The Anthropology of the Discourse on the Koreanness of Koreans

Han Kyung-Koo

Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the making of the hanguginnon or hanguk munhwaron in modern Korea. Special attention is also given to the influence of nihonjinron. This topic has not attracted much attention until recently, because of the small size and less commercialized nature of the Korean publication, and foreign readers' general lack of interest in a relatively poor and unthreatening country like Korea. As the very idea of a national culture is predicated on the existence of nations with clear boundaries and distinct histories, the diversity, conflicts, and changes within nation states are largely ignored in the discourse pursuing national essence. What is called the "national culture" is often the result of competition and compromise among different groups that aspire for political, social and cultural hegemony within a nation. In East Asia colonialism and internal Orientalism also played important roles in identifying and constructing national cultures, often accepted and internalized the Social Darwinian message of the colonizer that indigenous traditions were less fit, and were actively engaged in cultural engineering by criticizing one's own national character and proposing its reformation, thereby increasingly resembling their enemies by adopting the same method and logic.

Keywords: Korean culture, cultural nationalism, nihonjinron, national character, internal Orientalism

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Introduction

This paper is an attempt to examine the making of hanguginnon, the discourse on the Koreanness of the Koreans or hanguk munhwaron, the discourse on the Koreanness of Korean culture in modern Korea. At the same time it will explore the influence of nihonjinron and nihon bunkaron, the discourse on the Japaneseness of the Japanese and of Japanese culture, respectively, on the making of hanguginnon.

It is rather ironical that the search for national essence is becoming increasingly important in the age of globalization when all the nations in the world are supposed to grow similar through increased contact among them. But, on closer observation, national cultures seem to be constructed and reconstructed all over the world as a result of such contact. Nationalism, instead of losing influence, has gained increased popular interest and support in a far more sophisticated form of cultural nationalism, the quest for national identity in this increasingly globalizing world.

Since several alarmed authors have been pointing out the growing nationalist tendency in the pursuit of national identity in Korea, it seems high time to examine hanguginnon. Although repeated efforts have been made to understand and identify the unique cultural patterns of Korea,[1] very few have actually attempted to examine the discourse on the Koreanness of the Koreans and of Korean culture itself. If we consider the fact that nihonjinron has been one of the most hotly discussed topic in the field of Japanese studies,[2] the strange absence of academic interest in the discourse on Koreanness as a theme is rather striking. Koreans' interest in this discourse may appear to pale in comparison to the enthusiasm Japanese people have shown for nihonjinron,[3] but Koreans have certainly been interested in the Koreanness of the Koreans, as their pride in themselves as a state comprised of a single ethnicity (danil minjok gukga) attests. However, this interest did not develop into a sort of cultural industry as its Japanese counterpart nihonjinron did in Japan.

1. For recent attempts, see Kim Kwang-Ok (1998) and others in *Korea Journal* 38.3.
2. See Aoki (1992), Befu (1987), Minami (1994), and Han (1994) for detailed discussion on this topic.
3. According to one estimate, more than a thousand books seem to have been published after the war (Han 1994).

This may be because of the small size and the less commercialized nature of the Korean publishing industry, as Kweon suggests (Kweon 1999). Another more important reason is that, in addition to the fact that Korea has been largely misunderstood as part of the Chinese civilization, Korea has not been regarded as a potential threat to the West as Japan has been; Korea has neither fascinated nor threatened the Westerners as Japan has. Nothing like The Chrysanthemum and the Sword has ever been written about Korea, and the identity of Korean culture has not become a heatedly discussed topic for both Koreans and foreigners. In addition, Korea has not been vociferous in its protest against Western prejudice and criticism as Japan has been. In fact, there has been no Korea-bashing on a large scale. Still another important reason is that few foreigners have tried to understand why Korea failed in her efforts toward modernization and became colonized. If Western scholars' enthusiasm for nihonjinron has been mainly based on the quest for the secret of Japan's success, it is not surprising that hanguginnon did not become an object of interest for Westerners. Hanguginnon came to attract a larger audience only after South Korea's rise as a major economic power through her spectacularly rapid economic growth.

Whatever the reasons for the initial lack of or the later rise in interest in hanguginnon, the very idea of hanguginnon is based on the premise that there is something called a national culture. Unlike the old anthropologists of the Culture and Personality School who tended to think in terms of one culture for one nation or ethnic group, many modern anthropologists consider national culture as a hegemonic construction composed of the cultural characteristics of the dominant group or the result of competition and compromise among different groups that aspire for political, social and cultural hegemony within a nation. This means that there might not be such a thing as Korean culture or Korean character per se. What has often been called Korean culture or Korean character is but a result of the

generalization or selection of certain traits from the very diverse cultural and personality features of Koreans of different classes, ages, sexes, times, and places. Adding a modifier and talking about "traditional" Korean culture further begs the question of "tradition" and "modern"[4] and simply presupposes the existence of a primordial Korean culture. By trying to identify "traditional" Korean culture, the timelessness or immutability of the national culture is assumed and the existence of a national culture is naturalized, i.e., made to be taken for granted. The idea of a national culture also presupposes the homogeneity and integration of people. Differences between regions, classes, historical periods, and ethnic groups are all ignored in the notion of a national culture. Diversity, conflict, contestation and change are largely ignored in the pursuit of a national essence or archetype. Also ignored is the interaction and mutual influence among the cultures.[5]

Recently, there were some efforts to apply Hobsbawm's notion of the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and shed light on the recentness of so-called traditions in Korea. These efforts,[6] by arguing that tradition is man-made, i.e., the result of historical processes and changes, deconstructed some of the beliefs about Korean culture, but have not yet been quite successful in shedding light on the political nature of the very concept of national culture.

