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

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PART THREE PITFALL OF CIVILI-SATION

Chapter Seven

The Limits of the Reformists' Ideas: Civilisation and the Progressive Conception of Time

In previous chapters, we have examined two themes. Firstly, in Part One we have addressed the shift in the worldview of Korean reformist intellectuals (including reformist Confucians) that occurred over almost two centuries. During this time, the predominant Confucian ethical view of the world was gradually marginalised, and a factual, empirical, and realist worldview took centre stage. In Part Two, we have dealt with the reconstruction of the public world by the reformists of the 1880s and '90s. All these discussions are part of a grand civilisational shift that had been taking place from the eighteenth century onwards. Indeed, late nineteenth-century reformists were obsessively discussing a new civilisation. This chapter aims to present a new perspective on the reformists' ideas on civilisation.

The theory of civilisation that was first exhibited in the sources composed in the 1880s and then prevalent among Korean intellectuals during the early decades of the twentieth century is a developmental view of civilisation. It presupposes that human civilisation develops from a low stage to a high stage, and that civilisations at different stages of development dimensions are found in the contemporaneous age. The problem with this theory is not only the linear development model that tailored history with too blunt scissors,

[417] This chapter is an upgraded version of the originally published article in *Korea Journal* 52(4) (2012), pp. 188–212.

but rather the implications of this view and specifically its effects on those who are from a civilisation or society at a low stage of development. In the Korean reformists' case, they had a self-negating view of their culture and customs, while blindly pursuing advanced civilisational standards. Previous studies have mainly identified Social Darwinism as the driving force behind the reformists' problematic way of thinking,[418] or focused on the Western-centrism prevalent in the reformists' view of civilisation.[419] Yet these studies have scarcely heeded the fundamental bases of the civilisation development model itself, specifically the 'progressive conception of time' embedded in the model. Korean reformists adopted the development model by internalising the progressive view of time. In this regard, what this chapter pays attention to is the radical shift in the conception of time that was taking place in the late nineteenth century.[420] The radical shift of the conception of time, in

[418] Kim Tohyŏng has argued that the political ideas of Korean intellectuals in the enlightenment movement period (1905–1910) were based on Social Darwinism. (Kim Tohyŏng, "Hanmal kyemong undong ŭi chŏngch'iron yŏn'gu" [A Study of the Political Ideas of the Enlightenment Movement in the Last Years of Chosŏn Korea], *Han'guksa yŏn'gu* 54 (1986), pp. 75–137). Chu Chin-Oh has interpreted the social ideas of *Tongnip sinmun* in terms of Social Darwinism. (Chu Chin-Oh, "Tongnip hyeophoe ŭi sahoesasang kwa sahoe chinhwaron [The Social Thought and Social Darwinism of the Independence Club]," in *Sonbogi paksa chŏngnyŏn kinyŏm sahak nonch'ong* (Seoul: Chisik san'ŏpsa, 1988), pp. 755–87). Koen De Ceuster has defined Yun Ch'iho's problematic way of thinking as based on his adoption of Social Darwinism. (Koen De Ceuster, "From Modernization to Collaboration, the Dilemma of Korean Cultural Nationalism: The Case of Yun Ch'iho (1865–1945), PhD dissertation submitted to Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (1994), ch. 8). Chŏn Pokhi has understood the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century history of Korea in terms of Social Darwinism and its peculiar ideas of state. (Chŏn Pokhi, *Sahoe chinhwa ron kwa kukka sasang* [Social Darwinism and the Ideas of the State] (Seoul: Han'ul, 1996)). Recently, Vladimir Tikhonov has viewed Social Darwinism as the most distinctive and powerful social ideology that modernisation-orientated Korean intellectuals adopted in the period from the 1880s to the1910s. (Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea: the Beginnings (1880s-1910s)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010)).

[419] Chŏng Yonghwa, "Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ŭi tŏt: Yun Ch'iho ilgi rŭl chungsim ŭro" [The Pitfall of the Ideas of Civilisation: with a Focus on *Yun Chiho's Diary*], *Kukje chŏngch'i nonch'ong* 41 (4) (2001), pp. 297–314.

[420] Concerning the shift in the conception of time, a number of studies have elucidated that change, yet their main focus was placed on "the physical-astronomical time," not "the historical time," to borrow R. Koselleck's division of time. (See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 1–2.) For example, they have mainly seen the change in the calendar system from the lunar to the solar calendar,

combination with the reformists' factual view of the world on the basis of the negation of their normative tradition, encouraged them to accept the civilisation model, particularly the four stages theory, and a Western-centric view of civilisation.

The other point that this chapter addresses is whether their pursuit of 'civilisation and enlightenment' (文明開化, *munmyŏng kaehwa*) was the very factor that led the reformists to anti-national political behaviours. Pointing out the extraordinary case of Yun Ch'iho, who fell into collaboration with the Japanese authorities in the colonial period, researchers argued that the reformists' idea of *munmyŏng kaehwa* forced them into collaboration.[421] That is to say, they asserted that the reformists placed *munmyŏng kaehwa* ahead of the value of national

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the introduction of the seven-day week system, the adoption of standard time, and the spread of the clock. Chŏng Sang'u in particular has illuminated a series of shifts in the late nineteenth-century Chosŏn after the adoption of the solar calendar system and Korean people's adaptation to modern time in the early decades of the twentieth century. (Chŏng Sang'u, "Kaehang ihu sigan kwannyŏm ŭi pyŏnhwa [Changes in the Conception of Time after the Opening Up]," *Yŏksa pip'yŏng* 50 (2000), pp. 184–99.) Chŏng Kŭnsik has developed this study and investigated Korean people's adjustment to the solar calendar system, the week system, and the spread of calendars and watches in the period from the mid-1890s to 1910. In the ensuing study where he has focused on the colonial period, he proceeded to analyse Korean people's conformity to the modern-time system, introducing the controversies over the enduring use of the lunar calendar system, campaigns on time saving, and national memorial days set up by the colonial authorities. (Chŏng Kŭnsik, "Han'guk ŭi kŭndae jŏk sigan ch'eje ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa ilsang saenghwal ŭi pyŏnhwa Ⅰ[The Formation of the Modern Time System and the Change in Everyday Life in Korea Ⅰ]," *Sahoe wa yŏksa* 58 (2000), pp. 161–97; _____, "Sigan ch'eje wa singminji jŏk kŭdaesŏng [The System of Time and Colonial Modernity]," *Munhwa kwahak* 41 (2005), pp. 147–69.) Chŏng Sŏnghi, in the same context, has concretely analysed confusions after the adoption of the solar calendar system and the newly-made national memorial days in the Great Korean Empire period (*Taehan cheguk*, 1897–1905). (Chŏng Sŏnghi, "Taehan jegukgi t'aeyangnyŏg ŭi sihaeng kwa yŏksŏ ŭi pyŏnhwa [The Administration of the Solar Calendar System and the Change of the Calendar Book in the Era of Great Korean Empire]," *Kuksagwan nonch'ong* 103 (2003), pp. 29–53.) Pak T'aeho has focused on *Tongnip sinmun* as a means of representing the modern time and instilling its value to contemporary Koreans, taking a theoretical approach. (Pak T'aeho, "Tongnip sinmun gwa sigan-gigye [*Tongnip sinmun* and Time-machinery]," *Sahoe wa yŏksa* 64 (2003), pp. 166–99.) Yet the conception of time that had a greater influence on Korean people was that of *historical time*. Contrary to physical-astronomical time, which came about through the scientific investigation of the earth as a planet, historical time is formed by men under certain conditions of history and functions as a fundamental criterion for men's projection of will and their interpretation of the world. This conception of time thus operates as a basic component of civilisation.

[421] For the representative case, see Chŏng Yonghwa, "Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ŭi tŏt".

independence and, as a consequence, were led to abandon their country's sovereignty for the sake of the former. In this context, researchers, particularly Korean researchers, did not pay attention to the reformists' political thinking (especially those who fell to collaboration) for a long time.[422] What this chapter argues is that, while the side effects of *munmyŏng kaehwa* are admitted, the pursuit of civilisation is not the single factor that led to their collaboration. I will demonstrate this point by showing the compatibility of *munmyŏng kaehwa* with the value of national independence.

