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On Inter-Ethnic Marriages among the Korean Population in the City of Almaty

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My article represents preliminary results from a questionnaire which was given to the Koreans in Almaty and was devoted to the questions of inter-ethnic marriages and mixed families. The questionnaire was administered in two stages: the first one in summer on 1992 and the second in autumn-winter of 1996. The selection of respondents was done at random. However, in general it corresponds to the real ethno-demographic parameters.

According to the census of 1989 the demographic characteristics of the Koreans in Almaty were as follows: the number of Koreans is 16,073¹⁾ among which 52.5% are women and 47.5% – men, and the tendency for such disproportion is quite stable. 62.3% of the Koreans living in Almaty were born there, 21.5% were born in Russia 2/3 of them in the Primorskiy Krai, 11.4% were born in Uzbekistan and 5% in other republics of the former USSR.²⁾ 71,800 of the Koreans in Kazakhstan were married, about 6,000 – widowed, 4,200 – divorced.³⁾ Among those married there were 70,200 ethnically endogamic marriages and 1,600 inter-ethnic. Average size of the family was 3.7. The main age groups were as follows: children up to 9 – 16.5% of the total number of Koreans, teenagers and young people from 10 to 29 – 30%, middle-aged people from 30 to 49 – 32.3%, elderly people from 50 to 59 – 9.4%, people from 60 to 69 – 6.7% and from 70 and older – 4.8%. The majority of Koreans in Kazakhstan – more than 85% live in cities. Those living in the capital formed the 7th largest group in the city regarding number after Russians, Kazak, Ukrainians, Uigurs, Tatars and Germans.

158 people of Korean nationality were questioned and the least of respondents are representatives of inter-ethnic marriages. The age and sex characteristics of the respondents were as follows: men constitute 70 and women – 88.

Age total men women

18-25	86	37	49
25-30	28	18	10
40-50	41	13	28

60-...	3	2	1
total	158	70	88

Representatives of the Korean nationality among the respondents constitute 147 people the remaining 11 are from inter-ethnic marriages /Kazaks, Russians, Ukrainians/.

The questionnaire was composed of 30 questions, most of which were of the open type. We were interested in the demands to husband-wife to-be, how possible are intimate relations between Koreans and people of other nationalities, and what is the idea of ideal married couple. The respondents were asked to answer the questions openly concerning inter-ethnic marriages: relations with parents, attitude of both sides/wife and husband/ to the problem of family name, language, national traditions and culture of future spouse. The questionnaire also included situational questions of the family life : on division of family duties ,on leading role in solving important family matters, on up bringing of children. Apart from situations of personal character they were offered questions related to the problems of Korean diaspora on the whole.

To the question What is in your opinion the most important while choosing a partner for family life? we offered several answers - approval of the parents, mutual feeling, education, nationality, material status and attractive appearance. Many respondents found difficulty in giving the only one answer preferring instead to say that a combination of all the traits in one person would be ideal. However, the majority answered mutual feeling - 84.8% , material status - 12.6%, education - 15.2% , approval of parents - 10.1%. Regarding the question which is the most important for us 20.9% answered - nationality. And ultimately - the last choice - attractive appearance was chosen by 8.9 % of those questioned.

We think the following two questions were logically related. The first is : Have you ever had strong feelings to a girl/boy of other nationality than yours?. Positive answer was given by more than half of the respondents - 58.2%, negative - 41.8%.Then the second question followed: Could you marry a girl/boy of nationality other than yours?. The answers divided as follows: positive answer - 54.4% (86 people) and negative - 45.6% (72people).

Almaty is a city where together with Koreans live people of many other nationalities but the majority constitute Russians and Kazaks. In connection with it we offered the question which gives the chance to determine the most preferable, most adaptive nationality to Koreans. The question was - A a girl/boy of what nationality you would prefer while choosing your future spouse?. Possible answers included - the same nationality as mine, Russian, Kazak, besides if the offered variants did not satisfy the

respondents they could give their own answer. The specific nature of this question was that in this case a respondent should think not about someone from his or her life story but about specific features of certain nationalities that appeal to him personally. Maybe it explains why 83.5% of the respondents felt like writing –the same nationality as mine as it is closer and better, 8.2% said that it is of no importance for them, 3.2% were in favor of Kazaks, 1.3% Russians, the same number pointed to Germans or Europeans in general.⁴⁾ Thus, at present time the most preferable nationality for Koreans are Kazaks.

