

# The Koryo-Saram of Kazakhstan: an example of soft power and identity building ?

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## Abstract

The increased global popularity of Korean cultural products (“the Korean Wave”), has the potential to influence and reshape the Korean identity amongst Korean diaspora members worldwide. The subject matter of this research is the Korean diaspora living in Kazakhstan, and the impact of Korean movies as soft power resources on their diasporic identity and ethnic consciousness. Even though the assimilation process into the Russified society could not be overcome, the Korean diaspora managed to preserve their culture to a certain extent in this post-Soviet country. This qualitative analysis of 30 online surveys and 4 interviews shows that Korean movies are popular amongst the Koreans of Kazakhstan, and half of the participants indicate that Korean movies affected and reinforced their ethnic identity. By applying Cohen’s (2004) framework on diasporic identities, it becomes clear that the Korean diaspora considers themselves Korean by culture or by birth. The Korean wave contributes to a positive perception of Korean society, as most respondents showed an increased interest in other Korean cultural elements, learning the Korean language or visiting Korea.

De toegenomen wereldwijde populariteit van Koreaanse culturele producten (“de Koreaanse golf”), heeft het potentieel om de Koreaanse identiteit onder Koreaanse diaspora leden wereldwijd te beïnvloeden en opnieuw vorm te geven. Het onderwerp van dit onderzoek is de Koreaanse diaspora in Kazachstan, en de impact van Koreaanse films als “soft power” middelen op hun diasporische identiteit en etnisch bewustzijn. Hoewel het assimilatieproces in de gerussificeerde samenleving niet kon worden overwonnen, slaagde de Koreaanse diaspora erin haar cultuur tot op zekere hoogte te bewaren in dit post-Sovjetland. Deze kwalitatieve analyse van 30 online enquêtes en 4 interviews toont aan dat Koreaanse films populair zijn bij de Koreanen van Kazachstan, en de helft van de deelnemers geven aan dat Koreaanse films hun etnische identiteit beïnvloed en versterkt heeft. Door het theoretisch kader van Cohen (2004) over diasporische identiteiten toe te passen, wordt duidelijk dat de Koreaanse diaspora zichzelf Koreaans beschouwt omwille van bepaalde culturele aspecten of door geboorte. De Koreaanse golf draagt bij tot een positieve perceptie van de Koreaanse samenleving; de meeste respondenten toonden immers een toegenomen belangstelling voor andere Koreaanse culturele elementen, voor het leren van de Koreaanse taal of voor een bezoek aan Korea.

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# Introduction

The Korean Wave reached millions of fans globally since the beginning of the 1990s. This increased global popularity of Korean cultural products was an excellent opportunity for the Korean government to gain popularity abroad, attract tourism and counter negative sentiments towards their country. At the same time, this Korean Wave was also meaningful for many Koreans living abroad, as it was a chance for them to reconnect with their Korean roots, revive their Korean language and culture, and perhaps even feel proud of their origins and the popularity of these cultural products worldwide. This master thesis will not delve deeper into the material benefit of the Korean Wave, but it will rather ask the question what this Korean Wave meant for Korean societies outside of Korea and how it affected their emotional attitude towards their ethnic identity.

More specifically, this research will deal with the Korean diaspora living in Kazakhstan. The unusual choice for studying a Korean diaspora in a post-Soviet country is a deliberate one, not at least because they share a fascinating and unique history, but also because their place of residence in the world affects the way South Korea is viewing and treating them. South Korea, the historical homeland for this diaspora, wants to create a strong and wealthy diaspora abroad, mainly to receive reciprocal obligations from the respective states and diaspora members. Understanding what Korea mainly wants in and from the region, is crucial to understand the diasporal outreach policies of the Korean government.

Half a million ethnic Koreans live nowadays in the former Soviet Union. These Koreans are referred to as 'The Koryo-Saram'. Koryo refers to Korea, and Saram means person, thus 'the people of Korea'. Some other terms that are used nowadays are 'Goryoin' or 'Russian Koreans'. (Lee, J.H. 2021) According to the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on statistics, there are approximately 108,551 Koreans living in Kazakhstan. Only two other countries of the former Soviet Union have a larger Korean diaspora living in their territories, which are Uzbekistan and Russia with respectively 177 000 and 153 000 ethnic Koreans. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021). These Soviet Koreans were brutally mistreated by the Soviet authorities, as many of them were deported to abandoned areas in the Soviet Union under Stalin's regime of ethnic cleansing. This collective memory of trauma and deportations, led to the creation of a unique group of ethnic Koreans in Central-Asia.

After its independence, Kazakhstan became a multi-ethnic and multicultural state, in which the Koryo-Saram was and is the tenth largest ethnic group in the country. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the following Kazakh independence did not lead to a massive cultural revival of many ethnic minorities living in Kazakhstan. This is because the new leadership of the independent Kazakh state started to push for nationalization policies, in which Kazakhs were considered the titular people and a Kazakh mentality was promoted. Even though Kazakhstan was advocating for multiculturalism on the surface, Kazakh culture and customs have become dominant in the country. (Khazanov 1995)

According to some researchers (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021; Yem, 2018), Koreans worldwide share some common characteristics. Usually, Korean diasporas are well accepted into their host countries, not only by the authorities, but also by the local population. Koreans are

viewed as exemplary, law-abiding, hard-working people, who are usually highly academic qualified and have financial capital. The members of this diaspora become renowned figures in various fields, such as politics and business. Moreover, unlike other Asian diasporas, Korean communities and diasporas have shown high levels of adaptability in their new places of residence, to new ecological, economic and socio-cultural conditions. (Kim, 2003). This all leads to the conclusion that Koreans are seen as the 'model' ethnic minority in many foreign countries, but also in Kazakhstan.

Gans (1979) claims that there is tendency amongst migrants to merge into their host societies and eventually assimilate with the mainstream culture prevalent in their host country. Two or three generations later, only a symbolic ethnicity remains: these migrants usually do not feel much attachment to their homeland anymore, and only a limited knowledge remains on their ancestry and certain traditions. For the country of origin, there are many benefits to keep the connection and ties with the diaspora community strong, often for economic reasons. In this case as well, South Korea is trying to strengthen the diaspora in Kazakhstan, and their self-understanding as being a member of the diaspora group, instead of being part of the country of origin or residence. (Naujoks, 2010). Moreover, the way the South Korean government is treating its diaspora members abroad, is also often considered as a model for many other countries. The Korean diaspora policies contribute to the development of migration and diaspora policies in other countries.(Yem, 2018)

This master thesis is a study centered around the characteristics of the Korean diaspora living in Kazakhstan and the influence of certain South-Korean soft power resources on the diasporic identity of the Koreans of Kazakhstan. This research thus aims at measuring the ethnic or diasporic identity of this group of Koreans, and finding out to what extent they still feel connected to their historical homeland, speak the Korean language and adhere to certain Korean traditions. Moreover, the study is conducted through a soft power paradigm, namely through the specific lens of Korean movies, in order to establish how these movies influenced or re-shaped the ethnic identities of these Koreans.

This master thesis will deal with the following research question: **What is the impact of South-Korean movies, as sources of Korean Soft Power, on the diasporic identity of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan?**

The study is not limited to an analysis of the consumption of Korean movies, but it goes one step further in seeking the answer to the question whether this consumption serves as a stimulus for the Korean diaspora to reflect upon their identity. Answers are sought on four subquestions, namely: **What are some of the cognitive or affective elements that the Koreans of Kazakhstan associate their ethnic identity with? Are Korean movies popular amongst the Koreans of Kazakhstan? To what extent does the Korean diaspora interpret Korean movies in relation to their Korean ethnic identity and does it reinforce feelings of 'ethnic belonging' ? How does watching Korean movies transform their perception of the historical homeland, and South-Korean society in general?**

The analytical framework of Cohen (2004) on diasporic identities will serve as the theoretical foundation of this research. His work offers a theory-based tool for researchers to analyze ethnic identities and to study cognitive and affective attitudes towards ethnic identities.

Furthermore, the work of Hoh Youn Koh and Kyungmin Baek (2020) also served as a major inspiration for this research. In their study, the Korean Wave is considered a cultural trend that has the transformative power of re-shaping Korean identity amongst young Korean diaspora members. Instead of focusing on music, this study will look at the transformative power of movies.

For this research, fieldwork was conducted in march and april 2022 in the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan. The researcher chose to use surveys which included close-ended and open-ended questions and conduct some additional semi-structured interviews. The surveys were distributed in the Korean Cultural Center and in various facebook groups such as the Корё-сарам или корейцы СНГ (koresaram) or the Koryo saram research network group, in which Koreans of all ages and regions could participate. Eventually, 30 participants filled in the survey. The research participants were asked if they were interested in participating in an additional interview, to which only four people agreed. These semi-structured interviews were useful in deepening the interpretation of the results obtained by the questionnaire.

This master thesis seeks to contribute to the field of diaspora and identity studies in a Central-Asian context. Every tenth inhabitant of the country is a non-Kazakh or non-Russian citizen. As a result, it is politically relevant to gain a deeper understanding of the different ethnic groups living together in Kazakhstan and conduct more qualitative studies of individual ethnic groups. Much can still be explored regarding Kazakhstan's multiethnicity and multi-ethnic civil model. (De Cordier, Eschment, 2021) As is known, ethnicity plays a large role in dozens of conflicts around the globe, and it thus should be a matter of growing concern. (Cohen, 2004)

In the period 1985–1995, it was expected that the multi-ethnic Kazakh Soviet Republic would face some serious ethnic conflicts caused by the decline of the Soviet Union. However, this did not happen in Kazakhstan, and many people would argue that the multi-ethnic civic model as proposed by the Kazakh state, was a success. (De Cordier, Eschment, 2021) Furthermore, some researchers have argued that Koreans are often viewed as ethnic minority models in many foreign countries. Moreover, the Korean diaspora policies have been seen as the basis of many diaspora policies worldwide and thus it seems very relevant to analyze this case-study of the Korean diaspora living in Kazakhstan. This thesis aims at bringing a 'positive' story of successful ethnic integration.

Finally, this research has current value, due to the recent popularity of Korean movies and Korean pop-culture abroad. It is useful to study South-Korea's nation branding through movies, to better understand the dynamics of South Korea's soft power in a post-Soviet country like Kazakhstan, with a large Korean diaspora (Lee, S.T., 2021).

The body of this thesis is organized as follows: the first chapter will consist of an introduction to the Koryo-Saram in Kazakhstan. An historical background will be provided, followed by a glimpse on the Koreans in Kazakhstan today and their relation to the historical homeland. Next, there will be a chapter dedicated to the Korean cultural products that reached Kazakhstan, followed by an analysis of the Korean diaspora policies and Kazakh initiatives to support the Koryo-Saram. The next two chapters will be dedicated to a literature study, as well as the conceptual framework or theoretical basis for this research. Finally, the results of

the fieldwork will be presented, followed by some remarks and suggestions for further research and a final conclusion.

# An introduction to the Koryo-Saram in Kazakhstan

## 1. Historical background

The Koreans of Kazakhstan share a turbulent history: in the mid-nineteenth century, during Joseon Era in Korea, many Koreans decided to leave Korea to escape poverty, corruption, famine and Japanese oppression. They settled in the Russian Far East, which was almost uninhabited at the time. The Russian state offered at that time various incentives to ethnic Russians to encourage them to move east. However, due to a lack of willingness amongst the Russian population, the Koreans settlers were welcomed in their place in the region. The geographical proximity and availability of farmland pulled these Koreans towards Russia. These Koreans were generally strongly opposed to the Japanese, who were considered the invaders of their homeland, and they supported the Korean independence fighters for the liberation of Korea. (Kim, 2003)

The Koreans' daily life, social relations, ethnic culture, and language remained almost exactly the same as in Korea, since they lived in separate villages. In fact, Korean culture even flourished, as a group of Korean national intelligentsia had formed and Korean radio, theater, educational, and cultural institutions were established. The rural areas consisted of dozens of Korean agricultural and fishing kolkhozes. At the same time, Koreans were Sovietized, as many young Koreans studied at Russian universities and many Koreans were involved in various government and social organizations. (Kim, 2003) Many Koreans adopted a socialist ideology. After the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian civil war broke out. As a result, Japan invaded the Russian Far East to support White Russian forces against the Bolshevik Red Army. Many Korean partisan groups entered Russia to fight against Japan, and the Koreans who were already living in the Far East joined the Red Army to support the Bolshevik regime. The Bolshevik regime acknowledged that the support of the Koreans would be beneficial to defeat the Japanese troops and gave their support. After the Japanese eventually declared their military victory in Siberia, the Soviets had to recognize the Japanese power in the Far East. As a result, the Soviets also felt obliged to disarm the Korean activist groups after 1922, in order not to stand in the way of the Japanese. At the same time, the Soviets feared that their political and military grip on the Far East was decreased and they were concerned about the potential influence that the Japanese could have over the Koreans. (Lee, 2012)

When Stalin eventually came to power in 1924, he feared all groups of people who could possibly gather around a common cause or grievance to oppose him. The Koreans were one of the first groups that were perceived by Stalin as a threat, and they became victims of one of the numerous resettlement programs for national minorities in Soviet times. (McNeill, 2012)

In 1937, 180 000 Koreans were deported to Central Asia under Stalin's regime of ethnic cleansing, followed by dozens of other peoples of the Soviet Union, such as Germans,



Kurds, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Chechens. Despite the Koreans' support for the Russian and the Bolshevik cause and their hatred towards the Japanese, these Koreans were accused of spying for Japan. (Hwang, 2019) In the eyes of Russia, the Koreans were considered Asians in the first place, difficult to distinguish from the Chinese and Japanese. The fact that they could preserve their own culture and gather around a common Korean cause, was unsettling to the Russians. Moreover, the Soviet state believed that the growing aspirations of these ethnic Koreans were of such an extent that they had a desire to unite the Far Eastern territories and create an autonomous Korean national district. (Kim, 2021) As a result, they were considered as being unreliable in defending the border areas and thus they had to resettle. (McNeill, 2012)

Besides being deported to Uzbekistan, 70 000 Koreans were also resettled to an unpopulated area of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic to work on collective farms and cultivate rice, onion, garlic and other vegetables.(Markova, 2021) Many died during this journey, and starvation and illness were very common during the first months of the resettlement. (Ahn, 2019) The Koreans were dispersed between 44 different regions, but the main settlement in Kazakhstan was the Kyzylorda region in south-central Kazakhstan. (Oka, n.d.)



