

The Modern Transformation of Korean Identity: Enlightenment and Orientalism

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Abstract

The self-image of Koreans was formed through complex relationships with modernity, colonialism, and nationalism. It was shaped through a modernization process in which traditional identity was changed or redefined. This was first led by a change in the notion of “civilization” due to the transformation of “international society” and thereafter was affected by the trauma of Japanese colonization. Through the process of transition from a traditional Confucian notion of civilization to a Western notion of acceptance and resistance, Koreans shaped their civilization as well as their notions of the racial, cultural, and individual modern self. Western Orientalism, in particular, accompanied the introduction of the Western notion of civilization, which served as the background for forming the self-identity of Koreans. Furthermore, the fact that the Japanese version of Orientalism developed in the midst of the relationship between the two countries also played a critical role in shaping the self-identity of Koreans. Consequently, Korea still maintains an inferiority complex toward Western culture, ambivalent feelings toward Japanese culture, and biased—positive or negative—views of their own cultural traditions. The roots of this condition possibly developed from an extreme focus on the Western notion of civilization and the perpetuation of such a paradigm. This study will demonstrate how modernization and colonization can shape and impact the formation or distortion of self-consciousness of non-Western peoples.

Keywords: modern self, Korean identity, enlightenment, Orientalism, colonialism

서식 있음: 글꼴 색: 검정

Foreword

Self-identity is not formed entirely alone, but through a person's reflection in relation to others. The self aims for assimilation and differentiation within the social classification of self, other, them, and us. Generally, individual identity is formed from one's group identity (our-identity), which is shaped through the impact of history.¹ As it is with "our" identity, "their" images of us are also formed and produced through historical experience.

Modern Korean self-identity developed during the process of modernization, which played a role in altering and shaping this identity. It is this author's hypothesis that the development of modern Korean self-identity was greatly affected by Western Orientalism and the Japanese version of Orientalism.² It is well known that the West had created and diffused Orientalism as a ruling ideology over the non-Western world. In order to identify with the West and differentiate the East as the "other,"³ and to break away from the Western Orientalist perspective, Japan created their own version of Orientalism and applied it to their neighboring states. This is a counter imitation of the Western Orientalism and, as Immanuel Wallerstein has mentioned, it is a form of "anti-eurocentric eurocentrism." Some of the images of Orientals created by Westerners were internalized by Koreans (self-orientalism) and formulated into what became Korean self-identity. Koreans experienced the impacts of both the West and Japan, and through this the cultural, racial, national, and individual self-identity was transformed.

Within the developmental period of the Korean modern self-identity, I will focus on the time period of the Korean enlightenment, specifically around the 1880s to the early 1920s. This was a time when the traditional self-identity of Koreans was

1 Menel (1994).

2 Orientalism is the unconscious, untouchable certainty about what the Orient is. Its basic content is static and unanimous. The Orient is seen as separate, eccentric, backward, silently different, sensual, and passive. It has a tendency toward despotism and away from progress. It displays feminine penetrability and supine malleability. Its progress and value are judged in terms of, and in comparison to, the West, so it is always the Other, the conquerable, and the inferior. It is well known that the theory of Orientalism is originated from Edward Said (1978) who developed the concept of knowledge/power from the ideas of Michel Foucault.

3 Komori (2001, ch. 1).

fundamentally reformed and modern characteristics emphasized. This was also specifically when Koreans were first introduced to media sources such as newspapers and magazines, and through these sources were able to form a public discourse. Through this they formed the basis for modern ideas and behavior.⁴ This period was also a time of conflict and trouble between the “reception” and “resistance” to Western standards of civilization. In the course of modernization, Koreans had formed a distorted notion of self-identity but one that also suggested the possibility of a synthesis of East-West civilizations.

This study specially focuses on the impact that the transformation of “international society” and the “notion of civilization” had on both group and individual self-identity. Here international society is not a global reference but refers more to a “sphere of civilization,” with each civilization having its own idea of civilization.

Before modern times, the world was managed by Christian, Confucian, and Islamic civilizations. After modernization, Christian civilization expanded worldwide, eventually attempting to place the rest of the world under a Western standard of civilization.⁵ It is the author’s basic premise that while this Western standard of civilization had an impact on non-Western cultures, including Korea, there were counter-forces of reception and resistance that eventually shaped non-Western people’s modern self-identity. This study will also focus on the impact of change on the notion of civilization and international society, as well as its impact on politics. This study will also discuss the impact of the experience of colonization on the self-identity of Koreans as non-Westerners.

Between Civilization and Barbarism

As Koreans had traditionally lived within the sphere of Chinese civilization, the nineteenth-century penetration by the West was initially perceived as a threat and challenge to their civilization. To the Korean people, Westerners were not portrayed as partners of trade and politics but as threatening barbarians. This was not surprising to

4 So, those sources such as newspapers and magazines at that time will be mostly dealt with in this paper.

5 In this writing, the international society’s geographical, historical, and constructive characteristics were viewed from the theory of English school of international society, specially adopted from Grotian tradition. Wight (1992); Bull and Watson (1984); Gong (1984).

the Korean people, who were proud of their Sino-centric status as the last bastion of civilization in the midst of the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty. There was also a strong sense of anti-morality growing in China because of the Opium War and the Catholic refusal to participate in religious sacrifices. To them, traditional Confucian civilization represented truth and Western civilization represented evil, a dichotomy that was the basis of the *wijeong cheoksa* theory (“protect the orthodox, repel the heterodox”). They believed that “if the Way of Confucianism fails, then we will be pursued by barbarians and beasts. While the northern barbarians of the Qing dynasty can be spoken of as enemies, the Western beasts are not even worthy of that name.”⁶ The reason they believed Westerners to be beasts is because those in the West had not accepted the five moral principals of Confucianism.⁷ They saw no reason to accept Western civilization when confronted with the threat of repelling invasion. They simply chose to resist. However, a clash of prides in civilizations occurred when Western powers refused to ceremonially kowtow to the Chinese emperor. Such collisions were rooted in fundamental differences in the concept of civilization itself. We will examine how such differences resulted in conflict and, in the process, how Korean self-identity was transformed.

