Art and Morality of Communication:
A Case Study of the Soviet Koreans

Jayoung F. M. Shin, Yun Tae Kim, and Hyun Jeong Kim

Abstract

This article examines what it means to be a Soviet Korean in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. We argue that much of Korean cultural manifestation explicitly lies outside verbal expression, and hence, focusing on the implicit domain is important. As we understand that "Soviet Koreanness" is found in the way people acquire certain dispositions, sensitivities, and feelings, we have explored such diverse aspects as non-verbal expressions, sensorial experiences, and rules of expressing emotions. In doing so, we found that the perceptive dimension of being Korean is also formed in relation to this symbolic structure. This article finds a variation in the way the Soviet Koreans relate to and communicate with other people. This analysis explores the Korean emphasis on non-verbal and implicit forms of communication and examines their relationship with notions of personhood, morality, and ethnic identity. Finally, this article examines the making of "Koreanness" distinguished from that of "others," especially Russians, in the context of communicating emotions and using words.

Keywords: "Koreanness," Soviet Korean, *dusha*, morality, communication, emotion, ethnic identity, *han*, *hyo*, culture

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Introduction

This article examines what it means to be a Soviet Korean in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.[1] The majority of Koreans in Alma-Ata are the historical result of two displacements, having first migrated to Russia from the nineteenth century and then being deported to Kazakhstan in 1937 by Stalin (Kim 2001; Kim and Khan 2001). The repression was followed by decades of confinement to collective farms. The unlikely Korean presence in Central Asia was to be unveiled to the outside world after Glasnost, and a change in international political climates around the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games resulted in unprecedented encounters between the Soviet Korean diaspora community and other Korean visitors. Fieldwork began shortly afterwards into the distinctive characteristics of the Soviet Koreans in Central Asia, capturing the historical moment of this hitherto little known section of the Korean diaspora. This article is based on participant observation and personal interviews with Soviet Koreans living in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan in order to examine the perceptive process of personhood of the Soviet Koreans.[2]

In a way, the history and identity of Soviet Koreans can be read as a narrative of affiliation; theirs is a story of the struggle to stay obedient and to even align with the oppressive authorities (Baik 2001). This paper argues that the way this minority group frames its

1. The usage of the anachronistic terms "Soviet Korean" and "Alma-Ata" is deliberate, as they chronicle the reality of Koreans who were at a historical crossroad of de-Sovietization during the fieldwork. The Koreans whose story is told in this paper generally regarded themselves as *Sovietsky Kareits* (Soviet Koreans). Regardless of their origin, their lives were anchored in the city of Alma-Ata, which gave them a sociocultural reference point. The Soviet Union was a reality that the informants still strongly identified themselves with, despite its political demise.
2. Many important parts of this paper are based on interviews with different types of Soviet Koreans and other ethnic groups in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan during 1993-1994. Some are named in texts but others have preferred anonymity. Information collected in interviews was combined with recent documentary research and personal contacts after the field work.

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situation and seeks a solution bears the hallmark of Korean tradition. Thus, the Soviet Korean minority stands out from numerous Soviet ethnic groups by demonstrating a distinct sociocultural pattern of intense educational zeal, urbanization, and preference for economic self-sufficiency, which is very much in common with other parts of the Korean diaspora (Oka 2001). We maintain that their convergence into this common pattern is not an arbitrary, independent phenomenon, but a manifestation of the continuity and transformation of the Korean culture they brought with them.

In their research on Korean Americans, Abelmann and Lie (1995) rightfully stress the significance of the "emigration package" Korean immigrants carry and their continuous ties with Korea. Though the history of Russo-Soviet immigration is older and the Soviet minority's contact with the motherland was severely limited, our observation also agrees with their findings that the minority's ongoing resilience and strategy of survival is a carry-over from its Korean past. In a way, Koreans are also comparable to certain institutionalized inmates who are unperturbed by the harshness of confinement, as they already have become immune to worse hardships they had experienced before (Goffman 1991).

We are not, however, positing an immutable tradition. Rather, in line with other studies on Asian diaspora (Yanagisako 1985; Adler 1998; Watson 1975), we emphasize the extraordinary resilience of cultural meanings and symbols and point out that they are selectively reinforced and transformed within the particular Soviet historical context. Without looking into these historically embedded symbols and principles, defining these Soviet Koreans through external markers such as absence or presence of Korean language, ethnic education, or organizations remains superficial, even though such deprivation was undoubtedly a significant loss to the community.

We drew inspiration from Maurice Bloch in our attention to the fact that the reproduction of Korean personhood does not only take a verbal pathway. As his perceptive study (1998) on cultural transmission and cognition has illustrated, logical and language-based cognition is only a fraction of what constitutes a much bigger picture

of human cognition and social transmission of knowledge.[3] Bloch argues that memory cannot be reduced to oral transmissions alone and that there are other modes that bypass articulation and visibility. Following his argument, we maintain that much of Korean cultural manifestation explicitly lies outside verbalization, and hence, focusing on the implicit domain is all the more relevant.

