Articles

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By returning to the process of the evolution of the Korean national identity, this paper argues that the Korean national identity discourse during the colonial period was not an articulation or construction of new identity. Rather it was a re-articulation of traditional Korean collective identity that was distinct and had most of the ingredients of national identity. Korean people have had a common culture, language, and defined territory, and historical linkages from ancient time. There is also enough evidence that people considered themselves Korean, though there were several other supra and sub-identities which were contesting with the national identity of Korea. A survey of national identity discourse after the division of the Korean Peninsula also makes it clear that political division has not been successful in diluting the sense of this collective identity, and that it might play a constructive role in the reunification of Korea in the future. In conclusion, the paper submits that the fact that political division does not have a direct bearing on the national identity of Korea in the past and also in the present, national identity could be utilized innovatively and constructively for the goal of the reunification of Korea.

Keywords: National identity, Colonialism, Korean division, Discourse, Identity discourse

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I. Introduction

At first sight, the Korean identity appears to be unproblematic in its meaning, evolution, nature, and scope. The Korean people are connected by race and blood (real or imagined) and share common culture, language, and definite territory and, thus, had a shared sense of collective identity from ancient times. The history of a distinct Korean identity begins with the establishment of the Gojoseon kingdom by Dangun (檀君) around four thousand years ago.[1] Almost every Korean believes that they are descendants of Dangun and Korean people thus have a common

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1 Dangun Wanggeom was the legendary founder of Gojoseon, the first Korean kingdom, around present-day Liaoning, Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula. He is said to be the "grandson of heaven," and to have founded the kingdom in 2333 BCE. The earliest recorded version of the Dangun legend appears in *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事, *Memorabilia of the Three kingdoms*), a thirteenth-century Korean text.

collective identity. Since their collective identity consists of almost all the variables which are considered to be constituent of a nation, Korea had a common national identity even before the introduction of the western ideology of nationalism in the late nineteenth century in the country.

Although there have been disintegrations and re-integrations of political entities in Korea in the course of history, the sense of collective consciousness and shared collected identity remained intact. The narrative concedes that the evolution of Korean national identity has not been linear and, at times, there have been contests and overlapping of other identities, but overall the collective identity consciousness remained almost unbroken. It might have weakened or become differently articulated at times, but it continued to be present in one form or another in the minds, customs, and cultural practices of people.

However, there are serious questions regarding whether Korean people thought of themselves as Korean nationals even before the introduction of the idea of "nationalism" in the late nineteenth century, or whether they thought of themselves in terms of their local or regional identities or as a part of the Chinese civilization. The question basically emanates from the recognition of a multiplicity of identities, which are layered as well as overlapping in the cases of most countries. It also comes out of the "faith" of the modernist scholars of nationalism who believe that there could not be a national identity before the emergence of the ideology of modernity. The modernist scholars treat national identity largely as a construct based on a real or an imaginary commonality between people of a certain territory and their subjective realization of this commonality. Any semblance of national identity in any part of the world before the origin of ideology is considered to be pre-national or proto-national. Thus, they argue that Korean national identity was also a modern construct, one which was embedded and contingent.

The national identity of Korea was formed through complex

relationships among colonialism, modernity, and nationalism during the colonial period (Shin and Robinson, 1999, p. 17). Many scholars suggest that the discourse on the Korean national identity was also articulated to serve as a counter-ideology against colonialism in Korea. As happened in several other cases, the ideology of nationalism became strengthened and more solidified with its alliance with the anti-colonial movement. Korea also experienced similar surges in the debate and discussion around the idea of nationalism as an anti-colonial ideology. Thus, the discourse of nationalism became synonymous with the discourse on the Korean identity issue in this period. However, the point is whether it is appropriate to say that the new consciousness and new epistemology of discourse on the issue of Korean national identity was merely instrumental or a construct. Does this mean that prior to this new terminology and the emergence of self-consciousness regarding their identity that Korean collective national identity was incoherent or absent?

Undoubtedly, the Korean national identity consciousness saw re-articulation during this historical epoch. Also, the ideology of nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments became the focus of this re-articulation. But it would be inappropriate to say that the ethnic national identity of Korea does not have a prior historicity. The modernists who claim that Korea was divided into several vertical and horizontal identities before the modern period should realize that even after re-articulation of the nationalist identity in Korea, other parallel narratives based on region, class, and gender did not disappear completely. In fact, a broad national identity is not necessarily antithetical to several other sub-national or supra-national identities. Thus, even though the influence of the modern ideology of nationalism fundamentally affected the identity discourse in Korea in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by introducing a few new terms, such as *minjok* (民族, Korean nation), into the intellectual discourse of the country, the historicity of nationalism is much older.