Examining these themes, this chapter aims to clarify that the negative aspect of the reformists' thoughts is their ideas of civilisation, not their purely political ideas. Due to the unclearness of their negative side, their political thinking, which contributed to the opening up of the constitutional and republican age in Korean history, was depreciated. Let us first view how traditional Confucian intellectuals in Chosŏn understood 'time' so as to grasp the shift of the conception of time in the late nineteenth century.

1. Chosŏn Confucians' Way of Thinking on Time

Distinctive ways of thinking of traditional Confucian intellectuals in Chosŏn were closely related to the conditions in which they lived. This is well illustrated when we look at the moments when they were faced with foreigners and had to respond to the latter's different ways of thinking. The diplomatic dispute between Chosŏn and Japan over the Japanese memoranda and the military conflict in 1875 forms a good example. A key element in the

[422] The radical reformist Pak Yŏnghyo's case is representative. Although his political ideas and actions were pronounced in the 1880s and '90s, his political ideas and his role in the *Kabo* reforms were scarcely highlighted until Kim Hyŏnch'ŏl focused on his thought in the late 1990s. His ill treatment by researchers was closely associated with his succumbing to collaboration with the Japanese colonial authorities.

dispute was the grounds that led the Chosŏn government to refuse to accept the diplomatic document from Japan for seven years.[423]

A dialogue among high officials in the Chosŏn court on 10 May 1875 shows how the traditional officials viewed the dispute, making their way of thinking all too clear. Kim Pyŏnghak (金炳學, 1821–1879), one of the three highest officials at the time, expressed these with emphasis:

> The reason why our government did not accept the diplomatic memorandum is because of some words contained in it. In the ancient *Chunqiu* (春秋, B.C. 770–403) era [of China], the peoples of Wu (吳) and Chu (楚) presumptuously called their rulers 'kings' (王), but this was done only within their national boundary. When they sent emissaries to other countries, they reduced the title of their rulers to *kwagun* (寡君, petty prince) and their countries to *p'yeŭp* (弊邑, troubled country). This memorandum from Japan calling their king an emperor is outrageous and unprecedented. This is the reason why we did not permit the reception of the memorandum for over a year. They also insist that they will not wear the traditional costume at a welcome feast. This might cause a problem in the future so that we should be cautious and careful in dealing with this issue.[424]

The main message of Kim's speech was that Japan's memorandum was in contravention of the old conventions between the two countries, and therefore that the government should be wary in handling the dispute. To make his point, as was customary, he cited an anecdote from ancient Chinese history as an example. He found the reference for his judgement in past precedents rather than in strategic considerations directed to the present

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[423] For concrete analyses on the dispute between Chosŏn Korea and Meiji Japan over the diplomatic memorandum from Japan, which resulted in Chosŏn's first modern-type, diplomatic treaty with Japan and opening up of ports, see Martina Deuchler, *Confucian gentlemen and barbarian envoys: The opening of Korea, 1875–1885* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), chs. 2, 3; Key-hiuk Kim, *The last phase of the East Asian world order: Korea, Japan and the Chinese Empire, 1860–1882* (Berkeley: University of California, Center for Japanese Korean Studies, 1980), ch. 6.

[424] *KJSL* 12/05/10.

and the future. For him, the present and the future were subject to the past.

This *past-oriented*, *precedent-focused* way of thinking could not accept Japan's use of the words "*hwang*" (皇, emperor) and "*ch'ik*" (敕, emperor's decree), words that had been reserved only for Chinese emperors. Given this viewpoint, the government officials hesitated to clearly express their own opinions in discussing the issue, because it lay beyond their conventional horizons.[425] This past-oriented viewpoint was not confined to Kim Pyŏnghak and a small group of conservative officials, but prevailed among most of the traditionally educated officials and Confucian scholars, with the exception of rare figures like Pak Kyusu (朴珪壽, 1807–1877), who put more emphasis on current strategic considerations than on adherence to the conventions of the past.[426]

The traditional way of thinking reappeared during the negotiations in January 1876 which resulted from the *Unyō* (雲揚) incident in August 1875.[427] The Korean representative,

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[425] See the following statements by high officials. High official Yi Yuwŏn stated: "If we receive the memorandum as a makeshift measure, it will be a temporary measure, but a lot of concerns will arise from it. Whatever decision we will make, we should be very cautious in addressing it, but Your Majesty's servant is maladroit and does not have a grand vision, so that it is difficult for me to deal with the current issue" (*KJSL* 12/05/10). Another high official Kim Pyŏngguk said: "If we accept the memorandum, it will not create a problem at the moment, but who knows whether they will make another unacceptable demand? At any rate, what can an awkward person like me say towards a resolution?" (*Ibid*.). At first sight, these passages indicate that the high officials hesitated to express their own opinions as they felt burdened by the responsibility of offering advice to the king on this matter. In Chosŏn court politics, officials stood up against their *right* opinion, and arguing on the basis of conventional practice. The case of this memorandum was extraordinary, since it clearly contravened Chosŏn's traditional practice of international relations, but at the same time raised the possibility of a Japanese invasion if the king was advised to hold on to the propriety of tradition. The key point here is that, faced with the dilemma between 'the traditional idea of ethics among nations' and 'realistic consideration of the interests of the state', the officials shied away of speaking out for the latter. Without precedent, the officials lacked any past reference that would have allowed them to positively advocate accepting the Japanese memorandum.

[426] Pak Kyusu's practical and strategic response to the Japanese memorandum reflects the *Sirhak* tradition that ran in his family since Pak Chiwŏn being his grandfather. For Pak Kyusu's opinions about the memorandum issue, see *KJSL* 12/05/10.

[427] For the concrete analysis of the military collision between the Japanese military vessel *Unyō* and Chosŏn's guards, see Yi T'aejin, "Unyangho sakkŏn ŭi chinsang" [The True Story of the *Unyō*

Shin Hŏn (申櫶, 1810–1884), was following Kim Pyŏnghak's mode of expression. Shin drew his references from anecdotes from ancient Chinese history and Confucian texts. For instance, when the Japanese representative, Kuroda Kiyotaka (黑田淸隆, 1840–1900), asked why the soldiers on the side of Chosŏn had fired on the Japanese military vessel *Unyō*, Shin responded by citing a reference from *Liji* (禮記, Book of Rites), a classical Confucian text on *ye*:

> In *Liji*, it is written that when people trespass on a foreign country's border, they should ask about the restrictions. But, last autumn, your vessel did not state its purpose in crossing the border of our country and it approached the defence area, so it was inevitable that our army fired.[428]

In the same context, he quoted the traditional Confucian principles of international relations, implying that both Chosŏn and Japan's relations should be based upon them:

> Traditionally, the right way of building friendly relations with a neighbouring country was thought to be based on four principles: *sŏng* (誠, sincerity), *sin* (信, trust), *ye* (禮, propriety), and *kyŏng* (敬, respect). If your country and our country restore the former good relations [upon the basis of these principles], it will be a good thing for both of us.[429]

This dispute demonstrated the basic way of thinking of Chosŏn's Confucian officials with great clarity. They presupposed an integrated viewpoint based on distinctive conceptions

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Incident] in *Chosŏn ŭi chŏngch'i wa sahoe*, ed. by Ch'oe Sŭnghi kyosu chŏngnyŏn ki'nyŏm kanhaenghoe (Seoul: Chipmundang, 2002), pp. 435–75. And for the Japanese response to Chosŏn's rejection of the memorandum and their debates on the Korean policy, *sei-Kan ron* (征韓論), see Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 31–43.

[428] *KJSL* 13/01/19.

[429] Ibid.

of space and time, reflecting Chinese cultural hegemony and having the profound marks of Confucianism. They viewed their world through the lens of this Chinese and Confucian world order. Their conception of space was fixed by China and its small neighbours. Likewise, their conception of time was formed from the Chinese historical experiences. The repetition of a well-governed and a turbulent period (一治一亂), drawn out from Chinese dynasties' rise and fall, was regarded as natural. More important in the context of Chosŏn was the Confucian view of time. That is to say, Confucians thought that the ideal institutions and customs upon which later generations and states should model themselves were the ancient states before the warring states era. This conception of idealising the past was formed under the dogmatic hegemony of Confucian texts written in the ancient turbulent times of *Chunqiu zhanguo* (春秋戰國, B.C. 770–221). Under this heritage of Confucianism, the laws and institutions, culture and customs, and even the characters of the people of the ancient times were idealised. Thus, most of Confucian reformers in later periods tried to model their views on those ancient laws and institutions. The past-oriented way of thinking of both Kim Pyŏnghak and Shin Hŏn arose from these deeply entrenched assumptions, transmitted through Chosŏn's centuries-old Confucian intellectual heritage. The way in which they handled the case of the memorandum, their hesitation in making decisions, their lack of strategic thinking, and their habit of looking back to the past in search of precedents, all stemmed from this deep-seated legacy.

