

Present Performativity of the Traumatic Memories of *Koryŏin* in Kazakhstan*

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Abstract

This paper, first of all, re-reads the memory of the 1937 deportation endured by the *Koryŏin* in Kazakhstan from the aspect of it being a traumatic memory. The aim is to see how the memory of deportation constructs into traumatic memory that is repeatedly summoned to the present rather than just remain in the past. In this paper, the deportation is seen as an incident that drove the *Koryŏin* out to the world of dehumanization where human vulnerabilities become revealed and forced them to live in constant innate fear afterwards. However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980's, *Koryŏin*, rather than forget their past history of deportation, forged their own collective memory and is performing the act of remaining in mourning. I argue that, through such process, the remembering can act as a call for universal human rights to be guaranteed for all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, against the backdrop of Kazakh-centralism becoming more entrenched.

Key Words: Kazakhstan, *Koryŏin*, Deportation, Traumatic Memory, Performativity

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1. Introduction: Traumatic Memory of Deportation

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the Korean relocation to Central Asia. Koreans had already settled in the region since around 1864 but it was only in 1937 that they migrated and settled there en masse. And during that same year, around 170,000 *Koryŏin* from Primorsky Krai were put in cargo freight trains, referred to as black boxes, and scattered in various places around Central Asia. As is well known, their migration was not voluntary. It was forced in the sense that an entire ethnic group—*Koryŏin*—that was living in the Far East was made to relocate regardless of their intent.

It took 50 years for their migration to be identified as forced deportation. It was German Kim who, through *Lenin Kichi* (February 9, 1989), argued for the first time that the migration was forced and illegal, criticizing that the claim the migration of the *Koryŏin* was inevitable because of espionage or that it was voluntary was distorted. Following Kim, M. Ussebayewa used the expression “deportation (депортация).” Then Boris Chvan, Nikolai Li and some others argued contrarily, leading to a heated debate.¹⁾ However, today, it is difficult to come across any counterarguments to the view that the migration of 1937 was indeed forced deportation.

That the migration to Central Asia in 1937 was ‘forced’ implies that it was violent, and therefore, inflicted pain upon those involved. One narrative consistently found in the testimonies of *Koryŏin* was that ‘they had no idea’, and that they ‘denied any accusation of espionage’ and ‘complained of false accusation.’ The word ‘deportation’ (the English term originating from the French ‘déportation’ and the Latin ‘dēportatio’) can be traced back to a term referring to banishment or expulsion,²⁾ which is usually a form of punishment involving severing a person who had committed a crime from a community and kicking him

1) Hŏn-Yong Sim, “The Mechanism in the Occurrence of Deportation and its Influence on the Ethnic Relations: in the Case of Soviet Union,” *The Korean Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3. Boris Chvan, Nikolai Li and others criticized the perspective that the relocation was forceful, based on the argument that it was the result of state policy and that, from a realist perspective, there were concerns of the affinity with other ethnic groups being destroyed.

2) Ibid., 199.

or her out. However, not all *Koryŏin* living in Primorsky Krai at that time were spies for the Japanese. In fact, many were involved in armed struggles against the Japanese Empire, and during the civil war, they even cooperated with the Red Army and contributed to the Russian Revolution. They had no reason to be treated the way they were by the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, they had to leave behind the precious lives they had worked hard for. During the journey, around 10% of the population died and those who survived had to witness such deaths. In particular, it was the relatively weak—young children (including newborns) and the elderly—who were unable to survive the arduous life and the inadequate environment inside the trains. The families had to simply abandon the dead bodies of children and the elderly at places they could not identify, unable to erect tombstones, and then board the trains again. The *Koryŏin* arrived, on one cold winter day, at a place where there was hardly any housing, forcing them, in some regions, to live in caves. And during that winter, many died of tuberculosis.

Just like that, they became ‘*Koryŏin* of Central Asia.’ The name, ‘*Koryŏin* of Central Asia,’ was born together with the migration of 1937—a process filled with violence, death, suffering and pain. Therefore, the history of deportation could only be left as an important memory, inseparable from their identity. Also, the fact that Central Asia, where they had survived and are surviving, was the destination of the deportation as well as being the place they had fought hard to survive and therefore contained intact the memories of the pain they had suffered, the memories of the deportation cannot be confined to the past in terms of chronological time. In other words, their everyday space in and of itself cannot help but make present and repeat the memories of the deportation. Therefore, deportation is a form of traumatic memory that permeates throughout the everyday lives of *Koryŏin* who live in Central Asia today.

