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Resettlement of Ethnic Koreans in South Korea: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract. In this article, authors delve into the historical journey of ethnic Koreans relocating to South Korea from CIS countries, where they are commonly referred to as «koryoin» or «koryo-saram». The study conducted by the authors meticulously analyzes the migration patterns of Korean repatriates, identifying key stages and motivations for returning to their ancestral homeland.

Furthermore, the research sheds light on the legislative frameworks and policy changes implemented by the South Korean government to facilitate the smooth integration of repatriates. By examining the evolution of these laws and initiatives, we gain insight into the structured mechanisms developed over years of experience to support this migration flow.

One crucial aspect explored in this study is the challenge of integrating ethnic Koreans into the host society, which manifests at various levels influenced by subjective perspectives. The article highlights the obstacles they encounter in their new environment. Notably, repatriates have formed close-knit networks to navigate these challenges, albeit posing potential disruptions to societal stability and security in South Korea. Consequently, the imperative of addressing the integration of «koryo saram» and other ethnic Koreans into the broader society emerges as a pressing concern for South Korea. By fostering a deeper understanding of these integration dynamics and advocating for inclusive practices, South Korea can strive towards a more cohesive and harmonious multicultural landscape.

Keywords: repatriation; Koryo saram; Koryoin; historical return migration; ethnic Koreans; Koreans; Central Asian Koreans; migration policy.

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Introduction

There is a common belief that returning to one's own country is easier than for migrants who have settled in a different country. This notion stems from the idea that individuals returning to their homeland will not encounter as many cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and mental differences. However, the reality is that repatriates often face numerous challenges when reintegrating into society in their historical homeland. Despite having lived in another country for multiple generations and maintaining their ethnic identity, mentality, and cultural practices, noticeable differences still exist. Relocating to a new place necessitates biological and socio-psychological adaptation to unfamiliar natural, economic, social, and cultural environments, which can be a difficult process for many.

The article explores the process of repatriation and integration of repatriates from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries in the Republic of Korea. It delves into the definition of ethnic Koreans, specifically those who have emigrated from the Republic of Korea and their descendants who have obtained foreign citizenship. Referred to as «koryoin» or «koryo-saram» in South Korea, the number of ethnic Koreans returning to Korea has significantly risen from 101,000 in 2000 to 780,000 in 2021.

First of all, it is important to define terms, in particular who are ethnic Koreans? By law, an ethnic Korean is:

1. A person who was a citizen of the Republic of Korea (including those who emigrated) but is currently a foreign citizen.
2. A direct descendant of the person specified in Section 1 who received foreign citizenship (Kim, 1995).

By examining the historical factors leading to their return, the challenges encountered in the new society post-migration, and the governmental responses, the study sheds light on the experiences of ethnic Koreans who have moved from the CIS countries to South Korea. The primary aim is to provide insight into the history of repatriating ethnic Koreans to South Korea, focusing on individuals who have immigrated from the CIS countries.

Understanding South Korea's repatriation policy is crucial, as it offers valuable lessons that can help address issues related to blood relations in Kazakhstan's migration policy. By analyzing Korea's experiences, one can learn how to anticipate and effectively resolve challenges associated with migration and integration policies.

Research methods

For a comprehensive study of immigrant integration, it is essential to analyze this phenomenon from both institutional and individual perspectives. Traditionally, migration research has primarily focused on macro-level analysis, which includes examining migration processes within state policies, migration legislation, and political and social frameworks. However, this approach often neglects the migrants' own viewpoints on their integration into the host society, their personal experiences, and life trajectories.

To address this gap, this study incorporates a historical analysis of migrants' personal lives to understand the perspectives of migrants and delve into their integration process.

By considering factors such as migrant satisfaction levels and the quality of their new life, researchers can gain a holistic view of integration that encompasses not only material aspects but also moral dimensions. By exploring the personal histories of repatriates and comparing their interactions within their new environment, this approach allows for an insider's look into the migration process and offers valuable insights into the nuances of integration from the migrants' standpoint.

The history of migration of ethnic Koreans to South Korea.

