

The politics of ethnic nationalism in divided Korea

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The collapse of the Soviet empire and subsequent rise and spread of ethnic and national conflict in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have sparked a wave of research on ethnicity and nationalism among scholars and policy makers alike (Brubaker 1996; Diamond and Plattner 1994; Greenfeld 1992; Horowitz 1985; Smith 1991). This recent surge of interest in ethnicity and nationalism particularly concerns the potential danger that ethnic nationalism poses to social stability and political developments such as democratisation. There is a strong tradition in the scholarship on nationalism, from Hans Kohn (1945) to Donald Horowitz (1985) which views political nationalism as civic, integrative and constructive while ethnic nationalism is dangerous, divisive and destructive. Ethnic cleavages are considered more fundamental and permanent than other forms of cleavage, and conflicts arising from them are therefore 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). Horowitz concurs:

In divided societies, ethnic conflict is at the center of politics. Ethnic divisions pose challenges to the cohesion of states and sometimes to peaceful relations among states. Ethnic conflict strains the bonds that sustain civility and is often at the root of violence that results in looting, death, homelessness, and the flight of large numbers of people. In divided societies, ethnic affiliations are powerful, permeative, passionate, and pervasive. (1985: xii)

While such characterisations reflect much of what has happened in the former Soviet empire, ethnic nationalism is much more diverse and complex in its nature and functions. For instance, ethnic nationalism is currently

being activated in the 'new' Germany 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 populace to finance the costs of a unification process involving a delegitimised GDR regime and an apolitical GFR people. As a result, the prevailing political slogan shifted from 'We are the People' to 'We are One People'. While this 'superficial' appeal to ethnic nationalism draws growing concern among German intellectuals (see Fulbrook 1994; Offe 1990), it shows how ethnic nationalism is used differently in Germany than in the multi-ethnic states which have received the bulk of research attention, as mentioned above.

On the other hand, ethnic nationalism in Japan has been employed as a major source of challenge to the legitimacy of the modern state. According to Doak, contrary to standard accounts of Japanese nationalism that emphasise the rise of the modern state and the institution of the emperor, ethnic nationalism has functioned as a form of 'populist attack on the [authoritarian] state' in place of 'civil society'. Even the postwar 'liberal' Japanese state 'has not yet completely uprooted ... "love of the fatherland" and replaced it with ... "love of society"'. As a result, 'civil society in postwar Japan still has to compete with ethnic nationalism as an alternative source of anti-state sentiment' (Doak 1997: 299). Although Doak's argument might be criticised for conflating ethnic nationalism with popular nationalism (see Sato 1998), his argument illustrates the complex uses of ethnic nationalism that are often overlooked in the current literature.

The Korean case offers further complexity to our understanding of the workings of ethnic nationalism. While the studies mentioned above deal with multiethnic states like the former Yugoslavia or ethnically homogeneous (in a relative sense) nation-states like Germany and Japan, Korea presents a rather different situation. Korea resembles Germany and Japan in that Korean ethnicity is perceived to be homogeneous. However, post-1945 territorial division has created the problem of who would represent the Korean ethnic nation, leading to a contested 'politics of representation' between the two Koreas (Shin 1998a). Contrary to conventional wisdom, ethnic unity – or more precisely the perception or illusion of ethnic homogeneity – has not produced peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas, but instead has produced intense conflict and tension lasting over a half-century. 'Contrary to conventional wisdom' since most studies of ethnic nationalism argue that ethnic cleavages are more fundamental and permanent, implying that ethnic unity – the absence of ethnic division – would and should function as a unifying force in divided Korea. In fact, current unification proposals from both Koreas are based on the premise that a long history of ethnic unity should inevitably lead to reunification (Koh 1994). If so, it remains a puzzle why and how a strong faith in ethnic unity has produced instead intense conflict, a puzzle that cannot be solved by current theories of ethnic nationalism drawn from multiethnic state settings.

The present study seeks to understand the conflict and tension arising

from a territorially divided nation with a strong legacy of ethnic homogeneity, using the Korean case for consideration.¹ In so doing, we rely on a recent development in social identity theory to explore the dynamics and conflict inherent in intra-group social identification. We rely particularly on a recent study which demonstrates that the pressure to maintain ingroup (ethnic) homogeneity can lead to conscious efforts to identify and derogate undesirable in-group members. This strategy of producing 'black sheep' is intended to enhance the overall positivity of the in-group, but in fact hardens internal schisms. This theoretical attention to intra-group processes together with the example of the Korean case, by going beyond the predominant concern with inter-ethnic contexts, contributes a new dimension to current thought on ethnic nationalism and conflict. We also hope that this study will offer insights into the prolonged Korean peninsular conflict that has persisted into the post-Cold War era.

Ethnicity, nation and conflict

At the heart of the debate about nation, nationalism, and ethnicity lies the question of 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 pre-existing geographic or cultural foundations ('primordial', cf. Geertz 1963; Connor 1994; Smith 1986, 1991). This dispute is over whether nationhood is a product of a nationalist/political mobilisation of uniquely modern dimensions or, conversely, whether the prior existence of ethnicity in fact explains much of modern nationality. This issue is particularly complex in the Korean context (as in Japan) where there exists substantial overlap between race, ethnicity and nation, as detailed below. In negotiating the poles of this debate, we follow Smith's argument (1991: 13) that nation-building is a historical process where both elements – political and ethnic – operate to varying degrees depending on specific historical and political conditions: '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 citizenship and 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 (see also Sato 1998, esp. ch. 5).

