

Ch'oe Namsŏn and Identity Construction through Negotiation with the Colonizer*

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Introduction

With the arrival of the imperialist Western powers in Asia and the eventual opening of Korea in 1875-76 by neighboring Japan, Korea was compelled to find and to establish a new foundation of its state and identity as an independent and emancipated nation outside of the until-then prevalent Sinocentric world order, and within a new Eurocentric international community. This was necessary to avoid the calamity of colonization, which befell many other non-Western nations. At that time, China found itself in a semi-colonized situation. Many Korean intellectuals therefore considered Japan, with its methods of modernization and successful stand against the West, as a model for Korea. The forced opening after the Kanghwa-do incident and Japanese rivalry with China, and later Russia, over influence on the Korean peninsula, which respectively led to

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war in 1894 and 1904, shows that Japan constituted a major threat to Korean independence at the same time. Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890-1957), a famous and important Korean intellectual during the colonial period, was aware of this fact. In 1908, he wrote that help and guidance should be derived from Japan and that after the Korean youth have built a new Korea, "Japan will be Korea's oldest friend. [As] a rival, however, Japan will also be the biggest obstacle."¹ This statement is surprising, not only because it was made by an 18-year old, but also since it was stated at a time of strong anti-Japanese sentiment. Korea had already become a Japanese protectorate three years earlier in 1905, and Japan exerted influence on Korea's internal affairs. Because of this, most Korean intellectuals were reluctant to publicly call Japan a friend. They rather found themselves in a dilemma; distinguishing themselves and their ideas from the colonizer to argue for an independent Korea and against the established colonial order, as Andre Schmid showed in his book *Korea Between Empires*.²

A well-known example of Korean resistance against the Japanese scientific colonialism of history is Sin Ch'aeho (1880-1936). He confronted the attempt by Japanese scholars to incorporate Korea into Japanese history with the idea of the Korean *minjok* (people),³ and warned his contemporaries not to become slaves of Japanese historiography, as Koreans had been slaves of Chinese historiography in the past.⁴

At a young age, Ch'oe Namsŏn was anxious to enlighten his fellow countrymen and to impose a new (self) image of Korea through his publications. Resorting to Japanese works, translations and models, he tried to

1 Ch'oe Namsŏn, "Haesang Taehansa (Sonyŏn, 1908–1910)." *Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn chŏnjip* (Collection of Ch'oe Namsŏn) 2 (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 1973), 393.

2 Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

3 Henry Em, *Nationalist discourse in modern Korea: Minjok as a democratic imaginary* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995).

4 Sin Ch'aeho, "Toksa sillon (Taehan Maeil Sinbo: 25.08–13.12.1908)," *Tanje Sin Ch'aeho chŏnjip* (Collection of Sin Ch'aeho) 3 (Seoul: Tongnip Kinyŏngwan, 2008), S. 327

accomplish knowledge production about Korea by Koreans themselves, with the aim of replacing the knowledge and Korean images produced outside of Korea. The efforts regarding the construction of an identity for the Korean people by Ch'oe before and during the colonial period are interesting and special in several regards. Ch'oe did not only attempt to construct a Korean identity, as will be shown below, but he also influenced contemporary Korean identity. An article in *The Korea Times* portrayed him as

“the nation's first modern poet and thinker, a scholar who tried to create the Korean identity, for the sake of the nation's independence, dignity and sovereignty while under the colonial rule. His Declaration of Independence was comparable to that of Thomas Jefferson. [...] In addition to writing the Declaration, he was one of the main architects of the March First Mansei Movement and a scholar of ancient Korean history from Tan'gun onward. He was disenchanted with the Korean factional politicking that was in front of the urgency of the nation-building and the fight for independence from the Japanese yoke. But more than anything, he wanted to be remembered as a historian who tried to establish the Tan'gun myth as the starting point of the Pulham civilization of the Northeast Asian nations.”⁵

Such praise of Ch'oe's achievements for Korea, however, overlooks the controversy about his person and the accusation of having been a pro-Japanese collaborator in colonial times. After his conviction and imprisonment due to his role as author of the Korean independence declaration of 1919, he started to cooperate with the Japanese and was regarded as a traitor by many Koreans. This cooperation, or collaboration, as some might call it, contradicts the still-dominant Korean nationalistic narrative

5 Choi Yern-hong, “Choe Nam-sun's life and his love of nation,” *The Korea Times*, October 28, 2016.

of a constant resistance against the Japanese colonizer, and relativizes his acts “for the sake of the nation's independence, dignity and sovereignty.”

In the following pages it will be argued that his cooperation instead enabled Ch'oe to continue his opposition against the colonial portrayal of Korea, albeit in a different form. To convey his autoethnographic view⁶ on Korea to the Japanese, he had - like all those who had been colonized - to use the language of the colonizers, and to participate in their discourses in order to maintain a Korean identity within the colonial setting, not by a “negation” of Japanese research but by a “negotiation” of it through his autoethnographic reinterpretation.⁷ Since negotiation presupposes dissent and a willingness to reach an agreement with the Other, this practice automatically places him in an ambiguous position, between resistance and collaboration. As will be shown by looking more closely at his “Treatise on Purham Culture“ (Jap.: *Fukan bunkaron*; Kor.: *Purham munhwaron*), written in 1925, Ch'oe Namsŏn based his work on Japanese research, and by participating in the academic discourse of the colonizer, negotiated a new and eminent position for Korea in history. He resisted the colonial view of a weak and dependent Korea. Reference to the colonizer's scholarship, however, simultaneously reveals its appropriation and reproduction by Ch'oe. Japan was, for him, an Other for identification *and* for differentiation, since the main objects of his othering were eventually, and to a greater extent, the West and China. After the liberation of Korea from colonial rule, Ch'oe himself had to admit this ambiguity and ambivalence. In defense of his Purham Culture Theory, he claimed that his aim was to prepare Korea for a long mental fight with Japan, but he had to confess that this and his attempts to establish a Tan'gun shrine had a negative

6 Mary Louise Pratt, “Transculturation and autoethnography: Peru 1615–1980,” in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Barker, Francis et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). See also below.

7 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22.

influence on Korean society.⁸

Ch'oe's Early Life

Ch'oe Namsŏn was born into a middle-class family in 1890. He was educated in Chinese and started to learn Japanese when he was 12 years old. He received a scholarship which enabled him to study in Japan for a short period, from October 1904 to January 1905. A year later he left Korea again for Japan, where he stayed more than two years. His stay in Japan had an immense influence on his life. He not only developed his interest in history, but also participated in political activities with the Korean students in Japan at a time when Korea had become a Japanese protectorate. As an editor and author, he got involved with the publication of several journals for Korean exchange students in Japan, and acted as the Korean representative in 1907 when a dispute between Korean and Japanese students arose over the possible integration of the Korean imperial family into the Japanese imperial family. During his stay in Japan, he also met the writer Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950) and activist An Ch'angho (1878–1938) for the first time.

