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The Lost Heritage of Koryoin: Citizen or Outcast?

By Jungmin Yoo

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Introduction

The icy winds of the Baltic bite deep into the bones of barely-clothed prisoners of an unnamed war camp. The cold is unbearable in the frigid Prussian hinterlands, the chatter minimal, and everyone is huddling to survive. Amidst the stale air of death and starvation, small clouds of melodic choir powerfully pierce through the hushed chill: "Ari-rang, ar-ri-rang, ara-ri-yo…"[1] From the bellies of a group of Koryo Saram, the Korean folk anthem wistfully winds its way through the barbed wires, straining to reach back home.

In a curious, seeming oddity, ethnic Koreans, Koryoin, found themselves conscripted from the Far Eastern regions to fight for the Russian Empire thousands of miles away on the Eastern Front of World War I. During a particularly brutal beatdown at the Battle of Tannenberg, a lethal saber thrust into the heart of Russian Northwest forces, 4,000 ethnic Koreans[2] were among the 90,000 Russian soldiers taken as prisoners of war.

A small minority of these Koryo Saram, or Koryoin, would soon be afforded some warmth at Humboldt University, where German linguist Dr. Wilhelm Albert Döggen studied their language and music. Dr. Döggen borrowed a few Korean singers for an anthropological study, recording 59 albums of these four men, including a young, 27 year-old Gregory Kim.[3]

Gregory seemed to be of especial interest, as he wrote his own introduction in the book and article released on the study. A Buddhist nationalist fighting for Korea's independence from the Japanese yoke, and father of two,[4] Gregory relates his life through this rare first-hand narrative. Born in Nikolsk Ussuriysk, Russian Far East, Gregory learned Russian at 17 or 18 and signed up for the army at the ripe age of 21.[5] Once his service was done, he returned to his hometown to start life with Kim Bok and Kim Saet-Byul, his son and daughter, only to be called up for service when war broke out a few months later.

Almost no information exists as to his life after his imprisonment. Perhaps he died. Perhaps he lived a long life back in Nikolsk with a thriving family. What we know for sure is that Gregory was constantly fighting the pangs of hunger and chill of death to sing the Arirang and become a recorded artist of sorts, and some of his albums are now preserved at Mungyeong Old Road Museum.[6]

Gregory Kim's Korean name is Kim Hong-Jun, and he was a third-generation Koryo Saram.

I. The Origins of Koryo Saram

In the 19th century, after centuries of stability and isolation under the Joseon Dynasty, the Korean Peninsula began to experience tectonic shifts. Internally, the kingdom was suffering from stalled development and growth with extreme social and economic stratification. The *yangbans*, or the Neo-Confucian scholar-aristocrat class, controlled most of the land and were busy exploiting the population, while nearly 90% of Koreans were either slaves, farmers, merchants, or other "lowly" professions.[7] Safely nestled under the Ming Dynasty, Joseon was complacent and did not strive to reform its static society; idling and trivial in-fighting were rampant, as they were in Ming, which also led to its downfall. Meanwhile, Russia was expanding its borders and Japan undergoing dramatic modernization following the 1868 Meiji Restoration.

During the mid-19th century, Joseon economy was in ruins: "wages and rents fell, tax receipts shrank, and budget deficits expanded, forcing the government to resort to debasement."[8] Poor peasants emigrated north from what was then the Joseon Dynasty to Northern China and Primorsky Krai, located in the far-flung eastern regions of Russia.[9] After the annexation of Korea by Japan and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), many more fled the war-torn peninsula. Although the Russo-Japanese borders were strictly controlled, Koreans still illegally migrated to Russia through the Tumen River. In 1908 alone, over 60,000 ethnic Koreans settled in Primorsky Krai.[10]

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[1] Hwang, Eun-soon. "'I Am a Korean.'" Weekly Joesun , August 21, 2015, http://weekly.chosun.com/client/news/viw.asp?ctcd=c01&nNewsNumb=002371100003.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] "Joseon History through Eyes of Commoners." Koreatimes, February 27, 2009, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2009/02/135_40420.html.
[8] Cha, Myung Soo. "The Economic History of Korea." EHnet, https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-korea/.
[9] Kim, German Nikolaevich. "Koryo Saram, or Koreans of the Former Soviet Union." Amerasia Journal. Accessed January 9, 2022, https://soyunglee.com/files/GKim-Koryo%20Saram,%20or%20Koreans%20of%20the%20FSU.pdf.
[10] *Ibid., 21.*

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As emigres, these Koreans began to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population by calling themselves *Koryo Saram*.[11] The word *Koryo* refers to the historical 12th century Korean dynasty, and *Saram* or *it means* 'people' or 'person' in Korean. *Koryo Saram* was, therefore, an identifier, to denote that 'I am of Korean descent.'