Further, in arguing that "Soviet Koreanness" is found in the way one does things, moves one's body, cultivates certain dispositions, sensitivities, and feelings, we have explored such diverse aspects as nonverbal expressions, sensorial experiences, and the rules of expressing emotions. Throughout the exploration of such aspects, certain themes and symbols repeatedly arise; they are etched into the way Koreans organize life, see the world, relate to others, and understand the notions of communication and morality. Symbolically, "Koreanness" also extends to the realm of control, labor, production, and consumption. This article focuses on the way in which "Koreanness" is constructed, articulated and contrasted from that of "others," especially Russians, in the context of using words and communicating emotions.

Even though Kazakh ascendancy was begrudgingly accepted, the Kazakhs often recede into the background while Russians constitute the quintessential "others" vis-à-vis Koreans. The reasons may be two-fold: First, in the local Korean ethnic hierarchy, Russians are the only group available for reference and emulation.

Second, in many respects, the Russians provide a clear contrast against which Koreans can delineate themselves, as opposed to the Kazakhs. The latter section picks up a strand of socialization and morality within the family context. Though no longer lumped together with formal education, domestic social training still falls under the traditional notion of education and is still found to exert a significant influence on the contemporary lives of members of the minority

3. Bloch (1998) argues that memory cannot be reduced to only oral transmissions and there are other ways that bypass articulation and visibility. See Rime, Corsini, and Herbette (2002).

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group. Knowing how to discern, express, highlight, and withhold certain emotions and their verbalizations is seen as a crucial part of Soviet Korean personhood and morality that sets these people apart from "others." The whole process clearly mirrors Korean kinship ideology, particularly that of parent and child. Thus, we elucidate the special significance attached to training communicational sensitivities and relate them to the Soviet Korean notions of personhood and ethnicity.

A Disciplined Heart

Even though the Korean criticism of Kazakhs and Russians is based on their alleged inadequacy as workers and improvident consumers, Russians are particularly frowned upon for "sitting for tea for ages" and "chatting away" and "going to a buffet" to catch up with friends. Their hard work "gets wasted immediately on stupid things that take their fancy."[4] Even worse, "care-free" Kazakhs who "like to sing folksongs and visit relatives almost everyday"[5] are accused of aspiring to play the role of a boss, complete with professional suits and briefcases, while taking credit for other people's efforts. In contrast, Koreans define themselves as being restless in mind and body. They find it hard to justify "just sitting" and "doing nothing" or being content, and even elderly Koreans do not easily learn how to relax, and feel that they always have to do something.

Many Koreans talk emotionally about wearing out their bodies through labor, particularly their hands. To an elderly informant who showed her knotted fingers, they were the embodiment of her life's work and principles:

> I worked in the field all my life, wearing [my hands] out. You will find many Koreans in my generation with the same hard, rough hands. We irrigated and tamed the barren land to grow rice and vegetables, and you have to wait a long time before the harvest. Only we Koreans can do this hard job, slavery to the land. The lazy Kazakhs should be grateful for all the vegetables, fruits and grain we have taught them to grow.

Korean affinity to the land is associated with their physicality, as expressed through their stooped backs, posture of squatting, and the use of a low wooden Korean stool. Agricultural labor is also seen to "crush" Koreans to the bone and marrow, and occasionally it was even claimed that the "heart" itself had been destroyed through overexhaustion. Even the contemporary urban and educated Alma-Atian Korean cannot escape this haunting image as they continue to see themselves as the cause of the crippled hips and backs of their parents. The Korean occupation with ceaseless aspiring, planning, and taking action is described as being always on the move and on the roll and this constant movement is associated with the *gol*, brain, which disciplines and restrains. *Nongsajil*, or farming, is regarded as work that demands both nimble hands and a calculating mind, which attracts many, even despite the Soviet climate that criminalizes profit-making.

On the other hand, *dusha*, or soulful heart, is a traditional Russian cultural ingredient that permeates the whole society but is seen more to influence Kazakhs and Russians, rather than Koreans. *Dusha* makes people generous, emotionally exuberant, and live for the moment with magnitude: having potlucks, sparing neither time nor toil for friends, giving away one's last crumb to others, and forgiving and forgetting easily are all considered to be its manifestation and is something much adored. Even a degrading alcoholic binge and accompanying emotional overindulgence is often romanticized as enacting a tragically wasted figure whose otherworldly heart could not bear the hard, petty life. The centrality of the exuberant "heart" is aptly pointed out by Anna Wierzbicka:

> . . . from the point of view of traditional Russian culture, states such as joy, worry, grief, delight, and so on constitute most people's nor-

4. Genrieta, 43 years old, housewife and part time bookkeeper; Liza, 18 years old, university student; Yana, 10 years old, school girl.
5. Ganya, 45 years old, secondary school teacher.

