POSTCOLONIAL ASPIRATION AND CONTESTATION: 
POLITICS AND POETICS OF NATIONALIST DISCOURSES 
IN TWO NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF SOUTH KOREA

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF 
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF 

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY 

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies 
(Anthropology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA 
(Vancouver)

October 2012

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Abstract

After colonial liberation from Japan in 1945, Koreans have been eager to establish their sovereignty and to elevate national pride through nationalism. In South Korea, the nationalist discourse is ubiquitous, and generated top-down directly from the government as well as bottom-up in both traditional media and new social media. Emphasizing the unity, longevity, and distinctiveness of the Korean people by promoting nationalism based on the idea of ethnic homogeneity was a way of both redressing a traumatic colonial past and integrating modern social theories. While the nationalist discourse in South Korea constantly reinforces the uniqueness of Korean people and the worthiness of its splendid culture asserted to be of “five thousand years,” South Korean nationalism is far from being self-sufficient. One of the most significant motivational forces for nationalist consciousness in South Korea is not self-determination but its postcoloniality. South Korea’s anticolonial self definition is a direct reaction to Japanese colonialism (1910-1945), and the aggressive pervasiveness of nationalism in contemporary South Korean society is the prescribed way of rejecting and erasing a past both undesirable and regrettable. This prescribed ethnic nationalism is extremely problematic in both its ahistoricity and increasingly conspicuous irrelevancy in the face of an increasingly multiculturalizing contemporary South Korean population.

By examining the interplay between postcoloniality and nationalism, this dissertation examines the two major national museums of South Korea, the National Museum of Korea (NMK) and the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK). Conceptualizing museums as complex sites where different social, political, and cultural agendas are projected and contested, this dissertation attempts to contextualize the
discourses and phenomena of nationalism and postcoloniality in contemporary South Korea within the “contact zone” of museums. While the use of “contact zone” in understanding the nature of museums is strongly informed by James Clifford’s (1997) adoption of Mary Louise Pratt’s term (Pratt 1992: 6-7), this dissertation aims to broaden the scope of the concept by not limiting the discussion to the dialogue between the exhibited and the exhibitor, but by extending it to mean the process by which museums, the audience, and the society interact to generate and reinforce anticolonial nationalism in South Korea.
Preface

This doctoral research was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia (File Number B06-0107).
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List of Abbreviations

CCM  Chosŏn Central Museum of History
DPRK  Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)
KIS  Korean Immigration Service
MDL  Military Demarcation Line
NMK  National Museum of Korea
NFMK  National Folk Museum of Korea
PEM  Peabody Essex Museum
PRC  People’s Republic of China
ROK  Republic of Korea (South Korea)
ROM  Royal Ontario Museum
SCAPIN  Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers Instruction
TE  Tan’gun Era
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
VANK  Voluntary Agency Network of Korea
WHC  World Heritage Committee
WHO  World Health Organization
Acknowledgements

When I began my doctoral research a long time ago, I was under the naïve impression that it would be finished within a few years, and the only thing that really mattered was my own ability to research and write. Reflecting back across the last six years, I realize that this dissertation took far longer and required the support of far more people to complete.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Millie Creighton. Without Dr. Creighton’s patience, understanding, and continuous support throughout my doctoral program, I could have not completed the dissertation.

I also would like to thank my other supervisory committee members, Dr. Hyung Gu Lynn and Dr. Jennifer Kramer. I am especially appreciative of Dr. Lynn’s insightful expertise in Korean history and culture that helped me both to broaden the perspectives and to deepen the depth of analysis. I am also thankful for Dr. Kramer’s generous willingness to join the supervisory committee for my dissertation at a later stage that smoothed out the whole procedure. Dr. Kramer’s comments based on her own curatorial experience helped me to re-evaluate some of my assumptions in a productive way.

As an anthropological study, this dissertation required fieldwork that was conducted at the National Museum of Korea (N MK) and the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK). I am tremendously indebted to my informants at both museums who gladly participated in my interviews. Sharing daily life with museum professionals at the N MK and the NFMK during my fieldwork was a priceless experience. Dr. O Yŏng-ch’ an, the chief curator at the N MK at the time, was the one who literally opened the gate for me to launch fieldwork. Had it not been for his interest in my doctoral research...
project and genuine support, I could not have even stepped into the NMK. Dr. Cho Hyŏn-chong, a head of Archaeology Department at the NMK during the fieldwork, facilitated my fieldwork by generously arranging a visiting researcher position in the Archaeology Department. All the curators, interns, and volunteers at the Archaeology Department deserve my sincere thanks. I also would like to thank Dr. Kim Hong-nam, a director at the NFMK during my fieldwork, whose open mind and foresight enabled my research at the NFMK. I am appreciative for all the understanding and guidance I receive from the curators and staff at the Exhibit Department at the NFMK, including Dr. Ki Yang, Mr. Yi Mun-hyŏn, Mr. Choi Sun-kwon, and Mr. Kim Chong-tae. I learned a great deal from their tremendous experience in and enthusiasm for museum life.

The Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies at Seoul National University provided a doctoral researcher position during my fieldwork in Seoul, Korea. I appreciate all my professors and friends at the Department of Anthropology at Seoul National University for their warm support. I am also thankful for my friend and classmate, Denise Fong, who read my rough draft and made many helpful suggestions. I would like to thank Dr. Eunyoung Choi, an old friend of mine, for her emotional support during the very last stage of my program.

I offer unfathomable gratitude for my parents in South Korea who have never lost trust in me and my work. I am grateful to them, as well as my brother and his family for their unconditional support.

Finally my warm gratitude goes to my family. My husband, Tae Yang Kwak, read through multiple rough drafts and offered much constructive criticism. His own expertise in Korean history and insights into Korean society helped me in striving for a
balanced focus and clear vision. I also want to thank my dearest son, Ryan Hyung-Woo Kwak, for being a wonderful source of motivation and distraction, both of which were indispensable for writing a dissertation.

For financial support, I am grateful to many institutions devoted to supporting scholarship, including the Department of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of British Columbia, the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, the Centre for Korean Research at the University of British Columbia, the Centre for Japanese Research at the University of British Columbia, and the Vancouver Korean-Canadian Foundation.

Lastly, I would like to show my appreciation to the late Dr. Michael Ames, the former director of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. His love and passion for museum studies was a true inspiration for my own work.
Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Précis

This doctoral dissertation examines postcoloniality in South Korean society, particularly the postcolonial and nationalist discourses projected and contested in the two national museums. I conducted extensive fieldwork at the National Museum of Korea (NMK, Kungnip chungang pangmulgwan) and the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK, Kungnip minsok pangmulgwan) as a visiting researcher from January 2006 to September 2006. To follow-up, I also visited these museums annually from 2008 to 2011 in order to update data by tracking changes at museum displays and conducting further observations. I conducted additional archival research using the collections at the Seoul National University and the National Library of Korea. Beyond the two major sites of the NMK and the NFMK, I also visited other museums in order to get a fuller context of analysis, such as the Independence Hall in Ch’ŏnan, the Sŏdaemun Prison Museum, and the War Memorial in Seoul.

1.2 Research Question and the Goal of the Research

1.2.1 Research Question

South Korea has had an experience of Japanese colonialism (1910-1945). How has South Korean postcoloniality framed the strong nationalist discourse in South Korean society? More specifically, how is the interplay between postcolonialism and nationalism reflected in the national museums? Based on long-term fieldwork at the two major national museums in South Korea, this dissertation attempts to answer these questions. Strong nationalism and the wide-spread mythic belief in ethnic homogeneity in South Korea are best understood as a response to Korea’s colonial experience under the
Japanese occupation and colonization (1910-1945) among scholars of Korean nationalism (see Shin 2006a, Schmid 2002, Robinson 1988). To redress the colonial imprints and legacy and to resurrect the “national spirit,” (kukhon) South Koreans turned to ancient history and the myth of homogeneous ethnicity for a source of self-esteem and collective identity in order to counteract the colonial past. The antiquity and historical legitimacy of South Korea form the core of ethnic homogeneity-based nationalist discourse.

1.2.2 The Goal of the Research

The goal of my doctoral research was to illuminate the interplay between nationalism, colonialism, and postcolonialism embedded in current sociocultural issues in South Korea in order to obtain a better understanding of contemporary South Korean society. I also examine how recent changes to the ethnic make-up of South Korean society including the large scale immigration of transnational migrant workers and of international brides have stirred up the issue of multiculturalism, and its implications to nationalist discourse. The discrepancy between nationalism based on asserted ethnic homogeneity and growing social changes in reality has developed even more strong nationalist sentiment in South Korean society, which I understand as a symptom of cognitive dissonance. I chose two major national museums, the National Museum of Korea and the National Folk Museum of Korea, since these museums are places where the nationalist narratives are publicly projected, contested, and promoted.

1.3 The Field

The national museums of Korea are ideal sites to test and examine the overlapping interplay among postcolonialism and nationalism, academic discourse and
popular belief, and self and other. Often considered to be the “face of our nation” ( uri minjok ūi ŏlgul) by South Koreans, the national museums are expected to actively advertise and promote the uniqueness of Korean culture and civilization, both to South Korean nationals and to foreign visitors. The antiquity of Korean history and its eternal continuity to the present are also emphasized in this context. In a word, national museums are places where national pride and honour are standardized in official narratives. At the same time, due to public aspects as “contact zones” (Clifford 1997), the projected narratives of nationalism at these museums are widely open to contestation and debates among different groups of people, through which the limit and incongruity of the museum narratives become pronounced. For my research, I focus on the limits and contradictions that reside in the official museum narratives in order to explore mutual implications between postcolonialism and nationalism.

1.4 National Museum of Korea (NMK) and National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK)

Among national museums across South Korea, the National Museum of Korea (NMK) and the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK), both in Seoul, were the main field sites for my doctoral research. Specializing in Korean archaeology, art history, and history, the NMK is the largest museum in South Korea in terms of collection size, architectural space, and staff numbers. As a signature cultural institution of South Korea at the head of eleven other provincial national museums, the iconic status of the NMK in
South Korean society is almost incomparable to other South Korean museums. The NFMK is much smaller in size compared to the NMK, but due to its strong specialty in folk culture and its convenient location within the Kyŏngbok Palace, a major tourist location in Seoul, it is the museum most visited by foreign tourists in South Korea. These two museums had been located close enough to each other to form a museum complex within the Kyŏngbok Palace until the relocation of the NMK to the Yongsan area in Seoul in 2005. Detailed descriptions of each museum’s developmental history and structure are discussed in chapter two.

1.5 The Fieldwork

During the fieldwork period, I worked as a visiting researcher at both museums, in the Archaeology Department at the NMK and in the Exhibit Division at the NFMK respectively. I divided my time for observation and research in proportion to the size and significance of each museum. For the first two months, my primary fieldwork was done at the NFMK since entering the NMK as a fieldworker was halted by administrative hurdles. After having been officially admitted to the NMK for fieldwork, I generally spent three weekdays at the NMK, and two weekdays at the NFMK, conducting participant observation research among the staff and the visitors. Weekends were mostly spent in the exhibit halls, and special occasions and events over the weekends were also attended and observed. A detailed discussion of methods is found in a separate section below.

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1 The following eleven national museums are located in major provincial cities in Korea: Kyŏngju, Kwangju, Chŏnju, Puyŏ, Taegu, Ch’ŏngju, Kimhae, Cheju, Ch’unch’ŏn, Chinju, and Kongju.
1.6 Methods

1.6.1 Participant Observation In and Around the Museums

The main field sites for research were two national museums, the National Museum of Korea (NMK) and the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK) as noted above. As with many cases of anthropological fieldwork, the issue of the gatekeeper factored as a significant obstacle from the beginning of my fieldwork. In my case, the gatekeeper was not an individual, but the bureaucratic system itself. Since national museums of South Korea are under direct administration of the government, museums are constrained by the same bureaucratic procedures as other administrative departments. When I asked museum administrators for permission to conduct fieldwork, the most troublesome element was the absence of provisions and regulations with regard to visiting researchers. The bottom line of the bureaucratic system was as simple as “everything should be administered by the stated provisions under any circumstances.” The implications of this simple statement were enormous. According to national museums, since there was no clear provisions regarding having visiting researchers, they could not have one under any circumstances. If you want to go beyond the exhibit rooms of the national museums and set foot into the world of the staff, you should be an official staff of the museums, satisfying all the qualifications for civic employees. To be a civic employee, in turn, it is necessary to pass exams and have work experience. I was not equipped with these, and these were not something one can acquire over several months.

After presenting all the official documents and departmental letter asking for cooperation, I was again told that having a visiting researcher is not feasible since there was neither a provision nor precedence of a similar case. After several months of futile contacts and exchanges of emails all of which repeatedly pointed out the absence of
written provisions for having a short-term, non-paid visiting staff as the source of rejection, it seemed impossible for me to get into the field. As a last resort, I turned to a personal network to get into a behind the scenes zone and finally was allowed to work as an unpaid visiting researcher/intern/translator. Once fully immersed in the field site, the participant observation was conducted both in the staff area and the exhibit halls for the visitors. Due to the difficulty of getting into the NMK, I spent the first two months exclusively at the NFMK. Once I was allowed into the NMK, I spent three to four days a week at the NMK and the rest of the week at the NFMK. On Sundays, I usually made observations in and around the museums, listening and talking to visitors and attending special events and programs.

Conducting participant observation among the staff was much more challenging than making observations of the visitors. Since the staff members were aware of the existence of an unfamiliar researcher, at first they seemed to be reserved with words and actions in front of me, as if trying to reveal as little as possible. Some of them overtly expressed their uneasy feelings about “being observed.” There was resistance and rejection on the part of the staff, too. Feelings emerged such as “Why should we cooperate with you for your own research? You are the only one who will benefit from the research by getting a degree, not us.” In a nutshell, the early stage of fieldwork was a process of struggling with an inefficiently rigid bureaucratic system which was skeptical of outsiders. All these difficulties in the early stage were well anticipated in advance, so it was not surprising, but nevertheless trying. The circumstances got much better as I shared the nine to six daily routine with the staff. As with many workplaces in South Korea, there were many occasions the staff needed to work overtime, often until 10-11
p.m. and until dawn of the next day right before special exhibits. Joining the staff members in their work schedules including the overtime and helping them with their daily work was the key for establishing a rapport in my case.

Even casual conversations with volunteers were effectively insightful especially when they shared episodes they experienced with the visitors. Most volunteers appeared very proud of their duty at the museums. One of them phrased is as follows.

My work here is letting people know how great and distinctive our culture and traditions are. With our [volunteers’] help, visitors learn a lot from the museum. It is physically demanding, but nevertheless a very rewarding job. [An interview with a volunteer at the NMK, April 29, 2006]

Making observations of the visitors was less challenging. While spending time observing visitors in the exhibits halls, I also had opportunities to talk and listen to volunteers, the majority of whom were retirees in their fifties or sixties.

1.6.2 Open-ended Interviews with Visitors and Staff

Other than daily participant observation, open-ended interviews were conducted with staff members including curators, educators, interns, and volunteers. For interviews and surveys, the UBC Board of Ethics approved consent forms were presented and signed by the interviewees. Some interviews were recorded using a digital recorder with the interviewee’s consent. In cases where the interviewees preferred not to have the interviews recorded, only note-taking was done with the interviews. Some interviews followed a set of prepared questions, and other interviews were done only with topics. Recorded interviews were transcribed after the interview. Open-ended interviews did not exceed an hour on average. The names of the interviewees are not released in this dissertation to maintain confidentiality.
Compared to the entire group of museum staff at the NMK and the NFMK, the number of people with whom I interacted during the fieldwork was small and limited. In addition, the majority of my interviewees were also members of specific divisions/departments at both museums. Under this circumstance, many of the interviewed museum staff were concerned about the issue of confidentiality and wanted the contents of their interviews and conversations not to be cited as direct quotations. To respect their preference for high confidentiality and to protect their privacy as much as possible, I minimized the use of direct quotations in dealing with the content of interviews in my dissertation. I also tried my best to reflect on and to represent the interviewees’ opinions and positions on particular issues with my own words rather than referring to the specific interview cases, because even indirect quotations could reveal some clues for personal identities depending on the provided contextual information. As a result, my subject position in this dissertation represents that of a deeply involved colleague who shares the interviewees’ perspectives on issues in and around the museums, rather than a detached researcher. The opinions and thoughts of the museum staff are incorporated in my own voice throughout the dissertation.

1.6.3 Surveys with Visitors

Quick surveys were conducted mostly with the visitors, as opposed to my long term participant observation or open-ended interviews with the staff. Unlike the staff, visitors would come and go just like the ebb and flow of the sea. Considering their rather short stays at museums, conducting surveys was the most efficient way to hear from the visitors. The visitors also perceived it as less intrusive than interviews. Selected visitors were fully informed of the nature and the purpose of the research before they filled out
the survey form. In most cases, filling out the survey forms did not exceed ten minutes. Only a few cases of senior citizens with vision and hearing impairments took more time in completing the survey. Names of participants of the survey are not released, while information on ages and gender are indicated only when the participants agreed to do so.

1.6.4 Published Sources

Museum periodicals, books on exhibits, posters, and reports at libraries of the NMK and the NFMK provided a crucial basis for analysis. Brochures, pamphlets, program guides, and tickets were also regarded as subjects of archival research. Publications in Korean on topics of Korean history and culture at the Seoul National University Library and the National Library were also valuable sources to scrutinize how South Koreans themselves understood and interpreted historical events and sociocultural issues.

1.6.5 Web-based Research

The advent of extensive and intensive Internet usage in South Korea opened a new site for opinion making and sharing. Forums and online communities proliferate in the “virtual world,” mostly drawing on two main advantages of the online world: anonymity and spontaneity. While these two factors enable active involvement of people of all ages, unfiltered and unsupported claims also mushroom. The more the Internet forms a significant part of contemporary life, the more the boundaries become blurry between facts and claims.

In the realm of total anonymity and speedy information, the boundaries between history and myth, reality and fantasy, reason and belief gets easily confused. Unbalanced and unsupported perspectives more effortlessly burgeon on sensational issues, such as
territorial disputes with neighbouring countries and controversies around ancient history. There are literally hundreds and thousands of web pages that irresponsibly reproduce unsupported claims in the name of defending national pride and boosting national spirit. The penetrating influences of such online communities are simply overpowering especially among young people, who now get more information from the Internet than from books. Exhibits at the NMK and the NFMK were more often than not the subject of disputes among the online communities of nationalist fervor, being severely criticized as “colonial,” “pro-Japanese,” and “shameful.”

Another valuable source for my research on the web was the online bulletin board on the museums’ official websites. As institutions directly under governmental administration, national museums of South Korea have an online bulletin board on their website following the default protocols imposed by the government. Anyone can post questions and suggestions on this board, and the museum is expected to respond to every post in a timely manner. Monitoring the online bulletin board on a daily basis was informative in grasping the museum audience’s expectations and possible dissatisfaction. Comments on the board were not confined to exhibits and programs of the museum. As discussed in chapter two, the online bulletin board on the NMK’s official website was inundated with complaints and bitter remarks of the colonial legacy of the museum, sometimes questioning the pro-Japanese family background of the director of the museum. The online bulletin boards were also a good place to hear from the audience in a broad sense, including people who only participated in the web debates while not physically visiting the museums. They might not be “museum visitors,” but nonetheless
were part of a “museum audience,” since they persistently made their voices heard and sometimes even made the museum change specific exhibits and programs.

1.7 Background of the Research

To examine national and postcolonial aspects of South Korean society through museums, relevant historical, sociocultural, and international contexts need to be considered. As first and foremost a process of self-identification, nationalism needs others to differentiate the self (Calhoun 1997: 7, Eriksen 1993:111). Understanding the historical, sociocultural, and international backgrounds described below will provide a useful context to examine such aspects of South Korean nationalism.

1.7.1 Historical

In South Korea, Japan is often conceived of as a (physically) close but (emotionally) not-so-close country. The geopolitical relationship between Korea and Japan is a convoluted one developed over a long period of time. The most recent and the most pertinent historical event was Japan’s colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945. The conclusion of World War II officially terminated Japanese imperial power and the Allies recognized Korea’s independence from Japan. Under Japanese colonization, Korea went through rapid transformation in major sociocultural spheres. Industrialization, modernization, and urbanization took place during the colonial period, mostly designed and led by the Japanese. Japan’s plan for developing Korea was in line with its imperial ambition to advance to Manchuria and Eurasia with Korea as a supply base. The role of Japan in such developmental processes of industrialization, modernization, and urbanization has been a topic of heated debate. Nationalist historians of South Korea accused Japan of thwarting Korea of its own opportunity to launch
modernization on its own. This group of scholars, representing the “sprouts of capitalism theory (Chabonjuŭi maenga ron), believes that Korea already developed an indigenous germination of modernization prior to the advance of Japanese colonial power (Kim Yong-sŏp 1995, Kang 1997). Had it not been for the Japanese occupation, Korea would have accomplished a more proper and self-sufficient model of modernization that truly benefitted Korean society and culture. Some other scholars in the fields of history, economics, and political science argue that even though the modernization of Korea was motivated by colonial aspiration, it is nevertheless hard to deny Japan’s role in Korea’s rapid achievement of modernization (Chang 1977; Cumings 1987; Eckert 1991; Shin 2006a).

Japanese colonial rule disrupted South Korea’s pride especially because of the long historical relationship between Japan and Korea. At least in South Korea, the popular understanding of the historic relationship between Japan and Korea is that of Korea’s unilateral benevolence. According to the South Korean version, the Korean peninsula played the role of bridge through which the advanced civilizations of China and central Asia were transferred to Japan, a nation located in the Pacific Ocean. Buddhism is one of the exemplar cases that showed the flow of enlightenment that was delivered to Japan through Korea. Listings of contact between Japan and Korea appearing in Korean historical documents in the pre-modern era are mostly comments about Japanese attempts to invade Korea. Sporadic appearance of skirmishes with Japanese pirates during the Three Kingdoms Period (18 BCE –668 CE) and beyond, and the two major organized military advances of Japan’s Tokugawa Bakufu in the seventeenth century are what most South Koreans are aware of when it comes to the
Japan-Korea relationship prior to colonization. The ancient “help” that Korea offered to Japan gets highlighted in contrast to the Japanese “ungrateful” act of colonizing Korea.

Japanese atrocities during the colonial period still reside in some old people’s vivid memory. More importantly, the memories of colonial sufferings of Korea are continuously reproduced through commemorations (for example, the Independence Hall, Sōdaemun Prison Museum), public education (school curriculum), and media. Anticolonial and anti-Japanese sentiment is summoned not just by issues directly related to the colonial past, such as comfort women and Korean draftees that certainly evoke colonial memories, but also by more generalized issues and disputes between South Korea and Japan, such as the territorial dispute over Dokdo (called Takeshima in Japan), a group of small islets located in the East Sea/Sea of Japan. Online communities and forums exploded in numbers with the extensive expansion of Internet usage in South Korea, and these “virtual communities” on the web were instrumentalized in endorsing and disseminating nationalist discourse by calling people’s attention to disputes between Japan-South Korea and China-South Korea, including controversies over Dokto (Takeshima) sovereignty, Japanese history textbooks, the Northeast Project of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and UNESCO World Heritage designation. Loyal South Korean followers of the nationalist spirit ranging from elementary students to senior citizens with personal experiences of Japanese colonialism were easily recruited into the online world of anonymity. Although the direct victims of Japanese colonialism are decreasing in numbers as time goes by, the web-based engine of nationalist sentiment is ever-intensifying, and smudging the borders between myth and historical fact, fantasy and reality, aspirations and contestations.
1.7.2 Sociocultural

Over the last two decades, the ethnic makeup of South Korean society has gone through a substantial change. The main sources of this change are the influx of transnational migration workers and international brides from other parts of Asia, mostly from China and Southeast Asia. This change holds significant meaning in South Korean society, since the change in population is directly related to cultural change as well. Different cultural inputs caused by the influx of transnational migrant workers and international brides has diversified the cultural landscape of South Korean society, but the more important contribution of increased multietnicity lies in its implications to South Korean nationalism. As discussed in chapter four and chapter five, South Korean nationalism is rooted in the popular belief of ethnic homogeneity. This common belief even leads to a strong claim that, “Korea is a nation-state consisting of one ethnicity (tanil minjok).” With Tan’gun as the progenitor, many Korean people believe that they have formed Han minjok from time immemorial and continue to keep the homogeneous ethnicity quite intact.\(^2\) Hence the influx of heterogeneous ethnicity is seen as a threat to South Korean culture and society by many South Koreans. The fact that people with different ethnicities are involved in significant numbers of new marriages extends the threat into the unknown future. It is not difficult to find an article or online posting deploiring ethnic “crossbreeding,” which is in turn translated into the deterioration of the

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\(^2\) Tan’gun is a mythical figure who was believed to establish Kojosŏn, the first state in the Korean peninsula in 2333 BCE. According to a state-founding myth, Tan’gun was born to Hwanung, who was a son of Heaven, and Ungnyŏ, a bear-turned lady after hundred days of penance. Believed to have built the first state of Kojosŏn in the Korean peninsula, Tan’gun is considered as the founding father of the Korean people. Although the existence of Tan’gun has neither been proved archaeologically nor historically, “we are the descendants of Tan’gun” is a popular catchphrase to trace back the origin of the Korean people to him.
unique culture and civilization of the ethnically homogeneous Han minjok. The picture of endangered Korean ethnic purity generates a stronger sense of reactive nationalism. To remedy the popular aversion toward multiethnicity and multiculturalism, the government and cultural institutions such as national museums are eager to promote the value of multiculturalism and the image of South Korea as an open society. However, their understanding and interpretation of multicultural values also bear their own limit and flaws, which will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

1.7.3 International

Irredentism has an Italian etymology. Irredento (unredeemed) refers to territorial disputes based on historical or past affiliations. Recent territorial disputes between South Korea and its East Asian neighbours exemplify irredentist disputes. When taking a close look into the issues, however, they are not so much about territories themselves as about an urge to establish historical legitimacy, which provides a warrant to present self-esteem and pride. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ vigorous launching of the Northeast Project in 2002 and the Chinese government’s efforts to add Koguryŏ sites in China to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2004 are pertinent cases in the context of China-South Korea irredentist disputes.

The Dokto (Takeshima) controversy is sometimes understood as an example of irredentism depending on the perspective. The reason that these nation states are active in redeeming historical legitimacy based on territory and cultural affiliations lies in

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3 “Dokdo (獨島)” should be Romanized “Tokdo” according to the McCune-Reischauer system, but is rendered “Dokdo” in this dissertation because that is how it was Romanized for the opening special exhibit at the NMK.
international politics within East Asia. With the grim unpredictability of the future of North Korea in the background, China, Japan, and South Korea became more conscious of power dynamics in East Asia. Territorial disputes and related controversies around cultural affiliations and historical legitimacy are better understood within the picture of competing international relations among East Asian nations.

1.8 Theoretical Background and Review of Relevant Literature

In examining postcolonial nationalism reflected at national museums of South Korea, the main three theoretical references for this dissertation are (1) postcolonial studies (2) nationalism and (3) museum representation.

1.8.1 Postcolonial Studies

First and foremost, the prefix of “post” in postcoloniality needs to be scrutinized. Not a few people falsely interpret “post” in postcolonial as “after,” presuming postcoloniality denotes the end of coloniality. While colonialism as an official system of political coercion and economic exploitation has disappeared, the aftermath of colonialism is still in effect, in the realms of culture, politics, and economics, because “colonial experience is a continuing psychic experience that has to be dealt with and will have to be dealt with long after the actual colonial situation formally “ends”.” (Hulme 1993:120). In this regard, I take the “post” in “postcolonial” to mean immediately subsequent to, not the end of colonialism, but the launch of colonialism. By this definition, postcoloniality can be grasped in its totality, as a condition that emerged with the very inception of colonialism, and a condition in which anticolonial struggles were initiated, formed, and developed.
Even though postcolonialism as a political movement greeted, “eventual triumph against colonial rule” as Robert Young (Young 2003:3) explained in the twentieth century, postcoloniality still as a solid condition was evolving into diverse configurations, as seen in tribal conflicts in Africa and social discrimination against immigrants in Europe and Asia. Given the cases where postcolonial reactions, struggles, and desires did not wait until colonialism receded but formed around the active operation of colonialism, I believe this way of understanding “post” in “postcolonial” achieves a higher definitional validity. A lengthy quotation from Alfred J. Lopez’s Posts and Pasts: a Theory of Postcolonialism illuminates my point here.

What exactly do we mean when we say that a given novel or painting or political theory is ‘postcolonial’? How appropriate is it to apply the term to some or all of these things? As Padmini Mongia asks; “Does the term refer to tests or practices, to psychological conditions or to concrete historical processes?” The response of this book to these and related questions, at the risk of seeming disingenuous, is ‘all of the above.’ What establishes the postcolonial as a unity or heading, however tenuously or provisionally, is not a specific method, thesis, or object of analysis but a condition; that is, the discourses collectively known as ‘postcolonial’ share, if not a common history of colonization, then a condition or state of having been or presently being colonized, as well as the problem of how best to think of and live with that condition. These shared concerns constitute a broad context or outline for postcolonial studies as it emerges at the intersection of discourses such as nationalism, class, ethnicity, gender, language, economics, and geography, and so on. All of these and more must enter any consideration of the postcolonial, even if no single overarching theory can hope to do them all justice, to focus on one of these at the expense of others, to argue for a formulation of postcoloniality that “is” this and not that, or that attacks such studies for not centering around a particular ideology or method, is to forget how far and in what diverse forms the discourses of imperialism have themselves trafficked through the centuries. The postcolonial is, in this sense, certainly a response to the brute facts of colonization; but beyond that it also represents an analysis of its own relation to colonialism, a reckoning or coming-to-terms with what has happened (and is happening) under the banner of the colonial. [Lopez 2001: 2-3]
Postcolonial studies as an academic circle attempt to locate postcolonial conditions and sentiments in the aftermath of colonialism. Some of the pioneering works of postcolonial studies came from intellectuals with the direct experience of the colonized world, namely Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Albert Memmi. Memmi presents a portrait of colonial relationships in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965). Although his own experiences in colonial Tunisia are reflected throughout the book, Memmi’s picture of colonial relationships attempts to go beyond Tunisia by delineating the universal nature of colonization, the colonizer, and the colonized. His examination of colonial relationships funnels to what he sees as the one and only solution for colonialism: since assimilation is rejected by the colonizer, the only solution available for the colonized is revolt. According to Memmi, colonial relationships rest on the idea of privilege, the foremost privilege being economic. His definition of a colony—“a place where one [colonizer] earns more and spends less” (1965: 4)—clarifies his basic assumption of the essence of colonization. In fact, Memmi places economic exploitation at the center of the colonial setting, and to him, it is not merely an effect caused by colonization.

While Memmi’s examination of colonial relations puts an emphasis on economic relations, Frantz Fanon’s seminal work *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967) delineates the coloniality of human conditions. While this book is certainly about the “black man” as Fanon says, it is also about human beings in general. Fanon begins with a fundamental question “What does a man want?” in the first place. As an African-French and an Antillean, Fanon conducts a psychological examination of the colonized, primarily in the case of “the Negro” under French colonialism. Fanon uncovers how the Negro’s unstable, depressed, and alienated self-conception was in fact constructed by colonial power, and
how that construction was necessary to establish French collective consciousness. In doing so, Fanon provides a point-by-point attack on arguments that blame the Negro’s miserable situation on a racial concept of inherent inferiority such as Mannoni’s “dependency complex” (Fanon 1967: 83-108). In investigating the psychological effects of the colonial invention of “Blackness” on the Negro, Fanon demonstrates how language, sexuality, and physicality all operate to produce the alienation and distorted stereotype of the Negro.

If Memmi and Fanon respectively criticized the outer and inner mechanisms of colonialism, Aimé Cezairé elegantly undermines the principle of colonialism, i.e., the colonialist view of civilization-progress, and uncovers its true nature in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972). Cezairé defines colonialism as a system of “thingification” that “dehumanizes even the most civilized [person]” (1972: 20). Like Memmi, Césaire points out that the destructive force of colonialism is not limited to its effect on the colonized but also on the colonizer. Césaire emphasizes the racist aspects of European colonialism by locating Nazism in direct relations to the ideology of colonialism. After reminding the reader of the beautiful and peaceful time before colonial power came in and ruined everything, Césaire urges that a new society of humanism should be created. Césaire’s image of the dream-like past is not a call for going back in time, but is a way of invoking a shared identity and solidarity among the colonized.

While Memmi, Fanon, and Cezairé paved a way to diagnose the coercive and inhumane system of colonial relations, Edward Said heralded the cultural understanding of coloniality/postcoloniality with his seminal and canonical work *Orientalism* (1979). Employing literary criticism in reading the “World-as-Text,” Said declares that
Orientalism is neither a mere ideological representation nor false images. What is taken up by him as “Orientalism” refers to a body of concepts on the Orient as well as the sociopolitical relations between the Orient and the Occident, the accumulated mutual interaction between which has formed not only the Orient but also its Other, the West. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of discourse, Said rejects the putative status of “pure knowledge” and focuses on how political knowledge unfolds itself in seemingly innocent fields, be it arts, literature, or scholarship. Said’s wisdom on understanding Orientalism as a representational structure that has perpetuated its body of knowledge while producing the real conditions and being conditioned by them deserves attention, especially in the discussion of identity politics in the so-called postcolonial world.

Studies on postcolonialism had a significant turn with the emergence of intellectuals with poststructuralist approaches. Scholars in this category repudiate the structuralist premise of Manichean binary oppositions and attempted to deconstruct the very basis of colonizer versus colonized, center versus margin, West versus non-West by conducting “a more nuanced examination of the ways in which the positions of both colonizer and colonized are inwardly conflicted” (López 2001:4). Exemplary scholars in this stream are Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Some of the now familiar concepts developed by Bhabha include ambiguity, ambivalence, hybridity, and mimicry, all of which accentuate the in-between places in postcolonial conditions (Bhabha 1994).

In Bhabha’s framework, Western perspectives on modernity and progress are rendered not only ineffective in understanding colonial/postcolonial situations but also epistemologically and politically incorrect. There is no homogeneous empty time within or across societies, but only heterogeneous cultural differences, and all Manichean
conceptual boundaries such as inside/outside, private–public, us–them are nothing but imagined categories. According to Bhabha, however, the in-between situations are where the subversion and re-appropriation of dominant Western paradigms by the dominated/colonized can happen. The concept of liminality, which is related to all those canny terms such as mimicry, sly civility, hybridity, and of course, ambivalence, plays a central role in Bhabha’s discourse; all in all, it is the liminal aspects of culture that disrupt and threaten the dominating authorities and their regime of truth.

In applying theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism to my examination of contemporary South Korean society, Paul Gilroy offers a very useful point of analysis. As a protégé of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy is a renowned expert on Black identity in the context of Western modernity. Although his works mostly cluster on the intersections of race and nation in post-imperialist Britain, his mastery of criticism about the British effort for homogenization of collective identity at the cost of genuine endorsement of multicultural and diasporic values provides profound insights in examining postcoloniality in other parts of the world (Gilroy 2005: 2). Among Paul Gilroy’s many oeuvres, Postcolonial Melancholia is most pertinent to my doctoral research. In this work, Gilroy reads post-imperialist British society as suffering from postcolonial melancholia drawing on the psychoanalytic concept of Alexander Mitscherlich and Magarete Mitscherlich (Gilroy 2005: 98-106), by which melancholia is used to interpret the lingering nostalgia toward the colonial past and racial hierarchy in Britain. There exists a slight gap in terms of specifics in transposing Gilroy’s argument to the South Korean case since South Korea (along with North Korea) was the colonized not the colonizer, but there is ample room to apply Gilroy’s concept of postcolonial melancholia.
to South Korea in the sense that South Korea also displays a strong colonial legacy in accepting and denouncing multicultural and diasporic reality. If the British postcolonial melancholy desires the glorious colonial past, South Korean postcolonial melancholy aspires to project a reversed colonial hierarchy to others, mostly immigrant workers and international brides in contemporary South Korean society.

Gilroy’s mobilization of W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, along with Frantz Fanon’s interest in double consciousness in examining postcolonial identity, also plays an important part in locating my examination of South Korean postcoloniality. While Du Bois and Fanon specifically look into Black identity in the White world, the keen discrepancy between reality and desire elaborated by double consciousness overlaps with the cognitive dissonance from which contemporary South Korean society mostly suffers. The ever-growing perpetuation of a cultic belief in ethnic homogeneity in the face of increasing multicultural circumstances and the global context illustrates South Korea’s own version of double consciousness, or I might say double layers of coloniality. In short, South Korea is caught between the urge for single ethnicity-focused nationalism in compensation for colonial imprints and the desire for global standards in the era of internationalism and transnationalism. This cognitive dissonance has shaped South Korea’s ambivalent perspectives on multicultural and global values, perspectives combined with enthusiasm and revulsion at the same time.

### 1.8.2 Nationalism

The phenomena of nationalism and nation-states have become dominating concerns in anthropology as anthropologists respond to the criticism that they have arbitrarily insulated their traditional objects of study. The ambivalence in analyzing and
typologizing empirical cases under the umbrella term of nation and nationalism has been criticized (Brubaker 1999: 69).

Scholars of nationhood and nationalism are often categorized depending on how to define the nature of nationalism and locate its root. Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith represent two major streams of studies of nationalism, modernist-constructivist and primordialist-perennialist approaches respectively. Gellner understands a nation as a specifically modern product of Western industrialization. To Gellner nationalism is “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 1983: 1). Gellner’s discussion of nationalism needs to be situated within his philosophy of the progress of human history, which is comprised of three major phases: the pre-agrarian, the agrarian, and the industrial. Nationalism is a distinct product of industrialized society, and is “intimately connected to its mode of production” (O’Leary 1997: 199). In Gellner’s discussion of nationalism, people of a nation became a “large, centrally educated, culturally homogeneous group” under the nation with the spread of high culture (Gellner 1983:35).

Smith, on the other hand, argues that nation and nationalism are not exclusively modern products, focusing on the primordial ties shared among community members, namely “ethnie,” as a basis of a nation and nationalism (Smith 1987). In The Ethnic Origins of Nations, Smith argues that nationalism is an ideologically malleable device that can be built on pre-existing ties based on kinship, religion, and ethnicity. Also a modernist-constructivist but employing more global perspectives than the Eurocentric views of Gellner, Benedict Anderson explores the integrating force of nationalism across members of “imagined communities” of nations, made possible by the development of
print-capitalism and mass media (Anderson 1983). Anderson theorizes a necessary link between modernity and the rise of nationalism in the non-Western world as well as in Europe. His central argument is that modernity’s newly-acquired technology of imagining anonymous, mass individuals as fellow members of a *single* community—such as in newspapers or novels—has been the central force leading to the rise of nation-states around the globe. John Kelly (2001), one of the common reactionary corrective voices from anthropology to the discourse of *Imagined Communities*, has criticized Anderson’s argument as being more about modern sensibility in general than about nations and nationalism specifically. Kelly argues that Anderson’s theory of nationalism suggests “a vague sense of necessity and inevitability to nation-states and the national community, and an unfortunate peripheralization of colonial political dynamics” (Kelly and Kaplan 2001: 22). In other words, Anderson’s idea that “nations as imagined communities were a new consciousness awakened by modernity” (Kelly and Kaplan 2001: 5) makes sense when colonial and postcolonial history is in large part neglected.

In a similar vein, Partha Chatterjee, as another enthusiastic and effective critic of Anderson, presents his analysis of Third World nationalisms, especially that of India, in reaction to Anderson’s argument (Chatterjee 1993). Although Chatterjee admits the instrumentality of primary conditions in the development of nationalism that Anderson pointed out (e.g., print capitalism) in *Imagined Communities*, he contends that Asia and Africa did not merely copy Western models but already had formed their own national identities even before Western imports came in. Dividing the realms of identity into two, material and spiritual, Chatterjee argues that Anderson and other Western scholars mainly focus on the former, neglecting the native emergence of spiritual identity. As a leading
scholar of the Subaltern Studies Group, Chatterjee traces back how national identity and consciousness in Bengal was conceived in the soil of native nationalists especially by the bilingual elites, even before the advancement of colonial powers. While Chatterjee’s repudiation of Anderson’s scheme of Western modular nationalism and its variations in the Third World broadens perspectives on Third World nationalism, discussing spiritual identity in separation from outer influences risks missing the important link between colonialism and nationalism.

1.8.3 Museum Representations

In examining the sociopolitical aspect of museums as lived spaces, one of the most crucial concepts is James Clifford “contact zones.” Utilizing Mary Louise Pratt’s term (Pratt 1992: 6-7), Clifford attempts to explain the moment in museums in which “a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship—a power charged set of exchanges, of push and pull” (Clifford 1997: 192). As exemplified in well-known controversial exhibits, such as *Into the Heart of Africa* and *The Spirit Sings*, “contact zones” are often “conflict zones.” While Clifford initially employed “museum as a contact zone” to refer to colonial encounters between indigenous cultures and Western discourse, the concept of contact zone is effectively applicable in a much broader sense to

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4 *Into the Heart of Africa* (November 16, 1989-August 6, 1990) was an exhibit held at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Canada. Although the curator of the exhibition, Jeanne Cannizzo, intended it to be a reflexive and nuanced approach to colonialism and the nature of museums as imperial institutions, many members were offended by the lack of African voices in the exhibits. *Into the Heart of Africa* was largely criticized as conveying racist and colonialist perspectives (Schildkrout 1991). *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples* at the Glenbow Museum in 1988 was an exhibit designed to celebrate Canadian native heritage. The exhibit became the focus of controversy when the Lubicon Lake Cree in Alberta boycotted the 1988 Winter Olympics and then *The Spirit Sings* in the middle of their land claims with the Canadian Government. The fact that Shell Oil Canada Limited sponsored the exhibit also provided grounds for their boycott (see Ames 1991, Harrison and Trigger 1988).
explore the process in which identities and discourses are contested and negotiated at museum settings.

