

**Bringing the Other home:
Differing representations of foreignness and Korean identity
in North and South Korean text books.**

By Dennis Hart

Associate Professor, Political Science Department,

Kent State University

Ohio 44240

dhart@kent.edu

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Foreignness as a means of being Korean

In Korea, as is the case almost everywhere, the state oversees a process of education that inspires its citizens to join in a particular imagined community. The writing of such ideas on the self and the nation is the production of a knowledge that reflects and reifies power relations as well as partisan interests. Such images normally call upon citizens to learn, and then live, a particular set of ideas, practices, history, or beliefs that bind them all to a single community. To these people, they are who they are since they are all linked, in one way or another, to a past, present and future that are all shared. Yet, another, equally important dimension of national identity must be looked at if an observer is to understand a little better the complexity of this process. Just as important in this construction of a shared national community are the narratives concerning the Other, foreigners and foreignness.

The paradox of national identity that is linked to membership in a particular group and that such an identity requires the existence of Others, those who are not members of that group. Without outsiders to use as a marker of one's own boundaries, national identity would become impossible. That

is, claiming to be Korean only makes sense if one is also denying membership in another group. To state that one is a Korean is to also say that one is not Vietnamese, or German, or Polish or Japanese.

Therefore, being a member of a shared and imagined community requires a person to know more than the shared attributes of fellow members. Membership also requires people to know share and reflect upon beliefs about the Other, and, how the Other is related to their own community. For without this shared set of narratives there is no way for them to separate themselves from non-members. In this way, national narratives totalize both the self and the Other. Each are assigned universalized attributes that clearly demarcate boundaries and imply how each is fundamentally irreconcilable. Yet, we should remember that each set of narratives is linked at the fundamental level of creating a shared national vision.

We need to ask a pair of key questions here. First, how and why has each Korean state chosen to construct foreignness for its citizens. The answer is more complex than one might surmise for a populace who claim to be a single people. For despite this claim of solidarity, there are on the Korean peninsula today a variety of national narratives that seem to be mutually contradictory. Whether viewed at the level of each Korean society by itself, or as a divided peninsula, the process of constructing national identity has “built in guarantees that it cannot succeed in the old-fashioned nationalist way – if only because we have more than one nationalism....” Each state has different historical experiences, ideologies, interests, and wishes to differentiate itself from its rival regime. Given this, we should expect each state to also construct its narratives on foreignness differently. The end results are narratives on Korean identity and foreignness that are rooted in the needs and concerns of modern Korean states.

Now a second question needs to be addressed – how and why has it come to pass that tens of millions of Koreans can so proudly and passionately lay claim to a select few narratives on foreignness? After all, nations are not natural, they are malleable, modern, and, by definition, invented. The answer is complex, but for this paper it will be simple. I will view how each state has used its education system to achieve this goal. The state narratives included in the education are expressly political since the state uses it to urge, prompt and teach its children how and when to proclaim identity. I conducted a discourse analysis of the state narratives on foreignness as contained in North and South Korean. While national socialization through public education in general and lessons in particular will not fully explain all the beliefs held by Koreans, they undoubtedly

contribute to the beginnings of a shared definition of nationalism for a great many young Koreans. National identity is, in part, a process by which people sort through a cacophony of voices. For Koreans today, no single voice is as widely shared as that of their state.

In studies of some of the textbooks used in North and South Korea, scholars at the Korean Education Development Institute (KEDI) found a variety of state-sponsored, political content in schools. In South Korea, the education system and curriculum selection are administered by the national government. In the North all textbooks are written, printed, and distributed by the Educational Book Publisher (*kyoyuk tos? chulp'ansa*.) The history book used in North Korean high schools focused heavily upon political ideology. For the South, I examined *Sahoe* (elementary school *Social Studies*) and *Kuksa* (high school *National History*), which were published or in use from 1990 to 1999. For North Korean books, I obtained copies of several books from a variety of grades and subjects from 1986 through 1991. I have supplemented these with recent KEDI studies of North Korean textbooks from the 1970's to 1997.

Foreignness and identity in South Korean

For the Southern textbooks the images on foreigners and the foreignness are complex and at times contradictory, which perhaps is partially reflective of the South's complex encounters with foreigners. As one might expect, their textbooks represent foreignness in a variety of ways. These narratives span both time and space. In the South, the textbook authors have adopted a multifaceted set of narratives. On the one hand, the books instill tales of traditional "Koreanness" in students, in part by the use of foreignness. At other times, foreignness, and thereby foreigners are often praised and Korea is shown as both benefiting and inviting such a presence. Yet, at the same time, students are provided with other lessons that clearly show how foreigners can be a hostile Other, someone to be dreaded and defended against.