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> mal state and that absence of emotions would be seen as indicating a deadening of a person's *dusha* ("heart / soul") (Wierzbicka 1999, 17-18).

Blurred with other attributes such as human, fraternal, and Soviet, the notion of *dusha* and seeking such emotional exuberance and intimacy is manifested in the ways that people express themselves in everyday interactions, such as using pet names, terms of endearment, as well as both dramatic rhetoric and acts.

During a time of political and economic transition, these everyday social rituals take on a moral or spiritual tone expressed through "humane" qualities distinguished from the time-keeping or "business-mindedness" of "heartless and soulless" capitalism. Exchanging passionate talk and sympathy is thus an important social currency and should take priority over other commitments. Frequent expressions such as "Work does not run away to the forest" and "So what? To hell with it!" are seen as justification enough in situations that require no further validation. So it came as no surprise when Rosa,[6] a Russian neighbor, came with a bottle of vodka to see her Korean neighbor, Genrieta, for *dusha* camaraderie.

The first thing we noticed was Rosa's alarming physical and verbal intimacy with Genrieta who, in stark contrast, was almost wooden and stiff. In Anglo-Saxon culture, such behavior can be seen as very intimate, almost sexual, but it was very clear that was not the intention of either woman. Rosa was like a puppy following the reluctant Genrieta to the kitchen. The Korean only managed a half-wry, half-awkward smile. Within a short space of time, Rosa bombarded the even more taciturn Genrieta with endearments such as "my beautiful Genyanka, my darling, darling friend," cajoling her to sip vodka without much success. Then she casually introduced her extremely traumatic life history: she was born as a result of her grandfather raping her mother and was subsequently abandoned under a tree. Her tone was serious, but she was still quite jolly in her

6. Late 30s, Russian, hairdresser.

narration. Rosa was blissfully oblivious of her reluctant neighbor's attitude during her Shakespearean soliloquy, and Genrieta remained wearily cynical. Fortunately, Genrieta's persistent iciness finally saw Rosa off. In spite of the Russian's demonstrative *dusha* work, the bleached blonde remained a clown with smeared rouge, failing to engage her critical Korean neighbor who could not wait for her to go.

Though much admired in Russian literature, this character of mercurial bouncing from pathos and bathos make local Koreans/Russian particularly ill at ease; Liza interprets her Russian cousin's demonstrative behaviors as inconstancy and insincerity that change so soon. In this respect, Russians are often likened to vulnerable children or adolescents whose weakness lies in restraining their impulsiveness. Amoral rather than immoral, they are even somewhat secretly admired for their ability to let go, being simple and free as opposed to serious duty-bound Koreans. However, undoubtedly both Russians and Koreans are busy with work of their own.

"Koreanness": Soft or Hard?

My character is Russian while my daughter and husband's is "soft" (a middle-aged Korean woman).

> Umm. . . there is something coarse in Russians. The way they talk back even to their own mothers . . . they are not like yielding Korean women (a local college girl of Korean/Russian parentage).
>
> Korean mothers look soft, but oh, their grip on their children! (an elderly local Korean man).
>
> Don't get taken in by the local Koreans, we might appear all easy, but in truth, we are fierce people (a local Korean academic).

In the local Korean discourse, being a Korean is very much tied to the quality of being "soft." One does not voice his opinions loudly, nor argue or fight readily. Rather, one yields to others, speaks gently, has finely tuned sensitivities, and cares for his parents and others in

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need. This local notion, first undifferentiated and vaguely covering all ranges of Koreans, was to undergo sharp modifications as the local Koreans came into contact with "other" Koreans. Although both Koreans and non-Koreans recognize the aforementioned qualities, the delicate graciousness is expected more from women than from men, and from the young rather than from the old. "Soft" Korean women are more reserved in their gestures and the way they relate to men and elders. They must always show a sense of decorum. Children also remain submissive during ritualistic maternal chiding. Sometimes, these scoldings literally reduce children, including university students, to whimper or tears, but active confrontations are peculiarly rare. Even when the harassed children resort to verbalization, it is a fragmented pitiful whine rather than arguing or self-advocacy. These children are being "soft."

This "soft" quality and restrained physical demeanor readily expand to the broader field of interethnic relationships. A soft-spoken Korean is a good contrast to a Kazakh, who self-consciously stretches and moves his body with a certain air of swagger. Russians also claim their expansive presence through sudden exaggerated gestures and volatile postures such as clenched fists and swinging arms. Kazakhs were referring to a stereotypical image when they were contrasting it to the humbleness of Koreans. Mentioning one of her Korean colleagues named Aisha, a middle-aged Kazakh English lecturer opined:

> Most Koreans are very sincere and humble, but this one is very ambitious. He boasted to me that he could manage a good command of English within a month.

