

Globalization and National Identity: *Shintobul-i*, A Case of Cultural Representation of Economic Nationalism****

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This article aims at analyzing and explaining the process of invention, as well as its diffusion, and finally examining the controversy around the meaning of the adage Shintobul-i. This Korean set phrase literally means "Soil and body are one and the same." Looking at the form of the adage, one can easily be misled and think that it comes from traditional Korea or ancient China. Actually, it is an invention of the Korean Agricultural Cooperative in 1989 in order to mobilize the public against trade liberalization. The case study of Shintobul-i indicates that the cultural dimension of nationalism can be deeply intertwined with economic interests so that they mutually reinforces in a synergetic process. 1) The principal actors in the invention process are educated urban elites, even though farmers contributed to the popularization of the idiom. 2) The emergence of Shintobul-i as a symbol of national identity corresponds to the historical context of economic development and democratization. 3) The diffusion and popularization of Shintobul-i cover a quite long period of the 1990's and the first decade of the 21st century. 4) This case indicates that the symbols of national identity must possess the popular appealing power as well as some specific qualities, such as indispensability or prestige, which make them worth of a nation.

Keywords: *Shintobul-i, Korea, Nationalism, Globalization, Identity*

1. GLOBALIZATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF *SHINTOBUL-I*

Globalization has various definitions depending on the phenomena that writers and thinkers wish to underline (Rosenau 2003, 18-19), but one of the most common definitions insists upon the economic and technological dimension as its' central feature. Thus globalization signifies the diffusion of market mechanism on a world scale and the progressive formation of a world market in terms of production and trade, as well as of financial services (Stallings 1995, 8-12). Technological innovations in transport and communication not only have greatly contributed to, but also made literally possible the acceleration and enhancement of this global market unification. From that central nucleus, the process of globalization tends to ignite transformation in other spheres such as the political, social and/or cultural (Sassen 1996). The trends for unification have been so powerful and exhaustive that some came to declare the end of the nation-state (Omae 1995) and even the end of history (Fukuyama 1992).

Against this unilateral perspective and somewhat exaggerate conclusions, more refined and empirically strong research demonstrated that the local, the national, and the regional level were much more active in the face of globalization (Hall and Soskice 2001). The local and national specificity of the same capitalist mode of production was still resilient so much that a re-invention of capitalism could be identified in non-Western cultures (Bayart 1994).

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The local and the national actors were not only ready to react and find out creative responses to the challenge of globalization, but also imagine a re-arrangement of their own collective identity in order to better mobilize fellows (Bayart 1996). Thus, we can assume that national identity, which is still one of the most appealing collective identities of the modern world (Wendt 1999), maintains a very complex relationship with globalization.

This article tries to investigate this complex relationship between globalization and national identity in the particular context of contemporary Korean society from the 1980's to the dawn of the 21st century. From a narrow economic perspective, globalization in Korea meant trade liberalization and especially the opening of its domestic market to the ever big number of products, including agricultural products. But from a larger perspective, globalization to reach the standards of the developed countries meant economic development in general, nation-building to stand firmly on the international stage, and democratization to acquire the utmost respectability of a leading country. This macro social change was the context for the emergence of a cultural nationalism with a strong reaffirmation of tradition and identity. Here, I chose to study *shintobul-i* as a representative case of invented tradition to deal with the needs of modern social mobilization. This case might also be considered a cultural representation of economic nationalism and clearly indicates that economic interests are put in the cultural bottle more often than assessed.

Scholars of Korean nationalism usually consider the 1980's as a turning point in its historical evolution. *Gim Dongchun* (1994, 46-47) for example distinguishes three different stages in the history of Korean nationalism. The first stage covers the period from the end of the *Choseon* dynasty to the Japanese occupation and can be characterized as an aborted attempt of anti-imperialist nation-state building. The second stage corresponds to the cold-war world order and represents a 'state building without nation' either in north or south. Finally, the third stage begins with the end of the cold-war in the 1980's which means the end of the international imposition of national separation. But *Gim Dongchun* (1994, 51) estimates that the improvement of general education level, industrialization with disintegration of rural communities, urbanization and the generalization of consumer culture, as well as the development of mass media, constitute the weakening factors of affective nationalism. *Yeom Mu-ung's* (1994) discussion of the 1980's is more nuanced: He observes an 'astonishing theoretical ascendant' of national literature in the mid-1980's which was interrupted shortly after, by the industrialization of culture from the end-1980's.

The above-mentioned perspective does not provide a fine analysis of Korean nationalism. The vision of history in terms of stages is too teleological and seems to impose a nationalist course of historic evolution. Furthermore, the political dimension of nationalism, especially the international constraints, dominates all other aspects such as civic, societal and cultural dimensions. *Hong Sungtae* (2005) is much more perspicacious in underlining the entirely new characteristic of nationalism at the end of the 1980's: His three periods of nationalism globally corresponds to the stages examined above, but he insists on the new nationalism of middle classes proud of their personal and historic achievements, economic development and later political democratization. During the economic and social crisis of 1997-98, Korean society also experienced a form of societal nationalism distinct from the administrative nationalism – *gwanje minjogju-ui* – (Bak 1998) of military dictatorship. In a sense, the economic hardship urged the need for national heroes who were 'fabricated' in such diverse domains as cinema, television, sports and even science (Yang 2006).