Benedict Anderson, among others, argues that modern states and people create and use maps to represent the boundaries of their nation. That which is inside the borders of these paper nations is usually totalized. A map of Korea says to its readers that all the people and things contained within it are universalized "Korean." Conversely, all that which is outside such boundaries may be counted as "foreign" and external. In this way, young South Koreans are instructed on how to define the borders of their nation.

The book also teaches students about the geographic basis of “Korea’s national borders.” In a story in the book, students are shown studying a variety of historical dynastic maps. One student poses the question “When did our country’s national borders (*kuk ky?ngs?n*, 국경선) become as they are in today’s maps?” In response, the teacher shows them another map that demonstrates how “our country’s territory on the Korean peninsula (*han bando*, 한반도)” shifted according to the dynasty, but that these national borders eventually become fixed at the “Amnok and Tuman Rivers.”

Another pair of maps shows a system of warning signal fires (*bongsudae*, 봉수대) used during the Choson dynasty. These fires are shown as stretching from the “oceans to the national borders” and were an important form of communication when “emergencies such as foreign invasions” (*waejok ui ch’imip*, 외적의 침입) took place.

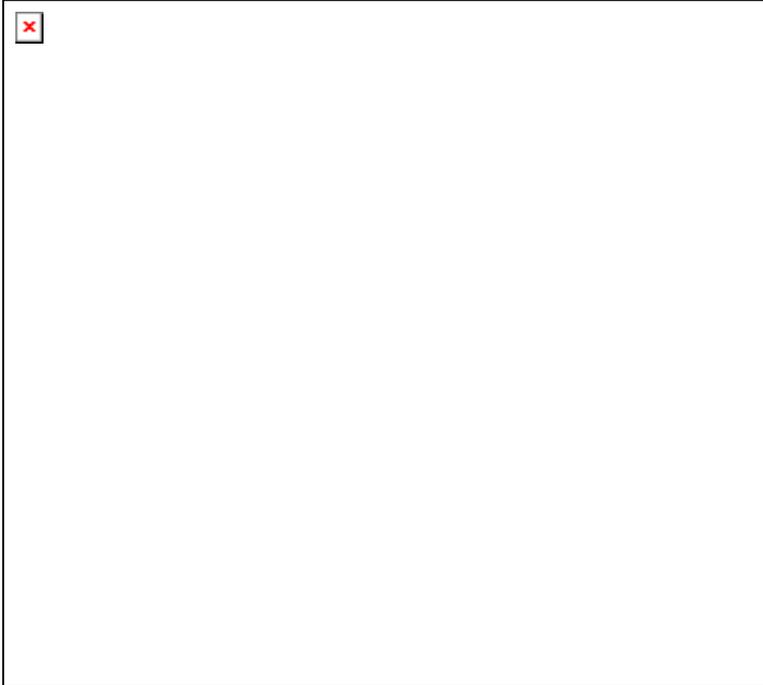
Regardless of the period being discussed or the amount of territory included, the authors use terms such as “our culture”, “our country” or “our ancestors.” Shilla, Kogury?, Paekche, and every other dynasty are portrayed as having been part of “Korea.” The question of whether the people who lived back then would see themselves as “one people” or that perhaps the people of Shilla based at least a portion of their identity on being different than the people in other kingdoms is never seriously raised. Nor are students ever instructed to think that perhaps their “ancestors” who lived during these times might actually view modern Koreans as a potential Other? both foreign alien and unrelated. Instead, Southern students are told how over time specific names have changed, borders have drifted, and dynasties have come and gone; however, the connections between “our ancestors” and “our nation” transcend these differences.

The “friendly foreigner” narratives adopted two major approaches. First, in keeping with South Korea’s current dependency upon capitalism and trade with foreign trade, the textbooks repeatedly demonstrate how Korea, long ago, engaged in commercial activities with a wide variety of other people. In this way, foreignness is portrayed as positive, and, in keeping with an early and determined system of trade, commerce, and capitalism in “traditional” Korea. That is, the act of international commerce is shown as being part of being Korean as far back as the Three Kingdoms Period. Thus, state the textbooks, the society and economy of today is not a radical departure from the past and has long been a source of national wealth and power.

For example, one lesson in a fifth grade book is titled "The Story of Apples and Bananas." In seven panel cartoon, Koreans from the Three Kingdoms Period are shown trading apples for bananas from appear to be possibly people from Africa. These people are depicted as wearing grass skirts and learning about apples from Koreans.

