
Globalization of Ethnicity: from Nations to Meta-Nations

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Globalization of Ethnicity and Perspectives of Korean Meta-Nation¹

One of the striking tendencies of the contemporary world is the globalization of ethnicity and the increase of the ethnic factor in world politics. K. Marx once formulated a slogan: “Proletarians of all countries, unite!”, considering that belonging to a class is the main trait that unites people in large communities and determines their behavior. The second half of the 20th century and modern processes showed the value and role of ethnicity. The Marx’ slogan is replaced by the slogan: “Ethnoses of all countries, unite!”. This is national (ethnic) liberation movements in former colonies during the second half of the 20th century; disintegration of the former federative states on the basis of ethnicity (USSR, Yugoslavia, Georgia), creation of international ethnic associations and networks, etc.

Ethnic processes come to the fore in world politics and social sciences. It is possible to talk about a new phenomenon – *globalization of ethnicity*. *Firstly*, this is an intensive process of diasporization in most countries of the world. According to the UN, in 1960 there were 75.5 mln people living outside the country of their birth worldwide; in 1990, that number reached 154 mln, in 2000 – 176.6 million in 2013 - 232 mln, and in 2017 - 258 mln.²

Secondly, ethnic conflicts cease to be local in nature and come into the sphere of world politics. It is sufficient to mention the problem of Kosovo (Serbian-Albanian conflict), which divided the international community into two camps: those who have recognized Kosovo as an independent State, and those who did not. It is a problem of recognition or non-recognition of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey (Armenian-Turkish conflict), the problem of divided Cyprus (Greek-Turkish conflict), Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenian-Azerbaijan) conflict, the creation of a Palestinian State (the Arab-Israel conflict), the creation of independent States in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the significant component of crisis in Ukraine etc.

1. <http://www.unmigration.org>

2. The concept of “meta-nation” was developed by author in the previous presented papers and articles (Khan 2001, Khan 2007, Khan 2011).

Thirdly, in world politics it is observed a tendency of *panethnism*, when the national states make a policy of the Diasporas' unification or create the global/international ethnic communities (networks), which became the actors of international politics (World Congress of Jews or Armenians, Kazakhs, Tatars, Russians, etc.). The Republic of Korea also makes its police in this direction. In this regard, I would like to focus on the Korean case study.

Korean immigration, which has taken place during the last 150 years, has led to the fact that nowadays, according to Overseas Koreans Foundation, the number of overseas Koreans is more 7 million people (<http://www.okf.or.kr>). Today Koreans live all over the world: in more than 150 countries. If the current rate of migration is taken into account, then in the near future the number of Koreans outside the peninsula will be comparable to the population of North Korea (and South Korea, in the distant future).

The circumstances of Koreans' migration and existence abroad are different. These are:

- Voluntary migration and forced deportation.
- Homogeneous and heterogeneous ethnic environment.
- Compactness and dispersion of settlement.
- Commonality and difference of cultures in recipient countries concerning Korean culture.
- Democratic and totalitarian political regimes, plan and market economic systems, etc.

Adapting to and being assimilated into ethnically alien environments, Koreans in different countries acquire more and more traits that distinguish themselves from each other and transform their initial ethnic characteristics. The widening *quantitative* dispersion of Koreans and the increasing *qualitative* differentiation within them lead to new processes in the evolution of Korean ethnicity. As Koreans settle throughout the world and adapt to various countries, *Korean identity begins to take diverse forms and can no longer be reduced to the ethnic characteristics that exist on the Korean Peninsula.*

In this regard, what concepts in terms of sociology, cultural anthropology, and political science should we use for Koreans? Besides, the divergent ethnic and political processes on the Korean peninsula as well as in Korean Diasporas need a clarification of the terminology that can reflect these processes.

