

Research Article

Socio-economic relationship of Korea and Kazakhstan: The role of the Korean diaspora and homeland engagement

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Received: 03.06.2021; Accepted: 14.06.2021. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.38154/cjas.1>

Abstract: An increase in bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and South Korea has been experienced in many spheres, with advances noted in the economic, social, cultural, and educational areas. It is argued that the historical and cultural affinity of the two nations, such as that of the ethnic Korean diaspora, have played a significant role in the development of these ties. Therefore, this study investigates the socio-cultural, economic, and educational relationship between Kazakhstan and Korea. To this end, the history of the ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan and the governmental organizations that are involved with the Korean diaspora are first investigated, with a particular focus on social and cultural aspects, after which the economic ties were analysed, along with statistical data related to imports, exports, and investments. Finally, an analysis of the exchange programs in place was completed, including the Korean studies in Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian and Kazakhstani studies in Korea, increasing the understanding regarding the depth of the educational relations between the two countries.

Keywords: Korea, Kazakhstan, diaspora, Central Asia, koryo-saram

Kore ve Kazakistan arasında sosyoekonomik ilişkiler: Kore diasporasının ve vatan bağlılığının rolü

Öz: Kazakistan ve Güney Kore arasındaki ilişkiler ekonomik, sosyal, kültürel ve eğitimsel yönler de dahil olmak üzere birçok alanda gerçekleşmektedir. Etnik Kore diasporası gibi tarihi ve kültürel yakınlıklar bu ilişkilerin gelişmesinde önemli bir etken olarak gösterilmektedir. Bu araştırma, Kazakistan ve Güney Kore arasındaki sosyo-kültürel, ekonomik ve eğitimsel ilişkilere odaklanmayı amaçlamaktadır. Makalede öncelikle, sosyal ve kültürel bir odakla, Kazakistan'daki etnik Korelilerin ve Kore diasporasıyla ilişkili hükümet kuruluşlarının tarihsel yönü ele alınacaktır. İkinci olarak, ekonomik bağlar, ithalat ve ihracat ile yatırımlara ilişkin istatistiksel veriler ile analiz edilecektir. Son olarak, iki ülke arasındaki eğitim ilişkileri bağlamında ülkeler arası değişim programları, Kazakistan'da Kore çalışmaları ve Kore'de Orta Asya ve Kazakistan çalışmaları incelenecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Güney Kore, Kazakistan, diaspora, Orta Asya, koryo-saram

Introduction

Shortly after Kazakhstan gained its independence in October 1990, diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and South Korea were established on January 28, 1992. The bilateral ties between the two countries have grown steadily since then. Cooperation between the two nations has grown in many spheres, with advances noted in the economic, social, cultural, and educational areas. As a result, Kazakhstan has become one of the key anchors in Korea's engagement in Central Asia. The historical and cultural affinity between the two nations based on an ethnic Korean diaspora, which contributed to South Korea's interest in developing relations with Kazakhstan, is considered one of the most critical aspects of the relationship. The ties between the two countries have their foundations in the tragedy of one's nation¹ and a painful history that affected both countries. Over the years, however, the Korean diaspora has not faded away, nor has it lost its national identity, but has instead enriched its culture, diversified, and contributed to the development of the multi-ethnic Kazakhstan we know today.

¹ Forced deportation of Koreans in the Soviet Union in 1937 on the orders of Joseph Stalin.

Ethnic Koreans, or “koryo-saram,” feature every aspect of Kazakhstan’s history, society, and culture. The diplomatic relations Kazakhstan has with South Korea today would not have been possible if it were not for ethnic Koreans residing on the Kazakh Steppe. Through the efforts and support of both countries, the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan continues to grow and prosper, alongside the economic, political, and educational relationships of the two countries.

Another major reason for this engagement is that Kazakhstan is the largest and richest of the five regional republics and is the greatest strategic resource of oil and natural gas, with opportunities for reciprocal relations with the Korean industry. Moreover, Korea’s investments in the Kazakhstani market entered their most sensitive period immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, thus ensuring the economic ties growing over time in different sectors, with Korea today being one of the top 10 investors in Kazakhstan’s economy.

Moreover, educational relations contribute to the future of diplomatic ties between the two countries through young specialists and professionals in various areas. Through different educational events, student visits, and cultural programs, along with grants, scholarships, and bilateral university exchange systems, the two countries are working to build upon the already prosperous relations and to create a closer and more cooperative relationship in the future.