Civilization and Munmyeong

Although the Western term “civilization” has been in use in East Asia since it was first translated into Japanese as *bunmei* (*munmyeong* in Korean), in the 1860s, there is a slight difference in the implications of its meaning. “Civilization” in East Asia referred to countries that practiced Confucian morals and ethics, while those from other countries were “barbarians” who were to be educated and civilized.⁸ The Confucian notion of civilization was based on ethical standards, at the geographic center of which stood China. The Sino-centric idea of civilization throughout Asia was reinforced from the international recognition of the tributary system.⁹

In the West, the word “civilization” began to be used in the mid-eighteenth

6 Yi H. (1876).

7 Kim P. (1876).

8 Tetsuji (1983, 596).

9 Fairbank (1968); Yi C. (1997).

century to represent the centrality and universality of their mode of life, especially in France and England.¹⁰ European Enlightenment thinkers addressed other cultures as either barbaric or still immature, while using themselves as the standard of civilization and to further shape their self-identity. Enlightenment thinkers believed in the European notion of modernity, which viewed civilization in terms of a European concept of progress.¹¹ The reason “civilization” became such a popular idea in the nineteenth century had much to do with the Western self-conscious.¹²

Whether called *wenming*, after the Eastern term, or “civilization,” after the Western term, both ideas carry the dichotomy of civilized-versus-barbaric and continuously claim an ethnocentric superiority (Eurocentric or Sino-centric) over the “other.” They also both hold their own civilizations as the highest standard and promote the belief that others should accept their ideas as well. Western civilization, however, is more aggressive, basing its ideas on teleological notions of time and race. To modern Westerners, “civilization” does not refer to many civilizations, but only to one civilization, one following a linear path from barbarism to European civilization. All others are positioned somewhere along this hierarchical line. Assimilation and discrimination occur simultaneously. The white race is the leader of civilization and the rest are defined as ‘others’ who are short of something. On the other hand, the Chinese notion of civilization represents a cyclical concept of history that goes from order to disorder instead of progressing along a linear course. Though the Chinese idea of civilization also compares and differentiates among others based on civilized or barbaric traits, it once allowed any nation or group who embraced Chinese norms the status of being civilized.¹³

The meeting between Western countries and East Asia in the mid-nineteenth century was a true confrontation of two different civilizations, with both expecting the other to accept their respective ideas. This began with a hegemonic struggle over the “standard”¹⁴ of civilization within the international society of global expansion. The

10 Fisch (1989).

11 Delanty (1995, ch. 5).

12 Elias (2000, 3-4).

13 Jeon (1980, 181-213); Yi C. (1998, ch. 4, ch. 6); Yi S. (1995, 107-153). Chinese civilization did not seek to expand but waited for others to come to them. Akira (1995, 20-22).

14 It is well known that there was a ceremonial controversy between the East Asia and West when they met. James Hevia (1995) tries to reinterpret the kowtow controversy as not a civilizational one but as one

first change of the East Asian notion of civilization began when the Japanese acknowledged the hegemony of Western civilization in the 1860s. The Japanese further stated that Western civilization was a true civilization while Eastern civilization was only a semi-enlightened one.¹⁵

In order for Korea to accept the standards of Western civilization, they first had to break away from the Sino-centric idea that Chinese civilization was the only civilization. Within the self-conscious idea of “a country of courteous people” and “a land of gentlemen,” there was the belief that the Korean people too could become a part of the Middle Kingdom. This was also connected to an exclusive relationship with the other. However, after the Korean-American War (Sinmi Yangyo in 1871), Bak Gyu-su (1807-1876) pointed out that being recognized as a country of courteous people is an acknowledgement of superiority over other barbarians from a Sino-centric perspective, which is therefore actually an insult.¹⁶ Also, by asking the question, “What country is not courteous?” he prepared the way for an acceptance of Western civilization.

More aggressive acceptance of Western civilization began in the 1880s after Bak’s followers, who were “civilization and enlightenment” (*munmyeong gaehwa*) thinkers, began to consider China as a political other. This was triggered after the opening of the ports in 1876, when modern Western civilization gradually penetrated Korea as China’s political position weakened. As the first modern thinker of Korea, Yu Gil-jun (1856-1914) intentionally gave up his preparations for the state examination in order to resist traditional Confucian ideas. After his studies in Japan, he wrote a book called *Segye daese ron* (The Trends of the World, 1883), in which he referred to China as Jina (Zhina in Chinese) instead of Jungguk (“Middle Kingdom”) and accepted Fukuzawa Yukichi’s Western notion of civilization, in which levels of civilization were divided into civilized (enlightened), semi-civilized, and savage—a paradigm that placed Korea into the semi-civilized category.¹⁷ Implicit within the self-consciousness of semi-civilized status was a reevaluation of Chinese civilization and a search for assimilation

between two empires.

15 Japanese major enlightenment thinker, Fukuzawa Yukichi, explaining the history of mankind as progress from barbarism to civilization, calls England “civilized” in his book written in 1868. Also, in the book *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* 文明論の概略 (*Outline of a Theory of Civilization*) written in 1875, he wrote that in order for Japan to become civilized, it had to follow the Western path.

