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The modern transformation of Korean political thinking : revisiting the political ideas of the Late-Nineteenth-Century Reformists

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The Modern Transformation of Korean Political Thinking:

**Revisiting the Political Ideas of the Late Nineteenth-
Century Reformists**

Choong-Yeol Kim

**The Modern Transformation of Korean Political Thinking:
Revisiting the Political Ideas of the Late Nineteenth-Century Reformists**

Proefschrift

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de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
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Introduction

1. The Aim of the Research

This study pursues two interconnected themes. Firstly, it unearths the historical origins of the current democratic and republican political ideal of contemporary Korea (South Korea). Secondly, it examines the relationship between democratic/republican political ideas and Confucian political ideas. Concerning the first theme, previous studies have found the origin in the year 1945, when Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). This study traces the origin back to the late nineteenth century and locates it in the reformists' political ideas and their national reform efforts of that time. Next, the reformists' ideas exemplify the close relationship between the *political necessity* ideas of Confucian political thinking, specifically *minbon* (民本, people being the foundation of the state) ideas, and democratic ideas. Seen in this light, the history of Korean political thinking can be seen as a continuous development, despite turbulent historical changes. The present study is conducted with the academic framework of Political Science and specifically the History of Political Thinking, combining a historical approach with political theoretical insights. This basic outline is elaborated in the following sections.

Democracy in the present-day Republic of Korea looks obvious and an integral part of everyday life. However, after the adoption of democracy as a governmental system following the country's liberation from colonial rule, Korea underwent a long period of confrontation between its authoritarian regimes and democratic civil society. Under the

authoritarian and military regimes that lasted for around forty years from the late 1940s, civil society strenuously resisted the regimes' oppressions, staking its claim for democracy. A series of epochal political events encapsulate Koreans' intense desire for democracy. These include the April 19th Democratic Revolution in 1960 in opposition to the authoritarian ruler Yi Sŭngman (Syngman Rhee, 1875–1965), the May 18th Kwangju Democratic Uprising in 1980 against the newly arisen military regime led by Chŏn Tuhwan (1931–), and the June Democratic Movement in 1987 opposing the Chŏn regime. This tradition of resistance against undemocratic governments did not dwindle even after procedural democracy had been accomplished. The so-called candlelight street demonstrations against the irresponsible and corrupt conservative governments in 2008 and in 2016–17 are testament to Korean society's staunch democratic culture and Koreans' aspirations toward a more accountable and rightful government.

As a country that adopted democracy as a governing system after the Second World War, Korea is considered to be one of the successful cases of democratic transition among the so-called third-world countries.¹ Dynamic characteristics of Korean democracy and its analysis in terms of comparative political studies have become major subjects in the study of Korean democracy.² Researchers, specifically Korean political scientists, have mainly examined the development of democracy within the time frame ranging from 1945 to the

¹ See "Introduction: Consolidating Democracy in South Korea" in *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea*, Ed. by Larry Diamond and Byung-Kook Kim (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 1–20.

² For example, Amy L. Freedman, *Political change and consolidation: Democracy's rocky road in Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, and Malaysia* (New York, U.S.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Yoonkyung Lee, *Militants or Partisans Labor Unions and Democratic Politics in Korea and Taiwan* (Stanford, California, U.S.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

present.³ Setting the year 1945 as the origin of modern politics in Korea, however, they have paid little attention to the core *moments* that made the successful democratisation of Korea possible. Is Korean democratisation linked to the initiation of democracy education since 1945, which would have worked as a core moment of building democratic culture? Can it be traced back to the spread of modern education made in the colonial period? Or is it related to a more distant origin; that is, Korean political tradition in the Chosŏn dynasty? It is understandable that modern-style education after the liberation in 1945, especially university education, instilled democratic values into young people. However, is it acceptable that only fifteen years of modern education – if we set aside education in the colonial period, which mainly provided elementary and technical education to Koreans – cultivated democratic values in Korea and Koreans’ earnest aspiration for democracy? Did the April 19th Democratic Revolution in 1960 take place because students learned about democratic values in school? It is fair to say yes, but this factor alone cannot offer a sufficient explanation. If democracy education is not so convincing a factor to explain Koreans’ intense yearning for democracy, then we must go back further into history and explore the cultural encounter with Western civilisation in the late nineteenth century (*Kaehwagi*) and the dominant political traditions of Chosŏn Korea.⁴

³ For example, Han’guk chŏngch’i hakhoe (An Ch’ŏngsi (ed.)), *Hyŏndae han’guk chŏngch’i ron* [Modern Korean Politics] (Seoul: Pŏm’munsa, 1995); Kim Il’yŏng, *Kŏnguk kwa puguk: hyŏndae han’guk chŏngch’i sa kang’ui* [State-building and Wealthy Country: Lectures on the History of Modern Korean Politics] (Seoul: Saeng’gak ūi na’mu, 2004); Kim Yŏngmyŏng, *Han’guk ūi chŏngch’i pyŏndong* [Political Transformation in Korea] (Seoul: Ŭlyu munhwasa, 2006).

⁴ I define *Kaehwagi* (開化期, the opening up period) as the period from 1876 to 1899, when Korea was incorporated into the imperialist international order following the forceful opening of its ports; the period when different political factions formulated diverse reform proposals in response to great external pressures; and the period when national reform efforts in the 1880s and ’90s were frustrated and the incumbent king Kojong proclaimed his absolute rule through the constitution of *Taehan’guk kukje* (大韓國 國制, Constitution of the Great Korean State, 1899).

Claims for democracy are, indeed, cries for basic human values, such as liberty, equality, human rights, rule of law, and people's sovereignty. Without internalising these values, one cannot become a democratic person. Moreover, these values that form people's sense of political rightfulness are created through a socialisation process. In order for someone to become a democratic person, therefore, it is presupposed that the society in which they live should have internalised those values for quite a long time. This means that the modern education during the chaotic period of the 1950s would not have been sufficient for Koreans to internalise such values as their core tenets for the public realm. Accepting that not all democratic values need to be adopted in advance for a society to be democratised, we can still expect that not only the democracy education but also the cultural/intellectual contacts with Western civilisation from the nineteenth century and, furthermore, the long-standing Confucian tradition of Korea – especially the ones compatible with democratic values – contributed to Korea's successful democratic transition and development.

In recent studies of Korean politics, however, efforts to articulate the past and Korean political traditions as a core factor that affected Korea's democratisation have rarely been made.⁵ This is mainly owing to political scientists' disinterest in historical research. However, another core reason is that researchers have preoccupied themselves with themes such as democratic *development* or industrial *development*, rather than with Korean traditions

⁵ Exceptionally, Kim Yong-Jick has attempted to find the origins of Korean democracy in its political tradition, putting emphasis on “public opinion” in Confucian Chosŏn, going as far as claiming that Chosŏn's political institutions and political processes were already democratic. He describes Chosŏn's tradition of “checks and balances” between the king and government officials and between the officials themselves, along with the tradition of respect for public opinion, as proto-democratic. Yet his assertion is overemphasised; rather meaningful questions he did not touch upon include how these traditions were transformed in the late nineteenth century and how they facilitated the acceptance of democratic ideas. Kim Yong-Jick (Kim Yongjik), “Han'guk minjujuŭi ūi kiwŏn” [The Origin of Korean Democracy] in *Han'guk kŭnhyŏndae chŏngch'iron* (Seoul: P'ulbit, 1999), pp. 49–73.

congruent with those developments. That is to say, political scientists have placed their occupational focus more upon the future of Korean political development than on tracing its origins. This kind of research trend was affected, both consciously and unconsciously, by the deep legacy of the modernisation paradigm, the predominant social scientific theory popular from the 1950s to the 1980s, in which political scientists thought that meaningful political developments were made together with the adoption of democratic institutions from the late 1940s. This developmental view of Korean politics drove researchers to see previous dynastic kingdoms as far away from modern politics and thus to consider the past as rather irrelevant to their research.

That Korean political scientists set the start of ‘modern’ Korean politics in the year of 1945 coincides with the adoption of democratic republicanism as new governmental system, abandoning the long-standing monarchical system in the wake of the colonial period. The implied understanding is that with the introduction of a U.S. style government system, Korean society broke radically with its past. Consequently, the main interest of political scientists was the institutional development of transmitted democracy, democratic crisis under authoritarian rule, and democratisation and its consolidation.⁶ Missing from such an explanation is the historical fact that constitutional/republican ideas had been introduced and to some extent institutionalised in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the reformists of the late nineteenth century had attempted to establish a national assembly on the basis of the principle of the division of power, and – albeit for a very short period of time – the early form of national assembly functioned as a body checking the government.⁷ As a consequence,

⁶ A representative example of such an approach is Kim Yŏngmyŏng, *Han’guk ŭi chŏngch’i pyŏndong*.

⁷ In contrast to most Korean political scientists, historian Pak Ch’ansŭng meticulously traced the origins of democratic republicanism in Korea back to the late nineteenth century. Taking a historical

how constitutionalism and republicanism developed in early modern Korea and how Korean reformist intellectuals responded to constitutionalism, and especially parliamentarianism, has been little investigated. Specifically, how late nineteenth-century Korean reformists, educated with Confucian classical texts, came to accept modern political ideas and institutions so swiftly has yet to be researched. In this regard, an argument this thesis pursues is that modern Korean politics had already begun in the late nineteenth century.

The late nineteenth century is a transitional period, when tradition intersected with modernity. Between tradition and modernity, three political factions voiced their visions for the state: conservatives held on to tradition while intensely repudiating Western forces; moderates accepted Western civilisation while maintaining their traditions; and radicals leaned toward Western modernity, claiming a rapid disconnection from tradition. Under rapidly changing political circumstances in the early 1880s, however, the conservatives' arguments lost their legitimacy and soon lost traction on the central political stage, leaving the two options of the moderates' and the radicals' visions. Yet the division between these two groups became blurred in the mid-1890s amid radical changes in political conditions. From the late 1890s, the ideological division developed into two rigid camps: the conservative side that pursued a gradualist modernisation, led by King Kojong (r. 1864–1907), and a radical side that sought a regime change for rapid modernisation, led by radical reformists. Between

perspective, Suh Hee-kyung, a political scientist, also found the origins, or “sprouts”, of Korean republicanism in the late nineteenth century, particularly in the Independence Club movement in 1898. Historian Yi Pangwŏn studied the emergence of *Chungch'uwŏn* (中樞院, privy council) as an early form of national assembly; its development and workings as a government organ checking the executive during the period 1894–1910. See Pak Ch'ansŭng, *Taehan min'guk ūn minju konghwaguk ida* [Republic of Korea is a Democratic Republic] (Seoul: Tolbegye, 2013); Suh Hee-kyung (Sŏ Higyŏng), *Taehan min'guk hŏnpŏb ūi t'ansaeng* [The Birth of the Constitution of Republic of Korea] (Seoul: Ch'angbi, 2013); Yi Pangwŏn, *Hanmal chŏngch'i pyŏndong kwa Chungch'uwŏn* [Political Transformation and *Chungch'uwŏn* in the Last Years of Chosŏn Korea] (Seoul: Hye'an, 2010).

these two forces, several high-ranking government officials took a moderate view on national reforms, but their voices were hardly heard. The point to consider is that all the main political actors shared a common Confucian background due to the traditional education they had received when young. Even in the case of the radicals in the 1880s, they started their learning with Confucian classics in the context of conventional preparation for the civil service examination (*munkwa*) to obtain a position in government officialdom, yet, at the same time, they were keen on the external political environment of the time and picked up novel ideas quickly. Thus, for the reformists, both moderate and radical, tradition and modernity blended together. Through this conflation of thoughts, we can see how traditional ideas interacted with modern political ideas. That is why it makes sense to analyse the reformist intellectuals' political ideas in order to understand the modern development of Korean political thinking.⁸

What is often missed in reference to Chosŏn Korea's Confucian tradition is its plurality. Rather than a single entity, the Confucian political tradition consisted of two contrasting tendencies that co-existed in tension and variously affected Korean intellectual history. I name these two tendencies 'political necessity' and 'ethical ideal'. The late nineteenth-century political factions' different responses to the Western impact are related to their position in regard to these two tendencies.

The need to go back to the late nineteenth century, the reformist intellectuals as the driving force behind the transformation of Korean political thinking, and the need to examine different strands within Confucian political tradition are closely related to the aim of this

⁸ Kim Tohyŏng named the radical reformists *munmyŏng kaehwap'a* (the civilisation and enlightenment faction) and characterised their ideas as all-out Westernisation on the basis of their radical disconnection from tradition. This view fails to grasp that their swift adoption of Western political ideas was mediated conceptually by ideas on *political necessity* in Confucian tradition, as I will discuss it in chapter one. See Kim Tohyŏng, *Kūndae han'guk ūi munmyŏng chŏnhwan kwa kaehyŏk ron* [The Civilisation Transformation and Reform Ideas in Modern Korea] (Seoul: Chisik san'ŏpsa, 2014), ch.3.

dissertation. For a long time, researchers have regarded the radical reformists of the 1880s and '90s as disconnected from their Confucian political tradition, due to a singular focus on their (radical) political actions. Recent studies on the political ideas of the reformists have highlighted the continuity of their ideas with Confucian ideas.⁹ What these studies did not consider was the different strands of Confucian tradition. They failed to discern the different effects of the competing aspects of Confucian political ideas and then the moderate and radical reformists' diverse preferences for the two aspects. The present study aims to revisit the reformists' political ideas especially with regard to the development of Korean political thinking. More than simply a response to the Western impact, the reformists' ideas are also an outcome of a long-term development within Confucian political thinking in Chosŏn Korea.

2. The Theoretical Framework of the Dissertation

The tradition/modernity framework has frequently been used to analyse the thought of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century East Asian reformist intellectuals. The tradition/modernity model is based on a certain conception of time that the word “modernity” acquired after the fifteenth century in Western Europe. Modernity, originating from the Latin

⁹ Representative studies are: Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko (月脚達彦), “Chōsen kaika shisō no kōzō: Yu Kilchun Sōyu kyōnmun no bunmei ron teki riken kunshu sei ron (朝鮮開化思想の構造: 兪吉濬『西遊見聞』の文明論的立憲君主制論)” [The Structure of Reform Ideas in Late Chosŏn: the Theory of Civilisational ‘Constitutional Monarchy’ in Yu Kilchun’s *Sōyu kyōnmun*], 朝鮮學報 159 (1996), pp. 111–44; Chang Insōng, *Changso ūi kukje chōngch’i sasang: tong’asia chilsō pyōndongki ūi Yokoi Shonan kwa Kim Yunsik* [The Political Thought of Topos: Yokoi Shonan and Kim Yunsik in the Period of the Transformation of the East Asian World Order] (Seoul: Sōul taehakgyo ch’ulp’anbu, 2002); Chōng Yonghwa, *Munmyōng ūi chōngch’i sasang: Yu Kilchun kwa kūndae han’guk* [The Political Thought of Civilisation: Yu Kilchun and Modern Korea] (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisōngsa, 2004).

word *modernus*, meaning “of today” as opposed to “of yesterday,” came to be used not only as some chronologically distinct span of time different from Antiquity or the Middle Ages, but also as a new time-consciousness as “completely other, even better than what has gone before.”¹⁰ The social experiences of the Renaissance and Reformation, and specially the Enlightenment, made Europeans feel that the time in which they were living was “qualitatively new” in comparison to previous ages. As Koselleck has argued, it was a *Neuzeit* (new time), or an age of the “acceleration of time.”¹¹ This consciousness of being new and in opposition to the past, which continues incessantly, came to be recognised by many philosophers, literary theorists, and historians. However, viewed from a social scientific perspective, the new consciousness of time was closely related to the awareness of modern time as “progress” or “development.”¹² Because of this characteristic, the modern age became not only a new span of time, as opposed to the ancient and medieval ages, but a qualitatively new time different from all times before it. Thus, from the modernists’ vantage point, the ideas, culture, and customs that persisted before the contemporary age were seen as “antique (ancient)” or “traditional.” Indeed, employment of the “antique/modern” conceptual pair was widespread among intellectuals from the late medieval period through to the nineteenth century. This conceptual coupling changed slightly in the twentieth century, specifically with the advent of modernisation theories in the U.S. that saw non-Western societies as traditional and suggested Western modernity as a model for such non-Western

¹⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 228. In dividing the concept of ‘modernity’ in two, I depend heavily on Peter Osborne. Osborne understands modernity as a new time-consciousness mainly in an aesthetic dimension rather than in a historical dimension. See P. Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 1–29.

¹¹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 12.

¹² In chapter 7 I will offer a concrete analysis of the origins of the idea of progress and its effects on Korean reformist intellectuals’ way of thinking.

societies, with the “tradition/modernity” framework thus becoming a firmly established conceptual pair.¹³

In the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, the modernisation model was a most influential theory in the social sciences. Many scholars used that model to analyse social, political, and economic shifts (or modernisation), specific patterns of developments, and the theorisation of the modern shifts, conducting both theoretical and empirical research.¹⁴ Although the modernisation theories vary according to individual academic disciplines and individual scholars’ interests, these theories upheld some common presumptions: that modern society is qualitatively *different* from traditional society; that the cultural values and institutions of modern societies have *universal* characteristics; and that late-coming societies follow the Western model as a reference point and that there thus occurs a wide-ranging *convergence* towards a Western style of modernity.

The presumptions of the classic modernisation theories, however, came to be criticised from the late 1960s. A number of researchers raised doubts about the

¹³ For the explanation of the shift in the semantics of “modernity,” I referred to Matei Calinescu, “The Idea of Modernity” in *Faces of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 1977), pp. 11–92 and Jacques Le Goff, “Antique (Ancient) / Modern” in *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 21–50.

¹⁴ Elaborate theories concerning the effects of modernisation on society have mainly been formed in the field of sociology. Among the first-generation scholars, T. Parsons developed the most systematic theories of modern society by establishing the action theory, the theory of the social system, and structural-functionalism. (See Talcott Parsons, *The System of Modern Societies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1971) and “Evolutionary universals in society,” *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964), pp. 339–357.) In economics, the modernisation perspective was employed to analyse how an economy in traditional society takes off and grows to become a self-sustaining economy. (For a representative study, see Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge University Press, 1960).) In political science, the modernisation perspective was used to explain the structure of the political process in modern society and political development in modernising countries. (For representative studies, see Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston, US: Little, Brown, 1966) and Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, US: Yale University Press, 1968).) For a representative empirical study of modernisation, see Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958).

presuppositions of the modernisation theories. Specifically, they raised objections to the dichotomy model of tradition versus modernity.¹⁵ The voices of doubt about the classic model grew increasingly louder, as the tradition versus modernity paradigm has many points incongruent with historical reality. As global social developments have shown, modern (or indeed modernising) societies in the non-Western world were recognised as not having converged in Western-style modernity; rather, it turned out that Western modernity was adopted selectively by the elites of non-Western societies. Furthermore, in the global dimension, modernity turned out not to be static, but in a state of continuing reconstruction or reinterpretation, in line with changes in global political and economic systems. New global issues that seem to contravene the premises of modernity, such as the re-emergence of nationalism, ethnic and local identity against nation-state identity, religious fundamentalism, and feminist and ecological movements, emerged and gave rise to new problems and conflicts. These phenomena eventually led researchers to revise the classic presuppositions of modernisation and to form a more refined or “negotiated” version of modernity. The core of this refined version is that modernity is not identical to Westernisation and that there are “multiple modernities” in the contemporary world.¹⁶ Although there exist similar cultural and institutional features inherent in the fundamental conditions of capitalist modernity, they

¹⁵ The first group of scholars who raised questions about the modernisation model were Reinhard Bendix, “Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 9 (3) (1967), pp. 292–346; Joseph R. Gusfield, “Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change,” *American Journal of Sociology* 72 (1967), pp. 351–362; C. S. Whitaker, Jr., “A Dysrhythmic Process of Political Change,” *World Politics* 19 (2) (1967), pp. 190–217; and Dean C. Tipps “Modernization Theory and the Comparative study of Societies: A Critical Perspective,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15 (1973), pp. 199–226.

¹⁶ Mouzelis has argued that only certain elements of Western modernity have a trans-cultural character today so that Westernisation should be seen as “simply one type of modernity” not as “modernity *tout court*”. See Nicos Mouzelis, “Modernity: a non-European conceptualization,” *British Journal of Sociology* 50 (1) (March 1999), pp. 141–59.

are far from homogenous and are in the midst of continual development.¹⁷ In order to escape Western-centred modernity, some researchers even went back to the modern history of western and central Europe and reinterpreted it in terms of multiplicity¹⁸; some even tried to find the characteristics that the modern West had within the historical development of other axial civilisations, such as Islamic, Hindu, and Confucian civilisations.¹⁹

This correction in modernisation theories directly impacted the studies of the recent past of East Asian countries and brought about an essential shift in perspective. In the early stage of research, and specifically in American academia in the 1950s and 1960s, researchers, implicitly and explicitly, took the framework of the Western impact and Eastern response. They saw that East Asian countries that had had “change within tradition” for a long time began to “transform” themselves in the wake of the Western impact. These researchers named the East Asian response to Western stimuli and their ensuing learning of Western technology, institutions, and even values “modernisation.”²⁰ This Western-centric view was deeply embedded in the early works on the modern history of East Asian countries. From the early

¹⁷ For the refined version of modernity or “multiple modernities,” I have referred to the following sources: S.N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129 (1) (Winter 2000), pp. 1–29; ____, “The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity: Modernity as a Distinct Civilization,” *International Sociology* 16 (3) (September 2001), pp. 320–340; ____, “Some Observations on Multiple Modernities” in *Reflections on Multiple Modernities*, Edited by Dominic Sachsenmaier and Jens Riedel with Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 27–41; Dominic Sachsenmaier, “Multiple Modernities—The Concept and Its Potential” in *Reflections on Multiple Modernities*, pp. 42–67; Jürgen Kocka, “Multiple Modernities and Negotiated Universals” in *Reflections on Multiple Modernities*, pp. 119–28.

¹⁸ For a new approach on European modernity in terms of multiplicity, see Björn Wittrock, “Early Modernities: Varieties and Transitions,” *Daedalus* 127(3) (Summer 1998), pp. 19–40; ____, “Modernity: One, None, or Many? European Origins and Modernity as a Global Condition,” *Daedalus* 129 (1) (Winter 2000), pp. 31–60.

¹⁹ For modernity in Confucian civilisation as having a different origin to European modernity, see Kim Sangjun, “Chungch’ŭng kŭndaesŏng: Tæan jŏk kŭndaesŏng iron ŭi kaeyo” [Modernities: Multiple Origins, Multi-layered Formations], *Han’guk sahoehak* 41 (4) (2007), pp. 242–79.

²⁰ John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. 3–10.

1970s, however, this Western-centric modernity model was challenged. It was Benjamin Schwartz who acutely pointed out the limited validity of the framework of “tradition versus modernity” as an approach to the recent past of East Asian countries. In an article he wrote in 1972, he asserted that, “some traditions, far from impeding certain aspects of modernization, may have actually facilitated them.”²¹ While illuminating the intellectual history of nineteenth-century China, Schwartz emphasised that neither tradition nor modernity can be regarded as definite, internally consistent, and mutually exclusive entities. He found the value of tradition as a stimulant of modernity in reformist Chinese intellectuals who began their learning with Confucian texts and then adapted themselves to the changing reality of the late nineteenth century.

In the same context, Paul Cohen, in his book reviewing American scholarship on the recent past of China, disclosed the ideological distortions of American scholars. He persuasively argued that the framework of tradition versus modernity, alongside the impact–response approach, implicitly conveys a Western-centric perspective in our understanding of East Asian history. According to him, Western modernity functioned as the norm for assessing historical developments in non-Western societies, with non-conformity to Western standards being seen as forms of abnormality or peculiarity. In this regard, Cohen proposed discarding the closed polarity of “tradition versus modernity” and, instead, adopting “open models of change, accompanied by open-ended questions” in understanding late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China.²²

²¹ Benjamin Schwartz, “The Limits of ‘Tradition versus Modernity’ as Categories of Explanation: The Case of the Chinese Intellectuals,” *Daedalus* 101 (2) (1972), p. 72.

²² Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 95. Like Cohen, Harry Harootunian discloses the ideological bias of American area studies, which divided the world into the West and the non-West and employed the modernisation perspective (or “structural functionalism”) as a main approach

This anti-Western-centrism was shared by Alexander Woodside. Examining the traditional East Asian mandarinates in China, Vietnam, and Korea, he argued that the meritocratic bureaucracy and examination-based recruitment of government officials in the three Confucian states are testimony to a *multiplicity* of modern developments. Seeing the development of world history in terms of the emergence of rational (or modern) institutions, he stated that East Asian bureaucracy is a “lost modernity” that is equal in weight to Athenian democracy and Roman law. Moreover, spelling out the risks of the meritocratic bureaucracy (that Max Weber thought was a representative characteristic of modernity), which had also been pointed out by Confucian mandarins themselves in the three traditional states, he counter-argued those who insisted on the Western origin of modernity. His point is therefore that modernities may occur independently of one another. Although he limited rationality only in the institutional aspect, his demonstration made his point of the multiplicity of modernity and the problem of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity.²³

From the above discussions, we learn that tradition is not entirely undetached from modernity. Rather, it is the source that gave rise to modernity. Therefore, we need to consider

in viewing the non-Western world. He also reveals as the very reason for that bias the close relationship between the strategic need of the U.S. government and multinational conglomerates to control many non-Western societies soon after the Second World War and the establishment of area studies in American (or Western) universities. Unlike Cohen, however, who steers his course toward “a China-centred history of China” by thoroughly pursuing “native knowledge,” Harootunian suggests the “everydayness” approach as a method by which to explore the *common* experiences of capitalist modernity and its effects on societies regardless of whether they are Western or non-Western. For Harootunian’s criticism of American area studies, see H. Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); for his analysis of Japanese society and culture in the midst of modern change in the 1920s and 1930s, see his *Overcome by Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²³ I think that Woodside interpreted rationality, a core criterion of modernity, narrowly, finding it in institutional characteristics. The evidence of rationality (which is not much different from pursuing efficiency) is widespread in traditional East Asian societies. This dissertation will show in chapter two how the rational worldview was inherent in the Korean intellectual tradition. See Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea and the Hazards of World History* (Harvard University Press, 2006).

‘tradition’ itself in a more theoretical manner. As we can see by its persistence in modernised societies, tradition, by nature, can never be entirely replaced by the elements characterised by modernity. Despite the culture of innovation in capitalist society, numerous and time-honoured institutions, practices, habits, and ways of thinking have survived and affect people’s understanding of the world and their peculiar patterns of living. Indeed, tradition is deeply entrenched in people’s lives. Tradition, as visible and invisible inheritances from the past that provide meaning, legitimacy, and normativity for people’s patterns of behaviours, institutions, and practices, is embedded in entire areas of people’s lives and supplies pre-understanding of their cognisance and conduct. That an institution or practice has been maintained for a long time and been transmitted to later generations indicates that the institution or practice has some utility or addresses needs among those who share it. Insofar as the utility does not completely disappear, it is preserved as a tradition; and even when its utility eventually disappears, the tradition itself is not swiftly abandoned. Moreover, intellectual traditions, even if they have deteriorated for quite a long time, can be revived by later generations when their values are re-appreciated. Thus, tradition has a propensity to be preserved. According to H. Gadamer, this is itself “an act of reason” in the sense that tradition is questioned and then confirmed by people.²⁴ The resilience of tradition is also evident in relation to the new, or the modern. According to Edward Shils, the traditional and the modern in a society coexist and are interdependent. This is because “those things which are new owe a great deal of their form and substance to things which once existed and from which they

²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 281. Gadamer basically accepts that tradition is a source of authority and provides validity for our behaviour. However, he refuses the romantic view that tradition is the opposite of free self-determination being the core value of the Enlightenment, and claims that the preservation of tradition is always the result of our reasonable judgement. He thinks that tradition is to be affirmed, embraced, and cultivated in order to be preserved, and, to that extent, tradition has “an element of freedom and of history itself.”

took their point of departure and direction.”²⁵ The new or the modern actually incorporates the old or the traditional in itself, or takes the form of the old. The new rarely manifests itself without a hand from the old.²⁶

Moreover, tradition, as “a reservoir of conflicting responses to human experiences,” is by nature a complex and multi-faceted structure.²⁷ The complexity of tradition indeed represents the complexity of human experiences. Thus, a long-maintained tradition contains multiple aspects within it. For example, Confucianism in East Asia is generally named an ethical philosophy, yet, if we look into the history of Confucianism, we can see that Confucianism has traditions that cannot be incorporated into the appellation of a normative thought system. Apart from being an ethical philosophy, Confucianism has a tradition of linguistically and philologically analytical and positivist study. This tells us that the rational, empirical, and positivist analysis of objects, which has been seen as peculiar to the Western intellectual tradition since the ancient Greek philosophers, is not actually unique to the West, and Confucianism entails a similar intellectual tradition within itself. In this way, a long-sustained intellectual tradition has a variety of aspects within itself.

Next, due to the multiplicity of tradition, certain traditions function as seedbeds for modernity. In his theory of rationalisation as a core feature of modern societies, Max Weber

²⁵ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 34.

²⁶ Eric Hobsbawm has also pointed this out, indicating that “[s]ometimes new traditions could be readily grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouse of [the old ones].” He found this boundedness of the new to the old in the fact that “[a] large store of such materials [for new traditions] is accumulated in the past of any society and an elaborate language of symbolic practice and communication is always available.” Although he does not clarify the comprehensive given-ness of tradition in a theoretical manner, his intention is that we humans are situated in wide and complex traditions and think within the boundary of tradition. Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” in *The Invention of Tradition*, E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 2–3.

²⁷ Schwartz, “The Limits of ‘Tradition Versus Modernity’,” 76.

found the origin of ‘rationalisation’ in Jewish theology of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The rational aspect of the ancient religion was transmitted to the institutions of Roman Catholicism and later to Protestantism, specifically the Calvinistic variant, which inculcated people with “the obligation to transform the surface of the earth by rationally disciplined labor for the glory of God.”²⁸ Thus, rationality, which is commonly seen as being opposite to tradition, is actually a part of the seemingly irrational ancient religious tradition. This tells us that the modern owes much to the past, or the traditional. As time goes by, some aspects of the past decline, but others survive and are adapted to a new social environment through “transformation.” This is the way in which tradition survives; forms of tradition might change greatly through transformation, yet the substance of the new would be closely connected to the traditional. In this regard, Gadamer has argued that “[e]ven where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything.”²⁹ The old combines with the new social environment and creates new values. According to Gadamer, this dependence on the past is inevitable because “we are always situated within traditions,” and our cognizance and historical judgment have “ingenuous affinity with tradition.”³⁰ This pre-determinate character of tradition makes humans think within the boundary of the given, not distancing it and freeing ourselves from tradition.

When discussing Korean political thinking in the late nineteenth century, researchers have mainly focused on the reformists’ modernistic vision for contemporary Chosŏn, while paying little attention to the deep-rooted Confucian political traditions. As we have shown, however, the new or modern is accepted within the boundary or as a mediation

²⁸ Shils, *Tradition*, p. 292.

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 281.

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 282.

of the old or traditional. This path-dependent character of historical development has rarely been considered seriously in the studies of the reformist intellectuals of the late nineteenth century. In this context, how tradition functioned in the modern transformation of political thinking among Korean reformists has scarcely been researched. In the face of the great pressure for modernisation from the outside world, Confucian political tradition affected the reformists differently: as far as the reformists' thoughts are concerned, the political necessity side of the Confucian tradition survived and functioned as a stimulant for the adoption of modernity; on the other hand, the ethical ideal side of the tradition was under severe criticism in the face of the vehement pressure of change and retreated to the private sphere. The reformists' case, which generally concurs with a long-term trend in Korea's Confucian political tradition, tells us that the Confucian tradition was not entirely replaced by modernity. I name this dual effect of Confucian political ideas on modernity 'complex interactions between tradition and modernity.'

3. The Review of Previous Studies and Method

In the face of the great pressure for modernisation in the late nineteenth century, contemporary Korea witnessed various voices for national reform. We can classify these voices into two groups: one grassroots and the other elite-based, i.e. government officials and Confucian intellectuals. The voice of the former is represented by the *Tonghak* (東學, Eastern Learning) peasants' uprising and their claims for social reform in 1894 and Seoul residents' support for the causes of the Independence Club (*Tongnip hyŏphoe*, 1896–1898) movement in 1898. The *Tonghak* uprising was not different from previous peasant uprisings in that it

occurred because of local government officials' corruption. However, the peasants' claims contained some radical ideas, such as revocation of the social status system, elimination of evil social customs against women and lower-class people, and granting peasants self-rule in local areas.³¹ Seoul residents' support for the Club's political movement was based on their approval of the Club's campaign for rightful government, which was made against the contemporary disorderly government in the midst of national crisis in the late 1890s.³² On the other hand, the voices from elites are divided into three groups: those of conservatives, moderates, and (radical) reformists. Among these political factions, this study focuses on the 'reformist' government officials and intellectuals. It is difficult to confirm whether the reformists outnumbered the others, yet it is fair to say that they recognised the contemporary world better than any other groups; that their reform ideas resonated farther than any others; and that their vision for contemporary Chosŏn society was largely pertinent to the national tasks required for Korea at the time. In this regard, the reformists' vision for post-Confucian Korean society was pronounced.

Previous studies on the reformists can be classified into three categories. Firstly, early researchers, such as Yi Kwangnin, Kang Chae'ŏn, and Shin Yong-ha, illuminated the emergence of the reformists as a political group and their social and political ideas. These early scholars mainly focused on unearthing historical facts related to the life and actions of the reformists (*Kaehwap'a*), the intellectual backgrounds that gave rise to their reform ideas

³¹ A standard explanation of the *Tonghak* peasants' uprising, the peasants' claims, and their historical meanings is given in Shin Bok-ryong, *Tonghak sasang kwa kabo nongmin hyŏngmyŏng* [The Thoughts of *Tonghak* and the 1894 Peasant Revolution] (Seoul: Sŏn'in, 2006).

³² The 1898 street demonstrations led by the Independence Club, and Seoul residents' support for the political campaigns, are discussed in Shin Yong-ha (Sin Yongha), *Tongnip hyŏphoe yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Independence Club] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1976), chs. 6, 7.

(*Kaehwa sasang*) and the modern characteristics of their thought.³³

Next, the political events staged by the reformists were highlighted by researchers. After the opening up of ports in 1876, the reformists organised three epochal political events. Researchers paid attention to the *coup d'état* in 1884 in which early reformists such as Kim Ok'kyun, Hong Yöngsik, Pak Yönghyo, and Sö Kwangpöm organised a radical political upheaval, modelling themselves on the Japanese case of regime change led by reformist bureaucrats.³⁴ The *Kabo* reforms (1894–95), which marked the first large-scale, modern transformation in Chosön that treated a variety of areas of the society and that was inspired by the Japanese in alliance with Korean reformist officials in June 1894, received considerable attention from researchers.³⁵ Likewise, the reformists' last attempt to modernise

³³ In a number of books published mainly in the 1970s and '80s, Yi Kwangnin, Kang Chaeön, and Shin Yong-ha paved the way for the deeper understanding of the reformists. Their primary concern was empirical; to try to fill empty parts of historical pictures on the reformists with newly found facts and newly interpreted ideas. What these scholars shared with each other was their view on the emergence of the reformists. Instead of seeing their rise simply as a response to temporal stimuli, they found it in the influence of late Chosön's practical Confucian studies (*Sirhak*), proven through their human networks and the similarity of their thoughts. In this dissertation I develop this connection further by suggesting a new way of seeing the continuity between *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang*. See Yi Kwangnin, *Han'guk kaehwa sasang yön'gu* [Studies of Reform Thoughts in Modern Korea] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1979); _____, *Kaehwap'a wa kaehwa sasang yön'gu* [Studies of the Reformist Faction and Their Thoughts] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1989); Kang Chae'ön, *Han'guk üi kaehwa sasang* [Reform Thoughts in Modern Korea], trans. by Chöng Ch'angyöl (Seoul: Pibong ch'ulp'ansa, 1984); Shin Yong-ha, *Han'guk kündae sahoe sasangsa yön'gu* [Studies of Social Thoughts in Modern Korea] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1987).

³⁴ The earliest studies on the 1884 *Kapsin coup d'état* mainly concentrated on its intellectual background, the fourteen-point reform proposals, and appraisals of the coup. Pak Eünsuk, *Kapsin chöngbyön yön'gu* [Studies of the 1884 *Kapsin coup d'état*] (Seoul: Yöksa pip'yöngsa, 2005) was the first full-length monograph dedicated to an in-depth study of the *Kapsin* Coup. Her work deserves mention for situating the reformists' fourteen-point reform measures within the historical context, and for documenting profiles of hitherto overlooked commoner-class participants through an analysis of government investigation reports.

³⁵ Lew Young-ick (Yu Yöngik), *Kabo kyöngjang yön'gu* [Studies of the *Kabo* Reforms, 1894–96] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1990) argued that the reforms were basically autonomous efforts by Korean reformists, rather than heteronomous ones initiated and guided by the Japanese. Wang Hyönjong, *Hanguk kündae kukga üi hyöngsöng kwa kabo kaehyök* [Modern State Building in Korea and the

the country radically by transforming the governmental system, the Independence Club movement – especially its street demonstrations in 1898 led by Sŏ Chaep'il, Yun Ch'ihŏ, and other figures – and the Club's media activity through the publication of the newspaper *Tongnip sinmun* (The Independence Newspaper, 7 April 1896–4 December 1899), also became a focal point of researchers.³⁶

More recently, studies on the political ideas of individual reformists by political scientists set the tone. Particularly Yu Kilchun (1856–1914), who left behind meaningful works, has received a fair amount of academic attention.³⁷ In the following paragraphs, I will

Kabo Reforms] (Seoul: Yŏksabip'yŏngsa, 2003) read the reforms from the perspective of modern state formation in Korea.

³⁶ The early and most systematic and comprehensive study on *Tongnip sinmun*, the Independence Club, and its street demonstrations (People's Mass Meeting (*Manmin kongdonghoe*)) was conducted by Shin Yong-ha, *Tongniphyŏphoe yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Independence Club] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1976). He detailed its political actions and ideas meticulously, summarising it as a movement for “national independence, people's rights, and self-strengthening.” Revisiting the Club movement in a critical manner, Chu Chin-Oh (Chu Chin'o), “19 segi huban kaehwa kaehyŏk ron ŭi kujo wa chŏngae: tongniphyŏphoe rŭl chungsim ŭro” [Modern Reformism and Political Activities in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea], PhD dissertation, Yŏnse University (1995) distinguished two periods in the Club's existence, that of enlightenment and that of political reform movement. By researching the backgrounds of the Club's leadership, dividing them into moderates and radicals, he argued that the eventual failure of the Club movement was caused by the radicals who attempted to capture political power. On the whole, Chu Chin-Oh saw late nineteenth-century Korean history as a static phase, not a dynamic process. Judging that a legitimate path to modernisation lay in the traditional king's conservative path, he downgraded the Club's modern-style political movement. And insisting that the Club aimed to strengthen the monarchy, he belittled the radical nature of the Club's political ideas. On the other hand, in his *Imperialism, Resistance, and Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea: Enlightenment and the Independence Club* (Berkeley, California, U.S.: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1988) Vipin Chandra highlighted the nationalist character of the Club's movement and its campaigns for political participation in the 1898 street demonstrations.

³⁷ According to Chŏng Yonghwa, who published a monograph on Yu Kilchun, most of the early studies on Yu focused on the modern (or Western) aspects in Yu's thought until Lew Young-ick turned the focus to a conservative aspect within him. Lew characterised Yu Kilchun as a conservative gradualist and saw that he represented moderate reformism. However, Lew did not concentrate on the complex existence of both (Confucian) tradition and modernity within Yu, which was unveiled by later scholars including Japanese scholars, such as Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko (月脚達彦) and Oka Katsuhiko (岡克彦). See Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ŭi chŏngch'i sasang: Yu Kilchun kwa kŭndae han'guk* [The Political Thought of Civilisation: Yu Kilchun and Modern Korea] (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 2004), pp. 30–33.

critically review these studies.

Studies on the reformists' ideas began from the 1970s when Korean society was still preoccupied with the modernisation perspective and strong nationalism. The early attention to the reformists was therefore centred on their voluntary modernisation amidst national crisis. Shin Yong-ha appraised the *Kapsin* coup in 1884 as “a grand reform in pursuit of *autonomous* modernisation from above.”³⁸ This autonomous modernisation perspective was also applied to the *Kabo* reforms and the Independence Club Movement, so as to emphasise Korean reformists' voluntary efforts for modern transition. In this framework, the autonomous efforts by Koreans ended in failure due to the intervention of foreign powers, as was the case of the *Kapsin* coup and the *Kabo* reforms. The decades-long academic debate over the legitimate path for modernisation between the Independence Club that aimed for a radical path including regime change, and King Kojong's reform efforts (*Kwangmu* reforms (1897–1904)) that pursued a gradual conservative path, essentially resulted from Korean researchers' anti-Japanese nationalism. The nationalist historians thought that King Kojong's voluntary modernisation from above was frustrated by imperialist Japan's forced colonisation of Korea, which was antithetical to the view that located a proper and mainstream course for modernisation in the Independence Club movement.³⁹

³⁸ Shin Yong-ha, *Ch'ogi kaehwa sasang kwa kapsin chŏngbyŏn yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Early-stage Enlightenment Thought and the Kapsin Coup] (Seoul: Chisik sanŏpsa, 2000), pp. 181, 273.

³⁹ This view has been suggested by the historian Yi T'aejin. He found a proper course of state reforms in the late 1890s in King Kojong's initiatives from above, criticising the Independence Club's radical path because of its disruption of national integration amidst foreign threats. A number of researchers have endeavoured to vindicate the existence of the *Kwangmu* reforms led by King Kojong and his aides as legitimate modernisation efforts before Korea's annexation by imperialist Japan. (Whether the *Kwangmu* reforms were meaningful reform efforts or not has been an academic focus for decades.) In line with this, Kyung Moon Hwang has suggested that modernisation measures implemented by the colonial authorities in several areas had already been commenced by the

From the 1990s, however, a number of researchers began to cast doubts on the previous studies based on the modernisation perspective and turned the academic debates to a new direction, highlighting the influence of “tradition” within the Korean reformist movement. The original focus on tradition, especially Confucian tradition, was caused by scholars’ interpretation of the moderate reformist Yu Kilchun.⁴⁰ The co-existence of modernity with tradition within Yu’s thought led researchers to take the influence of Confucian tradition seriously. Naming their approach a *pokhaphwa* (複合化, overlap or complexity) model, Korean researchers extended that model to more moderate figures like Kim Yunsik (1835–1922) and even to King Kojong, and reinterpreted the radical reformist Pak Yŏnghyo (1861–1939) from that perspective. Through these studies, they highlighted that the reformist intellectuals still maintained Confucian ideas and mind-sets while accepting modern ideas and that tradition and modernity were not antagonistic within their thoughts.⁴¹

government of the Great Korean Empire (Taehan cheguk 大韓帝國, 1897–1910) and that the measures taken during the colonial period built on the previous Korean government’s efforts. Where to find the origins of social and economic modernity has been another hot issue among researchers. See Yi T’aejin, *Kojong sidae ūi chae chomyŏng* [The Reign of King Kojong Revisited] (Seoul: T’aehaksa, 2000), ch. 1; Kyung Moon Hwang, *Rationalizing Korea: The Rise of the Modern State, 1894–1945* (University of California Press, 2016). For the recent debate as to whether King Kojong’s reforms actually existed or not, see Kyosu sinmun (ed.), *Kojong hwangje yŏksa ch’ŏngmunhoe* [A Historical Hearing of Emperor Kojong] (Seoul: Purŏn yŏksa, 2005).

⁴⁰ Among Korean researchers, Ha Yŏngsŏn, Chang Insŏng, Kim Pongjin, and Chŏng Yonghwa revisited Yu Kilchun with that perspective; among Japanese researchers, Tsukiasi Tatsuhiko and Oka Katsuhiko took that view.

⁴¹ In his monograph on Yu Kilchun, Chŏng Yonghwa emphasised that, within the core ideas of Yu, his Confucian inheritances coexisted with his modern ideas. This view was shared by Kim Hyŏnch’ŏl, who treated Pak Yŏnghyo as his subject. Yet these researchers reduced multiple factors that affected these two intellectuals’ thoughts to a single factor, i.e., the *pokhaphwa* model. In analysing King Kojong’s political role in the late nineteenth century, Kang Sangkyu put emphasis on the structural weight of the time-honoured Confucian tradition in Chosŏn, posing a counter-argument against previous studies that highlighted the irresolute character of the king. In interpreting the moderate Kim Yunsik, Chang Insŏng emphasised his “locatedness” (or *Topos*) and his adaptation to the changing time within the givenness of the location, which entailed the structure of Confucian tradition. In a comprehensive analysis of Kim Yunsik’s life and thoughts, Kim Sŏngbae also took that view as his

Despite their meaningful contributions, these studies failed to theoretically develop the *pokhaphwa* model, so it is ambiguous whether the term *pokhaphwa* indicates ‘the overlap of tradition with modernity’ or the ‘complex interactions between tradition and modernity.’ In several cases, the researchers simply understood the term to signify the intellectuals’ maintenance of Confucian ideas, alongside their adoption of modern ideas, with reference to their citation of Confucian texts or their upholding of some Confucian ideas or mind-sets. However, the process of merging between tradition and modernity (or the way in which tradition and modernity interact) is an evasive, hard-to-capture process that needs careful investigation. In this context, the *pokhaphwa* is rather complex interactions than a simple overlap or co-existence.

In order to properly examine the *pokhaphwa* as complex interactions between tradition and modernity, ‘Confucian tradition’ itself needs to be seriously studied. The

main framework. Among Japanese researchers, Tsukiasi Tatsuhiko and Oka Katsuhiko took the similar perspective in interpreting Yu Kilchun. See Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ūi chŏngch’i sasang: Yu Kilchun kwa kŭndae hankuk* [The Political Thought of Civilisation: Yu Kilchun and Modern Korea] (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 2004); Kim Hyŏnch’ŏl, “Pak Yŏnghyo ūi kŭndae kukga kusang e kwanhan yŏngu: Kaehwagi munmyŏng Kaehwaronja e nat’anan chŏnt’ong kwa kŭndae lŭl chungsim ūro” [A Study of the Modern State Building of Pak Yŏnghyo: with Focus on Tradition and Modernity within an Advocate of Civilisation in the Era of *Kaehwagi*], PhD Thesis of Seoul National University (1999); Kang Sangkyu, “Chosŏn ūi yugyo chŏk chŏngch’i chihyŏng kwa munmyŏngsa chŏk chŏnhwangi ūi wigi — chŏnhyŏng’gi ūi kunju kojong ūl chungsim ūlo” [The Political Terrain of Confucian Chosŏn and the Crisis of Chosŏn in the Transitional Period of Civilisation: Focusing on King Kojong] PhD thesis of University of Tokyo (2004); Chang Insŏng, *Changso ūi kukche chŏngch’i sasang: tong’asia chilsŏ pyŏndongki ūi Yokoi Shonan kwa Kim Yunsik* [The Political Thought of Topos: Yokoi Shonan and Kim Yunsik in the Period of the Transformation of the East Asian World Order] (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2002); Kim Sŏngbae, *Yugyo jŏk sayu wa kŭndae kukje chŏngch’i ūi sangsangnyŏk: kuhanmal Kim Yunsik ūi yugyo jŏk kŭndae suyong* [The Confucian Way of Thinking and the Imagination of Modern International Politics: Kim Yunsik’s Reception of Modernity in the Late Years of Chosŏn Korea] (Seoul: Ch’angbi, 2009); Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko, “Chōsen kaika shisō no kōzō: Yu Kilchun Sōyu kyōnmun no bunmei ron teki riken kunshu sei ron; Oka Katsuhiko (岡克彦), “Yu Kilchun i p’aakhan “hang’gupōb” ūi kwannyŏm e kwanhan han koch’al: han’guk kundaepōb sasangsa yŏn’gu sŏsŏl” [A Study of Yu Kilchun’s Idea of *hang’gupōb*: A Preliminary Study for the History of Modern Korean Legal Thoughts], *Pŏbhak yŏn’gu* 7 (1997), pp. 203–35.

researchers presuppose that Chosŏn's Confucian tradition as a dominant intellectual tradition was a single entity and that the reformist intellectuals maintained that singular Confucian tradition while accepting modern ideas. However, the Confucian intellectual tradition contains plural elements. Overall, in a dominant tradition of political thinking, certain elements relate to essential and universal matters concerning the maintenance of the political community, while other elements reflect particular conditions of the society. If vehement external pressures of change affect society, as was the case with Korea in the late nineteenth century, and, consequently, a comprehensive appraisal of the old system is made, the universal aspect of tradition matches well with similar traditions from the outside world, when the new appears reasonable and more efficient. On the other hand, the particular aspect of tradition can in such a context easily become the object of drastic controversy between supporters and critics. Likewise, in the face of great challenges to tradition, some elements of intellectual tradition can work as progressive ideas, while others might operate as conservative ideas. Therefore, analysing 'tradition' itself is critically important in knowing its diverse effects in the period of transformation. The studies of the *pokhaphwa* school does not pursue such an approach.

The *pokhaphwa* school's neglect of tradition has created a self-contradiction. While they claim that tradition and modernity are not incompatible, they insist at the same time that the reformists' ideas (or *Kaehwa sasang*) are discontinuous with *Sirhak*, the eighteenth-century practical studies. For example, Chŏng Yonghwa has argued that *Kaehwa sasang* aimed for Western modernity, so it is different from *Sirhak*, which was grounded in the

Confucian social system and simply wished to overhaul it.⁴² Yet *Sirhak* stemmed from Confucianism, which was a practical, rational, and positivist strand within the Confucian ideas. Therefore, his view that *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang* are different indicates that Confucianism and the reformists' political ideas are incompatible, which creates an oxymoron with his basic framework. Chŏng's erroneous conclusion appears to be caused by his neglect of Confucian tradition itself.

Concerning the relationship between *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang*, a number of researchers have demonstrated the connections between the two thought systems. Firstly, they illustrated human connections that Kim Chŏngghi (1786–1856), the *Sirhak* scholar who lived in the early and mid-nineteenth century, delivered *Sirhak* to figures such as Kang Wi (1820–1884) and Oh Kyŏngsŏk (1831–1879), who taught the young reformists about the changing international environment, and that Pak Kyusu (1807–1877), the high-ranking official and the grandson of the *Sirhak* scholar Pak Chiwŏn (1737–1805), inculcated progressive ideas and the shifting world order in the young reformists (*Kaehwap'a*).⁴³ Next, they pointed out

⁴² Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ŭi chŏngch'i sasang*, 135–39. The historian Cho Kwang also claimed that *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang* are rather discontinuous and based on different intellectual grounds. However, he overlooks the fact that both *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang* share a basic way of seeing the world, or epistemology. From the perspective of the long-term development of Korean political thinking, the two thoughts are based on a common worldview. Chang Insŏng argued that the *Kaehwa sasang* did not emerge as the direct inheritance of *Sirhak* and that in the period of the opening up, new texts from China influenced the reformists more than *Sirhak* scholars' works, yet, at the same time, he remarked that *Kaehwa sasang* was "the response of the *Sirhak*-like (Chosŏn's) intellectual tradition" to the outer challenges. He considered visible factors significant without paying attention to internal connections between the two academic strands. See Cho Kwang, "Sirhak kwa kaehwa sasang ŭi kwangye e taehan chaegŏmt'o" [Revisiting the Relationships between *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang*] in *Chosŏn hugisa yŏn'gu ŭi hyŏnhwang kwa kwaje*, Kang Mangil (ed.) (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 2000); Chang Insŏng, "Ch'eje haech'egi ŭi kaehyŏk sasang" [Reform Ideas in the Period of the Destruction of the Existing System] in *Chosŏn sidae kaehyŏk sasang yŏn'gu* (Sŏngnam: Han'guk chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'guwŏn), pp. 212–13.

⁴³ Kang Chaeŏn and Kim Yŏngho surveyed the human networks broadly, and Yi Kwangnin explored Kang Wi's learning from Kim Chŏngghi and his close relationship with the young reformists or *Kaehwap'a*. Kim Myŏngho confirmed that Pak Kyusu, who had absorbed his grandfather's thought,

commonalities between the two thought systems, such as the negation of the China-centred world order and the China-centric view of civilisation and barbarism (華夷觀, *hwaigwan*); the need to open up ports for international trade; equality of all humans; and scepticism about the Neo-Confucian doctrines as viable political ideas.⁴⁴ In addition to these points, we can add a new approach to their similarity, which is to situate both *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang* in the long-term development of Korean political thinking. In particular, by analysing *Sirhak* scholars' worldview and by comparing it with those of the Neo-Confucianism and the late nineteenth-century reformists, we can understand the continuity and discontinuity of both *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang*.⁴⁵

What we have discussed so far is directly linked with the 'method' of the present study. Previous studies took a synchronic approach, putting their main focus on the late nineteenth-century setting and thus examining the reformists' responses to external challenges. Due to this method, researchers failed to grasp the distinctive legacies of Confucian political thinking inherited by the reformists and the continuity and disjuncture of Confucian ideas with the reformists' ideas. This study adds a diachronic approach to the synchronic one so as to gain the perspective of seeing the late nineteenth century in terms of a

taught practical and rational ideas to the young reformists. See Kang Chaeŏn, *Han'guk kŭndaesa yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Modern History of Korea] (Seoul: Han'ul, 1983) [originally published in Japanese in 1970]; Kim Yŏngho, "Sirhak kwa kaehwa sasang ŭi yŏn'gwan munje" [The Relatedness of *Sirhak* to the Nineteenth-Century Reformists' Ideas], *Han'guksa yŏn'gu* 8 (1972); Yi Kwangnin, "Kang Wi ŭi inmul kwa sasang: Sirhak esŏ kaehwa sasang ŭroŭi chŏnhwan ŭi han tanmyŏn" [Kang Wi, the Figure and Thought: A Case of the Transition from *Sirhak* to the nineteenth-century Reformism] in *Han'guk kaehwa sasang yŏn'gu*; Kim Myŏngho, "Sirhak kwa kaehwa sasang" [*Sirhak* and the Nineteenth-century Reformism] in *Han'guksa simin kangjwa* 48 (2011), pp. 134–51.

⁴⁴ Kang Chaeŏn and Kim Yŏngho broadly examined the commonalities between the two idea systems. Kang Chaeŏn, *Han'guk kŭndaesa yŏn'gu*; Kim Yŏngho, "Sirhak kwa kaehwa sasang ŭi yŏn'gwan munje."

⁴⁵ In Part One of this thesis, I will take this approach to argue that *Sirhak* and the reformists' ideas are continuous.

long-term development of Korean political thinking. With the diachronic approach, we can understand the effects of Confucian tradition on the reformists and the relationship of the reformists' ideas with Neo-Confucianism and *Sirhak*.

4. The Structure of the Study

The present study, which examines the transformation of Korean political thinking in the late nineteenth century in terms of complex interactions between tradition and modernity, is composed of three parts.

In the first part (chapters 1, 2, and 3), we examine the characteristics of Confucian political ideas in Chosŏn Korea and their development, especially with regard to their development toward the eighteenth-century practical studies *Sirhak* and the late nineteenth-century reformists' statecraft ideas *Kaehwa sasang*. Concretely speaking, we first conceptualise an analytical framework for the Confucian political ideas and briefly trace their development throughout their entire history (ch.1); then, we illuminate the worldview of *Sirhak* as a new academic trend to discern its relation with Confucianism (ch.2); and lastly, we examine the reformist intellectuals' worldview to identify its continuity with *Sirhak* (ch.3). The core point is to see both continuity and discontinuity between (Neo-)Confucianism, *Sirhak*, and *Kaehwa sasang*, and, for a coherent understanding of these intellectual shifts, we suggest a framework, 'a tension between political necessity and an ethical ideal' in Confucian political ideas in Chosŏn. The concepts 'political necessity' and 'an ethical ideal' are not only about substantial objects or spheres in a political community, but also about different methods of governance and different worldviews. Using this conceptual framework, we can see the

shift of worldview from Neo-Confucianism (or Zhu Xi's philosophy) to *Kaehwa sasang*.

In the second part (chapters 4, 5, and 6), we shift our focus to the late nineteenth-century reformist intellectuals' reconstruction of political thinking. We first analyse the reformists' reconstruction of values and norms for the public realm (ch.4), their novel understanding of government and appropriate governmental systems (ch.5), and then their new conceptions of political legitimacy (ch.6). The primary question is whether the reformists' reconstruction of political thinking is entirely based on the Western political ideas that they adopted anew, or whether their novel political ideas are congruent with their Confucian tradition. If there is continuity between Confucian political ideas and modern (Western) political ideas, which aspect of Confucian ideas is consonant with the modern ideas?

In the third part (chapter 7), we see the negative side of the reformists' ideas, specifically their reception of a developmental view of civilisation and consequently a self-negating view of their culture and customs. The reformists' evolutionary view of civilisation, encouraged by the progressive, future-centred conception of time, engendered an anti-tradition attitude. The four stages theory of civilisation regarded Western countries as the most advanced civilisations, while Korea was seen as only semi-enlightened. Having originated from Enlightenment thinking in modern Europe and being influenced by Social Darwinism, this theory affected the reformist intellectuals' self-negating psychology.

Each part of the dissertation engages in specific scholarly debates. Firstly, in Part One, I suggest a new perspective on the existing debate as to whether *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang* are closely connected with each other or not. Secondly, in Part Two, I aim to provide new insights into previous debates on the relationship between Confucian ideas and modern Western political ideas. And lastly, in Part Three, I suggest a new perspective on the

reformists' self-negating psychology, highlighting a fundamental shift in the view of time that occurred in the late nineteenth century.

PART ONE TRANSFORMATIONS

Chapter One

The Development of Confucian Political Ideas in Chosŏn Korea

The late nineteenth-century reformists' ideas, or *Kaehwa sasang*, are located at the last phase of the history of Confucian political ideas in Chosŏn and, at the same time, the first stage of Korean political thinking in the post-Confucian era. *Kaehwa sasang* has been viewed by a number of researchers as related to the late eighteenth-century 'practical learning' trend *Sirhak*, but others have argued that the two are rather discontinuous than continuous. While the former group of scholars have pointed out the commonalities of both *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang* as against Neo-Confucianism, the latter have claimed that *Sirhak* is still a variant of Confucianism, while *Kaehwa sasang* is far from the Confucian thought system. Both of these views are reasonable, yet we should point out that the two groups of researchers touch upon different aspects of the same matter. From the perspective of research stages in the history of political thought, those researchers' discussions are focused on the question of continuity and discontinuity between the two thought systems. In general, in the studies of political thinking, researchers see, firstly, the ideas of individual thinkers; secondly, they investigate the continuity and discontinuity of political ideas in a certain period; and finally, they try to capture a long-term tendency of political ideas. Roughly speaking, the advance of research in the history of political thinking is possible when individual thinkers' idea systems are clarified and broadly shared among academic circles and the idea systems of the thinkers are

compared. The academic debate over *Kaehwa sasang* and *Sirhak* was caused partly by the deficiency in shared grounds for comparison. Indeed, scholars have not yet reached an agreement on the essential characteristics of Confucian political philosophy, and likewise, on the identity of *Sirhak* as a specific idea system. Due to this reason, the scholars could not reach a common ground and consequently have failed to compare them appropriately, let alone finding an agreeable long-term intellectual tendency. This chapter, as the first chapter in Part One of this study, in which we aim to understand *Kaehwa sasang* in terms of the development of the Confucian political ideas in Chosŏn Korea, suggests an analytical framework for the investigation of Confucian political ideas, which will function as a benchmark for the comparison of diverse intellectual trends. By means of this framework and through an analysis of the development of the Confucian political ideas, we can expect to find a long-term tendency.

Previous studies on the history of Korean political thinking have rarely attempted to establish an analytical framework as a method to understand a long-term trend. For instance, the work, *Han'guk chŏngch'i sasangsa*, written by the members of the Association for Korean and Asian Political Thoughts, which covered the entire period of Korean history, simply listed the themes of political thinking in each era, without a consideration of their continuity/change and of a pertinent analytical framework.⁴⁶ Other works on Korean political thought by political scientists hardly differ from this template.⁴⁷ Historians, on the other hand,

⁴⁶ Han'guk tongyang chŏngch'i sasangsa hak'hoe (ed.), *Han'guk chŏngch'i sasangsa: Tan'gun esŏ haebang kkaji* [The History of Korean Political Thought: From the era of *Tangun* to that of National Liberation] (Seoul: Paeksan sŏdang, 2005).

⁴⁷ This does not mean that they did not consider the context of the internal development of political ideas in each era; yet the inner connections of ideas are not distinctive in those works. See, representatively, Pak Ch'ungsŏk, *Han'guk chŏngch'i sasangsa* [The History of Korean Political

have considered intellectual continuity and change in a certain period as well as individual thinkers' idea systems, but they did not develop an analytical framework either. They mainly focused on the shifts in political thinking during specific periods. For example, in his book Jung Jae-Hoon has examined the process of deepening ethicalisation in Confucian understanding during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴⁸ Kim Chunsŏk and Chŏng Hohun have illuminated a new intellectual trend turning toward practicality in late Chosŏn in opposition to the Neo-Confucian ethical preoccupation of mid-Chosŏn.⁴⁹ Other researchers, such as Chŏng Okja and Yu Ponghak, have focused on the practical and variegated intellectual and cultural trends in the late eighteenth century and their development into the early nineteenth century.⁵⁰

This chapter first draws out a conceptual framework as a model for the analysis of Confucian political ideas in Chosŏn and then, in the second section, interprets the history of Confucian political ideas by means of that framework.

1. A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Confucian Political Ideas in Chosŏn:

A Tension between Political Necessity and an Ethical Ideal

Thought] (Seoul: Sam'yŏngsa, 2010); Shin Bok-ryong (Sin Poknyong), *Han'guk chŏngch'i sasangsa* vol. 1, 2 [The History of Korean Political Thought] (Seoul: Chisik san'ŏpsa, 2011).

⁴⁸ Jung Jae-Hoon (Chŏng Chaehun), *Chosŏn chŏngi yugyo chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu* [Studies of Confucian Political Thought in Chosŏn in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries] (Seoul: Sŏul taehakgyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2005).

⁴⁹ Kim Chunsŏk, *Chosŏn hugi chŏngch'i sasangsa yŏn'gu* [A Study of the History of Political Thought of Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Chisik san'ŏpsa, 2003); Chŏng Hohun, *Chosŏn hugi chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu* [A Study of the Political Thought of Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Hye'an, 2004).

⁵⁰ Chŏng Okja, *Chosŏn hugi Chosŏn chungghwa sasang yŏn'gu* [Chosŏn's Self-Consciousness of Chinese-ness in Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1998); ____, *Chosŏn hugi yŏksa ŭi ihae* [Understanding of the History of Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1993); Yu Ponghak, *Yŏnam ilp'a pukhak sasang yŏn'gu* [A Study of Yŏnam Pak Chiwŏn and His Group's Ideas of Pukhak] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1995).

In his book highlighting the statecraft ideas of the seventeenth-century Confucian scholar Yu Hyŏngwŏn (1622–1673), James Palais classifies the manifestation of Confucianism in Chosŏn into “Confucian philosophy” (or “Confucian ethics and metaphysics”) and “Confucian statecraft.”⁵¹ Palais’s main focus is on the ideas and practices of Confucian statecraft in Chosŏn, so his division primarily reflects his intellectual concerns. His division, which distinguishes Confucianism as philosophy from Confucianism as statecraft, has been considered a standard way of understanding the state ideology Confucianism.⁵² This framework assumes that ‘Confucian philosophy’ is singular, implying that it does not have conflicting elements within itself. What this interpretation misses is the fact that Confucian philosophy is not only about “ethics and metaphysics” but also includes political teachings on governance. These two aspects of Confucian philosophy, though seemingly consistent and mutually augmentative, are basically diverse in character and thus may create conflicts in specific circumstances. Palais appears to have seen Confucian thought as hierarchical, imagining a model in which Confucian ethical philosophy is dominant and Confucian political teaching is drawn from it. The model suggested here sees Confucian philosophy as having an inner tension between ethical character and political character. From this standpoint, we can create a new framework in which the two theoretical orientations within Confucianism affect the political and the intellectual reality in separate and conflicting ways.

I understand Confucianism as a ‘reasonable comprehensive doctrine’ in which

⁵¹ James Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), pp. 5, 18.

⁵² In Korean academia, the similar distinction was labelled *kyŏnghak* (經學, study of Confucian texts) and *kyŏngsehak* (經世學, statecraft ideas) (or *simuhak* (時務學)). Yet this distinction is slightly different from Palais’s division because *kyŏnghak* mainly refers to the interpretation of classical Confucian texts, not merely the philosophical aspect of those texts.

reasonable religious, ethical, and political philosophical aspects are blended.⁵³ Due to its political philosophical aspect, it naturally contains core ideas of politics within itself, such as what a political community is by nature, how it is to be governed, and which vision people should or can have for an ideal community. When seeing Confucianism as a system of political thought, we can get some help from Plato in order to obtain a suitable analytical framework, because he suggested significant theoretical insights that can be developed as a theoretical framework. Indeed, Plato's *The Republic* is one of the earliest treatises on the nature and aim of political community in the Western intellectual tradition, and the ideas within that book are applicable regardless of cultural particularities.⁵⁴ In the book Plato suggests that any political community must satisfy two essential aspects in order for it to be sustained as a state. The first one is needs or necessity. In Book Two of *The Republic*, he says that the city state where he lived originated for the purpose of meeting each individual's "needs" (369 c) or for resolving "the matter of necessity" (373 b). Here, needs or necessity basically indicates food, housing, and clothing, yet beyond these he enumerates other necessary things on behalf of the city state, such as the arts, music, poetry, and many other services. He does not stop there and argues that for a state to be an ideal state the guardians' role is important. In Book Two he briefly mentions that the guardian ideally should be a philosopher, and then in Books Five and Six he paints a picture of an imagined city ruled by a

⁵³ When defining Confucianism, the most distinctive point is its comprehensiveness. It encompasses political philosophical, ethical, and religious aspects. In this regard, Rawls' expression "reasonable comprehensive doctrines" is pertinent to define it, although the context of use is different. By that expression, Rawls indicates a social aspect in a liberal and plural society, where reasonable people can choose a doctrine as proper. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 58–66.

⁵⁴ The ideas or insights in *The Republic* are significant in that they provide pertinent conceptual tools to capture the core characteristics of Confucian political ideas. Plato's ideas also endow a moment for Confucian ideas to be rephrased in more generally accepted terms.

philosopher king.⁵⁵ Thus, Plato's description of both the origin and ideal form of the state serves our purpose. Plato did not disregard the importance of "necessity"; yet, at the same time, he thought that necessity alone was not enough to maintain the state. In other words, a long-sustained state must satisfy both necessity and an ideal model. Confucianism as a political philosophy must contain both aspects within it.

We can develop these insights of Plato in a theoretical manner. If a political community is to endure over a long period of time, it must first resolve the problem of needs or necessity, i.e., the question of how to maintain a community as an independent and long-lasting state, a primary task for any political community. For the sake of this task, a state should resolve a number of matters, which primarily include national security from foreign invasions, economic sustenance for the members of the community, and the resolution of conflicts among domestic groups and individuals in orderly ways. We can conceptualise this aspect of political community as the question of 'political necessity.'

Secondly, a political community must resolve the problem of how to lead it to a desirable model of society, which is the matter of an 'ideal.' Every stable and long-lasting state in history has had its own ideal model of society, whether strong or weak, which works as a goal binding diverse parts of society together and provides them with a certain direction. Such an ideal has mainly been furnished by an ethical religion, a collectively shared idea of a better society inherited through the memory of the glory of the past, or a political ideology. In John Rawls's term, this kind of desirable model is "a well-ordered society," which he found in a liberal democratic society where its basic institutional principle is to be grounded upon

⁵⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

“fair justice.”⁵⁶

In the case of Chosŏn Korea, the desirable model of society was mainly drawn from (Neo-) Confucianism (or the Song Studies), the state-sponsored orthodox teaching. The Confucian ideal model of society envisaged a society regulated by the Confucian ‘ethical’ system, which contained elaborate teachings to cultivate a person’s mind and body and developed metaphysical theories of ethics, as well as functioning to underpin the legitimacy of the stratified social division and other socio-cultural institutions and customs. Governing the mind and behaviour of a person, the interrelationship of members within a family and clan, and divisions between those of upper and lower status, the Confucian ethical system furnished resources for the order of the society and stabilised it.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Rawls thinks that in a pluralist democratic society two principles of justice should work as a foundation of basic institutions: first, each person should have “equal basic rights and liberties”; second, in social and economic matters, each person should have “fair equality of opportunity” and social policy should satisfy the condition of “the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.” (Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 5–6.) On the other hand, in *The Republic* Plato also suggested his own ideal model of society. As shown in Books Five and Six, a number of conditions must be satisfied, including production and consumption being operated in a communal way, the family system no longer prevailing, a philosopher king controlling the city tightly, and citizens being united in their thoughts and feelings. For the idea of “a well-ordered society,” see Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 35–40.

⁵⁷ Confucianism has a tension within itself between its recognition of the existing social hierarchy and an ideal that anybody can become a noble man by cultivation of the self. However, in practical terms, Confucianism is not so much a philosophical theory propagating inborn equality of people, but rather as a secular ethico-religious and political theory taking for granted a human division between the high and the low. For example, the basic assumption of Confucian ritual propriety *ye* (禮) was based on the human division between the upper and the lower, and the near and the far, while its spirit of the pursuit of propriety in dealing with persons and situations is universally acceptable. (See Rhee Wontaek (Yi Wŏnt’aek), “Kaehwagi yech’i robut’ŏ pŏpch’i roŭi sasangjŏk chŏnhwan: miwan ŭi ‘taehan’guk kukje’ wa kŭ sŏngkyŏk” [From Rule by *Ye* to Rule by Law in the Opening-up Period: The unfinished ‘*Taehan’guk kukje*’ and its characteristics], *Chŏngch’i sasang yŏn’gu* 14(2) (2008), p. 67.) Although Confucianism does not mention human division according to inborn social status, in Chosŏn the existing social status system did not give rise to serious conflicts with Confucian doctrines. This weak tension between the ideas and the reality is also revealed in Confucian ethics itself. Confucian ethics functioned in two ways: an individual’s moral perfection and inner transcendence, and its support of the existing social class, values, and customs. These two aspects, as Max Weber has well pointed out, did not create conflict. Generally, the former was pursued upon the basis of the wider social hierarchy, as Confucian thinkers mainly belonged to the upper class. For Weber’s

At the same time, Confucianism as a political idea system supporting ‘monarchic rule’ also had clear ideas concerning the question of political necessity. As far as classical Confucian texts are concerned, the issues regarding necessity were never neglected. Above all, such issues as the importance of agriculture for the economic sustenance of a state, a proper tax rate for land products for peasants’ lives, preparation of the military for national defence, the need to build peaceful relations with neighbouring countries, fair treatment of legal disputes, and the need to revamp national laws and abstain from inhumane punishments are testimony to this. Improving state laws and institutions and stabilising the state were the main concerns of sage kings in ancient China. Indeed, the virtues of the sage kings, as seen in *Shujing* (書經, Book of History), were virtues of political necessity, rather than ethical virtues.