What is often called the national culture of a nation is, as mentioned above, often the culture of the people that is politically, numerically, or culturally dominant, and in a colonial situation, the national culture of a colonized people is often identified and constructed by those who hold cultural hegemony. Many intellectuals of a colonized people accepted and internalized the images of their culture suggested by the colonizers, who, in the age of Social Darwinism, tended to regard the culture of the colonized as less fit for survival, or, in extreme cases, slandered, distorted, and underestimated the colonized culture with the hidden agenda of justifying the colonization. In the same way, many negative statements that were the result of conscious manipulation by sinister intellectuals came to be included in the discourse on the Koreanness of Koreans, as part of the received wisdom of the natives.

4. The so-called traditional Korean culture that is the subject of folklore studies and classical ethnography is the result of profound historical changes the colonial experience, war, process of industrialization and the new forms of social, political and personal relations that are also result of these changes. It is well known that culture can be defined in various ways; more than one hundred and seventy-five definitions were found to exist in the early 1950s and the number has increased since then. The relation of culture to society is a dynamic, complex, and multifaceted process. It is an oversimplification to conceive of a single cultural system as reflecting or influenced by a single social system. Culture itself is a contested terrain in this sense.
5. See Wolf (1982), Said (1979) and Anderson (1983) for detailed discussion.
6. For example, *gimchi*, which has become a representative of the very essence of Koreans, is found to be a recent invention on close examination (Han 2000c).

The Shaping of Hanguginnon or the Discourses on the Koreanness of Koreans

Preliberation Period

During the Joseon dynasty, Korean elites, the yangban, took great pride in the high degree of the Confucianization of Korea and delighted in the epithet of the "nation of decency and manners in the East" (dongbang ye-ui jiguk). Especially after the fall of the Ming in China, Korea proclaimed herself "little China" (sojunghwa) since the original civilization or the "middle kingdom" had fallen into the hands of barbarians and the Way was lost except in Joseon. Korea took it upon herself to carry on the torch of morals and civilization. This pride, of course, was the result of the spread of Confucian values across the country during the Joseon dynasty.

But, when Korea became colonized in 1910, Confucianism and all that was associated with it were identified as the main reasons for Korea's misfortune, and came under heavy attack. It was only natural that the yangban, the main proponents of Confucianism, were harshly criticized during the colonial period. Korean intellectuals as

well as Japanese writers lamented that everybody in Korea tried to become a yangban, competing for prestige through the strict observation of rules of ritual and codes of conduct.

This so-called "yangban-ization Thesis" seems very powerful indeed, and can be found in the characterizations of Korean culture by some Japanese and American scholars, as I have noted elsewhere (Han 2000b). For example, in an ethnographic study of Korea's upper middle class life in the mid-1990s, Denise P. Lett asserts that the "growth of South Korea's middle class can be characterized as the "yangban-ization" of Korean society in the modern context" (Lett 1998, 212). Lett resorts to cultural explanation when she argues—not only that Korea's contemporary urban middle class exhibits upper-class characteristics, but also that this is due to a culturally inherited disposition on the part of Koreans to seek high status, combined with a favorable political and economic climate that has made it possible for many Koreans in South Korea to actually achieve this status" (Lett 1998, 2). In this way Koreans are again represented as inherently and overly status conscious, which is considered one of the characteristics of Asian people. Lett borrows the concept of "yangban-ization" (a process by which lower class families raise their social ranking and pass for yangban through the cultivation of status symbols and "meticulous efforts to conform to the behavior model of the upper yangban") from Yi Gwang-gyu and Suenari Michio to explain the status seeking tendency of the middle class in contemporary Korean society.

But, it seems that the concept of yangban-ization has some critical problems and cannot be used to suggest Koreans' deep-rooted cultural proclivity for status. Yangban-ization, far from the preoccupation of the majority of Koreans during the Joseon dynasty, might have been triggered by colonization. Moreover, the idea that there was extensive social mobility in the later Joseon period (the population of yangban becoming the majority!) was, according to a study on the social history of the Joseon dynasty (Song 1987), based on a misinterpretation of registration data. It was virtually impossible for lower class families to raise themselves to yangban status during the

Joseon dynasty when the genealogical positions of all the yangban families could easily be traced and identified with the aid of genealogical records regularly published by lineage organizations.

