

Nationalism, Post-Nationalism, and Shin Ch'ae-ho

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Contents

I. <i>Minjok</i> as a Modern and Democratic Construct	3
II. <i>Minjok</i> and Historiography	6
III. <i>Toksa shillon</i> (1908)	8
IV. Colonialist Historiography	11
V. <i>Minjok</i> as a Totalizing Discourse	13
VI. Colonialism and Nationalism	15
VII. <i>Minjok</i> and <i>Minjung</i>	17
VIII. Post-Nationalist Positions and Histories not Yet Written	20

I. *Minjok* as a Modern and Democratic Construct

“Korea” as a civilization, or as a cultural and social formation, has a history dating back well over a thousand years. As the political and religious elite of “Unified” Shilla (676–935), Koryo (936–1392) and Choson (1392–1910) reacted to and participated in intellectual movements within the larger cosmopolitan world centered around China, they were compelled to generate various forms of collective identity—representations of their state and their people as being separate and unique. Through the practice of state-sponsored rituals, the building of monuments, and the compilation of official histories, narratives about the collective “self” were continuously generated. As such narratives were generated, other (competing) narratives were repressed or contested. That is to say, narratives on “Korean” identity did not simply accumulate over time: not all such narratives got transmitted and those that were, were invariably translated (i.e. reinvented) for use in the present.¹

It is in this sense that the concept of Koreans as constituting a “nation” (*minjok*) is a modern construct which, in the historical context of its emergence at the turn of the century, enabled more democratic, more inclusive forms of political action. The word itself (read as *minzoku* in Japanese) was a neologism created in Meiji Japan.² In the early 1880’s, Miyazaki Muryu translated the French Assemblée Nationale as *minzoku kaigi*. But it was only in the 1890’s that *minzoku* came to mean the ethnic nation.³ As usage of the term became more fixed in Japanese political discourse, its meaning approached the German Volk or *Volkschaft*.⁴ And, as Andre Schmid points out, when intellectuals throughout East Asia appropriated the neologism, *minjok* became

¹ As Prasenjit Duara points out, understanding the process by which narratives get transmitted over time requires that we understand how “Transmission of a trace or a narrative is premised upon repression, contestation, and negotiation of other, dispersed traces and narratives. For the historian, it is methodologically necessary to grasp this bifurcation of history as linear transmission and dispersion”; see Prasenjit Duara, “Bifurcating Linear History: Nation and Histories in China and India,” *Positions* 1.3 (winter 1993).

² Depending on the context, I will translate *minjok* as “people,” “Koreans,” or as an ethnically defined “nation.” When Korean (and Chinese and Japanese) nationalists wrote in English in the first half of the twentieth-century, the English word they generally utilized for *minjok* was “race.” In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Walker Connor points out, numerous writers in the West (incorrectly) employed “race” as a synonym for “nation.” In those cases in which I employ the word “nation” for *minjok*, I do mean to convey the idea of common blood ties as suggested in the Latin noun “natio” (from which the word “nation” is derived). On the etymology of words like nation, ethnicity, and the conflation of the words “state” and “nation,” see Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a ...,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1.4 (1978): pp. 379–388.

³ Yasuda Hiroshi, “Kindai Nihon ni okeru ‘minzoku’ kannen no keisei,” *Shiso to gendai* 31 (September 1992); cited in Kevin Doak, “Ethnic Nationalism and Romanticism in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 22.1 (1996).

⁴ Shin Il-ch’ol makes this point: “It must be kept in mind that [the word] *minjok*, as it is commonly used in our country, is not congruent to either “nation” or “race” in English. Rather, it is analogous to *Volk* or *Volkschaft* in German.” Having attained ethnic homogeneity quite early in its history, Shin argues, the Korean *minjok* or *kyore* in premodern times constituted a *chun minjokchok kongdongch’e* (a proto-national community) comparable to the *Volkschaft*, or to the *narodnosti* as conceptualized in Stalin’s later writings on the national question. In an interesting twist, Shin argues that the emergence of modern (*Gesellschaft*) nationalism in Korea was made difficult precisely because traditional society in Korea had such a strong community (*Gemeinschaft*) consciousness. Shin Il-ch’ol, “Shin Ch’ae-ho-ui kundae kukkagwan,” in Shin Ch’ae-ho, edited by Kang Man-kil (Seoul: Korea University Press, 1990), pp. 1–3.

not only a powerful political concept but also “a powerful conceptual too (...) to rewrite [the] historical past.”⁵

This is not to ignore Lydia Liu’s injunction to those engaged in cross-cultural studies to eschew a conceptual model “derived from a bilingual dictionary.”⁶ Although the word *minjok* entered the Korean vocabulary in the late 1890s and became widely used two decades later, this is not sufficient proof that the *minjok* is a modern construct. Son Chin-t’ae (1900-Korean War?) made this point in 1948 when he wrote,

Although the word *minjok* was not used in the past—because it was the quintessential character of Korea’s court-centered, aristo-cratie states to obstruct the development of such [national] consciousness (*sasang*) and concepts—the [Korean] *minjok* certainly did exist even if the word did not.⁷

Similarly, Cho Tong-kol, in a recent book on historians and historiography in Korea, applauds the pioneer of nationalist historiography, Shin Ch’ae-ho (1880–1936), not for creating a historical narrative based on a new construct called the *minjok*, but for creating a historical narrative based on the discovery of the *minjok*—suggesting that prior to its discovery the *minjok* was already (and always) present.⁸ In contrast to these views, I argue in this essay that *minjok* is a modern construct, and not to recognize it as such is to miss the crucial link, in early twentieth-century Korean historiography, between nationalism and democratic thought.

To understand this linkage, we might begin with the question of when and how peasants of Kyongsang-do province, for example, became “Koreans.” Of a very different historical context, Eugen Weber has argued that the French peasant was “nationalized” (that is, made French) only in the 1880s. “The French” were produced in the last decades of the nineteenth-century through the creation of a national language (standard French) and national customs. To be more precise, the transformation of peasants into Frenchmen became possible after the establishment of universal schooling, unification of customs and beliefs by inter-regional labor migration and military service, and subordination of political and religious conflicts to an ideology of patriotism. In other words, it was only after the emergence of modern state structures that distinctive social, political, and linguistic practices became “local variations” of a newly created national culture.⁹

⁵ Andre Schmid, “Rediscovering Manchuria: Sin Ch’ae-ho and the Politics of Territorial History in Korea,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 56.1 (February 1997).

⁶ Such a model—which implies that “a word in language A must equal a word or a phrase in language B; otherwise one of the languages is lacking”—will lead the observer to form mistaken opinions about other peoples and, conversely, about the observer’s own totalized identity; see Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁷ Son Chin-t’ae, *Choson minjoksa kaeron* (An Introduction to the History of Korean Nationalism) (Seoul: Eul Yoo Publishing Co., 1948). Writing in the post-liberation context of divided occupation by Soviet and American forces and violent struggles between the left and the right, Son praised the work of Paek Nam-un, a Marxist historian, but then criticized him for having discovered only a part of “ourselves” (*uri chashin*). That is to say, Son Chin-t’ae’s privileging of the *minjok* as the totality of “ourselves” that transcends class divisions attests to how the category of *minjok* was implicated in ideological struggles during and after the colonial period. Son became South Korea’s Vice-Minister of Education in 1950, and he was forcibly taken to North Korea during the Korean War.

⁸ Cho Tong-kol, “Kundae ch’ogi-ui yoksa inshik” (Historical Awareness in the Arise of Modern Korea), in *Han-guk-ui yoksaga-wa yoksahak*, vol. 2, edited by Cho Tong-kol, Han Yong-u, and Pak Ch’an-sung (Seoul: Changbi Publishers, Inc., 1994), p. 19.

⁹ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). Ernest Gellner makes a similar argument. According to Gellner, “[Nationalism] claims to defend

If the French became “French” in the 1880s, when did Koreans become “Koreans”? In asking this question, it must be emphasized that Korea, perhaps as early as the Koryo period, had far more linguistic and cultural unity than did pre-Revolutionary France. There were, however, significant linguistic and cultural differences among the various provinces in Korea. Even more important than these regional (lateral) differences, status distinctions between yangban, *chung-in* (middle people), commoners, and *ch'onmin* (base people) had created horizontal lines of cultural cleavage in which each status group had its own idiom, norms, and social role. It can be argued, for example, that Confucianism “belonged” to the ruling class (*yangban*) in the sense that it served to underscore, legitimize, and make authoritative the different worlds inhabited by the horizontally segregated layers in premodern Korean society.