16 Bak G. (1978, 558-559).

17 Yu G. (1978, 3:27-60).

with the West. From this view, China was seen as semi-civilized or barbarian, while Japan, which accepted the West early, was considered civilized. Yet while the dualistic framework of “civilization-barbarism” was created according to Western standards, it also overlapped with the Confucian framework of “civilized-barbaric.” Enlightenment thinkers simply shifted the center from China to the West within the same framework so that they essentially shared the same theoretical framework as *wijeong cheoksa* thinkers. It still operated within a universalistic concept of civilization rather than one of individual nation-states.

The political conflict during the early stages of Korean modernization was nothing but a conflict between the reception and resistance to the Western notion of civilization. In theory, “modernization” is not a universal process of internal evolution, in which traditional societies evolve into modern ones, but rather an international diffusion and reception of the modern West. *Dongdo seogi* (“Eastern ethics and Western tools”) thinkers still believed Chinese civilization to be “universal” while Western civilization was “particular,” a place from which to simply draw useful ideas, such as scientific skills. On the other hand, enlightenment thinkers believed Western civilization to be universal and Chinese civilization particular. An enlightenment thinker once asked, “Are we barbarians or not?” and to this a *dongdo seogi* thinker replied, “It has been a long time since our country grew out of that.”¹⁸ Another *dongdo seogi* thinker said “I regarded the word ‘enlightenment’ (*gaehwa*) as strange. It is well known that the barbarians of the peripheries change their rough customs. But, I’ve heard that learning from Western customs is considered to be enlightenment. Our country has already become civilized, so how can we be enlightened again?”¹⁹ These dialogues show the contradictory perspectives on civilization. The 1884 Gapsin Coup (Jeongbyeon) was nothing but a political struggle that arose from these different notions of civilization and the resultant differential approaches to state reform, those represented by China or Japan.²⁰

The acceptance of the Western notion of civilization began in the search for

18 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, January 29, 1884.

19 Kim Y. (1971, 156-157). This quote accurately shows the opinions of two sides.

20 Kim Ok-gyun, the leader of the Gapsin Coup, was ashamed that his country was a tributary state of China. Therefore, in his revolution pledge article 1, he announced that the tributary behavior toward China had to stop. Then, he marked Min Yeong-ik, one of the Queen’s intimates and leader of the pro-Qing group, as first to be killed. This coup d’etat was suppressed by the Chinese.

parity with Western wealth and power, but it did not occur through force. As people found things in Western civilization to be superior to those in their traditional cultures, there were more movements for acceptance to the degree that such an adjustment in thinking was even considered to be in accordance with the law of nature (heavenly way). Even though one of the leaders of the Gapsin Coup criticized the Western invasion, he still evaluated Western politics to be in close correspondence with Confucian virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom).²¹ As Korean thinkers began to learn more about modern Western civilization, their belief in traditional Confucian civilization weakened while criticism toward it intensified. Such changes are evident especially after the Sino-Japanese War, which has been called the “war between civilization and barbarianism.” Therefore, in 1895, even the headquarters of Confucian studies, the Seonggyungwan (National Confucian Academy), acknowledged the importance of “civilization and enlightenment.”²²

However, traditional civilization was not easily replaced by Western civilization. Resistance against Western civilization was exemplified by the Donghak (Eastern Learning) and *uibyeong* (righteous army) movements. The Donghak confronted the Western learning of Catholicism, while the *uibyeong* upheld the theory of *wijeong cheoksa*, maintaining their view that Western civilization was simply material development while Confucian civilization represented the truth because it included moral development.²³

Those who did not agree with equating civilization with Westernization began to change their views through the writings of Chinese scholar Liang Qichao. Liang was the first to use the word *wenming* as a Chinese translation of “civilization” and made a Chinese project of civilization with reference to that of Japan.²⁴ His civilizing project greatly affected Korean Confucian reformists, as was evident in the books, newspapers, and journals of the 1900s. The *Hwangseong sinmun*, published by Confucian reformists,

21 Japanese Department of Foreign Affairs, ed. *Nihon gaikou bunsho* 日本外交文書 (Diplomatic Documents of Japan), vol 21, Doc. No.106, 297.

22 *Gojong sillok* (Annals of King Gojong), August 9, 1932, Decree of Education Ministry Hakburyeong No.2; *Hanmal geundae beomnyeong jaryojib I* (The Library of Korean Assembly, 1970), 538.

23 Yu I. (1984, 33-34). From the perspective of civilization Jo Gyeong-dal (1991) characterizes *wijeong cheoksa* as “civilization defensism,” Donghak as “civilization revivalism,” *dongdo seogi* as “civilization cooperatism,” and civilization and enlightenment thinkers as “civilization implantationism.”

24 Hazama (1999, 106-131).

stated at last that “The way of governing during the reigns of Yao and Shun and during the three kingdoms was truly nothing more than one of trust. Today the fundamental technique of governing by the powers is also nothing more than this trust. How could it be that there would be two ways of governing the base?” In this way, they were claiming universality to be based on the same way or principle.²⁵ Thus the formerly Sino-centric Confucian reformist notions of civilization finally came closer to the *munmyeong gaehwa* thinkers’ notions of civilization as influenced by Japan. This grand transformation was completed as this notion of civilization became shared throughout East Asia. The rapid prosperity of Meiji Japan contrasted with the rapid decline of the Chinese empire, which caused a traditional civilization to be reduced to “a civilization heritage” and supported the view that modern, Western civilization was a “universal civilization.”