The Korean diaspora consists of around 7.3 million people. Around 84.5% of overseas Koreans live in several countries: China, the United States, Japan, Canada, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Table 1.) (Statistics of Overseas Koreans, 2023).

Table 1

Countries with many overseas Koreans

№	Country	Number of overseas Koreans (2023)
1	United States of America	2 615 419
2	China	2 109 727
3	Japan	802 118
4	Canada	247 362
5	Vietnam	178 122
6	Uzbekistan	174 790
7	Australia	159 771
8	Russia	124 811
9	Kazakhstan	121 130
10	Germany	49 683
11	Brazil	47 544
12	United Kingdom	39 097
13	Philippines	34 148
14	New Zealand	31 810

Traditionally in Korea, foreign Koreans were treated differently depending on their country of origin and even called them by different names. For example:

1. Hanguk saram (한국사람) is a Korean from the South Korea;
2. Pukhan saram (북한사람) is a Korean from North Korea;
3. Kyopho (교포) is a foreign Korean, often a Korean from the United States;
4. Koryoin (고려인) or Koryo saram is a foreign Korean from Russia and CIS countries;
5. Choseongjok (조선족) is a foreign Korean from China.

The migration history of ethnic Koreans to South Korea can be delineated into distinct stages, each influenced by varying circumstances and historical events.

1st stage. The word «Koryo» means the name of the Korean state from 918 to 1392 AD. And the word «saram» is used in the sense of «man», «people». We call the descendants of Koreans who lived or immigrated to the Far East of former Russian Empire in the 1860s (Kho, 1987). Sakhalin Koreans are also sometimes classified as «koryo saram».

Economic, political and geographical reasons pushed Koreans to move to Russia for several reasons, like land shortage, famine and natural disasters. Moreover, historians identify one of the main reasons for the resettlement of ethnic Koreans to the Far East as Japanese expansionism. After Russia's defeat in the war with Japan of 1904-1905, and the subsequent transformation of Korea into a protectorate of Japan, the flow of migrants intensified – in addition to peasants, opponents of the Japanese occupation also began to move to Russia. The history of the ethnic Korean people in Central Asia begins with the Russian Empire. For the first time, information about them was officially shown in the census conducted in 1897 in the territory of modern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (Wishnick, 2005). They migrated from the Joseon Peninsula. Basically, Koreans concentrated in Primorsk (24 thousand people) and Amur (1.5 thousand people) regions (Kim, 2001). By 1930, a half-million Korean diaspora had formed in the CIS. Koreans usually moved to the Russian Empire as whole families, were engaged in agriculture and were open to communication with other ethnic groups and were not inclined to return migration. They formed a compact strip of large rural settlements along the border with Korea.

2nd stage. Under the pretext of fighting espionage and suppressing other contacts between Koreans and Japan, in August 1937, a resolution was adopted on the forced eviction of the Korean population. The Korean people in the Far East of Russia were forcibly resettled in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as a result of Stalinist persecution (Picture 1). The deportation of Koreans took two months and ended at the end of October 1937. This was the first episode of mass deportation in the USSR based on nationality.



Picture 1. Ethnic Koreans' migration to Central Asia

In 1937-1938, among the forced exiles, the number of Koreans reached 170 thousand (Kim, 2013). No shelter was prepared for the new settlers in the territory of modern Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: the Koreans were brought to desert and uninhabited places. People were digging cellars with their own hands, there was not enough food, they had to gather grass in the fields and use it for food. In order to avoid the risk of creating a closed community, the authorities did not concentrate the exiles in one place but placed the Koreans in different villages far from each other.