The modern nation as a bounded community is thus socially 'imagined' in terms of its ethno-cultural distinctiveness and, as well, is territorially framed by the political entity of the state. Yet in most cases these two criteria – which may be roughly termed the ethnic and political dimensions of nationhood – are not congruent or compatible and violate 'the nationalist

principle of congruence of state and nation', to use Gellner's (1983) phrase, creating the potential for conflict within and across national boundaries. In other words, political and ethnic elements do not merely coexist in the nation-state formula, but often operate in ambiguous and even conflictual configurations. As Connor reminds us, loyalty to the ethnic group (nationalism) and loyalty to the state (patriotism) are 'not naturally harmonious' (1994: 30). It is the rare case where the two loyalties coincide, meshing rather than competing with each other. We may thus logically expect that when the ethnic notion of nation predominates over and against the state, it may produce separatist ethnic nationalisms, as in Bosnia. And when the political notion is emphasised over and against ethnic identities, it can facilitate integrative (if repressive) political nationalisms, as in Western Europe. It is these sorts of scenarios, multiethnic state settings, that current work largely focuses on (Brubaker 1996; Horowitz 1985; Diamond and Plattner 1994).

The issue, however, gets more complicated as we consider a contrasting situation, one in which a single ethnic identity constitutes multiple states. To be sure, given the dominance of multiethnic states and the paucity of 'multistate ethnicities' in the world today, scenarios of inter-ethnic conflict like those in Bosnia, the Soviet Union or Europe are understandably most visible. None the less, examining a 'deviant' case like Korea can make a crucial theoretical contribution to our current understanding of the dynamics of ethnic nationalism.² This is particularly so since the Korean experience might defy the prevailing view of ethnic nationalism that stresses the power of ethnic over political affiliations, illustrated by Connor's assertion that when loyalty to the ethnic group and loyalty to the state are 'perceived as being in irreconcilable conflict', political loyalties generally succumb because they 'cannot muster the [same] level of emotional commitment' as ethnic ones (1994: 208). In other words, given the salience attributed to ethnic affiliations, it would seem logical to expect the force of a shared *ethnie* to work across the divide of different political systems, yielding unification: ethnic nationalism ought properly to function as an integrative force for nations like Korea that are territorially divided but have strong commitments to a shared ethnic identity (see Breuilly 1994: esp. ch. 14).

However, we argue that this outcome is not guaranteed, even when ethnicity is a primary source of group identification. Ethnic unity, or more precisely the perception of ethnic homogeneity, can actually heighten political tensions, leading to bitter conflict. We wish to call attention to this scenario, since it points to a relative lacuna in current theorizations of ethnic and national conflict and is directly concerned with the predicament of contemporary Korea.³ Our main assertion is that when ethnicity functions as a primary source of group identification in a divided nation, salient conflict can emerge over who would represent the ethnic community as a whole, beyond such division. This is because territorial division creates

a new (or secondary) source of social identification, one which goes against ethnic unity (a primary source of group identification). The interaction of these two antagonistic levels of social identification results in strong pressures to restore that lost ethnic unity, provoking contention over national representation.

Korea illustrates this last sort of scenario, one in which territorial division cuts across a shared sense of ethnic homogeneity, resulting in intense national conflict. This is due primarily to the historical development of Korean nationalism as discussed below. For Koreans in both the North and South, ethnicity is one of the main bases of identification. However, territorial division into two opposing political entities after 1945 created an additional source of identity, one that is at odds with their primary ethnic identity, and the incongruity of these two levels of affiliation produces contention over nation and national identity that has coloured the Korean conflict. How, then, did Koreans come to develop such a strong ethnic nationalism with a belief in shared ancestry in the first half of twentieth century?

The formation of Korean nationalism

In Korea, there exists substantial overlap at the levels of race, ethnicity and nation. As in Japan, the Korean nation was 'racialised' through belief in a common origin in pre-history, producing an intensely felt collective sense of 'oneness' (Armstrong 1989; Weiner 1997; Yoshino 1992 for a discussion of the Japanese experience). While ethnicity is generally regarded as a cultural phenomenon based on a common language and history, and while race is generally regarded as a collectivity defined by virtue of innate and immutable phenotypic and genotypic characteristics, Koreans did not differentiate between the two notions. Instead, race functioned as a marker that strengthened ethnic identity, which in turn came to play an instrumental role in defining the Korean nation. Koreans defined their identity as 'immutable' or 'primordial' through an imagined conception of 'Korean blood' (*hyŏlt'ong*), regarding themselves as belonging to an 'unitary nation' (*tanil minjok* or *tanitsu minzoku* in Japanese), an ethnically homogeneous and racially distinctive collectivity. This belief in a unitary national past with common ancestry invokes a notion that 'we' are members of an extended family, consequently accentuating the psychological distance between the in-group and the out-group. Thus race, ethnicity and nation were all conflated in Korea and this is reflected in the multiple uses of the term *minjok*, the most widely used term for 'nation' but which as easily refers to *ethnie* or race.

