

The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea

Han Kyung-Koo

Abstract

This paper intends to excavate and examine the long-forgotten naturalization practices and policies of traditional Korea that existed before the advent of a single-raced nationalism, based on the transformation of Dangun from the first king into the biological ancestor of Koreans. The following three points will be made: first, the so-called ethnic nationalism that underlines the purity of Korean blood is not an integral part of Korean tradition. Traditional Korea did not consider itself to be ethnically homogeneous. In addition, it is erroneous to say that Koreans lack a historical experience of living together with foreigners.

Second, ethnic homogeneity in Korean nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon. Korean nationalism was based on a profound sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority. The idea of Koreans as being the descendants of Dangun was originally introduced to emphasize the Korean political and cultural life as being old as that of China.

Third, those who identify ethnic homogeneity as the main cause for prejudice and discrimination against foreigners are actually engaging the wrong enemy, because the real cause is this very sense of being civilized and culturally superior. This is why multiculturalism is so easily embraced by nationalists.

Keywords: multiculturalism, ethnic nationalism, homogeneity, Dangun, immigration, foreign bride

Han Kyung-Koo (Han, Gyeong-gu) is Professor at the Division of International Studies, Kookmin University. He obtained his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1991. His works include "The Anthropology of the Discourse on the Koreanness of Koreans" (2003). E-mail: hanthro@kookmin.ac.kr.

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Introduction

Korea has been long described as a racially homogenous state with a uniquely homogeneous culture and population, but recently it has become common to declare Korea as rapidly transforming itself into a multiracial and multicultural society, as the number of foreign nationals residing in Korea has reached one million, or more than two percent of the total population. With more than four out of ten single farmers marrying foreign women in 2006, scholars, NGO activists and reporters argue that Koreans must learn how to live with non-Koreans and be tolerant of other cultures.

The year 2006 marked a sudden increase in the media coverage and discussion of the conditions and policies for foreign brides and workers in Korea. The visit of Hines Ward, a biracial Korean who won the Most Valuable Player award in the U.S. Super Bowl, was a sort of a watershed. He was hailed as a proud son of Korea and a symbol of what Korea might achieve if it could cease to call itself a single-raced nation and promote multiculturalism. The official discourse has taken a positive turn and advocated for multiculturalism, which is a far cry from the official affirmation of a single nation-state. From now on, cultural diversity and the presence of immigrants are to be viewed as an important asset in Korea's effort for continued development in an increasingly globalizing world. When President Roh stressed the need to stop teaching ethnic homogeneity and embrace the tenets of multiculturalism, different government agencies came up with various projects to help foreign brides adjust themselves to Korea: NGOs found themselves on the receiving end of sudden increases in government subsidies for their activities, while scholars and research institutions suddenly found research money and support at every turn.

As this sudden enthusiasm for multiculturalism was largely the result of changes in the attitudes of government agencies and the mass media, some critical observers called it "state-sponsored multiculturalism" or "government-led multiculturalism." The flimsy basis of this kind of official multiculturalism was revealed in the recent

uproar over the recommendation of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). All the major newspapers in Korea reported that the CERD expressed concern over the Korean emphasis on the ethnic homogeneity of the nation and that the CERD had recommended that Korea stop using such expressions as *sunhyeol* (pure-blood) and *honhyeol* (mixed-blood) as part of an effort to reduce discrimination. In the report prepared and submitted by the Korean government to the CERD in 2006, the government had repeatedly used phrases as “Korea is an ethnically homogeneous country.”¹ Although those who wrote this report intended it as an apology for the current state of affairs by invoking what they thought to be “historical facts” or “cultural traditions,” to the CERD it appeared to be an effort to justify Korea’s ethnic homogeneity. So, it was the accidental phrasing in the report submitted by the Korean government that caused the CERD to express its concern that “the emphasis placed on the ethnic homogeneity of Korea may represent an obstacle to the promotion of tolerance and friendship among the different ethnic and national groups living on its territory.”

Even though there is a great deal of diversity and difference, not to mention contradiction and competition, among the positions and policy proposals of government agencies, NGOs, and scholars (Kim Hye-sun 2006), the current discourses and practices of multicultural-

1. For example, the report said on page one, “4. The Republic of Korea is an ethnically homogeneous country with a total population of 47,254,000 as of November 2005. However, the ethnic composition of the population is not clearly documented since the Republic of Korea does not conduct a census on ethnicity.” Also on page ten, “43. As an ethnically homogeneous State, the Republic of Korea has been traditionally unfamiliar with the problems of ethnic minorities. However, the dynamic exchange of human resources between countries and an increase in the number of interracial marriages have recently raised a range of concerns involving ethnic minorities.” “44. The principle of the ‘pure-blooded’, based on the Republic of Korea’s pride in the nation’s ethnic homogeneity, has incurred various forms of discrimination, largely invisible and not illegal, against so-called ‘mixed-bloods’ in all areas of life including employment, marriage, housing, education and interpersonal relationships. This is particularly serious since such practices are passed down from one generation to the next.”

ism seem to share three common problems. First, enthusiastically embracing multiculturalism, the boosters for a new multiculturalism tend to regard a Korean nationalism that emphasizes ethnic homogeneity as the single most critical obstacle to overcome in Korea's transition toward a multicultural society. For many NGO workers and scholars, as well as those government officials who prepared the report to the CERD, ethnic nationalism is the cause for prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, discussions are focused on the need to outgrow this "old" idea that no longer fits with a different reality.