2. The Progressive Conception of Time in the 1880s: the Case of Yu Kilchun

This traditional mind-set could not survive the collapse of the conditions that had enabled it to exist. The principal intellectual impact of nineteenth-century globalisation, specifically a novel conception of civilisation, brought about a new notion of time. Indeed, civilisations are

predicated on distinct conceptions of space and time. In the transforming era of the late nineteenth century in Korea, the shift in civilisation was accompanied by new ideas about space and time. As the traditional China-centred world virtually collapsed, the traditional idea of civilisation that presupposed that space centred around China and its neighbouring ethnic groups crumbled. The reformist intellectuals who understood the conditions of the outside world located the most developed civilisations in Europe and America. This shift in the locus of civilisation meant a change in the criteria for civilisation itself. The traditional Confucian standard of civilisation, which put focus on the ethical constitution of society, was no longer trusted by them. Rather than spiritual or ethical integrity, their understanding of civilisation was driven by material and practical elements, such as military power, economic wealth, and scientific and technical advancement. This new standard corresponded to the reformists' general view of the world that was tilted toward a factual, empirical, and comparative outlook.

With Western civilisation as a new centre came a new way of seeing time. The core of the new conception of time was an evolutionary frame of historical development, with society and civilisation following a linear progressive course of development. Human history was regarded as a developmental process where tribes, ethnic groups, or races proceeded along a path of gradual development. Yu Kilchun applied this evolutionary conception of time in his essay *Segye daeseron* [General Trends of the World, 1883], where he divided the nations or ethnic groups of the contemporary world into four different stages: savage (野蠻), unenlightened (未開), semi-enlightened (半開), and civilised (文明).[430] He linked to those four stages specific modes of their way of living, culture and customs, and even manners of thinking, categorising European countries and the U.S. as the civilised group. Subsequently,

[430] Yu Kilchun, "*Segye daeseron*" in *Yu Kilchun chŏnsŏ* 3, 27–36.

he made it clear that the four divisions were limited to the current point in time and that the currently civilised stage was not the final stage of human development. Thus, Yu's categorisation of countries or ethnic groups was open-ended, so that, although a country was currently at a low stage, if it strived to become a civilised country, then it could rise up to the civilised stage.

Yu Kilchun's view of civilisation looks to have been influenced by Fukuzawa Yukichi, because Yu studied under Fukuzawa's guidance in Japan during 1881–1882 just before he wrote the essay.[431] Indeed, Fukuzawa employed the four stages theory of civilisation development in the same manner as Yu did. From his early works, Fukuzawa addressed the four stages theory of civilisation,[432] and, in his famous book *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (1875), he contracted it to three stages and emphasised that this was a dynamic system, with the current order merely representing a moment in time. Western countries were merely civilised *vis-à-vis* semi-enlightened countries such as China and Japan, but, in the future, this order might well be upset. This *relativist* view of civilisation is characteristic of Fukuzawa. Instead

[431] Besides Fukuzawa, we can expect that the American zoologist, Edward S. Morse (1838–1925), influenced Yu's view of civilisation development in his main work *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*. This is because Yu resided in Morse's house when he stayed in Boston between 1883 and 1884. However, we do not know how much Yu was influenced by Morse, because the only source that shows Yu's connection to Morse is Yu's letters to Morse written in the mid-1890s, in which we cannot find any remarks on civilisation development or Social Darwinism. Nevertheless, Morse, a serious Darwinist, influenced Meiji leaders while staying in Tokyo for about two years from 1877 as professor of zoology at the newly built Imperial University of Tokyo. For Morse's transmission of Darwinism to Japanese elites, see Sherrie Cross, "Prestige and Comfort: The development of Social Darwinism in early Meiji Japan, and the role of Edward Sylvester Morse," *Annals of Science 53*(4) (1996), pp. 323–44. For Yu Kilchun's letters to Edward Morse, see Yi Kwangnin, "Yu Kilchun ŭi yŏngmun sŏhan" [Yu Kilchun's Letters to Edward S. Morse], *Tong'a yŏn'gu* 14 (1988), pp. 1–28.

[432] In his early works, such as *Tōjin ōrai* (唐人往來, 1865) and *Seiyō jijō gaihen* (西洋事情外編, 1868), Fukuzawa drew human history as a development process from a savage state to civilisation, and in his works such as *Shōchū yorozukuni ichiran* (掌中萬國一覽) and *Sekai kunijin* (世界國盡), written in 1869, he suggested the four stages theory and categorised countries into these stages. For a concrete explanation, see Ha Yŏngsŏn, "Kŭndae han'guk ŭi munmyŏng kae'nyŏm toip sa [The History of the Introduction of the Concept of Civilisation to Modern Korea]" in *Kŭndae han'guk ŭi sahoe kwahak kae'nyŏm hyŏngsŏng sa* (Seoul: Ch'angbi, 2009), pp. 36–65.

of placing the contemporary evolutionary stages in an iron cage, he saw that Japan could catch up with Western countries by learning the spirit of Western civilisation, which he ascribed to "knowledge and virtues" (智德).[433] As a samurai intellectual, he had an eye to penetrate the contemporary imperialist world and strategies for Japan to take in order to protect its national independence, for the sake of which learning about the essences of Western civilisation was necessary. Yu Kilchun adopted this relativist view of Fukuzawa, through which he was able to hold an open-ended, autonomous attitude towards the discouraging stages theory.[434]

Yu Kilchun's initial introduction of the stages theory was reiterated in his main work *Sŏyu kyŏnmun* in a delicately reformulated fashion. In Chapter Fourteen, he repeated the stages theory, but in a different manner from Fukuzawa's. Fukuzawa assumed a nation or

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[433] Nevertheless, his concentration was placed on the side of knowledge. His idea was that, as far as virtues are concerned, the Japanese (private) ethical virtues are not secondary to the Western virtues, but the core reason that made a difference between the two was lack of knowledge. He saw that knowledge affects even the development of virtues. See his *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*, chs 6 and 7.

[434] While interpreting Yu Kilchun as the first Korean intellectual who adopted Social Darwinism, Vladimir Tikhonov has asserted that Yu learnt of Social Darwinism from the American biologist Edward Morse, who taught zoology at the Imperial University of Tokyo from 1877. However, this view should be reconsidered because, according to Yi Kwangnin, Morse taught in Tokyo for only two years from 1877 and returned to the U.S. in 1880. Yu Kilchun visited Tokyo in 1881 as part of an entourage of government officials and stayed there for two years studying under the guidance of Fukuzawa. Because Morse visited Tokyo twice more, in 1881 and 1882, Yu might have met Morse through Fukuzawa, but evidence that Yu learnt about Social Darwinism from Morse is difficult to find. Tikhonov also exemplified Yu's citation of the expression *kyŏngjaeng* (競爭, competition) from Fukuzawa's *Seiyo jijo* as proof of his adoption of Social Darwinism. However, Yu transformed Fukuzawa's expression to the Confucian-flavoured expression *kyŏngryŏ* (競勵, competition and encouragement) in parts, which indicates that he did not like the idea of serious competition among individuals. Under Fukuzawa's influence, Yu accepted the *four stages theory* of civilisation development, which had been popular among European Enlightenment thinkers since the late eighteenth century, rather than Social Darwinism. Fukuzawa learnt of that theory through François Guizot and Henry Thomas Buckle's books on the history of civilisation, which were influenced by the eighteenth-century stages theory. In the 1880s and most of the 1890s in Korea, Social Darwinism was not yet an issue among intellectuals. See Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea*, ch. 2. For Yu's relationship with E. Morse, see Yi Kwangnin, "Yu Kilchun ŭi yŏngmun sŏhan."

ethnic group's development from a savage to a civilised state, but Yu applied that category to individuals; that is, an enlightened, a semi-enlightened, and an unenlightened "person", attributing particular characteristics to each category. Yu mentioned that countries could be divided in such a way, but his focus was on individuals, not countries. Moreover, he did not remark that Chosŏn was a semi-enlightened country, which was different from the editors of *Tongnip sinmun* in the 1890s.[435]

Fukuzawa's relativist and open-ended view of enlightenment was repeated in *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*. Defining enlightenment (開化), or civili-sation, as "humans' reaching the finest and most exquisite state of all kinds of things and affairs,"[436] Yu saw that the enlightenment process takes place in almost all areas of society. For Yu, enlightenment was the best state of development in all sections of society, including human behaviour, academic activity, politics, law, and technology. Instead of placing his country into a less-enlightened iron cage by highlighting its backward status, Yu saw that any country has enlightened, semi-enlightened, and unenlightened people living within it, and that an enlightened country is simply a country where enlightened people form the majority. He believed that enlightenment was a state that individuals could achieve by their own volition, rather than something structured within a nation's spirit or culture and thus difficult to cure without transforming the structure at all. Because he took this open-ended attitude, he asserted that to enlighten oneself meant not only to adopt others' good points but also to maintain one's own merits. This relativist and prudent approach must have led him to criticise the radical reformists of his time – according to him, "sinners of enlightenment works" – for their extraordinary preference for foreign things and institutions. Yu's relativist and autonomous view would generally reflect his moderate

[435] See Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, 395–404.