For the same reason, even after the division of Korea into two states, the Korean national identity may have fractured, but it has not weakened. The division and distinction of two states and their identities might have been projected as a fundamental break in the national identity of Korea, as both countries followed different and mutually exclusive ideologies of state-building, the sense of Korean national identity has hardly loosened its grip in the popular imagination. There could be two models of state and national building, but this does not mean that people from the other side of the 38th Parallel are less Korean. The common sentiment about Korean national identity across the peninsula, thus, has very significant implications for re-unification.

This paper looks at the evolution of the Korean national identity and the related discourse in the colonial period. It tries to identify pre-modern and pre-colonial manifestations of the Korean national identity, but does not agree with theory of perennial nationalism or the linear evolution of national identity in Korea. However, it tries to argue that Korean national identity needs to be understood in its own terms without attributing its origin to the modernist ideology. Moreover, the paper also argues that the overlapping of states and of national identities are merely incidental. The national identity discourse in a divided Korean Peninsula makes it clear that political division does not constitute a fundamental shift in the collective consciousness of the Korean people. Both states in the peninsula have propagated different ideologies of state and nation-building by questioning the legitimacy of the other regime, but did not question the common national identity of the Korean people. Also, they have tried to utilize the consciousness of common national identity for the legitimacy of their own regimes by aligning their state policy with the common national identity of the Korean people. Thus, the national identity discourse is an important variable in articulating a process for and the possibility of reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

II. Meaning and Evolution of Korean National Identity

The term "national identity" in the paper is used largely in consonance with the work of Anthony D. Smith, who is one of the pioneers of the concept of ethnic origin of nations by connecting its pre-modern and modern variants (Smith, 1986). According to this definition, the nation and national identity cannot be narrowly reduced to an ideology or form of politics, and must be also treated as cultural phenomenon (Smith, 1991, p. 7). The people in pre-modern periods might be both subjects of a particular king and part of a nation. The collective consciousness, which could be based on real or imagined commonality and a sense of belonging along with the subjective realization of "self," one different from "other," makes a community a nation. There are several other variables, such as material and cultural expressions of commonality in the forms of racial and blood ties, cultural and customary sharing, language, and history, which decisively augment the sense of national identity. It should also be made clear that national identity has not been the only identity, or the dominant identity of people in most countries, nor has it evolved in a linear trajectory. Its evolution has taken different paths and trajectories across societies. In some cases, there may be real commonality, which produced a common identity consciousness; in other cases, the modern construct played an important role in "imagining" most of the commonalities. The wider understanding of national identity outlined above makes it possible to accommodate other collective identities, which were competing, contesting, and collaborating with the national identity. In Korea, too, within the collective identity of being Korean were several narratives of "self" and "others" which constantly existed, and were evoked, articulated, and constructed depending on their utility for the ruling elites and the intelligentsia.

Even though Korea is broadly considered to be a part of Chinese civilization, its unique collective identity distinctly evolved in the course of history. The collective identity of Korea, as a distinct civilization and

as a social formation, has been recognized even by those scholars who are doubtful of the existence of a Korean national identity before the advent of the ideology of modernity in the country (Em, 1999, p. 283). Korean people had an unparalleled ethnic homogeneity, which was further enforced by being situated in a relatively definite geographical territory. The people, having the same ethnic origin and geographical setting, shared many cultural practices and customs in spite of their being divided into many political entities. This was possible because the borders were quite porous and it was not difficult for the cultural traits of one political unit to permeate into other political units. Korean scholars such as Lee Gi-baek and Lee Gi-dong have propounded that the statement that "Dangun (檀君) established the first Korean kingdom" is not a legend but historical fact. On the basis of their findings related to the prehistory of Korea, they write that the so-called Korean slim bronze dagger was distributed in a territorial range called Dongyi around 1000 BCE in the cultural sphere of Korea's earliest state Gojoseon. On the basis of archaeological findings, they postulate that the Dongyi cultural sphere could be related with Buyeo and Koguryo (Lee Gi-baek and Lee Gi-dong 1988, pp. 46-50 and p. 75) and it proves that Korea was separate from Chinese civilization. Sin Chae-ho and Choe Nam-seon also mentioned the idea of a "pan-Dongyi nationalism" in their writings. There are two important cultural influences identified, *bukbang-gye* (northern) and *nambang-gye* (southern), and when these interacted with each other, cultural traits of the Korean race were created around the first millennium BCE. (Kim Won-yong, 1986; Lee Gi-baek and Lee Gi-dong, 1988). There may be valid questions regarding the historicity of Dangun, but there is no doubt that there are constant references to the legend in various historical sources of Korea. After *Samguk sagi* (三国史記, *The History of Three Kingdoms*), the story of Dangun is mentioned in *Jewang ungi* (帝王韻紀, *Rhymed Record of Emperors and Kings*), which was compiled in 1417, and in *Sejong sillok jiriji* (世宗實錄地理志, *Geographical Treatise, Annals of King Sejong*), which dates to 1454 (Yun I-heum et al,