Second, current enthusiasm for multiculturalism assumes that the rate of increase in the numbers of immigrants will continue in the future, that foreign workers will continue to enter Korea, and that Korean farmers will continue to marry foreign-born women. Even if the number of foreign workers and spouses entering Korea continues to grow, the composition of incoming migrants might change. What is important is that very few people have seriously asked whether the number of the immigrants or their commitment to cultural assimilation warrants the generalization that Korea has become a multicultural society.

Third, those who promote multiculturalism in Korea have never paid due attention to what a multicultural/multiethnic society is and what kind of future lies ahead if Korea decides to officially adopt it as ethos. This may indicate that many advocates of multiculturalism in Korea are nationalists who view multiculturalism as a survival strategy for the nation-state. Of these three problems, this paper will focus on the first, as the remaining two will be addressed by other articles in this special issue.

This paper, with its title "the Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea," intends to excavate and examine the long-forgotten naturalization practices and policies of traditional Korea. They existed long before the advent of a single-raced nationalism, which was found on the transformation of Dangun from the first king into the biological ancestor of Koreans. Throughout this paper, I will attend to the following three issues: first, the so-called ethnic nationalism that underlines the purity of

Korean blood is not an integral part of Korean tradition. In addition, it is erroneous to say that Koreans lack a historical experience of living together with foreigners, as many scholars and laymen along with the government officials who prepared the report to the CERD repeatedly mentioned. Traditional Korea had clear policy principles and practices concerning immigration and naturalization (*hyanghwa*). Moreover, traditional Korea did not consider itself to be an ethnically homogeneous state, and did not discriminate against foreigners simply on the basis of their ethnic origins.

Second, ethnic homogeneity in Korean nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon. Korean nationalism, although superficially focused on the point of ethnic homogeneity, was really based on a profound sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority. Such expressions as “We Koreans, the descendants of Dangun,” which is now touted as the proof of the consanguinity of the Korean people, was first introduced not to emphasize the blood relationship of Koreans, but to emphasize the history of Korean political and cultural life as being old as that of China. It was only in the last century that Dangun began to be taken as the biological father of Koreans.

Third, the logic follows that those who identify ethnic homogeneity as the main cause for prejudice and discrimination against foreign workers and brides are actually engaging the wrong enemy, since the real cause of prejudice is this very sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority. Therefore, even if Koreans succeed in doing away with the notion of ethnic homogeneity, this will not automatically make Korean society tolerant of different cultures and values. Naïve is the assumption that classification of people according to their bloodline is outdated and wrong and that differentiation on the basis of culture is modern and good.

If we realize that cultural discrimination based on the sense of being civilized (and therefore superior) may be more persistent and dangerous than the concept of ethnic homogeneity, one is able to understand why multiculturalism can be so easily embraced by nationalists. What is needed is a serious reexamination of nationalism in Korea.

What Does the Phrase “the Descendants of Dangun” Signify?

Many scholars and laymen believe that Korean nationalism is essentially an ethnic nationalism because Koreans not only say that they have a common language, history and set of customs, but also that they are descendants of a common ancestor—Dangun. However, as mentioned above, the idea that Korea is a state made of a single homogeneous ethnic group is an idea that emerged quite recently. The people of Goryeo and Joseon did not believe that they shared a common biological ancestor and welcomed many foreigners to Korea without discriminating against them simply on the basis of ethnic difference.

The people of Goryeo and Joseon declared themselves to be the descendants of Dangun, but their intention stopped far short of any claims to be blood relatives. What they meant was that Goryeo and Joseon were the successors of the ancient kingdom of Joseon (Gojoseon or Old Joseon, distinguished from the Joseon founded by Yi Seong-gye in 1392), which was founded by Dangun. In fact, the Dangun myth² itself asserts that he was the first king of Korea, not the progenitor of the Korean people. However, even scholars fail to critically review this misconception and blame the Dangun myth as the source of ethnic nationalism in Korea. This misunderstanding is corroborated by the so-called Korean “familism” that emphasizes blood relatedness, which makes Korean ideology look preoccupied with blood, an archaic means of solidarity. However, it is important to note that this focus on blood was popularized by a group of Japanese scholars (Murakami et al. 1979), echoing the view of a Chinese-American anthropologist Francis L. K. Hsu, who condemned the Korean and Chinese tendency to find successors only among blood-related kin, while the Japanese concept of *ie* (house) performed this function better by enabling the adoption of non-blood relatives. Such

2. The earliest records on Dangun are found in *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) and *Jewang ungi* (Songs of Emperors and Kings).

a rationalization of Japan's success and Korea's failure to modernize, which smells of internal Orientalism, seems to have been largely adopted and internalized by Koreans.