When the Joseon dynasty fell, the yangban, its governing class, lost their moral and power basis, too. As yangban could no longer distinguish themselves or raise their family status by taking high office and serving in the political arena, they were forced to concentrate on the display of their status in the sphere of ritual practices. Thus, it was only after the fall of the Confucian Joseon dynasty that the yangban became dissociated from power and were reduced to a lifestyle that middle and lower class families could actively emulate by adopting the paraphernalia of ancestor worship. The fact that the yangban were no longer a significant political power made it possible for the common people to emulate them by investing in elaborate ancestor rituals and buildings. Yangban-ization, if it happened at all in full scale, started only after the colonization of Korea by Japan. The yangban-ization process was the result, not the cause, of colonization. In the same way, Sanskritization should be reexamined as a result of British colonization and not simply as the Indians' cultural obsession with status (Han 2000b).

In addition to this status seeking, other characteristics of the Confucian interpersonal relationship structure also became the object of severe criticism. Dominance and subordination, authoritarianism, and servility seemed to foster Koreans' proneness to flatter and engage in double play, to mix and fail to differentiate the self and the other. Confucianism was regarded as responsible for the degeneration of Korean culture, the failure to modernize, and the loss of independence. It is indeed interesting that this Confucianism came to be celebrated as a contributing factor in Korea's rapid economic growth in the late 1980s.[7]

It is also important to note that many of the characteristics pointed out by hanguginnon writers may not be so uniquely Korean, but

7. Serious efforts have been made since the late 1980s to rethink the role and value of Confucianism in the form of what can be called the Confucian capitalism thesis.

can also be found almost universally in many premodern, agricultural societies. According to hanguginnon writers, the peasant hamlet was generally self-sufficient and a world in itself to the inhabitants. The division of labor was not well developed and peasants were expected to engage in necessary exchange and cooperation in all spheres of life. All inhabitants were expected to follow an elaborate and readily understandable code of conduct, and the entire village often functioned as a unit of social control. As irrigation was based on a complicated system of dams, gates, and canals to share and distribute water, a certain level of communal solidarity and control was necessary.[8] These ideas sound quite plausible and have often been used by hanguginnon writers to describe and explain the culture and behavior patterns of Koreans, but the same has been used by nihonjinron writers quite frequently to describe Japanese culture.

If much of the so-called typically Korean values and behavior patterns can be found in many other peasant societies all over the world, this means that these characteristics may not be so uniquely Korean. One explanation for this might be that this happens because traditional and preindustrialized Korea is compared with the modern and industrialized West or Japan. As long as the modern, industrialized, and urban culture is the standard of comparison, all the traditional, preindustrial, and rural cultures of the world will appear identical.[9]

It is rather surprising that even in the Confucian state of the

8. It is also important to note that some forms of cooperative work in rice cultivation, for example, transplanting, came rather late as result of advances in agricultural methods and cannot be regarded as a contributing factor in the shaping of the cooperative village community.

9. This does not mean that Korean traditional villages did not differ from those of Japan or China. For example, it should be remembered that many *yangban* families resided in the countryside of Joseon, making school, party, lineage, and affinal ties much more important than communal solidarity based on common residence. This is in striking contrast to the conditions in Tokugawa Japan where samurai warriors were not allowed to live in the countryside but had to reside in or near the castle of their feudal lords. The fact that Japanese villagers were made collectively responsible for taxes and other duties made the quality of Japanese villages communal solidarity far different from that of Korea.

Joseon dynasty, which appears to have been a well integrated cultural whole, there were significant differences of opinion among the intellectuals concerning the cultural identity of Korea. Some tended to emphasize the early civilizing efforts by Gija in Korea and the essential identity of Korean culture with that of China, while others attached importance to the distinctiveness and independence of Korean culture by tracing the origin of Koreans to Dangun. As is well known, in the thirteenth century when the Mongols repeatedly invaded the kingdom of Goryeo, the cult of Dangun, limited until then to the Guwolsan mountain area in Hwanghae-do province, began to develop into a national worship venerating Dangun as the founder of the original Korean state of Gojoseon (Ancient Joseon) and the progenitor of the Korean nation.

In the late fourteenth century, Jeong Do-jeon, the chief designer of the yangban bureaucrat state of Joseon, tried to assert that Korea was as old as China and that Korean culture was as civilized as that of China by emphasizing Dangun. He made it clear that this new Joseon was the successor to the Gojoseon founded by Dangun and civilized by Gija.[10] As Dangun came down from heaven and had no relation to China, he was regarded as a political hero who founded the first state in Korea and fathered the Korean nation. Gija was considered a cultural hero who had civilized Koreans by teaching decency and good manners. Thus, Jeong established a sort of balance and division of labor between Dangun and Gija, and Koreans could claim a dual identity of a "distinct but civilized" nation in a world dominated by the military and cultural hegemony of China.

However, this balance between Dangun as the native king and political hero and Gija as the Chinese scholar and cultural hero proved to be a precarious one. With the progress of Confucianization, the significance of Dangun and worshipping him notably declined, while the relative importance of Gija increased. This decline of Dangun is clearly reflected in the new view of history proposed by Han

10. Gija was a sage who left China and moved East when King Wu of Zhou staged a successful revolt against King Zhou of Yin.

