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Korean Identity Issues: Establishing Korean Nationalism within the Asian World and the West

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Jaeun Kim, *Contested Embrace: Transborder Membership Politics in Twentieth-Century Korea* (Stanford California, Stanford University Press, 2016).

Gil-Soo Han, *Nouveau-riche Nationalism and Multiculturalism in Korea: A Media Narrative Analysis* (New York, Taylor and Francis, 2016).

Gilbert Rozman, *Asia's Alliance Triangle: US-Japan-South Korea Relations at a Tumultuous Time* (New York, Houndmills, 2015).

History and political science often co-mingle in studies of nationalism. While historians are more concerned with how the past events turned countries into nation-states, political scientists look at how the growth of a nation has affected their nationalism and how this influences their country and its citizens in the contemporary world. The ongoing conflict of divided Korea and the increasing economic disparity between the North and South made books on the topic of Korean nationalism much more important. It is through this complex and unusual creation of the two Korean states that has prompted such a need to understand their history and nationalism. Political history of Korea within this scope of Korean nationalism is the main idea of the authors presented within this review essay.

Korea is a country with rival political identities. The people of Korea live between two diverse worlds: that of the communist mantra of North Korea and the liberal democracy of South Korea. How has Korea become this divided? Moreover, how did this affect the citizens of these two countries? Jaeun Kim provides an intricate look into how the Korean people manage through these tumultuous times by looking at not just Korea, but also at China and Japan and their relationships. As Kim states in the introduction, "*Contested Embrace* is a comparative, historical, and ethnographic study of these complex relationships." (Kim 7).

Because of the inherent nature of nationalism as a topic, the author crafts the book as a sociological work with a historical background to provide the reader with the context of how the shifting ethno-politics of Asia affected non-ethnic Koreans and emigrants. The sociological approach works well, allowing the author to employ proper tools for the research and to discuss these important topics and themes within her book, which she defines as trans-border membership politics.

Jaeun Kim is not the first author to tackle Korean nationalism, Gi-wook Shin covered the topic as well in his 2006 book, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*. Gi-wook's book looks at how Korean ethno-nationalism became a staple of Korea, especially in South Korea. Both authors examined how the struggle during imperialist colonialism period (1875-1945) affected the ideas of Korean nationalism. While Shin's work primarily focused on South Korea, Jaeun Kim covers both South and North Korea, which makes her work rather important, especially for the readers interested in seeing how the two sides of Korea deal with the trans-border politics.

The main topic of the book covers how Korean nationalism was shaped not from the inner workings of Korean nation building; but rather from Korea and its relationship between communist China and democratic Japan as both Asian powers have used their own nationalism and expansion to influence Korea in a multitude of ways. The book starts with the rise of the Japanese Empire, and more importantly the rise of ethno-migration as many Japanese people moved to Korea and Manchuria during the rise of the Japanese Empire to settle in the newly occupied territories. As she discusses the migration, Jaeun Kim notes that many authors and studies about Korean nationalism have failed to cover the detailed Japanese imperial practices that triggered the creation of "cross-border networks, national categories, and diasporic imaginations" (Kim 30).

The fact that Jaeun Kim looks at Japanese occupation first reveals how integral she feels that the occupation and rise of Japanese control over Korea was to the growth of Korean nationalism and the rise of trans-border membership. The practice was similar in Korea as in other colonized territories under the control of an imperial power that sought to solidify its control over the occupied people through integration into their laws and customs. As such, the people of Korea who migrated and moved through Japan and China integrated into these new spheres of state within these countries.

The book coverage moves chronologically exploring the dissolution of Japanese imperial control after the Second World War and explores how Koreans, who were not on the Korean peninsula during the imperial rule of Japan, dealt with the complex ethnocentric issues that post-colonial nations struggled with in the aftermath of the Second World War. Jaeun Kim places this troubling and complex dilemma of ethnic nationalism in the shadow of the Cold War. The fear of imperial control was no longer valid but the spread of democratic or communist ideology during the period of nation building became the worry of Asian nations as their ability to forge their own destinies became entwined with the growing super powers. Kim states that ideology-building overshadowed nation-building by creating two Koreas with rival ideologies (Kim 74). The Cold War influence on Asia is a study that deserves a lot of introspection and review as it is one of the places where the Cold War still rears its head in Korea.

The subsequent chapters reflect the division of ideology on the two Korean states. As the ethnic Koreans living in China dealt with the growing disparate nature of communist China and the socialist totalitarianism of North Korea, tensions emerged as they attempted to use dual citizenship as a means of safety and connection. Tension also arose as some attempted to return to South Korea and found that the growing issues of political ideology made it extremely difficult for them to be wholly accepted back into the more democratic political sphere of South Korea, although South Korea welcomes them back as citizens. The Korean War impacted the trans-border politics of both Koreas and their nation-building process, which in turn made the desire to have a connection to the homeland much more integral to the growing emigrant groups of Koreans.

