

# Emergence of ing “The Social” in Modern Korea: The Concept and Reality of “Society”

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## Background

The concept of *sahoe* (society), which is now commonly used ~~both~~ in both academia and ~~in~~ daily lives-life, did not appear in Korea ~~around-until~~ the first half of the 1890s. In the 1920s ~~However,~~ however, this term was ~~not only applied to-used~~ put to frequent and ~~and~~ various ~~usages-usages~~ in Korean newspapers ~~or-and~~ magazines ~~of-1920s,~~ but-and it became ~~also~~ an indispensable concept for explaining and describing ~~the~~ reality. ~~Major concepts such as gungmin (citizen), minjok (nation), and gaein (individual) began to appear and to be established during the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, with more or less temporal differences between their emergences [Is this necessary?]. In this respect, this period marks a very important era in Korea's modern intellectual history.~~

——Linguistic changes do not always coincide with ~~the~~ changes of-in reality; however, since the emergence of a new concept reflects the social change ~~of-a-society~~ that enabled its birth, the history of a concept is an intellectual history as well as a social history. The fact that major concepts such as sahoe, gungmin (citizen), minjok (nation), and gaein (individual) began to appear during the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries reveals that Korea's modern intellectual history was strongly related with the historical transformation of the period. This change primarily comes from internal factors, but external factors must be also be includedconsidered. Thus, it is inevitable to consider the context of world history as a global expansion of modern civilization. In fact, many modern concepts became settled around during this era through the global expansion and reception of modern civilization that had originated in the West.

This paper will examine how the new concept of “society” was accepted within the Korean historical context dating from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries and attempt to explain how “the social” came to appear and was connected to the changes of in discourses.

## 2. Acceptance of the Concept of “Society”: Intellectuals and the Media

The process through which ~~the term~~ *sahoe* (from *shakai* in Japanese) was selected as the a translation of the word “society” was a a-part of the global expansion of Western thought. At the same time, it was a kind of acculturation in that ~~when translated, changes in the~~ meaning of the word underwent changes when it was translated~~occurred~~.<sup>1</sup> But ~~in the process of transmission of transmitting~~ this concept from Japan to Korea did not require, ~~additional "translation" was not necessary~~: because the two countries belonged to the same cultural realm of Chinese characters in East Asia, the meaning of concepts could be conveyed in using the same words.

The current meaning of *sahoe* as a ~~translated word for translation of~~ “society” was first introduced by Korean students in Japan.<sup>2</sup> In 1895, after the Gabo Reform (1894), the government selected students and dispatched them to Japan for “civilization and enlightenment.” These students formed the Daejoseonin Ilbon Yuhaksaeng Chinmokhoe (Fraternal Society of Korean Students in Japan) and published the bulletin *Chinmokhoe hoebo*, in which the concept of “society” was first introduced. In its first issue of in October 1895, an introductory article about French socialism and the Socialist Party was published, and in the second issue of in March 1896, Sin Hae-yeong, vice-president of the society, and others like Eo Yong-seon and Ko Hui-jun wrote articles that

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<sup>1</sup> In Japan, *shakai*, the ~~translated word for translation of~~ “society,” first appeared around 1875, and its appearance in ~~the~~ English-Japanese or French-Japanese dictionaries was dated about ten years after that. Yanabu (1994).

<sup>2</sup> For ~~the a~~ detailed discussion ~~on of~~ the ~~acceptance~~ process of acceptance for the concept of “society” in Korea, see Park (2000).

utilized the term of “society.” Also, the bulletin published ~~a-the~~ writing of Fukuzawa Yukichi who introduced the social contract theory to Japan and emphasized its necessity. However, the impact of this bulletin was not so great in that the discussions were limited to internal ones among a few intellectuals.

The process of establishing the concept of “society” with certain political and cultural implications coincided with the overall social changes in Korea ~~dating~~ from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. ~~Especially-This was especially influenced by the-~~intellectuals who emphasized ~~the-~~acceptance of modern institutions and knowledge of the West, and the mass media that represented their views ~~influenced significantly~~. Broadly speaking, four categories of ~~groups-people~~ and media contributed to the acceptance and expansion of the concept of society. At first, the discursive and social influence of the Dongnip Hyeophoe (Independence Club) and its newspaper, *Dongnip Sinmun* (The Independent), took a great role ~~ones~~ in introducing new concepts including society and implementing them into Korean context. As Sin Yong-ha wrote, “The concepts of nation-state, individual, citizen, and society were, for the first time, clearly established by the Independence Club,”<sup>3</sup> enlightenment intellectuals who were leaders of the Independence Club movement argued ~~s~~ that the acceptance of ~~a~~ new culture and institutions was necessary, and the concept of society was introduced in this context. The concept of society advocated by the Independence Club is closely related to ~~the~~ modernization theory based on the social contract. According to the article entitled “Two Powers,” ~~carried-published~~ in *The Independent* ~~son~~ on 5 September 1899, the term “society” meant an artificial and historical phenomenon ~~made-created~~ by people, unlike the term “nature” that connoted ~~the-predestined-conditions~~. In ~~given-by-destiny-[This sounds too lefty.]~~ *The Independent*, the concepts like *gukga* (state), *gungmin* (nation), and *jeongbu* (government) were much often used than society in order to emphasize the urgent task of political modernization of Korean traditional system. The Independence Club tried to establish a constitutional monarchy by pursuing the importance of such politico-cultural transformation. However, when the Independence Club was forced to ~~dissolve-disband~~ in 1899 and *The Independent* ~~s~~was to terminate its publication, their influence ceased.