Ch'oe was especially impressed by the number of publications in Japan and became aware of their importance for the enlightenment and education of the people. Therefore, following his return from Japan in June 1908, he published his own journal called *Sonyŏn* (“Children”). Ch'oe was only 18 at that time and did most of the writing himself. Over time, he was able to persuade Korean intellectuals like Yi Kwangsu, Pak Ŭnsik (1859–1925) and Sin Ch'aeho (1880–1936) to contribute to *Sonyŏn*. The journal was shut down in 1911 due to the new colonial and political environment. With the title “Children”, he showed his conviction that only the youth of today with their knowledge can ensure a strong Korea. The jour-

8 Pak Sŏngsu, “Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu. ‘Chayŏlsŏ’-ŭi punsŏk,” *Kuksakwan nonch'ong* 28 (December 1991): 212.

nal not only provided a platform for the transfer of Western knowledge to Korea and through the Korean language, but also contributed to the construction of a new Korean identity and placement of Korea within the world and the international community. To achieve this goal, he resisted an external representation of Korea through the construction and dissemination of a self-confident image of the Korean nation.⁹ A good example of his resistance to the prevailing image of Korea at that time can be found in the article “Pongil’s Geographical Studies” (*Ponggiri chiri kongbu*). There, a tiger with its face and paws in the direction of Manchuria is drawn into the contours of the Korean peninsula, while a similar smaller picture with a rabbit drawn into the contours of Korea is pictured beside it.¹⁰ The drawing conveys Korea not as passive, weak, and the prey of other countries, but strong, powerful, and ambitious.

Ch'oe was aware that the internal and external representations of Korea as a weak and passive nation could only be replaced through the Korean production and dissemination of knowledge. In 1922, he wrote:

“We must become independent, first in our minds. We must be independent ideologically and academically. We must realize a complete independence and an absolute self-determination by way of our spirit to respect ourselves, and allow our thoughts to manifest ourselves and our academic capabilities to search for our own identity. We must establish Korean studies with our own hands. We must create a Korean encyclopedia alive with Korean blood and Korean breath.”¹¹

9 Cf. Ryu Sihyŏn, *Ch'oe Namsŏn p'yŏngjŏn* (Seoul: Hanyŏre Ch'ulp'an, 2011); *Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Yŏksa Pip'yŏnsa, 2009).

10 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “Ponggiri chiri kongbu,” *Sonyŏn*, October 1907, 67.

11 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “Chosŏn yŏksa t'ongsok kanghai kaeje,” *Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn chŏnjip* 2 (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 1973), 416. Quoted from: Chizuko Allen, “Northeast Asia centered around Korea: Ch'oe Namsŏn's view of history,” in *The Journal of Asian studies* 49, no. 4 (November 1990): 792.

With this awareness, Ch'oe Namsŏn founded the "Association for Korea's Glorious Literature" (Kor.: *Chosŏn Kwangmunhoe*; jap.: *Chōsen Kōbunkai*) in 1911, shortly after the annexation of Korea by Japan. The association collected and published old Korean works and made them available to the wider public. Some of these works were reintroduced from Japan, as they no longer existed in Korea. The aim of this was to gain the power of interpretation over Korea for Koreans, and to establish a positive image of the mostly negative depiction of the Chosŏn period. The work of the association constituted a Korean counterbalance to Japanese societies like the "Association of Korean Studies" (Kor.: *Chosŏn Yŏn'guhoe*; jap.: *Chōsen Kenkyūkai*), which did not only do research on and interpreted texts, but also translated them into Japanese and made them available to the Japanese public.¹² Ch'oe's association was shut down by the General Government in 1918, as was his magazine "Youth" (*Ch'ōngch'un*) which he had been publishing since 1914, as a successor to *Sonyŏn*.

"Maritime History of The Great Han" (Haesang Taehansa)

As can be clearly seen from this rough outline of his early life, Ch'oe was eager to create a Korean nation and mentality equal to its Western and Japanese counterparts.

Those intentions can be found in his article "Maritime History of The Great Han" (*Haesang Taehansa*), published in 1908 in *Sonyŏn*. Despite the fact that Ch'oe wrote the article when he was 18 years old, essential aspects of his thinking regarding Korea's standing in relation to Japan, China and the West are already evident: the influence of Japanese scholarship, his ambivalent stance towards Japan, the de-centering of China, references to and resistance against the West, the emphasis of Korea's global significance, views towards the North of the Korean peninsula and

¹² Ryu, *Ch'oe Namsŏn p'yŏngjŏn*, 61-63.

the importance of the Tan'gun myth in constructing a new Korean identity.

With this article, Ch'oe wanted to "satisfy the youth's thirst for knowledge regarding the maritime issues and arouse the sense of adventurousness related to the sea" by replacing negative Korean associations with positive ones. Even though Korea's geographic position had caused harm and suffering in the past, he also saw advantages to it being a peninsula, as the three seas surrounding Korea would allow for close trade relations with other countries while having a connection to, and being a part of, the mainland. With references to Greece, Italy, the Iberian and Arabic peninsula and Asia Minor, Ch'oe emphasized the role of the peninsula as a receiver, intermediary, and exporter, and as a place of origin, preservation, accumulation, and merging of culture.

His references to examples from the European cultural sphere are not accidental. Europe set the standards for what would be regarded a modern nation, and Korea had to comply with those standards if it wanted to be a sovereign nation with equal rights on the international stage. Therefore, it is not surprising that Ch'oe mainly focused on historical and cultural Korean achievements, which not only proved that the nature of Korean people met the standards of modernity (that is, Western civilization), but also went beyond it by claiming that Korea invented important features of civilization far earlier than the West had. Under Tan'gun, for example, Korea had already been a state with a monotheistic religion, according to Ch'oe's explanation. He claims, moreover, that Paekche was the first country in history which introduced a republican and constitutional system and that important inventions like the movable printing types or the ironclad warships worldwide were first to be found in Korean history.¹³

13 Ch'oe's later claimed that America was discovered before Christopher Columbus by a Buddhist monk and the Korean invention of the airplane (Ch'oe Namsŏn, "Miju-ŭi palgyŏnja-nŭn (ilch'ŏn obaengnyŏn chŏn-ŭi) pulgyo sŭngnyŏ," *Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn chŏnjip* 9 (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 1974), 329; "Chŏson-ŭi pihanggi," *Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn chŏnjip* 8 (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 1973), 539-543.

Ascribing an important position within world history to Korea by emphasizing its potential and (past) advancements in fields like politics, religion, culture, and military in relation to the West enhanced the status of Asia and, at the same time, the status of Korea in relation to its Asian neighbors.