This emergence of cultural nationalism can be traced to the mid-1980's. Hong points to a historic novel *Dan* published in 1984 which became a best-seller. This novel imagined a

supposedly Korean ancestor people named *Baegdusanjog* – literally the ethnics of Mount *Baekdu* –, who dominated the Antiquity and who will renew its strength after a cycle of three millennium. The emergence of *kimchi* as a proud national culinary symbol in the same period reaffirms this new phenomenon (Cho 2006). This new trend of cultural nationalism has become a structural characteristic of Korean identity with considerable mobilizing capacity as demonstrated during the so called IMF economic crisis as well as in the Korea-Japan World Cup. *Gim Sangbae* (2003) has also analyzed the social mobilization to save a Korean software company in a movement of techno-nationalism to defend cultural legacies. We consider that *Shintobul-i* is a very representative and popular symbol of this cultural nationalism which combines economic need, identity manipulation, and social mobilization. Furthermore, it covers all the period from the end-1980's to the beginning of the 21st century.

Shintobul-i is a Korean set phrase which literally means “Soil and body are one and the same.” Looking at the form of the adage, one can easily be misled and think that it comes from traditional Korea or ancient China. Actually, it is an invention of the Korean Agricultural Cooperative in 1989 in order to mobilize people against trade liberalization. The assumption of the phrase is that, because soil and body are one and the same, one should eat products of the soil where one is born and grown. This adage rapidly became a popular slogan frequently used for various kinds of social mobilization, so much so that it was introduced in the dictionary of Korean language in 1996. The broad success and popularity of this invented adage made it an important symbolic and expressive tool in the repertory of the Korean national identity.

This article aims at analyzing and explaining the process of invention, as well as its diffusion, and finally examining the controversy around the meaning of the adage. This case of invented tradition is interesting for several reasons. First, the rapidity of its social adoption is surprising. It took only seven years to be introduced in the dictionary. Does it mean that there was a historical and social need for this kind of expressive symbol at the end of the 1980's?

Second, at the same time, its relative longevity is also amazing. After more than seventeen years of existence, it is always broadly used in various social spheres. In the contemporary world, it is not uncommon to see the rapid appearances and disappearances of slogans, especially with TV commercials. But *Shintobul-i* not only was rapidly diffused, but also survived and became an ‘institutionalized’ adage. What are the ingredients of success of this invention?

Third, even though *Shintobul-i* possesses first of all a cultural meaning, its popularity can be explained only by adding its economic dimension. The genesis of the traditional symbol itself was motivated by economic need. Then the social diffusion can also be principally explained by an economic logic of appeal for national identity. In other words, this represents an interesting case of invented tradition for economic nationalism.

One can doubt our approach which consists in taking a simple adage as an invented tradition. Hobsbawm (1983) defines it as ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.’ In this sense, *Shintobul-i*, along with other elements we will consider later, forms a set of discursive practices destined to enunciate and enhance the nationalist values and norms which constitute a bridge between the old time immemorial and the present, first of all among the Korean population. I will demonstrate in this article that *Shintobul-i* is not a mere

adage popularly used, but a truly important symbol crystallizing the ethnic version of the Korean national identity.

2. INVENTION

The process of invention of *Shintobul-i* is relatively simple and can be easily dated. In this part, I will pay particular attention to 1) the social and historic context of economic internationalization in which the process took place, 2) the nature and the characteristics of the actor who invented the adage, and the particular form of the invented adage which will be of great importance for the diffusion phase.

2.1. Social and Historic Context

The end of the 1980's forms a particularly interesting period in the history of contemporary Korea (Cumings 1997: 299-393). First, she had achieved a rapid economic development since the beginning of the 1960's, its' average economic growth rate being one of the highest in the world. From the ashes of the Korean War (1950-53), a very competitive export-oriented economy emerged progressively, so that observers named it 'the miracle of the river Han'. Like many developing economies lacking natural resources, Korea had also a structural and chronic trade deficit for the most part of the period of the 1960's and 1970's. But in the 1980's, appeared for the first time a trade surplus, especially vis-à-vis the United States, thus fostering strong American pressures for market opening. These bilateral pressures were combined with the multilateral ones in the framework of the Uruguay Round trade liberalization talks which began in 1986. In a sense, Korea was a victim of her own success. At the international level, she was asked to return the benefits she enjoyed as a member of a free trade system by opening her market. The US was specifically interested in opening the Korean market for agricultural products, along with other sectors where they had a comparative advantage (Woo Jung-en 1991). From the Korean perspective, these pressures were considered unfair because they didn't reflect decades of Korean deficits compared to several years of surplus.

Second, the end of the 1980's constitutes also a turning point in Korean politics in terms of liberalization and democratization (Kim 2003). After decades of vicissitudes with alternating dictatorial and democratic regimes since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, massive demonstrations for democracy in 1987 were successful in establishing a more liberal and democratic regime. In December 1987, the first direct presidential election inaugurated the Sixth Republic which is still alive and is the longest constitutional regime in contemporary Korea. The liberalization and democratization were not limited to the strictly defined political sphere, but provoked a more general transformation of different and various social spheres and organizations. In short, Korean politics and society entered a turbulent era of the burgeoning democratic phase at the end of the 1980's.

Third, from the ideological and cultural perspective, the end of the 1980's can be qualified as a period of reinforcement of the national pride and identity. The economic and political achievements underlined above were internationally recognized by the organization of the 1988 Olympic Games. In the 1980's, a radical form of nationalism developed in

student, cultural and labor movements¹: it considered the national unification with the north the ultimate and supreme political objective, and criticized the government of being a simple vassal of the US. More important for us is an apparently benign form of cultural nationalism which developed progressively in the 1980's.² It shared with the political nationalism the critic of the semi-colonial character of the Korean state, but insisted much more on the necessary revival of the Korean traditional culture opposed to the imported foreign and especially Western culture.

The economic development in the context of international trade liberalization, the political liberalization and democratization with strong social pressures, and the resurgence of political and cultural nationalisms form the social and historic context of the Korean society at the end of the 1980's. The invention of *Shintobul-i* as well as its rapid diffusion can only be understood in this context. The economic development had allowed the social formation of middle classes conscious of their achievements and proud of their country, on the one hand. On the other, it has ignited the economic pressures from the world, especially from the United States. At the same time, political liberalization and democratization has opened a space for mass expression against these international pressures. On the cultural front, a renewed interest in a return to tradition was characteristic of this period. *Shintobul-i* can then be analyzed as emerging from this cross-road of economic, political, and cultural trends.