Against this backdrop, this paper, first of all, seeks to look into how the traumatic memory of the Central Asian *Koryŏin* came to be constructed by re-reading the history before and after their deportation. ‘Re-reading’ does not merely refer to trying to reconstruct the past and the memory that were then unable to be labelled as wound, which was ripped apart and left to fester within the time

frame of the past. Memory, a noun, when combined with a verb, expresses an action. Just as ‘wind’ combines with ‘blows’ to form a sentence that expresses an action, memory can combine with ‘remember’ to imply an action. Such combination creates an image of a certain situation (or an object) and endows meaning, thereby carrying performativity that can either produce or destroy a discourse.

Therefore, the memory of deportation does not purely consider the past event, in and of itself, as its object to be remembered. It is always related to the present. That does not mean that such memory is constructed only according to present demands because the present, in which the performers of the memory are located, is a space that oscillates between the past and the future. With no past, there can be no present, which in turn cannot be free from the desires of the future. “The relationship between remembered pasts and constructed presents is one of perpetual but differentiated constraint and renegotiation over time.”³⁾ With this in mind, this paper seeks to discuss what implication the traumatic memory performed by the Kazakhstani *Koryōin* has on the space of their lives today.

2. The World of Survival and the World of Dehumanization

Koryōin, who had moved to Primorsky Trai to avoid persecution under Japanese colonialism and to participate in the anti-Japan struggles, were unable to be completely integrated to either the Japanese Empire or Russia, the country they resided in. They were ‘in-between-beings’ amidst the various ethnic groups in Russia. Since they were not ‘registered’ with a particular state, they were beings who could not be completely described using ‘state language.’ For them, the 1917 Revolution was considered an opportunity to access equal distribution of land, overcome poverty and dream of liberation from Japanese imperialism. Maybe not all, but many *Koryōins* supported the revolution and enlisted to the Red Army during the civil war to fight against the White Army and the Japanese military.

3) Jeffrey Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Regret*, trans. Kyōng-Yi Kang (Ilsan: Okdang Books, 2011), 97.

During the process, “Many Korean armed independence fighters became members of the Bolshevik Communist Party in Russia.” It implies that many *Koryŏin* started to live lives as ‘Russian *Koryŏins*’ and not merely as natural persons of a minority ethnic group.⁴⁾

If one were to look at the number of Korean farms in southern Primorsky Krai during the late 1925, the number of Korean families who had naturalized (11,624) had overtaken the number of families who had not (9,927). The USSR constitution of 1924, in ‘Part 2 The State and the Individual,’ stimulated that citizens were equal before the law, without distinction of origin, race or nationality (Art. 34), that different races and nationalities had equal rights (Art. 36), and that citizens of other countries and stateless persons in the USSR were to be guaranteed the rights and freedoms provided by law, including the right to apply to court and other administrative measures (Art.37). That the time, many *Koryŏin* had already gained USSR citizenship or they had the right not to be unjustly treated by the state. Also, in August 1927, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee decided to recognize the need to form Korean soviets in the rural areas and to make a curriculum to train people who would work at soviet organizations, meaning that the *Koryŏin* could be members of the Soviet Union regardless of their ethnic origin. With high expectations regarding such measures, many youths naturalized to the Soviet Union.⁵⁾

Of course, it is questionable whether such legal and administrative decisions were actually observed and implemented. According to German Kim, *Koryŏin* living in USSR may have been discriminated in light of the fact that even before the 1920s, migration of *Koryŏin* against their will had already been planned and attempted from time to time. However, such migration policy was unable to proceed properly due to resistance from the *Koryŏin* and also the policy itself later changed to one of integrating Koreans into the Soviet society, implying that

4) Loudmila Chvan viewed 1923~1936 to be “the period when multiple ethnic groups were being integrated” and “Koryŏins, like other ethnic groups, were considered to be a member of the pan-ethnic family of the Soviet Union.” The perception of “Soviet *Koryŏins*” was becoming stronger. Loudmila Chvan, “Tragic History Step of Kore-Sarem and the Problems of Modern Times,” *Journal of Institute of Korean Culture* 32 (2005): 6.

5) Vladimir Fyodorovich Li and Evgeny Evgenievich Kim, *Deportation of Koreans During Stalinist Regime*, trans. Myŏng-Ho Kim (Seoul: Konkuk University Press, 1994), 80-81.

Koryŏin in Russia did have a voice and that they had rights—albeit limited and partial—as citizens.

However, from the 1930s, these circumstances did not prevail. In particular, the Stalinist constitution enacted in 1936 declared the principles of Socialism in One Country and of Great Russia, leading to suppression of equal rights for ethnic minorities. Such transition of policy can generally be understood as the scrapping of the previous indigenization policy, based on recognition of the language, culture, autonomy and other rights of various minority ethnic groups within the Soviet Union. Before, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a political community was more emphasized and the difference between various ethnic cultural communities was downplayed. But the circumstances reversed.⁶⁾ On one hand, this could be the result of the problematic task fundamentally rooted in constructing a state consisting of communes, as well as of the sense of crisis that the basis of the revolution could be undermined. On the other hand, it seems that it was following the model set by modern states of the West, which had created a cultural community from an imaginary community— a community based on bloodline. Therefore, in that process, ethnic minorities inevitably became a heterogeneous factor that needed to be excluded.