1994). Even though the Dangun myth was not a historical fact, its constant presence in the psyche of people must have played an important role in the evolution of the collective Korean national identity. It played an important instrumental role, one which was played by print-capitalism and modern means of communication in Benedict Anderson's "imagined community," by connecting them together.

The known historical records about the Three Kingdoms, including *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa*, make it obvious that, though the Three Kingdoms of Koguryo, Baekje, and Silla competed for political supremacy, they shared a sense of connectedness.[2] Even though there were strong cultural influences of China in the peninsula, the people of the Korean peninsula did not feel themselves to be fully associated with China and considered it as an "other" which might be worth imitating but was different from "self" (Lee Sang-taek, 1996, p. 51). Koguryo, the northernmost kingdom of Korea, though, adopted many Chinese institutions and religious ideologies, and the writing system (Eckert et al, 1990, p. 30), but it always desired to unify the other two kingdoms and confront China. The place of Koguryo is considered to be important in the Korean history because if it had fallen to the aggressive intent of China, the whole Korean Peninsula would have come under the direct political control of China.

Once political unity across the Korean Peninsula was achieved again with the emergence of Unified Silla in the seventh century, the sense of being part of one collectivity became more obvious as state identity and ethnic-cultural-national identities overlapped significantly. The political unification brought people of the peninsula closer to each

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[2] *Samguk sagi* was compiled by Kim Busik in 1145. It is considered to be the oldest available book on Korean history. *Samguk yusa* is a collection of legends and historical accounts of the three kingdoms of Korea. It was largely compiled by the Buddhist monk Iryeon (1206-1289) at the end of the thirteenth century. Unlike *Samguk sagi*, this text provides more details about Korean legends, folktales, and biographies, including the first recorded reference of the legend of Dangun, who established the first Korean "nation" of Gojoseon.

other and their common identity consciousness strengthened further. From the unification of three kingdoms, the word "Korean" meant any person on the Korean Peninsula who shares the common blood-line (Lee, 1978). The Unified Silla period brought about cultural and economic progress in Korea, which made it possible for Koreans to connect their sub-national identity or regional identities into a larger category of Korean identity in a more concrete manner and to distinguish them from China and Japan (Holcombe, 2011, p. 112). The Goryeo period also underlines the distinct collective identity of the Korean people (Breuker, 2010). The writings of *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, respectively, differ in their focus because of their context and purpose, but they did signify the fact that the history of Korea was, though divided in political boundaries at that time, constituted of one collectivity. There were many commonalities in people's imaginations across the peninsula. From language (Breuker, 2010, pp. 402-403) to religious practices, from historical origin to their names and ways of life, and from common blood-ties to racial unity, Korean people shared this collective identity.

Political stability in Korea during the Joseon period brought out further narrative clarity to this collective identity. When Han Baek-gyeom (韓百謙) wrote in 1615 about the two lines of descent in Korean history - in the north from Dangun and Gija down through Koguryo, and in the south from Samhan down through Baekje, Silla, and Gaya - he was not questioning the common Korean identity. Basically, he was trying to present his own narrative of one Korean identity, which might have one, two, or many lines of descent, but they were all part of one unique Korean identity. To further differentiate Korea from China and to devise an easier writing system of the Korean language, King Sejong (世宗) assigned scholars to develop a separate script, and *Hangeul* was invented and introduced in 1443 for the Korean masses who encountered difficulty in using Chinese characters. It also underlined the fact that the Korean people were one distinct identity category and a separate writing

system was needed to further connect them together.

