

Introduction

Explaining the Roots and Politics of Korean Nationalism

One afternoon in June 2002 hundreds of thousands of Korean people filled the plaza in front of city hall in Seoul, Korea. They were shouting, “Taehan min’guk” (Republic of Korea, or literally, the Great Han People’s State), and “Oh, p’ilsŭng K’oria” (Oh, victory Korea), and “Uri nŭn hana” (We are one). The scene was reminiscent of the June 1987 uprising in which equally large numbers of Koreans gathered at the plaza to demand democratic reform from Chun Doo Hwan’s authoritarian government. This time, however, they did not come out to the plaza as dissidents; they were fans rooting for the Korean soccer team that had just advanced to the semifinals of the Japan-Korea World Cup 2002. As the *New York Times* reported, “On the vast city hall plaza where a half-million demonstrators shouted protests against dictatorial rule a generation ago, about 200,000 red-shirted young people roared a new set of slogans this rainy afternoon with equally nationalistic message” (June 11, 2002). According to estimates, on that day at least seven million Koreans poured into the streets all over the nation to cheer for the soccer team. Even in Los Angeles, at 4:30 a.m. twenty thousand Korean Americans filled the Staples Center (home of the Los Angeles Lakers) to cheer for the Korean team. A “red wave” of Korean soccer fans (also known as the “Red Devils”) appeared in other places as well, such as Paris city plaza, the Korean embassy in Germany, and Varsseveld in the Netherlands, hometown of the Korean soccer team head coach Guus Hiddink.

This fervor over the World Cup was not simply about soccer. It was also about national pride, identity, and confidence. After Korea’s victory over Spain led to a semifinal showdown with Germany, President Kim Dae

Jung proudly proclaimed that it was “Korea’s happiest day since Dangun [Tan’gun]—the god-king who, according to legend, founded the Korean nation” in 2333 BC (*Asia Times Online*, June 25, 2002). A survey of 542 Koreans conducted by Han’guk Research between June 27 and 28, 2002, showed that 75 percent of the respondents felt “strong pride” that they were Koreans during the games; 76 percent felt renewed confidence in Korea’s capability in the world (*Korea Herald*, July 10, 2002). Korea’s success aroused national pride among ethnic Koreans abroad as well. In Japan, during the Korea-Germany match at Tokyo Stadium two rival Korean political organizations, the pro-South *mindan* and the pro-North *choch’ongnyŏn*, cheered together for the first time, chanting, “Taehan min’guk.” The *Korea Times* quoted Kwŏn Pyŏnghyŏn, chairman of the Overseas Koreans Foundation: “One of the most important impacts of the World Cup on the 5.6 million overseas Koreans was to arouse their pride in being [ethnic] Korean and to bond with one another beyond differences” (June 27, 2002).

The strong sense of unity and national pride displayed by Koreans during the World Cup arises in large part from an identity based on a common bloodline and shared ancestry. President Kim’s reference to Tan’gun, the mythic founder of the Korean people, was not an accident; rather, it reflects a deep-rooted sense of ethnic national identity and unity shared by Koreans. Recent polls in South Korea confirm what these newspaper accounts reveal: a survey conducted in South Korea on December 1999 by the Korea Broadcasting Station (KBS) and by Hallym University found that 68.2 percent of the respondents in South Korea consider “blood” the most important criterion of defining the Korean nation; 74.9 percent agree that “Koreans are all brothers and sisters regardless of residence or ideology”; 67.5 percent say they are “proud of our national history.”¹ I conducted a survey in the fall of 2000 in South Korea; the results reveal similar views of nation and national identity.² Ninety-three percent of the respondents reported, “Our nation has a single bloodline”; 95 percent agreed that “North Korean people are of the same Korean ethnic-nation.” In addition, 83 percent felt that Koreans living abroad, whether they had emigrated and attained citizenship elsewhere or were born outside Korea and were considered legal citizens of a foreign country, still belong to the *han* race because of shared ancestry. Reflecting such a racialized notion of nation, South Koreans feel much stronger attachment to Korean descendants in Japan (62 percent) and the United States (63 percent) than they do to Japanese (18 percent) or Americans (17 percent)

living in Korea. For precisely this reason nationalistic slogans such as “We are one” invoked belief in ethnic unity and greatly appealed to the Koreans who gathered at the Seoul plaza as well as to the overseas ethnic Koreans who congregated to celebrate in various parts of the world.³

The question “What accounts for the rise and dominance of this strong sense of ethnic national unity?” requires scrutiny, and yet despite its importance to Korean society, the historical origins and politics of Korean national identity based on a sense of ethnic homogeneity has not received adequate scholarly attention. Ethnic unity is widely assumed on both sides of the Korean peninsula, and most Koreans do not question its historicity. Indeed it seems “politically incorrect” to question the eternal and natural essence of Korean ethnic unity.⁴ However, one cannot assume that Koreans’ ethnic national identity is fixed, or is something that stems from ancient times. As Carter Eckert notes, prior to the late nineteenth century, “There was little, if any, feeling of loyalty toward the abstract concept of ‘Korea’ as a nation-state, or toward fellow inhabitants of the peninsula as ‘Koreans’” (1991, 226). As such, Korean national identity based on ethnic homogeneity should be understood as a product of particular historical processes that require scholarly attention. On the other hand, belief in ethnic homogeneity is not simply a myth or a fantasy that lacks a substantive, historical base, as some scholars have claimed (for example, Grinker 1998). Although it does entail elements of construction in its formative processes, it has real social and political significance. As Connor points out, ethnic national identity can engender “a reality of [its] own, for it is seldom *what is* that is of political importance, but what people *think is*” (1994, 140; emphasis in original). Identity has crucial behavioral consequences. Indeed, a sense of ethnic unity has served Koreans in a variety of ways from being an ideology of anticolonialism to that of national unification.