The key research question, then, is to identify the historical processes by which this notion of *tanil minjok* came to occupy a hegemonic position in Korean nationalist discourse. For the nation or even race is not something

naturally given but a 'social construction, fluid in content, whose meaning is determined by historical and national context' (Weiner 1997: xii). Identifying such historical contexts is particularly important since the Korean notion of nation, despite similarities to its Japanese counterpart, developed in a situation very different from Japan, that is, in the context of Japanese imperialism. Korea was less imperial than Japan, and less concerned with its periphery in the way that Japan was concerned with maintaining control over Okinawa, Hokkaido, the Ryukyus and the rest of Asia. Korea was less 'feudal' or regionally differentiated in the Chosŏn period than Japan or China, and was simply smaller and less diverse than China. In light of all this, early modern Korean nationalists did not have to work as hard as those in Japan and China to produce a viable, homogeneous ethnic national identity. In addition, as Korea lacked an autonomous state with which Korean nationalists could identify, they turned their attention instead to 'race thinking': race as 'imagined community' differs from nation only in that it lacks the element of sovereignty (Miles 1987). Aggressive efforts by the Japanese to ethnically assimilate Koreans since the 1930s also brought home to Korean nationalists the urgent task of affirming the distinctiveness and purity of the Korean ethnic nation or race.

First of all, we must note that Korean nationalism arose primarily as a response to imperialism, especially Japanese aggression. As the first 'modern' East Asian nation, Japan increased its influence and power in the peninsula in the late nineteenth century, provoking a strong nationalist reaction from within Korean society. In Western Europe nationalism developed as an ideology to integrate diverse ethnic groups into a unified political community called the nation-state. In contrast, for Korea with its nearly 1000 years of political, linguistic and geographic continuity, unification was a less urgent problem than the threat of imperialism. Nationalism was thus called into use mainly as an anti-imperialist ideology, opposing Japanese aggression or assimilation, and at the same time as an agent of modernisation. Korea did not need any new geographical demarcation to assume the modern form of the nation-state, though some nationalists showed irredentist tendencies (Schmid 1997; Allen 1990). It was instead more urgent for them to assert the distinctiveness of the Korean nation and demonstrate its capacity to effectively confront the foreign challenge and modernise the Korean state and society that had been put in peril. Accordingly, early Korean nationalists (re)invented the *Tan'gun* myth, which naturalised the Korean nation.⁴ While it would be misleading to regard the Korean nation as natural or given, Korea since the Koryŏ dynasty (c. late tenth century) may lay claim to what Smith (1991) would call an 'ethnic core' or, in the words of Korean nationalist Sin Ch'ae-ho, the 'chujok' (the subject or main race) on top of a territorially consistent political community (if not a nation-state in the modern sense) with equivalent historical continuity (Duncan 1998). It is no coincidence that early Korean nationalists constructed their modern notion of the Korean

nation around this historical *ethnie*, defined in contradistinction to the Chinese and Japanese (Schmid 1997).

The myth of common ancestry, though not unique to Korea, became the defining characteristic of the Korean nation. For instance, Sin Ch'ae-ho, a major early Korean nationalist, attempted to identify the Korean nation as a distinct and primary unit within the context of East Asian history, tracing its origins back to *Tan'gun Chosŏn* (BC 2333). Having rejected the subservient Yi state as 'not a worthy focus of national identity', Sin turned to racial and cultural symbols in his search for the 'evidence of autonomy and Korean uniqueness'. According to him, the Korean nation is 'an organic body formed out of the spirit of the people', which was connected to the ethnic core (*chujok*) of the Korean people (Robinson 1984: 132, 135). Even if its political autonomy was lost, for Sin, the nation would remain immortal. Accordingly, for nationalists of Sin's generation (see, for instance, Pak Ŭn-sik's (1980) *Han'guk t'ongsa* written in 1910), the most urgent task Korea faced at the time was to revive 'the spirit embodied in the nation', and with the revival of the national spirit would come a 'renaissance of energy and the will to defend the nation' against increasing foreign threats (Robinson 1984: 134).

Japanese colonial policy intensified Korean nationalist sentiment with the consequence of further 'racialising' the Korean notion of nation. Given the misfortune of colonisation and unable to recover their political sovereignty, Korean nationalists turned to the task of 'asserting the greatness of Korea's cultural heritage through a quest for Korea's historical origins' (Allen 1990:791). For instance, Ch'oe Namsŏn, a key nationalist figure during colonial rule, stressed the uniqueness of Korean culture (including its language, literature and folklore) and elevated *Tan'gun* to the supreme symbol of Korea's cultural and historical heritage. He went so far as to advocate a historical view of 'Northeast Asia centered around Korea' (Allen 1990). While early Korean nationalists pursued diverse versions of political nationalism from liberal to Marxist, and from agrarian to anarchist-irredentist (Robinson 1988; Shin 1998b; Schmid 1997), few ever disputed the naturalness of the Korean ethnic nation. To question it would have been tantamount to denying Koreanness in the face of the imperial challenge of an alien (Japanese) ethnic nation (*minzoku*).

This project of asserting the ethnic distinctiveness and purity of the Korean nation became all the more important as Japan attempted to assimilate Koreans into the empire as 'imperial subjects' in the name of *naisen yūwa* (fusion of Japanese and Koreans) and *naisen ittai* (Japanese and Koreans as one body).⁵ The Japanese also promoted *nissen dōsoron* (theory of common ancestry between Japan and Korea), which maintained that Koreans and Japanese arose from a common origin but that the Koreans had always had a position subordinate to the Japanese from ancient times onward. This theory was widely accepted in Japan at the turn of the century and was used to justify the colonial assimilation policy in Korea (Allen

1990). Japan initiated the *kōminka* (making imperial subjects) movement so as to 'get rid of all distinctions and achieve equality between Koreans and inlanders' (Sato 1998: 340). *Kōminka* programmes included the change of Korean names into Japanese ones, use of Japanese language only, teaching the Japanese ethical system in school and Shinto worship. The movement intended to erase Korean cultural traditions and replace them with Japanese ones and also required stricter surveillance and control in Korea.