Even at the popular level, a distinct sense of national identity can be identified by going through various songs of illiterate shamans during the Joseon period. This makes clear that the class identities were not able to substantially divide the common consciousness of Koreans at the time. The elites and the masses, both sections of society, and their cultures were in many subtle ways connected (Walraven, 1999). Here, it should also be emphasized that these songs of the oral tradition of Korean history were quite old, and were gradually written and compiled in the late Joseon dynasty. Thus, they represent a narrative of a distinct category of Korean people even before the establishment of the Joseon dynasty. These shaman songs are called *muga* (巫歌). The corpus of these songs available now is just a fraction of this rich tradition. The most "common theme found in shaman songs (is) a historical overview of the peninsula, beginning with Dangun, whose dates place him as contemporary of the Chinese emperor Yao (堯)" (Walraven, 2011, p. 49). Typically, there is only mention of China in the introduction of the songs and then the subject matter is focused "entirely on the Korean Peninsula." There could be references to the capital cities of successive dynasties, and the narrative goes back to Dangun (檀君). In the food-offering ceremonies, too, the national identity appears to be evoked by mentioning famous food items of various parts of the peninsula. By going through the vocal tradition of Korea, such as *sijo* (時調) and *gasa* (歌詞), which could be situated between the oral and written traditions of Korea, we can find a similar trend of geomantic descriptions of China and Korea and the distinct place of Korea in Chinese civilization. In the *sonnim* (손님, guest) songs of this period, the cultural and food practices of China and Korea are mentioned to be different and so it was not easy for the *sonnim* (guests) from China to adjust to the new surroundings. It is remarkable that the regional variations of Korean foods are overlooked and clubbed together. By looking at the oral and vocal traditions of Korea during the Joseon dynasty, clearly before the modern introduction

of the ideology of "nation" in Korea, it is obvious that Korea had a consciousness of one community located between the Amnok (鴨綠) and Duman (豆滿) rivers in the north and surrounded by the sea in the south.

Thus, looking at the evolution of Korean identity, it can be said that Korean people had socio-biological (Berghe, 1995) and given factors such as blood, speech, customs, and territory (Geertz, 1963) which constitute important variables in the formation of national identity. It may seem devoid of any sophisticated ideology (Kedourie, 1960), as it was articulated in the modernist interpretation of nationalism, but Korea did have more real and less "imagined" social and cultural community, which were concurrently supported by the political order of the country. This meant that Korea already had most of the pre-modern roots of a modern nation before the colonization by Japan in the early twentieth century. For the same reason it is said that the modern articulation of Korean national identity is grafted onto older visions of a community that could potentially unite people of states such as Goryeo or Joseon (Duncan, 1998). Thus, it would be inappropriate to neglect ideational and material long-term processes and structures in the evolution of Korean national identity. The modern discourse of the Korean national identity was situated in these broad contours, which evolved in the course of time in a non-linear path.

III. Korean Identity Discourse and Colonization

The Korean national identity narratives from the late nineteenth century were influenced by the regional political context of East Asia. Korea, at this time, had to face fundamental changes in the regional ideational and political structures. The influence and capabilities of China were declining in the region, and both the West and Japan were trying to replace China. The changes also brought intellectual discourses associated with the process of enlightenment in the West to Korea, such as the concept of modernity, which significantly changed the pattern of

politico-economic organization in the West. These changes led to a serious churning in the Korean intellectual tradition. Korean scholars began to articulate their place and identity in this changing context of regional politics. The Korean historiography of this period articulated broadly three positions regarding the issue of nation which had direct bearing on the issue of national identity discourse in the country.

The first set of articulations was by Japanese historians, who intended to make their narrative instrumental in achieving the hegemonic goal to dominate Korea and finally justify the colonization of Korea. Japanese scholars tried to put forward two distinct ideas about Korea. One was that Korea shared historical and racial ties with Japan; the other was that Korea had been inferior to Japan. They introduced the myth of shared common ethnic origins of Japanese and Koreans, and the colonization was presented as nothing more than restoration of ancient ties. According to Hatada Takashi (旗田巍), Japan and Korea had a common ancestry and Japan had control over Korea in the past. These Japanese scholars tried to create a competing historical narrative of a Japan-centric East Asian history to replace the China bias (Tanaka, 1993). They were trying to have their own version of "orient." This narrative was an attempt to either negate the distinct Korean national identity or to "humiliate" it for establishing their "cultural hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971).