[436] Yu Kilchun, *Sŏyu kyŏnmun*, 395.

disposition, as well as his teacher Fukuzawa's influence. While radicals considered Confucian civilisation the main culprit of the low level of development of Chosŏn and, upon this ground, called for the reconstitution of a new civilisation, Yu was prudent and maintained the values of Confucian civilisation. His view of civilisation was therefore eclectic and moderate, which was based on both the past- and the future-oriented view of time.[437]

3. The Progressive Conception of Time in *Tongnip sinmun*

The tradition-negating, Western-centred view of civilisation and its developmental conception of time is well documented in *Tongnip sinmun* (1896–1899). The conception of time in the paper is lopsidedly tilted toward the future-oriented, or progressive view of time. Indeed, the core slogan of the paper, *munmyŏng kaehwa* (civilisation and enlightenment), which had been coined in Japan as a translation of the word "civilisation," implies the progressive conception of time. Let us first examine the traces of the progressive conception of time in *Tongnip sinmun* before we discuss the origin of the developmental view of civilisation and its problems. In the editorials of the paper, writers divided time into the past, present, and future, and matched these with an un-enlightened age, the age of working to achieve enlightenment, and an enlightened age. They highlighted the future as something to be achieved by negating the present. The editors' future-oriented manner of thinking was

[437] A similar view was suggested by the moderate conservative Kim Yunsik (1835–1922); he saw that Chosŏn was already a civilised country, so the claim that Chosŏn should be enlightened was improper. In this context, he understood the concept of *kaehwa* (開化) as practical matters of the present (時務) to tackle. Kim Yunsik first held a view that both the Eastern and the Western civilisations were based on different foundations, but later he shifted his view and thought that civilisations were rather universal, which was made as a way to accept Western civilisational elements, according to Kim Sŏngbae. See Kim Sŏngbae, *Yugyo chŏk sayu wa kŭndae kukje chŏngch'i ŭi sangsangnyŏk: kuhanmal Kim Yunsik ŭi yugyo chŏk kŭndae suyong*, 139–47.

deeply rooted in their editorials:

> If Chosŏn concentrates on the education of the people *from now on*, then, *in a few years* the government and the people will co-operate with each other and the people will become enlightened. Moreover, as a result of education, everyone in the nation will have their own jobs and, henceforth, the people will get rich. Therefore, we hope that the government will do its best in educating the people *at the moment*. Then, *in a few years Chosŏn will rise up to the same position as other countries*.[438]

> If someone commits wrongdoings, tells a lie, maligns others, or takes another's possessions, following *old habits*, he will be committing an unpardonable crime, not only to His Majesty but also to his ancestors and descendants. So, *we hope that all the people of Chosŏn will forget the ways that they followed in the past and will open a new page of history from today.* And we believe that, if the people, regardless of the officials or commoners, do their best to work for the nation, abandoning their private preferences and aversions, *then, in five years all the people of the state will benefit from it*. Therefore, *let us throw away the old habits and follow new morals, laws, rules and ideas, modeling ourselves on those of civilised and enlightened countries*…and, by doing so, let our country become one of the top countries in the world.[439]

As these passages show, once time was combined with the idea that history develops toward civilisation and enlightenment, the uncivilised past had to be discarded, and the present negated in favour of a civilised and enlightened future. This future-oriented manner of thinking was also reflected in the form of the editorials themselves. Many of them had three sections: introduction, main paragraphs, and concluding remarks. The main paragraphs were usually filled with current social and cultural problems, whilst the concluding remarks were devoted to remedies and prospects for the future. Interestingly, these concluding

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[438] *TS* 25 August 1896, italics added.

[439] *TS* 23 February 1897, italics added.

remarks, in many cases, adopted a particular formula: "We hope that…" For example, in the editorial of the 20 May 1897 issue, the editor wrote: "We hope that the people of Chosŏn will wake up from sleep as soon as possible and co-operate with each other, so Chosŏn will be ranked amongst the powerful countries in the world."[440] In addition, conditional sentences were widely used to express both things to be done in the present and the rosy prospects to be achieved in the future, affirming that "If one wants to…, it will be necessary to do…now."[441] These concluding remarks usually had a deontological nuance, conveying hope for the future. For example, in the editorial of the 24 April 1897 issue, the editor wrote that "It is right to make our country dignified with wealth and power and glorified with civilisation."[442]

Where, then, is the origin of this future-oriented view of time? This conception of time, which presumes a single pathway of history, originates in the Enlightenment view of time in modern Europe, which put *progress* at the centre of the development of human history. As Kant put it, human history is the process of "the achievement of a *civil society* [*sic*] which administers right universally,"[443] which will be attained collectively and gradually and will hence be potentially realised in the future. This optimistic understanding of history, which

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[440] See other examples: "We hope that the students studying in Japan will work for the nation after coming back and make great achievements for the country, so that Chosŏn will be treated as a high-ranking country in the world" (*TS* 8 April 1897); "We believe that the way to cure the root of the ills of Chosŏn is that, from today, people cooperate, discard the wrong, old customs, and make their efforts in advancing towards civilisation" (*TS* 13 February 1897). This kind of writing is common in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun*.

[441] E.g. "If the government wants to achieve national independence, then, first of all, it must try to protect the people's rights" (*TS* 9 March 1897).

[442] E.g. "We regard it as one of the most important things for the government to make Chosŏn become a wealthy nation" (*TS* 25 May 1896).

[443] Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective" in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History* (New Haven, U.S.: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 8.

regarded human history as "the realisation of a concealed plan of nature"[444] or the attainment of "enlightenment…as a great good," [445] offered a paradigmatic view of time for Enlightenment Europe. Hegel inherited this view of history, proclaiming in his lectures on the philosophy of history: "[t]he History of the world is none other than the *progress* of the consciousness of Freedom."[446] He divided world history, according to the stages of the advance of freedom, into the oriental world, the Greek and Roman world, and the German (Western) world. This division of world history in accordance with the stages of progress was prevalent among French Enlightenment thinkers like Turgot and Condorcet, as well as Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar.[447]

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[444] Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 13.

[445] Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 14.

[446] George. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications INC., 1956), p. 19, 56, 63, 72, italics added.

[447] For example, Condorcet, convinced of "the march and progress of the human mind," divided world history into ten stages in which human beings first formed tribal society, reached the development of the modern Europe of his time, and left further progress still to be achieved. Antoine-Nicolas De Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of The Progress of the Human Mind* (L'Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progress de l'esprit humain), trans. by June Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955).