While the *kōminka* movement produced some pro-Japanese Koreans, its policy provoked strong resentment and resistance from many and the 'ethno-cultural differences' between the two nations came to be more sharply perceived in the early 1940s (Shin 1996: esp. ch. 8). This was because, as Allen points out,

Under the Japanese assimilation policy, Koreans needed to affirm zealously the value and uniqueness of their heritage if their culture were to survive. In the face of a Japanese policy to assimilate Koreans as a second-class, subordinate people, asserting the significance of their cultural heritage was a means to maintain and strengthen their national identity. (1990: 792)

In 1942, Minami Jiro, an advocate of the *naisen ittai* policy who served as governor-general in Korea from 1936 to 1942, indeed admitted that 'Koreans are a foreign nation (*minzoku*); their thoughts, sentiments, customs, manners and languages are different' (cited in Sato 1998: 342). In short, Japanese assimilation policy did not remove national consciousness from Koreans but rather reinforced their conviction that they possessed a truly distinct and homogeneous ethnic identity.

After 1945, the *ethnie* as shared locus of social identification remained firm, but territorial division created a problem of national representation. Koreans still strongly identified with the Korean ethnic community, but territorial partition created an additional identity which was not congruent with their primary source of identification. Each regime appropriated a particular (political) notion of nation and national identity, linking it to mass politics, and contested the other's view so as to claim the right to sole representation of the whole Korean ethnic nation. Unlike in Germany, where a similarly strong ethnic nationalism was discredited after 1945 due to its linkage with Nazism, Korean nationalism, which developed as an anti-colonial ideology, became a highly valuable political resource in both North and South, making the issue of representation all the more salient and contentious. Liberated from colonial rule, the battle lines shifted from confrontation with the Japanese and an effort to prove the distinctiveness of the Korean nation, which was now taken for granted,⁶ to confrontation internal to the *ethnie* (intra-ethnic conflict) and an effort to legitimise the respective political regimes in ethnic nationalist terms. This 'politics of representation' then produced contention between the two Koreas over which side should represent the entire Korean (ethnic) nation, with the other being portrayed as having lost its 'true' national identity.

That both Koreas share a commitment to the ethnic base of the Korean nation but contest its political conception is best reflected in current linguistic usage. The Korean term equivalent to 'nation' in both North and South Korea is *minjok*, a term with strong 'ethnic' connotations (*minjok* can be translated as 'ethnic nation' or even 'race').⁷ Yet when speaking of citizenship in a political community in the modern sense, different terms apply: *inmin* in the North and *kungmin* in the South (see No 1997), reflecting the contestedness of the political notion of nation.⁸ The incongruity between the ethnic and political base of the Korean nation, once again, has been a key factor behind the tension and conflict on the Korean peninsula over the last half-century.⁹ Before presenting our analysis of nationalist politics in both Koreas, we will discuss our theoretical approach to understanding how such incongruity in identity can produce conflict.

Group homogeneity, the black sheep effect and conflict

In attempting to understand Korean national conflict, we rely on theoretical insights drawn from social identity theory. This theoretical borrowing seems justified and even necessary in the current stage of theorisation of ethnic nationalism and conflict. As indicated above, the current literature tends to emphasise ethnic and national conflict arising from multiethnic state settings, and thus is of much less value to the Korean case where a single ethnicity is divided into two states. Of course, we recognise a gap between the two fields of social psychology and studies of nationalism, especially in terms of levels of analysis. Where studies of ethnicity and nationalism, often taking a sociohistorical perspective, assume the saliency of relatively large and complex social groups, experimental social psychology generally limits itself to local 'naturally occurring groups' or, more often, to experimentally isolated groups with minimal internal differentiation and contestation. None the less, the nation and *ethnie*, as forms of 'imagined community', fulfil the basic requirements of social identity theory for perceived group identity and provide sufficient group distinctiveness (Tajfel and Turner 1986) based on perceptions of shared culture, language, history and geography. In fact, scholars of nationalism such as Connor (1994) and Horowitz (1985) recognise the potential value of experimental psychology for a better understanding of ethnonationalism, especially its emotional and psychological dimension.

In the field of social psychology, social identity theory (SIT) has been a leading approach in explaining the dynamics of group identification. Like current research on ethnic conflict, however, SIT has conventionally been concerned with *inter*-group processes. As Simon *et al.* indicate, a guiding presupposition has been that in 'ingroup-outgroup contexts social identification leads to the (perceptual) accentuation of *intergroup* differences in favor of the ingroup' (1995, emphasis added). This is because 'group members

accentuate intergroup differences in order to achieve or maintain (a preferably positive) ingroup distinctiveness or social identity' (1995: 326–7; see also Tajfel 1982).