This is not to suggest that Korean elites were ignorant of differences (political, linguistic, and cultural) between themselves and, say, the Chinese. For more than a thousand years, Korea had a central bureaucratic state that employed a class of people whose job was to maintain and articulate difference vis-à-vis competing, neighboring states (most often in Manchuria, sometimes Japan, and of course, China itself). However, unlike the modern nation-state, the kingdoms of “Unified” Shilla, Koryo, and Choson were not interested in “nationalizing” their subjects. In fact, it can be argued that the premodern state’s (extremely effective) solution to the problem of maintaining political stability was to tolerate local distinctiveness and to maintain status distinctions.¹⁰

The literati of Choson knew that they shared certain ties with other people living in the Choson kingdom, as well as with ancestors they had never seen. But, as Benedict Anderson would argue, these “ties” would have been imagined particularistically—“as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship.”¹¹ At the turn of the century, however, a new generation of political activists and intellectuals felt they had to redefine Korea in terms of internal homogeneity and external autonomy. The historical juncture for this epistemological break came after Korea was forcibly incorporated into a nation-state system dominated by Western imperial powers, after the Korean monarchy proved itself incapable of keeping those powers at bay, and after Korean intellectuals were forced to acknowledge the strength of Meiji (Westernizing) Japan. Organizing movements for independence, self-strengthening, and people’s rights, these intellectuals re-imagined Korea’s collective identity in terms of a “deep, horizontal comradeship”—regardless of, or because of, the actual divisions and inequalities that prevailed in Korean society.

folk culture while in fact it is forging a high [i.e. yangban] culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society; (...) it preaches and defends continuity, but owes everything to a decisive and unutterably profound break in human history [the development of industrial society]”; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 124–125.

¹⁰ As Fujiya Kawashima has shown, by the eighteenth-century the *yangban* elite out in the countryside had succeeded in constructing diverse local cultures based on Confucian ethics, a culture that structured the daily lives of not just *yangban*, but also *chung-in*, commoners, and slaves. This “cultural localism” was upheld as being “universal” in that Confucian ethics and morality were applicable to every-one everywhere, even as it accentuated a shared sense of self-discipline, self-rule, and self-sufficiency. But this shared local culture did not transgress status distinctions. This culture assumed that the social hierarchy separating the different status groups (*myongbun*) was natural and commonsensical. Fujiya Kawashima, “Cultural Localism in the Late Choson Dynasty and Its Significance in Modern Korea,” *Bulletin of Hiroshima Jogakuin University* 45 (December 1995).

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 1–18.

II. *Minjok* and Historiography

It was ethnic-national historiography (*minjok sahak*), then, born in the early twentieth-century, that 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.¹²

The first nationalist historian responsible for centering the ethnic nation—both as the subject of history and as the object for historical research—was Shin Ch’ae-ho.¹³ His 1908 essay *Toksa shillon* (A New Way of Reading History), set forth the first and most influential historical narrative equating Korean history (*kuksa*) with the history of the Korean nation (*minjoksa*). As a history of the ethnic nation, rather than a dynastic history, Shin Ch’ae-ho’s use of the Tan-gun legend in the twentieth-century context was a re-invention—and not simply a revival—of an old and recurrent narrative in premodern Korean historiography. That is to say, earlier representations of Korea as a social totality in the *Samguk sagi*, *Samguk yusa*, or in the Confucian historiography of the Choson period did not necessarily, or teleologically, develop into the imaginary called the *minjok*. The best evidence that any “transmission” of the past must also be a re-invention is Shin Ch’ae-ho’s *Toksa shillon* itself. If Korea as a homogenous ethnic nation had been a well-established, abiding concept, then there would have been no need to write *Toksa shillon*, and it would not have caused such excitement among his readers in 1908.

By identifying the *minjok*, rather than the monarch, as the subject of an evolutionary history (where the strong survive and the weak perish), Shin Ch’ae-ho’s *Toksa shillon* displaced

¹² As commonly defined in present-day South Korea, the categories of “nationalist historians” and “nationalist historiography” for the colonial period encompass a wide range of historical writing by writers who embraced quite different, sometimes opposing philosophical, political, and methodological positions. By nationalist historiography, I mean histories written as a narrative of resistance to colonial rule, devoted to countering the pernicious effects of colonialist historiography and to empowering Koreans to join the struggle for Korea’s independence, by historians such as Shin Ch’ae-ho, Pak Un-shik, An Chae-hong, Mun Il-p’yong, and Chong In-po. We should be careful to distinguish between national historiography (*minjok sahak*) and nationalist historiography (*minjokchuui yoksahak*). Almost all histories written today are national histories (for example, histories of Korean women, religion, literature, music, art—not to mention politics), but not all histories are nationalist histories.

¹³ Shin Ch’ae-ho was born in 1880, in Ch’ungch’ongnam-do province. He received a classical education from his grandfather and at the age of eighteen entered the Songgyun-gwan, the government-run Confucian academy. In 1905, Shin received his doctor’s degree and at the invitation of Chang Chi-yon joined on the editorial staff of the *Hwangsong shinmun* (Capital Gazette). When the Japanese authorities forced the *Hwangsong shinmun* to close, Shin moved to the *Taehan maeil shinbo* (Korea Daily News) and became its editor-in-chief. In 1907, with the intention of inspiring Korean youth to become heroes themselves, Shin translated Liang Qichao’s (Liang Ch’i-ch’ao) biographical sketches of Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Cavour (*Italy kon-guk samgoljon*), and in the following year wrote biographic sketches of the Koguryo general Ulchi Mundok and Choson admiral Yi Sun-shin. In 1907, Shin also helped organize the Shinminhoe (New People’s Association, a clandestine nationalist organization), and through his editorials, publicized Shinminhoe views. Until annexation in 1910, Shin published *Kajong chapchi* (Family Magazine), a magazine for women, and wrote essays on nationalism, Korean linguistics, Korean history, and poetry. Shin left Korea just before the annexation to continue his nationalist activities abroad, and with the exception of a brief trip home in 1916, he never set foot in Korea again. In 1919, when the March First Movement erupted in Korea, Shin took part in organizing the Korean Provisional Government (KPG) in Shanghai. By 1920, however, Shin was so disgusted with the diplomatic and gradualist strategies advocated by Rhee Syngman and An Ch’ang-ho that he turned his back on the KPG. Although active in revolutionary nationalist politics, Shin also immersed himself in historical study. Shin’s writings in the 1910s and 1920s were influenced by Liang Qichao’s historical methodology (1910s) and by Chinese anarchist intellectuals (early 1920s). In 1923, Shin Ch’ae-ho wrote the “Declaration of Korean Revolution” for the Korean revolutionary organization Uiyoltan. By 1925, Shin Ch’ae-ho had become an anarchist. In 1927 Shin joined the Eastern Anarchist Association, and in the following year he was arrested by the Japanese military in connection with a forgery scheme to raise funds for anarchist activities. In 1936, he died in a Japanese prison in Port Arthur.

traditional forms of Confucian historiography—*p'yonnyonch'e* (chronicles) and *kijonch'e* (annual-biographies)—with the (tragic) epic form. Shin Ch'ae-ho adopted a novel way of telling what Confucian historians had already known; his narrative utilized new codes to produce new structures of meaning quite different from that found in histories written in the chronicle style and the annal-biography style.

Confucian historiography had constituted itself not as a separate discipline but as part of a larger body of knowledge of statecraft (*kyonghak*). Its function was to serve as a mirror and as a repository of knowledge that would enable the monarch and his officials to act morally and ethically in the present. As a pedagogical tool, Confucian histories were used to educate scholar-officials in the art of govern-ing; as a political tool, history writing had the solemn ethical function of assigning praise or blame. Although both official and private histories existed, both were written by bureaucrats for other bureaucrats (either holding office or aspiring to do so).¹⁴ Moreover, in terms of access to court documents and official histories, these could be consulted only by a small group of scholar-officials.¹⁵

Although nationalist historiography constituted itself as a separate discipline (separate from statecraft), it preserved some aspects of Confucian historiography: for example, the concept of history as a mirror for the present, and history as serving an ethical function (assigning praise and blame). But the critical difference had to do with the profound epistemic break caused by Korea's incorporation into the nation-state system dominated by the West in the late-nineteenth century, and the social position of the historian and his intended readership in colonial modernity. Few of the nationalist historians came from high *yangban* status, many were regularly hounded by the colonial police, and most wrote their histories in their capacity as "public intellectuals." When Shin Ch'ae-ho wrote *Toksa shillon*, for example, he was a member of the secret society Shinminhoe (New People's Association) and employed by the newspaper *Taehan maeil shinbo* (Korea Daily News), and the essay itself was serialized in the *Taehan maeil shinbo* from August to December, 1908.¹⁶

On the eve of being colonized by Japan, to achieve political independence and to reclaim dignity and "authentic" identity in reaction to colonialist discourses on Korea, nationalists such as Shin Ch'ae-ho sought to arouse, unite, and mobilize the entire Korean population. In place of loyalty to the king, and attachments to the village, clan, and family, and in place of hierarchic status distinctions among *yangban*, *chung-in* (middle people), commoners, and *ch'onmin* (base people), nationalist historiography endeavored to redirect the people's loyalty toward a new, all-embracing identity of Koreans as a unique ethnic group. It was with this political intent, then, that Shin Ch'ae-ho wrote *Toksa shillon* for an emerging "general public," tracing Korea's ethnic

¹⁴ Private histories were sometimes free of some of the restraints that inhibited official historiography. However, because the authors were either potential or actual office-holders, there was a strong similarity in outlook between private historiography and official historiography.