The idea of contact zone is also informative in understanding the sense of authenticity embedded in the space of museums. Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims (1991) attempt to define the nature of authenticity in museum display. Understanding that “authenticity” means “authority,” the authors delve into the source of authenticity-authority by comparing two types of museum display: object-driven and idea (theme)-driven exhibits. While in the former, the provenance of objects gets the primary importance, and therefore authenticity more or less resides in the specific object, idea-driven exhibits allow display makers to recontextualize objects, by rendering objects as representing specific themes determined by sociohistorical research. If these two types of exhibits show the roles respectively played by museum professionals and by social historians, the authors expanded the ground for examination by casting light on the part of the audience as well. The meaning and authenticity of exhibits are not solely determined by curators or researchers, but also by the audience’s own interpretations. Hence the authenticity or authority of the museums is located not in the objects, nor in the labels, but in the encounters and communications between objects, museum staff, and the audience.

Moira G. Simpson’s argument in her book *Making Representation: Museums in the Post Colonial Era* (1996) is not far from those of James Clifford, Michael Ames (1992) or Shelly Butler (2000) in that the suggested solution for the museum crisis of representation in the postcolonial era is collaboration and communication with indigenous people. Here again, the focus of representation is on the case of representing
“others” where the exhibitor is from the West and the exhibited are from the non-West. The role of museums in the postcolonial era is addressed in this book as “patron,” whose primary clients are, of course, native peoples. While Simpson considered that incorporating native voices into museum practices is the “social responsibility” of museums, she never asked or explained why that responsibility should be the primary concern of museums. Is this because museums need to make up for initially being imperial and colonial institutions? Is this because museums are supposed to be non-profit organizations that should serve the public good? Is it because this is a point of universal ethics for humankind? Can one confidently say that there is no patronizing neo-colonial sentiment in all these collaboration urges? (see Boast 2011: 65-67) The problem is that, while numerous suggestions on collaboration are pouring in, the conceptual basis of these arguments has hardly been touched. Still the binaries of the exhibitor and the exhibited, self and others, West and non-West persist as the basic framework for the collaboration concept. Westerners’ representations of themselves or conflicting representations of non-Westerners made by themselves still do not garner much discussion. More in-depth analyses of fragmented representations among diverse groups, and more detailed criteria than just ethnic categories for designating “communities” or “cultural groups” are still needed.

While Clifford and his concept of museum as a contact zone emphasizes communication and empowerment, other scholars paid attention to the role of museum that overlaps with Louis Althusser’s concept of Ideological State Apparatus (1971). As an art historian, Carol Duncan (1995) analyzes the process of identity formation in art museums, using theories developed in anthropological and cultural studies of museums.
Duncan’s argument is based on the notion that museums are temples of bourgeois ideology where civilizing rituals are performed. Transposing the anthropological concept of “liminality” (Gennep 1960; Turner 1967) onto museum settings, Duncan convincingly illustrates how art museums, which often exemplify the value of modernism, such as the concept of progress, serve as a site where secular people are transformed into enlightened citizens in front of the almost transcendental and sacred aesthetics of “art” pieces.

In a similar line of investigation, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 2000) employs Foucault’s framework of power/knowledge (Gordon 1980) in examining the history and development of museums, i.e., the archaeology of museums, in the West. Changes in museum displays and practices are juxtaposed with the shift in episteme as discussed by Foucault, and related forms of knowledge. Starting from earlier forms of museums, i.e. cabinets of curiosities, as exemplified in Medici collections, Hooper-Greenhill reveals the underlying episteme and rationale of collecting, storing, and displaying processes in this era, which was influenced by interests in exotic peoples and objects (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Foucault’s paradigm of power/knowledge becomes more prominent when the author attempts to examine modern public museums. Unlike preceding quasi-museums, modern public museums are generally thought to embody openness, equality, and democracy. The value of Hooper-Greenhill’s genealogical study of museums lies in its scrutiny of the underlying power and knowledge formation process happening at museums that is often masked by the alleged neutrality of “true” knowledge. Through various examples, Hooper-Greenhill demonstrates how disciplinary efforts are embedded in museum programs and displays, and how people are controlled, disciplined, and also transformed into manageable entities for the benefit of the state. However, just like her
theoretical mentor, Foucault, Hooper-Greenhill overly focused on the overwhelming disciplinary power that permeates all the layers of life, and in this case every museum related activity (see Foucault 1977). Underestimated aspects are the conceptual space in which the audience appropriates the suggested discourse of museums.

1.8.4 Nationalism in South Korea and the Colonial Legacy

In Korea, imperial encroachment and colonial rule in the late nineteenth century were defining factors in forming nationalist roots. Scholars like James Palais asserted that national sentiment in Korea had been extremely weak, if not unheard of, until the last phase of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897) (Palais 1998). Korean nationalist ideology emerged around the turn of the twentieth century with the visible presence of encroaching foreign powers and took strong anticolonial orientations in subsequent formative years (Shin and Chang 2004: 121). Nationalist thoughts and movements were developed under Japanese colonialism, but they continued to play an important role in liberated Korea as social glue that could unite its people.

The struggle of Korean elite nationalists in establishing nationalist discourse in the colonial arena, between two empires, Japan and China is well delineated in Andre Schmid’s aptly titled book Korea between Empires (2002). Korean nationalist thoughts developed on the basis of the belief and conviction of “enlightenment and civilization,” which also provided a legitimate ground for the colonial authority of Japan. The dilemma for Korean elites was imminent: they had to find a way in which their nationalist thoughts could be maintained while Japanese colonial narratives could be repudiated. Schmid’s examination of the conceptual shift in writings of Sin Ch’ae-ho (1880-1936), a Korean nationalist historian, elucidates the painstaking strategy Korean
nationalist elites took. Once a strong advocate of state-centered nationalism (especially before 1910), Sin and his followers gradually turned their attention to the spirited entity of nation, exemplified in such terms as “minjok,” “kukhon (national spirit),” “kuksu (national essence),” which transcend territorial boundaries, thus minimizing the effect of supporting Japanese colonial rule of the Korean peninsula under the banner of “enlightenment and civilization.” The popularization of an “ethnic nation” through newspapers at the turn of the century can be best understood in this context.

Facing the Japanese colonial desire to eradicate Korean ethnicity and its culture by assimilation policies, Korean nationalist narratives resorted to guarding the uniqueness and homogeneity of Korean ethnicity. With its tremendous focus on minjok and ethnic nation, South Korean nationalism is often considered as a clear example of ethnic nationalism (Shin 2006a). Considering South Korean nationalism as a modern product, Shin Gi-Wook nevertheless underlined the fact that there had been a loose sense of community with bounded territory and centralized state in the Korean peninsula as early as the tenth century, which paved a platform for the modern form of nationalism to appear. With strong anticolonial spirit towards repudiating shameful colonial experiences, the story of more than five thousand years of cultural and ethnic continuity of the Korean people was popularized in ethnic nationalist discourses.

While the majority of South Koreans believe that the Korean ethnic and cultural identity is of primordial origin and Japanese colonialism only left a damaging effect, Hyung Il Pai (1998, 2000) carefully deconstructs both popular beliefs in her book on the construction of South Korean identity in the process of nation-building. Archaeological-anthropological excavations and fieldwork conducted and supported by Japanese scholars
and administrators during the colonial period have been criticized by South Korean scholars on the basis that the main purpose of such projects was to legitimize specific theories that supported the Japanese colonial occupation. For example, particular interests the Japanese scholars showed in the Three Kingdoms Period are often interpreted by South Korean people as representing Japan’s eagerness to validate an intimate relationship between Korea and Japan, which in turn legitimized Japan’s rule of Korea. Admitting the selectivity and political nature of Japanese archaeological projects in Korea, Pai nonetheless argues against the popular belief that these projects were intended to loot Korean cultural material heritage (Pai 1998). The establishment of museums in Korea by the Japanese colonial Government-General (朝鮮總督府廳舍) and the enactment of the Japanese Government-General cultural preservation laws, according to Pai, prove not the “evil” nature of Japan, but the “lying complexities of all colonial contact situations” (Pai 1998: 20). Furthermore, Pai reminds the reader that it was Japanese scholars and Western missionaries rather than Korean people who discovered and documented the “neglected historical ruins” in Korea. Pai’s study subscribes to neither the rhetoric of postcolonial South Korean nationalism nor those of Japanese colonialism. Elucidated in Pai’s detailed investigation is how the shared background of “cultural and colonial” ties between Korea and Japan have shaped the cultural politics of contemporary South Korean nationalism.

1.8.5 The Interplay between Postcoloniality and Nationalism in South Korea

Scholars of nationalism have developed various categories as analytical tools for specific cases with particular historical context, including cultural nationalism, ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism, state nationalism, banal nationalism, popular nationalism,
economic nationalism, and sports nationalism. While this way of categorizing and distinguishing nationalism has facilitated the analysis of particular case studies, a categorized conceptualization based on the overtly expressed faces of nationalism might overlook the underlying critical condition that has shaped the current manifestation. For example, South Korean nationalism includes aspects of all the above mentioned categorized understandings. It was first conceived as an ethnic nationalism centered on the idea of minjok (ethnicity, nation, or people) against imperial threats and colonizing forces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and evolved to include cultural nationalism (Robinson 1988) during the mid to late colonial period (1919-1945) allowed within and without the cultural rule (bunka seiji) policies. In post-liberation South Korea, the government promoted a strong anticolonial nationalism based on the idea of distinct ethnic homogeneity using mass media and public education. The propagandized state-directed nationalism in South Korea successfully permeated into every layer of South Korean public and private worldviews, assuming the form of banal nationalism with such well known symbols as national flags, national anthems, a pledge of allegiance, and sporting events. Another problem with categorizing nationalism is that it may overlook many overlapping aspects of different types of nationalism that is not exclusive, nor analytically distinct.

Therefore the focus of this dissertation is on the underlying condition for, rather than the superficial manifestation of contemporary South Korean nationalism. In my analysis of South Korean nationalism, South Korea’s postcoloniality is understood as one of the most important motivational forces that has inspired, shaped, and nurtured strong anticolonial nationalist discourse based on the longevity and distinctiveness of Korean
culture and people. This type of nationalist discourse had effects of both redressing the traumatic colonial past and justifying the eventual re-unification between North Korea and South Korea in the future.

While the postcoloniality of South Korea has shaped its nationalist discourse, South Korean nationalism also has promoted negative aspects of postcoloniality. In other words, anticolonial, insulated, and self-contained nationalism has not decolonized South Korea, but has perpetuated the negative aspect of postcoloniality by protracting anxieties of an inferiority complex and perceived imperfections of self determination. Contemporary South Korean nationalism has outlived its utility as a bastion for anticolonial identity and now undermines its citizens capabilities to confront and resolve past and present problems (such as the colonial experience, contemporary multiculturalism, and relationship with North Korea) or cope with them based on healthy, historical, and open-minded criticism. Contemporary South Korean nationalism disillusions its citizens by locating the sources of self identity in a mythic past and a capricious reliance on a fictional ethnic oneness.

1.9 Organization of Chapters

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction and includes a discussion of methods and a review of the related literatures. Chapter two surveys the history and background information of the NMK and the NFMK, the two national museums under study. The history of establishment and development of these two national museums largely reflects the sociopolitical changes in South Korean society. Chapter three makes a case study of a special exhibit of Dokdo/Takeshima held at the NMK, shedding light on the territorial claim over Dokdo/Takeshima. The disputed
sovereignty over Dokdo/Takeshima between South Korea and Japan is a perennial issue and the continued controversy over it has made Dokdo a symbol of national pride and of the independence of South Korea. By examining anticolonial and anti-Japanese discourse embedded in the Dokdo-Takeshima dispute, this chapter attempts to explore the postcolonial landscape of current sociopolitical issues. A special exhibit at the NMK provides an example of how a cultural institution is mobilized to reconfirm anticolonial sentiment and perpetuate postcolonial citizenship among South Koreans through visualized embodiment of nationalist claims. Contrary to the general response, what was confirmed in the special exhibit was the popular belief and aspirations toward Dokdo, rather than the indisputable fact that “Dokdo is a South Korean territory.” Chapter four looks into the search for the historical legitimacy of Korea in the context of nationalism, focusing on the museumization of the ancient history of such kingdoms as Kojosŏn (2333 BCE-108 BCE), Koguryŏ (37 BCE-668 CE), and Parhae (698-926) at the NMK and the NFMK. Tracking the recent irredentist controversy between China and South Korea around the Northeast Project and the UNESCO World Heritage Designation is informative to understanding the postcolonial dimension of retrospective nationalist claims in South Korea. Multicultural discourse, a relatively recent social development in South Korea, is the main focus of chapter five. In this chapter, the NMK’s Asian Gallery and the NFMK’s education programs are under scrutinizing gaze to uncover the limited and flawed understanding of multiculturalism prevalent in South Korean society. This chapter illuminates how a myth of ethnic homogeneity that grew further from colonial memories found ethnic heterogeneity or hybridity a threat to South Korean nationalism. In the related vein of a myth of ethnic homogeneity, chapter six rethinks the ubiquitous
yet hardly defined term of *Han minjok* (usually translated as Korean nation, Korean ethnicity, or Korean people) in terms of its conceptual and practical values. While the self-identifying term of *Han minjok* is widely and deliberately employed in national museums as an organizing keyword, little contemplation was given to the ambiguous and arbitrary aspect of this common term. As a consequence, museum narratives depicting the history of *Han minjok* stretched over an indefinite time period inevitably reveal the lack of conceptual value of the term. At the NMK, the history of *Han minjok* was delineated in absolute past terms, and even the past was abruptly brought to a close right before the Japanese colonial period. As a result of the inability to settle the colonial past there is an absence of the present of *Han minjok* at the NMK. While the NMK exemplifies incompleteness in the presentation of *Han minjok* history, the NFMK provides a case for selectivity in the portrayal of *Han minjok* lifestyle. The NFMK’s representation of *Han minjok* lifestyle is based on the reconstructed life of the *yangban* elite class of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Visitors most of the time conveniently and unconsciously transpose the class of the *yangban* elite with the entire *Han minjok*, including themselves. The effect is to picture the entire *Han minjok* in utmost sumptuous lifestyles, being satisfied with the glorious cultural images of *Han minjok*. Chapter seven presents the dissertation’s conclusion.
Chapter 2. Colonial Legacy and Nationalist Mind: History and Related Issues of the NMK and the NFMK

2.1 Introduction

Nationalism is the most distinctive meta-narrative that characterizes contemporary South Korean society. Developed in response to the imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Korean nationalism is based on the idea of ethnic homogeneity and cultural unity of Koreans, descending from a mythical common ancestor from time immemorial. In contemporary South Korea, the government indoctrinates nationalist discourse through the prescribed school curriculum from an early age. Additionally, this foundation is constantly reinforced through various sociocultural channels including mass media, print media, and cultural institutions such as national museums. Unlike textbooks and other printed materials, museums convey nationalist discourses through visuality, giving the visitors a sense of virtual experience. Another crucial element of museums in disseminating specific ideological discourse is the authority and authenticity with which people endow museums.

Visitors at museums often mistakenly assume that museum exhibits are structured in an authoritative way as much as possible to provide fact and reality. Prevalent images of museums as non-profit educational organizations also induce audiences to presume that museum exhibits tell a story with objectivity and authenticity. To the contrary, museums are subjective and selective by their nature and far from being politically neutral spaces. What visitors encounter in the museum are carefully selected and deliberately arranged displays and narratives beneath which lurks a web of social, political, and economic tensions. The role of museums in shaping knowledge and ideology among the audience has been a focus of investigation in museum studies.
scholarship (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Bennett 1995). Such studies explore how the meta-
narratives in museums impose their perspectives onto visitors through exhibits and other
museum structures including facades, passages, and interior designs. A museum tour can
become a ritual through which visitors are exposed to and then more likely accept a set of
values and ideas that are choreographed in a specific way. Carol Duncan compared art
museums to temples, and museum tours to rituals.

. . . rituals may be quite unspectacular and informal-looking moments of
contemplation of recognition. At the same time, as anthropologists argue,
our supposedly secular, even anti-ritual, culture is full of ritual situations
and events . . . like other cultures, we, too, build sites that publicly
represent beliefs about the order of the world, its past and present, and the
individual’s place within it. Museums of all kinds are excellent examples
of such microcosms; art museums in particular – the most prestigious and
costly of these sites – are especially rich in this kind of symbolism and,
almost always, even equip visitors with maps to guide them through the
universe they construct. . . To control a museum means precisely to
control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths.
It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within
that community. Those who are best prepared to perform its ritual – those
who are most able to respond to its various cues – are also those whose
identities (social, sexual, racial, etc.) the museum ritual most fully
confirms. [Duncan 1995:8]

These museum audience studies investigate how visitors interpret, understand, and make
meanings out of museum narratives and exhibits. The less examined aspect, on the other
hand, is the role of the audience in actively structuring and making changes to museum
narratives and exhibits. The case of South Korean national museums illustrates the
mutual process between museums and their audiences in shaping the knowledge of
museum narratives.

In South Korea, there are more than four hundred museums (besides private for-
profit art galleries), and approximately one fourth of them are public museums that are
administered and funded by the Government.\textsuperscript{1} Among these hundreds of public museums, the National Museum of Korea (NMK) and the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK) annually welcomes approximately eight million visitors. This number stands for half of the total visitors to all museums in South Korea, public and private combined.\textsuperscript{2} Although it cannot be trusted as absolute criteria, the amount of funding and the number of visitors well reflect the social importance of the institutions and the public interests towards them and that is why these two museums are cases of choice in this dissertation.

The fact that the origin of the NMK dates back to the Japanese colonial period and that it inherited much of the museum’s structure and collections from the Japanese Government-General museum (1915-1945) has been a source of controversy (Ch’oe 2001, 2008; Chŏn 2005). Eliminating the colonial imprints and establishing a solid nationalist narrative within the museum has been a tremendous task for the NMK. The building, exhibits, and even people of the NMK were often criticized for still retaining colonial marks and not fully satisfying the nationalist consciousness. While relatively detached from colonial origins, the NFMK also has its share of serving nationalism. As a national museum specialized in folklore items, the NFMK presents a five-thousand-year view of the splendid culture and life of Han minjok, Korean people. In this chapter, the origin and the status of the two museums and heated issues around them are examined to shed

\textsuperscript{1} The numbers vary depending on sources. The annual report of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism indicates that there are 422 public and private museums (including 111 unregistered institutions), while the Korean Private Museums Association says there are more than 430 private museums, including around 200 unregistered ones.

\textsuperscript{2} The numbers are provided by the Korean Private Museums Association.
light on how the postcoloniality of South Korea is reflected around cultural institutions of national museums. In particular, the relocation project of the NMK following the razing of the former Japanese Government-General building (to be discussed) is a focus of interest in this chapter, since the whole process evidently reflects colonial traumas and the postcolonial desires of South Korean society.

2.2 Factsheets and the History of the Two Museums

While having been acknowledged as the heart of cultural education in South Korean society, the NMK and the NFMK are also major tourist attractions. Before the relocation, the NMK spent thirty years within the Kyŏngbok Palace area, moving in and out of three different buildings. The NFMK is still in the Kyŏngbok Palace area, although the original restoration project for the Kyŏngbok Palace clearly states that the NFMK should find a new home outside the area by 2009.\(^3\) Being couched within the Kyŏngbok Palace area, these two museums enjoyed maximized advantages from their location in recruiting large numbers of tourists.

2.2.1 The National Museum of Korea (NMK)

The NMK is the largest museum in South Korea in terms of the size of collections, staff, and infrastructure. It has eleven provincial museums under its operation, and staff members are exchanged between the NMK and the provincial museums on a regular basis. As of December 2005, the total number of full-time staff (including those in the eleven regional museums) was 531 (Munhwaw kwangbu [Ministry of Culture and

\(^3\) The deadline for relocating the NFMK has been continuously delayed.
The NMK has four departments: archaeology, fine arts, history (which is a new addition implemented with the relocation), and collection management. The majority of its collections are comprised of archaeological objects and fine arts pieces.

Figure 2.1 National Museum of Korea in Yongsan

The history of the NMK discussed below illuminates why these two groups of items are predominant in its collections. There have been disagreements regarding the origin of public museums in Korea and specifically of the National Museum of Korea. Regarding the history of public museums in Korea, some claim the starting year is 1945 with the National Museum of Korea while nationalist historians argue the earlier Yi Royal Museum in 1909 (Yi is the family name of the Chosŏn dynasty) was the earliest
Contested views regarding the origin of the public museum in Korea led to incongruent celebrations respectively in 2005 and 2009. In 2005, the NMK designated the year as the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of the national museum in South Korea. Only four years later, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of South Korea launched a large-scale celebration on the hundredth anniversary of the modern public museum in Korea, which regards the Yi Royal Museum as its pioneer. The establishment of the Yi Royal Museum in 1909 was an effort of King Sunjong of the Chosŏn Dynasty to open the royal collection of art and artifacts to the public under the slogan of yŏminhaelak (“share the joy with the people”) (Ch’oe 2009: 6-7). Some people questioned the validity of the sixtieth and hundredth anniversaries of the public museum and the national museum that are only four years apart. The issue gets more convoluted since the NMK made it clear on its official website that the Yi Royal Museum was the progenitor, which renders the sixtieth anniversary of the national museum in 2005 deeply contradictory. In addition to this numeric complication, the nature and qualification of the Yi Royal Museum as a genuine modern public museum is open to debate. Park Kwang-hyŏn pointed out that the Yi Royal Museum was also called Chesil Museum, Ch’angkyŏnggung Museum or Kungnaebu Museum by different groups of people, which reveals that the nature of the Yi Royal Museum was contested from the beginning (Park Kwang-hyŏn 2009: 59-63).

4 There also exist a group of people, including some museum professionals I interviewed, who believe the Japanese Government-General Museum during the colonial period is the true origin of the public museum in Korea, because the NMK basically inherited its collection and organizational structure. The nationalist sentiment in South Korea, however, makes it hard for this voice to be heard.
Debates around the origins of public museums in Korea extend the discussion to the birth of the NMK. Some scholars consider the Museum of the Government-General as the direct predecessor of the NMK, setting 1915 as the starting point of the NMK, while others prefer 1945 as the true birth year of the NMK when the name was officially installed in Independent Korea. The Museum of the Government-General under the Japanese colonial rule was inaugurated in 1915 right after the Chosŏn Expo which was held in celebration of the first five years’ Japanese colonial rule of Korea. With the initial collection consisting of objects of archaeology and art history that were on display at the Chosŏn Expo, the Museum of the Government-General was housed in a small building built in the former Expo lot inside the Kyŏngbok Palace area. With Korea’s independence in 1945, the Museum of the Government-General officially changed its name to the National Museum of Korea. The official title was replaced, but everything else remained almost the same. Both the building and the organizational structure of the Japanese Government-General Museum were fully inherited by the NMK, and no serious changes were made until the Korean War. During the Korean War, the NMK moved to Pusan in an effort to protect its collection from war destruction and plundering. After being housed in three different locations since then, the NMK returned nearly to its original location in the Kyŏngbok Palace precinct in 1986, but this time, being housed in the former Government-General building. The former Government-General building was a home of the NMK until its demolition in 1995. The NMK then temporarily occupied

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5 Given the nationalist sentiment prevalent in South Korea, while it is hard to find publications that explicitly confirm the Government-General Museum during the colonial period as the official starting point of the modern public museum in Korea, several studies on Korean museums aptly point out the legacy of the Government-General Museum that was inherited by the NMK, such as organizational structures and collection divisions (Mok 2000; Ch’oe 2001).
an adjacent administration building until the new home in Yongsan was completed. The NMK launched a grand reopening in October, 2005, opening up the “Yongsan era” of the museum.

The NMK in Yongsan has the Archaeology Hall, History Hall, Art Hall I, Art Hall II, the Donation Gallery, and the Asian Gallery in its main building. As a new addition to the relocated NMK, the Asian Gallery was implemented in response to the criticism that the NMK was too ethnocentric and not global enough. The Asian Gallery currently displays objects from China, Japan, Central Asia, and Indonesia. Since the NMK’s collection is mostly Korean objects, exhibits of the Asian Gallery largely depend on objects on loan from the original Asian countries (see chapter five for more discussion of the Asian Gallery). Besides the main building, the museum complex has a Dragon Theatre, a Reflecting Pond, and outdoor exhibits of pagodas.

The NMK in the Yongsan area also has a separate annex for special exhibits. There are two types of special exhibits depending on the collection. The first type of special exhibit is primarily based on the collection of the NMK and other national museums, complemented by some private collections found in South Korea. The other type of special exhibit consists of objects on loan from major museums abroad. The second type of special exhibits focuses on non-Korean themes. These exhibits are often large in scale and attract higher admission fees. The recent special exhibits of this kind include, “The Collection of the British Museum,” “The Glory of Persia,” “Gods and People of Greece,” “Turkish Civilization,” “Ancient Civilization of Maya and Aztec” and “Baroque and Rococo Era Court Culture.” These blockbuster special exhibits are a new development at the NMK in Yongsan, and they show the museum’s efforts to elevate its
status on a global scale. While these big name special exhibits have succeeded in bringing a large number of visitors, the imbalance in the NMK’s expenditure was pointed out and criticized. The NMK allocated and spent more of its budget on borrowing objects from foreign museums for special exhibits than in purchasing and increasing its own collection.

2.2.2 The National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK)

The NFMK is specialized in folklore items and dedicated to promoting and diffusing Korean traditional culture, although the institution appears to have a difficult time defining and interpreting the categories of “folk” and “folklore.” The NFMK first opened as the “Korean Folklore Museum” in April 1975, and became a branch of the NMK in 1979 (National Folk Museum of Korea 2009). It was separated from the NMK in 1992 and became an independent institution. The annual budget for the NFMK in 2005 was around thirteen million USD. As of December 2005, right before my fieldwork began, the total number of full-time staff was 79 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2005: 282-283). The annual number of visitors is around 2.5 million and about 54.6% of them are foreigners. Due to the nature of folklore items from real life use, a majority of the

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6 While the Ministry of Culture and Tourism identifies the “Korean Folklore Museum” as the beginning of the NFMK, the institution prefers to establish an affiliation with the “National Ethnology Museum” which was founded in 1945 by Song Sŏk-ha. However, the NFMK’s affiliation with the 1945 National Ethnology Museum mostly came from the fact the Song Sŏk Ha was one of the first Korean folklorists. The National Ethnology Museum was absorbed into the national museum system in 1950 as the “Namsan Branch.” After the Korean War, as the previous building for the Namsan Branch was lost, the National Ethnology Museum closed and its collection became the property of the NMK, not the NFMK.

7 According to the 2004 Annual Report of the NFMK, the total number of visitors in 2004 is 2,574,738 and that of foreigners was 1,406,830. The NFMK is known for its education programs for foreigners (NFMK 2004: 222).
NFMK collection is from the later stage of Chosŏn period, mostly dating around late nineteenth century to early twentieth century.\(^8\)

**Figure 2.2 National Folk Museum of Korea**

The Façade of the National Folk Museum of Korea


The NFMK has three permanent exhibit halls, representing “The History of Han minjok” (The history of Korean ethnicity, nation, people), “The Livelihood of Han minjok,” and “The Lifecycle of a Korean.” In addition to the permanent exhibit halls, two other halls are reserved for special exhibits. The three permanent exhibit halls went

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\(^8\) Interestingly, there are many items that were made and used during the colonial period, but the labels nonetheless indicate the period ambiguously as “Late Chosŏn,” without specific numbered century. I raised the point in a conversation with one of curators at the museum, and he explained that “the form and function of folklore items usually have a long life span.” Consequently, even though some items were made during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), they by and large represent forms and functions that had been developed in the earlier Chosŏn period. On hearing his explanation, I could not but wonder, if that was the case, how far one could go back in time in deciding the appropriate period of a certain item? Should not a period in a museum label tell the specific time of construction of the item? I asked these questions to the curator, only to hear that it was not easy to confirm the exact dates for some items.
through a rigorous renovation process from 2005 to 2008. Interiors of exhibit halls and display structures were the main target of the renovation process. Several LCD screens and a series of hands-on displays were installed to maximize visitors’ active engagement with museum exhibits. Another major change made during the renovation process was implementing a contextual display method. Before the renovation, the permanent exhibits were organized and displayed according to categories of the objects. For example, a group of musical instruments was displayed in one glass box, and clothing and accessories were in another. In the renovated exhibit halls, contextual rather than categorical display methods were used to visually convey a story to visitors. Musical instruments used during a Korean shaman’s exorcising rituals were on display next to shaman’s attire for the same occasion, while the ritual was played on a LCD screen on the wall. After the completion of renovation, each glass box and display section contains a story rather than a group of similar items to put the objects in the context of actual usage. While the renovation process made a lot of structural changes in the exhibit halls, the Han minjok centered meta-narrative of the museum remained somewhat intact. The effort of the NFMK in the renovation process was made more at the stylistic level rather than the conceptual level (there is more discussion of this in chapter six).

2.3 Relocation Project of the NMK

2.3.1 Demolition of the Government-General Building in 1995

Under a presidential directive, the relocation project of the NMK was initiated in November 1993. Although it was true that the NMK in the former Government-General building was suffering from limited storage space, the relocation project was initiated for
political reasons. The more pressing factor was the symbolic meaning of the building it occupied, as a building completed in 1926 and used as the Government-General headquarters during the Japanese colonial period. The Japanese razed dozens of royal buildings within the Kyŏngbok Palace compound to construct this building. With regard to the location of the Government-General building in the heart of the Kyŏngbok Palace ground, the majority of South Koreans believe that the Japanese imperialists had the deliberate intention of repressing the national spirit of South Korea by carving out a colonial headquarter within the heart of the Chosŏn royal palace.

In a post-liberation South Korean society, the former Government-General building has never failed to be at the centre of heated debate. On one hand, many people could not stand the fact that such a blatant symbol of Japanese colonialism still robustly stood in the heart of their capital city and argued that it should be demolished forever. People on this side of the debate often pointed out the fact that this building had been a regular visiting point for Japanese students’ school trips and for other Japanese tourists coming to South Korea, which was often understood as an exemplary case of colonial

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9 The removal of the Governmental-General building and the relocation of the NMK was part of the restoration project for the Kyŏngbok Palace, which was partly destroyed and rearranged during Japanese colonial rule.

10 The construction of the building itself began in 1916 and was completed in 1926 (Kim Chŏng-tong 2000: 217). The Government-General headquarters moved into this building in 1928, when the landscape architectural work was completed.

11 The Japanese Government-General Building (朝鮮総督府) was the largest building in the Japanese Empire by the time of its completion in 1926, including being larger than any building in Japan proper.

12 A director of the Seoul National University Museum at that time said in a column that getting rid of the Government-General building is like “pulling out a nail that had been put in one’s forehead.” (Seoul sinmun 1995)
nostalgia. On the other hand, many people including historians and architects insisted on keeping the building, on the grounds that it contained undeniable historical and architectural value (see Yi 1995). Some historians also pointed out that the Government-General building had non-colonial value as well. The building was occasionally used by the South Korean government after Independence for hosting several historical events, e.g. the opening of the Constitutional Assembly, the announcement of the Constitution, and the inauguration of the first South Korean president Seung Man Rhee (1875-1965). As a compromise, some architects and historians recommended removing the building from the Kyŏngbok Palace area, but nonetheless suggested that the building should not be torn down due to the architectural quality and embodied historical experiences contained in the Government-General building. There were even people who proposed to designate this building as a cultural property. They wanted to use the Government-General building for housing the Independence Museum, thus transforming a colonial trauma into an emblem of anticolonialism and providing future generations a valuable site for remembering historical experiences (Hankyŏre sinmun 1995). In support of such suggestions, examples in other parts of the world were cited to show how people in those countries still maintained architectural structures built by invaders. The Alhambra in Spain, El Zócalo in Mexico, and the Santo Domingo Church in Peru are examples. It is interesting to note that an editorial in a major South Korean newspaper disputed this suggestion by saying, “we should remember that these countries are known for blood-mixing [between the colonizers and the colonized so that the line between them became

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13 According to the NMK, the number of Japanese tourists to the NMK decreased by 30-40 percent after the demolition of the Government-General building (Chungang ilbo 2004).
The Government-General Building was decapitated at a ceremony in front of VIP guests and high-ranking government officials in the name of “eradicating colonial imprints and thus elevating the national spirit of South Korea” as a part of the “Redressing Our History” campaign (Kwangbok osip chu’nyŏn kinyŏm saŏphoe 1995: 108). On the destiny of the former Government-General building, President Kim Young Sam (1993-1998) appeared to be determined to put an end to this issue during his presidency. He announced that destroying the former Government-General building was a way to “recover our national pride and national spirit.” He stated that, “it would be remembered as a significant moment for correcting our distorted history for a better advancement to the global era” (National Museum of Korea 2006: 34). Although public opinion was divided on the issue of tearing down the former Government-General building, the majority of professionals, especially those academics in archaeology, art history and architecture, highly criticized the South Korean government’s hasty decision that risked the valuable collection of the NMK for political ends. Even if the building should be eliminated, they argued, constructing a new building for the NMK, rather than demolishing the current one, should be the first step. There were even several civil committees organized against the government’s decision, but the dogmatic sentiment of

14 The plan for destructing the former Government-General building was announced on the first of March, 1993. The first day of March is a Korean national holiday that is observed to commemorate the nation-wide anticolonial movement which took place in 1919 under the Japanese colonial rule.
“resurrecting national pride and national spirit” did not leave much room for these alternative voices to be heard.

Finally on August 15, 1995, in a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Independence, the former Government-General building was torn down in a ceremonious way. The ceremony began with a parade of guards of honour in traditional uniforms, followed by the performance of a traditional military band, speeches by high government officials, and koyuje, a traditional ritual of informing ancestors of the purpose of the gathering. With the side wings of the building already demolished a few weeks before, the main part of the building with its distinctive dome and pinnacle top still intact stood in front of hundreds of VIP guests at the ceremony. In preparation for the ceremonial decapitating, the pinnacle top that weighed more than twenty five tons had been cut in two pieces, an unsophisticated metaphor for decapitating (or castrating, given the shape of the pinnacle) Japanese colonialism. After a series of routine protocols, the pinnacle top was finally removed by a 300-ton crane, amidst steamy summer heat, industrial dust, and of course, cheerful applause from the 50,000 guests and spectators. Due to safety and efficiency concerns, only the upper part of the two sections was pulled down. Nevertheless, as many healing ceremonies do, this ceremony seemed to give some South Koreans peace of mind. One person who was in charge of the destruction process told the press afterward that the ceremony was followed by a sudden shower (which is not

15 According to the Ministry of Culture and Sports in 1995 (renamed as the “Ministry of Culture and Tourism” in 1998) that was in charge of the demolition project, it cost around 15 million USD, not counting other related expenses including those for renovating the sociocultural education building for temporarily housing the NMK.

16 One of the major Korean newspaper pointed out that the diamond wire saw used in cutting the top was made in Korea, making the process all the more meaningful (Chungang ilbo, 1995).
unusual in August in South Korea) that poured down only inside the Kyŏngbok Palace area, while right outside of the palace area there was bright sunlight (which is not usual given the geographical proximity). He interpreted this phenomenon “as if the traces of Japanese colonialism were destined to be wiped away” (Kyŏnghyang sinmun 1995). While the ceremony itself was about exorcising the Japanese colonial ghost, the post-ceremonial event was heavily fraught with a theme of re-unification between South and North Korea. A re-unification torch was transmitted to the platform, an orchestra played the “Re-unification Fantasia,” and a group of children performed a modern dance that represented a national desire for re-unification (Han’guk ilbo 1995).

The anticolonial spectacle did not end with the ceremony. The cut-off top was displayed on site for a month after the ceremony and then transported to the Independence Hall, in Ch’ŏnan, South Korea. In 1998, the Independence Hall opened an outdoor exhibit, “Remains of the Japanese Government-General Building.” Here, the pinnacle top of the Government-General building was placed in a five-meter deep pit in the southern part of its outdoor exhibit space. Being underground and facing the South direction symbolized death, an ending, and a fall, according to the Independence Hall, which was dedicated to “treat any Japanese colonial remnants as debasing and as humiliatingly as possible” (Wŏlgan misul 1998). They even named this display method “contempt display.” On December 13, 1996, the Government-General building was completely removed from its location, and on December 27, another grand pan-national festival was held by the NMK in celebration of this occasion. Besides several concerts featuring traditional music and dance, a cleansing ritual was performed on the site where the former Government-General building used to stand. People who attended the festival
were given fist-size stone pieces collected from the dismantling site as a souvenir.\textsuperscript{17} One of the NMK personnel stated the purpose of the festival as “to bear in mind the meaning of clearing off Japanese colonial remnants and to pray for unification between South and North Korea” (Han’guk Kyŏngje sinmun 1996). The Ministry of Culture and Sports made small souvenir panels out of the marble steps of the Government-General building and gave them to President Kim Young Sam, ministers of state, and several religious leaders. The panel was inscribed with President Kim’s speech on the fifteenth of August, 1995.

The destruction of the Government-General building was one thing, but its impact on the NMK was quite another. The rushed schedule for knocking down the building did not leave enough time for the NMK to find a new home for its collections. Even though constructing a new building for the NMK was a major part of the relocation project, no construction work had been done at the new site until October 1997.\textsuperscript{18} As a temporary measure, the NMK renovated an adjacent building which had been used initially for a cafeteria for employees, and then for a sociocultural education facility. Even after the renovation process that turned the former cafeteria building into a temporary home for the NMK, spaces for exhibit items and storage were highly limited. In addition to this, concerns were raised about poisonous gas emissions from the newly renovated building and their harmful effect on museum exhibit collections. The NMK was housed in this

\textsuperscript{17} An article in Monthly Chosŏn sneered at this saying that it was the losers’ self-assuring booty (Wŏlgan Chosŏn 1997).

\textsuperscript{18} On the commencement of the construction work on the 31st of October 1997, President Kim Young Sam declared in his speech that his decision to demolish the former Government-General building was to follow the majority of Korean people’s ardent desire.
building for eight years, from 1996 to 2004, until it was temporarily closed for a year in preparation for the grand reopening of the new NMK in Yongsan area in Seoul.

2.3.2 Concerns around the New Building and Yongsan Area

The new NMK building and Yongsan area received media attention as much as the former Government-General building did. Costing 370 million USD, the construction began in October 1997. The opening of the new NMK was scheduled for December 2003, but it was delayed until October 28, 2005. The main reasons for the delay included structural problems and administrative issues. Negotiating with the US eighth Army for the relocation of a helicopter pad that shares a fence with the new museum property was not smooth, either. Although less than a month had passed since the initiation of the construction, major newspapers already began to predict that the scheduled opening of 2003 was impossible (Chosŏn ilbo 1997b).

The Yongsan area, a new home ground for the relocated NMK, was criticized because of geological and historical conditions. Geologically speaking, the area where the new NMK building would stand was a marshy lower ground, and this raised serious concerns. Being close to the Han River, a major river that runs through Seoul, the area was also notorious for high humidity, being hazardous for the museum collections. Making matters more complicated, it was pointed out that the damp ground was not ideal for hosting such a huge architectural structure, the World’s sixth largest museum made of cement, granite, and marble, whose total length was more than 400 meters, covering 134,270 square meters. Concerns were also raised regarding the possible flooding of the Han River in summer.
Another line of concern focused on the historical meaning of the Yongsan area and related issues of “national pride.” The Yongsan area was continuously used as a military camp base by foreign invaders in the past, e.g., Japanese as early as in the sixteenth century and the Qing armies in the late nineteenth century. In 1904, the Japanese colonial government officially designated the Yongsan area for the use of headquarter and the twentieth division of Japanese troops, providing a basis for later military rule and invasion of Manchuria. Along with this, a residential area for Japanese people was built on the right side of the Han River, encompassing the Yongsan area. As the Japanese colonial rule ended in 1945, the US army replaced the Japanese military base. Since then, approximately sixteen percent of the Yongsan area has been occupied by US Army command facilities, with the expense paid by the South Korean government. As the Cold War atmosphere came to lose its vigor in the 1990s, voices against the presence of a foreign army in the middle of its capital were raised in South Korea. The relocation of the NMK to the Yongsan area, yet again, cast light on the distressing history of the area. To many South Koreans, the history of the area made Yongsan not so ideal a place for their national museum, as “a face of the country” (Chosŏn ilbo 1997a). Considering the history of Yongsan that is dotted with foreign military occupations, the fortress-looking design for the new NMK building seemed uncanny.

