

A Historical-Geographical Identification of East Asia as a Cultural Region*

Je-Hun Ryu**

동아시아 문화지역의 역사-지리적 설정*

류제현**

Abstract : In East Asia, regional identity can be expected to obtain popular consent more successfully when it is firmly based on historical-geographical reality. This study is an attempt to apply a broadened concept of place to the identification of East Asia as a cultural region. Cultural mixture within places at various scales, rather than cultural integration across those places, would give greater coherence to East Asia as a cultural region. This cultural mixture varies from one place to another, depending on the relative position in power relations. It could appear in the form of either domination or resistance, and even entanglement. The concept of a "mountain as a contested place" is proposed as an experimental effort to search for the basis for cultural identity within East Asia. This concept of place should be extended to the individual studies of such spatial units as houses, gardens, villages and cities. These individual studies, if accumulated, would result in improved theories of East Asia as a region that has a distinct cultural identity in historical-geographical terms.

Key Words : East Asia as a cultural region, historical-geographical reality, a broadened concept of place, cultural mixture, mountain as a contested place

요약 : 동아시아의 지역적 정체성은 역사-지리적 실재에 근거할 때 비로소 더욱 성공적으로 대중적 동의를 얻을 것으로 기대된다. 본 연구는 최근에 확대된 장소 개념을 이용하여 동아시아 문화지역의 역사-지리적 설정을 시도하고자 한다. 동아시아 문화지역에 일체성을 부여하는 것은 복수적 장소들이 공유하는 문화적 동질성이 아니라 다양한 공간 규모를 가지는 단일한 장소 내부의 문화적 혼합이다. 문화적 혼합은 지배가 아니면 저항, 그리고 때로는 뒤엉킴의 형태로 표현되는 것이다. "경합 장소로서의 산악"이라는 개념은 동아시아 내부의 문화적 동일성을 탐구하기 위한 실험적 노력의 일환으로 제안되었다. 이러한 장소 개념은 산악을 제외한 다른 공간적 단위 - 가옥, 정원, 촌락, 도시 등 - 에 대한 연구들로 확대되어 적용될 필요가 있다. 왜냐하면 이러한 연구들이 축적되면 결국 동아시아가 역사-지리적으로 특정한 문화적 동일성을 가진 장소라는 정의가 구체적으로 가능해질 것이기 때문이다.

주요어 : 동아시아 문화지역, 역사-지리적 실재, 최근에 확대된 장소 개념, 문화적 혼합, 경합 장소로서의 산악, 문화적 동일성

1. Introduction

East Asia generally means a region including

China, Japan, Korea and sometimes Vietnam. In reality, however, few people in the world seem to know precisely where East Asia is and what exactly makes it East Asian. East Asian people, by

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** Professor, Department of Geography, Korea National University of Education, jhryu@knue.ac.kr

themselves, have also rarely adopted a regional focus. The sort of political and economic integration accompanied by establishment of strong regional organizations that Europeans have achieved in recent decades still appear as remote prospects in East Asia, and it is difficult to identify any good foundations for them in its history. Recently, however, the economic effects of regional cooperation have largely contributed to the pursuit of regional identity in East Asia, upon which regionalism would have to depend. This study aims to identify East Asia as a cultural region from a historical-geographical perspective, and to provide a foundation for the construction of East Asian regional identity.

East Asia as a cultural region has been defined as that part of the world that once used Chinese writing. The written word in Chinese for "culture" literally means the "transformation caused by writing."¹⁾ Classical Chinese remained the most prestigious written language throughout East Asia until as late as the nineteenth century. Within East Asia, nonetheless, runs a deep linguistic fault line, straddling the extremes of two very different language stocks: the Sino-Tibetan languages of China and the Eurasiatic (or perhaps more narrowly Altaic) languages of Korea and Japan.

East Asia has emerged as a new strategic and economic center of gravity in the international system during the post-Cold-War period. East Asia, through its economic prowess, burst into the world scene in the 1970s and 1980s. East Asia is contemporarily one of the three regions – U.S.A., E.U., East Asia – that are contending for world superiority. It is widely known that each separate national effort has made much contribution to the collective modern reemergence of East Asia as a power in the world scene. China, Korea and Japan are indeed among the most venerable nations in the world. Although their national boundaries have shifted over time, the notion of nationhood has resonated long and

deeply with the majority of each country's inhabitants. In the meantime, the broad national distinctions among China, Japan and Korea, to some extent, often appear to be deliberately exaggerated for divisive political purposes.

Everywhere in East Asia, we find shared universal core elements with overlapping local peculiarities at multiple levels or scales. There is a general awareness of the common Chinese roots of each country's tradition. Justification for a regional identification is not hard to find. It has been recently suggested that this identification is evident in the common heritage of the region. This can be customarily, but somewhat imprecisely, called Confucian heritage. It has also been proposed that the concept of Confucian heritage can be broadly defined as "a complex of attitudes and guides to behavior that spread from China."²⁾

Nevertheless, not all of the patterns in East Asia are normally identified with Confucian teachings. We should not disregard the fact that Mahayana Buddhism also shaped the regional heritage. Even where there is some historical association between behavioral patterns and Confucian teachings, the patterns sometimes were not associated with just one religious (ideological) tradition. Confucian principles often became part of an eclectic approach to life, not easily dissociated from other intellectual influences. An East Asian person could simultaneously follow Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Shintoist, or Shamanist practices. In East Asia, consequently, any effort to isolate Confucian teachings from other influences on social relations faces an obstacle.

