palgrave
communications
HUMANITIES | SOCIAL SCIENCES | BUSINESS

COMMENT

https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0248-3 OPEN

Dueling nationalisms in North and South Korea

Seo-Hyun Park[1]

ABSTRACT

Are frequent appeals to autonomy and self-reliance by political leaders indicative of strong North and South Korean nationalism? As divided nations that have experienced colonization and Cold War intervention, North and South Korea are described as having particularly nationalistic tendencies, exemplified by the extreme ideology of self-reliance in North Korea and episodes of anti-Japanism and anti-Americanism in South Korea. But often ignored in existing structural or cultural deterministic accounts is the other side of "Great Power" nationalism in both Koreas—that is, the desire to become advanced nations themselves by emulating the success of Great Powers. The argument presented here is that such an outward-looking nationalism is also a shared source of Korean foreign policy and has become a source of domestic legitimacy battles, during which weakened leaders turn to greater autonomy to bolster their political positions. Through a comparative examination of the evolution of *juche* in North Korea, which began as a reaction to perceived Soviet interference in the mid-1950s, and the development of anti-*sadae* (Great-Power revering) thought in postwar South Korea, this article attempts to explain the role of Great Powers in, as well as identify the patterns of, domestic legitimacy contestation in Korean foreign policy.

[1] Lafayette College, Government, Easton, PA, USA. Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to S.-H.P. (email: parksh@lafayette.edu)

Introduction

Are frequent appeals to autonomy and self-reliance by political leaders indicative of strong North and South Korean nationalism? According to conventional wisdom, due to past experiences of colonization and outside intervention during the Cold War, Asian states are believed to be among the most protective of the principle of sovereignty and the right to self-defense. As divided nations, North and South Korea have both displayed strong sensitivity to encroachments on their sovereignty, particularly in their relations with regional Great Powers. For example, the North Korean regime has long promoted the ideology of *juche* (self-reliance) as a way to overcome the long history of foreign intervention—by the Chinese, Russians, Japanese, and Americans—in Korean politics. In South Korea, anti-Great Power sentiments have been increasingly vocalized since the deepening of democratization and civil society, building on decades of various historical grievances—perceived and real—against external actors. Alternatively, North and South Korean leaders may use the language of autonomy as a rhetorical "weapons of the weak" strategy to mask their dependence and power asymmetry vis-à-vis Great Powers.

But what is often neglected in these existing accounts of cultural or structural determinism is the other side of "Great Power" nationalism in Korean history—that is, the desire to become advanced nations themselves by emulating the successful models of Great Powers. In the immediate post-liberation period, both regimes in Pyongyang and Seoul sought to integrate their political economic systems into the global socialist and liberal democratic models, respectively. While divided along political, economic, and social lines, North Korean and South Korean governments shared similar goals of building a *gangseong daeguk* (strong state) and *seonjinguk* (advanced state), respectively.

In this article, I argue that such an outward-looking nationalism is also a shared source of Korean foreign policy rhetoric. Relations with Great Powers, however, become a source of domestic legitimacy battles, during which weakened leaders turn to the rhetoric of greater autonomy to bolster their political positions. Through a comparative examination of the introduction and evolution of *juche* in North Korea, largely a reaction to perceived Soviet interference in the mid-1950s, and the rhetoric of anti-*sadae* (Great-Power revering) foreign policy and "autonomous defense" (that is, less dependence on the United States) in South Korea, I attempt to explain the role of Great Powers in, as well as identify the patterns of, nationalist rhetoric in Korean foreign policy.

The nineteenth century origins of dueling security nationalisms in Korea

Nationalist rhetoric in Korean political debates show two key characteristics: first, a continued emphasis on the concept of, and quest for, sovereignty autonomy; and second, a pattern of oscillating between two enduring security frames that offer competing views on how to manage relations with Great Powers. Both traits were born out of the wide-ranging political and social transformations of the late nineteenth century in the East Asian region. As Qing China, Meiji Japan and Joseon (Chosŏn) Korea deepened their interactions with the Western powers, gaining recognition as capable modern states and enhancing status vis-à-vis other Great Powers became a shared concern.

During this time, sovereign autonomy emerged as the central concept for debating strategies of state-building and status-seeking in international relations. One understanding of sovereign autonomy was state-strengthening via external status advancement. Uncovering and reintroducing language from old classical Confucian texts, Japanese and Korean officials spoke of reaching advanced-nation status through a "rich nation, strong army" (*fukoku kyōhei* in Japanese, *buguk gangbyeong* in Korean) within the context of a reimagined and reified hierarchical order.[1] In other words, to be a truly sovereign state was to be judged favorably against civilizational standards, as promoted by dominant powers in the international system.[2]

It was in this context that the concept of *sadae* (accommodating or revering Great Powers) was first politicized—and stigmatized—in Korean politics. Originally, the term *sadae* simply referred to Korean policy during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910) of paying tribute and respect to the Chinese emperor in exchange for protection and autonomy of rule, as was mandated by traditional Confucian civilizational standards (Pak, 1977, p. 218). It was also a strategy of realpolitik for smaller polities when the only options available against civilizational powers were resistance, often violent and futile, or accommodation (Ledyard, 1968; Kim, 1989, pp. 167–170; Chung, 2004, pp. 112–113; Larsen, 2000; pp. 17–19). But the policy, and the cultural context endorsing the appropriateness, of *sadae* became a target of progressive reformers in Korea, who became increasingly critical of the ruling conservatives who, in order to maintain their own power and authority, continued to rely on Chinese diplomatic and military support. These Enlightenment (or Independence) Party leaders stated as their policy objectives independence from Qing China and continued implementation of modernizing reforms. In highlighting their desire for independence from Chinese influence, they labeled the ruling conservative factions the Sadae Party, admonishing them for their subservient, obsequious and backward attitudes and thought.