Once the construction of the new building began, the building itself began to reveal structural as well as administrative problems. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism held a world-wide competition for the design of the new NMK building two months after the demolition of the former Government-General building. The first prize went to a South Korean company that submitted a design inspired by a Korean traditional
fortress, allegedly combining traditional and modern aesthetics. However, when the NMK reopened in a new building, many South Koreans found the massiveness of the building excessive and intimidating, as one archaeology professor contended in a newspaper column stating that, “They [museum people] have to remember that our aesthetic sensibility is not that of ‘Grand Canyon’ but that of harmonious balance among heaven, earth, and human beings” (Chosŏn ilbo 1997c). Even the “traditional” aspect of the new building was not well appreciated by visitors. Visitors commonly complained a lot about the tastelessness of the building, although one of the design company representatives once noted that “not having special marks is what really characterizes this building” (Chungang ilbo 1999).

Two weeks after the commencement of construction, the Hangyöre sinmun reported that it turned out that the NMK building had not acquired prior approval for construction from the Yongsan District, which made the whole construction process illegal (Hangyöre sinmun 1998). Along with this, frequent changes in structural designs decreased the efficient expenditure of the budget, which likely resulted in fraudulent work. As construction work proceeded, a professional inspection showed that the new building had several cracks on the wall and was suffering from leakage problems (Tonga ilbo 2001). In 2001, in the midst of criticism, the construction committee finally announced that the grand opening would be postponed for another year and a half from the initial schedule until the end of 2003, and an extra ten billion USD was needed for the completion of the work. Yesterday’s symbol of national pride became today’s money-gulping monster. At this point, it was not surprising that some academics straightforwardly said that the best way to solve problems around the NMK was giving
up the half-completed construction site altogether for a better alternative (Chosŏn ilbo 2001). Once hailed as a firm determination for recovering national pride, President Kim Young Sam’s hasty decision to demolish the former Government-General building was retrospectively criticized for lacking forethought and proper planning. As one museum professional stated, “the current government is trapped in the previous government’s bungle” (Chungang ilbo 2001). Among all these concerns and criticisms, the construction work sped up as the US Army finally agreed to move the helicopter pad that was located right next to the new NMK construction site.

2.3.3 Reopening of the NMK

Approximately 100,000 objects of the NMK collection were transported to the new NMK building in 2004, in 490 separate trips using shock-free five ton trucks in the course of eight months. It was the seventh move of the NMK collection in less than sixty years.

On November 28, 2005, the NMK finally reopened its door to the public in a new building in Yongsan. Including eight years for the construction of the new building, the relocation project of the NMK took twelve years to be completed (Munhwa kwan’gwangbu [“Ministry of Culture and Tourism”] 2005: 274). The historical grand opening of the NMK in a building that is allegedly the world’s sixth largest building succeeded in garnering 100,000 visitors within the first three days, and a million within just forty four days, stirring up what the Ministry of Culture and Tourism proudly interpreted as a “museum syndrome” among South Korean people.

On the opening day, the new NMK welcomed 10,900 visitors. Except some scenes of hassle in the ticket line (although the admission fee was free to celebrate the
reopening, visitors still needed to get the free ticket from the box office) among a surging crowd, the NMK had a successful first day. Since the NMK had been closed for a year in preparation for transition and relocation, its popularity might be a reflection of South Korean people’s thirst for art and culture, as the NMK director interpreted it. However it was hard to deny that free admission and a huge advertisement campaign were some of the major attractions.19 During the first week after the opening, the NMK received the honour of being the most searched item on major South Korean web search engines (Tonga ilbo 2005b).

2.3.4 Controversies Following the Reopening

The reopened NMK first got applause for its long awaited reopening, but was soon criticized from various parts of South Korean society. As discussed in chapter four in detail, the timeline at the Archaeology Hall was among the first that drew negative attention at the reopened NMK. The mythical figure of Tan’gun is considered the progenitor of the Korean people and he is believed to have built Kojosŏn, the first kingdom in the Korean peninsula. Kojosŏn and Tan’gun are briefly mentioned in Samgukyusa, which is a compilation of legends, folktales, and myths. Despite the popularity of Tan’gun and Kojosŏn among Koreans, there is no archaeological evidence to prove the actual existence of Tan’gun, nor Kojosŏn. Nevertheless, the prevalent popular belief around Tan’gun as a founding father of Korea made people criticize the NMK for not being nationalist enough in its exhibits. Not just the archaeological timeline that did not indicate Kojosŏn, but the absence of an exhibit hall reserved for

19 Some newspapers showed a picture of many homeless people sleeping on the new NMK facilities.
Kojosŏn became the focus of criticisms. From the perspective of academic integrity, either registering a mythical kingdom in the archaeological timeline or installing an exhibit hall dedicated for it does not make sense. In the frame of nationalist discourse, however, instating Kojosŏn within Korean history is of overriding importance that supersedes any issue of academic integrity or professional reliability. The NMK decided to insert Kojosŏn in the archaeological timeline shortly after the reopening and eventually installed the Kojosŏn Hall in 2009 (there is more discussion of this in chapter four).

Museum exhibits were not the only target of nationalist backlash at the NMK. Right after the reopening, another major criticism clustered around the director of the NMK at that time. Yi Kŏn-mu, an archaeologist specializing in the Bronze Age, was appointed as the director of the NMK in 2003. His academic specialty and experiences as a museum professional fully qualified him for the directorship. The appointment of Yi as the director of the NMK was welcomed among museum staff since he represented a life-long museum-trained archaeologist, striking a balance between academic knowledge and field experiences. What led to public criticism was not director Yi’s qualification, nor his career, but his family background.

Yi Kŏn-mu’s grandfather was Yi Pyŏng-to (1896-1991), a famous first generation South Korean historian. As common with Korean elites during the colonial period, Yi Pyŏng-to was academically trained in Japan for higher education, studying history and sociology at Waseda University. Yi Pyŏng-to actively participated in research activities related to Korean history when he returned to Korea. He was the founding member of Chindan hakhoe (震檀學會), an association established in 1938 by Korean scholars for academic exchange and advanced studies of Korean history, folklore, literature, and art.
The association’s journal, *Chindan hakbo* (震檀學報), is one of the first scholarly periodicals on Korean studies edited and published by Koreans. Yi Pyŏng-to was even decorated in 1954 and 1962 by the Korean government for his contributions in advancing the study of Korean history. Despite Yi Pyŏng-to’s palpable achievement and contribution in promoting the study of Korean history, Yi’s academic background and theoretical framework were constantly accused of being pro-Japanese and anti-nationalist by Korean nationalists, which finally placed Yi Pyŏng-to on the “List of Pro-Japanese traitors” that was made and published by Minjok munje yŏn’guso (Institute for Research in Collaborationist Activities) in 2005 (Kukmin ilbo 2005). The main criticism included Yi Pyŏng-to’s close relationship with his Japanese supervisor at Waseda University and his participation in the pro-Japanese history group (*Chosŏnsa pyŏnsu ūiwonhoe*) that represented a “colonial perspective of history” (see Yi Kyŏng-ran 2010: 344, 349-351). Director Yi Kŏn-Mu at the NMK was thus criticized for being a grandson of a historian who was suspected to have been involved in pro-Japanese activity in the past (Oh My News 2006). The interesting thing was that although Yi Kŏn-mu was the director of the NMK from 2003, the pro-Japanese accusation toward him soared when the NMK reopened in Yongsan in 2005. For the criticizers of Yi Kŏn-mu, it was not acceptable to have a descendant of a pro-Japanese traitor as the director of the NMK, especially when the museum was about to embark on a journey of decolonization. Personal attacks on Director Yi filled the online bulletin board of the NMK official website on a daily basis until he finally left the NMK in 2006 to take a professorship at Yongin University. The pro-Japanese accusation toward Director Yi got inflated across the web, generating some incorrect rumors as well. For instance, it was rumoured that
Director Yi is a descendent of Yi Wan-yong (1856-1926), an infamous pro-Japanese minister who signed the Treaty of Japan-Korea annexation (Herald kyŏngche 2006). Being labeled as a descendant of Yi Wan-yong is like getting a permanent mark as a national traitor. The NMK did rectify the inaccurate information posted on its online bulletin board such as Director Yi’s alleged relationship to Yi Wan-yong, but still the NMK largely remained silent toward pro-Japanese accusations about the director. One of the curators told me in a conversation, “People believe what they want to believe, and personal attacks will go on until Director Yi completes his term. All we can do at the NMK is not to aggravate the issue by assertively responding to those attacks and accusations as much as possible. It will eventually subside when there is a new director.” The controversy around Director Yi demonstrated the social expectation toward the NMK in defining nationalism in postcolonial South Korea.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

One of the directors of the NMK once said, “A National Museum is the face of our nation.” At the NFMK, one can find an interesting sentence printed on disposable paper cups provided at public water purifiers. With the NFMK logo attached, it reads “Culture is our nation’s power.” In South Korea, public museums cannot be discussed outside the frame of nationhood. The social responsibility of public museums usually consists of the dissemination of knowledge, the promotion of education, and the increase of cultural opportunity for the public. National museums of South Korea have another prioritized social responsibility that overrides other duties; endorsing and advancing nationalism by raising national pride and prestige through exhibits and related programs.
As a result of historical experiences of Japanese colonialism, South Korean nationalist fervor is based on strong anticolonial sentiment. “Redressing our history” is a popular catch phrase of nationalism in South Korea. However, the anticolonial effort in South Korean nationalism is not so much about learning from the past and resolving the remaining issues as it is about wiping out colonial imprints altogether. At the NMK and the NFMK, such a perspective runs through the exhibits and narratives as discussed in the following chapters.
Chapter 3. The Special Exhibit on Dokdo at the National Museum of Korea

3.1 Introduction

Korea and Japan have had an inextricable historical relationship extending back to ancient times. The most salient experience for understanding contemporary controversies between the two nation-states in this matter of Japan and South Korea is the Japanese Empire’s annexation of Korea (1910-1945), particularly because it involved a deliberate assimilation policy of erasing a distinct Korean cultural and racial identity. The postcolonial trauma is not only impressed abstractly in the public consciousness, but it is ubiquitously manifested in physical spaces such as former Japanese colonial buildings, ruined palaces of former Korean monarchs, and the prisons that held Korean nationalists. The most conspicuous of such spaces was the former Japanese Government-General Building. The former Government-General Building had been the largest building in the Japanese Empire, even larger than any building in Japan proper. From 1986 to 1995, the National Museum of Korea (NMK) had the fortune or misfortune of having been housed there from 1986 to 1995. The postcolonial appropriation of the building to house the NMK could have been seen as a triumph over, and ownership of, the past. However, many South Koreans dwelled on the building’s embodiment of colonialism and loss of sovereignty. The whole process of demolishing the Government-General building in 1995-1996 and relocating the NMK to Yongsan in 2005 presented a postcolonial drama filled with anguish and aspiration.
After relocation to Yongsan, the NMK launched a special exhibit in its new building, and the subject was Dokdo (known as Takeshima in Japan).\textsuperscript{1} Referred to outside of South Korea, often diminutively, as the Liancourt Rocks, Dokdo/Takeshima is a small group of rock formations in the middle of the East Sea (Sea of Japan) between Korea and Japan.\textsuperscript{2} Despite the fact that these volcanic islets have little inherent value because of their rocky terrain, small size, and scarcity of drinking water, Dokdo bears enormous significance in the context of geopolitics. Dokdo has been a source of conflict between South Korea and Japan, as the two nation-states perennially contest their sovereign rights to it. The South Korean state and its people fetishize Dokdo with extraordinary significance by considering it as the embodiment of anticolonialism and of victory over Japan. In post-liberation South Korea, Dokdo became an indisputable symbol of national pride and sovereignty that must be defended at all cost, especially from its ex-colonizer, Japan.

The special exhibit, “Longing for Our Land, Dokdo,” was a challenge for the NMK staff in terms of actual installation since the main object of the exhibit, Dokdo, could not be contained and displayed within a museum space. Instead, the exhibit was filled with photo images of the islets and historical documents supporting South Korea’s territorial claim to Dokdo over Japan’s. With the authority of the NMK as an official educational institution, the territorial claims visually displayed at the Dokdo special

\textsuperscript{1} The islets have many names; called as Dokdo in Korea, as Takeshima in Japan, and as the Liancourt Rocks internationally. Since this chapter examines the symbolic meaning of the islets in South Korea, I use Dokdo to refer to the islets.

\textsuperscript{2} The body of water where Dokdo/Takeshima is located is known internationally as the Sea of Japan. East Sea or Eastern Sea is primarily used by Koreans and Chinese.
exhibit acquired a quasi-objective status among the audience. While the images and texts displayed at the special exhibit were carefully chosen and interpreted to accommodate South Korea’s perspectives rather than those of Japan or other parts of the world, the institutional format of the museum packaged the contents of the special exhibit as neutral, objective, and self-evident.

The special exhibit itself was not merely a territorial dispute about Dokdo as much as about the broader issue of South Korean postcolonial sovereignty and its contestation with Japan, which was reconfirmed and perpetuated through the symbolic case of Dokdo. The popular attention and emotive response drawn and made toward the special exhibit on Dokdo symbolized the anticolonial struggle and postcolonial independence of South Korea. Just as the demolition of the former Government-General building and the relocation of the NMK into its new building in Yongsan was carried out as a project of eradicating the Japanese colonial legacy, the NMK’s special exhibit in Yongsan, “Longing for Our Land, Dokdo,” was a place where the postcolonial aspiration of South Korean society was presented, confirmed, and circulated among its people.

3.2 Ambiguity in Debates around Dokdo

South Korea’s stance in the dispute around Dokdo is best reflected in the well-known catchphrase of “Dokdo is our land.” This slogan sounds as a declaration with little justification. Although the assertion “Dokdo is our land” appears as a simple and straightforward slogan, the historical and political reality is not that evident. There is nothing self-evident in the claims and debates around Dokdo. South Korea and Japan mostly resort to (1) historical documents and (2) international agreements to support their sovereign claims to Dokdo. In presenting the “evidence,” both South Korea and Japan
often obscure the fact that both historical documents and international agreements need to be interpreted to yield meanings, since it is impossible that the “evidence” would provide irrefutably objective information. To make the matter more complicated, the series of historical documents and international agreements presented as evidence is fragmentary, far from being comprehensive enough to provide a definite resolution on the Dokdo vs. Takeshima dispute. The value and validity that South Korea and Japan proclaim with historical documents and international agreements as “clear” or “doubtless” are in fact products of purpose-laden interpretation and selective appropriation.

The most eminent problem with historical documents presented by South Korea as evidence is that they bear an enormous amount of ambiguity in terms of terminology. Many historical documents used geographical names for Dokdo and other neighbouring islands in a very confusing way, leaving ample room for misinterpretation and manipulation. Even in the absence of such confusion in names, historical references can yield quite different interpretations as a result of contextual readings. The following examples illustrate how the ambiguity of historical “evidence” has contributed to complications.

3.2.1 Ambiguity in Historical Documents: Labyrinth of Names

The official use of Dokdo as a name for the present Dokdo first appeared in 1905 in a government report submitted by Sim Hŭng taek, a mayor of Ullŭng. The residents of

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3 Ullŭngdo is a residential island located to the west of Dokdo. The earliest archaeological evidence of human residence in Ullŭngdo such as ancient tombs dating back to the Iron Age, is around 300 BCE (Chŏng and Yi 2005). In historical references, Ullŭngdo and Dokdo often appeared as a group, under the title of Usanguk. Since “guk” in Usanguk means a state, it is believed that there once existed a proto-state established by Ullŭngdo or Dokdo natives.
Ullŭngdo called Dokdo as ‘Doksŏm’ at that time, so it is believed that Sim adopted the popular use of the name and turned it into a Chinese letter based name, Dokdo (獨島) (Kim Chŏng-suk 2005; Naito 2009). Ulŭng, Mŭlŭng, Usando, Usanguk, Songdo, Jukdo, and Sŏkdo are only a few of the names that have appeared in historical documents to denote either Ullŭngdo or Dokdo. Since Dokdo was often considered as a companion islet of Ullŭngdo, often times such names as Usanguk were used to refer to either Ullŭngdo or Dokdo which further complicated the matter. For example, even the series of references that South Korean people have used to support their sovereign claim reveal signs of contradiction; for example, “Jukdo” is sometimes used to refer to Ullŭngdo, and at other times to Dokdo. It is not unprecedented that geographic names went through changes over time, in which a name once used to call one place was used for another place later in time. However, the change in naming convention for Ullŭngdo and Dokdo is neither unilateral nor apparent. That being said, making sovereign claims based on fragmentary appearances of geographical names in historical documents is a matter of interpretation. This makes both South Korea and Japan’s claims to Dokdo quite contentious. For example, Takeshima is the Japanese reading of the Chinese characters “Jukdo (竹島)” which literally means bamboo island. However, it is easy to spot a historical record that used Jukdo in reference to Ullŭngdo, not Dokdo. In diplomatic documents from the Meiji period, Jukdo referred to Ullŭngdo, while present day Dokdo was known as Songdo (松島) (Hong 2009: 105; Sin 2000: 591). A commonsensical

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4 Sŏm in “Doksŏm” means an island, and “Dok” was one of the regional variations of the word of “Dol,” which means rocks. Since Dokdo is made of rocks, people in Ullŭngdo might have used “Doksŏm” to refer to it, meaning “Dolsŏm, “‘rocky islands.”
insight also makes it difficult to envision Dokdo, a volcanic islet with scarce vegetation, as full of bamboo shrubs, which in turn underlines the high probability of mixed usage of names between Ullŭngdo and Dokdo. To make matters more complicated, there exists another small islet between Ullŭngdo and Dokdo that is currently called Jukdo, which has actual bamboo fields.

3.2.2 Ambiguity in Historical Documents: Clashing Interpretations

The complicated name situation regarding Dokdo is actively appropriated and manipulated by both South Korea and Japan in efforts to establish allegedly valid arguments. In fact, many of the South Korea-Japan debates regarding historical references hinge on the interpretation of names as well as hidden messages. The significance of contextual interpretation in the Dokdo debate is well demonstrated with the episode of a permit that was exclusively given to the Japanese families of Otani (大谷家) and Murakawa (村川家) by the Tokugawa Bakufu (幕府, a private military government of a Japanese shogun) in 1618. This permit enabled these two families to engage in fishing activities around Ullŭngdo and Dokdo (Yi 1998: 318-319). Japan located historical references to this event and uses this to argue that Dokdo has been in control of Japan since the seventeenth century. With the same reference, however, South Korea made a completely different interpretation and used the same event to support its own claim. South Korea’s reasoning was: the sheer fact that only two particular families needed a special permit exemplified the fact that Dokdo was not under Japanese territorial control. Based on this South Korea argues that if Dokdo was then a legitimate territory of Japan, nobody needed a permit for fishing activity as with the case of many other parts of Japanese inshore fishing. The permit, according to South Korea, was
indeed a counterpart of present day passports, allowing people to go across the borders
and that evidently underscores the “fact” that Dokdo was and has been a territory of
Korea, not Japan. In this context, a more aggressive argument can be made regarding the
concept of terra nullius that is favoured in Japan’s claim. If having issued permits
suggested that Dokdo was under Japanese control, then it directly contradicts Japan’s act
of incorporating Dokdo as terra nullius, meaning unclaimed territory, in 1905 with the
Shimane Prefecture Notification No. 40.5

3.2.3 Ambiguity in International Agreements

In debates around Dokdo, international agreements and declarations of the mid-
twentieth century often get more credit than historical documents under the false
impression that being “international” warrants impartial objectivity and indisputable
legality. Contrary to this false common understanding, international agreements are a
pact among participant nation-states at a given time, being specific in regard to time and
agenda. The main problem with international agreements often used as supporting
evidence for South Korea and Japan’s sovereignty claims to Dokdo is that Dokdo was not
their main agenda. Using international agreements primarily related to Japan’s postwar
stance to validate the sovereignty of Dokdo inevitably involves circumstantial
interpretations, just as with the historical documents mentioned above.

The Cairo Communiqué of 1943 and the Potsdam Declaration of 1945 are often
received by South Koreans as validating South Korea’s sovereignty over Dokdo. The

5 Japan regarded Dokdo as a terra nullius, a land without an owner, and officially incorporated Dokdo as a
Japanese territory with Shimane Prefecture Notification No. 40 in 1905.
Cairo Communique is indeed the first international document that addressed the legitimacy and urgency of Korea’s independence from Japan in the near future (although this was undefined), but it did not explicitly indicate Dokdo or any other particular geographic names in its contents: “The aforesaid three great powers (the Great Allies), mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent” (The Korea Herald and Park 2009: 381). Hence, the Cairo Communiquè declared principles, rather than procedures. The spirit of the Cairo Communiquè was on the whole reaffirmed by the Potsdam Declaration in February 1945 but large room was left for further determination. The Potsdam Declaration stated that “the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out and Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and such minor islands as we determine” (The Korea Herald and Park 2009: 383). The Instrument of Surrender in September 1945 stated, “We hereby undertake for the Emperor, the Japanese Government and their successors to carry out the provisions of the Potsdam Declaration in good faith” (The Korea Herald and Park 2009: 384). These series of international legal documents made it clear that Korea’s independence was urged and promised but they are less useful as supporting evidence of South Korea’s sovereignty over any particular territories. According to the popular South Korean claims, SCAPIN (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers Instruction) article No. 677 in 1946 defined Dokdo as non-Japanese territory. It reads:

For the purpose of this directive, Japan is defined to include the four main islands of Japan (Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku) and the approximately 1,000 smaller adjacent islands, including the Tsushima Islands and the Ryukyu (Nansei) Islands north of 30° North Latitude (excluding Kuchinoshima Island), and excluding (q) Utsuryo (Ullung) Island, Liancourt Rocks (Take Islands) and Quelpart (Saishu or Cheju
Island), (b) the Ryukyu (Nansei) Islands south of 30° North Latitude (Including Kuchinoshima Island), the Izu, Nanpo, Bonin (Ogasawara) and Volcano (Kazan or Iwo) Island Groups, and all the outlying Pacific Islands (including the Daito (Ohigashi or Oagari) Island Group, and Parece Vela (Okinotori), Marcus (Minami-tori) and Ganges Habomai (Hapomaze Island Group (including Suisho, Yuri, Akiyuri, Shibotsu and Taraku Islands) and Shikotan Island. [Excerpt of the SCAPIN No. 677, cited from The Korea Herald and Park 2009: 387-388]

However, despite the South Korean claim that SCAPIN No. 677 renders Dokdo as non-Japanese territory, this is not enough to end the controversy. The primary international agreement that Japan values as firm evidence of its own sovereignty over Dokdo is the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, in which Dokdo was not listed as among the territories immediately to be returned to Korea. While Japan sees the omission as undermining South Korea’s claim to Dokdo and thus supporting Japan’s claim, South Korea on the other hand points out that Dokdo was included in previous working drafts of the Peace Treaty. There were a total of nine drafts for the Peace Treaty that was finally signed in 1951 and Dokdo was indicated in the first to fifth draft as a territory to be returned by Japan to Korea. In the sixth draft, however, Dokdo was indicated as Japan’s territory, and most South Korean scholars assume this change was a result of Japan’s aggressive lobbying and a provision of allowing a US radar base on Dokdo. The sixth draft with this change was denied by other Allied nations such as the UK, New Zealand, and Australia. The seventh to ninth drafts chose to leave the controversial Dokdo off the list of territories to be freed from Japan, precluding imminent cacophony among the Allies but opening up further controversy between Japan and South Korea in the future.

South Korea’s and Japan’s strategies as well as their problems with international agreements are not much different from those with historical documents: South Korea and Japan both unfold their claim on the basis of non-inclusive and selective international
agreements. As seen in the above examples, making sovereign claims with international agreements has many loopholes. Should the omission of Dokdo in the San Francisco Peace Treaty be understood as approving Dokdo as Japanese territory? Should SCAPIN No. 677 be read as determining the sovereign status of Dokdo/Takeshima as South Korea contends, or should it be understood as rendering Dokdo/Takeshima as one of the indicated unmentioned islands belonging to Japan as Japan might contend? Since these international agreements did not enumerate all the islands and small territories in the contents, making sovereign claims based on the presence or absence of names in such documents raises more problems than resolutions. Conflicting contextual interpretations have only made the Dokdo controversy as convoluted as possible.

3.3 Essentializing Dokdo: Outside the Exhibit

Even though historical evidence and international agreements cannot present clear-cut resolutions, the manifesto of “Dokdo is our land” is nevertheless firmly rooted in the consciousness of South Korean people. What made this possible? To most South Koreans, Dokdo has rarely constituted their world of experience since very few people have actually visited Dokdo. Despite being detached from any real life experience, Dokdo nevertheless was successfully enthroned as a national symbol that represents anti-Japanese spirit among South Koreans. It was through a persistent process of meaning-imbuing through school curriculum and mass media that perpetuated the image of Dokdo as a symbol of anticolonial and anti-Japanese struggle. Situated within the context of postcolonial defiance, the underlying ambiguity in the debate around Dokdo evaporates while South Korea’s claims to Dokdo are justified as a legitimate redemption of the colonial past. The process of essentializing Dokdo as a postcolonial icon got accelerated
with an extensive spread of Internet usage in South Korean society. Online communities with a strong nationalist inclination burgeoned on the web without hurdles, boosting and disseminating the iconic image of Dokdo as a milestone of anti-Japanese struggle.

3.3.1 Detached: Limited Access

Human inhabitation of Dokdo is minimal. Only a handful of South Korean police are currently dispatched to Dokdo and their stationing is more of a political statement against Japan than a genuine inhabitance. A few attempts have been sporadically made by South Koreans to use Dokdo as a residential address in the family registration record in an effort to make it quasi-official that South Koreans currently inhabit Dokdo. However, it is primarily a political gesture rather than actual residence. Even a visit to Dokdo involves a series of cumbersome procedures. Although Dokdo has emerged as a tourist attraction in recent years, its scale still remains diminutive. Entering Dokdo has been highly regulated on the basis that it is a “Natural Monument.” According to the *Law on the Protection of Cultural Properties*, entering Dokdo can be permitted on following occasions: (1) administrative purposes, (2) scholarly research, and (3) authorized fishing activities including emergency retreats for fishers in case of ocean storms. Additionally, the request for permission must be submitted thirty days prior to the desired date of visiting Dokdo. Tours of Dokdo are currently offered by a few tourist agencies, but the tour itself is mostly about cruising around Dokdo in a small ferry, and

6 Since the registration of residence was mandated in 1962, a total of sixteen people have used Dokdo as their residential address, some of whom only sporadically lived in Dokdo throughout the year. As of 2010, four people including a couple use Dokdo as their registered residential address. One of them is a caretaker of the lighthouse, and the other three stay in Dokdo only for several days to several months during the year because of inhospitable weather conditions in Dokdo during the winter.
even that is only possible when the climate allows. The highlight of the tour is strolling around on the docking area for about an hour, which is advertised as “setting your foot on Dokdo, our native territory.” In March 2009, the South Korean government announced its plan to ease up on regulations for visiting Dokdo and build facilities such as public restrooms and lodgings to promote tourism. The Dokdo tour is usually offered with an Ullungdo tour, a much larger island with a population of about 100,000 which is located between the Korean Peninsula and Dokdo.7

3.3.2 Attached: Becoming an Icon

Hence it is not by actual visits to Dokdo but through media and the Government-designated school curriculum that most South Korean people have internalized the idea of “Dokdo is our land.”8 While text books and newspapers were the main sources that disseminated the slogan only a few decades ago, the advent of extensive Internet usage noticeably changed the conceptual landscape. With hundreds of web pages that rigorously express strong nationalist inclinations around the Dokdo issue, now it is the general public rather than the government and public schools that demand the slogan of “Dokdo is our land.” Enjoying at full length their advantages of easy access to and rapid circulation of unconfirmed opinions and poorly supported arguments on the Internet,

7 As will be noted later with more details, Ullungdo is considered a main island to which Dokdo belongs and its sovereignty has never been in debates, unlike Dokdo (see Oh 2009; Sin 2004).

8 In South Korea, Korean history textbooks are either published or regulated by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (formerly Ministry of Education) and both private and public schools are required to use these government-designated textbooks in their curriculums. The government-controlled education of Korean history in school curriculums made it possible for most South Korean people to have standardized knowledge of Korean history.
these online communities have become critical agents in transforming Dokdo into a postcolonial-nationalist emblem.

One of the most famous online communities is the Voluntary Agency Network of Korea (VANK). It started as a web-based community in 1999, and has been actively delving into the Dokdo issue. According to their official website, VANK’s mission is threefold: (1) change the image of Korea among the world’s six billion population (2) unite the six million and five thousand Koreans living outside the Korean peninsula and (3) encourage the dream of the six million and five thousand Koreans outside the Korean peninsula (although what defines their dream remains obscure). As their mission states, the areas of interest of VANK cover a broad range of issues, not just limited to that of Dokdo. Nevertheless the issue of Dokdo constitutes a central focus for VANK. VANK is most famous for its unique “cyber diplomat program,” in which supporters of this organization voluntarily follow fourteen training steps to obtain a VANK certificate of “cyber diplomat.” The cyber diplomat aspires to, “be friends with the world’s people, advertise Korea, and finally promote Korea’s national reputation in the world.” The fourteen procedures described on their website are as follow:

1. gather materials for advertising Korea
2. introduce oneself and Korea in English
3. make e-pen pals to promote Korea
4. promote Korea in online chat rooms
5. become an international specialist
6. translate foreign news articles
7. find incorrect parts about Korea in foreign news articles
8. send friendly letters to publishers of textbooks in foreign countries
9. send letters asking for cooperation to foreign institutions
10. send letters to foreign schools
11. send letters of objection
12. unite Korean expats all over the world
13. make our dreams come true
A mere glance at the procedure gives an obvious impression that the program is operated on extremely abstract terms with little systematic coherence. For example, “being an international specialist” is as ambitiously ambiguous as “making our dreams come true.” The point here, though, is not the step-by-step procedures ambiguously explained on its website but the proposed slogan for VANK’s “cyber diplomat program”: “With Dokdo kept in our heart, we advertise Korea to the world.” Here, Dokdo is the symbolic core in establishing group identity for VANK. With the organization’s growing popularity, VANK even launched the “Cyber Dokdo Academy” to increase and diffuse knowledge of a series of historical and territorial controversies between South Korea and its East Asian neighbours. The mission statement of Cyber Dokdo Academy made it clear that its main purpose is, “to educate South Korean national leaders to confront historical and territorial controversies around North East Asia” (The Official Website of VANK). Here, the name Dokdo is no longer limited to a reference to the actual islets of Dokdo, but has also acquired an iconic status to advocate cases where South Korean sovereignty and identity are contested, disputed, and challenged. The name Dokdo, suggesting humble origins of tiny nearly uninhabitable islets in the marginal sea area, has been able to stir up patriotic feelings among South Koreans by embodying deeper connotations related to South Korean identity and sovereignty. Furthermore, as seen with VANK’s mission of training
a “Cyber Diplomat,” Dokdo became an ontological emblem for calling attention to broader issues of geopolitics between South Korea and other East Asian neighbours.9

3.4 The Special Exhibit on Dokdo at the NMK

How was such an essentializing process outside the museum reflected in the special exhibit on Dokdo? At the special exhibit on Dokdo, the ambiguity imbedded in the slogan of “Dokdo is our land” was obscured with a quasi-objective narrative through visualized information. The purposes of displayed materials were (1) to underline South Korean claims to Dokdo and to repudiate Japanese claims (2) to essentialize Dokdo as a symbol of South Korean sovereignty, and eventually (3) to counteract the history and memory of Japanese colonization of Korea through Dokdo. These purposes were pursued in the exhibit as follows: (1) to thwart Japan’s claim to Dokdo the special exhibit relied largely on written documents and ancient maps that demonstrated the antiquity of the use of the term Dokdo (2) to make Dokdo a symbol of South Korean sovereignty and independence Dokdo was described as containing the essence of South Korea, both physically (indigenous flora and fauna) and rhetorically (a series of historical episodes confirming Dokdo as belonging to Korea) (3) to situate Dokdo in the discourse of anticolonialism, the conflict around Dokdo was primarily interpreted as a matter of anticolonial struggle against Japan. To the effect of augmenting the anticolonial tone, a series of calligraphy and paintings by anti-Japanese figures such as An Chung-kŭn was also exhibited right next to the special exhibit.

9 According to VANK, there are 57,060 Cyber Dokdo Academy “cadets” as of February 29, 2012 (The official website of Dokdo Cyber Academy 2012).
3.4.1 Exhibit Design: Challenges and Limits

One of the new features of the new NMK building in the Yongsan area is that it has a separate building reserved for special exhibits. This consists of two halls designed to hold two smaller special exhibits concurrently or to accommodate one large-scale exhibit when combined. Securing an exclusive space of its own was expected to promote both the consistency and the quality of special exhibits at the NMK, and the first special exhibits in a new building were intended to showcase this new development as well as to exemplify the symbolic significance of the re-opening of the NMK. When it came to symbolic national significance, nothing could compare to Dokdo as the theme of the special exhibit to be held at the new NMK. To celebrate the new home of the NMK, which is supposedly free from the Japanese colonial influence (see chapter two), the goal of the special exhibit was to resonate with the general excitement of South Korean people, highlighting South Korean independence and sovereignty. Dokdo signifies the popular sentiment of South Koreans with regard to national pride and sovereignty, making it a perfect candidate for the theme of the special exhibit in a new building (Kentaro 2007).

In addition, it was also pointed out that the year 2006 marked one hundred years of the official use of the name Dokdo since Sim Hŭng-taek, mayor of Ullŭng, first used it in a 1905 report (Seoul sinmun 2006). Despite this meaningful background, designing an actual exhibit posed several challenges.

One of the chief curators at the NMK who directed the Dokdo exhibit once said that the challenge his team faced was twofold: (1) it was the first exhibit on a “geographical region” which did not involve any specific series of artifacts or
archaeological sites, (2) the exhibit was the first systematic attempt to present evidence of the “fact” that Dokdo is indeed within South Korean territory. As the chief curator acknowledged, it is uncommon that the main theme of an exhibit is a geographical place that few people actually reside. When the exhibit is about a certain “place,” the content is usually comprised of things that can depict people’s lives there both in the past and present, showing the historical chronology of cultural tradition. That posed the first hurdle for the NMK staff: How was an uninhabited place like Dokdo to be displayed in glass boxes? To resolve this problem, the NMK staff had to decide what messages they wanted to convey through this exhibit. Was it the geographical features of Dokdo, yielding something similar to a National Geographic Show? Was it the history of Dokdo focused on geopolitical issues between South Korea and Japan? Based on interviews with the staff during my fieldwork at the NMK, their initial plan was geared towards the latter aspect – the historical significance of Dokdo in the context of contemporary South Korean society. However, the challenge, again, boiled down to “how.”

There had been several exhibits previously held at the NMK and other national museums in South Korea to convey ideas and concepts, but all of them had a clear material basis, either through art pieces or artifacts. When those objects were not available, as in the case of exhibits about comfort women or the anti-Japanese movement during the colonial period, video and audio interviews were used to deliver the message with vivid “voices.” With Dokdo, it was apparent that such approaches were not possible. Dokdo is, first and foremost, a natural geographical location composed of rock and earth,

10 “On the exhibit, Longing for Our Territory, Dokdo” which appeared in the official NMK Web blog.
and although most South Koreans believe that they are deeply familiar with this particular place and the embedded historical narrative surrounding it, there were not people who could stand in front of a camera or an audio recorder to tell their unique stories of Dokdo (as seen in many exhibits about Native Americans - their childhood stories and memories constituting oral history that recreate the past and its aftermath). In other words, almost all the South Koreans “believe” that they are well aware of the existence of and the history of Dokdo, but what they share (at least in South Korea) is a standardized and internalized version of official narratives. The bottom line is that everybody has essentially a similar knowledge about Dokdo, and that allowed the special exhibit on Dokdo to become a site where they could affirm their existing knowledge rather than generate any kind of new understanding, as many people, including the NMK staff, falsely believed. The media release by the NMK stated that “this special exhibit aims at broadcasting the value and meanings of Dokdo and raising historic consciousness and self-pride among South Korean nationals.” The NMK also stated: “we believe that this special exhibit provides South Korean citizens with a valuable opportunity to share their knowledge on the historical fact that Dokdo belongs to South Korea.” Hence the nationalist narratives were there to be re-affirmed and re-disseminated, but the curatorial process that could engineer this narrative at a museum setting was not well prepared. Museum-wise, Dokdo was far from an easy theme for an exhibit. South Korea-wise, however, Dokdo was a magnet for media attention, guaranteeing intense, nation-wide popularity.
3.4.2 Exhibit in Practice: Implications and Revelation

Despite the technical difficulties in the actual installation of the exhibit, the NMK staff chose the Dokdo theme because of its national importance. In addition to those challenges discussed above, the absence of Dokdo experts on the exhibit team was another source of major concern, according to the chief curator in charge of the special exhibit. However, it was not a problem limited to this specific exhibit; rather it is a general problem. Even though Dokdo has been successfully imprinted in the South Korean consciousness as one of the most important icons of national independence and pride, there have been very few well-researched and balanced scholarly analyses of Dokdo. The chief curator in charge of the special exhibit on Dokdo reflected on the preparation of the exhibit saying that his concerns disappeared once he found out that there are plenty of documents that showed the antiquity of Dokdo belonging to Korea. However, this “plenty of materials” are not necessarily of actual relevance to the exhibit.

The special exhibit unmistakably revealed the degree of that challenge despite the claim of the chief curator that there were “plenty of materials.” The number of pieces displayed at the exhibit was not small, but many of them have only a tangential and obscure connection to Dokdo. Basically the NMK staff painstakingly gathered and displayed everything on and about Dokdo that they could find, from landscape photos to scaled dioramas. A structure simulating a boat was constructed at the beginning of the exhibit on a slanted stage, with the intent of providing visitors with a “real-life”

11 “On the exhibit, Longing for Our Territory, Dokdo” which appeared in the NMK Web blog.
experience of going to Dokdo.” Sounds of waves and sea gulls were additional effects to make the simulated visit more realistic. The exhibit itself consisted of four sections.

I. Dokdo, Our Territory
   (1) Geographic Location of Dokdo
   (2) The Formation of Dokdo and Its Geological Features

II. Dokdo in Historical Documents

III. Dokdo in Old Maps
   (1) Korean Maps
   (2) Japanese Maps
   (3) Western Maps

IV. People of Dokdo
   (1) Usanguk and Admiral Isabu of Silla
   (2) An Yong-bok, Loyal Guardian for Our Territory
   (3) Lee Kyu Won, Governor of Ullŭngdo in the Chosŏn Dynasty
   (4) Sim Hŭng-taek, Mayor of Uldo

V. Natural Terrain of Dokdo
   (1) Natural Environment
   (2) Nature and Ecology

The first section, intended as a brief introduction to Dokdo, consists of information on Dokdo’s geographic and geological features. The panel in Section I contains numeric data such as the geographic coordinates of Dokdo (37°14’30”N 131°52’0”E) as well as the distance from Dokdo to both South Korea and Japan. Although the distance between Dokdo and the mainland of Japan is shorter (157.5 km) than that between Dokdo and the Korean Peninsula (216.8 km), the panel also reminded visitors that Dokdo is only 87.4 km away from Ullŭngdo, which is proposed as more relevant and legitimate factual information. Along with the distance, visibility is also used as supporting evidence for South Korea’s claim to Dokdo. The panel includes the quotation, “Dokdo can be seen from Ullŭngdo on clear days with bare eyes’ from Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam.’’

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12 Sinjŭng tongguk yŏji sŭngnam book 45, Gangwondo, Uljin Province
Again, these interpretations are not exclusive and unambiguous enough to indisputably rule out Japan’s claim to Dokdo.

The second section, “Dokdo in Historical Documents” deals with the history of Dokdo as a Korean territory. Exhibited pieces include royal documents such as annals and chronicles, Government-issued geographical surveys, and other historical references that contain comments regarding Dokdo or geographical reviews of Dokdo. For example, Samguksaki (History of the Three Kingdoms) is believed to be the oldest historical document that included a mention of Dokdo saying Isabu, an admiral of Silla, conquered Usanguk, followed by the phrase “the island is called either Usanguk or Ullŭngdo.” The geography section of Koryŏsa (History of Koryô) also describes a note on Dokdo which states; “it is believed that Usan and Murŭng are two separate islands, each can be seen from the other on a clear, windless day.” The same note is also found in the geography section of Sejongsillok (Annals of King Sejong). In Kangyeji, a history book published in the eighteenth century says, “there are two islands of Ullŭng and Usan, and one of them is what Japanese call ‘Songdo’.” As discussed previously, here the names for Ullŭngdo and Dokdo were used in a rather confused and sometimes interchangeable way. South Koreans take this as “clear” evidence that the two islands, Ullŭngdo and Dokdo, have always belonged together, which is interpreted as evidence thwarting Japan’s territorial claim for Dokdo.¹³

¹³ While Dokdo has never been out of territorial dispute, Ullŭngdo is relatively free from such controversy with its larger size and a longer history of substantial occupation by Korean residents. In this context, South Korea is often willing to consider Dokdo as an accessory island of Ullŭngdo to put an end to the territorial dispute.
Section three displays old maps that support South Korean territorial claims to Dokdo to build a historical legitimacy as well. Three subsections respectively deal with maps made by Koreans, Japanese, and Westerners. The oldest appearance of Dokdo in maps dates back to the sixteenth century, under the names of Usan, Chasan, or Kansan.\textsuperscript{14} There are two interesting points about Dokdo’s appearance in old maps. One is its size and the other is its location. From the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century, Dokdo or Usan/Chasan/Kansan was depicted as the same size as Ullŭgdo.\textsuperscript{15} Another point worth emphasizing is that maps from this period almost unitarily place Dokdo on the west side of Ullŭngdo, which is the very opposite of the true location. The consensual mistakes observed in these maps can be interpreted in several ways. First, since these were created before the advent of scientific cartographic technology such as aerial photography, many of the maps were made based on earlier maps. That means, if one map misplaced Dokdo, the subsequent maps would likely copy and perpetuate the errors. The second possible explanation is that Usan in old maps did not refer to Dokdo, but rather to an imaginary island of Usanguk. This hypothesis is convincing especially when Dokdo was often depicted as the same size as Ullŭngdo or larger. If Dokdo was known as some island that could be seen from Ullŭngdo on a clear day, it is very easy to believe its size to be as large as Ullŭngdo. The supporters of the second hypothesis argue that the consensual and continuous appearance of ‘errors’ in major maps show that it was not error at all.