The next question in the questionnaire was: Would your parents object to your inter-ethnic marriage? 56.3% answered Yes, 42.4% gave negative answers and 1.3% failed to give any definite answer.

Taking into consideration the fact that after inter-ethnic marriage have taken place the tendency of ethnic development of this microsocial collective manifests itself first of all in the every day family life, we asked the respondents to imagine themselves as members of such a collective. The most important point in the scope of issues under consideration was determination of the nationality of children in the ethnically mixed families, as it is this point that is the external manifestation of ethnic orientation in mixed collectives. 94.9% of the respondents consider children in ethnically mixed families must be of the nationality of their farther, 1.9% – of the nationality of the mother and 1.9% did not give any answer.

The determination of the nationality of children in ethnic their ancestors the ally mixed families depends on a number of factors: ethnic composition of the family, historically grounded national preference, place of living, ethnic environment and others. For Almaty Koreans childrens nationality in the ethnically mixed families depends on the nationality of the father, whether he is Korean, Russian, Kazak or another nationality. Contemporary Koreans thus see this issue in the same way as their ancestors – a new generation in the family is connected with the continuation of the line of the father. Though the final result of an inter-ethnic marriage in the ethnic field becomes evident while determining their nationality by children who are off age. This issue remains to be studied.

Regarding culture and language of the children in ethnically mixed families 84.2% thought that children must acquire the culture and language of both parents. 14.5% consider that it was enough to know the cultural traditions of their father as he represents the continuation of their family. Only 1.3% pointed to the importance of the culture and language of their mother.

As far as language is concerned it is necessary to take into account the following: among ethnic factors influencing inter-ethnic marriages language is number

one. The results of the sociological research done by Min L.V. at the end of the 80ies show that the absolute majority of the Korean teenagers born and living in Kazakhstan do not know their mother tongue and know only some words (62.7%). Only 11.7% of the teenagers stated in the questionnaire that they sometimes speak in Korean with their grandparents who live with them but very often they use Russian words in their Korean. Almost 75% of grown-up people and 25.6% children said that they understand spoken Korean but cannot speak themselves. Neither parents nor children can read Korean and absolutely do not understand literary Korean.⁵⁾

To the question : How do you want to live with the parents of your wife/husband? we got nearly unanimous answer separately – 95% and only 5% wanted to live together with the parents. It should be pointed out that regarding respondents sex those who want to live separately constitute approximately the same number – 43.3% –men and 56,7% –women .Among these who preferred to live in the parents house men predominate considerably – 62.5% while women are only 37.5%.

Among Koreans like among many other nations living together with ones wives or husbands parents is considered as temporary, caused by material difficulties. in the families of socially different generations cultural level, ideas and views of parents and children are a bit different which sometimes create tense situation in the family. The desire of the young to live separately from the parents is quite often caused by their desire to free themselves from old traditions and from the necessity to observe traditional etiquette.

Due to the considerably higher number of mixed marriages which can be found in the city in comparison with the rural areas we also asked: Is anybody of your close relatives married to a person of other nationality?. In this case positive answers dominated – 75.9% against 24.1% negative. To gage personal assesment of such marriages, we asked the respondents to assess them according to the following categories: happy, –good, –unsuccessful, –bad. This question made nearly everybody think hard. Many said that it is impossible to describe ethnically mixed marriages in one word and that everything depends on the people themselves. The mixed couples themselves gave more neutral assessments – 61.4% called such marriages good. It is also important that 24.7% defined such marriages as unsuccessful. Part of the Koreans called them happy in comparison with monoethnic – 8.2%. And only a few totally rejected the possibility of harmony and happiness in such marriages having called them bad (1.9%).

We cannot but agree that in every family even the happiest one there appear some problems. What in your opinion, is the cause of difficulties in ethnically mixed families?–

we asked. The answers to this question varied. Regarding the cause of problems the answers were different. The main factor which was named among the reasons for family problems as parents interference – 43.7%. Some of the Koreans thought that the reason or all the troubles which appear in the mixed families is different interests which do not depend on the nationality – 38.6% and at last a considerable share of the respondents see the sources for family problems as different national characters, traditions and culture of the spouses.

