

China and Contemporary Korean Nationalism: Reflecting on China's Northeast Project

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Abstract

China's Northeast Project (NEP), also known as the "Research Project of Northeastern China," has unleashed national sentiment among many Korean people. Even if it originated in purely academic research, the NEP poses a grave political challenge to contemporary Korea. The Korean response to the NEP can be broadly categorized in two ways: The first is that while negative perceptions of these moves by the Chinese have prevailed in Korean society, the Korean government has been very cautious in expressing criticism of the NEP due to national interests with the Chinese government. The other point is that as time has progressed, a series of Korean self-reflections on the complex nature of nationalism in response to the NEP has emerged. With the analysis of these self-reflections, this paper attempts to address an inter-subjective nationalist perspective of history as a solution that recognizes "mutual recognition of national identity" in considering the prevailing reality of Northeastern Asian nationalism.

Keywords: Northeast Project, Goguryeo, *zhonghua minzu*, Chinese nationalism, Korean nationalism

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Introduction

China's Northeast Project (NEP) unleashed national sentiments among many Korean people. It has had profound political implications for contemporary Koreans, regardless of its original intentions and purposes. Many Koreans believe that it undermines the identity of the Korean people and that it involves some political influences of Chinese nationalism. The NEP not only hinders mutual cooperation between Korea and China, but also poses a dilemma of nationalism in the Northeast Asian region where China, Korea, Japan, and other countries are facing the need to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation for long-term projects involving political and economic integration.

Historically, Korea and China have developed distinct political and cultural identities while maintaining strong ties to one another in spite of conflicts, competition, and wars. In Northeast Asia, China has been a major power, posing a threat to the political independence of the Korean people. Along with this subtle political tension, Korea and China have shared knowledge and culture to a considerable degree, while still developing their respective interpretations and distinctions. This has contributed to the building of a broader East Asian civilization.

The economic relationship between the two countries rapidly developed in the wake of the implementation of the reform and open policy in the People's Republic of China beginning in 1978, and the subsequent 1992 establishment of an official diplomatic relationship between Korea and China. The expanded relationship has contributed to an enhanced mutual understanding with benefits for both parties, albeit with occasional minor conflicts. This economic cooperation was expected to facilitate greater amicability in political relationships and cultural exchange.

In the course of this friendly development, the NEP has emerged as expression of nationalism, derailing the development of amicable ties between the two countries and contributing to changing Korean attitudes towards the Chinese. Koreans expressed a good impression

of China prior to the NEP, but this attitude has shifted towards a view of China as a potential threat to Korea's political independence and historical identity. The NEP presents an opportunity to reflect on the identities of China and Korea as well as Korea-China relations for a new global order.

Most of Korean scholarly responses to the NEP can be classified into two categories. One is focused upon criticizing the political motivations and implications that the NEP invokes both explicitly and implicitly. The second is concerned with refuting Chinese scholars' attempts to interpret Goguryeo (Koguryo) as part of Chinese history by defending Goguryeo as comprising an essential part of Korean history on the basis of historical records.¹ Of course, we see many works that involve both these characteristics. This paper begins with the viewpoint of agreement on the main points of Korean scholars' analyses and arguments, and is firstly concerned with analyzing the discourse surrounding the NEP, including responses from civil society and the government, as well as academic debates. This analysis also aims to find potential alternatives for avoiding excessive nationalism, which creates a barrier to regional cooperation in East Asia.

Since nationalism has been deeply associated with the discourse around the NEP in China and Korea, it is necessary to trace the five-year progression of the NEP and the Korean response to it in carefully balanced terms. It should also be pointed out that the Korean criticism of Chinese nationalism related to the NEP involves some aspects of Korean nationalism, though it is a legitimately defensive response. With this balanced reflection in mind, a set of analyses shall be conducted in the following order: First of all, it seems necessary to begin with the origins of the NEP and its implicit and explicit political ramifications in order to properly examine the Korean responses. To do so, we will attempt to illuminate the profound discord between geopolitical intention and positivist objectivity in the studies of Chi-

1. For representative works of the former, see Lee H. (2005), Yoon (2005 b), Kang J. (2005, 2006) and Nah (2004). And for works of the latter, see Lee S. (2005) and Youn M. (2004).

nese scholars. Second, we will analyze the discourses and responses of mass media, civil society, government, and scholarship in Korea. Most importantly, we will point out that diverse Korean perspectives also might face a similar self-contradiction in their criticism of the NEP, while still having reasonable grounds for complaint. Finally, we attempt to address the idea of “inter-subjective history” for a reasonable reconstruction of histories and identities in East Asia.

A Theoretical Review of the NEP

The NEP, identified by the Chinese government as the “Research Project of Northeastern China,” was a five-year research project from 2002 to 2007 that investigated the history and geography of China’s northeastern borderlands. This project has attracted the attention of many Korean scholars, as it has grave implications for contemporary Korea. A brief sketch of the motivations and processes underlying the NEP may provide beneficial information for the analysis of arguments and the issues raised by many scholars.

Motivations of the NEP and the Interpretation of Goguryeo

The NEP officially started in 2002 under the auspices of the Center of Borderland History and Geography Research, which is under the supervision of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. It was deemed a solely academic project by the Chinese, but Koreans expressed concern over its underlying motivations. This project was perceived to have grave implications for the relationship between China and Korea. The most controversial issue in the NEP was the interpretation of the history of Goguryeo. Although Chinese scholars contend that the issue of Goguryeo is just one of the many various topics in the whole project (Li 2005),² the disputes between Korea

2. Although Li stressed that the research about Goguryeo comprised only 8.5 percent of the entire research project, other agendas are also related to Korean history, such as “Local History of China’s Northeastern Borderland,” “History of Nations in

and China have always revolved around the interpretations of this ancient kingdom.

China’s current northeastern border area includes land that was previously part of Manchuria, an area of historic geopolitical significance. Furthermore, political changes in Manchuria were influential for the development of the entire East Asian region (Yoon 2005b, 121-122). Goguryeo established a strong and independent political power in territory ranging from Manchuria in China’s current northeastern area to the Korean peninsula. Dozens of ethnic groups lived there, some of which later founded the powerful Qing dynasty. Particularly in the modern period, when extreme political conflicts among regional powers emerged, widespread nationalism in the region revived its geopolitical implications. In the 19th and early 20th century, disagreements related to the strategic importance of the area among Japan, Russia, and China led to war. This significantly changed the ruling political order of East Asia.