The present study focuses on the socio-cultural, economic, and educational relations between Kazakhstan and Korea. To this end, the history of the ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan and the governmental organizations that are involved with the Korean diaspora is first investigated, with a particular focus on social and cultural aspects, after which the economic ties are analyzed, along with statistical data related to imports, exports, and investments. Finally, an analysis of the exchange programs in place is made, including the Korean studies in Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian and Kazakhstani studies in Korea, to understand the depth of the educational relations between the two countries.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its utilization of various statistical data sources within Kazakhstan and Korea. There has been no study of the relations mentioned above that uses statistical data from the Korean Immigration Service, KOTRA, KOICA, the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics, the Kazakhstan State Revenue committee, and the National Bank of Kazakhstan. This research primarily uses data from the 2010–2019 period, offering a general overview of the relationship between Kazakhstan and Korea based on current data and analyzing the current trends in their bilateral relations. The paper may contribute to further studies of this issue.

Socio-cultural aspect

Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic state, with ethnic Koreans being among the ten largest ethnic groups (Table 1 and 2). They are most likely to have taken up residence in Kazakhstan after the deportations of 1937 when the Soviet Union forcibly moved its entire population of ethnic Koreans from the Russian Far East to an unpopulated area of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

Table 1. The population of the Republic of Kazakhstan by individual ethnic groups

Year	Kazakhs	Russians	Uzbeks	Ukrainians	Uyghurs	Tatars	Germans	Koreans	Turks	Azerbaijanis
2010	10,292,242	3,774,118	467,455	327,460	228,649	203,994	179,408	101,151	98,162	87,547
2011	10,527,283	3,753,155	480,612	320,927	233,086	203,689	180,423	102,256	99,766	90,626
2012	10,765,206	3,727,173	493,746	313,747	237,501	203,365	180,898	103,420	101,389	93,461
2013	11,003,294	3,702,621	507,424	307,151	242,111	203,142	181,379	104,405	103,037	96,155
2014	11,244,217	3,685,814	521,188	301,415	246,759	203,146	181,941	105,414	104,771	98,629
2015	11,495,988	3,666,401	534,851	295,420	251,478	202,980	181,948	106,283	106,340	101,026
2016	11,747,506	3,645,198	548,746	289,740	256,268	202,943	181,767	107,175	107,919	103,492
2017	12,000,610	3,619,002	563,103	283,738	261,048	202,542	180,774	107,681	109,394	105,789
2018	12,250,305	3,588,686	576,817	277,514	265,497	202,121	179,476	108,177	110,713	108,030
2019	12,505,251	3,553,232	590,993	270,916	270,096	201,492	178,029	108,396	112,107	110,341
2020	12,764,821	3,512,925	605,137	263,962	274,509	200,545	176,107	108,551	113,421	112,547

Source: Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics, 2020.

It is important to note that the “koryo-saram” living in Kazakhstan are believed to have a higher social status and higher education levels than the rest of the Central Asian nations and Russia (Oh 2006). As a result, the “koryo-saram” have integrated into Kazakhstani society and earned a respected reputation as diligent and hardworking people, contributing to admiration and respect for Korean culture among modern Kazakh. Therefore, it is safe to say that “koryo-saram” in Kazakhstan had fully integrated into Kazakhstani society socially and in a legislative sense. For example, on June 25, 2020, “koryo-saram” Alexei Tsoy took up the position of Minister of Healthcare in Kazakhstan (Премьер-Министра Республики Казахстан 2020).

Table 2. Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan

Year	Total population of Kazakhstan	Ethnic Korean population	Ethnic Korean percentage (%)
2010	16,203,274	101,151	0.62
2011	16,440,470	102,256	0.62
2012	16,673,933	103,420	0.62
2013	16,910,246	104,405	0.62
2014	17,160,855	105,414	0.61
2015	17,415,715	106,283	0.61
2016	17,669,896	107,175	0.61
2017	17,918,214	107,681	0.60
2018	18,157,337	108,177	0.60
2019	18,395,567	108,396	0.59
2020	18,631,779	108,551	0.58

Source: Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics.

The interaction between the Great Steppe and the Korean Peninsula has existed since ancient times, and this is confirmed by the similarity of ancient archaeological cultures, the proto-Altai proximity of the Turkic and Korean languages, the similarity of the shamanistic beliefs in Kazakhstan and Korea, and anthropological kinship (Oh 2012). For centuries, the Silk Road connecting East and West ensured the contact of ancient Korea through the lands of the Middle Kingdom with the territory of modern Kazakhstan. However, with the cessation of caravan flows along the Silk Road, ancient communications were interrupted but were revived in the latest period of world history. After the collapse of the USSR, Koreans, unlike other ethnic minorities who chose the path of emigration from Kazakhstan, decided to stay and adapt to the new conditions of a sovereign republic. This led to the nation embarking along a way to see the democratization of the socio-political system, the transition to a market economy, and multi-vector foreign relations. According to Oh, based on the announcements of country officials, it is clear that the Korean government's policy was to "help and protect your [ethnic Koreans'] peaceful and prosperous future in Kazakhstan" (Oh 2007). This, in turn, led the "koryo-saram" to conceptualize the titular state (i.e., Kazakhstan) as their homeland. At first, ethnic Koreans could not easily repatriate to South Korea, unlike other ethnic groups, such as the Germans or Turks. Later, they would lack the necessary nostalgia compelling them to return to their historical homeland. As German Kim puts it, ethnic Koreans felt like strangers in Korea due to the fundamental differences in their mentality, their ways of life, and their customs and habits (Oh 2007).