However, the persistence of *intra*-group tensions and conflict in the real world has challenged the findings of SIT, which have been based largely on experimental situations where simple, often artificially defined groups interact. As a result, some researchers have begun to extend social psychological theorems to understanding the way in which complexities at the sub-group or intra-group level contribute to social identity and inter-group processes (Lindemann 1997; Abrams and Hogg 1990; Marques 1990; Thompson *et al.* 1997). Other studies have sought to refine the understanding of the creation of in-group homogeneity, looking at what occurs beneath the apparent unity of a complex, real-world group (Simon *et al.* 1995; Kelly 1989). The generation of social identity involves a commitment to in-group homogeneity, which in turn implies the potential justification for either purely cognitive or more outward political strategies of *erasure of salient ingroup difference*. The perception of in-group homogeneity is inherent to social identification, key modern forms of which are ethnicity and nationality. Thus a consideration of the real-world politics of ethnic nationalism must confront the strategies by which homogeneous identities are constructed and maintained. One recent move in this direction is Marques *et al.*'s (1988; Marques 1990; Marques and Yzerbyt 1988) focus on mechanisms for policing conformity to the in-group in the form of a 'black sheep effect'.

A major postulate of social identity theory is 'in-group favouritism', by which in-group members receive a favourable bias in contrast to the out-group. In-group identity is usually constructed to highlight positive distinctive traits. Marques and Yzerbyt seek to extend this theme, arguing that 'judgements about both likeable *and unlikeable* in-group members are more extreme than judgements about out-group members' (emphasis added, 1988: 1). Thus, in-group favouritism, a fairly commonsensical consequence of group identification and inter-group contexts, extends not only to 'an in-group bias for desirable members' but an 'in-group derogation for undesirable members . . . [where] downgrading unlikeable ingroupers may be a cognitive strategy aimed at preserving the group's sense of positivity as a whole' (Marques *et al.* 1988: 288).

In one study Marques *et al.* interviewed a sample of Belgian university students for their comparative evaluation of Belgian students versus North African students, looking at a number of positive and negative traits. In this study the in-group was more extremely evaluated for both likeable and unlikeable traits (in-group favouritism *and* in-group derogation). That in-group members, due to their relevance to the group identity, would be judged more negatively is termed the 'black sheep effect' (Marques and Yzerbyt 1988a; 7). In another experiment, Marques *et al.* gave a number of Belgian undergraduates a questionnaire on 'soccer and violence' shortly

after a major riot at a soccer game in Belgium which had been covered extensively on major television channels. The students were asked to imagine that Belgian and German fans had started the riots (the actual riots had been Belgian and Italian) and their responses were evaluated to determine judgemental extremity. Marques *et al.* (1988) found that the Belgian students yielded more negative assessments of the Belgian rioters.

If we view ethnicity and nationality as forms of social identification, this insight into the process of extremely negative ingroup judgements, or 'black sheep effect', can be readily applied to understanding ethnic and national conflict. When behaviours of undesirable in-group members are perceived to threaten the in-group identity, the black sheep effect can be activated to preserve or restore the perceived positivity of the in-group as a whole. However, conflict could and would arise over who is defined as a 'black sheep', triggering intense conflict within the group. Thus, we see that strategies of policing the in-group are inherent in the maintenance of coherent and manageable social identity. *Intra*-group conflict may be more intractable than inter-group conflict since the in-group itself is the place where identity must be preserved, allowing for the efficient functioning of the group in relation to other groups it is in contest with.

Accordingly, when there exists a shared sense of ethnic unity, it is likely to produce a strong pressure for conformity to standards of in-group homogeneity. Such an (imagined) unity increases expectations for all members to conform to certain shared norms or customs. However, political/ideological cleavages could threaten the coherence of that ethnic identity, triggering a process of selective in-group derogation and policing of conformity. This can be done in the name of purifying the ethnic community – cleansing foreign ideas and thoughts that are seen to contaminate or betray the community. Here we see the potential for operation of the black sheep effect in nationalist politics as each side views the other as a profound threat to in-group (ethnic) homogeneity. Who would define and represent the ethnic nation becomes hotly contested, and the campaign for political and ethnic homogenisation could lead to intense conflict between in-group members. The conflict is bitter and persistent because each side is wedded to a vision of ethnic unity in which the greatest threat to that level of identity is not the out-group, but internal 'traitors' (unlikeable in-group members). This theoretical insight has much to say to our understanding of the conflict between the two Koreas, given the particular way in which ethnic and political nationalisms have been deployed in the post-colonial period.

Contentious identities in Korea

We now examine how the creation of an additional group identity through the formation of two political regimes on top of a strong identification with

the Korean ethnic community has produced identity politics and conflict on the Korean peninsula. In so doing we analyse the official discourses of Kim Il-Sung of the North and Park Chung-Hee of the South, based on Connor's recommendation that 'nationalist speeches and proclamations' are fruitful areas for research on nationalism. It was during the 1960s and 1970s that both Koreas engaged in the most intensified form of ideological contest, and the legacy of this period looms large despite some important changes in recent years (for example, Roh's *Nordpolitik* of the late 1980s). Of course, we acknowledge that the speeches and works of these two figures contain a variety of propagandistic elements, but the focus here is 'not the sincerity of the propagandist, but the nature of the mass instinct to which he or she appeals' (Connor 1994:198).¹⁰ Thus, we view both Kim and Park as skilful practitioners of nationalist mass politics, which can be best seen in Kim's *juche* (or *chuch'e*) ideology of independence or self-reliance, and Park's slogan of *choguk kundaehwa* (modernisation of the fatherland) (Chiot 1994; Cumings 1993). Our interest lies in their respective views of ethnic and political notions of the Korean nation, as the incongruity between the two came to produce contention and conflict as discussed above.