This area remains a spiritual homeland to the Korean people, who see the ancient civilization of Goguryeo as an essential part of Korea’s national history. There are also numerous Korean-Chinese people who moved into Manchuria during the Japanese colonial rule. Many nations conceive of a certain land as their homeland, as is the case with Jewish Palestine and Korean Manchuria. The memory of homeland may be at the heart of nationalism. The memory of the history of Goguryeo comprises an essential part of contemporary Korean identity. Yet for decades there has been no significant conflict between the two nations concerning this area.

Recently, Mark E. Byington traced back the chronological development of Chinese scholarly perspectives on the history of Goguryeo. In his investigation on Chinese studies of Goguryeo, Byington suggested that historically, pre-modern Chinese scholars did not regard Goguryeo as part of Chinese history during the period from the fall of

China’s Northeastern Borderland,” “History of Gochosun·Goguryeo-Balhae”—all of which were formerly understood to be part of ancient Korea by Korean and Chinese historians until the 1980s—and “Historical Relationship between China and Joseon,” etc.

Goguryeo in 668 to the early twentieth century (Byington 2006, 121-126; 2004, 377-378). Rather, many traditional Chinese historical books described Goguryeo as one of the Three Kingdoms, along with Baekje and Silla, and as being unrelated to China (Yoon 2005a, 162-163).³ It was right after the Manchurian Incident in 1931 that Chinese scholars attempted to look for historical evidence contending that Manchuria had been an inseparable part of Chinese history, even in premodern times. One of the first Chinese attempts to interpret Goguryeo as part of Chinese history was Fu Sinian's *Dongbei shigang* (Historical Overview of China's Northeast) in 1932. According to Byington, the book was aimed at justifying Chinese claims to the territory of Manchuria but was hastily written with a number of historical inaccuracies and contradictions (Byington 2006, 121-126; 2004, 377-378).

One of the most influential studies regarding Goguryeo as part of Chinese history was *Dongbei tongshi* (Comprehensive History of China's Northeast) by Jin Yufu.⁴ This is one of the most favored and quoted studies by scholars in the NEP. Byington considered it a representative work contributing to the basic idea of the modern Chinese nation. The main focus of Jin's study was not confined to Goguryeo, as it analyzed the genealogy of ethnic groups in Manchurian history and argued that nations in Manchuria historically belong to Chinese nations (Byington 2006, 120-129).

It is worthwhile to mention that almost no serious research on Goguryeo was published in China from the 1950s to the 1980s. After economic liberalization and the opening of official diplomatic relations between China and South Korea, the number of studies on Goguryeo drastically increased (Byington 2006, 131-136). Rapid changes in the sociopolitical environment of China have accelerated increases in the economic cooperation of China with South Korea. This economic interchange has stimulated Korean-Chinese to seek the "Korean dream," which refers to favorable opportunities to work

in South Korea and earn a significant quantity of money. According to one interpretation, the Chinese government became concerned about the potential for these Korean-Chinese, who were mostly Chinese citizens, to assimilate into Korea (Kim I. 2004, 132). Furthermore, it is also inferred that the insecurity in North Korea, aggravated by extreme poverty and the nuclear issue, has contributed to increasing anxiety over the collapse of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) regime and the chaos likely to ensue on China's north-eastern border, including the possibility of a massive inflow of North Korean people into the region. It is suggested that these situations provided a backdrop for the underlying motivations of the NEP.

Byington explains that Chinese interpretation of Goguryeo as part of Chinese history is a natural product of the perspectives prevailing in China's recent historical studies, and their attempt to refit premodern China into a conceptual framework of modern China as a multinational state. Its aim is to stabilize the sociopolitical environment in the northeastern border areas by cutting off the potential for any separatist movements or disputes in the area. Byington diagnoses the project as a defensive rather than offensive one. The Chinese interpretation relies upon the contradictory argument that all the nations, races, and people who currently fall under the territory of contemporary China have comprised the history of China from ancient times (Byington 2006, 137-139). Byington puts it aptly as follows:

Goguryeo has been portrayed as an integral part of the imagined Chinese multi-ethnic state of antiquity, primarily because all ancient peoples and states that occupied lands that are now part of the People's Republic of China are also treated as an ancient "minority nationalities" of China. This depiction of the past, while unsupported by historical evidence, serves to provide stability and security for China's border regions by portraying those regions as having always been part of China" (Byington 2004, 386).

However, Byington is silent on the political implications of the NEP and the Chinese interpretation of Goguryeo history in his diagnosis of such maneuvers as defensive posturing. Even if the NEP began out of

3. For details, see Lee S. (2005) and Piao Zhen Shi (2005a).

4. For Korean translation, see Jin Yu-fu (2007).

desire for a domestic integration of contemporary China, it inevitably comes to have political implications for other nations or states outside China as well as domestic minorities. Even if it was defensive positioning, it involves the danger of turning into an offensive maneuver if it fails to provide reasonable grounds to others affected by the project.

It seems apparent that changes in the Chinese perspective on Goguryeo were strongly associated with changes in the sociopolitical environment of China. The NEP was conducted within a greater plan for building a modern multinational state of China. Above all, it appears undeniable that the NEP has political motivations and purposes, even if the research was conducted using rigorous social science methodology. In the participants' introduction of the NEP, they stressed the geopolitical and strategic significance of China's north-eastern borderland by describing it as "a region of developed culture with abundant resources and crowded population, and also of a strategically important status." Moreover, they described their motivations for the study using expressions such as "China came to face the significant change of international environments, especially since China's reformation and open-door policy, and its effects on China's borderland became more critical" and "maintaining stability and promoting development in the northeastern borderland is a sacred vocation of social sciences."⁵

A Chinese scholar, Liu Housheng, set basic principles⁶ for researching the history of the northeastern borderland, putting an emphasis on strengthening interdisciplinary research. He noticed that the history of China's northeastern border area was inseparable from past experiences with imperialism. Predicated upon this idea, he strongly argued that historical studies should contribute to patrio-

5. <http://chinaborderland.cass.cn> (accessed February 12, 2008).