The second narrative regarding the national identity of Korea was of those "nationalist" Korean scholars, such as Sin Chae-ho (申采浩), who were trying to enter into the changing political and ideological contexts of region and trying to write an indigenous history of Korea and the Korean people. The changing political and ideological context of the region warranted emphasizing the Korean distinct national identity and articulating it in terms of the modern epistemology of "nationalism." These scholars tried to distance Korean national identity not only from Japan but also from the supra-identity of the China-centric Confucian civilization. For the same reason, they focused on the Korean

distinctiveness and tried to explain its relations with other transnational identities and sub-identities such as civilization, region, and class. The process of introspection about the Korean national identity began from the early nineteenth century in the intellectual tradition of Korea, but became more explicit and gained coherent expression in the early twentieth century. Not only the idea of "nation" but also discourses about "civilization," "east and west," "enlightenment," and "race" received great attention. This, undoubtedly, was a period of important developments in the intellectual history of Korea. It is in this context that Yun Chi-ho (尹致昊) wrote that Korea faced a dilemma between "civilizing the nation" and "national independence" (Chung, 2006, p. 126). Thus, in a way, modern articulation (though not a new one) of Korean national identity is a product of this context when Korean ideas and intellectual tradition had to reformulate its old narratives in a different epistemological tradition.

The third set of scholars tried to deliberately overlook the basis and nature of Korean nationalism and its relations with modernity. Rather, they were more concerned about the negative and narrowness of the idea. In a way this narrative did not contribute much in understanding of the Korean national identity discourse as it bore a preconceived value judgment regarding the idea of nationalism itself.

Here the focus will fall exclusively on the second set of scholars as their narratives on nationalism and national identity constituted the most notable development of the time. Also, they have been critically examined and reviewed by scholars of the modernist tradition in contemporary discussion on Korean nationalism. The most notable scholars of this tradition were Sin Chae-ho, Lee Dong-hwa (李東華), and Lee Gwang-su (李光洙). All of them have a different focus in their writings, but they recognized pre-national roots of Korean national identity. In the late nineteenth century, there were attempts by Korean scholars to distinguish themselves from China, a phenomenon called "decentering China" (Schmid, 1992, pp. 55-56). These scholars also tried

to refute the Japanese "yellow race" theory and the inferior place for Koreans in it. Lee Don-hwa discussed reconstruction of the Korean national character and emphasized that Koreans were "good-natured" from Gojoseon to the Koguryo period and grew "lazy and idle" only during the Joseon period (Lee Don-hwa, 1920). A similar opinion was expressed by Lee Gwang-su in his essay "Theory of Reconstruction of National Character." Rather than trying to construct a new Korean character, both scholars appealed to Koreans to resurrect their past in order to counter the colonial hegemonic idea of Korean people being "inferior." Lee Gwang-su and Choe Nam-seon (崔南善) also discussed the organic nature of the Korean nation which demanded a free political state to regain its lost glory. It appears that these "nationalist" scholars subscribed to an organic sense of nation in which nation was considered to be eternal and which is over and above all other possible collective identities.

It is clear from their narratives that these Korean "nationalist" historians argued persuasively about the pre-modern Korean nationalist identity and tried to remind Koreans of their Korean past in order to contest contemporary domineering tendencies in historiography. The noted Korean scholar Son Jin-tae (孫晉泰) wrote that the word *minjok* was not used in the past, as political elites were not comfortable with its all-inclusive character, and according to Sin Chae-ho, the "*minjok* certainly did exist even if the word did not." Other scholars also had similar opinions (Cho Dong-geol, 1994).

Basically, Sin Chae-ho's historical narrative was not an invention but just a discovery of the existing collective identity of Koreans. It would be inappropriate to compare the Korean case with France by saying that "the French" (especially in southern provinces) became French in the last decades of the nineteenth century when national language and customs were created and the establishment of a modern political structure paved the way for national culture which earlier had divided into various local variants (Weber, 1976). Korea had many more