The ethnic notion of the nation

We first examine the primary source of Korean national identity, the ethnic notion of the nation, in the rhetoric of Kim and Park. What emerges is a sense that both sides have a deep commitment to the ethnic base of the nation, seeing it as having been uniform and homogeneous for thousands of years. Neither territorial partition nor political separation lessened the shared sense of ethnic unity, but rather preserved or even enhanced it as each side committed itself to national reunification based on their respective ideological strategies (strategies whose differences relate to their differing alignments in the Cold War world order). Both considered the post-1945 division as only temporary; to admit otherwise would result in the loss of political legitimacy. Even today, unification proposals from both Koreas are based on the premise that ethnic unity will inevitably lead to national reunification (*minjokch'ok t'ongil*) (Koh 1994).

Kim Il-Sung demonstrated a serious investment in the purity and unity of the ethnic nation: 'Our people have lived as a homogeneous nation in the same land for thousands of years. They have spoken and written one language, and their history and cultural traditions are the same. Our country has no national minority' (1965: 175). With such pride in the linguistic, cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the Korean past, he strongly resented national division and the presence of American military forces in the South. Kim accordingly asked: 'How can our nation which has a long history and time-honoured culture put up with US imperialist colonial rule and tolerate national humiliation and persecution ...?' (1965: 222). From this perspective, even the civil war of 1950–53, with its devastating

consequences, could be justified as a nationalist effort to liberate fellow South Koreans from American imperialism and the Southern puppet regime.

For Kim, since all Koreans belong to the same ethnic nation (in-group), despite a small fraction of 'national traitors' (undesirable in-group members, i.e. the ruling elite in the South) who surrendered the nation to imperialist forces (the out-group), the majority of 'ordinary' Koreans can easily unite in their struggle for reunification. Although Koreans live under different political systems with different ideologies, Kim claims, there can be no contradictions between them as far as the reunification question is concerned. Now when even countries consisting of people from diverse ethnic and national groups are fighting in concert for a common goal, he asks, 'why can't our people of one and the same descent and nation join hands in the bid for national reunification ... We do not antagonize our southern fellows, nor do we seek to enforce our ideology and social system on them' (1982: 178). For Kim, even communism is ostensibly less important than (ethnic) nationalism. Or rather, despite various contextual differences, he sees communism as compatible with nationalism given the higher cause of the ethnic. Kim finds no reason for conflict among the Korean people, despite their political and ideological differences, as long as they are nationalistic. The nation, and not ideology – not even communism – comes first.

Similarly, Park Chung-Hee never questioned the fact that Koreans are of 'one race and one people' (1970: 21, 24) and constantly stressed Korea's mythohistorical derivation from a common ancestor, *Tan'gun*. Furthermore, he proudly proclaimed that 'we have never given up our pride nor our dignity in being a homogeneous people' (1973: 179). From this kind of perspective, and despite the reality of political division between the North and the South, he went so far as to call the North Koreans 'our brethren in the north of this great Han race', proclaiming that:

Although we are now separated into south and north, we are *one entity* with a common destiny, bound by one language, and by one history and by the *same racial origin*. Ideology changes, but the nation stays and lasts. We must quickly recover our identity as the *inseparable Han race*, and boldly push ahead to bring about a historic turning point through which national identity can be revived in the northern land. We are a great nation which, during some five thousand years of history, has had to confront innumerable trials and perils, and yet has shown courage amid hardship, wisdom amid crisis, and has thus triumphantly overcome adversity. (1973: 22, emphasis added)

Here, by 'we', Park meant neither of the two divided Koreas but an essential, ethnically homogeneous Korean nation at their root, which was split due to 'national traitors' (undesirable in-group members, i.e. North Korean communists) as well as global politics. In fact, references by Park to this transcendent, ethnocentric nationalism frequently appear in other

speeches and works (1973: 26, 55, 56, 179). Like Kim, Park consistently stressed the historical, ethnic homogeneity of the Korean nation as well as the concomitant imperative to reunification. He even considered his promotion of capitalist economic development and anti-communism to be prerequisites to eventual national unification. Meanwhile, Park also expressed his willingness to cooperate with the 'northern brethren' in order to bring about a national reunification whose major obstacle was the anti-national communist leaders (the unlikeable in-group members). Park proclaimed his anti-communism a necessary consequence of his nationalism: an ideological means to achieve nationalist ends.

Thus, both Kim and Park shared a commitment to an ethnic notion of the Korean nation, found in its historical homogeneity and greatness, and reinforced by the demand for national unification. However, major lines of difference and contention appear when we turn to the political base of the Korean nation.

The political notion of the nation

It is the political notion of the nation that most distinguishes these two figures, as each side brands the other as a traitor guilty of violating the sanctity of the Korean national spirit. Both Kim and Park attempt to claim sole legitimacy over the whole of the ethnic Korean nation through exclusion of 'unlikeable in-group members', i.e. the 'national traitors' who contaminated the Korean nation with foreign ideas or ideologies, whether communism or American imperialism. This competition over a political legitimacy so strongly rooted in a sense of common ethnic destiny can be seen to have triggered the 'black sheep effect', producing bitter intra-ethnic conflict, leading even to the civil war of 1950–53.