¹⁵ Since at least 1178, the literati had access to the *Chobo*, written by lower functionaries, which gave notice of decrees and orders from the king, appointments and dismissals of officials, palace affairs, and the particulars of reports from officials in the countryside. Suh Chung-Woo, "Enlightenment Period Newspapers and Fiction," *Korean Studies* 18 (1994): p. 16. However, only a very small circle of scholar-officials had access to documents such as the Daily Record kept by the court diarists, or official histories such as the *shillok* (veritable records).

¹⁶ A secret society organized in 1907 by An Ch'ang-ho, with Yi Tong-hwi, Yang Ki-t'ak, and others, the goals of the Shinminhoe were to promoting nationalist consciousness, Korean independence, and popular sovereignty. Shin Ch'ae-ho wrote its prospectus, *ch'wijiimun*.

and cultural origins as far back as possible to a geographic area that extended far beyond the Korean peninsula into Manchuria.

In 1908, Shin Ch'ae-ho's indictment of Kim Pu-shik's *Samguk sagi* for the deletion of Manchuria from Korean history and his reconceptualization of state history (*kuksa*) as the history of the Korean nation (*minjoksa*), were radical conceptual acts.¹⁷ Shin Ch'ae-ho's identification of the *minjok* as the subject of an evolutionary history marks a watershed in modern Korean intellectual history.¹⁸ Through a reading of Shin Ch'ae-ho's writings, I hope to create an interpretive framework for understanding the historical emergence of nationalist historiography in Korea.

In creating this interpretive framework, I sometimes side with those who condemn nationalism and nationalist historiography and at other times side with those who defend nationalism and nationalist historiography in postcolonial societies such as Korea. To put it simply, some see nationalism as a rational attempt by the weak and poor peoples of the world to achieve autonomy and liberty, whereas others see nationalism as "one of Europe's most pernicious exports" whose inevitable consequence has been the annihilation of freedom. But, I argue that, as in other nationalist movements, Korean nationalism embodies both democratic (liberating) and oppressive tendencies, and these tendencies manifest themselves most directly in the writing of nationalist historiography in Korea. Focusing on the historiography of Shin Ch'ae-ho, I show how nationalist historiography resisted the degrading assertions of Japanese colonialist historiography and helped to create a modern form of civil society in Korea. At the same time, I explain how this nationalist historiography has inhibited the deepening of democracy by suppressing heterogeneity and discontinuity in Korean history.

III. *Toksa shillon* (1908)

Because of space limitations and the existence of superb studies of Shin Ch'ae-ho, I do not attempt an exhaustive interpretation of his historiography.¹⁹ Instead, I present interpretive read-

¹⁷ In a later essay, "Choson yoksasang ilch'onnyon lae cheil taesakkon" (The Most Disastrous Event in the Past One Thousand Years of Korean History), serialized in the *Dong-A Ilbo* from October 1924 through March 1925, Shin Ch'ae-ho saw the defeat of Myoch'ong by Kim Pu-shik in 1135, and the subsequent erasure of Tan-gun and Palhae (and thus Manchuria) from Korean history, as the disastrous turning point in Korean history. The historical context for this polemic (early 1920s) had to do with Shin's denunciation of those Koreans who were lobbying for an "independent domestic administration" (*naejong tongnip*), "voting right" (*ch'amjongkwon*), or "self-rule" (*chach'i*) within colonial Korea. Shin understood these moves as capitulation to Japan's claim over Korea, a capitulation that conformed to the mentality of subservience established by Kim Pu-shik.

¹⁸ Han Yong-u identifies Shin Ch'ae-ho as the initiator (*sonch'angja*) of modern nationalist historiography in Korea. According to Han Yong-u, Shin Ch'ae-ho's *Toksa shillon*, written in 1908, was a pioneering work in modern nationalist historiography because its epistemology was informed by three tenets: nation (*minjok*), democracy (*minju*), and science (*kwahak*). Han Yong-u, *Han-guk minjokchuui yoksahak* (Seoul: Ilchokak Publisher's Co., 1994), pp. 4 & 6.

¹⁹ I would like to acknowledge Michael Robinson's article "National Identity and the Thought of Sin Ch'ae-ho: Sadaejui and Chuch'e in History and Politics" and two articles by Andre Schmid, "Rediscovering Manchuria" and "Decentering the Middle Kingdom: China in Korean Nationalist Thought," unpublished paper. In Korean, I learned a great deal from studies on Korean nationalist historiography written by Cho Kwang, Cho Tong-kol, Han Yong-u, Kang Man-kil, Kim Yong-sop, Pak Ch'an-sung, Shin Il-ch'ol, Shin Yong-ha, and Yi Man-yol. One very important issue not discussed in my essay is the relationship between Taejonggyo (Religion of the Great Ancestors) and Shin Ch'ae-ho's focus on Tan-gun (in his early work). On this issue, see Han Yong-u, *Han-guk minjokchuui yoksahak* (Seoul: Ilchokak Publisher's Co., 1994).

ings of selected passages in Toksa shillon and later works such as *Choson sanggosa* (History of ancient Korea) and the political manifesto “Choson hyongmyong sonon” (Declaration of the Korean revolution). *Toksa shillon* begins:

[par. 1] The history of a state is that which renders a precise record of the rise and/or fall, prosperity and/or decay of the *minjok*. Without the *minjok*, there is no history; without history, the *minjok* cannot have a clear perception of the state—and thus, the historian has a heavy responsibility (...).

[par. 3] A state is an organic entity formed from the national spirit (*minjok chongshin*). That is to say, even in a state formed by various tribal groups (*chongjok*), not to mention a state formed by one tribe with a single blood line, there is always a special tribal group that assumes the primary role (...).

[par. 4] Examining history books used at different schools, I’ve found hardly any of value. In the first chapter, Koreans (*minjok*) are described as if they were part of the Chinese people; in the second chapter, Koreans appear almost like part of the Sonbijok (Hsien-pi); and reading the entire book Koreans are variously made out to be part of the Malgaljok (Moho), part of the Mongojok (Mon-gols), part of the Yojinjok (Jurchen), or part of the Ilbonjok (Japanese). If this were true, our land, which encompasses several tens-of-thousands li, would be in pandemonium with barbarians from north and south milling around, and [our] accomplishments of four thousand years would be credited to the Liang in the morning, and in the evening to the Chu (...).

[par. 5] Incomplete as our ancient history may be, if we examine it carefully, we can clearly discern the true likeness of those who constitute the primary ethnic composition of our country—the descendants of Tan-gun. That being so, what is the reason for the confusion over who our ancestors are? As we try to dispel the ignorance of the entire citizenry through nationalism (*minjokchuui*) and train the minds of our youth with concepts of state so that they may guard our country’s last remaining pulse, history is an indispensable instrument. But bad histories are worse than no history.²⁰

The textbooks referred to by Shin Ch’ae-ho were published by the Bureau of History (P’yonsaguk: established in 1894 under the aegis of the Japanese Minister to Korea). Although these books listed Kim T’aek-yong, Hyon Ch’ae, and others as authors, many of them were nothing more than translations of history books on Korea written by Japanese scholars.²¹ In criticizing these textbooks, Shin Ch’ae-ho (1) identified the history of Korea with the fortunes of the *minjok* as constituted by the descendants of Tan-gun; (2) gave the geographic length of Korea as about ten times the customary 3,000 *li*, thus appropriating nearly all of Manchuria; (3) took great pains to assert a distinct, separate ethnicity for the Korean people, tracing a precise,

²⁰ Shin Ch’ae-ho, *Toksa shillon, Tanjae Shin Ch’ae-ho chonjip*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Tanjae Shin Ch’ae-ho Sosaeng Kinyom Saophoe, 1987 [1972]), pp. 471–72.

²¹ For the list of history textbooks used in this period, see Han Yong-u, *Han-guk minjokchuui yoksahak*, p. 43. Hyon Ch’ae’s *Tongguk saryak* (1906), for example, was all but a translation of Hayashi Taisuke’s *Chosenshi* (1892).

singular genealogical history beginning with Tan-gun through Old Choson—Puyo—Koguryo—Palhae—Koryo—Choson; and (4) characterized, without equivocation, history as an instrument or a vehicle for instilling patriotism among youth.

On the first point, Shin Ch'ae-ho's identification of a country's history with the history of the people (*minjok*) parallels the revolutionary shift that occurred with the French Revolution, the shift from *L'état c'est moi* to *L'état c'est le peuple*. The opening sentence of *Toksa shillon* reflects the republican ideal held by Shin Ch'ae-ho and many other leading nationalist intellectuals of that time. Later in this text Shin Ch'ae-ho stated, "A state does not belong to one individual, it belongs to the entire people."²² As a tactical matter, however, Shin Ch'ae-ho did not attack the Korean monarch.²³ Nevertheless, the republican position staked out in *Toksa shillon* gives evidence of what Kang Man-kil has described as the shift from patriotism based on loyalty to the king to a nationalism based on popular sovereignty.²⁴ This democratic predisposition became much more manifest in Shin Ch'ae-ho's later writing (see the discussion below of the *minjok* in relation to the *minjung*).