Indeed, in traditional Korea, Dangun was not perceived as the symbol of the blood ties of the Korean people, but as the founder of the first state formed in Korea: his importance lay only in his having been a political leader, not a biological progenitor. The idea of Koreans being the descendants of Dangun is based on the thesis called *samhan jeongtong ron* (thesis on the legitimacy of three Hans). The early form of the thesis was proposed by Kwon Geun (1352-1409) in the early Joseon period and perfected by Yi Ik (1629-1690), a famous scholar of Silhak (Practical Learning). The thesis is based on the concept of legitimacy in Neo-Confucianism (Seongnihak) created by Zhu Xi. Yi Ik proposed that Korea, although small in size and situated as it was in the periphery (east of China, the Middle Kingdom), was actually as old and civilized as China itself (Yi 1976; Song 1976).

The records of Dangun's foundation of Korea (Gojoseon) during the same year as the ancient Chinese King Yao indicate that the political history of Korea is as long as that of China. Later, Gija, a sage of the late Shang dynasty in China, fled to Old Joseon when the persecution of sages by King Zhou, the last king of the Shang dynasty, occurred. He founded Gija Joseon when the present king, a descendant of Dangun, abdicated his power, and, according to *Samhan jeongtong ron*, civilized Korea under his rule. When Wiman, a refugee from northern China, entered the Korean peninsula and staged a coup to usurp the throne by force, King Jun, a descendant of Gija, fled to the south and founded the kingdom of Mahan. Thus, Yi Ik claimed that the line of legitimacy began with Dangun Joseon, to be succeeded by Gija Joseon, and then by Mahan. He effectively excluded Wiman Joseon and the Four Han Commanderies (Hansagun) from Korean history. Later, An Jeong-bok (1712-1791) further developed *Samhan jeongtong ron* and argued that the line of legitimacy of Mahan was succeeded by Unified Silla, Goryeo, and Joseon. As the Three Kingdoms, namely Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla, held the same qualification in terms of legitimacy as parts of early Korea,

none of them could claim legitimacy alone (*mutong*).³

For the Koreans during the Joseon period, the important point was that Goryeo and Joseon were no less splendid than China, as they are the successors of the ancient kingdom of Old Joseon, which was founded by Dangun and civilized by Gija: it did not matter whether they were one big family related through blood or not. Neither the scholars nor the politicians of Joseon argued that all Koreans were blood relatives of Dangun. Dangun's importance lay in his having been the founder of the early Korean state, not in being the progenitor for all people living in Korea.

As is well known, the Dangun myth presupposes that there had already been many people residing in the area. Hwanung, Dangun's father, looked down upon this area, thought that it would be nice to rule, and descended from heaven down to earth. Therefore, if one were to take the myth of Dangun literally, not all Koreans are descendants of Dangun: some are descendants of Dangun and others are descendants of the aborigines, who had been there before Hwanung arrived. Therefore, the idea of all Koreans being the genealogical descendants of Dangun is contradicted by the Dangun myth itself. What was important to the scholars and politicians in Joseon was their country being defined as the legitimate successor to Dangun, not their being defined as his biological descendants.

Traditional Korean Policies and Treatment of Immigrants

Although bloodlines were important, Confucianism put greater emphasis on learning and cultivation of the self. An ancient sage king such as Yao chose to give the throne to a wise person, not to his biological son. If noble birth did not automatically qualify a person for

3. Later, many nationalist historians praised this thesis for recognizing the independence of Korea. Nevertheless they criticized it for recognizing the legitimacy of Gija Joseon (a dynasty founded by a Chinese sage) and was not entirely free from the idea of Sinocentrism (*Hwa-i sasang*).

high office, and if diligent study, cultivation of the mind, and moral training defined a man's worth, then it followed that a man from a poor family could somehow improve himself and achieve the status of enlightenment. Likewise, it was not so farfetched to suppose that barbarians could achieve civilization through concerted effort. Moreover, Confucius himself was known to have found good qualities in the barbarians. Although Confucian sages of ancient China tended to distinguish civilized people from uncivilized ones, Confucius said that he would board a ship and go to live among the Eastern Barbarians (Dongi) rather than endure wicked rule in China.

As Korea prided itself on having achieved the status of civilization through the teachings of Gija, Koreans were ready to agree that birth itself did not condemn a person to uncivilized status. Civilization was attainable to those who chose to change and make the necessary effort, as expressed partly in the government policy towards foreign defectors to Korea. A Jurchen (Yeojin) chief or a Japanese pirate could become a civilized Korean by discarding his old ways to adopt a Korean way of life and cultivate himself. It may have taken time, but was not impossible. Therefore, discrimination was theoretically based on one's intention to assimilate or not, and not on place of birth or ethnic origin. This idea of the possibility of improving human character was one of the principles that directed Joseon's policy toward immigrants and their naturalization. This line of reasoning is always twofold: the barbarians "can be" and "should be" assimilated.