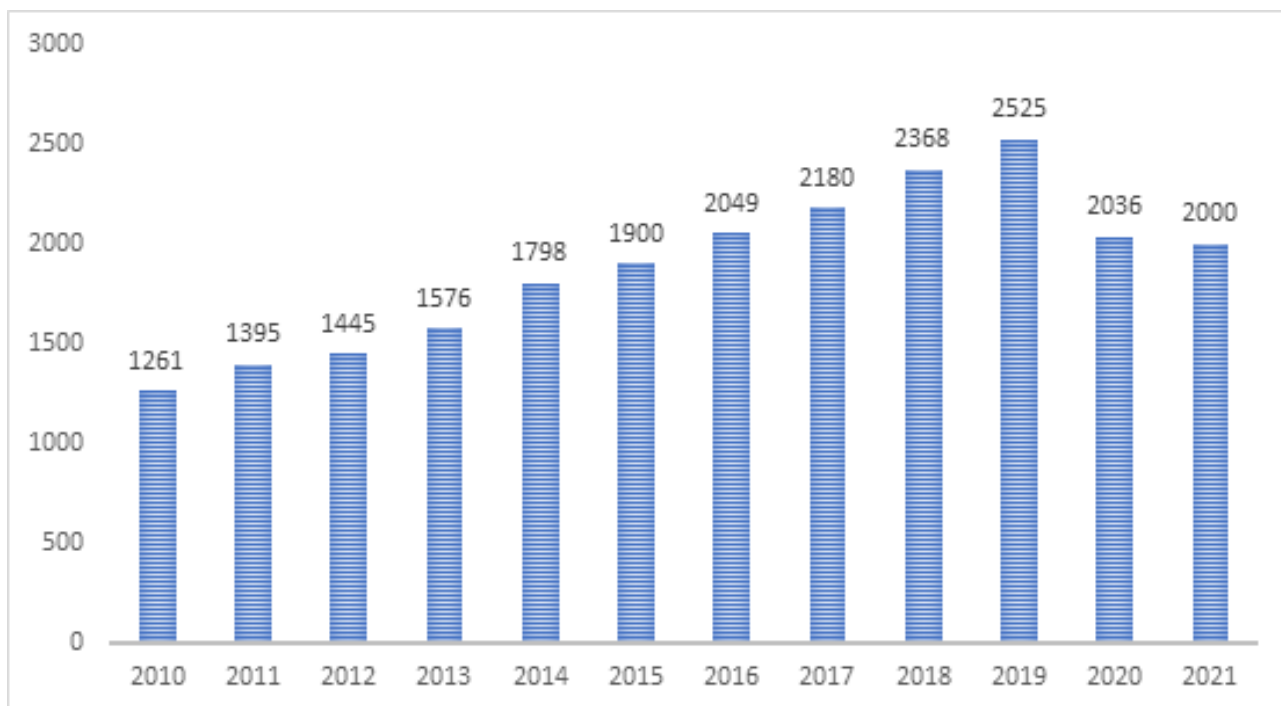
The rights of exiled Koreans were severely restricted. After resettlement, their movement in Central Asia was limited. Unlike representatives of other nations who were later deported, Koreans were given a number of benefits. They had the opportunity to hold leadership positions and study at higher educational institutions. Mainly, exiled Koreans engaged in agriculture on the lands given to them or joined collective farms of the local population. Villages inhabited by Karaites were scattered over a large area among Uzbek, Russian, and Kazakh settlements. Some Korean children went to Russian school immediately after the migration. As a result, within one or two generations, the displaced Koreans became Russian-speaking.

3rd stage. It begins with the breakdown of the USSR and the emergence of independent states. The collapse of the USSR and the opening of borders gave Soviet Koreans the opportunity to learn more about their roots, restore lost traditions, learn modern Korean, and come to Korea as tourists or repatriates.

In April 1991, the Law «On Vindication of Persecuted Peoples» announced the universal recognition of the rights of persecuted peoples to restore the territorial integrity and national-state structures that existed before the implementation of coercive measures. Later, in 1993, it was supplemented by a special resolution of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation «On the rehabilitation of Russian Koreans» (Chey, 1987). After the removal of administrative restrictions, a significant number of Koreans immigrated to Russia, mainly to its central regions.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Koreans faced an identity problem. Soviet citizens primarily self-identified as «Soviet people» and their ethnic identity was secondary. And after the independence of the states, the Koreans got the status of «ethnic minority» (Khan, 1998). Each state began to conduct its own national policy. At the same time, the influence of political and socio-economic instability in the post-Soviet period was also observed. Therefore, Koreans began to move from the post-Soviet states to Europe, the USA, and South Korea.