According to Jeffrey Alexander, the conception of 'progress' in the modern West is related to the promise of the Golden Age, or the millennium in Judaism and Christianity, which is realisable in *this world*, something peculiar to the European tradition. The kingdom of God came to be *more* realisable in this world in the wake of the Reformation. Protestants, and especially Calvinists and Puritans, thought they could bring about a perfect world on earth by working hard. This worldly perfection was encouraged by Renaissance humanism and, in the wake of the Enlightenment, was translated into the vocabulary of *secular progress*. The Enlightenment thinkers firmly believed in the imminent possibility of a secular golden age. Alexander's description came from Karl Löwith's philosophical interpretation of progress as 'secularised eschatology'. He saw the philosophies of history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a secularised version of the eschatological pattern set up by the Jewish and Christian religions. The words of progress such as 'hope', 'living by expectation', and 'futurism' were closely linked to anticipation of the 'final' events, such as the coming of the Messiah or the Last Judgement. Löwith's critical interpretation of the philosophy of history was later countered by Hans Blumenberg. After criticising secularisation theory, Blumenberg found the origins of the idea of progress in two moments: the overcoming of the fixed, authoritative status of Aristotelian science by the idea of a cooperative, long-term scientific progress guided by method, and the overcoming of the idea of ancient art and literature as a permanently valid model of perfection in favour of the idea of the arts as embodying the creative spirit of their particular ages. For a succinct history of the idea of progress in the West, see J. Alexander, *Fin de Siècle Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso,

According to Koselleck, Enlightenment thinkers of modern Europe who held the progressive view of time schematised civilisations, ethnicities, and races according to their different stages of development.[448] As he puts it: "The contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous, initially a result of overseas expansion, became a basic framework for the progressive construction of a world history increasingly united since the eighteenth century."[449] The division of human development through stages was established as the "four stages theory." According to Ronald Meek, the four stages theory, mainly put forward in the most systematic fashion by the French thinker Turgot and the Scottish Adam Smith among several others, was based on four different "modes of subsistence." So civilisation was presumed to develop according to the stages of hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce.[450] Together with this line of development, the European thinkers thought that institutions, laws, and even manners of people evolved in stages. As Meek argues, this way of seeing the human history was encouraged by the temporal context of the eighteen-century Europe, in which the thinkers experienced the change in Glasgow and the northern cities of France and the contrast between areas which were economically advanced and areas still in

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1995), pp. 65–67. For Löwith's philosophical interpretation of the idea of progress, see Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago University Press, 1955). For Blumenberg's interpretation of progress in modern time, see Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983).

Peter Bowler focused on the academic controversies among scholars in Victorian Britain over the origins and development of humankind, societies, and civilisations, focusing on the vocabularies of progress, evolution, and Darwinism. See P. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

[448] R. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 238.

[449] R. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 246.

[450] Ronald L. Meek, *Social science and the ignoble savage* (Cambridge University Press, 1976). Peter Bowler argues that a linear model of social progress and the "image of races battling for supremacy" originated from "the idealist view of history" formed in the Continent, rather than the theories of Herbert Spencer or Charles Darwin, who rejected the linear model and was liberals at the time. See P. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress*, 57, 60, 71.

lower stages of development. Moreover, contemporary historical and anthropological studies, especially regarding American Indians which enabled the hypothesis about the earliest stage of human life, propelled them to come up with the stages theory. The original historical explanation of human development shifted slightly as they understood the outside world so that the model turned to the side that even in contemporaneous world the different stages of civilisation existed. According to Meek, the British thinker and politician Edmund Burke (1729–1797) thought that all the developmental stages were manifested in the contemporaneous world so that historians did not need to try to find historical evidence of ancients.[451] This stages theory of human civilisation was introduced into East Asia and was prevalent in the 1890s. In an editorial, *Tongnip sinmun* introduced this theory in a quite concrete manner:

> As far as countries are concerned, there are four distinctions of countries into savage, under-enlightened, semi-enlightened, and fully enlightened countries. Savage countries' people are called the lowest of races, because they do not know much about human beings' humanity, cannot make meals with grains but eat only fish and wild animals, cannot build houses, sleep under the shade of trees in summer and live in caves in winter, cloak their bodies with hides, and do not live under government and law and fight with one another all the time. In under-enlightened countries, people have some knowledge, rear cattle, and engage in agriculture; but they do not like learning, live with under-organised institutions, build their houses of soil in damp places, wear shabby clothes, know nothing about sanitation, and do not make things in an orderly way. In semi-enlightened countries, people exert themselves to make their living in all areas of literature, agriculture, art and technology, and commerce; but they try to

[451] According to Meek, the Eurocentric understanding of the four stages theory was already criticised in the 1780s and '90s by the writers, such as Johann G. von Herder, William Russell, and James Beattie. These writers emphasised concrete conditions of individual nations and peoples, focusing on their structural limits mainly caused by unfavourable natural environment. The stages theory was combined by a model of competition among countries under the influence of Social Darwinism in the late nineteenth century, which was an adaptation of the original version in the context of the imperialist world order. R. Meek, *Social science and the ignoble savage*.

> keep their old ways of life, do not revere new knowledge, have arrogance in their hearts and treat others with contempt, and do not like progress and becoming enlightened. In fully enlightened countries, people have advanced knowledge, are good at all kinds of arts and technology, expand commerce around the world to increase their national finance, try to advance knowledge, exert themselves to make progress, communicate with foreign countries with sincerity, and love their own country very much.[452]

As seen in the citation above, the original four stages presented by the Enlightenment thinkers shifted to a social development theory containing contemporary implications. In this framework, moving to a fully enlightened country was regarded as a deontological task for the less-enlightened countries.

4. The Duality of the Progressive Conception of Time

The view of the future in *Tongnip sinmun* was different from that of the European thinkers in that the future of contemporary Korea, as depicted by the editors of the paper, was *ambivalent*. On the one hand, they saw it as progress towards a wealthy, strong, and civilised country; on the other hand, they saw it as uncertain and potentially desperate. This ambiguous conception of the Korean future may have reflected the political oscillations between reform and reaction after the year 1894. The sense of crisis in *Tongnip sinmun* would also reflect the *location* of Korea in the imperialist age. The paper's pursuit of *munmyŏng kaehwa* and national independence was restricted by the unfavourable conditions surrounding Korea at the time. Contemporary Korea was sustaining itself upon the balance of power between Russia and Japan, and the sovereignty of Korea would be put in danger when the balance of power broke down. Thus, the sense of crisis was affected by the spatial-temporal condition that Korea

[452] *TS* 11 September 1899.

faced.[453] Yet this condition was more fundamentally linked with Korea's status as a semi-enlightened country at the time. On a single pathway of history to *enlightenment* and *civilisation*, a semi-enlightened country like Korea faced two alternatives: if it achieved domestic reforms and stepped forward to become part of the enlightened world, then it could expect a bright future; however, if it failed to do so, it would face a dreadful fate.

This ambivalent view of Korea's future was predetermined by the vocabulary of enlightenment. Time was assessed in terms of the degree of enlightenment or civilisation. The enlightened or progressed state was seen as being chronologically later, while the under-enlightened or under-progressed state was seen as being chronologically retarded. This equivocal view was evident in a number of editorials in *Tongnip sinmun*. On the one hand, the editors saw that Koreans had the capacity to build up a civilised country on their own, posing a bright image of Korea's future. At the end of the editorial that introduced the stages theory of civilisation, the editor added his own view:

> Although the Blacks and Reds belong to the human race, it is needless to say any more about their humanness. Likewise, savage countries and under-enlightened countries, though they belong to the category of countries, it is needless to say any more about their nationhood. As far as Korea is concerned, it belongs to the Yellow race, so the race is not bad. Hence, by exerting ourselves to reform our laws and rules and by proceeding unswervingly, why do not we make our country into a high-ranking country in the world?[454]

This hopeful vision for the future was exhibited in a number of editorials. However,

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[453] The importance of *location* in explaining different responses among East Asian countries to the Western challenges was focused on by a number of scholars. For a study directly addressing the effect of location on both a Korean and a Japanese intellectual in the late nineteenth century, see Chang Insŏng, *Changso ŭi kukje chŏngch'i sasang*.

[454] *TS* 11 September 1899.

this optimistic view was counter-balanced by many disappointing problems that the country faced. The editors' innate comparative perspective, especially *vis-à-vis* advanced Western countries, conveyed the sentiment of frustration. In many editorials, their style of argument was grounded on categorisation and comparison; the categories for comparison were: national wealth and power, the advancement of science and technology, the development of practical studies, emancipation from old customs and social habits, and particular characteristics of the people such as diligence and honesty. The editorials comparing Korea with advanced countries usually implied that Koreans should learn from White people and follow their civilisation. The following passages represent this view:

> The people of foreign countries think on the basis of what really exists, whatever they think of, and even though the real thing clashes with their original ideas, beliefs, and opinions and is even harmful to them, they do not reject the real thing but create ideas and acts on the basis of the real thing. On the contrary, in the Eastern tradition of learning, once someone has learnt that a white object is black, he sticks to what he has learnt, and though another person tries to show that the white thing is in fact white on the basis of evidence, he does not listen to the person and sticks to his original idea. So, the people in the East do not try to learn what really is, do not want to learn it, and are even afraid of it. As a result, the people's way of living, law, and politics are not based on what really is but on the empty and un-substantive, so their way of thinking is more inclined to the empty and un-substantive than to the real or true.[455]

> The Whites are the smartest, most diligent, and most brave among the races. They are spreading across the world, winning over the lower races and occupying their land and resources. Therefore, a race that does not learn from the Whites' studies and morals and does not keep pace with them in progress is being exterminated. For example, tens of millions of American native Indians have nearly been exterminated, due to their failure to learn the

[455] *TS* 24 February 1897.