It may be said that there was both one universal elite high culture and as many different local popular cultures as local communities. East Asia has been internally a tremendously diverse region, as richly complicated as Western Europe. No two places seem to be similar. Even China by itself is a realm of many realms, characterized by

a plurality of cultures or what has now become called multiculturalism. Moreover, regional (local) color has recently proven to be a lucrative marketing tool, and regional (local) identity today is increasingly manifested in commodity terms. This commercialization of place, which may have antecedents in Japan, has advanced rapidly throughout East Asia. This is why the classical concept of formal regions may not perfectly serve the purpose of identifying East Asia as a cultural region.

In classical geographical terms, it is much more difficult to identify East Asia as a cultural region than it is to do that for Western Europe. Using only the traditional perspective from cultural geography – cultural diffusion and formal regions – may not lead successfully to the recognition of cultural identity in East Asia. This perspective may not be effective in unveiling the cultural identity that has often been politically differentiated along the lines of national characteristics. For this reason, this study adopts a new perspective from human (and cultural) geography for a historical-geographical identification of East Asia as a cultural region. This is a new perspective in that it premises a broadened concept of place, which is closely associated with the concepts of multiculturalism, cultural politics and culture-as-ideology (culture-as-practice).

2. The Problem with Placing East Asia in the World

Although the number of regions varies somewhat from one map to another, most world regionalization systems arrive at the same set of macro-cultural zones: East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Southwest Asia and North Africa, Europe, Russia and its environs, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand,

and the United States and Canada (Oceania and Central Asia are sometimes added to the list) (Lewis and Wigen, 1997, 157). As all these labels suggest, the terminology of world regions relies heavily on that of continents with some modifications from civilizations.³⁾ In this regionalization, we can see the directional subdivision of super-continent of Asia into East, Southeast, Southwest and sometimes Central Asia.

This directional division dates back to the middle nineteenth century when several geographers carved the whole Asia into locational blocks: Northern Asia, Eastern Asia, Southern Asia and Western Asia (Lewis and Wigen, 1997, 162). Before the entry of the United States into World War II, the geographical term Far East was conventionally distinguished from Europe, Russia and the Near (Middle) East. But, after then, it was broken up into South, Southeast, and East Asia.⁴⁾ Since then, Far East has often been used as an interchangeable term with East Asia in separation from Southeast and South Asia. Some academic works continued, however, to categorize all of East, South, and Southeast Asia as the Orient, the Far East, or even monsoon Asia.

The particular usage of Northeast Asia also furthers the confusion of the term East Asia. Although East Asia is obviously a term from the Euro-American tradition, the notion of a distinctive East Asian civilization has a deep indigenous history. Less conventional, by contrast, is Northeast Asia, a region generally composed of Japan, the two Koreas, northern China, and some unspecified portion of Russian Far East (see the *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*). Different authors also employ different configurations. It can be a synonym for Japan and Siberia on the one hand, and Korea and its surroundings on the other hand. In the extreme cases, Northeast Asia would extend as far south as the thirtieth parallel, below which one would find Southeast Asia (Lewis and Wigen, 1997, 272-273). This conven-

tion, which effectively eliminates the historical significance of East Asian civilization, would further the confusion of the term East Asia.

To be sure, not all subcontinents of Asia are so readily compared to the whole of Europe. Relatively unproblematic are the three Asian world-regions: East Asia (the historical zone of Chinese influence), South Asia (the historical zone of Indian influence), and Southwest Asia (the historical heartland of Islam, joined with North Africa) (Lewis and Wigen, 1997, 170). East Asia, the historical zone of Chinese influence, extends from Japan and Korea in the northeast to Singapore and Hong Kong in the south. This region forms the eastern edge of Eurasia that is located largely in the moderate zone between the vast but sparsely settled northern lands of Siberia, Russian Far East, and Central Asia, and the tropical southern coastal and island areas of Southeast Asia. East Asia can be roughly divided into three ethnic areas: the areas of Chinese settlements – governments of the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore – and the two areas of non-Chinese residence, consisting of Japan and two Koreas (R.O.K. and D.P.R.K.).

Out of the areas excluded from East Asia, only Vietnam would have some claim to membership. Vietnam adopted Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism from China. Vietnamese culture was so thoroughly Sinified that some scholars have considered it a part of East Asia. But, especially in the more southerly reaches of the Vietnamese zone, local practices and imports from India like Hinduism were assimilated with Chinese imports to create more Southeast Asian versions of Vietnamese culture. Confucianism as a state ideology was never securely established in Vietnam, and the Vietnamese themselves have been strongly emphasizing their Southeast Asian origins and connections in recent years (Rozman, 1991, 7). For this reason, in this study, the

discussion concentrates on the three ethnic areas of China, Japan and Korea, and their national cores: the People's Republic of China, the state of Japan, and Republic of Korea. Within these national cores, we can look at national manifestations of the Confucian heritage and regional commonalities in East Asia.

While dominating East Asia in population, China was the source of the principal elements in the common heritage called Confucianism (Huntington, 1996). Core values of this East Asian heritage emerged in the second millennium B.C. in northern China. This was also the time of agricultural diffusion, city building, and establishment of governments. They were systematized and expanded by Confucius (孔子) and his disciples in the following millennium. In the first millennium A.D., the Confucian worldview began to spread throughout East Asia by means of the Chinese written language. (Korea and Japan kept on borrowing extensively the preeminent Confucian civilization from China). As recently as the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries the common heritage was still penetrating down from government and elite circles to the common people (Rozman, 1991, 8). Gradually, through state sponsorship and intense education, Confucian practices and ways of thinking entered the lives of most people. The emerging East Asian world came to coincide, accordingly, with what became the word of Confucianism.