Baek-gyeom[11] in the early seventeenth century, which argued that a Period of Two Koreas had existed: Dangun's Joseon in the north and the three states of Han (Mahan, Jinhan, Byeonhan) in the south. This dualistic view of Korean history was based on the Confucian conception of legitimate succession. By tracing the legitimate line of succession through Gija's Joseon, Mahan, Silla, and so on, some intellectuals of the later Joseon period virtually ousted Dangun from Korean history and made Gija the the initiator of cultural and political activities in Korea, thus celebrating the Sinification of Korea. This easily developed into the concept of Korea as "little China" when the "real" China came to be regarded as no longer existing.

Scholars like An Jeong-bok and Yi Jong-hwi, however, did not agree with such Sinification and instead asserted that Dangun had been the first civilizer-king of ancient Korea. Through this they proposed deeming Korea as a cultural identity distinct from and on a par with China.

To these different ways of understanding the cultural identity of Koreans was added another fresh contribution by Han Chi-yun who was interested in how others understood Korean history. He compiled Haedong yeoksa (The History of Korea) by first searching and copying all the relevant records from various history books published in China and Japan, and then classifying and organizing these records into a system. It was the first known effort to understand Korean history from the perspective of foreigners and attests to the growth of the international awareness of the intellectuals of the Joseon dynasty. For those who do not appreciate the significance of this international perspective, this book appears simply ridiculous, lacking many important elements.

It was in this context that Korea came into contact with Christianity and then the gunboats of the West and Japan. Some Korean scholars tried to import not only advanced technology but also the

11. The Han clan, Seonu clan, and Gi clan of Korea trace their legendary origins to King Jun of Gija Joseon, who fled south and became the king of Mahan when Wiman usurped his throne.

Christian religion (Seohak or Western Learning) from Qing China. Others were alarmed at what they perceived to be the moral threats posed by Western Learning and tried to crush these efforts by massacring the converts. This extreme position developed into the "defending the righteous and rejecting the wrong" (wijeong cheoksa) movement opposing the opening of the ports.

Korea's miserable failure in modernization and subsequent colonization was a great shock to this position based on moral superiority, and the despair of the Koreans developed into a wholesale devaluation of the values and attitudes of the past, especially the idea of Korea as "little China" and a morally superior nation. After the miserable failure of the Donghak (Eastern Learning) Uprising, which was evidently the first and the last effort to reform Korea by revitalizing native values, and as Korea's colonization seemed to prove that traditional Korean culture was no longer viable, denial and criticism of the past became analoguous with progress and modernization. Thus, the prevalent tone of hanguginnon became extremely negative. The very fact that Korea had been colonized by Japan was enough to mark traditional Korean culture and behavior patterns as unworthy and harmful.

This was heavily influenced by the cultural attacks of Japanese colonialist intellectuals. Also important was the role of internal Orientalism. Japan, which has long been a victim of internal Orientalism by China and Korea before falling victim to western Orientalism, was now on the offensive. Especially condemned was Koreans' incurable proclivity toward factionalism as attested by the factional strife of the Joseon period, but it is interesting to note that factionalism was a quality with which the Japanese were obsessed. Meiji Japan emerged as a unified state from a country composed of more than a hundred separate feudal domains after internal wars and armed rebellions. "Venerate the Emperor" was the rallying cry to unite these divided Japanese into one in order to expel the Western barbarians. Factionalism and many other "premodern" qualities typically considered "Japanese" by Japanese and Westerners alike (that are universal, in fact), were projected onto Koreans consciously or unconsciously dur-

ing the colonial period. Yi Tae-jin argues that the emphasis on the Koreans' factionalism was part of the deliberate defamation efforts exercised by Japanese colonialists (Yi Tae-jin 1987).

Other negative views in the form of the "peninsular character theory" (bandojeok seonggyeok ron) and the "stagnation theory" (jeongcheseong ron) emerged as well. The problems and distortions involved in these have been amply criticized by Yi Gi-baek (Yi Gi-baek 1987) and Kang Jin-cheol (1987), and need not be repeated here. These negative views of Korea were often the result of conscious distortion and manipulation by Japanese colonialist intellectuals as well as of Orientalist and internal Orientalist intellectuals. The situation was aggravated by haphazard and superficial observations limited in time and space.

What is critical is the fact that many Koreans internalized these foreign views of Korea[12] and came to accept the supposed adverse effects of peninsular character, stagnation, factionalism, and Confucian values on social change and modernization. Koreans came to blame themselves and their culture for their loss of independence, failure to modernize, and poverty.

As shown in "The Character Features of the Korean People" (Appendix A), "The Real Nature of the Korean People" (Appendix B), "The Causes of the Ills" (Appendix C), Korean intellectuals accepted and internalized such characterizations as emotional volatility, undisciplined energy, inability to sustain productive efforts for long periods, cantankerous resistance to authority, heroic ambition, cheerfulness in the face of disaster, pride, uncontrollable rage, obsession with family and hierarchy, the lack of public-mindedness, formalism, family-centeredness, factionalism, tendency to show off, male superiority, ritualism, nepotism, and cronyism. In this way, it was thought natural that Koreans with these defects were not able to govern themselves, failing to modernize, and came to lose independence and

12. Japan s apparent success in the modernization effort made Korean and Chinese intellectuals look up to Japan and eager to learn her secrets of success. What was especially painful was that Japanese leaders tended to dissociate Japan from China and Korea in an effort to deny Japan s Asian qualities.

be colonized.