Whites' studies.[456]

The ambivalent perspective on the future of Korea appears to be related to the influence of Social Darwinism. The view of civilisational development altered slightly under the nineteenth-century intellectual environment represented by Darwin's evolutionary biology, as the idea of 'a struggle for existence' became prevalent together with the publication of Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* (1858). Social Darwinism, a derivative of Darwin's theory of natural selection, posited that civilisational development was the result of humans' struggles for existence, which could easily be drawn to a worldview justifying an imperialist, racist interpretation of the world. Viewing the world as a competitive venue for survival or diminution, it provided a logic that could be used for the legitimation of Western powers' imperialist encroachment on other regions on the globe.[457] The idea of 'social progress' and 'civilisation development' were thus imbued with the Social Darwinist perspective.[458] This intellectual environment permeated *Tongnip sinmun* editors' view of civilisation. The editors' sense of crisis and ambivalence for their future was, therefore, deeply associated with their

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[456] *TS* 24 June 1897.

[457] According to Mike Hawkins, Darwin himself attempted to extend his theory of natural selection to men's "mental and social phenomena," so he was an obvious and major architect of Social Darwinism. Moreover, he argues that, although Social Darwinism is of substance, it is characterised by "indeterminacy" or "flexibility", which means that the theory or "world view" provides rich sources for different rhetorical uses and interpretations. This open-endedness gave Social Darwinism a theoretical success. However, by depending on the assumption of "struggle for survival," it included a malign aspect. Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), part 1.

[458] According to M. Hawkins, Darwin used the concept of 'progress' in his main work *Origins* to indicate the result of natural selection, and saw 'savages' as caught in the most primitive stage of development (Hawkins, 36). This means that the eighteenth-century developmental view of society/civilisation was tinged with (Social) Darwinism. On the other hand, the other evolutionary theorist, Herbert Spencer, shifted 'civilisational development' to a process of social evolution, which was the result of individuals' struggle for existence. Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*, ch.4.

interpretation of the world predicated on Social Darwinism.[459]

On the other hand, the four stages theory of civilisation development in *Tongnip sinmun* was a slightly altered form of the eighteenth-century version. According to previous studies, the four stages theory was introduced into East Asia through François Guizot's and Henry Thomas Buckle's books on civilisation, which had been published before Darwin's *Origins*.[460] These works, which followed the progressive view of history and discussed civilisation from the point of view of Europeans, were the sources that influenced Fukuzawa Yukichi by being introduced first into Japan.[461] Korean reformist intellectuals who studied or

[459] The editorials of *Tongnip sinmun*, however, do not contain a vocabulary clearly indicating the direct influence of Social Darwinism, such as *usŭng yŏlp'ae* (優勝劣敗, the superior wins and the inferior loses), *chŏkja saengjon* (適者生存, survival of the fittest), *saengjon kyŏngjaeng* (生存競爭, competition for survival), and *yakyuk kangsik* (弱肉强食, the strong eats the flesh of the weak). Yet, in an editorial in *Taechosŏn tongnip hyŏphoe hoebo* (The Bulletin of the Independence Club of Great Korea, November 30th 1896–July 31st 1897), the bi-monthly bulletin of the Independence Club, the editor uses the Social Darwinist expressions "*yakyuk kangsik*" and "*usŭng yŏlp'ae*." This means that already in 1897 the Social Darwinist worldview was known among Korean intellectuals. *Taechosŏn tongnip hyŏphoe hoebo*, (no. 16) 15 July 1897.

[460] It is important to note that Guizot's and Buckle's books were published before Darwin's *Origins* was published, which indicates that the view of civilisation in the two books were more in the continuation of the eighteenth-century stages theory than of Social Darwinism. Korean reformist intellectuals' adoption of the four stages theory of civilisation development model in the 1880s and '90s can be understood in this context. Indeed, Hawkins locates the origin of Social Darwinism in the year 1859, which was the time when Darwin's *Origins* began to influence Western intellectuals. (Hawkins, 58) The two books by which Fukuzawa was influenced in forming his view of civilisation are: François Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe* (Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe) (published originally in 1828 and translated by William Hazlitt into English in 1846), and Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* 3 vols. (London: Longman Green, 1857). For the view that Fukuzawa was seriously influenced by these books, see Tozawa Yukio (戸沢行夫), "Kaisetsu(解說)" in *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (文明論之概略: 福澤諭吉著作集 四卷) (東京: 慶應義塾大學校出版會, 2004), pp. 339–91.

[461] Maruyama Masao, an interpreter of Fukuzawa Yukichi, also confirmed this course of transmission of the Enlightenment civilisation discourse to Fukuzawa. However, he did not seriously examine the problems of the civilisation discourse and its linkage to Social Darwinist perspective. See Maruyama Masao and Kato Shuichi, *Pŏnyŏk kwa ilbon ŭi kŭndae* [Translation and Japanese Modernity], trans. by Im Sŏngmo (Seoul: Isan, 2000), pp. 150–51.

stayed in Japan for years in connection with Fukuzawa adopted this view of civilisation.[462]

What, then, are the fundamental grounds that determined this particular conception of time? It seems to be deeply related to the *rationalisation* of human thinking as a condition of modern times. As the traditional frames of thought were destabilised, modern men directly interrogated the *raison d'être*, or purpose, of things and affairs and, in doing so, were soon led to how to achieve that purpose most *effectively*. Thinking in terms of *purpose* and the *efficient means* that correspond to it was a process of rationalisation in human thinking. This rationalisation was deeply embedded in modern men's conception of time, providing the standard of advance and backwardness.

In Korea, this process of rationalisation was accelerated in the course of the late nineteenth century. The traditionally established conditions of thinking were being rapidly destabilised in this period, as the Confucian ethical system, which had provided the reference for people's judgement, lost its hegemony. Together with the decline of the Confucian normative way of thinking, the reformist intellectuals formed a framework of seeing the world in a rather factual, empirical, and realist manner, as well as in an intensely comparative outlook. This was combined with the consciousness of Korea's status at the time as a semi-enlightened country, and this blindly drove more radical reformists to model themselves on the advanced civilisation of Western countries. The sense of backwardness in the race for time upon the basis of the disconnection with traditional norms thus divested them of the leeway to make a prudent judgment, and simply led them to internalise the way of thinking that civilisational standards existed outside their own country. *Tongnip sinmun* editors'

[462] Following M. Masao's view, Ha Yŏngsŏn makes clear the course of transmission of this kind of civilisation discourse into Korea in the late nineteenth century. Ha Yŏngsŏn, "Kŭndae han'guk ŭi munmyŏng kae'nyŏm toip sa," 36–65.

criticism of their culture and customs arose in this context.

5. The Ideal of *Munmyŏng kaehwa* and the Reality of Korea: Two Different Views of Contemporary Korea

The replacement of the traditional conception of time with the modern or progressive one gave the reformist intellectuals a deontological view of *munmyŏng kaehwa*, but it left a big gap between the ideal and reality. In the late 1890s, Korea was still in severe social disorder as a result of both domestic and international political troubles, but the conservative government did not want to initiate a radical reform. In this situation, there arose two perspectives of Korea: one, balanced between the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* and the dismal reality of Korea and optimistic of the future of Korea, and the other, inclined to *munmyŏng kaehwa* at the expense of national independence, and pessimistic of its future.