II. Life in Soviet Russia

Koryo Saram were Korean expatriates, who "have common genetic roots, and are of the same anthropological type, and share a culture and language"[12] as Koreans now. But as with all diasporas, Koryoin lives began diverging from those in the Peninsula, and they began to carve out their own unique identities and histories.

Because of the burgeoning Korean population in the East, the Governors of the Soviet Union announced the "Korean Question" and decided to forbid any more Korean immigrants from residing in Russia.[13] As a consequence of this policy, Korean communities were split up and sent to different territories around Primorsky Krai, leading to many losing their lands, which were taken by Russian settlers.

On August 20th, 1888, the "Russian-Korean Convention on Border Relations" was signed, dividing Koreans into three different groups: first, Koreans who resided in Russia before the Russo-Korean agreement of 1884, which allowed them to obtain Russian citizenship; second, Koreans who settled after 1884 and sought Russian citizenship; and third, Koreans who temporarily lived in Russia through short-term labor contracts.[14]

There were relatively more Koreans who did not obtain Russian citizenship than those who were able. Despite this, due to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, Soviets began to mistrust Koreans. Pavel Unterberger, the Priamur Governor-general, was particularly skeptical of Koreans once Japan annexed Korea in 1910. Unterberger and other governors in Russia considered Koreans untrustworthy and even mistook some of them as Japanese spies.[15] Eventually, Korean settlers were kept under strict control, while some were even deported.

However, most Koreans did not want to give up on their residency in the Soviet Union. To earn back trust, Koryoin conscripted themselves in the Red Army during the 1917 October Revolution.[16] Korean workers believed that through this action, all oppressed Koreans could gain freedom and independence in Russia. Nevertheless, the situation worsened: two-thirds of Koreans were not granted Russian citizenship; statistically, only 1,300 out of 6,000 Koreans received citizenship.[17] Most Koryo Saram were left stateless.

However, that was just the beginning of their entangled history. In 1937, Stalin deported all the "aliens"—a term he used to refer to all foreigners—living in the Soviet Union on "ghost trains," a name the Koryo Saram invented because the suffocating month-long ride that killed millions of people,[18] sort of like the Soviet Trail of Tears. In a first-hand account, Aleksander Leonidovich, a Russian surveyor, wrote that "people buried their relatives in every single car," and that "although sometimes [they] could stop to bury them, most of the time [they were] forced to just throw the bodies away."[19]

During that suffocating ride, Koryo Saram were abandoned in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; around 100,000 were settled in Kazakhstan and 74,000 in Uzbekistan.[20] As Stalin's aim was to destabilize foreign enclaves, the territories had no food or shelter, so people had to dig special holes underground called *zemlyanka* (earth hut) to survive the freezing winters. Stalin also banned all Korean education, such as language and culture, in an effort to stamp out any traces of non-Russian identity. Therefore, Koryo Saram began to gradually lose the pieces that tied them back to their homeland.

III. The Korean Way

Tenaciously, ethnic Koreans tried to hold on to their essence as Koryo Saram by a variety of means, including taking political offices in an attempt to overturn stifling policies. The official turning point came in 1953, the year of Stalin's death.[21] Although the USSR existed, Koryo Saram were able to flourish within a much more liberalized political regime. Through their organized petition for national rehabilitation, the USSR government permitted the work of strengthening the educational and cultural system of the Koryo Saram. By the 1970s, Koryo Saram worked for key industries and educational institutions.[22] Moreover, they were "elected to the

[11] *Ibid, 21.*
[12] Ember, Melvin, Carol R. Ember, and Ian A. Skoggard. *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*. New York: Kluwer Academic Plenum Publishers, 2004.
[13] Ross King, German N. Kim, and Hesung Chun Koh, *Koryo˘Saram: Koreans in the Former USSR* (New Haven, CT: East Rock Institute, 2001), 21.
[14] *Ibid., 22.*
[15] *Ibid., 24.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Woo, Meredith Jung-En. "Tracing the Steps of Stalin's Unreliable People: Koryo Saram." Journal of the International Institute. MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, October 1, 2006. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0014.101/--tracing-the-steps-of-stalins-unreliable-people-koryo-saram?rgn=main%3Bview.
[19] Ekaterina Professor and myself conducted an interview with a Koryo Saram, Aleksander Leonidovich Ten. on August, 2020.
[20] Ю, Чонмин. "Treading the Water for an Identity." Молодой ученый. Издательство Молодой ученый, November 16, 2020, https://moluch.ru/archive/336/74957/.
[21] Kim, German Nikolaevich. "Koryo Saram, or Koreans of the Former Soviet Union."
[22] *Ibid.*