Since most ethnic Koreans had a high level of education, they made great progress on the social ladder. However, this also contributed to losing their ethnic identity and culture, becoming instead “Soviet people” and embracing Russianness. Therefore, they had a weaker attachment to their homeland than other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

For most ethnic Koreans, Kazakhstan is the homeland in which they were born, grew up, were educated, and became an integral part of the people of the multinational republic. At the same time, “koryo-saram” still have a historical homeland – Korea, which is divided into two states due to historical circumstances. To encourage their re-connection with their historical homeland, the South Korean government supports numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations that support the “koryo-saram” and various educational, cultural, and economic opportunities.

According to Oh, three major governmental organizations in South Korea work directly with the Korean diaspora: The Korea Foundation, the Overseas Koreans Foundation, and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). The Korea Foundation and the Overseas Korean Foundation operate under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although their missions differ: the Korea Foundation supports Korean studies in the region through various educational programs for students and academic staff related to the Korean language or Korean studies. In contrast, the Overseas Korean Foundation supports diasporic centers and organizations that help overseas Koreans maintain a sense of national fellowship and live as exemplary citizens in the nations in which they reside. Moreover, they organize various cultural and educational programs introducing the “koryo-saram” to their historical motherland. KOICA’s mission, on the other hand, is considered more multi-leveled, focusing on strengthening Korea’s relations with the country and promoting socio-economic advancement in the developing world. Although KOICA’s initiatives do not directly address the Korean diaspora, their work with human resources development and their contributions to the country’s sustainable development positively affect the Korean diaspora.

As can be seen in Table 3, the number of Kazakhstani citizens arriving² in Korea each year has seen a marked increase, from 6,854 in 2021 to 56,011 in 2019. The Korea Immigration Service statistics from which the table is compiled detail three main groups – students, workers, and Kazakhstani spouses of Korean citizens. With the globalization of Korean education, more and more Kazakhstani students are pursuing degrees in Korea. According to statistical data, more

² Kazakhstani citizens arriving in South Korea are mainly tourists, students, working immigrants, and ethnic Koreans.

female students come to Korea than male students, which is considered one of the safest countries globally regarding security, leading to female Kazakhstani students feeling safe while studying there. In addition, Korean popular culture is popular among women in Kazakhstan, further increasing their interest in continuing their education in Korea. Immigrant workers also account for many Kazakhstani citizens who have come to Korea, with a 14-fold increase seen in their numbers over just the last decade. Finally, many Kazakhstani citizens are motivated to go to Korea to find work, considering the labor shortage and the relatively high wages.

Another influential group includes the Kazakhstani spouses of Korean citizens, arising from one of the leading social problems in Korea, whereby men in rural areas cannot find brides due to their economic and environmental conditions. Since the 2000s, Korea has witnessed an increase in foreign women visiting rural areas searching for matrimony. Many immigrants in Korea come from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines. In comparison to Southeast Asian people, due to their ethnic history, the physical appearance of Central Asians more closely resembles that of Koreans, which results in their children appearing to be more Korean. For this reason, Central Asian women, including those from Kazakhstan, are considered more desirable for marriage (Oh 2009). Economic and instrumental reasons are why there are more Uzbek and Kyrgyz women, and relatively fewer Kazakhs, among the married immigrants. Regardless, the number of married immigrants of Kazakhstani origin in Korea seems to be increasing from year to year.