This book seeks to identify the historical processes through which Koreans came to develop national identity based on shared bloodline and to specify the ways in which this ethnic national identity has played out in Korean politics and society. Concerning the first issue, I focus on two inter-related processes: the rise and dominance of “nation” as a major source of collective or categorical identity over nonnational or transnational forms (class, for example), and the rise and establishment of a racialized and ethnicized notion of nation. With regard to the second point, I look closely at how the politics of ethnic national identity have played out in various fields,

including anticolonialism, civil war, authoritarian politics and democratization, national division and unification, and globalization.

Contending Views of the Origins of the Korean Nation

Scholars of nationalism debate the relationships among nation, nationalism, and ethnicity. Their dialogue centers around the extent to which the nation should be understood as something new and modern (“constructed,” cf. Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Giddens 1984; Hobsbawm 1990), or as a continuation of long-standing patterns of ethnicity, built on preexisting geographic or cultural foundations (“primordial,” cf. Connor 1994; Geertz 1963; Smith 1986, 1991). This dispute is over whether nationhood is a product of nationalist political mobilization of uniquely modern dimensions, or, conversely, whether the prior existence of ethnicity in fact explains much of modern nationality. The issue is particularly complicated in the Korean context, where there exists substantial overlap between the levels of race, ethnicity, and nation. When Koreans shouted, “We are one,” in Seoul’s city hall plaza and in Los Angeles’s Staples Center, they meant that Koreans are one race, one ethnicity, and one nation, regardless of their current legal citizenship, place of residence, or political beliefs. Although race is understood as a collectivity defined by innate and immutable phenotypic and genotypic characteristics and ethnicity is generally regarded as a cultural phenomenon based on a common language and history (see Yoshino 1992), Koreans have not historically differentiated between the two. Instead, race has served as a marker that strengthened ethnic identity, which in turn was instrumental in defining the nation. Race, ethnicity, and nation were conflated, and this is reflected in the multiple uses of the term *minjok*, the most widely used term for “nation,” which can also refer to “ethnic” or “race.”

What accounts for the rise and establishment of such a strong sense of ethnic national identity or racialized notion of nation held among Koreans? As in the general literature on the study of nations and nationalisms, there exist several contending views to explain the origins of the Korean ethnic nation.⁵ First, those who advocate an ethnicist or primordialist view regard the idea of Korean ethnic national unity as natural, since all Koreans are considered descendants of Tan’gun. An Hosang, the first minister of education of the Republic of Korea, for instance, defined nation, and particularly the Korean ethnic nation, as a “natural product” of those who share the same “bloodline”

and “fate” (1992, 49, 59). For An, because the most important criterion that defines a nation is bloodline, one is “born into a particular nation as its sons and daughters” (An 1992, 59). As such, nation is an ascriptive feature of individuals, not a social construction of a particular society. Many Korean historians, regardless of their ideological views, held the same view. In 1947 the prominent South Korean historian Son Chint’ae wrote, “Since the beginning of history, we [Koreans] have been a single race that has had a common historic life, living in a single territory. . . , sharing a common destiny” (cited in Duncan 1998, 198). Similarly, the well-known Marxist historian Paek Namun noted in 1946, “The Korean nation is a unitary nation with a common blood, territory, language, culture, and historical destiny for thousands of years” (cited in Pang 1992, 124). They argued that the Korean nation has been in existence since the dawn of historical time or at least since the Silla unification of the seventh century. The contest among the Three Kingdoms was taken as a struggle for the political unification of the Korean nation. As such, the contemporary sense of ethnic unity was the natural extension of historical experiences—the Korean *minjok* existed even if the word did not. Political leaders such as Rhee Syngman and Park Chung Hee of the South and Kim Il Sung of the North shared the same view. While in contention for national legitimacy and representation, they did not dispute the ethnic homogeneity of the Korean nation, which they agreed spanned thousands of years and was based on a single bloodline. In the early 1990s, North Korea even announced discovery of the tomb of Tan’gun, the mythic founder of the Korean nation, and some South Koreans sought to erect an honorary Tan’gun statue in every government office building. This primordialist view is still popular among the Korean populace, as shown in the surveys mentioned above.