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parliaments of the Soviet Union and the Central Asian republics," "given ministerial posts in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and were also found among the generals of the Soviet army."[23] The population of Koryoin bourgeoned in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), former Soviet Central Asian and East European countries, now standing at around 493,000, mostly in Uzbekistan, Russia, and Kazakhstan.[24]

However, while they flourished in the post-Stalin USSR and synthesized aspects of Slavic culture, Koryo Saram continued to nurture their deep attachment towards their motherland. The Korean language was known as *Koryo-mal*, which simply means the Korean language.[25] Although they learned and spoke Russian, they also consistently spoke *Koryo-mal* because they retained the long-lasting dream of returning to their home. *Koryo-mal*, however, stems from the language spoken during Joseon-era Korea—when Korea was united. In Korea, *Koryo-mal* has altered over time to the modern-day Korean language, which is different on both sides of the peninsula's border.

Koryoin also celebrated all Korean holidays such as *Seollal* (**설날**), Korean New Years and *Chuseok* (**추석**), Korean Thanksgiving. They even kept traditions for weddings and funerals, such as wearing white hanboks during funerals. However, as time passed, the traditions of Koryo Saram and modern-day Koreans diverged to a certain extent. For example, Koryo Saram wedding attires in Russia were altered to mix traditional Korean hanbok with hints of traditional Russian design.[26]

Koryo Saram culture flourished, and the Communist Party published many collections in diverse mediums, such as poetry, books, and newspapers by which the Koryo Saram maintained their unique identity and developed a strong sense of unity through the Korean language—*hanguel* (**한글**). Some significant poems include *Oseon Poetry* (1958), *October Sunlight* (1971), *Homeland of Happiness* (1988), and *The Land Where Flowers Bloom* (1988).[27] All of these publications depict Koryoin's fragile identity, the "fear and hatred of the other [Koreans]," and "preserv[ed] the culture and identity of people struggling to survive away from their homeland."[28] One of the poems, "A Leninist Song of Friendship,"[29] was written by Boris Park to emphasize Lenin's saying that Russia should maintain a good friendship with the Koreans and local indigenious people.[30] As such, Koryo Saram's internal struggles expressed through *hanguel* was their only way to "appease their souls" and "distraught with nostalgia."[31]

IV. The Hermit Kingdom's Closed Doors

The attachment to their home had an ultimate goal: return back to Korea. As such, many Koryoin rejected USSR citizenship and "opted to remain stateless."[32] To this day, many remain stateless, without legal protection from any country, placing them in a precarious liminal space, living as ghosts that are open to exploitation.

Around 50,000 Koryo Saram have repatriated to South Korea[33], but to hostile conditions that don't accept them as fully Korean. Just as they themselves blended in Russian culture and changed, Koreans have undergone rapid and dynamic shifts "in their mentality, ethnic identity, language, customs, cuisine, and even appearance."[34]

In 1989, the Soviet Communist Party's Committee created a "friendship village" following the fall of the Berlin Wall.[35] The friendship village was envisioned by the committee as an experiment to see how South Korea might act or behave should Koryo Saram be reunited with their compatriots in the Peninsula.[36] Unfortunately, the experiment was seen as a failure, as South Korean entrepreneurs highly detested working with Koryo Saram, who they believed to be lazy compared to the Koreans back home. Was this attributable to stereotypes of "impurity" or a harsh dose

[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Hong, Min-Oak. *Exploring Factors on Identity of Korean Diaspora in the CIS Countries*. KDI School of Public Policy and Management, December, 1 2020,
[25] Kim, German. "Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan : Question of Topical Problems for Minorities in Post-Soviet Space." Academia.edu, January 1, 2003, https://www.academia.edu/64002465/Korean_Diaspora_in_Kazakhstan_Question_of_Topical_Problems_for_Minorities_in_Post_Soviet_Space.
[26] New World Encyclopedia. (n.d.). *Koryo-Saram*. Koryo-saram - New World Encyclopedia. Retrieved January 23, 2022, from https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Koryo-saram
[27] Joseph, Agnel, ed. Korean Literature Now. Accessed January 11, 2022, https://www.kln.or.kr/.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] This poem was published together with the poem, "The Land Where Flowers Bloom" in the Kazakhstan Almaty, Sasutt Publishing House.
[30] World Korean Cultural Exhibition. "A Leninist Song of Friendship." **세계한민족문화대전.** Accessed January 11, 2022, http://www.okpedia.kr/Contents/ContentsView?localCode=cis&contentsId=GC95301281.
[31] Joseph, Agnel, ed. Korean Literature Now.
[32] Jeewon Min, Jewoo Lee. "Legislation on Migration, Residence, and Citizenship: Ethnic Koreans (Koryo-in) in the Former Soviet Union, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and South Korea." Migration Research and Training Centre, December 2019, https://www.mrtc.re.kr/business/business02_2.php?admin_mode=read&no=581.
[33] Kim, Byung-Hyuk. **이주 고려인의 서울 정착을 위한 대책.** The Seoul Institute, January 3, 2018, https://www.si.re.kr/sites/default/files/2018-CR-01-03_0.pdf.
[34] Ember, Melvin, Carol R. Ember, and Ian A. Skoggard. *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*. New York: Kluwer Academic Plenum Publishers, 2004.
[35] **Кожин, Сергей**. "Peace, Friendship, Projects." **МК Владивосток**, November 9, 2010, https://vlad.mk.ru/articles/2010/11/10/544673-mir-druzhba-prozhektyi.html.
[36] *Ibid.*