The deportation was the tragic result of the state's dualist action, whereby the groups that were considered homogeneous were labelled as 'us' while those categorized as heterogeneous by state power were deprived of rights and banished outside the boundaries. This kind of dualist action by the state was carried out through "tactful manipulation."⁷⁾ The signs of such manipulation can be found in the background as to why the *Koryŏin* were forcefully relocated. Of course, there are a variety of different theories to the relocation, such as the need to foster agriculture in Central Asia, resolving of land-related issues in the Far East and even allegations of Stalin's hostility towards ethnic minorities. However, official records, once confidential but later disclosed, revealed that it was "to stop the

6) Chong-Ryŏl Ch'oe, "Nationals and Migrant Workers—Instability of Identity and Fear of Difference," in *Contemporary Society and Multiculture* 1 (2011).

7) René Girard said that behind the strict mechanisms of a sacrificial ritual, there lies hidden tactful manipulation, characteristic of violence that switches its target. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Chin-Sŏk Kim and Mu-Ho Park, (Seoul: Minumsa, 2012), 35.

infiltration of Japanese spies in the Far East.”⁸⁾ The latter theory was emphasized.

That the deportation was aimed at stemming the penetration of Japanese spies shows that such official aim was really imaginary. This official objective of the deportation—to prevent (potential) espionage that could threaten the Soviet state and its people—shows that there was a switch to make the *Koryŏin* the legitimate target of violence, even though majority of the *Koryŏin* had migrated in the first place to flee from the exploitation under Japanese colonialism and were in solidarity with the Bolsheviks during the revolution.⁹⁾ Butler’s statement that “the state is the psychological state”¹⁰⁾ is very befitting here. In this sense, Kwon Hi-Yŏng has said that the decision of the Communist Party’s Central Committee was “only possible from a mental state of paranoia.” The deportation was the result of a sort of a religious obsession to eliminate ‘contamination’ in order to protect the sacredness of the Bolshevik revolution and the USSR.¹¹⁾

The problem is that the ‘contaminated beings’ (hostile ethnic groups, enemies of the people etc.) identified through such delusional manipulation were banished and forced to live not in the world of life but the world of survival. If, “unlike life, which allows for sufficient realization of human potential, survival is the state whereby the conditions for realization of potential are not provided and one can only just about survive,”¹²⁾ then survival describes the situation faced by the *Koryŏin* in 1937. In this world of survival, any kind of resistance—whether vocal or physical—against the violence that is being inflicted is impossible. As

8) Vladimir Fyodorovich Li and Evgeny Evgenievich Kim, *Deportation of Koreans During Stalinist Regime*, 102.

9) This kind of fabrication involving espionage was not limited to the 1930’s. The Kronstadt rebellion of 1921, when the civil war was nearing the end, was one such example. Although the fundamental cause for the rebellion was the long war against the White Army and the plundering of the rural areas—in other words, pragmatism of wartime communism—the government legitimized the violent suppression of the rebellion under the pretext that French spies had infiltrated the sailors. Choi Jin-Sŏk referred to this incident as a ‘shocking delusion.’ Chin-Sŏk Ch’oe, “Soviet Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship—The Commune, State and the Issue of Emotions During the Russian Revolution,” *Revolution and Transition* (Paju: Hanul, 2017), 159.

10) Hyŏn-Chun Cho, “Judith Butler’s Gender Genealogy of Race and Political Ethics of the Other: Nella Larsen’s Passing and Levinas’ Face,” *The Journal of Humanities* 17 (2010): 202.

11) Loudmila Chvan said that the period after Lenin’s death was an ‘era of terror’ and “The state machinery changed into a beast with three heads – Council of People’s Commissars, NKVD and the Communist Party.” Loudmila Chvan, “Tragic History Step of Kore-Sarem,” 7.

12) Kŭn-Sik Chŏng, “Discrimination or Exclusion and the Reconstruction of Social History of Minorities in Modern Korea,” *Economy and Society* 100 (2013): 200.

consistently appears in many novels and testimonies (memoirs),¹³⁾ people actually migrated as obediently as a flock of lambs. As many have pointed out, such behavior was not because the *Koryŏin* supported Stalin's migration policy nor because the *Koryŏin* were obedient in nature. Even before the actual deportation, nearly 2,500 *Koryŏin* were arrested and imprisoned or executed, and amidst this atmosphere of terror, resisting to or fleeing from migration was nearly impossible. Their self-defense mechanism had been outrun.