Modernists or constructionists, by contrast, regard the Korean nation as a modern product of nationalist ideology that was espoused at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty. Prior to this period, they argue, Korea was a status society with a clearly defined vertical hierarchy, which divided people into elite (*yangban*), commoners, and slaves. The Korean elite would have found the idea of nationalism not only strange but also uncivilized, and they may have considered themselves to be members of a larger cosmopolitan civilization centered around China.⁶ In such a situation, people would not and did not recognize themselves as belonging to one national community.⁷ In Henry Em’s (1999) view, the Korean nation was born only with Korea’s integration into the modern world system of nations and the subsequent rise of

ethnic-nationalist historiography (*minjok sabak*) in the early twentieth century. He argues that even though Korea had a central bureaucratic state for more than a thousand years, unlike the modern nation-state, it was not interested in “nationalizing” its subjects. Ties were primarily hierarchical rather than “horizontal” as they are in the modern national community.⁸ Em also points to the rise of ethnic-nationalist historiography that replaced dynastic historiography as crucial to the birth of *minjok*—this “for the first time narrated the history of Korea as the history of the Korean *minjok*, a category inclusive of every Korean without regard to age, gender, or status distinctions” (1999, 339). In this view, the Korean nation was no exception to the general pattern of nation building seen elsewhere: it was a fundamentally modern construction that developed in conjunction with the emergence of the modern world system. This modernist (or postmodernist) position is gaining more currency among the new generation of Korean scholars in various fields, from literature to history to the social sciences (H. Kwōn 2000; H. Sin 2003; C. Yim 1999). At its extreme, Koreans’ sense of ethnic homogeneity is even taken as “myth,” “fantasy,” or “illusion” that lacks substantive historical base (Grinker 1998).

A third group of scholars dispute both positions by attempting to address the uniqueness of the Korean experience (Duncan 1998; Schmid 2002). While they do not accept the Korean nation as natural as primordialists claim, they warn against applying the Western model to the Korean case. In particular, they refer to the remarkable stability of territorial boundaries and the endurance of the Korean bureaucratic state, and they attend to the potential these have as social and cultural bases for ethnic identity. For instance, John Duncan claims that “the organizational activities of the state may have created a homogeneous collectivity with a sense of shared identity much earlier than happened in the countries of Western Europe that provide the model for ‘modernist’ scholarship” (1998, 200–201). Although these scholars use different terms in referring to the enduring collective identity maintained by premodern Koreans, such as “pre-modern nation” (*chōn kūndae minjok*) (No 1997), “proto-nation” (Duncan 1998), or “ethnie” (M. Cho 1994), they all seem to agree that because of its presence, modern nationalism was able to take root rather quickly in Korea in the late nineteenth century. In Schmid’s (2002) words, this protonation just needed to be reframed in a new language of nation and nationalism. For these scholars, it would be misleading to mechanically apply the Western model to the formation of the Korean

nation—instead, historical developments of premodern Korea should be taken into account in any explanation of the formation of the modern Korean nation.

It seems to me fruitless to continue to debate whether the Korean nation is modern or primordial. It is apparent that the very notion of nation we use today is modern and Western in its origins, largely having to do with the rise of the world system of nation-states. There is no compelling evidence to show a direct connection between the premodern conception of a political community or identity (whether it be ethnic or protonation) and this modern sense of nation. Premodern Koreans held multiple forms of identity, and there was no assurance that nation as a form of collective identity would prevail over other rival forms, nonnational and transnational, in the modern era. Similarly there was no guarantee that ethnicity would become the primary basis of the Korean nation, as it has had to compete with other potential sources of nation.

To be sure, the modern claim to nationhood is often evoked through the language of kinship and descent, and ethnicity can be a basis for nation or national identity as in Korea. Still, the two need to be conceptually and analytically distinguished. Calhoun does this by defining ethnicity as “networks of social relationships” and nation as “categories of similar individuals.” The former is reproduced through direct “interpersonal interactions,” and the latter through “the mediation of relatively impersonal agencies of large-scale cultural standardization and social organization” (1997, 28). In Benedict Anderson’s words, nation is an “imagined” community whose members are connected to each other through imagination vis-à-vis the impersonal medium of print capitalism. As a form of “categorical identities,” the defining characteristic of nation or nationality is, then, “identification by similarity of attributes as a member of a set of equivalent members” (1997, 42). As such, the individual does not require the mediation of family, community, region, or class to be a member of the nation. In essence, nationality should be understood as an attribute of the individual, not of intermediate associations.⁹ Premodern Korea had no such conception of nation as a categorical identity, although one could argue that it had some agencies of “large-scale cultural standardization and social organization.” Therefore, debate about whether the Korean nation is modern should be replaced with explanations of the historical processes in which the nation rose, was contested, overrode other contending forms of collective or categorical identities, and came to

be conflated with ethnicity and race. Nation or national identity remains a contested terrain in contemporary Korea, subject to constant challenge and reformulation.

Embedded, Contingent, and Contested: An Analytical Framework

Nation is a product of social and historical construction, especially as the result of contentious politics, both within and without, in historically embedded and structurally contingent contexts. Let me elaborate key elements in the formation of a nation, that is, historical embeddedness, contingency, and contentious politics.

