

Nationalism and Cultural Identity: Unravelling Disputes over Culture Ownership between China and South Korea*

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In recent years, debates and concerns surrounding the “ownership of culture” have gained prominence in both China and South Korea. This article examines the root causes of this phenomenon through the lens of nationalism, contrasting with existing research that mainly focuses on the heated discourse and its political and economic contexts. This analysis delves into the formation and construction of modern nationalism in the two countries, the flourishing cultural nationalism in both countries today, and the influence of the globally prevailing neo-nationalism in the 21st century on their respective nationalisms. Through the examination, this paper uncovers the dynamics of contemporary nationalism in both countries, highlighting the inevitability of clashes on the issue, and exploring the underlying reasons behind the heightened attention and escalating tensions. The study contributes to the understanding of the complexities and implications of nationalist sentiments in East Asia, thereby shedding light on the broader implications for culture ownership debates in an increasing globalised world.

Keywords culture ownership, neo-nationalism, cultural nationalism, Chinese nationalism, South Korean nationalism

I. Introduction

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992, China and South Korea have made notable strides, while encountering intermittent disputes. Such disputes include the 2003 Goguryeo controversy, tensions during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics,

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and disagreements over North Korean nuclear issue and South Korea's THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) anti-missile system deployment in 2016. More specifically, in 2003, South Korea criticised China of "cultural imperialism"; during the Olympic Games, both countries experienced heightened negative nationalist sentiments; and concerning the THAAD issue, China accused South Korea of aligning too closely with the United States, thereby undermining China's national security interests, whereas South Korea criticised China for its "hegemonic" tendencies and attempts to reinstate the traditional "Hua-Yi order (华夷秩序)"¹ in Asia. Though the triggers varied, it is undeniable that all these disputes ignited waves of nationalist sentiments, which, to some extent, impacted the political mutual trust, economic cooperation, and civilian interactions between the two countries.

Within academic circles, debates on the origins and attributions of the cultures and traditions of both countries have endured. However, these once predominantly academic discussions have gained widespread attention concurrently with the aforementioned recurrent nationalist outbursts. Chinese and South Korean netizens have been constantly debating over the "ownership of culture", with discussions encompassing topics such as kimchi and pao cai, Hanbok (traditional Korean costume) and Hanfu (traditional Han Chinese costume), Danoje (단오제) and Duanwu (端午节)

¹ Hua-Yi order, also called the Hua-Yi distinction, is a historical Chinese concept that delineated a culturally defined "Hua" from cultural or ethnic outsiders "Yi". Hua refers to the Huaxia (later known as the Han), most inhabiting the political and civilisational centre, and Yi refers to the other minority nationalities in the land of China. "Yi" carries a negative connotation in Chinese and is often associated with undeveloped or uncivilised. This concept was propagated by Confucianism since the Qin and Han dynasties, wherein civilisation and barbarism were distinguished based on the Han cultural customs and rituals, with the identification criteria being broadly based on blood, geography, and cultural practices such as attire and manners.

festival. Illustratively, on 10 May 2023, a search for “韩国文化 (South Korea culture)” on China’s largest search engine Baidu, generated results in which the second most relevant search term was “韩国文化挪用 (South Korea culture misappropriation)”, followed by “韩国文化入侵 (Korean culture invasion)” in third place, and “韩国文化与中国文化的关系 (relationship between Korean and Chinese culture)” in fourth place.²

In addition to political, diplomatic, and economic factors, the emergence of this phenomenon can be attributed to the flourishing neo-nationalism observed in both countries in recent years. In this article, we aim to explore the reasons behind the recent surge in public attention and heated debates surrounding the “culture ownership” issue in both countries, employing a study of nationalism. Our approach will commence with an examination of the formation and construction of nationalism in both countries, followed by a discussion of the prevailing global neo-nationalism in the 21st century. Subsequently, we will delve into the revival of cultural nationalism in China, analysing its causes and implications. While numerous discussions have explored these arguments, their primary emphasis has been on illustrating the phenomenon, identifying its political and economic underpinnings, and endeavouring to address the raised questions within these debates. Moreover, with respect to online controversies, despite some articles dissecting the nationalistic sentiments expressed on the internet, few scrutinise these sentiments through the angle of Chinese cultural nationalism revival. This article seeks to bridge these research gaps. By examining the underlying nationalist factors, it seeks to contribute to reducing civil discord between the two countries, thereby aiding in improving the public opinion base for the reconstruction of China-South Korea relations.

² The first was “韩国文化特点 (Features of Korean culture).”

II. Culture Ownership Debates between China and South Korea: Three Topics

1. Historical Affiliation of Goguryeo

Goguryeo (37 BC-668 AD) was a regime that once spanned the northern and central regions of Korean Peninsula and the southern and central areas of Northeast China during ancient times. In 2002, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences initiated the Northeast Project, a research endeavor centred on the history and current state of the northeast borderland of China. The outcomes of this project have ignited considerable controversy. Korean scholars predominantly assert that Goguryeo forms an integral part of Korean history while Chinese scholars hold four divergent viewpoints: 1) Goguryeo was a ethnic minority regime in ancient Chinese history; 2) Goguryeo was an ancient Korean state and a part of ancient history of the Korean nation; 3) Goguryeo's history is divided into two parts. It belongs to Chinese history until its capital relocation from Ji'an in China to Pyongyang on the Korean Peninsula. After the capital was moved, it became an ancient Korean state; 4) The history of Goguryeo is a shared heritage encompassing both Chinese and Korean history, commonly referred to as "two histories in one".

Significantly, on 22 August 2004, the two governments reached an agreement known as the "Five Matters of Understanding" (Yu, 2007). This accord emphasised the separation of academic discourse from political considerations, present-day from history, with the advocate of addressing the matter with reason and propriety, preventing negative impact on the bilateral relationship. However, up to the present, a mutually acceptable resolution to this issue remains elusive, and it continues to serve as a latent catalyst for nationalist sentiments in both countries (Yang, 2018).

2. Danoje and Duanwu Festival

The identification, protection, and preservation of cultural heritage, particularly intangible heritage, have always been delicate and intricate issues. One such tradition is the celebration of the fifth day of the fifth month in the lunar calendar, a time-honored festival within the Sinosphere, also referred to as the East Asian cultural sphere. The Chinese call the day Duanwu while the Koreans mark it with Danoje.

In 2005, South Korea proclaimed the inclusion of the Gangneung Danoje festival on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Nevertheless, controversy has persisted since South Korea initiated the process of inscription. Several Chinese scholars were concerned that once the inscription is successful, not only will the inscription of the Chinese Duanwu festival be affected, but may also lead to a growing misconception among people, particularly Westerners, who usually have limited knowledge of East Asian culture, that this festival culture, which originated in China, is traditionally Korean.

