

Haengbok (Happiness), beyond Its Colonialism and Privatization*

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Abstract

The Korean word haengbok 행복 (幸福 in Chinese characters), meaning “happiness,” was newly coined during the state’s modern times. Haengbok and its rival terms hyangbok 향복 (享福 in Chinese characters), meaning “bliss,” began to appear in usage from the Gabo Reform and was used sporadically, yet never established a clear usage nor acquired popularity among people until a turning point in 1910. Until then, haengbok had been mainly a statist term and rarely used in an individualized or private way, but in the 1910s, became popularly used, being associated with private intimacy differentiated from the public sphere on the one hand and with pleasure separated from labor and daily routine on the other hand. The colonial power of the 1910s and its media, the Maeil sinbo (Daily News), played a special role in the course of isolation and privatization of happiness in Korea. Colonial happiness began to be reappropriated in the midst of overwhelming new values such as freedom, justice, and humanity upheld in the March First Independence Movement of 1919, and during the early 1920s, it was widely used as a public and dynamic concept. The concept of happiness then took the path of introspection and privatization, and in this latter course there was no attempt to engage in active discourse on its individualization.

Keywords: haengbok (happiness), pleasure, individual, colonialism, privatization, March First Independence Movement of 1919

* This article is a revision of the paper presented at the symposium “Concepts and Korean Modernity,” co-hosted by Yonsei University’s Institute of Language and Information Studies and the Hallym Academy of Science on January 13, 2012.

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***Bok* 福 (Fortune), *Rak* 樂 (Pleasure), and a New Word, *Haengbok* 幸福 (Happiness)**

Today, the Korean word *haengbok* appears to seamlessly correspond to the English word “happiness.” This is true for two reasons. Firstly, there are many English translations of *haengbok* besides “happiness,” such as “bliss,” “elation,” “euphoria,” “felicity,” etc., but everyone thinks of “happiness” upon hearing the word *haengbok*. Secondly, between the two words, people notice virtually no semantic gap that tends to exist in translated words. For instance, the same sort of cleavage that exists in corresponding *kwaerak* 쾌락 (快樂 in Chinese characters) to “pleasure” or *bokji* 복지 (福祉 in Chinese characters) to “welfare” is not detected in the set of *haengbok* to “happiness.” In this sense, it may be said that *haengbok* was successfully established both as a translation and as a newly coined word. However, it did not have a smooth start when it first appeared in Korean lexicon in the late nineteenth century.

At the beginning, its usage was different from that of today and also, it underwent quite a different course of development from the semantic web of happiness (English), *bonheur* (French), and *glück* (German). *Haengbok* 幸福 competed with *haengbok* 倖福 (elation), *hyangbok* 享福 (bliss), *bongni* 福利 (wellbeing), and *bokji* 福祉 (welfare), and also contested with *kwaerak* 快樂 (pleasure), *allak* 安樂 (comfort), and *hwarak* 和樂 (harmony). Through this process, it played a role in adjusting the relationship between individual and society in modern Korea and a balance between achievements and goals in life. This history of adjustment catches our attention, when we try to trace back the course of the concept *haengbok* from the early modern period to the late colonial era.

As it is shown in English-Korean dictionaries published in the early modern period, “happiness” was originally translated into single-syllable word *rak* 樂 (pleasure) or *bok* 福 (fortune). In the 1890 edition of Underwood’s dictionary, it was translated into *rak* and *bok*; and in the 1891 edition of Scott’s dictionary, it was translated into *bok*. The word *haengbok* appeared for the first time in the twentieth

century. Jones's dictionary printed in 1914 listed *haengbok* and *kwaerak* for translations of "happiness." Gale's dictionary released in 1925 translated "happiness" into *haengbok*; and Underwood added *haengbok* next to *rak* and *bok* in his 1925 print and listed *rak* and *kwaerak* as translations of "pleasure." Looking through the dictionaries of Underwood (1890), Scott (1891), Jones (1914), and Gale (1924), one can see that "pleasure" was translated into several words such as *jeulgeoum* 즐거움 (blitheness), *gippeum* 기쁨 (joy), *jami* 滋味 (delicacy), *heungchwi* 興趣 (excitement), and *yeollak* 宴樂 (delight); of them, *rak* and *kwaerak* were employed once each. The word "welfare" was problematic, too. While it had no entry in early dictionaries, Gale (1924) and Underwood (1925) proposed *annyeong* 안녕 (wellbeing) and *haengbok* 행복 (happiness) in addition to *taepyeong* 태평 (insouciance), *pyeongan* 평안 (peace), *anbu* 안부 (safety), *munan* 문안 (regards) for translations of "welfare."¹ Based on this, it may be said that in the early modern period, the English words of "happiness," "pleasure," and "welfare," and Korean words denoting *bok* and *rak* were used interchangeably without clear distinction. *Rak* linked "happiness" and "pleasure," and *bok* bridged "happiness" and "welfare." From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, those concepts of happiness, pleasure, welfare, and wellbeing were regarded as overlapped and hybrid rather than mutually exclusive.

It is believed that the corresponding relationship between *haengbok* and "happiness" was established during the early to mid-1910s, when the previously unstable association of *haengbok* and "happiness" merged and became fixed. In winning the competition with neighboring concepts, *haengbok* appeared to have been entitled to claim the word "happiness," and "happiness" was accepted as a concept referring to a certain state of mind and a specific set of emotions differentiated from pleasure and welfare. This might be viewed as a

1. For the dictionaries cited here, I refer to the photocopies made by Hwang and Yi (2012). Particularly, the section on "happiness" and "pleasure" in the corresponding vocabulary table was an excellent source of information for me to launch a more in-depth investigation.

process in which the newly created word *haengbok* became entrenched and at the same time, the foreign word “happiness” overcame unrest in a new linguistic terrain and established a stable usage. Turmoil is often observed when a translation of a foreign word is accepted in society, and interestingly, this occurs repeatedly. Until its safe arrival in Europe, the term “happiness” in the modern meaning had gone through changes between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, and the same sort of fluctuation was also discovered in a compressed form in the history of the new Korean word *haengbok*.