In these matters, apart from the principle of convenience, Confucianism developed very political principles, which worked to sustain a state. A number of ideas such as *minbon* in *Shujing* and *Mencius* (孟子) that governance should be executed for the sake of the interests of the ruled; the Mencian idea that a despotic ruler who does not care about the people’s well-being can be legitimately expelled from the throne; and the teachings of the sage kings Yao and Shun that rulers should follow the public opinion (公論) of their subjects, all functioned as principles in addressing state affairs and formed the core ideas of Confucian political philosophy. Some scholars have erroneously regarded these principles as stemming from Confucian ethics rather than political necessity. Yet these teachings were closely related to the end of maintaining a kingdom and preventing its collapse.⁵⁸ As both Confucius and

analysis of Confucianism as little in tension between the secular and the transcendental world, see Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth (The Free Press, 1962), pp. 227, 235.

⁵⁸ Indeed, whenever Chosŏn Korea faced serious national crises, the most commonly cited passages in government dialogues were those from political necessity ideas within classical Confucian texts.

Mencius put it, the loss of the support of the ruled (民信) endangers a state more than anything else.⁵⁹ These ideas of governance coming from deep thoughts about the rise and fall of states thus arose from the need to sustain a state and functioned as principles in framing laws, institutions, and government policies in Confucian polities.⁶⁰

For example, when the *Tonghak* peasants uprising took place in 1894, the previously common, ethically-embellished phrases and way of speaking in the royal court disappeared and, instead, the passages concerning political necessity reappeared, such as “common people are the foundation of the state” quoted from *Shujing*. See *Kojong sillok* [高宗實錄, Annals in the Reign of King Kojong] 31/5/25 and 31/12/13. Entries in *Kojong sillok* in the period from 1863 to 1895 were written in the lunar calendar system, but entries from 1 January 1896 were written in the solar calendar system. I will not specify this hereafter. I have referred to *Kojong sillok* translated into modern Korean, which is found on the website of *Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe* [National Institute of Korean History]. (<http://sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.jsp>). Whenever I found unnatural translations, I have referred to the original passages and corrected them. Hereafter, ‘*Kojong sillok*’ is abbreviated to *KJSL*.

⁵⁹ See *Analects of Confucius*, Book 12, ch. 7; Mencius 4A9 and 7B14.

⁶⁰ In explaining the two aspects of Confucian political ideas, we should consider the historical context of classical Confucianism in the time of Confucius and Mencius. The original Confucian ideas emerged in the *Chunqiu zhanguo* (春秋戰國, B.C. 770–A.D. 221) era in which Confucius who had erudite knowledge on extant classical texts unfolded his own thought on the contemporary Chinese world. China at the time was divided into a number of states, big and small in size, fighting against and allying with one another. Contemporary China was losing the old mores which had been maintained under the Zhou (周) kingdom (a feudal system). Yearning for the old Zhou’s institutions and customs, Confucius endeavoured to restore the old social mores of the peaceful times of the past. Keeping in mind the disorder of his age, he set up his vision with an ideal of a morally complete person (君子) and an ideal governance run by a morally mature ruler. He also established core ethical concepts, which would be developed further by the scholars of later ages. So the most important contribution of Confucius to Chinese thought was his substantiation of Confucian *ethical* philosophy by augmenting existing words of values with philosophical meanings. However, as we can see in *Lunyu* (論語, *Analects of Confucius*), the ethical emphasis was largely balanced by the needs of people. In other words, he did not disregard the sphere of necessity for people, though his priority still lay with the ideal of a moral man and moral virtues. Likewise, Mencius who lived in the warring states era saw recovering the “stability” of the Chinese landmass as the most critical question. He thus reinterpreted the rule of the sage kings including Yao and Shun and that of the peaceful era of Xia, Yin and Zhou (夏殷周) as “lenient rule” (*injŏng* 仁政), a concept connoting ethical nuance. Put differently, in the warring states era, states pursued their needs, and in many cases the rulers sought their own needs, not their countrymen’s needs or interests, which easily led to wars. It is in this context that Mencius put weight on the so-called “moral politics,” inheriting the ethicalisation of politics made by Confucius. He wanted to achieve peace and stability through the ideas of moral politics. Yet it does not mean that he did not care about the problems of needs for a state. Rather, in Mencius the two were balanced. He just aimed to domesticate the sheer pursuit of political interests of the states. So, it would be reasonable to argue that in Mencius the ethics-based understanding of politics was in harmony with the necessity-based understanding of politics.

The two aspects, political necessity and an ideal model of society, need each other if a political community is to sustain itself over a long period of time. Thus, the two are complementary and may be well balanced. However, they may create a tension. If a political community pursues the demands of necessity to an extreme degree, it may find it easy to neglect the question of the ideal and this could result in serious social instability. In contrast, an unbalanced pursuit of a certain ideal may put the needs of the community in danger. It is a common thread throughout history that states put matters of necessity above ideals, since the former is more urgent and directly related to the survival of the political community itself. However, in Chosŏn, national security was guaranteed under Chinese regional hegemony so that it enjoyed a long peace for the first two centuries and its agrarian economy maintained stability. These conditions gave birth to a characteristic political thinking that focused on the goal of building an ethically well-ordered society rather than pursuing the goal of political necessity. This tendency, furthermore, was encouraged by Cheng-Zhu Confucianism itself. The Neo-Confucianism, which was considered to be the orthodox Confucian teaching by Chosŏn Confucians, did not strictly distinguish the values or virtues of the private domain from those of the public domain, and the cultivation of high ethical virtue in the private

Let us turn our sight to Confucius's and Mencius's interpretation of ancient texts. For instance, *Shujing*, one of the earliest history books in China, contains the facts regarding the great political achievements of famous historical figures in the ancient peaceful times. Confucius reinterpreted these figures' "political" accomplishments *ethically* in the context of his time. By doing so, in *Lunyu*, both the political (or historical truth-based) and the ethical aspect came to coexist. Mencius in a more vivid fashion synthesised both the view of politics in *Shujing* and that in *Lunyu*. This is the original form of *classical* Confucian political ideas. Later in Song China Confucian scholars thoroughly investigated the ethical concepts originally established by Confucius, and other texts like *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, and elaborated the ethical aspect into a philosophical system. This would be the reason why many modern researchers see Confucian philosophy simply as an "ethical" philosophy. Considering the original form of Confucianism from a *political* perspective, however, we can see that even its ethical ideas were motivated by the political demands of the era. In this context, *injŏng*, the ideal of lenient rule, taught by Confucius and Mencius, should also be interpreted as an ethically domesticated concept of essentially political necessity-based teachings shown in *Shujing*.

domain was demanded of the ruling class as a precondition of their entering the government officialdom. Thus, in Chosŏn, ethical cultivation through the study of Confucianism was an integral process to be pursued before engaging with the public service, and this gave Chosŏn's government officials an intense ethical character. Eventually, this peculiarity of Chosŏn, the pursuit of the ethical ideal over political necessity, created seriously *ethicalised* politics on the one hand, and on the other, led to a fundamental tension between the two.

The conceptual framework of 'a tension between political necessity and an ethical ideal' is basically related to an essential way in which political communities exist, or it indicates two different spheres to handle within communities. Yet it is also a framework signifying *different methods* of statecraft. Since the framework concerns two diverse but essential spheres to deal with, they are complementary, but at the same time, due to their different methods, the two are competitive with each other. In this respect, it is different from the commonly used framework in political theoretical analysis, that is, political idealism versus political realism, which are rather grounded on the interest or preference of an agent in choosing a policy alternative. The model suggested here covers not only the matter of different objects (or spheres) but also different approaches to 'good governance.' In Confucian Chosŏn, the *ethical ideal-based understanding of politics* subordinated politics to the ideal of an ethical society. Ideal politics was conceived as rule by a *sage king* or *junzi* (君子, noble man) who had all virtues and wisdom within himself. Governance was seen as an extension of a person's thorough moral cultivation. The expression of *sugi ch'iin* (修己治人 (Ch.: *Xiuji zhiren*)), which means "cultivate oneself before governing others"

represents this Confucian ideal.⁶¹ On the other hand, in the *political necessity-based understanding of politics*, politics was viewed as being based upon the elaboration of pertinent laws, institutions, and customs rather than an individual ruler's cultivation of virtues. In other words, by improving common people's material conditions of life, such as safety, eating, and housing, it is possible to attain a good governance. And only after satisfying these could people pursue moral dignity. Considering material conditions as the primary means for a better life, this necessity-based understanding of politics counter-balanced the Neo-Confucian metaphysical theories and had the resources to open up a new perspective on the world.

In Chosŏn's political and intellectual arenas, the tension between the two approaches to politics reflects a number of conflicting relations. Firstly, in the academic arena, scholars who had more interest in political necessity underscored pragmatic studies or *kyŏngsehak*, alongside philosophical discourses on ethics, in opposition to those on the side of an ethical ideal, who put emphasis single-mindedly on the latter. Secondly, in regard to the purpose of Confucian studies, the former thought that statecraft and the well-being of the ruled was the primary value of Confucianism, while the latter regarded ethical cultivation and the sophistication of Confucian philosophy as the most crucial. Lastly, in terms of worldview, the scholars interested in political necessity had a propensity for seeing the world more

⁶¹ In reality, *sugi* and *ch'iin* are only weakly connected to each other. As is understood when carefully considered, *ch'iin* (the public in character) is not simply an extension of *sugi* (the private matter), but an area beyond individuality. *Ch'iin* is the realm in which multiple interests of numerous people compete against one other and thus different approaches are required. While different in context, the peculiarity of a political arena as *public sphere* different from private (or economic) sphere was propounded by Arendt. (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1998).) And the ideal of ethical politics in Confucian Chosŏn in which *sugi* and *ch'iin* were thought to be consecutive and its problems in the sixteenth century were well pointed out by Kim Yŏngsu. See Kim Yŏngsu, "Chosŏn kongnon chŏngch'i ŭi isang kwa hyŏnsil" [The Ideal and Reality of the Politics of Public Opinion in Chosŏn], *Han'guk chŏngch'i hakhoebo* 39(5) (2005), pp. 7–27.

rationally and practically, while those who focused on the ethical ideal interpreted the world from an intensely ethical perspective. We will address this difference of worldview of the two elements of the Confucian political ideas in concreteness in the following two chapters.⁶²

2. An Outline of the Development of Confucian Political Ideas in Chosŏn

2.1. The Deepening of Ethical Politics (15th and 16th C.)

The tension in Confucian political ideas can be seen both in an individual scholar's thought system and in the development of the intellectual history of Chosŏn as a whole. In what follows, we focus on the changing dynamic between the two aspects of Confucian political ideas throughout the Chosŏn period. Since the aim of this chapter is to lay bare the general trend of the development of Confucian political thinking in Chosŏn, we will highlight the characteristics of each century in a succinct manner rather than embracing all aspects of a certain period.

During the first century since the establishment of the dynasty (15th C.), Chosŏn's political ideas were largely balanced between the aspect of political necessity and that of ethical ideal. This was closely related to the character of Confucianism in this era as well as to the reform-oriented political circumstances in the early years of the dynasty. Chosŏn was founded upon the initiative of Confucian scholar-officials who objected to the former

⁶² This duality is similar to the model that Fukuzawa Yukichi drew in interpreting the "low development" of East Asian countries. He ascribed the relative backwardness of the East, in comparison with the West, to the tradition that cherishes "virtue" or "ethics" and, conversely, the relative advancement of the West to the tradition that heightens "knowledge" or "truth." He then confronted the former theoretically, asserting that the accumulation of knowledge or truth built the advanced Western civilisation. Fukuzawa's model is different from mine, but, in terms of the intention of the duality, both look compatible. See Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (文明論之概略: 福澤諭吉著作集 vol. 4) (Tokyo: 慶應義塾大學出版会, 2004), ch.6.

kingdom Koryŏ (高麗, 918–1392), which, as of the late fourteenth century, faced serious national problems that threatened its survival. The scholar-officials followed Neo-Confucianism, or Cheng-Zhu studies (or *Xinglixue/Sŏngnihak* (性理學)) – which had been established during the Song dynasty of China (宋, 960–1279) from the tenth to the twelfth century and transmitted to Koryŏ in the late thirteenth century. Under the influence of the Neo-Confucianism, they called Buddhism, the dominant religion in Koryŏ, a heretical theory, with a group of scholars criticising it harshly and naming it a core social problem.⁶³ This new intellectual trend from Song that strengthened the metaphysical base of classical Confucian ethics had a theoretical depth comparable with Buddhist philosophy. Yet its effects on Koryŏ were still limited, as a consequence of the course of transmission of that teaching. Concerning the introduction of the Neo-Confucianism into Koryŏ, previous studies largely agree that the new teaching was not directly introduced from Song, but done later through Yuan (元, 1260–1368) during the years when Koryŏ was subjugated by the Mongolian empire. Thus, the characteristics of Yuan Confucianism were accepted into Koryŏ. In Yuan, Confucianism, which was established under the leadership of the great scholar Xu Heng (許衡, 1209–1281), was a practical teaching combining self-cultivation and statecraft rather than mere metaphysical debates on ethics.⁶⁴ Consequently, in late Koryŏ, the core philosophical and

⁶³ Confucians' attack on Buddhism in the late fourteenth century is well shown in Chŏng Tojŏn (1342–1398)'s *Pulssi chapbyŏn* (佛氏雜辨, Miscellaneous Remarks on Buddha). Kim Yŏngsu, reviewing both Buddhist and Confucian political ideas in a theoretical manner, saw the shift of state-sponsored religious teachings that took place in accordance with the shift of dynasty as “the transformation of Korean civilisation.” Kim Yŏngsu, *Kŏn 'guk ŭi chŏngch'i: Yŏmal sŏnch'o hyŏngmyŏng kwa munmyŏng chŏnhwan* [The Politics of Building the State: Revolution and Civilisation Shift in the Last Years of Koryŏ and Early Chosŏn] (Seoul: Yihaksa, 2006).

⁶⁴ Almost all recent studies on Confucianism in late Koryŏ appear to agree on this view. See Moon Chul-Young (Mun Ch'ŏlyŏng), “Koryŏ hugi sinyuhak suyong kwa sadaebu ŭi ŭisik segye” [The Introduction of Neo-Confucianism in Late Koryŏ and the Confucian Scholars' World of

metaphysical discussions of Cheng-Zhu studies, which would become a predominant academic subject since the sixteenth century, did not occupy a dominant position. Even pivotal sources on the Cheng-Zhu studies compiled in Song China were not yet introduced into contemporary Koryŏ.⁶⁵ As researchers like M. Deuchler and J. Duncan have argued, the Confucian scholars in late Koryŏ adopted the novel theory on top of the existing Ancient Learning of Confucianism focusing on classical texts, and a number of Confucian scholars still thought that the Buddhist philosophy was compatible with the Neo-Confucian ideas, seeing the former as a method of self-cultivation.⁶⁶

This trend did not shift radically in the first century of the Chosŏn dynasty. Despite the widespread Confucianisation of Chosŏn society, the Neo-Confucian philosophical themes were not thoroughly comprehended yet, and besides the Neo-Confucian studies, scholars heeded practical studies, such as the military and agriculture. This academic trend in the fifteenth century was also linked to the conditions of the early years of the kingdom.

Consciousness], *Hanguksaron* 41, 42 (1998), pp. 335–417; To Hyŏnch'ŏl, *Koryŏ mal sadaebu ūi chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Confucian Scholars' Political Thought in the Last Years of Koryŏ] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1999); Jung Jae-Hoon, *Chosŏn chŏn'gi yugyo chŏngch'i sasang*.

⁶⁵ Indeed, in the late fourteenth century, core works like *Zhuzi daquan* (朱子大全) and *Zhuzi yulei* (朱子語類) were not yet introduced into Korea. To Hyŏnch'ŏl, “<Kyŏngje mun'gam > ūi inyong chŏn'gŏ ro pon Chŏng Tojŏn ūi chŏngch'i sasang” [The Political Thought of Chŏng Tojŏn with Reference to His *Kyŏngje mungam* (經濟文鑑)], *Yŏksa hakbo* 165 (2000), p. 92.

⁶⁶ John Duncan emphasises that the existing Ancient Style Learning of Confucianism was mixed with the newly adopted Cheng-Zhu Learning shared by bureaucratic aristocrats (or scholar-officials) in late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn, and finds the practical nature of Confucian learning at the time in this respect. On the other hand, To Hyŏnch'ŏl argues that the Confucians' treatment of Buddhism is divided into two groups: a moderate group led by Yi Saek (李穡, 1328–1396) admitted it as a teaching for self-cultivation, regarding both Buddhism and Confucianism as essentially similar, but another group represented by Chŏng Tojŏn severely criticised it as a fundamental problem of Koryŏ society. To Hyŏnch'ŏl characterises these two groups' different views as based on different understandings of the Neo-Confucianism, finding their diverse attitudes toward the founding of the new dynasty Chosŏn in this regard. See Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), pp. 20–24; John B. Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (University of Washington Press, 2000), pp. 237–65; To Hyŏnch'ŏl, *Koryŏ mal sadaebu ūi chŏngch'i sasang*.

Confucian scholar-officials were largely concerned with the matters of necessity during the epoch. They had to establish a firmly centralised administrative system, as well as new institutions, rituals, and values. Moreover, in this century, academic activities were mainly stimulated by the government, with government academies (*kwanhak*, 官學) functioning as institutes to educate young Confucians to do the government a service. This environment gave Confucians leeway to pursue practical studies and engendered Chosŏn's development in the material dimension, as shown in scientific inventions and agricultural growth during King Sejong's (r. 1418–1450) and the ensuing kings' reigns. This balanced setting in academia in the fifteenth century between practicality and ethical serenity has been regarded by researchers as being placed in the midst of the transition from late Koryŏ's focus on statecraft and literature to mid-Chosŏn's attention to philosophical ethics.⁶⁷

In contrast to the fifteenth century, the sixteenth century witnessed the deepening of the Neo-Confucian philosophical themes and the general ethicalisation of Confucian understanding in Chosŏn. This change was closely related to the early establishment of peaceful diplomatic relations with the Ming dynasty of China (明, 1368–1644). As a consequence, from the late fifteenth century, new sources on the Neo-Confucianism were introduced from Ming China, which soon fostered academic activities in Chosŏn including the compilation and printing of a number of new books. Among the newly introduced books, the core texts which greatly influenced the Confucians and determined the character of

⁶⁷ This interpretation was put forward in early studies conducted by such researchers as Hyŏn Sang'yun and Yi Pyŏngdo, and was reiterated by Kim Hongkyŏng. See Hyŏn Sang'yun, *Chosŏn yuhaksa* [The History of Confucianism in Chosŏn], edited and annotated by Yi Hyŏngsŏng (Seoul: Simsan, 2010), p. 58; Yi Pyŏngdo, *Han'guk yuhaksa* [The History of Confucianism in Korea] (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1987), p. 100; Kim Hongkyŏng, *Chosŏn ch'ogi kwanhakp'a ŭi yuhak sasang* [The Confucian Ideas of the School of Government Academy in Early Chosŏn] (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1996), pp. 17–18.

Chosŏn Confucianism were *Xinjing* (心經, Classics on the Human Mind and Heart) by Zhen Dexiu (眞德秀, 1170–1235) of Song and *Xinjing fuzhu* (心經附註, Supplementary Exegeses on the Classics on the Human and Mind and Heart) by Cheng Minzheng (程敏政, 1445–1499) of Ming, which extracted passages on the nature of the human mind and heart (心) from classical texts. These texts and other sources drove Chosŏn scholars to delve into the psychological structure of the human mind and heart, especially the bases of humanity's ethical behaviour, leading to the famous and ever-lasting academic debate on *li* (理) and *qi* (氣).⁶⁸

This ethical inclination also prompted Chosŏn Confucians to maintain high ethical standards in all their thought and actions, with *susin* (修身 (Ch.: *Xiushen*), ethical self-cultivation) becoming the core notion representing Confucianism. While in the fifteenth century *ch'iin* (治人), or secular accomplishments through humans' voluntary acts, was still thought to be significant, in this century the focus was shifted to *susin*, the internal cultivation of ethical virtues. This change is well registered in the shift in the king's study at the royal lectures (*kyŏng'yŏn*, 經筵). According to Jung Jae-Hoon, the Confucian text *Daxue* (大學, Great Learning) and its supplementary exegeses by Zhen Dexiu, *Daxue yanyi* (大學衍義, Supplementary Exegeses of Great Learning), were used in different ways in the two centuries.

⁶⁸ These new sources were influenced by the popularity of Wang Yangming's philosophy in Ming. Wang Yangming's new Confucian theory, arisen from the criticism of Zhu Xi philosophy, however, was criticised by Confucian scholars in Chosŏn such as Yi Hwang and his disciples from the early years of its introduction, and was accepted by only a small number of scholars throughout its entire history. For the trend of Confucian thoughts in the sixteenth-century Chosŏn, I have mainly referred to Jung Jae-Hoon, *Chosŏn chŏn'gi yugyo chŏngch'i sasang*. Specifically, on the introduction and effects of the books on human's heart and mind, see Jung Jae-Hoon's, pp. 175–203. For the historical development of the Wang Yangming philosophy in Chosŏn, see Chŏng Ch'akŭn, *Tongyang chŏngch'i sasang: han'guk yangmyŏng sasang ūi chŏn'gae* [The Eastern Political Thought: the Development of Wang Yangming's philosophy in Korea] (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 1996).

During the fifteenth century, they were mainly used as texts for the method of statecraft with an emphasis on ancient Confucian sage kings' great political deeds, but, in the sixteenth century, were used as texts for ethical cultivation as the basis of statecraft.⁶⁹ In accordance with this change, generally, in selecting texts for the king's Confucian study, books on ethical cultivation were preferred to those on great examples of statecraft. Moreover, as *susin* was emphasised, Confucianism itself was interpreted as a study for following sages' minds and hearts (or learning to become a sage), with Confucianism being frequently named *sŏnghak* (聖學, sages' teaching). Indeed, a number of works composed in this century used the term *sŏnghak* for their titles, an example of the ethical disposition of Confucianism at that time.⁷⁰

This switch in Chosŏn Confucianism is well shown in the works of Yi Hwang (李滉, 1501–1570). Yi, the most prominent Confucian scholar in this age, reached the highest stage of the Neo-Confucian philosophical theories for the first time in Chosŏn. His scholarship is characterised by his stress on the *a priori* existence of humans' ethical nature, or *li*, and its preponderance over human temperaments and desires, or *qi*. In his famous debate with Ki Taesŭng (奇大升, 1527–1572) about the psychological basis of humans' ethical behaviour, he refuted Ki's empiricism based on the primacy of *qi*, while arguing for the predetermining character of *li* and its working within *qi*.⁷¹ As he took the transcendental, ethical principle-centred approach to norms, his understanding of politics was seriously tilted

⁶⁹ Jung Jae-Hoon, *Chosŏn chŏngi yugyo chŏngch'i sasang*, 95–150, 204–239.

⁷⁰ The titles of the main works of the two respected Confucian scholars of the sixteenth century, Yi Hwang and Yi I, were *Sŏnghak sipdo* (聖學十圖) and *Sŏnghak chip'yo* (聖學輯要). Ibid., pp. 296–374.

⁷¹ This famous debate over *li* and *qi* became a perennial topic among Chosŏn Confucians. The division of political factions from the late sixteenth century largely coincided with the fault lines in the academic discussions over this issue. For the debate between Yi and Ki, see Yi Hwang, "Non sadan ch'iljŏng sŏ" [Discussions on the Four Beginnings and the Seven Feelings] in *T'oegye sŏnjip*, edit. and trans. by Yun Sasun (Seoul: Hyŏn'amsa, 1993), pp. 211–96.

ethically. In his memorial presented to King Sŏnjo (宣祖, r. 1552–1608) in the year of the king's enthronement, he exhibited this view of politics. In that memorial, he advised the king to cultivate himself through diligent study of Confucianism if he wanted to become a great ruler. He viewed achieving ethical virtue through studying Confucianism as the essence of political matters.⁷² Except for the ethical cultivation, he scarcely mentioned the matter of political necessity of his time and the factual side of politics. He perceived politics simply as a sub-field of ethics in accordance with his *li*-centred interpretation of the Neo-Confucian ethical philosophy.

While this extreme predilection for ethical politics had some positive effects on Chosŏn, it had serious negative influences on Chosŏn politics.⁷³ The *susin*-based education reinforced the ethical concerns of scholar-officials and led them to assert ever more dogmatically their claims in handling national affairs. Perceiving issues only from the ethical point of view, they failed to resolve conflicts through mediation and compromise. Hence, in spite of the demands for high ethical integrity, in reality, the sixteenth century witnessed severe political conflicts and purges between political factions. The literati purges between the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century were closely associated with this ethical definition of politics. As the Neo-Confucian ethical understanding of the world was deepened, the younger groups of bureaucrats who internalised the Neo-Confucian teachings as their

⁷² “其三曰 敦聖學 以立治本. 臣聞 帝王之學 心法之要 淵源於大舜之命禹. 其言曰 人心惟危 道心惟微 惟精惟一 允執厥中. 夫以天下相傳 欲使之安天下也. 其爲付囑之言 宜莫急於政治 而舜之於禹 丁寧告戒 不過如此者. 豈不以學問成德 爲治之大本也. 精一執中 爲學之大法也. 以大法而立大本 則天下之政治 皆自此而出乎. 惟古之聖謨若此 故雖以如臣之愚 亦知聖學爲至治之本 而僭有獻焉.” Yi Hwang, “Mujin yukjoso” [Memorial of Six Articles Presented in the Year of Mujin] in *Kukyŏk T'oegyepip* (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1997), p. 106.

⁷³ Chosŏn's ethical politics had a positive effect in that it caused the subjugation of the king to the authority of Confucianism and, consequently, there was no despotic ruler throughout its entire history. However, this taming of the throne engendered the weakening of the king's power and irresolute kings at times of national crises.

tenets in both private and public life attacked the high-ranking, merits-based officials who had practical attitudes towards national issues. From the standpoint of the intellectual transformation in this era, the purges of the young literati by the senior merit subjects, called *Sahwa* (士禍), represented a collision between the existing practical approach to statecraft and Confucian fundamentalism.⁷⁴ After the ethical fundamentalist view came to predominate in the political arena from the sixteenth century, the scholar-officials' dogmatism and sternness in repelling different opinions yielded the invigoration of factional strife. As a typical case, the disputes of political factions over the funeral costume in King Hyōnjong's (顯宗, r. 1659–1674) reign, or *kihae yesong* (己亥禮訟, 1659), represented the limits of ethical politics.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Edward Wagner found a core reason for *Sahwa* in the intellectual shift of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, specifically the emergence of young literati who committed themselves to Confucian tenets. Edward W. Wagner, “Chōngch’isa chōk kwanjōm esō pon Yijo sahwa ūi sōng’kyōk” [The Characteristics of the Literati Purges in Chosōn seen from Its Political History], *Yōksa hakbo* 85 (1980), pp. 150–51; ____, “Yijo Salim munje e kwanhan chaegōmt’o” [The Question of *salim* in Chosōn Revisited], *Chōnbuk sahak* 4 (1980), p. 170.

⁷⁵ In the issue of the proper funeral costume of King Hyojong's (孝宗, 1649–1659) step-mother at Hyojong's funeral, the core issue was how to regard the deceased king who was the second son of his father Injo (仁祖, 1623–1649). The representative debaters of the *namin* (南人, the Southerners) faction, Yun Hyu and Hō Mok, argued that while Hyojong was the second son, once he was enthroned as the king, he should be treated following the funeral rite of the first son. On the opposite, the *sōin* (西人, the Westerners) discussant, Song Siyōl claimed that King Hyojong's step-mother should wear a second-son's funeral costume, while emphasising the universal application of Confucian funeral rituals. In this debate, Yun Hyu upheld the principle that the royal family's status (公) should be separated from that of private families (私). Song Siyōl took the opposite view. Hō Mok was rather eclectic, arguing that although Hyojong should be treated as the first-son's case (due to his position of king (尊尊)), his step-mother should wear a second-son's funeral costume (親親). In this debate, while Song relied on Zhu Xi's texts on *ye*, Yun and Hō mainly depended on ancient texts on *ye*. Concerning this debate, Chi Duhwan has argued that at the core of this debate lies how to see the royal family's rituals in comparison with commoners' rituals. Chōng Okja, accepting this view, has extended its implication so that the *yesong* and the ensuing party competition (or *hwan'guk* (換局)) were not the characteristic illness of Chosōn politics, but a normal evolution of party politics (*pungdang chōngch'i*) among political forces or parties. Rhee Won-taek rephrased the arguments over *ye* in more common terms and insisted that the core points of the debate were the conflict between *ch'inch'in* (親親, Treat those who are close closely) and *chonjon* (尊尊, Respect those who are respectful) and between the logic of the private (私) and that of the public (公), and that the pivotal

2.2. The Resurgence of the Ideas of Political Necessity (17th and 18th C.)

This ethical understanding of politics lasted into the seventeenth century, with Zhu Xi's philosophy still being powerful as orthodox study. A representative scholar of this century, Song Siyöl (宋時烈, 1607–1689), indeed, maintained Yi Hwang's view of politics, although the political faction he belonged to (*sŏin*) was the opposite of Yi Hwang's disciples (*namin*). Song's view of politics is well shown in his memorial to King Hyojong (孝宗, r. 1649–1659), which was submitted in the year when the king was enthroned. Song stated there that his memorial was intended to cultivate the king's mind and heart, which he regarded as the essence of a king's rule. Concretely, he advised the king in a highly ethical manner that maintaining his mind and heart still and reflecting on himself are the essence of governance.⁷⁶ This ethical understanding of politics, which ascribed governing to the king's ethical cultivation of mind and heart, lasted throughout the century and even to the late nineteenth century.⁷⁷ In this century, however, the philosophy of Zhu Xi had apostates too. This is well

difference between them is shown in Song Siyöl's inclination to *ch'inch'in* (the private) and Yun Hyu's *chonjon* (the public). On the other hand, Kim Sang-joon approached the *yesong* by means of a social scientific concept "*moralpolitik*", arguing that the *yesong* is an attempt to tame the real politics with *ye* or morality and the feuds in that process is not specific in Confucian Chosŏn. See Chi Duhwan, "Chosŏn huki yesong yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Disputes over Ritual Propriety in Late Chosŏn], *Pudae sahak* 11 (1987), pp. 77–125; Chŏng Okja, "17 segi sasang'gye ūi chaep'yŏn kwa yeron" [The Intellectual Re-arrangement in the Seventeenth-century Chosŏn and the Debates over Ye], *Han'guk munhwa* 10 (1989), pp. 211–40; Rhee Won-tak, "Kihae pŏkje nonjaeng kwa kŭ i'nyŏm chŏk chi'hyang" [The Controversy over Funeral Costumes in the Year of *Kihae* and Its Ideological Direction], *Han'guk chŏngch'i hakhoebo* 34(4) (2002), pp. 23–39; Kim Sangjun, "Chosŏn sidae ūi yesong kwa moralpolitik" [The Disputes over Ritual Propriety in Chosŏn and *Moralpolitik*], *Han'guk sahoehak* 35(2) (2001), pp. 205–36.

⁷⁶ Song Siyöl, "Kich'uk pongsa (己丑封事)" in *Kukyŏk Songjadaejŏn* 5 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1980–88), p. 240.

⁷⁷ For example, when King Kojong (高宗, 1864–1907) came to the throne in 1864, Yi Kyŏngjae (李景在, 1800–1873), one of the three highest officials at the time, advised the new king on the right

shown in Song Siyöl's stigmatising of '*samun nanjök*' (斯文亂賊, enemy of Confucianism) on the two scholars, Yun Hyu (尹鑄, 1617–1680) and Pak Sedang (朴世堂, 1629–1703), who made critical remarks regarding Zhu Xi's interpretations of core Confucian texts. The co-existence between Zhu Xi's extreme adherents and opponents formed the seventeenth-century academic environment in Chosŏn.

The impetus of the intellectual shift was the Confucians' concentration on the ideal of an ethical society and consequently their neglect of the state's necessities. The symptoms of national crisis had already appeared in the late sixteenth century. Since the staple state institutions concerning taxation, such as the land tax, the tributes of local products to the royal court (貢物), and the military service system, were not reformed appropriately, a number of problems arose and reformist officials spoke up. This situation further worsened as the country was invaded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Japan for eight years from 1592. After the war ended, the government endeavoured to reform and reconstruct the country. Prince Kwanghae (光海, r. 1608–1623) in alliance with the *puk'in* (北人, the Northerners) faction made an attempt to reform the country, but the prince's rule was soon overturned by the mainstream moralists, since his deeds ran counter to Confucian ethical norms. The following attacks by Manchus and Chosŏn's eventual submission to them in 1637 illustrated the precarious situation of Chosŏn, which was related to the neglect of the necessities of the country.

As Kim Chunsök has persuasively argued in his analysis of Confucian political thinking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the face of this predicament, the

way of governance, saying that "once your Majesty's mind is upright, the royal court will stand right and our whole country will also do so." *KJSL*, 1/01/10.

Chosŏn government and Confucian scholars had to deal with two essential tasks.⁷⁸ The first one was to resuscitate the Confucian social order that had been loosened by the foreign invasions, especially the Manchu invasion and their following occupation of the Chinese lands. For aristocratic *yangban*-class Confucians, the chaotic domestic and international situation was evidence of crisis of their predominance in the social status system, so they aimed at strengthening the hierarchical social system by tightening the Confucian ethical order. The second task was to carry out national reform to redress chronic ills resulting from outdated state institutions. This task was combined with the crucial socio-economic change in the age. As their salary was paid in the form of rice, instead of tax rights on fields (as had been the case earlier), owing to the shortage of available land, the *yangban* officials sought to accumulate private land. This situation gradually divided the population into a small number of big landlords and a majority of self-employed peasants cultivating small plots or tenants owning no land.⁷⁹

The different factions within political elite responded differently to the two tasks mentioned above, although it cannot be denied that all regarded them seriously. According to Kim Chunsŏk, the *sŏin* (西人, the Westerners) party focused on the rehabilitation of the existing social order, while they viewed the need to address state reforms in a limited way mainly through the amelioration of the existing tax system. Later, the *soron* (少論, the Disciples' group) faction, the minority within *sŏin*, were more reformist and practical, and moderate in handling their opponent party, *namin* (南人, the Southerners), as opposed to the

⁷⁸ Kim Chunsŏk, *Chosŏn huki chŏngch'i sasangsa yŏn'gu*.

⁷⁹ Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe (ed.), *Han'guksa 30: Chosŏn chunggi ŭi chŏngch'i wa kyŏngje* [The History of Korea: Politics and Economy in Mid-Chosŏn] (Seoul: Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 1998), pp. 379–516.

noron (老論, the Patriarchs' group), which was the majority faction and took a sternly repelling attitude to the *namin*. On the other hand, the *namin* party, and especially those originally from the *puk'in* faction, placed more weight on national reforms, and their reform ideas were more radical than those of the *noron* faction.⁸⁰ Some scholars in this minority faction moved further toward the relativisation of orthodox Zhu Xi's philosophy, turning back to classical texts in pursuit of the original ideas of Confucius.⁸¹

Let us now briefly see the scholars who paid attention to the political necessities of their time and then those who triggered the academic shift in the century. As far as the attention to political necessities are concerned, we should first mention Yi I (李珥, 1536–1584) who himself was a great Confucian ethical philosopher in the sixteenth century while having acute interest in the problems of his time and thus encouraging later generations to turn their eyes to the problems of their time. Yi's academic character is well shown in his main works that are marked by his balanced interest in both the Neo-Confucian ethical philosophy and statecraft. The core writings composed during his serving as a government official, i.e., *Tongho mundap* (東湖問答, Dialogue at an Eastern Lake) and *Manŏn bongsa* (萬言封事, A Secret Memorial of Ten Thousand Words), addressed the emerging crises in contemporary Chosŏn. Likewise, one of his main works named *Sŏnghak chip'yo* (聖學輯要, A Digest of the Sages' Teachings) treated both Confucian ethical ideas (*susin*) and thoughts on governance (*ch'iin*). Yi's interest in necessity was inherited by a number of scholars including Yu Hyŏngwŏn (柳馨遠, 1622–1673), the famous seventeenth-century scholar.

⁸⁰ For the political ideas of the main academic figures in each political faction after the Hideyoshi invasion, see Kim Chunsŏk, *Chosŏn hugi chŏngch'i sasangsa yŏn'gu*.

⁸¹ For the political ideas of the *namin* scholars whose origin was from the *pukin*, such as Yu Hyŏngwŏn and Yun Hyu, see Chŏng Hohun, *Chosŏn hugi chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu*.

Witnessing the devastated state after the two invasions, Yu aimed to rebuild staple state institutions on his own in his magnum opus *Pan'gye surok* (磻溪隨錄, A Miscellaneous Account of Pan'gye Yu Hyŏngwŏn). He reviewed the ancient institutions of both China and Korea in a very meticulous manner, and traced the ideas of state institutions through both classical texts and the works of previous scholars. His radical opinion of the nationalisation and redistribution of land to the people in order to eliminate the evils of the private amassment of land is famous.⁸²

On the other hand, from this century, scholars began to harbour a 'relativist' view on Zhu Xi's interpretation of Confucian texts and, at the same time, went back to classical texts without clinging to Zhu Xi's philosophy. Scholars like Hŏ Mok (許穆, 1595–1682), Yun Hyu, and Pak Sedang objected to Chosŏn scholars' excessive adherence to Zhu Xi's exegesis of Confucian texts and led the eighteenth-century practical learning trend.⁸³

The eighteenth century saw blossoming of statecraft ideas, as well as the ongoing relativisation of Zhu Xi's orthodoxy. Groups of scholars who are now named *Sirhak* (實學) scholars led this academic trend. The practical academic circumstances of this century were closely associated with the settlement of previous crises and the development of Chosŏn under the great leadership of King Yŏngjo (英祖, r. 1724–1776) and his grandson Chŏngjo (正祖, r. 1776–1800). And under these kings' rule, the country saw a resurgence from its previous decline. The intellectual characteristics of this century, that is, diversification of academic interest and intellectual liveliness, was in tandem with the socio-economic changes,

⁸² For Yu Hyŏngwŏn's reform ideas on staple national institutions, see Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions*; Kim Chunsŏk, *Chosŏn huki chŏngch'i sasangsa*, ch. 2.

⁸³ Concrete analyses of these scholars' new interpretations of Confucian texts and their views on contemporary Chosŏn will be discussed in the next chapter.

such as urbanisation of Seoul and the general development of commerce.⁸⁴ Along with this vivacity, the legacy of the ethical ideal and its worldview continued in this century. Specifically, Manchu's rout of Chosŏn and rise as a new empire in the Chinese landmass imprinted a deep sense of uneasiness and indignation on the part of Chosŏn Confucians and led them to claim a military expedition to Qing (北伐), though made surreptitiously. As Qing's predominance of mainland China became stable, the Chosŏn court's attention now turned to efforts to commemorate Ming China's grace toward Chosŏn by building an altar for the late Ming emperors. In line with this, many of them claimed that the orthodoxy of Confucian civilisation was moved onto Chosŏn, calling their country voluntarily "little China" (小中華).⁸⁵ While the distinction between civilisation and barbarism (*hwaigwan*) largely decreased together with Qing's firm political and cultural power, the ethical view still affected orthodox Confucians' way of thinking and had them sustain the ethical understanding of politics in the century.

The stabilisation in relations with Qing brought about significant intellectual changes in Chosŏn. Firstly, as new books, especially those on Western sciences and

⁸⁴ For the urbanisation and social change and their effects on the emergence of *Sirhak*, see Ko Tonghwan, "Chosŏn hugi tosi kyŏngje ūi sŏngjang kwa chisik segye ūi hwakdae" [The Growth of Urban Economies and the Expansion of Knowledge in Late Chosŏn], *Tasi, Sirhak iran muŏt'inga* [Again, What is *Sirhak*?] (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2007), pp. 249–75.

⁸⁵ Chŏng Okja has seen that the mainstream Confucians' self-consciousness of their country as "little China" was their honour and pride in view that Chosŏn inherited the glorious Confucian civilisation which was tarnished in China by Manchu Qing. Kye Sŭngbŏm, however, has interpreted it critically. Highlighting the Chosŏn court's construction of *Taebodan* (大報壇, Altar for Great Recompense) for the purpose of paying tribute to three Ming emperors, he argued that that ceremony, which continued during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, indicated a continuity of the anachronistic conception of *hwaigwan* (華夷觀) in Chosŏn. Indeed, this episode tells the resilience of the ethical view of politics in Chosŏn. See Chŏng Okja, *Chosŏn hugi chosŏn chungghwa sasang yŏn'gu* [Chosŏn's Self-Consciousness of Chinese-ness in Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1998); Kye Sŭngbŏm, *Chŏngji toen sigan: Chosŏn ūi taebodan kwa kŭndae ūi munt'ŏk* [Time Stalled: Chosŏn's *Taebodan* and the Threshold of Modernity] (Seoul: Sŏgang taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2011).

technology, were introduced, scholars began to see the world from a more empirical and scientific viewpoint. They came to know that the new knowledge system better explained physical and natural phenomena than the classical Chinese texts did.⁸⁶ Secondly, visiting Qing as members of diplomatic entourages, Chosŏn's intellectuals witnessed Qing's advance in material standards. This experience forced several of them to abandon the derogatory view of Qing of the past and, conversely, to assert that backward Chosŏn should learn from them. While Confucians in the minority, namely the *namin* faction, mainly adopted the Western knowledge from the newly introduced books, many Confucians of the mainstream, or the *noron* faction, realised the need to learn from the northern empire (*pukhak* (北學)) through opportunities to visit Qing.⁸⁷

Among the scholars of the minority *namin*, Yi Ik (李穡, 1681–1763) and Chŏng Yakyong (丁若鏞, 1762–1836), the representative scholars of the faction, are famous for their coverage of a wide range of studies beyond the Neo-Confucian philosophical themes. They addressed not only the interpretation of Confucian texts and national problems of their time but also the issues of science and technology. The important is their approach to scholarship, in which the hegemonic ethical view of the world was restricted by empirical, practical, and positivist worldviews.⁸⁸ These characteristics are largely shared by reformist scholars of the majority *noron* faction. Among these, Hong Daeyong (洪大容, 1731–1783)

⁸⁶ For the introduction of Western Studies and their effects on Chosŏn, see Kang Chae'ŏn, *Chosŏn ūi sŏhak sa* [The History of Western Studies in Chosŏn] (Seoul: Min'umsa, 1990); Roh Dae-hwan (No Taehwan), "Chosŏn hugi ūi sŏhak yuip kwa sŏgi suyong ron" [The Introduction of Western Studies and the Adoption of Western Technology in Late Chosŏn], *Chindan hakbo* 83 (1997), pp. 121–54.

⁸⁷ For the formation of the *pukhak* school and its ideas, see Yu Ponghak, *Yŏn'am ilp'a pukhak sasang yŏn'gu*.

⁸⁸ I will discuss the characteristic ideas and worldview of both Yi Ik and Chŏng Yakyong in the next chapter.

adopted the Western scientific knowledge in earnest and upon this basis attempted to deconstruct the world grounded in the traditional knowledge of the physical world. After witnessing Qing's advance in material life, scholars like Pak Chiwŏn (朴趾源, 1737–1805) and Pak Chega (朴齊家, 1750–1805) had special interest in the development of technology and the need to encourage trade and commerce, which were disregarded traditionally as low and base works.⁸⁹

2.3. The Decline of the Orthodox Teaching (First Half of the 19th C.)

The variegation of academic interest and the relative decline of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy in the late eighteenth century faced a setback in the early nineteenth century due to the introduction of Roman Catholicism. At first, books on Western studies, especially those concerning geography, astronomy, mathematics, and the almanac, helped Chosŏn Confucians receive Western scientific achievements and undermine the Confucian ethical worldview. The Confucian scholars' study of Western sciences had not been prohibited by the authorities, because the new knowledge provided better explanations on the physical and natural world. However, the diffusion of Roman Catholicism created some serious problems. For instance, Catholic priests were openly opposing the widely accepted ancestral memorial rites (*chesa*) in Chosŏn, calling it an idol worship service. They also stressed equality between people from different social statuses. In contrast, conservative Confucians, as is seen in An Chŏngbok's

⁸⁹ Hong Daeyong's scientific interpretation of the world is well exhibited in his essay *Ŭisan mundap* (醫山問答). (I will analyse Hong's adoption of Western scientific knowledge and his worldview in the next chapter.) Pak Chiwŏn's social ideas are well shown in his short stories that ridiculed contemporary Chosŏn and his travel story *Yŏlha ilgi* (熱河日記). Pak Chega's ideas of the need to adopt new technology and the importance of trade and commerce is well shown in his book *Pukhakŭi* (北學議).

essay, harshly criticised Western religion for its erosion of the social foundation of Chosŏn.⁹⁰

In the midst of the challenges to the Confucian world, as King Chŏngjo, the defender of several *namin* bureaucrats who converted to Catholicism, suddenly passed away, the opposite faction (僻派) that came to have power did not hesitate to persecute them. With this event, promising *namin* officials and the aides of the former king fell victim to persecution in 1801.⁹¹ This incident and subsequent persecutions that lasted to 1866 dampened the enthusiasm of Chosŏn's progressive scholars in their pursuit of the new knowledge from the West, and consequently undermined the liberal and critical academic atmosphere of the late eighteenth century. Moreover, after King Chŏngjo's demise in 1800, Chosŏn's political process was seriously distorted, with a couple of families of the ruling *noron* faction controlling the government. Under these circumstances, the practical studies popular in the previous century lost their momentum. Yet the *relativisation* of the orthodox Zhu Xi's philosophy continued in the nineteenth century. Scholars retreated to purely academic disciplines, grappling with Han Learning or *Kaozhengxue* (考證學) used as the main method for understanding Confucian canons. Most of the prominent scholars in this era, including Kim Chŏnggi (金正喜, 1786–1856), were interested in both the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy (*Xinglixue*) and *Kaozhengxue* and believed that both of them were complementary

⁹⁰ An Chŏngbok's essay is a representative counter-argument against Roman-Catholic doctrines. He pointed out unreasonable elements of Christianity and criticised them one by one. Specifically, he claimed that the religion taught the people the equality between father and son, and king and subjects. He also regarded Catholicism as a heretical theory (異端) just like Daoism and Buddhism. An Chŏngbok, "Ch'ŏnhak mundap" [天學問答, Questions and Answers on the Heavenly Studies] in *Kukyŏk Sun'amjip* 3 (Seoul: minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1996), pp. 227–51.

⁹¹ Pyŏn Chusŭng has interpreted the 1801 persecution (辛酉迫害) not simply as the ruling group's removal of their opposites (時派), that is, King Chŏngjo's aides including *namin* officials, but also as the oppression of the grassroots who adopted the new religion and were about to turn against the existing order. Pyŏn Chusŭng, "Sinyu pakhae ŭi chŏngch'i chŏk pae'gyŏng" [The Political Backdrop of the Persecution of Roman Catholicism in 1801], *Han'guk sasang sahak* 16 (2001), pp. 91–116.

and indispensable. The main academic debates in the Seoul region in this era were done over how to see the relationship between the two strands of Confucian studies. What is deficient in their academic practice, however, was the liberal and critical attitude that the reformist scholars of the late eighteenth century had.⁹² The erosion of Confucian social foundation was being made continuously by Catholicism. Despite the persecutions, the number of Catholic believers did not shrink; rather, Catholicism spread further among commoners.

In the midst of the domestic reaction, a greater challenge was posed by the outside world. The news that Qing was invaded by Western powers was spreading across Chosŏn from the early 1840s. By this time, some pioneering scholars like Ch'oe Han'gi (崔漢綺, 1803–1877) and Pak Kyusu (朴珪壽, 1807–1876) developed an interest in the Western powers through newly introduced books from Qing; yet their understanding of the West was based on limited sources and Chosŏn was not directly exposed to Western imperialist pressure, so that the pioneers' concerns about the Western penetration did not develop further

⁹² The introduction of *Kaozhengxue* and its wide-spread effects on Chosŏn Confucians have been analysed by Kim Munsik, yet the intellectual trends in the first half of the nineteenth century have not yet been fully explored. The retreat of the eighteenth-century practical studies (*Sirhak*) in this era looks obvious, but recently scholars like Yu Ponghak and Roh Dae-hwan have argued that the late eighteenth-century practical intellectual trend did not dissipate. In the same context, Yi Kyŏng'gu has insisted that the grand shift in literary trends made in the late eighteenth century lasted to the early nineteenth century. According to Yi, the vivacity of the academic environment in the late eighteenth century retrieved its energy soon after the shock of the persecution of Western studies in 1801. I think it is pertinent to argue that in literature the lively and liberal trend did not wither away, given a number of recent studies in the field, but in social and political thinking the enthusiastic environment of the previous century declined. At any rate, in the midst of the political bewilderment, the position of the orthodox Neo-Confucian teaching was undermined, too. See Kim Munsik, *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghak sasang yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Trends of the Interpretation of Confucian Classics in Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1996); Yu Ponghak, “18, 9 segi noron hakgye wa sallim” [The Academia of Noron scholars and Sallim in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries], *Hansin nonmunjip* 3 (1986), pp. 23–46; Yu Ponghak, *Chosŏn hugi hakgye wa chisik'in* [The Academia and Intellectuals in Late Chosŏn] (Seoul: Sin'gu munhwasa, 1998); Roh Dae-hwan, “19 segi chung'yŏp Yu Sinhwan hakp'a ŭi hakp'ung kwa hyŏnsil kaehyŏkron” [The Academic Trend of the Yu Sinhwan School and Their Reform Ideas in the Mid-Nineteenth Century], *Han'guk hakbo* 72 (1993), pp. 191–228; Yi Kyŏng'gu, “18 segi mal 19 segi ch'o chisik'in kwa chisikkye ŭi tonghyang” [The Intellectuals and Intellectual Trends in the Era of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries], *Han'guk sasang sahak* 46 (2014), pp. 283–310.

to create a distinct intellectual trend. The real threats to Chosŏn came from the mid-1860s.

It is meaningful to consider that the intellectual configuration of the first half of the nineteenth century developed into three main political factions in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The moderate reformists, mainly practical government officials of the ruling *noron* faction in the Seoul region, were brought up in the eclectic academic atmosphere in the first half of the century. While maintaining a practical view about opening up of ports for trading with foreign countries, they upheld Confucian values at the same time. The radical reformists, who also hailed from the *noron* faction residing in Seoul, started their learning with Confucian texts at their early age, but they soon developed a vivid interest in the outside world under the influence of Pak Kyusu, Oh Kyŏngsŏk (1831–1879), and Oh’s colleague Yu Hongki (1831–?). Moreover, they were affected by the eighteenth-century practical and critical studies (*Sirhak*) spearheaded by Pak Kyusu, which drove them to hold generally reformist views. On the other hand, the conservatives (or *wijŏng ch’ŏksap’a*), who still adhered to the Cheng-Zhu teachings, mainly resided in the local regions. Staying isolated from Seoul, they were largely excluded from new intellectual sources from Qing China. Moreover, the conservativeness of the countryside would have contributed to their upholding of the traditional Confucian view of *hwaigwan* and as a result their serious opposition to the Government’s opening up policy in the early 1880s.⁹³

To summarise, the history of Confucian political ideas in Chosŏn had a certain tendency in

⁹³ For Ch’oe Han’gi, Pak Kyusu, and Oh Kyŏngsŏk’s interest in the new knowledge of the West, see Kwŏn Oyŏng, *Ch’oe Han’gi ūi hakmun kwa sasang yŏn’gu* [A Study of Choe Han’gi: His Scholarly and Ideological Attitude] (Seoul: Chipmundang, 1999); Son Hyŏngbu, *Pak Kyusu ūi kaehwa sasang yŏn’gu* [Pak Kyusu’s Ideas of the Opening up of Chosŏn] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1997); Shin Yong-ha, “Oh Kyŏngsŏk ūi kaehwa sasang kwa kaehwa hwaldong” [Oh Kyŏngsŏk: His Ideas and Activities for the Opening up of Chosŏn], *Yŏksa hakbo* 107 (1985), pp. 107–87.

which the first propensity for philosophical ethics was balanced by the scholars' interest in the necessities of the country from the late seventeenth century. In line with this development, Zhu Xi's philosophy began to be relativised from the late eighteenth century, which continued to the first half of the nineteenth century. The intellectual shifts between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century reflected the historical circumstances of each period, yet at the same time, they reflected the two main aspects within the Confucian political ideas. Confucianism as a political philosophy contained in itself the ideas of an ideal society, as well as those of governing a country practically. This duality of idealism and practicality within the Confucian idea system furnished various intellectual shifts in Chosŏn.

On the other hand, the criticism of the Neo-Confucian philosophical themes in late Chosŏn, which was linked with the resurgence of the ideas of political necessity, meant that an aspect of Confucian ideas endowed a resource to overcome the Neo-Confucianism itself. Although the eighteenth-century practical studies (*Sirhak*) were not focused on in this chapter, within *Sirhak* there were sources that could reconstruct Confucianism and even surmount its bounds. From the perspective of 'worldview', the *Sirhak* scholars' vision greatly differed from mid-Chosŏn ethicists' one. If we assume that late nineteenth-century *Kaehwa sasang* is connected to Confucian political thinking in any way, then the eighteenth-century *Sirhak* as the medium between the two thought systems obtains a critical status. In this regard, we will explore some aspects of *Sirhak* in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

The Transformation of Korean Political Thinking in Late Chosŏn:

The Worldview of *Sirhak* Scholars

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the worldview of the reformist Confucians who lived in the period from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Our aim is to trace the relationship between these reformists' ideas (*Sirhak*) and orthodox Neo-Confucianism and to lay the foundation to compare *Sirhak* with the worldview of *Kaehwa sasang*, which we will discuss in the next chapter. The reformist Confucians' worldview has usually been addressed by drawing out implied attitudes contained in the individual studies on their thoughts, while the predominant academic discussions have been conducted over the modern or pre-modern character of *Sirhak* itself. Due to the ongoing discussions over the modern/pre-modern character, concrete investigations into *Sirhak* scholars' worldview and its effects on their thoughts have scarcely been made.

Among previous studies, most have illuminated the modern characteristics of *Sirhak*, although not all the studies have championed this view. A number of recent researchers have criticised this dominant interpretation, arguing that the late Chosŏn reformist Confucians did not aim for modernity.⁹⁴ In this chapter, I do not use the modern vs. pre-modern framework

⁹⁴ While examining the ideas of state reformation proposed by Yu Hyŏngwŏn and Chŏng Yakyong, Kim T'aeyŏng has argued that these *Sirhak* scholars took the institutions of ancient peaceful times as their model, so their views were basically idealistic and not pertinent to current Chosŏn, and their reforms were more pre-modern than modernity-based. (Kim T'aeyŏng, *Sirhak ūi kukka kaehyŏkron* [The Ideas of State Reform in *Sirhak*] (Seoul: Sŏul taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1998)) Opposing the so-called Internal Development Theory in late Chosŏn, Yi Yŏnghun has insisted that *Sirhak* was the

because modernity exists within a wider basis of tradition and Confucian political ideas included elements that led Chosŏn society to modernity. At any rate, the reason why the academic debate over *Sirhak* has been tilted to the modern or pre-modern discussion is closely related with the founding of *Sirhak* as a research subject. Therefore, in the introduction of this chapter, I will describe the historical context in which the *Sirhak* studies originated.

Sirhak, the academic trend in late Chosŏn that is characterised by scholars' earnest interest in current national problems, varying academic disciplines, and the reinterpretation of Confucian texts outside of Zhu Xi's views, has been illuminated in multiple academic fields for decades. A major reason why *Sirhak* caught researchers' interest is that elements of modernity are found in the works of a number of Confucian scholars in late Chosŏn. In the early stage of the *Sirhak* study, the founders of that field of study needed to highlight the *Sirhak*'s modernistic character. As Ch'ŏn Kwan'u has clarified, the earliest interest in *Sirhak* scholars can be traced back to the early 1900s, when the Chosŏn of those times was engaged in an intellectual struggle between tradition and modernity.⁹⁵ Those trying to uncover *Sirhak* scholars and publish their works for the first time, including Chang Chiyŏn (1864–1921), aimed to persuade conservative Confucians with the *Sirhak* scholars' reformist ideas in an

accommodation of self-cultivating peasant-landowners-centred Chosŏn society (小農社會), based on *Xinglixue*, to socio-economic shifts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not a new study opposing *Xinglixue*. (Yi Yŏnghun, "Tasan ŭi chŏngjŏnje kaehyŏkron kwa wangt'o chuŭi" [Chŏng Yakyong's reform ideas to the well-field system and the tradition that all lands are king's land], *Minjok munhwa* 19 (1996); _____, "Chosŏn hugi sahoe pyŏndong kwa sirhak" [Social Transformations in Late Chosŏn and *Sirhak*] in *Han'guk sirhak ŭi saeroun mosaek* (Seoul: Kyŏng'in munhwasa, 2001)) Likewise, in his book on the reform ideas of Yu Hyŏngwŏn, James Palais has concluded that Yu did not aim to transform Chosŏn society into a modern society. James Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (University of Washington Press, 1996).

⁹⁵ Ch'ŏn Kwan'u, "Chosŏn hugi sirhak ŭi kae'nyŏm chaegŏmt'o" [Revisiting the Concept of *Sirhak* of Late Chosŏn] in *Yŏnse sirhak kangjwa* 1 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2003), pp. 27–35.

eclectic manner.⁹⁶ In the 1930s, a number of Korean researchers, including Chŏng Inbo (1893–1950), Mun Ilp’yŏng (1888–1939), and Ch’oe Ikhan (1897–), spotlighted *Sirhak* afresh as Koreans’ voluntary intellectual movement for modernisation. Under Japan’s colonial rule, those nationalist scholars needed to highlight *Sirhak* as Korean national studies known as *Chosŏnhak* (朝鮮學) in opposition to the Japanese authorities’ pejorative view of Korean history. During this period, the term ‘*Sirhak* (實學)’ began to be used for the first time.⁹⁷ In the wake of these preliminary efforts, from the late 1950s a number of researchers, including Ch’ŏn Kwan’u, Hong Isŏp, and Han Ugŭn, delved into *Sirhak* scholars in a fully fledged way and turned it into a core research subject of Korean history. Therefore, from its origin, *Sirhak* served Koreans’ social needs to prove that it was voluntary modernisation from within. In this context, the modern/pre-modern controversy has become the main theme of academic discussions of *Sirhak*.

However, apart from the term ‘*Sirhak*’ referring to practical studies in late Chosŏn, the word ‘*sirhak*’⁹⁸ had been used by East Asian intellectuals when they were trying to establish their studies as useful and pragmatic in contrast with a previous trend. For example, in early Chosŏn, the Confucians claimed that their Neo-Confucian study was *sirhak* in comparison with the literature-centred studies of late Koryŏ. Even in Chinese history, Zhu Xi himself called Song Confucianism *sirhak*, which was positioned in opposition to the

⁹⁶ The early explorers of *Sirhak* mainly used the term “*silsa kusi jihak*” (實事求是之學, Learning for Substantiating Affairs and Seeking Truth). Yi Kwangnin, “Kaehwagi chisik’in ūi sirhakgwān” [The View of *Sirhak* of the Late Nineteenth-Century Reformists] in *Yŏnse sirhak kangjwa* 4 (Seoul: Hye’an, 2003), pp. 359–64.

⁹⁷ Chŏng Hohun, “Han’guk kŭnhyŏndae sirhak yŏn’gu ūi ch’ui wa kŭ munje ūisik” [The Tendency of *Sirhak* Studies in Modern Korea and Their Questions], *Tasan kwa hyŏndae* 2 (2009), pp. 347–51.

⁹⁸ In order to make a distinction from the late Chosŏn *Sirhak*, I use *sirhak* with a lowercase ‘s’ here.

linguistic and philological studies in the previous Han and Tang era.⁹⁹ Therefore, the advocates of *sirhak* had their counterparts in history. When the Korean researchers named the late Chosŏn studies *Sirhak*, they also had a counterpart; that is, the Neo-Confucian ethical philosophy. Indeed, the *Sirhak* scholar Hong Daeyong used the word “*hŏhak*” (虛學, insubstantial studies) in his book *Ŭisanmundap* (醫山問答, Dialogue in Mount Yiwulu) and in context it indicated the scientifically groundless Neo-Confucian cosmology. Thus, the term *sirhak* itself represents a meaningful intellectual change in East Asian history, and many researchers dwelling on late Chosŏn *Sirhak* interpreted the change as modernity. If we want to express the elements of the change with the concept ‘modernity’ as a generic term, it is understandable. Nevertheless, a core premise upon which this study is based is that modernity was not something very new or fetched fully from the outside world, but one that existed within the Confucian ideas themselves.

In this context, regardless of the modern/pre-modern character, this chapter focuses on excavating the shift in worldview within *Sirhak* scholars. It first explores two intellectual moments that shaped *Sirhak* and then examines one of its core characteristics, the reinterpretation of Confucian texts.

1. Returning to Classical Texts and Widening of Academic Interests

⁹⁹ According to Hwang Wŏn’gu, even Wang Yangming and his disciples in Ming China called their study *sirhak* in comparison with Song Confucianism, while Yan Yuan (顏元), a scholar in Qing, stated that *Kaozhengxue* was a practical study in contrast to the Han Studies. Hwang Wŏn’gu, “Han’guk esŏŭi sirhak yŏn’gu wa kŭ sŏngkwa” [The *Sirhak* Study in Korea and Its Achievements] in *Yŏnse sirhak kangjwa* 1 (Seoul: Hye’an, 2003), p. 79.

Hö Mok's (1595–1682) return to Six Classics and the inheritance of the two distinguished *namin Sirhak* scholars Yi Ik and Chöng Yakyong have already been highlighted by researchers, in that their return to classical texts was conceived as a clear point of departure from the Neo-Confucian framework.¹⁰⁰ Previous studies, however, have not sufficiently heeded the *effects* of their return to classical texts. In this section, I will claim that these *Sirhak* scholars' practical, open-minded attitude towards scholarship and their widening of academic interests were greatly encouraged by their return to classical texts.

In the preface to his corpus *Kiön* (記言, Writing What Was Spoken), Hö Mok epitomised his fifty-year study as follows: “*Kiön* is based on Six Classics, has referred to *ye'ak* (禮樂), and has pierced the ideas of A Hundred Schools (百家) [of ancient China].”¹⁰¹ This summary well describes the characteristics of Hö Mok's academic inclination. Indeed, in his corpus he hardly addresses Chosön's famous *li-qi* philosophical debate on the structure of

¹⁰⁰ This view was first suggested by Chöng Okja and Han Yöngwu, and later studies have followed these two researchers' view. (Chöng Okja, “Misu Hö Mok yön'gu: küi munhak kwan ül chüngsim üro” [A Study of Misu Hö Mok: with a Focus on His View of Literature], *Han'guksaron* (1979), pp. 197–232; Han Yöngwu, “Hö Mok üi kohak kwa yöksa insik: <Tongsa (東事)> rül chungsim üro” [Hö Mok's Ancient Learning and His Understanding of History: with a Focus on *Tongsa*], *Han'guk munhwa* 40 (1985), pp. 40–87.) On the other hand, this illumination of Hö Mok's ancient learning (古學) has led researchers to focus on the *namin* scholars of *pukin* (northerners) origin of the seventeenth century, including Yun Hyu and Yu Hyöngwön, as a way to unearth their peculiarly practical and open-minded attitude towards scholarship, notably different from most of the orthodox Neo-Confucian scholars of the time. According to recent researchers, the *namin* scholars of *pukin* origin were affected by the two great scholars of the previous age, Sö Kyöngdök (徐敬德, 1489–1546) and Cho Sik (曹植, 1501–1572), in academic lineage, who had had a more practical and classical text-based understanding of Confucianism. These researchers found the *namin Sirhak* scholars' interest in practical matters of their time in Sö and Cho's academic inclinations. It is acceptable that the academic legacy of both figures was handed over by the *namin* scholars of *pukin* origin, but in the case of Hö Mok, the academic inheritance from the two figures is not clear. At any rate, the *pukin*'s academic tradition contributed to the burgeoning of *Sirhak* as seen in Yun Hyu and Yu Hyöngwön. See Sin Pyöngju, *Chosön chungugi chisöngsa yön'gu* [Studies of Intellectual History in the Mid and Late Chosön] (Seoul: Saemunsa, 2007); Chöng Hohun, *Chosön hugi chöngch'i sasang*.

¹⁰¹ “記言之書 本之以六經 參之以禮樂 通百家之辯.” Hö Mok, “*Kiön sō*” (記言 序) in *Kuk'yök Kiön* (國譯 記言) Vol. 1 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 2006), p. 2. As *Sirhak* itself was centred in Seoul and Kyönggi province, Hö Mok was born and lived in Kyönggi province.

humans' minds and hearts, and his writings on Confucianism are mainly about subjects from classical texts.¹⁰² Just as ideas in classical texts are usually didactic and pragmatic rather than metaphysical and speculative, Hō Mok's writing on Confucianism was not much different from this practice.

With respect to Hō's inclination to classical Confucian texts, two points are distinctive within his works. Firstly, the value of Confucianism was not its philosophical ideas but its practical usefulness. For example, in an essay in the first book of his corpus in which he dealt with the intellectual disorder after the Six Classics, he saw the Six Classics as main sources that led to the ancient peaceful times in the states of *Yu Xia Yin Zhou* (虞夏殷周). According to Hō, "nothing is better in rectifying people than *Shijing* (詩經), *Shujing* (書經), *Liji* (禮記), and *Yuejing* (樂經); nothing better in gaining wisdom in governing a country than *Chunqiu* (春秋); and nothing in knowing mysterious changes than *Yijing* (易經)." ¹⁰³ His basic idea was that the prosperity of the ancient times was intellectually based on classical texts, whose teachings are essentially practical and didactic. This practical concern with Confucian ideas is also exhibited in Hō Mok's works. In his two main writings on Confucianism, *Kyōngsōl* (經說) and *Sōsul* (敍述), he addressed useful summaries of the core ideas of the Six Classics, and extracts on certain subjects, such as

¹⁰² In his letter to an anonymous scholar, Hō says that he has read ancient people's works for fifty years without giving a glimpse into the sentences of later ages that concentrate on embellishing ancients' works. (僕讀古人之文五十年 後世彫琢之文 未嘗一經於心目 發憤求聖人之心). "Tap kaekja ōnmunhaksa sō" (答客子言文學事書) in *Kiōn*, vol. 1, p. 65.

¹⁰³ "教莫正於詩書禮樂 政莫善於春秋 神化莫大於易 虞夏殷周之隆 皆六經之治也." "Sōknan" (釋亂 (學)) in *Kiōn* vol. 1, p. 9.

anecdotes about ancient figures, the lives of Confucius and his disciples, and historic natural disasters.¹⁰⁴

Secondly, Hō Mok's academic interest was wider than other scholars of his time. Besides Confucians' usual interest in interpretations of classical texts (*kyōnghak*) and statecraft ideas (*kyōngsehak*) as well as literature, his interest in classical texts drove him to heed ancient rituals (古禮), ancient history, and even ancient people's calligraphy style. Moreover, Hō Mok accepted Daoism, which had been seen as a heretical theory in Chosŏn. He noted that Laozi (老子) was erudite on ancient affairs and liked *ye* so that even Confucius himself thought of him as a teacher. Hō Mok's inclination to Daoism led him to illuminate the lives of eccentric Daoist literati in Chosŏn.¹⁰⁵

These characteristics in Hō Mok's works were closely related to the attributes of classical texts. The six classics Hō mainly referred to, compared with Song Confucianism, are marked by their direct revealing of ancient people's acts and ideas. Although existing in an unorganised way, those books preserve the realities of ancient China before they were interpreted or systematised by Confucians in later ages. Since these texts convey concrete situations of ancient times, the world revealed in the classical texts is essentially multifarious, material, diverse, and open-minded, which is contrasted with the philosophically systematised and closed form of Song Confucianism. Moreover, in classical texts, we cannot find the distinction between orthodox and heretical theories as promoted by Confucians in

¹⁰⁴ “Kyōngsŏl” (經說) in *Kuk'yŏk Kiŏn*, vol. 2, pp. 1–86; “Sŏsul” (敍述) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, in vol. 4, pp. 1–161. Kyōngsŏl was submitted to King Sukjong (肅宗, r. 1674–1720). Hō Mok himself entered the central officialdom in the eighth year of King Hyojong's reign at the age of sixty-three; his career as a bureaucrat lasted for the next twenty years.

¹⁰⁵ Hō Mok depicted Daoist figures in Chosŏn, such as Kim Sisŭp (1435–1493), Chōng Ryŏm (1506–1549), and others, and called them pure and clean intellectuals (清士). “Ch'ōngsa yŏljŏn (清士列傳)” in *Kuk'yŏk Kiŏn*, vol. 1.

later periods. Hō's focus on the practical and didactic values in the texts, his interest in historical reality,¹⁰⁶ and his open-mindedness on heretical theories like Daoism were the result of his study of classical texts.¹⁰⁷

Now, let us see how Hō Mok's return to ancient texts was inherited by other scholars. Generally, it seems that most serious scholars in the *namin* faction coming after Hō, specifically those residing in Seoul and Kyōnggi province, followed his lead. This trend is exhibited in Yun Hyu (1617–1680), who lived in the same age as Hō. The most distinctive point in his corpus *Paek'ho chōnsō* (白湖全書, Entire Corpus of Paekho Yun Hyu) is that Yun read a wide range of texts beyond the Four or Seven Books and the Song masters' exegeses on them. He addressed Song Confucianism in his works, but he did not fully affirm the Song masters' views. Rather, he was critical of Zhu Xi's exegeses of core Confucian texts, and instead rediscovered the values of classical texts.¹⁰⁸ Specifically, in the funeral costume

¹⁰⁶ Hō Mok had a serious interest in history itself. In particular, he was interested in the history of ancient kingdoms on the Korean peninsula. His basic manner of seeing history was not modelled on Zhu Xi's example of ethical instruction; rather, his method involved positivist clarifications of past events. "Tongsa (東史 一三四)" in *Kuk'yōk Kiōn*, vol. 1.