The fact that Ch'oe doesn't mention China in the first part of the consecutively published article is in itself a statement, and reflected the changing balance of power in Asia. China was no longer the center ("the Middle Kingdom") as in the past, but backward, uncivilized and weak. Although Russia and Japan threatened China's territories in Manchuria, Ch'oe raised a Korean claim to those territories by considering them as not only the territory of the former kingdoms of Koguryŏ and Parhae, but also as Korean settlements throughout history and in the present.

His expansionist ambitions were clearly influenced by Korea's neighbor Japan, towards which he took an ambivalent stance. On the one hand, he saw Japanese emigration to Australia, the USA and Manchuria as a model for Korea and as embodying the desired sense of adventurousness for the Korean youth. On the other hand, he conveyed a warning to his countrymen since Korea and Manchuria increasingly became the focus for Japanese emigration due to geographic proximity, racial and cultural affinities, and lower logistical burdens.

Korea became a Japanese protectorate in 1905, which led to an increase in anti-Japanese resentment and resistance. It is interesting to recognize that Ch'oe did not only mention Korea's role as an exporter of culture and technology to Japan – the most important constituent in Koreans' identity construction in regard to ancient Korean-Japanese historic relations – but went further, addressing the affinity (with Japan as a branch of the Korean people) and the close and inseparable relationship over history between both nations. Despite the Japanese 'betrayal' of 1905, Ch'oe still saw Japan as the country which constituted a model and ally for Korea in terms of modernization. However, he also was aware of the fact that Japan represented the greatest danger for Korea. This ambivalent view towards Japan becomes clear as he wrote that:

“In this country a part of the way, which we want to go in the future, has been gone first. [...] In addition, not only does much of the new culture come from this country to ours, but – may this be a sweet or a bitter aftertaste – extremely close relationships have been tied at the moment and it is necessary for us to follow with gratitude when through something good suitable guidance is offered from there. On the day, on which the new Korea, towards which we are constantly strive, will have been built with the power of our whole youth, this country will also be our oldest friend. As a rival, however, this country will also be the biggest hindrance so that we mustn't neglect this country's affairs at any moment.”¹⁴

His tolerant stance to Japanese ambitions stemmed from his conviction that, without Japan, the USA would exert hegemony over Korea.

The Turning Point of 1919-1920

The year 1919 marks the beginning of a turn in Ch'oe's life. Encouraged by the end of the First World War and the idea of peoples' self-determination mentioned in U.S. president Wilson's 14 points, the Korean independence movement came into being on March 1st, 1919. It is believed that the draft of the declaration of independence, which was signed by 33 representatives of the Korean people and proclaimed in Seoul's Pagoda Park, had been written by Ch'oe. Because of his involvement in the independence movement, he was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment for two and a half years. After he had served his sentence, which stretched from March 1919 to October 1921, he focused more on academia and became the founder of 'Korean' Korean Studies (*Chosŏnhak*). He continued to offer resistance to the colonial description of Korea by Japanese scholars and framed a representation of Korea as a capable and inde-

14 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “Haesang Tachansa,” 393.

pendent people. Whereas some Japanese scholars regarded Prince Amenohiboko, who came from Korea to Japan according to the Japanese *Nihon shoki* (AD 720), as a hostage for the Japanese imperial court, Ch'oe described him as a ruler. As the title “Prince Amenohiboko of Shilla – the Great Colonizer of Mythical Times” (*Sindae-ŭi tae-singmin'ga Silla wangja Amenohiboko*) of an article published in 1926 expresses,¹⁵ Ch'oe reversed the political power structure mostly used in Japanese historiography and claimed that Korea established colonies in Japan. In other works, he also mentioned Korean colonies in Chinese coastal areas. By doing so, he contrasted the Korean present of being colonized with the past and future goal of being the colonizer.

Regarding the inscription of the Kwanggaet'o stele, he also presented his own interpretation. According to Ch'oe, Wae (Jap.: Wa) troops crossed the sea and helped Paekche not to defend their own interests and influence on the Korean peninsula against invading Koguryŏ as Japanese scholars claimed, but instead offered their help out of the fear that after the fall of Paekche, Japan would be the next target of Koguryŏ's expansion.

In respect to the relationship between the Korean and Japanese people, he believed that some ancestors of the Koreans settled down in Japan and were the “ancestors of the Japanese people.” This remark is noteworthy because most Korean intellectuals during the colonial period avoided mentioning a direct blood relationship to their Japanese colonizers.¹⁶ Instead, they restricted their relationship with Japan to the cultural level, with which – as has already been mentioned – Korean superiority in the past over Japan was emphasized. The reason for this avoidance was that the Japanese colonial discourse of close Korean and Japanese affinities

15 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “*Sindae-ŭi tae-singmin'ga Silla wangja Amenohiboko* (1929),” *Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn chŏnjip 9* (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 1974), 42-45.

16 Cf. Tobias Scholl, *Die Konstruktion von Gleichheit und Differenz. Der Kolonialdiskurs einer gemeinsamen Abstammung von Japanern und Koreanern, 1910–1945*. (München: Iudicium, 2018).

was used to legitimize colonial rule over Korea.

Despite such an incessant nationalistic zeal, the 1920s were also the time during which Ch'oe Namsŏn's Manichean attitude towards the colonizer Japan became visible to the general Korean public. After the March 1st movement, the new general governor Saitō Makoto adopted a "cultural policy" (Jap.: *bunka seiji*; Kor.: *munhwa chŏngch'i*) to appease the Koreans and ease anti-Japanese sentiment. Ch'oe was therefore allowed to publish his new magazine "Light of the East" (*Tongmyŏng*) in September 1922 after his release from prison the year before. The name of the magazine refers to Chumong, the founder of Koguryŏ, and to a glorious Korea. Rumours circulated that he received financial support for his magazine from the General Government of Korea. Ch'oe's decision to join the "Commission for the Compilation of Korean History" (Kor.: Chosŏnsa P'yŏnsu Wiwŏnhoe; Jap.: Chōsenshi Henshū Iinkai) in 1928 and to work officially and publicly for and with the colonial regime had a great impact on his reputation. At this time, Ch'oe "died"¹⁷ to many Koreans.

