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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA, KAZAKHSTAN, AND UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. This study examines the social trends, values, and worldviews of the millennial generation in South Korea, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Data were collected in 2019 through a survey of 1,047 university students aged 18 to 25. The sample included 300 respondents from South Korea, 447 from Kazakhstan, and 300 from Uzbekistan. As this generation is poised to play a pivotal role in future Central Asian-Korean relations, understanding their distinct characteristics is essential. The findings highlight significant divergences in individualism, family values, and economic priorities between the youth of Central Asia and South Korea.

Keywords: youth, millennials, South Korea, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, survey.

КОРЕЯ РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНДА, ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА ЖӘНЕ ӨЗБЕКСТАНДАҒЫ МЫҢЖЫЛДЫҚ ҰРПАҚТЫҢ СИПАТТАМАЛАРЫ

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ОСОБЕННОСТИ ПОКОЛЕНИЯ МИЛЛЕНИАЛОВ В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ КОРЕЯ, КАЗАХСТАНЕ И УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

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Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеу Оңтүстік Корея, Қазақстан және Өзбекстандағы миллиениалдар буынының әлеуметтік тенденцияларын, құндылықтары мен дүниетанымдарын қарастырады. Деректер 2019 жылы 18 бен 25 жас аралығындағы 1047 университет студенті арасында жүргізілген сауалнама арқылы жиналды. Іріктемеге Оңтүстік Кореядан 300, Қазақстаннан 447 және Өзбекстаннан 300 респондент кірді. Бұл буын Оңтүстік Корея мен Орталық Азия арасындағы болашақ қарым-қатынастарда шешуші рөл атқаратындықтан, олардың өзіндік ерекшеліктерін түсіну маңызды болып табылады. Зерттеу нәтижелері Орталық Азия мен Оңтүстік Корея жастары арасындағы индивидуализм, отбасылық құндылықтар және экономикалық басымдықтардағы айтарлықтай алшақтықтарды көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: жастар, миллиениалдар, Оңтүстік Корея, Қазақстан, Өзбекстан, сауалнама

Аннотация. Данное исследование изучает социальные тренды, ценности и мировоззрение поколения миллиениалов в Южной Корее, Казахстане и Узбекистане. Данные были собраны в 2019 году посредством опроса 1047 студентов университетов в возрасте от 18 до 25 лет. Выборка включила в себя 300 респондентов из Южной Кореи, 447 из Казахстана и 300 из Узбекистана. Поскольку этому поколению предстоит сыграть ключевую роль в будущих отношениях между Центральной Азией и Южной Кореей, понимание их отличительных характеристик имеет важное значение. Результаты исследования демонстрируют значительные различия в уровнях индивидуализма, семейных ценностей и экономических приоритетов между молодежью Центральной Азии и Южной Кореи.

Ключевые слова: молодежь, миллиениалы, Южная Корея, Казахстан, Узбекистан, опрос

Introduction

The lifestyle, worldview, values, and identity of youth in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan constitute the foundation for the behavioral characteristics that the adult population of Central Asia will exhibit in the near future. Consequently, a contemporary understanding of these factors is directly correlated with forecasting regional prospects, since the youth demographic in these states will be instrumental in shaping future bilateral relations between the Republic of Korea and Central Asian countries.

As social characteristics and orientations of this group crystallize, emphasizing close ties with Korea becomes strategically important. Developing active cooperation programs is necessary to expand and deepen mutual understanding between the younger generations of these nations.

Methodology of sociological research

The study was conducted by the Institute of Central Asian Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, with support from the National Research Council for Economics, Humanities, and Social Sciences (NRC) under the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea.

The survey was administered in 2019 to university students aged 18 to 25. The total sample size (N=1047) consisted of respondents from Kazakhstan (n=447), Uzbekistan

(n=300), and South Korea (n=300). The questionnaire was designed to provide insights into social trends among the younger generation and was finalized following consultation with local experts. Data collection was facilitated by local sociological organizations, while statistical analysis was performed by researchers specializing in Central Asian studies.

Results of sociological research

To assess value orientations, a survey was conducted with respondents being asked to identify their primary purpose in life. Results indicate a stark contrast in individualism. Among South Korean students, 80% stated they live for “personal happiness,” compared to 45.6% of Kazakh and 46.0% of Uzbek students. Conversely, living for “family happiness” was cited by 32.9% of Kazakh and 31.0% of Uzbek respondents, whereas only 11.0% of South Korean respondents selected this option.

