

Ethnic nationalism in korea



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

History influences the ethnic nationalism in Korea as well as the nature of the dynamic self-perception of the Korean people. Ethnic nationalism is defined as the combination of ethnicity and race due to historical circumstances. The self-perception of Koreans, a form of orientalism, derives from a form of ethnic nationalism and takes shape in the form of competitiveness amongst other nations. Although many critics argue that the stigma of ethnic nationalism may bring about a generalization of a nation's people, the certain dynamism of Koreans cannot be masked by ethnic nationalism. Both forms of identity bring about different effects in the social and political world of Korea. Gi-Wook Shin, author of *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, claims that the effect of ethnic nationalism penetrates every aspect of Korean society: "Indeed, a sense of ethnic unity has served Koreans in a variety of ways from being an ideology of anti-colonialism to that of national unification"(3). He demonstrates that this notion of ethnic nationalism is strong enough to influence political and national policies in a country, but he also explains that ethnic nationalism originated from distinct historical events that had occurred in the country. This unique phenomenon formed due to the specific historical circumstances and influences of Korea's past have not allowed Koreans to be able to fully differentiate between race and ethnicity: Although race is understood as a collectivity defined by innate and phenotypic and genotypic characteristics and ethnicity is generally regarded as a cultural phenomenon based on a common language and history, Koreans have not historically differentiated between the two. Instead, race has served as a marker that strengthened ethnic identity, which in turn was instrumental in defining the nation. Race, ethnicity, and nation were conflated, and this is reflected in the multiple uses of the term *minjok*, the <https://assignbuster.com/ethnic-nationalism-in-korea/>

most widely used term for " nation, " which can also refer to " ethnies" or " race" (pg. 4, ENK) Shin describes that the conglomerate definition of ethnic nationalism has been formed from Korea's historic events. In addition, Marxist historian Paek Namun concurred with Shin's definition of ethnic nationalism: " Korea is a unitary notion with a common blood, territory, language, culture, and historical destiny for thousands of years" (5). However despite this deep rooted nationalism in Korea, Shin argued that this ethnic nationalism was not inevitable and could not have existed. He claimed that the national identity of any nation was subject to change depending on its " historical contingency"(9). For example, the increase in the foreboding presence of Japan, China, and other foreign countries throughout Korea's history had also increased its sense of ethnic nationalism. More particularly, the distinction between Koreans and other East Asian countries posed as threats to the country, and Korea had thus evolved to form an ethnic nationalism that was " blood line" related. This strong sense of identity through blood is what critics relate to when defining the adamant stance in identity by the Korean people under Japanese colonialism. In addition to the different forms of ethnic nationalism, many have criticized and questioned Gi-Wook Shin's broad definition of ethnic nationalism and its association with identifying the self-perception of Koreans. Critics of Shin's argue that ethnic nationalism will result in essentialism and prevent the analysis of the true self-perception of Koreans. On the contrary, I believe that the dynamic nature of Koreans' notions of themselves stems from a form of ethnic nationalism in Korea. Korea's self perception is based off of the domination under foreign nations in the past and has stemmed from the ethnic nationalism that was represented in Korea under this oppression. Gilbert

<https://assignbuster.com/ethnic-nationalism-in-korea/>

Rozman explains the effect that influenced South Korea from such oppression in South Korea's National Identity Sensitivity: Evolution, Manifestations, Prospects: China with its precocious premodern past and record of regional centrality and Japan with its late premodern dynamism and modern rise to regional ascendancy, Korea pales in comparisons that fail to appreciate its own relative strengths on an international comparative scale and its lack of reasons for guilt in external relations... Koreans could take pride in how their country has repeatedly seized opportunities in confining circumstances (pg. 2) Rozman shows that the ethnic nationalism in Korea was the reaction reflected from the inferiority under Japan and China. He describes Korea's struggle to appreciate their impressive standing as a nation confined between two great East Asian countries. Ethnic nationalism therefore formed due to their restless struggle and determinant fervor to seek a position in the global world that it could one day be proud of. The competitiveness that grew out of this distinct ethnic nationalism developed from an outlook judged under the international community and its standards of a successful country. South Korea's dynamic nature therefore arose from an orientalist view that originated in the ethnic nationalism under Japan's and China's presence. Korea's dynamic nature is one that constantly evolves and adapts to current modernization. Koreans have been striving to seek success in almost every international sector, whether it can be shown through economic success, technological achievements, or through physical achievements such as the World Cup. As Shin describes the 2002 World Cup phenomenon: " This fervor over the World Cup was not simply about soccer. It was also about national pride, identity, and confidence" (ENK, pg. 2), he explains that the reward of success had contributed to Korea's definition of

<https://assignbuster.com/ethnic-nationalism-in-korea/>

its own identity. In addition, Shin includes that of 542 surveyed Koreans, 76% of them had claimed to express a "renewed confidence in Korea's capability in the world" (Korea Herald, July 10, 2002). As this identity is attributed to a prideful sense of ethnic nationalism based on success, the dynamic nature of Korea has certainly proved to work under its representation throughout the global community. As quoted above, Korea's success is to achieve world recognition in order to rectify its "capability in the world". This notion is what attributes the dynamic nature of the Korean people, and it is this attitude that pushes Korea to competitively seek its place as one of the top nations in the global community and rid its past image as the poor, war-ridden country that it once was in the past. Korea's ethnic nationalism and self-perception have both been very influential driving forces in Korean policies and attitudes. Both of these notions are effected by the historic events that have heavily influenced and changed how Koreans view themselves. In addition to this similarity, Koreans' self-perception has in fact stemmed from ethnic nationalism. However despite the relationship between the two, each notion has a much different effect on the people of Korea. Ethnic nationalism in Korea effects Koreans through its sense of unity and blood line. Self-perception of Koreans, however, impassion Koreans through a sense of competitiveness from the ethnic nationalism formed when Korea was under colonial rule. Therefore, Korean ethnic nationalism should not block Koreans' outlook on themselves.