In fact, it was not so much his ambition itself as the exaggerated expression that made Aisha uncomfortable. Thus she identified the offender as an atypical Korean. The alleged Korean softness also has its critics; the Korean posture of slumped shoulders and lowered heads are read as pragmatic conformity and servile resignation. In "An Alien's Complex," a local Korean writer named Alexander Kang describes such Korean softness, which manifests itself even when

they are confronted or wronged, as follows:

> He would sooner drop his eyes and continue his work. As a matter of fact, the posture of meekness with lowered head yet stoically upright back is the Korean's natural pose, be it a peasant of the 13th century or a junior research associate of the 20th century (Kang 1993, 31).

On the other hand, there is an equally pervasive but almost contradictory view that Koreans are "hard" people; their minds are always spinning fast to work out and promote their own positions in power relationships. In their feverish pursuit of the goal, they are exposed as being bad-tempered, aggressive, and even callous. Most crucially, their long memory makes them cold-hearted, as they neither forgive nor forget. They are slow to revenge, but during the "strategic withdrawal" period, they remain duplicitous, harboring their grudge inside but assuming otherwise outside.

The negative impressions usually came from local Koreans themselves, as if the unflattering "hardness" is kept hidden from others' view. They began to confess to these "skeletons" in their closet in a half-joking, half-serious way. It was at one of the relaxed, friendly meetings among local Koreans that a middle-aged Korean entertained others with the following joke:

> Well, we all know that Tatars have the most terrible temperament among all Soviet nationalities. One day a Tatar happened to meet this scary she-bear and they got married. And who else their offspring be, but we Soviet Koreans! Ha ha!

The in-joke made everybody laugh, and the Koreans further confided in one another in a conspiratorial manner that they were indeed the "hardest" of all people. This hardness is double-edged; while it enables Koreans to survive in a difficult environment, it also accentuates the Korean lack of socio-cultural graciousness in the context of Soviet society. Koreans view this ambiguous self-portrait with a mixture of certain regret and pride. When an elderly Soviet Korean lady

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softly but resolutely spoke of the presumed hardship of non-Koreans due to the latest hyperinflation of food prices, she was embodying this "hardness" bordering on hatred: "Let all others fall on their faces. We Koreans will be all right. We can live on rice alone."

We will further elucidate how these seemingly contradictory representations are two sides of the notion of being a Soviet Korean.

The Art of Silent Communication

Being an ideal Soviet Korean means being a communicative person who has learned to discern emotions and either conceal or express them appropriately. The Soviet Korean occupation of being and remaining obedient manifests itself in the way communication takes place.[7] At the heart lies sincerity with which one carries out duties in a controlled manner and fights against indulgence, gratification, and dissipation. In contrast, Koreans see "others" as being very relaxed in dealing with their children.

Many local Korean women showed dismay at the way Russians tolerate their children talking back in a rough way and were further scandalized by liberal Jewish mothers who discussed their sex life with their children.

Unlike Russians who are free individuals, Korean self-perception is strongly bound by the intergenerational notion of *dae* (generation) and its moral obligations. The obligation to family that includes dead ancestors and the strong fusion of parent and child identity strongly oblige Korean parents to take the social and moral responsibility of educating their children's sensitivities, and they become the primary teacher and recipient of the emotional caretaking. When a woman in her seventies boasted about her four considerate middle-aged children, the moral of her story could not be clearer: you reap what you

7. As much as formal education is crucial in reproducing Korean personhood, this learning to appreciate and reproduce appropriate feelings are an integral part of training a child in a Korean home.

sow. She strongly maintained that as she and her husband had trained them properly from an early age, her adult children turned out to be sensitive and caring, unlike others who are rough. As a concrete example, the children never go anywhere without first informing their parents. Even when they go away, they make sure to call their parents by phone to spare them of any emotional discomfort.

The Korean elders confided that they locate people and families on a map of propriety and morality by this "inherited breeding," which also implies the ubiquitous notion of kultura, "culture," and even class, *yangban*.

> The way one speaks gives away one's station. When people are gathered together, we all know who the *yangban* (scholar-official) children are and who the commoners' children are. In my family, both my grandfather and father, all of us, are descendents of the *yangban* lineage. Now we are the only generation which strictly maintains the ways of *yangban*. . . . Speech and action reveal the whole family. Proper people don't indulge in vain words (Kuma).[8]

Unfortunately, some South Korean dignitaries, including pastors, lost face among the local elders by being seen to breach this rule. "Breeding" is also seen as a determining force, similar to biological makeup. Often mixed children are seen to be diluted in their "Koreanness," lagging behind in sensitivity and filial consideration. Like Genrieta, numerous Korean informants unanimously blamed Russian parentage of mixed children as a "contaminating" influence that resulted in self-centered, "nervy" children who do not know how to reciprocate:

> My sister-in-law Manya,[9] who is half-Russian and half-Korean, is an incorrigible spender of my brother's wages. And she talks a lot and whines a lot. My mother, who worked hard all her life, quietly suffers from Manya's way of life. But it is her improper upbringing that

8. 69 years old, pensioner.
9. 45 years old, Russian/Korean, housewife.