Table 3. Overview of Kazakhstani Citizens in Korea

Year	Arriving citizens		International students		Workers (H-2 visa holders)		Married immigrants	
	Total	Sex	Total	Sex	Total	Sex	Total	Sex
2010	6,854	M: 3,421 F: 3,433	232	M: 89 F: 143	551	M: 254 F: 297	195	M: 8 F: 187
2011	7,827	M: 3,893 F: 3,934	254	M: 90 F: 164	491	M: 242 F: 249	213	M: 8 F: 205
2012	10,439	M: 5,086 F: 5,353	360	M: 137 F: 233	723	M: 389 F: 334	221	M: 8 F: 213
2013	12,691	M: 5,911 F: 6,780	469	M: 164 F: 305	765	M: 399 F: 366	218	M: 9 F: 209
2014	21,504	M: 10,279 F: 11,225	566	M: 208 F: 358	1,054	M: 634 F: 420	222	M: 9 F: 213
2015	29,661	-	711	M: 254 F: 457	1509	M: 873 F: 636	235	M: 12 F: 223
2016	35,080	M: 15,323 F: 17,763	813	M: 295 F: 518	3,030	M: 1,799 F: 1,231	245	M: 13 F: 232
2017	46,185	M: 21,549 F: 22,110	855	M: 300 F: 555	4,636	M: 2,524 F: 1,839	278	M: 13 F: 265
2018	55,104	M: 24,635 F: 27,163	947	M: 318 F: 629	5,173	M: 3,011 F: 2162	306	M: 15 F: 291
2019	56,011	-	969	-	7,762	-	-	-

Source: Korea Immigration Service Statistics.

Table 4 provides data of overseas Koreans or “koryo-saram” arriving from Kazakhstan to Korea from 2010 to 2019. Since Korea started issuing F-4 visas to ethnic Koreans, the number of arrivals from Kazakhstan has increased by almost 14 times over the last ten years, from 368 in 2010 to 5215 in 2019, showing the program's success. Notably, the gender ratio is relatively equal.

Table 4. Overview of Ethnic Koreans Arriving from Kazakhstan (F-4³ visa holders)

Year	Total	Sex
2010	368	M: 191; F: 177
2011	772	M: 359; F: 413
2012	1,089	M: 526; F: 563
2013	1,316	M: 598; F: 718
2014	782	M: 416; F: 366
2015	871	M: 471; F: 400
2016	1,852	M: 1,014; F: 838
2017	2,918	M: 1,566; F: 1,352
2018	3,495	M: 1,823; F: 1,672
2019	5,215	-

Source: Korea Immigration Service Statistics.

³ The F-4, or Overseas Koreans Visa, is a multiple entry visa for 5 years which offers almost the same level of residential benefits as a Korean nationality.

As shown in Figure 1, the number of ethnic Koreans residing in Korea has increased significantly over the years, which is understandable. As the number of arrivals increases, so does the number of residencies.

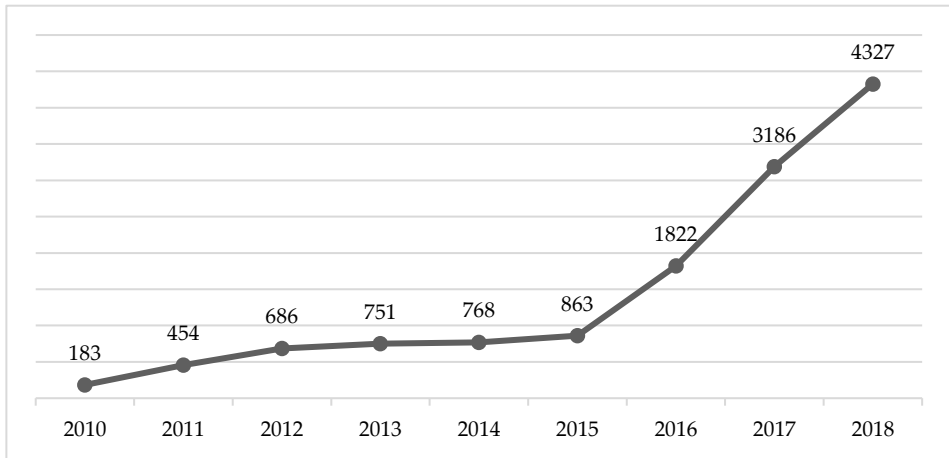


Figure 1. Ethnic Korean Immigrants from Kazakhstan. Source: Korea Immigration Service Statistics.

Although the number of ethnic Koreans has increased exponentially over the years, the naturalization process has been somewhat limited, as shown in Figure 2. Considering the number of arrivals and residencies, the number of naturalized citizens is relatively low, which could mean that ethnic Koreans desire to maintain their Kazakhstani citizenship. Moreover, there are several barriers to naturalization. First, as the number of applications is not high, and the acceptance rate is quite low, and this also suggests that the Korean government is somewhat hesitant to accept “koryo-saram” (Oh 2007). Another reason is that ethnic Koreans may be satisfied with their F-4 visa status, being an excellent instrumental reason⁴ to live in Korea, given the lack of economic disadvantages, and the only downside is the inability to vote. Therefore, “koryo-saram” do not necessarily need naturalization, as they may consider the economic instrument of F-4 visa to be enough. Even though initially the Korean administration was hesitant to accept “koryo-saram” for repatriation, currently, with the increasing age of the Korean population and the changes in policies, recent growth has been experienced.

⁴ They already have advantages and benefits they get in Korea, without them changing nationality.

