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Abstract
Since its colonial expansion, the West has been the most significant other for many non-Western countries in their identity construction processes. This paper provides a comparative view on three neighboring East Asian countries' dominant ways of constructing national identities in relation to the West. Through the comparative analysis of the discourses of Korean seonjunguk, Japanese nihonjirron, and Chinese new nationalism, it demonstrates that each country has distinctive self-national identity and the perceptions of the West and modernity. With regard to the West, Koreans tend to create it as an advanced entity on a supposedly universal developmental path. In contrast, the Japanese and the Chinese tend to perceive it as somewhat lacking and hostile beings respectively in relation to their national identities. As for national self vis-à-vis the West, Koreans consider themselves as somewhat insufficient, while the Japanese focus on their uniqueness and the Chinese on their potential alternative. And, in regard to the subjectivity of modernities, Koreans show a typical Eurocentric paradigm of modernity. In comparison, the Japanese emphasize non-modernity and postmodernity of their society, and the Chinese pay attention to alternative modernity with socialist characteristics.

Keywords
National identity, seonjunguk, nihonjirron, new nationalism, discourse, East Asia, the West
I. INTRODUCTION

National identity is a nationally popular process of boundary making between “us” and “them.” A dominant national identity is generally promoted by certain circles of national elites with a wide range of support from the general public. According to Dittmer and Kim (1993: 13), it is understood “as an ongoing process or journey rather than a fixed set of boundaries, a relationship rather than a free-standing entity or attribute.” Thus, a group of significant others, a “reference group,” plays important roles in the process of identity construction. In this regard, there can be two types of reference groups: one is positive reference groups with which “a state desires to associate itself” and the other is negative reference groups “whose opposition serves to dramatize the importance of defending the values of ‘us’ against ‘them’” (Dittmer and Kim, 1993: 16).

Korea, China, and Japan share in common that their onsets of early modernization projects were promoted by external shock, that is, Western countries’ expansion in the “age of empire” (Hobsbawm, 1987). Encountering the threat from outside, they were desperate for strengthening their economic and military powers in order not to be taken over by the “barbarians.” Their modernization processes can be regarded as those which were provoked by “a sudden external threat” (Thorborn, 1995). They suddenly