

SNUAC Asia Square Brown Bag Seminar Series, Spring 2024

Identity and Belonging in Films of Uzbekistani Koryo-saram

Olga Khan

Literally meaning scattered through or across, the ‘diaspora’ has become a prominent conceptual framework for generating knowledge and understanding regarding nationhood, migration, and displacement. The Koryo-saram is a sub-nation within the Korean nation that, due to various historical circumstances, relocated to the Russian Far East in the second half of the 19th century, followed by deportation to Central Asia under Stalin’s order, and has since resided in the post-Soviet space. Their assimilation process took place in a heterogeneous and ethnically unfamiliar setting, resulting in a synthesis of Korean, Russian, Soviet, Central Asian, and European cultures, along with the alteration and partial loss of the original ethnic culture. The hybrid and multilayered identity of Koryo-saram has been reflected in a variety of artistic genres, including literature, songs, paintings, etc. Yet, their experiences have been underrepresented in cinema, particularly within the context of the broader Korean diaspora.

Diasporic cinema plays an important role in portraying the complexity of identity transformation and exhibits a heterogeneous aesthetic and experience of living between two or more cultures. Unlike numerous documentaries on the deportation topic, emerging Koryo-saram directors share and evoke deep reflections on what it is to be Koryo-saram in both historical and contemporary settings, and use cinematic language to nurture a long-term, distinct ethnic consciousness and a collective memory. The first Uzbekistani Korean directors appeared only after 2010, so the cinema of Koryo-saram can be seen as a new phenomenon; it represents a developing field and serves as a valuable source for investigating Koryo-saram’s identity since directors explicitly incorporate their own and others’ historical experiences into the film text, visually reconstructing the meaning of home, diverse forms of belonging, and cultural identity. On the example of films *Hanaan* (2011, dir. Ruslan Pak), *When Poppies Bloom* (2018, dir. Rita Pak), *Pebbles* (2024, dir. Larisa Ligay), and documentary *The Choir* (2021, dir. Larisa Ligay), this presentation will explore identity and sense of belonging in films made by Uzbekistani Koreans.

Olga Khan obtained a PhD at Chung-Ang University in 2023. In her doctoral dissertation “Female Images in the Context of “Uzbekness” in Post-Soviet Uzbek Cinema,” she examined contemporary women’s images, focusing on social dynamics, the transition of women’s images from Soviet ideology to national one, and the process of shaping their representations in a retrogressive way. Has published articles on Uzbek cinema in peer-reviewed journals indexed in international databases (EBSCO, Web of Science, Russian Science Citation Index, ABSEES, etc.) and presented papers at international conferences (USA, Russia, Kazakhstan, etc.). Her research interests include cultural/visual anthropology, Korean diaspora, and gender issues.

Date & Time: May 21, 2024. 12:00-13:00

Place: SNUAC Room 304 (3rd Floor)