As it is widely known, the concept “happiness” has three or four corresponding words in addition to *eudaimonia* in the Greek lexicon.² It originally meant fortune or destiny, and after the transformation in the Enlightenment, it came to obtain its modern meaning and usage in many languages. Since then, it has been inaugurated as the ultimate telos of life, even for laypersons, and has become “complex and infinite purposes” of individual lives (McMahon 2008, 24-33, 466). Amid ceaseless philosophical debate on the exact meaning of “happiness”—whether it is pleasure, preference-satisfaction, or avoidance of pain—and constant psychological weighing of the relative importance of such elements as pleasure, satisfaction, and flourishing (McMahon 2009, 26), “happiness” has been met with multifarious and contesting interpretations, ranging from Aristotelian elevation that it means “prosperity combined with virtue” to Schopenhauerian cynicism that it is a “mere illusion” (McMahon 2008, 75, 408). In modern Korea, too, the history of the concept *haengbok* seems to reveal a similar rendition of competing interpretations focused around “happiness.”

In the history of corresponding words of *haengbok* in premodern times, the trajectory of *rak* and *bok* during the 1900s reveals that these two words were in competition with each other. Using a binary matching, *rak* roughly matched virtue, a pillar of happiness, whereas *bok* matched fortune, another pillar of happiness. *Rak* was an impor-

2. They are *olibios*, *makarios*, and *eutykia* (McMahon 2008, 17-19).

tant Confucian concept—especially, in Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty—which was connected with learning and the spirit of cultivation (Yi Seung-yeon 2005, 398, 416) while *bok* originally meant wishing for good fortune by performing ancestral rites and thus, understandably, circulated in folk custom (Kim Yong-nam 1999, 325). Depending on which of the two would have ascendancy over the other, the implications of “happiness” in Korea would have differed widely. By then, the term *haengbok* had already been established in China and Japan (Watanabe 1992, 496), but Koreans had just begun to ponder whether it should be *rak*, *bok*, or yet another compound word with one of the two letters contained in it.

The semantic transition of *haengbok* between the 1900s and the 1910s was not simple. It should be noted that contestation over the interpretation of the concept had continued, even though its meaning as understood in the coming years was pretty much set in the 1910s. Attempts to adjust and reconstitute *haengbok* only intensified during the 1920s after the March First Independence Movement of 1919, when the importance of the concept escalated. By investigating the historical struggle to interpret the term, this article seeks to bring to light how a modern concept *haengbok* found its place in Korea. In order to do this, the main focus here lies primarily on the 1920s when the struggle was the most intense.

***Haengbok* in the 1900s, Its Parochialism and Public Implications**

The usage of the concept *haengbok* in the 1900s Korea was not uniform. When reminded that the significance of a concept is not confined at the word level but connected to a higher semantic structure (Richter 2010, 33-34), it should be evident that the semantic field of *haengbok* formulated by the contemporary ideology and discourse was unstable as well. The frequency and usage of *haengbok* showed great differences in accordance with the media environment and the speaker-subject. Although it is a clear fact that the term *haengbok*

began to be used right after the Gabo Reform, as found in the February 1895 accounts in *Gojong sillok* (Annals of King Gojong),³ its conceptual consistence and stability was fluid, since it was never used in written texts during that period or employed with a meaning approximate to its modern usage. First, *haengbok* did not appear in the index of *Seoyu gyeonmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West),⁴ a book by Yu Gil-jun published in 1895, which created huge reverberations with fascinating new knowledge and terms contained in it. *Kofuku* 幸福 was widely used in Japan by this time, but neither *haengbok* 幸福 nor its closest rival *hyangbok* 享福 showed up in the book. Sometimes *bok* (fortune) appeared, examples being “enjoy wellbeing and the *bok* of health by protecting one’s life and body” (H. Yi et al. 2000, 119) and “peaceful *rak* . . . safe *bok*)” (H. Yi et al. 2000, 127). *Bokji* (welfare) appeared only once, in explaining the significance of patrolling: “for the *bokji* and safety of people’s life” (H. Yi et al. 2000, 273). *Kwaerak* (pleasure), the closest neighbor of *haengbok*, appeared only once, too: “it is the *kwaerak* of a human being to enjoy wellbeing and the fortune of health by protecting one’s life and body” (H. Yi et al. 2000, 119). Here, *haengbok* would be more appropriate than *kwaerak* in modern usage.

Haengbok was not used frequently in newspapers such as the *Dongnip sinmun* (Independence News, 1896-1899) and the *Daehan maeil sinbo* (Korean Daily News, 1904-1910). The usage of *haengbok* was not very different in the two papers, which were ten years apart. Typical examples being “to enhance the *haengbok* of the state and people” (*Dongnip sinmun*, December 1, 1898) and “pray for the progress of the state and promote *haengbok* of the people” (*Daehan maeil sinbo*, December 30, 1905), it was used in the context of pro-

3. Issuing a royal edict on education, King Gojong called to “not disturb folk principles by practicing the conduct of the Five Morals and to maintain the order of humanity and promote the *haengbok* of society by putting customs and teachings into roots” in the Cultivation of Virtue section (*Gojong sillok*, 2nd day of the 2nd lunar month, 1895).

4. For the vocabularies used in *Seoyu gyeonmun*, I rely on the index in H. Yi et al. (2000) and check its usages in the original text of the book.

moting the prosperity of the state and the wellbeing of the people.