As Andre Schmid has pointed out, when Shin Ch'ae-ho asserted a distinct, separate ethnicity for the Korean people that originated with Tan-gun and descended through Puyo, his aim was to subvert weak and limited conceptions of Korea's national space.²⁵ Schmid notes that confrontations over territorial access such as resource concessions to foreign powers, circulation of foreign currencies, extrateritoriality, unregulated Japanese immigration had already undermined inherited conceptions of territorial authority. Shin Ch'ae-ho's *Toksa shillon*, "became the first in a long line of Korean history writing that wielded the Manchurian connection to create a nationalist history that reveled in the grandeur of an ancient past."²⁶

²² Shin Ch'ae-ho, *Toksa shillon*, Tanjae Shin Ch'ae-ho..., vol. 1, p. 482.

²³ Vipin Chandra contrasts this with the situation in China and Japan: "Unlike China, where revolutionists could draw on 'Han nationalism' against 'alien' Manchu rule, or Japan, where the Meiji Restorationists (...) could paint the shogun-nate as a usurper of imperial sovereignty, Korea offered no such rationale for radical activists." See Vipin Chandra, *Imperialism, Resistance, and Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea: Enlightenment and the Independence Club* (Berkeley, Calif.: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1988), p. 215.

²⁴ See the preface in Kang Man-kil, "Ilche shidae-ui pan shingmin sahangnon," in *Han-guk sahaksa-ui yon-gu*, edited by Han-guksa Yon-guhoe (Seoul: Eul Yoo Publishing Co., 1985), pp. 231–232.

²⁵ Shin Ch'ae-ho's lament over the erasure of Palhae from official historiography, along with his irredentism, had historical precedent. In *Palhae ko*, completed in 1784, Yu Tuk-kong (1748–1807) lamented the fact that Koryo did not compile a history of Palhae (In the Confucian historiographic tradition, it is the duty of successive dynasties to compile the history of preceding dynasties from the material left by their predecessors.). Because the *Samguk sagi* did not include Palhae's history, tracing Koryo's legitimacy via "Unified" Shilla, Koryo had in effect given up its claim over the territory Palhae had once controlled. To reclaim Palhae's history as part of Korean history, Yu argued that Palhae and "Unified" Shilla should be seen as forming the Northern and Southern states. This argument was repeated by Kim Chong-ho in his *Taedong chiji* (1864). During the colonial period, this way of periodizing Korean history was adopted by Chang To-pin, An Hwak, and Kwon Tok-kyu. After liberation, in North Korea, Pak Shi-hyong, Chu Yong-hon and others characterized Palhae as the successor state of Koguryo, but they did not refer to this era as the Period of Northern and Southern States (Nambukkuk Shidae). In South Korea, Yi U-song has been the strongest promoter of this term. See his "Nambukkuk shidae-wa Ch'oe Ch'i-won," *Han-guk-ui yoksasang* (Seoul: Changbi Publishers, Inc., 1982). For an overview of historiographical issues surrounding Palhae, see essays by Song Ki-ho in Cho Tong-kol et al., eds., *Han-guksa t'ukkang*, pp. 67–81; and his essay on Yu Tuk-kong in *Han-guk-ui yoksaga-wa yoksahak*, vol. 2, pp. 296–309.

²⁶ See Schmid, "Rediscovering Manchuria," p. 27.

In thus problematizing orthodox conceptions of Korea's national space, Shin Ch'ae-ho drew on irredentist themes that existed in earlier historiography.²⁷ It is also important to note that, two decades prior to Shin Ch'ae-ho's *Toksa shillon*, Japanese historians had begun to question the "limited" conception of Japan's national space. In an article published in 1889, Kume criticized the notion of "Japan as an island nation that had not changed in thousands of years," and he reminded his readers of an ancient Japan that had encompassed Korea and southeastern China. Eventually, as Stefan Tanaka notes, "arguments like Kume's [served] as a historical justification for the annexation of Korea."²⁸ The spatial imagining of a greater Japan and Shin Ch'ae-ho's greater Korea shared a similar strategy, but their political aims were diametrically opposed—Kume was creating a historical framework for Japanese colonialism, and Shin a historical framework for Korean resistance.

With this defensive motivation, Shin Ch'ae-ho identified the Korean *minjok* as the descendants of Tan-gun, thus reconstituting Manchuria as the birthplace of the *minjok* and a powerful reminder of Korea's past glory. Although Shin Ch'ae-ho's appropriation of Manchuria can be seen as a defensive response, this historical narrative also sustained and duplicated a potent totalizing tendency.²⁹ Below, I elaborate on these issues in my discussion of *minjok* as a totalizing discourse, but first we need to examine more closely what it was that Shin Ch'ae-ho was reacting against.

IV. Colonialist Historiography

Colonialist historiography, written mostly by Japanese historians but also by a number of Korean historians, provided justification for Japanese control over Korea by narrating Korean history in terms of "lack"—for example, Koreans lacked the capacity for autonomous development, or Koreans lacked a progressive spirit. Colonialist historiography suggested (and at times

²⁷ In *Choson sanggosa* (History of Ancient Korea), published in 1924, Shin Ch'ae-ho praised Han Paek-kyom's Tongguk chiriji (Korea's Topographic Record) as having inaugurated (proper) historiography. Completed in 1615, Han narrated two lines of descent for Korean history: in the north, from Tan-gun and Kija down through Koguryo; in the south, from Samhan down through Paekche, Shilla, and Kaya. Han Paek-kyom's narrative privileged the northern line of descent over the southern one. Writing at a time when another invasion from Japan seemed unlikely, when the Ming seemed weak, and as the Jurchens were gathering their forces in the north, Han argued for a strong policy toward the Jurchens and included (rein-stated) Manchuria within the territorial boundaries of Korea's ancient past. Adopting Han's narrative strategy, Shin Ch'ae-ho panegyricized the northern line of descent.

²⁸ The reference is to Kume Kunitake, "Nihon fukuin no enkaku," *Shigakkai zasshi* 1 (December 1889). According to Stefan Tanaka, in making the argument that Japan before Jimmu (the mythical first emperor) was a sort of thalassocracy encompassing Kyushu, Korea, and southeastern China, Kume used passages from the *Nihon shoki* and *Kojiki*, not as actual facts, but as allegorical data that describe historical events. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 71–75. In 1891, Kume published an article in *Shigaku zasshi* in which he referred to Shinto as "a primitive custom of sacrifice to heaven." Kume came under such heavy attack from Shintoists and nationalists that he was obliged to relinquish his post at Tokyo Imperial University (i.e. two years after his "Nihon fukuin no enkaku" essay). Numata Jirō, "Shigeno Yasutsugu and the Modern Tokyo Tradition of Historical Writing," in *Historians of China and Japan*, edited by W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 272.

²⁹ As Schmid points out, the depiction of Korea as encompassing nearly all of Manchuria reveals an irredentism in Shin Ch'ae-ho's thought that has not been adequately addressed especially since irredentism looms large in present-day imaginations of right-wing nationalists in South Korea who dream about reclaiming Korea's "ancestral lands" (*kukt'o hoebok*). See Schmid, "Rediscovering a Korean Manchuria: Irredentism in the Thought of Shin Ch'ae-ho," unpublished paper.

stated unequivocally) that because of such inherent deficiencies Japan had no choice but to lead Korea into modern civilization. Present-day South Korean historians identify four characteristics of colonialist historiography: *t'ayulsong ron*, external forces (Chinese, Manchurian, and Japanese) had determined Korea's historical development; *chongch'esong ron*, Korean history was stagnant (late Choson had not even reached the feudal stage of development); *tangp'asong ron*, factionalism is deeply ingrained into the Korean political culture (as evidenced by successive literati purges and factional strife during Choson); and *il-son tongjo ron*, Japanese and Koreans shared common ethnic origins and thus Japan's colonization of Korea represented the restoration of ancient ties.³⁰

According to Hatada Takashi, the origins of what many contemporary Korean historians characterize as colonialist historiography can be traced to mid-Meiji efforts to write a national history for Japan.³¹ One influential work was *Kokushi kan* (A Survey of Japanese History), published by Tokyo Imperial University in 1890. Written by Shigeno Yasutsugu, Kume Kunitake, and Hoshino Hisashi, *Kokushi kan* was intended as a pointer in the teaching of Japanese history, and it was long used as a university textbook.