In another textbook, a two page cartoon shows how Koreans dealt with foreigners by trading over the ages. The story ends by telling how all of this trade eventually culminates in modernity and children learn how "our exports consisted mainly of natural resources and we imported products from foreign countries." See Figure one.

Figure 1.



In a two page series of drawings titled "The Development of the Market" (*Muy?k ui paldal*) a fifth grade text book begins the lesson by stating that "Since the time of Unified

Shilla, our nation has traded actively with China and Japan." Later, Koreans are variously shown as engaging in forms of trade with Arabs, Chinese, Japanese and eventually Westerners. Doing business with foreigners it is shown as fitting perfectly within the morals, ethics, and behavior of traditional Korean ruling elite. Aside from the obvious point that *yangban* who lived during these times might find these representations objectionable, we need also to look at relationship being presented to students. Foreigners are not automatically or completely "foreign." That is, foreign people and lands appear as potential trading partners, partners in a process of trade that already existed in Korea. Thus, such interactions are

not a variance with being “Korean.” Rather, they bring Koreans and foreigners together in a mutually beneficial relationship that still exists today. Also implicit is the idea that the move from tradition to modernity represents a process that is at times turbulent, but always leads us the “present day Korea.” The present does not represent a direct denial of the past. Instead, modern Korea, through its relations with other countries, is portrayed as either a logical extension of the past, or, as a “new and improved” version of tradition.

As mentioned above, a second, version of the “friendly foreigner” exists. In a paradoxical fashion, the textbooks use foreigners as a form of confirmation of the modern accomplishments and worth of Korea. While certainly students are told of the accomplishments of Koreans through out the ages, the textbook authors feel compelled to seek confirmation and acknowledgement of these accomplishments by linking them to foreigners in a variety of ways.

A sixth grade book begins its modern Korean history section with the sentence “from a long time ago, our country (*uri nara*) turned our eyes to overseas and had foreign relations with different countries.” The book then goes in depth on the topic of “the effort to modernize.” What is interesting is that the very first event in this effort to modernize is the landing by Weltevree on Cheju Island in 1628. This image is quickly followed with a description of Hamel’s experiences in Korea. These two foreigners receive just over three pages of text and pictures. Hamel and his depictions of Korea receive more space than Syngman Rhee does later on. Following this are sections with titles such as “Calling in Westerners” and “Requesting Trade with the West.”

This calling upon foreigners is not restricted to history. A common theme in a number of books is to teach students how to present Korea to foreigners who come as tourists. A picture in one 1979 *Sahoe* book shows foreigners viewing historical items in a Korean museum. In the text next to it, students are told how “Korean has many beautiful mountains and sceneries. We also have a very old culture with many wonderful works or art. They are so beautiful that even foreigners come to see them.” Another textbook provides a six-panel cartoon titled “When we develop tourism.” The first panel shows a line of foreign tourists in front of ancient buildings, surrounded by floating dollar bills. The final two panels (shown in figure 2) shows Korean children greeting foreigners and “introducing them to our culture.” Other pages teach similar lessons, show a graph on increasing tourism, and provide a worksheet to help students better learn these

important lessons. History and culture are portrayed as commodities that attract foreign dollars in the form of foreign tourists. It is not an accident that this section direct follows a section on national economic development.

Figure 2.

A final point on this theme is taken from a fourth grade book and is in a lesson that teaches students the value and importance of the newly constructed Incheon International Airport, title “An Island That Became a City of the World.” Students are told how this new airport will spur development and raise Korea’s image in the eyes of foreign countries. And, “our national power (*uri ui kukryok*) has increased, so the number of people coming and going to our country has increased a lot. Of course now the Incheon International Airport plays a central role in the world’s air traffic in Asia.” Clearly, simply increasing nation power is not enough for the authors. They fell obliged to confirm this “fact” by explaining how such power means foreigners visit Korea and how the new airport is central to their travel.

The basic message is a bit odd. Korean students are being prompted to take pride in the achievements, culture, legacies of their nation, but at the same time they are being told that modern success is tied to, and embodied in, the “friendly foreigners” confirmation of whether all these are indeed worthy. In this way, students are given a simplified version of a speech given some three weeks ago at a conference in Seoul. The opening speaker told the audience, at length, how Koreans in the field of Korean Studies (a field specifically created by foreigners to represent Korea to foreigners) are at long last beginning to “catch up” with the scientific methods used by foreigners. The obvious paradox of lauding Koreans for “finally” being more “Western” in their methods of representing Korea to foreigners was left untouched. Perhaps it will serve as a theme for next year’s conference.