cultural and linguistic commonalities than pre-Revolution France. Although Korea had regional (horizontal) and class (vertical) varieties of cultural and linguistic practices, still there was undoubtedly a shared sense of belonging. Although political elites of Korea during the Unified Silla, Goryeo, and Joseon periods did not overtly work to "nationalize" Korean people, they did try to differentiate them from competing neighboring states, including China. Their neglect to do so could also be attributed to the fact that in spite of horizontal and vertical variations, there was an idea of a common collective identity in Korea and it was not politically convenient to further articulate or strengthen it. Even the modern ideology of nationalism recognizes that there could be a simultaneous presence of "great" and "little" traditions in a country without anyway being contradictory with the idea of a common national identity (Redfield, 1960). The common ties, including ancestral links, were known to Korean people even before the idea of nationalism emerged as the dominant discourse in Korean historiography. This was simply the new epistemological age of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, as well as the historical context of entry into the nation-state-centric world order and colonization, in which the existing common national identity of Korea was rearticulated in a modern lingua. This does not make Korean *minjok* a new or constructed ideology. The Korean *minjok* was merely a new narrative of an old, existing phenomenon in the new epistemology of the age.

It would be too narrow to define the nationalist historiography of Korea as merely a narrative of resistance to Japanese colonial rule. The anti-colonial movement constituted an important part of the Korean nationalism, which influenced Korean scholars to articulate the pre-existing collective Korean national identity, but it could not be deemed the sole originator of Korean nationalist historiography. The historiography was influential as it tried to bridge the horizontal and vertical multiplicities of identity narratives to make the anti-colonial movement a more formidable force by including as many sections of

Korean society as possible. But it would be inappropriate to say that Sin Chae-ho and other scholars, such as Park Un-jik (朴殷植), An Jae-hong (安在鴻), Mun Il-pyeong (文一平), and Jeong In-bo (鄭寅普), were driven only by their anti-Japanese sentiments and attempted to create a non-existing Korean common national identity in the form of *minjok* to fight against Japan, as happened in India and other countries where an "imagined community" was invented to fight colonial power (Anderson, 1983). The new nationalist historiography was more inclusive and democratic as it brought in people from all regions, gender, and classes, and was useful for the freedom struggle of Korea at that time. It was also articulated in modern epistemological terms, but it was not a pure construction based on imagination.

It happened in several other countries that history began to be written by putting people at the center, rather than in the old practice of writing the history of political dynasties. In his *Doksa sillon* (讀史新論, *A New Way of Reading History*) published in 1908, Sin Chae-ho discussed the new way of reading history by emphasizing the Korean nation. Sin incorporated the legend of Dangun to support his narrative of ethnic nationalism. The legend, for Sin, was central to his idea of how the Korean nation evolved in the pattern of a family. As there is an originator in the family or clan record, so there is in the nation. A distinct identity of Korean people based on the Dangun legend was not a new thing. The Dangun legend-based nationalism was preserved and passed on by *seonga* (聖歌), who were hermit scholars of Korea (Jeong, 2001). They tried to explore, articulate, and sustain Korea's distinct ethnic and cultural identity from *Samguk yusa*. Sin tried to resurrect the *seonga* narrative about Dangun to argue the case of Korean nationalism.

His work received popular attention in Korea for two reasons. First, it was the first time that the Korean *minjok* was articulated in the language of modernity. Korean people had a similar but unsophisticated idea of this commonality, but they were not able to articulate it cohesively before. Second, it was the first attempt in Korea to write a

history where people were on center stage, not dynasties. Indeed, it was an important milestone in the Korean historiography and should not be reduced to an instrumental construct for fighting colonial power. In a strange way, this nationalist historiography of Korea gained help from Japan, which tried to reconstitute variants of local Korean sub-identities into a homogenous *Chōsenjin* (朝鮮人). It helped nationalism discourse in Korea by projecting Korean ethnic national identity as one and distinct.

IV. Division of Korea and National Identity

The Korean national identity discourse entered another phase with the division of the Korean peninsula after liberation. Following its modern articulation during the colonial period, it was thought that the discourse about the Korean national identity had reached its logical conclusion and once liberation was achieved, Korea would emerge as a modern nation-state. However, this did not happen as expected. The Korean national identity was again severed by the division of the Korean Peninsula after liberation. Actually, as the division of Korea was largely imposed externally, it was assumed that the separation would not last long and, consequently, even the fracture in the Korean national identity could also not be sustained. However, the Korean division has survived and so has the fracture in the Korean national identity.

Korea was divided into two competing and rival states. These states were founded and built upon different ideologies of political and economic organization. Although neither of them questioned the common national identity of Korea, both of them claimed to be the true and sole representative of the entire Korean people. The post-colonial discourse of the Korean national identity has had two variants based on the ideological positions of North Korea and South Korea. The latter focused on being a liberal-democratic polity and a capitalist economy, which has anti-communism as the core of its ideology. In contrast, North

Korea adopted communist and anti-colonial ideologies (against Japan and the United States). However, despite their ideological differences both Korean regimes have "appealed to the nationalist ethos" of Korea (Yim, 1994, p. 117).