2.2. Process of Invention: Actor and Form

The collective and individual 'inventor' of *Shintobul-i* can be easily identified. The 'invention' can be attributed personally to *Han Hoseon*, President of the Central Association of the Korean Agricultural Cooperative, called *Nonghyub*. More precisely, it is argued that he 'discovered' this set-phrase in a Japanese book (Hasumi 1988), and adopted it as a catch-phrase for social mobilization against trade liberalization and imports of foreign agricultural products in 1989 (Jeon 2004). The objective was to promote the consumption of locally produced agricultural products and maintain the protection of the agricultural market.

The peculiarity of both individual and collective actors should be underlined in order to fully understand this process. *Han Hoseon*, even if he is a leader of the Agricultural Cooperative, is not a farmer himself, neither a representative of a local cooperative. He was born in Seoul, the metropolitan capital of Korea, and is a graduate of public administration from the prestigious Korea University. He then began his career in the Central Association of *Nonghyub*, as a member of the first promotion of employees recruited by public selection in 1961. He was nominated president of the Central Association by the President of the Republic in 1988, and then was elected president for the first time in the history of the

¹ See for example (Pak 1998: 61-2): "When we examine the evolution of democracy movement in Korea, we find three key guiding principles in the ideology of the movement. They are nationalism (*minjok*-ism), democracy (*minju*-ism) and populism (*minjung*-ism) ... It was only in the 1980's that they became theoretically articulated in a combined way in the intellectual circles within the democracy movement."

² For Huchinson (1987: 16), "political nationalists have as their objective the achievement of a representative national state that will guarantee to its members uniform citizenship rights." but "the aim of cultural nationalists is rather the moral regeneration of the historic community, or, in other words, the re-creation of their distinctive national civilization."

association by the direct vote of representatives of member-cooperatives in 1990 (Sindong-a 1998). So we have here a typical urban professional who led a very successful career in the bureaucracy of the cooperative's central apparatus, and who finally became its first elected leader in the era of democratization. His intellectual status was further strengthened by a master's in public administration from Seoul National University, and a Ph.D in public administration from Myongji University. This partly explains the ingenuity of his 'invention'.

Nonghyub is a very powerful organization of the Korean agricultural sector, which possesses more than 2 million members and 66,991 employees in 1994 (*Mal* 1994). After the military coup of 1961, the new government enforced a fusion of the Agricultural Cooperative Movement and the Agricultural Bank. Till the liberalization at the end of the 1980's, *Nonghyub* functioned as an intermediary of the authoritarian state-corporatism under the military dictatorship. The membership was quasi-mandatory. The president of the Central Association was nominated by the President of the Republic and then the presidents of local cooperatives were nominated by the president of the Central Association. *Nonghyub* was criticized for its lack of interest in promoting members welfare and pursuing only its organizational expansion by multiplying its financial branches.

The political turning-point of 1987 was also crucial for *Nonghyub*, faced with increasing social demands for democratization (*Nong-eobhyeobdongjohap jung-anghoe* 2004). The Agricultural Cooperative had to work for and defend the interests of the farmers. At least, it had to convince its base that the organization was working for the benefit of its members. On December 30, 1987, the representatives of the local cooperative's presidents transmitted a letter of proposition asking for the limitation of the agricultural products imports' to the Ministry of Economic Planning, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and to the American Embassy in Seoul. In 1989, further steps were taken in the direction of the members' needs. On April, a demonstration against further trade liberalization of agricultural products was organized. On December, 12 health and medical centers were opened to answer the needs of members and a 'national campaign for the consumption of our agricultural products' was launched. *Shintobul-i* was adopted as a catch-phrase for this campaign and was promised to a very successful future. In short, *Nonghyub*, for its organizational interest, utilized the political atmosphere and mobilized farmers by introducing *Shintobul-i*.

The form of the 'invented tradition' is capital because it vests the new slogan with ancient clothes.³ *Shintobul-i* follows the form of a classical idiom: it is composed of four characters *shin* (body, 身), *to* (soil, 土), *bul* (negation, 不), *I* (two, 二). When a Korean hears this set phrase for the first time, he immediately presupposes that it comes from the past either from the traditional Korea or from the ancient classical China. Using such an idiom was part of the Agricultural Cooperative's identity strategy since it allowed the easily

³ *Shintobul-i* takes the form of a set-phrase (seong-eo in Korean, chengyu in Chinese) composed of two, three, four or more Chinese characters. The most usual form of seong-eo is that of four Chinese characters, so much so that some translate 'chengyu' into 'four-character idiom' in English. These idioms are often based upon myths, stories, allegories and historical facts of ancient China, even though there are those 'invented' or formed in Korea later. Because these phrases use the classical Chinese, they are often unintelligible even to modern Chinese who can only understand the vernacular language. The same is true for Korean people. Thus, understanding these idioms presupposes a preliminary learning process of Chinese characters and then comprehension of the story and the moral incorporated and compactly summarized in the idiom. Put in other words, the usage of these idioms is a highly complicated matter which can be mastered only by a long traditional education.

comprehensible opposition tradition/modernity, oriental/western, rural/urban, agricultural/industrial, locally-produced/imported foods.⁴ For students of nationalism accustomed to the process of the popularization of high culture (Gellner 1983: 35-8), the usage of classical high cultural forms for modern need of social mobilization is not a surprise.