Kim's political notion of the nation reflects his ideological positioning and takes the form of opposition to Japanese and American imperialism. Kim thus brands South Korea a puppet regime beholden to American imperialists after 1945 and, prior to that, to the Japanese colonial regime (1984: 418). Accordingly, for Kim, South Korea as a political entity may lay no claim to legitimacy. In contrast, he points out, his Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) had its origins in the anti-Japanese armed struggle (which he led), thus allowing him to lay claim to the legacy of a pure ethnic nationalism (Kim 1982: 4, 156). In Kim's view, contemporary North Koreans are 'fighting against imperialism' (1984: 441) in continuation of their strong anti-imperialist tradition, yet South Korea is forced to remain semi-colonial under a new imperialism imposed by America. Therefore, for North Koreans, only the DPRK, the political fruition of a successful anti-Japanese struggle, can claim national legitimacy, while anyone who collaborates with imperialist forces is disqualified from membership in the Korean national community. The current struggle for reunification is thus one not simply between the North and South but is

seen to be between patriots and traitors, or between the forces of national liberation and the imperialist forces of aggression. At stake is Korea's ethnic integrity. Kim's political nationalism has eventually developed into an overarching ideology of *juch'e* that promotes self-sufficiency and self-reliance in politics, economy, culture and ideology (Cumings 1993).

In contrast, Park has organised his political notion of nation and national identity around anti-communism. Just as Kim excludes the political system of the South from his definition of the nation, Park excludes the political system of the North, emphasising that only the Republic of Korea (ROK) has realised the true character of the Korean nation. Park's historical interpretation describes North Korea as a product of the Soviet Union, which quickly moved across the border into the peninsula at the end of World War II while the United States was then still relatively indifferent to the Korean situation, preoccupied as it was with managing the problem of Japan (1970: 160–5). Park's view of the North, the mirror image of Kim's, was that it was merely one of the many post-World War II satellite states dependent on the Soviet Union, with neither political independence nor, crucially, legitimacy in its claim to represent the Korean ethnic whole.

In discussing national legitimacy in terms of the political notion of nation, Park unequivocally proclaimed, 'We must not forget for even a moment that the Republic of Korea represents the true tradition and legitimacy of the Korean people politically, economically, socially and culturally and, above all, spiritually' (1973: 166). The justification for this exclusivity is that North Korea is disqualified by its communist system, which for Park is 'alien to the tradition and history of our nation'. In the North, people are 'mere tools of communist aggression', 'subject to a fanatic personality cult', and 'forced to call their own fathers "comrades"', which goes against [the] Korean tradition of filial piety' (1973: 165). Park, moreover, described the civil war as the result of communist aggression, a treacherous attempt to destroy the nation's rich tradition and identity. In short, for Park the North Korean communist leaders, while ethnically Korean, are the black sheep most responsible for contaminating the purity and integrity of the Korean ethnic. The political notions of nation held by Park and Kim illustrate a principle of mutual exclusion, one contested across a shared sense of ethnic unity.

The foregoing discussion shows that territorial partition did not lessen but rather preserved or even reinforced ethnicity as a primary source of Korean identification, producing a strong pressure for in-group homogeneity and conformity to an essentialised Koreanness. Yet the reality of national division, with its diverse array of powerful, international others, prevents fulfilment of the ethnic ideal, leading each side to accuse the other of being the 'traitors' who have betrayed the Korean community. Here we see the operation of the 'black sheep effect' in the nationalist politics of both Kim and Park, each viewing the other as a profound threat to the unity of the Korean nation. The conflict becomes bitter and persistent since

each side is wedded to a vision of ethnic homogeneity for which the greatest threat is not Japan, China or the US, but the leaders of the other side – Korea's internal traitors. This highly compelling and problematic common commitment to the ethnic nation has not functioned as a unifying force, but instead has intensified inter-Korean conflict over the last half century.

Conclusion

Ernest Gellner has argued that while nationalist sentiment is deeply offended by 'violation of the nationalist principle of congruence of state and nation', it is 'not equally offended by all the various kinds of violation of it'. It is 'most acutely offended by ethnic divergence between rulers and ruled', while a group which has 'more than one state associated with its culture' has 'less grievance' (1983: 134). The implications of his argument are clear: ethnic cleavages within a single state are more serious and difficult to deal with than the opposite situation, where a single ethnicity is divided into multiple states. By logical extension, ethnic unity or its perception would be expected to function as a unifying force across a divided system, a bias evident in current studies of ethnic nationalism.

The present study has sought to show why this need not be so, using the Korean experience as an illustration. Our central argument is that when a primary commitment to ethnic unity is violated due to territorial partition, there arises a strong pressure for restoring that lost ethnic unity, consequently activating the dynamic of intra-group censure which social identity theory terms the 'black sheep effect'. The process works to sanction certain unlikeable in-group members as threats to national identity, i.e. national traitors. As a result, conflict and tension inevitably arise over who would define the fundamental norms and identity associated with the category of the ethnic nation, over who can represent the nation and claim legitimacy. This 'politics of representation' would then lead to highly charged and intense conflict, as has been the case on the Korean peninsula over the last half century.