It was and is, however, too short-sighted to consider Ch'oe's work in the commission as an abandonment of his Korean nationalistic ideas. Ch'oe's position was that the huge project on the compilation of a Korean history would continue, and that such a production of knowledge regarding Korea should not be ceded to the Japanese entirely and without debate. Even though he was aware that Korean influence would be minimal, he considered it better than there being no Korean voice at all. He decided not to "negate" the commission but to "negotiate" with its Japanese members instead. Ch'oe himself strived in vain for the inclusion of Tan'gun as a historical figure in the compilation.¹⁸

Ch'oe's participation in the compilation committee can therefore be seen as a form of modified resistance through negotiation with the colonizer. As a scholar, he was forced to react to and interact with his Japa-

17 Ch'oi Hak-joo, *Yuktang Ch'oe Nam-sŏn and Korean modernity* (Seoul: YBM, 2012), 170.

18 Cf. Pak Sŏngsu. "Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu," 205-8.

nese counterparts if he wanted his works to be recognized beyond Korea since Japanese scholars set the international academic standards for Korean Studies at the time. Also, to be heard in academia and to participate in the debates and discourse of the metropole, he had to use the Japanese language. Ch'oe's intentions for collaboration and his works were intended to offer a Korean image of Korea alongside the existing Japanese images. In reference to Mary Louise Pratt, it can be said that he conducted an "autoethnography." Mary Louise Pratt's explanations regarding "autoethnographic text," which she defines as "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them,"¹⁹ also apply to Ch'oe. Pratt writes:

"Autoethnographic texts are not [...] what are usually thought of as autochthonous forms of expression or self-representation [...]. Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding. Autoethnographic works are often addressed to both metropolitan audiences and the speaker's own community. Their reception is thus highly indeterminate. Such texts often constitute a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture. [...] Autoethnographic representation often involves concrete collaborations between people [...]. Often, [...], it involves more than one language."²⁰

His nationalistic and "autoethnographic" efforts in the commission were eventually acknowledged, at least to a certain degree, since his engagement was not listed as one of his pro-Japanese deeds when he was

19 Pratt, "Transculturation and autoethnography," 28.

20 Pratt, "Transculturation and autoethnography," 28.

put on trial as a pro-Japanese traitor after Korea's liberation.²¹

One result of Ch'oe's autoethnographic pursuits was his research on Korean shamanism.

“Religion in general, but shamanism in particular, was a highly contentious issue during the colonial period. The governing principles outlined by colonial policies were meant to reinforce colonial assimilation and concepts of religion were the locus of intensely nationalistic discussion. Korean ‘shamanism studies’ (*musokhak*) was funded by the Government General to persuade Koreans to embrace Shinto with their theory that shamanism was an ancient form of Shinto.”²²

Whereas Japanese studies on Korean shamanism date back to 1902, Ch'oe Namsŏn and Yi Nŭnghwa, the second Korean scholar in the compilation committee, are regarded as the founders of Korean research on shamanism, which evolved around 1927.²³ In consideration of its meaning as one important component of today's Korean cultural construction, shamanism serves as a good example of how the colonizer initiated, (re)shaped, and influenced the identity of the colonized, which was built in accordance, relation, replication, reaction, and contestation with the former's gaze.²⁴

21 Pak Sŏngsu, “Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu,” 195.

22 Hwang Merose, *The Mudang: gendered discourses on shamanism in colonial Korea* (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), 184.

23 Ch'oe Sŏkyŏng, “Ilje-ŭi Taehan cheguk kangjŏm chŏnhu Chosŏn musok-e tae-han sisŏn pyŏnhwa,” *Han'guk musokhak* 9 (February 2005), 115.

24 Cf. Ch'oe Sŏkyŏng, “Ilje-ŭi Taehan cheguk kangjŏm chŏnhu Chosŏn musok-e tae-han sisŏn pyŏnhwa.”

The Purham Culture Theory

In the following, Ch'oe Namsŏn's efforts towards negotiating a new position for Korea within the colonial order, and a new Korean identity within the same and the world community will be scrutinized on the basis of his "Treatise on Purham Culture" (Jap.: *Fukan bunkaron*; Kor.: *Purham munhwaron*), written in 1925 and published in 1927 in the first issue of "Korea and the Korean People" (Jap.: *Chōsen oyobi Chōsen minzoku*; Kor.: *Chosŏn kŭp Chosŏn minjok*). It was written in Japanese and, as an autoethnographic text, addressed Japanese and educated Korean readers. In contrast to many other Korean intellectuals at that time who wrote in Korean or even in Chinese and who ignored Japan by focusing their studies on the territories north of the Korean peninsula, Ch'oe displaced Japan but also did not completely consider Japan as an Other either. Rather, he included Japan as an object of identification in his thinking. Moreover, he elaborated upon his work with reference to academic findings and in relation to the discourse from the metropole. In his (re-)construction of the alleged Purham cultural sphere, which he claims once spread from Eastern Europe to the islands of Ryūkyū and therefore had global importance, the influence from the works of Japanese scholars like Torii Ryūzō (1870–1953) and Shiratori Kurakichi (1865–1942) can be seen. The anthropologist Torii Ryūzō conducted research on shamanism in North East Asia and Siberia, and believed there to be a common ancestry for Japanese and Koreans (Kor.: *Il-Sŏn tongjoron*; Jap.: *Nis-Sen dōsoron*), whereas Shiratori Kurakichi, one of the most important representatives of the "History of the Orient" (Jap.: *tōyōshi*; *tongyangsa*), examined sound shifts and etymologies such as the shift of the p-sound or the word *taigar* / *tengri* in the languages of the "Orient."

Already, in the first lines of the "Treatise on Purham Culture – The Origin of Eastern Culture seen through Korea, One Part of Mankind's Culture with Tan'gun as Momentum," Ch'oe links his enterprise with the Japanese "History of the Orient." While *tōyōshi* considered Korean history as merely an extension of historical developments in the Northeast of

China and Manchuria (Jap.: *Man-Sen-shi*; Kor.: *Man-Sŏn-sa*), Ch'oe reversed the gaze and presented Korea as the source of history. "When it comes to the real establishment of Oriental Studies (*tongyanghak*), I expect that through them and with Korea in the centre, secret gates will be opened." "The primal state of Oriental Culture can be relatively clearly seen through Korea."²⁵ Studies on Korean history and on the history of the Orient were considered interdependent since everybody who wanted to explore the origins of Korean history would encounter the question of the origin of Oriental Culture, and bring forward research of the latter.²⁶ In this sense, Tan'gun does not only constitute "a unique key for solving mysteries of Korea's ancient history," but also "an extremely important foundation of Oriental Studies to look at the old form of Far Eastern culture."²⁷

Since no written records from the prehistoric time had been passed down, linguistic techniques were often used to discover traces of old cultures. Correspondingly, Ch'oe constructed his Purham cultural sphere on the dissemination of the syllable *paik* [*paek* / *pârk*] [=Purham]. The original meaning of *paik* had been "god," "heaven," "sun" and was an expression in ancient times of the common veneration of the sun as a god. In accordance with this, Ch'oe argues that it is not surprising that within Purham culture, the syllable was mostly used for naming the highest mountains as objects of veneration. In Korea *paik* is, for example, included in *Taebaeksan*, the holy mountain of the Tan'gun myth.²⁸ But this phenomenon can also be found in Japan, as Ch'oe believed, referring to the mountain *Takachiho*, which is the "historically and religiously most famous place among the mountains in Japan" and "occupies the same

25 Ch'oe Namsŏn, *Fukan (pârkân) bunkaron* (Keijō: Chōsen Shisō Tsūshinsha, 1927), 2.

26 Ch'oe Namsŏn, *Fukan (pârkân) bunkaron*, 2.

27 Ch'oe Namsŏn, *Fukan (pârkân) bunkaron*, 2.

28 There are several mountains with the name *Taebaeksan* in Korea. *Taebaeksan* is moreover a name for the famous Baekdusan, which also includes *paik*.

position within Japanese history as Taebaeksan does in Korean history.”²⁹ Moreover, he claims that there is almost no mountain on Kyūshū which has no connection to *pârk*, and held a similar opinion regarding the Sanin (Izumo), Yamato and Kantō areas, where Paekche immigrants settled down.