According to Hatada, *Kokushi kan* drew on the nativist reading of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* which asserted that Japanese and Koreans had a common ancestry (*nissen dossoron*): in the sense that Susano-o (the Impetuous-Male-Deity, or the Storm God) had ruled Korea before settling in Izumo (in Western Honshu); Ina-pi no mikoto (brother of Jimmu, the mythical first emperor of Japan) had become king of Shilla; his son Ama no hi hoko had returned to Japan in submission; and Empress Jingu (Jingu Kogo) had led a punitive expedition against Shilla forcing its king into submission.³² *Kokushi kan*, as intended, provided the narrative framework for Japan's national history textbooks used in primary and secondary schools. This, along with media portrayals of Korea following Japan's victory in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), created a historical imaginary (*rekishi zo*) whereby the Japanese came to believe that Japan had ruled Korea in ancient times, and the Japanese colonization of Korea in modern times represented the restoration of an ancient relationship.³³

³⁰ By “colonialist historiography,” I mean historiography written before, during, and after the colonial period whose ultimate political aim was to justify Japan's colonization of Korea in 1910. See Song Ch'an-sop, “Ilche-ui shing-min sahak,” in *Han-guk-ui yoksaga-wa yoksahak*, vol. 2, edited by Cho tong-kol et al.

³¹ The History Department at Tokyo Imperial University was established in 1887. *Nihon shiryaku* (An Outline of Japanese History) was also published in the same year (*Kokushi gan* was a revision of *Nihon shiryaku*). See Hatada Takashi, *Nihonjin no chosengan* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1969).

³² Hatada, *Nihonjin no chosengan*, p. 232.

³³ This nationalist imaginary in Japan's national histories was reproduced in histories of Korea. Hayashi Taisuke's *Chosenshi* (History of Korea), published in 1892, argued that in ancient times the northern part of Korea had been a colony of China (the Four Chinese Commanderies of Lo-lang, Chen-fan, Lin-t'un and Hsüan-t'u: 108 B.C.E.-313 C.E.), and the southern part of Korea had been controlled by Mimana (Kaya), a Japanese colony. Hayashi's *Chosenshi* set the framework for other studies on Korea that sought to explain Korea's historical development as having been determined by external forces. Hyon Ch'ae's *Tongguk saryak* (1906), which was used as a Korean history textbook in the newly established public schools, was pretty much a translation of Hayashi's *Chosenshi*. But what truly scandalized Shin Ch'ae-ho was that Hyon Ch'ae did not know what he had done wrong—both in terms of historical scholarship and in the political sense. Recent archaeological evidence suggests a very different dynamic between “Japan” and “Korea” during the Three Kingdoms period. Succinctly put, émigrés from Koguryo, Paekche, and Shilla seemed to have played decisive roles (cultural and political) in the formative period of “Japanese” history.

These studies of Korea in turn set the tone for other studies on the Orient.³⁴ Stefan Tanaka has shown how Japanese historians created the category of *toyoshi* (oriental history) so as to narrate Japanese history as different but equal to European history. One strategy used by Tokugawa intellectuals to deal with the China-centered East Asian world order, and to assert Japan's equivalence with China, had been to replace "Chugoku" (Middle Kingdom) with "Shina." After Japan's victory in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), historians such as Shiratori Kurakichi employed the term "Shina" to signify China "as a troubled place mired in its past, in contrast to Japan, a modern Asian nation."³⁵ The symbolic shift in names for China had its counterpart in Korea as well: After Japan's victory over China, the "decentering" of China reversed inherited notions of "civilization" and shifted the locus away from China and towards Japan and the West.

Shin Ch'ae-ho's use of "China" rather than "Chunguk" reflects this shift. At the same time, for historians like Shin Ch'ae-ho, the violence of imperialism, and colonialist historiography, was justification enough for writing a nationalist historiography. Shin Ch'ae-ho's historiography came to set the themes for much of later nationalist historiography, which insisted that Korea has always had a distinct culture and society, testified to the veracity of the Korean nation by chronicling the long history of the Korean people's resistance to foreign aggression, and narrated the emergence of the Korean nation as an essential part of World History.

At the same time, we can detect in Shin Ch'ae-ho's adoption of categories like China (Shina) and *tongyangsa* (*toyoshi*), a paradox inherent to nationalist discourse in the colonial world: the subjugated people, in the very act of resisting colonial rule, speak the language of their oppressors—the language of competition, democracy, and progress. The problematic in nationalist thought forces it relentlessly to demarcate itself from the discourse of colonialism, but even as nationalist discourse seeks to assert the feasibility of entirely new political possibilities, it remains a prisoner of the modes of thought characteristic of rational knowledge in the post-Enlightenment age—thus the lack of autonomy of nationalist discourse.³⁶

V. *Minjok* as a Totalizing Discourse

If, however, *minjok* is a twentieth-century construct, and a derivative discourse at that, how was it that Korean nationalism (*minjokchuui*) became such a powerful mobilizing force? While acknowledging the power (and achievements) of the Korean nationalist movement, we should be on guard against the appropriating and totalizing power of nationalist historiography. As Elie Kedourie cautions, not being wary of nationalist categories in historiography can result in deception:

³⁴ To cite one more example, Fukuda Tokuzo's *Kankoku no keizai soshiki to keizai tani* (Economic Units and Economic Organization in Korea) published in 1904, asserted that the most salient characteristic of Korean history was its stagnancy. Fukuda found Choson of the late nineteenth century comparable to tenth-century Japan (Fujiwara period). When Paek Nam-un wrote his *Chosen shakai keizaishi* (The Social Economic History of Korea, 1933), his polemical target was Fukuda Tokuzo and the "stagnation theory" then prevalent in Japanese historiography on Korea. Paek Nam-un studied at the Tokyo College of Commerce (today Hitotsubashi University) from 1919 to 1924 where Fukuda Tokuzo had previously taught economics.

³⁵ Shiratori Kurakichi was a professor at Tokyo Imperial University from 1904 to 1925 and the scholar primarily responsible for the formation and formulation of Toyoshi as an academic field of study. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient*, p. 4.

³⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Men who thought they were acting in order to accomplish the will of God, to make the truth prevail, or to advance the interests of a dynasty, or perhaps simply to defend their own against aggression, are suddenly seen to have been really acting in order that the genius of a particular nationality should be manifested and fostered.³⁷

Or, as argued more recently by Prasenjit Duara, while in reality the “nation” is a contested and contingent identity, national (as well as nationalist) historiography secures for the nation “the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time.”³⁸ Kedourie and Duara’s critique of national historiography is pertinent to the Korean case.

With easy confidence, contemporary Korean national historiography (*minjok sahak*) secures for the nation a long list of “national” heroes from as early as the Three Kingdoms period, heroes like Ulchi Mundok (mid-sixth-century—early seventh-century) of Koguryo. But, as John Duncan points out, it is “extremely unlikely that the peoples of Koguryo, Paekche and Shilla all thought of themselves as members of a larger, “Korean” collectivity that transcended local boundaries and state loyalties.”³⁹ Nevertheless, on the basis of certain assumptions made about blood and soil, national (and nationalist) historiography endows these military heroes with a common “national” identity. As explained by Etienne Balibar, this national identity

is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to [this entity] the continuity of a subject. The formation of the nation thus appears as the fulfillment of a “project” stretch-ing over centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness (...).⁴⁰

Through the power of this ideological form, national histories can portray even Paleolithic inhabitants of the peninsula as “early Koreans,” their culture as “pre-national,” and the modern Korean nation-state as the culmination of a long process of development.⁴¹ But, as Etienne Balibar

³⁷ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960), pp. 71–81.

³⁸ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), p. 4.

³⁹ I thank my colleague John Duncan for allowing me to quote from his paper “Proto-nationalism in Premodern Korea,” presented at the Third Pacific-Asia Conference on Korean Studies held in Sydney, Australia, in the summer of 1996. In this paper, Duncan rejects the premise (common in nationalist histories) that the nation was already in existence at the dawn of historical time. Thus, he rejects the notion that the contest among the Three Kingdoms (Koguryo, Paekche, and Shilla) represented a struggle for the political unification of the Korean *minjok*. On the other hand, Duncan points out that the formation of a homogeneous, kingdom-wide elite class was well underway by the mid-Koryo. Moreover, Duncan argues that we should not rule out the possibility that state-organized corvée and military service could have created a wider sense of identification with the state, “however negative that may have been at times,” and a certain homogenizing of the populace. To what extent the premodern state, or other forces, could have broken down local cultural and linguistic barriers, I will have to address in another forum. Suffice it to say at this point, Duncan’s conclusion somewhat parallels my own in that nationalist historiography seeks to project into the past “a modern nationalist discourse which seeks to elide potentially competitive forms of identification such as class, region, or gender in favor of a totalizing national identity.”

⁴⁰ See Etienne Balibar’s “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, edited by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 86.