¹⁰⁷ His propensity for the six classics, however, did not mean that Hō Mook took a negative opinion on Zhu Xi philosophy and renounced the entrenched ethical point of view. He rarely mentioned Zhu Xi or Song Confucian masters in his corpus, but he still maintained an ethical standpoint on national issues. Confucian ethics worked as the pillar of Chosōn's social structure. The *namin* scholar Yun Hyu also held this duality. Although critical to Zhu Xi's framework, he still maintained the ethical view. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Chosōn's academic development; something similar can be seen in modern European intellectual history. The Enlightenment thinkers in Germany and England, unlike the radical French thinkers of the time, did not forsake their Christian faith for their belief in the reconstruction of society based on reason. (See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. by Fritz C.A. Koelin and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton University Press, 1979, ch. 4.) This duality seems to have confused some researchers, such as Yu Yōngghi. Yu has made the interpretation that Yun Hyu did not abandon Zhu Xi's philosophy, although he was not a pure and faithful disciple of Zhu Xi's. However, Yu has failed to capture this dual, ambivalent, and transitory character of the scholars who lived in the seventeenth century. Yu Yōngghi, "T'al sōngnihak ūi pyōnju: Misu Hō Mok kwa Paekho Yun Hyu rŭl chungsim ūro" [The Variations of Post-*Xinglixue*: with Focuses on Hō Mok and Yun Hyu], *Minjok munhwa yōn'gu* 33 (2000), pp. 393–428.

¹⁰⁸ An independent mind-set characterises Yun Hyu's scholarship. Rising up as a promising young scholar by self-study, Yun behaved as an independent thinker. At the age of 22, he composed an essay

debate (*yesong*), he drew out his references of *ye* to ancient texts, refuting his opponent Song Siyöl's reliance on Zhu Xi's view.¹⁰⁹ So, in terms of his confrontation of Zhu Xi's framework, Yun's approach is slightly different from Hō Mok's, who did not deal with the Neo-Confucianism at all.

Regarding Hō's return to classical texts, we can find its clear influence on the eighteenth-century scholars of the same faction: Yi Ik and Chōng Yakyong. Yi Ik (1681–1763), who lived his entire life as a scholar in the countryside of Kyōnggi province, was influenced by Hō Mok; in turn, Chōng Yakyong (1762–1836) was influenced by Yi Ik. Yi's return to classical texts appears to be linked to his personal study (私淑) of Hō Mok's works. Owing to family ties between Hō and Yi, Yi Ik was able to see Hō's works and paid him respect as a teacher.¹¹⁰ Yi Ik's general academic characteristics are best shown in the encyclopaedia-style book *Sōngho sasöl* (星湖僊說, Miscellaneous Accounts of Sōngho Yi Ik), in which he clarified his attitude towards Confucian studies.¹¹¹ In an article, Yi Ik introduced the Ming scholar Cai Qing's (蔡清) view on how to study Confucianism and

commenting on the *li-qi* debate over the structure of the human mind and heart and the mechanism of moral and immoral behaviours and put forward his own position ingeniously, although that view was based on an eclectic mix of Yi Hwang's and Yi I's views. This independent mind developed further to make a series of exegeses on Confucian texts on his own. Yun Hyu, "Sadan ch'iljōng insim tosim söl" (四端七情 人心道心說) in *Kukyōk Paekho chōnsō* vol. 6.

¹⁰⁹ His inclination toward classical texts and scepticism about later scholars' exegeses is also shown in an example where Yun Hyu advised King Sukjong to focus on the main body of Confucian texts, not on the exegeses of later scholars, at a lecture for the king. This issue unsurprisingly met opposition in the court from the advocates of Cheng-Zhu studies. Yun Hyu, "Chaeso yun owöl isip kuil" (再疏 閏五月二十九日) in *Kukyōk Paekho chōnsō* (國譯 白湖全書) vol. 2 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 2006).

¹¹⁰ The famous scholar-official in King Chōngjo's reign, Ch'ae Chaegong (蔡濟恭, 1720–1799), composed the inscription on the stele of Yi Ik and stated that Yi studied Hō Mok's works out of respect for him and thus was linked to the line of *namin*. Moreover, according to Chōng Okja, Yi Ik himself composed the inscription on the stele leading to Hō Mok's grave (神道碑銘). Chōng Okja, "Misu Hō Mok yōn'gu," p. 211.

¹¹¹ Yi Ik, *Sōngho sasöl*, trans. by Ch'oe Sōkgi (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1999).

concurred with his view. According to Cai, the Six Classics are the proper foundation (正宗) for Confucian studies; the Four Books are legitimate inheritors (嫡傳); and the four Song masters are a true faction (眞派).¹¹² In this context, Yi suggested that, in learning Confucian texts, students should start from the true faction's writings and, in the wake of the legitimate inheritors, arrive at the right foundation. Yi deplored the fact that, in those times, students in Chosŏn focused on Cheng-Zhu's theories merely for the civil service examination and stopped before the halfway point in the course of study.¹¹³ Therefore, we can understand that Yi Ik did not disregard the Song masters' works, but his ultimate aim for Confucian understanding was the classical texts.¹¹⁴

As seen in Hŏ Mok, Yi's intellectual orientation to classical Confucianism forced him to weigh practical usefulness as a value of Confucian texts. Indeed, in the essay "Yuhak" (Confucianism) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, he criticised the current academic situation in Chosŏn, in which scholars were interested in philosophical concepts while neglecting the practice of what they learnt, which, according to him, ran counter to Confucius' teaching.¹¹⁵ Indeed, here and there, Yi lamented the current situation in Chosŏn, where studying Confucian texts was disconnected from the current affairs of the state. This would be the reason why he emphasised practicality in *Sŏngho sasŏl* using words such as *sil* (實), *silyong* (實用), and

¹¹² The four Song scholars are Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤), Zhang Zai (張載), Cheng Yi (程頤), and Zhu Xi (朱熹).

¹¹³ "Chinp'a chŏkjŏn" (眞波嫡傳) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 190–1.

¹¹⁴ In the afterword to his *Chungyong chilsŏ* (中庸疾書, Hurriedly Written Writing on *Zhongyong*), Yi clarified that what he aimed for was to go back to the original ideas of Confucius. ("其意都只爲探討蹊徑 務歸於夫子之本旨.") "Chungyong chilsŏ husŏl" (中庸疾書 後說) in *Kukyŏk Sŏngho chilsŏ*, 355–8.

¹¹⁵ In another essay, Yi stated definitively that the aim of the investigation of Confucian texts was to make use of them for a practical purpose. ("窮經將以致用也.") "T'ongsi" (誦詩) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 387–8.

sildŭk (實得). Therefore, Yi's emphasis on the practical use of Confucian learning, as well as his interest in a variety of academic disciplines beyond the traditional studies of Chosŏn Confucians, were closely associated with his return to classical texts.

The practical and open-minded attitude is also characteristic of Chŏng Yakyong's scholarship. In Chŏng's case, his encounter with Yi Ik's works seems to have had a critical role in deciding his academic characteristics. Having read Yi Ik's works, he confessed: "I woke up from a big dream while I personally learnt from Sŏngho [Yi Ik]."¹¹⁶ Given the context, this "big dream" seems to indicate Zhu Xi's philosophy-centred Chosŏn academism. Chŏng's view on Confucian texts is clearly shown in his account of Thirteen Chinese Classics, in which he answered a series of academic questions from King Chŏngjo. In the answers, he did not hide his regret about current scholars, who appreciated only the Corpus of Seven Books [七書大全], but were ignorant of the existence of the Exegeses of Thirteen Classics [十三經注疏].¹¹⁷ For him, the problem of Chosŏn scholars' study was that their coverage of Confucian texts was too narrow. Here we can see that Hŏ Mok and Yi Ik's Six Classics-centred understanding of Confucian classics was extended to Thirteen Classics for

¹¹⁶ After reading Yi Ik's works through acquaintances of his seniors in the same faction, such as Kwŏn Ch'ŏlsin, Yi Kahwan, Yi Kiyang, and Yi Sŏnghun, Chŏng also confessed that "That we came to know of the bigness of the world and the brightness of the Sun and Moon all resulted from the capacity of this elderly person" (自念吾輩能識天下之大 日月之明 皆此翁之力). (Recited from Chŏng Ilkyun, *Tasan sasŏ kyŏnghak yŏngu* [Studies of Chŏng Yakyong's Investigation of Four Books] (Seoul: Iljisa, 2000) p. 39.) In the poem entitled "*Pakhak*" (博學), Chŏng expressed his deep respect for Yi, remarking on the width and depth of his scholarship. In the poem, he treated Yi as his master. "*Pakhak*" (博學) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* (國譯 茶山詩文集) vol. 1, trans. and ed. by Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe (Seoul: Sol, 1996), p. 212.

¹¹⁷ The Thirteen Classics are: *Shijing* (詩經), *Shujing* (書經), *Yijing* (易經), *Zhouli* (周禮), *Liji* (禮記), *Yili* (儀禮), *Chunqiu zuoshizhuan* (春秋左氏傳), *Chunqiu qongyangzhu* (春秋公羊傳), *Chunqiu guliangzhu* (春秋穀梁傳), *Lunyu* (論語), *Xiaojing* (孝經), *Erya* (爾雅), *Mengzi* (孟子). Chŏng Yakyong, "*Sipsamgyŏng ch'aek*" (十三經策) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* (國譯 茶山詩文集), trans. and ed. by Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, vol. 4 (Seoul: Sol, 1996), pp. 37–9.

Chǒng. Indeed, in interpreting core Confucian texts, Chǒng cited many classical texts and a number of previous scholars' exegeses beyond Zhu Xi's ones. This implies that, for Chǒng, Zhu Xi's interpretations were only a part of the grand intellectual currents of Confucianism.

This return to the Thirteen Classics was the core momentum that determined Chǒng's scholastic character and marked his reinterpretation of Confucian texts suggesting alternative views from Zhu Xi's ones. We will discuss Chǒng's reinterpretation of Confucian texts in Section Three of this chapter. Needless to say, Chǒng's emphasis on practicality and his interest in a variety of academic fields are consistent with the cases of Hǒ Mok and Yi Ik.

2. The Development of a Scientific View of the World

If the return to classical texts and recovering the practicality of Confucian understanding was one internal factor that shaped *Sirhak*, the introduction of the Western scientific system and its adoption was another factor. This section aims to examine *Sirhak* scholars' adoption of Western scientific knowledge and its effects on their more scientific and empirical way of seeing the physical and natural world. Previous studies have already examined the scientific knowledge adopted by Chosŏn scholars and its effects. However, their main focus was on whether or not the new scientific system contributed to the scholars' shift to a *modern* understanding of the world. For example, studies conducted by historians have emphasised the advanced nature of Western scientific and geographical knowledge and its effects on *Sirhak* scholars' modernistic and nationalistic (or post-China-centred) understanding of the world.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, more recent studies by historians of science saw that Western

¹¹⁸ Among early researchers, Hong Isŏp and Kang Chaeŏn and, more recently, Ku Man'ok have taken this perspective. See Hong Isŏp, "Chosŏn kwahaksa" [The History of Science in Chosŏn] in *Hong*

sciences did not replace the traditional science system, but rather that the new knowledge was incorporated into the traditional understanding of the physical and natural world and enriched East Asian or Korean scientific discourses.¹¹⁹ These two groups of researchers differ in their emphases: the former has focused on the aspect of *change*, whereas the latter has stressed *continuity*, covering wider cases of scholars adopting Western sciences. However, our aim here is not to examine comprehensively the relationship between the traditional and the Western science system. Rather, what I am interested in is the *Sirhak* scholars' attitudes (or way of thinking) towards the physical and natural world. Here, I will examine the cases of Yi Ik, Hong Daeyong, and Chŏng Yakyong.

Before we discuss these individual *Sirhak* scholars, we should first examine briefly the context in which the Western scientific system was introduced into Chosŏn. The Western sciences were transmitted through China from the early seventeenth century, as Jesuit missionaries composed and translated books on sciences and technology as a strategy for the evangelisation of China. They needed to mitigate the alertness of the Ming court about the new religious teaching and had to prove their practical usefulness for China. Thus, in the period between the early seventeenth and the late eighteenth century, the missionaries

Isŏp chŏnjip 1 (Seoul: Yŏnse taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1994), p. 259; Kang Chaeŏn, *Han'guk ūi kaehwa sasang* [The Reform Ideas in Modern Korea], trans. by Chŏng Ch'angnyŏl (Seoul: Pibong ch'ulp'ansa, 1981), p. 148; Ku Man'ok, "Chosŏn hugi 'chayŏn' insik ūi pyŏnhwa wa 'sirhak'" [The Shift of the Understanding of Nature and *Sirhak* in Late Chosŏn] in *Tasi, sirhak iran muŏt inga* (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2007), pp. 169–201; _____, "Chosŏn hugi sirhak chŏk chayŏn insik ūi taedu wa chŏn'gae" [The Emergence and Development of the Understanding of Nature in *Sirhak* in Late Chosŏn] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), pp. 101–70.

¹¹⁹ For the newer perspective, see Mun Chungyang, "Chŏnt'ong chŏk chayŏn insik ch'egye ūi sajŏk pyŏnhwa" [The Historical Shift of the Traditional System of Nature Consciousness] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), pp. 47–99; Yim Chongt'ae, "Chigu, sangsik, Chunghwa chuŭi: Yi Ik kwa Hong Daeyong ūi sayu rŭl t'onghaesŏ pon sŏyang chiri haksŏl kwa Chosŏn hugi sirhak ūi segyegwan" [The Earth, Common Sense, and China-Centrism: Western Geographical Theories and Late Chosŏn's *Sirhak* with Reference to Yi Ik and Hong Daeyong] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), pp. 171–219.

published hundreds of volumes on sciences and technology as well as on Christianity, with the help of Chinese scholars.¹²⁰ The missionaries in China were also keen to spread their religious teachings into Chosŏn. They bestowed books on sciences and Christianity to Chosŏn's diplomatic missions in Beijing for the first time in 1631, in late Ming. And in early Qing, they formed a close acquaintanceship with the crown prince Sohyŏn (1612–1645), who was held in Beijing as a hostage, and gave him a number of books and mechanical gadgets. Thus, knowledge of Western sciences was delivered to Chosŏn as early as the 1630s. The seventeenth century in Chosŏn, however, was the era in which the dogmatic Zhu Xi philosophy and *hwaigwan* reached a peak so that the new knowledge made little impact on Chosŏn's literati. It was in the eighteenth century, specifically during King Chŏngjo's reign, that Chosŏn scholars came to have an interest in the new books from Qing and discovered their values.¹²¹

¹²⁰ The Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇, 1552–1610), arrived in Beijing in 1601. He and his Jesuit colleagues' main strategy for evangelism there was to use their knowledge of sciences and technology and to teach Roman Catholicism as a supplementary theory to Confucianism (補儒論), not as an alternative to it. (On the introduction of generic Western Studies and its historical background, see Kang Chaeŏn, *Chosŏn ūi sŏhaksa* [The History of Western Studies in Chosŏn] (Seoul: Min'umsa, 1990); Roh Dae-hwan, "Chosŏn hugi ūi sŏhak yuip kwa sŏki suyongron" [The Penetration of Western Studies and the Adoption of Western Technology in Late Chosŏn] *Chindan hakbo* 83 (1997), pp. 121–54.) According to a Chinese scholar's (熊月之) survey, during the period 1601–1773, in total 437 volumes were published by Western missionaries. Among these, 251 volumes addressed religion; 131 treated natural sciences; and 55 humanities. Cited in Roh Dae-hwan, "Chosŏn hugi ūi sŏhak yuip," p. 134 (note 49).

¹²¹ The value of the generic "Western studies" (西學) to Chosŏn Confucians lay in Western sciences, not in Western religion. Both Chinese and Korean Confucians were critical of Roman Catholicism. Their interests were largely in the new knowledge on astronomy, almanacs, and mathematics, and these books spread widely among intellectuals. According to Roh Dae-hwan, among early Korean Christians, about 20 per cent were led to accept Catholicism after they became aware of the advanced Western sciences, medicine, and agricultural technology. In Chosŏn, it was with the 1801 persecution of Christians that Western sciences as well as Western religion became a taboo and Confucians avoided investigating the sciences. Roh Dae-hwan, "Chosŏn hugi sŏyang kwahak kisul ūi suyong kwa kŭ nolli" [The Adoption of Western Science and Technology and Its Rationales in Late Chosŏn] in *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (Seoul: Hye'an, 2005), p. 243.

Let us now see how Western scientific knowledge affected Yi Ik. Yi Ik was one of the first scholars who widely accepted Western sciences. His great interest in scientific knowledge is shown in a number of essays in the first three books (卷) of *Sŏngho sasŏl*, entitled *Ch'ŏnjimun* (天地門, Gate of Heaven and Earth).¹²² What is distinctive in his treatment of science is his empirical and rational explanation of natural phenomena and, as a result, the separation between the physical/natural world and the human (or moral) world.

While suggesting an opposite view from the majority outlook that Western sciences were modern in character, Yim Chongt'ae has claimed that, although Yi Ik adopted the Western sciences, he did not abandon traditional views on astronomy and natural phenomena.¹²³ When surveying Yi Ik's entire output of articles of science, Yim's view is pertinent. Yet there were reasons why Yi did not discard traditional views. Firstly, in astronomy, the Western astronomical system that he encountered was based on Ptolemy's model, which was not much different from the traditional East Asian paradigm. So, while the idea that the Earth was round (rather than rectangular) was new to Yi Ik, the Earth-centred explanation of the solar system and the revolution of the heavens around the Earth were preserved. Secondly, Yi maintained that extraordinary natural phenomena such as eclipses occurred when heaven warns rulers about coming disasters caused by their misdeeds. However, interestingly, Yi understood that solar and lunar eclipses take place owing to the orbital movement of the sun, moon, and Earth. Therefore, concerning this issue, a reasonable

¹²² Out of 186 short essays, around half dealt with scientific subjects; his main references were the science books from Qing, as well as old Chinese texts treating the movement of the universe and Earth.

¹²³ Yim Chongt'ae, "Chigu, sangsik, chungghwa chuŭi," 185–200.

explanation is that Yi hesitated to abandon this traditional view because he thought that the old view had some beneficial effects for contemporary Chosŏn.¹²⁴

Let us move on to the distinctiveness of Yi Ik's method. In many explanations of natural phenomena, Yi's approach is based on empiricism and rationality. For example, when explaining the causes of rain, he largely refers to his empirical observations, such as the condensation of dew in a round ceramic container in which grains are fermented, and the formation of frost on the walls of a room on a cold day. He concluded that rain, like the principle of the formation of dew and frost, is created when cold air and hot air collide.¹²⁵ In the same way, in describing heavy rain, he referred to a dragon, signifying *yang* or hot energy that causes rain when it flies into cloud that has cold *yin* energy. Therefore, while Yi Ik seems to maintain traditional views on some natural phenomena, his ideas were rational and scientifically acceptable. Interestingly, his empiricism and rationality led him to deny Zhu Xi's views on natural phenomena. In understanding the natural world, Zhu Xi largely took on traditionally held views without casting doubts on them. He thus believed that a rainbow absorbs water vapour and that the hexagonal shape of snow crystals was caused by the fragmenting of snow blocks by the wind.¹²⁶ On these issues, Yi put forth rational explanations based on his empirical observation. Therefore, we can say that, through his contact with Western scientific sources, Yi Ik came to equip himself with an empirical and rational attitude towards the physical and natural world. In this regard, in an essay entitled

¹²⁴ Yi Ik, "Ch'ŏnbyŏn" (天變) and "Ilsik" (日蝕) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* vol.1 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1985), pp. 142–44, 146–48.

¹²⁵ It is unclear whether Yi Ik had already learned of the principle of the creation of rain through a Western science book, but in his article on "rain" he did not make any reference to one. Yi Ik, "Wu" (雨) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 169–70.

¹²⁶ "Hong'ye ūmsu" (虹蜺飲水) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 158; "Sŏlhwa" (雪花) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 180–1.

Yöksang (曆象), he made a meaningful remark that separated the logic of the physical/natural world from that of the human (or moral) world, stating: “In general, instruments and mathematics are more delicate, the later they were created. [In these areas] even sages’ wisdom is limited. If later generations make more efforts to improve them, the instruments and mathematics will become more enduring and more delicate.”¹²⁷ Thus, for Yi Ik, the method of the natural world was independent from the traditional human imagination and the moral curbs on it.

Chosŏn scholars’ adoption of Western sciences and consequent scientific attitude are witnessed more clearly in the work of Hong Daeyong (1731–1783). Hong’s time was the prime days of *Sirhak*, so his study was more inclined to practical matters, as seen from a letter of his written when young.¹²⁸ The crucial moment that made Hong Daeyong a thinker was his visit to Beijing. In 1776, he had an opportunity to visit Qing’s capital as part of the entourage of a diplomatic mission, and realised the backwardness of Chosŏn in both material and intellectual dimensions. His main works on science and mathematics were written after his visit to Beijing, and his famous book, *Ŭisan mundap*, was written in this period. Here, our aim is to uncover Hong’s scientific and rational view of the world and its effects on his reconstruction of the China-centred East Asian world through his main work, *Ŭisan mundap*.

A remarkably challenging book, *Ŭisan mundap* was intended to refute the traditional view of the physical world and to envision the world based on scientific rationality. As clearly shown in the name of the two main characters, Hŏja (虛子, Mr. Empty) and Sirong

¹²⁷ “凡器數之法 後出者工 雖聖智有所未盡而 後人因以增修 宜其愈久而愈精也.” “Yöksang” (曆象) in *Sŏngho sasŏl* 1, 188–9.

¹²⁸ In the letter Hong stated that in civilisation (開物成務) the matters of the almanac, mathematics, money and grain (錢穀), and the military are important. “Yŏinsŏ yisu” (與人書二首” (內集卷三)), *Kukyŏk Tamhŏnsŏ* vol. 1, p. 357.

(實翁, Old Mr. Substantial), Hong confronted the scientifically constructed, real world with the traditional or insubstantial world upon which Chosŏn Confucians built their study. The two opposing characters talking at Yiwulu Mountain thus represent the two different worlds.¹²⁹ The dialogue between the two consists of Hōja's questions and Sirong's answers, and the main content of the dialogue concerns the principles of the operation of the solar system and Earth. In terms of the dimension of scientific knowledge, Hong appears to be superior to Yi Ik. For instance, unlike Yi Ik, Hong was aware of the actual way the Earth rotates and its globe shape. He also understood the real mechanism that caused the lunar eclipse, as well as the existence of gravity, although he did not use the terms *chungnyŏk* (重力) or *illyŏk* (引力). However, owing to the influence of the old space model introduced firstly to Chosŏn, he still believed that the Earth was the centre of the solar system and the sun and moon revolved around it. He could not free himself completely from traditional conceptions and incorrect reasoning, so he clung to the ambiguous term *qi* (氣) when indicating air, water vapour, and other matters in context, and maintained that the shapes of mountains and valleys on the surface of the moon were reflections of the Earth's surface. Nonetheless, Hong's understanding of scientific knowledge was indisputably deep.

Now, let us see how his scientific proclivity affected his way of seeing the world. The distinction is that Hong decisively rejected the traditional conceptions of natural phenomena and tried to see the physical world on the basis of *scientific rationality*. For him, the division between logic in the natural world and that in the human (or moral) world was getting

¹²⁹ Yiwulu Mountain (醫巫閭山) is located on the north-eastern side of China, which formed the border dividing civilised China from Eastern barbarians. Yim Chongt'ae has pointed out that, by setting the location at Yiwulu, Hong intended to blur the old division between civilisation and barbarism. The point is that the very moment that caused that reflection is a scientific worldview. Yim Chongt'ae, "Chigu, sangsik, chungwa chu'i," 214.

stronger. For example, he saw that the movement of stars in the universe had nothing to do with human affairs. According to him, the old custom of finding omens through the movement of stars was no different from attempting to grasp the insubstantial shadows of the heaven. It was simply the opinions of astrologists, he asserted. He thus removed irrational remnants from the traditional way of thinking. Another example is his treatment of the old concept of *yinyang*. Instead of upholding its traditional idea as the origin of all creatures and the cause of the shift of nature, he deconstructed it by describing the change of the four seasons scientifically in terms of the closeness or distance of the sun from the Earth and of the angle of sunshine hitting the surface of the Earth. And he simply degraded *yinyang* as a theory of the ancients based on their observation of the regular shift of day and night.¹³⁰ In this regard, his rational worldview drove him to discredit the ancient text *Yijing* (易經) for its use for fortune-telling by means of the symbols (象數) in the book. Therefore, in Hong's thought, it is clearly shown that the physical/natural world was obtaining its independence from its old curbs of humans' irrational or arbitrary use of it for their convenience.

Hong's scientific rationality also forced him to abandon the old China-centred world model in East Asia. For a long time, China as the central state and its neighbouring small ethnic peoples were the normal way of seeing the geographical world. The new knowledge of the world informed from new atlases, however, drove Hong to abandon the old view and take on the idea that China represented no more than one tenth or so of the entire size of the globe. Moreover, from the new geographical understanding, China was no longer the central state (中國), just as Chosŏn was not an eastern country (東國). As evidence of that view, he argued that directions on the globe, specifically the east and west, could be differentiated

¹³⁰ Given that Chŏng Yakyong had a similar view of *yinyang*, this novel view must have been prevalent among progressive scholars in the late eighteenth century.

according to a place set as the criterion. Similarly, any place, if it be the criterion, can become the centre of the world.¹³¹ He thus denounced the worldview based on the ancient text *Chunqiu* (春秋), in which China was described as the “Inside” (or civilised) and the foreign ethnic peoples as the “Outside” (or barbaric). Hence, his scientific approach to the physical world imprinted Hong with a relativist view of the world and, by doing so, forced him to dismiss the traditional China-centred worldview.

Now let us move on to Chŏng Yakyong’s (1762–1836) case. Compared with Hong Daeyong, Chŏng’s academic coverage is wider, but, as with Hong, his scientific and rational view of the world was a distinctive element in building his thought. Here my aim is to show that Chŏng’s adoption of Western sciences and consequent rational understanding of the world operated as a cornerstone of his thought system, which has scarcely been highlighted in previous studies. Comprehensively examining Chŏng’s understanding of science, Kim Yŏngsik contended that Chŏng’s treatment of scientific knowledge was not deep and that his interest in science was basically pragmatic, not purely grounded in scientific purpose. Moreover, he added that the element of Western studies that most influenced him was Roman Catholicism, not Western science.¹³² This view corresponds to the majority of previous studies that have paid attention to Chŏng’s idiosyncratic interpretation of core Confucian texts, which was said to be influenced by his understanding of Catholicism.¹³³ Overall,

¹³¹ Later, Chŏng Yakyong also used this reasoning in order to refute the China-centred world model.

¹³² Kim Yŏngsik, “Chŏng Yakyong sasang kwa hakmun ūi siryong chuŭi chŏk sŏng’kyŏk” [A Pragmatic Character of the Thoughts and Studies of Chŏng Yakyong], *Tasanhak* 21 (2012, 12), pp. 65–116; _____, “Kidogkyo wa sŏyang kwahak e taehan Chŏng Yakyong ūi t’aedo chae’gŏmt’o” [The Attitude of Chŏng Yakyong toward Christianity and Western Science Revisited], *Tasanhak* 20 (2012, 6), pp. 255–305.

¹³³ Paying attention to the effects of Catholicism on his philosophy, Paek Minjung took this perspective. Paek Minjung, *Chŏng Yakyong ūi ch’ŏlhak* [The Philosophy of Chŏng Yakyong] (Seoul: Yihaksa, 2007).

Chŏng did not leave many works on science, and his depth of scientific knowledge did not go beyond Hong Daeyong's. Yet what is important is that, in terms of the way of seeing the world, his *scientific rationality* pierced his works; this rationality not only freed the physical/natural world from its previous curbs but also penetrated Chŏng's understanding of the human world.

Let us first review briefly the scientific topics that Chŏng treated in his works. Like many scholars of his time, he was interested in the solar system and earth science. In one essay, he testified that the Earth was globe-shaped, not rectangular, yet he did not address the Earth's rotation. In another essay, Chŏng expounded the scientific reason why the northern county in Chosŏn, Onsŏng (穩城), located at a higher latitude, had a longer daytime in summer than Tamla (耽羅), located at a lower latitude. In another essay, he illuminated the generation of sea tides and the reason for the flood and neap tides with the movement of the moon and sun, although he did not mention the existence of gravity. In addition, in one essay he described in detail why a convex lens collecting light can make fire. All in all, compared with Hong Daeyong's understanding of science, Chŏng's discussions of scientific themes are more sophisticated. Most distinctively, he uses graphic diagrams to support his argument for each theme. Considering that the diagrams are quite delicately drawn, we can surmise that he borrowed them from Western science books. Nevertheless, Chŏng's use of diagrams in explaining scientific phenomena was unprecedented. Moreover, he does not use conventional terms, such as *yinyang* and *qi*, at all to explain natural phenomena or scientific principles. Instead, his argument is based on logical causality and is largely rigorous and concrete. Thus,

while his level of scientific knowledge was still limited, his method of the investigation of the natural world was very scientific.¹³⁴

Chǒng's scientific and rational view drove him to take a very critical attitude towards scientifically unproven social customs in contemporary Chosŏn. Firstly, he was critical of traditional para-science. For instance, in an essay entitled *Maekron* (脈論), he sceptically viewed the traditional medicinal method of detecting illnesses by checking the vibration of the passage of blood through the wrist only with fingers, and called this method "a lie."¹³⁵ He also censured the old belief that a person's face shape (相) determined his destiny. Repudiating this prejudiced, irrational view, Chǒng asserted that a person's face shape is rather the product of his life circumstances and changes continuously according to the environment.¹³⁶ Neither did Chǒng hide his dislike of the irrational *feng shui* theory, which was deeply entrenched within Koreans' mind-set at the time. Refuting this theory point by point, he denounced it as follows: "It is a dream out of dreaming and a deception out of

¹³⁴ Like Hong Daeyong, Chǒng never associated the natural world with human affairs. In this regard, his clear separation between the matter of technology and that of moral teachings is meaningful. In his essay entitled *Kiyeron* (技藝論), Chǒng argued that moral teachings such as "filial piety and fraternal love" (孝悌) had already been clarified by the sages and what remained was to practise them, but the matter of technology was different. According to him, technology develops as time progresses, and even a sage cannot generate all technology, nor is a sage's wisdom better than that of several people. Therefore, Chǒng clearly understood that the principles of the natural or scientific world were not the same as those of the moral world. "Kiyeron" (技藝論 一二三) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 97–100. This point was emphasised by previous studies. See Kim Yŏngho, "Chǒng Tasan ūi kwahak kisul sasang" [The Ideas of Science and Technology of Chǒng Yakyong], *Tongyanghak* 19 (1989), pp. 277–300; Ku Man'ok, "Tasan Chǒng Yakyong ūi ch'ŏnmun yŏkbŏp ron" [The Ideas of the Astrology and Almanac of Chǒng Yakyong], *Tasanhak* 10 (2007), pp. 55–103.

¹³⁵ "Maekron" (脈論) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 100–3.

¹³⁶ "Sangron" (相論) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 103–5.

deceiving.”¹³⁷ This kind of comprehensive reflection on social customs stemmed from Chǒng’s deeply entrenched scientific and rational view of the world.

Chǒng’s scientific understanding of the world also forced him to reject the old China-centred view of the world, as we have seen in the case of Hong Daeyong. In taking the relativist view of China, Chǒng largely repeated the reasoning that Hong had employed previously. Upon the basis of the globe-shaped Earth and more precise world atlases, he argued that if one started a journey heading eastward from Japan, which was thought to be at the easternmost side in the traditional Chinese view, one would arrive at the western coast of Taejin (大秦, the Eastern Roman Empire), which, from a Chinese viewpoint, was located on the west side. From the Japanese point of view, however, Taejin is located on the east side, not the west side.¹³⁸ This essential relativity in geographical understanding forced Chǒng to take the perspective that any place on the globe, if its morning time and afternoon time are similar and if it is located between two poles, is a centre of the world. He thus asked why Chosŏn, a centre on the globe, should be called an eastern country.¹³⁹ As scientific geographical knowledge was adopted, the old China-centric view of the world could no longer be sustained.

Lastly, we should examine the effect of Chǒng’s scientific and rational worldview on his interpretation of Confucian texts. One important feature in Chǒng’s interpretation is that he often reduces philosophical ideas to empirical matters. In this case, he also suggests the reference to classical texts as evidence. His famous reestablishment of human nature (性,

¹³⁷ “此夢之中又夢 罔之中又罔也.” “P’ungsuron sam” (風水論三) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, p. 143.

¹³⁸ “Kap’ŭlron” (甲乙論) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 135–41.

¹³⁹ “Song Hankyoli sayŏnsŏ” (送韓校理使燕序) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, pp. 69–70.

xing) as *taste* (嗜好), an empirical term, is the representative case. Not only did he research the use of the word *xing* in classical texts, but also he observed human nature itself from an empirical attitude. As we will see in the next section, his empiricism contributed to the deconstruction of the philosophical system of the Neo-Confucianism. This means that Chǒng's scientific rationality pierces his understanding of philosophical themes. His preference for rigorous, evidence-based demonstration also relates to his reception of scientific methods. Even more, Chǒng's conscious efforts to build a systematic theory of his own, despite the structural limits of exegetical works, would be connected with the logic of science.¹⁴⁰

3. Independent Interpretations of Confucian Texts

Sirhak as a grand intellectual current embraces a number of intellectual changes in late Chosŏn, including scholars' practical concerns with national problems and aesthetic emancipation from ethical curbs.¹⁴¹ Here, I will focus on *Sirhak* scholars' independent interpretation of core Confucian texts in order to see the shift in their worldview. In this section, I aim to show *Sirhak* scholars' intellectual orientation, especially their methodological approaches based on rationality, positivism, and empiricism. Previous studies have mainly focused on whether or not the *Sirhak* scholars' interpretations can be described

¹⁴⁰ In her recent study, Paek Minjŏng has mainly focused on the effects of Roman Catholicism and the Western philosophical worldview on Chǒng's philosophy, but she has put little focus on the impacts of Western sciences on him. Paek Minjung, *Chǒng Yakyong ŭi ch'ŏlhak*.

¹⁴¹ In the field of arts, both intellectuals and commoners began to express their emotions frankly without being hindered by ethical curbs. On this change, see Yŏnse taehakgyo kukhak yŏn'guwŏn (ed.), *Han'guk sirhak sasang yŏn'gu* 3 [The Studies of *Sirhak* Thoughts in Korea] (Seoul: Hye'an, 2012).

as an “anti-” or “post-” interpretation of Zhu Xi’s predominant view. Early studies have argued that the scholars’ reinterpretation had an apparent anti-Zhu Xi inclination.¹⁴² A number of recent studies, however, have cast a negative view on this, while arguing that the seventeenth-century scholars Yun Hyu and Pak Sedang’s interpretations cannot be seen as showing an anti-Zhu Xi proclivity, because their difference from Zhu Xi is not based on core themes of Zhu Xi’s philosophy but is rather based on their disapproval of some subtle points of Zhu Xi’s interpretation.¹⁴³ This controversy is in fact a matter of how to properly conceptualise the change in late Chosŏn. Here I will name the change a ‘relativisation’ of Zhu Xi’s philosophy, not anti- or post-Zhu Xi studies.¹⁴⁴ I will argue that the relativisation began

¹⁴² Early researchers such as Hyŏn Sangyun and Yi Pyŏngdo have contended that Yun Hyu, Pak Sedang, and Chŏng Yakyong’s interpretations are based on anti-Zhu Xi philosophy. This view has been echoed by Yi Ŭlho, Yun Sasun, and Kŭm Changt’ae, albeit in a slightly altered way. For example, Kŭm has used the framework of *Tohak* (道學 or Zhu Xi studies) vs. *Sirhak* for late Chosŏn’s academic constellation. This perspective reflects the modernity-centred academic environment in Korea in the twentieth century. See Hyŏn Sangyun, *Chosŏn yuhaksa*; Yi Pyŏngdo, “Pak sŏgye wa pan chujahak chŏk sasang” [Pak Sedang and Anti-Zhu Xi Thoughts], *Taedong munhwa yŏngu* 3 (1966); _____, “Chaju chŏk sasang ŭi t’aedong” [The Advent of Autonomous Thoughts] in *Han’guk yuhaksa* (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1987); Kŭm Changt’ae, “Paekho Yunhyu ŭi sŏnglisŏl kwa kyŏnghak” [Yun Hyu’s Neo-Confucian Thoughts and Interpretations of Confucian Texts], *Yinmun nonch’ong* 39 (1998), pp. 231–57.

¹⁴³ On the interpretation of Yun Hyu, Miura Kunio, Ch’oe Sŏkgi, and Kang Ji-eun have raised an objection. And on Pak Sedang, Oh Yong-won, Kang Ji-eun, and Joo Young-ah have criticised the previous view. See Miura Kunio (三浦國雄), “17 segi Chosŏn e itsŏsŏŭi chŏngt’ong kwa idan: Song Siyŏl kwa Yun Hyu” [Orthodoxy and Heresy in 17th-Century Chosŏn], *Minjok munhwa* 8 (1982), pp. 162–201; Ch’oe Sŏkgi, “Paekho Yun Hyu ŭi kyŏnghak kwan” [The Characteristics of the Interpretation of Confucian Texts of Yun Hyu], *Nammyŏnghak yŏngu* 8 (1998), pp. 151–80; Kang Ji-eun (Kang Jiŭn), “Yun Hyu ŭi <Toksŏgi> wa Pak Sedang ŭi <Sabyŏnrok> i chujahak pip’an ŭl wihae chŏsul toeŏtdanŭn chujang ŭi t’adangsŏng gŏmt’o (1)” [The View that Yun Hyu’s *Toksŏgi* (讀書記) and Pak Sedang’s *Sabyŏnrok* (思辨錄) were Composed to Criticise Zhu Xi’s Philosophy Revisited], *Hanguk sirhak yŏn’gu* 22 (2011), pp. 167–200. On the new interpretation of Pak Sedang, see Oh Yong-won (O Yongwŏn), “Pak Sedang ŭi non’ŏ sabyŏnrok yŏn’gu” [A Study of Pak Sedang’s *Non’ŏ sabyŏnrok* (論語思辨錄)], *Taedong munhwa yŏn’gu* 47 (2004), pp. 329–59; Kang Ji-eun, “Sŏkye Pak Sedang ŭi <Taehak sabyŏnrok> e taehan chaegŏmt’o” [Pak Sedang’s *Taehak sapyŏnlok* (大學思辨錄) Revisited], *Han’guk sirhak yŏn’gu* 13 (2007), pp. 303–31; Joo Young-ah (Chu Yŏng’a), “Pak Sedang ŭi kaebang chŏk hakmungwan yŏn’gu” [A Study of Pak Sedang’s Open-minded Scholarly Attitude], *Tongbanghak* 20 (2011), pp. 7–53.

with Yun Hyu and Pak Sedang and, via Yi Ik, reached an acme in Chŏng Yakyong.

Let us first examine Yun Hyu's (1617–1680) characteristics of the interpretation of core Confucian texts.¹⁴⁵ When we see his interpretations, what is most salient is his reordering of the main bodies of the texts and his re-focus on the texts that had been set aside for a long time. In Yun's age, Zhu Xi's authority was becoming dogmatic and his edited versions of core texts, specifically those of *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, were accepted as the correct texts. Moreover, Zhu Xi's interpretations of those texts were seen as the orthodox way of reaching the essence of the texts. In this environment, impairing Zhu Xi's edition and creating a new edition was a great challenge to Zhu Xi. Yun Hyu reconfigured the main body of *Zhongyong*, the core text of Zhu Xi's philosophy, by reformulating it into ten chapters (twenty-eight sections), while abandoning Zhu Xi's established edition of thirty-three chapters. Moreover, in interpreting *Daxue*, in a repudiation of Zhu Xi's edition, Yun Hyu rediscovered the value of the original edition of *Daxue* (古本大學) as a truly orthodox text, and annotated it by dividing the body of the text into four parts. On the other hand, in understanding *ye*, he did not follow Zhu Xi's teachings in *Zhuzi jiali* (朱子家禮). Yun Hyu aimed to build his own system of *ye* and focused on ancient texts of *ye*, such as *Xiaojing* (孝經), *Zhouli* (周禮), and *Neize* (內則) (in *Liji* (禮記)), and annotated them. All these actions can be seen as a significant defiance of Zhu Xi's orthodoxy and Chosŏn's Confucians

¹⁴⁴ This term was first used by Miura Kunio when he interpreted Yun Hyu's exegeses of Confucian texts.

¹⁴⁵ According to An Pyŏng'gŏl, there were some scholars who interpreted Confucian texts on their own before Yun Hyu, but their interpretations were not full and independent. In the history of Confucian studies in Chosŏn, Yun Hyu was the first independent interpreter. An Pyŏng'gŏl, "Paekho Yun Hyu ūi silch'ŏn chŏk kyŏnghak kwa gŭi sahoe chŏngch'igwan" [Yun Hyu's Practical Understanding of Confucian Texts and His View of Chosŏn Society and Politics] in *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghak ūi chŏn'gae wa gŭ sŏngkyŏk*, by An Pyŏng'gŏl, Kim Kyobin, Ch'oe Sŏkgi, et al. (Seoul: Sŏngkyunkwan taehak'kyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1998), p. 12.

who followed this orthodoxy rigorously. Unsurprisingly, Yun Hyu was stigmatised as an enemy of Confucianism (*samun nanjŏk*) by his senior opponent, Song Siyŏl.¹⁴⁶

Now, let us turn to the intellectual orientation of Yun Hyu's interpretation of core Confucian texts. It is difficult to say whether Yun Hyu had any particular proclivity in his interpretations. His opposition to Zhu Xi's interpretation was expressed in a very allusive way, and, as he himself mentioned, he aimed to "supplement" Zhu Xi's orthodox view.¹⁴⁷ He largely followed Zhu Xi's method of interpreting texts. However, in interpreting *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, Yun Hyu showed a propensity for deviating from Zhu Xi's interpretation. Specifically, in *Daxue*, in opposition to Zhu Xi's interpretation, he put forth his own interpretation. Here let us see his interpretation of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* (格物致知) in *Daxue*, because it succinctly exhibits Yun's orientation.

In interpreting *kyŏkmul* (格物 Ch.: *gewu*) in *Daxue*, Zhu Xi saw it reaching (至) the nature of things and affairs (物) by investigation. The use of the word *kyŏk* (格) in Zhu Xi, argued Yun, was mainly employed in terms of *cognitive* reaching out to understanding.¹⁴⁸ Instead, Yun emphasised that *kyŏk* is rather close to "making meanings delicate, and thus

¹⁴⁶ Concerning the general characteristics of Yun Hyu's interpretation of Confucian texts, see An Pyŏng'gŏl, "Paekho Yun Hyu ūi silch'ŏn chŏk kyŏnghak kwa gŭi sahoe chŏngch'i kwan"; Ch'oe Sŏkgi, "Paekho Yun Hyu ūi kyŏnghak kwan." Concerning the controversy of *samunnanjŏk*, see Miura Kunio, "17 segi Chosŏn e itsŏsŏi chŏngt'ong kwa idan."

¹⁴⁷ What he intended to do is shown in his remarks in interpreting *Zhongyong*: "蓋天下之義理無窮而聖賢之言 旨意淵深 前人既創通大義 後之人又演繹之 因其所已言 而益發其所未言 此文武之道不墜在人而道之所以益明也." "Chungyong chuja changgu porok" (中庸朱子章句補錄) (雜著) in *Kukyŏk Paekho chŏnsŏ* vol. 8, p. 20.

¹⁴⁸ Zhu Xi's view of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* is quite similar to Kant's view of understanding in his epistemology, for Zhu Xi thought that reaching out knowledge involved a confluence between principles (理) within oneself and the principles of things and affairs existing outside. He explained two aspects of cognitive understanding, that is, both ontological/factual and moral aspects. For Zhu Xi's theory of *kyŏkmul ch'iji*, see Chŏng Sangbong, "Chu hi ūi kyŏkmul ch'iji wa kyŏng gongbu" [Zhu Xi's Theory of *Kyŏkmul ch'iji* and His Study through Mental Sincerity (敬)], *Ch'ŏlhak* 61 (1999), pp. 5–25.

sympathising and piercing (精意感通) the things and affairs to the heart.” According to him, it was just like the sincere attitude that one has when he conducts a memorial rite to his ancestor spirits (*chesa*). He exemplified the same usages of the word *kyŏk* from ancient texts. For Yun, thus, *kyŏk* is not merely reaching knowledge through cognitive acts such as learning, questioning, thinking, and discerning (學問思辨), but also maintaining a sincere attitude (居敬, 存誠) towards things and affairs. And he put his emphasis on the latter. Therefore, the attitude of *kyŏkmul* should accompany a man’s ethical cultivation and practice at all levels. This interpretation accords with Yun’s emphasis on the concept of *sŏngŭi* (誠意 (Ch.: *chengyi*)) in *Daxue*, one’s sincere attitude towards self-cultivation, which is different from Zhu Xi’s stress on *kyŏkmul ch’iji* and its cognitive character. The reason why Yun Hyu interpreted *kyŏkmul* in this way was also related to the fact that there was no concrete explanation of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* in the original text of *Daxue*. Zhu Xi thought that the original text itself had some parts omitted, so he created that omitted part himself. Yun Hyu, however, saw that there was no omission in the original text and that, because *kyŏkmul* as an attitude pierces all other stages of learning and practicing, the addition of a separate explanation of *kyŏkmul* was unnecessary. This is the context in which he re-illuminated the original version of *Daxue* (古本大學) and took it to be the right text.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, Yun tried to interpret Confucian classics on his own, which was in line with his aim at re-building the entire structure of Confucianism independently.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ For Yun Hyu’s reinterpretation of *Daxue*, see Kim Yugon, “Yun Hyu ŭi taehak i’hae e nata’nan wihak kwan” [Zhu Xi’s Understanding of Learning Shown in *Daxue*], *Han’guk sasang sahak* 41 (2012), pp. 201–223; Kang Ji-eun, “Yun Hyu ŭi <Toksŏgi> wa Pak Sedang ŭi <Sabyŏnrok> i chujahak pip’an ŭl wihae chŏsul toeŏtdanŭn chujang”.

¹⁵⁰ According to Ch’oe Sŏkgi, through his works of exegeses, Yun Hyu divided Confucianism into two categories: *sach’inhak* (事親學) and *sach’ŏnhak* (事天學). The former is about practical familial

Pak Sedang (1629–1703) was another scholar who interpreted core Confucian texts on his own. Pak’s exegeses differed from Yun Hyu’s in that Pak confronted Zhu Xi directly with core assertions of Zhu Xi’s interpretations. In the method of his exegeses, Pak first put forth his own interpretation on the verses of a Confucian text, and then compared it with Zhu Xi’s interpretation and refuted it. This means that, in interpreting texts, Pak was conscious of his difference from Zhu Xi. As Yun Hyu did in interpreting *Zhongyong*, Pak also reconfigured the main body of the text, reframing it into twenty chapters from Zhu Xi’s edition of thirty-three chapters. In *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, Pak even moved a number of sentences and chapters from their places in Zhu Xi’s edition, in order, according to him, to make their meaning clearer.¹⁵¹ Therefore, Pak Sedang’s opposition to Zhu Xi was unprecedented in the Confucian history in Chosŏn. Song Siyŏl’s naming Pak as an enemy of Confucianism (*samun nanjŏk*) is unsurprising in this context.

Let us now see what Pak aimed for with his own interpretations. In the introduction of *Sabyŏnrok* (思辨錄, Accounts of What was Thought of and Discerned), a collection of his exegeses, he cited the following phrase from *Zhongyong* in order to express his intention in

ethics, which he found in *Xiaojing* (孝經) and *Neize* (內則), while the latter is about respecting heaven, which is based on his interpretation of *Zhongyong*. Concerning Yun’s emphasis on heaven (天), it is evident that his understanding of Confucianism is based on classical texts. In this respect, Yun’s view is related to that of Chŏng Yakyong, who stressed heaven too, instead of the concept like *li* emphasised by Song masters. See Ch’oe Sŏkgi, “Paekho Yun Hyu ŭi kyŏnghak kwan.”

¹⁵¹ In the case of *Zhongyong*, there are eight places where Pak changed the order of chapters and sentences from Zhu Xi’s edited version. He did so because, as he stated in his questions on Zhu Xi’s edited version of *Daxue*, he wished to keep the sentences and chapters in order, so that there would not be any difficulty in interpretation. (Pak Sedang, “Taehak changgu chiui” (大學章句識疑) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok* (國譯 思辨錄) (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch’ujinhoe, 1982), p. 84.) According to An Pyŏng’gŏl, in interpreting *Zhongyong*, Pak criticised Zhu Xi’s exegeses with 38 points. See An Pyŏng’gŏl, “Sŏgye Pak Sedang ŭi tokja chŏk kyŏngjŏn haesŏk kwa gŭi hyŏnsil insik” [Pak Sedang’s Independent Interpretations of Confucian Texts and His Understanding of the Current Chosŏn] in *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnkhak ŭi chŏn’gae wa gŭ song’kyŏk*, p. 28.

the book: “If one wants to go far, he/she must start from a close place” (行遠必自邇).¹⁵² He, then, allusively chastised the current scholarly atmosphere in Chosŏn in which scholars wished to reach the far and high without holding the close and low. This metaphorical expression had a goal: to criticise those who pursued high and speculative discourses without tackling low or practical matters of their time. This criticism was also levelled at Zhu Xi, for it was Zhu Xi himself who interpreted the Confucian texts as a metaphysical science, not a practical study. This attitude of Pak Sedang is exhibited in his interpretation of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* in *Daxue*. According to Pak, Zhu Xi basically saw *kyŏkmul* as “reaching by investigation (至/窮至) things and affairs (事物),” yet he interpreted it too far to the dimension in which one reaches the highest point of understanding by realising both the nature of things (物) and one’s mind and heart (心). The problem raised here was that, in *Daxue*, *kyŏkmul* was placed at the initial stage of learning, which was supposed to lead to further stages such as *sŏngŭi chŏngsim* (誠意正心) and *susin chega* (修身齊家). Pak interpreted *kyŏkmul* as “the laws (則) of things,” in accordance with a commonly recognisable meaning of it, after which other, more sophisticated, ways of moral learning and practicing can be pursued.¹⁵³ He thus removed the far and high (or metaphysical) interpretation that Zhu Xi made with *kyŏkmul ch’iji*.

Another point with which Pak Sedang opposed Zhu Xi was the rejection of irrationality. In a number of places, Pak pointed out Zhu Xi’s irrationalities, especially in the logical flow of meaning. In the case of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* discussed above, apart from too high

¹⁵² In the same context, he also noted that “being equipped can be reached by starting from being terse and abridged, and being delicate from being coarse” (所謂備者 亦可自略而推之 所謂精者 亦可自粗而致之).

¹⁵³ “Taehak” (大學) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok*, p. 19.

and far an interpretation of it, what Pak problematised was its lack of balance with other items of self-cultivation. That is to say, since Zhu Xi's interpretation of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* already embraced the meanings of *sŏngŭi* (誠意) and *chŏngsim* (正心), there was no need to have the further stages of self-cultivation. Pak Sedang's adherence to *logical* (or contextual) *rationality* is not limited only to the minor logical problems at the level of sentences. His adamant reconfiguration of the main body of *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* was made by this problem of logical rationality. Indeed, in his critical review of Zhu Xi's edition of *Daxue*, Pak revealed the reason for his own reconfiguration as follows: "[I] hope that sentences follow the same group and phrases do not lose their order so that there is not any part that is difficult to construe and thus cannot be interpreted."¹⁵⁴ Likewise, in the last paragraph of his exegesis of *Daxue*, Pak stated in the same context that: "As a rule, what one states is intended to disclose reasons and show meanings, so that after the statements are put in order, the reasons are clearer and then the meanings can be shown, and only after that, the flavour of the statements will come out fully."¹⁵⁵ Hence, at the heart of Pak's critical review of Zhu Xi's interpretation lay the question of logical rationality as well as the criticism of a metaphysical reading. As in Yun Hyu, we can see a growing relativisation of Zhu Xi's works in Pak Sedang's interpretation of Confucian texts.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ “或冀文從其類 語不失次 無難曉不通之患.” “Taehak janggu jiŭi” (大學章句識疑) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁵ “夫言者 所以明理而見意 故其言之有序而後 理明 理明而後 意見 意見而後 味足.” “Taehak” (大學) in *Kukyŏk Sabyŏnrok*, p. 71. In his letter to Nam Kuman (南九萬, 1629–1711), his brother-in-law and a high official at the time, Pak stated the need to understand texts in the order of *kang* (綱) and *mok* (目) and spoke of possible problems when the order was violated. This was probably the method that he employed in interpreting the texts. “Tap Nam Unro sŏ” (答南雲路書) in *Kukyŏk Sŏgyejip* vol. 2, p. 99.

¹⁵⁶ Recent studies by Joo Young-ah, Kang Ji-eun, and Oh Yong-won have emphasised that Pak Sedang cannot be interpreted as an “anti”-Zhu Xi or “post”-Zhu Xi thinker. It is acknowledged that Pak did not aim to oppose the core framework of Zhu Xi's philosophy, but the studies have not

In the eighteenth century, the relativisation of Zhu Xi's works became much more apparent, especially in Chŏng Yak-yong. The eighteenth century was also the period during which the new academic trend *Kaozhengxue* was introduced into Chosŏn and scholars began to take a more analytical approach to Confucian texts.¹⁵⁷ This inclination is shown in Yi Ik, who formed a novel perspective on the texts. Before we discuss Chŏng's characteristic interpretations, let us first briefly examine Yi Ik's attitude towards the texts, since Yi's method was largely inherited by Chŏng. Yi's distinctiveness lies in his positivist and rational approach to the texts. The salient point of his series of exegeses of core Confucian texts, entitled *Chilsŏ* (疾書, Hurriedly Written Writings), is that he focused on the right and wrong use of particular words or expressions and their correct interpretations.¹⁵⁸ This linguistic and philological turn is also exhibited in *Sŏngho sasŏl*. In some essays in that book, Yi Ik pointed out the problems of the flow of meaning (文勢) in some core Confucian texts and asked why no scholar before him had mentioned misplaced words and sentences. He claimed that this was due to the academic environment of Chosŏn, in which not even a letter in Zhu Xi's

considered Pak's works within the temporal context of the seventeenth century. Pak, like Yun Hyu, had to confront Zhu Xi within Zhu Xi's framework, upon which Chosŏn's Confucianism was established. Therefore, both Yun and Pak, instead of criticising the core themes of Zhu Xi's philosophy, relativised some points of Zhu Xi's interpretations of core texts, which itself, I believe, was a big challenge to Zhu Xi. See Joo Young-ah, "Pak Sedang ūi kaebang jŏk hakmungwan yŏn'gu"; Kang Ji-eun, "Sŏgye Pak Sedang ūi <Taehak sabyŏnrok> e taehan chaegŏmt'o"; Oh Yong-won, "Pak Sedang ūi non'ŏ sabyŏnrok yŏn'gu."

¹⁵⁷ Kim Munsik has argued that after encountering *Kaozhengxue*, or Han Studies, a number of scholars realised the need to combine Song Confucianism with Han Studies, and that this eclectic approach to texts formed an academic trend in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Chosŏn. Kim Munsik, *Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghak sasang yŏn'gu*.

¹⁵⁸ Previous studies that have addressed *Chilsŏ* testify to this point. Kim Yugon et al., "Sŏngho Yi Ik ūi taehak i'hae ūi t'ŭkjing" [The Characteristics of Yi Ik's Interpretation of *Daxue*], *Yu'gyo sasang munhwa yŏn'gu* 56 (2014), pp. 327–44; Yi Yŏnggho, "Sŏngho Yi Ik ūi non'ŏ hak ūl t'onghae pon sirhakp'a kyŏnghak ūi t'ŭkjing" [The Characteristics of *Sirhak* Scholars' Interpretation of Confucian Texts Seen from Yi Ik's Understanding of *Lunyu*], *Yangmyŏnghak* 34 (2013), pp. 201–313; Kwŏn Munbong, "Sŏngho ūi chungyong chusŏk il goch'al" [A Study of Yi Ik's Exegeses of *Zhongyong*], *Hanmun kyoyuk yŏn'gu* 14 (2000), pp. 265–79.

works could be questioned, not to mention that of the classical texts.¹⁵⁹ Besides the linguistic analytical approach, Yi used a comparative philological approach to resolve academic questions that had long been left unsettled.¹⁶⁰ With these methods, Yi aimed to find out the *original ideas* of Confucius. In this regard, it is meaningful that Yi regarded a critical deficiency in Song Confucianism-based Chosŏn's academic tradition as the lack of casting "doubts" (懷疑) on the texts themselves, as he stated in part of his *Chilsŏ*.¹⁶¹

The methods that Yi used involved finding more rational explanations of the texts. In other words, his linguistic and philological approach was accompanied by his more rational view of the world. In fact, taking a rational approach to the texts, he paved the way for the peak of *namin Sirhak* that reached its acme in Chŏng Yakyong. A paradigmatic case that shows Yi Ik's rationality is his view of history. Chosŏn's orthodox way of understanding

¹⁵⁹ “但曰 一字致疑 則妄也 考校參互 則罪也 朱子之文 尙如此 況古經乎.” (“Yu'mun kŭmmang” (儒門禁網) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 400.) In an essay, Yi argued that the sentence in *Lunyu* (論語), “In cultivating fields, there is starvation in it, and in learning, there is a stipend in it” (耕也 餒在其中矣 學也 祿在其中矣), is inappropriate in the flow of meaning. He thus replaced the word *noe* (餒, starve) with *wi* (餵, feed) and reinterpreted it as “Once one studies, one can obtain a stipend. This is the same as one can get eating, once one cultivates a field.” And he added that what Confucius intended was to warn against scholars pursuing a government job and stipend without studying hard. See “Noejae kijung” (餒在其中) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 380–1.

¹⁶⁰ The short essay *Maengja suŏp* (孟子受業) registers the kind of approach Yi took to the texts. For a long time, the course of the inheritance of Confucian teachings from Confucius to Mencius was a moot point. Scholars guessed that Zisi (子思), the grandson of Confucius, composed *Zhongyong* and then taught it to Mencius. However, the relationship between the two persons was confused as several texts depicted their lifetimes incorrectly. Examining this question, Yi used a comparative philological approach and drew out the reasonable conclusion that the two persons' age gap was about a hundred years, so it was impossible for Zisi to have taught Mencius directly. With this investigation, Yi clarified that Zhengzi's (程子) view and Zhuzi's (朱子) early view on that inheritance were groundless. (“Maengja suŏp” (孟子受業) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 353–5.) This kind of redressing through positivist analysis is found in several parts of *Sŏngho sasŏl*. For example, see “Yahap” (野合), 370–1.

¹⁶¹ Concerning the importance of casting doubt as a method, see “Chungyong chilsŏ husŏl” (中庸疾書 後說) in *Kukyŏk Sŏngho chilsŏ* (國譯 星湖疾書), trans by An Pyŏnghak, Yi Naejong, Yi Ut'ae, et al. (Seoul: Hallym taehakgyo t'aedong kojŏn yŏn'guso, 1998).

history was grounded by Zhu Xi's *Zizhitongjian gangmu* (資治通鑑綱目, Outlines and Details of Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government), a book that tailored history with ethical scissors. History was a mirror to learn moral lessons from. Yi applied his "doubts" to history books and frankly remarked that one's good or bad behaviours and his benevolence (仁) or not in history books cannot be trusted as they are written. Then Yi insisted that "occasions in the world are subject to luck at the rate of eight or nine out of ten."¹⁶² In this context, for him the traditional axiom that those who do evil deeds are punished could not be applied to reality.¹⁶³ Yi Ik thought that history was a complex entity and that most historical events were decided outside of humans' good will. Therefore, for Yi Ik, a more rational and reality-based view of history was replacing the traditional ethical view of history. This shift in the view of history in fact represented the grand intellectual change taking place in Chosŏn at the time, when the dominant ethical view of the world was giving way to a more rational interpretation of the world.

This intellectual transformation is most obviously displayed in Chŏng Yakyong's interpretation of Confucian texts. Chŏng strengthened Yi's methods, putting his imagination in them. Here let us examine Chŏng's reconstruction of Confucianism in three ways: firstly, his criticism of *Xinglixue* or Song Confucianism; secondly, his reconstruction of Confucian ideas replacing Zhu Xi's views; and lastly, his major methods. First of all, let us start with Chŏng's critical view of *Xinglixue*, the orthodox Neo-Confucianism in Chosŏn. The core of Chŏng's criticism was its dogmatism and its metaphysical, not practical, proclivity. When we compare Chŏng Yakyong and Yi Ik, a major difference between them lies in the intensity

¹⁶² “天下事 大抵八九是幸會也.” “Tok saryo sŏngp'ae” (讀史料成敗) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 379–80. For a similar view on history, see “Kosa sŏn'ak” (古史善惡) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 376–8.

¹⁶³ “Kunja chonsim” (君子存心) in *Sŏngho sasŏl*, 331–2.

with which they confronted Zhu Xi. While Yi's exegeses largely aimed at complementing Zhu Xi, Chŏng's exegeses had a number of points that fundamentally challenged and offered alternatives to Zhu Xi's core ideas. Chŏng had already put forward an untraditional view on Confucian texts when he was a government official before his long exile.¹⁶⁴ This attitude of Chŏng's is apparent in his writing on thirteen classical texts. In the essay, Chŏng stated that, as Zhu Xi's theory was highly revered (while other theories were set aside), the academic atmosphere could be corrected into a right way, but the excessive preoccupation with Zhu Xi studies yielded a blind adherence to Zhu Xi's view. Thus, scholars came to be ignorant of the existence of other views and even different editions of the texts. As a result, according to him, there was no age like the contemporary one in which Confucian scholarship was so degraded and dispirited.¹⁶⁵ Chŏng's remarks were made in the context of the development of Confucianism in China, especially the situation of Ming China. However, it would be accepted that the case of Chosŏn was not much different and it is possible to interpret that Chŏng implicitly meant the circumstances of Chosŏn. By way of correction, he suggested a liberalisation of academic investigation. Concretely, he stated that scholars should be given the freedom to review all theories, including those of the Chin and Han eras, and compare them with one another, and that they should be able to choose between different viewpoints

¹⁶⁴ After the sudden death of King Chŏngjo in 1800, Chŏng Yakyong and his colleagues in the *namin* faction were persecuted for their adherence to Catholicism. Chŏng was sent into exile to Kangjin, Chŏlla province, and lived there for 18 years. Although conditions were not ideal, especially in terms of his career as a government official, he could devote all his energy and time to scholarly investigation and made great academic achievements. See "Chach'an myojimyŏng" (自撰墓誌銘) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 7.

¹⁶⁵ "Sipsamgyŏng ch'aek" (十三經策) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 4.

and to abandon them.¹⁶⁶ So, already when he was a young government official, Chŏng clearly recognised the problems of the Zhu Xi philosophy-dominated academic environment in both Ming China and Chosŏn.

On the other hand, in his other essay on Confucian academic strands entitled *O'hakron* (五學論, Discussions of Five Academic Strands), Chŏng levelled criticism at Song Confucianism itself for its excessively metaphysical and speculative character. In the part on *Xinglixue* (性理學), Chŏng censured the scholars of his time for their upholding of the philosophical concepts as their main concerns, such as *liqi* (理氣, principle and material force), *xingqing* (性情, the nature and feelings), *tiyong* (體用, essence and function), *benran qizhi* (本然氣質, the inherent moral nature and temperaments), and the like. He thought that they concentrated on too minute analyses of those concepts and subsequently generated a number of impractical strands of theory. According to him, these scholars had made arguments against one another for generations and then formed factions among those of similar views, but they did not know about practical matters of the state – such as concrete rituals and music (禮樂) and legal affairs and governing (刑政) – and simply wished to be treated as high and lofty scholars.¹⁶⁷ In another essay on Confucianism entitled *Sokhakron* (俗學論, Discussions of Vulgar Studies), Chŏng called these scholars “vulgar Confucians” (俗儒) and delineated true Confucians’ studies as existing “for the sake of governing the state, making people comfortable, routing barbarians, enriching national finance, and making both the words and the sword equipped, so that their studies are of nothing impertinent and

¹⁶⁶ In this context, he advised King Chŏngjo to revise the current civil service examination, specifically the one examining the level of understanding of Confucian texts (明經科), because the current system failed to enhance scholars’ general level of knowledge. Ibid., 57–8.

¹⁶⁷ “O’hakron” (五學論) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, 115–9.

unnecessary.”¹⁶⁸ Hence, we can say that Chǒng’s criticism of speculative Song Confucianism was based on his practical concerns; that is, its failure to enrich academic discourse and to tackle national problems. Considering his overall academic characteristics, Chǒng’s essential academic momentum seems to have come out of this concern. As is revealed in a letter to his pupil Chǒng Such’il (丁修七), he thought that: “Being bound by sentences and phrases, calling oneself a reclusive, lofty scholar, and being unpleased with making efforts to practical accomplishments, all are not the teachings of Confucius.”¹⁶⁹ A wealth of Chǒng’s scholarship was built upon this principle of *practical usefulness*. His disapproval of Zhu Xi’s philosophy and his interest in varied practical studies including technology and medicine (not to mention state institutions) stemmed from this context.

Second of all, let us turn to the core ideas in Chǒng’s interpretation of Confucian texts, especially the Four Books. The basic notions in Chǒng’s reconstruction of Confucianism were rationality and practicality. Chǒng’s exegeses of the Four Books are famous for the novel viewpoints that challenge Zhu Xi’s views. Contrary to Zhu Xi’s metaphysical and cognitive inclination, Chǒng’s interpretation largely retrieves the question of humans’ moral practice. Among a number of new interpretations, the most salient and essential is likely to be his theory of human nature (性), which is very different from Zhu Xi’s. Zhu Xi understood human nature in a two-fold way. In his theory, *li* (理) and *qi* (氣), the two fundamental components creating the cosmos, are naturally given to humankind, so that human nature is comprised of two aspects: one side of the nature is affected by *li* (本然之性), which is purely

¹⁶⁸ “眞儒之學 本欲治國安民 攘夷狄裕財用 能文能武 無所不當.” “Sok’yuron” (俗儒論) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, 172.

¹⁶⁹ “凡繳繞章句 自稱隱逸 不肯於事功上著力者 皆非孔子之道也.” “Wi pansan Chǒng Such’il chŭng’ŏn” (爲盤山丁修七贈言) in *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 7, 296.

good and moral and common to all humankind, and the other side is affected by *qi* (氣質之性), which is different from person to person and is good and moral in some situations but in others might work in bad and immoral ways. Humans' evil side is supposed to come out of the latter, specifically when that loses the mean (中). Hence, humans need to maintain their purely good nature and, at the same time, cultivate the other nature affected by *qi* through moral education.

Chǒng did not accept this theory, especially *li* as the fundamental principle generating the cosmos. Instead, he reconstructed his own theory in a monistic way, on the basis that in classical texts the term *li* was rarely used in the way that Zhu Xi employed it.¹⁷⁰ Chǒng's basic idea is that human nature is rather "taste" (嗜好), which he elicited by analysing nature (性) itself both textually and empirically.¹⁷¹ He understood 'human nature as taste' primarily as humans' diverse preferences for sense, and extended this idea to moral preference.¹⁷² Therefore, people's liking of moral acts was supposed not to be given naturally by the moral nature of humanity (*li*), but rather to come from people's preference for, or taste for them. When understanding human nature in the matters of good and bad (or morality), however, Chǒng could not entirely abandon Zhu Xi's dual structure. He thus admitted that humans are granted both a good nature from heaven (道義) (owing to this, humans' inborn taste prefers

¹⁷⁰ See Chǒng Ilkyun, *Tasan sasǒ kyǒnghak yǒn'gu*, 286–8.

¹⁷¹ I have borrowed the term "taste" as the translation of *kiho* (嗜好) from David Hume. In his aesthetic theory, Hume regarded the human sentiment of pleasure or pain in response to an object – that is, *taste* – as the essence of humans' sense of beauty and deformity. This view basically stemmed from his epistemic empiricism, from which Chǒng also took the term *kiho*. For Hume's aesthetic theory, I have referred to Theodore Gracyk, "Hume's Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/hume-aesthetics/>>.

¹⁷² In grasping the core themes of Chǒng Yakyong's reinterpretation of the Four Books, I have referred to Chǒng Ilkyun's *Tasan sasǒ kyǒnghak yǒn'gu*.

the good and rejects the bad) and individual temperament affected by *qi* (氣質), but his point was that these two sides are united into one and fight against each other within one's self. This marks a difference from Zhu Xi, who thought that the two sides are clearly separated within one's self. In the same context, Chǒng opposed Zhu Xi's idea of an inborn division of people based on the nature affected by *qi*. According to Zhu Xi, due to diverse *qi* given to all creatures, divisions between humans, animals, and plants emerge. On the other hand, since nature affected by *li* was given to all creatures equally, creatures in the world are assumed to have that nature in common. In the case of humans, because of the difference of *qi*, sages are born with a perfect nature, while average people are born with diverse characters and levels of wisdom. Chǒng negated this view and put forward his own idea that the nature of humankind is qualitatively different from animals' and that animals do not have an inborn moral nature. As far as the good and bad of individual humans is concerned, Chǒng argued that the difference between humans is not directly related to the nature affected by *qi*, but is rather caused by the environment and education after birth. He thus weakened the *a priori* notions of *li* and *qi* and the dualistic structure of human nature, so that humans' good and bad acts could now be ascribed to humans themselves. While Chǒng did not entirely abandon Zhu Xi's deontological framework, his theory went toward a more rationally and empirically acceptable version.

Chǒng's rational reinterpretation and imputation of human behaviours to humans' own responsibility are also shown in his theory of benevolence or *ren* (仁). Zhu Xi saw *ren* as the most essential virtue that exists *a priori* within humans' purely good nature like the notion *li*. This kind of *a priori* character of *ren*, however, owing to its metaphysical feature, yielded the problem of how to concretely practise it in everyday life. Chǒng's reply to this

problem is that *ren* does not lie in humans' nature, but in humans' relationships to one another and in concrete moral practices. That is to say, by practising benevolent deeds in human relationships, those behaviours can be called "benevolence." He thus repudiated the *a priori* understanding of *ren*.¹⁷³

Chǒng's attention to humans' practice also led him to the reinterpretation of heaven or *tian* (天), which Zhu Xi construed as *li* (理). Opposing Zhu Xi's view, Chǒng restored the old term *shangdi* (上帝, Heavenly God) found in ancient texts – which had been discarded by Song masters – and equated *tian* with *shangdi*.¹⁷⁴ He paid attention to the notion *shangdi* because, as is suggested in his exegeses in *Zhongyong*, he thought that *shangdi* would help people to be moral by overseeing people even when they are alone. According to him, only *shangdi* and ghosts (鬼神) can know of people's evil acts when committed clandestinely.¹⁷⁵ *Shangdi* was thus recalled in need of people's sincere *moral practice* in their daily lives. Chǒng recognised the weak basis of morality in the Confucian idea of voluntary ethical cultivation. And in this instance, the Catholic influence on him seems obvious. The point is

¹⁷³ Chǒng Yakyong's redefinition of *ren* as a practical concept has well been illuminated by Ham Yǒngdae. Ham highlighted Chǒng's conception of *ren* in the history of the notion itself and in comparison with both Chinese and Japanese scholars' views. See Ham Yǒngdae, "Tasan Chǒng Yakyong ŭi 'In (仁)'ja haesŏk" [Chǒng Yakyong's Interpretation of the Notion *ren*], *Tasankwa hyŏndae* 3 (2003), pp. 333–63.