\textsuperscript{14} The Chinese letters for Usan is 于山, which was believed to be often misread as Chasan (子山), or Kansan (干山).

\textsuperscript{15} Ullŭngdo is 73.15 km\textsuperscript{2}, while Dokdo, including all its constituents, is about 0.186 km\textsuperscript{2}.
Japanese maps and Western maps with clear marks of Dokdo or Usan/Chasan/Kansan were exhibited along with Korean maps as supporting evidence for one another. Dokdo has appeared in Western maps since the eighteenth century, and has also been misplaced to the west of Ullŭngdo, but the point of observation in Western maps, according to the exhibit panels, is the fact that Dokdo is placed much more closely to the Korean peninsula than to the Japanese archipelago. One of the panels says, “it shows that Westerners clearly perceived Dokdo as our territory, not that of Japan.” However, if the so-called “Dokdo” marked on the west of Ullŭngdo was in fact the imaginary island of Usanguk as discussed above, then this claim loses its ground for legitimacy.

All the maps in the special exhibit marked Dokdo in some way or another, but they did not agree on the name of the sea where Dokdo is located. Japanese maps and some Western maps indicated the sea as the Sea of Japan rather than East Sea or Sea of Korea. Most conspicuous in this context is the map published by the Allied Forces in 1946. This map was an attachment to SCAPIN No. 677 which many South Koreans

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To compensate for low frequency in the appearance of East Sea compared to Sea of Japan in historical documents, Korea has placed more emphasis on antiquity than mere quantity. Key historical documents and maps that Korea uses to support its arguments include Samgukaksı (History of the Three Kingdoms) written in the twelfth century, Samgukyusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) published in the thirteenth century, and “Atlas of Eight Provinces” in the Sinjŭngtonggukyŏjisŭngnam from the sixteenth century. They are all Korean sources that marked the term East Sea. The argument goes that the name Sea of Japan has unjustly replaced the correct name of East Sea in the twentieth century as Japan emerged as one of the major imperial powers. Japan, on the other hand, presented counterevidence that the name Sea of Japan had been adopted before the twentieth century. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit priest who was dispatched to China in the sixteenth century is a man of interest in this controversy. Kunyu Wanguo Quantu, China’s earliest known world map was published in 1602 by Matteo Ricci at the request of the Wanli Emperor (萬曆) of Ming. This map used the name Sea of Japan and Japan has utilized this map as a major piece of supporting evidence for its claim. Korea, on the other hand, underemphasized the significance of this particular map on the grounds that it was based on a translation of a foreigner, Matteo Ricci, and also that this map had little influence on maps published in subsequent eras.
claimed positioned Ullŭngdo and Take[shima] as Korean territory. Because of its authority and international recognition, this map is considered by most South Koreans as one of the most significant and authoritative indications supporting South Korea’s claim to Dokdo along with their assertion that SCAPIN No. 677 supports this. However, a point neglected in regard to this map is that it also clearly marked the Sea of Japan without any alternatives. How this selectivity validates the NMK’s intended aim of “providing the visitors with an independent basis for making an unbiased judgment regarding the legitimate territorial ownership of Dokdo” remains questionable.\(^{17}\)

The fourth section is about historical figures related to Dokdo. Isabu, an admiral of the Silla Dynasty is believed to have conquered Usanguk then occupied by “violent and rough natives.” Although this episode is a recurrent theme in different historical books both in the Koryŏ and Chosŏn dynasties, the comment is very brief and fails to deliver substantial information on the natives of Usanguk and Isabu himself.\(^{18}\) Even whether the Usanguk in Isabu’s episode is either Ullŭngdo or Dokdo is not clear. The episode of An Yong-bok from the Chosŏn Dynasty reveals more than that of Isabu. Based on his anecdotal appearance on several historical references of Korea and Japan, An Yong-bok, a fisher of the Chosŏn Dynasty in the seventeenth century, was captured by Japanese fishers while he was collecting shell-fish on the shore of Ullŭngdo. He was then brought to Japan for trial for “trespassing and soliciting” Japanese territory (Kwôn 2009). During the long journey from Ullŭngdo to Edo (present day Tokyo), An Yong-

\(^{17}\) This is from the NMK media release on the opening of the special exhibit.

\(^{18}\) The biographical information on Isabu, including birth and death years is not known.
bok was believed to make a case that Ullŭngdo and Dokdo in fact belonged to Chosŏn. An’s claim succeeded in convincing the Japanese leaders and An even received a written document from them confirming Ullŭngdo and Dokdo were indeed South Korean territories. That document (sŏgye 書契) went missing during An’s trip back to Chosŏn, so what remains traceable are fragmentary mentions of that document in historical references. Upon returning to his homeland, An was arrested and punished by the Chosŏn government for crossing borders without a governmental permit. An fortunately avoided the death sentence of beheading, but he was sent to exile in the Yŏngdong area and died there. The episode of An Yong-bok enjoyed more popularity afterward, since it fulfilled the basic structure of the hero story. A lay person from a low social class who made a living by collecting shellfish got to confront Japanese leaders and successfully claimed Ullŭngdo and Dokdo as territories of Chosŏn, even making the Japanese leaders issue a written confirmation, which even the Chosŏn government had not succeeded in doing. The fact that An Yong-bok’s brave act was not celebrated but punished by the Chosŏn government made the hero story more complete, adding to it the hardship the hero had to suffer. An’s recurrent appearance in historical references suggests that he was a historical figure actually involved with such an event rather than a legendary figure. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that there is an element of dramatization in making An Yong-bok an iconic “Guardian of Dokdo,” as the exhibit panel described. Although An was a historical figure, not a mythical one, the fact that the document issued by the Japanese leader confirming Japan’s acknowledgment of Ullŭngdo and Dokdo as Korean (Chosŏn) territories was never seen by anyone but An inevitably undermines the historical validity of that part of the episode.
The last section on the natural environments of Dokdo was mainly demonstrated by photos and pictures. However, the flora and fauna used to describe Dokdo’s natural environment were far from Dokdo-exclusive. Aside from a few cases, most species are very common elsewhere in South Korea (and outside it), such as sea gulls, sea otters, *paeraengi* flowers, and so on. In one case, a close up photo of the *paeraengi* flower (whose botanical name is ironically *Dianthus Chinensis*, meaning China pink) was displayed in conjunction with Sin Saimdang’s painting of “flowers and insects,” in which a small *pearaengi* flower is seen in a marginal place of the painting. Sin Saimdang (1504-1551) was a well known female writer and artist from the Chosŏn Dynasty, who is in fact more famous for best representing the Confucian ideal of “wise mother, good wife,” making Sin the icon of Korea’s Confucian tradition and values. Sin was a talented writer and painter herself, but it was Yi I (153601584), her son and a renowned Neo-Confucian scholar, who provided a firm place for Sin in Chosŏn history, a dynasty operated by Neo-Confucian ideals and thus heavily male-dominated in nature. Sin’s painting displayed at the exhibit was not even the original, but a copy in which the relevance to Dokdo is slight at best. If there was anything that this piece really revealed, it would be the extensive and somewhat obsessive efforts that the NMK staff made to establish a connection between Dokdo to South Korea. The same rationale was observed at the end of the exhibit as well. On departing the exhibit hall, visitors came across another smaller exhibit of calligraphy and paintings related to the Korean independence activists during the Japanese colonial period. Of greatest significance was An Chung-kŭn’s calligraphy featuring his famous handprint with one short ring finger, which was cut off by himself as a token of his determination and faith in Korean independence from
Japan. The calligraphy and paintings of Korean independence activists have no direct connections to Dokdo, but visitors appeared to have little problem in understanding the intended link between the activists and Dokdo, which involves an anti-Japanese and by extension, anticolonial sentiment.

Right next to this smaller exhibit stood a small museum shop kiosk, offering postcards with photos of Dokdo and other items related to the special Dokdo exhibit. Among them was a mouse pad featuring Kim Jŏng-ho’s Taedongyŏjido, one of the most well-known old maps of Korea (see Pae 2006, Wŏn 1991). Made in 1861 and currently designated as National Treasure No. 850. Taedongyŏjido is famous for its precision in comparison with contemporary aerial maps. Just as with Sin Saimdang’ painting and An Chung-kŭn’s calligraphy, Taedongyŏjido was considered one of the signature items of the NMK, representing unique Korean culture and history. The only problem with this souvenir mouse pad is that there is no Dokdo in Taedongyŏjido. In its original copy of Taedongyŏjido, only Ullŭngdo was indicated while Dokdo was not. It was indeed ironic to see a map without Dokdo sold to promote a special exhibit on Dokdo that painstakingly reconfirmed the slogan of, “Dokdo is South Korea’s land.” More ironic were visitor responses. Based on my observation for over a month, not one visitor noticed, raised a point or made an inquiry regarding the nonexistence of Dokdo in a Dokdo special exhibit souvenir. People visited the special exhibit, patriotically reconfirmed their belief of South Korea’s sovereignty over Dokdo, and then happily purchased a souvenir with a map of Korea without Dokdo.

19 In 1909 An assassinated Ito Hirobumi, the first Prime Minister of Japan and then the Japanese Governor-General of Korea.
3.5 Ahistoricity, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Blame

What was achieved at the special exhibit was reconfirmation of the status of Dokdo as an anti-Japanese and nationalist icon. Hence it is unquestionable that the colonial past and postcolonial present have formed the base of the heated debates around Dokdo, but the scope of postcoloniality projected to and understood by Dokdo remains quite narrow. The postcoloniality represented by Dokdo is highly confined to strong anti-Japanese sentiment and thus fails to embrace a broader discussion of postcoloniality beyond the duel of South Korea and Japan. In other words, the way in which South Korean society redresses its colonial experiences exemplifies what Edward Said called “a politics of blame” in the context of postcolonial studies, which, according to him, needs to be defeated by, “a politics of liberation,” through “a politics of critique and acknowledgement.” While a politics of blame remains retrospective and unproductive and exerts its energy to denunciate (ex)colonizers, a politics of critique and acknowledgement seeks to scrutinize and restructure the constitution of colonial discourse. By engaging in such process, postcolonial society can move beyond a politics of blame and achieve a true understanding of decolonization. In pursuit of a politics of critique and acknowledgement, not past sufferings caused by colonialism but critical considerations of contemporary context such as globalism constitute the focus of a postcolonial critique. In contemporary South Korean society, its postcolonial conditions are entirely acknowledged and consumed vis-à-vis its ex-colonizer, Japan. The case of
the Dokdo theme song and its reception in South Korean society clearly exemplifies what Said warned about as postcolonial entrapment.\textsuperscript{20}

There is a famous South Korean song about Dokdo called \textit{Dokdo is our territory}. It was first broadcast in a comedy show in 1982 when there was an ongoing controversy regarding the depiction of the ancient Korea-Japan relationship in Japanese history textbooks. South Korean people were furious at the Japanese attempt to distort what South Koreans thought were accurate historical accounts, and as a result, anti-Japanese sentiment was at a peak when the song first came out. The song was originally intended as a one-time theme song for a comedy show. With a simple and repetitive melody and catchy lyrics, the song enjoyed unexpected popularity, which led the producer of the comedy show to eventually publish it in a licensed album, featuring then unknown singer Chŏng Kwang-t’ae. Once the album was on the market, this song hit extreme popularity, enjoyed by all generations and Chŏng Kwang-t’ae became a national star. Thirty years since its first release, this song continues to be popular among South Korean people. The song has been featured in elementary textbooks since 1996 and some nationalist minds even propose to build a stone monument with inscriptions of the lyrics about Dokdo. The popularity goes beyond the military zones. According to the National Intelligence Service of South Korea’s media release in 1999, this song is one of the top five popular South Korean songs enjoyed by North Korean people. The lyrics are as follow:

\begin{quote}
To the Southeast of Ullŭngdo, proceeding in a boat for about 80 kilometers
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{20} Korea’s own colonizing gaze upon transnational migrant workers and international brides from other parts of Asia also reflects the lack of a politics of critique and acknowledgement in postcolonial concerns (see chapter five for more discussion on this).
There is a lonely island, a home of birds\textsuperscript{21}
Regardless of whoever on earth would allege it as their territory
Dokdo is our territory, our own territory

Dokdo-ri, Ullŭngŭp, Ullŭnggun, Kyŏngsangbukdo
37° 14′ 30″ N, 131° 52′ 0″ E
Average temperature 12 Celsius, rainfall of 1300 mm a year
Dokdo is our territory, our own territory

Squids, calamaries, cogs, pollacks, turtles, salmon roe, birds’ eggs
170,000 square meters’ ocean, female divers’ waiting room
There are one well and several craters
Dokdo is our territory, our own territory

“Usanguk” was mentioned in the 13rd year of King Chijŭng of Silla Dynasty
It also appeared in a Sejongsillok Geography chapter in page 50, on the third line
Hawaii is the United States’ territory, and Taemado (Tsushima) is that of Japan
Dokdo is our territory, our own territory

After the Russo-Japanese War
Very problematic if somebody contests Dokdo as Terra Nullius
Isabu, a military officer of Silla will laugh from the underworld to hear such an absurd claim
Dokdo is our territory, our own territory

To the Southeast of Ullŭngdo, proceeding in a boat for about 80 kilometers
There is a lonely island, a home of birds
Regardless of whoever on earth would allege as their territory
Dokdo is our territory, our own territory

[my translation]

The song lyrics indeed contain some historical references including specific page numbers of the \textit{Sejongsillok} Geography chapter, but there is a part that requires serious, critical contemplation: “Hawaii is the United States’ territory.” Historically speaking,

\textsuperscript{21} Technically speaking, Dokdo is made of two main islets, East Island (dongdo) and West Island (sŏdo), but Korean people usually consider Dokdo as one entity, as seen in this song.
Hawaii was annexed and colonized by the United States in 1893 as a part of US global expansion and only later granted statehood in 1959 (Van Dyke 2006: 223-224). The past of annexation and colonization eventually made the Clinton administration in 1993 issue an official apology to the Hawaiians for atrocities, clearly acknowledging that the annexation denied the natives of Hawaii their “inherent sovereignty through self-government and . . . their right to self-determination, their lands, and their ocean resources” (Van Dyke 2006: 224). Hence a basic historical understanding would have prevented Hawaii from being an example of a legitimate territory of the United States, which is in fact more in accordance with Japan's claim to Takeshima, not that of South Korea. While the original part of “Tsushima is Japanese territory” was heavily contended and eventually was revised to “Not sure of Tsushima,” it is ironic that the part about Hawaii in the lyrics has never been a point of slight attention (see Han 1998).

This song is not the only example that the colonial history of Hawaii is neglected in the context of the Dokdo controversy. On March 1, 2010, South Korean advocates of Dokdo and a Korean pop singer Kim Jang-hoon put out a video advertisement on the Time Square billboard in New York City, advocating South Korean claims of sovereignty over Dokdo (Korea Chungang Daily 2010). The date was carefully chosen to mark the anniversary of the March First Movement (Samil undong) in 1919, the biggest nationwide anti-Japanese protest by Koreans during the colonial period. The thirty-second video advertisement began with crossword puzzles in which the names of islands are matched with countries to which they belong. In this advertisement, Hawaii was the first puzzle item that appeared on the screen: Hawaii and the U.S.A., Sicily and Italy, Bali and Indonesia, and of course, Dokdo and South Korea. The general public of Korea highly
applauded the act of putting on the advertisement in the heart of New York, a cosmopolitan core, and the analogy of “Hawaii: the USA::Dokdo: South Korea” became circulated as a major supporting case for South Korea’s claims on Dokdo. Juxtaposing Hawaii of the U.S.A. with Dokdo of South Korea as an example of legitimate ownership and sovereignty is a product of neglect and superficiality in grasping the landscape of postcoloniality. The postcoloniality represented by South Korea’s claims to Dokdo is heavily dominated by a politic of blame which substantiates what South Korean sociologist Lim Jie-Hyun [Im Chi-hyŏn] called “victimhood nationalism.”

The ‘victimhood nationalism’ is complete when victimhood becomes hereditary in the historical imagination. Any historical reconciliation effort in East Asia has run against a rock of the victimhood nationalism. . . Victimhood nationalism has the sacralization of memories as its epistemological ally since sacralized memories effectively block the skeptical and critical eyes of the outsiders to ‘our own unique past’. In this unique past, nationalists could find the mental enclave where they can enjoy a morally comfortable position, regardless of whether these heirs of historical victimhood become today’s perpetrators. The colloquial thesis of “you, foreigners can never ever understand our own tragic national past’ defends victimhood nationalism against historical scrutiny. Once exposed to the light of comparative analysis, however, sacralized memories are open to communication with others. And the seemingly solid victimhood nationalism, I hope, melts away into air. The comparative history should not be reduced to a tactical concern to de-sacralize national memories and thus disarm the victimhood nationalism epistemologically. [Lim Jie-Hyun 2010:2-3]

3.6 Concluding Remarks

The exhibit ends with an enlarged quotation of Pyŏn Yŏng-t’ae, the third Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Korea, “Dokdo is not just a group of rocks, but an anchor of our honour.” What is ironic, in parallel with this self-assertion, is the very title of the exhibit, “Longing for Our Land, Dokdo.” There is an undeniably uncomfortable reality about Dokdo that this title implies. Despite the widely shared and intense attachment among South Koreans to this marginal place that is often translated into hostility toward
the Japanese (who also consistently claim territorial sovereignty over it as Takeshima), Dokdo, in reality, is an object or an idea that has been *longed*, rather than owned, asserted, and understood. Everybody talks about Dokdo as if it was within their grasp, but what people really have in their possession is the glimpse of its constructed image and meanings based on narrow sentimental longing. The special exhibit might have provided a place to re-affirm the pre-established beliefs of South Korea’s sovereignty over Dokdo, but it also re-confirmed the current state of the Dokdo controversy. The NMK called it a “fact” that Dokdo belongs to South Korea, but what the special exhibit exposed was that it is a subjective “fact” only among South Koreans. The exhibit succeeded to uncover some “evidence” that supports South Korea’s claim for sovereignty over Dokdo, but it also exposed the limited and selective basis for source materials.

At the special exhibit on Dokdo, the dispute over Dokdo was not really resolved, but instead became more pronounced which made it more difficult to settle. Confirmed at the exhibit was extraordinarily intense aspiration for and sentimental attachment to Dokdo among South Koreans, and it can only be understood in the context of South Korea’s insulated understanding of postcoloniality, in which Dokdo became a milestone of South Korea’s resistance to and independence from Japan. To South Koreans, Dokdo is not just a place. It is the inspiration for nationalist pride, and an aspiration for politico-economic victory in a contest with Japan. A marginal place like Dokdo has been put in the heart of sociopolitical issues in the postcolonial context, becoming an icon for South Korea’s sovereignty and authority. However, when it comes to international recognition, South Korea’s claims of sovereignty over Dokdo still remain obscure and abstruse. The NMK’s special exhibit on Dokdo was a spectacular success in terms of the number of
visitors and the depth of sensation it stirred up among South Koreans, but it was still more of a domestic ritual immersed in a politics of blame where South Korean citizens received their dose of standardized anticolonial-nationalist knowledge, and pre-existing beliefs were affirmed by being offered a simulated tour of Dokdo, a place to which they have never been, and most probably will never go in person.
Chapter 4. Irredentist Claims and Repatriation of the Ancient Past: Representation of Kojosŏn, Koguryŏ, Parhae, and Nangnang

4.1 Introduction

Irredentism refers to a movement or a position that raises claims, based on putative cultural or historical connections to the past, including territories that are currently held by another state or ethnic group. Such connections may be either real or imagined, depending on whose point of view it is. However, even in the case where prior historical connection to specific territory is objectively validated, making a retrograde territorial claim involves a series of complicated arguments and considerations. Who determines the legitimacy of present ownership claims based on the past?

In South Korean nationalism, the ancient past is often considered a source of pride and the continuity of Korean people and culture. Emphasizing the remote past embodied by Tan’gun and Kojosŏn as the source of national spirit reflects an angst-ridden effort of South Korean society to counteract colonial trauma and to repatriate a pre-colonial state of Koreanness. Recent irredentist claims made by South Korea against China around the Koguryŏ sites currently located in the Chinese territory is best understood in this context of anticolonial nationalism. In fact, South Koreans seem more concerned about cultural affiliation than about the actual stewardship of the territory in making irredentist claims over Koguryŏ sites, since such cultural affiliation legitimizes the lineage of Korean people originating from Kojosŏn (2333?–108 BCE) and then descended to Koguryŏ (37 BCE–668), to Parhae (698–926), and eventually to contemporary South Korea. The fact that ancient kingdoms of the northern part of the Korean peninsula are much more favoured over their counterpart in the southern area, such as Silla (57 BCE-935) and
Paekche (18 BCE-660) in tracking down the origin of Koreans also points out the postcolonial desire of South Korea to establish a strong and robust nationhood just as those northern kingdoms once did.

Representations of Kojošŏn, Koguryŏ, and Parhae at the NMK and the NFMK demonstrate the juncture where the academic endeavor of museum professionals inevitably intersects with nationalist consciousness of South Korean society. In installing museum exhibits on those ancient kingdoms, absence of archaeological data and lack of artifacts to display were offset by nationalist narratives and unsupported popular belief in national myth. The most crucial aspect regarding exhibits about Kojošŏn, Koguryŏ, and Parhae is not the quality or academic validity of the exhibits themselves, but their presence at national museums as a testament of the continuous cultural affiliation of South Koreans from Tan’gun to contemporary South Korea.

4.2 The Beginning: Between Myth and History

Kojošŏn, the first kingdom of Korea believed to have been founded by Tan’gun allegedly in 2333 BCE, stands between myth and history. The name of the kingdom was mentioned in two historical references, but there has been little archaeological evidence that proves the actual existence of earlier Kojošŏn in the Korean peninsula. Nevertheless, the symbolic status of Kojošŏn in South Korean nationalism outweights academic validity of any kind.

Only three days after the re-opening of the new facility in 2005, the NMK once again dominated headlines of almost every major newspaper in South Korea (Chosŏn ilbo 2005). What captured media attention was not the successful re-opening. This time, the media hype was around the banner hung at the entrance of the Archaeology Hall at the
NMK. Covering the entire wall from floor to ceiling, the banner at the Archaeology Hall showed a chronological timeline of Korean history based on archaeological evidence.1 A series of developments of civilization in China, Japan and the West is presented as well to provide comparative perspectives. The Archaeology Hall at the previous NMK building in the Kyŏngbok Palace area had displayed a timeline with the same content, but this time, it was enlarged and illustrated with colourful photos of archaeological objects and sites. The grand reopening of the NMK also unintentionally misguided the visitors as if the chronological timeline was a brand new development.

The part that captured the eyes of mass media and thousands of museum visitors in this re-introduced timeline was the earliest stage of Korean history. What astounded the South Korean public, the timeline failed to indicate the existence of Kojosŏn, allegedly the first state in the Korean peninsula built around 2333 B.C.2 Why does Kojosŏn matter? “Kojosŏn was the first state in the Korean peninsula which opened the first page of Korean history” was an echoing theme in every history text book in South Korea.3 One of the visitors in his fifties expressed his fury facing a timeline with no Kojosŏn.

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1 The Archaeology Hall is the first destination of the “suggested tour” provided by the NMK. Once finding oneself in the NMK building, it is hard to miss the huge sign with an arrow indicating the entrance for the Archaeology Hall.

2 Kojosŏn appeared in Tongguk t'onggam, chronicles of early Korean history compiled by Seo Gŏ-chŏng (1420-1488) and others. The compilation was initially commissioned by King Sejo in 1446, and finished under the reign of King Sŏngjong in 1485. Tongguk t'onggam is considered the earliest record that contained the myth of Tan’gun and the history of Kojosŏn.

3 South Korean history textbooks containing accounts on Tan’gun and Kojosŏn are in fact open to possibilities for different interpretations. The description of the myth of Tan’gun is followed by such comments: “The myth of Tan’gun was documented as a written record after being passed down over a long period of time. As with most myths, some parts were added, while other parts were deleted over
I was always taught in schools that our history of five thousand years began with Kojosŏn and have had no doubt about that. But this timeline stole the half of our history by omitting the existence of Kojosŏn. Take a look at this timeline. While the Sang and Ha Dynasty in China and Babylonian civilization in the West are clearly indicated for the same period, for us (Koreans), there are only a few photos of artifacts from the Neolithic and Bronze Age. If those with no background knowledge on Korea take a look at this table, they would think we Koreans didn’t form any state and lived like some cave people. [Tonga ilbo 2005a]

The NMK’s ignorance of the popular sentiment and wide spread “knowledge” regarding Kojosŏn was serious enough to stir a huge dispute among the public, including a large number of people who have never been to the NMK and most of whom will probably never visit.⁴ One criticism accused the NMK of adopting the derogatory depiction of the Korean timeline that appeared in a Japanese history textbooks published by Fusosha Publishing Company (Tonga ilbo 2005c). Also contributing to the criticism was the fact that the Archaeology Hall was the first exhibit that any visitor following the directed path at the new NMK would encounter. In other words, the first message with which the “nation’s face” greeted its own people was in fact an unmitigated denial of the origin story that had been devoutly venerated.⁵

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⁴ At the end of my fieldwork days at the NMK, I occasionally caught taxi cabs in front of the NMK, and one of the first things cab drivers brought up to make conversations was the missing Kojosŏn incident at the NMK (they all thought I worked at the NMK). They were furious about the mistreatment of Kojosŏ at the NMK, but whenever I asked them if they have ever been to or have an intention of visiting the NMK in the near future, the answers were almost always in the negative.

⁵ One of the directors of the NMK used the expression “nation’s face” to describe the importance of the NMK in an interview with a newspaper, but it was not his creation. A popular metaphor of “the NMK as our nation’s face” is often found in newspaper articles and in people’s speech (see Chosŏn ilbo 1997a).
The Archaeology Department at the NMK responded to this dispute by explaining on academic-specific grounds: the timeline was intended to show “archaeological” periods, not “historical” ones, meaning that only archaeologically validated cultures and periods were included in the timeline. According to the Archaeology Department, Kojosŏn was mentioned in a couple of early Korean and Chinese documents, but no archaeological evidence had been confirmed. However, this “academic” explanation could not alleviate the general public’s frustration. It was pointed out by the visitors and the media that the earliest state names appearing in the timeline were those of the Three Kingdoms (57 BCE–668) in the subsequent period, Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla respectively, which created the false impression that Korea was behind Japan and China in terms of statehood formation. The Archaeology Department again explained that including the names of the Three Kingdoms was done only to help visitors understand the archaeological periods with familiar names. These Three Kingdoms left enough archaeological evidence (artifacts and sites) behind, so including their names next to archaeological periods as supplemental information did not pose any contradictions. Unlike the Three Kingdoms, however, Kojosŏn, which is believed to represent the Bronze Age in the Korean Peninsula, has not been archaeologically proven and thus including the name of Kojosŏn in the timeline would have conflicted with the academic integrity of archaeology. The Archaeology Department at the NMK also tried to clarify their position by pointing out the “fundamental” difference between an “archaeological” and “historical” timeline. They reminded the public of the fact that Kojosŏn appeared in the “historical” timeline at the entrance of the History Hall. The NGO for Korean Studies (Kuhak undong simin yŏnhap) responded to this by stating “it is not about the difference
of academic perspectives between archaeology and history, but about the colonial trace that has not been redressed” (Tonga ilbo 2005d). Despite these explanations on the part of the Archaeology Department, criticism of the archaeological timeline increased until the Archaeology Department decided to eventually accommodate (if not surrender to) the public sentiment towards Kojosŏn. They decided to insert the name of Kojosŏn in the “archaeological” timeline immediately. This prompt gesture somewhat reduced furious public voices, but this incident left the NMK, a place supposed to hoist national pride and honour as the face of a nation, with a permanent scar of not being nationalistic enough.

On facing the timeline at the new NMK two months after the public disputes on Kojosŏn, I noticed a little piece of paper with “Kojosŏn” written on it attached to the original banner. Its slightly discoloured and already worn-out edges were flapping out to reveal its adhesive back side covered with dust. Clearly it was too time-consuming to replace the whole wall-to-ceiling banner when the controversy arose, making the Archaeology Department go with a simple method to revise it in a prompt manner. When I reminded them of the issue, people at the Archaeology Department sighed and shook their heads.

It had been like this (meaning no Kojosŏn in it) for a long time even before the reopening. People did not pay much attention to it then, but as you see, it took one news clip to make the whole country fuss about it. We had no choice but to revise it regardless of academic context. That is how things get done with such issues. [An interview with a NMK staff, May 1, 2006]

6 I was in Vancouver when this controversy soared, not having a chance to see the actual table until I started my fieldwork at the NMK two months after the reopening of the NMK.
4.3 Kojosŏn and Tan’gun: Myriads of Myth, Religion, and History

To fully understand the source of this commotion and its aftermath, the meaning and significance of Kojosŏn to South Koreans needs contextual elucidation. To most South Koreans, “five thousand years of our history” is more than a familiar phrase to describe the depth of Korean history. South Korean people literally grew up with this concept from the moment they entered mandatory education. For some, the phrase “five thousand years of our history” is introduced even before public education, since it is featured in children’s stories, song lyrics, cartoons, and history books, not to mention all levels of history curriculum. Virtually every person who has ever attended the public school system in South Korea knows how the story unfolds. In this familiar and favoured discourse, Kojosŏn was built by Tan’gun and it marked the starting point of Korea’s five thousand years of history. This (hi)story has earned almost unanimous agreement among South Koreans with little doubt. As one Korean journalist noted, “as a child grows learning how to speak and how to write, we Koreans grow learning a priori knowledge that “we are descendants of Tan’gun.” (Chŏn, 2000).

The founding myth of Kojosŏn by Tan’gun appeared in the *Memorabilia of Three Kingdoms* as follows:

Since time immemorial, Hwanin (Heavenly god 桓因) lived in the heavenly country. As his younger son Hwanung (桓雄) wished to go

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7 There even has been a movement among extreme nationalist minds who claimed that the span of Korean history should be ten thousand years, not five thousand years.

8 *Memorabilia of Three Kingdoms* (*samgukyusa* 三國遺事) is a collection of folktales, legends, stories, historical accounts, and biographies compiled by Buddhist monk Ilyŏn during the thirteenth century. *With History of Three Kingdoms* (*samguksagi* 三國史記) written by Kim Pu-sik in the twelfth century, it is considered as an important source to shed light on the Three Kingdom Periods as well as other preceding periods.
down to the world of [people], Hwanin gave his son three heavenly seals and three thousand people and sent him down to Mountain Taebaek, the place that was best suited for devotion to the welfare of [humankind] (hongik ingan 弘益人間). Hwanung came down to the Sindansu (divine-altar tree) on the top of Mountain Taebaek, where he established the Sinsi (divine city 神市). Along with his three loyal subjects, Pungbaek (wind), Usa (rain), and Unsa (clouds), Hwanung oversaw three hundred and sixty tasks such as grain, life, disease, punishment, good and evil, and ruled over the world of [people] with reason.

Then one day, a bear and a tiger, both of which lived in a cave together, begged Hwanung to be reborn as human beings. Hwanung told them that they would be transformed into women if they could spend one hundred days in a cave without seeing any light, while eating only a handful of sacred mugwort and twenty pieces of garlic which he provided them. The impatient tiger could not pass the test and ran out of the cave before it turned into a human, while the bear stood the test. On the twenty first day, the bear was turned into a woman called Ungnyŏ. Later, she married Hwanung and gave birth to a boy named Tan’gun Wanggŏm. In the fiftieth year of the reign of King Yao (2333 BC) in China, Tan’gun, choosing Pyŏngyang Fortress as his capital, founded his own kingdom named Chosŏn. He then moved the capital to Asadal near Mountain Paegak, where he ruled for one thousand and five hundred years. The capital was moved to Changdanggyŏng after Kija became the new king of Chosŏn. Tan’gun later returned to Asadal, where he died at the age of 1,908 and became a sinsŏn (immortal 神仙). [Han 2010: 88-89, original translation by Han]

As described in this myth, Tan’gun as the progenitor of Koreans and as the Kojosŏn founder has achieved a symbolic status among Korean people, serving as “the origin of

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9 Sarah M. Nelson made an error in understanding Tan’gun and the myth in one of her books, confusing Ungnyŏ as Tan’gun’s wife, not his mother. “The most recent announcement concerned the excavation of a burial attributed to Tan’gun and his wife. Nothing was said about evidence of her bear ancestry in the excavated tomb, but the bones were said to be exceptionally large. (Tan’gun was the culture hero founder of the state of Ancient Chosŏn in northern Korea, who married a bear that transformed into a woman)” (Nelson 2004: 175). Nelson’s earlier book, however, delivers the myth more correctly by describing Tan’gun was a son from a she-bear and a son of Hwanin (Nelson 1993: 155).

10 The actual place of capitals of Kojosŏn also provides a source of debates and ample room for conjecture. Some consider current Pyŏng Yang as where the mythical Pyŏngyang Fortress was located, while others argue that it must have been in Manchuria. Han Yŏng Woo explains the location of Pyŏngyang as supposedly the Hongshan Culture area in Liaoxi, the areas of Chifeng, Niuhe ling, and Chaoyang (Han 2010: 89). Identifying the actual site of capitals of Kojosŏn holds significance in that it is directly related to the territory and power of Kojosŏn, and also those of other kingdoms subsequent to Kojosŏn such as Koguryŏ and Koryŏ.
Korean people’s national identity and collective self-esteem” (Jeong 2001). Given that Kojosôn has always been considered as having opened the first page of Korean history marking the birth of the Korean nation, the public responses to the archaeological timeline at the NMK were by no means a surprise. Hence the absence of Kojosôn in the chronological timeline at the Archaeology Hall was understood as a denial of national origin, rather than an interpretation of archaeological validity. Some visitors expressed their frustration saying that the NMK’s rejection of Kojosôn is nothing but a betrayal of its own history and people.11 The reluctance of admitting the mythical details of Kojosôn and Tan’gun is even criticized as representing “the deeply colonized mind” (Yi Hyŏng-rae 2006: 374).

There is a considerable amount of research done in South Korea regarding the historicity of Tan’gun. So-called mainstream historians in academia prefer to draw a clear line between myth and history, understanding Tan’gun as more of a general noun used to refer to “chief priests” (Song 2002, 2003; Han 2010). Popular or non-conventional historians outside the institutional academia with strong nationalist orientation, on the other hand, firmly believe that Tan’gun was a historical figure who actually existed just as the myth explains (Yi Hyŏng-rae 2006; Yi Hyŏng-sŏk and Yi Chong-ho 2009).12 Regardless of the factuality, Tan’gun in South Korea has fully attained a status of signifier (signifiant in French) in Saussure’s sense. The signified

11 Interviews with visitors, during February 20–March 15, 2006.

12 According to the major historians in academia, Tan’gun originated from the term “tangol,” which means “chief priest.” They argue that the myth of Tan’gun is not about an actual mighty figure, but reflects the social situations when the religious priesthood and the political rulership was being merged within a bounded territory (Song 2000: 343-345).
(signifié in French) in this case, is the longevity of national history and the depth of national pride, as seen in the lyrics of the Kaechŏnjŏl song.\textsuperscript{13}

If we were water, there is the fountainhead
If we were trees, there is the root
The founding father of this nation is Tan’gun
The founding father of this nation is Tan’gun

The symbolic status of Tan’gun even established him as the marker for the beginning of national history with the use of Tangi (檀紀), the unique Tan’gun Era (TE). The TE made the 2333 BCE as the point of beginning. The number of 2333 is based on Sŏ Kŏ-chŏng’s Tongguk t’onggam. Sŏ adopted the number 2333 from Memorabilia of Three Kingdoms in which Tan’gun was described as building Kojosŏn “fifty years after the Chinese Emperor Yao was enthroned.” The problem with this comment is that Emperor Yao is another legendary figure. Hence there is very little basis for the year 2333 to stand for any actual historical event, just as with the case of Tan’gun (Song 2002: 48-49). Despite this ambiguity around Tan’gun and the year 2333, the Tan’gun Era was the one officially used in South Korea from 1948 to 1961.\textsuperscript{14}

The TE was employed as a way of eradicating colonial imprints and resurrecting national pride. The use of the TE as the official designation of the calendar era for South Korea provided a solid platform for forming a collective memory among people. Placing a great emphasis on legitimacy both in political and cultural tradition is not an unusual practice in politically and socially unstable nation-states and Tan’gun was re-discovered

\textsuperscript{13} Kaechŏnjŏl (開天節, literally meaning the “day the sky opened”) is a Korean national holiday (October 3) to commemorate the origin of Korean history by Tan’gun. The Kaechŏnjŏl song is taught in every public school in Korea, from elementary to high schools.

\textsuperscript{14} The TE first century falls on 2333 BCE., based on Tongguk T’onggam, chronicles of early Korean history compiled by Sŏ Gŏ -chŏng in 1485.
in such efforts. The use of the TE was officially terminated in the 1960s under the Park Chung Hee regime, as a part of the modernizing project. However, it is not difficult to find people still using the TE, most of whom are either nationalist historians, or people who simply share their nationalist perspectives. In these days, maintaining the use of the TE in publications is considered a way of expressing one’s view on the spectrum of nationalist positions.

The symbolic status of Tan’gun goes beyond an object of mere appreciation. It was even installed as a quasi-deity for ultimate veneration. Taejonggyo, a religion that worships Tan’gun as the progenitor of the Korean people, was established at the dawn of the colonial period by Na Chŏl in 1909. Taejonggyo succeeded in drawing popularity among the public since then, mostly with an appeal to nationalist minds. The veneration toward Tan’gun during the colonial period was also an aspiration for national independence. During the colonial time, the Tan’gun-related rituals such as commemorating Kaechŏnjŏl, a day in commemoration for Tan’gun’s opening of the first page of Korean history, was also officially practiced among members of the Provisional Government of Korea (1919-1945) (Oh 2005). Although the heyday of Taejonggyo seems to be gone, it is still active under the new banner of the “Association of Han minjok Movement” (Han minjok undong yŏnhap). This group is in fact deeply related to Taejonggyo but the new name sounds more nationalistic than religious to the general public. The Association of Han minjok Movement has been actively engaged in the

15 Followers of Taejonggyo form another circle of the TE users.

16 Han minjok is a self-identifying term referring to Koreans themselves as descendants of Tan’gun. More discussion of Han minjok is in chapter six.
revival of Tan’gun, most well known of which was the late 1990s campaign of building statues of Tan’gun at elementary schools. Sin Eûn-che’s study of commemorative statues and collective memory has a table showing the categories of statues in elementary schools in the Pusan area (Sin 2006). According to the table, statues of Tan’gun outnumber those of other historical figures including the Great King of Sejong or the “Korean Jean de Arc” Ryu Kwan-sun, a girl who led the March first movement in 1919. The only historical figure that outnumbered Tan’gun in terms of the statues is Yi Sun-shin. Considering that Yi’s popularity was by and large a product of the Park Chung Hee regime’s conscious and intensive manipulation of collective memory in an attempt to establish legitimacy for his own dictatorship achieved by the military coup, the high numbers of Tan’gun statues should be seen as revealing the extent of influence exercised by the Association of the Han minjok Movement and Tan’gun. The sense of collective identity around Tan’gun is aptly captured in what Jeong Young-hun called “Tan’gun Nationalism” (Jeong 2001).

4.4 Contested History: The Northeast Project of China and Koguryŏ

The heart-felt attachment to Tan’gun as a national progenitor, which was clearly a product of institutionalized education through schools and media, was not the sole basis for the public’s resentment toward the NMK’s display of an “archaeologically correct”

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17 Yi Sun-shin (1545-1598) was a naval commander of the Chosôn dynasty. He is best known for having defeated the Japanese navy during the two Japanese invasions of Korea (1592-1598). Yi was one of the military figures that the Park Chung Hee regime highly evaluated as Korean national heroes to validate its own military coup and political rule.