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of reality, as the Miracle on the Han River[37] was sparked by an intense work culture?

We will never know what went through the minds of those businessmen, but over the years, Korea has become even more constrained in its idea of nationness. Despite their effort to assimilate to the community through shared language and culture, most immigrating ethnic Koreans are considered 'aliens.' To South Koreans, the multiple generations abroad can be a marker of "tainted" blood, similar to Imperial Spain's Casta system and the perception that Peninsulars, or Europeans born in Europe, were superior to Creoles, Europeans born in the Americas.

A concept that developed after the Korean War (1950-1953) is *minjok*, defined as "one country, one people, and one language," and the term that derives from it—"*Danil Minjok,"* which means "one blood."[38] Yet, despite sharing ancestry, modern-day Koryo Saram do not quite fit in Korea's confined idea of *minjok*: people were present during Korea's modern history and grew together from the ashes of a devastating war. Furthermore, although first-generation Koryoin can be considered ethnic Koreans, the second and subsequent generations were born in Russia, with some being mix-blooded, and are therefore considered as foreigners. This is evidenced by a 2016 study, where less than half of Koreans considered North Koreans as "one of them" or "brothers," with the younger generation especially identifying less with their Northern compatriots.[39] People who have lived for decades, if not over a century, thousands of miles away fare even worse.

South Korea's unacceptance towards Koryoin tends to occur because the country has never been receptive to multiculturalism. South Koreans might be tolerant of different cultures, but that does not "translate to greater support for specific ethnic Korean groups," and Koreans still remain "hesitant to accept the notion that co-ethnics should all live in one state."[40] There are many theories as to why, but the core reason is the competitiveness of the nation. South Korea is one of the world's most densely populated countries.[41] Many Koreans believe that Korea is a strong nation because the relatively small amount of opportunities for a large number of people drives out the best in each individual, allowing the nation to be competitive despite its small size relative to other countries.[42] Most South Korean students, therefore, spend 16 hours at school and after-school academies called *hagwons*.[43] The competition for top universities is extreme, and students often describe the system as "stressful, authoritarian, brutally competitive, and meritocratic."[44] In such a dog-eat-dog world, the addition of Koryoin means more people, meaning more competition for jobs and schools, which makes it even harder for South Koreans themselves to survive in their country.

'Succeeding to make the nation a better place' has been a common saying for many Korean generations. This specific motto came into existence during the post-Korean War when South Korea was not industrialized or developed. Therefore, many senior citizens tend to assert that it is the responsibility of the future generations of Korea to brighten the future of the nation. Following that motto, younger generations became focused on their country's achievements, gradually leading them to prefer a closed, tightly-knit community. This behavior makes the Korean public tentative about accepting people who wish to settle in South Korea, a country that they themselves built and are proud of, that "Korea was born to life exclusively by the work of Koreans and no one else"[45]; any foreigner is then seen as simply reaping the benefits of Korean blood, sweat, and tears. This social unacceptance extends even to Koryoin who already reside in South Korea, who are "othered," heavily discriminated against, and can only work menial labor[46].

The Korean public's hesitancy causes the government to promote stricter immigration laws and programs, making adjustment to life in Korea even more difficult for Koryo Saram. Accordingly, although some ethnic Koreans received visa privileges to reside in the country, most visas do not last long because policies keep changing over the years.[47] First and second generation Koryo Saram have gained citizenship and visas, but South Korea has stiffened its policies toward the third and fourth generations; fourth generationers are not guaranteed to receive citizenship, even if their parents are Korean.

[37] The Miracle of Han River refers to the period when South Korea achieved rapid economic growth after the Korean War. This is when South Korea transformed from a developing to a developed country.