Image 1: in Spassk, 35 km south of Karaganda in Kazakhstan, the Korean victims of political repression are commemorated

According to the historian Valery Khan, the work ethic and high productivity of the Koreans on the agricultural fields gained respect of the local population. (Khan, 2015) For example, they managed to dry up the swamps, develop the steppes into productive lands on which new types of wheat and rice could be grown from the grains they had brought with them from the Russian Far East. The Koreans also produced a large amount of jute. All in all, they were highly praised by the Soviet leadership, and were even awarded various prizes and medals. (Kim, 2021) However, the Soviet authorities did not allow these Koreans to travel outside of some restricted areas and provinces. Furthermore, the Koreans could not study at a university or serve in the army. (Khan, 2015) When Stalin died in 1953, some freedom of movement was installed but only in the late 1980s during the perestroika era, the Koreans were granted a full restoration of their national rights and acknowledgement of their history and it led to some extent to the revival of the Korean language, culture, and art. (Lee, J. H. 2021)

However, during these fifty years in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and even long after that, the Koreans were primarily obliged to assimilate in the Russified society, much more than was the case in the Russian Far East. (McNeill, 2012). According to Huttenbach there were various reasons as to why this assimilation process dramatically increased in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic: there were high urbanization rates, many intermarriages between Koreans and Russian or Kazakh people, Koreans received a Russian first name since the Russians could not remember Korean first names and the education was only offered in Russian. Furthermore, professional mobility, a lack of a central settlement of ethnic Koreans, a lack of recent immigrants from Korea, and the remoteness from Korea also contributed to the assimilation process. (1993) By the 1970s, the use of the Korean language started to diminish. (McNeill, 2012) The deportation to Central Asia, had led to the erosion of historical identity and ethnic group fragmentation. (Kim & Kim, 2020) These Koreans became primarily Soviet people and had a weaker attachment to their homeland than other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

After the USSR collapsed, national policies drastically had to be readjusted in the former Soviet republics. The Soviet Union was in fact a grand multi-ethnic project, consisting not only of historically settled people but also of many national minorities that were deported during the stalinist era, and now various ethnic issues had to be regulated. Many ethnicities began to 'reclaim' their roots and strive for cultural reproduction. (Markova, 2021)

Ethnic minority groups such as the Germans or Turks returned from Kazakhstan back to their homeland. This was not the case for the Koreans. The ethnic Koreans were so adapted to life and customs in Kazakhstan that they felt like strangers in Korea. (Oh, 2007) They did not feel any nostalgia to return back to their historical homeland. Moreover, unlike Germany, Russia or Poland, South-Korea was not interested in repatriating their ethnic population from Central Asia after 1991, as they were mainly focused on Korean diaspora's from the Western countries. They believed that these Westernized Koreans with high skills and Western education could help to rebuild the Korean economy after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Immigrants from post-communist countries were not so welcomed in capitalist South Korea, as the Korean government feared for a massive flow of immigrants. (Oh, Zholomatova, 2021)

As mentioned in the introduction, it was assumed that in the period 1985–1995, the multi-ethnic Kazakh Soviet Republic consisting of more than 130 different ethnicities, would face some serious ethnic conflicts caused by the decline of the Soviet Union. However, this did not happen in Kazakhstan, due to the multi-ethnic civic model proposed by the Kazakh state and deliberate policies in the sphere of interethnic relations. (De Cordier, Eschment, 2021)

Issues of national identity and nation building became a top priority for the newly formed Kazakh state. The country inherited a complex soviet legacy: Kazakhstan consists of a large Russian ethnic minority, as well as several other ethnic groups that were either deported during the Stalinist era or that had moved there during the Virgin Lands campaign in the 1950s or 1960s, a program to boost the Soviet Union's agricultural production.

In the early 1990s, the newly established leadership in Kazakhstan under the former president Nazerbayev tried to provide an answer to these challenges, by adopting a dual approach regarding 'identity'. On the one hand, they promoted an ethnic Kazakh identity for the Kazakh population and, simultaneously, a civic Kazakhstani identity for all citizens regardless of ethnicity. Kazakhstan had to become the home of Kazakhs and Kazakhstani alike. (Eschment, 2020)

So firstly, the newly established Kazakh state started to push for a process of 'Kazakhization', to promote an ethnic Kazakh identity. The idea was that Kazakhstan was established on indigenous Kazakh soil and that Kazakhstan the ethnic heartland of the Kazakh people is. The Kazakhs do not have any other country in the world to live in. (Eschment, 2020) Many researchers claim that the countries in Central-Asia became nationalizing states, meaning that processes of ethnicization (in this case, Kazakhisation) were carried out by designing the institutions and policies to defend the interests of a titular ethnic group. The Kazakhs would be considered the titular people in the titular nation Kazakhstan. This gives the Kazakh people advantages or privileges compared to other national minorities or diasporas. (Kim, 2003) Many streets and cities were renamed and local languages (Kazakh) and cultures were promoted. A state-sponsored return of the Kazakh diaspora in the 1990s, also led to the resettlement of one million so-called oralman (i.e. returnees) in Kazakhstan. And partly as a result of this policy, the state and society have become ethnically more Kazakh (going from 40% in 1989 to 68.5% in 2020).

At the same time, a multiethnic civic identity was promoted (a Kazakhstani identity), based on citizenship of the country. This identity is offered to all citizens of all ethnicities, and it grants them equal constitutional rights and protects them from discrimination.(Eschment, 2020) This was to ensure internal cohesion and stability, and reduce the risks of potential ethnic conflicts. Different ethnic groups were also free to rediscover their own history, culture and language. To ensure the development of interethnic relations, the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan was founded in 1995. In this national political body, representatives of all the country's ethnic communities are seated and its task is to represent the various ethnic groups that make up Kazakhstan at national level (Eschment, 2020).

It is still very much open to debate whether this multi-ethnic civic model was a successful policy or not. (De Cordier, Eschment, 2021). The Kazakh people themselves however do not find the civic identity dominant in their self-identification. Ethnic and religious identities are in

reality more important. (Sharipova, 2020) This has been shown in different studies (Eschment, 2020 and Jumageldinov, 2014). A ZOiS survey conducted in 2019, showed that the large majority of the participants have a strong sense of ethnic identity but at the same time they also self-identify to a high degree in civic terms, meaning that most have a multiple national identity. For ethnic Kazakhs, the terms “Kazakh” and “Kazakhstani” are largely synonymous; as a result non-Kazakhs attach even greater importance to their Kazakhstani identity as a way to protect themselves against assimilation or exclusion. (Eschment, 2020) At the same time the study by Jumageldinov (2014) also showed that many ethnic minorities would not agree with the removal of their ethnic identity in official documents, as it would be a step towards assimilation and a loss of their own identity. Overall, interethnic conflicts are rather rare (but not non-existent: i.e. ethnic clashes between Kazakhs and Dungans in 2020), but there is significant competition between Kazakhs and Russians. Some ethnocentric policies are judged by the Russians and other ethnic minorities as discriminatory. In the last decades, Kazakhisation policies have been focused around the use of the Kazakh language, which can lead to discrimination occurring in employment recruitment, public services and politics, for those who do not speak the language well. (Eschment, 2020)

## 2. Koreans in Kazakhstan today and their relation to the historical homeland

Nowadays, the Korean diaspora consists of approximately 108,551 Koreans in Kazakhstan. According to the Assembly of the people of Kazakhstan, most ethnic Koreans live in the Almaty region, followed by the Karaganda and Jambyl region. (Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, n.d.) The large majority of these Koreans is nowadays urbanized and live dispersed, which was not the case when Kazakhstan just became independent. (Yefremov 2021)

The Koryo-Saram is well-integrated into the Kazakh society in terms of demographic and social mobility, and with many of its members present in the highest political and academic circles. They earned the status of diligent and hardworking people, which led to admiration and respect for Korean culture amongst the Kazakh people. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021) Moreover, they have obtained a solid and legal basis for their own ethno-cultural reproduction. (Markova, 2021) However, due to the lack of national Korean schools, kindergartens, or universities, many Koreans lost their knowledge of the Korean language. There is an overall low level of emigration to Korea or Russia, and according to statistical data, the number of Koreans living in Kazakhstan has increased by almost 9000 people by 2019. This is a consequence of their comfortable living conditions in Kazakhstan and a good level of natural reproduction. When Koreans do migrate, it is mostly for study purposes. More often than not, those that complete their studies at a South Korean university, return to Kazakhstan. Labor migration is also rather rare, according to Markova. (2021).

However, in 2007, the Korean government enacted a law on immigration for overseas Koreans, issuing F4 work visas for Koreans from the former USSR with almost the same level of residential benefits as Korean nationals. Since then, some working-class Koreans from Central Asia have moved to Korea. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021) News articles indicate that this trend is becoming more common. These Koreans from Central-Asia consider

South-Korea as a wealthy nation, with many opportunities to earn money and receive higher salaries. In order to buy a car or apartment at home, they move to South-Korea for a few years for work, and eventually they return home to Central Asia. Their remittances constitute a significant percentage of Central Asia's GDP. According to the Korea National Statistics Office, 12,885 Koreans from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan have moved to Korea between 2007 and 2017. Many of these laborers end up working in factories, where the work is hard and dangerous. (Iakupbaeva, 2019) Few of these emigrated Koreans seek to obtain Korean nationality /citizenship while working in South Korea. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021)

### 3. Korean cultural products reaching Kazakhstan

An element that has the potential to have a great impact on the identity of the Koryo-Saram, is the influx of Korean cultural products into the country. One such product is South Korean pop culture, such as South Korean popular music (K-pop) and Korean movies. The spread of the Korean entertainment industry, the so-called 'Hallyu' or the 'Korean Wave', reached Kazakhstan as well as it reached the rest of the world by the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. Being Korean is nowadays a brand, and the Korean diaspora worldwide is able to maintain their national identity for a large part, due to the cultural influence from South Korea. (Trotsenko, 2021)

The Korean Wave started with the popularity of certain TV dramas and gradually shifted to K-pop. The Korean Wave is widely appreciated by Kazakhs and ethnic Koreans in the country. (Laruelle, 2019) This can be seen by the amount and popularity of Korean restaurants and shops opening in Kazakhstan, and the popularity of K-pop amongst the Kazakh youth. (Baeh, Koh, 2020)



Image 2: Korean shops selling cosmetics and other products in the streets of Nur-Sultan





Image 3: Korean restaurant in shopping mall Mega Silk Way in Nur-Sultan

Social media gave rise to various online communities dedicated to Korean pop culture. (Otan, 2020) Furthermore, various Korean events such as the preliminary round for the 2019 Changwon K-pop World Festival were organized in Kazakhstan, which is a K-pop talent competition. K-pop also inspired another genre of Kazakh music, called Q-Pop, which has similar pop tunes, tightly choreographed dance routines and fashion trends. The style of K-pop is thus mixed with more classical elements of Kazakh culture, and it is gaining popularity in the country. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021)

Korean series and movies such as Squid Games, Parasite and Train to Busan have become very popular and successful abroad as well. These movies share the theme of class struggle and contain critiques on Korean society and its inequality. (Jang, 2021) In Squid Game for example, marginalized groups are depicted, such as migrant workers, North-Korean defectors, divorcees, long-term unemployed, people with mental health issues, who are very often struggling to survive in the highly unequal South-Korean society. Poverty is presented as a personal responsibility and the poor as failures, economically and socially. Both Squid Games and Parasite show the audience also the problem of the gap between rich and poor in modern society. This is not only an economic gap, but it can also manifest itself through unequal access to education, housing, opportunities. (Liu, 2020) As this is a common social problem everywhere, these movies resonate with audiences from all over the world, because they can transcend differences in cultural backgrounds. (Liu, 2020)

Film has also been an important source of soft power for the Korean government to gain international appeal. The Korean government is supporting the entertainment industry by funding high production values, marketing campaigns, encouraging corporate investment

and slowly removing barriers like screen quotas for foreign content to encourage South Korean artists to innovate and compete with their international rivals. (Ekstrom, Yermukhametova, 2021). The Korean government did not actively create the Korean Wave, but they created an environment in which these industries were able to thrive. (Gibson, 2020) By doing so, they hope to counter anti-Korean sentiments globally, sell their products abroad, attract tourism and to become a leading global exporter of culture. Therefore, it is interesting to study South-Korea's nation branding through movies, to better understand the dynamics of South Korea's soft power in a post-Soviet country like Kazakhstan, with a large Korean diaspora. (Lee, S. T. 2021).

The popularity of recent Korean movies amongst the Korean diaspora members will thus be explored in this research, but several news items do give the impression that series such as Squid Game is widely watched in the country, also by young people. (Smayil, 2021) Other Kazakh journalists tried to draw some parallels between the societal views that were presented in Squid Game and the Kazakh society. (Makischeva, 2021) Flixwatch, a netflix database with catalogs of titles streaming currently in various countries, indicates that Korean movies are watched within Kazakhstan. (Flixwatch, n.d.)

#### 4. Korean diaspora policies and Korean-Kazakh relations

Both the Korean and the Kazakh government took initiatives to support the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan via Korean diaspora institutions and organizations, and they both played a great role in the development of the Korean diaspora.

It started in 1997, when the Korean government launched the "Overseas Koreans Foundation Act". In 2005, an additional program was launched as part of the fund, the so-called "Overseas Korean Relief Program for Koreans Abroad living in the former Soviet Union." Since that moment on, the international relations between Kazakhstan and South Korea have intensified (Almukanova, 2015). In these programs, activities of Korean communities abroad are supported and the rights of the diaspora are closely monitored. The official goals of this diaspora policy of the Korean government was to preserve the ethnic identity of Koreans abroad, and help them to integrate in their new countries. By establishing Korean cultural centers, offering Korean language courses and providing scholarships for studies at Korean universities, the Korean government hopes to establish a strong and consolidated diaspora abroad, who is able to support the country of origin and lobby its interests on a global political and socio-economic level. Nowadays, there is still a program called the "Overseas Korean Foundation scholarship", which has the following purpose: *"To build the foundation of educating human resources who can make contributions to the development of overseas Korean societies as well as in the motherland by finding the next generation talents of excellent overseas Koreans."* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, n.d.) The program provides scholarships for foreign Koreans to come study at Korean universities, and the selected students receive mentorship programs and follow Korean cultural classes in order to familiarize them with the Koreans traditions and culture.

Moreover, this diasporal outreach is a way for the Korean government to attract foreign Koreans to come and work in Korea. As mentioned before, F-4 visas are issued for skilled professionals in a certain field for unlimited duration, as well as H-2 visas for unskilled workers to stay a maximum of 5 years. However, the Korean government is cautious and

tries not to attract too many laborers, to prevent overflowing labor markets. Foreign Koreans are carefully selected for this permanent residency, according to the level of development of their host countries, education level and financial security. The preference still goes to wealthy foreign Koreans coming from the United States and Canada, rather than from Central-Asia. Investments are expected from the former group, whereas assistance is provided to the latter group. Nevertheless, the diaspora policies of the Korean government is still considered as a model for many other countries. (Yem, 2018)

South Korea was moreover one of the first foreign investors into Kazakhstan after its independence in 1991. Korean multinational companies such as Hyundai, LG and Samsung were eager to invest in the Kazakh economy, in order to help the country develop. According to Yem (2018), the South Korean businessmen could very easily adapt to the new conditions in Kazakhstan, due to the help of Korean diaspora members living in Kazakhstan. Some of the ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan were actively involved in these newly established businesses, and they created joint ventures with the Korean entrepreneurs. German Kim defines this type of business doing amongst the Korean diaspora 'ethnic entrepreneurship', which is establishing business relations among people of the same ethnicity to fulfill socio-economic needs and promote ethnic mobility in a foreign country. (Kim, 2009) In 2014, there were more than 300 Kazakh-Korean joint ventures active in Kazakhstan. There are approximately 2500 citizens of Korea residing in Kazakhstan, and about 200 Korean enterprises active in Kazakhstan. Often Kazakhstan-South Korea summits are held, in which officials of South Korea repeatedly expressed their gratitude to the Kazakh president for his support of the Korean diaspora (Yem, 2018)





Image 4: In 2017, the Korean-Kazakhstan friendship garden was opened in Nur-Sultan to honor the harmonious cooperation and long friendship between the two countries.