The ruling status of Western civilization was structured by the power of knowledge. Enlightenment thinkers asserted that “the reader of the Four Books and Three Classics has become useless in this world.”²⁶ Stating that “the knowledge of the East has no expectation of progress,”²⁷ they insisted on learning the “practical knowledge” of the West. As a Protectorate Treaty was being concluded in 1905 and the country came under threat, enlightenment thinkers blamed everything on “old knowledge.” They emphasized the importance of developing power and skills for their independence, and that such power would come from “new knowledge.”²⁸ Those who were affected by Liang’s destructivism claimed that old ideas and beliefs should be extracted by their roots.²⁹ In order to keep from being overwhelmed by this “new knowledge,” *dongdo seogi* thinkers created the Daedong hakhoe (Academy of Great Unity) in 1907 and moved for a compromise somewhere in-between and a blending of “old” and “new” knowledge. However, those who were familiar with the “old knowledge” gradually moved on to absorb the “new knowledge.” Finally in 1910, “new knowledge” completely dominated academic society.³⁰

25 *Hwangseong sinmun*, April 3, 1903.

26 *Dongnip sinmun* (The Independent), December 22, 1896.

27 *The Independent*, September 9, 1899.

28 *Daehan hyeophoe bo*, vol. 8, November 1908.

29 *Daehan maeil sinbo*, July 30, 1910.

30 Yi G. (1980, 1-16).

The Mirrored Self-Image

The active acceptance of Western civilization was motivated by the *Dongnip sinmun* (The Independent, 1896-1899), which was run by those who had studied in America, such as Seo Jae-pil (Philip Jaisohn) and Yun Chi-ho. The editors of the *The Independent* constantly advocated the idea that “Civilization = Westernization.” Such thinking triggered the minds of the “civilized” (Westerner) to reevaluate “oriental ways.” Moreover, the civilization of the West and the barbarianism of the Orient were compared within this dichotomous scheme:

As we analyzed people of different cultures, we could see that Westerners calmed their minds and aspired to progress each day. Therefore, the people are becoming more civilized and the population is growing. On the other hand, the Oriental people (*dongyang saram*) do not discard their old habits; therefore, when they face difficult situations, they do not know how to manage them, and instead they go backwards. When they find someone who is ahead of them and more knowledgeable, they do not attempt to learn and accept their ideas but they show only jealousy. Therefore, they are in a sleeping world. Also, the population is getting smaller and the economy is growing weaker. This is the truth that the intelligent of the world all know.³¹

Such a dichotomy produces the wrong ideas that the East and West are respectively just one conglomerate and that their simplified images are a fixed reality. As Stefan Tanaka has pointed out, the word *dongyang* (the East) was first coined by the Japanese to describe anything non-Western, but later as they attempted to follow the path of the West, they wanted to symbolize it. Therefore, the central figure of *dongyang* became Zhina (China).³² Korean enlightenment thinkers influenced by Japan denounced China as a “country that had not awakened from its dream, falling back into old habits, which have thus become the world’s weakest country, one that is constantly laughed at.”³³ They regarded China as the “other” and Japan, which identified with the West and

31 *The Independent*, June 17, 1899.

32 Tanaka (1993).

33 *The Independent*, August 4, 1897.

presented a model of development as the “self.” Thus the new identification was formed according to the Western standard of civilization.

The transformation of the notion of civilization led to criticism of the Confucian civilization. Yun Chi-ho (1865-1945), the editor of the *The Independent*, claimed that Confucian civilization was centered on self-interest and that the idea of public spirit cannot be found anywhere.³⁴ “Confucianism, by making the king the despot over the country and the father the despot over the family, has succeeded in completely killing the spirit of freedom and joy in the home and in the country. Confucianism may be called a hierarchy of despotism”³⁵ and “contains the seeds of everlasting ‘go backism.’ It has no progressivism or vitality to advance or improve and has ruined poor Koreans beyond recovery.”³⁶ Apart from this, Confucianism caused Koreans to accept enslavement to China as a given, thus weakening the country’s autonomy.³⁷

In contrast, Christian civilization was understood to be more ideal. In Christian civilization, there were the ethics of praxis, public spirit, freedom and equality, progressiveness, and personal autonomy. Therefore, Christianity, a religion for the superior, triggered the prosperity of Western civilization.³⁸ There was confidence that Christianity was a “religion for the civilized” and Confucianism was the “religion for the ruined country.” In short, Christianity represented the modern and civilized.

Any religion other than Christianity was considered superstitious belief.³⁹ Enlightenment thinkers, who were sensitive toward the people of civilized countries, looked down on fortune tellers, geomancers, and even Buddhist monks.⁴⁰ It was not only Christians who criticized the traditional village gods and Buddhism for their idol worship. The Confucian reformists, critical of traditional religion, also voiced their arguments for the elimination of superstition.⁴¹ *Donghak* believers, who could not make

34 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, March 11, 1894; April 6, 1902.

35 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, May 27, 1904.

36 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, December 12, 1893; September 28, 1894.

37 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, December 28, 1900.

38 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, September 24, 1893.

39 The reason Christianity spread so fast in Korea is because they believed that it was the “true religion.”

40 *The Independent*, May 7, 1896; July 25, 1899.

41 “Once someone falls into superstition, he loses his sense of reason and eventually gets corrupted, which will negatively impact the country—he will be extremely sensitive about the most unreasonable things. How sad is that?” Bak E. (1907).

the Westerners understand their point of view, were looked down upon as barbarians.⁴² The Confucian uprisings, which fought against total Westernization, were thought to be actions committed by “those who harmed their own country” and “people who are as poisonous as leprosy.”⁴³ Moreover the Japanese imperial military, which killed *Donghak* believers and suppressed the Confucian uprisings, was praised in the name of civilization.⁴⁴