In addition to the high concern from the academic community, heated discussions between the two countries' netizens have been ongoing on the Internet as press and media kept following up on the issue. Since the festival originated in China, some Chinese accused South Koreans of acting as if the culture is completely Korean-born and stealing Chinese culture, and they advocated for the protection and defence of Chinese Duanwu festival (Liu and Du, 2010). On the other side, South Koreans retorted that the festival culture has taken root in Korean Peninsula for more than 1000 years and formed its unique Korean style along with cultural integration. Despite celebrating the same day, Danoje and Duanwu have obvious differences in festival customs and activities. And that it is therefore reasonable for Danoje to make an inscription application (Zheng and Zhang, 2009).

Although China's Duanwu festival (under the name "Dragon Boat festival") was also successful in its inscription in 2009, the debates over the festival continue between the two countries.

3. Kimchi and Pao cai

Prior to clarification, Chinese-style pao cai and Korean-style kimchi were collectively denoted as "pao cai (泡菜)" in Chinese. However, the two, though do have some similarities, are actually different kinds of salted fermented food and have different names in English.

In November 2020, the international standard *ISO 24220:2020 Pao cai (salted fermented vegetables) - Specification and test methods*, developed and led by China, was formally published (ISO, 2020). This international standard specifies the categories of pao cai, its requirements and corresponding test methods, and it clearly stated in the document that it does not apply to kimchi. Moreover, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of South Korea (MAFRA) (2020) also issued an announcement, especially highlighting that this international standard is not applicable to kimchi.

However, a report by the Chinese media "Global Times" on the matter caused a furor in South Korea. Taking advantage of the fact that the two foods have the same collective name in Chinese, the report claimed that China has become a benchmark in the international fermented vegetable market, and that South Korea's sovereignty over kimchi has long been in name only (Global Times, 2020). As kimchi is the most common food on Korean dining tables and a Korean cultural symbol, such a statement no doubt provoked widespread opposition in South Korea. MAFRA also voiced that it is inappropriate to report on the international standard without properly distinguishing the two kinds of salted fermented food (BBC News, 2020).

And on 9 January 2021, Li Ziqi, a renowned Chinese vlogger with over

17 million subscribers, posted a 20-minute video on YouTube, in which she demonstrated the making of two types of Sichuan pao cai for about two minutes. The appearance of one of the kinds is very similar to that of kimchi, leading to a new round of debates between Chinese and South Korean netizens over the origin of kimchi. The debate has intensified as a number of non-governmental organisations and scholars joined in (Feng, 2023), and on 20 January a spokesperson for Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China even received a question from a South Korean reporter regarding the controversy (Xinhuanet, 2021).

South Korean netizens contended that kimchi is intrinsically Korean. “Kimjang, making and sharing kimchi in the Republic of Korea” was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013, and kimchi is one of its key elements. In addition, Li Ziqi has a large fan base, and her videos are not only a record of her personal life, but also a broadcast of Chinese culture, so uploading such contents would give westerners the impression that kimchi is Chinese. On the other hand, Chinese netizens hold the view that Chinese people have been using salt and fermentation to preserve vegetables since Xi Zhou Dynasty (1100-771 BC), and this ancient method is called Zu (菹). After roughly 1300 years, Zu was introduced to the Korean Peninsula, after which records of pickled and fermented vegetables appeared in Joseon (Jiang, 2019). Later on, it evolved to the present-day Korean kimchi. Additionally, it’s noteworthy that approximately 35% of kimchi available in the South Korean market is imported, with 99% of these imports coming from China (Zhihu, 2023).

The debate also highlighted in South Korea the absence of an official Chinese name for kimchi (Park, 2021). On 22 July 2021, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korea (2021) issued an amendment to Decree No. 448, *Guidelines for Foreign Language Translation and Notation*

of *Public Terms* (공공 용어의 외국어 번역 및 표기 지침) to specifically stipulate the Chinese name of kimchi to be “辛奇”, which was adopted phonetically as “xin qi” to better reflect Korean culture.

The above lists three types of frequently debated topics. In addition, there are many other things, such as traditional knots, attire and medicine that have also caused controversies between the two countries’ netizens. The most recent highly discussed one may be the “Phoenix Hairpin Controversy” involving Jang Won-young, a member of the idol group IVE, who, when being interviewed about her outfit at a Paris fashion event in October 2022, said that she wore a phoenix hairpin to add a Korean touch to her look. The debate between Chinese and Korean netizens centred on whether the phoenix hairpin should be considered a Korean culture symbol or a part of Chinese culture.

In these culture ownership debates, one can observe that the main arguments made by netizens in both countries are basically the same. On the Chinese side, they argue that though cultural integration is bound to occur in the course of history with changes in form, South Korea often exploits this law by stating cultures originating in China as sole creations of its own people without mentioning the origins, which is a kind of misappropriation of Chinese culture. The view of South Korean netizens, on the other hand, is often that after a long period of cultural integration, the cultural traditions under discussion have long since taken on a Korean identity. Moreover, intangible cultural heritage is shared regardless of time and space, and cannot be claimed for exclusive ownership. The international community has acknowledged the importance of cultural sharing to preserve cultural diversity, so China should not accuse South Korea for misappropriating Chinese culture, which would be a form of moral abduction.

Indeed, culture is inherently fluid and dynamic, and unlike the origins

of culture, culture ownership is very difficult to define. However, the controversy over “culture ownership” is particularly prominent between China and South Korea. On the one hand, this may stem from the aftermath of their modern history full of challenges - the desire to be recognised by the world (especially the Western world) while striving to develop out of the reputation of being a poor and backward country. Such disputes over culture ownership are often triggered when some cultural tradition attracts the attention of the Western world. Consider the UNESCO World Heritage list, though initially established to protect the cultural and natural heritage of all human civilisation, the country-based approach it adopts to inscription largely leads to the fact that, once an application has been approved, it will be regarded as if the country’s cultural traditions have gained the recognition of the advanced western culture. On the other hand, this is also related to the context of the East Asian cultural sphere. While the “state” and “nationalism” are modern notions, concepts of statehood, national consciousness and nationalistic sentiments have deep roots and are widespread in the East Asian cultural sphere. Despite the many political and economic reasons behind the clashes of ideas between the people of China and South Korea, it is the nationalisms of the two countries that have continually added fuel to the fire of the culture ownership dispute and kept it burning.