4th stage. It is directly related to the return of ethnic Koreans to their historical homeland. Since the beginning of the 1980s, due to the rapid economic growth of South Korea and changes in the demographic situation in the country, the labor migration of Koreans abroad began to decrease (Kwon, 1997). In the 1990s, due to labor shortages in some industries, South Korea began to become a labor importing country. The number of foreigners living permanently in South Korea has grown rapidly over the past two decades (Picture 2.).



Picture 2. Number of foreigners in Korea

The flow of foreign migrants mainly comes from China, the countries of the former USSR, Mongolia, Vietnam, Southeast Asia, etc. traveled from the states. Thus, according to statistics, foreigners make up more than two percent of the total population in South Korea. But if we examine it, most of the foreigners are ethnic Koreans. For example, according to statistics, more than 1 million Chinese citizens live in the country. And 627,004 of them are ethnic Koreans (Korea Immigration Service, 2024).

In 1997, the South Korean government, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, established the Fund for Overseas Koreans. Overseas Koreans Foundation helps and supports overseas Koreans to maintain national ties while settling into their countries of residence as exemplary members of such societies. The Foundation provides educational programs, nurtures leadership for the next generation, empowers a sense of politics for overseas Koreans, promotes interaction with business leaders, exchanges culture, and conducts integrated network projects (United Nations Network on Migration).

Then the South Korea adopted a special repatriation policy. In 2005, the repatriation policy was expanded, and the program of interaction with diasporas in the CIS countries was added. As a result, a legal and financial network for supporting Koreans abroad was created. Moreover, a special integration program for foreigners (Korean Immigration and Integration Program (KIIP)) has been adopted. As part of this program, migrants can take language courses for free, as well as attend lectures where specially trained teachers explain to foreigners the features of the Korean consumer protection system.

Later, in 2007, to attract foreign labor among Koreans abroad, the government issued a new type of work visa (H-2) for ethnic Koreans, especially from China and several post-

Soviet states. That's why ethnic Koreans took advantage of the opportunity to return to their historical homeland on the basis of this program and began to move in large numbers. A significant number of ethnic Koreans from China and the CIS countries settled in Seoul and neighboring cities. The scale, forms and directions of migration flows are causing a number of serious economic, social, political and psychological problems. Thus, the integration of immigrants in the Republic of Korea is one of the most pressing issues.

Research results and discussion

In the Republic of Korea, the problem of integration of ethnic Koreans is comprehensively considered. First of all, the legal requirements and protection of the rights of repatriates were regulated. Amendments to the Immigration and Legal Status of Koreans Abroad Act of 1999. Article 17 of the Law on Relations with Foreigners in Korea, which guarantees the entry, residence or economic activity of Korean naturalized persons or their direct descendants; Immigration Control Act, Multinational Family Support Act, National Health Insurance Act, Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, National Pension Insurance Act, Employment Act etc. adoption and additions to laws have been made. Thus, the government of the Republic of Korea has a complex system enshrined in many laws under the jurisdiction of various ministries and government agencies in order to protect the rights of repatriates equally. Everything has been done on the basis of the law.

There is a lot of work done by the state to integrate repatriates into the host society. In 2000, the system of training and employment of repatriates was introduced. Between 2004 and 2007, laws were passed to facilitate employment opportunities for ethnic Koreans. In 2009, dual citizenship was allowed. In 2010, the Law on Citizenship was amended. Somewhat simplified conditions were created for repatriates to obtain citizenship. In addition, in the same year, a system of laws was passed with special benefits for ethnic Koreans who came with a work visa to stay in the country for a long time or to invite their families. In general, from the presidential administration of Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) to the present, the policy regarding foreign Koreans has been actively pursued.

A special «Personal Guide for Supporting Ethnic Koreans Living Abroad to Live in Korea» is available for everyone to download on the Internet and is compiled in Russian. This small booklet contains the most important information (Individual guidance for ethnic Koreans living abroad to support their settlement in Korea).

In addition, the mentioned guide provides information where migrant can work with different visas and which ones have certain restrictions. For example, the H-2 visa is limited to working in many places. The F-2 visa provides some flexibility in choosing jobs. There are no work restrictions for F-5 visa holders. In general, only companies specially authorized by the state can provide work to repatriates. Mostly they are industry, agriculture/livestock/fishery, service sector etc. includes industries.