The praise of Western civilization caused Western imperialism to be seen as good or inevitable for the practice of the “civilizing mission.” “The conquest of Africa by the enlightened countries was viewed as saving poor people from misery.”⁴⁵ And “England is the teacher who travels around the world and teaches freedom.”⁴⁶ Confucian reformists, too, believed imperialism was inevitable.⁴⁷ This was largely a result of a combination of Social Darwinism and racism. Social Darwinism, at least, acknowledged that East Asia had an inclination toward the progress of mankind achieved through the survival of the fittest, in a parallel fashion as in the animal kingdom. This idea supported the capitalist ideas of modernity and self-strengthening. This idea also presented a grand philosophy of enlightenment, thereby substituting the teachings of Zhu Xi. One of the leading Confucian reformists, Bak Eun-sik (1859-1926), claimed that “only the brave and brilliant can fully practice Confucian morals. The weak and unwise cannot practice them. The superior countries’ conquest of inferior countries is the same as men conquering beasts in ancient times.”⁴⁸ He accepted the logic of Western imperialism. His Confucian universalism was replaced by national imperialism. As Ashis Nandy has mentioned, anti-colonial movements have often been the products of the imperial culture itself and, even in opposition, these movements have paid homage to their respective cultural origins.⁴⁹

Although the reality of imperialism brought forth nationalistic resistance, on the other hand it also fostered an envy and desire to imitate imperialism. When the Qing

42 *The Independent*, March 31, 1898.

43 *Hwangseong sinmun*, December 14, 1906.

44 *The Independent*, April 14, 1898.

45 *The Independent*, June 17, 1899.

46 *The Independent*, June 22, 1897.

47 Yi G. (1979).

48 *Seou* (Bulletin of Western Friends Association) 1 (1906): 8-9.

49 Nandy (1983, 3).

dynasty paid reparations to Japan after losing the Sino-Japanese War, *The Independent* stated, “If Koreans could awake from their dreams -- and strengthen their wealth and military progressively, fairly, honestly, and conveniently -- they would also be able to attack the Qing dynasty and take their land through reparations. Therefore I really want the Korean people to have a strong mind in order to retake Manchuria from China and Tsushima from Japan in ten years.”⁵⁰ Resistance was concurrent with imitation.

The appropriation of Western civilization allowed for the reevaluation of oneself and of one’s life style from the point of the civilized eye, through which was asked the question, “How do civilized people see us?” That is, the sensitivity toward the Western gaze was presented in terms of shame. They were concerned that foreigners might view them as savages. As a writer for the *Jeguk sinmun* writer noted, “I wish that we could change our rules and manners day by day so that we will not feel ashamed in front of foreigners.”⁵¹ As Norbert Elias also demonstrated in *The Civilizing Process*, shame is a big motivating factor in changing one’s behavior. They said Koreans should change not only their trivial manners but also throw out “their old minds and behavior and rectify it to fit the Western style.”⁵² As soon as they internalized their inferiority according to the Western standard of civilization, tradition became an object that needs to be broken. The appropriation of Western civilization resulted in the alienation of the traditional lifestyle. As they degraded themselves as subjects of the enlightened, they alienated and colonized themselves. Thus Western Orientalism was internalized without consciously realizing it.

Between Race and Nation

Formation of National Identity

As soon as Koreans accepted the notion of Western civilization, it was easy to have a

⁵⁰ *The Independent*, August 4, 1897.

⁵¹ *Jeguk sinmun*, August 12, 1898.

⁵² “I state this generally because it is good to know a small portion of traditional law and behavior. When meeting foreign women, please treat them nicely as you treat men and do not smoke in front of her when visiting other people’s places. do not go there after eating food full of different smell such as scallions or garlic. It is also impolite to yawn, burp, and sneeze in front of other people. Ask for forgiveness when passing by other people.” *The Independent*, November 14, 1896; June 2, 1899.

sense of inferiority as a yellow-skinned people with feelings of envy toward white people. However, envy and the critical moment toward oneself are totally different. The reality of Western imperialism created the critical moment of nation and race. According to an article from *The Independent*, “Generally, the goal of Westerners is to remove all the other religions and to prostrate the other races—wanting to be the greatest in the world—and only the yellow-skinned people of Korea, Japan, and China have not been included under their domination—how dangerous it is, the yellow race!”⁵³ In this way, they thought that it was time to fight between the races and express the crisis of the yellow race. This article continued that the unity of the yellow race was necessary to prevent domination by the white race. It also advocated that Japan, which had risen to equal standing with Europe and America by succeeding in the revision of treaties, needed to be at the center:

How can the yellow race resist the domination of the West?

Through the Japanese experience, we can predict the future of the yellow race. Westerners despise Eastern (*dongyang*) countries --- They aren't interested in the same rank, as many Japanese systems have become almost the same as civilized countries in Europe and America, and they only reluctantly permitted the same rights. The Japanese represented the yellow race's knowledge and ability to the world. Therefore, I praise not only Japan but also the yellow race in the East. Even though they are separate nations, the white people unite themselves like a Triple Alliance or Concert of Europe when they come toward the yellow-race in the East. Then why does the yellow-race of the East never unite, always being estranged and separated by those from the West? --- I truthfully desire that all yellow-race nations learn from the Japanese people's spirit and recover their equality. Today's Japan is a source for advancement that the yellow race needs to reach, a mirror that fixes the politics and laws, a wall that can destroy the alien thief. The Japanese, who

53 *The Independent*, November 9, 1899.

reformed their treaties with countries in Europe and America, should lead and encourage the people from the yellow race --- It is a duty from God to maintain the peace in the East and to protect the race. (*The Independent*, November 9, 1899. 각주처리, 인용부분 단락 처리)

Thus racism in East Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was formed for the sake of a collective defense against the white Western race. This combined with the Japanese view toward Korea and Asia after the Sino-Japanese War, which enlightenment scholars accepted as a form of pan-Asianism. In particular, when the West's imperialist attack on Asian countries became prominent after 1898, this idea was promoted throughout the country by newspapers such as *The Independent* and *Hwangseong sinmun*, as well as by enlightenment magazines that were published after the Russo-Japanese War. The foundations of pan-Asianism were rooted in a cultural concept of "same race and same character" (*dongmun dongjong*), and also from relations "between lips and teeth" (*bogeo sunchi*), in geopolitical terms. The identification of the same race and character was formed from a consciousness against other races and character, and it posits a racial and cultural closeness. *Dongmun dongjong* was a term with political meaning just as well as an anthropological one.