18 Some Korean Protestant groups intensely argued for the removal of Tan’gun statues from elementary schools, saying it was an act of idolism. The conflict increased until several Tan’gun statues got beheaded overnight by anonymous attacks.
timeline with no Kojošon on it. Another factor came from outside of South Korea. Kojošon recently got more attention and importance among South Korean people as China launched the controversial “North East Project (Northeast Borderland History and the Chain of Events Research Project 東北邊疆歷史與現狀系列研究工程)” at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2002.

The proposed goal of the Northeast project, according to the Chinese government, was to conduct comprehensive research on the history and current state of the Northeastern peripheral territories. Neighbouring countries such as South Korea and North Korea and Japan raised concerns about this quasi-academic project from the beginning, for it was seen by them as China’s insidious effort to rewrite its own history with it, and that of East Asia, in a way that eventually builds up China’s cultural, historical, political and even economic legitimacy for any future territorial disputes (Pang 2004; Kim Chŏng-hi 2004; Yi In-ch’ŏl 2010; Song 2004; Ch’oe 2004; Yi Sŏk-u 2004). More specifically, the controversy posed “a potential threat to regional stability in case of radical changes in North Korea and/or continued intensification of Chinese popular nationalism” (Seo 2008: 40). As seen in Ma Dazheung’s (馬大正) assertion, it was at least apparent that the implication of launching such a project has more political dimensions than academic. The project states that, “The direct purpose of the Northeast Project is to ensure a long and stable state government, and hence a united state, integrated nations, and stabilized boundaries should be the starting point of this great initiative” (Yi Hyo-hyŏng 2009: 23). No doubt the Northeast Project greatly disturbed neighbouring nation-states in its realization, including North Korea and South Korea, Japan, and Russia. When it comes to South Korea and China, sites of Koguryŏ and
Parhae are at the centre of the dispute (Kim Chŏng-hi 2004; Yi In-ch’ŏl 2010). While South Korea asserts that these two sovereign kingdoms were legitimate parts of Korean history, China regards them as provincial powers that belonged to Chinese history (Yŏ 2010). The Northeast project was seen by South Koreans as China’s insidious and systematic attempt to usurp Korean history and to incorporate it into Chinese history (Chung 2009). People organized mass protests against China, and scholars pointed out the need to launch a long term re-evaluation process for Korea’s ancient history (Song 2002: 8).

Along with the Northeast project, China’s application for UNESCO World Heritage nomination for sites containing Koguryŏ relics located in current Chinese territories also raised concern (Yi In-ch’ŏl 2010: 48). In July 2004, the twenty eighth session of UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee (WHC), held in Suzhou, China, decided to add “Capital cities and tombs of the ancient Koguryŏ” submitted by China to the World Heritage List (World Heritage Ref #1135). At the same venue, North Korea succeeded as well in getting a complex of Koguryŏ tombs, which consists of thirty individual tombs, inscribed on the World Heritage List (World Heritage Ref #1091). The title of an article appearing in a South Korean online newspaper Oh My News right after

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19 On November 6, 1972, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at its seventeenth session adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. In 1976, UNESCO set up the World Heritage Committee, an inter-governmental cooperative body, under the Convention. The committee is responsible for including cultural and natural treasures of outstanding universal value on the World Heritage List. World heritage is divided into three types: natural, cultural (including cultural sites) and the combination of natural and cultural heritage. Making a World Heritage List is an effort “to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity”(The Official UNESCO Website). As of June 2010, the World Heritage List includes 936 properties (725 cultural, 183 natural, and 28 mixed).
the WHC’s decision, aptly captured the general sentiment of South Korean people toward the result: “Koguryŏ, did we get the half repatriated, or get the half stolen?” (Oh My News 2004). In line with the rationale of the Northeast Project, the information appearing on one Chinese website for its World Heritage sites explained Koguryŏ primarily as a provincial ethnic group of China:

Koguryŏ was a regime established by an ancient ethnic group living in northern China. In 37 BC, the Koguryŏ Kingdom was founded in present-day Xinbin County, Liaoning Province. Later its capital was established in Heshenggu City (in present-day Huanren County, Liaoning Province). The capital was moved to Guonei City when Weinayan City (both in Ji'an City of Jilin Province) was set up in 3 BC, and was moved finally to Pyŏngyang in 427. The Koguryŏ regime ended in 668. [The Official Website of PRC’s Embassy at Liberia]

Judging from this statement, it was clear that the UNESCO’s initial idea of the World Heritage sites being appreciated as the heritage of all humankind, rather than being regarded as exclusive properties of specific nation-states, was not fully satisfied by the host countries. UNESCO made its intention with the World Heritage designation clear from the beginning. This is shown in the following statement, “What makes the concept of World Heritage exceptional is its universal application. The World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located” (The Official Website of UNESCO). However, in reality, the UNESCO World Heritage becomes a source of conflict and contestation among involved nation-states.

Many conflicts fester unresolved because bereaved claimants are poor and weak. No wonder ex-colonial Asian and African nations spearhead UNESCO’s heritage restitution drive. Though now sovereign, these states often seek in vain to regain purloined icons of identity. Lacking armed clout, they rely on moral entreaty, with predictably few victories. [Lowenthal 1994:52]

Examining the meanings and implications of Koguryŏ allows us to gauge South Korean people’s emotional attachment to Koguryŏ and Parhae. Among the Three Kingdoms,
Koguryŏ occupied the far north region of the Korean Peninsula and beyond, situated closely to China and other northern tribes such as Mohe (靺鞨) and Khitan (契丹). Due to its geopolitical location, Koguryŏ was in frequent and constant conflict and war with the northern tribes and China, and it is often described in Korean history textbooks as being “a breakwater of our nation.” It is widely suggested that the Sui Dynasty of China consumed a considerable amount of its power in three major wars with Koguryŏ, which eventually led to the premature demise of the once-affluent Sui Dynasty. Hence the militaristic and masculine character of Koguryŏ was partly historically-based and was later reemphasized during the military regime of Park Chung Hee in the 1970s. Park’s primary motivation in emphasizing Koguryŏ was likely providing legitimacy to his own dictatorship based on a military coup and thus quelling dissident voices. Park drew on Sin Ch’ae-ho’s historical narratives of Korea to establish persuasive grounds to appeal to the nationalist minds.20 In a subsequent series of military regimes that lasted until the early 1990s in South Korea, the alleged masculinity and valour of the Koguryŏ society was continuously reemphasized and reproduced through the school curriculum and various media. As Sheila Miyoshi Jager elaborated in her examination of the War Memorial in Seoul, the value of Koguryŏ’s military spirit was in large part conditioned by political intentions of military dictatorship in the 1970s-1980s (Jager 2003). Largely drawing on this perpetuated image of Koguryŏ, it is now customary to consider Koguryŏ as the most masculine and militarized kingdom, not just among the Three Kingdoms but

20 Sin Ch’ae-ho (1880-1936) is a nationalist historian famous for his historical narrative of Korea as “history of minjok ” (history of Korean nation or ethnicity) during the colonial time (Schmid 1997: 27). In Sin’s narratives of minjok-centered Korean history, the line of Tan’gun Kojosŏn-Puyŏ-Koguryŏ got particular emphasis.
also throughout the entire Korean history. Many South Koreans sincerely believe that the picture would have been fundamentally different if Koguryŏ, rather than Silla, which was the final winner who unified the Three Kingdoms in 668 CE, had unified the Three Kingdoms. People believe that the big historical “if” would have placed Korea in a very different position than now—geographically, culturally, economically, politically, and by extension, globally. Koguryŏ’s geographical location in the northern part of the Korean peninsula, with its proximity to the main continent of Eurasia, makes the what-if picture more desirable to most South Koreans, in that Korean people might have occupied larger territory than the current Korean peninsula. Detailed discussion of the history and culture of Koguryŏ requires a separate analysis. Suffice it to say that the Northeast project of China stirred up a sense of violation and even of insult among South Koreans, making it urgent to understand and defend ancient history of “our [South Koreans’] own.”

Many of the Koguryŏ exhibits in Korean museums are usually comprised of military goods and mural replicas that contain scenes of horseback hunting or martial arts practices. At the NMK, the situation is no different. Due to the fact that the former territories of Koguryŏ are now in North Korea and China, access to actual Koguryŏ sites is highly limited for South Korean scholars. The NMK’s strategy of reconstructing Koguryŏ life with replicas of murals and tombs is in part an unavoidable choice under the circumstances of the current North-South division of Korea. A timely response in regard to the WHC’s decision regarding Koguryŏ sites appeared at the NMK. Right outside the Koguryŏ hall, one large wall is completely covered with a map of World Cultural

21 Public attention was driven not just to Koguryŏ but to the whole spectrum of Korean history, especially around earlier ones including Kojosŏn.
Heritage sites that once belonged to any part of Korean history. It includes not just sites within the Korean peninsula such as those of Silla and Chosŏn, but also Koguryŏ sites currently located in Chinese territories. Each World Cultural Heritage site related to any part of Korean history in its entirety is marked on the map with photos. The effect of colourful floor-to-ceiling pictures is to expose the visitors to a visualized and spatialized history, unfolding the regional extent that Korean culture once reached. Interestingly enough, all the sites were marked with its historical periods, but there is not a word regarding current territorial ownership or stewardship of those sites. Ancient tombs of Koguryŏ currently in China are marked as “Koguryŏ sites,” with no trace of China’s part in regard to the World Cultural Heritage List. No information on South Korea-China disputes around them is provided with the map. The same is the case with those sites currently located in North Korea. The political division between the two Koreas seems to have simply melted away in the extensive portrayal of deep Korean history. Contemporary nationalities and sovereignties were completely effaced in this large scale diagram for the sake of Korea’s long and glorious history. Complexities of the present were completely masked over by the depth of the past in an effort to assert historical legitimacy.

4.5 The Victory of Nationalism: Kojosŏn Hall at the NMK

Although the Tan’gun figure as the founding father and the related myth entailing the year of 2333 BCE were neither historically nor archaeologically validated, it was widely acknowledged among scholars in both fields that Kojosŏn emerged sometime during the Bronze Age as the first state in the Korean peninsula. Nevertheless, defining the details of the Kojosŏn state, such as its territories, state power and relations with
neighbouring states, still requires more archaeological data. However, once the NMK had hastily inserted the year 2333 BCE in the archaeological timeline as the founding year of Kojosŏn in the midst of the public dispute, it was felt that it had to be reconciled by the NMK. In a sense, like the first button of a shirt that is misplaced, a historical narrative of Korea beginning with Kojosŏn founded in 2333 BCE became a precondition that the NMK would abide by from then on regardless of contradicting evidence.

Kojosŏn Hall was not included in the original floor plan for the reopened NMK. It was later added in 2009 as part of a renovation project of the Archaeology Hall. Along with this, another significant change was made to the chronological panels installed at the entrance of each small room of the Archaeology Hall. Before the installation of the Kojosŏn Hall, each room had a panel with a specific period highlighted within a wider chronology consisting of Palaeolithic Period—Neolithic Period—Bronze Age and Early Iron Age—Proto-Three Kingdom Period—Three Kingdom Period. With the arrival of Kojosŏn Hall, the revised chronology became as follows; Palaeolithic Period—Neolithic Period—Bronze Age and Kojosŏn—Puyŏ and Samhan—Three Kingdom Period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Renovation</th>
<th>After Renovation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palaeolithic Period</td>
<td>Palaeolithic Period</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neolithic Period</td>
<td>Neolithic Period</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bronze Age &amp; Early Iron Age</td>
<td>Bronze Age and Kojosŏn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proto-Three Kingdom Period</td>
<td>Puyŏ and Samhan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Kingdom Period</td>
<td>Three Kingdom Period</td>
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Table 4.1 Name Changes in Chronological Periods at the NMK
The change accomplished by the renovation was twofold. The first, obviously, was the official introduction of Kojosŏn into the “Bronze Age and Early Iron Age,” and also into the field of South Korean archaeology at a national museum. The official inclusion of Kojosŏn in South Korean archaeology was enthusiastically celebrated by the general public, in one case interpreted as “the resurrection of Tan’gun” (Sisa Korea Journal 2009). Another implication of this change, as Ch’oe Kwang-sik, the former NMK director who led the renovation said, was that it made the museum narratives congruent with those that appeared in the school curriculum that situates Kojosŏn as the first state of Korea built in 2333 BCE. The second change was the replacement of “Proto-Three Kingdom Period” with “Puyŏ and Samhan.” This change was understood in a similar context of the installation of Kojosŏn Hall. Getting rid of the term “Proto-Three Kingdom Period” was seen as an effort to redress history, since the term had been highly criticized by the nationalist side on the grounds that it was the exemplar case of “a colonial view of history (sikmin sakwan).” According to the nationalist criticism, the “Proto-Three Kingdom Period” was introduced by the Japanese colonial government in an attempt to downplay the significance of Puyŏ in Korean history and to make Korean history seem as primitive and delayed in development as possible.22 Thus replacing “Proto-Three Kingdom Period” with Puyŏ and Samhan period was evaluated as another victory on the nationalist side, which consistently denounces the Japanese colonial legacy in South Korean archaeology, in South Korean national museums, and in South Korean

| 22 Puyŏ is generally believed in Korea to be the predecessor of Koguryŏ. |
After the renovation, each panel with archaeological chronology has a dubbed tape to reflect the terminological changes.

With an exhibit room secured exclusively for Kojosŏn, the task left for the NMK staff was to choose the right objects to fill the glass boxes and to develop narratives to imbue the space. Of course, the narrative should comply with the thesis that Tan’gun established the state of Kojosŏn in 2333 BCE. The majority of objects finally exhibited in Kojosŏn Hall are bronze daggers and arrowheads that supposedly show the “Kojosŏn-style” (Lianoning Type), although in the labels of most of these objects, both the terms “Kojosŏn” and “Bronze Age” are indicated as eras. Considering that objects from the early Three Kingdom Period have their eras labeled as “Three Kingdom Period” instead of “Iron Age,” indicating both the state name and the archaeological period for the alleged Kojosŏn objects reveals the anguished effort on the part of the staff who seem torn between scholarly integrity and popular demand. With the ongoing debate around the territory of Kojosŏn and the location of its capitals, the staff needed to conjure up narratives that accommodate at least parts of both sides of the story in the Kojosŏn Hall exhibit.

In its finalized version, Kojosŏn Hall is organized around four themes: (1) Formation of Kojosŏn (2) Changes in Kojosŏn (3) Development of Kojosŏn and (4) Fall of Kojosŏn and its aftermath. Only a glance around the room reveals that structured narratives are imposed on the objects displayed, rather than narratives being derived from

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23 This change is currently effective only in national museums in Korea. For instance, as of June 2011, the Korean Gallery at the British Museum still adopts the “Proto-Three kingdoms” in its timeline, and Kojosŏn is not indicated.
and reconstructed based on the objects. There are several maps in Kojosŏn Hall that show the broadest extent of Kojosŏn territory and the wide distributional areas of supposedly Kojosŏn-specific objects, such as Liaoning type bronze daggers and arrow heads. Song Ho-chŏng, a historian at the Korean National University of Education who wrote the first South Korean doctoral dissertation on Kojosŏn in 1998, strongly argued against the tendency of assuming any area excavated with a Liaoning style bronze dagger as Kojosŏn territory, criticizing this as “uncommonsensical reasoning” (Song 2003: 19). Song pointed out that the Liaoning type bronze daggers were used by various groups of people, and were not exclusive to Kojosŏn people. According to Song, presuming any area excavated with Liaoning type bronze daggers as Kojosŏn territory is similar to arguing that the USA is Korean territory if Americans ever used the same knife as Koreans did (Song 2000: 345-346). Hence the displayed objects did not constitute sufficient evidence to support the territorial claims on the maps. Despite the painstaking effort on the part of the staff to strike a balance between popular expectation and scholarly resources, this incongruence was easy to spot in the Kojosŏn Hall. For example, a label for the signature Kojosŏn object, the biggest and the most well-known prototype Liaoning type bronze dagger, revealed the limit and incompleteness of the alleged claim of Kojosŏn-specific objects. The label, in indicating the origin of the dagger, a signature Kojosŏn object, reads “probably from Sinch’ŏn, Hwanghaenam-do” (emphasis added). In other words, the bronze dagger that is often featured in textbooks and other media as a signature Kojosŏn item has no evidence of being excavated within or around the Kojosŏn territory, no matter how unclear that territory might be. No one knows where the bronze
dagger was actually found. Only the stylistic feature of the dagger as an example of Lianoning type was the primary justification for this dagger to be representing Kojosŏn.

**Figure 4.1 Liaoning Type Dagger at the NMK**

![Liaoning Type Dagger at the NMK](image)


The unavoidable void that archaeological objects failed to fulfill, since the existence of Kojosŏn has not been archaeologically confirmed as discussed above, was instead filled by visual media. On a LCD screen on the wall of the Kojosŏn Hall, a documentary was being played throughout the day. The documentary, an episode of the popular Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) television show *History Special* featuring Kojosŏn, was telling a story about the mystery state of Kojosŏn—how large it was, how powerful it was, how sophisticated it was, and how really “Korean” it was. Being a
popular nation-wide television show, *History Special* is famous for tracking down and reconstructing interesting historical events or periods, drawing on various resources such as archives, archaeological data, computer-based simulation programs, and sometimes anthropological surveys. The episode on Kojosŏn unfolded the largest possible territories of Kojosŏn, showing it once occupied most of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, and emphasized the strong statehood of Kojosŏn that threatened many neighbouring states.

Most students on a fieldtrip to the NMK would sit right in front of the screen and watch the documentary, which was often followed by a recap by their guiding teachers. Those students usually came to the museum with previous knowledge on Tan’gun Kojosŏn and the history textbook version of the famous story. After touring the Kojosŏn Hall, the documentary once again confirmed what they already knew even before coming to the museum. The specific episode, however, had been publicly criticized by Song Ho-chŏng. Song accused the *History Special* and nationalist historians who claim a historic figure Tan’gun built Kojosŏn in 2333 BCE as making up a story with non-existent ghost images and thus absurdly situating the mythical figure of Tan’gun in history. After detailed criticism of the incorrectness and arbitrariness of the episode’s contents on Kojosŏn, Song concluded that nationalist claims regarding Tan’gun and Kojosŏn were nothing more than an arbitrary interpretation of archaeological data for the sake of ultra nationalism (Song 2000). To him, the religious fervour toward Tan’gun and Kojosŏn among nationalist historians and the general public are understandable, but not acceptable.

In an interview with a Korean newspaper *Han’guk ilbo*, Song succinctly criticized this wishful thinking: “I know that people turn to Tan’gun and Kojosŏn whenever contemporary society struggles with its own problems . . . however, a fantasy of
nationalism cannot replace history” (Han’guk ilbo 2000). What Kojosŏn Hall really shows is an attempt to define ambiguous ancient history with limited evidence to support present nationalist claims.

Figure 4.2 Students Watching History Special on Kojosŏn

Students watching History Special on Kojosŏn at the NMK

4.6 Parhae Hall and the Repatriation of History

In establishing cultural and ethnic affiliation from Kojosŏn to Koguryŏ, and eventually to South Korea, there is another northern kingdom that substantiates the lineage. Parhae (渤海 Bohai in Chinese pronunciation), a short-lived but quite flourishing kingdom, was a dynasty established by Tae Cho-yŏng in 698, thirty years after the fall of Koguryŏ. Parhae was finally conquered by the Khitan in 926, and the
remaining residents of Parhae were forced to relocate to Liaodong, emptying the area Parhae had occupied. The fact that no dynasty immediately succeeding Parhae occupied its former areas right after its demise resulted in a significant lack of archaeological objects and historical documents for Parhae. Partly due to this lack of materials for investigation, most research on Parhae published in South Korea focuses on defining its cultural and ethnic affiliation, which is directly related to questions of the historical lineage of Parhae (Im 2008; Song 1993; Sŏ 2007), such as who were Parhae people? What culture did they have? Is it possible to track down Parhae descendants? Ultimately, who are entitled to claim Parhae as their own history? Although all the above questions are still in debate among scholars, South Korea nevertheless makes a strong claim that Parhae constituted a legitimate part of Korean history. Even in the dearth of Parhae collections, the NMK and the NFMK managed to install Parhae Halls with replicas and photos. The presence of Parhae at both national museums is not so much a collection-based museum practice as a nationalist statement to secure the lineage of South Koreans.

The ethnicity or nationality of Tae Choyŏng, the founder of Parhae, is not clear (Song 1993: 290). Some believe he was of Koguryŏ descent, while others believe he was of Mohe descent. Since Tae, the founding hero of Parhae, has an unclear background in terms of ethnicity, research on Parhae in South Korea tends to focus on group identity rather than individuals in studying the kingdom-building process of Parhae (No 1981, 2009; Song 1991; Im 1993). The residents of Parhae were mostly composed of Koguryŏ refugees along with the Mohe, with the latter far outnumbering the former. The fact that the Mohe constituted the majority of Parhae residents provides grounds for Chinese scholars to argue that Parhae is a part of Chinese history. South Korean scholars, on the
other hand, paid attention to the cultural character of Parhae rather than numeric statistics of residents, concluding that despite the small number, the political and cultural power of Koguryŏ refugees were much more influential than that of the Mohe. Drawing on this argument, South Korean scholars have determined Parhae to be the legitimate heir to Koguryŏ. The cultural and ethnic affiliation of Koguryŏ is then related to Koryŏ and Chosŏn, forming a neat linearity from as early as Kojosŏn to current South Korea. Song Ki-ho, a historian at Seoul National University, argues against this type of purpose-driven research of Parhae, saying that it is true that Parhae inherited much of Koguryŏ culture, especially Buddhism, but that there also exists abundant evidence indicating influences from other cultures. Song contends that Parhae is definitely a part of Korean history, but putting a nationalist agenda in front of scholarly integrity is not right, nor desirable (Song Ki-ho 1993; 1999).

Then why is this controversial history of Parhae represented at national museums in South Korea? A separate hall for Parhae at the NMK is a recent addition. Before the reopening in Yongsan, the chronological organization of the Archaeology Hall ended with Unified Silla (676-935). Parhae was mentioned in a panel of the timeline, but did not have an exhibit room of its own. The absence of the Parhae exhibit at the NMK was constantly pointed out both by academics and the public. Song Ki-ho, also once emphasized the imperative to include Parhae in the NMK’s permanent exhibits. He wrote;

. . . (at the NMK) Parhae is indicated in the panel of a timeline, but there is no exhibit hall solely prepared for Parhae. Of course, there are not many archaeological objects of Parhae left to display. However, the symbolic status of the NMK as the centre of South Korean museums cannot be neglected. The NMK is a destination of foreign scholars and young students. Therefore, even though the scale would be small, the NMK
should consider borrowing Parhae objects from the Seoul National University Museum and displaying them with photos of Parhae sites and objects. Using replicas can be another option until Korea is unified. There is no need to insist on having real objects on display. The more important thing is to visually demonstrate, both to foreigners and to our Korean people, that Parhae indeed constitutes our history. [Song 1999: 31, my translation]

With the relocation project, the new NMK finally secured a small space exclusively for Parhae and filled it with mostly replicas and photos, just as Song suggested. At the time of the reopening, the Parhae Hall was located at the end of the East Wing, right after the Unified Silla Hall. The quality and quantity of Parhae exhibits were far less than those of its counterpart Unified Silla, making the counter partnership printed on the banner “Period of North-South States,” less convincing. Many visitors complained about the scale and quality of the Parhae exhibit. A policy of “better than nothing” was aptly applied to the case of the Parhae Hall at the NMK, but still, the quantity and quality of the Parhae exhibit remained minimal at best. In 2009, the NMK announced a renovation on the first floor, which included the expansion and relocation of the Parhae exhibit to a much larger space. More Parhae objects were lent from Russia to fill the new glass boxes.

24 The term of “North-South States Period” was first coined in Yu Dük-kong’s Parhaego (Thoughts on Parhae, 1784) as referring to the period when Parhae and Unified Silla coexisted in the Korean Peninsula, with the former in the Northern part and the latter in the Southern part. Until the late 1970s, the “Unified Silla period” was the conventional term used to refer to the same period. In endeavours during the 1980s to revive the Northern history of Koguryŏ and Parhae, scholars began to prefer to the “North-South States Period” over “Unified Silla period” and now the former is much more in frequent use than the latter. History textbooks currently officially employ “North-South States Period” and so do the NMK and the NFMK. However, there are criticisms on the prevalent use of this term, focusing on the fact that there were few interactions between Parhae and Unified Silla. Kim Chŏng-hi shed light on the fact that the term of North-South states usually got used in historical description when these two states were divided and then unified later. Kim criticized the overuse of the North-South States Period, pointing out that there are no historical records that confidently show either Unified Silla or Parhae considered each other as a counterpart of its own (Kim Chŏng-hi 2004: 222-223). Yi Sŏng-si also contends that there is little supporting evidence for active exchanges between Silla and Parhae (Yi 2001: 125-126).
A big panel depicting the enormous territories of Parhae in its heyday was hung in the wall of a new space.\(^{25}\) Photos showing the excavation process decorated the back wall. At least in terms of spatial structure, the new Parhae Hall is on a par with other halls. The arrival of the new Parhae Hall at the NMK in 2009 was celebrated by visitors and media, since it was seen as having filled the void at the NMK in terms of the linearity of Korean history: Kojosŏn-Koguryŏ-Parhae-Koryŏ-Chosŏn-current South Korea.

The NFMK preceded the NMK in terms of including Parhae in its permanent exhibit. As mentioned in chapter two, there are three permanent exhibit halls at the NFMK: (1) History of Korean People (2) The Korean Way of Life and (3) The Life Cycle of a Korean. The chronological history of Korea is told in exhibit hall I, while the other two halls are based on thematic displays. With the much smaller scale of the NFMK in terms of building space, size of collection, and size of staff, it is interesting to see that there is an actual size replica of one of the Parhae ancient tombs, that of Princess Chŏng Hyo (貞孝 757-792). The replica was installed in 2000 as a part of a permanent exhibit under the theme of “Our Lost Kingdom, Parhae.”\(^{26}\) The replica was constructed with realistic details based on archaeological research. The brick inner room, covering stone panels and wall paintings were meticulously restored in the replica, delivering a vivid visualization of historical information. A restored tomb is placed inside a glass room revealing the inner room and overall structure to visitors. A small screen in front of

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\(^{25}\) While the “Map of Parhae Territory” is found both at the NMK and the NFMK, the illustrations of the two maps do not exactly overlap each other. This shows that the expansive territory of Parhae is more imagined than archaeologically validated.

\(^{26}\) After the renovation in 2005 - 2008, the Parhae exhibit at the NFMK is in the Hall of “History of Korean People,” under the sub-theme of “Expansion of Territories.”
the exhibit plays a short documentary on the history and culture of Parhae. Given the scarcity of archaeological objects (the NFMK has no Parhae object in its collection except for replicas), the effort to represent Parhae at the NFMK with an actual size replica of an ancient tomb looks both impressive and out of proportion. Regardless of the debates around the cultural and ethnic character of Parhae, the small panel in front of the tomb replica made it clear that the group central to building Parhae was the Koguryŏ refugees, not the Mohe.27

Parhae (698-926) was built by the former Koguryŏ residents headed by Tae Cho-yŏng ( ?-719), with the Mohe combined to it. Parhae was in tension with Tang from the beginning, but more or less stable international relations among Tang, classical Japan, Silla and Parhae were established since the mid eighth century. From the tenth reign of King Sŏn to the thirteenth king, Parhae enjoyed its heyday with the nickname of “a prosperous country East to the Sea (海東盛國).” [From the panel on Parhae at the NFMK]

Almost without fail, I came across visitors amazed at the tomb replica at the NFMK. People are impressed to “actually see” the Parhae site with their own eyes. The map of Parhae territory is another source of usual amazement, aspiration and lamentation. The following shows a typical conversation in front of the Parhae exhibit at the NFMK.28

“Wow, our [Korea’s] territory was that large, covering Manchuria and part of current China.” “Only if Parhae didn’t fall . . . I wish those territories were still ours [Korea’s]!” [Field observation at the NFMK, August 10, 2006]

27 The panel at Shangjing museum in China explains Parhae as follows, in direct contrast with that of the NFMK; “The state of Parhae (698 - 926) was a regional government established by the Mohe people, and it belonged to the Tang dynasty” (Song 1993: 16).

28 This kind of conversation was more frequently overheard between young children and their parents or young students and their teachers.
Thus the Parhae Exhibit at the NFMK and the NMK is a visualized tool for resurrecting and substantiating “lost” memories of Parhae among South Korean people. “Lost” may not be the right choice of term. If something is to be lost, that something must be owned beforehand. Rather than the quality of and the message delivered by the actual exhibit, the presence of the Parhae exhibit plays a role of testifying to South Korea’s legitimate ownership of lost history. The mobilization of visual culture in popular and institutional spheres is vital since visualization gives visitors a sense of remembering specific events, as if they happened in the past. Museums are the most exemplary places where an “event has been visualized and collectivized” (Conway 2010: 119).

4.7 Vanishing of Nangnang Hall: History Gone Astray

If Kojosŏn, Koguryŏ, and Parhae represent the process by which the anticolonial nationalist endeavor repatriates a “lost” past, the case of Nangnang presents an effort in the opposite direction. Nangnang (楽浪 Lelang) was one of Four Commanderies that the Han (漢) Chinese dynasty established in the former territory of Kojosŏn after its demise. Among the Four Commanderies, Nangnang existed for the longest period (108 BCE-313), developing a unique culture of its own. Objects and archaeological sites of Nangnang testify that it enjoyed a sophisticated culture in which elements of both Han(漢) Chinese and Kojosŏn were amalgamated (NMK 2001; Yi Sŏng-chae 2007; O Yŏng-ch’an 2006). Despite its splendid cultural legacy, finding a proper place for Nangnang within the nationalist discourse of South Korea was not easy. The composition of the

29 The other three were Chinbŏn (真番 Zhenfan), Imdun (臨屯 Lintun), and Hyŏndo (玄菟 Xizntu).
general people and the ruling class of Nangnang was exactly the opposite of Parhae. The majority of residents of Nangnang were Kojosŏn refugees, but the dominate culture was heavily influenced by that of the Han (漢) Chinese dynasty. Then to whose history does Nangnang belong? Applying the same rationale by which Parhae is considered a legitimate part of Korean history will conclude that Nangnang was a part of Han (漢) Chinese history. However, since Nangnang occupied the former area of Kojosŏn, leaving it out from Korean history can be problematic. At the same time, because of the fact that Nangnang was first and foremost established as a colony of Han (漢) China, embracing Nangnang as Korean history might feel equally uneasy to nationalist minds. Not just within the nationalist perspective of Korean history, but also within the NMK, finding a proper place for Nangnang was a thorny task. The series of episodes of installing and eventually closing off Nangnang hall at the NMK highlights the struggle of the museum in defining and defending South Korean identity in regard to the ancient past.

In contrast to the sumptuous appearance of its objects witnessed in one of its famous gold buckle pieces, the position of Nangnang at the NMK is muddied at best. The NMK has a substantial collection of over five thousand pieces of archaeological objects and excavation reports on Nangnang, most of which were acquired during the Japanese colonial period (NMK 2001). It was a part of the Japanese colonial regime’s effort to present the origin of dependency inherent in Korean history to justify Japanese aggression on the Korean Peninsula. By identifying Nangnang as a Chinese colony, the Japanese colonial regime supported archaeological projects that could reveal foreign controls of Korea in the past. With abundant archaeological sites that remain in the Pyŏngyang area (located in what is now North Korea) of the Korean peninsula, the
ancient history of Nangnang was seen by the Japanese as the perfect case for proving Korea’s tendency of dependency and its need for foreign intervention.

When the NMK was in the former Government-General building, Nangnang objects shared the same floor with Central Asian objects and Korean Calligraphy & Paintings. At the reopened NMK in the Yongsan area, Nangnang objects found a new home within the Asian gallery. On the NMK’s announcing a new location of Nangnang in the Asian gallery, public and media attention began to seethe. What was the nature of Nangnang in terms of cultural and ethnic makeup? Whose history does Nangnang belong to? Was it nothing but a Chinese colony as the Japanese colonial regime insisted, or was it a localized state that should be understood within the broad frame of Korean history? Answers to these questions would result in the Nangnang Hall being located quite differently at the NMK. Some people insisted that Nangnang should be considered as a legitimate part of Korean history, which would put Nangnang in the Archaeology Hall which specialized in prehistoric periods and the ancient history of Korea. Others felt hesitant about placing Nangnang within the Archaeology Hall, arguing that the culture of Nangnang shows too much Chinese influence. Although there was some disagreement with including the Nangnang Hall in the Archaeology Hall that exclusively displays the history of Korea, some people still appeared unsatisfied with the NMK’s decision to include the Nangnang Hall within the Asian gallery. A concern expressed in a newspaper

30 As discussed in chapter two and as will be explored in more details in chapter five, the Asian gallery was primarily designed to add a taste of diversity to the Korea-centered atmosphere of the NMK. China, Japan, Central, South and Southeast Asian objects are on display at the Asian gallery, aiming to widen the visitors’ perspectives. In the Asian Gallery, the seemingly most “unfitting” one is Nangnang (樂浪 Lelang in the Chinese pronunciation) Hall.
article exemplifies the uneasy public sentiment regarding the placement of Nangnang within the Asian Gallery: “Nangnang Hall has been included in the Asian gallery. It is interpreted as we [South Koreans] admitting Nangnang as Chinese history” (Kyŏnghyang sinmun 2008).

Including Nangnang Hall within the Archaeology Hall, on the other hand, would pose another problem. At the time of the reopening of the NMK when the new location of the Nangnang Hall was announced, there was no Kojošŏn Hall in the Archaeology Hall. The Archaeology Hall with Nangnang but without Kojošŏn would have been fundamentally problematic to most South Koreans. After all, Nangnang was a controversial burden among the NMK staff as well. As one chief curator remarked, “Some staff expressed their concern saying that if we place Nangnang in the Asian gallery, the history of Nangnang would be permanently excluded from our own history. However, other groups also question the legitimacy of Nangnang as Korean history on the basis that many objects from Nangnang tombs are identical to those of the Han (漢) dynasty in China” (Yŏnhap news 2007).

The debate regarding the location of Nangnang, both on the museum floor map and in Korean history, exemplifies how problematic the task of projecting present identity onto the ancient past is. Nangnang was not quite a “traditional” Korean culture in that it was heavily influenced by Han (漢) culture, but the fact that it was physically located in the Korean peninsula raised an indispensable need to examine every possible
bit of Koreanness in Nangnang culture. More specifically, the fact that Nangnang was established on the previous territory of Kojosŏn made it more critical for South Koreans to embrace it within the frame of their own history. Japanese colonial attempts to fabricate a Korean tendency of subordination added the need to develop a counterargument—that Nangnang artifacts indeed show the localization of Han Chinese on the basis of Kojosŏn culture, ultimately having produced a unique Nangnang culture.

The NMK did its best by offering an explanation of Nangnang culture as a unique culture born out of both Han and Kojosŏn influences, but locating it in the Asian Gallery dissatisfied many nationalist sentiments of South Koreans. Nevertheless, including Nangnang within the Archaeology Hall as an incontestably genuine Korean culture was not without criticism. After perennial disputes regarding the proper location of Nangnang Hall at the NMK, the NMK choose to shut it down entirely in the process of renovating the Asian Gallery, while keeping a very low profile with the ultimate closure of Nangnang Hall. New features of renovation of the Asian Gallery were highly advertised, but the removal of Nangnang Hall was done in absolute silence. Right before I briefly returned to South Korea in 2011 for follow-up study, I noticed that Nangnang Hall disappeared from the NMK’s official website. Before making an actual visit to the NMK, I made an inquiry on the phone regarding the “erasure” of Nangnang Hall from the NMK’s official website. The receptionist who answered my phone call had no idea regarding my inquiry and forwarded the call to the Asian Team. I was not provided with

31 In the museum guide book published during the 1990s, Nangnang culture was explained as having more of Han influence than that of Kojosŏn, which is only slightly represented in some daggers and earthenware. The narrative changed dramatically as some scholars developed new perspectives on Nangnang culture and its bearers. (see O Yong-ch’an 2006)
the name of the person who answered the forwarded call, but a woman supposedly from
the Asian Team simply confirmed my “finding” without much contextual explanation.
All I was told was that “The Nangnang Hall is now closed.” My inquiry as to the reason
for shutting down the Nangnang Hall was answered with another simple explanation,
“Because the exhibit is terminated.” Given that Nangnang Hall was installed as a part of
a permanent exhibit of the NMK, not as a special exhibit, this explanation was far from
adequate, nor persuasive. I looked for newspaper articles on the closing down of the
Nangnang Hall, but surprisingly there was no official press release from the NMK
regarding this matter. It was obvious that as the Nangnang Hall was closed, the space
was renovated as Artifacts from Sinan Shipwreck Hall II. The NMK indeed made an
announcement for this change under the heading, “the Asian Gallery at the NMK has
been renovated,” in which not a word on the disappearance of Nangnang was found.
When I visited the renovated Asian Gallery in 2011, there was no trace of Nangnang Hall
either in the floor maps or museum guide brochure. The only trace I found was a
discolouration on the wall of Sinan Shipwreck Hall II, where the word “Nangnang Hall”
once marked the walls with die cast letters. In the absence of the NMK’s official
announcement, it seems that the perennial debates regarding the proper location of
Nangnang Hall made the NMK turn to a more fundamental solution of removing the
cumbersome issue once and for all. Considering the previous media hype over the
Nangnang Hall at the NMK, it was truly odd to see that no official inquiry was made by
any group regarding the sudden disappearance of Nangnang Hall.
4.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter explored how the presence as well as absence of representation of the ancient past at national museums provoked debates around historical legitimacy and the practice of irredentism. Examining representations of and disputes around Kojosŏn (2333?–108 BCE), Koguryŏ (37 BCE–668), and Parhae (698–926) in and around national museums illuminates the interplay between museum narratives and popular nationalist discourses in the realm of historical legitimacy and irredentist claims. What is revealed by the museum representation of such ancient kingdoms are the museum’s (and by extension, South Korean society’s) efforts at and rationale for redeeming the “glorious past” through memory, history, and territory to legitimize the present politico-cultural entity. Bakhtin once succinctly summarized the characteristics of nationalist epic genre in literature where the past becomes dramatized and its relation to the present justified in the name of obscure national tradition. Alonso explains that;

Bakhtin characterized the epic as nationalist genre that has three constitutive features: 1. a national epic past, as the subject, 2. national tradition, as the source, and 3. an absolute epic distance, separating the epic world from contemporary reality. Temporal categories are valorized creating a hierarchy among past, present, and future in which the past becomes “the single source and beginning of everything good for all later times. . . the distance between past and present is mediated by national tradition. [Alonso 1994: 388]

The representation of ancient kingdoms and (re)construction of memory in national museums in South Korea reveals both the desire and frustration of the present projected to the past. In this process, South Korea’s postcoloniality plays a decisive role in asserting the ownership of the ancient past and thus of obtaining legitimacy in the present, as exemplified in the NMK’s contrasting ways of making representations of Kojosŏn, Koguryŏ, Parhae and Nangnang.
Chapter 5. Representation of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism at the National Museums of Korea

5.1 Introduction

The acceptance of the concept of *tanil minjok* (homogeneous ethnic nation or people) is a pervasive phenomenon in South Korean society. During the colonial period, Korean nationalist Sin Ch’ae-ho strove to provoke an anti-Japanese identity on the foundation of a distinct and homogeneous Korean ethnic consciousness. In post-liberation Korea, in a society of stark socioeconomic and traditional social hierarchies, diverse religious affiliations, discursive political and ideological loyalties, for better or worse, the unifying force remains the belief in ethnic homogeneity. This ethnic homogeneity is explicitly cultivated by the government, formal curriculum, and mass media.

The historic record shows that while traditional Korea may not have been particularly diverse, it was never ethnically homogenous. The idea of “pure blood” and single ethnicity is historically and scientifically unsupportable and the cultic belief in ethnic homogeneity in South Korea is a national myth rather than empirical reality. In recent years, the escalating influx of transnational migrant workers and the increase of international marriages (*kukche kyŏlhon*) are conspicuously undermining the myth of South Korean ethnic homogeneity. In particular, “international brides” are being brought to South Korea for the explicit purpose of marrying and birthing children who will be South Koreans. Nationally, South Korea has a critically low birth rate, which is even more acute in the superannuated rural countryside where most of these international brides are settling and producing new South Koreans, mixed heritage South Koreans.
The concept of ethnic homogeneity anywhere is necessarily essentialist and subjective since it cannot be defined in rigorous, consistent, empirical terms. In South Korea, there is terrible anxiety associated with challenging or undermining the myth because it has existed since colonial times and has been the principle foundation of cohesive Korean identity. Locating, discovering, or inventing an alternative nexus, such as a unifying political or philosophical ideology is a radical solution. However, social conservatives in South Korea are invested in maintaining, defending, and proliferating the myth of ethnic homogeneity, and what they fear most in the contemporary context of growing multiethnicity in South Korean society is the possible hybridization and “contamination” of the “pure” and essentialized South Korean culture (see Han Kyung-Koo 2007: 9-10). Therefore even though multiculturalism has become one of the official buzzwords of contemporary South Korean society as an expression of its desire to be validated as modern and civilized, manifested by the physical change in social landscape, its self-consciousness of genuine multicultural values remains superficial and self-absorbed (see Cho 2007: 5-6, Han Geon-Soo 2007: 34-35). With little interest in appreciating other cultural legacies introduced into its society, “multiculturalism” as promoted by the South Korean government and accepted by most South Koreans aims merely at tolerating foreigners by Koreanizing them as much as possible, with the perception of the superiority and purity of Korean ethnicity and culture as sacrosanct and immutable.