6. Liu set out four points that Chinese historians should focus on: 1) strengthening research of borderland theory on the principles of historical and dialectical materialism, 2) strengthening interdisciplinary research, 3) the necessity of establishing a center for collecting and arranging information, and 4) attempting to establish a department of "borderland study" to train new students. See Liu (2005, 18-19).

tism, stating that "since the study of borderland history is inseparably associated with one nation's rise and fall, its meaning for political reality is very significant" (Liu 2005, 14). Another scholar postulates that the histories of all nations or all ethnic minorities in China should belong to Chinese history, with this statement:

As history developed thus far, all nations in our whole China came to live in a great family. Therefore, we should resist in concert against invasion from the outside and struggle for four modernizations to construct our socialist nation. Today, when we write Chinese history, we should include histories of all nations [in contemporary China] into Chinese history since this [contemporary] China has been commonly created by all our 56 national peoples, thus not each national people with its own home respectively (Tan 2005, 89).

Considering these remarks, it is relatively certain that the intellectual climate for the Chinese scholars involved in the NEP is tinged with political motivation in the study of the northeastern borderland's history. Not a few studies of northeastern borderland's history in the 1990s carry similar sociopolitical significance.⁷ All this supports the idea that the NEP was initiated out of political concerns, and even if this was a defensive move aimed at domestic stability within contemporary China as Byington diagnoses, it is hard to deny that it can have offensive implications for other countries.

Controversy over the Academic Neutrality of the NEP and Chinese Nationalism

In response to Korean criticism that the NEP incorporates Chinese expansionism, Chinese scholars have emphasized that the project remains confined to academic research. Reacting to strong protests from Korean scholars and civic groups, the Chinese scholars respond-

7. See Shin (2005). Most introductory papers in this collection stressed the geopolitical significance of research on the history of the northeastern borderland.

ed that they oppose “politicizing academic debates,” “attacking academic research and even the Chinese government without any grounds,” and “political practices which undermine the friendship of the two countries” (Li 2005, 25-26).

Emphasizing that the NEP has been conducting solely academic research, Chinese scholars have asserted that academic disputes should be resolved only through an academic approach. However, this suggestion is hardly consistent with the political motivations and purposes that were subtly mentioned in their project introduction. If we look closely into their earlier remarks on the regions in the project, their studies fail to maintain scholarly neutrality.

Chinese scholars defend their progressive understanding of history through use of the distinctive term, “*zhonghua minzu*.” This concept is usually translated into “Chinese Nation” in English, which misses the connotations of “harmony” in the term.⁸ *Zhonghua minzu* presupposes China as a multi-ethnic nation-state that appears to encompass all national minorities within the boundaries of contemporary China.⁹ In this way, *zhonghua minzu* can mean seeking harmony within China, with an emphasis on peaceful coexistence with nations outside of China. Such a definition appears to be a more liberal concept, respecting the individual character of each nation.

The pursuit of both internal and external harmony remains another ideal of *zhonghua minzu*. Chinese scholars contend that this extension of harmony through *zhonghua minzu* may help build a harmonious world. However, it reflects a Chinese conception of the modern state, which seeks to attain a greater Chinese nation including minorities. A nation-building process that includes all nations within current Chinese territory as part of a greater China presents the inherent danger that the idea of *zhonghua minzu* may degenerate

8. Chinese scholars emphasize that *zhonghua minzu* is different from the Western concept of a nation that is related to hegemonic discourses of nationalism in the modern age. See Wang Yiwei (2007, 79-85, 101-102) and Wang Ke (2005).

9. For a defense of the idea that China has maintained a multi-ethnic state since the ancient times, see Wang Ke (2005).

into a hegemonic nationalist dialogue within China under the banner of national harmony. More specifically, a question is raised as to whether this form of nationalism can really be beneficial to national minorities in China. *Zhonghua minzu* might be employed to defend the exclusive and inviolable autonomy that justifies every discourse and practice within the boundaries of Chinese territory and refutes all external criticism as misunderstanding and ignorance of the Chinese notion of harmony.

In the NEP, the Chinese interpretation of Goguryeo brought critical responses from Koreans, as it undermines Korean identity and historical legitimacy. Chinese historians generally cite four reasons supporting the idea that Goguryeo was one of the local regimes in the Chinese nation. First, Goguryeo was founded within China’s current territory; second, its central stage was always within the Han dynasty’s local realm; third, Goguryeo was a tributary state of China; and fourth, a considerable portion of people from Goguryeo were assimilated into the Han nation after the fall of the kingdom (Lee D. 2004, 50-53).

Many Chinese historians have attempted to incorporate the histories of all nations falling geographically under current Chinese territory into the history of China. This interpretation is predicated upon the contemporary expanded concept of a greater Chinese nation, i.e. *zhonghua minzu*, which includes all nations and ethnic minorities in contemporary China’s territory. They have blurred the difference between this expanded concept of contemporary Chinese nation and the Han-centered nation of the past. Even in Chinese historical scholarship we see criticisms of this contemporary territorial approach, alongside a more elaborate thesis that China has historically maintained a unified multi-ethnic state,¹⁰ to explain how it does not coincide with historical records. For example, Sun Zuomin criticizes seeing the histories of ethnic minorities as belonging to Chinese history, and says it exposes a critical problem in that it fixes the territorial changes of each old Chinese dynasty within the framework of con-

10. For defense of this position, see Wang Ke (2005).

temporary China and runs counter to scientific explanations (Kim H. 2005; Lim and Kim 2005, 97, 108-109, 115).

The historical facts and interpretations surrounding Goguryeo are extremely controversial, including evidence for and against the argument that Goguryeo was within the Han dynasty's local realm on the basis of participation in the tributary-investiture system. Even Chinese scholars do not agree on a single interpretation of whether historically Goguryeo belongs to Korean history or Chinese history. There are also arguments that the tributary-investiture practice was a reflection of diplomatic relations between nations, especially between stronger and weaker states.¹¹ The Chinese historians' genealogical interpretation brings about a dilemma in that a considerable portion of the population of Goguryeo was assimilated into Korea. Chinese justifications appear to rely upon the idea of *zhonghua minzu* and a Han-centered historical interpretation.