The grand principles of Confucianism applied uniformly to "All-under-Heaven," but in more trivial matters all the subject peoples were released to follow their own local practices. So-called Confucianization meant the civilizing mission, equivalent to the peaceful transformation of strangers through cultural assimilation. An ability to overlook local ethnic differences, without necessarily denying or obliterating them, may be regarded as one of the strengths and one

of the more attractive features of ancient Chinese civilization (Holcombe, 2001, 14). The traditional Chinese expected that there would naturally be plenty of local variation in terms of customs, language and other minor matters. In addition, Buddhism in China was not only transformed by the very process of translation, but also Sinified through the mixture with Taoism or Confucianism to be tolerable to the local (ethnic) differences. It was then spread to the rest of East Asia, while further cementing the solidarity of the region.

Even within the Chinese empire, variant local customs and universal truths were fully expected to cohabit, both in theory and in practice. The genius of the Chinese approach to cultural integration was that it permitted a high degree of variation within an overarching structure of unity (Holcombe, 2001, 46). In East Asia, local customs differed, but these differences were not in any way fundamental. They were merely accidents of habit or circumstances. This prevailing balance between universalism (civilization) and particularism (place) made East Asia a tremendously diverse region, as richly complicated as Western Europe.

Sinification (through Confucianism) in East Asia did not mean becoming "Chinese" anywhere except within the borders of the Chinese empire itself. Elsewhere in East Asia, elements of Chinese civilization merely overlay a complex mosaic of local diversity, while functioning like international norms. If the acceptance of certain agreed-on common standards of elite high culture did tend to promote a degree of cultural convergence throughout East Asia, this may have acted as little more than a modest counterbalance to an opposing natural process of seemingly inexorable diversification (Holcombe, 2001, 222). Geographically speaking, the maturation of the East Asian region as a whole coincided with the maturation of its separate major internal spatial divisions. Focusing on the cultural mixture (heterogeneity)

within a place rather than the cultural integration (homogeneity) across the region would give greater coherence to East Asia as a cultural region. This is why we need to pay more attention to a broadened concept of place that would embrace the dualism of universalism/particularism.

3. A Need for a Broadened Geographer's Concept of Place

As the elite high culture associated with Confucianism diffused from the political centers, the diversity in local customs was expected to increase with distance from the capital cities. In addition to the polarity between the universal (cosmopolitan) and particular (provincial or local), there was also an anticipated polarity between the center (中央) and periphery (邊方). Beyond the certain point, the courtly model was not even supposed to trickle down to the periphery (Holcombe, 2001, 46). The common people in the periphery might be resistant to assimilation into the elite Confucian culture.

Cultural interaction at the frontiers could contribute to the making of core cultures themselves, while political margins turned into cultural counter-cores. Somewhere in between particularism from variant local customs and universalism from Confucianism might cohabit, often in the state of contestation, within a place at various scales. These historical-geographical situations in East Asia require a fundamental rethinking of the terms core and periphery, the theoretical foundation for cultural diffusion or ecology in geography. The challenge is now to integrate the more fluid conception of the region into a broader historical-geographical vision, a broadened geographer's concept of place.

According to this new notion, the general (the

universal) and particular form a core semantic axis that helps to define the geographer's concept of place. Place is defined in the concreteness of everyday experience and practice, but this existential quality need not make place the particularistic twin to a universalistic space.⁵⁾ Rather, place contains within itself the dualism of particular/universal, provincial/cosmopolitan (Entrikin, 2002, 200). In East Asia, there was indeed a basic conflict between the universalistic principles of Confucianism on the one hand, and the particularistic claims of local communities to preserve the integrity of their habitual ways of life on the other. The universal cannot be thought or lived without its nemesis, the particular, in East Asia. Recognizing the tension within a place between these two ideal end-points rather than concentrating on either universalism or particularism would enlarge our geographical vision over the region.

Place has most often been associated with the local and the particular, and the geographic is conceived as a set of static and fixed relations rather than as processes (Agnew, 1989). Geography's central concepts, such as place, territory and landscape, have been associated with the primordial linking peoples to land, or blood to soil (Entrikin, 2002, 19). Geographers are now looking beyond the factual and descriptive to include the moral into the concept of place. It has been suggested that geographer's concept of place need not be limited to the study of the traditional, the specific and the particular. Place is now understood as the context for human actions rather than merely their setting, which bears a mutually constitutive relation to the self (Entrikin, 1997, 263).

The subject is related to milieu or environment through place. It is the relationship to the self that implicates place in the construction of identity. It is this necessary relation to self that extends the meaning of place beyond that of objects located

together in space and into the realms of the moral and the aesthetic (Entrikin, 1999, 270). This broadened notion of place may contribute effectively to the historical-geographical identification of East Asia as a cultural region where the intimacy between art and politics was assumed to be normal. In China, the Confucian approach to empire building was benevolent intervention. Confucianism taught that the expansion of virtue prospers, but the expansion of territory perishes. Confucian government in China and other countries in East Asia sought not to conquer their enemies but to civilize (culturally assimilate) them. The civilizing mission for them meant the peaceful transformation of strangers through cultural assimilation. That is, in the Confucian government, cultural and political leadership were commingled (Holcombe, 2001, 33-40).