The main subject for the National Museum of Korea (NMK) is the history and culture of Korean people. The Asian Gallery at the re-opened NMK in Yongsan is a concerted effort to implement a multicultural scope to its hitherto self-centered narratives.
However, the exhibits displayed at the Asian Gallery are fragmentary with insufficient context, falling short of offering a comprehensive multicultural perspective. This is a direct result of the NMK’s strategy to frame the discourse at the Asian Gallery asapolitically and ahistorically as possible, in an attempt to assert Korean ethnic and cultural superiority and to avoid counter-discourse.

Compared to the NMK, multicultural efforts at the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK) are focused on the audience and educational programs rather than the exhibit alone. Foreigners comprise the most prominent target audience for various experiential programs (ch’ehōm) at the NFMK, and the museum developed specific “multicultural” programs for foreign residents of South Korea for the benefit of “promoting multicultural values to accommodate recent sociocultural changes in our (South Korean) society.” Revealed in designing and operating such multicultural programs, however, is a double standard prevalent in South Korean society in appraising the foreign cultural influences. While the “multicultural” efforts targeting the non-Korean, Asian “other” boils down to Koreanizing them by asserting South Korean superiority, the culture and values of the White Western “other” is often admired as constituting the global standard to which South Koreans aspire. The otherness of the non-White is feared and thus needs to be minimized by converting them into quasi-Koreans through multicultural policies, while the otherness of White Westerners is revered and envied under the banner of globalism.

5.2 Ethnic Homogeneity as a Source of South Korean Identity

Tanil minjok, meaning one ethnicity or one ethnic people, is the most favored phrase with which South Koreans describe themselves. Despite the popularity of the
word, even a cursory investigation of Korean history reveals that South Korea is far from being purely homogeneous in terms of decent or ethnicity. Nevertheless, the myth of ethnic homogeneity formed a platform for Korean identity since the colonial period, fusing anticolonial spirit and national consciousness together. As a source of South Korean identity, the myth of ethnic homogeneity is not purely about racial distinctions but more about the superiority of Korean culture, based on the belief that Koreans stem from a single ancestor and that Korean culture was continuously passed down by its members for more than five thousand years. However, while the belief in *tanil minjok* appears solid in South Korean society, the application of this slogan reveals ambiguity and mixed standards. What defines being a legitimate South Korean and Korean culture is differently understood in different cases: sometimes the concept of “blood” dominates all other factors, while at other times a cultural heritage overrides ethnic concerns as observed in cases where mixed descent “Koreans” are involved.

South Korean national identity has formed around the shared myth of ethnic homogeneity. This idea of ethnic nationalism was designed as a refuge for Koreans in the colonial period (1910-1945) in the face of Japanese imperial assimilation policies designed to undermine and ultimately eradicate a separate Korean identity. According to Andre Schmid, without a political state and with a bitter history of deep socioeconomic divisions and hierarchies, Koreans rallied around the abstract but inalienable idea of “race” as a refuge and seed for Korean nationalism (Schmid 2002). This myth of ethnic

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1 Ironically this reactionary response was based on Imperial Japan’s own mythologization of an ethnically homogenous Japanese family led by a “restored,” paternalistic Emperor (Fujitani 1996). Koreans replaced a living Emperor with an obscure mythical progenitor, Tan’gun (Simons 1995: 69).
homogeneity has not only survived the colonial period, but has grown to become the most pervasive psychological force for Koreans. It transcends time and space. It reaches beyond history and the North-South political divide. It galvanizes as powerfully as it alienates.

The Mongolian invasions in 1231 and again in 1270, and the Japanese invasion in the sixteenth century and Japanese colonial rule in the twentieth century all resulted in undeniable ethnic “mixing” that make historical claims of “pure blood” untenable. For two centuries at the beginning of the last dynasty (Chosŏn 1392-1910), there was an active program of cultural assimilation that brought immigrants (hyanghwa-in) from the neighbouring countries - China, Japan, Manchuria and from as far away as Tibet, and India (Han Kyung-Koo 2007: 12, Duncan 2000). The unique culture and wholly distinct dialect of Cheju Island, which lies in the Korean Strait off the southern tip of the Korean peninsula, also further suggests the possible mingling of different ethnicities and cultures in ancient times. In other words, historically, culturally, and even technically it is impossible to keep a certain group of people as “pure-blooded” for more than five thousand years and Korea is not an exception. Han Kyung-Koo also pointed out that the belief in ethnic homogeneity and discrimination toward other ethnicities is not found in traditional Korean society (Han Kyung-Koo 2007: 15-19).

It also needs to be noted that although the idiom of homogeneity sounds self-explanatory, its application involves ambivalent standards. Not only Koreans living on the Korean peninsula are seen as homogeneous, but also Korean expatriates living abroad are considered as exceptional members of the homogenous group if they are success. For example, if a Korean-American high school senior is selected to be a presidential scholar,
then the person would be in every South Korean newspaper and on major Internet portals with sensational but misleading titles like, “Korean student got selected as the most distinguished high school student in the United States.” When it turned out that President Obama’s daughter wore a dress designed by a Korean-American woman, South Korean people embraced the designer as a Korean, part of the homogeneous people of the Korean peninsula. It does not matter if the designer can speak Korean or the person retains a value system congruent to Korean culture. Sometimes the obvious “heterogeneity” in descent resulting from inter-ethnic marriages can be condoned on the ground that a person’s cultural background is much more imperative in determining true Koreanness. A few years ago, when Hines Ward, a NFL player whose father is an African-American and mother is South Korean, became the MVP of the year, South Korean media displayed an almost euphoric response to his achievement while underlining his Korean heritage traceable to his mother (Lee 2008). It is not difficult to run into news articles illustrating these kinds of ambiguous standards regarding the homogeneity of Koreans. Sometimes what is emphasized is “blood,” sometimes culture, and other times a mixture of both. If there is a rule of thumb in designating Koreanness in complicated cases, it would be if the case is something to be proud of or not. Simply stated, despite the common use, ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity are more often than not defined in an extremely arbitrary fashion.

5.3 Multiculturalism in Postcolonial South Korea

Multiculturalism is now a prevalent sociopolitical phenomenon around the world. Despite the fact that it is a word ending with “-ism,” multiculturalism is more of a label on the “multicultural condition” than an ideology (Kincheloe and Steinburg 1997: 2;
Mclennan 2001: 392). The South Korean case exhibits particularities that complicate the effective application of prevalent discussions of multiculturalism in other postcolonial societies. In examining multiculturalism in the postcolonial world, many studies have focused on societies that have colonial origins of multiculturalism (Chanady 1995; Gunew 1997). In Canada, Australia, and even in the United States, multiculturalism was actively implemented by the governments as official policies in an effort to minimize intercultural conflicts and seeds for social disintegration among groups with different cultural identities. Such groups included immigrants, indigenous people, and the descendants of settler colonizers. In other cases, as often seen in African nations that were under European colonial rule, multiculturalism is a direct product of the previous colonial occupation in which ethnic and cultural groups were arbitrarily demarcated, separated, and forced to integrate with each other for the imperialists to maximally exploit the colonized people and resources. South Korea is a postcolonial society, but both the operation of colonial rule in the past and the contemporary multicultural conditions are very different from those cases. As the only non-Western colonizer in the twentieth century, Japan was known for adopting an assimilation policy for colonized Korea based on the physical similarity. Additionally, for Koreans, the Japanese were not a completely alien people or civilization from distant shores. Japan and Korea had a long history of cultural exchange and military conflict that went back to ancient times, including eras and episodes of both mutual cooperation and bloody rivalry. Racial and cultural affinity between Japan and Korea made the latter resort to the concept of unique Korean ethnicity for creating anticolonial nationalist consciousness to defy the Japanese colonial ambition of assimilation.
The usual conceptual distinction between state multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism seen in literature on the issue also does not correctly accommodate the contemporary South Korean case (see Gunew 2004: 16-17). In South Korea, the government has made an effort to promote multiculturalism in its official discourse, but this is done mostly through cultural sectors such as national museums and occasional multicultural festivals. The South Korean government’s policy implementation is too minimal to be categorized as state multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism on the other hand, refers to a counter-hegemonic effort to question and criticize the monolithic and essentialist understanding of culture and its totalizing effect as embedded in multicultural discourse. For South Korea where interest and concerns in the multicultural condition are still in an early phase, it is premature to apply the frame of critical multiculturalism to the level of society.

Multiculturalism as a discourse is primarily interested in maintaining harmony and thus preventing conflicts in the society under consideration, rather than seeking to benefit particular cultural groups (Mclennan 2001: 392). In this chapter, South Korean multiculturalism is understood in this light, being conceptualized as a regulating mechanism of the society that rapidly becomes diversified in terms of ethnicity and cultural identity.

5.4 Multiethnicity vs. Multiculturalism

The reality and future prospects of further multiethnicity conspicuously challenges the efficacy of the myth of ethnic homogeneity in South Korean society and consequently undermines the basis of South Korean national identity. There are more than 1.2 million foreign residents in South Korean society, constituting nearly 2.4% of
the total population of South Korea (Frideres and Kim 2010: 679).² The 1.2 million figure is significant especially, “in the context of South Korea’s assiduously, even single-mindedly, crafted image as an ethnically/racially pure and homogenous nation” (Lim 2010: 52).

Transnational migrant workers and brides in international marriages are the two main groups contributing to recent ethnic diversity in contemporary South Korean society. According to Statistics Korea, transnational migrant workers are responsible for more than two percent of the total industry labor of South Korean society.³ As a group of the “isolated, marginalized, and disempowered” (Lim 2003: 424) social members, they routinely face social prejudice, discrimination, and sometimes even open hostility.⁴ Along with transnational migrant workers in the manufacturing industry, foreign spouses in international couples form another major group of non-ethnic Koreans in contemporary South Korean society (Lee, Seol and Cho 2006; Lee Hye-Kyung 2008; Jones and Shen 2008; Bélanger, Lee, and Wang 2010). As of 2006, the “multicultural marriages” accounted for 11.9 % of all marriages in South Korea.⁵ Interracial or international couples, which had been relatively rare in South Korea two decades ago,

² As of 2008, Statistics Korea estimated the number of transnational migrant workers as between 460,000 to 550,000, while the Korea Development Institute (KDI) calculated the figure somewhere between 680,000 to 800,000, which is approximately 250,000 more than Statistics Korea’s estimation. One of the representatives of Statistics Korea confessed that it was extremely hard to get a precise number of transnational migrant workers in Korea because there is a large number of “illegal” migrant workers who are not captured in the official statistics (World News, January 28, 2010).

³ 2009 press release from Ansan Foreign Workers Center.

⁴ Lim assessed the number of originating countries for migrant workers in Korea as 54, drawing on internal reports of the Foreign Workers’ Labor Counseling Office in Seoul, Korea (Lim 2003: 426). Since there are a significant number of illegal migrant workers who do not want themselves included in any kind of survey or report, to get precise statistics on them is extremely difficult.

⁵ Korean Immigration Service (KIS), the First Basic Plan for Immigration Policy 2009, p. 45.
exploded in number in the mid 1990s, and the number continues to grow. Since the 
1990s the majority of this group is comprised of international brides imported to South 
Korea from Southeast Asia or ethnic Koreans from China (Chosŏnjok). Typically the 
brides themselves tend to be very young women married to much older, rural South 
Korean men, and these marriages are arranged through brokerage services reminiscent of 
“mail order brides” or “picture brides” in the United States. Although the general 
birthrate in South Korea has plummeted to alarmingly low levels, these international 
families generally have more children than the average South Korean families.\(^6\) It is due 
to the fact that the Confucian idea of the importance of having sons remains much 
stronger in rural areas than in cities. In fact, the predominant motivating factor for many 
South Korean males involved in international marriages is to produce sons so that their 
patrilineal line can be secured.

Since the concept of ethnic homogeneity originating with the myth of Tan’gun is 
a long-standing belief in South Korea, ethnic heterogeneity or interracial relations can 
still cause almost phobic reactions among those who have internalized the “pure blood” 
myth of Korean ethnicity. People in favor of ethnic purity are opposed to granting full 
citizenship to the interracial children of international families, arguing those children are 
not authentic South Koreans in terms of blood purity.\(^7\) It is ironic that most mixed-

\(^6\) In South Korea, the official title for these families is “multicultural families (tamunhwa kajok).”

\(^7\) Cultural gap, along with linguistic barriers for smoother and efficient communication, is one of the 
major sources of problems among interethnic, thus intercultural couples and families. Although ethnic 
authenticism in favor of homogeneity is still prevalent among conservatives, both young and old, there 
also emerged liberal and humanitarian efforts among civil rights groups to make South Korean society 
more tolerant and fair for people other than ethnic Koreans. This includes several civil rights groups, 
religious communities, and women’s organizations such as YWCA, Center for Multicultural Korea, and
heritage South Korean children of this category, who are constantly increasing in number, have a hard time getting socially acknowledged, while South Korean society is always concerned about the low fertility rate and there is fear of losing its population due to the dropping fertility rate (Abernethy and Penaloza 2002). The periodic appearance of news articles and editorials depicting the gloomy future of South Korea becoming a “silver society” reflects this phobic attitude as well as obsessive ignorance about children from inter-ethnic marriages.

Even among the more liberally minded, people appear to think it is necessary for foreign residents to learn and adopt South Korean customs and culture in order for them to be accepted in South Korean society. Given the number of foreign residents and the multiethnic status of current South Korean society, it is truly odd to watch television entertainment shows applauding a handful of foreigners who speak Korean well and eat *kimch’i* (a staple Korean dish made with pickled cabbage, radish, hot pepper, garlic, and fermented fish sauce). People cheer as the foreigners share their interest in Korean food, clothing, architecture, and traditions (see Han Geon-Soo 2007: 33-35). People love to find out how genuinely Koreanized the foreigners are, but the interest the general populace shows for the foreigners’ own culture and customs remains superficial. With the rising numbers of foreign brides in South Korean society, many local governments or communities have so-called “multicultural festivals,” but the contents of these occasions hardly go beyond tasting foreign foods prepared and served by women wearing

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Joint Committee with Migrants in South Korea, to name a few. Their attempts include helping foreign residents in South Korea to seek legal protections (especially from domestic violence and abuse), getting medical aids, and providing cultural advice.

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8 According to the World Health Statistics 2010, the total fertility rate per woman in South Korea was 1.6 in 1990, 1.4 in 2000, and 1.2 in 2006. (World Health Organization 2010)
supposedly traditional attire from those countries. The history, contemporary culture, and their sociopolitical relationship with South Korea of these “foreign” countries are largely overshadowed, if not totally ignored, by the stereotypical images of exotic foods and clothes. Foreigners can escape this two dimensional image only when they display their acceptance of Korean culture and language. In other words, foreign residents in South Korea can be recognized as members of society as long as they are willing to show their eagerness to be reborn as South Koreans. While the word “multicultural” has come into common use in South Korean society in an effort to cope with the reality of ethnic diversity, it focuses more on minimizing cultural influences of other ethnicities by Koreanizing them than delivering genuine multicultural understanding.

5.5 The Number Thirteen: Distorted Images of the Global

Multiethnicity has become a conspicuous social reality in South Korea, but the strong belief in South Korean ethnic homogeneity and its cultural superiority nevertheless remain firmly entrenched. The gap between the multiethnic reality and the aspiration or longing for ethnic homogeneity produces a “cognitive dissonance,” in which other ethnicities are hierarchically conceptualized to defend the superiority and antiquity of Korean ethnicity. Westerners are exalted as representing advanced values and thus discussed within the frame of globalism; while non-Western others are suspected as a degrading factor to South Korean culture and ethnicity. Consequently, multiculturalism in practice becomes a paradoxical exercise in attempting to gain Western affirmation of the distinctness and value of South Korean culture (a non-Western one itself), while denigrating other non-Western cultures as inferior and imposing a program of Koreanizing assimilation to these “new” South Koreans.
At the NMK, this conceptual struggle is evident. Who is the target audience for the National Museum of Korea? This is an important question for any museum, but particularly for a national museum. Is the mission of the NMK to promote national pride and therefore target South Koreans with the struggles, triumphs, and glories of the past? Is the mission of the NMK to impress foreigners with the uniqueness, distinctiveness, and worthiness of South Korea? It cannot comfortably be both at once because the two missions are contradictory and paradoxical. On the one hand the NMK seeks to reinforce South Korean nationalism based principally on the myth of ethnic homogeneity and Korean uniqueness. This leads to a narrative that celebrates mythical dynasties as history and assertions of Korean achievements and inventions considered to be firsts in the world while attempting to isolate and rarify South Korea as an independent, self-sufficient nation-state. In this narrative, the contemporary political division of Korea into two states is ignored, North Korea is simply omitted, most conspicuously in the Korean history timeline that begins with the mythical Tan’gun Kojosŏn and ends with one Korea, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) since 1945.9 On the other hand, South Korea feels a compulsive desire to be recognized by the West but not be part of the West, and they defy genuine globalization. South Koreans need to be recognized for their exoticism by the most exotic people for them, White Westerners. This most unhealthy circumstance is in fact not unique nor particularly distinctive. It is typical of many postcolonial societies reacting against past humiliation by present assertion and glorification of the past (both

9 The Republic of Korea (South Korea) was founded in 1948 after a failure to hold nationwide elections that included Koreans outside of the US occupied zone north of the thirty-eighth parallel. The Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea) was founded shortly after in 1948 in response.
real and imagined) and the obsessive need to have this triumphant version of the past validated by outsiders, particularly Westerners.

On June 29, 2006, in what normally would be relaxed minutes before nine o’clock in the morning at the NMK, the atmosphere was abuzz with anxious bustling. I had been doing my doctoral fieldwork at the NMK as a visiting researcher. On typical mornings before the start of the workday, people would loiter around enjoying their morning coffee or cigarettes. This morning, however, the museum staff seemed unsettled and busy, convening emergency meetings and answering an atypical cacophony of incoming calls. Some were inter-departmental calls but many were from major newspapers and other media. The museum staff hurried in and out of the room where my desk was, some with very concerned or aggravated expressions on their faces. My experience from the past several months at the NMK told me that I needed to wait until some of them would voluntarily share information with me. I had learned that hasty questioning or interrogation as they might call, it would not reveal any information on what was going on and would completely shut out any possible further transmission of information. There were occasions when questions from fieldworkers were not at all welcomed, and that morning was the exemplar case of this. After a few more minutes of fidgeting, one chief curator who was very understanding of my field project finally dropped me a hint of what was causing the unexpected tension, saying, “Take a look at a newspaper article today.” I learned that one of the major newspapers published an article in their daily morning issue, with the sensational title, “Shameful Status of the National Museum of Korea: Only Thirteen Foreign Visitors per Day” (Chosŏn ilbo 2006).
The timing was a big factor in this commotion. A few words are needed about the context in terms of the NMK’s reputational ups and downs before and after the grand reopening in October 2005. The spectacle of the dismantling of the former Government-general building and the temporary closing of the NMK fully sparked public attention, naturally generating high expectation on the scale and depth of the NMK that would open in its new building in the near future. The construction of the new building complex in the Yongsan area took more than eight years to finish. When the new NMK was finally opened to the public in 2005, the massive architectural scales were both held in awe and disparaged from different groups of people. Newly installed exhibits got both compliments and criticism by different groups of people. The nationalist vibes at the NMK gathered both applause and jeers. On whichever side one might stand, people wanted to come and see the NMK, and even some controversies such as the missing Tan’gun Kojosŏn listing in the Archaeology Hall sparked a number of visitors. However, once the promotional free admission period of two months was over, and the excitement about the opening waned, the number of visitors had been noticeably dropping. The long lines of large tour buses around the formerly fully-packed parking lots were gone. The previously endless seeming lines that once appeared at on-site restaurants and the food court were hard to find. Some exhibit halls had more volunteers than visitors at more than one point of the day. Media coverage of the NMK was more focused on negative comments than positive ones. Exhibits and panels were attacked as not being nationalistic enough and even as “pro-Japanese” (Han’gyŏre sinmun 2005).

The NMK’s inconvenient location also constantly gathered complaints. In terms of the location of the new NMK, the blue print of the government was to move national
museums near to Yongsan Family Park, starting with the NMK followed by the NFMK and other museums. Yongsan was also regarded as the future home of the first National Museum of Natural History in Korea. The idea of combining the museum complex with green areas was inspired by the Mall and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC and the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History to the east and west of New York’s Central Park. Unfortunately, this blue print had remained as a mere blue print for a long time. Relocation of the NMK was finally completed in 2005, but no final plans were made for the NFMK. The NFMK, which has been located in the Kyŏngbok Palace area from its beginning, was reluctant to leave the Kyŏngbok Palace area. Unlike the Kyŏngbok Palace area which is located in the heart of Seoul right near the Blue House (the South Korean counterpart of the White House), other governmental buildings, embassies, and mega bookstores, the Yongsan Family Park is outside of the main area of Seoul with few other points of attractions in the vicinity. Absence of nearby attractions that could have boosted the number of visitors gave the new NMK and its staff a sense of isolation. Another factor that made the whole relocation project stumble was the change in administrative government. Policies, plans, and budgets had been gravely altered as a new administration was elected and new ministers were appointed.

However, the true sense of isolation came with the arrival of the headline of “thirteen foreign visitors.” The NMK people expressed their uneasy feeling about the newspaper’s article, calling it “incorrect,” “lame,” and even “vicious.” Speaking as someone who spent several months at the NMK on a daily basis making observations, the story of thirteen foreign visitors a day was factually incorrect. At the NMK, they have a
system for counting the number of foreign visitors: admission tickets issued to foreigners are marked differently from those for domestic visitors. This provided a way of roughly tracking the number of foreign visitors, but it is often not accurate enough. For example, with people in guided group tours, the South Korean tour guide usually purchases the tickets for his or her group and the receptionist at the box office often mistakenly gives out admission tickets for South Koreans to the whole group which may include foreign visitors. I was also told by the staff that the NMK used the number of English pamphlets picked up at the information booth to calculate the number of foreign visitors, which obviously sounds not very efficient, nor accurate. In addition, while White Westerners appear visibly “foreign,” Asian visitors were more difficult to be acknowledged as “foreigners.” No matter how inaccurately defined the calculating system might be, based on what I had observed for more than six months until then, the number thirteen was grossly under-representative.

The more significant problem with the newspaper article on “foreigners” visiting the NMK is its ambiguous categorization. An objective definition of “foreignness” is the technical and unambiguous designation of nationality printed on one’s passport or certificate of citizenship, which is a modern category required by modern bureaucracy in the modern world. But the newspaper article used a highly subjective definition of foreigner. By including only white Westerners as foreigners, from whom Koreans seek particular cultural affirmation, the newspaper disingenuously omitted the considerably larger presence of non-Western, non-White visitors. However, they underreported even the number of White visitors in order to embarrass the museum and highlight its failure to successfully propagandize Korean culture to the target Western audience.
The story of thirteen foreign visitors immediately stirred up media attention, and soon the South Korean newspapers were busy uploading articles and editorials concerning the shameful status of the NMK in terms of global standards. The NMK tried to mend the damage by announcing new programs that could attract more foreign visitors, but the decreasing number of foreign visitors has always been an issue. Statistics have constantly shown that the NFMK, which is much smaller than the NMK in terms of collection, staff, and building spaces, receives the largest number of foreign visitors among the national museums (Yŏnhap News 2006). Perhaps it is because of the fact that the “exotic” folk collection at the NFMK has more possibility of appealing to foreigners’ interests than the NMK’s archaeology and fine art-oriented collection. Or the theme of everyday life displayed at the NFMK is easier and more accessible to enjoy than the rather monotonous theme of South Korean legitimacy running through the NMK exhibits. At any rate, the article of “thirteen foreign visitors” appeared as the last straw on the back of the NMK in the context of a suggested failed globalizing effort. The point that needed to be scrutinized in this case is not why the NMK is not attractive to foreigners, nor why the NMK is less successful than the NFMK in getting foreign visitors. The significance in the media-geared fuss over “thirteen foreign visitors” lies in the ambiguous rationale of South Korean society, which is particularly noticeable in but never limited to the case of the NMK.

Being “authentic,” “unique,” “world’s first” or “the most ancient in human history,” are the expressions one would persistently encounter at the NMK: from the pamphlets, talks of the docents, the automated audio tour, the panels and the labels in the exhibit halls. In fact, these are the repeating catchwords in South Korean history
textbooks: Korea is a small country but with a long history and unique culture whose originality made huge influences on other neighbouring countries. Because of this canonized school curriculum, many South Koreans firmly believe that their culture is superior to those of neighboring countries. It seems that South Korea and the case of the NMK easily exemplify what Frantz Fanon stressed in *A Dying Colonialism* as the quintessence of the postcolonial sentiment. According to Fanon, “the phenomena of resistance observed in the colonized must be related to an attitude of counter-assimilation, of maintenance of a cultural, hence national, originality” (Fanon 1994:42). There follows an irony, though. As such a pride-ridden society being an heir to a glorious history and distinguished culture, South Korea appears to have failed to establish a firm basis for giving itself credit. To put it another way, it seems that the sense of pride and honour South Korean society consistently flaunts needs confirmation by *others* (specially Westerners) for its fulfillment. Beneath its ardent effort of claiming originality, South Korea cannot but reveal insecurity in dearth of self-assurances. Fanon, again, provides a useful platform to ponder the dual layers of confidence and insecurity. The discrepancy between surface pride and deep-rooted insecurity in this case is in subtle reminiscence of Fanon’s dual vision of self on the part of the colonized. The interesting parallel lies between Fanon’s argument of the “dependency complex of colonized people” (Fanon 1968:83) and the South Korean case in the sense that the desire of the self to be independent from and superior to others is conditioned by the very mental frame of “the other.” In other words, South Korea still needs a confirmation from “the other” whom it earnestly strives to go beyond. The extensive advertisement of the NMK as the world’s sixth largest museum, especially around the time of its grand reopening, offers just one
example. It shows how it is important to be recognized on the level of “the world” with global rankings, even if it only involves superficial traits such as the size of building space. Nonetheless, it turned out it was precisely in line with the South Korean audiences’ expectations for being recognized on the level of “global.” People were exhilarated by the “number six” on the world’s ranking scheme, even when many of them had no clue what it really meant. When I interviewed visitors to the NMK and asked other people outside the NMK, they were all well aware of the number six, but most of them had no idea what the number really meant.

The commotion with the news article of thirteen foreign visitors discloses another case of insecurity of this kind. Given that the target audience of the NMK are South Korean nationals with the knowledge of average middle school students, it is ironic that the number of foreign visitors became a direct measure of the institution’s performing standards.\(^\text{10}\) In a sense, contemporary South Korean society is dealing with double layers of colonial legacy. One involves Japan, which is based on historical experiences, and another is that of the Western or White world, which is on a more conceptual level (at least for South Koreans) compared to the former. The Japanese colonial legacy is well known to the general populace to the extent that it stirs up almost frenetic expressions of nationalism among South Koreans. It is mainly reinforced through the official school curriculum and related educational experiences, including field trips to museums. Almost on a daily basis people read and hear about comfort women stories in newspapers, in books, and on the Internet. There are chronic debates over the need to penalize the

\(^{10}\) The idea of the target audience of the NMK as average middle school students comes from conversations with several curators at the NMK, although it is not specified in policy, nor mission statement.
pro-Japanese traitors during the colonial time and to confiscate their assets already passed to their descendants. Anti-Japanese movement groups in South Korea eventually published a *Who’s Who* type of dictionary listing the names of pro-Japanese traitors after having been delayed by different interest groups’ lobbying efforts.

If struggling with Japanese colonial imprints is the manifest colonial legacy, gauging cultural institutions’ standards by the presence and absence of foreigners is a latent colonial legacy of which many South Koreans are not conscious. Because it is latent and resides more on the unconscious level unlike the anticolonial sentiment towards the Japanese, it is actually more difficult to contest and defy: that is precisely why the NMK staff strove to present evidence that they had in fact more than thirteen foreign visitors daily when the headline of “thirteen foreign visitors” maligned the pride of the NMK. That is why the NMK hastily responded to the press that it would develop a long term plan to attract more foreign visitors. That is why people who read the sensational newspaper article thought that it was indeed shameful that the NMK was visited by so few foreigners. Witnessing the heated discussion around the number thirteen, it was truly odd to see that no one stood up and questioned the validity and legitimacy of the number of foreigners as a flat-rate criterion in assessing performance and reputation of cultural institutions, especially when the primary target audiences are South Korean nationals. Not until this colonial legacy on the conceptual level is faced
and resolved should any number again appear on the headline either to jeer or applaud the NMK’s performance as a cultural institution on the level of the “global.”

5.6 Uneasy Neighbours: the China and Japan Halls of the Asian Gallery

While the West is considered to be the ideal global standard to which the NMK should make reference, Asia is primarily regarded as a source for injecting diversity, diluting the NMK’s Korea-centered focus. The Asian Gallery at the re-opened NMK is an exemplary case to shed light on this. Even in the context of “providing diversity,” representations of other Asian nation-states at the Asian Gallery are highly limited, mostly being comprised of an apolitical display of modern art pieces. It was primarily planned out as a response to the criticism around the NMK’s over-emphasis on “Koreanness” in the era of so-called globalism. The fact that the Asian Gallery’s primary focus is on modern art, rather than archaeology and history, reflects the idea that the exhibits of archaeology and history at the NMK should be exclusively on Korea, leaving little room for negotiation. To state it boldly, the underlying claim in this arrangement is that art, usually exemplified by such artifacts as ceramics, painting, and sculpture, can represent processes of interactions, exchanges, and even hybridization while archaeology and history cannot accommodate such ideas.

11 Publishing a mission statement is customary among North American museums, but most Korean museums do not have one. Instead, they have “welcoming comments” from the current director of the museum which usually state the value and the direction that the museum pursues. According to Ch’oe Kwang-sik, a current director of the NMK as of 2010, “to make the NMK, a hall of national culture that has been loved by the Korean people, a world class museum is the desire of Korean people and also a responsibility of the NMK staff.”

12 Art, archaeology, and history are the three main themes for organizing collections and exhibits at the NMK, and the three main departments of the NMK are organized as such.
As of October, 2005 when the new NMK opened, the Asian Gallery contained six exhibit halls: China, Japan, India and Southeast Asia, Sinan Shipwreck Collection, the Nangnang and Central Asia Halls. A glance at the categories seem to be inclusive enough, but once one visits the exhibit halls, it is not difficult to get the impression that the “Asian countries” represented by actual objects are somewhat randomly selected than systematically inclusive. The list of nations represented by objects is far from balanced in representing the area of “Asia,” especially when Asia’s diverse religious, cultural, and linguistic traits are taken into consideration. For example, the India and Southeast Asia Hall has a Buddhist statue in Gandhara style, and made an interpretation that this one statue represents all areas influenced by the Gandhara kingdom, saying that, “The broad range of Gandhara-influenced areas encompass contemporary Pakistan and Afghanistan, which in turn connect West Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia” (The Official Website of the NMK). The majority of the India and Southeast Asia Hall exhibits are those of India, and a few borrowed objects from Indonesia and Vietnam that are supposed to represent the whole area of Southeast Asia.

More uncanny is the spatial arrangement and the collection exhibited in the Asian Gallery. For example, China, through whom Korea adopted many fundamental heritage such as Confucianism and Buddhism, only has one room that is not much bigger than the other halls in the Asian Gallery. Considering the longevity and the depth of extensive interactions between Korea and China since the first century BCE, the exhibits in the China Hall are neither reflective nor representative in any sense. The scope and scale of exhibits in the China Hall are far from comprehensive in demonstrating the longevity or complexity of Chinese history. Exhibits mostly consist of paintings and pottery, from
"Ting" of the Han dynasty to Sancai ceramics of the Tang dynasty. Represented by these paintings and pottery are stylistic genealogies in a political vacuum. Across different halls in the Asian Gallery, ancient artistic stylistic variation is explained in details using technical terminology, but the colonial influences most Asian countries suffered in the twentieth century is simply missing in the Asian Gallery. The time is frozen, making “Asia” only ancient, which is then objectified in glass boxes. The prevalence of seemingly unsystematic selection and blunt omission is not much different in the Japanese Hall, and perhaps even worse.

The relationship between Korea and Japan is a truly convoluted story of conflict and controversy involving several historical events, one of which is the legendary Empress Jingu’s invasion and conquest of the southern part of the Korean peninsula in the third century. Whether her invasion of Korea was real as some Japanese believe or nothing but a mythical story reflecting Japan’s aspiration of conquering Korea as most South Koreans would argue, the history of interactions between Korea and Japan cannot be neglected (Yi 2001:23-24, 38-48). How to interpret the interactions and the relationship between Paekche and Japan in the seventh century constitutes another source of chronic rivalry between Korea and Japan. While South Korea proudly confirms and reconfirms the argument that Korea helped Japan become civilized by offering the high culture of Paekche and other states that existed in the Korean Peninsula, this claim needed to be materialized and visualized to get popular endorsement. The museum is one of the most effective and favoured places in this context using various artifacts and documents to support such a claim.
Kŭmdong mirŭk posal pan’ga sayusang (Guilt-Bronze statue of Maitreya bodhisattva), one of the signature exhibits of the NMK, is considered to be the prototypical evidence showing Korea’s tremendous influence on Japan (Covell and Covell, 2001, NMK 2007). *Pan’ga sayusang* is a statue of Buddha when he was still a prince, depicting him sitting and contemplating with one hand supporting his head and one leg placed over the other thigh.\(^{13}\) The NMK has two famous *Pan’ga sayusang* in its collection, National Treasures No. 78 and No. 83, each on display every six months in rotation in the Art Hall.\(^{14}\) The subtle smile on *Pan’ga sayusang* is often compared to that of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, while the posture is discussed in comparison with that of Rodin’s *Thinker*. The pose of *Pan’ga sayusang* is a favored iconic theme among Buddhist statues, producing many similar statues in China, Korea, and Japan where Mahayana Buddhism was in practice. While many *Pan’ga sayusang* were made during the fifth and sixth centuries in China, it was more popular in the Korean peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries, which fall in the Three Kingdom Period. The two *Pan’ga sayusang*, National Treasures No. 78 and No. 83 are signature exhibits at the NMK, and many curators at the NMK think of these two as the crown jewels of the museum.

At the NMK, *Pan’ga sayusang* in the Art Hall is displayed in a small dark room with dramatic lighting only on the statue, giving visitors the impression of discovering a long-hidden treasure in a secret cave. The enforced pathway in this small, dark room

\(^{13}\) At later times, *Pan’ga sayusang* came to represent a more generalized image of *bosatsu* (meaning the “enlightenment being”) rather than Buddha himself.

\(^{14}\) Other than that No. 83 being slightly bigger and heavier than No. 78, they have similar looks, with the only significant difference in their crowns. No. 78 boasts a florid style with details on its crown, while No. 83 has a more polished look with a simple but elegant crown.
makes visitors walk around the statue, enabling one to take a good look at the front, sides, and back of the statue. The display room itself is extremely dark with light narrowly focused only on the statue, and in order to keep the display room dimly lit, information panels for the statue are installed outside of the display space. Alongside a panel containing the usual information of the production year, materials, history, and iconology of Buddhist statues, visitors can find another set of panels with photos and contents. It is about Miroku bosatsu at the Koryuji temple in Kyoto, Japan. Miroku bosatsu at the Koryuji is one of Japan’s National Treasures, made famous in South Korea for its striking resemblance with Pan’ga sayusang No. 83 in its appearance; some would call these two “almost twins” (Covell and Covell, 2001: 89). To South Koreans, it is a clear and self-evident example that shows Korea’s critical influence transported into Japan. Although the source materials are different (Pan’ga sayusang is made of bronze, while the Miroku bosatsu is made of red pinewood) the fact that the kind of wood Miroku bosatsu is made of is more commonly found in the Korean Peninsula than in Japan is considered strong evidence of Korea’s influence on Japan. In fact, the Miroku bosatsu is the single most well-known Japanese art piece in South Korea. It is featured in school text books, history books, and art history books (with its photo always put right next to that of Pan’ga sayusang), as confirming Korean influence on Japan. Any elementary school student of South Korea (even one who has never been to Japan) knows of Miroku bosatsu, of its material, and of its significance to South Korea in the Korea-Japan relationship.

15 The wooden statue of Miroku bosatsu is believed to have been gilded gold, which is now worn off. With the overlay, the resemblance in appearance between the Korean Pan’ga sayusang and the Japanese Miroku bosatsu must have been much closer.
The panel for *Pan'ga sayusang* featuring *Pan'ga sayusang* and *Miroku bosatsu* offers a snapshot portrait of the way in which the Korea-Japan relationship is interpreted and represented in South Korean museum settings: with the idea that Japan owes Korea a lot in terms of culture and civilization. The fact that *Pan'ga sayusang* is on display in the Art Hall needs to be pointed out here. If Korea exerted crucial influences on Japanese art and culture in ancient times, then art pieces from those periods in Japan inevitably are shown to exhibit similar aspects to *Miroku bosatsu*. There would be no problem implying Korea’s cultural or artistic superiority to Japan in ancient times either at the Art Hall or Archaeology Hall, since these spaces are dedicated to Korea-centered narratives. However, the case of the Asian Gallery is rather different. The installation of the Asian Gallery was first and foremost to highlight differences and diversities, not similarities and homogeneity. The primary intention of having the Asian Gallery at the NMK was to have a space (however small it might be) for “them,” not “us,” infusing an atmosphere of diversity in the museum. Therefore it is important to appreciate “their” arts and histories from “their” perspectives at least in the Asian Gallery. However, it would be nevertheless problematic if “their” stories told in the Asian Gallery were in severe conflict with those heard in other halls at the NMK. This speaks volumes about the limited and insufficient displays and narratives easily observable in the Asian Gallery. A conscience effort is made to avoid conflicting narratives in terms of historical relationships, especially around ancient times. This meant the Asian Gallery, especially the China Hall and Japan Hall were planned in ways that were perceived to be safe from possible controversy. Rather than focusing on ancient artifacts reflecting ancient history in which Korea-Japan and Korea-China relationships can be a source of further
controversies, the China and Japan Halls primarily specialize in modern art pieces, leaving room for only a minimal amount of political implication in terms of international relations. This strategy might have avoided controversial issues as the NMK aimed, but the results are, as discussed above, that there are seemingly incoherent art pieces in the Asian Gallery with very little historical context that might have substantiated the exhibits. In the Japan Hall of the Asian Gallery, for example, the majority of the displayed objects are modern art pieces, such as oil paintings with Impressionist influences or wooden jewelry chests with a modernist flair. The interpretation of these objects at the Asian Gallery does not emphasize a historical context other than stylistic genealogy. Compared to the China Hall and Japan Hall, other halls of the Asian Gallery are relatively free from this “strategy” since their ancient relationship with Korea is minimal, with the “possible controversy” based on historical context not much of a concern.

5.7 The Lunar New Year Festival and Colour Scheme

The context for the NFMK results in a slightly different situation from that of the NMK. It is hard to find a room for “other cultures” at the NFMK, since there is no exhibit hall dedicated to non-Korean cultures at the NFMK. The NFMK is strictly about “us,” not “them.” It is explicitly about our culture, our life style, our traditions, and our customs. While there is no space for the “multicultural” to come into direct play in actual exhibits, the main target audience for experiential programs and performances around
seasonal occasions are, without a doubt, foreign visitors.\textsuperscript{16} Despite this difference, privileging the West over the East is apparent at the NFMK as at the NMK; the presence of White foreigners is much preferred over other Asian visitors for photos in official pamphlets and media releases. Also eminent across the NFMK’s educational and experiential programs are its limited perspectives toward multicultural values, which are at best translated into the unilateral acceptance of South Korean values by foreigners.

The NFMK hosts special programming on several national holidays throughout the year. In addition, smaller programs are prepared for seasonal occasions based on the Chinese lunar calendar, which has twenty-four divisions for agricultural references. Among these, the most important occasions are definitely Lunar New Year Day (Kujŏng) and Korean Thanksgiving (Ch’usŏk, the fifteenth of August in lunar calendar), with the former celebrated on a larger scale than the latter. The atmosphere of the Lunar New Year Day celebration is truly festive. A long passage from the entrance leading to the NFMK main building would be packed with visitors, both South Korean nationals and foreigners. A series of experiential kiosks are lined up alongside the passage to attract visitors. Every kiosk specializes in one of “traditional” arts and crafts items: rice paper crafting, woodcarving, natural dying, and so on. With a few dollars’ worth of money, visitors can get a chance to “experience (ch’ehŏm)” making Korean traditional items with precut kits and then take the end product home with them as souvenirs. Although many South Koreans also find this festive occasion enjoyable, the most targeted audience for

\textsuperscript{16} According to the NFMK staff I interviewed, all of them expressed their views that the main target audience was South Korean nationals, but when it came to the designing of actual exhibits and panels, one of the major concerns was always how to attract foreign visitors’ attentions.
this are foreign visitors. Despite the lack of qualified interpreters, kiosk volunteers and museum staff are eager to get as many foreign visitors as they can to nearby kiosks to have them try out different experiences. To the NFMK, Lunar New Year Day and Korean Thanksgiving are ideal occasions to advertise and promote Korean arts and culture and also to reaffirm the “foreigner-validated” status.