It is also important to note that with the implementation of the Korean Immigration and Integration Program (KIIP) of the Ministry of Justice of South Korea, obtaining Korean citizenship or a long-term residency visa requires the applicant to take a significant number of Korean language and culture classes (depending on their Korean language level) and to pass an exam. Therefore, the naturalization process requires foreigners to commit a certain amount of time and financial resources, making them hesitant to apply.

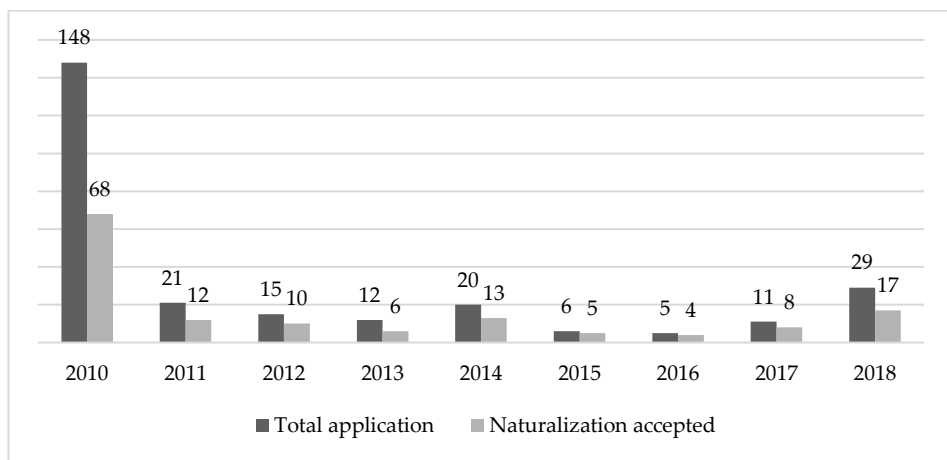


Figure 2. Naturalization of Kazakhstani Citizens in Korea. Source: Korea Immigration Service Statistics

Cultural aspect

Due to the cultural similarities of ethnic Koreans and native Kazakhs, the relationship between the two countries has long been warm and hospitable. The “koryo-saram” has served as the “middleman” between them. These two factors make cultural relations between Korea and Kazakhstan even more active and prosperous.

In addition to the South Korean organizations working with and supporting the Korean diaspora, the “koryo-saram” in Kazakhstan have founded several organizations and have launched projects supporting the Korean diaspora. The most prominent of these is the Association of Koreans of Kazakhstan. Founded in 1990, the association has witnessed positive growth and made many accomplishments, such as supporting the opening of the editorial office of the national “Kore Ilbo” newspaper, as well as a library and a choreography class, the establishment of the Youth Movement of the Koreans of Kazakhstan, and the Scientific and Technical Society “Kahak”. 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 Korean State Republican Academic Theatre of Musical Comedy, founded in 1932, 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 and Kazakhstan, existing as an ethnocultural phenomenon (Г.Н. 2012).

Moreover, in December 2009, a Korean Culture Center was established in Astana (now Nur-Sultan) within the Korean Embassy as the first cultural center in Central Asia, opening up new opportunities for further cultural cooperation with Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries. 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.

Furthermore, one cannot overlook the global success of Hallyu, which has gained a massive number of followers and fans among the Kazakhstani people. The Kazakhstani public was already aware of the Korean culture thanks to their interactions with the Korean diaspora and the activities, events, and projects mentioned above. Thus, they transitioned naturally to the Korean wave and events such as the SM Entertainment Global Audition in Kazakhstan in 2011, the 2019 Changwon K-pop World Festival, continuously supporting the growing fandoms in Kazakhstan. K-pop has also inspired a new genre of Kazakh music, Q-pop (Q standing for Qazaqstan), which is gaining popularity by combining the catchy style of K-pop with classical elements of Kazakh culture. As a result of the Year of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Korea in 2010, the Year of Korea in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2011, and the various annual Korean culture and film festivals held, the two countries are contributing considerably to the strengthening of their cultural relations.

While recognizing the success of the two countries' bilateral relations, it is necessary to keep in mind the painful history that brought the Korean diaspora to Central Asia, specifically Kazakhstan. The delicate issue of the repatriation of Korean independence fighters from Kazakhstan is a point worthy of note. In 2019, the remains of two Koreans who fought for independence against Japan's 1910–1945 colonial rule, Gye Bong-woo (1880–1956) and Hwang Woon-Jeong (1899–1989), were returned to their homeland from Kazakhstan, while in June 2020, the repatriation of the remains of the legendary Korean independent fighter Hong Beom-do was delayed due to the continuing pandemic. Hong commanded the Korean Independence Army while under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945)

and claimed victories in battles against the Japanese forces in Manchuria, including the Battle of Fengwudong in 1920. He died in Kazakhstan in 1943 and was buried there (Yonhap News Agency 2020).