⁴¹ The same holds for North Korean historiography—except that Koguryo/Palhae would be substituted for Unified Shilla in tracing the development of subsequent “mainstream” Korean history. The reason for the discrepancy is quite simple: the kingdom of Koguryo, and subsequently Palhae, encompassed northern Korea and southern Manchuria, whereas Unified Shilla (after causing Koguryo’s collapse with the aid of Tang China) encompassed the southern two-thirds of the Korean peninsula. Unified Shilla’s northern boundary with Palhae ran east along the Taedong-gang river to the Bay of Wonsan.

reminds us, we should not read this history as “a line of necessary evolution but [as] a series of conjunctural relations which has inscribed them after the event into the pre-history of the nation-form.”⁴²

Even as some historians acknowledge the discontinuities and breaks in Korean history, nearly all still accept the nation-state as the “normal” or “natural” form of political community.⁴³ This, Prasenjit Duara argues, is a central facet of Western hegemony: the assumption that the nation-state is the only legitimate form of polity.⁴⁴ We are as yet unable to imagine alternative political forms, and by writing narratives of the nation, which constitutes much of modern historiography, historians help maintain the illusion of a nation’s necessary and unilinear evolution. The nation form, as ideology, presents itself to us as ontological necessity—our desire that history will con-firm our belief that the present rests on profound intentions and necessities prompts the production of a linear, continuous history that begins in the ancient past and culminates in the establishment of the Republic of Korea or (depending on one’s politics) the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.⁴⁵

It remains for a democratic historiography, then, to show how the nation threatens to impose immutable articulations in an authoritarian way. And strange as it may sound, the basis for a much less totalizing historiography may, I think, be found in Shin Ch’ae-ho’s later historiography and certainly in his anarchist writings. But first, we need to look more closely at the relationship between colonialism and nationalism.

VI. Colonialism and Nationalism

The proliferation of discourses on Korean identity, which emanated from both the Korean nationalist movement and the Japanese colonial state, stemmed from the necessity to “nationalize.” For both Koreans and the Japanese, the necessity of producing Korean subjects was prompted by the development of the global nation-state system.⁴⁶ In the process of trying to compete,

⁴² See Balibar, in *Race, Nation, Class*, edited by Balibar and Wallerstein, p. 88.

⁴³ In *Han-guk kodaesa sanch’aek*, the authors (a younger generation of historians) begin their narrative with an admission of uncertainty: “When did people begin to live in the Korean peninsula? And who are our ancestors? These questions engross many people, but the reader cannot expect clear-cut answers. And this situation will remain the same. Clear-cut answers will not be forthcoming because it was so long ago, and because there is such a dearth of historical evidence (...). Habitually calling ourselves a homogeneous nation (*tanil minjok*), there is a tendency to stress the purity of our bloodline. But the bloodline of contemporary Koreans was not homogenous nor constant from the beginning.” See *Han-guk kodaesa sanch’aek* (Seoul: Yoksa Pip’yongsa, 1994), p. 11 & 15. As suggested by *Han-guk kodaesa sanch’aek*, the essentialist, totalizing strategy does get problematized by Korean historians. But it seems to me that this undertaking needs to be theorized in a more rigorous way.

⁴⁴ See Prasenjit Duara, “Rescuing History from the Nation-State” (working papers and proceedings of the Center for Psychosocial Studies, Center for Psychosocial Studies, Chicago, 1991), p. 7.

⁴⁵ Almost all general histories of Korea begin with the Bronze Age, if not earlier, suggesting that the people who used bronze daggers and built dolmen tombs more than 2,500 years ago were early Koreans. A cursory survey can illustrate this essentialist tendency. The university-level general Korean history textbook *Han-guksa kaesol* (Outline of Korean history), authored by South Korea’s Compilation Committee for National History Textbooks, begins the narrative of Korean history with: “The Korean nation (*minjok*) emerged from the Neolithic period and the Bronze Age as an exceptional, homogeneous people possessing a unique culture, and established a tradition that was different from that of the Chinese.” See *Han-guksa kaesol* (Seoul: Compilation Committee for National History Textbooks, 1983), p. 15. In *Choson t’ongsa*, vol. 1, published in P’yongyang by the Social Science Academy, the narrative begins with the appearance of “primitive bands” in Northeast Asia and the Korean peninsula during the Paleolithic era about a million years ago; See Son Yong-jong et al., *Choson t’ongsa*, vol. 1 (P’yongyang: Sahoe Kwahak Ch’ulp’ansa, 1991), p. 2.

or simply survive, in the nation-state system, both the colonial state and the Korean nationalist movements and organizations had to study, standardize, and thus re-invent (or just invent) almost everything we now associate with the Korean nation.⁴⁶

Compelled to deny any “constructive” role to Japanese colonialism, contemporary Korean nationalist accounts draw attention to the last decade of the colonial period when the colonial authorities, under the banner of “Naisen Ittai” (Interior [Japan] and Korea as one body), pursued a policy of forced assimilation: eliminating the use of Korean in school instruction (1934), requiring attendance at Shinto ceremonies (1935), and the forced adoption of Japanese surnames (1939). The slogan of “Naisen Ittai,” however, reveals the ambivalence of Japan’s racist policy throughout the colonial period, the ambivalence marked by the combination of exteriorization and internal exclusion. Japan, as the Interior (*nai*), excludes Korea (*sen*) as the “outside”; at the same time, this outside (Korea) must become one with the Interior which is always already there.⁴⁷

It was in this sense that Japanese colonialism was “constructive” for both the colonizer and the colonized: the construction of Japanese superiority as demonstrated by the inferiority of Koreans; and the superiority claimed by the colonizer generating a self-image of inferiority among Koreans.

Coercion, prohibition, and censorship, then, were not the only (or even primary) forms through which colonial power was exercised. The Japanese colonial state did establish new rules and controls over the enunciation of Korean national identity. Areas, if not of utter silence, at least of tact and discretion, were established for example, in newspaper editorials and the school curriculum. At the same time, there was a steady proliferation of discourses concerning Korean identity emanating from the Japanese colonial state itself—including studies of Korean history, geography, language, customs, religion, music, art—in almost immeasurable accumulated detail. What are we to make of this?

For the Japanese colonial state, the goal of exploiting Korea and using it for its strategic ends went hand in hand with the work of transforming peasants into Koreans, or “Chosenjin.” In other words, the logic of its racist colonial policy compelled the Japanese colonial state to reconstitute (disparate) Korean identities into a homogenous “Chosenjin.” Thereafter, “Chosenjin” became both a bureaucratic and derogatory classification that applied to all Koreans regardless of gender, regional origin, or class background.

Thus, contrary to conventional nationalist accounts which argues that Japanese colonial authorities pursued a consistent and systematic policy of eradicating Korean identity, we should see that the Japanese colonial state actually endeavored to produce Koreans as subjects in the sense of being under the authority of the Japanese emperor, and in the sense of having a sepa-

⁴⁶ The transformation of Japanese peasants into Japanese (*kokumin*) had begun several decades earlier—after the consolidation of the Meiji Restoration and the establishment of a strong central state. By the time of Korea’s annexation, the Japanese state had accumulated substantial experience with the technologies of nation-building—including the production of national consciousness. This is what Balibar means (Balibar and Wallstein, eds., *Race, Nation, Class*, pp. 96–97) when he writes, “No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them (...) are ethnicized.”

⁴⁷ I am indebted to Ted Hughes for his discussion of Naisen Ittai. Hughes writes, “The nation can figure itself as plenitude, presence, originary self-identity only by means of a supplementary racism which, as supplement, necessarily points to the structural lack, absence, dispersal of this self-identity. Japan as “Interior” can only figure itself as inside, as nation, by adding to itself the supplement of its “inferior” racial Other” (unpublished paper). For discussion of racism not as an “expression” of nationalism but as its “supplement,” see Etienne Balibar, “Racism and Nationalism,” in *Race, Nation, Class*, edited by Balibar and Wallerstein.

rate (and inferior) subjectivity. This, in turn, led to a bifurcated national (and racial) discourse—because Korean nationalist historians, in competition with the Japanese colonial state, were engaged in the project of recovering/producing an autonomous Korean subjectivity. Nationalist historians would find evidence of this subjectivity in history, but in necessarily incomplete or disfigured form: only political independence could render possible the full realization of true Korean subjectivity.

