

Narrative politics, nationalism and Korean history

Michael Robinson

Narratives of nation

This paper considers how narratives of nation effect politics and intellectual enquiry in Korea but present various problems for outsiders who try to write about contemporary or historical Korea. Concurrently, it engages the issue of representation, which has become an important issue for historians and area studies scholars. At the root of this discussion is the narrative of nation. Creating, transforming and maintaining narratives of nation is at the core of what nationalists and, quite often, historians do. Moreover, both understand our world generally as a community of sovereign, bounded entities called nation-states. For those who create and sustain (indirectly and directly) the stories of the 160 or so nation-states which form the world system, these are often immutable, natural entities, variously legitimated by any of a number of distinct variables including a distinct culture, language, historical memory, race, religion or territory.

Yet there really is nothing "natural" at all about these nation-states. They have come into being along diverse paths. They support the stories of their emergence with a bewildering combination of variables to demonstrate collective solidarity and the rightful claim of a people, however defined, to be the subject of their own sovereignty, a sovereignty equal to that of other nation-states. In spite of the accepted formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept, Benedict Anderson reminds us that the "paradoxical fact of their irremediable particular concrete manifestations remains".¹ There are thousands of potential nations. Why, then, is the world divided into fewer than 160 nation-states? Certainly practical political considerations delineate optimum characteristics for sustaining a nation-state.² Practicality aside, the fact is that this relatively small group of nation-states artificially limits and restrains the world's vast ethnic and cultural diversity. To create and maintain identities requires that other identities be submerged, if not effaced, in the making of national collective identity.

Within nations, the imperative to create and mobilize collective identity leads to the submersion of other identities. Even in rare cases of ethnically, linguistically and culturally homogeneous societies, the imperatives of nationalism can repress alternative concepts of collective identity. National identity is a totalizing idea, its peculiar logic impels it in the realm of politics to subordinate alternative identities related to class, gender, social status, region and kin. Therefore there are several different concepts of what constitutes national identity, even within groups. However, when they are brought to the level of a nation-state, the state constructs and maintains a "master narrative" of nation which acts as an official story of the nation.³ This master narrative legitimates the existence of the state and nation internally; it is also projected externally, to legitimate a nation's existence in the world community. Moreover, the master narrative is merely a construction, although it is usually couched in terms of naturalness and immutability, and as the product of a chronological historical logic. It is a construction because it necessarily minimalizes internal contradictions, omits alternative versions and effaces differences in order to support and maintain national solidarity.⁴

Master narratives are particularly successful when they engender a broad consensus in a society, but even if there is broad consensus the process of constructing and maintaining a master national narrative is riddled with anxieties. It is part of a dynamic process in which the story is told again and again, changed, attacked and re-formed.⁵ Its logic is to bound and strengthen the collective identity, but the diversity of the group in non-national terms or external assaults act to destabilize the narrative continually. Richard Handler, in his perceptive study *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, posits that the metaphoric basis of the master narrative, "the nation", is inherently unstable because nationalist rhetoric transforms nations into collective individuals whose existence depends on things they appropriate, on their collective objectified cultural property.⁶ The problem is that such collective individuation must be continually defined and defended and its culture appropriated and reappropriated to maintain identity. In this view nationalist discourse is a dynamic relationship between speakers and interpreters all haunted by the "dark vision of national disintegration" or galvanized by a desire for the preservation of national integrity.⁷

In a nation-state where the master narrative is contested, what would seem to be harmless "academic" analysis (archaeology, historical research, linguistics, literary criticism, etc.) can become political dynamite. Indeed, to provide material with which to revise the master narrative is to attack the legitimacy of the state and the socio-political formation upon which it rests. This brings me to nationalism's second anxiety, the problems faced by outside observers of nationalism.