Thus, majority of the *Koryŏin* boarded not even passenger but cargo trains with very little space and had to endure thousands of kilometers with what food and water they could find, unable to complain, burying the many deaths in their hearts and in the sides of the rail tracks. "People in padded *chŏkori* over their white clothes, without any sense of shame or pride, held onto the boots of the locomotive drivers and the guards, and begged to be sent back to where people actually lived."¹⁴⁾ This was the only thing they could do. In the winter mornings in the middle of desert-like barren lands, there were only cries of mourning by those who held onto their dead loved ones, no words of resistance.¹⁵⁾ In the world of survival, words (actions) as humans are forbidden. It is outside the world of life and is filled with not language but sounds of plea and suffering. The deportation had opened up a world of dehumanization where the right to language was deprived, one was shunned out to the world of survival and the underlying human vulnerabilities were exposed.

3. Life in Purgatory and Innate Fear

Even if those who had been banished, being vulnerable beings, are situated in

13) Chin Han, "Terror," *Lenin Kichi*, May 23-31, 1989; Sŏng-Hun Pak, "The Phase of Remiscence; Distortion is Not Possible in History," *Lenin Kichi*, August 18, 1989.

14) In Lavrantiy Song's short story, *The Area of a Triangle*, it is mentioned that "The Cental Committee and the People's Committee of the Kazakhstan Communist Party decided on measures to regionally allocate the *Koryoin* and provide stable housing only on March 3, 1938." Wung-Ho Hong, "In 1938 Koreans Society in Kazakhstan through *Lenin Kichi*," *Journal of Institute of Asian Culture* 31 (2013): 229.

15) In 1938, the mortality rate for entire Kazakhstan was 18.3 per 1,000 persons, but the rate for *Koryŏin* was 41.5. Infant mortality rate was 203.8. Won-Bong Yi, "A Study on Deportation of *Koryŏin* to Central Asia," *Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 8 (2001): 94.

the world of survival, that does not mean they are outside the sphere of power. The world of survival is indeed the world of dehumanization, but that does not imply it is a world of Physis where only animals live. The *Koryŏin* lived not outside, but within, the borders of the Soviet Union and were under strict control of the authorities. As such, the world they lived in, in fact, was one that was under the influence of a much stronger magnetic field of political power. That power labelled the deported *Koryŏin* as ‘special settlers’ and made them the object of their control.¹⁶⁾

This is evidence to the fact that the nation state centered on the Russian people continued to consider the *Koryŏin* as being deficient, contaminated and impure. In Lacanian terms, the *Koryŏin* were rejected from forging an imaginary identification with the Other, thereby failing to become their own agents as the people of the Soviet Union. They were unable to be completely integrated into the symbolic order and thus could not enjoy any freedom. Lacan, in regard to Ivan’s comment that if God is dead then everything will be permitted, replied that if God is dead, then nothing will be permitted. In Lacan’s view, the law of the father can be characterized as permitting everything except for desiring mother, in which case, all forms of freedom shall be forbidden. In the eyes of the state, as the name of the father, the *Koryŏin* were deficient beings who were not armed with socialism, beings desiring something that was forbidden (even though such state of being was actually created by the state itself). In 1938, the Korean language “was excluded from the Soviet Union’s recognized ethnic minority languages.” “Korean schools were converted to Russian schools.” Travelling to destinations outside the border was forbidden and Koreans were not allowed to serve in the military.¹⁷⁾ As far as the *Koryŏin* were concerned, God, who permitted everything except for a few things, was dead.

On the other hand, the bodies of the *Koryŏin* were mobilized at production sites that were operated under the pretext of socialist competition.¹⁸⁾ The idea of

16) 8 years after the relocation, in 1945, there was a debate within the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) on whether that labelling was legitimate. However, the conclusion was that they were indeed ‘special settlers.’ Ibid., 97.

17) Ibid., 97.

18) “Out of the entire number of deported *Koryŏin* households, around 40% were placed in 61 newly

‘socialist competition’ was a concept created to promote efficient economic development amidst competition against the capitalist system. “It was a benevolent form of labor competition based on voluntary and proactive participation of the workers, and on socialist self-regulation.” A major example was the Stakhanovite Movement—a radical reform movement of the 1930s implemented during the process of promoting collective farming and rapid heavy-industrialization. “Within the *Koryōin* community, the Stakhanovite Movement was manifested in the form of construction projects to solve housing issues, sowing of seeds to respond to immediate food issues, construction of irrigation to provide water to farms during the autumn harvest, and also communist ideology education to prevent chaos and unrest among the *Koryōin* as they settled in an unfamiliar place.”¹⁹⁾ Working to foster growth of the socialist economy and undergoing ideology education were part of the process of purifying their impure bodies to become true Soviet citizens.