It is a notable fact that the term *hyangbok* came into being with almost the same meaning as *haengbok* around this period. In the *Dongnip sinmun*, the former outnumbered the latter. In the *Daehan maeil sinbo*, however, the former only appeared once or twice per year while the latter appeared more often, peaking at 37 times in a year. Although the meaning's association with individual comfort and satisfaction was yet to emerge and the state and people were still the focus, the increased use of *haengbok* seemed to signify a change. This is further supported by the fact that some sections of the newspapers (not the editorial column, however) explored a new meaning of *haengbok*. Examples of this were: "true *haengbok* is found in mental satisfaction," "the greatest *haengbok* lies in the pleasure of mind," and "true *haengbok* comes when one knows one's lot and is satisfied with it." These phrases were quoted from the translated text of *Shosei hyakubanashi* 處世百話 (One Hundred Stories of How to Conduct in Life) by Japanese writer Iwamoto Goro (*Daehan maeil sinbo*, September 12-13, 1908). Here, the meaning approximated introspected happiness which had been pursued after the eighteenth century.

It is important to remember once again that *haengbok* and many other related words were translations of foreign words. It is supposed that foreign origins would result in creating conceptual differences in (translated) Korean words. Of course, a further investigation into the origins is necessary and should be a task for future work, but to note briefly here is the rough notion that the selection and acceptance of a vocabulary might be understood as a process of subjectification. As observed in the translations of Iwamoto Goro's book, the influence of the translation factor might have been stronger in the case of the individual and private concept of happiness. This is also confirmed in the fact that the usage of *haengbok* as "happiness" was rarely found in major newspapers like the *Dongnip sinmun* and the *Daehan maeil sinbo*, but found quite often in magazines and textbooks. The effect of translation would have been more direct in the latter since it dealt less with news items or reasoning. Magazines showed scattered usages of *haengbok*, in which individuals and family were its subjects: "the aim

of a state is nothing other than to protect wellbeing and *haengbok*” of the people, in *Seou* (Friends from the Western Region) by Ok Dong-gyu (1906, 28); “wanting to enjoy wellbeing and *haengbok*” is natural in human life, in *Gajeong japji* (Home Magazine); and “peaceful spirit is overflowing in home and the family will enjoy *haengbok*, and this is the honor of a housewife,” in *Yeoja jinam* (The Right Way of Women) (Yi Gi-yeong 1908, 4). Even more impressive were its usages in textbooks. Morality and ethics textbooks included such clauses that family members should work together to promote the “*haengbok* of the family,”⁵ or peace in family is the basis of the “family’s happiness *haengbok*” and the pillar of the “state’s *haengbok*.”⁶

A very interesting case is *Botong hakgyo hakdoyong susinseo* (Morality Textbook for Elementary School Students) printed by the Ministry of Education. The textbook provides a glimpse into how the positions of *haengbok* and its neighboring words were rearranged. Since its publication was led by Mitsuchi Chuzo, a Japanese advisor at the Education Ministry, and one-third of the contents overlapped with Japanese textbooks (Ishimatsu 2003, 43), a purely indigenous change in the book cannot be expected. What would be more important to note, however, is the context of the acceptance of the word *haengbok* since, according to some records, as many as 40,000 copies were supplied or loaned in 1909 and therefore the textbook is presumed to have had a great effect on its acceptance. Volumes One to Three of *Botong hakgyo hakdoyong susinseo* were printed in February 1907, and Volume Four in March 1908. In less than a year, the frequency and usage of the word *haengbok* showed a significant change.

The first three volumes mentioned *jami* (delicacy), *hwamok* (harmony), and *kwaerak* (pleasure), but not *haengbok*.⁷ But in Volume

5. *Jungdeung susin gyogwaseo* (Morality Textbook for Middle School) (Seoul: Hwimungwan, 1906), 32.

6. *Godeung sohak susinseo* (Morality Textbook for High School) (Seoul: Hwimungwan, 1907), 9.

7. The statement that “a peaceful family even makes others feel pleasant [*kwaerak*],” in the chapter “Ilga hwamok” (Peaceful Family), the old story that Zhang Gongyi 張公藝 of the Chinese Tang dynasty fulfilled his morality by having a peaceful family, in the chapter “Inji wideok” (Virtue of Patience), and the teaching that one

Four, *haengbok* appeared several times. Its first appearance was in the context that people who suffered from poverty as children often prosper later, as in the phrase, “it is common that people born in a poor family enjoy *haengbok* as adults,” in the chapter entitled “Dongnip jayeong” (Independence and Self-support). In the other five cases, *haengbok* was mentioned in reference to royalty and the country; for example, since everyone wishes for peace and happiness and its shortcut is to cultivate one’s morals and manage the family, the king must seek *annyeong haengbok* (peace and happiness) of his subjects while the subjects must seek *annyeong haengbok* for themselves; and the government must “strive to increase the *haengbok* of people.”⁸

What is also worth noting is that, while the focus of the first three volumes dwelled on giving admonishments on various topics, the emphasis in volume 4 progressed gradually from the individual level to that of humanity. It began with “independence and self-support” and “occupations,” then it addressed community and the public, followed by royalty and benevolent officials, then the life of Florence Nightingale in the section on “fraternity” and “treatment of animals,” and finally introduced the establishment of the Red Cross. Despite some heterogeneous elements scattered here and there, the contents were aligned in the progressive direction of “individual→society→nation→world.” This feature of the fourth volume was distinct from the other three, which were arranged as collections of moral lessons and their case studies. It was unclear whether this alteration was due to the consideration of student levels, a response to the expectations of the targeted groups, or the author’s internal change, but it is quite interesting to note that *haengbok* was approaching the European model of the concept. This shift becomes more evident when consid-

should find “pleasure [*kwaerak*] in playing” after work (“work for an adequate number of hours and play for an adequate number of hours”) suggested the feeling of happiness, but the word *haengbok* did not appear even once (*Botong hakgyo hakdoyong susinseo* [Morality Textbook for Elementary School Students], vol. 2 [Seoul: Ministry of Education, 1907], 32-34; and vol. 3, 13.