Kazakhstan was at the beginning mainly interested in doing business with South Korea in the areas of shipbuilding, semiconductor industry, automobile manufacturing, construction and communication technology. They welcomed the chance to diversify their foreign relations, export routes and other sources of foreign investment. (Fumagalli, 2016) South Korea, on the other hand, was interested in kazakh mineral resources and energy resources. (Yem, 2018) South Korea has a high demand for natural energy due to their own paucity of domestic natural resources, and they are actively looking for alternative geopolitical energy routes as a way to diversify their heavy dependence on the Middle East. As a result, the country is constantly on the look-out for new markets, and thus found new trading partners in Kazakhstan, which has an abundance in natural resources. (Kim, 2021) The discourse that Korea is using is one of 'official development assistance', as they want to share their experience as a formerly impoverished and now developed nation with Kazakhstan. South Korea does not seem to have any political ambitions in the region and they do not get involved in Kazakhstan's domestic affairs. According to Fumagalli (2016), South Korea has

developed a non-threatening profile to Kazakhstan, in the sense that their trade relations are defined by pragmatism and they do not have any political goals or geopolitical ambitions.

The Kazakh support for the Korean diaspora, comes from their strategy to create interethnic harmony and support the Kazakhisation process. By supporting institutions of ethnic minorities, the Kazakh state can ensure that these institutions maintain a strong national orientation. The aim of these institutions is thus to strive for a close integration of its members into the Kazakh state, while at the same time preserving the Korean cultural heritage. (Markova, 2021)

A couple of organizations were founded under the auspices of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan: the first one was the Association of Koreans in Kazakhstan. This organization was founded in 1990 by the Korean diaspora, *“to consolidate representatives of the ethnic group, as well as to provide systematic support to national Korean communities in cultural and entertainment spheres”*. Several representatives of this Association, have climbed up to the administrative apparatus of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, as well as to the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the lower house of the bicameral Parliament. One example is Kim Roman Uhenovich. From 2007 until 2017, he has been the head of the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan. Since 2012, has been a member of the Mazhilis of the Republic of Kazakhstan as well. (Markova, 2021) This illustrates the national orientation of this Association. The Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan today has branches in nearly every major city in Kazakhstan, where people can learn the Korean language and participate in cultural events.

The association has witnessed positive growth and made many accomplishments since its founding. It supported for example the formation of a State National Academic Korean Musical Drama Theater, The Koryo Ilbo newspaper, the Cultural Center, the establishment of the Youth Movement of the Koreans of Kazakhstan, and the Scientific and Technical Society “Kahak”. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021) The association has also established a business club and organized business fora, to scope out opportunities for both countries and launch joint projects. (Lee, 2017)

The Kazakh state is actively financing the activities of regional newspapers, and various radio and TV-shows in the Korean language. One example is the broadcasting of a weekly half-hour program in the Korean language by the ‘Kazakh Radio’. Even though there are many Korean language courses organized by the Kazakh state and there are no legal or infrastructural impediments to organize those courses, the level of proficiency in Korean is extremely low. Only in 76 schools, Korean is listed as a required or optional subject. (Markova, 2021)

There is also a Korean Theater of Musical Comedy established in Almaty. This theater was founded in 1932 and is the oldest national theater in Kazakhstan and the first national Korean theater in the world. Throughout its history, the theater has been a cultural hub for the Korean diaspora of the former USSR. Already since the beginning, the theater focused on diaspora building, while preserving diaspora integration and interethnic consolidation. For example, not only Korean dramatic works were performed, but also classical Russian, Soviet and national Kazakh works. It has moreover strengthened the

diplomatic ties with South Korea, by collaborating with South Korean theaters and artists. (Hwang, 2019).

Moreover, in December 2009, a Korean Culture Center was established in Nur-Sultan within the Korean Embassy as the first cultural center in Central Asia. The center offers language classes, Taekwondo classes, cooking classes, K-pop dance classes, movie nights, etc., and also supports Korean cultural events outside the center, such as the events of the Nazarbayev University's Korean Club and the K-pop Cover Dance Club. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021)

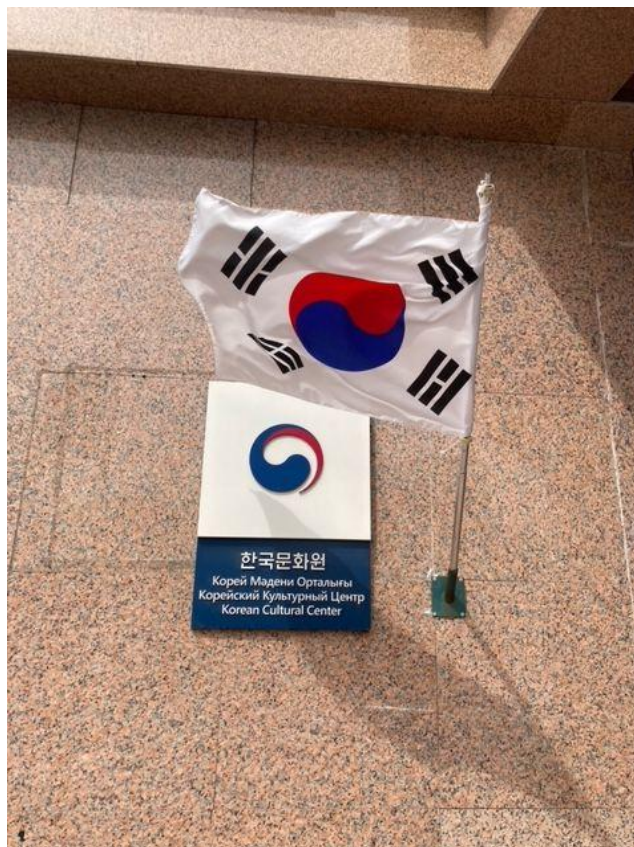


Image 5 and 6: the Korean Cultural Center in Nur-Sultan

German Kim notes that many visitors of these centers are not Korean, but Kazakh people. The commercialized culture of South Korea does not only reach the Korean diaspora but all people around the world. For German Kim this can be beneficial for the Koryo Saram, since

they can look up to their culturally advanced and economically developed historical homeland and be proud of their ethnic Korean background. (Trotsenko, 2021).

# Literature Study

From the late 1980s on, research on the Koryo Saram started to become more extensive. This was due to Gorbachev's democratization process and glasnost, which provided many scholars access to secret archival documents. Another reason was that many ethnicities began to strive for cultural reproduction, which sparked the interests of many scholars to study certain ethnic minorities. In the 1990s, the South Korean government, research centers and cultural institutes started to support research on the history of the Korean diaspora. In the beginning, scholarly work remained rather descriptive and general and lacked a deeper understanding of the present day lives and future for the Koryo Saram. (Kim, 2003)

For this research in particular, it is important to take a look at the research that has been conducted in the last five to ten years, in order to find out what has been written on the lives of the Korean diaspora nowadays. It is possible to categorize the existing literature on the Korean diaspora in a few categories: firstly there is literature around the diplomatic and socio-economic relations between Korea and Kazakhstan and the role in it for the Korean diaspora, secondly there has been some research conducted on diaspora building and the identity formation of the Koryo-Saram in the multi-ethnic states of Kazakhstan and other CIS countries, next there are articles that analyze the promotion of Korean culture by certain initiatives based in Kazakhstan, fourthly research centered around the influence of popular Korean culture in Kazakhstan and more general on how films can be a soft power tool for the Korean government abroad, and finally there are historical articles dealing with the history of the Koryo-Saram and their integration into the Kazakh state.

For the literature on the relations between Korea and Kazakhstan, the recent work of Oh and Zholamanova is important. (2021) Their article 'Socio-economic relationship of Korea and Kazakhstan: the role of Korean diaspora and homeland engagement' deals with the Korean-Kazakh bilateral relations in the economic, social, cultural, and educational spheres. According to the researchers, the diplomatic relations between both countries are mutually beneficial and continue to grow. Korea is one of the top ten investors in Kazakhstan's economy. The researchers claim that the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, and their historical and cultural affinity with Korea, contributed to South Korea's interest in developing relations with Kazakhstan. Only in the socio-cultural sphere there is still some work in progress: Kazakhstan is actively promoting Korean culture, but Kazakh culture seems to be less appealing and popular in South-Korea.

Furthermore, Oh and Zholamanova state that the Korean diaspora has not lost its identity. At the same time, the diaspora is well-integrated and actively working towards the development of a diverse and harmonious multi-ethnic Kazakh state. (2019) This is a statement that appears to be widely accepted in the literature on the Korean diaspora. Another researcher Lee (2020) confirmed this in his study on 'the Socio-Cultural Structure of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan', in which he argues that Koreans have adapted to Russian culture and particularly to Kazakh culture, while at the same time retaining part of their ethnic identity. He found out that 89.6% of Kazakhstan Koreans are proud to be Korean and 70.7%

feel a sense of belonging to the Korean ethnic group. However, Lee found out that their participation in Korean social movements or associations are rather low. Moreover, many of his participants confirmed that they faced some ethnic discrimination in their daily lives, but they considered this discrimination as normal, due to their being non-local.

Whereas older generations seem to attach greater importance to their ethnic identity, the younger Koreans in the CIS are less inclined to feel 'Korean'. Hong and Cho (2021) studied the Korean identity amongst Millennial Korean diasporas in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries. They centered their research around the following factors: the diasporas' perceived relationship with host country and homeland, homeland experience, family education, Korean culture, history, and language affect, and to what extent these factors affect their national identity and life satisfaction. None of these factors stood out as 'critical' in the formation of the national identity of the Millennial Korean diaspora. The authors explain that 'the ideas of imagined, idealized and vague reality of ancestral home' seems to reduce with this new generation, since they are third or fourth generation- away from their ancestral homeland. This is also what Adamz (2015) argues in his master thesis: the Koryo Saram no longer consider South Korea as an historical homeland and there are no longer maintain myths of "homeland" return. They have established 'a territorial identity' within the Central-Asian states.

The third category of research is centered around the analysis of Korean (cultural) initiatives in a multiethnic environment. Some of these initiatives have been discussed in the introduction already, but it is important to compare to what extent researchers estimated the importance of the initiatives for the diaspora building. One example of such a research is that of Hwang, 'the Korean theater in Kazakhstan as a cultural hub of the diaspora'. (2019). According to the author, the theater has been a great success in the sense that it succeeded in maintaining and promoting national culture among not only the Korean diaspora but also the diverse ethnic populations of the Soviet Union. The tasks of the theater, founded in 1932, was and still is twofold: it would focus on diaspora building, while at the same time look at diaspora integration and interethnic consolidation. For example, not only Korean dramatic works were performed, but also classical Russian, Soviet and national Kazakh works.

Another research of Lee (2019) is centered around the discourse on integration and Kazakhisation, in Korean newspapers in Kazakhstan. She compared the discourses in the Lenin Gichi, which was a Soviet Korean newspaper, with the discourses in the Koryo Ilbo, which was the successor of the Lenin Gichi and is up until today a Korean Kazakhstani newspaper. The author claims that in the articles in the Soviet Korean newspaper, written in the late 1980s, there was often mention of a revival of Korean culture, language and national history, and even a discussion about national autonomy. After the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, the Koryo Ilbo stopped publishing as many articles on 'national Korean revival'. Kazakhstan's national unity became a central theme through most articles, as well as active support for government policies. Lee thus confirmed in this research once again the generally accepted statement about the Korean diaspora, namely that they support the process of national integration into the Kazakh state, and that nowadays Korean Kazakhstani are actively working towards building an identity as Kazakhstan citizens.



A final article of a Korean initiative, is that of Kim and Kim 'Youth Korean organizations in the South of Russia as a factor in preserving the identity of the Korean youth' (2020). Even though the researchers focus on another region, namely the South of Russia, the article is still interesting to find out more about the ethnic identity of the younger generation of the Korean diaspora in a former Soviet country. The authors claim that a new, hybrid ethnic identity of young Koryo-Saram was formed through these Korean youth ethno-cultural organizations. In these youth organizations, they are organizing cultural and festival activities, including Korean language and reading contests. Their members attach importance to not only traditional Korean rituals, but modern Korean culture such as K-pop is appreciated as well. The authors conclude that the members not only identify as Koreans, but as Russian Koreans, and Russia is considered their motherland. So even though these youth organizations are culturally oriented, they define the ethno-political aspect of the young Koreans' identity.

These three examples of Korean initiatives aimed at supporting the Korean diaspora abroad show that, even though Korean culture and a Korean identity is promoted, at the same time these initiatives can be drivers of multi-ethnic harmony and diaspora integration.

Popular culture can also have a transformative effect on diaspora building. This has been put forward in a research conducted in 2020 by Hoh Youn Koh and Kyungmin Baek. In this research, the Korean Wave is considered a cultural trend that has the transformative power of re-shaping Korean identity amongst the young Korean diaspora. More specifically, the researchers examine to what extent young Korean Kazakhstanis interpret K-pop in relation to their self-identity as Korean. Their findings are the following: K-pop strengthens indeed the diasporic identity of the Korean Kazakhstanis. These young people appreciate K-pop both for its national 'Korean' components, as well as for the universal values that K-pop carries out. Whereas living in a post-Soviet country sometimes shaped a negative attitude towards their Korean identity, K-pop made the Korean Kazakhstanis reflect on their identity more and changed their perception towards Korea in a positive sense.

This research aims at understanding how film can have the same transformative power on one's identity. Lee (2021) analyzes how film can become a soft power tool of the Korean government to gain support worldwide, in the article 'Film as cultural diplomacy: South Korea's nation branding through Parasite.' In this article, the author claims that the popularity of the Korean movie Parasite can be attributed to the universal theme of class struggle. As this is a common social problem everywhere, this movie resonates with audiences from all over the world, because they can transcend differences in cultural backgrounds. Although Parasite paints a negative picture of the Korean society, sentiments towards South-Korea are still largely positive, thus proving that film as a soft power tool can be effective. (Lee, 2021) The global success of the movie, winning four Oscars, can furthermore strengthen feelings of pride amongst the Korean diaspora and thus movies have to be considered when studying identity building amongst this diaspora.