Besides *pârk*, Ch’oe also scrutinized the word *taigâr* (mongolian: *tengri*), which had the meaning of “head” in Korean. With the help of linguistic comparison, it becomes clear that the word was an expression for sky in ancient times, according to Ch’oe, and is the origin of the first syllable in the Chinese holy mountain Taishan. Using this fact, Ch’oe pointed out that the veneration of mountains and the sky “are no peculiarity of the Chinese, but [...] a continuation and taking over of old customs of the Eastern barbarians who lived throughout this region since ancient times.”³⁰

Citing more similar examples of relics of Purham culture, he concludes that “it can be estimated how immense the influence on Chinese culture and history was. In short, the philosophy existing in China [...] seems to have already been rooted in the old philosophy of the Eastern barbarians and things like religious perceptions seem to be completely taken over from the Eastern barbarians.”³¹

For Japan, *taigâr* (*tengri*) could be found in words like in *taka* (high, sublime) or *take* (summit). In Korea, Ch’oe claims, a great deal of proof can be found that a religion based on *pârk* and *taigâr* existed, which created a cultural sphere with a wide reach. “In truth, the ‘Way of Pârk’ never died, it is living in the present and is the reality [of the] currently active generation [...]. [Just] the people [...] are not so conscious [of it in] themselves.”³²

29 Ch’oe Namsŏn, “Purham munhwaron (1925),” *Yuktang Ch’oe Namsŏn chŏnjip* 2 (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 1973), 45-46.

30 Ch’oe Namsŏn, “Purham munhwaron,” 51.

31 Ch’oe Namsŏn, “Purham munhwaron,” 52.

The name Tan'gun, who was the founder of Old Chosŏn, is seen as a title of a political and religious leader which is derived from *tengri*. Since Tan'gun might be a little fuzzy as a historical figure but whose existence is proven from a religious standpoint, anyone who claimed that he was simply an invention of later times could therefore be considered “academically unrighteous.”³³

Even though the origin of Purham culture did not lie on the Korean peninsula, Korea was given the most significant position by Ch'oe since Koreans had been the people in the cultural sphere who “resided over the longest time within it, has a coherent and consistent history as one people and became the cultural radiant in all directions.” “After Korea, Japan is the oldest land in regards to the continuity of one territory and one people.” “I think that the approach and conception of the academics regarding Purham culture needs significant revision in the future. Whether Korean or Japanese, both need to stop looking blindly to Chinese standards and start looking at their own constitution autonomically, to see the motives and true nature of their own culture and history.”³⁴

Ch'oe Namsŏn did not only relativize the importance of China in world history, but also the importance of the West and India by claiming that *park* could be found in words and names like Brahma, Baal, Apollo, Vulcanus and Baldur.

As can be ascertained from this, Ch'oe Namsŏn was eager to replace the colonial image of a weak, dependent and subordinate Korea with an image of a Korea of regional and global significance. Like other Korean and Japanese scholars, he looked to the regions to the north of the Korean peninsula, establishing Manchuria as part of Korean history, and as his-

32 Andrew Logie, “Sources: Choe Namseon’s ‘Bulham-munhwa-ron’ – The great lineage of Joseon sindo,” posted on November 20, 2012, <https://koreanology.wordpress.com/2014/11/20/sources-choe-namseons-bulham-munhwa-ron-the-great-lineage-of-joseon-sindo-神道/>

33 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “Purham munhwaron,” 60.

34 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “Purham munhwaron,” 60.

torically and culturally distinct from Han China. The de-centering of China occurred with the relativization of some Chinese cultural assets and achievements. The West became “provincialized” by the huge extension and influence of Purham culture on Europe. While Ch’oe chose to represent China and the West as an Other, he represented Japan as a different Other by emphasizing its belonging to the same cultural sphere and their commonalities. Although he claimed Korean ancestry of Japanese in earlier works, Ch’oe denies that the Koreans and the Japanese had a (proven) common ethnicity.

Negotiation: Between Resistance and Collaboration

Ch’oe Namsŏn's denial of a shared ethnicity between Koreans and Japanese offered the Koreans a certain difference and independence within all commonalities. In his article “The Korean and Japanese Myth” (*Chosŏn-ŭi sinhwa-wa Ilbon-ŭi sinhwa*) (1930) for example, Ch’oe rejected such claims as unacademic, and argued that the immense Chinese influence on Korea had no influence on the question of a common Korean-Chinese ethnicity, as today’s importation of Western culture into Japan would not have any influence on the question of a common ethnicity between Japanese and Westerners in the future.³⁵ In a radio lecture with the title “Thinking of the Old Times of the Gods” (*Kami nagara no mukashi wo omou*), which was broadcast in April 1934 and published in 1936, Ch’oe again rejected the idea of a common kinship. In this “earliest surviving article, which clearly suggests his support of Japanese expansion,”³⁶ Ch’oe writes:

35 Ch’oe Namsŏn, “Chosŏn-ŭi sinhwa-wa Ilbon-ŭi sinhwa,” (1930) in *Yuktang Ch’oe Namsŏn chŏnjip* 5, published by Koryŏ Taehakkyŏ Asea Munje Yŏn’guso Yuktang Chŏnjip P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 1974), 45.

36 Chizuko Takeuchi, “Ch’oe Nam-sŏn. History and nationalism in modern Korea” (PhD diss., University of Hawaii, 1988), 231.