Notably, while 19.0% of Uzbek and 12.8% of Kazakh students expressed a desire to live for the “development of their country,” none of South Korean students selected this response. This reflects prevalent skepticism among Korean youth (average age 20) toward their society, often encapsulated by terms such as “Hell Joseon”¹ and “spoon class theory”².

Table 1. Primary Purpose in Life (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	South Korea
Your own happiness	45,6	46,0	80,0
My family’s happiness	32,9	31,0	11,0
Development of my country	12,8	19,0	0,0
I don’t know yet	8,7	4,0	9,0
Total	100	100	100

The survey examined adherence to traditional values by asking if respondents would marry against their parents’ wishes.

South Korean students demonstrated strong individualistic tendencies: 45% stated they would marry despite opposition, while only 17% would comply with parental wishes. In Central Asia, patriarchal traditions remain relatively more influential. Nevertheless, 39% of Kazakh and 35% of Uzbek students indicated they would proceed with marriage despite objections. A significant portion of respondents in Kazakhstan (48%) and Uzbekistan (44%) remained undecided. This uncertainty may stem from

¹ “[Hell Choson](#)” is a popular satirical term in modern South Korea that expresses the deep disillusionment of young people with the socioeconomic situation. It symbolizes life as hell, characterized by high competition, unemployment, inequality, and a rigid class hierarchy, reminiscent of the hardships of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897).

² The “silver spoon theory” in Korea is a popular socio-cultural concept that states that a person’s social status, wealth, and success in life are predetermined by the income level and assets of their parents. It describes a rigid class division, where the position (spoon) cannot be changed by one’s own efforts.

a generational shift where youth are cautious about adopting traditional patriarchal customs yet remain influenced by the extended family structure. In Korea, the high rate of uncertainty (38%) is likely attributable to awareness of the practical socioeconomic difficulties of marrying without parental support rather than Confucian filial piety.

Table 2. Attitudes Toward Marriage Despite Parental Opposition (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	South Korea
I would get married	39,0	35,0	45,0
I will not marry	13,0	21,0	17,0
I don't know yet	48,0	44,0	38,0
Total	100	100	1 00

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Table 3. Attitudes Toward International Marriage (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	South Korea
If I love this person, I will marry him	46,0	41,0	65,0
I would make a decision depending on the situation	25,0	17,0	23,0
I will not marry under any circumstances	22,0	23,0	6,0
I don't know yet	7,0	19,0	6,0
Total	100	100	100

Respondents showed generally positive attitudes toward interethnic marriage. When asked about marrying a foreign national, 65% of South Korean students affirmed they would marry if they were in love. Similar sentiments were observed in Central Asia, with 46% of Kazakh and 41% of Uzbek students answering affirmatively. When combining unconditional willingness with situational decision-making, the acceptance rates are 71% for Kazakhstan, 58% for Uzbekistan, and 88% for South Korea.

The survey assessed the importance of financial stability in choosing a partner. Findings reveal that 60% of South Korean students prioritize a spouse's financial capabilities, implying expectations of a wealthy background or active economic participation. In contrast, only 33.9% of Kazakh and 28% of Uzbek students prioritized financial factors. Despite lower GDP per capita in the Central Asian nations, this result suggests the persistence of traditional gender roles where the male is the primary breadwinner and the female manages the household. The high emphasis on finance among Korean students likely reflects the economic constraints of independently maintaining a household in contemporary Korean society.

Table 4. Significance of Spousal Financial Capability in Marriage Selection (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	South Korea
Yes	33,9	28,0	60,0
This is not true	22,5	42,0	1,1
I don't know yet	43,6	30,0	29,0
Total	100	100	100

Respondents were asked how they would allocate a significant accumulation of their capital. South Korean students overwhelmingly prioritized stability, with 71% choosing to purchase a home. Conversely, entrepreneurial aspirations were dominant in Central Asia: 38% of Kazakh and 49% of Uzbek students stated they would invest in their own business.