To sum up, through their shared painful history, the cultural codes of the two nations developed along similar paths, with Koreans playing a crucial entry point and mediator role. Accordingly, in terms of cultural relations, there is no obstacle to further prosperity. This somehow induced an active cultural exchange involving numerous activities that cannot be detailed within the confines of this paper. However, the most significant ones have been mentioned earlier. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that cultural relations between the two countries are warm and fruitful.

Economic relations

Korea's economic ties with Kazakhstan have witnessed steady growth over the years. Most significantly, LG Electronics became a pioneer in the Kazakhstani market after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. While other foreign companies were hesitant to enter the new market, LG made a bold choice, making South Korea one of the biggest investors in Kazakhstan's economy. In the 1993–1998 period, South Korea was responsible for almost 20 percent of the foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan, making South Korea the second-largest investor after the United States.

In 2008, Kookmin Bank, South Korea's largest bank, bought a 30 percent share of Kazakhstan's Center Credit Bank for \$634 million as part of its overseas expansion drive. It became the first major cross-border acquisition in nearly half a decade, and Shinhan Bank Kazakhstan JSC also launched activities in Kazakhstan in November 2008. South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's trip to the region in 2011 spurred a fresh round of large-scale investments, including two construction deals worth \$4 billion each, representing the largest contract to be signed since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992 (Hwang 2012). Today, thousands of legal bodies and entities, branches, and representative offices registered with South Korean participation, among which are such major Korean corporations as Hyundai, LG Electronics, LG Chem, POSCO and SK Corporation, and construction companies like Dongil-High Vill and Urim.

As shown in Figure 3, Kazakhstan's imports to and exports from Korea have witnessed a rapid increase since 2010, particularly after 2016. So close economic engagement is expected in the future.

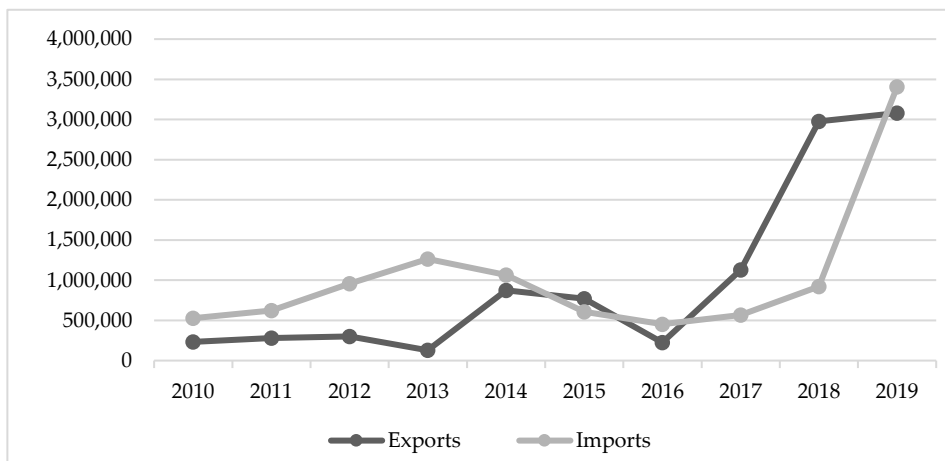


Figure 3. Kazakhstan's Imports to and Exports from Korea (Unit: 1,000 US Dollars). Source: State Revenue Committee Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

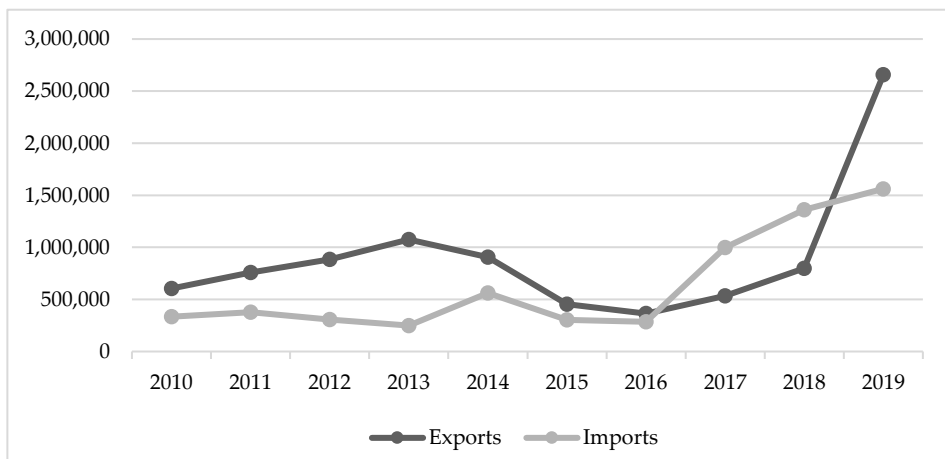


Figure 4. Korea's Imports to and Exports from Kazakhstan (Unit: 1,000 US Dollars). Source: Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency and Korea Health Industry Development Institute

As seen from Figure 4, Korea's imports to and exports from Kazakhstan have increased, especially over the last couple of years. Therefore, it can be concluded from the graphs and export and import figures of the two counties

that economic relations have a bright future, given the exponential growth over the years.