8. *Botong hakgyo hakdoyong susinseo* (Morality Textbook for Elementary School Students), vol. 4 (Seoul: Ministry of Education, 1908), 4, 19-20, 24.

ering the fact that it is hard to find in Korean modernity this paradigm for the axis of identity formed in the direction from the individual to the world and *haengbok* located within the framework. Here, *haengbok* was concerned with all of the three—individual, society, and the state—and thus, created a different semantic field from its public implications during the 1900s and its inclination toward the private from the 1910s.

The media, which was leading the discourse of the time, e.g., the *Dongnip sinmun* and the *Daehan maeil sinbo*, used the term *haengbok* in a parochial sense, more specifically, in the context of happiness of the state and its people. But in morality textbooks, *haengbok* posited the modern individual seeking unity with the society, the state, and the world. While *Botong hakgyo hakdoyong susinseo* published by the Ministry of Education showed this in the most typical format, many private school textbooks, which would have enjoyed more freedom in its contents, revealed the same approach. For example, Hwimun Private School's *Jungdeung susin gyogwaseo* (Morality Textbook for Middle School) presented in a quite systematic fashion the progression of “self → others → family → public → state → humanity → all existences” and applied the term *haengbok* to all the levels. Here, the term was used in both the private and the public realm, as shown in the statements that “health is required to promote not just one’s own *haengbok* but the *haengbok* of society and the state”⁹ and “empathy increases the *haengbok* of society by comforting people in sorrow and delighting people in joy.”¹⁰ In this manner, along with local appearance of the term *haengbok*, with its public implication, a different approach to the concept of *haengbok* emerged at least in some areas such as textbooks during the 1900s.

The 1910s, the Colonial Language and Its Rupture

Entering the 1910s, *haengbok* was turned into a term symbolizing the

9. *Jungdeung susin gyogwaseo*, vol. 3, 7.

10. *Jungdeung susin gyogwaseo*, vol. 3, 41.

policy of the colonial power. First of all, *haengbok* became a highly political concept since it served as a pretext under which the Japanese colonial empire governed Korea. The fact that all treaties and decrees concerning Korea made since the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1907 included the word *haengbok* in the text was a symbolic attestation to this point. For example, the preamble to the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1907 stated, “The government of Japan and the government of Korea agree to the terms in the left column for the aim to accelerate the wealth and power of Korea and the *haengbok* of Korean people.”¹¹ When the treaty for the forced annexation of Korea to Japan was signed in 1910, a proclamation was issued in the name of King Sunjong of Korea that the agreement was meant “for the purpose to promote eternal *haengbok* of both sides,”¹² and the text of the agreement reaffirmed that its purpose was to enjoy happiness together and salvage people.

In the response to the Korean Emperor’s order, the first Japanese Governor-General Derauchi Masatake claimed that his only goal was “to promote the wellbeing and *haengbok* of all people,”¹³ The obsessive attachment to the pretext of *haengbok* went on even after the March First Independence Movement of 1919. The stated colonial objective continued to be the “safety and prosperity” of Korea and “*haengbok* and satisfaction” of its subjects, and the ultimate direction remained to “let people who work in their occupations diligently and happily enjoy the fortune of peace and contribute to increasing national prosperity.” While the term *bongni* (welfare) began to be used together with *haengbok*, the former appeared less often, relative to the weight and consistence of the latter in usage (Ireland 2008, 322-342).

Who were supposed as the subjects in these treaties to enjoy *haengbok* through the “wealth and power” and “civilization” of the Empire? This must have been an important question to the Japanese imperial power, which had claimed contradicting goals of imperialist

11. *Gojong sillok* (Annals of King Gojong), 24th day of the 7th lunar month, 1907. Hereafter, only dates are noted in this article.

12. *Gojong sillok*, 22nd day of the 8th lunar month, 1910.

13. *Gojong sillok*, annex, 29th day of the 8th lunar month, 1910.

ambitions and peace in Asia. As it turned out, the colonial power opted to replace the happiness of *Korean people* with that of the populace and subjects and, thereby, impede their linkage to the nation, the country, and the world. Throughout the 1910s, the term *haengbok* appeared quite often, but it was only pursued within the individual realm, unable to expand to even family and society, let alone the nation, the country, and the world. This was the choice made by the colonial power; it had transformed *haengbok* into a political term in treaties and edicts, mindful only of its privatization in dealing with the implications in the real world. Therefore, in the 1910s, *haengbok* took the course of depoliticization and privatization, sealed off either from its public implications, as shown in the *Dongnip sinmun* and the *Dae-han maeil sinbo*, or from the linkage of the individual and the world, as found in morality textbooks of the 1900s. Further, the word *haengbok* achieved semantic stabilization and became part of everyday life usage during this period. It could be said that the Korean word *haengbok* has ingrained in it a colonial origin of the 1910s.

When private media was virtually banned in the 1910s, the Japanese Government-General of Korea employed such words as *haengbok*, *kwaerak*, and *haengnak* (euphoria) proactively in its flagship newspaper the *Maeil sinbo*. As if divesting it of its politicized meaning shown in treaties and decrees, the media power of the *Maeil sinbo* emphasized incessantly that *haengbok* referred to the satisfaction one could find in ordinary life and a state of mind that could be achieved by simple pleasures. It was in this context that the newspaper praised *civilians* who pursued “satisfaction in small things” in simple life and “never neglected to fulfill their duties for the country”;¹⁴ it also called them to “persevere through tiring days by taking the time to look up to the serene evening sky after a busy day” and “relishing fresh air on a leisurely Sunday.”¹⁵ *Haengbok* as *devotio moderna* (modern devotion) and individualized or internalized *haengbok* was accepted as

14. *Maeil sinbo*, “Pyeongbeomhan saenghwal” (Simple Life), January 31, 1915.