There are several types of immigrants for short-term work purposes, long-term work purposes, family purposes, and long-term residence purposes as indicated in table 2. The author of article «Immigration to Korea: A Fiscal Boon or Burden?», scientist J.Hur, used modified by him table in his study to analyze the categorization of immigrants by visa category (Table 2.).

Table 2

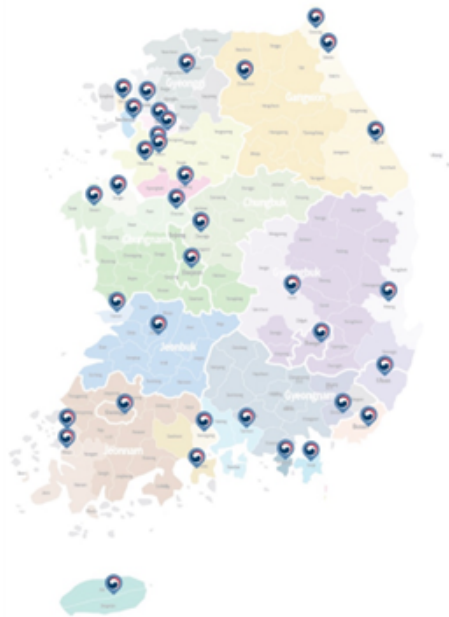
Categorization of immigrants

Purpose	Years of stay	Visa in each category
Short-term Work purpose	1-5 years	Non-professional employment (E-9), Work visa (H-2)
Long-term Work purpose	5 years+	Professorship (E-1), Foreign language Instructor (E-2), Research (E-3), Technology transfer (E-4), Professional employment (E-5), Arts and performance (E-6), Special occupations (E-7)
Family purpose	5 years+	Family visitation (F-1), Residency (F-2), Dependent family (F-3), Marriage migrant (F-6)
Long-term Work purpose	5 years+	Overseas Koreans (F-4), Permanent residency (F-5)

Source: Hur J. (2020).

Also, for Korean foreign nationals, the Ministry of Justice is taking various measures to support free immigration and permanent residence, namely short-term visa (C-3), work visa (H-2), foreign national visa (F-4) and expanding the number of people eligible for permanent residency (F-5). Therefore, the Migration Contact Center is very accessible. Anyone can contact by phone or social network and get the necessary information.

A lot of work is being done to adapt and integrate ethnic Korean people. There are successfully functioning centers for returning repatriates in the country. There are currently 11 temporary support centers for ethnic Koreans and 36 migration services departments throughout the country.



Picture 2. Migration services departments in South Korea

And despite the fact that the process of integration of repatriates into the new society is formed on the basis of subjective views, certain laws can be determined. Basically, they can be divided into 3 types based on their length of stay in Korea, language skills and future plans:

The first group of repatriates will accept moving to South Korea as the right decision in their lives. Most of the people belonging to this group have a permanent job or have completed higher education in Korea and are fluent in Korean. He connects his children and his life completely with this country, that is, he feels himself as a Korean and identifies with his historical homeland.

The second group includes repatriates who took advantage of the opportunity given to ethnic Koreans and risked to improve their lives. In most cases, their identity has not yet been fully determined. If his goals are not fulfilled, he will not abandon his plan to return to his country.

People belonging to the third group do not identify themselves with the Korean nation at all, but emphasize the great cultural, linguistic and religious differences between them. Most of them do not associate their lives with Korea, so they are in no hurry to learn Korean. Also, the local population does not accept repatriates and prefers to keep them away.

Most respondents cited relatives and acquaintances who had immigrated to Korea before them as their main source of immigration and visa information. And he noted that official resources, such as the special immigration or embassy website, do not provide accurate and complete information. Most respondents in the late 2010s identified the Internet, message boards, and social media as other sources of immigration information.

In general, the integration of ethnic Koreans from CIS countries into the new society is highly appreciated. This is because most repatriates understand the importance of integration and are open to cooperation in order to improve their living standards, accept the values of society and become active members of it.