Moreover, since the onset of the 21st century, it’s clear that the culture ownership debates have increasingly centered on trivial aspects of daily life, ranging from history to traditional festivals to everyday food and clothing. This shift underscores the heightened sensitivity of individuals in both countries to the issue. If matters continue this way, the issue will only continue to be exaggerated and distorted, and even affect the ordinary cultural exchanges between China and South Korea. It is therefore necessary to examine the underlying causes of these controversies through

the lens of nationalism, so as not to exacerbate the misunderstanding and barrier between the two peoples and harming the friendship between them.

III. The Development of Modern Nationalism in China and South Korea

With roots traceable to 1409 (Smith, 1973), nationalism can be succinctly defined as the assertion of a unique nation with distinct values, deserving recognition, and autonomy to protect these rights (Breuilly, 2013). Anthony D. Smith (1991) characterised nationalism as an ideology that aims to maintain national autonomy, identity and unity, in which national autonomy refers not only to liberation from foreign subjugation and domination but also to popular sovereignty.

Nationalism can be divided into two paradigms: political nationalism and cultural nationalism. Based on “sovereignty lies with the people (popular sovereignty)”, political nationalism strives for national autonomy, establishes its own sovereign nation-state on equal terms with other nation-states worldwide, and preserves national unity. Cultural nationalism, on the other hand, emphasises national spirit and culture. It asserts the superiority of the nation’s intrinsic culture and advocates for national cultural unification by focusing on national identity, particularly cultural identity (Guo, 2007). Though also concerns national unity and autonomy, it neither views the state as indispensable, nor refer only to territorial integrity and political autonomy, but also to national cohesion, the right to assert one’s own values and beliefs, and the alignment of state actions with the will of the nation, traditional values and civil customs (Hutchinson, 1987).

This chapter discusses why it is to some extent inevitable for the peoples in China and South Korea to have disputes over cultural issues

by exploring the formation and construction of the two country's modern nationalism.

1. Modern Nationalism in China

In modern China, nationalism was a dominant social trend which consistently intertwined with the various other trends of thought that flooded modern China (radicalism, conservatism, liberalism, the Three People's Principles, Marxism, etc.). This was due to the national crisis experienced by China since the Opium War³ until the establishment of the People's Republic of China (Xu, 2015). The primary task ahead of modern China was to liberate itself from imperialist oppression, achieve national independence, and transform into a democratic, developed, and prosperous country.

Modern Chinese nationalism is shaped by two primary influences: traditional sources and Western ideologies.

The concept of "nation" began to emerge in China as early as the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (770-221 BC) with the presence of the Huaxia (later known as the Han) ethnic group, and naturally, the seeds of nationalism accompanied it. Traditional nationalism in China emphasises the superiority of ethnicity and national culture. Nonetheless, it differed significantly from modern nationalism though with four relevant aspects

³ Also known as the First Opium War, it was a series of military conflicts between Britain and the Qing Dynasty in China between 1840 and 1842. It is considered to be the beginning of China's modern history, and also the beginning of a century of humiliation in Chinese nationalists' eyes as the war ended in the defeat of China with the signing of the *Treaty of Nanking*, the first in Chinese history to grant foreign powers indemnity and extraterritoriality. The society nature of China changed fundamentally from then, becoming a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, and lost its independence and autonomy.

noteworthy: 1) Central geographical notion of Huaxia civilisation⁴; 2) Cultural superiority over other nations; 3) Handling of relations with other nations: Through the “tie-up and softening policy (羈縻怀柔政策)”, political, economic and military methods were employed to engage with and influence other nations, sticking to the principle that “If vassal states use Yi manners, they are called Yi; But if they adopted Chinese manners, they could also be called Chinese (诸侯用夷礼则夷之, 进于中国则中国之)”⁵; 4) Hua-Yi distinction⁵, which emphasises ethnic and cultural differences (Tao, 1995). Han culture and rituals were seen as fundamental in distinguishing civilisation and barbarism. This concept of Hua-Yi was extended to relations with the Western countries when China began to have exchanges with them. Similar to the minority nationalities of ancient China, they were treated as socially and culturally inferior (Zheng, 2007).

Modern Chinese nationalism began to crystallise during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Along with foreign invasions, the nation superiority in traditional nationalism gradually collapsed. The realisation dawned that China was merely one among numerous countries and Chinese nation was only one of many nations in the world, and that the advancement or backwardness of nations and countries was determined by various factors such as military, economic, political, and cultural strength, rather than solely by nationality.

China was experiencing two interrelated national conflicts by then: one with external powers, i.e. imperialism, and the other within its borders, between the Han and other nationalities, particularly the Manchu that founded the Qing dynasty. These historical circumstances distinguished

⁴ Ancient Chinese believed that the sky is a hemispherical dome, the earth is a square, and they live in the centre of the square, while other nationalities (the so-called Yi) live on the four sides of the square. The centre is certainly superior to the four sides.

⁵ See footnote 1.

the formation of modern Chinese nationalism from Western nationalism. The conflict with the Manchu stimulated the revival of traditional Chinese nationalism, while the confrontation with imperialism led to the acceptance and adoption of Western-concept nationalism, which was introduced to China by scholars of the day as a weapon against imperialism.

Most Chinese nationalists of that era embraced a fusion of traditional Chinese and Western-concept nationalism (Zheng, 2007). They were initially steeped in traditional Chinese nationalism before encountering modern Western nationalist thought. Influenced by the ideas of national independence and democratic revolution from Europe, America, and Japan, they blended traditional Chinese nationalism with Western ideologies. It was through them that Western-concept nationalism was introduced to China in the early 20th century. Sun Yat-sen's nationalist ideology is a typical example, as it originated from the anti-Manchu claims of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, which was rooted in the traditional Chinese nationalism's Hua-Yi distinction, and later was greatly influenced by western ideas (Zheng, 2012).

More specifically, bourgeois revolutionary representatives of the time like Sun Yat-sen advocated for the "overthrow of the Manchu" and the end of the Qing dynasty. The Qing regime, founded by the Manchu ethnic minority, embodied a corrupt and despotic system by then, contributing to China's backwardness and national crisis while acting as a puppet of foreign powers. In the efforts to overcome the national crisis and re-power China, nationalists considered their opposition to the Qing regime as resistance both against feudal despotism and imperialist aggression, thereby striving for the establishment of a modern state. In doing so, they infused traditional Chinese nationalism with new ideologies. They selectively adopted elements of Western modern nationalism that could inspire national consciousness, foster a sense of national identity, and facilitate the

establishment of an independent and democratic state. Nonetheless, aspects associated with national expansionism were criticised and rejected, being labelled under “imperialism”, an expression of the inflated nationalistic psyche that emerged alongside the flourishing of modern nationalism in the 19th century (Zheng, 2007). The selective absorption of Western modern nationalist elements, along with the adaptation of traditional Chinese nationalist principles, contributed to the formation of modern Chinese nationalism.