15. *Maeil sinbo*, “Jeoldaehan kwaerak: geumgangsan-eul gugyeongham-eun choeda-ui kwaerak” (Absolute Pleasure: Sightseeing in Mt. Geumgang Gives the Greatest Pleasure), May 1, 1915.

part of the strategy of colonialization. While in the 1900s the structure of the ideology and discourse supporting the concept *haengbok* was not firmly established and its systematization was attempted in morality textbooks, *haengbok* of the 1910s found its place in daily life, being systematized and approved of only in the narrow realm of individual/family. Although harmony between the pursuit of happiness and individualism was difficult to achieve in reality (Bruni 2007), editors of the *Maeil sinbo* warned against connecting it even with family and kinship, only to praise and spread *haengbok* on the premise of its separation from the realm of society-state-humanity.¹⁶

How did the colonized people respond to *haengbok*? This requires examinations of its ruptures in the *Maeil sinbo* and skepticism and criticism expressed by other media, such as *Cheongchun* (Youth) and *Hakjigwang* (Light of Learning), but the focus here is an emergence of a very dramatic scene in the wake of the March First Independence Movement. The Movement had two notable strategies: one highlighted freedom, justice, and humanism instead of happiness, and the other reappropriated the concept *haengbok* at the level of humankind. The Declaration of Independence, written by Choe Nam-seon and signed by 33 representatives of the nation, was an exemplary case of exercising the two strategies. It resisted against the colonialist discourse by calling out “the forces of justice and humanity” and professing such values as “world peace and happiness for mankind,” which had been forced into silence throughout the 1910s. With appeal to instances like the emergence of justice and humanism, and the adjustment of the values of peace and happiness, the colonial language, which touted the happiness of *Korea* and peace in *Asia* but only allowed for a mediocre locus within the realm of individual, was refuted and negated.

If the proposition of the new values of justice and humanity and the remodification of the existing values of peace and happiness could be labeled the strategy of creation and that of appropriation, respectively, the former of the two distinct strategic directions seemed to

16. For a detailed discussion on the 1910s, see Kwon (2010, 126-136).

have been emphasized. An assessment based on the numerous declarations, manifestoes, and publications that poured out at the time of the March First Independence Movement reveals that terminologies highlighting happiness and peace of the world and humanity (e.g., “at a time when peace for the happiness of all humans in the world emerges on the planet”)¹⁷ are less often found than those on freedom and humanity (Dokdo Declaration, 67) and humanity and justice (Declaration by Freedom Front, 70). Encouragement and incitement is discovered in virtually all declarations issued around the nation at the time: “Justice knows no enemy, so go for it. We are bound to win” (APK Declaration, 87); “oppression is brief and liberty is eternal” (a manifesto found in Sogyekdong, Seoul, 143); and “the right to freedom will be returned to 20 million brothers” (a decree in Junaemyeon, Yeosu-gun, 181). The sequential mention of justice, humanity, survival, respect, and honor in the first of the “Three Open Pledges” attached to the main text of the Declaration of Independence and the cliché-like repetitions of the resolution that “[i]t manifests our spirit of freedom” are found in all such declarations.

The strategies of creation and appropriation continued in both coexistence and divergence even after the March First Independence Movement. The temporal order in the creation of new words and the dynamics between new and existing ones may be disputable, that is, whether a new term is coined first and then it influences the readjustment of existing values, or constant rearrangements of familiar terms lead to the discovery of a new word. Anyhow, it is interesting to note that the *Dong-A Ilbo* (Donga Daily) and *Gaebyeok* (Genesis), two leading media of the early 1920s, adopted a slightly different strategy from each other. Roughly speaking, the *Dong-A Ilbo* employed the strategy of creation, whereas *Gaebyeok* hired that of appropriation. The *Dong-A Ilbo* chose to underline freedom, justice, and humanity over happi-

17. It is quoted from a manifesto found in Dangju-dong, Seoul, on April 4, 1919. See Veterans' Office (2002, 189). This book serves as the main reference for all quotations from declarations and decrees issued at the time of the March First Independence Movement. The issuer and the place of each one, together with the relevant page number in the reference book, are listed in this article.

ness. It touted the value of freedom persistently until the beginning of 1922 when aspirations of liberation from the colonial rule were finally aborted after the Washington Convention.

Revisiting the core values of the French Revolution (liberty, equality, and fraternity) around this time, the *Dong-A Ilbo* advocated the ideal that a state should be an assembly of free people. Introducing the notion that constitutionalism and nationalism were the result of institutionalization and ideological adoption of freedom, “a great factor in the advancement of humankind,”¹⁸ it stressed that “indeed, morality in modern times begins with liberty and ends with it.”¹⁹ *Haengbok* appeared to occupy no place in the rhetoric of contrasting despotism and oppression against freedom and liberation. When reminded of the fact that “happiness” was secularized and turned into a utilitarian concept through the French Revolution (Arendt 2004, 227-230), the asymmetric juxtaposition does not seem very convincing at first glance. This is even more evident when we consider the fact that *Gaebyeok* explored the value of happiness very actively. The same hopes for a “new reformed world” but slightly different ways of practicing it existed side by side. They somehow managed to achieve harmony without definitive breakups, though only for a brief time, in the framework of liberation from despotism and pursuit of ideal and happiness.