Since the late nineteenth century, *sadae* has become synonymous with everything that prevents the Korean nation from being truly autonomous.[3] Interestingly enough, *sadaejuui* (roughly, *sadae* thought or Great Power worship) is used commonly and interchangeably alongside *sadae*, even though the former is a relatively newer invented term in the 1900s.[4] The trope of *sadaejuui* is also, as the historian Yi Gi-baek (1994, p. 177) and others (such as Jang, 2014) remind us, often used by the oppressor (in this case, imperial Japan) to blame conquest and forcible rule on the weakness of the oppressed (colonized Korea). In short, we see during the late nineteenth century a linguistic alteration in the usage and the meanings attached to *sadae*—from a specific political-military strategy within the Sinocentric diplomatic order to a symbol of an antiquated and undesirable worldview. Such conceptual change would have lasting consequences.

In the process of adopting diplomatic procedures and state institutions based on formalized, legal Westphalian sovereignty, Joseon (and later, North and South Korean) elites engaged in political debates—and rhetorical battles—over what constituted full sovereign autonomy. While some, such as the progressive reformers, emphasized the removal and delegitimation of anachronistic policies and vested interests (anti-*sadae*), others focused on demonstrating state strength through institution-building, as well as international recognition and support (*buguk gangbyeong*). While not necessarily mutually exclusive, they operated as alternative, often competing, focal points of political mobilization. More importantly perhaps, they endure as competing frames of political legitimacy in both North and South Korean national identity politics. The anti-*sadae* frame motivates the *juche* (self-reliance or self-identity) ideology in North Korea and calls for *jaju* (autonomy or independence) in South Korea in the postwar period. At the same time, *buguk gangbyeong* strong-state-ism undergirds the appeal and resonance of official slogans such as *gangseong daeguk* (strong Great Power) in 1990s North Korea and *seonjinhwa* (national

advancement, or becoming an advanced nation) and *seghyhwa* (globalization) drives of successive South Korean governments since the 1970s.

Recurring nationalist rhetoric in the domestic legitimacy politics of North and South Korea

The previous section demonstrated the relevance and enduring influence of late nineteenth century concepts—as well as the context in which their contestation and change took place—for contemporary nationalist rhetoric in North and South Korea. Other scholars have also identified anti-*sadae* sentiments as the primary source of widespread support for self-reliance and *juche*. For example, Vladimir Tikhonov (2012, pp. 1–2) writes that *juche* "owes much of its legitimacy in the eyes of the North Korean population (and its few isolated South Korean sympathizers) exactly to its (not necessarily unfounded) claim to protect an essentialized 'Koreanness' from all foreign threats, notably those originating in the 'imperialist' countries."

However, it should also be noted that the Western literature on North Korean politics tends to overemphasize *juche* as the most—perhaps only—important source of all North Korean foreign policy behavior. While it is an important guiding principle to be sure, we should not lose sight of the fact that North Korea was explicitly committed to the international socialist revolution for most of the Cold War period (Pak, 1996). Following liberation from Japanese colonial rule, regimes in both North and South Korea sought to emulate successful Great Powers, importing their political economic models and technology, as well as sending students abroad. Even though both Koreas are more commonly cited as examples of staunch defenders of sovereignty and self-defense principles, there is often a tension between anti-*sadae*, pro-autonomy sentiments on the one hand and the habitual benchmarking of advanced nations on the other.

How then are these dueling nationalisms politically contested in North and South Korea? I argue that the mobilization of nationalist rhetoric occurs in North and South Korea as a result of leaders' attempts to maintain or bolster their legitimacy. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the internationalist mode of nationalism—that is, an outward-looking national advancement discourse—has been the default mode, with a more defensive, insular, anti-Great Power self-reliant stance being emphasized during moments of domestic legitimacy crisis. Precisely because the latter tends to be activated and mobilized through fiery policy slogans or public contests of legitimacy, we are more likely to recognize this insular frame as epitomizing Korean nationalism. While these two alternative nationalist frames ordinarily coexist in everyday politics, during certain periods of crisis, the pursuit of greater autonomy from perceived and future Great Power interference is pitted as a more authentically "nationalist" alternative to prior—seemingly compromised—policy stances.

Major examples of legitimacy politics in North and South Korea suggest that they are triggered under conditions of extreme political competition. Debates between alternative security nationalisms tend to become polarized especially when leaders experience "competitive outbidding," either from outside challengers or within-regime divisions.[5] Legitimacy contests are conducted within shared constraints, often revealed in language. The comparative case studies in this article provide empirical analyses of repeated contestation over the meaning of autonomy since 1945. Domestic legitimacy politics in North and South Korea have involved both sources of nationalist appeals—that of emulation-oriented strong-state nationalism and of Great Power-distancing or dissociation.

North Korea's pursuit of autonomy: between *juche* and *gangseong daeguk*

The 1956 crisis in North Korea and the birth of *juche*. While North Korean nationalism is often equated with *juche* self-reliance, Kim Il Sung initially gained power over his rivals under heavy Soviet influence. Following the Moscow Conference in December 1945, the Soviets ousted non-Communist nationalists in the northern half of the Korean peninsula. By allying himself with ethnic Korean communists from the Soviet Union, such as Ho Ka-yi and Pak Chang-ok, and representatives of the Korean Communist Party from the South, such as Pak Hon-yong and Pak Chong-ae, Kim Il Sung successfully established a pro-Soviet regime in North Korea. Revolutionary internationalism encouraged such mutual assistance (Shen and Xia, 2015, pp. 96–97). Soviet assistance was critical for industrial operations and development in North Korea during this period, as the Chinese Communists were in no position to do so. A "pattern of emulation embodied in the slogan 'Learn from the Soviet Union!' was established largely during the Red Army occupation of North Korea from 1945 to 1948" (Paige, 1963, p. 230). In fact, Kim Il Sung was careful to state, in February 1959, that: "Solidarity centered on the Soviet Union was necessary yesterday, is necessary today, and will be necessary tomorrow. This solidary around the Soviet Union does not mean that somebody is dominating somebody else; it also does not mean that we are suffering from *sadaejuui*…" (Paige, 1963, p. 250).