But still, these idioms are very different from classical ones. The Chinese characters used here are so simple that even a commoner without a high level of education can easily *guess* the meaning of the idiom. It is *directly* comprehensible and in this sense, the idiom is very close to the vernacular form of the language. The ingenuity of the process of invention is to combine the *traditional form* of a set phrase with the *modern simplicity* of direct communication. The modern massive usage of the idiom is not hindered by the prestige of the pedigree of an ancient adage. Because body and soil are one and the same, they are inseparable. Therefore, one should eat the product of the soil where one is born.

3. DIFFUSION

Were there not the successful process of large diffusion, the invention would have been just another neologism, interesting perhaps just for linguists. But *Shintobul-i* became immediately a social phenomenon, undergoing 1) a large cultural diffusion, 2) then a specific economic diffusion, 3) and finally transformed into a social symbol of national identity against the waves of globalization. In a period of a few years, a simple adage introduced to serve as a catch-phrase experienced an astonishing success and became a set phrase of everyday life.

3.1. Cultural Diffusion

Shintobul-i was first promoted by the Korean Agricultural Cooperative in its campaign for the consumption of nationally produced agricultural products. At this phase, it was no more than a new slogan for a commercially motivated campaign, as one can easily see or hear everyday. These slogans are innumerable and only a few are memorized by the audience. Furthermore, only a very few survive the ephemeral world of commercial slogans and enter the temple of popular idioms.

For *Shintobul-i*, the commercial motivation was supported by the organizational capacity of the Korean Agricultural Cooperative's more than two million members. More important was the adoption of the slogan by farmers in general: They frequently used *Shintobul-i* along with *Nongjacheonhajidaebon* on the banners accompanying their demonstrations and meetings. This latter social mobilization was particularly frequent because of the ongoing Uruguay Round negotiations⁵, and visible because of the newness of liberal and democratic political regime.

⁴ Another idiom frequently used by the Agricultural Cooperative and the farmers is *Nongjacheonhajidaebon* (農者天下之大本) which means "agriculture is the basis of a nation."

⁵ The Uruguay Round negotiations (1986-93) incited a broad social mobilization in Korea, especially in the period 1990-93, against the imports liberalization of agricultural products. Foreign pressures for the market opening of rice, which is the traditional main food for Korean people, ignited a feverish reaction from the public opinion. (Mo and Choe 2002: 29)

These farmers' demonstrations in the beginning of the 1990's infused an artistic motif to an unknown singer. *Bae Ilho*, from a poor peasant family with just primary education, arrived in Seoul at age 17, worked either as an urban proletariat or made small businesses, and began to sing in clubs at nighttime. He was inspired by these demonstrators, and particularly by their slogan, *Shintobul-i*. A song titled *Shintobul-i* was made by his colleagues and he began to sing it at farmers' meetings and demonstrations. (Yeo-seong dong-a, 2002) He quickly became the farmers' singer, but the success and popularity of the song was not limited to that profession. It was a national hit in the 1990's, so much so that he is now called *Shintobul-i Bae Ilho*. These are the words of the song:

Who are you? Who am I?
 Those of us who are born in this land
 Let's shout "Body and soil are one and the same!"

Streets of Apkujung-dong, Kangnam
 In what country are these streets?
 Where has Sunhee gone?
 Why can I see only Miss Lee instead of Sunhee
 Mannequins in the show window
 Dance amid imported goods.
 Mountains, waters, soybeans, red-beans –
 Ours are good for our bodies
 Why are you looking for somebody else's?
 Red pepper paste, soybean paste, kimchi and kaktugi
 Do not forget, do not forget that
 You and I, we are Koreans
 Body and soil are one and the same
 Body and soil are one and the same

The message of the song is simple and clear: This is an appeal to the 'mass sentiment' of national identity. "A nationalist language or symbolism is broader than an ideology or ideological movement; it often connects that ideology with the 'mass sentiment' of the wider segments of the designated population, notably through slogans, ideas, symbols and ceremonies." (Smith 1991: 73) 'You' and 'I', "who are born in this land" are inseparably united in the spirit of *Shintobul-i*. This fusion of men with the territory is the departing point of the national community. Then appears a severe criticism of the corrupted metropolitan urban culture: *Apkujung-dong* and *Kangnam* are the most fashionable and rich districts of Seoul which are often criticized for 'over consumption';⁶ *Sunhee* which is a very familiar and popular Korean name for girls is opposed to the imported way of calling people, 'Miss Lee' (pronounced *miseu li*); mannequins and show windows not only dance amid imported goods, but are themselves imported words, pronounced respectively *maneking* and *syowindo*; this strange world is mirrored into the Korean everyday foodstuff, red-pepper paste, soybean paste, *kimchi* and *kaktugi*. The song ends by an awakening (do not forget), and a

⁶ In Korea, *gwasobi*, which can be translated into excessive or over consumption and means principally conspicuous consumption, is an important ideological concept used to criticize 'unnecessary waste of resources in a country which has to import everything.'

repetition of the symbolic slogan. Following the classic nationalist logic underlining the fact that “members dress and eat in similar ways and speak the same language; in all these respects they differ from non-members, who dress, eat and speak in different ways” (Smith 1991: 75), the song is a strong cultural reaffirmation of the national community.

The popularity of this song can be checked by the number of singers who included it in their album. *Gim Hyeyeon*, *Min Seung-a* and *Jang Chunhwa* are those who sang *Shintobul-i* and incorporated it into their album respectively in 2000, 2001 and 2004.⁷ The song was not only a national hit in the turbulent years of the Uruguay Round negotiations, but also became a classic pop song after more than ten years. Reflecting the success of the idiom, *Shintobul-i* appeared for the first time in the dictionary of Korean language published by *Minjungseolim*. It was also in the list of the new words searched by the National Institute of the Korean Language in 1995.⁸ In less than a decade, *Shintobul-i*, from a commercially motivated campaign slogan, developed into a catch phrase for combative social mobilization, before becoming a popularly sung word in a song with the same title, and finally entered the temple of the relative eternity of the language dictionary.