“Those who aim to make practical effects tend to make a great effort to try and prove that Koreans and Japanese originated from the same ethnic stock [*chongjokjök tongwŏn kwanggye*]. They are so eager to assert this argument that some attempt to fabricate un-academic stories to serve their purpose, and others even come up with some so-called valuable book of the ancient period, which is unreliable, in order to make a big thing out of nothing. In fact, it is not an easy task to make a clear ethnological judgement. First of all, we should know that neither the Korean people nor the Japanese people has been given a clear position in ethnology and thus it is too early at this point to discuss an ethnic relationship between the two.”³⁷

Advocating an ethnically distinct Korea, Ch'oe relativized and downplayed the importance of a blood relationship by stating that cultural values were more important for the affinities between people. “There is a well-known saying that blood is thicker than water. What must be thicker than blood in a relationship, however, is the connection of the hearts. Nothing is so solid and persistent as a community or relationship among people, which is concluded by culture as an expression of the heart.”³⁸ For historical examples, he referred to Christianity and Islam as spheres of a unifying culture.

During the 1930s, more ‘concessions’ in negotiations with the colonizer were made. While Ch'oe claimed, in his treatise on Purham culture, that Korea was the “pure crystal”³⁹ through which Purham culture shined, he later modified his claim, taking the stance that Japan was the country in which the old culture is best preserved and visible. In other words, he

37 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “Kami nagara no mukashi wo omou,” in *Zai-Man-Chōsenjin tsūshin* 11 (September 1936), 27-28. Quoted from Takeuchi “Ch'oe Nam-sŏn: History and nationalism in modern Korea,” 250.

38 Ch'oe Namsŏn: “Kami nagara no mukashi wo omou,” 28.

39 Ch'oe Namsŏn, “Purham munhwaron,” 70.

moved Korea out of, and Japan into the center of, Purham culture⁴⁰, and thus reduced the difference between his view and those of most Japanese scholars, which meant surrendering a part of his resistance. It is therefore unsurprising that contemporaries and current scholars alike accused him of being an advocator of “unity of Japan and Korea” (Jap.: *Naisen ittai*; Kor.: *Naesŏn ilch’ŏ*). The campaign was initiated by Governor-General Minami Jirō, with the aim of enforcing the assimilation of Koreans and mobilizing them for Japan’s war against China, which broke out in 1937. *Naisen ittai* was heavily based on the so-called common ancestor theory,⁴¹ and stressed every kind of affinity and commonality between Korea and Japan within a hierarchic framework which described Japan as Korea's superior.

Another criticism of Ch’oe derived from the similarities between his Purham cultural sphere and the ideology of expansionism which resulted in the announcement of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Jap.: *Daitōa Kyōeiken*; Kor.: *Taedonga Kongyōngwŏn*) in 1940. In both, Japan and Korea constituted the core and thus the leading part of a huge sphere. Like many other Korean intellectuals at the time, Ch’oe saw the region north of the Korean peninsula as the territory of former Korean dynasties and an area for Korean expansion, especially through migration. In the 1930s, Japan extended its influence first over Manchukuo and then over other parts of China and made them accessible to Koreans as well. “Ch’oe’s strong desire to gain access to Manchuria and north China, that his Korean ancestors had controlled or came close to controlling in the ancient period, blinded him to the reality that the Japanese were invading the area at the expense of the local population. He did not see an enemy,

40 Ch’oe Sōkyōng, *Ilje-ūi Chosŏn yŏn’gu-wa singminjijŏk chisik saengsan* (Seoul: Minsokwŏn, 2012), 477.

41 Noriko Berlinguez-Kōno, “Naissance de la thèse de l’unicité nippon-coréenne (Nissen dōsoron).” In *La Nation en marche – Etudes sur le Japon impérial de Meiji*, ed. Tschudin, Jean-Jacques Tschudin and Claude Hamon (Arles: Philippe Picquier, 1999), 222.

but rather found a co-worker in the Japanese imperialism seeking control of the region.”⁴² Ch'oe's attitude, as described by Chizuko Allen, might have been shared by many other Koreans at that time.

Between Collaboration and Resistance, between Mimicry and Mockery?

After the liberation of Korea, Ch'oe stated that his Purham culture theory was not meant to advocate the idea of *Naisen ittai*, but that he could also not negate his responsibility regarding the negative influence on Korean society it caused.⁴³ The inclusion of Japan into the cultural sphere was, according to Ch'oe, done for academic reasons, but also in order to be prepared for a long spiritual struggle against Japan. His intentions were to make Korea's founder Tan'gun known to the Japanese, and to preserve him as a spiritual foundation for the Koreans. Yet Ch'oe confessed that his intentions and the plan to build a Tan'gun shrine helped the colonizers' efforts to disseminate Shintoism in Korean society, instead of countering it.⁴⁴

In consideration of the fact that Ch'oe wrote his treatise roughly a decade before the introduction of *Naisen ittai* by the colonial authorities, it can be argued that this was not his original intention. In the 1930s, however, he modified his theory in favour of the colonizers, and helped to propagate *Naisen ittai*, which can be seen in the way that he wrote the preface to Kang Ch'anggi's book, *Naisen ittairon*. For Chizuko Allen, “it is obvious that Ch'oe was not paying mere lip service to Japanese expansion. He began writing in support of Japanese expansion in 1934, when the pressure was not yet unbearably strong, and his pro-Japanese writings

42 Chizuko Allen, “Ch'oe Namsŏn at the height of Japanese imperialism,” in *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (April 2005): 40.

43 Pak Sŏngsu. “Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu,” 212.

44 Pak Sŏngsu. “Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu,” 212.

were too numerous and enthusiastic to be dismissed as lip service.”⁴⁵ In April 1939, he accepted a position as professor at the university in the Japanese puppet state Manchukuo where he worked until September 1942 and became a symbol of the Japanese campaign of “harmony between the five races” (Jap.: *gozoku kyōwa*; Kor.: *ojok hyōphwa*). In 1940, he and Yi Kwangsu encouraged young Koreans to join the Japanese army when they were in Tokyo.

Was Ch’oe, therefore, a pro-Japanese collaborator, who sided with the colonizers and betrayed his fellow Koreans? Although there might be reasons to affirm this claim, such a judgement appears to be overly biased, and caught in a black and white mindset which neglects the possibility of ambivalence. Jun Uchida describes in his book *Brokers of Empire* the dilemma for Korean elites who openly cooperated with the Japanese:

“To be sure, many local elites accepted the colonizer’s argument that Koreans, given their ‘low level of wealth and knowledge,’ must depend on Japanese assistance. But they simultaneously demanded a means to uplift them-selves (that their Japanese partners were wont to withhold) by turning the promised package of colonial modernity into a potent ‘claim-making device’. The Korean businessmen, in other words, operated within the hegemonic framework of Japanese rule without accepting the premise of settler dominance, and appropriated the colonial trope of ethnic harmony to demand proper returns from their cooperation with official policy.”⁴⁶

„Even as [...] [they] began to collaborate with the state more boldly during the 1930s, Korean elites did not cease to think of their actions in terms of ethnic interests“⁴⁷

45 Allen, “Ch’oe Namsŏn at the height of Japanese imperialism,” 44.

46 Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire. Japanese settler colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 237.