All these undesirable characteristics of a backward society led to the argument pointing to the necessity to reform the national character and turn Korea into an advanced country. Yi Gwang-su and Choe Nam-seon were the leaders of this line of thought. We can find in these figures what some writers call a "self-inflicted severance with tradition." In the eyes of the intellectuals of the colonial period who held an extremely negative view of traditional culture, the behavior patterns of the past were responsible for Korea's colonization. Therefore, in order for Korea to regain independence, it was necessary to modernize and become strong by getting rid of these harmful traditional patterns that were only hindering the process of modernization. For them it was the responsibility of the intellectuals to find out and condemn the undesirable elements in Korea's traditional culture.

"Hanguginnon" after Liberation

Even after liberation, the major arguments of hanguginnon writers did not differ much from those of the colonial period except that the significant cultural Other changed from Japan to the West, especially the United States of America. Because Korea was regarded as a poor and backward society that needed to be modernized, it was again considered imperative to identify and abolish the undesirable elements in the cultural patterns and national character. To serve this purpose, the negative views on Korea shaped during the colonial period persisted, as shown in "The Typical Characteristics of the Korean People" (Appendix D).

Yi Eo-ryeong may be regarded as one of the most popular hanguginnon writers in the 1960s involved in this discussion. In his best-selling book, Heuk sok-e jeo baram sok-e (In the Earth, In That Wind), which is a collection of essays written for the Kyunghyang Daily News, Yi selected behavior patterns, games, folk tales, clothes, books, and diverse artifacts of Korea and revealed the elements of feudalism, defeatism, irrationalism, cowardice, cruelty hidden in these. For example, he finds Koreans' favorite game of yunnori extremely

tragic, in that the score of each player is determined by the combination of the relative positions of the four sticks, contrary to the western game of dice where the score of each player is absolutely simple and self-evident. The fact that whether a certain stick falls face up or face down does not matter in itself, but that the score of a particular throw is determined only by the combination of the four symbolizes, in Yi's eyes, the collective nature of and the suppression of individualism in Korean society. Whatever one is or does in Korean society, one's fortune is always dependent on the performance and attitude of others; this situation reminds Yi of the "power struggle of the four political factions" of the Joseon period that he loathes so much. Moreover, in yunnori, one piece (called mal or "horse") can give a free ride to another of the same party, and can kill the other party's piece by catching up with it. There is no safety on the yutpan (board) as in Korean society; the only way to win is to run away from this loathsome and dangerous arena as soon as possible.

Turning the pages of his book today, one is struck by the ruthlessness of the self-criticism that amounts to masochistic self-torture. His readers in the 1960s must have felt a secret joy in discovering such terribly undesirable qualities hidden in their daily lives and must have resolved to correct those evils in themselves.

Yi later recalls that he intentionally presented such harsh views of Korean culture to quicken the process of discarding the undesirable elements of traditional culture. In "Forty Years after In the Earth," the appendix to the fortieth year anniversary edition of his book, Yi changed many aspects of his position and reinterpreted the same cultural patterns and artifacts in a more positive way, justifying his former statements as well-intended criticisms to help Korean society achieve the goal of modernization and economic growth.

Here we see a case of an intellectual actively engaged in social and cultural engineering, using the discourse on culture as a means to move society in a certain direction.[13] Yi's book was perhaps far more influential than the works of other hanguginnon writers whose

13. Yi s writing makes it clear that he selected and interpreted certain aspects of Korean culture in certain ways in order to serve the modernization efforts of Korea. What we have here is the admission by one of Korea s leading intellectuals and policymakers confessing that he depicted Korean culture in a particular way to serve the nation. It is not surprising that Yi later served as the Minister of Culture, who worked to project a very positive image of Korea.

approaches were more balanced and academically oriented[14] because the former had one clear message: tradition is loathsome and must be discarded.

Compared to Yi's "chemically pure" construction, the works of others seem rather ambiguous and ambivalent. The works by Choe Jae-seok and Yun Tae-rim are more academically oriented and do not engage in sweeping generalizations. Although there are great similarities in their characterization of Koreans and Korean culture, Choe and Yun tend to take a more or less positive view of native traditions.

Another hanguginnon writer who merits special attention is Professor Jo Ji-hun, a poet and scholar of Korean literature. As Head of the Institute of National Culture at Korea University, he directed the compilation of the Outline of National Culture Series and wrote the Introduction to the Cultural History of Korea in addition to many articles and beautiful poems.

Jo is a great admirer and lover of traditional culture, and while acknowledging the weaknesses and undesirable qualities of the native culture, he nevertheless defends it from harsh criticism and ridicule. He is deeply interested in the Siberian origin of Korean culture and folk religion, and tries to establish the unique identity of Korean culture distinct from Chinese civilization by integrating the studies of many scholars and intellectuals. His discussion of Korean meot (style, taste, grace, or elegance) is a case in point.