Values and their organized superstructure in East Asia contain a much greater emphasis on aesthetics than is true in Western Europe. The notion of aesthetic is akin to art appreciation in Western Europe, whereas it is an integral part of religious values in East Asia (Olsen, 1975, 631-632). In East Asia, nature and morality are closely linked, while man and environment forming a moral unity (Brunn and Kalland, 1995). The anthropocentric criteria of Confucianism and the social hierarchy dominated East Asian life and man-nature relationships until very recently. The Confucian vision of a natural moral order was also widely spread throughout East Asia.

Places in East Asia, moreover, must be seen as having permeable boundaries across which things are always moving (Rose, 1995, 116). Identities, too, can often involve experiences of cultural changing and mixing. In the classical sense, heartland or cores are centers of power which may be considered as taken-for-granted spaces. They are positioned well inside an unambiguous boundary, strategically located at

the center of an undisputed territory. This traditional notion of region has been challenged as borders and margins have proved to be much more resistant. Borders, peripheries and margins may not be those unbounded spaces wrapped around, or sandwiched in between the cores. The broadened notion of place proposes a rethinking of centers, cores and heartlands as shot through homogeneity, stability, conformity and fixity. According to this notion, a core location provides the space, which is required for internal conflict to thrive, for internal fragmentation to proceed, and for the localization of difference to become extremely tuned.

This broadened concept of place is also closely associated with theory that the identities of place are never pure. The identities of place are always already the product, in part, of a long history, and, of connections beyond and with other places (Massey, 1995, 67). Places are also hybrid ones. Maybe, we can think of places as more essentially open, porous, and the products of links with other places, rather than as exclusive enclosures bound off from the outside world (Massey, 1995, 67). Places can therefore be conceptualized as formed out of numerous social relationships stretched over space. Places are thus not isolated from each other, and each of them has its own internal history. Places are both interconnected and interdependent; however, they are not simply linked together, but are linked together in unequal ways. The social relations that bind them together are relations of power. Each form of mixing places must be evaluated in its own terms, and in the context of the power relations in which the identity of place is established (Massey, 1995, 71).

The concepts of resistance and entanglement are crucial in the examination of power relations that would give a certain form of mixing places. Resistance involves not only heroic struggles, but also everyday battles for survival and

commonplace struggles for empowerment (Pile, 1997, 1). Resistance may take place as a reaction to unfairness and injustice or as a desire to survive intolerable conditions. It may also involve a sense of remembering and of dreaming of something better. The term entanglement, by contrast, is meant to be a metaphor, full of spatial imagery, while conjuring up the threadings, knottings, and weavings of power in the relation between domination and resistance (Sharpe *et al.*, 2000, 24).

Geographers have been intrigued by the concept of resistance because it often involves the activity of appropriating place and making new places. So far, it has been shown how places consist not only of domination, but also of resistance. Resistance in one direction can be oppression in another (Pile, 1997, 28). Domination and resistance cannot exist independently from each other, but neither can they be reducible to one another. No moments of domination, in whatever the form, is completely free of relations of resistance, in whatever the form, which is also entirely segregated from relations of domination (Sharpe *et al.*, 2000, 20).

It is arguably more useful to think of domination and resistance as occupying a continuum. Any inquiry into moments of domination should take into account the ways in which dominating power is constantly fractured by the struggles of the subordinate. By the same token, moments of resistance should also be seen to be constantly conditioned by the structures of power relations. Neither domination nor resistance is autonomous. Resistance turns up in domination and domination turns up in resistance. Resistance in one place may therefore be complicit with domination in another, which begins to introduce the entangled geographies (Sharpe *et al.*, 2000, 21-24). With the understanding of these concepts in relation to the place, it would be significant to examine the specific place of Confucianism in the

identification of East Asia.

4. The Place of Confucianism in East Asia

Confucius scarcely refers to territory. Nor does he refer to locality. He speaks of the village several times, but attributes no value to it. There is no expression for attachment to any territory to which ancestors were native. In view of Confucius' emphasis on lineage and ancestral place, it is strange that no sense of piety toward place appears in the *Analects* (論語). Elsewhere he proposes that a gentleman should not become too attached to a particular place. He says, "A gentleman who is attached to a settled home is not worthy of being called a gentleman (Shills, 1996, 70)." In short, place has, ideally, no place in Confucius' idea of society.

The Confucian civilization was supposed to be exportable and not to be confined only to Chinese empire. Its basic principles were asserted to be universal truths. The crucial distinguishing feature of this universal civilization was the ceremonial standards of *li* (禮), called by Confucius himself. The presence of the [universal] *Dao* (道, Way) takes precedence over the [particular] place. The *Dao* circulated, and lands have no constant influences. Wherever the Confucian *Dao* was realized, there too was civilization (Holcombe, 2001, 41). China was not seen to be a land so much as it was a civilization. This civilization was not necessarily tied to any particular piece of land. China could still survive and flourish anywhere as far as it was the Confucian civilization.

In relation to the place, a religion or ideology can be classified into the local (that is bound to place) and the universal (that is free from place). The worship of local gods binds a people to

place whereas universal religions give freedom from it (Tuan, 1977, 152). In this sense, Confucianism is supposed to be a universalism that is free from any sense of place. In practice, however, it may not have been quite that way. Neo-Confucian scholar-officials in China and Korea practiced a derived ideal of piety toward their own localities as ancestral homelands. This may have partly been so because rootedness in the soil and the growth of pious feeling toward it was natural to settled agricultural peoples.