¹⁷⁴ Chǒng's retrieval of the terms of *tian* and *shangdi* is one of the critical points that distanced Chǒng from Song Confucianism. There is disagreement among scholars over where these notions stemmed from. Some scholars, including Yi Ŭlho, have argued that those terms indicate Chǒng's return to classical Confucianism, while others, such as Kŭm Changt'ae, think that they are proof of Chǒng being affected by Roman Catholicism. See Son Hŭngch'ŏl, "Tasan Chǒng Yakyong ŭi sŏngkihosŏl kwa kŭ nongŏ punsŏk" [Chǒng Yakyong's Theory of Nature as Taste and Its Reasoning], *Tasanhak* 4, 2003, p. 247.

¹⁷⁵ In "Chungyong chajam" (中庸自箴), Chǒng stated: "That a gentleman stays in a dark room and does not dare to do any evil act while being frightened is because he knows that the heavenly god stays with him" (君子處暗室之中 戰戰栗栗 不敢爲惡 知其有上帝臨女也). See "Chungyong chajam kwŏn il" (中庸自箴 卷一) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* (國譯 與猶堂全書) vol. 1, trans. by Chŏnchu taehak'kyo honamhak yŏnguso (Seoul: Yŏgang ch'ulp'ansa, 1986), p. 203.

that Chǒng retrieved the ancient concept *shangdi* for its practical usefulness.¹⁷⁶ This practical concern of Chǒng corresponds to his continual focus on the notion of *shendu* (慎獨) in *Zhongyong*, as a method of self-cultivation and staying aware of god. He also treated *cheng* (誠), a sincere and pious attitude in dealing with things and affairs, as a core concept penetrating the thoughts of both *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*. Chǒng's commitment to moral practice is also shown in his interpretation of *mingde* (明德) in *Daxue*, in which Chǒng ascribed the bright virtues (*mingde*) to concrete and practicable familial values of *xiaotici* (孝弟慈), instead of Zhu Xi's view that finds it in something given from heaven mystically and is equipped within humans as a principle like *li*.¹⁷⁷ All these novel interpretations testify to Chǒng's serious predilection for moral practice and his rational view of the world.

Lastly, let us look into Chǒng Yakyong's distinctive methodological approaches in reinterpreting Confucian texts. The most distinctive elements in his method are his *positivist* and *empirical* attitude. In his exegeses, Chǒng mainly referred to classical texts in order to testify to the truthfulness of later scholars' interpretations. On the basis of the authority of classical texts, he corroborated or refuted existing views and suggested his own perspectives. In his works, Zhu Xi was merely one of the previous scholars, although deemed a great scholar. Zhu Xi's philosophical interpretations were backed up or refuted on positivist grounds. For example, reviewing Zhu Xi's dualistic approach to human nature, Chǒng

¹⁷⁶ Chǒng's adoption of the omniscient god can be reasonably interpreted to be affected by his encounter with Catholicism, specifically through the book *Tianzhu shiyi* (天主實義) written by the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci. However, as Paek Minjǒng argues, Chǒng did not fully accept the view of god suggested in *Tianzhu shiyi*. While the Christian God judges man as they leave "this" world and leads good men to paradise, Chǒng's god never does this. Chǒng's *shangdi* does not have "that" world and just shows himself in the form of *tianming* (天命); *tianming* is shown as *daoxin* (道心). Thus, Chǒng's adoption of the idea of god is simply within the extent to which it is permissible within the Confucian thought system. Paek Minjǒng, *Chǒng Yakyong ŭi ch'ŏlhak*, chs. 1, 2, 3.

¹⁷⁷ See "Taehak kong'ŭi il" (大學公議 一) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* vol. 1, pp. 19–31.

discovered that in the ancient texts the concept *xing* (性) was used in an empirical manner that was different from Zhu Xi's metaphysical approach; on that basis, he reconstructed *xing* with the concept "taste" (嗜好). This positivist and analytical attitude of Chǒng's appears to be influenced by the methods of *Kaozhengxue* and Western science. These new knowledge systems worked as methods for Chǒng to relativise the firm basis of Zhu Xi's philosophy.

Another approach that Chǒng used is empiricism, with which he reduced philosophically nuanced concepts in Confucian texts to empirical matters. He liked to analyse controversial points in the texts empirically and turned the points to a different direction. One notable case is his reinterpretation of human nature or *xing*. He brought the philosophical concept *xing* down to earth and saw that notion in the dimension of "my nature likes raw fish and grilled beef" or "my nature hates the croaking sound of frogs"; upon this basis, he reconstructed *xing* as "taste."¹⁷⁸ Therefore, Chǒng's view of 'human nature as taste' was derived from his observation of the actual workings of human nature. Another example is his reinterpretation of the concepts *yinyang* (陰陽) and *wuxing* (五行, five basic materials (金木水火土)), in which he raised opposition to Song scholars' metaphysical view. As we discussed in the previous section, Chǒng reinterpreted *yinyang* as both daytime and night-time created by the sun, following Hong Daeyong's view. Likewise, he cast doubt on the old view that the five principal materials (*wuxing*) comprise all creatures. He questioned this old view upon the basis of empirical observation and judged that the five materials are just five

¹⁷⁸ "Chungyong chajam kwǒn il" (中庸自箴 卷一) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* vol. 1, p. 199.

among numerous materials.¹⁷⁹ Taking this empirical approach, Chŏng dismantled some core parts of Zhu Xi's philosophical system.¹⁸⁰

From the discussions above, I think it is evident that there was a meaningful intellectual transformation in late Chosŏn. The most critical shift was the relativisation of the hegemonic Zhu Xi philosophy. To rephrase this in terms of worldview, the rational, practical, positivist, and empirical views were being rebalanced with the ethical worldview. From my own conceptual framework suggested in this thesis, *Sirhak* is a form of study that retrieved the ideas of political necessity. After all, *Sirhak* was a reformist strand of Confucianism, yet at the same time, it had elements that would go beyond even the Confucian boundary, as its worldview was clearly separated into two. The rational, practical, positivist, and empirical view of the world provided the intellectual resource to overcome the Confucian framework itself.

According to Yu Ponghak, *Sirhak* is, above all, an intellectual trend of the prestigious ruling *noron* families in Seoul (京華士族), which means that the practical intellectual trend

¹⁷⁹ “Chungyong kang’ũirok kwŏnil” (中庸講義錄 卷一) in *Kukyŏk Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* vol. 1, pp. 262–5.

¹⁸⁰ In interpreting Confucian texts, the *namin* scholars who resided in the Kyŏnggi province largely held more radical views than the majority *noron* scholars, but this does not mean that the former appropriated the relativist perspective on Zhu Xi’s exegeses. Among the so-called *pukhakp’a* scholars, Hong Daeyong also unveiled a critical interpretation of Zhu Xi’s views. For example, in his analysis of *Zhongyong* he thought that Zhu Xi arbitrarily divided and connected meanings, and, by doing so, made the mistake of interpreting the text too minutely (密) and too delicately (巧). Hong Daeyong, “Chungyong mun’ui” (中庸問疑) in “Kisŏ hangsa Ōm Ch’ŏlgyo sŏngmun yong’ui” (奇書杭士嚴鐵橋誠問庸義) in *Kukyŏk Tamhŏnsŏ* (國譯 湛軒書) vol. 1 (Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch’ujinhoe, 1974), pp. 100–110.

was not limited to a number of alienated, minority intellectuals.¹⁸¹ Given that there was a diverse spectrum of scholars who relativised Zhu Xi's philosophy, we can estimate that the *namin* scholar Chŏng Yakyong was the person who went furthest, compared with the more moderate, majority scholars of his time. This means that *Sirhak* in late Chosŏn was not a minority's appropriation. Indeed, whether radical or moderate, all reformists in the 1880s hailed from Seoul's prestigious *noron* families. The radical reformist Pak Yŏnghyo (1861–1939), indeed, confessed that the *Kaehwa sasang* came out of his group's gathering at Pak Kyusu's house, where they were taught by Pak Kyusu, the grandson of Pak Chiwŏn, with the latter's works.¹⁸² Previous studies have already examined the connection of *Sirhak* with *Kaehwa sasang* by looking into both human networks and the commonality of the two thought systems.¹⁸³ Therefore, if we can testify that the rational, practical, positivist, and empirical worldview of *Sirhak* is continuous with that of *Kaehwa sasang* of the late nineteenth century, we can find a new way to prove the intellectual continuity between the two thought systems. In the next chapter, therefore, we will examine the worldview of the reformist intellectuals of the 1880s.

¹⁸¹ Yu Ponghak, "Chosŏn hugi kyŏnghwa sajok ūi taedu wa sirhak" [The Emergence of the Prestigious Families in Seoul in Late Chosŏn and *Sirhak*] in *Tasi, sirhak iran muŏt inga* (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2007), pp. 95–123.

¹⁸² Yi Kwangsu, "Pak Yŏnghyo ssi rŭl mannan iyagi" [The Story of Meeting with Mr. Pak Yŏnghyo] in *Yi kwangsu chŏnjip* 17 (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1962), pp. 400–5.

¹⁸³ Kang Chaeŏn and Kim Yŏngho have researched the human network, and Yi Kwangnin has investigated Kang Wi's learning from Kim Chŏngghi and his close relationship with the young reformists or *Kaehwap'a*. Kim Myŏngho has confirmed that Pak Kyusu taught practical and rational ideas to the young reformists. For the reference, see note 43.

Chapter Three

The Reformists' Factual Understanding of the World

In the previous chapter, we noted that, for *Sirhak* scholars, the world was divided into two. While the hegemonic ethical world was diminished, the factual and empirical world was strengthened. The *Sirhak* scholars' increasing rational, practical, empirical, and positivist worldview corresponded to the widening of the factual and empirical world.¹⁸⁴ Was this trend of the growing factual and empirical world and its related worldview invigorated in the late nineteenth-century reformist intellectuals? This is the question that I will explore in this chapter. Specifically, this chapter aims to clarify the reformists' way of seeing the world (or worldview) by dividing the world into both the physical/geographical and the human world. This chapter argues that, within the reformists' worldview, the factual, empirical, and realist viewpoint extended greatly, while the traditional Confucian ethical viewpoint was scarcely seen, except by moderates such as Yu Kilchun. A point to keep in mind is the different backdrop of *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang*. *Sirhak* is Confucian scholars' academic products, so it is principally scholastic and its worldview is more epistemic. *Kaehwa sasang*, however, refers to the reformist government officials' and intellectuals' thinking on contemporary Chosŏn, so their thoughts are more practical and pragmatic and the objects of their pondering

¹⁸⁴ In this chapter, I use the 'factual, empirical, and realist' view of the world as opposed to an 'ethical' view of the world. When I need to shorten the former, I simply use the 'factual' view of the world. The word 'factual' was used by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas to indicate a sociological aspect of the world, contrasted with a normative/deontological aspect. See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Trans. by William Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

are social and political problems facing contemporary Korea. Thus, the objects of their attention may have differed, but they shared similar worldviews.

The investigation of worldview in *Kaehwa sasang* has rarely been made by researchers, which I think is associated with researchers' lack of interest in understanding *Kaehwa sasang* with regard to the previous intellectual developments in Chosŏn. Since most researchers who read the late nineteenth-century Korean history have presupposed that, alongside the emergence of *Kaehwa sasang*, a new era of Korean history commenced, they have paid little attention to *Sirhak* as its predecessor and thus the continuity or discontinuity of worldview between the two thought systems was overlooked.

This chapter begins with the newly introduced books from Qing from the 1840s, because these new sources addressing the new world beyond the Sinocentric world presaged the different worldview of the late nineteenth-century reformists.¹⁸⁵

1. New Sources of the World and Their Characteristics

1.1. Books on the New World

¹⁸⁵ The new kind of books introduced from the 1840s has triggered an academic debate over the origin of *Kaehwa sasang*. As noted in the Introduction, some scholars, including Chang Insŏng, have argued that the new books had more influence on the formation of *Kaehwa sasang* than *Sirhak*. However, it is difficult to identify the origin of a thought system in a clear-cut way, because an intellectual's or a group of intellectuals' thoughts are formed by numerous factors. Nevertheless, distinctive factors in forming a new thought system include previously or contemporarily dominant or influential intellectual trends and the temporal circumstances of the time. In this regard, the practical intellectual environment in the Seoul region since the eighteenth century, together with the temporal circumstances of the Western impact and the newly introduced books from Qing, would have contributed to the formation of *Kaehwa sasang*. It is difficult to imagine that only a couple of books formed a new intellectual trend without the support of a favourable intellectual backdrop and temporal demands. This study is interested in the macro-historical development of Korean political thinking, in which Neo-Confucianism, *Sirhak*, and *Kaehwa sasang* formed meaningful intellectual trends.

For a long time, Koreans introduced new knowledge through China and this practice continued until the early 1880s, in the wake of which the gate broadened to Japan and the U.S. In terms of the kind of books from China, a significant change took place by the 1840s, from which main sources were no longer about Chinese knowledge. We have already examined in the previous chapter that the first impact of world knowledge was made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the Catholic missionaries, and the new sources from the 1840s formed the second impact of the knowledge of the outside world, which reflected the Western impact on East Asia. The new sources about the world introduced from the 1840s to the early 1880s can be categorised into two groups. One is works which addressed geographical information of the continents and countries and China's crisis and how to strengthen the country. The other is about international relations, which mirrored the Western expansion into East Asia and the newly-formed international system based on modern diplomatic treaties. The aim of this section is to survey these new sources and then see their characteristics. I will first examine the new sources of the first group.

The geographical books introduced in the 1840s were *Haiguo tuzhi* (海國圖志, Illustrated Treatises on the Sea Kingdoms, 1843) and *Yinghuan zhilue* (瀛環志略, A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit, 1848), which represented the crisis of the Opium War (1839–42). Wei Yuan's (魏源, 1794–1857) *Haiguo tuzhi* was based on the sources collected by Lin Zexu (林則徐, 1785–1850) who triggered the Opium War, and intended to aid Chinese officials with improved knowledge about the contemporary world.¹⁸⁶ Because the

¹⁸⁶ Serving in Canton, Lin Zexu realised the need to know about Western countries and collected materials on them. But, after the Opium War, he was dismissed from his position in disgrace and the materials were handed over to his old friend Wei Yuan. Wei added more sources and completed the

book was composed soon after the Opium War, the temporal mood was reflected in the layout of the book. The author, in the first chapters, unveiled his own ideas on the strategy of maritime defence and policy proposals for a possible war and diplomacy in the encounter with Western forces.¹⁸⁷ On the other hand, in order to manage the Westerners, it was necessary “to know first the barbarians’ conditions. [And] To understand the barbarians’ conditions it [was] necessary first to know the barbarians’ geographical situation.”¹⁸⁸ This is the reason why most of the contents of the book was infused with geographical information about the outside world. In the case of the third edition, totalling one hundred chapters (卷), chapters from three to seventy addressed world geography by dividing the globe into six regions (洋). The book first introduced the countries of Japan and Southeast Asia, moved to southern, western, and central Asia, and then Africa and Europe, and lastly addressed Russia and the Baltic countries and those in America. In terms of contents, it delivered not only geographical information with roughly drawn maps but also their history, customs, political systems, religions, and trading conditions in a succinct and formalised fashion. So the book was basically a geopolitical book.¹⁸⁹ The important is that, though the author emphasised the European infiltration to other regions, his main focus was on Southeast Asia. Europe and Africa were dealt with in merely three chapters, while Southeast Asian countries were

book. For the context of composing the book, see Jane K. Leonard, *Wei Yuan and China’s Rediscovery of the Maritime World* (Council of East Asian studies, Harvard University, 1984).

¹⁸⁷ There are three editions of the book, which is of 50, 60, and 100 chapters respectively, completed each in 1843, 1847, and 1852. According to Jane Leonard, in the case of 60-chapter book the first four chapters address his opinion about national defence. Leonard, *Wei Yuan and China’s Rediscovery*, ch. 5.

¹⁸⁸ Ssu-yü Teng and John K. Fairbank (ed.), *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839–1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 31.

¹⁸⁹ Kim Ŭikyŏng, “Wi Wŏn ũi hae’guk toji e natanan sŏyang insik” [Wei Yuan’s Understanding of the West Shown in *Haiguo tuzhi*], *Chungguksa yŏn’gu* 5 (1999), pp. 128–56.

covered in thirteen chapters. This might reflect the limits of available sources on European countries. However, according to Jane Leonard, it is concerned with Wei Yuan's traditional attitude in seeing the West's penetration into Southeast Asia and China. He saw the Western expansion from China's past experience, regarding it as Western barbarians' pursuit of 'trade' with China and maritime Asian kingdoms. He was not much interested in the West itself. A consequence of this outlook is that he failed to capture the imperialist nature of the Western powers and its upcoming momentous effects on China.

Xu Jiyu's (徐繼畲, 1795–1873) ten-chapter book, *Yinghuan zhilüe*, also aimed to provide knowledge about the world, by dividing the world into four continents. However, he differed from Wei Yuan in that he focused on Europe (four out of ten chapters).¹⁹⁰ This means that he was clearly conscious of the novel character of the European appearance and its difference from China's previous encounter with foreigners. Indeed, Xu, governor of Fujian province who experienced the Opium War, witnessed Western technological superiority and China's relative backwardness. In this regard, in the book he posed fundamental questions about the nature of Western power and the future of China, which would reverberate among reformist Chinese intellectuals in the following decades. Taking a historical approach, he tried to capture the roots of Western wealth and power, by paying attention to their lenient political system, capitalist economy, and technological development. And, upon this basis, he questioned whether China could maintain its old civilisation. So, while Wei Yuan, a conservative, still held a Sinocentric view, Xu Jiyu, a moderate, did not and frankly confessed the end of China-centred world, seeing the world in a factual and

¹⁹⁰ North America was also addressed in a chapter. So when North America was included, half of the chapters dealt with the West. Fred W. Drake, "A Mid-Nineteenth-Century Discovery of the Non-Chinese World," *Modern Asian Studies* 6 (2) (1972), pp. 205–24.

objective manner. As Fred Drake puts it, his answers to his own questions were superficial and insufficient, but his book was a pioneering work leading to the “self-strengthening movement” (自強) of China in the 1860s.¹⁹¹

Among books on self-strengthening, the most influential book to Korean policy makers was Zheng Guanying’s (鄭觀應, 1842–1922) *Yiyan* (易言, Easy Remarks, 1880). Zheng, a reformist intellectual from Guangdong province who worked as a Chinese agent of foreign firms (compradore) for more than two decades, well recognised the conditions of the outside world and challenges given to China.¹⁹² On the basis of his experience as a business man, he systematised his own ideas on thirty six issues of contemporary China and published them in the form of volume. *Yiyan* as a collection of statecraft ideas aimed to build China as a wealthy and powerful country by reforming itself and adopting Western institutions and practices. He developed the book further and republished it as *Shengshi weiyan* (盛世危言, Words of Warning in a Flourishing Age) in 1894.¹⁹³ When we see Zheng’s ideas through *Shengshi weiyan*, one of the most distinctive was his fair-minded attitude towards contemporary China.¹⁹⁴ Due to his career and contacts of foreigners for a long time, he concretely witnessed the imperialist character of Western diplomats, merchants, and even

¹⁹¹ Drake, “A Mid-Nineteenth-Century Discovery,” 216–24.

¹⁹² For his life, times, and publishing records, I have referred to Guo Wu, *Zheng Guanying: Merchant Reformer of Late Qing China and His Influence on Economics, Politics, and Society* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2010).

¹⁹³ This book was further augmented and republished in different editions in 1895 and 1900. See Yi Hwasŭng, “Haeje: chungguk kaehyŏk e taehan saeroun chujang” [Bibliographical Introduction: A New Voice on the Reform of China] in Zheng Guanying, *Sŏngsewŏn: nanse rŭl hyanghan koŏn*, trans. by Yi Hwasŭng (Seoul: Ch’aeksesang, 2003), pp. 154–94.

¹⁹⁴ I have referred to the following book: Zheng Guanying, *Sŏngsewŏn: nanse rŭl hyanghan koŏn* [*Shengshi weiyan: candid advice for a disorderly time*] trans. by Yi Hwasŭng (Seoul: Ch’aeksesang, 2003).

missionaries and illustrated them in his book. At the same time, he was not blind to the fallacies of the Qing government, irrational Chinese laws, and the people's conservatism and anti-foreignism. He realised that expelling foreigners was impossible, and the only way that China should take is to adopt Western institutions and to reform its own irrational ones. He frankly depicted China as a backward and corrupt country, instead referring to England and Japan as being a developed country and a model Asian country respectively. The model of society he had in mind was that of wealthy and strong Western countries. Concretely speaking, in political reform, he thought that China should follow the Western parliamentary system (議院), finding the Western power in the unity of the peoples, which was possible owing to the parliament. In economy, his understanding of the economic system was quite capitalist. He emphasised the need to upgrade the manufacturing industry of China to compete with foreign goods. He also argued that Western wealth and power came out of their flourishing of "trade and commerce," which was conceived in China as a debased job. He detailed the advanced practices of commerce in Western countries and, contrarily, irrational institutions of China blocking the development of commerce. In this context, he stressed the role of government as an agent to reform its laws and institutions rationally. These concrete analyses of the problems and prescriptions on them must have given deep impression on Chosŏn's high officials. According to Yi Kwangnin, *Shengshi weiyan*'s original version *Yiyan* was widely circulated within the Chosŏn government and laid the foundation of Korean reformism taken in the early 1880s.¹⁹⁵ Thus, *Yiyan* and the geographical works led Chosŏn's reformist intellectuals to understand the contemporary world and to realise a new age evolving currently.

¹⁹⁵ Yi Kwangnin, "Yiŏn kwa han'guk ūi kaehwa sasang" [*Yiyan* and Reform Ideas in Korea] in *Han'guk kaehwasa yŏn'gu* 3rd edition (Seoul: Iljogak, 1999), pp. 20–33.

1.2. Books on International Relations

A different kind of sources on world knowledge that made an impact on Korean intellectuals was about international relations. The need to adopt this kind of books was related to the circumstances of East Asia in the late nineteenth century, in which Western countries demanded trade relations on the basis of Western-style diplomatic treaties. In this situation, East Asians hardly had knowledge about the norms and rules of those Western countries. The first pressure to know of the Western international system and their rules was given to the Chinese government in the context of its earliest contacts with them. This condition drove the Chinese government to have interest in translating ‘international laws’ as a way to understand the nature of the relations among Western countries. The Qing government fortuitously came to know that the American Protestant missionary William A. P. Martin (1827–1916) was translating Henry Wheaton’s book *Elements of International Law* into Chinese. The international law actually took effect when the Chinese authorities protested Prussia’s seizure of three Danish ships on Chinese seas in March 1864, which moved the Qing government to support Martin and his translation of Wheaton’s book, published as *Wanguo gongfa* (萬國公法, 1864). Martin himself continued to translate a series of works of international laws, which were to be widely circulated in East Asia over the ensuing decades.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ In translating *Wanguo gongfa*, Martin was assisted by four Chinese officials because of his limited capacity in Chinese. Probably getting help from Chinese officials, after publishing *Wanguo gongfa*, Martin translated a series of books on international laws. For the analysis of the concrete process of the translation of *Wanguo gongfa*, see Yi Kŭnkwan, “Tong asia esŏui yurŏp kukjepŏp ūi suyong e kwan’han koch’al: man’guk gongbŏp ūi pŏn’yŏk ūl chungsim ūro” [A Study of the Introduction of European International Law into East Asia: A case of the translation of *Wanguo gongfa*], *Sŏul kukjepŏp yŏn’gu* vol. 9 (2) (2002), pp. 17–44. For concrete historical contexts of Martin’s series of translations, see Kim Yongku, *Man’guk gongbŏp* [Public Laws of All Countries] (Seoul: Sohwa, 2008), ch. 4.

International law, or *Kongbŏp*, reflected European history, specifically the international system after Peace of Westphalia (1648), through which each state, regardless of an empire or a tiny principality, was guaranteed equal sovereignty in international relations. International laws were created upon this principle and were supposed to regulate all countries on the globe on equal terms. Indeed, international laws contributed to the establishment of basic principles of international relations in the post-China-centred international system in East Asia. East Asians understood that a diplomatic treaty is made between two independent sovereign states, and that once a treaty is concluded, both parties have a mutual responsibility to it. On top of these notions, they had a conception that, if a weak country has multiple diplomatic relations with a number of countries, then it creates a balance of power between them and consequently protects the weak country's sovereignty. This was indeed what the Chinese mastermind of Chosŏn policy, Li Hongzhang (1823–1901), and the diplomat who wrote the essay *Chosŏn ch'aeknyak* (朝鮮策略, Strategies for Chosŏn, 1880), Huang Zunxian (1848–1905), found as merits in the Western international laws and why they persuaded the Chosŏn government to sign diplomatic treaties with Western countries in the early 1880s as a way to prevent Japan's possible invasion. There were some other positive elements that the Chosŏn court made use of. The court liked the stipulations that a country has a right to take a neutral status in international conflicts and that any country can use the title of emperor instead of king. The Chosŏn court employed these for its own sake in the 1880s and '90s. Notwithstanding, the international laws did not play a meaningful role in resolving conflicts in East Asia. Those laws had meanings only among Western Christian states that had a similar level of military power. They hesitated to apply the laws to their relations with non-Western countries. When necessary, Western imperialist powers did not observe international laws and morality and relied on their military force. For instance,

Britain occupied a southern island of Chosŏn, Kōmundo, in 1885 without any notice to or permission from the Chosŏn government and retreated in 1887 upon its own needs.¹⁹⁷ As in this case, East Asians vividly experienced the gap between principle and reality, which drove them to hold a political realist view of international relations.

The 1880s was the era in which Chosŏn's intellectuals learned strategic international relations, and the book which provided a critical moment was the Chinese diplomat Huang Zunxian's essay *Chosŏn ch'aeknyak*. In that essay, Huang found a core phase of the confrontation in East Asia in the conflict between two big powers, Britain and Russia, and especially he worried about Russia's territorial ambition in Chosŏn. To check the Russian march southwards, he advised the Chosŏn court to tie close diplomatic relations with Japan and the U.S., as well as with its traditional patron China.¹⁹⁸ For Chosŏn's policy makers in the early 1880s, this strategic idea was new and stunning. After this essay was introduced, most reformist intellectuals reverberated Huang's view and found the pivotal conflict in East Asia within the tension between Britain and Russia, as the radical reformists Kim Ok'kyun and Pak Yŏnghyo did in their works. In this context, the perspective of international relations turning toward political realism, not idealism, was a natural process.

¹⁹⁷ British occupation of Kōmundo Island (Port Hamilton) was arranged to check Russia's march to the south in Central Asia. When Russia defeated the British-trained Afghan army in March 1885, Britain conceived that, when Russia moved to the south further, a war against Russia would be inevitable. Instead of the deployment of army forces in Central Asia, it planned to attack Vladivostok, for which it needed to have a naval port in Chosŏn. Yet as Britain and Russia reached an agreement over the Central Asian issue in September 1885, Britain did not need to continue the occupation and, in December 1885, decided to retreat from Kōmundo; and, after receiving a Russian promise of non-occupation of Chosŏn's port, which was made through the mediation of China, the UK finally retreated from the island in February 1887. For a concrete analysis of the Kōmundo incident, see Kim Yongku, *Kōmundo wa bladibostokū: 19 segi hanbando ūi p'ahaeng chōk saegyehwa kwajōng* [Kōmundo and Vladivostok: an abnormal process of globalisation in the nineteenth-century Korean peninsula] (Seoul: Sōgang taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2008).

¹⁹⁸ Huang Zunxian(黃遵憲), *Chosŏn ch'aeknyak* [Strategies for Chosŏn], trans. by Cho Ilmun (Seoul: Kōn'guk taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1988).

That a country which failed to self-strengthen could be a prey of the Western powers was commonly mentioned by Chosŏn's reformists. Indeed, Huang cited the cases of Burma and Vietnam that were on the brink of the loss of sovereignty as the very example. Huang's essay therefore played a critical role in shifting the perspective of international relations of Chosŏn's reformist intellectuals. Due to the impact of this essay, they recognised that Chosŏn was placed in the midst of a brutal game of survival.

These new sources from China represented the post-Confucian world that both Chinese and Korean intellectuals encountered. And these new books contained new ways of seeing the world, which were to be manifested apparently in the Korean reformists' works.

2. The Reformist Intellectuals' Understanding of the World

2.1. A Scientific Understanding of the Physical / Geographical World

The 1880s in Korea is the period during which both the government and reformist intellectuals began to seek the enlightenment of its people through publications like newspapers and books. During the decade, the government published the newspaper, *Hansŏng sunbo* (漢城旬報, Seoul Ten-Day Newspaper, 31 October 1883–9 October 1884) / *Hansŏng chubo* (漢城週報, Seoul Weekly Newspaper, 25 January 1886–12 March 1888), so as to spread the knowledge of the outside world, and the reformist intellectual Yu Kilchun wrote a book entitled *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* (西遊見聞, Observations on a Journey to the West,

written in 1889 and published in 1895), which intended to enlighten Korean people.¹⁹⁹ Even among other reformists' works written in that period, Pak Yŏnghyo's famous memorial to King Kojong (1888) exhibited his aim to enlighten the king. This section aims at examining the reformists' worldview through the works composed in the 1880s. Concretely, it will argue that the reformists' way of seeing the world was seriously inclined toward the factual, empirical, realist side of the world. Here we will first see how they understood the physical / geographical world.

A new perspective on the physical and geographical world is well exhibited in *Hansŏng sunbo* / *Hansŏng chubo* and Yu Kilchun's *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*. Interestingly, the editors of the paper and Yu set out the information and knowledge of the new world in the first issues and chapters, while in the case of *Sunbo* and *Chubo* the introduction of the new world and scientific knowledge continued to the last. In the first issue of *Hansŏng sunbo*, the editors explained latitude and longitude, equator, and the Arctic and Antarctic of the Earth, then introduced the scientific arguments that proved the Earth being round, not flat and angled, and also outlined the continents, oceans, major countries, and races on the globe, using three different articles for these pieces of information.²⁰⁰ The second issue of the paper discussed the Earth's revolution and rotation, along with the scientific evidence of the Earth revolving around the sun, and introduced the planets within the solar system. After these macroscopic

¹⁹⁹ In the introduction and the note on his book, Yu Kilchun stated that his book was written as a substitute of newspapers and that he took the mixed writing style of both classical Chinese and pure Korean because he wanted those who know letters a little bit to understand the book without a problem. This means that he conceived of his readership as the common people as well as intellectuals. Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* (*Yu Kilchun chŏnsŏ I*) (Seoul: Iljogak, 1971).

²⁰⁰ *Hansŏng sunbo*, “地球圖解”, “地球論”, “論洲洋”, 31 October 1883. The editors did not mention the sources of these articles at all. Yet, given the context, it is reasonable to say that they wrote the articles themselves referring to multiple sources, not transmitting them entirely from a foreign paper or book.

explanations were outlined, in another article of the same issue the editors turned to more specific matters of each continent, starting with Europe and specifically its geographical features, the main seas and the countries, races, religions, and political systems.²⁰¹ From the third to the fifth issue, the paper addressed the main continents excluding Asia, and then from the sixth issue it zoomed in onto individual countries, concentrating first on Britain and specifically its geographical, racial, and historical characteristics and its industries, political system, and military.²⁰² Introductions to individual countries continued in the following issues, along with occasional articles on earth science, such as the effects of the Earth revolution and the scientific principle of the thermometer, the historical illumination of Europeans' discovery of the American continent, and the statistical data on countries' rivers, each city's average temperature, and the population of the globe. It appears that the editors intentionally began with a macroscopic picture of the Earth as a planet and its continents and oceans and then turned their attention to the more detailed matters, dealing with individual countries and other specific themes. This systematic deployment of the information and knowledge of the Earth and its natural world must have stemmed from their intended aim, the enlightenment of the people about the new world.

This format is repeated in Yu Kilchun's book, in which Yu himself made it clear that he wrote for the purpose of enlightening the people.²⁰³ He started with physical features

²⁰¹ *Hansŏng sunbo*, “論地球運轉”, “歐羅巴洲”, 10 November 1883.

²⁰² *Hansŏng sunbo*, 20, 30 November; 9, 20 December 1883.

²⁰³ I think Yu's *Sōyu kyōnmun* is best interpreted as a book for the enlightenment of the Korean people of the time. For that purpose, he collated information and knowledge on each subject here and there and arranged them in order. In terms of setting out the entire knowledge of the new world, he placed the geographical world first, and then put the human world next in a macroscopic manner, which was followed by several miscellaneous themes. The historical significance of the book lies in several parts where he unveiled his own ideas. Providing a good introduction to and critical assessments of *Sōyu kyōnmun* to English readers, Dr. Koen De Ceuster sees the whole structure and

of the Earth within the solar system and the core knowledge of earth science, and then he narrowed his focus to six continents on the globe and then to the main countries on each continent. After these explanations, he turned his focus to the major mountains, seas, rivers, and lakes, and then discussed the human races, dividing them into five. Lastly, he addressed the commercial products of major countries, categorising them into both natural products and processed ones. By deploying all this up-to-date information and knowledge in the first two chapters (編), he intended to enlighten Korean people about the new world.

In showing the new world, the editors of the paper and Yu Kilchun presented a novel image of the world, one which was entirely different from the traditional one. In Confucian cosmology the image of the world was manifested as a mystical entity, for Chinese Confucian masters employed some abstract concepts of *Yijing* (易經) to depict the cosmos, such as *wuji* (無極), *taiji* (太極), *dongjing* (動靜), *yinyang* (陰陽), *wuxing* (五行), and *qi* (氣), instead of the description of the cosmos as it is observed empirically. This metaphysically forged cosmology was therefore detached from the real cosmos and supplied a mystical image. The Neo-Confucian cosmos was thus an imagined world generated to elicit fundamental moral principles for the human world. In *Sunbo* and *Chubo* and Yu's book, the solar system and Earth are depicted as they exist with scientific evidence and in a logical and objective manner. The cosmos and the world thus became demystified. The reason why the editors of the papers and Yu placed the knowledge of the new world into the fore was to let

the information/knowledge contained in it as Yu Kilchun's intended project for the suggestion of his own views and thoughts of the current world, not simply introduction of those pieces from a number of sources. Moreover, he thinks that throughout the entire chapters Yu suggested a new vision for current Chosŏn, aiming for a liberal nation state modelling on Anglo-American societies. See K. De Ceuster, "The World in a Book: Yu Kilchun's *Sōyu kyōnmun*" in *Korea in the Middle: Korean Studies and Area Studies*, ed. Remco E. Breuker (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2007), pp. 67–96.

Korean people recognise the real world. In these writings, it is apparent that a scientific view of the world is replacing the Confucian view of the world.

Moreover, the method they used in delivering the information of the geographical world, i.e., the form of standardisation and quantification, is worthy of mention. Numerous pieces of information and knowledge of the world are given in a standardised form and many of them are quantified in statistical data. In articles about the knowledge of countries on the globe (各國誌略) in *Hansŏng sunbo*, each country's geographical, racial, and historical features, as well as its industrial, political, and military situations, are well summarised in a standardised form. Likewise, the population of each continent and each country is suggested in the form of statistical data to be understood comparatively, as is the information about the big rivers of each country and big mountains of each continent. Thus, the positivist, objectified, and scientific way of seeing the world deeply penetrated the descriptions of the physical and geographical world within the publications. In this kind of view of the world, the Confucian and China-centred world could not be maintained any longer.

One more point to be discussed is the editors' and Yu Kilchun's inclination toward “*pugang*” (富强), or wealth and power, in assessing the geographical world. Indeed, the word *pugang* represents the mood of the times. As traditional norms and values regulating international relations were being demolished and as people came to see the world more factually, a newly emerging criterion for ranking countries in the world was their wealth and power. Countries on the globe were assessed on the grounds of their degree of economic and military strength, which was observed empirically and measured objectively. *Pugang* was one of the most powerful catchphrases sweeping across East Asia in the late nineteenth century. In this regard, it looks natural that the editors of the newspaper and Yu took that perspective

as a standard of judging the world, though the perspective was rather hidden than manifest in their view of the geographical world. There are a number of proofs that the reformist intellectuals in the 1880s saw the world centring on *pugang*. For example, in the order of introducing continents in *Hansǒng sunbo*, Europe came first and then came America. Likewise, in explaining individual countries, Britain was first and then came the U.S. Even in the main contents of the articles about Britain and the U.S., the editors cast queries like what made these countries rich and strong. The accounts of the histories of those countries were naturally associated with their development.²⁰⁴ This viewpoint is also found in illuminating the histories of Russia and Italy, in which the editors had an interest in the basis of their wealth and power, and in describing their history they did not omit information on the kings who built the ground for their prosperity.²⁰⁵ In the issue of 8 March 1884, in the same context, the editors introduced European countries' territorial size, population, and the size of their armies and navies, and compared them with those of Asian countries. And then they analysed the reason why Asian countries are backward – despite their bigger territorial size and population – finding the cause in their retention of old habits and their failure to transform themselves. In the same manner, in illuminating African continent they mainly saw African customs disparagingly, describing black Africans as “barbarians” living in deep darkness and the chaotic world.²⁰⁶ This negative view of less rich and strong races and ethnic groups is also applied to indigenous tribes in Australia and its neighbouring islands. The article on them describes the European occupation of the islands and the destiny of the native tribes in a sad mood, but, at the same time, it attributes the fate of the “barbarians” in a nuanced way to

²⁰⁴ *Hansǒng sunbo*, 20 December 1883; 17 February, 8 March 1884.

²⁰⁵ *Hansǒng sunbo*, “各國近事,” 3 July; 11 August 1884.

²⁰⁶ *Hansǒng sunbo*, “亞非利駕洲,” 30 November 1883.

their failure to build a civilisation like Europeans'.²⁰⁷

Yu Kilchun also saw the world from the perspective of *pugang*. Recounting the physical and geographical world in an objectified manner in Chapter One and Two, he rarely included his own opinions, but, in the last part of Chapter Two, in introducing major countries' products and their import and export goods, he exhibited his standpoint of the world. He saw that a country's prosperity and strength lay not in the abundance of natural products but in the capacity to process those natural products. He found a paradigmatic case in Britain and located British prosperity in hard working and less idle people, the number of whom was greater than that of any other country. Asserting that "a country's wealth and power rely on whether its people are diligent or idle, not its [natural] products' abundance or not," he pointed to black Africa and native America as the cases of poverty and weakness, despite their rich natural resources.²⁰⁸ Therefore, as the editors of *Hansŏng sunbo* and Yu Kilchun saw the world in a more factual, positivist, and objectified manner, 'wealth and power' came to become a core criterion of assessing the world and this led them inadvertently to hold a Western-centric view of the geographical world.

2.2. A Factual View of the Human World

The perspective of seeing the world through *pugang* is more salient in the reformists' understanding of the human world. Their understanding of the human world through the concept of *pugang* indicates that they saw the world as a demystified, objectified, and

²⁰⁷ *Hansŏng sunbo*, "阿西亞尼亞洲," 9 December 1883.

²⁰⁸ Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, 104.

measurable world. In this world, pursuing *pugang* which was a clear signpost for advancement was a natural national goal. Imperialism was none other than struggles among powers to achieve a higher level of *pugang*. The situation was not different in the Chosŏn of the 1880s. Although *pugang* was not sought systematically in the dimension of state projects, the reformists clearly recognised that the wind on the globe was blowing toward *pugang*. The aim of this sub-section is to see the reformists' understanding of the human world, which was closely related to their illumination of *pugang*. What is distinctive in their writings is their re-reading of Confucian texts for the purpose of *pugang* and their reconstitution of society to commercial society in this process. Moreover, they pondered concrete methods to achieve *pugang*. This modification of the world they were living in is exhibited in almost all reformists' works, but most clearly in *Hansŏng sunbo* / *Hansŏng chubo*.

A most remarkable change that the inclination toward *pugang* brought about is the re-reading of Confucian texts for the sake of a wealthy country and a commercial society. It is acknowledged that the dogmatic Neo-Confucianism in Chosŏn supported by the ruling class put lopsided weight upon building an ethically well-ordered society rather than a wealthy and powerful country. This unbalanced emphasis on an ethical ideal had been reflected on by *Sirhak* scholars since the late seventeenth century, but the majority of Confucians did not abandon the Confucian ethical ideal. In the 1880s, however, as the Confucian definition of the world itself was discredited, the traditional ethical worldview was seriously undermined. Instead, a factual understanding of the world, i.e., pursuit of *pugang* and catching up with the West, comprised the intellectuals' principal vantage point of the world. In this regard, it is impressive that the editors of *Sunbo* / *Chubo* reinterpreted Confucian texts in terms of the ideas embracing the wealth and prosperity of both the state and individual.

The reason why articles on *pugang* in the newspaper usually start with Confucian sources backing up wealth and power appears to be related to its readership, mostly intellectuals educated in a traditional manner.²⁰⁹ Mentioning that “although *pugang* is the subject that those who address the right way of governance rarely comment on, when considering state affairs, they are none other than the matter of wealth and power,” the editors led the traditional intellectuals to be conscious of the need for *pugang*.²¹⁰ Yet owing to the limits of the newspaper article as a medium, the writers’ discussion of Confucian texts on the ground of *pugang* is insufficient. Nevertheless, citing Confucius’s or Mencius’s remarks concerning the need to make people rich and to concentrate on trade and commerce, they effectively employed those texts as appropriate sources for a need to build wealth and power. In the article entitled *Puguksöl* (富國說), the writer cited the old text *Zhouli* (周禮) and asserted that, although the book discusses how to achieve a peaceful world (太平), its main idea does not go beyond how to make the state prosperous (足國). Likewise, in reference to Confucius, who believed that “only after becoming affluent can common people be taught [morally] (富而後教),” the author insisted that the sages including Confucius and Mencius grounded the well-governing of the state in “making people well-off.”²¹¹ In another article focusing on the value of commerce as a means to increase *pugang*, the author quoted a passage in *Yushu* (虞書) (within *Shujing* (書經)) to stress the importance of trade and

²⁰⁹ As the first newspaper in Korea, *Hansŏng sunbo* targeted intellectuals as its main readership so that it was written in old Chinese (漢文). But its retrieved edition in January 1886, *Hansŏng chubo*, used three writing systems: a mixed system of old Chinese and Korean, pure Korean, and pure old Chinese, though the articles written in pure old Chinese are more than half in number.

²¹⁰ “富強之說雖爲講王道者所不談論究□王業所不能外.” *Hansŏng sunbo*, “富國說 上,” 25 May 1884.

²¹¹ Ibid.

commercial activities: “by trading what one has and what one has not, wealth came to exist, all people could eat rice meals, and all countries could be governed” (懋遷有無貨居烝民乃粒萬邦作乂). And in the same article, referring to the classical text *Zhouyi* (周易, or *Yijing*), the author located the original ideas of “exchange” (易) in the world and the significance of “trading”(交易) in the teaching of that text, and regarded it as a precursor to the current commercial society.²¹²

The reinterpretation of Confucian texts on the basis of *pugang* is most clearly displayed in the way of construing the concept of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* (格物致知) in *Daxue* (大學). In the past, among the eight stages of learning and practicing in *Daxue*, the core stage epitomising all others was *susin* (修身). By cultivating inner ethical virtues first, thought Chosŏn’s Confucian intellectuals, a person could reach the stages of governing a state and pacifying the world (治國平天下). Now, in the newspaper, the article writers did not mention *susin* at all, and their focus was placed on the practically reinterpreted concept *kyŏkmul ch’iji*. *Kyŏkmul ch’iji*, the first stage for learning, despite its simplicity in meaning, had caused controversies in both China and Chosŏn, for the Song Confucian master Zhu Xi was not content with its simple and clear meaning, i.e., analysing things and then reaching knowledge, and thus extended its meaning to find its hidden philosophical implications. This interpretation of Zhu Xi later became the object of criticism in Chosŏn, with some scholars in the late seventeenth century including Pak Sedang who directly opposed Zhu Xi’s view and returned to its simple meaning. In the 1880s, *kyŏkmul ch’iji* was construed literally and practically, and was associated with the goal of *pugang*. So it was stated that “*kyŏkmul ch’iji*

²¹² *Hansŏng chubo*, “歸商論,” 20 September 1886. Other articles in *Hansŏng chubo* also cited ancient texts to support their ideas of *pugang*. See “論學政 第二,” 1 February 1886.

is the root of governing the state and pacifying the world (治國平天下),” and once *kyŏkmul ch’iji* is accomplished, making a fortune and making use of things effectively, and even governing the inside and outside of the state, are not serious problems.²¹³ The difficulties of Chosŏn in the 1880s were also seen as lying in its neglect of *pugang*. It was also proposed that educational curricula in schools be infused with courses linked with practically understood *kyŏkmul ch’iji*. Indeed, several disciplines of natural science were translated at the time as “*kyŏkch’ihak* (格致學),” though later *kwahak* (科學) received universal recognition as the term indicating natural science. The point is that now *kyŏkmul ch’iji*, redefined practically, became a representative term of learning, replacing the old one *susin*.²¹⁴ The authors addressing the education policy of the country emphatically argued that European education was based on a number of disciplines essentially related to practical *kyŏkmul ch’ijihak*, so that Chosŏn’s new education system should be modelled on that of Europe.²¹⁵

This view of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* was also exhibited by the radical reformist Pak Yŏnghyo. In his famous memorial to King Kojong in 1888, which dealt with eight subjects to reform the state, he contrasted the method of *kyŏkmul ch’iji* with the old way of learning, i.e., reciting Confucian texts and composing *belles-lettres* without analysing things and affairs in a practical manner, and highlighted it anew as a true and essential teaching of Confucian

²¹³ *Hansŏng chubo*, “論開礦,” 13 September 1886.

²¹⁴ The article “Chungsŏ siseron (中西時勢論)” in the issue of 8 January 1884 and “Chŏnbosŏl (電報說)” in the issue of 18 January 1884, *Hansŏng sunbo*, used the expression “*kyŏkch’ihak* (格致學)” to indicate natural science, while the article “Puguksŏl ha (富國說下)” in the issue of 4 June 1884 used “*kwahak* (科學)” for the same meaning. On the other hand, Yu Kilchun used “*kyŏkmulhak* (格物學)” to translate physics in chapter 13 of *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*. Pak Yŏnghyo also used the expression “*kyŏkmul kungnijihak* (格物窮理之學)” to signify practical and pragmatic studies in his 1888 memorial.

²¹⁵ *Hansŏng chubo*, “論學政第三,” 15 February 1886.

masters. He located the strength and prosperity of Western countries in the Westerners' studies of *kyŏkmul ch'iji* and, in this regard, advised the king to place practicality (實用) ahead of the splendour of letters (文華).²¹⁶ Therefore, the old Confucian concept that had been construed metaphysically by Zhu Xi was now reinterpreted by the reformists as an intellectual means to encourage practical, or modern, knowledge. Shown in this way, the new, or the modern, was induced by the medium of the old or through the reinterpretation of the familiar.

The reinterpretation of Confucian texts in terms of *pugang* implied a significant change in contemporary Chosŏn society, as shown in the articles in *Sunbo* and *Chubo*. Although Confucianism did not prefer any particular industrial base for its ideal society, in both China and Chosŏn agricultural society functioned as the socio-economic basis, and, on the contrary, commerce was relatively despised for its 'pursuit of base monetary interests (未利).' As the Western wealth and power showed, however, trade and commerce (商) were now recognised as a key industry, as valuable as other occupation categories in traditional East Asia – that is, scholarly work, agriculture, manufacturing (士農工) – or more important than the others. So, the emphasis on *pugang* in itself implied the social transformation of Chosŏn from an agricultural society to a commercial society. A number of articles addressing commerce stressed the importance of commercial activities in building prosperity, mainly

²¹⁶ Pak Yŏnghyo, "Pak Yŏnghyo ūi kŏnbaeksŏ – naejŏng kaehyŏk e kwanhan 1888 nyŏn ūi sangsomun" [Pak Yŏnghyo's memorial – the 1888 memorial on national reform], trans. Kim Kapch'ŏn, *Han'guk chŏngch'i yŏn'gu* 2 (1990), pp. 280–82. Whenever I cite Pak's memorial, I have checked the original script in Chŏn Pongdŏk's book (*Han'guk kŭndae pŏp sasangsa* [The History of Legal Thought in Modern Korea] (Seoul: Pak'yŏngsa, 1981), pp. 148–87).

concentrating on the mutual benefits of trade.²¹⁷ The articles also included sections rebutting the traditional mind-set in which people saw commercial activities as base and degraded, and emphasised conversely the importance of the circulation of goods as a means to increase wealth. Moreover, the articles advised the literati to work in trade and commerce by establishing commercial businesses (商會), which was argued on the ground that the literati class had better understanding on world affairs and would have enough background knowledge to do business.²¹⁸

This perspective on commerce is also reiterated in Yu Kilchun's *Sōyu kyōnmun*. Yu refuted the traditional derogatory view of commerce at great length, and conversely stressed how much it contributes to the state's prosperity. As "indispensable great affairs (大道) of the state," merchants' businesses should be protected by the government with established laws and well-built roads for the easy transportation of goods, he insisted.²¹⁹ He also enumerated the importance of trade and commerce in the globalised world of the nineteenth century, likening them to "a war in a peaceful time" and illuminating the advanced skills of Western merchants. Stepping further from *Sunbo* and *Chubo*, he noted other points that merchants must be aware of, such as the calling of merchants, the essence of merchants' arts, the need to keep learning, and crucial principles for long-term, successful business.²²⁰ The emphasis on trade and commerce and, as a consequence, a turn to commercial society were the point shared by the reformists in the 1880s.

²¹⁷ See *Hansōng sunbo*, "富國說上," 25 May 1884; *Hansōng chubo*, "論貨幣第一," 22 February 1886; "論商會," 1 March 1886; "歸商論," 20 September 1886.

²¹⁸ *Hansōng chubo*, "歸商論," 20 September 1886.

²¹⁹ Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, ch. 14 (商賈大道), 379–80.

²²⁰ Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, ch. 14, 386–89.

What are then the concrete methods to accomplish *pugang* suggested in *Sunbo* and *Chubo*? A number of articles addressed specific matters to be carried out to achieve *pugang*. The article entitled *Puguksöl* (富國說) is a paradigmatic case. After talking about the need to build wealth and power and to encourage trade and commerce, it pointed firstly to the need to develop mining. Indeed, mining for natural minerals was one of the commonly addressed issues in the newspaper. In an article, the author saw the need to develop mining as deriving from the need to obtain seed money for the building of *pugang* in Chosŏn. He thus proposed some concrete policy measures for the government to administer, such as the formation of a government bureau to control mining works, invitations of mining engineers from Western countries, the teaching of mining technology to young Koreans, and the permission of private mining.²²¹ Even in mining, the editors of the paper had to confront the traditional taboo against digging holes and tunnels in mountains. The old *feng-sui* theory, and the inaccurate concerns that underground minerals as a national treasure would flow out to foreign countries, had to be refuted primarily. The article writers saw that all animals and plants and inanimate objects like metals existed to assist the demands of humans (資民用), and located Western wealth and power in the use of all kinds of natural resources and the discovery of natural scientific laws.²²² Nature was no longer an object to be afraid of and conform to as traditional Koreans had thought, but one to develop and make use of for the benefit of human beings.

Besides the development of mines, the editors argued that railroads should be built because trains were an expedient means to transport goods. The construction of electrical

²²¹ *Hansŏng chubo*, “論開礦,” 13 September, 1886.

²²² *Hansŏng sunbo*, “富國說上,” 25 May 1884; “富國說下,” 4 June 1884.

lines for telegraph, light, and other activities was also regarded as important work to be done. Indeed, in several places in the paper, statistical data on the length of both railroad and telegraph lines were commonly displayed for the comparison of the advancement of countries. Other policy measures were also proposed for *pugang*. In an article on educational reform, the author stressed that “the skills to increase wealth” (植貨之術) should be taught in schools.²²³ In another article on the currency of Chosŏn, the message was that the money-based economy that is crucial to enhancing a commercial society should be built by forging a variety of new metal coins.²²⁴ And in an article on rearing cattle, the idea is that rearing cattle, which was not well advanced in Chosŏn, is a fast way of making a fortune.²²⁵ All these ideas and proposals were given as part of building *pugang*. The discussions until now can be summarised as follows: as the reformists’ basic point of view of the world was predisposed factually and empirically, their main concerns were set upon the pursuit of *pugang*, and their remedies for Chosŏn were also set for the task of *pugang*.

2.3. A Realist Interpretation of International Relations

In addition to the perspective of *pugang* in seeing the human world, another distinctive way of seeing the human world was a *realist* stance on international relations. The reformist intellectuals’ view of the world based on power relations among nations is not peculiar or unusual from a comparative perspective, but in the historical context of Chosŏn Confucians’ comprehension of the international order, their turn to political realism has significant

²²³ *Hansŏng chubo*, “論學政第二,” 1 February 1886.

²²⁴ *Hansŏng chubo*, “論貨幣第一,” 22 February 1886.

²²⁵ *Hansŏng chubo*, “牧牛說,” 17 May 1886.

implications. In this regard, here, we will first see how the reformists understood the China of the 1880s, and then, will examine their realist view of international relations.

Firstly, let us see concretely how the reformists saw the old suzerain China. Before we discuss the reformists' view, we need to discuss briefly the nature of the traditional East Asian international system. The China-centred international order in East Asia was an extension of the feudal relations of the pre-Chin era of China, which regulated the relationship between a supreme ruler (帝/天子) governing the centre and several of his feudal lords (諸侯) governing peripheries. The feudal lords regularly visited the supreme ruler and sent envoys (朝聘) with tributes (貢物), and the ruler also superintended them by sending envoys in return (聘問). This relationship was formalised ritually and justified in an ethical manner. This diplomatic practice within China extended to foreign ethnic peoples residing in the outer lands of China from the time of the Han dynasty and the foreign vassal lords (or kings) dispatched diplomatic envoys regularly.²²⁶ In the entire history of Korea, Chosŏn's relations with Ming and Qing China represent a typical case of the China-centred world order. In Chosŏn, together with the tradition of a feudal lordship against the Chinese empire and the real difference of military power, the Confucian ethical understanding of the world order helped justify the hierarchical division between China and Chosŏn and led Chosŏn

²²⁶ On the ancient feudal state system and its diplomatic practices, and their development in China, see Yi Ch'unsik, "Chungguk kodae chogong ūi silch'e wa sŏngkyŏk" [The Nature and Character of *chogong* in Ancient China] in *Kodae hanchung kwankyesa ūi yŏn'gu*, ed. by Han'guksa yŏn'guhoe (Seoul: Samjiwŏn, 1987), pp. 10–47. And on the different characters of governing the large Chinese landmass and foreign ethnic tribes in each period throughout Chinese history, see Kim Han'gyu, *Ch'ŏnha kukka: chont'ong sidae tongasia segye chilsŏ* [The State under Heaven: East Asian World Order in Traditional Times] (Seoul: Sonamu, 2005), part 1.

Confucians to internalise the stratified relations between the two as normal.²²⁷ The traditional view of China as being located at the centre of the world and being the only great civilisation had already begun to be discredited from the eighteenth century, but a full, direct refusal of China as a suzerain of Chosŏn and the efforts to stand up as a country equal to China were attempted for the first time by the reformists in the 1880s. The advent of Western powers and the humiliation of Qing from the early 1840s prompted the momentum. The reformists witnessed that the novel world order had overwhelmed the traditional order in East Asia, and thus they exerted themselves to catch up with the new order and accommodate Chosŏn to it.

Concerning the reformists' view of China, there was a divergence between the radicals, who vehemently denounced China and wished to build wealth and power as an independent state modelled on Japan, and the moderates, who had connections with the Chinese in Chosŏn and affirmed China's long and special relations with Chosŏn. The radicals' understanding of China is well illustrated in the writings of Kim Ok'kyun and Pak Yŏnghyo. Kim's *Kapsin illok* (甲申日錄, Daily Accounts of the Incident in the *Kapsin* Year), his recollections of the *Kapsin* coup carried out by himself and his radical colleagues in 1884, exhibits that "national independence" (獨立) from China's interference since 1882 and reforming the state by removing pro-Chinese government officials were the main reasons for the coup. By disconnecting from its past status – i.e., Chosŏn's position under China's suzerainty that made it un-enlightened, poor, and weak – he thought that Chosŏn could move

²²⁷ Mencius contributed to the establishment of the ethical international relations in Chinese history. He thought that a big and a small country should mutually take responsibilities. As the famous expression in *Mencius*, *shida zixiao* (事大字小), indicates, in ideal international relations a small country should treat a big one with respect and a big country should take care of a small one. This view of international relations was regarded by Chosŏn Confucians as normative. See *Mencius*, Book 1B3, 4A7.

forward to become a wealthy, strong, and independent country. So the *Kapsin* coup was the result of the radicals' conscious efforts to remove the influence of China in Chosŏn. On the other hand, in his 1885 memorial to King Kojong, Kim Ok'kyun indicated that the most critical international confrontation in East Asia at the time was a possible military clash between two global powers, Britain and Russia. Since Britain had occupied Kōmundo Island for its military purpose in the same year, if events escalated, Russia would take over another port of Chosŏn for its own use. In this condition, he added, China would not be able to take any measures to restore Chosŏn's territory.²²⁸ He clearly understood that China's influence had become marginal in the global hegemonic competition between the two big powers. In terms of worldview, he saw the current world factually and realistically beyond the traditional ethical or *ye*-based conception.

This view which relegates China is also exhibited in Pak Yŏnghyo's 1888 memorial. In the first article among eight that he proposed for the reform of the state, he described the contemporary international political circumstances. What he was concerned with strategically was the Russian march southwards and the possibility of Russia's arbitrary occupation of a north-eastern part of Korean territory, which he saw as a great danger not only to Chosŏn but also to all East Asian countries. Discussing this issue, however, he did not mention China at all; rather China was simply regarded as one of the three countries in Northeast Asia.²²⁹ Overall, for radical reformists China was seen as an ailing country that was backward in wealth and power, so its international status was greatly lowered to them and in many cases

²²⁸ Kim Ok'kyun, “臣 金玉均誠惶誠恐頓首百拜 (1885)” in *Kim Ok'kyun chŏnsŏ* [Complete Works of Kim Ok'kyun], ed. Han'gukhak munhŏn yŏn'guso (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1979), pp. 143–47.

²²⁹ Pak Yŏnghyo, “Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ,” 254–56.

lower than Japan. They were thinking about contemporary international relations outside of the traditional China-centred world order.

On the other hand, for the moderate reformist Yu Kilchun, Chosŏn's position relating to China was complex. In the third chapter of *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, Yu addressed the "rights of state" provided by international law. In the first half, he enumerated the rights that sovereign states could enjoy, and in the second half he gave his own opinion, redefining the traditional relationship between China and Chosŏn in the language of international law. He first conceptualised the old relationship between China and Chosŏn with the terms of *sugongguk* (守貢國, suzerain state) and *chŭnggongguk* (贈貢國, tributary state), and made it clear that *chŭnggongguk* was different from *sokguk* (屬國, dependent state). While *sokguk* is subordinate to a big country and does not have rights to sign international treaties with independent countries or to announce war and peace autonomously, *chŭnggongguk* is an independent country that has all these rights, although it should observe a treaty concluded with a suzerain state and send tributes to it. These restrictions are inevitable for a small tributary country because, by respecting them, it can prevent a big country's possible invasion and enjoy its independent sovereignty. Thus, *chŭnggongguk* has rights to sign international treaties with other sovereign states and can send ministers, consuls, and envoys; in certain circumstances, it can announce a war against a country and also maintain political neutrality between two conflicting countries; and it can even send its diplomatic missions and consuls to a suzerain state. Although Yu did not directly mention the status of Chosŏn with respect to China as the very case of *chŭnggongguk* and *sugongguk*, here he meant that a tributary state Chosŏn was an independent sovereign state. The background of this insistence of Yu, according to Chŏng Yonghwa, was Qing's *de facto* imperialist policy toward Chosŏn after the

soldiers' mutiny in 1882. Specifically, after the failure of the *Kapsin* coup, Qing's envoy stationed in Seoul, Yuan Shikai (袁世凱, 1859–1916), treated Chosŏn as a *de facto* dependent country (*sokguk*), interfering excessively in Chosŏn's domestic politics and negating Chosŏn's diplomatic sovereignty. Yu Kilchun needed to defend Chosŏn's independence by means of international law.²³⁰ What Yu found through the international law was the concept of *chŭnggongguk* which was different from *sokguk*.²³¹

At the same time, however, Yu Kilchun held an idea that a small country's tributary relations with a big country was formed in the “structural conditions and situational elements” (處地와 形勢) that the small country was placed under, so that, until the two countries reached an agreement to end up the tributary relationship, the small country should pay tributes as had been done in the past.²³² This was caused by his cautious and prudent view regarding the relations with China. If Chosŏn had suddenly denied the old relations, it might have been under Qing's military attack. Taken together, Yu's main concern was to re-conceptualise the tributary state Chosŏn as an independent country. For this purpose, he

²³⁰ Concerning Qing's interventionist and subjugation policy toward Chosŏn in the mid-1880s, Owen N. Denny, American advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of contemporary Chosŏn, had already defended Chosŏn's independence on the basis of international law by publishing a book (Owen N. Denny, *China and Korea* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh Limited Printers, 1888)). According to Chŏng Yonghwa, Yu Kilchun cited ideas from this book and added his own view that the traditional tributary relations with China should not be altered radically. On the other hand, Yu Kilchun understood current Chosŏn's international status as “dual” between China and other countries. In dealing with China, Chosŏn was a tributary state, but, at the same time, it was also an independent state in dealing with all other countries. He named this dual system *yangjŏl ch'eje* (兩截體制). See Chŏng Yonghwa, “Yu Kilchun ŭi yangjŏl ch'eje ron: yijung chŏk kugje chilsŏ esŏui pangguk ŭi kwŏlli” [Yu Kilchun's Ideas of the Double System: The Rights of the State in the Dual International Order], *Kukje chŏngch'i nonch'ong* 37 (1998), pp. 297–318.

²³¹ On this basis, Yu Kilchun assailed Chosŏn's conservatives because they “do not abandon [the old] obdurate attitude [towards the relationship with China] and utter vain and untrue opinions without restraint.” Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, ch. 3 (邦國의 權利), 112.

²³² Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, ch. 3, 114.

needed to employ the notion of equal sovereignty of modern international law and its terminology. As a moderate, however, he considered reality as well as ideal. This is the point where he diverges from the radicals.

Secondly, let us turn our sight to their political realist view of international relations. When the reformists discarded the traditional hierarchical system between China and Chosŏn and saw Chosŏn as an independent country, they were encouraged by sovereign state-based Western international law. The international law (萬國公法 or 公法), however, prescribed only the normative side of the relations among nations, and Western powers, when their core interests mattered, relied on their military forces instead of international law, morality, or public opinion. Watching and hearing actual occasions in international relations, the reformists took a *political realist* view. Indeed, almost all reformists' writings composed in the 1880s maintained a realist stance toward the world order.

Let us first see the case of *Hansŏng sunbo* and *Hansŏng chubo*. When we carefully illuminate the articles on international relations in both *Sunbo* and *Chubo*, it is revealed that the two papers' views are slightly different. In *Sunbo*, the relentlessly realist view of the world order is mixed with a wish for a peaceful world order, and international laws are also addressed positively. For instance, in an article on the alliance among Austria, Prussia, and Italy, the editor's perspective was obviously based on political realism. Expounding strategic relations among the European countries, the editor clarified that the three countries made an alliance in opposition to France that had forged an alliance with Russia. With reference to that alliance, the editor stated that in Europe the balance of power (均勢法) among countries, stipulated in international law, made effects, as countries allied against a certain country that aimed to become a super power. Likewise, at the end of the article, the editor expressed a

wish for Germany (德國) (which was in a defensive alliance against France and Russia) that it should take the initiative in establishing an international peace regime using the current balance of power in Europe.²³³ In an article on how to eliminate war, the editor cited a Japanese scholar's view on creating a global peace regime. According to the article, world peace is possible only by establishing an international organisation addressing international affairs. The organisation should be given the rights to set up international laws regulating all nations on the globe and even to form an international army to maintain peace and to oppress a country that pillages its neighbours. This positive view of world peace through recourse to a world government and international law shows a rosy prospect of global peace through international collaboration.²³⁴ This also indicates that in the early 1880s the editors of *Sunbo* did not abandon an idealist view of international relations.

This hopeful vision of world order, however, seriously weakened in *Chubo* published between 1886 and 1888. This seems to be related to the fact that the editors of the paper had sufficient understanding of the reality of international relations through their experience including Britain's occupation of Kōmundo Island in 1885. In *Sunbo*, a number of articles concerning international affairs were those already published in Chinese papers, but in *Chubo* all the articles on international relations were written by Korean editors.

²³³ *Hansǒng sunbo*, “奧普意三國同盟,” 9 December 1883. The editor of this article states that he found this issue in the Chinese newspaper *Hubao* (滬報) and recent telegrams (近信) from foreign news agencies. Given the context, it appears that the editor himself edited the related news from the sources or wrote himself on the basis of those sources. This means that the contents of the article reflected the editor's viewpoint.

²³⁴ *Hansǒng sunbo*, “鎖兵說,” 20 December 1883. The editor makes clear that this article was fetched from the Chinese paper *Xunhuan ribao* (循環日報) written by the Chinese intellectual Wang Tao (王韜) and cites Wang's positive comments on the Japanese scholars' view, showing his acceptance of Wang's view. So the editor did not transmit the article without any context. He endorsed the ideas or viewpoints of the original article.

Characteristically, the articles in *Chubo* exhibit a serious distrust of international law, seeing the contemporary world as the same as the Warring States era in ancient China (春秋戰國時代), in which countries were in endless war and allied frequently for their own benefits.²³⁵ In an article on the international circumstances of those times, the author spelled out the concrete cases of European powers' expansionism in Africa, Oceania, and Asia, and stated that, though the powers signed treaties to do commerce with weak countries on the ground of international law, when necessary, they did not hesitate to disregard those laws and treaties and were unashamed of it. Thus, the situation resulted in "the big oppressing the small and the strong ignoring the weak" (大之抑小強之凌弱).²³⁶ Likewise, in an article commenting on Japan's twenty-year effort to revise the original unequal treaties with Western countries, the editor blatantly despised the effectiveness of international law, stating that international treaties and laws were nothing other than the means that wealthy and powerful countries use to excuse themselves (恕己) and rebuke others (苛人). The editor, furthermore, pointed out essential inequality in treaties, recounting the problems of consular jurisdiction and unequal tax rates on exports and imports.²³⁷

This realist view of international relations was shared by the radical reformist Pak Yŏnghyo. Pak saw the contemporary world in terms that "a strong country amalgamates a weak and a big country swallows up a small" (強者并其弱大者吞其小), just as in the Warring States era in ancient China. He also expressed a seriously negative view on international law, the effects of the balance of power, and public morality (公義), contending

²³⁵ *Hansŏng chubo*, "論希臘難," 31 May 1886.

²³⁶ *Hansŏng chubo*, "論天下時局," 8 March 1886.

²³⁷ *Hansŏng chubo*, "論西日條約改證案," 24 May 1886.

that “international law and public morality are by nature not trustable” (公法公義素不足以爲恃也) and that if a country does not have strength to stand up independently, its territory is soon ceded and divided up by other powers as in the case of Poland and Turkey. He did not even hide his loathing for Westerners who bore the mind of beasts within themselves. This exceedingly realist view led to the proposals on how to save Chosŏn from falling prey to imperialist powers. The remaining seven proposals in his long memorial addressed several areas of society to be reformed, that is, law and discipline, economy, the military, health, education, politics, and people’s liberty, including concrete measures of how to reform the state and how to make it strong and wealthy. Taken together, this realist view of international relations within the *Chubo* editors and Pak reflected the increasing factual world within their worldview, which accorded with the evolving high time of imperialism in East Asia.

The moderate Yu Kilchun’s case was different from the radicals’. In his early essay “General Trends in the Current World” (世界大勢論, 1883), Yu shared the realist aspect of the world and argued that, if a country is not strong enough, its rights are infringed. He illuminated, as an example, the situation of Chosŏn at the time in which foreign countries enjoyed extraterritorial rights. They had rights to control tax rates on Korean exports on their own, but Chosŏn had to consult them to do so in advance. And their diplomatic envoys could be accompanied by their army in entering Chosŏn, while Chosŏn’s envoys could not. Yu imputed the humiliation of Chosŏn to its weak military power, putting it as “a country’s national rights are grounded in its military force.”²³⁸ Nonetheless, he did not abandon his confidence in international law. Finding the evidence of international collaboration in the contemporary world, he optimistically stated that, under international law, countries do not

²³⁸ Yu Kilchun, “Segye daeseron” (世界大勢論) in *Yu Kilchun chŏnsŏ 3* (Seoul: Iljogak, 1979), p. 93.

mobilise their soldiers without reason; in peaceful times they handle affairs in accordance with international laws; and they create new laws and observe them to encourage their amity. In the same context, he interpreted countries' mutual treaties and their diplomatic envoys' reciprocal visits as a proof of peaceful coexistence. This optimistic view on peace and collaboration among nations in "General Trends" developed into his full-fledged ideas of the rights of states put forth in Chapter Three in *Sōyu kyōnmun*. His re-evaluation of the traditional China–Chosŏn relations using the terminology of international law came out of this context. Yu's essential moderateness, therefore, seems to have driven him to maintain a balance between the realist and the idealist view of international relations.²³⁹

Although the radicals and moderates diverged over the comprehension of international relations, the reformist intellectuals' realist view of world order expanded from the 1880s onwards. This realist stance reflected the long-term tendency of Korean political thinking and was fuelled by the political environment at the time; that is, a rush toward wealth and power and the resulting competition amongst countries. The pursuit of wealth and power and, as a consequence, the formation of the imperialist world system went in tandem with an increasing factual, realist view of the world among those who lived in the nineteenth century.

²³⁹ Chōng Yonghwa argues that Yu well recognised the aspect of power politics in international relations and cites as evidence his early work "General Trends of the Current World". Yet in that work and *Sōyu kyōnmun* written in his 20s, Yu obviously had confidence in the order regulated by international law and treaties. I think that Yu's view of international relations had a change. As a moderate, he had a somewhat idealist view when young, but after experiencing enough the realist aspect of the world order, he turned to a realist. The latter side is well shown in the introduction to his translation on the Crimean War and the introduction to his writing on Prussia's Frederick the Great's Seven Years' War, written at his age of 50s. Chōng Yonghwa, "Yu Kilchun ūi yangjŏl ch'eje ron", 307–8.

Until now, we have discussed the viewpoints from which the reformists understood and reconstructed the world. What we have found is that they mainly analysed the world in a factual, empirical, and realist way, instead of a moral or deontological manner. What was relevant to the reformists was not a normative understanding of the world, but a factual and empirical grasp of the world as it existed. The Confucian ethical worldview was scarcely seen in their works. In hindsight, Yu Kilchun's optimism in regard to international laws and treaties would reflect the remnants of Confucian convictions and a modicum of the ideal of an ethically constructed international order.