Nationalism and academic discourse

Until recently social scientists, historians and political scientists wrestled with nationalism as a phenomenon which, if understood, could teach us more about how the world came to assume its modern political form, as well as how the imperatives of capitalist development seemed to require nation-states.⁸ Nations have become the standard unit of world politics and the subject of political history. In such history the nation-state becomes the endpoint in a narrative of modernity. This narrative, in turn, usually creates a picture of a nation coming to self-awareness (either the awakening of a primordial collective identity or the invention of some new group identity). In terms of progress, the nation moves towards a new collective identity in concert with economic and social development which requires a new concept of citizenship in the nation-state. The new nation-state sets rigorous standards for inclusiveness or exclusiveness with regard to the polity and bounds itself culturally, politically and territorially.⁹ The concept of a nation's emergence and its association with modernity breed a descriptive lexicon of dichotomies which have become the hallmark of liberal political history: traditional/modern, developed/undeveloped, backward/progressive, old/new, unenlightened/enlightened.

Indeed, the very notion of nation is employed as an allegory. As in fiction, historians give abstractions (nation, city, class, etc.) the character of individuated beings, setting them out on a narrative grid that is assumed to be adequately suited to the world it proposes to represent.¹⁰ The goal is to create an understanding that is controlled, one that gives an effect of totality, unity, continuity and coherence - a goal, by the way, that nationalist ideologues also embrace.

As an historian I will not give up my metaphorical use of nation soon. Our historical narratives play a role in our understanding of how our world was and came to be. However, as an historian I must be mindful that my narratives are not objective in the sense of a recovered truth or certainty about the past. Moreover, I must be aware that my use of nation and analysis of nationalism is linked to the core Western doctrine of progressive development as a universal pathway, fundamental to much historical and social science analysis done today. This is important because to link nation to a Western concept of world history and to impose these ideas and analytic categories on the non-Western world can mire us in a crude Orientalism that obscures more than it reveals.¹¹ This realization is further compounded by the fact that non-Western nationalists have appropriated the same universalist concept as well. The current debates about decolonization, neocolonialism and subaltern identities in the non-Western world which challenge this earlier appropriation must also be taken into account in our narratives of non-Western history, as will be considered below.

With the above in mind I would like to consider the problem of writing Korean history and the necessity of manoeuvring between contradictory and hostile master narratives of the Koreans themselves. In doing so, I will consider the elasticity of nationalism as a concept and its many uses, its essentially constructed nature and its linkages to a Western universalist concept of world history. In addition, I must be mindful that my historical narratives, whether related to the emergence of nationalism in Korea or not, will be appropriated, understood or rejected in relation to other competing narratives of Korean history. In modern Korea, historical narratives can also be political weapons in a highly charged and emotional discourse about the political and cultural legitimacy of competing states.

Three master narratives of modern Korea

I would like to shift now to the master narratives of Korean nationalism, to show how they are interrelated and how they skew our understanding of Korean history. Two states claim sovereignty over the Korean people. Each holds a seat in the UN. While the Republic of Korea (South Korea) is "recognized" by more members of the world community, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) has still managed to maintain a network of supporting nation-states. While at present (July 1994) it is in economic crisis and the focus of world approbation over its nuclear programme, it shows no sign of disappearing from the world stage no matter how many people might wish it would.¹² Each Korean state has woven a version of its ancient and modern memory into a master narrative which justifies its claim to legitimacy. In both cases the state has used considerable force to repress counter-narratives, to police the writing of history and shape public opinion around a general common understanding of why its system should be recognized as the true expression of Korean collective identity. In North Korea there is no visible dissent, and in the South until recently challenges to the master narrative were highly circumscribed. Partial democratization in the South since 1987 and the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1989 have broadened the debate over the suitability of the South Korean narrative, but it endures today essentially unchanged from the 1960s.

According to South Korea's master narrative, the Korean nation-state came into being in 1948, three years after liberation from Japanese colonial rule. Due to the intransigence of the Soviet Union, a UN-sponsored plebiscite was limited to the southern, US-occupied zone of Korea which legitimated a new democratic republic. Following the founding of the nation-state, the communist puppet state in the North precipitated a war of aggression against the legitimate, democratic South and was beaten back by a combined South Korean and UN army. Tragically, the externally imposed

national division remained, and South Koreans had to build the nation isolated from their northern brethren. Subsequently, successful economic development further legitimated South Korea as the true inheritor of the nationalist mantle as it successfully guided the Korean people onto the world stage, insinuated the nation-state into the world system and brought capitalist prosperity to the majority of its people.