Finally, there are some more historical articles, dealing with the history of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan. Ahn (2019) explored in her research how diasporas are understood in post-Soviet contexts and how important historical narratives are in challenging the homogenizing nation-state discourses. According to her, past research on the Korean diaspora (Central Asian Koreans (Kim, 1993, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2009; Son, 2012),



focused on establishing historiographical and linguistic accounts of this community. She wanted to look at the lived experience of the Kazakhstani Koreans and study their diasporic memories through a qualitative lens. With the research, the author mainly stressed the heterogeneity that exists within diasporic communities and the need for more diverse historiographical accounts. Some feel or felt a strong connection with the 'homeland' Korea, others do not. The identity formation is a very complex and fluid given.

Markova (2021) conducted historical research as well, but dedicated her work to the place and role of the Koryo-Saram in the system of Kazakhstan's national policy. As mentioned before in the socio-historical context, there was a serious need for adjustments in the field of national policies within the former Soviet republics after the multi-ethnic USSR collapsed. Many ethnicities began to 'reclaim' their roots. Markova studied which institutions were established by the Kazakh state, to support the Koryo-Saram, and she analyzed the regulatory and legal framework that supported their existence. Her findings are that the Korean diaspora has a solid normative and legal basis for its own ethno-cultural reproduction. Even though they are a small population, they form a significant group in the political and economic life in Kazakhstan. The author claims that the integration of the Koryo-Saram, is a remarkable and unique example of a positive experience in the implementation of the state's strategy of interethnic harmony during the post-Soviet democratic transition. Markova confirms again that the Koryo-Saram have been able to maintain and cultivate an interest in their original culture, by using all the necessary legal and infrastructural resources. At the same time, they form an organic part of the Kazakhstani society and support the Kazakhization process imposed by the Kazakh state. This is confirmed by Yefremov (2021), who states that the multi-ethnic environment in Kazakhstan led to the preservation of Korean ethnic and cultural identity on the one hand, but at the same time, also led to the adaptation of the Kazakh civil identity.

In the literature, there is thus a general consensus on the fact that the Koryo-Saram managed to stabilize their group, integrate in Kazakh society, achieving a 'territorial identity' while at the same time preserve their Korean identity partially. Authors warn that special attention has to be paid to the localized component of the diaspora and on their hybrid identity, for example amongst older and younger generations. Several researchers give the indication that the Korean culture reached Kazakhstan and can have a transformative power on Korean's their identity. Culture can thus define ethno-political aspects of one's identity. This article will analyze to what extent films can have this effect and will contribute to a broader understanding of how the Korean diasporic community navigates the complex socio-cultural context in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

# Conceptual Framework

This master thesis will analyze and contribute to a further understanding of two concepts, which are diasporic identity and soft power.

The first concept is that of diaspora and diasporic identity (Cohen, 2004). A diaspora can be defined as members of a community who are away from their historical homeland for various political, economic and/or social reasons. These groups have been scattered away from their place of origin and settled into hosting societies (Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996; Brubaker, 2005). The concept of diaspora cannot be mistaken for an ethnic minority group with shared memories. Ethnic minorities have a collective belief in kinship, share the same language, religion, race, cultural traits, powerful symbols and have a sense of a shared history, which all reinforce their subjective feeling of belonging. (de Vos, 1995). All these features are also applicable to diaspora's, but more specific for diaspora's is the de-territoriality aspect, which means that a diaspora is not defined by territorial borders (contrary to an ethnic minority). Furthermore, diasporas are formed by forced or voluntary migration or displacement. (Cohen, 1996) Trauma and violence are other important notions often connected to diaspora, which becomes a unifying element of the diasporic identity. (Gilroy, 1997; Eschment, 2021) Usually, members of the diaspora have a strong sense of connectivity and solidarity amongst each other. They also have a shared idea of 'the homeland', the ultimate place for their descendants to return to (Safran, 1991, 2005). This notion of an imagined center or homeland is fundamental to diaspora studies, in which the homeland is considered a distant place of nostalgic longing to which they cannot return. (Tsuba, 2009) However, there is also debate whether or not the term diaspora should refer to an ethnic community oriented towards an historic and 'original' homeland, or whether it is a more fluid, non-essentialised, 'nomadic' identity. (Diener, 2009). Eschment supports the former idea, and argues that specifically to Kazakhstan, the ethnic discourse distinguishes between a Historical and a Second or 'Small' Homeland, rather than a 'home/kin state' and 'host state'. Contrary to Western science, which views the Homeland as constructed and changeable, in Kazakhstan the notion of a Homeland implies an inherited and an enduring bond. (2021)

Locality is another important concept associated with diaspora communities, which means that the diaspora has to adapt and transform their culture and identity in order to fit in the host societies. Cohen argues then that the diasporic identity is more rooted into the place where the diaspora settles, rather than it is in the historical homeland, but at the same time the culture within the ethnic community and the culture of the host society must be considered in any study of "diaspora" identity. (2004) Yet, there is an ongoing debate whether researchers on diasporic theory should focus on spaces of arrival, or on the places of origin, from which the diaspora dispersed. (Alexander, 2017) Diasporic identities are not static, homogeneous or fixed but evolve over time in response to their relationship with the homeland and the host countries. (Choi, 2003; Angouri, 2012). Researchers on diaspora's should always challenge the notion of singularity and rather focus on the hybridity, to study how diasporic communities, identities and their narratives are constantly changing. (Diener, 2009)

Even though the study of 'identity' has been a field of academic study, political debate and public controversy for a long time, this term per se will not be further explored in this framework. (Naujoks, 2010) The term has been criticized for being too vague and not clearly defined, because it has been acknowledged that it is difficult to obtain reliable information on the different aspects associated with 'identity'. (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). This is why in this research a singular tool/framework for measuring someone's (diasporic) identity will be used, in order not to get lost in the different contested definitions of 'identity'.

Fishbein indicated that an ethnic identity is composed of three elements: a cognitive, an affective and behavioral side. (1965). The cognitive and affective are linked with the psychology of an identity, whereas the behavioral side are the so-called sociology of an identity. Cohen recognized that most of the empirical studies in the past have been focused on the behavioral aspects of diaspora members, by checking on the attendance rates in community events or by observing certain religious traditions. Cohen claims that cognitive and affective attitudes are as important, to broaden our understanding of 'ethnic identity'. Cohen goes even further in his research by distinguishing between cognitive and affective/symbolic attitudes. Someone can identify themselves with a certain 'state' or 'homeland' as a symbol, however they can declare that their identity is not dependent on the relation to this state (Cohen, 2004).

Cohen (2004) thus offers an analytical and universal framework to study cognitive and affective attitudes towards ethnic identities: he distinguished between five categorical components of diasporic identities from survey data on the Jewish diaspora: (1) ethnicity (birth or biology); (2) religion or (religious) education; (3) attachment to the homeland; (4) culture; and (5) universal. Cohen tried to understand which of these five components dominated the discourse amongst the Jewish diaspora, more specifically amongst staff members of informal Jewish educational programs in various parts of the world, when discussing their ethnic identity. It has to be noted that Cohen doesn't use the term "diasporic identity" himself but other scholars have associated the term with his work. (Koh, Baek, 2020).

Each of these five components should have, according to Cohen, a corresponding set of symbols or discussion points (names, specific traditions, etc.) . Preliminary lists of appropriate symbols relating to the diaspora in question thus need to be developed in advance. Koh and Baek did this preliminary work already in their study on the influence of Korean pop-music on the diasporic identity of the Koreans in Kazakhstan, in which they conducted focus group interviews and afterwards coded this qualitative data. Because they conducted a similar research by applying the same framework, their lists of 'symbols' (obtained after coding the interviews) will serve as an inspiration for this research. (2020). Since they offer a contemporary approach to study identity formation in a diaspora, Koh and Baek's understanding of diasporic identity on the Koreans of Kazakhstan will be further explored in this research and adapted where necessary.

The first component of ethnicity is referring to some primordial characteristics of a diaspora. A blood-based definition of a diaspora is thus put forward, and bloodlines, family lineages and race are strongly emphasized. Some symbols that are associated with this first component are the mentioning of family, parents, physical appearance, blood, etc. The second category of religion and education refers to the influence of specific ideas put

forward by religious or educational practices on individual identities. The work of Cohen mentions different Jewish religious traditions that are practiced amongst the Jewish diaspora. Education in a Jewish context generally refers to some kind of religious education, hence why these two categories were combined. In this research, questions will be asked regarding religion as well, however they are expected to be less of a present or determining factor for the Korean diaspora. On the other hand, high pressure on students, high expectations regarding education, being good at mathematics and studying hard, etc. are very specific to Korean society, and this research will aim to find out whether this is also the case amongst the Korean diaspora. The third category is that of attachment to the homeland. If the ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan refer to their historical homeland, the Korean peninsula, in a positive way, it means that they attach great importance to their origins. Do the Koreans of Kazakhstan present their homeland in an idealized or nostalgic way? Do they wish to return to their homeland or talk about specific places in Korea that they have memories of? The fourth category is centered around culture and all the different cultural elements that are associated with Korea and being Korean. Adhering to certain traditional holidays, customs, eating habits, consuming Korean movies or music, practicing Korean sports are examples of these cultural elements. Finally, the universal component is described by Koh and Baek as follows: *“anyone who follows Korean practices can be regarded as a member of the Korean diaspora. Even if someone identifies herself as a Korean without reference to Korea-specific elements like biological components, this person can also form a Korean identity based on actual habits.”* (Koh, Baek, 2020) When someone is joining non-ethnic communal activities, for example taking Korean language classes, or participating in certain hobbies where other Koreans are present or who have common interests in Korea, the Korean identity can be reinforced or acquired by commitment. In these settings, one can feel Korean, whereas on other occasions one can feel Kazakh or something else. Being Korean thus does not mean anything special here, but is defined by commitment. Finally, Koh and Baek added two additional components to the framework of Cohen: that of locality and individuality. With the locality component, Koh and Baek tried to find out whether some local characteristics of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan affects their self-understanding as being Korean. For example, if the collective memory of being displaced in the 1930s still prevails amongst the younger generations. The individuality component tries to assess someone’s subjective experience, attachment or interpretation of Korean music and personal stories (Koh, Baek, 2020). Due to the fact that these components are quite self-explanatory, and seem to be embedded already in the term “diasporic identity”: (diaspora: localized in Kazakhstan and identity: individualized”, these last two components will be neglected in this research.

Following Koh and Baek's research, the analytical framework of Cohen (2004) is useful to study the Korean diaspora, because of its universal features to study identities of immigrants and diaspora. Cohen offers a theory-based tool for researchers to analyze someone’s ethnic identity and, less important for this research, the tool is also beneficial for empirical comparisons of ethnic subpopulations living across different continents. Cohen used empirical data of more than 10 000 Jews, so we can assume that his five different categories are carefully selected. Various conceptual definitions of diaspora are offered within one single theoretical framework and this framework makes it possible to ‘measure’ someone’s diasporic identity. If we look at these different categories on a spectrum, then the biological component can be considered as a blood-centred definition of a ‘diaspora’, whereas the universal component is considered to be a ‘practice or commitment- based’ definition of a

diaspora. Another way of defining this spectrum is to make a distinction between the 'received' or 'primordial' characteristics such as birth and education and the 'chosen' or 'situational' ones such as commitment. (Cohen, 2004)

The aim will be to find out to what extent these different components contribute to the diasporic identity of the Korean Kazakhstanis in relation to consuming Korean cultural products such as movies, and whether the diasporic identity of the ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan is centred around a biological or a universal component. Mapping out the ethnic identity of the Koryo-Saram, alongside the spectrum of a blood-based definition of a diaspora and a practice-based definition, will be helpful to find an answer on the following question: do the Koreans of Kazakhstan consider themselves Korean by birth, by religion or education, by their attachment to Korea, by culture, or does it mean nothing special to them? (Cohen, 2004) Moreover, does watching Korean movies reinforce their attachment to their Korean ethnicity, to their religious and educational practices, to their attachment to Korea, to certain cultural practices or to the movie industry or other interests in general?

The main hypothesis is that under the influence of soft power tools or sources of soft power, movies in this case, diasporic identities can change. Soft power can be identified in this case as an independent variable, because it influences the dependent variable that is measured in this research, which will be diasporic identity. (Russel, 2006)

Soft power, a concept coined by Joseph Nye, is widely used in international relations literature. Basically, soft power is defined as 'the ability to shape the preferences of others and to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payments'. It is a source of influence, and it is based on three resources: culture (in places where it is attractive to others), political values at home and abroad and foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate) (Nye, 2008; De Cordier, 2021). Soft power thus arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political virtues, and policies. Seduction is considered more effective than coercion. When policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, the soft power is enhanced. It stands in contrast to hard power, which is using economic or military means to influence the behaviour of your opponents. (Lee, 2009) Even though the term soft power has been widely used, it has also been criticised for being too vague or as being difficult to distinguish from hard power. (Mattern, 2005)

For example, South Korea has done a great job in handling the pandemic effectively, by displaying their domestic political virtues and their resilient population, which has increased others' respect for its policies and could possibly empower their position in multilateral institutions. More important for this research, is the support of the Korean government for the Korean cultural industry since the 1990s, as a way to underscore their policy priorities. (Lee, Botto, 2020). Nye himself highlighted the political importance of popular culture, because he argued that the positive effect of pop culture can make the process of carrying out policy more easy and effective, and popular culture often contains messages of individualism and other virtues that have certain political effects. (Nye, 2004.) According to Zoysa and Newman, cinema can serve as a socialization process for people around the world and can really set the image of a certain country. (Zoysa, Newman, 2002)

The Korean government tries to transform their pop culture and entertainment industry into true soft power. Gibson highlights that a distinction should be made between the initial phase

of nation branding, in which a country is promoting itself in a positive but relatively superficial manner, and soft power. Using soft power means using the appeal of soft resources, such as the Korean entertainment industry, Korean tourist attractions or study abroad programs, in order to change the perception abroad about the country. Korean movies are also considered soft power resources that have the ability to turn into active soft power. Gibson is warning that using these soft power resources can only be effective if they are linked with specific foreign policy goals, such as trade promotion, development, etc. in order for them to really turn into sustainable soft power. (Gibson, 2020)

South-Korea ranked 11th on the Global Soft Power Index 2021. (Brand Finance, 2021) It would thus be interesting to find out to what extent film and the Korean Wave in general have contributed to this high ranking, how effective it has been in Kazakhstan and what the impact is on the diasporic identity of Korean Kazakhstanis.

Soft power is becoming more important for middle powers such as South-Korea and Kazakhstan, which are limited in terms of hard resources and thus have a hard time competing with Russia or China in hard power. (Lee, Botto, 2020) Whereas South-Korea has done a great job in displaying and developing their soft power resources, Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian countries are only beginning to establish their soft power policies. (Oh, Zholamanova, 2021)

# Fieldwork and findings

## 1. Methodology

As explained earlier, the aim of the research is to apply the framework proposed by Cohen (and Koh, Baek) on the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan and to analyze the impact of movies on their diasporic identity. This has been done by distributing online surveys in Russian amongst the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, through various facebook groups (e.g. Koryo-Saram Research Network), and by contacting the staff working at the Korean Cultural Centre and the Korean Studies Center at the Nazerbayev University in the capital Nur-Sultan. 30 people eventually filled in the survey anonymously. Four additional interviews which were also conducted in Russian completed this qualitative research. Two of these interviewees filled in the survey as well and are thus part of the 30 respondents, the others two did not. The questions in the survey were a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions, and the interview questions were semi-structured. In this way, comparable data could be gathered, and the research participants were encouraged to provide additional information.