Let us go back to the original question we posed at the start of this chapter. Was the trend toward a growing factual and empirical engagement with the world and its related worldview invigorated in the late nineteenth-century reformist intellectuals? We have established it was. A further question that relates to this is whether *Sirhak* and *Kaehwa sasang* are continuous or not. In the previous chapter, we have seen that, among *Sirhak* scholars, the way the physical/natural world was approached differed from the way the human world was viewed. In the cases of Yi Ik and Chŏng Yakyong, we established that they applied rational and empirical views to the human world, leaving ethics to specific aspects only. This indicates that a factual, empirical, and scientific world was being independent from the former ethical pre-eminence. The reformists of the late nineteenth century expanded the world predicated on the factual, empirical, and realist perspective. The Confucian ethical viewpoint was difficult to find within their works. In that the reformists mainly perceived the world factually, empirically, and realistically and analysed the world in a scientific, objectified, and rational manner, *Kaehwa sasang* was continuous with *Sirhak*. However, the fact that the Confucian ethical worldview almost disappeared within the nineteenth-century

reformists' outlook indicates that there was a discontinuity, too.

The next question we should ponder is how the reformists reconstructed the public world for post-Confucian Korea. If they came to lose confidence in the Confucian ethical ideal, which values and norms did they advocate for new public order? Moreover, if the Confucian ethical ideal was discredited by the reformists, what happened to the other side of the Confucian political ideas, i.e., the political necessity ideas? These questions are the topics to be addressed in Part Two.

PART TWO RECONSTRUCTION

Chapter Four

The Reformists' Adoption of New Public Values and Norms

Examining the development of Chosŏn's political thinking chronologically and thematically, in Part One we have identified that, while the ethical world was shrinking in Korean intellectuals' world consciousness since the eighteenth century, the factual and empirical world was getting expanded. The Confucian ethical ideal that functioned as a central resource providing values and norms in both the private and the public realm was getting losing its hegemonic lustre. The late nineteenth century in Korean history was a critical period when traditional public values and norms were replaced by novel ones. In the midst of the disintegration of the traditional social system, the reformist intellectuals put forth new public values and norms and new political ideas for post-Confucian Korean society. In the coming three chapters, I aim to examine how the reformist intellectuals reconstructed the public realm in a post-Confucian way, beginning with a discussion of their advocacy of new public values and norms.

Public values during the Chosŏn dynasty, which also operated as the source of public norms, mainly originated from Confucian ethics. Besides the Confucian principle that for a person to build a career in the public realm, he should first cultivate moral virtues, a

²⁴⁰ This chapter is an upgraded version of the originally published article in *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 13(2) (2013), pp. 169–92.

variety of and culturally embedded norms, supported by Confucian ethics, regulated people's behaviours and their relationships to each other. Specifically, *sangang* (三綱, three principles) and *wulun* (五倫, five Confucian relationships) defined the basic Confucian standards of interpersonal relationships in Chosŏn. In the late nineteenth century, however, the traditional Confucian values were being distrusted, particularly as values in the public realm, and being retreated to the private realm. Instead, influenced by modern Western political ideas, the reformists championed new public values, such as liberty, equality, rights, and the rule of law. Importantly, the reformists adopted the new values to address social needs of contemporary Korea, specifically the needs to catch up with Western wealth and power and to redress chronic social problems, such as the authorities' dominance over the people, the hierarchical social status system, and patriarchal and male-dominated customs. The reformists' adoption of the new values, therefore, reflected the historical context of late nineteenth-century Korea; they did not champion those values because of sheer merits of the notions themselves.

Previous studies have mainly interpreted the new values in terms of the reformists' adoption of the Western conception of *minkwŏn* (民權) or 'the people's rights,' without considering the historical context of the time seriously. Specifically, they focused on the reformists' limited reception of the concept of rights which they imputed to the reformists' Confucian background. For example, drawing a general picture of Pak Yŏnghyo's ideas of rights, Kim Hyŏnch'ŏl saw that Pak's view of the need to restrict individual liberty in society was based on his Confucian preconception.²⁴¹ In his survey of Yu Kilchun's ideas of rights, Chŏng Yonghwa also ascribed Yu's limited adoption of rights to his Confucian pre-

²⁴¹ Kim Hyŏnch'ŏl, "Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi '1888 nyŏn sangsomun e nat'an an minkwŏn ron ŭi yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Ideas of People's Rights in Pak Yŏnghyo's 1888 Memorial], *Han'guk chŏngch'ŭi hakhoebo* 33(4) (1999), pp. 9–24.

understanding.²⁴² In a similar but slightly different manner, Oka Katsuhiko claimed that, while Yu Kilchun's adoption of rights was basically linked with his Confucian preconception, Yu, instead of holding to the Neo-Confucian view of society in toto, accepted "humans' desires" as a relevant source in social life and validated a "utilitarian" aspect of society, too. Yu's idea of the need to constrain liberty in society is therefore not simply based on his Confucian pre-understanding, but rather on the need to regulate individuals' maximisation of utility.²⁴³ On the other hand, Kim Pongjin, in his comparative study, found the difference between Yu Kilchun and Fukuzawa Yikichi in the diverse Confucian traditions between Chosŏn Korea and Tokugawa Japan. In Fukuzawa's case, the original championing of individual rights leant towards the value of national rights, which was related with the Japanese tradition. By contrast, Yu Kilchun understood rights as given from heaven in the Confucian manner and regarded it as an overriding *principle* for the people's life.²⁴⁴

These studies largely highlighted the remnants of Confucian tradition within the reformists, but they paid little attention to the reformists' confrontation with their traditions. When we see the reformists' advocacy of the concept of rights within the historical condition of the time, we can grasp that their championing of rights was closely associated with the need to correct 'bad' social customs at the time. Moreover, they failed to distinguish a considerable difference between Pak Yŏnghyo, the radical, and Yu Kilchun, the moderate,

²⁴² Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ŭi chŏngch'i sasang: Yu Kilchun kwa kŭndae han'guk* [The Political Thought of Civilisation: Yu Kilchun and Modern Korea] (Seoul: Munhak kwa Chisŏngsa, 2004).

²⁴³ Oka Katsuhiko (岡克彦), "Han'guk kaehwa sasang ŭi kwŏlligwan: Yu Kilchun ŭi kwŏlliron ŭl sojae ro" [The Ideas of Rights in Korean Reformism: with Special Reference to Yu Kilchun's Ideas of Rights], *Kyŏnggi pŏbhak nonch'ong* 1 (2000), pp. 399–424.

²⁴⁴ Kim Pongjin, "Sŏku 'kwŏlli' kwan'nyŏm ŭi suyong kwa pyŏnyong – Yu Kilchun kwa Fukuzawa Yukichi ŭi pigyo koch'al" [The Reception and Transfiguration of the Western concept of 'Rights' – A Comparison between Yu Kilchun and Fukuzawa Yukichi], *Tongbang hakji* 145 (2009), pp. 65–104.

because of their deductive approach given by their theoretical framework, i.e., Confucian influence on the reformists' ideas. As a radical, Pak had a seriously confrontational attitude toward the traditions. They did not either heed other factors that helped to create the reformists' peculiar understanding of rights; that is, the translation of Western concepts and the terminological characters of the translated words. In addition, by putting their attention only to the 1880s, they did not track the development of the new public values in the 1890s.

When it comes to new public norm (the rule of law), Chŏn Pongdŏk comprehensively illuminated the reformists' ideas of law in the 1880s and '90s.²⁴⁵ His jurisprudential approach provides a professional assessment of the reformists' understanding of law, but, owing to his legal approach itself, he has failed to consider historical contexts in which the reformists proclaimed rule of law as the most important norm in the public space. The reformists' championing of law was directly associated with the context of the time.

This chapter first examines the introduction of new concepts of public values, which were originally translated from modern Western concepts into Chinese and Japanese, and then sees the context of the adoption of those concepts through the reformists' works.

1. New Public Values

1.1. Liberty

In Confucian Chosŏn, the basis of social interactions was not merely individuals or subjects.

²⁴⁵ Chŏn Pongdŏk, *Han'guk kŭndae pŏp sasangsa* [The History of Legal Thoughts in Modern Korea] (Seoul: Pak'yŏngsa, 1981).

Besides an independent person, a man was seen with regard to wider networks of relationship, such as a member of an extended family and one in a certain social status category. This relationship-based social interactions, supported by Confucian ethical norms, took the division of people into both the high and the low and the near and the far for granted. Given that the hierarchical social status system (especially, the discrimination of *sŏŏl* (the secondary descendants of the *yangban* class)) had been criticised by many reformist Confucians in late Chosŏn, it looks obvious that the traditional social system was not complete. Rather, it was a system based on deep dissatisfaction and conflict. This inner dissension was gradually addressed during the nineteenth century, as slaves were liberated steadily and the social status system itself was finally repealed through the *Kabo* reforms (1894–95). The equalisation process was accelerated after the opening up (1876) and, as a consequence, facilitated the destabilisation of the existing social system. An important moment that fuelled the destabilisation of the existing system was the adoption of new public values, including liberty. From the early 1880s, Chosŏn's government officials and students began to experience foreign countries like Japan and the U.S. and accepted novel ideas on the constitution of society. Liberty, a core public value replacing Confucian values, was a key element of the new ideas they adopted.

The English word 'liberty' or 'freedom' is currently translated by *chayu* (自由, Ch. *ziyou*; Jp. *jiyū*), yet *chayu* was not an entirely new word created in the process of cultural encounter in the late nineteenth century. The expression had occasionally been used in old Chinese texts and poems, though in these cases *chayu* was not a public value but an

expression meaning that something is done without outer intervention or done arbitrarily.²⁴⁶ Before the word became the translation of liberty/freedom, *chayu* was more frequently used in Japan, as is found in the interrogation documents relating to Christian missionaries, and in the 1860s it was employed in diplomatic treaties with Western countries, though it was still being used as a predicate, not the public value liberty.²⁴⁷ This would be the reason why *jiyū* was chosen for the first time in Japan as the translation of liberty. The first case of the adoption of *jiyū* in Japan was in Hori Tatsunosuki's *A Pocket Dictionary of the English and Japanese Languages* (1862).²⁴⁸ Yet even in this case, *jiyū* meant “do something at will” and “be wayward” in a somewhat negative sense. On the other hand, in China liberty was frequently rendered as *zizhu* (自主) until Wilhem Lobschied adopted *ziyou* for the first time, along with other terms like *zizhu*, *zhiji zhiquan* (治己之權, the right of self-governance) and the likes in his dictionary compiled in 1869.²⁴⁹ These confusions probably would have made Fukuzawa Yukichi reluctant to use *jiyū* in the first edition (初編) of his book *Seiyō jijō* (西洋事情, Conditions in the West) published in 1866. In the first edition, Fukuzawa used the expression “jishu nin’i (自主任意)” as the word indicating liberty.²⁵⁰ In the later edition (外

²⁴⁶ An instance of the usage of *chayu* in an old Chinese text is seen in *Houhanshu* (後漢書): “建武元年 赤眉賊率樊崇逢安等 立劉盆子爲天子 然崇等視之如小兒 百事自由。” (松尾章一, 『自由民權思想の研究』, 日本經濟評論社, 1990, p. 14) Recited from Chǒng Yonghwa, *Munmyōng ūi chōngch’i sasang*, 339.

²⁴⁷ Ch’oe Chonggo, *Han’guk ūi sōyangpōp suyongsa* [The History of the Adoption of Western Laws in Korea] (Seoul: Pak’yōngsa, 1982), pp. 319–22.

²⁴⁸ Zhang Qing, “Interpreting ‘liberty’: an analysis of the history of ideas,” *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, vol. 5 (1), (2011), p. 29.

²⁴⁹ Wilhem Lobschied, *English and Chinese Dictionary, with the Punti and Mandarin Pronunciation*, part 3 (Hong Kong: Daily Press Office, 1869), p. 1107, quoted from Zhang Qing, “Interpreting ‘liberty’”, p. 29.

²⁵⁰ See Fukuzawa Yukichi, “*Seiyō jijō Shohen* (西洋事情 初編),” *Seiyō jijō* (西洋事情: 福澤諭吉著作集 vol. 1) (Tokyo: 慶應義塾大學出版会, 2004), pp. 15–16.

篇) published in 1869, however, Fukuzawa used *jiyū* as the word indicating liberty unequivocally, and as the book became popular, the word *jiyū* became current among people and was transmitted even to China and Chosŏn. Following Fukuzawa's precedent, in rendering John S. Mill's *On Liberty*, Nakamura Masanao (中村正直, 1832–1891) also used the word *jiyū* for the translation of liberty. In Chosŏn the word *chayu* began to be used from the early 1880s, as is seen for the first time in Min Chongmuk's report presented to King Kojong in 1881 after he returned from a secret investigative journey to Japan to see its modern facilities and institutions.²⁵¹ Then, in 1882, when King Kojong had a dialogue with the reformist official Hong Yŏngsik soon after the latter's return from a diplomatic mission to the U.S., American people's right to liberty was addressed in their dialogue.²⁵² In Pak Yŏnghyo's 1888 memorial and Yu Kilchun's *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, the word *chayu* was employed as the exact translation of liberty or freedom.²⁵³

Now let us see the context in which the Korean reformists used the word *chayu* in their works. The first discussion of *chayu* is shown in *Hansŏng sunbo* and *Hansŏng chubo*, although in the newspaper the editors did not address new values such as *chayu* and *p'yŏngdŭng* (equality) as independent themes. This reluctance can be ascribed to the status of the newspaper, which was founded and financially supported by the government. The editors

²⁵¹ Hŏ Tonghyŏn, *Kŭndae han'il kwangyesa yŏn'gu: chosa sich'aldan ŭi ilbongwan kwa kukka kusang* [The Studies of the Relations between Korea and Japan in the 1880s: Chosŏn Government Officials' Views on Japan and Their Visions of State] (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 2000), pp. 101–2

²⁵² Kim Wŏnmo (ed. and trans.), “Kyŏnmi sajŏl Hong Yŏngsik pokmyŏng mundapgi” (遣美使節洪英植復命問答記) [The First Korean Embassy, Vice-minister Hong Yŏngsik's Report on the United States in 1883], *Sahakji* vol. 15 (1981), pp. 214–24.

²⁵³ Yu Kilchun also used the expression “*chayu im'ui*” (自由任意) as a translation of liberty and stressed that *chayu im'ui* was obviously different from licence. He would have brought the expression from Fukuzawa's original translation of liberty, “*jishu nin'i*” (自主任意). Yu Kilchun, “*Sŏyu kyŏnmun*,” ch.5 (政府의 治制), 173.

would have to be cautious in expounding new ideas unpalatable to high officials. Moreover, considering the still conservative social conditions of Chosŏn in the 1880s, it is not strange that the editors did not deal with these values directly. Instead, they championed the values indirectly, addressing them in the articles introducing the European countries and their political regime. The 10 November 1883 issue of *Hansŏng sunbo*, entitled “the European continent” (歐羅巴洲), is a rare article discussing the value of liberty. The writer of the article first described Europe’s geographical character in detail and then treated its races, religions, social customs, and its academic and political features. In the part dealing with its social customs, the writer stated that in Europe the garments, meals, houses, and churches are splendid, and the gap between the high and the low class (貴賤) is not large and the people just want to be close to each other. Even the noble-class people like a king or prince, according to the writer, are so humble that they are not accompanied by servants when they go outside, and the people do not kneel down on the floor when greeting them. Described in concrete cases, what the article meant was that people in European countries are more *equal* than those in Asia. Then, it went on to explain that in Europe if people’s acts do not cause harm to society, they can do what they want without being prohibited by the authorities and without being vilified by their neighbours. The writer called this “the right of liberty” (自主之權利). What is important is the writer’s mode of understanding *chayu*. He argued that, due to the right of liberty, in Europe a government and common people (上下) cooperate with each other, and thus to a large degree a country can seek “wealth and power,” and to a minor degree a person can preserve his own rights. And the writer contrasted the situation in Europe with that in other continents where people cannot pursue what they want, even if they cause no harm to society. Although written very briefly, this description gives us a hint that the

writer located one of the secrets of European countries' prosperity and strength in the universal provision of the right of liberty.²⁵⁴ Because of the right of liberty, according to them, individuals can pursue their talents and interests and thus in the end contribute to the state's wealth and power.²⁵⁵ So the interest in the concept of *chayu* was endowed not by its sheer value but by its socio-political effects. This says that the editors recognised the merits of *chayu* as a core public value for their factually and empirically tilted view of the world.

This way of understanding *chayu* is more clearly seen in Pak Yŏnghyo. In the sixth proposal in his 1888 memorial, he argued for the importance of educating common people. He first stated that, if the king wanted to maintain his unlimited power, it would be a good strategy for the common people to be kept in a state of ignorance, whatever effects this had on the state. But on the contrary, if the king desires a wealthy and powerful country and aims to stand as an equal to other countries, he argued, the king should limit his power and, instead, provide commoners with "a proper portion of liberty" (當分之自由) and, at the same time, let them have obligations toward the state. And he added that only with these measures could the civilisation of the state progress. Likewise, in the seventh proposal on correcting the

²⁵⁴ The writer especially emphasises liberty as a core value in European societies, so this interpretation is reasonably drawn. On the other hand, the editors do not mention the source of this article at all. Given the expression of "*chaju*" (自主) as a translation of liberty, it is possible to assume that the editors fetched it from a Chinese source, but it is unclear. One thing notable is that, although the writer aimed to introduce the European continent, it maintained a comparative perspective between the European and the East Asian countries.

²⁵⁵ Reformist Chinese intellectuals such as Wang Tao (1828–1897) and Yan Fu (1853–1921) also saw that, behind Western wealth and power, there are the values like freedom, equality, and democracy. In particular, Yan Fu found a core factor that determined the historical development of the West in the liberation of "the individual's energy and faculty" and suggested his own idea of an ideal society based on Herbert Spencer's evolutionism. For Wang's and Yan's life and thoughts, I have referred to Paul A. Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T'ao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China* (Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1987) and Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964).

national politics, he stated that “if the people have the right of liberty and the king’s power is limited, then the people and the state will be peaceful forever; yet, if the people do not have the right of liberty and the king’s power is unlimited, then though there is a short period of strength, this state of affairs will not last and it will decline.”²⁵⁶ From these remarks, it is surmised that, in Pak Yŏnghyo’s view, only by furnishing more liberty to commoners, society could become more dynamic, and, with their initiatives, the state could generate bases for national wealth and power. So it is reasonable to argue that he found one of the secrets of Western advancement in the universal right of liberty. Liberty was seen as the matter of need for the wealth and power of Chosŏn.

Pak also addressed the need to increase Korean people’s liberty in another context. In the eighth proposal, he first mentioned the existence of humans’ inborn rights that heaven endowed universally and then focused on the reason why the right of liberty is critically restricted in contemporary Chosŏn. He found a main reason in “bad social customs” (惡風/惡俗) in society. He thought that liberty in contemporary Chosŏn was a “barbaric liberty” (野蠻之自由), because, instead of all people’s equal liberty, men and husbands enjoyed liberty upon the illiberal state of women and wives, and the *yangban* class enjoyed it upon the sacrifice of other classes. He illustrated concrete examples of the barbaric liberty, such as high officials’ use of palanquins carried by lower people on their shoulders, *yangban*’s treatment of their servants like animals, and men keeping concubines. Thus, he thought that the primary limitation of “civilised liberty” (文明之自由) in Chosŏn was inequality between men and women and the existence of the privileged class. Then, he explained in a quite

²⁵⁶ “凡民有自由之權 而君權有定 則民國永安 然民無自由之權 而君權無限 則雖有暫時強盛之日 然不久而衰亡。” Pak Yŏnghyo, “Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ,” 287.

theoretical manner the reason why individual liberty in society is to be restricted through law, which he named “social liberty” (處世之自由), employing Fukuzawa’s ideas in his *Seiyō jijō* (西洋事情).²⁵⁷ Kim Hyōnch’ōl’s study on Pak Yōnghyo emphasised this point in order to argue that Pak was still thinking of the value on the basis of Confucianism; yet the point is that Pak’s adoption of *chayu* itself had a strong confrontational attitude towards Chosŏn’s traditions.²⁵⁸ Pak’s *chayu* had an aim for liberation in contemporary Chosŏn. In sum, Pak Yōnghyo considered both the social merits of the value of *chayu* and the need to restrict it for the public end. He did not approach *chayu* in an abstract, theoretical manner; rather, for him *chayu* was demanded for its practical needs for Chosŏn society at the time.

Yu Kilchun’s approach to *chayu* is more theoretical than practical and largely repeats Fukuzawa’s view of *chayu*. Unfolding his understanding of *chayu* in the fourth chapter of *Sōyu kyōnmun*, he saw liberty as a core element of citizens’ (*kungmin*) rights and defined it as “the right to do as one wants to do without external restrictions.” What is characteristic to Yu’s understanding is that he is seriously inclined to a theoretical clarification of a proper degree of liberty in society, not seeking to contrast the ideal of liberty with the reality of Chosŏn at the time, as Pak Yōnghyo did. At core parts, following Fukuzawa’s ideas, Yu maintained that, though liberty is a right given to humanity by heaven,

²⁵⁷ The expressions, “野蠻之自由” and “處世之自由,” were borrowed from Fukuzawa’s book *Seiyō jijō*. Both Pak Yōnghyo and Yu Kilchun used these expressions in discussing people’s liberty. The Japanese scholar Aoki Koichi registers how much Pak Yōnghyo was influenced by Fukuzawa Yukichi. He analyses Pak’s memorial sentence by sentence and clarifies Pak’s direct citations from Fukuzawa’s books. See Aoki Koichi (青木功一), *Fukuzawa Yukichi no Ajia* (福澤諭吉のアジア) [Fukuzawa Yukichi and Asia] (慶應義塾大學出版會, 2011), ch. 7.

²⁵⁸ Kim Hyōnch’ōl saw Pak’s view of restricting liberty in society as evidence of his upholding of the Confucian mind-set. It is understandable, but the need to restrict liberty in society can be seen as a way to maintain social order in terms of utilitarianism, as Fukuzawa understood so. Moreover, Kim did not address Pak’s criticism of traditional practices concerning liberty, which stood for his radicalness. Kim Hyōnch’ōl, “Pak Yōnghyo ūi 1888 nyōn sangsomun.”

in living with others in society, each individual must renounce some degree of liberty. Limits of liberty to live together in society (*ch'ŏseji chayu*) can be made only through “law,” which is the acceptance of Fukuzawa’s view. What is peculiar for Yu was suggested at the last part of the fourth chapter where he added his own opinion. He used some Confucian-flavoured expressions such as *tianli* (天理, heavenly way) and *renyu* (人慾, human desires), and divided liberty into both good liberty (良自由) following *tianli* and bad liberty (惡自由) following *renyu*. And he saw that law is the mechanism that discerns good liberty from bad liberty. His use of Confucian terms and his stress on the limits of liberty drove researchers like Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko and Chŏng Yonghwa to focus on Yu’s holding to Confucian legacies, which was different from Fukuzawa’s utilitarian approach. Yet another point to consider is that he never addressed the reality of Chosŏn regarding *chayu*. While he recognised the value of *chayu* theoretically, he refrained from discussing the actual condition of *chayu* in Chosŏn. This can be interpreted to be related with his moderateness and elitism in social and political issues. Due to these characteristics, he was not much interested in transforming the undesirable state of his country. From the perspective of Confucian legacy on him, his adherence to the ethical ideal of Confucianism forced him to be passive in tackling the reality of Chosŏn.²⁵⁹ In this regard, his view of liberty was not progressive.

The word *chayu* was widely circulated in the language acts of Korean people in the

²⁵⁹ Concerning Yu Kilchun’s moderateness, Chŏng Yonghwa has found it in his Confucian background, but he has failed to discern diverse traditions within Confucian political thinking. There are both the progressive and the conservative tradition within Confucianism, which are well matched with the ‘political necessity’ and ‘ethical ideal’, the two aspects of Confucian political thinking suggested in this dissertation. The radical Pak Yŏnghyo mainly adopted the former, while divesting himself of the latter. On the other hand, Yu Kilchun maintained the two aspects. Both the liberal and conservative sides within Yu’s thoughts were thus connected with this character. His moderateness in political issues and his elitism derive from this view of Confucianism. Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ŭi chŏngch'i sasang*.

late 1890s. In the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* (7 April 1896 – 4 December 1899), the paper representing the reformists' view in the late 1890s, the word *chayu* was commonly used, and their understanding of *chayu* was not different from the currently used one in modern Korea. The use of *chayu* in the paper is divided into two groups. Firstly, it was used to indicate the public value liberty, or the right of liberty, by being expressed in *chayukwŏn*, *chayu kwŏlli*, *chayujigwŏn* (자유지권), and other similar expressions. Secondly, it was used more commonly as adverbial expressions and predicates to refer to “be free.”²⁶⁰ In two editorials introducing a legal judgement on a case in which the Club leaders were embroiled and King Kojong's decree sentencing a legal case, the word *chayu* was employed as both a common noun and the public value (*chayujigwŏn*).²⁶¹ And even in the lyric of a song composed to encourage the common people's spirit of national independence and patriotism, the expression “*chayu hase*” (let's achieve freedom) was used.²⁶² Because of the routinisation of the term, in the entire editorials of the paper there is none that addresses the value of liberty theoretically.

Instead of a general and theoretical explanation of the concept of liberty, the editors' attention was placed in a specific form of liberty. For example, in an editorial discussing the right to expression (*ŏn'kwŏn chayū*), which was the only editorial that used *chayu* in the title,

²⁶⁰ Commonly used expressions are as follows: “*chayu hada*” (자유하다), “*chayu ropgye*” (자유롭게), “*chayu hanŭn*” (자유하는), “*chayu rŭl/ro hada*” (자유를/로 하다), “*chayu ro hago*” (자유로 하고).

²⁶¹ For the editorial on the legal judgement on a case in which core leaders of the Independence Club were embroiled, see *Tongnip sinmun* 21 July 1896, and for the king's decree sentencing a legal case, see *Tongnip sinmun* 15 February 1898. Hereafter *Tongnip sinmun* is abbreviated to *TS*.

²⁶² “사농공상 진력하여 사람마다 자유하세.” For the lyric of the song, see the miscellaneous news of *TS* 9 May 1896.

the editor showed worries about the government's measure to create a new law regulating newspaper publication, and persuasively argued that the government should not hurt the right to free press, which would contribute to forming public opinion and thus guaranteeing an upright government, mobilising both the idea of natural rights and historical precedents that preserved the right to speech in both the East and the West.²⁶³ Therefore, in the late 1890s, liberty as a public value was widely circulated among Korean people through their language acts.²⁶⁴

1.2. Equality

Contrary to the value of liberty, equality cannot be said to be a wholly new value because it is

²⁶³ “언권 자유” in *TS* 10 January 1899.

²⁶⁴ The prevalence of the word *chayu* or ‘liberty,’ however, did not develop into liberal-ism in Korea, as did not in China and Japan. The historical circumstances of the turn of the century were too severe to move toward liberalism as a socio-political ideology. Korea was distraught by the pressure of rapid modernisation and the fear of falling to a prey of neighbouring imperialist countries. The conception of liberty was also challenged by nationalism and then socialism in the first decades of the twentieth century. In Japan, Fukuzawa Yukichi, who had championed the value of liberty in his early book *Seiyō jijō*, turned himself into a nationalist in *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (文明論之概略, 1875). Some researchers like Kim Chusōng, Chōng Yonghwa, and Yi Nami interpreted the adoption of new values in the 1880s and '90s as the first instance of *liberalism* in Korea, highlighting the reformists' emphasis on “more liberty to people” and “limits on the state's authority.” This insistence, however, was caused by their failure to divide liberalism from liberty as a public value. Besides the two aspects, the reformists did not mention other core liberal elements, such as the primacy of individuality, minimal role of government, and recognition of differences or tolerance. And other pivotal values the reformists addressed, including equality among those of different social status, rule of law, people's sovereignty, and division of power, and people's self-rule in local government, cannot be said to be closely related to liberalism. They are the values of modern Western political thinking since the Enlightenment. Their writings mainly focused on “the nation,” “the people,” or “human beings,” not individuals. Moreover, their peculiarity lies in limiting liberty in society to be balanced with others' liberty and social mores, not in enhancing liberty as a supreme value. See Kim Chusōng, “Kim Ok'kyun Pak Yōnghyo ūi chayujuūi chōngsin” [Liberal Ideas in Kim Ok'kyun and Pak Yōnghyo], *Chōngch'i sasang yōn'gu* 2 (Spring, 2000), pp. 37–60; Chōng Yonghwa, “Yugyo wa chayujuūi: Yu Kilchun ūi chayujuūi kaenyōm suyong” [Confucianism and Liberalism: Yu Kilchun's Adoption of liberal Ideas], *Chōngch'i sasang yōn'gu* 2 (Spring, 2000), pp. 61–86; Yi Nami, “Tongnip sinmun e nat'an an chayujuūi sasang e kwanhan yōn'gu” [A Study of Liberal Thought in *Tongnip sinmun*], PhD dissertation, Koryō University (2000).

a quite universal value integral to any human community. This is the reason why East Asian civilisation developed a number of words indicating equality. However, being equal as an instrumental and mechanical sense is different from all human beings' inborn equality as a natural right. While Confucianism does not instruct humans' legitimate discrimination in accordance with one's status background, it is apparent that Confucianism is not a radical political theory proclaiming humans' inborn equality. In that Confucians in Chosŏn did not seriously problematise the institutional segregation of people subject to the difference of social status, it can be said that the orthodox teaching worked as a conservative political doctrine in service to the ruling *yangban* class' social interests. The long-lasting social status system, together with the custom of putting women and wives lower than men and husbands, remained core inequalities in Chosŏn Korea. These chronic problems gradually surfaced on the public sphere as social ills from the late eighteenth century, as *Sirhak* scholars denounced the old habit of discriminating secondary descendants of *yangban*. This claim for equalisation was strengthened as the reformist intellectuals of the 1880s raised this problem as a core social issue. Here, I will examine the context in which they problematised the unequal situation in Chosŏn. Ahead of that, we need to see how the concept of 'equality' was translated and accepted into Korea.

The currently commonly used word as a translation of the English word 'equality' in East Asia is *p'yŏngdŭng* (平等, Ch. *pingdeng*; Jp. *byōdō*). Yet there have been a number of words indicating equality in East Asian literature, because equality is a basic value in a civilised society and 'equal/unequal' is one of the common words in people's language acts. In East Asian culture of *hanja* (漢字, *hanzi* or *kanzi*), the representative words signifying equality are *kyun* (均), *tong* (同), *p'yŏng* (平), and *dŭng* (等), and, by combining these

individual words, two-syllable words are also easily created. Currently, therefore, besides *p'yŏngdŭng*, similar words such as *kyundŭng*, *tongdŭng*, and *kyunp'yŏng* are used in Korean language. *P'yŏngdŭng*, thus, was just a choice among a number of similar words. This is why it is difficult to find the word *p'yŏngdŭng* in the literature published in the late nineteenth century. For instance, one of the first books of jurisprudence translated into classical Chinese, *Wanguo gongfa* (萬國公法, 1864), used the word “平行” for the word “equal.”²⁶⁵ In his work *Yinbingshi wenji* (飲冰室文集, 1899), Liang Qichao employed the word “平權” as a translation of equality, which was borrowed from Japanese words at the time.²⁶⁶ This means that even in the late 1890s *p'yŏngdŭng* was not the only choice as a translation of equality. Even in the case of Fukuzawa Yukichi, *p'yŏngdŭng* or *byōdō* was not used in his main works and instead *tongdŭng* (同等) or *dōtō* was frequently employed. In Chosŏn, *Hansŏng sunbo* and Pak Yŏnghyo's memorial composed in the 1880s continued to use the word *kyun* (均) to indicate equality. Even in *Tongnip sinmun* the word *p'yŏngdŭng* was not used at all prior to 1898, and the common word employed for ‘equal’ or ‘equality’ was *tongdŭng*. This means that in Korea *p'yŏngdŭng* came to be used commonly as from the late 1890s.

Let us now see the context in which equality was used by the reformists. In *Hansŏng sunbo* ‘equality’ was not addressed as an independent theme. The championing of equality as a public value was briefly made in an article on a democratic regime and each country's constitution and parliament (譯民主與各國章程及公議堂解) in the 7 February

²⁶⁵ Yi Kŭnkwan, “Tongasia esŏi yurŏp kukjepŏp e kwanhan koch'al: man'guk gongpŏp ŭi pŏnnyŏk ŭl chungsim ŭro,” Appendix 1.

²⁶⁶ Federico Masini, *The Formation of the Modern Chinese Lexicon and Its Evolution toward a National Language: The Period from 1840 to 1898*, trans. Yi Chŏngjae (Seoul: So'myŏng ch'ulp'an, 2005), p. 309.

1884 issue.²⁶⁷ The editor first explained the nature of a democratic regime, arguing that the essential character of Western countries' governmental system was that its source of power lay in the common people (民). According to the article, this resulted from the fact that people are "equal" (均). Subsequently, the editor demonstrated why humans are equal in a naturalist or factual manner, to the effect that nature affects all humans identically. Under the impartiality of nature, the editor continued, both the noble and the lower (貴賤) are the same, and just as a king and his retainers do not have longer ear, neck, lip, and nose, lower people (小民) do not have shorter ones. Therefore, the editor argued that the laws of a country must come from the common people, not from a ruler's arbitrariness, yet in reality, people are divided into numerous individuals so that there is a need to delegate the people's power to a person, a ruler, which is the origin of a publicly elected ruler and his officials. This quite adamant assertion was made in order to introduce Western countries' democratic political system, not as a form of deontological insistence. With these demonstrations, what this article conveys is that 'equality' is a prerequisite for the democratic system. Yet the situation of Chosŏn based on traditional absolute monarchy was far from the ideal of equality.²⁶⁸ The

²⁶⁷ In this article, the editor remarked that he translated the contents from a Western newspaper, but the editor did not translate them without his own view. Rather, the article was edited from the editor's point of view, regarding the Western countries as a third-party. So the article in fact entailed the editor's opinion.

²⁶⁸ It is not an easy work to exactly translate traditional Korean monarchy into English. The kingship had elements to be named tyranny, but in concrete political process, the king's power was checked by Confucian bureaucrats' collective power. This is the reason why James Palais saw the relationship between the king and *yangban* bureaucrats as checks and balances. Traditionally, Chosŏn's kingship has been called *chŏnje* (專制, rule by a single person), and in European history 'absolute monarchy' that reached the apex in Louis XIV in Bourbon France is quite similar to Chosŏn's monarchy. Therefore, in this dissertation I will use the term 'absolute monarchy' to indicate Chosŏn's monarchy. For a study that illuminated the rise and fall of absolute monarchy in France with regard to intellectual backgrounds, see Nannerl O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1980). For a study that compared the two absolute monarchs in both Chosŏn Korea and Bourbon France, see Christopher Lovins, "Absolute Monarchy

traditional hierarchical social status system and the male-dominated social customs remained intact in the 1880s. This was the reason why most of the reformists focused on that value.

The real state of equality in contemporary Chosŏn is revealed in an article in *Hansŏng chubo*, where the editor praised King Kojong for his measure to limit private slaves' service only to their own lifetime.²⁶⁹ In the 1880s, the slave system and the stratified social status system hardly changed and represented core social contradictions of Chosŏn, although the move toward status equality had gradually progressed from King Sunjo's reign (1800–1834), when the king emancipated public slaves in government offices. So King Kojong's 1886 decree on private slaves followed this move, and the article welcomed the king's measure as a pivotal step toward the equality of social statuses. Therefore, equality in Chosŏn in the 1880s was an urgently demanded value requested from the inside, rather than an abstract value introduced from the outside for its conceptual merits. Equality of social statuses, however, was still a very subtle and nuanced idea to deal with publicly, because slave owners were mostly the privileged *yangban* class including government officials. This would be a reason why the paper merely paid tribute to the king's feat without directly grappling with the undesirable reality regarding equality in Chosŏn.

The understanding of equality as a pressing public value is also shown in Pak Yŏnghyo. He did not illuminate equality as an independent theme in his memorial. He treated it alongside liberty, but in his view equality was premised in liberty. As in *Hansŏng chubo*, in his memorial Pak acclaimed the royal decree on the emancipation of private slaves, assessing

East and West: Chŏngjo and Louis XIV", *Journal of Asian History* 52 (2018), pp. 1–22. And for Palais' explanation of the checks and balances relationship in Chosŏn, see James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: the Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1975), pp. 4–16.

²⁶⁹ *Hansŏng chubo*, “禁奴婢世役論,” 15 February 1886.

it as “a sage’s governing” (聖政).²⁷⁰ Yet Pak appreciated the value of equality more seriously and spelled out inequalities of Chosŏn at the time. Firstly, he pointed out unequal conditions under which women and wives were placed, and petitioned King Kojong for them to be given equal rights (權), the same as furnished to men and husbands, concretely explaining how women were being treated unequally by social institutions and customs. Next, he sternly urged the king to abolish the traditional hierarchy of social status among *yangban*, commoners, middle men, and secondary descendants of *yangban* (班常中庶). Specifically, just as Kim Ok’kyun had lamented the existence of the privileged *yangban* class in his 1885 memorial, he also deplored the continuance of the *yangban* status. Pak critically saw *yangban*’s privilege and their liberty to use lower-class people like animals, naming it a “barbaric liberty” which is contrasted with “civilised” or equal liberty. So, to Pak Yŏnghyo, the issue of equality in contemporary Chosŏn was such an important and urgent social problem to be treated, rather than an abstract, deontological value to be pursued.

As we have seen, radicals like Pak addressed the matter of equality seriously, but, for moderates like Yu Kilchun, that issue was not regarded as a sober social issue. It would be related to the fact that Yu held on to the traditional difference of the high and the low class and the related social customs. It also relates to Yu’s elitist character which made him distrust commoners’ capacity as political citizens. So how to see tradition largely affected the reformists’ diverse attitudes towards the championing and neglect of the value of equality. Previous studies paid scant attention to the reformists’ ideas of equality and thus failed to capture this difference between Pak and Yu.

²⁷⁰ Pak Yŏnghyo, “Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ,” 290.

Equality was also of critical importance in *Tongnip sinmun*, yet the paper's treatment of the value largely reiterated that of Pak Yŏnghyo. Firstly, the paper scarcely unveiled a theoretical explanation of equality. What it mainly discussed was concrete examples of the current unequal state in Chosŏn. Next, what the paper mainly addressed was both the inequality between *yangban* and commoners, and the discrimination of women and wives *vis-à-vis* men and husbands. While Pak treated these two points equally, the editors of the paper put their attention to the latter. The division between *yangban* and commoners (班常) and the *yangban*'s unlawful acts against commoners still had some remnants, but in the late 1890s the social status system had officially been repealed through the *Kabo* reforms. This would be the reason why only two editorials touched upon the negative legacy of the *yangban* class, while the discrimination of women and wives received far more attention in the forty three months of publication.²⁷¹ The unfair treatment of women and wives was not as much an institutional inequality as an androcentric folk culture or *p'ungsok* (風俗). Due to the deep-rootedness of that custom within Korean culture, it was difficult to uproot. Concretely, the most commonly mentioned problem was men keeping concubines and their right to re-marriage when their wives passed away, which was denied to women even when they lost their husbands when young. Moreover, parents' disinterest in educating their daughters and in the worst case trading off their daughters to rich men as their concubines for money were also remarked frequently. To correct these problems, *Tongnip sinmun* argued in repetition for the education of women, as well as the awakening of inborn equality of both sexes. The paper emphasised women's education through six editorials and praised the

²⁷¹ The two editorials on the *yangban* class are in the issues of *TS* 22 February 1899 and 26 April 1899.

women's association, *Ch'anyanghoe* (讚揚會), for its memorial to the king about the founding of girls' school in 1898.²⁷² For the reformists in the 1880s and '90s, therefore, equality was a pivotal and urgently demanded value so as to treat the social ailment and to rebuild the public order of contemporary Korean society. Equality as a new public value arose out of the need of contemporary Chosŏn, not for its merits in a theoretical sense.

1.3. Rights

Another core value that the reformists commonly referred to with regard to the people's public life was 'rights.' In traditional Korean society as in other civilised societies, the concept of rights was not uncommon, but rights was mainly understood as existing between parties that have legal transactions and between one who has a government position and the other who has not. This legal and administrative understanding of rights was obviously different from the new conception of rights, 'heaven-endowed universal rights to all humankind,' adopted in the wake of the late nineteenth century. Indeed, this kind of broad concept of natural rights incorporates the notions of liberty and equality and defines the essence of the new public values. The unfree and unequal state of humanity caused by old, habitual social institutions and customs could be broken up by this new conception of rights. The underlying social contradictions in Chosŏn caused above all by the hierarchical social status system were on the way to be redressed as the idea of universal natural rights was introduced. Here, I will first see the process in which the novel, tricky concept of rights was

²⁷² Concerning the editorial on the memorial by *Ch'anyanghoe*, see *TS* 13 October 1898. And the editorials emphasising women's education are in the issues of *TS* 12 May 1896, 4 January 1898, 13 September 1898, 26 May 1899, 21 September 1899.

translated with Chinese characters and then survey how the Korean reformists comprehended this new concept.

The English word ‘rights’ is now commonly translated as *kwŏlli* (權利, Ch. *quanli*; Jp. *kenri*) meaning ‘power and benefits provided to a person,’ which is similar to traditional concepts like *kwŏn* (權), *kwŏnse* (權勢), or *kwŏnhan* (權限), all meaning power, authority, or the capacity attached to a person’s status or position. This lexical similarity gives us an impression that ‘rights’ was an easy word to translate and already had words of similar meaning in East Asia. However, the word ‘rights’ expressed a novel value for East Asians, because it did not merely indicate legally granted rights, but rather signified natural rights, which was given at birth to everyone regardless of social position. Fukuzawa Yukichi used the expression “*tenbu no jiyu*” (天賦の自由) to mark this sort of rights and Korean reformists also understood the concept of rights in this way.²⁷³ For instance, Pak Yŏnghyo started his last reform proposal, which is about liberty, with the sentence following: “Heaven has generated humans, and all sorts of people are the same and have an inalienable *t’ongŭi* [通義, rights]. *T’ongŭi* is humans’ preservation of their life, the seeking of their liberty, and the pursuit of their happiness. This is what others cannot intervene in.”²⁷⁴ This idea of rights, taken from Fukuzawa, originated from *The Declaration of Independence* of the U.S.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Fukuzawa Yukichi, “人間の通義” in *Seiyō jijō*, pp. 238–53.

²⁷⁴ “天降生民 億兆皆同一而稟有所不可動之通義 其通義者 人之自保生命求自由希幸福是也 此他人之所不可如何也.” Pak Yŏnghyo, “Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ,” 288.

²⁷⁵ The original passage in *The Declaration of Independence* is: “WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Pak took this passage from Fukuzawa Yukichi’s explanation of the U.S.’s history in “亞米利加合衆国” in *Seiyō jijō*.

What is important here is the translation word *t'ongŭi* indicating rights. *T'ongŭi* is the word Fukuzawa used in his book *Seiyō jijō*.²⁷⁶ He well understood the meaning of rights being humans' privileges provided universally at birth, but he had difficulty in translating it into a proper word using *kanzi*. *T'ongŭi*, 'universally accepted (right) principles or norms' in literal translation, was Fukuzawa's choice for 'rights,' and it highlighted the social and political aspect of the word, not its narrower legal one. Yet, in fact, the word rights had originally been translated using *kwōlli* in the latter sense in William Martin's *Wanguo gongfa* (1864). This book was soon transmitted to Japan and re-published there in 1868. So, by the time Fukuzawa published the first edition of his book *Seiyō jijō* (1866), he might have known the word *kwōlli* or *kenri*. He must have been reluctant to use that word, however, because it did not fully reflect rights as heaven-endowed universal values for humanity; *kenri* rather mirrored the narrower legal meaning.²⁷⁷ So, until Japanese jurisprudence scholars adopted the word *kenri* as a better translation for 'rights' after they understood its full legal meaning, some translations were in competition. Korean reformists who studied under Fukuzawa's guidance and were affected by him in the 1880s adopted his translation, yet, at the same time, they used *kwōlli* because *kwōlli* was commonly circulated at the time. As a result, confusion arose. Pak Yōnghyo and Yu Kilchun used the two words *kwōn* (權), or *kwōlli*, and *t'ongŭi* in their works. To make things more complicated, the two persons, well-informed in old

²⁷⁶ *T'ongŭi* had been used in classical Confucian texts. An instance is *Mencius*: “故曰或勞心或勞力 勞心者 治人 勞力者 治於人 治於人者 食人 治人者 食於人 天下之通義也.” *Mencius* 3A4. Cited from Kim Hyōnch'ōl, “Pak Yōnghyo ŭi '1888 nyōn sangsomun e nat'anankwōn ron,” 16.

²⁷⁷ In this context, Fukuzawa used the term “權理通義” in his book *Gakumon no susume* (學問のすすめ) published in 1873 and “權理” in the book *Jiji taisei ron* (時事大勢論, 1882). This indicates that he still had some discontent with the translations of the word 'rights'. For concrete contexts of the translation of *kwōlli* in Japan, see Yanabu Akira (柳父章), *Pōnyōk'ō sōngnip sajōng* (翻譯語成立事情) [The Context of the Formation of Translation Words], trans. by Sō Hyeyōng (Seoul: Ilbit, 2003), pp. 148–66.

Chinese letters (*hanja*), interpreted the word *t'ongŭi* literally, so, at some parts, they used *t'ongŭi* as Fukuzawa originally meant, that is, as rights, but, at others, they interpreted it as is indicated literally, that is, universally accepted (right) principles or norms. This dual use of *t'ongŭi* is exhibited in both Pak and Yu.

Pak Yŏnghyo considered liberty significant, but, at the same time, he contrasted liberty with *t'ongŭi* as social norm, insisting that by giving up certain liberty by *t'ongŭi* and law, one can achieve the liberty of living with others in society (*ch'ŏseji jayu*). This contrast between human liberty and *t'ongŭi* is clearer in Yu Kilchun's case. Yu saw that *kwŏlli* (權利) consisted of both liberty and *t'ongŭi*, and understood *t'ongŭi* as proper and right principles or norms in society (當然한 正理) by interpreting it literally. So he divided *kwŏlli* into two, the right of liberty and the right of *t'ongŭi*, and indicated the former as belonging to individuals and the latter as being social norms regulating individuals' excessive pursuit of liberty. After dividing liberty into several sub-liberties, such as relating to life, property, business, assembly, religion, speech, and dignity, he also added socially proper forms of them, which were called *t'ongŭi* for each of them. Even in Fukuzawa the need to restrict liberty by law for the sake of social order was mentioned, but Yu, owing to the misconception of *t'ongŭi* or his own firm judgement, strengthened the need to limit individual liberty in society. Following Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko's view, Chŏng Yonghwa has interpreted that Yu's emphasis on "the right of *t'ongŭi*" resulted from Yu's firm judgement based on his Confucian background. That is to say, because of the communitarian ethics of Confucianism, Yu thought that liberty should be properly restricted by social norm (*t'ongŭi*).²⁷⁸ Given Yu's moderate character, this view is

²⁷⁸ Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ŭi chŏngch'i sasang*, ch. 7. Earlier than Chŏng Yonghwa, Tsukiashi positively interpreted the concept of *t'ongŭi* as the proof of Yu's influence by Confucian ethics. Oka

acceptable. Yet considering that the radical Pak Yŏnghyo also used *t'ongŭi* in a dual way and that the word *t'ongŭi* itself is interpreted so, we can also find their double use of *t'ongŭi* in the characteristic of that translated word.

Comparatively speaking, Pak put more stress on the value of liberty, but Yu was ambivalent about the value of liberty and the need to curtail it to maintain social order. Likewise, Pak revealed concrete cases of the unequal state of rights in contemporary Chosŏn, but Yu stuck to a theoretical perspective, emphasising “education” as a method to inspire the value of rights among Koreans. Through education, he thought, people can recognise each one’s rights and, furthermore, the importance of the rights of their own state, i.e., the right to national independence. With his stress of education, we can surmise that he had a negative view on contemporary Koreans’ capacity to become the men of rights.

Contrary to Yu’s *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* we can see an explosive use of the word *kwŏlli* or *kwŏn*. According to Kim Tongt’aek, the word *kwŏlli* was used 471 times, the frequency of which far exceeded that of *chayu* (75 times).²⁷⁹ This means that the word *kwŏlli* was no longer a novel concept to Korean people in the late 1890s. If we

Katsuhiko opposed this view and saw that Yu insisted on the need to restrict liberty on the basis of an utilitarian idea of society, while it is accepted that Yu himself could adopt the concept of rights easily due to the Confucian notion of *tianli* (天理). Oka thinks that Yu’s Confucian ideas are not purely Neo-Confucian and, within Yu’s thought, the Confucian view of *tianli* (天理) and *renyu* (人慾) has some change. In that Oka argues that in Yu’s ideas Confucianism underwent some serious change, I think his view is more pertinent than Tsukiashi and Chŏng Yonghwa’s. Yet Oka’s basic thesis that Yu Kilchun is still a Confucian reiterates Japanese scholars’ typical view of Korean reformists. I think that this perspective has some serious limits in explaining the major parts of Yu’s ideas in a coherent manner. In this study, I see Yu Kilchun as a moderate reformist. See Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko (月脚達彦), “Chōsen kaika shisō no kōzō: Yu Kilchun Sōyu kyōnmun no bunmei ron teki riken kunshu sei ron; Oka Katsuhiko (岡克彦), “Han’guk kaehwa sasang ūi kwŏlligwan: Yu Kilchun ūi kwŏlliron ūl sojae ro.”

²⁷⁹ Kim Tongt’aek, “*Tongnip sinmun* ūi kŏndae kukka kōnsŏl ron” [The Idea of Modern State Building in *Tongnip sinmun*] in *Kŏndae kyemong’gi chisik ūi palkyŏn kwa sayu chip’yŏng ūi hwakdae* (Seoul: So’mŏyŏng, 2006), pp. 189–225.

think about the reason why the new notion *kwŏlli* was accepted quickly among Korean people, a clue is its similarity with other words in meaning, such as *kwŏllyŏk* (權力, power), *kwŏnse* (權勢, force), and *kwŏnwi* (權威, authority). Indeed, one of the features of the usage of the term was that it was often used to signify *kwŏllyŏk*, *kwŏnse*, or *kwŏnwi*. This confusion of *kwŏlli* with other concepts appears to be caused by its meaning common with the others in the sense of ‘being given exclusively’ or ‘having something authoritatively.’ The compatibility of *kwŏlli* with the others in meaning, thus, was a reason why it was quickly established as a common word among Korean people’s language acts. This overuse of *kwŏlli* in *Tongnip sinmun* editorials continued for quite a long time until it clearly indicated both legal and natural rights from late 1899.

Tongnip sinmun and the Independence Club (*Tongnip hyŏphoe*, 1896–1898) were in fact fervent advocates of the people’s rights in contemporary Korea, and worked to protect both ‘the common people’s rights’ and ‘the state’s rights’ as an independent country. Indeed, these two kinds of rights represented the conception of rights suggested in *Tongnip sinmun*. Firstly, the rights of individual citizens included both natural rights like women’s rights and many legal rights. In an editorial, the editor made it clear that the Club’s objective was “to prevent the government from violating the people’s (*paeksŏng*) rights to life and property.”²⁸⁰ Many of the Club’s activities indeed aimed to prevent both the central and local government officials from breaching commoners’ rights.

Next, another concept of rights ardently proclaimed in *Tongnip sinmun* was the state’s right (*nara kwŏlli* or *kukkwŏn*), which meant contemporary Korea’s right to enjoy

²⁸⁰ See “협회에서 할 일” in *TS* 4 August 1898.

itself as an independent sovereign state. Because of this value, the paper persistently reiterated the importance of national independence (*chaju tongnip*) and endeavoured to rouse the people's patriotism. The rise of the concept of the state's rights was, of course, associated with the political circumstances of Korea at the time. As China lost its suzerainty over Chosŏn in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War (1894), Chosŏn came to assume its full diplomatic rights. Moreover, Japan retreated from the peninsula after the murder incident of Queen Min (1895), so Chosŏn had full rights as an independent state. However, the king and some high officials depended on Russia, and Russian influence was growing from October 1897. In this situation, the rivalry between Russia and Japan was going on under the surface to the point that the paper even warned of a possible collision between the two countries over the peninsula in the near future.²⁸¹ *Tongnip sinmun*'s emphasis on the value of the state's rights and its endeavour to stimulate common people's patriotism, and on this basis, its opposition to the government to rely on Russia in 1898, stemmed from this context.

Indeed, the Club's shift from an enlightenment association to a political association was linked with its objection to the government leaning on Russia, and this finally led to claims for political rights, or "the right to opine to the king."²⁸² In this context, the paper's original emphasis on common people's private rights to life and property developed to their public (or political) rights to oppose the misled government from early 1898. This expansion of the concept of rights and the Club's patriotism drove them to stage mass street demonstrations against the pro-Russian government in March 1898, which developed further

²⁸¹ See *TS* 16 November 1899.

²⁸² The first editorial opposing the government for its invitation of a Russian general accountant cum advisor for the Finance Ministry, which became a milestone for the Club's turn toward a political association, is shown in the issue of *TS* 23 October 1897. And the first remark on common people's right to political opinion, or the right to opine about government issues is seen in the editorial in the issue of *TS* 8 January 1898.

as grand political rallies in central Seoul from September. Throughout the year, *Tongnip sinmun* used diverse expressions to indicate this kind of political rights of the common people. For example, in the editorial in the 11 January 1898 issue, the editor stated that the people have “duties” (*chikbun* or *chikmu*) to oversee the government activities and to thwart its misdeeds when it harms the state. Here, the people’s political rights were translated into civic duties. In a memorial to King Kojong presented in October 1898, the Club members stated that when a government official does illegal acts and hurts the benefits of the state, to voice against and impeach him is “the rights of the subjects (the people).”²⁸³ And in a letter to *Tongnip sinmun* after he went back to the U.S. in May 1898, Sŏ Chaep’il, the founder and the first editor of the paper, used a radical expression, remarking that “owners of the state” (common people) in Korea have become the slaves of government officials, so, in order to recover their original ownership, the people must let the officials work for them.²⁸⁴ Therefore, through the activities of *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club, the horizon of a person’s individual rights extended to the right of political opposition. The shift of the traditional political system was anticipated through this extension of the notion of rights, which indeed represented the Club’s idea of popular sovereignty.

Taken together, the idea that all humans have inborn rights to be free and equal was a ground-breaking intellectual resource, which was novel to Korean people. However, the two core values, liberty and equality, were demanded from the needs in the context of contemporary Korea. The abstract value, natural rights, theoretically supported the new values. The extension of the concept of rights to that of political rights was also the result of

²⁸³ TS 25 October 1898.

²⁸⁴ TS 16 November 1898.

the need that surfaced in the late 1890s. Therefore, the spread of Western political ideas was not as much one-sided intellectual transmission as a positive embrace of them on the part of the Korean reformists because of their needs.

2. New Public Norms

2.1. The Rise of Rule of Law

The decentring of the Confucian paradigm in the public realm signalled the destabilisation of the old public norms in Chosŏn, which combined ‘ye’ (禮) as moral norms and customs founded on Confucian ethics, and ‘law’ mainly as administrative and penal codes. Specifically, as ye lost its authority as a public norm, re-establishing public norms supported by new public values became an urgent historical task.²⁸⁵ Most publications written by the reformist intellectuals in the 1880s and ’90s reinterpreted law as *a system of rights* and defended it as a new public norm. Here I will first examine the context in which law, or rule of law, became the single public norm and then will see how the reformists of the 1880s and *Tongnip sinmun* understood law.

The true condition of traditional public norms is well illustrated in a speech by a high official, Chŏng Pŏmcho (鄭範朝, 1833–1898), in a dialogue with King Kojong about

²⁸⁵ Ye is a comprehensive concept which covers the areas of values, way of behaving, rites, and even institutions and customs. It is a norm based on hierarchical social status and encompasses various levels of relations between individuals, families, and states. Ye is regarded as a primal norm ahead of law in Confucian Chosŏn. For the understanding of ye, especially in the context of Chosŏn Korea, see Martina Deuchler, “Neo-Confucianism in Early Yi Korea: Some Reflections on the Role of Ye,” *Korea Journal* 15 (5) (1975), pp. 12–18; Rhee Wontaek, “Kaehwagi yech’i robut’ŏ pŏpch’i roŭi sasangjŏk chŏnhwan,” 67.

national problems in 1892. In the dialogue, Chŏng said:

As far as the current situation is concerned, the people's destitution is getting worse day by day, and the recent drought has only added to these difficulties. Reports from local provinces are nothing but surprises... Now, the ways to care for the poor people and the measures to help them rely on local magistrates, yet will they do their best in soothing the people and will they treat Your Majesty's worries about the subjects with deference? In recent years, *law and discipline* became loose (法綱解弛) and the sense of *shame and moral integrity* collapsed (廉防隳壞), so that there have never before been local magistrates who were so corrupt or made such harsh extractions as those today. Extorting money from the people is regarded as competency and exacting with draconian methods is thought talented; when one does not do so, he is simply regarded as a gentle but useless man. It is deeply lamentable to say this to your Majesty.²⁸⁶

In his speech, Chŏng mentioned two points in relation to public norms. Firstly, he emphasised that the two resources of social regulation in Chosŏn were in crisis, that is, on the one hand, "law and discipline became loose" and, on the other, "the sense of shame and moral integrity collapsed."²⁸⁷ Secondly, he revealed that local magistrates became corrupt

²⁸⁶ KJSL 29/#6/25, italics added.

²⁸⁷ Because the ideal of an ethical community had held intellectual hegemony through orthodox Neo-Confucianism, law did not develop much in Chosŏn except as administrative and criminal legal codes. Although law was a significant means to regulate society, especially the common people, it was conventionally regarded as a subordinate to morality. For example, following the tradition of Confucian view of law, Yi Hwang (李滉) argued in his memorial to young King Sŏnjo that governing people by teaching morality is a central method and governing them by law is a subordinate method. As one who teaches morality to people, the ruling class of Chosŏn was required to cultivate moral virtue. Nevertheless, law in Chosŏn was continuously augmented throughout the entire period of the dynasty and had some rationality as positive law. Jung Geungsik argues that *Daminglü* (大明律, The Great Ming Code), the key penal code in Chosŏn, had the principle of *nulla poena sine lege* (no penalty without a law), though less so than modern Western law (Jung Geungsik (Chŏng Kŭngsik), "Taemyŏngnyul ūi choehyŏng pŏpchŏngchu'ui wŏnch'ik" [The Principle of *nulla poena sine lege* in The Ming Code], *Pŏphak* 49, no.1 (2008), pp. 110–58.). Yet, since the ideal of rule by ethical teaching was strong, punishment was understood as means to achieve the ideal of no crime and punishment. Thus, punishment was largely harsh in order to enlighten people so that they would commit no crimes (Chŏn Pongdŏk, *Hankuk kŭndae pŏp sasangsa*, 52–4). This conventional conception of law lasted even in the late 1890s, so that, for instance, when a former government official, Kim Hongnyuk, attempted to commit regicide in 1898 by putting opium in King Kojong's

and lost the integrity required to rule. Chŏng's speech described the conditions of local governance in Chosŏn in the early 1890s, which eventually led to the *Tonghak* peasants uprising in 1894. The message of the dialogue was that the traditional social norms in Chosŏn virtually disintegrated in the 1890s.

Rhee Wŏntaek has already sought to explain the decline of the old system of norms and the rise of a new one in this period through the transition from the system of *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* (經國大典, Great Code of Administration) to that of *Taeahan'guk kukje* (大韓國國制, Constitution of Great Korea), characterising it as a change from the rule by *ye* to the rule by law.²⁸⁸ His stress on 'change' between the two systems, however, is unconvincing. Two legal codes within the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* system, that is, the *Kukjo oryeŭi* (國朝五禮儀, Code of the State's Five Ye) as a code of rites and *Daminglü* (大明律, The Great Ming Code) as a code of criminal law, changed to *Taeahan yejŏn* (大韓禮典, Great Korea's Codes of Ye (1898)) and *Hyŏngpŏp taejŏn* (刑法大典, Great Code of Criminal Law (1905)), but without much change

coffee, conservative officials insisted on the restoration of old draconian punishments. A memorial raised by conservatives represents the traditional conception of punishment: "The intention of sages in establishing laws was not made because they dislike saving people's lives or they like killing, but in making people alert by punishing one [harshly as an example] in order to make punishment disappear" (TS, 5 October 1898). For a general introduction on law in Chosŏn, see Chŏn Pongdŏk, *Han'guk kŭndae pŏp sasangsa*, 11–54. For law as criminal code in Chosŏn, see Cho Jiman (Cho Chiman), "Chosŏn ch'ogi taemyŏngnyul ŭi suyong kwajŏng" [The Process of the Reception of the Ming Code in Early Chosŏn], *Pŏpsahak yŏn'gu* 20 (1999). For the role of morality in legal cases, see Lee Junghoon (Yi Chŏnghun), "Chosŏn chŏn'gi hyŏngpŏl ŭi mokjŏk: taemyŏngnyul hyŏngnyul ŭi punsŏk ŭl chungsim ŭiro" [The Purpose of Punishment in Early Chosŏn: The Analysis of Criminal Law in The Ming Code], *Pŏpch'ŏlhak yŏn'gu* 13(1) (2010), pp. 227–52. And for the historical development of Korea's legal tradition and customs with an emphasis on the formation of civil codes under the Japanese colonial authorities, see Marie Seong-Hak Kim, *Law and Custom in Korea: Comparative Legal History* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁸⁸ Here, 'rule by law' does not mean 'the rule of law'. Rhee Wontack, "Kaehwagi yech'i robut'ŏ pŏpch'i roŭi sasangjŏk chŏnhwan," 60–83.

in their contents, as he admits.²⁸⁹ The most striking change in law in the reign of King Kojong was the establishment of a modern legal court system in 1895, and the enactment of the *Taehan'guk kukje* in 1899, which clearly stipulated the absolute power of the monarch. The key point is that the two came from very different intellectual backgrounds. While the former was a progressive measure instigated by the reformers, the latter was a reactionary measure taken by King Kojong and the conservatives just after the collapse of the reformists' mass street demonstrations in 1898. Rhee did not recognise that what he called the *Taehan'guk kukje* system was continuous with the *Kyōngguk taejōn* system and what was really discontinuous with the latter was the reformists' ideas of law and their reforms of legal institutions in the *Kabo* reforms.²⁹⁰

Among the works by the reformist intellectuals, Pak Yōnghyo's memorial and Yu Kilchun's *Sōyu kyōnmun* explicitly depicted law as a new public norm. Distinctive to both was their recognition of the two main roles of law in society. Pak's understanding of law, at first glance, seems limited to its traditional conception as a means to maintain public order. Yet his understanding of law was obviously modern in that his proposals for the reform of the legal system were based on a modern understanding of it as a system protecting people's lives, liberty, and property. What he emphatically stressed concerning law was the idea of "equality

²⁸⁹ According to Pak Pyōngho, *Hyōngpōp taejōn* was established with reference to existing bodies of law, such as the *Taejōn hoet'ong* (大典會通, Great Codes Collected) and *Daminglü* (大明律, The Great Ming Code). The new body of law created after 1894 inherited the traditional laws. Pak Pyōngho, *Han'guk pōpjesa go: künse ūi pōp kwa sahoe* [Korean History of Legislation: Law and Society in Modern Times] (Seoul: Pōpmunsa, 1987), p. 429.

²⁹⁰ To use modern terms, both the *Kyōngguk taejōn* and *Taehan'guk kukje* are constitutions, but the two are starkly different. The former does not mention the king's prerogatives, while the latter stipulates the king's absolute rights in eight out of its nine articles. These differences reflect different contexts of the Chosōn king's authority. When the *Kyōngguk taejōn* was established in early Chosōn, the king's power was strong, but when the *Taehan'guk kukje* was promulgated, the king's traditional authority was being seriously destabilised. King Kojong intended to clarify his unlimited power as king in the form of a constitution.

before law,” which was contrary to the traditional discrimination in legal applications according to the offenders’ social status.²⁹¹ This modern conception is clearly illustrated in his proposal to establish a modern legal system by specifying twelve items like establishing legal courts, repealing egregious punishments, and introducing the principle of *nulla poena sine lege* (no penalty without a law). His suggestions in the memorial became real institutions through legislations, when he took charge of the interior ministry in 1895.

Yu Kilchun’s discussion of law was more systematic as he understood well the two main roles of law in society.²⁹² He wrote that “the fundamental intention of law was to respect a person’s rights and preserve them” and “if there was no law, rights would have hardly existed.”²⁹³ In several parts of his work, he repeated the same argument. Furthermore, his insistence on law as a system of rights was balanced with the concept of law as “a great tool maintaining public order.”²⁹⁴ Law can limit a person’s rights in order to “maintain a

²⁹¹ According to the criminal law section of *Taejŏn hoet’ong*, the *yangban* class was not imprisoned without the king’s approval, and in a legal hearing *yangban* were allowed to submit their reply in a document instead of presenting themselves. *Yangban* were judged at *Ŭigumbu* (義禁府), a central government office treating legal cases, instead of a local magistrate’s office. Chŏn Pongdŏk, *Han’guk kŭndae pŏp sasangsa*, 49.

²⁹² There are a number of studies that analysed Yu’s reformist thought in *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, but studies that focused on his legal ideas are rare. Exceptionally, Chŏn Pongdŏk highlighted Yu’s legal ideas in *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* upon jurisprudential terms and concluded that his legal ideas were conservative and still largely limited by traditional Chosŏn’s legal conceptions. As for how Yu’s thought continued or broke with traditional legal terms, Chŏn emphasised continuous aspects. (Chŏn, *Han’guk kŭndae pŏp sasangsa*, 227–52.) In contrast to Chŏn’s slightly negative view of Yu Kilchun’s legal ideas, Oka Katsuhiko reinterprets his legal ideas with a focus on his concept of *hang’gupŏb* (恒久法), and defends that Yu aimed not to follow old laws and customs blindly, nor did he replace the old ones with the Western legal system. That is to say, he aimed to improve Korean laws upon the basis of the old one. See Oka Katsuhiko (岡克彦), “Yu Kilchun i p’aakhan ‘hang’gupŏb” ŭi kwannyŏm e kwanhan han koch’al: han’guk kundaepŏb sasangsa yŏn’gu sŏsŏl” [A Study of Yu Kilchun’s Idea of *hang’gupŏb*: A Preliminary Study for the History of Modern Korean Legal Thoughts], *Pŏbhak yŏn’gu* 7 (1997), pp. 203–35.

²⁹³ Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyukyŏnmun*, 138–9.

²⁹⁴ Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyukyŏnmun*, 282.

public end, which is to make the public live well together.”²⁹⁵ In this regard, he compared law with an army commander and rights with a private, stating that only when each person observes their duties can law and rights be arranged properly.²⁹⁶

A peculiarity of Yu, in contrast to Pak, is his moderate standpoint on legal policy. While Pak demanded a radical reform in the legal system, Yu believed that a country could develop satisfactory laws simply by revising existing laws instead of creating new ones.²⁹⁷ He wrote that “only when it is befitting of a country’s customs and institutions can law become public principle.”²⁹⁸ In this context, he admitted the king’s rights and role in legal administration, stating that “the king has the right to legislate,” as was thought traditionally.²⁹⁹ However, he made it a proviso that the king must “take care of the rights of the people and protect and guide them.”³⁰⁰ He also championed the Confucian understanding of rule by prioritising governing people by teaching morality over governing them by law.³⁰¹ This seemingly contradictory viewpoint on law appears to have come from his very moderate and prudent perspective on the reality of contemporary Korea.

In sum, Pak and Yu’s understanding of law was based on a very modern view, although they still maintained morality as a means of social regulation. They had a far more sophisticated understanding of law, which included a new meaning of law as a method for

²⁹⁵ Yu Kilchun, *Söyukyönmun*, 138.

²⁹⁶ Yu Kilchun, *Söyukyönmun*, 139.

²⁹⁷ Yu Kilchun, *Söyukyönmun*, 287–91.

²⁹⁸ Yu Kilchun, *Söyukyönmun*, 291.

²⁹⁹ Yu Kilchun, *Söyukyönmun*, 283.

³⁰⁰ Yu Kilchun, *Söyukyönmun*, 283–4.

³⁰¹ Yu Kilchun, *Söyukyönmun*, 284–5. Pak Yöngghyo also expressed the same idea in his memorial. Pak Yöngghyo, “könbaksö,” 257.

protecting people's innate rights. The rediscovered law, which was fit for new public values, gained force by being institutionalised during the *Kabo* reforms, but competition between the old and the new notion of law persisted. The *Taehan'guk kukje* (1899) was the result of a mixture of the traditional conception of governing and its modern, constitutional form.

2.2. Law in *Tongnip sinmun*

Law, as presented in *Tongnip sinmun*, is different from Pak and Yu's theoretical understanding of it in that the paper shows the real context in which law had become the only possible public norm in Korea at the time. As the frequent use of the word *pŏmnyul* (법률, law) in *Tongnip sinmun* indicates, Korea desperately needed law or rule of law, not only because social disorder was prevalent, but also because traditional social norms had virtually collapsed and the public culture was increasingly on the decline.³⁰² The editors thought that 'rule of law' was the single alternative for restoring social stability and rebuilding public culture.³⁰³

The domestic situation of Chosŏn concerning public order in the mid-1890s is well

³⁰² According to Kim Tongt'aek's survey, the word *pŏmnyul* was used 821 times in the paper. Kim Tongt'aek, "Tongnip sinmun ūi kŭndae kukka kŏnsŏl ron," 223.