Many studies suggest that returnees in South Korea have an accepted hierarchy in informal society. In the hierarchy, American Koreans are the first, followed by Japanese Koreans, Chinese Koreans, and post-Soviet Koreans below (Kim, 2012). It can be said that the emergence of such a stereotype is due to Korea's policy on repatriates and types of visas. This is because very few F-4 visas specially accepted for repatriates are issued, and they are not issued to Koreans from China and post-Soviet countries. This social inequality was criticized by Chinese Koreans. Changes were introduced only during the reign of the ninth president of South Korea, No Moo-hyun (2003-2009), and the way was opened for the arrival of ethnic Koreans from China and CIS countries (Yun, 2022). Most ethnic Koreans from post-Soviet countries come on H-2 visas. Although this visa is issued to low-skilled migrants, it has a number of advantages compared to non-Korean foreign workers.

The benefit of the H-2 visa is the variety of areas in which you can work. The next advantage is that you can receive a national pension. The disadvantage is that the length of stay is short and it is impossible to work in professional fields. The advantage of the F-4 visa is that you can stay in Korea longer, work in your specialty, and you can also start your own business. The disadvantages of the F-4 visa are that you cannot work a simple job, and you will not be able to receive a national pension after working for several years.

When it comes to the main problems in integration, repatriates primarily cite language barriers. The next problem is the problem of finding a job. Inadequate education and qualifications or the fact that diplomas obtained in their home countries are not recognized in Korea are also major obstacles to finding a job. This set of problems actually deprives migrants of the opportunity to work in a number of sectors. Therefore, the representatives of «Koryo-Saram» go to work with migrants from CIS countries who did not need Korean language before them. Even some repatriates believe that there is a certain negative attitude towards Koryoin among the local population, which makes it difficult to work with the local population. Indeed, given the differences in language and general work culture, working for local companies can be a stressful situation to adapt to new working conditions and environments. Therefore, taking into account that not all employers are ready to work with immigrants, representatives of immigrant groups create their own business structures, enterprises and firms and become individual entrepreneurs. Thus, entrepreneurial activity is, first of all, a means of survival in a foreign environment for repatriates themselves. In this case, new social networks based on common identity «repatriate networks» are formed. Such networks help to reduce the temporary economic and psychological burdens associated with adaptation to the host society. But the emergence of such closed networks is a major obstacle for the stability and security of the host society. Therefore, the issue of integration of «koryo saram» and other ethnic Koreans into society is very relevant for South Korea.

Conclusion

Globalization and economic growth have reshaped South Korea's position in the global labor market, shifting it from being a source of Asian labor to a significant importer of foreign labor. Initially, South Korea's repatriation policy was restrictive, but over time, there was an evolution in the definition of «ethnic Korean», leading to the establishment of special programs facilitating the relocation of ethnic Koreans from post-Soviet countries to South Korea.

Currently, there is a notable increase in the number of «Koryo Saram» relocating to South Korea, driven by aspirations for a better quality of life. Beyond financial incentives, factors such as comfort, stability, and security contribute to the appeal of moving and settling in South Korea for ethnic Koreans.

Drawing on its extensive experience in receiving repatriates, South Korea has developed a systematic approach that includes various visa categories with specific features, with migration contact centers providing valuable information to immigrants. The underlying principle of South Korea's ethnic Korean repatriation policy is to attract ethnically homogeneous, low-skilled migrants as a source of affordable labor.

However, successful integration into the host society hinges on several factors, including cultural, linguistic, and religious considerations. Ethnic Koreans often establish closed networks to address challenges during the integration process, which can inadvertently pose obstacles to the stability and security of the host society. Balancing the needs of migrants with the broader societal dynamics remains a critical aspect of South Korea's approach to managing its influx of ethnic Korean immigrants.

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Authors' contributions

Aitymbetov N.I.:

- Analysis and synthesis of literature data;
- Collection of literature data
- Writing the text of the manuscript;
- Critical revision of the manuscript text (including stages before or after publication of the manuscript);
- Editing the text of the manuscript.

Bastabaeva A.Zh.:

- Conducting research;
- Generalization of research results;
- Interpretation of research results.

Shakeyeva B.R.:

- Justification of the research concept (formulation of ideas, research goals and objectives);
- Development of research methodology;
- Creation of a research model.