47 Uchida, *Brokers of Empire*, 17.

Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry provides an interesting tool for analyzing the ambivalence in Ch'oe Namsŏn's collaborative and antagonistic attitude towards the colonizer. Homi Bhabha regards mimicry as both resemblance and menace at once.⁴⁸ Such a relationship is displayed in the fact that autoethnographic texts are not autochthonous, but representations which are produced in reaction to representations of hierarchical higher others, often by "a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror."⁴⁹

As has been shown above, Ch'oe referred heavily to academic works from the metropole. "He wrote *Chosŏn yŏksa* (Korean history) by adding his knowledge to the structure of *Chōsen tsūshi* (Korean history survey), written by Hayashi Taisuke. He published *Kosat'ong* right before Korea's liberation from Japan, but the title was borrowed from *Koshitsū*, written by Arai Hakuseki."⁵⁰ The article "The Great Han's Maritime History" (*Haesang Taehan-sa*) is often associated with Kume Kunitake's (1839–1931) construction of a Japanese thalassocracy for the ancient times in the article "Nihon fukuin no enkaku" (1889). The arguments of Ch'oe's Purham culture theory are especially influenced by the academic works of Torii Ryūzō and Shiratori Kurakichi. The resemblances were so great that the historian Hong Isŏp (1914–1974) held the opinion that "there was nothing unique or original in Yuktang's [Ch'oe Namsŏn's] historical works because he merely borrowed from Japanese works."⁵¹

Yet Ch'oe was, by far, not the only Korean intellectual who referred to or was influenced by Japanese academia. To offer resistance to the colonizer's stance, this was inevitably necessary. To participate in the discourse, to make one's own voice heard, and "to create self-representations

48 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

49 Pratt, "Transculturation and autoethnography," 28.

50 Hong Isŏp, quoted from Takeuchi, "*Ch'oe Nam-sŏn. History and nationalism in modern Korea*," 8.

51 Hong Isŏp, quoted from Takeuchi, "*Ch'oe Nam-sŏn. History and nationalism in modern Korea*," 8.

intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding,”⁵² the addressee must also be the colonizer. While many Korean intellectuals such as Sin Ch'aeho and Pak Ŭnsik wrote their works in Korean or *hanmun*, Ch'oe published his *Purham munhwaron* in Japanese. He engaged in dialogue with the colonizer and therefore relied on “negotiation [...] rather than a negation [...]”⁵³

His open participation in committees run by the General Government of Korea can be seen as a form of this. Instead of offering resistance through a direct negation of Japanese scholarship on Korea, he resisted the negative Japanese representation of Korea by destabilizing it through the ambivalent nature of his mimicry, which is “almost the same, but not quite”⁵⁴ the same as it.

The fact that “his historical studies show[ed] a remarkable similarity to the National Studies [Jap.: *kokugaku*], in motives, objectives, the use of materials, and conclusions”⁵⁵ as well to other Japanese (and Western) works, he “emerge[d] as 'authentic' through [this] mimicry,”⁵⁶ which allowed him to open a third space for negotiation with Japanese scholars, eye to eye. Within the negotiation, Ch'oe offered a self-representation of Korea by autoethnographically modified methods and arguments taken from researches of Japanese scholars. Copying the scholars of the Japanese National School and their research on the *Kojiki* (AD 712) by considering the *Samguk yusa* (13th century) as the main source of Korean essence, Ch'oe came, like his Japanese predecessors in regard to Shintoism, to the conclusion that “the way of pärk in Korea [...], was the superb

52 Pratt, “Transculturation and autoethnography,” 28.

53 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 22.

54 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

55 Takeuchi, “Ch'oe Nam-sŏn. History and nationalism in modern Korea,” 134; cf. Chizuko Allen, “Northeast Asia centered around Korea: Ch'oe Namsŏn's view of history,” *The Journal of Asian studies* 49, no. 4 (November 1990), 802-801. Yūichi Hosaka, “Ch'oe Namsŏn-ŭi Purham munhwakwŏn-gwa Il-Sŏn tongjoron,” *Hanil kwanggyesa Yŏn'gu* 12 (April 2000): 173.

56 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 88.

system, superior to religious and philosophical systems imported from abroad. While Motoori Norinaga claimed that Japan should be called a 'divine nation' (shinkoku) because of her Shinto tradition, Yuktang [=Ch'oe Namsŏn] asserted that Korea occupied the central position in an extensive cultural sphere because of her park [sic!] tradition."⁵⁷

Although Ch'oe Namsŏn increasingly transferred Purham culture's central position to Japan in the 1930s and was consistent with the colonial order in which Japan had a higher position than Korea, his views still contained opposition to that of many Japanese and could be seen as opposition through mimicry and negotiation. He indeed conceded that in the present time the "old way" could only be found in Japan sufficiently, but this concession turned out to be ambivalent, as it simultaneously threatened the Japanese identity which claimed superiority of the Japanese people due to Shintoism, its divine descent, and its divine Japanese emperor.

In his "Treatise on Purham Culture," he linked Japanese Shintoism with the religion of Purham culture. The Japanese shrine gates *torii* were a modification of god poles common in Purham culture, the Japanese word for religious festivals *matsuri* was etymologically related to the ancient Korean word *mazi*, and the divine palanquins (portable Shinto shrines) *mikoshi* had, among others, their equivalents in Silla and Koryŏ. Ch'oe Namsŏn, in other words, claimed the existence of an "old Shintoism" (Jap.: *ko-shintō*; Kor.: *ko-sindo*) in the Purham cultural sphere, and thus negated the uniqueness of Japanese Shintoism. By conceding a higher Japanese position in the present, he "displaced"⁵⁸ Japan at the same time by downgrading Japan's position in regard to its uniqueness, since not only Japan, but all the countries in the former Purham cultural sphere became potential "divine nations" due to their common ancient heritage of old Shintoism. For advocates of a special "national polity" (jap.: *kokutai*), this was heresy. "Up until Japan's defeat in 1945, and even afterwards,

57 Takeuchi, "Ch'oe Nam-sŏn. History and nationalism in modern Korea," 137 (marking in the original).

58 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 89.

this idea of the *kokutai*, which was centered on the idea of a divine emperor and based on political Shintō thought, formed the official and binding Japanese concept of the modern state, in which the institution of the emperor served as the metaphysical and mythical core of the national family.⁵⁹ In 1891, the historian Kume Kunitake had to give up his position as professor at the Tokyo Imperial University after he had claimed that Shintoism was a widespread form to venerate heaven, and thus introduced a theory of a foreign origin of the Japanese imperial house.