The political purpose of pan-Asianism was different between Korea and Japan. Japan wanted to be the leader of the "yellow race" and thus was concerned with pursuing "national interests" in the name of "racial interests," while Koreans regarded as going alongside their own national interests. Thus, Korean policy was a product of moral imperative rather than political strategy. Koreans expected a "Peace of the East" advocated by Japan during the war and were deeply impressed by Japan's victory. The victory was presented as a victory of the yellow race against the white race and afterward the expectation for Japan to become a leading country rose tremendously. An Jung-geun (1879-1910), who assassinated the first Japanese Resident-General of Korea, Ito Hirobumi, reflected the disappointment of Korean people, including himself, who had supported the war with a united heart because of its character of "racial

competition” and had the expectation of “peace in the East and the independence of Korea.”⁵⁴ In this way, the process of Japanese imperialism/expansionism consolidated the confrontational consciousness between the races of the East and West.

Traditionalists who were critical of Japanese expansionism also expressed the idea of pan-Asian solidarity in a different way from the enlightenment thinkers. *Wijeong cheoksa* thinkers accepted international law as the norm among states and allowed some aspects of Western civilization around the Sino-Japanese war period, demonstrating their concerns for pan-Asian solidarity around the time of the Russo-Japanese war. One of the most representative persons of this group, Choe Ik-hyeon (1833-1906), thought that there was a possibility for Russia to attack and reenter East Asia as an act of revenge after losing the war. The “three nations of the East” needed to prepare and be ready for this with a tripolar stance.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, there was a movement of disbelief toward pan-Asianism after the experience of the 1905 “Protectorate Treaty.” Yun Chi-ho expressed his like and dislike toward Japan immediately after the treaty by writing, “I am glad Japan has beaten Russia. The islanders have gloriously vindicated the honors of the Yellow race.... I love and honor Japan as a member of the yellow race; but hate her as a Korean from whom she is taking away everything including independence itself.”⁵⁶ His like and dislike of Japan came from the mixed identities of “yellow race” and “Korean people.” The tension between “race identity” and “national identity” presented a new challenge and choice through the experience of the dilemma between “national independence” and “civilizing the nation.” Enlightenment thinkers thought of national independence mostly as something that would become possible after having gained the proper skills, or in other words, after becoming civilized. But since Korea was not yet civilized, it was thought necessary to first mainly focus on civilizing the nation, the best example of which was Korea’s neighbor of the same race, Japan. Japan became the new center among enlightenment thinkers, replacing China. As soon as they considered Japan an exemplary country and identified it as the Self, the “cooperation” and “leadership” of Japan were welcomed for the purpose of Korea’s civilization. Yun Chi-ho confessed, “I

54 An (1997, 206-207).

55 Choe (1906).

56 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, September 7, 1905.

don't want to live in dirty China, full of racism and prejudice toward America, or under a weak government in Korea." "If I could choose my own country, I would choose Japan."⁵⁷ Thus "ambivalent resistance" finally resulted in adaptation.⁵⁸

On the other hand, the nationalists,⁵⁹ who put more importance on national identity and independence, started to differentiate "race" from "nation." Sin Chae-ho, the founding father of modern Korean historiography, stated it in this way:

Alas! If one village unites and rescues the crisis of our family, it is a rightful pursuit, but today, the unity of one village is unrelated to our family's rise and fall.... If Korea doesn't propose nationalism during this competition among all nations and dream of pan-Asianism, then this is the same thing as being concerned about competing with other worlds in the universe. . . . The nation is the head but pan-Asianism is only a guest. Nonetheless today's pan-Asianist advocates pan-Asia as the head and nation as a guest. They do not care about the rise and fall of their nation. Alas! How has stupidity reached this point? Even if Korea and Koreans eternally fail, if the country's land falls under the label of the yellow race, is this satisfactory? Ah, this is not right.... We notice there is no such Korean who rescues the nation by using pan-Asianism, and yet the foreigners usurp the national soul (*gukhon*) by using pan-Asianism. We should keep watch and be careful about this.⁶⁰

Sin Chae-ho criticized the falsehood of pan-Asianism based on racism and claimed that every Korean should have national self-identity. National self-consciousness was seen to be inevitable in the process of self-confirmation as modern men. In fact it was pan-Asianism that arose during this period without a new regional order after the collapse of the Chinese world order during the late 19th century. Therefore the formation of modern nationalism was accompanied by such a breakaway of pan-Asianism. But national consciousness was again overwhelmed by the will of civilization. Finally, as Japan colonized Korea, the enlightenment thinkers admitted that it was inevitable, while

57 *The Diaries of Yun Chi-ho*, November 1, 1893; August 6, 1905.

58 Homi Bhabha, a theorist of post-colonialism, has made the concept of "ambivalent resistance" which means between total refusal and total acceptance. He insists this can be a way of subversion with physical resistance when there is no alternative. Bhabha (1994, 101-122).

59 As we see nationalism includes democracy internally and independence externally, *wijeong cheoksa* theorists as well as Civilization reformists had a defect. *Wijeong cheoksa* theorists neglected independence from China and democracy. Civilization reformists neglected independence from Japan.

60 Sin (1997, 219-220).

nationalists either resisted or fled from the country. If the enlightenment thinkers positively identified themselves with Japan, the nationalists negatively excluded Japan as the “other.” The reality of colonization caused the dissociation of national self-identity.