Jaeun Kim discusses how Korean nationalism is embraced by ethnic Koreans either among those who live and work in other Asian countries or among Koreans who live in North and

South Korea. How could such individuals maintain their Korean identity when they become integrated members of China or Japan, and what of those Koreans who escaped from North Korea? How could they initiate a peculiar South Korean identity? The fact that each of the two Korean states viewed themselves as the rightful heirs to the country and thus the conflict of the state became one not just political but also sociological. She emphasizes that the Family Registration System of Korea became an important “cultural artifact” that connected diasporic Koreans to their Korean identity (Kim 235). Ethnic Koreans use family registration as a means of solidified identity with their birth-country or their spiritual homeland. This helped create a sense of anxiety for Koreans as they attempted to balance this nationalism with being physically far away from Korea.

The archival data used by Kim covers a wide range of publication from official government documents, and magazines to ethnographic sources, such as oral histories. Though her research material on both North Korea and communist China was limited, they were more than sufficient to prove her argument when they were coupled with the existing qualitative works on the subject. Oral history interviews she gathered from Korean citizens, Zainichi Koreans (Koreans who remained in Japan), and Chinese Koreans are the major components that supports the author’s argument.

The author used a wealth of sources and materials from South Korea, North Korea, and China. Much of the work takes on the liberal democratic perspective characteristic of the South Korean position, but she informs readers about the Chinese and North Korean perspectives. The book is written for the historian in mind as many of the chapters are filled with historical context and sociological material. That is not to say that a general reader could not understand this material, but the more intricate details of the book may leave many readers unsatisfied with the book. There is hardly anything that author leaves out of her research on the topic; her writing leaves no holes within the overall thesis and work that she has put into the book has tremendous merit to say the least. The book provides a major contribution not just to the history of the post-colonial states but how imperialism actively helped to develop these colonial states themselves. Asia specialists or graduate students with a goal to specialize on Korea should have it on their bookshelves.

In his book *Nouveau-riche Nationalism and Multiculturalism in Korea: A Media Narrative Analysis*, Gil-Soon Han looks at how the large technological and economic growth within South Korea has enhanced its anxieties and desires for multiculturalism. Unlike Jaeun Kim, who looks at the broad scope of Koreans in other countries and their relations to the conception of Korean nationalism, Han primarily looks at South Korea and focuses on how South Koreans deal with the growing multiculturalism of their nation.

First off Gil-Soon Han talks about why it is important to look at Korean nationalism through the lens of multiculturalism; stating that his “book is not meant to be a solely theoretical piece on Korean nationalism, but to demonstrate how it is being manifested in a multicultural Korea.” (Han 2). The book looks at how Korean media has depicted multiculturalism and how people have either supported or opposed it during times of economic and social growth or downturns. In his introduction, Han makes a very bold statement saying that South Korean politicians care more about satisfying the basic social and healthcare needs of the people than controlling non-ethnic citizens (Han 3).

The book deals with social and racial tensions within South Korea and how the media presents them. The news and entertainment media depiction of minorities reveals many of the worries and tensions of the nation. In order to combat the isolationist attitude of North Korea,

South Korea has collaborated with the United States, embraced democracy and allowed multiculturalism, while frantically seeking to maintain its ethno-nationalism. Gil-Soon Han's work shines as he investigates the reasons why South Korea uses a method called *Nouveau-riche* or the "Newly Rich" nationalism. Han explains how the South Koreans, who have recently become wealthier, justify their actions against minorities and foreigners in South Korea. Within the first chapter Gil-Soon Han looks at this method of nationalism and discusses it in conjunction with racism. Han points out the economic factors as some of the reasons why South Koreans treat immigrants and foreign citizens with disdain. He states that Korea uses West Germany's usage of "contracts" for immigrants during the 1960s and 1970s to attract potential labor forces as one of the methods that were used to control immigrant populations and flow within that particular country. Germany used "rotation" methods, which kept many of immigrants in the country long enough for them to work to gain the least amount of security from the host country and gave Germany fresh supplies of immigrants, to continue a very racial and frankly exploitative method of labor gathering. It is no wonder that a growing South Korea could adopt this labor acquisition method for its own labor needs (Han 15).

Han also looks at the "Pure Blood" method of ethno-nationalism in South Korea. That method supposedly measured the "purity" of the blood within the people of that nation-state, using it to emphasize the superiority of their culture and people; a method they adopted from the Japanese, who in turn had adopted it from Germany (Han 21). Han states that this ethno-nationalism was selectively adopted; white Americans have been treated much more favorably than the groups from the Middle East or other countries. Han even mentions several racially motivated assaults against non-white minorities in South Korea (Han 47-48).