The key elements in this narrative (a narrative which constitutes the "common understanding" of how the true Korean nation-state emerged) are that the South Korean state was the inheritor of the successful bourgeois nationalist resistance movement against the Japanese, it defended the nation against an international communist conspiracy and it successfully developed capitalist prosperity for its people.

For its part, North Korea constructs a diametrically opposed understanding of emergence. Its master narrative credits its anti-Japanese partisan guerrilla leadership with a successful anti-imperialist struggle against Japan which awakened and channelled the revolutionary power of the Korean labouring masses. It organized a democratic people's republic, purged pro-Japanese elements, inaugurated self-reliant economic development and set the nation on a truly democratic and autonomous basis. Only the counter-revolutionary actions of the US during the 1945-48 occupation prevented the certain destruction of the comprador and collaborationist bourgeois leadership which dominated the South and, later, saved this leadership by intervening in the Great Patriotic War (Korean War 1950-53). Unhappily, Western imperialism continues to support its puppet state in the South while North Korea has successfully constructed an autonomous socialist state representative of the true historical Korean nation, the masses.

The key elements in the North's story are its successful struggle against colonial and neocolonial forces, the mass base of its politics, its autonomous economic and political development and its victimization by the intrusion of Western imperialism.

Both of these master narratives forget much, remember selectively and have vigilantly repressed alternative versions. They also accomplish what master narratives must, they legitimate the state's politics, bound the nation and link it in linear fashion to a historical memory. The fierce enmity between the two Koreas, the militarized nature of each regime, the lack of a formal "peace", the presence of US troops under the UN flag in the South, differential recognition from the outside world and the memory of a catastrophic and fratricidal war ensure continuing tension between these two narratives as long as each state perpetuates itself.

In such a situation, to write a narrative which challenges the essential elements of either official story can be a hazardous undertaking. In the North it is simply not possible, given the strength of centralized power, the state's

control over research and information and the corporatist merging of the master narrative with the actual brain impulses of an omnipotent leader.¹³ In the South intellectual life has been relatively more open, but until the 1980s to write a counter-narrative or to challenge any essential fact within the master narrative risked indictment for a political crime.¹⁴

A third master narrative, that of the cold war, compounds the competition between the national stories of North and South Korea. Essentially this is a narrative created by the US which fits the problematic of the Korean peninsula into its own concept of the post-Second World War era. This narrative links with the South Korean master narrative in interesting ways. South Korea loses its subject status and becomes a fledgling democratic, anti-communist front-line state allied with the US in its containment of communism. Thus South Korea is historically legitimated as a product of the post-1945 period and survivor of a defeated international communist plot. Moreover, the cold war narrative celebrates the successful economic development of South Korea as a "miracle" and "model" for other third world nations. As far as North Korea is concerned, it delegitimizes the North by demonizing its regime, repeatedly stigmatizing it as irrational, bizarre, dangerous and isolated in the world system. Since 1989 this representation has gained added weight with the apparently victorious emergence of democratic capitalist forces in the aftermath of the cold war.¹⁵

The "system of division": Ensuring narrative tension

In combination, the three master narratives of Korea discussed above support what one South Korean intellectual, Paik Nak-chung, calls the "system of division".¹⁶ The system of division is a creature born of the cold war and which now survives it. The system defies labels, being neither purely colonial, semicolonial or neocolonial. It resonates with former power alignments of the bipolar cold war system within the newly "decentred" world of multilateralism. The division of North and South Korea curiously serves the interests of each Korean state as well as the great power interests around them. For North Korea to merge with the South would be ultimate annihilation in a world which has abandoned socialism. South Korea frets that successful unification, even on its own terms, would destabilize its polity and economy. Even more ironically, the continuation of national division is seen by Korean capitalists as a peculiar national advantage - the prospect of cheap "northern", ethnically and linguistically compatible labour for "off-shore" sourcing of manufacturing. For China an independent DPRK serves as a security buffer, in spite of the North's intransigently "independent" foreign policy. Russia supports the *status quo*, fearing any destabilization as more chaos it cannot afford. Japan sees economic opportunity, yet is threatened militarily by the prospect of a united and

hostile Korea. Finally the US is mired in a contradictory policy that wants to "finish off" a last stronghold of the communist system yet is restrained by the economic and political consequences of any precipitous realignment.