When these special events are held at the NFMK, staff members in the public relations department usually take pictures for media release. In taking pictures, there exists a tacit but nevertheless solid rule: Try to get as many foreign faces as possible in the pictures. Even among foreigners, there is a preference, or one might say, a hierarchy: while Westerners are the most wanted in photos. For instance, there seems an underlying idea that the “most exotic” image of people with blonde hair and blue eyes having fun in learning Korean culture best shows the advanced status of the museum and by extension that of South Korea. Such photos are taken elsewhere, too. The NFMK offers art and craft classes primarily for foreigners in which people learn about Korean culture and can make small so-called traditional items such as rice paper jewelry boxes, bamboo fans, pencil cases, and dolls using precut and not-so-traditional art and craft kits. Vivid photos of the class scenes were taken and used for media release and for the NFMK’s own pamphlets, and the same discriminatory rule was also in place. To put it in a very politically incorrect manner, photos of white-skinned people seem most preferred, followed by brown-skinned and finally yellow-skinned people in terms of representing the globalized status of the museum. There is nothing more appealing than images that capture foreign visitors at the museum aspiring to measure up to “global standards.” Considering the disproportionately large proportion of Chinese and Japanese tourists
among the foreign visitors, it is extraordinary how over-represented White visitors are in the photo reporting. On a related and almost comical note, one staff member at one of the major national museums shared the secret with me that when they congratulated the ten thousandth visitor to the museum with a prize, they framed it up so that a White Western foreigner, not a South Korean national, could get selected. Why? The answer is simple. Because the exotic appearance of the smiling foreigner is much more effective in delivering the message: this museum is a place where foreigners (and specifically White Western foreigners) gather to learn about South Korea and its culture. Just like the phrase “doctor-recommended” invokes immediate authority, the implicit message of “White Westerner-validated” carries strong reverence in and around South Korean national museum.

Among the educational programs designed for foreign visitors, there are specific classes reserved for so-called “multicultural families” and transnational migrant workers. Since 2004, the NFMK began to offer such programs on a regular basis, the most well known of which is the, “Folk art classes for migrant workers,” in which transnational migrant workers are introduced to various Korean folk culture customs. The NFMK presented its stance in terms of multicultural values in the brochure introducing these educational programs which states, “South Korean society has become more and more attentive to multicultural values in recent years due to the increase of intercultural marriages and the influx of migrant labor. With regard to this social aspect, the NFMK aspires to promote understanding and harmony among different cultures by offering various classes and educational programs for multicultural families, transnational migrant workers, and other foreign residents in Korea.” These programs are, according to the
NFMK, intended to ease the foreign residents’ settlement process in South Korea by introducing traditional Korean culture and values. Based on surveys filled out by the participants of the classes, the NFMK assessed these programs as successful within the museum and the media praised the NFMK’s effort in promoting multicultural values in South Korean society.

However, behind the applause, the fundamental limitations cannot go unnoticed. The biggest problem is that the classes for transnational migrant workers and multicultural families are virtually unilateral in terms of information flow. It is not intercultural dialogues, but rather a unidirectional process in which Korean culture and values are expected to flow to and be accepted by foreign residents in South Korea.

5.8 Concluding Remarks

The NMK and the NFMK’s struggles to implement multicultural dimensions within the frame of ethnicity based nationalism of South Korea illustrate multiculturalism’s “real and perceived incompatibility with national unity (Stratton and Ang 1998: 135). Can a postcolonial society that is still struggling with a colonial imprint genuinely embrace multiculturalism? In South Korea’s particular case there are many obstacles. The way in which the country was occupied by foreign powers after Japanese colonization (1910-1945) has left Korea politically divided and in a state of constant

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17 In 2009, the NFMK changed its approach moderately, and developed programs to accommodate the voices of foreign residents. In “Multicultural Festivals,” different Asian cultures are introduced by their natives and more efforts have been made to find similarities between different cultures to minimize unfamiliarity. In these festivals, not only can foreign residents learn about South Korean culture, but South Korean nationals are encouraged to experience and learn other Asian cultures. The NFMK also held a special exhibit of “World in us: Multicultural life,” in which everyday items from ten different countries were displayed. The items were borrowed from actual “multicultural families” in Korea.
military anxiety. South Korean nationalism is principally based on the myth of ethnic homogeneity, itself a concept born out of, and in reaction to, colonial exploitation and Japanese attempts to assimilate Koreans. However, this myth of ethnic homogeneity does not accurately reflect contemporary South Koreans. The South Korean diaspora has spread Koreans and people of Korean descent all over the world, particularly to the US, Japan, China, Russia, Central Asia, and South America. South Korea itself has become much more diverse. There are hundreds of thousands of migrant workers and their families living in South Korea fueling the dynamo that is the South Korean economy. There are hundreds of thousands of “international brides” immigrating to South Korea and supporting South Korean families, taking care of elderly in-laws and having mixed heritage children. More than one tenth of all marriages and more than one third of all rural marriages in South Korea are between South Korean men and international brides.\textsuperscript{18} Without these international brides, South Korea would be experiencing negative population growth and the negative social, economic, and psychological consequences that would go along with this. There is national cognitive dissonance between the myth of ethnic homogeneity and the complex social realities of the nation.

If the myth of ethnic homogeneity is not a historical reality, and not a South Korean invention, and furthermore not reflective of contemporary South Koreans, why do the national museums still promote it? When Sin Ch’ae-ho capitalized on this idea during the colonial period, he consciously sought to unite Koreans in an anarchistic and

\textsuperscript{18} For example, in 2010, 10.8\% of the total marriage in South Korea was between South Koreans and non-ethnic Koreans and 34\% of rural marriages in South Korea was between South Korean men and international brides (Korean Statistical Information Service http://kosis.kr/, last accessed May 20, 2012)
anti-imperial struggle against the Japanese. However, today, when South Koreans are diverse and live in a democracy with their sovereignty restored, the idea has become anachronistic and problematic. Although still smaller and poorer than the wealthiest Western nations and Japan, South Korea exerts enough regional economic pull that it continues to attract hundreds of thousands of young international brides from China and Southeast Asia to South Korea to marry poor or, rural, older South Korean men who are considered undesirable husbands by South Korean women. In essence, these newest South Koreans are contributing to the diversification of South Korea.

Immigration motivated by work opportunities and marriage are not the only ways in which South Koreans are diversifying. Through emigration, travel, commercial trade, and studying abroad, South Koreans are becoming more globalized. With the peninsula conspicuously divided into North and South, with the ethnic makeup of South Korea changing, with South Koreans struggling for an ideological identity, continuing propaganda about and renewed indoctrination of an ethnic-homogeneity-centered nationalism is harmful for Korean themselves. The already substantial and growing number of immigrants and mixed heritage South Koreans will be alienated. Reconciliation with North Korea or diffusion of inter-Korean political or military hostility will not be possible if South Koreans, particularly younger South Koreans, are unable to understand the political division of the nation if they are led to believe that ethnic homogeneity is a necessary and sufficient basis for nationalism (see Parekh 2000: 225-226, 231-232). Shin Gi-wook also pointed out the danger of “ethnic consciousness that tends to encourage false uniformity” in his book Ethnic Nationalism in Korea.

. . . it is no surprise that my 2000 survey shows that Koreans have stronger attachment to “ethnic Koreans living in foreign countries” than to “ethnic
non-Koreans living in Korea.” It is also much easier for a Korean American who supposedly has “Korean blood” to “recover” Korean nationality than for an Indonesian migrant worker living in Korea to obtain Korea citizenship. This is true even if the Indonesian worker might be more culturally and linguistically Korean than a Korea American. Koreans need an institutional framework to promote a democratic national identity that would allow for more diversity and flexibility among the populace, rather than simply appeal to an ethnic consciousness that tends to encourage false uniformity and enforce conformity to it. They should envision a society in which they can live together, not simply as fellow ethnic Koreans but as equal citizens of a democratic polity it should be an integral part of democratic consolidation processes that Korea is currently undergoing. Otherwise, it would be hard to expect Korea to become “Asia’s hub,” which will require the accommodation of cultural and ethnic diversity and tolerance. [Shin 2006: 235]

In this convoluted context of ethnicity-centered nationalism and postcolonialism, museums should expand the scope of multiculturalism and foster multilateral understanding of different cultures to flesh out a socially-responsible form of multiculturalism. Being socially-responsible is indispensable in discussions of multiculturalism, since multiculturalism is, in its due course, about “which groups and interests will hold power and shape the production and reproduction of society in such domains as education, government, institutions, and art” (Eller 1997: 251).
Chapter 6. The Politics and Poetics of Han Minjok at National Museums

6.1 Introduction

Minjok (民族, minzoku in Japanese, minzu in Chinese) refers to a group of people with shared culture and history. It is a sociopolitical neologism referring to the ethnic nation. It was initially employed by the Japanese and then adopted by Korean Enlightenment activists (Kaehwap’a) in the late nineteenth century. In the frame of Japanese imperialist discourse, the use of minzoku was instrumental in differentiating East Asia from the West and then in justifying Japan’s advancement onto China (Chow, Doak, and Fu 2001). While the concept of nation is seen as the essence of modern collective identity formation by many different streams of scholars of nationalism (Gellner 1983; Smith 1987; Anderson 1993), East Asia found minjok as the ultimate source of identity that is inseparable from a sense of shared culture and history. While minjok is often translated as “nation” or “people” in literatures of social sciences, it has more cultural dimensions than a nation especially in that the consciousness of minjok is based on shared memories that go deeper than what we call the “modern” era (Ch’oe 2005: 143; Eckert et al 1990). In this respect, the concept of minjok resonates more with what Anthony Smith called ethnie, a pre-modern ethnic community that made a platform for ethnic nationalism. However, while minjok indeed displays several similarities to what Smith called ethnie such as having shared memories, myth, and descent ties, these two concepts need to be differentiated from each other. While Smith explained ethnie qualitatively in opposition to a civic and modern type of nation and nationalism, this is not necessarily the case with minjok. Smith’s claim for ethnie as a sort of proto-nation in
an evolutionary scheme of his theory of nation and nationalism cannot adequately address
the modern as well as civic nature of minjok that can be constantly renewed rather than
wane with the advent of full-fledged nations. More importantly, minjok is different from
ethnie in that it does not necessarily precede nationhood or have existed from the
antiquity as Smith implied. The category and value of minjok is often determined
retrospectively by a specific urge and need in the present, in the process of which the
“invention of tradition” as discussed by Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992) plays
a crucial role.

In the context of East Asia, minzoku was initially instrumentalized by imperialist
Japan as a pivotal concept in delineating the cultural as well as physical hierarchies with
which they established Japanese identity in contrast to “inferior” and “underdeveloped”
groups of Asians, throwing an Orientalist gaze to other Asian neighbours (Doak 2006:
402, Kang 2004: 40-42). Highly imbued with discourses of eugenics and social
Darwinism, imperialist Japan’s use of minzoku strongly conveyed racist claims.
Confronting this imperial utilization of minjok (minzoku) based on hierarchical
categories of physical characteristics, Korean nationalists adopted the concept and
employed it to redefine Koreans and ultimately to counteract the Japanese imperialist
discourse (Ko 2002: 125-128, 130-137). For example, Sin Ch’ae ho (1880-1936), a
Korean nationalist historian, interpreted the minjok concept in his nationalist
historiography in light of shared “blood” as well as collective culture rather than that of
strict condescending racial terms. With a concept of minjok that goes back to Tan’gun
and is continued to the present with shared history, Sin made minjok a source of inclusive
identity from which national spirit can be extracted to ultimately resist Japanese efforts to
assimilate Koreans (Chase 2011: 65). Sin once made a proclamation in the preface of his *Toksa Sillon* (1908) that “If one dismissed minjok, there is no history.”¹ Minjok became the core unit of Korean history as Sin’s work garnered popularity among colonized Koreans and it continued to be as such in liberated Korea as a source of fortifying the sense of distinct identity (Cumings 1997; Em 1999).

If *minjok* is a noun referring to “people,” *Han minjok* (韓民族) is a noun specifically referring to Korean *minjok* and it has been a pride-ridden self-identification among South Koreans. The representation of *Han minjok* in narrating Korean culture and history at the NMK and the NFMK indicates the loopholes and analytical deficiencies of *Han minjok* as a conceptual term. Despite its popular use in contemporary South Korean society, the term of *Han minjok* became a poor signifier that does not hold either clear definitional value or conceptual consistency. At the NMK and the NFMK, the mutual perpetuation between popular discourse of *Han minjok* and its museum representation exemplifies the social mechanism by which nationalist discourse perpetuates itself.

6.2 The Label *Han Minjok*

*Han minjok* (韓民族 often translated as *Han* ethnicity, *Han* nation, and sometimes as *Han* race) is one of the most undefined yet extremely popular terms used in South Korean society. The term *Han minjok* appears in almost every book on Korean history, but very few of them actually make an attempt to define it clearly. In its common usage, the term *Han minjok* refers to the idea of Korean people who embody Koreanness. The problem with this term *Han minjok* is that it is located in a political, social, and historical

¹ *Toksa Sillon* was published in the Taehan maeil sinbo from August 27, 1908 to December 13, 1908.
vacuum. An effort to track down the origin and development of *Han minjok* as a social group becomes convoluted since the journey ends up in a place where myth merges with history. Furthermore, the concept of *Han minjok* is hard to measure in time and space, since it is believed to have existed from time immemorial and has always resided in the “heart” of Koreans. It is a concept that is more understood by emotion than defined by reason. Following is one of the typical examples of *Han minjok* used in literature on Korean history.

One of Korea’s most striking characteristics has been its long and continuous existence as a unified country. In spite of numerous invasions and occupations, the Koreans have remained remarkably homogeneous, and have been termed *Han minjok* [meaning “Korean nation”]. [Yim, 2002: 38, original inclusion]

The official definition of *Han minjok* offered in a dictionary of the Korean language is circular at best. In a Korean dictionary, the entry for *Han minjok* is simply explained as a synonym for *Han kyore*, which is in turn explained as “referring to our kyore.” Looking up *kyore* in this Korean dictionary leads to the following definition. “A group of descendants originated from a common ancestor.” Based on these chains of definitions, *Han minjok* is best understood as a term used by Koreans to refer to themselves in recognition of “having descended from a common ancestor.” The problem is, of course, that this definition is based on too much ambiguity, especially the part about being based on “a common ancestor.” Maybe this explanation sounds clear enough to people who firmly believe that they all descended from a common ancestor, Tan’gun. However, as chapter three examined based on the historicity, Tan’gun is a mythical figure not a historical one, which raise a serious question of the nature of “a common ancestor.”

Long, continuous, homogeneous, and unified are customarily used adjectives for describing *Han minjok*, but it has more appeal to emotion than historical fact or
rationality. It is believed that Koreans can understand and feel what Han minjok is without any definition or qualification. It is about “we Koreans,” hence if you belong to Han minjok, you will naturally understand and appreciate the meaning and value of Han minjok. In a sense, it is an a priori concept in South Korea. The value of Han minjok more belongs to the realm of emotion and passion than that of reason and logic. Questioning the definitional value of Han minjok would even bring accusations of being “anti-nationalist.” Even in its everyday usage, however, the term Han minjok is still wrapped in ambiguity and arbitrariness. Sometimes it transcends the political division of North Korea and South Korea, as it is often used to refer to both sides on those occasions where North Korea and South Korea collaborate with each other. On other occasions, such inclusiveness is not obvious, though. One can find cases in which the individual political view weighs more than the descent-based fraternity that is supposedly inherited from Tan’gun, as some anti-communist South Koreans refuse to embrace North Koreans within the category of Han minjok.

6.3 The Boundary of Han Minjok: the Presence and Absence of North Korea at the NMK

The incompleteness of Han minjok in conceptualizing ethnic Koreans is most evident in South Korea’s mixed attitude toward North Korea. If having descended from a common ancestor and having shared cultural tradition is a key determinant in envisioning the boundary of Han minjok, North Koreans, should then be recognized as belonging to Han minjok. In reality, however, embracing North Koreans as members of Han minjok entails mixed feelings of unwillingness and uneasiness. Such an emotion discloses that the idea of Han minjok is not as naïve as its surface meaning of sharing a common ancestor. To the contrary, the idea of Han minjok is heavily charged with a political
elements. North Korean people may have a common ancestor, but under the current political and military tension between the two Koreas, they cannot be imagined separately from their communist polity.

As far as official narratives are concerned, North Korea is simply not present at the NMK. The timeline both at the Archaeology Hall and the History Hall do not indicate the existence of such a state as North Korea. In both timelines, the year of 1945 is described as Korea’s independence from the Japanese colonial occupation, and the year of 1945 is also indicated as the beginning of the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea). In reality, the Republic of Korea was officially established in 1948, not in 1945. In the timelines, there is no trace of at least three years’ extreme ideological conflict and political chaos right after independence in 1945 that ultimately led to the political division between North Korea and South Korea. The founding of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) on the northern half of the Korean peninsula in 1948 cannot be found in the timeline either. The message contained in this omission is simple and clear: South Korea is the only legitimate political entity on the Korean peninsula. Rejecting the legitimacy of the operating regime of North Korea might be easily justified at the NMK, especially considering that it is a government-sponsored institution. Transposing this political statement into the realm of cultural identity, however, is neither simple nor clear. Eradicating the presence of North Korea at the NMK has further dimensions than political concerns because this generates significant discontinuity and incompleteness in narrating Korean history and culture. This is especially true when South Korea, and the NMK by extension, glorify Kojosŏn (2333?-108 BCE), Koguryŏ (37 BCE-668), and Parhae (698-926) as the jewels in the
crown of Korean history, all of whose territories are now located in North Korea and China. South Korea’s furious response to recent controversies around the Northeast project of China (東北工程) in 2002 illuminated the importance of historical and cultural ties that entail postcolonial politics (see chapter four). In line with the Northeast project, China’s movement toward obtaining the UNESCO cultural heritage recognition for Koguryŏ sites in 2004 has caused outraged reactions among South Koreans.

Territorialities are not the only issues in determining cultural legitimacy either. What about those people who have lived in the northern part of the Korean peninsula over generations? Would they be recognized as the descendants of the great Koguryŏ and Parhae, and even Kojosŏn? Most importantly, can they be considered as legitimate members of Han minjok as the mythic descendants of Tan’gun? The North-South division has been continued for about sixty years and it is undeniable that the division caused some level of cultural discontinuities and cultural differences between the two Koreas (Yim 2002: 39). However, if the continuity and unity of Han minjok gloriously survived for more than five thousand years as most South Koreans believe, sixty years of division constitutes only a small fraction of this entire period, making the basis of argument untenable for North Korea’s cultural derailment from Han minjok.

There was a particular moment when this ambiguous relation between North Korea and Han minjok was epitomized in a museum setting. In 2006, the NMK launched a special exhibit on cultural properties of North Korea, entitled “Cultural Properties of the North: National Treasures from Pyongyang.” The title cleverly eschewed the term “North Korea” and used “the North” instead, which definitely referred to the northern part of the Korean peninsula but nevertheless avoided clearly recognizing the presence of
North Korea as a separate political entity. The special exhibit was made possible by the first cooperative effort between the NMK and the Chosŏn Central Museum of History (CCMH) in Pyongyang, a North Korean counterpart of the NMK. A total of ninety items were lent from the CCMH, including fifty National Treasures and eleven Treasures. In terms of time span, the range of the borrowed objects stretched from Paleolithic artifacts to paintings of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910). Some objects were of great interest in that they were a rarity in South Korea such as oversized earthenware from the Neolithic period. Others were noticeable on the grounds of their antiquity, such as the bone flute, which was supposed to be the earliest musical instrument ever excavated on the Korean peninsula. The bronze statue of Taejo Wangŏn of Koryŏ was of particular interest as well, since the special exhibit was its first public debut to the world outside North Korea.

There were references found in historical documents about having made and buried the statue in Songdo (currently Kaesŏng, North Korea), but its actual existence had not been confirmed for a long time. In fact, the bronze statue of Taejo Wangŏn was a signature item of the special exhibit featured on the cover page of the official brochure and on the admission ticket. The first special exhibit on North Korean objects in South Korea attracted public attention even before the actual exhibit opened. Important to note was that more genuine attention was directed toward the symbolized meanings conveyed through the special exhibit than through the objects themselves. In other words, the North-South relation embedded in this special exhibit was the true focal point. As a part of cooperative effort, the process of consulting, examining, and finally lending objects involved many staff members of the NMK visiting North Korea and meeting with the CCMH staff on several occasions to discuss arrangements. This process of collaboration
was understood as the first step in stimulating and facilitating cultural exchange between North Korea and South Korea. Media displayed exalted interest in the special exhibit, emphasizing the cooperative aspects between the two Koreas. The fact that it was the first time for South Korean museum staff to ever visit the CCMH since the North-South division was repeatedly highlighted in the newspapers, as if it heralded a breakthrough to a hitherto forbidden world. The whole process of transporting the objects on loan from the CCMH to the NMK was also dramatized through the media. The journey of the objects on loan in oversized container trucks from Pyŏngyang via Mountain Kŭmkang to Seoul across the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) drew attention both to the current state of North-South division and to the future possibility of reunification.

With this backdrop of political implications and cultural significance, the special exhibit successfully drew a large number of visitors despite relatively high admission fees. People lined up to see the cultural properties from the North. The special exhibit hall was crowded with visitors the whole time, many of whom came to Seoul from provincial areas just for the special exhibit. Particular interest in the special exhibit came from the group of Silhyangmin, people who came to the South from the North during the Korean War (1950-1953) and never got to return to their hometowns as the Korean peninsula became divided into two antagonistic nations. Now in their seventies and eighties, these Silhyangmin people cheered the exhibit as if they were reunited with their own family members that they had been separated from for almost half a century. One of my interviewees in his late seventies expressed his thrill as well as sorrow on encountering the special exhibit:

I cannot believe that I actually see those artifacts from the North right in front of my eyes. Look, all those things remind us that we share the same
culture and same history. They testify that there is no reason that the unification is not possible. My only hope is to meet my folks in North Korea before I die just as I see these things with my own eyes. [An interview with a visitor to the special exhibit of Cultural Properties of the North, June 15, 2006]

Other young visitors who do not have any personal experience of the North-South division also uttered their firm belief in the oneness of the Korean people, which, according to them, is demonstrated through the exhibit:

I was amazed to find out that all the things in the hall are extremely similar to what we have here. Especially the earlier artifacts clearly showed the common origin that the two nations share. I hope more events like this will take place in the near future, confirming the common root between North Korea and South Korea and easing out the political tension between the two. [An interview with a visitor to the special exhibit of Cultural Properties of the North, July 18, 2006]

Although some senior citizens who retained bitter experiences of the Korean War revealed their revulsion toward the communist government of North Korea, they nevertheless expressed solid belief in the common origin and shared history of the North and South. To sum up the visitors’ responses, the special exhibit on “Cultural Properties from the North” offered a forum for many South Koreans to reconfirm the category of Han minjok that included people in the North based on cultural affinity over a long period of time.

The most awkward aspect of this was that this special exhibit took place although “the North” simply does not exist at all in the museum’s official narratives. It was ironic to observe both the commonality between North Korea and South Korea and the inclusiveness of Han minjok exceedingly emphasized inside the special exhibit hall, while the rest of the entire museum unreservedly seemed to deny the existence of North Korea. The “Cultural Properties from the North” were welcomed as if they were traces of long lost siblings. At the same time, it seemed that few people actually realized that
the long lost siblings had in fact been deliberately wiped out from the museum narratives, with North Korea being treated as an evil twin whose existence should not be tolerated. As the collaborative effort between the two major museums of North Korea and South Korea continues to grow, the NMK is in urgent and indispensable need of developing a new narrative that goes beyond both total denial and emotive attachment to the North.

6.4 Representation of Han Minjok at National Museums

The presence and absence of North Korea at the NMK testifies to the inability of Han minjok to aptly reflect the contemporary political conditions of the divided Korea. Representations of Han minjok at national museums suffers from inadequacy and arbitrariness not just in addressing time-specific issues but also in portraying the everlasting national journey of Han minjok even in its most vague sense. The depiction of Han minjok found in the NMK and the NFMK turned out to be discontinuous, selective, and misleading.

Upon relocating to the Yongsan area, the NMK adopted a new logo and presented it proudly to the public. The logo consists of nine triple lines stacked together vertically and then cut into another three segments horizontally. The “Logo” section on the NMK’s official English website explains the meaning of the NMK’s new logo as follows: “The three parallel lines represent the diverse culture that Korea has accumulated in its long, enduring history. The two white vertical lines serve as the borders between the past, the present, and the future” (emphasis added). In this English version, “Korea” does not sound nuanced, but comparing the English version to its original Korean version reveals that the word “Korea” is a translation of “Han minjok.” The logo represents the history and culture of Han minjok, which spans from the past, the present, and the future. It is
worth pointing out, however, that the entire exhibit provided at the NMK is heavily-focused on the past. The present, not to mention the future, is hard to grasp from the exhibits at the NMK. The glorious past on display at the NMK might suggest a hopeful picture of the present and the future at best, but no clear narratives on the present and future can be found.

Even the representation of the past is highly limited and selective. While the starting point of Han minjok steadfastly goes back to the Paleolithic period, around the time when Tan’gun supposedly founded Kojosŏn, the past of Han minjok at the NMK unsurely stops at the establishment of the Great Han Empire in 1897. The uncomfortable general feeling in South Korea surrounding the Japanese colonial occupation (1910-1945) and subsequent division between the North and South is quite understandable, but an abrupt conclusion of Han minjok history with the founding of the Great Han Empire only reveals the inability of the NMK to cope with South Korea’s own past. It naturally precludes producing any contemplative representation of the present, and a platform for discussing the future. The status of Han minjok stalled in the past is even more obvious at the NFMK, where the narratives of Han minjok history end with the late Chosŏn dynasty. On the grounds that the NFMK is a “life history (生活史)” museum whose primary focus is the everyday life of Han minjok, exhibits at the NFMK provide very little political context. Most time periods displayed at the NFMK appear harmonious and conflict-free, as if existing in a sociopolitical vacuum. The most problematic aspect of the NFMK regarding Han minjok is its seriously flawed representation of Chosŏn
Yangban elite as if they are the whole picture of Han minjok. The portrayal of the Chosŏn Dynasty at the NFMK is filled with extremely selective and misleading images with an exclusive focus on the yangban elite class, which the NFMK proudly advertises as the life of Han minjok.

6.4.1 The NMK: Unresolved Past, Unstated Present

The NMK has six main halls, including Archaeology Hall, History Hall, Art Hall I, Art Hall II, Asian Gallery, and Gallery of Donations. Except for the Asian Gallery, all the other halls display objects directly related to Korean history and culture. Archaeology Hall and History Hall together cover the time period from the Paleolithic Period to the Chosŏn dynasty in a chronological order.

At the end of the History Hall, there is a small section displaying objects on the establishment of the Great Han Empire. A handful of objects on display, including one of the earliest Korean national flags and royal seals, decorate the last part of the Korean history exhibit at the NMK. While this last section of the History Hall displays the rise of the Great Han Empire, the fall of the Great Han Empire is not depicted at all since it would inevitably broach the painful memories of the Japanese colonial occupation. Shunning painful historical experiences is not limited to the Great Han Empire part of Korean history at the NMK. Japanese and Mongolian invasions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are also either vaguely eschewed or simply omitted from the museum narratives at the NMK. Blotting out inglorious moments by highlighting the

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2 Yangban was a ruling class of Chosŏn Dynasty. Within the Confucian hierarchical system of Chosŏn social classes, yangban, scholarly officials, were located at the top, followed by peasants, artisans, and merchants.
most splendid ones is a typical practice of escapism. There is an exception though. If there exists tangible evidence that illustrates the united effort of the people against foreign invasions and occupations such as *palman taejangkyŏng* of Koryŏ, then it becomes the focus of the exhibit. In fact, the Japanese colonial period produced many such artifacts that testify to the suffering as well as to the resistance of the *Han minjok*, including Korean national flags (*T'aegeukki*) used during the March First Movement, Japanese torture devices used for repressing the Korean independence activists, as well as Japanese textbooks used to suppress the Korean language and national spirit. A considerable number of these objects exist in South Korea for museum use, but none of them are on display at the NMK. Such items are found either at the Independence Hall in Chŏnan or at the Sŏdaemun Prison Museum in Seoul. The Independence Hall was built to honour and commemorate Korean independence and Korean people’s anticolonial struggle. The Sŏdaemun Prison Museum uses renovated former prison facilities where Korean nationalist activists and independence movement leaders were imprisoned during the Japanese colonial rule. Exhibits at these two locations show the interminable national spirit of *Han minjok* and its unyielding resistance that eventually begot Korean independence from Japanese colonial rule. It is undeniable that both the Independence Hall and the Sŏdaemun Prison Museum commemorate important parts of *Han minjok*’s history, but the existence of these specialized museums in a way testifies to the need to

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3 *Palman ta jangkyŏng* of Koryŏ refers to more than eighty thousand woodblocks inscribed with Buddhist canons whose production was sponsored by the Koryŏ government to resist the Mongols with the help of Buddha during the Mongolian invasions (1231, 1270).
separate this specific part of *Han minjok* history from other glorious and untainted periods, most of which are on display at the NMK.

The NMK’s trajectory of development might have been partly responsible for this separation and discontinuity in narrating the history of *Han minjok*. As discussed in chapter two, the NMK basically succeeded the Japanese Government-General Museum in 1945, inheriting both its organizational structure and collection divisions. Art history and archaeology were two main pillars of the Japanese Government-General Museum, both in terms of collections and research (Ch’oe 2001; 2008), and these two departments continued to form the main components of the current NMK. The History Department was a new addition to the reopened NMK, as was the History Hall. As a result, the NMK’s collection of historical documents and objects is relatively weak compared to those of art and archaeological artifacts. In particular, objects and documents dated from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century were not well collected and conserved for museum purposes, since that was when the Chosón Dynasty rapidly disintegrated with the advance of other neighbouring powers such as Japan, China, and Russia. However, considering the decent collections of the Independence Hall and the Sŏdaemun Prison Museum that were rescued and conserved as museum collections after the Independence, the NMK’s lack of exhibits on the recent past and contemporary South Korea should be seen as a result of specific narratives implemented at the NMK rather than as a mere shortage of specific types of collections. Some aspects of the recent past have been on display through occasional special exhibits, such as woodblock paintings made during the colonial period, but these kinds of efforts have yet to be incorporated into a permanent exhibit at the NMK.
When I made an inquiry on the absence of the recent past and contemporary history, one of the curators at the NMK stated his remorse with a sigh. He explained the absence as a result of the eventfulness of recent Korean history. Pointed out as sources of difficulties in building proper narratives of the recent past were conflicts and antagonistic duels in the early twentieth century between left and right, modernists and traditionalists, rich and poor, capitalist and communist, pro-Japanese and anti-Japanese elements, as well as pro-American and pro-Soviet Union elements. He believed that all these conflicts have not quite been resolved and consolidated within society even to the present, imposing overarching narratives onto the recent past and onto contemporary South Korean history such that any such exhibit is destined to produce a convoluted message. While fashioning a comprehensive narrative of the recent and contemporary South Korean history is challenging as such, installing an anti-Japanese discourse is relatively straightforward considering the prevalent anti-Japanese sentiment in South Korean society. In fact, out of all the above-mentioned social issues, anti-Japanese sentiment might be the one and only discourse that appears to be more or less agreed to at the level of general society in South Korea. The relative success of the Independence Hall and the Sŏdaemun Prison Museum is effectively explicated in this context, while the NMK is not ready to interpret the rest of the recent past and contemporary social aspects in the museum settings. As a result, Han minjok at the NMK stalled with the Great Han Empire and has not proceeded since then. While the political and social conflicts in the remote past can be easily minimized with a discourse of glorious and harmonious unity, the devastating and acutely vivid experiences of the recent past still await some sort of
resolution. Without an effort to remedy this, Han minjok at the NMK would be long contained only in the past, just like a faded stuffed specimen behind a glass case.

6.4.2 The NFMK: Exhibit Halls I and II

Just like the NMK, the NFMK employs Han minjok as a keyword in organizing its permanent exhibits. The NFMK has three permanent exhibit halls, all of which were vigorously renovated during the last five years. These three exhibit halls at the NFMK have numeric naming systems with respective thematic titles. They include Hall I: History of Han minjok, Hall II: Livelihood of Han minjok, and Hall III: The Lifecycle of a Korean. The first two exhibit halls have “Han minjok” in their titles, and the last one uses “a Korean” in its title as a singular form of Han minjok.

At the NFMK, the term Han minjok is used to represent the totality of Koreans and their trajectories, transcending time and space. The timeline at the entrance of exhibit Hall I clearly demonstrates this. With “timeline of Han minjok” as the title, the table goes directly back to the Paleolithic period as the first stage of Han minjok without much explanation. Going back to the origin of Han minjok in the Paleolithic period might have been based on the myth of Tan’gun, but not providing any contextual evidence in defining the origin of Han minjok is extremely arbitrary and unusual for museum practice. On one hand, it is purely retrospective in that the true starting point lies in the “present.” That means, the category of Han minjok is pre-determined by the current group of Korean people, however vague it might be. Tracking back the origin of Han minjok as it is determined in the present presupposes that there is a linear developmental trajectory of Han minjok throughout all of human history, from the Paleolithic period to the present. It is true that there is archaeological evidence of human
residence in the Korean Peninsula from the Paleolithic period and onwards, but presuming that this tracing indicates direct and inevitable connections among the bearers of different archaeological culture groups that go as far as to the current residents of the Korean Peninsula is nothing but a poorly supported conjecture. In this sense, the narratives told at the NFMK about Han minjok are undefined, inconsistent, and circular.

According to the museum narratives at the NFMK, Han minjok existed from the Paleolithic to the present, with cultural and ethnic essence retained making it possible to continue to categorize it as one group. This convenient linearity of Han minjok from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic and subsequent periods up to the present is more a product of conscious efforts to legitimize the longevity and continuous unity of Han minjok than of valid archaeological and historical investigation. The timeless homogeneity of Han minjok is imbued in every exhibit hall, as if all the individual members of Han minjok have always been in equal and harmonious relations with one another. Obscured by this discourse of homogeneity and unity are, of course, conflict and inequality between social classes across different time periods. Social differences, discriminations, and conflicts are conveniently clouded over by this exhibit of the proud history of great Han minjok. Only ordeals on the level of Han minjok as a whole are worth receiving attention, while the probable sufferings of the lower social classes on a daily basis are simply mute.

In Exhibit Hall I, mannequins are lined up to show the clothing of the Three Kingdoms Period. All costumes proudly shown are those of kings, queens, and nobles with flamboyant details and excessive accessories made of gold and jade. Visitors busily take photos with these exhibits in the background, looking impressed with the glitzy look of the clothing and accessories. The panel of the exhibit simply states, “Clothing of the
Three Kingdoms.” Taking into consideration the proportion of upper class people to the total population, the information delivered by this exhibit is extremely selective, often making young visitors confuse the particular with the general. Sometimes narratives suggested by the exhibits border as being dishonest rather than just selective. In Exhibit Hall II, different types of houses of Han minjok are displayed with photos and miniature models. Contrasted in this exhibit are kiwa chip, an earthen tile roofed wooden house that was popular among the wealthy Chosón yangban elite, and other less glamorous types such as ch’oga chip, a thatched earthen house mostly resided in by commoners, nōwa chip, a thin wood panel roofed earthen house, and kulpi, a bark roofed earthen house. Apparently these houses were occupied by different groups of people, and what differentiated those groups largely hinged on the social class of the occupants. However, the exhibit showing different types of houses appears innocent of this, with no information on the social aspects of the different groups of residents for each house type. They are displayed as if they only demonstrate varieties in stylistic terms. Explanations on labels are strictly limited to the materials used and the structural characteristics of the houses. For example, nōwa chip, a house roofed with thin wooden panels is explained as a type of a house that was prevalent in mountainous areas in the Kangwon province. Historical knowledge will shed light on the fact that the residents of nōwa chip did not just include people in the Kangwon area, but also specifically hwajŏnmin, people who made a living by slash-and-burn agriculture. Kulpi, a house roofed with pieces of oak bark, is another type of dwelling that was home to hwajŏnmin. This hwajŏnmin group, nōwa chip and kulpi occupants, was located at the bottom rung of farmers. With no information on the true character of the occupants of the houses, nōwa chip and kulpi
style dwellings were primarily explained at the NFMK as regional variations of houses without a social class context. Furthermore, they are often displayed as examples of “eco-friendly” technology that demonstrate the wisdom and “green” mind of Han minjok who made the best use of local materials. These explanations only romanticize nôwa chip and kulpi, leaving out the significance in terms of the social and cultural contexts.

The different types of housing reflect not just about style and structure, but also about the social class of the residents because in many cases, the residential areas and housing types were determined by the livelihood of people. The occupants of nôwa chip and kulpi did not choose to go into mountainous areas in order to befriend nature. They were socially forced to make a living in marginal and deserted areas. The ways in which nôwa chip and kulpi are explained at the NFMK might be similar to the case of culture in the US Deep South being romanticized without any contextual interpretation of social aspects. The plantation houses in the Deep South are only superficially consumed if there is no understanding of the system of slavery.

6.4.3 NFMK: Exhibit Hall III

The concealed selectiveness in presenting prototypical images of Han minjok is most obvious in Exhibit Hall III, “The Lifecycle of a Korean.” Exhibit Hall III was the first in line among the NFMK’s three permanent exhibit halls that went through a series of rigorous renovations during 2005-2006. The renovated hall was entitled, “The Lifecycle of a Korean,” in which the lifecycle of a Chosŏn elite yangban was on display from birth to death. If the case of nôwa chip and kulpi, the past was romanticized by obliterating pivotal social context, Exhibit Hall III manipulated the past by perpetuating stereotypical images. The selectiveness and undue prominence of a peculiar part of
history as seen in Exhibit Hall III are not just implicit but are rarely noticed by visitors. It is because the selectiveness has been perpetuated by the school curriculum and other cultural education for a long time and has penetrated into people’s minds so far that people have internalized the selectively offered representation of Han minjok of Korea as the accurate model, along with images of Korean past elites.

In preparation for the renovation, the exhibit department at the NFMK held a series of meetings and conferences to decide on the themes and layouts of the renovations, which fortunately took place during my fieldwork at the NFMK to give me the opportunity to attend and observe. Most of the meetings were about designing and installing a new exhibit that would most effectively deliver the theme of, “The Lifecycle of a Korean.” The much less discussed part was the nature of, “The Lifecycle of a Korean.” Who is “a Korean”? If “a Korean” is understood as a singular form of Han minjok, within what time period and what social frame should the Korean be situated to best show the “lifecycle”? There is also the issue of gender. If “a Korean” is a singular form of Han minjok, is the representation more commonly of a male, when it could be either a male or female? My discussion will focus on the issues of historic time frame and class. With such questions as those asked above largely unasked and unanswered, most considerations and discussions at renovation meetings focused on the actual exhibit designs rather than the conceptual framework of the renovation project. The “Three Purposes of Renovation” that the NFMK posted on their website also revealed that the conceptual context was deemphasized compared to the display technology. According to the NFMK, the three main purposes of the renovations were: (1) to revamp the display environment of the NFMK as a major life history museum in South Korea, (2) to change
the display space and maximize the use of newly acquired collections, and (3) to raise historical understanding of the lifecycle and values of South Koreans through folk collections. The first two are about improving display technology and the last one emphasizes the use of folk collections in understanding Korean culture. None of the three main purposes states the conceptual basis of making the Chosŏn yangban elite the representative image of Korean life. In addition, the renovation process of Exhibit Hall III considerably recycled previous exhibits. Changes were made mostly to the display methods resulting in a stronger focus on a coherent representation of yangban elite life, while the exhibits before renovation included some aspects of commoners’ life as well. One of the chief curators of the NFMK emphasized the importance of contextual display, in which objects are not frozen in glass cases but put in the actual context of their original use to maximize understanding of the objects and their true values (Ki 2006: 12-13).

According to Ki Yang, a chief curator at the NFMK, the renovation project at the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) in Salem, Massachusetts was seen as a benchmark for that of the NMFK. In his article on the NFMK’s renovation, Ki highly complimented the effort of the PEM, especially the permanent installation of Yin Yu Tang, a wooden house from the Qing Dynasty, at the PEM. Yin Yu Tang was initially located in China. It was carefully taken apart, transported to Salem, and reconstructed at the PEM. Having transposed the whole structure of the house into the courtyard of the PEM, Ki explained, enabled a true appreciation of Chinese life as if the visitors were standing in an actual house in the corner of a Chinese city. The positive aspects of the contextual display method at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City were also admired in this article. It states;
The display technique staged at the Metropolitan Museum was to find and deliver values of objects in context. This contextual display method efficiently played an amazing supporting role, maximizing and emphasizing the value of the objects. [Ki 2006: 12]

Drawing on the examples of PEM and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Ki stressed the importance of introducing this strategy into the NFMK. He also pointed out in the article that the permanent exhibit at the NFMK before the renovations had never been changed since it was installed in 1993. The old and static exhibits had been long overdue for change and this served as the primary driving force for the renovation. To sum up, the renovation project at the NFMK was initiated to build a new permanent exhibit with the contextual display technique. The renovated exhibits as the final product seemed to succeed in introducing the contextual display techniques for a better understanding of the in-use value of the individual objects. On the other hand, the contextual analysis of the renovation project itself remained deeply unfulfilled.