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<sup>3</sup> Sin (1975, 593).

The second influence came from Cheondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way) and the *Mansebo* (Independence News). *Independence News* published by the Cheondogyo was more evidently interested in the concept of “society” and “the social” than *The Independents*. While he was in exile in Japan, Son Byeong-hui, who became the third patriarch after the death of Choe Si-hyeong, urged ~~the~~ Donghak followers to form the *Jinbohoe* (Progressive Society) and attempted to make this ~~society group as~~ a leading entity for modern reforms. ~~In this context, he tried to actively utilize the concept of society.~~ Cheondogyo defined the group organized by peasants as a “*minhoe*” (commoner’s group) and identified ~~the~~ communal solidarity formed by this group as a “society.” Yi In-jik, the first editor-in-chief of the *Independence News*, wrote an ~~inaugural an~~ editorial ~~titled under the title of~~ “Society” and showed explicit interest in this concept.<sup>4</sup> According to this editorial, a society ~~meant could mean~~ various human groups, ~~encompassing that could encompass~~ either large and broad categories beyond spatial and temporal boundaries or temporary, small groups. It is believed that Yi In-jik contributed this editorial to the *Independence News* because he considered the concept of society ~~as a to be~~ significant ~~meaning~~ in describing and criticizing the situation ~~of facing~~ ~~the~~ Korean government and people of the time.

The third influence came from the patriotic enlightenment intellectuals and the *Daehan maeil sinbo* (Korea Daily News). Compared to the *Independence News*, this newspaper dealt with the notion of “state” much more heavily than the concept of “society,” but ~~revealed showed an aspect of~~ a distinctive understanding of “the social.” This was because the main writers for the *Korea Daily News* were intellectuals who accepted ~~the~~ modern culture and institutions based on ~~the~~ traditional Confucian knowledge and took a deep interest in the maintenance of national sovereignty. The inclination toward ~~the~~ modernity shown by Bak Eun-sik and Sin Chae-ho was far from that of Yi In-jik, and this distance was reflected in their ~~ir~~ utilization of the concept of society. The ~~the~~ emphasis was ~~placed~~ on the close relationship ~~of between~~ a state and a society rather than ~~on~~ the antagonistic ~~relationship confrontation of between~~ the two. ~~could survive This claim coincided with the circumstances of the time demanding the solidarity and unity of the people in the post Eulsa Treaty era when the national~~

<sup>4</sup> *Mansebo* (Independence News), first issue, June 17, 1906.

~~sovereignty was weakening. This claim coincided with the demands of the post-Eulsa Treaty era, when national sovereignty was weakening and the solidarity and unity of the people was needed.~~ They viewed the category of a society as being related to the realistic problem of restoration of national sovereignty and ~~the~~ asserted the use of “social forces” or “the spirit of a society” for a rich and strong state. The concept of society used in the *Korea Daily News* was ~~placed based~~ on the logic of “independence” and “self-strengthening” proposed by the advocates of ~~the~~ self-strengthening at the time.

Finally, the impact of textbooks must be considered. The new form of education controlled by the Japanese Residency-General stood for ~~the~~ pro-Japanese modernity. The Ministry of Education ~~manifested embodied the education’s this~~ political stance while ~~changing the contents of textbooks, and~~ reinforced the function of justifying colonization by completely eliminating ~~the contents any content~~ that ~~may was thought to~~ “harm friendly ties between Korea and Japan,” or “cause nationalistic sentiments” from the textbooks. ~~from the textbooks.~~ The *Korea Daily News* criticized the Ministry of Education as ~~the target~~ “destroying the country,” but ~~the~~ textbooks possessed a long-term and systematic effects impact. ~~One medium utilized in this process was the textbook~~ important because ~~the~~ they was an were a form of official discourse and contained the viewpoints that were taught in the public educational system, ~~it~~ Especially in particular, ~~one of the most influential textbooks was the~~ Moral Education or ~~the~~ Ethics, very important textbooks in these days, in which the concept of society was illustrated the concept of society with. ~~The logical arguments in these textbooks, which described~~ systematically and conceptually described the logic of ~~the~~ civil society of the modern period. The hierarchical relations among individual, social groups, society, and states were explained in the textbooks bourgeoisie, appeared in similar patterns in various academic journals and bulletins published in from 1908-1909. as a universal principle of modern society.

### 3. The Meaning of the Concept of “Society”: Implications of “The Social”

The media discussed so far adopted the concept of society on the bases of positive

evaluations of ~~the~~ Western modernity. However, the term was variously applied while maintaining complex meanings. Three meanings that were interrelated yet separable coexisted within the concept of society: social contract of individuals, publicness of social associations, and morality of integration. ~~In the following, I would like to briefly discuss this point.~~

### *Independent Individual and the idea of Social Contract Theory*

One of the distinctive characteristics ~~in this period~~ ~~in of the late Great Han Empire period~~ was that the concept of “society” was ~~deeply~~ related to ~~individualism and~~ the social contract theory in its usages. According to ~~the~~ ~~idea of contract~~ ~~the social contract theory~~ ~~that formed a major axis in the modern Western thought~~, enlightened individuals organize groups based on their will ~~and active involvement~~ and constitute a society or a state through the union of these groups. The Independence Club, which emphasized the consciousness of civil rights and attempted to adopt the principle of representative democracy, especially asserted the idea of social contract theory. ~~In addition,~~ ~~As~~ the article of the *Korea Daily News* ~~that said that~~, “Individuals make up a society and the societies compose a state.” the relationship among individual, society, and state was considered as a clearly showed the multi-layered and, hierarchical one<sup>5</sup> relationship among individual, society, and state. ~~The idea that~~ Since As far as individuals can make social groups according to their will, individuals who are constituents of a political communities, problems of a state the community should must be solved by its members’ independent consciousness and active participation. The concept of society was combined with such an individual’s rights and responsibility and rights in a state. political community. should take an interest in agendas in order to influence them with their independent consciousness and that they should be involved in solving these agendas through public opinion was the essence of the concept of society.

The fact that diverse groups could be organized voluntarily was considered as a phenomenon

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<sup>5</sup> *Korea Daily News*, June 21, 1906.

~~which proved proof of the social contract practices of individuals. Indeed, the concept of society was often used to indicate these newly emerged groups or organizations. In traditional Korea, human~~

~~————The Eemergence of groups or organizations with various purposes was the proof of the social contract practices of individuals in reality. Indeed, the concept of society in this period was often used to indicate these groups or organizations. From a Clong time ago, civic organizations —groupss in the form of hoe or gye had long existed, but neither the formation of political organizations for achieving power nor was impossible and the elimtate of economic organizations in pursuit of economic-material profits were as not permitted. In this regardThus, the formation of various organizations with different objectives could besince the late nineteenth century wascould be regarded as an good example which showed the appropriateness of the individual’s role in making society. social contract theory. Social groups such as the Independence Club and the Progressive Society, numerous academic societies that led the patriotic enlightenment movement, and modern commercial companies that strove for economic profits all began to surface around this time. The concept of society in *The Independent*, the *Independence News*, and the *Korea Daily News* was largely utilized to emphasizedesignate the eiviepeople’s organizations such as the Independence Club and the Progressive Society, numerous academic societies that led the patriotic enlightenment movement, and modern commercial companies that strove for economic profits. At the same time, voluntary associations were regarded as non-private spheres in whichthat sprang up voluntarily as the a subject to that could lead the ideas and practices of public discussion and public interest, namely, the “publicness.” were discussed.——As illustrated in the expressionexamples of “various societies,” “all societies,” or “members of a society,” it was not uncommon for the concept of society to refer to specific associations itself.~~

The concept of “society” was adopted and settled in a historical context when the social status system was abolished and the new principles of social organization were formed. ~~It was an era that newly demanded a form of community thinking that would embraceing a variety of members or a national identitiesy was newly demanded and necessitated new systematic and ideological principles uniting all the members were necessary.~~ In some aspects, the concept of society could be internalized only when traditional social status



system had been disappeared, and for this reason the Donghak, which played a major role in the abolition of the social status system, perhaps used ~~most actively~~ this concept most actively. For a while, however, society used to be utilized as a functional substitute for that of social status. Along with structural division, “the social” carried an implication of social strata that hierarchically differentiated the ruler and the ruled. In Sin Hae-yeong’s writing of 1896, ~~an-the~~ expression ~~of the~~ “upper and lower society” appeared, and Yi In-jik, in his inaugural article for the *Independence News*, designated the ruling class as a political society, the populace as a civil society, and ~~made-drew a~~ contrast between the two. Some powerful people such as distinguished families and bureaucrats were called as ~~as~~ the “noble society,” and people who were in agriculture, commerce, or manufacturing ~~inge~~ in villages ~~as~~ the “commoner society.” ~~it seemed that “the social” was rather in contrast with the political and the national. The social was frequently used in opposition to the political, conventional state power. In this case,~~ Even in the *Korea Daily News*, the concept of society was often used to indicate the “civic” in opposition to the “government” or the ruled class in contrast with the ruling class.