In the early 1920s, there were assertions that the conflict among individual, society, state, and mankind can be easily resolved since the personal happiness was the true foundation of all values. “If an institution interferes with individual *haengbok*, we can break it and change it anytime” (Gojeop 1920, 92); “As nationalism is a crystallization of selfish thought, humanism is a crystallization of altruistic thought. This is . . . to acknowledge that one’s *haengbok* lies in the

18. *Dong-A Ilbo*, “Segye gaejo-ui byeokdu-reul danghayeo joseon-ui minjok undong-eul nonhanora” (On the Emergence of the Nationalist Movement of Korea at the Outset of World Reformation), April 2-3, 1920.

19. *Dong-A Ilbo*, “Sindodeok-eul nonhayeo sahoe-reul mang-hanora” (Discussing a New Morality for the Hope of Society), July 19, 1920.

haengbok of humankind.”²⁰ With the establishment of a notion aiming to pursue *haengbok* concurrently at each level of the continuum of individual, family, society, state, and world, which seemed possible in the 1900s but blockaded in the 1910s, *haengbok* of the 1920s was thrust into a *holistic* purpose. The remarks for the first issue of *Gaebyeok*, “The position of viewing the whole world as the single source of moral system is absolutely necessary for the *haengbok* of the state, the society, and the individual,”²¹ attested to the shift appropriately. Individuals of the early 1920s appeared to be exempt both from the hollowness of statism of the 1900s and from individualistic passivity of the 1910s by positing individual, family, society, state, and world, under a unified perspective. It was a time when duty and harmony cohabited with passionate idealism, just like the Platonian geometric ideal world. Of course, it was only a brief, precarious optimism, or a shaky stability. The potential rupture latent in “happiness,” *bonheur*, and *glück*, all of which originated from the Greek word *eudaimonia*, or the excessive weight of requiring satisfaction and ceaseless pursuit of targeting both the public and the private spheres was prone to cause problems.

Rupture and Negation of *Haengbok*

The concept of *haengbok* displayed a diverse spectrum in the early 1920s Korea. The redefined *haengbok* contributed to individual liberation more than anything else (Choi 2011, 49) and it also persuaded that the continuum of “individual-family-society-state-humanity” disallowed disintegration, thus laying down ethicism based on subjectivity instead of moral virtue. After the March First Independence Movement, one could easily come across such statements as “the purpose of life lies in *haengbok*” (Gojeop 1920, 92) and “we do not know what

20. “Beominganjeok minjokjuui” (Panhuman Nationalism), *Gaebyeok* 31 (January 1923): 8.

21. “Segye-reul alla” (Know the World), *Gaebyeok* 6 (June 1920): 8.

is good and what is evil in life; we just need to know what is *haengbok* and what is *bulhaeng* (unhappiness).”²² By presenting *haengbok*, which could not be objectively measured, the young generations were able to break away from old-fashioned moral codes and recompose new ethics focused around individuals. Furthermore, the *holistic* nature of *haengbok* ensured engagement with relations and contexts. It was not difficult to find this notion in the writings produced during this period.

For example, Kim Gi-jeon, a major contributor to *Gaebyeok*, argued that: firstly, moral doctrines grounded on family were outdated; secondly, what was required in the ethics of modern times was the “absolute infinity of one’s ‘self’” and its “boundless delight”; and thirdly, self-realization and self-perfection could contribute to the “advancement of social wellbeing” and accord with the “ultimate *haengbok* of the entire humanity” (Kim Gi-jeon 1921, 10). He criticized old-fashioned intellectuals who still thought that the individual and society were separable. The notion that the best strategy for individuals to take in the context of society-state-humanity was to “develop their capacity to the extent possible and achieve their *haengbok* to an even greater extent” (Oh 1920, 81) became popularized during this period. From an analytic standpoint on *haengbok*, it seemed that among the three notions of pleasure, satisfaction, and self-realization, *haengbok* was noticeably associated more closely with the last one.

Then, what about pleasure and satisfaction? We should remember that when “happiness” was translated and accepted in Korea initially, its boundary from pleasure and welfare was vague. The word “happiness” was considered to mean the same as *rak* (delight) and *bok* (fortune) at once and it also included such qualities as fun and joy through the mediation of pleasure. Expectations of pleasure, fun, and joy did not evaporate, despite the mainstream idealist trend and the fashionable prospect of stressing self-realization. In a 1922 article entitled “Yesul-gwa insaeng” (Art and Life), Yi Gwang-su tacitly transmit-

22. “Oin-ui singiwon-eul seoneon-hanora” (We Declare Our Origin), *Gaebyeok* 8 (August 1920).

ted the idea that happiness was equal to fun by declaring that “Let’s enjoy this life at any means. Let’s be happy. That is the purpose of life.” In the same writing, whose main theme was to make life into art, “art” and “happiness” were turned into mundane experiences, as summarized in the sentence: “Let’s make everything people do from the morning till the evening some enjoyable play, like playing house or hide-and-seek. It should be the aim of our lives” (Yi Gwang-su 1922, 2-3).

Considering that Yi Gwang-su accepted “happiness of the people” as a thesis of absolute sanctity, a belief that he never compromised even in his collaboration with the Japanese colonial power, it is really paradoxical that he interpreted *haengbok* as enjoyment, fun, and even game and play. This was not the only evidence showing that the concept of *haengbok* overlapped with that of *kwaerak* (pleasure) in the early 1920s. At the popular level, the idea that happiness was fun, enjoyment, and pleasure seemed generalized. For instance, No Ja-yeong, a member of a literary coterie magazine *Baekjo* (Swan) and a best-selling author, displayed a hedonistic inclination to the extent that he used the terms “happiness,” “fun,” and “pleasure” without distinction and liked to describe personal pleasure as the ultimate goal in his novels. Moaning that “I cannot live in this restricted, unequal, and boring society” (No 1922, 33), he identified the lack of freedom and equality with a *dull* condition of life and treated fun, happiness, and pleasure as synonyms in an inflammatory remark, “Let’s live, having lots of fun! . . . Let’s crush anyone who violates our *haengbok* and our pleasure!” (No 1922, 39)