This reminds one of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. Dante is guided by the poet Virgil and travels through hell, purgatory and heaven. In Hell, those who had committed the 7 types of sins are judged and punished, and in purgatory, the sinners are given an opportunity to atone their sins and go to heaven. Of course, heaven is a paradise where one can forget the past sins and live only with memories of good deeds. The *Koryōins* who, after being deported, shed sweat and tears participating in the process of economic development and trying hard to become true Soviet citizens, were placed in purgatory. As Kim Ki-Chōl mentioned in “The First Year After Migration,” deportation was the process of the *Koryōin* being judged and punished as sinners who had not committed any sins²⁰⁾ while their life after deportation was a process where they, as ‘special settlers,’ were

organized independent agricultural kolkhozs amounting to 6,723 households, and 20%—3,315 households—were placed in 193 existing kolkhozs. In short, around 60% of the *Koryōins* were placed in agricultural kolkhozs. 806 families, around 5%, were placed in fishing kolkhozs and 122—less than 1%—in sovkozs. Interestingly, 5,945 households were allocated to industrial cooperatives and administrative work. They accounted for around 35% of the total. They were mainly placed in cities and other local administrative districts.” Wung-Ho Hong, “In 1938 Koreans Society in Kazakhstan through *Lenin Kichi*,” *Journal of Institute of Asian Culture* 31 (2013): 351. On the life after deportation to Central Asia, refer to Ka-Yōng Ko, “Kazakhstan Bespermak and Soybean Paste Soup: The Koreans between the Ethnic Identity and Hybridity,” *Journal of Western History* 38 (2016).

19) Wung-Ho Hong, “Stakhanov’s Movements of Koreans Society in Central Asia after Deportation,” *Journal for the Studies of Korean History* 54 (2014): 230.

20) Ki-Chōl Kim, “The First Year After Migration,” *Lenin Kichi*, May 5, 1990.

branded with a ‘P’ for peccati (sin) on their foreheads, forced to purify their sins and be reborn as Soviet people.

As Hong Wung-Ho and Kang Chin-Ku have pointed out, the *Koryŏin* lived under constant fear that they could be deported somewhere once again or be accused of a political offense and be punished. However, this fear was also entangled with hope and faith that if they were able to prove their patriotism and become true Soviet citizens, then they may be able to lead happy lives in the future.²¹⁾ The biggest difference between hell and purgatory is that in hell, stars are not visible whereas in purgatory, they are. Unlike hell, one has ‘hope’ in purgatory, of going to heaven. For the *Koryŏin*, the way to meet Beatrice and go to heaven was to become “complete Soviet citizens.”²²⁾

As is well known, from 1939—two years after the deportation—*Koryŏin* started to be positively assessed by the Soviet authorities. And from 1940s, many ‘heroes’ were born in various sectors. For them, who had no other political way out, faithfully fulfilling the demands from the state and “representing their beings again” were the only ways for them to be “recognized as members of the society.” Living under both fear and hope, perhaps they saw the possibility to overcome their present arduous life by asking oneself ‘what does the State want from me?’ and answering that question through action—by dedicating themselves to production activities and thereby gaining recognition from the government. According to the assessment of Sergei Han and Valery Han, the obsession the *Koryŏin* seemed to have shown towards intense labor and education was “a struggle by those who were expelled from their homes and deprived of their rights, to find stability and peace once again and earn their rights, just like other ethnic groups.”²³⁾

However, such endeavors were unable to come to fruition (reach heaven) and faced obstacles frequently. For example, in the case of Aktyubinsk region in Kazakhstan, “115 Koreans were arrested by the NKVD between the summer and

21) Wung-Ho Hong, “Stakhanov’s Movements of Koreans Society,” 248.

22) Wung-Ho Hong, *ibid*, 230.

23) Hi-Yŏng Kwon et al., *Study into Identity of Koreans in Uzbekistan* (Sŏngnam: The Academy of Korean Studies, 2001), 39.

autumn of 1938 alone and majority of them got the capital punishment—they were shot dead.”²⁴⁾ There were other examples, including the censorship imposed on the poet Kang T’ae-Su. After deportation, although they received recognition from the government, the stability of their everyday life was constantly threatened as they were always looked upon with suspicion.

What was important was that such everyday threats and the ensuing fear appeared because their ethnicity was a continuation of the past and could never be erased. As written at the entrance to purgatory, “Enter; but I warn you—he who would look back, returns-again— outside.” Even if they voluntarily and loyally try to become true subjects of the Soviet Union in order to survive, they could never become true Russians even if they tried to break away from their past and become Soviet citizens. Thus, they had to suffer from constant fear. Insofar as Soviet policies were centered on Russian ethnicity, the very existence as *Koryŏin* was indeed an existential condition that mnemonically summoned the painful experience before and after the deportation and made them live in fear. It may be the case that the *Koryŏin* were able to briefly taste being true Soviet subjects only while they were participating in labor and education as demanded by the state. Even if they received recognition from the state, even if they were able to advance closer to the state and more loudly shout their repentance, their fear could never be fundamentally dispelled because it came from their identity of being *Koryŏin*. They were drifters afloat between being nationals of a state and an ethnic group.