EMBEDDED

I view the formation of nation *embedded* in particular social relations and history. Although the modernist view is correct in claiming that the formation of any nation inevitably includes the element of construction (Hobsbawm 1990; Gellner 1983; Anderson 1983), it is not simply the abstract process that is often conceptualized. Rather, a “nation” is socially and historically rooted, and aspects of modernity (for example, capitalism) that are said to influence the formation of the nation can have different meanings and significance in concrete cases. This explains why the spread of nationalism does not necessarily follow the pattern of its first emergence and why nationalism assumes different forms and functions as it spreads (Greenfeld 1992). In the Korean case, a sense of external threat as well as specific Korean historical experiences (for example, colonization) have been largely responsible for the rise and continued dominance of an ethnic, organic conception of nation, which stressed internal solidarity and submission to collectivist goals.

In addition, historical embeddedness can explain the continuing power and vitality of nations in this global age. In contrast to predictions from both modernization theorists and Marxists, neither economic development nor social revolution were able to uproot nationalism. Instead, nation has continued to carry mobilizing power in many parts of the world, as most clearly illustrated by ethnic nationalism and conflict in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Nationalism commands popular appeal since nation building incorporates native elements—preexisting sentiments, cultural heritages, and ethnic formations—into its formation process. As Calhoun rightly points out, demonstration of invention and manipulation should not be taken to mean that “nationalism has nothing to do with ethnicity and

draws no strength from the emotional commitments people forge in their everyday social relations” (1997, 30). In Smith’s view, as an ideology “nationalism can take root only if it strikes a popular chord and is taken up by, and inspires, particular social groups and strata” (1995, viii). In the Korean case, for instance, the Tan’gun myth struck a popular chord among Koreans just as they were facing foreign aggression. The myth’s utility in countering colonial racism and assimilation policy has left a long-lasting legacy. Historical embeddedness, not abstract formulation, explains not only the origins but also the continuing power of nation and nationalism in the present day.

CONTINGENT

That the formation of nation is embedded in particular social relations and history does not mean that the rise of nation is inevitable or that preexisting ethnic relations or cultural heritage determines a particular form of nation. Instead, both the rise of nation as a form of collective identity and the development of a particular notion of nation are a matter of *historical contingency*. First, there are no objective conditions that necessitate the emergence of nation and nationalism, though earlier social science theory sought to “predict” the emergence of nationalism (see, for example, Deutsch 1953). As many scholars of nationalism have shown, nationalism first emerged out of a concurrence of events in one country, England, and then spread due to historical coincidence. In Michael Mann’s view, “Anderson’s much-touted ‘print capitalism’ could have as easily generated a transnational or a federal West as a community of nations” (1994, 2).

By the late nineteenth century, nationalism became a powerful modern ideology that other countries came to emulate. Korea closely followed the Japanese model in the early stages of the modern nation-building process, as Japan demonstrated the efficacy of nationalism in its rise to a power in an emerging East Asian regional order. By the second half of the twentieth century, nationalism became a “canon” in both parts of the Korean peninsula and produced contentious “politics of national representation” between them. Still, it would be misleading to assume that the hegemonic position that nationalism has enjoyed in the peninsula was inevitable. In the process of its emergence and dominance, nation, as a form of categorical identity, had to compete with other forms, nonnational and transnational, such as race and class.¹⁰ Its hegemonic position was not destined, but rather is largely due to historically contingent situations. Even in premodern Korea, as John Duncan shows, there existed “several levels of identity” and “which particular identity

took precedence at any given time was dependent on historically contingent circumstances" (1998, 220). Thus, historical contingency should guide an explanation of the rise and dominance of nation as a categorical identity.

Similarly the rise and development of a particular notion of nation is historically contingent. Nation building is a historical process where various elements operate to varying degrees depending on specific historical and political conditions. As Smith argues, "Every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms. . . . Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasized" (1991, 13). Brubaker's comparative study of nationhood in France and Germany (1992) illustrates how a varying mixture of these elements produces distinctive forms of nationality in different historical and structural contexts. In Kuzio's (2002) view, ethnic factors tend to overshadow civic elements in times of crisis such as immigration, foreign wars, and terrorism. In the Korean case, once again, a sense of external threat was largely responsible for the rise of the ethnic notion of nation. It is simply wrong to regard the establishment of an ethnicized notion of nation in modern Korea as inevitable or natural. Scholars must specify historically contingent contexts that produced a particular notion of nation and nationhood.

CONTESTED

I consider *contestation* a key element in the historically contingent process of nation formation. Although the current literature on nationalism focuses on competition among different ethnic groups vying for state power or contention among different kinds of nationalism, I examine a much larger field of contentious politics in nation-building processes. In particular, I pay close attention to two interrelated processes: one in which nation came to dominate other forms of collective identities (for example, class, gender, race), and the other in which a particular notion of nation and nationhood came to dominate competing interpretations of the nation. First, nation as a collective identity competes with other forms of identity from the local to the transnational. The history of modern Western Europe shows that the rise and dominance of a nation occurred at the expense of local-regional (for example, feudal lords) and transnational (for example, churches) rivals (Mann 1993). Likewise, in modern Japan, national narratives were caught between two forces: an impulse to assimilate colonial subjects as citizens of the Japanese

empire, and the equally powerful drive to distinguish itself from its backward Asian colonies (Tanaka 1993). Duara summarizes: "Rising almost simultaneously with nationalism as a global ideology in the late nineteenth century were various transnational ideologies such as pan-Europeanism, pan-Asianism, and later pan-Arabism, pan-Africanism" (1997, 1033). Even before contending over its very notion (civic or ethnic, for example), the nation as a source of collective identity has had to compete with other forms, nonnational, subnational, or transnational.