Especially in Korea, locality was one of the most salient principles of lineage (宗族) organization. Agnates who descended from a common ancestor tended to live together in immediate geographic proximity and formed single-lineage villages. The geographical foci of ritual action were lineage-owned tomb-areas and a nearby ancestral hall. Even when some of the relatives lived in the countryside, geographical dispersal did not necessarily lead to a break in the consciousness of common lineage identity. What held these lineage structures together was the memory of common descent and the original ancestral place, which were usually recorded in the family genealogy called *jokbo* (族譜).

The members of a lineage were interested in displaying their influence and power in the political world by fostering common ancestral bonds with close relatives. A great number of lineages were directly connected with private academies (書院), the centers of learning and local power. At the core of these academies stood the shrine in which lineage members known for their scholastic and other achievements were commemorated at regular intervals. Lineages attached to them could exert influence far beyond local boundaries through ownership of the academies. The academy occupied the prime position in the dynamics of territoriality at various scales: national, regional and local. The territoriality of an academy was a powerful

strategy to control people and things by controlling the area (Ryu, 2007). It was a strategy to establish different degrees of access to communities, resources, and powers while maintaining the hierarchical order of society.

Confucius says that those with wisdom or knowledge enjoy streams while those with benevolence or goodness like mountains (Keum, 2000, 69). While using mountains and water as metaphors of wisdom and benevolence, he contrasts the two basic components of human virtue. He insists that wisdom is like water in that it implies an unbroken flow of reasoning ability; benevolence is like mountains in that it is fixed and unchanged in its devotion to truth and justice. While enjoying the mountains, a man can cultivate his good mind to become benevolent. While appreciating the water, a man can accumulate his knowledge to be wise. When a Confucian retired from the complexities of the secular world, mountains and water provided him with a space within which he could devote himself to the pleasures of learning and self-cultivation (Keum, 2000, 70). These are the places filled with the excitement of nature and the joy of truths found deep within the heart. The mountains and water were no more than a home for retired scholar-officials to lead self-sufficient lives.

Neo-Confucianism, notwithstanding, had elaborated on the concept of place including nature to make a moral justification for the attachment to localities. The real value of Neo-Confucianism is not only in its return to classical Confucianism, but its fundamental transformation of Confucian doctrines. This system is also built upon the influence of Buddhism and Taoism, which includes the belief in the sacred sites (Yao, 2000). In China, Southern Song Neo-Confucians led by Zhu Xi (朱熹) (1130-1200) were actively involved with the re-construction of sacred sites that had been occupied by Buddhists and Taoists.

Like temples, monasteries and shrines, academies inspired rumination on the power of scenery and its relation to the built environment (Walton, 1998).

Since Confucianism was not originally related to sacred geography, academies had usually been situated at the scholarly retreats in secluded settings until the late Tang times. Neo-Confucianism, the revival of the Confucian *Dao* (Way), was at the heart of the Northern Song efforts to build academies in the mountains previously dominated by Buddhist or Taoist institutions. Most of the prominent Northern Song academies were in mountain settings. Southern Song Confucians, by contrast, sought to impose their own visions on the scenery as well as appropriate the spiritual power of sacred sites appreciated by Buddhists and Taoists (Walton, 1998). The physical presence of academies was then the interpretative reshaping of the landscape according to a Confucian vision. In the construction of sacred places, Neo-Confucians went beyond simply appropriating Buddhist and Taoist sites. They crafted their own vision of the power of scenery.

Zhu Xi, the prominent leader of Neo-Confucianism, elaborated on the Confucian idea of nature, with more emphasis on water. He insisted that the mind of a person who understands the (Confucian) *Dao* (Way) thoroughly could be compared to a clean stream flowing gently, but without stopping (Keum, 2000, 68). He also suggested that a curving valley through which a meandering stream flows downwards should be ideal for studying the metaphysics of this world. He spent many of his days in retirement from office in the Wuyi Mountains (武夷山) of northwestern Fujian (福建), where the beauty of scenery inspired him to build several retreats (Walton, 1993, 34). He described the scenery in the Wuyi Mountains precisely as a long valley of nine-bends (九曲), through which a

stream was gently zigzagging nine times.

Zhu Xi actually wrote a series of ten poems about Nine Bends in the Wuyi Mountains to praise the natural beauty ideal for self-cultivation. Each of the Nine Bends in that valley was given a name with a description that would represent the stages of learning from the lower to the higher level (Keum, 2000, 72). He wanted to match the boating tour through the Nine Bends with the progress in reaching the (Confucian) *Dao* (Way). Zhu Xi's series of ten poems and paintings called Wuyi Nine Bends (Song) (武夷九曲), was not simply praising natural beauty, but symbolizing the stages of self-cultivation. Neo-Confucian scholars in Korea, who were familiar with those series, tried to locate their residences near places with nine river-bends (Ryu, 2007).

Academy sites were sometimes characterized by Southern Song writers as *ling* (靈), frequently defined as numinosity, a conception of scenery as the physical embodiment of the historical transmission of the *Dao* (Way). The ideological construction of Neo-Confucian sacred places took place through commemoration of these sites by building shrines and academies. Writers of commemorative inscriptions infused these sites with meaning by linking scholars both in time and spatial scale. While inscriptions on Northern Song academies virtually ignored the scenery despite the location of many of these academies at sacred mountains, most inscriptions on Southern Song academies paid considerable attention to the scenery. By the late Southern Song and early Yuan, ideas of the transmission of the *Dao* (Way), embodied in particular scenery and through men over time, appear to be a common assumption (Walton, 1998).