But the experience of the Korean War (1950–1953) and subsequent external and internal challenges to his power and legitimacy led to a reshaping of North Korean nationalist rhetoric—from striving to become part of the global socialist network toward an emphasis on self-reliance and dissociation from Great Power influence. While Kim Il Sung was dependent on Chinese and Soviet aid during the Korean War, he also resented Chinese dominance and begrudged the limited military assistance from the Soviets, who did not want to provoke a conflict with the U.S. When American air raids destroyed North Korean towns and villages, it likely "reinforced Kim's determination to lessen the DPRK's dependence on the two communist giants" (Szalontai, 2005, p. 33). During this time, Kim also managed to remove two of his key rivals from the Chinese Communisty Party-affiliated Yan'an faction, Mu Chong and Ho Ka-yi, for their military failures (Shen and Xia, 2015, p. 93; Szalontai, 2005, p. 33). By 1956, Kim Il Sung maneuvered to purge any and all significant political opposition from the Domestic (South Korean) communist faction, the Yan'an faction, and the Soviet faction, Chinese and Soviet protests notwithstanding (Shen and Xia, 2015, pp. 93–94).

It was in this context that Kim Il Sung and his associates created and institutionalized the ruling ideology of *juche* (self-reliance).[6] It was simultaneously an attempt to consolidate his power following a factional and leadership crisis and a reaction—and preemptive challenge—to Soviet and Chinese influence in domestic affairs. As Zhihua Shen and Danhui Li (2011, p. 217) note: "Kim reinvented the Juche ideology to emphasize North Korea's independence, not only from Moscow but also from Beijing. Beneath the 'lips and teeth' appearance, Sino-North Korean relations were volatile in nature." Following the 1956 coup attempt, Kim Il Sung was especially insecure and reluctant to participate in Soviet-style de-Stalinization or the Chinese experiment with the Hundred Flowers campaign. Rather, "the Chollima Movement of 1958 was reminiscent of the work-harder-campaigns in the Soviet Union and Europe and not of the much more extreme Great Leap Forward, despite similar terminology" (Frank, 2010, p. 8). As observed by Dae-Sook Suh: "Contrary to the common view that the North Korean pendulum swung back and forth in the Sino-Soviet dispute, the North Koreans viewed

their position as firm as they tried to maintain their independence between Soviet revisionism and Chinese dogmatism. Indeed… they simply tried to maintain Korea's autonomy" (Suh, 1988, p. 189).

After 1956, Kim Il Sung "began to cautiously, yet persistently, cast off the shackles of Soviet-Chinese tutelage. He also started to get rid of some Soviet-style policies that had been imposed on his country. The 'imported Stalinism' of the late 1940s began its gradual transformation into 'independent Stalinism'" (Lankov, 2005, p. 4). When Nikita Khrushchev's "secret report" denouncing Stalin's leadership began circulating among socialist countries in February 1956, Kim convened a special party plenum and a Korean Workers' Party congress, during which he "argued that Stalinist perversions were not applicable to North Korea, which had always had genuine collective leadership" (Radchenko, 2017). Kim also took caution to add "to master Marxism-Leninism does not mean to blindly learn individual provisions of Marxist-Leninist theory by heart. It means to be able to understand the revolutionary essence of this theory and on its basis to scientifically summarize the experience of revolutionary struggle and the questions raised by reality, to draw correct conclusions from them, and employ them in practical work" (Record of a Speech delivered by Kim Il Sung at the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party).

In response, Leonid Brezhnev delivered a scathing report from the Third Congress of the KWP:

> "In spite of completely obvious facts, it was stressed in every way that the principle of collective leadership was being consistently pursued in the KWP and in the work of its CC, and that a cult of personality has not occurred. Pak Heonyeong [Pak Hon-yong] supposedly had tried to propagate it, but he was exposed in time, etc. All this does not correspond to reality. The cult of Kim Il Sung continues to flourish in the DPRK. The numerous portraits, busts, all possible exhibit, films, pictures, and books which are completely devoted to the glorification of Kim Il Sung tell of this" (Record of the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party).

Brezhnev was also critical of the lack of acknowledgment of Soviet aid. He writes: "It is known that the aid of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries plays a great role in the revival of the economy of the DPRK. However, nothing specific was said on this score in the report. The size of the aid was not named, it was not indicated how it is being used, what shortcomings there are in this matter, or how it is proposed to use the remaining part of the resources" (Record of the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party).

In January-February 1957, nine of seventeen ministerial-level advisers were recalled by Moscow. In a symbolically important gesture, the North Korean authorities ordered that all classes in the Sixth High School, where a majority of the second-generation Soviet Koreans received their education, be taught in Korean. In 1957 and 1958, the number of North Korean students overseas was greatly reduced, and in early 1958, the North Korean government decided to send only postgraduates (and no undergraduates) to the USSR in an effort to crack down on defection possibilities (Lankov, 2005, pp. 186–188). While preserving and strengthening some Stalinist institutions, they increasingly took on a nationalist flavor. For instance, after the mid-1950s, the *Nodong sinmun* no longer published classical Chinese poetry because they were seen as "flunkeyist" (Lankov, 2005, pp. 175–176).