Modern Chinese nationalism, taking on a pragmatic, self-defensive nature (Xiao, 1996), is characterised by two distinctive features: 1) resistance against oppression and the pursuit of national independence, and 2) an inherent fusion with patriotism (Shi, 2006). Its evolution can be segmented into three phases (Zheng, 2010). First, the forming phase, during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, revolved around the type of nation-state to be established. The differences centred on whether to exclude or include the Manchu and later expanded to a single Han nation-state or a multi-ethnic state including Manchu. Eventually, the consensus was reached on establishing an independent, democratic, and united multi-ethnic nation-state (Zheng, 2007). Second, the developing phase, during the May Fourth period, focused on national self-determination and resistance against imperialism and feudalism. Third, the upsurging phase, throughout Japan’s aggression against China (September 18th, 1931-August 15th, 1945), witnessed the formation and widespread of the socially influential trend of “Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (Zheng et al., 2014).

Additionally, the evolution of the modern concept of the “Chinese nation (中华民族)” closely paralleled the development of modern Chinese nationalism and the awakening of the Chinese nation’s self-consciousness. “Chinese nation” originally referred to the Han people living in China alone and only turned to represent the unified ethnic community of all

nationalities residing in China at the beginning of the 20th century. After Liang Qichao first used it as a collective term in 1902 (Zheng, 2013), it gained wider acceptance during the May Fourth period. With the rise of national self-determination movements, it was eventually clarified and formalised (Zheng et al., 2014). While national crisis and nationalist sentiments further intensified because of the Japanese invasion, this modern usage of “Chinese nation” gained greater social acceptance and popularity.

To summarise, modern Chinese nationalism is shaped by two primary influences. Whilst Western ideologies have left their imprint on Chinese nationalism, traditional nationalism continues to infiltrate the modern iteration, which ensures that traditional culture is pivotal in the Chinese psyche and an important source of national pride. Notably, traditional nationalism includes the notion that if Yi nations adopt Chinese manners, they are considered part of Chinese culture. Subsequently, within Chinese historical narratives, Korea was once perceived as a Yi nation that had integrated Chinese culture, and thus was considered part of it. Though this perspective highly contradicts the equal statehood sought by Korean nationalism, the idea that “part of Korean history belongs to Chinese history” remains prevalent in China. These factors all contribute to the ongoing debates over culture ownership between Chinese and South Koreans.

2. Modern Nationalism in South Korea

Similar to modern Chinese nationalism, South Korean nationalism also has been influenced by both Western ideologies and its traditional roots. However, unlike China, the mono-ethnic nature of the Korean population has made the ground for Korean nationalism particularly fertile.

Since the three-kingdom division ended in the 7th century, with the

continuous refinement and consolidation of the centralised system, economic and cultural communication between tribes became increasingly close and the integration of nationalities was accelerated. Therefore, a common national identity and consciousness were gradually formed in the Korean peninsula, so as the concept of nationality. The Koreans refer to themselves as “the descendants of Dangun”. Dangun is said to be the “grandson of heaven” and “son of a bear”, and to have founded the kingdom in 2333 BC (Melton, 2014). In the 13th century, during the Mongol invasion, the legend of Dangun was widely spread and strengthened the cohesion of the national community.

Given its strategic significance, the Korean peninsula has historically been a focal point for rivalries among major powers, deeply shaping its historical narrative. The peninsula was an important part of the traditional Chinese Hua-Yi order, also the tributary system, until Western capitalism arrived in East Asia in the mid-19th century (Cai, 2008). After the Qing-Japan War ended with the signing of the *Treaty of Shimonoseki* in 1895, Korea was officially freed from its vassal status of China. In 1910, the Korean peninsula became a Japanese colony. Though was liberated after World War II, the peninsula was again subjected to division and war as the Cold War broke out. As articulated by former South Korean President Kim Daejung in 1987, “Korea’s history is emblematic of its people’s resilience against the nation’s geopolitical challenges”. Accordingly, vigilance against great power influences is deeply embedded in the nation’s DNA.

Grounded in this collective national psyche and historical legacy, modern Korean nationalism, marked by its “reactive-self-defence” trait, ardently advocates for independence from foreign dominance, and pursuit of an independent and sovereign nation-state, having a strong anti-great power orientation (Cai, 2016). Before the Qing-Japan War, nationalism in the peninsula was directed mainly towards the suzerain (i.e., China); after the

Japanese invasion, it was directed towards Japan, and after World War II, gradually towards the United States.

After the Cold War, as the peninsula was divided into two countries, a search for post-divisional identity began, and nationalism in South Korea entered a new phase (Jager, 2007). While society underwent transformation, the national identity of South Koreans was reconstructed and became the people's emotional affiliation and value aspiration (Guo et al., 2010), contributing reversely to the modernisation and democratisation of the society. However, along with the rapid development and the "Miracle of the Han River", the open economy also brought in impacts of globalisation. Overseas commodities reduced the competitiveness of domestic products, creating significant concerns among people. This sentiment reached its peak in the 1997 financial crisis. The common consensus of "people and their country have shared destiny" led to an upsurge of nationalist sentiments and a concerted effort to help the people regain confidence and the country overcome the difficult times, and this in turn further strengthened the national identity.

The formation of nationalism in South Korea hinges on both historical and cultural constructs.

For historical construct, shaping national identity by forging a shared national memory is a prevalent method of nurturing nationalism (Li, 1998). Nationalism in South Korea seeks a common national memory through a historical retrospective of clarifying the origins and history of the nation. The above-mentioned "descendants of Dangun" is a tracing of the nation's origins. While it blends elements of history and myth, it aligns with Hobsbawm's (1992) notion of "political and social myth", which is not uncommon in constructing national identity through national history and justifying the existence of a nation through history.

In terms of the nation's history, South Korean nationalism has consistently

sought to establish historical legitimacy and strengthen independent national consciousness. Since Silhak (실학) rose in the late Joseon Dynasty, emphasis has been placed on the separation of Joseon from the Chinese dynasty and on constructing and consolidating the peninsula's own history. This was intended to emphasise that Joseon was an independent state on equal footing with the Chinese dynasty and to detach national identity from a Chinese dynasty-centred consciousness. This approach was carried over into modern times, such as after the Qing-Japan War, the Yeongeunmun, which was originally built to welcome envoys from China, was pulled down and rebuilt as the Dongnimmun (Independence Gate) using the dismantled materials; and since 1970, all Korean elementary and secondary school textbooks have eliminated Chinese characters.