In this context, East Asia should be understood as a cultural region consisting of a single universal elite high culture, with multiple local popular cultures everywhere. While Chinese (Confucian) high culture shaped the emergence

of East Asian culture in general, an opposing factor of resistance to Chinese (Confucian) culture has been a driving force in the historical formulation of East Asia. This cultural resistance and its consequent entanglement at various scales have made mountains, among others, as contested places in East Asia. In terms of power relations, however, the relative position of Confucianism in the society varies among the countries (and even among the localities within a country).⁶⁾ Depending on the power relations among the various religions (ideologies), the state of contestation would vary not only among the mountains in question but also among the sites on the slopes of one mountain.

5. The Mountain as a Contested Place in East Asia

A mountain in the East Asian context can mean a single peak, a cluster of hills, or whole mountain range, not to mention slopes, gorges, caverns or valleys of a mountain or even an island. The peaks seem from very early times to have been viewed as points of facilitated access to or communication with Heaven, or places where deities dwelled (Naquin and Yu, 1992, 11). The worship of great mountains as embodiments of mysterious power was one of the major elements of the East Asian state religion (Munakata, 1991, 2). The revered mountains in East Asia are numerous, with some designated as nationally important sacred mountains, and many worshipped locally.

The sacred sites on the mountains were much more extensive, complicated, and multi-focal. The intrinsic numinosity of nature – summits, cliffs, vistas, caves, springs, rocks, and trees – was the foundation on which a variety of altars, shrines and temples could be built. Different East Asian

people at different times held widely different and sometimes opposing ideas of what was a sacred site on the same mountain. This diversity of views did not detract from the fame of a site, but on the contrary, reinforced it.

Because the state checked and co-opted the power of organized religion, a diversity of religious systems and interpretations was normal in East Asia. Despite rivalry, no single group of religious professionals triumphed for long, and other systems came to be seen as complementary alternatives (Naquin and Yu, 1992, 24). Although some sites on the mountain had been labeled Buddhist, Taoist, Shintoist, Shamanist, or Confucian, these labels usually represented disputed claims. The sacred sites were rarely the exclusive possession of one group (Naquin and Yu, 1992, 9). Even within a single tradition, different sects and religious orders competed for control of certain sacred spaces.

The mountain in East Asia is thus a text to be deciphered. It is a succession of spaces that themselves encapsulated mystical time. The Taoist, Shintoist or Shamanist attitude toward folk-belief was different from that of Buddhism, despite a similar elite contempt (Faure, 1987, 341). The symbolic systems of the folk traditions was hierarchized as on an inferior level, and this is still the case today in Taiwan and Korea. Buddhists felt compelled to convert or subdue the local deities and to erase the memory of places, but in reality that has been gradually subverted by continuing popular tradition. The cultural models it imposed lost some of their purity in the densely haunted valleys of the sacred mountains (Faure, 1987, 355).

In ancient China, the worship of the great mountains as embodiments of mysterious power was one of the major elements of all national religions. Even emperors of the successive dynasties prayed to the sacred mountains at imperial altars to ensure the prosperity of the

state. There were five nationally revered mountains, called The Five Sacred Mountains (*wuyue*) (五嶽): Mount Tai (泰山) (East), Mount Hua (華山) (West), Mount Heng (衡山) (North), Mount Heng (恒山) (South), and Mount Song (嵩山) (Center) (Munakata, 1991). When a foundation of a dynasty was secured, the emperor was supposed to visit these mountains, or at least Mount Tai. He was to report to heaven through them and to receive the heavenly mandate for ruling the entire world.

In the early periods of China, the mountains were not only revered but were considered as forbidden spaces where spirits and other mysterious creatures resided (Munakata, 1991). The mountains gradually became familiar and provided havens for those who sought to attain supernatural powers or spiritual enlightenment. People who practiced Taoism or Buddhism associated the great mountains with the teleological concept of the realms of the immortals or Buddha. More secular Confucian scholars, by contrast, regarded the mountains as paradigm of world order. Eremitism in China, both in the Taoistic and Confucian senses, has been inextricably associated both with the awesome and the benign forces of the mountains (Munakata, 1991).

For example, since earlier times, Mount Lu (廬山) was a hotbed of local cults, as well as a place where struggles were played out between such cults and both Taoists and Buddhists (Walton, 1993, 31). Mount Lu eventually became a sacred mountain studded only with Buddhist and Taoist sacred sites. An eminent Buddhist Monk, Huiyuan (334-416), built a temple at the foot of this mountain and explored the mountain together with this disciples and lay followers. His Buddhism, which sought cosmic revelation in the mountains, is sometimes called landscape Buddhism (Munakata, 1991). From this time on, Mount Lu gained steadily popularity among

Buddhists, Taoists, and men of letters. During the Northern Song, competition over territory on this mountain began between Buddhist and Confucian groups (Walton, 1993, 31). This competition over territory had become more and more intense by the Southern Song when Zhu Xi, among others, expressed serious concern over the proliferation of Buddhist (and even Taoist) sites and the lack of Confucian ones.

In Japan, too, the mountain is not to be interpreted solely from the perspective of Buddhism, but it is also the manifestation-site of native deities. The religious significance of mountains continued to grow from the Heian Period on, possibly with some influence from Taoism. The definition of sacred place was gradually expanded from the sacred site through the sacred area to the sacred nation (Grapard, 1982, 195-196). The medieval pilgrimage was an expression, in spatial and temporal terms, of a specific Buddhist vision of the religious experience. In addition, Shinto mythology and Buddhist concepts were employed side by side in describing the nation.⁷⁾ Sacred mountains became archetypical national landscapes, which drew heavily on geographical imagery, memory and myth.