The Japanese Version of Orientalism

After signing the protectorate treaty of 1905, Japan differentiated herself from Korea in order to justify its domination over that nation. Since 1885, Japan had already been preparing its uniqueness from the “Orient.” Fukuzawa Yukichi claimed in his famous article, “Escape from the Orient” that although Japan was geographically at the end of the East, the people’s minds had already moved to the West. In disconnecting her relationships with the “bad friends” Korea and China, who were still embedded in their old habits, Japan imagined itself along with the civilized West. What Fukuzawa feared was that they would be seen at the same level as Korea and China when viewed from the perspective of Orientalism. The Japanese could not stand to see themselves being looked upon at the same level as Korea and China, who were still “un-scientific,” and still filled with Chinese “servility” and Korean “wretchedness.” Japan attempted to disassociate herself by applying the “civilized-barbarian” framework within Asia. Japan invented and emphasized Korea’s national diseases. Japan generalized Korea’s traditional culture as the *yangbanism*⁶¹ of class discrimination, dependence, and *sadaejui* (a doctrine of “serving the great”) and denounced it as the etiological cause of their restrictions.⁶² Claiming that they would cure such diseases and lead Korea into civilization, Japan justified their imperialism. This was no doubt a strategy of cultural imperialism that fostered a sense of inferiority among Koreans and acceptance of colonial dominance.

However, the Japanese version of Orientalism carried, as Edward Said mentioned, a partial truth, which engendered hard times for Koreans. The enlightenment thinkers gave in and accepted such a label. Then, finally, as Andre Schmid has pointed out, Korean intellectuals and Japanese colonialists spoke the same language with a

61 “Editorial,” *The Independent*, July 28, 1896.

62 From this, *yangbanism* was further criticized for its elitism in Korean society.

shared vocabulary and worked within the common framework of *munmyeng gaehwa*.⁶³ Self-strengthening advocates accepted the idea that the reason Korea fell into inferiority was because of these “diseases.” Jang Ji-yeon (1864-1921), who wrote “Today We Cry Out in Lamentation,” claimed that Korea had been inured to Sino-centrism, from which grew their dependence, weakness, and laziness. He pointed out the five roots of diseases that needed to be cured immediately: chronic partisanism, bad habits of character, a spirit of dependence, chronic laziness, and a lack of patriotism.⁶⁴ Once these diseases were cured, the country could then become a civilized free nation. Such arguments were common among the advocates of self-strengthening.⁶⁵ Although the Korean inferiority theory was basically a self-criticism by Koreans, it was still referred to and accepted as a truth in Korea. This also exemplifies Koreans’ voluntary internalization of colonialism through Social Darwinism. Such acceptance was developed in Yi Gwang-su’s article in *Gaebyeok*, “Reform of National Character” in the 1920s.

Since then, the Korean people have reproduced their own sense of Orientalism (auto-Orientalism). They formed a negative self-perception of the Korean people by indirectly looking at how Westerners viewed them. Negative Korean characteristics stood opposite to those of the West, which presumed its reality.⁶⁶ One of the ultimate powers of the colonizer is to define the terms and representations in which the colonized articulate their own sense of self. The slipperiness of the terms, however, together with a multivalence of representations, offered much latitude for Koreans to continue to work with the concepts and forms of knowledge that they had explored for their own purposes before 1905, but which thereafter Japan threatened to arrogate for its own purposes.⁶⁷ The reason Koreans accepted Japanese imperialism and Orientalism is because they fell into the trap of the “philosophy of enlightenment.” Enlightenment thought converted political problems into cultural issues by analyzing the non-West’s “latitude” as being culturally caused. As Korean enlightenment thinkers tried to solve political predicaments with cultural methods, they ignored the realm of politics. For instance, although they sympathized with the patriotism of the *uibyeong*, they blamed

63 Schmid (2002, 113).

64 *Daehan Jaganghoe weolbo* (Korean Self-Strengthening Society Monthly) 3 (1906): 5; 5 (1907): 1-7.

65 Bak C. (1992)

66 Liang Qichao (1901) also enumerated Chinese diseases such as selfishness, untrustworthiness, cowardice, inaction, etc.

67 Schmid (2002, 135-136).

them for stupidity because it was not a time to resort to military solutions but a time for cultural approaches.⁶⁸ Also, the fact that Koreans were barbaric, poor, and weak was because of no one else but Koreans.⁶⁹ The self-strengthening movement during the Japanese domination occurred within this perspective; therefore progress was limited. So, even though enlightenment thinkers are generally evaluated positively for moving toward modernization, they were still overwhelmed by Western civilization, fell into its conceptual trap, and therefore must be criticized.⁷⁰

The resistance to Japanese Orientalism began with an argument for Korean uniqueness and autonomous subjectivity. This is closely related to the condition of losing sovereignty. Korea had to create and maintain a “cultural identity” over “political identity.” The word “cultural nation”(minjok) was being used more commonly than “political nation”(gungmin), because it carried the meaning that they were special beings as a part of an autonomous community with a shared historical and cultural background. The phrase “20 million Korean brothers and the beautiful lands of Korea have been free since the 4200 years of Dangun era—the time of the founding father”⁷¹ contains both the long record and a wide gap in the history of the Korean people. Specifically, the use of the Dangun calendar symbolizes autonomy in a time consciousness distinguishable from the Chinese and Japanese. As phrases such as “20 million Korean brothers” and “souls in Samcheolli”⁷² demonstrate, blood kinship and geographical community were stressed. Stressing the language community of *hangeul* (Korea’s vernacular alphabet) was based on the idea that languages and letters were elements of independence.