Another important principle is found in Confucian political philosophy which supposes that people should admire a good ruler. Ancient Confucian texts are full of records in which people left their country for another ruled by a good king, or loyally followed their good ruler when he was forced into exile. The ideal king in Confucianism was also supposed to be a great civilizer and reformer who could influence subjects in the same way as "the blowing wind makes the grass bend." So foreigners, defecting from their own countries to seek permission to reside in Korea, were not regarded as simple refugees. They were the very proof that a given Korean ruler was a virtuous king admired by people from the outside. Since it was his

reputation that brought these foreigners to Korea, they were welcomed by the Korean government, which felt itself obliged to treat them with good manners, justice, and fairness, not to mention compassion.

Both Goryeo and Joseon adopted Tang China's practices and maintained a policy of welcoming and treating well those foreigners who voluntarily came and naturalized themselves. The government of Joseon had the principle of "stopping neither those who wanted to come nor those who wanted to leave." It would exempt Jurchen and Japanese immigrants from taxation to help their settlement in Korea. These settlers were free from paying land taxes for three years and from corvée for ten years (Han M. 2001).

During the Joseon period, many Japanese migrated to Korea partly because of economic distress and hardships in life. The government of Joseon chose to accept these Japanese as part of a countermeasure against the Japanese pirate raiders (*waegu*).⁴ Such a positive measure might have led to an increase of Japanese surrenders, because the number of the naturalized Japanese in Gyeongsang Province alone was reported to exceed two thousand during the reigns of King Taejo and King Taejong. When the number of descendants of these Japanese and Jurchen immigrants began to grow, some government officials wanted to put them on the military register and make them pay military taxes. However, some government officials argued against this policy, saying that it is against the rules of treating guests who had come from afar. Others argued that it would make their livelihoods difficult if the government began to require military service as early as from the third-generation of immigrants. After some deliberation in front of the king, the Joseon government decided to start to require military service from the fourth-generation of immigrants.⁵

4. "We would like to ask for land and become the subjects [of Joseon] because we heard that His Majesty appeases those who surrender, let them lead stable life, and does not punish the past wrongs." *Taejo sillok* (Annals of King Taejo) 10, 12th lunar month of 5th year of King Taejo's reign.

Besides tax exemptions, Joseon allowed these naturalized immigrants and their descendants opportunities to take state examinations for public office. Sometimes, the government appointed many of these to public offices according to their respective knowledge and skills in serving the national interest. Those who had strong family background, or a large following, or expertise in medicine or ship-building were preferred. As a result, many of the naturalized Japanese succeeded in occupying high government offices: a Japanese immigrant father and his son were appointed to the post of Royal Physician in one case; and many descendants of the Japanese immigrants passed the highly prestigious Civil Service Examination as well as the Higher Military Service Examination. Descendants of Chinese immigrants with cultural capital often distinguished themselves in the examination. Additionally, many Jurchen immigrants were given special military commissions to serve in the court.

The Joseon government helped defectors fleeing from economic distress in their own country or prisoners of war to settle in small groups, and granted them patches of land in the provinces with the goal of assimilating them into the population (Han M. 2001, 49). It is

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5. Sim Hoe argued, "The descendants of the naturalized Japanese and the Jurchen are growing in number. If the government does not require them military service, there will be a problem with defense budget. However, it seems to be too soon to let the grandson of the naturalized person pay the military duties. I would like to suggest that we have to start with the great grandson of the naturalized person." Yun Pil-sang also said, "Those naturalized persons tend to eke out a scanty livelihood because they are new here and have had not much time to establish themselves. If the government let the third generation of naturalized persons do the military service, I am afraid they might not simply be able to take the burden." To this Hong Eung and Yi Geun-bae added, "Putting all the grandsons of the naturalized persons residing in Seoul is not the way to treat the guests who came from afar. It might compromise our honor and reputation. It would be better not to put the descendants of the naturalized persons on the military register." Then No Sainsaid, "It would be better to accept the proposals made by the Ministry of Rites." Upon this, the king replied in writing, "As for the question of putting naturalized persons on the military register, let it start with the great grandson of the naturalized person." *Seongjong sillok* (Annals of King Seongjong) 207, 9th lunar month of 8th year of King Seongjong's reign.

interesting to note that Joseon also gave some consideration to immigrants in the criminal justice system. Immigrants and their descendants who committed crimes in Joseon were put on trial and punished by the penal codes of Joseon. However, the “rule of leniency” was applied so that they were punished less severely than native Koreans (Han M. 2001, 196). It also seems that many naturalized immigrants were able to marry Korean women and bear children.⁶

Cultural Superiority rather than Ethnic Homogeneity Responsible for Discrimination

The policies and treatment of immigrants to Joseon seem far kinder and less discriminating than imagined by Koreans of today. Immigrants and their descendants enjoyed some government protection and even assumed public office. It reflects the assumption that one could dilute one’s ethnicity by cultural assimilation, and that no discrimination should be caused simply by one’s ethnic origin.