Concluding this bloc of questions we asked: Which marriages are in your opinion more stable and happy?. It turned out that nevertheless Almaty Koreans consider more acceptable mono-ethnic marriages – 81%, 12% were in favor of ethnically mixed marriages and only 7% did not give any answer as they think that it is not important.

A good family was an indispensable condition for a happy family life for the majority of the respondents. To gauge the respondents idea of a happy family life was asked: what is more significant – a loving wife/husband, – quiet without troubles life, or material status? The answers were also not limited. The respondents were given a chance to present their own idea of happy family life. The answers were divided as follows. A considerable number of the answers were in favor of love, 59% consider it the most important value. Another standard is material status – 39.2%. A small percentage (13.3) stick to the opinion that a happy family life consists in quiet, modest life free from troubles and concerns. The Koreans who lived in Kazakstan have always to be careful as immigrants. Circumstances made them become even better than they really are and it was achieved by hard work with the constant feeling of worry and tension. This part of Almaty Koreans think that if the family is not rich but stable and quiet then the life is happy. A part of Koreans (10.1%) could not agree to such limited variants of the answers and tried to formulate their own variant of the answer: Mutual understanding, mutual trust, mutual respect ... Favourite work... Loving children... Warmth and comfort at home... Harmony. And only 1.9% failed to answer.

Within the frameworks of our research we'd like to study the problems of family life connected with children as children change all spheres of the family life. When a child is born in the family the parents get new roles – mother and father which lead to certain changes in the relations between them, The appearance of these new relations thus transforms the structure of the family. The number of children depends not only on the size of the family (its quantity parameters) but to a certain degree its inner structure and external connections both familial and social.

In a number of our questions there were two points which reflected the number of children in the families of the respondents and the number of children which they want

to have. In the respondents parents families first of all we see that families with 1-2 children dominate (51.9%) then we see that in the near past the element of many children families still remained strong – more than 3 children – 24.7%. Comparatively a small percentage of the families among Almaty Koreans has 2 – 3 children – 17%. And only 6.3% did not give any answer because of unknown reason. It follows that the preceding generation of Koreans in urban areas were oriented towards small number of children in their families and the tendence for many children families started to disappear. The next generation of urban Koreans imagine the composition of their family and the number of children in a different way. Most of the respondents (69.6%) would like to have only two children. Interestingly – the number of young people who imagine their families with three or more children still remains on the same level (20.2%). The number of those who found difficulty in answering this question is 1%.

Ethnic processes in all times have been reflected in the system of interrelations among the members of the families. The most important parameters for distinguishing types of families, as is well known, are formal and real solutions to the question of who is the head of the family and the question on the authority of representatives of different generations who hold definite positions in the family ties (husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, sister, brother, daughter-in-law, son-in-law etc.).

To the first type belong families where the personal power of the head is preserved, in most cases it is the eldest man (father, husband, in undivided families grandfather) and less frequently the eldest woman (mother, wife, grandmother). This power is based usually on the personal authority and life experience of the head and exercised on members of the family within certain limits. For the families of the second type it is characteristic that formal recognition of the head of the family is given to the husband (or father) seldom wife (or mother) while in reality all grown up members enjoy equal rights. The third type refer families which are called double head with equal division of rights and duties between wife and husband. If in such families there are unmarried children they usually participate in the discussion of all important family matters but take into consideration the opinion of the parents. The forth type of families is close to the first and the second. In the families of this type it is difficult to call anybody – the head.

Taking into account the importance of this aspect of family relations we offered two parallel questions: Who, in your opinion should be the head of the family?. As a result it turned out that for the parents families of Almaty Koreans the first type of the family is characteristic. Families with personal power (authority) accorded to the eldest man, usually husband – 67.7%. A considerable number of the respondents also named

as the head of the family the mother – 27.8%; in a comparatively small number of families – 4.4% – husband and wife share rights and duties equally. Regarding future families or already existing young families of the respondents it was noted that the percentage of those who stick to the opinion that the head must be the husband is increasing – 70.3%. Furthermore so only very few think that the head should be a woman – 2.5%. At the same time the number of those who support the idea of the two-head families where husband and wife share leadership is relatively high – 26.6%.