Throughout the book, Han examines the issues of migrant worker rights, bi-racial Korean children, and how K-pop and Korean entertainment media depicts foreigners in negative ways. The well-researched book provides statistical data to support the author's points. The book reveals the complexity of ethno-nationalism in South Korean politics. Few books examining South Korea cover the growing racial tensions between the ethnic Koreans and the non-Korean citizens, who immigrated to Korea for economic opportunities; this book fills a gap in this area.

The author takes into consideration that media material can be biased but he believes that, because of the diverse views in the media, his analysis is a well-rounded. He also talks about critical realism. For a critical realist, social constructions are real and they are the product of complex and contingent causal mechanisms which may not be directly accessible to us. It has become a significant ontological stance among sociologists and others who are deal with extraordinarily complex social issues. His justification for using this method is that "critical realism best paves the way to describe reality and understand how the social phenomenon under examination results from particular kinds of interactions." (Han 5).

Kim looked at Korean minorities outside Korea, such as ethnic Koreans in China and Japan, and summarized how they dealt with prejudices against them. It would be interesting to see in Han's work how Koreans project their own prejudices and racism against minorities within their country. Nevertheless, the book does enhance how nationalism in the modern period has shifted and how racial tensions in these growing nation-states have contributed to the growth of these tensions. The book is beneficial to readers in terms of explaining how Japanese and German nationalist ideas influenced Korean nationalism and how the economic growth and advancement of the country has reshaped or challenged this nationalist outlook.

Gilbert Rozman's anthology book, *Asia's Alliance Triangle* covers the complex relationship among the United States, Japan, and South Korea. The book is divided into five main parts and each part has four chapters that deal with different aspects of this tri-lateral relationship. From the history and politics of this relationship to national security issues, various topics are covered along with the impact of this complex past on the national identity in Japan and Korea. The book is a timely contribution for scholars and common readers who want to understand the scope of the relationship among regional and global powers in the Far East.

While the book mainly focuses on the recent relations between the United States and its two Asian allies, some chapters have a holistic approach with detailed historical background. The editor states that one of the reasons for compiling this book was to bring out the diverse views of Japan and South Korea on China, North Korea, and Russia (Rozman 11). Rozman is aware of the emerging interest in China and this work helps to assess the significance of this tri-lateral alliance and their stance on China. In the five chapters Rozman authored, he discusses the lack of interest in the sixty-year history of this tri-alliance and explains how the US and its Asian alliances function on a political and global scale. Rozman points out that this alliance has been going strong for almost sixty years but the rise of China necessitates an update on the dynamics of this alliance. Details in the narrative reveal that the painful past between Japan and Korea earlier overshadowed the relationship and made it hard for the US to bring these two regional allies together. The threat of communism helped them to leave the past behind, at least temporarily, and look into the future. After the historical background of relationships in the first part, the second part "Japan-ROK Relations under Stress" reveals the magnitude of mistrust between Japan and South Korea. Three chapters by Bong Youngshik, J. Berkshire Miller and Park Cheol Hee detail that building a trust between two countries, especially in areas of defense and military issues, has been a challenging task. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's desire to reinterpret the Japanese constitution and highlight the significance of "collective self-defense" makes Japan's neighbors uncomfortable.

The third part primarily covers Japan and its domestic and foreign policy as well as its defense issues from the past to the most recent Shinzo Abe government. Five chapters in the fourth part cover more specific developments, such as President Barack Obama's meetings with the South Korean President Park Geun-hye and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In light of these gatherings, the authors outline existing issues among three allies. In chapter twelve Kiichi Fujiwara covers the political dimension of the Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands problem between Japan and China and the US intermediating efforts. The Senkaku Islands along with the Spratly Islands issue in the South China Sea have potential to dominate the relations with China. Although South Korea is not directly impacted by these issues, establishment of Chinese dominance in the region may bring future problems for Korea. Five chapters in the fifth and the last part of the book focus on the impact of this complex relationship on national identity in both Japan and South Korea. These chapters as well point out the sensitivity of Koreans and Japanese on almost every issue and the deep-seated mistrust.

Overall, the book is a good source for experts on Asia. It would have been a more informative book had the editor included chapters on the economic dimensions of the relationship among these three regional allies. Economic cooperation has been an instrumental side of the relationship and often mutual economic interests helped to soften relationships. Rozman's edited volume is informative and more general compared to more specific coverage in Kim and Han's works. The last part of Rozman's work highlights how the history of relations can haunt and intoxicate current and future relationships: the past impacts the national identities and such identity

issues impact current politics. This vicious cycle seems to dominate the future of relationships between Japan and South Korea, while economic cooperation offer a counter balance.

The materials presented here will help researchers to understand how Korean Nationalism effects their domestic and diasporic populations, especially important now that North and South Korea are in talks of ending their political strife. The research conducted by the authors will become integral to future discussions of the Korean political sphere, including the complex negotiations of full denuclearization of North Korea; books such as the ones discussed will help to establish important social context to this monumental event.