Second, the notion of nation is contested as well. In the process of nation building different elements operate to varying degrees depending on specific historical and political conditions. However, this does not mean that structural conditions determine the rise and dominance of a particular notion of nation. Instead it must be seen as the outcome of contention over other competing notions. As Sato (1998) claims, nation can be considered "a field of politics" in which different conceptions of nationhood and forms of nationalism compete for dominance—state versus oppositional nationalism; political-territorial versus ethno-cultural conception of nationhood; civic and individualistic versus ethnic and collectivistic notion of nation, and so on (see also Brubaker 1992). This kind of internal contention is inevitable since the notion of nation, as Calhoun points out, is "so deeply imbricated in modern politics as to be 'essentially contested,' . . . because any definition will legitimize some claims and delegitimize others" (1993, 215).

Thus, this study seeks to identify two interrelated processes that has led to the formation of ethnic/racial nationalism in Korea: (1) one in which the nation came to dominate over other forms of categorical identities such as region and class (discussed in Part I); and (2) the other in which an organic, racialized, and collectivistic notion of nation based on common blood and shared ancestry came to prevail over other notions of nation (discussed in Part II). Once again it is my view that the rise and dominance of ethnic nationalism or an organic notion of the Korean nation was a product of contentious politics, both within and outside of Korea, in historically embedded and structurally contingent contexts.

Nationalism as a Force of Modernity

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion and debate among scholars in Korea and elsewhere over the concept of modernity. Terms such

as “East Asian modernity,” “colonial modernity,” “high modernity,” and “postmodernity” illustrate the diversity and scope of such debates (Barlow 1997; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1989; Shin and Robinson 1999; Tu 1996). In the Korean context, the debates particularly focus on identifying particularistic and universalistic features of modernity that appeared in Korea (see the special issue of *ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng* 21, no. 4 [1993]). The question arises because while modernity is often associated with Western Europe, what appeared in Korea was quite different from what happened in Europe. Contrary to earlier modernization theories, which assumed that societies develop along the line of Western modernity, it has now become clear that there are multiple paths to the modern world. Barrington Moore Jr.’s (1966) seminal work on diverse paths to modernity—West European bourgeois democracy, German/Japanese fascism, and Russian/Chinese communism—clearly established this idea.

However, there exists much less consensus over how to specify the paths that lead to a particular form of modernity. In the field of East Asian studies in general and Korean studies in particular, a prevailing view has emphasized the role of the “developmental state” in the East Asian or Korean transition to modernity (Amsden 1989; Evans 1995; Johnson 1982; Wade 1990; Woo 1991). The East Asian or Korean state, according to this view, was able to act as an agent of modernity since it possessed both the “capacity” to lead the transformation with an efficient Weberian bureaucracy and “autonomy” largely insulated from society (Evans 1995; Johnson 1982). In short, the “developmental” role of the state would differentiate East Asian from West European experiences in their transition to modernity.¹¹ Recently, however, scholars have begun to question such a statist approach as exaggerating the exceptional trajectory of the East Asian (and Korean) road to modernity. They claim that social groups and classes have played an equally important role in East Asian (and Korean) cases. Hagen Koo (1993), for instance, argues that Korea’s transition to the modern world has not been a smooth, evolutionary process, nor has it been dictated by the state or a foreign (even colonial) power. Instead, it has been highly “contentious,” and individuals, groups, and social classes have equally contributed to its transition processes. My earlier works (1996, 1998) likewise showed that agrarian class structure and conflict shaped Korea’s road to modernity.

The present study should be understood in this larger context, that is, as an effort to specify a mechanism of Korea’s transition to modernity.

Following an important tradition in historical sociology, I focus on nationalism as a major force that has influenced Korea's transition to the modern world. Gellner's (1983) seminal work on "nations and nationalism" showed how nationalism was a necessary component of the overall process of modernization by supplying "a mobile, literate, culturally standardized, interchangeable population." In a different context, Gerschenkron defined nationalism as "an ideology of delayed industrialization" considered necessary to "break through the barriers of stagnation in a backward country. . . [and] to place [its] energies in the service of economic development" (1962, 29). In the East Asian context, nationalism, often in the form of developmentalism, became a major mobilizing force behind first Japanese and then Korean modernization projects.