[38] Ю, Чонмин. "Treading the Water for an Identity." Молодой ученый. Издательство Молодой ученый, November 16, 2020, https://moluch.ru/archive/336/74957/.

[39] Denney, Steven. "South Korean Identity: The Return of Ethnic Exclusivism?" *Sino NK*, October 30, 2016, https://sinonk.com/2016/10/28/south-korean-identity-the-return-of-ethnic-exclusivism/.

[40] Rich, Timothy S. "What Influences South Korean Perceptions on Immigration?" The Diplomat, October 5, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/what-influences-south-korean-perceptions-on-immigration/.

[41] World Population Review. "South Korea Population 2021 (Live)." South Korea Population 2021 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs), 2021, https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/south-korea-population.

[42] "Education in South Korea." WENR, July 16, 2021, https://wenr.wes.org/2018/10/education-in-south-korea.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] Ko, Jun-tae. "I'm Korean, You're Not, and There's a Fine Line You Can't Cross." Stanford University Freeman Spogli Institute, Sept. 22, 2021, https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/us-and-them-i%E2%80%99m-korean-you%E2%80%99re-not-and-there%E2%80%99s-fine-line-you-can%E2%80%99t-cross.

[46] Jo, Mi-Jeong. "Koryo Saram in South Korea: 'Korean' but Struggling to Fit In." Korea Expose, July 17, 2018, https://www.koreaexpose.com/koryo-saram-from-central-asia-and-russia-struggle-in-south-korea/.

[47] Jeewon Min, Jewoo Lee. "Legislation on Migration, Residence, and Citizenship."

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Nevertheless, the Korean government, to a certain extent, has put in the effort to modify some of its existing immigration policies to help ethnic Koreans through more flexibility within specific policies. For example, in mid-2019, an amendment was made by removing some restrictions and allowing "lineal descendants" to be "entitled to the status of overseas Koreans regardless of generation."[48] However, ethnic Koreans who are stateless have "not been considered de jure 'overseas Koreans.'"[49] Therefore, "they are not eligible for an Overseas Visa (F-4) or a Working Visa (H-2)," which means that they are not allowed to apply for Korean citizenship either.[50]

V. A Place to Call Home

Things aren't much better in former Soviet countries, and Koryo Saram are like stray dogs, facing discrimination in both Russia and Korea. Almost 80% of the individuals who took a public survey conducted in 2020[51] claimed that they faced discrimination from Russia and Korea, with 60% of the discrimination due to their lack of distinct national identity. Some of the experiences were caused by their appearances. In Russia, Koryo Saram were often called **Узкоглазая** ("narrowed-eyes"), and *nerus* ("non-Russian").[52] In Korea, Koreans glared at them for no reason, and despite their fluency in Korean language, Koreans continued to treat them as foreigners.

Take Yu Sasha as an example. Yu Sasha is a 10th grader and 4th generation Koryo Saram interviewed on a YouTube channel called Korea Expose.[53] In the interview, Yu Sasha wondered why citizenship or residency is not provided to the 4th generation; he asserts that he is "also a Koryo Saram, so it feels like discrimination" as only up to the 3rd generation is considered as Korean.[54] In spite of this discrimination, Yu Sasha, along with the majority of the those who answered the public survey, say that their hearts belong to Korea.[55]

It is ironic that Koryoin face the most discrimination in the two communities in which they are supposed to feel most welcome. It seems that they are lost, neither here nor there. So what should they identify as? When the USSR collapsed in 1991, Koryo Saram were able to rally again to build their national identity: some as Russians, some as Koryo Saram, but mostly as Koreans. Even with this opportunity, however, they could not settle in a specific identity group, as a result of their complicated and long immigration history.

Various social theories can be applied to the Koryo Saram situation. Sociologists have pointed out that ethnicity can be seen in different ways: primordialism, which stresses common blood, history, and territory;[56] constructivism, which stresses common myths, group identity, and solidarity;[57] and instrumentalism, which combines primordialism and constructivism to argue that groups can choose the ethnicity that benefits them the most.[58]

With these ideas in mind, Koryo Saram can potentially fit into all of them, but simultaneously none of them as well. The first generation of Koryo Saram can fit into the category of primordialism since they have common ancestry, history, and country of origin with modern Koreans. However, as generations go on, they tend to share a mix of Russian and Korean blood and/or culture and history, and primordialism does not capture this synthesis. As for constructivism, Koryoin still share common myths like Jeosung Saja who are the Grim Reapers that Koreans believe to be afterlife messengers, but group identity and solidarity are not quite aligned.[59] Instrumentalism is perhaps most fitting for these stateless peoples, though they currently are constrained in acquiring citizenship in Korea.