Ch'oe Namsŏn's theory of Purhan culture can finally be linked to Homi Bhabha's mimicry by its interpretation as a resistance which is "between mimicry and mockery."⁶⁰ Mimicry is here seen as "an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas. This exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference, and so it is not evidence of servitude of the colonized. In fact, this mimicry is also a form of mockery [...], because it mocks and undermines the ongoing pretensions of colonialism and empire."⁶¹ Ch'oe based his theory on an exaggerated application of Shiratori Kurakichi's theory of the p-sound shift. It is highly likely that Ch'oe himself did not believe in the academic accuracy of his work, since he stated that the exploration of national history served historical research less than the national spirit.⁶² After the liberation of Korea, he called his attempt to subsume not only Japan but also half of mankind's culture under a Tan'gun culture a "daring theory" (*tangdorhan cheron*). He claimed, moreover, that he intended to establish the state founder Tan'gun as mental support for Korea, and to prepare the Koreans for a long mental war with Japan.⁶³

Yet by copying Japanese scholars like Shiratori Kurakichi (who took

59 Klaus Antoni, *Kokutai – Political Shintō from early modern to contemporary Japan* (Tübingen: Karls Eberhardt University, 2016), Preface.

60 Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 86.

61 David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 40.

62 Pak Sŏngsu, "Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu," 214.

63 Pak Sŏngsu, "Yuktang Ch'oe Namsŏn yŏn'gu," 212.

his research as far as Hungary),⁶⁴ Ch'oe brought about a dilemma for the colonizer. Since Ch'oe's claims were based on and imitated Japanese research, it made it more difficult for the colonizers to reject them completely as absurd. The exaggeration of expanding the influence of Purham culture to almost every part of the world, on the other hand, cast a shadow on the works it was based on and made them appear equally untrustworthy. Thus, Ch'oe's exaggeration pointed to an absurdness inherent in the imitated work of the colonizer.

Conclusion

From an early age, Ch'oe Namsŏn was engaged in constructing an image of a strong and capable Korea, on par with both its neighbors and Western countries. While he then was close to the enlightenment and nationalistic movements and wrote the Independence Declaration of the First March Movement in 1919, he changed to a cooperative approach with the Japanese afterward. Although he wanted to be regarded as a mere scholar after 1919, his contact with the Japanese (for example, by joining the compilation committee of Korean history) was in itself seen as a political act by many of his fellow Koreans. Among others, Ch'oe was eager to secure Tan'gun as the ancestor of the Korean people in Korean and global history. For the latter, he resorted to Japanese academic works to argue in favor of the existence of a huge cultural sphere in his autoethnographic text "The Treatise on Purham Culture." He ascribed Korea a central position within this cultural sphere, and simultaneously de-centered China, Europe, and Japan through relativization of their historical weight. "While the Japanese portrayed Korea as an obscure nation historically subordinate to her neighboring powers, Yuktang [Ch'oe Namsŏn] identified Korea as the source of a cultural sphere with a long history and large

64 Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient. Rendering pasts into history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 77-78.

geographic area. In this respect, his approach was an effective counterattack against the historical views advanced by the Japanese at that time.”⁶⁵

In contrast to other Korean intellectuals at the time, Ch’oe, however, did not cut Korea’s connection and affinities with the Japanese islands. Rather, he included Japan as an important part of the Purham cultural sphere and described Han China and Europe as the primary Others. With Japan’s expansion in the 1930s, the composition of his cultural sphere was easy to reconcile with Japanese politics, such as the campaign for the “unity of Japan and Korea” and the establishment of a “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere,” especially as Ch’oe modified his view in favor of Japan. Nonetheless, Ch’oe’s versions of history contained enough “excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry,”⁶⁶ so that it can be regarded as resistance against the colonizer, as Ch’oe claimed himself. On the other hand, his mimicry resembled the colonizer’s stance to such an extent that Ch’oe could reasonably be regarded as a collaborator by his fellow countrymen.

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65 Takeuchi, “Ch’oe Nam-sŏn. *History and nationalism in modern Korea*”, 189.

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〈Abstract〉

Ch'oe Namsŏn and Identity Construction through Negotiation with the Colonizer

Tobias Scholl

This paper takes a closer look at Ch'oe Namsŏn's construction of Korean identity during the colonial period. Ch'oe was ambiguous towards Japan, seeing it as many other intellectuals did, as a model for Korea's modernization, and was aware that Japan would be both Korea's "oldest friend" and "biggest obstacle" in this regard. After his imprisonment for his role in the Korean independence movement in 1919, he started to cooperate with the Japanese to influence colonial knowledge production and therefore decided to "negotiate" directly with the colonizer. In his "Treatise on Purham culture," Ch'oe included Japan in the same cultural sphere and saw it as less of Other than the West and China. While his theses and arguments were based on Japanese research and written in Japanese, Ch'oe maintained a Korean identity within the colonial setting not by a "negation" of Japanese research, but by "negotiation" through its reinterpretation and autoethnography. Due to his referring to Japanese scholars and due to the ambiguity of his mimicry his work can be considered "at once resemblance and menace," and simultaneously as collaboration and resistance.

Keywords: Colonial Period, Ch'oe Namsŏn, Purham Culture, Autoethnography, ambivalence, resistance, collaboration, mimicry

〈국문초록〉

최남선과 식민자와의 협상을 통한 식민지 지식인의 정체성 형성

Tobias Scholl

이 논문은 식민지 시기 한국인의 정체성, 최남선은 다른 지식인들이 그러했던 것처럼, 근대화의 모델인 일본에 대해 모호한 입장을 가지고 있었다. 이러한 측면에서 일본은 한국의 “오랜 친구”이자 “가장 큰 장애물”로 간주되었다. 1919년 3·1운동에 참여하여 수감생활을 한 이후, 최남선은 식민지의 지식 생산에 영향을 미치기 위해 일본인들과 협력하기 시작했다. 식민자와 직접 “협상”하기로 결정한 것이다. 그의 “불합문화론”에서 최남선은 일본을 동일한 문화권 안에 포함시켰으며 불합문화권을 서구와 중국의 문화권과 같은 동등한 것으로 보았다. 비록 그의 주장과 연구는 일본어로 작성된 일본인들의 연구에 기반하고 있었지만, 일본인의 연구를 “거부”하지 않고 재해석을 통해 “협상”함으로써 최남선은 식민지라는 조건 속에서도 한국인의 정체성을 유지했다. 일본인 학자들에 대한 의존과 그의 연구가 갖는 유사성으로 인한 모호함 때문에 그의 연구는 “모방이자 위협”으로 여겨질 수 있으며 그와 동시에 협력과 저항으로도 읽을 수 있다.

주제어: 식민지시기, 최남선, 불합문화론, 양면성, 저항, 협력, 모방, 자가 기술 민족학