³⁰³ Systematic research on the conception of law in *Tongnip sinmun* has been carried out by Chŏn Pongdŏk. He interpreted law in the paper in the modern sense, analysing it on jurisprudential terms. However, why the word was mentioned so frequently should be understood in terms of its social context, not its jurisprudential significance. See Chŏn Pongdŏk, *Han'guk kŭndae pŏp sasangsa*, 264–309. For other studies which address the legal ideas of the paper, though limitedly, see Shin Yong-ha, *Tongnip hyŏphoe yŏn'gu*, pp. 311–16, 341–47; Ch'oe Chong'go, "Hanguk ūi sŏyang pŏp sasang suyong kwajŏng ko" [Discussions on the Adoption of the Western Legal Ideas into Korea], *Han'guk munhwa* 2(1981); Kim Hongwoo, "Han'guk sahoe kwahak ron ūi hwadu rosŏui tongnip sinmun" [Tongnip sinmun as a Subject of Korean Social Science] in *Han'guk chŏngch'i ūi hyŏnsanghak chŏk ihae* (Seoul: Ingan sarang, 2007), pp. 753–856.

shown in the editorial of the third issue of the paper:

The people of Chosŏn do not seem to clearly know the difference between loyal subjects and rebels. So, today, we would like to discuss loyal subjects and rebels. We think that a loyal subject is none other than a person who observes law and a rebel one who does not observe law. Whoever wants to preserve his body and loves the king and government must follow the law whether he is high or low and privileged or low-born, once law has been ratified by His Majesty. When a law is thought to be inappropriate, he can express his opinion in a newspaper or make a public speech about that. However, rising up in rebellion, or insulting or killing local magistrates is the act of rebels. If one commits crimes, the punishment will not stop at his own body but reach his parents, brothers, wife, and children. So we hope that the people will realise that those acts are not beneficial at all.³⁰⁴

This editorial carries the simple message that, by observing law, people can protect their lives and become faithful subjects. Yet it implicitly confirms the reality of Korea at the time in which social order was seriously shaken after a series of political incidents from 1894 onwards. In April 1896 the country was still in great turmoil in the wake of several incidents, such as the *Tonghak* peasants uprising, the Sino-Japanese War in Korea, the pro-Japanese reformist government's radical reforms (*Kabo* reforms), the murder of Queen Min, and King Kojong's escape to the Russian legation. In the midst of these incidents, peasant rebels swept across the southern provinces, bandits haunted the countryside, and righteous armies raised their banners against the Japanese and the pro-Japanese government. The statements quoted above exhorting people to observe laws were raised in an effort to stabilise the chaotic situation of the time. Under such circumstances, invoking law as a constraining norm to secure social order was inevitable, leading to the high frequency of the word *pŏmnyul* in *Tongnip sinmun*.

³⁰⁴ TS 11 April 1896.

However, a closer reading of the paper makes it clear that the emphasis on law was intended not merely to preserve social stability but also to establish new values for society. In the wake of the dramatic events following 1894, the public culture of Chosŏn was in serious disrepair. In many editorials, the paper disclosed the corrupt realities of the public space and argued for ‘rule of law’ as a public value to correct them. One of the commonly mentioned problems that the paper revealed was the ruling class’ loss of morality and rampant corruption. Ever since the traditional system of norms was critically destabilised, local magistrates and lower officials lost the sense of public spirit and pursued private interests by extorting money from people, making rich commoners poor. On the other hand, positions in local government often became the object of trading.³⁰⁵ The collapse of the government officials’ public spirit engendered a sharp decline of social mores as seen in the following editorial:

Let us talk about the current situation in Korea... Imagine a person who manages a farm. If he works hard and harvests sufficient crops, he can sell his surplus products to markets and with the profit he can buy oxen for farming and can build a tile-roofed house instead of his former grass-roofed house. In this case, it is reasonable for the government to protect his property, and, because he pays more tax than others, the laws should allow him to flourish all the time. But in Korea this person can easily lose all his property, because the government officials extract money from him by threatening him with groundless crime, or by naming him a member of *tonghak* (동학, Eastern learning) or *ũibyŏng* (의병, righteous army), or by blackmailing him for his impiety to his parents or for family discord. In addition, *yangban* borrows money from him and does not repay it. If he demands that they repay the loan, they [falsely] accuse him [of some crime] at a local magistrate’s office and, in the end, reduce him to poverty. Everybody likes to have a fortune, but who would like to build a fortune in this situation? Some rich people, after witnessing these illegal acts, are afraid of their being placed in the same situation. Thus they try to avoid them by irregular methods... Specifically, they form a connection with a central government official in return for a bribe so that he will

³⁰⁵ Two editorials of the paper vividly present the current situation of Chosŏn, see *TS* 15 August, 8 December 1896.

save them if they suffer from that kind of local officials' illegal acts. They might buy an official position that does not require any real work, or a real position by paying 200 *wŏn* for *chusa* (주사, a clerkship) or 2000 *wŏn* for a *wŏn* (員, a chief of a town), where they can at most earn 800 *wŏn* a year. At times, they also have to give presents to government officials. Thinking about these situations, we can understand how miserable they are. But it is really distressing that even though Koreans suffer from these illegalities, they do not bear any strong resentment.³⁰⁶

This situation, caused principally by institutional problems that lower officials in local provinces were not paid at all, was not a new pathology in late Chosŏn, yet it is true that these illegal acts worsened in the late nineteenth century. The deterioration of public culture was also linked with the traditional culture of *ch'inch'in* (親親, treat closely those who are close), social relations based upon kinship. This had formed the legitimate basis of the Confucian social order, but by the 1890s it was regarded by the editors of the paper as a serious social ill distorting the public order of society. The deep-rooted social bias that favoured those connected by kinship was seen as one of the fatal maladies of society:

Once the two characters, *sajŏng* (私情, private connections), disappear, all of the affairs of Chosŏn will go well. So, we hope that those who love Chosŏn, regardless of whether they are authorities or the common people, will think about things in the interest of the public and act accordingly... If the government and the people cooperate and deal with things in a fair and honest way, then we believe that in a few years Chosŏn will be treated as a dignified country among countries in East Asia and that the state will become wealthy and the people will be comfortable.³⁰⁷

In the issue of 1 September 1896, the paper repeated the same idea that, if the government officials work only on the basis of *kongp'yŏng* (公平, fairness), eliminating

³⁰⁶ TS 19 April 1898. Italics added.

³⁰⁷ TS 28 May 1896. Italics added.

sajŏng, then, all people of Chosŏn will believe in them. As the traditional norm which relied on individuals' ethical virtue became discredited and the culture and customs based on familial kinship gradually came to be conceived as the source of distorting the public order, new public norms were needed to regulate a person's external behaviour instead of internal moral conscience by clearly stipulating wrongdoings and punishments for them in legal codes. The new public norms were also expected to embody new public values like 'justice' and 'fairness.' A new public norm which satisfied these conditions was the modern conception of law. Law administered through fair procedures was assumed to exist "for judging legal cases only with the two characters *kongp'yŏng*, regardless of whether litigants are high or low, prestigious or humble, rich or poor, powerful or powerless."³⁰⁸ Thus, the concept of law expressed in the paper was a *public value* representing justice and fairness, which were seen as necessary for a new society. According to the paper, it is only with *rule of law* that the government and people can communicate well, build trust in each other, and in the end maintain national integrity from foreign countries.³⁰⁹ Law in *Tongnip sinmun*, therefore, was a major building block for a new public culture and a stable country.

Tongnip sinmun editors' vision of rule of law, however, came into conflict with the conservative government officials' traditional notion of law as the penal codes and a system of punishments. The conflict between the reformists and the conservative officials took place over the punishment of those who attempted to murder King Kojong.³¹⁰ The conservative

³⁰⁸ TS 14 July 1896.

³⁰⁹ TS 1 March 1897.

³¹⁰ Kim Hongnyuk, a pro-Russian official favoured by King Kojong for a time and later rejected because of his abuse of power, attempted regicide in September 1898. For the controversy over the Kim Hongnyuk incident between the Independence Club and conservative officials, see TS, 11/14/16/17/26/27/28/30 September 1898 and 1/4/6/7/8/10/11/12/14 October of the same year.

officials saw the attempt at regicide as the result of inadequate punishments for felonies within the new legal system.³¹¹ They sought to revive old draconian punishments and execute them without a trial, but *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club insisted that even those rebels must be treated according to due process of law.

This incident basically marked a confrontation between two visions of regulating society in that transitional time, that is, the conservatives' traditional combination of the ruling class's ethical virtue and exemplary use of law for crimes versus the reformists' vision of society regulated by the principle of rule of law. The following dialogue between the conservative minister of justice and the representatives of the Club, depicted in *Tongnip sinmun*, illustrates this situation well:

Mr. Shin Kisŏn [the Minister of Justice] replied: "Is whether the laws are enforced more fairly or not really an issue related to our national affairs?" Representatives of the Independence Club said: "How can whether or not laws are enforced fairly not be connected to our national affairs? Can anything and any affair in the world exist beyond the boundary of law? How can you speak like that as a justice minister?" Mr. Shin said: "Cultivating virtue is more important." The representatives retorted: "Once laws are enforced fairly, will not virtue arise from that?" Mr. Shin looked embarrassed and did not reply.³¹²

Although this incident resulted in the victory of the Club, the confusion and disorder over norms for the public space continued, partly because conservatives still occupied the key posts of the government at the time.

³¹¹ The minister of Justice Shin Kisŏn's remark represents the traditional approach in handling this kind of incident: "Does not whoever turns his face to the north [i.e., subjects] in our royal court want to eat the rebel's meat and rest his head on the rebel's leather [i.e., his flayed skin]? As far as our public mores are concerned, if a rebel is just executed by decapitation, it is not enough to appease the people's public anger... This kind of incident has occurred because rebels are not executed severely" (TS 28 July 1898).

³¹² TS 4 October 1898.

Until now, we have examined the reformist intellectuals' visions of a post-Confucian society in terms of their ideas of new public values and norms. The need to adopt the new public values and norms arose in the midst of their confrontation with the problems of contemporary Chosŏn, which were related to the decline of the Confucian ethical ideal. It is difficult to say that the reformists accepted the new values sheerly owing to their theoretical goodness in an abstract sense. Domestic *needs* were combined with the new concepts from the outside world.

Among the new values, *chayu* and *kwŏlli* engendered the matter of the pertinent translation of original Western concepts because of their novelty. For the same reason, the reformists had to consider the optimal level of *chayu* for Korean people to enjoy in society, over which a division into radical Pak Yŏnghyo and moderate Yu Kilchun was made. It is also noteworthy that the political rights of the common people were first championed in *Tongnip sinmun*. The unprecedented 1898 mass rallies staged by the Independence Club were possible because of the new notion of rights. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the public values that modern Koreans enjoy and take for granted were already formed in the wake of the 1890s.

Previous studies have sought to establish a thesis that Confucian values were continuous with the reformists' ideals, and in order to prove this they highlighted the moderate Yu Kilchun's views. It is acknowledged that Yu's limited adoption of liberty has something to do with his Confucian background, but a point to consider is that the new values that Yu admitted were substitutes for Confucian ethical values. Previous studies have placed too much focus on Yu Kilchun's maintenance of the Confucian legacy, blurring the historical significance of the transformation in public values. The new values, such as liberty, equality,

rights, and the rule of law, were replacing Confucian ethical values in the public realm. Therefore, while admitting that the Confucian preconception was still affecting the reformists, a core point is that the relationship between Confucian ethical values and modern public values was rather discontinuous.

In this chapter, we have examined changes in the public values and norms after the Confucian ethical ideal came to be distrusted. What we should survey next is changes in the political thinking of the reformists. In particular, we will consider how they treated the Confucian political necessity ideas in reconstructing their political thinking.

Chapter Five

The Reconstruction of Political Thinking 1:

Re-conceptualisation of Government and Desirable Governmental Systems

In this chapter, we will examine the reformist intellectuals' ideas of government and desirable governmental systems to understand their reconstruction of political thinking. The decline of the Confucian ethical ideal gradually undermined the foundation of Confucian monarchy in Chosŏn and the traditional legitimacy of governance. As a consequence, the need to re-establish the monarchy upon the ground of the post-Confucian social condition arose as a pivotal task for the reformists to address in the late nineteenth century. From the 1880s, the reformists began to unveil novel ideas about the purpose and role of government, which went in tandem with their championing of constitutional monarchy as an alternative to the existing absolute Confucian monarchy. The reformists' redefinition of government and desirable governmental systems put forth in the 1880s and '90s spoke to an important political orientation of contemporary Korea that was formulated outside a Confucian-defined social framework. However, their novel view of government and desirable governmental systems were posed on the basis of an aspect of the Confucian ideas of governance, particularly *minbon* ideas. In this chapter I will highlight this point.

Examining the reformists' political thinking, previous studies have mainly put the focus on their understanding of the concept of 'the state' (*kukka*, 國家), not the re-conceptualisation of 'government' (*chŏngbu*, 政府). In his study on the reformists' adoption

of the concept of ‘sovereignty’ (*chukwŏn*, 主權) in the 1880s, Kim Hyŏnch’ŏl argued that the transmission of *Wanguo gongfa* (1864) into Korea brought about the spread of the concept of the sovereign state.³¹³ Developing Kim’s study, Kim Sŏngbae focused on the reception of “modern” concepts of the state and surveyed them over an extended period of time. His main argument was that the initial adoption of the concept of “the sovereign state” was extended to “the nation state” in the 1880s and ’90s and, after 1905, to “the statist, organic concept of the state.”³¹⁴ These researchers mainly examined the adoption of the Western concepts of the state and regarded the reception of the Western concepts as a development in the notion of the state.

However, the researchers hardly heeded the legacy of the Confucian ideas of governance and their effects on the reformists, or the likelihood that the Confucian ideas had been merged with the reformists’ new definition of the state. They simply surveyed the vocabulary indicating the state, such as *kuk* (國), *pang* (邦), and *kukka* (國家), in both Chinese and Korean sources in an attempt to explain the shift in the meaning of the state. In this regard, Kyung Moon Hwang’s study is pronounced. Analysing the conceptual shift of the state (*kukka*) in the enlightenment period (1896–1910), he established that, in addition to the traditional notion of the state being the ruling authority, the first and foremost view was “a liberal, collectivist view of state,” including the people and the land as core components of

³¹³ Kim Hyŏnch’ŏl, “Kaehwagi man’guk kongpŏb ūi chŏllae wa sŏgu kŭndae chukwŏn kukka ūi insik: 1880 nyŏndae kaehwap’a ūi chukwŏn kaenyŏm ūl chungsim ūro” [The Transmission of *Wanguo gongfa* in the Enlightenment Period and the Adoption of the Modern Western Sovereign State: with a Focus on the Reformists’ Reception of the Concept of Sovereignty], *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn’gu* 28 (1) (2005), pp. 127–52.

³¹⁴ Kim Sŏngbae, “Han’guk ūi kŭndae kukka kaenyŏm hyŏngsŏng sa yŏn’gu: kaehwagi rŭl chungsim ūro” [A Study of the Formation of the Modern Concept of State in Korea: with a Focus on the Opening up/Enlightenment Period], *Kukje chŏngch’i nonch’ong* 52 (5), 2012, pp. 7–35.

the state. This conception was later augmented by the German-style, statist view of the state after 1905, when Korea fell to being a protectorate of Japan. Expounding this expansion of the concept of the state, Kyung Moon Hwang did not miss a Confucian influence on the adoption of the liberal, collectivist view of the state and argued for their compatibility.³¹⁵ His concentration on the concept of the state (*kukka*), however, failed to notice that a significant change in Korean political thinking took place in the 1880s and '90s over the concept of government (*chǒngbu*). His stress on the state forced him to focus on the period between 1905 and 1910 rather than on the 1880s and '90s, but the liberal and democratic view of government, similar to the liberal, collectivist view of the state, had already flourished in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. His focus on the concept of the state led him to delve into the period after 1905.

The studies on desirable governmental systems show little dissension. Through the studies of Shin Yong-ha, Cho Tonggöl, Yun Taewön, and Park Ch'ansüng, it has now been clarified that constitutional monarchy, the dominant alternative system in the 1880s and '90s, gradually gave way to the republican system in the wake of the country's falling to a protectorate status (1905) of imperialist Japan and King Kojong's forced abdication (1907).³¹⁶ Following Shin Yong-ha's claim, it is widely accepted that *Sinminhoe* (新民會,

³¹⁵ Kyung Moon Hwang, "Country or State? Reconceptualizing *Kukka* in the Korean Enlightenment Period," *Korean Studies* 24 (2000), pp. 1–24.

³¹⁶ Shin Yong-ha, "19segi han'guk ūi kŭndae kukka hyōngsōng munje wa ip'hōn konghwaguk surip undong" [Modern State-Building in Korea in the Nineteenth Century and the Movements for a Constitutional Regime] in *Han'guk kŭndae sahoesa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Iljisa, 1987) pp. 9–96; Cho Tonggöl, "Imsi chǒngbu surip ūl wihan 1917 yŏn ūi 'Taedong tankyŏl sŏn'ŏn'" ["The 1917 Pronouncement for Great Unity" for the Foundation of the Interim Government], *Han'gukhak nonch'ong* 9 (1987), pp. 123–70; Yun Taewön, "Hanmal Ilche ch'ogi chǒngch'eron ūi non'ui kwajōng kwa minchu konghwaje ūi suyong" [Discussions of a Proper Governmental System in the Last Years of Taehan and the Early Years of the Colonial Period and the Adoption of the Democratic Republican System], *Chungguk hyōndaesa yŏn'gu* 12 (2001), pp. 53–72; Pak Ch'ansüng, "Han'guk ūi

1907) was the first association to indicate a preference for a republican system. Korean intellectuals' interest in the republican system was further encouraged by witnessing the republican revolution in China in 1911. And, as Cho Tonggöl has established, the independence movement activists' Pronouncement for Great Unity (大同團結宣言) in 1917 affirmed allegiance to the way to the republican system, until this was finally set as the governmental system of liberated Korea by the Provisional Government based in Shanghai in 1919. In relation to these long-term analyses, Chŏng Yonghwa focused on the 1880s to see the context in which the reformist intellectuals championed constitutional monarchy as a desirable system.³¹⁷

All these studies traced the development of preferred governmental systems proposed by Korean reformists, but did not engage with the key elements of these preferred governmental systems. From the early 1880s, the reformist intellectuals paid attention to both 'constitutionalism' (specifically, the division of power and rule of law) and 'parliamentarianism' as pivotal components of an ideal governmental system, and strived to establish these two principles into political institutions through national reforms. From the perspective of the development of these two principles, the 1880s and '90s were not the period in which a regime change failed as researchers have commonly understood so, but one that gradually marched towards a constitutional system.

kündae kukka kŏnsöl undong kwa konghwaje" [The Modern State-Building Movements in Korea and Republicanism], *Yŏksa hakbo* 200 (2008), pp. 305–343; and Pak Ch'ansŭng, *Taehanminguk ūn minchu konghwaguk ida* [Great Republic of Korea is a Democratic Republic] (Seoul: Tolbaegae, 2013).

³¹⁷ Chŏng Yonghwa, "Chosŏn esŏŭi ip'hŏn minjujuŭi kwan'nyŏm ūi suyong: 1880 nyŏndae rŭl chungsim ŭro" [The Acceptance of Constitutional Democracy in Chosŏn: with a Focus on the 1880s], *Han'guk chŏngch'i hakhoebo* 32 (2), (1998), pp. 105–124.

This chapter deals with these two themes, i.e., the re-conceptualisation of government and desirable governmental systems, one by one. A significant point to consider is the effects of the Confucian political necessity ideas (specifically, *minbon* ideas) on the reformists' novel ideas of government. Interestingly, it is identified that the reformists adopted the new ideas of government through the medium of the Confucian *minbon* ideas. In this chapter, we will first examine Chŏng Yakyong's understanding of governance, as his reconstruction of governance provides an example of the connection between Confucian ideas and the democratic view of governance.

1. The Reconstruction of Governance in the Case of Chŏng Yakyong

Confucianism provided standards for a number of areas of traditional Korean people's life. One of the areas deeply affected by Confucian teachings was governance. Yet the Confucian teaching on governance was not a single entity. One side of the teaching was mainly presented in classical Confucian texts, such as *Shujing* and *Mencius*, which taught an ontological deontology to the rulers by inculcating the idea that the common people are the foundation of the state so that all government measures should be taken for the sake of the people. A number of similar ideas in classical texts that belong to this category originated from ancient Chinese people's historical experiences. On the other hand, Confucianism furnished another resource for governance, through which the distinction between the high and the low and the ruling and the ruled was legitimised (正名, 分義); accordingly, people's different portion of rights and initiatives was justified. This side of Confucian ideas of governance helped to sustain the hierarchically divided, government-led society, while

contributing to the stability of Chosŏn's stratified social system. These two contrasting aspects of the Confucian ideas of governance are evident in the annals of the Chosŏn dynasty, *Sillok* (實錄). Generally, when the state was at peace, the latter idea was emphasised and the king's authority and the state's patriarchal role were pronounced, with the king often likened to a parent and common people to bare children (赤子). However, at a time of crisis, the former idea invariably recurred and predominated the royal court dialogue. Therefore, the Confucian theoretical bases supporting Chosŏn's monarchic rule were dual-sided: they obviously had a domineering aspect over the ruled, but, at the same time, furnished a self-restraining and self-corrective aspect on the part of the ruling.

The Confucian scholar who put emphasis on the latter aspect and reconceptualised governance before the late nineteenth century was Chŏng Yakyong (1762–1836). Chŏng's reconstructive thinking of governance reflects the historical context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Chosŏn, in which the Confucian *ethical* worldview was waning. In his essays on the original form of governance, he problematised the premises of contemporary monarchic rule of Chosŏn and suggested an alternative model of governance. As noted above, in his research on the concept of the state (*kukka*) in Chosŏn, Kyung Moon Hwang found that in late Chosŏn *kukka* was mainly understood as “the central government.” Since he concentrated on *kukka*, however, he missed the fact that a significant transformation in the idea of governance had already been made by Chŏng Yakyong.³¹⁸ Chŏng's reconstruction of governance is exhibited in his two essays, *T'angnon* (蕩論, On King T'ang)

³¹⁸ Kyung Moon Hwang, “Country or State? Reconceptualizing *Kukka* in the Korean Enlightenment Period,” pp. 7–8.

and *Wŏnmok* (原牧, Original Governor), where he posed fundamental questions on governance.³¹⁹

In *T'angnon* he traced the origins of governorship back to ancient times and asserted that all chief positions, such as village chief, county chief, local lords (諸侯), and emperor (天子), were “selected” (推) by people. If they were selected, claimed Chŏng, they should step down from their positions when their performance proved to be poor and thus those who selected them were in disharmony. Yet the chiefs demoted from their positions returned to their former status. Chŏng cited examples from history, where figures such as Dan Zhu (丹朱), Shang Jun (商均), Qizi (杞子), and Songgong (宋公) – all descendants or brothers of former emperors in ancient China – retained their original title of lord (侯) even after their family had lost the emperorship in their own generation. Analysing ancient governorship historically, he noted that, only after the Zhou dynasty (周) was overthrown by the Chin dynasty (秦), the previous royal family could no longer maintain their original title of lordship. He thus argued that the political practices of the feudal system in pre-Chin China were different from those in post-Chin era, contending that in the pre-Chin era rulers could be ousted if their performance was poor. In this regard, he argued in conclusion that T’ang’s banishment of the tyrant king Jie (桀) of Xia (夏) was not a usurpation of the king as a subject but the application of customary practices of his time. With this logic, he refuted some scholars’ view that T’ang was the first subject who betrayed his king. Chŏng added political imagination to historical facts and put forth a novel vision of governance to the contemporary dynastic kingship in Chosŏn.

³¹⁹ Chŏng Yakyong, “Wŏnmok,” *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* vol. 5, trans. by Minjok munhwa ch’ujinhoe (Seoul: Sol, 1996), pp. 15–17; “T’angnon,” *Kukyŏk Tasan simunjip* 5, pp. 127–29.

Chǒng's quest for the original form of governorship was unfolded in more concrete terms in the essay *Wǒnmok*. He began his essay with a taunting question as to whether governors (牧民者) exist for the common people (百姓) or the people exist for governors. In order to draw out an answer to this question, he again traced the original formation of governorship back to ancient times and saw the creation of chief positions at each level of administration as the consequence of the need to resolve conflicts. When people had disputes over an issue at a village level, they could resolve it after hearing an old man's wise judgement. Thus, they selected him as the chief of the village (里正). Likewise, when the people of several villages could not resolve a conflict between them, they could hear a reasonable solution from a virtuous old man. So they selected him as the chief of the villages (黨正). In this way, the positions of county chiefs, provincial chiefs, local lords, and an emperor came to exist. In this original administrative system, according to Chǒng, due to the bottom-up selection system, laws were initiated from chiefs at the village level and reached up to the level of emperor. So, in the original form, governors served the interests of the people. But the old system collapsed and was replaced by the current top-down system, as a strong man took the emperorship by force and appointed local governors at each level at his will. As a consequence, laws were formed from above for the benefit of the ruler and descended to the lower administrative levels. The contemporary governing system in which the common people seemed to exist for the sake of governors arose from this context. Chǒng's intention was, of course, to criticise that system and to demonstrate that that governing system was a degenerate form of the original one. He was able to have this novel vision of governance, since he investigated classical texts that furnished him with ancient political practices in pre-Chin China. Finding historical traces through the classical texts, he

realised that the dynastic kingship of his time was simply a regime formed in a certain historical context. Since he comprehended the existence of a different model of governance, he was able to relativise the existing idea of governance.³²⁰

2. The Reformists' Re-conceptualisation of Government

In his study, Kyung Moon Hwang argued that the concept of the state in Chosŏn, which was mainly understood as the dynastic government or at times as the monarchy itself, shifted in the late nineteenth century by the enlightenment reformists. The reformists reformulated the state as a collective entity including not only the monarch and government but also the people and land. He noted that the liberal, collectivist view of the state was seen in the newspapers of the late 1890s, but full-blown ideas of that view of the state were exhibited in the publications after 1905.³²¹ Hwang's interest lies in the concept of the state, but if we turn our sight to government (*chŏngbu*), then we can see that, already from the 1880s, the reformist intellectuals avidly re-conceptualised it in a liberal and democratic fashion, which corresponds to the liberal, people-centred, collectivist view of the state that Hwang referred to. Among the reformists' works published in the 1880s and '90s, those of Pak Yŏnghyo and

³²⁰ In his book *Mingyi daifanglu* (明夷待訪錄, 1663), Huang Zongxi (1610–1695), the Chinese scholar who lived in late Ming and early Qing, addressed the original prince (原君) as the first subject, in which he highlighted the customs and institutions of governance in ancient China and contrasted them with degenerate forms afterwards. Considering that Huang's ideas and style are quite similar to Chŏng Yakhyŏng's in *T'anŭngnon* and *Wŏnmok*, it is reasonable to surmise that Chŏng read Huang's book and received insights from it. Yet, in comparison with Huang's essay, Chŏng's exposition is more concrete and rich. See Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince* (Huang Tsung-hsi's *Ming-i-tai-fang-lu*) (Columbia University Press, 1993).

³²¹ Kyung Moon Hwang, "Country or State? Reconceptualizing *Kukka* in the Korean Enlightenment Period," 4–5.

Yu Kilchun, and *Tongnip sinmun*, register the redefinition of the concept of government. Let us first examine the case of Pak Yŏnghyo.

Pak's 1888 memorial to King Kojong aimed to convey the idea that Chosŏn was in a state of national crisis so that it was necessary to carry out urgent and comprehensive reforms. For this purpose, he divided the problems of the state into eight categories and analysed them, suggesting concrete reform measures to be carried out in each category. Importantly, in his memorial he posed a question regarding the *raison d'être* of a government three times. His question was raised in relation to the need to awaken the king to the urgency of national reforms. In this process, he needed to redefine the proper roles of a government. He asked: "what is the end of a government?" With regard to this question, his replies were slightly different according to contexts. At first, he answered that a government exists "to protect the people and preserve the state (保民護國)."³²² In order to vindicate the significance of protecting people's lives, he enumerated famous passages in classical texts including *Shujing* and *Mencius*, and historical anecdotes. Secondly, he asserted that the original intention (本志) that the people paid taxes and followed the authorities (出稅奉公) was because they wanted to "protect their bodies' and families' happiness and well-being (保身家之幸安)."³²³ Finally, he argued that the original intention for which humans (人間) established a government was for the corroboration of their rights (通義), not for the sake of a king. Here, the rights of humans referred to the protection of their life, the seeking of liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Moreover, echoing Mencius, Pak adamantly stated that, if a government dislikes what people like and likes what people dislike, then the people (民) will overturn the

³²² Pak Yŏnghyo, "Pak Yŏnghyo ūi kŏnbaeksŏ," 250.

³²³ Pak Yŏnghyo, "Pak Yŏnghyo ūi kŏnbaeksŏ," 264.

government and establish a new one.³²⁴ Common to all the answers was that Pak found the *raison d'être* of government in the common people's interests. Since he upheld this view of government, it was not strange that he cited the Mencian dictum that 'a despotic ruler can be expelled from his throne.' With this idea of Pak, we can reasonably argue that Pak inherited the *necessity-based understanding of politics* within Confucianism as suggested in this thesis, specifically its *minbon* ideas. As Pak himself cited in his memorial, the famous passage in *Shujing*, "common people are the foundation of the state so that when the foundation is firm, the state can become stable," was a core reference point in reconstructing government. On the other hand, he did not mention the other side of Confucian ideas of governance – that is, rule as a way of maintaining the hierarchical social order; nor did he accept the king's predominant rights to state affairs and the different distribution of rights to people.

An important point to ponder is that Pak's understanding of government is not simply a reiteration of the Confucian *minbon* idea. As noted above, Pak cited the Mencian idea of the legitimate expulsion of a despotic ruler, but this idea had scarcely been quoted by Chosŏn Confucians because of its radicalness. His citation is thus extraordinary, and we can suppose that his adamant reference is based on a different notion of government. In this regard, we should heed his re-definition of government in the third reply, where he mentioned that "humans established a government" to substantiate their own rights. According to him, when a government trespasses against the people's rights, the people can overthrow and re-establish the government to protect their rights. This view of government is rather close to the government in the liberal and democratic political system, where the common people are the ultimate source of the legitimacy of governance and they themselves as political subjects can

³²⁴ Pak Yŏnghyo, "Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ," 288.

change the government. Thus, in Pak's redefinition of government, both the Confucian and the liberal/democratic view of government are intertwined without tension. The idea of *minbon* functioned as a medium of the adoption of the liberal and democratic view of government.

How, then, can this resemblance be explained? Roughly speaking, the liberal/democratic view of government represents the disintegration of the *ancien régimes* in modern Europe. In opposition to the values and practices of the *ancien régimes*, the enlightenment thinkers and the liberal thinkers of the nineteenth century reinvented humanistic values as universal ones. They relativised the traditional social and cultural presuppositions and re-conceptualised the notion of the state. Upon this basis, they envisaged a society in which all people would have universal rights. In this course, democracy, which had been one of the ancient Greek political systems, was re-invoked.³²⁵ This reconstructive idea of the state based on the universal rights of equal humanity led to the liberal and democratic view of government placing the legitimacy of governance on the common people's will, which is similar in terms of the source of legitimacy to the *minbon* idea. Owing to this resemblance, Pak did not have any trouble in adopting the liberal/democratic view of government.

The moderate reformist Yu Kilchun's case is slightly different from Pak's understanding of government. As far as his main work *Sōyu kyōnmun* is concerned, he maintained the two aspects of governance of Confucianism. After the initial introduction of the origins of government by means of anthropological explanations in Chapter Five, he

³²⁵ See John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), ch.2.

stated the purpose of government in a quite deontological manner. According to him, whether a government is an inherited kingship or an elected presidential system, “the important task and grave role of a government is to encourage and preserve the bases of the common people’s (人民) peaceful life and well-being.”³²⁶ A similar view is expressed in the same section of the chapter in a more manifest way: “The fundamental intention of establishing a government in a country is on behalf of the common people and the great aim that a king commands his government is also for the benefit of the people.”³²⁷ Insofar as Yu Kilchun puts the main goal of government in the preservation of the interests of the common people, he apparently inherited the Confucian *minbon* idea as Pak Yŏnghyo did. However, as a moderate, Yu did not go so far as the liberal/democratic view of government. In contrast to Pak, he maintained the predominance of king over government in managing the state. In the last part of the section, he expressed his frank opinion that, in order to prevent the crisis of collapse, state institutions should be reformed appropriately except for the king’s supreme position and primal responsibility. He listed the core elements to be preserved: 1) a king should stand above the common people and have the rights to organise his government; 2) a king should have the sovereignty to maintain the state peacefully; 3) the common people should be loyal to the king and follow the government’s commands.³²⁸ He stated these points in an abstract and general manner, yet it is not difficult to grasp that he expressed his own political opinion, keeping the circumstances in Chosŏn in mind, especially the conditions after the 1884 *Kapsin coup d’état*.

³²⁶ Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, 160.

³²⁷ Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, 161.

³²⁸ Ibid.

Yu's moderateness is more clearly displayed in his view of the common people in governance. Contrary to Pak, who provided the common people with the right to form a new government, Yu saw the common people in the traditional way: as the subjects of the king. According to him, the people revere and submit to a government because they want to receive graces and benefits from the government equally.³²⁹ In Yu's ideas, therefore, the common people are still passive and do not hold autonomous political initiatives. What will happen, then, if the government betrays its original intention by veering from the right way? He replies that in that case the government would become a "harmful and useless entity."³³⁰ Repeatedly, he argues that a government must keep in mind its original intention, while never mentioning the people's legitimate rights to create a new government. Given Yu's Confucian background, we can say that he maintained the two aspects of Confucian ideas of governance and, as a consequence, could not fully adopt a liberal and democratic view of government.³³¹ He thought that a government exists 'for the sake of the people,' but his upholding of the ethical ideal of Confucianism prevented him from having the idea of 'governing by the people.'

Pak Yŏnghyo's and Yu Kilchun's ideas of government were based on the temporal circumstances of the 1880s. After the state was opened up, these intellectuals visited Japan

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ “有害無益한 長物.” Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, 161. This expression was originally used by Fukuzawa in his book *Seiyō jijō*, 130.

³³¹ Another source of Yu's moderateness was Fukuzawa Yukichi's view in *Seiyō jijō*. Fukuzawa pointed out the possible problems that a country could have when it pursued a radical regime change. His view of regime change in *Seiyō jijō* was largely moderate and gradualist. Given that Yu himself adopted many ideas and pieces of information from Fukuzawa's books, and was taught by Fukuzawa when in his mid-20s (1881–1882), it seems reasonable to argue that Yu Kilchun was influenced by Fukuzawa's moderateness to a considerable extent. For Fukuzawa's moderate ideas on regime change, see *Seiyō jijō*, 134–39.

and the U.S. and witnessed a significant gap in material civilisation between Chosŏn and the outside world. And they came to see their Confucian civilisation and governing system from a relativist perspective. The decline of the Confucian tradition and the discrediting of the monarchic rule were accelerated in the wake of a series of political events in the mid-1890s, including the *Tonghak* peasants' uprising (1894), the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), the Japanese-inspired *Kabo* reforms (1894–95), and King Kojong's escape to the Russian legation (1896). The sense of national crisis, that Chosŏn might lose its national sovereignty, swept across the minds of the reformist intellectuals. The only way to survive the country's imperialist neighbours was to initiate major national reforms, refurbishing state institutions and building new public culture and values.³³² It was in this temporal context that the civic enlightenment and political association, The Independence Club, set about its movement in 1896. Its enlightenment newspaper, *Tongnip sinmun*, was anti-traditional in character and its political ideas entailed a number of novel and radical elements.

Tongnip sinmun put forth plenty of reform ideas concerning a variety of areas of Korean people's lives, including the area of government. Overall, the conception of government suggested in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* was not much different from the ideas of Pak and Yu. As Pak and Yu's re-definition of government was grounded in an aspect of Confucian political ideas putting emphasis on the common people as the foundation of the state, this aspect of Confucian governance was echoed in the idea of government in *Tongnip sinmun*. For example, in the editorial of the 6 May 1899 issue, the editor stated that "after the common people existed, the state emerged, and after the state existed, a government was

³³² Not only Japan but also Qing China took imperialist policies toward Chosŏn from the early 1880s. This view is illustrated in Kirk W. Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).

established.” Here, it is meaningful that the common people were seen as the most important source comprising the state, and the weight of government came last. In the ensuing passage, echoing Chŏng Yakyong, the editor argued that government officialdom was originally arranged, because people needed a process to resolve disputes among themselves. Since the officials had to devote all their time to public service, the people supported them by paying taxes. The editor concluded: “the common people are the foundation of the state” (백성들은 나라의 근본). This explanation is not much different from the traditional Confucian *minbon* ideas putting the essential legitimacy of governance upon the benefits of the common people. The same view was exhibited in the editorial in the 20 May 1897 issue, in which the editor enumerated the roles of a government, such as stabilising the politics of the state, enforcing laws equally, maintaining trustful relations with foreign countries, building public hygiene and educational systems, and encouraging people to have occupations for subsistence. Then, the editor ascribed all these roles of government to the benefits of the common people.³³³ This Confucian view of governance was still widely shared among Chosŏn’s political elites in the late 1890s, so even King Kojong echoed the famous dictum in *Shujing* in his decree announced in the midst of the People’s Mass Meeting in 1898, stating: “without the people, who could the king rely on?”³³⁴

A critical difference between *Tongnip sinmun* and the reformists in the 1880s is that the editors of *Tongnip sinmun* highlighted the common people as principal political actors in

³³³ This re-conceptualisation of government in the newspaper was also related to the national circumstances in the late 1890s. After undergoing a series of turbulent political incidents, *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club located the essential problems of Chosŏn in the king and his conservative retainers. They chastised the current government for the desperate situation of the state and asserted that the state is the people’s state.

³³⁴ TS 28 November 1898.

the state. As discussed, Pak Yŏnghyo asserted that the common people as the foundation of the state can overthrow a government when it runs counter to the people's general interests. Yet this view was rather stated as a deontological *principle* based on the idea in *Mencius*.³³⁵ This contention, therefore, did not directly mean that the common people should oppose the government's actions and voice their opinions on national issues. On the contrary, the idea of the people in *Tongnip sinmun* was essentially *practical* and presented for concrete issues of the state of Chosŏn in the late 1890s. So the statement in the paper, that "people are the foundation of the state," in fact meant that the people have the right to participate in the real political process. In this regard, when the editors referred to the common people as political subjects, what they commonly attributed to the people was "*kwŏlli* (rights)" and "*chikmu* / *chikbun* (duties)." For instance, in the editorial in the 15 December 1898 issue, the editor deplored the fact that, for the last three thousand years, the government had claimed its own rights to national affairs so that *paeksŏng* (commoners) did not know about their own rights. He added that a way for contemporary Chosŏn, or Taehan (大韓, Great Korea),³³⁶ to prosper forever would be to divide half the rights into the rights of the government and half those of the people. In a different editorial, the editor went further and sternly averred that, if a person, who is the foundation of the state, loses his rights and is oppressed by government officials but does not make any protest, then he will be "a weak and foolish man and be better to die as

³³⁵ For the Mencian idea of the legitimate expulsion of a despotic ruler, see *Mencius*, Book 1B8.

³³⁶ The official name of Chosŏn changed to 'Taehan' and the appellation of King Kojong was heightened to that of 'emperor' on 12 October 1897. Earlier in November 1895, the reformist Cabinet created the reign name, *kŏnyang* (建陽), which was revised to *kwangmu* (光武) in August 1897. These measures were an extension of the *Kabo* reformists' efforts to level up Chosŏn's international status as an independent state. In December 1894, they had already renamed Kojong's official title from *chusang chŏnha* (主上殿下) to *taekunju p'yeha* (大君主陛下), elevating it with a more respectful expression. On 10 May 1895, they held a ceremony to commemorate the day as the founding day of the state of Chosŏn. In certain contexts, I will use the term 'Taehan' instead of 'Chosŏn', but in order to prevent any confusion, I will continue to use the name 'King Kojong'.

early as possible.”³³⁷ In the ensuing passage, he located the reason why Korean people are persecuted by the officials in their lack of education and, as a result, their ignorance of their own rights.

Together with *kwŏlli*, the editors emphasised the people’s *chikmu* or *chikbun*. This is clearly illustrated in the editorial in the 11 January 1898 issue, where the editor claimed that “a country’s prosperity or collapse depends on whether the people of the country practice their duty (*chikbun*) or not.” According to the editor, the duty of the people did not merely indicate that they should observe the commands of the government, but in the case that the government did not work for the sake of the people, making it work for the people was also the duty of the people. He then listed three duties of the people (or citizens): firstly, to stop the government when it harms the state; secondly, to obey the laws made by the government when they are beneficial for the state and people; finally, to act as a good citizen and to encourage all Koreans to become upright citizens. Such duties are the ‘political’ (or public) duties typically expected of the citizens in liberal and democratic societies. So, given the roles provided to the common people as a core element of the state, the notion of government in *Tongnip sinmun* no longer remained Confucian-based. The active political role that *Tongnip sinmun* demanded of every common citizen was closer to that in a liberal/democratic state. This difference of *Tongnip sinmun* from the reformists of the 1880s reflected the different temporal context of the late 1890s, when Chosŏn had experienced the grand *Kabo* reforms through which many of the traditional socio-cultural bases of the society were destroyed. Moreover, the two editors of the paper, Sŏ Chaep’il and Yun Ch’iho, who stayed in the U.S. for around ten years and absorbed modern Western political values at university,

³³⁷ TS 6 May 1899.

spread the new idea of government. The liberally and democratically tilted view of government in *Tongnip sinmun* stemmed from this context.

Taken together, Confucian monarchy in Chosŏn had encountered an inner challenge already in the late eighteenth century, as the Neo-Confucian ethical ideal began to be destabilised from their earlier orthodox position, as seen in Chŏng Yakyong's case. The serious weakening of Chosŏn kings' authority and the appropriation of power by a couple of ruling *noron* families in the early and mid-nineteenth century were related with this critical intellectual transformation that had been taking place since the eighteenth century. It is meaningful to understand that the political idea that undermined the monarchic system was an aspect of Confucian political teaching. As the Neo-Confucian ethical dogmatism was eroded, the ideas based on political necessity re-emerged as the core of Confucian political ideas, together with Confucians' political imagination. In this context, the dictum in *Shujing*, that "the people are the foundation of the state," naturally became the motto of the understanding of government. This Confucian idea of *minbon* was readily grafted onto the liberal/democratic view of government as the late nineteenth-century reformists adopted that idea from the 1880s, thereby eventually paving the way for a constitutional and republican era in Korea.³³⁸

3. The Reformists' Understanding of Desirable Governmental Systems: Two Core Components

³³⁸ Chŏng Yonghwa has remarked that the Confucian idea of *minbon* is different from *minchuchui* (民主主義) or democratic ideas, but he does not elaborate on it. From my own vantage point, the two are compatible in that both put common people at the centre of legitimate governance. Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ŭi chŏngch'i sasang*, 265.

The reformists' reconstruction of the notion of government was in line with their questioning of the existing ruling system and their conceiving of better governmental systems. Overall, in East Asia, dynastic rule had been the dominant ruling system for a long time. The dynastic system included considerable variations, such as the feudal system in pre-Chin China and the *bakufu* system in Japan, and the extent of a king or an emperor's power was different in relation to other ruling elites, subject to each country's historical context. Yet the dynastic model itself was never questioned. The monarchic tradition in East Asia faced a serious challenge in the wake of the Western impact and subsequent domestic socio-political transformations. In the case of Korea, the Confucian monarchy was challenged from the 1880s, as the reformist intellectuals recognised foreign countries' different ruling systems and began to categorise and compare various governing systems. Therefore, in this section we will review the governmental systems preferred by the reformists and analyse why they championed those systems. Specifically, we will focus on two core components of the desirable systems: constitutionalism and parliamentarianism. Ahead of these discussions, let us first survey briefly how the knowledge of different governmental systems came to be introduced into Korea.

As Kwŏn O'yŏng and An Oesun have shown, Western countries' governing systems were first considered by Ch'oe Han'gi in his book *Chigu chŏnyo* (地球典要, Summary of the works on the Earth, 1857).³³⁹ This book, as the title indicates, was intended to introduce the

³³⁹ Ch'oe Han'gi, *Chigu chŏnyo*, vol. 1–6. (I have referred to a digitalised version of the source through the website of the Seoul National University library.) In his study on Ch'oe's comprehension of Western institutions, Kwŏn O'yŏng has focused on epitomising Ch'oe's understanding of Western governmental systems without evaluation. On the other hand, An Oesun saw that Ch'oe's interest in the Western governmental systems, especially democracy, meant his reception of democracy as a

Earth as a planet and its countries in summary, by referring mainly to Wei Yuan's *Haiguo tuzhi* and Xu Jiyu's *Yinghuan zhilüe*, and other sources transmitted earlier. The book first explained the Earth as a planet and gave some scientific knowledge on the Earth. Then, from the second chapter (卷), it epitomised each region's and country's geography, human species, culture and customs, economy and industries, ruling system, law, and even language. Following Wei Yuan's example, Ch'oe also began with the countries on the eastern and southern sides of China, and then moved to India, the Middle Eastern countries, and European and American countries. Overall, his interest lay with Western countries rather than those of any other region, given that he devoted six and a half chapters (out of a total of nine chapters) to the countries on the European and American continents. He briefly introduced the ruling system of each country that he discussed. A case in point is his discussion of the parliamentary system of England (英吉利), with a particular focus on the interaction between the monarch and the two houses of parliament in the management of state affairs. In the case of the United States of America (米利堅), he highlighted the presidential system rather than its national congress; in particular, the way the president (總領) is elected and governance is concretely made. He specifically noted that under the American system governmental affairs were uncomplicated, the political process was swift, commands were well enforced, and laws were well observed.³⁴⁰ Thus, for the first time among Chosŏn Confucians, Ch'oe showed a great deal of interest in the different governmental systems of foreign countries. However, his

valid form of government. See Kwŏn O'yŏng, "Ch'oe Han'gi ūi sŏgu chedo e taehan insik" [Ch'oe Han'gi's understanding of Western Institutions], *Han'guk hakbo* 62 (1991), pp. 119–50; An Oesun, "Chosŏn esŏui minjujuŭi suyongnon ūi ch'u'i: Ch'oe Han'gi esŏ tongnip hyŏphoe kkaji" [The Trends of the Acceptance of Democracy in Chosŏn: From Ch'oe Han'gi to the Independence Club], *Sahoe kwahak yŏn'gu* 9 (2000), pp. 38–65.

³⁴⁰ Ch'oe Han'gi, *Chigu chŏn'yo*, ch.10.

primary concern was on introducing individual countries' ruling systems, rather than on making a classification of governmental systems and evaluations on that basis. He stopped at recognising the dissimilar ruling systems of Western countries.

It was from the 1880s that Korean intellectuals began to appreciate the categorised governmental systems and commenced comparing and evaluating them. We can find the first instance of categorised governmental systems in the reports by government officials, who were secretly dispatched to Japan in 1881 (朝士視察團) to investigate Japan's governmental, military, educational, and various industrial reforms since the Meiji Restoration. According to Hō Tonghyōn's comprehensive study, in their reports presented to King Kojong, the high officials Pak Chōngyang and Min Chongmuk introduced current discussions in Japan over the issue of the shift in the governmental system, especially the main alternative 'constitutional monarchy'.³⁴¹ In particular, Min in his report introduced various governmental systems of foreign countries, categorising them into four types: the system in which a king and people rule together (君民共治, constitutional monarchy); absolute monarchy (專制政治); aristocratic rule; and republican government. He also noted that Japan was modelling itself on the English system by opting for a combination of a parliament with monarchic rule.

The government officials also discussed for the first time the principle of the 'division of power'. They described Japan's re-arranged governing system and bureaucracy through the lens of the division of power.³⁴² From the early 1880s, therefore, Chosŏn intellectuals began to comprehend foreign countries' different governing systems, classifying them into

³⁴¹ Hō Tonghyōn, *Kūndae hanil kwankyesa yōn'gu*, ch. 4.

³⁴² Hō Tonghyōn, *Kūndae hanil kwankyesa yōn'gu*, 100–8.

categories. In this context, in 1883, when King Kojong had a dialogue with the government official Hong Yöngsik, who had just returned from his mission to the U.S., he already knew that in the U.S. the president was elected by the people and that its ruling system was democratic (民主制), and he showed great interest in concrete ways of managing the state at a democratic polity.³⁴³

After these initial introductions, more clear and concrete analyses of diverse governmental systems were made in *Hansöng sunbo* (Oct. 1883–Oct. 1884), in which a number of articles examined foreign countries' central and local government systems. Besides brief descriptions of each country's governmental system within general introductions to individual countries, several articles directly focused on Western countries' ruling systems. For example, in an article entitled "the constitutional system in Europe and America" in the 30 January 1884 issue, the editor classified the governing systems of the countries in both continents into two: the system in which both monarch and the people rule together (君民同治) and the republican system (合衆共和); he highlighted that both were constitutional systems (立憲政體).³⁴⁴ The article elaborated that the constitutional system stipulates a division of power into legislative, administrative, and judicial power. Next, it spelled out how each branch works and how each is part of a mutual system of checks and balances. At first glance, the editor rarely expressed his own evaluation of the governmental systems and simply depicted their institutional features in a descriptive manner. However, considering carefully the editor's attitude towards the governing systems, a clear preference

³⁴³ Kim Wönmö (trans.), "Kyönmö sajöl Hong Yöngsik pokmyöng mundapgi," 214–30.

³⁴⁴ This article was written by an editor of the paper, not copied from a foreign paper. *Hansöng sunbo*, "歐美立憲政體," 30 January 1884.

is detected in both the *constitutional* and the *parliamentarian* system. These two points were in fact the core ingredients of Western countries' governmental systems and the elements that the Korean reformists in the 1880s and '90s endeavoured to achieve through governmental reforms.³⁴⁵

In several articles, the editors showed their preference for constitutionalism; that is, the principle of the division of power and the management of state affairs governed by a constitution.³⁴⁶ Their explanation of constitutionalism was aimed at the enlightenment of Korean readers at the time. As a result, the ideas are too basic and plain to elaborate on more. A more salient element that they preferred was parliamentarianism. An important point to consider regarding parliamentarianism is that they ascribed a country's "wealth and power" (富强) and "lenient governance" (寬政) to the existence of a parliament in a country. A case in point is the article "the European continent" (歐羅巴洲) in the 10 November 1883 issue, where the editor first divided governmental systems in European countries into three: the republican system as adopted by Switzerland and France; absolute monarchy as existed in Russia and Turkey; and constitutional monarchy (君民共治) as followed by the other countries. He then introduced the way in which people elected their representatives to parliament and the roles that parliament assumed, highlighting its positive effects. According

³⁴⁵ In the rare study that paid attention to desirable governmental systems in *Hansŏng sunbo*, Chŏng Yonghwa saw that the paper's preferred system was "constitutional democratic polity" (입헌민주정치). However, he did not look into the core elements of this constitutional democratic polity and overlooked the fact that both constitutionalism and parliamentarianism penetrated almost all the reformists' ideas of desirable governmental models in the 1880s and '90s. Chŏng Yonghwa, "Chosŏn esŏui ip'hŏn minjujuŭi kwan'nyŏm ūi suyong," 110.

³⁴⁶ For example, see *Hansŏng sunbo*, "歐羅巴洲" in 10 November 1883; "歐美立憲政體" in 30 January 1884; "譯民主與各國章程及公議堂解" in 7 February 1884; "條約諸國政體記略"(日本) in 19 September 1884; "條約諸國政體記略續稿"(彌利堅) in 29 September 1884; "條約諸國政體記略續稿"(英吉利) in 9 October 1884.

to the editor, a king or government cannot manage state affairs arbitrarily, because they are checked by parliament. Concretely speaking, tax collection and government expenditure were approved by parliament in the yearly budget. This prevented government officials from extorting illegal taxes and allowed the people not to worry about the government's activities. In this regard, the editor conclusively stated that: "it is not groundless to argue that the wealth and power of Western countries stem from parliament."³⁴⁷ This view was reiterated in another article in a different issue, in which the editor located the origin of the wealth and power of Western countries in that government affairs were discussed in parliament so that all government activities aligned with public purposes and consequently the government and the common people were in harmony.³⁴⁸

On the other hand, an article addressing the democratic polity, its constitution, and parliament asserted that "countries that administer lenient rule" (寬政之國) in Western countries are those where parliament has great power and all kinds of people have the right to vote.³⁴⁹ Before the article remarked on the lenient rule, it discussed the division of power and the role of parliament with the cases of Britain and the U.S., and mentioned that, in general, lenient rule was common in democracies. Specifically, it illuminated the features of the Western countries that administered lenient rule with three points: 1) both public and private schools enlighten the people; 2) newspapers report both the good and the bad of the government's rule so that the people's political consciousness is high; 3) the church and the state are divided and the former cannot intervene in national affairs. The article clarified that

³⁴⁷ "此推之則泰西之富强出於民會云者不爲無據也". *Hansǒng sunbo*, 10 November 1883.

³⁴⁸ *Hansǒng sunbo*, "在上不可不達民情論," 30 January 1884.

³⁴⁹ *Hansǒng sunbo*, "譯民主與各國章程及公議堂解," 7 February 1884.

the content was sourced from a Western newspaper and that the editors simply translated it with the sole intention of delivering the information on democracy. However, the article was not merely a translation, in that all the Western countries mentioned in the article were treated as third parties and there was a narrator who led the meanings in a quite objective manner. This means that the editors had their own view that democracy is a good governmental form that makes a lenient rule, and that they actually conveyed this perspective to Korean readers. In this context, it is not strange that the editor concluded with the following sentences: “For the state not to hold total power is beneficial. To divide and share it with the people is proper.”³⁵⁰

The editors of *Hansŏng sunbo* did not expound very clearly how parliament engenders wealth and power and lenient governance, yet we can comprehend that the parliamentary system guarantees the common people more scope to take part in government. Put differently, it furnishes an opportunity for the ruled to become the ruler through the election of their representatives, and the representatives uphold the interests of the ruled. This would be the way in which the editors thought that Western parliamentarianism actually embodied an institutional mechanism that forced a government to run the state for the interest of the people.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ “且夫利之所在 其權不必全爲國家操之 散入民間與民共之可耳,” Ibid.

³⁵¹ The Chinese reformist Zheng Guanying also located Western wealth and power and Japan’s rise in the world in their shared governmental system, i.e., the constitutional system, while arguing that China should adopt constitutionalism for its own benefit. He saw the existence of a parliament as a pivotal element of constitutional government, arguing that, because of that institution, the government and its people could unite and no despotic rule or rebellion would arise. He suggested this idea in his early book *Yiyan* (易言) and reiterated it in *Shengshi weiyen* (盛世危言). See Zheng Guanying, *Sŏngsewŏn*, 151–53.

The newspaper's focus on constitutionalism and parliamentarianism is related to the editors' factual and empirical observation of Western societies and their governmental systems. Not least, their attention to the division of power into three sectors would reflect the novelty of that system, as well as the editors' judgement that the division of power was a reasonable and efficient institutional format. However, as far as parliamentarianism was concerned, we can find the editor's interest in it with regard to their Confucian pre-understanding. As discussed in the previous section, the well-being of the common people as the *raison d'être* of governance was a time-honoured, central idea of Confucian political teachings. This *minbon* idea, however, did not indicate that the common people, or the ruled, had the right to take part in governance in any way. Nevertheless, from the vantage point of the newspaper editors, we can reasonably argue that the editors saw the Western parliamentary system as an advanced governing system that would realise the Confucian ideal of *minbon*. Indeed, by means of checking a ruler's arbitrary use of power and granting the ruled the right to voice their own opinions on national affairs, Western parliamentarianism aimed to protect the interests of the ruled, which was not that different from the aim of the Confucian *minbon* ideal. A significant difference was that in parliamentarianism the voluntary initiatives of the governed are emphasised, which is contrasted with the rulers' good will and dominant roles to look after their subjects in Confucian *minbon* ideas. The point is that the deep-rooted *minbon* ideas facilitated the reformists to adopt the value of parliament and drove them to institute it in their national reforms. Moderates, such as Yu Kilchun and Yun Ch'ihō, fully appreciated its value, but did not like the idea of establishing it promptly and thus endowing commoners with the right to speak about national affairs. Their cautious and elitist standpoint made them hesitate to call for a rapid transformation of the governmental system into parliamentarianism.

Let us now move to the radical Pak Yŏnghyo's case regarding desirable governmental systems. The idea that a country's prosperity and strength were closely associated with its governmental system is reiterated in Pak. In his memorial to King Kojong, Pak mentioned the issue of governmental regime change twice in relation to the need to provide more liberty to the common people. At first, he asserted that, if a country really wanted to build wealth and power and stand equal to other countries, it should restrict a king's rights and give more liberty to common people and then let the people have duties to their country.³⁵² Here, to restrict a king's rights and furnish more rights to the people meant a regime change, and, in context, what Pak aimed for was a constitutional monarchy. Using generic terms, however, he did not explicitly indicate the case of Chosŏn. Moreover, Pak did not concretely explain how more rights being granted to the people could lead to national wealth and power.

Further down the memorial, Pak expressed his intention with somewhat more explanation. He stated there the same message that, if common people have the right to liberty and a king's power is limited, then the people and the state will be peaceful forever; on the contrary, if the people do not have liberty and a king's power is unlimited, then the state will decline. Here, he added a sentence explaining the reason: because "the governance of the state is not done in a systematised form (or fixed frame) and the ruler decides state affairs arbitrarily."³⁵³ Pak's idea of the reason is still insufficient, but it tells us that when a

³⁵² Pak Yŏnghyo, "Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ," 279–80. This idea was first put forward by Fukuzawa Yukichi in his book *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*. Exemplifying the case of England, Fukuzawa argued that, by limiting the king's power and enhancing the people's rights, England could increase its national power and establish the kingship on a firm base. Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*, 53.

³⁵³ “凡民有自由之權 而君權有定 則民國永安 然民無自由之權 而君權無限 則雖有暫時強盛之日 然不久而衰亡 此政治無定 而任意擅斷故也。” Pak Yŏnghyo, "Pak Yŏnghyo ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ," 287.

country's governance is practised outside of a reasonable and systematised form and state affairs are handled arbitrarily, then the state becomes disorderly and in the end debilitated. This sentence is interpreted as Pak's view on his desirable governmental system. That is to say, what he argues is that, for the state to become wealthy and powerful, it is necessary to take the constitutional/parliamentarian system. In his memorial, Pak did not mention the need to create a constitution or a parliament promptly in order to build a constitutional system, but in the *Kabo* reforms (1894–1895) he was the very person who propelled the shift in regime change toward constitutional monarchy, by establishing independent legal courts and an embryonic parliament (*Chungch'uwŏn*, 中樞院, the privy council) for the first time in Korean history. While in his memorial Pak did not directly assert that a nationwide parliament (or national assembly) should be established in contemporary Chosŏn, he clarified his preference for parliamentarianism, especially in the local dimension. He argued that even in Chosŏn the tradition of deliberating on national issues together between the ruling and the ruled existed, and exemplified the real practice in local governments where magistrates consulted upright Confucian scholars in the regions (so-called *sallim* (山林) scholars) concerning public affairs. Then, reminding the king of *sallim* scholars' authority and their weight in deliberating national affairs in the past, he advised the king to develop this tradition further by improving it and thus making it function as a local congress (縣會).³⁵⁴ This instance provides an example that Confucian political practices in Chosŏn, as well as Confucian political ideas, offer elements that could be developed into the parliamentarian system.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

A similar way of thinking is found in Yu Kilchun in a more concrete manner. In the section entitled “forms of government” in the fifth chapter of *Sōyu kyōnmun*, Yu first categorised governmental systems into five types: a system in which a king arbitrarily runs the state on the basis of his absolute power (君主의 擅斷하는 政體); a system in which a king commands (or 壓制政體 (an oppressive system)); an aristocracy; a system in which a king and people rule together (君民의 共治하는 政體); and a system in which people rule together (國人の 共和하는 政體).³⁵⁵ He then classified countries in the world according to these categories, noting his observation that Asian countries mostly had the oppressive system, whereas European and American countries mainly belonged to the constitutional and the republican system respectively. He added his view that several countries on the European and American continents were one hundred times as wealthy and powerful as Asian countries, and found the reason for this in the “difference in governmental institutions and norms.”³⁵⁶ He thus inherited Korean reformists’ vantage point since *Hansōng sunbo* that a country’s wealth and power are closely linked with the country’s governmental system, and that good and bad governmental systems exist. In other words, in their value judgement of governmental systems, their factual, empirical, and utilitarian perspective of the world was functioning significantly.

Yu Kilchun then shifted his focus to the disparity between the system in which a king and the people rule together (constitutional monarchy) and the system in which a king commands (an oppressive system). He did not discuss the republican system independently,

³⁵⁵ Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, 163–65.

³⁵⁶ Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, 168.

since he thought that this system was not much different from constitutional monarchy except that it did not have a king. According to Yu, the system in which a king and the people rule together is characterised by the people's participation in politics through the election of their representatives to parliament and the representatives' checks on government. The representatives are supposed to assist a king's governance and preserve the common people's rights by superintending government ministers' activities and by discussing and deciding government laws and commands. Yu continued to argue that under this system the government likes to do what people like and hates to do what people hate, expressing his view through the famous passage in *Mencius*. Moreover, under this government, laws and commands are enforced in accordance with public opinion so that atrocious rules or draconian laws cannot be administered. This governmental system also breeds the people's progressive spirit and independent mind-set to the effect that they not only pursue their own independent life but also their country's independence and prosperity. This is why small countries in Europe, such as Switzerland and Denmark, can enjoy independence and prosperity.³⁵⁷

What is noteworthy is that Yu's perspective is quite similar to that of the advocacy of parliamentarianism in *Hansŏng sunbo*, which ascribed a *lenient rule* to the effects of parliament. Thus, we can drive our rational reasoning into the relationship between Yu's

³⁵⁷ Interpreting Yu Kilchun as a Confucian, Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko argued that Yu accepted the Western constitutional system as a mechanism for finding "right virtues" (正徳) – not "practical usefulness" (利用) and "people's welfare" (厚生) – in correspondence with his Confucian mind-set. Yet Yu himself made it clear that the reason why Western countries are a hundred times as wealthy and strong as those in Asia is because of the difference in government institutions and norms. This means that Yu saw the world in a factual, empirical, and utilitarian manner, and upheld the idea that the constitutional system is the best system for national wealth and power. Tsukiashi reads Yu too much on the basis of the Confucian thesis. Tsukiashi Tatsuhiko, "Chōsen kaika shisō no kōzō: Yu Kilchun Sōyu kyōnmun no bunmei ron teki riken kunshu sei ron."

view of parliament and the ideal Confucian governance based on the *minbon* ideas. As seen in Yu's citation of the passage in *Mencius*, his explanation of governance through parliament was not much different from the ideal governance in the Confucian political tradition. This perspective also explains why Korean reformists were not in defiance of the idea of parliamentary rule. For Yu, Western parliamentarianism was an advanced form of the Confucian ideal governance based on *minbon*. We can thus posit a point of view that Yu's preference for parliamentarianism was encouraged by his preconception of the Confucian ideal governance.³⁵⁸

On the other hand, Yu Kilchun clearly expresses his disapproval of the oppressive system in which a king commands. According to him, under this system, government officials, who are mainly selected from an aristocratic class, are not very fair in dealing with state affairs, and common people are not very patriotic either. When a wise king and lenient officials assume government, the people receive benefits from the virtuous rule; yet when a tyrant and cunning men run the government, the people undergo all sorts of harms from their rule. As a consequence, under this system the people are dispirited and regard their own country just as outsiders', and they are deficient in an independent mind-set. So, describing the weaknesses of this governmental system to which Chosŏn belonged, he clearly

³⁵⁸ In her study on the adoption of democratic ideas in Korea, An Oesun has also argued that both Confucianism and democratic ideas were not antagonistic. She claimed this idea by focusing on the reformists' employment of Confucian ideas in their championing of people's rights to political participation and resistance. According to her, the reformists, particularly Pak Yŏnghyo and Yu Kilchun, added "morality" to their understanding of liberty and, likewise, added "rule by virtue" to rule of law. While she has failed to see the difference between the radical Pak and the moderate Yu – which is related to her failure to distinguish the two contrasting aspects within Confucian political ideas – her study braces the continuity thesis between Confucian ideas and democratic ideas. An Oesun, "19 segi mal Chosŏn e itsŏsŏ minjujuŭi suyong ron ŭi chaegŏmt'o: tongsŏ sasang yunghap ŭi kwanjŏm esŏ" [Revisiting the Introduction of Democracy in Late Nineteenth-Century Chosŏn: From the Perspective of the Confluence of both Eastern and Western Thoughts], *Chŏngch'i sasang yŏn'gu* 4 (2001), pp. 27–53.

understood the limits of the oppressive system. Because of this difference between the governmental systems, he argued, big countries in Asia are insulted by small countries in Europe. He thus asked readers: “should we not consider this point seriously?”³⁵⁹

Hence, Yu Kilchun recognised the way in which the Constitutional system operates and understood the benefits of parliament. However, as a moderate, he did not like the idea of instituting a parliament into contemporary Chosŏn promptly. Regarding the reason, he stated that, “in a country where its common people lack in knowledge, providing them with the right to participate in politics must not be permitted.”³⁶⁰ That is to say, he meant that, when the common people were not ready to play a role in government, regime change toward commoners’ taking part in managing the state would end up with national disorder. This constant dilemma within Yu Kilchun is closely linked with his maintenance of the two sides of Confucian political ideas, as well as his prudence in political transformation in contemporary Chosŏn.

If we define the 1880s as the period during which the core ideas of desirable governments were accepted by Korean reformists in a rather theoretical fashion, the next decade was the time when they endeavoured to adopt both constitutionalism and parliamentarianism into government institutions. What drove them toward this phase was a shift in the political environment from the middle of the decade, through which the king’s absolute power and the government’s previous authority declined to a great extent. The creation of the legal court system and the early parliamentary organ, *Chungch’uwŏn*, instituted through the *Kabo* reforms, was the first attempt at regime change toward a

³⁵⁹ Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, 170–71.

³⁶⁰ Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, 172.

constitutional monarchy.³⁶¹ Due to the political turmoil of those years, however, the first attempt to institute parliament was soon frustrated, but the legal courts survived political disturbances and lasted to the next conservative government, although their full, independent operation was not yet achieved.

The second attempt to form a parliament was made by the Independence Club, when it demanded to King Kojong that the government re-organise *Chungch'uwŏn* as a way to redress state problems in the midst of the Club-led street demonstrations in October 1898.³⁶² Under the pressure of the people's power on streets, King Kojong answered positively, and the first parliament in Korean history was launched in that year. What is meaningful is the shared grounds of the needs between the king and the Club to create a parliament as a place to form public opinion (*kongnon*). The king accepted the proposition in late October because he thought that the official opening of that body as a place to discuss national affairs would disband the demonstrations in central Seoul. Yet King Kojong's choice was not solely based on the strategic grounds. As shown in his announcement of the Five-Articles Decree (詔勅五條), he thought that the repeal of the old communication channels (especially, *samsa*) between the king and the subjects had caused the people's street demonstrations to rise up.³⁶³

³⁶¹ During the *Kabo* reforms, the reformists made a series of efforts to shift the existing Confucian monarchy to constitutional monarchy, by introducing both the constitutional (specifically, division of power) and parliamentary elements. For these efforts made in the years between 1894 and '95, see Wang Hyŏnjong, *Han'guk kŭndae kukka ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa kabo kaehyŏk* [Modern State Building in Korea and the *Kabo* Reforms] (Seoul: Yŏksabip'yŏngsa, 2003), ch. 6. The establishment of the first parliamentary organ, *Chungch'uwŏn*, and its development were studied by Yi Pangwŏn. See Yi Pangwŏn, *Hanmal chŏngch'i pyŏndong kwa chungch'uwŏn* [Political Transformation in the Era of Taehan cheguk and *Chungch'uwŏn*] (Seoul: Hye'an, 2007).

³⁶² See Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyenyŏnsa 3* [Last Years of Great Korea], trans. by Kim Uchŏl (Seoul: So'myŏng ch'ulp'an, 2004), pp. 200–6.

³⁶³ TS 1 November 1898. In Chosŏn, there were some channels through which the king received reports about the circumstances of his subjects, including the three government agencies (*samsa* (三司):

That is to say, he perceived *Chungch'uwŏn* with regard to the old institution of communication in Chosŏn politics, which was based on the Confucian tradition of respect for public opinion. His decree, proclaimed on 26 June 1898, that he would follow “*kongnon*” (public opinion) in all his awards and punishments, was the reflection of the old political tradition of Confucian Chosŏn.³⁶⁴

On the part of the Club, the need to found *Chungch'uwŏn* was also linked with the call to form public opinion. As shown in the editorial of the 24 February 1898 issue of *Tongnip sinmun*, the exigency to frustrate the government's submission to a series of Russian demands of concessions at the time drove them to call for a government organ to form public opinion on those issues. They thought that the government's submission to Russian demands was possible, because there was no official body to express public opinion about national issues. With the re-installment of *Chungch'uwŏn*, what they envisaged as a model was a Western parliament, which would make the government work more effectively in the division of labour and function in a more upright manner.³⁶⁵ In calling for the founding of *Chungch'uwŏn*, the Club cited the ancient sage kings Yao and Shun's practices of listening to lower people and the passages in *Mencius* on a king's obligation to follow public opinion.

Sahŏnbu (司憲府), *Saganwŏn* (司諫院), and *Hongmun'gwan* (弘文館)) that assumed the role of giving “right opinions (直言)” to the king, secret inspectors' (*amhaeng'ŏsa* (暗行御史)) reports, and local magistrates' regular reports on the regions. In particular, *samsa* represented the role of informing the real conditions of the people and was thus understood as the core channel for the (indirect) communication between the king and the subjects. For the establishment of the *samsa* institution and its role in the Chosŏn government, see Ch'oe Sŭnggi, *Chosŏn ch'ogi ōngwan ōnron yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Government agencies of Communication and Their Practices in Early Chosŏn] (Seoul: Sŏul taehakgyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1976).

³⁶⁴ Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyenŏnsa* 3, 78–9.

³⁶⁵ For the benefits of establishing a parliament on the part of the Club, see the editorial in *TS* 30 April 1898 issue and *Taehan Kyenŏnsa* 3, 204. The concrete rules of discussion in the *Chungch'uwŏn* modelled itself on those of foreign parliaments.

The Confucian *minbon* ideas, therefore, furnished theoretical resources for Chosŏn's transition to a parliamentary system.³⁶⁶

This chapter has examined the reformist intellectuals' reconstruction of government and the governmental systems that they wanted to put into practice, which were put forth after the decline of the Confucian ethical ideal. Here, I would like to epitomise the relationship between the Confucian *minbon* idea and the liberal/democratic idea of government. In the second section, we have discussed how the concept of government addressed in Pak Yŏnghyo, Yu Kilchun, and *Tongnip sinmun* was predicated on the Confucian idea of *minbon*. They saw that a government exists on behalf of the common people, which is a core idea in classical Confucian texts such as *Shujing* and *Mencius*. As we have seen in Pak Yŏnghyo and especially in *Tongnip sinmun*, this Confucian idea of government and the liberal and democratic view of government were not in discord. The Confucian *minbon* idea finding

³⁶⁶ For the Club's references to classical Confucian texts and ancient anecdotes on the importance of communication, see the Club's memorials presented on 3 and 11 July 1898 in Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyenyŏn* 3, 80–3, 87–90.