These two contrasting views appear in the editorials of *Tongnip sinmun* and its English edition *The Independent*. At first glance, they all seem to be written from a common experience of contemporary Korean society, conveying identical messages throughout the whole issues. But a more careful reading underlines the difference between editorials and the contrasting views of the editors. When Sŏ Chaep'il (徐載弼, Philip Jaisohn, 1864–1951) assumed the editorship from 7 April 1896 to 19 May 1898, his editorials largely balanced a deontological and a critical view of Korea with appraisals of its real conditions, and he rarely fell into pessimism. He pointed out problems concretely and criticised them appropriately. In the wake of the experiences of running the newspaper and teaching at the *Paichai* (培材) School, he remained confident that Koreans were capable of making a modern change by themselves:

> Pessimists may say what they please in regard to the future of Korea, but we see that there is a hope, a great hope at that, for the regeneration of this nation in the near future. We say this, not because we see things through rosy hued glasses, but through unprejudiced spectacles. Our hope and faith are based upon many incidents that have come to our notice lately. The students of the different schools give us more hope than any other class of Koreans, especially those children who are under foreigners' supervision. The boys in the schools under a foreign teacher are entirely different from the lads who are idling away their time at their homes or who waste the precious moments of their young lives in committing to memory of the Chinese classics. These students who are taught by the foreigners have the same kind of ambitions as the boys in European and American schools. They are eager for knowledge; they acquire independent, manly habits, spirit and dispositions; they are ambitious to be well informed on all subjects so that they can converse and deal with the peoples of the world on equal terms; they look down on those who are neither honourable nor patriotic; they realize that the strength of a nation lies in the united effort of the people of the whole nation; and above all, they understand the necessity of reforming the political and social customs of their country.
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> A few days ago, we witnessed the procedure of the new Debating Society of the *Paichai* School students. The orderliness of the members, strict enforcement of the rules of parliamentary usages, the earnestness of discussing the question before the meeting, eagerness of taking a part in the procedure by every member present and the fearless manner in which they expressed their views were quite pleasing to the hearts of those who wish for Korea's welfare.[463]

In his editorial which was continued in the next issue, Sŏ concluded that Korean people possessed all necessary qualities to make their nation prosperous and independent, and

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[463] *The Independent* 3 December 1896. In the citation, "the rules of parliamentary usages" indicates *Robert's Rules of Order* (1872) by Henry M. Robert, which was translated by Yun Ch'iho with the title of *Ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik* (議會通用規則) in April 1898. The rules were used at *Paichai* School's discussions and the Independence Club's regular discussions (*T'oronhoe*). For this fact, see Ryu Ch'unghi, "Kaehwagi Chosŏn ŭi minhoe hwaldong kwa ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik: ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik ŭi yut'ong kwa pŏn'nyŏk yangsang ŭl chungsim ŭro" [The Activities of Civic Associations and *Ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik* in Early Modern Korea: The Circulation and Translation of *Ŭihoe t'ongyong kyuch'ik*], *Tongbang hakji* 167 (2014), pp. 1–32.

the only requirement in bringing out these qualities was proper guidance.[464] This optimistic view was carried over to his outlook of politics. He understood it in volitional rather than structural terms. His approach to break through the dependent policies of the conservative government in relation to Russia in early 1898, and his organisation of mass street demonstrations, showed this volitional standpoint clearly. His view of politics is well shown in the following editorial:

> The people of Chosŏn have many of their own rights, but they do not seem to have those rights just because they do not use them. If every person in the nation wants to make Chosŏn a wealthy and powerful country, then this will be achieved in a few years, whatever country interrupts it. If every person in Chosŏn wants things to go on as they are, then that will happen, and, if they want things to be worse than now, that will also happen. Therefore, we think that whether Chosŏn becomes prosperous or poor lies in the hands of the people, not in the hands of the officials.[465]

Whether due to his volitional view of history or his strong will, Sŏ did not suffer from the conflict between a deontological ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* and the reality of his country. The ideal and reality were balanced in his editorials.[466]

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[464] *The Independent* 5 December 1896.

[465] *TS* 24 August 1897.

[466] Yi Sŭngman (李承晩, Syngman Rhee, 1875–1965), one of Sŏ's students and a young radical leader in the 1898 street demonstrations and, later, the first president of the Republic of Korea, was also optimistic regarding the future of Korea. In the late 1890s, he was a fervently patriotic nationalist and a young intellectual educated in the mission school, *Paichai*. He was acutely aware of the gap between the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* and the dismal reality of Korea. For him, the need of modern reform of Korea for the sake of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was counterbalanced by the value of national independence, as is seen in his book *Tongnip chŏngsin* (The Spirit of National Independence), composed when he was jailed in the Seoul Prison and completed in 1904. Yi saw the current conditions of Korea from a historical perspective, assessed the political situation from a strategic and realist standpoint, and did not succumb to a purely normative understanding of political affairs. He held a steadfast belief that the most important task for Korea at the time was to change its political system. He definitely stated that "the reason why Korea is now placed in this wretched situation is due

By contrast, Yun Ch'iho (尹致昊, 1865–1945), who was educated in foreign countries from his mid-teens to late twenties and edited *Tongnip sinmun* from May to December 1898, was more deontological in his attitude towards *munmyŏng kaehwa* and more critical of the gloomy realities of Korea. He was not eager to consider concrete and strategic ways to improve the real conditions of Korea. His viewpoint was excessively critical, deontological, and structural, and showed little strategic insight into the problems of his country:

> If things go on as they are, Koreans will be deprived of all their jobs and businesses by foreigners; all of their houses in central Seoul will belong to Chinese, Japanese, or Westerners; and all Koreans' economic lives will be exploited by foreigners. It is truly regrettable, but the blame should be placed on Koreans themselves. If we are diligent, sincere and talented, and if we do well whatever we do and, as a result, become rich, then why will we have to fear foreigners, however many live in Seoul? The way to get out of this dangerous situation is not by lamenting, weeping, swearing, resenting or rueing, but by stopping the old ways of living, such as sleeping and eating without achieving anything and depending on others. Instead, we should eagerly learn foreigners' arts, orderliness, diligence and sincerity. If we do so, then we will be able to protect our houses and even our nation. Contrarily, if we stay in an idle, nasty, disorderly, and insincere state, as we have done, we will lose this city and nation to foreigners. I do not know what is more urgent than this.[467]

As is seen in this citation, he mainly approached issues with a structural view, attributing problems to Koreans' culture and customs and the nation's characters; he lacked a balanced understanding between the ideal of his country and its gloomy reality. And he readily settled for the reformation which stressed *education,* a gradualist method to treat the matters, and saw the absence of it as the key reason for Korea's problems at the time. Only by

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to the fact that we have not changed the political regime." Yi Sŭngman, *Tongnip chŏngsin* (Seoul: Chŏngdong ch'ulp'ansa, 1993).

[467] *TS* 18 July 1898.

educating the ignorant and by changing them into modern men, he thought, could Koreans hope to advance toward a civilised world:

> For our nation to get out of this state of weakness and to achieve enlightenment and progress, what is urgent is not to make the palace splendid and to increase the army and navy. It lies in establishing many elementary schools. We hope that the government will exert itself to educate children in the primary schools, not spending a penny on founding a high school or a university.[468]

In a similar way, Yun opposed a radical approach to the problems of politics, such as establishing a lower chamber of national assembly and providing the common people with the right to vote. His gradualist, or anti-radical, approach to politics is well shown in the following editorial:[469]

> In an ignorant society, whether it is ruled by one person or many, the society's going into the wrong direction will not make any difference. Rather, in an ignorant world, monarchy is more durable than democracy, as is proved by the history of both the past and the present and by the current situation in Europe and America. Therefore, whichever country it is that tries to establish a lower chamber of national assembly, the education of the people must take precedence for them to have the ability to discuss the topics of the country and to feel responsible for national affairs, just as his or her own private affairs. However, our people were not educated for hundreds of years during which they were uninterested in national affairs. If those affairs do not affect them, they will not mind even if the state is subject to a foreign country, as long as they can find their own meals. They do not know about liberty

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[468] *TS* 6 July 1898.

[469] I think that Yun Ch'iho's pacifist, gradualist approach to national problems, instead of a radical and political approach, is closely associated with his weak and timid personal character. At several entries of his diary, he confesses his weak personal character. His rather structural than volitional approach to the stalemates of contemporary Korea was also linked with his personality. His sixty-year diary is an important historical source as well as his personal life accounts. Yun Ch'iho, *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi* [Yun Ch'iho's Diary], edited by Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe (Seoul: T'amgudang, 1974). Hereafter, *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi*.