Liah Greenfeld in her study of "five roads to modernity" argues that the emergence of nationalism predated the development of every significant component of modernity. According to her, the rise of civic-individualistic nationalism in England and ethnic-collectivistic nationalism in Germany were instrumental in shaping the kind of modernity that appeared in these respective countries (that is, liberal democracy and authoritarian fascism respectively). In her view the causal order in the relationship between nationalism and modernity must be explicit: "Rather than define nationalism by its modernity, I see modernity as defined by nationalism" (Greenfeld 1992, 18). Although Greenfeld overlooks the reciprocal or interactive nature of their relationships and the historical fact that nationalism and modernization arose almost simultaneously in many parts of the world including Korea (see Shin and Robinson [1999] for a discussion of the interactive nature of modernity and nationalism), her argument that nationalism is not simply a reflection but rather is a defining feature of modernity should be taken seriously.

Thus this study is based on the premise that while nationalism is shaped by modernity, it also shapes, if not determines, the forms and nature of modernity that a particular country takes. In Korea, for instance, one can argue that nationalism based on common blood and shared ancestry has functioned as a key mechanism to establish collectivism or a strong sense of oneness. This is said to be a key feature of Korean modernity that presents a sharp contrast to the individualism of Western modernity. Nationalism can also be seen as instrumental to the rise of a "developmental ethic" that contributed to the success of Korean modernization. Although the developmental ethic may have been associated with Confucianism, as some scholars

have argued (Berger and Hsiao 1988), what transformed the Confucian ethic from a hindrance to promoter of capitalism was its linkage to nationalism. The Park regime was able to create a developmental ethic among Koreans by skillfully fusing the Confucian respect for hierarchy, harmony, and loyalty to authority with the nationalist slogan of “modernization of the fatherland.” Similarly, militant nationalism expressed in *juche* (*chuch’è*, or self-reliance) ideology is a defining feature of North Korean modernity (Cumings 1993). Finally, by looking at the contentious politics of nationalism (both internal and external) as specified above, this study can identify specific sites of contention among various social groups as well as that between state and society in shaping Korea’s road to modernity.

Beyond Essentialism

There exists a strong tradition in the scholarship on nationalism, from Hans Kohn (1945) to Donald Horowitz (1985, 2001), that views political nationalism as civic, integrative, and constructive, while ethnic nationalism is seen as dangerous, divisive, and destructive. Ethnic cleavages are considered more fundamental and permanent than other forms of cleavage, and conflict arising from them are said to be the most difficult to deal with. For instance, Diamond and Plattner argue that the “conflicts [ethnicity] generates are intrinsically less amenable to compromise than those revolving around material issues. . . because at bottom they revolve around exclusive symbols and conceptions of legitimacy. . . characterized by competing demands that cannot easily be broken down into bargainable increments” (1994, xviii). Recent research in ethnicity and nationalism that has focused on the potential danger that ethnic nationalism poses to social stability and political development in the former Soviet Empire and Eastern Europe reflects such an orientation (Diamond and Plattner 1994; Horowitz 2001; Mostov 1994; Urban 1991).

Yet such a view essentializes the nature of ethnic nationalism, overlooking diversity and complexity in its role and functions.¹² In Japan, for instance, ethnic nationalism is said to have functioned as a major form of “populist attack on the [authoritarian] state” in place of civil society. According to Kevin Doak, the postwar “liberal” Japanese state “has not yet completely uprooted . . . ‘love of the fatherland’ and replaced it with . . . ‘love of society,’” so that civil society had to compete with ethnic nationalism as an alternative source of antistate sentiment (1997, 299).¹³ Also in the “new”

unified Germany, ethnic nationalism is being activated by the state as a potentially unifying force. Faced with the painful process of reunification, the German elite has deployed ethnic nationalism as a strategy to entice the people to finance the costs of a delegitimized German Democratic Republic regime and an apolitical German Federal Republic. As a result, the prevailing political slogan shifted from "We are the people" to "We are one people." Although this "superficial" appeal to ethnic nationalism raises growing concern among German intellectuals (Fulbrook 1994; Offe 1990), it illustrates the complex use of ethnic nationalism that is often overlooked in current literature on nationalism, which is primarily based on the multiethnic states.

Korean scholarship on nationalism has often asked whether nationalism is good, and whether it should be seen as an ideology of domination or as one of resistance (see the inaugural issue of *yōksa munje yōn'gu*). Although recent scholarship has begun to point out the dark side of Korean nationalism and its fascist potential (H. Kwōn 2000; C. Yim 1999), the prevailing view continues to cast it in a positive light, that is, as an ideology of anticolonialism, anti-imperialism, and national unification. Nationalism has also colored historical scholarship, producing highly nationalistic master narratives in both sides of the peninsula (Shin and Robinson 1999). As history, especially the history of nationalism, was closely linked to regime legitimacy, each side "patronized" its own version of nationalist master narratives. Yet, one must recognize the double-edged nature of nationalism, which can be both a blessing and a curse. The rise of nationalism would be a blessing for those people who share a common language, culture, and history but who have no nation-state to call their own. This was the case for Korea under Japanese rule. At the same time the liberating potential of nationalism can be easily converted to the basis or rationale for domination and repression, intolerance, and persecution, as seen in postcolonial Korea, both North and South (especially before the 1987 democratic transition).