In February 1958, North Korea and China signed an agreement on the withdrawal of Chinese troops (the Chinese People's Volunteers) from Korean territory, which was another diplomatic victory and propaganda tool for the regime in Pyongyang. North Korea, unlike South Korea, had rid itself of foreign military presence, and the Chinese withdrawal also restricted Beijing's ability to influence North Korean internal politics directly (Lankov, 2005, p. 189). Kim also began to emphasize national "self-reliance" in postwar economic reconstruction, even as he privately acknowledged the considerable amounts of aid provided by the Chinese and the Soviets.[7]

By the late 1950s, "both China and the USSR, North Korea's main foreign patrons, became simultaneously positive and negative models for the Pyongyang leadership. Both Cultural Revolution and de-Stalinization a la Khrushchev were to be prevented at all costs, since they could threaten the stability of the indigenous power hierarchy" (Tikhonov, 2012, p. 3). In 1958, Kim Il Sung had embarked on an "autonomous" route to economic development, known as the Chollima Undong, in order to reduce interference from both China and the Soviet Union. The dramatic reduction of Soviet aid and the Sino-Soviet split had heightened a sense of need for economic self-reliance. The Kim regime responded with the slogan *uri-sik sahoejuui* (North Korea-style socialism) or *sahoejuui-jeok aegukjuui* (socialist-style patriotism) (Pak, 1996, p. 35, 67). After opposing Chinese intervention in Vietnam, in 1965, Kim announced his "*juche* (self-reliant autonomy or independence) in ideology, *jaju* (autonomy or self-rule) in politics, *jarip* (self-reliance) in economy, *jawi* (self-defense) in national security" platform at the Bandung Conference held in Indonesia. In 1966, he declared *juche* (self-reliant autonomy) as the official ideology of North Korea in the *Nodong sinmun* and began to distance North Korea from China (Yi, 2013, pp. 91–92; Jeon, 1994, p. 71).[8] At the first session of the Fourth Supreme People's Assembly, Kim Il Sung gave a speech emphasizing the importance of *juche*, which he described as "a question of special importance in the light of [North Korea's] geographical situation and environment, the specifics of its historical development and the complex and arduous character of [the country's] revolution." Furthermore, he added: "As a full-fledged, independent state, our country now sets its own lines and policies independently and exercises complete equality and sovereignty in its foreign relations" (Party History Institute, 1971, pp. 553–554). By 1970, Kim spoke confidently of having established *juche*—defined as a "revolutionary line of independence, self-reliance and self-defense"—as "the permanent guiding principle of [the Party]" and that North Korea's "unflinching struggle against flunkeyism and dogmatism" was reflected in the political, economic, military reconstruction of the country (Kim Il Sung, 1986).

North Korea-China relations remained fraught throughout the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution, and the U.S.-China détente in the early 1970s (Lee, 2000, p. 8; Heo and Ma, 2011, p. 34). Throughout these series of external crises, Kim Il Sung was able to consolidate his control and set in motion his plans for dynastic succession. A new constitution was adopted in December 1972, elevating Kim Il Sung from premier of the cabinet to president of the republic. He reemphasized *juche* as the guiding principle for the entire military and country and rallied North Koreans to pursue a uniquely North Korean-style socialism. It was also during this time that Pyongyang began to increase efforts to forge ties with other "Third World" countries such as Pakistan, Sudan, Zambia, Somalia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Algeria, Iraq, Arab Yemeni Republic, and People's Republic of Yemen. The North Korean government also continued to seek distance from both the Soviet Union and China. The East German embassy reports that "in spite of good relations between DPRK and PRC there are also reservations, logically emanating from Chinese nationalism and great power chauvinism. With its continuous insistence on 'independence' and 'self-reliance,' the

DPRK doubtlessly sends a message to the PRC that it [the DPRK] is not willing to subordinate itself completely under Chinese interests. Apparently the Korean leadership wants to main a certain maneuvering space for its relations with the Soviet Union and our countries" (Theses On the Present State of Relations between DPRK and PRC, 1973).

The turn to a strong state (*gangseong daeguk*) rhetoric in the 1990s. While *juche* has served as a legitimating ideology for North Korean elites in the postwar period and has been integral to regime security (Armstrong, 2013, pp. 3–18; Cheong, 2011; Park, 2002), a series of security challenges in the late 1980s onwards led to a reformulation of Pyongyang's rhetoric. The death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 and severe economic hardship, as well as natural disasters resulting in millions of deaths forced the North Korean regime to shift its language of legitimation—from emphasizing self-reliance toward survival, social unity, and state strengthening.

Following Kim Jong Il's official succession in 1998, and consolidation of his power, the North Korean leadership introduced a new slogan, *gangseong daeguk* (literally, a powerful prosperous nation). The term first made its appearance in a September 1998 editorial under the heading of "Let's construct a Kangsong Daeguk [*gangseong daeguk*] as led by the great leadership of the Party." It quickly became the dominant rhetoric in 1999 and throughout the early 2000s (Kwon and Cho, 2014, p. 139). Given the goal of becoming a *gangseong daeguk* by 2012, Kim Jong Il needed economic and political support from China, who tried to pressure North Korea into adopting economic reforms. In July 2002, Pyongyang announced limited economic reform measures that focused mostly on price liberalization and wage adjustments (Joo, 2009, p. 184). Other more specific goals as part of the *gangseong daeguk* initiative included the construction of 100,000 residences in the city of Pyongyang, the completion of Hoeryong plant in Yanggangdo, and the opening of the 105-story Ryugyong Hotel (Gomi, 2014, p. 118).