Gradually, however, the concept was applied to non-hierarchical social categories, like the “students’ society,” the ~~a collective space for~~ “women’s ~~san~~ society,” the “reader society” or the “aesthetes’ society,” which designated groups or classes that shared similar characteristics.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, consciousness about ~~the~~ social contract was connected with the idea of equality. An article in the *Independence News* that said, “The lower society screams for equal rights, and the women’s ~~san~~ society demands ~~for~~ equal rights between men and women,” could be interpreted as an integration of Donghak’s ideology of equality and ~~the~~ Western enlightenment thought.<sup>17</sup> When *Korea Daily News* ~~of~~ wrote that “the upper society is effeminate and ostentatious, the lower society is lazy and weak in minds, and the female society is inferior and dissipated,”<sup>18</sup> it tried to show the opposition and resistance against traditional social categorization, because the lower society could be critical and defiant toward the upper society ~~and-as~~ could the female society toward the male society. Here we can find the possibility of the

<sup>15</sup> *Korea Daily News*, February 17, 1906; March 6, 1906; June 10, 1906; and August 2, 1906.

<sup>17</sup> *Independence News*, July 22, 1906; and July 25, 1906.

<sup>18</sup> *Korea Daily News*, June 8, 1909.



concept of society ~~could as grounded on the social contract theory to~~ accompany civil resistance and critical consciousness toward the existing system ~~or order~~. The ideas of independent individual and social contract among them were the first element of the concept of society in that period.

### *Social Associations and Non-national/political Publicness*

These ~~applications in~~ usages of the concept of society resulted in the dismantling of traditional views on publicness. Up until 1984 when the social status system was abolished, “the public” ~~sphere~~ was monopolized by the *yangban* class centering on the king, and any public authority or activities to criticize or refuse this monopoly were suppressed. The ~~settlement-establishment~~ of the concept of society provided ~~an occasion~~ ~~the chance~~ to understand a certain realm that was different from the state but ~~that~~ also did not belong to the private ~~sphere~~, or a new space of publicness. In *The Independent*, ~~this phenomenon-the term~~ of society indicated collective and public activities appearing not when “one single person made ~~an~~ efforts,” but when “a number of people helped one another and ~~established-formed~~ relationships.” In an article, the power generated by ~~these~~ ~~collective~~ activities was called ~~the~~ “social power,” and this power was regarded as essential to “public interest,” “advancement,” and “enlightenment” ~~that were-as~~ the constituents of modernization.<sup>6</sup>

The *Independence News* published a series of articles regarding ~~the differences and relationships between the state and society~~ ~~the state science~~,<sup>19</sup> ~~and especially in the early articles~~ ~~differences and relationships between the state and society were systematically introduced~~ ~~will be explored in detail~~

While a state is a legal category, a society is an historical category. ~~According to~~

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<sup>6</sup> *Dongnip Sinmun* (The Independent), January 9, 1899; August 12, 1899; and September 5, 1899.

<sup>19</sup> These articles were published from 19 September 1906 to 22 November 1906. According to their structure and contents, the articles appeared to be a translated work of a Western book or retranslation ~~of~~ an already translated book. Seen from the expression of “universal brotherhood” (一視同仁), it seems that they may have been a translation from a Japanese book, but the fact that they were entirely written in Chinese characters and the mention of “. . . translated by our country’s best scholar . . .” suggest other possibilities.

~~¶The basic legal logic in state is the legal principle that, all members must be equally treated equally as and in this sense the the constituents of a state, while the logic in society is protecting the that is, the citizens' rights to pursue their own interests. A state should support the would enjoy their own equal political rights among the citizens, but a. On the other hand, the historical logic for a society means that a society bases its composition on the differences and distinction. differentiations of the members; therefore, its essence lies in diversity and distinction.~~ In addition, just like a corporation, a state has clear boundaries against other states with its single will and rights and duties, but a society is maintained by mutual relationships based on historically established customs and manners, without any legal regulations upon the entire society. The freedom of an individual also appears differently between state and society, on the national level or on the social level. ~~In short, o~~ On the national level, freedom indicates the possibility that the ruled people can politically express their opinions, while freedom on the social level means the possibility to move social strata according to their own ability<sup>20</sup>.

Therefore, between the principle of a state and that of a society, close interactions and discords appear simultaneously. ~~For example, w~~ When the upper group of a society monopolizes the national authority and secures its own benefits, ~~the a~~ ruled class could not enjoy without lacking political freedom and social dimension. ~~is inevitably formed.~~

But when the ruled become enlightened, overthrow the social privileges of the small number of the upper group, and establish "the equal rights of citizens," then the publicness could not be limited within the ruling group. Social contract among individuals can provide a foundation of new publicness. In this context, voluntary associations were regarded as non-private spheres in which the ideas and practices of public interest, namely, the "publicness" were discussed.

However, on whether the voluntary formation of individual organizations ~~and their activities~~ would always lead to the strengthening of the state, there were distinctive differences of opinions between the patriotic enlightenment activists and the pro-Japanese modernists centering on Iljinhoe. In the *Korea Daily News*, it was frequently pointed out that collective solidarity was not an unconditionally welcoming fact and there could be

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<sup>20</sup> For this, the author analyzed and classified the writings published serially in the *Independence News* from 19 to 26 September 1906.

disagreements and contradictions between private and public solidarities. Iljinhoe considered itself as a modern socio-political organization or a civiceommoner's group that attempted to lead large-scale social movements, but the *Korea Daily News* was cautious of the negative aspects of the Iljinhoe's activities. In particular, the newspaper criticized ~~that the~~ Iljinhoe's abuse to increase for trying to increase its power by bringing random in the vagrants at random in into the group, saying this could not be the main purpose of a "society."<sup>7</sup> Pointing out that, in addition to ~~the~~ Iljinhoe, numerous local groups might be negative ~~that began to emerge in local areas negatively influenced their~~ terms of the unity of the entire society, the newspaper also targeted their criticism on the organizations that pursued family-centered, personal profits.

This implied that a dysfunctional relationship could exist between the small-scale, systematic solidarity and the public union-unity of the entire society, ~~a dysfunctional relationship could exist~~. It meant that a society ~~became~~ to bear complex meanings that connected specific differences and particularities, beyond the simple meaning of an organization or a union.<sup>8</sup> This coincided with the claim that the formation of groups based on the notions of class, region, or self-interest could rather in fact harm the state or the people, as written in the article titled, "Ways to Establish an Organization."<sup>12</sup> Also, the argument that divided groups into national groups and social groups, and village groups and family groups shared a similar critical stance.<sup>13</sup> In theory, it was the problem of ~~the~~ relations between small-scale *Gemeinschaft* and large-scale *Gesellschaft*. Under these circumstances, ~~t~~The Korea Daily News ~~could not~~ exhibited a critical stance toward Iljinhoe or private organizations, because they were in a position to evaluate the activities of all groups or organizations based on their primary mission to restore ~~the~~ national sovereignty. The difference between ~~the n terms of the views on civilization and enlightenment, unlike the Independence News,~~ the ~~and the~~ *Korea Daily News* was an intellectual conflict between against "assimilated imitation" and ~~tried to maintain~~ "national subjectivity consciousness" or "national spirit"; ~~and~~ the concept of society was

<sup>7</sup> *Korea Daily News*, February 17, 1906.

<sup>8</sup> Around this time, Sin Chae-ho argued the logic of the family state through articles such as "Nation is One Large Family," or "Changes of the Notion of New Family State." He claimed the expansion of familial ties and love to the national level, but he also gave warnings for the opposite case.

<sup>12</sup> *Korea Daily News*, January 17, 1909.

<sup>13</sup> *Korea Daily News*, April 24, 1909.

located on this line of thought.<sup>14</sup>

### *Organic Integration and Morality-Order*

In 1906, Yi In-Jik concretized the concept of “society” in the first issue of *Sonyeon hanbando* (*Young Korea*),<sup>6</sup> in which he distinguished ~~between a society into a~~ a small ~~society~~ and a large society: a small society ~~meant-referred to~~ social groups or social organizations, and a large society ~~signified-referred to~~ a “large entity” that included these small societies and enabled their activities. Then he ~~saw-noted~~ that this large society corresponded to an intangible idea such as morality and the “cultural form of a nation.”<sup>10</sup>

~~The concept of On the other hand, a view on of the concept of society as an organic-principle that integrated all parts of a society or a moral solidarity also existed. In this case, the society was not a partial sphere distinguished from and in opposition to politics or economy, but instead it signified a moral dimension that enabled an organic unity of various parts. An article of in a bulletin published in the late Great Han Empire period described the organic relationship between society and individuals in the following as follows:~~

~~A society is not an opposite of a self, but a larger unit including the original nature of the self. . . . Human beings hold by nature social instinct. . . . individual self. . . . social self. . . . After a society exists, one’s personality exists and this personality forms a social self.<sup>21</sup>~~

~~In textbooks of at the time, the society was explained in relation to human original nature. In other words, humans were by their nature defined as “social animals” and the fact that humans couldnot live-society was identified with a cultural principle of an organic unit,~~

which shows a harmonious integration among many parts. Social Darwinism, the most powerful social thought at that time, was highly influenced by H.Spencer’s sociology

<sup>14</sup> Bak (1992, 95-99).

<sup>6</sup> *Sonyeon hanbando* (November 1906): 11-13.

<sup>10</sup> In addition, Yi In-jik introduced sociology from the second to the fifth issues of the *Sonyeon hanbando*. Especially after introducing the opinions of Spencer and Rousseau, he mentioned the importance of groups, the law of natural selection, and social evolution; he also asserted that while psychology emphasizes ~~the~~ “intrinsic notions,” sociology values social elements that influence individuals; and he argued that unlike economics which deals with the conditions ruled by desires as a part of sociology, sociology covers large areas and is a study of “general principle that governs people’s life in a society.”

<sup>21</sup> “Yulli chonghwa” (Writings on Ethics), *Seobuk hakhoe wolbo* (Northwestern Academic Association Monthly) 11 (1909).

which considered society as a living organism. Particularly according to the textbooks, society was not only a partial sphere distinguished from politics or economy; instead it signified an organic unity integrated by morality. Human beings were by their nature defined as “social animals” and the fact that humans could not apart from society, or the “social nature” of the human beings, was considered as the basis of a society. This logic was illustrated in expressions like “Humans are animals living in groups,” or “The establishment of a society results from our sociability~~le emotions~~.”<sup>22</sup> The emergence of society was regarded not a modern phenomenon but a universal condition in human history, and the concept of society can be applied to a “primitive society” when it was applied ~~it to the~~ a more temporally and spatially generalized past.<sup>23</sup> This understanding of ~~the~~ society as an organism was connected to the argument of “Without society, personality cannot exist,” and carried a completely different implication from the social contract theory. As seen in a phrase that “If a society does not exist, no knowledge can exist, and in fact the situation will be worse than hell,”<sup>24</sup> ~~the~~ society now possessed an independent, absolute authority in-over the integration and order of each part, and individuals became mere constituents of this integrated organism.

From this argument, morality as a social principle was emphasized: “The state sets its boundary with a certain territory and maintains its solidarity with law. . . ~~the~~ society is operated on the basis of only moral principles and customs.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, ~~the~~ society was rather “imperfect” under ~~a~~ compulsory, legal reasoning, but could be completely integrated and maintained by morality. With the understanding of the inseparable relationship between society and morality, ~~the~~ society became an object to be maintained, followed and obeyed, rather than what something individuals created, ~~got were~~ involved in and continuously developed. Therefore, when discussing the concept of society, normative discussions on morality and ethics were also added, and ~~the~~ traditional ethical virtues such as “the relationship between elder and younger” ~~was importantly were~~ considered ~~as~~ a kind of social morality that was a everyone’s “major duty ~~of everyone~~.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Sin Yeong-hae (1980, 33, 258).

<sup>23</sup> Hwimun Uisuk (1908, 226-227).

<sup>24</sup> “Yulli chonghwa,” *Seobuk hakhoe wolbo* 11.

<sup>25</sup> Hwimun Uisuk (1908, 337).

<sup>26</sup> Sin Yeong-hae (1908, 129).

~~The~~ Society was essentially based on order and peace, which was supported by ~~moral~~ethical elements ~~that were~~ rooted ~~on~~in individuals' morality. The significance of the factors influencing ~~the~~ social order--for example, language, custom, and history--could be acknowledged and considered, only when ~~they are~~ viewed from the point of social integration. Tension and conflict between the social and the political gradually weakened, and instead, a general and fundamental integration of individual, family, society, and state became emphasized in ~~an~~ ~~de~~apolitical form. Like this, the concept of "society" was used in relations to ~~de~~apolitical, moral principles that were far from the critical approach toward the social reality stressed by ~~the~~ social contract theory.

Of course the political implication of morality was very different in ~~the event that~~ ~~the relation to the situation where the loss of~~ national sovereignty was on the verge ~~of~~ ~~being lost~~. In March 1909, when the Ministry of Education sent out guidelines related to ~~the~~ textbook review, it revealed the contents of the political, social, ~~and~~ educational fields. The following three points ~~of caution were pointed out to pay attention~~ in the social field ~~were written~~: First, language or articles that could corrupt public morals; second, articles ~~on~~about socialism or those that could harm social peace; and third, articles that ~~could~~ ~~belong to~~ ~~encouraged~~ fictitious and absurd superstitions<sup>11</sup>. It shows a clear relationship between the idea of harmony and colonizing project of Japan.

On the contrary, writers in the *Korea Daily News* had different ideas when the principle of harmony and morality was mentioned. As the ~~idea analogy~~ that the state was the root of a tree ~~and~~, the society was the trunk, ~~and the with~~ people ~~made making~~ up the branches and leaves, the relationship was also considered as an organic interdependence. It was ~~said~~, however, ~~that~~ such ~~the argument that a state's decline must be a byproduct of social conflicts and disorder becomes possible~~ (*Korea Daily News*, April 17, 1906), ~~and the logic that~~ a harmonious integration ~~then~~ was ~~a~~ ~~the~~ "basis for the protection of the nation and the state" and should be considered not only ~~as~~ a cultural basis for the society, but also ~~as~~ a moral foundation for securing and developing state's power. ~~an~~ "organization for enlightenment and advancement" (*Korea Daily News*, April 4, 1906) ~~can be also constructed~~. The reason to pay attention to the relationship between state and

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<sup>11</sup> *Korea Daily News*, March 13, 1909.



society ~~in~~ is ~~because may have been a manifestation for a hope that~~ even though one may have lost ~~the~~ political sovereignty, if the social basis remains, there is at least the hope ~~possibility that one will still gain it would be possible to have~~ a promised future. It was in this context that Korean nationalism began to be developed during this period had internalized a highly ethical morality towards national community.

### Colonial Rule and “The Social”: Changes in the 1920s

By the 1920s, the concept of “society” was much more broadly used. The notion of “Joseon society” was overwhelmingly used in place of that of the state, which carried the strong implication that the basic logic of Joseon’s status as a nonpolitical sphere ~~community~~ would be social rather than political. ~~inevitably result in considering its existence as being categorized as a merely social category~~ ~~one~~. Some conditions contributed to this enlarged-expanded meaning of ~~the~~ society would be mentioned briefly in this paper. The first was the capacity to produce discourse ~~which that~~ was enabled by daily newspapers such as the *Dong-A Ilbo* and *Chosun Ilbo* and magazines like *Gaebyeok (Opening the Heaven)*. New discussions of knowledge, which were impossible during the period of military rule in the 1910s, began to be accepted, and various media supported the application of useful concepts. The fact that a new class of modern intellectuals including students abroad was formed must also be ~~also noticeable~~ noted. Secondly, the intellectual environment after the late 1910s was very important. After the success of Soviet revolution and the end of WW I in the late 1910s, diverse “new social thoughts” were burst out in Japan where many Korean young intellectuals had studied. With the strong influence of socialism and political relationship with international communist movements led by Comintern during 1920s, the concept of society enjoyed lots of disputes in terms of social problems and social movements. The third condition was the emergence of ~~the~~ newly-formed, various social organizations and social movement groups. The rapid expansion of ~~the~~ groups, such as youth groups, intellectual groups, labor groups, and farmer groups, was ~~an~~ one important social aspect of this era. As these groups as a whole were called “the social groups,” many discourses on society and social



issues were developed among those groups and their activities. Finally, although limited, the development of individualism in urban areas should be mentioned. The growth of individuals as subjects of political rights was completely banned, but with the spread of their relationship with capitalistic productions, the consciousness of individuals as economic and legal subjects was developed. According to the *Dong-A Ilbo*, freeing oneself from feudal autocracy and convention was viewed as the liberation of individuals, and the interconnections of free individuals as the liberation of a society.

However, under ~~the~~ colonial rule, tensions and conflicts surrounding the notion of “society” deepened.<sup>27</sup> At least, two aspects are worthy of mentioning. Above all, there was continuing contradiction ~~a~~ regarding the idea of ~~the~~ social contract. Between ~~s~~The social contract theory which presupposed ~~the~~ a state built under contracts among the people~~for~~ and the colonial power mainly based on military coercion from above, there was a big logical gap. Under an oppressiveng dictatorship or ~~a~~ repressive colonial rule, the strong critical stance toward the colonial condition which was not based on the “contract” could appear, or on the contrary, the logic that viewed this colonized condition as rendered through the contract might be accepted. The relationship among individual, society, and state under colonialism was very different from that of normal nation-state based on free civil society.

Such a gap became clear in the confronting disputes on the principle of “strengthening individual ability first” shared by most bourgeois intellectuals. It was argued that when an individual was enlightened and increased his/her ability, these efforts would turn into social power, and these collective individual strengths would become ultimately the power of a nation. As Yi Gwang-su referred to “political activities within the possible limits,” some conservative nationalists permitted individual accomplishments within the colonial framework. ~~showed~~—This compromise attitude towards colonial authority deepened when the concept of society was explained as moral and ethical principles. For example, ~~the~~ arguments such as “Human beings can exist only within a society,” or “No matter how sacred and important individualism is ~~sacred and important~~, it can not be separated from ~~the~~ society,” resulted in acceptance and acknowledgment of the existing colonial system and order. It is needless to say that such

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<sup>27</sup> Park (2004).

an attitude could not have hegemonic power among the people as well as intellectuals who had suffered from the lack of freedom in making their own socio-political spheres.

Second aspect of the inner contradictions is on the meaning of ethical morality in social thoughts and practices. According to enlightenment thoughts, individuals are the very subjects of community with their own reasoning and calculation. In that sense, developing moral sensitivity and modern knowledge of individuals is very important not only for themselves but also for the whole society. Yi Gwang-su argued in his article titled “theory of national reformation” in 1922 that sense of responsibility, ethical morality, civilized attitudes, and voluntary participation at communal affairs were necessary conditions in individual growth as well as national development. On the contrary, however, there were diverse criticisms on the assumption of individual’s subjectivity showing strong skepticism whether ~~the~~-individual accomplishments could become ~~the~~-collective resources ~~come out~~. Particularly socialist intellectuals argued that the idea of individual’s morality used to be functioned as logic of bourgeois class interest and elitist perspective on social affairs. Socialists considered the essence of “society” not as a community of harmonized individuals, but rather as an arena of social conflicts and class confrontations.

The disputes on the “campaign for the encouragement of Korean products” (*mulsan jangnyeo undong*) that emphasized “individual and material” were the very case of confrontation regarding the relationship between ethical ideas on consumption and that of class interest in economic interactions. The campaign maintained the importance of moral consensus on supporting national industries with the idea of “national interest,” but the harsh criticism of the concept of society from socialists viewed such argument as mere manifestation of class interest. The criticism of socialists toward the campaign based on the idea of “strengthening individual ability” was partly a political fight, but basically it was ~~an~~-ideological opposition to the existing understanding of the relationship among individuals, society and nation as well as to the moral elements of social integration. This ideological opposition became more apparent as the 1920s went by, and in similar lines, the different angles of looking at “the social” were also at odds with each other. During the period when the legitimacy of the state was not permitted due to colonial oppression, the position of “the social” was unstable. The conflicts surrounding

the notion of “the social” in the 1920s were the reflection of confrontations and tensions among individualism, the idea of strengthening individual ability, social contract theory, and modernism under ~~the~~ colonial rule.