Another social scientist, Robin Cohen, identifies the ethnic idea of homeland through solid, ductile, and liquid forms.[60] While solid indicates native land and origin, ductile refers to a place that triggers a sense of belonging. Lastly, liquid means the desire for a home. Intriguingly, once again, the Koryo Saram fall into all but none of them. In fact, it is quite ironic that they consider Korea as their origin yet the country rejects them and they simultaneously feel a sense of belonging and

[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] This public survey was taken through Google Forms, which was posted on multiple social media platforms such as facebook, *Vkontakte.ru, and Odnoklassniki*, specifically to Koryo Saram communities. This public survey was collected by myself and Professor **Екатерина Рыбакова**, a professor at Saint Petersburg University. The form had over 52 responses.
[52] **Ю, Чонмин**. "Treading the Water for an Identity." **Молодой ученый**. **Издательство Молодой ученый**, November 16, 2020. https://moluch.ru/archive/336/74957/.
[53] KoreaExpose. "Koryo Saram: 4th Generation Redefines Korean 'Roots'." YouTube, September 21, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eh8IMNhqbLE.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] 'Korea Expose' has been running a YouTube channel since 2014 along with its website, which all mainly focus on showing Korea through different media: essays, videos, podcasts, and documentaries.
[56] "Primordialism." Wikimedia, December 18, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primordialism.
[57] McLeod, Saul. "Constructivism as a Theory for Teaching and Learning." Simply Psychology, January 1, 1970, https://www.simplypsychology.org/constructivism.html.
[58] Guadeloupe, Francio, and Yvon van der Pijl. "Imagining the Nation in the Classroom: Belonging and Nationness in the Dutch Caribbean." European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, March 22, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/11586741/Imagining_the_Nation_in_the_Classroom_Belonging_and_Nationness_in_the_Dutch_Caribbean.
[59] YoonSsam. "8 Interesting Korean Myths." uBitto Blog, January 9, 2020, https://blog.ubitto.com/culture/8-interesting-korean-myths/.
[60] Cohen, Robin. "Solid, Ductile and Liquid: Changing Notions of Homeland and Home in Diaspora Studies" QEH Working Paper Series, 2008, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6759343.pdf.

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detachment. Furthermore, even if they desire for a home, their decisions and desires are relatively irrelevant and weak compared to those in Korea and Russia, who have the power to accept or deny them.

Since the Koryo Saram left Korea so long ago, it now seems, for both the Koryo Saram and Koreans, as if they are close yet distant from each other, the degree to which these two co-exist depending on the generation. But it is clear that what Koryo Saram in general believed to be a continued and firm nationality has, in fact, diminished long before the Korean War occurred, long before what they call United Korea collapsed, and long before North and South Korea began to live in completely binary environments. The "linguistic, cultural, and psychological distance" between modern South Koreans and Koryo Saram has elongated over a long time, making it harder for the Korean community to willingly accept Koryo Saram and for Koryo Saram to seamlessly adapt into Korean society.[61]

Natsuko Oka, an ethnicity and nationalism scholar with expertise in Khazantan, states that "after more than fifteen years of contact with their South Korean compatriots, the Koreans in Kazakhstan (Koryo Saram) have realized that they have a different culture and mindset."[62] In addition, her study asserts that "some of the attitudes of South Koreans caused negative reactions among the minority."[63] Therefore, even if Koryo Saram were granted citizenship, the citizenship would be meaningless; citizenship will provide a legal identity but will not guarantee them a personal identity and sense of belonging.

VI. Forging a Unique Identity

Though many Koryoin, especially the fourth generation, question the morality of Korea's behavior, they still unwaveringly believe in their Korean identity. To the Koryo Saram, they and the Koreans are still firmly rooted and attached to the same tree, which gives them a straggling branch of hope—that one day they will be treated equally not as foreigners but as Koreans.