A significant method employed to sever historical ties with Chinese culture is the emphasis on Dangun. There is another story about the origins of Gojoseon, that of Gija Joseon. According to legend, Gija, a member of the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BC) royal house, did not want to serve the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC) and led the surviving Shang people to Joseon. He brought to Joseon Chinese culture, technology for farming and weaving and sericulture, as well as a large number of bronze objects (Kang, 2006). The story is recorded in literature such as the *Records of the Grand Historian*, the *Book of Han* and the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. Gija had historically been regarded as a crucial figure in Joseon history, along with Dangun (백동현, 2009). During the imperial era, the rulers of the Korean peninsula had always held Gija in high esteem, crediting him with bringing civilisation to Joseon. However, since the 20th century, being accused of lacking concrete evidence, the authenticity of Gija's existence has been widely questioned by Joseon scholars (Ebrey et al., 2013). The existence of Gija Joseon has now been declared unreal by the mainstream in both North and South Korea. Whereas in the early 1990s, Dangun was added to textbooks

as the ancestor of the Korean nation. The South Korean elementary textbook “National History” includes a chapter on “Dangun and Gojoseon”, which clearly asserts that Gojoseon was founded by Dangun (Fan, 2017).

For cultural construct, South Korean nationalism emphasises the promotion of cultural superiority and uniqueness to instil a sense of national pride and the reshaping of popular culture to bolster national identity. While globalisation is often seen as opposed to nationalism due to the potential rise of a global culture that transcends individual states and nations, South Korean nationalism was not weakened by the large-scale and rapid globalisation in modern times. Instead, the development of cultural industry has fostered a national popular culture that links the new era with South Korea, strengthening the cultural identity and national pride of the people.

Throughout this process, the government has been a strong supporter, consistently subsidising and encouraging the growth of popular culture to amplify its influence. The support was gradually ramped up as the construction of national identity deepened: from a tilt towards cultural heritages and traditional arts in the 1970s to an emphasis on contemporary art and popular cultural life in the 1980s, and then to a focus on popular culture and cultural industries in the 1990s. In 1998, the government officially launched its “Culture Nation (문화입국)” strategy, nurturing the cultural industry as a strategic pillar for the development of the national economy, providing protection through a progressive judicial system, and sparing no effort in promoting its culture worldwide.

Consequently, with the exponential growth of the cultural industry, the phenomenon known as “Hallyu” has emerged, bringing South Koreans an invigorating cultural pride (Kim, 2006). South Korea’s national status and international recognition have also increased steadily as its culture’s influence has expanded globally. Accordingly, cultural nationalism is

deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the South Korean people (이동연, 2022). The successful export of popular culture has created a strong sense of national pride and reinforced the people's national identity. Meanwhile, the aspiration to enhance the country's status by widening the international influence of Korean culture has also become an extension of national sentiment in South Korea.

To sum up, history and culture serve as pivotal building blocks in the formation of Korean national identity. In the debates over culture ownership, Chinese participants often hold the view that some specific Korean history or culture is part of traditional Chinese history or culture, which undermines the foundations of the nationalism construction in South Korea and negates the extensive efforts made over centuries to sever ties with Chinese culture to establish Korea as an independent nation. Furthermore, with the booming of the cultural industry, cultural nationalism has already penetrated the hearts and minds of South Korean people. Culture is not only a source of national pride and identity, but is also considered to be closely tied to country status and international influence. Considering the "reactive-self-defence" character of nationalism, the intense responses from the South Korean side to these arguments are hardly surprising. Additionally, it's noteworthy that the authenticity of the Gija legend is often unquestionable to Chinese people, given that the literature documenting Gija is considered authoritative and even includes official historical sources of ancient China. Therefore, most Chinese believe Gija brought civilisation to Korea rather than Dangun founding the Korean nation, which starkly contrasts with the mainstream Korean attitude today. This disparity might also contribute to the disputes.

IV. The Global Rise of Neo-nationalism in the 21st-century

1. The Concept

Nationalism carries both commendable and concerning facets. On the one hand, it has been instrumental in cultivating national pride, fostering a spirit of innovation, revolution, and enlightenment (Song, 2006), and fuelling national liberation movements while promoting unity within nations. However, on the other hand, it also harbours inclinations towards rejection and suppression of liberal ideologies. Associated with xenophobia, it has often substituted political principles with culturalism, thereby fostering national identity based not solely on the nation/state but rather on cultural distinctiveness. Consequently, what begins as a defence of the nation would often be distorted into a defence of traditional culture (Zheng, 2018).

Therefore, nationalism can evolve in two distinct paths. One fosters a profound attachment to one's own nation, seeking its independence, liberation, prosperity, and strength. It involves treating other nations with respect, fostering peaceful coexistence on equal terms, and refraining from wilfully harming other nations for the sole benefit of one's own nation, while refusing to tolerate bully and insults from other nations. The other, however, places the interests of one's own nation as paramount, often exhibiting a pronounced exclusivity and, in extreme cases, even contempt toward other nations. It deems compromise and sacrifice of other nations' interests acceptable as long as it advances the welfare of one's own nation, potentially leading to alarming inclinations such as racial animosity and outward aggression.

As the 21st century commenced, significant changes occurred in the global landscape, characterised by parallel trends of global convergence and polarisation. These trends include the globalisation of economy

and democracy, the deepening divide between the rich and the poor, the emergence of conflicts over identity and so on. Furthermore, the intervention and dominance of major powers have led to regional conflicts and subsequent waves of refugees. Within this context, a “neo-nationalism”, was forged, distinctly diverging from its modern counterpart.

In comparison to modern nationalism, which can be simplified as a focus on one’s own nation across various aspects like politics, economics, society, and culture, neo-nationalism has more complex origins and connotations, rooted in deeper economic, political, social, cultural, and psychological motivations. Neo-nationalism amalgamates diverse doctrines such as populism, anti-globalisation, anti-immigration, exclusivism, nativism, protectionism, isolationism and faith-based politics, creating a complex and inherently conflicting picture.

In Western countries, neo-nationalism emerges as a combination of nativism, which views immigrants as “outsiders”, religious conservatism that rejects modern values, and economic egoism. In Third World countries, neo-nationalism takes shape through the fusion of native nationalism and religion, referring mainly to separatist nationalism on religious grounds, which constructs and shapes national identities with faith-based politics. It is important to note that neo-nationalism is not a singular form but encompasses specific types of nationalism prevalent in contemporary times and describes a broader spectrum of nationalist phenomena (Zhou, 2021). The 21st-century neo-nationalism can be viewed as a cascading composite, which has the distinctive feature that various nationalisms inspire, compete with, and reinforce one another, leading to a superimposed effect.