Many researchers focused on the constitutional government as an alternative system in the 1880s and '90s and thought that, as the reformists failed to transform the absolute kingship, there was little advancement in regime change. However, this view is to be reconsidered. Albeit not ideally, legal courts began to operate from 1895 and *Chungch'uwŏn* was actually established in late 1898. So, the turn toward the constitutional and parliamentary system was on track in the wake of the mid-1890s, which means that contemporary Korea was already exiting from the traditional absolute monarchy. Moreover, as Shin Yong-ha has argued, a radical group of the Independence Club envisaged the republican system as an alternative. (See Shin Yong-ha, "19segi han'guk ūi kŭndae kukka hyŏngsŏng munje," 53–82 and *Tongnip hyŏphoe yŏn'gu*, 519–20.) This is not a meaningless episode, for this occasion accorded with the liberation of commoners and slaves from the traditional social status system, which was made officially through the *Kabo* reforms. These new *citizens* were instilled with the ideas of equality and popular sovereignty and mobilised by political associations like the Independence Club and the pro-Japanese association the *Ilchinhoe* (一進會) in later years. It is no coincidence that *Sinminhoe*, the reformists' organisation led by An Ch'angho in 1907, proposed a republican system, which was inherited more explicitly by the Pronouncement for Great Unity in 1917 and finally officialised on the constitution of the Provisional Korean Government in 1919.

ultimate political legitimacy in the benefits of the common people were consonant with the liberal and democratic idea of government based on the ideal of the people's government.

In the third section, we have examined how both constitutionalism and parliamentarianism were the core of the reformists' ideas of desirable governmental systems. Previous studies highlighted constitutional monarchy as a main alternative, with the manifestation of the historical context in which the reformists argued for it. However, it is the two core elements that we need to pay attention to, because these elements clearly present the reformists' political inclinations and intellectual connectivity. What we have found is, firstly, that the reformists came to heed both constitutionalism and parliamentarianism, because the countries that adopted these elements were more wealthy and powerful. By seeing the world more factually and empirically, they could come to have a new vision of politics. Secondly, we have seen that Western parliamentarianism was adopted on the basis of Confucian political ideas and institutional practices. The reformists regarded parliament as an institutionally developed form of the Confucian *minbon* ideas. Through the institution of parliament, they thought, the Confucian ideal governance could become a reality. 'Lenient rule' was possible in Western democracies, since they had parliament that consisted of lawmakers representing the people. This is the way in which the Korean reformists, as well as the Chinese reformist intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, understood the value of parliament. Due to the Confucian *minbon* idea, the Western notion of parliamentarianism was easily grafted onto Korean political institutions.

This Confucian influence is also shown in the reformists' understanding of political legitimacy. In the next chapter, we will see how they reconstructed new ideas of the legitimacy of rule in the late 1890s.

Chapter Six

The Reconstruction of Political Thinking 2:

New Legitimacy of Rule in the Late 1890s

In the same manner as the previous chapter, in this chapter we will continue to examine the reformists' reconstruction of political thinking, especially with regard to their new ideas of legitimacy of rule. As the Confucian ethical ideal lost its influence and was discredited as the source of legitimacy of the political system, the reformists began to reconstruct new ideas of political legitimacy from the 1880s. The reconstruction of new political legitimacy was in tandem with their re-formation of new public values and new conception of government. Yet in the 1880s, the new ideas of legitimate rule were nascent and too premature to surface as a political issue. It was in the late 1890s that the new ideas of legitimacy were circulating among the reformists and emerged in the form of a political agenda. In this chapter, we will focus on *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club, because the paper's ideas and the Club's political actions (specifically the 1898 mass rallies) represent a novel view of legitimate rule. The ideas of political legitimacy expressed in the paper and by the Club movement are intellectually meaningful, as they represent domestic change, i.e., common people's rise as political citizens and the growing strata of reformists, and their call for rightful governance. Lasting for more than two years, the paper and the Club inculcated new ideas of the legitimacy of rule into Korean people and exerted themselves to realise these

³⁶⁷ A slightly different version of this chapter was published in *History of Political Thought* 38(3) (2017, Fall), pp. 494–522.

ideas.

The ideas expressed in *Tongnip sinmun* and political actions of the Independence Club have received the attention of many researchers, because they have been seen as a distinctive harbinger of post-Confucian political ideas and actions in Korean history. Early studies on *Tongnip sinmun* and the Club have mainly highlighted the Club's political actions in 1898, or the People's Mass Meeting (*manmin kongdonghoe*), and the social and political ideas that led to that political movement, while creating an academic debate over the appropriate path to achieve national independence and modernisation in Korea at the time. In his monograph on *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club, Shin Yong-ha has comprehensively and meticulously examined the Club's ideas and actions, while interpreting the movement positively as a right path for national independence, people's rights, and national reform for a modern state.³⁶⁸ On the other hand, researchers like Ch'oe Töksu, Chu Chin-Oh, and Yi T'aejin have raised a critical view, finding an appropriate path to those tasks in King Kojong's conservative reforms from above.³⁶⁹ Chu Chin-Oh, in particular, has provided new insights on the Club movement by dividing the leadership of the Club into two, the moderate and the radical group. He has also suggested that the ultimate failure of the Club's street demonstrations was caused by the radicals' ambition to take power from the king. Yet Chu's study is based on unequal treatment of contrasting facts on the Club movement. Chu's, as

³⁶⁸ Shin Yong-ha, *Tongnip hyŏphoe yŏn'gu*.

³⁶⁹ Ch'oe Töksu, "Tongnip hyŏp'hoe ūi chŏngch'e ron mit oekyo ron yŏn'gu: Tongnip sinmun ūl chungsim ūro" [The Ideas of the Political System and Diplomacy of the Independence Club], *Minjok munhwa yŏn'gu* 13 (1978), pp. 197–233; Chu Chin-Oh, "19 segi huban kaehwa kaehyŏk ron ūi kujo wa chŏn'gae: Tongnip hyŏphoe rŭl chungsim ūro" [Modern Reformism and Political Activities in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea], PhD dissertation, Yonsei University (1995); Yi T'aejin, "Sŏjang: Kojong sidaesa hŭlŭm ūi chaecho'myŏng: kaehang esŏ kwangmu kaehyŏk kkaji" [Introduction: the History of King Kojong's Reign Revisited: from the Opening Up of the Ports to the *Kwangmu* Reforms] in *Kojong sidae ūi chaechomyŏng* (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 2000), pp. 39–74.

well as Ch'oe's and Yi's studies, lack in the balance between what the Club aimed for and accomplished, and how the radicals misbehaved.

The clarification of the 'political' ideas of the paper and the Club has been made relatively recently. Yi Nami has interpreted *Tongnip sinmun* as the first instance of the introduction of liberalism into Korea, while Choi Hyung-ik has found the origin of the Korean democratic movement in the late 1980s in the People's Mass Meeting in 1898. Lee Dong-soo has seen the Mass Meeting in terms of the creation of a modern public sphere in Korea. On the other hand, Kim Hong-woo saw the entire process of the Mass Meeting after September 1898 as a grand process that formed a social contract between King Kojong and the common people and its final breakdown.³⁷⁰ While interesting in subject and diverse in perspective, these studies have largely failed to situate their ideas within historical context. Keeping the historical context in mind, I focus on their novel ideas of political legitimacy, an aspect that is crucial in understanding their reconstruction of political thinking.

This chapter highlights two themes: a systematic understanding of the new ideas of legitimacy on the one hand, and, on the other, the relationship of the Club's ideas of legitimacy with Confucian political ideas. Regarding the first theme, I conceptualise the new legitimacy as a combination of both *democratic* and *procedural* legitimacy. Previous studies addressing the democratic ideas embedded in *Tongnip sinmun* and the People's Mass Meeting

³⁷⁰ See Yi Nami, "Tongnip sinmun e nat'anan chayujuŭi sasang e kwanhan yŏn'gu" [A Study of Liberal Ideas in *Tongnip sinmun*], PhD Dissertation, Koryŏ University (2000); Choi Hyung-ik (Ch'oe Hyŏng'ik), "Han'guk esŏ kŭndae minjujuŭi ŭi kiwŏn: kuhanmal tongnip sinmun, tongnip hyŏphoe, manmin kongdonghoe hwaldong" [The Origin of Modern Democracy in Korea: The Activities of *Tongnip sinmun*, the Independence Club and the People's Mass Meeting], *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'gu* 27 (3) (2004), pp. 183–209; Lee Dong-soo (Yi Tongsu), "Tongnip sinmun kwa kongnonjang" [*Tongnip sinmun* and Public Sphere], *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'gu* 29 (1) (Spring 2006), pp. 3–28; Kim Hong-woo (Kim Hong'u), "Tongnip sinmun kwa sahoe kyeyak" [*Tongnip sinmun* and Social Contract] in *Han'guk chŏngch'i ŭi hyŏnsanghak chŏk i'hae* (Seoul: Inkan salang, 2007), pp. 713–51.

paid scant attention to the conceptual bases,³⁷¹ and none of the previous studies illuminated procedural legitimacy as a core theme of the Club's political ideas. Concerning the second theme, I argue that the democratic legitimacy of rule upheld by the paper and the Club was closely linked with the necessity-based understanding of politics within Confucian political ideas. Before we discuss these two kinds of legitimacy, let us first see the historical conditions of contemporary Korea with regard to political legitimacy.

1. The Crisis of Legitimacy of the Old Regime

Political legitimacy, which signifies the rightfulness of a power-holder or system of rule, is an important analytical tool in explaining the maintenance and fall of a government. A governmental crisis indicates that the grounds of legitimacy have eroded for some set of reasons. According to David Beetham, a government that wants to obtain political legitimacy must hold "legal validity," in which its power must be acquired and exercised according to established rules. Furthermore, in order to have legitimacy the government must have a "moral justification," which refers to both *a rightful source of political authority* and the *rightful ends or purposes as a government*.³⁷² When we apply these two criteria of moral justification to the government of Chosŏn in the 1890s, we can see that the legitimacy of the Confucian monarchy was critically impaired.

Let us begin with the sources of the legitimate authority of Chosŏn's system of rule.

³⁷¹ Shin Yong-ha simply named several elements of modern "social" ideas in *Tongnip sinmun* democratic ideas without discussing the democratic ideas themselves. Similarly, Choi Hyong-ik interpreted the People's Mass Meeting as a democratic movement without elucidating the conceptual bases of the democratic movement. See Shin Yong-ha, *Tongnip hyŏphoe yŏn'gu*, 612–36; Choi Hyung-ik, "Han'guk esŏ kŭndae minjujuŭi ŭi kiwŏn."

³⁷² David Beetham, *Legitimation of Power* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

The Chosŏn kingdom's rule is aptly termed "traditional domination" in Weber's classification of rule, which is grounded on "an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them."³⁷³ The kingship of Chosŏn supported by *yangban* aristocratic bureaucrats drew its legitimacy basically from the cumulative authority of the tradition of monarchic rule. With the hierarchical social structure comprised of the king, aristocracy, and commoners, which was maintained for about two millennia, the ruling class of Chosŏn held the legitimacy of rule and enjoyed social stability. Another source of legitimacy for Chosŏn's ruling system came from the orthodox state ideology, Confucianism. That the government was successful in building a society organised by Confucian values and institutions from its previous orthodox religion, Buddhism, and that its rule was principally based on Confucian teachings, provided the ruling elites with ideological legitimacy. Moreover, Confucianism established on the basis of monarchic rule and stratified social divisions legitimised the social status system of Chosŏn.

The traditional kingdom also enjoyed stability resulting from a further condition of legitimacy, that is, the rightful purposes or performances of the government. Generally speaking, it is reasonable to argue that the Chosŏn government provided an appropriate level of security and economic sustenance to its people throughout most of its reign. The regional hegemony of Ming and Qing China guaranteed Chosŏn's national security and long peace until the 1860s, in return for regular tributes, except for two invasions by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Japan in 1592–98 and Manchu's Qing in 1627 and 1636. Moreover, Chosŏn's

³⁷³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society 1*, trans. by Ephraim Fischhoff, Hans Gerth, A. M. Henderson et al. (University of California Press, 1978), p. 215. Weber's ideal type of traditional domination, in contrast to charismatic or rational domination, does not wholly fit the Chosŏn government's rule. In Chosŏn the king and *yangban* bureaucrats were, to some extent, in a relationship of checks and balances. The bureaucracy developed a range of rational rules and institutions independently of the king's power, and held a measure of moral authority over the king, checking his arbitrary exercise of power, although the final authority in decision-making still belonged to the king.

agrarian economy was relatively stable and the government could manage the domestic disputes arising from socio-economic problems, such as peasant rebellions that took place from time to time.³⁷⁴ The Confucian teaching of *minbon* (rule for the sake of the common people) and government policies based upon it also helped lessen social conflicts between rulers and the ruled and haves and have-nots. Indeed, the *yangban* bureaucrats' prioritisation of institution-building to the benefit of their own class was often offset by government policies for the commoners, especially when they suffered from natural disasters. In addition, on the level of political process within the government, there were 'checks and balances' between the king and the bureaucracy and these prevented the rise of a despotic ruler throughout its five-hundred-year history.³⁷⁵ Given these facts, it is reasonable to say that the Chosŏn government's purpose or performance within its system achieved legitimacy.

The legitimacy of the government, however, was seriously undermined after the 1860s, when the country was challenged from the outside world and forced to integrate into the nineteenth-century imperialist world order. Above all, as the Chinese regional hegemony

³⁷⁴ The inequality of land ownership between ruling-class landlords and commoner-class peasants remained a key element of Chosŏn's socio-economic structure. Yet, as Kim Yongsŏp has shown, the division between *yangban* landlords and commoner-class peasants was being eroded in the wake of social changes in late Chosŏn. Peasant rebellions were mainly caused by the inflexible tax system set by the central government and local officials' institutionalised corruption, as in the case of Chinju in Kyŏngsang province in 1862. For the socio-economic changes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chosŏn, see Kim Yongsŏp, *Chosŏn huki nong'ŏpsa yŏn'gu* [Studies of the History of Agriculture in Late Chosŏn] 1, 2 (Seoul: Iljogak, 1992, 1990). For the peasant rebellion in Chinju in 1862, see Kim Yongsŏp, "Chŏljongjo millan palsaeng kwa kŭ chi'hyang: Chinju millan anhaek munkŏn ūi punsŏk" [The Rebellions in the Reign of King Chŏljong and Their Inclination], *Tongbang hakji* 94 (1996), pp. 49–109.

³⁷⁵ The negative side of the checks and balances relationship should also be pointed out. In spite of the benefits mentioned, checks on the king and an excessive stress on ethical motivation in politics had long-term costs, resulting in meek and indecisive kingship and a society far too focused on ethical issues, instead of a militarily strong and wealthy nation. When the internal system lost its insularity in the late nineteenth century, all the demerits of the Chosŏn kingdom rose up. For the checks and balances between the king and the bureaucracy, see James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*, 4–16.

virtually collapsed, reformist intellectuals cast fundamental doubts on the traditional dependency of Chosŏn on China, calling Chosŏn an independent sovereign state in reference to modern international laws. The destabilisation of China as the centre of civilisation also led to widespread critical reflections on the Confucian model of civilisation and on traditional culture and customs. In the midst of comprehensive deconstruction occurring in the late nineteenth century, the traditional bases of political legitimacy that had so long upheld the Chosŏn kingdom and its sanctity were seriously devalued. In contrast to the weakening legitimacy of traditional kingship, new political ideas from the outside world disseminated a new source of authority conferred by the common people, as is exemplified by the *Hansŏng sunbo* (1883–4) and other sources that informed readers of the democratic regimes of foreign countries.

The undermining of Chosŏn's ruling system was also accelerated by its poor handling of national problems and its failure to build any new legitimacy for its rule. Generally speaking, the government's response to the transformation of the international political environment was not prompt or strategic, and its effects to adapt to the changing world were neither voluntary nor proactive. Thus, once Chosŏn was opened up, it became a battleground for neighbouring imperialist countries seeking political and economic gains, which was encouraged by the government's mishandling of chronic domestic problems. An ongoing financial crisis from the mid-1870s and local officials' widespread corruption and lack of discipline degraded the government's efficacy. King Kojong and most of his subjects adopted a conservative stance, caused by prolonged isolation from the outside world, instead of progressive national reforms. The king wanted to take a moderate or conservative path in reforming the state, leaving several and urgent matters of the country untreated. He hated to impair his traditional authority as king by accepting reformists' initiatives on government

reorganisation; instead he endeavoured to sustain his throne by obtaining foreign powers' support and by employing the balance of power between competing imperialist forces on the peninsula. These circumstances gave birth to reformists' radical impetus for state reform as well as grassroots uprisings. *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club movement representing the reformists' vision rose up in this context.

The reformists' endeavours to define a new basis for political legitimacy developed from the 1880s, as they unfolded new political thinking. This was particularly apparent in their expressions of people's rights and a constitutional system as a desirable form of government. First formulated in the 1880s, these new ideas of political legitimacy were not fully developed until full-fledged new ideas were expressed in the editorials of the *Tongnip sinmun* and promoted by the Independence Club.

2. New Base of Legitimacy 1: Democratic Legitimacy

2.1. A New Source of Legitimacy in *Tongnip sinmun*: The Common People

The most distinctive of the political ideas of *Tongnip sinmun* was its new conception of the legitimacy of rule and specifically a shift in the source of legitimate political authority from the traditional kingship to the common people. The state of Chosŏn was composed of the king and subjects, with the latter including both *yangban* aristocrats and commoners. The bureaucracy, recruited mainly from the *yangban* class, mediated between the king and the commoners. The king was commonly identified as the state (expressed as *nara*) and had the right to make the final decisions on national affairs. Yet, in Chosŏn there was a tension over the fundamental source of power between the king as the real power-holder and the Confucian idea that the (common) people were the *raison d'être* of government. However,

since the kingship was thought to embody Confucian teachings, this tension remained weak and implicit and rarely surfaced in real political scenes. Thus, although it was widely accepted that the state existed for the sake of the people, in reality the king, as the parent of the subjects and the ethical master leading them to righteousness, was at the centre of political legitimacy in Confucian Chosŏn. The political process in Chosŏn was, therefore, generally top-down, with a centralised bureaucratic system supporting this order.

In the late 1890s, however, as the king's authority disintegrated, this innate tension emerged. Editorials in *Tongnip sinmun* and the People's Mass Meeting reveal this tension vividly, manifesting a new legitimacy of rule centred on the people. What is salient in the paper's editorials is indeed its objection to the old top-down political process and its consequent emphasis on the common people (called *paeksŏng* or *inmin*) as a core subject in creating political opinions and transformation. While the paper occasionally treated the king as identical with the state in accordance with tradition, many editorials clearly distinguished between these two. The most frequently cited concept corresponding to the people was *chŏngbu* (government), *nara*, or *kukka* (the state), not the king; in the paper kingship lost its central position in state management. Now, governance was no longer seen as the king's beneficence toward his subjects, as tradition regarded it, but rather was recognised as the representation of the voluntary activity of the people for the purpose of guaranteeing their own interests. The king's state therefore turned into the people's state. The following editorial in *Tongnip sinmun* discussing the origin and functions of the state demonstrates this point:

In the beginning, the original intent in the emergence of *nara* was to have several people engage in discussions and then deal with all manner of affairs on behalf of *inmin* (the people) in the entire country. *Kwanwŏn* (government officialdom) was also formed for the people's sake, and people pay taxes for their own sake. Therefore, whether a country rises or falls, its

laws are fair or not, its government officials are good or not, its soldiers are brave or not, its police is doing right or not, the government has a good relationship with foreign countries or not, and the people's knowledge of agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce grows or not, are all the concerns of the people and related to the interests of the people.³⁷⁶

Articles stressing the people's role and interests in managing the state are not rare in *Tongnip sinmun*. Mr. Kim Hŭng'gyŏng's contribution to the paper on 20 May 1897, discussing the duties of both government officials and the people, insisted that "*chŏngbu* was established for the sake of the people. So, if it is not helpful for the people, what else is it useful for?" This re-conceptualisation of the common people as the core subject of rightful governance and the new understanding of the government as an institution representing the people's interests were frequently expressed in terms of a social contract. Interestingly, the editors of the paper used a contractual model the former Confucian scholar Chŏng Yak'yong (1762–1836) had formed. For example, in an editorial discussing the role of law in the 30 November 1898 issue, the editor described the origin of the state in the same manner as Chŏng's political essay *T'angnon*. The editor argued that a state originated in an association of houses, villages, and then tribes as it gradually broadened. Furthermore, the editor adopted Chŏng's style in articulating the new contractual view of governance, insisting that government officials were originally elected by the people and for the people's sake, so, according to them, "*paeksŏng* is the foundation of *nara* and government officials are just like *koyong* (employees)."³⁷⁷ This had as implication that it was only natural that a poor-performing government was ousted for a new performant, as Chŏng clearly stated in his essay. This contractual or reconstructive view of the origin of the state is prevalent in *Tongnip*

³⁷⁶ TS 17 April 1897.

³⁷⁷ TS 6 May 1899.

sinmun.

The radical reversal of the traditional conception of rule is also well represented in a letter Sŏ Chaep'il sent to the paper. Sŏ was one of the key members of the 1884 *coup d'état* and was the founder and a main editor of the paper from April 1896 to May 1898, following his return from his exile in the U.S. Yet in May 1898 he had to go back to the U.S., where he had received the degree in medicine and had citizenship, owing to his tense relations with the current government and with foreign diplomats in Seoul who saw Sŏ as a main impediment to their national interests in Korea. In his letter from the U.S., Sŏ described in strong terms the conditions of Korea in which the common people, who are the owners of the state, lost their ownership to government officials who should rightfully be their employees, and were relegated to the status of slaves. He thus urged Korean people to realise their current state and retrieve their original rights:

For hundreds of years, Korean people have regarded the government officials as sages and gentlemen, and asked the officials to protect their lives and property in return for paying taxes every year. Although they are the *chuin* (owner) of the state, they did not claim their ownership; instead, they asked the officials to look after their own jobs. But, more and more, these employed *sahwan* (servants) became the owners and the real owners became *noye* (slaves) and lost their lives and property to the employees. The reason for that was nothing less than that *chuin* did not play well their role as *chuin*... In recent years, the conditions in Korea and China have been similar in that the two countries are being humiliated in the world. The blame for it, above all, should be ascribed to the people who are the *chuin* of these countries. Even today, if *chuin* control *sahwan* and force them to conduct tasks beneficial for *inmin* and useful for the state's glory, there is no doubt that the bad *sahwan* will become faithful ones.³⁷⁸

Once the common people as the objects of rule came to be seen as the source of

³⁷⁸ TS 16 November 1898.

legitimate political authority, it followed that the responsibility for national affairs was ascribed to them rather than to the traditional ruling elites. As the editorial of the 11 January 1898 issue discussing the duty of the people put it, “the rise and fall of a country depends on whether the people of the country carry out their duty or not.” Furthermore, it continued, “from the people’s point of view, if a government does not conduct tasks for the sake of the people, then to force the government to perform tasks for the sake of the people is also the duty of the people.”³⁷⁹ These passages show that by the late 1890s the traditional way of governing via an appeal to the ruling elites’ ethical integrity had ended, and the responsibility for redressing government officials’ wrongdoings had become seen as the duty of the people. In this regard, the editorial of the 3 November 1898 issue entitled “Duties of the government officials and the people” asserted that whether laws are properly enforced or not depends on the people themselves, and it also urged citizens to express their opinions in order for government officials to administer laws justly: “the reason why laws are not enforced [in Korea] is that the people do not express their own opinions.”

This radical change in political legitimation emphasising the common people can be related to the Confucian ideas of *minbon* (or *wimin*), but the representation of the people in *Tongnip sinmun* exceeds the boundaries of the traditional concepts. The view of the common people in the paper is closer to the concept of people in democratic polities in that the people are placed at the actual centre of the political process rather than only rhetorically. Indeed, following the opening up of Korea, Western democratic ideas were introduced to Korean intellectuals through many channels. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the newspaper *Hansŏng sunbo* and Yu Kilchun’s *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* introduced democracy to Korean

³⁷⁹ TS 11 January 1898.

people. Many students who had an opportunity to study in Japan and the U.S. from the early 1880s also saw that in democratic countries a ruler is elected by the ruled. The democratic understanding of legitimacy in *Tongnip sinmun* followed this trend at this time. Moreover, the two main editors of the paper, Sŏ Chaep'il and Yun Ch'ihŏ (1865–1945), studied at American universities, so their radical conception of the people must have been closely linked to their study and experience in the U.S.³⁸⁰

Their democratic ideas, however, could not be expressed in their own way without compromise. *Tongnip sinmun* as a historical account representing the political opinions of the reformists must be read in this context. The radical political thinking in the paper does not mean that the Club had good reasons to act as they thought, by demanding the establishment of a complete popular assembly through a popular vote and by seeking a democratic republican regime. Even though they maintained the democratic legitimacy of rule, the editors had to be cautious in handling specific issues, especially those relating to changes in the monarchical system. They had to take into account the king's authority as the incumbent ruler and the people's old habit of regarding monarchy as the only and proper political regime for Korea. Thus the paper's political articles express a mixture of radical, moderate, and occasionally quite conservative viewpoints, and some scholars have failed to recognise the

³⁸⁰ For the biography and political activities of Sŏ Chaep'il, see Kim Tot'ae, *Sŏ Chaep'il paksu chasŏjŏn* [Autobiography of Dr. Sŏ Chaep'il] (Seoul: Ŭlyu munhwasa, 1974); Kim Yongdŏk, Paek haksun, Yi T'aekhui et al. (eds.), *Sŏ Chaep'il kwa kŭ sidae* [Sŏ Chaep'il and his time] (Seoul: Sŏ Chaep'il ki'nyŏmhoe, 2003). For Yun Ch'ihŏ's life and activities see, Yu Yŏngnyŏl, *Kaehwagi Yun Ch'ihŏ yŏn'gu* [Studies of Yun Ch'ihŏ in the Opening up Era] (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1985), pp. 15–170 and for his life course as a collaborator with the Japanese colonial authorities in the colonial period (1910–45), see Pak Chihyang, *Yun Ch'ihŏ ŭi hyŏpnyŏk ilgi* [Yun Ch'ihŏ's Diary of Collaboration] (Seoul: Yisup, 2010). For a study that highlighted the effects of Christianity on the two persons' view of common people, particularly on women's rights, see Hyeweol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways* (University of California Press, 2009), pp. 30–8, 41–2.

radicalism in the editorials and misinterpreted the political ideas in the paper.³⁸¹

2.2. Democratic Legitimacy in the 1898 Street Demonstrations

Through the People's Mass Meeting in 1898 the democratic idea of legitimacy surfaced on the political stage and came into conflict with the king's traditionally maintained, exclusive rights to national affairs. This confrontation was formed when the Independence Club staged street demonstrations against the government's submission to Russian demands: in particular, the government's granting of the lease of a south eastern island in February 1898.³⁸² This

³⁸¹ Some researchers, including Kim Tongt'aek, have failed to grasp this difference between ideas and reality. Kim argues that *Tongnip sinmun* does not have any radical political ideas, pointing out the paper's silence on people being sovereign themselves and their rights to political participation. Not only does he fail to recognise the radical ideas in the editorials, but he also becomes bemused by the editors' compromise with political reality. Furthermore, he insists that the paper envisioned a strong kingship, not a constitutional monarchy or a republican system, as a proper political system for Korea at the time. But this view had already been criticised by Sŏ Yŏnggi. According to Sŏ, the often-used term *aegun* (愛君, love the king) was used not to enhance Kojong but to enhance the nation, in a rhetorical sense. She persuasively argues that the paper and the Club made continuous efforts to limit King Kojong's power. See Kim Tongt'aek, "Tongnip sinmun ūi kŭndae kukka kŏnsol ron" [The Ideas of the Modern State-Building of *Tongnip sinmun*] in *Kŭndae kyemonggi chisik ūi palgyŏn kwa sayu chi'p'yŏng ūi hwakdae* (Seoul: So'myŏng, 2006), pp. 189–225; Sŏ Yŏnggi, "Kaehwap'a ūi kŭndae kukka kusang kwa kŭ silch'ŏn" [The Ideas and Practices of Modern State-Building of the Reformist Political Faction] in *Kŭndae kugmin kukka wa minjok munje*, edited by Han'guksa yŏn'guhoe (Seoul: Chisik san'ŏpsa, 1995), pp. 261–302.

³⁸² Russian interventions in the Chosŏn government were initiated by King Kojong's request of Russian protection for his kingdom after he fled to the Russian legation in Seoul in February 1896. The Russian government responded positively, but cautiously, given the balance of power with Japan. Russia's engagement was invigorated after Alexis de Speyer replaced the former minister Karl Waeber in September 1897. De Speyer aimed to control the tax and finances of Chosŏn by appointing a Russian financial advisor and establishing a Russo-Korean Bank in charge of the public finances of Chosŏn. His last bid against the Chosŏn government was the lease of Chŏryŏng Island situated in front of Pusan Harbour, for a coaling station. The Club stepped into this issue and staged the first street assemblies in March 1898 in order to reproach the Foreign Ministry for their submission to the Russian Demands. Chu Chin-Oh has suggested a view that the Japanese were deeply involved in the Independence Club's anti-Russian movement in February 1898, and Yi T'aejin has accepted his view. But this is far-fetched. Rather, it would be reasonable to argue that the Club's anti-Russian movement corresponded to Japan's national interests, as it was in competition with Russia. Apart from Russia's aggressive Korean policy, the Club's idea of *chaju dongnip* (national autonomy and independence), one of the two key ideas of the Club, alongside *munmyŏng kaehwa* (civilisation and enlightenment), is thought to be the reason for its turning to a political action against the Russians and the submissive government. For a concrete explanation of the Russian demands and the Club's intervention, see

confrontation re-appeared in a vehement way when the government mistreated the Kim Hongnyuk case after his attempt at the regicide of King Kojong in September. As the Mass Meeting and the Club's demands on the government persisted, the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* also became direct political statements on the people's rights to political opinions and participation. Such ideas are found in many of *Tongnip sinmun* editorials and in the memorials to the king presented during the People's Mass Meeting in late 1898. The editorial in the 7 November 1898 issue entitled "Effects of opposition" is representative:

Since no person is a sage, whoever does not have some faults? Likewise, how can we hope that government officials will be extremely good? Thus, whichever country's history we look at, the wealth and power of a country does not rely on its government. Rather, they depend on the people who express complaints about the government and force the government to remain alert and to carry out national affairs in the right way. In this regard, the more a nation is enlightened, the more there are opinions opposing the government, and the more there are complaints, the more the enlightenment of the country is achieved... Some say that the people's opposition to the government is strange. But if there is no opposition, they will not make any progress. For example, birds can fly high because, when their wings flap the air, the air opposes the wings; and ships can go ahead because water opposes the oars. Likewise, in politics, when opposition parties check national affairs and complain about them, politics will become right. The effect of opposition is like this. Therefore, we hope that Korean people will understand this principle and will not hesitate to oppose whenever the government does misdeeds, and, by doing so, we hope the people will make the government alert.

Articles putting an emphasis on the people's legitimate right to political opinions and opposition are found commonly during the Mass Meeting. A memorial to the king demanding

Vipam Chandra, *Imperialism, Resistance and Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea: Enlightenment and the Independence Club*, ch. 7. For Chu's view on the street assembly and Yi's adoption of it, see Chu Chin-Oh, "Kaehwa kaehyŏk ron ūi kujo wa chŏn'gae," 103–11; Yi T'aejin, "Kojong sidaesa hŭrŭm ūi chaejomyŏng," 60–62.

the impeachment of conservative, high-ranking officials, presented on 8 October 1898, asserted the view that if the people's public opinion is suppressed, then the country cannot be maintained.³⁸³ Another memorial submitted on 25 October 1898 further insisted, "censuring government ministers and discussing government commands are the people's legitimate rights."³⁸⁴

The Club's and the paper's insistence on the people's rights to political opinions and opposition soon led to a collision with the conventional view of the king's exclusive rights to national affairs. The direct impetus for the collision was the Club's impeachment of conservative ministers in September and October 1898 for their attempts to re-adopt old, inhumane punishments in the course of their treatment of the Kim Hongnyuk incident, and their efforts to prevent the Club and the people from conducting protest campaigns in central areas of Seoul.³⁸⁵ In opposition to the Club and its Mass Meeting, the conservative officials contended that the Club impaired the king's peculiar rights to managing the state. The Club counter-argued that their discussions of the government affairs and their censure and impeachment of the corrupt and incompetent ministers were their legitimate rights, and that the people's rights were not incompatible with the king's rights. The Club's stance is clearly stated in the following memorial presented to King Kojong on 23 October 1898:

As far as rights are concerned, there are rights proper for each person, from an emperor to an ordinary man. Being equal to all countries of the world and standing parallel to those

³⁸³ TS 12 October 1898.

³⁸⁴ Memorials presented on 27 October and 20 November 1898 also had the same message.

³⁸⁵ The inhumane punishments indicate both *noryuk* and *yŏnjwa*. *Noryuk* refers to executing a rebel's wife or son along with the rebel, and *yŏnjwa* to punishing a person for his father's, son's, brother's, uncle's, or nephew's serious offence. The Club's memorial raised to King Kojong on 8 October 1898 and ensuing ones present its stance on the issue. See TS 10, 11 October 1898; Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyemyŏn* 3, 175–81.

countries are Your Majesty's rights. As Your Majesty's people, censuring and impeaching the government officials who harm our nation by not protecting the national land, by impairing the right ways of politics, and by putting laws into disorder, are the rights of us, the people. Some say that if the people's rights become strong, then the king's rights will be diminished. How extremely ignorant is their argument? Without people's opinions, politics and law will be harmed, and then will collapse, and the seeds of disaster will spring up at a part of the state. Why does Your Majesty alone not recognise this?³⁸⁶

The one-month-long confrontation over the people's right to political opinions between the Club and the king finally ended with the Club's victory, as the king dismissed seven conservatives from the government and implicitly permitted the Club's opinions on national affairs in late October. Soon after their victory, the Club proceeded to carry out national reform in collaboration with newly adopted cabinet members. They held a special joint Mass Meeting (*Kwanmin kongdonghoe*) with the new, progressive ministers and unanimously adopted the six proposals for national reform (獻議六條). Most were intended to limit the king's arbitrary exercise of power, including the fourth article on checking the king's exclusive right to appoint government ministers and the fifth on restraining the royal family's arbitrary collection on taxes and random access to government finances.³⁸⁷ When

³⁸⁶ TS 25 October 1898.

³⁸⁷ The six proposals were as follows: "1. That both officials and people shall determine not to rely on any foreign aid but to do their best to strengthen and uphold the Imperial prerogatives. 2. That all documents pertaining to foreign loans, the hiring of foreign soldiers, the grant of concessions, etc. – in short every document drawn up between the Korean government and a foreigner – shall be signed and stamped by all the Ministers of State and the President of the Privy Council. 3. That no important offender shall be punished until he has been given a public trial and an ample opportunity to defend himself either by himself or by a counsel. 4. That to His Majesty shall belong the power of appointing his Ministers, but that in the case that the Majority of the Cabinet disapproves a man, he shall not be appointed. 5. That all sources of revenue and methods of raising taxes shall be placed under the control of the Finance Department, no other Department or office, or a private corporation being allowed to interfere therewith and that the annual estimates and balance shall be made public. 6. That the existing laws and regulations shall be faithfully enforced." *The Independent* (the English edition of TS), 1 November 1898.

the new cabinet accepted these six proposals, King Kojong added five more articles (詔勅五條) to them, which represented the King's personal interest in state affairs.³⁸⁸ The first and second articles were important, concerning respectively the establishment of a semi-popular national assembly and the creation of laws regulating popular associations and newspapers intended to keep the Club and *Tongnip sinmun* in check. The first article, which is historically significant, also coincided with the Club's strategy to participate in the policy-making process through the organisation. It ordered the reorganisation of the government body *Chungch'uwŏn* so as to recreate it as a body for national assembly, where its members had the right to legislate, revise laws, discuss national affairs, and recommend policies to the cabinet.³⁸⁹

With these measures, the people's demands for political opinions and participation appeared to make real progress, but the king still had doubts about the Club's intentions and was soon coaxed by conservatives. The conservative royalists plotted an anonymous poster incident in early November, by which they insisted that the Club aimed to build a republican

³⁸⁸ To summarise the five articles by King Kojong, the 1st is the reform of the law on *Chungch'uwŏn* and their implementation; the 2nd is the creation of the laws and rules on people's associations and newspapers; the 3rd is the punishment of corrupt local governors; the 4th is the allowance of the people's accusation of the illegal acts of specially dispatched officials (어사) and (Buddhist) temples (사찰); and the 5th is the founding of commercial and technical schools for the occupation of the people. *TS*, 1 November 1898.

³⁸⁹ For the initially revised ordinance of *Chungch'uwŏn*, see *TS*, 5 November 1898. This ordinance however was revised again on 12 November and *Chungch'uwŏn*'s roles became slightly restricted. Specifically, the number of the Club members being the representative of the new organ was limited to seventeen out of fifty from its original twenty five. This reflected the king's and conservatives' concerns about the Club's predominance. On the other hand, the idea of establishing a government body for discussions of national affairs, or *ŭihoe* or *ŭisabu*, vis-à-vis an administrative body, or *haengjŏngbu*, was first proposed in the midst of the *Kabo* reforms in 1894. *Kungukgimuch'ŏ* (Office for Affairs of the Military and State), created for the *Kabo* reforms, was also called *ŭihoe* and planned to be reformed as a national assembly by its members, with the existing government body *ŭijŏngbu* (Council of the State) to be reformed as an administrative body. But this plan was soon abandoned due to the king's objection. See *KJSL* 31/06/10, 31/08/02, 31/09/11, 31/09/21.

regime. Employing this deceptive plot, the king attempted to crush the Mass Meeting by arresting seventeen leaders of the Club, but this incident caused another round of great mass demonstrations that lasted almost two months. In their scheme to confront the demonstrating people, the conservatives in collusion with the king also mobilised a peddlers' organisation (*pobusang*) and violent clashes took place in central Seoul in late November.³⁹⁰ In fear of the destructive confrontations, the king promised to accept the Club and the people's demands, to implement the six proposals, and then to approve the Club as a legitimate popular association, though he still hesitated to carry out the six proposals.³⁹¹

In the course of this confrontation, a critical shift in the flow of events occurred unexpectedly, as several young radical members of the Club provided a motivation for the king to take a suppressive measure against the people in the streets, by electing Pak Yŏnghyo, a radical senior politician who was in exile in Japan, as a candidate for a cabinet level minister at the first meeting of the newly formed national assembly in mid-December. The king and conservatives employed this as an opportunity to suppress the Club and the people,

³⁹⁰ *Pobusang* refers to the peddlers' guild. They formed a national organisation to protect themselves from the extortions of lower officials in local areas. The government mobilised this well-disciplined peddlers' group when it carried out extensive construction works and the state was in crisis, as in the invasion of the French navy in 1866 and the soldiers' mutiny in 1882. Then, in 1883 the government protected the organisation by creating an organ controlling them (*hyesang kongguk*) and providing them with some privileges. The organisation, therefore, became a commercial-political group and was summoned whenever the ruling group of the government required. This was the context in which the *pobusang* was called to confront the Independence Club in 1898. For the concrete explanation of *Pobusang*, see Cho Chaegon, *Pobusang: kŭndae kyŏkbyŏngi ūi sang'in* [*Pobusang: Merchants in the Tumultuous Times in Modern Korea*] (Seoul: Sŏul taehak'gyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2003).

³⁹¹ Previous studies have failed to clarify why the king hesitated to implement the six articles. A letter to government ministers sent by the Club on 2 November 1898 shows that the key issue was the fifth article, that is, the unification of government finance: "If the budget of *kungnaebu* (Office of Household) becomes insufficient because the sources of revenue ascribed to the royal family are to suddenly transferred to the Department of Finance, it can be resolved by allotting its budget twice. Only when the organisation for collecting revenues is not divided and the one for distributing finance is unitary, collecting taxes privately on the pretext of the merit for the royal family will be extinguished from below, and, from above, problems with the budget of the royal family to be in want or in urgent need will disappear. Why do you sirs mind carrying it out?" TS 04 November 1898.

and the Independence Club movement eventually ended on 25 December 1898. The failure was directly caused by the young radical's imprudent behaviour. Indeed, they seriously harmed the subtle balance maintained throughout the year between the king's incumbent post as a sovereign and the people's appeal to political rightfulness that provided the street demonstrations with legitimacy. However, a more significant reason was the lack of strong leadership and thus its inability to break through a very critical point in time, for example, in the violent standoff with the peddlers. Yun Ch'ihŏ, the president of the Club, could not control the Mass Meeting, nor did he have a progressive vision to make use of the people's power and a strategy to deal with the king and conservatives.³⁹²

3. New Base of Legitimacy 2: Procedural Legitimacy

The Independence Club's confrontation with the government was based on another source of legitimacy, which is rational procedurality in handling state affairs. The late 1890s, following the *Kabo* reforms in 1894–5, were a period when old laws and customs crumbled and new laws and rules were not yet properly enforced. The operation of the government and the treatment of state affairs were supposed to be made upon the basis of new laws and rules, but still stuck to old customs. The Club confronted this condition and aimed to establish a government based on the principle of procedurality.³⁹³

³⁹² Shin Yong-ha has aptly pointed out that one of the core reasons that led to the abortion of the Club-led national reforms was the absence of an able and strategic leadership on the part of the Club in the critical juncture of November and December 1898. Shin Yong-ha, *Tongniphyŏphoe yŏn'gu*, 521.

³⁹³ It was due to the *Kabo* reforms that the question of procedural legitimacy was discussed. In the wake of the grand reforms of institutions and laws covering almost all segments of society, Chosŏn Korea laid the foundation for a modern state. Characteristically, it aimed to revoke bad cultural practices, such as the hierarchical social status system, slavery and prohibition of young widows' remarriage, and also aimed to transform the Confucian monarchy into a constitutional monarchy by

The Club's conception of procedural legitimacy is well demonstrated in its activities soon after it succeeded in repelling Russian demands, especially the lease of Chōryōng Island in March 1898. After that, it actively intervened in the government's illegal acts. For example, in March it took issue with the Ministry of Justice for its arrest of four Club members and urged the ministry to treat the members according to due legal procedures.³⁹⁴ In May it intervened in a legal trial through which Justice Minister Yi Yuin schemed to take the property of a commoner,³⁹⁵ and subsequently in June the Club appealed against the police for its lack of transparency in dealing with a commoner's possessions after his arrest on a false accusation.³⁹⁶ In September it stepped into the government's illicit treatment of Kim Hongnyuk's accomplices and then the conservatives' attempt to re-introduce the old, barbaric punishments, which in the end re-kindled the People's Mass Meeting. The Club's intervention in these cases was mainly caused by the authorities' contravention of laws in processing these cases. The legal authorities did not follow new legal procedures prescribed in the modern legal system established through the *Kabo* reforms.

The modern legal system required the protection of the people's life, liberty, and property as basic rights and fair treatment of all people before the law. This differed from the

re-arranging existing government institutions and creating new ones, including a national assembly and modern legal courts. This grand reform project was modelled after the Japanese precedent under the guidance of Japanese advisors, which indicates Japan's deep involvement. Indeed, the reforms were initially motivated by Japan's cunning scheme, as a pretext, to station its army in Seoul and to have a showdown with China in 1894. As abruptly as it began, it suddenly ended: when Japan's influence retreated in Korea and domestic political conditions changed from mid-1895, the pro-Japanese reformists' cabinet could not last. Thereafter, domestic controversies between the old laws and customs and the new ones emerged and the Independence Club advocated the latter. For the *Kabo* reforms, see Yu Yōng'ik, *Kabo kyōngjang yōn'gu*; Wang Hyōnjong, *Han'guk kūndae kukka ūi hyōngsōng kwa kabo kaehyōk*.

³⁹⁴ Miscellaneous news (*chapbo*) of TS 29 March 1898; Chōng Kyo, *Taehan kyen'yōnsa* 3, 46–50.

³⁹⁵ TS 2/7 June 1898; Chōng Kyo, *Taehan kyen'yōnsa* 3, 65–74.

³⁹⁶ Miscellaneous news of TS 23/25 June 1898; Chōng Kyo, *Taehan kyen'yōnsa* 3, 76–78.

old legal system in which the authority of the government was valued over the people's rights and the laws functioned rather as an apparatus to preserve the conventional social system. Since existing laws already provided for due process of law, the Club's appeals to the authorities mainly focused on the matter of procedure in the application of laws rather than on advocating the values of the modern legal system. In reality, however, the principle of due process of law was not observed rigidly. For example, in the case of the four Club members, King Kojong himself ordered the Ministry of Justice to punish them with exile on 20 March 1898 without any trial. The Club saw the order as groundless incrimination and appealed against it in its formal letter to the Minister of Justice:

As far as new laws are concerned, all offenders, major or minor, are supposed not to be punished without being sentenced by a judge through a trial. This was introduced not only to clarify their offences against the law, but also to ensure the most appropriate punishment for offences they committed. According to the decree issued recently, the reasons for the accusation of the four persons are written as 'their thinking is sly' and 'they agitate public sentiment and mislead people.' We think that a ten-year exile for them is relatively minor, and shows His Majesty's desire to spare people's lives. But it does not show which clause of law relates to their offences and which clause of punishment is applied to them. Moreover, since this case was not brought to trial, people have some doubt. If people do not trust in law, problems will arise in bringing cases to justice.³⁹⁷

The Club's confrontation with the government was thus caused primarily by the current legal practice in Chosŏn. On the other hand, the Club used its demands for due legal procedure as a rationale for its pressure on the king and government when confronting them with issues on which they conflicted. Against King Kojong's arbitrary issuance of commands on legal cases, the Club counter-argued with reference to the necessity of a trial, demanding

³⁹⁷ Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyemyŏn* 3, 49.

clarification of the accused's contravention of law and proper punishment for them. For example, when the Club had an intense confrontation with the king in November and December over the implementation of its six proposals and the punishment of five royalist conservatives colluding with Kojong, it accused him of making arbitrary judgements regarding the royalists without trials in court:

Your Majesty had to open a legal court to punish the five persons with appropriate laws, but two of them were sentenced to exile without a trial. Although this stems from Your Majesty's intention to save people's lives, we subjects have some doubts. Moreover, we would like to know why Your Majesty does not hold a court for the remaining three. We wish Your Majesty to command the Minister of Justice to arrest them quickly and to get them tried, and by doing so to enforce law fairly.³⁹⁸

The Club's appeal to due legal procedure was therefore used for a political purpose, as well as given for the necessity to establish rational legal procedure. It employed the logic of due process of law to urge the king and his government to accept its political demands. Yet there was another dimension of procedure the Club used, which was more political than legal. As mentioned, in the Korea of the late 1890s, modern legal values and procedures were in competition with traditional legal ideas and customs. In this situation of strife, the Club supported the former, while the conservatives preferred retrieving the old ways. Here the point is the strategy the Club employed to respond to foil the conservatives' endeavours to restore traditional legal conceptions and customary applications of law. In addition to the procedural claims discussed above, they made 'argumentative confrontations' with the king and conservatives, in which those of stronger logic were to win. This rare confrontation was

³⁹⁸ This passage is part of the memorial presented to King Kojong on 11 December 1898. See *TS* 13 December 1898.

possible in the context in which the king's and the government's traditional authority was debilitated, and the national crises they faced legitimately compelled the people to raise their voice on national affairs.

A representative case of this confrontation was the controversy over the conservatives' effort to re-adopt the old, inhumane punishments soon after the Kim Hongnyuk incident. When the conservatives justified their re-adoption of the punishments by reasoning that rebel incidents actually took place after *noryuk* and *yŏnjwa* were repealed in 1894,³⁹⁹ the Club posed their reasons as follows: 1) if Korean laws are not consonant with the laws universally adopted by many countries in the world, Korea will not be treated equally with those countries;⁴⁰⁰ 2) King Kojong had already ordered the repeal of *yŏnjwa* in June 1894 and declared that he would protect people's rights in legal processes in his official oath at the late kings' shrine in December 1894;⁴⁰¹ 3) the ancient sage king of China, King Wen (文王), did not apply *noryuk* to his people, so the conservatives who recommended those punishments to the king were not much different from rebels.⁴⁰² This superior logical argument facilitated the Club's victory on this issue.

In this regard, the politics of the People's Mass Meeting are particularly significant for the history of Korean politics, in that the Club used a different way of speaking. As against the conservatives' traditionally maintained, ethical, context-bound manner, the Club members' expressions were founded upon an argumentative, logical, legal, and universalist moral base. In this context, modern politics in Korea was accompanied by a new way of speaking and a

³⁹⁹ See the memorial raised by the conservatives in miscellaneous news of *TS*, 5 October 1898.

⁴⁰⁰ Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyenyŏnsa* 3, 158.

⁴⁰¹ Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyenyŏnsa* 3, 159.

⁴⁰² Chŏng Kyo, *Taehan kyenyŏnsa* 3, 179–80.

new morality, which were commonly invoked in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* and memorials to the king presented by the Club. For example, in an editorial in the 12 August 1897 issue of *Tongnip sinmun*, the editor advised the people to argue with local magistrates legally and logically about the magistrates' wrongdoings: "When a local magistrate commits wrongdoings, all people of the county should meet him and discuss his right and wrong with reasons, morals and laws, while respecting him as a magistrate, instead of revolting. Then, the magistrate will be more afraid of debating with people than a revolt and will not commit wrongdoings any longer."⁴⁰³

In the 1898 confrontation the Club prevailed over the king and conservatives with better argumentation. Given that argumentative confrontation is chiefly a matter of using stronger logic and reasoning in speech acts, this argumentative process itself was 'procedural.' Due legal procedure advocated by the Club against the government was also a means employed within this milieu of an argumentative process. The abrupt termination of this logical confrontation by the government's violent crackdown on the Club and its People's Mass Meeting on 23 December 1898 was, therefore, the loss of a rare and unique opportunity to transform the country on the basis of better argumentation.

4. Confucianism on Democratic Legitimacy

⁴⁰³ The argumentative way of speaking used in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* and memorials to the king presented by the Club appears to be related to the main editors of the paper, Sŏ Chaep'il and Yun Ch'ihŏ, who were educated in the United States. After coming back to Korea, Sŏ organised a debating society called *Hyŏpsŏnghoe* for the students of the *Paichai (paejae)* School in November 1896 and then Yun established a series of regular debates called *T'oronhoe* at the Independence House (*Tongnipkwan*) in August 1898. The argumentative way of speaking of the Club would have been brought up in these two debating societies. For *Hyŏpsŏnghoe* and *T'oronhoe*, see Shin Yong-ha, *Tongnip hyŏphoe yŏn'gu*, 112–17, 261–73.

Until now, we have discussed new ideas of legitimacy in *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club movement that are discontinuous with Confucian political ideas. Yet certain aspects of Confucian ideas apparently stimulated the reformists' adoption of democratic legitimacy instead of thwarting it. Here we will focus on the continuous relationship between Confucian political ideas and democratic ideas and will clarify the source of Confucian support for the adoption of democratic governance.

Shin Yong-ha has pointed out that both political ideas of *Sirhak* and modern Western ideas of the Enlightenment and democracy were embraced within the democratic ideas of the Independence Club.⁴⁰⁴ He especially stressed *Sirhak*'s influence as a motive inherited from the intellectual tradition of Korea itself and cited Chŏng Yak'yong as a precursor of the Club's political ideas. Yet he did not seriously consider the link between Chŏng's thought and Confucian political ideas themselves. Indeed, Chŏng's democratic ideas derived from his re-interpretation of classical Confucian texts, which indicates the close relationship of his political thought with classical Confucian political ideas. What then are the shared political ideas common to classical Confucianism, Chŏng Yak'yong, and the Independence Club?

When the confrontation between the Club and King Kojong intensified after October 1898, the Club frequently cited passages from classical Confucian texts in their memorials to the king. The most frequently cited passages are as follows:

[1] Setting up logs which allow people to rebuke government affairs was a great deed practised in the peaceful era of the ancient time. And asking those who cut grass in fields about government affairs, and even listening to an insane man and adopting something

⁴⁰⁴ Shin Yong-ha, "Ip'hŏn konghwaguk surip undong," 55.

meaningful, were the deeds the bright kings practised.⁴⁰⁵

[2] People are the foundation of a country, so that when the foundation is solid, the country becomes stable.⁴⁰⁶

[3] An old saying states that if a king likes what people like and dislikes what people dislike, his rule will accord with the ancient sage kings' rule.⁴⁰⁷

[4] Mencius said that a king should select a person when all people of a country regard him as lenient and dismiss one when the people speak against him. This is the norm kings should reflect on when they appoint government ministers.⁴⁰⁸

These quotations from well-known classical Confucian teachings can be seen as an attempt to persuade the king by citing familiar passages, since traditionally memorial presenters were likely to reinforce the seriousness of their opinions by citing Confucian texts and famous historical anecdotes. Indeed, in their contexts these passages were deployed to invigorate the Club's voices by means of the authority of Confucianism. The first passage describing great political deeds by the ancient Chinese sage kings Yao and Shun was commonly referred to throughout the history of Chosŏn, when Confucians presented memorials to the king disclosing the real condition of national affairs and compelling him to take their opinions seriously. The other passages, well known *minbon* ideas, were also used widely in presenting memorials. These passages usually drawn from *Shujing* and *Mencius*

⁴⁰⁵ This passage comes from several sources including *Shiji* (史記, Historical Records) and is part of a memorial to King Kojong raised on 25 October 1898, after the king announced an edict concerning the regulation of popular associations. See *TS* 27 October 1898. For a similar citation of both *Yao* and *Shun*'s anecdotes in a memorial, see *TS* 21 November 1898.

⁴⁰⁶ This passage is originally from a classical Confucian text, *Shujing*, cited in a memorial presented on 8 October 1898 demanding the impeachment of seven high-rank conservative ministers for their mistreatment of the Kim Hongnyuk incident. See *TS* 12 October 1898. For a similar citation in a memorial, see *TS* 21 November 1898.

⁴⁰⁷ This passage is originally from *Mencius*, quoted in a memorial to Kojong presented on 25 October 1898. See *TS* 27 October 1898.

⁴⁰⁸ This is a quotation in a memorial presented on 16 November 1898 that requested the impeachment of five royalist conservatives. See *TS* 19 November 1898. For the same citation in a memorial, see *TS* 27 October 1898.

played a key role in maintaining the publicness of Chosŏn politics and were employed by government officials or local Confucians to check the king's power.

However, these citations give us another means of interpretation in regard to the context of the memorials. As far as the Club's memorials after October 1898 are concerned, it is important to consider their non-traditional nature. Above all, citations of Confucian texts and famous historical anecdotes were used very limitedly, except for the kinds noted above. What the Club employed instead for persuasion was 'logical validity' as well as 'political rightfulness'. In other words, the Club members had confidence in the rightfulness of their cause and specific political claims. Upon this basis, they also used logical arguments in both form and substance, as a method of disproving the king and conservatives' logic. Thus, the citation of Confucian texts was not a normal situation in the Club's memorials.

Regarding the first passage, the Club used it in the context of arguing for the people's rights to political opinions and of opposing Kojong's intention to curb the Club's activities by formulating a law against popular associations. Utilising King Yao's and Shun's anecdotes, it aimed to obtain the people's freedom of speech. Indeed, throughout the history of Chosŏn, the sage kings exerted great influence in checking the king's power by allowing the subjects to discuss the good and bad aspects of national affairs in the name of public opinion. This tradition was carried on and revived by the Club when confronting the king on the people's rights to political opinions. The Club's demands for founding a sort of national assembly and King Kojong's acceptance also came out of this tradition of respecting public opinion, a tradition originating from classical Confucian political ideas. The Club also retrieved the idea of *minbon* in the process of its confrontation with the government for the sake of the people's rights to political opinions and participation. The above passages concerning *minbon* were used when the Club impeached corrupt and incompetent conservative ministers and argued

against the king's traditional, exclusive rights on state management. By citing relevant passages in *Shujing* and *Mencius*, the Club aimed to corroborate its logic of the freedom of speech and the rights to oppose government affairs. Specially, the Club stressed that its defence of the people's rights was not brand-new, but rather in accordance with the teachings of the ancient sage kings.⁴⁰⁹ This means that it was aware that in the Confucian tradition there were intellectual sources supporting its cause and it deliberately referred to those passages. Likewise, it is meaningful to consider why the Club leaders never cited the Confucian emphasis on the king's *susin* or ethical self-cultivation, which was more widely referred to in Neo-Confucian Chosŏn. Some scholars insist that the Confucian idea of *minbon* is different from the idea of democracy or *minju* (民主, people being the owner of the state) based on the ideal of people's self-rule; yet seen in terms of 'legitimacy of rule,' the Confucian legitimacy of rule is not incompatible with the democratic legitimacy of rule.⁴¹⁰

This view is also identified in the case of the Taishō era of Japan. In the 1910s and '20s many liberal Japanese intellectuals adopted the Confucian-flavoured word *minpon* instead of *minshu* to signify 'democracy.' This was deliberately intended to evade misunderstanding, for *minshu*'s connotation of popular sovereignty was in collision with *tenno* sovereignty commonly accepted by Japanese people at the time. At any rate, here the two terms were used for a similar meaning. This indicates that East Asian societies based on Confucian traditions have theoretical resources compatible with democratism in Western

⁴⁰⁹ See *TS* 27 October 1898.

⁴¹⁰ For a study representing the incompatibility thesis, see Kim Tongt'aek, "Tongnip sinmun ūi kŭndae kukka kŏnsŏl ron," 217.

political ideas and thus could adopt democratic ideas relatively easily.⁴¹¹

Next, let us see which tradition of Confucian political ideas has survived and been adapted to democratic ideas. Many scholars have criticised Samuel Huntington's thesis that Confucianism is incompatible with democracy.⁴¹² Among them, scholars like Francis Fukuyama and Ying-shih Yü proposed appropriate counter-arguments.⁴¹³ In particular, Ying-shih Yü traced the Chinese intellectual history of the late nineteenth century and illuminated Chinese reformist and revolutionist intellectuals who, in opposition to traditional tyrannical rule, adapted to democracy by drawing their theoretical resources from the ancient sage kings' rule in Chinese history. For example, in his denunciation of traditional despotism, which he regarded as the representation of the ruler's egotism, Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873–1929) made use of the Mencian doctrine of benevolent government and prioritised the common

⁴¹¹ The development of *minbon/minpon* into democratic institutions, however, was not easy. Just as the millennia-old monarchical tradition in Chosŏn thwarted democratic change in the late nineteenth century, the *tenno*-centred feudal heritages in Japan, as well as the militarist national aim associated with the imperialist international political environment at the time, prevented the development of *minponshugi* (民本主義) into liberal and democratic social forms in Japan. On the other hand, according to John Dunn, the idea of democratic legitimacy of rule itself is none too clear. For social changes in the period of Taishō Democracy, see Narita Ryuichi, *Taishō demokurashi* [*Taisho Democracy*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007). For Yoshino Sakuzō, a representative liberal intellectual who propagated the concept *minponshugi*, see Tetsuo Najita, "Some Reflections on Idealism in the Political Thought of Yoshino Sakuzō" in *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy*, Bernard S. Silberman and H.D. Harootunian (eds.) (University of Michigan Press, 1974); Germaine A. Hoston, "The State, Modernity, and the Fate of Liberalism in Pre-war Japan," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 51 (2), 1992, pp. 287–316; Jung-sun Han, "Envisioning a Liberal Empire in East Asia: Yoshino Sakuzō in Taisho Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 33 (2), 2007, pp. 357–82. And for a sceptical view of legitimacy in modern democracies, see John Dunn, "Legitimacy and Democracy in the World Today" in *Legitimacy and Criminal Justice: An International Explanation*, Justice Tankebe and Alison Liebling (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 7–18.

⁴¹² Samuel Huntington, *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 300–7.

⁴¹³ See Francis Fukuyama, "Confucianism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (2) (1995), pp. 20–33; Ying-shih Yü, "Democracy, Human Rights and Confucian Culture" presented in The Fifth Huang Hsing Foundation Hsueh Chun-tu Distinguished Lecture in Asian Studies, Asian Studies Centre, University of Oxford (10 November 1998).

people as the fundamental source of legitimation for the authority of the monarchy in late nineteenth-century China. He went even further to legitimise the idea of “government by the people” from the traditional “government for the people” through the medium of the Mencian understanding of political legitimacy.⁴¹⁴

Ying-shih Yü, however, failed to identify which aspect of classical Confucian political ideas was compatible with democratic ideas. In the case of Korea, Confucianism lost its viability as a working political framework in the wake of the turbulence of the late nineteenth century, but the ideas regarding ‘political necessity’ survived and acquired new meaning. Within Confucian political ideas, an *ethical ideal-based understanding of politics* that emphasised an ethically well-ordered society, ascribed political matters to the ruling class’s cultivation of ethical virtue, and then held hegemony throughout most of the era of Chosŏn under the influence of the Zhu Xi philosophy, was dismissed from the public domain. On the other hand, the *necessity-based understanding of politics* that focused on essential elements sustaining a political community, such as national security, economic sustenance, and the resolution of domestic conflicts, and by doing so guaranteed the publicness of politics, survived and was adapted more or less to democratic ideas.⁴¹⁵ Indeed, the passages discussed above were related to the necessity-based understanding of politics within Confucian political

⁴¹⁴ Hao Chang, *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 101–6.

⁴¹⁵ Some can claim that the Confucian idea of *minbon* is closely related to Confucian ethical ideas, but the original ideas of *minbon* appearing in *Shujing* shows the opposite. In *Shujing*, *minbon* was emphasised in the context of the sheer need of survival of the state, and as shown in the *Sillok* (實錄) of the Chosŏn dynasty, the *minbon* ideas were recalled whenever a national crisis affected the country. This means that the idea of *minbon* is closely linked with the necessity-based understanding of politics. Indeed, the idea of *publicness* in politics emerges from desperate experiences of a political community over the matters of political necessity. A clear example is the *Tonghak* peasant rebellion in 1894. As the peasants uprising became uncontrollable, the dialogue in the royal court turned to those related to political necessity or *minbon*. See *KJSL*, 31/02/22, 31/05/25/, 31/12/13.

ideas. Ying-shih Yü thus failed to grasp the tension between these two different views of politics within Confucian political ideas, and also failed to understand that the Confucian teaching that Chinese reformist intellectuals emphasised was the political necessity ideas.

Scholars like Hahm Chaibong and Sor-Hoon Tan have also failed to grasp this contrast within Confucian political tradition owing to their normative approach to “Confucian democracy.” They focus on Confucian ethics and its communitarian values as a theoretical source replacing the problematic liberal democracy model; yet they do not appear to have examined the historical development of Confucian political ideas in both Korea and China in the nineteenth century. Their arguments are plausible, but their excessive focus on normativity lacks historical awareness.⁴¹⁶

The new legitimacy of rule in *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club movement, conceptualised into both democratic and procedural legitimacy, signify that in the wake of the 1880s and '90s there was a grand transformation in Korean political thinking. The new ideas of legitimacy had rather familiarity with the constitutional and republican systems by endowing the common people with the fundamental source of political authority. The new public values and norms, the new notion of government, and the new conceptions of political

⁴¹⁶ Hahm Chaibong (Hahm Chaebong), “Asia chŏk kach’i wa minjujuŭi: yugyo minjujuŭi nŭn ka’nŭng han’ga?” [Asian Values and Democracy: Is Confucian Democracy possible?], *Chŏlhak yŏn’gu* 44 (1999), pp. 17–33; Sor-Hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2003). On the other hand, Wang Juntao has examined “Confucian democrats” in the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century China and argued that Confucianism is compatible with democracy. While he has adopted a historical approach, he did not clarify the characteristics of the political ideas of the Confucian democrats, which would be strikingly distinctive from those of old Confucians in the era of imperial Song (宋) and Ming (明). As a result, he missed the fact that the Confucian democrats’ political ideas were based more on a necessity-based understanding of politics than on an ethics-based understanding of it. See Wang Juntao, “Confucian Democrats in Chinese History” in *Confucianism for the Modern World*, eds. Daniel A. Bell and Hahm Chaibong (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 69–89.

legitimacy, proposed by the reformist intellectuals, therefore, anticipated a new era of Korean history. Confucian political ideas that had served the maintenance of the monarchy in Chosŏn were giving way to new political ideas legitimising constitutional and republican systems.

Notwithstanding the grand transformation of Korean political thinking at the time, an aspect of Confucian political thinking survived and facilitated the reformists to receive the new political ideas relatively easily. *Tongnip sinmun* and the Independence Club were generally critical of Confucian traditions, yet part of their political ideas was still grounded in them. What the Club reclaimed in their confrontation with the conservative government was the Confucian ideas of ‘*minbon*’ and ‘respect for public opinion’. Scholars have failed to understand the tension within Confucian political thinking and thus missed that the idea of *minbon* was closely associated with the ‘necessity-based understanding of politics’ within Confucian political thinking. Scholars like Samuel Huntington have failed to understand the plurality of political ideas within Confucianism.

The impact of the Independence Club’s political thinking on the development of Korean politics is worth mentioning. It was through the Club’s political activities that the common people came to be aware of and understand their country’s gloomy condition and their status as political subjects, not the objects of rule. The unprecedented People’s Mass Meeting in 1898 was the result of the common people’s growing identification of themselves as the fundamental source of political legitimacy. Academic controversies over the evaluation of the Independence Club were partly caused by some scholars’ failure to capture its political ideas clearly and then their failure to distinguish their positive effects from their negative effects. The Club’s ideas on politics should be separated from their ideas on culture, which we will examine in the next chapter.

PART THREE PITFALL OF CIVILI-SATION

Chapter Seven

The Limits of the Reformists' Ideas:

Civilisation and the Progressive Conception of Time

In previous chapters, we have examined two themes. Firstly, in Part One we have addressed the shift in the worldview of Korean reformist intellectuals (including reformist Confucians) that occurred over almost two centuries. During this time, the predominant Confucian ethical view of the world was gradually marginalised, and a factual, empirical, and realist worldview took centre stage. In Part Two, we have dealt with the reconstruction of the public world by the reformists of the 1880s and '90s. All these discussions are part of a grand civilisational shift that had been taking place from the eighteenth century onwards. Indeed, late nineteenth-century reformists were obsessively discussing a new civilisation. This chapter aims to present a new perspective on the reformists' ideas on civilisation.

The theory of civilisation that was first exhibited in the sources composed in the 1880s and then prevalent among Korean intellectuals during the early decades of the twentieth century is a developmental view of civilisation. It presupposes that human civilisation develops from a low stage to a high stage, and that civilisations at different stages of development dimensions are found in the contemporaneous age. The problem with this theory is not only the linear development model that tailored history with too blunt scissors,

⁴¹⁷ This chapter is an upgraded version of the originally published article in *Korea Journal* 52(4) (2012), pp. 188–212.

but rather the implications of this view and specifically its effects on those who are from a civilisation or society at a low stage of development. In the Korean reformists' case, they had a self-negating view of their culture and customs, while blindly pursuing advanced civilisational standards. Previous studies have mainly identified Social Darwinism as the driving force behind the reformists' problematic way of thinking,⁴¹⁸ or focused on the Western-centrism prevalent in the reformists' view of civilisation.⁴¹⁹ Yet these studies have scarcely heeded the fundamental bases of the civilisation development model itself, specifically the 'progressive conception of time' embedded in the model. Korean reformists adopted the development model by internalising the progressive view of time. In this regard, what this chapter pays attention to is the radical shift in the conception of time that was taking place in the late nineteenth century.⁴²⁰ The radical shift of the conception of time, in

⁴¹⁸ Kim Tohyŏng has argued that the political ideas of Korean intellectuals in the enlightenment movement period (1905–1910) were based on Social Darwinism. (Kim Tohyŏng, “Hanmal kyemong undong ūi chŏngch’iron yŏn’gu” [A Study of the Political Ideas of the Enlightenment Movement in the Last Years of Chosŏn Korea], *Han’guksa yŏn’gu* 54 (1986), pp. 75–137). Chu Chin-Oh has interpreted the social ideas of *Tongnip sinmun* in terms of Social Darwinism. (Chu Chin-Oh, “Tongnip hyeophoe ūi sahoesasang kwa sahoe chinhwaron [The Social Thought and Social Darwinism of the Independence Club],” in *Sonbogi paksa chŏngnyŏn kinyŏm sahak nonch’ong* (Seoul: Chisik san’ŏpsa, 1988), pp. 755–87). Koen De Ceuster has defined Yun Ch’iho’s problematic way of thinking as based on his adoption of Social Darwinism. (Koen De Ceuster, “From Modernization to Collaboration, the Dilemma of Korean Cultural Nationalism: The Case of Yun Ch’iho (1865–1945), PhD dissertation submitted to Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (1994), ch. 8). Chŏn Pokhi has understood the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century history of Korea in terms of Social Darwinism and its peculiar ideas of state. (Chŏn Pokhi, *Sahoe chinhwa ron kwa kukka sasang* [Social Darwinism and the Ideas of the State] (Seoul: Han’ul, 1996)). Recently, Vladimir Tikhonov has viewed Social Darwinism as the most distinctive and powerful social ideology that modernisation-orientated Korean intellectuals adopted in the period from the 1880s to the 1910s. (Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea: the Beginnings (1880s-1910s)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010)).

⁴¹⁹ Chŏng Yonghwa, “Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ūi tŏt: Yun Ch’iho ilgi rŭl chungsim ūro” [The Pitfall of the Ideas of Civilisation: with a Focus on *Yun Chiho’s Diary*], *Kukje chŏngch’i nonch’ong* 41 (4) (2001), pp. 297–314.

⁴²⁰ Concerning the shift in the conception of time, a number of studies have elucidated that change, yet their main focus was placed on “the physical-astronomical time,” not “the historical time,” to borrow R. Koselleck’s division of time. (See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 1–2.) For example, they have mainly seen the change in the calendar system from the lunar to the solar calendar,

combination with the reformists' factual view of the world on the basis of the negation of their normative tradition, encouraged them to accept the civilisation model, particularly the four stages theory, and a Western-centric view of civilisation.

The other point that this chapter addresses is whether their pursuit of 'civilisation and enlightenment' (文明開化, *munmyŏng kaehwa*) was the very factor that led the reformists to anti-national political behaviours. Pointing out the extraordinary case of Yun Ch'ihŏ, who fell into collaboration with the Japanese authorities in the colonial period, researchers argued that the reformists' idea of *munmyŏng kaehwa* forced them into collaboration.⁴²¹ That is to say, they asserted that the reformists placed *munmyŏng kaehwa* ahead of the value of national

the introduction of the seven-day week system, the adoption of standard time, and the spread of the clock. Chŏng Sang'u in particular has illuminated a series of shifts in the late nineteenth-century Chosŏn after the adoption of the solar calendar system and Korean people's adaptation to modern time in the early decades of the twentieth century. (Chŏng Sang'u, "Kaehang ihu sigan kwannyŏm ŭi pyŏnhwa [Changes in the Conception of Time after the Opening Up]," *Yŏksa pip'yŏng* 50 (2000), pp. 184–99.) Chŏng Kŭnsik has developed this study and investigated Korean people's adjustment to the solar calendar system, the week system, and the spread of calendars and watches in the period from the mid-1890s to 1910. In the ensuing study where he has focused on the colonial period, he proceeded to analyse Korean people's conformity to the modern-time system, introducing the controversies over the enduring use of the lunar calendar system, campaigns on time saving, and national memorial days set up by the colonial authorities. (Chŏng Kŭnsik, "Han'guk ŭi kŭndae jŏk sigan ch'eje ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa ilsang saenghwal ŭi pyŏnhwa I [The Formation of the Modern Time System and the Change in Everyday Life in Korea I]," *Sahoe wa yŏksa* 58 (2000), pp. 161–97; _____, "Sigan ch'eje wa singminji jŏk kŭdaesŏng [The System of Time and Colonial Modernity]," *Munhwa kwahak* 41 (2005), pp. 147–69.) Chŏng Sŏngghi, in the same context, has concretely analysed confusions after the adoption of the solar calendar system and the newly-made national memorial days in the Great Korean Empire period (*Taehan cheguk*, 1897–1905). (Chŏng Sŏngghi, "Taehan jegukgi t'aeyangnyŏg ŭi sihaeng kwa yŏksŏ ŭi pyŏnhwa [The Administration of the Solar Calendar System and the Change of the Calendar Book in the Era of Great Korean Empire]," *Kuksagwan nonch'ong* 103 (2003), pp. 29–53.) Pak T'aeho has focused on *Tongnip sinmun* as a means of representing the modern time and instilling its value to contemporary Koreans, taking a theoretical approach. (Pak T'aeho, "Tongnip sinmun gwa sigan-gigye [*Tongnip sinmun* and Time-machinery]," *Sahoe wa yŏksa* 64 (2003), pp. 166–99.) Yet the conception of time that had a greater influence on Korean people was that of *historical time*. Contrary to physical-astronomical time, which came about through the scientific investigation of the earth as a planet, historical time is formed by men under certain conditions of history and functions as a fundamental criterion for men's projection of will and their interpretation of the world. This conception of time thus operates as a basic component of civilisation.