Things began to change in the 1980s with Korea's so-called economic "miracle." As in Japan, many elements of Korean traditional culture, hitherto regarded as obstacles to modernization, began to be praised as contributing factors in unique East Asian ways of development.

14. For example, see *The Social Character of Koreans* by Choe Jae-seok and *The Koreans* by Yun Tae-rim.

As Korea failed in her attempt to modernize and had to experience modernization under colonial rule, Western civilization was imported through Japan, and such concept as wakonyosai or "Western Technology and Japanese Spirit" remained a lasting part of the Japanese colonial legacy that would provide Koreans with the framework to understand the relation between the Self and the Other. The remnants of Japanese rule in Korea not only include materials and institutions, but also ways of understanding the world.

The devastation brought about by the Korean War made Koreans highly prone to self-criticism and also firmly determined to escape their poverty. The paramount importance of the United States in every aspect of Koreans' lives after the Korean War made the U.S. the new cultural Other against whom Koreans had to measure their every shortcoming and backwardness.

After the military coup in 1961, the authoritarian regime pursued rapid economic growth and modernization, and virtually declared war on traditional culture when President Park Chung-hee argued that the New Community Movement would be a spiritual revolution. In a nationwide pursuit of wealth at any cost, overcoming the so-called yeopjeon mentality[15] or feudal mentality became sort of an obsession. This emphasis on "can-do spirit" and "hungry spirit" was to fade away as Korea achieved economic affluence.

Instead of self-criticism and self-blame, Koreans began to be accused of overconfidence and conspicuous consumption. Amid the cries denouncing the carefree attitude of the "Orange Tribe,"[16] new forms of hanguginnon emerged. As the papers by Kweon Sug-In and Yi Jeong Duk deal with this new tendency in hanguginnon at length,

15. *Yeopjeon*, a common name for an old coin used during Joseon period, became useless after colonization and the currency reform; hence, *yeobjeon* mentality means the typical Korean mindset of giving up without even trying because it is regarded as useless.
16. *Orenji jok* (orange tribe) are those young Seoul kids of the late ninety-eighties and early nineties who indulged in spending and pleasure-seeking with their parents money. They tended to avoid seriousness and liked soft, bright, and light things; hence the term orange.

and point out some of the relevant academic problems and political implications, it suffices here to mention some of the other forms of hanguginnon that consciously aim to help Korea continue on the path of economic prosperity.

One such attempt was made by Yi Meon-u, a professor of industrial engineering, in his bestselling book Let's Make W Theory. This book identified sinbaram (wind of God)[17] as a distinctive quality of Koreans that needed to be enlivened to regain the spectacular performance for which the Korean economy was once renowned. His main argument was picked up by Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), the public television network, and given nationwide promotion.

Another very interesting attempt was made by the authors of Han Management (Yi and Yi 1994)[18] who argued that Koreans had a national character that was particularly well suited for venture business. As I have noted in another paper (Han 2000a), this is an entirely new and positive interpretation of Korean culture.[19] What is interesting about this new interpretation is the way in which Korean culture is used by business leaders in their companies. They choose specific traditional virtues and reinterpreted them to suit the purposes of their organization.

17. The literal translation of *sinbaram* would be kamikaze in Japanese, but it has an entirely different meaning. *Sinbaram* in Korean means the state of ecstasy a shaman falls into when she or he is possessed by a spirit.
18. This is a book coauthored by a venture business leader and a professor of business administration who studied the former s company. For a detailed discussion, see Han (2000a).
19. According to Yi Min-hwa and Yi Jang-u, Koreans are said to be weak in loyalty and tend to disobey rules; these may have been considered undesirable qualities in the past, but now, they mean something quite different; Koreans are independent-minded and better fit for an ever-changing environment where workers have to make immediate decisions. Compared to the rule-bound Japanese workers for whom it takes long to reach a consensus, Korean workers can improvise and find solutions on the spot. Koreans are rather rash, but this is a desirable quality when time matters. Koreans may not be as cooperative as the Japanese, but they are very good at competition. It also means that Koreans are fit for a system of management by objectives (Han 2000a).

The Influence of Nihonjinron on the Making of Hanguginnon

Many Korean writers of hanguginnon have been heavily influenced by nihonjinron in one way or another. Hanguginnon writers of the late Joseon period and of the colonial period tried to respond to Koreans' deepest desire for independence and modernization. In the process of supposedly defending Koreans' minds and souls in the age of imperialism and colonialism, they found it useful to adopt, consciously or unconsciously, many of the points and arguments of the nihonjinron writers of prewar Japan, which were also the outcome of Japan's troubled search for a new identity as well as the struggle against the West to regain self-confidence. Thus, in challenging Japanese colonialism, many Korean intellectuals ironically ended up consciously or unconsciously emulating the arguments of nihonjinron writers.

It is surprising to find some influences of the nihonjinron even in a nationalistic religion like Daejonggyo which was founded in 1909 and played a pivotal role in the armed struggles for Korea's independence in Manchuria. Although Daejonggyo was conceived of as a spiritual weapon against Japanese imperialism, there is a striking similarity between Daejonggyo (centered on the worship of Dangun) and Shintoism.