However, there were negative phenomena as well. Joseon considered itself a civilization distinct from but equal in level to China, and looked down upon the Jurchen and Japanese. This caused the tendency for Joseon to regard Chinese immigrants and their descendants as more civilized, and to give them more favorable treatment in comparison to the Japanese and Manchurians who are, from the modern perspective, ethnically and linguistically far closer to Koreans. For example, Hong Bong-han remarked on November 26, during the twenty-seventh year in the Reign of King Yeongjo (1751), “I immensely admire Your Majesty’s decision to make a special exemption from the military tax for the descendants of the natural-

6. Yi Geun-gyun said, “During the reign of King Sejong and King Sejo, the naturalized Jurchens were treated so well that many Jurchens chose to surrender themselves and were given chance to serve at the court. . . . Those who serve now at the court are not the Jurchens who chose to naturalize themselves, but the descendants of those who married Korean women. . . .” *Yeonsangun ilgi* (Annals of King Yeonsan), 3rd lunar month of 3rd year of King Yeonsan’s reign.

ized Chinese and not ‘apply the same rules that have been applied to the descendants of naturalized Jurchen and Japanese’ (emphasis mine).” Such preferential treatment to naturalized Chinese and their descendants meant that learned men of Joseon Korea felt more attached to the civilized Chinese than to the Manchurians and Japanese, who were their closer ethnic cousins.

This sense of cultural superiority often translated into contempt, distrust, and ultimately fear of the namely “uncivilized” peoples. In the *Annals*, there are many instances of discussions that indicated profound distrust and discrimination towards the Japanese and Jurchen. In one case, these people are presumed to have “a black spot in their hearts because they are not one of our kind.”⁷ In many parts of the *Annals of King Yeonsan*, such phrases as “Although it may have been so in the past, how could we trust those who have a human face but a beastly heart?” are frequently found.⁸ Such a sense of distrust and contempt, typical of the Orientalist, is again found in a proposal to build a castle wall and drive away the barbarians.⁹ These expressions do sound racist, but upon close reading of the text, especially the last part, we find that these government officials were trying to prevent the Jurchen from mixing with Koreans only when the former maintained their “barbarian” way of life. The government wanted to draw the line between the civilized and the uncivilized,

7. “After our conquest of them, they repent their past wrongdoings and surrender to us. Now that they are surrendering, we have to treat them very well if we consider what constitutes good manners. However, as they are not one of our kind (*biajok*) they must have some black side in the heart. How can we simply trust sincerity of their intention to surrender and relax our watchfulness on the border?” *Sejong sillok* (Annals of King Seongjong) 63, 1st lunar month of 16th year of King Sejong’s reign. For example, see *Yeonsangun ilgi* (Annals of King Yeonsan), 3rd lunar month of 3rd year of King Yeonsan’s reign.

8. For example, see *Yeonsangun ilgi* (Annals of King Yeonsan), 5th lunar month of 3rd year of King Yeonsan’s reign.

9. “In my opinion we have to bring the wicked mind of the Manchurian barbarians under control by constructing fortress walls around the towns where there is none, drive away them and make it clear that the civilized and the barbarians (*hwa-i*, 華夷) cannot mingle together.” *Jungjong sillok* (Annals of King Jungjong) 54, 4th lunar month of 20th year of King Jungjong’s reign.

and allowed the Jurchen to cross this when they agreed to be civilized, that is, assimilated to Korean ways.

There was also a consideration of national security. The government did not seem to completely trust the naturalized Japanese. It took the cautious approach of not allowing these defectors and refugees to live in a large group, but divided them into small groups and gave them parcels of land to settle in remote villages.¹⁰ The Joseon government was ready to help foreign immigrants settle in Korea and assimilate themselves to a Korean (namely “civilized”) way of life, but was not tolerant of those who continued to keep their foreign (therefore “uncivilized”) ways. One government official who was a descendant of a naturalized Jurchen was severely criticized for having not discarded his ethnic customs.¹¹ In several instances, the

10. “Those Japanese who have lived in the islands are not one of our kind. Therefore it would not be wise to let a large number of them settle in Seoul, Gyeonggi-do [near the capital city], Gyeongsang-do, and Jeolla-do [near the coast] areas. I beseech your majesty to divide them into small groups and let them settle in remote villages.” This proposal was accepted and carried out. *Sejong sillok* (Annals of King Sejong) 4, 7th lunar month of 1st year of King Sejong’s reign.