⁴²¹ For the representative case, see Chŏng Yonghwa, "Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ŭi tŏt".

independence and, as a consequence, were led to abandon their country's sovereignty for the sake of the former. In this context, researchers, particularly Korean researchers, did not pay attention to the reformists' political thinking (especially those who fell to collaboration) for a long time.⁴²² What this chapter argues is that, while the side effects of *munmyǒng kaehwa* are admitted, the pursuit of civilisation is not the single factor that led to their collaboration. I will demonstrate this point by showing the compatibility of *munmyǒng kaehwa* with the value of national independence.

Examining these themes, this chapter aims to clarify that the negative aspect of the reformists' thoughts is their ideas of civilisation, not their purely political ideas. Due to the unclearness of their negative side, their political thinking, which contributed to the opening up of the constitutional and republican age in Korean history, was depreciated. Let us first view how traditional Confucian intellectuals in Chosŏn understood 'time' so as to grasp the shift of the conception of time in the late nineteenth century.

1. Chosŏn Confucians' Way of Thinking on Time

Distinctive ways of thinking of traditional Confucian intellectuals in Chosŏn were closely related to the conditions in which they lived. This is well illustrated when we look at the moments when they were faced with foreigners and had to respond to the latter's different ways of thinking. The diplomatic dispute between Chosŏn and Japan over the Japanese memoranda and the military conflict in 1875 forms a good example. A key element in the

⁴²² The radical reformist Pak Yŏnghyo's case is representative. Although his political ideas and actions were pronounced in the 1880s and '90s, his political ideas and his role in the *Kabo* reforms were scarcely highlighted until Kim Hyŏnch'ŏl focused on his thought in the late 1990s. His ill treatment by researchers was closely associated with his succumbing to collaboration with the Japanese colonial authorities.

dispute was the grounds that led the Chosŏn government to refuse to accept the diplomatic document from Japan for seven years.⁴²³

A dialogue among high officials in the Chosŏn court on 10 May 1875 shows how the traditional officials viewed the dispute, making their way of thinking all too clear. Kim Pyŏnghak (金炳學, 1821–1879), one of the three highest officials at the time, expressed these with emphasis:

The reason why our government did not accept the diplomatic memorandum is because of some words contained in it. In the ancient *Chunqiu* (春秋, B.C. 770–403) era [of China], the peoples of Wu (吳) and Chu (楚) presumptuously called their rulers ‘kings’ (王), but this was done only within their national boundary. When they sent emissaries to other countries, they reduced the title of their rulers to *kwagun* (寡君, petty prince) and their countries to *p’yeŏp* (弊邑, troubled country). This memorandum from Japan calling their king an emperor is outrageous and unprecedented. This is the reason why we did not permit the reception of the memorandum for over a year. They also insist that they will not wear the traditional costume at a welcome feast. This might cause a problem in the future so that we should be cautious and careful in dealing with this issue.⁴²⁴

The main message of Kim’s speech was that Japan’s memorandum was in contravention of the old conventions between the two countries, and therefore that the government should be wary in handling the dispute. To make his point, as was customary, he cited an anecdote from ancient Chinese history as an example. He found the reference for his judgement in past precedents rather than in strategic considerations directed to the present

⁴²³ For concrete analyses on the dispute between Chosŏn Korea and Meiji Japan over the diplomatic memorandum from Japan, which resulted in Chosŏn’s first modern-type, diplomatic treaty with Japan and opening up of ports, see Martina Deuchler, *Confucian gentlemen and barbarian envoys: The opening of Korea, 1875–1885* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), chs. 2, 3; Key-hiuk Kim, *The last phase of the East Asian world order: Korea, Japan and the Chinese Empire, 1860–1882* (Berkeley: University of California, Center for Japanese Korean Studies, 1980), ch. 6.

⁴²⁴ *KJSL* 12/05/10.

and the future. For him, the present and the future were subject to the past.

This *past-oriented, precedent-focused* way of thinking could not accept Japan's use of the words “*hwang*” (皇, emperor) and “*ch'ik*” (敕, emperor's decree), words that had been reserved only for Chinese emperors. Given this viewpoint, the government officials hesitated to clearly express their own opinions in discussing the issue, because it lay beyond their conventional horizons.⁴²⁵ This past-oriented viewpoint was not confined to Kim Pyŏnghak and a small group of conservative officials, but prevailed among most of the traditionally educated officials and Confucian scholars, with the exception of rare figures like Pak Kyusu (朴珪壽, 1807–1877), who put more emphasis on current strategic considerations than on adherence to the conventions of the past.⁴²⁶

The traditional way of thinking reappeared during the negotiations in January 1876 which resulted from the *Unyō* (雲揚) incident in August 1875.⁴²⁷ The Korean representative,

⁴²⁵ See the following statements by high officials. High official Yi Yuwŏn stated: “If we receive the memorandum as a makeshift measure, it will be a temporary measure, but a lot of concerns will arise from it. Whatever decision we will make, we should be very cautious in addressing it, but Your Majesty's servant is maladroit and does not have a grand vision, so that it is difficult for me to deal with the current issue” (KJSL 12/05/10). Another high official Kim Pyŏngguk said: “If we accept the memorandum, it will not create a problem at the moment, but who knows whether they will make another unacceptable demand? At any rate, what can an awkward person like me say towards a resolution?” (*Ibid.*). At first sight, these passages indicate that the high officials hesitated to express their own opinions as they felt burdened by the responsibility of offering advice to the king on this matter. In Chosŏn court politics, officials stood up against their *right* opinion, and arguing on the basis of conventional practice. The case of this memorandum was extraordinary, since it clearly contravened Chosŏn's traditional practice of international relations, but at the same time raised the possibility of a Japanese invasion if the king was advised to hold on to the propriety of tradition. The key point here is that, faced with the dilemma between ‘the traditional idea of ethics among nations’ and ‘realistic consideration of the interests of the state’, the officials shied away of speaking out for the latter. Without precedent, the officials lacked any past reference that would have allowed them to positively advocate accepting the Japanese memorandum.

⁴²⁶ Pak Kyusu's practical and strategic response to the Japanese memorandum reflects the *Sirhak* tradition that ran in his family since Pak Chiwŏn being his grandfather. For Pak Kyusu's opinions about the memorandum issue, see KJSL 12/05/10.

⁴²⁷ For the concrete analysis of the military collision between the Japanese military vessel *Unyō* and Chosŏn's guards, see Yi T'aejin, “Unyangho sakkŏn ūi chinsang” [The True Story of the *Unyō*

Shin Hŏn (申櫟, 1810–1884), was following Kim Pyŏnghak’s mode of expression. Shin drew his references from anecdotes from ancient Chinese history and Confucian texts. For instance, when the Japanese representative, Kuroda Kiyotaka (黒田清隆, 1840–1900), asked why the soldiers on the side of Chosŏn had fired on the Japanese military vessel *Unyō*, Shin responded by citing a reference from *Liji* (禮記, Book of Rites), a classical Confucian text on *ye*:

In *Liji*, it is written that when people trespass on a foreign country’s border, they should ask about the restrictions. But, last autumn, your vessel did not state its purpose in crossing the border of our country and it approached the defence area, so it was inevitable that our army fired.⁴²⁸

In the same context, he quoted the traditional Confucian principles of international relations, implying that both Chosŏn and Japan’s relations should be based upon them:

Traditionally, the right way of building friendly relations with a neighbouring country was thought to be based on four principles: *sŏng* (誠, sincerity), *sin* (信, trust), *ye* (禮, propriety), and *kyŏng* (敬, respect). If your country and our country restore the former good relations [upon the basis of these principles], it will be a good thing for both of us.⁴²⁹

This dispute demonstrated the basic way of thinking of Chosŏn’s Confucian officials with great clarity. They presupposed an integrated viewpoint based on distinctive conceptions

Incident] in *Chosŏn ūi chŏngch’i wa sahoe*, ed. by Ch’oe Sŭnggi kyosu chŏngnyŏn ki’nyŏm kanhaenghoe (Seoul: Chipmundang, 2002), pp. 435–75. And for the Japanese response to Chosŏn’s rejection of the memorandum and their debates on the Korean policy, *sei-Kan ron* (征韓論), see Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 31–43.

⁴²⁸ KJSL 13/01/19.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

of space and time, reflecting Chinese cultural hegemony and having the profound marks of Confucianism. They viewed their world through the lens of this Chinese and Confucian world order. Their conception of space was fixed by China and its small neighbours. Likewise, their conception of time was formed from the Chinese historical experiences. The repetition of a well-governed and a turbulent period (一治一亂), drawn out from Chinese dynasties' rise and fall, was regarded as natural. More important in the context of Chosŏn was the Confucian view of time. That is to say, Confucians thought that the ideal institutions and customs upon which later generations and states should model themselves were the ancient states before the warring states era. This conception of idealising the past was formed under the dogmatic hegemony of Confucian texts written in the ancient turbulent times of *Chunqiu zhanguo* (春秋戰國, B.C. 770–221). Under this heritage of Confucianism, the laws and institutions, culture and customs, and even the characters of the people of the ancient times were idealised. Thus, most of Confucian reformers in later periods tried to model their views on those ancient laws and institutions. The past-oriented way of thinking of both Kim Pyŏnghak and Shin Hŏn arose from these deeply entrenched assumptions, transmitted through Chosŏn's centuries-old Confucian intellectual heritage. The way in which they handled the case of the memorandum, their hesitation in making decisions, their lack of strategic thinking, and their habit of looking back to the past in search of precedents, all stemmed from this deep-seated legacy.

2. The Progressive Conception of Time in the 1880s: the Case of Yu Kilchun

This traditional mind-set could not survive the collapse of the conditions that had enabled it to exist. The principal intellectual impact of nineteenth-century globalisation, specifically a novel conception of civilisation, brought about a new notion of time. Indeed, civilisations are

predicated on distinct conceptions of space and time. In the transforming era of the late nineteenth century in Korea, the shift in civilisation was accompanied by new ideas about space and time. As the traditional China-centred world virtually collapsed, the traditional idea of civilisation that presupposed that space centred around China and its neighbouring ethnic groups crumbled. The reformist intellectuals who understood the conditions of the outside world located the most developed civilisations in Europe and America. This shift in the locus of civilisation meant a change in the criteria for civilisation itself. The traditional Confucian standard of civilisation, which put focus on the ethical constitution of society, was no longer trusted by them. Rather than spiritual or ethical integrity, their understanding of civilisation was driven by material and practical elements, such as military power, economic wealth, and scientific and technical advancement. This new standard corresponded to the reformists' general view of the world that was tilted toward a factual, empirical, and comparative outlook.

With Western civilisation as a new centre came a new way of seeing time. The core of the new conception of time was an evolutionary frame of historical development, with society and civilisation following a linear progressive course of development. Human history was regarded as a developmental process where tribes, ethnic groups, or races proceeded along a path of gradual development. Yu Kilchun applied this evolutionary conception of time in his essay *Segye daeseron* [General Trends of the World, 1883], where he divided the nations or ethnic groups of the contemporary world into four different stages: savage (野蠻), unenlightened (未開), semi-enlightened (半開), and civilised (文明).⁴³⁰ He linked to those four stages specific modes of their way of living, culture and customs, and even manners of thinking, categorising European countries and the U.S. as the civilised group. Subsequently,

⁴³⁰ Yu Kilchun, “*Segye daeseron*” in *Yu Kilchun chŏnsŏ* 3, 27–36.

he made it clear that the four divisions were limited to the current point in time and that the currently civilised stage was not the final stage of human development. Thus, Yu's categorisation of countries or ethnic groups was open-ended, so that, although a country was currently at a low stage, if it strived to become a civilised country, then it could rise up to the civilised stage.

Yu Kilchun's view of civilisation looks to have been influenced by Fukuzawa Yukichi, because Yu studied under Fukuzawa's guidance in Japan during 1881–1882 just before he wrote the essay.⁴³¹ Indeed, Fukuzawa employed the four stages theory of civilisation development in the same manner as Yu did. From his early works, Fukuzawa addressed the four stages theory of civilisation,⁴³² and, in his famous book *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (1875), he contracted it to three stages and emphasised that this was a dynamic system, with the current order merely representing a moment in time. Western countries were merely civilised *vis-à-vis* semi-enlightened countries such as China and Japan, but, in the future, this order might well be upset. This *relativist* view of civilisation is characteristic of Fukuzawa. Instead

⁴³¹ Besides Fukuzawa, we can expect that the American zoologist, Edward S. Morse (1838–1925), influenced Yu's view of civilisation development in his main work *Sōyu kyōnmun*. This is because Yu resided in Morse's house when he stayed in Boston between 1883 and 1884. However, we do not know how much Yu was influenced by Morse, because the only source that shows Yu's connection to Morse is Yu's letters to Morse written in the mid-1890s, in which we cannot find any remarks on civilisation development or Social Darwinism. Nevertheless, Morse, a serious Darwinist, influenced Meiji leaders while staying in Tokyo for about two years from 1877 as professor of zoology at the newly built Imperial University of Tokyo. For Morse's transmission of Darwinism to Japanese elites, see Sherrie Cross, "Prestige and Comfort: The development of Social Darwinism in early Meiji Japan, and the role of Edward Sylvester Morse," *Annals of Science* 53(4) (1996), pp. 323–44. For Yu Kilchun's letters to Edward Morse, see Yi Kwangnin, "Yu Kilchun ūi yōngmun sōhan" [Yu Kilchun's Letters to Edward S. Morse], *Tong'a yōn'gu* 14 (1988), pp. 1–28.

⁴³² In his early works, such as *Tōjin ōrai* (唐人往來, 1865) and *Seiyō jijō gaihen* (西洋事情外編, 1868), Fukuzawa drew human history as a development process from a savage state to civilisation, and in his works such as *Shōchū yorozukuni ichiran* (掌中萬國一覽) and *Sekai kunijin* (世界國盡), written in 1869, he suggested the four stages theory and categorised countries into these stages. For a concrete explanation, see Ha Yōngsōn, "Kūndae han'guk ūi munmyōng kae'nyōm toip sa [The History of the Introduction of the Concept of Civilisation to Modern Korea]" in *Kūndae han'guk ūi sahoe kwahak kae'nyōm hyōngsōng sa* (Seoul: Ch'angbi, 2009), pp. 36–65.

of placing the contemporary evolutionary stages in an iron cage, he saw that Japan could catch up with Western countries by learning the spirit of Western civilisation, which he ascribed to “knowledge and virtues” (智德).⁴³³ As a samurai intellectual, he had an eye to penetrate the contemporary imperialist world and strategies for Japan to take in order to protect its national independence, for the sake of which learning about the essences of Western civilisation was necessary. Yu Kilchun adopted this relativist view of Fukuzawa, through which he was able to hold an open-ended, autonomous attitude towards the discouraging stages theory.⁴³⁴

Yu Kilchun’s initial introduction of the stages theory was reiterated in his main work *Sōyu kyōnmun* in a delicately reformulated fashion. In Chapter Fourteen, he repeated the stages theory, but in a different manner from Fukuzawa’s. Fukuzawa assumed a nation or

⁴³³ Nevertheless, his concentration was placed on the side of knowledge. His idea was that, as far as virtues are concerned, the Japanese (private) ethical virtues are not secondary to the Western virtues, but the core reason that made a difference between the two was lack of knowledge. He saw that knowledge affects even the development of virtues. See his *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*, chs 6 and 7.

⁴³⁴ While interpreting Yu Kilchun as the first Korean intellectual who adopted Social Darwinism, Vladimir Tikhonov has asserted that Yu learnt of Social Darwinism from the American biologist Edward Morse, who taught zoology at the Imperial University of Tokyo from 1877. However, this view should be reconsidered because, according to Yi Kwangnin, Morse taught in Tokyo for only two years from 1877 and returned to the U.S. in 1880. Yu Kilchun visited Tokyo in 1881 as part of an entourage of government officials and stayed there for two years studying under the guidance of Fukuzawa. Because Morse visited Tokyo twice more, in 1881 and 1882, Yu might have met Morse through Fukuzawa, but evidence that Yu learnt about Social Darwinism from Morse is difficult to find. Tikhonov also exemplified Yu’s citation of the expression *kyōngjaeng* (競爭, competition) from Fukuzawa’s *Seiyo jijo* as proof of his adoption of Social Darwinism. However, Yu transformed Fukuzawa’s expression to the Confucian-flavoured expression *kyōngryō* (競勵, competition and encouragement) in parts, which indicates that he did not like the idea of serious competition among individuals. Under Fukuzawa’s influence, Yu accepted the *four stages theory* of civilisation development, which had been popular among European Enlightenment thinkers since the late eighteenth century, rather than Social Darwinism. Fukuzawa learnt of that theory through François Guizot and Henry Thomas Buckle’s books on the history of civilisation, which were influenced by the eighteenth-century stages theory. In the 1880s and most of the 1890s in Korea, Social Darwinism was not yet an issue among intellectuals. See Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea*, ch. 2. For Yu’s relationship with E. Morse, see Yi Kwangnin, “Yu Kilchun ūi yōngmun sōhan.”

ethnic group's development from a savage to a civilised state, but Yu applied that category to individuals; that is, an enlightened, a semi-enlightened, and an unenlightened "person", attributing particular characteristics to each category. Yu mentioned that countries could be divided in such a way, but his focus was on individuals, not countries. Moreover, he did not remark that Chosŏn was a semi-enlightened country, which was different from the editors of *Tongnip sinmun* in the 1890s.⁴³⁵

Fukuzawa's relativist and open-ended view of enlightenment was repeated in *Sōyu kyōnmun*. Defining enlightenment (開化), or civili-sation, as "humans' reaching the finest and most exquisite state of all kinds of things and affairs,"⁴³⁶ Yu saw that the enlightenment process takes place in almost all areas of society. For Yu, enlightenment was the best state of development in all sections of society, including human behaviour, academic activity, politics, law, and technology. Instead of placing his country into a less-enlightened iron cage by highlighting its backward status, Yu saw that any country has enlightened, semi-enlightened, and unenlightened people living within it, and that an enlightened country is simply a country where enlightened people form the majority. He believed that enlightenment was a state that individuals could achieve by their own volition, rather than something structured within a nation's spirit or culture and thus difficult to cure without transforming the structure at all. Because he took this open-ended attitude, he asserted that to enlighten oneself meant not only to adopt others' good points but also to maintain one's own merits. This relativist and prudent approach must have led him to criticise the radical reformists of his time – according to him, "sinners of enlightenment works" – for their extraordinary preference for foreign things and institutions. Yu's relativist and autonomous view would generally reflect his moderate

⁴³⁵ See Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, 395–404.

⁴³⁶ Yu Kilchun, *Sōyu kyōnmun*, 395.

disposition, as well as his teacher Fukuzawa's influence. While radicals considered Confucian civilisation the main culprit of the low level of development of Chosŏn and, upon this ground, called for the reconstitution of a new civilisation, Yu was prudent and maintained the values of Confucian civilisation. His view of civilisation was therefore eclectic and moderate, which was based on both the past- and the future-oriented view of time.⁴³⁷

3. The Progressive Conception of Time in *Tongnip sinmun*

The tradition-negating, Western-centred view of civilisation and its developmental conception of time is well documented in *Tongnip sinmun* (1896–1899). The conception of time in the paper is lopsidedly tilted toward the future-oriented, or progressive view of time. Indeed, the core slogan of the paper, *munmyŏng kaehwa* (civilisation and enlightenment), which had been coined in Japan as a translation of the word “civilisation,” implies the progressive conception of time. Let us first examine the traces of the progressive conception of time in *Tongnip sinmun* before we discuss the origin of the developmental view of civilisation and its problems. In the editorials of the paper, writers divided time into the past, present, and future, and matched these with an un-enlightened age, the age of working to achieve enlightenment, and an enlightened age. They highlighted the future as something to be achieved by negating the present. The editors' future-oriented manner of thinking was

⁴³⁷ A similar view was suggested by the moderate conservative Kim Yunsik (1835–1922); he saw that Chosŏn was already a civilised country, so the claim that Chosŏn should be enlightened was improper. In this context, he understood the concept of *kaehwa* (開化) as practical matters of the present (時務) to tackle. Kim Yunsik first held a view that both the Eastern and the Western civilisations were based on different foundations, but later he shifted his view and thought that civilisations were rather universal, which was made as a way to accept Western civilisational elements, according to Kim Sŏngbae. See Kim Sŏngbae, *Yugyo chŏk sayu wa kŭndae kukje chŏngch'i ŭi sangsangnyŏk: kuhanmal Kim Yunsik ŭi yugyo chŏk kŭndae suyong*, 139–47.

deeply rooted in their editorials:

If Chosŏn concentrates on the education of the people *from now on*, then, *in a few years* the government and the people will co-operate with each other and the people will become enlightened. Moreover, as a result of education, everyone in the nation will have their own jobs and, henceforth, the people will get rich. Therefore, we hope that the government will do its best in educating the people *at the moment*. Then, *in a few years Chosŏn will rise up to the same position as other countries*.⁴³⁸

If someone commits wrongdoings, tells a lie, maligns others, or takes another's possessions, following *old habits*, he will be committing an unpardonable crime, not only to His Majesty but also to his ancestors and descendants. So, *we hope that all the people of Chosŏn will forget the ways that they followed in the past and will open a new page of history from today*. And we believe that, if the people, regardless of the officials or commoners, do their best to work for the nation, abandoning their private preferences and aversions, *then, in five years all the people of the state will benefit from it*. Therefore, *let us throw away the old habits and follow new morals, laws, rules and ideas, modeling ourselves on those of civilised and enlightened countries*...and, by doing so, let our country become one of the top countries in the world.⁴³⁹

As these passages show, once time was combined with the idea that history develops toward civilisation and enlightenment, the uncivilised past had to be discarded, and the present negated in favour of a civilised and enlightened future. This future-oriented manner of thinking was also reflected in the form of the editorials themselves. Many of them had three sections: introduction, main paragraphs, and concluding remarks. The main paragraphs were usually filled with current social and cultural problems, whilst the concluding remarks were devoted to remedies and prospects for the future. Interestingly, these concluding

⁴³⁸ TS 25 August 1896, italics added.

⁴³⁹ TS 23 February 1897, italics added.

remarks, in many cases, adopted a particular formula: “We hope that...” For example, in the editorial of the 20 May 1897 issue, the editor wrote: “We hope that the people of Chosŏn will wake up from sleep as soon as possible and co-operate with each other, so Chosŏn will be ranked amongst the powerful countries in the world.”⁴⁴⁰ In addition, conditional sentences were widely used to express both things to be done in the present and the rosy prospects to be achieved in the future, affirming that “If one wants to..., it will be necessary to do...now.”⁴⁴¹ These concluding remarks usually had a deontological nuance, conveying hope for the future. For example, in the editorial of the 24 April 1897 issue, the editor wrote that “It is right to make our country dignified with wealth and power and glorified with civilisation.”⁴⁴²

Where, then, is the origin of this future-oriented view of time? This conception of time, which presumes a single pathway of history, originates in the Enlightenment view of time in modern Europe, which put *progress* at the centre of the development of human history. As Kant put it, human history is the process of “the achievement of a *civil society* [*sic*] which administers right universally,”⁴⁴³ which will be attained collectively and gradually and will hence be potentially realised in the future. This optimistic understanding of history, which

⁴⁴⁰ See other examples: “We hope that the students studying in Japan will work for the nation after coming back and make great achievements for the country, so that Chosŏn will be treated as a high-ranking country in the world” (*TS* 8 April 1897); “We believe that the way to cure the root of the ills of Chosŏn is that, from today, people cooperate, discard the wrong, old customs, and make their efforts in advancing towards civilisation” (*TS* 13 February 1897). This kind of writing is common in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun*.

⁴⁴¹ E.g. “If the government wants to achieve national independence, then, first of all, it must try to protect the people’s rights” (*TS* 9 March 1897).

⁴⁴² E.g. “We regard it as one of the most important things for the government to make Chosŏn become a wealthy nation” (*TS* 25 May 1896).

⁴⁴³ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective” in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History* (New Haven, U.S.: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 8.

regarded human history as “the realisation of a concealed plan of nature”⁴⁴⁴ or the attainment of “enlightenment...as a great good,”⁴⁴⁵ offered a paradigmatic view of time for Enlightenment Europe. Hegel inherited this view of history, proclaiming in his lectures on the philosophy of history: “[t]he History of the world is none other than the *progress* of the consciousness of Freedom.”⁴⁴⁶ He divided world history, according to the stages of the advance of freedom, into the oriental world, the Greek and Roman world, and the German (Western) world. This division of world history in accordance with the stages of progress was prevalent among French Enlightenment thinkers like Turgot and Condorcet, as well as Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” 13.

⁴⁴⁵ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” 14.

⁴⁴⁶ George. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications INC., 1956), p. 19, 56, 63, 72, italics added.

⁴⁴⁷ For example, Condorcet, convinced of “the march and progress of the human mind,” divided world history into ten stages in which human beings first formed tribal society, reached the development of the modern Europe of his time, and left further progress still to be achieved. Antoine-Nicolas De Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of The Progress of the Human Mind* (L’Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain), trans. by June Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955).

According to Jeffrey Alexander, the conception of ‘progress’ in the modern West is related to the promise of the Golden Age, or the millennium in Judaism and Christianity, which is realisable in *this world*, something peculiar to the European tradition. The kingdom of God came to be *more* realisable in this world in the wake of the Reformation. Protestants, and especially Calvinists and Puritans, thought they could bring about a perfect world on earth by working hard. This worldly perfection was encouraged by Renaissance humanism and, in the wake of the Enlightenment, was translated into the vocabulary of *secular progress*. The Enlightenment thinkers firmly believed in the imminent possibility of a secular golden age. Alexander’s description came from Karl Löwith’s philosophical interpretation of progress as ‘secularised eschatology’. He saw the philosophies of history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a secularised version of the eschatological pattern set up by the Jewish and Christian religions. The words of progress such as ‘hope’, ‘living by expectation’, and ‘futurism’ were closely linked to anticipation of the ‘final’ events, such as the coming of the Messiah or the Last Judgement. Löwith’s critical interpretation of the philosophy of history was later countered by Hans Blumenberg. After criticising secularisation theory, Blumenberg found the origins of the idea of progress in two moments: the overcoming of the fixed, authoritative status of Aristotelian science by the idea of a cooperative, long-term scientific progress guided by method, and the overcoming of the idea of ancient art and literature as a permanently valid model of perfection in favour of the idea of the arts as embodying the creative spirit of their particular ages. For a succinct history of the idea of progress in the West, see J. Alexander, *Fin de Siècle Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso,

According to Koselleck, Enlightenment thinkers of modern Europe who held the progressive view of time schematised civilisations, ethnicities, and races according to their different stages of development.⁴⁴⁸ As he puts it: “The contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous, initially a result of overseas expansion, became a basic framework for the progressive construction of a world history increasingly united since the eighteenth century.”⁴⁴⁹ The division of human development through stages was established as the “four stages theory.” According to Ronald Meek, the four stages theory, mainly put forward in the most systematic fashion by the French thinker Turgot and the Scottish Adam Smith among several others, was based on four different “modes of subsistence.” So civilisation was presumed to develop according to the stages of hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce.⁴⁵⁰ Together with this line of development, the European thinkers thought that institutions, laws, and even manners of people evolved in stages. As Meek argues, this way of seeing the human history was encouraged by the temporal context of the eighteen-century Europe, in which the thinkers experienced the change in Glasgow and the northern cities of France and the contrast between areas which were economically advanced and areas still in

1995), pp. 65–67. For Löwith’s philosophical interpretation of the idea of progress, see Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago University Press, 1955). For Blumenberg’s interpretation of progress in modern time, see Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983).

Peter Bowler focused on the academic controversies among scholars in Victorian Britain over the origins and development of humankind, societies, and civilisations, focusing on the vocabularies of progress, evolution, and Darwinism. See P. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

⁴⁴⁸ R. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 238.

⁴⁴⁹ R. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 246.

⁴⁵⁰ Ronald L. Meek, *Social science and the ignoble savage* (Cambridge University Press, 1976). Peter Bowler argues that a linear model of social progress and the “image of races battling for supremacy” originated from “the idealist view of history” formed in the Continent, rather than the theories of Herbert Spencer or Charles Darwin, who rejected the linear model and was liberals at the time. See P. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress*, 57, 60, 71.

lower stages of development. Moreover, contemporary historical and anthropological studies, especially regarding American Indians which enabled the hypothesis about the earliest stage of human life, propelled them to come up with the stages theory. The original historical explanation of human development shifted slightly as they understood the outside world so that the model turned to the side that even in contemporaneous world the different stages of civilisation existed. According to Meek, the British thinker and politician Edmund Burke (1729–1797) thought that all the developmental stages were manifested in the contemporaneous world so that historians did not need to try to find historical evidence of ancients.⁴⁵¹ This stages theory of human civilisation was introduced into East Asia and was prevalent in the 1890s. In an editorial, *Tongnip sinmun* introduced this theory in a quite concrete manner:

As far as countries are concerned, there are four distinctions of countries into savage, under-enlightened, semi-enlightened, and fully enlightened countries. Savage countries' people are called the lowest of races, because they do not know much about human beings' humanity, cannot make meals with grains but eat only fish and wild animals, cannot build houses, sleep under the shade of trees in summer and live in caves in winter, cloak their bodies with hides, and do not live under government and law and fight with one another all the time. In under-enlightened countries, people have some knowledge, rear cattle, and engage in agriculture; but they do not like learning, live with under-organised institutions, build their houses of soil in damp places, wear shabby clothes, know nothing about sanitation, and do not make things in an orderly way. In semi-enlightened countries, people exert themselves to make their living in all areas of literature, agriculture, art and technology, and commerce; but they try to

⁴⁵¹ According to Meek, the Eurocentric understanding of the four stages theory was already criticised in the 1780s and '90s by the writers, such as Johann G. von Herder, William Russell, and James Beattie. These writers emphasised concrete conditions of individual nations and peoples, focusing on their structural limits mainly caused by unfavourable natural environment. The stages theory was combined by a model of competition among countries under the influence of Social Darwinism in the late nineteenth century, which was an adaptation of the original version in the context of the imperialist world order. R. Meek, *Social science and the ignoble savage*.

keep their old ways of life, do not revere new knowledge, have arrogance in their hearts and treat others with contempt, and do not like progress and becoming enlightened. In fully enlightened countries, people have advanced knowledge, are good at all kinds of arts and technology, expand commerce around the world to increase their national finance, try to advance knowledge, exert themselves to make progress, communicate with foreign countries with sincerity, and love their own country very much.⁴⁵²

As seen in the citation above, the original four stages presented by the Enlightenment thinkers shifted to a social development theory containing contemporary implications. In this framework, moving to a fully enlightened country was regarded as a deontological task for the less-enlightened countries.

4. The Duality of the Progressive Conception of Time

The view of the future in *Tongnip sinmun* was different from that of the European thinkers in that the future of contemporary Korea, as depicted by the editors of the paper, was *ambivalent*. On the one hand, they saw it as progress towards a wealthy, strong, and civilised country; on the other hand, they saw it as uncertain and potentially desperate. This ambiguous conception of the Korean future may have reflected the political oscillations between reform and reaction after the year 1894. The sense of crisis in *Tongnip sinmun* would also reflect the *location* of Korea in the imperialist age. The paper's pursuit of *munmyōng kaehwa* and national independence was restricted by the unfavourable conditions surrounding Korea at the time. Contemporary Korea was sustaining itself upon the balance of power between Russia and Japan, and the sovereignty of Korea would be put in danger when the balance of power broke down. Thus, the sense of crisis was affected by the spatial-temporal condition that Korea

⁴⁵² TS 11 September 1899.

faced.⁴⁵³ Yet this condition was more fundamentally linked with Korea's status as a semi-enlightened country at the time. On a single pathway of history to *enlightenment* and *civilisation*, a semi-enlightened country like Korea faced two alternatives: if it achieved domestic reforms and stepped forward to become part of the enlightened world, then it could expect a bright future; however, if it failed to do so, it would face a dreadful fate.

This ambivalent view of Korea's future was predetermined by the vocabulary of enlightenment. Time was assessed in terms of the degree of enlightenment or civilisation. The enlightened or progressed state was seen as being chronologically later, while the under-enlightened or under-progressed state was seen as being chronologically retarded. This equivocal view was evident in a number of editorials in *Tongnip sinmun*. On the one hand, the editors saw that Koreans had the capacity to build up a civilised country on their own, posing a bright image of Korea's future. At the end of the editorial that introduced the stages theory of civilisation, the editor added his own view:

Although the Blacks and Reds belong to the human race, it is needless to say any more about their humanness. Likewise, savage countries and under-enlightened countries, though they belong to the category of countries, it is needless to say any more about their nationhood. As far as Korea is concerned, it belongs to the Yellow race, so the race is not bad. Hence, by exerting ourselves to reform our laws and rules and by proceeding unswervingly, why do not we make our country into a high-ranking country in the world?⁴⁵⁴

This hopeful vision for the future was exhibited in a number of editorials. However,

⁴⁵³ The importance of *location* in explaining different responses among East Asian countries to the Western challenges was focused on by a number of scholars. For a study directly addressing the effect of location on both a Korean and a Japanese intellectual in the late nineteenth century, see Chang Insöng, *Changso ŭi kukje chöngch'i sasang*.

⁴⁵⁴ TS 11 September 1899.

this optimistic view was counter-balanced by many disappointing problems that the country faced. The editors' innate comparative perspective, especially *vis-à-vis* advanced Western countries, conveyed the sentiment of frustration. In many editorials, their style of argument was grounded on categorisation and comparison; the categories for comparison were: national wealth and power, the advancement of science and technology, the development of practical studies, emancipation from old customs and social habits, and particular characteristics of the people such as diligence and honesty. The editorials comparing Korea with advanced countries usually implied that Koreans should learn from White people and follow their civilisation. The following passages represent this view:

The people of foreign countries think on the basis of what really exists, whatever they think of, and even though the real thing clashes with their original ideas, beliefs, and opinions and is even harmful to them, they do not reject the real thing but create ideas and acts on the basis of the real thing. On the contrary, in the Eastern tradition of learning, once someone has learnt that a white object is black, he sticks to what he has learnt, and though another person tries to show that the white thing is in fact white on the basis of evidence, he does not listen to the person and sticks to his original idea. So, the people in the East do not try to learn what really is, do not want to learn it, and are even afraid of it. As a result, the people's way of living, law, and politics are not based on what really is but on the empty and un-substantive, so their way of thinking is more inclined to the empty and un-substantive than to the real or true.⁴⁵⁵

The Whites are the smartest, most diligent, and most brave among the races. They are spreading across the world, winning over the lower races and occupying their land and resources. Therefore, a race that does not learn from the Whites' studies and morals and does not keep pace with them in progress is being exterminated. For example, tens of millions of American native Indians have nearly been exterminated, due to their failure to learn the

⁴⁵⁵ TS 24 February 1897.

Whites' studies.⁴⁵⁶

The ambivalent perspective on the future of Korea appears to be related to the influence of Social Darwinism. The view of civilisational development altered slightly under the nineteenth-century intellectual environment represented by Darwin's evolutionary biology, as the idea of 'a struggle for existence' became prevalent together with the publication of Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* (1858). Social Darwinism, a derivative of Darwin's theory of natural selection, posited that civilisational development was the result of humans' struggles for existence, which could easily be drawn to a worldview justifying an imperialist, racist interpretation of the world. Viewing the world as a competitive venue for survival or diminution, it provided a logic that could be used for the legitimization of Western powers' imperialist encroachment on other regions on the globe.⁴⁵⁷ The idea of 'social progress' and 'civilisation development' were thus imbued with the Social Darwinist perspective.⁴⁵⁸ This intellectual environment permeated *Tongnip sinmun* editors' view of civilisation. The editors' sense of crisis and ambivalence for their future was, therefore, deeply associated with their

⁴⁵⁶ TS 24 June 1897.

⁴⁵⁷ According to Mike Hawkins, Darwin himself attempted to extend his theory of natural selection to men's "mental and social phenomena," so he was an obvious and major architect of Social Darwinism. Moreover, he argues that, although Social Darwinism is of substance, it is characterised by "indeterminacy" or "flexibility", which means that the theory or "world view" provides rich sources for different rhetorical uses and interpretations. This open-endedness gave Social Darwinism a theoretical success. However, by depending on the assumption of "struggle for survival," it included a malign aspect. Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), part 1.

⁴⁵⁸ According to M. Hawkins, Darwin used the concept of 'progress' in his main work *Origins* to indicate the result of natural selection, and saw 'savages' as caught in the most primitive stage of development (Hawkins, 36). This means that the eighteenth-century developmental view of society/civilisation was tinged with (Social) Darwinism. On the other hand, the other evolutionary theorist, Herbert Spencer, shifted 'civilisational development' to a process of social evolution, which was the result of individuals' struggle for existence. Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*, ch.4.

interpretation of the world predicated on Social Darwinism.⁴⁵⁹

On the other hand, the four stages theory of civilisation development in *Tongnip sinmun* was a slightly altered form of the eighteenth-century version. According to previous studies, the four stages theory was introduced into East Asia through François Guizot's and Henry Thomas Buckle's books on civilisation, which had been published before Darwin's *Origins*.⁴⁶⁰ These works, which followed the progressive view of history and discussed civilisation from the point of view of Europeans, were the sources that influenced Fukuzawa Yukichi by being introduced first into Japan.⁴⁶¹ Korean reformist intellectuals who studied or

⁴⁵⁹ The editorials of *Tongnip sinmun*, however, do not contain a vocabulary clearly indicating the direct influence of Social Darwinism, such as *usŭng yŏlp'ae* (優勝劣敗, the superior wins and the inferior loses), *chŏkja saengjon* (適者生存, survival of the fittest), *saengjon kyŏngjaeng* (生存競爭, competition for survival), and *yakyuk kangsik* (弱肉強食, the strong eats the flesh of the weak). Yet, in an editorial in *Taechosŏn tongnip hyŏphoe hoebo* (The Bulletin of the Independence Club of Great Korea, November 30th 1896–July 31st 1897), the bi-monthly bulletin of the Independence Club, the editor uses the Social Darwinist expressions “*yakyuk kangsik*” and “*usŭng yŏlp'ae*.” This means that already in 1897 the Social Darwinist worldview was known among Korean intellectuals. *Taechosŏn tongnip hyŏphoe hoebo*, (no. 16) 15 July 1897.

⁴⁶⁰ It is important to note that Guizot's and Buckle's books were published before Darwin's *Origins* was published, which indicates that the view of civilisation in the two books were more in the continuation of the eighteenth-century stages theory than of Social Darwinism. Korean reformist intellectuals' adoption of the four stages theory of civilisation development model in the 1880s and '90s can be understood in this context. Indeed, Hawkins locates the origin of Social Darwinism in the year 1859, which was the time when Darwin's *Origins* began to influence Western intellectuals. (Hawkins, 58) The two books by which Fukuzawa was influenced in forming his view of civilisation are: François Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe* (*Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*) (published originally in 1828 and translated by William Hazlitt into English in 1846), and Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* 3 vols. (London: Longman Green, 1857). For the view that Fukuzawa was seriously influenced by these books, see Tozawa Yukio (戸沢行夫), “Kaisetsu(解説)” in *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (文明論之概略: 福澤諭吉著作集 四卷) (東京: 慶應義塾大學校出版會, 2004), pp. 339–91.

⁴⁶¹ Maruyama Masao, an interpreter of Fukuzawa Yukichi, also confirmed this course of transmission of the Enlightenment civilisation discourse to Fukuzawa. However, he did not seriously examine the problems of the civilisation discourse and its linkage to Social Darwinist perspective. See Maruyama Masao and Kato Shuichi, *Pōnyōk kwa ilbon ūi kŭndae* [Translation and Japanese Modernity], trans. by Im Sŏngmo (Seoul: Isan, 2000), pp. 150–51.

stayed in Japan for years in connection with Fukuzawa adopted this view of civilisation.⁴⁶²

What, then, are the fundamental grounds that determined this particular conception of time? It seems to be deeply related to the *rationalisation* of human thinking as a condition of modern times. As the traditional frames of thought were destabilised, modern men directly interrogated the *raison d'être*, or purpose, of things and affairs and, in doing so, were soon led to how to achieve that purpose most *effectively*. Thinking in terms of *purpose* and the *efficient means* that correspond to it was a process of rationalisation in human thinking. This rationalisation was deeply embedded in modern men's conception of time, providing the standard of advance and backwardness.

In Korea, this process of rationalisation was accelerated in the course of the late nineteenth century. The traditionally established conditions of thinking were being rapidly destabilised in this period, as the Confucian ethical system, which had provided the reference for people's judgement, lost its hegemony. Together with the decline of the Confucian normative way of thinking, the reformist intellectuals formed a framework of seeing the world in a rather factual, empirical, and realist manner, as well as in an intensely comparative outlook. This was combined with the consciousness of Korea's status at the time as a semi-enlightened country, and this blindly drove more radical reformists to model themselves on the advanced civilisation of Western countries. The sense of backwardness in the race for time upon the basis of the disconnection with traditional norms thus divested them of the leeway to make a prudent judgment, and simply led them to internalise the way of thinking that civilisational standards existed outside their own country. *Tongnip sinmun* editors'

⁴⁶² Following M. Masao's view, Ha Yöngsön makes clear the course of transmission of this kind of civilisation discourse into Korea in the late nineteenth century. Ha Yöngsön, "Kündae han'guk ūi munmyöng kae'nyö'm toip sa," 36–65.

criticism of their culture and customs arose in this context.

5. The Ideal of *Munmyǒng kaehwa* and the Reality of Korea: Two Different Views of Contemporary Korea

The replacement of the traditional conception of time with the modern or progressive one gave the reformist intellectuals a deontological view of *munmyǒng kaehwa*, but it left a big gap between the ideal and reality. In the late 1890s, Korea was still in severe social disorder as a result of both domestic and international political troubles, but the conservative government did not want to initiate a radical reform. In this situation, there arose two perspectives of Korea: one, balanced between the ideal of *munmyǒng kaehwa* and the dismal reality of Korea and optimistic of the future of Korea, and the other, inclined to *munmyǒng kaehwa* at the expense of national independence, and pessimistic of its future.

These two contrasting views appear in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* and its English edition *The Independent*. At first glance, they all seem to be written from a common experience of contemporary Korean society, conveying identical messages throughout the whole issues. But a more careful reading underlines the difference between editorials and the contrasting views of the editors. When Sō Chaep'il (徐載弼, Philip Jaisohn, 1864–1951) assumed the editorship from 7 April 1896 to 19 May 1898, his editorials largely balanced a deontological and a critical view of Korea with appraisals of its real conditions, and he rarely fell into pessimism. He pointed out problems concretely and criticised them appropriately. In the wake of the experiences of running the newspaper and teaching at the *Paichai* (培材) School, he remained confident that Koreans were capable of making a modern change by themselves:

Pessimists may say what they please in regard to the future of Korea, but we see that there is a hope, a great hope at that, for the regeneration of this nation in the near future. We say this, not because we see things through rosy hued glasses, but through unprejudiced spectacles. Our hope and faith are based upon many incidents that have come to our notice lately. The students of the different schools give us more hope than any other class of Koreans, especially those children who are under foreigners' supervision. The boys in the schools under a foreign teacher are entirely different from the lads who are idling away their time at their homes or who waste the precious moments of their young lives in committing to memory of the Chinese classics. These students who are taught by the foreigners have the same kind of ambitions as the boys in European and American schools. They are eager for knowledge; they acquire independent, manly habits, spirit and dispositions; they are ambitious to be well informed on all subjects so that they can converse and deal with the peoples of the world on equal terms; they look down on those who are neither honourable nor patriotic; they realize that the strength of a nation lies in the united effort of the people of the whole nation; and above all, they understand the necessity of reforming the political and social customs of their country.

A few days ago, we witnessed the procedure of the new Debating Society of the *Paichai* School students. The orderliness of the members, strict enforcement of the rules of parliamentary usages, the earnestness of discussing the question before the meeting, eagerness of taking a part in the procedure by every member present and the fearless manner in which they expressed their views were quite pleasing to the hearts of those who wish for Korea's welfare.⁴⁶³

In his editorial which was continued in the next issue, Sō concluded that Korean people possessed all necessary qualities to make their nation prosperous and independent, and

⁴⁶³ *The Independent* 3 December 1896. In the citation, "the rules of parliamentary usages" indicates *Robert's Rules of Order* (1872) by Henry M. Robert, which was translated by Yun Ch'ihō with the title of *Ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik* (議會通用規則) in April 1898. The rules were used at *Paichai* School's discussions and the Independence Club's regular discussions (*T'oronhoe*). For this fact, see Ryu Ch'unghi, "Kachwagi Chosŏn ŭi minhoe hwaldong kwa ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik: ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik ŭi yut'ong kwa pŏn'nyŏk yangsang ŭl chungsim ŭro" [The Activities of Civic Associations and *Ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik* in Early Modern Korea: The Circulation and Translation of *Ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik*], *Tongbang hakji* 167 (2014), pp. 1–32.

the only requirement in bringing out these qualities was proper guidance.⁴⁶⁴ This optimistic view was carried over to his outlook of politics. He understood it in volitional rather than structural terms. His approach to break through the dependent policies of the conservative government in relation to Russia in early 1898, and his organisation of mass street demonstrations, showed this volitional standpoint clearly. His view of politics is well shown in the following editorial:

The people of Chosŏn have many of their own rights, but they do not seem to have those rights just because they do not use them. If every person in the nation wants to make Chosŏn a wealthy and powerful country, then this will be achieved in a few years, whatever country interrupts it. If every person in Chosŏn wants things to go on as they are, then that will happen, and, if they want things to be worse than now, that will also happen. Therefore, we think that whether Chosŏn becomes prosperous or poor lies in the hands of the people, not in the hands of the officials.⁴⁶⁵

Whether due to his volitional view of history or his strong will, Sŏ did not suffer from the conflict between a deontological ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* and the reality of his country. The ideal and reality were balanced in his editorials.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ *The Independent* 5 December 1896.

⁴⁶⁵ *TS* 24 August 1897.

⁴⁶⁶ Yi Sŭngman (李承晩, Syngman Rhee, 1875–1965), one of Sŏ's students and a young radical leader in the 1898 street demonstrations and, later, the first president of the Republic of Korea, was also optimistic regarding the future of Korea. In the late 1890s, he was a fervently patriotic nationalist and a young intellectual educated in the mission school, *Paichai*. He was acutely aware of the gap between the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* and the dismal reality of Korea. For him, the need of modern reform of Korea for the sake of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was counterbalanced by the value of national independence, as is seen in his book *Tongnip chŏngsin* (The Spirit of National Independence), composed when he was jailed in the Seoul Prison and completed in 1904. Yi saw the current conditions of Korea from a historical perspective, assessed the political situation from a strategic and realist standpoint, and did not succumb to a purely normative understanding of political affairs. He held a steadfast belief that the most important task for Korea at the time was to change its political system. He definitely stated that “the reason why Korea is now placed in this wretched situation is due

By contrast, Yun Ch'ihō (尹致昊, 1865–1945), who was educated in foreign countries from his mid-teens to late twenties and edited *Tongnip sinmun* from May to December 1898, was more deontological in his attitude towards *munmyōng kaehwa* and more critical of the gloomy realities of Korea. He was not eager to consider concrete and strategic ways to improve the real conditions of Korea. His viewpoint was excessively critical, deontological, and structural, and showed little strategic insight into the problems of his country:

If things go on as they are, Koreans will be deprived of all their jobs and businesses by foreigners; all of their houses in central Seoul will belong to Chinese, Japanese, or Westerners; and all Koreans' economic lives will be exploited by foreigners. It is truly regrettable, but the blame should be placed on Koreans themselves. If we are diligent, sincere and talented, and if we do well whatever we do and, as a result, become rich, then why will we have to fear foreigners, however many live in Seoul? The way to get out of this dangerous situation is not by lamenting, weeping, swearing, resenting or rueing, but by stopping the old ways of living, such as sleeping and eating without achieving anything and depending on others. Instead, we should eagerly learn foreigners' arts, orderliness, diligence and sincerity. If we do so, then we will be able to protect our houses and even our nation. Contrarily, if we stay in an idle, nasty, disorderly, and insincere state, as we have done, we will lose this city and nation to foreigners. I do not know what is more urgent than this.⁴⁶⁷

As is seen in this citation, he mainly approached issues with a structural view, attributing problems to Koreans' culture and customs and the nation's characters; he lacked a balanced understanding between the ideal of his country and its gloomy reality. And he readily settled for the reformation which stressed *education*, a gradualist method to treat the matters, and saw the absence of it as the key reason for Korea's problems at the time. Only by

to the fact that we have not changed the political regime.” Yi Sŭngman, *Tongnip chōngsin* (Seoul: Chōngdong ch'ulp'ansa, 1993).

⁴⁶⁷ TS 18 July 1898.

educating the ignorant and by changing them into modern men, he thought, could Koreans hope to advance toward a civilised world:

For our nation to get out of this state of weakness and to achieve enlightenment and progress, what is urgent is not to make the palace splendid and to increase the army and navy. It lies in establishing many elementary schools. We hope that the government will exert itself to educate children in the primary schools, not spending a penny on founding a high school or a university.⁴⁶⁸

In a similar way, Yun opposed a radical approach to the problems of politics, such as establishing a lower chamber of national assembly and providing the common people with the right to vote. His gradualist, or anti-radical, approach to politics is well shown in the following editorial:⁴⁶⁹

In an ignorant society, whether it is ruled by one person or many, the society's going into the wrong direction will not make any difference. Rather, in an ignorant world, monarchy is more durable than democracy, as is proved by the history of both the past and the present and by the current situation in Europe and America. Therefore, whichever country it is that tries to establish a lower chamber of national assembly, the education of the people must take precedence for them to have the ability to discuss the topics of the country and to feel responsible for national affairs, just as his or her own private affairs. However, our people were not educated for hundreds of years during which they were uninterested in national affairs. If those affairs do not affect them, they will not mind even if the state is subject to a foreign country, as long as they can find their own meals. They do not know about liberty

⁴⁶⁸ TS 6 July 1898.

⁴⁶⁹ I think that Yun Ch'ihō's pacifist, gradualist approach to national problems, instead of a radical and political approach, is closely associated with his weak and timid personal character. At several entries of his diary, he confesses his weak personal character. His rather structural than volitional approach to the stalemates of contemporary Korea was also linked with his personality. His sixty-year diary is an important historical source as well as his personal life accounts. Yun Ch'ihō, *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi* [Yun Ch'ihō's Diary], edited by Kuksa p'yōnch'an wiwōnhoe (Seoul: T'amgudang, 1974). Hereafter, *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi*.

and human rights. And even if they have heard of these ideas, they regard licence as liberty, and seeking self-interest at the expense of others' as being human rights. Therefore, granting political rights to this kind of people and establishing a lower chamber will lead to a national crisis... Only after the people are enlightened in 40-50 years will it be possible to think of building a lower chamber.⁴⁷⁰

As is shown from the above passage, his structural approach to problems forced him to prefer enlightening the people through education to a transformation of the state through political re-arrangements. Furthermore, his structural view led him to see the problems of Korea as those of nationality, as several parts of his diary show it. He ascribed the problems of the Korean nation to the “absolute control” of Confucianism, which is inborn with corruption, perceives women as inferior, and teaches “go-backism.”⁴⁷¹ He thus wrote that “The blood of the [Korean] race has to be changed by a new education, a new government, and a new religion.”⁴⁷² In order to cure the nation of these fundamental problems, he was even ready to abandon national sovereignty already in the 1890s: “Since the Koreans are thus incapable and unwilling to better their condition, it may be a mercy to them for Japan or

⁴⁷⁰ TS 27 July 1898. Shin Yong-ha has seen this editorial as the Independence Club's opinion concerning the establishment of a lower chamber, but it must be attributed to Yun's own personal view. This misjudgement occurred because he failed to capture the difference of editorials in accordance with different editors. Chandra made the same mistake by arguing that Sō Chaep'il and Yun Ch'ihō shared their views on the Club's political participation and its quest for a national assembly in 1898. He failed to discern Yun's more moderateness from Sō's radicalness. This misinterpretation was repeated by Kenneth M. Wells. Analysing Protestant intellectuals' actions and ideas for the rebuilding of Korea in the years from 1896 to 1937 in terms of “self-reconstruction nationalism,” he interpreted *Tongnip sinmun* as Korean Protestant intellectuals' accounts and depicted the two main editors, Sō and Yun, as having the same opinion. Moreover, he exaggerated the relationship between their religion Protestantism and their socio-political opinions. Though at some editorials they did not hide their preference for Christianity, it is difficult to find a direct relationship between their religion and their modernistic character. Their general reformist characteristic was not much different from Kim Ok'kyun's, Pak Yōnghyo's, and other non-Protestant reformists'. See Shin Yong-ha, *Tongnip hyōphoe yōn'gu*, 363; Vipin Chandra, *Imperialism, Resistance, and Reform*, ch.8; Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), ch. 2.

⁴⁷¹ *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi*, 12 December 1893.

⁴⁷² *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi*, 1 February 1899.

England to take possession of the peninsula altogether.”⁴⁷³

Reformist intellectuals with contrasting views of the conditions of Korea in the 1890s responded to Japanese colonial domination differently. What turned out in historical facts tells us that they acted in line with their assessments of Korea in the late 1890s. The optimists, Sŏ Chaep’il and Yi Sŭngman, worked to recover the sovereignty of Korea, while Yun Ch’iho fell to a Japanese collaborator. Yet Yun’s case should be seen as an extraordinary case because he was educated in foreign academic institutions and stayed in foreign countries from the age of 15 up to 29. During those years, he lost opportunities to cultivate his national identity and patriotism. His timid and introverted personality also encouraged him to see problems in structural terms and to hold his excessive commitment to *munmyŏng kaehwa*. In this regard, Chŏng Yonghwa’s view that Yun Ch’iho is a typical case of the reformists among those who adopted the perspective of *munmyŏng kaehwa* should be reconsidered.⁴⁷⁴ Some scholars’ argument that the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* prompted Korean reformist intellectuals to collaborate with the Japanese colonial authorities is acceptable,⁴⁷⁵ but it fails to explain why some reformists fell to collaboration, while others did not. Among the reformists of the 1890s, the cases of Sŏ Chaep’il and Yi Sŭngman show that the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* could be balanced with an optimistic vision of contemporary Korea. This means that the idea of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was not the only factor that drove some reformists to fall into collaboration with the Japanese colonial authorities. While accepting that the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* affected their way of thinking to a considerable extent, other factors

⁴⁷³ Yun Chi-Ho *Ilgi*, 28 September 1894.

⁴⁷⁴ Chŏng Yonghwa, “Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ūi tŏt.”

⁴⁷⁵ Chŏng Yonghwa and Andre Schmid have suggested this perspective. See Chŏng Yonghwa, “Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ūi tŏt,” 297–314; Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 136–38.

including personal and situational ones influenced their ideas and actions significantly.⁴⁷⁶

This chapter has examined two important but misunderstood subjects regarding the reformists' thoughts and acts. It has aimed to elucidate, firstly, the origin of the reformists' self-negating psychology and, secondly, the factors that forced them to fall into collaboration. Concretely speaking, regarding the first theme, we have argued that the shift in the conception of time, especially the reformists' adoption of a progressive view of time, lay in their embracing of the developmental view of civilisation, which saw Korean culture and customs as low-developed. The reformists took the stages theory of civilisation for granted, as they deserted their long-maintained normative values in judging things and affairs and instead took a factual, empirical, and realist view of the world as their main outlook. This disconnection with their normative tradition largely engendered a self-negating or self-deprecating psychology. Regarding the second theme, we have illuminated that the pursuit of *munmyōng kaehwa* was not the clear and direct reason for the reformists' falling to collaboration.

⁴⁷⁶ Taking a critical stance toward Korean historians' nationalist and moralist approach to Yun Ch'ihō, Dr. Koen De Ceuster has argued that, when interpreting Yun's falling to collaboration, it is important to consider sufficient "historical situations" and his "personal motives." On the other hand, Yun Ch'ihō's case is similar to that of Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950), the famous writer in the colonial period and one of the most notorious collaborators. They were mainly educated in their teens and twenties in foreign countries: for Yun, Japan, China, and the U.S., and for Yi, Japan. They also liked to see things and affairs structurally and culturally. Interestingly, Michael Shin has found Yi's culturalist way of thinking in his adoption of the Kantian idea of "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*), which Yi learnt of while studying in Japan. Shin has also emphasised that an attempt to reduce Yi Kwangsu's collaboration to a single factor like Social Darwinism does not tell the entire truth. This point is applied to the case of Yun Ch'ihō. His idea of *munmyōng kaehwa* was not a direct reason for his collaboration. For Dr. Koen De Ceuster's view on Yun's collaboration, see Koen De Ceuster, "Yun Ch'ihō ūi ch'inil hyōp'nyōk e taehan chaep'yōngka" [Revisiting Yun Ch'ihō's Collaboration with the Japanese Authorities] in *Yun Ch'ihō ūi saeng'ae wa sasang*, ed. by Chwa'ong Yun Ch'ihō munhwa saōphoe (Seoul: Ulyu munhwasa, 1998), pp. 331–50. For Yi's collaboration with the Japanese authorities, see Yi Chunsik, "Ilje kangjōmgi ch'inil chisikin ūi hyōnsil insik: Yi Kwangsu ūi kyōng'u" [The Collaborationist Intellectuals' Understanding of Their Time in the Colonial Period: The Case of Yi Kwangsu], *Yōksa wa hyōnsil* 37 (2000), pp. 175–97; Michael D. Shin, "Yi Kwang-su: The Collaborator as Modernist against Modernity," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71 (1) (2012), pp. 115–20.

Researchers have thought that the reformists' idea of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was the main source of the problem. However, *munmyŏng kaehwa* was compatible with the value of national independence, though its somewhat toxic effects are admitted. This tells us that we should consider multiple factors that influenced a reformist intellectual's falling to collaboration, including one's personal life and situational reasons.

All these arguments were arranged not only to remove the foggy state of the negative image of the reformists, but also to clarify their contributions to Korean history and the unconsciously driven pitfalls of their thought system. For a long time, the reformists' political thinking was shelved because of the stigmatisation that came with their collaboration with the Japanese colonial authorities. As we have discussed, however, the problem was their cultural ideas, specifically their idea of civilisation prompted by their disconnection from the old normative tradition. On the other hand, from a long-term development perspective of Korean political thinking, the negative side of the reformists' ideas was closely linked with their positive side, i.e., their political ideas. The reformists' critical stance on the Confucian ethical ideal, which was an inheritance of *Sirhak* scholars, encouraged them to take the developmental model of civilisation and Social Darwinism for granted. The negative side of the late nineteenth-century reformists' ideas was thus closely linked with the development of Korean political thinking itself. The negative side was invigorated by the significant pressure of modernisation of the late nineteenth century. The momentous pressure of change at the time, therefore, generated the reformists' self-negating ideas.

Conclusion

The current study is an attempt to identify a core characteristic of Korean political thinking of the present time, specifically its historical development until it reached the initial stage of the present form. The democratic and republican political ideal of modern Korea was formed in this historical process as the result of the long-term process of continuity and change of Korean political thinking. Contrary to previous studies in Korean political science academia, which located the origin of the democratic and republican age of Korean history at the time of Korea's liberation from colonial rule, this study traced this origin back to the late nineteenth century, particularly the reformist intellectuals' political thinking that took form as they sought to accommodate the changing times. More importantly, this study has asserted that the democratic and constitutional/republican elements that the reformists held were not simply new ideas based on modern Western political ideas, but were built on an aspect of Confucian political ideas that showed familiarity with those Western ideas. In this context, this study opened with an analysis of two core aspects of Confucian political ideas in Chosŏn, and traced this down to the reformists of the 1880s and '90s. What we found is that the reformists' worldview and core political thinking lay the foundation of the 'modern politics' of Korea.

Although previous studies had noticed the conflation of Confucian and modern ideas in the reformists' thinking, little attention was paid to how Confucian political ideas affected the reformists' reconstruction of political thinking. This study conceptualised two connected but diverse elements of Confucian political thinking as 'political necessity' and 'an ethical ideal'. In terms of worldview, the former had a close affinity with a rational, practical, and

empirical way of seeing the world, while the latter related to a normative or ethical view of the world. From a long-term historical perspective, the first great momentum of intellectual change occurred in the late eighteenth century, as reformist Confucians began paying serious attention to practical matters instead of focusing on the metaphysical debates of Zhu Xi's philosophy. This intellectual turn was largely inherited by the reformists of the late nineteenth century. The late nineteenth-century reformists' worldview was an extension of the eighteenth-century reformist Confucians' basic premises of seeing the world.

The late nineteenth-century reformists treated the two elements of Confucian political thinking differently. They relied on the political necessity ideas, especially *minbon* ideas, in reconstructing new political thinking. Chapter Three demonstrated how they employed relevant passages of classical Confucian texts related to political necessity in order to justify their ideas on commerce and industrial development. Chapter Five developed the liberal and democratic model of government on the basis of the Confucian *minbon* ideas of governance. Chapter Six showed how democratic ideas of legitimacy were developed in reference to the Confucian *minbon* ideas. In this way, most of the ideas that the reformists re-elucidated and employed for their purpose of the reconstruction of political thinking were those of political necessity. Except for moderate reformists like Yu Kilchun, the ethical ideal that had run as a core in Confucian thought was scarcely invoked. The ethical ideas largely retreated to private ethics, while in the public domain new values centred on rights, influenced by modern Western political thinking, replaced the Confucian values.

This pattern of continuity and discontinuity was not different in the reformists' way of seeing the world. *Sirhak* scholars' more rational, practical, empirical, and positivist view reflected the retrieval of the political necessity ideas of Confucian political thought. The late

nineteenth-century reformists largely inherited this worldview, and invigorated the factual, empirical, and realist side of the world. On the other hand, the Confucian ethical world, which was in balance with the factual world in *Sirhak* scholars, lost its viability within the reformists' way of seeing the world, with the exception of moderates such as Yu Kilchun.

This factually tilted view of the world had some positive effects. Above all, the reformists could grasp that the dominant wind on the globe was blowing toward *pugang* (wealth and power). As a standard for evaluating the world, *pugang* led them to study societal features of wealthy and strong countries. They appreciated the value of liberty for its contribution to wealth and power in Western countries. The reformists associated the parliamentary system as a contributing factor with the West's wealth and power. However, their factual way of seeing the world had a cost. Disconnected from the long-standing values and norms, the reformists perceived civilisation on the basis of material and practical criteria, such as convenience, efficiency, and systematisation. While understanding civilisation with these criteria, they were easily led to adopt the four stages model of civilisation development and regarded their own civilisation as a backward one. This view of civilisation engendered a self-deprecating psychology in some reformists.

From what we have discussed, we can discern two implications on the study of Korean political thinking. Firstly, the series of major intellectual trends in the history of Korean political thinking since the Chosŏn dynasty – that is, Neo-Confucianism, *Sirhak*, and *Kaehwa sasang* – are continuous. Previous studies failed to clarify the continuity and discontinuity between these idea systems, as they did not have a relevant conceptual tool to analyse the changes. What we have found in this study is that the late nineteenth-century reformists grounded their new political thinking in an aspect of Confucian political ideas. We

have argued that their reconstruction of political thinking toward the democratic and constitutional/republican forms was to a great extent stimulated by their political traditions. The Confucian *minbon* ideas and related political practices in Chosŏn were inherited by the reformists, albeit in an altered fashion. As is demonstrated in theoretical studies on tradition, one cannot accept an entirely novel thought without a medium of familiar ones. In this regard, the *minbon* ideas functioned as the medium between Confucian political thinking and the reformists' democratic and constitutional/republican reconstruction of political thinking.

Secondly, the negative side of the reformists' thinking is closely linked to the positive side as two different sides of the same coin. From a long-term view of Korean political thinking, the ideas of the late nineteenth-century reformists form a mainstream of its development, as the intellectual changes since late Chosŏn favoured the political necessity ideas over ethical ideals. This inclination began with *Sirhak* scholars and was strengthened by the reformists of the late nineteenth century. The decline of the Confucian ethical ideal was a long-term trend that started in the eighteenth century and was inherited by the reformists' sceptical view on traditional normative values. This intellectual proclivity was formed in line with the calling of the times, for the social system based on the Confucian ethical ideal had been increasingly called into question since the late eighteenth century. So, from a long-term perspective, the late nineteenth-century reformists' distrust of traditional culture and customs based on Confucian ethical ideals was an integral part of the development of Confucian political thinking in Chosŏn Korea. Yet the legitimate reflection tipped over into a downcast attitude under the vehement pressure of modernisation in the late nineteenth century. The self-negating psychology was therefore a consequence of the momentous and drastic impact toward modern transformation in the midst of the imperialist world order.

This study has conceptualised the two core components of Confucian political thought with general terms of the history of political thought. While this conceptual framework is helpful in redressing the previous focus on ethical philosophy as the key of Confucian political thought, it has not fully succeeded in registering the ideas of political necessity in a concrete and comprehensive way. Besides the well-known core ideas, such as *minbon*, the respect for public opinion, and institutional checks and balances in Chosŏn politics, more ideas and practices should be searched for through classical texts and primary historical sources in order for this conceptual framework to be established as a meaningful perspective. This task is to be conducted in following research.

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English summary

As Korea's recent history has seen drastic transformations, including modernisation following Western encroachment, colonisation by Japan, ideological strife and the division into two separate states, researchers have usually read the history of Korean political thinking since the nineteenth century as one of discontinuity. The transition from traditional Confucian political thinking to current democratic and republican political ideals has been regarded as a discrete process. Such an appraisal is based on the observation of historical contexts rather than on an examination of the theoretical elements of the idea systems. Combining the latter approach with the former, and specifically breaking down Confucian political ideas into two distinct elements, this study establishes a continuity between Confucian political thinking and democratic and republican ideas. It does so by rereading the political ideas of the late nineteenth-century reformists (Kaehwap'a), as their ideas were formulated during a transitional period between Confucian and modern political thinking. A predominant view on the reformists was that they abandoned traditions and went for all-out Westernisation. What is missed in such an appraisal is the compatibility of some elements in Confucian political thinking with modern political ideas. By adopting the customary ethics-centred view of Confucianism, such a reading overlooks the very political nature of Confucian ideas that are consonant with modern political ideas. This study embarks on a theoretical examination of Confucian political thinking through the application of a dichotomous perspective conceptualised as a tension between 'political necessity' and 'ethical ideal.' Through an analysis of various concepts used in the formulation of reformist thinking, this study argues that Confucian ideas on the political necessity spectrum functioned as a medium for the adoption of liberal and democratic political ideas. Moreover, this study shows that the adoption of a modern worldview in response to ideas of political necessity resulted in either a positive or a negative outlook on the world.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Korea heeft een turbulente recente geschiedenis doorgemaakt met vele ingrijpende veranderingen waaronder modernisering volgend op Westerse inmenging, kolonisering door Japan, ideologische tweedeling en opsplitsing in twee staten. Onderzoekers hebben de geschiedenis van het Koreaanse politieke denken sinds de negentiende eeuw dan ook vaak gelezen vanuit het perspectief van discontinuïteit, en de transitie van traditionele Confucianistische politieke denkbeelden naar de hedendaagse democratische en republikeinse idealen als onderscheiden. Deze interpretatie volgt uit een inschatting van de algemene historische context eerder dan uit een grondige theoretische analyse van de successieve ideeënsystemen. Door de focus te verleggen naar wat de twee systemen verbindt, en door Confucianistische politieke ideeën te lezen vanuit twee onderscheiden perspectieven, toont dit onderzoek een continuïteit aan tussen het Confucianistische politieke denken en de latere democratische en republikeinse ideeën. Het doet dit door het politieke ideeëngoed van de laat negentiende eeuwse hervormers (kaehwap'a) te herlezen in het besef dat hun ideeën vorm kregen in een transitieperiode van Confucianistisch naar modern politiek denken. Tot nog toe was de dominante lezing dat deze hervormers de tradities verwierpen en volmondig kozen voor een algehele overname van Westerse ideeën. Wat een dergelijke lezing over het hoofd zag is het feit dat elementen uit het Confucianistische politieke denken aansloten bij moderne politieke ideeën. Door louter te focussen op de klassieke ethische lezing bleven deze specifiek politieke aspecten van het Confucianisme onderbelicht. Dit onderzoek leest het Confucianistische politieke denken vanuit het perspectief van een spanningsboog tussen 'politieke noodzaak' en 'ethisch ideaal.' Deze binaire visie op het Confucianisme laat zien hoe hervormers steunen op aspecten van Confucianistische 'politieke noodzaak' als katalysator voor de aanvaarding van liberale en democratische politieke begrippen. Verder toont dit onderzoek aan dat het moderne wereldbeeld dat zich ontwikkelde vanuit een focus op 'politieke noodzaak' zowel positieve als negatieve aspecten vertoonde.

Curriculum Vitae

Choong-Yeol Kim was born on an island in Chölla province of South Korea on 26 October 1973, and finished his primary and middle schools there. He moved to Kyönggi Province for his high school study. After graduating from a high school in 1992, he entered Hallym University in 1993 to study Political Science. During his undergraduate days, he finished the two-year compulsory military service. After completing a bachelor's degree in 1999, he entered the graduate school of Seoul National University in 2000 for a master's degree in the History of Political Thought. He finished his master's degree in 2002 with a thesis entitled "A Study of Law and Politics in the Political Theory of Jürgen Habermas." He continued his graduate studies at PhD level at the same university, but switched to the University of Cambridge (UK) in 2005 to pursue his PhD research there. While in Cambridge, his academic focus turned from a strictly theoretical approach of Western political thought to a more historical approach of Korean political thought. This change in both subject and method resulted in February 2016 in a switch to Leiden University, where he found the environment and supervision that matched his interest and focus.