Thus, we have both the Japanese colonial state and Korean nationalists researching and writing Korean history, preserving and interpreting Korean customs and religious practices, and laboring to create a standard Korean language. Although the power of the repressive and ideological apparatuses of the Japanese colonial state far surpassed that of the Korean nationalist movement, the contradictions inherent to Japan's racist colonial policy, along with the capacity of the Korean nationalist movement to (re-)generate discourses of identity and liberation, insured that the discourse on nation remained a contested field throughout the colonial period.⁴⁸

The ability of historians like Shiratori to define, limit, and authorize a certain view of the rest of the Orient, and then impose it, was made possible by an emerging industrial mode of production in Japan whose success was verified in Japan's victories over China (1895) and Russia (1905). And yet, Japan's version of Orientalism could not achieve full hegemonic status in the sense that even as Japan colonized Korea, established a puppet state in Manchuria, and controlled parts of north China, Japan remained a dependency of Britain and the United States. Thus, we might say that there were overlapping and competing "hegemonies" operating in Korea, producing competing discourses on race, nation, gender, modernity, and culture. Moreover, these hegemonies dissipated as one moved from the core (London, Washington, Tokyo) to the major intellectual centers in the periphery (Beijing, Shanghai). From the periphery, intellectuals like Shin Ch'ae-ho succeeded in subverting and/or displacing the dominant framework in important ways.⁴⁹

VII. *Minjok* and *Minjung*

In Shin Ch'ae-ho's anarchist writings (1925 on), the all-embracing identity of *minjok* is replaced by the more partisan category of *minjung*. In historical studies written in the 1910s and early 1920s, Shin had begun to present a less essentialist way of conceptualizing the nation. Perhaps as a self-critique of his earlier position in *Toksa shillon*, Shin Ch'ae-ho's "Introduction" to the *Choson sanggosa* (History of ancient Korea; hereafter CS) has moments of ambivalence in signifying the *minjok*, that is, moments of slippage in the opposition of self/Other. In "writing from the periphery," Shin Ch'ae-ho succeeded in subverting not only colonialist historiography, but many of the assumptions associated with the nation form. Ironically, this counter-hegemonic move was

⁴⁸ Any "Korean" subjectivity created under such conditions—whether loyal or defiant to the Japanese empire—had to be profoundly unstable, and constantly threatened by the contradictions of colonial experience. By this I mean starvation alongside plenty, brutal oppression alongside new forms of pleasure and new objects of desire (made possible by a new popular/consumer culture). These contradictions, experienced in different ways by Koreans and Japanese residents of Korea, end-lessly reproduced the politics of identity and difference.

⁴⁹ Robert Young asserts that, if poststructuralism is the product of a single historical moment, then that moment is probably not May 1968 but rather the Algerian War of Independence. Suggesting that there is a link between subversive tendencies in poststructuralism and resistance to colonialism in the periphery (Algeria), Young notes that Sartre, Althusser, Derrida and Lyotard, among others, were all either born in Algeria or personally involved with the events of the war. See Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

made possible through Shin Ch'ae-ho's appropriation of Hegel's subject-object distinction. It is worth quoting at length from Shin's introduction to CS.

What is history? It is the record of the state of mental activity in human society wherein the struggle between the "I" (a) and the "non-I" (*pia*) develops through time and expands through space. World history, then, is a record of such a state for all of mankind, while Korean history is a record of such a state for the Korean people (*Choson minjok*).

Who do we refer to as "I" and the "non-I"? Simply put, we call the person situated in the subjective position "I," and all others we call "non-I." For example, Koreans call Korea "I" and call England, America, France, Russia, and others the "non-I." But the people of England, America, France, Russia, and other countries each call their countries "I" and call Korea a "non-I." The proletariat refers to itself as "I" and to landlords, capitalists, and others as the "non-I."

But the landlords, capitalists, and others each refer to their own group as "I" and to the proletariat as the "non-I." Not only this but in learning, in technology, in occupations, and in the intellectual world—and in every other area—if there is an I, there will be a non-I as its opposite; and just as there is an I and the non-I within the I position, so there is an I and the non-I within the non-I position. Therefore, the more frequent the contact between I and the non-I, the more heated will be the struggle of the I against the non-I. And so there is no respite in the activity of human society, and there will never be a day when the forward advance of history will be completed. It is for this reason that history is the record of struggle between I and the non-I (...).

[Paragraph 7] If the people of Myo, China, etc.—the non-I—constituting the other (*sangdaejja*) had not existed, it is unlikely that "I" would have existed. That is, naming the state as Choson, building the three capitals, keeping the five armies, etc.—this manifestation of the "I" would not have occurred (...).⁵⁰

Here, in reference to "China" (*Shina* in Japanese), we might detect the presence of Japanese Orientalism. But although Shin Ch'ae-ho may have used "China" (中國) rather than "Chungguk" (中國) to distance Korea from the barbarian/civilized, outer/inner implications of China as the Middle Kingdom, Shin Ch'ae-ho's use of China in CS did not (indeed could not) invoke the kind of Orientalist assumptions present in Shiratori's historiography. National identity (Korean, English, or French) is historically constructed and changes over time⁵¹: National identity may have been constructed in opposition to a foreign other, but it is also (necessarily) fragmented from within. Thus, we find the subject-object distinction made by Hegel, but it is clear that the philosophical structure "which uncannily simulates the project of nineteenth-century imperialism," as Robert Young puts it, has been taken over, made "universal" from the point of view of the colonized.⁵²

Immersed in the intellectual ferment of Shanghai and Beijing (especially in the wake of the May Fourth Movement), Shin was able to appropriate Hegel's dialectic in a way that produced

⁵⁰ Shin Ch'ae-ho, *Choson sanggosa*, Tanjae Shin Ch'ae-ho..., vol. 1, pp. 31–32.

⁵¹ Shin Ch'ae-ho writes, "Neither individuals nor societies possess an intrinsic self-identity (*chasong*: inner essence, true nature) (...). Self-identity comes to be constituted by way of the environment (*hwan-gyong*) and the epoch (*shidae*)." "Introduction" to CS, Tanjae Shin Ch'ae-ho..., vol. 1, p. 70.

⁵² Robert Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 3.

not a chau-vinist historiography (based on the triumphant, rational subject), but a contingent and open-ended one. Even if we did not know that Shin Ch'ae-ho became an anarchist after writing these histories,⁵³ the texts themselves suggest moments of ambivalence in signifying the *minjok*: that is, moments of slippage in the opposition of self/Other. "If there is an I, there will be a non-I as its opposite; and just as there is an I and the non-I within the I position, so there is an I and the non-I within the non-I position."⁵⁴

In his later anarchist writings, Shin tried to construct a new collective subjectivity capable of subverting the modernist program which he saw as oppressive, exploitative, and brutal. The nation form as imagined by the West was hegemonic—hegemonic in the sense that the global nation-state system set the boundaries of political discourse, defining the nation-state as the "normal" or "natural" form of political community. And yet, no construct can be completely or permanently hegemonic, and hegemony dissipated as one moved from the core to the periphery. From the periphery, then, intellectuals like Shin Ch'ae-ho succeeded in subverting and/or displacing the dominant framework in important ways.

What did Shin Ch'ae-ho advocate in the 1920s? As Shin Yong-ha argues, Shin's disgust with nationalists in the Korean Provisional Government, plus his reading of Pyotr Kropotkin, turned Shin from nationalism to anarchism.⁵⁵ Today, most conservative intellectuals in South Korea gloss over the fact that rather than the nation (*minjok*), the historical subject in Shin Ch'ae-ho's revolution was the people (*minjung*), a broad political grouping of the oppressed and exploited "propertyless masses" (*musan taejung*). The *minjung*, as Shin Ch'ae-ho used the term, was a more amorphous category than Marx's proletariat, but it was not synonymous with the Korean people as a whole, that is, *minjok*. As Marx did for the proletariat, Shin Ch'ae-ho granted ontological privilege to the *minjung*. But unlike the Marxist-Leninists, Shin Ch'ae-ho refused to distinguish between the vanguard and the masses, or between leaders and the led.

Shin Ch'ae-ho resisted the Leninist idea that the "for itself" of the revolutionary subject was accessible only to the enlightened vanguard. And indeed, even as he called for a revolution, Shin

⁵³ In 1923, when Shin wrote the "Declaration of the Korean Revolution" for the Korean revolutionary organization Uiyoltan, he did so in consultation with Yu Cha-myong who was an anarchist and the leading theorist in the Uiyoltan. According to Shin Yong-ha, Yu Cha-myong's anarchist ideas were influenced by Li Shizeng and Wu Zhihui. See Shin Yong-ha, "Shin Ch'ae-ho-ui mujongbu chuui tongnip sasang," in Shin Ch'ae-ho, edited by Kang Man-kil (Seoul: Korea University Press, 1990) p. 106. Li Shizeng and Wu Zhihui were among the doyens of Chinese anarchism; See Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 12–14. Anarchist ideals were broadly diffused in radical circles in Beijing and Shanghai in the early 1920s. One commonality between Li, Wu, and Shin was their admiration of Pyotr Kropotkin. In his 1925 essay "Nanggaek-ui shinnyon man'pil," Shin called on the Korean youth to "become baptized" with Kropotkin's essay "An Appeal to the Young."

⁵⁴ Shin Ch'ae-ho, "Introduction" to CS, *Tanjae Shin Ch'ae-ho...*, vol. 1, pp. 31–32.