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> is the problem and you cannot correct it now. Talya,[10] Manya's eleven-year-old daughter is more like her half-Russian mother than her quiet Korean dad. The child is more Russian, because her mom spoiled her and made her a selfish egoist. She doesn't know how to be sensitive to others. But like an actress, she gets what she wants by her sweet talk and cloying gestures.

"Russian breeding" is seen to interfere with the Korean focus on restraining children to internalize and express themselves through emotive identification with their parents. It is regarded as inimical in developing a sense of belonging to a bigger self, a paternal family line, which obliges sensitive interaction with outsiders in order to save face.

Non-verbal communication is particularly emphasized as a normal way of inculcating shared meanings as opposed to resorting to explicit expression. As a second-generation Japanese-American puts it: "Very little was said, but you just understood" and "You learn by observing them and the way they live" (Yanagisako 1985, 171). In the absence of the hierarchically nuanced Korean language, the parents still sensitize children to rules of respect through deportment, movement, and deliberate verbal reservation until these are ingrained as natural qualities. As Arlie Hochschild (1983) illustrates, achieving the smooth operation between cultivated inner work and appropriate expression is by hard work. The local Korean parent resorts to emotional appeal more than ever by sensitizing children to empathy and harmony. They know all too well that idioms of *hyo* (filial piety) and filial obligation cannot be found in the time and society they live in.

Fathoming the Implicit

The politics in the field of communication is an extremely sensitive area for the local Koreans; strong feelings and judgements often

10. 11 years old, quarter Russian/Korean, school girl.

abound against others who are unable or unwilling to decipher nuances and reciprocate subtleties. Often a source of moral hazard, rules of communication and emotional expression provide an idiom of Korean contention between the old and young, men and women, emotional insiders and outsiders. For example, when a son-in-law doggedly avoids addressing his parents-in-law, he is also vetoing their moral authority as parents. Likewise, elderly local Koreans felt slighted and angered by the way a South Korean visitor sat, laughed, and joked in their presence. The same moral indignation was stirred when a young teenager asked for a cigarette with his hands in his pockets and without properly greeting an elderly Korean, who retorted:

> You scoundrel, don't you have parents and siblings? Do you not see who your seniors are? How dare you ask for a cigarette from elder strangers at an age when you should be busy studying? (Kho 1987, 71).

Being discursive in self-expression and able to fathom others' implicit intention is part of the social finesse as a Korean. The ability is also connected to being "reserved," which means being both conscientious and conscious of others, unlike "nervy" and "aliens." When a Russian neighbor habitually asks for small favors such as borrowing matches, Koreans feel quiet contempt towards the one who does not know the art of self-sufficiency nor the shame of begging. The culprit is even guiltier for his inability or reluctance to sense the unhappy mood of his neighbor.

As Korean parenting inculcates delicateness in both physicality and disposition, a delicate form of communication through emotional knowingness sets them apart from the crude and uncultured. Just as a Korean child learns to appreciate the dexterity of picking up a finely sliced carrot salad with chopsticks or the meticulous handling of seedlings in the field, a Korean adult knows how to exercise refinement in the constant monitoring of nuances and inflections. Early Korean settlers in Russia who were otherwise known to be very docile, nevertheless, surprised foreign observers with their hypersen-

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sitivity to such nuances.

To the older Koreans, such subtleties were the key to fathoming social hierarchy, and the ultimate source of personal dignity that extended to their family. Thus, it was their moral duty to regurgitate the offence until reparation. For that reason, Koreans admit themselves as having a long memory where all the nuances of social interactions are stored. Thus, "Koreanness" is associated with an act of meting out appropriate measures in the present based on a past record that has been remembered and analyzed. This proverbial Korean sensitivity can quickly degenerate into tiresome Korean acts of plotting and intrigue.

In families, Korean children are soon sensitized to read between the lines and learn to communicate in an implicit way from a young age. In this context, neglect or ignorance of what is going on in another's heart is considered an offence. When parents are involved, it becomes all the more grave as a further breach of *hyo*, which stipulates emotional care such as minding unspoken needs, sparing trouble, and offering comfort.

Though local Korean parents are quite happy to show natural affection using pet names and hugging children, there is still strong restraint in emotional and verbal expression. Korean children often complain about this lack of explicit parental affirmation and compliments, yet they accept it as the Korean way, something that is characterized by a hidden commitment that runs deeper than mere words and rhetoric.

Restraint is considered a virtue when conflicts arise. By refusing to engage in direct confrontation, people can secure enough time to cool off and save face. Unfortunately, however, this delicacy is not always reciprocated or appreciated. It is helpless in the face of a person who does not share the same moral or communicational code. This becomes a common source of frustration and anger for local Koreans.

Tellingly, for many local Koreans, including Vadim,[11] it was a moral core that was to be inculcated by parents from a young age.

11. 43 years old, doctor.

Vadim concluded that verbal prompting was used in these matters only when the culprit was considered already beyond reformation and should be consigned outside the realm of human decency. Though intended silence is again the severest sanction and the last resort of the offended victim, it is not so adequate a measure in the contemporary Korean family.