Compared to modern nationalism, this neo-nationalism can be seen as embarking on the second developing direction of nationalism. While modern nationalism combines national interests, pride, and patriotism with the pursuit of broader notions of “freedom”, “equality” and “justice”, neo-

nationalism openly places its own interests above those of other groups and nations. It openly promotes egoism, as exemplified by slogans like “America first” and “Hinduism first”, and questions the existing values and achievements of current political civilisation. It even advocates a blatant embrace of the law of the jungle. This shift in guiding ideology has rendered neo-nationalism more complex, prone to inter-state conflicts, and unpredictable.

In contrast to the gradual spread of modern nationalism, neo-nationalism harnesses the advantages of advanced science and technology. Particularly through the Internet and social media, neo-nationalism engages with the masses more directly and effectively, making the outreach dynamic and influential. It amplifies nationalist sentiments, identities and appeals to the utmost through immediate public participation, transforming the public into conscious or unconscious but active purveyors of neo-nationalism. Additionally, by advocating the preservation of native populations, religion, and traditional culture, neo-nationalism can always attract a significant following, even among those without inherent nationalist or racist tendencies, increasing its influence and power substantially.

Almost all neo-nationalism leaders have become masters of technopopulism, utilising new media to motivate and engage their supporters directly and promptly. In contrast to modern nationalism, which relies heavily on elite figures for its design, mobilisation, and promotion, neo-nationalism relies more on populism and manifests as social movements. These movements have transcended national and regional boundaries, permeating and influencing the regional and even global political order and security. Within the movements, right-wing forces galvanise the general public, enabling them to play a significant role in driving and even shaping the movement. Internet forums, rallies, and various solidarity activities have transformed highly specialised political discussions confined to specific

areas into uncontrolled populist narratives.

Neo-nationalism claims typically exhibit the following features: 1) Dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs; 2) Interwoven with factors such as religious differences, territorial disputes and sectarian struggles; 3) Emphasis on loyalty to the nation-state and the pursuit of its interests; 4) Often exhibiting xenophobic tendencies, reflecting national egoism, and prone to conflicts with other nations; 5) Frequently marked by extreme nationalist sentiments and expansionist aspirations.

2. China and South Korea

In this era of prevailing neo-nationalism, nationalist sentiments have been particularly strong in China and South Korea since the 21st century. Due to their relatively undignified modern histories, both nations are highly sensitive and reactive to foreign interference.

In contemporary China, the rise of neo-nationalism can be traced back to a reflection on Western culture and ideas. In the early phases of China's reform and opening up, the West was idolised as a beacon of prosperity, rational governance, innovation, and cutting-edge technology. However, over time, people became aware that this "perfect West" was merely an imagined utopia. As China has grown stronger, kindness from the West has diminished, the "China threat theory" has gained traction, and Western powers started to act against China's national interests. China, for its part, though gradually integrating into the international system, is reluctant to fully accept some international norms and regulations led by the Western powers and thus faces mounting pressure from all sides. As a consequence, nationalism has become the spiritual backbone of China's resistance to those external pressures.

Historically, China's modernisation was often synonymous with

Westernisation (People.cn, 2023), and according to neo-nationalists, created a crisis of national and cultural identity, endangering the foundations upon which the nation-state was constructed. Therefore, the modernisation reforms must not be Westernisation-oriented but China-centred instead. Consequently, Chinese neo-nationalism, in addition to the mentioned general features, also emphasises “Chineseness” and the distinctiveness between Chinese and Western civilisations, aiming for a new national identity (Zheng, 2019). This emphasis has brought a tendency to “inventory our civilisation”. Using a not entirely accurate analogy, traditional Chinese culture can be seen as a treasure-filled storehouse. While previously the attitude was more of acknowledging the existence of such a storehouse without regularly visiting it, the emphasis on “Chineseness” has shifted the attitude towards taking stock of the storehouse to confirm what the treasures are and ensure whether anything is missing, given out or taken away. As a result, issues concerning culture ownership have gained greater attention in present times.

From a South Korean perspective, apprehensions about being overshadowed again by China’s influence have surged in tandem with China’s rapid development. The notion of “China is seeking to re-establish the former Hua-Yi order” has gained some traction, resulting in a surge of nationalist sentiments in South Korea. With its “anti-great power” character, the nationalism sword pointed once again towards China. Additionally, the young population is the main producer, distributor and consumer of popular culture and the dominant force of the country’s cultural industry. While cultural nationalism has taken hold among the youth as the cultural industry flourishes in South Korea, the younger generation is heavily exposed to neo-nationalist sentiments through their use of new media. Presently, young people in South Korea tend to hold negative perceptions of China, and anti-Chinese sentiment (Sinophobia) is widely spread (Yu,

2022). Martha Nussbaum's (2019) concept of "projective disgust" suggests that fear can lead to mistakes and evoke emotions such as anger and disgust. Hence, the emergence of Sinophobia may also be connected to the aforementioned concerns (Jeon, 2021). As worries intensify, fear grows, and projective disgust escalates. These together, clashing over the culture ownership issue, reacted into increasingly heated arguments.

V. Revival of Cultural Nationalism and the Renaissance of Traditional Culture

In general, nationalism encompasses both political and cultural dimensions that often complement each other, as observed in the case of South Korea. However, modern Chinese nationalism diverges from this norm. Unlike South Korean cultural nationalism, which has thrived in modern times, Chinese cultural nationalism has historically been overshadowed and suppressed by political nationalism since the May Fourth period.

Earlier chapters delved into the historical roots of the culture ownership disputes between the two countries, and why the disputes have intensified and attracted such strong public interest at this moment in time in the global atmosphere context. In this chapter, exploration will zoom in and continue on another possible explanation for the debates to be increasingly heated in the present day, that is the revival of cultural nationalism in contemporary China.

1. Rise and Decline of Cultural Nationalism in Modern China

In the lens of cultural nationalism, the nation is perceived as a holistic

entity that has evolved over time, with its unique and perceived “superior” civilisation at its core (Xu, 2006). The civilisation holds a collectively shared way of life, thought, and behaviour (Li, 2020) and forms the common foundation of cognitive reference system and identity of a unique community with shared ideologies. Whereas a well-structured society relies upon a well-established cultural awareness and a well-functioning culture (Wen and Li, 2020), cultural nationalism asserts that if the original cultural and moral order and the value belief system of a nation are disordered, moral degradation, society dysfunction, and nation decline are likely to ensue (Guo, 2007).

The concept of cultural nationalism has deep historical roots within traditional Chinese culture, dating back to the pre-Qin era (before 221 BC). Huaxia people have always been displaying a profound sense of nationhood, national consciousness, and well-developed historical and cultural awareness (Zhou, 1998). Throughout Chinese history, despite interactions with various ethnic groups, the dominance of Huaxia culture remained unchallenged.