3.2. Economic Diffusion

Shintobul-i was not only an expressive cultural symbol for national identity, but also became a very popular brand-name for a variety of products. As Anthony Smith (1991: 145) puts it pertinently, “the point that is often missed is that national aspirations tend to combine with other non national economic, social or political issues, and the power of the movement often derives from this combination.” It is very difficult to draw a clear limit between the cultural and the economic, especially in our contemporary world of global capitalism characterized by the commodification of everything (Wallerstein 1998: 10). Nevertheless, here we consider the social usage of the idiom by economic actors whose main objective is business.

In 1989, the year the phrase was invented, a monthly magazine titled *Shintobul-i gungang* (*Shintobul-i* health) was created. In 2002, the publisher *Gim Yunse* received an award from the minister of culture and tourism for his contribution to “the improvement of national health by promoting our spirit and style, by reinforcing the national identity with the search for our roots, and by developing functional food based upon the superiority of the Korean native products.” It should be emphasized that the father of *Gim Yunse*, *Gim Ilhun* was an adept of Korean traditional medicine and ‘inventor’ of *Jug-yeom* which literally means

⁷ Information from a music website:

http://srch.bugs.co.kr/s_bugs.asp?s_kind=main&query=%BD%C5%C5%E4%BA%D2%C0%CC&keyword=%BD%C5%C5%E4%BA%D2%C0%CC&nil_Search=btn&start=0&count=10&opt=1&cluster=2&convert= (Accessed as of September 20, 2006)

⁸ The creation of this Institute in 1991 is also a part of the rising cultural nationalism in Korea in this period. A small institute of the Korean language was created in 1984 as a sub-unit of the Korean Academy. The creation of a ministry of culture in 1990, separated from the former ministry of education and culture, was an opportunity for this small institute to become a National Institute. Its main achievement is the publication of the Standard Dictionary of the Korean Language in 1999. According to this dictionary, *Shintobul-i* means that “body and soil are not two, but one, and that the agricultural products of the land where one lives are the best for body.” (*Guglib gug-eo yeonguwon* 2000).

bamboo-salt. The salt from the Yellow Sea at the western coast of the Korean peninsula is put into bamboo, which is sealed with loess, then heated with pine fire. The repetition of the process gives finally the bamboo-salt with medicinal effects. Soybean paste, soap or tooth paste can be produced with bamboo-salt. *Gim Yunse* is the president of the association of bamboo-salt producers, and is himself the president of *Insaga*, a bamboo-salt producing company (Weekly *Hankook* 2002). It seems that this businessman-publisher had the flair of the enormous commercial potential of this idiom. The magazine was a tool to popularize the idea that “body and soil are one and the same” and fully exploit the commercial opportunity of the rising cultural nationalism.

Since 1989, *Shintobul-i* as a commercial brand-name has known a tremendous success: In 2006, the yellow pages of the Korean Yahoo site shows 290 businesses named *Shintobul-i*. Among them, 266 are in the category ‘food and restaurants’, 13 in ‘family, life’, 5 in ‘health’, 3 in ‘agriculture and fisheries’ and 2 in ‘business and industry’. The location of the business indicates also an interesting trend. The seven urban districts (Seoul, Busan, Daegu, Daejeon, Incheon, Gwangju, Ulsan) with 48% of Korean population represent only 30% of the businesses named *Shintobul-i*. 70% are located in the mainly rural area of the nine provinces.⁹ Apparently, the name is more popular in rural and agricultural areas of the country.

The least we can say is that national identity sells. Here, as underlined above, the national aspirations are intertwined with economic activity in a very complex manner. The act of consumption is not a pure consequence of a nationalist or patriotic logic. Eating the products of national soil is good for one’s health and body. The basic self-interest as a motivation for nationalist act explains perhaps the rapid and large success of *Shintobul-i*.

3.3. *Shintobul-i* versus Globalization

In the 1990’s, the cultural and economic diffusion of the idiom was accompanied by the phenomenon of the crystallization of the national identity around the concept of *Shintobul-i*. From a popular set-phrase *à la mode*, shouted and sang by farmers, promoted by rural restaurants, it progressively became a concept of high profile expressing the philosophy of cultural nationalism. In this process, the idiom acquired a new dimension and status. In several years, *Shintobul-i* came to symbolize the national identity, especially in opposition to globalization.

The high profile of the idiom is reflected in the publications title and the vast and varied domains it covers. More than several dozens of books were published with titles including the idiom *Shintobul-i*. *Shintobul-i Our Food* (Urinuri 2006), *Shintobul-I Antifungals* (Cha Injun 2004), *Shintobul-i Babies’ Food* (Bak Myeongsuk 2001), *Shintobul-I Is Good* (Jeong Hisung 1994) are books where the meaning of the idiom corresponds to the initial significance. In *Shintobul-i Medical Treatment for Liver Diseases* (Gim Yeonggil 1996) or *Shintobul-i Diet and Health Revolution* (Lee Wonsub 1998), the idiom still indicates a very specific method of medical treatment or diet. But in titles such as *Shintobul-i Child Rearing* (Bak Mija 2006), *Shintobul-i Our Cultural Heritage* (Lee Jongho 2003) or *Shintobul-i Stories* (Choe Jinho 1994), the catch-phrase came to represent an adjective meaning simply

⁹ Information from the Korean Yahoo’s yellow pages:

<http://kr.gugi.search.yahoo.com/gugi/search.php?p=%BD%C5%C5%E4%BA%D2%C0%CC>
(Accessed as of September 20, 2006)

Korean. The dates of publications indicate that the idiom very rapidly acquired the symbolic status of national identity at the beginning of the 1990's.