It is known that ethnic communities (ethno-social organisms) had different historic forms (clan, tribe, union of tribes, nationality) whose evolution and political construction³ resulted in the formation of *nations* as stable ethnic entities, namely, national (ethnic) states. However, an ethnic nation is not the final form of the evolution of ethnic communities (ethno-social organisms).⁴ As

3. See (Gellner E. 1983)

4. After the French Revolution the concept of "nation" gradually changed. In French and English ethnic content of the "nation" is replaced by political one. Especially this process got intensive character under globalization. The concept of "nation" became a synonym of "state" (for example, United Nations). But in German and Russian "nation" is not a synonym of "state" and expresses, first of all, ethnic characteristics. Because of these differences, some scholars distinguish the concepts of "ethnic nation" and "civic nation" (Tishkov 2000).

previous ethnic communities, nations are subjects of divergent and convergent processes. For example, in case of the USA one can speak about supra-ethnic community – American people or American nation that includes the representatives of different races and ethnicities, and can not be reduced to a certain ethnic group. In the case of the former USSR one can speak about supra-national and supra-ethnic community – Soviet people that consisted of not only different ethnic groups but also different nations (national states, republics – the Uzbek Republic, the Armenian Republic, etc.). These communities are not reducible to a certain nation as a state formation – say, to Belarus or Turkmenistan, or to a certain ethnic group – say, to Russians. Ethnic communities, which settled all over the world and formed large foreign diasporas (Jews, Armenians et al.) have also adopted supra-national characters. For instance, there are more Armenians outside Armenia than in the country itself. There are ethnos which form more than one state (Chinese, Koreans or Germans before unification), and diasporas which compose a big part of the population (for example, Chinese in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand) in some countries. Thus, in the result of immigration and divergent processes the ethnic nations break up to sub-ethnic formations, also finding supranational character, but differ from supranational communities, which are a consequence of interethnic integration and synthesis, conditioned by convergent processes.

In the case of Koreans, one can observe three co-existing supra-national communities: 1) community where North Korea is a core or attractive center (along with the North Korean state this includes some parts of diasporas which have close relations with North Korea – Chongryon in Japan, organizations of Bomminryon, etc.); 2) community where South Korea is an attractive center (Mindan in Japan, etc.); and 3) some diaspora communities (for example, CIS Koreans who live in different countries; they are the same people– Koryo Saram– but distributed among various national states).

Even though relations among these communities are very complicated, the global tendencies in the sphere of ethno-political processes permit a discussion of the possible formation (construction) of a *supra-national Korean ethnic community* or a *Global Korean Community* (GKC) – Koreans of North Korea + Koreans of South Korea + Overseas Korean Diasporas. Of course, the primary and necessary condition for the formation of such a community is improving relations between North and South Korea. In the future, by forming a more or less *stable* formation, this “supra-national” community could signify a new stage in the evolution of Korean ethnicity – a *meta-nation* stage as an *aggregate of related but culturally differing ethnic communities (mother ethnos and ethnic sub-groups) historically belonging to one nation*.

What are the correlations between the concept “meta-nation” and other notions such as “supra-ethnic community”, “supra-national community” and “trans-national community”, “inter-national community”?

On the use of word “nation” in Korean language see (Song, Kue-Jin 2009).

Paying attention to various interpretations of the concept of “nation” (both as ethnic identity and as state identity), Holland and Russian scholars write that “one should distinguish nations, nations-states and multinational states. Thus, nation and state are not identical but mutually-crossed concepts” (Rukavishnikov, V., Halman, L., Ester, P. 1998: 269).

Meta-nation and supra-ethnic community. A supra-ethnic community is an aggregate of different ethnic communities. It can exist in two forms. First, it exists in the form of a union of ethnic groups which has not become a nation yet (many multi-ethnic states where co-relation of centrifugal and centripetal forces is not simple). For example, in case of Ruanda– which is a formal (official) state and member of the UN– one can say that it is a supra-ethnic community but not a nation (something whole) because of bloody war between Hutu and Tutsi, basic ethnic communities in the country. In case of meta-nation, it is not formed on the basis of different ethnic groups; its parts historically belong to one ethnic nation – mother ethnos (ethnicity). Second, supra-ethnic community can exist in the form of a nation (for example, the American people). But meta-nation is a next form (stage) compared to nation.