We should note that the general tendency of the development of family relations for both generations under consideration is reduction in the number of authoritarian families and the spread of families with recognized equality of spouses as far as ethnically mixed families are concerned – here the leading role in solving the main problems of family life belongs to the principle of collective, joint decisions. All the respondents – representatives of ethnically mixed families stated that all vital problems in their families are solved jointly by husband and wife, besides in such families they recognize the equal importance of the opinion of grown up children and their parents.

The formation of a new type of family relations based on the principle of equality is closely connected to the changing position of women in the family and society. One of the factors causing it – is the equal level of education and culture of men and women. Nowadays more than a half of married couples in ethnically mixed families have equal level of education and among the rest – families with a more educated wife predominate. Maybe here lies the reason for the situation in regards to the head of the family.

In the course of history and culture for many thousands of years there functioned only one system of family relations – patriarchal where everything was based on obedience to the head of the family and even nowadays the cultural paradigm of the patriarchal model of the family is still relatively stable. Distribution of men's and women's work in the family remains traditional and because of it many city men practically do not have any sphere which to apply their abilities except the professional sphere.

What is typical for Almaty Koreans regarding distribution of family duties between men and women? To the question Provided your salary is high enough will your wife/you concentrate only on the family, children, home? – 30.4% of the respondents answered Yes; 22.2% did not agree to it; and most – 46.8% answered that it depends on her/my wish.. As far as distribution of family duties is concerned despite the still existing traditional division of men's and women's work we can trace a general tendency towards equality. The more so in the answers of the respondents from

ethnically mixed families (as compared to monoethnic) we notice a more equal distribution of family work between spouses.

Disputes on the up-bringing of children occupy quite a significant place among causes for family conflicts. To the question Who will hold priority in the bringing up of your children? - 60.1% pointed to wife; 10.1% decided to share this responsibility between husband and wife and interestingly - 29.1% voted for fathers as best educators of their children. Fathers in their turn think that they should educate sons while bringing up of daughters should be the responsibility of mothers.

Summing up the presented materials we can say that in the family relations of Koreans with other nationalities there are some general phenomena which appeared and are appearing in the process of the cultural integration of Koreans in Kazakhstan. The specific nature of this international organism is determined by traditions which more and more modify under the modern conditions of multinational Kazakhstan. It is also important for us to study the ethnic consequences of modern tendencies in the development of inter-ethnic marriages.

The formation of an ethnically mixed married couple opens the possibility of exchange of information between the contracting ethnoses both within the generation (spouses themselves, their friends, and relatives) and between the generations (first of all through the children of such marriages). Inter-generation transmission of information can leave deep traces in the culture as children in mixed marriages to a certain degree inevitably learn elements from the cultures of both ethnoses. As a result there appear the possibility of the process of ethnic/national/assimilation of Koreans in Kazakhstan (the process of dissolution of an independent ethnos or small groups of such ethnos, full or partial loss by such groups of authentic ethnic features and the full adoption of new ones).

How real is this possibility and what do Almaty Koreans think in this respect? Sharing the opinion that when you grow older you become more sensitive to everything national and there appear problems in ethnically mixed families (53.8%), 18.2% think that this fact does not correspond to reality, 38% failed to answer. Most of our respondents failed to solve the question: Is the prospect of gradual assimilation of the Korean ethnic group in Kazakhstan real? (48.1%). Nevertheless among the second half of the Koreans who are more acquainted with the modern ethnic situation, 36.1% were sure that such possibility exists and 15.8% reject it.

Summing it up, we do not want to make hasty conclusions on the nature of the phenomenon of inter-ethnic marriages among Kazakhstan Koreans and their ethnically mixed families. It should be also noted that until recently the topic of inter-ethnic

marriages and ethnically-mixed families was little studied. In this connection we see our task as follows: using the experience of ethnographers, demographers, sociologists, psychologists and the empirical base of scientific data to study these problems in historic retrospective taking Kazakhstan Koreans as an example that represents one of the unique ethnic groups of the multinational Republic.

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