The contradictions which abound within the geopolitical forces impinging on the system of division ensure the continued instability of the master narratives that were produced to explain and legitimate this preposterous situation. Therefore the two competing master narratives of Korea remain incomplete. Each remains a narrative of the whole which lacks half of the nation. The system of division perpetuates a cognitive dissonance, particularly in the South, where the events of the last ten years have led to more open intellectual dialogue and escalating attacks on the core nationalist narrative. I turn here to speak more concretely of South Korean society, because it is simply impossible to observe any dialogue in the North on these matters.

I spoke earlier of the key elements of the South Korean master narrative - a bourgeois struggle against Japanese colonialism, its anti-communism and partnership in democracy with the US and its linkage of nationalist legitimacy with successful capitalist development and integration with the world system. Anti-communism and economic development worked to mobilize national unity through the 1970s but, ironically, the very success of anti-communism and capitalist development has created contradictions within South Korean society. These contradictions are particularly acute in the realm of nationalist discourse. Its strongly accidental narrative, which so massively legitimates itself in terms of anti-communism and economic development, no longer resonates in a post-industrial South Korean society.

Thinking backwards and totalizing practices

Before considering recent counter-narratives of nation in South Korea, I need to return to the dilemma of the historian (irrespective of ethnicity) working in the field of Korean history. Historians usually think backwards.¹⁷ That is, their vantage point in the present inevitably informs their analysis of the past. Moreover, since most of us write in linear, narrative form, however careful we are our narratives tend to align with other, larger understandings of how the present came to be. Even if we avoid enmeshment with other master narratives, we cannot foreclose the appropriation of our work by others.

Our own understanding of the world provides us with the intellectual baggage of social science concepts, the long tradition of thinking in metaphors of collective units such as nation, class, society, culture, etc. When aligned to master narratives which are themselves linked to universal

paths, such as progress, development, modernity and nation-building, we are led into a world of familiar binary relationships: traditional/modern, foreign/indigenous, national/international, developed/undeveloped. These categories have helped us to understand a number of phenomena in history and the social sciences, but they also obscure phenomena which are indeterminate.

Such totalizing practices are part of our analytical arsenal as historians or social scientists, and they are shared and deployed by nationalist ideologues. In the case of Korea our histories will invariably either contradict or conform to the larger master narratives. The fact that narratives which contradict the legitimizing master narrative are dangerous has inhibited open enquiry in Korean historical studies. In South Korea it was dangerous to question the "fact" that a bourgeois leadership successfully overthrew Japanese colonial rule. It was dangerous to acknowledge the contributions of Leftists, let alone communists, to the anti-Japanese struggle. The Korean War was not a civil war but an international conflict imposed on the peninsula. A number of other historical "silences" have also been encouraged by the dominance of the South Korean master narrative. Agrarian movements, labour history, the women's movement, studies in early Korean popular culture and the colonial origins of Korean capitalism were all topics until recently highly circumscribed by the political dominance of the South Korean master narrative.

If we examine writings about Korea in the West, there is a similar phenomenon of selectivity. The two most developed areas of foreign expertise on Korea are linked to the obsessions of the cold war master narrative mentioned above. US security interests and military participation in the Korean War spawned an enormous literature on the conduct of the Korean War, general security problems and North-East Asian regional politics. The dramatic economic growth since the 1960s gave birth to a similarly large development literature. However, the hundreds of books on these topics tell us very little about the Korean people, their culture, ideas and historical memory.

My point here is obvious. The politicization of history was a product of the contested origins of the Korean nation-state. The narratives of the South, the North and the cold war were predicated on aligning historical experience with antagonistic political positions on the peninsula which led to the emergence of the division system. Each master narrative asserts the fact of national sovereignty; in each story the history of the nation-state pivots on the 1945 defeat of the Japanese. The importance and decisiveness of the 1945 break's effect on the writing of Korean history cannot be overemphasized. It has worked to foreclose the study of continuity between colonial Korea and its post-colonial aftermath.

The emergence of counter-narratives in South Korea

In contemporary South Korea, recent liberalization of the intellectual climate together with the deepening anachronism of the cold war view have combined to generate three interlocking debates which have challenged the post-war master narrative: the discourse on the post-colony or decolonization, the debate over an "authentic" modern Korean identity and, finally, the rise of a more militant feminist critique of Korean sexual inequality. Each debate challenges the political repression that was supported by the South Korean master narrative.

The discourse on decolonization rejects the master narrative's assertion that South Korea became truly independent after forming its republic in 1948. In doing so, it rejects the privileged position of the 1945 historical break from the colonial past. The debate over decolonization raises the following fundamental question: to what extent were the social formations of the colonial period carried forward by the domestic and foreign political alignments which spawned the South Korean state? The answer is that outside interests (the US) supported the remnants of a collaborationist elite who sustained the repressive social conditions of the colonial period. Thus the South Korean master narrative obscures the historical continuities of the continuing repression of peasants, workers, women and thought perpetrated first by the Japanese overlords and later by bourgeois forces in the name of the nation. Moreover, they decisively attack the dependence of the South Korean state on US-Japanese economic ties and US security arrangements as further proof of the regime's illegitimacy in core nationalist terms.¹⁸

This was heresy before 1987, but is now common currency among certain intellectual circles in the South. While still a minority view, it has challenged and destabilized important elements in the master narrative of South Korea, namely its alliance with the US, its repressive labour policies and its hypocritical assertions of political and economic autonomy in the world system. To overcome this neocolonialist position the state and society must confront its colonial past and recapture a subject position for the masses as the core of the nation. Not only should both Koreas decolonize relatively, but there must be complete decolonization by overcoming political division on the peninsula.¹⁹

Concurrently, there is a wide-ranging debate about developing a modern yet uniquely Korean national identity. Critics of present-day social and cultural trends point to the overwhelming and corrosive influences of Western-Japanese commercial culture in Korea. The state itself is ambiguous on this issue. On one hand development has become a national priority; on the other Koreans are enjoined to resist decadent Western-Japanese popular culture, excessive consumption and commodity values.

Critics charge that state development priorities have caused the current cultural crisis - a crisis which was the ultimate result of the logic of dependence on the West and the anti-nationalist cosmopolitanism of a Western-educated, developmentalist élite.

The search for a truly Korean identity has stimulated a renewed interest in Korean folk culture and indigenous religion. Students adopt mask dance, story telling and shamanistic ritual in order to turn such practices into living traditions and political weapons. Use of folk practices is both instrumental and spiritual. The belief is that folk practices embody the spirit of the true nation and become an antidote to foreign cultural imperialism. In the 1970s student radicals adopted shamanistic ritual and folk theatre as means to both express dissent and address the issue of healing the fundamental national wound, the division of the peninsula. Since the 1980s there have been several grass-roots movements which attempted to revive and re-establish traditional rituals and practices (drawn from both popular and élite traditions) in order to Koreanize modern life.²⁰

Finally, the new women's movement has challenged nationalist orthodoxy by linking the continued repression of women by Korean patriarchy with the colonial past, thus further destabilizing the belief in an historical break in 1945. In the late 1980s survivors of the *chǒngshindae* (*wianbu*) or comfort women emerged to tell their stories publicly. In doing so they exposed major contradictions in South Korean society. The horrifying story of conscription for prostitution during the Pacific war was not new. That it was not used by the state as a propaganda weapon to stir anti-Japanese sentiment in the entire history of South Korea seems surprising. Yet very quickly the survivors' stories merged with a devastating critique of the South Korean state's complicity in supporting and organizing the present-day sex industry, major portions of which serve not only Japanese tourists and US servicemen in a seamless recapitulation of colonial sexual slavery, but Korean men as well.²¹ This issue undermines the South Korean master narrative of nationhood as a nationalism which not only supports the sexual interests of foreigners but the bottom line of foreign exchange accounts as well, all at the expense of powerless Korean women.

New questions of history: Against the grain of nationalism

I refer to these current debates in South Korea because it is within the tensions of these issues that historians should be searching for questions to ask about the pre-1945 historical record. Until recently the history of modern Korea, as enunciated in Korea and the West, has been driven by questions about the emergence and perpetuation of the system of division. In turn, the master narratives of the system of division have prevented open

historical enquiry. We have continued to enquire, but the white noise of master narratives, inability to gain access to the record, nationalist passions and our own ethnocentrism have clouded our narratives.

I have decided to write against the grain of nationalism, de-emphasizing the process of national emergence and refocusing on Korea's early experience with modernity as a way to make sense of the present social and cultural conditions of South Korea. Again, I return to the significance of the 1945 break in our common understanding of contemporary Korea. The problem here is that the successful modernization of South Korea and the failure of socialist construction in the North have legitimated an implicit belief that modernity arrived in Korea after 1945, that Korea was successfully decolonized. The decisive truth of this matter, however, is that modernity arrived in Korea during the Japanese colonial period, but the record of this modernism has been silenced by the post-war master narratives of the North, South and the cold war.

Recovering the experience of this colonial modernity helps explain much of the intellectual and cultural tension within present-day South Korea. In terms of popular culture, Koreans have yet to acknowledge that they developed a modern popular culture in the 1930s. Because of the fact of colonial rule and their need to dissociate themselves from collaboration or accommodation to it, cultural formation before 1945 can only be analysed in a nationalist logic as oppositional or accommodationist. Such a view splits culture into "authentic" Korean and anti-national cosmopolitan or still worse, Japanese, culture. The fact that early Korean popular culture was a cosmopolitan construction is lost; this muddles the story and silences the memory of Korean artists, musicians and writers who struggled during this formative movement of admittedly skewed cultural development.

The fact remains that Korean society has been in the process of constructing its own modernity for over half a century. That this process occurred in the context of repeated external repression cannot negate it. Indeed, the colonial origins of Korea's modernity explains many of the continuing tensions in its politics and cultural life. Principle among these tensions is the very ahistorical nature of the current debate over the effects of Western-Japanese popular culture in Korea. The silence on Korea's own early construction of a modern popular culture focuses the "blame" once again on "outside" forces and perpetuates a victim mentality within present-day Korea. Moreover, the almost exclusive focus on the foreign threat to Korean culture diverts Koreans from examining their own role in the development of their modernity, a process which began over 70 years ago.

Conclusion: Confronting the past

No nationalist master narrative can undo previous events, but it can disconnect people from the memory of that past and, in so doing, perpetuate the oppression, disconnection, cognitive dissonance and pain caused by that experience. Denial is a powerful force which protects us from pain in our personal lives; collective denial can ensure a similar protection. In constructing and enforcing a master narrative which obscures portions of the collective memory in order to mobilize national unity artificially the South Korean polity has perpetuated a break with its own past. Changes within South Korea and internationally have exposed the repressive aspects of what had been accepted as common understanding. This situation will lead to the ultimate reconstruction of a new master narrative in the South; reunification of the peninsula will require yet another story.

At the level of popular memory, this process will most probably take a path such as that suggested by the prominent South Korean writer Cho Chŏngnae. He explained to a group of young critics what kind of historical function a literary work such as his own might perform as follows:

Looking at history, there seems to be validity in saying that the injuries and conflicts of history cannot be resolved unless they go through the filtering processes of stories and novels. Take the Nazis and the Israelis. There had to be innumerable novels, movies and plays before there could be forgiveness, before there could be acceptance. Only after all the tragic facts were brought to light and emotions and feelings were filtered to an equilibrium there was acceptance... What we ought to do is to restore tragedies that have been made emotionally uniform and ideologically fixed, for political purposes, and reflect upon them anew. This must be done through literature, not by political slogans or political movements alone.²²

Such reflections are also worthy of consideration by outsiders who presume to write about Korea. As an organizing device for our narratives, nationalism has taught us much but we must remember that it is a mercurial tutor. The malleability, instability, politicized character and constructed nature of nationalism make obvious the danger of assuming that our own historical narratives are contributing to clarity and certainty. The historian who hazards into the murky waters of Korean history must accept greater uncertainty and also be willing to be guided by a number of different paradigms. If we are to move towards a more detailed understanding of the Koreans' story we must contribute to a more inclusive memory which is supportive of a diversity of experiences. In this way we will not deliberately or inadvertently contribute to continued denial of the past nor support a rigid and repressive common understanding of how Korea or the world ought to be.

Notes

- 1 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, New York: Verso, 1983, p. 16.
- 2 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983. Chapter Three. An important keystone to Gellner's concept of nationalism is a society's size and socio-economic integration. He sees nationalism as a necessary organizing device to integrate and organize state power of large, internally homogeneous societies. Thus there is an implicit size and power requirement for sustaining nation-states, at least in Gellner's eyes.
- 3 Prasenjit Duara, "Bifurcating linear history: Nation and histories in China and India", *Positions* 1:3 Winter 1993, pp. 779-804.
- 4 Harumi Befu (ed.), *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity*, Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993. This volume explores the constructed nature of nationalism in East Asia. In essence, nationalism becomes cultural politics divided internally by nationalists' struggles over how varying concepts of the "national" cultural logic translate into the politics of the nation-state.
- 5 Michael Robinson, "Enduring anxieties: Cultural nationalism and modern East Asia", Befu (ed.) *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*, pp. 167-186.
- 6 Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, p.7.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 194.
- 8 Theorising about nationalism came of age when historians and social scientists were in the thrall of modernization studies in the 1960s and 1970s. The sociological theories of people like Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith explicitly linked nationalism to capitalist development. In the 1980s a more subjectivist view began to predominate. Views pioneered by Anderson's crystallizing metaphor of "imagined communities" and Hobsbawm's "invention of tradition" now dominate academic discourse on nationalism.
- 9 Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* cited above is the most explicit statement of this idealized process. This book represents Gellner's final word on the subject and is the culmination of his attempt over several decades to integrate the macroforces guiding the development of the modern world with the political, economic and intellectual properties of nationalism.
- 10 Rudy Koshar, "Playing the cerebral savage: Notes on writing German history before the linguistic turn", *Central European History*, 22:3/4 1990, pp. 343-359. Koshar draws from Hans Kellner's *Language and Historical Representation*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. I am indebted to Professor Koshar for his insights into the problem of the "linguistic" turn in history writing.
- 11 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial world: A Derivative Discourse*, London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986, p. 2.
- 12 While I was preparing this paper North Korea's "Great Leader" died of a heart attack on 8 July 1994. His death certainly will necessitate the rewriting of the North Korean master narrative. The device of centring the history of the Korean state on the person of the "Great Leader" in a personality cult of unprecedented depth and pervasiveness unified North Korea and mobilized its people for 30 years. Yet the sudden demise of society's "great brain" leaves a very large gap to fill in the record. While the succession of power to Kim's son, Kim Jong il, has been in preparation for ten years, it is not clear whether Kim Jong Il can maintain a similar cult around his own person.

Certainly his accomplishments and character will not automatically provide the foundation for a position similar to his father's in any subsequent rewriting of history. What is clear, at the time of writing, is that North Korea's leadership crisis is severe. Not since the Korean War has the North Korean state been faced with such acute internal and external pressures.

13 I observed this at first hand on a visit to the DPRK in November 1991. It took us over a week to meet working "academics", even though the purported reason for our visit was to establish academic exchanges with the North Korean Academy of Social Sciences. In discussion with North Korean historians and social scientists it was clear that no one authors anything. With the exception of Kim Il Sung (The Great Leader) and his son, Kim Jong Il (The Dear Leader), most books on history or social development are written by committees. The party ideology drives the construction of all representations of the state, society and its historical memory. This situation does not mean intellectuals have totally surrendered pride of authorship to the collective. In one meeting with social scientists a researcher coyly winked at me while holding up a committee-authored history and said, "I was responsible for the last two chapters."

14 The main mechanism of intellectual repression in the South has been the National Security Law (NSL). Under this law a number of people have been arrested for intellectual crimes, professors dismissed from posts at universities, and publications closed, banned or censored. See Henry Em, "Overcoming Korea's division: Narrative strategies in recent South Korean historiography", *Positions* 1:2 Fall 1993, pp. 450-485.

15 Such demonization has been readily observable in the US news coverage of the current (summer 1994) "crisis" over North Korea's alleged possession of nuclear bombs and the US efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. In most coverage North Korea has been presented as "irrational, bizarre and unlawful", a true "renegade" state. The representations of North Korea are often accompanied by anachronistic film footage of North Korean tanks attacking UN positions in the 1950-53 Korean War. The media coverage supports the "common understanding" of where North Korea fits in the US master narrative of the cold war.

16 Paik Nak-chung, "South Korea: Unification and the democratic challenge", *New Left Review*, 197 January-February 1993. See also Paik Nak-chung, "The idea of Korean national literature then and now", *Positions* 1:3 Winter 1993, pp. 574-575.

17 Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, p. 269.

18 For one analysis of the discourse on decolonization see Chungmoo Choi, "The discourse of decolonization and popular memory: South Korea", *Positions* 1:1 Spring 1993, pp. 77-102.

20 There are several interesting examples. Laurel Kendall's forthcoming book on marriage practices in modern Korea shows how the revived "traditional" marriage customs are absorbed into the "new marriage" practices which emerged in the post-war era. Middle class housewives attend folk dance classes which function as "aerobics" classes. A revivalist movement of folk songs attempts to wed the politically inscribed folk music (of Western derivation) of the 1960s-70s to Korean folk music genres. These examples are drawn from private initiatives, they are now no longer exclusively political in their orientation. Student folk theatre (*madangguk*) and revived shamanistic rituals of the 1970s were explicitly opposed to official state revival programmes.

21 For discussion of the *chongshindae* see Chungmoo Choi, "Korean women in a culture of inequality", in Donald N. Clark (ed.), *Korean Briefing 1992*, New York: The Asia Society, 1992, pp. 97-116; Chungmoo Choi, "The discourse of decolonization and popular memory: South Korea", *Positions* 1:1 Spring 1993, pp. 77-102. For a discussion of prostitution and the US military see Sandra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda

Stoltzfus (eds.), *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the US Military in Asia*, New York: The New Press, 1992. Two articles in this volume are devoted to South Korea: Bruce Cummings, "Silent but deadly: Sexual subordination in the US-Korean relationship", pp. 169-175; and Sandra Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, "Tong Du Chun: The bar system", pp. 176-179.

22 "Cho Chŏngnae: sangchŏbadŭn shidae, kuhan kwa pulkkot ŭi munhak" (Cho Chŏngnae: The literature of resentment and flame), *Munhak Chŏngshin*, December 1989, p. 52. Quoted in Uchang Kim, "The agony of cultural construction", in Hagen Koo (ed.), *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 193.

Nationalism in East Asia 1948-53: British reactions to events in China, Japan and Korea

Peter Lowe

The aim of this paper is to provide a concise comparison between British responses to manifestations of nationalism in East Asia between 1948 and 1953. British policy in China was shaped by the nature of British economic interests and by the manner in which Britain reacted to the growth of nationalism in the 1920s and after. While Britain's economic position declined relative to that of other powers from the late 19th century, sizeable investments remained and long established British firms like Jardine and Matheson, Butterfield and Swire and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank continued to pursue their activities, as did multinationals like Shell and Unilever.¹

In 1945 attempts were made to restore the former pre-eminence of Shanghai as the great metropolis in East Asia. The treaty port era ended formally in 1943, as the culmination to acceptance of legitimacy of the case advanced by China since the May Fourth movement.² Yet the treaty port mentality lived on among expatriates, and this helps to explain their failure to grasp the full potential of Chinese communism when the CCP assumed power in Mainland China in 1949. Hong Kong was restored to crown colony status in 1945. The British Foreign Office had long viewed the Kuomintang regime of Chiang Kai-shek cynically: the KMT was seen as corrupt, incompetent and brutal. Chiang was perceived as preoccupied mainly by bolstering his power by any methods deemed suitable. British dislike was fuelled through resentment at the pressures encountered by Britain during the paper unification of China under Chiang's leadership in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Chiang was xenophobic, reactionary and hostile to the arrogance of British imperialism. The US thought quite favourably of the KMT, with Chiang personifying the courage of the Chinese masses when confronted with the savage depredations of the Japanese. The caustic reports of General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell were