

A Review of the Intellectual Thrust to Adopt Democracy in the Late 19th Century: The Integration of Eastern and Western Thought

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Abstract

This study examines the movement to adopt democracy during the enlightenment period, Korea's first intellectual attempt to fuse Confucianism and democracy. This paper focuses on the context within which the enlightenment intellectuals adopted the ideas of liberty and rule by the people (*minchi*), core concepts of democracy. More concretely, this paper first explores how enlightenment intellectuals adopted the democratic concept of rule by the people on Confucian soil, where explicitly defined concepts as rule of the people (*minbon*) and for the people (*wimin*) were not extant. Then this paper examines how they adopted the value of liberty, a concept focusing on the rights of both parties engaged in a bilateral contract, based on the Confucian tradition that emphasized morality in the establishment of ethical order centering on exchange of duty for mutual benefit.

The findings are summarized as follows: First, in adopting the Western principle of rule by the people, which was represented by the provision of political rights and the right of resistance, Korean enlightenment intellectuals focused on making the latent Confucian counterpart principles manifest. Second, they clung to Confucian tradition by matching the Western notions of liberty (right) and rule of law with the Confucian ideas of mutual benefit and rule of virtue. For rule by the people, enlightenment intellectuals admitted the weakness of Confucianism and attempt its reinterpretation. For liberty (right) and the rule of law, they strongly defended the superiority of the Confucian notions of mutual benefit and moral politics.

Keywords: Korean enlightenment scholar, Confucianism, liberal democracy,

liberty, rule of law, rule of morality, rule of virtue, rights of political participation, rights of resistance

Introduction

This paper will review the character of the movement to adopt democracy during the enlightenment period, which was Korea's first intellectual attempt to fuse Confucianism and democracy. The existing research on the adoption of democracy in the enlightenment period, a process that occurred amid conflicts and rearrangement of world order, can be roughly divided into two. The first focuses on how actively the enlightenment intellectuals adopted modern thought. The other approaches the adoption of democracy from the standpoint of the clash and fusion of the two heterogeneous civilizations of Confucian and Western. Since the diffusion and transmission of a certain ideology from one civilization to another is not single-tracked or unidirectional, it tends to conflict with the existing dominant ideology, and in this process both ideologies may experience some degree of readjustment. Thus, it is inevitable to reinterpret Confucianism from the perspective of democracy and vice versa.

This paper focuses on the context within which the enlightenment intellectuals adopted the ideas of liberty and "rule by the people" (*minchi*), core concepts of democracy. I investigate how enlightenment intellectuals adopted the democratic concept of rule by the people on Confucian soil, where explicitly defined concepts as "rule of the people" (*minbon*) and "for the people" (*wimin*) were not extant. Then I examine how they adopted the value of liberty, a concept focusing on the rights of both parties engaged in a bilateral contract, based on the Confucian tradition that emphasized morality in the establishment of ethical order centering on exchange of duty for mutual benefit.

Section 2 examines the concepts of political participation and resistance intrinsic in Confucianism and how enlightenment thinkers used Confucian teachings to expand these modern concepts into the notion of rights. Section 3 explores the implications that the adoption of the concepts of liberty and the rule of law had for Confucianism, and traces the philosophy of enlightenment intellectuals related to these concepts. The final section summarizes the main points of discussion and presents the implications of enlightenment thought for present-day Korea.

Main sources for this paper are the *Hanseong sunbo* (from October 1883

to October 1884), "Geonbaekseo" (Writings on Reform of Joseon's Domestic Politics) (1888) by Bak Yeong-hyo (1861-1939), and *Seoyu gyeonmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West) (1895) by Yu Gil-jun (1856-1914).¹⁾ These sources provide excellent understanding of the early adoption of democracy in Korea.

In order to understand the general nature of the early adoption of democracy in Korea, it is essential to review works by Choe Han-gi (1803-1877) in the 1850s and the Dongnip Hyeophoe (Independence Club, 1896-1898). But they are not included here because the purpose of this paper is to reexamine the merging of Confucianism and democracy, and not to review the general character of the adoption of democracy. Choe Han-gi regarded Confucian monarchism as an alternative political system for Joseon, although he held a favorable view of Western democracy. The Independence Club flatly rejected the traditional ideology of Confucianism and held an absolute preference for democracy.²⁾

The Confucian Adoption of the Principle of "Rule by the People"

Implications of the Concepts of "Political Participation" and "Resistance" for Confucianism

The core value that forms the basis of the modern democratic system is the concept of individual rights. In politics, this manifested itself as the political rights or sovereignty of the people. The term sovereignty did not exist in Confucian society prior to the nineteenth century and was in itself a product of Western influence. But the absence of a term does not necessarily mean an absence of the concept implied by the term. This is because "even if right is not explicitly used as a word, one can have the notion of right and use it. Instead of the word right, a long combined phrase can imply the concept."³⁾ Moreover, the idea of right can be implicated in an explanation of a situation.

1. The editions I use for each source are as follows: *Hanseong sunbo* and *Hanseong jubo* (Hanseong Weekly) (Seoul: Kwanhun Club Shinyoung Research Fund, 1983); Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ed., 「朝鮮國內政ニ關スル朴泳孝建白書」 (Writings on the Reform of Joseon's Domestic Politics, hereafter "Geonbaekseo") 『日本外交文書』 (Japanese Foreign Relations Documents) 106, vol. 21, document no. 106 (Bak Yeong-hyo 1888); Yu Gil-jun, *Seoyu gyeonmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West), in *Yu Gil-jun jeongjip* (Complete Works of Yu Gil-jun) (Seoul: Ilchokak Publishing, 1971).

2) Refer to An Oe-sun (2000, 2001) regarding the general character of the early adoption of democracy in Korea and its characteristic trends, along with views on Choe Han-gi and the Independence Club in that regard.

3) Alan Gewirth (1978), p. 99.

Confucianism regarded people as the ultimate goal and beneficiaries of politics, but it never explicitly ensured them their political rights or viewed them as political actors.⁴⁾ Yet this does not imply the absence of a concept of political participation per se, something that would guarantee political expression of their opinions. In a sense, Confucianism was born in the attempt to establish people's political views as the Heavenly Mandate, i.e., the origin of political authority, and this attests to its emphasis on the guarantee and pursuit of the expression of popular views. Indeed, traditional Confucianism had the potential to become manifested as political rights and the rights of resistance.

The *Shujing* (Book of Documents), the oldest among classical Confucian scriptures, notes: "Heaven creates the ruler to help people."⁵⁾ In order to realize this, "Heaven must listen to what people want"⁶⁾ and the ruler must obey what people say because "Heaven sees what people see."⁷⁾ *Mengzi* (Mencius) faithfully follows the teachings of *Shujing*. He says, "Even if all officials say that he is benevolent, do not make him a ruler yet. . . . If all people say that he is benevolent, check if it is true before making him a ruler" and "One can be a ruler only after one obtains the heart of people."⁸⁾ These are firm principles of Confucianism. This was true even in the Han dynasty, in which a shift was made from the theory of "subject first, monarch later" advocated by Mencius to the tendency to see a monarch as a source of authority. Gu Yi (200-168 B.C.), a major Confucian scholar of the Han dynasty, puts the teachings of Mencius in even more concrete terms:

People may appear foolish but they are actually wise. Make sure they are involved in the selection of government officials. If officials and people adore someone in particular, the king must examine if it is true and hire him if it proves to be so. If officials and people do not like someone, the king must examine if he did any wrong and banish him if he did. A good king does not hire officials arbitrarily; he lets people speak their mind and then acts accordingly. Thus, people have the right to say who can become an official.⁹⁾

4) Contrary to this view, Xiao Gongquan, a Sinologist in the United States, claims that Mencius viewed sovereignty as belonging with the people (1998, 158).

5) *Shujing* (Book of Documents), 4-1-2. Section division of *Shujing* in this paper follows that of *Annotations on the Thirteen Scriptures*.

6) *Shujing*, 4-1-2.

7) *Shujing*, 4-2-3.

8) *Mengzi* (Book of Mencius), 2-7-4 and 14-14-4. Section division of *Mengzi* in this paper follows that of *Mengzi jizhu* (Annotations on Book of Mencius) by Zhu Xi.

9) Part 2 of "Dazheng" (Great Governance), in *Xinshu* (New Book).

The concept of resistance is not new to Confucianism, which is clearly a non-Western, premodern mode of thinking. Early Confucian thought has sensitive and clear expression of will with regard to resistance, which is developed more than political participation. From its beginning, Confucianism justified popular revolution against unjust regimes. This is demonstrated in the following episode: King Tang, who founded the Yin dynasty through China's first coup, anguished over whether other coups might follow to topple him. His subject Zhong Hui assured him that his coup was justified, mentioning King Jie's tyrant acts and people's absolute support of King Tang's acts.¹⁰⁾ This spirit of argument runs throughout all volumes of the *Shujing*. In the book, the honor or banishment of a regime or king is justified depending on whether the regime or king obtained or lost political legitimacy (morality). Among the three Chinese classics, the logic for providing legitimacy for popular resistance is most evident in the *Shujing*, and it reaches its peak in Mencius' ideas of tyrant and revolution.¹¹⁾ Gu Yi inherits Mencius' idea of revolution, conceiving that "In all ages and times, he/she who became an enemy of the people was deserted. It was just a matter of time. . . . Therefore, one's fortune and misfortune lies not with Heaven but with the officials/people."¹²⁾ In Confucianism, then, the idea of resistance existed as a warning to unjust regimes. Therefore, it can be said that the Confucian idea of political participation and resistance of the people had the potential to develop into the idea of rights of political participation and rights of resistance, given the right impetus.

Enlightenment Scholars' Perceptions of the Rights of Political Participation and Resistance

Believing that the enrichment of Western countries came thanks to the political system guaranteeing political rights and the rights of resistance, enlightenment scholars turned their attention to similar concepts inherent in the Confucian tradition and tried to manifest them as rights.

First, the ultimate goal of Confucianism was to caution against the possibility of a monarch's monopolization of power for personal gain, and to

10) Part 2 of "Zhong Hui zhigao" (Zhong Hui Says), in *Shujing* (Book of Documents).

11) *Mengzi*, 2-8-1. Because it justified revolution based on this logic, *Mengzi* had been banned for a long time.

12) Part 2 of "Dazheng, in *Xinshu*.

establish a moral society based on an ideal of the common good. Pointedly, the enlightenment school found it very useful to ensure the Western system of "rule by the people" in order to attain the ultimate goal of Confucianism. Bak Yeong-hyo and Yu Gil-jun stressed that division of power and provision of political rights to the populace, as practiced in the West, were the best ways to prevent the abuse of power for personal gain and to hire wise men:

They may seek personal gain but cannot realize it, so this is the first benefit of power-sharing among the three branches. Because the constitutional political system listens to the voice of the public through popular votes, wise men will be hired and petty men will be blocked [from public office]. This is the foremost benefit of the constitutional system.¹³⁾

In a democracy in which the ruler is elected by voters, its greatest strength is that sovereignty lies with the people and all laws are made by the people, so the ruler cannot do as he pleases.¹⁴⁾

The democratic system upholds fairness and disallows personal feelings from interfering, so the ruler likes what people like and dislikes what people dislike. Politics and institutions are administered by public opinion of the common people.¹⁵⁾

These statements show how the enlightenment scholars understand the modern concept of political rights as an extension of the Confucian principles of "share joy with people"¹⁶⁾ and "public opinion."¹⁷⁾

Second, enlightenment scholars adopted the notion of political rights of the people within the framework of traditional Confucian notions of harmony-based community and Great Unity. Supposing harmonious rather than conflicting or confrontational relations between individuals and between individuals and the state, they developed a logic of political participation based on a Confucian foundation.

Why is it that China cannot keep up with the economic and military power of Western nations? In the latter, the king and people are of one mind and every matter of state, trivial or important, is discussed in the parliament. . . . The ruler

13) *Hanseong sunbo* (Hanseong Ten-Daily), 3 January 1884.

14) *Hanseong sunbo*, 7 February 1884.

15) Yu Gil-jun (1895), p. 149.

16) *Mengzi*, 2-1-8.

17) *Mengzi*, 2-7-4.

does not cruelly exercise power domestically, attends to national protection and defense internationally, and focuses energy on running economic affairs at normal times and on defense of sovereignty in emergency. . . . Thus, the king and the people are of one body and the superior and the inferior are harmonious. That is why these nations are prosperous.¹⁸⁾

Enlightenment scholars understood the Western principle of political rights of the people, which was built on the premise of differences in interest and opinion between individuals, as a system of Great Unity based on the common interests of the king and the people. In other words, western modern democracy was born together with liberalism and grounded on the view that relations between individuals and the state arose from the principle of distrust and the mutual checking of different interests. Meanwhile, enlightenment intellectuals of Joseon understood this principle from the Confucian perspective, which presupposed an overlap between the interests of individuals and the state. That is, they saw the ruler and ruled as sharing the same interests.

Third, enlightenment intellectuals also called for the adoption of a provision for political rights, regarding this as an extension of the Confucian notion of duty. Yu Gil-jun asserted that the rights of the people formed the basis of the rights of the nation, and that the expansion of individual rights made people feel a sense of duty to the nation, making them want to defend its rights. If they did not appreciate the importance of the nation, they would not defend it even if invaded by another country, and they would not want to recover it even if they lost it. Therefore, a nation's independence and enrichment depends on individual independence and enrichment.¹⁹⁾ On democracy, he noted that men of virtue and ability were selected from a set number of people to assist the king with politics. He also observed that people had the right to monitor the job performance of officials in the administrative and legal branches, and that the establishment of institutions and enactment of laws were conducted through discussion. This "allowed each and every individual to see that he or she was important to the nation, and motivated the individual to cooperate with the government in one mind with a progressive and independent spirit, in order to enrich the nation and find proper ways to attain a higher civilization." Korea's early enlightenment scholars saw that one could pursue individual interests by working for national ones,²⁰⁾ and that the provision of political rights would impress a sense of duty,

18) *Hanseong sunbo*, 30 January 1884.

19) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 98-99.

20) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 148-149.

thus further promoting national interests. They adopted the notion of rule by the people based on the concept of moral obligation which Yi Yin asserted,²¹⁾ not because guarantee of the individual's personal interests is so important and is ensured by democracy, but rather because democracy gives opportunities to individuals who understand the importance of the nation to serve it.

Fourth, believing that the parliament and party system of Western democracy was historically realized in the Confucian tradition, enlightenment intellectuals groped for historical legitimacy for the provision of political rights to the people and the adoption of political rights in Joseon dynasty. Bak Yeong-hyo argued that "People create a government; the government creates the principles of politics; the principles of politics create open discourse; open discourse creates agreement and disagreement agreement and disagreement create perpendiculars and horizontals; and perpendiculars and horizontals create factions to conduct discourses of their own. Factions are what they called cliques in the past and political parties in the present." Bak Yeong-hyo viewed Joseon as already possessing an ideology of co-governance between ruler and subjects, and then pointed to the process of creating public opinion led by political faction or Confucian rural literati in Joseon, a Confucian political system equivalent to the Parliament and local councils of the West.²²⁾ Yet he was also aware of the main differences between the two, admitting that it was time to change and develop the traditional faction system into a modern Western one, which would ensure co-governance between ruler and subjects.²³⁾

Finally, the enlightenment intellectuals' adoption of the rights of resistance was an extension of the Confucian notion of the right of dethronement to remove a tyrant. According to Bak Yeong-hyo, "a nation exists not for the king but for the people. The king is only entrusted with the responsibility to govern the nation."²⁴⁾ Having a traditional Confucian view of political community, he maintains that "the fundamental purpose of erecting a government is to strengthen the universal principle, not for the king."²⁵⁾ Thus, it would be inevitable that people resist a

21) In the process of founding the Yin dynasty through a military coup, King Tang repeatedly offered Yi Yin a chance to join the effort to create the new dynasty, only to be rejected each time. In the end, Yi accepted his offer, saying that "I should exert my efforts to make him a benevolent king like King Yao and King Shun and enrich people as those in the era of King Yao and King Shun, rather than just admire the goodness of them by myself." (*Mengzi*, 09-07-02).

22) "Geonbaekseo," Article 7.

23) An Hwak (1983 [1923]), a Korean nationalist active under Japanese colonial rule, and de Bary (1998 [1983]), pp. 58-59), a Neo-confucian scholar in contemporary America, both hold the view that Confucianism-based factions, *hyangyak* (village code), and *hyanghoe* (village council) are similar to modern political parties and local government.

24) Preface to "Geonbaekseo."

government that did not live up to its *raison d'etre*. Citing the *Daxue* (Great Learning), Bak reminded his fellow Confucians that "If the king fails to control himself and abandons himself to the pursuit of pleasure, he will be brought to death by the people." He seemed to understand the restraint of kingly power and the restriction of his power in the same context. Bak continued to emphasize that it was necessary to guarantee the people's freedom and restrain the power of the king, and unless this was done, the rights of resistance would be activated inevitably.²⁶⁾ It is justifiable to banish a ruler who is unable to protect the people or defend the nation "just as King Tang drove out King Jie and as King Wu expelled King Zhou."²⁷⁾ He emphasized this as a universal truth, citing the case of the American War of Independence.²⁸⁾ Such an example shows that the enlightenment scholars were able to adopt the modern Western idea of people's rights without much difficulty, since this was already based on the Confucian notion of "sharing joy with people."²⁹⁾ As they were already familiar with the Confucian concepts of government by the people or for the people, enlightenment scholars were no strangers to these modern Western ideas of political rights and the rights of resistance of the people.

The Confucian Adoption of the Concepts of Freedom and Rule of Law

Implications of Freedom and Rule of Law for Confucianism

Confucianism, which focuses on benevolence as its core value, also implicitly includes concepts of freedom and equality based on respect for the existence of individuals. "Benevolence is to love all men."³⁰⁾ Thus, benevolence is based on respect for individual existence and all other things that accompany it. Yet freedom in Confucianism is the freedom to choose goodness and act accordingly, or the freedom to make an ethical choice.³¹⁾ More specifically, the Confucian concept of

25) "Geonbaekseo." Article 8.

26) "Geonbaekseo," Article 7.

27) Preface to "Geonbaekseo."

28) "Geonbaekseo," Article 8.

29) "Geonbaekseo," Article 8.

30) *Lunyu* (Analects of Confucius), 12-22-1. Section division of *Lunyu* in this paper follows that of *Lunyu jizhu* (Annotations on *Analects of Confucius*) by Zhu Xi.

31) *Lunyu*, 09-04-1.

freedom ethically includes or justifies certain concepts of freedom, such as the freedom of the individual to choose a benevolent king in political relations, to choose good friends in social relations, to choose a good place to live (right to move), and to speak out, guided by goodness and benevolence (freedom of speech), and so on. Moreover, Confucianism does not reject the equality of humanity, by which all of the above freedoms are made possible. Still, the Confucian concept of equality presupposes the equality of human nature--equality *a priori*. All human beings are equal because they possess a human nature endowed by Heaven.³²⁾ As a result, all people are equal in the sense that they have the potential to be good kings, such as King Yao and King Shun.³³⁾ Indeed, in Confucianism, equality is fundamental. Although Confucianism does not explicitly address equality in any other way, it is significant that it includes the idea of equality, though universal and abstract. Confucian notions of freedom and equality are, however, different from Western notions of the term in the sense that from the perspective of Confucianism, the individual is free to be a sage but must perform specific duties before demanding that right. In other words, Confucian equality and freedom cannot be achieved unless one carries out one's duty according to moral principles.³⁴⁾

Confucianism is oriented towards a moral politics. It relies on a moral politics as a way to realize a moral world. The goals and means of Confucian politics must be oriented towards morality and thereby depend on it.³⁵⁾ Yet this does not mean that Confucianism rejects the rule of law. In Confucianism, the rule of virtue accompanies the rule of law based on moral principles, that is, the rule of propriety. And yet, many people misunderstand, thinking that the rule of virtue excludes rule of law and that the two cannot go hand in hand. This is mainly due to interpretations such as those by Han Feizi and Liang Qichao.³⁶⁾ The rule of propriety is an external expression of Confucian rule of virtue. It is based on natural law and moral principles rather than positive law. Confucius does not negate the rule of law; what he negates is a prohibitive law-oriented politics emphasizing terror and punishment via penalty. Instead, he stressed moral politics emphasizing virtue and propriety through edification and leniency.³⁷⁾ Here we need

32) *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean), 01-01. Section division of *Zhongyong* in this paper follows that of *Zhongyong zhangju* (Phrases of *Zhongyong*) by Zhu Xi.

33) *Mengzi*, 05-01-04.

34) See Hsieh Yuwei (1967), pp. 307-314.

35) Yi Sang-ik (2000), pp. 23-24.

36) For more details, see Yi Seung-hwan (1998), p. 170

to pay attention to the fact that the enlightenment intellectuals' aspiration to adopt democracy were heir to the Confucian morality-based conception of law.

The Mutual Integration of Liberty and Morality as well as the Rule of Law and the Rule of Virtue

Next, let us examine the enlightenment intellectuals' belief that the attempt to adopt the core values of modern democracy, such as freedom and the rule of law, had to be complemented by the Confucian tradition of morality and rule of virtue. The enlightenment intellectuals did not seem to have difficulty adopting modern Western concepts of freedom and rights, since they were already building on a Confucian tradition that implicated those concepts within it, though they were never explicitly stated. For example, the traditional concept of *tongui*, or a meaning "universal principle" was interpreted by Bak Yeong-hyo and Yu Gil-Jun as the "universal right" and "universal duty," respectively.

Bak Yeong-hyo cited passages from the Declaration of Independence of the United States for the first time in Korea,³⁸⁾ stating that "When Heaven creates men, it endows them with the universal principle (*tongui*, or the universal right) and nothing under the sun can change this. The universal principle (*tongui*) here meant 'certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'."³⁹⁾

Bak's interpretation from a Confucian point of view calls for special attention. While Bak defined freedom as "acting according to what one thinks is right," he also conceives of freedom as something that allows one to "follow the principle of heaven and earth." Furthermore, he did not miss the significance of humans as societal and relational beings. He talked about three kinds of liberty: i) natural or "barbarian liberty," ii) civil liberty as social beings, and iii) innate liberty, which is a combination of the first two. According to him, forsaking barbarian liberty did not result in reducing innate liberty but increased civil liberty, another kind of innate liberty, and this ultimately increased the public interest.⁴⁰⁾ According to this Confucian interpretation of liberty, when social freedom increases, the freedom of individuals as social beings inevitably increase; furthermore, individuals' interest increased with the increase of the public interest

37) See Yi Seung-hwan (1998), pp. 178-189.

38) "Geonbaekseo," Article 8.

39) Refer to Aoki Kuichi (1970), pp. 78-87 and Kim Hyeon-cheol (2000), p. 262.

40) "Geonbaekseo," Article 8.

of "heaven and earth" because they are members of that realm. Bak considered all individuals to be entitled to basic innate rights, but yet not to be isolated beings.⁴¹⁾ Thus, his interpretation of liberty can be characterized as an attempt to make a well-matched fusion between the modern Western notion of liberty and the traditional Confucian conception of morality.

The effort to combine the Western individualistic notion of liberty with the Confucian principle of relational morality becomes more systematic and more explicit in the thinking of Yu Gil-jun. Unlike Bak Yeong-hyo, Yu believed that the universal principle (*tongui*) was a universal duty to keep one's place in accordance with the Heavenly Principle and universal ethics.⁴²⁾ He divided the people's rights into the right of liberty and the right of universal duty. According to him, everyone was entitled to enjoy both rights from birth. He also believed the two rights to be a free, independent spirit that should not be subject to excessive restriction or unjust interference.⁴³⁾ Furthermore, he differentiated between natural and artificial universal principles, as well as between unrelational and relational universal ones.⁴⁴⁾ Although the terms "liberty" and "right" were not often used in the culture zone that utilized Chinese characters, he noted that people were inevitably destined to live in a community, thereby obligating them to establish order by law and set boundaries (lot and proper place) according to this universal principle. He also pointed out that unequal human relations needed to be improved by preventing unbridled liberty from violating the order of society. In this manner, he claimed, based on Confucian philosophy, that the Way (*dao*) should not leave us even for a moment and that we needed to uphold the Heavenly Principle and prevent human desires from sabotaging it.⁴⁵⁾

Concerned that adopting only the individual right of liberty may cause an absence of social responsibility, Yu presented a solution to match liberty with this universal duty, which seemed ill-suited to it.⁴⁶⁾ When he spoke about the right to

41) Professor Yi Gwang-se criticizes that it is an unreasonable, imaginary, fictitious idea that the "freedom of autonomous individuals" in Western liberal democracy asserted by John Locke means, in extreme terms, that individuals can and have the right to choose their course of action completely autonomously without the interference of tradition, culture and any other things, and they are conscious actors in "tabula rasa." See Yi Gwang-se (1998), pp. 46, 73.

42) Yu Gil-jun (1895), p. 109. As mentioned earlier, Bak Yeong-hyo uses the term "universal principle" in the sense of "universal right" whereas Yu Gil-jun does it in the sense of "universal duty." Actually, it can be used both ways because it originally means that "it is right to obtain universality." *Mengzi*, 05-04-06.

43) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 109-110.

44) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 110-113.

45) Yu Gil-jun (1895), p. 116.

enjoy freedom of life, wealth, business, assembly and religion, he also mentioned the need to perform universal duty with reference to life, wealth, business, assembly and religion. In other words, because humans are social beings by destiny, their liberty must inevitably be restricted in relation to others. He explained liberty in the Confucian way, saying that it was "good liberty" to constrain human desires, to uphold the Heavenly Principle and to follow the right Way, which were the main tenets of Zhu Xi's philosophy, while it was "bad liberty" to follow bad desires. He also argued that it was the "liberty of beasts" or the "liberty of barbarians" for people to only claim their own liberty stemming from unfettered bad desires and not yield to others, and make the strength of power the dominant criterion.⁴⁷⁾ These examples illustrate that enlightenment scholars tried to match liberty with morality.

The enlightenment intellectuals' attempts to match liberty with morality continued with attempts to match the rule of law with the rule of virtue. While accepting the rule of law, Bak Yeong-hyo claimed that "It is barbarian politics if it severely harms humanity, destroys justice by forcing punishment, loses trust via arbitrary enforcement of law, or stirs people by making them feeble-minded, cruel or suspicious. It is enlightened politics if it conducts penalty with humanity, exercises punishment with justice, enforces law with trust, and comforts people by making them feel wholesome, peaceful and trustful." This implied his demand to make the rule of law suit the rule of virtue, rather than advocate a separate morality from law in accordance with the modern idea of rule of law.

Yu Gil-jun also believes that rule of law requires moral discipline and responsibility. He notes that "The government is established to teach people moral principles and educate the people about the rights through law, thereby making possible for anyone--strong or weak, wise or foolish--to uphold moral principles, life and wealth.⁴⁸⁾ He also states that "The most important task of the government is to unify people's minds and hearts and maintain the moral principles by utilizing its authority."⁴⁹⁾ From this, we can see that he took the state's role of moral intervention for granted and viewed the state as the agent responsible for educating people. In this manner, his idea of rights and rule of law was built on the foundation of the traditional Confucian notion of moral principle and edification through the rule of virtue.⁵⁰⁾

46) Yu Gil-jun (1895), p. 113.

47) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 115-116.

48) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 136-137.

49) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 140-141.

Enlightenment intellectuals also projected a Confucian image of the sage in establishing the political actors of a new Korean democracy. According to the *Mengzi* (Mencius), the foremost qualification of a politician is the ability to cultivate and educate people.⁵¹⁾ Meanwhile, in the theory of modern Western democracy, citizens refer to the bourgeoisie, a newly emerging class. They gained political rights as political "citizens" and actors within a nation by succeeding in presenting "culture" and "wealth" (tax payment) as their qualifications, as opposed to the status and reputation of the dominant class, the king and the nobility.⁵²⁾ This means that even in a democratic society, the actors of rule by the people needed to be equipped with at least the minimum qualifications to participate in the public sphere. For this reason, laborers and the have-nots could be included in popular elections as voters when the entire populace became liable to education and taxation. It was not that the modern nature of the political entity or the state bred the nation-state, but that the existence of the "citizenry" and "nation" gave birth to the nation-state. Enlightenment theorists adopted the idea of political rights of the people in principle, but they did not allow the immediate participation of all people. As mentioned earlier, Yu Gil-jun required their reeducation before providing political rights as follows: "First, educate people to acquire the knowledge required to participate in the affairs of state, and then discuss the democratic political system. That is the right order."⁵³⁾ Bak Yeong-hyo revealed the same attitude by saying that people could not exercise their political rights immediately due to their lack of education, but ultimately they had to be the bearers of political rights. For that goal, he suggested various concrete methods through which to educate and enlighten people.⁵⁴⁾

Conclusion

Let me summarize what I have discussed so far before addressing implications of these issues for modernity.

In Section 2, I examined how enlightenment intellectuals who wanted to

50) See Jeong Yong-hwa (2000, 75) for Yu Gil-jun's notion of liberty and morality.

51) *Mengzi*, 04-02-06.

52) See Jin Deok-gyu (1993), pp. 54-97, particularly, p. 79.

53) Yu Gil-jun (1895), pp. 141-142, 152.