In the Medieval Age, for instance, the social status of Buddhism on Mount Hiko was deemed superior to those of mountain ascetics called Shugendo and Shintoism (Grapard, 2000, 116). By the nineteenth century, the Shinto members claimed to have a status to that of the Buddhist members. In 1872, the government issued a decree abolishing Shugendo, and soon thereafter, the majority of the mountain ascetics left the mountain. Some mountain practices, however, remained in and around the mountain and continued sustaining their practices in secret (Grapard, 2000, 123). So to speak, on the eve of the Meiji Restoration, a fundamental construction of the new religious system in Japan was a

systematic reconstruction of the territory on the mountains.

In Korea, the great mountains have been and still are places for contestation among various religious (ideological) interests, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism and other local cults. For example, on Mount Gyeryong, in the middle of South Korea, different religious (ideological) groups endowed space with amalgams of different meanings, uses and values (Ryu, 2005). In addition to Buddhism and Confucianism, Shamanism and other local cults practiced their own ideologies (powers) to create and maintain their own territories and identities. It seems that Shamanism managed to resist the domination from the state organization (national park and the military headquarters), and maintain its territory through practice of spatial tactics. The geographies of resistance, involving Shamanism, were scattered all over the mountain, discontinuous in the territorialization.⁸⁾

The entanglement of Shamanism with Buddhism, in various patterns through space and time, indeed contributed to the survival of Shamanism as a subordinate power. Without understanding Buddhism as an intermediary in the relation between the state and Shamanism, it would be difficult to explain the dynamism in the survival and revival of Shamanism in the past and the present on Mount Gyeryong. This entanglement of power could be easily found in the valley where Buddhist halls were most tolerable to the practice of Shamanism (Ryu, 2005). In this valley, a variety of religious practices from Shamanism were always permitted in the open spaces and even during the daytime.

6. Conclusion

In East Asia, the economic effects of regional

cooperation have largely contributed to the discussion of regional identity upon which regionalism would have to depend. The true effect of this cooperation has been to stimulate hope for an evolving regional identity from the cooperative ground of individual and national identities. In reality, however, a true economic integration in East Asia is far from feasible at present. The region has for long suffered from a high degree of political, societal and cultural heterogeneity. While the emergence of regionalism has introduced most people to a vague regional identity, each of national government is struggling to reinforce the uniformity of national identity. Therefore, we cannot forecast that the effect of regionalism will finally overcome everything including national interests and lead to political coherence in East Asia.

As we can learn from the European experience, we should develop a historical-geographical understanding of cultural identity upon which most East Asians can agree to be common. A regional identity can more successfully obtain a popular consent from the members when it is based on historical-geographical reality. In East Asia, we need at first to work out a project of recognizing cultural identity in the region from the historical-geographical perspective. East Asia is, by any standards, not a culturally homogeneous region on a continuum that can be easily identified in terms of the classical geographical concept, such as cultural diffusion or formal region. For this reason, it is proposed in this study that the broadened geographer's concept of place would be more useful in the identification of East Asia as a cultural region.

This place concept is also expected to encourage the perspective from multiculturalism, because it focuses both on space and time (and embraces both the particular and universal). In East Asia, there was a basic conflict between the universalistic principles of Confucianism on the

one hand, and the particularistic claims of local communities on the other. The universal cannot be thought or lived without its nemesis, the particular, in East Asia. In East Asia, recognizing the tension between these two ideal end-points within a place rather than concentrating on either universalism or particularism would enlarge the geographical vision on the region.

In cultural politics, Confucian government and scholars maintained an ability to overlook local (ethnic) differences, without necessarily denying or obliterating them. In theory, the presence of the [universal] *Dao* (道) (Way) takes precedence over the [particular] place. Wherever the Confucian *Dao* was realized, there was also a culture. If a culture, rooted in *li* (禮), was assumed to be uniform and universal, there would be naturally much more local variations of customs, language and other minor matters. In more trivial matters, everyone was leased to follow their own local practices other than the grand principles of Confucianism. Within a place as well as across the places, variant local customs and universal truths were fully expected to cohabit, both in theory and in practice.

Sinification (through Confucianism) in East Asia did not mean becoming Chinese anywhere except within the borders of the Chinese empire itself. Elsewhere in East Asia, elements of Chinese civilization merely overlay a complex mosaic of local diversity, while functioning like international norms. If the acceptance of certain agreed-on common standards of elite high culture did tend to promote a degree of cultural convergence throughout the region, this may have acted as little more than a modest counterbalance to an opposing natural process of seemingly inexorable diversification. While Chinese high culture shaped the emergence of East Asian culture in general, an opposing factor of resistance to Chinese culture has also been a driving force in the historical development of East Asia.

In practice, moreover, Neo-Confucian scholar-officials in China and Korea believed in and practiced piety toward their localities as ancestral homelands. Lineage attached to local Neo-Confucian academies could exert influence far beyond their local boundaries. The academy occupied the prime position in the dynamics of territoriality at various scales: national, regional and local. The territoriality of an academy was a powerful strategy to dominate people and things by controlling the area. This particularism in practice seems to be on the contrary to Confucian universalism, which is free from the bondage to any place. Neo-Confucianism, however, with influence from Buddhism and Taoism, made a moral justification for the belief in the sacred places and attachment to localities. This is why twin concepts, culture-as-practice and culture-as-ideology, are expected to contribute effectively to the identification of East Asia as a cultural region.