In 1991, a very popular TV commercial opportunistically came to reinforce the message of *Shintobul-i*. It was a commercial for a pharmaceutical product of the traditional medicine called *Uhwangcheongsim-won*, which is a pill made of ox bezoar. At that time, more than forty different Korean companies were producing *Uhwangcheongsim-won*, and the massive imports of cheap Chinese *Uhwangcheongsim-won* were hurting the Korean industry. The commercial stressed that only the product of *Solpyo* was prepared and fabricated following the proper traditional method. The core concept of the commercial is tradition, and a Korean traditional singer, *Bak Dongjin*, also a national human treasury, sings and says "Ours is precious!" This simple vernacular message was then transformed into "Ours is good!" and very popularly used, as a synonym of *Shintobul-i*. The significance was similar without being identical. *Shintobul-i* was basically universalistic and objective, whereas "Ours is good!" was subjective and exclusive: "Theirs is not good!" would be the implicit pendant of the message. The classical high cultural form of *Shintobul-i* with four written Chinese characters contrasts with the simple vernacular form of the TV commercial sung and spoken by a human voice, be it that of a national living treasury. In spite of these differences, or because of them, the two set phrases formed a complementary couple and they came to represent the expressive vehicle for Korean national identity.

As examined above, the invention of *Shintobul-i* is intimately related to the process of economic internationalization. Its cultural and economic diffusion and the subsequent acquisition of a more noble national identity marker function made it the prominent concept opposed to globalization. The Uruguay Round, which was concluded in 1993, was a terrible choc for the Korean public because it meant the opening of the national rice market, how limited and progressive it was. In November 1994, President Kim Young Sam proclaimed that Korea should elaborate a coordinated policy of *Segyehwa*, which literally means globalization. For him, *Segyehwa* was the process by which Korea should attain the global standard and level in order to 'create the new Korea' (*sinhangug changjo*). In January 1995, an executive committee for *Segyehwa* was established by the cabinet of the Prime Minister. Many comic strips of the time ridiculed this policy orientation, and one of them put *Segyehwa* and *Shintobul-i* in direct confrontation. One can see advertising balloons and banners with 'Internationalization' (*Gugjehwa*) and 'Globalization' (*Segyehwa*) on them. A civil servant precipitously comes back to his office and questions himself if he can keep a framed calligraphy where one can read *Shintobul-i*. (Baek 1995: 61) The president's globalization policy is criticized as hurting the spirit of the traditional national identity.

The emergence of *Shintobul-i* is analyzed in this part from three perspectives: First, as a cultural phenomenon, through the vehicle of social mobilization and cultural market; Second, as an economic instrument, where one can "kill two birds with one stone" satisfying both one's material self-interest and national spiritual communion; Third, as a symbol of national identity in confrontation with the alien, internationalization and globalization. But its success provoked also multiple criticisms and many controversial fronts were opened.

4. CONTROVERSIES

Shintobul-i is an invented idiom with a classical traditional form to satisfy a simple contemporary socio-economic purpose. Thus one should not be surprised to see a massive

flow of criticism. This can be summarized into three themes, the origin, the content and the usage of the symbol. But the criticism paradoxically contributed to the reinforcement of the idiom by the ideological enrichment it permitted in the reactions of the original promoters, without being able to destroy the popular basis of users, supporters and ‘profiteers’.

4.1. Origin

The fact that the adage *Shintobul-i* was originally extracted from a Japanese book was the crucial problem. Even though *Shintobul-i* was not a popular set phrase in Japan, the single fact that the word comes from a Japanese writer was a crime of *lèse-majesté*. Korea had been not only a colony under direct Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945, she had been also subjected to a severe repressive cultural policy of assimilation, including the negation of Korean language, culture and even names. Thus, the anti-Japanese sentiment forms an essential part of Korean nationalism. It was not unimaginable to borrow from Japanese ideological repertory to affirm Korean identity in spite of the universal character of the message, “body and soil are one and the same.” Therefore, it was argued that the adage followed the Japanese style idiom formulation. The Korean style idiom should be *Shintoru-i* (身土如一). Kim Jeongsub, the co-president of the National Union to Save Our Language,¹⁰ criticizing the Standard Dictionary of the Korean Language published in 1999, raised the case of *Shintobul-i* as an example of expression introduced from Japanese “in order to kill definitely our language, or considering that the Standard Dictionary is a garbage can where one can throw anything” (Kim Jeongsub 1999).

These criticisms provoked a rapid reaction of the original promoters of the idiom, the Korean Agricultural Cooperative. The organization was mobilized in order to find *a postiori*, the Korean origin of the idiom. In 1992, several possible affiliations were found either in traditional Korea or, interestingly, China, as if the Chinese origin was not as humiliating or embarrassing as the Japanese one. First, *Shintobul-i* was related to *Dong-uibogam*, a famous encyclopedia of traditional medicine: At one passage, one can read “man’s flesh is like the soil of land.” Perhaps, more important was the fact that *Dong-uibogam* was the title of a best-selling novel of the time,¹¹ and reflecting another wave of Korean cultural nationalism of the period “Ours is good.” Second, a passage in *Hyangyagjibsunbang*, another classic encyclopedia of traditional medicine published in 1431, says “Herbs and trees come from regions which correspond to their character, men also have different food and customs so that disease should be treated with medicine and herbs of corresponding character.” *Hyangyagjibsunbang* was a compilation work ordered by the famous and revered King Sejong, who also led the invention of Korean writing system independent from the Chinese characters. The oldest and the most similar formulation was found in a Chinese document *Nosanyeonjongbogam*, written by Buddhist priest *Bodo* of the Yuan dynasty (13-14th

¹⁰ This is a radical linguistic nationalist movement aiming at regenerating the Korean language by extracting as far as possible all traces of foreign influence, including those of ancient China and Chinese characters. They presuppose that there is a pure Korean language to be saved and promoted.