The questionnaire started with questions regarding demographic information, in order to establish a social profile of the participants. The next set of questions were aimed at analyzing the knowledge of the Korean language amongst the diaspora members, the preservation of cultural traditions, family ties, community belonging and other aspects related to one's identity. An attempt was made to 'measure' the diasporic identity of the participants. The next questions were related to the consumption of Korean movies and the impact of these movies. Finally, the last questions were related to the interpretation of Korean movies as sources of soft power and how it has affected the perception of the historical homeland. A blank survey is added in the annex. The interview questions followed the survey to a large extent, but some follow up questions were asked regarding history, attachment to the historical homeland, traditions and discrimination in Kazakhstan. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants and their consent was asked. The respondents were also given the option to receive the final results of the research, if they were interested.

The author ensured that people from different ages, sexes and regions in Kazakhstan filled in this survey, by regularly checking on this demographic information and seeking the participants that were at that stage not represented in the survey results.

It is important to have a wide range of ages represented in this survey. On the one hand young people are presumed to be more susceptible to popular culture and are often more preoccupied with questions regarding identity, whereas older people usually have more of a sense of who they are. For the case of the Korean diaspora more specifically, older generations might have heard stories about the deportation out of the Russian Far East first-hand from their parents or grandparents. This trauma passing down generations might have reinforced their sense of belonging to the Korean diaspora. Even though the Koreans nowadays live quite dispersed in the country, having respondents from different regions was less of a determining criterion for this specific research. Finally, the answers of the respondents and the graphs and charts were translated in English.

## 2. Demographic information

The survey started with a number of questions on demographic data, such as age, gender, place of residence, birth place, ethnicity of the parents, education, profession and religious affiliation. Needless to say, this part is not intended to draw some general conclusions on the Korean diaspora as a whole, but rather to establish a social profile of the thirty ethnic Koreans that participated in this research.

	<b>Participants</b>
<b>Age</b>	
under 16	1
16-20	3
20-25	5
25-35	3
35-50	8
50 or older	10
<b>Gender</b>	
male	15
female	15
<b>Place of residence</b>	
Almaty	13
Nur-Sultan	10
Jambyl region	1
Kyzylorda region	1
Turkistan region	1
abroad	2
<b>Birth place</b>	
Soviet-Union (Kazakh or other SSR)	15
Kazakhstan	12
Korea	1
Uzbekistan	2



<b>Highest degree of education</b>	
High school	8
Higher education	19
Academic degree	3
<b>Profession</b>	
public sector	1
private sector	10
professional: doctor, lawyer, academic	4
pensioner	2
self-employed	7
student	5
unemployed	3
<b>Ethnicity of parents</b>	
Both Korean	26
One of two Korean	1
- Korean father, Russian mother	1
- Korean father, Kazakh mother	1
- Uzbek father, Korean mother	1
<b>Religion</b>	
Christianity	1
- Russian orthodox	4
- Protestantism	4
Korean shamanism	1
Agnostic	4
Atheist	15

TABLE 1 : basic demographic data on the research participants

In interpreting these figures one has to take into consideration that not all of the questions were mandatory for the research participants. This explains why the total number does not always come down to 30 participants. There were also some open-ended questions, in which the participants were allowed to fill in their own answers. Finally, if no one indicated living for example in a certain city, this option was left out from the table above.

It is clear that people of all ages filled in the survey, but it is remarkable that a large portion of the participants is 50 years or older. A possible explanation for this is that older people are nowadays often more active on Facebook than younger people and the survey circulated more in these Facebook groups for the Koryo-Saram than elsewhere. Most of these people above 50 years indicated that they find out about this survey via one of the many Facebook groups, whereas the younger generations learnt about it via friends, family or the Korean Cultural Center.

The majority of the participants are coming from Almaty, which is not surprising considering the fact that most ethnic Koreans live in the Almaty region. (Assembly of the people of Kazakhstan, n.d.) Fifteen people were born in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. They all must have experienced, to some extent, the assimilation process, in which ethnic minorities were obliged to assimilate in the Russified society. It would be interesting to find out to what extent the older generations lost their attachment to the historical homeland in the course of their lives and how it might, or, according to the literature, might not, have “revived” when Kazakhstan became an independent and multi-ethnic country.(Ji-Yeon, 2017)

It is clear that the majority of the participants are well integrated in terms of social mobility and education, with 19 people having received higher education and the majority having jobs, mostly in the private sector, followed by self-employment.

With regards to the ethnicity of the parents, almost all participants have parents that are both of Korean descent. One research participant even commented: “*persons of Korean nationality in Kazakhstan are ethnic pure*”. This respondent thus indicated that intermarriages are quite uncommon amongst Korean diaspora members. This contradicts the existing literature: according to German Kim (2003) the number of intermarriages was already quite high back in the beginning of the 2000s, and Yefremov (2021) notices the same high rates of ethnic intermarriages nowadays. According to Tagiyev (2018), Koreans in Kazakhstan are merged into the local population much more than for example the Koreans in Uzbekistan. Even though this research is too limited in its scope to draw some general conclusions, the fact that some different results are shown proves that there exists a lot of heterogeneity within diasporic communities.

Finally, half of the participants consider themselves atheist, and the other half is mainly split into Protestants, members of the Christian Orthodox Church and agnostics. In Kazakhstan, Islam (72%) and Christianity (23.1%) are the two most practiced religions, only 4% of the population is unaffiliated. In Korea however, the majority of the people have no religious affiliation (56.1%), followed by protestantism (19.7 %) and buddhism (15.5%). (Pew Research Center, 2015). When analyzing these results for the Korean diaspora in

Kazakhstan in percentages, at first glance the proportions of the answers do not differ much from the general proportions in Korea (except for Buddhism), while they deviate very much from the figures for Kazakhstan as a whole. This shows that the pluralism of religions or world views in Korea also exists considerably within the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan. The fact that half of the participants label themselves as 'atheist', also demonstrates the existing legacy of the Soviet period in which the state tried to eradicate religion. According to Kim (2012), the official religions in the Central Asian countries nowadays, such as Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, have not attracted young Koreans to convert themselves. The importance of religion in the ethnic consciousness of the Koreans is thus rather limited.

### 3. Findings on ethnic identity in relation to Korean movies

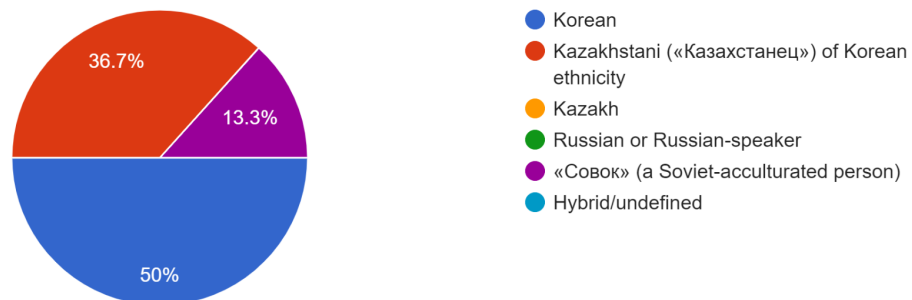
#### 3.1 Measuring the diasporic identity

The following questions on the survey were all related to the ethnic consciousness of the Koreans in Kazakhstan and the different aspects that are tied to this ethnic identity such as language, preservation of cultural traditions, family ties, community belonging, etc.

#### Self-identification of Koreans in Kazakhstan

The first question was the most straightforward:

How would you self-identify in the first place?  
30 responses



PIE CHART 1 : self-identification of ethnic Koreans

These results demonstrate that half of the participants self-identify with being Korean. Being a 'Kazakhstani of Korean ethnicity' comes in second place with 36.7% or 11 responses. One interviewee mentioned the following: "My passport shows my nationality as Korean, but my mentality is Kazakhstani." Diaspora members can therefore have a hybrid identity, figuratively speaking (in their mind) but also literally (as their passport will indicate both their ethnic Korean as well as their Kazakh civil identity.) It is not possible to see a correlation between age and the self-identification of the participant as Korean or Korean-Kazakh. However, those in the age category of 16-20, all identified themselves as 'Korean'. This partially refutes the statement made by Hong and Cho (2021) who claimed that younger

Koreans in the CIS countries are less inclined to feel Korean. Admittedly, the scope of the research is too small to make any general conclusions.

A 'Soviet-aculturated person' comes third with 13.3%, which are 4 responses given by participants older than 5. What is remarkable about the results, is the fact that no one considers themselves a full-fledged Kazakh citizen, which indicates that ethnic identity and family background does play a role in the lives of the Koreans. It also affirms the general consensus within the literature, that people in Kazakhstan attach greater importance to their ethnic identity, than to their civil identity. (Sharipova, 2020)

### Language

Regarding the language, 10 participants indicated that they can understand Korean to a certain extent, but they don't speak the language themselves. 8 participants do not understand or speak any Korean at all. On the other side of the spectrum, only 3 people indicated that they speak and write fluently in Korean. The remaining people admitted having some problems with writing, understanding only the alphabet, or only knowing some basic sentences. One person announced that he or she understands the Korean dialect. This dialect, also known as Koryo-mar, is a mixture of Russian and a distinct Korean dialect from the northeast that dates back to the 10th century. This dialect can only rarely be found amongst Soviet Koreans that used to interact with North-Koreans before the 1990s. However, because the Russian language became the first language in Central-Asia, the dialect slowly vanished. (Ming, 2017)

It is not possible to draw a general profile of those that speak Korean fluently and those that do not understand it at all. The three people indicating that they speak Korean perfectly are between 25-50, and have various social and family backgrounds. The same goes for those that do not speak Korean at all: the profile is very diverse and people of all ages indicate that they do not understand one single word of Korean. However, those above 50 years old usually have at least some understanding of the language (8 of 10 indicated so), whereas the category of those that do not understand Korean at all mostly consists of people in their 20s. The youngest people that are under 20 years old, announced that they only know some basic phrases or the alphabet.

One interviewee claimed that usually only the older generations speak some Korean. This was also confirmed by Alikhanova, who conducted research on the languages spoken by the ethnic Koreans of Kazakhstan (2021): according to her, people of the younger generation (under 26 years old) do not speak Korean and do not even have basic knowledge. Koreans between the ages of 26 and 60 speak basic Korean by hearing everyday speech at home or talking to older people. Koreans between 60 and 90 years, and especially those that grew up in the countryside, can write and speak their native language to a certain extent. According to her, this is because ethnic culture and languages are usually better preserved in the countryside. This research stays silent about the correlation between rural-urban and the level of knowledge of Korean, but it does confirm that usually older generations know some Korean.

Russian is the main language spoken by the Koreans of Kazakhstan, as 28 of the 30 participants indicated to communicate in Russian with their family members. In everyday life, for work for example, 26 people declared to speak Russian. The other four speak Korean

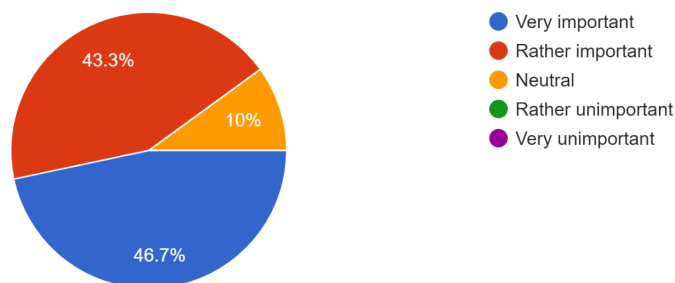
only, English, or a mixture of all these languages. No one indicated to speak Kazakh at home or in public life. According to Alikhanova, only 2-3% percent of the Koreans consider themselves as native speakers of the Kazakh language. Even though state policies are aimed at pushing for the Kazakh language to become the unifying factor of multi-ethnic Kazakhstan, Russian has the largest numbers of speakers in Kazakhstan (93.8%) and is still the lingua franca for most people, so it is not surprising that Koreans mostly speak Russian. (Akhmetova et al., 2016)

The survey also showed that some young people (only 4 of them, between 16-35) have followed some type of Korean language courses. This might confirm the claim made by Alikhanova, that the adult generation over 40 usually knows Korean by communication with the family members in their childhood, whereas the younger generation tries to learn Korean by following language courses in educational centers. (Alikhanova, 2021) Of course, 4 answers are not enough to claim that there is a 'renewed desire' amongst the youth to learn the Korean language.

### Korean traditions and history

Preserving certain Korean traditions is also deemed very or rather important for 27 research participants, as is shown in the following pie chart:

Is it important for you or your family to preserve certain Korean traditions (eating Korean food, celebrating holidays etc.) ?  
30 responses



PIE CHART 2: preservation of Korean traditions amongst Korean diaspora members

According to one 14-year old interviewee, his family has preserved a part of the traditions, only the most important ones. *“I don’t remember the names of all the different traditions, my elders do. I have a bad memory, sometimes I try to memorize them, but then I forget. In the future however, when I will have a family, I will continue the traditions.”* An older interviewee (50 years) said that *“everyone interprets the customs differently now. That is why there are many disagreements. Few people adhere to rituals and traditions to the fullest extent nowadays. They are simplifying.”*

Two other interviewees summed up the different traditions or holidays that are still celebrated amongst the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan: *“‘Baek-il’ or ‘the 100 days for the child’, the child’s one year anniversary, 60th anniversary, Parents’ Day, Chuseok, Korean*

*New Year and weddings and funerals.*” The results of the survey and the additional interviews thus indicate that traditions are quite important for the respondents, but they are only preserved to a certain extent.

This research stayed rather silent on the importance of history for the diaspora members. According to Alikhanova (2021), the generation before 2000 knows their history quite well, whereas those younger than 20 are not so well versed in it anymore. The responses of the interviewees are mixed. A 14-year old interviewee said that his parents never shared any stories about life for Koreans during the Soviet times, and according to him there are no stories circulating around in his family on the deportation of 1937 and how his ancestors came to Kazakhstan. Another interviewee of more than 50-years old said the following: *“I am 50 years old, and among my generation we don’t talk about history. We haven’t lived through those times. Stories about the deportation and our origins are not important.”* When asking this interviewee how Koreans could preserve their nationality and culture during the Soviet times, this person answered that Korean identity was quietly maintained in the Kazakh Socialist Republic. According to this person, the Korean identity is nowadays even less preserved than it was back then. There are many possible explanations as to why history is not so relevant for the diaspora members. According to Ji-Yeon (2017), *“the absence of official texts or history classes, the geographical distance from the historical homeland, the long duration of the diaspora, the lack of recognition of Korean cultural heritage in public spaces and the fact that there are no possibilities for return to the ancestral homeland”*, makes that the Koreans are not so eager to learn about their history.