Meta-nation and supra-national community. In terms of content, the concept «supra-national community» has broader meaning than the “meta-nation”. There are three types of supra-national communities: 1) federative communities formed on the basis of different ethnic groups *and* states (for example, the Soviet people); 2) inter-national communities; and 3) communities consisting of the sub-ethnic groups historically belonging to one nation. Only the third meaning relates to meta-nation.

As to the concept «transnational community», it coincides with the second meaning of the term «supra-national community», that is, as an «international community». In other words, in terms of content this concept does not coincide with the concept “meta-nation”.

In comparison with term “supra-national community”, the concept “meta-nation” has a single meaning. It fixes a new form (and stage) of ethnicity which arises *after* nation. It reflects the supra-national character of the new community (the globalization of ethnicity) as well as the ethnic heredity of its components from the point of view of historical belonging to one nation. The main features of the meta-nation are the following:

- The common historical ethnic roots;
- The presence of the nation with all attributes and, first of all, the national state, or national states;
- A high level of migration out of the national state;
- The formation of diasporas abroad, integrated and assimilated into the new ethnic environment, on the one hand, and keeping historically-cultural and genetic identity, on the other hand;
- Ethnic consciousness;
- The interrelations between the kindred ethnic groups, giving the meta-nation the features of a stable community.

Korean Diasporas: Also Koreans or Others?

In connection with the process of divergence from the peninsula, anxiety is expressed in Korea

about the fact that the ethnic identity of overseas Koreans is experiencing a “serious crisis” (Hun, Jeong Young 2000). Often, overseas Koreans (especially, CIS Koreans) hear complaints that they are insufficiently “Korean”, that they lost Korean language⁵, and their customs are incorrect,⁶ etc. However, it is necessary to realize that the peculiarities of the Korean diasporas are *reality* and that they should be not perceived as anomalies but accepted just as they are. Moreover, from the point of view of diasporan Koreans, transcending the frameworks of mono-ethnic homogenous consciousness is not a deficiency but actually a virtue that opens new horizons of consciousness and perception of the world. This provides an opportunity for Korean ethnicity not only to build relations with “the other” but also to include “the other” as its own organic element, thus rendering its consciousness open and externally oriented.

In other words, the transformation of ethnic culture and consciousness does not necessarily present a crisis. No ethnic culture stands in one place. It develops and is influenced by other cultures, except in the case of isolationism, as manifested in Korea until the 19th century. True, Koreans of the CIS have lost much of the culture of their forbears. But they have created their own unique culture, the *Eurasian Korean culture*, of which they can be rightfully proud. This characteristic of cultural identity can be called a crisis only from the standpoint of a statically understood “Korean identity.”

One of the peculiarities of the formation of the ethno-cultural identity of the Overseas Koreans, in contrast to the Koreans on the peninsula, is their foreign ethnic environment. We can differentiate the identities of Koreans living in mono-ethnic (homogeneous) societies from those in poly-ethnic (heterogeneous) ones. For instance, North and South Koreans live in a homogeneous mono-ethnic (Korean) environment where all people are Koreans. In China and Japan, where there are large Korean diasporas, it can be said with certain reservations that in these countries the process of adaptation took place in *homogeneous, ethnically foreign and culturally close* environments. In the USA and the former USSR, the process of assimilation of Koreans took place in *heterogeneous, ethnically and culturally foreign* environments.

Thus, Soviet Koreans were in constant contact with representatives of various peoples (more than 120 peoples lived in the USSR), and this led to the *flexible* psychological attitudes of Koreans towards their ethnic environment, as well as the *flexible* models of their behavior.