The standoff with the United States on nuclear development and the sudden death of Kim Jong Il in 2011 have led to a decrease in the usage of the *gangseong daeguk* slogan. But it does suggest that despite the conventional images of North Korea as a static, isolationist, communist country, Pyongyang has responded to external and internal challenges by seeking new modes of legitimation and by reconstructing nationalist discourses (Cho, 2011).

Dueling nationalisms in postwar South Korea

Anti-*sadae* nationalism in the post-independence period. In the immediate post-independence period in U.S.-occupied southern Korea[9], a common thread among all political parties, despite ideological divisions, was on regaining sovereignty and the right to self-rule. Writing immediately after liberation, Kim Ku stated that: "The first task of our nation is to build a completely independent country that is neither restrained by or dependent on other countries" (Kim, 1985, p. 50). Both Kim Ku and Syngman Rhee on the Right derived their political legitimacy from their stature as independence movement leaders (Cheong, 1991, pp. xi-xii). The Left, factional divisions notwithstanding, was also united by their shared goal of sovereignty-regaining and autonomy-enhancing nationalism. Much of the public support for Korean communist leaders was based not so much on their espousal of Marxist-Leninist ideology but rather on the fact that they had led resistance movements against Japanese imperialism.[10] In fact, many leaders in northern Korea could not distinguish Communism from nationalism, having adopted communism for its anti-imperialist doctrine in order to bolster their national liberation movement.[11] Echoing the political stance of Independence leaders in the late nineteenth century, nationalist leaders in South Korea in the immediate postwar period accused the Right of holding onto *sadae sasang* (ideology of deferring to Great Powers) for the latter's preferred policy of seeking outside aid and tutelage for nation-building (Kim, 1995, pp. 189–191). For instance, Yeo Un-hyeong argued in December 1945 that:

> "Our project [of state building] must now deal with foreign powers. The qualifications of our 30 million people will be shown to them. That we are in the situation of having to accommodate two honored guests does present a predicament. But we must always eschew the humiliation and weakness that is our *sadae sasang* (ideology of deferring to Great Powers), which has plagued our history for 500 years.[12]

The nationalist versus *sadae* cleavage on the Korean peninsula, however, was replaced by polarizing reactions to the December 1945 proposal, announced at the Foreign Ministers' Conference held in Moscow, to put Korea under joint trusteeship by external Great Powers. Among the more than 70 political parties formed since independence (Kim, 1995, p. 121), priorities on national reconstruction varied, based on alternative state-strengthening nationalisms: immediate sovereign independence, on the one hand, and gradual rebuilding through international support, on the other. In general, South Koreans viewed trusteeship as a continuation of dependence on outside powers, with the United States and Soviet Union replacing the position previously occupied by Japan.[13] Taking advantage of the support built through the anti-*sadae*, anti-trusteeship campaign, Syngman Rhee embarked on a campaign to discredit the trusteeship-supporting Left as anti-nationalist. He further differentiated himself from the foreign dependence eschewing (*ban woese*) nationalist stance of his rival Kim Ku and began to mobilize an anti-communist cause to seek American support (Choi, 2002, pp. 18–19). After the failures of the 1946 U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission and the Left-Right Coalition Committee (Jwa-u hapjak wiwonhoe),[14] American officials decide to hold separate elections to be supervised by the United Nations. Fearing the perpetuation of the country's division, both Kim Ku and Kim Gyu-sik boycotted the election in southern Korea, which allowed Rhee to become the inaugural President of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948 (Kim, 1995, pp. 233–235; Chung, 2000, pp. 127–135).

The Nixon Shock and autonomous defense in South Korea. After seizing power in a military coup in 1961, Park Chung Hee attempted to compensate for his lack of legitimacy by emphasizing both support from the United States and economic self-reliance. He unveiled his ambitious and determined plans for "national reconstruction" that would allow South Korea to become a *seonjin-guk* and achieve "first-rate nation" status. But this carefully framed *seonjin-guk*-building campaign would become subject to political contestation by the 1970s and later continue to motivate anti-U.S. and anti-hegemony discourses during and after democratization in South Korea.

South Korean President Park's crisis of legitimacy in the early 1970s began with increasing signs of a decline in security commitments from Washington in the late 1960s, such as the "betrayal" of Taiwan by the U.S. and Japan, the U.S.'s retreat from Vietnam, and Nixon's plans for withdrawing troops from the Korean peninsula. South Korea's status as a staunch anti-communist ally was also negated by the Sino-U.S.

rapprochement. Another challenge to Park's political legitimacy was demonstrated by the very close election results of April and May 1971, in which Park and his ruling party narrowly defeated Kim Dae-jung and the New Democratic Party.

In order to shore up his legitimacy, Park shifted the focus of his political mandate from an anti-communist partnership with the U.S. toward a state-led program of military, political, and economic self-reliance. He introduced radical institutional and policy changes, such as the authoritarian Yushin constitution, development of an indigenous defense system, the launching of a five-year military modernization plan, and plans to acquire an independent nuclear deterrent capability, which created significant tensions in the South Korea-U.S. alliance relationship (Nam, 1986, p. 103).[15] Such policy shifts were also accompanied by a change in Park's political rhetoric—from an emphasis on "national reconstruction" and "modernization" in the early- to mid-1960s to self-reliance (*jarip*) in the 1970s. In the 1960s, Park had frequently spoken of the goal of economic reconstruction—to build a "rich country, strong nation" (*buguk gangbyeong*)—and catch up to the Western Great Powers. By 1970, he began to put much more emphasis on economic and military self-reliance, as well as maintaining anti-*sadae* attitudes. In a speech delivered on January 1, he argued: "We have to secure our own independent self-defense strength adequate to crush any North Korean aggression without the help of other nations. This is what I call the spirit of self-help, self-dependence, and self-reliance" (Park, 1970, p. 83).