4. Transitional Justice and the Return of Words

In 1956, three years after the death of Stalin in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, criticized Stalin at the 20th Party Congress and said, “I have promised to restore the honor of the

24) Pyŏng-Cho Yi, “The Death of the First Korean Naval Officer in the Soviet Union (Choi Pavel Petrovich) and the Tragedy of Stalin’s Terror through the Data from the Russian State Naval Archive,” *Journal of Slavic Studies* 31, no. 3 (2015): 49.

ethnic groups that had been deported.”²⁵) However, when Khrushchev said ‘ethnic groups,’ he was referring to the Karachays, Chechens, Ingushis, Balkars and Kalmyks—not the *Koryŏin*. Also “The main groups who had their honor restored were mainly the politicians who were sacrificed during the political struggle.”²⁶) Of course, the *Koryŏin* also had their registration papers returned to them and could go back to Primorsky Krai if they wanted to, however, their honor was not officially restored by the federal government. This was before the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the state had not officially recognized the forced deportation specifically of the *Koryŏin*. Therefore, uttering any words about the forceful nature of the migration was dangerous. This was why within the *Koryŏin* community, nobody could critically and properly discuss the deportation until the late 1980s.

This in itself shows the everyday fear and tension. In Yi Chŏng-Hi’s novel *Life as a Drifter*, the scene where the narrator, who is a Korean from Sakhalin and an intern reporter at the department of literature and arts of the *Koryo Newspaper* in Kazakhstan, asks a colleague photographer about the background to the *Koryŏin*’ move, shows this kind of fear and tension well.

“If the conditions in Primorsky Krai were better, why did they move here?”

“Don’t ask questions like that. You don’t need to know.”

The photographer replied curtly to my question. He didn’t say anything afterwards.

Bluntly and sharp-temperedly answering not to ask questions nor try to know probably was not just because the initial question highlighted that the *Koryŏin* were outsiders, and not indigenous people, who had migrated to Kazakhstan. The question was going beyond this differentiation, toward asking ‘why’ they had moved from Primorsky Krai, the answer to which would require one to bring out to the surface the suppressed memories of the deportation as well as criticize the government’s migration policy. During the oppressive Stalinist rule, criticism

25) Sŭng-Su Hyŏn, “Ethnic Minority Policies in Kazakhstan: Focusing on the Chechen and Ingush Diaspora,” *Russian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2014): 262. It was only in 1957 that the *Koryŏin* were able to return to Primorsky Krai without any interference from the state.

26) Hŏn-Yong Sim, “Policies on Restoring Honor for Deported Ethnic Groups in Russia,” *Studies of Koreans Abroad* 8, no. 1 (1999): 362.

towards Stalin or the State was strictly forbidden. Therefore, this kind of immediate response came out of the pre-sentiment that the speaker could suffer violence. In the following part of the same novel, a novelist, Kim Ki-Ch'öl, who also works at *Koryo Newspaper*, stops the question from being asked in the first place, telling the narrator, "If you want to live in peace, never ask that kind of question and never try to know."

In accordance with Raymond Williams who said that violence is an analogy to the passion and inner thoughts that can be neither endured nor suppressed, Tomiyama Ichiro has said that a pre-sentiment is an catachrestic expression that comes out of linguistic desperateness of being unable to express violence as a form of an infinitive marker.²⁷⁾ The photographer and Kim Ki-Ch'öl felt the fear of violence and rather than giving an explanation of why they must remain silent, they tried to prevent the other person from speaking by giving a short and quick gesture, 'Shh! Be quiet.' A pre-sentiment is not based on rational reasoning, however, for them, it delivered a psychological state of fear because violence continued to remain as an unknown existence, triggering a defense mechanism in them. Of course, Tomiyama Ichiro saw the pre-sentiment of violence as going beyond an already-decided prediction of the future and showing the potential of resistance against the violence. He said, "The fact that those existing outside of words have begun to gain words means that (...) they can be both dangerous and have possibilities."²⁸⁾ However, for the *Koryōin*, it took another 30 years after the death of Stalin for them to gain words.

The *Koryōin* started a full-fledged discussion about their deportation in 1989, fifty years after the event. On November 14, 1989, together with the reforms consisting of *Perestroika* (reforms), *Glasnost* (opening) and *Perevarot* (radical transition of system), the Supreme Soviet announced a statement recognizing the illegality of the deportation. Later, in 1991, the Soviet Union legislated a law "On

27) Tomiyama Ichiro, *Pre-Sentiment of Violence*, tran. Chi-Yŏn Son et al. (Seoul: Greenbee Publishers, 2009), 46. Tomiyama Ichiro defined catachresis as a "rhetoric of borrowing words." "It is used as a complement when there is no sufficient expression to refer to an object, or as an expression of something similar in order to fill the gap that general linguistic expressions cannot fulfill. This form of rhetoric comes from the fact that the number of words is finite whereas the number of objects to be expressed is infinite." (Tomiyama Ichiro, *ibid.*, 24, footnote 7.)