## Conclusion

As discussed thus far, the adoption of the concept of “society” in Korea cannot be understood without consideration of the social changes that occurred since the opening of ports, particularly the sociopolitical turmoil from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. If considered only in terms of acceptance of the terminology, then the influence of Western social thoughts via Japan was clearly great because lots of discourses were imported from Japan. Of course, Japan was not the sole source that introduced ~~the~~ social contract theory or social evolutionism to Korea because the writings of Chinese intellectuals such as Liang Qichao had given great influence, too. The fact that Japanese terminology *shakai* could be finally internalized in Korea shows a strong relationship between social changes and intellectual acculturation.

~~ed~~The concept of society was introduced and used for the first time after 1896, and ~~since-after~~ the beginning of the 1900s, this notion was actually put to wider usages. Especially when ~~the~~ national sovereignty was forfeited ~~after-following~~ the Eulsa Treaty or Protectorate Treaty of 1905, and the country became ~~almost~~ semi-colonized, an overall cultural reflection and reconstruction emerged, and during this process, it is thought that the concept of society earned a strong discursive power. In the period when ~~the~~ national sovereignty was threatened and when voluntary movements to achieve independent modern reforms with the emergence of diverse groups were active, the concept of society became a term ~~to-that~~ referred to these phenomena. The integration of individual solidarity and collective strengths through voluntary organizations and groups, concentration of public discussions, and democratization of ~~the~~ power, altogether made it possible for the concept of “society” to ~~settle-down~~ be established in Korea.

It was natural that in the critical circumstances within which the autonomy of Korea was threatened under the pretext of ~~the~~ modern civilization, ~~the~~ state and society

retained their respective political implications. While the pro-Japanese enlightenment advocates, particularly those of Iljinhoe, emphasized the importance of abstract “social” boundaries that were independent from the state, the intellectuals whose utmost task was ~~to restore the~~ national sovereignty discussed and reviewed ~~the~~ society in close relations to the boundaries of the state. In addition, the concept of society in *The Independent* or the *Korea Daily News* was discussed in the context of the identity and critical consciousness of individuals, as well as a political reform. However, in the moral education or ethics textbooks of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept was explained as moral, ethical principles that were depoliticized.

These complex systems of meaning ~~of for~~ society were changed with each new circumstances in which various intellectual discussions were adopted and numerous magazines were published after the so-called cultural movement period in the first half of 1920s. The concept of society was freely used since the 1920s, but its meaning was not unitary, and its political implication also contained heterogeneous elements in many cases. The different meanings of the concept that existed since the late Great Han Empire period ~~was lasted~~ endured while accompanying different political implications ~~in the colonial situation~~ under colonialism. Broadly speaking, while the flow of ~~the~~ social contract theory was maintained among ~~the~~ nationalists who led the idea of strengthening individual ability and the campaign for the encouragement of Korean products, socialist discourses surrounding the idea of social problems and class movements were gradually expanded. Though the moral and ~~de~~ apolitical concept of society was utilized as an underlying logic for the pro-Japanese modernists, the development of social publicness, distinguished from the national, became distorted by ~~the~~ colonial conditions. To be sure, the Japanese imperial government would not allow such publicness, and the nationalists opposing ~~the~~ colonial power also could not develop an interest ~~of in~~ depolitical publicness due to their overemphasis on the political and the nationalistic aspects. Though ~~there was an assertion of~~ Bak Dal-seong ~~that said~~ asserted, “finally I came to know the society” in the inaugural issue of *Gaebyeok* in 1920, the concept of society had to be remained as problematic one with changing condition of “the social.” ~~in the inaugural issue of *Gaebyeok*~~

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*Dongnip sinmun* (The Independent)

*Gaehwagi gyogwaseo jaryo chongseo* (Collection of Materials on Textbooks in the Enlightenment Period)

*Hanseong jubo* (Seoul Weekly)

*Hanseong sunbo* (Seoul Thrice Monthly)

*Hwangseong sinmun* (Imperial Capital News)

*Yu Gil-jun jeonse* (Complete Works of Yu Gil-jun)

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### Glossary

Cheondogyo 天道教

*Chinmokhoe hoebo* 親睦會會報

*Daehan maeil sinbo* 大韓每日申報

Daejoseon Ilbon Yuhaksaeng Chinmokhoe 大韓日本留學生親睦會

Dongnip Hyeophoe 獨立協會

*Dongnip sinmun* 獨立新聞

*Gaebyeok* 개벽

*gaein* 個人

*gukga* 國家

*gungmin* 國民

*gye* 契

*hoe* 會

*Iljinhoe* 一進會

*jeongbu* 政府

*Jinbohoe* 進步會

*Mansebo* 萬歲報

*minhoe* 民會

*minjok* 民族

*mulsan jangnyeo undong* 物產獎勵運動

*sahoe* 社會

*Sonyeon hanbando* 少年韓半島

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