> and human rights. And even if they have heard of these ideas, they regard licence as liberty, and seeking self-interest at the expense of others' as being human rights. Therefore, granting political rights to this kind of people and establishing a lower chamber will lead to a national crisis… Only after the people are enlightened in 40-50 years will it be possible to think of building a lower chamber.[470]

As is shown from the above passage, his structural approach to problems forced him to prefer enlightening the people through education to a transformation of the state through political re-arrangements. Furthermore, his structural view led him to see the problems of Korea as those of nationality, as several parts of his diary show it. He ascribed the problems of the Korean nation to the "absolute control" of Confucianism, which is inborn with corruption, perceives women as inferior, and teaches "go-backism."[471] He thus wrote that "The blood of the [Korean] race has to be changed by a new education, a new government, and a new religion."[472] In order to cure the nation of these fundamental problems, he was even ready to abandon national sovereignty already in the 1890s: "Since the Koreans are thus incapable and unwilling to better their condition, it may be a mercy to them for Japan or

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[470] *TS* 27 July 1898. Shin Yong-ha has seen this editorial as the Independence Club's opinion concerning the establishment of a lower chamber, but it must be attributed to Yun's own personal view. This misjudgement occurred because he failed to capture the difference of editorials in accordance with different editors. Chandra made the same mistake by arguing that Sŏ Chaep'il and Yun Ch'iho shared their views on the Club's political participation and its quest for a national assembly in 1898. He failed to discern Yun's more moderateness from Sŏ's radicalness. This misinterpretation was repeated by Kenneth M. Wells. Analysing Protestant intellectuals' actions and ideas for the rebuilding of Korea in the years from 1896 to 1937 in terms of "self-reconstruction nationalism," he interpreted *Tongnip sinmun* as Korean Protestant intellectuals' accounts and depicted the two main editors, Sŏ and Yun, as having the same opinion. Moreover, he exaggerated the relationship between their religion Protestantism and their socio-political opinions. Though at some editorials they did not hide their preference for Christianity, it is difficult to find a direct relationship between their religion and their modernistic character. Their general reformist characteristic was not much different from Kim Ok'kyun's, Pak Yŏnghyo's, and other non-Protestant reformists'. See Shin Yong-ha, *Tongnip hyŏphoe yŏn'gu*, 363; Vipan Chandra, *Imperialism, Resistance, and Reform*, ch.8; Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), ch. 2.

[471] *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi*, 12 December 1893.

[472] *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi*, 1 February 1899.

England to take possession of the peninsula altogether."[473]

Reformist intellectuals with contrasting views of the conditions of Korea in the 1890s responded to Japanese colonial domination differently. What turned out in historical facts tells us that they acted in line with their assessments of Korea in the late 1890s. The optimists, Sŏ Chaep'il and Yi Sŭngman, worked to recover the sovereignty of Korea, while Yun Ch'iho fell to a Japanese collaborator. Yet Yun's case should be seen as an extraordinary case because he was educated in foreign academic institutions and stayed in foreign countries from the age of 15 up to 29. During those years, he lost opportunities to cultivate his national identity and patriotism. His timid and introverted personality also encouraged him to see problems in structural terms and to hold his excessive commitment to *munmyŏng kaehwa*. In this regard, Chŏng Yonghwa's view that Yun Ch'iho is a typical case of the reformists among those who adopted the perspective of *munmyŏng kaehwa* should be reconsidered.[474] Some scholars' argument that the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* prompted Korean reformist intellectuals to collaborate with the Japanese colonial authorities is acceptable,[475] but it fails to explain why some reformists fell to collaboration, while others did not. Among the reformists of the 1890s, the cases of Sŏ Chaep'il and Yi Sŭngman show that the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* could be balanced with an optimistic vision of contemporary Korea. This means that the idea of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was not the only factor that drove some reformists to fall into collaboration with the Japanese colonial authorities. While accepting that the ideal of *munmyŏng kaehwa* affected their way of thinking to a considerable extent, other factors

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[473] *Yun Chi-Ho Ilgi*, 28 September 1894.

[474] Chŏng Yonghwa, "Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ŭi tŏt."

[475] Chŏng Yonghwa and Andre Schmid have suggested this perspective. See Chŏng Yonghwa, "Munmyŏng kaehwa ron ŭi tŏt," 297–314; Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 136–38.

including personal and situational ones influenced their ideas and actions significantly.[476]

This chapter has examined two important but misunderstood subjects regarding the reformists' thoughts and acts. It has aimed to elucidate, firstly, the origin of the reformists' self-negating psychology and, secondly, the factors that forced them to fall into collaboration. Concretely speaking, regarding the first theme, we have argued that the shift in the conception of time, especially the reformists' adoption of a progressive view of time, lay in their embracing of the developmental view of civilisation, which saw Korean culture and customs as low-developed. The reformists took the stages theory of civilisation for granted, as they deserted their long-maintained normative values in judging things and affairs and instead took a factual, empirical, and realist view of the world as their main outlook. This disconnection with their normative tradition largely engendered a self-negating or self-deprecating psychology. Regarding the second theme, we have illuminated that the pursuit of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was not the clear and direct reason for the reformists' falling to collaboration.

[476] Taking a critical stance toward Korean historians' nationalist and moralist approach to Yun Ch'iho, Dr. Koen De Ceuster has argued that, when interpreting Yun's falling to collaboration, it is important to consider sufficient "historical situations" and his "personal motives." On the other hand, Yun Ch'iho's case is similar to that of Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950), the famous writer in the colonial period and one of the most notorious collaborators. They were mainly educated in their teens and twenties in foreign countries: for Yun, Japan, China, and the U.S., and for Yi, Japan. They also liked to see things and affairs structurally and culturally. Interestingly, Michael Shin has found Yi's culturalist way of thinking in his adoption of the Kantian idea of "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*), which Yi learnt of while studying in Japan. Shin has also emphasised that an attempt to reduce Yi Kwangsu's collaboration to a single factor like Social Darwinism does not tell the entire truth. This point is applied to the case of Yun Ch'iho. His idea of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was not a direct reason for his collaboration. For Dr. Koen De Ceuster's view on Yun's collaboration, see Koen De Ceuster, "Yun Ch'iho ŭi ch'inil hyŏp'nyŏk e taehan chaep'yŏngka" [Revisiting Yun Ch'iho's Collaboration with the Japanese Authorities] in *Yun Ch'iho ŭi saeng'ae wa sasang*, ed. by Chwa'ong Yun Ch'iho munhwa saŏphoe (Seoul: Ulyu munhwasa, 1998), pp, 331–50. For Yi's collaboration with the Japanese authorities, see Yi Chunsik, "Ilje kangjŏmgi ch'inil chisikin ŭi hyŏnsil insik: Yi Kwangsu ŭi kyŏng'u" [The Collaborationist Intellectuals' Understanding of Their Time in the Colonial Period: The Case of Yi Kwangsu], *Yŏksa wa hyŏnsil* 37 (2000), pp. 175–97; Michael D. Shin, "Yi Kwang-su: The Collaborator as Modernist against Modernity," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71 (1) (2012), pp. 115–20.

Researchers have thought that the reformists' idea of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was the main source of the problem. However, *munmyŏng kaehwa* was compatible with the value of national independence, though its somewhat toxic effects are admitted. This tells us that we should consider multiple factors that influenced a reformist intellectual's falling to collaboration, including one's personal life and situational reasons.

All these arguments were arranged not only to remove the foggy state of the negative image of the reformists, but also to clarify their contributions to Korean history and the unconsciously driven pitfalls of their thought system. For a long time, the reformists' political thinking was shelved because of the stigmatisation that came with their collaboration with the Japanese colonial authorities. As we have discussed, however, the problem was their cultural ideas, specifically their idea of civilisation prompted by their disconnection from the old normative tradition. On the other hand, from a long-term development perspective of Korean political thinking, the negative side of the reformists' ideas was closely linked with their positive side, i.e., their political ideas. The reformists' critical stance on the Confucian ethical ideal, which was an inheritance of *Sirhak* scholars, encouraged them to take the developmental model of civilisation and Social Darwinism for granted. The negative side of the late nineteenth-century reformists' ideas was thus closely linked with the development of Korean political thinking itself. The negative side was invigorated by the significant pressure of modernisation of the late nineteenth century. The momentous pressure of change at the time, therefore, generated the reformists' self-negating ideas.