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Оңтүстік Кореядағы этникалық кәрістердің қоныс аударуы: кешенді шолу

Андатпа. Бұл мақалада авторлар Оңтүстік Кореяға ТМД елдерінен қоныс аударған этникалық кәрістердің тарихи сапарына тереңірек тоқталған. Оларды әдетте «Корёин» немесе «Корё-Сарам» деп атайды. Авторлар жүргізген зерттеуде кәріс репатрианттардың көші-қон заңдылықтары мұқият талданды, олардың ата-бабаларына оралуының негізгі кезеңдері мен мотивтері айқындалды.

Сонымен қатар, зерттеу репатрианттардың біркелкі интеграциялануын жеңілдету үшін Оңтүстік Корея үкіметі енгізген заңнамалық база мен саясаттағы өзгерістерді айқындайды. Осы заңдар мен бастамалардың эволюциясын зерделей отырып, авторлар осы көші-қон ағынын қолдау үшін көп жылдық тәжірибеде әзірленген құрылымдық механизмдер туралы айтады.

Бұл жұмыста зерттелген маңызды аспектілердің бірі – субъективті көзқарастардың әсерінен әртүрлі деңгейде көрініс беретін этникалық кәрістердің қабылдаушы қоғамға интеграциялану проблемасы. Мақалада репатрианттар арасында жүргізілген сауалнамалардың негізінде олардың жаңа ортада кездесетін кедергілері көрсетілген. Атап айтқанда, қайтып келген этникалық кәрістер осы мәселелерді шешу үшін біртұтас желілер құрды, дегенмен бұл Оңтүстік Кореядағы әлеуметтік тұрақтылық пен қауіпсіздікке ықтимал қауіп туғызады.

Демек, «Корё-Сарам» мен басқа да этникалық кәрістердің жалпы қоғамға интеграциялануын шешу қажеттілігі Оңтүстік Корея үшін өзекті мәселеге айналып отыр. Осы интеграцияның

динамикасын тереңірек түсінуге жәрдемдесу және инклюзивті тәжірибелерді қолдау арқылы Оңтүстік Корея біртұтас және үйлесімді көпмәдениетті ландшафтқа ұмтыла алады.

Түйін сөздер: репатриация; Корё сарам; Корёин; тарихи отанға оралу миграциясы; этникалық кәрістер; Орталық Азия кәрістері; көші-қон саясаты.

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Переселение этнических корейцев в Южную Корею: комплексный обзор

Аннотация. В этой статье мы углубимся в исторический путь этнических корейцев, переселившихся в Южную Корею из стран СНГ, где их обычно называют «корёин», или «корё-сарам». В исследовании, проведенном авторами, тщательно анализируются закономерности миграции корейских репатриантов, выявляются ключевые этапы и мотивы возвращения на родину.

Кроме того, исследование проливает свет на законодательную базу и изменения в политике, осуществленные правительством Южной Кореи для облегчения плавной интеграции репатриантов. Изучая эволюцию этих законов и инициатив, мы получаем представление о структурированных механизмах, разработанных за годы опыта для поддержки этого миграционного потока.

Одним из важнейших аспектов, изученных в этом исследовании, является проблема интеграции этнических корейцев в принимающее общество, которая проявляется на различных уровнях под влиянием субъективных точек зрения. На основе опросов, проведенных среди репатриантов, в статье освещаются препятствия, с которыми они сталкиваются в новой среде. Примечательно, что репатрианты сформировали сплоченные сети для решения этих проблем, хотя это и создает потенциальные нарушения социальной стабильности и безопасности в Южной Корее.

Следовательно, необходимость решения проблемы интеграции «корё сарам» и других этнических корейцев в общество в целом становится насущной проблемой для Южной Кореи. Способствуя более глубокому пониманию этой динамики интеграции и выступая за инклюзивную практику, Южная Корея может стремиться к более сплоченному и гармоничному мультикультурному ландшафту.

Ключевые слова: репатриация; Корё сарам; Корёин; историческая возвратная миграция; этнические корейцы; корейцы Центральной Азии; миграционная политика.

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