Yet, not all foreigners are friendly. The books also explain that only some of them are, and only some of the time. The most dangerous time for Korea, according to the textbooks, was during the late 1800’s, when foreigners turned aggressive and became invaders. Various books all describe this period as one fraught with danger as foreigners threatened

the national integrity of Korea. The foreigner that most often fills this role is, of course, the Japanese. In book after book, the Japanese are shown as predators, two-faced, cruel, high handed, among other images. Recent textbooks pay special attention to their duplicity and cruelty during the 1870s and the March First Movement. Not all foreigners are equal though. The books mention the attacks and intrusions of the Americans and French forces only briefly. These are portrayed as minor, almost accidental in nature. The aggression of the Japanese, in contrast, is shown as calculated and systematic. Figure 3 shows one picture in a lesson titled “The Kanghewado Treaty is an Unequal Treaty.” It is worth noting that these images of Japan change with the time period under discussion. Japan receives a far more positive representation in sections that discuss it as a modern trading partner.

Figure 3.


Finally in this section, the concept of foreignness itself receives more positive treatment. This is because it is almost always equated to modernity itself. Through pictures and stories students are shown how modernity is an improvement on the past. Cartoons show children who attend “modern” schools are happier than those attending traditional schools. People in western clothing are shown as better than those who wear a *hanbok*. Almost all books show how modern material conditions, all of which are derived from foreign countries, are an improvement over traditional conditions and life. The authors of the high school history book *Kuksa* provided students with such themes as “The Unfolding of Modern Society,” “Development of a Modern Society,” and “Development of Modern Culture.” The result was an interpretation that teaches students that the late Chosŏn dynasty was a period of response to foreign ideas that generated internal changes in politics, economics, society and culture, all of which represented “a movement toward a modern society and a new age.”

South Korean students are given a complex, perhaps paradoxical set of narratives of Korean identity and foreignness in their textbooks. On the one hand, traditional Korea is lauded and students learn of their national roots. At the abstract and distant level children are prompted to identify with people and cultures they have never known and encode them as shared “national ancestors.” Yet, at the same time, children learn to embrace a

modern daily life that is expressly tied to foreignness. At the level of everyday life, children's minds are instructed to observe the material artifacts of their capitalist culture in an uncritical, but congratulatory fashion. In this way a binary is created and the voice of the state fuses images of Koreanness and foreignness that may be as schizophrenic as the process of modernity itself.

Keeping it simple: Foreignness as the Other in North Korean textbooks

Compared to the Southern textbooks, the portrayal of foreigners and foreignness in the North is far more unified. All foreigners are the Other and pose a threat to the lives and lifestyle of North Koreans. Though the basic representation is unified, it by no means simple, for different foreigners play different roles in creating national identity. However, as was the case for the South, in the North, representations of foreignness are tailored to fit with the politics, economics and culture of the current regime. The end result is an alternative state curriculum that is as "authoritative," "accurate" and "natural" as that of its rival, and just as supportive of its authors' positions.

In a parallel to the South, the North's textbooks teach about traditional Korea as if it were a poor cousin, related but not as well off. However, the use of foreignness is much more selective and limited. Foreigners do not serve as equal or superior bearers of material improvements. Instead they are markedly inferior and provide reasons for ideological improvements. In this way, foreigners are markers of Korean strength and unity. They do not provide Korea with "modernity" but are barriers to Korea's march to social modernity. As such, they provide clear boundaries for the self and create increased unity.

An example of this appears in an elementary book that teaches Korean language. Students are told briefly about how *han'gul* (the Korean alphabet) was made. Kim J?ng Il's words (in a special, enlarged font) lead off the chapter titled "Our language's expression" by stating that "There are many nations (*minjok*) in this world. However, it would be very hard to find any language as rich as our own." The authors then sing the praises of *han'gul* and points to it as an example of the brilliance of the Korean people. It also notes how the creation of this new and easy to learn writing system allowed the lower classes to gain literacy and thereby help promote the overall class consciousness of the Korean people. However, in a vivid violation of the Southern version, no mention is made of the role played by King Sejong. For South Koreans, this exclusion would be unthinkable since

their books intimately have tied King Sejong and *han'gul* to one another. Mention one, and the other commonly comes to mind. Northern students' attentions are drawn towards the efforts of the Korean people and their unmatched brilliance.

Foreigners also serve as a foil that demonstrates the strength of the Korean people as well as the leadership of Kim Il Sung. The Japanese occupation is the most commonly used stage for these lessons and are part of a much larger educational campaign that teaches about Kim Il Sung's long record of activities as a patriotic anti-Japanese guerrilla and his eventual rise to national leadership. In various books and in various ways, Kim is shown either as a youth who combats collaborators and their Japanese masters who are enjoying a boating party, a young, but active, patriot during important historical events such as the March First Movement, or a masterful military leader who consistently outwits, outfights and outmaneuvers the Japanese imperialists.