Morevoer, in the works of the so-called nationalist historians of the 1930s, we can catch a glimpse of the chilling phenomenon of "resembling the Other while fighting the Other." Sin Chae-ho who emphasized Joseonsim (the heart of Joseon) and Joseonhon (the spirit of Joseon) was not entirely free from such practices. Korean nationalist history was, in a sense, a version of the Japanese imperialist view of history. Although they were politically opposed to Japanese imperialism, their methods were borrowed from, or at least, quite similar to those of the Japanese imperialist historians. The same can be said of Choe Nam-seon, the author of Bulham munhwaron, who argued that Japan's Shintoism had branched out from Korean Shintoism. His statements sound very nationalistic on the surface, but they encounter serious problems by sharing similar premises as nihonbunkaron. Ji Myeong-gwan (1995) points out that the central problem with Choe Nam-seon was that he agreed to resist imperialism by adopting the language of Japanese Shintoism and applying it to explain Dangun.

We can also find some other instances of parallel between hanguginnon and nihonjinron. Both Korean and Japanese writers find the natural environment very important in the shaping of a national culture. Climatic or geographic determination has such a long intellectual history that it would be meaningless to try to find out who borrowed from whom.[20]

In the case of Jo Ji-hun and Yi Eo-ryeong who emphasized the importance of climatic and geographic factors in shaping Korean culture,[21] they were mainly concerned with making comparisons to the West. The result is that the differences between the climatic and geographic conditions of Korea and those of the West were given much attention, but not those between Korea and Japan.[22]

One striking feature in the discussion of modern hanguginnon writers is the conspicuous absence of China. One of the reasons might be that China was no longer important for the discussion for Korea's future. Another reason might be that China, considered as having failed in modernization and Westernization, was not very interesting to Koreans, in the same way that Korea was not of interest to Westerners in the past. Instead of China, Japan and the West loomed large in Koreans' minds as the cultural Other. This situation is changing again, as Koreans' interest in China grows.

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20. The possibility that Yi might have been directly influenced by Watsuji was already pointed out earlier.
21. In characterizing Korean culture, Jo Ji-hun puts great emphasis on dualism. As Jo Ji-hun refers only to Ko Yu-seop, it is difficult to know whether Jo Ji-hun was directly influenced by Watsuji s discussion of dualism in his *Fudo* (Wind and Earth). In the case of Yi Eo-ryeong s *In the Earth, In That Wind*, the connection can be immediately inferred. Yi Eo-ryeong s book is the reminiscent of Watsuji s book, although Yi does not specifically refer to Watsuji.
22. Others, like Kim Yong-un, who made a comparison between Japan and Korea, were concerned with differences in the natural environment of the two countries.

While heavily influenced by nihonjinron, the role of hanguginnon writers has been different. Many nihonjinron writers since the late Meiji period willingly or unwittingly functioned as ideologues of the Japanese Empire with the Japanese government even participating in the authorship of such books as the Kokutai no hongi (Cardinal Principles of the Japanese Nation) and Shushin (Ethics or Training of Self). But hanguginnon writers have never enjoyed the endorsement of the Korean government. Most of the popular hanguginnon writers, whether they took a positive view or a harshly critical view of traditional culture, have unanimously agreed that Koreans have to discard or correct their undesirable cultural and behavioral patterns. It was only in the 1980s that the tone of the hanguginnon writers began to change in a more favorable direction.

Meiji was a period of bunmei kaika (civilization and enlightenment) devoted to learning from the West[23] but there was no such wholesale discarding of Japanese culture. Instead, many Japanese intellectuals of the late Meiji period, like members of Meirokusha (Meiji Six Society),[24] tried to regain self-respect and confidence by bringing light to the good in Japanese culture.

But the situation was totally different in Korea in that Korea was colonized, while Japan emerged from two victories against China and Russia. This made the harsh negation of native culture the mark of intellectuals in Korea. When Yi Gwang-su rebelled against old customs and morals in his novels, he immediately became extremely popular among young Koreans. The same can be said of Yi Eo-ryeong in the 1960s.

Those who advocated the native culture could not even expect popular support until the 1970s when Kim Ji-ha and some others recognized the value of folk music and literature in trying to find the

23. For example, dance parties at Rokumeikan, were organized by Meiji leaders to give the impression on the foreigners that Japan was westernized and modernized enough to justify the revision of unequal treaties.
24. It was founded in 1873, the sixth year of Emperor Meiji s reign; hence the name, Meiji Six Society.

national essence in the songs and dances of the minjung, the peasants and the workers.[25] It is understandable that those who led the minjung culture movement tended to show hostility toward the elite culture of the Joseon period as well as the new literature of the colonial period.

Conclusion: National Cultures Are Good to Think?

Interest in the collective identity of one's group seems to be a natural phenomenon widely shared by different peoples all over the world. But it is very rare that such interest in collective identity develops into a sort of industry with best-selling books and authors as it does in Japan. What is disconcerting is the fact that we may be witnessing the birth of a similar industry in Korea. Like its cousin nihonjinron, this new type of hanguginnon that started developing in Korea in the late 1980s is a form of cultural nationalism.

