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

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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]

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[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'ŭi* [State-building and Wealthy Country: Lectures on the History of Modern Korean Politics] (Seoul: Saeng'gak ŭi na'mu, 2004); Kim Yŏngmyŏng, *Han'guk ŭi 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 ŭi 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 transitionary 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

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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 ŭn minju konghwaguk ida* [Republic of Korea is a Democratic Republic] (Seoul: Tolbegye, 2013); Suh Hee-kyung (Sŏ Higyŏng), *Taehan min'guk hŏnpŏb ŭi 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, *Kŭndae han'guk ŭi 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 Sŏyu kyŏnmun 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 *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*], 朝鮮學報 159 (1996), pp. 111–44; Chang Insŏng, *Changso ŭi kukje chŏngch’i sasang: tong’asia chilsŏ pyŏndongki ŭi 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: Sŏul taehakgyo ch’ulp’anbu, 2002); 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).

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

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[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

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[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

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[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 multiplicity[18]; 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

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[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: Taean 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]

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[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

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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

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[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

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[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 Yŏngsik, Pak Yŏnghyo, and Sŏ Kwangpŏm 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 Chosŏn 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

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[33] In a number of books published mainly in the 1970s and '80s, Yi Kwangnin, Kang Chaeŏn, 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 Chosŏn'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 yŏn'gu* [Studies of Reform Thoughts in Modern Korea] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1979); ____, *Kaehwap'a wa kaehwa sasang yŏn'gu* [Studies of the Reformist Faction and Their Thoughts] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1989); Kang Chae'ŏn, *Han'guk ŭi kaehwa sasang* [Reform Thoughts in Modern Korea], trans. by Chŏng Ch'angyŏl (Seoul: Pibong ch'ulp'ansa, 1984); Shin Yong-ha, *Han'guk kŭndae sahoe sasangsa yŏn'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 Eŭnsuk, *Kapsin chŏngbyŏn yŏn'gu* [Studies of the 1884 *Kapsin coup d'état*] (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 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 Yŏngik), *Kabo kyŏngjang yŏn'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 Hyŏnjong, *Hanguk kŭndae kukga ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa kabo kaehyŏk* [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'iho, 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

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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) Vipan 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]

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[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]

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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 ŭi 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: Purŭn 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

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main framework. Among Japanese researchers, Tsukiasi Tatsuhiko and Oka Katsuhiko took the similar perspective in interpreting Yu Kilchun. See Chŏng Yonghwa, *Munmyŏng ŭi 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 ŭi kŭndae kukga kusang e kwanhan yŏngu: Kaehwagi munmyŏng Kaehwaronja e nat'anan chŏnt'ong kwa kŭndae lŭl chungsim ŭro" [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 ŭi yugyo chŏk chŏngch'i chihyŏng kwa munmyŏngsa chŏk chŏnhwangi ŭi wigi ― chŏnhyŏng'gi ŭi kunju kojong ŭl chungsim ŭlo" [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 ŭi kukche chŏngch'i sasang: tong'asia chilsŏ pyŏndongki ŭi 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 ŭi sangsangnyŏk: kuhanmal Kim Yunsik ŭi 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 Sŏyu kyŏnmun no bunmei ron teki riken kunshu sei ron; 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.

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 Chŏnghi (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

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[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 Chŏnghi 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

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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.