As modern times dawned, Chinese cultural nationalists recognised the drawbacks of Western industrial civilisation and technological rationality, which they believed led to the objectification and alienation of individuals, neglecting people’s minds and emotions and contributing to cultural crisis (Chai, 2006). Consequently, they sought to re-evaluate traditional Chinese culture and explore practical approaches of forging a new Chinese culture that combines both Chinese and Western elements. This marked the emergence of modern cultural nationalism in China.

The first phase of China’s modern cultural nationalism took shape during the 1898 Wuxu Reforms, when Western science and technology were introduced to make the country stronger. It was believed necessary to resist Christianity infiltration to safeguard the unity of Chinese culture.

The second phase emerged around the time of the 1911 Xinhai Revolution. As the Eight-Nation Alliance invaded, China faced intensifying crisis of being annihilated by Western and Japanese imperialism, and people began to realise that the primary issue at hand was not religion but the nation itself. With the introduction of modern Western nationalism into China, nationalists recognised the interconnectedness of national and cultural crises and that for a nation to stand on its own feet, it must rely not only on military strength but also on its own culture. The cultural crisis was thus a more fundamental and serious crisis for a nation. Metaphorically, culture is the inner core of national life, while the state, with its laws and governments, constitutes the outer cover. For the time being, foreign invaders had breached the outer cover of China, posing a direct threat to the culture inner core. Consequently, cultural nationalism of the time endeavoured to defend national self-confidence and advocated the “self-esteem of Chinese nation”. Notably, cultural nationalists refuted three forms of national nihilism that belittled the Chinese nation: 1) racial inferiority, suggesting that white Westerners were born superior to people of colour; 2) geographical inferiority, asserting that inland civilisation was inferior to maritime civilisation; and 3) linguistic and script inadequacy, “the clumsy Chinese language shackles the Chinese mind” (Ch'en, 2019).

Furthermore, modern Chinese cultural nationalism places significant emphasis on the originality of Chinese culture. For instance, Liang Qichao highlighted in a speech that of the five major origins of world civilisation, Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, India, and China, the first four all had interactions with each other, resulting in civilisations that were “their own but also foreign (自己的实兼有外来的)” (Chen, 1989). Only China, geographically separated by mountains and seas, had no direct contact with them, and its civilisation originated entirely on its own (Yang, 1999). This is one source from which national cultural confidence is derived.

However, with the rise of cultural radicalism, the upward momentum of cultural nationalism was snapped. Modern Chinese cultural nationalism entered its third phase and started to decline since the 1919 May Fourth Movement. Cultural radicalism by then was marked by radical anti-traditionalism and a complete embrace of Westernisation, evidently in the anarchist trends, the New Culture Movement, and the theory of full Westernisation. And it was during the 1919 May Fourth Movement period, cultural radicalism reached its peak and exploded (Chai, 2006).

Chinese nationalism since the May Fourth Movement had suffered severe schizophrenia, as the political and cultural components, which mutually reinforce each other in general cases, took divergent paths and even became incompatible (Guo, 2007). More specifically, political nationalism aimed to restore state authority, reshape the nation, bolster the economy, and strengthen the military. Its proponents saw traditional culture as dross of feudalism and the root cause of China's underdevelopment, which must be dejunked and subjected to revolution.

This perspective was sourced from Max Weber's analysis of the interdependence of culture and economy in societal development and history. Societal culture reflects economic development while economy acts as the foundation for cultural advancement, and so, subjective cultural awareness and objective society status exert reciprocal effects (Weber, 2013). Culture affects the supply of factors of production such as capital and labour, and influences their output (Wen and Li, 2020), acting as a deep-rooted driver of economic growth (Luo and Bai, 2020). Thus, to foster economic growth, a country must nurture an advanced and wholesome societal culture, getting rid of the backward and decadent "old" culture. The escalating national turmoil since the Opium War underscores the inadequacy of China's then-dominant culture. This is why the political nationalists of the time believed that without eradicating traditional culture,

China could never attain enlightenment, strength, prosperity, and position as one of the modern nation-states worldwide.

This movement of sweeping off traditional culture was overwhelming and unstoppable. Therefore, Chinese cultural nationalists, who swam against the tide, found themselves weak and were no match. As a result, political nationalism and its “anti-traditionalism” dominated China for an extended period (Guo, 2003).

2. Revival of Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China

The decline of cultural nationalism continued until 1989. Since then, the Chinese central government has begun to actively promote the essence of traditional culture as part of its “patriotism education”. This shift in policy was in response to the demonstrations that took place that year. The central government believed the 1989 Movement was not only caused by “bourgeois liberalisation” and “Westernisation”, but also by a resulting “national nihilism” (Guo, 2007). Accordingly, the promotion of traditional Chinese culture has increased considerably. A prime example is the emphasis by the central government on “confidence in culture” starting in 2014, which advocates rational approaches towards the vast and encompassing Chinese traditional culture as well as a clear distinction between feudal rituals and “good” traditional culture.

The shift in the central government’s attitude toward traditional culture has significantly impacted the “anti-traditionalists” and “Westernisers”, reshaping the landscape of political and cultural nationalism. It has created a once-in-a-century opportunity for cultural nationalism to revive in contemporary China, thereby paving the way for the renaissance of traditional culture.

In addition to the influence of the official attitude, there is a possibly

deeper reason for the revival of cultural nationalism, namely the “crisis of faith” and “moral crisis” that have been frequently discussed. From an individual perspective, people have a psychological need for spiritual reliance to achieve inner self-stability. Therefore, when lacking in faith, turning to the nation and its culture becomes one of the easiest choices. The underlying psychological structure of cultural nationalism is a persistent search for roots (Chai, 2006).

Moreover, from a collective standpoint, the emergence of faith and moral crisis has also brought about a crisis of national identity. Anthony D. Smith (1991) suggests that national identity crisis is triggered by the crisis in the legitimacy of tradition. To a large extent, a nation’s self-consciousness relies on its own traditions and value system and if these foundations encounter significant legitimacy issues, the national identity built upon them will falter and no longer be naturally accepted by people.

For China, the legitimacy crisis of tradition began with the May Fourth period when cultural radicalism undermined the original national and cultural identity, leading to a growing lack of identity, albeit the lack seemed somewhat insignificant due to the more pressing national crisis and frequent revolutions and wars (Zheng, 2019). With the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the traditional belief and value system was largely replaced by a socialist one, resolving the crisis of collective identity to a large extent. However, China’s reform and opening up from 1978 brought challenges and impacts to the socialist belief and value system, leading to people’s wavering on existing ideological beliefs and the country’s development goals (Zheng, 2019). Cultural intrusion, ideological confusion and lack of faith have become prevalent in society, and the legitimacy crisis resurfaced once again.