Cultural nationalism can be defined as the effort to revitalize the national community through creating, maintaining and strengthening the nation-state's cultural identity when this is felt to be lacking, unstable or threatened, by regarding the nation-state as the product of a unique history and culture and the collective solidarity based on these (Yoshino 1992). One of the fundamental assumptions of cultural nationalism is the existence of a nation or a national culture. For the discourse on the Koreanness of Koreans or on the Japaneseness of the Japanese to have any meaning, people must, first of all, believe that a nation is an overwhelmingly significant category which can ignore the enormous geographical and class diversity it encom-

25. It is interesting that President Park s regime, hitherto devoted to and highly successful in economic growth and modernization efforts through a negation of the traditional past, began to resort to nationalism in search of legitimacy. Intellectuals of the *minjung* culture movement bring to mind the German intellectuals who tried to find the good old German Kultur in the lives of peasants, regarded to be spiritually superior to the materially affluent and technologically advanced civilizations of France and England.

passes and the discontinuities caused by historical changes.

Having accepted this, the idea that every nation has an indigenous and unique culture seems to be just a corner away. The Korean nation or Korean culture becomes something that can be discussed as if it were a real entity, and not a construct. Therefore, regardless of how different the arguments of different hanguginnon authors are, all of them may be sending out the same basic message, which is that all Koreans are alike and that they are different from other peoples.

Lévi-Strauss, playing on Malinowski's explanation on totemism, "Animals are good to eat," observed that totemism is a system of thought of primitive people for whom "Animals are good to think." If totemism makes the relationship between different groups of people as "natural" (that is, fair and proper) as the relationship between different animals and birds, nationalism seems to make the relationship between different nation-states "natural" as well as fair and proper. That is why we can rephrase Lévi-Strauss, and say, in this age of globalization, "National cultures are good to think."

Appendix A: The Character Features of the Korean People (The Japanese Governor-General's Office, 1927)

1) being wild, luxurious, spendthrift, speculative
2) being superficial and fond of appearances and formalities
3) following others blindly
4) a strong tendency to emulate others
5) lacking in vitality
6) lacking in courage, cowardly, trying to see where the wind blows (nunchi), opportunistic, and defensive
7) self-centered
8) not serious and thorough enough
9) hard to move emotionally
10) dependent, like to ask for favors, offer bribes
11) lacking in sense of gratitude and responsibility
12) lacking in self-reliance
13) dull-witted

Appendix B: The Real Nature of the Korean People (Choe Nam-seon: Ways to Reform the Korean Nation, 1930)

1) weak will power
2) lack of courage
3) inactive
4) dependent
5) spendthrift
6) melancholy
7) lack of confidence
8) lack of pride
9) moral degradation
10) political and economic downfall

Appendix C: The Causes of the Ills (Choe Nam-seon: Ways to Reform the Korean Nation, 1930)

1) misgovernment during the Joseon period
2) ill effect of the oppression of free thoughts and ideas by the absolute authority enjoyed by Confucianism
3) education without self-reflection and self-consciousness
4) difficulty of learning Chinese characters
5) tyranny of the literati class

6) excessive formalism as a restricting force binding the thoughts and behaviors of the people to the details of etiquette and mannerism
7) irrational and uneconomical way of everyday living
8) custom of early marriage
9) blind respect for the aged
10) pervasive superstitious beliefs and practices among the Korean people

Appendix D: The Typical Characteristics of the Korean People
(Yi Gyu-tae, 1977–1983)

1) inferiority complex
2) disposition to conceal: to avoid the danger of self-exposure
3) introversion; turning their backs on a threat and trying to defend themselves in a passive and introverted way; tendency to seek rivals within the circle rather than outside
4) fatalism
5) self-deprecating tendency
6) dependence
7) vertical hierarchy
8) looking-upward; purchase expensive things and show off to others
9) face and honor
10) authoritarianism
11) uncalculating disposition
12) collectivism
13) emotion of han
14) peculiar view of the other world; this-worldly orientation
15) intuitiveness; tendency to conceal one's real motives and feelings; silent communication
16) asceticism and so on

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GLOSSARY

bulham munhwaron	不咸文化論	Ming (Ch.)	明
bunmei kaika (J.)	文明開化	minjung	民衆
Dangun	檀君	meot	멋
danil minjok gukga	單一民族國家	nihon bunkaron (J.)	日本文化論
dongbang ye-ui jiguk	東方禮義之國	nihonjinron (J.)	日本人論
Gija	箕子	sinbaram	신바람
Gojoseon	古朝鮮	sojunghwa	小中華
Haedong yeoksa	海東繹史	wijeong cheoksa	衛正斥邪
han	恨	yangban	兩班
hanguginnon	韓國人論	yeopjeon	葉錢
hanguk munhwaron	韓國文化論	yunnori	윷놀이
Meirokusha (J.)	明六社		

(Ch.: Chinese, J.: Japanese)