In the northern part of the peninsula, although a communist state was established, it could not be claimed that in any sense of the term North Korea was less nationalist. North Korea has attempted to evolve its own version of communism, and for the same reason the North Korean ruling ideology of *Juche* (主體) was initiated. The ideology talked about "self-reliance" and, more importantly, "self-realization." The North Korean system is actually a unique amalgamation of communism, nationalism, and familism (Jowitt, 1987).

In the beginning, though North Korea referred to Marxism-Leninism as its guiding principle, the government was in fact pondering its ideological foundation, which could be more synchronized with the idea of the Korean nation and nationalism. The gradual introduction and emphasis on the idea of *Juche* in the late 1960s was part of North Korea's attempt to connect its own variety of communism with nationalism. In the beginning, North Korea avoided use of *minjokjuui* (民族主義, nationalism) in its official documents and proclamations, and instead used the word *aegukjuui* (愛國主義, patriotism), but in essence it evoked the similar idea of ethnic nationalism, which has been part of the larger discourse of the Korean identity. In the changing context of regional politics and domestic crisis in North Korea from the beginning of the 1990s, it became pertinent for North Korea to use the word *minjok* more often, and it finally abandoned the use of the word "Marxism-Leninism" in its constitution. It is no coincidence that in October 1993 North Korea announced that it had found the tomb of *Dangun* and in the next year, after repair, opened it to the public. North Korea announced a national holiday to celebrate the birth of the Korean nation on this date. The regime also reconsidered its position vis-à-vis Confucianism and tried to incorporate it into the *Juche* ideology. And North Korea has

officially proclaimed that "the Korean nation … has inherited the same blood. … All Koreans in the north, south, and abroad belong to the same nation." It would not be wrong to say that North Korea "might be socialist in form but has been clearly nationalist in content" (Armstrong, 2003, p. 245). In a country like North Korea where civil society hardly exists, all the claims and statements of the ruling regime and leaders are representative of the North Korean position on the Korean national identity and the people are being indoctrinated in a systematic manner. However, it is important to remember that in the case of North Korea, the regime did not inculcate a new ideology in people. Rather, it tried to garner political advantage by opting for an ideology which had already laid a strong imprint in the minds of Korean people on the northern side of the 38th parallel.

In South Korea, too, similar recognition of the Korean national identity based on race and blood was evoked from the very beginning. South Korea adopted the Dangun calendar and the day of Dangun's accession to thrown was declared a national holiday in South Korea. The first President of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, claimed that only South Korea "has realized the true character of Korean nation" (Shin, 2006, p. 156). His policy of *Ilminjuui* (一民主義) was based on the idea of Korea and Koreans being part of one nation. It was underlined by South Korean political leaders that "we are one people. We people have the same bloodline, (and) the same fate" (An Ho-sang, 1950). Park Chung-hee also proclaimed his adherence to the idea of Korea having one national identity by saying that "ideology changes, but the nation stays and lasts" (Park, 1973, p. 22). His slogan of "modernization of the fatherland" was rooted in the ideology of nationalism. The economic success of South Korea under his leadership could also be attributed to the nationalist ethics, which was the substitute for the "protestant ethics" of western economic success (Shin, 2006, p. 104). The common national identity narrative was so powerful at the popular level in South Korea that Park Chung-hee successfully utilized it whenever he felt a

legitimacy deficit. In the early 1971 election, when he found that the legitimacy of his rule was dwindling, he started indirect talks with North Korea and came out with the first Joint Declaration between the two Koreas, which underlined that the issue of unification was "above ideologies and systems." In a way, this was recognition of the common national identity of Korea. With increasing democratization in South Korea, there were more popular demands to engage with North Korea, and this was based on the understanding that without reunification, the Korean national identity would remain fractured. The success stories of the South Korean economic and political processes would not be complete without something being done to re-unify the Korean Peninsula and the Korean people. In the early 1990s, both Koreas expressed their commitment to common national identity and with the first summit meeting between the leaders of North Korea and South Korea in June 2000 and the joint participation of North Korean and South Korean teams in the Sydney Olympics, there was an euphoria of national sentiment across the 38th parallel.