These textbooks also show how the ordinary people are simultaneously conscious agents and impotent victims in the face of foreign invasions, a paradoxical portrayal that eventually helps explain the necessity for Kim Il Sung and *juche* ideology. Historical Koreans are shown in terms of what the North Korean state wishes its people would be in the face of foreign invasion (revolutionary and nationalist) and are measured in terms of what they lacked (Kim Il Sung's brilliant leadership.) Throughout the high school history book, *Chosŏn Ryŏksa*, the Japanese are the reason for laborers, workers, peasants and slaves to "fight for their independence," and peasant uprisings against foreigners receive extensive coverage.

Equally important are the representations of the *yangban* class (*yangban jijunom*), the "feudal government," and the events of the later part of the 1800s. The landed class and the government of the late Choson dynasty are consistently shown as bowing to the wishes of foreign invaders. They engage in acts of self-aggrandizement while ignoring the plight of the peasantry. They not only allow foreigners to force unequal treaties upon the Korean people, these "feudal rulers" sell out the nation. In this way, the North draws an important distinction between the masses and the feudal rulers, one that uses foreigners as an element in its arguments. By "betraying" Korea, these rulers are guilty not only of class oppression, but also aligning themselves with foreigners over Koreans. This theme is often repeated when the texts discuss the collaborators of the colonial period and the South Korean government. In the case of the latter, the Southern rulers and their regime are delegitimized since they are less "Korean." The

North, in contrast, teaches how its government and leaders all were true nationalists who opposed foreigners and foreignness at every turn.

The use of foreigners as a way to generate nationalist sentiments may also be seen in high school history book section titles such as “The people’s struggles against American and Japanese capitalist invasion in the mid-19th century,” “The bourgeois reforms of 1884 and the peasant war and bourgeois reforms of 1894,” “The suffering of the Korean People under Japanese Imperialist,” and “How the Japanese exploited the Korean people.” Americans are also recruited to help serve this role. Elementary textbooks repeatedly show Korean soldiers fighting against American invaders and how Americans oppress the South Korean people.

In these stories, students are told which heroes to admire and which villains to hate. The authors consistently write how the peasants were “fighting hard,” “stubbornly resisting the foreign invaders” and “vigorously rising up” to gain independence. This is perhaps best shown in the treatment given the March First Movement. This movement may have been the first time when practically all Koreans had to confront their identity both within and through the context of modern nationalism. Oppressed by the Japanese, who served as the national Other, North Korean textbooks used this movement to reify a widespread sense of being Korean.

North Koreans remember it as the March First People’s Rebellion (*sam il inmin bonggi*.) Many sections of the Northern history book begin with quotes from the “beloved leader” (*ui dae han suryong*). Speaking of how the “ripening anti-Japanese struggles of the Korean people exploded with the nation-wide anti-Japanese rebellion of March 1,” Kim Il Sung is quoted as stating:

“On March 1, 1919, our people raised their voices and shouted “Drive out the Japanese and the Japanese military” and “Long live Korean independence” while they opposed the Japanese robbers. That day was the day our people mightily attacked the Japanese imperialists.”

The Northern story then extends this struggle against foreigners by placing Kim Il sung as an active participant in the events of the March First Movement. As stated in *Choson Ryoksa*:

“Under the leadership of the great and passionate anti-Japanese revolutionary Kang Jin S?k (the older brother of Kim

Il Sung's mother), the shout of 'Long live Korean independence' spread like a wave throughout the country. From the outset the struggle had the characteristics of a riot and spread. At this time, our great and beloved leader Kim Il Sung, who was eight years old, participated in the anti-Japanese demonstration and traveled to Bongt'ongdae Gate, which was about 30 // away."

Through such stories, Kim's credentials as an eight year old revolutionary and nationalist are validated by the participation of him in the nation's most important battle against foreigners.

Conclusion

After viewing the textbooks from the North and the South, it becomes clear that, at least in the two Koreas, foreignness is the other side of the self. It is a necessary and important part of national identity as well. By examining representations of foreignness we can learn about state representations of the nation. Foreignness is also tied closely to modernity. By making this link each state legitimizes itself in the eyes and hearts of its people. For the South, a natural bridge is made between past trade practices and the help extended by foreigners and their inventions. For the North, foreigners are the Other whose oppression created the forge that tempered the spirit of the people and give rise their leader, Kim Il Sung.