Under the conditions of an ethnically foreign environment, many components of the initial ethnic culture, which are preserved in a homogeneous Korean environment, were transformed or lost. Especially, Soviet Koreans, having lived in isolation from Korea over the course of four to

5. In the USSR that was inhabited by a great number of the peoples speaking different languages, the only language which guaranteed a possibility of full communication in any region of the huge country, gave the chance of the best education and upward mobility, was Russian. Koreans have made it a mother tongue. New language identity has opened for Koreans the way to a new, wide world, and it became one of the prerequisites of their achievements.

6. This is a controversial subject. Being isolated, the Soviet Koreans kept many elements of traditional Korean culture which disappeared in Korea itself. For example, the modern youth in Korea does not know and does not celebrate such traditional holiday as *Ovol' Tano*. Or, many Korean products are made in Korea in the factory way, while in Central Asia, they still made in the traditional manual way.

five generations, certainly differ from the Koreans on the peninsula in language, mentality, values, ideals, outlook, behavior, customs, and traditions. The degree of difference between the Koreans from Korea and the Korean diasporas is so great that it can be the basis for forming *new sub-ethnic communities* – Eurasian Koreans (Soviet/Post-Soviet Koreans or Koryo Saram), Koreans in China, Koreans in Japan, USA, etc.

The greatest difference lies in the fact that the culture of Koryo Saram is a *mixed* one – i.e. it is a synthesis of Korean, Russian, Soviet, Central Asian and European cultures. This is especially evident in the intelligentsia and the youth. The following list captures the main characteristics of Eurasian Koreans:

- the essential transformation of the cultural genetic pool (i.e., the transformation of the initial socio-cultural characteristics of Korean ethnicity);
- the process of this transformation in a poly-ethnic (heterogeneous) environment;
- the transition of the mother tongue from Korean to Russian;
- the adaptation to cultures essentially different from traditional Korean culture;
- the transcendence of the framework of monoethnic consciousness (Eastern type) and the formation of a Eurasian one;
- a high level of acculturation and assimilation;
- the dynamism and intensity of the above listed processes;
- a high level of achievements in various fields.

Due to this mixed nature of Eurasian Korean culture, it is sometimes easier for CIS Koreans to understand the psychology and behavior of the Russians, Jews, Georgians, Uzbeks, or Kazakhs than the Koreans from Korean peninsula.

The mixed character of Korean diasporic culture is also important for understanding relations between Korean Diasporas and the historic motherland. This is especially important when we speak of the “Global Korean Community/Network”.

Let’s take a case of Soviet/Post-Soviet Koreans. During the period of perestroika, all Soviet Koreans suddenly felt that they were *Koreans* and in any event wished to be like *genuine* Koreans. Korean language courses, as well as the etiquette and behavior of Koreans from the peninsula (both North and South) became fashionable. Everything that they did provoked admiration, resulting in a phenomenon of mechanical, blind imitation.

However, soon it became clear that attempts to imitate “genuine” Koreans would only lead the Koryo Saram to inferiority complexes. Soviet Koreans vividly demonstrated a sense of national inferiority (telling themselves that they were not genuine, that they were deformed Koreans), and their self-abasement and self-reproach began to lead both North and South Koreans to take an arrogant, mentoring, lecturing position towards the Koryo Saram. Representatives from the Korean embassies started openly meddling in the activities of Korean organizations, newspapers, TV, etc. In this case, the Koreans (especially South Korea) play a role in the spirit of globalism and sometimes do not take into consideration the interests of the Korean diaspora.

The North and South Korean media began to represent transformational changes in Soviet Korean culture as a “crisis of Korean identity”. That is, Koryo Saram again must radically change their way of life and mentality; they must sacrifice their habits, customs and traditions.

But do they want that? South Korean businessmen, professors and pastors constantly stress the principle of shared blood (“we are all Koreans”). They deduce from this basis a principle of absolute obligation (“you should”, “you must”) that practically leads to the fact that, in everything, the Koryo Saram must follow South Korean models of behavior and consciousness. Of course, sooner or later this situation will result in a negative reaction on the part of local Koreans.