Though a brief survey about the discourse of Korean national identity in the age of the divided Korean Peninsula, it becomes obvious that political division has not been able to weaken the collective identity of the Korean nation. Political division may have made the collective identity more complex as both states have tried to claim themselves as the sole representative. Nevertheless, the presence and prowess of the collective identity could not be doubted. It is not strange that leaders of both states in the Korean Peninsula did not attempt to question the common national identity of the Korean people. They do not attempt to distance their state from this collective identity as doing so would destabilize their respective regimes. The common collective national identity of Korea has been so powerful that political elites in both states have tried to utilize it for their political actions and legitimacy rather than contradict it. The idea has been so powerful as to even have been used in the past for legitimizing authoritarian rule by the leaders of both North

Korea and South Korea. Both states have blamed each other for creating the fracture in the national identity of Korea, but they do not doubt this collective identity.

V. Issue of Unification and Korean National Identity

Scholars have forwarded the ethnic homogeneity-national unification thesis in which it is assumed that the presence of one leads to the arrival of the other. This thesis predicts that since there is a strong sense of common national identity and ethnic homogeneity across the border, both Korean states would not find it difficult to reunify in the future if the external political environment is relatively conducive. They opine that it is not simply a necessity, but rather an inevitability (Koh, 1994, p. 157). The nationalism in both North Korea and South Korea also indicates that the fact of ethnic homogeneity could become a common ground to seek for reunification of the peninsula (Jeong, 1995). The thesis looks to be convincing at first sight. However, it neglects practical problems in the process of reunification by not taking into account the fact that both Korean states have been politically separate for more than six decades. Thus, there are chances that the neglect of reality might become a hurdle in the process of the reunification of the peninsula (Grinker, 1998).

However, both extremes of expectations are not sufficient to capture the reality of the Korean national identity and its relationship with the reunification issue of Korea. It is true that common identity provides a good ground for reunification, as there has been and is a sense of common collective identity which would definitely inspire both states to ultimately reunify and become a nation-state. It should not be forgotten that the Korean people had common identity, though they were divided in several political units and regions in the past. In the divided Korea, too, the consciousness of being one ethnic people is significant even though the political reality is not that of a unified ethnic people (Connor, 1994, p. 140). The issue of reunification could be positively

affected when both the political states and the people understand that common national identity does not necessarily demand for an absence of other regional and sub-identities. Inside the common national identity there may be several horizontal and vertical divisions, and these should be considered as enriching rather than weakening the common national identity. In the process of reunification, the Korean national identity could be emphasized, but at the same time the presence of several other collective sub-identities would also not be neglected. By using this framework, it is possible to write histories of other collective categories such as class, gender, and region without making them contradictory or contentious with the Korean national identity discourse. If we look at the response to the South Korean engagement policy in both states, a definite sense of tolerance and co-existence can easily be seen. The sense of co-existence would deepen with close interactions between the states and the people of the two Koreas and would further move towards a kind of confederation and reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

There is not enough information available about public opinion in North Korea toward reunification in the context of the common national identity. However, various opinion polls and surveys in South Korea show that the fundamental basis and imperative of reunification is the common national identity. Even the younger South Koreans, who are reportedly not so inclined to reunify with North Korea as they have always been taught that North Korea is their enemy and they also worry about the impact of reunification on their economic opportunities, do not question that they share their collective national identity with North Koreans. They also feel that the ultimate goal is the reunification of the Korean people, though it should be done in an incremental and peaceful manner.

VI. Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion, it may be said that a distinct

Korean national identity based on race and blood-ties (real or imagined) along with cultural, linguistic, and other commonalites evolved in a relatively defined geographical boundary and was in Korea from before the arrival of the western ideology of nationalism. The political division of Korea was not able to decisively hamper the evolution of the national identity in Korea. When Korea came into contact with the ideology of modernity in the late nineteenth century and tried to re-articulate its existing distinct identity in a more coordinated manner and in accordance with the modern parlance of nationalism, it was not a new construction or imagination but merely a re-articulation of an already existing collective identity. Similarly, after the division of the peninsula in the mid-twentieth century, the Korean national identity was fractured but was never challenged or contested by the two Korean states. Both states have contested only on the matter of representation. Both of them have tried to acquire their own model of state identity as well as to link their state identities with the Korean national identity. The existence of a distinct Korean national identity, in spite of political divisions, makes it possible to argue that it might play a constructive role in the process of the reunification of the peninsula in the future.

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