In many cases, we observed similar patterns of rhetoric and conflict between men and women, old and young. In the majority of cases, the wronged and crossed victims enacted the role of self-appointed executors of morals, while the opponent played it down as being petty, hard, old-fashioned and Korean.[12]

In this sense, it is not surprising that Koreans relate better to the discursive and less verbalized form of expressing themselves, such as in song. Traditional Korean songs, especially sad ones, are highly effective vehicles for conjuring up a commonly accentuated emotionality of *han* and sorrow. Even though the Korean language remains unfamiliar to many young Soviet Koreans, they were equally under the spell of the sense of intimacy created by Korean songs. We observed that in many individual and public occasions such as birthdays, sixtieth birthdays (*hwangap*) or family reunions, listening to and singing Korean songs were important ways of reproducing the emotional common denominator and group solidarity.

When there was a reunion of long lost relatives from China, Roberto[13] and Genrieta, who were from the Soviet side of the family, felt ill at ease and inadequate in front of "proper" Koreans. Their confidence was visibly restored when they were able to sing old Korean folk songs. The impact of these plaintive songs was immediate. Soon, there was a sharing of a common denominator of delicious grief in

12. The theme of Korean preoccupation with form over content was also pointed out by Janelli's perceptive study of a contemporary South Korean village (Janelli 1993). In his study, the crux of the matter lay in how, rather than what was communicated, and this allowed a socially lubricating form of ambiguity and deception. Thus, Janelli identifies acceptable and effective filial strategies of sabotage, deception and misrepresentation, all of which use discursiveness.

13. 45 years old, mechanic-turned-businessman.

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the congregation. Even otherwise boisterous children who were bored became visibly shaken, displaying solemn and dutiful expressions. But once this atmosphere was reached and commonality ascertained, they could safely diverge into other merriment.

As sorrowful traditional Korean songs conjure up a concoction of association, memory, and emotion among people, the atmosphere subtly blurs the boundaries of kinship, ethnicity and statehood.

A Quiet Korean: Dangers of the Explicit

To Koreans, verbal exposition is suspect most of the time, and this spells trouble. People complained that they had to mind every nuance while talking to Koreans. Parents constantly chided their children for the inferior quality of verbalization by repeating, "Do you really need to be told?" The Korean antipathy goes even further by regarding verbalization as actively devaluing the genuineness of emotion. People often frowned when describing the Russian ills as lyalyaing, i.e. continuous empty talk and promises.

In stark contrast, eloquence and speech is celebrated in mainstream Soviet/Russian culture and virtually all meetings and encounters abound in toasts, literary recitations, jokes, and personal observations. Russians were described as enjoying interesting and creative leisure activities, according to our Korean informants, who in return described themselves as people who did not know how to amuse themselves. In contrast, it is often remarkable how Koreans tend to cut short these rhetorical occasions. But even Genrieta could not fault her husband Roberto for being too contrived during a New Year's party in their home. Proposing a toast to some serious family guests, he solemnly declared:

> This is the year of the Dog, according to the traditional Korean calendar. I propose that, like dogs, we all work hard and thus have plenty to eat. That's it.

When one comes across an occasionally refined orator, the reception tends to be mixed; his skill is coveted and applauded, but there is a perceptible sense of weariness in the receiver and the "alienness" of the orator. The suspicion of rhetoric is well illustrated in this mother's homily to her eleven year old son, who was fidgeting while struggling to deliver a toast on her birthday:

> Don't bother with big words. Just be simple and wish for something very important, like good health and happiness. That's it.

In other words, all she needed was just a few sincere words, not lengthy, pretty words. Though lamented as "Koreanness," which largely plagues children and courting men, this shyness and inarticulateness is also favorably interpreted as being sincere and delicate: instead of speech, Koreans use more charged silence and body language, such as a trudging gait and stooped shoulders, to express their deep and hidden pain. On these occasions, ornate speech is tantamount to sacrilege.

Restraint as a moral quality is also visibly at work in the avoidance of complaining or whining. When Russians talk about their misery and plead for help, it is seen as a triple offence by Koreans: indulgence in self-pity, open expression, and shameless begging. Though Koreans are no strangers to scandal and gossip, there is a great fear of "airing one's laundry," especially concerning family. So Ella's[14] candid talk about her life and family to us was further evidence of her "unworthiness" as a Korean to her husband, Vadim, who openly condemned her for being a "nervy" Russian woman.

Ironically, the Korean emphasis on self-control puts great pressure on Korean elders, who are anxious not to lose credibility and respect from others. When the young also gain a reputation for being modest by not speaking in front of their seniors, the result is often generational segregation.

For example, Edik[15] was as stiff as a wooden doll among his

14. 42 years old, lecturer.
15. 20 years old, college student.

