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

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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 zhilüe* (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

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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 ŭi 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 (徐繼畬, 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" (自强) 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

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[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, *Sŏngsewiŏn: 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, *Sŏngsewiŏn: 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 conservativism 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 ŭi 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 esŏŭi yurŏp kukjepŏp ŭi suyong e kwan'han koch'al: man'guk gongbŏp ŭi pŏn'yŏk ŭl chungsim ŭro" [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, Kŏmundo, 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.

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[197] British occupation of Kŏmundo 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 Kŏmundo; 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 Kŏmundo incident, see Kim Yongku, *Kŏmundo wa bladibostokŭ: 19 segi hanbando ŭi p'ahaeng chŏk saegyehwa kwajŏng* [Kŏmundo and Vladivostok: an abnormal process of globalisation in the nineteenth-century Korean peninsula] (Seoul: Sŏgang taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2008).

[198] Huang Zunxian(黃遵憲), *Chosŏn ch'aeknyak* [Strategies for Chosŏn], trans. by Cho Ilmun (Seoul: Kŏn'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

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[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 1*) (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

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[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 *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* 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 *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* 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

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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 Sŏyu kyŏnmun" 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 *Hansŏng 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] *Hansŏng sunbo*, 20 December 1883; 17 February, 8 March 1884.

[205] *Hansŏng sunbo*, "各國近事," 3 July; 11 August 1884.

[206] *Hansŏng 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 *Puguksŏl* (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] (富而後敎)," 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**强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

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[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 (末利).' 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 ŭi kŏnbaeksŏ – naejŏng kaehyŏk e kwanhan 1888 nyŏn ŭi 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 *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*. 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.

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

[218] *Hansŏng chubo*, "**歸商論**," 20 September 1886.

[219] Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, ch. 14 (**商**賈大道), 379–80.

[220] Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, 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 *Puguksŏl* (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 ŭi silch'e wa sŏngkyŏk" [The Nature and Character of *chogong* in Ancient China] in *Kodae hanchung kwankyesa ŭi 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 ethic 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 Kŏmundo 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

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[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

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[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 esŏŭi 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 Kŏmundo Island in1885. 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.

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[233] *Hansŏng 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] *Hansŏng 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" (大之抑小强之凌弱).[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" (强者并其弱大者呑其小), 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

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[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 *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*. 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] Chŏng 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 *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* 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. Chŏng Yonghwa, "Yu Kilchun ŭi 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.