However, not all respondents neglect the importance of history, and family narratives do matter for some: one 40-year old interviewee indicated that: *“of course our grandparents tell us how they were repressed and how they made their living here, how they managed their farm, and how hard life was for them at the time”*.

### Life for Koreans in Kazakhstan

The next question dealt with the preservation of Korean culture in Kazakhstan. 16 respondents answered that they can preserve their Korean culture and traditions while living in Kazakhstan, but only to a certain extent. 11 people declared that they can preserve their culture to a sufficient extent and only 2 people announced that they cannot preserve it at all in Kazakhstan. A 50 year old interviewee indicated the following: *“It is quite possible to maintain our culture in Kazakhstan. If it were up to me, this would be even desirable. However, there are very few people left who can pass it on. There are a lot of mixed marriages now, that’s why we don’t stick to the customs. Now we are Kazakhs. The older generation is dying.”*

When asking the research participants in additional interviews about certain images or stereotypes about Koreans that are common in Kazakhstan, a 14-year old person answered that the teasing about having a Korean ethnicity usually only happens during childhood. Some stereotypes about Koreans are circulating around, such as the fact that Koreans are eating dogs. This person got used to it and ignored such harassments. An older woman of 50 years old, commented: *“In general, Koreans in Kazakhstan are treated friendly. Traditions of Koreans and Kazakhs are similar. Some people however disapprove of Koreans eating dogs.”* Yet another interviewee said that Kazakh people sometimes think of Koreans as

*“heavy drinkers, gamblers and womanizers, but this is a stereotype. Every Kazakh has a friend who is Korean.”* This contradicts Lee’s (2020) statement that ethnic discrimination does occur towards the Koreans. According to these participants at least, teasing might occur but Koreans in Kazakhstan are generally well accepted and treated friendly.

Most respondents (14) rated the level of organization and cohesion of their (Korean) community as ‘average’. 8 people rated it as high, whereas another 8 people rated this as low. People of all ages are again mixed in their opinions. A 14-year old interviewee indicated that he has a lot of Koreans friends, as well as a 50-year old participant who claimed that almost everyone, Kazakh or Korean, has Korean friends. This person’s main environment consists of Koreans, as she is working in a Korean company.

The participation in Korean social movements or associations seems to be rather low amongst these respondents, which was also indicated in the literature by Lee (2020). Only 5 respondents followed some type of language course or Korean drum class in a Korean cultural center or elsewhere.

#### Attachment to the homeland

This research was too limited in its scope to analyze to what extent the participants still feel some sort of attachment to their historic homeland. As is shown in bar chart 1 (see next subchapter on the next page), only 7 respondents associate their Korean identity with ‘the homeland’. However, there are some indications that the respondents at least look up to Korea and the Koreans. From the survey it became clear that 13 people would like to visit South-Korea one day, 7 would like to live there one day and 10 already visited Korea before. The 50-year old interviewee mentioned that she would not want to live in South-Korea, but she does visit the country often, *“because she likes South Koreans very much”*. Another interviewee called the country and its inhabitants hospitable, intelligent and industrious and the youngest interviewee believed that people can earn good money in Korea. These results at least point to the great attraction of, or at least curiosity about, Korea.

Most respondents (28) know someone who recently moved to South Korea as well, for study, work, etc. Half of the research participants still have some relatives either in Korea, or in the Far East. Some of the participants mentioned that those relatives only moved there after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1991. These results indicate that there are still quite a few old or new personal connections with Korea or the Russian Far East. However, 11 people do not have any relatives in Korea or in the Far East, thus it would be an overstatement to say that most participants still have very strong (family) ties to their homeland.

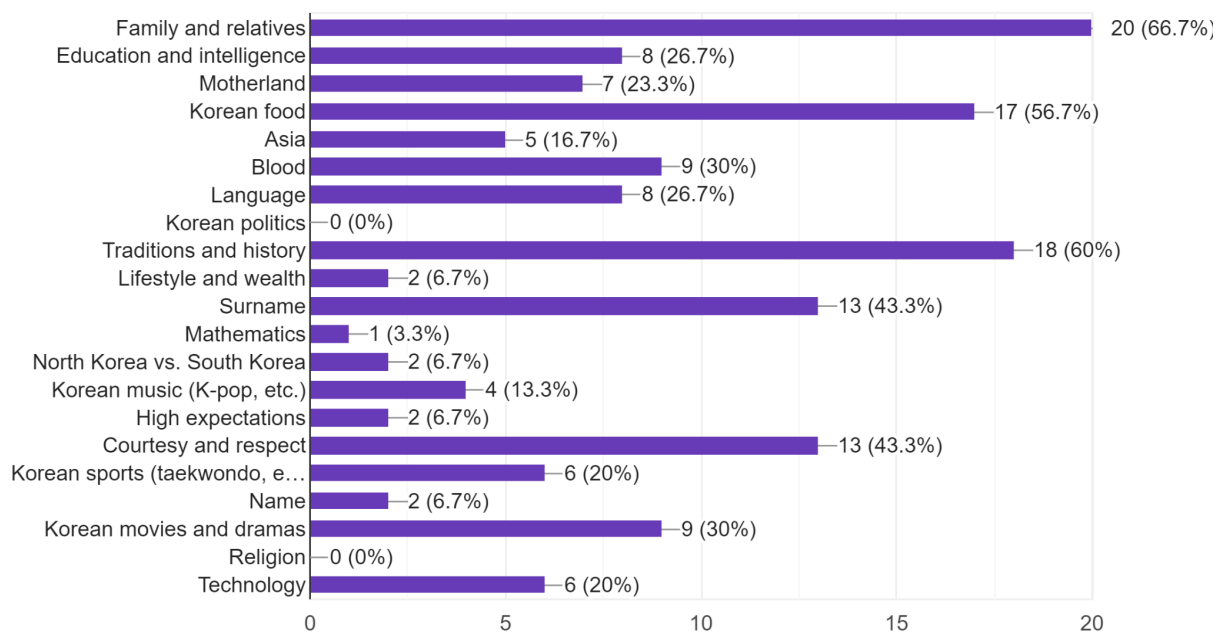
#### Cognitive and affective attitudes towards Korean identity

The most important part of this research was to find out what symbols are associated with a Korean identity, in order to understand the cognitive and affective attitudes of the Korean diaspora towards their Korean identity. The preliminary list of symbols associated with the Korean diaspora, as offered by Koh and Baek, was presented to the research participants in the form of a multiple choice question.(Koh, Baek, 2000) They had to indicate or select

which of these symbols they associated with their Korean background and they could choose as many as possible. In order not to neglect any additional symbols or associations, the participants could write down additional words. Cohen acknowledged that surveys are rather cognitive in format, but the questions surrounding the expressions of someone's identity, through these 'symbols', are an attempt to evaluate certain affective or emotional attitudes. (Cohen, 2004) Selecting certain symbols or words does not necessarily relate to any specific behavior of the participant, so the survey is really an assessment of cognitive or affective attitudes.

What does it mean to you to be "Korean"? When you think of "Korean", what comes to your mind?

30 responses



BAR CHART 1: symbols associated with a Korean identity

After having categorized these different symbols according to the different components proposed by Cohen's work on diasporic identity (Biology, Education, Homeland/origin, Culture and Universality: see table 2) and counting the total number of participants having indicated one of the symbols that are related to the component, it becomes clear that the cultural component is the most important component, meaning that the symbols that are associated with the cultural component were selected or mentioned the most by the participants : 56 times. This is followed by the biological component, with 42 mentions, next the education component with 32, the universal component with 13 and the homeland/origin component with only 9 mentions.



Component	Symbols
Biology	blood, family and relatives, surname
Education	education and intelligence, language, mathematics, religion, courtesy and respect, high expectations
Homeland/origin	motherland, Korean politics, North Korea vs South Korea
Culture	Korean food, traditions and history, Korean music, Korean sports, Korean movies and dramas, name
Universality	Asia, lifestyle and wealth, technology

TABLE 2: symbols per diasporic identity component

However, when looking at the individual symbols, ‘family and relatives’ were chosen the most (20 of the 30 participants) which belong to the biological component. This is what the two interviewees also declared, that their ethnic consciousness is first and foremost associated with their nationality and family. Three of the four interviewees indicated that they mainly feel Korean because their parents or relatives are Korean. The next two mostly chosen symbols were traditions and history (by 18 participants) and Korean food (17). Even though the interviewees claimed (see subchapter Korean traditions and history) that traditions are simplifying or forgotten by younger generations, this table shows that their importance for the Korean people should not be denied. The surname is also often associated with being Korean (13), as well as ‘courtesy and respect’ (13), two distinct values that are often linked to Confucianism and a Confucian society. The legacy of Confucianism remains a fundamental part of Korean society nowadays, where values such as respect for elders are still very prevalent. (Connor, n.d.) The educational component is thus also quite important, standing at the third place. One interviewee demonstrated this by saying: *“Koreans are loved by everyone, very hardworking, they honor elders, have respect, are polite, kind, open-minded and supportive”*. All these qualities refer to a certain extent to a way of upbringing, at home or in school.

The universal component scores rather low, meaning that for most of the research participants, ‘being Korean’ does mean something special, and is not necessarily linked with the broader Asian region or just any other foreign or wealthy country. It also means that most participants would argue that one cannot achieve or reinforce their Korean identity, simply by commitment (such as following language courses) or other behavioral aspects. A blood-based definition of a diaspora is thus more prevalent amongst members of the diaspora, where ‘received’ or ‘primordial’ characteristics such as birth are more important than ‘chosen’ ones such as commitment.

The lowest score goes to the homeland/origin category. It means that most of the participants would not necessarily or primarily associate their Korean origins with the Korean

peninsula and refer to it as their homeland. Only one interviewee spontaneously said that Korea is considered her historical homeland. However, another said that: "*The homeland is the land where a person was born. I consider Kazakhstan my native land.*" This research stays rather silent on the question whether the Koreans of Kazakhstan present their homeland in an idealized way. As mentioned before, some interviewees did seem to stress the attractiveness of Korea and the hospitality of the people there. Even though additional research should be conducted, at first sight it seems that the link with 'the homeland' is rather absent, and that there is no such thing as 'nostalgia to this homeland'. This would confirm Adamz' (2015) hypothesis that the Koryo Saram no longer consider South Korea as an historical homeland and there are no longer maintained myths of "homeland" return. This also explains why history is not considered as very relevant for some Korean diaspora members. Following the definition of a diaspora according to Cohen, the diasporic identity is indeed more rooted into the place where the diaspora settles, rather than in their historical homeland and thus the 'locality' aspect is very important to take into account when studying the Koreans of Kazakhstan. (Cohen, 2004)

Finally, most relevant for this research: 9 out of 30 people indicated that they associate Korean movies and dramas with their Korean identity. Even though this is not the majority of the research participants, it is a considerable number. The influence of movies on the diasporic identity of the Korean diaspora will be analyzed in the following chapter.

### 3.2 Interpretation of Korean movies in relation to the ethnic identity

The next set of questions dealt with Korean movies and the impact of these movies on the ethnic identity of the participants. First of all, 50 % of the participants indicated that they like watching most Korean movies and dramas. 11 people answered that this depends on the movie and only 4 people announced that they don't like Korean movies at all, and these are people of all ages. The famous Netflix show Squid Game has been watched by the majority of the participants, as well as the movies Train to Busan (17 people), Parasite (11) and the somewhat older TV-show from 2009 Boys over Flowers (14 people). Most participants discovered Korean movies on TV, as well as by recommendations of family or friends or through the internet.

When asking how Korean movies are interpreted in relation to their ethnic identity, the following results came out:

How important is your identity as a Korean when you watch Korean movies? Does watching movies reinforce your feeling of 'being Korean'?

30 responses



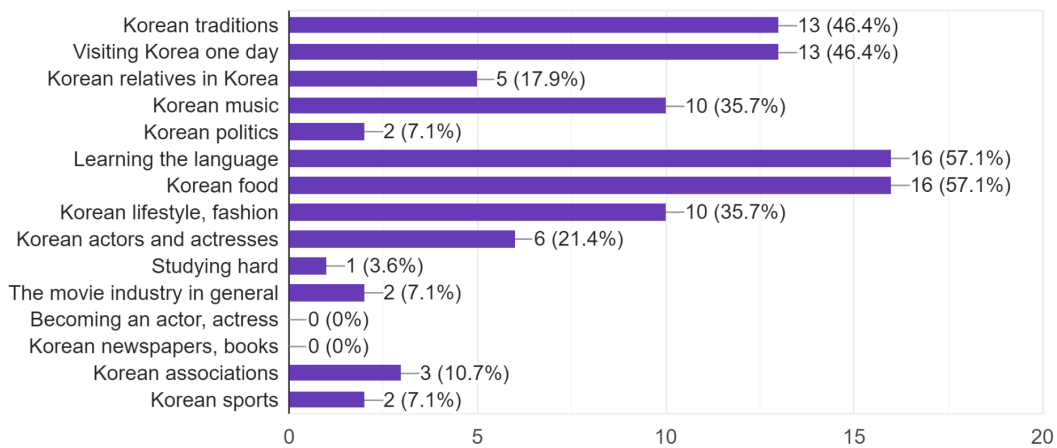
PIE CHART 3: Korean movies in relation to ethnic identity

14 respondents or 46.7% of the respondents indicated that watching Korean movies does not have anything to do with their ethnic identity. These people do not think about their identity in relation to the movies. On the other hand, 8 people (26.7%) find their identity rather important in relation to Korean movies, and 6 people (20%) indicate that it is very important. Again, age did not seem to be an important element in this question: those that think their ethnic identity is reinforced, range from the age between 16 up until 50 or even older. In another question, 17 participants indicated that they feel very similar with regards to their identity, after having discovered and watched Korean movies. 8 participants announced that they now feel more proud of their Korean background, after consuming Korean movies. Only 1 person indicated that they feel less proud after watching these movies, so we can conclude that watching movies usually does not have a negative impact on people's identification as Korean. This means that most Koreans are either neutral about the influence of movies on their ethnic identity, or they feel that the movies have a positive influence on their ethnic consciousness, in the sense that they feel 'partially' or 'very' Korean after they have watched a movie and they are proud of their Korean background.

Consuming Korean movies can often lead to various other interests related to someone's Korean identity, as is shown in the following bar chart. Again, respondents were allowed to choose as many options as possible, and they could write down additional words or interests.