The two above-mentioned directions, self-realization and pleasure, representing in reality commitment to publicity and selfish pursuit of pleasure, respectively, could have been in divisive conflicts. The near absence of such friction in the early 1920s was due to the fact that the freshly discovered *self* was forcefully pulling the continuum of “individual-family-society-state-humanity.” Understandably, in the same context, utilitarianism and the utilitarian view of happiness were often subjected to criticism. Utilitarianism was attacked as “hypocrisy of horrible contradictions” (Kim Yu-bang 1921, 96) and the perspective

of “viewing material pleasure as *haengbok*” was cited as a case of metaphysical failure of modern civilization (Kim Gi-jin 1924, 46). Critics found it intolerable that utilitarianism supposed the separation between individual and society. At the same time, positing happiness as a matter of foremost concern, debaters urged to forsake the individual for the whole, and yet in a seeming contradiction, called to protect individuality with a dire determination.²³ It was easy to predict that this patchwork of inconsistency could not last long. It might have been different, had Korea’s march to a new world been smooth. But when the reality was just the opposite, tension between individual and society and between pleasure and self-fulfillment in society only heightened gradually.

The fundamentally different sentiment regarding family and society drew attention as well. One editorial of *Dong-A Ilbo* depicted the society as “the place of strife and survival of the fittest,” and home as “the place of love and affection.” “Compared to social life, which we could imagine it as being rife with the struggle to rule by the strong and their preying on the weak, family life is, indeed, a paradise full of love.”²⁴ Family is distinctively different from the realm of society, state, or world, within which happiness is difficult to realize. As a matter of fact, after civic happiness was minted in the French Revolution, the model of bourgeois family exerted the greatest influence on its refraction and settlement (Perrot 2002, 148). Perhaps it was quite natural that, among some people, *haengbok* was monopolized by the pleasure of courtship and marriage. As revealed in the following statements, that “what young men and women want most earnestly is a really happy marriage”²⁵ and “to have a romantic sex life or an ideal thriving family is the number one act of our *haengbok* in this world” (Kang 1920), the continuum of “courtship-marriage-happiness” obscured that of “society-state-world.” Unlike the precarious happi-

23. *Dong-A Ilbo*, “Haengbok-ui saenghwal” (A Happy Life), June 29, 1920.

24. *Dong-A Ilbo*, “Sahoe saenghwallon” (On Social Life), June 21, 1921.

25. “Mihon-ui jeolmeun namnyeodeul-ege” (To Young Single Men and Women), *Sinyeoseong* (New Women) (May 1924).

ness of the 1910s, the happiness of a sweet home in the 1920s found a firm place in the ideological practice and discourse anchored on the self, individual, and individuality. Under the colonial condition that denied the family as a real agent of the state (Fanon 1998, 180-187), however, it was fair to say that colonialism cast a dark shadow over it. For this reason, personal bourgeois happiness could not occupy a status comparable to the level of society or state.

The separation between individual-family and society-state-world was one of the important conditions that governed the life of Koreans throughout the colonial era. The breakup of the axis of modern identity, which had been shaped with much effort, widened the distance between private happiness (to be pursued in the sphere of individual-family) and public faithfulness (to be sought in the sphere of society-nation-world). With the frustration of happiness, which should have been achieved by actualizing the common goal of the individual-family-society-nation-world continuum and by attaining the private-individual and public-political simultaneously, the concept was subjected to negation. Recollecting on the “age of reform,” a contributor to *Samcheolli* (Three Thousand Miles) noted that, faced with the reality of class confrontations and national antagonism, there was a need to “highlight the misery of today rather than sing for the happiness of tomorrow” (Im 1932).

Indeed, agony, sorrow, misfortune, and suffering were often confessed right after the March First Independence Movement. What had changed from the preceding period was that the distance between the problematic reality and the goal of happiness had now become even greater and, thus, happiness was more difficult to achieve due to the heightened awareness of the problematic reality. In the first issue of *Gaebyeok*, anguish and sorrow were written as representations of progress: “The so-called labor issues, women’s voice, racial struggle, and social problems are sacred and forceful revelations of humankind in wanting to be free of anguish and sorrow of any sort.”²⁶ As people more audaciously set their eyes on the goals of justice, humanism,

26. “Segye-reul alla” (Know the World), *Gaebyeok* 1 (June 1920).

and peace, their feelings of agony and grief rose. Happiness could change to unhappiness in a simple manner; all it required was to turn one's eyes from the goals to the grim reality in front. Labor, which was looked upon as a creative activity and the basis of happiness, turned out to be nothing but hard toil to earn a wage (S. Bak 1920, 24). And civilization, which was regarded as a synonym of happiness (D. Bak 1920, 24), was recast as the origin of "great anxiety and suffering" (Yi Seong-tae 1922, 24). In the irrational social system, happiness and civilization were believed to be unapproachable goals. "Turn your head for a while. . . . How can a happy civilized life of each individual be realized when economic dismantlement continues?" (In 1937, 16) With the loss of a universalist perspective on the new world and the contestation of different ideologies and discourses, *haengbok* was negated or limited, losing its validity as a universal value and being reduced to one for certain domains or specific classes.