A comparison of the two graphs highlights a lack of balance in the trade between Korea and Kazakhstan. For instance, the value of Kazakhstan's imports from Korea in 2019 was almost three times that of Korea's imports from Kazakhstan. One way of re-aligning this imbalance is to increase the number of Korean tourists to Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has a magnificent natural landscape and such tourist attractions as the Medeu skating rink and the Shymbulak ski resort, the Buddhist rock art sanctuary in Tamagaly-tas. These are especially of great interest to Koreans stressed from the city culture, trying to escape to nature and peace. However, such tourist attractions are not as well-known among Koreans. So, a proactive approach needs to be applied to promoting Kazakhstani tourism, improving the infrastructure, and remedying the imbalance in the trade mentioned above.

Lastly, as Kazakhstan is rapidly developing, there is a need for investment in infrastructure, construction, and urban regeneration. Therefore, in economic terms, Korea can get a great opportunity because it will participate in the Social Capital Overhead project (SOC) of Kazakhstan. Moreover, Turkey is already actively engaged in the provision of construction services in Kazakhstan. Thus, if Turkey and Korea can cooperate, it can create a new model of cooperation in the region, it will be possible to create a synergy between these countries.

For example, the construction of the Big Almaty Ring Road, with the participation of a Korean-Turkish consortium, is of strategic importance for Kazakhstan as one of the major projects. Another major project relates to creating a transcontinental railway route connecting the Korean Peninsula to Western Europe through Kazakhstan as a part of the Eurasian initiative proposed by President Lee Myung-bak. From a logistical point of view, Central Asia is an important area for Korean trade. Korean products are ready for export, not through ships, but by rail via Russia and Kazakhstan, to Europe.

Educational relations

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a boom was seen in Korean language studies in Kazakhstan (Г.Н. 2012). Over the past decade, interest in Korean studies as an educational specialty has been growing steadily, the Korean language being vital for successful employment in South Korean companies in Kazakhstan. Currently, the Korean language is being taught at an academic level in the Faculty of Oriental Studies of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages. In contrast, in

other universities and faculties, the Korean language is taught as a “Foreign Language” or “Second Foreign Language”.⁵

After Kazakhstan became a sovereign state, it became clear that the country needed its own scientific school of oriental studies. So, in early 1992, the Center for Oriental Studies was established. Its status was increased later, being renamed the Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Center has implemented various educational projects to date, such as the Overseas Koreans Foundation scholarship programs, the Korean Studies Academy, the National Institute of the Korean Language, and the National Institute of Korean History, among others.

Table 5. Turkic studies related Departments in Korea

Establish. Year	Department Name	University Name	Research Area	Student Number	Graduate Number
1973 → 2008 ~	Dept. Turkish Studies → Dept. Turkish-Azerbaijani Studies	Hankuk University of Foreign Studies	Turkey Azerbaijan	120	850
1995 → 2015 ~	Dept. Turkey-Central Asia → Dept. Russia-Turkey-Central Asia	Busan University of Foreign Studies	Turkey Kazakhstan Uzbekistan	160	291
2004	Dept. Central Asian Studies	Hankuk University of Foreign Studies	Kazakhstan Uzbekistan	120	Approx. 100
2006	Kazakhstan Studies division	Kangnam University	Kazakhstan	-	Incorporated into International studies department

Source: Oh, 2010.

As seen from Table 5, Kazakhstani studies have been included in the Turkic studies curriculum in Korea. The first Turkish Studies Department opened in the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in 1973 and was expanded to become the Turkish-Azerbaijani Studies Department in 2008. The first Central Asian studies department was established in the Busan University of Foreign Studies, later becoming the Department of Russia-Turkey-Central Asia, attracting around 40 students every year. The current number of graduates is close to 300. Students

⁵ Nazarbayev University, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research, Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University, etc.

enrolled in the department learn the Kazakh and Uzbek languages and the history, economy, politics, and cultures of Central Asia. The Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and the Busan University of Foreign Studies are consequently considered the leading Kazakhstan-related departments in Korea.