This internal feeling of unity that people feel towards the nation, or what political scientist Benedict Anderson calls the "interiorized feeling of (nation)-ness," propels Koryo Saram to seek their motherland like an unrequited lover.[64] In this sense, Koryo Saram exhibits "self-sacrificing love" and "the cultural products of nationalism show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles".[65]

In the modern era, Koryo Saram have effectively utilized newly available mass media social platforms to express their nationalism. Well-known communities exist on Facebook and on two Russian networks, *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki*. On Facebook, many Koryo Saram have formed small communities, such as *Ansong Neri Korea For All*, and *Koryo-Saram Research Network*. Though small, members are highly active. For example, *Koryo-Saram or Koreans of the CIS* is a public group of Koryo Saram with around 22,000 members[66] that welcomes anyone interested in Korean and Russian culture; they do not necessarily have to be Koryoin, Korean, or Russian. It is an open forum that updates recent information about the Koryo Saram community and upcoming events held in other Korean or Russian organizations. Youtube is also a popular medium. *VEKS* is a channel that introduces content based on the history and culture of the Koreans of the CIS, and showcases documentaries on different diasporic Koreans and biographical sketches produced by South Korean journalists and social scientists.[67] "*Koryo*"-*Interactive Kore-saram community* is an all-inclusive social media branch of the website called *Koryo Hope* with around 13,000 members[68] that focuses on Korean diasporas all over the world and makes effective use of modern technology by branching out to larger platforms like Facebook and *Odnoklassniki.ru*. These social media platforms have allowed Korya Saram communities in Russia and abroad to speak for their identity and create safe, inclusive borderless enclaves where Koroyin can freely discuss issues and inform people about their unique history and culture.

While these communities connect Koryo Saram from countries all over the world, there are distinct platforms in both Russia and Korea that serve a much smaller, tighter-knit community of Koryo Saram. On *Vkontakte.ru*, a widely used Russian social media platform similar to Facebook, Koryoin gathered to create a "virtual enclave" that serves the group's central belief that "wherever [they] lie, no matter how long [they] part, despite the time and borders, [they] remain one people."[69] This shows their understanding of their identity as Koryo Saram, who they believe have "one root, one ancestor, one story."[70] This open group aims

[61] Oka, Natsuko. "The 'Triadic Nexus' in Kazakhstan: A Comparative Study of Russians, Uighurs, and Koreans." Semantic Scholar, 2006, https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no9_ses/19_oka.pdf.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] O'G, Anderson Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991., 146
[65] *Ibid.*

[66] https://www.facebook.com/groups/108681204241
[67] Similarly, *"Ansong Neri Korean for All"* is a Facebook community, which is also open for anyone interested in the Koryo Saram. However, compared to *Koryo-Saram or Koreans of the CIS, Ansong Neri Korean For All* has much fewer members. It functions more like a free group that allows the people to post anything interesting rather than strictly focusing on the culture and stories of the Koryo Saram.
[68] https://www.facebook.com/groups/koredo.
[69] "Russian Koreans – Корейцы СНГ – 고려사람." VK. Accessed January 9, 2022, https://vk.com/koryosaram.
[70] *Ibid.*

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to preserve Koryoin identity and values through story-sharing.[71]

Similar to Russian platforms, Korea itself has a few Koryoin-focused and -led social media groups. *Numeo,* for example, is a Korean organization that has been actively helping the Koryo Saram since 2011.[72] *Numeo* mainly focuses on cultural aspects such as language, traditions, and socialization. Since Koryo Saram that are the most active on the internet are teenagers or young children, *Numeo* takes a pedagogical approach by teaching these demographics essential skills and knowledge related to their background, so that the next generations don't lose these pieces of their history and themselves.

A more formal approach is *Koryo Ilbo*, an online publication created by a partnership between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea, as they both recognize the importance of multiple perspectives. The site serves as an information hub, translating and broadcasting current news, informing people about the two countries, and notifying readers about the economic and cultural programs active in both communities. The most innovative aspect of the site is that it translates Russian news into Korean and Korean to Russian, which broadens its reach.

These are just a few of countless active communities trying to spread the identity of Koryo Saram, which has largely branched out from the internal feeling of belonging and nation-ness. When looking closely at the behaviors and patriotic attachment of the Koryo Saram, it is clear that they still hold a deep love for their roots, the country, culture, language and the people. Generations after Gregory Kim, the yearnful yodeling continues to reverberate in cyberspace.

VII. Lessons from Israel

While so much effort has been put in by the Koryo Saram, no significant changes have been made to improve their lives. Many still do not have Korean citizenship or any legal status in a specific country. Although challenging, devising a compromise acceptable to both Koryoin and Korea can be met.

Israel was able to handle a similar situation by assessing the issue from multiple perspectives and taking approaches that did not harm either their citizens or the ethnic Jewish applying for citizenship. Otherwise known as the Jewish Diaspora, the Jews were dispersed outside of their ancestral homeland, Israel, for over two thousand years. However, in 1950, Israel passed The Law of Return, a policy whereby the State of Israel granted immediate citizenship to overseas Jews if they "simply show up and request to be Israeli citizens."[73] This was a historic step taken because the law was passed unanimously by Israel's Parliament. David Ben-Gurion, the prime minister of Israel, stated that this law reaffirmed the right that Jews already retained because the "connection between the Jewish people and the homeland"[74] had never been broken. Because of this strong connection, wherever they were from and however long they were apart, Jews were permitted to settle back in Israel.