Thus, nationalism in itself is fairly harmless. Only when combined with other ideologies can its effect be felt. As Smith (1991) points out, nationalism allows for "chameleon-like permutations" because it can be combined with ideologies like liberalism, racism, and romanticism, which serve a variety of goals from democratic to authoritarian, divisive to unifying, modern to antimodern. Indeed, ethnic nationalism has been combined with different forms of ideologies in modern Korea, the Left (communism) and the Right (capitalism), modern (industrialism) and antimodern (agrarianism), authoritarian

and democratic politics, and local and transnational forces (globalization). Ethnic nationalism has also intensified tensions and conflict between the two Koreas, while still serving as an ideology of national unification. Scholars need to specify historical and political contexts to reveal the multiple roles and functions that ethnic nationalism has played, rather than assuming its uniform nature or function, or making a priori moral judgments. Only then can a proper evaluation of both the prize and price of Korean ethnic nationalism be undertaken.

Toward a Sociology of Nationalism

The book departs from most previous works of Korean nationalism with a specific focus on its ethnic dimension. It does not intend to be a general study of Korean nationalism, but rather focuses on the blood-based notion of nation that prevails in Korea today. It is my belief that having a more specific focus, rather than a general study, is key to advancing an understanding of Korean nationalism and also to facilitating constructive debates on the origins of the Korean nation. In fact, those few studies that have a specific focus in the study of Korean nationalism (for example, Robinson's [1988] cultural nationalism) have made better contributions than general studies have.

Methodologically, this book takes a macro historical-sociological perspective. Most of earlier works (Kim Tohyōng 1994; Pang 1992; Pak Ch'ansŭng 1992) are primarily historical and descriptive, narrating the history of Korean nationalism based on key nationalist figures. Although intellectuals are often leaders of nationalist movements and their writings are used extensively as materials for my own analysis, nationalism is more than an intellectual discourse or narrative. Nationalism does not consist of ideas that are free floating but rather of ideas that are socially, historically, and locally embedded. Moreover, despite the fact that nationalism by definition is supposed to include all people, it was often built on a particular class and class interest. Thus, instead of focusing on intellectual history, this book seeks to identify social and historical conditions that have shaped the rise and development of ethnic nationalism in twentieth-century Korea. For this reason, I use a variety of sources and data, including speeches by political leaders, public opinion surveys, and various writings by intellectuals and activists.

In so doing, I take ethnic nationalism as a key organizing principle of Korean society. In the Durkheimian sense, ethnic nationalism represents a

major form of “mechanical solidarity” of Korean society. Mechanical solidarity, according to Emile Durkheim, comes from “likeness” between members of society and prevails to the extent that “ideas and tendencies common to all members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those when pertain personally to each member.” This solidarity can “grow only in inverse ratio to personality” (Durkheim 1933, 129–30). Koreans’ national identity based on common blood and shared ancestry can be considered representative of such a mechanical form of solidarity. However, it should not be taken as a primitive form to pass away with modernization. Contrary to Durkheim’s prediction, ethnic nationalism has not disappeared or been replaced by “organic solidarity” as societies modernized or globalized.¹⁴ In Korea, decades of rapid industrialization and globalization have not uprooted ethnic nationalism; instead Koreans’ ethnic national identity has intensified in response to the penetration of these transnational forces.¹⁵ The presence and power of ethnic nationalism was well displayed at the Seoul plaza when Koreans cheered for their national soccer team at the 2002 World Cup. Seen in this way, the study of ethnic nationalism demands a more sociological approach: as a form of solidarity or organizing principle of society, rather than simply as intellectual discourse, it has crucial behavioral consequences.

In this book, I view nation as a contested field of politics. Whereas previous works have focused on the contention between bourgeois and Marxist versions of Korean nationalism, I examine much larger fields of contention, between national and transnational forces as well as between different notions of nationhood.¹⁶ In so doing, I seek to overcome the bifurcated view of Korean nationalism and to recover voices and stories marginalized by the master narratives of nationalist historiography on both sides of the peninsula (Duara 1995; Shin and Robinson 1999). My goal is to demonstrate that modern Korea has been a rich repository of the diverse and contending views of a political community in search of a new, modern, viable nationhood. Such a search continues today.

Finally, I evaluate the prize and price of ethnic nationalism in modern Korea. Nationalism is like a double-edged sword, wielding both a blessing and a curse. Indeed, nationalism has had much to contribute during Korea’s turbulent years of modern transformation as a force of anticolonialism and modernization, for instance. It still offers a source of inspiration and pride for many Koreans and functions as a key ideological basis for national unification of divided Korea. At the same time, nationalism has exacted a heavy price

to Korean society, culture, and politics. It marginalized other competing voices and was, in the name of an abstract, immortal nation, used by authoritarian states (in both Koreas) to suppress civic rights and individual freedom. Korea continues to face the tough task of transforming national identity based on common blood and ancestry into a more open, civic, and democratic identity.