In the renovated Exhibit Hall III, the lifecycle of a Korean unfolded as that of a Chosŏn yangban elite. The larger contextual understanding of why a Chosŏn yangban elite man is eligible for representing “a Korean” does not seem a matter of interest. Since Exhibit Hall III was titled, “the Lifecycle of a Korean,” rather than “the Lifecycle of a Chosŏn yangban elite man,” there should be more explanation regarding what made the life of a Chosŏn yangban elite man qualified to represent “a Korean,” or Han minjok. At the exhibit hall, however, there is only one sentence regarding this choice of a Chosŏn yangban elite man as a representative of “a Korean.” A panel at the entrance to the hall begins with a very simple sentence: “Displayed in this hall are life passages of Chosŏn (1392–1910) yangban elite, from birth to death.” It is a statement not an explanation of why a member of this social class was chosen. Other than this simple announcement,
there was no further explanation offered on this issue. Then the panel goes directly to
detailed descriptions of the rites of passage of Chosŏn yangban elite, focusing on four
major ceremonial events; coming of age, marriage, death, and memorial service for
ancestors. The panels and exhibits of Exhibit Hall III attempt to provide contextual
understanding of these ceremonial events through lengthy texts on the social norms and
Confucian values of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Objects and dioramas displayed in
reconstructed settings depict the most sumptuous scenes of yangban elite culture. For
example, the part on the first birthday celebration (tol) features tolsang, a small table
containing specially prepared birthday food that has symbolic connotations, and tolbok,
traditional silk attire set for the one year old baby.

Figure 6.1 Tol Sang and Tol Bok

![A reconstructed scene of Tol sang and Tol bok at the NFMK © Kyung Hyo Chun, 2012.](image)

The reconstructed scene of a wedding shows a traditional court yard ceremony
with more than twenty life sized mannequins. In installing the wedding ceremony scene,
the renovation team’s main goal was to make it as splendid as possible to show the elegant Chosŏn yangban culture. As a result, the whole presentation looks polished and affluent but assuming this type of celebration was even common for the entire yangban elite class would be too naïve. There is no doubt that even among the yangban elite of Chosŏn, only those in the top layer could have even tasted such a luxurious lifestyle. Conversations often overheard in front of the recreated scenes of the first birthday, wedding ceremony, and the sixtieth birthday revealed how the selectively constructed images of the past in turn reshaped people’s memories. Facing theses scenes of opulent celebrations, many senior visitors proudly told their grandchildren “this is how we celebrated the important occasions when I was your age.” Whenever I overheard such conversations I had to control my urge to ask them back instantly. ‘Are you sure?’ Of course some of them may have really been fortunate enough to have had such feasts, but it is simply not possible that every senior visitor had the same level of experiences. What they share is not the past itself, but the constructed and continuously perpetuated images of the past. Even young parents in their thirties also made similar comments, based not on what they actually experienced but what they have learned from school and media.
The visitors’ responses to this extremely selective representation of a Korean lifecycle were particularly interesting. Out of more than fifty museum visitors I interviewed, only six people expressed dissatisfaction about the representation, and even that was not about the rationale behind the choice of representational theme. Their dissatisfaction was mostly directed towards the exhibit designs, with comments such as “they could have had more lights over here,” or “more explanations would have been better for the coming of age part.” When I asked about their opinions on Chosŏn yangban elite being used as the prototype of Korean life, most of the visitors said they had no problem with that, or they had not realized that until it was pointed out to them.

Regarding the museum’s fondness for the Chosŏn Dynasty, visitors provided different views of their own. The majority of them I discussed it with thought it was a legitimate choice since the Chosŏn Dynasty is the most recent and the longest dynasty in Korean history. Some visitors expressed their views that the easiness of obtaining
artifacts from the Chosŏn Dynasty must have been a determining factor in shaping the renovating process of Exhibit Hall III. The museum staff members who participated in the renovation project were interviewed as well and they admitted that the fact that artifacts from the late Chosŏn period constitute the largest part of the NFMK’s collection indeed played a significant role in placing a big focus on the Chosŏn Dynasty. However, according to museum staff, that was not the determining factor. They thought that the direction of the renovation project was shaped by the audience’s expectation rather than the nature of the museum’s collections. As one of the curators who was directly involved with the renovation of Exhibit Hall III said, “People are more familiar with the Chosŏn Dynasty than with any other time period in Korean history. The familiarity has been established through television shows, books, and school curricula. If we, the national museum, offer something different than what they are accustomed to, audiences will be confused and definitely not happy. We should gauge visitor expectations and aim to fulfill them.” In other words, the audience’s expectations provided a rationale by which the museum staff shaped the exhibit themes and content to satisfy public interest. In turn, the audience’s expectations have been formed through being exposed to such museum exhibits and media depictions that prioritize Chosŏn culture as the prototype of Han minjok. The relationship between museums and their audiences are mutual, conditioning and being conditioned by one another’s expectations.

If the Chosŏn dynasty is the most favored time period to represent Han minjok, then why has the yangban elite culture received priority over other groups? Another curator pointed out that the sophisticated and refined appearance of Chosŏn yangban elite culture is a source of admiration and pride. Because of its exquisite and fancy
appearance, yangban elite culture is what most South Koreans want to identify with as the general image of themselves. Many responses from the visitors I interviewed on the culture of Han minjok actually reflect this, especially in the context of globalism. As one of my interviewees said, “We need to promote the image of Korea in this era of globalism. Something that is eye-catching and sophisticated should be advertised as the proper traditional culture. The cotton and linen clothes of commoners are not impressive at all and might give the wrong impression that South Korea has always been a poor country” (from an interview with a visitor of the NFMK, May 15 2006). The rivalry with Japan was also mentioned in some interviewees’ responses. This is shown in the following.

Europeans and North Americans’ interest in Japanese culture was based on its exotic beauty. Look at those kimono, their food, and even their paintings. All are very colourful and beautiful. We, too, need to emphasize such qualities in promoting Korean culture to the outer world. I know that we Koreans are baekūminjok (people who love to wear white clothes), but with white cotton broad cloth, you cannot earn other people’s attention. [An interview with a visitor at the NFMK, June 3, 2006]

Here, being global is understood as showing international tastes for high culture. Promoting high culture as the proper Korean tradition is most evident in tourist spots such as Insadong in Seoul where stores specializing in Korean traditional items are clustered. Silk patchwork, embroidered clothes, porcelain and celadon are displayed in the show windows. The brilliant colours of silk patchwork on items discussed by a saleswoman as “traditional Korean items” can dazzle foreign tourists. For a souvenir industry, developing items that easily catch people’s eyes with vibrant colours is a good strategy. In contrast, public museums, as non-profit organizations whose missions first and foremost are to collect, preserve and educate, should go beyond promoting such an approach based on superficiality. Displaying showy objects without proper context might
be a souvenir store’s marketing strategy, but should not be a national museum’s rationale for making representations, especially when the subject is the ultimate source of collective identity of the nation. Packaging *Han minjok* in its most proud style to disseminate and advertise national pride mirrors South Korea’s postcolonial desires to be recognized as having an uninterrupted history filled with superior, unique, and authentic culture. Colonial experience and other times of sufferings are presented as overshadowed by the heyday of *Han minjok* life as represented by elite *yangan* culture of the Chosŏn period.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

*Minjok* is a term used to describe ethnic communities with a shared history and culture. At the turn of the century, Korean nationalists such as Sin Ch’ae-ho established nationalist narratives of Korean history by defining *minjok* as determined by both decent and culture and installed it at the analytical core of his study. As a group of descendants of Tan’gun as Sin contended, *Han minjok*, in theory, offers a fundamentally inclusive identity that transcends class, regional, and religious conflicts. In practice, however, the term *Han minjok* lacks conceptual and definitional value despite its everyday popularity in South Korean society.

In academic circles, using *Han minjok* as a concept calls for far more precaution than its use in popular usage. It becomes extremely complicated when this vaguely defined term *Han minjok* finds its usage in an institution such as a museum. On a conceptual level, it should be an existential concern for museums to adopt such an elusive term as *Han minjok*, since keeping scholarly integrity and at the same time fully satisfying the audience’s expectations are real challenge from the perspective of the
museum. In reality, South Korean museums seem to have no reluctance to employ the popular but neither historically, nor politically defined term *Han minjok* in their official exhibits and programs. Within the proud display of *Han minjok*, however, fundamental limitations are hard to overlook and two of them have been discussed here; (1) The NMK’s obscure stance toward North Korea in terms of establishing the representational boundary of *Han minjok* (2) the incompleteness of the history of *Han minjok* at the NMK which abruptly ends with the founding of the Great *Han* Empire in 1897 and (3) the delusively representative of *Han minjok* at the NFMK which places the Chosŏn *yangban* elite as equivalent to the entirety of *Han minjok*.

*Han minjok* is in fact an overarching key term that organizes the NMK and the NFMK, and considering the popular nationalist sentiment, it is hard for national museums not to adopt the idea of *Han minjok*, a self-identification of Koreans. Just as with the case of Kojosŏn described in chapter three, the absence of *Han minjok* in museums would have definitely ignited another furious response among the nationalist minds of South Koreans. The introduction of *Han minjok* in national museums resulted in particular social classes and specific time periods being mobilized and packaged as representing the prototype and entirety of *Han minjok* at museums, deceptively submerging other important moments and constituents of the culture and history of *Han minjok*.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

The primary research question this dissertation explores is the interplay between postcoloniality and nationalism as manifested in the national museums of South Korea. After colonial liberation from Japan in 1945, Koreans have been eager to establish their sovereignty and to elevate national pride through nationalism. In South Korea, the nationalist discourse is ubiquitous, and generated top-down directly from the government as well as bottom-up in both traditional media and new social media. Emphasizing the unity, longevity, and distinctiveness of the Korean people by promoting nationalism based on an idea of ethnic homogeneity was a way of both redressing a traumatic colonial past and integrating modern social practices. In contemporary South Korea, nationalism is one of the most powerful meta-narratives that characterize the social landscape, from the public school curriculum to international sporting events, and even to campaigns to buy domestic products of South Korea.

While the nationalist discourse in South Korea constantly reinforces the greatness of the Korean people and the worthiness of Korea’s splendid culture of “five thousand years,” the current form of South Korean nationalism is far from being self-sufficient. The major motivational force for nationalist consciousness in South Korea is not self-determination but postcoloniality. South Korea’s anticolonial self-definition is a direct reaction to Japanese colonialism (1910-1945), and the assertive pervasiveness of nationalism in contemporary South Korean society is the prescribed way of rejecting and erasing a past both undesirable and regrettable. This prescribed ethnic nationalism is extremely problematic in both its ahistoricity and conspicuous irrelevancy in the face of an increasingly multiculturalizing contemporary South Korean population.
By examining the interplay between postcoloniality and nationalism, this dissertation examines the two major national museums of South Korea, the National Museum of Korea (NMK) and the National Folk Museum of Korea (NFMK). Conceptualizing museums as complex sites where different social, political, and cultural agendas are projected and contested, this dissertation attempts to contextualize the discourses and phenomena of nationalism and postcoloniality in contemporary South Korea within the “contact zone” of museums. While the use of “contact zone” in understanding the nature of museums is strongly informed by James Clifford’s (1997) adoption of Mary Louise Pratt’s term (Pratt 1992: 6-7), this dissertation aims to broaden the scope of the concept by not limiting the discussion to the dialogue between the exhibited and the exhibitor, but by extending it to include the process by which museums, the audience, and the society interact to generate and reinforce anticolonial nationalism in South Korea.

7.1 Chapter Findings

Chapter two discussed debates around the historical backgrounds and social statuses of the NMK and the NFMK, with a particular focus on the colonial origin and the relocation process of the NMK which exemplified the postcolonial anxiety of contemporary South Korea. Chapter three examined the process in which the Dokdo/Takeshima controversy got imbued with symbolic significance in South Korea. As a milestone in establishing the anticolonial national identity of South Korea, the Dokdo/Takeshima issues go beyond territorial claims: South Korea’s claim made to Dokdo/Takeshima represents the postcolonial aspiration for politico-economic victory in a contest with the former colonizer Japan. Chapter four looked into museum exhibits and
narratives on ancient kingdoms at the NMK and the NFMK to highlight how the present desire to consolidate historical legitimacy has been projected to the past, yielding conflicting interpretations on Kojosŏn, Koguryŏ, Parhae, and Nangnang. By identifying contemporary South Korea as a legitimate heir to such ancient northern kingdoms known as militaristically successful and culturally sophisticated, rather than other historic associations, South Korea was seeking a sense of glory and pride that could overcome recent undesirable experiences of Japanese colonization of Korea. Chapter five revealed the limited and flawed representations of multiculturalism on display at the NMK and the NFMK. The distorted images of globalism and multiculturalism found in exhibit halls and education programs of the two museums resulted from the discrepancy between the old myth of ethnic homogeneity of Korean people and the increasingly changing sociopolitical situations of contemporary South Korea. What is noticeable in the two national museums’ approaches towards internationalism and multiculturalism was a hierarchical categorization of the White West as representing desirable “global” standards and non-Western-non-Koreans as epitomizing ambiguous “multicultural” aspects. Chapter six problematized the popular concept of Han minjok (an ethnic group of Korean people) by analyzing the ambiguous nature and selective capacity of Han minjok in addressing the entirety of Korean people within the two national museums. The lifestyle of Han minjok portrayed in the national museum is in fact that of a particular social class and gender during the specific era, that is, a yangban elite man of the Chosŏn dynasty. However, there are few people who question the national museums’ depiction of Han minjok, because it is a familiar image that has been disseminated and perpetuated by the public school curriculum and mass media as the idealized portrait of Han minjok.
7.2 Analysis of the Research and Conclusion

This dissertation deconstructs and problematizes museum representations of Korean history and culture in an attempt to understand how the colonial and postcolonial experience has conditioned nationalism in South Korea. As the two major national museums in South Korea, both the NMK and the NFMK are heavily imbued with nationalist consciousness. Between the two museums, the NMK has more aspects for consideration because of its controversial colonial origin and the recent relocation process that clearly embodied the postcolonial struggles of South Korea. To compensate for its stigmatized colonial origin, the NMK has striven to represent a strong nationalist discourse: epic stories of the Korean people are told and the distinctiveness of Korean culture is accentuated through exhibits on Korean archaeology, history, and art history in the museum. With these exhibits and narratives, the NMK offered a foundation for South Koreans to confirm and reinforce their national and cultural identity. Despite this surface appearance, a close examination reveals moments of conflict and insecurity beneath the strong manifestation of self-pride and self-praise of South Korean nationalism. Rather than coming to terms with colonial trauma by re-evaluating colonial experiences and their aftermath, South Korean society became indulged in escapist nostalgia.

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represents the postcolonial aspiration for politico-economic victory in a contest with the former colonizer Japan. Chapter four looked into museum exhibits and narratives on ancient kingdoms at the NMK and the NFMK to highlight how the present desire to consolidate historical legitimacy has been projected to the past, yielding conflicting interpretations on Kojosŏn, Koguryŏ, Parhae, and Nangnang. Chapter five revealed the limited and flawed representations of multiculturalism on display at the NMK and the NFMK. The distorted images of globalism and multiculturalism found in exhibit halls and education programs of the two museums were resulted from the discrepancy between the old myth of ethnic homogeneity of Korean people and the increasingly changing sociopolitical situations of contemporary South Korea. Chapter six problematized the popular concept of Han minjok (an ethnic group of Korean people) by analyzing the ambiguous nature and selective capacity of Han minjok in addressing the entirety of Korean people within the two national museums.

As discussed in chapter three, the special exhibit on Dokdo held at the reopened NMK in the Yongsan area of Seoul exemplified the symbolic status of the NMK in defining and perpetuating nationalist discourse in postcolonial South Korea. Perennial debates around Dokdo made it a national symbol for anticolonial nationalism in South Korea, and by dedicating the special exhibit in a colonial imprint-free building to Dokdo, the NMK satisfied social expectations. The special exhibit on Dokdo reconfirmed the familiar slogan of “Dokdo belongs to Korea” with supporting historical documents and ancient maps, but at the same time, it revealed the innate selectivity and ambiguity in interpreting particular sources of “evidence.” On one hand, the special exhibit succeeded in affirming the hitherto iconic status of Dokdo as a symbol of national sovereignty and
anti-colonial independence within South Korean society. On the other hand, however, it failed to situate the territorial controversy around Dokdo within the broader field of international relations and to open up a forum for conversation and negotiation.

One of the main pillars of South Korean nationalist discourse is the belief that Koreans have maintained a homogeneous ethnic group for more than five thousand years as descendents of Tan’gun. Despite the fact that Tan’gun was not a historical but a mythical figure as was his kingdom of Kojosŏn allegedly built in 2333 BCE, the symbolic significance of Tan’gun and Kojosŏn overrides reason and historical reality as seen in the case of the archaeological timeline at the NMK described in chapter four. When the NMK opened its door to the public in a new building in Yongsan, there was a huge banner with an archaeological timeline. The timeline did not initially enlist Tan’gun’s Kojosŏn, on the basis that there was not enough archaeological evidence that could prove the actual existence of Kojosŏn built in 2333 BCE. The general public was offended by the absence of Kojosŏn in the archaeological timeline at the NMK, and newspapers were busy uploading articles and editorials that criticized the NMK’s lack of nationalist consciousness. The NMK’s initial decision to place historical reality above popular nationalism eventually resulted in criticism about the NMK for being insensitive to the nationalist sentiments of the South Korean people. The NMK tried to draw a line between scholarly integrity and popular belief by pointing out the difference between archaeological and historical timelines, but it only prompted an accusation made toward the NMK of not just being anti-nationalistic but of being pro-Japanese. After the media hype and aggravated public opinion, the NMK finally included Tan’gun’s Kojosŏn in the archaeological timeline to accommodate the nationalist sentiment of the general public,
but the incident is still remembered as one of the most troubled aspects of the NMK in many South Korean minds. The Kojosŏn controversy has become a cautionary tale to the museum staff as well. The NMK’s effort to strike a balance between scholarly endeavor and public demand eventually resulted in the installation of the Kojosŏn Hall at the NMK in 2009.

The imagined glorious past is not limited to the mythical origin of Korean history. Koguryŏ, one of the Three Kingdoms that flourished in the Korean peninsula from 37 BCE to 668, is another ancient kingdom that became an object of nostalgia for South Korean nationalism. As obvious from the name of the period, there were two other kingdoms competing with Koguryŏ, respectively Silla (57 BCE-676) and Paekche (18 BCE-660), but neither of them are objects of longing to the same extent as Koguryŏ is in contemporary South Korean society. Known as the most militaristic state among the three kingdoms, and often considered as a legitimate heir to Kojosŏn, Koguryŏ is famous in South Korea for having competed with China and expanding Korea’s territory to Manchuria during the reign of the Great Kwanggaeto King. Given that South Korea still struggles with the colonial past, there is a sense of psychological compensation achieved through the image of Koguryŏ that once conquered and colonized the vast region of Manchuria. The importance of earning recognition as a legitimate successor to the genealogy from Kojosŏn to Koguryŏ then to Parhae is well-reflected at national museums. Despite not having large collections from those ancient northern kingdoms, the NMK and the NFMK were nevertheless keen to install and expand exhibits on these ancient kingdoms by mostly borrowing objects, photos, and replicas. South Korea’s resentment and protest against the Chinese government’s enlisting of Koguryŏ sites for the UNESCO
World Heritage list is best understood in this context. Within the frame of postcolonial nationalism, South Korea’s irredentist claims around Koguryŏ and other ancient northern kingdoms are an effort to secure the glorious past of the Korean people. The mythical belief in Tan’gun Kojōn and the controversy around Koguryŏ sites exposed the postcolonial desire for historical legitimacy in addressing the identity of contemporary South Korea, exemplifying what Richard Handler pointed out as the essence of nationalist belief. According to Handler (1990:30):

Nationalists believe profoundly in the uniqueness of their cultural identity. They also believe that the boundaries they construct to define that identity are naturally given and not a symbolic construction of their own devising. . . however, imbued with modern notions of progress and linear temporality, nationalists also see the nation as a project of becoming. They speak, as did the Bradley Commission historians, both of “who we are” – as if that could be defined– and of “who we are becoming.” Or they speak. . . about restoring or recapturing a lost identity, as if a definitive collective identity existed in the past and can be recovered through correct historical scholarship and political action. [Handler 1994:30]

The ancient past is easier to imagine and to reconstruct than the present reality. Myths, legends, and epic stories about founding figures and heroes are instrumental in presenting a celebrated image of the past. The present, on the other hand, is too complicated to maneuver to yield a specific picture especially when that picture contradicts reality. In recent years, South Korea is losing the basis for a strong belief in ethnic homogeneity and cultural unity as the social landscape of the country constantly changes. In particular, with the increasing influx of transnational migrant workers and international brides, South Korean society faces a major challenge in maintaining the belief in a single ethnicity and monoculture as the basis of national identity.

Reconstructing the past is a specialty of museums in general, and the NMK and the NFMK are not exceptions. Developing a story of the present, however, may be a
more difficult task, especially when the present reveals conflicting images to the long-standing belief about collective self-identity. Chapter five explored efforts made by the national museums to accommodate the changing configuration of South Korean ethnicity in their exhibits and educational programs, only to find their methods of addressing the current phenomenon of multiethnicity and multiculturalism were highly limited and sometimes flawed.

Most so-called multicultural programs at the NFMK observed during my fieldwork were designed to “Koreanize” foreign residents in South Korea, rather than promoting bilateral and balanced cultural exchanges between South Koreans and non-South Koreans. At the centre of the unilateral approach as seen in multicultural programs, was a strong sense of supremacy of Korean culture, hindering a genuine appreciation of multicultural values. What determined weather such multicultural programs were successful was how much the “multicultural” people got to know and accept Korean culture and values, while little attention was directed the other way. The word “multicultural” became a label for indicating the non-Korean origins among people with different heritages, rather than representing an effort for mutual respect and understanding. Another distinctive tendency observed at the national museums in the context of multiculturalism was the arbitrary categorization of non-Korean audiences and cultures such that: (1) White Westerners and their cultures are often considered as denoting “global” standards while (2) non-White-non-Koreans and their cultures are lumped together as representing “multicultural” aspects. The hierarchical divisions among White Westerners, (ethnic) Koreans, and non-White-non-Koreans represent how the otherness is differently consumed in the name of globalism, nationalism, and
multiculturalism in South Korea. In other words, the otherness of the non-White is feared and thus needs to be minimized by converting them into quasi-Koreans through multicultural policies, while the otherness of White Westerners is revered and envied under the banner of globalism. Reflected in the inadequate efforts of the two national museums are South Korean society’s limits in acknowledging and accepting multicultural values at this point. It is imperative for South Korea to re-evaluate the price of holding on to the outdated discourse of ethnic homogeneity. There is no doubt that social agreement on the ethnic homogeneity and cultural unity of Koreans was highly instrumental in mobilizing anticolonial consciousness and also in establishing a sovereign nation-state after liberation from Japan. However, in the era of internationalism, transnationalism and globalization, the insulated concepts of ethnicity and cultural integrity do more harm than good to South Korean society.

This dissertation has also shown that the ethnic homogeneity-derived idea of Han minjok (Korean ethnic nation, or Korean people), is the basic fabric of South Korean nationalism. Despite its common usage in both everyday life and public institutions in South Korea, the definition and the conceptual boundary of Han minjok remain obscure. Inconsistency and arbitrariness is also found at national museums in addressing and depicting Han minjok as illustrated in chapter six. Han minjok refers to a Korean ethnic group that is believed to have been originated from the common ancestor, Tan’gun. Based on this definition, North Korea is perfectly qualified for membership in Han minjok. However, the boundary of Han minjok in the real world is less clear than in the definitional value. Proclaiming itself as the only legitimate government within the Korean Peninsula, South Korea refuses to acknowledge the North Korean government as
a rightful polity. This official stance complicates the way in which North Koreans are recognized by South Koreans in the context of Han minjok: can we (South Koreans) embrace the political adversary (North Koreans) in the name of minjok, despite an apparent gap in social values and political intentions? The NMK’s uncomfortable conceptualization of North Korea both as a long lost sibling in the special exhibit and as a threatening enemy in the permanent exhibit demonstrates the convoluted and conflicting narrative of Han minjok that is heavily laden with both emotion and politics. Ambivalent perspectives regarding Han minjok are not just present in the North-South division. The NFMK’s predisposed representation of Han minjok with the reconstructed image of a Chosŏn yangban elite man illustrates the fallaciousness and the selectiveness in representations of the harmonious past of Han minjok. In an attempt to advertise the sumptuous life of a Chosŏn yangban elite man as the prototype of the life cycle of Han minjok, political rivalries and social fissures both in the past and the present are obscured in the national museums to yield a seamless portrait of the great Han minjok. Additionally, gender issues are dismissed in the assumptive rendering of the prototypical member of Han minjok as male.

It is not uncommon that strong anticolonial nationalism operates as a popular survival mechanism for a nation-state that has colonial experiences. Korean nationalism was fostered by the imperial and colonial advancement of Japan, China, and Russia onto the Korean peninsula, and it grew to be the most effective uniting force among Koreans during the Japanese colonial occupation (1919-1945). After Independence, South Korean nationalism went through different phases of growth, but its anticolonial aspect has been persistent. South Korean nationalist discourse emphasizes the unity and continuity of
Korean people based on Korea’s long and continuous culture and ethnic makeup (Kim Ki-hyŏp 2008: 11-12). This dissertation explored the insecurity and lack of self-determination underneath the strong nationalist discourse manifested in and around the national museums, and concluded that such an inferiority complex is a product of colonialism as South Korea, a postcolonial society, still struggles with its colonial legacy. The strong desire of postcolonial South Korea to become an independent, sovereign, and self-determined nation-state led it to develop an inflated and misleading version of the nationalist epic story of Korean history and its people, only to reveal more of its own insecurity (see Im and Yi 2004). Nationalism is found all over the world, so is postcoloniality. However, in order not to turn nationalism into a swamp of obsessive nostalgia and persisting inferiority complex, South Korea needs to overcome the colonial trauma by re-evaluating colonial experiences in light of both political economy and social change. The colonial past is not easy to forget for ex-colonies, and resisting colonial brainwashing is essential in the process of decolonization. Nevertheless, attempting to negate the entire colonial past based on a sense of shame is neither effective nor helpful for South Korea’s own sake.

7.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Research

This dissertation is based on long-term fieldwork at two national museums of South Korea. A primary strength of this doctoral research comes from the fact that it is based on daily conversations and interviews with various groups of people in and around the museums. Conversations and observations among curators, volunteers, visitors, administrative staff, and even museum store sales people enabled this nuanced study. Entering the seldomly visited area of museums (no ethnographic research had been done
inside the NMK or the NFMK prior to my fieldwork) and then sharing daily routines with museum curators were the most valuable and important aspects of this doctoral research. When there are issues surrounding the museums, the quantity and quality of information the general public can get from the museum is highly limited, mostly centered on the museum’s official media releases and museum exhibits. In addition, what people get to see at museums are final products of months of deliberation, with the preparation and actual manufacturing process completely unknown to the public. Spending time with curators on a daily basis opened a new level of analysis for examining issues related to the museums. Observations of and participation in numerous meetings and committees for planning, structuring, monitoring, and installing exhibits and programs offered an in-depth perspective on the decision making process of the museum. Through working closely with museum professionals on a daily basis, this researcher witnessed a series of conflicts, disagreements, distress and dissatisfaction among different perspectives and opinions of museum people, which was of great help in situating museum issues in the broader context of sociopolitics. Based on these experiences, this dissertation could complement existing discourse on how museums shape audience experiences by focusing on the process by which national museums are conditioned by the audience and by the society.

Another strength of this research was that it was conducted by a native ethnographer. Born and raised in South Korea, as the researcher I am familiar with the South Korean education system and mass media through firsthand experience. Although the actual fieldwork was conducted over several months, the personal experience of having visited the same museums frequently over the last twenty years facilitated the
process of contextualizing contemporary issues around museums within South Korean society. The language barrier was not a problem and the familiar outer appearance as a native South Korean also smoothed the process of participant observation. However, as has been discussed in the field of anthropology, being a native ethnographer is a double-edged sword (Jacobs-Huey 2002; Narayan 1993; O Laoire 2003). It is a source of both strength and weakness. Because of the familiarity I have with the field sites and South Korean society in general, sometimes it was hard to maintain an ideal conceptual and analytical distance. While being familiar with the field obviously helped situate the museological issues within the social landscape of South Korea, the boundary between background information and personal experiences was often overlapping, not necessarily always yielding the most balanced perspective. It is also possible that if a non-Korean conducted this research, the tone and focus of analysis might have been very different. The category of non-Koreans can be defined differently depending on what criteria are employed in determining “Koreanness.” Such categories may be descent, ethnicity, nationality, self-identification, language, cultural knowledge, and any combination of these. There is research on contemporary South Korean nationalism among South Korean youth done by a White woman who speaks Korean well (Campbell 2011). Based on her face-to-face interviews with sixty South Korean students in their 20s, Campbell asserts that changing conceptions of South Korean identity are apparent. Campbell writes:

Ethnicity is no longer the defining factor in young people’s conception of who can qualify as a member of the Korean national unit. Increasing numbers of young people do not consider ethnicity to be a requirement for membership of the Korean nation. . . More generally, young people show a positive attitude toward the arrival and integration of foreigners into South Korean society. [Campbell 2011: 122]
Despite the topics and methods of the studies being similar, Campbell’s understanding of contemporary South Korean national identity and its implications to the multicultural conditions of South Korean society shows some contrast to my own findings. The contrasting differences that results from these two researches can be interpreted in many ways, but it is hard to deny that interpersonal subjectivity between researcher and interviewees plays a significant role. In other words, Campbell’s fluency in the Korean language and her familiarity with Korean culture might have been a crucial factor in her face-to-face interviews with South Korean young students, especially on the topics of the inclusiveness of national identity and the integration of foreigners into South Korean society.

Another limitation of my research lies in the fact that the focus of analysis and the source of information came more from being with museum professionals than with various museum audiences. During my fieldwork, the majority of time and energy was spent listening to and observing the museum staff. The difference in information-gathering methods used on the museum staff and on the museum visitors also resulted in this imbalance. While open-ended interviews and daily participant observations were the primary channel to gather information from the museum staff, interaction with the museum visitors was limited to distributing surveys and asking short questions. This was partly due to the basic structure of the fieldwork of this research (spending the majority of the time in the museum offices and conference rooms), and partly due to the limitation innate in interacting with the museum visitors. (This is because they do not want to get interrupted during their visits to museums by a stranger-researcher, and as a consequence, having open-ended interviews with them was extremely difficult).
Another constraint of the research is its scope. Due to time and circumstantial constraints, this research is focused on two national museums. More comprehensive perspectives on the issues of nationalism and postcoloniality as reflected in museums could be obtained if the research also included substantial fieldwork in the Department of Culture and Tourism and the Office of Cultural Properties. Contacting those two departments was considered in the initial plan, but after experiencing a bureaucratic barrier in getting research permissions for just the two national museums, the initial plan was revised. In a similar vein, examining other smaller national museums in South Korea for parallel analyses would have added a more comprehensive dimension of comparative analysis to this research, considering many provincial museums outside Seoul show strong dedication in promoting regional history and traditions with their exhibits.

In discussing the changing landscape of South Korean society in terms of multiculturalism and ethnicity, the North Korean refugees deserve special attention. North Korean refugees constitute one of the major “non-(South) Korean” groups that have rapidly increased in number in contemporary South Korean society. Looking into the conceptualization and reception of the group of North Korean refugees in South Korea the context of multiculturalism, ethnicity, and nationalism would be a meaningful task, although available data and possible contact with North Korean refugees for my research interest are limited at this point mainly because of security reasons and lack of museum programs targeting North Korean refugees.

7.4 Implications and Contributions of the Research

The major implications of this research are significant for both South Korean museum studies and the field of anthropology. Although there exist a few studies on
South Korean museums (Ch’e 2001, 2008; Jager 2002; Mok 2000, Park Kwang-hyŏn 2009), they consider museums mainly as static institutions rather than as dynamic sociopolitical spaces where lived experiences interact with meta-narratives, including colonialism, nationalism, and postcolonialism. Also, no previous studies have incorporated the museum staff’s perspectives in analyzing South Korean museums. The space behind the exhibit rooms has been a forbidden world for most people. Unlike the handful of studies on South Korean museums that exclusively focused on the institutional history and exhibit structure, this research more fully brought in the most important element in museum practice: museum people. By situating museums in the realm of everyday practice which compromises and negotiates conflicting interests on various sides, this research attempts to go beyond the prevalent thesis of disciplinary museums in order to complicate the discussion around the role of museums within the changing configuration of South Korean society.

The second implication of the research is that it problematizes South Korean nationalism, a nationalism based on an ahistorical and unscientific belief in a timeless ethnic homogeneity. In South Korea, there are only a few scholars and social activists who are openly questioning or challenging the usefulness of nationalism that is based on the idea of ethnic homogeneity. By definition it is always unpopular to challenge popular notions, but in South Korea, it is also dangerous to challenge ethnic nationalism because it is not only a unifying idea but a coping mechanism to salve the trauma and discontinuities of colonization and modernization. Korean ethnic nationalism, born as a reaction to colonial attempts to erase a distinct Korean identity, served as a crucial refuge for national solidarity during this existential crisis. However, as the colonial experience
recedes in time, and new social and historical factors, such as division, inter-Korean civil war, globalization, and an accelerating surge in immigration, ethnic nationalism in South Korea grows ever more anachronistic. Unfortunately, this anachronistic ethnic nationalism does not become innocuously irrelevant. It becomes a dangerous liability because it does not prepare Koreans for the present or future. Ignoring the existence of North Korea, or embracing a blind faith in an ethnic determinism to produce unification, leaves South Koreans woefully unfamiliar with the historical, political, social, or ideological knowledge or sensitivity to achieve durable inter-Korean reconciliation. As South Korea becomes more globalized, succeeding in exporting consumer and cultural products abroad as well as inviting millions of migrant workers and “international brides,” the physical make-up of Koreans is conspicuously changing. When hundreds of thousands of “international brides” are immigrating into the country for the express purpose of marrying Korean men and having Korean children - children who will be mixed heritage Korean children - the myth of ethnic nationalism becomes conspicuously irrelevant.

7.5 Future Research

The examination of South Korean postcoloniality reflected in nationalist discourse at national museums was the theme of this research. As addressed in the section on the limitations of this research, a comparative analysis of other national museums in South Korea would be a good point upon which to broaden the scope of this research. With a much smaller budget, fewer personnel, and most of all, with much smaller public interest and attention, one would imagine that the experience of national museums outside the capital of South Korea must be much different from the experiences
of the NMK and the NFMK. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the fact that many provincial museums focus on regional diversities poses interesting points for comparative analysis. Examining how similar or different the nationalist tone of the museum narratives are at those smaller museums will substantiate the current research and broaden the spectrum of investigation.

Another point of research interest involves commercial exhibits separate from national museums. As the public school system of South Korea will officially implement a five-days-a-week school plan in 2012, parents’ interest in exhibits and other “educational” cultural experiences for non-school Saturdays are soaring. In response to this public demand, the number of commercial exhibits and cultural “experience” shows (ch’ehŏmjŏn) targeting youth have become much more popular than ever. In the absence of the kind of authority that national museums carry, what will be the primary factor in framing a story or discourse at those commercial exhibits? The comparative analysis between the popular sector and the public sector, non-profit organizations and commercial organizations, permanent exhibits and short-term exhibits can yield a more nuanced perspective on understanding the role of museums in South Korean society.

My belief is that South Korea is a society where contesting aspects such as tradition and modernity, localism and globalism, coloniality and postcoloniality, nationalism and multiculturalism are in dynamic interplay, and that this has a great value for significant academic inquiry at all levels of interest and for a diverse audience. Korea has always been a crossroad of civilization and cultural adaptation and transmission, from ancient times as both “Eastern Barbarians” (東夷 tongi) to China and a conduit for continental civilization to Japan, to a modern nexus of Eastern and Western imperialism,
colonialism, neo-Confucian orthodoxy, and industrial modernization. As an anthropological study on contemporary South Korea at the site of cultural institutions this study can contribute to broadening the research focus in regard to South Korea.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Initial Contact

This is a request for your cooperation with my research “The Postcolonial Location of Korean Museums: Colonial, Anticolonial Nationalist and Beyond” which focuses on the cases of The National Museum of Korea and The National Folk Museum in Seoul. This project will commence January 15, 2006 and will last for eight months. I would like to listen to your understanding and evaluation of museum exhibits, program and publications. Most interviews will be held in open-ended style. I hope you can meet once a week with me, and spend less than one hour each time. If you agree to cooperate in this research, please indicate your preference below. If you have any further question, please feel free to contact to the number below.

Preferred days
Mon __ Tue __ Wed __ Thu __ Fri __ Sat __ Sun __ Flexible __

Preferred hours
Morning __ Afternoon __ Evening __ Flexible __

Your Signature Date

Please complete this request and return to the below address.
Kyung Hyo Chun, PhD Candidate
Dept. of Anthropology & Sociology
University of British Columbia
Appendix B: Consent form

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “The Postcolonial Location of Korean Museums: Colonial, Anticolonial Nationalist and Beyond.”

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Millie Creighton
Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology and Sociology,
University of British Columbia
Tel: 604-822-6494

Co-Investigator:
Kyung Hyo Chun, PhD Candidate
Department of Anthropology and Sociology,
University of British Columbia

Purpose:
This research attempts to examine historical changes in museum narratives in Korea from the colonial period to the present. Central to the study is how museum narratives have played a significant role in shaping Korean citizenship in the context of a colonial legacy. For the analysis museum visitors and staff will be interviewed on their perception and response to museum narratives reflected in exhibits, program, and museum publications. This research is for a graduate thesis for PhD degree in Anthropology, and will be published in a form of PhD dissertation.

Study Procedures:
You will be interviewed in open-ended style, and simple questionnaires will be given if that is needed. All interviews will be held individually, and will be less than one hour with the condition that the total amount of time will not exceed 20 hours.

Confidentiality:
Not under any circumstance, will your identity be revealed to any individual or to any institution except the researcher herself, and you will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

Contact for information about the study:
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Millie Creigton who is supervising the study.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.
Consent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your employment, class standing, and access to further services from the museum.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature                                    Date

Printed Name of the Subject

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.
Appendix C: Cover letter for Questionnaire

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “The Postcolonial Location of Korean Museums: Colonial, Anticolonial Nationalist and Beyond.”

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Dr. Millie Creighton
Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology and Sociology,
University of British Columbia
Tel: 604-822-6494

Co-Investigator:
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Department of Anthropology and Sociology,
University of British Columbia

Purpose of the Research:

This research attempts to examine historical changes in museum narratives in Korea from the colonial period to the present. Central to the study is how museum exhibits and narratives have played a significant role in shaping Korean citizenship in the context of postcolonial nationalism. For the analysis, museum visitors and staff will be interviewed on their understanding and experiences of museum narratives reflected in exhibits, program, and museum publications. This research is for a graduate thesis for PhD degree in Anthropology, and will be published in a form of PhD dissertation.

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If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.
Consent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your employment, class standing, and access to further services from the museum.

Your completion of this questionnaire indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
Appendix D: Sample Questionnaire

—Thank you for your time completing this survey.

1. Can you tell me your age?
   ○ 20-29
   ○ 30-39
   ○ 40-49
   ○ 50-59
   ○ Above 60

2. In the last two years, how many times have you visited either The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea?
   ○ This is my first time
   ○ 2 to 3 times
   ○ 3 to 5 times
   ○ 5 to 10 times
   ○ More than 10 times

3. If you have visited The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea before, do you think the exhibits have changed considerably since your last visit?
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

4. How many hours do you spend exploring exhibits when you visit The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea?
   ○ Less than 30 minutes
   ○ 30 minutes to an hour
   ○ 1 hour to 3 hours
   ○ More than 3 hours

5. What is the main reason for visiting The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea?
   ○ Seeing the special exhibit
   ○ Satisfying general interest
   ○ Getting specific knowledge on the collection
   ○ Educating your child/children
   ○ Touring
   ○ Other (Please specify ____________________________________________)

6. Overall, how satisfied are you with your visit to The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea?
   ○ Satisfied
   ○ Somewhat satisfied
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Somewhat dissatisfied
   ○ Dissatisfied
7. Please rate The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea on the following features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prescribed passage</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed theme of each exhibit</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents of labels/panels</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual appeal of labels/panels</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual appeal of exhibits</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of brochure</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge on Korean history</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge on history of other countries</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal to non-Korean citizens</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. In you visit to The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea, how many maps of Korea did you encounter?

○ None
○ 1-5
○ 5-10
○ More than 10
○ Can’t remember

9. What did you like most about The National Museum of Korea or The National Folk Museum of Korea?

10. Comment