

Dilemma of Neighborhood: Conflicts between China and Korea over Duanwu Festival

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Does neighborhood lead to cooperation or competition? As for the cultural politics of Asia, it is nearly a dilemma whether such neighbors as China, Japan and Korea are collaborating on the formation of Asian or East Asian identity, if any, or they are rather competing with each other for the global recognition of its national and regional identity. In the age of globalization, a cultural heritage, for example, which has been continuously rediscovered and reinvented by nationalistic discourses, seems to be increasingly becoming the arena of competition among East Asian countries. The conflicts between China and Korea over the Duanwu 端午 festival (Dragon Boat festival, Dano 단오 in Korean) clearly exemplify the problems of cultural sharing and cultural ownership in East Asia. This article describes Korea's registration of Gangneung Dano festival, a local practice at the city Gangneung, in the UNESCO cultural heritage list and its aftermath, including the initial furor in cyberspace and China's follow-up cultural policies in response. This article investigates contemporary political and economic needs embedded in traditional heritage, which often drive people into cultural nationalism.