Conclusion

What are the stakes involved in understanding these dueling nationalisms in North and South Korean politics? Empirically, assumptions about Korean nationalism often lead to misleading or inconsistent conjectures of foreign policy preferences and behavior. For example, we are told that *juche* nationalism is what made North Korean nuclear development possible, and that the Kim Jong Un regime will jealously and fiercely guard it till the bitter end. Here, we assume too much about *juche* as the only viable form of North Korean nationalism. At the same time, however, expectations of Chinese influence and leverage over North Korea pervade current discussions, especially in the United States, of how to deal with nuclear proliferation in East Asia. Here, North Korean nationalism matters hardly at all and is assumed to be nothing more than "cheap talk." Yet, North Korea has presented one of the most challenging problems for the Chinese government, both in the contemporary period and historically; the "vicissitudes of the international Communist movement between 1950 and 1960 were also reflected in changes in Sino-North Korean relations" (Shen and Xia, 2015, p. 92). By taking into account the enduring patterns of contested national identities in postwar North Korea, we gain greater insight into alternative—sometimes competing—ideational sources of foreign policy and leaders' strategies of domestic political legitimation. It also suggests that North Korean leaders, like political leaders elsewhere, must cater, respond, and be otherwise sensitive to domestic political audiences by crafting narratives that resonate with the public and mobilize their support.

A careful analysis of North Korean and South Korean national identity politics also offers theoretical insights as well. Korean nationalist discourses are neither singularly unique nor uniquely singular. They are not solely attributable to the individual rhetorical choices of charismatic leaders or their cults of personality, as is the common characterization of Kim Il Sung's *juche* or Park Chung Hee's *jaju gukbang*. Nor is there a mainstream or hegemonic style or category of nationalism that is readily accepted by most or all Koreans. Existing studies of Korean nationalism have tended to emphasize the uniqueness of the Korean context, such as the pitting of North and South Korean nationalisms against one another during the Cold War (Bleiker, 2005) or enduring ethnic nationalism in both countries (Shin, 2006). In a recent study, Campbell (2016, p. 3) argues that South Koreans are eschewing ethnically-based nationalism, and its related unification discourse, and embracing a "new type of nationalism" that can be characterized by a more modern, cosmopolitan, internationalist nationalism, largely due to generational turnover.

While isolating specific structural or cultural factors is a fruitful research strategy, this study suggests the value of an alternative approach—one that looks beyond what appears to be the dominant nationalist rhetoric in a given context. Korean nationalist discourses have varied historically and should not be treated as unified, single-dimensional responses to foreign intervention or influence, such as colonization in the early twentieth century, the Korean War, or the Cold War rivalry. I highlight in this paper the enduring patterns of contested national identities and dueling nationalist rhetoric in post-1945 North and South Korea, whose origins can be traced to security frames articulated during the tumultuous transformation of the regional order in the late nineteenth century and reinforced by shared historical experiences such as the loss of sovereignty and subsequent division of the country.

Received: 12 October 2018 Accepted: 2 April 2019
Published online: 23 April 2019

Notes

1 According to Peter Katzenstein (2010, p. 6), civilizations are internally diverse and contested, but "as social constructions of primordiality, civilizations can become political reifications, especially when encountering other civilizations."

2 See Bowden and Seabrooke (2006, pp. 5–7) on the continued relevance of "externally established benchmarks for socio-political self-organization" within the current globalization debate. Internationalism, according to Sluga and Clavin (2017), was also mobilized as a political movement uniting indigenous populations, feminists and anti-colonialists, as well as politicians, economists and central bankers.

3 Some scholars, such as Kim (2017) go as far to argue that the "prevalent mentality" of most Koreans is one of *sadaejuui*, which is antithesis to nationalism.

4 Others, such as Park (2010) and Kang (2009), argue that it was originally used by Fukuzawa Yukichi and his followers immediately following the failure of the Gapshin Jeongbyeon, an 1884 coup d'etat in Korea led by young Korean progressives educated in and inspired by reforms in Japan, to frame the incident in terms of a pro-Qing, conservative Sadae Party steeped in *sadaejuui* (*sadae no shugi*, in Japanese) versus a reformist Independence Party.

5 In their study of political mobilization in ethnic conflicts, Lake and Rothchild (1996, p. 44) argue that "political outbidding" occurs when moderates, faced with an electoral challenge from extremists, are driven to "ethnicism." One reason, as presented by Kaufman, may be that extremists within ethnic groups denounce and sanction middle-grounders, forcing them to choose ethnically-based identities. Goddard (2010) also discusses rhetorical outbidding during legitimacy contests. In their analysis of elite uses of anti-Americanism, Blaydes and Linzer (2012) find that both Islamists and secularists engage in anti-American claims only when they face intense political competition.

6 According to Andrei Lankov (2005, p. 5), the term *juche* as a political concept was coined by the North Korean leader on December 28, 1955, in the midst of his offensive against his Soviet Korean rivals.

7 Zhihua Shen and Danhui Li (2011, p. 199–200) detail some of this aid. "To help with North Korea's economic recovery and development, both Moscow and Beijing provided Pyongyang with large-scale assistance. China's aid to North Korea was enormous. In the four years between 1954 and 1957, China gave North Korea 8000 billion Chinese yen, or 1.6 billion rubles, for free; China forgave all its wartime loans to North Korea from 1950 to 1953, which totaled 7,290 billion Chinese yen, or 1.45 billion rubles; and China adopted 22,735 ethnic Korean war orphans in Northeast China during the three years of war and shouldered all the living expenses for the

North Korean citizens and their families, a total of 31,338 people, who were responsible for the education of these orphans.