The present study also suggests the need to direct greater attention to intra-group processes integral to the maintenance or disintegration of complex, real-world social identities like ethnicity and nationality. Although current studies tend to stress a sense that the presence of or conflict with an out-group may strengthen solidarity and reinforce the identity of the in-group, research cited above from social identity theory shows that things are not always so simple. On the contrary, the presence of an out-group can increase internal social identification pressures, which may have divisive consequences for the in-group, as pressures to consolidate a positive in-group identity lead to derogation of undesirable in-group members rather than simply in-group favouritism. In this light, Chirot's (1997) recent observation that anti-Semitism and anti-Sinicism were directed against the

most 'assimilated' Jews and Chinese is illuminating. These highly assimilated ethnic minority groups were viewed by the majority as more responsible for poisoning 'the purity of the nation by introducing foreign ideas and practices' (Chirot 1997: 9). To understand this seemingly ironic feature of ethnic conflict requires more research attention to in-group processes and *intra-group* dynamics beyond current focus on inter-ethnic contexts.

Finally, the present study can offer theoretical ground for rethinking the current unification approaches of both Koreas, which are based on the premise that ethnic unity ought ultimately to lead to reunification. The forgoing analysis suggests this premise may not be justified: in so far as both regimes are complicit in the politics of representation, little progress toward reunification can be expected (Shin 1998a). In addition, as Habermas has pointed out, the political commonplace which holds that 'a democracy needs to be backed up by the bonding energy of a homogenous nation ... [is] both empirically false and politically dangerous' (1996: 10). By extension, we might infer that unification efforts solely based on the precondition of ethnic homogeneity and nationalism may also be politically dangerous (Grinker 1998).

If this is the case, Koreans need to promote a more democratic national identity rather than appeal to the sort of ethnic nationalism that preaches a false sense of uniformity which is only realisable through demands for conformity and a violent process of exclusion. Put differently, Koreans should envision a society in which they can live together not simply because they are ethnically one but because they are equal citizens of a democratic polity. Although a half-century of intra-ethnic politics may have made this task very difficult, it can still be achieved with concerted effort. After all, national identity is a social construction and thus amenable to modification and transformation by political institutions and social movements. The promotion of a democratic national identity to overcome the harmful effects of a misplaced perception of ethnic unity, and consequent intra-ethnic politics, appears to be the major task that Koreans face in the coming century.

Notes

1 We are not suggesting that Koreans have been a historically homogeneous people. We recognise as is detailed below that ethnic homogeneity is a modern and social/political construction, dating no earlier than the late nineteenth century. Our primary concern here is to show how such a perception or illusion of ethnic unity has been played out in the politics of both Koreas. We agree with Connor that regardless of its factual basis, the myth of homogeneity engenders 'a reality of [its] own, for it is seldom *what is* that is of political significance, but what people *think is*' (1994: 140, emphasis in original). For a discussion of the history of Korean ethnicity, see No (1997) and on the Japanese illusion of homogeneity, see Weiner (1997).

2 See Emigh (1997) for a discussion of how a 'deviant case analysis' that 'compares a single case to some generalization based on the knowledge of numerous cases' makes a crucial theoretical contribution.

3 Connor recognises that 'while myths of unity have a capacity for engendering harmony, they also have a capacity for accentuating division' (1994: 140). This theme, however, has not been systematically examined in his works.

4 *Tan'gun* is the divinely descended mythic founder of the Korean race and original Korean homeland in 2333 BC. Korean nationalists promoted *Tan'gun* worship in a manner similar to Japanese Shinto worship of Amaterasu.

5 To reflect this assimilationist thinking, Japanese authorities termed Korea and Taiwan the *gaichi* (outland), a counter concept to that of *naichi* (inland), used for Japan proper.

6 Writing in 1947, Son Chin-t'ae, a well-known historian, proclaimed that 'Since the beginning of history we (Koreans) have been a single race (*tongil-han hyŏljok*) that has had a common historic life, living in a single territory ... sharing a common culture, and carrying out countless common national struggles under a common destiny. This is because we have had no racial mixing with other nations' (cited in Duncan 1998: 198). In a similar vein, North Korea announced a few years ago that the tomb of *Tan'gun* had been located, thus providing the archaeological evidence for this narrative.

7 Other terms referring to ethnic nation in Korea are *tongp'o* and *kyŏre*. But *minjok*, a translation of the Japanese term *minzoku*, from the turn of the century, has been the most widely used term for ethnic nation in twentieth-century Korea.

8 A similar distinction between the ethnic nation (*minzoku*) and political nation (*kokumin*) can be found in Japan. See Doak (1997).

9 We are not suggesting either that this politics of representation alone is to be blamed for the Korean conflict or that international Cold War politics was insignificant. Instead, our main point is to show how international politics were intertwined with an historically formed nationalism to produce the intense tension and conflict that still exists between the two Koreas, even in the post-Cold War era.

10 There is no question that it would be valuable to compare the *popular* nationalist discourses of both Koreas. However, it is doubtful that there exists such a discourse distinct from the official one in the North and, even if so, relevant data are not available for analysis. In addition, our main purpose in this study is not to present a comprehensive historical view of nationalist discourses of both Koreas, or of their continuity and change over time, but instead to offer an explanation of how nationalist politics *on top of* the Cold War split has produced intense conflict in the peninsula. A comparative analysis of official and oppositional nationalist discourses in the South also shows that both spheres were in agreement on the ethnic base of the nation but differed in their respective political notions of the nation, a pattern of difference similar to the one found in our analysis of Kim and Park shown here. See Shin (1998c).

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