⁵⁵ Unlike other conservative nationalist intellectuals, Shin Yong-ha acknowledges Shin Ch'ae-ho's turn toward anarchism. According to Shin Yong-ha, Shin Ch'ae-ho turned to anarchism because of his estrangement from the nationalists in the KPG, and because he was persuaded by Kropotkin's critique of Social Darwinism. For Kropotkin, mutual aid (i.e. cooperation) was as central to animal and human evolution as the struggle of the fittest. In Shin Ch'ae-ho's earlier nationalist writings, there had been a tension between Shin's program of strengthening national power and his critique of Japanese imperialism. That is, if survival depended on national power, what could be the ethical basis for criticizing imperialism? As Shin Yong-ha notes, this tension emanated from Social Darwinist assumptions that emphasized competition but not mutual aid. In Kropotkin, then, Shin Ch'ae-ho found a more ethical way to understand human evolution. Repelled by the antics of nationalist politicians, Shin turned to anarchism which placed so much faith on the cooperative spirit of the *minjung* while at the same time taking direct action against imperialism. Shin Yong-ha, "Shin Ch'ae-ho-ui mujongbu chuui tongnip sasang," in Shin Ch'ae-ho, edited by Kang Man-kil, pp. 78–147.

Ch'ae-ho's language echoed the moralistic tone of Kropotkin.⁵⁶ But it was Shin Ch'ae-ho's assertion that an unfettered people would construct communities based on equality, cooperation, and reason. Although Korea's liberation from colonial rule was a fundamental goal of the revolution, "privileged classes" (*t'ukkwon kyegup*) which oppress the "Korean people" (Choson *minjung*—with Choson *minjung* in brackets in the original text), including the colonial administration, were to be overthrown so as to recover an "unfettered people" (*chayujok Choson minjung*). The emergence of an unfettered people, and the communities they would create based on equality, cooperation, and reason, could not be brought about through the power of any nation-state.

Here, then, was a political program that went beyond nationalism, and a historical view that undermined the continuous, unified narrative of the nation. To those who fear the unraveling of this narrative, Shin Ch'ae-ho might say:

Those who do not know how to build do not know how to destroy, and those who do not know how to destroy do not know how to build. Construction and destruction are different only in appearance. In the mind, destruction is immediately construction.⁵⁷

VIII. Post-Nationalist Positions and Histories not Yet Written

A post-nationalist perspective need not be synonymous with anti-nationalism.⁵⁸ But it does imply a rejection of certain nationalist assertions.⁵⁹ For one, it would reject the assertion that the *minjok*, as an objective historical entity, was present at the very beginning of Korean history. A post-nationalist position, recognizing the historicity (that is, the constructedness) of the nation, nevertheless recognizes the (limited) value of that construct. Need we be reminded that human civilization is founded on constructs? That is, everything we hold dear is a historical construct: truth, democracy, freedom, equality, friendship, peace. In a related (but lesser) sense, the nation too is a valuable construct. But just as peace should signify something more than the mere absence of war, we need to think deeply about what the *minjok* should (and should not) signify in the act of resisting imperialism.

The imaginary called the *minjok* was constructed on the debris of Confucian political discourse by men like Shin Ch'ae-ho. Nationalism directed the people's loyalties to a new, all-inclusive, collective identity called the *minjok*, and thus nationalism created the nation. Nationalism was (is)

⁵⁶ Shin Il-ch'ol suggests that anarchism was a mere tool for Shin Ch'ae-ho's nationalist goals; see his *Shin Ch'ae-ho-ui sahoe sasang yon-gu* (Seoul: Hangilsa Publishing Co., 1984), p. 328. The dismissal of Shin Ch'ae-ho's anarchism is difficult to fathom in light of the textual evidence. Shin Yong-ha, who acknowledges Shin Ch'ae-ho's turn to anarchism in the mid-1920s, argues that Shin would have abandoned his anarchism after Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. But this is just another way of erasing the tension between Shin Ch'ae-ho's earlier writings on *minjok* and his later emphasis on *minjung*. By erasing this tension, what is being repressed is the radically egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, and open-ended character of Shin Ch'ae-ho's later writings.

⁵⁷ Shin Ch'ae-ho, *Choson hyongmyong sonon*, Tanjae Shin Ch'ae-ho..., vol. 3, pp. 43–44.

⁵⁸ At present, the discourse on "globalization" obscures other non-nationalist, or post-nationalist positions. By construing cross-border trade and the free flow of capital as both highly beneficial and unstoppable, the discourse on globalization serves an ideological function: The devastation of local economies and democratic structures (such as labor unions, environmental laws, etc.), gets downplayed or even pushed outside mainstream discourse. The post-nationalist position being outlined in this paper would suggest an internationalist stance critical of both nationalist politics, and globalization as envisioned by Wall Street or the IMF.

⁵⁹ The political aim, here, is not to "disarm" (☒☒☒) Korean intellectuals. A post-nationalist stance can produce a more rigorous critique of Western and Japanese imperialism.

a subjective force, but at the historical juncture when a China-centered world order crumbled and Choson was reduced to semi-colonial status, the <en>minjok attained the character of an external “objective reality.” The “objectivation” of the *minjok* began in the vernacular press in the last decade of the nineteenth century. When “internalized” at the individual level, women, peasants, and even *ch'onmin* experienced the *minjok* as a facticity outside of themselves, as an objective reality which could be experienced in common with others. In this way, a relatively new discourse came to possess the capacity to direct individual lives. A post-nationalist perspective, then, recognizes the historicity of the *minjok*, and acknowledges the positive (and negative) aspects of nationalism. Specifically, the positive aspects of nationalism had to do with the creation of new social identities and new political spaces which enabled an ever broader spectrum of people to fight both imperialist aggression and the inequalities of Choson society, including gender oppression and status discrimination.

Shin Ch'ae-ho's turn to anarchism—where the all-embracing identity of *minjok* is replaced by the more partisan category of *minjung*—would imply that *minjok*, by itself, can no longer serve as a democratic imaginary. *Minjok* as a political (and historiographical) concept had had a democratic tendency because it was conceptualized as being inclusive of all Koreans. But in the process of constructing this new collective identity, the *minjok*, defined as a unified Self, inevitably acquired a totalizing tendency as it sought to subordinate or even suppress heterogeneity and “internal” conflict so as to oppose the external, foreign Other. To the degree that the democratic versus totalizing potential of nationalism revolves around the question of sameness and difference—that is, how to define the self (☒) vis-à-vis the other (☒☒)—a post-nationalist perspective should be able to reveal new points of antagonism.

Politically, to paraphrase Shin Ch'ae-ho, a post-nationalist perspective on the questions of (peaceful) Korean reunification, or peace and democracy in East Asia, would recognize that there will *always* be a self (☒) and other (☒☒) among “ourselves” (☒), and a self and other among “them.” Today, most people in South Korea see themselves as the self (☒) and the people of North Korea as the other (☒☒)—and vice versa. At a different level, most Koreans see themselves as the self (☒) and the Japanese as the other (☒☒)—and vice versa. But within South Korea (and within North Korea and Japan), there exists both the ☒ and the ☒☒, that is, heterogeneity and conflict along multiple cleavages (gender, class, etc.).

One lesson to be drawn from Shin Ch'ae-ho's observation, then, is that a peaceful and democratic reconciliation and reunification of the two Koreas cannot be a matter of the people in North and South Korea again learning to recognizing each other as “one *minjok*” (☒). A democratic and peaceful unification will require that people in both North and South Korea also learn to recognize *themselves* as the other.⁶⁰ From a nationalist perspective, the problem posed by the reunification of North and South Korea is how to overcome difference (☒☒☒), and achieve sameness (☒☒☒). But from a post-nationalist position, difference is not a problem to “overcome.” A post-nationalist perspective would instigate a “radically democratic” approach to unification, where the problem is defined in terms of how to reveal, acknowledge, and accommodate many differences concurrently.

⁶⁰ The title of Paul Ricœur's book, *Oneself as Another*, suggests “a kind of otherness that is not (or not merely) the result of comparison, otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of selfhood as such. *Oneself as Another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that one passes into the other.” See Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), p. 3.

From the standpoint of historiography, a post-nationalist perspective would acknowledge that there were more than two histories in the post-1945 period—not just the “History of South Korea” and “History of North Korea,” but histories of political prisoners in both North and South, histories of everyday life in cities and the countryside, histories of women, workers, farmers, the urban poor and their struggles, histories of radical intellectuals, etc.⁶¹ For the premodern period, a post-nationalist perspective would prompt a different approach to narrating local histories (not as microcosms of the nation, but as independent sites of memory and social practice), or gender histories (where [*yangban*] masculinity is not assumed to be the normative standard). A post-nationalist historiography will necessarily be destructive, but it should also encourage more creative scholarship, and more critical-minded students, by being attentive to the relationship between knowledge and power, and the mechanisms by which various knowledge systems emerged. Post-nationalist histories will allow a more dynamic and complex picture of Korean civilization to emerge, enriched by the recognition of diversity and dramatic change.

⁶¹ From the Juche idea perspective, Korean history can be understood only through the framework of Juche idea but I think this is also an indefensible position. To insist that we look at North Korea only through the framework of Juche idea is similar to insisting that we look at South Korea during the Park Chung-hee era only through the framework of “Korean-style democracy.”

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