As shown in Table 3, the number of international students from Kazakhstan has increased from 232 to 969 over the last ten years. Moreover, bilateral exchange programs between Korean and Kazakhstani universities continue to grow and strengthen the educational ties between the two countries, securing the next generation of cooperation. Beyond the independent country-related studies in each country, exchange students are also rapidly increasing in number. For instance, H University in Seoul has seen growing interest in its exchange program (inbound and outbound). As shown in Table 6, around 50 students have been arriving annually from Kazakhstan for the past two years.

In comparison, approximately 10 Korean students go to Kazakhstan every year. The decline in the 2019–2020 academic year can be attributed to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced students to continue their studies online due to international travel bans. It is apparent that H University is focused mainly on targeting the leading universities in Almaty and Nur-Sultan. There is a need for Kazakhstani regional universities to be more proactive in their efforts to attract international exchange students.

Table 6. Status of Academic Exchange between H University and Kazakhstani Universities

University name	Inbound				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	14	12	30	32	5
Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages	7	3	10	12	
Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research	4	3	5		
L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University			6	8	2
Suleyman Demirel University			1	3	
Total	25	18	52	55	2

University name	Outbound				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	6	6	13		
Kazakh Ablai khan University of International Relations and World Languages	15	5		8	
Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research			1		1
Total	21	11	14	8	1

As can be understood from Table 7, in the case of K University in Almaty, there has been an increase in the number of students and universities studying in various parts of Korea as a part of an exchange program. K University is sending approximately 30 students to Korea every semester, which is a significant number. But what is more important is that Kazakhstani universities send students to various institutions throughout Korea, which means that Korean regional universities are actively hosting international students.

Table 7. Status of the Academic Exchange between K University and Korean Universities

University name	2014-2015 academic year	2017 spring semester	2018 fall semester	2019 fall semester
Ajou University	1		1	3
Busan University of Foreign Studies	-	2	2	
Chungbuk National University	2	3	4	4
Chung Ang University	4		2	2
Chungnam National University				2
Daegu University	3	2	2	2
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies	7	4	6	7
Joongbu University	1			
Keimyung University	2	2	3	2
Kookmin University	2	5		3
Kyung Hee University	2	2	2	2
Sungkyunkwan University			3	
Pai Chai University	3	3	3	4
Wonkwon University	2	2		1
Total	29	25	28	32

Conclusion

Diplomatic relations between South Korea and Kazakhstan continue to grow, based on the deep relationship established at the outset, and the bilateral economic ties have also dramatically increased. There are no points of tension or sensitivity in terms of political diplomacy that could pose a threat to other areas. Thus, from a political, economic, and diplomatic perspective, Kazakhstan and Korea maintain quite positive relations. To prosper for the benefit of future generations, however, the socio-cultural side should be considered as the most crucial area. When assessed alongside the economic relations, more profound attention needs to be paid to the social and cultural side, and there is a need for more programs in those fields.

Korean cultural centers were established in Almaty in 1991 and Nur-Sultan in 2009, respectively, and both institutions have been very active in disseminating the Korean culture and studies throughout Kazakhstan. They have various programs and events, such as language classes, cooking classes, K-pop dance classes, movie nights, quizzes, game nights, etc. Naturally, these cultural relations must be reciprocal, especially when considering the engagement of Korean centers in the promotion of Korean content.

There has not yet been established a Central Asian or Turkic culture-related center in Korea. Opening such a facility can now be considered vital for the reciprocal expansion of cultural exchanges. Last year, a Turkish culture center (Yunus Emre Institute) was established in Korea. However, it is understandable that a Central Asian center is yet to be established, given the required resources and investments.

Soft power policies are considered essential these days for any country. In Kazakhstan in particular, where it is hard to compete with Russia or China in hard power, soft power may serve as the main power form. Accordingly, Kazakhstan and many other Central Asian countries seek to establish soft power policy, the like of which Korea has managed to achieve, and establishing a cultural center could be the first step to introducing and later expanding Kazakhstan's soft power into Korea and East Asia. For Kazakhstan, establishing a Kazakh cultural center in Korea offers considerable potential and merit as a facility for showcasing a pivotal center in the Eastern region, especially considering its regional location, closeness, and engagement policy.

Considering the potential of Kazakhstan in terms of economy and political leadership in the region, Kazakhstan may well benefit from the creation of a Kazakhstani and/or Central Asian center. Korean culture centers provide massive support to Korean education in Kazakhstan. Once such a culture center is established in Korea, it can offer support to Kazakhstani, Central Asian, and

Turkic researchers. This would lead to a more significant balance between the two nations, starting at a cultural level and hopefully expanding into the economic and political spheres.

Acknowledgements

This research has been supported by HUFs Research Fund of 2020, and the NRF Research Fund of 2020. (NRF-2017S1A2A3055970)

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