¹¹ Published on February 1990, the novel *Dong-uibogam* is the life story of Heo Jun, a palace doctor of the 16-17th century who compiled and wrote a medical encyclopedia titled *Dong-uibogam*, which literally means the Treasures of Eastern Medicine. The encyclopedia is considered the utmost achievement of traditional Korean medicine which covers not only Korea but also China and Japan. The novel was a best-seller: It sold more than 3.9 million copies in ten years since its publication.

century), where a passage says *Shintobonlaemu-isang* (身土本來無二像): it means “Body and soil originally are not two images”, signifying that the Buddhist world is the reflection of Buddhas’ body. The formulation and the Chinese characters used are very similar, but the meaning is quite apart.

It is very interesting to observe that criticisms provoked a further historical research in order to legitimate the authenticity of the idiom. But closer examination leads to the conclusion that there is not any authentic, direct and identifiable relation between the modern idiom and these classics. Two prestigious Korean medical encyclopedias are mobilized, but either there is only a metaphorical comparison, or a mere indication that medical treatment should be adapted to individual case. The appeal to a Chinese classic can be explained by the formal similarity and the universalist Buddhist component which can ‘forgive’ the foreignness of the origin. The battle of the origin involves very complex international, historical and cultural interactions. Because the first pressures for market opening came from the US, an Oriental classic formulation was imported from Japan and put forward. Faced to critics from purist nationalists, a Korean historic affiliation was found with a complementary role for a Chinese and Buddhist formulation. Most surprising is that for proponents and supporters of *Shintobul-i*, this was another pedigree proving the veracity of the idiom, whatever the *reality* of affiliation.

4.2. Content

Shintobul-i progressively acquired an ideological force in some specific sectors such as food and medicine. “Body and soil are one and the same” diffused the idea that Korean agricultural products were better than foreign ones. Thus, in Korean contemporary everyday life, *Shintobul-i* products are more expensive than imported ones. Australian beefsteak is much cheaper than Korean beefsteak, and Korean garlic is dearer than Chinese one. It seems that, for every agricultural product where there is a competition between Korean and foreign products, one can find the price differential. In this sense, the nationalist ideology of *shintobul-i* had a clear economic impact. In traditional alternative medicine too, the medication produced with Korean raw materials were more expensive than those fabricated with imported materials – mainly from China. The principle of *shintobul-i* was extended to closely related markets such as that of fish and seafood. Korean fish and seafood were dearer than the Chinese ones, for example. The mass media was at the forefront of this ideological inculcation, and TV reports on prime time news on how to distinguish Korean fish and food from the imported ones at market stands were not rare. This nationalist inculcation was more frequent in specific periods of the year like *chuseok* – mid-autumn festival – or *gujeong* – lunar new year –, when families had to prepare the ancestry cult ceremony. It was suggested that the ceremonial food should be cooked with Korean products.

But as in many cases of ideological inculcation based upon large popular consent, few dissenting voices could be heard. Such criticizing voices of the content of *Shintobul-i* were those of scientific and medical community. In a brief article of two pages, the president of the Korean Industrial Health Association, a medical doctor specialized in preventive medicine, ridiculed the *shintobul-i* thought (Yun Imjung 1999: 62-3). He took the example of many famous Korean people living in foreign countries who had achieved great things, who nevertheless didn’t respect the practice of *shintobul-i*. He also raised the fact that historically, most of Korean agricultural products originated from imported seeds. Furthermore, the nationality attribution to products of fisheries coming from the same sea but depending upon

the nationality of the ship was ridiculed. A rural economist from Chungbuk University, in an article titled “*Shintobul-i*, a lie” also underlined the absurdity of the *shintobul-i* thought saying that the limit of one’s own soil was not clear: One country has different types of soil, and a same type of soil (environment) can be found in different countries. (An Inchan 1992: 123-6). An Deogyun, a professor of Korean medicine from Kyeonghi University, also dismissed the scientific character of the *Shintobul-i* ideology: The often cited *Hyangyaggibseongbang* of the King Sejong’s period encouraged the utilization of local raw material for medication because it was difficult and expensive to get Chinese material. And, to believe that the medicinal effect of raw materials depend on nationality is not scientific (Hankook Ilbo 2004). Finally, Jo Han-ig, a professor of medicine from Seoul National University declared *In Medicine, There Isn’t Shintobul-i* in the title of his book (2003).

What is surprising is not the existence of critical voices of *Shintobul-i* in medical and scientific community, but the big number of proponents of this pseudo-scientific theory among scientists themselves. For example, Bu Gyeongaeng, president of the Korean Association of Agricultural Science and professor at Seoul National University, and Gu Ja-ok, professor of agricultural science at Jeonnam University, explained the *Shintobul-i* thought as the Korean version of the scientific theory of coevolution, in a common article titled “Is *Shintobul-i* Superstition or Science?” (Bu Gyeongaeng and Gu Ja-ok 2006: 71-75): “Finally, men, according to race, have different skin color, body shape and biological function. For example, one of the significant differences between white and yellow race is the length of digestive tube. White men who depend on meat of high nutritional value have shorter digestive tube than yellow men who depend on vegetables of low nutritional value. These differences are not without relation with the soil of the land one lives or eating habits. That is the exact consequence of the principle of *Shintobul-i*.” At the end of their explanation, they insisted upon the universal character of the *Shintobul-i* thought mentioning the American anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, the French historian Fernand Braudel, or the German adage “Der Mensch ist was er ist.” This is a very interesting process of the justification of particularity by invocation of universality of the principle of nationalism. In their approach, *Shintobul-i* acquired the status of philosophical, historical and scientific truth resulting from the interactions between life and its environment in the last 100 million years.