Table 5. Primary Priorities for Large Capital Allocation (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	South Korea
Buy a prestigious foreign car	5,0	2,0	4,0
Buying your own home	36,0	22,0	71,0
I will invest in my business	38,0	49,0	15,0
I will donate to the community	14,0	21,0	0,0
I don't know yet	7,0	6,0	10,0
Total	100	100	100

Regarding temporal orientation, the majority in all three nations favored saving for the future. However, South Korean students showed a higher propensity for immediate consumption (28%) compared to their Central Asian peers (9.4% in Kazakhstan, 12% in Uzbekistan).

Table 6. Primary Priorities for the Allocation of Accumulated Capital (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	South Korea
I will save money because the future is important	81,7	78,0	55,0
Since the present is important, I will buy the necessary things	9,4	12,0	28,0
I don't know yet	8,9	10,0	17,0
Total	100	100	100

Employment preferences varied significantly by region. Uzbek students showed a strong inclination toward entrepreneurship (45%), whereas Kazakh and South Korean students favored employment in public or private institutions. Notably, a large segment of Kazakh (38%) and South Korean (35%) students remained undecided regarding their career path.

Table 7. Temporal Orientation Toward Financial Management: Saving vs. Immediate Consumption (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	South Korea
Work in government agencies	21,0	12,0	26,0
Work in private companies	23,0	22,0	34,0
Starting your own business	18,0	45,0	5,0
Not sure yet	38,0	21,0	35,0
Total	100	100	100

When asked for their primary association with Korea, Kazakh students most frequently cited “K-Pop/Korean Wave” (45.2%), followed by “Korean-made cars” (20.4%). In Uzbekistan, “Samsung” (31%) and “K-Pop” (28%) were the top associations.

The lower prominence of K-Pop in Uzbekistan compared to Kazakhstan is notable given the large Korean diaspora and widespread broadcasting of Korean dramas in Uzbekistan. However, the strong association with Samsung and cars in Uzbekistan is linked to the industrial presence of Daewoo (later GM) since 1996, which established Korean vehicles as a dominant market force. In Kazakhstan, the “Korean Wave” encompasses K-Beauty, cuisine, and fashion, with widespread adoption of Korean dining culture and cosmetic brands.

Table 8. Primary Associations with South Korea Among Kazakh and Uzbek Students (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan
K-POP / Korean Wave	45,2	28,0
Samsung	16,1	31,0
Korean Partition	14,3	10,0
Korean-made cars	20,4	25,0
Others	4,0	6,0
Total	100	100

Regarding motivations for visiting South Korea, “study abroad” emerged as the primary driver for students from both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. However, the preference for educational migration was significantly more pronounced among Uzbek respondents, appearing nearly twice as frequently as in the Kazakh cohort. While tourism and employment were identified as the second and third most popular reasons, respectively, the distribution of these responses reveals distinct regional disparities.

These proportional differences are largely attributable to divergent visa policies. Specifically, Kazakh citizens benefit from a 30-day visa-free entry regime, whereas Uzbek citizens are subject to more stringent regulations, making even short-term tourism difficult to access. Consequently, the higher inclination toward tourism and employment among Kazakh students is directly linked to these higher levels of mobility.

From an institutional perspective, Uzbekistan is designated as a priority partner under the Republic of Korea’s Country Partnership Strategy (CPS). Within this framework, a substantial portion of bilateral cooperation, facilitated by organizations such as KOICA and the EDCF, is concentrated in the education sector. The proliferation of Korean educational and vocational institutions within Uzbekistan, including Inha University, the Tashkent and Samarkand Institutes of Vocational Education, and the Sejong Academy, has fostered a perception of South Korea as a premier educational hub. As a result, many young Uzbeks view South Korean higher education as a critical vehicle for professional advancement and improved career prospects.

Table 9. Primary Motivations for Visiting South Korea Among Kazakh and Uzbek Students (%)

Response	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan
Study Abroad	36,0	57,0
Employment	21,0	18,0
Treatment	6,0	1,0
Tourism	34,0	23,0
Miscellaneous	3,0	1,0
Total	100	100

Conclusion

The millennial generation in the surveyed nations will be instrumental in shaping future bilateral relations. The study reveals distinct value divergences, where South Korean youth exhibit high individualism and economic pragmatism, while Central Asian youth balance emerging modern values with traditional patriarchal structures.

Based on these findings, it is recommended to implement targeted cooperation programs that address these specific social orientations. Policy measures should focus on fostering realistic exchanges and socio-cultural cooperation to ensure sustainable mutual understanding between the future leaders of Korea and Central Asia.

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Transliteration

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