The maturation of the East Asian region as a whole coincided with the maturation of its separate internal spatial division. The cultural mixture (heterogeneity) within a place at various scales rather than the cultural integration (homogeneity) across the places would give coherence to East Asia as a cultural region. The cultural mixture itself varies from one place to another, depending on the relative position in the power relations among religions or ideologies. It could appear in the form of either domination or resistance, and sometimes entanglement that may have changed through space and time. In other words, domination and resistance cannot exist independently from each other, but neither can they be reducible to one another. In East Asia, it can be understood that resistance in one place may be complicit with domination in another.

Finally, in this study, the concept, "the mountain as a contested place," is proposed as an experimental effort in the search for the cultural identity of East Asia. Despite rivalry on the

mountains in East Asia, no single group of religious professionals triumphed for long, and other systems came to be seen as complementary alternatives. Although some sites on the mountain had been labeled Buddhist, Taoist, Shintoist, Shamanist or Confucian, these labels usually represented disputed claims. The sacred sites were rarely the exclusive possession of one group. The mountain in East Asia has been a place, not dominated by a single religion (ideology) but contested among multiple religions (ideologies). It is a text to be deciphered, and a succession of spaces within which they encapsulated mystical time. Confucians or Buddhists felt compelled to convert or subdue the local deities and to erase the memory of places, but in reality they have been gradually subverted by the native tradition. The cultural models they imposed lost some of their purity in the densely haunted valleys of the sacred mountains.

In the case of place concept, moreover, geographical scale is not the amount of information on a map, as with cartographic scale, but the focal setting at which spatial boundaries are defined for a specific social claim, activity, or behavior. For this reason, one scale makes sense only in relation to others. Typically places are more localized like mountains, given that they are associated with the familiar and with being at home. But they can also be much larger areas, like East Asia, depending on geographical patterns of activities and social network connections. In this study, it is suggested that the broadened concept of place should be further applied to the individual studies of other spatial units such as houses, gardens, villages and cities. It is expected that these individual studies would result in accumulation in the idea of East Asia as a place that has a distinct cultural identity in historical-geographical terms.

Notes

- 1) In each of East Asian countries, the written word in Chinese, “文化” for culture, is pronounced in a different way from one another: *wenbua* in China; *bunka* in Japan; *munbua* in Korea.
- 2) Confucianism, as it is expressed in various Chinese terms (儒教, 儒學, 儒道, 儒家), is seen to be a set of rituals aimed at harmonizing human relations and more generally as a guide to social behavior. It is also seen to be a method of governance, relying on a system of education and a clear-cut ordering of society. It is a world view, but often not an exclusive one. It is a set of ideals, combined with the means to achieve them at individual, community, and state level.
- 3) Like civilizations, these world regions seem to be the large socio-spatial groupings delimited largely on the grounds of shared history and culture.
- 4) By most criteria, however, Southeast Asia (one commonly referred to as Indochina) lacks the deeply rooted and widely shared religio-philosophical systems that give coherence to these three Asian regions.
- 5) In the traditional geography, space offers a concept of the general as opposed to the particularity of places. Space is also understood as commanded or controlled by powerful agents and institutions (such as states), whereas place is lived or experience space. Space is the abstraction of places onto a grid or coordinate system as if an observer is outside it or looking down at the world from above (Agnew, 2002, 15).
- 6) In Korea, Confucianism was a foreign import that was used to get both the elite and, eventually, commoners to change some of their most basic social situations. In China, to the contrary, it seems that Confucianism was continually stretched to accommodate changes that came from other sources, such as popular ideas about ghosts or geomancy. In Japan, Confucianism was largely associated with schools and those who attended schools, and until the introduction of compulsory education in the Meiji era was not a large part uneducated people's lives. Even ancestral rites were performed as Buddhist rites. In Japan, Confucian values were not always presented in a pure form. The presentation seems much more eclectic. We see Confucian moral values mixed (and sometimes intermingled) with notions from Buddhism, Shinto, Taoism, and folk religion. In the process, Confucianism was realigned with Shinto notions of the divine origins of the imperial line and reinterpreted in the service of nations objectives. It is, therefore, difficult to assess the weight of such interlinked historical variables as Confucianism, and Shinto (Rozman, 1991, 144-154).
- 7) By the end of the 19th century Buddhism in China had lost its appeal to the elite and had been reduced to meditation and popular devotionalism. After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, and particularly during the Cultural Revolution, Buddhism was suppressed in mainland China. In Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore Buddhism remains very much a living force. In Korea, during the Joseon Period, Buddhist beliefs and practices, along with Shamanism, were despised as an outcome of superstition and ignorance by the Neo-Confucian ruling elite. During this period, Buddhism managed to survive with popular support from the common people including women. In Japan, by contrast, the story of Buddhism has been the continuity of all schools or sects, co-contrast, the story of Buddhism has been the continuity of all schools or sects, co-existing side by side to the present day. Today Buddhism continues to flourish in all its forms. At one end of the scale it is hardly distinguishable from superstition and magic, but at the other end there are two elements: a highly intellectual study and profound spiritual discipline (Collcutt *et al.*, 1998).
- 8) These geographies of resistance, in particular, could be best identified around the most sacred sites, such as mountain peaks, waterfalls and ponds.

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- Correspondence: Je-Hun Ryu, Department of Geography, Korea National University of Education, Cheongwon-Gun, Chung-Buk, Republic of Korea (e-mail: jhryu@knue.ac.kr., phone: 043-230-3616).
- 교신: 류제현, 363-391 충북 청원군 강내면 산 7번지 한국교원대학교 제2대학 지리교육과 (이메일: jhryu@knue.ac.kr. 전화: 043-230-3616)
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