11. Yi Seong of Hullyeonwon (National Military Training Academy) presented a memorial to the king and asked to change the office of Mr. Dong Cheong-rye who was a naturalized Jurchen. In the memorial, he said, “Ever since the government established Seonggyungwan (National Confucian Academy) and Hullyeonwon and well treated the gentlemen preparing themselves for civil and military services, all the ministers and generals have been produced by these institutions, and the government has relied on them for the recruitment of officials and officers. Recently the Ministry of Defense (Byeongjo) accepted the appeal of Mr. Dong and allowed him to be appointed to the post of Seupdokgwan (Officer for Practicing Reading: post of low-rank officials of sixth degree or lower created to teach specialized knowledge). It is true that Mr. Dong passed the state examination, but his father Dong Sorogamu is a Jurchen who, when he surrendered, simply changed his appearance without changing his outrageous manners and customs. As his son failed to change these outrageous manners and customs completely, I feel great shame to serve together with him. The post of Seupdokgwan is very important, because when one completes its term of office successfully he will be, as a rule, appointed to a post in the civil service; some times to the office of *gamchal* (inspector), sometimes to the office of *nanggwan* (middle-rank posts); it is even possible for him to be appointed to the office of governing local towns and provinces. It is highly inappropriate to appoint Mr. Dong to such offices even if he

government was requested and decided to punish those immigrants who practiced their traditional marriage custom of taking the wife of a deceased elder brother.¹² Considering that such marriages had been practiced during the Goguryeo period and many other “barbarian marriage practices” were abolished only recently at the time through a vigorous Confucianization drive in the late Goryeo and early Joseon periods (Deuchler 1995), we can only guess the importance of the sense of cultivating “civilization” at that time.

In this way, discrimination based on a sense of civilization and cultural superiority was far older and persistent than that based on ethnic nationalism developed only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This means that the sense of biological relatedness functioning as a source of discrimination, prejudice, distrust, and fear is a relatively recent trend.

The Production and Reproduction of Ethnic Homogeneity

It is not necessary here to discuss the formation of ethnic nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are some detailed studies (Shin 2006; Schmid 2002) discussing the advent of nationalism emphasizing the ethnic homogeneity of Korean people during this period. Many Korean intellectuals and laymen, such as Sin Chae-ho, who participated in the formation of Korean national-

successfully completes his tenure of this office. Your Majesty will please make distinction and not let them serve you in a mixed confusion.” *Seongjong sillok* (Annals of King Seongjong), 1st lunar month of 24th year of King Seongjong’s reign.

12. Yo Won, who was making a round of inspection in Yeongildo (Hamgyeongdo) sent a report to the king where he made a proposition of changing the customs. He reported: “Many of the naturalized Jurchen living in various towns tend to destroy ethics and morals by impudently marrying their immediate cousins and cousins once removed. In extreme cases they take the wife of their deceased brother. Please prohibit this obscene practices and change their customs. And severely punish those who violate them.” The king accepted the proposal. *Taejong sillok* (Annals of King Taejong) 29, 3rd lunar month of 15th year of King Taejong’s reign.

ism, were obviously influenced by European thinkers, especially by Fichte and advocates of German nationalism, among others. The idea of ethnic homogeneity seems to have been borrowed from Fichte, who emphasized common blood as well as a common language and culture. As German nationalism was extremely influential and emulated in Japan, many Koreans may have learned about German nationalism through Japan.

It is an irony that, in their struggle for independence, Korean independence movement leaders turned to Germany for inspiration in the same way the Japanese had done. Shin (2006) points out that the idea of ethnic homogeneity was developed by Koreans during the colonial period as a countermeasure against the Japanese propagandist notion of *naisen ittai* ("Korea and Japan are one and the same"), embracing the view of Oguma (2005) and Lie (2001) that the idea of ethnic homogeneity came to be established in Japan only after the Pacific War. However, when closely read, Oguma is found to suggest that the notion of mixed races was not fundamentally different from that of a single race, because the former concept postulated that all the ethnic groups within the Japanese Empire were eventually related to one another. Therefore, it would be correct to say that Korean ethnic nationalism was developed under the influence of Japanese as well as German nationalism. In addition, Korean nationalism might have adopted some elements of *kokugaku* in the process of its search for a national identity independent of the Chinese view of civilization.¹³ The Japanese version of nationalism was extremely attractive to the extent that even those who were infuriated at the imperialistic aggression of Japan were forced to admit its efficacy and capability while criticizing and hating the country. The appeal of Japanese nationalism also caused many Chinese young men to go to Japan instead of America or European countries. They were not only interested in Western science and military technology, but in how Japan

13. For the efforts of *kokugaku* thinkers to liberate themselves from China, see Wakabayashi (1986).

had successfully transformed herself into a modern nation-state (Yen 2005). Many Koreans went to Japan to study for the same reasons. They were impressed with the Japanese efforts at inventing tradition and constructing a national identity and culture. Even with animosity against the Japanese, Koreans were ready to study and learn Japanese institutions and policies, as well as their diligence and work ethic.

For these early leaders of Korean nationalism, Korea had to be a nation of people sharing a language, culture, history, and blood. It was when Korea lost its statehood through annexation to Japan that Dangun was transformed from a political leader into a mythic procreator of the Korean people. At the same time, the idea of “Gija as the Civilizer” became very awkward and inconvenient, since he was a Chinese, a foreigner.¹⁴ Korean intellectuals could not find a rightful place for Gija in the new brand of nationalism that emphasized ethnic homogeneity, and eventually established Dangun as a cultural hero to assume the role of Gija. This is how Dangun became the biological and cultural father of the Korean people. The expression “descendants of Dangun” now came to denote his genealogical descendants as well as the political successors to Dangun Joseon.