The term *haengbok* was not obliterated in the socialist-communist ideological system, either, as Stalin appointed himself an "architect of happiness" and North Korea preached about communistic happiness (Seok 1963). The concept of *haengbok* that stressed its public and future-oriented character in the 1920s, although ultimately denied, provided a crucial foundation for the later development of socialism (Choi 2011, 59). The formation process of the notion of the internalized *haengbok*, which is generalized today, is not clearly captured. The concept of *haengbok* as subjective and inner satisfaction appeared for the first time in Japanese books, such as *Shosei hyakubanashi* 處世百話 (One Hundred Stories of How to Conduct in Life) introduced in the 1900s, and it was reinforced by the colonial power in the 1910s. Then, its orientation turned obscure amid the ideological discourse of the 1920s. Up until the 1910s, *haengbok* was virtually an imposed vocabulary by the colonialists and, thus, any attempt to trace its history should look at the discourse on happiness after the 1910s. Except for the early 1920s when optimism for its public readjustment was ripe, however, it is difficult to detect active engagement in the debate. *Haengbok* as subjective and internal satisfaction was engendered away either from publicity or from consumption-oriented hedonism,

but a philosophical or political debate on this trend had never fully developed in Korea. From the 1930s, however, meditative essays began to be circulated, which led to producing many aphorisms that would take the place of a philosophical or political debate. Among them were Kim Jin-seop and Ishikawa Takemi in the 1930s, Ahn Byung Wook, Pi Cheon-deuk, and Lin Yutang as well as followers of Russell and Makiba in the 1950s. Since then, the genre of meditative essays has become an important reference point in the development of a popular usage of the term *haengbok*.

Happiness, Its Multifaceted Identity and the Future

Happiness may be an absurd goal. As Nietzsche ridiculed early on, there is still a deep-rooted thinking that happiness is a philosophy for an era of weaklings, or a promise of comfort, fashion, or at best, a seat in Parliament, thus “humanity does not strive for happiness” (Nietzsche 2002, 191-192, 214). The core idea of the utilitarian concept of happiness, which served as an important axis of happiness, lied in the belief that all rights should be equal and no suffering should exist (Nietzsche 2002, 75). Then, it is inevitable that there would be reluctance to make a leap for singularity or achieve growth at the expense of more suffering. Rousseau, Kant, and Arendt also expressed skepticism or antipathy to happiness and more recently, some scholars have noted that utilitarian ethics is, indeed, nothing other than economics (Garatani 2001, 120). In the Korean lexicon, *haengbok*, which is a compound word of *haeng* (luck) and *bok* (fortune), has a strong connotation of accidentality.

Looking back on the competition between *rak* and *bok* and between *hyangbok* and *haengbok*, an adoption of the former word in each set in translating the Western concept of happiness into Korean would have made it acquire a more active and subject-oriented meaning. The linguistic distance between *haengbok* and *yohaeng* in Korean vocabulary seemed narrower than generally thought, considering the fact that “happiness” was once translated in another Chinese charac-

ter “倖” (*xing*), which means a maximized state of “unexpected good luck” (Watanabe et al. 1992, 495).²⁷ A case in which *haengbok* was used in a negative connotation is found in a short story “Mongjo” (The Boding Dreams) written by Seok Jin-hyeong in the 1900s. It states, “one who has amassed wealth and obtained a high status with little regard for other people’s fortune . . . is a happy one.” Apparently, this was not unique in the Korean language. In Japanese, *kofuku* 幸福 has a double meaning; when being read by the sound of the Japanese letters “こうふく,” it means happiness of a good person, and when being read with the meaning of the letters “いあわせ [仕合せ],” it signifies a lucky situation of a bad person (Ishida 1989). In European languages, “hap” in the English word “happiness” and the German word *Glück* originally meant luck or accident (McMahon 2008, 194). In this context, the early 1920s was a rather exceptional period in the long history of the word *haengbok*, when a completely different usage from its original implications such as passivity and individualism was developed.

After the expectation that happiness could be a common goal of individual-family-society-state-world evaporated, the concept *haengbok* diverged into two paths: being isolated in the realm of individual-family on the one hand and being rejected or postponed in the name of society-state-world on the other hand. In other words, *haengbok* came to mean either a petty contentment with the current situation or an ideal state of mind whose realization should be postponed until a utopian moment in the future. Of the two, the former had a superior place in reality. Thus, it was circulated as a reflective and petite bourgeois value operative in the space of individual-family. Then, the concept of *haengbok* reemerged in the public sphere in the context of expanding fascism during the late colonial period. As the Japanese empire employed the rhetoric of national *happiness* and *Asia’s peace* for the pretext of its war against China (as it did in Korea in the 1910s), some civilians also utilized the term *haengbok* as the justifica-

27. The use of the word *haengbok* is confirmed in the editorial section of *Hwangseong sinmun*, January 20 and February 20, 1900.

tion for their own cooperation with the imperial efforts. The Japanese imperial rhetoric expressed that “as the war is for the happiness of the empire and the peace and joy in the East,” it will be a “solution for eternal peace and happiness in Korea” (D. Yi 1937, 6), and it was foreboded as “the path to happiness and prosperity for *Korean people*” (In 1939, 61). Procolonialists similarly contended that people must cooperate with the war “for the welfare of the humanity on Earth and ultimately, for the happiness of each and every one” (Minami 1941, 49). In contrast to the *haengbok* advocated in the *Maeil sinbo* during the 1910s, which presupposed isolation from society-state-world, *haengbok* of the late colonial period was reformulated in the manner of rejecting individual-family and following the order of loyalty to the state.

The analysis in this article has demonstrated that *haengbok* was largely a term of isolation in modern Korea. Nevertheless, it is evident that the pursuit of *haengbok* as a multifaceted identity in a harmonious way was possible, albeit in imagined ways and for too short a period. Due to its history of the colonial period and the dictatorial era of singular emphasis on economic development, the integration of personal happiness with that of a greater public cause has seldom been made in vocabulary or in practice in Korea until today (J. Kim 2009, 143). The concept of *haengbok*, therefore, has much room for exploration and experiment in Korea. Recently, while the term “well-being,” instead of *haengbok*, has caught the popular attention, plans have been called for boosting public happiness, which is different from personal or social happiness (S. Kim 2011). The concept of *haengbok*, thus, has been undergoing continuous change.

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