Do you think your interest in Korean movies has led you to become interested and involved in other aspects of Korea, such as:

28 responses



BAR CHART 2: interests after consuming Korean movies

Component	Interests
Biology	/
Education	Learning the language, studying hard, Korean associations
Homeland/origin	Visiting Korea, Korean relatives in Korea, Korean politics
Culture	Traditions, music, food, sports, newspapers or books
Universality	Movie industry in general, Korean lifestyle and fashion, Korean actors and actresses, Becoming actor or actress

TABLE 3: interests per diasporic identity component

Referring to the five different components mentioned in table 3, associated with a diasporic identity by Cohen (2004), these results indicate that the cultural component is again the most dominant factor, with 41 mentions of interests in some cultural elements. Consuming Korean movies thus encourages Korean diaspora members primarily to become interested in other Korean cultural aspects, such as traditions, music, food and sports. This increased cultural interest suggests that most participants associate Korean movies with Korea as a culturally distinguishable entity. Consuming Korean movies also encourages ethnic Koreans to learn the Korean language, as 16 participants mentioned being interested in this. Whereas the cultural component thus stands out, the homeland/origin component (20 mentions) and the

universal component (18 mentions) have a lower score in total. Watching movies does not stimulate the majority of the participants to get in touch with some Korean relatives living in Korea or learn about Korean politics, but it does lead to a considerably increased interest in visiting Korea one day. The Korean movies thus transform the views of some diaspora members on Korea as an attractive destination or foreign country, but not necessarily as a place of origin. The universality component has the lowest score, which means that Korean movies are appreciated for its Korean elements and cultural components, and they are not seen as just another film genre. Consuming Korean movies does not lead to enhanced general interests in the movie industry in general or in becoming an actor or actress. It does however lead to some interest into the Korean lifestyle and fashion, which also confirms the fact that Korea is considered as an attractive destination by a lot of participants.

#### 4. Interpretation of Korean movies as sources of soft power

The final set of questions were aimed at measuring the influence of Korean movies as sources of soft power. When asking the opinions of the participants on the reasons why Korean movies might be so popular abroad, the following answers were given: *“Koreans are very smart and know how to entertain people. They invested a lot of money in culture and the entertainment industry.”*, *“these are very emotional and beautiful films. Great staging”*, *“there is not as much violence as in American films”*, *“because of the Korean vision and aesthetics”*, *“the handsome actors and their high acting levels”*, *“the romantic or unusual plot”*, *“the story lines are close to reality”* and *“the movies and dramas are of a higher level than in Hollywood”*. It is clear that Korean movies are evaluated very positively, they are considered to be of higher quality than American movies and the romantic, non-violent and emotional aspects of these movies are highly appreciated. This indicates that the Korean diaspora is enjoying Korean movies as a unique genre on its own, which can be distinguished from Western movies by its Korean or cultural components.

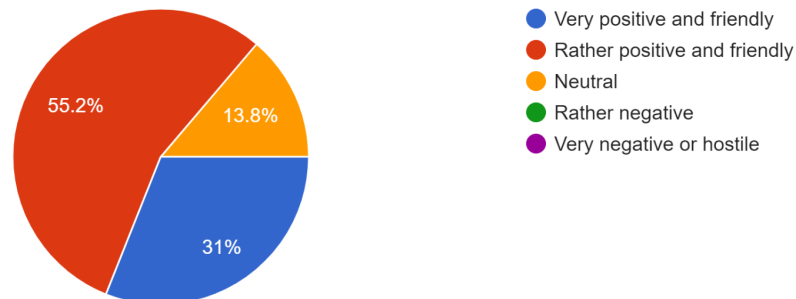
The participants associated the following words with Korean movies: *romance and drama, entertaining and exciting, thought-provoking, interesting and original and good actors and actresses*. Only 3 people indicated that they found the storyline credible and 2 who found the characters relatable. This partially refutes the hypothesis that Korean movies are appreciated for their critiques on social inequality, which is a common social problem everywhere (also in Kazakhstan) (Liu, 2020). This topic of social inequality has the potential to resonate with audiences from all over the world, however in the case of Kazakhstan, this does not seem to be decisive, at least not for these 30 participants of the Korean diaspora. Only 1 interviewee mentioned that she learnt from Korean movies that Korea is *“dividing its society into rich and poor”*. 5 people have a more negative view on the movies, namely that they were *predictable and cliché-ridden* and 1 person said that the movies were *slow and boring*. Overall, there is thus a positive appreciation of the movies. People did however indicate that in movies everything is more romanticized, more exaggerated and too dramatic.

The following pie chart (4) also indicates that the majority of the participants (25) have a positive outlook on Korean society after consuming Korean movies. It would be an overstatement to claim that the Korean Wave, including the popularity of Korean movies, changed the perception amongst the diaspora members on the Korean society for the better: it is very possible that some diaspora members already had some positive views on Korea

before getting to know Korean popular culture. Nevertheless, these results do indicate that movies contribute to a positive and friendly understanding of Korean society and lifestyle.

What do you think of Korean society after watching these films?

29 responses



PIE CHART 4: opinion on Korean society

Let us refer back to the definition of soft power of Nye: *“the ability to shape the preferences of others and to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payments”* (Nye, 2008). As mentioned in the introduction, Korea’s diasporal outreach’ objective is to reconnect with the Korean diaspora, in order to preserve the Korean ethnic identity abroad and establish a consolidated diaspora. One respondent commented: *“South-Korea did not forget its people abroad. In fact, Korea provides enough opportunities for us.”* A well-integrated diaspora could support the country of origin and lobby its interests abroad, without having the desire to migrate to South Korea. A strong Korean diaspora creates a fruitful basis for doing business in Kazakhstan, attracting the most talented Korean professionals into the country and gaining increased support for their overall policies in the world. Moreover, what South Korea also wants in and from the region, is to transform the diaspora into pro-South Korean political and economic actors, in order to penetrate deeply into the attractive markets of Kazakhstan, which revolve around the exploitation of natural resources. The creation of Korean (or non-Korean) cultural actors is not a top priority, however it is a means to achieve these ‘greater’ economic and political goals. (Yem, 2018)

On top of their various diaspora policies in the framework of the Overseas Korean Foundation Act, we can imagine that the appeal of Korean pop culture and movies abroad are also beneficial for the Korean government to re-attach the Korean diaspora to their historical homeland and have a positive influence on their perception of the country. As Nye himself indicated, the positive effect of pop culture can make the process of carrying out policy more easy and effective. (Nye, 2004) Soft power resources can thus be considered as a convenient addition on top of the more classic diaspora or foreign policies. Consuming Korean movies can lead, as is shown in this research, to an increased interest in learning the Korean language, visiting Korea and learning about Korean traditions. Furthermore, it creates a positive outlook on Korean society and lifestyle. In this sense, Korean movies as soft power resources have the ability to turn into active soft power. To conclude, South Korea’s foreign policy and public diplomacy in Kazakhstan, seemed to be based on the one

hand on diasporal outreach policies, and on the other hand on soft power politics. (Kim, 2021)

One side note to keep in mind is that the Korean government did not actively create the Korean Wave, they only created the necessary conditions in which for example the movie industry could flourish. (Gibson, 2020) Since the early 2000s, the government has ceased to take any measures to protect or develop a specific cultural identity projected in the movies. Korean films transformed into blockbusters type of movies, without promoting national culture per se. (Jin, 2006) These blockbuster Korean movies or other popular culture instruments are thus only one of the many soft power resources that the Korean government can use to achieve their higher goals abroad, which are often of economic nature. Korean-Kazakh relations can thus not be considered as a case in which Korea is deploying extensive soft power, but it is a classical policy of bilateral interaction and influence, in which some elements of soft power are or can be embedded. (De Cordier, 2021) Furthermore, not only Korean diaspora members are targeted to be influenced, but the broader Kazakh (or other) population. Korea thus does not only seek to propagate Korean culture or Korean lifestyle for the Korean diaspora abroad, but for the wider population, to mobilize support and create favorable conditions and legitimacy to do business in various parts of the world.

## 5. Remarks and suggestions for further research

This research's objective was not to seek some generalizable findings on the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan or to theorize, due to its limited scale. Its aim was rather to find some first insights and to analyze the extent to which 30 diaspora members of different ages identify as Korean. Even though the representativeness of the research was being monitored, a larger scale research with a higher number of participants could provide different data and thus the conclusions made within this research should be carefully interpreted. It is necessary to take into account that there might be many other narratives or discourses about Korean identities across regions, and socioeconomic statuses for example.

Second of all, the format of surveys is not ideal. On the one hand, handing out surveys allowed the researcher to reach more participants and to get some comparable data. However, even though some open questions were provided, it needs to be admitted that people are less likely to take their time to write down their opinions, or to come up with additional symbols or interests themselves (bar chart 1 and bar chart 2). The choice of symbols in bar chart 1 are also very much open for further debate. The researcher found inspiration in the work of Koh and Baek (2020) to choose certain symbols and categorize them in certain components, however some symbols could have been chosen more carefully or differently. Conducting interviews with the research participants and coding the interviews afterwards, might have given a wider variety of symbols. This was why the four additional interviews were useful, in order to get some additional data and to analyze the more general discourse on identity by the four interviewees.

According to Naujoks (2010), it is overall a very difficult task to come up with meaningful information on different aspects associated with 'identity'. Especially in the format of surveys,

it is difficult to get a more nuanced or context-specific view on the meaning and consequences of certain attitudes towards identities. It needs to be considered that identities are not rigid or singular. Identity formation is a process and it can change over the years. (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) People can have several or hybrid identities according to the context, and thus it is necessary to take into consideration the specific social context in which this data was obtained. (Naujoks, 2010) Because the questions were so centered around 'ethnic consciousness' and 'being Korean', participants might have exaggerated their attitude towards their identity, whereas in an informal conversation the participants might have given less pronounced answers. Moreover, these surveys, which were posted in facebook groups or distributed in Korean cultural centers, might have attracted those that already feel a great attachment to their Korean identity.

By centering this research around a rather harmless topic such as film, the research community did not face any kind of harm from this research. Moreover, the privacy of all the participants were ensured, so even if they spoke about certain more 'political' topics, such as discrimination and questions on being an ethnic minority, there would not have been any negative consequences from speaking out freely. Being 'there' in the field was of course beneficial, as it was easier to gain the trust of the participants and explain the research purpose.

Finally, some suggestions for further research. One participant asked in a facebook group why the research was only centered around the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, and not in Uzbekistan or in Russia. A research proposal could be to gather similar types of data on the diaspora members living in those countries and look for connections or dissociations on their attitudes towards their identity formation. Multi-sited ethnography should not be neglected in the case of Korean diaspora members abroad, and especially not on those that come from the former Soviet Union and share a similar history. Researchers could thus extend this research by looking for resonances with other cases in different localities. (Lund, 2014)

As indicated in the research, the researcher was not able to gather some comparable or meaningful data on the importance of history and nostalgia towards the homeland for the Korean diaspora members. Also, not much is known about distinctions between those that live in different regions in the country and between those that live in rural or urban areas. It is plausible that ethnic culture and language are better preserved in rural areas than in cities where many nationalities are mixed. (Alikhanova, 2021) Even though the Korean diaspora is highly urbanized in Kazakhstan, it could still be interesting to find some correlations between the rural-urban and the level of attachment to the Korean identity. Finally, in order to understand how effective the Korean Wave as a source of soft power is in Kazakhstan, it is necessary to interview Kazakh people as well and ask their opinions about Korean society after having watched Korean movies.



# Conclusion

This research aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of one of the many ethnic minority groups living in Kazakhstan, the Korean diaspora or the so-called Koryo-Saram of Kazakhstan. Approximately 108,551 Koreans live in Kazakhstan nowadays, dispersed in the country and mainly in urban areas. There are many reasons for studying this diaspora community, such as their fascinating history and their ambiguous relations with the historical homeland, Korea. These Koreans were brutally deported from the Russian Far East to abandoned areas in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan back in 1937 under Stalin's regime of ethnic cleansing. This traumatic history gave them their unique and regional features. Moreover, living for decades in the multi-ethnic country Kazakhstan, in coexistence with the majority ethnic groups, led to their high degree of acculturation and assimilations into the Russified society. The nationalization policies of the newly independent Kazakh state, resulted in a further loss of the Korean culture and language. At the same time, the Koreans are known for their adaptability, as they are well-integrated into the Kazakh society and are considered by many as model ethnic minorities. Even though the process of assimilation, which started already during the Soviet times, could not be overcome, the Koreans managed to preserve their culture to a certain extent.

South Korea made efforts to vitalize the 'Koreanness' of the Koryo-Saram, in the form of classic diasporal outreach policies and soft power politics. (Kim, 2021) However, the South Korean government does not recognize the Koryo-Saram as belonging to the Korean peninsula. Their goal in the region is to create a strong and wealthy diaspora abroad, mainly to receive reciprocal obligations from the respective states and diaspora members. Their policies are driven by pragmatism, natural energy needs and other economic means in the Central-Asian region. The role of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan is to serve as valuable bridges between Kazakhstan and Korea. (Adamz, 2015) Moreover, the popularity and spread of Korean cultural products, the so-called Korean Wave, is a convenient resource for the Korean government to gain legitimacy for their higher political and economic policies in the region. These soft power resources, such as Korean movies, thus have the ability to turn into active soft power, because they can be linked to specific foreign policy goals. However, additional research should be conducted in order to understand if and how exactly the Korean government is deploying these soft power resources in their foreign policies in Central Asia. The Korean Wave was not intentionally created by the Korean government, they merely supported it. A hypothesis is thus that the Korean-Kazakh relations are defined by the more classical policies of bilateral interaction and influence, in which elements of soft power can be embedded but are not used intentionally or extensively.

The aim of this master thesis was to find out what this Korean Wave meant for the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, and how it affected their emotional attitude towards their ethnic identity and their historical homeland. This study thus sought to provide the first insights into the diasporic identity of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan in relation to the growing

influence of Korean pop culture. For many Koreans in Kazakhstan, representations of Korea occur through Korean popular media to a large extent.

To analyze this, fieldwork was conducted in the Kazakh capital of Nur-Sultan. 30 research participants of Korean origin, of all ages and coming from different regions, filled in a survey, and on top of that 4 participants were interviewed. In the first part, the researcher gathered some general demographic information of the participants such as their ages, places of residence and education. Following the analytical framework of Cohen (2004), as proposed by Koh and Baek (2019), an attempt to measure the ethnic or diasporic identity of this group of Koreans was made. Moreover, the recent popularity of Korean movies brought the researcher to ask questions about the consumption of Korean movies and their impact. An answer was sought to the following research question: What is the impact of South-Korean movies, as sources of Korean Soft Power, on the diasporic identity of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan?

There were four sub questions to this main research question: What are some of the cognitive or affective elements that the Koreans of Kazakhstan associate their ethnic identity with? Are Korean movies popular amongst the Koreans of Kazakhstan? To what extent does the Korean diaspora interpret Korean movies in relation to their Korean ethnic identity and does it reinforce feelings of 'ethnic belonging'? How does watching Korean movies transform their perception of the historical homeland, and South-Korean society in general?

Before getting to the main topic of Korean movies, some general information was gathered in order to determine the level of ethnic consciousness amongst the Korean diaspora members. These are some of the main results. First of all, the majority of the 30 research participants are well integrated in terms of social mobility and education, with 19 people having received higher education and the majority having jobs, usually in the private sector, or by self-employment. With regards to the ethnicity of the parents, almost all participants have parents that are both of Korean descent. Even though one respondent indicated that intermarriages are quite uncommon amongst Korean diaspora members, this contradicts the existing literature and thus no generalizable conclusions can be made. The pluralism of religions or world views in Korea also exists considerably within the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan, as half of the participants consider themselves atheist, and the other half is mainly split into Protestants, members of the Christian Orthodox Church and agnostics. These numbers do not differ much from the general figures in South Korea, except for the fact that there are no Buddhists amongst the diaspora members. It also shows that the Koreans have not converted to Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, the main religions in Kazakhstan.