54) For example, as for measures to foster political consciousness of people, he argues to make books available by vitalizing the printing and publication industry, to establish museums, to allow freedom of speech and assembly and to approve printing of newspapers. See "[Geonbaekseo](#)," Article 6.

introduce democracy to Korea adopted the idea of rule by the people in a manner that was efficient for the realization of an ideology of "rule for the people" and rule of the people in preexisting Confucian thought. They conceived the notions of rule for the people and rule of the people as the essence and thought rule by the people to be the means to realize such notions. They found the logic for adopting rule by the people—as was to be actualized by the guarantee of political rights and the rights of resistance—in traditional Confucian notions of "repressing personal interests," "achieving Great Unity" "sharing joy with others," and "the ability to dethrone tyrants." In their view, the Confucian notions of rule for the people and rule of the people did not contradict the new (democratic) concept of rule by the people.

Section 3 explored how, in adopting the notions of liberty and rule of law, enlightenment intellectuals believed that those notions needed to be combined with the ideas of morality/ethics and the rule of virtue. They cautioned against the negative effects of rightism and individualism in which liberty and rule of law were given excessive emphasis, while still believing in the importance of relations and moral values necessary for the maintenance of community. They also considered the "Confucian virtuous gentlemen-citizens" to be political actors inheriting the Confucian tradition, equipped with the morality and political authority needed for politics, regardless of class and wealth.

In this context, we need to note two characteristics in the adoption of democracy by enlightenment intellectuals. First, in adopting the Western principle of rule by the people, which was represented by the provision of political rights and the rights of resistance, they focused on making the Confucian latent counterpart principles manifest. Second, they clung to Confucian tradition by matching the Western notions of liberty (rights) and rule of law with the Confucian ideas of duty and rule of virtue. For rule by the people, they admitted the weakness of Confucianism and actively attempt reinterpretations. For liberty (rights) and the rule of law, they strongly defended the superiority of the Confucian notions of mutual benefit and moral politics. This is what enlightenment intellectuals considered to be an alternative way to integrate tradition and modernity.

Confucian moralism stresses mutual benefit instead of bilateral contract. It does not approve of a party's desertion of duty triggered by the other party's negligence of duty. It holds the view that a bilateral contract cannot prevent conflict and struggle in human society. As Confucius pointed out, a society in which an individual can play a proper role within the order of humanity is one in

which justice and righteousness are realized. In such a society, there would be a continual demand for an effort to realize a society in which each role is reciprocally respected, with justice and righteousness ensured. Indeed, the order of humanity represented by moral rules governing the five human relations is even more necessary in the contemporary era of democracy. In this sense, the mutual benefit in Confucian moralism is universal, which can and must contain "intimacy" with democracy emphasizing political equality as a fundamental principle.⁵⁵⁾

From the enlightenment intellectuals' point of view, emphasis on morality and ethics should never be rejected, no matter what change may occur in a civilization. According to them, humans cannot live outside the network of relations called society under any circumstances and thus, liberty and the natural rights of humans should be realized in a context of humaneness (*illyun*). Because of this, the "liberty of conducting oneself" (social liberty) and the "trajectory of the universal principle" must not be forsaken. These intellectuals had no doubt that Confucian moralism and normativism needed to be preserved, despite the realities of power-based international politics.⁵⁶⁾ Therefore, they were intent on combining democratic principles with Confucian core values that "did not discard morality." Confronted with Western democracy for the first time, Korean enlightenment intellectuals recognized not only that democracy should not abandon its aspirations for ideal democratic politics, but that Confucianism needed to be wary of its potential to degrade politics into its worst possible condition. This approach did not end in the late nineteenth century, and still remains as a salient issue in the contemporary agenda.

At a time for reconciliation between East and West, to achieve fusion between individual-based ethics and community-based ethics, and to strike harmony between tradition and modernity, it would behoove us to take some lessons from Korean's intellectual history and the experience from a century ago.

Glossary

Daxue (Ch.) 大學

Dongnip Hyeophoe 獨立協會

55) See An Oe-soon (2001), p. 81.

56) See Jang In-seong (1999), p. 97.

Geonbaekseo 建白書
Gu Yi (Ch.) 賈誼
Hanseong sunbo 漢城旬報
Jie, king (Ch.) 桀
Mengzi (Ch.) 孟子
minbon 民本
minchi 民治
Seoyu gyeonmun 西遊見聞
Shujing (Ch.) 書經
Shun (Ch.) 舜
Tang, king (Ch.) 湯
tongui 通義
wimin 爲民
Wu (Ch.) 武
Yao (Ch.) 堯
Zhong Hui (Ch.) 仲虺
Zhou (Ch.) 周

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Mengzi (Mencius)

Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean)

Shujing (Book of Documents)

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