These problematic analyses demonstrate why the NEP has encountered criticism from Koreans, who blamed Chinese nationalism for the geopolitical interpretations. Studies of Goguryeo were perceived to dovetail historical facts with current sociopolitical needs. While Chinese scholars have tried to defend their interpretations as a progressive understanding of historical facts, Koreans perceive them as politically motivated by the current geopolitical situation of the northeast border and its link to a greater Chinese nation. Although Chinese scholars have strongly criticized Western prejudices against Chinese nationalism, it seems unreasonable to resort to the Chinese version of a nation-state in interpreting ancient history, particularly where we cannot find an equivalent to the modern concept of a nation. The Chinese version of nationalism and a greater Chinese nation fails to dissociate itself from the Western version they criticize.

Among the prevalent atmosphere that a majority of Chinese scholars basically agree on the thesis of one unified Chinese multi-ethnic state, it is interesting to encounter a more moderate approach

11. See Piao Wenyi (2005b) and Paio Zhenshi (2005a).

by some Chinese scholars addressing, "one history shared by two (or more) nations" (*yishi liangyong*), suggesting that Goguryeo belongs to both Chinese and Korean history. Jiang Meng-shan views Goguryeo history as belonging to Korea as well as China in terms of current territory, political power, economy, culture, and ethnic lineage. He argues, "one history shared by two nations" should be applied to Goguryeo history (Jiang 2005, 171-181). Sun Jinji and Paio Wenyi also represent this position. However, Sun contends that Goguryeo history can belong to China and Korea since contemporary China and Korea currently both occupy the old territory of Goguryeo, while arguing that Goguryeo historically had been part of China. In contrast, while agreeing with Sun that Goguryeo history can belong to both China and Korea in terms of territory, Paio argues that historical evidence justifies Korean historical claims to Goguryeo. Piao further argues that a multinational perspective on history is more in line with current trends of world historical thought and that the creation of human civilization and important historical practices are products of concerted efforts by many nations and states.¹²

In these controversial debates on the history of Goguryeo, we see that history is intertwined with the contemporary political situation and national identity. Diverse interpretations of history can not only provoke conflicts between nations or states, but also influence the status of domestic national minorities. The concept of one history shared by two or more nations or states still remained within the discourse of nationalism, and can provide the basis for more diversified debates on overcoming the trap of nationalism.

Analysis of Korean Responses

It is apparent that the NEP poses some grave political implications for Korea, regardless of whether it is purely academic research or is part of a defense of using Chinese nationalism for maintaining national

12. See Sun (2005, 27-36); Piao Wenyi (2005b, 32-52).

integration and stability within China. These implications might be unintended or unexpected by the Chinese scholars, but it seems natural that Koreans responded to it negatively. Feeling that the NEP involves political motivation, many Koreans worried about the possibility of Chinese expansive nationalism underlying the project.

Two serious conflicts occurred between Korea and China in 2004 and 2006 when the project published its outcomes. In 2004, between these two periods of aggressive discourse, the two governments outlined a set of verbal agreements (Lee H. 2007, 14) establishing basic principles for the prevention of politicizing academic issues. However, the agreement was verbal rather than written and intended more as a symbolic political patch-up. No concrete documents were codified to alleviate potential conflicts likely to occur in the future, and in 2006 the NEP provoked further problems with Korea. There were a number of different Korean responses to the NEP from the mass media, civil society, the Korean government, and scholarship.

Mass Media and Civil Society

It was an article in a Korean newspaper (*JoongAng Ilbo*, July 14, 2003) that first shed national attention on the NEP.¹³ The term “Northeast Project” was initially introduced in Korea on July 14, 2003 more than a year after the NEP officially started in February 2002, and just days after having declared the “Broad Cooperation and Partnership” between the two countries on July 7, 2003. In the articles published at that time, we see a great number of Korean reports focusing on China’s “true intentions.”¹⁴ Major daily newspapers in South Korea, regardless of their position on the ideological spectrum, expressed similar concerns over the NEP, such as the possibility of “intended distortions and pillaging of our history” and “a war of his-

13. This article appears to be the first one concerning China’s Northeast Project.

14. For example, “Hidden Motives behind China’s Northeast Project,” *Korea Herald*, August 24, 2004. Kang also points out that “Koreans think of the NEP as political matter even though Chinese don’t.” See also Kang J. (2004, 211).

tory between Korea and China.”

The NEP has stirred strong nationalist sentiments within Korean society. Citizens often identify themselves as part of a unified “Korean nation” regardless of their personal ideology, religion, generation, or political position. However, it is recognizable that strong Korean nationalist feelings against China existed prior to the NEP. For example, some extreme nationalists have overtly expressed their conviction that Manchuria should be returned to Korea since it was the “old territory of our ancestors,” and many ethnic Koreans continue to live there. In early 1990s, several South Korean tourists sightseeing at historical sites related to the Goguryeo voiced a desire for the “return our territory” without serious consideration of the implications (Nah 2004, 12). In 1995, a diplomatic conflict erupted between the two countries because of the “Damul movement,” a kind of *reconquista* for the old territory of Goguryeo. Recently, activists have attempted to organize a “Movement for Recovering of Korean Nationality for Korean Chinese and their Abandonment of Chinese Nationality” (Kim I. 2004, 136).

It is clear that the NEP triggered anti-Chinese nationalism within Korea. According to several surveys, Koreans demonstrated significant differences in levels of amicability towards China before and after the NEP began. In 2002, during a period of intense anti-American demonstrations and sentiment, 40.9% of the respondents indicated having “a friendly feeling toward China,” while only 29.6% indicated they had such feelings toward the United States. This difference was most evident among individuals in their twenties and thirties, particularly the educated.¹⁵ In the middle of 2004, however, another survey showed substantively different responses with 58.2% of the respondents polled answering that they “do not have a friendly feeling toward China.” In this poll, 62.3% of individuals in their twenties

15. “Dislike America More than Before, 56.1%...” (*Sisa Journal*, March 7, 2002). See another study reflecting the same phenomenon, “1988-2003 Public Opinion: Goodwill of America 25%, -11% point during Recent Two Years” (*Hankyoreh*, May 15, 2003).

and 64.5% of students indicated the same negative response.¹⁶ These results are in striking contrast with 2001 surveys stating that 33% of the Chinese individuals polled have a “friendly feeling toward Korea”¹⁷ and 76.7% responding in the affirmative in 2006.¹⁸

With nationalist sentiment soaring, many NGOs like Kookhak-won (Institute for Korean Traditional Culture Studies) and Kookhak-NGO (NGO Coalition for Korean Traditional Culture Studies) initiated demonstrations and petitions against the NEP. The first petition against the NEP began on December 23, 2003 and signature drives were held in 23 cities, acquiring 400,000 signatures within just a few days. As NGO response became more heated, Korean media kept pace with this growing movement. During 2004, 12 major newspapers and magazines published 231 articles about the NEP and 1,499 articles about Goguryeo, along with 62 TV programs on the topic.¹⁹

The Response of the Korean Government

The response of the Korean government came in stark contrast to those of the media and civil society. The government intentionally tried to maintain control and minimize nationalism out of caution for the political ramifications, while the media and civil society expressed nationalist sentiment as a means to safeguard Korean identity and historical legitimacy. The Korean government made an official statement on January 9, 2004, stating, “Unlike the media’s negative portrayals, it is hard to consider the NEP as a project propelled by the Chinese government.” While maintaining this posture, the

16. In KBS Program of “Open Discussion,” eight out of ten responded that “Korea and China are inevitably in the relation of competition.” *Kukmin Daily*, September 13, 2004.

17. “Most of the Chinese... 33% have a friendly feeling towards Korea”; “Korea is a country to visit of high preference.” *Kukmin Daily*, June 13, 2001.

18. “Chinese have a most friendly feeling toward Korea.” *Maeil Business Newspaper*, March 21, 2006.

19. See the Koguryo Research Foundation (2004, 283-388). Recited from Kim W. (2007, 8).

Korean government established the Koguryo Research Foundation to focus on scholastic studies.²⁰

However, on August 6, 2004, 52 members of the Korean National Assembly, criticizing the passive policy of the government, presented a resolution entitled, “Resolution on China’s distortion and pillaging of the history of Goguryeo.” Despite this resolution demanding that the Korean government take a more active role, the government remained cautious. Although the “Five Agreements” between the Korean and Chinese government on August 24, 2004 stated, “the Chinese government understands Korean concerns and will take corrective measures,” there was no tangible progress to resolve the issue. On the contrary, this agreement fueled criticism against the government’s passive approach.²¹

On September 3, 2004, 59 members of the Korean National Assembly presented another resolution on the invalidity of the Gando Convention.²² Following this, the media and civil society continuous-

20. The Koguryo Research Foundation, now renamed the Northeastern Asian History Foundation, was founded by the government in March 2004 in response to the concerns of scholars and civic groups.

21. The five points of agreement are as follows: 1) Korea and China should bear in mind that Goguryeo history has become a significant issue between the two countries; 2) The two countries should cooperate with each other to prevent the issue of history from hurting Korea-China friendship and cooperation as well as make efforts to promote the overall cooperative partnership addressed by the common announcement of the establishment of official Korea-China diplomatic relations and the common announcement of the Korea-China summit meeting; 3) The two countries should make efforts to prevent politicizing Goguryeo history, as well as take proper measures to fairly solve the issue of Goguryeo history; 4) The two countries should prevent distortions of Goguryeo history at national and local government levels, including distortions of Goguryeo history in revisions of history textbooks in primary and secondary schools; and 5) The two countries should make efforts to promote the holding of academic exchanges concerning the issue as soon as possible. Despite the Korean government efforts, citizens were critical in their response. According to one poll conducted in September 2006, 70.9% of respondents indicated negative feelings towards the Korean government’s diplomatic policy toward China on the issue (*Dong-A Ilbo*, 25 April 2004).

22. The Gando Convention was a treaty signed by the Qing dynasty and Japan in 1909, affirming the territorial rights of Qing dynasty over a large part of current Jilin province. A number of Koreans believe the treaty is void because it was

ly complained about the NEP until February of 2007 when the project officially concluded. The number of articles on NEP rapidly decreased after mid-2007.²³ Since January 1, 2008, there has been little mention of the NEP among the seven daily newspapers, such as *Kyunghyang Daily News*, *Kukmin Daily*, *Naeil Shinmun*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, *Munhwa Ilbo*, *Seoul Shinmun*, *Segye Times*, and *Hankyoreh*. In the event that no clear solution was reached, some critics warned, "the real NEP is supposed to start from now."²⁴ Nationalist sentiments regarding the NEP issue have become dormant in the public sphere.

Debates in Scholarship

Korean scholars have suggested that the NEP is not free from nationalist discourse. For example, one Korean scholar explains that the main purpose of his writing is to reveal, "The aim of the NEP is to weaken Korean national identity and to put Korea under the influence of Chinese culture" (Youn 2004, 815). In fact, the term "NEP" used by Korean scholars, a variation of the official title, "The Research Project of Northeastern China," appears to reflect the perspective of Korean scholars. Most Korean scholars in the field are devoted to analyzing the intent of the NEP and criticizing the positions that Chinese scholars have employed on historical matters.²⁵

From 2004 to 2007, there were a great number of seminars con-

signed when Japanese had already negated the Korean government's right to conduct its own foreign affairs. However, whether or not the territorial rights over Gando historically belong to Korea is also a controversial issue.

23. Found in the Korean Integrated News Database System, <http://www.kinds.or.kr/> (accessed February 29, 2008). Lee Hee Ok believes that this is because the North Korean nuclear missile crisis in September 2006 made South Korea and China cooperate with each other in responding to NK's action (October 2007).

24. Yonhap News Agency, January 26, 2007.

25. See Kim W. (2007, 5-7). He summarized the published opinions of Korean scholars in *Chosun Ilbo*. Most of these opinions include nationalistic expressions. Prior to the NEP controversy, there were discussions criticizing "one history owned by two nations, Korea and China," for meaning "Goguryeo composes Chinese as well as Korean history."

cerning the NEP and a variety of articles were published on the topic. The research can be classified into two broad dimensions: historical and political. Researchers on the historical dimension made counter-arguments to the interpretations of Chinese scholars. In contrast, researchers in the political arena attempted to highlight the intentions of the NEP.²⁶ Their arguments about the Chinese intentions are summarized in the following points: First, the northeast of China has been a very important area, historically and geopolitically; second, the area is in an unstable situation replete with economic, racial, and national problems; to resolve these problems, intensive redevelopment and reeducation of "our [Chinese] history" is needed;²⁷ China's "Development Strategy of Northeastern China" (*dongbei zhenxing zhanlue*) and "Research Project of Northeastern China" are based on these political purposes; the NEP aims to impose a Han national identity upon ethnic minorities in the area²⁸ as the Chinese government has previously in other minority areas.²⁹

Scholars in political studies presented a variety of different interpretations and reactions. Some have criticized by saying that the NEP perverts the truth; some argued that Han nationalism is too self-centered and violent; some suspected that China was using the project to express imperialistic motivations towards the Korean peninsula;³⁰

26. See Kang G. (2004, 115-122).

27. For an example, see Yoon (2005).

28. Park Sun-young pointed out that the main aim of the NEP is not to distort Korean history, but to infuse Chinese nationalism into the area (2004). Park Jung-su also argues that, "One China" is the most important political statement of the Chinese government (2004). Furthermore, the Chinese government plays up patriotism and nationalism to resolve problems in the region, including vacuum spaces of Socialism, economic inequality, and possible independence movements of minority nations. For examples, see Choi (2004, 245-267) and Nam (2005, 79-101) and Lee H. (2007, 23-27).

29. Ryu Yong-tae argues that the recent NEP can be understood as a typical example of the Chinese reaction to great historical events in the region. According to him, research involving these districts increased dramatically when they faced the Manchurian Incident, the Sino-Japanese War, and the recent open-door and reform policies (2005, 204-210).

30. Regardless of differences in these arguments, see Ahn (2004, 61-63), Kim W. and Kim Y. (2004, 200-202), Kang (2006, 5), and So (2004, 65).

and some demanded that the Korean government change its policy and stake a more aggressive position, including making efforts to reclaim Gando (Kim W. and Kim Y. 2004, 205-206). These responses can be classified into defensive or offensive points of view,³¹ but both sides agree that the conclusion should be a demand that China give up their expansionistic nationalist ideology and Han-centered nationalism. The following point represents one of the most central concerns of Korean scholars: "The NEP can be offensive and appear imperialistic to Korea in short- and long-term view, whether this is what China intended or not" (Jun 2006, 371).

As nationalist feelings began to dwindle, scholars converted their research stance to that of self-reflection. In historical studies, some have come to view their studies as having relied too much on their own previous research, without providing new historical facts and interpretations in their criticism of recent Chinese scholarly research.³² In political studies, some scholars majoring in Chinese area studies warned of the danger of alleging conspiracies without a sound factual basis.³³ This has facilitated a time of self-reflection. The controversy over the NEP between Chinese and Koreans provided a valuable opportunity for both sides to reflect on their positions, as well as criticizing the other's position.

A Suggestion for Reinterpretation of East Asian History

The NEP controversy led to reflection on the nationalist interpretation of history adopted both by Korean and Chinese scholars. Particularly, as historical evidence has shown, it appears that the history of Goguryeo cannot become a possession of one nation or state. The history of Goguryeo is related to contemporary Korea, China, and even the Manzu minority, which still practices its traditions while liv-

31. Kim In-sung classifies the existing debates into "offensive" and "defensive." See Kim I. (2004, 123-136).

32. For examples, see Lim (2006, 20).

33. For example, see Lee H. (2007, 33-34).

ing in Manchuria. Thus, when we interpret East Asian history through a nationalist perspective, we fail to take into consideration the diverse interpretations and implications, creating controversies among relevant parties.

East Asian history is not the product of a single nation or state, but of the complex interactions in which a variety of ethnic origins, nations, and states have participated. Contemporary China, as we observe it, is also a product of these interactions and exchanges and has been shaped by diverse nations and ethnicities throughout its historical development. This fact is also supported by Chinese scholars who defend a unified Chinese multi-ethnic state. Meanwhile, on reflection, Korean responses to the NEP demand a new perspective on East Asian history from both China and Korea.

Rethinking Nationalist Perspectives

In East Asia, particularly Korea and China, it is evident that historical interpretations inevitably became nationalistic because the nation-building processes of contemporary Korea and China were directly linked to overcoming the historical memory of imperialism and colonialism. For example, the task of developing post-colonial Korean history as a means to recover self-respect is to recognize and identify Koreans as a "subject" of history, distinguishable from the colonial people who were degraded as an "object." In doing so, the modern interpretation of Korean history was strongly influenced by nationalism from the beginning: "It was amid Anti-Japanese sentiments due to the forced Protectorate Treaty in 1905 and the occupation by Japanese forces in 1910 that the so-called 'nationalist historical studies of Korean nation' (*minjok sahak*) were born" (Han 1990, 9). Under the state-initiated development project, this nationalist historical interpretation was empowered by the authoritarian government as a tool for national unity.

However, it is worthwhile to note that the Korean government did not initiate recent nationalist criticisms against the NEP. Rather, the government has attempted to soften nationalist enthusiasm. The

nationalist response against the NEP in Korea prevailed in civil society despite the government's efforts. This fact may demonstrate that nationalism and nationalist interpretations of history have already become embedded in the contemporary Korean mindset. This trend is not confined to just the Korean people; nationalistic conflicts between East Asian countries have been numerous. Anti-Japanese sentiment and anti-Korean sentiment in China, as well as Japanese right-wing demonstrations and an anti-China movement in Japan are evidence of this. Following the NEP controversy, we see a series of critical views on nationalism in East Asia in Korean academic scholarship.

Lim Ji-Hyun, an advocate for the "dismantlement of nationalist history," criticized the three East Asian countries as being trapped in the "antagonistic accomplices" of nationalistic history due to their exclusivist and self-centered nationalism (Lim J. 2005). In order to resolve this problem, several alternate methods and stances have been put forth. One solution calls for the dissolution of the "state-centered history" perspective. Kim Gi-bong states, "I think that the main reason that Korean history is in conflict with Japanese history and Chinese history stems from our epistemological structure of viewing Korean history as a history of Korean nation. One way to overcome this structural problem is to dissolve our perspective of the nationalist study of history seeing history as a history of nation or state" (Kim G. 2008).

Similarly, Professor Kim Han-gyu views the history of Goguryeo as a history of distinctive Yodong. In his explanation, Kim suggests the reclassification of the historical entity or communities of Northeast Asia into China, Korea, and Liaodong. Recognizing differences in the historical understandings of Korean and Chinese history books, he suggests the existence of different characteristics represented by a single nationality of Korea and a multi-nationality of China, distinguishing the ideas of the modern nation-state and historical communities from each other.³⁴

34. See Kim H. (2004).

Lee Jeon suggests reflection on our concept of a homogeneous nationality. Koreans exhibit a tendency to be proud of the idea of a 5,000-year-old homogenous civilization. In actuality, though, the Korean nation has developed through the assimilation of diverse ethnic origins and the conception of a single homogeneous Korean nation is simply an imagined product (Kim H. 2004, 352). Baik Young-seo suggests combining a nation-centered history and the history of East Asia to rewrite a combined history for East Asia in the future (Baik 2004). In his suggestion, we note the importance of writing a new history of East Asia as a historical measure for the future, even if we do not abandon the nationalist perspective.

Chung Do-hee employs the argument of "one history shared by two (or more) nations" to suggest that Goguryeo history is the sole possession of neither Korean history nor Chinese history. Furthermore, there is no exclusive right to contend that it is only part of Korean or Chinese history. Although this position does not promote movement away from nationalist interpretations, it takes a more inclusive view that diverse nations can share the same history (Chung 2004, 183). Lee Jong-wook suggests that we should abandon nation-building or history-building to rewrite the history of Korea by employing social science theories and systems (Lee J. 2003).

One of the important aspects of the Korean response to the NEP was the criticism against the "nationalist interpretation of history," which appeared in the 1990s but failed to attract attention amid the prevailing nationalist atmosphere. Some critics suggested alternative methods of historical interpretation and demanded well-balanced reflections on the NEP controversy in Korea, as mentioned previously. These alternatives demanded a new understanding of history, particularly the history of Northeast Asia, with an emphasis on moving away from nationalist interpretations. In sum, these reflections drive us to develop more diversified perspectives and interpretations of history, such as diversification of subjects to include regional communities and ethnic minorities as well as nations and states, and an enlarged perspective of East Asia and global world history.

History and Nationalism

E. H. Carr's famous remark on history, which is abstracted as "unending dialogue between the present and the past" (Carr 1961, 35), poses a profound observation on the nature of history itself. Beyond the mere cutting and pasting of historical facts, history is dependent on interpretation. Most historians have developed their own principle for clarifying the purposes of their investigations. This principle, which involves the continuous normalization of the historian's cognition of history, is generally referred to as the philosophy of history. Applying this principle to the study of East Asian history, we may assume that both Koreans and Chinese have, consciously or unconsciously, used their own ideas of historical philosophy to interpret relevant history. The philosophical foundation of interpretation that both sides employed in the discourse surrounding the NEP was nationalism, not Confucianism, as one might hastily conjecture from the philosophical tradition deeply embedded in East Asia.

Nationalism combined with the geopolitical nature of Manchuria and its historical complexity drove scholars, whether they participated in the NEP or responded to it, to interpret the ancient history of Northeast Asia for their own purposes. To legitimize their national perspective, they sometimes selectively omitted details of historical documents and interpreted them without considering the full context. Scholars sometimes misrepresented ideas, combining ancient history with current geopolitics, even if this was not deliberate. This stemmed from the separation of history and social sciences.

Despite this selective construction relying upon nationalism, the researchers themselves were trapped in a conception of historical truth that lies beyond their full understanding of the factual past. They might suggest that the history of the northeastern borderland has long been distorted by colonial powers and external pressures from domestic and foreign governments and that we should rectify history by correcting old mistakes in historical documents and their interpretations, and clarifying which nation the history of Goguryeo belongs to. However, the probability of success is dubious in light of

the nature of history.

Historians may reorganize historical documents and interpret them selectively. A selective approach may be the nature of historical studies, but as E. H. Carr aptly asserted, there is no pure fact in history that historians cannot find *a priori* from the historical material they have collected. Collecting and interpreting historical documents involves selective processes, and even historical materials themselves become selective products. This selective process proceeds with limited historical records and human cognition. Historical records are also selectively constructed products and human cognition is too limited to claim historical truth.

Historians typically evaluate and interpret historical facts from current viewpoints, which facilitates the reconstruction and reinterpretation of certain historical facts related to the historian's contemporaries. Many debates between Korean and Chinese nationalists involving the NEP were concerned more with which interpretation was closer to historical fact, not which interpretation was more meaningful and progressive from a contemporary viewpoint. It is apparent that this academic interpretation was far from a desirable form of dialogue of the present and the past.

Furthermore, we add to our discussion the division of subject and object that has a long history of inquiry. The subject, as an undeniable entity of thinking and reasoning, has been a part of human intelligence since the Renaissance. On the other hand, it has objectified everything outside itself. Scientific explanations enable everything to be turned into ideas that can be objectified and explained as a means to find the "truth" of the object. Eventually, individual human beings were also reduced to the object of science. We do not mean biology, but rather rigid and positivistic human sciences such as history. Objectifying everything except the subject tends to occur in subject-centered thinking, where one is reluctant to accept the reality of another subject other than the thinking self. Nationalist approaches to history are another form of this subject-centered thinking that is reluctant to recognize others also as a subject.