Half of the participants self-identify with being Korean to the fullest. This affirms the general consensus within the literature, that people in Kazakhstan, the Koreans equally, usually relate more to their ethnic identity rather than their civic, Kazakh, identity. However, hybrid or multiple identities are also common, as 11 participants indicated feeling a 'Kazakhstani of Korean ethnicity'. This indicates that diasporic identities do not appear in isolation, but that they are tied to the national identity. Not one respondent considered themselves as a full-fledged Kazakh citizen, so again, ethnic identity and family background does play a role in the lives of the Koreans. The multi-ethnic environment in Kazakhstan thus led the diaspora members to be focused on the preservation of their own ethnic and cultural identity,

but at the same time, their long-term residence in the country also partially led to their adaptation of the Kazakh civil identity. (Yefremov, 2021)

The general knowledge of Korean is rather low. Approximately half of the participants have some understanding of the language, but those that speak Korean fluently are very limited. Russian has become the main language, as 28 of the 30 participants indicated to communicate in Russian with their family members. No one mentioned speaking Kazakh at home or in public life, so usually Koreans do not consider themselves native speakers of the Kazakh language. 4 young participants followed some type of language course, but additional research should be conducted to find out whether there might be a 'renewed desire' to learn the Korean language amongst the youth.

Preserving certain Korean traditions is also considered to be important for 27 respondents. According to the interviewees, young Koreans are forgetting the traditions nowadays and traditions are usually simplifying. However, the list of holidays that are still celebrated nowadays is quite extensive, according to another respondent. Traditions are thus preserved, but maybe only partially. Most respondents answered that they can preserve their Korean culture and traditions while living in Kazakhstan, but only to a certain extent. Ethnic discrimination, apart from some teasing, usually does not occur, as one interviewee answered that Koreans in Kazakhstan are generally treated friendly. The level of organization and cohesion of the Korean community is assessed by 14 participants as average, by 8 as high and by another 8 as low. The participation in Korean social movements or associations seems to be rather low as well amongst these respondents.

Additional research should be conducted, but there were at least some indications that history and feelings of attachment to the historical homeland are not very relevant to the diaspora members anymore. This could be because of the absence of official history classes, the geographical distance from the historical homeland and their long-term stay in Kazakhstan without having opportunities to 'return'. Still, many respondents indicated that they would like to visit or even live in Korea, and these results point at least to the great attraction of, or at least curiosity about, Korea. There are also quite a few old and new connections to Korea, as most respondents know someone who recently moved to South Korea and half of the participants still have some relatives either in Korea, or in the Far East.

The most important part of this research was to find out what symbols are associated with a Korean identity, in order to understand the cognitive and affective attitudes of the Korean diaspora towards their Korean identity. This would answer the first sub-question. Symbols such as 'family and relatives', 'Korean food', 'traditions and history', 'surname' and 'courtesy and respect' were quite often associated with a 'Korean identity' and chosen the most by the diaspora members. The next step was to categorize these different symbols according to the different components proposed by Cohen's framework of a diasporic identity, (1) Biology or birth; (2) education or religion; (3) attachment to the homeland; (4) culture; and (5) universal. Finally, the researcher attempted to find out which of the five categorical components of diasporic identities dominated the discourse amongst the diaspora members. It became clear that the cultural component, followed by the biological component dominated the discourse, and that the Korean diaspora member thus mostly considers themselves Korean due to some cultural aspects or birth. For most participants, being Korean does mean something special and it is not something that can be achieved by commitment or behavioral

aspects. A blood-based definition of a diaspora is thus more prevalent amongst the participants. Clearly, 'received' or 'primordial' characteristics such as birth are more important than 'chosen' ones such as commitment. The homeland/origin category has the lowest score, which means that the participants would not primarily associate their Korean origins with the Korean peninsula and refer to it as their homeland.

To answer the second sub question, Korean movies are indeed quite popular amongst the diaspora members, as 15 respondents indicated that they like watching Korean movies and 9 indicated that this depends on the movie. Korean movies are evaluated very positively and considered to be of higher quality than American movies. The romantic, non-violent and emotional aspects of these movies are highly appreciated. The third sub question aimed at measuring the extent to which the Korean diaspora interpret Korean movies in relation to their Korean ethnic identity and if it reinforces feelings of 'ethnic belonging'. Most Korean participants, 14, either feel neutral about the influence of movies on their ethnic identity, and 14 others, quite a significant amount, feel that the movies have a positive influence on their ethnic consciousness. They thus became more proud of their Korean background, after having watched a Korean movie.

Consuming Korean movies mostly leads to further interests in cultural elements, such as traditions, music, food and sports. Consuming Korean movies also encourages ethnic Koreans to learn the Korean language, as 16 participants mentioned being interested in learning Korean. Again, the homeland/origin component and the universal component have a lower score in total. The majority of the participants do not feel inspired after watching movies to get in touch with some Korean relatives living in Korea or learn about Korean politics, but it does lead to a considerably increased interest in visiting Korea. The Korean movies thus transform the perspective of some diaspora members on Korea as an attractive destination, but not necessarily as a place of origin. The universality component has the lowest score regarding the consumption. Korean movies are thus clearly appreciated for their Korean elements and cultural components, and they are not seen as just another film genre.

To answer the fourth sub question: the majority of the participants, 25 of them, does indeed have a positive outlook on Korean society after watching Korean movies. Admittedly, this needs to be carefully interpreted: some diaspora members might already have some positive views on Korea before getting to know Korean popular culture and Korean movies. Nevertheless, these results do indicate that movies contribute to a positive and friendly understanding of Korean society and lifestyle.

To conclude and answer the final research question, even though not many Korean diaspora members would necessarily associate their Korean identity with 'movies', they do, however, consider themselves mostly Korean by culture. Korean movies are popular amongst the ethnic Koreans, and for half of the participants, watching these movies reinforces their ethnic consciousness. After consuming Korean movies, most respondents showed an increased interest in other cultural elements, learning the Korean language or in visiting Korea. The perception of South Korean society is positive, but in the minds of the Korean diaspora it remains rather an attractive destination, rather than a place of origin. Soft power resources, such as Korean movies, thus have the ability to reinforce the diasporic identity of the ethnic Koreans of Kazakhstan. Culture can have the transformative power to re-shape

ethno-political aspects of an identity. However, the emphasis must be placed on 'can', because only half of the participants indicated feeling this impact.

When referring back to the original definition of a diaspora, the Korean diaspora shares a lot of the general features: they have been scattered away from their place of origin, share the same race and cultural traits, and they are formed by forced displacement. However, after finalizing this research, many questions remain about other so-called unifying elements of a diaspora: such as the shared trauma, sense of history or language, and having an imagined or idealized homeland. This research aimed at contributing to the field of diaspora studies, to demonstrate that the diasporic identity is indeed more rooted into the place where the diaspora settles, rather than in their historical homeland. This research also reaffirms the claims made by several authors, that Koreans have adapted to Russian culture and transformed their culture in order to fit in. At the same time, they retained parts and sense of their identity, despite the many political shifts that have occurred in Kazakhstan.

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# Appendix

## QUESTIONS FOR SURVEYS (translated from Russian to English)

### What is your age?

1. 16-20
2. 20-25
3. 25-35
4. 35-50
5. 50 or older

### Gender:

1. Male
2. Female

### Where do you live in Kazakhstan?

1. Nur-sultan
2. Almaty
3. Karaganda region
4. Aqmola region
5. Aqtobe region
6. Atyrau region
7. Jambyl region (Taraz)
8. Kostanay region
9. Kyzylorda region
10. Mangystau region
11. Turkistan region
12. Pavlodar region
13. North Kazakhstan region
14. I do not live in Kazakhstan
15. Other, specify:

### How would you self-identify in the first place?

1. Korean
2. Kazakhstani («Казакхстанец») of Korean ethnicity
3. Kazakh
4. Russian or Russian-speaker
5. «Совок» (a Soviet-acculturated person)
6. Hybrid/undefined
7. Other, specify:

### Place of birth?

1. Soviet Union (in the Kazakh or other SSR)

2. Kazakhstan
3. Korea
4. Other, specify:

**What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?**

1. Primary school
2. High school
3. Higher education (college, for specialized professional or vocational training)
4. Academic degree
5. Other, specify:

**What is your employment status?**

1. Working in the public sector
  - a) technical function
  - b) administrative function
  - c) supervisory function
2. Working in the private sector
  - a) technical function
  - b) administrative or commercial function
  - c) supervisory function
3. professional: doctor, notary, lawyer, academic
4. pensioner
5. self-employed (i.e., not officially employed, but doing casual work or independent business activity)
6. student
7. housewife
8. unemployed

**Ethnicity of your parents?**

....

**Do you have relatives living in Korea and/or the Russian Far East?**

...

**Religion?**

1. Christianity
  - a) Roman Catholic
  - b) Russian Orthodox
  - c) Protestantism
  - d) Pentecostalism
2. Tongbulgyo Korean buddhism
3. Korean shamanism
4. Agnostic (believer but not religiously-affiliated)
5. No religion because atheist
6. Other, specify:

**Do you have a command of the Korean language?**

1. Yes, I speak and write it fluently
2. Yes, I can speak and write quite well
3. I can speak and read a little, but not write
4. I understand Korean more or less, but I do not speak it
5. I do not understand any Korean
6. Other, specify:

**What does being “Korean” mean to you? Indicate all the words, objects or experiences that you relate with being Korean:**

1. Family and relatives
2. Good education and intelligence
3. Motherland
4. Korean food
5. Asia
6. Blood
7. Language
8. Korean politics
9. Customs and history
10. Lifestyle and wealth
11. Last name
12. Mathematics
13. North vs South Korea
14. Korean music
15. High expectations
16. Politeness and respect

17. Korean sports (Taekwondo, etc.)
18. First name (given name)
19. Korean films and dramas
20. Religion
21. Technology
22. Other, specify:

**Do you like watching Korean movies or dramas?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Sometimes, it depends on the movie

**Have you watched any of these Korean movies or dramas? Indicate all the movies that you have watched.**

1. Squid Game
2. Train to Busan
3. Parasite
4. Burning
5. Snowpiercer
6. All of us are dead
7. Crash landing on you
8. Boys over Flowers
9. Other, specify:

**Did you attend events or courses in Korean language offered by associations from Korea or the Korean embassy?**

...

**In which language do you usually communicate in everyday life within your family?**

1. Korean
2. Russian
3. Kazakh
4. Hybrid (mixture of Korean, Russian and/or Kazakh)
5. Other, specify:

**In which language do you usually communicate in everyday life in the public sphere (work, neighborhood, ... )?**

1. Korean
2. Russian
3. Kazakh
4. Hybrid (mixture of Korean, Russian and/or Kazakh)
5. Other, specify:

**Is it important for you or your family to preserve certain Korean traditions (eating Korean food, etc.)**

1. very important
2. rather important
3. neutral
4. rather unimportant
5. very unimportant
6. Other, specify:

**Where or how did you encounter Korean movies for the first time?**

1. Recommended by family or friends
2. Saw it once on TV
3. Through the internet
4. Hype on social media
5. Through school
6. Through a Korean cultural institute or association
7. I don't remember

**What words or characteristics do you associate with the movies you watched? How would you describe Korean movies in general? Indicate all possible options.**

1. Entertaining and exciting
2. Slow-moving and boring
3. Relatable characters
4. Relatable story
5. Thought-provoking, original and interesting
6. Predictable and cliché ridden
7. Violence
8. Romance and drama
9. Fantasy
10. Good actors and actress
11. Overrated
12. Underrated
13. Other, specify:

**Why do you think Korean movies are so popular around the world? What is specific about them, or what makes them special?**

...

**How do you feel about Korean society, after watching these movies?**

1. very positive and friendly
2. rather positive and friendly
3. neutral
4. rather negative
5. very negative or hostile



6. Other, specify:

**Would you like to visit Korea one day, or even live there (for studies, work, etc.) ?**

1. Yes, I would like to visit
2. Yes, I would like to live there one day
3. I already visited Korea before
4. No
5. Other, specify:

**Do you know someone who has moved to Korea (for studies, work, etc.)?**

1. Yes
2. No

**How important is your identity as a Korean when you watch Korean movies? Do you feel that being Korean has a special meaning when you watch Korean movies?**

1. very important, I feel very Korean while watching Korean movies
2. rather important, I feel partially Korean while watching Korean movies
3. neutral, I don't think about my identity while watching Korean movies
4. rather unimportant, I do not feel particularly Korean while watching Korean movies
5. unimportant, I don't feel Korean at all while watching Korean movies
6. Other, specify:

**Do you feel more ethnic conscious after having discovered and watched Korean movies?**

1. I feel more proud of my Korean background, the movies reinforced my 'Koreaness'
2. I feel very similar, the movies had no impact on my self-identification
3. I feel less proud of my Korean background after watching these movies
4. Other, specify:

**Did you become interested or involved in other aspects of Korea, after having discovered Korean movies? Did it make you more interested in...**

1. Korean traditions and religions
2. visiting Korea one day
3. getting in touch with Korean relatives living in Korea
4. Korean music (K-pop, traditional, etc.)
5. Korean politics
6. learning the Korean language
7. Korean food
8. the Korean life-style, fashion, etc.
9. the life of Korean actors and actress, celebrities
10. studying hard
11. the movie industry in general

12. becoming an actor, actress myself
13. reading Korean newspapers or books
14. becoming part of a Korean association
15. typical Korean sports
16. Other, specify:

**Do you feel you are part of a Korean community? How would you rate the level of organization and cohesion of your community?**

1. High level of organization and cohesion
2. average
3. low level
4. Other, specify:

**Do you think living in Kazakhstan, you and your family can sufficiently preserve cultural, national or religious traditions?**

1. Yes, to a sufficient extent I can preserve
2. Only to a certain extent
3. No, I cannot practically preserve it.
4. I don't care about preserving Korean traditions.
5. Other, specify:

**Are you interested in having a small (online) interview with me, to talk more about your identity as a Korean living in Kazakhstan ?**

In this case, feel free to contact me on the following email address: [nastja.elst@hotmail.com](mailto:nastja.elst@hotmail.com), or write your email address below and I will contact you.

Email address:

**Are you interested in receiving the final results of this research?**

In this case, feel free to contact me on the following email address: [nastja.elst@hotmail.com](mailto:nastja.elst@hotmail.com), or write your email address below and I will contact you.

Email address:

**How did you learn about this survey?**

1. Through a friend, family member or acquaintance
2. Through a post shared in a facebook group ( Коресарам в Алматы, or other)
3. Through a Korean cultural association
4. Other, specify: