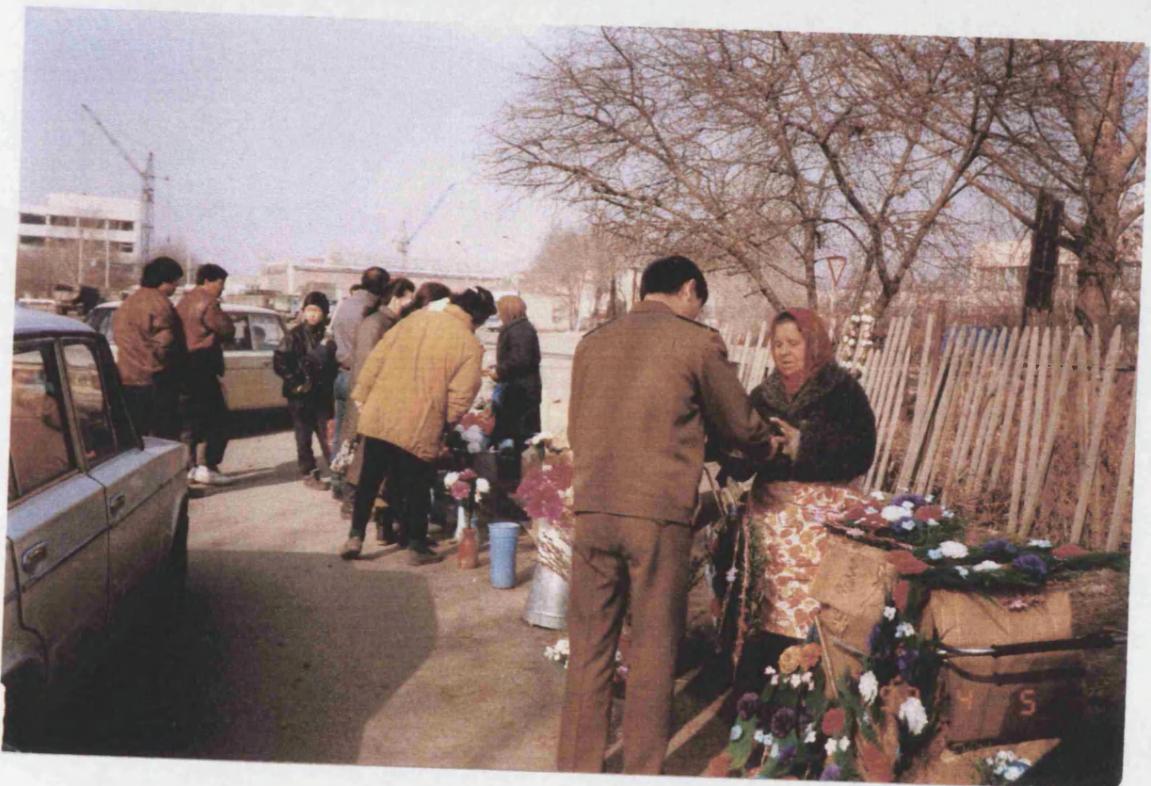
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7 Photo : Anna Tsoy (Chwe Ai-ra). 1908-1909



8 . Photo 1: N. L. Tsoy's house in Vladivostok (1894-1895)
9 . Photo 2: Nikolai Lukich Tsoy, the early 1900's



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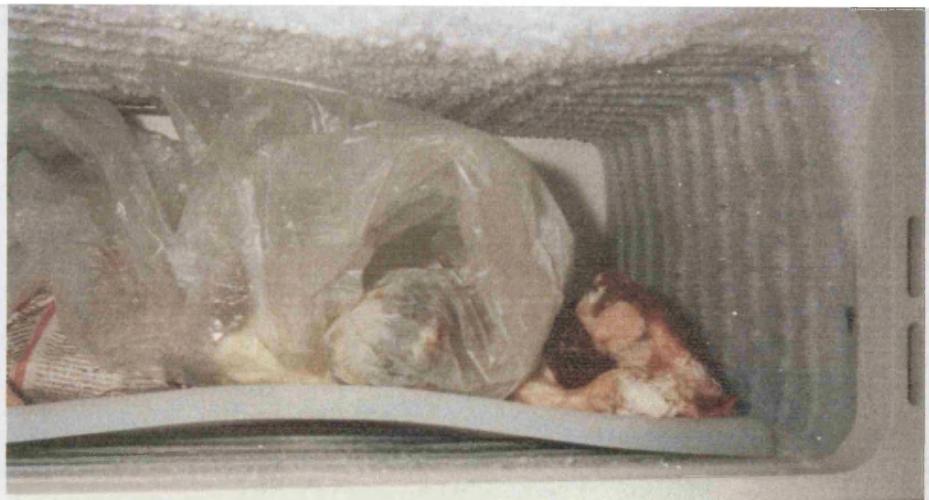




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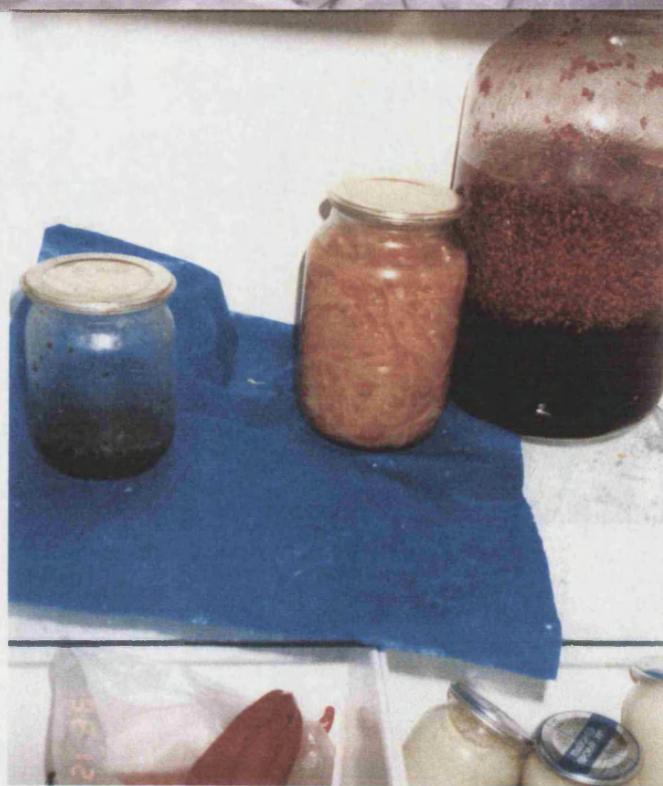
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