Most forms of nationalism are predicated upon a subject-cen-

tered ideology, in that they often dismiss the legitimacy of other forms of nationalism. This ideology tends to be oppressive to domestic minorities as well as aggressive or exclusionist towards other nations. At the same time, a self-centered subject is likely to present self-identity as a response to critiques from other forms of nationalism. Lim Ji-Hyun aptly pointed to this negative relationship by describing it as “antagonistic accomplices.” However, his notion of the “deconstruction of national history” in his critique of nationalism neglects to recognize the distinctiveness of historic nationalism in East Asia.

Hobsbawm puts that “no serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist” (Hobsbawm 1990, 12). Though it is not proper to analyze nationalism from the viewpoint of a political nationalist, nationalism is deeply associated with the long-term development of historic nations in East Asia. As a conviction in the primordial nature of national identity is problematic without sound grounds, reducing Korean or Chinese nationalism simply to the modern invention is also misleading. Hobsbawm himself categorized nationalism in China, Korea, and Japan as one based upon the idea of “historic nations” in which historic idea of a state was linked with ethnic homogeneity for a relatively long time (1990, 66 & 137).³⁵ Thus it may be hasty to suggest total deconstruction of national history for a re-interpretation of nationalist history in North-east Asia.

Western nationalism was imagined by modern print-capitalism with the same print-language (Anderson 1991, 43-46) that created a distinctive national history. Prior to the development of nationalism, European history was once shared and recognized by all European countries. Yet, Korean nationalism and Chinese nationalism have long had a relatively clear border between them. This has resulted in the construction of exclusive and distinctive national histories. In Byington’s study we can see that historians in pre-modern times also distinguished the realm of history belonging to the Korean peninsula from the history belonging to China (Byington 2004, 375). Without seriously considering distinctiveness, efforts to deconstruct national

history would be viewed as a dangerous threat to national identity.

Before the establishment of the NEP, some Chinese historians argued that the history of Goguryeo should be maintained by both nations under the idea of “one history shared by two nations.” Although it has somewhat transitional character in that it was presented just before the assertion that Goguryeo was one of the local political entities within the Chinese nation, Korean Chinese historians generally held this viewpoint of the NEP. Comparing the relationship between Korea and China with that of the European nations, Piao Wenyi points out that the histories of Germany, France, Spain, and Italy were intricately interwoven. Many European nations are rooted in the same history, with smaller nations often being conquered by their neighbors. Piao argues that this idea of “one history for a plurality of nations” was a recurring trend in world history studies. Furthermore, Piao asks for fair acknowledgment of the differences and similarities between the two nations’ histories (Piao W. 2005b, 48-49). This idea paves the way for what we call the perspective of “intersubjective history” for the countries in East Asia. Intersubjective history recognizes one history for a plurality of nations, as Piao suggests, but further demands that one party provide reasonable grounds to others, including subjects such as national minorities or specific communities in domestic society, as well as the other nations or states concerned.

Conclusion

In searching for a resolution of conflicts motivated by nationalism, it is essential to limit excessive forms of nationalism and clarify the boundaries of nationalist expression. Admitting that both Korean nationalism and Chinese nationalism are based on perceptions of history, particularly those of historical territory, it is difficult to resolve controversies because they often become entangled with political disputes. Therefore, we suggest the mutual recognition of national and political identities. It is pointless to deny the geopolitical implications

of recent disputes over the northeastern border areas. The mutual recognition of nationalism may provide an opportunity for strongly subject-centered parties to employ "subject versus subject" perspectives when seeking dialogue each other. This approach demands that the parties concerned provide reasonable grounds for their nationalist position to other concerned parties, both domestically and internationally.

Manchuria's history as a victim of imperialism and a symbol of oppressed minorities should be recognized from the perspective of the subject, not of the object, thus giving insight into the peoples' struggle to live in a devastated environment. Once we observe that most historical "facts" found in ancient documents were described from the perspective of the ruling class, it should be considered that an honored national expansion of territory made by our ancestors might be nothing but an oppression of the people who struggled to survive within that society. Therefore, both Chinese and Koreans should be mindful of the different perspectives on Manchuria.

This is a decisive step toward post-nationalism. Without taking seriously the strong historic nationalism in Northeast Asia, a post-national idea would be Western-centered and naïvely idealistic. Recognizing subjects that were once objectified will help in moving beyond national boundaries. It is preferable to prepare for the emergence of a post-national movement in East Asia, rather than to wait for changes to occur due to obsessive nationalism. The ancient history of East Asia has other topics that ought to be reinterpreted from the viewpoints of the present. The entire world is shifting towards a post-national society, propelled, despite their relative ethnic homogeneity, through the kinds of economic globalization witnessed by the East Asian countries.

Since the opening of the official diplomatic relationship between the two countries, Koreans have experienced mixed feelings towards China. Economic cooperation has increased dramatically in the past 20 years, but there still remain varying levels of emotional distrust, whether from fear of a new imperialism or because of more traditional forms of Sino-phobia. Whatever the reason, this fear of China has

enabled Korean nationalism to be self-identified and more cohesively self-centered, which in turn increases Chinese nationalism. Now is the time to terminate this feedback mechanism by reflecting on the recent debates instigated by the NEP. Excessive rivalry between Korea and China is pointless. The current discourse promulgated by the controversy surrounding the singular history of two nations can be a vehicle for redefining the future of both nations: a new construction of the intersubjective perspective on East Asian history.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Dongbei shigang</i> (Ch.)	東北史綱	Liu Housheng (Ch.)	劉厚生
<i>Dongbei tongshi</i> (Ch.)	東北通史	<i>minjok sahak</i>	民族史學
<i>dongbei zhenxing</i>	東北振興	Paio Wenyi (Ch.)	朴文一
<i>zhanlue</i> (Ch.)	戰略	Sun Jinji (Ch.)	孫進己
Fu Sinian (Ch.)	傅斯年	Sun Zuomin (Ch.)	孫祚民
Goguryeo	高句麗	<i>yishi liangyeong</i> (Ch.)	一史兩用
Jiang Mengshan (Ch.)	姜孟山	Yodong	遼東
Jin Yufu (Ch.)	金毓黻	<i>zhonghua minzu</i> (Ch.)	中華民族
Kookhakwon	國學院		

(Ch.: Chinese)