Now, let us look at why this brand of nationalism, newly formed to fight Japanese imperialism, continued to exercise such a great influence long after the end of the colonial rule in 1945, developed into modern Korean nationalism, and became reinforced through the experiences of economic growth, the democratization movement, and the foreign currency crisis. In Japan, the moral education of *shushin* with a focus on the national polity (*kokutai*) was abolished in the education reform process by the occupation forces. The so-called imperial view of history disappeared from the official stage. As the territory of Japan was reduced to the Japanese archipelago, the idea

14. There are three major clans which claim to be descendants of Gija. These clans, namely, Han (韓), Seon-u (鮮于) and Gi (寄), do not marry each other, but consider themselves as Korean as any other clans. Some scholars considered Gija Joseon to have been ruled by Han lineage, and not foreign.

of Japanese as a homogeneous nation came into fashion (Oguma 2003). However, curiously enough, in Korea, the influence of Japanese imperialism remained in many ways. The imperialism that praised Japanese people and the Japanese leader was only replaced by the nationalism that praised the Korean people and the Korean leader: the contents were gone, but the forms remained. Especially after the Korean War, the national mobilization system was reestablished in the South as well as in the North. The so-called “Fifteen Years War” (the Pacific War) was over in Japan, but in Korea, that war continued in a sense. Its nationalistic elements were strengthened as the competition occurred between the North and the South over which side was more nationalistic, and therefore more legitimate. Despite the official effort to liquidate the colonial legacy, not much serious reflection or reexamination was made for the institutions and policy tools adopted and learned by Koreans through the Japanese during the process of modernization. Therefore, while Japan and the Japanese were the object of hatred and rejection, many Japanese ways remained in Korea, among which Japanese-style nationalism was not an exception.

When nationalism was regarded as more important than any other universal values, democratic processes, freedom of speech, and human rights were subject to suspension for the sake of the nation. Park Chung-hee and Kim Il Sung were champions of nationalism in their own ways, as they both shrewdly manipulated nationalist symbols and values in their efforts to overcome supposed “national crises.” Park competed not only with Kim over who was more nationalistic, but also with his political enemies, and student activists. With superpowers looming close by and national reunification ahead, they found Japanese-style German nationalism extremely convenient and attractive political tools.

As Koreans recovered national pride and confidence as a result of the rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s witnessed a resurgence of interest in things Korean. When this nostalgia joined hands with commercialism, the search for and the invention of traditions came to be an important part of Korean cultural life.¹⁵ This

commercialized nationalism or nationalist commercialism was a far cry from the kind of nationalist drive found under the authoritarian rule of the early 1980s.¹⁶ The experience of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the success of the democratization movement, and the so-called peaceful change of political power provided occasions for more frequent expressions of national pride. Even the globalization drive by the Kim Young-sam government proved to be yet another occasion for boosting nationalism in the context of competition among countries on the international level. The foreign currency crisis in 1998-1999 was regarded as a national crisis and saw citizens coming out to save the nation through the Gold Collection Movement, reminiscent of the "Encouragement Movement to Use Native Products" (*Mulsan jangnyeo undong*) and the Movement to Redeem the National Debt (*Gukchae bosang undong*) in the past. This crisis seems to have rekindled sentiments over defensive nationalism, which a growing number of Koreans had been inclined to forget.

Conclusion

As we have examined, it was a sense of cultural superiority that was responsible for discrimination against foreigners in traditional Korea. The idea of ethnic homogeneity came relatively late, and remained to overshadow and characterize Korean nationalism because of the

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15. It was at this time that the novel titled *Dan* (丹), which portrayed the ancient tradition of spiritual training, was published and immediately became a bestseller. The publication of *Hwandan gogi* was part of the efforts to recover the long lost glories of ancient Korea. Many other books such as *Na-eui munhwa yusan dapsagi* and *Soseol dongui bogam* (Exemplar of Korean Medicine) became million sellers.
 16. The nationalist drive under President Chun Doo-hwan was partly responsible for the decision to stop selling coffee at the vending machines installed in the government office buildings, military units, and schools. Government officials and soldiers were asked to drink *guksancha* (tea produced in Korea) only. Government officials found to be wearing imported neckties were reprimanded. Smoking foreign cigarettes was heavily fined. These are extreme cases, but the government was always conscious of the criticism by student activists.

unusual political and cultural circumstances of the Korean War, national division, authoritarian rule, the Cold War, and a myriad of other factors. Especially important historical factor was the loss of confidence and pride in Korean civilization during modernization. When both the West and Japan presented themselves with “superior” technology, scientific knowledge, and industrial power, Korea had to resort to the idea of a “Kultur”-style German nationalism and solidarity in the forms of a symbology based on myths of a common language and blood.