It should be taken into account that due to their mixed culture and the Soviet system of education – considered one of the best in the world – Soviet Koreans achieved considerable successes in many fields. For instance, from Soviet/Post-Soviet Koreans there were:

- members of government (vice-premiers, ministers and deputy ministers), senators, members of parliaments and local governmental bodies, outstanding figures from various political and public organizations;
- winners of the most prestigious titles and prizes (Heroes of the Soviet Union, Heroes of Socialist Labor, winners of the Lenin Prize, the National Prize, etc.);
- scientists with different degrees and titles (academicians and corresponding members of the Academies of Sciences of the USSR, Kazakh and Uzbek republics, professors);
- heads of educational institutes (principals and vice-principals, deans and deputy deans and heads of departments of universities, directors of schools and colleges);
- heads of scientific research institutions (directors and deputy directors, heads of departments and scientific-research and planning institutes);
- managers of large industrial, finance and agricultural state and private enterprises;
- outstanding athletes (Olympic champions, World and European championship medalists, world champions in professional sports, winners of various international tournaments, winners of national championships of the USSR and the CIS countries, head coaches of national teams of the USSR and CIS countries, heads of national Olympic committees, heads of associations of various sports);
- well-known, internationally recognized writers, composers, painters, opera and ballet stars, etc. (Khan V. 2006, Kim B. 1999, Li G. 1998, Sovetskie koreitsy Kazakhstana. 1992)

There is no other country in the world where a Korean diaspora community achieved such high positions as Soviet Koreans. Not only Koryo Saram but Koreans in general can be proud of these achievements. It is quite natural, that the mentor tone of Koreans from the peninsula at a certain stage resulted to a negative reaction from Koryo Saram. Among themselves, Koreans from the CIS have begun, more and more, to criticize the thinking abilities, values, moral qualities and behavior of Koreans from the peninsula. Moreover, these criticisms have become sharper and sharper (Kim B. 1997).

The attempt to impose on Koryo Saram the statically understood Korean identity intends to produce in an individual's consciousness and behavior the realization of one's rigid belonging to a certain community (in our case – to the Korean ethnos), though in *real* life this connection can be quite fragile. This is an attempt to program his thinking and behavior in accordance with traditions and norms of Korean identity as a kind of abstract, frozen essence. The world outside the way of thinking and the norms of a given community is seen by this consciousness as “alien” and, in the case of extreme nationalism, as abnormal. It seems to me that ethnocentrism and narcissism of various social groups (not only ethnic, but religious and others) in a historical perspective only leads to a dead end. And, the *attempt to unify Koreans from all over the world in accordance with standards of a single Korean identity presents itself as nonproductive and utopian.*

Of course, this criticism of the standardized Korean identity does not at all negate Korea's right to preserve and develop its culture. The paradox is that in trying to preserve Korean culture under the conditions of globalization (namely, Americanization), Koreans from the peninsula do not notice that sometimes they themselves assume a standardizing role (on the basis of their understanding of Korean identity), refusing *the right of Overseas Koreans to be what they are.* It seems to me that the condition for a normal dialogue between Koreans of the peninsula and of the various Korean diasporas can only be recognition of Korean communities around the world as *unity in diversity.* These two opposite approaches can be called *globalism* and *glocalism.*

To be harmonic, relations between Korea and the Korean diaspora should be constructed on the basis of the following principles (Khan V. 2001):

- 1) Equality.
- 2) Mutual respect and cultural tolerance.
- 3) Non-interference.
- 4) Mutual support
- 5) Glocalism but not globalism.

Conclusion

The formation of a Global Ethnic Communities needs new conceptualization free from the myths and short-term political interests. The values placed on ethnicity - which vary across societies and cultures - are so strong and divisive that it is difficult to find any “common language” with which to transcend divisions of belonging between ethnic groups. Yet it is imperative that in the near future we solve the question of how can people build the “common village” or global community if they do not understand nor accept each other because of ethnicity?

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