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elders during his twentieth birthday party. Throughout the lengthy celebration, the courteous yet apprehensive youth kept to himself and only spoke when spoken to. In actuality, Edik was doing very well and demonstrating his correct upbringing by abstaining from speaking in a way that befitted a modest youngster. For the same reason, even adult children do not go on too much in their toasts and well-wishing at their parents' celebrations for fear of appearing self-regarding and proud.

The same pattern of generational gap was remarkable at the first birthday party for the infant Lena.[16] We could not help but notice that there was a sharp divide among the people: the elderly men including Lena's grandfather took over the most comfortable living room, while Lena's father and his friends, only a few in numbers, diffidently hovered around in another room. They appeared almost scared to step into the other's space, and when they had to interact, they were anxious to perform respectably. They visibly relaxed with jokes and laughter only when left alone.

Korean elders are extremely discerning in mixed company, as crossing or sharing "territory" with the young is seen as a potential source of over-familiarity, leading to a demystification of their authority. So when egalitarian conviviality rules, the elders are expected to make way for the merrymaking of the young, such as at weddings. This same mutual avoidance and other strategies in Korean kinship was discerned by Janelli (1993). However, his account gives the impression that these strategies are too premeditated and the actors too consciously calculating. What is missing in his otherwise plausible work is the great extent to which emotion and communication is embedded in the parent-child relationship. Against the hostile outside world, the extent to which parental authority exerts its influence depends on the emotional intensity which stirs so spontaneously in a filial heart.

16. One year old.

Filial *Han*

The parent-child relationship is the most privileged affiliation in Korean kinship. Much emphasis is placed on both inculcating filial feelings and externalizing what goes on in one's heart in this specific context. In stark contrast to otherwise reserved Korean behavior, public outbursts of filial passions of sorrow and guilt are not only common, but even expected and fostered. Even though talking about oneself shows a want of modesty, talking about one's parents is not only common but is also an expected practice as well.

Born into a cycle of generations, the concept of *dae* reinforces intense identification between parent and child within a Korean family. Again, the ideology of *hyo* encourages children to mind their parents' emotions, naturally fostering a sense of empathy towards them. However, the system forces a Korean child to remain always indebted to his parents, never achieving full reciprocation of the parental "graces." His debt increases even more with the all-too-human but individualistic preoccupations that distract him from the path of filial obedience.

Along with the concept of a "debtor" child who shares everything with his parents, the second mechanism of parents being framed as "wronged victims" also governs the parent-child relationship powerfully among the local Koreans. Whether the agent of the tragedy is unavoidable, historical contingencies, states, or personal circumstances, this formula elicits fierce loyalty, sympathy, pity, and pathos. They often divert possible direct opposition and expositions of the source of power. So those conformed emotions are highly articulated at the expense of aggression and discord (Levy 1984).

The theme of filial compassion even goes into the realm of sexuality. When a university student Liza was repeatedly courted by her old Russian school friend who wanted to sleep together, her reason for refusing his proposal was her parents. She felt very flattered and tempted, but also felt that such behaviour would be hurtful to her parents, even if it were never found out. She remembered how hard her parents worked for their children and suffered since they opened

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the family business in the midst of economic chaos. They were already too pitiable to be treated badly. Furthermore, even though it was not clearly articulated by Liza, her way of thinking also makes it clear that she was guarding the moral decency of her parents by controlling her sexuality.

Likewise, when Ella described her kind-hearted female cousins, Genrieta and Vera,[17] she also related their being good daughters to their sexual naivete. According to Ella, because they have "soft" hearts towards their parents, who they knew have suffered and worked all throughout their lives, they obediently kept their virginity until marriage. The "good" daughters had compassion for their "poor" parents who had already experienced so much suffering in their lives and did not rebel even secretly in their hearts. Their chastity was a genuine result of their sincere heart. But their youngest sister who later married out was described as having a "bold" heart, not like the other two.

If we follow Levy (1984), *han*, or sorrow, guilt, anxiety, loss, harmony, and gratitude can be identified as highlighted senses and emotions in a Korean family that accentuate the inequity of children as contrasted to the liberality of parents. Even though the dominant sentiment is a filial guilt experienced for being an inadequate child, on some occasions, negative emotions of aggression and anger easily trump those of legitimate avenues. When aggression is internalized under the mantle of filial sorrow, it manifests as self-defeating anger and self-hatred, while externalized aggression often lays blame on the spouse as a source of divided loyalty. The filial *han* also provides a crucial incentive for the Soviet Korean commitment to work and study as a form of compensation.

Remembering parents, whether dead or alive, happens in great frequency and intensity and in both ordinary and ritualistic settings. The condensed parent-child discourse and its emotions can be easily triggered by certain material, physical conditions, or sensory inputs such as laboring on a plot in hot weather, assuming a "Korean" posture like squatting, revisiting collective farms, seeing a Korean agricultural instrument, and hearing accented Russian. Anniversaries of the dead or the child's own rites of passages are also apt reminders as one is reminded that every stage of his life is intertwined with his parents. The remembered parents, including those who are still alive, are often idealized in this highlighted memory. Ambitious, scolding mothers and distant fathers are air-brushed and become prime examples of hallowed parental bodies of selfless sacrifice. The child pales in comparison, and this makes him sad and even more appreciative of his parents. He sighs, looks away, and breaks the conversation, or cries, manifesting the telltale filial reactions.