It is no wonder that Koreans had great difficulty overcoming ethnic nationalism if one considers the traumatic experience of war and division, as well as the depressing sense of being a victim in international power politics. Concerns and criticisms have been raised about the nature of Korean nationalism, but thus far, not very successfully. Recent enthusiasm for multiculturalism in Korea should be examined in this context. The discourse of multiculturalism is the terrain upon which advocates for human rights and other universal values pose a challenge to those who regard multiculturalism as a threat to the survival and prosperity of the nation-state. Ironically, it is not Charles Taylor but Siono Nanami who seems to give inspiration to many Koreans. According to her bestselling novel *The Story of the Romans (roma-in iyagi, romajin monogatari)*, it was the Romans’ flexible attitudes to the absorption of foreign elements without insisting on old ways that enabled them to build their mighty empire. Multiculturalism is identified with being a successful cultural borrowing or cultural hybrid.¹⁷

However, multiculturalism may not remain a handy tool of the nation-state. The idea of multiculturalism is inherently subversive to the nation-state. The official endorsement of a multiculturalist policy

17. Multiculturalism is expected to help Korean society absorb and ingest diverse cultural elements, enrich Korean culture, and make Korean society more adaptive and resilient, i.e., more competitive on the international stage. It is important to note that “cultural melting pot” is the expression chosen to describe the vision and goals of the policy to support education of multicultural families announced by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development in May 2006.

will inevitably invite questions of human rights and other universal values as well as complaints against reverse discrimination and increasing financial burden, for which few Koreans seem to be prepared at this time. Many essays and policy proposals that employ the expression “multicultural” do not properly address the question of the character and content of multicultural life. Instead, they accept multiculturalism simply as values to guide government policy and educate the general public, and do not show any concrete vision for the realization of multicultural society in Korea. As Oh (2007) correctly points out, what is needed is not the introduction or advocacy of multiculturalism, but an in-depth deliberation over what shape a multicultural society should take.

Another crucial problem with the current discourse on multiculturalism lies with the understanding of the concept of culture itself. Still firmly rooted in the idea of national culture, many advocates of multiculturalism in Korea are not prepared to see diversity within a culture, nor are they prepared to recognize an individual except as a member of a clear and distinct, homogeneous cultural or ethnic group. Without the ability to accept that what is now called Korean culture may simply be an outcome of ongoing compromises, competitions, negotiations, and contradictions between different cultures, you end up with the rigid notion that cultures always have to be defined according to their respective boundaries and closures.

Accepting the concept of multiculturalism tends to make us take national and cultural boundaries for granted. In the naïve belief that differentiation on the basis of culture is far better than that on the basis of blood, we are misled to overlook the ideology of the nation-state that lies beneath the concept of culture, something that Nishikawa (2006) so eloquently pointed out. It is regretful that some cultural education materials developed under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family have attempted to teach the essence of different national cultures to Korean husbands and family members of marriage migrant women, believing that such cultural knowledge would promote mutual understanding and peaceful assimilation. I firmly believe that cultural education should be target-

ed to protect individuals' rights and choices, develop their ability to negotiate and compromise, and help find a solution for existential problems rather than foster understanding and preserving of different cultural traditions as is the case in current multicultural policies in Korea.

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GLOSSARY

An Jeong-bok	安鼎福	<i>mutong</i>	無統
<i>biajok</i>	非我族	<i>naisen ittai</i> (J.)	內鮮一體
Byeongjo	兵曹	<i>nanggwan</i>	郎官
Dangun	檀君	<i>Samguk yusa</i>	三國遺事
Dongi	東夷	<i>Samhan jeongtong ron</i>	三韓正統論
<i>gamchal</i>	監察	Seonggyungwan	成均館
Gija	箕子	Seongnihak	性理學
Gojoseon	古朝鮮	Seupdokgwan	習讀官
Gukchae bosang undong	國債報償運動	Shang (Ch.)	商
<i>guksancha</i>	國產茶	<i>shushin</i> (J.)	修身
Hansagun	漢四郡	Silhak	實學
Hong Bong-han	洪鳳漢	Silla	新羅
<i>honhyeol</i>	混血	Sin Chae-ho	申采浩
Hullyeonwon	訓練院	<i>sunhyeol</i>	純血
Hwa-i sasang	華夷思想	Taejo	太祖
<i>Hwandan gogi</i>	桓檀古記	Taejong	太宗
Hwanung	桓雄	<i>waegu</i>	倭寇
<i>hyanghwa</i>	向化	Wiman	衛滿
<i>ie</i> (J.)	家	Yao (Ch.)	堯
<i>Jewang ungi</i>	帝王韻紀	Yejin	女眞
Jun	準	Yeonsan-gun	燕山(君)
<i>kokugaku</i> (J.)	國學	Yi Seong-gye	李成桂
<i>kokutai</i> (J.)	國體	Yi Ik	李翊
Kwon Geun	權近	Zhou (Ch.)	紂
Mahan	馬韓	Zhu Xi (Ch.)	朱熹
Mulsan jangnyeo undong	物產獎勵運動		

(Ch.: Chinese; J.: Japanese)