

NATIONS, NATIONHOOD AND NATIONAL CULTURES:
THEORIZING A GENEALOGY OF KOREAN NATIONS
TO UNDERSTAND THE LOGICS OF SOFT POWER
ON A DIVIDED PENINSULA

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ABSTRACT

Soft power and culture being intertwined, any real analysis of power must begin with a thorough investigation of *national cultures*. However, regarding the Korean case, this task is complicated. There are two main reasons why North Korean *national culture* and South Korean *national culture* are often mistaken for each other. First, ethnic theories of collective identity often blurry the sociological lines of national division. Second, both nations share the same sociological structures, namely *imperialism* and *political legitimacy*. Working on a genealogy of Korean nations allows to assess the existence of a variety of *national cultures*, a state of affairs usually remaining unnoticed to more ethnic oriented theories. Introducing *national genetics* theory and characterizing Korea's three historical nations are the first steps to be taken in acknowledging the existence of a trio of Korean nations – each of them producing their own distinctive *national culture*. This paper starts by proposing a theory on *national genetics* allowing to track and detail Korea's various historical nations and *national cultures*. *National genetics* is then applied to the heterodox case of Korea. The themes of *imperialism* and *political legitimacy* are seen as *sociopolitical chromosomes* lying at the core of Korea's *national genome*. It will be shown that these *chromosomes* have framed all three nations of Korean modern history: the Korean *republican nation*, the North Korean *revolutionary nation* and the South Korean *developmental nation*. This paper concludes with the demonstration that open *national cultures* – which export themselves through socialization to international norms – are more prone to soft power than closed *national cultures*. This may explain convincingly why South Korea has opted for soft power, while autarchic North Korea has continuously chosen to rely on its hard power.

Keywords: North Korea (DPRK), South Korea (ROK), soft power, national culture, national genetics theory.

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