8 On the similarity in emphasis on *juche* (autonomy) by Kim Il Sung and Park Chung Hee during the Cold War, see Kim (1999, pp. 99–100).

9 For a more detailed treatment of alternative mobilizations of sovereign autonomy in South Korea during and after the Cold War, see Park (2017).

10 The Korean Left subsequently split into the Communist Party, led by Pak Heon-yeong (Pak Hŏn-yŏng), and Yeo Un-hyeong's (Yŏ Un-hyŏng or Lyuh Woon-hyung] socialist nationalists.

11 According to Cumings's (1981, pp. 407–408) well-known study of the Korean peninsula in the early postwar period, the Soviets had to strengthen their political training program for Korean members of the people's committee, such as Kim Il Sung and Kim Du-bong, on subjects such as organization work, public leadership, and current affairs.

12 Cited in Kim (1986, p. 39). The translation is my own.

13 In response to Korean opposition, General John R. Hodge, the head of the U.S. occupation authorities in Korea, attempted to explain that trusteeship was fundamentally different from Japanese imperialism in a December 31 press conference. See Jeon (2002, p. 83).

14 This coalition of moderates, led by Kim Gyu-sik and Yeo Un-hyeong, was created in October 1947 but soon became incapacitated with the assassination of Yeo. On the formation and activities of the Coalition Committee, see Jeon (2002); Oh (2002).

15 On the "loss" of Vietnam and the Nixon Doctrine as a critical juncture for Korean politics, allowing Park Chung Hee to introduce Yushin reforms, see Oh (1999).

References

Armstrong C (2013) The role and influence of ideology. In: Park Kyung-ae, Snyder Scott(eds). North Korea in transition: politics, economy, and society. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham

Blaydes L, Linzer DA (2012) Elite competition, religiosity, and anti-Americanism in the Islamic world Am Political Sci Rev 106(2):225–243

Bleiker R (2005) Divided Korea: toward a culture of reconciliation. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

Bowden B, Seabrooke L (2006) Civilizing markets through global standards. In: Bowden Brett, Seabrooke Leonard(eds) Global standards of market civilization. Routledge, New York

Campbell E (2016) South Korea's New Nationalism: The End of 'One Korea'? Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, Boulder and London

Cheong S-H (1991) The politics of anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea: Japanese-South Korean relations under American Occupation, 1945-1952. Greenwood Press, New York

Cheong SC (2011) Contemporary North Korean politics: history, ideology and power system. Hanwol, Seoul

Cho YC (2011) North Korea's nationalist discourse: a critical interpretation Korea Obs 42(2):311–343

Choi S-Y (2002) Trusteeship Debate and the Korean Cold War. In: Oh Bonnie BC (ed) Korea under the American Military Government. Praeger, Westport, CT

Chung H (2000) Korea and the United States Through War and Peace. Yonsei University Press, Seoul

Chung Y-H (2004) Munmyung ui cheongchi sasang: Yu Kil-chun kwa keundae Hanguk [The Political Theory of Civilization: Yu Kil-chun and Modern Korea]. Munhak kwa chiseong sa, Seoul

Cumings B (1981) The Origins of the Korean War, volume 1. Princeton University Press, Princeton

Frank R (2010) Socialist Neoconservatism and North Korean Foreign Policy. In: Park Kyung-Aeed. New Challenges of North Korean Foreign Policy. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

Goddard SE (2010) Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy. Cambridge University Press, New York

Gomi Y (2014) Bukhan gwa Jung-guk [North Korea and China], trans. Dong-uk Kim et al. Hanul Academy, Seoul

Heo M-Y, Ma M-h (2011) Jungguk ui busang e daehan Bukhan ui insik gwa daeung [North Korea's Understanding of and Response to the Rise of China]. Korea Institute for National Unification, Seoul

Jang I-S (2014) Junghwa cheje wa sadae: Han-jung sadae gwangye e gwanhan jeongchihak jeok haeseok [Tianxia, Power Structure and Sadae: Reconsidering the Meaning of Sadae in China-Korea Tribute Relations]. Han-guk dongyang jeongchi sasangsa yeon-gu [Korean Rev Asian Political Thought] 13 (2):185–218

Jeon S-I (1994) *Bukhan minjokjuui yeon-gu* [A Study of North Korean Nationalism]. Minjok Tong-il Yeon-gu-won

Jeon SS (2002) U.S. Korean Policy and the Moderates During the U.S. Military Government Era. In: Oh BonnieBC(ed) Korea Under the American Military Government, 1945-1948. Praeger, Westport

Joo S-H (2009) North Korean Policy Toward Russia. In: Kwak Tae-Hwan, Joo Seung-Ho(eds) North Korea's Foreign Policy Under Kim Jong Il: new perspectives. Ashgate, Burlington

Kang D-G (2009) 'Sadaejuui' ui giweon [The Origins of Sadaejuui]. Ilbon gong-gan [Jpn Space] 5:138–162

Katzenstein PJ (2010) A world of plural and pluralist civilizations: multiple actors, traditions, and practices. In: Katzenstein PeterJ(ed) Civilizations in world politics: plural and pluralist perspectives. Routledge, New York

Kim G-S (1985) 8·15 jik hu jeongchi jidojadeul ui noseon bigyo" [A Comparison of the Political Ideologies of Korean Leaders in the Immediate Aftermath of the 1945 Liberation]. In: Kang Man-gil, et al. (eds) Haebang jeonhusa ui insik [Views on the History of Korean Politics Before and After Liberation], volume 2. Han-gilsa, Seoul

Kim H-K (1995) The Division of Korea and the Alliance Making Process: Internationalization of Internal Conflict and Internalization of International Struggle, 1945-1948. University Press of America, Lanham