Korea as a Case

In the general literature on nations and nationalism, East Asian nations are largely treated as exceptional cases. In his well-known book on nationalism, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, Eric Hobsbawm, for instance, regards China, Japan, and Korea as “among the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous” (1990, 66). To be sure, East Asian nations, especially Korea, have different experiences and trajectories in their modern nation-building processes, but these need to be integrated into or used in developing “general” theories of nationalism, rather than being relegated into “particular” or “deviant” cases of nationalism. As Emigh (1997) argues, a “deviant case analysis” can make a crucial theoretical contribution by comparing a single case to some generalization based on the knowledge of numerous cases. Korea has had experiences different from most other nations, even Japan and Germany, which are often compared with Korea, and its experience can be useful in understanding complexities in nationalism.

First, in contrast to many West European and African countries where a more territorial notion of nation took place and ethnicity was attenuated or even suppressed by modernizing forces or nation-building efforts, in Korea ethnicity has been a key marker of nation and national identity. Korea, unlike other countries, has long maintained a coherent political community within a stable territorial boundary with a well-established agrarian bureaucracy. Also Korea has had a fairly homogeneous ethnic, proto-nation, or historic nation, if not the nation in the modern sense, for centuries. Such historical experiences present significant contrasts to Western Europe, in which the current geographical and political map was not formed until the modern era and where nationalism primarily functioned as a political ideology to integrate diverse ethnic groups into a coherent political community called nation. Korea has been divided since 1945, violating the “nationalist principle of congruence of

state and nation,” to use Gellner’s (1983) famous phrase. Yet the violation in Korea—“one ethnic nation, two states”—is the opposite of most other cases where multiple ethnic groups were contending for state power.

Second, while Korea resembled and was influenced by Japan in developing nationalism, the two countries still showed important differences. During the formative years of nation building, Japan was an imperialist power, while Korea was its colony. Also, unlike European colonialism in African and Latin American countries that established new but quite arbitrary administrative units that later became national boundaries, Japanese colonialism did not draw a new geographic boundary. Instead, it sought to assimilate Koreans into the Japanese empire as imperial subjects. In contrast to prewar Japan in which nationalism was fused with militarism and imperialism, nationalism in colonial Korea functioned as an ideology of anticolonialism, carrying a positive connotation among the populace. Colonial Korea saw the development and articulation of ethnic nationalism based on shared blood and ancestry that countered colonial racism and assimilation. Thus, Korea differs from Japan where a sense of ethnic homogeneity was, for the most part, a post-1945 product that replaced the prewar model of the multiethnic Japanese empire (Lie 2001; Sato 1998).

Third, one may point out that Korea resembles divided Germany in the sense that both nations maintain a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity and were split into two parts after 1945. Still, Korea differs from Germany where a similarly strong ethnic nationalism was discredited after 1945 due to its prewar linkage with Nazism. In contrast, nationalism, as a political resource, has been extensively used and promoted in postcolonial Korea. Today, Korea is the only place in which ethnic homogeneity (real or perceived) remains broken into two political entities.¹⁷

Thus, from a comparative perspective, Korea offers a fascinating case in the study of nation and nationalism. One may argue that as a “deviant” case, though it may be interesting in itself, the study of Korean nationalism is not theoretically important since it lacks generalizing power. By contrast, some, especially most Korean scholars, have not paid proper attention to the theoretical or comparative relevance of the Korean case. They remain “case studies” of Korean nationalism. It is my belief that the history of Korean nationalism presents a theoretical challenge to the study of nations and nationalism and thus can contribute to the current literature. A study done in this manner can help to overcome an essentialized view of ethnic nationalism prevalent in

the current literature. As such, this study aspires to offer more than a mere description of the history of Korean nationalism. I hope that this study can offer larger theoretical implications for the general literature on nations and nationalism.

What Is Ahead?

This book is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on specifying historical processes in which nation has come to dominate rival forms of collective or categorical identities in modern Korea. Nation is treated as only one of many competing sources of collective identity for Koreans in their transition to the modern world. Part I considers four major transnational forces: pan-Asianism (Chapter 1); colonial racism (Chapter 2); international socialism and communism (Chapters 3 and 4); and capitalism and modernization (Chapter 5); all of which have competed with nationalism.

Part II examines the processes and politics of contention among various notions of the Korean nation. Even as nation became a dominant source of collective identity, there was no consensus over its basis and it was subject to contentious politics. Part II starts with examining the contention between individualistic/civic/universalistic and collectivistic/ethnic/particularistic understandings of nation at the turn of the twentieth century (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 investigates the contention between modernist and antimodernist (agrarian) conceptions of nation during colonial rule. The focus then shifts to the post-1945 contention between the two Koreas over national representation (Chapter 8), and one between official and popular versions (in the South) during authoritarian rules and democratic movements of the 1960s through 1980s (Chapter 9).

Part III looks at current manifestations of ethnic nationalism in (South) Korea. Two main issues that confront Korea today are unification and globalization. Because current discourse and policy on unification is based on the premise that Korea will be unified since it is an ethnically homogeneous nation, Chapter 10 evaluates this claim with close attention paid to the ways in which ethnic identity shapes views of the North, national division, and unification. Chapter 11 examines the interplay of nationalism and globalization, the latest in the array of transnational forces that have appeared in modern Korea.