4.3. Usage

The reinforcement of the social prestige of *Shintobul-i* along with its popularization was an enormous commercial opportunity for a variety of products, not only agricultural but also pharmaceutical and industrial. *Shintobul-i* progressively became a traditional Korean thought of particular value in the modern times for its supporters, while it was depicted as a superstition, a lie, or a synonym of traditional ignorance. But generally speaking, the social usage of the term can be analyzed as a reflection of the large implicit support for this thought.

The popularization of the term *Shintobul-i* was accompanied by increased interest of consumers for local special products. These were commonly called *Shintobul-i* products and each particular local product was called by the name of locality: Green tea of Boseong, Korean beef of Icheon, dried persimmon of Sancheong, garlic of Uiseong, rice of Cheolwon, pepper powder of Yeongyang, melon of Seongju etc. Because specific products of specific locality were nationally famous and more expensive in the market, there was the need for producers of these localities to limit the use of the geographic name. The national agricultural products quality management service in the Ministry of Agriculture began to

register these geographic specifications in 2002. In 2004, the trademark law was revised to allow the juridical protection of these names as a trademark (Kim Byungil 2003). This can be considered one of the concrete consequences of *Shintobul-i* thought translated into legal evolution.

Some introduced the principle of *Shintobul-i* into the industrial sector: One such a commercially fruitful idea was the bed produced with soil. It is explained that Korean traditional houses were built with loess of soil which produces far infrared rays when heated by sun or fire. These rays have beneficial effects on human body but in modern habitat, dominated by cement and chemicals, people have lost them. The company began soil-loess bed production in 1994, and its president-inventor received a Presidential Award for Invention in 1998 (Daehannews 2001).

When comparing the degree of controversies, everything happened as if one could easily question the origin of the idiom, or even the content and veracity of the idiom. But, for the social usage of ‘body and soil are one and the same’, it is accepted as meaning ‘worth preserving traditional Korean way of life.’ Paradoxically, the critics on the origin and content of the principle allowed the refinement of *Shintobul-i* thought so that it was more easily accepted in its pseudo-scientific clothes within the general population.

5. CONCLUSION

The political strength of nationalism has often been contrasted with its philosophical poverty. The same can be said of *shintobul-i*. I fully agree with Anthony Smith when he says “nationalism is primarily a cultural doctrine or, more accurately, a political ideology with a cultural doctrine at its centre” (Smith 1991: 74). The cultural dimension is again underlined: “More than a style or doctrine of politics, nationalism is a *form of culture* – an ideology, a language, mythology, symbolism and consciousness – that has achieved global resonance.” And he continues to argue “nationalism ideally prescribes a self-sufficiency of resources and purity of lifestyle in line with its commitment to autonomy and authenticity; failing that, nationalists strive for maximum control over their homeland and its resources” (Smith 1991: 91). The case study of *Shintobul-i* indicates that the cultural dimension of nationalism can be deeply intertwined with economic interests so that they mutually reinforce in a synergetic process.

Some findings of this study should be underlined and eventually checked in future research of economic and cultural nationalism.

1) The principal actors in the invention process are educated urban elites, even though farmers contributed to the popularization of the idiom. The organizational strength of the Korean Agricultural Cooperative should not be undervalued: When first criticism was raised, the Cooperative mobilized its organizational machine in order to refine and legitimize the Korean origin of the set-phrase. Furthermore, the Cooperative continues to be active in promoting *Shintobul-i* by campaigning for the exclusive use of Korean agricultural products in collective meal service in schools and for the introduction of the idiom in school textbooks. The intellectual capacity of the inventor and the organizational capacity of the promoter were capital in the success of this adage.

2) The emergence of *Shintobul-i* as a symbol of national identity corresponds to the historical context of economic development and democratization. The economic growth was rapid and continuous from the 1960’s and the standard of living improved for the majority of

the population. One interpretation can be that the need for self-affirmation appeared after surpassing a certain level of economic development. But the question remains: Why at the end of 1980's and not in the 1970's? This basic economic explanation must be completed by the historical evolution of international politics, domestic politics and cultural trends. Briefly, the American pressures for trade liberalization in the Korean context of neo-colonial bilateral relationship, the democratization process with increased participation of civil society in public life, and the cultural movement emphasizing people and nation against internationalized elites explain the cultural nationalism of this period.

3) The diffusion and popularization of *Shintobul-i* covers a quite long period of the 1990's and the first decade of the 21st century. In this article, this period is treated indistinctly: It is just considered as a uniform period of diffusion of cultural nationalism with relative economic plenty and political democratic consolidation. But I am conscious of the changes in Korean society which took place in this period and influenced the nature and status of cultural nationalism: The East Asian financial and economic crisis of 1997 left profound marks not only in socio-economic life but also pushed for cultural and intellectual change. The transformation of cultural nationalism during this period should be analyzed in future research.

4) The form of the slogan is very interesting because it satisfied both the need for social distinction with its false classical style (four character idiom) and the necessity of popularization with its easy message. As a study on *kimchi* nationalism reveals (Han Kyung-Koo 2000),¹² the national symbol in taste is mediocre (popular), but indispensable (symbol). *Shintobul-i*, following the same principle, is comprehensible (popular), but prestigious (symbol). The symbols of national identity must possess the popular appealing power as well as some specific qualities, such as indispensability or prestige, which make them worth of a nation.

In order to elaborate this case of invented symbol of the Korean cultural and economic nationalism of the democratic period, further case studies are needed. The progressive development and institutionalization of Korean traditional medicine, art, cuisine and sports, can be a fruitful object of such investigation, analysis and comparison.

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¹² This article also dates the 'declaration of independence in taste' by the promotion of *Kimchi* as a national symbol in 1988 Seoul Olympics, which doesn't seem to be coincidental.

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