Consequently, both official and unofficial actors have demonstrated desires to repair or rebuild the societal belief and value system over the

past two to three decades, and cultural nationalism has re-surfaced as a framework to address the issue. Notable examples include the “traditional Chinese culture fever”, the “Confucius craze”, the reconstruction of “core socialist value system” under President Hu Jintao, and the “12-word core socialist values” proposed by President Xi Jinping during the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). It is evident that contemporary China is in the process of revising, adapting, and refining its national value system, with a strong emphasis on the utilisation of traditional culture as a valuable resource.

As a result, cultural nationalism has witnessed a revival, with traditional culture gaining increasing significance among the Chinese populace in recent decades. The assertion that traditional Chinese culture is the root and soul of the Chinese nation has gained widespread acceptance. Additionally, the significance of culture has been repeatedly emphasised at major national conferences such as the 19th and 20th National Congress of the CPC.

Nevertheless, while cultural nationalism championing culture and its distinctiveness, it also has an undertone of ethnocentrism that is difficult to eliminate. Ethnocentrism refers to perceiving the world, whether consciously or unconsciously, from the perspective of one’s own group and using that group as a reference frame to evaluate all other groups (Baylor, 2012). Typically, people have a conscious or unconscious affinity for their own nation’s customs, traditions, heritage, institutions, lifestyles, and so on. As Edward Westermarck (2020) stated, “Just as civilised people, barbarians ascribe all virtues to themselves. — The Chinese are indoctrinated at birth with the idea that they are better than all other ethnic groups. — The ancient Egyptians considered themselves a special nationality, especially favoured by God. — In ancient Persia, the title of the Persian monarch was ‘the centre of the universe’ — ” Ethnocentrism has been a prevalent

phenomenon in the world since ancient times.

However, depending on the environment, ethnocentrism can either manifest in a benign or malignant manner. The benign form affirms and appreciates the traditions, institutions, lifestyles, etc., of one's own nation while also respecting and appreciating these aspects in other cultures. The malignant form begins with the unconscious affirmation of certain absolute values believed to exist only within one's own culture. This can result in a sense of superiority and arrogance, leading to a conscious or unconscious attitude of contempt, disapproval, and rejection towards other cultures (Yin, 2002). In the broader context of the rise of neo-nationalism, the underlying ethnocentrism within cultural nationalism can easily take on a malignant character, potentially intensifying conflicts related to culture.

In conclusion, traditional culture plays a pivotal role in addressing both individual and collective crises of faith and identity. Cultural nationalism revived in contemporary China along with the official efforts to vigorously promote traditional culture. Consequently, traditional culture now occupies a significantly elevated position in Chinese people's consciousness. However, with its ethnocentric undertone, cultural nationalism possesses the potential to take a malignant turn if exposed to negative or aggressive environments. In the backdrop of worldwide prevailing neo-nationalism, it could easily lead to conflicts between nations regarding culture-related issues.

VI. Conclusion: Chinese and South Korean Contests over Culture in the early 21st century

To understand the reasons behind the increasing disputes and widespread concerns regarding the "culture ownership" issue among the Chinese and South Koreans in recent years, this article examines the formation and

construction of modern nationalism in both countries. It also discusses the influence of global neo-nationalism in the 21st century on their respective nationalistic sentiments and explores the revival of cultural nationalism in contemporary China. Through this examination, the paper uncovers the dynamics of contemporary nationalism in both countries, discusses the inevitability of clashes on the issue, and explores the underlying reasons behind heightened attention and escalating tensions at this very moment in time.

1. Traditional culture holds significant weight in the hearts and minds of both peoples:

In China, modern nationalism is influenced by both traditional sources and Western ideologies, placing significant emphasis on pride in traditional culture. The contemporary revival of cultural nationalism has further amplified the importance of traditional Chinese culture among the Chinese people. In South Korea, modern nationalism also has its roots in traditional culture, and history and culture are essential building blocks of South Korean national identity.

2. Reasons rooted in the development of modern nationalism in both countries:

In China, traditional nationalism notions permeate and intertwine with modern nationalism, resulting in the “Hua-yi” concept continuing to influence the way some Chinese perceive Korea. Within China, there is a widespread belief that certain aspects of Korean history are integral to Chinese history. Conversely, Koreans have striven for centuries to break away from these cultural ties and establish Korea as an independent nation.

The conflicting interpretations of historical relationships between China and South Korea illustrate the complexities and controversies surrounding the culture ownership issue in the context of nationalism.

3. Cultural nationalism flourishes with rising sentiments in both countries in today:

In China, following a period of decline, cultural nationalism has experienced a contemporary revival, with cultural nationalist sentiments running high. This revival can be attributed not only to the government's promotion of traditional culture but also to the recognition of traditional culture as a crucial resource for addressing the crisis of faith and identity. In South Korea, the mono-ethnic background has deeply rooted the concept of a Korean national community even before the emergence of modern nationalism. Currently, cultural nationalism is flourishing within the country as official support for the cultural industry continues to grow and as the industry begins to be associated with the country's international status and influence.

4. Influence of the globally prevailing neo-nationalism in the 21st century:

1) Neo-nationalism has facilitated the emergence of inter-ethnic conflicts and the ensuing confusion that distorts the defence of the nation into defending traditional culture. At the same time, fuelled by new technology and media, its influence and power has soared.

2) China and South Korea, due to their modern histories, exhibit particularly strong nationalist sentiments, making them highly sensitive and reactive to foreign interference and easily triggering the self-defensive nature of their nationalism. South Korea's growing apprehension

regarding China's rapid development has steered its sword of nationalism, characterised by "anti-great power", again towards China. On the other hand, the pressure from the international atmosphere stimulates nationalist sentiments among the Chinese, manifesting culturally as an emphasis on Chineseness. These together are reflected in the expanded concerns and intensifying debates surrounding culture ownership.

3) The ethnocentric undertone of cultural nationalism can easily be influenced in negative directions by the xenophobia commonly associated with neo-nationalism. This susceptibility increases the potential for conflicts over cultural issues.

In conclusion, by employing a study of nationalism, the findings of this article contribute to the understanding of the complexities and implications of nationalist sentiments in East Asia, provide insights into improving the civil antagonism between the two countries as well as the public opinion base for the reconstruction of China-South Korea relations, and shed light on the broader implications of culture ownership debates in an increasing globalised world. Looking ahead, as nations and states across the world become more interconnected, it becomes crucial to persist in studying and critically analysing the evolving landscape of nationalism and its interplay, including the role of nationalism in shaping societies and identities both regionally and globally, and it would be vital in our future responses to international opportunities and challenges.

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