17. 41 years old, housewife.

As the angry elders of the previous section exemplified, this culture-specific pattern between parents and children readily extends beyond its confines, setting appropriate tones in the other social orders. Our encounters with the local elders illustrate how they readily reproduced a similar set of charged words, gestures, and emotions in establishing a relationship with us. Almost the same thing happened when other South Korean students and we met local elders at a local Korean theatre. After hearing about our academic careers, one of them even started to sob. He then stroked our heads and repeated exactly the same word, like a mantra, that a Korean parent would: "study hard," "persevere to the end." The expression and reproduction of *han/hyo* also takes place at the community level.

Though there is lesser enthusiasm for ornate speech-making among Koreans, exceptions often arise when they pay homage to their roots. One occasion of delivering such formatted rhetoric was the celebration of the Korean liberation on August 15. In 1994, many local Korean dignitaries gave speeches on behalf of various local Korean associations, almost all of which reminded the audience of the local Korean debt to their parents while presenting respect for elders as an extension of filial relationship. In speaking of the privileged *hyo* and its derivative virtues and sentiments, people were very eloquent and did not mind the rhetoric.

The latest addition to the genre of the remorseful child can be found in Soviet Korean memoirs. While accusatory literature mush-

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roomed after the Jewish Holocaust, the de-Sovietization has brought about confession as its equivalent. Mainly authored by elderly male academics, Soviet Korean memoirs (e.g. Stefan Kim in Jeong 1995, Han Sergei in S. M. Han and V. S. Han 1999) are peculiarly penitential in tone. They allocate the most tender and emotional part to remembering their parents, and make a public literary confession, as if self-flagellating themselves for being guilty children. However, the sentiment is extended to their "Korean" roots, including their homeland. Thus, expressions of filial sorrow and gratitude became a kind of currency in forging and reaffirming ethnic solidarity and moral authority. While meeting the communities' need to declare its *hyo* ideology, this penitential literature towards one's parents and ancestral roots also endorsed the stature of the writers who are worthy and able to air the key sentiment on behalf of the community.

While writing and public speaking is a highly formalized way of expressing filial sentiments beyond the realm of ordinary Koreans, a more common way is talking frequently about parents with others in everyday life. Though the themes of iniquitous children and gracious parents are still there, variations can be added to the repertoire such as how the narrator strives to pay back his filial debt to his parents, and how he would do the same for his children. As a narrative is shared, other listeners also share a pervading sense of grief and melancholy. Though they are indirect experiences, the repetitive exposure to the poignant parental narratives and its pathos sensitizes the children to the degree of almost re-living their parents' pains. Starting from an early age, this internalization makes people highlight the patterned sentiments, which come to feel natural.

As a core of Korean personhood, the *hyo* ideology and its accompanying emotional manifestations thus set them apart from "others" and provide the most consistent idiom of cultural continuity.

Concluding Remarks

Control and discipline is largely associated with being a Soviet Kore-

an in the midst of "others" who are seen as lax and indulgent. We traced the repeated theme in the area of social expression of emotions in both deportment and verbalization. Yet, the end result of a soft-spoken but hard-boiled Soviet "Koreanness" is without ambiguity. It is a key quality that was selectively accentuated as a way of surviving for all seasons, but it is also a deeply alienating barrier that puts Soviet Koreans ill at ease with "others," socially and psychologically. Our discussion further analyzes the Soviet Korean emphasis on implicit and discursive ways of communicating with others and maintains that this preoccupation is expected to be learned at home. Thus, passive gestures, as well as indirect and restricted verbalizations, are often preferred among Koreans over forthright words and ornate rhetoric. This knowledge of communication is also linked to moral authority and power relationships, often resulting in a deep conflict in the community's ever-changing social order. Lastly, we argue that being Korean also involves not only the knowledge of how to communicate but also, to a lesser extent, what to communicate. We have shown that much of it is dominated by the intense affiliation between parent and child.

The Korean kinship that emphasizes generational continuity, especially the parent-child relationship, still exerts a profound influence upon the Korean minority. Thus, one's core identity is defined by ongoing parental and filial status. Certain representations are constructed in sustaining parental control and filial obedience. The practices are deeply embedded in people's lives, enabling them to highlight emotions such as filial remorse and guilt. This pre-existing cultural system further converges into the minority's traumatic history resulting in Koreans' sharing with Jewish Holocaust victims and Japanese American camp internees, certain themes; an intense intergenerational bond, parental suffering, and the raising of a child with a mission to compensate for parental misery (Valensi and Wachtel 1991; Alder 1998). Education, in this context, becomes an intensely effective medium of transformation, both personal and intergenerational.

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