In 1970, Israel permitted citizenship to even non-Jewish people who had Jewish parents or even grandparents, which made Israel a haven and the homeland of the Jewish people and their descendants. In this sense, the Act is a metaphorical monolith of a solidified Jewish identity worldwide, that all Jews are the same people and can go back to their home whenever they want. Furthermore, by establishing a legal avenue for ethnic Jews to settle in a country, the Act gives access to fundamental human rights such as the right to work, health insurance, and education.

Israel's actions can serve as examples to South Korea, which has been slow to implement accommodative policies to help those who once shared the same history and blood. South Korea does not provide any more citizenship to Koryo Saram and the granting of visas has dropped significantly low as well—even to those who have parents with Korean citizenship. Legislation like the Law of Return may be challenging in Korea because the country is still unfamiliar with accepting immigrants or the ideology of multiculturalism. However, although enacting similar policies would be a difficult step for South Korea, doing nothing would be worse than taking the risk—it would still be a step forward for South Korea and the Koryo Saram, who have constantly been fighting for somewhere to belong. If Korea can progressively work towards inclusion, it can, like Israel, act as a beacon for anyone with Korean blood and truly illustrate to the world that Koreans, too, are a strong, unified peoples, a pride that Jews around the world share.

VIII. Conclusion

Happening to be born American, Chinese, Korean, or French is rather arbitrary or unchosen. None of the seven billion people worldwide chose to become *something-an* or *something-ese*. However, things are slightly different when we deal with the term 'nation-ness.' Nation-ness is a cultural and political concept that ties people with a nation through a sense of belonging,

[71] *Odnoklassniki.ru* is very similar to *Vkontakte.ru-- also a Russian platform. Odnoklassniki.ru* is a less commonly used media in Russia as it has existed for a long time. Just like *Vkontakte.ru*, *Odnoklassniki.ru* has a Koryo Saram group which is open to anyone interested in the history and culture of the multifaceted ethnic group.

[72] Numeo. Koryoin Assistance Center. Accessed January 9, 2022, http://www.jamir.or.kr/main/main.php.

[73] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, trans. "The Law of Return." The Jewish Agency For Israel. Accessed January 9, 2022, https://archive.jewishagency.org/first-steps/program/5131.

[74] "Law of Return." Wikipedia, January 8, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_Return.

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shared identities, and citizenships.[75] Therefore, people essentially have the control over where they feel a sense of nation-ness. However, Anderson in *Imagined Communities* states that "nation-ness is assimilated to skin color, gender, parentage and birth era - all those things one can not help".[76] Anderson's assertion reveals a sobering truth: modern people progressively developed a fixed image of 'nation-ness' or nationalism as rooted in the visible and unchosen factors. If a group of people does not possess all of those natural characteristics, then they may encounter a wall of unacceptance and discrimination even in places where they truly believe they belong: the homelands where their race or place of birth might not be traced, but where their hearts reside.

Koryoin, despite generations away from their physical homelands, retain a strong sense of Korean-ness; that notion is where their hearts are. Yet, the Koreans hold different definitions of Korean-ness, and these conflicting perceptions between Koreans and Koryo Saram seem like magnets of the same pole: essentially the same, but can never unite.

To solve this problem of identity, citizenship, and belonging, Koyro Saram and Koreans first have to pause from incessantly striving for their own goals. In order to reach the same page and the same starting point of understanding, the Koryo Saram and Koreans must focus on untangling the firmly tangled knot of problems that is growing till this day. Reaching the same page means that both parties must have the same general outlook on the issue at hand. To do that, Korea must be more specific in their definitions and policies, and provide more legal protection of the Koryo Saram, perhaps a special visa with provisions like Israel's Law of Return. On the other hand, the Koryo Saram must understand that the Koryo Saram and South Koreans are not the same people anymore, and that they may never receive full citizenship.

Gregory soulfully belted out the words of the Arirang, a traditional folk song that has become the de-facto national anthem and popular even in current-day North Korea. The lyrics express that two star-crossed lovers are separated and distraught, without any real conclusion as to whether they would meet again. Gregory most likely never got to see his family again nor the country he desperately cried out for, but Koryo Saram can be reconciled with their "beloved one,"[77] no matter how she has changed.

[75] Guadeloupe, Francio, and Yvon van der Pijl. "Imagining the Nation in the Classroom: Belonging and Nationness in the Dutch Caribbean."
[76] O'G, Anderson Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991., 147
[77] Arirang roughly translates to "beloved one"

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