28) Tomiyama Ichiro, *ibid.*, 81-82.

the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples.” The law mentioned that the object of the legislation was “restoring historical justice,” and that the deportation and the laws and regulations that had oppressed the people were unlawful and criminal. It ordered those laws and regulations to be abolished and the repressed peoples’ honor to be reinstated. In particular, in Article 8, the right to equality, including the right to return to their homes before deportation and the right to exercise their freedoms and political rights, was stipulated as the “political rehabilitation of repressed peoples who were unable to own their own nation state organization,” meaning that the *Koryŏin* also were given an opportunity to seek legal and official restoration.²⁹⁾ In fact, on April 1, 1993, the Russian Federation’s Supreme Soviet passed a bill on the rehabilitation of the honor of Russian *Koryŏin*.³⁰⁾ During the same month, Kazakhstan legislated a law on the restoration of honor for victims of political repression (April 14, 1993).

However, because there was no agreement made between Russia and Kazakhstan regarding the restoration of honor of *Koryŏin*, “The effects of the law did not reach the Koreans who had been deported to Kazakhstan.”³¹⁾ Then *Koryŏin* started to send continuous petition letters to the Russian Embassy in Kazakhstan, leading to a foundation for a bilateral agreement on formal restoration and conditions thereof to be formed. Furthermore, vibrant discussion started among scholars in regard to the history of the deportation, as I had already mentioned, and many poems, novels and other forms of literature were written in large volumes.

Obviously, the declaration that the past deportation and other forms of repression of ethnic minorities were an abuse of human rights, as well as the legislation and enforcement of various laws aiming to restore historical justice, were not promoted

29) Vladimir Fyodorovich Li and Evgeny Evgenievich Kim, *Deportation of Koreans During Stalinist Regime*, 260-262.

30) Porisū Pak and Nikolai Bugai, *140 Years in Russia*, trans. Kwang-Hwan Kim and Baek-Yong Yi (Seoul: Zeitgeist Publishers, 2004), 404. The details were as follows: “① The deportation and the repression afterwards shall be recognized as unlawful and criminal measures, and therefore, the honor of the *Koryŏins* shall be restored. ② They shall have the right to return to their original place of residence. ③ If the *Koryŏin* living in each country of the Commonwealth of Independent States wishes to attain Russian nationality, it shall be given. ④ A *Koryŏin* returning to one’s original homeland will be provided with various livelihood support measures including tax benefits. ⑤ The CIS shall provide measures to solidify the legal status of *Koryŏins* in the former Soviet Union (Yŏng-Sŏp Chŏn, 1998, 113-114).”

31) Porisū Pak and Nikolai Bugai, *ibid.*, 521.

bottom-up, but top-down, amidst the complex changes in the internal and external political landscape. However, it was the *Koryŏin* themselves who tried to endow contemporariness to the past and talk about anti-human rights nature and unlawfulness of the deportation and the pain endured by the *Koryŏin*.³²⁾ It was the ‘return of words.’

5. Conclusion: Present Performativity of Mnemonic Practice

‘The return of words’ did not simply mean that they were able to speak about the topic. It referred to the fact that the return was able to play some sort of a performative function including intervening into the *Koryŏin*’ existential situation. For them, the return of words performed the following.³³⁾ First, it was able to perform the act of belated mourning by bringing out the memories that were forced into silence under fear for the past fifty years. Although the process accompanied anger, sadness, suffering and other kinds of emotions, the *Koryŏin*, rather than forget, placed themselves within the memories. This process appears quite different from the function of mourning as described by Freud. For Freud, mourning followed a principle of exchange, in which the lost libido was replaced by something else. However, for the *Koryŏin*, the belated mourning led the *Koryŏin* to ask questions they were unable to ask in the past, such as ‘Why were the *Koryŏin* of the Far East unjustly deported?’ and ‘Why did we have to die in the trains crossing Siberia?’, thereby establishing themselves as an ‘aspect of ignorance.’

This process played the role of bringing out the painful memories by asking questions about a situation that they had faced but were unable to comprehend. Therefore, secondly, the return of words, performed ‘self-representation’ of the vulnerability of humans who had crossed the boundaries of what is comprehensible. More than any other animal, humans are weak and thus vulnerable, however, in

32) Jae-Sŭng Yi, “Transitional Justice and Chronotope,” *Journal of Democratic Legal Studies* 64 (2017).

33) Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, trans. Hyo-Sil Yang (Busan: Kyungseung University Press, 2008).

regard to the relationships-within-one's-world, where one has formed amicable bonds, that vulnerability does not seem so obvious. This can be understood as a form of a social safety net that has been created by the ethics, laws and norms of human community. But on the other hand, it is also true that violent contacts are made precisely because we are within that relationship, and human vulnerability appears because of that kind of contact. Therefore, the return of words refers to declaring that self-representation of that vulnerability is not a condition of just *Koryŏin* but one that is common to humans who were and are still living with them, here, and that the mourning should indeed take place jointly.

Then what is the third situation that can be derived from the former two (establishing oneself as an aspect of ignorance and self-representation as human vulnerability)? Performing the former two is a mnemonic practice of making the painful memory of the deportation into a 'collective memory' and, in this sense, it is the process of newly creating an ethnicity (*minchok*) as a mnemonic community. In regard to collective memory, Jeffrey Olick argued, "It is not just that we remember as members of groups, but that we constitute those groups and their members simultaneously in the act (thus re-member-ing)."³⁴ All in all, remembering the deportation can become the process of reconstructing the identity of *Koryŏin* in Kazakhstan as an emblematic group that is able to expand the questions about the pains of their past historical experience to something that is universal, and based on the vulnerability of humans found in that history, call for social justice in the space they are living in now.

This is of vital importance in light of the circumstances in present day Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstani constitution clearly stipulates that Kazakhstan is the state of the Kazakh people. In fact, demographically, the Kazakhs have become the dominant ethnic group, surpassing the Russians, and Kazakh-centralism is becoming more entrenched.³⁵ Although 20 years old, according to a survey by

34) Jeffrey Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 57. In this sense, Kyŏng-Sik Sŏ also said, "A group does not resist because they are eligible to do so as one people. Eligible or not, they fight because of the reality that oppresses and alienates them. And it is during this process that they are forged into one people." He argued that 'we' as one people is created "because of a common historical experience." Kyŏng-Sik Sŏ, *Between a Refugee and a National*, trans. Sŏng-Mo Yim and Gyu-Su Yi (Paju: Dolbegae, 2006), 141-42.

35) Chŏn Sin-Wuk describes Kazakhstan's language policy and the lives of *Koryŏin* as follows: "*Koryŏin* living in Kazakhstan face a situation where they have to learn Russian, Kazakh and Korean, since in

the Hillary Institute, 54.8% of the respondents replied that the relationship between the different ethnic groups in Kazakhstan has deteriorated.

Also, in a survey done by Georgiy Kang and Dmitriy Myōng, 45.4% replied ‘worse’ and 76.1% concerned. As Chang Won-Ch’ang and Hyōn Sūng-Su have pointed out, one cannot guarantee that the relationship between different ethnic groups in today’s Kazakhstan has gotten any better, in light of the fact that the authoritarian hegemonic control by the political elite is quite strong.³⁶⁾ Therefore, for the *Koryōin*, an ethnic minority that only accounts for 0.6% of the entire population of Kazakhstan and faces a high entry barrier to the political arena, such circumstances within the country they live in constitute elements causing fear that the past history may repeat itself.

Therefore, what is needed is not emphasis on superiority of the *Koryōin* people through some success myth, nor efforts to make themselves the center by stressing the joint destiny they face with the Kazakhs.³⁷⁾ Such idea would merely contribute to strengthening the need to marginalize other ethnic groups and could even later become a boomerang. Rather, in facing the 80th anniversary since the deportation, what is needed is to make the name ‘Kazakhstani *Koryōin*’ a symbol of practices conducive to human rights, by self-reflecting on the history of deprivation of universal human rights, warning about the dangers of Kazakh-centralism, and even calling for provision of conditions where all peoples will be able to live their lives in equality.

September 1989, the Kazakhstani government enacted a law on languages to be used in the Republic of Kazakhstan, adopting Kazakh as the official state language. However, such enactment went beyond simply the dimension of learning languages. It led to socio-economic inequality. Ethnic minorities such as the *Koryōin*, if they did not learn the national language of the country they lived in, could not help but be discriminated in all areas of society. Sin-Wuk Chōn, “A Study on Remigration Factors and Resettlement of Central Asian Koreans (Russko-Koreets) to Maritime Region (Primorsky Krai),” *Korean Policy Sciences Review* Volume 11, no. 3 (2007): 87.

36) Sūng-Su Hyōn, “Ethnic Minority Policies in Kazakhstan: Focusing on the Chechen and Ingush Diaspora,” *Russian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2014); Sūng-Su Hyōn, “Control Strategy of Non-Kazakh Elites in Kazakhstan,” *The Journal of the Institute of the Middle East Studies* 31 (2012).

37) Dmitri Myōng, “Change of Generation Among Kazakh Koreans and the Change in Their Sense of Belonging” *Peace Studies* 8 (1999).

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