As one type of resistance to Japanese Orientalism, Korea’s cultural and moral superiority over Japan was stressed. For example, “Japan was civilized through Korea in the past. Although their military power is strong, the Korean people have always looked down on them.”⁷³ Also, although the Japanese criticized the weaknesses of Koreans, through the Japanese invasion, Korea once again looked down on Japan because it “threw away its righteousness in order to pursue a small benefit.”

68 *Hwangseong sinmun*, May 29, 1906.

69 *Seou* 8 (1907): 1-2.

70 Details are shown in Chung (2001).

71 *Daehan maeil sinbo*, January 21, 1908.

72 *Daehan maeil sinbo*, September 11, 1907.

73 *Daehan maeil sinbo*, January 7, 1910; *Hwangseong sinmun*, March 31, 1904.

Furthermore, the Japanese invasion was also “against humanity,” just as Russia’s was to Poland, and France’s was to Vietnam.⁷⁴ From the enlightenment thinker’s perspective, Japan may have been superior, but Korea was morally much higher. It required a great effort to displace their inferiority of power with moral superiority and long history. When there were not enough material resources to fight this battle, resistance came from the mental sphere. Sin Chae-ho attempted to preserve the people’s mentality in order to maximize resistance, which he called “national essence” or *guksu*.⁷⁵ He mentions that curing national “diseases” is good, but destroying everything without regard to what is good and evil is wrong. *Guksu* signifies a historical behavior, tradition, law, or order. Without this, he thought, the Korean people would lose their sense of patriotism.⁷⁶ Sin Chae-ho assumed a cultural relativist position and severely criticized the civilization reformists who scorned tradition through the eyes of Westerners. He differentiated between “equal learning” and “assimilative learning,” in that one can make or develop oneself to be equal to others, while the other tries only to assimilate themselves to others without self-identity, which can lead to subjectivity.⁷⁷ He rejected both the Sino-centrism of traditional Confucians and the Western-centrism of civilization reformists and tried to uncover the origin and supremacy of Korean culture. His act of critically reconstructing tradition with an eye to national self-esteem can be evaluated as a subjective synthesis beyond blind reception and resistance.

Conclusion

The modern self-identity of Koreans was shaped through the modernization process, when traditional identity was redefined. This was first led by the notion of civilization according to the changes in “international society” and after that it was affected by the trauma of Japanese colonization. The formation of the modern self-identity of Koreans was formed through complex relations among colonialism, modernity, and

74 *Daehan maeil sinbo*, July 10, 1907.

75 *Daehan maeil sinbo*, August 12, 1908.

76 With this in mind, Sin Chae-ho moved to preserve the people’s pride, and what eventually surfaces is the study of Korean history of nationalism.

77 Sin C. (1998).

nationalism.⁷⁸ Out of the transitional process from traditional Confucian notions of civilization to a Western notion of civilization, Koreans shaped their civilization as well as their racial, cultural, and individual modern self through both resistance and acceptance. In particular, the concept of Orientalism accompanied the introduction of the Western notion of civilization, which served as the background for the formation of Korean self-identity. Furthermore, the fact that the Japanese version of civilization developed in the midst of the two countries' relationship also played a critical role in shaping the self-identity of Koreans. Consequently, Korea still maintains an inferiority complex toward Western cultures, ambivalent feelings toward the Japanese, discriminatory views of other Asians, and a sense of the alienation of the individual, which is still carried out to this day. The cause of this condition developed perhaps from a heightened focus on Western notions of civilization and the continuation of such a paradigm.

The Western-centrism of civilization was formed with the reception of enlightenment theory. Moreover, the enlightenment has had a dual face that contained both "modernity" and "colonialism." The dilemma between modernity and colonialism, that is, civilization and independence, has been the common problem of non-Westerners in modern times. Those who achieve independence through civilization seek to assimilate themselves with the West while neglecting their own traditions and demeaning themselves under Orientalism. While civilization reformists can be evaluated somewhat positively when accepting the positive points of foreign civilizations and presenting visions of "modernization," they can also be criticized for being overcome by Western civilization and trapped by its logic. While civilization reformists and nationalists stand on opposite sides of assimilation and resistance, both played common roles of internalizing and strengthening the Western way of modernization by seeking modern projects of wealth and power. Even the logic of national resistance imitated that of colonialism in its attempt to reconstruct a self using values borrowed from Western colonialism. In the socio-political context of accentuating a grand idea of national unity, the individual self has been criticized as anti-social.

78 Shin and Robinson (1999, 17).

Therefore, in order to rectify the distorted images of the modern self, the notion of civilization must be first reevaluated. Linear, progressive Western civilization does not have to be set as the standard for other civilizations. It needs to be provincialized as the Other. In order to overcome the double nature of Western enlightenment thought and Orientalism, “transversality” should be the goal, rather than universality.⁷⁹ The process can begin with an intellectual praxis that attempts a critical reconstruction of the modern system of knowledge. To achieve this we do not have to forfeit intellectual tensions in order to maintain a “tottering balance.” We have to grope for true transversality and humanity after overcoming the colonial mind that has been divided by this neglect or worship of the “Orient.”

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79 Jung (2002, 297-306).

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Glossary

bunmei (J.) 文明

bogeo sunchi 輔車唇齒

dongdo seogi 東道西器

Donghak 東學

dongmun dongjong 同文同種

dongyang saram 東洋 사람

gaehwa 開化

gukhon 國魂

guksu 國粹

gungmin 國民

minjok 民族

munmyeong 文明

munmyeong gaehwa 文明開化

sadaejuui 事大主義

segye daese ron 世界大勢論

Sinmi Yangyo 辛未洋擾

uibyeong 義兵

wenming (Ch.) 文明

wijeong cheoksa 衛正斥邪

Zhina (Ch.) 支那

(J.: Japanese, Ch.: Chinese)

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