Kim IlS (1986) Closing Address at the Fifth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea'. November 13, 1970. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Kim Il Sung, Works, Vol. 25, January-December 1970. Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang, p. 327–333

Kim J-H (1999) Nambukhan jibae damron ui minjokjuui bigyo yeon-gu [A Comparative Study of Nationalism as Hegemonic Discourses in North Korea and South Korea]. Ph.D. Dissertation, Yonsei University

Kim Y-J (1989) *Hanmal naesyonollijum yeonku* [Study of Korean Nationalism in the Late Chosŏn Period]. Cheong gye yeonkuso, Seoul

Kim Y-M (2017) Han-guk minjokjuui ui jaengjeom [The Issues Surrounding Korean Nationalism]. Hanguk jeongchi oegyosa nonchong [J Korean Political Dipl Hist] 38(1):217–247

Kwon S, Cho YC (2014) Legitimacy and Regime Security in North Korea: Pyongyang's Slogan Politics. Dongseo yeon-gu [East West Stud] 26(4):119–147

Lake DA, Rothchild DS (1996) Containing fear: the origins and management of ethnic conflict Int Secur 21(2):41–75

Lankov A (2005) Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956. University of Hawaii Press and Center for Korean Studies, University of Hawaii, Honolulu

Larsen KW (2000) From Suzerainty to Commerce: Sino-Korean Economic and Business Relations during the Open Port Period (1876–1910), Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University

Ledyard GK (1968, October) Han-guk-sa-ui sadaejuui [Sadaejuui in Korean History]. *Sin dong-a*

Lee J-S (2000) Bukhan-Jungguk gwangye 1945-2000 [North Korea-China Relations, 1945-2000]. Jungsim, Seoul

Nam J-H (1986) America's Commitment to South Korea: the first decade of the nixon doctrine. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Oh Bonnie BC (2002) Kim Kyu-sik and the Coalition Effort. In: Oh Bonnie BC (Ed.) Korea Under the American Military Government, 1945–1948. Praeger, Westport

Oh JK-C (1999) Korean politics: the quest for democratization and economic development. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London

Paige GD (1963) North Korea and the Emulation of Russian and Chinese Behavior. In: Barnett A Doak(ed) Communist Strategies in Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Governments and Parties. Frederick A. Praeger, New York

Pak C-S (1977) Hanguksa e isseoseo ui kukche jilseo kwan nyum e kwan han sochal [A Study of Conceptions of World Order in Korean History]. Kukje jeongchi nonchong [International Politics Review] p. 17

Pak J-H (1996) Buk-han minjokjuui teukseong yeon-gu" [A Study of the Characteristics of North Korean Nationalism]. Master's thesis, Yonsei University

Park B-J (2010) Gapshin Jeongbyeon gwa Gabo Geyongjang sigi ui sadae wa donnip ui uimi [The meaning of 'sadae' and 'independence' in the era of 1884 coup and Kabo Reform]. Hanguk hak yeongu [J Korean Stud] 34:39–64

Park CH (1970) Major Speeches by President Park Chung Hee. Hollym Corporation Publishers, Seoul

Park HS (2002) North Korea: the politics of unconventional wisdom. Lynne Rienner Publishers, London

Park S-H (2017) Sovereignty and Status in East Asian International Relations. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Party History Institute of the C. C. of the Workers' Party of Korea (1971) Kim Il Sung: Selected Works IV. Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang

Radchenko S (2017) 'We Do Not Want to Overthrow Him': Beijing, Moscow, and Kim Il Sung, 1956." Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Blog: Sources and Methods. August 7. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/we-do-not-want-to-overthrow-him-beijing-moscow-and-kim-il-sung-1956.

Record of a Speech delivered by Kim Il Sung at the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party (1956) History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 229-250. April 23, 1956. Translated by Gary Goldberg. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120185.

Record of the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party by L.I. Brezhnev (1956) History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 221-228. April 30, 1956. Translated by Gary Goldberg. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120183.

Shen Z, Li D (2011) After leaning to one side: China and its allies in the cold war. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C.
Shen Z, Xia Y (2015) Refuting two historical myths: a new interpretation of China-North Korean relations. In: Freeman CP(ed) China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China. Palgrave Macmillan, New York
Shin G-W (2006) Ethnic nationalism in Korea: genealogy, politics, and legacy. Stanford University Press, Stanford
Sluga G, Clavin Peds. (2017) Internationalisms: a twentieth-century history. Cambridge University Press, New York
Suh D-S (1988) Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader. Columbia University Press, New York
Szalontai B (2005) Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C.
Theses On the Present State of Relations between DPRK and PRC (1973) History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PolA AA, MfAA, C 295/78. February 01, 1973. Obtained for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer and translated for NKIDP by Karen Riechert. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116677.
Tikhonov V (2012, February 11) Transcending boundaries, embracing others: nationalism and transnationalism in modern and contemporary Korea. *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 10-7-3
Yi G-B (1994) Minjok gwa yeoksa [The Nation and History]. Iljogak, Seoul
Yi H-R (2013) Bukhan ui dae-Jung jeongchaek e yeonghyang eul michin naebujeok yeoksajeok yoin eun mueotinga [What are the internal and historical factors that influenced North Korea's policy toward China?]. In: Jeong Deok-gu, Chu Shulong(eds) Giro e seon Buk-Jung gwangye [North Korea-China Relations at a Crossroads]. JoongAng Books, Seoul

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Filippo Costa Buranelli and the participants of the panel on international hierarchy at the 12th Pan-European Conference on International Relations in Prague, Czech Republic for their very helpful comments.

Additional information

Competing interests: The author declares no competing interests.